**A Dance of Titans**

*Summary*

This is the story of three individuals drawn to each other with the gravity of two massive giants circling a scorching sun; like titans forever locked in an interstellar dance, slow and steady, to a song nobody else is privy to. On their dance hinges the fate of billions of much smaller stories, those flickering lights, and the universe waits with bated breath as it unfolds.

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Three weeks after the events of Starkiller base, Kylo Ren brings Rey onto the Finalizer kicking and screaming before departing to complete his training, and Hux finds himself in the role of her interrogator. Let's just say it doesn't end well. But power struggles also have a way
of bringing together unlikely individuals.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Everything comes to an end, eventually. Everything and everyone that lives will also die, the children of stardust that will return to stardust.

Civilizations rise, civilizations fall. Power is exchanged, quid pro quo, and the wheels of time continue grinding forward, undisturbed. The universe, impartial and unmoved, is a silent scribe that records everything that ever was and ever will be across the infinite inevitability that is forever. Some stories are small, faint; pinpricks of light in the vastness of time and space, fading as easily as they came into existence in the blink of an eye: A life well lived in some far away land where the troubles of power and war cannot reach. A happy childhood. A peaceful death. Eventually, they too will be forgotten, and like everything that comes from nothing, will eventually become nothing themselves.

Every once in a while, though, there are those that come along with the power to shred the threads that bind it all together, those who force time and space to shift.

Some stories are only footnotes.

Others are far-reaching sagas, and for those in them, destiny demands greatness. When their stories are told around fireplaces and dinner tables, the legends will be unbelievable, and perhaps some day will become myth. But every myth and every legend is born of truth.

This is the story of three individuals drawn to each other with the gravity of two massive giants circling a scorching sun; like titans forever locked in an interstellar dance, slow and steady, to a song nobody else is privy to. On their dance hinges the fate of billions of much smaller stories, those flickering lights, and the universe waits with bated breath as it unfolds.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT:
Note as of Feb 22, 2017: This story is a canon-divergent story right after the events on TFA, building upon the bits of information we had in 2016, and will vary wildly from what's been established in canon in the Aftermath series! For that reason keep in mind that Hux will be named "Brendol Hux II" after his father in this story, not Armitage.

Seeing as canon has provided us more information about Hux in Aftermath: Empire's End, I felt the need to point this out to anyone delving into this story that this storyline only builds upon the information we had regarding Hux and his character in 2016. Likewise for Rey and Kylo.
Thank you for reading! If you are a new reader, please consider commenting as you read along. I enjoy interacting with people and getting to know them as they experience the story for the first time!

This is going to be a rather long fic, so get yourself a warm mug of something nice and settle in.

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Chapter Playlist:
Prologue: M83 - Outro
(Don't mind the video, but do watch from 1:00 to 1:33.)
The Long Game

Chapter Summary

Hux is stuck interrogating an angry, cornered force sensitive who looks just about ready to rip someone's throat out. This should be interesting.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“General,” comes the voice at his right arm. Hux turns to acknowledge Captain Phasma as she snaps off a crisp, sharp salute.

“At ease, Captain,” He nods before turning his attention to the comings and goings of his crew on the bridge.

He’s spent the last three weeks scrambling to reinstate a sense of normalcy over the remains of the First Order, awaiting words from Supreme Leader Snoke that never arrive, and Hux’s head twinges with the migraine he’s carried since Starkiller practically imploded.

“General,” Phasma says, her usually pleasant voice sounding metallic to his ears through her modulator, “You are requested immediately in the prison bay by Lord Kylo Ren, sir.”

Hux stops mid blink, looking at Phasma’s helmet with an unreadable expression. Where exactly did that absolute bastard get off on requesting - more like demanding - him to be anywhere? Last time Hux checked, he did not answer to Lord Kylo bloody Ren.

“Is that so?” He asks in a practiced, placid tone, receiving a small modulated breath for his efforts. Phasma of all people knows that there is no love lost between Hux and Kylo Ren, especially after Hux had to go out of his way to save his useless hide when Ren’s tunnel vision concerning that scavenger cost Hux a lifetime’s worth of work and planning.

“And to what do I owe the pleasure of this request?” Hux asks. Phasma’s helmet turns infinitesimally to the left, the only tell of her amusement. He ignores it.

“Sir,” even Phasma’s modulator can’t disguise the amusement in her voice, except Hux can’t see what could possibly be so funny about Kylo Ren’s massive sense of entitlement. “He has just landed at the hangar and is on his way to bring the Jakku girl to a prisoner cell.”

Hux’s brows rise fractionally, but his surprise is soon clouded by annoyance. There’s absolutely no reason for him to go to the prison cells for this. Still, he yanks his already pristine jacket into place and runs his fingers over his lapels, giving Phasma a curt, irritated nod.

“Very well.”

“Sir,” Phasma salutes once more before turning on her heel and walking to her post on the bridge, Hux’s long strides carrying him away from the bridge and towards the prison cells.

Just as he turns the corner with purposeful steps, the soles of his boots thumping on the hard floors as two stormtroopers flank him all the way, Hux is treated to the most ridiculous thing he’s ever seen:
that of Kylo Ren stomping towards one of the prisoner cells with a wriggling scavenger tossed over his massive shoulder like a bag of potatoes.

Her arms are tied behind her back and she’s been gagged, but Hux can hear the muffled, furious screams even at this distance. Her legs fling wildly and kick Ren repeatedly in the stomach, and though Kylo Ren doesn’t seem to notice - or pretends not to - Hux is sure that’ll leave a collection of angry bruises for the Knight to find in the morning. A small pinprick of satisfaction runs through him at the thought. Bruises are the least the oaf deserves.

He hangs back just long enough to watch the Knight walk into the cell and drop the prisoner carelessly on the floor before Hux allows himself to enter at a languid pace. The mechanical doors shut with a loud ‘thunk’ that reeks of finality to his ears.

The scavenger scrambles up to her feet from where she’d been tossed down like a bag of grain, then crouches like a feral thing. He takes her in with amusement as her eyes turn to slits and she hisses over the cloth gagged in her mouth, sharp little teeth glinting.

So the desert rat does have fangs after all.

He holds his ground, though, steeling himself, refusing to let this slip of a girl think she could intimidate him. Hux would find it kind of endearing, really, if not for the fact that she’s part of the reason why he’s been spending anxious nights sleeping less than usual for three weeks, awaiting for a summons with more and more trepidation as the days pass.

Silence stretches and Hux starts to wonder if he’s been brought here so he could play a game of who can blink first. He certainly has no time for this.

“I see you picked up a stray,” Hux clips at Ren, words icy while he gives the girl a once over.

The barely-there sound of plastoid armor adjusting over itself reaches his ears as the stormtroopers shift their weight and Hux realizes that the girl makes them nervous, a known force sensitive angry and cornered like an animal inside a sealed vaulted room with them inside. Hux doesn’t twitch a muscle. It would not do for his men to think that their leader could become fidgety, though if he were to admit it to himself, he likes the prospects of being around two force users - one angry and on the defensive, the other a total degenerate - just as much as the stormtroopers do.

The silence continues and Hux just barely refrains from rolling his eyes and storming out of the room.

“Well?” he bites instead.

“A word,” Kylo Ren finally deigns to speak, turning towards the doors. Hux inches his gaze at the cameras in the ceiling and gives a small, curt nod before looking at Ren.

“She can’t move,” Kylo says, voice impassive as ever through his helmet, “Frozen.”

Hux turns to look at the scavenger. True enough, the only things that seem to be able to move are her slowly blinking eyes, the feral turn to her lips over her bared teeth otherwise frozen. Hux narrows his eyes.

The doors slams shut behind them when they step out, leaving her crouching inside. The stormtroopers immediately dismiss themselves to give their superiors privacy, while remaining just close enough to return to their posts if called.

Hux curls his fingers over a fist behind his back as he acknowledges the Knight in front of him, head
held high and shoulders squared; Kylo Ren is only about an inch or two taller than he is and he won’t let the man watching him silently use that to intimidate him.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of your request?” he asks as professionally as he can afford to be.

“I apprehended the scavenger on her way out of Ahch-To,” Kylo says, “Headed for D’Qar, as per the coordinates in her ship’s logs.”

Hux narrows his eyes. He would need to issue a reconnaissance meeting soon... This new information could prove very useful in zeroing in on the rebels. Before he can ask further questions, however, Ren continues.

“I have been summoned to Supreme Leader Snoke to finalize my training,” Ren says in the most formal voice Hux has ever heard from the giant. It’s tinged with pride, Hux thinks, but drops it. It's none of his business.

“And what does your little Force Cult gathering have to do with me, Ren?” Hux asks.

There is no reason as to why he’d have to be down here to be told this. A simple comm could have achieved the exact same thing with a lot less hassle, and a lot less wasted time on Hux’s end. He had an armada to run.

“I cannot oversee her interrogation while on board a ship headed to outer space, General,” Kylo drawls, moving closer to Hux than necessary.

“Interesting, that,” Hux barbs, “I thought you and your little gang of magical children could do just about anything.”

Kylo’s fingers twitch at being called a kid, the sound of stretching, creaking leather reaching his ear as Ren steps closer, his helmet mere inches from Hux’s nose. If he breathed just hard enough, Hux muses, he’d be able to fog it over. Ren says nothing, however, and Hux finally says the words he meant to say, rather than the antagonistic jab he had delivered.

“You can’t possibly be suggesting I interrogate her. I have no time for babysitting your pet projects.”

“That is exactly what I’m... asking... General. Nicely.” Kylo says, his throat choking around that one word like he’s never had to ask for anything in his life. Hux very much doubted he ever truly had to.

“You’re asking me.” Hux deadpans. “Nicely.”

“Yes.” Kylo growls, then straightens as though he’s remembered who he is, a mountain swathed in black, leather and terror. The man reeks of command.

“You’ll have to do better than that, Ren,” Hux sneers. Why was it up to him to always go in and salvage the situation?

“Would you prefer I tell Snoke you think interrogating a very dangerous prisoner of war is beneath your pay grade?”

Hux’s nostrils flare. He tightens the reins on his temper and control and stares at the other man. When Kylo Ren senses no answer coming, he continues. “You’re the best interrogator on this base other than myself, General.”

Hux’s brain sparks up for a millisecond at this. Was that a compliment? From this man?
“Or do you perhaps think that your skills could be best used doing… other…things?” Kylo asks. The jibe comes with a telltale brush against his awareness and Hux slams every single defensive wall he possesses around his thoughts.

There.

That insufferable bastard.

How dare he?

“Keep your filthy mind games to yourself, Lord Ren, or you’ll find yourself regretting it,” Hux warns, words dripping with venom as he moves in to meet Kylo’s visor until his breath does fog a small round spot on the helmet’s nose. His hands have fisted at his side and he’s about a tenth of an inch away from snapping.

And just like that, Kylo Ren pulls back and Hux can only imagine the self satisfied smirk behind the mask, reveling in sneaking under Hux’s skin and fueling his fury.

“I’d like to see you try, General,” Kylo says, looking for another response. Hux won’t even dignify that with an answer. “Until then, perhaps, your skills would be best used here?” Kylo finishes, his helmet tilting towards the vaulted door where the scavenger waits, then turns around and leaves without awaiting for Hux to confirm that he would even bother to agree to his demand.

Typical.

A loud scream and a thump against the wall tells Hux that Kylo has released the Force Freeze and he nearly turns around to leave. Of course he’d keep her that way until the last possible second. Of course he would. A small present for the General, another way to get under his skin.

Hux fights the urge to curse under his breath and twitches his fingers at the stormtroopers to follow. She might be bound, but from the sound of the repeated rams against the walls, she’s far from harmless.

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Hux has two comfortable chairs brought to the scavenger’s cell, placed facing each other by the stormtroopers before they retreat to the back corners of the room, weapons aimed at the girl’s back.

He lowers himself to his seat like a man who has all the time in the world and makes himself comfortable, crossing one leg over the other and pulling off his gloves, resting them on his knees. The girl is back on the floor, her chest heaving and her lips panting around the cloth gag shoved into her mouth, staring murder at Hux. He crosses his hands calmly on his lap as he watches her, eyes roving over her singed, dirty clothes and wild hair falling out of what looks like three little buns. She hadn’t gone down without a fight.

“Sit, please,” Hux offers, extending a hand to the empty chair behind her. She doesn’t move. He regards her impassively while the air around them crackles dangerously with tension.

“Here’s how this is going to happen,” Hux begins, purposely keeping the edge out of his voice like a parent talking to a petulant child, “You can either take a seat, or remain on the floor - it does not matter to me - but here we will talk like civilized people.”

When she bares her teeth at him and he’s reminded of a rabid dog waiting for a fight, Hux realizes she plans on being anything but civilized. He suppresses the urge to pinch his nose in distaste, studying her face in quiet wonder. Now he begins to understand exactly why he’d found Kylo Ren
cut up like a pig to market and bleeding out three weeks ago.

Hux sighs, then he uncrosses his legs and leans forward ever so slowly, careful not to spook her. She inches away from him, hackles rising, and Hux raises his palms up in a silent, peaceful offering to indicate he means no harm. Her eyes dance across his, trying to catch him on a lie, but she makes no move to retreat.

“I am only trying to remove this… whatever this is,” he looks at the piece of dirty rags that had been forcefully shoved in her mouth and bound in place with another dirty strip, then grimaces. “Then we can speak.”

Give it to the First Knight of Ren to be a total boor. War may not be pretty by necessity, but it doesn’t have to be so uncivilized. The scavenger pinches her nose and Hux allows her to see the small upward tug of his lips. On this at least they agree.

She stays in place when Hux moves forward again, and he grabs the slip of fabric over her mouth to tug down. The air sparks when his thumb accidentally meets the pad of her lips, cold fingers rusing over searing hot skin, and he withdraws quickly before she forcefully spits out the wad of cloth.

“There,” he murmurs, leaning back into his chair and assuming his previous seating arrangement. The warmth of her lip still burns. “I assume that feels better.”

The girl grumbles something under her breath that sounds a bit like agreement, but it’s so low Hux wonders if he imagined it. He speaks again after a long moment in which she makes no move to sit up.

“I would take your restraints off entirely, except we all know how that went the last time you were on my base,” he says, suppressing a sneer, thinking warily to what he’d heard of her escape and the immediate consequences.

Her eyes snap up to his at the reminder and — like a slow motion holovideo playing out in front of his eyes — her face goes slack and her lids lower as she takes him in.

“You will remove these restraints,” she commands, slowly and deliberately intoning every syllable. “You will open these doors and let me go. You will not remember this.”

Hux drapes a calm mask over his own expression as he relaxes his features, lips parting slightly - in surprise at her gall, if he’s honest with himself - and he bites back the laugh that almost bubbles up his throat.

Clever girl. Unfortunately, not clever enough.

“I will—” he repeats, watching the tiny spark of hope slowly working its way to her face, relishing it for an extra breath before continuing, “I will do no such thing.”

Her expression sours quickly enough to cause whiplash. Hux almost chuckles.

“Did you really think that would work on me, girl?” he asks. How dare she try compulsion on him? What was it with every blasted Force user thinking that they could just barge into his thoughts and order him about like a puppet?

“I—“ She stutters, a flush creeping up her collarbone; it’s not anger, he thinks, but embarrassment that tinges her cheeks pink.

He glances at the stormtroopers. They had gone stiff, shifting in the spot as she’d tried to use
compulsion. The men slowly relax back into their positions as the air clears, blasters aimed at her shoulder blades. The scavenger in front of him tenses up.

Hux looks at her closely. He’s here to get information out of her, not to rile her up further, so he fills in for her benefit.

“It’s fine,” Hux offers with a minute smile, holding it until he’s sure she’s seen it, “you didn’t know any better. And how would you? No one’s taught you.”

Ah... there.

He hit the nail on the head as her expression goes through the paces: being taken aback, mortification, anger, fear, then a slow, sad resignation that veils itself across her eyes.

She’s just as bad as Kylo Ren.

“How did you know?” She whispers, curling in on herself.

Hux considers. He could goad her, call her weak and silly for trying to take over a general’s mind without proper training, but it would only push her further into the defensive, and a cornered, unwilling prisoner was of no use to him.

The girl is obviously untrained. He remembers as much from audiences with Snoke. Which meant she must have tried to find the Skywalker. It would explain her capture coming out of what is, for all intents and purposes, an uninhabited planet.

So, she’d been rejected, then.

“Lucky guess,” he says, turning the tiny bit of information in his mind. This meant D’Qar could be the location of the rebel base. He’d request audience with the Supreme Leader as soon as he was done here.

The girl slumps. Hux studies her closely.

“You should know that trick only works on the weak of mind,” he says and taps his temple, looking for a way to use this to his advantage, absentmindedly beating a slow rhythm with his heel. The constant, steady beat grabs her attention immediately. Her eyes swing down. “You would need much more practice to use compulsion on someone trained to guard their thoughts.”

Hux deftly plants a small seed in her mind.

Luke Skywalker cannot train her, but there is another Force user who could. It lasts a few heartbeats, every thought painted clearly on her face, then she shakes her head.

Hmm. Tough little weed to sway, aren’t you?

He’s not sure why he even tries — this is Kylo’s mess and he damn well should be the one doing the legwork, not Hux — yet here he is, dangling the proverbial carrot in front of her, and she shakes it away. Hux only sees a personal challenge.

Perhaps a bigger carrot is needed.

Hux leans forward once more and extends a hand.

“I cannot take your restraints off, but perhaps I can make you more comfortable. Won’t you take the seat?”
The scavenger looks behind her, frowning. Hux notes the bruises around her ankles from her restraints, and he knows for a fact that the floors are freezing. He personally keeps the prisoner cells colder than most places - a little chill makes faster work of unwilling minds and mouths. She turns her frown on him then sighs, struggling to get up without the aid of her hands.

He’s at her side immediately, grabbing her by the elbow to help her up. She flinches at his fingers wrapping around the small crook of her elbow; Hux ignores it, pulling her up gently and leading her until her bottom hits the plush seat. A small, inaudible sigh escapes her and he smiles internally, dropping his hand and retaking his own. He leans forward, elbows perched on his thighs so that his eyes are lower than hers, forcing him to look up through his eyelashes. It’s a small thing, but intimidation would only get him so far, something Kylo Ren had never learned.

Hux berates himself at the reminder. This is the fifth time in a matter of minutes thoughts of Ren have weaseled into Hux’s thoughts. He shoves the irksome realization to the back of his brain and focuses on the girl in front of him. She’s still on eggshells, tense and ready to run, but she’s no longer trying to find a spare moment to lunge herself at him. It’s progress, however small.

“I apologize on behalf of the Order for the way in which you were… deposited… here,” he starts, only to be cut off.

“Why would you care?” she seethes, “You’re just as monstrous as he is. You’re all monsters.”

Hux arches an eyebrow and stomps on his irritation before replying with languorous words.

“Civilized conversation, girl,” he reminds her. He thinks he’s made a mistake to do so when her feet stomp down on the cold steel floor, shoulders are thrown back, trying to skin him alive with her glare.


It takes him aback. Her rage. She’s spit fire and barely contained fury in her wild eyes, even dirty and restrained as she is. He takes in the wispy hairs flying around her face, and for a second the pure display of power robs him of air.

He soaks it in, then uses his height to his advantage, rising. She must crane her neck up and squint if she wants to watch him over the glaring overhead lights.

“Well, Rey…” The name is soft and glides on his lips too easily, “Perhaps we should speak later… once all of our tempers have simmered down.”

Another flush creeps up her cheeks even as she glares daggers at him. The only temper that has flared here is hers, and that gives him the upper hand. A well admonished child is easier to guide as the adult wants.

Hux turns to leave, frowning. This is Kylo Ren’s job, not his, and yet, here he is.

The second time he sees with the girl - Rey, he reminds himself, preparing for another round of battle - he finds her curled up on the chair. Well… chairs. She’s pushed them together into a makeshift bed.

She jumps like an alarmed cat when the doors hiss open. Hux stops at the door as she sits up, tucking her legs in and painfully avoiding the second chair.
He considers, then takes one step forward.

“May I speak with you?” he asks, and the confusion on her face is priceless. She didn’t expect the courtesy.

He steeplets his fingers on his other hand behind his back, patiently waiting for her.

“No,” she says then looks at the wall. Hux smiles, nods, takes one step back. He’s fine playing the long game.

“As you wish,” he replies, noting the the look of disbelief on her face as he takes a step back and the door hisses shut.

She’s more cooperative the third time. Hux asks for a decent meal and a blanket to be brought to her beforehand, knowing that she’s freezing and starving. He takes in the empty room as the stormtroopers take their places behind her, noticing the marks on the walls, some sort of count, wondering how she managed. She’s bundled up in her blanket. Her wrist restraints are removed for meals, and he’d had them removed for his meeting with her. The small show of kindness must have worked, because this time she grants him an audience.

She scoots over to her chair, leaving the other vacant. He approaches her as he would a scared rabbit, on light feet and in slow motion, keeping as close to the wall as possible before approaching and dragging his chair a fair distance away.

Hux sits down and crosses his ankles this time, a less intimidating posture than when he crosses his one leg over another like an emperor at his leisure.

Hux slowly drums his fingers on his thigh, and again, her eyes swing to it. She can’t help herself, he muses, watching her focus on the consistent beat.

He’d done his homework. An orphan from a desert planet. He imagines the quiet days and nights with no sound but that of her own breathing.

“Would you like to talk, today?” Hux asks, breaking the silence by giving her the choice.

Her eyes widen a fraction when she looks at him before once more glazing over in irreverent refusal.

“I see,” he says into the stretching silence.

Well, if she won’t talk...

“I have ordered your restraints to be permanently removed.”

The blankets rustle as the girl instinctively rubs at her wrists. They’re undoubtedly aching and bruised by now.

“I will have a med droid examine them,” Hux offers, nodding towards the movement, “ensure there’s no damage.”

Perhaps this third kindness finally breaks her. Rey lowers her head and a soft whisper dances all the way to his ears.

*Thank you.*
Hux nods, allowing himself a satisfied smile.

Yes, he’d play the long game indeed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Chapter Playlist:
Intro: World Boss - Gov't Mule
Rey: I'm Not Talking - The Yardbirds
Honored Guest

Chapter Summary

Rey tries to escape, repeatedly, ultimately forcing Hux's arm while grinding every one of his gears. Nobody's happy about this new development. At all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The days had started bleeding together. Rey had paced the small cell from corner to corner for two days, inspecting every edge, looking for any crack she could exploit to escape from this Light forsaken hellhole. After her first meeting with… she didn’t know who he was, actually, she’d realized, confused— He must be important, however, because he came and and went as he liked, flanked by stormtroopers, and he’d called her a stray to Ren’s face without ending up on the wrong end of his lightsaber. That had to count for something. After meeting with the redhead, Rey decided she’d find a way to escape or die trying. She’d denied him an audience, watching in bewilderment as he’d calmly taken a step back, accepting her refusal as if she were only turning down food. She’d begun plotting immediately after. Her first order of business had been to mark the wall with her handcuffs, rubbing against it to indent it: day one.

By the second night, her pacing slows from frantic to methodical as Rey counts the steps it takes to walk the perimeter. It keeps her sane, keeps her occupied so she doesn’t drown in the horrible wave of defeat that keeps roaring up, trying to crush her.

On the third night her nerves are on edge. She’s sleep deprived and cold. Freezing, in fact; the outfit given to her by the Resistance is very ill-suited for being kept in the equivalent of a freezer. She examines the walls. There are no cracks, no weak edges or corners. She sighs, flopping on her makeshift bed. She considers her options: she could break a leg off and club the troopers with it at meal time, if it ever came. Her stomach grumbles, and Rey groans in frustration. She hadn’t eaten in twenty four hours. The durasteel restraints around her wrists chafe when she leans back. Rey growls. Even if she managed to make a weapon out of a chair, she couldn’t use it while her hands were tied behind her. A reminder of her weakness; what good does the Force do her if she can’t control it enough to get these blasted things off?! They’d been removed for meals by a small and efficient droid; precautions had been taken to keep her from bending a stormtrooper’s mind, she notes with satisfaction. Good. Let them believe she’s strong. At least strong enough for that.

She shifts on her chairs. Clubbing a droid would not do. Rey likes droids. It isn’t their fault that humans use their programming for wrong-doing, and bringing her a meal does not deserve a whack and potential malfunctioning.

Her stomach growls again. As if on cue, Rey hears the doors hissing open to admit a small droid bearing a tray of food on top of a bundle of something. Stormtroopers stand armed to the teeth across the hall, eyeing her warily as the droid enters the chamber, far enough away that she can’t use compulsion yet close enough to block her path if she tries to run.

The closing door blocks her view of the soldiers, and the droid quickly undoes the locking mechanism of her restraints, pushing a round key-like piece of metal into the matching hole in her handcuffs. A whir as the lock gives way, a sharp, metallic click, and the handcuffs fall off her wrists.
and into a mechanical claw before hitting the floor. Rey rubs at her now freed wrists immediately, inspecting them. Sickly yellowy-red rings of old bruises, topped off with newer ones, purple and blue and angry, circle her bony wrists like bracelets. Rage sparks inside her chest.

“Prisoner 3259,” the droid greets with a tinny voice, sputtering out technical data about her food. “Your meal is currently at perfect temperature for human consumption. This room’s temperature is fifty-six degrees. It will take approximately fifteen minutes for the contents of your plate to become cold. Please eat now.”

The words don’t register anything but the prisoner number, stripped of her name, of anything that marks her as an individual. Her anger spikes. This must be how Finn felt at being called FN-2187, she muses, pain blooming in her chest at the thought of her friend. Where is he now? Had he recovered fully? Had he died? He had been under heavy sedation when she had last seen him. Just barely stable. Injuries such as his could still take a turn for the worst at the last minute. Rey prays to a deity she doesn’t know, any deity that would listen, that her friend would survive.

“Prisoner 3259,” the droid calls out once more, rocking on its wheels to get her attention, pushing a bundle towards her, “A request has been made for this delivery.”

Rey grabs it tentatively, almost breaking down and crying when she realizes it’s a blanket. A large, plush, blessedly warm fleece blanket. She’s freezing.

“I—…” She starts, but the droid interrupts her again with its spiel about the food’s temperature. Rey shakes her head.

“Thank you,” she whispers sincerely. It lets out a self satisfied whir of its internal gears.

Perhaps she could persuade this little droid.

“My name is Rey,” she says.

The droid does nothing, gears turning at a low buzz. She must have imagined the previous sound. How silly of her. This is a First Order droid, programmed to lack personality.

The droid speaks.

“Prisoner Rey 3259,” it chimes, giving her the food temperature run-down again, this time with far less time until it runs cold. Rey grins, food forgotten. The droid responded. Intelligently, though still within the restrictions of its programming. Even so, it had said her name.

So Rey turns around, setting the blanket aside and dutifully eating. Satisfied, the droid turns on its wheels and exits the room, leaving her alone with her thoughts, and she sets to devouring the gruel on her plate. Her stomach aches, half protestation, half delight at finally having something to digest, and for a second Rey feels the echoed pangs of her hungry life on Jakku. Her heart sinks. She’d exchanged one hell for another.

Rey sets the empty tray aside, grateful the restraints hadn’t been replaced as she curls herself up on the makeshift bed, wrapped up in her new blanket. It is the most deliciously comfortable thing she’s ever felt. Her only comparisons were the rags she’d used during sand storms in Jakku, and the stiff blankets on the millennium falcon. Night and Day. It must have been recently been laundered, because the warmth couldn’t possibly be natural.

Just as she’s lulling herself to sleep the doors open.

The redheaded man stands at the door and she debates with herself on the merits of just staying down
and denying him a seat, but then she feels the soft, warm blanket around her and sits up gingerly. She
could grant him an audience. Doesn’t mean she’d actually say anything useful, if at all. He must be
awfully good at non-verbal communication, Rey muses, picking up on her decision without Rey
saying anything as he slowly walks in with short, deliberate steps. Lazy steps. He could cover
ground in two long strides. She refuses to make herself small for him, however, unflinching when he
makes a grab for the vacant chair and positions it in front of her.

His eyes roam the room as he sits down, lingering a moment too long on the cuff marks she’s been
leaving on the walls. If Rey vandalizing his ship bothers him at all, he doesn’t show it. Instead his icy
blue eyes land on her as he crosses his ankles.

Silence stretches for a heartbeat. Rey has a hard time looking away from his gaze.

“Would you like to talk, today?” he murmurs. Rey’s brain speeds up.

Why is he giving her an option at all? She’s a prisoner. Rey steels herself. Of course he’s not giving
her an option. He’d force it out of her when she refuses to oblige and his temper runs short, if he’s
anything like Kylo Ren. Rey inspects his clothes, trying to read him. A professional interrogator? It
would make sense.

“I see…” He acknowledges her silence. “I have ordered your restraints to be permanently removed.”

He must be joking, surely. Rey’d expected torture, lashes, perhaps. It’s undoubtedly coming, but her
hands reach to comfort her bruised and painful wrists automatically even as she refuses to
acknowledge him.

Maybe if she stays quiet, he’ll give up again and walk away.

Rey doesn’t have much to give him anyway - now that she truly thinks back on it, she spent less than
twenty four hours with the Resistance - for all that’s worth. For the hundredth time in the last three
days she wishes she had access to Luke’s lightsaber. Her gears start turning towards escape from this
prison as she slowly, carefully rubs at her wrists.

His eyes shift to her lap once, twice, three times, then back at her.

“I will have a med droid examine them, ensure there’s no damage,” he offers with a nod towards the
rustling blanket.

Rey stops, tenses, studies him for a second too long.

“What’s he playing at?

The blanket’s warmth serves as a reminder that she’s at his mercy, that the small kindnesses could be
taken away just as easily as they had been bestowed and spending days on end freezing her limbs off
in this place isn’t ideal. Rey is nothing if not a survivor, so she does the only thing she can do, her
instinct to survive stronger than her stubbornness.

Rey lowers her head, breathing out two small words.

“Thank you.”

A tiny smile plays on his lips. Rey relaxes a fraction and leans her head back on the headrest of her
chair, sighing yet never looking away. She’d be stupid to close her eyes and drop her defenses; her
intent is to leave this place in one piece, so Rey would play the long game until she finds out how,
then leave all this behind and forget it ever happened.
What would she do then? Return to the resistance? Go back to Jakku? Perhaps she could just disappear into the outer rim like Finn had tried to, start over somewhere else with no Force and no War and no whoever this man sitting in front of her is—

“Rey…” he chimes, turning her name over slowly, and her eyelids twitch at the sound of it on his tongue. “I have a proposal for you.”

Rey’s head snaps up. She frowns. A what now?

He leans forward again, palms extended, elbows resting on his knees.

“The truth is, I have no use for prisoners, especially those who won’t talk.”

She knew this was coming.

Slowly, she steels herself up for potential pain. She’s never been tortured before, but she’s been in plenty of brutal fights to know what hard thrown punches feel like, and she’d been beaten to near death once or twice over salvaged scrap. Rey could endure.

He continues as if he hadn’t just implied that he’d take what he needs by force.

“I also have no use for force users. That is Kylo Ren’s thing, not mine,” he offers her a small conspiratorial smile, but his tone screams that there’s no love lost between the two. “So my options dwindle as the days go by…”

He lets the words sink in as silence descends. She’d be able to hear a pin drop.

Rey starts running through her options as well. Her eyes twitch towards the cameras she knows are hidden in the ceiling along the corners — she’d found them on the second day — before swinging back to the man in front of her.

“So perhaps we can come to a mutual agreement, yes?” He says, dangling the offer like a carrot on a string.

“What offer?” Rey asks, tone hard. She wouldn’t give him the pleasure of friendliness.

“Well… Simple, really. I can’t let you go,” he says, crushing her dreams of easy freedom, “but I could make your life a whole lot more comfortable here. This room, for one.”

His hand swings lazily about forcing her to take in the bare, steely walls, the cold floors, the bright lights.

“In exchange for what, exactly?” She asks.

“Luke Skywalker.”

Rey laughs, a rough, rusty thing. She can’t remember the last time she laughed at anything.

“You want me to—…” she giggles. This man is unbelievable. He’d said it so easily. “I fought in a collapsing planet in order to keep that secret, and you want me to hand it out to you for..what? A blanket?”

He turns feral for a second before quickly schooling his expression, and Rey wonders exactly what his connection to that incident had been. That look belonged on a predator. A manka cat. Rey would be the mouse. Still, she refuses to let him think she’s intimidated by him. He doesn’t move.
“Why were you in Ahch-To?” he asks, cutting her laughter off abruptly. His eyes flick back and forth between hers, trying to read her. Rey clamps her mouth shut and glares.

“He’s there, isn’t he?” he asks.

“The Resistance probably knows by now that I’ve been captured.” This is a lie, but she can only hope that someone would have guessed something happened. She’d been gone long enough.

He shrugs.

“Perhaps,” he says nonchalantly.

“They will come for me,” she promises. He smiles then, a wide, toothy smile, danger curling at its edges.

“They can try,” he taps the fingers of his left hand against the back of his right and her eyes fly to it before she forces her gaze up. She won’t get distracted. This is too important for her to let sound get to her. Then the man says something that nearly splits her apart.

“But I am guessing they will not,” he states matter of factly, “You’re a nobody from a backwater wasteland. You were turned down by the Resistance’s god on earth. You have nothing to offer them now that would benefit their best interests now that Skywalker’s rejected you; except somewhat decent flying skills, and they can’t be that great if Kylo Ren locked onto your ship and hauled you back here kicking and screaming. They certainly have no one else to train you; not to use your magical powers, not to be a better pilot. You’ve only known them for… what? A handful of weeks at most? Do you really, truly know them? Why would you swear your undying loyalty to a group of people like that?”

He’d done his homework. Rey stiffens to stone. Her only other option would be to lunge for his throat and rip out his jugular with her teeth, and she doubts the two stormtroopers at her back would respond kindly.

She takes in every well aimed jab, every single rip at her ego and the few things she held with pride, and mentally rages at the bastard sitting across from her. How dare he? Rey throws all caution to the wind, though, because her anger’s gotten to her.

“You’re no different, you monster,” she snarls, “or have you already forgotten that your precious Order just wiped out billions of people for… what? Your best interests? Why would I help a group of people like that?”

He tilts his head at her twisting of his words, considering. The look of anger is gone from his eyes, replaced by something colder, stonier, and Rey suddenly starts fearing for her life.

“Because, as of right now, you’re my guest. And the least you could do is behave and cooperate, no?”

“No.”

He smiles. Rey can’t tell if he’s irritated or actually amused, though she’s nearly sure it’s the former. They sit regarding each other silently for a long time.

“I hope you enjoy your accommodations, then,” he says after what feels like a lifetime. He gets up and moves to retreat.

Rey doesn’t know why she does it. Why she speaks up, but it comes tumbling out either way.
“Wouldn’t a guest know her host’s name, at least? Or have I been demoted to prisoner of war once more?”

He stops, and Rey takes a split second to run her eyes over the broad expanse of his shoulders, thrown back and covered with fine, sturdy, impeccably pressed black fabric; gloved hands rigid at his side, ever the stance of someone used to giving orders. A commander, then. He turns, expression unreadable and Rey’s eyes widen a fraction.

How could someone guard their emotions so easily? She hopes that hers don’t show at every turn. The sound of his hard boots on the floors bounces against the walls. The only sound as he watches her from under long, thick red lashes.

She might have pushed a bit too far.

“Hux. General Hux, to you. Welcome aboard my ship.”

She chokes down air.

The man runs this ship? The only other General she knows is General Leia Organa, the woman running the whole of the Resistance. A station of power, then. A very, very high station. How was she not dead yet, after continually insulting him?

General Hux turns on his heel and walks out, and Rey’s resolve to escape doubles as the door slams behind his retreating, powerful stride.

The first time she manages to escape, she’s so close to truly being free that she cries when she lands right back in another cell, uncaring of the cameras.

After the General left, Rey set about to work. She’d removed her over tunic, ripping it to pieces between her teeth with short fingernails. Her teeth positively hurt by the end of it. She’d noticed that the cameras would flicker for a second every handful of hours. Activity. The lights in her cell were blessedly darkened at night - another small mercy, perhaps? - And she though they were surely equipped for night vision, they couldn’t see all corners at once. So she ripped her tunic into squares with the lights on, then waited until they went dark.

Once dark, she’d take the chairs to the corners and dropped the fabric over the cameras’ eyes. She’d hold her breath for the alarms to go off, but when nothing came, she quietly moved her chairs back to the center of the room and went to sleep.

When guards checked on her the next day, and the day after that, they would always find her asleep. The squares would come down, and she’d only cut more up from her tunic and repeat it the next day. Eventually, whoever was in command of the cameras assumed she simply wanted privacy, because they stopped taking her ragged scraps of fabric.

Once she’s gained their trust, she gets to work. The next two nights she covers the cameras, then stacks her chairs in the center of the room and climbs gingerly, careful not to fall and cause a ruckus. Rey pries at the overhead light with bleeding fingertips, but she doesn’t care. Small cuts she can deal with. Whenever General Hux comes in to jostle information out of her, she carefully keeps them hidden.

By the third night, the cap on the overhead light pops off along with the lightbulb. Rey grins.
She shoves her hand through the hole, careful to avoid wires or yank anything out of place, and feels around tentatively, landing on small little bolts. The tiny amount of light coming through the bottom crack of the door is enough for her to work.

*Of course, the ceiling’s panels are bolted from the inside!* Clever, but they hadn’t considered the one weakness… the light socket.

Rey works the bolts slowly, carefully, one hand suspended under the panel to ensure it doesn’t clatter to the ground. She strips the two bolts closest to her, grinning with relief when the panel swings upward. It won’t fall after all. Rey climbs down, repositions her chairs under the panel, climbs back up carefully and pushes it until it falls open with a soft thud.

*This is it!*

She climbs up, praying to the Maker that there are no exposed wires, and breathes a sigh of relief when she finds a clear ventilation shaft. Rey moves on elbows and knees, hissing every once in a while at scraped skin without stopping. Her heart thrums in her ears, her guts twisting until she feels slightly sick, but she follows the ventilation shaft along the ship like a rat inside the wall - Rey smirks at that - until she overhears stormtroopers.

She climbs slower, stopping for sounds. She’s following blind, but at least she’s not stuck in a holding cell. Eventually she comes across a hall with no noise. So, rarely patrolled. Rey waits a good twenty minutes to make sure then works her aching fingers over panel bolts, dropping into the hallway. She’s weaponless, but at least she knows she can use compulsion on a trooper. She’d be careful.

Rey finds an information station and taps at it hurriedly, placing herself in relation to the hangar. Fifteen minutes later, Rey crouches behind a bolted TIE-Fighter. Her eyes rove over the area. So many ships. She didn’t know there could be this many.

Her heart beats like a drum and she’s out of breath it being at her throat, nerves on edge, but this might be her only chance to escape. First, she needs her ship in order to do so. She looks up and down the hangar, panic building.

There are black TIE-Fighters everywhere, and a few command shuttles, but no white ship. She’d grabbed a wrench, as long as her forearm, from a supply closet to use as a weapon, wielding it with an iron grip of her own. The ship must be somewhere.

There must be a second hangar somewhere. She’d find an information station and locate the next. As she makes her way to where she came from, Rey curses this blasted gigantic destroyer.

Her roaming is cut short when a stormtrooper appears. It wasn’t supposed to be there. She had counted the turnaround for patrols. Rey curses.

“HALT!” The stormtrooper screams.

Rey bolts, stuck between the hangar and a stormtrooper, and skids to a stop at the realization. Her only way out is through that hallway. Rey turns around to go incapacitate the Stormtrooper when yet another one appears from a different hall, having heard its comrade.

*Kriffing Hell.*

“HALT!” the trooper screams as his comrade activates the overhead alarm. Loud, screeching noises go *Woo-Woo-Woo!* until Rey’s sure she’s about to get a splitting headache. They advance slowly, aiming their blasters straight at her, and Rey crouches, readying herself. Another set of Stormtroopers
appear at a run. She curses just about every damned person on this ship when they pounce.

Rey twirls out of the way, one stormtrooper accidentally knocking another with its blaster, stuck in too close quarters to shoot. Rey quickly gains the upper hand, swinging her iron wrench like a club at helmets and chests and kneecaps. She’s so close. So close.

Her wrench meets a stormtrooper’s helmet and he falls with a sickening crack, the visor broken, the stormtrooper screaming murder. Rey doesn’t spare a second wondering if she blinded it - them, she reminds herself. It’s a person in there - before twisting to avoid a hit to her abdomen.

And then, a familiar voice floats to her.

“What in the hell do you think you’re doing?”

Rey falters at the General’s voice. That’s all it takes for her to lose.

Something hard rams into her back between her shoulder blades. A blaster, she thinks as she grunts and stumbles forward.

“Apprehend her.”

General Hux is still in uniform, impeccable as ever, and a ridiculous part of her brain wonders if he ever changes or if somebody just irons his clothes while he’s wearing them.

Her hands are yanked behind her, pinned on her lower back, and she hears the resounding clicking of metal as it shuts on her freedom. Rey’s head drops as her eyes screw shut.

She was so close.

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General Hux takes away everything. The chairs. The blanket. Her clothes.

She’s put into military issued underwear. If she were to rip anything off, she’d be left entirely naked. Rey curls up atop the cold metal slab built into the wall. The mattress had also been taken away. Her meals are delivered not by the kind droid that had learned her name, but by a battle droid armed to the teeth.

Rey weeps that night, something she’d promised she’d never do. Not here. Not ever.

She’s proved wrong.

He strides in after hours of her shivering like a giant meeting with an ant. This time nobody accompanies him. Rey refuses to meet his eyes.

“This could have gone so much easier, you know that, right?” He finally says after an eternity. There is no gentle demeanor, no calm words. Just cold. Rey wants to scream.

“Look at me, girl,” He barks.

Rey, against her better judgement, looks up.

“Did you really think we’d leave your garbage shuttle of a ship lying around for you to get to so easily? It’s under maximum security somewhere you’ll never find it,” He says with a sneer.
“Didn’t you say I am of no use to you? Why not just let me go?” She asks, knowing how stupid it is, but asking it either way.

“And what? You’ll just walk away and not cause any issues?” he snides.

“Yes,” Rey deadpans.

“You’re promises are worth very little right now, girl.”

“Stop calling me that,” She grits out.

“What? Speak up. I didn’t hear you,” Hux mocks, having heard her just fine.

“Stop calling me girl!” Rey screams, exasperated. The look of contempt he gives her sends an ugly shiver down her spine.

“I will call you what you are, brat. A petulant, spoiled, irritating little girl,” He snarls, “and until you prove to me that you can be an adult, that’s all you’ll ever be.”

Hux leaves her to stew despite the freezing temperatures. Rey sits up and curls in on herself in the corner, trying to conserve as much body heat as humanly possible.

The second time she nearly escapes she wonders if the universe is just set out to get her. A stormtrooper makes the mistake of coming too close to her door, and she forces the unsuspecting soul to open it.

She’d yanked the stormtrooper’s blaster out of his hand at lightning speed and cracked it over its helmet. It fell. Did they not put any sort of padding in those things?

A thought for some other day.

Rey hauls the stormtrooper into the room, jamming the blaster between the door and the wall, and quickly strips the prone body of trousers and shirt, leaving the helmet on; she doesn’t want to know who she attacked anyway. The clothes are too big. Way too big. But they’re clothes and blessedly warm. Rey won’t complain. She forgoes the stormtrooper’s armor - it would restrict her movements anyway - and wiggles her way out of her cell, letting the door fall shut.

Rey rolls up the sleeves, keeping her hands free to operate the blaster.

The cells are stacked against each other, one after another in one long corridor, and she hears the muffled sounds of other people behind doors. Her heart squeezes, wishing she could open them, but her fingerprints would immediately set off the alarms. Rey has to worry about herself first. She vows to some day free every one of these beings, but for now, she has to run.

Except, of course, why would anything go her way?

Just as she’s exits the corridor a tall, broad chested redhead dressed in perfectly wrinkle-free clothing, not a hair out of place, turns the corner flanked by four stormtroopers.

Everything stops.

He stops. She stops.
Her breath stops.

Her heart stops.

Time stops.

And then she’s trying to run down the hall only to end up at a dead end, now crowded in by rushing stormtroopers.

Rey swears she hears a muttered curse from behind the wall of white plastoid and helmets.

“She’s kriffing unbelievable.”

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“Enough!” He screams.

It bounces in the hall. Rey flinches. She’s surely going to die now.

“Handcuff her.”

General Hux looks like he’s about to spit out fire. A stormtrooper shoves her against the wall and Rey grunts when a gun is shoved to the back of her head as a second pair of hands make quick work of ramming handcuffs around her wrists again. Rey winces. She’s going to end up with permanent nerve damage from this.

She’s yanked around by the elbow and snarls, her eyes registering a moment too late that all the plastoid-ridden bodies have moved aside. The only thing in her direct field of vision, uncomfortably close to her nose, is the face of a very angry redhead as he stoops over her, crowding her in. His gloved fingers find the crook of her arm and he squeezes, eliciting a small unbidden yelp.

“What. Do. You. Think. You’re doing?” Hux hisses into her face, his breath warm against her cheek, every word more heated than the last.

“Going for a stroll,” she deadpans, shrugging. Like hell would she let this guy think he could do this to her.

His eyes turn to slits, flying back and forth between her own, too close to be able to take them in at the same time, a displeased curl to his lips.

“Does this look like a game to you? Because I can assure you, it certainly is not a game,” he hisses, and Rey notices just how pale and crystalline his blue eyes are, and made of ice, if the way he looks at her is any indication.

“No. It looks like you’re keeping me here against my will, General.”

He regards her silently for too long, eyes never leaving hers. Rey holds her breath.

Hux straightens, his fingers tightly wrapped around her elbow still.

“You’re all dismissed.”

She blinks.
Every stormtrooper snaps off a salute and turns, leaving in neat, orderly single file until it’s just them and the retreating sound of marching. General Hux lets out a low, angry breath. He yanks at her elbow, tugging her along behind him.

Rey tries to dig in her heels but there’s nothing for them to catch on, the stupidly shiny metal floors forcing her to glide behind as she’s forcefully dragged. Fine then. He can drag her the whole way to wherever they’re going. For the next fifteen minutes or so, she’s treated to the cacophony of stomped steps from Hux’s boots, and the hissy shhhhh of her own - the stormtrooper’s boots - dragging on the ground.

Rey frowns when they stop. This isn’t a cell hall, but a long dark one, smaller than any other on the ship, with doors built into only one wall.

General Hux tugs his glove off from his right hand with his teeth, shoves it into his pocket, and lifts his hand to an access pad. A red line of light silhouettes his long fingers, then beeps green, and the doors in front of them hiss open.

He drags her through then shoves her inside, quickly stepping in behind her to keep her from bolting. The door hisses shut. Rey doesn’t notice, too busy staring at the room.

Her first thought is that it’s huge. Certainly not a prisoner cell.

In fact, it looks anything but. Anywhere else, she’d assume it a high class hotel room, to be honest. The spacious room is split into a small kitchenette, all brushed steel and black counters; a seating area with a long, sleek leather couch, two seating chairs to either side it, and a crystal coffee table in the middle. Her eyes land on the white lilies sitting in a crystal vase on the coffee table, amusement crashing over her at the thought of a man like General Hux keeping flowers alive. Several long steps behind it there’s a long table with a single chair, set against the backdrop of open space. A desk? A dining table? To one side there’s an open and she notices a bed pristinely made, sheets of gunmetal grey and white, black night stands, white lamps. There’s a second door to the left. An office? A refresher?

Rey yelps. In her distraction, Hux yanks her hands back and shoves something into her cuffs. They fall off. Rey turns to watch him hold them between index finger and thumb like a live snake.

“You will not do this again,” He states, grabbing her elbow once more and Rey’s about to clock him because, really, must he be so unnecessarily rough? That hurts. Except he’s a strong man with an iron grip, and a fight here with nowhere to run would not end well for her.

He shoves her into one of the high backed chairs, taking the one opposite her with a single ‘sit’ as if he hadn’t already forced her to.

“Why am I here?” She asks.

General Hux studies her, quiet as a tomb.

"Well?" she presses.

“Since you seem so eager and skilled at getting out of every single holding cell on this blasted ship, I am left with no options and am forced to keep you here,” he says, spreading his arm around to show the space. “Believe me, I am not pleased.”

Rey snorts, wringing her wrists. It hurts.

“If I had known all it takes are two failed attempts at escape to earn upgraded accommodations, I
would have done it sooner.”

Hux looks like he’s about to pop off a button from his perfectly pressed coat. Rey almost smiles.

“These are my quarters,” he stands, looming over her. Rey leans into her seat. “And I hate intruders. Your two choices are to stay here or go out that way,” he says, pointing to the wide expanse of crystal clear window opening up like a maw to space.

“At which point, I will not complain,” he continues. “But since I can’t seem to keep you anywhere else, you’ll be in the one place you can’t get out. Here.”

Rey tilts her head, delighting in the knowledge that she’d riled him up. It’s his turn to huff, his turn to have his neck turn red, his turn to bark out his words in an uncontrolled rush.

“And what makes you think I can’t get out of here, too?”

Hux snorts.

“You’re inside a commanding officer’s quarters. The only way out of here is with my hand,” he says, lifting his right hand, “and I don’t plan on letting you anywhere near it.”

His brows raise as Rey stares a little too long at his long, dexterous fingers.

“There is no way in or out of this place without my biometrics, girl. This room is as good as a fort,” he emphasizes, as if watching Rey’s gears turn.

“If you try to escape, I will know. If you break anything, I will know. If you do anything, I will know.” He adds, “You are truly my guest here, and I expect you to behave as such.”

Rey looks at him.

She’d half suspected she’d have no way out, but his tone forces her to pay attention. All traces of anything even remotely close to composure have escaped the man. This is it. It’s either play along or find her body stuffed in a body bag when she least expects it.

So Rey nods slowly, deliberately, until she’s sure he’s noticed.

His eyes lose a degree of the hardness they held. Hux steps back.

“Good,” he says, “Refresher is to the left inside the bedroom. I will have proper clothes brought in for you.”

He gives her three-times-too-large clothes a once over then sneers.

“Dinner will be served at seven sharp.”

And with that, he turns around, clears for exit, and stalks out the room.

Rey sags into her chair and lets out a shuddery breath.

What the hell has she gotten herself into?
Hi all! thanks for reading! From this chapter on I'm going to be including something fun for you all. The soundtrack to which I'm writing this! And so, we open up with this chapter's song.

Chapter's Song: "Free" - by Broods

This chapter got a little out of hand, so here we are, 7k words after the fact, 6 days earlier than I expected. I can't put this story down! I hope you enjoy!

Thoughts and comments deeply appreciated and encouraged! I want to know what you guys think.
Power Struggle

Chapter Summary

Hux worries about his cat, Rey worries about poison, and dinner turns rather ugly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hux needs to calm himself.

He leans back in his office chair and tugs out a cigarette, clipping it between his lips as he blindly fumbles behind him for the lighter in the pocket of his greatcoat. It’s not a habit he indulges often, certainly never in public or during work hours, but he’d make an exception. The ship is silent, everyone but patrol would be in the mess hall; he’s finished his morning duties and nobody is due to report to him for the next few hours. He’d indulge.

His fingers wrap around the metal tube and he sighs, relishing in the short hiss and sputter as it comes to life. He cups a hand over it, tipping his head forward until the flame meets the cigarette resting calmly against his teeth; his lids hood over his eyes as he takes in the first long drag and his lungs fill with the burn of smoke and nicotine. He holds it in for a heartbeat or two, dropping his head against the chair, then allows the smoke to filter out along with a small amount of his stress.

Hux’s mind slowly turns over the events of the last hour.

She had escaped. Again.

The fact that she had managed to escape once was unbelievable; She’d come so close to actually managing to get herself inside a ship that Hux had not only been startled but a little impressed, honestly.

His cells were strong little perfect cages. They were unbreakable. Nothing got out. Then Hux had inspected the breach and found the chairs stacked one on top of another, the light socket dangling from its wires and a panel wide open in the ceiling. He’d been proved wrong.

In a way, she had done him a service, finding a flaw in the design without use of the Force, and he had to give it to her, she was a clever little thing. The chairs had been his fault, for allowing her the kindness of sleep on something other than cold metal floors, but the rest had been all her. She’d bested his design. He’d have to remedy that.

Hux had been irritated. Furious, even, when the alarms went off, checking on the source of the chaos himself because a part of him knew it to be her. His intuition had been rewarded with the sight of Rey knocking his stormtroopers around as though they were untrained children rather than the soldiers he had raised to excellence. He’d tossed her in a stronger cell and called it good.

The second near-successful attempt at escape caught him by surprise, him on his way to see her, of all things; Hux’s brain had short-circuited for a second with the absolute inconceivability of the situation. She had stopped in her tracks, alarm painted on her face as she watched him with the disbelief that surely must have matched his own, before sprinting away to escape. Rey’d met a dead
end and Hux had thanked the Maker for small mercies.

Then his rage kicked in.

His power had been undermined by a slip of a girl, a child, slithering out of every possible container he put her in and running around like a wild thing; worse yet, his power had been undermined publicly. Twice. She’d goaded him and he had allowed himself to be goaded in front of witnesses. Soon the whispers would run amok, which he could not tolerate. He makes a mental note to comm Phasma on the matter before it could no longer be contained.

Hux brings his smoke to his lips and pulls, letting the intoxicating nicotine dampen the anger bubbling up in his chest long enough to allow him to think.

He needs to compose himself before he faces her again. Not for the first time in a week had she managed to drag him out of the neat little compartments Hux had made for himself, the control he’d so carefully crafted over his emotions shredded in plain sight. He’s of half a mind ask her if she and Kylo Ren had gotten together and taken lessons on how to get under his skin.

Hux doesn’t smile, he thinks with a sneer. He doesn’t hiss. He doesn’t curse, at least in public, and he certainly does not drag women around in the undignified way he’d been forced to. In less than a week she’d had managed to find every single crack in his demeanor and busted it open at the seams.

Yet she had escaped a second time - if no farther than the hallways - and he had been forced to adopt drastic measures in the face of her escape. Hux had dragged her all the way to the top levels of the ship, cursing himself with every step, listening to the scrape of her boots - of course she wouldn’t go willingly, of course not - until he had found himself doing the one thing he would never do willingly otherwise: shove someone into his quarters and then leave.

Not for the first time in the space of six days does Hux wonder when Kylo Ren would return to the Finalizer so that Hux could finally stop playing the role of babysitter. Hux sneers, wondering about how much damage she’s probably already inflicted on his belongings, before inhaling deeply and putting his cigarette out.

He hesitates a second then bring up his holoscreen, bypassing the main security controls and punching in his private access code. The security cameras in his quarters go live all at once: one in the kitchen, one in the living room, one in his bedroom and another in the refresher, flickering on his screen in pale shades of blue. His eyes search, then stop on the living room.

She’s curled in on herself, knees to chest and cheek on her knees, exactly where he left her, the only signs of life the rise and fall of her shoulders. Hux narrows his eyes a fraction. The room looks untouched. She hadn’t moved at all.

Asleep, he muses. Deeply so.

His suspicions are confirmed when he watches a small tabby kitten hop on the high chair and inspect Rey’s sleeping form. His brain screams in alarm. He had forgotten Millicent when he so ingloriously had dumped the scavenger in his quarters. Millicent, having decided that Rey was interesting enough to investigate, slowly hops on the back of the chair. There’s a butt wiggle from the cat and Hux’s throat constricts as he waits for it to pounce.

He can already see it. The cat pounces and Rey reacts and snaps his pet’s neck.

He purses his lips, his knuckles turning white on the edge of his desk, every one of his muscles itches to grab the animal before it’s harmed. But he’s hundreds of feet away and Hux can do nothing but
watch with mounting terror. Hux starts reconciling himself with the idea of having to get another cat when Millicent pounces.

Rey’s head snaps up, turns in disbelief, ready to defend herself, and… and Hux notices her chest rising and falling, her shoulders shaking. She’s laughing.

Rey relaxes in an instant, turning cautiously and reaching back, gingerly holding a hand out for Millicent to inspect. The tabby closes in on her fingers, gives her hand a sniff or two. It must have approved. The next thing Hux sees is Millicent’s tiny head rubbing against Rey’s hand, sneaking up her arm.

His eyebrows lift. Millicent only tolerates him. Barely. The kitten is young enough to allow to be petted exactly three times before clawing into his hands, yet Millicent makes her way into Rey’s lap and stays there, happy to receive affection for as long as it lasts. Hux tries not to be a child about it, ignoring the hint of jealousy that tries to worm its way into him as he turns the screen off with a disdainful sniff, refusing to watch the absurd scene of domesticity in front of him. Instead, he gets to work. He plows through a mile-long list of small, tedious tasks that he’d been ignoring in favor of dealing with his new prisoner. Kylo Ren’s new prisoner, he reminds himself. This has nothing to do with him other than having to play nanny temporarily. He just needs to get through this until Ren returned.

Hux messages Phasma regarding the stormtroopers, receiving a reply within the minute that she’d look into it then report back. He orders for a team of medics to inspect Rey, make sure she’s not disease ridden; the last thing he needs is an outbreak of something native to that trash heap of a planet she calls home, or worse, to get sick with it himself now that he’s sharing his quarters with her. He also instructs for birth control to be implanted, any medication she needs to be given, and, for good measure, a tracking chip. He’ll be damned if he allows her to escape again. The last missive goes to supply so that somebody gets her out of those baggy stolen stormtrooper clothes and into something decent.

He shuts off all comms and rubs two long fingers to his right temple. The migraine he’s been carrying for weeks pounds like a jackhammer to his neurons. Hux exhales and brings back up his systems, checks his personal comm dangling from his wrist, and grinds his molars. Still no word from Snoke. Perhaps he’ll never receive a summons. Perhaps Snoke will just kill him for his failure.

Hux clicks all systems off and grabs his greatcoat, draping it over his shoulders and walking out, resolute to forget about the girl until he absolutely needs to face her. The rest of his day goes in a flurry of activity as he clips orders and glares at his petty officers, sending them scurrying to work faster.

But the time to face her comes, and it comes fast.

Hux finds himself standing in front of his door fifteen minutes to dinner time, still as a statue except for the creaking of leather as he clenches and unclenches his fists. It’s idiotic, his inability to enter his own quarters. He’s known it for the last ten minutes he’s stood there, scowling at the particularly unpleasant idea of walking into his private sanctuary to find somebody else invading it. With a final clench of his fist, Hux tugs the glove off with jerky motions and lets his hand hover over the access pad a little longer than necessary. The indecision grates. He’s a man used to power and wielding it, he berates himself, he can deal with a desert rat in a bedroom. Soon enough she won’t be his problem anyway.

He checks his temper and his expression, relaxing every muscle one by one until he’s wearing a mask of cool indifference. Hux breathes in deeply, his straightens his shoulders, tilting his head back as his chest comes forward a fraction.
He steels himself then walks in. When the door opens, his face breaks into a small, tight smile. Rey’s still exactly where he’d left her, albeit wearing different clothes. His words had sunk into that thick little skull of hers after all. Rey winces at the sound of the door opening, then freezes. Millicent is still on her lap. It gives him something to break the ice with.

“I see you’ve acquainted yourselves,” he says, tone neutral, slowly shedding his greatcoat.

Rey looks up for a second before turning back to the little tabby, remaining resolutely silent. Stubborn girl. Hux suppresses the contemptuous curl of his lip and walks past her, toward his bedroom to hang his coat, taking care to smooth down the sleeves, fingers gently running over the bands denoting the rank of general to ensure they remained crisp. The silence stretches on, broken only by Millicent’s purr. Hux retreats to his refresher and shrugs out of his uniform jacket, carefully setting it aside before running the sink. The water’s cold on his cheeks. Ice cold, in fact. He never sleeps enough, but he doubts he’ll be getting any sleep tonight. He shrugs his jacket back on, leaving it unbuttoned to the white undershirt beneath. These were his quarters. He would only forgo so many comforts for the sake of propriety here.

The door chimes. He walks back out to find Rey staring the door. Hux confirms the request. A pair of attendants roll in a long, sleek trolley burdened with dishes. They drive it all the way through to his dining table. A third attendant follows behind, hoisting a second chair to match his own. It’s placed on the opposite end of the table.

The attending staff sets the table then departs without so much as the sound of shuffling feet. They are awfully efficient. He would make sure Phasma praised the kitchens for it. Hux looks at Rey still curled up on the chair.

“What is it?” She asks, and it takes him a split second to catch her meaning when, finally, she gingerly holds up Millicent’s small body in her hands.

Ah.

Curious little thing.

“Have you not seen one before?” he asks, reaching her with slow, lazy steps. She gives his open coat a once over, but her face betrays nothing. She shakes her head instead, stroking behind Millicent’s small ears. The traitorous cat purrs contentedly and melts into her hands.

“It’s a feline. A cat.”

A wide smile that betrays her otherwise resolute indifference to everything spreads across her face. It lasts for a second, but it’s bright enough to blind.

“A cat,” she repeats, testing the word.

His eyes flicker to Millicent once more then back to her face.

What a strange girl.

“Come,” he orders, walking to the table and removing the covers from both her tray and his. He settles himself on the right, busying himself with his napkin. Without waiting for a response, he lifts his wine glass, twirling the dark liquid a moment before taking a sip. This was another indulgence. From here on out, it’s water only.

It is then that his peripheral vision picks up movement as Rey sets Millicent down and comes to her chair. She looks at her plate, at the chair, then slowly, very, very slowly, at him. Hux raises an
eyebrow at the flush slowly blooming on her cheeks.

“It’s not poisoned, if that’s what you’re thinking. Even I do not sink that low.”

Rey huffs, fidgeting with the edges of her dark tunic.

He has to admit she looks rather fetching in First Order colors, black trousers snugly fitted to her slender legs, a grey tunic falling to mid-thigh over the three quarter sleeved shirt of grey underneath, the banded red collar caressing her long neck. Her hair is still in those three ridiculous buns, but he imagines their luck could only be pressed so far. He absentmindedly raises his wine glass to his lips, watching her over the crystal rim. She is obviously uncomfortable, but the way in which her eyes keep darting back to her plate tells him she is also starving and finding it very hard to resist the simple fare before her.

When she makes no move to sit, however, Hux lets out a long, exasperated breath and removes his napkin from his lap. He walks to where she stands and, ignoring her alarmed jump at his proximity, he forks a small piece of everything on her plate onto his fork and pushes it into his mouth. She watches him with wide eyes, his own gaze pinned on hers for the few moments it takes him to chew, then he swallows.

“No poison,” He says with finality, returning to his seat.

He fastidiously cuts the steak on his plate into smaller, edible pieces without waiting for her, refusing to let his dinner go cold, and is rewarded with the scrape of a chair being pulled back. The soft breath she lets out when she sits drags a small satisfied twitch of his lips, and all’s well that ends well.

Until, that is, the sounds of slurping and open mouthed chewing hit his ears. It’s like watching a ship crash happen in front of his eyes. He stares. He should not stare, but he can’t drag his eyes away.

Rey looks up, a small bit of steak juice dangerously close to dribbling down her chin. She licks her lips, wipes her mouth on her sleeve - at which point Hux’s mind is screaming in alarm - and regards him.

“What?” she asks defensively.

“I-“ this is the first time words fail him, Hux realizes in a panic. He covers it quickly. “I hope the food is to your satisfaction.”

Rey shrugs and Hux frowns.

“It’s not?” he asks, “if it isn’t, I can ask for something else to be brought up.”

He doesn’t know why he offers it. She’s not really his guest, and his own plate is no different than what she’s been shoving into her mouth.

“No,” she says, and when his frown deepens, Rey stutters, hurriedly trying to correct herself. “N-no, it’s not that. It’s fine. In fact, more than fine.”

This is the most she’s ever said to him outside of goading or insulting him. He takes it as a small white flag waved and wonders how he can use all of this to his benefit: her soft spot for Millicent, her obvious discomfort where food is concerned.

As if to prove a point, Rey looks at the fork in his hand and deliberately grabs her own. She forks as much food as she can onto it then shoves it all into her mouth, her eyes on him, as if afraid he’d take it away.
So Hux nods, lowering his eyes, allowing her the space to continue eating, all thoughts of advantages dissolved from his mind for the moment. He only looks up once again when all sounds from the other side of the table have stopped.

Rey’s squinting at the goblet filled with red in front of her.

“Wine,” he offers, returning to his food. “Make sure to take it slowly.”

He’s about to put some steak into his mouth when he hears a sputter, a choke, and a gasp. There’s a fine wet mist covering half the table. Her glass is half empty.

“I told you to take it slowly.”

Rey lets out a strangled gasp as she hits her chest repeatedly. Hux can just barely hold back a chuckle.

“Water will help.”

Rey grabs for her goblet of water as though it’s a lifeline, quickly emptying it and rasping out something akin to thanks, so Hux nods and returns to his food without a word.

The minutes stretch uncomfortably, disrupted only by the click of his fork and knife and the slight sound of Rey pushing a single lonely blue bean around her plate. Hux wonders for a second why it hasn’t been devoured yet.

“Why did you do it?”

“Why did I do what, exactly?” he asks, about to bite again.

“The Hosnian system. Why did you blow it up?”

Hux stops, gaze lowered, hands held mid air, fork over knife, his shoulders hardening fractionally. Not an inch of him moves except for his lids when he glances up slowly.

“Why did you blow up Starkiller Base?” He asks, watching her cheeks take on the look of a bruised apple, mottled with patches of red. She’s struggling with herself not to explode and potentially throw her plate at his head, but he’s quickly learning that Rey’s temper is kept on a very short leash.

“Because you’re all killers! You’re all monsters! You all go around killing billions of people!” Rey practically screams at him. Hux tasks his brain with setting his silverware down slowly to keep from matching her temper.

“And you? What do you think you did, that day?”

Rey reddens further but confusion flashes on her face.

“Did you really think Starkiller base was an empty planet, simply because it was also a weapon?”

Rey slams her hands on the table hard enough that his own plate jumps slightly. He narrows his eyes.

“You killed billions!” she accuses, words heavy with anger. It rolls over him like a thick layer of oil.

“So did you,” he replies calmly.

The color on her face draining so fast that for a moment he wonders if she might faint. She sits back,
mute, and Hux picks up the knife from where it had clattered on the table, returning to his food and considering the matter closed.

But she’s not done.

“I didn’t kill billions of people…” she mutters, her eyes firmly on her lap. “I only tried to save my friends."

“I didn’t press the big red button, either,” he says, losing all appetite. He sets his silverware down, “and I did it to save my men as well.”

Rey looks up at him then.

“Save your men?” she asks, incredulous.

Hux rests back on the arms of his chair, studying her while she shifts uncomfortably the longer his gaze lingers on her. He thinks of his men and all the families that had been under his care. All the people who didn’t make it onto ships for evacuation.

“How many people do you think have died in this war, Rey?” He asks.

Rey’s eyes snap up, angry and uncomfortable that he would drag her name into this fight.

“How many?” He presses and she fidgets. Hux narrows his eyes, his gaze steely.

“Too many,” he says. “And how many more do you think would have died in the next, what… five? Ten years?”

Rey lets out a choked noise that may or may not have been an answer. He continues, refusing to acknowledge it.

“The answer is, it doesn’t matter,” he says. “They would have all died. In a big tidal wave or in a trickle, billions of lives would have been lost. So yes, I did it to save my men. I did it to spare them the agony of having to watch families die slowly, by war or by the absolute lack of law and principle this new Republic of yours promotes.”

He should stop. He can hear his breath coming in quicker puffs of air, his voice rising, and Rey’s turning colder in front of him and it is grinding the wrong set of gears in him tonight. This is too close to home, too soon, too quickly. So much for not letting her rile him.

“Do you think that your Resistance is innocent in all of this?” He hisses. It finally makes her react.

“Of- Of course not!” she cries out and stands, strands of hair flying wild as she shakes her head. “I just—“

Hux drags air into his lungs and tries to control himself.

“Then why are you defending them?” he asks.

Rey stops. Stares. She falls back to her seat with a thud.

“Because they’re fighting for the right cause,” she whispers.

“And what is that?” he asks.

Rey’s little gears start going a million miles an hour in her head. After a pregnant pause, she finally
replies.

“Freedom, order, progress. Peace.”

Hux smiles.

“Same as I, then.”

Rey recoils as if slapped.

He’s had enough of this. He lets his napkin fall to his seat and walks away towards his room, leaving Rey behind, looking properly chastised.

He steps into the small walk-in closet, one of the few nice things his command allows for, and pulls down an extra set of blankets and a pillow. When he returns Rey is still slumped in her chair, sulking. He refuses to feel pity. He had meant every word, and had been civilized and, dare he say, friendly enough to attempt to have a meal with a person considered his enemy in every sense of the word. So he lets her stew, walking to the long couch, dropping the blankets and pillow on it.

“You will sleep here,” Hux informs her, leaving no room for argument.

“There is an extra towel in the refresher,” he continues, “and extra toiletries. I suggest you use them.”

Hux turns on his heel and walks to his kitchen, grabbing a bottle of water and taking long strides towards the door on the right. Rey’s eyes lift just enough to see him walking into his office, her curiosity getting the best of her. He shuts the door slowly behind him, refusing to let her see how much she’s riled him.

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He sits there for the better part of an hour, staring at the wall. Hux toys with the bottle in his hands absently, waiting for anything to distract him from his thoughts, but nothing comes. Not from Phasma, not from Ren, not from Snoke. Not even a damned report. He could use the distraction.

Except the only thing distracting him is the stubborn girl on the other side of the door.

He hadn’t lied to her. Every single one of his actions were justified. Everything he did had a reason. Every reason usually ended in creating a world in which, perhaps some day, he could continue his family legacy without his children having to fight his battles.

Not that you’ll ever find anyone to carry it on with, he thinks bitterly. His life revolved around the Order and command of his ship. Neither left him much personal time or space to pursue such things. Hux shakes the thought aside. There are better things to worry about than a future that may never happen. He had worked too hard, sacrificed too much, to get here. He could not afford to be distracted.

He twirls the bottle between his fingers.

He had to worry about a future nonetheless. Hux thinks back to the girl on the other side, worrying at his lip in the privacy of his office.

He knows that Snoke wants her trained; had tasked Ren with finding her. She could be a powerful ally, in her own way, but the part of Hux that knows how to read people also knows that she was far
too… moral, is the word he thinks of. She’s far too moral for war, far too moral for the ugliness that comes with it. Her compass is too decidedly pointed towards justice to understand that justice is a manmade concept that too often failed. She has power, but it is raw, crude, and she has little control of it on her own.

Yet she’s whip smart. Deceivingly so. She had to be in order to pull the escape stunts she’d pulled. She had to be in order to match wits with him at his level.

She’s a cunning little thing, and perhaps that would work in their favor, yet she only displays those traits when it suits her. And she’s as stubborn and unmoving as a boulder, to boot.

For a second, he almost pities Kylo Ren. Almost. The man has his work cut out for him.

The thought of Ren brings him up short. He checks his comm again, expecting silence.

Except as soon as he looks, a solid bar appears as if it had been waiting for him to notice. A message.

He clicks it.

Heat and icy dread curl in the pit of his stomach, unfurling until it encloses and constricts around his chest. He’d been waiting for this for so long that he’d forgotten how anxiety inducing they were, and this time he has far more to answer for than any other summons he’d ever received. Snoke.

Slowly, carefully, he reads his summons.

He sets the water bottle on his desk with an obnoxious amount of care and stands.

Time to face the music.

He’s thankful to note Rey’s not there to see his face. She must have gone to the refresher. Hux forgoes his greatcoat and zips up his jacket, taking long, hurried steps towards the amphitheater where he knows the giant hologram of his leader will be waiting. It takes no time at all, though it feels like a lifetime, until he’s standing in front of the long doors.

Hux lowers his head, taking a few steadying breaths. For all he knows, he’s walking to his death.

His bare fists clench, knuckles turning white, short fingernails digging into his palms, and he uses the pain to bring himself out from under the noxious cloud of anxiety floating above his head. Hux takes what could be his last breath then unclenches his hands. He throws the giant doors open, walks in, forces himself to lower his gaze rather than look around for his potential executioners.

He waits for the pain to come. He waits for as long as it takes him to reach the center of the amphitheater’s small platform. He waits while he lowers himself and kneels, glaring at the tip of his shoe and biting the inside of his cheek until he tastes blood.

Silence.

His hands turn cold and clammy.

He wonders how long he’ll be kept guessing before he meets the end of blaster fire, or the wrong side of a lightsaber. Would Kylo Ren be waiting in the shadows for orders to take Hux’s head? He itches to look. He doesn’t.

“Rise, General,” the massive hologram drawl reaches his ears.
Hux forces himself to steady his legs as he stands, though his knees feel jelly-like.

“Supreme Leader,” he starts, then his mouth stops working.

Panic rises along with bile in his throat.

“Silence, boy,” Snoke snaps.

Hux almost misses the fact that he can blink, but when he notices, he shuts his eyes so hard his facial muscles hurt. He forces himself to open them. If he’s to die, he won’t die a coward.

“You failed,” Snoke sneers.

Hux’s tongue is frozen to the roof of his mouth.

“I should have your head, Hux.” Snoke’s voice is slippery, the sort of sound the Supreme Leader makes when he’s toying with his prey, right before devouring it with darkness.

“I should have your head, and the heads of your commanders, and the heads of your incompetent troops, who couldn’t stop a gaggle of pilots, a couple of children, and a furry Wookie armed with a bowcaster and a handful of explosives from blowing up our main weapon!”

The creature’s voice reaches an angry roar, and Hux is thankful he’s frozen. It keeps him from visibly flinching.

Silence, then.

So much silence.

The Amphitheater threatens to drown him in Snoke’s anger. He may not be a Force user, but some things are strong enough to raise the hackles of any warm blooded human being. This feeling is one of them.

“I should have your head…” Snoke says, controlling his tone, and Hux waits for the pain. Steel’s himself for it.

“But I won’t.”

The hold that had frozen him in place is released and Hux chokes. He swallows it down, daring to look up.

“You— You won’t?” he asks, disbelieving.

“My dear child,” Snoke croons, making Hux’s hackles rise, “Your head remains on your shoulders by the sheer fact that you managed to take the Hosnian system, and the seat of the Republic, down with you. Consider it a blessing.”

His conversation with Rey sparks in his brain. He can’t help himself. The mere mention of the Hosnian system brings up the image of an angry, shouting Rey screaming into his face with all disregard for his station, or his power, or the fact that she’s at his mercy, in his room.

Snoke plucks it from his mind with delight.

“What is this?” Snoke asks, and Hux has the very distinct feeling that the creature before him is turning that memory around his fingers like a curious artifact. Hux curses himself, not for offering up the memory, but for allowing his mind to be so clearly exposed. He’d been too wrapped up in his
own fear of execution to even consider that his mind would betray him.

“You have the girl?” Snoke asks, losing all sense of rage, eyes glinting with curiosity.

“I-“ Hux says, clearing his throat. “Yes, my Lord. I thought Kylo Ren had informed you?”

Snoke waves a hand of dismissal. Hux narrows his eyes.

“She’s in your quarters,” Snoke continues, “why is she not in a cell?”

Hux grinds his teeth, staring straight ahead rather than at Snoke’s face.

“She escaped, my Lord,” he admits begrudgingly. “Twice.”

The sound that comes from Snoke is nothing Hux could ever consider human. It’s something between a rumble and a coarse grinding of something immensely ancient and rarely used. A deep rasp repeated over and over to sound like a comical yet terrifying version of laughter.

“Is that so?” Snoke quips, his voice full of eerie mirth. “Clever little thing.”

Hux hesitates.

“Yes, my Lord.”

“So you’ve kept her in your quarters?” The grating, curious rasp is back in Snoke’s voice. That Snoke keeps returning to this fact sets Hux on edge.

“It is the only place she cannot escape from,” Hux provides in a light tone he hopes comes off as neutral and uninvested. “Not unless she has access to my biometrics, which I would never allow.”

Snoke lets out a long thoughtful hum, chin resting over long spindly fingers as his large, inhuman eyes regard Hux like one would an ant under a magnifying glass.

Hux glues his gaze to a spot in the middle of Snoke’s robes, where he does not have to look at the creature directly, waiting for Snoke to pass judgement or give orders.

With all the time in the world on his end, Snoke lazily swinging his fingers below his chin, his other hand drumming a slow beat on the arm of his throne.

“What an interesting development,” Snoke says, and Hux frowns.

What development?

He’s about to ask the very same question when Snoke silences him with a finger.

“You’re dismissed.”

Hux nearly protests, but at this point, the fact that he’s escaping with his head on his shoulders is the only motivation he needs to give a deep bow and hold it for a second longer than necessary. It seems to amuse Snoke, who lets out a low chortle as his hologram disappears. Hux turns on his heel and storms out as quickly as his feet will carry him.

He’d survived.

Once outside the amphitheater Hux leans a hand against a wall and crunches in on himself as he hurls. Everything he’d ever eaten, including the meager excuse for a dinner he’d had with Rey,
comes rushing up and out of his system. He holds his stomach as he retches, his guts spilling out of him, all the fear he'd been holding for the last three weeks coming up in the form of bile.

Hux curls in over his own vomit, rasping and catching his breath.

He’d survived.

A pool of yellow slowly inches toward his boots. Hux takes a step back and glares at it, as if it’s at fault for everything that’s happened to him. He walks away, sending Phasma a quick message about clean up. She’ll send some poor soul here to deal with it. His mind’s already too preoccupied to feel even remotely bad about the mess he left behind.

He regains his composure with every step he takes away from the amphitheater despite the tremble in his right hand, breathing deeply. Every breath feels brand new, deliciously crisp even from the recycled air of the ship. No one’s around as he passes through halls and goes up lifts, no one’s around to notice the disheveled look of his hair from where he’s run his fingers through repeatedly. No one’s around to notice the small specks of spit on his boots from his episode of weakness. No one’s around to notice that he’s unzipped his jacket, trying to just get air in and out of his lungs. It suits him fine.

By the time he makes it back to his room, it’s dark. The ship is silent. He frowns. He hadn’t been in Snoke’s presence that long, at least in his mind.

Hux slides in quietly, kicking off his shoes and tossing the jacket aside without a thought. He tugs his undershirt from the waist of his trousers, shivering at the cold air hitting his midriff. He’s about to start unclipping his belt when a rustle of blankets pulls him up short. His head turns ever so slowly to the couch, hands falling from his shirt.

Hux notices an impossibly bright pair of eyes staring at him. Perhaps it’s the cover of the blankets, or that she’s fully covered when he’d nearly stripped in front of her, that keeps Rey from averting her eyes.

They stay like this for a heartbeat. Long enough for his chest to rise and fall slowly. Hux raises an eyebrow and the spell breaks.

“What, do you need a better view?”

Rey snaps her attention to the lilies sitting in their crystal vase in front of her.

Hux collects his jacket with the tiniest of tugs playing at his lips, looking down as he walks past just long enough to notice her sinking into the pillow, making herself smaller. He shakes his head and closes his door. It would always be like this. Even with the smallest of gestures, Hux and Rey would forever be locked in a battle of wills, struggling for the upper hand over the other.

He’d need to remember that she slept there now, before walking in and trying to undress himself on the spot. He crawls into his bed and sighs, reaching out to his nightstand and pulling a drawer open. Out comes a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. The second in a day. This girl would drive him to his grave, and she’d been in his rooms less than twenty four hours.

He ignites the cigarette and inhales, the smell of a fresh lit cigarette carrying its own thrill and its own little form of addiction. Hux takes a deep, long, slow drag through his teeth. He’s breaking so many regulations, but it’s either calm himself down this way or take himself in hand, and that’s the last thing he would ever do with the scavenger not twenty feet away. His fingers tremble around the small stick, and he stares at the lit end as the embers turn to ash. He lets it build, longer and longer.
“General?”

Hux jumps at the soft voice on the other side of the door. A clump of searing hot ash falls on his bare chest and he curses, just barely avoiding an undignified yelp.

“Kriiff!” he hisses.

“… General?” Rey asks again, this time with distinctive alarm.

Hux sighs.

“One moment.”

He gets up, sets the stick of death in an ashtray, for he knows the damn things aren’t good for him, and pulls his discarded undershirt back on. His bare feet pad all the way to the door and he yanks it open. Rey jumps. Hux leans against the door frame, blocking her view, and raises an eyebrow at her. Despite both his and her lack boots, her head hovers somewhere just below his chin. This close, she has to take a half step back and look up in order to meet his eyes. Hux takes in all the freckles strewn across her face.

“What can I help you with?” He asks, all professionalism.

Rey hesitates, then looks at her toes. Or maybe it’s his she’s looking at. Hux refuses to confirm that for himself.

“What did you have them put in my arm? Earlier, I mean.”

Hux frowns. She wanted to talk about her medical exam?

“What do you ask?”

Rey huffs, “Because it’s my body and I’d like to know what a man like you is forcing on me!”

Hux straightens, brows rising. He takes a step back.

“Antibiotics, mostly,” He replies automatically in a near robotic tone, “Who knows what diseases you’ve brought on board with you. Also a contraceptive.”

Absolute horror and disgust cross her face. It hits him all at once—

How could she think something like that of him?

The logical part of his brain chimes in that it’s not a farfetched worry to have. Not for her. She is aboard an enemy ship, surrounded by people who hate her, with no clear way to defend herself. Rape has long been used as a weapon of war, and as a woman, she would always be on the receiving end of such atrocity. He stiffens further.

“It will keep you from getting pregnant should you engage in relations with anyone on this ship,” he continues in a monotone, “Stormtroopers are known for being crass, and I will personally make sure no such harm comes to you, but some can be rather charming.”

A twisted sense of satisfaction creeps on him at the giant red blooms taking over her cheeks. Good.

“It will also keep you from your menstrual cycle should you engage in training with Kylo Ren.”

He nails the last nail to that coffin and watches her swallow hard.
“I thought I was a prisoner?” She asks, trying desperately to change the subject.

Hux shrugs.

“Do you want to be a prisoner?”

He doesn’t expect an answer and she gives him none. In all honesty, he doesn’t want it. Some things are better left to the people who will deal with them, and he’s not the one who’s going to be dealing with her.

“The third implant is a tracker.”

Rey lets out a loud, huffy gasp, obviously insulted that such a thing would be planted on her.

“What—Why?!” she balks.

“You tell me. You were the one who tried to escape twice.”

Rey’s nostrils flare, telling him with her eyes that she’d be just as happy escaping his room if only she could find a way to.

He smirks at her.

“Does that answer your question?” He asks.

She hesitates, then nods.

“Did they not explain this to you?” Hux asks, tilting his head.

“They were not very… forthcoming, no,” she says, “They seemed really uncomfortable to be near me, really. Not much conversation took place.”

Hux’s left eye twitches. He makes yet another mental note, adding it to the running list of hundreds.

“Is there anything else?” He asks.

Rey shakes her head and retreats. He closes the door with a soft click, returning to his bed to settle in for a long night, grabbing a holopad from the drawer to his side and quickly types in a memo. Hux grabs what’s left of the cigarette and pulls, blowing smoke out the side of his mouth.

He’d just set it on the tray and started typing in another message when a second round of knocking comes. His brows rise all the way to his hairline this time.

What now?

He takes two long steps and yanks the door open harder than intended. Rey flinches again.

Such a jumpy creature, he muses, scared of her own shadow.

“I…” she says. Hux pays attention, noticing her fidgeting. Rey shifts her weight back and forth, holding the pillow tightly to her chest like a shield.

“Yes?” He prompts, trying to infuse his voice with calm and kindness.

Rey looks up at him.

“Yes…” she blurs out in a rush, stiffening, visibly steeling herself for rejection or worse.
“Why?” He presses, gently, part of him wanting this as much as he wants air in his lungs.

“I—“ She shifts again, losing her nerve for a second before she rushes through the words, “I yelled at you. In your home.”

Rey looks up then, her lips stiff and her hands digging into the pillow, “While you offered me a meal and clothing freely, I yelled at you. I am sorry.”

Too moral for her own good.

Hux nods, remaining as quiet and still as he possibly can. She’s not done, and he’d hate to stop this amazing display of humility before it’s over.

“I am also sorry for shouting at you about the—the…” she waves her hand in the air in an exasperated huff, obviously uncomfortable, but finishes with a carefully selected, “medical care.”

Hux nods again.

Then the Rey he’s come to know snaps back into place and he’s unsure whether he feels regret or relief when she turns up her nose at him, haughty as she can manage, and glares him down.

“I still don’t believe in what you do. I think it’s awful, and immoral and wrong, and I will never agree with any of it.”

There you are… he croons to himself. Rey barges on.

“I don’t agree with any of it. But…”

Wait.

Hux’s breath hitches. There’s a 'but' to this?

“Yes?”

“I—well…perhaps..maybe—“ Rey huffs, “One day, if you’re not busy… you’ll tell me more?”

Rey shifts her weight again to her left foot, utters a rushed good night, and all but runs into her makeshift bed on the couch. Hux stands like an idiot at his own door, his eyes switch from wide to narrow in the semi darkness.

“Why?” He calls to her, instantly suspicious.

He gets no answer.

Soon enough, all he hears is the deep, slow breathing coming from the direction of the couch, and he wonders if she heard him at all.

He turns on his heel and shuts the door behind him.

No, he would get no sleep tonight.
You all get to benefit from my lack of sleep tonight. I could not stop writing! So enjoy another long chapter, and I promise we'll be seeing a bit more of Kylo Ren soon.

Chapter playlist:
Salute Your Solution - The Raconteurs
Four Five Seconds - Rhianna/Kanye West
Rebel Heart - The Shelters
Playing With Fire

Chapter Summary

Kylo Trains, Hux plots, and Rey learns how to use a shower.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thump.

Another body.

Kylo ren watches it as it falls to the floor lifelessly, eyes already glazed over, and another pinprick of life extinguishes from the Force. He swings around as blaster fire aims for his head and a sword swings at him, twirling to block it on a downward stroke. He pushes, the sword resisting the force of his saber, some ancient creation that Kylo had thought lost to time. Perhaps Snoke has rediscovered the secret to creating saber-resistant metal, after all. With a round twirl of his saber, the sword goes flying, followed by the swordsman’s head. He, too, falls in pieces to the floor, adding to the count surrounding him.

Kylo can no longer remember sunlight. His days have been wrapped up in sweat and blood, grime and death; with nothing to look forward to but short bouts of restless sleep before the cycle began anew. This was to be part of his training. Kylo had taken it for what it was, another exercise of the Darkness under the guidance of the Supreme Leader. He had bowed and done as requested of him, immersing himself in battle, one against dozens, every day, until nobody stood but him.

It’s been a long time since his hands had not run with the blood of others, Kylo muses as his saber quickly dispatches with another two soldiers, wet patches pooling on their dark robes. And so they keep falling, and in Kylo’s mind there is only silence and darkness.

Or, at least, Kylo wishes for nothing but silence. Somewhere in the back of his mind there is a soft hum, detached and far apart from the reality of his training as his days bleed together. It’s faint but consistent. He hears it at night, has heard it for a month now; an incessant chime in the distance, a flickering mirage, insubstantial but there nonetheless. Kylo breathes in deep through clenched teeth, the gash crossing from brow bone to collarbone aching and burning. He’s covered in sweat and ichor; it’s been hours of physical exertion, but he’s determined in his task.

Bodies fall. He dances like Death incarnate, limbs and heads flying off his opponents, screams drowning out the hum in the back of his head. Snoke wants to shred him of any hint of humanity, until there’s nothing left but cold lack of feeling, and he would think that perhaps it’s working, that perhaps his past mistakes are finally becoming irrelevant, that at the end he will achieve his ultimate goal of feeling nothing but the Dark side of the Force. Yet all he feels is numb.

Numb and exhausted.

The final body falls with an anguished scream, the sound of gurgling reaching him as the man chokes on his own vomit. Kylo watches a small pool of urine bloom around the man’s trousers and soon it begins to mix with the ever growing spread of blood. Kylo turns off his saber and steps back.
His robes are in shreds, he’s covered in shallow and deep wounds alike, more scars to add to his collection. A small lock of his hair is singed from blaster fire, and all Kylo can feel is a bone-deep ache. He lets his head fall, darkness shaking around him. The room shifts. He’s standing inside his small quarters.

At first Kylo wondered what could possibly achieve this, to transport him from one place to another without him feeling a thing. By the second day, he’d wondered if the fights he fought were imaginary, if the people who died were only apparitions, but the wounds he wore now all in varying degrees of healing were very real, as real as the screams had been. By the seventh day, he had stopped wondering, too busy getting through the blood curling massacres until he was deposited back in his room.

Kylo collapses on his bed - if you can call a wood frame and a thin mattress a bed - robes on and hair plastered to his forehead, his temples, the back of his neck. He aches in places he did not believe he could ache any longer, his wounds still bleeding, but he can barely bring in breath to his lungs, much less bother to get up and undress.

Kylo closes his eyes and focuses his breathing, falling into a meditative trance. It is in moments like these, between waking and sleeping, between alertness and meditation, that the hum intensifies. He inspects it in the safety of his room, his consciousness flying to it and wrapping around it, hovering but never touching, like a moth drawn to a flame.

His breathing matches the hum inside his mind, falling in step with the glowing little thrum of energy lighting up the darkness of his thoughts; his aches start to dissipate, his body stops sweating, and ever so slowly, a strength he did not know he could possess, after so many days of brutal training, seeps back into his limbs. This renewal of strength is not because of meditation. It had never happened before, no matter how deeply or how long he meditated. This is new.

Kylo falters for a moment while he considers what he must do next. In the depths of darkness within his mind, a small voice caresses him and urges him to touch this glow of energy, instigating him to try and understand it better. He floats, turning circles around this thing that had been consuming his thoughts, cautious.

Curiosity wins.

He reaches for it in his mind firmly pressing into his thoughts. In the beginning, he had thought this was the Light side of the Force. He’d been reminded so often by Snoke that he still possessed it, the Light, that he should endeavor to rid himself of it. Snoke had guided him like a Master Jedi guided their own padawans for years. His family believed he had been coerced into his path after Kylo claimed his father’s life. Kylo Ren had simply chosen a new master. His true reason for his choice rests on a crystal box atop the small table in the room: his grandfather’s mangled mask, forever calling to him, strengthening him, anchoring him in the Darkness as not even Snoke’s teachings could. He exists to avenge his grandfather’s dreams, so true and right before being twisted by the Light before his death.

He had hated himself when this little bud of lightness had sprung to life inside of his mind, believing himself a colossal failure. Hadn’t he done what he must? Hadn’t he killed his own father to extinguish this same light? Hadn’t he spent his days killing, killing, killing, raining blood on himself and others, just to extinguish it?

Yet it is still there.

A tendril of fear curls up Kylo’s spine as he reaches.
Would it engulf him? Would it grow, burning away his very awareness? The little voice in his mind caresses him again and he growls. It sounds too much like the small voice of a young boy Kylo had chosen to bury so long ago, had murdered and left behind, forgotten to the eternal sands of time. A Boy made of Light that has no place in Kylo’s life.

But the pull of this bundle of Light is too strong, and Kylo Ren too weak.

After what feels like eternity, he allows his awareness to brush the Light.

______________________

Millions of miles and systems away, Rey jerks awake with a gasp.

She scrambles up, looking around in a panic as she takes in her surroundings without recognition, then she feels a small ball of orange fur twitch and stretch with a low purr.

The sight of the kitten brings her back to reality. She’s inside General Hux’s quarters.

The tightness in her chest threatens to shut off her airways, and the headache that’s starting to bloom in the back of her mind makes her eyes water. It spreads like a wildfire, a single pinprick in her brain roaring to a flame that engulfs her thoughts as it envelops and consumes her. Rey drops her face in her hands and rubs at her eyes furiously, wiping away the wetness from her lashes and taking a deep breath.

A dream. Only a dream.

She can barely recall anything now, after waking up so suddenly, except her heart hurts, and screams she’s sure she’s never heard before rattle around her brain like an echo. The longer she sits with her face in her hands, the softer and less jarring the screams become. Eventually they become a vague memory.

Rey sighs and the kitten purrs. She gets up.

She takes a full-body toe curling stretch, chasing sleep away before her shoulders slump forward, arms dangling at her sides. Rey looks around, the previous night coming back to her in bursts. She cringes.

Her hand rubs down her face and she groans. She’d made an utter fool of herself. Repeatedly.

Rey remembers her heated exchange with the General then considers falling back into the grey leather couch and fusing with it, refusing to acknowledge the man ever again. It’s a little too late for that after a week of constant run-ins with the man, though.

The overhead lights are still dim. Early, then. Now would be a good time to make herself scarce.

She would get ready for the day as quietly as possible then… She looks around the room. There’s nowhere to go. It’s a comfortable room, the couch had certainly been more comfortable than most things she’d ever slept on, but it is still a prison, albeit a well equipped one. She could always just make herself small on her chair… the chair, she corrects, refusing claim anything of his as her own.

Rey walks towards the General’s bedroom, worrying at her lip. What if he is still there, sleeping?

But the only way through to the refresher is through his room.
Rey nods and steels herself, opening the door slowly, suddenly very glad that the Order apparently keeps its doors very well oiled. She breathes a giant sigh of relief. The bed has been perfectly made and he’s nowhere to be seen, even though the alarm clock on the bedside table reads ungodly o’clock. Perhaps he doesn’t sleep.

The lead leaks out of her spine in his absence and Rey pads over to the refresher, undressing to her underthings as she grabs a towel. She turns on the tap once, wets the cloth, then sets about cleaning herself down, turning the water back on and off to dampen it again when she’s run out of moisture, refusing to waste water. Wasting water is as close to committing a sin as murder, she huffs in her mind as she towels down her right arm.

Her thoughts are taken up with the exchange last night as she works the damp towel over her skin. Rey had seen a side of the man that she very much doubted he ever showed to anyone else. Had he felt… compassion for the deaths of so many people? No, not that. Compassion would have kept him from murdering so many in the first place. The man’s hands ran with so much red Rey could not think of a single way for him to scrub it off, but there had been a hint of something there. Regret, perhaps? If he feels regret, Rey is sure it is not for those people on the other side of the war who had lost everything. The only regret General Hux could ever feel would be for the losses Hux himself suffered. Still, something about the way in which he had spoken had made a small amount of sense to her, much to her discomfort.

She scrubs at her skin harder than necessary, replaying the conversation in a loop. He had set her up for it, Rey knew, now that she could examine the exchange. Hindsight is twenty-twenty. She’d walked right into his trap, admitting her goals — the resistance’s goals — were not all that different from his.

She mulls on that persistent fact as she works. Water on and off, toweling of her arms, water on and off, start on the left leg, propped on the counter.

Goals. They had made her ask something of him that she never thought she would: the time to understand what he had meant by it all. The line that divided black and white in her mind had been blurred. It gnawed at her incessantly, her need to comprehend the world around her. She had been stuck on a planet with nothing but sand for over a decade, and Rey hated not understanding. She wanted knowledge, to internalize it and then make her decisions based on that.

Water on. Water off.

So she would take whatever knowledge he imparted, internalize it, then use it once she found a way to get out of this damned room and off this blasted ship. Perhaps she would give it to the resistance. Make this an even fight. Would that make her a spy?

She would inspect the room for weaknesses after her shower. There had to be some way to leave. The only way out couldn’t possibly be via his fingerprints—

“Pray tell, what exactly are you doing?”

Rey screams. The towel goes flying as she whips herself around towards the door, her hands instinctively fisting for a fight. Rey berates herself, alarm ringing loudly in her brain. She’d been so caught up in her thoughts she hadn’t heard a thing.

The towel lands on the floor in front of her with a wet flop.

Standing just a few steps outside of the door is General Hux, his great coat draped over his shoulders, covered in black from the bottom of his Adam’s apple all the way to his toes. The only
colors he sports are the shock of his red hair, his cold blue eyes and the soft pink hue of his lips. He’s fresh shaven and there is not a single hair out of place.

*How does he even manage that at this ungodly hour?*

He takes a step forward in the face of her silence, forcing Rey to take a step back, then stops at the door and arches an eyebrow.

“That’s an interesting way to shower,” Hux murmurs with only obvious disinterest, face blank.

Rey straightens. She has nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of, and she would not appear weak in front of this man. Rey drops her fists instead, taking a step forward to regain lost ground, then picks up the wet towel. She would not allow him the upper hand.

“It’s efficient and quick,” she replies, making sure to keep her face as stonily as his own, “in lieu of a sonic shower.”

Hux considers, his eyelids twitching slightly closer, one hand caressing the edge of his black leather glove, unaware that he’s doing it. Rey can’t help but watch.

“I can never fault a soul when it comes to efficiency,” he praises like a man who prizes efficiency perhaps above all else. He looks at the bathtub before gazing at her, “That said, one of the few pleasures of having access to a general’s private refresher - one of the few pleasures of life, really - is also having access to a bath and a regular shower.”

His hands drop again to his sides and Hux stiffens.

“You are not forbidden from using them while you remain my guest.”

Rey turns to the sink, partly to deposit her wet towel in it, and partly to avoid his eyes. She’d promised herself that she would not take any kindnesses from anyone aboard this ship again, but she’s also toeing a very fine line in her precarious situation. Rey nods. Hux must have taken it as acquiesce, because the next sound Rey hears is that of footsteps walking away.

Her eyes travel to the massive white bathtub for a heartbeat, then to the large shower built into the wall. It’s large enough that she could see a raised sitting bench, which amuses her. Who would sit while showering?

She listens to the retreating footsteps before curiosity bests her.

Rey pokes her head out of the refresher.

“Wait!”

The noises stop. Rey nibbles at her lip, worrying that he’ll walk away until they resume, drawing closer. A moment later, General Hux appears at the door, his brow furrowed.

Rey breaks the silence.

“I would… appreciate… your help,” she says. Hux regards her stonily so Rey looks at the shower. “I am not sure how to operate the…”

Rey waves her hand at the shower, biting on her cheek to keep from blushing. She’s not ashamed of her lack of knowledge, it’s not as though she’d had many chances to use accommodations like these; but there is something very, very uncomfortable about having to admit it to someone like General
Hux. All she sees is a man who obviously does not want her to be here. Not like she wanted to be here, either.

Rey focuses on the glass panels, on the black marble walls and chrome details, for a hair longer than necessary before looking at the General. He hasn’t even twitched.

Hux approaches quietly, slowly removing the greatcoat from his shoulders and hanging the bulky thing on a towel hanger. Her eyes follow the motion, inspecting the coat. It’s kept to perfection: wrinkle free, no loose threads on the crisp lapels; the collar’s clean, the sleeves ridiculously sharp, the bands denoting his rank a beautiful silvery grey fabric.

She notices him watching her out of her peripherals; there’s a curious glint in his gaze, but he only clears his throat to catch her attention. Rey turns to him as he extends his hand towards the shower, urging her closer as she approaches. Rey carefully keeps her distance.

“This controls which shower heads turn on,” he says, pointing to a small white dial in the wall, then towards the shower heads above and to the sides. Rey nods.

“This one controls pressure,” He points to a small black dial next to the white one.

“This handle controls the temperature by degrees,” he says, finally, grabbing at the chrome handle and turning it. “Left for cold water, right for hot.”

He steps back and points to a cabinet. “There is soap and other toiletries in there.”

Rey stares as Hux collects his greatcoat without another word and makes for the door.

“Thank you,” Rey calls out to him.

He stops once more and nods without turning to look at her, then strides out the room. A minute later she hears the faint beep of his quarters’ access pad and a set of doors sliding shut.

Rey sighs and strips completely, giving the shower a wary glance. This would be a new experience.

After fumbling with buttons and the handle, she gets the water to where she wants it: near scalding. She steps into the swirling steam and jets of water, sighing as muscles she hadn’t been aware were sore start to slowly unknot and relax. The sensation of so much water raining down on her is such a delight she nearly forgets where she is, letting out a giggle. What a wonderful thing, a shower.

She definitely will take up the general’s offer to use his shower more often, Rey decides contentedly, all leftover memories of a rude awakening forgotten under the heat of the waterspray.

Hux’s feet carry him to the bridge but his mind is currently elsewhere.

He’d been inside his walk-in closet, dressing himself for the day with his mind wrapped in a hazy cloud of exhaustion from lack of sleep, when the noises had started. The water in the refresher went on, then off. Hux frowned. He hadn’t heard the door open whatsoever, but he assumed it was Rey. He’d shaken his head and pulled on his jacket, straightening out any potential wrinkles and buckling up his belt.

Then there it was again. The whoosh of a faucet going on, only to be shut off abruptly.
He’d tilted his head, his ear twitching, and waited.

When nothing came, he let out a deep breath, his thoughts returning to his exhaustion and the million tasks that awaited him.

Until yet again the water went on and off.

So hux did the one thing he shouldn’t have done. He’d gone to investigate. Was something faulty? He’d have to file a report for someone to fix it, if so.

Except, when he’d reached the door, what he’d met had *not* been what he’d expected.

The water went on and off for the fourth time, and his lips threatened to twitch upward at the sight of the scavenger stripped to her small clothes, scrubbing at her skin with a wet towel.

He should have walked away silently. He knew she would have never allowed this to happen with the door open had she known he was still in the room, but something had yanked the unbidden words out of his mouth anyway.

“You’re so strange, you little wild thing…” Hux thought to himself. Such an interesting wild thing.

“You’re so strange, you little wild thing…” His mouth seemed to be working despite his brain telling him to stop, something so very out of character for him, but she’d stared at him with impossibly wide eyes, lips parted slightly, and he could not resist himself, his curiosity a predatory thing.

Rey had said something about efficiency that had taken a handful of seconds to register, his mind too busy trying to deconstruct the puzzle that was this girl standing in front him. He’d given her some off hand remark until her words had finally sunk in, his gaze flying to the shower. The puzzle pieces of her past, an orphan on a desert planet, clicked into place then. He’d looked at her and wondered with mounting horror how many small pleasures a single person could be deprived of.

He would not feel pity for her. That was beneath them both. But in this at least he would be a gentleman. So he’d told her as much.

“That’s an interesting way to shower.” He straightened. That would be as far as he would allow it to go, using the moment as a reminder to them both about the particulars behind her stay. “You are not forbidden from using them while you remain my guest.”

He turned to leave then, after she had offered him the tiniest of nods, except what happened next unraveled every notion Hux held of what was appropriate when it came to Rey of Jakku.
She had asked for help.

And just like that, Hux had found himself in the most bizarre, domestic situation of his life, explaining to a half naked woman how to use his shower.

He shakes his head, returning to reality and focusing instead on what keeps replaying in his mind over and over: Rey looking at his greatcoat.

The look he’d found on her face when her gaze had landed on his greatcoat, swept over his rank bars, holds a small thrill for him. It had been awe and curiosity, and he’d allowed it to stroke his ego for a second too long, but she was so very interesting to him - her mannerisms, her infallible sense of duty to something greater than herself, the streak of wildness that coursed through her like the deadly undercurrents of a churning river; the power she held, raw and unexplored. Even he, a man with no Force sensitivity, could feel it when she was pushed too far. It’d crashed over him, a force to be reckoned with. What great things could she accomplish for the First Order if only she allowed herself to be swayed? That nearly imperceptible hint of awe in her eyes when she had looked at his greatcoat keeps pulling at him like a magnet. Perhaps…

Hux thums his fingers on the railing.

Perhaps she could be swayed to see things his way. She had been the one to ask him to explain, to tell her more, after all. Hux smiles as he remembers her flustered, rushed request the night before. But if she was clever, so was he. He knew, in all reality, that her only objective in offering that olive branch would be to gain information she could leak to the Resistance. Except when a door opens, one can walk through it both ways, and Hux is nothing if not a man who thrives under a challenge.

It would certainly make his life easier. One less enemy to worry about, especially one with the potential to wield so much power, currently sitting so close to home. Snoke had looked nothing but deliriously happy at this new arrangement of his, so it would do no harm to proceed, at least until she proved to be a danger. If that time came, he would defer to Snoke’s guidance. Still, this might be his return ticket to the Supreme Leader’s good graces.

Just as he’s turning the idea over in his mind, an officer brings his attention back down to the bridge.

“Sir,” Lieutenant Savoy calls over the hustle and bustle of the crew, “A message has been sent for your immediate review.”

Hux regards her ramrod straight posture, her perfectly tailored uniform. He nods. She transmits the message with a few taps and the comm at his wrist beeps to life.

A hologram of an intelligence agent blinks to life in front of him, snapping a salute.

“General,” the man says. Hux studies the full, untamed beard, the wild hair that hasn’t seen gel or hair product in months. Hux narrows his eyes. Had the man been aboard his ship rather than off spying for him, he would have been subjected to regulation a long time ago.

“Go on,” Hux says.

“Sir, I have intercepted a message detailing newly implemented plans by the Resistance, sir,” the spy says, “I will be sending them directly to you via an untraceable line.”

Hux nods. A second beep. The spy continues.

“Plans are a-go two days from now at nine-hundred hours, sir.”
“Thank you,” Hux says. The spy positively preens, snapping another salute before Hux lets the line go dead. He pulls up the second message, eyebrows climbing up slowly as he reads. There are pages upon pages detailing long, well thought out plans by the rebel scum. When a door opens, one can walk both ways, yet he didn’t think it would open so very soon. His lips curl up slowly.

Hux is nothing if not a man who thrives under a challenge.

His footsteps fall silent as he enters his room that night, careful this time not to shed any layers of clothing except for his greatcoat, which he goes to his room to hang in its usual place. He ignores the girl sitting on the couch playing with Millicent until he’s back facing the door. Hux leans against the door frame, watching the back of her head as she toys with the tabby. She refuses to acknowledge his presence, Hux notes with wry amusement, dangling her fingers just out of reach of Millicent’s sharp little claws instead, wiggling them and teasing the little creature.

Her hair is down, for once, hanging in damp waves.

“I hope the shower was to your satisfaction?”

Rey’s head snaps up, turning by degrees until she’s locked eyes with his own. From where he stands, she has to tilt her chin back in order to look at him, her nose held in the air aristocratically as she tries to stare him down. A blanket of curiosity settles over Hux’s shoulders. She was just so intriguing like this.

“Yes, thank you.”

“I don’t know how much time long hair takes to dry, but if you need something to help dry your hair faster I can—” he starts, and suddenly she’s blushing so furiously that his words die in his mouth. Millicent’s finally gotten what she wanted and pounces at Rey’s hand, biting and clawing as hard as the little cat can manage, causing Rey to flinch, but the girl does not move.

“I- No!” she nearly shouts in a rush before catching herself and taking in a deep breath. “No, no, it’s fine.”

Hux remembers very similar words spilling out of her the night before and wonders if this will become a daily ritual; him offering any small thing and Rey rushing to try and turn the offer down. But then she continues and he fights the urge to smile.

“I took another shower,” Rey mumbles and Hux has to strain to hear the words. “A couple of them, in fact.”

Rey straightens and levels him with a peculiar look. “I hope you do not mind.”

Hux schools his expression and shakes his head.

Curious, interesting little wild thing.

“I am glad you’ve accepted my offer,” he says, prying himself from the doorframe and walking towards the kitchen.

He undoes his jacket, relaxing minimally at the added wiggle room to move. Hux reaches for the data pad, about to order his usual meal, then hesitates and curls his fingers into his palm, turning to
look at Rey.

“Is there something you’d prefer to eat?” he asks. Rey’s eyes widen a fraction.

“Anything is fine,” she answers after a beat too long, “I don’t mind.”

Hux is too busy thinking of what he must do after their meal to linger on this, ordering the same dish they’d had last night, then pours himself a glass of wine and settles opposite her to wait. They sit in semi-comfortable silence, Rey busy with Millicent and Hux busy with his plans, untouched wine swirling in his glass for the hundredth time.

When their meal is finally served, Hux rises, extending his hand to her without putting much thought into the gesture, his mind wrapped in the machinations of much larger things to come.

Rey looks at his proffered hand for a long time, then at his face, and stands up. The motion puts her inches away from his chest and Hux finds himself straightening to his full height, letting his hand drop. This is far too close for comfort. A step forward and she’d fit right under his chin like a puzzle piece. Hux steps back, chasing away that thought with wildfire, before turning and sitting himself at his usual spot the head of the table to the right. This time they actually go through their meal in blessed silence.

Every once in a while Hux catches Rey looking at him, watching his hands, then slowly imitating them. His amusement skyrockets. It’s so small and insignificant, but it further proves Hux’s theory about the woman sitting on the other side of his table: she’s a quick learner, and so very eager to learn. So Hux takes his time, showing her without speaking how to properly hold her silverware, where to cut and how to do it without grating noises, how to scoop up the grains onto the fork with the flat side of the knife, how to bring small pieces of food into her mouth without flashing all of her teeth and half chewed food. By the end of their meal, she eats a little bit more dignified and less like an unmannered troll. Hux delights in it.

Hux sits back, twirling his untouched wine around his glass in a soothing, meditative motion, wondering how to approach this conversation. Rey is easy to spook and leading in with the wrong words would only start another fight he honestly could do without. He had no interest in fighting a child.

“If I asked you to join me in my office, would you?” Hux offers, allowing her to turn it down. With her, he thinks, it’s all about choices.

They remain locked in a battle of wills for minutes, staring each other down.

“How?” She tilts her head. He’s piqued her interest.

“I have something to show you.”

“What?” she demands.

“If I remember correctly, you asked me to tell you more about the order… about what I do,” He sets the bait.

“I could do better than tell you,” he dangles it in front of her face.

“I could show you,” he whispers as Rey’s eyes drill into him.

He’s hooked her.
“Okay,” Rey says, standing before Hux even tries to, to Hux’s delight. *She is so very eager.* He follows her lead as Rey forgets her position as guest and practically barges into his office, Hux following quietly behind. He closes the door behind him, watching her look around the room and take in the neat shelves, the small, modern silver accents displayed on them, the long wooden desk, and then finally the chair in front of it. She turns to him and he inclines his head, prompting Rey to take it before walking around to take his own, carefully gauging her mood as she continues to look around.

Ever since Kylo Ren decided to so irreverently force Rey into his care, Hux has been walking around wearing silken kid gloves. Even when he had regrettably lost his composure those silk gloves had not come off, he admits. This time he’s toying with bare fingers over a flame that could very easily get out of control and burn him. It’s a gamble, one she could exploit, but Hux likes to think he’s got excellent intuition. And so he decides to place his faith in that intuition, slowly activating the holopad in front of his desk. A blue screen comes to life and he whisks it to the side with the palm of his hand, allowing him to keep an eye on Rey’s reaction at all times.

“Now,” he turns, “I have one request of you before we begin. Indulge me, please. Why do you want to learn more about an organization you abhor?”

Rey looks at him silently, eyes narrowed.

Hux’s lips quirk up, “One small gift for another, Rey. I can show you so very much, but first, you must trust me. Otherwise, we can act like this never happened and return to the living room.”

Rey wouldn’t trust him as far as she could throw him, but Hux carefully weaves the words into place and waits for her response. The drop of trust it would take to answer him is all he needs to cultivate it further.

The minutes stretch on and Hux waits for her to jump to her feet and walk out but Rey only tilts her chin up defiantly, glaring at him, then speaks through gritted teeth.

“I want to understand,” she clips.

“Understand what, exactly?” he murmurs, gently pressing her.

Rey’s silence stretches on and Hux watches as her expression betrays her every thought.

She’s as easy to read as a book, her eyes flying back and forth between two imagined spots in the air, looking for reasons she’s not sure she’s ever considered before.

“I want to understand why you make the decisions you do, why you’ve made the ones you’ve made, why there’s a First Order to begin with. I want to know what you think this...all of...” she swings her arms around in the air to mean more than the comfortable office they’re in, “why all of *this* matters.”

Hux examines her face, her knuckles turning white as she grips the chair tightly.

“Thank you, Rey,” he says. Rey relaxes by degrees, probably thankful to not be asked any further questions.

He leans back on his chair and rests his hands on his lap, leg crossed one over the other, much more like a kind, patient teacher this time.

“I cannot have you understand why I make the decisions I make unless you’re there when I make them,” he starts, and Rey immediately frowns.
“So I will allow you to be here when I make one. Right now.”

Rey’s eyes widen, and Hux takes it for encouragement.

“There will be an attack on one of my bases in less than two days.” He says.

“What?” Rey frowns.

“Intelligence has informed me that one of my supply bases on an off planet will be attacked in two days,” he repeats, calmly, and brings up the recording of his previous conversation, replaying it for Rey. She frowns the whole way through, lids sliding together into a squint the longer she reads.

“How do you know this?” Rey asks abruptly. “How did he find that out?”

Hux tilts his head. So moral…

“He’s a spy, Rey,” Hux offers as an answer. It’s the only answer there is to give.

Rey obviously does not appreciate it.

“A spy?! You’re spying? How is that even remotely fair? I thought you were all about doing things the right way, that the Resistance did everything the wrong way! Something about order and such nonsense.”

Hux’s eyebrow rises a hair.

“Spies are a reality and a necessity of war, Rey. We are not the only ones who spy. We’re simply better at finding them within our ranks than they are at finding ours.”

Rey gawks at him.

“You’ve found Resistance spies?”

He nods.

“What happened to them?” she demands, suddenly defensive.

“They were executed.” He says, holding up his hand when she looks ready to balk, “I can assure you they would execute ours if they were to find them.”

“No they would not!” she huffs, obviously affronted by it. For the hundredth time he wonders how the Resistance could so very easily indoctrinate her in a matter of hours. She knows so little and yet believes so much. “They would hold a trial! A fair, public trial!”

Hux smiles.

“And then they would be executed.”

Rey falls silent. She knows he speaks truth.

“Ok, fine,” she changes tactics immediately. Hux has to give it to her, she accepts defeat well even while refusing to give up the fight. “So they blow up a base somewhere with nothing but crates of food and weapons. So what?”

Hux’s head tilts. Does she really know so little?
“The base is not empty, Rey. This planet is inhabited. By the First Order, yes, but also by people who have chosen to make their livelihood there, who have made homes and started families.”

“But the resistance would never hurt those people,” Rey counters.

He has her in his grasp now, so he takes the time to give her a life lesson he hopes she’ll never forget.

Hux silently pulls up the documents he’d received that morning, prompting her to read them, then he sits back and watches. He nearly forgets to blink, unwilling to miss a single twitch of her brow or narrowing of her bright hazel eyes, or the small downturn her lips take as she gets to page three.

Rey mutters to herself, but Hux notes the disbelief in her words.

“They’re carpet bombing.”

Hux stays silent. Rey keeps reading.

He watches her get to the transcript of the orders, to a conversation that must have taken place in D’Qar, which Hux is almost certain homes the Resistance base. His spies could not confirm it, which meant the Resistance must have sniffed them out, but perhaps tonight he would have confirmation. Rey’s line of sight lands on two single, damming words. They tumble out of her in a whisper.

*Collateral Damage.*

Her head turns to him robotically, fingers fisted in her lap, shoulders tense, a vein in her neck straining.

“What do they mean by collateral damage?” she asks.

At this, Hux rises and walks around the desk. He pulls a second chair up to her side and plops himself into it, pulling his sleeves up his wrists, the very picture of an exhausted man. That picture is not far off the mark.

He leans on his knees so that his face is brought closer to her, below eye level, and she looks down into his eyes, chest unmoving. She’s holding her breath without even knowing.

Finally, he lets out a strained, tired sigh. He's bone tired, but the gesture is simply for her benefit.

“There are twenty thousand people in the immediate surroundings of and inside that base. The resistance plans to carpet bomb the area.” He lets those words sink in, “it is a high risk operation for the Resistance, as this base is heavily guarded and an important depot for us between systems, blowing it up would set us back months…. So, General Organa has agreed to deal the blow and accept collateral damage as part of the operation.”

Rey’s lips tighten until they’re nearly invisible.

“Twenty thousand people are the collateral damage, Rey.”

It takes a moment for it to register. The damming evidence in front of her has the power to convince her of what his words the previous night could not. Nobody’s innocent in war. There were no real sides, no black and white, no good and evil. Just war, and power, and the actions of those who mean to make a grab for it.

The fight bleeds out of her.
She slumps back in her chair, eyes clouding over. Rey refuses to look at him again when she speaks.

“But how? How could they do this? They’re not evil people, they’re not like—” she cuts herself off abruptly, but it doesn’t take a genius to know who she’s referring to. Hux, set on seeing her through this, ignores the insult.

“They do what they have to do,” he says, hating himself for even uttering such a thing, but it feels as though she needs it. Still, he refuses to be painted as the monster here, “Just as we do.”

Rey finally looks at him, glossy eyed and scowling.

We.

“Your decision,” she prompts, “you said you had a decision to make.”

Hux nods. He’d already made a decision. He’d made several, in fact, and ten contingency plans per each should the one chosen fail. Just in case. His decision had been to let her decide.

“We do,” he says, casually rolling the implied alliance off his tongue. “What do you think should happen, Rey?”

“I—… they should…” she fights with herself. She hesitates, fingers turning pale the tighter she digs into her own skin.

“We should stop them,” he supplies, once again making sure she hears the we in there. Rey looks away, bubbling in her anger. Hux leans forward, his eyes searching for hers.

“Well then, I will need your help.”

It makes her look up and he smiles internally.

“A small gift for a small gift,” she whispers, and Hux nods. She is clever, after all. Very clever.

“I cannot stop resistance fighters from flying into the planet and carpet bombing, but I will initiate evacuation of the base and its immediate surroundings, and I will try to endanger as few lives as humanly possible, civilians and troops alike.” He says, and Rey is hanging on his every word. “But we will fire on the pilots and bring every single ship down. We will attack with everything we have. It will potentially escalate.”

Rey’s breath comes in shallow pants.

“Or..?” she asks, dangling the question for him to pluck.

He’s playing with so much fire right now.

“Or you can give me the location of the resistance base. I will start evacuation and remove all personnel and civilians, the rebels will fly in and destroy our base, civilian homes will be destroyed, and not a single weapon from our side will be fired. They will fly home. We will plan an attack on their base and I will avert my eyes as you run to inform them. I will even provide you with the means to do so. They will evacuate, we will destroy their base. And at the end of the day nothing is lost except for some buildings turned to rubble.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” she finally asks in a pained whisper. A small part of Hux pities the fact that he must.

“These are the decisions I must make,” he says, “A decision would have been made without you,
one probably ending in bloodshed; but now you have a chance to save lives at your disposal.”

Rey struggles, a fierce battle as she debates which of her choices costs more; a rebel base and betraying her convictions, or the lives of the people she considered friends.

“You can say nothing,” he says, giving her a way out, “do nothing, and when this all happens in two days’ time, I will not bring it up. Our little war will go on in its own merry way. I will not fault you.”

Her breaths come in short pants, quick and quiet, and her eyes swing wildly from side to side as she looks at the floor, hoping it would offer her an answer.

The seconds tick by.

With the finality of a hammer falling to an anvil, Rey gives him all the ammunition he needs.

“D'Qar. The base is in D'Qar.”

She looks at him, then, a spark hissing to life in her mind.

“And what do you gain? What do you gain, then? If they destroy your base and you destroy theirs, and no one dies, what do you gain?”

Hux smiles.

Clever girl.

No, she’s not a fool.

He extends his hands, palm up, as if a supplicant for her understanding.

“Time,” he answers. “Time to rebuild, and we go back to war as usual.”

She looks at him then, realizing the implication: nobody wins, but nobody loses, either.

Hux’s next words are left unsaid, but he means them just as much.

He gains time.

And, perhaps, with time, a powerful ally.

It would be a gamble he’d have to take.

Chapter End Notes

Hello, all! Happy weekend.
You all get a chapter a day early because I just looked at my schedule and hooo-boy do I have a lot of work. So, knowing I won't be able to spend any time online, now seemed as good a time to drop this chapter.

Also, Kylo starts unraveling his end of the bond and things happen! Now we wait for Rey. And Hux is a cunning motherfucker, as always.

Enjoy it! Next chapter will be up on Friday, hopefully :)
Chapter Playlist:
- The Switch and the Spur - The raconteurs
- These Stones will Shout - The raconteurs
A bond blooms in the most unexpected of ways.

Rey stares at the high ceilings of the living room, blankets drawn up to her chin, the kitten plopped on her stomach snoozing away happily. She’s cold despite the room’s comfortable temperature, so unlike the holding cells several levels below. Rey looks at the light fixtures, knowing she’d never be able to reach them to pull off the same stunt she had in her prison, and curses herself for not knowing enough of the Force to do some of the things she had seen Kylo Ren do.

Like pull an entire ship close to his command shuttle and hold it in place against all the push and fuel she had given the engines of the Millennium Falcon in her vain attempts to escape.

Rey’s lips draw over her teeth in a silent snarl, but she’s snarling into the dark, empty nothingness, and that won’t do her any good. She sighs instead, shifting. The kitten purrs softly at the movement.

If she knew how to use the Force she’d be able to escape. She wouldn’t have to count on a bout of luck like she had on Starkiller base, or even in her last two escapes. She’d be able to escape General Hux and get the hell out of this place.

She had known it was the Force when her engines stopped responding, whirring but never advancing. She had known it was the Force when her shields had been disabled by a seemingly invisible hand. She had known it was the Force when the Falcon had rattled as an unwelcome ship connected with hers, when her ramp had lowered without her permission.

She’d been the only person aboard the Millennium Falcon then; Chewie and R2-D2 had stayed behind with Luke, promising to meet her in D’Qar. Chewie had wanted to spend time with his old friend now that Han was dead, and Rey could not deny the wookie his solace when he so desperately needed to grieve his partner in crime. Ahch-To would be the perfect place to do so. Tranquil and beautiful, and blessedly remote.

Her exit from the planet had been dashed along with her plans when a dark, looming figure had clomped up her ramp, ready to cut her down. She had fought with everything she possessed, and still flinched at how much damage she knew both of them had imparted to the inside of the ship while fighting tooth and nail. Luck had not been on her side. She’d been captured in part because she did not understand the Force as he did, and Rey hated her captors, she hated this ship, she hated every single one of the soldiers aboard it. She just wanted freedom. She wanted to return to the resistance, to her friends, to a place where she had found that she could finally belong. A place where people fought for what’s right.

Except…

It keeps buzzing in her head. She buries the thought but it continued to resurface in the night, floating above the hum in her mind.
Rey had finally received a taste of what she had wanted. She had been granted information, and it sits in the pit of her stomach like a brick.

**Collateral damage.**

Collateral damage, they’d called it. Twenty thousand lives, cosigned to a number on a page for the sake of progress in a war nobody seemed to be winning. A *sacrifice that must be made*, the missive had said. A part of Rey wanted to believe that it was for the best, that these people were monsters and murderers and they deserved everything that came to them. But the other part of her brain insisted that the majority of those twenty thousand souls were people like her, civilians caught in the whirlwind of a galactic war far bigger than anything they could comprehend. And even if they *were* monsters and murderers, even if she willed herself through excuses to reconcile the concept of death in exchange for power in her mind, the part of her that was attuned to the Force could never do the same. Because inside of her she felt those lives.

She had lived on a desert planet, her powers dormant, and all she had known was silence. Then she had touched Luke’s lightsaber and it had been as though a dam had burst, letting in all the light in the universe, and she had *felt* more than known that there were millions, billions of lives around her in the galaxy, perhaps even more. She could feel it now, where she was surrounded by thousands of them on this ship. The Force would not allow her to discount the thousands of beating pulses and pinpricks of life inside her mind. She knew without a doubt that if they were to suddenly die, she would feel each and every one. Suddenly, it wasn’t so black and white.

The last damning nail to the coffin had been Leia Organa’s signature. She felt a pang of pain in her chest. It felt very nearly like betrayal. True, she didn’t *really* know the woman; had only known her for a few hours. She didn’t know the woman that had held herself with such grace, a grounding force for those around her…except that Rey had hugged her and felt nothing but love and concern, and she had grieved with her as General Organa had resigned herself to the death of her husband, to the betrayal of her child, to the loss of her family. Rey had squeezed the woman’s hands as she had said her goodbyes, promising to return with General Organa’s twin. She had failed at that.

*Would Leia know I’ve gone missing?* Rey muses. She hadn’t even had time to send a distress signal for Leia to intercept before her capture. She had failed at that, too.

Rey did not believe General Organa was evil. Could not force herself to believe that.

She turns on her couch and the nameless kitten, her only true companion here, simply adjusts to curl itself in the crook of Rey’s knees. Rey’s head tilts back and her eyes fall on the door leading to the bedroom.

No, Rey could not force herself to believe that General Organa was evil. So what did that make the man behind the closed doors?

He had given her a choice hours before inside his office.

Rey knows she had been used for information. She knows it as well as she knows her heartbeat; she is many things but a fool isn’t one of them. Yet Rey had given the information up because she had also been given a choice to save lives. She does not want to think of what other decisions would have been made had he not deferred to her judgement. How many resistance pilots would have died? How many stormtroopers forced to stay behind in order to fire their weapons? How many people on both sides of the fight? People without choices. Because, Rey reminded herself, whether they wore pilot helmets with resistance insignia or stormtrooper armor, they were people nonetheless, pawns in a galactic game of chess, there to be sacrificed for the goals of kings and queens. General Hux would have done what needed to be done, and more people would have died. She thinks of Finn, telling her
with deep, soulful eyes, that he had escaped because he refused to kill. That he had been a child taken from a home he had never known. How many more were like Finn? The stormtroopers would have no choice but to fire… but up until this moment, she had not considered that the resistance pilots would have had no choice in the matter either. As it stands, had she stayed with the resistance, would she have a choice? She wants to believe that she would.

Rey pulls her eyes away from the closed door and settles back on her pillow, sighing at the headache sparking behind her eyes. She closes them, evening out her breaths. Her mind wanders back to Finn, to Poe, to BB-8 and Chewie. If she has to fight for a side, Rey thinks, she’ll fight for the side where her friends are. They’re as close to family as she’ll ever have. Her chest constricts at the thought, and in that second of pain something stops her short. A soft hum, a glow in the back of her awareness that intensifies. Rey frowns.

She tries to focus.

She’s had that feeling in her mind for weeks now. That golden Light, floating in the back of her awareness. Humming softly. She had ignored it, assumed it as her due for being part of the Force now, and concentrated on more important tasks like surviving. Escaping Starkiller base, finding Luke and gaining a teacher — the memory of Luke’s immensely sad, wise gaze still hurts to think about — escaping the Finalizer alive. Fighting Kylo Ren and General Hux at every opportunity.

With such important things to worry about, she had basically ignored that hum and decided to deal with it some other time. She thinks back to her rude awakening that morning and is almost certain this Light caused it. The heat and the pain had been the same as they are now, but now it thrums with every emotion of hers, as if in answer. When she is calm, it lies quiet. When she’s agitated, it glows with heat. When she hurts, it hurts. Is the Force supposed to do that?

She knows that she knows so little. It makes her angry.

The glowing ball of Light pulses with her distress.

She approaches it, tentatively, her breath hitching at the heat it spreads through her, down every vein, in every bone.

Her breathing quickens the hotter her senses become, until she feels drawn to this floating presence in her mind, unable to help herself.

Rey pinches her eyes closed tight as she concentrates on it, gauges its size within her, gingerly floats around it and inspects it. Would the Force be like this in her mind forever? Would she always feel consumed by fire?

She reaches towards it and —

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Kylo Ren sits up with a jerk. A very painful jerk. He had been meditating, trying to calm himself because ever since he had touched that ball of energy in his mind, all he could feel were waves of emotions that did not belong inside of him. One moment he’d feel happy for absolutely no reason, the next, waves of rage would consume him - and any other time he would have welcomed the rage - but not when it came quickly followed by numbness, sadness, anxiety, resignation, and anger once more. It was a rollercoaster in which he was an unwilling passenger. He had raged in his own way, then, throwing and destroying everything within his reach until all that was left untouched in his
room was his grandfather’s helmet, still carefully resting inside its crystal box.

Had this been what he had signed up for when he brushed his awareness against that ball of light? A lifetime of feeling all the things he had worked so hard to stamp out of him? Had Ben Solo come back from his eternal grave to haunt him? When it had become too much, he had sunk into the destroyed mattress in a sitting position and set tomeditate, determined to stomp out any feeling and shove Ben Solo back into his cage.

Except this time his heart aches and he watches with horror as the ball of Light inside his mind unspools, stretches, shines brightly enough to blind him. The hum turns into a single, soulful note, light and airy and so ridiculously high that he cringes. It unravels fast, faster, and then —

— And then it’s latching onto him. Kylo Ren scrambles to shove up his mental defenses, protecting what is solely his against whatever this thing is, but the light is too quick and it cuts through his useless attempts, clinging onto his very essence and —

A flash of a face appears in his mind. Bright eyes and dark hair, freckled face and a soft mouth parted in what might have been a gasp or a scream, he doesn’t know, and he feels soft blankets that he knows do not belong in the wretch of the room he’s in, and hears a soft purr of no animal he can see.

His eyes fly open.

The rope of light that anchors to him sings. It glows, brighter and brighter, and tethers itself to his soul with a strength that’s difficult for his mind to comprehend. And then, slowly, gently, a second awareness buds within his mind, an awareness that is not his, and—

And it’s the scavenger. He knows it like he knows his own name. He senses that the rope that had latched onto him has done the same for her because suddenly emotions that are not his beat into his mind like the winds of a hurricane. Out of sheer panic, something that is so unfamiliar to Kylo Ren, he throws up his walls and blocks everything that is him until he’s safe within the cocoon he’s built for himself, until there’s only a dampened echo left behind of that storm of emotions that had assaulted his thoughts.

Kylo scrambles out of his cot and takes two purposeful strides towards his grandfather’s helmet, longing to anchor himself in something familiar, longing to return to his strength. Then the room is shifting under him, darkness enveloping every corner, and Kylo Ren lowers his eyes, barely refraining from sighing.

He grabs for the lightsaber hitched under his robes as twenty five men - Kylo counts quickly - surround him, guarded and armed, and Kylo knows it is time to begin all over again.

He ignites his saber and prepares himself to dance.

Chapter End Notes

Rather short-ish chapter! But the bond blooming to life deserved its own chapter, so no Hux this time. Don’t worry, he’ll be back next chapter.

Also thank you all for the amazing comments you’ve all left me in the last few chapters. You all make my heart feel warm and fuzzy in all the right places. I’m super flattered,
especially by those of you who have decided to try out Reylux by reading ADOT! ;---;
You beautiful people, you. I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Chapter Playlist:
We’ll be Okay - With Confidence
Rehabilitation

Chapter Summary

Things happen in the situation room and Kylo sends Hux a text.

Chapter Notes

A giant thank you to all who have read, commented, kudo'd (is that a word? I'm making it a word), bookmarked, and overall been hugely enthusiastic about this. I live and breathe for your joy. Onto the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The morning of the attack on the First Order’s supply base comes just as all other mornings do, the irony not lost on Hux as he shrugs his greatcoat over his shoulders - how the universe keeps going, unchanging and uncaring of the machinations of men.

The sound of water rushing from the shower heads in his bathroom bring his mind to Rey, who had surely snuck into the refresher while he changed in his walk-in closet much like she had three days ago. He shakes his head. Has it already been three days? Over a week since Ren had so unceremoniously dumped her in his care…

Under his supervision, he corrects with a purse of his lips as quickly as the thought crosses his mind.

Soon it would be half a moon cycle and here they stood at an impasse. After that meeting in his office Hux had seen very little of her. Oh, he had seen her, sure, but he hadn’t seen her. Not a trace of her fiery spirit. He had received no snarky remarks, no huffed responses, no angry glares. They had sat in silence to dine the following night and Rey, usually quick to inhale her meal, had only pushed her vegetables around. Hux wondered if he should worry, but then again, her problems were not his. He would not allow himself to get entangled in them. Still, he needed her attention on him today, if only so he could accomplish what needed to be accomplished.

He finishes dressing himself, brushing his clothes one last time before stepping quietly into the common room. He takes a seat on his usual high chair, legs crossed, and drums his fingers on his knee while he settles himself to wait.

Rey comes out of his bedroom not much longer after, that thought making his left eye twitch, and Hux motions to her usual seat opposite him (another troubling thought, that). She stiffens under his gaze, so he waits, face impassive, patient. When finally there is nothing for her to do but obey, she carefully sets herself to doing her hair up in her usual three-bunned style. He finds himself unable to avert his gaze as she runs her fingers through her damp hair and entirely disregards him. Millicent jumps on her lap, having made herself a permanent fixture in the personal space of the girl in front of him. It’s another one of those uncomfortable domestic scenarios that he had been trying so hard to avoid. He schools himself to disinterest once she concludes her task and peers up at him.

“I am surprised to see you here, General,” she greets in a monotone, “I thought perhaps you had
Hux drums his fingers on his knee again and her eyes fly to it. He does it on purpose, this time; distracting her simply because he knows he can. Power. There is only power and those who wield it. In that moment, he exerts an infinitesimal amount of it over her, and this little game is just so entertaining to him.

Then he stops and her eyes fly back to his face.

Like clockwork, he muses.

He doesn’t think she even realizes that she’s doing it. If this is her response to a simple, consistent beat, he wonders what her response to music would be like. He quickly brings his attention back to the task at hand. No, he would not allow himself the distraction. Not now.

“I do have important things to attend to,” he speaks, finally, and Rey watches him like a hawk. “As it stands, I thought perhaps you would join me.”

Rey stiffens visibly, and Hux gets the distinctive impression that she knows exactly why.

He’s proven right about her once more when she juts her chin out and speaks with a challenge in her eyes.

“You will keep your promise?” she demands.

Hux leans back, resting his elbows on the armrests of his chair.

“My dear, I promised you nothing,” he begins, and the fire he had missed for two days comes roaring back, “I swore no oath to you, little scavenger. But you kept your word and gave me the information I needed, so I will keep mine.”

Rey positively bristles. More so at the endearment, at being called little; at the reminder that she is a scavenger and so below him.

He stands and starts strolling towards the main door then, his next command issued without turning to look at her.

“Come.”

He waits for a second without slowing his step, rewarded once more when he hears the quick shuffling of her feet. The look on her face when she reaches his side is that of excitement to finally be out of her confines, and Hux narrows his eyes in her general direction.

“I believe I need not remind you what happens should you try to escape.”

Rey turns her nose up at him but says nothing, and he notes with a flicker of surprise that she makes no move to run. When he’s certain she won’t, he turns on his heel and walks off, Rey falling in behind him.

He has little time to wonder at this new development, however, when Captain Phasma reaches him at a clip, snapping off a clean salute and falling in beside him. To the captain’s credit, she does not hesitate nor does she stop to look at the brunette girl following behind him, taking a step and a half for every one of his.

“Sir,” comes the modulated voice behind the helmet, “The officers have assembled in the situation
room,” she says. “We only await your command.”

Hux nods, continuing his long stride until they arrive at the command quarters minutes later, entering the situation room with fifteen minutes to spare. The clock ticks closer to nine hundred hours.

All the officers in the room stand as one when Hux enters the room with Phasma, Rey in tow. He takes his seat at the head of the table, Phasma assuming her place at his right hand behind him. Out of the corner of his eye he watches Rey hesitate, unsure of where to stand, before stiffly setting herself behind his chair to his left. If the petty officers and commanders sitting in the room are bothered by her presence, nobody shows any inkling of it. Not even a lingering look.

“General,” Lieutenant Savoy speaks, her voice crisp and her eyes sharp. “Ten minutes until the strike.”

Every eye in the room turns to him, then. He feels the pressure of Rey’s drilling into the back of his head.

“Bring up the image,” he orders, and immediately four different giant screens project in the middle of the room, over their oval table; every single person has a view of what’s happening. There’s a soft gasp behind him, but he keeps his eyes trained on the screens.

“Report, Lieutenant.”

Savoy’s turns towards him, leaning toward in her chair to catch his eye over the screens.

“Sir, all troops have been evacuated. The perimeter of the base has been cleared in a radius of a hundred miles, all civilians along with relief units, just to be sure.”

Hux nods then, drumming his fingers on the table. The screens flicker and he watches from four different angles as cloaked First Order ships provide video of Resistance X-wings entering atmosphere. The room falls quiet except for the drumming of his fingers. To his side, just at the edge of his peripheral vision, Rey shuffles her weight.

“Sir, five minutes to impact.”

The count down is given to him by another officer standing in the room until all video feeds project image of their soon to be rubble of a base as hidden camera rooms along the mountain range return their feedback to the Finalizer.

“Three minutes to impact.” The short, dark haired petty officer announces.

Lieutenant Mikata speaks for the first time since Hux entered the room, “Sir, it would take just as long for our ships to hit atmo. If we are to attack, we need word now.”

“Two minutes.”

Hux continues his thrumming, and every eye turns to him. His own, however, are locked on the sight of X-wings zooming toward his base. The shuffling behind him stops. He can almost sense Rey holding her breath.

“One minute to impact.” Comes from the petty officer.

“Sir, we need word now.” Comes from Mikata.

Hux stops his fingers and gives a single shake of his head.
He knows his officers are stunned that he’s actually following through with the plan he had relayed to them the night before. But he had his word to keep. They would follow his orders, however ridiculous they were, however much letting the enemy destroy his supplies seemed like tactical suicide.

“Thirty seconds.”

Hux purses his lips.

“Twenty.”

He steels himself and all eyes turn towards the screens, long past the point of being able to retaliate with fire.

“Ten.”

He hears short pants of breath from his left, quiet enough to only reach his ears.

“Brace for impact.”

And then the screens are raining fire.

Missiles fall and X-Wing blaster weapons fire, and there’s nothing but the thunderous sounds of destruction echoing against the dark walls of the room they sit in.

X-Wings zoom by like flies from where the cameras transmit, and it takes exactly two minutes for months’ worth of Hux’s work to be turned to nothing but flames and broken pieces. He watches as the fire takes not only his base but a perimeter of miles, burning down landing pads and hangars, the x-wing fighters flying high enough to avoid damage to their wings. Hux clamps his teeth together and waits. He reminds himself of the bigger picture, his ears straining to hear any noise from Rey.

The line that the First Order was able to intercept from the X-Wings comes with a hoot; some Resistance pilot already celebrating at his victory, shouting something about Imperial scum, unknowing that the First Order is listening in. Hux lets his eyes travel to Rey for a heartbeat where she’s standing stonily. His eyes return to the carnage in front of him, and within another minute, the Resistance pilot is sending a positive to the command to exit.

Mikata speaks again, all professionalism after the destruction they all witnessed on the screen.

“General, Resistance pilots prepped for exit. Would you like us to fire upon them once they burn atmo?”

There’s not a word whispered, not a single breath taken in the entirety of the room, but he knows as well as they that there will be no fire exchanged today.

Rey, however, is nearly hyperventilating by his side. Quietly, but still very much hyperventilating.

He lets the silence go for a few more seconds before—

“All troops, stand down.”

______________________

Rey’s breath had hitched itself in her throat and refuses to dislodge itself. Hux stands up from his
chair and silently walks out of the situation room, leaving her and Phasma to chase after him. His heels click as he walks away and Rey can only keep throwing glances back to the situation room. The officers who had sat inside file out quietly, in eerily orderly fashion, before dispersing to do their jobs; some to places Rey could not guess, and a few falling in after Hux a fair distance behind, towards the bridge.

Once on the bridge, Hux walks to the railing of the top level and stands quietly. Phasma departs, leaving them alone to watch as the crew work at their stations, switching controls, monitoring screens, and generally ignoring the two people hovering overhead, watching their every move.

They stand there, a powerful giant and a girl, because in this very moment, against everything that she is and everything that she believes in, she feels just like a girl without a clue. Rey tries to get oxygen in and out of her lungs. He’d had plenty of chances to fire. He’d had plenty of chances to break his word to her, and as she watched the fire and smoke blooming like a mushroom above the base on screen, he’d reminded her that this is what war looks like. That it was easy to discuss losses and numbers in the comfort of an office, but something else entirely to watch the destruction happen in real time. Rey’s brain keeps thinking that had they not intercepted the missive, that destruction would have hailed down on twenty thousand unsuspecting heads. She cringes at that thought.

Hux says nothing, happy to leave her to her thoughts. Probably deep in his own, she thinks, as her head turns lightly and she watches him from the corner of her eye. His gaze is set on the expanse of black space in front of him, jaw clenched, regal nose held high in the air, a stern set to his lips. She follows his gaze to the open windows, watching the darkness engulfing them.

She doesn’t know what to say, either, so instead she looks over at the bridge and watches closely. She’ll never get another chance like this to see how the command of the ship is run, and Rey immediately sets to stashing any bits she can in her mind for later use. They stay like this for a good twenty minutes until she’s itching from standing in silence.

“So what happens now?” she asks.

Hux looks at her in silence for what feels like an eternity from under long, red lashes before returning to the view of open, dark space.

“Now we retaliate.”

This is what Rey feared. The retaliation. Because it meant that she was the one person responsible for it all. She hated thinking about the damage she would inflict upon her own friends. Rey clenches her hands into fists and breathes in deeply, Hux impassive at her side, hands clasped behind him as if waiting patiently for something to happen.

And whatever happens next is truly up to her. She had saved Resistance lives by making a deal with the devil, she thinks, but then her mind goes back to the mushroom clouds of fire and destruction. Her anxiety flares.

She thinks of the trees of D’Qar, to the soft light, to the cool, damp air. To the tranquil beauty. Some of it would be destroyed because of her.

Then Hux turns on his heel and starts walking away, and she’s forced to follow when even Captain Phasma turns her head to look at her standing there.

His steps echo around them, her own smaller ones rushing to catch up. They walk in silence and Rey uses the distraction to try and memorize the layout of the ship, but there are too many turns, and she loses track as they eventually reach his quarters. He quietly removes his gloves and reaches for the access pad, then steps aside to let her in, his eyes narrowing slightly when she hesitates.
If she steps in, she’ll be back in her well furnished cage. Then she sends an icy glare his way and steps forward. If she didn’t know any better, she’d swear she sees a degree of tension seep out from the squared set of his shoulders.

The general walks past her towards the table where they usually set themselves down to dine as the doors close. Rey watches him curiously, his self assured stride, the slant of his lips as he turns to face her, the way his usually fiery blue eyes gaze back at her dully, tired and hard.

He reaches into his greatcoat’s inner pocket and pulls out a data pad, placing it on the table with a soft click, his gloved hands bringing it up to life. He takes a step back, then, and stares at her for a moment longer than is comfortable to Rey.

“This data pad has an untraceable connection open right this minute. Any message you send will be sent anonymously, and a copy is being transmitted to my personal comm the second you press send.”

Rey frowns.

“Contact them, don’t contact them, warn them or don’t, it does not matter to me. Uncover your position aboard my ship and I will immediately see you in a torture cell. I do not plan on playing the games we’ve played until now. Should you bring danger to my ship, your options will be to wait for Kylo Ren to mete out his particular brand of justice, or for me to make it quick and put a bullet in your head.”

A shard of fear lodges itself in her spine like lead. He is absolute ice. This is nothing like the man who had interrogated her, even with his cruel treatments prior to this. What she had thought of as cruelty then seems now like child play in comparison. This is certainly not the man who had shown her his own particular form of kindness, either, despite her being a prisoner. This is the true face of General Hux, all business and no nonsense. All cold, hard edges and military detachment.

He continues.

“I do not plan to interfere with your message. You kept your word, and so I am keeping mine. As long as my demands are met, you will continue comfortably in my quarters as my guest. Please do not try and test my limits today, Rey.”

It is the way in which her name rolls off his tongue that brings her up short. Despite his tirade, when he says her name he sounds tired, and older than his years. It’s the voice of a man unrecognizable to her, but also that of a man who just wants to get this over with. Thinking back to the situation room, she can understand that desire.

“A retaliation strike will take place against the rebel base on D’Qar in two days, at nine hundred hours.”

He turns on his heel then and walks into his office, letting the door fall shut with a soft click.

So he’d only give them as long as they had given him. Rey knew that the Resistance would suspect of spies. Would hunt down the man who had leaked their attack on the First Order, and execute him, as General Hux had said. She tries to swallow the lump in her throat.

She also knew that the resistance would not be as gracious as Hux had been to withhold fire. Lives would be lost this time around.

But he had given her the choice, the option to try and save countless more, and so she very nearly runs to the data pad in her haste; she punches in the coordinates for messages to the resistance, and types as fast as her fingers can glide over the data pad.
They would also assume that someone had leaked this information from the First Order. But the Resistance had to know who their spies were. Would they assume it was her, when it turned out to be no one they could account for? Or would they assume it is another Finn-like trooper?

She shakes her head then, remembering the warning Hux had so callously delivered. A bullet to the head or Kylo Ren’s saber. In light of that, there wasn’t much of a choice. She leaves the message unsigned and hits send.

Rey stands staring at the data pad numbly, hearing the beep coming from the other room as soon as she hits send and the message finishes transmitting. Hux’s copy, she imagines.

Once that’s done, the door opens again and Hux approaches the table, giving her one hard look before picking up the data pad and pocketing it once more.

“Thank you,” she says, because she does not know what else to say in the face of what just happened.

His eyes settle on her like a blanket then, calm and considering.

“This changes nothing,” she quickly adds, trying to regain what little ground she can.

He keeps looking at her. Then his head dips lightly and he’s looking up at her through the most impossibly beautiful red lashes she’s ever seen, suddenly looking amused though his expression barely shifts.

“Of course not,” he agrees, and there’s a vague hint of light humor there that Rey can’t help but latch onto.

She fights the light upward twitch of her lip, because she doesn’t know why she would even smile at such a thing, but suddenly the air feels just a little lighter, and she can’t help herself. There’s something, Rey admits, to two people deciding what the fate of thousands of lives can be, and it’s a heady feeling. And perhaps it’s the fact that Rey, a nobody from a backwater planet, helped save those thousands, that finds her giving him a smile nonetheless. Because it does change something.

It changes everything.

That evening, the ground shifts under Kylo’s blood soaked cloak and boots as it had every night, except this time he lands not in his tiny room but on a platform overseeing a dais in a large, cavernous room. There is no light here except from a small pool of water at his feet. He stands alone. He frowns.

A figure glides out from the cloak of darkness and Kylo has just enough sense to immediately drop to one knee. He kneels there, tired and worn from the long day spent fighting and killing, and Kylo just wants to collapse onto his destroyed bed and sleep away forever, but now is not the time to think such thoughts. He calms his mind, as quiet as the pool of water in front of him. He had not seen the man since a vague hologram had instructed him to begin his training, disappeared, and left him in the darkness to begin the bloodletting that continued on for now nearly two weeks.
“Rise, young Knight.”

Kylo Ren forces his tired legs to an upright position and finally met his Master’s eyes. Those deep, dark, knowing eyes. The creature is not the size of his hologram. He is closer to just shy of a foot taller than Kylo Ren, but the way he carries himself, like he held all of the Force in his grasp, ready to unleash, lend him an otherworldly aura of danger that Kylo Ren is too familiar with.

“How have you learned your lesson, Kylo Ren, First of the Knights of Ren?” Snoke asks, only seemingly mildly interested in the answer.

“Yes, Supreme Leader,” Kylo replies robotically.

“Liar,” Snoke hisses, but there is no anger there, just resignation as though Snoke had expected this.

“You still feel, Kylo Ren,” he continues, walking circles around Kylo, stroking his mind with what Kylo assumes is the creature’s way of … of what? Trying to reassure him? It is the touch of an adult trying to calm down a child.

“I see you have secured the Jedi girl.” Snoke changes the subject, leaving Kylo to catch up.

“How did you know, Supreme Leader?” he asks, his voice schooled to indifference. He had not offered his thoughts on the exchange and ultimate capture of the scavenger girl.

“I know everything, boy.” Snoke replies. “Tell me, is she as untrained as ever?”

Kylo Ren nods, then hesitates. “She is perhaps a little stronger, but not enough to defeat me, Master.”

Snoke comes to stand in front of him and suddenly Kylo nearly lurches forward, feeling Snoke invade his thoughts with the force of a hammer, ramming through and wading his thoughts around until he finds the one specific memory he’s looking for: Kylo Ren aboard the Millennium Falcon. Then that memory is followed by Kylo Ren bringing Rey aboard the Finalizer, literally kicking and screaming, hauled over his shoulder like so much baggage.

Snoke lets out a soft wheezy laugh then, not like the terrifying sound of his hologram. This laugh is much more human, far more frail, though Kylo knows there is anything but humanity in the creature before him.

“She’s made of fire,” the Supreme Leader says. “That could be useful to her, in time.”

Then Snoke is changing directions again.

“General Hux has been a very gracious host to our little Jedi. He’s even kept her in his own quarters,” Snoke says with a hint of amusement and delight, changing subjects so quickly Kylo’s mind whiplashes. Kylo freezes.

How could he know that? Was it true?

But Snoke had never lied to him, and thus Kylo assumed that the creature in front of him did indeed know.

“Yes, Master,” is all there is left for him to say.

“I think perhaps now it is time to move forward with your training,” Snoke replies, leaning forward to stroke Kylo’s jaw, cupping his chin like he would a child.

“Was this not my training, Supreme Leader?” Kylo asks against his better judgement, perplexed.
What had he spent doing for all these days while killing, if not? His brow furrows.

“Oh no, dear child.” Snoke explains with a glee that turns Kylo’s blood cold. “This was just rehabilitation.”

“Master?” Kylo asks, dumbfounded. He hurries himself to school his expression and calm his mind, everything lying quiet under the unmoving surface, even that golden thread he had come to think of as a bond to the scavenger girl. Snoke must have not sensed it, or if he did, he had said nothing.

“I have decided to…alter…the course of your training, Knight of Ren,” Snoke says, stepping forward to cradle the back of Kylo’s neck, stroking the hairs standing up at the nape. A hint of amusement paints itself over those torn lips, the jagged edges of missing flesh twitching and stretching over the feral grin Kylo is gifted with.

“The best way to learn is to teach, boy.” He finally says when Kylo makes no move to speak. “You are well enough along your training to take an apprentice of your own. So you will teach this girl, at whatever cost. What she learns of the Darkness will only help to reinforce your own knowledge. I trust you will do well?”

And then Kylo Ren is being frozen in place as Snoke turns circles around him lazily, examining with eyes that are too big for Kylo to comprehend, too shrewd, too all-knowing. Kylo is finally unfrozen.

“Yes, Master.”

Snoke laughs then, and the sound sets Kylo’s teeth on edge, but he bows his head to his master and stands there as the creature that has guided him for six years slowly retreats. Then the ground is shifting again under him, and he’s left back in his room.

Kylo immediately walks towards his grandfather’s helmet, removing the crystal top and holding the mask with trembling fingers.

“Grandfather,” he implores, “I will need your guidance more than ever.”

And Kylo sighs, almost a contented sigh, when he closes his eyes and he listens to what he believes are his grandfather’s words, guiding him, anchoring him. This helmet, a dark artifact left behind by a most powerful man, still holds the essence of the man Kylo aspires to be. He had found it as a child training to be a jedi on temple grounds; Kylo Ren imagines that his uncle had kept it for the sake of sentimentality. He sneers. Sentimentality brought down the Jedi. But Kylo’s grateful nonetheless to have found it, this reminder of what his true path can be, of who his true master is: Darth Vader.

The words come into his mind, then, and his fingers tighten on the helmet.

*Turn her. Make her yours, and you will be stronger than you could ever imagine.*

He sets his grandfather’s helmet down with reverence, whispering soft words of gratitude, before turning around in his room.

It is time to return.

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Hux brings the smoke he holds gingerly between his fingers to his lips, letting the water lap at his chest, head resting on a towel behind him, soaking up dampness from the mess of red curls. He looks
at the ceiling and clings to the burn tickling his throat.

Beside him on a small stand rests his towel, an ashtray, and his personal comm. Finally done for the night and, without much to do in terms of work after his now usual dinner with Rey, he’d retreated to his room to bathe and, perhaps, try and catch a few hours of sleep. He doubted those precious winks of sleep would come, though. They rarely did, but at least he could try.

He lets out the smoke from his lungs, his head swimming in the burn of nicotine, his thoughts on a particular smile as he takes another long drag and repeats the process of holding it in.

He has to admit it to himself. He wants another one of those smiles. If only because, for a second, he had received something substantial as a reward for achieving his goal. Hux would not think about the quiet little voice in his head that gives him more reasons for wanting that smile; tonight it would be enough that he had succeeded.

Smoke leaks out from his nose slowly, floating in the air in a milky haze, and Hux sinks further into the hot water enveloping him. A hot bath was truly one of life’s few pleasures.

Then his comm is beeping and he frowns, sitting up as water splashes around, dangerously close to spilling out of the tub. He grabs for the thing with irritated, pruney fingers, a frown burrowing between his brows, but the annoyance at being interrupted quickly dissipates when he reads the message.

“I am coming.”

Signed, Kylo Ren.

Three words, and suddenly Hux isn’t sure whether to be elated or displeased.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter playlist:
Hurricane - Thirty Seconds to Mars

THINGS ARE HAPPENING.
Also I now have a billion headcanons of text conversations between Hux and Kylo. What would Kylo's drunk texts be like? Hux's? Rey's?
Wolf & Panther

Chapter Summary

After two and a half weeks of travel in hyperspace, Kylo boards the Finalizer to a welcoming committee made up of Rey of Jakku and General Hux. Nobody ever said returning home had to be a happy occasion.

Chapter Notes

Hope you all enjoy this chapter. I know I've been waiting for it for a long time now! HAPPY SUNDAY ALL (or Monday or Saturday depending where you are in the world?)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two and a half weeks is a long time to be stuck traveling from Snoke’s temple to where he had last found the Finalizer’s coordinates.

He’d spent the better part of those two weeks and a half aboard his command shuttle with nothing to do except pace the small area or sleep on a hard seating bench turned makeshift cot. It certainly wasn’t a ship made for long trips, but he’d slept on worse, and if the truth were to be told, he wasn’t sleeping. He’d made the trip to Snoke alone. Fitting, since his training and the ultimate path of his life would always be a lonely one, but that meant he had no one to talk to or look at for so many long days. The first few days it had been just as well. He’d slipped into a meditative trance that lasted the better part of forty eight hours, then it got harder after that. Nothing but silence. Silence and a particularly loud hum in the back of his mind, a second awareness consistently distracting him from any attempts he made at meditating. If he didn’t think he’d end up crashing his shuttle out of hyperspace by taking his saber to the boards, he would have thrown a few raging fits by now. Letting out pent up anger always made him feel better. In lieu of that, he’d exercised as best as he could in the small space until his limbs had turned to jelly. By the fifth day, however, he was feeling very much like a trapped cat. The longer he went in hyperspace with literally nothing to do but think about the scavenger, the worst his mood became.

Now, minutes away from finally boarding the Finalizer, Kylo’s arms are twitching as he clenches and unclenches his fists.

He thinks back to Snoke’s words — she is made of fire — of that, he needn’t be reminded. He has a permanent reminder etched across his face and his collarbone. The woman is made of tougher stuff than her tiny frame and innocent face let on, and he had been stupid in underestimating her on the snow that day; foolishly giving in to his basest desires, his need to have someone as strong as himself by his side. He’d offered to teach her and watched the snowflakes landing gently on her lashes, on her lips, hoping without hope that she’d take his offer.

He rubs his fingers down his scar. That’d teach him to allow himself to get entangled with the girl. To get entangled with anyone.
Except Kylo hasn’t learned a kriffing thing.

He’d spent all those days doing nothing but pacing and thinking about her. He hadn’t been able to properly meditate, the hurriedly administered batca patches doing little in the way of truly healing him. He’d tried his best to keep the bond shielded both for her sake and his, and was glad when for the last two and a half weeks it had mostly remained… quiet.

Content. As it is now.

He frowns. He’s used to being on the receiving end of her moody rollercoaster, or at least, he had once thought he was, and the absence of it makes him panic. He remembers how she had spiked hours before he had sent a message to Hux warning him of his impending arrival, and Kylo tries not to indulge the ugly thought that perhaps she had sensed his intentions to return. It reached a loud crescendo sometime around what he assumed was ten hundred hours ship side, then… then she was happy. Light. Airy inside his mind. He’d nearly stumbled as he’d loaded himself into his command shuttle. What was happening? For the next two weeks and change he kept replaying Snoke’s words about the scavenger’s accommodations. Was that it? He had left her inside a prison cell and somehow in the span of two weeks she was being hosted inside the General’s personal quarters. Kylo tries hard not to grind his molars. Was this Hux’s idea of interrogating? If so, the man certainly had a very perverse idea of what interrogation meant, and Kylo was set on seeing to it that it stopped immediately. Kylo may be a monster, but using his prisoners as playthings was not on the list of atrocities he would ever commit. Even he had a standard to adhere to.

Yet, if that was the case, what could possibly account for her happiness?

No. Not if she was being forced. If she was being forced Kylo would only feel lethal fury from her.

There’s always the other option…

Maybe she decided she likes Hux.

Gingerly, against his better judgement, he sends his senses out through the Force bond. As his ship’s commands are overriden by the Finalizer’s gravitational pull, Kylo Ren lifts himself off the pilot’s chair and starts preparing to land. He dons his tunic, slowly working his arms through the long, comfortable sleeves. Next come his outer robes, falling like armor around him until they reach the floor. The belt, and at this he feels a spike of curiosity from the girl. He resists the urge to yank on the buckle as happiness flares, then boils back down to frustration, irritation, confusion. Kylo can barely keep up with the stream of it all. He wraps his cowl around his shoulders. Confusion is still coming to him in rivulets.

He would be lying to himself, however, if he were to dismiss the fact that her feelings changing so quickly soothes him, it means she hasn’t given herself up entirely. Yet those weeks of contentment…

Next comes his helmet, settling on his head and compressing at the front, his eternal shield.

He would have very strong words to trade with the General once he gets onboard.

The shuttle lands, a soft jolt of decompressing metal limbs meeting hangar floor, and he punches the button that disengages the shuttle’s bay door. He already has a route planned to Hux’s office, the quickest he knows even if it means thundering through impossibly crowded areas at this time of day, and is quickly clomping down the ramp when he hears the scream.

His head turns lightly as a furious girl with tendrils of hair falling out of three buns is flying at him.
The two and a half weeks after the resistance strike go by in a blur for Rey. She spends her days in Hux’s quarters, mostly reading books from a stack the General had given her after she very nearly begged him for anything to do. In any other life Rey would have rolled her eyes hard and ground her teeth at the idea of asking General Hux for anything, but after so long with nothing but a kitten for company, she was desperate, because, in all honesty, she had been bored out of her blessed mind. Stretching and practicing her kicks in the open space of the room only brought her so far. She hadn’t had a true sweat in ages and to call what she was experiencing cabin fever would have been the understatement of the century. She allows herself a moment to reflect on that — she’ll have been aboard the Finalizer for five weeks now. A week in various cells, the rest in Hux’s rooms. It feels unreal.

Her eyes run quickly over the words on the page, choosing to focus on the book in front of her rather than on the uncomfortable knowledge of her rather extended stay. It was easier to lose herself in the pages of a good story.

This one’s about a tiger and a boy. Rey had to ask Hux what a tiger was and Hux had laughed and pointed to Millicent - which she had finally learned was the kitten’s name, - and said a tiger was a giant version of the cat in her lap. Striped and with fangs the length of his hand.

They had died off a long time ago, his words tinged with something so close to sadness that Rey had wondered who this man who had replaced her General was and what he was doing here. Her mind kept turning his laugh inside her brain. It was airy, unguarded, and so rare it had startled Rey, story all but forgotten for a few moments. Hed’ picked up his personal holopad and accessed the galactic database, pulling up an image of a tiger when she had told him she did not believe a word he said. Her breath had caught in her throat. Tigers were beautiful! Beautiful, powerful, regal creatures. She could understand now the sadness in the man’s voice at their extinction.

He’d left her to her book, then, taking off to deal with much more important things than regaling her with stories of long lost species. Her mind had been thoroughly taken up with tales of tigers and jungles and a boy lost at sea. She had never had access to books, though she had known how to read - being good at languages had its benefits, and she assumed she’d been taught before being left on Jakku - and having access to this novelty swept her up for the rest of her day until —

Hux is walking in the bedroom sometime around midday, which is so uncharacteristic of his daily routine that Rey jumps at the door opening. He raises his eyebrows at her as he walks in, obviously amused at her reaction while deftly removing his other glove, and Rey refrains from scowling. It comes either way.

Hux’s lips quirk in the ghost of a smirk just as he’s coming forward to stand in front of her.

“So what’s happened so far?” he asks conversationally and Rey knows he’s speaking of the book.
An olive branch, then. She imagines he knows exactly what’s happened and is simply trying to appease her for his intrusion. It works, suddenly she’s all excited again.

“They’re on an island with fresh water!” she says, a little too exuberantly, completely forgetting the fright he’d given her. She’d seen the sea of Ahch-To, but for her, it was the fresh bodies of water that held the appeal. So much water available to drink! In another life, she’d fill herself up until she had to roll herself away if given the chance, Rey thought. Kriff, she would in any life. This new hobby of hers is like being able to live a thousand lives while sitting comfortably on a couch, a luxury she never thought she’d have while she sweated on Jakku inside the dead bellies of giant ships. She didn’t know pages could be so thrilling. Not for the first time, she wonders how he managed to get his hands on real books — paper is an expensive commodity. But then again, this is General Hux. The man could probably buy entire planets and turn it all to paper.

Hux nods then, his eyes traveling to the left as if trying to recall the specific scene, before he shakes his head with another twitch of his lips.

“I am afraid the stories of tigers and boys must wait now.” He stretches his hand out to her much like he had nearly a month ago, the glove held in his left hand, “we have a visitor for you.”

Rey frowns, first at his hand and then at his face, but when his hand remains held out for her, she very gingerly raises hers and places it in his palm. The shock that runs through her is like a spark. His fingers are soft and incredibly warm where she had expected nothing but ice, because in her mind he would be as icy as his glare. Strong, limber digits wrap around her own, engulfing her much smaller ones in their heat and he tugs her up and out of her seat. Then he’s dropping her hand and Rey allows herself a moment to miss that warmth because it reminds her of the heat of Jakku. When he next speaks the thought escapes quickly, a small bird being set free.

“If I were you, I’d… prepare myself for this,” he advises, a warning weaved into his words as he turns sharply around and starts walking towards the door. She hurries after him.

“What do you mean, prepare myself?” she demands once out of his quarters, but Hux ignores her and simply keeps walking ahead, hands clasped behind him, cap securely seated on his perfectly combed head of red hair. Rey scrunches her nose. The man is insufferable.

They had fallen into a rhythm, Hux and Rey, ever since the supplies depot incident two weeks prior. Rey had not stopped her attempts to find a route to freedom, not that she could find any, but she had admitted to herself that she was tired of fighting, and what she learned in the meantime could be useful. Hux tried to be a somewhat tolerable human being, in whatever small capacity the stiff man could muster, and Rey in turn would not goad him or start fights. He had even allowed her in the situation room when the First Order had retaliated against the Resistance, ensuring she got a front row seat. The knot inside Rey’s stomach had finally let loose when, after everything was said and done, stormtroopers had landed to secure the space and found no casualties. The Resistance had heeded her message and evacuated. Sometimes Hux would let her follow him around, shadowing him while he worked, and Rey had started to relax. A handful of times they even had pleasant dinners and conversations. So, in exchange, Rey had also tried to be a decent person to him, though sometimes he made it difficult.

Like right now.

“General?” She presses, lips stiff, “what do you mean, prepare myself?”

Hux says nothing and irritation worms itself from the bottom of her spine all the way to her shoulders, knotting her muscles, and she’s about to yell at him when then they come to a hallway she remembers. She frowns. This is the same hallway she had been apprehended in the first time. They
don’t stop, Hux leading her until they’re standing in the hangar.

A black, beautiful, sleek, terrifying command shuttle is settled smack dab in the middle of the hangar’s platform, the ramp lowering slowly. Rey takes in a deep breath and holds it. She would know that shuttle anywhere, only now beginning to understand what the general had meant about having a visitor.

Then the clomping comes, reverberating off the walls. Rey bristles on instinct.

She can’t stop herself.

She lurches with a scream.

There’s only enough time for her ears to register Hux’s sardonic comment of ‘Well, that’s one way to welcome him home,’ but the General makes no move to stop her and Rey is flying at full speed towards Kylo Ren.

His helmeted face turns, then, and something inside Rey thums. Surprise. He had not expected her to be out here. That golden rope that had anchored itself in her head for so long and that Rey had tried to avoid thinking of — because it had been him when she had touched it — shakes and glows inside of her; Rey’s fury flares up out of a well of anger she didn’t know she possessed.

She grabs a long metal rod with wrench heads on its ends off of an unsuspecting mechanic on his way to another ship, wielding it above her head like she would her staff. The mechanic yells after her but she doesn’t hear it. The rod is shorter than her staff, but it would do just fine in order to bash Kylo Ren’s stupid face in.

She screams again, jumping high and bringing down the rod to meet his head.

She half expects him to whip out his lightsaber and strike her down mid-leap, but perhaps he’s still taken in by surprise because he simply twirls out of the way and blocks with his arm. There’s a modulated hiss, and a spark of pleasure runs through Rey even as she feels a pain in her own arm at the rod’s contact. They both startle at this - her at the pain, him at the pleasure - but they recover quickly when he turns to twist the rod out of her hands. She wraps her body around it and yanks, pulling him close until his visor’s a hair away from her nose before her booted foot meets his chest. She shoves his hold off with all the strength she has.

He’s sent back a handful of feet, his boots skidding shrilly on the metal floors as he slides backwards, Rey crouching with a feral snarl. There’s a small echo of pain on her forearm, but she ignores it because she has so much pain to inflict yet. There’s a sardonic thought pressing into her mind, and Rey can almost swear that it is his, but then when she tries to push against his mind as she had on Starkiller base, she’s met with a brick wall.

Fine.

She could do without his thoughts anyway.

She twirls low, bringing the rod to his kneecaps, trying to knock him off his feet, yet he’s fast and jumps high enough to avoid the sweep, landing hard and advancing on her. Rey runs a few steps back, metal rod swinging, before letting out a scream and running full force at the man. She feints, he tries to grab her from the left and she swings to the right, twirling behind him and whacking him straight between the shoulder blades. He makes a grab for her hair, trying to gain purchase anywhere he can, and she dodges of out those large gloved fingers just in time. Her shoulders itch, a dampened version of the strike, but she refuses to think about it.
He manages to grab her wrist and she uses the momentum to dive under his arm, twisting it along with her as she raises her foot and brings it down hard on his leg.

Kylo Ren stumbles forward after a well placed kick to his shin and she whacks him once more, this time over the shoulder, *so very close to his neck*; and perhaps this is what does it because Ren turns around with a modulated snarl and his hands go to his waist.

“Enough!” Kylo Ren’s command is more of a thunderous bark than anything, the rumble of his chest shaking through Rey’s limps even at this distance. A wolf’s growl, poised to rip her apart.

There’s a hiss of red plasma as his lightsaber’s cross-guard ignites and he drops into an opening stance. A collective wince shudders through the crowd in the hangar, nobody daring to breathe. At the sight of the his saber flaring like a live wire, everyone steps back further.

She narrows her eyes, dropping into her own stance, daring him to approach.

All stormtroopers have retreated to form a very large semi-circle around them, berth wide enough to avoid any pain. Every single commissioned worker and officer has stopped in their tracks. There are hundreds of eyes trained on them from the railings above their heads like a morbid version of a play at a collosseum.

She wishes she had Luke’s lightsaber, but if she must die right here, she’d give as good as she got before she died.

Then…

“Alright, children,” comes the voice of General Hux over the whispers building around them.

“As entertaining as seeing you two kill each other would be,” Hux’s boots click on the floors in the dreary quiet as he approaches at his leisure, “I *really* would appreciate it if you spared my hangar.”

Then he’s standing between Rey and Kylo Ren, watching between Rey’s snarl, her chest heaving with anger, and Kylo Ren’s impassive and dangerous immobile form.

“She started it,” is all that comes from Kylo Ren in a low threatening tone.

Hux snorts.

“Remember your rank, Lord Ren,” is all he gives the Knight to his side, then his eyes narrow at Rey, “And you, remember where you are, girl.”

Rey nearly turns the metal rod on Hux at that, but the General is standing with his back straight and his nose up in the air.

A heartbeat, then two more.

She takes a deep breath, hoods her lids, and then drops her arms to her sides, the metal rod clattering to the floor. Fighting either one of them now would be a grave mistake.

Kylo ren deactivates his saber. He straightens to his full height, rolling his shoulders.

He’d be covered in bruises in the morning, she thinks. *Good.*

The poor mechanic she had basically yanked the tool-turned-weapon from scurries to her side, still as far away from her as he can go while still being able to reach the thing, and yanks it away before hurrying off out of view.
They stand there like perfectly chastised children.

“Now,” General Hux continues once it’s clear they don’t plan on attacking each other like animals again, “Will you please follow me?”

Rey knows the question is more for Rey’s benefit. Kylo Ren doesn’t answer to anybody; he could just stomp off and the General would not bat an eyelash. The same thing couldn’t be said for Rey. So she squares her shoulders and watches as Hux walks away.

They stand there for a second too long, waiting for the other to take a step; somewhere in her mind Rey realizes how childish this is, not wanting to be the first to walk, but then Hux is turning around and shooting them both a warning glare. Kylo Ren and Rey step forward at the same time.

Soon enough the tall, dark mountain that is Ren has caught up to Hux and is walking beside him, leaving Rey to follow behind the two giants. She sneers at their backs. They don’t even bother to make sure she’s following. They seem to be in no rush to defend themselves from an attack from behind. Or even to make sure she’s not running, though she knows that Kylo Ren would freeze her on the spot if she tried. That last thought irks her. They’ve stopped considering her dangerous, and it sets Rey’s skin aflame. She itches to grab Kylo Ren’s lightsaber and hack at them both.

“You will do no such thing,” Ren warns, and Hux turns a confused look at Ren before giving Rey a curious glance.

Rey grinds her molars but remains silent.

She hates that she’s projecting her thoughts, and tries to recall how she had forced him out of her mind the last time. But that had been luck, and for the first time in her life she envies the dark cloaked man in front of her something. She wishes she knew how he had blocked her in the hangar.

His head turns a few degrees to glance back at her at this, but if he had snatched that thought too, he has nothing to say on the matter.

They continue walking until they’re standing in front of Hux’s quarters again. Rey makes it forward to step into the room as soon as the door opens. Somewhere in her mind, her bond to Kylo Ren stiffens at how natural it had come for her to enter the other man’s room. Rey frowns and stops, but the two men have already stepped inside and the door is closing.

“Forgive the meeting place, Lord Ren,” Hux drawls, obviously not feeling sorry at all about it, “But due to…circumstances,” Hux looks at Rey then, and Rey stomps down on the urge to shoot him a gloating smirk, “these are her holding quarters at the moment. So we must meet here. I ask that you two behave like adult, well mannered human beings here.”

The last words very definitely were not a request. Hux walks past them both and Rey follows, quickly claiming her high chair, refusing to allow Kylo Ren to disturb one of the few small constants in her life by snatching it first. Hux claims the other opposite her, and they both give Ren an expectant look before the man lowers himself robotically onto the middle of the long grey leather couch between them both. He turns to look at Rey through his visor and her hackles rise. She itches to find something to throw at his head. He says nothing, but something like amusement flickers in her mind. Rey wonders if he realizes he’s projecting just as much as she has been.

The silence stretches on, Hux having leaned back in his seat, seemingly happy to just watch the silent war going on between the two individuals in front of him.

When it becomes too much to bear, Rey barks.
“Are we going to just sit here and stare at each other?” she nearly growls, “because if so, it’s a rather unfair exchange. I have no helmet under which to hide.”

She nearly bites out the last word, thoroughly irritated with all of this, wanting nothing more than to jump on the man who had taken so much from her and tear him to pieces.

Hux drums his fingers on the arm of his chair. Rey, for once, ignores it and keeps staring at Kylo Ren.

Instead of making any move to remove the helmet, Kylo simply changes subjects, immobile in his seat.

“You’ll be happy to hear Ahch-To has been deserted.”

Rey’s brain blanks of anything else she had been thinking about.


“Your… master…” Kylo supplies snidely, “escaped by the time I made it to the Jedi temple.”

Rey’s eyes flicker, but she can’t ask the question she wants to ask. What about Chewie? R2-D2?

She brushes his mind again and meets nothing but hard steeled determination to keep her out.

“The coward ran,” Kylo continues in a murmur, turning then to look at General Hux. “We’re back to square one.”

Hux arches an eyebrow at Kylo Ren, because, really, the problems of Jedi and Dark Force users were of no consequence to him unless Snoke made it Hux’s problem. His eyes settle on Kylo Ren’s mask before very pointedly looking back at Rey, forcing Kylo’s gaze to return to her.

Rey’s own gaze has fallen to the lilies in the middle of the table. Her lips are bloodless, pressed in a tight grip, her hands digging into her charcoal grey tunic until she can feel the sharp edges of her fingernails.

“He’s not my master,” she whispers, finally, when the minutes tick by and no one else mutters a word.

There’s a sort catch of air from Kylo’s modulator, but Rey refuses to look up. That is, until she’s the one feeling a brush against her awareness and her eyes snap up, nearly setting themselves on fire when they land on Kylo’s visor again. She snarls at him silently, and the brush against her mind recedes.

Rey allows herself to be swept up in a giant wave of relief.


That must mean that they had figured out that Rey went missing. Would they know that she had been captured? Would they think to look for her? Would they assume her dead? That last thought sends a pang of pain spreading through her chest, because if they think she’s dead, it means no one’s looking for her.

No. She won’t let herself think about it that way.

If Luke disappeared, hopefully with Chewie and the droid, then they would try and track her down. She was sure of that.
“What did you say?” Kylo Ren speaks, and she catches the infliction in his voice even through the hiss of his modulator.

Rey narrows her eyes, staring at him in defiance.

“He’s not my master,” she repeats. No use hiding that now. Her fists cling to her tunic so hard she starts feeling her circulation being cut off from her fingers.

“He turned me down. Something about old mistakes coming to haunt him,” she glares at Ren, “He gave me a meal and a place to sleep, a kind word, and then set me out. He wouldn’t teach me.”

At this, Kylo tilts his head slightly, silently watching her, and somehow Rey knows the look under the mask is considering, calculating. And... And a little triumphant.

She feels it. Feels it through that blasted golden thread.

Rey shivers, but not in fear. She’s quivering with rage. It takes everything she has to not leap at him and tear out his eyes.

Then he stands, nods to Hux - something that seems to take Hux by surprise, Rey thinks, realizing that she’s starting to distinguish between the almost-nonexistent changes of expression on the general’s face — and then Kylo Ren is leaving the room.

There’s a beat of uncomfortable silence then.

And another.

“Well, that went better than expected,” Hux murmurs, getting up and walking away from Rey, leaving her to her anger as he enters his personal office and closes the door behind him.

A short, stocky woman dressed in crisp black clothes, a First Order emblem on her bosom, walks in to find Rey sprawled on the leather couch, nose inside a book.

She comes to a stop behind the glass coffee table and gives Rey a once over before clearing her throat.

Rey jumps.

She had been so engrossed that she missed the sounds of the woman entering entirely.

“Lady Rey,” she greets, and Rey cringes. “I have a delivery for you.”

“Please...” Rey pleads, “call me Rey.”

Rey hates the title, but the crew has taken to simply addressing her as Lady Rey. The thought makes her stomach queasy. What did the title mean? What about the lack of a prisoner number? Why had they stopped calling her Prisoner 3259 to begin with?

The woman gives a hint of a smile before schooling her expression, all business once more.

“I am sorry, Lady Rey,” she shakes her head, then changes the subject, returning to the delivery. “This is to be delivered to you.”
The stocky woman pushes a parcel forward and Rey frowns at it, setting her book aside.

“What is it?” she ask, curious but wary as her fingers wrap around the bundle wrapped in black paper, bringing it to her lap.

“Training clothes, ma’am.”

Her eyes fly forward, brows nearly in her hairline as she watches the woman switch on her feet.

“Training clothes?” Rey asks, finally, “Who ordered you to deliver these?”

“Lord Ren, ma’am.” The woman really fidgets now. She’s obviously uncomfortable. “Along with a message.”

By now the woman is positively twitching. Rey practices what she had attempted on Kylo before, brushing her mind gently against the woman’s. The raven-haired woman does not seem to notice the intrusion, her face betraying nothing. Rey watches as a mountain of black wool, leather and metal looms in a memory over the woman standing in front of Rey, speaking in no uncertain terms that Lady Rey is not to refuse.

So that’s where the name has come from.

Rey tilts her head lightly, trying not to let her irritation show. It was not this lady’s fault, after all.

“You are to meet Lord Ren in room 508, Ma’am, at your earliest convenience.”

Rey’s brows raise at this. At her convenience? So the insufferable asshole would not come here and drag her kicking and screaming again?

“What is this room, if you don’t mind?” she asks, as friendly a tone of voice as she can muster.

“It’s the…” The woman looks at her feet then, “It’s the Knight’s training room, Lady Rey.”

Rey nods then, and the woman lets out an audible sigh of relief at this, happy to not be interrogated any longer, and eagerly power walks out of Hux’s quarters.

Hux, who had been in his office this afternoon, opens his door and leans against the door frame with one brow quirked at her. He must have heard everything.

“We’re going to have to move you soon, I dare say,” he drones on, “You keep bringing in guests uninvited into my rooms. I’m starting to feel like a guest in my own home, and you the lady.”

There is no malice to those words and Rey snorts at Hux’s almost playful jab, too annoyed at Kylo Ren’s request to bother bantering with the general. She undoes the bundle in her hands, gasping at what she pulls out. A set of clothes nearly identical to what she used to wear in Jakku, complete with leather belt, arm wraps and leather wrist cuff, except…

Except this is all black. From the loose trousers and short sleeved overshirt to the long strip of flowing fabric.

She holds the pieces one by one in front of her with a frown.

“Is this a joke?” she asks, disbelieving.

Hux is still leaning against the door frame, eyes trained on the set of clothing, and when he speaks, he sounds ridiculously amused.
“Have you known Kylo Ren to ever make a joke? But…He’s a strange creature, that man.”

Rey nearly wants to throw the clothes in Hux’s face. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black. Instead she lets out a huff.

They’re not training clothes, she knows. They’re just a much more expensive, cleaner imitation of her scavenger clothes, and the reminder jams itself between her ribs like a sharp thorn. But she admits they would be easier to move in; the tunic and curve-hugging trousers she currently sported not made to run around and fight in.

Rey shoves the clothes back into the parcel and glares at them, but then Hux is walking towards the front door. He punches in an access code, a light beeps green and remains green, and then he’s slowly returning to his office with what could very easily pass off as a smirk on his face.

“You’re welcome to go. I will have an escort outside for you shortly.”

He closes the door behind him and Rey’s left sitting on the couch, steaming.

“Bastard,” she mutters.

Of course this would only be the one time he allows her out willingly.

She itches to set the clothes on fire. To tear them apart and toss them through the garbage chute.

She considers those options for a moment too long.

Then, because the thought of using her muscles - and perhaps, if she’s lucky, a chance to beat the pulp out of Kylo Ren - is too hard to resist, she changes right in the middle of the living room and storms out of the room.

Outside the room is Captain Phasma, waiting ever patiently, still as a statue.

“Lady Rey,” comes the sound through Phasma’s helmet in greeting.

Rey flinches.

“Please, I don’t know why people keep doing that,” she rants, knowing exactly why, “but could you please stop calling me that?”

“As you say, Lady Rey,” is all that Phasma gives her, and Rey thinks Phasma is just as amused at the title as Hux had been at the clothes earlier on. It’s like they’re all conspiring to drive her insane. Rey stews in her irritation, following the tall woman silently through halls and down lifts.

It takes a good fifteen minutes until they reach their destination. Long enough for Rey to calm down by a hair or two.

“Room 508, Lady Rey,” Phasma says, standing a few steps away to allow Rey to walk through.

Rey shoots Phasma a look that’s part exasperation and part pleading not to be left alone. She doesn’t know this woman, but anybody is preferable to Kylo bloody Ren.

Phasma simply nods once before turning on her heel and walking away to wait a distance away.

Rey turns towards the doors and steels herself.

The girl coming in through the doors into his training room is a vision in black, anger and determination worn over her shoulders like a mantle. Kylo’s lips twitch under his helmet. She’s walking robotically to where he stands, stopping several feet away and simply glaring at him in silence.

He stands there watching her for a long moment before he walks to the weapons rack, hefting two heavy, well balanced long-staffs. He picked the weapons precisely because it had been her torture device of choice to club him with in the hangar. Without warning, Kylo tosses one at her back and she turns, reflex quick as a cat’s, her hand snatching the staff out of the air. She stares at it for a second, nearly unbelieving, before dropping back into her opening crouch; the perfect picture of savage fury. Kylo circles her, his breathing coming as a metallic rasp through his modulator, steps quiet while his hand deftly turns his own weapon.

They don’t say a word. They don’t spare a warning, or a single twitch of muscle.

Instead they jump into each other and fight.

The dance they weave is a deathly close combat waltz. They knock staffs against each other, lose ground, gain ground, whack and smack each other’s undefended angles; him gingerly, though never softly, her with all the strength her slender arms can afford her.

Kylo slips into a meditative trance, and suddenly the bond that binds them is glowing gold. He feels her anger as surely as if it were his own.

But there is something else there, as well.

Pain.

“Why do you hurt?” he murmurs, curious, blocking her downward strike with tense muscles, her staff coming uncomfortably close to his visor as it clanks against his own, the clacking ring reverberating up his forearms.

She snarls, bloodthirsty, and comes at him harder yet.

He parries and they continue their incessant circling, locking staffs then jumping away, aiming for the other person’s elbows and knees and ankles, and anywhere they can possibly reach.

He throws her down once and she loses all sense of composure. She lunges for him like an angry rancor then, ramming him with so much force that he stumbles back and has to scramble before she can pin him by the throat. He blocks her jab to his stomach, deflecting it and knocking the staff aside, but the other end hits him on the thigh and his leg nearly bends at the knee. He forgets to go slow in that moment, swiping at her ankles and sending her flying to the ground with a loud ‘thud.’

He could freeze her in place and end this, but instead steps back and allows her to climb to her feet. This fight isn’t done yet.

“Why do you hurt?” he repeats, his voice low.

She snarls.

“Why do you care?!” Rey spits out, eyes wild as he straightens and lowers his staff a degree.
“I feel it, too. I feel everything you feel.”

The words are so close to what he had said to her nearly two months ago, though he means something entirely different this time.

Before she can go too far down that path, he amends.

“And it’s painted all over your face.”

That was the wrong thing to say.

Rey screams and runs towards him, swinging her staff like she would a club. She yells her words to match every whack she administers, each word enunciated every time she catches him across shoulders, forearms, midssection.

“At least one of us can tell!”

Ren jumps back and blocks her this time, his staff and hers meeting between them as he finally puts his weight to good use and forces her against one of the pillars of the training room.

“What?”

“Isn’t it obvious? You stand there and judge me and my feelings, so easily displayed for you to pluck and mock,” she gnashes her teeth, forcing the words out between pants, “while you hide behind your shiny little mask like a coward!”

Rey seems unaware that she’s left the bond wide open—or perhaps she does know, and just wants him to know it—and he can sense just how irritated she is at him. How furious. How much she hates him. Him and the mask he wore, in her mind. He shoves her until she’s hitting the solid metal pillar with a hard thud, a wheeze coming out of her as the breath leaves her lungs. The motion gives him just enough time to step back and, for the third time in his life, remove his helmet in front of somebody willingly. He lets it clank to the floor then picks up his staff again, resuming his fighting stance.

Rey stares.

“Now we’re even.” He says, lips drawn back, wild.

It’s not a smile.

She returns the favor by flashing him sharp, pointy teeth with a snarl.

They fly at each other again and resume their deadly waltz. The long staff is not a Jedi’s weapon, but she wields her it like a saber just the same, and he refuses to give up ground. She tries to jab at his jaw and he pivots just in time, catching her hard by the shoulder blade with his own weapon and spinning her around with a shove of its blunt end.

*Make her yours, and you will be stronger than you could ever know.*

He won’t go soft on her, though he holds back *just* enough to avoid irreparable injuries. She’d be no use to him otherwise. Still, it’s enough to send her flying multiple times. Each time, she recovers and advances. She’s made of fire, tougher than Luke Skywalker would ever be. She would have been wasted at his hand.

His heart thunders in him as their bond stretches and contracts, glows and hums, that single, longing
note playing in his mind as surely as it plays in hers while they swirl around each other in a hurricane of black robes and flowing fabric. Her footsteps are light, Kylo notes, impressed, and what she lacks in strength she makes up for speed. They spend an hour like this. Two hours, then three.

Circling, encroaching, attacking, retreating.

“Happy yet?” he asks through gritted teeth after what feels like eternity, breath hard on his throat. His wounds from his rehabilitation have not healed. Would not be healed, as ordered by Snoke, unless they healed on their own. So he had avoided the med bay and is feeling it now as Rey hits him over tender wounds and he lets out barely audible hisses every time.

The girl in front of him is covered in sweat, hair flying out of her buns, around her face, eyes dark with something that gives him hope that he would be able to turn her; her chest rises and falls, hitching every few seconds. He had never seen something so beautiful and so terrifying at the same time.

“What could I possibly be happy about?” she sneers, crouching lower, a panther readying for the kill. A predatory wolf in her own right.

“Are you done beating me?” he asks, softer than he intended, though it turns dark soon enough, “are you done making me hurt, happy watching me bleed?”

He remembers the thoughts he had snatched in the hangar, of her absolute need to draw blood. Well, she is drawing it now. A few of his injuries had busted open again and he’s bleeding from multiple spots.

She frowns, fingers twitching around her staff, and then her eyes are traveling up and down his frame, taking him all in, zeroing in on the wet spots that are just a shade darker than the rest of his robes. He hefts his staff, waiting for her to pounce now that she knows his weakness.

But then her hands are falling to her sides and she’s staying her attack.

“You’re hurt.”

There is no compassion in those words. They’re as cold as ice, a statement, rather than his question not long ago. It mocks him.

Hux must have been teaching her well, Kylo thinks with wry amusement.

“I am,” he admits.

“You’re hurt,” she repeats, “and you asked me here to fight you while you’re like this.”

Her voice hardens.

“Why, did you think I couldn’t beat you otherwise?” her tone is rising to a shrill yell by the second. “Did you think you were doing me a favor? Do you think me so weak that you have to give me an advantage? Who do you TAKE ME FOR?!”

She’s screaming and Kylo can only stare as she unleashes on him. Her face is turning red and her eyes, wild before, hold nothing but pure venom and unchecked ferocity.

*Turn her.*

Her breathing comes in rough gasps, her skin glows with the sweat of hours of exertion, tendrils of
hair sticking to her forehead, her cheeks, her neck. In that moment Rey is as close to a goddess as Kylo imagined anyone could ever be.

Make her yours.

“I only gave you what you longed for, Rey,” he murmurs. Rey screams then, hating the sound of her name on his lips, and chucks the staff at his head so hard that had Kylo not twitched aside to avoid it, she would have taken an eye.

“I HATE YOU!” she screams. Kylo fights the urge to worry at his lower lip, staying where he stands, scared to spook her.

“I know,” he whispers.

He doesn’t think the words reach her. She’s too wrapped up in her own mind. Flashes of images come flying at him. The dark clothes she wears a contrast to her clothes on Jakku. A mockery of her suffering, of her hardships, and Kylo frowns because he did not intend them that way.

The fight in the snow - the scar crossing Kylo’s face itches at this - her nearly taking his head off. There’s satisfaction rolling off her at that thought.

His offer to teach her.

Grudging distrust.

Luke turning her down.

A pang, an ache, settling itself just below her breast upon her heart.

She’s falling apart emotionally in front of him, and something tugs at him to go to her — perhaps that part of him that had obsessed over her for two months now, that had thought of nothing but her for the last two weeks — but he remains where he is. Moving now would only make it worse.

“Let me go,” she finally says.

It comes so out of her so suddenly that Kylo frowns, blinks, repeats the words in his brain so that he can understand them. Anyone else would think she’s asking to be dismissed. Kylo knows better.

“I can’t do that.” He replies, because he can offer her nothing but the truth.

“I am nothing, no one,” she grinds out, “I am not powerful enough to fight you and defeat you, even while you stand there bleeding right in front of my eyes.”

“Then let me teach you,” he offers in a nearly pleading tone. She ignores him.

“I defeated you once by sheer luck, and I have nothing to offer. You’re wasting your time. Let me go.”

“I can’t do that.” He repeats.

“WHY NOT?!”

He considers his words carefully, then.

“You are powerful,” he finally replies with only half truth as he slowly walks towards her, because admitting the full truth would be a sure way to make her run. She flinches, ready to flee, and Kylo
slows his step. “You are powerful, but also volatile.”

_That’s an understatement, even from me_, he thinks to himself, continuing to inch towards her with careful steps.

“What happens if I let you go, Rey?”

His words are met with a sneer, displeased again to hear her name uttered by his mouth. He ignores the soft pang of hurt in his chest.

“If I let you go, you run away to those people you call _friends_, or to somewhere else, and you continue fleeing with _dynamite_ in your blood until you can no longer _control_ your powers. Then you’ll accidently kill someone, or worse, _yourself_, because you don’t even know how to _contain_ it. And your _friends_ won’t be able to help you. Where are your friends, Rey? Why aren’t they here?”

With every word he emphasizes her face turns from fury to pained chagrin. She’s known it all along. The bond tells him as much as her thoughts come unbidden into his mind.

“You may think yourself a …no one,” he murmurs, her own words repeated to her softly, “but you have so much potential.”

She looks at him then, and he feels that single, tiny thread in her mind that wants so desperately to believe his words. She kills the thought and her eyes glaze over.

“You still need a teacher,” he offers again, coming to stand inches from her. Not one to back down or be intimidated, Rey squares her shoulders and refuses to budge. “I could be that for you… if only so you learn not to be a danger to yourself.”

“Why?” she asks, her voice retaining the same hardness of minutes ago.

He looks down at her, his gaze traveling over the constellation of freckles gracing her face. He aches to reach out and touch them. Kylo Ren has never felt an emotion if not felt viciously. Two months of chasing her face in his thoughts, in his dreams, and suddenly she’s standing _so close_. Mostly he’s curious, he tells himself, and he’s _oh so curious_. But a smaller voice also whispers about how he aches to just touch her. He shies from it and chooses to focus on her face, on the feelings she’s sending into his awareness.

He stills his hands at his sides and searches her gaze for a long moment, feeling the soft huff of her breath beating against his chest.

“I used to be like you once.”

“I don’t need a teacher.” She retaliates, spitting out the obvious lie.

Kylo remains silent. It proves to be the right choice.

“I don’t _want_ a teacher!” another lie.

He smiles at her then, though it holds little warmth.

“Whatever you may think, you definitely need a teacher…” he murmurs, self assured, “Though perhaps not a Jedi teacher. You are too strong, too willful, for a Jedi Master. I could teach you so much more. You need only trust me.”

“Let me go.” She insists, refusing to answer his plea.
Kylo ren bites his tongue to keep from losing it then.

They stand in silence for a minute.

“I can’t do that."

Rey’s eyes settle on his face, run down the scar she gave him, sending a shiver down his spine. her gaze is hard and dark. Entirely too unforgiving.

She turns on her heel and leaves.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry about all the sads :C *bows low and begs for forgiveness*

For those wondering, the book is Life of Pi, which I've been devouring, which of course Hux would give her because a) He's a cat man, and b) it actually has a pretty hard life lesson to learn, and who is Hux if not one to try and teach her even through fiction?

Look at these two babies being decent to each other.

Also, grumpy Kylo at the idea of Rey liking Hux. Does somebody sound a little jealous?

Chapter Playlist:
Show me your fangs - Matt Nathanson (I love this song so much.)
Token Trapped Woman - People in Planes
Drunken Dreams

Chapter Summary

Rey's plots her next escape, though it doesn't go particularly as she'd planned...
Meanwhile, the men must deal with the fallout, coming to a small realization.

Chapter Notes

HELLO ALL LOVERS!
Thank you all who have taken the time to comment and be generally lovely over the last chapter. I love every kudos you leave, every subscription, every bookmark, and every beautiful glorious comment you all leave. They give me life. Know that hearing from you keeps me going! So thank you for taking the time to let me know what you think.

ON WARDS!
Enjoy this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She hates the man. She hates everything.

Rey storms out of the training room, raging. As soon as she’s out, Phasma falls in step with her on her side; Rey decides she likes the woman the more for it when she says absolutely nothing, having noted Rey’s mood. They walk like this, Phasma with a slow clip — slowing her stride to match Rey’s, whose legs are particularly shorter — Rey with an angry stomp.

They walk and walk and Rey simmers down just long enough to note that this way back is not the one they’d taken to get to the training room; it’s much longer, far less crowded. She turns her gaze towards Phasma, the Captain walking with her hands clasped behind her armor much like Hux does when he’s thinking.

“Where are we going?” She asks, more irritation than she intended slipping into the words, still boiling from her training with Kylo Ren. If the inflection in her voice bothers Phasma, she doesn’t say. Instead she keeps her gaze ahead, her step slow, and Rey is forced to look ahead rather than trip and fall over her own two feet and add shame to her growing list of irritations for the day. That would be her luck.

“I figured you needed some time, Lady Rey,” comes the modulated sound of her voice after a while before she suggests: “To think, perhaps.”

Rey knows what she needs isn’t time to think. She needs to spend the pent up energy coursing through her limbs. Rey glances at Captain Phasma once more.

The woman owes her nothing.

“Thank you, you’re very kind,” Rey finally murmurs, “you didn’t need to do this.”
There’s a hesitant moment in which Rey feels as though Phasma is about to say something else, but instead the woman laughs, the sound a soft tinkle even through her helmet, and she shakes her head. “I am not doing it for you, Lady Rey. I’m doing it for me. Your mood sometimes seems to seep into the general, and I would rather avoid him walking around like a thunderhead today, cowing my men at every turn.”

Rey’s steps nearly falter at this sudden revelation. Phasma does not miss a beat, her steps sure. Rey tries to recover quickly.

“Is that so?” she asks, trying to channel General Hux and cloaking her voice with disinterest, but Phasma laughs again, and Rey is sure her attempt failed.

“Forgive me, Lady Rey, I shouldn’t have spoken out of turn,” Phasma apologizes, and Rey panics as she feels that window of comfortable honesty, the sort of camaraderie only two women could share, quickly closing. So she hurries to speak.

“No, not at all. Please, Captain. I have few people to speak to aboard this ship,” Phasma looks at her then, but she continues bravely, “And you’ve been nice to me.”

Rey thinks of the woman’s small mercy of taking the long way, and suddenly feels deeply touched by such a small thing, because she did need the time to think, and this gives her a chance to finally know someone less irritating than Kylo Ren or General Hux. They were enigmas to her. Captain Phasma seemed easier to talk to.

“Does my mood really affect him?” she asks in a whisper, as if saying it too loudly would bring Hux on their heads for gossiping behind his back. Rey half believed he would. The man probably had eyes everywhere.

Phasma’s chrome helmet turns to her and there’s the soft, airy sound of a very low chuckle.

“Perhaps you don’t notice it as well as I, who spend my time around him all hours of the day, but there have been a few times the man’s been absolutely distracted. Some others his temper’s been contained only by a very, very short leash.” Phasma says, also lowering her voice, “Congratulations, Lady Rey, you have managed to pull emotions out of stones.”

Rey can’t help herself. She laughs.

The first true laugh in a month.

“You did not hear this from me, however,” Phasma warns. And Rey gives her a wide grin even if she cannot see the other woman’s reaction.

“I will take it to my grave.”

Their long way around finally comes to an end when Phasma and Rey stop in front of Hux’s quarters. Rey sighs, glad to have had even a few minutes to spare where her thoughts were not consumed by Kylo Ren, and her mood suddenly sours at the thought. Then something intriguing happens.

Phasma removes her right hand gauntlet and her glove, exposing a long, pale hand and graceful fingers, and presses her palm up to the access pad. A red glow encircles her hand then beeps green, and the door opens. Rey’s eyes widen.

*Phasma* has access to General Hux’s quarters?
Her thoughts immediately go to a place less than innocent and Rey’s chest is starting to turn a deep shade of red. A lover, perhaps? No wonder Phasma could read him so well. Before Rey can say anything, Phasma is nodding to her and striding away after seeing her safely back. Rey steps inside and the door suddenly shuts behind her with a resounding hiss. The implication of Phasma having access to his rooms makes Rey turn ten shades of red, but then her scavenger’s quick predisposition to survival kicks in and she’s wondering if she could lure Phasma back, knock her out, and use her prints to escape.

She quickly discards that idea when she remembers that Phasma is about as tall as both the General and Ren, and probably just as strong by the look of her armor’s shoulders. She’d be stupid to try that. Not to mention Phasma is currently the only person who seems to want to be decent to her without ulterior motive.

Her thoughts return to Ren. Rey walks to the couch, grabs a throw pillow, then screams as loud as she can into it. She would cry if she wasn’t so pissed off.

She’s been gone for a few hours and nearly yelps when Hux walks back out of his office, staring at her with a smothered pillow in her hands. She had figured he’d be gone by now.

He says nothing, happy to watch her with contemplative eyes.

For once, Rey would like to just be alone. She hates that he watches her as though he can read her like the pages of a book.

She nearly wants to scream again.

She had spent so many years alone with nothing but sand and silence to fill her days, she had never thought she would long for that silence out in the desert ever again.

Yet here she is in captivity and can’t get a single true moment of solitude to herself.

Maybe she should just knock Phasma out, camaraderie and Rey’s regrets be damned.

“Dinner will be served at seven,” is all he gives her before walking back into his office and shutting the door.

And then seven comes around and dinner’s being served, and Rey gets an idea.

It’s silly, but she’s desperate, especially after her run-in with Kylo Ren bringing her escape to the forefront of her mind, and it might just work.

“I would like to try wine again,” she declares as the General is sitting himself to the table. Hux doesn’t seem to question this, perhaps too used to their meals and Rey’s rather eccentric behavior when it came to anything revolving around food by now. The attendants are just about to reach the door when he stops them, then, calling one back with a twitch of his finger.

A short boy with barely a hint of stubble comes hurrying back with a ridiculously big bottle of red wine, setting himself to the task of filling up their glasses.

When he makes to move, Rey reaches for his hand and stops him. He visibly flinches at her touch, a boy not used to being touched - unless it’s punishment, Rey imagines - but remains where he stands. Rey smiles at him and then grabs the nearly full bottle from his hands, setting it on the table slowly. She lets the boy go and he practically runs, leaving Rey and Hux alone.

Rey is rewarded with the incredulous look on the General’s face. Or at least, Hux’s version of
incredulity. His eyes have widened a fraction and his hands are frozen mid-way to his lap, white fabric napkin outstretched between his fingers as he watches her with raised eyebrows.

She glares defiantly back at him, her own eyebrows shooting up, and he recovers quickly, resuming his busy work of setting his napkin in place. Any thoughts he might have had on her sudden desire to down a bottle of wine he keeps to himself.

They eat quietly; or, really, Hux eats while Rey drinks.

She’d never drank, not really. Though she’d had her fair attempts at a sip or two on Niima Outpost, Rey considered drunkenness a dangerous habit to indulge in a world where no one would ever look out for her. She had a scrap of a home and scraps of salvage to protect, and by the way visitors and wretches on the planet alike acted when drunk, Rey had quickly learned to stay away from the stuff. Today the vile stuff would be her ticket to freedom. She pushes her plate aside — After her fight with Ren, she has no appetite — and makes a grab for her glass of wine. Sip after sip they go down, Rey ignoring the burn going down her throat. The first few swallows force her to pinch her nose, but it becomes easier by the third or the fourth, though her sips are small to avoid consuming too much too quickly. This goes on for a while.

Hux is watching her like a hawk, probably confused at her sudden desire to not only down her current glass of wine but refill it a second time.

“Perhaps you should pace yourself,” he finally comments when she accidentally lets out a hiccup she did not intend for, her second glass half empty.

Her head’s a little fuzzy, and she’s starting to feel really good.

*So this is why the wretches drank.* It feels good enough to almost help her forget Ren and his stupid face.

The edges of her anger are even starting to get slightly blurry.

Is this why the General drank the thing? Yes, she decided. She imagined *he* had plenty to forget.

But Rey has a plan to see to. By the way this wine is making her feel, she figures if she can get the general to drink just as much, it might just work. She isn’t stupid. She had seen plenty of people get hammered during the nighttime in Jakku. Once men lost their senses they’d do anything, especially if a pretty woman asked.

Rey didn’t think she was pretty, per se, but she knew she also wasn’t entirely hideous. If all failed, she’d knock him out over the head. With the bottle, if necessary.

Yes.

She’d knock him out and drag him to the door and use his hand to escape.

Rey takes in a deep breath and smiles the most charming smile she can, scraping her chair back and grabbing the bottle as she makes her way towards Hux, who’s visibly tensing with every semi-wobbly step she takes.

“General, why didn’t you tell me this was so good?” she asks coyly, shaking the bottle in front of his eyes. She doesn’t mean for it to come out so sickly sweet, she thinks, once the words escape from her lips. She was trying for sultry, not intoxicated wench, but Rey had had a few too many sips now, and they were quickly adding up.
Hux’s eyes never leave her, setting his silverware down and leaning back in his chair.

“It is,” he replies, refusing her anything else.

“You should share this with me. It would be rude of me to drink it all by myself,” she gestures to the bottle again, raising her brows at him with what she hopes are innocent eyes.

“Not at all,” he says, and Rey thinks she sees the corners of his lips twitch, but when she concentrates on the full pout of his mouth, it’s gone. “Please, be my guest.”

Rey frowns at this.

“No,” she states flatly. “I insist. Consider it celebrating for our mutual efforts.”

People seemed to drink in order to celebrate on Jakku, after all. The bottle’s nowhere near empty. She shoves it in front of his face as if to emphasize her point, forcing him to inch his head back to avoid getting his nose bashed in with it. Did she really have that much alcohol? She doesn’t think so.

“Drink,” she orders.

She fills his glass to the brim, careful not to slosh it everywhere, though a few drops still make it to the table.

General Hux looks at the glass, then at her face. Then he’s giving the barest of shrugs and lifting the bloated glass to her between long fingers.

“As you wish,” he says, and he clinks the glass with her bottle. “Cheers.”

Hux drinks from his glass and Rey, not wanting to bother with going back for her own, simply takes a swig from the bottle. When his glass is empty, she refills it again, taking just as many liberal gulps until the bottle’s about a third of the way to the bottom.

Rey sways slightly against the table and Hux gently moves out of her way, indicating his own chair. Rey plops down on it ungracefully. He is walking away then, and Rey frowns.

“Hey where are you going?”

“Sending a comm before I forget,” is all he offers, walking to his office. He punches something into his data pad, turning to look at Rey once more before seeming to think better of it and punching something else again.

Rey raises an eyebrow at him but her train of thought is a little fuzzy now, and instead she focuses on the fork in front of her. Is the room spinning?

Then Hux is returning and leaning back against the table, one arm wrapped around his midsection lazily, the other one reaching to grab his glass of wine. She notes how he drinks slowly while he watches her from over the crystal rim of the glass.

“I hate Kylo Ren,” she blurts out, then frowns because she had not intended to say that. She had intended to tell him to drink more.

Hux hums, but says nothing, simply taking another sip.

Rey looks at his glass and gets up, swaying slightly in place as she inches closer to Hux and lifts the bottle up to refill it. When her forearm shakes, the General’s long fingers wrap around her wrist, steadying her, guiding her hand to a tilt so that she can fill his glass, eyes locked on her face.
Then she’s pulling back and he lets her go, and Rey takes another swig of the sticky, sweet red liquid. She realizes pleasantly that it no longer burns going down.

“I hate you, too,” she continues.

The general’s lips do twitch up then, a darker shade of red from the wine as he murmurs around the edge of his glass.

“I know.”

“I hate this ship.”

“Yes.”

“I hate this room.”

“Hmmhm.”

“And I really hate these clothes,” that last remark slips out as a whine, but by now she can’t bring herself to care all that much.

She gestures to her clothes with the bottle, a few droplets spilling on her trousers.

She’s getting angry again, and curses herself because the wine isn’t helping take away the edge anymore, and Rey feels tiny tears threatening to pool on her lashes.

She stands up, taking one last swig of the wine before emptying the rest in Hux’s glass, who seems happy to continue sipping away, and Rey stomps around the room somewhat shakily. Hux’s eyes trace her path and watch her quietly, one arm resting over the other as he leans back against the table, his ankles crossed at his leisure.

“I hate these clothes,” she says, yanking out the long strip of flowy fabric from her leather belt. She chucks it at the window facing space and it only floats down slowly, gracefully landing on the floor. That makes her angrier.

“I hate this prison!” she yells, taking off the belt and chucking it at the window as well. Hux doesn’t move.


Next comes her shirt, because she’s not even remotely thinking straight at this point. Not that it matters anyway. The man’s seen far more.

“I hate the Force!”

And with that, she collapses on the leather couch and starts crying. It’s a single tiny sob, really. But it wrenches itself out of her chest before she can stop it.

Hux comes to stand in front of her and lowers himself to the high chair closest to where she sits.

“And I know,” he murmurs, and somehow that feels like the right thing to say. He makes no apologies, which means that Rey does not have to apologize, and good, because the last thing she wants to do now is to apologize to anybody.

She must have had more than she thought for her to be making these admissions to a man who despises her. A man she despises. The fact that he doesn’t seem to be even a little inebriated only
irritates her more.

Her chest is heaving, black chest wrap flying up and down with every breath, and Rey clenches her eyes shut. She’s swaying in her seat, and she thinks Hux must have noticed because he’s moved from his seat to the one beside her, sitting very still as he studies her, and Rey just wants to crawl into the corpse of her AT-AT and cry herself to sleep. She allows herself to think of it, imagines herself there. The quiet, dusty, warm inside of her AT-AT. The dead desert flower plant that Rey had tried so hard to keep alive and failed at like so many things in her life, the first of many failures. She thinks of the scratch marks on the wall, counting her days, endless. She thinks of the rags she used for blankets, and yearns to wrap herself in them again. That had been home for so long. She focuses on the quiet, on the calmness.

And then her body is tilting of its own volition, except in her mind Rey is about to fall into the thin pillow of her makeshift bed, her mind is a little fuzzy with wine, and Rey can’t bring herself to think of anything else but that freedom she had known once. Her head hits Hux’s shoulder, who has not even twitched.

After a while, Rey thinks she hears the door opening, but she’s too tired to open her eyes. Better to be inside her AT-AT. Better to be warm and surrounded by silence and sand and loneliness.

She falls asleep.

Hux hasn’t moved a muscle in ten minutes, and he’s starting to feel it in the tensing of his lower back. He had moved without thought when she had looked about ready to fall out of her seat on her face, and now he’s stuck propping her up. Rey’s head rests balanced precariously on his shoulder and Hux uses the spell of silence to really look at her, then, careful not to jostle her into falling. He’s taken by her face when her walls are down and her expression’s soft. She looks so much more peaceful that way. Much less like the wild little creature roaming his quarters every day, waiting for a moment to run, or to kill him. So much more like the young girl she is. So very young, he thinks.

He’d called for Kylo Ren via a message when Rey had finally taken his seat - which still feels strange to Hux. He’d never shared that space with anybody; yet another boundary crossed - but he had continued to indulge her, letting her keep drinking, and drinking just as much, because the whole thing was severely amusing to him. Rey had gone from just tipsy to absolutely drunk off her feet in a matter of minutes, he didn’t even have a buzz. He knew her original intent was to try and get him drunk so she could run. That was clear in the way she had suddenly become so…sweet. Rey was not sweet. Not when it came to him. Once she reached top inebriation, she’d basically unleashed on him, and her clothes, and he had had no choice but to stand quietly and let her rage. He has to admit it’s almost endearing. Then his eyes fall on the blooms of new welts and bruises and any thought of endearment flees, replaced by consternation.

His mind is wrenched from Rey as his door opens and Ren comes storming through.

“What is it?” Kylo Ren barks in a fury as he stomps his way into his’s quarters. Hux raises his eyebrows. He had opened the doors when he sent his message on the data pad, expecting for the man to come, but it is still jarring to see Ren entering his private space like he belonged there. No knock, no pause. The fact that the man is unmasked and looking murderous does not help, leaving him to wonder why the man’s so furious.

Hux’s eyes travel to Rey, her hair tickling his chin as he turns. Her cheeks are flushed with color from the copious amounts of alcohol she’d consumed, her lips stained a deep red. Hux stares a little
longer than necessary before forcing his eyes away with a jerk. The Knight looming in front of them seems to get the hint then, because he’s suddenly slowing his steps. Where they were harsh stomping sounds one minute they become deadly silent the next, and he has to do a double take. He didn’t know the man could be so graceful and so quiet.

He watches Kylo as he approaches and reaches the side of the couch and studies them, him and the girl; Hux’s hands are knitted in front of him, his legs bent at the knee while Rey’s head balances on his shoulder, her breathing having switched from jarring hiccups and gasps to a quiet and slow rhythm. Kylo’s eyes are trained on her sleeping form and a curious look crosses his face: something like tenderness, but also pain.

“What happened?” Kylo whispers, soft and guarded.

“She tried to get me drunk,” Hux says with a slight huff that might have passed for a snort if not for the fact that he was keeping his voice low, tone colored with amusement.

Ren’s brows shoot up in the air, “The scavenger did? Our scavenger?”

Hux’s gaze presses itself firmly on Ren’s face. The man seems to not have noticed what he’d said, how he’d referred to her, as he sits himself across from them.

“I assume she had intentions to escape. Though I imagine if she had kept her wits about her, she would have noticed when I disabled the access lock for you. She also left her food untouched. Not the most effective of her escape attempts so far, though certainly the most creative.”

Kylo looks at her again, and another flash of what might pass as pain crosses his face once more. Hux catalogs that look into the depths of his memory for future inspection.

“Exhaustion from combat and lack of food… how much did she have?”

Hux shrugs, “A glass or five… she mostly just downed it straight from the bottle, trying to get me to drink just as much.”

Then Kylo is recovering in a flash, something of the smarmy smart-mouth rearing his ugly head.

“The girl tried to take advantage of you, general?” he asks, one boot coming up to rest on the coffee table in front of him. It makes Hux itch. “And you allowed it? I must say… I’m surprised. Who knew she had it in her… Too bad I wasn’t here to witness it. You, at the scavenger’s heel.”

He shoots Ren a leaden glare, that particular mental image slapping Hux across the face, but then he remembers Rey’s outburst.

“I don’t believe you would have enjoyed it.”

Kylo sends him a glance that says he may or may not agree, but then he’s looking at Rey curiously once more.

“Why is her shirt missing?” Kylo asks incredulously, though there’s a rather dark hint in his voice and Hux nearly laughs. Stupid man.

“She hates the clothes you so thoughtlessly gifted her, so she took them off.”

“In front of you?” Kylo blurts out, his voice husky despite the obvious tone of disbelief, pupils expanding only as long as it takes him to blink once more.
“Talk about an unmannered brat,” Kylo comments with a rasp of his throat. Trying to cover his slip up, Hux thinks.

It was quickly becoming clear to him that Kylo Ren’s interest in the girl was not all focused on her Force abilities. Yet it’s so rare for them to converse calmly this way that Hux finds himself yearning to extend it just a little longer.

“You should have seen her during dinner her first night here.”

He does something very unlike himself then; he projects a memory for Kylo to snatch. By the way Kylo’s face is taking on the look of horror personified, jaw slightly slack, eyes widening, wide soft lips parted slightly, Hux knows he did indeed take the memory. He smirks. Kylo composes himself after a moment but his eyes are searching Rey almost tenderly and he can’t help the feeling that grips his chest, tightening for the duration of that gaze. The minutes stretch on in peaceful stillness, Rey’s ribs moving against Hux’s arm, noting uncomfortably that he can feel her heartbeat faintly through the layers of his jacket like a softly beating drum.

He lets out a low, long sigh before speaking just above a whisper.

“As much as I am sure you’d love to sit here and watch her all night, Lord Ren, I actually called you here to discuss work.” He tilts his head towards Rey once more. “Would you be so kind as to remove her?”

Kylo gives him a hard stare then for daring break the spell but moves quietly nonetheless until he’s standing on Rey’s other side. When he leans down to wrap one arm around her back protectively and then slowly edge the other under her knees, Kylo’s head of thick raven locks fall directly into Hux’s view, head coming dangerously low towards his lap when he bends over Rey. Ren’s breathing resonates deep in his throat as he makes to hoist the girl up, Hux’s nostrils filling with the scent of something spicy and heady coming from the knight, and he has to force himself to focus. He fixes his eyes on the door ahead of him, averting his gaze from Kylo’s glossy hair and sharp profile.

Then Ren is getting up slowly, lifting Rey along with her warmth from Hux’s side, a frown on his face as he looks at the sleeping girl curled up like a small bundle against his chest. The giant man is cradling her like a precious thing, careful and gentle like he’d never been in the past, and Hux represses the need to worry at his lower lip at the sight, motioning instead towards his bedroom.

He’s given another stony stare for his efforts, Kylo refusing to move. Irritation sparks inside Hux but he bites down on it, opening the door for Ren to cross through.

The man makes absolutely no move to walk in.

“Why is she being kept in your room, General?”

Kylo’s words are measured — immensely measured, Hux notes, considering he had a habit of throwing tantrums — They’re low and unaffected, and yet Hux knows exactly what the man’s inferring in that tone. That somehow he’d been taking advantage of the girl in Ren’s absence. It was the dangerous tone of a man willing to strike if the wrong words were spoken. Hux uses all the willpower he possesses in that moment to contain himself and refrain from snapping. When his words come, they’re tinted with their usual shade of derision.

“Don’t worry your pretty little head over it, Ren, she sleeps on the couch,” he says matter-of-factly, “I would not offer if not for the fact that she’d hear everything from my office while we work tonight. As it stands, if you must know why she’s being kept in my room, it’s because she’s very
adept at sneaking out of every other prison cell I’ve put her in. This seemed to be like the only place I could keep her. Or would you prefer I dumped her in your quarters instead?”

Kylo goes rigid at the suggestion and Hux quirs a brow. Then the block of ice inside Ren’s shoulders noticeably chips away slowly as he looks at Rey, carefully cradling her when he turns to bring her inside with long, quiet steps. He hovers over the bed and lowers Rey’s small form atop of the sheets on the side where Hux usually sleeps, leaving the redhead to try and avert his eyes despite his muscles refusing to work. The man leans over Rey’s head, his face inches away from hers; one long beat, then another, and by the third he’s slowly straightening until Hux can no longer see Kylo’s breath disturbing the soft hairs framing Rey’s temple. Kylo’s gloved fingers reach to touch her jaw then, Rey’s face falling to the side, facing the wall of black cloth in front of her, but then he stops himself and instead lightly removes a stray lock of hair tumbling down her eyes. That image will be imprinted on Hux’s memory for the rest of his life, though he doesn’t know it yet; he’s too busy leaning against the doorframe and silently watching these two Force Users and whatever seems to tether them to one another in that single moment of quiet intimacy.

Kylo brings himself to his full height after a heartbeat too long and is then joining Hux by the door, prompting Hux to think of all the catching up they had to do. There is no way other than to state things simply, so he does.

“We destroyed the resistance home base. It was in D’Qar after all.” Hux murmurs without preamble. Kylo's eyebrows twitch up with surprise. The rest of their conversation happens in a whisper so as not to wake her.

"You did,” he replies, voice curiously empty. Hux gazes at the man standing next to him and reminds himself that whatever monster he could be now, he still had connections to the Resistance. His mother, to be exact, the very same woman commanding about as many men as Hux himself did. His gaze lingers a moment too long.

"We lost our own supply depot, but were able to repay the kindness."

"And how did you manage that, General?” There's a hint of wariness in Kylo’s voice, but also curiosity. Hux prickles at the implication that he could not manage anything of consequence on his own, because it’s surely what the Knight meant. So, naturally, Hux internally preens at being able to deliver his next words.

"Rey gave us the information, in fact."

Kylo Ren can't hold himself in any longer as he turns and leans forward, perhaps a bit too closely, and deadpans in a low voice.

"She gave you the information."

Hux raises an eyebrow at Ren, but the man refuses to back out of Hux's personal bubble.

"How?” is all he asks, Hux tilting his head so that he can get a perfect view of Kylo Ren's lashes. There's something dangerous in that question. A warning and a threat all wrapped up in one.

"A small gift for a small gift."

Ren frowns, not sure what to do with this tidbit, and Hux refuses to help him figure it out, willing his face into a cool mask of disinterest.

"You used her, General,” is all Kylo says after a moment, "They would have destroyed the base either way; we would have scouted D'Qar and routed them out. You used her, Hux.”
Hux's eyes linger on Rey's sleeping form, running down the gentle slope of her jawline, watching her chest rise and fall slowly.

"And you haven’t?" he murmurs, knowing the answer without needing to receive one. "You were the one who left her to me to be interrogated. One would think you would be happy with this development. In the end, though, she got something she wanted just as much out of the deal, if not necessarily on her terms. You're working with time I borrowed for you, Ren; perhaps a little more gratitude is in order."

Kylo Ren looks at him then, the men exchanging a single meaningful glance before their eyes fall again on the sleeping girl in front of them, each of them thinking of the ways in which they had taken from her, never knowing that some day she would have them both wrapped around her little finger.

"Snoke knew I brought her aboard the Finalizer," Kylo says rather abruptly. Hux looks at the man from the corner of his eye, wondering what prompted the sudden display of trust. Perhaps the Knight of Ren had simply tried to change the subject, though it still was far too close to Rey for comfort where Hux was concerned. "He had me kill, day in and day out without audience, but he knew either way. It's as though her destiny is already written across the stars and he's privy to all of it. I have to believe it will come to pass."

Hux wonders what destiny that was, but by the way Kylo's eyes darken and widen on Rey, Hux has a small inkling of what that destiny would look like. The man beside him had a flair for the dramatic.

Still, something bothers him about this confession, his mind returning to his own audience with Snoke. Then, after a moment's deliberation and despite his better judgement, he opens his thoughts up to Ren, willingly offering up another memory.

"He saw me holding her in my quarters after her attempts at escape. He seemed...amused, by this. Certainly pleased, at least. He also seemed to already know about it when he plucked at my thoughts, or at least, it seemed that way back then when he dismissed my question. He made it look as though you had already informed him."

Kylo turns his head to look at him, flashes of something utterly terrifying crossing those dark, beautiful eyes, his jaw hard, a vein popping at his temple.

"I had not."

The revelation dawns on Hux just as hard as it must be dawning on the First Knight because Ren's gaze hardens to Onyx.

Snoke had played them both.

Hux returns his gaze to Rey with a soft, low hum in the back of his throat, the look on Kylo's eyes prompting a dull ache in him that he refuses to examine.

"Makes one wonder how many other things the Supreme Leader has kept from us both," he murmurs.

In that moment, a small, treacherous seed plants itself deep in both their psyches. They stand there for a long time, their meeting having come to a close on its own accord.

Chapter End Notes
Lol. I hope you all enjoyed Rey's drunken rant. I admit that while this part of the story could have been moved along in a myriad of ways for the sake of plot, Drunken!Rey is hilarious to me and I partly also wanted to make up for all the sad angst of last chapter, so it's just this side of fluffy. Hux watching Rey get drunk is even more hilarious in my mind ... the shit that man puts up with, tbh.

And Kylo. Oh, Kylo, will you ever have a happy day in your life?

ALSO! You'll be happy to note that this story now has an estimated amount of chapters! My plot sits somewhere around 30-35 chapters, but I'm known for mercilessly hacking and cutting things, so I'm leaving it at 25 for now. If it needs to go up later, we'll make changes when we cross that bridge.

Hope you enjoyed this!

*BLOWS KISSES TO ALL AND DISAPPEARS INTO THE WIND AMONG THE FLOWER PETALS THAT IS REYLUX*
Kuat

Chapter Summary

Another small gift for a small gift is exchanged between Rey & Hux. Kylo really doesn't like it.

Chapter Notes

hello all! You guys, thank you for all the comments on the last chapter. It was hilarious and fantastic sharing my thoughts with you and seeing all of your ideas and what you found entertaining. You guys are all beautiful.
Also, we reached 100 kudos and went over to 120 in the span of a week? that's 119 more than I ever thought I would get, so here's me getting all warm and gushy. Thank you for all the support you've shown this story so far.

Onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There’s a sound coming from his bedroom. The girl has just woken up. It is still ungodly early, overhead lights dim except for the small lamp shining on his desk, and he’s surprised at her rising so early. Not that Hux has gotten any sleep either, sitting in his office going through piles’ worth of documents through the night, his third cup of kaf sitting cold and half empty on his desk.

He’d gone into the room just long enough to change into more comfortable clothes after Ren had taken his leave, silently stepping wide around the bed on his way into his closet, eyes averted from the sleeping form splayed across his bed. He’d grabbed a pair of loose slate grey sweatpants and a black long-sleeved t-shirt and thrown them on quickly in the dark before padding back out of the room and into his office. If he was going to work through the night he would do it in comfort.

The noises keep coming, this time from the living room — grunts and banging of furniture and muttered curses — which he only half minds, his eyes running down a rather long weapons requisition document he’d received earlier that morning. He tugs the sleeves up his forearms until they rest just under his elbows and sighs. He’d have to check in with supply and find an exact number of items lost during the Resistance raid, then schedule a trip to Kuat to place in another order with the KDY. Hux cringes internally at this. Dealing with the Kuati is not his idea of fun, nor a fair deal, but it would be necessary. He could go with another manufacturer, of course, but the Kuati had been making his First Order ships for years now and always delivered nothing short of excellence, though not without a hefty price tag and a rather haughty attitude. For the excellence alone he would bite his tongue and make the compromise. They had managed fine after the depot got blown up to pieces, but wear and tear between trips, as well as damages obtained during missions, were starting to cut into their supply if this requisition was anything to go by. He would also need to place commissions for more ships now that Starkiller’s been destroyed. He’d have to make that trip soon. Sooner than he had intended, certainly.
Rey lets out a string of rather colorful curses with a scream loud enough to float to his office; a few of them words he doesn’t understand though he’s certain they’re just as bad as the ones he does understand the meaning of, if not worse. Hux’s lips twitch into a slight smirk around his cigarette, eyes never leaving the documents in front of him. She’s as foul mouthed as she’s temperamental, which somehow surprises him exactly not one bit. He turns in his seat and types in a memo to supply to request a count of all weapons currently onboard all First Order ships, as well as any checked out for missions. If he’s lucky, the numbers would not exceed the amount they currently had sitting in their coffers, though if bad came to worse he could always ask the Supreme Leader about funding. That thought makes him cringe. He doesn’t like being indebted to anyone.

Just as he hits send Rey storms out from the living room with loud stomps and barrels right into his office, hair buns looking like little bird nests, strands sticking up in all directions, clothes rumpled - she had managed to find her shirt, he notes - her stare askance and pinned straight on him.

He lowers his cigarette from his lips, letting out the smoke through his lips softly and slowly, and brings his eyes up to meet hers. His head tilts slightly as he takes in her flushed cheeks and deep frown.

“Why was I in your bed?” Rey demands, tone acidic, chin jutted forward and shoulders squared.

*Well, good morning to you too, scavenger.*

She’s favoring her left foot— by the scream she let out, she’d probably stubbed it — and her arms are crossed over her chest, small hands wrapped into fists. Hux says nothing, his eyes returning to her face. The longer he stays silent the redder the bloom in her chest becomes, the more she juts out her chin, the faster her eyes narrow. He knows he’s pushing his luck while he counts the heartbeats it would take her to explode, purposely letting his eyes travel up and down her lithe frame. Just as her lips part, no doubt to deliver a litany of death threats, Hux lets his eyebrows raise all the way up his forehead.

“Do you not remember last night?”

Oh, but his words incensed her!

Good. That'll teach her to get drunk off her feet on an enemy ship.

Hux isn’t sure why he keeps trying to push her buttons, but he does nonetheless. Perhaps it is because he is tired and crabby already, or perhaps it is as repayment for her serious lack of judgement in trying to inebriate him - not that it helped her any - or, and this Hux would never allow himself to agree with, it’s because she looks so appealing when she is flushed and flustered. A time bomb waiting to go off and he with the power to deactivate it or let it burn everything to the ground, including him. Now that she's sober and back in her senses, he'd allow himself the moment.

“Should I?” she barks, eyes glinting ferociously in the light of his lamp as she takes a step forward, “Is there anything in specific I should be aware of before I take your head off for it?”

Hux’s eyebrows do go up of their own volition at the threat.

*Still the same volatile little wild thing...*

Then he tsk’s.

“Manners, girl. Threatening your host is no way to worm your way into his graces,” he replies,
voiced to indifference as he returns to his work with renewed purpose, “I did not touch you, nor did anyone else for that matter, if that’s where your unfortunate little mind has gone to.”

When she says nothing, he narrows his eyes. This time, he decides to toy with her like a cat with a trapped mouse. On purpose.

“Though I must say, the spectacle you put on last night should be enough for you to perhaps hide your own head somewhere.”

He projects to her, then, knowing she can’t avoid taking the image like Ren can. He projects his thoughts so hard she stumbles back a half a step towards the door, the memory of her half naked tantrum hitting her like a jackhammer between the eyebrows. He glances up at her for a satisfied second through thick eyelashes, his head still bowed, and is rewarded with the utter shock and horror streaking past her eyes. Not only was she an angry, sad drunk, but apparently she was also the kind to not remember anything after the fact. He’d have to remember to keep wine out of her reach from now on.

She takes another step forward, a far more controlled one, and begins fidgeting with the hem of her shirt, all anger having drained out of her in one fell swoop. He doesn’t need to be able to read minds like she and Kylo Ren do to see the absolute mortification streaking past her face. Apparently she didn’t know she was an angry, sad drunk with a predisposition to not remember a thing, either.

“I—“ she starts, then seems to think better of it. The silence goes on for a few more seconds. Hux keeps his eyes on his paperwork, the very picture of a busy man.

“My apologies, General,” Rey mutters. Her voice is steady and there’s no hint whatsoever of actual remorse in her tone at having tried to play him, or take his head off. He regards her with thoughtful yet bright eyes.

_Hm…Good girl._

She’s learning after all. That alone keeps him from baiting her any further or reprimanding her for her previous actions. Instead he offers a helpful hint.

“Perhaps next time try something other than alcohol. I have a high tolerance to it. You can’t seem to hold your own very well.”

He’s dismissed her, then, returning his attention to his work fully as he types another missive, expecting her to walk out. She doesn’t.

Instead she strolls bravely the rest of the way in until she’s standing in front of him on the other side of his desk, giving him one hard glare, daring him to turn her out. He doesn’t. He’s curious, and he won’t deny that he’s still half amused by this whole situation. Her presence offers is a small reprieve from the tedium of thinking about ships and guns, despite the fact that his eyes are trained on his screen.

Rey drops herself into the chair opposite him and brings her legs up, resting her hands on her knees, chin on the back of her hands. She reminds him of a toddler, making herself small, watching him carefully.

“What are you doing?” She asks.

“Working,” he replies matter-of-factly, the fast flight of his fingers making quick work of missive after short missive.
“No, really? And here I thought the uptight general tried to relax every once in a while.”

A half snort, half chortle escapes him at her flippant remark. He was quickly learning that Rey and hangovers didn’t mix; her claws come out. Sharp little claws looking for anything to dig themselves into… preferably him. Hux doesn’t mind.

When he says nothing, she makes yet another remark that takes him by surprise.

“I want my own room.”

He does look at her then. His eyes force themselves off his screen and travel very slowly to her face. He remembers how she’d ordered him to drink not but five hours prior, and now she’s demanding her own space.

The little wild thing has a bossy streak.

“What makes you think I would agree to such a thing?”

He knows he can’t keep her in his rooms forever. She’s a prisoner after all, despite whatever warped sense of… comfort? No, something else. He knows he can’t keep her, despite whatever it is he derives from having someone else in his space.

Strange, Hux muses, detaching himself from the thought and analyzing it with clinical precision.

He had never been a man to enjoy company; had craved solitude, in fact. There was time to think in solitude, space to think; time to plan, to lay out his steps far into the future. Such things could not be done with company prattling at his ear. Yet he had to admit that having someone there to dine with and, every once in a while, even converse pleasantly with outside of work held its own appeal, for what that was worth.

It wouldn’t even have to be the scavenger, he promises himself, wondering if he could replace Rey at dinner with Phasma instead.

“I refuse to wake up in your bed again, General, whatever the situation. We may continue playing host and guest, but if I am to remain aboard this blasted ship for Maker knows how long,” or until she escapes again, Hux thinks wryly while Rey continues, “I would like my own space. You can either afford another room or send me back to a cell.”

He laughs, partly at her demand and partly at his own wayward thought about dinners, of all things.

A small voice in his head chimes that he also knows he would never behave with anyone else the way he had allowed himself to be around Rey, lax and nearly… domestic.

Hux shakes his head just as Rey opens her mouth to retort. He shelves his musings for later.

“So my options are to give you free run of my ship from a room you can leave at your leisure, or have you escape from a cell we obviously know you can sneak your way out from? Not much of a choice, Rey. I don’t think so.”

She stiffens by degrees at his words, arms going tense and knees drawing closer to her body, but she purses her lip defiantly in a way that draws his attention a little too long.

“You’re the one who said my presence here has allowed for too many people to wander in and out of your quarters uninvited,” she counters.
He hums, studying her for a heartbeat.

He had said something to that effect.

“If you hate my quarters so much, perhaps we can move you in under Kylo Ren’s care in his quarters,” he offers with a patient smile, and his offer is immediately set on fire and discarded by Rey when she narrows her eyes at him into slits.

“Or not…”

She holds him there, refusing to look away. Searching for any weakness in his armor.

“You’re still a prisoner,” he bites back a sigh, “I can’t let you go about wandering.”

How could he? After all, access to a personal room meant also access to the locking mechanism, and he knew she would immediately take it upon herself to leave the room and go wandering about the ship, potentially breaking things.

Then a thought crosses his mind and he purses his lips, bringing up two fingers to rest in the jut of his bottom one. Rey’s eyes fly to his fingers and linger for a moment before moving back up to his eyes, her gaze stern and her brows furrowed.

“What?” she demands. He tilts his head, realizing in that instant that the girl in front of him had been learning to read him a little too well, unsure of whether he’s irritated or pleased by it.

A thought for another time.

“Perhaps…” he murmurs, mostly for his own benefit, turning his new idea in his mind. It could work, he thinks. It would require lessons, first and foremost — a lot of lessons — and there was little time but maybe… .

“What?” she insists again.

Hux prides himself in being an excellent teacher.

“Tell you what, perhaps we can make a deal.”

To say that Rey’s glare is unfriendly is perhaps the biggest understatement of the year, but she sits still and listens, and that’s all he really needs from her.

“You give me something to prove that I can trust you with this arrangement of yours you seem so insistent on,” he starts, and her lips turn down into a frown, so he smiles. “And I agree to your demands in turn.”

“What, another small gift for a small gift?” she asks, a hard but blessedly considering edge.

He gives her a dazzling smile tinged with pride, one so rarely given to anyone, even to himself; by the way her brows twitch in confusion and her eyes wander from his eyes to his lips, he can see her mind’s gears turn. That brain of hers was truly a delight.

He gets right to business. Better to bring someone in with honey than vinegar.

“And I need weapons.”
Rey’s frown deepens.

“I don’t know how to build guns, General.”

Hux shakes his head in amusement.

“Silly girl, I want no such thing from you,” he offers, “but I could use your assistance with procuring more. And ships, since you so gracefully destroyed Starkiller. We are woefully under-supplied and I need to resupply my men desperately.”

“How?” Rey asks, all business as well. He liked that about her. She could switch on a dime much like he could, and it made the process so much easier. No time wasted having to explain himself over and over.

She obviously doesn’t like the idea of aiding her enemy by the way her lips take a downward turn, but it seems the promise of her own personal space - even in captivity - is a good enough draw. A compromise he could make.

“I must travel to Kuat to place an order,” he explains, “They are the builders of our ships as well as our weapons. An excellent manufacturer. They are also incredibly difficult to deal with unfortunately.”

“How so?” Rey asks.

A twinge of annoyance coils in the back of his neck as he remembers previous dealings with the Kuati. It only strengthens when memories of having to practically shout to be heard surface from where he’d tried to bury them.

“They’re a matriarchal society, and as such, the words of men are very rarely taken…seriously,” Hux knows for a fact the women have tried to get more money out of deals with him by playing on the fact that his power held absolutely no sway over the Kuati council; his arguments, no matter how well crafted, would always fall on deaf ears. He’s about to speak when Rey fills in for him.

“So you want me to negotiate on your behalf,” she states.

Clever little wild thing.

He gives her a curt nod and offers her a tiny smile.

“And in exchange you’ll grant me a room of my own.”

Hux nods once more, allowing her to consider.

“No.”

He blinks. A second passes in which he has to repeat that word in his mind to truly understand it.

“What did you say?” he asks, trying and nearly failing to hide his incredulity.

“I said no, General,” she bites.

“And why is that? Weren’t you the one begging for your own quarters not but a moment ago?” he asks, bringing his nearly finished cigarette back to his lips and taking a long drag, waiting for her answer as he holds in smoke. She watches the motion carefully but betrays nothing.

“You want me to help arm you, get you even more ships, negotiate on behalf of a group of people
who believe in everything I do not, and your payment is a \textit{room}?” She asks, voice reaching an incredulous high pitch as her remark ends and then drops, “The answer is no.”

He can only watch as she speaks, much like he had during her little angry rampage earlier, and somewhere inside of him there’s a small little gauge of respect that ticks a few notches up. He tilts his head and blows smoke up to the side and away from them both in a cloud of gauzy white smoke.

“What would you like in exchange, then?” he asks, ever the businessman.

He could do the negotiations without her, surely, but now that the idea has planted itself in his brain it is rather difficult to let it go. Having a woman to negotiate amongst a matriarchal culture and female driven corporation would give him both the advantage of a speedy transaction and perhaps, the chance to gain more than he would have to do it on his own. For far less, even. He has plenty of women aboard his ship, sure — Lt. Savoy comes to mind — but they are soldiers and officers and would never meet the level of mental dexterity he would need, and the one who potentially could, Captain Phasma, Hux would need aboard the ship as the last commander left to run the Finalizer in his absence. Rey had that mental dexterity, however. This one would be a rather important transaction, considering the length of pages sitting on his data pad. It would certainly be a benefit to him. What could she ask for in return that he couldn’t \textit{possibly} provide?

“I want my freedom.”

\textit{I stand corrected.} Hux thinks wryly.

“You want your freedom.” He deadpans.

Rey tilts her chin up defiantly.

“I am pretty sure handing over the upper hand to the \textit{opposition} in battles to come would be plenty to earn me that, General. I assure you the D’Qar base had been far more important to the Resistance than your base had been to you. You were, after all, ready to sacrifice it. I can’t say that General Organa could have said the same thing about her own.”

He leans back in his chair, watching her, eyes slightly narrowed as he gives her a considering once over. He thumbs the butt of his cigarette in his left hand, small tendrils of smoke wafting up to his nose. Every word she says had been true, and he is pleasantly surprised to know that she had seen through his power play with the D’Qar base. She had also learned from it well, by the way she was negotiating for her freedom. He isn’t sure \textit{why} this specific discovery pleases him, but can’t help the small wave of satisfaction riding close to his chest. Hux notes her obvious omission of her hand in blowing up Starkiller base with amusement.

He can’t let her just walk out; Ren would have his head on a spike over it in a second, and he appreciates having his head attached to the rest of his body, yet having her negotiate on his behalf \textit{would} make his life so much easier. He goes for the middle of the road instead.

“I’ll consider it,” he says and her eyes start to spark a little. He holds up a hand immediately. “\textit{If} you do well, and I mean \textit{very} well, I’ll begin negotiations for your release. I cannot promise you your freedom, it cannot come from me, but I will keep my word if you keep yours. \textit{If} you do well, mind you.”

Rey frowns, immediately disliking the added stipulations.

“And if I don’t? Do well, I mean…”

“Then it will have been no different than me having to negotiate with the Kuati women and we’re
back to square one. You remain my guest."

Rey snorts. She’s clearly unhappy with this, but then she gives a curt nod of acquiesce. A promise of negotiations for her freedom is far more than she’d had to work with the previous night, resorting to alcohol to try and pry her freedom out of his fingers. It certainly was more. It meant winning with a temporary ally on her side who’s good enough to potentially achieve gaining her a ticket out of First Order captivity. He’d defer to Ren for her release, and that would render his end of the bargain fulfilled.

Hux uncurls his fingers, stretching them out towards her for her to shake. She glares at his hand — a habit of hers, he’s noticed — but then gingerly laces her own fingers around his palm, warm and calloused from years of hard work. They shake to their agreement and then she’s dropping his hand like it’s a hot poker and it burns. Business deal made, he turns back to his work.

Rey just sits in her chair and watches him quietly, having returned to her previous sitting position, legs bent and arms on knees, and Hux makes it a point not to look back up unless prompted to.

The hours pass in comfortable silence.

Perhaps comfort was the word he had been looking for after all.

______________________

Did you hear? I heard that girl stunned ten troopers that first time she escaped!

No way, are you shitting me?

Crazy, right? She barely got caught.

Man, she’s dangerous.

So, I heard from Grip that when they caught her the second time she was almost naked as sin! Grip was in the General’s detail that day.

No way, is she pretty?

Beautiful, they said, but she’s also wild. Managed to down a trooper and get out of her cell somehow.

Man, that’s wild.

Did you hear?! Apparently the general brings her flowers every day - that lady from the kitchens, yeah, the pudgy redhead one - she was telling anyone who would listen about the feasts he organizes every day and brings to her.

So you think they’re doing it?

Must be. He now requests new flowers for his apartments instead of Phasma doing it.

Must like ‘em feisty, the General does.
Yo, Hunt! Were you at the hangar when Kylo Ren arrived today?

Ugh, no. Don’t mention it anywhere loud, okay? I heard from Kit who heard it from FN-3476 - What’s his nickname? Tank? Yeah, him — that it was crazy.

What do you mean? I heard the whispers.

Man, that girl managed to bring the man to his kriffing knees bleeding! Big ol’ gushes. She’s strong, that one, though she doesn’t look it.

I would have killed to see that, man!

The whispers start immediately. They catch like wildfire and raze through the ship in record time. Hux had known that troopers were a gossipy bunch, despite his best efforts to recondition such an annoying habit out of them as his father had once, but it had done little to remove the basic human instinct to talk. So this time he’d use their annoying habits to his benefit.

At first the murmurs started slowly, quietly, when she was dumped aboard the ship, intensifying after she managed to successfully escape her cells twice, thrumming amongst the troops once Hux had been forced to put her in his rooms, the tale cheerfully retold by the four stormtroopers who had been on his detail that day they found her mid-escape, gun in hand and looking doe eyed in the bright lights of the hall. He hadn’t heard the rumors personally, but he’d heard about enough of them, and every rumor became more incredible than the last.

By the time Kylo Ren had arrived on board the gossiping had traveled at hyper speed.

That morning alone he’d caught stormtroopers mid-sentence twice regarding the situation on the hangars the day before. In this version, Kylo Ren is hit so bad with a wrench that supposedly there’s a new crack on his helmet. He calls Phasma into his office to discuss it that morning.

The Captain is in the middle of reassuring him that she would address the problem when he shakes his head and stops her sentence short. It could quickly become a spiraling problem if the troops saw Rey undermining his and Kylo Ren’s authority—

— or, his mind supplies, it can establish her as somebody of equal power.

Isn’t that what he wants, eventually? An equally powerful ally when the time comes to turn the tides and this war. Word of a girl named Rey, able to match both Ren’s power and Hux’s smarts, yet still deferential to both, would soon start making it aboard other ships and amongst other troops. Snoke would see it as success on Hux’s part when he heard of it, surely, and it would all be as Hux needs it to be. So long as the Supreme Leader thinks everything is going according to his wishes Hux would be free to act under the radar. He’d need that cover for what he was about to do after Kuat.

“Sir,” comes the voice of his captain, obviously confused at all of the seemingly haphazard decisions Hux has been making lately, all of which are the very, very opposite of anything Hux had ever done in the past. Phasma reaches up and decompresses her helmet in the privacy of his office, a short crop of platinum hair falling out of the metal thing. Hux is used to this. Phasma is all professionalism in public, but she does allow herself a few moments’ indiscretion in private, and Hux is more than happy to give her the small courtesy. He can only imagine that those helmets are anything but comfortable. This time when she speaks, her voice is human and far more delightful than the helmet would ever let on. This was friend Phasma, not Captain Phasma.
“Bren, what are you playing at?” she asks, propping the helmet on Hux’s desk delicately as she lowers herself to a chair.

“What do you mean?” he asks.

“The girl. I mean what are you playing at with the girl? Keeping her in your rooms, dining with her nightly — and I assure you the kitchen staff is talking. Loudly. — letting her shadow you, allowing her in on important situations. Isn’t she a spy? I thought for all intents and purposes she’s still Lord Ren’s prisoner.”

Hux raises an eyebrow.

“I can assure you, Phas, this is not a game. It can be just about everything else, but I’m not playing with the girl.” He retorts, immediately slipping into her nickname as he had done so many times during their training at the academy. Their friendship was a private thing. Few people outside of this office knew they were even acquaintances outside of a work scenario, much less close confidantes.

Phasma doesn’t miss the heaviness of the one word and her brows rise, a small smirk slipping into the pale face, pearly teeth showing.

“Aren’t you?”

“Of course not!”

They’re no longer talking about playing tactical games. He clears his throat with an annoyed rasp. That’s the second implication that he’s fraternizing with the girl in less than twenty four hours.

“She’s not a spy, though I believe she’d like to be. She stashes any bit of information she can somewhere in that little mind of hers,” he provides and Phasma snorts.

“I saw her staring at the controls on the bridge the other day.”

Hux snorts in turn, “Somehow, I’m entirely unsurprised. She’s whip smart and opportunistic to the core, that one. But no, she’s not a spy. I would have dealt swiftly with her if she had been, you know that. I assure you all my decisions are made in exchange for a greater prize, Phasma.”

As expected of Phasma, she narrows her eyes. She wouldn’t be his Captain if she didn’t believe her to be as smart at running her troops as he is at running the order.

“The girl.”

“The very same,” he agrees. “She’s strong in more ways than one, though she doesn’t know it yet, and that could aid us in the future.”

“That’s why you evacuated,” She adds.

He nods. Phasma drums two fingers on her chrome-covered thigh, beating a soft metallic beat against the fingers of her gauntlet.

“So… Let the rumors run their course or encourage them?”

Hux grins.

The stormtroopers were her children, and as such, she knew exactly which buttons to push. No, she wouldn’t be his Captain otherwise. Oh, Hux runs ships and makes big decisions, but when it comes to the troops, it is Phasma who leads. The men would follow her to the death, and they would eat up
just about anything she gave them.

“You know what to do, though I would appreciate giving those rumors a…guiding hand, if you will.”

She nods. They sit in comfortable silence for a minute longer. Then Phasma does as only Phasma ever could; she gives her opinion without being asked for it. With a smirk, of all things. The woman’s smirk could match his.

“I spoke with her for a few moments after her training session with Kylo Ren. She’s stubborn and reckless. Her temper could easily match Lord Ren’s and yours. She also seems to be rather adept at eliciting behaviors from you both that I would not call very worthy of commanders.”

Hux rolls his eyes hard, making sure she notes the motion, though he knows there is truth to what she says. Phasma’s particularly good at reading people. Her lips jerk up.

“You may not be playing with her, but you’re playing with fire, Bren.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

Phasma picks up her helmet and dons it, returning to the amazon of chrome that everyone else knows and respects.

“Anything I can do to be of assistance, Sir,” she offers.

Hux nods. He would need that assistance later. Phasma salutes and exits, then, leaving him to his thoughts.

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He stands on the bridge hours later, watching impassively as his crew goes about their daily routine. Moments later he feels a looming presence by his right arm. He doesn’t turn to look. He doesn’t have to.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of your presence on the bridge this early, Lord Ren?” He asks, voice calm and low enough to not disturb the crew as they go about their business.

Not that it matters. The man has a magnetic aura of darkness around him that makes all eyes snap up to see the man striding in. Kylo stands next to Hux, the sound of mechanical breathing filtering through his modulator.

“A word, General.”

Hux’s temple throbs. What now? He’s tired and the last thing he needs right now is another display in front of his officers. So he extends his arm to Ren to guide him forward and quickly makes his way towards the secluded office to the back of the bridge where Hux usually works. Once inside, he lets the door fall closed when the last edges of Kylo Ren’s robes flow through.

“Yes?” Hux asks impatiently.

Kylo Ren hesitates in his silence, something so uncommon for the man that’s proven to be so willful in the past.

“The scavenger,” he states, finally, as if those two words should tell Hux with absolute certainty
what Ren wanted. He reins in the need to roll his eyes, but sprints up to meet the opportunity. It saved him having to approach Ren, and having this conversation on his turf made it that much easier.

“Glad you bring her up,” Hux replies, “There’s been a new development. I must make it to Kuat to procure more ships and weapons. I could use your presence there.”

There’s a soft creak of leather as Kylo’s fingers stretch and contract. The motion holds no danger, Hux thinks as he watches Kylo’s tell. He’s considering this.

“Why would I possibly want to come to Kuat?” Ren finally asks, “Ship and Weaponry procurement does not fall under my jurisdiction, even if I do hold a command. And what does that have to do with the scavenger.”

Hux shrugs, “Rey will be the one negotiating on our behalf.”

Kylo stands an inch and a half taller than Hux yet is somehow overbearingly large as he seems to swallow up the entirety of the room by being in it. In that moment the man is a brick wall boxing him in.

“She’s negotiating on our behalf?” Kylo asks, disbelieving, his head turning left infinitesimally. Then, because Kylo Ren is as quick as Hux himself is, Hux hates to admit, he follows with: “What did you offer her?”

“A room of her own, you’ll be happy to know,” Hux admits, “and she turned it down immediately despite it having been her demand to begin with.”

Kylo remains unmoving, obviously waiting for the second shoe to drop.

“So instead I offered her her freedom.”

That elicits a response from the Knight of Ren. A physical one.

It always surprises Hux how Kylo Ren can turn as if switched on or off, going from morose to deadly in the span of a batted eyelash. The knight stalks forward, closing the already minimal space between them, so close now that Hux can inspect his close shave on the visor. He has to stretch his neck back in order to gain a small sense of personal space, not that it helps much.

“Absolutely not,” Ren barks, his modulator making it sound animalistic and raw, fingers inching towards the holster under his robes for his saber.

“Control yourself, Lord Ren,” He warns the man before him before Ren can start inflicting damage to his office, “The offer came with very specific stipulations.”

“Such as?” Ren asks, the growl in his metallic voice hard to ignore.

“That she would need to do very well in her negotiations, for one,” he says, “and that I would not be the one to grant her that freedom. Since she is technically your prisoner, Ren, her release would be up to you. By telling you this right now I am upholding my end of the bargain: initiating negotiations. The rest is up to you.”

Ren takes his helmet off to get a better look at him, throwing it on Hux’s desk. There’s a hiss of decompression as the front of his mask angles up and the helmet comes off. Despite having seen this done repeatedly, it never fails to take Hux aback at how perfect his hair always seems to fall out from under that bucket of metal. Some people were blessed with a little too much. He knows there’ll be a dent where it was placed. The thing is far heavier than it looks, far heavier than Phasma’s.
“Why would you offer her such a thing without my explicit permission to do so? In case you’ve forgotten, General, she’s my charge.” Kylo demands, a dangerous flash slanted across his features.

“Yes, because you’ve been doing such a spectacular job at it, Ren.” He barbs, then takes a deep breath. Instigating the man now would only earn him his death, “I was thinking quickly on my feet. She’s eager to get away from us both and would allow for no other arrangement, but freedom renders her cooperative. There’s also the fact that if I must deal with a skittish girl, the least she and you can do is help me procure more ships and weapons,” Hux replies curly, though his mind focuses a little too fondly on the quiet dinners and the calm moments when he brings up her particular skittishness.

He feels the brush of Ren’s power on his mind a second too late and, before he can build up his defenses or even so much as snarl at him for the attempt, Ren has snatches the thought like a low hanging fruit plucked off a tree. The look in Ren’s eyes sends a sliver of apprehension down his back. The man now had a memory of something even Hux himself had refused to look at tenderly for so long. It makes him bristle.

“Careful, Hux, that your personal interests do not interfere with my missions,” Kylo drawls.

The sound of his own words on Ren’s lips make the small hairs on his back stand up straight.

Irritating little—

“They do not interfere, and we both gain from this. Or are your goals for this galaxy not the same as mine any longer? She will do as she’s told and her freedom is up to you.” At this, he raises his eyebrows, “Or do you really believe that keeping her caged aboard this ship like a common household pet will in any way convince her to see things your way, Ren?”

Kylo doesn’t miss a beat with his retort, “Are you trying to tell me you’re not doing the exact same thing, General?”

We’re at an impasse then.

He changes tactics.

“Perhaps now would be a good time to dedicate to her training, Lord Ren,” he offers, “As I must begin my lectures with her to ensure she’s prepared. I am scheduling take-off to Kuat in a week’s time, and the trip will take two weeks there even in hyperspace. If you’ll allow me, I will bring in a ship with accommodations for your…sessions… while we’re on our way, as long as you promise not to destroy anything.”

Kylo is deadly still. He seems to be weighing in the benefits of having Rey to himself for two weeks - obviously discounting Hux from the equation, but Hux could live with that - against the potential run-in with her about her freedom. Hux puts him at ease then, even if he doesn’t need to.

“If she fails at negotiating for more than what I myself could, nothing changes and she’s still my guest.” Kylo’s jaw immediately starts tensing with clenched teeth, so Hux is quick to add: “I offered to move her to your quarters but she didn’t seem to be very open to that.”

“No. No, she wouldn’t be,” Kylo murmurs.

He notes it with curiosity - Kylo Ren was not one known to agree with him over anything - before continuing.

“Allowing her off this ship even once might make her more amenable to working with us if she feels
less like a prisoner. Give her a sense of purpose. She had been eager to learn.” He takes a deep breath, “You gain more from a person if you give them something to strive for, Ren. Give her something to want to work on, one that does not involve trying to destroy the Finalizer so she can get away from it.”

Kylo says nothing, determined to imitate a rock in the way he sits unmoving. Hux sighs.

“She’s smart, but the Kuati are shrewd - you know this - there’s a very real possibility you won’t have to worry about setting her loose. And who knows, perhaps by the end of this, we will have swayed her,” His voice comes softer than he intended.

The look that Kylo gives him is something between sadness and hard determination. Determined to what, exactly? The man looks so, so tired. Not the kind of tired that could be quickly fixed with a nap. No, this is the kind of tired that runs bone deep, aching and throbbingly painful, the kind you can’t shake off with any amount of kaf or rest, the kind that followed you around like a black cloud. His eyes look tired, drained, and Hux imagines what it would be like to run his thumb over those dark circles to smooth them over.

*Perhaps, Hux thinks, Ren draws comfort from her presence, too.*

It is one of those rare moments when the layers of mistrust and strife peel back from the two men who share it, standing in silence in the small office of a ship floating in the darkness of space. It is a strange sensation for both of them to quietly agree over anything when they had never before agreed on a single issue, so they let the moment wash over them and sink into their bones for a moment longer.

“What is your interest in her, Hux? Or are you just using her to get back in Snoke’s graces?” Kylo says, stare dead, icy.

“Feeling threatened?” Hux deadpans.

The knight glares, fingers twitching around an invisible lightsaber, and Hux lets out a rather showy, pained sigh for Ren’s benefit if not his own.

“Perhaps I just enjoy the challenge as much as you, Ren.”

Kylo narrows his gaze and holds his there, unwilling to let him recant or shy away from the answer he’d provided, a mistrustful glint in his eye.

It lasts long enough to make him uncomfortable, to start doubting if he should have tried to calm the Knight in front of him. In hindsight Hux knew that his words of comfort had also sounded a little too wishful for their own good. The whole time he had addressed their situation as “us” not “you” — working with us, he had said, not working with you. We will have swayed her. He nearly wants to slap himself.

Kylo nods sharply, abruptly straightening up.

“I will train her in the mornings when she’s at her peak strength, and you may instruct her afterwards, any other time you prefer.”

*We have an agreement.*

A precarious one, Hux thinks, but one nonetheless.

“General,” Kylo states as he departs, snatching his helmet from the desk and placing it calmly over
his head. A parting acknowledgement.

“Lord Ren,” He returns.

Hux looks at his desk then and sighs. Sure as the stars shine, there, small but visible, is a small knick imprinted into the hard wood.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Chapter 9 turned into a 15 thousand+ word monster so I've split it into a few chapters before the trip to Kuat. Complicated relationships take a while to develop. Next will be Kylo's chapter :)

**Glossary:**

Kuat / Kuat Drive Yards - A neutral world ruled by The Ten families, matriarchal by nature and also mostly a shipbuilding world. They are known for building the Empire's star destroyers, which I am extending now to the First Order. For the sake of ADOT, they're also producing guns.

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Chapter Playlist:

Pretender - Run River North
Elegant Fingers

Chapter Summary

There's an image of long, elegant fingers circulating around. Literally everybody is uncomfortable.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your comments the last chapter :) as always, your feedback is always super welcome and extra encouragement for me to keep writing, so I always love seeing what you have to say.

This is the 2nd part of last chapter, which had run rather...lengthy. In order to move everything along at the pace I'd planned, I'm posting this chapter early so that it all resumes again next week.

Enjoy!

It had started with a shrill thrum of the bond, halting Kylo mid-step in a complicated Ataru leap that nearly sheared his leg off when his saber came down the wrong way, barely able to correct himself to avoid irreparable damage. An echo of something sharp and drowsy started flowing into him the second Rey’s meager mental defenses failed, and all he could feel was a drunken agitation that left him perfectly incapable of returning to his training, then he’d received a message over his personal comm. It had been short and sweet:

We have work to do. - Hux.

He’d dismissed it, deciding that the summons could wait until after he checked in on Rey, when a second message had followed immediately at the previous one’s heels:

Rey. My rooms. Now. - Hux

He’d bolted from where he’d been practicing his stances in the training room then, lungs jammed in his trachea. Was she sick? Hux’s hurried comm message combined with Rey’s drunken agitation flowing through the bond, becoming sharper by the minute, sent Kylo into the darkest depths of his mind — Drowning. Internal Wounds. Head trauma. Poison.

He’d sent a couple of troopers flying with the Force when they didn’t move from his path fast enough. The troopers scrambled up behind him and ran away as fast as their legs could carry them, happy to just have been spared much worse though long forgotten in his haste, and the crowds along the halls parted like the seas everywhere his stomping stride rang.

By the time he’d entered Hux’s room he’d been worked up into a fury.

“What is it?”
Rey was leaning up against Hux, looking small and defeated and covered in so many bruises and welts that Kylo had recoiled internally, knowing he’d administered all of them. Her shirt was missing, giving him a perfect view of all the purplish black and yellow bruises, barely registering the fact that she was half naked, sagging into the man at her side and dozing off in the bond.

“What happened?” he’d whispered when he felt her truly succumb to exhaustion.

Soon enough he was being regaled with the most ridiculous story about her trying to escape through drinking Hux under the table and he had been amused only up until the point when he realized this too was his fault.

“Exhaustion from combat and lack of food… how much did she have?”

His eyes traveled to the jumbo bottle of wine tipped off on the floor, empty.

She’d nearly downed enough to knock a grown man out. Hux only confirmed it.

He’d tried to cover up the fact that he’d been left reeling from these realizations yet the way Hux studied at him, an open book in front of a man for whom very few could hold a secret, left little room in his mind that the redhead had seen right through him.

A series of small movements, short sentences, and he’d been setting her down on Hux’s bed. He itched to touch her this way, with her eyes closed and her face slack and all the anger and hatred she felt towards him drained from an otherwise beautiful face. The face he’d chased for weeks, the freckles he’d begun tracing constellations on for months, the face behind the thoughts he now carried around him like a second piece of himself. He’s so close, so delightfully close, that his breath disturbs the soft baby hairs across her temples. But this is not for him to take. So instead he rearranges a lock of her hair when her face falls to meet his.

Another episode of shared glances between the only other man who had seen her in her quiet, in her peace, then the conversation had turned to Hux’s original message: work. And a small realization had come out of that which had put Kylo on a collision course with himself. He’d taken his leave after nearly an hour of two men standing there silently, each lost to their own particular train of thought, and made it to his room where he inevitably set to agonizing over both Rey and that small lie Hux and Kylo had caught his master in before collapsing out of sheer exhaustion.

Hours later, Kylo had woken up in the darkness of his room to a strange emotion nestling in his chest. Rage and something like…fear. It was not his, he knew. This was not the dark rage with which he fought, or the anguished kind that bloomed every time he thought of his family, or even the empty, quiet rage he so very often aimed at himself just for the sake of feeling something and fueling his power. No, this one was…scared. Angry, but scared. His eyes had flown open when he realized it came from Rey, the long golden thread in his awareness turning hot and orange, like a barely contained roaring flame. He’d bolted from the bed, long legs bringing him out from the warm sheets as he padded around the perimeter of his room, large hands running incessantly through his already sleep-mussed hair. He hadn’t had enough sleep to begin with after his meeting with Hux and being roused with a jerk only set him on edge.

He itched to run to her, to find out what was happening in that instance. Whatever it was, it was drowning his senses as surely as he breathed, and he could not control himself under such a barrage. He thought irately at how much of himself had simply become a reflection of Rey’s feelings in a matter of weeks. That alone would drive him mad, except her persistent fear kept bringing him back down to focus on her instead. His fingers twitched, making for a lightsaber that wasn’t there, his
mind concocting scenario after scenario of what could be happening. His mind flew unbidden to images of the general and Rey and, against his better judgement, he opened his bond to her further.

What came rushing through was not at a trickle but a dam collapsing in on itself, and for a flash of a second he had been able to see through her eyes. Alone in Hux’s quarters, rustling about for something on the dark floor, swearing in aggravation. Kylo took a step forward as if to reach for her; Seeing through her eyes was disorienting enough that Kylo nearly banged into a chair before righting himself and focusing on his surroundings. The dark walls, the wall-sized window overseeing empty space, the small table where he ate alone, the brushed steel kitchenette, the raised platform where his large bed rested, sheets thrown about haphazardly in his haste to get out of it, the black leather chairs and doors leading off to the refresher and his grandfather’s shrine. He walked towards that space then, sitting in front of Darth Vader’s mask, looking without really seeing, for once. At least it kept him from pacing, from potentially walking into the furniture, or worse yet, finding his lightsaber and hacking it all to pieces.

No, Hux would never touch her. He knew that with certainty. Yet that imagined thought had sent something deep and dark coursing through his veins, the rushing image of long dark brown hair falling over short red locks. A tangle of sheets. Soft gasps. Interlocked fingers.

He worried at his lips, the notion boiling like a snake uncoiling in the pit of his stomach, and Kylo ached to slip back in bed and sleep, but he forced himself to concentrate on Rey and what she’s projecting as he viciously tore the imagined fantasy from his mind. The fear seems to dissipate, only to be taken up by anger once more; nowhere near as horrible as the kind that had woken him, but hot and searing nonetheless.

He leant forward in his chair, elbows on knees, and ran his fingers through his hair again. A nervous tick, one left from a long time ago on a Jedi planet, when Kylo went by a different name and worried about different things, but it calmed him, and he supposed that would be a small price to pay for comfort.

She was perfectly capable of defending herself, he knew. He also knew how hard it was to think when she occupied so much of his awareness. She sat in the back of his mind day in and day out and he’d become a puppet to her whims, their bond ruling almost any other thought in his mind; it was tearing him apart in ways he didn’t think possible. In ways he could have never imagined. Snoke’s intrusions into his mind were nowhere near as destructive as this was. Snoke’s interrogations were brutal, but they had an end eventually. Rey simply just existed there - no end in sight, and the girl wasn’t quiet. No, of course she wouldn’t be.

He lets out a guttural growl in frustration and his fingers twitch against his scalp, itching in that moment to pry his skull apart and physically remove her.

His body gave him a jolt, as if also physically refusing that idea, and Kylo panted. No, his mind would not allow that removal. Not now that it had been so ingrained into his very essence.

He closed the connection once more, letting it go to a soft damp hum, careful not to project his own feelings. He returned to his quarters, an infinitely large room that held no warmth, and resumed his pacing for the remainder of the night like a cornered, fretful beast.

Now he finds himself on the bridge standing by General Hux, because after hours of worrying, he had to find out what was happening with her. It would be the only way he could get some rest.

*If something had happened other than her sleeping, there would be a reckoning.*

Kylo shoves that thought aside as well, concentrating on the redheaded man who simply stares ahead
like a statue. Rey does not belong to Kylo. She belongs to no one. If she had wanted to share her bed with the redhead at his side, it was well within her right to do so. Who is he to stop her from seeking whatever comfort she could find aboard a ship where she does not belong?

And, if she becomes attached to Hux, it’s one more reason for her to stay by your side.

His gut clenches, heat spreading rather uncomfortably through him. Uncomfortable as the thought may be, it would be one way to keep her close.

“A word, General,” he finally requests when he senses Hux’s awareness had turned to him and he’s given a rather snippy greeting; a nicety, coming from Hux. He had been very careful not to brush against Hux’s mind since the last threat the general had delivered, yet somehow he was as attuned to Hux as he was to Rey, even lacking a bond tethering him to the insufferable man. An irritation for another time.

Hux motions for him to follow and they enter Hux’s office in a blur that doesn’t quite register inside Kylo’s mind, too worried with turning over his worries from the previous night to notice the man close the door, give him a wary look, then walk around to his chair. When prompted to give a reason for his sudden appearance on the bridge, Kylo replies with the one thing taking up all of his waking time.

“The scavenger.”

And then that meeting had dived from tense to unpleasant in a matter of minutes, their exchange about Rey and Kuat irritating the same aggravation he’d dealt with all night to a higher degree. When Hux got to her turning down his offer to be placed in Kylo’s quarters — which jabbed at him, though he knew he had given her no reasons to want to be in his presence - Kylo had resigned himself to hating that day. Then the potentially slippery slope of discussing her freedom with her was brought up and Kylo immediately saw red. His anger had just barely been contained. Anger at Hux for having offered it, anger at Rey for considering it, anger at himself for being too weak to keep a single girl contained aboard his own ship. He hated that the only way he could see forward was to keep Hux happy and obliging with the stupid trip, because keeping Hux happy seemed to be the only way he could keep Rey happy, and a happy Rey meant she was at least somewhat willing to listen and be taught. He knew, he knew that he could not let her go. He’d been given orders to teach her.

Yet part of him wondered if, when the time came to it, he would be strong enough to keep her from bolting. Hux’s comment about keeping her like a common household pet rankled. How could he turn her to the dark side against her will? It would be a fight every step of the way and Kylo didn’t know anymore if he’d be strong enough to do so with every single one of her emotions digging at his chest.

And that was the crux of it all, wasn’t it? Her blasted emotions and the continuous loop they flowed through within their bond.

He had done his best to shield her from his own, knowing that it would scare her senseless and drive her away faster than anything he could say or do, but she had no idea how to shield herself and thus everything was just projected into him, magnified, then bounced around for the rest of the day. If anything, for his own benefit, he would need to teach her to shield. Soon. He knew distance would not change anything, he’d known it since his rehabilitation with Snoke had ended and he’d spent two and a half weeks inside his command shuttle feeling all of her through their newly awakened bond. Kylo didn’t know the extent of how deeply it ran, but if it were only ever to be this deep, he was already in trouble.

Yes, she’d need to learn to shield, or be a danger to him. He shuddered to think what would happen
in a field of battle if she didn’t and he was forced to reckon with it while trying to stay alive.

He wouldn’t last.

That morning, after his meeting with Hux, Kylo makes his way quickly up the ship, taking shortcuts and lifts to speed up his way. He circles the upper levels in long strides before steeling himself and forcing his feet to walk to Hux’s quarters, fists clenching and unclenching. Then he’s tugging his glove off and pressing it to the access pad, sending a small rope of the force into the machinery and forcing it to read his biometrics as though they were Hux’s. The red outline takes over his hand, a heartbeat, then beeps green. The door’s lock decompresses and then is slowly sliding off into the wall.

He’d have to act fast. Hux would probably assassinate him in his sleep if he knew he was breaking into his quarters without his permission. He smiles. The small amount of satisfaction flees quickly, however, when his eyes fall on the couch.

Inside, Rey is curled up on the couch, covered by a big blanket and a book pressed to her nose, a kitten on her lap, looking for all the world as though this were her home and he had intruded. In a way, perhaps he had. That gut wrenching feeling in his stomach returns and he’s forcing it aside as he steps in.

“Get up,” he instructs. Rey jumps. Her book goes flying to the side of the couch and Millicent lets out a rather high pitched yelp at being dislodged so briskly.

Kylo stands a few steps inside the door and studies her for a long moment before realizing that the bond had laid quiet the whole time he’d been in Hux’s office.

Content, if tired.

His eyes travel to the book. She hadn’t heard him coming, her mind too occupied. Perhaps she’d be in a good mood.

“What’re you doing here?” she demands, squinting her eyes. “And why are you so loud?”

Guess not.

“Get up. It’s high enough time we began your training.”

Rey frowns at him, very gently picking up her book and smoothing out the wrinkles in the pages from where she’d dropped it, setting it down on the table and giving him a glare as she ushers Millicent off her lap, the kitten having returned to its previous position. Even the cat hates him, he thinks, when Millicent gives a soulful meow then looks at him with accusation in its green little eyes before slinking off into Hux’s quarters to hide away.

Rey’s voice snaps him back to why he’s here.

“Training? And what makes you think I want a repeat of that?” she bites as Kylo strides purposefully toward her, covering ground in four long steps. Their last encounter in the training room bubbles up to the forefront of his mind. “Also, I am a prisoner and no more, why would you possibly want to train me? And, I don’t feel well, so you can very well just sod off now.”

Kylo leans forward until he’s looming over her, using his size to intimidate this time, bending at the waist until he’s staring straight into her eyes. She gives him a glare and Kylo feels a sharp jab in his brain like an icepick being rammed in. He looks her over once and notes the pallor of her usually lively, olive skin, the way her hair sticks damply to her temples, chapped lips and sullen eyes rimmed
with dark circles.

A hangover.

Good. She deserved it for her silliness.

“You will train,” he warns, leaving no room for argument and very pointedly ignoring her last question, “You will train with me now, and you will train with me on the way to Kuat. This is non-negotiable.”

Rey arches a petulant eyebrow in his direction as she regains her composure, “You’re going?”

“Did you not hear me the first time?” is all he replies with, and notes the giant waves of displeasure rolling off of her.

“Don’t look so disappointed, girl. I didn’t want to go, either.”

“Don’t call me a girl. I have a name. And I will not train with you,” she replies instantly.

“You don’t get a choice in this,” he counters, almost taken aback that she would balk. No one ever disobeyed his commands, much less blew them off right in front of him. The woman is infuriating.

“You will train, if only so that you know how to defend yourself in Kuat, should the need arise, and so that you learn how to stop projecting every single thought that crosses your mind. That would serve you poorly when negotiating.”

Rey tilts her head at this, giving him a curious glance.

“I thought that was only me, and I’ve managed perfectly fine so far when it comes to defending myself, thank you.”

He ignores her barb in favor of that first remark…knowing what she means without asking. She thought she had been the only one feeling him. Kylo curses himself then snorts.

She had thought she’d been the only one? She probably had not felt even a fraction of what he had, what with her emotions projecting ‘round the clock, every day, into his mind. He tells her as much.

“You’ve been projecting your emotions all aboard this ship ever since I arrived here.” And he’d been her radar. The bond intensified the effect, but Kylo didn’t mention this. It was still true that anyone looking for her thoughts would be quick to snap them up when she made it so very easy for them.

“Or do you wish me to read everything in your mind now when you had fought me so hard previously just to hide a few meager memories away?”

This snaps her spine to attention. She sits up straight and glares.

“Get out.”

“No. Not until you agree to train. Do not force my hand, Rey,” He growls.

He refuses to go another day with Rey embedded in his mind as though he lived inside her own.

She sits there, considering.

“If I agree to train, will you get out?” she asks warily. Kylo wonders why she’s so adamant to shove him out of Hux’s quarters of all places. But he simply gives her what she wants.

“Certainly.”
Rey narrows her eyes at him once more, then very hesitantly nods.

Before he can breathe a sigh of relief he didn’t know he was holding, she sets her jaw.

“I am only agreeing to this so that I can block you out, and don’t believe for a second my agreeing to this is an agreement to anything else. I am not your student, I am not your padawan, I am certainly never going to accept you as my Master. I do not want a teacher. I will take just enough of what I need to make it through this Kuat nonsense, and then we’ll be done.”

Kylo cringes internally, watching her flinch as his fingers fist with a creak of black leather.

It is a start, he tells himself. It’s a start to what he needs.

“Fine,” he says, before turning around to leave because he knows he’s overstayed his welcome. “Go get ready.”

Rey gapes at him.

“What, you mean now?” she asks, incredulously looking around her.

“I’m sorry, am I interrupting your confinement in any way?” he says, “Your training begins now.”

Rey tilts her head back and gives him an icy glare worthy of General Hux. She’d been spending far too much time around the man.

Then she’s swinging her legs down from the couch and shoving them into her boots, a black clad version of the girl he had fought two months or so ago in the snow. Had it only been that long? He is left little time to wonder about it as she gets up and strides all the way to meet him, eyes hard and jaw set. Kylo turns and leads her out. Then they’re walking purposefully down the halls, stormtroopers moving quickly out of their way. Some time between walking out of Hux’s rooms, the doors locking behind him, and making it to the training room, his comm at his wrist screeches with a message. Kylo looks at it. It’s from Hux.

“How did you get into my quarters?” The message is composed, calm, an innocent question. He knows there’s a glacier’s worth of anger and irritation behind it. Kylo ignores it. He’ll deal with it later.

Instead, they enter the Knights’ training room - deserted now as he was the only Knight currently onboard - Kylo storming through and Rey at his heel, grumbling the whole way there about her killer headache. He allows himself to imagine a future in which she follows him this way willingly, a powerful apprentice and her Master. The image sends a thrill down his spine.

He goes to the weapons rack and picks out a practice longsword, taking his place in the middle of the room. Rey simply stands, looking at him.

“Choose your weapon,” he orders.

Rey narrows her eyes.

“I thought you would teach me to guard my thoughts?” she says. Kylo’s words come in a clip.

“Do you know how to meditate?”

Rey fidgets.

“I thought so.” Then he removes his helmet and tosses it to the side. “Physical exertion will help you
in these beginning stages, draining you of extra tension and energy to where you can allow your mind to go silent. By the way your mind has been rattling off curse words at me since we left your confines, I doubt you’d be able to meditate on your own without the aid of exhaustion. I’m also very aware you just want to fight me, so why are you holding back?”

The short explanation seemed to make sense to her because the litany of colorful swearing stops flowing into his mind and she’s moving to the weapons rack. She chooses a long staff, her preferred weapon, and he gives a short nod to himself. When she turns, he gives a more pronounced one to her.

“Begin.”

She flies at him without warning, a hurricane at full speed, never one to hold back. She’s fury personified, a fire trying to overtake his senses. He blocks, immediately thrust into the defensive, twirling around her and parrying every blow. He knocks her feet from under her and she falls, but springs up and repays him the kindness by whacking him where the bowcaster had wounded him. Kylo hisses but keeps going, refusing to slow down for something as insignificant as a partly healed wound. All the pent up rage comes out as they attack, retreat, circle each other, attack, sweat out their anger and go at each other once more.

Rey hits him hard enough to splinter bone a few times and he in turn holds nothing back, the only sounds of their intense warring the grunts and screams and snarls coming from them both. They dance around each other and Kylo notes her movements, memorizing the way her graceful limbs move to block and parry, how she crouches to avoid his sword, how she meets his strength, his power, and deeply cultivated skill with a weapon with her own nimbleness, swiftness, and raw power of her own. They fight like two warriors who have found their opposites; a fight of equals, greater as a sum of their halves than the differences that divided them when separate. They dance like they’ve found their other half in the Force, though there’s nothing beautiful about this dance. It’s all power and lethality even without sabers. He muses over this, thoughts of Master and apprentice, then eventual equals standing together in the Force. Those thoughts are so alluring to him. They keep him focused on her as he longs for them to fight back to back rather than against one another.

“As if!” she hisses, pushing him hard and Kylo nearly stumbles.

*I will never stand with you!*

She’d seen it.

She snarls, storming into his weapon until they’re clashing, her breathy pants inches away from his face.

“You saw that?”

*I did, you monster!*

Kylo frowns. He stops. He drops his hand to his side and Rey uses the opening to whack him hard on the side once. Kylo grunts, but makes no move to defend himself.

“What did you say?” he pants. Rey only glares.

“I said nothing,” she replies through hitched up breaths.

“No, you did,” he presses, stalking towards her, and Rey takes a step back as his voice lowers. “I heard you. What did you say?”
He had heard it so clearly in his mind. He knew it. It had not been imagined. It couldn’t be.

“I will never stand with you,” she bites.

Kylo growls, giving one hard shake of his head.

“No, think it,” he prompts, and at her look of confusion, he steps closer, lowering his face so he can look into her eyes until there’s only a few hairs’ worth of space between them. “Think it at me.”

She does.

It chimes in his mind as though she had spoken right into him, echoing off the internal walls of his chest, his head, his limbs. In a way, she had.

_I will never stand with you._

He smiles. It’s a dark, mirthless smile that never reaches his eyes, all predatory teeth. He tests the bond, for surely if she can reach into him, it must flow the other way.

_We shall see._

Rey recoils and looks at him as though he were a live snake. Perhaps, in her eyes, he is. Perhaps, in his own mind, he knows he is too.

“What was that?” she asks, a small choke in her voice.

Kylo simply stands there, allowing her to step back.

“What did you do?” she barks.

Her mind is throbbing with the residual pain of her wine escapade and his intrusion is severely unwelcome. He feels the echo of it throbbing at his temple, a slight curl of nausea in his throat.

“You tell me. You were the one screaming into my mind,” he responds, hoisting his sword back into an offensive stance. Rey quickly recovers and does the same.

Where nothing was held back the last time, this time their fight is feral, two bodies warring for dominance. They rage at each other with a furious need to hurt, to force the other to submit, to bring the other to their knees. It doesn’t stop until they’re both dripping with sweat and covered in welts that would soon turn to bruises. He shoves all images of welts and bruises marring her skin out of his mind.

This is a small price to pay, he reminds himself, lungs on overload as he tries to still his breathing, twirling his sword lazily in front of him as he taunts her.

“Ready to meditate, girl?”

Rey growls, ready to snap. She hates being called a girl. He’d have to ask her why some day. Preferably when she wasn’t feeling murderous.

She turns on her heel and makes for the door and Kylo bites back a curse, ready to sprint after her and haul her back if necessary, when Rey seems to think better of it and stops. She slowly does an about-turn and walks to the weapons rack, dropping her weapon in place, returning to him with leaden steps.

“I want you out of my head,” is all she gives for an answer. He takes it as assent and drops his own
weapon off, feeling the heat rolling off of her as she stands impatiently waiting for him in the middle of the room. He’ll take what he can get.

But first…

He grabs a water bottle from a small cooler box kept stocked at all times, shoving it in her face as he returns to his previous spot before her.

“Drink.”

She makes a face but does as told, and he can sense her relief as the water cools down a parched, tight throat. The ghostly curl of nausea in him eases as she downs the bottle’s contents in five long gulps. He reaches forward and presses his thumbs to her temple, pressing them in harder when she tries to jerk away, slowly moving circles along her temples with a minuscule amount of the force sent with each administration and she sags against his fingers. Her headache slowly starts abating. He stands like this over her for a good fifteen minutes, working the hangover out of her even while having half a mind to let her keep it. But she won’t learn when distracted by the headache, so he chooses to not be petty and works the pain out of her senses, drawing it out slowly until it dissipates. When she looks at him like he performed a miracle with a whispered thank you, he can’t help the tiny smile tugging at the corners of his lips.

They drop to a sitting position, straight backed as they face each other. Rey does nothing but glare at him even as she mirrors him, legs curled into each other, hands on knees.

“Close your eyes,” he orders. She frowns.

When she makes no move to do as she’s told, he nearly growls.

Stubborn, insufferable woman.

“Do it, Rey,” he demands, and Rey shoots him one last fiery glare before slowly, warily, dropping her lids until her eyes shut.

“Now follow my lead,” he murmurs, closing his own eyes and slowly projecting images into her mind. She stiffens, he can feel through the bond, but does not refuse the thoughts he’s sending her.

He guides her through breathing, matching her tempo with his own, until they’re sitting in perfect harmony.

Clear your mind.

She definitely stiffens then, his use of their newly discovered ability through the bond most certainly unwelcome.

“Stop that,” she barks.

“Stop talking,” he barks in return.

The same message skitters through the bond once more.

Clear your mind.

Then he’s showing her how to slowly compartmentalize her memories, guiding her hand - as it were - until there’s nothing but a cool calm pooling inside her mind.

Now, follow my lead.
He hesitates. He’s never done this before. Then he remembers his commands to teach her, to turn her to his side, and begins weaving a wall around her thoughts from the outside the same way he would create a wall for his own awareness. He demonstrates in slow, deliberate steps how he wraps silence around the memories, how he weaves determination into that silence until it becomes a hard wall of a nothingness, a quiet that cannot be penetrated. She catches on quickly, finding ways to strengthen and then prop up the wall on her own. He lets go of his handiwork then, untangling his senses from it as she replaces it with her own. Kylo gives her a warning before he fully removes himself, making sure not to spook her by pulling back.

*I will step back now.*

And so he does, untangling his awareness from hers until all that remains from him is the soft hum in the back of her mind, and he nearly sighs to feel that she’s done the same for him. When he tries to brush against her mind, he hears nothing. There is nothing but the echo of a hum. Rey smiles, having felt his brush, but knowing he had met nothing but stony resistance. Their bond lays dormant, alive but blessedly silent for once.

His eyes open and land on her face, and for the first time he can remember, he’s gifted with a grin so wide his heart clenches, momentarily forgetting how to properly engage his lungs into breathing.

The moment does not last, though. It never does, he thinks bitterly.

Soon enough she remembers who he is and he remembers why she’s here. They stand in unison, Kylo gathering his helmet and donning it quietly as they walk out of the training room, through halls and up lifts, not a word exchanged even after he deposits her back inside Hux’s quarters.

The silence suits him just fine. It’s a welcome change after weeks of nothing but Rey inside of him all the time.

The door shuts before him and he’s about to walk away when he sees a redheaded, furious General stomping towards him at full force.

“*Just where do you think you’re going?*” Hux snarls.

Kylo steels himself for the storm that’s about to hit.

______________________

Hux is seething. He had seen Kylo Ren being followed by Rey as they made their way through the ship and immediately knew where they were headed. Back to his rooms. Back to his rooms that *Kylo kriffing Ren* had not been given permission to access. He follows at a distance on mechanical limbs to keep himself from rushing them until the door shuts closed behind Rey, then storms towards the wall of black robes and metal mask.

“How exactly did you get into my rooms?” Hux demands when he’s standing close enough to Ren to see his reflection on the man’s visor.

“The Force is a wonderful thing, General.”

Hux narrows his eyes dangerously.
Of course the man would resort to his magic in order to bypass Hux’s carefully developed technological designs. To insert himself in the one place that was his and his alone.

“You should never underestimate it.”

He grinds his molars.

“Is that all?” Ren continues, “If so, I have other things to attend to.”

The man makes to side step him but Hux blocks him with a gloved hand to the chest. He knows Ren could Force choke the life out of him in an instant but he doesn’t particularly give a damn in that moment about Kylo Ren and his stupid Force, his fury coloring his senses.

“I don’t think so, Lord Ren,” he clips in a dangerous tone, voice low to avoid bringing unwanted attention on their heads, “We’re not even close to being done here. That is my personal space you just invaded. I have made allowances for you in the past, but know this, I do not welcome intruders, and do not look kindly upon those who think they can just barge in uninvited.”

Ren simply looks down at his hand where it rests against his black robes, but makes no move to remove it forcefully. Hux feels the man’s heartbeat under the dark robes, the wide expanse of hard, taut muscle underneath. Ren tilts his helmeted head to the left, as if considering, and it incenses him further.

“Really? Is that what you told Rey as well, Brendol?”

At hearing his name, Hux’s lip draws lightly over his teeth.

He would kill the man with his own hands. He had killed before for less.

“I would pay to see that under any other circumstances,” Kylo’s amused drawl flows through his modulator.

An image is pushed into Hux’s brain: Hux’s long, slender fingers wrapped around a pale bare throat, a shower of tiny moles and freckles, a long silvery scar running down its side.

He pulls his hand back, digits burning as though Ren had become a live hot coal. He had done this before, tried to gain the upper hand in their never ending power struggle by shoving unwanted images into Hux’s mind. Every time he did, Hux’s temper unraveled, and Kylo would bask in his own self condescending glow. The following sensation shoved upon his mind was that of the man’s deep amusement and self satisfaction at Hux’s reaction, at having once again used power to dominate. Ren continues, a modulated glower:

“Do not forget, General, you were the one who suggested her training begin at once. I had different plans.”

Then Ren does side-step him then, the conversation clearly at an end as he forces his way through with the sheer power of his broad shoulders. What was it about Force users absolutely pushing him to the edge? He sneers where he stands, resisting the urge to attack the man until he’s watching the flow of black robes disappear around the corner; he strides off in the opposite direction, then, attempting in vain to bring his anger down to a simmer.

It would be a very long trip to Kuat.
The next day finds him in the training room, trying to meditate with a fidgety Rey before him.

Kylo’s eyes are closed, his breathing even, and somewhere in his mind he feels Rey twitching through the bond.

“Find your silence,” he instructs her. The bond stills, he hears her breathing even out. She’s trying. He slips back into meditation, a place far away where the pains of his body no longer reach him, where there is only him and the force. And his connection to Rey’s mind.

Once upon a time it would have just been him and the Force around him; now she’s ingrained herself right into his meditative space as well. It is a soft thing, though. Her proximity to him seems to help, the knowledge of her whereabouts somehow easing the ever present hum, as if the only thing that could quiet their bond’s incessant hum is being bodily close. A rubber band at rest. With her so close, it finally stays still enough for him to concentrate on meditating, so unlike his attempts at Snoke’s temple and aboard his shuttle. He uses that silence, that proximity, to soothe his senses.

She fidgets again.

“Rey,” he speaks just above a murmur, “meditation doesn’t work if you keep focusing on your discomforts. Concentrate.”

There’s a breathy huff from her and he flutters his left eye to open just enough to see the fuzzy outline of her seated form.

“I can’t,” she states, shifting in her seat. Kylo finally opens his eyes and gives up on his own meditation with an exasperated grunt.

“Not tired enough?” he asks, a small unbidden smirk blooming on his face. They’d gone hard on each during their combat bout. Kylo’s aching torso was a testament to that. Still, Kylo being Kylo, he couldn’t stop the words as they came next, “I could always tire you out.”

Rey’s ears flush red at this and he arches an eyebrow.

“No, I’m perfectly exhausted, thank you,” she deadpans with a down curl of her lip, “I just can’t… find my silence.”

He sighs in frustration. He’d tried to get her to calm her mind well enough to where he could guide her towards accessing the Force, something that was entirely overdue by now, but her fidgeting had not only kept her from calming down but successfully disrupted his own concentration.

“Fine, no meditating. We’ll try something else,” he explains.

He looks to be patient with her, he reminds himself. Rey needs to be coaxed and lured into attempting any form of training, and he benefits just as much from her learning to quiet her thoughts and to not betray her mind as she does, yet she can’t stop thinking at every moment of every day, and her block of the bond was tenuous at best. Sometimes she’d remember to do it and it would all go blessedly quiet, then she’d drop it absentmindedly in the middle of the day and nearly make him scream. He had a couple of times already. Instead of barging into her — Hux’s — rooms and forcing her to stop, he’d taken it out on empty rooms and board panels much to the chagrin of the guards. So, if she wouldn’t quiet her thoughts then he’d force her to at least guard them.

“Build up your defenses,” he commands.
“Why?” she frowns, giving him a look as her mind reaches out to touch his. She meets stony silence. He lets his brows rise as he gives her a once over for her attempt at intrusion.

*Impetuous little girl.*

“Do as you’re told,” he orders her, expecting a fight and ending pleasantly surprised when Rey simply takes in a deep breath.

Without alerting her he reaches out and cups her cheek. She jerks instinctively to get away, but his reflexes are faster than she is and he cradles his other hand across the back of her neck, yanking her back in place. He sends a probe into her mind.

Rey’s quick, but not quick enough. Her hastily thrown defenses are weak and his probe breaks through. He meets an image of breakfast.

Was she really thinking about food? *Now* of all times? He catches himself just short of shaking his head and lets the probe die. Rey’s glowering at him.

“Was that necessary?” she snaps.

He ignores her question and demands she build up her defenses as well, never once removing his hands, her skin soft to his touch and the soft downy hairs in the back of her neck tickling his fingertips. He sends in another probe.

This time he’s met with stronger walls, but still not strong enough to keep him out. They fall, and Kylo snatches another wayward thought.

Again.

Again.

Again.

By the tenth thought he’s snatched, the images have gone from innocuous to murderous. This particular one involves pinning him by the throat and choking the air out of him. He smirks. Maybe he could just *anger* her into the dark side.

The next probe is met with something stronger. The minutes go by and slowly Kylo finds himself kneeling, leaning in closer as he forgets his role as a teacher and takes up her defiance to let him in as a personal challenge. He’s looming over her on his knees and she tries to arch back away from him, his hair brushing her temples, but it only brings her chest closer to his and he very nearly stutters out of his probe. His breathing’s hardened and hers is hitching, beads of sweat beginning to form on her brow and his as they push each other harder. He shoves his mind into hers, trying hard to break through the walls she’s been slowly strengthening and—

Rey *shoves*. Her awareness pushes against his and they get entangled in a reverse match of tug of war, her trying to push at his awareness and him trying to invade hers. And much like on Starkiller, she wins.

Kylo tenses, every muscle knotting tightly, screaming at him to run. This is not like their force bond. This isn’t a rope connecting them to each other’s souls, soft and glowing. This is an intrusion from the outside, forceful and callous and entirely unrefined. Rey’s eyes turn doe-eyed as she breaks in, realizing that suddenly she’s in his mind not once but twice. Her awareness of his thoughts has doubled. She splashes around like a child in a shallow pool, curiously looking at anything and everything that crops to the surface and Kylo almost wishes Hux were there to take her away in that
She latches onto that, immediately drawn to the image of the General she has become so close to, and her breath clamps inside her throat.

Long, elegant fingers of a paleness she would never find on Jakku, too delicate for the work of the low class; fingers she recognizes as the same that had pulled her from her seat, shaken with to agree on Kuat. Those fingers were wrapping around an equally long and elegant neck covered in tiny moles and freckles.

A squeeze.

A soft caress.

Soft, thick hair the shade of midnight tangling between those careful fingers, squeezing, squeezing at warm flesh. So similar to her own desire to squeeze just moments ago.

She springs back from it with a gasp. Kylo stumbles forward at the rough jerk, hands flying from her face and cheeks to brace himself over her sides as they slam on each side of her hips, his forehead falling on her collarbone before he looks up at her; he sees his reflection in her gaze, and what stares back at him is a man with eyes dark, pupils dilated, a mix of resentment and…

They stay like that for a long moment, shared hard breaths mingling in the small space between them and Kylo tries to close his end of the bond. He’s too late, of course. He’s always too late with her. She plants herself in his mind though that glowing link, unbudging as she touches, caresses, investigates every part of his awareness gently. He rights himself, putting immediate distance between any of his exposed skin and any of hers.

“What was that?” she rasps, blinking at him with heavy lids.

“Nothing you need to concern yourself with,” he tries his best to sound cold and detached. That fails.

“The General?” she asks, brows rising and a tinge of red creeping up her cheeks. He narrows his eyes, taking in the way her eyes turn glassy and her nostrils flare.

She’d invaded his mind, so this time he throws out his senses and—

There.

A soft warmth expanding, pooling in her stomach, rolling inside her and traveling down, down. His eyes trail that warmth as if he could see it physically. It settles on her lower belly. There’s something like shame mingled with that warmth.

So you do like him, he speaks to her. Rey’s eyes jerk to the door, ready to fly out of there.

“I absolutely do not,” she says, tone hard and defensive.

“Your body does, then,” he croons, leaning back in to inspect her face. She says nothing, but her pupils expand for the length of time it takes her to blink. Then she’s scrambling up and running out of the training room. He lets her go, falling back from his kneeling position with a sigh. He curls into himself and runs long fingers through his hair.

That image had been a taunt to the General when he’d threatened to kill him for taking Rey out of his rooms without permission. He had thought of nothing but to irk the man then. Kylo should have let her know that the image hadn’t been real, that he’d fabricated it for his own personal amusement.
He should have.

Yet when he’d felt her warmth, spreading thickly down her limbs, through her torso, all the way to a well at the bottom of her belly, his body had responded instantaneously. Where hers had been a soft, rolling heat, his had arrived like a jolt, simmering then coming dangerously close to a boil in a matter of seconds, her reaction to an imaginary version of Hux and Kylo sharing an intimate moment setting his skin on fire, rising up to her physical reaction as if she’d taken a match and sparked him to life. He hadn’t tried to even go after her in light of that.

He tries to reach out to her through the bond only to find it shut. She has an exceptional grasp of how to do it when she wants to, and only when she wants to. He growls.

He has to remember that her reaction had been for Hux, not him. Yet he had been part of that mental image, and that had seemed like enough, her mild interest at seeing them both, Hux and Kylo, tangled together. He shoves himself up into a standing position, picking up her discarded staff and his and dropping them on the weapons rack before stepping out of the training room, resolute to forget about the whole ordeal.

Kylo finally receives a summons. When the General walks in to stand beside him at the platform, waiting for Supreme Leader Snoke to appear, Kylo forces his eyes ahead and refuses to meet the gaze of the man standing next to him. Only about an inch and a half separates them in height, and what Kylo makes up in bulk Hux manages to compensate for in the way he carries his more slender frame, straight backed and with an air of superiority that Kylo had seen no one but his mother pull off in the past. Hux barely spares him a glance, preparing himself for their audience.

Just as well.

He chooses to spend the time in silence to concentrate, to school his thoughts, to hide away the outburst in the training room, to conceal all traces of any conversation about the scavenger he and the General had shared, about Snoke himself. The way Hux is staring impassively at the currently empty stand-in dais tells him he’s doing the same. Good.

They’re made to wait. Twenty minutes later and the giant platform that serves as Snoke’s dais remains empty. This is a show of power, of course. Both men are aware that being forced to show up early then made to wait for minutes on end is nothing but the Supreme Leader showing that he chooses to do as he does simply because he can. Yet no two other men can weather these whims as General Hux and Kylo Ren can, straight-backed and patiently expectant the whole time without so much as a single twitch. Being made to wait is the least of what could go wrong in this audience.

Snoke does show up eventually, however, sitting at his leisure and studying them in silence. He would not speak unless addressed by the twenty foot hologram of the Supreme Leader. From the other side of the hologram a seven foot creature stares at the two smaller hologram versions of his apprentice and his General. Snoke had delayed this meeting for long enough, allowing these children to do as he does simply because he can. Yet no two other men can weather these whims as General Hux and Kylo Ren can, straight-backed and patiently expectant the whole time without so much as a single twitch. Being made to wait is the least of what could go wrong in this audience.

“Report, General,” he drawls and Hux snaps to attention. The man had a promising future in front of him, yet Snoke had also seen the man’s most inner workings before. Humans were so fallible, always adhering to legacies and promises, tearing themselves apart to fulfill dreams they never fully
understand themselves, dreams that were never their own to begin with.

“Supreme Leader, we have scheduled a gathering in Kuat to procure more ships and weapons, in the absence of Starkiller base, to help us prepare for an attack on the rebellion,” the redhead toy soldier clips, shoulders stiff. He hates being the one to deliver the reminder of his own failure, and Snoke nearly smiles.

“Your initiative to plan ahead is commendable, General. Funds will be transferred to the Order’s coffers. See to it we are well supplied,” Snoke picks up a holopad and punches a few key digits in. Within minutes the transfer is made, and he makes sure to provide plenty of funds to cover transactions. Funds have never been a problem for him, not for a very long time, and he needed his army well supplied. He cares little for things like credits when there are far more interesting things to discuss, “I suggest haste.”

“Yes, Supreme Leader,” Hux agrees and gives a short bow. Snoke nods, immediately dismissing the ships from his mind as his eyes fall on Kylo ren.

Much more important things to discuss.

“And what of the girl?” he asks, and Hux looks at Kylo, knowing that his time to speak has ended.

The young knight in front of him gives a short bow, a greeting of ‘Supreme Leader,’ then slips into his explanation.

“She is strong,” Kylo states, “Though she is impulsive and fights my control at all times. Still, I have been able to coax her to opening up to learning. At least now she’s trying to learn to meditate.” Snoke hums. How very pleasing to hear. She will fight every step of the way, and he needs her to. This was her sandbox to play in, to strengthen her spine, until he had a use for her. She would not suit his plans if she were a weakling, a thing made to break. No, he needed her to be made of steel, to be the foundation upon which he built his future order, the seat from which he’d rule a galaxy. Snoke had been so surprised at the awakening. He had gone through great lengths to eliminate all Jedi, and despite force sensitives existing as seers, as people who could sense that which was intangible, few of them awoke into their powers. Few could access the well of the Force. Imagine his surprise to find that the awakening was a girl. A babe, by any definition. Snoke had lived a hundred years. More. Her lifespan was but a single breath to him, a single blink, and yet—

She would be integral to his plan to conquer. He nearly purrs.

He could wait.

When he reaches out and touches the minds of the men across this plane of the Force, he finds them having carefully shielded their thoughts, as they always did. Careful not to reveal everything. He respected this to an extent — fools who offered up their minds were not worthy of being in power… So he’d allow them their thoughts today. Invasions of mind were ugly things, and he preferred to use them as a teaching tool. He knew that you could only push a man so far before he’d rebel or his mind would break, and he needed these two whole for now. Whole and entirely faithful to him.

Yet Snoke does not need to dig into their awareness to feel its immediate aura. If he concentrated, he could feel both thinking of her in very different lights. Interesting. Where Kylo’s thought emanates heat, Hux’s is tempered by a soft warmth. One is impatient, earnest, tinged with desire. The other is serene, soft as one would touch a flower.

So… the men were starting to develop feelings for his scavenger. Feelings for what was his, for his
would be Queen. Perhaps this amused him most of all. Humans…so fallible. So willful, so needy, so quick to succumb to their desires. He does what he knows how to do best.

“General,” he prompts, and Hux’s eyes snap up to him through the hologram. He slowly drums his fingers on the arm of his chair. “Tell me, what do you think of the girl? She’s lived in your rooms this whole time, after all.”

Both men stiffen and Snoke smirks internally.

“She is smart,” Hux offers truthfully, “Perhaps too much so. And she is eager, Supreme Leader.”

Hux offers him a single memory that Snoke snatches, immediately delighting in it. That of a girl threatening to cut his head off not that long ago. The whispers of a strong girl rushing through the ships. That of a girl, shifting her weight and asking to learn about the Order.

He arches an eyebrow.

“Is that so?” he asks.

Good. This is very good.

“You have kept her happy? Comfortable?”

Kylo is hardening his shoulders by the second. Snoke barely spares him a glance. No matter. He would find out the Knight’s true feelings later on. As much as the young man thought himself strong enough to avoid his basest desires, to control his need to feel, Snoke knew it was futile. He was an imperfect vessel of Light and Dark. He had once thought this was what he’d need. Now he sees that what he needs is a counter to himself, he who is a creature made of darkness. Still, the Knight was pliant and useful.

Hux interrupts his train of thought.

“As well as one can with a prisoner, My Lord,” the redheaded General answers, yet Snoke can tell by the man’s face that he’s only telling a half truth. The redhead standing there is a master of control. Snoke has had to exert far more pressure in order to read him than the open book that is Kylo Ren. Still, it seems the scavenger brings a side out in the man that he has to fight hard to contain. Feelings. Such a weak thing. It was immensely amusing to him to watch these children squabble over such a petty thing as sentiment.

Hux continues.

“She has asked to learn more of our cause, so I have willingly allowed her to shadow me, now that I have ensured she’s not a spy. She is a quick learner. I would like to request your permission to bring her to Kuat with me, that she might see the might of our Order as our ships are built.”

Snoke considers for a long time. He cared little for the Order’s shows of might, with their little ships and their little guns, in truth, but if a display of power changed her alliances sooner, then this could only benefit him.

“You may,” he gives finally. Hux nods.

His attention turns to Kylo Ren.

“Lord of Ren,” he uses the formal title to address his apprentice, “What of you? Can you agree that she is a quick learner?”
Kylo bows, “I can, supreme leader. She can be a good asset to our cause if properly trained.”

“I am glad to hear,” he drawls, his mind thinking of the scavenger, throwing out his awareness. He could feel her like a pinprick across the force, brighter than most, somewhere in the galaxy. Probably a few thousand feet from where the men stood. If only he could but reach across the hologram and into the ship, to pluck her from it and to his side.

No, he would bide his time from his perch. He would let them run around and believe themselves independent, powerful, and lull her into the Dark before she came to him, prepped and primed to become his vessel of glory. He had lived hundreds of years. He could wait a little longer.

“Bring her to me to test her knowledge after your expedition,” he says, then fixes both men with a hard stare, “Ensure that she has learned well. We have little time to waste before we must strike against what is left of the rebellion and the struggling rabble of the Republic.”

The men nod in assent and Snoke dismisses them, switching off his hologram.

Then they’re walking out the door once the dais sits empty and the amphitheater grows dark, the clicking of their heels the only sounds reverberating off walls as they put distance between themselves and the room of their audience.

Hux is deadly quiet for the duration of their walk, leaving Kylo to his silence as he marches ahead, shoulders stiff.

“Is she happy?” Hux asks out of nowhere and Kylo has to mind his step as the words register.

“I am not sure I know what you mean, General,” he replies, knowing exactly what the redhead had meant, yet disbelieving the question all the same. He knew the man to be cold, calculating, perfect and obsessive in nearly every endeavor. He did not know the man to obsess over the feelings of a girl, however. Hux seems less inclined to drop the subject.

“Rey.” he offers, giving him a hard look, “You seem to be able to understand her far better than I ever would.”

“What do you think?” His response is tone-dead as Kylo resists the urge to parrot back a near-similar answer to the one Hux himself had given Snoke.

Hux stiffens.

“What I think doesn’t matter as much as how she can serve us does.”

Kylo turns to the man as they walk, donning his helmet, his voice immediately becoming metallic and breathy.

“If I didn’t know any better, General, you’ve been the one serving her,” his voice takes on a self assured tone tinged with wry amusement as he goads, “I saw her mind; someone hovering over her as she fell asleep. It was foggy, but I know it to be you. Or this is you just enjoying the challenge?”

The man walking beside him says nothing, still walking at a brisk pace, visibly irritated despite the small creep of flattering pink slowly gracing his otherwise pale countenance. Kylo smirks, but it only lasts so long.

The reminder of having seen Rey’s mind brings him back to the episode in the training room. Suddenly he’s very glad to be wearing his mask. He who had enjoyed a similar challenge of making Hux squirm, he had no room to needle the General. Having enjoyed that challenge had come back to
bite him in the ass, though.

He lets the subject drop.

When Hux finally speaks, it’s to change tracks entirely.

“We will have to tell her eventually that Snoke wants to see her. I will leave that to you, Ren. She is your apprentice, after all?”

The last part of that sentence comes out with a snort and Kylo’s fingers tighten into a fist.

“If you set her free then what does it matter?” Kylo replies, voice low, measured.

“Her freedom is up to you, Ren. You’d do well to remember this,” Hux gives him a side glance, “Though if you’d rather like to have her fight you the whole way and that’s some odd kink of yours, be my guest.”

He takes in a deep inhale and feels the vein at his temple throb.

No. No, he couldn’t have her fight him. That was the whole reason he had agreed to this silly trip to begin with, to earn her trust and bring her rightfully to his side. He lets out an exasperated grunt.

“That’s what I thought,” Hux provides, eyes focused ahead of them, before he whispers.

“He doesn’t know everything.”

Kylo’s helmet turns as he looks at Hux’s sharp profile; eyes narrowed, nose held high, back of his neck straight.

He thinks back to the General asking for permission to bring Rey to Kuat. Except Hux had set that in motion long before their audience. In playing up appearances by giving the Supreme Leader a half truth — about Rey’s desire to integrate herself into the Order by learning from it, about not having yet decided to bring her to Kuat before he asked for permission — and having hidden the offer he’d made Rey, Hux had uncovered a small chink in Snoke’s armor.

He doesn’t know everything.

They keep to themselves as they turn that small fragment of information in their minds, quietly walking side by side before they part ways to their respective quarters.
The first day aboard their ship to Kuat proves to be quite a treat for everyone involved, like that toothache you never wanted.

The day of their departure comes four days later with a flurry of activity at the hangars. The raider-class corvette sits waiting in the middle of the space, a small crew running in and out of the ship loading cargo, the engines prepping for departure. Hux stands on a platform and looks at it impassively as he waits for Kylo Ren and Rey to make their appearance. Their morning training session should be done by now.

The ship resembles the much larger star destroyers of the order, ensuring that anyone seeing it would fear confrontation despite its size. It is a small ship compared to some of the other options available to Hux, but it is equipped to travel hyperspace. It is well armed and easily defensible, and, most importantly, it is large enough that Hux and his two companions could walk away from each other when the time came for much needed space. He’d made sure of that because, in all honesty, he knows they’ll need that space. It is also large enough to allow Kylo Ren and Rey a large training room for them to beat each other to a pulp without damaging the ship. He’d seen to that, seeing to it that the space be made if it wasn’t already available.

Just as the thought crosses his mind Rey comes bouncing up to his side. Hux frowns. She’s awfully peppy today.

“Is that her?” The question comes out of her with a breathy high pitch.

Hux turns his head lightly to look at her with arched brows, then nods.

“That’s our home for the next two weeks.”

Rey smiles so brightly it’s nearly blinding. He simply watches her and saves the memory of that smile; it appears so very rarely that he cherishes it while it lasts, even if he knows it is not his place to. He’s already taken from her with this trip; he should steer away from her and refrain from taking more. Yet he can’t help himself; smiles like that are not often displayed around him, or born as a result of his actions. Figures that a ship of all things would be the thing to make her this happy.

“She’s beautiful,” Rey exclaims with a hint of awe in her voice.

“That she is,” Hux murmurs, voice soft, tearing his eyes away from Rey before his gaze lingers longer than appropriate.

“Where is Ren?” he asks lightly. Rey’s mood sours, the air immediately turning stale and heavy around him. So very different from the light, airy space it had been but just a few seconds before.

“You mean the insufferable bastard?”
Hux’s lips draw slightly upward despite his attempts at remaining impassive.

“That’s one way to put it,” Hux agrees.

Then steps are coming from behind and there’s only one person aboard this whole ship who could make the simple act of walking sound like a death march.

“The insufferable bastard is here,” Ren’s voice drips with sarcasm as he comes to a stop on Rey’s other side. To the passing eye, she would look like a child between the two much taller men. She has the decency to blush at being caught in the name calling.

“General,” the man offers, voice neutral and flat.

Hux inclines his head in greeting, intent on remaining as cordial as humanly possible if they were going to survive through this trip. After Ren’s crass invasion of privacy in the hall four days ago, he is resolute in his decision to avoid talking to the man unless absolutely necessary. Rey ignores Kylo entirely and looks at him as though she had just realized something rather abruptly.

“While we’re gone, who’s looking after Millicent?”

Of all the things she could be worried about — being confined to a rather small ship with Ren and himself for two weeks, having to negotiate on behalf of people she hates, potentially managing to finally get her wish of freedom — that is what she asks? It’s almost enough to make him want to laugh. Then he remembers that aside from Hux himself and occasionally Ren, Millicent had been Rey’s sole companion for nearly a month. He chuckles despite himself and shakes his head. Of course she’d ask. His mind focuses for a second on the notion of her implied return when she voices her concern for the tabby.

“She’ll be taken care of,” he offers. Rey frowns at him, utterly unconvinced. Hux tugs on the edges of his gloves, securing his wrists away from the cold of the hangar as he looks at Rey, “Phasma will look after her.”

Then something very peculiar happens: Rey’s ears start turning red by degrees. It starts at the tips of her ears and slowly spreads to her earlobes, crawling to her jaw and blooming towards her cheeks. Her neck and collarbone run a deeper shade of pink. When she manages enough courage to actually look at him, her eyes travel to his fingers and she blushes harder. His left eye twitches.

“Are you alright? Are you feeling okay?” he asks, serious concern ringing with every word.

They’re about to embark on a trip for two weeks and the last thing they need is for Rey to become violently ill with no access to a proper medical bay. The corvette would have its own med bay, but it was equipped to deal with battle wounds for short amounts of time until it managed to arrive to a flagship, not to deal with long, drawn out illnesses.

“I—..” Rey’s face turns even redder and even Kylo is turning to look at her then, stepping closer behind Rey should she faint, but Rey’s shaking her head and squaring her shoulders, even if the flush continues to intensity. “I’m perfectly alright. Thank you.”

He frowns, Kylo has not moved away, still standing silently behind her.

“Are you positive?” he presses again. “We can request a medical team immediately.”

The woman can be stubborn. That peculiarity he’s more than familiar with.

“I’m fine, General,” she intones, her words laced with clipped annoyance as she slams the door on
that particular line of inquiry for him.

Hux studies her a moment longer before he nods, but he keeps looking at her out of the corner of his eye just to make sure while they stand there for another twenty minutes as the ship engines are primed and, finally, the passengers’ belongings are loaded. Kylo’s helmet twitches slightly every once in a while as well, and Hux knows the man is keeping just as close an eye on their prisoner as he is.

Finally it’s time to board and the three of them walk down the hangar and up the ramp in the same formation they had kept on the platform, Rey flanked by both Hux and Kylo Ren. Behind them the crew enters, followed by two squads of stormtroopers. Once they reached Kuat, the corvette would sit in orbit while Hux, Rey and Ren descended on a smaller vessel. Having a crew to maintain and fly the corvette would also allow Hux hands-free time to impart Rey with her lessons. They had started two days ago, going over the basics of Kuat’s leading structure, but now came the hard work. He’d have to cram her head with details of ships and weapons, of negotiation and diplomacy, and manage to do it just shy of fourteen days.

The ramp lifts shut behind them, sealing them inside with a loud, metallic finality. Hux looks at the man and woman walking ahead of him. Rey notices that he’s stopped walking and hesitates. Kylo keeps walking. He’s familiar with the layout of the ship and makes himself scarce immediately, leaving Rey standing there between him and the retreating crew. Hux arches an eyebrow at this.

“I take it training didn’t go well?” he asks, and the bridge of her nose pinches.

“The man is just so…so…” she struggles to find a suitable enough insult, her cheeks puffing out slightly, and Hux smiles.

“I know,” he supplies.

Rey sighs and shakes her head and Hux slowly walks up the remaining distance to her side, giving her an inquisitive glance. Then the words are spilling out of her at a ridiculous speed.

“He’s just so… infuriating!” She balks, yanking in irritation at the black arm wraps crawling up her biceps. “He taught me how to stop projecting my thoughts, which is very useful, except now he seems bent on destroying all of that progress by constantly trying to beat my walls down! And meditation. How does he even do it? Does he not have a tailbone? Because mine’s been screaming from days of sitting on hard floors trying to find my silence. What does that even mean? Imagine it like a calm pool, he says. Well, he can shove his small pool of silence right up his—”

Hux hums, interrupting her before she says the words that he knows will send him into an outburst; he refuses to be that undignified in front of her or anyone else for that matter.

“Perhaps he’s simply trying to help you strengthen them,” Hux replies, his own thoughts traveling back to their last incident. “I can assure you, if there’s anyone who can teach you how to build those walls up, it’s Lord Ren.”

Hux doesn’t tell her it’s because the man is pure filth and continually tries to lord his power over others. Rey looks at him with a strange expression on her face. He knows that by admitting that last bit, his words sound a little too much like a compliment. Let her be blissfully unaware. He is sure she’ll learn soon enough.

Rey looks to be considering her next words. Hux waits.

“Even so… blocking him will only do so much. I can hear him. He’s constantly there, like an
annoying fly that refuses to leave me alone.”

Comparing Kylo to a fly is the last thing Hux could have ever expected. It’s so unconceivable in his mind that he snorts, because Kylo Ren is anything but a fly. Then he looks at her and frowns.

“What do you mean?”

She hesitates for a moment, but her need to finally vent to someone about it must have finally gotten the best of her because she’s spilling out again. Hux would have to teach her how to keep her cards closer to her chest somehow. He couldn’t afford for this to happen during negotiations.

“He’s just…It’s hard to explain, General,” she says as they start walking, “He’s in there.”

She points to her head and jabs her index into her temple.

“For two weeks, he’s been nothing but incessantly tugging at me and blocking him out only goes so far. It only dampens the noise. It doesn’t mute it.”

Hux slowly brings his hands behind his back the way he does when he’s thinking hard. His fingers curl around his other hand and he walks slowly towards the passenger’s area. They would need to buckle up for take-off soon, but the crew would not take off until the commanders were ready, so really, there was no rush. His mind is more preoccupied with Rey’s words. She could hear him? All the time? What sort of torture would that be like?

So much made sense in that moment, however. The quiet conversations they seemed to carry at a glance. The way she had started tensing every time Kylo came into view or joined them, especially if he joined them.

It explained so much. He proceeds gingerly.

“Do you mean he…talks to you.?”

“No, well— yes.. Sometimes. Most of the time it’s just…” Rey worries at her lip and Hux’s eyes zero on the motion. “His feelings.”

So… a very horrific, exhausting kind of torture.

“He’s projecting?”

Hux didn’t know much about the Force, but he knew enough to know about projection. He had, in two instances, projected his own thoughts for Ren to grab onto. Snoke was particularly fond of digging inside people’s minds and snatching thoughts floating too close to the surface as well. He wasn’t entirely unfamiliar with the whole process. He is aware enough to know the Force is real, even if to him it seems rather like people make a bigger deal of it than necessary.

Rey shakes her head.

“No…” she says in a near whisper, “In fact, he’s better at keeping me out of his thoughts than I’ll ever be at returning the favor… he shrouds them in such deep silence. They just…still…come at me.”

He knows she is placing immense trust in him to share something so private about herself and the first Knight of Ren, so he waits for her to speak rather than needling her for information, aware that the only reason she’s opening up to him is because she has no one else to turn to.
“You said he keeps you out. So this…exchange…goes both ways?”

Rey nods.

Before he can ask further questions a speaker beeps to life, informing all passengers that all engines are primed for take off. Hux and Rey quicken their steps until they’re standing in the passenger bay. Kylo’s already strapped to his seat, his body rigid, helmet resting on his lap while he stares blankly straight ahead.

Hux looks at him as he straps himself into the opposite seat, Rey sitting a few seats away on Kylo’s side. His eyes move slowly between the two force sensitives. They could communicate that way? Were they exchanging thoughts now? Hux tried to imagine being inside Ren’s mind and immediately averts his gaze when the Knight’s eyes fall on him hard. What a dark place to be in, he imagines.

Twenty minutes later finds them out in hyperspace, coordinates set for Kuat, and all three passengers unbuckle their belts and slip out of their seats. Kylo Ren is the first to speak.

“Training will resume at zero seven hundred hours,” he informs Rey as he looms over her. Rey frowns but nods curtly.

Then he’s storming away and Rey glares at his back, leaving Hux to wonder what that was all about, though he doesn’t have to wonder for long as Rey starts muttering to herself. ‘Insufferable bastard’ seems to have become her favorite monicker for the man. Hux clears his throat.

“As much as I’d love to sit and listen to you curse Ren all the way to the outer rim, and truly, I would…” he insists as Rey turns her attention to him, her murmurs dying on her lips, “There is the matter of our own lessons. We will need to begin right away. Tonight, in fact.”

Hux pulls out a data pad from his great coat and extends it for her to take as he steps closer. Her fingers gingerly reach out, brushing his own, before she frowns and pulls it up to her face. He continues.

“Your lessons have been loaded onto this data pad. Needless to say there is no access to outside connections, and I would appreciate it if you tried to remain as concentrated on the task at hand as possible given your new…development… with Lord Ren.” Hux could only imagine how distracting it would be to sense the man inside his head at all times. “We will go over your reading material every evening from sixteen hundred hours until bed time, with a break at nineteen hundred hours for dinner.”

Rey nods, turning on the data pad and quickly inspecting the documents on it, accepting this as her due for these negotiations. Hux is pleased that she does not look dismayed at the massive amounts of data she’ll have to read. Then she’s looking up at him as if waiting for him to speak more, which Hux takes as an opportunity for what comes next.

“Follow me,” he says, stepping away from her and making to turn. Rey falls in step immediately as he leads them through hallways. Stormtroopers snap to attention and push themselves further back into the walls, offering them both a wide berth.

It only takes a few moments, but then he’s standing in front of a set of doors. He punches an access key into the pad, prepping the scanner for fingerprints. He motions to the access pad and when she hesitates Hux reaches, grabbing her wrist and bringing her right hand to the scanner. He feels her tense, but she allows him to guide her until the access pad is beeping green.
“Your rooms,” he finally says when she turns to look at him with wide eyes, still skeptical.

That gives her pause. She searches his face for a second to see if he’s lying, but when he betrays nothing, she smiles.

“So I get my own space? No sharing with you?”

Were he any other man he would have felt hurt at those words, but he reminds himself of their particular situation and nods instead.

“It’s not like you can escape while we’re in hyperspace,” he explains, “and it’s going to be a long two weeks.”

She nibbles at her lower lip then before nodding. Her hand comes back up to the access pad and it blinks green with assent, sliding the door open for her. Hux watches from the threshold as she enters and does a wide turn. The rooms are not big, given the ship; a full-size bed, a small desk and chair a few feet away, drawers under the bed for her belongings, a sink and mirror, and a door to a small sonic fresher to the left. It was standard officer quarters, though perhaps with a bit more privacy than for petty officers. He and Ren would each have similar accommodations down the hall. But then Rey’s turning and looking at him as if he had just handed her a palace. His gut clenches.

“Thank you, General, this is very kind of you.”

Her display of gratitude is so very unlike the scavenger he’s used to that Hux just stands there without stepping inside.

He looks at the data pad in her hand, forcing her to follow his gaze and her eyes land on it as well.

“We’ll be reviewing the first two chapters of material at sixteen hundred hours in the main lobby. Please make sure to have reviewed the information by then,” he says and turns around more sharply than intended, leaving her standing in her small quarters, the door sensors finally pick up on the fact that he’s not obstructing the space, closing behind him with a hiss.

“Are you done playing house with the scavenger, General?” comes a low, breathy voice behind him. Kylo Ren is looming over his back as he leans in to whisper in Hux’s ear, his tone mocking, and Hux narrows his eyes.

“Are you done being a perpetual pain in my arse?” he bites back.

Ren leans back then and chuckles.

“Is that what you think I’m doing?”

Hux refuses to dignify that with an answer. Kylo comes around him to sit in the open space opposite him inside the common room. Between them a table prepped for a game of Dejarik sits untouched. Neither man looks at it.

Hux had spent the better part of an hour going through documents for Rey’s lesson, as well as catching up on work he would issue to Lt. Savoy and Phasma once they dropped out of hyperspace. Work never waited for anyone, after all. He glares at Ren then returns to his work. It seemed like that was the only thing he ever had time for lately, work and dealing with these two glorified children. He
really does not want to be here talking to Ren, so he tries to get him to just stomp off as is his custom.

“What else would you be doing?” he asks with his eyes glued to the screen, “Don’t you have things to attend to or troops to terrorize?”

“Hardly, General,” Kylo replies, “We’re stuck in hyperspace for two weeks and until the girl is ready to train, I have exactly a hundred and fifty meters of space. We’re bound to run into each other eventually.”

Hux finally lifts his eyes from his document, because this has gone on long enough, and if this is how they’re starting out their journey Hux is about ready to order the crew to drop out of hyperspace and return back to the Finalizer.

“What do you want, Ren?”

Kylo sits there and watches him for a long time, all traces of teasing - if you could call what Ren did teasing - suddenly evaporating. He’s is out of his usual long robe and cowl, sitting in front of Hux in his ribbed calf-length tunic and no globes gracing his large hands. He looks a little more like a normal person and less like a monstrous creature born of nightmares that way, unmasked and crowned with impossibly beautiful jet black hair. He also looks so young, Hux muses, despite the long thin scar marring his features. It was a perfect picture of danger and vulnerability, that face. The man may look young and beautiful, scars and all, but that very same scars are a reminder that Kylo Ren dealt in death. You don’t earn those sorts of scars sitting behind a desk.

“I was ordered to teach her… at whatever cost,” Ren starts, his long fingers curling into a fist on top of the table. Hux notes how Kylo’s eyes take on the same far away look he’d had the night he placed Rey in his bed. “She is the key to my training’s completion, General.”

“I see,” murmurs Hux.

So this is why Ren is so hesitant about the idea of the girl’s freedom.

Sure, she is Force Sensitive, and a strong one, at that. Hux would be stupid to deny that the fact alone probably held a great deal of appeal to Kylo Ren — Hux himself could appreciate a good challenge against somebody who could match him and his wit — he assumed it would be the same for the Knight of Ren when it came to her. Yet they both also know that she has very little to offer in terms of useful information now that Luke Skywalker had slipped between Ren’s fingers, and she would be practically useless if she refuses to learn of her own volition. That, Hux reminds himself, is the only reason the man is sitting across from him, sharing more personal information than he ever had in the many years they’d spent working together. He says as much.

“And if she refuses your tutelage?” he queries carefully. “The only reason she’s agreeing to any of this is because she believes she’ll go free. Once this is all done, she’ll refuse you.”

Hux also knew how important it was to Ren to complete his training. He’d been in plenty of audiences, listening to Snoke dangle the promise of making Kylo Ren the strongest Force user in the galaxy through use of the Dark, had watched as the man before him bled day after day for it, patiently and obediently doing as the supreme leader had ordered for years while chasing that promise; an impossible task to try and retrieve the dangled carrot. Hux’s eyes narrow, a small treacherous thought crossing his mind.

“Do you think, perhaps, that is exactly what the Supreme Leader is hoping for?”

The words come out softly, murmured as if the walls have ears. Kylo’s eyes snap up to his and
something dangerous crosses his visage before he schools his expression to blankness. If there is something Kylo Ren wants more than the scavenger, it is to complete his training and fulfill whatever sense of destiny the man had made up for himself.

“The supreme leader is wise, General,” Kylo deadpans, yet the way in which his jaw hardens and his temple throbs tells Hux that his words had hit too close to home for comfort.

“I never said he wasn’t wise, Ren,” Hux agrees, suddenly unable to keep the gears in his mind from whirling, and he does not mean it when he says, “You and I both know that.”

He leaves the rest unsaid. Snoke certainly is wise, but as Hux knew all too well, being wise and being honest were entirely different things. Then an image is being shoved into Hux’s mind as Kylo takes on a pained expression. A memory.

Two men stand on a long bridge over a deep fall into nothingness. One, Ben Solo — no, Kylo Ren — Ben Solo died a long time ago.

The other is older, a few inches shorter, scruffy faced and so very sad, but determination is painted across his face. He looks like Kylo Ren, the man Kylo Ren would be if he ever reached that age.

“What is this?” Hux’s voice comes at a hitch.

That man, Han Solo — for who could it ever be but his father come to haunt him? Something else?

“Take off that mask. You don’t need it.”

“What do you think you’ll see if I do?” The modulated voice, despite its metallic, airy tinge, sounds regretful

“No. Ren, stop.”

Hux is starting to feel incredibly uncomfortable. This is not for him to see. This was never for him to see.

Why is Ren sharing this with him?

“Your son is gone. He was weak and foolish, like his father.”

His father had come to bring him home.

Hux can’t tear himself from this, hard as he tries. Kylo Ren won’t let him. He doesn’t want to see this. Hux has a perfectly constructed mental image of the man sitting in front of him that he’d like to preserve if he is to make it through this war, and this memory has no place in it. This was too personal. Too private. Too human.

“That’s what Snoke wants you to believe, but it’s not true. My son is alive.” The man who is a reflection of who Kylo Ren could have been speaks, and flashes of pain flare.

“No. The Supreme Leader is wise,” Kylo retorts, wanting to believe those words like he’s never believed in anything.

“Snoke is using you for your power,” Han speaks, “When he gets what he wants, he’ll crush you — You know it’s true.”

Hux feels his heart contract. Yet he understands now why this is being shared with him. Hux had implied the same thing not but a minute ago.
“It’s too late.”

Then Han is looking so much older in that moment, a man pained for his child, a man willing to die. And die he does.

Hux sees through eyes that are not his as the life slips from an old, ragged man’s eyes, feels through a memory that is not his as a hand cups his cheek in one last caress. Senses through hands that are not his one last heartbeat as Han’s pushed over the edge.

There’s a scream from above, and his eyes land on a scavenger.

Then he’s jerking back from that memory, nostrils flaring as he tries to suck in air. He stares at Kylo, who’s looking back at him with a mix of anguish and hard anger. They sit there and stare at each other while Hux tries to grapple with every bit of his being for a foothold so that he doesn’t mourn for a father that is not his.

“Do you see now why I must do this, General? The lengths I have gone?” Kylo’s voice is surprisingly flat and collected.

There is no room for sentimentality in the world they inhabit. Yet…Hux’s father had never looked at him the way Kylo’s had looked at him even in his dying moments, and his heart aches. How horrible, for a boy to grow up thinking he’s not loved, when that love had stared him right in the face until the very end. How horrible, to have to sacrifice something so large for a promise that wasn’t being fulfilled. And he understands, then, why Kylo clings onto his belief that Snoke will deliver with every shred of his being. Because if he fails to believe, he has nothing left.

“That memory was not for me to see, Ren,” Hux reproaches, trying hard to place a bite in his words that does not quite deliver.

“No, it was not,” Kylo agrees before standing up and walking away.

It was not for him to see, but he had needed to. It had been too personal, too pained, and yet… and yet, it told Hux all he needs to know. That Kylo Ren is on the same page he is, even if he ardently wants it to be different. That his words had been confirmation of something Kylo Ren had tried very hard to ignore. That, despite it all, he is too deep in now to change course. Perhaps Hux is, too.

The small clock tucked into the wall of Rey’s room ticks closer to zero sixteen hundred and Rey rolls herself out of the small bed and shoves her feet into her boots. She looks around but aside from the small data pad she’d been engrossed in, there’s nothing for her to take along with her, so she approaches the access pad on the inside of the room and presses her right hand to it. It glows green and a satisfying beep reaches her ears; Rey smiles. This is the first time in what feels like eternity that she’s been able to truly have space to herself, and it feels heavenly. Sure, General Hux’s quarters were something out of a dream to a previous scavenger like her, but having her own space was a luxury she hadn’t been afforded for a very long time. The doors slide open with a soft sound of decompression and she steps out, letting it fall shut behind her.

She vaguely remembers the way, but there’s a small information station close enough and Rey accesses the ship’s deck plan, landing her in the common area soon enough. General Hux is already seated at the table, brows furrowed over what must surely be work. Rey didn’t think the man ever did anything but work. She was correct. A quick glance down at his data pad showed a list…a very
long one.

His eyes are finding her then and there’s a peculiar hardness that nearly makes her take a step back. Something very near like pain. Then it’s gone in a second, replaced by perfect professionalism, and Rey is left to wonder if she imagined it. He looks at the clock and there’s still a minute left to zero six hundred.

“Punctual,” he speaks, his tone lightly impressed. “I didn’t know if you knew how to read a clock.” Rey glares at him, but by the twitch of his lips she realizes he’s joking and Rey huffs. “I didn’t know you knew how to be anything but a straitlaced curmudgeon.”

He smirks then, prompting her to sit.

As soon as she sat down the litany of questions began.

“Where is Kuat located?” he asks.

“In the Galactic Core,” she replies instantaneously, her brain latching onto the information she had read about previously.

“And what is their political arrangement?” he continues.

“Neutral. They are ruled by a group of influential aristocratic families that refer to themselves as royalty.”

Hux nods, “So how are you to address them?”

“Your Lordship, My Lady, Mister or Madame Dignitary. Also as Your Majesty, should we encounter one of the high family matriarchs.”

Hux rewards her with a curt nod at this, and Rey pinches her nose at the last. She didn’t think very highly of people who thought they could lord their power over everyone else.

“You will refrain from doing that in front of any Kuati persons,” Hux interrupts her train of thought. It’s not a question, and she smirks.

“What? Show my distaste?”

“Exactly.” Then he’s back to the stream of questioning.

“What are their main sources of business?”

“Import and export of goods, primarily weapons and some spices, but mostly their wealth is built on ship making.”

They go on like this until it’s dinner time, touching on all points from Kuat Drive Yards and its formation, to the Royal We and how they had built their ruling order, sometimes resorting to gossip and corruption, even one particular backstabbing hundreds of years ago. Rey’s eyes had gone wide as saucers. So much political intrigue. Despite this, she learned, the planet as a whole was ruled fairly and the citizens treated well. All political fights came about partly because these were families tied together for thousands of years, and families tend to fight.

Dinner comes and goes without event. Rey wonders for a moment where Kylo Ren is; she had not seen him since departure, but then she figures the man probably ate on his own. Or maybe he just
didn’t eat, she muses. She had never seen him take a single bite out of anything. Not even water during long training sessions. He’d always walk along quietly after training as Rey stuffed herself with an energy bar and chugged water, and he looked as if he needed absolutely no sustenance. Maybe his creepy dark side Force keeps him going. Maybe he’s undead.

Then Rey and Hux are finishing their meal and returning to the questions. By the time it all ends Rey’s exhausted, her elbow propped on the table and her face sliding off her hand. Between the long training session of that morning, having drained all of her physical energy, and all of the mental power this lesson was taking, Rey just wants to drop where she sits and sleep.

Hux must have sensed this because he’s suddenly reaching forward and turning off her data pad. “You did well,” he says. Rey’s eyes fly to his face. Was that a compliment? “Now get some rest. I believe you have an early start in the morning.”

Rey just sits there. Now that their lessons are over, the general seems to return to a place Rey can’t quite read him from. She’s used to him being surly, snappish, and sometimes even friendly to a much, much more minimal degree. This General is aloof and detached, his mind seemingly far away from him. Without thinking, she reaches out to brush her mind against his. Then there’s a wall slamming up and she recoils.

Hux’s eyes travel very, very slowly from the work in front of him to her face. He says nothing. “You seemed… troubled,” is all she can manage, despite wanting desperately to apologize. Yet she wouldn’t. She had done nothing wrong. If anything, she had allowed herself to feel concern for a moment. Obviously it had backfired.

“If you want to know something, Rey, I suggest you asked me.”

He says her name so infrequently that the few times he does she snaps to attention. Perhaps that is his intended effect. It works. She stiffens her shoulders.

Fine, she would.

“Why are you really doing this?” she asks. It wasn’t the question she had wanted to ask. What she had wanted to ask was what’s wrong - but she knew he’d never tell her that.

“What are you referring to?” he asks, arching an eyebrow.

“This!” she says, and though she’s sure he knows she’s not referring to the ship, he gives her an imperceptible shrug.

“I’m in need of ships and weapons.”

Bastard.

“You know what I mean. I don’t mean Kuat. I mean me, General. I have nothing further to offer you. You can negotiate with the best of them, even I know that much about you. So why are you prolonging this? Why do you keep a prisoner around that you don’t need? Why not let me go? Why not just kill me?”

She’d never let him do the latter, of course. She’d kill him first, if need be. She’d kill anyone. Rey
was not above killing for survival, but only for survival, and that was the crux of the matter. He had made absolutely no attempt to endanger her life, and so Rey’s options were to urge him and Kylo Ren to reconsider letting her go, or to escape. Her escape attempts had not gone well. Instead of answering her, the unbearable man simply replies to her question with another.

“Why would I do that?” he sets his data pad down, all attention on her now.

Somehow that question brings to mind the absolute inconceivable nature of their exchange. Yet, here they are, and he is asking her that, and Rey knows he is very serious about it. When had they stopped fighting tooth and nail and started talking like normal people? When had Rey become comfortable enough to talk to her capturers like this instead of trying to run from them?

“Because you hate me.” She replies.

Again not what she had wanted to say.

“Why did I say that?” and now he’s the one that sounds completely incredulous. “If anything, you’re the one who very loudly and in no uncertain terms expressed that you hate me.”

He’s talking about that night she got drunk. Rey flushes but refuses to back down.

“You hate people like me,” she amends, though refuses to retract her former accusation. “People who fight for what’s right, rather than for order. People who won’t fall in step immediately when you command something. People who just want something tangible, like a home, and a family, rather than power and whatever it is you fight for. You hate people like me, and you have no use for me specifically, other than this silly Kuat thing that I am sure you could have accomplished well enough on your own, so why?”

The words spill out of her faster than she can tell herself to stop. But once they’re out, she can’t take them back. Those things had been bothering her for weeks now. She thinks she understands Kylo Ren’s motivation in all of this. She’s known it for as long as the bond in the back of her mind has existed. Ren wanted power, true, but it was a different kind of power. He also wanted Rey out of his head just as much as she wanted him out of hers, and that proved to be its own challenge. But the General? What of him?

Hux sits there, fingers languidly hovering over his data pad as if he’s forgotten about what he was previously doing, eyes trained on her face. The next words slip out of her in a murmur.

“Why have you been so gentle, when you have no reason to be?”

There.

That was the truth of it. The man had not been friendly, he had not been kind, but he had been gentle. In the face of their situation, when so many gory and cruel things could have happened to her, of how much pain he could have put her through even in the face of her unwavering determination to hate him and everything he stood for, he had been gentle. It was not a soft gentleness. She knew that much. It was not Finn’s warmth and Poe’s kindness, it was not Leia’s motherly affection. It wasn’t even Han’s begrudging offer to give her a job and a place to belong when she had known nothing but solitude for most of her life. But it was gentleness nonetheless. And unwavering patience. Outside of Finn, with whom she’d spent a handful of days, this had been the longest she’d spent around anybody else in the universe other than her desert and Unkar Plutt, who had never been patient nor gentle.

She expects no answer though, because this is bloody General Hux she’s talking to, and he gives her
none. Instead he murmurs, softly, for her ears only.

“Go to sleep, Rey. You have a long day ahead tomorrow.”

Rey sits there for a minute longer, daring him to force her, but he just watches her from under long eyelashes, a small frown marring his features. With a defeated sigh, Rey lifts herself out of her chair and leaves him behind. She wants to hate him for this evasion. For this and for so many other things. Yet, Rey realizes in defeat, she’s not entirely sure that she can anymore.

______________________

Why.


Hux took to his quarters after Rey’s departure, dropping everything in his wake, clothes, data pad, shoes. He’d sat on the edge of his bed and stared at the opposite wall for twenty minutes.

Now he sometimes catches hints of his red hair in the mirror, of the ticking clock on the wall behind him, but his thoughts are so far away from the small room that he barely notices. He’s starting to curse this trip. Between Rey of Jakku and Kylo Ren, it seemed they were both determined to strip Hux of every shred of certainty he had ever held for himself, and he couldn’t even outrun them. Not inside a ship this small.

First the man had made him question his loyalties, then the woman had forced him to question his actions. His feelings; something which made Hux entirely too uncomfortable to think about. Hux runs his fingers through his usually perfectly styled hair, leaving it all mussed and very un-general-like. He rubs at his face and then slowly sets about picking up after himself, hanging his jacket neatly, folding his trousers carefully and setting his shoes by the door. The data pad he places on the small one-seat table. He’s avoiding thinking, he knows. Cleaning and tidying up became crutches to him in moments like these. He couldn’t help himself. He straightens the bed for the second time, fluffs his pillow. He could let a crew officer do all this. He should. But he doesn’t. Instead he does it himself and avoids thinking. Except there’s only so much room and he knows he won’t be sleeping any time soon. So he lies down on his back and stares at the low ceiling instead.

Why.

That single word had been rattling around in his mind for the better part of an hour. After Rey walked away he’d been left staring at her retreating back, clenching and unclenching his jaw. He hadn’t stopped since.

Petulant child, demanding answers from him as though she had any right to them.

But she also had a point.

Why had he gone out of his way, gone through all this trouble, when his life could be so much easier without her in it? His fingers lace together over his chest and he makes it a point to blink every once in a while.

Snoke, of course, he answers himself and gives a self satisfied nod. He needs to get back in Snoke’s graces. Snoke has not revealed all of his playing cards, he knows — though Hux itches to find out what they are — but he has the same common goal as the Order. Except they had caught the creature in a lie, and that was something Hux could not set aside. They had caught him in a lie and their last
audience had only confirmed it.

Except..

Except not an hour prior to Rey’s arrival he himself had been the one to propose to Kylo Ren that perhaps the Knight was being used. Which uncomfortably brought about the next thought — if Kylo Ren could be used, and by Kylo’s own admission in his memory he had no doubt that he was — what kept Snoke from using him? He is a General, yes. He is young, and he had claimed his rank ruthlessly, climbing up through with nothing but cunning and an unwavering determination to prove to himself that he could continue his family’s legacy. Yet he was not Kylo Ren. His only gifts were his mind and his ruthlessness, and at both, Hux believed Snoke far excelled over him. He was, ultimately, replaceable.

Why do you keep a prisoner around that you do not need?

Hux was the first to agree he’d seen her as a pawn. A over a month and a half ago, and even now to a certain degree. Another chess piece that could move from pawn to powerful ally, something for him to move around in his schemes to achieve his goals. Was he too deep in now, as Ren believed as well? Was he a pawn on Snoke’s board? He’d wanted her as a powerful ally next to him when the time came, but what if it never did?

The thought sits uncomfortably in the pit of Hux’s stomach.

And why had he been so gentle with Rey? It surprised him that she had seen his treatment of her that way. It had surprised him even more when he had to admit to himself that she was right. Feeding, clothing, entertaining and teaching a person about diplomacy is not how prisoners of war are meant to be treated. At least not in this war.

Hux had been nothing short of callous in his treatment of anyone who got in his way in the past, yet this slip of a girl had found her way under his skin and promptly planted herself there. He had planned to play the long game and suddenly the long game had extended itself for an indefinite amount of time. Or at least until she managed to get away, and Hux had no doubts she would at least try. She’d made that perfectly clear from the get go. So why not just let her go? Why not kill her? With alarming clarity he realizes he would never be able to end her life; not like he’d threatened to in the past. So if things took the wrong turn - and Hux’s chest felt heavy at the idea with something fairly like panic - he’d let her go.

Wasn’t that what he had bargained for, anyway?

But her freedom wasn’t up to him. It was up to Ren. Would Ren let her go? She continually said she had nothing to offer, but he had seen a glimpse of what she could achieve, both in his own ship and marked permanently on Kylo’s face. She didn’t know her true strength, and her quick mind was a beautiful thing.

Why was he even so invested in this? He’d made so many promises to himself to not get entangled in this mess.

In the privacy of his room, Hux laughs. A low, throaty laugh. It reminds him of the few she’s been able to wrangle out of him.

Get a hold of yourself, you fool, he berates himself.

A few more heartbeats pass and Hux comes down until he’s breathing slowly. Then he makes up his mind, because going forward without a plan is not an option for a man like him. The ‘why’ stops
rattling in his brain. His reason would not change. He’d want her as an ally. But the reason behind the reason shifts, because now he’s determined to find out if his suspicions are true about the Supreme Leader, and he’ll need all the powerful allies he can get should everything fall apart. He’s worked too hard, for too long, to let it all collapse now.

Hux is not a pawn. He would not allow himself to be.

Kylo paces the minuscule room he’s in. It takes him exactly three steps in any given direction and he’s forced to turn around when he meets a wall, but he doesn’t stop, instead he turns and paces the other way.

He’d made a mistake in showing that memory to Hux.

No, he hadn’t made a mistake.

It needed to happen.

Except the man had looked at him with something so very full of pity that Kylo feels the need to rage. He didn’t need anyone’s pity.

He’d made a mistake in showing that memory to Hux.

But then he remembers the words that Hux had spoken, so similar to his father’s that the short hairs on the back of Kylo’s neck had stood up straight.

No, he hadn’t made a mistake. It needed to happen.

He paces.

The General needed to understand. He needed him to understand.

Three steps. Hit a wall.

Three steps. Decide it’s been a mistake.

Three steps. Change of heart.

The pacing’s only agitating him further and he finally gives up, yanking his tunic and undershirt off, kicking his boots to the side and falling onto the bed that is far too small for him. His legs dangle over the end of the mattress and he can only stretch his arms so far before his elbows are falling on the sides. He grunts. This would definitely be a long trip to Kuat.

How could he possibly let Rey go?

Would he be able to?

Do you really believe that keeping her caged like a common household pet will in any way convince her to see things your way?

Kylo grunts again, slamming his fists down on the stiff mattress. He knows the man was right. The man is always right. It infuriates Kylo. But what could he do about it then? Let her leave? That’s preposterous. Why he had agreed to this ridiculous expedition to Kuat is beyond him. He should
have demanded Hux stop immediately and kept Rey aboard the finalizer, where he could train her and show her that he was right. He should have intercepted when Hux had mentioned it to Snoke. He should have done something other than be led by the nose by Hux’s little plans.

He’d thought he could convince her before this was over, but he found himself only incensed about her outright refusal to cooperate. What had she learned from Luke anyway? Absolutely nothing. The Jedi had had a chance at something so much greater than his previous failures staring him right in the eye, begging him to take a chance, and he had turned it down. The fool. And so now Kylo had the exact same chance, except he was the one begging now. Like a child. Like a needy, clingy child. He hates himself for that.

What use is a student who does not want to learn? What good a powerful force wielder who does not want power? Kylo looks at his grandfather’s helmet, sitting on the small table anchored to the wall.

*Turn her. Make her yours, and you’ll be stronger than you could ever imagine.*

His jaw twitches and he grinds his molars so hard his jaw hurts. How could he ever accomplish such a thing?

Hux’s words hit him once more. The woman was strong headed and refused to bend, refused to be taught. Refused to see things his way and become powerful with him. How was he to complete his training that way? To fulfill his grandfather’s vision?

*Do you think, perhaps, that is exactly what the Supreme Leader is hoping for?*

His blankets bunch in his fists as he yanks, his arms shaking. Then he’s letting them fall as he takes in a deep breath. Is he being used? Yes, he knows. Somehow his father’s words rang true, and Hux had only but confirmed that suspicion by pointing out what Kylo had not wanted to see. He’d been so entangled in his desire to be more, to be something other than what he’d been all the way to this point — a weak leftover of his family’s gigantic galactic legacy, too weak to be more for their sake — that he knows he’d made himself blind to the glaring truth that he was disposable.

So much. He has sacrificed so much, given up so much, done so many things he would receive no forgiveness for. For what? To be disposed of? Kylo thinks of Rey, somewhere aboard this ship, and a sharp shard lodges itself in his spine. Would Rey be his replacement? He tries to imagine a world in which Rey is Snoke’s right hand as Kylo has been. He would salivate over that image if only he could see himself in it, too, but his mind has painted him a stark alternative reality.

He stares at his grandfather’s helmet. He doesn’t think he would oppose serving at Rey’s heel - a dangerous, dark thought - but he could not abide to be used and discarded after all he’d been through. Would the Supreme Leader lie to him? Once, he hadn’t thought that possible. Once, Snoke had been his kindred. Yet Hux had caught the Supreme Leader in a lie. It had been so small… making both men assume that he had known Rey had been captured all along. Such a small, passing remark to both men. Yet it had been a lie. A small lie, but from small lies bloom much bigger ones. He should get up now and go to her and cut her down, and be worthy of his title as Knight of Ren by removing anything and anyone trying to get in his way. But he won’t, because the force bond thrums and hurts on his end again at the thought and he realizes even if he could kill her, he never would. He’d lose a part of himself if he did, and he had already lost so much, sacrificed so much.

If Snoke thought him disposable, then perhaps letting her go would be the best thing that happened to both her and Kylo himself.

If the Supreme Leader doesn’t know everything, then he wouldn’t know it either when he believed that she had escaped. Kylo would know if she’s captured again. She had practically embedded
herself in his consciousness, unbudging no matter how hard he tried to dislodge her. He’d always know of her as long as she stayed alive. He could send her off to the unknown regions, to a place where she could never be found, and she’d gain her freedom and he’d gain… what? What would he gain?

Quiet. Peace. Or as much peace as a man like him could get.

Kylo stands up from his uncomfortably cramped little bed and throws a black shirt on. He forgoes his shoes for the sake of stealth as he pads out of his room and into the cold hallways of the ship. A few minutes later, he’s hesitating in front of the General’s room. He nearly turns around to leave. What a stupid idea this was. But then Kylo steels himself and knocks. There’s silence.

He throws out his awareness, looking for the man’s signature inside, and finds it where he knows a bed would be. Asleep, perhaps? He does turn to leave then. Except a few seconds later the door is hissing open and a disheveled general is staring back at him with a minute frown, looking much like Kylo himself: Hair in a state of total disarray, a sleeveless undershirt on, trousers wrinkled and no shoes on.

“Ren?” he asks, unbelieving.

To be fair, Kylo’s unbelieving that he’s even standing there facing Hux.

He gives a tiny shrug as explanation for the oddity, then steps forward.

“Could we talk?”

That’s the most civil he’s ever been in demanding anything from anyone. He had asked, this time. He blames it on exhaustion. Hux registers this too, because he’s standing aside and letting Kylo walk through. The door shuts and the two men are standing in ridiculously small quarters, forced to a few feet between them because there’s nowhere else to move. Fine. He’d make it quick.

“What is your plan, Hux?” he asks.

Hux doesn’t need to ask what he’s talking about.

“Let her go,” is all he says, and Kylo stomps on the desire to fling something with frustration. He crosses his arms in front of him instead. His arms nearly brush the General’s undershirt.

“Then what?” he asks, hoping for dear hope that this is not a colossal mistake.

“Let her go,” Hux tilts his head, “then let her come back on her own terms. We can’t do anything if she’s unwilling… but if she comes back, if she comes back then we have a chance.”

“Why?” He asks, tone particularly devoid of any emotion. Hux simply smiles. It’s a sad thing, a tired thing. A semblance of a smile. It’s the first he’s ever seen on the redhead’s face.

“Because we need her,” he murmurs.

We.

Kylo rolls that around his mouth, tasting the sound.

“We need her,” he replies, and it’s neither a question nor an assent. Yet he knows, deep down, that they do.

Kylo tries not to concentrate on what Hux could possibly ever need her for, because it would send
his mind down dangerous pathways, and that has never proven to be a good idea. And yet, part of him only hopes that she’ll disappear. That she’ll step out of his life the same way she’d stepped in, and cease to exist except for the glowing thread inside his awareness. He doesn’t say this to Hux; the man would have to learn how to deal with her absence when the time came for his machinations just as Kylo would need to learn to deal without her in his plans for something greater. This is a way to that mean.

Then Hux is speaking and the world somehow stops.

“Do you trust me?”

Those four words.

He blinks, unsure of whether he’s heard wrong.

Those four words have moved mountains.

Those four words have built and brought down empires.

Those four words could very well be the death of him.

Kylo nods.

Chapter End Notes

...I am so sorry.

Thank you to the lovely EjBlaKit for being made of everything sweet and wonderful and helping read over my things to make sure they still make sense after I've looked at them for too long. She's amazing. Go read her things. All of them.

Glossary:
Raider class corvette - the ship they're making the trip on, customized to allow Rey and Ren a training room.
Dejarik - A game like chess but with holographic creatures that beat each other to a pulp.
The Core Worlds
No one brings up the events of their first day aboard the corvette. In fact, they all walk on eggshells around each other for the next three days. Rey avoids Hux’s eyes and Kylo avoids her gaze and Hux seems to have decided that outside of lessons and meals, neither one of them exists. He’d lock himself up in his room or spend his time on the bridge, while Rey stayed in her own small quarters studying and Kylo Ren hogged the training room, constantly pounding away at the training dummies in lieu of slicing them down with a saber because they’d need them to train on. This arrangement suited them all fine, except that on a ship so small, they eventually would have to run into each other. Tensions had risen to an all time high.

Rey shows up to the training room at seven like Kylo had demanded to find him already warming up by himself against some poor stuffed dummy, as expected. She watches him from afar. He’s in a t-shirt and loose trousers and Rey has to do a double take. She’s so used to him in robes that she forgot that under all that black fabric there is skin and - to Rey’s frustrated surprise - a whole lot of corded muscle. He must have sensed her standing there, but refuses to look at her until she approaches. She refuses to look at him, period. After the time she’d pushed into his mind and seen that memory between him and General Hux, she’d made sure to keep her bodily distance from him at all times, engaging only when necessary.

She still flushes every time she thinks about it, had flushed when thinking of it in the shower, on Hux’s couch, while eating meals by herself quietly in the morning, while locked in her tiny room aboard this ship.

She berates herself.

It had been those fingers. Those beautiful, graceful fingers that she had taken to staring at so often when he wasn’t looking. The way he’d toy with his gloves when he thought no one was watching, the way he held onto his glass of wine, and how he held his cigarette to his lips like an open invitation, the way he uncurled them for her to take. Rey gulps and stares at Kylo as he punches into another practice dummy. And then Kylo’s neck… dotted with beauty marks and cradled in a bed of beautiful black hair. She gulps empty air again.
Who is she to wonder about it anyway? Rey may have become friendly with the General and polite if necessary with this towering giant in the training room, but that doesn’t give her any right to their private lives. Much like with Phasma, however, she’s starting to wonder if she’d been getting in the way of their… needs. Rey bites her tongue to keep from blushing like some sort of damn cliche, the sting pushing that blasted warmth away that had started creeping up her spine, resolute to keep from entangling herself with the love lives of her captors even as her body frustratingly responds every time she thinks of it.

They stand in silence for a couple of heartbeats before Rey starts feeling a little uncomfortable.

“So… training…” she begins.

Kylo nods silently while looking over her shoulder. She frowns. Gently she reaches out across the bond but meets nothing but silence.

“Today we’ll start on levitating,” he finally speaks.

Rey’s eyes widen. She’d use the Force?

“You mean you’re not teaching me to blow up things?”

She’s kidding, of course. They had spent so long on combat - mostly to tire her - and blocking, that she thought she’d never be taught how to use the Force. She’s far too excited to be snippy at the change. He doesn’t think she is, though.

His eyes land on her again and the look he gives her feels like getting dunked in ice water, making her good mood evaporate immediately.

“Alright,” she continues, “Levitating it is.”

He says nothing and walks to the middle of the room, taking up his usual sitting position. When she moves to sit in front of him Kylo shakes his head and pats the place next to him, far enough away to indicate that she isn’t to sit closer than necessary. Rey plops down with a few feet of space in between them, sighing in relief. Then something happens. He’s digging into his pocket and bringing out pebbles.

“Pebbles?” Rey asks, features scrunching up in confusion.

Kylo places them in a line in front of her.

“This is Jedi training,” his tone’s so sour when he says those words that she forces her eyes up to meet his. He continues, “But they’re good basics regardless. So we’ll start you here.”

He nods, more to himself than for her, and points at each one of them.

“Your goal is to levitate them one by one, then all at once, then you will stack them neatly atop each other.”

Rey figures this would be easy. She remembers pulling Luke’s lightsaber to her. These pebbles are tiny by comparison—

She spends the next three days staring murder at the little stones without success.

Every once in a while Rey throws her arms in the air in a huff, once her brain aches and her limbs hurt from kneeling and frustration simmers up to a boil. By the third day she lets out a frustrated
scream that makes Kylo smile despite himself. She catches it.

“So you do behave like a human every once in a while?” She barbs, far too annoyed at this whole exercise in futility to watch her tone.

He simply smiles wider but says nothing, pointing back at the pebbles.

When she crosses her arms and refuses to obey he narrows his eyes and she feels a small tendril of power, like a single long finger, wrapping around her jaw and directing her eyesight back to the pebbles. Their bond sparks to life and she inhales sharply. It’s been the first time in weeks that he’s opened up to her in any way. She opens up her own end without thinking, perhaps a little too eager.

*Go on, Rey. Concentrate.*

Rey huffs, and the tendril of Force around her jaw dissipates.

*Easy for you to say, Lord I can hold a bloody running ship in space with my damn mind.*

Kylo smirks and closes his eyes, turning back to his incessant meditation. The link goes quiet, though not entirely silent. This time she feels it like a warm buzz inside of her awareness.

That night she tells Hux all about it over lessons, entirely disregarding his attempts to bring her back to the technical bits of Resurgent-Class Star Destroyer ships, something she’d need to know if she was going to be demanding that the Kuati make them two new ships in a year. Rey loves ships. She had been looking forward to this lesson for days. But now she was here she couldn’t concentrate on ion cannons and hyperdrive scanners when she had spent three damn days out of her kriffing mind over pebbles.

She says as much in a very colorful manner.

Despite himself, Hux smiles as well, clearly amused if a little exasperated by her refusal to concentrate.

And that’s all it takes for them to slip back into something resembling normalcy, which is to say neither one of them is trying to kill each other or behave like the other two do not exist. Rey unknowingly managed to part the gloomy clouds with her little pebbles rant. Business returns to normal aboard the corvette on their way to Kuat, or, as normal as business can be… all things considered. At least for a handful of days.

*_______________________*

He could stop training her now that he’d made up his mind, he promises himself for days, but there are appearances to keep. The ship still has a crew, and crews had eyes and ears, and mouths that reported to Snoke. She would also need to know how to *truly* defend herself, from her own powers as well as others’, so he trains her.

Instead of beating each other to a pulp in order to tire her out, Kylo starts Rey on combat forms against a training dummy. He’d tried instructing her with a practice staff, holding it much like she would a single-source saber, but it became quickly apparent that she was far more comfortable with a long-staff. So he’d decided instead that he’d work with her strengths rather than against them. Once she got to build her own saber — *if* she got to build her own saber — it would have to be a double ended lightsaber. She could wield a regular saber, true, he had seen it with his own eyes on a snowy battlefield, but she shone like the sun when allowed to wield a staff.
The training was rigorous. He refused to make it easy on her, and they trained for hours on end until it was time for her lessons with Hux. He’d taught her the basics of Shii-Cho, but she’d caught up on the rudimentary motions quickly enough, the moves coming as second nature to her from years of wielding weapons to defend herself. So instead he put her through the paces starting with the second form, the Makashi form, but it quickly became apparent that it was ill suited for Rey’s fighting style, needing her weapon to be held in front of her most of the time with minimum swirl — not what she’d need for a double ended saber. Still, he put her through the paces.

Rey swung and slammed her weapon into the dummy as he circled both her and the stuffed victim, eyes looking for any inconsistencies. Whenever she’d do something wrong he’s push on her back with the butt of his staff to intercept her blow and force a stop, then step in to correct elbows, knees, and general posture. Again and again until she dripped with sweat, muscles straining in her lithe arms from exertion. Rey seemed to slip into a place of concentration that surprised him. Where she could never sit still for meditation, her mind immediately became a single pinprick when she concentrated with near tunnel vision. This would serve her well. She didn’t complain, and that only made it easier. At the end of the day he would fight her, forcing her to use the techniques she’d learned.

She manages a knock or two to any one of his limbs and he smiles.

She’s a quick learner. Her payment for her progress is getting to levitate more things, which she absolutely hates. Kylo smirks every time.

*So eager to fight.*

He guards his side of the bond and his thoughts carefully from her, ensuring that her concentration is unbroken, and it leaves him to think freely. To think freely *of* her.

He watches as she grunts against the stuffed dummy, pushing and hitting and generally ignoring him unless he steps in for corrections. When she brings her staff down he clanks his own against it and pushes her back slightly.

“Again. Elbow’s too high.”

She gives him a stern look but does it again. Again. Again. Until her elbow comes up just right, level with her shoulder. He gives a short, satisfied nod and allows her to continue. He tilts his head as he circles her again, watching her unwavering determination. He likes that about her. It serves her well. *It* serves her well.

“Again.”

This time he corrects a turn, pursing his lips as he steps behind her and his body wraps into hers, long arms bending when her elbows cradle into the crook of his arms, large hands engulfing her much smaller fists, slowly swirling the staff over her head and his. And it would be fine, except that she’s too close and he can feel her heart beating through her ribcage from exertion against his own chest, and her torso’s pressed into his a little too tightly when the staff swings in front of her. Her breathing’s coming in short, shallow puffs of air and his is all but non-existent by now. He guides her strike then steps back quickly, swallowing hard on empty air and clearing his throat.

Rey looks over her shoulder, having recovered far faster than he ever could, and arches an eyebrow at him. He knocks her elbow up with his staff.

“Concentrate.”

Rey grunts something at him and he feels her return to her tunnel vision concentration. He gives himself a small mental shake and takes a deep breath through gritted teeth. If she can focus then so
They go through the hours like this until it’s almost time for her to leave and meet Hux. He grabs her weapon from her hand and she surprisingly lets him, and it’s such a small amount of trust when so many days ago he would have had to pry it out of her cold, dead fingers. It’s something. He’ll take it. He drops the weapons off then drops into a sitting position for meditation, pulling out three small pebbles. Rey arches an eyebrow at him.

“I thought I already tried that?” she asks, petulant as ever.

“And you’ll try it again.”

Rey huffs and the bond sends him an undignified curse, angry at the inane exercise. He bites the inside of his cheek to keep from smiling. He seemed to be doing that an awful lot lately. She ambles towards him with a hip swaying gait that does uncomfortable things to his chest and he berates himself for staring, choosing instead to school his face to stony nonchalance when she reaches him and stares down at him from where she stands.

“So why?”

Kylo looks at her and arches an eyebrow. Anyone looking from the outside would only see a giant man kneeling before a petite girl as if she owned him. He pushes that thought out of his mind as well.

“Why do I have to do it again?” she asks, exasperated. He probes through the force bond only to feel her annoyance. Were he anyone else he’d roll his eyes. So impatient. Yet he couldn’t. Not when it took every ounce and drop of patience he had just to sit there and watch her, to be the teacher she needed, rather than what he wanted to be.

Because I said so.

Rey’s lips purse into a thin line until they’re nearly invisible.

That’s not a good enough reason, she fires back.

They’d slipped into this so easily over the last few days. Falling in and out of conversations started with words and continued on with a slight narrow of the eyes, an imperceptible frown, a tensing of limbs and fisting of fingers as they fired back through the bond instead.

Do you want to learn or don’t you?

Rey takes a deep breath and grits her teeth. There’s a small grumble in her throat that he feels like an echo in his own. He can feel her this way when her emotions spike. He remembers the thick dullness of drunkenness when her escape plan had backfired and she’d been consumed with anger, he remembers seeing through her eyes that night in Hux’s room when she’d woken up in a panic, that first flash of awareness when their bond had connected and her emotions had rioted. It felt like a disembodied part of him coursed through her limbs and returned to him to give him the feedback. He stares up at her, waiting for her reply.

With a grunt, she drops in front of him ungracefully and glares, but then she concentrates on the unmovling bits of stone. While her eyes concentrate on the pebbles he concentrates on her face.

“Close your eyes,” he orders. Her gaze flies up to him.
“What?”

“Do as you’re told.”

Rey’s fingers bunch on her trousers.

“That’s really annoying, you know that, right?” she hisses through clenched teeth. “You can’t just tell me to do things without telling me why!”

“I can do whatever I want, Rey, and you’ll listen if you want to learn,” he growls back, his leash on his patience immediately shortening. She’d try him and push him and defy him every step of the way and Kylo kept extending the leash he kept on his patience, but every once in a while it would snap back. He sighs, about to explain that she needs to look for it inside her. She can’t just stare her way into making the Force obey when—

For the hundredth time, Rey pushes further.

“No.”

His eyes narrow slightly and he has to fight his instinct to bunch up his fists where they rest on his lap.

He can’t.

“What did you say?”

“I said no.”

He inhales deeply as they fight through their usual staring match. Were she anyone else, he would have long taken to a lightsaber and ended this right here. Were she anyone else, and his grandfather’s words any different; were he anyone else…

He could sense how ready she was to move past this stage. She itched to move on, to start fighting with a saber, to get to the good part where she could lift and stop ships in space, throw people out of her path - preferably him - and freeze people like she’d seen him do on Takodana. She would also preferably do that to him as well. He resists the urge to smile. She doesn’t seem to realize these skills are strictly used by those who pledge themselves to the darkness. Oh, sure, Luke Skywalker could do it if his hand was forced. He had trained under Kylo’s grandfather for a while, after all, but Jedi felt themselves too saintly to use the Force to its full capacity. That’s how they’d all ended up dead.

He’d also felt a block on Rey. Those first few days when she’d cursed every constellation in space over three pebbles, he’d felt through their mutual bond that Rey struggled to grasp the Force. Oh, she’d accessed it plenty of times in situations of danger, in situations where she felt threatened and her feelings spiked again - something that drove him insane, he who thrived on raw feelings of anger and fear - but when she tried to access it willingly, she struggled. Her awareness refused to access the well of power unless she was in danger, and three pebbles posed no danger to her, no threat. He decides to test a theory.

Kylo throws his senses out and brushes her mind. Rey stiffens the same way she always does, but she’s used to his intrusions by now. He means her no harm, so she lets her walls drop, carefully guarding that which she does not want seen. He picks the most innocuous of memories.

Like a true child of the Light, her use of the Force had been used to protect and defend against intruders, with only just enough Force leaking through that her true powers lay dormant until she’d truly needed to fight for her life.
The force had aided her when she’d needed to protect herself on the desert as she unknowingly pushed her powers into her staff during skirmishes. She’d sent power to her limbs to help her run faster when her opponent was too big for her to take on. She’d tapped into it to escape from a stormtrooper guard. He looks as memories of their first encounters bubble up to the surface unbidden… she’d used it as a shield to defend against intruders. To defend against his intrusions. He’d met a wall back then. This time, when he pursues that memory, Rey’s shoulders quiver and—

He can feel her trying to instinctively access the Force. To protect. He feels the swell of power bubbling up inside of him like a phantom of her own. He probes further, urging that power to overflow its small pool inside of her, to break the dam, to attack rather than defend, his temple throbbing from the effort. Rey starts to panic and he breathes in deeply. He can’t tell her what he’s doing just yet, or she’ll simply relax and it’ll all be over. He pushes.

One push.

*Confusion.*

Another push.

*Resistance.*

Another push.

*Defiance.*

She’s so close. So close to letting the Force take over to defend and attack against the intrusion; to stop using it as shield and instead wield it as a weapon.

Kylo pushes one last time. Hard.

*Panic.*

A wall meets him like an iron curtain at the same time Rey throws up another set of walls and cuts their connection, his awareness returning to him like a tightly coiled spring flinging back.

She scrambles back.

The whole thing took less than a split second, and in that split second he’d gone from being a reluctantly welcomed presence in her mind to being shoved out. Yet for an exhaled breath that still lingered between them, he’d felt her block. That iron curtain so different from her usual defenses, the ones she’d learned from him. It was there, sitting quietly in the back of her mind. A silent centurion, guarding her access to the Force.

Rey tries to scramble to her feet but he’s faster. He grabs her wrist and yanks her back down, her knees landing hard between the spread of his own.

“We’re not done yet,” he states, trying his best to keep his voice unaffected.

She tries to yank her wrist out but his grasp is firm, strong, and her hand so much smaller than his. He engulfs her slender wrist like a giant cupping a flower. One hard squeeze would be all he’d need to snap her wrist in two. *Were she anyone else…*

Were she anyone else, he already would have. Kylo Ren was not a man to accept defiance, and Rey was nothing but defiance, but he had to see her through this. He had to see *himself* through this.
He holds her there and she glowers at him, tense and so very ready to kill him where he kneels.

“Stop doing that!” she screams into his face, twisting and writhing to try and get away from him.

“No,” he says, because what he wants to say is for her to stop fighting him, but then he tightens his hand around her wrist and she lets out a little whimper. She only struggles harder.

He holds his breath and tugs her wrist closer to him, and she yanks back so hard for a second he worries she might pop her shoulder out of its socket, but she only keeps twisting. Her other hand comes to wrap around his fist, trying helplessly to pry herself out of his grasp. He tightens his hold.

“Let. Me. Go.” She bites, yanking and tugging and starting to get physical when her hand stops trying to pry his fingers apart and instead bunches into a fist in his tunic, trying to push him away.

Then he feels it. A tiny pinprick in the back of her mind. The centurion guarding her starts inching slowly away as she slips into the defense, as her feelings start making waves rather than ripples. He smiles.

“Make me,” he replies languidly.

She bares her teeth and he only tightens. Just enough. His eyes go to her fingers, ensuring her blood’s still circulating, but his grip is relentless. His other hand flies up to grab her other hand and then she’s pinned under his grip, making it harder for her to try and remove him. Her hands bunch into fists, both to yank away and to jerk forward to try and connect a punch to his jaw. His legs fly out to pin hers under his knees until she can’t squeeze out by standing. They’re a mess of tight grips and bunched fists, of arms and elbows as he dominates her and she fights back.

“Fight me, Rey.” he murmurs, leaning closer. He brushes the tip of his nose lightly against hers, against his better judgement. Her breath tickles the corners of his mouth and he has to fight the urge to lean in closer, and he eggs her on to fight his hold over her with a hard gaze.

“Fight me.”

So she does.

One moment he’s got her pinned down with arms and legs and the next he’s flying across the room and slamming into a back wall with a sickening thud. His body falls forward from the impact where his back had bounced; he falls face first with barely enough time to brace himself to where he lands hard on his forearms. He can hear the echoes of her angry scream when she’d sent him flying bouncing around the room, ragged pants matching his own pained grunts. His head is down and his hair falls like a curtain around him, nose almost brushing the floor and Kylo grins. It unfurls slowly, starting at the corners of his mouth, spreading until all his teeth show. A satisfied, proud grin that’s hidden behind a cascade of black locks, one he’s glad she can’t see.

Oh, she may be made of Light, but she would never be a slave to it.

When he rights himself after a few panted breaths, trying to get his lungs to re-engage and schooling his expression from borderline giddy to something more befitting the moment, Rey’s eyes meet him wide and bright. He sucks in a breath and forces his mind to concentrate, stumbling his way back to her and resuming his kneeling position, resting his weight back on his calves. She tracks his every step, his every move, but doesn’t twitch, watching him silently until he’s settled back in front of her.

“Now, do it again,” he orders, bracing himself for being thrown across the room but fairly sure the
push won’t come.

Rey stares intently at him as if trying to make it happen but he remains in his seat, taking shallow
breaths and his muscles tense instinctively.

Nothing happens. Not this time. He’s not gripping onto her now.

She frowns.

“Why can’t I do it now?”

Her question is half a demand and half a small frustrated whine. Kylo brings up a hand and rubs at
the back of his head where it had bounced against the wall. The sting is like a shock of electricity to
his nervous system. There’s a tiny trickle of something damp on his scalp. He ignores it. He’d
suffered worse. His fingers come away sticky and red and Rey’s eyes glance down at his digits with
flashing panic, so he intercepts her thought before it can get started.

“You’re blocked,” he supplies. Her frown deepens.

“What?” she asks, incredulous.

“You’re blocked,” he repeats, “Your access to the Force, it’s blocked.”

“What?” she croaks again, but this time it’s not incredulity veiling her face but something like panic
and fear. And hurt.

“You’re only able to access it when your subconscious triggers you into fight or flight situations so
you can defend yourself. Without that variable, your attempts are useless.”

She stares at him, and the moment is suspended in time for just a breath, then—

—Rey’s expression sags, puzzle pieces slowly falling apart one by one from the whole, eyebrows
tilting up in the saddest look he’d ever seen on anyone’s face, lips going slightly slack, nostrils
flaring. He locks his eyes on her, frowning.

“Useless…” she repeats, pinning her gaze on the ground as she fights to avoid his. His head inches
down and forward a hair’s width to catch the tiny glint of dampness on her lashes.

“Rey,” he starts, but she takes in a deep, shuddering breath. Then she laughs. And if the universe
could come up with a bigger paradox it would be the sound of Rey’s pained laugh — throaty and
bell-like all at the same time, light and sad all in one. Her shoulders slump under her weight as she
throws her head back and her laugh mingles with a hitched-up rasp that quickly turns into a sob. She
brings up a hand and covers her eyes and despite her laughter Kylo’s chest constricts because she’s
crying, and her heart’s breaking into pieces in front of him and he doesn’t know why. He tries to
grab onto those pieces, collecting them as fast as they fall, but there’s too many, and Rey’s half-
laugh, half-sob turns into full crying as she repeats the word ‘Useless.’

Kylo inches forward, ready to pull her into his lap and curl up around her, to try and be the glue to
hold her together in that moment, when her hand comes down and she looks at him with quickly
reddening eyes.

She laughs again, and this time it’s nearly manic yet relieved.

“See? I told you. You’re wasting your time.”
He clamps his jaw shut and watches her intently with a frown.

“Rey,” he warns, but she puts up a hand to his chest when he inches closer.

“No, no. You just confirmed it for yourself. I’m useless. And why would you train a useless thing? A nobody?”

That’s it.

He snaps. The short leash he’d kept on his temper, that he’d been so proud to keep all these days, snaps with him.

With a growl he grabs her wrist again and pulls her closer, the one he’d so badly manhandled not that long ago, as the other grabs her chin and forces her to look at him. He nearly snarls the words into her face.

“Would you stop calling yourself a nobody?”

Rey purses her lips but the small little sob that rips through her throat belies any hardness she might have tried to display, and in that moment he remembers how young she is. Her face is that of a child. A small, breakable child. One he’d never been able to see in the face of the fierce woman she’d always been around him, one that looks so much like the face of a young raven haired boy once upon a time. He sighs and lets go of her hand, reaching up instead to rub his thumb on her cheek. His other hand releases her chin and inches to her temple, lightly removing stray little hairs and tucking them behind her ear. Her lower lip is trembling and Kylo realizes that this is the most vulnerable she’s ever allowed herself to be around him. Even more so than the first time she’d beat him to a pulp after he’d arrived on the Finalizer. Her eyes immediately move down, staring at her hands as though they hold every answer for her.

“Rey,” he murmurs softly, trying to keep the pleading edge from his voice that still comes out when he continues, “Rey, look at me.”

Her eyes rise reluctantly and she looks up at him through the tear stained spider webs of her lashes. So vulnerable and easy to break.

Were she anyone else, he’d use that to his advantage. Were she anyone else, he would have used that weakness against her by now…

He rubs his thumb on the hollow under her cheekbone, swallowing before he speaks, daring to ask too much and expecting little.

“Why do you keep doing that?”

Rey tenses and looks at him in the eye for the first time.

He shudders imperceptibly and whatever steel she’d pushed into her spine melts away under his hands, and he thinks no one’s ever asked her what she felt, or why, and that’s the only reason she’s relenting now. She sags into herself and whispers.
“No one wants useless things… Useless things are always left behind and abandoned like the old, useless ships rusting away in the desert,” she murmurs, her words jagged shards of glass cutting into him, “and a useless person is a nobody.”

“Rey,” he croaks, but he can’t allow himself another word.

Not when she’d taken a knife and twisted it inside of him and made him feel something he’d never felt before. Sympathy and pain for someone else.

He sits there and feels her sadness and anguish leaking through the bond into his mind, mingling with his own despair for her and his anger at the sudden revelation until it blends into toxic soup.

He tries to force himself to untangle himself from her feelings, to pull back and guard his own mind, but how could he? Their bond would not allow it. Not now. Kylo receives flashes of memories that she projects, too sad to notice she’s doing it. A ship flying away, leaving her behind. So many more ships watched from a distance in longing. A wall of thousands of knicks where she’d marked her endless days. An ugly creature telling her her hard work was worth less today than it had been yesterday as it handed her her meager scraps with a leer. Her feelings of not being good enough to earn a meal so many times. Of being useless. Being told no one was coming back for her. A collection of rejections and wounds that slowly threaten to chip away all of her spirit, and a girl too stubborn to let it consume her despite her want to curl up and just let it take her. A Jedi rejecting her…

He doesn’t pry into her memories, purposely blocking the barrage she’d unknowingly pushed his way, scared to see more. He can’t pry, because if he did, he’d force Hux to turn the kripping ship around and make it his personal goal to find every single person who ever made her feel useless, a nobody, and strike them down where they stood. The fact that he knows he would without hesitation scares him just as much. His strong little scavenger, reduced to this.

So instead of doing what he always does, which is to go on a manhunt and avenge every wrong-doing and every slight, he collects her by the shoulders into him and wraps his arms around her small frame, adjusting his knees to cradle her and cocoon her. She doesn’t want it. She doesn’t want pity.

So he gives her none. He simply sits there and holds her, and she doesn’t want it… but she gives into it anyway because it’s the closest thing to comfort and warmth she’s felt in months.

Rey.

Rey who would never let her guard slip. Rey who would never allow him even an inch. Rey slowly unspools and buries her face in the crook of his neck, and her chest rocks with silent crying so he holds her closer. And she whispers into his mind, just this once, and what is he to do but agree?

Alright.

Tomorrow she’ll bring her carefully crafted walls back up around herself and reject him, and he’ll let her. And he’ll let her leave when the time comes and he’ll end his association with her as he’d decided to, with only a soft glow in the back of his mind for a reminder that she was ever in his life, that and a memory of a constellation of freckles. But for now he feels the dampness of her tears on his neck, and she cries silently to herself until she’s spent and her breathing starts to come back down, and for now that’s enough. What is one small kindness for a girl who’d be leaving his life soon anyway?

He’d become soft. He would pay for that someday.
But that was not this day. This day, letting her cry herself to sleep on his shoulder is enough.

He collects her in his arms much like he had on Takodana and exists the training room. As he turns the corner he comes into view of a certain redhead. The man stops midstep and frowns, his eyes traveling from his face to Rey’s sleeping one then back.

“What happened?” Hux asks, voice curiously devoid of feeling, taking three long strides until he’s standing inches from where Rey rests in his arms. Kylo says nothing.

“I swear, Ren, if you—”

“If I what, General?” Kylo asks with an arched eyebrow, too emotionally spent to deal with this nonsense.

Hux senses it and clamps his mouth shut, giving him one hard look before his eyes travel back to Rey’s face. He watches as a minute amount of the eternal ice the man holds in his gaze melts, before he hardens again and forces himself to look up at Kylo’s face. Kylo shelves that look for later inspection.

“What happened?” Hux asks again in whispered words to keep from waking her, inspecting her quickly for wounds with a roving, clinical look.

Kylo hesitates.

It’s not his story to tell, and he almost says as much, then he remembers that Hux has dealt with this just as much if not more than he has, and how could he ask her to go through that again? Hux notes his ambivalence and narrows his eyes.

“What is it, Ren?” he asks, lips stiff.

Another heartbeat. Hux would never speak of it unless she was ready to, he knew.

“I now know why our scavenger seems to think she’s a nobody,” he murmurs, looking down at her.

Kylo carefully plants a fresh memory inside Hux’s mind like he had done their first day aboard this ship. He’d berate himself for sharing his mind so willingly with the General some other time. For now it is enough that Hux would understand as well. Before him, Hux is turning to granite by the second, the only tells of his anger that of his hands fisting at his sides and the man’s own version of a nervous tick. His left eye twitches once. Twice. The look he gives Rey is the closest thing to empathy Kylo’s ever seen on the General before that too is kept in check under a veil of perfect detachment, a skill Hux had honed over many years.

Hux turns on his heel and motions for Kylo to follow him, clipping at a hard pace towards Rey’s small room. He punches in the override code with hard jabs of his index finger, slamming his hand against the access pad before it beeps green, then stepping aside with stiff shoulders and jerky steps to let Kylo enter. There’s only just enough room for him to deposit her on the bed and step back. He watches her and Hux watches them from the door, and it’s the second time both men have loomed over her sleeping figure.

It wouldn’t be the last, but they had no way of knowing that in this moment, too busy with their own particular brands of anger at all the ways in which the universe had taken so much from her.

When she wakes hours later, Rey goes about her lessons with Hux with red rimmed eyes and her face set in stern concentration, and Kylo watches from the distance.
By the next morning, she’s back in the training room, her momentary lapse already stored away under lock and key in her mind as she’d rebuilt her walls like he knew she would, and he’s glad that their scavenger is back when she throws herself into training, because who is she if not someone who rises to the challenge? She wouldn’t let something like a silly block stop her, just like she had never let sand and loneliness swallow her, and he’s proud of her like he’s never been proud of anything; that renewed determination and her stubborn streak meant she wouldn’t allow herself to break, wouldn’t allow the world to break her. Luke Skywalker had been a fool to turn her down.

She doesn’t bring up their incident in the training room and he pushes their embrace into the darkest depths of his mind, and everything is as it should be when he guides her into Soresu, the third form. He would guide her through all five before this trip was over, and hope she’d remember enough once she’s on her own.

Chapter End Notes

I got peer pressured into posting by EjBlaKit. Whom I also have to thank for reading through this to make sure I didn't fuck it all up. lol. It's ok though, what are posting schedules anyway? I don't have one. Thursdays seem to work pretty well though.

NEWS, HOWEVER! originally I had this set at 30 chapters but the way this is going, we might end up going well over 30. I'm not sure how many that will be yet, but keep an eye out for that number to go up!

Comments + concrit always welcome and I love you all to pieces and COME HERE LET ME HUG YOU!
Trust

Chapter Summary

Here come dat boi, also known as Kylo Ren, stirring the shit pot.

Just a little bit of nonsensical fun. Because I can.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Back.

She can see him out of the corner of her eye, standing there in his usual black robed ensemble. When she shows up to her lessons with Hux that evening, after having cried her eyes out in Kylo Ren’s arms, the General is waiting for her with a giant mug of hot caf, loaded with cream like she’s always preferred it, and what looks like a sandwich on a plate. It’s definitely not regular food rations. She arches an eyebrow.

“Eat,” he instructs without looking up, eyes on his data pad and finger lazily scrolling through files she can’t quite read from where she stands.

She would fight him on this but sighs instead, plopping down on her seat unceremoniously, pulling the plate towards her and biting into the sandwich. Her eyes lift at the taste.

“What’s in this?” she asks, curiously looking at Hux only to see him smile lightly. His eyes are still glued on his screen and he totally ignores her question, so she follows up with another question.

“Where did you get this?”

She could tell there was meat in there, real meat, and some extravagantly rich cheese over buttery toasted bread. Certainly not regular ship rations. Hux shrugs, glancing up at her once before returning to his work.

“They’re from one of crates being delivered to the Kuati,” He offers, looking at her and quickly amending when she looks ready to balk, “There’s plenty more, they won’t miss a few bits of it.”

Her brows hit her hairline and she blinks rapidly to avoid getting teary at yet another one of Hux’s small kindnesses. He’d found her comfort food from the gifts he’d intended to deliver. No one had ever gone out of their way to do that for her. No one had also held her while she cried her heart out. Rey chances a glance out of the corner of her eye only to find Kylo sitting regally on a chair staring out into space from the small paneled window, so she lowers her head with a muttered thank you to the General and bites down into her sandwich.

Hux is watching her intently from under long lashes. She can feel them pressing into her. Yet every time she looks up his eyes fly right back to the screen of his data pad. Rey bites back a sigh. She’s too tired to fight him or anyone else in that moment. Let him stare. She takes her time with her food and he’s surprisingly happy to let her take it, patiently and silently minding his work, even if it’s cut an hour into their lessons already and she’s nursing her mug of caf for all it’s worth. Kylo is still quietly sitting by the observation window, plainly ignoring them both, though she sometimes feels
pangs of something like rage emanating through the bond before he quickly gets a hold of it and shuts it down. She carefully keeps her eyes either on her food or ahead of her. Kylo Ren had already seen far more than she was willing to admit having shared with anyone; she didn’t want him seeing the rims of her reddened eyes, or the way her shoulders slumped over her drink.

Rey doesn’t want to be sitting there eating and drinking. She wanted to crawl under her bed in her tiny room and never come out. But she had made a bargain and she had her end of it to uphold, so here she sits with General Hux instead, who keeps looking at her curiously. His gaze keeps flipping from his version of warm and kind to icy cold every time his eyes travel from her face to somewhere far away behind her head — as if remembering something distasteful — only to flick back to her and defrost into their usual crystalline blue calm. The second one is always a look reserved for her, she’d noticed. Rey frowns and he offers her a small smile.

“How was it?” he asks.

She knows he’s diverting her from asking him about the sudden shifts in mood, smart intuitive man that he is, and she sighs into her mug. She’s too tired to make the effort to even try.

“It was great, thank you. You didn’t have to.”

“You looked like you could use it,” is all he gives her, before sliding his data pad to the middle of the table. “Ready to start?”

Rey stares at the contents of her mug, mostly drained now, inspecting the small amounts of brown caf swirling at the edges of the otherwise creamy drink.

“Rey?”

His voice cuts through her thoughts and she looks up with a sigh.

“Yeah, I’m ready.”

Hux purses his lips for a moment then gives a curt nod, and Rey decides it’s time to put the events of the last twenty four hours behind as if they never happened.

_____________________

Forward.

Rey throws herself into training like she’d never tried before, fighting now not against the external annoyance that is Kylo Ren, but the internal knowledge that she now had one more roadblock to overcome. That had been the story of her life, one kriffing challenge after another, and her mind immediately did what it always does best: find the best way to beat whatever tried to hold her back.

Ren thankfully kept his thoughts to himself regarding her crying episode, demanding more effort from her now that she showed a willingness to truly work with him this time. She begrudgingly found herself respecting him for the effort he made to give her her personal space regarding her emotional breakdown, never asking, never pushing, and treating her training with clinical professionalism. She also had to begrudgingly admit he was a good teacher.

He puts her through combat forms and when she grumbles one day that it’s useless to know these forms without actually wielding a lightsaber, he whacks her wrist and tells her she’ll get a lightsaber when she earns it. Rey growls, but it only makes her work harder. She knows Kylo’s still in
possession of Luke’s old saber, the one that the Jedi had refused to pick up. She asks him as much, he doesn’t answer. Rey sighs and continues training. Even if he had it with him, she doubts she’d get to see it. Still, learning combat forms keeps her from agonizing about other things — like what she’s going to do if or when she finally breaks free, and why every time she thinks about it in front of either one of these two men, unease curls around her ribcage and squeezes. So she lets Kylo Ren impart his lessons and soaks them up, and in a matter of days things start turning a little less antagonistic; enough for her to finally relax a hair.

By the seventh night aboard the ship Rey believes space has opened and the Maker had decided to play a prank when just as she and the General are sitting down to dinner — relatively small portions of ship rations, meant to be filling rather than full of flavor — Kylo shows up to the large round table. Being Ren and needing zero permission to do anything, he plops himself down until all three of them are sitting in the semblance of a triangle.

Rey stops and stares at him when he starts digging into his ration, head bent low over his quiet chewing. Hux keeps eating, not even bothering to acknowledge Kylo’s presence.

She doesn’t know why she says the next words when she says them. In fact, she hasn’t known why she’s said anything the last four days, after that incident in the training room. It’s ridiculous and she’s painfully aware of it but the words come any way.

“So you do eat! I knew it. You couldn’t possibly be undead.”

Kylo stops mid bite and Hux chokes on his mouthful.

“What?” Kylo finally croaks after managing to swallow his own food. His brows lift up to his hairline.

Rey should shut up right now, her brain is telling her to shut up right now. She doesn’t.

“This is the first time I’ve ever seen you eat anything. I was starting to believe you ran on air and the tears of your enemies.”

There’s an even more pronounced choking sound coming from Hux and both Kylo and Rey turn to look at the General as he starts turning a rather unflattering shade of red. Hux thumps his chest lightly, delicately, a couple of times then grabs his glass of water and downs one third of it in one gulp. Then something like a chuckle escapes him, low and breathy. Rey’s looking at him with amusement and Kylo’s sitting like a stone, but Hux keeps his head down, resolute to mind his own business as he resumes eating. Kylo returns his attention to Rey.

“Are you offering your tears, scavenger?” he teases, eyes narrowed, and to Rey this feels like a warped version of her interactions with Finn, and talk of tears reminds her of their episode in the training room. Suddenly uncomfortable, she lowers her gaze and returns to her food.

This is not a Kylo Ren she’s used to. She’s used to moody, to volatile, to easily irritable Kylo Ren; she’s used to the stories about his infamous temper tantrums. She’s not used to Kylo Ren teasing her, looking so much younger than his years, and when he leans forward like that she gets a peek at his neck and her cheeks flush because all she can think of are the general’s long fingers around it—

He gives her a cautious look and immediately drops the subject, sensing her distress through the bond and perhaps a bit more, and they sit around the table in silence for a while. Rey bites the inside of her cheek, hoping he hadn’t seen her fantasizing about that one intimate moment between the
men. Except the universe’s joke isn’t done yet. No, it’s only starting when Kylo speaks.

Rey gets the sense that he’s spent so much time in silence, meditating or avoiding her and the General outside of training — or perhaps trying to change the subject? — and he just can’t help himself when he suddenly lets out a barely audible, gruff,

“So, Millicent.”

Rey looks up. Hux looks up. Kylo’s looking at her.

“The tabby? What about her?”

“She despises him,” Hux states matter of factly around his fork, a small self satisfied smirk surfacing. Obviously Hux enjoys that even his cat hates Ren. Rey shakes her head. This whole thing is surreal.

“She’s kept me company,” Rey answers before she murmurs to herself, “I hope she’s okay.”

“She’s perfectly fine, I assure you. Phasma will take good care of her,” Hux responds.

Then there’s a repeat of their time standing at the hangars as Rey’s ears start turning red, hoping the men don’t notice. Hux’s eyes don’t miss a thing, though, and Kylo’s lips are twisting hard, trying to bite his tongue and keep silent.

“Are you alright?” Hux asks, the food on his fork completely forgotten.

And then Kylo’s guffawing — a throaty, deep, unused sound — and Hux is looking at him like he’d grown a second head. Which really, he might have, because since when does Kylo Ren guffaw? Hux zeroes in on the fact that Rey’s face has gone even redder. She’s too mortified about the whole Phasma situation to think about the fact that she’s broken Kylo Ren and he wouldn’t stop laughing, or that he’d instigated the whole conversation by bringing up the cat.

“Will you please say something, Rey?” Hux speaks with a tone that says he’s worried and about to lose his patience all at the same time. “And you, what has gotten into you, Ren?”

Rey gathers all the courage she can and wraps it around herself like a security blanket.

“I, uh… I just…” she starts, because was it just her or had the common room area suddenly become really small and really hot? “I just…”

Kylo’s trying to rein in his chuckling, failing to contain it despite his best efforts, and it’s making it really hard for her to concentrate on the next words, so she rushes through them.

“Well, when Phasma came to take me to training I noticed she had access to your room with her biometrics and I thought that perhaps you two — well, that perhaps I had been intruding too long and you two needed… space… and I had been denying it because I know men have their needs and —”

Kylo’s laugh finally booms, unable to be contained. Rey’s eyes travel to him, and a certain image of long fingers against a pale throat blooms in her awareness. She blushes harder. Kylo seems to be too wrapped up in his own chuckling to pluck that one from her brain, for which she’s thankful.

Hux is turning a few shades of tomato red.

“You… thought what?” he chokes out. There’s no food obstructing his airways this time.

She wants the ship to open up and swallow her then. She wants to disappear into the ether and never
be seen again by either man in front of her. In her fluster, she’d accidentally let her guard slip and Kylo had seen absolutely every single filthy image Rey had concocted in her mind over the last few weeks. There’s a small damp trail along his eyelashes and she’s suddenly drowning in her shame.

“I know men have their needs,” she repeats the explanation with conviction, but her voice is lower and meeker than she wanted it to be and she avoids looking at them and bringing up even more reasons to embarrass herself.

“Would you stop laughing, Lord Ren? Control yourself,” Hux snaps at Kylo, which seems to only send him into yet another fit of low, if barely more restrained snickering. Once he’s going he sure doesn’t seem to be able to stop.

This is way more than Rey had signed up for so she quietly gathers the items on her tray and gets up to leave.

“Sit down.” Hux’s voice booms, leaving no room for argument.

She glares at him but she’s far too gone in her trail of shame to be able to fight him. She drops into her chair with an undignified huff. Hux takes in a deep breath, probably to compose himself; this seems to help Kylo, who’s no longer laughing uncontrollably, though his eyes are bright and a small laugh-like hiccup escapes every once in a while. She still can’t believe Kylo had actually laughed at anything.

This whole thing is so surreal.

“Rey, why would you think Phasma and I need… space… ?” He sounds out the last word carefully, trying his best to make it absolutely neutral.

Rey fidgets. She really does not want to be there right now.

“Well, she has access to your rooms and I just thought…”

Kylo’s watching this with more interest than Rey’s ever seen displayed on his face and her cheeks turn red. Why did she need an audience for this?

Yes, Rey, comes from the bond, why do Hux and the Captain need space? Will you tell him?

Rey glares at Kylo.

Or should I tell him about how you’ve pictured Hux with a helmeted Phasma in the shower?

The thoughts Kylo’s sending through the bond are positively lewd. He’s laughing at her because Rey doesn’t know what Phasma looks like, so she’d imagined a naked woman with a chrome helmet on. Kylo looks about to bust out in laughter again. She groans.

“Would you two stop that?” Hux’s irritation cuts through them both. Kylo’s open face immediately shuts off as he realizes that Hux knows a bit more than he should. He frowns at Rey.

You told him?

Rey gives him another glare for good measure.

Why wouldn’t I? You certainly weren’t willing to talk to me about it.

“Stop it,” Hux reiterates, and both force sensitives look at him.
“How much do you know?” Kylo asks, suddenly defensive. He’s left the bond open and is shoving all of it towards Rey. He’s displeased that Hux knows this.

It’s another weakness to exploit, in Kylo’s mind. Rey isn’t sure whether to feel flattered or hurt that she’s thought of as a weakness. Kylo’s eyes flicker to her for a second in response, but then he’s looking back at Hux, jaw set.

“Enough to know that you two are having a conversation about me and excluding me from it, which I would like to remind you is awfully rude of you. I don’t care about what special powers you two have but please don’t include me in them.”

Kylo says nothing and Rey fidgets, feeling the air turning sour on a dime. Then Kylo seems to remember something and closes the bond to her, leaving her near gaping at the void left behind so abruptly. He looks at her before nodding to Hux.

“It won’t happen again,” Rey rushes to defend. Hux gives them a long look, and Rey feels as though he’s looking right through her, then seems content enough to take it. He nods and Rey relaxes minimally.

“There is nothing between Captain Phasma and I. She cares for Millicent,” he explains, “I rarely have time to be in my quarters and she’ll drop by and feed the tabby for me. She had not done so while you were there simply because, well, you were there. Caring for her.”

Oh.

Oh.

Of course. How could she be so stupid? She blushes hard and bites her cheek in an effort to make it go away.

“So you’re…friends?” she asks, but Hux is starting to close off again and she lets the subject drop. The General’s friendships are no concern of hers. Rey’s glad for this new information, though, and likes Phasma the more for it. But then he gives her a tiny nod and the air in the room clears once more.

A small alarm goes off.

Time for lessons.

Kylo Ren takes that as his cue to excuse himself and return to his own training, while Rey and Hux set their trays aside for a crew member to remove, igniting their data pads at the same time. There is not a single mention of Phasma and the tabby again for the duration of their trip to Kuat.

The more time she spends trying to access the Force -- even through her kriffing block -- the more she manages to coax it out in battle, the stronger the bond grows. Kylo is now an unshakeable presence in her mind, not a hum but a solid form sitting in the back of her awareness the more she explores her power.

The rest of the trip goes on similarly to their first dinner together, except small changes start to take place. General Hux shows up to their training session one morning after having nothing else to do, silently leaning against the doorframe and watching as Rey and Kylo practice her combat forms.
before she’s tired enough to attempt to meditate and levitate pebbles. Kylo refuses to let her get
distracted with the new visitor by throwing her with the Force when her attention shifts. She falls
with a painful grunt as Kylo extends his arm to help her rise. She takes it begrudgingly, lets him hoist
her up like he would a feather. Lesson learned. She does not allow her concentration to waver the
rest of the session. By the time Rey looks at the door, General Hux has quietly slipped away.

Kylo in turn starts regularly showing up to dinner time, all three of them eating quietly, sometimes
answering her questions about Kuat and sometimes quizzing her along with Hux. Eventually he
starts showing up for lessons as well, sitting quietly and observing while Hux puts her through the
mental wringer.

In the time between that first embarrassing dinner and the third day afterwards, Hux has braved the
entrance to the training room and comes inside, sitting himself gingerly on one of the benches and
propping a data pad on his knee, no doubt working endlessly. His eyes lift every once in a while to a
snarl from Rey or a grunt from Kylo as they trade blows during her combat forms practice. These
visits become a daily routine.

Kylo’s presence becomes as integral to her lessons as Hux’s tutelage is. He refuses to help her via the
bond under strict instructions from Hux, who despises anyone who cheats, and will sometimes even
help with providing scenarios under which Rey has to think quickly on her feet should negotiations
go wrong. It becomes a game she enjoys, testing the limits of both men and letting them test her as
the days go on.

Sometime between day seven and day nine of their trip Rey finally manages to levitate her pebbles,
and only through excruciating hardship, having to circumvent her block by having Kylo instigate
her, but it’s something. There’s a celebration that night. It’s a one sided celebration, with Rey
drinking some wine that the General had managed to stock on board as a gift to the Kuati — they
wouldn’t miss a bottle, she tells him, and he rolls his eyes — and Rey’s the only one drinking while
the men watch her curiously, carrying on their own hushed conversations. She doesn’t remember
much of that night, but she doesn’t mind, somehow ending up in her quarters safely and still clothed.
She had celebrated like she’d seen people celebrate on Jakku and it felt kriffing good to achieve
something for once in the training room. A few days after that she beats one of Kylo’s scenarios,
earning her a round of compliments from both men that she didn’t really think they were ever
capable of uttering. She preens.

“And if that doesn’t work?” Hux asks, trying to get her back on task.

Rey shrugs. “Then we’ll set them all on fire and hightail it out of there.”

The answer is so unlike her that both men stare, then chuckle, and it feels so very good.

“Careful, girl,” Kylo says with a smirk, “You’re starting to sound like a dark sider.”

Rey doesn’t mind being called girl for once.

The morning after, during combat, Rey had finally won, though she’d cheated her way into that
victory. Kylo Ren had come at her, all bulk and wide shoulders and strong arms to try and grab her
by the waist to spin, except she’d learned how to snake her arm around his until she’d had the upper
hand, turning herself as if to allow him to grab before hoisting him over her shoulder with
momentum and sending him flying. He’d fallen on the matted floor with a loud grunt.

Then Rey’s turning to a smirking Hux with arms fisted in front of her, doing a small sidestep back
and forth as she throws out a challenge.
“Come on, General. I’m on a roll here. Come fight me!”

She’s grinning like an idiot and Hux’s smirk hasn’t left his face, and she’s on top of the world until Kylo knocks her knees from under her with his weapon and she’s the one crumbling to the floor in a heap.

“Never turn your back on your enemy,” Kylo growls. He hoists her up again and they continue, Hux returning to his work, though she notices from the corner of her eye that the little smile never leaves his face.

But even as the days go by Rey becomes more and more lethargic. She’s been dreaming. She had never really remembered her dreams before. Daydreams, sure, but not dreams like these. They’re nightmares. The crew is four days out from reaching their final location and Rey’s starting to feel like a caged animal inside the ship. During waking hours she trains, exhausts her body, she learns, exhausts her mind, then dreams such horrible things that she’s slowly starting to exhaust her soul. On the twelfth night, she wakes up with a jerk and a scream.

Sometimes in the dreams desert sand and sea water would mix into a slush, and she’d sink while a voice told her sadly that he couldn’t help her. She’d suffocate in the darkness.

Other times there were the screams of a little boy. Rey looked and looked, but her eyes were cloaked in red and she couldn’t even see her hands no matter how hard she tried to rub the red away. The screams would continue until she woke.

And yet other instances she was slipping inside a dark cavernous room with a creature she couldn’t quite place, being told she wasn’t good enough.

The men must have noticed; next thing she knows she’s told she’s being forced to take a day to relax and recuperate, no if or buts about it. Not that she’d ever fight it. She spends the morning sleeping and manages to make it out of her quarters by noon, according to the clock, though who knows what time it really is when she’s been stuck in hyperspace for almost two weeks now.

She grabs something to eat under the stern gazes of Hux and Ren before slowly making her way back to her quarters and collapsing again. Thankfully this time, no dreams come.

Hux and Kylo are sitting in the common room staring at each other after Rey takes her leave, returning to her rooms. They’d both noticed how she’d been slipping the last few days and Hux’s concern is mounting. She had repeatedly reassured them that she was not ill, but he’s starting to believe otherwise.

“We will get her to a medical facility as soon as we land,” Hux says.

Kylo shakes his head, making Hux frown.

“What?” he asks.

“She’s not sleeping well,” Kylo responds, his fingers toying with a small loose thread from his sleeve close to his thumb.

They had been quietly discussing the potential issues they could encounter with their new plan to allow Rey to leave when she had dragged herself through the doors, grabbed a small ration and eaten
about a third of it before returning to her quarters. Hux narrows his eyes.

“She could still be ill,” he states, not ready to drop this. The last thing he needed was for Rey to get sick.

“She’s not, General,” Kylo retorts again with something like irritation, “She can’t sleep because she’s having nightmares.”

Hux narrows his eyes.

“How do you know that?” he asks.

Then Kylo’s hesitating for a moment.

“Because they’re mine… her nightmares. They’re bleeding through the… Force bond… when both our guards are lowered. Now that she’s stronger inside of my mind, her subconscious and mine start bleeding into each other. It’s not like I can stop it, short of swearing off sleep permanently.”

Hux thinks the man has actually considered that option by the set of his lips. He takes in the dark circles under Ren’s eyes, the hollowness to his cheeks. The knight hadn’t seen proper rest in a while. Hux guesses neither of them had, and now Rey was adding to that count. He words his next query carefully.

“Have you told her?”

Kylo’s head shake is nearly imperceptible. He says nothing, but Hux gets a sense that he can’t quite bring himself to.

“Will you go to her?” Kylo murmurs in a rush.

“What?” Hux stares at the man before him. He’s rarely taken aback, but those words certainly do it.

“When she wakes… you know it was loud enough for us to hear it last night, since her room’s in the middle. Will you go to her?”

Hux considers the words that must come next.

“Why would I do that, Ren? She’s not my charge, after all.”

Kylo stares blankly at him, unblinking, calling him out on that lie. Rey has been Hux’s charge just as much as she’s been Kylo’s since day one, if not more so. She was their responsibility. Their scavenger to protect. After those memories Kylo had shared of her total breakdown in the training room, something had passed between the two of them like a whisper on a soft breeze, unspoken but agreed to nonetheless. Hux knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that Kylo himself would gladly go to her this very moment if she would accept him. He thinks back to the man setting her in Hux’s bed what seems like eons ago, with something so very close to softness Hux had thought he had imagined it. He thinks back to the man setting her down once more in that tiny cramped space they called a room aboard this ship.

“She trusts you,” Kylo says, words low, yet Hux’s nostrils flare at this because it brings up a small amount of hope he’d been trying to stomp down on for a long while now.

“You might be exaggerating,” he provides, trying to call the Knight back down to reality. Kylo shakes his head then pushes his index finger to his temple.
“I can read her just about as well as she reads me. She trusts you, even if she’s not willing to admit it to herself.”

They sit in silence for a moment longer before Kylo pushes himself off his seat and departs.

That night, when the screams float down the hall to Hux, he silently pads out of the room and follows them until he’s standing at Rey’s door. Ren is nowhere to be seen.

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There’s a knock on the door and Rey frowns. She looks at the clock, it reads two in the morning. Her eyes fly back to the door but she refuses to move until another knock comes.

“Rey?”

Her frown deepens. Slowly Rey lifts her blanket from where it’s pooled on her lap as she had jolted awake, then steps out of the small bed and presses her hand to the access pad. The door hisses open softly and standing on the other side is the General. He looks so different she would nearly mistake him for someone else if not for the shock of red hair gracing his head, messy and falling over his ears, a few locks crossing his brow. There’s a small shadow of an unshaved beard starting to show and he’s wearing a quarter sleeve navy blue cotton shirt over black sweatpants. Rey’s tired mind is surprised that the man has any color in his wardrobe. Or that he even dresses in anything other than a uniform kept sharp as a tack.

“General,” she offers tiredly. “What can I do for you?”

He hesitates then, shifts his weight on bare feet once before leaning forward and speaking in a low voice.

“I heard you scream.”

Rey resists the urge to bite her lip. “I’m sorry. Did I wake you?”

Hux shakes his head very lightly then looks over her shoulder into her small room before settling his eyes on her.

“Are you alright? Do you need company?”

“I—” she starts, then stops abruptly.

No, she should say.

No, she didn’t need anything.

She didn’t need anybody, much less someone like General Hux.

She had not needed anybody for fifteen years, left to her own devices inside the corpse of an AT-AT. She could handle a few nights in a room aboard a ship and some harmless dreams. Yet perhaps it is the fact that she hasn’t had anybody ask her if she’s alright for fifteen years that makes Rey give him a long, considering glance. He’s staring at her with a carefully crafted vacant look that betrays nothing, leaning back on his frame as if he’s fully expecting her to turn him down.

Slowly, she steps aside to let him enter. Hux hesitates for a moment before walking in and turning to look at her. The room gives her very little space to move without bumping into him, so she stays
where she is once the door shuts and locks them both in.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” he asks once more.

Rey sighs, “I haven’t been sleeping well.”

“I could tell,” he replies.

They stand there looking at each other without really looking at each other until the General breaks the quiet by slowly walking to her bed. Rey’s alarms immediately start going off.

“What’re you doing?” she demands.

He turns and arches an eyebrow at her but stays silent while he sits at the head of the bed, back to the wall and legs sticking out over the side, ankles crossed, then he pats the open space beside him. Rey frowns.

“Come now, Rey; I promise you, I’d never sink so low as to do anything you don’t want from me.”

Rey bites her lip and he folds his hands on his lap, looking at her expectantly.

And she’s so tired.

She finally admits to herself how exhausted she is when she notices how Hux waits for her to jump in and make herself comfortable, and kriff if the idea of not sleeping alone doesn’t seem so appealing in that moment, after years of nothing but sleeping alone.

She makes up her mind.

Slowly, hesitantly, she crawls up into the bed. Hux doesn’t move, trailing her with his eyes. She sits next to him and they spend a few minutes in silence, looking at each other in the dim glow of the orange safety light set over the head of the bed. Rey looks at him and the General looks at her and the silence stretches comfortably as it always had between them. It is this that finally breaks her. Rey scoots down the mattress and gingerly lowers herself down until she’s able to carefully rest her head on his thighs. Her eyes are wide open and she’s barely breathing, gaze pinned on the wall, a part of her screaming for her to stop because what on earth is she doing, but her exhaustion wins and she lets her head rest fully in the warmth cradling her. Even more careful than her own movements are the General’s. For a second Rey wonders if he’ll stand up and leave, having decided this was a stupid idea, but then she feels his fingers slowly, tenderly carding through her hair, another hand falling on her shoulder, his thumb massaging careful, soft circles into her skin. Her eyes fall closed of their own volition.

She takes a heartbeat to cherish the feeling. In that moment her walls slowly collapse and she feels another awareness inside her mind. He’s awake. He rarely seems to sleep. He’s awake and he’s paying attention, and she knows he’s feeling a ghost of a touch in his hair the same way she sometimes feels a ghost of a touch in hers when he runs his fingers through his dark locks. In her half-awake mental state she sends the sensations to him through their bond and hopes that he’ll accept them. He does, because next thing she knows she’s hearing his voice in her mind, a soothing whisper of peace.

Sleep well, little scavenger.

Rey sighs as Hux coaxes her to relax into his touch and Kylo lulls her to dreamless sleep with peace and quiet.
For the first time in days, she rests.

Beautiful, quiet sleep.

It only lasts so long, though.

By the time she wakes up at her usual six in the morning the General has long left her bed. She rubs sleep from her eyes. It’s the thirteenth day and a voice comes from the head speaker informing all passengers that they are six hours out from exiting hyperspace, Kuat their next destination.

She sits up with a jerk and stares at the speaker.

It was time.

She meets the General for a last debriefing and he makes no mention of the previous night so she doesn’t either. Kylo Ren comes around soon after breakfast, and the next four and a half hours are spent planning, rehashing information, preparing their belongings to be loaded onto the small craft Rey and her companions would be flying into Kuat’s atmosphere, and generally going over every last detail until they’d all repeated them ad nauseam. Rey looks around and feels a small amount of regret that they had arrived. The bubble they had formed while inside this ship in the middle of hyperspace, where they could not be reached, had pushed them to spend time together. It had even been an enjoyable experience for her, if rocky in places. Now the bubble was about to burst as she cloaked herself with the knowledge that once in Kuat, the men before her were still a General of the First Order and a Knight of Ren, and she a prisoner who is gambling for her freedom.

Rey sighs. She refused to feel regret.

She’d focus on the freedom instead. Her mind wanders to all the places she can think of, names of planets she’d learned but had never seen, and her thoughts flood with the faces of her friends. She’d see them again. Of that, she was certain.

The trip down to Kuat’s surface goes in a blink. The comm link beeps to life, a voice demanding for all passengers to state their visit’s purpose as well as recite back the code sequences to their visiting permits. Rey knew it had cost Hux a pretty penny to be able to land on the planet rather than do their dealings aboard the ship rings of Kuat Drive Yards surrounding the planet. The Kuati could refuse them entrance of course, Hux had explained during one of their lessons, but the First Order was one of the KDY’s biggest clients. Rey remembers how his nose had pinched and he’d looked affronted at her question. They would not dare refuse us entrance, he’d stated, all haughty attitude and hard edges. Still, Rey holds her breath for a second longer than necessary until the comm link beeps back to life again and they’re being granted permission to land.

Once they break atmosphere Rey’s eyes rove over the fields of green and she sighs happily, eyes glued out the passenger window. She would have taken the copilot’s seat except the look Hux and Kylo had given her brooked absolutely no nonsense; the looks they were giving her now, had she peeled her eyes off the scenery long enough to notice, were both curiously warm and sympathetic, so different from how they looked at anything else in their lives. Yet her mind was elsewhere and she never noticed, too busy taking in all the beautiful shades of green and blue from the trees and bodies of water. She didn’t think she’d ever tire of those colors. If nothing else came from this adventure, at least she’d have one more memory of beauty to add to her meager collection.
Rey fidgets with the leather sleeves of her coat. Her usual comfortable outfit had been replaced by what Hux had deemed clothing appropriate for an ambassador of the Order, followed by a sarcastic murmur about how he would not be bringing the equivalent of a desert rat to negotiate in his stead. She’d glared at him for that, but he’d straight up ignored her. No, she would be dressed according to his specifications, no matter how much she’d complained.

The long coat is cinched at the waist, made of comfortably heavy, leather-rimmed black wool. It would keep her warm against the temperatures of the planet, which Hux noted were far, far cooler than the desert heat she’d used to. The shoulders and sleeves are a soft, shiny pliable leather that allows her limbs to move comfortably; a long golden zipper traveling from around her groin area all the way to the tall rounded neckline caressing her jawline, crossing two pockets similarly zippered that reminded her a little too much of Kylo’s cross guard when his saber was ignited.

It’s a beautiful thing, even if she knew nothing of fashion. It’s also dark as night.

She’d hated it on sight. It feels too much like something a Knight of Ren would wear.

She must have projected that thought because suddenly Kylo is turning his head slightly to the side to catch sight of her and she in turn catches a flash of desire on his features, but it’s gone quickly when he reminds her in a low voice to don her leather gloves. They would be entering port shortly.

Once the ship is propelled forward into its landing pad via a gravitational pull that allows for a perfect landing - something Rey is seriously impressed about - the two men are standing up and double checking that all of their own clothing items are resting where they should be. Kylo runs his fingers through his hair a few times to shove all the loose locks back from his face before donning his helmet, catching Rey’s eye and making her think that must be the secret to his perfect hairdo every time he removes the thing. Then he’s pulling his cowl over it, the perfect image of terrifying darkness. She can’t help herself. Her breath hitches and her pulse quickens in a very, very uncomfortable manner as her mind travels to that fateful interrogation room so long ago.

“Rey,” comes the modulated voice, but it’s soft, “It’s me in here. It’s alright,” he reminds her.

It wasn’t alright, not really, but the words bring her heart from where it had jumped to her throat back to where it should be in her chest and Rey takes in a deep breath.

Hux is watching them curiously, adjusting his own gloves, his usually perfectly pressed uniform even more pristine if that could even be possible, his great cloak perched on his shoulders as usual. The ramp lowers and her soft leather boots land on the hangar of Kuat. Rey catches a glimpse of herself and the two men flanking her on the reflective sideboard of a ship parked nearby. Hux was right, she very much looks like she belongs between them.

Three tall women await twenty feet away, straight backed and standing close together as they stare directly at them with blank expressions. A welcoming committee, then.

Rey steps forward as she had been instructed to during her lessons, the two men falling behind in tandem. They would show deference to her in all public exchanges from now on, standing behind her like an honor guard.

Rey takes a deep breath.

Time to face the music.
Oh Kylo, what are we going to do with you. 
Also, Kylo doesn't laugh often (read: ever. Up until this point he's had like zero reason to laugh), but when he does, there's no off switch.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter after the hell I put you through in the last two chapters. These beautiful babies found a way to coexist for like a week and a half. Aren't they beautiful?

And finally.

IMPORTANT PROPS:
1. Rey's coat upon arrival in Kuat

Thanks to the lovely EjBlaKit as always for helping proofread and beta this thing! <3
Rey watches the women huddled together and they in turn watch her approach. There is nothing friendly about the way they stare, despite holding themselves to what Rey could only assume is their utmost professionalism. These are women who are used to power and holding it over others, and the air with which they hold themselves straight immediately belies their sense of superiority. They were all part of the noble houses that governed the planet and held themselves as such, faces blank and impassive, hands held in front of their beautiful gowns in a shocking array of vibrant colors and soft looking fabrics. She immediately dislikes them.

Rey takes a few more steps before standing straight in front of them and bowing slightly at the waist as she'd been taught, practicing the move over and over until Hux had deemed it low enough to be respectful yet not so low that she’d pass off as a groveler. She takes the moment while her body is downcast and her face is obscured to pinch her nose. This would not be pleasant whatsoever. The men behind her mimic the motion, though she can tell through the bond that Kylo does not appreciate bowing to absolutely anyone. She doubts Hux is any more pleased by it.

“My Ladies,” Rey greets once she’s straightened.

The women before her incline their own greeting, far shallower than Rey’s had been. They are, after all, the residents here and she and her companions the visitors. All three are all taller than she is, forcing her to look up slightly at them, glossy hair braided back from beautiful faces. Rey wonders in passing if every person would be as lovely. Yet the set of their faces is anything but open or welcoming. A shorter woman, just an inch or so taller than Rey, with jet black hair and high cheekbones steps forward. She seems to be the youngest, dressed in emerald green and soft shades of blue. She shoots the men behind her a glance before looking Rey square in the eye.

“Welcome to Kuat,” she says, offering Rey no formal title, “My apologies, I do not know your name. I must say we are surprised. We did not expect a woman to arrive with the First Order envoys.”

Rey allows herself to give a pleasant smile, though her mind focuses on this small admission.

So Hux had not informed them of her coming with. Smart man. He’d caught them by surprise. That gives Rey an edge, and she immediately starts finding a way to turn this kernel of information to her
advantage.

“Rey Ren, My lady,” she replies with a much smaller incline of her head this time, rolling out the last name and tasting it on her mouth. It slips out like silk, only a letter off from her regular name.

She’d been given the Knight of Ren’s title in lieu of a last name since she had none, and they would not disclose that she was from Jakku. The name sounded odd on her tongue, but she must have sounded it off with enough familiarity as she notes all three women incline their heads once more in acknowledgement.

“I am known as Temir of House Depon,” the young woman says before turning to acknowledge the others behind her, “And my companions here are Lady Leras of House Andrim, and Lady Tiagha of House Purkis. It is our pleasure to welcome you to our home.”

Lady Leras is the tall, slender one to Temir’s right with long almond green eyes and a perpetual pout framed by a shoulder-length bob of brown curls. Lady Tiagha is stockier, face round and beautiful with a soft glow to her cheeks. Rey wonders if this woman has ever seen a hard day’s worth of work in her life, yet, despite Tiagha's charming smile, her eyes are sharp and bright. A dangerous combination, charm and wit. Rey immediately knows who is really leading this welcoming committee.

Interesting, that. Hux had spent the better part of four days drilling her with the names of each house pertaining to The Ten, the original houses that had colonized and terraformed Kuat, and who now governed over billions of citizens. Rey zeroes in on their house names. House Andrim has long been a rival house to both Depon and Purkis. She could use this to her advantage later.

“The pleasure is all ours, I assure you, Lady Temir.”

Temir seems pleased by the fact that she alone has been addressed by a formal title and name. It would mean that she alone would take the lead in their negotiations, leaving the other women bound to silence, and Rey intentionally singles her out. She’s young and perhaps easier to deal with than the stern faced Leras and the rather cunning Tiagha. It is a very old, very obscure custom of the Kuati, and Rey feels three instantaneous flashes of surprise emanating from their life signatures, but she has to hand it to them; if they are offended by any of it, their faces betray absolutely nothing.

The other two women would agree on absolutely nothing, being from opposing houses, and that is also something Rey could exploit. If they agreed on nothing and would not speak during negotiations unless prompted, then Temir would be Rey’s only true target.

Then they’re all being led away from the hangars and towards a large building that glows in the morning light. Kylo and Hux keep a respectful distance of about five feet behind her at all times, leaving Rey feeling rather alone in the middle as the women lead the way and the men bring up the rear. She takes the moment of solitude to let her eyes wander, careful not to gawk lest Hux would have her head. The sprawling well manicured fields speak of an abundance that Rey could have never pictured from the information she’d been given to prepare for her lessons. The cobblestone path is strange to Rey, who’s been used to the sands of Jakku, the cement platforms of the Resistance, the steel floors of the First Order’s ships. She looks at the path for a moment and wonders how long it must have taken to be constructed, each stone placed down individually and secured to its surroundings, simple in its parts but so intricate in its entirety. Rey thinks the whole thing rather beautiful.

The building itself could have been easily called a palace, not that Rey has a lot of experience in such things, but it is so large she can only imagine that hundreds of people could stand under the impossibly high domed ceilings and not feel the need to jostle for space. Large white columns
disappear into the distance and the marble floors under her feet are shined to a mirror-like polish. She matches her steps to that of the women before her, Kylo and Hux seemingly keeping their own little beat, and the soft clicks of their heels carries them down a side hall for minutes until they pass a large set of glistening doors and into a meeting room.

A gargantuan mahogany table sits in the middle of the room overlooking wide glass windows that gives a perfect view of a mountainous range, impossibly high and impossibly beautiful. Rey has never seen mountains; they’d been positioned facing the view for the sake of first impressions. Regardless, she stashes the image of mountains away before turning to the Kuati women. Temir’s the first to sit, positioning herself in the seat centered in the middle along one end, with Leras and Tiagha flanking her on either side. Rey does the same on the opposite side, with Hux to her right and Kylo to her left, and holds her silence. It would always be customary of the Kuati for their own emissaries to speak first.

“What brings you to our planet, Lady Ren? You must have come a long way for your trip to have lasted so long,” Temir offers, setting her hands lightly on the table and lacing her fingers together in question.

Rey rests hers on her thighs, offering Temir a radiant smile.

“Two weeks, to be precise, though it is a short distance to travel in exchange for your fine goods, Lady Temir.”

Well, Rey muses, flattery never hurt anybody.

She herself had seen its benefits when bargaining for food or parts on Jakku. She couldn’t deny that buttering up somebody who held the upper hand when bargaining always made it just that much easier to sweeten the deal. And it works, as Rey hoped it would, because Temir’s lips twitch ever so slightly in a smile before the woman schools her expression again. Rey takes a small breath and continues.

“We do not wish to intrude upon your hospitality for longer than necessary, so I’ll try to be as concise as possible. We would like to place an order. A rather large one.”

And what a large order it is. Rey had never even seen numbers like the ones Hux had mentioned to her. Her life had been exchanging labor for food, and when she had managed to get her hands on credits, they were only always a couple here and there; enough to help her get parts to maintain upkeep of her AT-AT’s weatherproofing or buy herself a small ion cooker for her meals. Never these amounts. She couldn’t quite imagine that much currency. The women in front of her obviously could, though.

They all lean forward, obviously interested. Orders are the currency of Kuat, much more so than credits themselves, though a large influx of them certainly didn’t hurt. Orders meant clients. Large orders meant that whatever house brought them in got bragging rights over the other houses for a small amount of time, giving them preference in making decisions in how the new funds aided the Kuat government’s goals until the next big order came, because ultimately, Kuat Yard Drives and the Kuati Government were really one and the same. Rey knows that with her choice to address Temir, she had given House of Depon the advantage.

She itches to look at Hux again, really look at him, and check to make sure that she’s doing alright. She doesn’t. In the eyes of these women, her reliance on Hux would be below her and she would lose her ground quickly if she was seen deferring to the men, so she trains her eyes on Temir’s instead.
“We recently lost a depot between systems that has set us back significantly in time and resources, and since you have always provided such fantastic service along with excellent ships and weapons, we made haste for Kuat as soon as possible. Here’s a list of all the things we’re hoping to procure from you.”

Rey pauses just long enough to dig a small data pad from one of the deep side pockets of her coat and hands it to Temir, who reaches out for it then glances at the list. The other two women lean in discreetly to also take a look, leaving her to watch their expressions as three meticulously groomed pairs of eyebrows rise by degrees the longer Temir scrolls down the list.

Temir looks up at Rey and blinks, then gives her a hesitant, rather closed smile.

“Well, you certainly said a large order, Lady Ren,” the slender woman offers, “Perhaps you would like to begin by discussing specifics?”

And so they spend the next three hours discussing specifics to be sure: specific weapons, specific ranges those weapons should reach, specific amounts of said weapons. This part goes on for quite a while but there are no disagreements. By the end of it, they’ve discussed the specifics for the specifics, and Rey’s eyes itch. Hand-weapons and even small artillery are things that the Kuati can create with their eyes closed in no time flat. Temir nods in assent as Rey reminds them that all weapons must carry the First Order’s insignia and be easily scanned or dismantled for inspection. The reminder makes her think of Finn. Rey shoves that aside. Now is not the time to be thinking about her ex-stormtrooper friend. She needs to keep her wits about her.

Still, everything up until this point has gone so well Rey’s starting to wonder when things will go downhill. It doesn’t take long. They move onto the specifics of the Star Destroyer ships, and negotiations take a turn towards… complicated.

Rey states her desire to have Star Destroyers and TIE fighters built, though she fails to mention the number the First Order needs just yet as she gauges the interest of the women before her. Temir simply gives her a perfunctory nod before she sets the data pad down.

“We can certainly build your ships, Lady Ren. We have had the First Order’s specifications on file for a long time now, and you have always been a very important client to us. Would they be the same or are there new modifications you’re looking to implement?”

Rey shakes her head.

“The vessel plans are to remain the same, Lady Temir,” Rey begins, “Our only request would be timely delivery, as we’re unfortunately under-supplied at the moment.”

The women look at each other. The KDY is a rather stickler organization when it comes to delivery times and would demand their time tables be adhered to. This Rey knows from her notes, and she guessed it was common knowledge. A TIE fighter would take them six months to complete. A Star Destroyer would take them a year. Rey needs three thousand TIE fighters in four months and two Star Destroyers in no more than eight.

To make up for the loss of Starkiller base, Hux had explained, his eyes hard on Rey, We’ll need to strengthen our fleets, otherwise we lose all tactical advantage.

She had bristled at that the rest of the night, but Rey was not one to turn down a challenge. She’d get him his blasted ships. She’d get him his ships on time and, if she was lucky, she’d bargain for more than what he wanted.

Temir is looking at her a second longer than appropriate, face guarded as she asks in a light tone.
“What’s your approximation for requested delivery, My Lady?” she asks.

Rey mentally takes a deep breath, finally getting to the part they had prepared for, then states their requirements as Hux had given them to her. Four and eight months, respectively.

The room falls silent. If Rey strains her ears she’s sure she could pick up on everybody’s breathing. Taigha’s eyes are drilling into Rey’s temple and Leras is allowing an unbidden look of shock to cross her face. It only lasts a second, but that’s long enough for Rey to catch it and store it away. Temir, despite her youth, is the only one with a stony look, as if unsurprised. Or perhaps determined. Silence stretches on for an uncomfortably long moment.

Then the young woman laughs, her jet black hair whipping around as she shakes her head.

“Surely you must be joking, my Lady. Those times are entirely too short for the sort of work you’re requesting, and we don’t even know how many you need. Perhaps we can discuss this further?”

Rey had been expecting this, she leans back into her chair and imitates Hux’s mannerisms, the way he can make himself look larger than the room simply by sitting at his leisure. She wraps herself in Kylo’s calm, commanding and demanding of silence all at the same time. Out of the corners of her eyes she catches the men giving her appreciative looks, and she wishes she could turn her head and grin smugly at them. Then she’s receiving a mental image of Hux’s appreciative glance as well as the Knight’s own impressed interest through the bond, and in that moment she doesn’t have to fake the self-assured smile she directs towards the three ladies in front of her.

She’d nearly forgotten about the bond in her haste to get this right. Immediately, she mentally sends her thanks to Kylo and he falls into mediating between what he can see and what she cannot throughout the rest of the meeting. Having a second pair of eyes is immensely useful. He can see what she cannot as she kept her attention on Lady Temir.

When Rey finally speaks again, it’s with all the gravitas of the General and all the confidence of the First Knight of Ren.

She remembers all the information Hux had drilled into her brain, as well as the specific numbers she’s to request, but Rey is riding a small high, and this time, she’d show them how a scavenger bargained for things.

“I need six thousand TIE fighters and ten Resurgent-Class Destroyers, Lady Temir, and I need them as soon as humanly possible.”

There’s a soft choked sound coming from Leras, which she quickly disguises as a clearing of her throat, and all of Tiagha’s good humor has slipped away in the blink of an eye, leaving the woman to look like Rey had dropped a hammer on her. Perhaps she had.

This wasn’t a large order, this was a colossal one. Rey reaches out to Hux’s mind and surprisingly he leaves it wide open once he feels her presence. She sends an image into his mind — Would they be able to afford this? — regretting that she cannot speak words with him the way she does with Kylo, but it must have come across well enough because he projects a reluctant agreement through to her. She gets another image from Kylo, who blessedly is wearing a helmet so no one can tell what he truly thinks except for Rey. Hux’s surprise is clearly painted for her to see even if she knows nobody but her or Kylo would be able to tell, the man wore impassivity like an iron mask.

While the women all lean into each other to whisper so Temir can confer with her companions — something she must do at this point given Rey’s numbers — Hux, Kylo and Rey pass images back and forth and hold a conversation of their own, though outwardly they have not twitched a muscle.
They’d be able to afford it, but Hux immediately projects his displeasure at her. It would be a tight budget. A very, very tight budget. He formulates a number and shoves it at Rey, a cap to what she can place on the table. He’s still a little flummoxed at Rey’s ballsy move, but has no choice but to play along now. He is just as unable to voice his opinion as Leras and Tiagha are.

When the whispers stretch on Rey clears her throat, forcing the other women to look up at her. It’s probably a rude thing to do, but she’d gained the upper hand through surprise and Rey is hell bent on keeping it.

“Forgive me, my Ladies,” she says without any remorse, “but have you perhaps arrived at some sort of agreement? Or am I to assume that our order cannot be fulfilled? If so, we’ll go take our business elsewhere. That would be lamentable, however, since your people are so skilled at what they do.”

Hux had not prepared this for her either and he starts shoving his alarm towards hers. He does not want to go elsewhere.

She blocks him out for once.

Rey knows that the women would not let this slip from their fingers. She knows something of greed. She’d known greed as she’d scavenged earlier than most and later than most, moving into ships too dangerous or too small for anyone to fit themselves through, dangling thousands of feet in the air by a thin rope, risking wounds and cuts for the promise of a bigger meal at the end of the day dangled in front of her like a carrot. No, the women would not let them walk away. If they took the order they’d be infused with enough funds to run the whole of Kuat for the next two years without need to take on another single client. That sort of infusion of credits would be hard to refuse. Not to mention what it would do for their family names.

Temir clears her throat before speaking. Cutting her off from her companions means that she must make her decision now and make it alone, or risk losing them, though for a moment Rey fears that the woman would call her bluff.

She doesn’t.

“I must admit, Lady Ren, your numbers are rather…. exorbitant. I cannot promise that we would have the manpower necessary for this sort of emptying our yards to relocate resources.” She extends her hands palm up, as if in explanation, “That would be inconceivable of us. We do have other clients we must serve in a timely manner as well. We could attempt to build all of this, but we’d need double - no, triple the allotted time.”

“No time changes, my Lady; we must have these ships by the time we currently request. It’s not an option for us. Are you telling me that, in a world where the very vast majority of your population is born to build ships, that you would be currently understaffed due to our request?”

There’s a small twitch in Temir’s temple that Rey doesn’t miss. Instinctively, she reaches out with the Force to read her; it came so easily now after trying to pound at Kylo’s walls in training the last two weeks. She nearly sighs with relief when she notes Temir has absolutely zero mental barriers. Temir looks worried that Rey knows that she’s hiding something, and Rey’s curiosity sparks. She wades around until a small thought floats to the woman’s surface and she snatches it.

She could use this. Rey purposely takes the time contemplating her response to Temir’s demand for time, as if she could yet be swayed, making a show of it while the kuati women wait expectantly for her to speak.

Rey changes tactics.
“Tell me, Lady Temir, have our troops orbiting your system caused you any trouble lately?”

All three pale at the same time. She’d find it comical if not for the situation. Rey pounces and snatches all their thoughts, looking for anything that could aid her in this, frantically hoping she’s not making the biggest mistake of her life and tossing away her only bargaining chip.

The First Order keeps ships orbiting Kuat. It was an open secret that the arrangement had been made of mutual benefit: The First Order’s troops would keep prying eyes away from First Order ships being built, denying neutral or rebel forces alike from seeing or attempting to steal any of the technological advances that Hux had spent so much time developing along with the KDY. Kuat in turn benefitted as a neutral entity and their own competitors were kept at bay.

Kylo turns his visor towards her. What are you playing at, Rey?

Kylo and the women would get their answer soon enough.

“I hear close patrols can sometimes be... bothersome... to shipyards like your own. Perhaps it would be wise for the First Order to remove our troops from your airspace. I am sure this would allow you to empty your ship yards faster, not to mention inspectors of the Galactic Shipbuilding Guild would delight in checking with you about your newest technological advancements.”

There. She’d placed her chip on the table.

Hux is pushing his confusion into her brain, battering at her mental block on him.

She reaches out to Ren through the bond instead, wishing she could do the same with the General, to reassure him she had a plan.

*The Kuati are dealing under the table. That is why they claim to be understaffed.*

People on rosters that were meant to be aboard a specific ship during legit order fulfillment were being moved quietly to work on other things. Dangerous things.

Weapons were being dealt to the black market at exorbitant prices, more dangerous artillery - the kind not sanctioned by the Guild - was being developed under wraps. They might be fair to their people, but they were corrupt to the core when it came to how they sourced their funds. Should the Guild get a whiff of this, they’d be immediately removed and barred from further ship-making -- another small tidbit she’d learned in an obscure note from her studies -- and without First Order fleets to shield them and protect them, they’d leave themselves open to potential war from slighted customers and competitors alike.

In her haste to impress by pushing to gain for more time, Temir had slipped. The worry about the missing body count from rosters had flashed over Temir’s mind and Rey had glimpsed that this was only one of a few negotiations the young woman had carried out.

When she’d conferred with the other women, they had not been able to agree on a single thing, as Rey had guessed would happen. She’d counted on it.

This was Temir’s test. She would be failing it spectacularly. Rey doesn’t wait for Temir’s answer.

“I believe you have the manpower.”

Silence. The heartbeat between the sound of a clock ticking one second and the next. And the next. It stretches on for what feels like eternity.
Temir’s nostrils flare and she gives a curt nod. The women beside her are obviously displeased, but nod sharply as well, unable to do anything further. They’ve been forced to keep their silence, after all.

Hux was a smart man. She’d have to thank him later for carefully slipping that old custom into her notes for lessons.

All traces of friendliness have left Lady Temir when she opens her mouth to speak again, though she’s still wearing professionalism like armor. Rey has to give her that much, at least.

“If we are to agree to this time frame, then we must speak about payment terms and upfront deposits, My Lady. I know how uncomfortable it is to speak about credits…”

Rey cuts her off. It’s awfully rude of her, but she’s gained the upper hand. She’s not about to let it slip past her so easily. She does allow herself a small glance at Hux, who’s face is a perfect mask of impassivity, before she proceeds.

“Surely with an order as massive as this one you’d be receiving enough compensation at our standard prices, Lady Temir? I have studied the prices we’ve paid in the past. Thoroughly. They all far surpass any prices you’ve given to other clients for similar work, despite their commissioned numbers being much lower than ours. I’d say you’ve already been profiting from us rather well.”

Everyone stiffens. Rey sighs for effect.

“I would hate to have to decline this far in our talks, but perhaps we can come to a mutually beneficial agreement?” Rey knows that the emphasis brings their minds to the black market dealing and First Order shielding, rather than to the talk of credits, and Rey smiles gently at them when they basically project the exact same thing into her mind. How could people who basically talked high stakes day in and day out not know how to shield?

It’s because they assume I’m not Force sensitive.

She’s proved right when she pushes her awareness out towards the women. Taigha is assuming at that very moment that the First Order has spied this information somehow. That suits Rey just fine. The longer they can keep believing she’s not tapping into their minds, the longer Rey has to take whatever information they project and use it against them.

“If we’re not able to agree, I am afraid we’ll have to take our offer and go elsewhere. That said, if our business is to conclude, we’ll also be pulling out our patrols. There’s no reason to guard something that no longer keeps our secrets.”

There.

She’s got them. Within a heartbeat, Temir’s cheeks are taking on a rather pink tinge of color, Leras’ eyes widen infinitesimally as she holds her breath, and Tiagha resembles a thunderhead, all clenched jaw muscles and fiery gaze.

It’s no longer about a large order and governing families having an edge over one another. It’s about Kuat’s foundation as an independent entity. If they lose their shipyards, they lose everything. They might be opposing houses, but they are intertwined families after all. They’ll look after their own.

“Allow us a moment, Lady Ren,” Temir clips.

Rey nods and extends her hand as if permitting them to take their leave in their own home. Tiagha looks ready to strike her where she sits. Rey smiles in return, just because she can. All three women
stride out of the room at an angry clip, the large doors slamming behind them.

Hux swivels to face her so fast her neck hurts just from watching him do it.

“Are you out of your kriffing mind, Rey? What are you doing?”

His voice is sharp enough to cut, icy eyes hard and squinting at her as he hisses the last word, a drop of spittle landing on the table. This was not what he had come to achieve and his control had quickly slipped out from his perfectly gloved fingers the second he’d handed her the reins. Rey shrugs.

“You said you wanted ships. I’m getting you ships, General,” she retorts with a tone of voice that would make even Kylo proud. The Knight is carefully minding his own business, though, pointedly avoiding drawing Hux’s ire to himself.

“I swear, Rey, if they turn us out under guard and you make an enemy of the KDY for me I will—“

He’s cut off when the doors open again and the women are walking back to their seats, looking far more composed than when they left, if no happier than before. Temir has a smile plastered on that does not quite reach her eyes. They all bow to her then, a hair deeper than before. Rey stands up, mimicked by the men at either side.

“We are honored that you have chosen to bestow such a large order on us, Lady Ren. Your patronage will surely help us maintain Kuat’s flourishing nation for a while to come yet, and for that we have to be thankful — even with the... limitations — and in the light of the immensity of your request we have decided to offer you in good faith a small discount of ten percent to help alleviate the burden on you. You’ve always been faithful customers of ours, after all.”

This is all business speak. Rey’s not familiar with any of it but she can read between the lines well enough: We keep you happy and you stay out of our hair.

Rey nods then and when she allows herself a bright smile she feels a little too much like Hux, playing mind games and twisting words.

“I am immensely grateful to you Lady Temir, Lady Leras, Lady Tiagha,” she replies, relieving the women from the ridiculous custom that had chained them to silence. She stretches out her hand to Temir then. “Our patrols will remain for as long as we are able to keep them there, of course.” With the condition that you keep your word, Rey leaves the words unsaid.

Temir stares at her hand as though it’s a live snake but she takes it gingerly and they shake, then Rey’s hand is being dropped like a hot poker.

Taigha, finally free to speak, gives Rey a tight lipped smile bordering on a sneer.

“One last thing, Lady Ren,” she says, hands folded neatly in front of her, “Your timing is perfect, We of Kuat are celebrating another millennial milestone of our settlement upon the planet, and the creation of our royal seat. Considering you have just aided us in helping to maintain that rule, we would be remiss not to invite you.”

The invitation was more like an order. Rey refuses to look at Hux even though she wants nothing more than to turn her head right that moment in his direction.

Instead she bows, another formal acquiesce, and smiles as she straightens.

“It would be our honor.”
Temir speaks for the first time in long minutes. “Your weapons requirements and master list has been passed on to procurement to begin gathering materials. They will be delivered with your first batch of Tie Fighters.”

Rey grins, relieved to hear that, and then the women are moving away, gesturing for them to follow. Taigha lingers behind and approaches Hux. She has just enough time to hear the next tightly clipped words before the scrape of a giant door muffles all other sounds.

“Pray tell, wherever did you find her, General?”

Rey finds the nearest bed once they enter the large three bedroom suite and collapses on it, neither caring if it’s meant for her nor bothering to look around at the amazing accommodations. Of course, Hux and Kylo Ren would not let her out of their sight now that they were on land and had so many ships around for her to steal and make herself scarce. Any other time she would have ogled at the rooms, at the beautiful decorations and the neatly trimmed plants, the comfortable lighting and the ginormous refresher. Right in that moment she’s so tired all she wants to do is fuse with the bed and never wake up again.

The men follow lazily behind and soon enough they’re standing at the foot of the bed, staring at her in silence.

Rey says nothing, hoping they’ll get the hint and leave.

“Rey,” Hux calls out to her.

Rey grumbles something and flails her arm. It’s meant to be ‘go away, I did what you wanted me to’ but only comes out as a muffled grunt.

She doesn’t care that this is not how she should act. She doesn’t care if she sounds even remotely whiny.

Her brain has been put through the wringer in that negotiation room and she’s feeling a little filthy at having manipulated others for her purposes, used the force to fish out information to benefit her; if it meant she’d earn her freedom, though, she’d do it all over again, gladly. But that was all done and over with and now she just wants to forget about it.

“Rey,” Hux repeats, a bit more gently this time.

She grunts and sits up, giving them both a tired glare. Kylo’s removed his helmet and is currently holding it under his arm, looking entirely like he doesn't want to be in the room at the moment.

“Unless you’re here to give me the access key to a nearby ship so I can leave now, please just go away.”

Anger flashes through Kylo’s face. Hux’s is stony. Rey ignores both of them.

“I’m afraid we can’t do that.”

Of course not.

Rage starts boiling in the pit of her stomach and she’s about to unleash it on them when the General
holds up a hand.

“At least not for until after tomorrow…we’ll be here for the duration of the festivities, I’m afraid. The Kuati delegation has made it painfully clear that they would appreciate our attendance.”

“Can’t you go without me? I already did what you wanted me to.”

General Hux stares at her blankly.

Of course not.

“Okay. Fine. But then I’m free…?”

She holds in her breath because this is it. This is what all of her hard work has been hinging on. For her to be able to finally leave the last almost two months of her life behind and return to her friends, or start over. She wants that choice. She craves it.

Hux turns to look at Kylo, and Rey frowns. That’s right, Hux had only promised to begin negotiations… her true captor was the man cloaked in all black. Her eyes travel to his face and trains on his, though they seem to be looking at everything but her. There’s a long moment in which his eyes flicker back and forth, lost, sad eyes… then a dark cloud settles over his gaze, all hint of life slipping out. She tries to reach him through the bond but meets nothing but a deadened wall. Kylo Ren nods.

“Then you’re free.”

Chapter End Notes

ARGH! I had this all typed out and then BOOM! Accidental computer crash. So, here we go.

That was a lot of brain stuff.

I can't believe we're about to break 100k words in this. This is my very first ever longfic and slow burn, and honestly, my very first ever piece of fiction that's this long or elaborate, so thank you, thank you, thank you to all who have shown it support and have kept commenting update after update. Your encouragement is what keeps me going, and I'm glad you all think I'm doing this slow burn justice <3

Comments & Concrits always 130% welcome. I live off the stuff :P

Thanks as always to EjBlaKit for reading over my junk and making sure it's coherent enough for for public consumption. I love you <3

And finally. The Kuati custom is totally made up to suit my purposes. Give me just enough information about a people and their planet to be dangerous and I. WILL. BE. DANGEROUS. The ladies mentioned here are all made up, however, their houses are
not. Please see the links below for more info.

Links:

1. Kuat Peoplei
2. The Ten
3. House Depon
4. House Andrim
5. House Purkis
6. Kuat Drive Yards
Chandeliers

Chapter Summary

Hux develops a mental boner as a result of Rey's negotiations, and everything turns rather soft under chandelier light.

Chapter Notes

So many milestones come with this chapter! 100 subscribers (wow you guys ;-; that's a lot of people), 400+ comments that all carry a whole lotta love, 100k+ words, and like a gazillion new friends I've made through this. YOU ALL ARE AMAZING. As a reward, here's this chapter <3 I hope you enjoy it.

He orders a whole new wardrobe for her.

His boots click on the marble floor as he paces long strides up and down the space, glancing at the door sitting ajar every once in a while as his ears train in on the conversations in the next room over. Hux’s been waiting for the tailors to stop working on Rey so he can finally address her without an audience, and it’s taking far longer than necessary. He’s had half a mind to walk in there and demand the tailors leave, but she needed proper clothes for the celebrations and he’d be doing neither one of them any favors by interrupting. He listens to her breathy swearing every time a pin pinches somewhere as the tailors profusely apologize. He shakes his head, then resumes his pacing.

The girl is certainly full of surprises. He’d watched with immense mounting horror as Rey had taken his directive and spun it on its head so quickly it had caused whiplash. He’d been nearly sure they would be shoved out and placed under tight security before being basically booted out of orbit when she’s doubled the amount of TIE fighters he’d requested, and had almost swallowed his tongue when she’d upped the amount of star destroyers from two to ten. He’d been getting ready to add the Kuat government to his lengthening list of enemies when she’d refused to budge on the price or the time frame and very ingeniously threatened them, immediately formulating ten different plans for how to keep from basically starting another side war.

The minutes stretch on and he’s of half a mind to actually walk in there and demand that the gaggle of tailors leave when he hears the door opening. As if on cue, a small army of men and women jostling fabrics and measurement instruments walk out, all bowing at Hux. He watches them go for a short second before striding purposefully into Rey’s room. He’d waited far too long. Rey turns around still in her small clothes, shoulders tense, and he has to force himself to look at her eyes rather than focus on the way her waist curved in the filtering afternoon light, the tiny silvery scars from a hard life. She stands as tall and proud as ever, bringing his mind for a moment to their shower episode nearly two months ago. Had it truly been that long? She brings his attention back to her with a soft clear of her throat.

“I believe I had made myself clear, General. I would like to be left alone. You barging in on me
decidedly not leaving me alone.”

Hux squares his jaw, his fingers twitching towards fists in frustration before he forces himself to splay them and relax. Yes, she’d made it perfectly clear. Rey had basically shoved him out of her room once Ren had taken his leave, muttering words about having fulfilled her end of the deal and wanting her space.

“Stop being a child,” he berates her (and himself, really), walking forward and handing her one of the white robes that had been left behind by the staff, bringing it up towards her in offering. She glares at him but snatches it out of his fingers, shrugging it on with jerky motions. This whole thing feels as though they had somehow regressed from what little progress they had made over the last few weeks aboard the ship. He pursed his lips tightly.

Part of him hates it. No, all of him hates it, he’s willing to admit, if only to himself. Sure, they had never quite been cozy with each other and their...alliance during this trip -- this whole thing since she’d been dropped off aboard his flagship, really -- had been tenuous at best. Yet he’d enjoyed it. He’d found himself enjoying her company, her witty remarks, her dazzling smile as it graced her face, the way she’d pinch her nose and her freckles would disappear--

He mentally shakes his head. Enough of that. There were important things to talk about.

“How did you do it?” He asks, finally, because this is really what he’d wanted to know.

They’d been swept away from the negotiation hall, the last words he had heard being Lady Tiagha’s barb about finding Rey somewhere, the implication in her voice clear; she thought he had a gem in his hands. Hux is not inclined to disagree. And yet, here he is about to set her loose and pray to the Maker she comes back. So he sighs, partly because there is little he can do about it, and partly because now comes the time to stop playing mind games. Doing both things are equally hard for him.

“How did you convince them to give us…what? Six thousand TIE fighters? Ten Star Destroyers? Were you out of your mind?” He asks, dropping into the seat from which he had lifted the white robe gracing her curves, leaning his elbows on his knees. He hadn’t consciously made the decision to drop lower than her line of vision, but from where she stood on a small little platform the tailors had left behind, he looked much like a man praying at her heels.

She tilts her head to the side and Hux takes a moment to delight in the way the light turns her hair coppery, the gentle slope of her jaw. She had far exceeded anything he’d asked of her. He had found a diamond and he was about to toss it back into the ocean that was the galaxy. Stupid, stupid man.

Rey brings him back out of his train of thought when she speaks rather tersely in his direction, though the small, mischievous smile that lifts up her face belies her tone. She’s proud of this, if only a little.

“They’re dealing in the black market, using our — your... orbiting fleets as a shield from prying eyes.”

His heart beats a little faster when she says ‘our’ as though he had been handed a precious little gift with those three little letters. Like a promise left unsaid, still lingering in the golden air of the Kuati afternoon. She corrects herself immediately, of course, but for a millisecond he allows himself the hope.

Then he’s grinning at her for entirely different reasons.
“Is that so? You’re a cunning little thing,” he muses, bringing himself back to the negotiations.

She grins then, elated to receive as close to a compliment as he’s ever really given her on his own. The last time he’d been surprised by her aboard their ship, he’d been able to hide behind Kylo’s own impressed administrations. Here it was just him and her and about five feet of space, and he wasn’t playing games. Not now. Not with her.

“How did you find out?”

“The Force is a wonderful thing, General,” she says haughtily and he laughs. That’s how she’d managed to come by the information.

Cunning little thing indeed. His cunning little thing. For now.

“You’re sounding an awful lot like your Master.”

Wrong words.

Her smile falters, all humor dissipating like smoke from the end of a spent cigarette. He nearly bites his tongue trying to utter an apology fast enough, a concept entirely foreign to him until this moment. The words had slipped so easily.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have—“ He tries, knowing she won’t accept it.

“No,” she shakes her head, “No, it’s alright. He has been a Master to me these last two weeks… of sorts, at least.”

She mumbles that last bit, and Hux watches her. Rey looks out the window, and maybe it’s just the light playing tricks on his mind, but her eyes shine golden and green, and he immediately starts making a mental list of things that shine as beautifully, yet his list comes up horribly short.

Kuat’s starting to get to him. A thumb comes up and rubs at his lower lip for a second before he forces his eyes off the girl in front of him and down, towards his hands, centering himself. She’s his prisoner, and she would remain his prisoner until she left, and he had no place staring at her as he’d stared, or noticing the way her long lashes turned coppery against the afternoon light. He could see why Ren was so obviously consumed by her, though.

“Where will you go?” He asks, though in his mind he’s sure that she’ll just return to the Resistance. She’ll slip away from him and end up on the other side of the war, where he can no longer reach her.

As if in confirmation, she turns and leaves him looking at her back as she fusses with her hair buns, letting the hair cascade down her shoulders in wavy tumbles. Hux rises slowly, taking that as his cue to leave and prepare himself for the first round of celebrations.

They enter the giant ballroom together, stopping at the grand doors as they are announced, one by one, Rey on Kylo Ren’s arm. Tomorrow it would be Hux’s turn to escort her.

“General Brendol Hux, Commander of the First Order,” the announcer calls his name while he stands rigidly on Rey’s other side. Her eyes turn slightly to look at him in the creamy pale light of the chandeliers high above their heads, clearly surprised, and he quickly realizes she had never heard his birth name. He offers her a tight lipped smile.
“Lord Kylo Ren, First Knight of Ren, Commander of the First Order.” The whole room hushes as Ren’s title is called out.

Even here he inspires fear, but mostly, every eye turns to look at him. He’s wearing his fineries today, beautiful robes of black and gold that fall to his knees, a black cloak with two small gold First Order seals clasped at each shoulder, crown of glossy hair framing his youthful face. This was a very, very rare occasion for anyone in the Galaxy, seeing the real eyes of the monster. Except he’s anything but a monster. He’s tall and beautiful, even if Hux hates to admit it, broad shouldered and imposing. More than one man or woman does a double take. Then their eyes stop across the scar Rey had marked him as her own with and eyes fall. It only served to remind those around him that youth meant nothing when you were so lethal. To imagine such a face and connect it with the gory things the man had done, it could only come as a shock. Rey had helped him by marring him.

“Lady Rey Ren, Apprentice to the First Knight of Ren,” comes the last announcement.

Rey stiffens imperceptibly. It had been his idea to introduce her as Ren’s apprentice, simply because he refused to allow her to be the only one without a title. That, and it announced that he would be accompanied by two strong force users, and that reminder could never go amiss. Should anyone slighted by her negotiations try to act on their disgruntlement, they’d have to think twice in the face of this new revelation.

He steps an inch closer to her, letting his great coat brush against her bare arms. He feels her shiver. Her dress left a little too much skin bare to the eyes. He shifts in just a little closer.

Then they’re stepping past the gates and are swallowed up by the massive amounts of bodies crowding the space. Hux immediately takes to adjusting the cuffs on his already perfectly arranged tuxedo jacket. He surveys the crowd, noting with interest the faces of Resistance emissaries, and nearly curses himself. They would not know who Rey was, not really, but they certainly knew who Ren was, and word of this would carry to Organa. Hux’s lips set in a tense line, reminding himself that once she leaves she is no longer their problem. Not unless she returned, and Hux prayed to a Maker he did not believe in that she would return.

Those emissaries shoot him dangerous glares but he lets them slide over him. Kuat is a neutral planet. No fights would be fought here.

They all wait around for the next twenty minutes for the entrance of House Kuat, the ruling house, and its matriarch. Once all visitors have been announced it takes only a moment for the matriarch of House Kuat to descend into the room down a large set of stairs.

She’s a tall amazonian woman who holds herself with all the regal air of someone who knows she holds power. Hux knows the type. He’s one of them.

Her gown of gold glitters as she’s announced to the sound of trumpets, a mile long list of titles too long even for Hux to remember fully, and the crowds hush before thunderous clapping breaks and the ballroom is engulfed in the thunder of hundreds of hands meeting enthusiastically. When the woman’s welcoming speech is done and over with, Hux leans into Kylo, gripping his elbow and forcing the much taller man to lean down. His ear grazes the man’s earlobe unintentionally and he feels Ren stiffen, but doesn’t pull back.

“I must work,” Hux states in a murmur, leaving Ren to guide Rey around the ballroom.

He waits with the rest as visitors make their way forward to give their greetings to the leader of Kuat, though he also notices the many who fall away from the places they waited, giving him room to cut all the way up the expectant crowd until he’s standing a footstep lower than the woman. He does as
is respectful of any person coming in contact with a queen, though the Kuati would never call it that, and bows at the waist as he grips her large hand in his and lightly kisses her knuckles, turning on the charm. The woman offers him a smile.

“General Hux,” she greets once he rises, and allows him to step up until he’s standing next to her. Everyone eyes them closely. Hux ignores the crowd.

“Your Majesty,” he replies respectfully, “congratulations on another ruling millennia. You and your families must be proud.”

She shoots him a calculating glance, taking in his sharp black tuxedo, crisp white collar, white bow-tie, and as always, his impeccable great coat hanging from his shoulders as befitting of a General, rank bars and First Order insignia glinting in the chandelier light. He’d dressed to make a point tonight. The woman gives a tiny smile.

“I hear you gave my negotiators a bit of a run for their credits this afternoon. Or…rather…a girl of yours did,” Her Majesty’s eyes rove over the crowd until they land on Ren, hard to miss as he towers above most of the crowd, looking like a king himself, as though he should be the one standing at the large stairs. Then her eyes narrow when they land on the slender girl on Ren’s arm, dressed in long flowing cream fabric the shades of the desert.

She had refused Hux’s offer to have it made in black, allowing him instead to adorn it with small glinting onyx stones, the train of her dress dragging as Kylo leads her away from a couple.

“She’s a beautiful thing,” the Matriarch of Kuat murmurs appreciatively, and Hux finds himself unable to disagree. “And smart, considering the whipping she gave Lady Temir, according to Tiagha.” She snorts, so very unladylike, before turning her eyes on Hux once more.

“Where did you find her, Hux?” She asks curiously.

“Unimportant, Your Majesty,” he responds as casually as he can muster, “Though I do admit she did her job well. I hope we have not brought any inconvenience upon you with this. Business is business, after all, and we’re in dire need for those ships.”

The Matriarch smiles, a predatory glint to her eye, “Not at all, General. Temir needed the lesson. She’s too young, too eager, and this will be something she’ll never forget. After all, business is business. As long as it remains mutually beneficial, I have no reason to complain.”

She had been referring to the black market dealing. Good thing he’d asked Rey about it. He so hated being unprepared.

“That said, General, if she ever does stop working for you, perhaps you could convince her to give us a visit. We could use someone as skilled as she is.”

Hux allows himself a smile, thinking of his clever little wild thing. She’d pulled the thing off so smoothly he had been left speechless when Tiagha had cornered him after the fact. Hux was never speechless.

“I would have to be a dimwit to let her slip away, Your Majesty, but I’ll certainly pass along your praise.”

The Matriarch turns to him and gives him a long considering look. Hux tries his hardest not to set his jaw. What was she seeing? He hated when someone thought they could read him so easily.

Then she smiles a knowing smile and whispers.
“Yes, you certainly would have to be. Enjoy the celebrations, General.”

Dismissed, he gives another semi-low bow and steps off the stairs, letting others rise to take his place. By the time he’s managed to make it to the other side of the ballroom all greetings have taken place and the music is starting.

He spots Ren and his charge and is about to approach them when a new melody starts and Kylo’s guiding her towards the dance floor. The guests allow them a wide berth, in turn allowing Hux a clear view. He takes a flute of champagne from a proffered tray and leans against one of the large marble pillars, settling himself in to watch. His mind thinks of her attention flying to any beating of fingers, jealousy spiking for just a second at the knowledge that he won’t be up close to see what first reaction listening to music brings out of her. Then Ren’s snaking his arm around Rey’s slender waist, thumb gently caressing the trail of exposed tanned skin near her spine as he pulls her closer, and Hux stops breathing.

Suddenly watching isn’t so bad.

Rey holds her breath as Kylo pulls her into him, his body dwarfing hers immediately as one hand sneaks around her waist, thumb lightly caressing her back. The other hand is picking up her hand and holding it securely.

“Rey, look at me,” he murmurs. “It’ll be fine.”

She frowns, but allows him to guide her, to teach her. She places her other hand on his shoulder and suddenly they’re in a position to dance. His hand gently caresses her digits, feeling through the bond as he tries to ease her into this. She’s never danced before. Having to do so in front of this many people, many of whom were staring at them rather intently, set her on edge. There isn’t much time to think on it though as a long note comes from a violin somewhere that takes her breath away.

“Just let me guide,” he says, “Relax your body, follow my feet, and try to keep your eyes on me. When I move forward, you move backward…alright?” His thumb draws another reassuring circle into her back, pressing close to her spine until she shivers.

She nods. She’s seriously starting to dislike this idea of dancing.

He chuckles, obviously having snatched that thought from the surface of her mind. She gives him a wary glance and shakes her head. This whole thing’s ridiculous. She should have just packed her bags and left before allowing herself to be put in a dress and made to dance.

“You’ll be fine,” he murmurs as he leans in closer, his warm breath tickling the shell of her ear, “I am a very well practiced dancer. Just let me guide.”

Some of the anxious edge seeps away from her chest, his words calming her like nothing else could. This is all unfamiliar, but the man under her fingers is real, a weighty presence she’s come to know well. She stares at him with parted lips as he slowly moves forward, forcing her back. The motion brings her back to his words.

“You know how to dance?” She asks, bewildered, letting him sway her to the left as she allows her body to go soft in his embrace, pulling her along, “Wouldn’t you First Order people, with your no nonsense mentality and stickler personalities, not be allowed to dance?”
Kylo chuckles, “I am not people, Rey. I’m a Knight of Ren. Technically, I stand apart from the Order, even if I do hold a command within the organization.”

Rey bites her lip, “Wait, so you don’t answer to General Hux? Not really?”

He smirks, guiding her forward as he steps back, and soon enough she notices that they’re trailing a square, slowly turning a half moon every time until it becomes a delicate glide. When she looks down she nearly stumbles and Rey snatches her eyes back up to his. He was right, it was easier to keep her gaze on him.

“No, I do not answer to the General, I answer to the Supreme Leader. I’m his apprentice.”

This is the first time she’s heard of this. There’s so much she doesn’t know. She had assumed this whole time that Kylo Ren and General Hux were the leading forces of the First Order. She hadn’t known there was somebody else above them, and it makes her curious. That curiosity drives her forward.

“Who is he? What’s he like?”

Kylo purses his lips with a frown, his hand stiffening on her spine and the slow, soft circles pressed into her back stop. He obviously is trying to shut that line of conversation down, but she’s curious.

“So he’s technically your… boss?” She asks, eyes a little wider than necessary.

He tenses under her fingers, just slightly, though he continues to guide her flawlessly. They turn and turn, forgetting the people around them, unaware of a pair of icy blue eyes following their every move from the distance.

“In a sense,” he muses, but that’s as far as he’s willing to reveal to her. She doesn’t dare probe into his mind. Instead, sensing how this is going, she changes tactics once more.

“And your boss lets you dance?”

Kylo looks at her then and there’s so much amusement coming through the bond that she is relieved to know she made the right choice. She would be leaving soon. Leaving him behind, him and General Hux, and forgetting about all this. He had not been a horrible person despite his horrible choices, though he certainly had enough edges for Rey to cut herself on, and she figured it was time to simply enjoy what little time was left.

He grins, “No, technically my… boss doesn’t let me dance,” he replies, “It was my mother who taught me. Before she was a general, she was a senator. Before even that, Leia Organa Solo was a princess. There were many a gala to be attended as a child, so I learned to dance from her.”

His eyes take on a little glaze as he whispers this, pain crossing his eyes when the name of Solo slips out of his mouth, when he mentions his mother. Rey itches to reach out and touch his face. He looks so small, so fragile, that Rey throws all caution to the wind. She cups his cheek gently, and it brings his attention back to her in a flash. Good.

“Your mother was a princess?” She asks curiously. She sends an image of the Leia she had met to him, and he looks so heartbreakingly sad, but his eyes soften. He nods. Rey now knows why the woman could hold herself so tall, command such presence, despite being so small herself. “So that means that technically…”

Kylo smirks at the words left unsaid as he leans in, his breath teasing the lobe of her ear, sending a shiver down her spine that he’s quick to massage away with the pad of his thumb.
“Technically, I’m a prince.”

She smiles then, because this is the smug Kylo Ren she’s used to. She lets him guide her across the floor and her eyes lower, half lidded as she takes in the music. She had never heard something so beautiful in her life, Rey sways to it, the notes carrying her in the air, and Kylo takes those moments to watch her and burn that expression of happiness into his mind. One more night after this, and that would be all they had. All he’d have left of her. He reassures himself that this is for the best. Still, he opens the bond, daring to hope against all hope that she’d do the same. Rey smiles when she feels him open up and pulls the veil from her own side slowly. This time there are no angry emotions being traded. They dance in the silence of their own Force bond for a long time, letting the music wash over them gently, one of the few last notes to the song that was their story. Rey knew she would not see them again.

Then there’s a tap at Kylo’s shoulder and he’s suddenly stepping away from her as General Hux cuts in.

“May I?” He asks, more for Rey’s sake than Kylo’s, and the tall man gives him a long look before he nods. A forward lady immediately walks up to the retreating man and asks for a dance, leaving both Hux and Rey to stare after them.

“That was quick,” Rey mumbles, and the small tinge of jealousy doesn’t escape Hux’s ears.

“You have to share him eventually, Rey,” he teases, and is rewarded for his effort with a fiery glare. He smiles down at her instead, repeating his question.

“May I?”

Rey looks at his hand and then nods, gently letting her fingers fall into his own as he brings her closer by the waist, much like Ren had done. He doesn’t miss the way her cheeks glow pinkish in the warm haze of the evening when she looks at his hand, how she wets her lips carefully, quickly, when her fingers land on his. Her body is inches away from him and Hux has to force himself to keep his eyes on her face, realizing a second too late that the low cut of her dress leaves a rather large expanse of her sternum bare to his gaze, sending a soft hum of heat down to his stomach. He swallows.

“Did you know he was a prince?” She asks as they sway, disrupting his train of thought.

Hux manages to catch her eye before she levels another gaze at Ren, dancing slowly with a beautiful Kuati woman only so many feet away. The man is a vision. He could see why the tall woman dressed in ruby red would ask him to dance despite the reputation that preceded him.

“I did,” he replies, “though the only time he even comes close to acting like royalty is when he’s being a royal pain in my ass.”

Rey laughs, the light bell-like sound bringing his eyes back to her. She had a beautiful laugh.

“So you can be funny,” she muses out loud, and perhaps it’s the combination of champagne and the heady heat of so many bodies that prompts Hux to pull her in just a little closer.

“I can be many things, Rey of Jakku,” he speaks with half lowered lids. She’s gazing at him intently and all thoughts of Kylo are forgotten when she’s looking at him that way, and it disturbs him to
realize so quickly that he likes it.

Maybe the heat of everyone surrounding them, pressed much closer to them than they ever did to Kylo, is reaching her as well. He feels her hand sneak from where it rests over his greatcoat to crawl up under it.

She sighs as the warmth nestled there envelops her hand and his pupils expand for a moment, feeling her that much closer to him. His own thumb rubs absentminded circles on her spine, just below where Kylo had but a moment ago, and they dance peacefully in that single moment, no longer a general and a scavenger, a First Order Commander and a rebel. Just a man and a woman, and a third awareness dancing a few feet away, feet moving with a beautiful Kuati woman but mind gliding along elsewhere, enjoying the moment through Rey’s mind.

Hux allows himself to think back on their two months together, realizing how soon he’ll have to hand over the reins to Rey again. Funny, that, how he’d suddenly found himself giving over control to the unlikeliest of people. A scavenger girl on the other side of the war. Perhaps the universe wasn’t so stoic in the machinations of humans, after all. Perhaps it liked to play tricks on him.

He suddenly feels something being pressed into his mind. Rey, acting as a mediator in all things, plants Kylo in Hux’s awareness as if he were in her own. His eyes widen. Was this what it felt like to have not one but two people inside your mind at all times? He just barely stops himself from faltering. He doesn’t think that’s how the Force was supposed to be used, though he has to admit he knows little of what it could accomplish. He had only ever seen it used for war. From his vantage point, it had never been a gentle thing, a kind thing. Or perhaps it has to do with its wielder, he thinks as he looks down at Rey, whether it could be kind and gentle? The girl is full of surprises. The music and the heat must be playing tricks on them all. They sway for a few moments longer before the spell is broken.

The music stops and Rey’s hand is falling from under his great coat, and he lets go of her waist. They take a few steps further away and Hux immediately misses the warmth of her skin. He gives himself a mental shake and bows to her, a formality after a waltz, before he excuses himself and steps away. He has to get a grip on himself already.

Then Rey is being swept away, dance after dance, by a throng of men who have realized that the beautiful girl everyone is whispering about has finally danced with her companions and is now free to be swept off her feet. Hux and Kylo both keep very, very close eyes on her, but within so many dances she’s gone from stressed out about the prospect of being separated, to looking like she’s positively enjoying herself. Hux assumes she isn’t used to being the center of such pointed affections and attention from anyone, yet she deals with it with grace, even if every once in a while her cheeks turn deep red. She glows and Hux immediately hates the men, and women, who manage to bring that out of her. A look at Kylo Ren twenty steps away tells him the man is thinking the same thing.

It isn’t that he’s feeling territorial. No, he knows she does not belong to him or Ren. She’d be leaving them behind in less than twenty four hours, in fact. But the woman had spent nearly two months around him and not once had he seen what he’s seeing now across her features, people of all ranks and walks of life managing to bring forth from her in minutes what he hadn’t achieved in two moon cycles. It feels a little like an insult to his ego.

He lets the thought go, however, and decides to return his attention to those who approach him. Sometimes they are First Order sympathizers, sometimes he can tell they’re very obvious Resistance lovers - all of whom he deflects with a lot of cordiality and a few placed words before walking away - and the next thing he knows they are well into the night and Rey is nowhere to be seen.

He panics for a second, his mind going to the worst possible scenario, before he sees Kylo’s eyes
following a lone figure walking away from the ballroom and into one of the secluded balconies facing the mountain range. He shoots a look at Kylo, who seems to sense him from across the room and tilts his head in her direction. A question then. He glares, and the men hold a conversation this way for a few heartbeats as Kylo looks down at one of Her Majesty’s daughters, hinting that he is obviously preoccupied at the moment with someone he couldn’t just blow off. Not here.

Excuses, he projects. It had become far too easy for him to shove his thoughts at Kylo and Rey, and he’d be worried about it if not for the fact that his mind is already on a young brunette. Kylo’s lips twitch slightly as Hux feels the brush of a mind against his, but he doesn’t look back, leaving Hux to make his way towards the same balcony.

He always found himself looking at her from doorways. He thinks back to the many times he’d stood back and simply watched her, from the doorway of his rooms, of the bathroom, of her training space with Kylo aboard both the finalizer or the corvette they travelled in. It occurred to him then that he had spent two months looking after a girl, looking at her from doorways, and how funny was it that on this night he would do it again. He can’t help but stare at Rey, outlined in the glow of the silver ring of the shipyards around the planet that acted as a moon-like source of light, as he finally reaches the threshold. The wind blows on the soft curls she’d arranged her hair in, with a little help from Ren, and her arms wrap around her waist as she gazes at the snow capped mountains in the distance.

The chill cools the packed ballroom inside but out here she’d catch the death of her in that flimsy dress.

He removes his greatcoat from his shoulders and advances towards her quietly, then slowly sets the thick wool over her strong but slender frame, letting his hands linger for a second. Rey sighs and he smirks. She was probably freezing.

“It’s beautiful,” she tilts her chin towards the view, “I’ve never seen mountains.”

Hux walks around her and comes to stand to her left, eyes on the same mountains. He’d never noticed them. He’d made plenty of trips planetside to Kuat but had been too busy to really look. He has to admit they are certainly an impressive view, giant fingers reaching up to the skies. He’d remember them now.

“I hope you’ve enjoyed your night,” he offers, because what can he say that would top what she must feel at finally seeing such a sight?

“Certainly a lovely note to end on,” she supplies and he turns to look at her from the corner of his eye.

“There’s still tomorrow,” he reminds her, tone a little harder than he’d meant to. Was she trying to leave tonight? He tries and fails to stop the sudden drop of his stomach at the thought.

Rey nods but says nothing. She’d stay around for tomorrow.

They stand in silence for a long time, the only sound that of the music playing behind them. Every once in a while he catches her swaying in place, dancing by herself, and he bites his lip, knowing those quiet moments are not for him to witness or inject himself into. Then the music stops and she looks at him in the seconds it takes for another round of melody to start.

“You never answered me, General,” she prompts, and his brows come forth a degree in a small frown.

“What?"
“Why have you been so gentle with me, when you didn’t have to be?”

Hux looks at her for a long moment, eyes dancing on the freckles on her nose.

This place and that dance are messing with his mind, but he isn’t ready to inspect a part of him that knew the answer to her question. He couldn’t face that part of him, not yet. Not ever. She’d be leaving soon.

“Where will you go?” He counters softly.

Rey smiles a sad smile before turning her eyes back towards the mountains.

A small gift for a small gift, and neither one of them is willing to give it.

“Did I do well today?” She asks suddenly after a long stretch of silence and Hux does turn to look at her then, his body moving of its own volition.

The way she’s staring at him, as though he could give her the universe with one word, dislodges his lungs from where they usually rest and resettles them up in his throat. He’s not used to this feeling. To not being able to breathe. He steps way too far into her personal space before slowly reaching down to grab the hand that not so long ago had rested so comfortably on his shoulder.

Rey’s body seems to suspend in time, quiet and unmoving, waiting for his next move. Her nostrils flare slightly as Hux turns her palm up, inspects her fingers, turns her palm down, inspects her knuckles. His thumb brushes lightly over them. They’re rough, no doubt from years of scrubbing at parts and yanking on metal, beating against bellies of ships to find her next meal. It reminds him of how tough she is, and he smiles. Then he’s wrapping his fingers around hers and curling them inward. Her eyes widen the closer those knuckles come to his face, and his smile only grows wider.

He may not have prompted unguarded laughter out of her like those men this night had, but he knew he could do this. Catching the scavenger by surprise is a feat of its own, and one few people could achieve.

He lowers his mouth to her and grazes her knuckles, letting his lips part ever so slightly as he plants a very soft, very tender kiss. And he holds it there, cherishing the feeling of her skin against his, giving her the only reward he could give her, if he couldn’t hand her her freedom himself.

When he speaks his voice vibrates against them and Rey shivers.

“My dear Rey…You were extraordinary.”

Kylo watches from a distance as his companions stand apart from the crowds on a balcony overlooking the mountain range. They had stood there, unmoving, for the better part of twenty minutes. He’d witnessed as Hux had placed his coat on Rey’s shoulders and felt a particular thrill at seeing his general’s bars on her frame, at seeing her swathed in black as he’d so often imagined her. He’d watched as she swayed slightly, a small imitation of their dances earlier, and felt a pang at wanting to wrap her in his arms again and sway her to music only the two of them could hear. He’d watched as Hux turned his head to look at her with something close to admiration, though perhaps from this far away Kylo’s eyes were playing tricks on him.

He watches now as he turns and the next thing he knows Hux is kissing Rey’s hand.
He should feel jealous. He should be raging that it is the General standing in her proximity rather than him, but jealousy had left him a long time ago, he realizes with sudden clarity. Somewhere between leaving the Finalizer and landing on Kuat, he had stopped guarding jealously and allowed for a third entity to enter that space with him. He should have felt something other than odd comfort when Rey had pressed his awareness up to Hux’s in a way he didn’t know could even be accomplished via the Force, he should have felt something other than near want when he felt the ghost of a strong thumb circling his spine as Hux circled Rey’s. He should have wanted to rage when Hux kissed her knuckles, yet all he felt was heat pooling in his insides, a lump in his throat bobbing as he feels a ghost over his knuckles.

He is starting to wonder if this place is messing with him when another woman approaches him. He closes himself off from the bond, allowing them their privacy, and focuses on the woman.

Lady Tiagha.

He remembers her from negotiations, had watched her sit there glaring daggers at everyone.

“My Lord,” she greets, allowing him to speak.

“My Lady,” he replies, deep voice cool and unaffected. His eyes train on her for a little longer than necessary. The woman simply smiles before her eyes turn to where Rey and General Hux stand.

“She’s not one of yours, is she?” She asks. Kylo suppresses his hackles from rising.

“I’m not sure what you mean, Lady Tiagha. She’s my apprentice, if that is what you’re not so subtly inquiring about.” He knows he should not threaten, but he is, after all, Kylo Ren. He would not allow this woman to push him around, even if this was her turf.

The woman simply extends a hand as a peace offering.

“Forgive me, but I can’t help but be curious about the girl. She managed to snare us rather impressively this afternoon. Trust me, Lord Ren, that does not happen often. She’s rather special.”

Kylo’s eyes remain impassive on the woman yet a small bolt of pride sparks up at her words. Good. Let them know that Rey, worthy of being called his apprentice, was also worthy of much more in her own right. He had not aided with those negotiations - though it had been more like Rey clubbing the Kuati over the head and beating them at their own game - and he took pride in knowing that she had been capable of pulling it off smoothly. He is not a tactician to the level Hux is, but he could appreciate the intricacies of Rey’s power play, and she had excelled at it.

“She is,” he agrees, warming up a small amount to the woman. “Forgive me, Lady Tiagha. Is there anything I could help you with or are you approaching me simply to talk about my apprentice?”

Tiagha gives him a long considering look then, eyes slanting as she studies his face; his eyes, his lips, the set of his brows, and particularly the long scar running from browbone to jaw, disappearing under his robes.

“I have it in good faith that one of your Knights is somewhere in this room. I also have it in good faith that there are a lot of resistance sympathizers who have noticed your entrance and the woman on your arm tonight, Lord Ren.”

Kylo narrows his eyes. He had not even thought about the possibility. He’d been too busy wrapped up in Rey and Hux to even think about it. He nearly curses himself. The spell of the night had been broken with two sentences.
“Thank you, My Lady. But what prompted you to believe I needed to be warned?” He asks, voice as impassive as he can make it, which was a feat of its own, reminding himself that this is Kuat, and this woman is a member of one of its ruling families. He would not undo the work that Hux and Rey had so carefully crafted because of his temper, despite the curl of dread and anger already bubbling up.

The woman sends him a glare then, sharp and cutting. A reminder of what he’d already known; she isn’t one to be trifled with.

“Kuat may be a neutral system, Lord Ren, but that doesn’t mean every one of us is.” Her words are delivered low for his ears only, and he has to lean down to catch them to begin with.

So, a First Order sympathizer.

“So, a First Order sympathizer.”

“Thank you, My Lady,” he offers, hoping the gratitude shows.

She bows and then leaves him standing there after he returns the gesture.

Kylo sets about looking for the Knight Tiagha mentioned, irritation mounting with every step at the thought of not having been approached already. It’s much harder to spot one of his own when there are no helmets and black cloaks to look for in a ballroom crowded to the brim with party goers. His search doesn’t last long, however. He throws his awareness out, looking for any recognizable life signature. He immediately finds Hux and Rey, tucking them safely away while he continues to look until he finds a red little glow that belongs to a tall woman the color of night itself. She turns as she spots him, dark eyes widening slightly at his approaching stride and immediately bows to him in deference. He should have known. The woman was one of the few friends he had within his own group of knights — if he could call not being assassinated a friendship, though they were amiable enough — and she was a brilliant woman. Supreme Leader Snoke had picked well to send her. He would be proved right soon enough.

“Lady Yathe,” he inclines his head in return.

“My Lord Kylo Ren,” she replies, voice calm as always, “What an entrance.”

Kylo narrows his eyes, temples throbbing, jaw clicking. “Surprising you say that. Considering I had not known of your presence all night, I would have assumed you missed it entirely.”

“My apologies, First Knight,” she supplies, stepping closer and lowering her voice, “I am— was, now that you’ve found me—under specific orders to remain cloaked. I am sure you understand.”

He nods but remains silent. If Yathe had really not wanted to be found, he wouldn’t have found her.

“So the whispers are true, then…” Yathe offers, giving him a sidelong glance. “The girl is your apprentice?”

Kylo tenses. There are few people he trusts amongst his own Knights - any one of them would slice his throat open for a chance to take his place — but if he had to choose only one, Yathe would be it. He’d taken her under his wing when he was just twenty and she a young girl with hunger in her eyes, hunger to be something more. She was so very like him. Still, the thought that Snoke had sent her cloaked when the man surely knew he would be on Kuat settles like lead in his stomach.

“What whispers, Yathe?” He asks, careful not to ball his fists, “She is being trained under the guidance of Supreme Leader Snoke, no more, no less.”

Yathe lets out a soft hum that may have been agreement or may have been her blowing him off
entirely, carefully turning her champagne flute between long dark fingers. Her vague response prompts him to press the next question, simply because she left the door open.

“Why are you really here, Yathe? Fancy balls are not your sort of party, if I remember correctly.”

The woman shoots him a glance out of the corner of her eye before she brings up her glass to her lips, taking a long swig. When she lowers it after a long gulp of liquid courage, she narrows her eyes. Clearly she doesn’t want to be here either.

“To keep an eye on you, Kylo. You and your…companions.”

“Why would that be necessary?” He asks with barely restrained anger at the implications. Yathe, clearly unimpressed but familiar with his short temper, simply raises an eyebrow and shrugs.

“Why does Snoke do anything? You’d have to ask him.”

They stand in silence and Kylo watches as her eyes follow his to where Hux and Rey are returning from the balcony. The woman’s voice, so very light and soft in contrast to her usually intimidating appearance, floats to his ears.

“Is she as strong as they say she is, then?” She asks, clearly curious, but also gauging what rung on the power ladder Rey stands on. Kylo gives her a mirthless smile, all teeth and tug of lips that never reaches his eyes.

“I believe the scar on my face proves that.” He’s satisfied when Yathe flinches involuntarily. Yes, Rey was powerful - she couldn’t control it, or even coax it fully from behind her block, not yet - but the power was there.

“Good to know. Remind me never to get on her bad side, then,” Yathe sips her champagne once more and Kylo allows her to swallow before delivering the veiled warning.

“You would be wise not to attempt it.”

Yathe, smart woman that she is, turns to look at him then gives a curt nod. To act against Rey would be to act against him.

If she ever comes back, that is. And if she doesn’t, then she’s out of my hair and I don’t have to worry about it.

He still could not believe he had agreed to her release. He couldn’t believe he’d convinced himself to let her go. He’d almost backtracked, that afternoon in her room, when she’d looked at him with exhaustion and he’d avoided looking at her for as long as humanly possible. He’d searched and grappled for any foothold, and found that he couldn’t, not when keeping her against her will would cause nothing but pain for everyone involved.

No, letting her go was the right thing to do, even if it felt like tearing off a limb. Yathe pulls him back from that particularly painful train of thought.

“Believe it or not, Lord Ren, I do not envy you your title as First Knight. You get to be the one who’s under surveillance tonight, while I get to fly under the radar. You’re the one who has to answer to Snoke personally.” She smiles, and it’s not pitiful and not quite amused, “I just serve as messenger girl tonight. There will be challenges to your apprentice, you know this. That said, rest assured none will come from me. Not to you. Not to her.”

Kylo looks at her then. Really looks.
“There may be a time when I will need you to carry more than messages, Yathe,” he says, speaking words that he knows are about as close to committing treason as he can mutter. After his private meeting with Hux, he had decided that he would find out if Snoke was truly looking to finish his training or if he was being strung along, and Yathe was the perfect fly on the wall. He only hoped the woman would agree.

She considers him for a long while, onyx eyes rimmed by the yellow tinged whites of her eyes roving over the long scar on his face. Then she smiles. It’s a smile he hasn’t seen since they had been anointed Knights. Yathe’s loyalty had been hard fought for and earned. She may be dangerous, but she was his. This Kylo knew. Her smile, predatory and hungry, confirmed it.

“Anything I can do to be of assistance, Lord Ren,” Yathe says with a bow that Kylo returns.

“Did you tip off Lady Thiaga?” He asks after a moment, giving her a wary glance.

Yathe smiles. Bright teeth that shine from her dark features like a light, predatory as always.

“Who? Me?”

The Kuati sure know how to celebrate. By the time the trio is slipping back into their rooms it’s well into the early hours of the morning, the sky dark except for a soft hint of pink tinging the horizon with the oncoming sunset. They had nowhere to be, however, and so they’d spend the rest of their hours in their suite trying to catch a bit of rest before that fateful moment everyone was avoiding.

Rey had long left the men to their own devices after she’d kicked off her heeled shoes with a grunt and walked away to her room, slamming the door behind her and leaving the shoes where they fell. Hux picks them up carefully by the heel, setting them on the coffee table. Kylo’s staring at them as if the shoes might hold the answers to the meaning of life.

“Will you be ready for this?” Hux asks, because everything he’d planned for hinges on Kylo’s cooperation.

The man nods, but remains quiet. Hux watches him from the corner of his eye as he sets to removing his cuffs and loosening his bowtie. Kylo’s flung his beautiful cloak along the back of a chair, standing in the middle of the room with his gold trimmed robes glinting under the light.

“Snoke sent one of my Knights to spy on us today,” he says rather suddenly. Hux freezes.

“Which one?” He asks, turning robotically to face the man.

“Yathe Ren,” Kylo answers, flinging himself down on the chair on top of his cloak. Hux would have to have someone press it for tomorrow again.

“Can she be trusted?” He asks, knowing how ridiculous the question sounds. In a perfect world they would not be exchanging words of sedition like this, but the air smelled of gears grinding slowly, of large things slowly shifting.

Kylo snorts, “She’s the only Knight I would expect to not stab me in the back, if that’s what you mean.”

“You will need to send Lady Yathe on her way before Rey takes off,” Hux mutters, pulling at his
bowtie and undoing two buttons at his collar. He sighs at finally being able to breathe.

“I know.”

They sit in silence for a while then, simply staring at Rey’s shoes.

“This could backfire on us rather stupendously, General,” Kylo finally speaks, voice low and detached. He’s sitting with his arms flung over the sides of the chair, one leg crossed over the other. Like that, the man looks like he could conquer just about anything.

“Perhaps,” Hux agrees, “But if we’re being used only to be disposed of, I’d at least like to know. I like my skin where it is. On me.”

Kylo pins him down with a look. Hux had not told him any of this prior to this moment. A question of if suddenly becomes certainty. There is no longer a line between Knight and General. They are two men who fear the exact same thing, and neither one of them will take it kneeling down.

Hux smiles, searching for the cigarette lighter in his pocket as he pulls out a smoke from his great coat.

“If it turns out that Snoke simply wants a new force user and his goals remain the same as ours, then we have nothing to worry about, correct? We’re only mildly curious.”

Kylo returns his smile then, though there’s nothing gentle about it. He stares at Hux’s hand for a moment before letting out a soft hum.

“Those things will kill you, you know that, right?”

“So can your lightsaber and your fancy Dark Powers kill you, Ren. We all die of something.”

Kylo barks a laugh then and stands up, walking away and bidding his leave over his shoulder:

“General.”

“Ren.”

Chapter End Notes

Well...
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I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I know I certainly enjoyed writing it. Seemed like a fitting celebratory chapter to reach 100k words on.

Thanks to EjBlaKit for always, always being a beautiful enabler/encourager/overall amazing beta who keeps reading my stuff week after week and making sure it's the best I can make it. You beautiful soul, you.

IMPORTANT LINKS:
1. Rey’s Dress (imagine a small train to her skirt following behind, however)

(I will eventually get the boys' ensembles drawn, but today is not that day).
Friends

Chapter Summary

It's the last day on Kuat, and there are hard choices to be made.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The second day of celebrations is just as exuberant and as loud as the previous night. Kuat were proud, proper people. Until it came to partying, apparently. The men were charming, the women willing, and the alcohol flowed endlessly.

They arrive that night with far less fanfare than the previous evening now that everyone knew that they were planet side. That doesn’t keep Hux from tensing when, before being announced, he extends his arm to Rey only to have Kylo absentmindedly do the same. Hux looks at the other man, and Kylo simply stares at him impassively, neither one willing to be the first to give in. It had been unintended, but they would not be who they are if they had not spent a moment struggling against each other. Then Rey does what she's best at best: she surprises them both by snaking her arms into theirs until both men are escorting her inside, their names quickly announced. It must have been a sight, both men escorting her. Or perhaps she was escorting them? Hux doesn’t know.

Kylo is the first to disentangle himself, giving Rey a stiff squeeze on her wrist and a smile to both of them before excusing himself with some noncommittal excuse about seeing to an old acquaintance, which Hux understood as Kylo-speak for seeking out his Knight of Ren, Lady Yathe. In the absence of the Knight, he set himself to entertain Rey. He had no one to see to, having paid his respects the night before, and there was an eager force sensitive staring at him at the mention of food. They had had few options to taste the delicacies of Kuat the previous night and his lips tug at the corners at her obvious delight over the heaping tables, nearly buckling under the weight of the immense amount of intricately arranged hors d’oeuvre displayed. Rey starts popping globes of little juicy red fruits into her mouth one after another, letting out sounds that make his ears turn a slight shade of pink, but he simply follows her down the length of the tables as she gorges on sweets and expensive cheeses. For every little groan of delight she lets out, he finds his appetite leaking away little by little only to be replaced by a different sort of hunger in the pit of his stomach. He forces himself to concentrate on anything else.

“You might want to leave some space for dessert,” he calls to her, hands clasped behind his back as he shakes his head.

Rey turns from a few steps ahead and raises her eyebrows at him, cheeks puffed out with some sort of jelly-like substance. So unladylike. Neatly placed cubes all displayed in rows, impaled by tiny toothpicks, stare at him from the table. Rey already has about six toothpicks in her hand. She’d picked them off one by one until her cheeks bulged.

Rey struggles to chew and swallow before carefully trying to clean her mouth with the back of her hand. He cringes. You could take the girl out of the desert…

Still, she manages to miss some and Hux’s thumb instinctively reaches out. Her eyes trail him as he presses it to the corner of her mouth and very gently wipes away the little bit of yellow jelly hanging
there. Hux nearly sucks the sticky substance off his thumb before he stops with a jerk, reaching instead for a napkin off the table.

“Dessert?” She asks, bringing him back to reality.

“A small send off gift. Consider it a token of my appreciation. I had someone prepare something for once we return to the room. I do hope you aren’t too full for it? I would have tried for something else but I clearly remember Kylo’s gift of clothes to you the last time.” Slowly, Rey puts down the toothpicks on a tray and he doesn’t miss the small creep of color that takes over her cheeks, so alluring in the light of the chandeliers. Yet she grins at the idea of dessert and Hux feels much like he had when he’d allowed her to contact her beloved Resistance to warn them; he tucks that smile away for the lonely, cold days ahead. Part of him tells him he needs to get off Kuat. Two days, a handful of dances and he’s starting to go soft. Still, she avoids the food tables for the rest of the night and he allows himself to feel a small amount of satisfaction. She’d accept his gift; is even seemingly looking forward to it, in fact.

Hux snags two flutes of champagne, handing one to her. She eyes it warily.

“I don’t know if that’s a great idea, General,” she murmurs, obviously remembering the last few instances she’d decided alcohol was a good idea.

“One flute, no more. Its alcohol content is very low.”

He offers it partly because he would allow himself the same, and partly because it gave him something to focus on other than her standing rather too close. She accepts, and they stay comfortably in silence, admiring the ballroom without really seeing, looking at their drinks without really drinking. They avoid the dance floor, both their minds running back to their waltz the previous night, to the alcove, to warm lips brushing slender knuckles. Hux is thinking about how childish it is to be put out of his element by a tiny slender girl standing just close enough for her arm to be brushing his. He’s a grown man.

He’s berating himself quietly for his lapse in good judgement when she speaks.

“Where is Ky—Where is Ren?” Rey asks rather suddenly, her eyes turning to look at him.

Hux opens his mouth to speak when a tall, dark and handsome gentleman slowly starts to approach. The man immediately reminds him of FN-2187 and Hux nearly sneers. The man takes in Hux’s face and immediately does an about left, covering his tracks as he approaches another young lady.

“Look at that — You scared him away,” Rey chides, voice tinged with amusement, “You won’t make friends that way if you scare people before they approach, General.”

She’s teasing him. He knows she’s teasing him. Still, Hux’s brain can sometimes only handle so much stimulation, and she’d provided plenty over the last half hour without even knowing. It’s so absurd to his mind that they’re in a ballroom in their fineries, and the girl who had once been his prisoner is standing there teasing him, looking so lovely while she was at it, implying things about him that she had no right to. He purses his lips and stares her down, words a little harsher than necessary.

“I do not need friends, girl.”

Rey immediately tilts her chin up at him defiantly. He loves that expression.

“What am I, then? And call me girl one more time and I will take you down right here if I must.”
Oh, she is angry.

He arches an eyebrow a hair, letting her question go unanswered.

He likes it when she is angry. He has no doubt she’d try to strike him down, even in her dress, given the opportunity. Anyone else would have died for less than the threat she just made but he just lets it roll off his shoulders with a smirk on his lips.

“He wasn’t coming here for me, Rey.”

Rey’s brows furrow slightly, then, as his words sink in, they start going up. The flush slowly begins to creep up her cheeks once more.

“Oh.”

How could she be so clueless when she was so sharp witted with everything else? Even he, a man who rarely took notice of anything but himself and work, can see what a vision she paints this night. Waves hanging free of her usual buns, the bodice of her dress a lacy thing that is far too enticing to the eye — He knows there’s a slip-like fabric under it, but it’s just the right color of her skin, giving the illusion of nothing underneath — The rest of her frame a cascade of soft, flowy black fabric. Hux had noticed Ren openly staring when she’d stepped out of her room, barely managing not to openly stare himself.

Before the whole thing can get too uncomfortable he lets out an audible, pained sigh, and snatches her champagne flute from her hand, ignoring the elicited complaint from her about not being done with that when he passes them off to a young serving boy. Hux turns to her and gives her a look of mild annoyance before gently taking her by the elbow and leading her towards the dance floor; he seems to only have two ways of pleasing her: food and dance. In lieu of food, he’d twirl her around until she forgets her irritation.

They slip into position more easily than the previous evening and Hux gets what he had been deprived of before - watching her face alight as the music starts. He would never tire of how easily she let herself be surprised, amused, bewitched by simple sounds. For that look alone he’d collect just about every beautiful sound in the galaxy and offer it to her. Soon they’re gliding around the room silently to the orchestra, her silky skirts kissing his legs, his white cloak floating behind him. They keep their attention on each other, except where Hux is looking at her face, Rey’s staring at his adam’s apple, nibbling on her lip in consternation. He aches to reach out and stop her from doing that with his thumb, to guide her to look him in the eye instead.

“Are we not friends, Hux?” She finally asks, having mustered the courage out of somewhere, determined not to let the subject drop.

Her eyes never reach his. His, however, cling to her face as his adam’s apple bobs. This is the first time she’s ever used his name and it rolls off her lips a little too softly. It’s not even his first name and he’s already acting like a fool.

“Does it matter? You’re leaving me in less than six hours,” he murmurs, immediately cursing himself and wishing he could take it back when she looks as though she’s been kicked in the gut.

So he makes to amend quickly.

“You’ve lasted almost two and a half months around me without dying or killing me outright,” he offers, and this brings her eyes to his. Finally. “You’ve shared my living quarters, my meals, my refresher — even slept in my bed once — my cat seems to like you more than she likes me…”
Those beautiful green brown eyes of hers glint in the chandelier light and he almost regrets having forced her to look up as he swallows on empty air. His eyes trail off above her head, thinking of all the other things she’s done. She matches him wit for wit, she defies him at every turn, never backs down from his challenges; she gets under his skin and sets his temper on fire, managing it all without flinching or cowering. And somehow she does it all without knowing.

When his eyes return to her face, there’s a small smile fighting to birth itself on her lips.

“Yes, I say that would qualify as…friends. Perhaps as close to being a friend as anyone’s gotten, little scavenger.”

In truth, with the exception of Phasma, he had little in the way of friends or acquaintances. Even then, Phasma had only stuck around because she was too much like him to be scared away.

She doesn’t fight him on the moniker. She’s too busy smiling a small, secret smile. He tightens his grip on her waist and tugs her just a little closer. They could be friends for the next six hours if it meant she wouldn’t look at him as though he’d tried to kill her cat…or, rather, his cat.

He needs to get off Kuat.

This place is making him go soft.

“He likes her,” comes the crystalline voice from beside his shoulder and Kylo’s eyes jerk to Yathe’s face.

They’d stood in a darkened corner of the ballroom watching Hux and Rey take over the ballroom floor like a dream come to life, black dress and white cloak taking over in an incessant twirl, two halves to a whole.

He says nothing. He does not need to. With enough time Yathe would explain herself.

She does.

“The man doesn’t allow anyone within ten feet of him. The few times I’ve seen him he’s barking orders in a voice hard enough to match yours, Kylo, and he runs the First Order with an iron fist.” Yathe lists off all the things Kylo had already known about Hux. Those were the comfortable things. The things Kylo could depend on to receive from the man. She continues with uncomfortable ones.

“Yet he’s dancing without a care in the world and turns to putty when she smiles. I can sense his desire rolling off him all the way from here.”

His Knight is immensely amused at the whole display between the couple on the marble floor. He can feel it through the force. Kylo’s gaze turn back to them and lingers for a little too long.

“Perhaps you’re right,” he murmurs. “Though that is hardly any of my business. Or yours. We’re not here to discuss the General.”

Yathe looks at him from the corner of her eye and her thick, dark brow arches.

“Could have fooled me,” she quips, but as Kylo’s mood instantly starts to darken she raises herself to her full height and gives him a bow of the head, a small olive branch.

“Forgive me, First Knight. How may I help you?”
Kylo’s nostrils flare for a second longer before he schools himself back to apathy. He would worry about Rey and the General later. For now Kylo had bigger things to worry about.

“Are you reporting to the Supreme Leader tonight?” He asks, moving in closer to keep their conversation quiet. Yathe Ren nods.

“As soon as I’m done here, in fact.” She tilts her head and her dark, curious eyes study him for a minute longer than necessary. Any other Knight would have been dealt serious consequences for overstepping, but this is Yathe. And he needs her at this moment. Unleashing on her is the worst way he could go about ensuring she’d cooperate.

“I need you to… alter… your findings.”

Her brows shoot up infinitesimal at this, “You want me to lie? To the Supreme Leader? Do you want me dead that much?”

Kylo gives her a pseudo-smile. “You will not be lying, I promise. But it will go a long ways in confirming my suspicions.”

“What are those?” She asks, too curious for her own good.

“Don’t you worry yourself about that - better if you don’t know. Snoke can’t pluck from you what isn’t there.”

“Ok…” Her eyes narrow. “What’s the message?”

“We bargained for two Star Destroyers and three thousand TIE fighters. The negotiations were successful. We had a grand time at the ball, and then Rey escaped.”

Yathe’s eyes fly to the couple spinning in the dance floor.

“Forgive me, Lord Ren, but either you’ve become really good at pulling an apparition out of the Force like a magic hat trick, or the girl is standing right there in your General’s arms.”

Kylo gnashes his teeth.

“He’s not my General, Lady Ren, and she will attempt to escape. How she manages that is inconsequential.”

“Why would I possibly stick my neck out that way, Kylo?” Yathe asks, “If he finds out I’m lying, he’ll have my head.”

“You’re one of the best Knights I have at concealment,” he admits, “I’m pretty sure you could hide your thoughts from the Maker himself if you so chose to. He will not find out. As to why… I believe our venerable Lord Supreme Leader Snoke has not been very… forthcoming… lately. I want to make sure he still has our best interests at heart.”

Yathe’s ears prick up. As always, she’d let the compliment wash over and away from her and concentrated on what was truly important.

“And if you’re wrong?” She asks.

He looks at Hux and Rey once more before turning back to her.

“If it turns out I’m wrong, then we have nothing to worry about.”
Yathe gives a full bow to him then, and for the sake of keeping up pretenses — they are, after all, just a lady and a gentleman at a ball — Kylo returns it with a bow of his own. Yathe seems ridiculously amused by that, so he sends her a mental warning.

*Don’t get used to it.*

She flinches then gives him a much smaller nod, taking off to do his bidding. Kylo stands where he is. Nobody approaches him. A dark knight in a dark corner in the room, looking a little bit like he’s brooding, is no invitation for any normal person to get closer. So he’s allowed a perfect view of the General and his Apprentice — for he would always think of her that way now — dancing away the minutes in a peaceful bubble of a dream. He feels Rey’s elation through the bond at listening to music, at dancing, something that’d always been such a rarity to her on Jakku; of being held and having to worry about nothing but letting the man holding her lead her about the floor. A small, precious, fragile bubble. He lets them have it and steps off towards one of the massive balconies. When he looks down he catches just a glimpse of Yathe’s flowing cloak, already thrown over her fighting clothes as she once more assumes the role of Knight and disappears into the shadows.

When they finally make it to their rooms Rey’s feet are hurting. She’d spent the night dancing away with the General and other men, even once or twice sharing a dance with Kylo Ren and the balls of her feet were sore. Her legs were sore. She wasn’t used to this. Yet as the hours passed and the ball room emptied, it became obvious to all three that the clock was ticking closer to her departure. The dances stopped, the easy conversation became just a hair more tense, and soon enough they all gave up and decided it was time to return to the room earlier. Rey was already worrying about her trip, memories of beautiful gowns and music falling away into the past when the door beeps and a small trolley is being rolled in, taking her by surprise.

“Dessert,” Hux announces.

Kylo is standing like a gloomy wall off to the large windows overseeing the mountains, practically ignoring them both.

She can’t help herself. It’s half her mental wiring from years of starving and scrounging for sustenance, and half her newly discovered sweet tooth. She walks over to the trolley, where the redhead General waits for her. Hux gives her a tiny tug of the lips before he’s lifting a tray’s lid to reveal three crystal glasses of some sort of thick, milky substance with small pruney items inside, sprinkled with a dusting of rusty red spice. Rey raises her eyebrows.

He lifts up a glass and a spoon and hands it to her.

“Try it,” he orders, and Rey hesitantly takes a spoonful and brings it to her lips.

It’s sweet, thick and soft. There are traces of what seems to be some sort of grain but her tongue’s mostly wrapped up in the heady sweetness with a hint of a deep spice. Her brows shoot up even further. She bites into one of the prune things. It’s sweet and fleshy.

“What is it?”

Hux smiles.

“Grandmother’s recipe. It’s an old thing, passed down through the family for hundreds of years now, from back when people had to get creative with their main food staples. It’s not much but…”

He’s inspecting her face closely, waiting for her to say something; that she doesn’t like it, perhaps.
He’s so far from the truth. It’s nothing like the treats served at the Kuati ball. Those had been elegant, complex, tiny, and could never fill her no matter how many she’d taken. This was heavy, warm and sweet and went down thickly. She knew if she ate the whole thing it would fill her as a meal would.

“It’s amazing!”

And he smiles. It’s a boyish smile. He looks so much younger than his years when he gives her that smile, eyes crinkling up in a way she didn’t know was even possible for his face. Maybe it’s because she’s leaving that Hux allows himself to behave this way around her now; dropping his guard a hint and letting her see something other than the hard-cut man of granite that is General Hux for just a second. She returns the smile before she picks up a second glass and pointedly sends Kylo a look. Hux seems to notice it and nods, leaving Rey to wander over to Ren’s side quietly. She stands in front of him and she knows he’s aware of her presence, but his eyes are trained out the window, so she clears her throat.

“Dessert?” She offers. His gaze lingers a moment longer before he slowly brings his gold flecked eyes to land on her hand.

Kylo shakes his head, “I’m fine.”

Rey’s eyes narrow.

“I’m leaving soon and the General was kind enough to do something nice for me and you will not ruin it. Eat.”

His brows lift and he takes in her face at that moment.

“You’re getting a little too big for your trousers,” he snips, but his hand is slowly picking up the glass as he turns to stare at it. “Seems you’ve forgotten I’m your Master, not the other way around.”

Rey scoffs.

“You’re not my Master. I thought we agreed on this.”

If he’s annoyed at her for the rebuttal, he doesn’t show it. Still, he certainly projects it. Kylo stares at the treat in his hand, his other hand hoisting the spoon in the air, pointedly avoiding looking at her. His lips tense, and Rey gets the distinct impression that he’s trying not to speak. That he knows better than to open his mouth. He would not be Kylo Ren if he did as he should however.

“No, you agreed on it, Rey. By yourself,” he murmurs, eyes still on his pudding. Rey’s is now forgotten in her grasp. “I offered to give you everything, and you agreed you’d only take what you needed and run. Why are we pretending otherwise?”

Her lips purse. There’s apathy coming through the bond from him, but laced through it there’s a deep feeling of dejection, she can feel it as if it were her own, standing this close to him. A bubble of frustration starts building up. They’re so entangled in their little skirmish that they’ve somehow forgotten the man who’s now sitting himself on a chair to watch the spectacle.

“Why are you pretending any of this was going to last?” Her voice comes, slowly rising in exasperation with every word, “We’ve been on opposite sides of this blasted war since you took me on Takodana!”

Kylo’s eyes land on her then, obviously remembering the incident, nostrils flaring. She’s not done yet. She’s projecting all of her anger and in turn he’s giving her all of his frustration through the bond. It’s like a two-pronged argument going on, and Rey can’t be bothered to keep her voice down.
“Just because you planted yourself in my brain and decided to take up residence, just because you taught me for a handful of weeks, does not give you any right to me!”

“And what other alternatives do you have?” He grinds out through clenched teeth, “What, run back to your gaggle of thieves and murderers and then—what? Become a pilot? Sweat under Leia Organa’s thumb until she sends you on a suicide mission? You said it yourself, Skywalker rejected you.”

The temperature in the room is spikes suddenly.

“Oh that’s rich, coming from you. Murderers? You, who killed your own father, have the absolute gall— Whatever they do will never compare to what you have done! What you did to me! Or have you forgotten how you dug into my thoughts without permission already? Whatever I decide to do will at least have been my choice! Something you clearly never gave me.”

Kylo very pointed ignores her question. Ignores the reminder of Han, because he’ll explode if he focuses on it. Ignores everything and unleashes instead, frustration through the bond reaching its maximum.

“Argh! you stubborn woman— I’m giving you one now! I’ve given you so many!”

His tone is pleading, exasperated, tired… she nearly bites her tongue.

“And what? You expected me to drop everything because the almighty Lord Ren suddenly decided to look at the desert rat? And don’t deny you’ve thought of me as that this whole time. I had a life before you! It wasn’t the best of them, but it was going somewhere. I had found a place to belong, I had found friends, I had found something to believe in! Then you come in and simply drop out of the kriffing sky and decide that’s all for you to take. Forgive me if I say no, thank you, Lord Ren.”

He opens his mouth to speak but she’s not done yet, because she’s been bottling this in for so long.

“You go around, taking what you please, and doing as you please, thinking the rest of us are just around to grovel at your feet without caring for the needs and sakes of other people; You, you had everything! I’ve heard the stories from Chewie. You had parents who loved you, a mother who taught you to dance, a father who tried to save you, an uncle who thought the world of you. A comfortable home. People who cared, Kylo. You had a life and you threw it all away for…for what? For skulking around at the feet of your Master, killing people left and right without conscience? I could never — would never — allow myself to be an apprentice to a man who is so obviously devoid of any emotional range outside of your constant fury!”

Kylo tenses with every word she utters until he’s holding the glass in an iron grip. Rey doesn’t need the bond to feel that very same fury building. His hand is shaking and the other hand is fisted at his side and he’s just about to take his glass and chuck it against the wall with a scream when—

A throat clears.

Rey and Kylo both turn to look at Hux, who has been watching them silently while slowly eating his own dessert. He arches an eyebrow at them both and Rey’s face blooms with red splotches. She’d completely forgotten about him. She fully expects him to berate her now, the berating she knows she so rightfully deserves, but when Hux finally speaks he’s addressing Ren instead.

“Please don’t throw that. I would hate to have to pay for damages.”

Rey watches as the men look at each other for a long time, having a silent conversation from which she’s excluded. Kylo’s eyes gleam darkly, darker than she’s seen them before, Hux’s remain calm
and unflinching. And just like that Kylo gets a hold of himself. He very slowly, very cautiously sets down the glass of pudding and spoon on the window sill before storming off into his room in a billow of dark cloak and raven hair, leaving her standing there numbly.

Hux turns his eyes on her then, Rey nearly moving to follow and apologize, and gives her a very small headshake. Now is not the time. Hux gets himself up as if it pains him to move from his comfortable chair before following Ren, closing the door softly behind him.

Rey looks at her delicious dessert, now lukewarm in her hands. She’s lost her appetite.

She sighs and walks into her room instead, ready to tear this ridiculous gown off of her and go. It’s time to leave.

Hux watches as the two force sensitives in front of him slip into the roles they play best: each other’s antagonizers. It’s like watching a holovid drama in real life and he treats the situation as such, eating his pudding as he watches. Until Kylo looks about ready to get destructive, that is. He clears his throat before the rampage starts. The last thing he wants is to have to deal with an angry staff and fork over credits just because the big baby got upset. He says as much.

Kylo shows all restraint the man possibly possesses as he sets the crystal glass and spoon down, then he storms off.

“That woman is insufferable,” Kylo growls as Hux follows him into his rooms. He shuts the door behind him and stands just a few steps ahead, arms crossed, listening to a pacing Kylo calling the girl a whole lot other of things: stubborn, hardheaded, infuriating. The ever infernal scavenger.

“She wouldn’t have lasted this long if she wasn’t,” Hux speaks with a rather light tone, “You or I would have killed her long ago. You know she spoke truth. Most of it, anyway.”

Kylo stops then and finally takes Hux in, his eyes darkening at the words. Perhaps that was the wrong thing to say.

“So what, I should just stand there and take it? Let her walk all over me before she takes her leave and leaves us behind like so much garbage, because she’s done scavenging?” Kylo growls, but the heat is slowly starting to leak out.

“Do you trust me?” He asks, ignoring Kylo’s line of query.

Kylo glares.

“You are letting her go, aren’t you?”

“Do I have any other choice?”

Hux shrugs, “You always have had a choice, Ren; The girl has never been afforded the same luxury. Something she clearly begrudges you, of course, and probably me as well. The only way she’ll come back to us is if we also give her the choice to make that decision on her own.”

Kylo skulks around in the small space, pacing the room with fists clenched.

“And what if I don’t want her to come back?” He growls, a caged wolf.

“Don’t you?” Hux asks, slightly confused for the first time. He nearly starts planning ahead for what
to do should Kylo get in the way of his plans when the Knight shakes his head. What the man wanted or did not want would not be what decided his actions for him. This would be entirely up to Rey. Kylo’s pacing intensifies and, when he speaks, Hux gets the feeling the words are not meant for him.

“I don’t know what I want anymore,” he mutters.

Ren starts yanking at his fine clothes in anger. His gloves go flying, his shoes thump against the walls, and when he gets to his cloak and starts yanking at the golden seals keeping the cloak clipped to his robes to try and remove it, Hux realizes he needs to intervene. The clasps are complicated and fragile, and Kylo would not be gentle in his fury, and that would be a shame. It’s a beautiful cloak. He steps forward and swats Kylo’s hands away.

“Stop. You’ll ruin a perfectly beautiful cloak that way.”

Kylo freezes and Hux sets to work, avoiding his eyes. The small little golden clasps have a tiny pin closure and Hux has to maneuver his long fingers to try and disengage the lock. It forces his face close so he can see what he’s doing, close enough that he can feel Kylo’s hot breath on his hair. The man jerks as if to move away.

“Stop it,” Hux commands, yanking him back closer by the chain of the cloak, forcing him to stand where he had been. “You’ll only make this worse.”

He fidgets with the thing, near about to curse as well when finally his fingers hit the right spot and the seal disengages with a soft click. Hux looks up with a triumphant smirk, about to gloat, except the motion brings his face inches from Kylo’s and his words freeze in his throat, the smile slipping off his face immediately.

He should step back. Much like with Rey, Ren seems to be able to read him like an open book and he’s far too close. He’s about to make a hasty retreat when a hand grabs him by the elbow, forcing him to stay in place. His eyes travel down to Kylo’s fingers wrapped around the fleshy crook of his arm, narrowing by the second.

“Am I really as bad as she says? Is that how everyone sees me? How you see me?” Kylo asks, voice low and scratchy, and Hux can’t bring himself to irritation any longer, the possessive hand around his elbow nearly forgotten.

“Like I said,” he clears his throat, “she wasn’t lying.”

Kylo gives him a long look, studying his face until Hux starts to feel uncomfortable. Kylo reaches up then and covers Hux’s hand with his own. Hux’s stomach clenches. It only lasts a second.

Kylo pries Hux’s fingers away slowly, gently, until their hands hover in midair. Hux snatches his back as if burned. Ren has not stopped staring at him but Hux’s eyes are too busy trying to look anywhere else but at the dark, tall figure so close in front of him, heart thundering uncomfortably.

“Excuse me, I have things to attend to,” Hux clips out before turning on his heel and exiting the room, closing the door behind so he no longer has to stare at Kylo Ren burning a hole in his back. Time to try and salvage what he can.

Once outside he takes a steadying breath, noting that the common area is empty. So, she had retreated to her room. Unlike with Kylo, Hux makes his way to her door slowly and rasps his knuckles on the door. Silence.

He knocks again.
Has she left already?

“Come in, door’s unlocked,” comes the muffled sound from the other side. Hux eases the door open and steps through.

She’s changed, dressed in a gunmetal grey tunic and a white undershirt she must have forced out of the tailors; Hux certainly doesn’t remember ordering them. Her slacks are the standard black of First Order petty officers. She’d prepared.

“Leaving so soon?” He asks sardonically, leaning against the door frame, his usual position for watching the girl.

She shoots him a glare but says nothing, walking around the room collecting what few belongings are truly hers, the two gowns she’d looked so stunning in tossed on the bed in a heap like so many rags. Hux contains a sigh.

“Rey…” he speaks softly, bringing her attention to him as he walks forward, closing the space between them. He’s slipping into his usual role now, he knows, slowly prying her hand from her satchel — another procured item he didn’t know about — and enfolding it in his own. Her eyes travel to his and pin him there.

“Rey —” he repeats, “Do you really want to leave so badly?”

“Yes,” she replies without hesitation. It almost makes him start panicking that his plan will fall apart, but then she’s biting her lip. “He’s insufferable.”

He smiles.

“He had similar words for you,” he admits, “Is that the only reason why you want to leave?”

If he could convince her to stay, to not have to let her go, it would make his plans much easier. It wasn’t because part of him was already regretting the decision to let her go in the first place, missing the little smiles and breathy huffs of irritation.

She does hesitate then, before her eyes lower and she yanks her hand out.

“I’ve been a prisoner and Ren’s pet project, nothing more. That wouldn’t change if I stayed.”

His lips thin, turning down at the corners.

“False, little one. You’ve proven to be useful here,” he offers, trying to veer her thoughts towards the more…palatable parts of her stay. “You could be useful still. No longer a prisoner. You’re immensely smart…” he narrows his eyes at her when her gaze finds him, smirking, “sometimes frustratingly so.”

She grins at that, which is all the encouragement he needs.

“You could be one of us. We’re not the resistance… I know, and you wouldn’t have to believe in what we do, but you could be one of us. Have a proper home. A proper teacher. I could teach you, as well, if you’d let me.”

By the time the next words are flowing out of his mouth Hux is no longer acting, not anymore. He hadn’t been acting for minutes now, even if he doesn’t want to admit it to himself.

“We could be your friends— I admit, I’m not the most…” He sighs, frustrated with himself now that
his words start to lack, something that had never happened before. Despite her having yanked her
hand away, he grabs it again and brings it close to him, undeterred, trying to make her see, “I’m not
the easiest man to get along with… but I could try. You could belong. You could do big things. Help
make this galaxy better. You just have to trust me, Rey.”

He feels so out of his depth, trying to speak from the heart when he can’t remember the last time he
had. Yet when he offers her the galaxy, when he offers her a chance to rule alongside him and make
it all better, he’s telling the truth. There’s a moment when her face looks like she wants nothing more
but to accept. Desire and need flash across her face for a single breath, and he dares to hope.

Then she narrows her eyes at him.

“Who are you and what have you done with angry, stuffy General Hux?”

He snorts.

“Kuat’s turned me soft, I’m afraid,” he quips with a smirk before letting his expression return to
seriousness once more, “I am not lying, however. You have to believe that.”

She studies him for so long he starts to feel like an ant under a magnifying glass and has to contain
himself from shifting his weight. Only this woman and the man in the other room could ever manage
to put him at odds with himself without so much as uttering a sound. Still, he straightens his back and
squeezes her hand, refusing to let her go just yet. In his mind, if she decides to stay after his heartfelt
plea, then that would be time gained for his cause.

But it’s not to be. She slowly slides her hand out of his and looks at the floor.

“Thank you, General, but I think perhaps it’s best if I go.”

He does let himself sigh tiredly then, reaching down and tilting her head up by the chin until she’s
looking at him once more. He hates it when she looks down.

“I tried at least,” he confesses, offering her a tired smile, “in that case, allow me a moment.”

He watches to make sure she won’t bolt the second he steps out. Rey nods and he turns, walking
quickly to his room and procuring two small items from his great coat before returning to her side.
When he offers them to her, he knows he’s basically handing her the keys to his kingdom and
suppresses the itch to slap himself.

“There’s a ship in hangar bay A42 with engines prepped and cleared for departure. This access chip
will allow you to enter the hangar and board. I’m sure you’ll be able to fly it just fine.”

The small orange, card-sized chip is pressed into her hand. Then he hesitates for a moment. Hux
knew full well he was about to make the biggest gamble of the night — no, of the last two, almost
three damn months, and what he was giving her was barely the size of her palm.

“You’re prepared,” she comments, brows raised.

“When am I not?” He murmurs, palming the next item. “I am nothing if not a man of my word.”

She looks at him questioning, eyes going back and forth between them. Hux takes a breath and
places it in her hand along with the orange access card.

“This is a navigational tracker. It’s been locked onto the Finalizer. Should you choose to return to
me” — he nearly bites his tongue trying to get those words back, but it’s too late to stop now —
“you’ll be able to find my ship’s coordinates from anywhere in the galaxy.”

Her eyes widen to saucers, unbelieving, shifting from the tracker to his face and back.

Hux hardly believes he’s doing it either. He knows she could just as easily turn that pad over to the Resistance and doom his ship to attack. Instead he steels himself.

Bigger picture. Remember the bigger picture.

“Please don’t make me regret the decision to trust you, Rey… if you don’t want to return, then see to its safe disposal.”

And that was it. She could just choose to leave, untangle herself from war, and that would be a good thing for her. It would also mean he’d never see her again. She wanted a choice, so he was giving it to her. He had nothing else to offer.

Rey nods, a tiny thing, so small he nearly misses it. Then she turns away from him without another word and he knows he’s been clearly dismissed.

There will be no goodbyes here. Hux looks at her for a second, another, a third, then forces his feet to move as he turns and exits without looking back.

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The hangar is pretty easy to find. The ship is a nondescript vessel that, as promised, is prepped for departure and stocked with a ridiculous amount of rations for her trip. Rey boards with enough ease once she uses the access key, leaving it in the slot for the hangar and closing the bay door behind her. She steels herself as she drops her satchel in the copilot’s seat and drops into the pilot seat herself.

She takes a deep breath and hesitates for just a moment before turning on the ship and easing the ship out of the hangar. Nobody asks questions over the comm link when she ascends — the vessel had been cleared for departure — and soon enough she’s exiting Kuat’s orbit, flying a ship for the first time in months, her veins thrumming with excitement.

It peaks as she hits open space and she drives the ship into hyperspace.

Finally, finally she’s free.

Chapter End Notes

Sigh.

Sigh sigh sigh.

Well, loves, we finally got to this point. It's a little bittersweet.

This officially marks the halfway point for this story, though perhaps now that the chapter count is going up (another 5 chapters have been tentatively added up to the 30, though it might be more...? we'll see), we'll have to reassess what the midway point is lol. But at least know that the chapter count is going up!
Also, there have been a few requests for scenes that we don't see in the story, so I'm planning on starting a series of drabbles for scenes that happen off-camera that I'll link to once I start posting them :)

Comments & concrit always, always welcome. You guys know me, I live for your comments and for discussing with you what's happening. It keeps me going.

IMPORTANT LINKS:
1. Rey's gown, in black.
2. Hux's outfit (I have a giant obsession with Hux in white, I can't help it, lemme alone).
3. Lady Yathe (I forgot to link her the last time oops...)

p.s: the dessert is rice pudding ;) chosen for no reason other than I was eating some. now, who wants to take bets on how far Hux had to go to source real raisins? anyone?

p.p.s: Remember that Reylo roadtrip fic I mentioned not that long ago? well, it's been publishing now for about two weeks or so, and now it's up to chapter seven. Everything, of course, goes wrong at every turn. It's a riot. you should all go read it, lovely people who have followed me here so far: A Proposal by Any Other Name (APAON), by yours truly.
The first realization Kylo has about Rey’s departure is that it was a colossal mistake to allow her to go.

The second realization is that he can’t allow her to go much farther. Damned be his desire to send her away before Snoke could replace him with her. He would deal with that when the time comes. He can’t let her go, not with her sitting firmly in his head. He leaves Hux to return to the Finalizer by himself while he takes a ship and sets to following her. Irritated, he follows her through two systems, except she’s ridiculously good at avoiding him because she switches transports regularly, leaving Kylo to stumble upon the abandoned spacecrafts with zero clue as to where she's headed. With some luck, he finds the first two, but by the third ship he's lost her trail. He'd followed her using the tracking chip in her arm until he finds it in a seedy clinic shop in Coruscant, obviously having been removed.

He’d entered the small little waiting room, with it’s yellow-stained white tile and the loop of an old holo-screen buzzing in his ears, checking his own pad’s blinking directional arrow as if saying ‘she’s here!’ except she wasn’t. The woman behind the desk had jumped up and pressed herself against the wall, clearly expecting him to kill her -- it seemed the news of him had made it even here, to the lowest, dirtiest levels of the pits of hell that was Coruscant -- before sagging to her knees when he’d stormed through to the back room. By the time he’d come out after successfully cowing the doctor and finding that Rey had, indeed, had her chip removed, the front desk had been cleared and there was no one in sight. The hospital had looked nothing like when he’d come in by the time he’d walked out. Mostly it resembled an empty room of rubble, but it’d helped. He could think a bit more clearly.

He’d then used their bond as a sort of lighthouse in the absence of the tracking chip. Yet every time he’d come close she'd slipped right through his gloved fingers; the bond only tells him that she's somewhere, somewhere far away from him, it doesn't act like a Galactic Positioning System.

He returns to the Finalizer frustrated.

Kylo drops the shield he’d maintained from the bond and shoves all of that frustration through it to her. He huffs with self righteousness at the flinch coming from the other side. He's being petty and childish, but he can't quite bring himself to care.
"You could have at leastwarned me you wereleaving, Rey."

She’d just gone. He’d been left standing in his room after Hux had helped shed him of his cloak, still fuming at the redhead’s back, only to find that she’d left without saying a word. Not a single word. He’d been left behind with anger from their latest spat, a handful of memories, and a glowing bond in the back of his head. Nothing else.

She builds up her own shield and blocks him out, and the gesture only irritates him further, but he’s too tired to do anything but stew about it. He knows he’s being punished for all of his misdeeds by having the infuriating girl floating in his awareness, so close yet so immensely far away. It taunts him. When he meets with Hux next, Kylo’s in such a foul mood that even the General has the sense of mind to keep quiet as he rolls into the room like a storm.

"She's nowhere to be found," he barks.

Hux remains silent for a little longer while Kylo removes his helmet and tosses it irreverently on Hux’s spare office chair. The General leans back in his seat and steeples his fingers in that infuriating manner of his, forever planning ahead, forever calm. Hux’s collected demeanor is yet another irritant added to the list of annoyances he’d been carrying around since her departure.

"We didgrant her her freedom. Of course shewould disappear, or did youexpect her to hang about and thank us for our hospitality?" Hux asks, tilting his head slightly and watching him over the tips of his fingernails.

"It was a stupid idea, Hux," Kylo barks again, feeling the absence of his apprentice.

Funny, that, how Kylo thought of her as his apprentice even if she had never agreed to such a thing. That absence felt like a nag, an itch between his shoulder blades, underneith his scalp, where he could never reach to scratch it. It left him feeling disoriented, knowing that a person exists without being able to see them, touch them, feel as they feel when he had done nothing for months but swim in her emotions.

"If it was stupid what does that make you, or me, then?" Hux retorts, obviously disliking Kylo’s sudden questioning of a plan that they had both agreed to. The immature barb a sign of how stressed the man truly is.

"And if she doesn't come back? If yourgamble fails, what then?" He grinds out. Hux’s left eyetwitches. Kylo knows this one, the involuntary tick whenever the General weighs his odds or is afraid his smarts won't be enough. Whenever something doesn't go as planned. That only sets him on edge further.

"You agreed to give me your trust, Ren. Have a little faith," Hux clips, then adds in a murmur, "and if my intuition is wrong, if it all falls apart, then... then we'll deal with it when that comes."

What a tall kriffing order.

Kylo looks at Hux then, really looks, when he focuses on Hux’s strained tone of voice. The man sounds so confident in himself yet Kylo’s eyes don't miss the way his eyes pinch, the dark circles pooling under coppery, full lashes like bruises. He looks paler than usual, skin sallow and stretched over his bones. The hints of a man who’s not eating or sleeping enough. He thinks back to the General standing so close to him only weeks ago, fighting tiny gold clasps with an intensity Kylo had almost found endearing as the man struggled to win the fight with his cloak’s closures. This man is not that man. That man had stayed on Kuat. This one was but his shadow.
Perhaps it's his own exhaustion that prompts him to speak.

"When was the last time you slept, General?"

Hux blinks slowly, a true tell-tale sign of his exhaustion. If he expected something from Kylo, this was probably not it.

"That is none of your concern, Ren," Hux balks, annoyed at Kylo's prodding. But then he lets out a soft sigh, long fingers reaching for his face, trying to rub away sleep that probably hasn't come in days. Kylo simply stares at him, taking all of him in. Hux looks as exhausted as he feels, and he knows a tired Hux is of no help to anyone if he's pushed beyond his limits, especially because there is still a reckoning with Snoke that would very likely come at any moment now.

"I can take command of the ship for the rest of the day," he offers, though it's more of an order than anything else, "you falling on your face in front of the Supreme Leader would not benefit either one of us."

Hux stops rubbing, his fingers splayed across his face as he opens his eyes and looks up at Kylo.

"And allow you to set my ship on fire? No, thank you."

Kylo smirks then. Perhaps not all of the Hux he knew had stayed behind in Kuat.

"Would you go sleep if I promise not to break anything?"

Hux stares at him skeptically. Kylo doesn't have a track record for being gentle with the ship's equipment. Then Hux leans back and lets out the loudest sigh Kylo's ever heard coming from the man, a breathy huff on the exhale rather than any real noise. His eyes flutter closed for just a second, giving Kylo a perfect view of a long, slender neck. There's a small amount of five o'clock shadow covering his jaw, another tell-tale sign of Hux's exhaustion. Kylo wonders if it would be prickly for a second, before torching that thought and clearing his throat.

"Go sleep," he demands, pushing away the thoughts that had been cropping up in his mind ever since Hux had stepped oh so close into his personal space not so long ago.

Hux seems to be fighting a battle with himself for a moment longer, then he loses the fight and gives up in front of Kylo's eyes. He slumps forward - so very unlike the General who always carries himself ramrod straight - before righting himself and standing up, an air of command cloaking him like a security blanket. He extends his hand for a moment to his chair before sidestepping the desk and walking past Kylo with a soft murmur, draping his overcoat over his shoulders.

"Try not to burn anything down, will you?"

"No promises," Kylo murmurs. Hux gives him a glare that holds zero heat then walks away.

Kylo watches him as he retreats and turns a corner, then quietly sits himself down at the General's chair and brings up the holo screens. It would keep him occupied from having too much time and too much silence in the emptiness of his quarters, with only a glowing bond for company. Rest could wait.

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Hux makes his way towards his quarters at a hard clip. Stormtroopers avoid him left and right, taking sharp turns around corners just to stay out of his immediate path, having noticed his short fuse over the last week. Even Phasma has the common sense to keep her distance unless absolutely necessary.
By the time he’s stumbling into his room he’s already pushed the greatcoat off his shoulders and is shedding pieces of clothing as he goes, too tired to bother being meticulous about folding and hanging. He had other jackets. Kicking off his shoes he takes in the wide living area. His eyes travel to the couch unbidden, much like they had for the last so many days he’s been aboard the ship. His quarters feel too empty, too quiet to be comfortable, too dim and lifeless. Millicent is curled up sleeping on the spot usually reserved for Rey’s head. His heart does a sad flop and pinches, and he forces himself to release the ache between his lungs with short breaths. He looks at the table where a second chair he hadn’t had the heart to remove sits neatly pushed into place, his usual chair sitting out farther where he had left it after breakfast.

Too quiet. Too dim.

He rubs a hand down the bridge of his nose, pushing his thumb between his brows, exhaustion rolling down his muscles in rivulets. He hadn’t slept since she’d left, his mind too busy thinking about all the ways this could go so very wrong, and perhaps focusing a little too intently on the fact that, once he’d arrived back aboard the Finalizer, everything had felt out of place. He was a man of constants, and a constant had been removed. It left him itchy, unnerved and irritated. Something out of place. Someone out of place in his life.

With a tired sigh he walks into his room, forcing himself to remove the rest of his underclothes, letting them fall where they would, before willing his legs to carry him to the bed where he knew he’d get no sleep. What he does is not so much slide in as flop in, and he rolls himself over to stare at the ceiling, painfully avoiding the left side of the bed where Rey had slept that one night. His usual spot. He’d been trying to sleep on the wrong side of the bed for a week now. Another constant out of place.

He knows he’s being childish about it all, but the absence bothers him, and not just because he misses her, no matter how much he tries to tell himself that’s not the case. Her absence also means a myriad of plans now hanging by a thread. A very flimsy one. If Rey does not return he would have to face Snoke, and potentially die for her disappearance. It had quickly become clear to him that Snoke prized her above everyone else, to go to the extent that a Knight of Ren had been sent to spy on them during what at any other time would have been a pretty standard business trip for the Order. She had stopped being a pawn in the chessboard and quickly climbed up to become one of the most important pieces. If she did return, he’d still have to contend with the idea of being replaceable in Snoke’s eyes. It was a lose, lose situation. Still, with her and Ren by his side, he had a bigger chance at survival. But that depended on Rey now. There’s nothing he can really do but trust. How is it that when he comes closest to gambling for his life, he’s reduced to this? His father would be ashamed.

He’s slipping. His carefully constructed walls, his meticulously crafted sense of self and purpose, it’s all slipping. That itch at the nape of his neck, right under his skin, crawls back the longer he thinks about it. A handful of months and a persistent girl, and suddenly his world’s been turned upside down, and he’s not sure he can do much about it now but wait. It physically hurts to think about, the wait. He isn’t used to letting go of the reins. He isn’t used to handing them over to somebody else willingly. He had done exactly that. He had handed her both her freedom and his in the simple act of giving her that tracker. He’d followed the implanted one in her arm until it eventually stopped moving and, after confirmation from Ren, had known that they’d lost her trail. She’d had it removed. Still, he had other means to track her, but knowing she’d removed it only meant there was one less thing to tie her to him.

_Smart girl._

An image of a lovely woman in beige standing quietly on a cold balcony slithers across the back of his eyelids the second his eyes close. He forces them open, painfully, desperately urging himself to
concentrate on more pressing matters. Snoke would be demanding an audience soon. He had made
them promise to have Rey brought to his presence, except there is no Rey to bring before their
master. They would be punished for this. He feared that punishment would end up being more
permanent than a swift episode of pain, however. He’d already failed once with Starkiller, a second
failure could very easily cost him his life. His hands reach up and he rubs again at his face, his hair,
tugs at it lightly. Anything to keep him from collapsing from exhaustion. He could not afford sleep.
Not when so much was at stake.

Still…three weeks of only snatching an hour or two a night since he’d departed Kuat has caught up
to him. He faces inward in the large bed, and as he falls asleep his hand reaches for the pillow across
from him, the one where a very particular head of brown locks had once rested, clutching at it with a
death grip as restless sleep take him.

Rey’s first stop had been Ponemah, where she’d traded the ship that Hux had provided her with for a
different one. At the time she’d thought it funny that she would end up at Ponemah Terminal of all
places. It felt like a lifetime ago she had offered to drop Finn off there before returning to Jakku, but
Ponemah was neutral and an easy place to trade away a ship for another less noticeable vessel. That
night she’d found a military duffel bag in one of the ship’s lockers and she had stuffed all the
portions she’d been given, as well as her few meager belongings, inside. Her years of scavenging
had served her well, haggling her way across a collection of systems until she made it to Coruscant,
where she’d remembered that she still had a tracker chip from when she’d first arrived aboard the
Finalizer. She nearly beat herself up over that one, how could she be so stupid as to forget? But if the
First Order had had its mind set on following her Rey figured they would have found her and
arrested her by then. As it was she never saw anyone. She knew Kylo was on her tail, but by the
third time she’d switched ships he’d lost her track. She smirked when he sent her a rather snippy
remark over their bond, full of frustration, and closed her end as he had taught her to do so well so
many weeks ago. This wasn’t a manhunt. This wasn’t like when he’d first tracked her down and
tried to burn worlds to find her. This was Kylo Ren throwing a temper tantrum because she didn’t
say good bye, so she let him follow along just long enough before throwing him off her scent by
closing the bond.

Rey sits at a sticky table in the corner of the room facing the giant windows, tentatively turning a
small pad between her fingers. She remembers the General’s pleading tone for her to remain behind.
She had almost wanted to, then, when he’d sounded like that. He’d offered her everything she had
wanted for so long, a home, a place to belong… Ren had as well, to an extent. A teacher, a sounding
board, a chance to finally be something other than what she’d always been, a scavenger with no
prospects. But how could she?

She stares at the homing device a little longer before pocketing it and looking out the large windows,
the sprawling view of Coruscant, a glittering city of lights and dreams spreading before her eyes.
Once upon a time she had wanted to visit Coruscant. She’d dreamed of a place so full of people that
she could just blend in, a fly amongst many; imagined what it would be like to be in a place where
permanent silence wasn’t the order of the day, every day, for years. It had been a child’s dream then,
the stories of the beautiful cities of light of Coruscant dazzling her young mind with imaginings of
something other than sand as far as the eye could see. Her eyes look over the foggy streets of the
seedy lower levels where she’d had her tracker removed. Silence now didn’t seem like such a bad
thing, surrounded by the raucous noise of the cantina. She places down a few credits for her juice,
having learned her lesson about drinking alcohol, and makes ready to leave Coruscant behind. She’d
had just about enough of fog and noise and grime. The lower levels of Coruscant were not what
she’d envisioned when she’d thought of this place.

When she reaches her ship she hesitates at the pilot’s seat. She’s got the means to go anywhere she would like. So many planets, so many systems, so many places where she could disappear to and start over. So many places where the last three months of her life could not follow her. She worries at her lip over it, feeling the small pad in her pocket.

Having so many choices for somebody used to having almost none, the idea is entirely overwhelming. And that overwhelming realization makes up her mind for her more than anything else does.

With a small huff of air she sets the coordinates for Takodana.

It’s high afternoon by the time she reaches the atmosphere of Maz Kanata’s home planet, and Rey delights once again at the sheer beauty of it, still just as green and lush as she remembers. From her ship she can see the birds floating above the canopies like small little specks, motes of dust in that beautiful end-of-day yellow light that takes her breath away. She sighs contentedly, enjoying the sights for a few more minutes before gearing to land when Maz’s Castle comes into view, finding the most level space she can and setting her ship down with a little maneuvering, trekking the rest of the way on foot. The way through the greens is slippery and Rey finds herself trying to be mindful of her step, the mossy green surface under her foot slick with the glistening glow of a previous rain shower.

She remembers the destruction from not so long ago, the castle lying in ruins, rubble and fire. It’s at near completion now, and the vegetation around it, resilient as ever, has returned. It makes her heart happy to know that nature continues on despite the machinations of men. She allows herself a few minutes outside the door, taking in a deep breath as memories return to her — memories of a lightsaber, memories of childhood, visions too terrifying to contemplate — it had all started here.

Rey wonders for a heartbeat too long if she’s made the right decision, but she can’t turn back, not now. With a deep, calming breath, she pushes the doors open and—

“REY OF JAKKU!”

Rey cringes. So much for getting in inconspicuously. She’d been treated to the same welcome Han Solo had so long ago. Her heart constricts at that thought, a dull ache setting in under her ribs. Han Solo had not been anything to her but a kind man who had offered her a job once. She’d known him for less than a few days. Yet… yet small things like Maz’s welcome only brought up the old man’s ragged face, his kind, if mischievous, smile, and his death. Rey pushes that out of her mind and steps forward, giving Maz a hesitant smile as the small orange woman sprints up to her.

“Where is my boyfriend?” She asks, tilting her head. The smile on Rey’s face falters.

Maz lets out a soft hum.

“Not with you, then… I thought perhaps—” then the little woman is shaking her head and grabbing Rey with an iron grip, “No, no. Come in, come in, child. Those words are better left for quieter spaces. Follow me.”

Rey dutifully follows, realizing that by now she hasn’t said a word. She clears her throat.

“Hello, Maz,” she offers lamely as a greeting after Maz’s rather boisterous one, and Maz gives her a wide grin. The little woman stops by the bar, a semi-makeshift thing propped up on large squared boulders left over from the fall of the previous castle structure. The bartender collects a bunch of foodstuffs and piles them on a tray, along with a few drinks that Maz takes from him, as she indicates
for Rey to move. She’s ushered to a quiet, secluded, empty corner where no one can watch or hear them, though she imagines at this point it doesn’t matter. Most patrons are too deep in their cups or their meals. Taking the proffered seat graciously, she’s immediately pushed into eating by Maz, whose small hand is shoving a muffin-like thing into her face.

“Eat, child, you look like you haven’t seen the right end of a proper meal in weeks. Conversation can wait.”

Rey obliges, shooting the woman a guarded smile.

She hadn’t, not really. Her last proper meal had been in Kuat, and since then she’d been existing on pre-dried synthetic rations, trying to conserve them as much as humanly possible since, up until she’d punched in her course for Takodana, Rey had had no clue where she was going. Not entirely.

She digs into the muffin and it’s soon being replaced by another honeyed bread, warm and buttered, and Rey sighs around it contentedly when it hits her tongue. Maz just sits and watches her, drinking from her mug every once in a while.

“So, what brings you to my neck of the woods?” Maz prompts once Rey’s downed her food with a gulp of the drink.

Rey nearly swipes her arm across her mouth to remove crumbs, only to be stopped by an unbidden image of a disapproving Hux. Instead she reaches for one of the napkins sitting on the tray and wipes down any remaining food she may have on her. Maz waits patiently. The woman had lived a thousand years and is perfectly happy waiting a few seconds more. Rey looks at her then, straightening in her chair.

“I…” she starts, worrying at her lip. “I need your help.”

“That much is obvious, child, but my question is what with, exactly?”

She hated asking for help. She specifically hates it now more than ever because she’ll have to speak about things she really had no wish to discuss. Yet Maz puts her at ease after noticing her discomfort.

“It’s alright, Rey. Just start at the beginning…”

Perhaps it’s the way Maz leans forward, setting herself to listen intently. Perhaps it’s the fact that she has never had anyone to really confide in, not like she needs to. Perhaps it’s that she’s just tired of carrying all the guilt around in her head, unable to share the burden, that prompts her to speak. Maz never needles, never talks before Rey finishes, and Rey finds herself spilling everything.

“I don’t know what to believe in anymore,” Rey says, biting her lower lip.

She tells the wise little woman about her trip to see Luke. She tells her about being rejected, something that still stings. She tells her about being captured — admitting that the reason she isn’t with Chewie is because she has no idea where Chewie is, or R2-D2, or Luke or even the Resistance. She tells the story of being dumped aboard the Finalizer, and, finally, she chokes out the reason she needs help: she needs to know where to go next.

Maz listens quietly the whole time, hands knitted together on the table as she takes Rey in, her face passive if not, at times, saddened.

The next thing she knows, she’s explaining how she felt, what she felt, at having found out about the Resistance’s bombing. How betrayed she’d felt at Leia’s signature, how hurt she’d been at the idea that twenty thousand people were only a number on a page, a necessary loss. She fidgets with her
sleeve as she retells Maz all of this, inevitably also having to explain her dinner with Hux, their argument, what she had felt in the force, how she couldn’t any longer ignore life for the sake of tactical successes. Maz nods slowly.

“The Resistance attacked a First Order depot. It was stupid of me,” Rey tries to keep the chagrin out of her voice but it leaks through anyway, “to try and bargain for the lives of pilots by giving away the Resistance’s base on D’Qar. I’ve set them back so long…”

A long, scrawny, ancient finger is shoved into her face at this and stops her from furthering the self-flagellation she’s about to undertake.

“You did the best you could with what little you had, Rey. You did the right thing. Anyone else in your place would have turned down the offer in order to feel better about themselves, to be able to say that they never cracked, that they never gave anything away. And yet people would have died. Do you see my castle?” Maz asks, swinging her arms about to illustrate. Rey’s eyes follow. “A thing of beauty, isn’t she?”

Rey smiles. It was coming along beautifully, yes. She gives a small nod.

Maz seems satisfied.

“We can always rebuild from the rubble, child. We can’t bring people back from the dead. That General of yours, General Fox or whatever, he knows this as well.”

Rey nearly giggles at Hux being called General Fox, but does not correct Maz, instead choosing to listen. She should have listened to her when she was told to take the lightsaber. She’s not about to ignore her this time.

“We can always rebuild, Rey. And they will, just as I have. The Resistance is a tough little weed; it’ll always spring back. You gave people on both sides of this silly war a chance to live, and that’s not something you should ever feel was a stupid decision to make. You didn’t fail us.”

Rey almost wants to cry, a small lump bobbing up and down in her throat at Maz’s words. She hadn’t failed them. She couldn’t quite believe those words, but hearing them moved her anyway. It was one thing for her to try and trick herself into believing what she’d done was right, it was another thing entirely for someone so far removed from the situation to confirm that yes, she had made the right decision. That reassurance went a long way.

“This silly war…” she repeats in a whisper.

“What about it?” Maz prompts, adjusting her goggles to get a better view of Rey.

“It’s not so black and white, is it?” She asks.

Maz tilts her head, considering. As if seeing where this conversation is going, or perhaps reading her mind — and Rey wouldn’t put it past Maz by now to be a force sensitive — the little orange woman changes course.

“You’ve been gone for a long time, child…Tell me about Kylo Ren and your General.”

Rey stiffens.

What? What was there to tell? Other than the fact that they had held her prisoner.

But she does. Her descriptions start robotically, describing them to Maz as she had once described
BB-8 to Kylo. Maz’s silence and a small look from her urges Rey to keep going whenever she falters. Slowly the clinical descriptions turn more human. She tells her about Hux, how he’s used to barking orders and he’s pretty much anal about everything concerning his ship, his devotion to his cause, yet also the fact that his beliefs were not that different from the Resistance’s, though their methods were certainly as different as night and day. She speaks of Kylo Ren, how he’s a man made of darkness, a terrifying sight in any light, but somehow also considerate, and — and this Rey does begrudgingly — her belief that the man has Light in him, no matter how much he tortures himself for it. It’s about as much as she’s willing to say without betraying their force bond. She speaks about how both men were annoying and impatient and high strung about everything, but still took the time to teach her patiently.

She bites her lower lip, and when she next speaks Maz’s eyes focus on her hard. She tells her about Millicent, about Hux’s gentleness that she still doesn’t understand; about Kylo’s steady intensity and yet how charming he could be, sweeping her up into a dance like the prince he was, the prince he refused to be. By the time she’s done Rey feels just about drained of everything she has. She sags in her chair a little.

Maz lets out a soft hum.

“So, what is it you need from me?” Maz finally asks, dragging a sigh of relief from Rey at the change of subject.

Rey leans forward and lowers her voice, looking around just to make sure no one’s listening.

“The Resistance — they evacuated — where are they?”

Maz looks at her consideringly.

“You still want to go back? Luke turned you down, after all. What if there’s nothing there for you?”

Rey cringes. She had agonized over the same thing while piloting her way across systems to make it here. To hear it spoken so loudly, in such a detached voice, made her insides hurt. But she couldn’t give up, not now.

“I don’t care if Luke Skywalker decided not to teach me — I still have friends there. Finn. And Poe and BB-8. Finn was hurt, I must get back to him. And I can help rebuild. You have to understand, Maz…”

She begs. She pleads with all she has. She’s been the reason D’Qar had been taken, and despite Maz’s words of encouragement, that decision meant she now had no idea where to go and couldn’t make it there without help. Yet she needs to return. She needs to make sure her friends were alright. She needs to offer any help she could. She needs to see Finn’s face. She needs…

She needs so much.

“You could always stay here and work for me,” Maz offers, indicating the castle again, “Pay’s decent and accommodations would be provided for. Hours are long, mind you, but I could always use a helping hand.”

Rey’s chest tightens again; Maz studies her expectantly.

Another sad memory, one she’d revisited earlier, on the banks of a pond not that far from this castle. She shakes her head.
“I must go to my friends.”

Maz gives her a sad smile before letting out a cryptic “It’s always in the eyes…”

Then little woman slaps her hand on the table.

“Well, if that’s your decision. The base is in Dathomir.”

“Dathomir? That backwater planet?” She asks, confused. She’d heard about Dathomir, about the witches that lived amongst its swamps. Those stories were legends to scare the children with back on Jakku.

Maz cackles, “Says the girl who comes from a backwater planet herself! Yes, Dathomir. Han Solo still owned it at the time his son…” Maz murmurs, leaving that sad reminder unsaid. “So, so unfortunate.”

Rey nods in silent agreement.

“Still, once he passed, the title went to the closest next of kin, and so now it belongs to Leia Organa. Convenient for the Resistance, to be sure. A whole new planet they own the rights to. You’ll find them in the swamps of Dathomir.”

Rey nods with a smile she can’t help but allow to bloom across her cheeks. One step closer.

“Thank you, Maz. Thank you.”

Maz waves at her to dismiss the gratitude with a small huff.

“One more thing. When I spoke to you last time, I mentioned no one would be coming back for you on Jakku,” Maz murmurs. Rey opens up her mouth to speak and is quickly silenced with a held up hand. She bites her lip. “I apologize. I know those were hard words to hear. But I also told you somebody still could come back. I thought it was Luke, then. I was so sure. Yes, we all needed Luke. But Luke found his own way back without your help.”

Rey frowns.

“He’s back?”

Maz nods.

“He arrived with Chewie at the new Resistance location. I thought…I thought you had found a way to return to them.”

Rey’s frown intensifies. So they’d known she’d disappeared and hadn’t…

That thought is interrupted again by Maz, sensing Rey already straying from the conversation.

“I told you somebody still could come back, child, but I see that I was wrong. I am, after all, only mortal,” then Maz is giving her a small, knowing smile, “It wasn’t one, but two.”

“What?” Rey asks, incredulous, confused.

“Two can still come back, Rey of Jakku,” Maz affirms.

“What do you mean, come back?” And she’s recalling the vision of the small girl screaming up at the sky, at the retreating end of a spacecraft. “Come back where?” Did the small woman mean her
parents? Her long lost family finally returning to her after all this time?

Maz smiles at her. An old, patient smile.

“There is space in the grey that is not just myth, child. The unbendable can still sway. Nothing is ever set firm in stone.” She raps her knuckles against the rough wall of her home, as if to prove a point that Rey can’t currently fathom.

Satisfied with her cryptic statement Maz is jumping off her high seat and waving a farewell to Rey.

“Alas, work never ends, child. Food’s on the house! Stay as long as you need.”

The small woman disappears into the crowd, yanking a tray and picking up empty mugs as she goes, leaving Rey to stare dumbly after her, trying to fit all the pieces together.

Rey ends up staying a week.

It’s been three now since she left Kuat, wandering about the galaxy for a rather sizable chunk of that time, and it felt nice to spend some time with Maz and her rowdy bunch. She’d spent it learning how to play cards and holo-chess, and relishing in kicking her teachers’ asses once she got the hang of the games.

Maz indulges her, having given her a room to stay free of charge in exchange for some help here and there with repairing some equipment. The little woman had whined that finding good help for electrical and mechanical things was hard, what with every person who could do it that passed by being more interested in getting drunk than being useful. So Rey complies happily, spending her days messing with replacement parts and greasy tools, and dirty rags and the sun beating down on her. It almost feels like being back on Jakku, sans the horrible sandstorms and lack of food and water. She could get used to this. Rey thinks back to Maz’s offer as she pulls out a worn wire from inside a compartment on the side of a little carrier ship Maz used to bring in goods and food items.

She could just…give up on Dothamir, toss out the GPS homing device Hux had given her into the water until it short-circuited, and make her life here. A quiet life of fixing things and eating good food and spending her mornings by the little water creek.

But giving up meant never seeing Finn again, or Chewie or BB-8. It meant not seeing Leia or Poe. It meant not seeing General Hux and Kylo Ren.

She nibbles at her lips, slowly working the small bits of copper wire until she bypasses the connection, running it from one cable to the other to ensure the little carrier could go just a little faster with a bit less noise. She grabs some electrical tape and wraps up the new connection securely, then closes the metal panel and secures the bolts.

She could stay.

But she shouldn’t.

Rey had never believed in destiny, that sounded like the sort of thing fools made up to strip others of their right to have a choice, but the longer she kept going the more she realized something like a path had been forged for her, and every time she deviated, it came back to bite her in the ass. Staying with Maz has made her feel so peaceful, so calm, and yet sometimes in the night she’d wake up from nightmares that would quickly buss away into the ether, leaving her with a strange heavy feeling in her chest like an iron cage crushing her lungs. And by the time the end of her week at Maz comes
around, they’re happening every night, and Rey feels her link to Kylo hum. She’d felt him press against her repeatedly, and she’d dug in her heels and resolutely kept him from speaking to her through the bond, yet sometimes in the night she could swear she could hear him. It had quickly become apparent to her that he’d be a constant in her life forever. No matter how long she kept away or how far away she’d gone, he was there.

She shakes her head.

She could stay.

But she shouldn’t.

Rey lifts herself up and dusts her knees, then tilts her head up to the sky. After so long stuck in a big ship, breathing recycled air, guiding her internal clock by artificial lighting, it felt heavenly to simply tip her nose to the sun and bask in it. She could stay.

She hears a small voice calling out to her, letting her know lunch is ready. Maz is standing on the large stone steps of her castle waving her little arms, beckoning her. Rey smiles and trots up, letting herself be brought in and settling herself at the large table piled high with foods she’d never tried before.

She shouldn’t stay, but she would, if only for a few more days.

Chapter End Notes

I’m super tired so, lol this note is short and sweet.

Ginormous thanks to my beta EjBlaKit for literally everything and then some. Thank you, darling.

Also, hope you all enjoyed the chapter. Poor babies :( 

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EDIT: I should mention. Ponemah Station is where Rey offers to drop Finn off during their run aboard the Falcon with BB-8. This happens in the novelization and is not included in the movie.
Dinner

Chapter Summary

The boys answer to Snoke. You can imagine how that goes.

"YOU LET HER ESCAPE!"

This is the greeting they receive as soon as they step up to the platform overseeing the dais. Snoke’s shrill scream reverberates off the walls of the amphitheater, an ugly chorus heralding the nightmares about to be bestowed upon them, the hologram having risen to its looming, overwhelmingly giant full height.

Snoke’s hologram is what horror is made of even as it flickers in that bluish glow of insubstantiality, and perhaps it is more terrifying because of it. To know that a creature that is not fully present can bring hell upon their heads, and by the look on Snoke’s face, he has no doubt that Snoke will mete out his judgement indiscriminately.

Hux and Kylo Ren stiffen and bow their heads silently, mentally bracing themselves for the pain that’s coming.

And it comes. Oh, it comes. For hours.

Hux had never felt pain as this, crackling and hissing in his bones as it electrocutes him from the inside out, turning his marrow to jelly by unseen lightning. The anguish is borderline frying his neurons, and he has to fight with every scrap of will he has to keep his sanity about him as his body reacts. His veins expand and contract, trying to pump blood faster to his limbs even as his heart works on overdrive to keep him going, every nerve on fire, every bone feeling as though it is snapping in half, grinding themselves back together only to snap all over again.

He’d always known that Ren was tortured for his wrongdoings, and had in the past been perfectly happy to instigate these punishments, but any thought he’d ever concocted of how much pain Snoke could inflict paled in comparison to the reality. The push against his mind and the pain coursing through his limbs would be enough to make any other man go mad. The only thing that saves him is years of practice fortifying his mental defenses, and even then, by the end of it all he’s curled in on himself, retching out empty air, blood trickling down his nose. Moving his neck feels like a knife being jabbed into his spine repeatedly, but he manages just long enough to find Ren half propped on his elbows and head bowed, chest heaving with the barely controlled panting of a man who’s faced this many times.

Another sickening rush of nausea rolls in him as Snoke inflicts another wave of crushing pain. It rushes through him like stabbing ice water being poured over scalding, raw skin. He has to fight with every shred of his will to keep a hold on his sanity with the barrage of mental torture being seared into his mind, into his very essence; a million lifetimes all ending in pain and death flash before his eyes, all the possible ways in which he could be made to suffer, and in that instant he believes Snoke truly could make them all happen.

Kylo bears with it far better than he can, or at least, Hux believes this to be the case because all he can hear is the throat-shredding sounds of his own screams, and that leaves very little room to
confirm if Kylo Ren is screaming, too. Snoke digs into his mind with ravenous force and Hux has just enough coherent thought to offer half truths, and he prays again to any deity that would listen that Kylo has the sense to do the same. From the way the rushes of pain keep coming without death, he assumes the Knight at least had succeeded in this. He hopes.

Yet he screams.

And screams.

And screams.

Blood runs down his nose and tickles his chin to where it drip, drip, drips below him. His limbs quiver with barely enough power to hold him up, leaden. It would be so easy to collapse now, to just give into it and allow the darkness fuzzing the edges of his vision to engulf him entirely. To put him out of his misery.

It horrifies him to think that he had once wished this on the raven haired man suffering by his side.

When the tenth wave of pain comes his back arches upward like a puppet tugged up by an invisible string connected to his spine. His whole body quivers, and Hux can no longer find it in himself to scream, lungs too spent from the effort, throat too raw.

Eventually the torture ebbs, Snoke finally satisfying himself with the uncountable hours of torture he’s imparted. Hux ventures a small look upward and watches as Snoke lowers himself back to his throne calmly, nothing present of the fury he’d unleashed upon Hux and the Knight. The creature sitting before them watches as they writhe under the struggle of trying to get their limbs to work properly after such an assault. When they finally are able to bring themselves up to their knees, Snoke sneers.

“Explain yourselves.”

Kylo gives Hux a look and Hux blinks slowly through heavy, painful lids, his body screaming to fall where he kneels. Falling would be so easy. Falling would mean an end to the pain. He tries to swallow but his throat is nothing but sandpaper gritting against sandpaper, and Hux has to force himself to breathe through parted, cracked lips. That hurts, too, but it’s better than trying to breathe through a bloody nose. The look Kylo is giving him is wary but insistent, hard with warning for him to be silent. This is Kylo Ren’s field of expertise, so for once he does as told; he stays silent, choosing to take the moment of respite to try and catch his breath, to regulate it away from its hiccupy, aching rasp and into a semblance of normalcy. Trusting anybody with his fate made his skin crawl. He had never been one to allow somebody else to talk on his behalf, but right now it seems like the smart thing to do. Like the only thing he could do. He couldn’t trust his vocal chords to work properly in that moment.

Kylo turns to Snoke, head bowing before setting his eyes on Snoke’s chest.

“She managed to slip away in the crowd during a dance on our second day in Kuat, Supreme Leader. By the time we’d realized what had happened, she’d hit hyperspace. I tracked her for weeks. Followed her tracking chip, but she managed to remove it.” Kylo explains, face impassive and words methodical. Hux turns to look at him.

Those things are all true. She’d slipped away to a balcony once. She’d danced the night away. Kylo had tracked her for weeks, only to lose her when she’d removed her tracking chip on Coruscant. When he braves a look at Snoke, the creature’s narrowed eyes are set on a distant point way above their heads, as if considering, as if watching a holo-movie playing somewhere in the distance.
He takes great care to guard his thoughts. He’s not sure how the creature before him manages to affect them when he’s not even in the room, but he knew enough to be cautious, especially as Kylo Ren offers up half truths. He’d have to ask Ren some time. Hux lowers his eyes and keeps his ears open, trying not to collapse under his own weight at the ache still coursing through his nervous system, but nothing happens for a long time. From the corner of his eye he watches Ren keep his eyes glued on the hologram, his pronounced adam’s apple bobbing under the long neck of his tunic, beating a small, anxious rhythm. Up. Down. Up. Down. The man does not blink for a long time. Blinking might mean missing something on Snoke’s face, a glint of the sort of anger that comes before a swift death.

In that long, pregnant pause, Hux wonders if this is it. If Snoke will demand their deaths. It only seemed fitting, after having avoided death once. Yet he almost wants to laugh. Had he made it through the fiasco of Starkiller Base only to die here on a gamble he’d made? All his best concocted plans seem a lot more fallible when in the face of possible death.

*Plans, boy, are only but spiderwebs. Even the best constructed ones can collapse.* He hears his father in the back of his mind, teaching a young, scrawny and power hungry fifteen year old Hux about the realities of power, of wielding it and keeping it. That little boy felt like a dream now, so far detached from this reality.

So eager. He’d always been so eager. Perhaps his eagerness had finally, finally come to haunt him into a gruesome early grave.

Snoke hums.

“At least you weren’t *entirely* useless,” Snoke drawls, referring to Kylo’s chase of Rey after her departure. Hux’s eyes snap up. He was suddenly very glad for Kylo’s indecisive, impulsive nature in that moment. It might be the only thing that would save them.

“Do you know why you two are still standing, Knight of Ren?” Snoke speaks once more, confirming Hux’s thoughts as the creature’s voice takes on that eerily calm tone that Hux knows so well, the one he’s used so many times. It is the voice of someone who’s only check on his rage is the reassurance of having a back up plan. Hux frowns, lowering his eyes to the ground and avoiding bringing further attention to himself. What back up plans could leader Snoke possibly have?

“You still stand because I am a gracious leader who believes in second chances…” Snoke continues, “and I have given you *many*. You have thrived by the grace of my training. That is the only thing that keeps you alive.”

The implied threat hangs in the air like a black, bloated cloud. They’d been given many chances already, and the Supreme Leader’s charitable well of chances for do-overs was quickly drying up for them. Hux keeps his hands from twitching, remembering the levels of pain he’d felt only a handful of moments ago. His father would be disgusted, to see him on his knees, prostrated like a sinner begging for mercy. But he would not be a pawn, even if it meant acting like one in this moment. Thankfully, Snoke seems to be too busy contemplating his own self-important sense of altruism to pick up on his train of thought, and he carefully guards against projecting.

“You will find her and you *will* make her heel, Kylo Ren. She is *too* important to *my* — to our plans, to allow her to disappear into the galaxy.”

Hux looks up, catching the quick change on the possessive, and his stomach roils. Snoke spares him a glance and a small sneer passes the marred, slanted features on the creature, like a candle that’d been half melted into a grotesque picture of distaste.
“And you, General, will aid Kylo Ren with anything he needs to complete this mission. I believe I need not remind you what will happen should you fail me again. Do what you must to find her, then bring her to me.”

Hux nods, schooling his face to stone. He’d be disposed of.

“Time is running out, gentlemen. For all of us.”

The hologram disappears with that last warning hanging in the air. As the last traces of blue holographic light simmer and disappear like a mirage, Kylo slumps forward and takes in a deep breath. Hux collapses on himself, the last bit of strength he’d possessed had been spent on schooling his features. They stay where they are for a long time, Hux half sprawled on the black shiny metal floor, Kylo looking about ready to crumple in on himself, both men catching their breath.

So weak.

He is so weak. All he’d cultivated over the decades, all the strength earned through hardship, crumbling in one fell swoop because of pain. Yet he had known pain in his life, and this was something else entirely. To know that the only reason they had not been disposed of was because Snoke had spent too much time grooming them into their roles only felt like added salt to the wound, because the threat had remained unsaid: I can find and groom others to take your place. Unspoken threats were more dangerous because of the silence.

No, there would be no pitying himself today. He’d use this as fuel. He would be no pawn.

He hears a grunt as Kylo moves and then there’s a hand shoving itself under his shoulder. Hux tenses. An arm snakes under his ribcage, and a leg comes down over his side. He’s about to protest when the other arm finds its way under him and he’s being hoisted by the armpits, his own arms dangling lifelessly over the crooks of Kylo’s elbows. Kylo grunts as he battles to lift Hux and keep himself upright until his feet find purchase and the Knight plants them securely under him.

“Can you walk?” Comes the gruff question against his left earlobe. Hot, raspy breath tickling his jawline. Hux nods weakly.

He could at least do that much.

Except he couldn’t, as soon as Kylo lets go he feels his body lurching forward and his knees wobbling as if made of gelatin, and he’s almost resigned to the idea of falling on his face and breaking his nose when an arm wraps tightly around his waist and hoists him back up. There’s another heavy grunt as Hux’s weight threatens to unbalance both of them, and oh Maker not only will he break his face but he’ll also be crushed by Ren’s massive body—

His right arm is swung briskly upwards as Kylo crouches and shoves himself against his aching ribcage until his arm is resting over the black, rough-sewn cowl. He immediately bunches his fingers into it for support and Kylo lets out another grunt, the Knight’s head swinging back.

“I’m sorry,” Hux croaks, readjusting his grip to let go of the handful of black curls he’d accidentally grabbed onto, making sure to only grab fabric this time.

Ren’s arm is still tightly wrapped around his waist and his other hand comes up to grab at Hux’s forearm where it rests on himself, hoisting himself and Hux along. He immediately bunches his fingers into it for support and Kylo lets out another grunt, the Knight’s head swinging back.

“T’m sorry,” Hux croaks, readjusting his grip to let go of the handful of black curls he’d accidentally grabbed onto, making sure to only grab fabric this time.

Ren’s arm is still tightly wrapped around his waist and his other hand comes up to grab at Hux’s forearm where it rests on himself, hoisting himself and Hux along. He’s just a hair shorter than Ren and the man stoops just slightly to accommodate, ensuring that Hux can still plant his feet firmly on the ground, before painfully turning them both around. They hobble to the door like this, two broken men who just barely escaped with their lives. Or, really, Ren hobbles and Hux allows himself
to be dragged.

Kylo takes them along back routes, deserted halls he’d never seen before even aboard his own ship, and Hux is too tired to even question this. He’s only thankful his men can’t see him this way. His mind wanders back to what had bothered him all those hours they’d spent screaming.

“How does he do it? He’s a hologram.”

Kylo, too busy trying to keep them both upright, only half manages a rumble. “The amphitheater.”

Hux frowns, coughing to the side. He watches a drop of red land on the wall and swallows. It feels like scratching the back of his mouth with sandpaper.

“What about it?” He finally asks when his lungs stop aching from the cough.

“It’s been modified. Temple stones. Force Amplifier. Channeled from afar.”

The longer Kylo talks the more his breathing turns into a pant. He’s probably just as worn inside as Hux is, the man’s usual low, dulcet tones nothing but gruff croaking. Hux doesn’t need to hear complete sentences, though. He understands just fine. His brows furrow until the middle of his forehead hurts. He didn’t remember allowing for any large stonemasonry when overseeing the final blueprints for the Finalizer.

“Where?”

“The dais, possibly.” Kylo responds through gritted teeth. It’s the only raised surface in the room. So, under it, then. Concealed.

Hux remains silent and does his best to put one foot in front of the other, thankful for Ren’s bodily support. Funny that he would ever feel thankful for anything the man ever did.

“Is it always like this?” He asks, and he doesn’t need to specify what it is for Kylo to understand. The knight nods under his arm, soft locks of hair bobbing against Hux’s hand, brushing against his face. By now Kylo’s steps have regained some of their usual sure-footed nature, making Hux cringe at the thought that he’s the one slowing them down. He finds strength from somewhere he didn’t know he had to push his free arm against the wall and provide a counterbalance to Kylo’s gait, and the men amble on quietly the rest of the way like this at a quicker pace.

When they finally make it to the doors of his quarters, Hux painfully dislodges himself from Kylo Ren’s cowl and forces his spine to strengthen, his limbs to lock, until he can stand on his own, though Ren is only a step aside should he falter. He grits his teeth, nostrils flaring as he brings his arm up and presses long digits against the access pad. It beeps green and the door hisses open.

“Can you make it on your own?” Ren asks from behind him.

No.

No he can’t make it on his own.

His limbs feel like a jackhammer has been taken to them, and he isn’t sure whether he could disengage the lock of his knees, and he just wants to collapse. But he’d make it, even if on persistence alone.

He nods.
Then he moves forward and slowly, painfully, lifts one foot in front of the other. He barely has enough time to spare a glance behind him when the door hisses shut, getting a glimpse of a worried Ren watching him through half lidded eyes, looking far more recuperated than Hux felt. He takes a deep breath and continues pushing one leg in front of the next until he makes it to Rey’s couch then he collapses. His face plants into the cushions, one arm and one leg dangling over the edge, and he closes his eyes as exhaustion rolls over him. His brain shuts him down slowly, forcing him to rest in order to heal.

“She is too important,” he mumbles with the last of his coherence, an echo of Snoke’s own words. “She’s too important to my plans.” The sentence plays on loop as he zones in and out until darkness finally takes him under its shroud.

Sometime during the night he wakes just long enough to hear the door hiss open, seeing through the slits of bleary eyes as a large body pads in slowly. Broad shoulders, long arms, thin waist and powerful legs. Ren.

He blinks slowly, trying to keep his eyes open, a cough dragging itself out of a gritty mouth as his chest clenches with pain. He has enough sense of mind to try and keep his eyes open when Kylo walks into his room, but he can’t turn his head to know what’s happening, too distracted by feeling hot and cold all at the same time. Then there’s the sound of the faucet turning on and off, and he thinks perhaps Rey has returned and is trying to shower. Hux shivers and closes his eyes. He’d see her in the morning. Damp fabric drapes across his forehead and he sighs. It’s so blessedly cool. Then his head is being cupped and lifted by heavy hands, a soft pillow placed under, a rag dabbing at his nose from where he’d bled, and the weight of warmth presses on him as Kylo ministers his touch clinically, checking for wounds, pulse, anything to indicate a rupture anywhere. Then there’s a blanket that drapes over him and Hux melts into the couch. Why is he on the couch? This is Rey’s couch. Maybe she took his bed.

Kylo drops himself on the floor at the foot of it, letting his head fall back to rest on the cushion seat and Hux stares at the back of the man’s head. Was he here for her?

“Ren—“

“Shhh.”

He reaches out and gently, carefully, places a hand on Kylo’s shoulder. Kylo nods. Hux closes his eyes and lets exhaustion take him back under.

The next morning Hux wakes up with a pounding headache. He jolts awake and a cool, semi damp towel falls off his head and onto his lap as he opens achy eyes. He stares at it, then slowly foggy images come back to him.

A tall, broad man walking into his room.

A faucet going on. Rey showering.

Rey showering? He blinks, looking towards his room. Rey isn’t there.

Ren has long taken his leave, leaving Hux’s hand to hang over the edge of the couch. From somewhere in his room there’s the sound of an alarm going off. He’d overslept. He checks his comm only to find a message from Kylo Ren informing him that command of the ship has been given to Phasma for the day.

Another message from Phasma inquires rather professionally about how long she would need to
maintain command of the ship. In Phasma speak it meant *are you okay?*

Would she need to send a team to oversee his current needs? *Are you bleeding? Should I send a doctor?*

And, as always, if there’s anything she could do for him, to let her know immediately. *Who’s ass do I have to kick?*

Hux smiles, the corners of his mouth dry and achy, and sends off a short reply with stiff fingers. He’d be back in command for Second Shift. He checks his ribs and winces, but nothing’s broken and there’s no bleeding. He remembers Kylo checking for wounds in the same way the night before.

No, he needed no teams, thank you. Everything is alright.

Signed, Hux.

*So, he’d have the day to himself.*

He gingerly gets up and attempts to use his limbs, pleasantly surprised that there’s no lasting pain. He aches, and he doubts he’ll sound much like himself for a few days after screaming for hours on end, but the worst had passed. He ambles over into his bedroom and procures his data pad from his great coat where he’d left it before his audience with Snoke. He brings it to life with a deep breath then inputs an override code that accesses a partitioned area unknown to anybody but himself. Anyone looking for a trace of it would immediately be redirected by the system’s history to the holonet, where by all intents and purposes it would have seemed as though he were only browsing for innocuous information. He also had the code to get rid of said partition, erasing all traces of it in case of a security breach.

The screen bleeps to life as the access to the partitioned area completes and a small blue bubble runs off a history of coordinates in quick succession down a list. The last one zeroes in on the Mid Rim.

She’s on Takodana.

Hux worries at his lower lip. He doesn’t like leaving his plans to chance, so he’d imprinted the code string on the homing device to send information to his data pad, and *only* to his data pad. It was virtually untraceable, otherwise, and so insured neither Rey nor anyone looking for her could ever detect that there was a back door to the homing device. Still, it had been a precaution. This is the first time he’s accessed it since she left.

He thinks of Snoke’s words, how quickly he had changed from a possessive ‘*my*’ to ‘*our plans*’. It nags at him like claws down a metal wall. Hux had not revealed to Kylo Ren that he could track her whereabouts, sending him on a wild goose chase just to mollify the bigger man’s impulsive instincts and avoid further destruction to his ship. Now he worries that perhaps he should have shared that tidbit of information, but in truth Hux had never planned to act on it, and one more person having that knowledge meant one more person who could accidentally let it slip. He had been true to his word. If she chose not to come back, he would not chase. He could only hope that she would dispose of the homing device safely so as to cut all connection to the Finalizer. No, he would have never acted on this partitioned backdoor to her location. He needs to trust her. He *does* trust her, he realizes with a blink. If she were to decide to never come back then he’d deal with his new situation then, but until it became clear whether Snoke was playing them, Hux refused to give his master one more tool than necessary. No, Rey would come back to him or she would not come back at all, and he hopes she has the sense to disappear into the unknown regions if she chooses to not return.

He takes in a deep breath, nostrils flaring, and with a quick fly of his fingers across the screen he
punches in the deactivation code and watches as his last link to the scavenger disappears forever. He wouldn’t allow Snoke to pluck her from under his nose.

The data pad falls unceremoniously on the bed as he makes his way towards the shower, stripping off his old, wrinkled uniform and sending it down the laundry chute. The length of his body prickles where it meets cool air, a shiver running up his spine, and he turns the dials and handles in the shower quickly before stepping under water hot enough to scald. Red locks quickly saturate and stick to his face, his neck, his temples like a mantle. He sighs when his forehead meets slippery black tile, water washing away the aches and day-old stink of sweat brought on by Snoke’s ministrations. A soft, shuddery breath escapes him.

She needs to come back.

Moments like these he almost wishes he shared the same mental link with her that Kylo Ren does, if only so he could implore her to return.

Funny, how so much could balance on the decision of a young woman.

He makes a mental note, one in hundreds, to begin monitoring all outgoing messages and frequencies and intercept them. They’d been ordered to track her, but Hux has different plans, and, after all, what Snoke doesn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

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There’s only the soft sound of a graceful glide to let him know she’s arrived. Kylo scrolls down through documents on his data pad as he checks on the whereabouts of his knights when Yathe Ren comes to a stop before him and kneels. It’s the deferential greeting. She’ll remain kneeling until he speaks, much like Kylo had done a billion times for Snoke.

“Rise, Knight of Ren,” he says, giving her a wave of his hand. Yathe lifts her head and smiles before quickly lifting herself off the ground, a limber, silent spider.

“You wanted to see me, First Knight?” She asks. Kylo motions to the chair before him. He’d secured a secluded viewing gallery and had continuously been sending patrols away from the halls with careful yet persistent suggestions via the force for the better part of the morning. No one would remember ever patrolling here, all records would show that the area had been patrolled just as it ever was, all security cameras set to skip without trace. He needed solitude for this.

“So?” He asks.

Yathe lowers herself into the plush chair and stretches her limbs, “he was furious.”

Kylo nods. He’d felt the brunt end of that fury the night before, right next to the General. Yathe had taken a ship and flown straight into Snoke’s temple so as to leave no trace of her spying. So she’d made the weeks’ long trip to Snoke in the flesh to report, then back. It had gained him a handful of weeks to this point, but Snoke had learned of their mistake and punished them brutally for it.

“And?”

“And he bought it.” Yathe’s eyes narrow, considering. “You were right. I’m not sure about just what, exactly, but Snoke has not been very forthcoming. I— we all thought he…”

Yathe pauses, considering her words carefully.

“So he doesn’t… know… everything?”
Kylo gives her a tight lipped smile. Realization dawns on her.

“And you wanted to confirm that.”

“He’s not been very forthcoming,” he agrees, then lets his eyes fall down to his data pad.

A message from the General agreeing to his transfer of command to Phasma pings. Good, the man was at least coherent. Impressive, really, considering this was his first time under Snoke’s true thumb. He’d received just as much torture and punishment as Kylo himself had, and yet he was up and about already in the early hours of the morning. The small gauge by which he measured his respect for the General ticked up. He was made of much sterner stuff. That was a relief. Kylo would need that from the man.

When he looks back up at Yathe she’s studying him intensely. He tilts his head lightly to the side, allowing her to have the moment. He knew what she’d almost said… They’d all thought Snoke was infallible, omnipotent. They had counted on him being those things, believing he would guide them all to glory. Knowing that the creature was not privy to everything in the universe or in the force revealed a weakness, and where there is one weakness, there are many, and the Knights of Ren had been trained to be birds of prey who dined on the weak. He could almost feel Yathe’s gears working inside her mind.

“So now what?” She asks.

“I need you to stay on the ship. Quietly, of course. Your usual quarters are ready for you, and I ask that you remain there until I call you.”

Yathe frowns.

“Careful, Kylo. I may be willing to follow you, but I will not be kept in a cage,” she whispers. Kylo arches an eyebrow. It would do him well to remember that Yathe was still as deadly as ever when cornered, and the woman hated to be manhandled into doing what she did not want to do.

He shakes his head.

“Nothing of the sort. But I need you here. I may need to cash in on your promise sooner than expected.”

Yathe lets out a shuddery breath. She eyes him, calculating, weighing the risks of throwing in her lot with him or following Snoke. Kylo knows he’s asking for a lot, even if she’s one of his Knights; especially because she is one of his Knights. Ultimately her best interests will always come first for her, for any of them, but she’s as close to an ally in this mess as he could ever ask for, and she’d delivered the message of Rey’s escape like he’d requested. They were accomplices now.

“I would never lie to you, Yathe.” He offers truthfully.

The silent stretches on for another minute, then she gives him a feral smile.

She’d thrown her lot in with him.

“And the other Knights?” She inquires, giving him a sidelong glance when she turns her head to look out the giant paneled walls into the vastness of space.

“They will know when the time is right. For now it’s better to keep them scattered. They’re too destructive when under the same roof with nothing to do.”
Yathe snorts. She knows first hand. She’s acted as his second for enough years to know that the remaining Knights were bloodthirsty children, itching for a fight. Putting them all on the same ship with no specific goal and nothing to do but wait would be courting disaster.

With a quick, graceful move she rises from her seat and gives a deep bow to him before exiting the room, leaving Kylo to his solitude again, half bathed in darkness in the dim blue glow of the high ceiling’s lights. He sits there for a long time, staring out into the nothingness, throwing out his senses through the bond to try and locate Rey. He can feel her in the distance, a dull throb in his mind. The longer she’s away the more intensely he feels it. He squints his eyes. If only he could see her just by looking hard enough.

She needs to come back.

Idiot, idiot, idiot for ever thinking that sending her away would fix all of his problems. He’d spent so much time fighting her, fighting their connection, that in her absence it only becomes more glaringly obvious how her true place is right beside him. Her absence only leaves a void, his only link to her a dim force bond as she blocks him out, like an itch he can never scratch. Leather creaks against leather and he bunches his fingers into a fist, breathing in deeply, then he leans forward and collects his helmet from where he’d dropped it between his feet. A quick run of fingers through his hair and his helmet settles in place with the satisfying hiss of compression, and Kylo sighs, listening to the modulated hiss that so comforted his ears.

He exits the gallery and makes his way quickly towards Hux’s quarters, thinking with wry amusement that he’d seen more of the redheaded General’s living space than his own ever since arriving on the Finalizer as he stalks the halls closer and closer towards the commander's rooms. He shakes his head and lets himself in. He uses the same trick he’d employed when getting Rey out to train, it feels like eons ago now. Kylo plants himself in one of the high backed chairs silently. He watches through his visor as Hux walks out of his bedroom, towel in hand, rubbing through his hair when he stops dead in his tracks in the door frame. His eyes widen for a fraction of a second then narrow to slits, but Kylo almost doesn’t notice. His eyes travel down.

Adam’s apple.

Prominent collar bones.

Slender, pointed shoulders thrown back.

Pale skin that hasn’t seen sunlight in a long time, much like his own.

Slender yet strong arms with cords of muscle running down milky biceps, strong forearms, veined wrists.

A spread of skin across his chest, painfully bare and hairless. Surprising… the General could grow a massive full beard, he knew, yet his chest…

A toned, defined navel, ridges of pectoral muscles twitching under the cold air of the room.

Skin painfully exposed where his lower abdomen meets a waistband—

There’s a cough and Kylo’s eyes fly up to meet a reddening Brendol Hux, who’s staring daggers at him.

“Did you come here to just sit there or do you have something to say? And what have I said about barging into my quarters?”
Kylo swallows, letting only the sound of slow, methodically controlled breathing escape through his modulator.

*Stupid, stupid, stupid.*

How could he allow himself to even look at the man half naked, much less stare? And it was all Rey’s fault. Ever since that day in the training room, and ever since each encounter aboard the corvette to Kuat. Ever since he’d seen them dance and Rey had pressed him into Hux’s awareness. He gives himself a mental shake, glad his helmet’s on.

He stands up and walks towards Hux, extending a gloved hand. Hux tries to jerk away, hand coming to rest on Kylo’s chest as if to shove him away. Kylo’s fingers immediately cup the back of the redhead’s neck, forcing him closer before he presses two gloved fingers to the man’s temple.

“Cooperate,” he orders, never removing his grip.

Hux watches him like a hawk, a reversal of their exchange in Kuat, but Kylo digs in deep and look for any leftover injuries. The man had screamed as he had heard no one scream, and Kylo was entirely impressed that he hadn’t bled internally from the strain. He searches for any vestige of a fever. Hux, it turns out, had recovered almost as quickly as Kylo did. After running a raging temperature from the torture, that is. He lets his hand drop.

“What was that?” Hux asks, tone hard.

Kylo takes a step back. “Checking your vitals, General. Nothing more.”

Hux gives him a wary glance but then gives a sharp nod, and so Kylo gets to what he had come to speak to the man about.

“Yathe Ren is on the premises, please ensure she’s not bothered by anyone.”

Hux tilts his head, immediately forgetting his annoyance at being barged in on and touched, face calculating and business like immediately. He pads softly over to the high-backed chair opposite Kylo’s and sits down, dropping the towel around his shoulders, under damp golden-red locks. He crosses one leg over the other, and in that moment Kylo could very well believe that the man before him could rule the galaxy, as the General turns his head to look at him. Kylo remains standing, looking down at the man.

“Is that so?” He asks, eyelids flinching minimally as he narrows his eyes at Kylo’s visor. “When did she arrive?”

“Not long after I left you last night,” Kylo admits, looking for a physical response.

He doesn’t get one.

After a pause Hux arches an eyebrow.

“She was spying on us in Kuat, was she not?”

Kylo nods, and Hux smiles.

“So, our Lady Yathe was the source of the news.”

Kylo nods again.

*Smart man.*
“What a wonderful development,” Hux purrs and Kylo suppresses the urge to shiver. Hux wields a calculating mind like Kylo wields the Force. The General had zeroed in on a weakness.

The beautiful thing about weaknesses is that they can be exploited.

Then Hux tilts his head and regards him for a very long time, seemingly trying to make up his mind about something, though Kylo knows better than to attempt and read him.

“Dinner will be served at seven,” Hux finally speaks and Kylo’s eyebrows nearly hit his hairline.

Is he being invited to dinner? That’s certainly new. He’d heard the same sentence issued to Rey plenty of times in passing, but it had never been extended to him. Kylo debates for a moment longer, and Hux’s eyes haven’t left him. He can almost sense the twitch of an eye coming on, so he nods. He’d come to dinner.

Without another word, Kylo turns and exits the room. Hux only spares him half a glance before getting up and walking into his bedroom as the main door slides shut. Kylo makes his way back to his quarters, the ones he had only seen for a moment before Hux had started projecting she’s too important into his mind from two rooms away over and over during the previous night.

He’d had to go and check on the General. They had taken a treacherous detour since Rey’s arrival and he could not afford for the man to die now from a little torture, though perhaps Kylo’s idea of what little meant had been skewed by years of suffering similar punishments at the hands of his Master.

He’d found Hux slumped where Rey used to sleep. He’d taken a single moment, let out a small sigh, and watched the vulnerable General splayed on the couch before getting to collecting a blanket, a pillow, and a cool damp towel with which to clean the crusted blood off the redheaded man’s face. He’d checked for internal injuries from the screaming, for the injuries Kylo knew first hand Snoke could inflict with the Force, but found nothing except for a burning fever raging through the slender man. Every once in a while Hux would project his confused, feverish thoughts, wondering if Rey had come back to take a shower, and Kylo’s heart had clenched. It seemed the General cared for her far more than he let on.

Hux’s body should have suffered worse than it had fared, but the General had proved to be made of as much granite as his will power. He’d made it out in one piece. Still, Kylo had lowered himself on the floor to watch through the night, letting his head fall against the couch, feeling the man’s long fingers press against his hair. When Hux had tried to thank him with a hand to the shoulder, Kylo had simply given a tense nod. What else could he do? This wasn’t his modus operandi. Then again, the last so many weeks of his life had been nothing like how he’d expected them to go either. Hux’s fingers had slowly weaved into his curls and tightened at his scalp, and when he’d brushed against the man’s mind, he’d found that the General’s fingers were acting of their own volition. Hux was clawing inside himself for any grasp on control, even in his fevered unconscious state. So Kylo had sat still and felt the General’s life signature soften as he fell asleep, and Kylo kept vigil that night until the fever broke, then left quietly after untangling Hux’s slender fingers from his scalp.

Kylo had no idea what he was doing anymore, driven by exhaustion and rage and an unquenchable thirst for... something. Someone. Anything to calm his mind.

When he finally makes it to his room, he throws his helmet on the table and makes his way straight to his grandfather’s shrine, finally letting out a breath he’d been holding for far too long.

“Grandfather.”
It comes out like a prayer. Finally, finally, he could let down his walls.

“Grandfather, show me…show me again…”

Kylo closes his eyes, lowers his defenses and opens up like a lotus flower, waiting for the words to come. He needed guidance, now more than ever, when his path seemed to stray from the course he’d set himself on so long ago. He waits with baited breath. When they finally do, they’re a balm to soothe his soul. He had not done this in so long.

*Turn her.*

Kylo sighs.

*She’s too important.*

Yes, she’s too important. He repeats that over and over in his mind, and it floats in his awareness coupled with a strange sense of deja vu, but he’s too focused on the fact that the longer Rey is gone the more he can feel the careful sense of stillness he’d constructed slipping. It is a small, frail little sprout he’d so attentively watered and guarded, a small shoot of hope he’d dared nurture.

How foolish of him to think that he could be able to exist as he had before the Force Bond if only he let her go. It is obsessive, he’s aware of it, but he would let her go if she chose to go. He had stopped his pursuit when he’d realized she did not want nor need to be followed, despite his burning desire to crush worlds and rip apart galaxies to close that distance between them. Still, he could do nothing but wait. Wait just as General Hux does, and try not to be consumed by the waiting.

He leaves his grandfather’s room and enters his own, shedding layers and taking to the bed, finally, collapsing from exhaustion. He hadn’t slept well in a long time, but keeping awake by the General’s side after a beating from Snoke had left him sapped. When he finally closes his eyes, his mind drifts to the force bond in the back of his mind. He touches it softly and whispers into it, but receives nothing back from Rey. She’s blocked him better than she’d ever had before.

Stubborn woman.

Dinners had become a regular occurrence since that first rather awkward meal Hux and Kylo had shared together.

Hux had invited him out of sheer impulse, something so very unfamiliar to him, but if he had to go one more day looking at that empty chair — *Rey’s chair* — across from him in his quarters, Hux would just about lose it. More infuriatingly yet, he could not bring himself to order someone to remove it. So Kylo had joined him that night.

He’d shown up with his helmet on, and Hux had forced the Knight to remove not only his helmet, because really, how would he eat with it on? But also his cowl and gloves before sitting down. That had gone well, if by well he conjured up images of full-on tension. But the Knight had complied to his host’s demands gracefully, however. The man that stalked the ship in a shroud of darkness, Hux mused, still retained his manners from his upbringing as the son of royalty.

During the day Hux would see Kylo prowling the halls, cowing officers and stormtroopers as was his custom, and Hux tried not to needle him about broken machinery as was *his* custom. The man was coping as best as he could, so Hux would quickly have someone fix the shredded equipment and saved the berating for some other time, leaving their dinners for pleasant silence instead. As soon as seven o’clock came around Kylo would walk into his room and shed his cowl, helmet and gloves.
without any further prompting. It gave Hux a perverse sense of satisfaction, to have tamed the beast even in this small thing.

Still, by the second week Hux could not imagine eating dinner by himself any longer. It had been Rey’s fault. All of it. His sudden weakness for companionship, his distaste for that empty chair during breakfast. Hux had tried and failed to get a hold of himself. But when everything else seemed to be going wrong in her absence, he’d allowed himself to indulge in the company of the only other person aboard the ship with whom he could share a private moment without it being an overstep of boundaries. Or worse, unbalancing power dynamics aboard the ship. Only Phasma held a command station aside from the First Knight of Ren, and Phasma preferred to spend her time amongst her men. Hux figured the Knight must also derive some sense of camaraderie in the simple notion of sharing a meal as they had aboard the ship to Kuat, because by the end of the third week he kept showing up on cue without need to be invited, quietly shedding helmet, cowl and gloves and sitting himself to their dinner for two.

Then dinner had bled into both men sitting and sharing glasses of wine or scotch nightly, quietly staring into their drinks without drinking as the hours stretched on, neither one willing to spend more time alone than necessary, formulating hazy plans for a future that depended on a young girl returning to them. They had gotten too used to company, starting with their two weeks to Kuat, and now it felt strange to eat by themselves in their empty, noiseless rooms. Quiet company was better than none.

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“Can you tell where she is?”

The question floats up to Kylo’s ears as he holds onto his glass of scotch, twirling the amber liquid without really focusing on it for what felt like the hundredth time that week. His helmet rests on the couch next to him, atop his cowl and gloves, and it’s curious how he no longer feels naked without them in front of the redheaded man who had just spoken. He allows himself to look up.

Hux is staring at his own glass of wine, swirling it around much as Kylo had with his own drink, his free hand beating a small drummed beat on the arm of his chair, legs crossed one knee over the other. A small flash of an image crosses his mind, of what the man would look like in white, a crown atop his perfectly styled coppery locks. He forces himself to concentrate.

“It doesn’t work that way,” Kylo finally offers by means of explanation. It’s not like he had to hide his bond with Rey from the General. The man had known about it for a while now.

“How does it work, exactly?” Hux continues, lifting his eyes from his pregnant goblet of red to stare right at him. Kylo swallows. Those icy blue eyes could certainly freeze him on the spot.

“It’s complicated,” he says, and it’s a lame response, but it’s a truthful one. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me,” Hux throws the challenge on the table, and Kylo has to admire the man for it.

So he explains. He explains how it had developed, out of nowhere, burning and scouring his insides, yet soothing them with light. He explains how it had thrummed and spread and uncoiled, and bound itself to him and Rey. How it had taken over his every waking thought the second Rey’s feelings had started flowing to him, expanded when further physical contact had strengthened it and suddenly she was not only shoving images and feelings at him but also words. Hux’s eyes narrow slightly at this.

“So, the closer you are, the stronger it is?” He asks, wine forgotten in his hand. Kylo nods, because
that, at least, seems to be the only explanation.

“It had started on Starkiller when I tried to interrogate her,” he finally confesses. “She and I had traded not only physical touches but also she’d fought my mental attempts. I believe this is when the bond was forged, though it lay dormant — or as dormant as a hum can be in the back of your mind — until we both approached it.”

He doesn’t know how to explain that, but Hux nods, surprising him further. He’s not being judged for any of this.

“So you could talk to her now, if you tried?” Hux asks, pulling Kylo out of his reverie.

Kylo gives a sardonic smile as he brings his glass of scotch to his lips and takes a long pull. Like the General, he had a rather high tolerance to the stuff. He looks into his glass for a long moment.

“No. She’s blocked me,” he finally says, admitting to yet another failing on his part. Hux shakes his head.

“Seems like you taught her well. You should be proud.”

It’s meant to be a barb, a backhanded compliment at best, but it makes him laugh. Backhanded or not, that was high praise from the man sitting across from him.

“Thank you, General. That seems to have been my only success.”

Hux gives a half slanted smile, clearly amused, and they fall back into silence.

They had discussed Rey plenty of times. It seemed like the only thing they had in common, other than their mounting suspicion that they were being set up to fail, ultimately to be replaced, and so when not discussing either Snoke nor Rey, General Hux and Kylo Ren would fall into companionable silence. Still, it felt odd to him, to simply show up and dine with the man without having acknowledged the change.

“Thank you,” he finally murmurs, remembering his manners, and Hux’s eyes snap up to his.

“For what?” Hux asks, slowly resting his elbow on the chair’s armrest, glass of wine carefully held off to the side by the stem. Kylo’s gaze inadvertently travels to those fingers before he jerks his eyes up. He should have never teased Hux with that image.

“Extending the invitation,” he replies carefully, hiding a small rasp as he clears his throat.

Hux nods, taking a measured sip of his wine that tinges his lips blood red. A little like liquid courage. It makes Kylo stare a little longer than necessary, then Hux finally speaks after a long moment.

“It’s open to you for as long as you would like to continue joining me.”

How curious, that. The irony of the situation isn’t lost on him. He and General Hux had kept up a petty, combative relationship built on mutual distaste for the other for so long that he had forgotten that Hux was a gentleman first and foremost. They may have been brought together by circumstance, and made to compete against each other for years, but a shared singular fear and a young scavenger girl had brought them together, resulting in this very moment. Perhaps they had Rey to thank for it.

Kylo nods his assent and then slowly sets his half empty glass of scotch on the small coffee table by the flower base, carefully lifting his bulk off the chair and setting himself to working his fingers into his gloves. Hux watches him curiously, quietly, and yet the silent gaze is so intense that Kylo has to
avert his eyes. Next comes the cowl, and Hux’s fingers have returned to their small rhythmic drumming, though his eyes never leave the side of Kylo’s face. When the Helmet finally comes on, he allows himself to let out a shuddery breath he’d been holding. This man would one day be the death of him.

He turns to the General and bids his usual farewell.

“General.”

Hux smiles, a small, private smile. It disappears quickly enough.

“Ren.”
Chapter Summary

Rey had wanted choices. She has all of them now, but having more choices does not mean getting more freedom.

Chapter Notes

Warning ahead of time: this is a 13.5k chapter.
Make yourself a cup of something warm, get comfy, and buckle in.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Four months. Between Starkiller’s collapse and her standing on Maz’s planet, her life had been a mess for a little over four months. She’d experienced more in that time than she had ever experienced in her life. Rey leaves Takodana without saying good bye, she doesn’t do farewells very well. The only parting words from Maz a reminder not to forget the small woman’s wise words to her so many days ago.

She drops herself in to the pilot seat and brings the control board up. A riot of green and blue lights light up and bathe her hands in their fluorescent glow, and Rey stares as her fingers tremble, realizing for the first time that she’d been avoiding this moment. Maz’s castle had been a refuge. The second she punches in the coordinates for Dathomir, she’d be right back in the mess.

Choices, so many choices.

She’d once thought that’s what she wanted. Now she has them and the weight of them sinks in as her eyes flicker back and forth on the live control board. Choices meant having to choose, and choosing meant potentially making irreparable mistakes. That realization freezes her in place. Rey clenches her jaw and swallows, closing her eyes. In her mind’s eye she tries to imagine a future, the right future, but none comes. All she feels is the hum of a force bond she hadn’t wanted but had become an extension of her own soul, and a collection of faces on both sides of a war she didn’t want to admit had become too important to her.

She takes a deep breath and counts.

On ten she makes her decision and hopes it’s the right one. She keys in the coordinates for Dathomir. Rey only hopes that throwing herself right back into this mess wouldn’t cost her her life. Perhaps, some day it still would. She rests her head back on her seat as her ship enters hyperspace, sleeping until her console alerts her that they are entering Dathomir’s orbit.

The planet looks like a red marble to her eyes, a globe of blood suspended in a black void. So different from beautiful D’Qar. Her chest clenches, despite Maz’s words. Soon enough she’s picking up the Resistance’s signal demanding her to state her purpose. As soon as she issues her name the line goes quiet, and Rey worries that it perhaps went dead, before there’s a bout of static and a voice comes on.
‘REY?! Rey, is that you?’

Finn.

Oh, Finn.

“Finn! Finn, it’s me! Rey!”

No sooner had she placed a foot down on Dathomir soil than a stocky, strong wall of velvety dark brown skin and muscle had knocked into her at full speed and picked her up in a bone crushing embrace. Quick on Finn’s heel is BB-8, rolling circles around them at maximum speed, letting out the highest squeals of delight Rey had ever heard. She throws her head back and laughs while being awkwardly bear-hugged, her feet dangling a foot from the ground. Poe comes sprinting out of a hangar towards them, Leia Organa and Luke Skywalker following behind at a hurried but far more dignified pace. The wall that is Finn’s crushing embrace only doubles when Poe runs up and joins Finn in the group hug, and suddenly Rey is wheezing through her laughter.

“Boys, I think she needs her lungs intact in order to be able to breathe,” comes the voice of Leia Organa.

Finn and Poe oblige, setting her down, and their bear hug eases but they refuse to let go. BB-8 quiets down by a couple of degrees but is still happily rocking back and forth by her feet, bumping her every once in awhile. She shoots the little droid a bright smile that earns her a happy squeal.

“Welcome back, Rey,” Leia says, forcing the men backwards when she moves forward with extended arms. She wraps Rey into a motherly embrace that makes Rey’s lashes flutter; it’s such a warm, comforting hug.

“Thank you, General,” she gives a small smile.

This is the first time she’s seen these people in four months, with the exception of Luke, who’s currently standing to the side giving her a kind look but is generally remaining detached and silent. An uncomfortable heat creeps up her neck as she looks at him, burning hot with embarrassment, and Rey has to avert her eyes from the man who had rejected her. Leia, perceptive as always, ushers her away from the ship’s ramp, giving Poe a look that said he should get busy storing the ship away. Poe snaps a salute and goes to do as ordered. Finn stands wavering between chasing after Poe or sticking to Rey like glue until Leia gives him a kind smile.

“We’ll have her back to you in no time, Finn,” she says, and poor Finn looks ready to balk but then he too salutes and, far more hesitantly than Poe, walks off towards Rey’s vessel.

“Come, come, child. You must be exhausted,” Leia says, hooking her arm through the crook of Rey’s elbow. “I must say, hearing your voice gave us quite the surprise, Rey.”

Luke follows a few steps behind. The fact that he has said nothing is starting to unnerve her, and Rey chooses instead to focus on General Organa.

“It’s been a very long time, ma’am,” she murmurs.

She’s so tired. She’s been so tired for so long. A very long time, indeed. General Organa gives her a kind, understanding look.

“Come, let’s get you fed first, then we can talk…But, it doesn’t seem like you’ve been needing for sustenance. Tell me, how did you survive? No, no matter. Plenty of time for that. Food first.” Leia says.
Rey blinks.

They make their way into the Resistance base in the reddish glow of Dathomir’s pink-hued sky, Luke following closely behind them, and Rey throws one last look to catch Finn, Poe and BB-8 moving around her ship before they enter and Rey is quickly guided to a seating area. Leia immediately starts worrying over her like a mother hen as she orders food be brought in — and is there anything Rey prefers? No? Well, okay, then some lunch from today will do — then sits herself in front of Rey to wait. Luke takes the seat next to his sister; his eyes keep continually glossing over Rey, trying to look at her but unable to make himself do so. Rey frowns and saves that for later, her stomach grumbling.

The food arrives and it’s not until her plate’s been filled and emptied twice that Leia finally works up the courage to ask what Rey knows she’s been wanting to ask since she arrived on Dathomir.

“Rey, tell me. How did you survive?” The woman is careful in how she intones those words, and she can see the worry and the relief in the General’s weathered face. Still, General Leia Organa is not one to beat around the bush and there’s that nagging feeling curling around Rey’s throat at the implication of survival. Rey frowns, worrying at her lip. She chooses her words carefully.

“By the skin of my teeth, like I’ve done my whole life, General,” she offers with a weak smile.

Leia reaches forward, taking Rey’s hand in hers and giving it a soft motherly squeeze. Rey keeps her silence. If there’s one thing she’s learned over the last four months it’s that silence procures confessions faster than questions ever could.

Leia looks up at Luke then back at Rey and lets out a breath she’d been holding. It’s a pained, low sound.

“I am sorry you’ve had to go through all of this, but there’s plenty of time to talk about the details. I am sure you have quite a story to tell. You don’t know how happy we are to have you back to us, Rey. After radio silence for so long, we thought you had died.”

There.

“Why?” Rey asks carefully, her eyes flying back and forth between Luke and Leia. The twins exchange a long, meaningful glance.

She’d had a feeling for months that no one was looking for her. To have it confirmed so casually hurt. Leia’s face takes on a pained look. Luke is sitting still as a statue, looking at her carefully, and Rey is careful to guard her thoughts.

“You have to understand, Rey, we couldn’t find a single trace of you. All traces of the Millennium Falcon were lost,” Leia’s voice cracks at this. The Falcon had been her husband’s vessel for so long, and Rey thought she understood the pain of losing the last connection to a place, to a person, connecting her to a past now lost to the winds of time.

“There was nothing. We tracked the homing chip the Falcon had installed and received no signals. We scouted the space around Ahch-To and came up empty, except for some debris.” General Organa’s voice comes as close to pleading as Rey had ever heard from her, the small woman who carried herself with so much dignity looking tired in that one moment. Talk of the Falcon was too close to the woman’s heart. “We assumed your ship had been destroyed.”

So they had found debris from when Kylo Ren had overtaken the ship, and decided that on such a tiny amount of evidence, she had died. Hux must have had the ship scoured for any traces of a
tracking chip and had it deactivated or removed.

Her gut clenches and she swallows, trying hard not to add Leia’s revelation to her list of disappointments. They had barely bothered to look.

“'I was captured, General,” she offers, and Luke’s eyes finally snap to her. Leia’s widen fractionally. “I escaped.”

“We must speak, then. Rey, anything you can give us, anything at all…” Then Leia clams up, realizing too late that she had tried to turn Rey’s time in captivity into a tactical asset. Rey clenches her jaw.

These people are her friends, she reminds herself. Or at least, they’re supposed to be. They would never hurt her. General Organa is just doing her job.

Still, it hurts. It hurts a little more than she’s willing to admit to herself.

“I’m sorry, perhaps we should wait until you’ve rested. There will be an enquiry, of course. I wish it weren’t so but…” Leia proceeds, shooting her an apologetic smile. Rey nods. “Well, then, until that time comes, how about we make you comfortable?”

Rey finally works up the courage to do what she’s been wanting to since before she arrived. She looks up at Leia and smiles, silently thanking her, then says, “Would it be too much to ask if I could have a moment with Mr. Skywalker?”

Mister Skywalker.

Rey wouldn’t call him Luke. She doesn’t know the man. It would be even weirder to call him Master Skywalker when he’d rejected her. Leia looks at Luke just as Rey settles her eyes on him, and Luke gives his twin a small resigned nod, as if he had expected this. He looks so much older then than when she’d arrived at his hiding place, if that could even be possible. Leia sets her lip in a stern line then nods.

“I will be in my office when you’re done, Luke.” She turns to Rey and gives her another kind smile, “and I’ll have your friends come to escort you soon after, alright?”

Rey grins, because the thought of seeing Finn, Poe and BB-8 warms her heart. Leia returns the grin then leaves, regally carrying herself out of the room until the door shuts behind her. She can see where Kylo Ren got it from. It certainly hadn’t been from Han.

After staring at the door for a moment too long Luke clears his throat. Rey turns to him again, worry at her lip. She feels a slight brush against her mind and tenses, her walls already sturdy and silent. They sit in tense silence for a moment until Luke speaks first.

“You’ve learned to guard yourself,” Luke murmurs, eyes pinning her to her seat.

“No thanks to you.”

She shouldn’t, she knows, get on the defensive immediately. Arguing with the man would only make him end this conversation immediately.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have. Some habits die hard,” he explains, offering his hands to her, “once a skill is learned, it is hard to unlearn. My father taught me to probe minds. It is not a skill of the Light,” he continues as if this excuses his attempt, and Rey raises an eyebrow.
To her, mind reading had become no different than compulsion, a skill Jedi were notorious for exploiting. At least when reading a mind, it doesn’t force a person to act against their free will. How much of a *Light Side* skill could compulsion be? Rey resolutely keeps her silence.

“I know what you must be thinking,” he says, giving her a long, tired look, “but I assure you it was not meant to hurt you.”

Rey breathes in deeply, trying her best to contain the weeks upon weeks’ worth of anger and resentment that had been welling up inside of her, now simmering in the pit of her stomach. Of course it would be easy for him to say it wasn’t meant to hurt her. Yet it had hurt.

“You turned me out when I needed you, then left me for dead, how else should I take it?”

The sound that comes from Luke’s throat is rattly, like a bunch of rusted tin cans clacking against each other from a distance.

“You couldn’t understand, Rey—“

“Try me.”

Luke’s lips set in a hard line, his shoulders stiffening at Rey’s obvious petulance, but Luke is a man of the Light. He would never allow himself to become victim to his annoyances and his anger. He relaxes methodically, and Rey can almost see it as it happens…First his fingers, then forearms, biceps, shoulders. He breathes in and out in a semblance of Kylo’s meditation, and it reminds her that the Knight of Ren had once been a student of Luke’s.

“I’ve made many mistakes in my life, Rey. I’ve failed at many things. I did not want to—could not... still can’t— allow myself to make another mistake.”

Luke’s words feel like getting stabbed with a needle in the heart repeatedly, but she tries her hardest to keep her eyes dry and her head held high. Rey takes a deep breath. She had heard from Han how and what had driven Luke Skywalker into solitude. It was old news by now. But she had spent time around one of the culprits for weeks now and she needed to hear it from Luke Skywalker himself.

“So because you made a mistake with Kylo Ren, you decided that every other chance would be a mistake also?”

Luke flinches, but then a muscle in his jaw twitches.

“*Ben* was my nephew. My flesh and blood. He was such a beautiful child, with so much promise. I thought, perhaps, this would be the Skywalker name’s chance at redemption. A child born to the Light who stayed in the Light.” Luke lets out a strangled breath, “Not like myself and my father before me, who were seduced. We too, escaped by the skin of our teeth, just like you had. One of us far later than the other.”

The way in which the man speaks keeps adding years on to him as the words flow. She watches him become small, lose some of the grand mythical air that had cloaked him when she’d first laid eyes upon him.

“It shouldn’t have been about you or the Skywalker name. You speak of him as if he were dead. A ghost of your past. Your nephew is still very much alive,” she responds with a clip. Luke looks up at her and frowns, but his eyes blur slightly with pain at her words.

“You’ve seen him?”
“He was the one who captured me,” Rey responds stiffly. Luke’s lip quivers once before the man has the sense of mind to school his features to calmness.

“I am sorry.”

He’s apologizing for more than her capture. He’s apologizing for failing Kylo Ren — Ben — and for failing her, and that apology comes too late. He’s apologizing for failing himself. She would feel pain and pity if not for the well of anger bubbling inside. Rey clenches her fists in her lap and breathes deeply. Luke speaks again.

“I… I am trying to do the right thing here, Rey. Please, if you can’t forgive me for anything else, at least try to understand that.”

Rey trains her eyes on the old, ragged man. He’s trying, or at least, his version of trying. Trying to make amends for refusing her, because it was his ultimate refusal that had gotten her captured to begin with. Perhaps she would have been captured in Ahch-to either way, but at least there she would have had a fighting chance with someone else, someone who knew what they were doing. With chewy and his bow-caster, and Luke and his saber. She’d been left to her own devices, however, and the first few days of her capture had been the hardest of her life. Yet Luke Skywalker was trying.

Rey asks the question that had been plaguing her for a long time.

“Was he a good man?” She asks. She now has two mental images of the man whom she’d tried so hard to hate for so long, and it’s hard to reconcile the two.

She thinks back to their embrace as she’d cried, to his multiple bouts of pleading for her to give him a chance to teach her. To the small kindnesses as she’d fallen asleep in Hux’s arms, when he’d whispered into her mind.

Luke gives her a long, odd look, then nods.

“Once, he had been,” he says, holding her gaze. His eyes are wise. They are deep and soulful and so very like Ren’s, if only a different color. They are cunning, but kind, like his sister’s. Perhaps it is a Skywalker trait. Luke leans forward until he’s level with Rey’s gaze and laces his fingers over his knees.

“You didn’t tell Leia everything,” he says. It’s not a question, but a statement.

Rey arches an eyebrow, suddenly defensive. “I didn’t tell any lies.”

“No, but you didn’t tell entire truths either, Rey.”

“No, I didn’t. Will you tell her this?”

She waits for the moment in which Luke tells her that he’s going to go tell his sister that Rey is lying. She waits for the moment when Leia comes in and apprehends her, believing her to be a spy for the Order, after four months of absence. She waits to be thrown in chains—

“That isn’t for me to tell,” Luke says, “nor would I, even if I should. The matters that concern me are about the Force and its balance, Rey, not about war and militia and tactical plans. Your truths are yours alone, and yours alone to share.”

Rey bites her lip. She knows she will tell Leia everything. She will, she reassures herself. When the
time comes to do so. She would tell Finn, too. Rey nods.

Luke seems satisfied by her answer, then extends a hand. She looks at it, frowns, thinks back to the many instances people have held out a hand to her. Why does everyone keep doing that? Still, she takes it. Luke inspects her hand carefully then gives her a paternal squeeze and lets it drop.

“You know what must come next,” he says, expression sad and resigned, “you’re too far down a path where I cannot follow you, Rey, not one I can lead you away from. I sensed it as soon as you landed on Dathomir.”

Rey stiffens.

“What does that mean?” She bites defensively, pulling her hand back into her lap, far away from him.

“Once a skill is learned, it is hard to unlearn,” he offers with a smile. “You will never be Light, even though you are made of it. My teachings would not suit you now, not for what’s ahead of you. The way of the Light is too calm, too slow and restrained for you, and I admit I am not the best equipped to take on such responsibility. I am the last of my kind, after all, and what I learned was learned much in the way you are learning now. In bits and pieces, from an array of masters.”

“Then why can’t you teach me now?” She asks, her voice almost betraying a whine. “Why can’t you teach me to wield a saber and fight as a Jedi would! Just because Kylo was a—..a mistake ..as you call him, doesn’t mean I would be!”

Luke smiles at her kindly, then stares at a spot above her head.

“You are blocked.”


“You learned to mind probe and to use compulsion during extreme times of duress, and the skills are now ingrained in you. What has been learned cannot be unlearned. You’re able to use them, to trickle power into those actions, but for you to learn and utilize the true ways of the Force, to use it to its full potential, you must first remove your block.”

Rey breathes through her nose, trying desperately to get air into her lungs.

“Then, teach me how.”

She had been offered so many chances, and turned them down. She had told herself so many times that she did not want a teacher, did not need a teacher, yet here she is back in front of the man who had rejected her once, begging desperately.

Rey hates herself for it.

“I do not know how, child.” Luke murmurs forlornly, his shoulders deflating, “There are many things I do not know. That is, perhaps, my biggest failure. Still, there may be someone else who could.”

Her eyes snap up. Rey tenses.

“Can he be a good man?” She asks, fearing what the answer will be but curious nonetheless. Sure, Kylo Ren could be a good teacher, but being a good teacher and being a good man were entirely different things. Luke smiles, a sad far away smile, the smile a man gives when his mind has drifted
to a time long ago, to what could have been.

“Ben is a great man, Rey. Some day, if we’re lucky — if we’re very lucky — he might learn to be a
good one. Legacy is a heavy burden.”

“Do you really believe he could learn to be a good man?” She asks, skeptical. But Luke had called
him Ben. Throughout it all. He’d called Kylo by his given name, and a given name held power. It
meant, at the very least, that Luke had not entirely given up on him.

Luke gives her a vague, sad smile and stands, slowly walking out of the room and leaving her to
hold her hands together, wishing answers would come.

They don’t.

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She spends the night curled up between Poe and Finn. They cuddle up on a tiny mattress and spend
the night talking, wide awake, and it’s innocent and warm and it makes her miss her friends dearly
even while in the room with them. If only for this, she’s glad she’s returned.

When the men ask her how she made it back, she gives them the same answers she gave Leia. Finn
looks terrified, and Poe cringes at the mention of escape.

They had pressed for more, but Rey wasn’t ready to share yet, and so they’d immediately dropped it
and decided to talk of other things. Rey spent the night listening to the men enthusiastically — if a
little sleepily — regale her with their antics. Finn had healed beautifully, thank you very much, and
had immediately enrolled to be part of the grounds’ troops. Poe told Rey rather proudly that Finn had
done such great work he was well on his way to a ranking commission, and Rey had noticed Finn’s
cheeks darken in the blessedly cool moonlight. She’d giggled and teased him over it, and he’d
balked, saying that Poe himself had earned rank. Rey had learned that Finn was learning to fly.

“Good! That way you won’t be such a shoddy pilot!” She pipes in and Finn cackles, turning around
and tickling her until she nearly stops breathing.

“Hey, I may have been a shoddy pilot, but I was a damn good shot!”

Rey grins, but then memories start flooding back and her smile falters, thinking about how their
 escapades had ended up with Finn nearly dying in the snow. “Yes you were.”

“Is everything alright?” Finn asks, concern lacing every word. Rey pastes on a smile.

“Fine. Say, where is Chewie? I haven’t seen him at all,” she says, thinking about the wall of fur that
had saved their lives. Poe and Finn exchange looks.

“Finn?”

Finn frowns.

“Chewy went back to his world, Rey. He couldn’t take the idea of losing Han and then…” Finn
falters, and Rey’s brow furrows. “He had just lost Han, and then he had to deposit me here with a
gash in my spine, and then you went missing.”

Rey stares at Finn. Poe is looking elsewhere and Finn reaches in over the blankets to give her a hug.
Of all the things she’d been told that day, this one hurts the most. She had been the reason for the
Wookie leaving.
“Can we reach him?” She asks, her lower lip starting to quiver slightly.

Poe smiles. “We’ll definitely try, Rey. That Wookie can be hard to reach when he wants to disappear, but we’ll try.”

She nods and swallows hard.

She should tell Poe and Finn how she’d managed to escape.

She should.

But she’d wait, because the day had already brought on way too many disappointments, and she could only handle so many at a time.

Rey finds Finn and Poe in the cafeteria early in the morning. She’d had to follow what she remembered of the layout of the last base in D’Qar and hoped she would find it soon enough. This place wasn’t like the Finalizer, with its neat little information stations and it’s brightly lit halls. It was a web of rooms and offices and rooms turned makeshift storage units, and it’d taken her a good ten minutes of aimless wandering. When she finally does arrive, Finn and Poe are curled in on themselves whispering and giggling like girls. Rey arches an eyebrow, reaching their round table and plopping herself down.

“What’s so funny?” She asks, reaching over into Finn’s tray to snatch a muffin.

It feels weird to her how easily she could do this with Finn. When she thinks back on it they’d shared exactly twenty four hours together when they met. Sure, those were some life-defining twenty four hours, but still it was only just enough time that Rey thought, perhaps, it wouldn’t be such a good idea to go snatching food from people’s trays. Finn, however, gives her a wide smile, dark cheeks tinged with a deep red, shoving his tray towards her just in case she wants anything else.

Poe straightens and clears his throat. They’re acting like young girls sharing in some juicy secret rather than the grown men they are.

“I— well…” Finn starts, and Poe gives him an indulgent smile. Finn blushes. Rey’s eyebrows go further up.

“Well—“ Finn starts again, and Rey is about to ask where her spunky friend had gone when Poe finally laughs, wrapping his arm around Finn’s shoulder. She watches as Finn leans in, just so, until he’s cradled in the crook of Poe’s arm.

“What he means to say is that we’re dating. As of right now.” Poe gives her a devilish smile and Rey’s world freezes.

Somehow, somehow, she could see it. She hadn’t expected it, not really, but she could see it. Finn looks up at her and gives her a hesitant smile, looking at her the same way he had back on Takodana when he told her he’d be leaving, as if waiting for her to make his day or crush his dreams. The air stills around them, Finn’s eyes glued to hers, Rey’s own flipping back between the men before her. Finn was looking for her permission, her blessing. Poe gives Finn a look and bites his lower lip, and she watches the little dimples forming under the scruffy five o’clock shadow Poe sports, and the way Poe looks at Finn clenches at her heart, reminding her of pale blue eyes and golden brown ones, yet her friends are here, safe and sound, and in love.

Rey grins.
“FINN! POE!” She squeals, launching herself from her seat into the arms of the two men as they laugh. Finn’s hesitant smile turns into the brightest thing she’s ever seen, and Poe is chuckling and repeating the scene from her landing in the hangar, all three of them huddled into a big hug.

“How?!” She asks, when she finally disengages from them just far enough to be able to take them both in. There are a few bits of food that had gone flying when she’d so carelessly flown into the mens’ arms, but no one’s noticed, and if they have, they’re not saying anything about it. Finn looks at Poe and smiles, and the flush returns to his face.

“Well, when you came back…Rey, we thought we’d never see you again. I thought— I thought I’d lost you. And then you showed up, alive and healthy and whole, and I just...” He looks at Poe then, “I don’t want to feel that again, like I’ve lost someone I’ve cared about without telling them how much I—“

Poe smiles, gently, and tilts his head to the side as if in complete understanding. He gets up and plants a kiss on Finn’s temple, a gentle, sweet kiss, and then gives Rey a peck on the cheek.

“I’ll be back later,” he says, “I have something to do.”

And Rey smiles because Poe is making an excuse to give them time to talk, and Finn looks so relieved and still so heartbroken, yet so in love when his eyes trail Poe out the cafeteria. There’s an echo of a pang somewhere in her chest. What would it be like to be so in love? So much she’d missed. The last time she’d seen Finn, he was still on life support as she’d kissed his forehead goodbye. They’d been on a hell of a ride for twenty four hours and then she’d taken off on her own, promising to both Finn and Leia that she’d return. And yet, somehow, life had gone on without her after her capture. That thought hurts. Time has left her behind once again just as everyone else had.

She looks at Finn.

No, she can’t begrudge him this. She’d left with a vague promise to a sleeping injured man, and he had thought she’d died, just like everyone else. He wasn’t beholden to her. Rey clears her throat, and Finn’s eyes snap to her with a sheepish smile.

“Sorry,” he immediately offers, then looks around the cafeteria. Everyone’s starting to mill in for breakfast, and soon enough they won’t be able to talk without being overheard. Finn picks up on that as well.

“Wanna get out of here?” He asks, holding out his hand to her. She looks at it. What was it with people holding out their hands, trying to take hers? Rey takes it, letting herself be hauled up from her seat. They walk hand in hand for a long time until they’re outside, and Rey finally gets a good look at Dathomir.

Maz hadn’t been lying when she’d said it was literally the pit of hell, even in the early morning, the place is a swampy planet full of sickly looking vegetation and a pale pink-tinged yellow sky that made her think of bile. Still, it is Leia’s now, and the safest place for the Resistance. Finn pulls her to a small rocky outcrop and sits down, patting the rock next to him. She takes her seat and they both stare out towards the horizon from the small rise where the base sits, quietly taking the time to simply be.

She knows she’d have to confront him eventually, and now seems like a good a time as any, yet she can’t bring herself to speak. It’s a relief when Finn talks first.

“I thought I’d lost you.” he murmurs. His voice holds none of the sweet, light hearted tone he’d had when Poe was around. It was deep, pained, the man she had known first before he became the man.
who sits next to her now. A man who had known loss, and felt it deeply. Rey hurts at the idea that she can’t do anything to take that pain away.

“Everyone did,” she offers by way of lame consolation, but she knows what Finn meant. No one else on that base had been with her, experienced things with her, the way Finn had; except BB-8, Chewie and Han. But BB-8 is a droid, Chewie is gone, and Han is dead. That only left her and Finn. Rey swallows the lump in her throat.

“Did they hurt you?” He asks, voice hard and eyes harder, though he can’t seem to bring himself to look at her in that moment. Talk of ‘them’ hurt. He had too much history there.

“Who?” She asks, trying to avoid the path this conversation would be turning to.

“You who exactly who, Rey,” he murmurs, his jaw set hard. He finally looks at her when Rey doesn’t answer fast enough.

Had they hurt her? She thinks back to being dumped aboard the Finalizer. Her fight during her capture had not been a pretty one. She’d fought and given everything she had, and her loss had gone down like a bitter pill she’d had to swallow, but surprisingly… No. The answer was no. They hadn’t hurt her. Not once. Rey shakes her head, wishing with all she’s got that she could change the conversation, but knowing Finn wouldn’t drop it, she didn’t. He had a right to know.

He just looks at her, big, beautiful eyes full of expression and concern. He doesn’t quite believe her.

“How did you escape, Rey?”

There it is. The small amount of suspicion so easily detectable in his voice.

“I’m not a spy, if that’s what you’re thinking,” she retorts, forcing herself to look him in the eye. Finn frowns and his jaw clenches.

“I didn’t say you were,” he responds, but Rey can tell that somewhere in his mind he’d wondered, if only for a second.

That hurts. She’d been gone for two months under First Order captivity, yes, but she’d returned. Didn’t that count for anything? Finn is the last person she needs doubting her. So she tells him everything.

He’s angry, as is to be expected, as she recounts her tale of being rejected by Luke, leaving Ahch-to, fighting for her freedom and losing, and Rey watches as he carefully plants his hands on his knees to keep from fisting his hands at his sides. He’s furious once he learns of the results of her second escape attempt, though she omits telling him where she’d been placed after, and she manages to get a chuckle out of him at being able to escape twice from her cells. But those are the easy parts to tell. Rey hesitates on what comes next. The depot. She had wanted to erase that from her mind the second she’d handed over the information. When she admits to having given away the location of D’Qar, silence descends on them like a blanket.

Finn stares at her, as if his worst fears had been confirmed.

“So you are working for them.” It’s not a question.

“What? No!” She sputters, immediately getting up to her feet, “Do you think I’d be here if I was working for them?!”

Finn glares, eyes hard, all emotion immediately disguised with a soldier’s veneer. He stays silent, and
Rey closes her eyes, taking a deep breath.

“Finn?” She asks.

Finn doesn’t say anything, so she tries a different tactic. “Was Poe one of the pilots on the mission to blow up the First Order depot?”

Finn frowns. He nods. Of course Poe would be one of the pilots. He was the best damn pilot the Resistance had.

“And you got him back safely. How do you think you managed to get him back? To get all the pilots back?” She asks, walking towards him and kneeling in front of him. “How, Finn?”

He keeps frowning, staring at her intensely as the pieces start falling into place. She urges him on, refusing to treat him as anything other than a grown man who knew war better than most.

“Did you ever find the spy who gave you the information to evacuate D’Qar?” She asks, tilting her head.

Finn blinks.

“It was you.”

Rey nods. Rey doesn’t tell him about the twenty thousand people the Resistance had co-signed to death. It wasn’t up to her to change Finn’s mind about anything. He would have to learn for himself what his choices meant now that he, too, was a soldier for the Resistance.

“Poe said there had been no retaliation,” Finn speaks, mind far away. “We’d all found it weird, thought— perhaps it was a trap. I had been the one to give them the location—“

Finn swallows.

“Someone here was a spy for the First Order,” she confirms. Finn nods dejectedly. Would they think it was him? No, he wouldn’t be here now if they thought it was Finn.

“Do you know who it is?” He asks, narrowing his eyes, “We have to find them.”

Rey shakes her head, “I was confined to the General’s quarter—“

“You were what?!”

Kriff.

And this was why she’d omitted that bit of information to begin with. Rey bites her lip. It had slipped out. Finn’s swiveling where he sits and grabbing her by the shoulders, immediately starting a very thorough examination of her neck, her limbs, her torso, anywhere he could look without touching for injuries or permanent marks.

“I was fine, Finn,” she reassures him after he swats her hand away when she tries to make him stop. Finn’s still frowning, utterly unconvinced.

“Finn.”

“Did he touch you?!” Finn’s not having any of Rey’s affirmations.

“Finn.”
“I swear if he touched you—“ Finn brings her head down and starts digging into her hair, looking for any head injuries, and Rey has to laugh.

“Finn!” She finally cries out, tugging his hands from under her buns, “Stop it. I am fine. I was fine. Hux—The General, he never treated me with anything but the utmost respect.”

Finn’s fingers freeze in her hands.

“Hux,” he repeats, his eyes drilling into hers. “You called him Hux.”

“That’s his name, isn’t it?” She asks petulantly, dropping his hands on his lap. Finn narrows his eyes.

“That’s not what I meant, Rey,” he warns, leaning in closer. Rey shrugs, because what else can she do, and it only seems to make him angry. “Or are you going to tell me next that the monster’s name is Kylo?”

“Finn!”

“No!” He barks.

The air of the Dathomir afternoon starts turning really hot around her, and Rey struggles to swallow and contain herself. Finn is entitled to his anger. He’d suffered more than most at the hands of these two men. So she lets him rage.

“No. No, Rey. You called him Hux. The other monster’s name is Kylo isn’t it? So that’s how it went? They brought you aboard that stupid ship in shackles and now you’re best friends? It only took, what, two months?” Finn is hyperventilating. He’s pulled away from her as if she were on fire, and climbs up to his feet. Rey rises from where she’d been kneeling in front of him. “You know! You know better than anyone else, Rey, what they do. What they’re capable of. And you’re calling them by their names? As if they’re childhood friends of yours?”

Rey blinks and time stops.

That stings. A lot.

Finn knows she’d never had any childhood friends. Rey bites back the retorts she already had planned and takes a step back, and maybe it’s the small retreat that snaps some sense back into Finn as his eyes widen in shock at his own words. He, too, knew better than anyone else.

Thump-thump.

“Rey…”

Thump-thump.

The anger is leaking out of his voice in a torrent as he reaches out, immediately stuttering and stumbling over his words in his rush to get them out as he takes a step forward. Rey holds up a hand. She isn’t doing this. Not with Finn. He seems to have enough sense to stop, palms spread in front of him in silent apology. Rey takes a deep breath and holds it.

She turns around on her heel and walks away, her vision blurry and damp, leaving him standing by himself in the paling light of the morning.

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She avoids Finn for the next week. Any time she catches a glimpse of chocolate skin in a tan leather
jacket, she bolts in the other direction, seeking comfort in her room, or outside the base among the scraggly bushes surrounding the camp. She’d been allowed a small radius — ten feet from the walls of the base, to be exact — without being escorted as the higher-ups decided what to do with her. Still, there were plenty of armed guards outside shooting her wary glances.

She’d spent the first few days locked up in the room issued to her by General Organa, only coming out to give a recount of her escape in front of a group of admirals and generals when it was requested of her. She’d given them the half story she’d given Leia: she had been held against her will, and she had escaped. Rey’s eyes had found Luke’s many a time and she’d had to stamp down on her fear that the man would speak up, would give her up as a liar, would have her placed in chains. But he never did, and for that she was grateful.

So she’d provided what little information she had gleaned from her escape regarding ship weaknesses, which were useless, and only solidified her story as an escaped prisoner. Nights would continue battering at her mental defenses with nightmares that left her gasping and screaming. That, too, seemed to solidify her story. A few times guards or even Leia would come to check on her, but eventually everyone chalked it up to trauma from her prisoner days, and left her alone to deal with the dreams as best as she could. Other than that, she’d seen no one and refused most meals, too tired to bother.

Her appetite had gone the same way as her resolve to talk to Finn, vanished into thin air. She avoided him as resolutely as her appetite avoided her. Except he finds her eventually. Outside, away from prying eyes, where she thought she’d be able to avoid him again. “Rey,” he begins, not even giving her a warning, and when she tries to run, he corners her with his much wider body.

“So can we talk? Please? You can’t just keep avoiding me.”

“Who said I was avoiding you?”

Finn snorts, “Do you think I’m blind? I’ve seen you slink off any time I come into a room. You’ve been avoiding me.”

He gives her a stern glare.

“Okay, fine, I just…” she starts, swinging her arms, “I didn’t want any of this. I didn’t want to fight. I just…”

“You just wanted it all to go back to normal,” he offers. Rey closes her eyes, worrying at her lip.

“Yes,” she whispers.

Because she had. She’d spent two months of her life trapped aboard an enemy ship wishing she could return to Finn, to Poe and Chewie and BB-8, and that everything would be back to normal. Or as normal as their situation could be. She hoped that being turned down by Luke wouldn’t be a strike against her, that she wouldn’t have to deal with one more rejection to add to her tally. She hoped that she could find a place to belong, a new sense of purpose, something to anchor her after her life had been so deeply uprooted at Maz’s castle with the knowledge that no one was coming back for her. She had hoped. She still hopes.

Rey worries at her lip and looks up at Finn, who’s giving her a small smile. Then he frowns, seeming to remember their last encounter, and closes his eyes. When they open again he looks so pathetically sad, like a small puppy, that she has to bite back a smile.

“About before, Rey… I’m sorry,” he halts her when she opens her mouth, shaking his head hard,
“No. Let me finish.”

He grabs her hands and squeezes.

“I’m sorry. I was the ultimate definition of jackass. I shouldn’t have said what I said. I understand if you’re mad at me. You’re the first friend I’ve had and I did the worst thing someone you thought of as a friend could do. I took your pain and I used it against you and I am so, so sorry. You have to believe that. You’re my friend. You didn’t deserve that.”

Rey’s lip quivers, because despite everything, Finn still thinks of her as a friend. She throws her arms around him, sniffing into his neck, and Finn’s fingers cradle the back of her head, hugging her close.

He sighs into her temple, then whispers, “Alright. How about we try this one more time?”

Rey sits back and they start all over again.

This time she gives every detail, every insignificant thing she can think of. Finn only stops her to ask her to clarify when he has questions, and does his absolute best at keeping his temper in check. Still, he’s kind of amused as the tale goes on, as she paints the more vivid picture of her stay aboard the Finalizer, a more human image of General Hux and the First Knight. He even chuckles at the whole Millicent and Phasma situation, though she has to work him through what the bond is several times before he gets it. He doesn’t like it. He lets her know very explicitly.

“So, he knows where you are now?” He asks, looking at her head warily. Rey smiles.

“I don’t have a bomb in my head, Finn,” she replies. She brushes his mind. He thinks otherwise. “No. He can feel me, and even speak to me if I open my side, but he can’t find me. It’s not a tracker chip.”

Finn gives a small nod, looking a little more at ease if not entirely convinced.

Rey explains her training, and negotiations, and Finn cackles at her beating the Kuati at their own game, surprised that Ren and Hux let her go, even as his concern mounts over the fact that she’d handed the enemy such large numbers of weaponry.

“You have time. Those supplies won’t be done for a long time yet.”

Finn frowns.

“What do you mean, *you* have time?” his eyes narrow. Rey nearly clamps on her tongue.

Why had she said *you*, not *we*?

Finn leans closer, worry painted all over his sharp features. “You’re not leaving, are you?”

She stares at him. She hadn’t thought that far ahead.

“Rey?” He presses, so close she can see the small veins in his eyes.

“I don’t know,” she answers truthfully, and Finn’s face lights up in alarm.

“Rey, you can’t possibly be thinking—“

“I said *I don’t know*, Finn,” she clips, cutting him off before he can continue down that track, then lets her voice return to normal. “Luke turned me down again.”
Finn frowns. He somehow seems entirely unsurprised. Another mark on the tally of hurt this trip was becoming, but she knows that if Luke had refused her once, he could do it again, and she doubted it was a big secret by now that he had. Finn’s silence encourages her to keep talking.

“I thought maybe of going to the Outer Rim, like you’d planned once.” She says.

Rey doesn’t know what she’s looking for, not exactly, when her eyes rove over his face. But it’s not there when she finally does. Just a hard-set jaw and a resigned look on his face.

“You should stay here. With us,” he counters with determination, “You belong here.”

She considers. Does she really?

She thinks back to her stay in D’Qar. She’d only been there a handful of hours, certainly not enough to call it home. She thinks back to Han, now dead. To Chewie, now missing. Images of her last few days in Dathomir. Luke, of course, and his rejection.

She had no line towards a Jedi path that way. She looks at the hangars in the distance. Perhaps she could be a pilot. Except, though her mind and body would always love flying, her heart had experienced so much more; She had tapped into the Force and laid bare all the possibilities that had been closed to her prior to this adventure, and she has no interest in pursuing a life as a soldier. She looks around towards the base, towards the landscape of Dathomir, and finds examples of life moving on without her.

Finally, her eyes land on Finn.

He, too, had carved himself a place where he belonged, fighting for things he believed in at the side of a man who loved him and — if the way Finn acted around the pilot was any indication — a man he loved. Finn had found a home.

Rey still felt suspended, frozen, in the minutes between Starkiller Base exploding and the hard decisions she’s making now, as if four months had only taken but a hard blink. The never-ending ache in her chest intensifies.

“I don’t think so, Finn.” She states, staring at the sky while she muses, “perhaps I should go find my own home somewhere. I hear the small planets of the Outer Rim are quite cozy. Or maybe I could start over with Maz.”

She smiles at him, but Finn doesn’t share her desire to lighten the mood.

“I mean it, Rey. You belong here with us.”

There’s an edge to Finn’s voice and it cuts like a knife. She shakes her head, refusing to be swayed on this. He belonged here.

Words come unbidden into her mind accusingly: Rey picking a life not suited for who she is, who she needed to be. Rey sweating under a thumb until she dies. Flashes of a glowering face, beautiful in its oddly paired features, marred by a scar she’d provided.

“Finn, stop. You belong here. You’ve made a home here, you’ve made friends, you’ve found purpose, you’ve found love with Poe and—“ and you’ve moved on, she wants to say, but finds at the last moment that she doesn’t have the guts. Finn seems to have picked up on it, however. He didn’t need the Force to read her as though she were an open book.

“A person can love more than two people, Rey,” he murmurs, pained, looking impossibly small.
Yet they both know that whatever they had shared pales in comparison to what Finn and Poe have, and there’s no room for her there. Theirs had been an attraction born of extreme duress, a need to survive bred into both of them, and they’d clung to each other like a lifeline. She has no doubt that Finn loves her, just… not in the way he loves Poe. And if she were to be honest with herself, she couldn’t love him the same way even if he did see her romantically.

Icy Blue.

Golden Brown.

She shakes her head.

“I can’t stay here, Finn,” she finally makes the admission.

She couldn’t stay. She couldn’t stay and make a home here, and make friends and form a family, and watch them die in a war from a position where she could do nothing to prevent it. That would be too cruel a choice to make for herself. Perhaps that makes her a coward. Perhaps it made her selfish. For once, she’s willing to be both.

Finn grabs her hand and squeezes it, hard, and they sit there looking at the sunset of Dathomir for a long time. The planet might be ugly, but the sunset, bright, golden yellow and pink and orange… Perhaps Dathomir did have a small amount of beauty left. Then Finn speaks, resigned, bringing her back from her musings.

“Fine, but promise me you won’t go back to them.”

“What?” She asks, turning bewildered eyes on him. That had not been what she’d been expecting him to say.

“No, Rey. I was willing to listen to you, to understand, and even accept that the monst— that General Hux and Kylo Ren treated you decently, but you can’t ask me to let you go back there in good conscience.”

Rey turns stony.

Why did everybody think they could make her decisions for her?

“Let me go? Since when do you have to let me do anything? I don’t need permission, Finn.”

She yanks her hand out from his. It’s a knee-jerk reaction, but being told what to do had never settled well with her. Finn grunts, throwing his hands up in the air.

“You KNOW what I mean, Rey!” He finally lets out in a gruff cry.

They seemed to be doing this so often. Agreeing, disagreeing, then fighting. And Rey would apologize under any other circumstance but she’s too angry now.

“No, Finn, I don’t know what you mean! I can go wherever I want. Once upon a time you encouraged me to. So what if it turns out it’s back to them? I have nothing here — and no, I don’t mean to aim that at you, you’ll always be my best friend—“ she interjects when Finn looks about ready to cry at her words, “But I can’t sit here and just…exist. I can’t, Finn. You know this. You’ve tasted what it’s like, to do something more. You know General Organa would never let me do that, not when she thinks I’m spying for the First Order. And Luke won’t train me, so what do I have left, other than be confined to the base?”
She’s begging, pleading for him to understand. Finn looks straight at the ground. He knows as well as she does that her going missing for two months only to come back unharmed from First Order captivity would never be laid to rest. It would follow her within the Resistance forever. She hadn’t meant to say she’d be going back to her captors, but Finn had put it on the table, and her mind had flown back to a small homing device zeroed in on the Finalizer’s location.

Finn stiffens, “And what would you accomplish there that you could not accomplish here, with us? With me?”

Those words are a bullet to the heart. Rey hunches in on herself, reaching out to Finn without looking at him as their fingers intertwine again. They stay like that for a long time, watching the wind as it sways the water starved shrubs. By the time Rey looks at Finn, the sun’s setting and the air has taken on a chilly bite.

“I don’t know. I don’t know, Finn, honestly. But it has to be more than what I can accomplish here…” she looks back towards the base, remembering Luke’s words. She gives Finn a long, considering glance.

How many people had she saved when given a choice to help? How many had been Resistance, like Poe and Leia and Chewie? How many had been like Finn, stormtroopers stuck inside their white plastoid carapaces, unable to choose for themselves? What could she do? Finn’s question keeps banging against her head.

“What if…” she poses, and her words come in a whisper, because even asking the question felt too much like treading uncharted water. Finn’s watching her from the corner of his eye, expression blank even as he realizes what must surely come next.

“What if… what, exactly?” He murmurs, voice low.

“What if… I could help from there?” She asks — more like, squeaks — and blinks rapidly, “What if I could make a difference?”

“They won’t let you,” Finn cuts in.

“They already let me once,” she barbs, shoulders tensing. Finn stares at her for a long moment and disengages his fingers from hers. “How many more are like you, Finn? What if… and I’m not saying I would but— What if I could help save them from that? What if I could free them? It doesn’t even have to be from there.”

“So then why not from here?” He asks, pained.

“Finn…”

She’s grasping at straws, but when she looks at her friend she can only imagine plastoid armor. There were so many more that could be like him under so many more armor suits there. People, not plastoid robots. People could change. She has to believe they can, because otherwise her only choice is to believe that this war will continue for the rest of her life, and what a bleak future that is.

Her heart lurches when Finn gets up. He turns to look at her, and they remain like this for an eternity, silently pleading with each other for entirely different reasons. Then it’s Finn’s turn to walk away, leaving her standing there with nothing but vague dreams and crazy hopes.

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There’s a knock on her door. Rey looks at the clock. Ten to eleven.
Another knock.

Rey frowns.

“Come on, Sunshine, I know you’re in there.”

It’s Poe’s voice. Rey considers just staying quiet when Poe speaks again, his voice light and teasing.

“And I have a delicious bagel with me and hot cocoa.”

Her stomach grumbles so loud even Poe chuckles from outside. She shakes her head. Stupid stomach giving her away. She hauls herself out of her blankets and opens the door gingerly, giving Poe a bashful look. He doesn’t seem to have been bothered by the fact that only a minute ago she’d been set on ignoring him entirely. He enters with an impish smile and offers her the plate resting on top of a hot mug. She takes it and walks over to her “nest” as she’s started to think of the mattress thrown on the floor, immediately plopping down. Poe follows more carefully, balancing mugs of hot chocolate. He offers her one, which she takes happily.

“Hey, I’m not judging you,” Poe says, breaking the silence. His lips are curled into a sad but good natured smile. Rey tenses.

“You think what I did was stupid and treacherous,” she bites, harder than intended, though all she can feel inside of her is apprehension. “Finn does.”

Poe regards her for a long time, tilting his head in that cute way of his. There are no smiles when he speaks next.

“What I think, Rey, is that you gave me a chance to come home to Finn. He’s the sweetest, kindest, most accepting being I’ve ever met, and he’s the only light in the darkness of this war for me. You gave me a chance to return to that. You gave us a chance to remain alive. And if it turns out that your return to those… people… can save more like him, then I can’t judge you for that.”

Rey stares at her mug, taking in Poe’s words and trying to keep the lump in her throat from bubbling up along with tears. She twirls a marshmallow around in the hot cocoa with her fingernail.

“How can you know all that?” She murmurs, unable to meet Poe’s gaze, “About how you feel about Finn, I mean. It’s only been so many months.”

Poe reaches over and tilts up her chin, making her look up at him as he gives her a brilliant smile.

“A lot can happen in so many months, Rey,” he whispers, “In a war, so many months is a lifetime. And it’s been four, to be exact. For us, I mean — Finn and I — it’s been four months, two days, and…” He checks his watch, “five hours, seven minutes, to be exact.”

Rey grins. What a silly man. What a helpless, romantic silly man. Finn is a lucky guy.

Rey sets the mug on a small table and then flops down on the mattress. Poe reaches over her to do the same then flops down next to her.

“Will he tell them?” She asks. He shakes his head.

“He doesn’t agree with a single thing you’re doing, sweets, but he knows that you’re perfectly capable of handling yourself. We both do.”

“You’ll be fine.” Poe plants a soft, brotherly kiss on her temple.
Rey smiles, “You should go to him.”

How sweet of Finn, to send his boyfriend to check in on her even when he was surely furious with her still.

“How sweet of Finn” He asks, eyes narrowing. Rey nods.

“I’m fine. I would like some time alone anyway.”

Poe gives her a hug then gets up, collecting both her mug and his. As soon as he exits the room Rey buries her face into her pillow and cries.

The next day, she stalks towards Leia’s personal quarters after asking around for directions. When Leia opens the door, Rey nearly turns around to leave. But she can’t. She has so many questions. She steels her spine and wraps herself in determination as Hux had taught her to.

“May we speak, General?” She asks.

She’d thought long and hard about her conversation with Finn, and with Poe, and there was one last person she had to confront before she packed her bags and left. In truth, Rey doesn’t know if they’ll even allow her to go, which still grates. It feels a little too much like Finn saying he couldn’t let her return to the other side.

Leia watches her with a serenity that tells her Leia knows why she’s here. To finally tell the truth. Rey tries not to cower. She’d had to deal with more difficult people — Hux and Kylo come to mind — and she would not be intimidated. Rey had done nothing wrong.

Leia steps aside and Rey lets herself in quietly, following her host to a small table. There’s a flower pot in the middle with some struggling flowers, and Leia smiles when she sees Rey inspecting them.

“I’m afraid sunlight here doesn’t allow for vegetation, no matter how carefully I water it and feed it,” she says, sitting down across from Rey. “So... you want to talk to me? I was wondering when you’d come around.”

Leia had definitely been expecting her. Rey sets her shoulders.

Where to start?

“I have to go,” she finally blurts out, realizing that there’s no way to sugarcoat this. Leia watches her with old, smart, sharp eyes and the woman gives her a small smile.

“I can’t protect you where you’re going, Rey,” she offers, a reminder that Leia Organa is no simple woman. She’s a General, a princess, a diplomat, and someone who knows war and people more intimately than most. She had expected this, too. Rey nods.

“How did you know?” Rey asks with a sinking feeling that all of her secrets had been betrayed.

Leia smiles, silently confirming without placing blame on her friend. Rey’s heart lurches, and she stomps on the feeling. Finn was doing what he believed was the right thing for her, even if it was misplaced overprotectiveness. Finn was trying to help. It was obvious by the way Leia had said she couldn’t protect her, rather than acting surprised and threatening to throw her in a cell.

“How much did he tell you?” She asks.

“Enough.” Leia supplies.
“Why?” Leia prompts, sitting regally in a way that reminded Rey of her son. So many of his mannerisms had come from this woman.

“You know your brother won’t train me,” she murmurs, and Leia nods. A curl of annoyance blooms inside Rey’s chest. “You knew it before he told me, didn’t you?”

Leia gives Rey a sad, knowing look, then nods infinitesimally again.

“Luke isn’t ready, Rey. In a way, I don’t believe he ever will be again…” Leia finally provides, trying to placate her, and Rey’s anger flares.

“Why didn’t you spare me that, then?” Rey asks, hands fisting in her lap. Leia just watches her.

“It wasn’t my answer to give you, Rey.”

“So you understand why I must go.”

“I do. But you know I can’t let you go.”

“Why?”

Rey knew the answer, asking it was just for show, for confirmation, for another reason as to why her decision to leave has been the right one. Leia doesn’t disappoint.

“We’re not in the business of letting potential spies leave, child.”

That’s the last straw.

“I fought for you, General. I fought for your Resistance, I fought by your husband’s side, I fought against your opponent and then went on a wild goose chase after your brother for you, never mind that he didn’t choose to teach me. I spent two and a half months trying to get back to you. Do I look like a spy?”

Leia flinches, the only sign that the woman does indeed feel bad for the decisions she’s had to make. But that’s not enough.

“I know you’re not a spy, Rey, but how am I to convince those above my rank? My footing is already weak as it is, and you put us in a tight spot with those ships. The Republic is non-existent, and all we have is a small group of fighters and pilots holding out their last hopes that we can make it through this. They would never let a woman who spent two months with the enemy walk away freely.”

Leia keeps delivering blow after blow and Rey cringes.

Rey looks out the window and the women sit in silence for a long time, Leia quietly staring at the dying plant, and Rey grasping for hope. She had known that the Resistance wouldn’t trust her, but she had figured, once, that if she’d stayed, they would at least let her make herself useful. Leia had confirmed her worst fears. If she stayed, she’d be a prisoner and nothing more. She’d traded one cage for another.

“Help me.” Rey pleads, a woman to a woman.

“What you’re asking of me is dangerous, Rey,” Leia offers, leaning forward to make Rey look at her fully. “This is my life’s work, upon which hinges the lives of many, and you’re asking me to
dismantle it so you can run to our enemy. Why would I do that?"

“Because I helped you once,” Rey bites, getting fed up with being told that she couldn’t leave, that no one could help her, that she was stuck forever without choices.

“What do you mean?” Comes the General’s question, tone guarded, curious.

Rey takes a deep breath, closing her eyes and forcing herself to release the death grip on her trousers.

“Twenty thousand people, General.”

Leia’s eyes widen fractionally for a moment, then the woman before her guards her expression with studied, methodical ease. Twenty thousand people. Not so long ago she had thought this woman in front of her invincible, a bastion of righteousness and a pillar of everything that seemed good.

By the way General Organa’s face had displayed her surprise, if only for a second, she realizes Finn had not told her everything. He’d kept her secret, at least.

Leia was a smart woman. Rey knew that as well as she knew she needed oxygen in her lungs. The older woman’s expression sags. If Rey had seen the number, then she also seen Leia’s signature.

“You gave them D’Qar,” Leia says, tone bland. It’s the worst sort of tone. It’s the kind that accuses without delivering a blow. Rey swallows and nods. “In exchange for what?” Leia asks, ever the tactician. “Your freedom?”

Rey frowns.

“No! In exchange for your pilots’ lives, General!”

General Organa breathes in deeply, studying her for a long time, then her expression softens. “You sent us the warning.”

Rey stares at Leia, pursing her lips, and Leia has enough sense in her to look away. There’s a look of embarrassment that crosses the older woman’s visage at having suggested that Rey would use the Resistance to her benefit. Good. This had turned into a negotiation, and it made her work in Kuat feel like child’s play.

But Rey knew she would hear no apologies. She didn’t want one. She wanted her freedom from Dathomir. She keeps her silence, letting the older woman before her think through this new revelation. General Leia Organa remains as straight backed and stoic as ever, all traces of motherly, doting affection gone to be replaced by a calculating woman used to ruling and making hard decisions.

“The ships. That I did for my freedom.” She finally admits truthfully.

Leia nods, undoubtedly having been informed by Finn, lips pursed tightly and features showing resignation. Still, if it came down to it, the Resistance would always outmaneuver their opponent, they had done so this far. Then she turns to Rey, and her shoulders sag a little.

“How is he?” She asks, looking at her hands as they tremble lightly. Rey doesn’t need to ask about whom she’s inquiring after.

“Alive and well, last I saw him, if a little… upset… at me for leaving.”

Leia smiles then, and the motherly, doting affection returns to her eyes. It’s a sad smile.
“He cares about something. Good. It’ll do him good,” Leia says, more to herself than to Rey, a wistful tone taking over her voice.

Rey reaches out to Leia then, pushing memories of a dance into the older woman’s mind, and Leia looks ready to sob for a moment as the images cascade through her. As she sees her son’s face when he mentions his mother teaching him to dance, as he smiles at being technically a prince, as he guides her around a ballroom, looking like a man rather than a monster. She shares another memory of him, a memory of him laughing, lashes rimmed with tears from his fits of giggles aboard the corvette. A memory of Rey being embraced in strong arms as she had cried herself to sleep.

This is no longer Rey, a scavenger negotiating for her escape, and General Organa, a woman who makes hard choices. This is two women sharing something that is important to the aging lady before her. Rey blinks, realizing that it is important to her as well.

Leia slumps back in her chair, and Rey lets her collect herself in silence. It is a long moment before Leia speaks again, her lip slightly quivering.

“Thank you,” she murmurs, swallowing hard. Rey nods but says nothing. There is nothing she can say.

When Leia speaks again, she’s as composed as always. “Pack your things. You’ll leave first thing tonight.”

Rey gapes.

“Why the sudden change of heart?” She asks, unable to help herself. She had basically been told not twenty minutes ago that there was no way in hell she’d be let go.

Leia smiles. A small, quivering smile. This is not a decision being made by a General, but by a woman who only has one thing left to lose, and he is somewhere on the other side of this galactic war. And she wants him back. Leia makes the only selfish choice she can make, the only one Rey needs.

“Perhaps you’ve already begun to do good elsewhere,” Leia answers, determined. “Leave me to worry about the how.”

It turns out Leia had very conveniently scheduled a diplomatic meeting off world overnight with what little was left of the Republic, sending all of her admirals and officers along for the trip. That left Rey a clear hangar and no one to ask questions. The woman sure knew how to act fast. Rey hadn’t even known what to say when Leia had stopped by her room that night in her beautiful deep blue gown. She would be off world, too, for the sake of appearances, and so their goodbyes had to be said then and there.

“What will they think when they find me gone?” Rey had asked. Leia smiles.

“That you escaped.”

“So they’ll think I’m the enemy?!” She asks.

“I convinced them you pledged to make yourself a double agent in exchange for freedom.” She supplies, “Promised them I’d informed you of our demands and given you the lecture on what we’d need from you. And… well… we’re so desperate around here that they will take any chances they can, if it means winning.”
“So, I have to actually spy?” Rey’s face had taken on a look of horror and Leia laughed.

“No, Rey. I don’t expect you to compromise your morals that way. Just, do what good you can."

“And when no missives come?” She asked, panicking immediately.

Leia just gives her an indulgent smirk. “Let me worry about that.”

Then they had wrapped each other in a long, lingering hug that held far too much pain and also far too much promise to end quickly, and Rey had heard a whispered ‘Take care of my son’ before the woman had turned around and left without another word or backward glance.

Rey had packed her things — what meager belongings she had — into a plain duffel bag and parked herself by a secluded door where she’d been instructed to wait.

She thumbs the homing device in her pocket absentmindedly, staring at the hangar as anxiety rises and rises further up her ribcage. She’d told Poe, who had told Finn, because Finn was still refusing to see her. Poe would meet her here, take her to a prepped ship cleared for departure, and say his last goodbyes.

It’s dark outside and she has to strain her eyes, looking for any source of life or light, and her heart clenches, falls, when she sees Poe arrive with only BB-8 by his side. She watches him come out from the darkness towards one of the safety lights of the tarmac, the small droid at his heels, and she bites her lip. Finn hadn’t come after all.

Poe gives her a smile and a hug, but otherwise they walk in silence until they arrive at the ship she’s supposed to be taking. When Rey finally approaches the ship’s ramp, she notices a cloaked figure standing by its side. Her muscles tense, expecting it to be a trap, only to see Luke come out of the shadows.

He looks ancient, like a man made of night himself, despite the glow of the Force being so bright around his aura. The myth she had once believed him to be. He gives her a smile and Poe makes himself scarce, mumbling about overseeing preparations.

Then they’re alone. Rey rocks back and forth on her heel, suddenly uncomfortable as the silence stretches. Luke just seems to be happy to wait until she speaks. She takes a deep breath.

“So…” she starts, not knowing what to say. She doesn’t know this man. Doesn’t know what she should say, or do. She shifts her weight awkwardly. “I guess this is it.”


“I don’t believe so.”

Rey frowns, looking up at the Skywalker fully for the first time. What was that supposed to mean?

But she doesn’t have time to ask questions when starts Luke fumbles behind his cloak. It takes him a couple of seconds, then he extends out his metal hand to her. In it there is another metal object. An octahedron shaped block of metal with intricate carvings, like a double pointed diamond. Rey frowns at it.

“What is it?” She asks, stepping closer, the part of her mind that has always been drawn to gadgets immediately kicking into gear, trying to find its opening. Luke reaches out with his normal hand and takes hers, then deposits the item in her hands. She turns it around lightly, studying it. When she looks up at Luke, he’s grinning.
“I used to love gadgets, too.” He offers, as if having read her mind. Perhaps he had. She wouldn’t put it past herself to project her giddiness. “It’s a holocron.”

“A what?”

“I said once that I couldn’t teach you. But… this,” he points to it, looking a little wistful, “Perhaps this can teach you something of the Jedi way. A little bit of healing when you step into a world where only wounds are created.”

Rey swallows.

“This can teach me?” She asks, gripping the holocron tighter. Luke nods.

“Only healing, I’m afraid. I don’t have a large collection of them. Most of them were lost during the… Well, It cannot guide you through the process, it can only instruct. But perhaps, if Ben— if you manage to break your block, you will find that instruction useful.”

Rey blinks her eyes rapidly, trying to avoid tears from forming.

“Thank you,” she murmurs.

Luke nods, then walks away quietly and disappears into the shadows like he’d never been there to begin with.

Poe comes out as if beckoned by the Force then, giving her a bright smile.

“Ready to go, Sunshine?” He asks, far too bright and cheery for the middle of the night. She stares out at the deserted hangar. There is nothing but the distant sounds of tiny creatures roaming around the swamps.

She looks at Poe.

“You sure you’re not judging me?” She asks, lump in her throat. BB-8 runs small, slow circles around her legs. Poe grins.

“Not a chance, Sunshine,” then he tugs on one of her small buns gently and gives her another hug.

“Is he coming?” She asks, and Poe looks at BB-8, then he shrugs dejectedly. Her heart constricts tighter.

She stares back out towards the hangar.

He’s not coming.

Rey tries to swallow her pain and stares at the bay door of her new ship. It would get her where she needed to be, she knew. The wind flutters her eyelashes, pushes gently on her hair, and she inhales. This would be the last time she breathed in regular planet-side air for a while, if she makes the decision she must make. Poe taps her on the shoulder. Rey frowns, looking up at him, then she notices the look in his eyes.

It’s that calm, quiet, kind look. The kind that tells her he’s looking at the most beautiful thing in the galaxy, the kind that signals—

She whips around and watches as Finn comes out from under the dark, hands in pockets and steps slow, and her knees nearly give under her. She runs towards him. She doesn’t care that he’s mad at her. She doesn’t care that she’s mad at him. She only cares that he came to see her off. He
immediately pulls his hands from his pockets and catches her in a bear hug, lifting her off the ground for a long moment before setting her back down again, and when he holds her it feels like the embrace of a brother she never had.

He grabs her hand and they walk back to the ship silently. Poe welcomes him by throwing his arm around Finn’s shoulder, and Rey looks between them and smiles. In that moment, she makes herself a promise.

“I’ll see you again, I believe that.”

She’d made that promise once to an unconscious Finn. This time, she wants him to hear it. He gives her a bright, toothy smile, even if his eyes are just a little sad, a little moist. He squeezes her hand again, and there are no goodbyes.

Good byes were for people who would never see one another. Good byes were for other people.

She turns on her heel and hefts the bag up her shoulder, patting BB-8 on the way as she walks up the ramp, and then punches the engage button without looking back.

She would see them again.

Rey pulls out of Dathomir and disengages the tracking device that Poe had not so subtly concealed (basically had left a bright yellow light on, telling her where it was for her to disengage), and hits atmo. She spares the red globe of a planet a last look before palming Hux’s tracker. She lights it up with trembling fingers and blinks as a projection pushes in front of her face. A quick passing list of coordinates, and soon enough a small holographic version of the Finalizer spins to life in front of her eyes. One last breath, and she sets her course.

She would see Finn and Poe again.

Now, she had to go see two other men.

Chapter End Notes

Ok so, firstly. Thanks a billion to my beta EjBlaKit for betaing this monster.

Second, if you made it through this, congratulations because you’re a kriffing rockstar.

Third, I know it's a lot to swallow, but I couldn't drag this out for two updates. It was all too painful to draw out, so we'll swallow the bitter pill in one go and get back to the fun, yes? also, I totally stole the good man/great man line from sherlock. Plz don't due me.

Fourth, a BILLION thank you to all of you who have stuck around and read, and commented, and shared and just been generally generous in your enthusiasm for this story. I wouldn't be doing this if not for you guys, so, thank you.

And FINALLY. YES. FINALLY. WE'RE GETTING BACK TO THE BOYS.

...
And Snoke.
But let's not worry about Asshole Snoke for a while.

This is the official turning point in the story. Rey is now returning of her own volition,
and that means we now will have three babies on equal footing, and isn't that a beautiful
thing?

There’s a Sherlock quote in there ;p 10 points to gryffindor if you caught it.

Comments & Concrit always welcome and appreciated. If you haven't followed my
tumblr (mosly reylo/reylux), you should do so already, because I've taken to posting
teasers of the chapters a handful of days before they get posted. And also...

**SHAMELESS PLUG!** My new Reylo Story, *A Proposal by Any Other Name* is in
full swing, and it is fluffy and hilarious, and I would love for all of you who also love
Reylo to go on by and give it a shot. I'd love to hear what you think :)

Happy end of the week and, to those lucky bastards who are reading this and also
attending Star Wars Celebration, know that I am ridiculously jealous and I hope you
have fun.

**Chapter Playlist:**
- [Run of Hide - Run River North](#)
- [I've Got to Go - The Wealthy West](#)
Promise

Chapter Summary

Rey returns to the finalizer. Hux & Kylo surprise her with her own room, the first of many firsts.

Chapter Notes

FINALLY.
Onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Commander,” comes the voice of Lt. Savoy. Hux tries not to squint his eyes under the strain of the headache he’s carried for days. He’d spent far too many hours on the bridge avoiding sleep, because sleep brought dreams. His eyes fly back towards the expanse of space.

“Commander,” Lt. Savoy’s demand for his attention floats up to his ears again.

“What?” He snaps, harder than necessary, then takes in a deep breath. He needed to stop doing that.

“There’s an unidentified ship requesting for the shields to be lowered,” the Lieutenant speaks, finally, double checking a screen. Hux stops breathing. He clips towards her at a hard pace and stares at the holoscreen. Sure enough, a ship is sending a request to access his hangars. Hux clenches and unclenches his jaw.

“Put me through to the ship,” he orders, and Lt. Savoy is quick to comply, having already tasted his temper one too many times over the last three weeks. Those had been torturous weeks.

He waits until the line beeps, hands clenched together tightly behind his back as his heart hammers up to his throat.

“State your purpose,” he calls with all the air of command he can infuse his voice with, not daring to hope. He’d already had so many false alarms only to find out the ships were supply runs, or officers on some nonsense or another. Every time he’d dared to hope Hux had been left sorely disappointed.

There’s static from the line, and he only can pick up a raggedy breath. He frowns. He motions to Lt. Savoy to begin preparations for weapons should this ship turn out to be unfriendly. The Lieutenant nods and walks away quickly. When Hux’s voice comes, it’s hard as granite.

“This is General Brendol Hux. State your purpose or we will fire immediately.”

Another breathy sigh. Another shock of static. Then—

“General…?”
The sound is so breathy he almost misses the acknowledgement, quiet and shy and bell-like, and his knees nearly buckle under his weight.

He bolts for the hangars, giving Phasma a silent look to take over, leaving her to take care of issuing permission as he flies down hallways and stairs, avoiding the lifts entirely because they take too much time.

It takes too long. It all takes too long.

Every long step he takes, almost at a run, takes too _kriffing_ long. He curses his ship being so big, curses the fact that he can’t just _fly_ there.

A handful of stormtroopers backtrack from their usual patrols, stopping mid-march and staring from behind visors. He doesn’t notice them. He just keeps pushing past doors, impatiently thumbing and overriding security locks in order to access shortcuts. What should take him twenty minutes at a normal clip takes him eight. He’s arriving at the hangar just as Kylo Ren is storming through as well, about thirty feet away.

The man’s helmet turns to look at him and they stare at each other for a second longer before turning their attention to the ship landing in the middle of the hangar bay. Hux uses that delay to take in a deep breath or ten, slowly relaxing each muscle and straightening himself, righting his overcoat on his shoulders. It had almost slipped off in his haste.

From the corner of his eye he can see Kylo Ren doing the same thing.

Three weeks.

After the two week trip back from Kuat, they had spent three weeks waiting for this. Hoping for this. Wishing with all their might for this. Delaying Kylo Ren’s search in hopes that she would show up.

He takes a shallow breath through clenched teeth, reminding himself to blink as the ship’s massive metal ramp lowers painfully slow. Everything is so painfully slow.

Then there’s a slender leg and a small foot taking a step forward, and he hears the ‘thump’ when it connects with the ramp, and then it’s being followed by the rest of a girl whose face had been plaguing his every waking thought. She stops at the bottom, just one step off from stepping onto the Finalizer, hesitating, perhaps wondering if she should turn around again, and he feels suspended in time.

_Her choice. It has to be her choice._

And so he looks to where Kylo Ren is standing and narrows his eyes. The Knight looks back at him in agreement, or at least, he hopes it’s in agreement. He can’t see his expression through that blasted helmet of his. They would not move until she did.

She doesn’t notice them standing in the almost-shadows, and that allows him to wait with bated breath for her to make her decision to step down. To stay with them. Hux was a man of patience, he’d always been. He could wait until stars burned out for what he wanted, yet in this moment there’s nothing patient in the way he forces himself to not fist his hands, in the way his eye twitches with desperation. So many of his plans, of his hopes, depended on her taking that one voluntary step.

She finally does, with a deep breath as she throws her shoulders back, and he releases the same breath he’d been holding. Both he and Ren step forward at the same time, and her head whips up. Her eyes land first on Ren, and Hux imagines the bond they share has something to do with the magnetism with which her eyes zero in on Ren’s helmet. Then she sees him, and she half turns her
body as Hux approaches along with Ren, closing the space until all three of them are standing in the semblance of a triangle, a handful of feet separating them.

It’s quiet. It’s so quiet.

Rey’s head tilts to the side as she regards him, and a small, shy smile curls up at the corners of her mouth.

“Were you really going to blow my ship up, General?” She asks, and Hux breathes in deep at the sound of her voice. He can’t stop the smile that creeps up his face, does not care that Ren can see it.

“You should have stated your presence sooner,” he chides. Rey grins.

Ren stands the whole time like a statue. His hands are placidly held at his side, and the only sign of life is the soft hiss of breath being taken in and expelled over and over. Rey looks at him and worries at her lip, the silence stretching while the two Force users before him tread lightly, gauging the other’s mood, leaving Hux to watch them. Kylo breaks the silence.

“Lady Rey,” comes the Knight’s voice through the modulator. Soft, even then.

Rey reacts as if pinched, straightening immediately to full height, and Hux gives Ren a hard, swift glare that the man doesn’t notice before he focuses back on Rey.

Silence descends on them again and Hux tries not to blink, or breathe, and nothing in his life has felt as important as watching what happens next when Rey bites her lower lip again, then makes up her mind and inclines her head in a low, deferential bow.

“Master.”

For the second time since she’d announced herself he feels his knees go weak.

She’d stay.

Her greeting for the First Knight of Ren seems to finally unfreeze him from where he’d rooted himself to the steely hangar floor as Kylo takes two long steps, closing the space between them, and tilts Rey’s face up by the chin. She looks at him defiantly, never flinching as she had done so many times before. They stay that way for a long time, then Rey gives the man the same shy smile she had offered Hux, some silent conversation taking place somewhere Hux can’t hear it. It no longer bothers him.

Hux steps forward.

“Well then,” Hux greets, the corners of his lips turning up a hair. “Come, you must be tired.”

Rey looks between Kylo, whose fingers are still gently cupping her chin, and him, who’s only standing a few steps away now, like children huddled together while whispering secrets. He doesn’t particularly mind that either.

Rey nods and Kylo drops his hand when her shoulders sag. Hux frowns. Her small show of bravado melts away and he finally notices the small circles under her eyes, the red rims that he’s too familiar with from endless nights without sleep. His ears pick up on the soft rattly breath that escapes her. This had not been easy for her.

When he turns his attention on Kylo the man gives a very small nod and immediately grabs her bag from her. Rey freezes.
“I can do that just fine on my own,” she balks, and Kylo’s helmet turns fractionally to stare her down. Hux knows how much she hates the helmet, and he nearly smirks when she shows her displeasure by fisting her hands and trying to grab the bag from the giant man in front of her. Kylo holds it high above her head.

“Rule number one,” Ren hisses for Rey’s ears only, though Hux manages to snatch it nonetheless, “You don’t question me in public. Is that clear?”

*In public.* Interesting, that.

Rey huffs but finally controls herself and nods.

“Yes,” comes the affirmative.

Kylo leans in closer, visor an inch from her nose.

“Yes what?” He asks perfunctorily. Rey’s lips pull back in the beginnings of a snarl before she bites down hard on her lip. Well, at least that hadn’t changed one bit.

“Yes, Master.”

Then Ren is straightening with a satisfied nod and turns to Hux. Children.

Hux gives Rey an indulgent smile before nodding to Ren and they start walking away, Hux and Kylo flanking her. She’s staring between the two of them and it’s such a surprising thing, to almost enjoy the way he feels a brush against his mind. He turns his head lightly and shoots her a glance. He’d been clear with her once. If she wanted something, she should ask. But he doesn’t shield himself, just lets his mind go blank.

“Where are we going?” Rey asks when she realizes she’s not getting any answers from him that way.

Hux’s lips twitch upward but, in true Hux fashion, he says nothing. So she’s left to walk between the two men as they go up and up through halls and lifts, quietly standing in formation as the lifts pull them higher, as their shoes click with familiarity on the metal floors of the Finalizer. For the first time in weeks something finally feels right again. By the time they finally come to a stop they’re in a hall she recognizes, but not far enough ahead to arrive to the place she’d spent so many weeks of her life in. She turns to Hux, eyes narrowing.

“What’re we doing?”

Hux resists the urge to smirk at her child-like, insistent curiosity as he places his hand on the small of her back and leads her gently to the access pad. He punches in a code and the data pad beeps, ready to accept…

Her eyes narrow further. She gives him a skeptical look but he simply stands there, one hand on her elbow, the other casually at his side. She turns her head towards Kylo Ren, but all she gets from the helmeted man — her new Master — is a small wave of silent amusement.

“Go on,” Hux prompts. Rey purses her lips, and somewhere in her the instinct to run spikes. No, she has made this decision for herself. There’s no need to run this time. Rey pushes her hand to the access pad.
It envelops her in red, then green, and the doors hiss open. When she steps inside Hux gives the command for the lights to brighten to eighty percent, and Rey’s breath is taken away.

It’s a room.

It’s bare except for the large bed raised on a platform, in standard First Order shades of grey. A small table with two chairs, a vase of white lilies sitting atop it; a small kitchenette with a raised stool, and a couple of bookshelves. Her eyes travel to the bookshelves and she finds Hux’s books neatly stacked there. The books he’d given her to read. The glint of metal catches her eye one shelf down. She takes a tentative step forward and has to swallow back the throaty gurgle that tries to sneak up her throat to produce a croaked gasp. A lightsaber.

The men come up behind her and she hears a small throat-clearing sound from behind. She turns her head over her shoulder. Hux is carefully studying her, face clear of any emotion of his own.

“Something to get you started. You may add your own belongings as you acquire them.”

Kylo is standing next to Hux, her bag still held tightly in his hand, and when she brushes his mind she finds a warm glow flowing in sheets, satiny and soft, radiating in her direction. He walks carefully to the small table and places her duffel bag on it, turning around and undoing his helmet. It hisses with the hydraulic shhhhh she’s so accustomed to, and a face she hadn’t believed she’d ever see again regards her, framed by a beautiful crown of jet black hair.

Her eyes turn around to survey the room again, and Rey has to bite hard on her lip to keep from making any undignified sound.

Her room.

Her room.

Instead she takes a deep breath and turns around, regarding the General.

“You’re prepared,” she murmurs, regarding him from under misty lashes. His lips twitch up just barely, another thing that feels so familiar.

“When am I not?” He repeats the same words he had when she’d left them in Kuat. The men haven’t moved. They just stand there and regard her, treading carefully, waiting for her to do something, anything, and finally Rey allows herself a smile. A bright smile. She wouldn’t be treated like a spy here, like a prisoner. Kylo and Hux had been right. She could build a home here.

She lets out a shuddery breath.

“So… now what?” She asks, realizing that she hadn’t formulated a plan.

Her only plan had been to just get here, to try and do something better with what she had. Beyond stepping out of her ship and onto the Finalizer she had zero notions as to what happened next. Rey look at the lilies on the table. Where had he gotten those? And had he just kept changing them out as they withered, waiting for the day she would show up, if she showed up? That makes her chest contract. Such a simple thing. But it was a small promise. A small promise that they hadn’t given up on her, and that, perhaps, they never would.

She keeps her eyes on General Hux. She couldn’t look at Kylo Ren just yet. Her new Master. She knows if she were to look she’d find something there in his expression as he read her as easily as he could the pages of the books on the shelf. Hux is safer. Hux, at least, she’d developed a tenuous friendship with. She still has too much she wants to ask from her new Master, too much, and it
would lead to confrontation. So her eyes remain on the redhead standing like a God in his impeccably uniform, his great coat hanging from his shoulders in its rightful place.

“I—uh…” she starts but Hux holds up a hand to stall her.

He’s back in his domain. This is his ship, where he’s the crowned king, and somehow that realization is somehow reassuring even as she clamps her mouth shut and waits for him to speak.

“We will need to register you as an official, ah—… resident of the First Order,” he explains, and Rey doesn’t miss the hesitation. She was not an officer, and the Knights of Ren stood apart from the Order, which meant she was… a resident. She would have laughed if she wasn’t so startled. Still, she nods, keeping her silence out of respect for the man who had respected her enough to let her make the decision to return on her own terms.

Hux looks at her Master and his eyes narrow fractionally, then his gaze returns to her, as if having made up his mind. “But that can wait. I assume you two have plenty to catch up on?”

Hux arches an eyebrow as he asks this and Rey tries her hardest not to grind her teeth. Of course. The last time she’d seen Kylo she’d shouted at him until his face had gone pale, then stormed out on him without saying another word. She knew this moment was coming, the moment when Hux would leave them alone and she’d finally have to truly face her decision. She thinks back to the moment in the hangar right as she’d called him Master. After he’d held her by the chin. He had looked so terrifying then, helmet and cowl and a shroud of death worn over his shoulders as was usual… but she’d then felt him through their bond, how relieved he’d been, elation underneath it all as he’d opened his side of the bond and coaxed her into opening hers. So kriffing happy that she’d returned. It had been a boyish elation, and she’d allowed herself to smile. But feeling emotions through their Force bond was not quite like having a hard conversation face to face. She swallows.

Rey nods, and Kylo hasn’t moved. Hux gives her a small smile that’s supposed to be encouraging and reassuring, but it does none of those things as he turns to Kylo.

“Do not destroy anything, or I will personally see you pushed out of an airlock.”

The words don’t hold any heat however, and Rey tilts her head. Had he just… made a joke? Kylo smirks but says nothing. That makes her eyebrows rise. They were being… friendly? That’s a new development. Hux looks at her once again, then at the books on the bookshelf, and nods, satisfied at something she doesn’t quite catch.

“Dinner will be served at seven,” comes the usual command. It makes her chest constrict, but it’s a pleasant feeling. Something that’s so very normal, something she’s familiar with, the comfort of routine. All the small little things she’s come to associate with this place, with these men. “Ren, please escort her to my rooms and make sure not to walk in with that awful helmet of yours.”

So, they were both being invited to dinner in Hux’s quarters. Her eyebrows keep traveling up.

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“Please comm me once you’re done,” Hux tells Ren, then walks out with shoulders straight and head held high. The door hisses behind him and then there’s just Kylo and Rey, and an awkward three feet of space between them.

She wants to look strong, she wants to ball her fists at her sides and look up at him with defiance, to show that she won’t be cowed or coerced into anything. Instead she shuffles her weight and fidgets with her tunic, because Rey very specifically remembers yelling at this man that she would never allow him to teach her, that she’d never come to him willingly, yet here she is. She eyes the bag he’d dropped on the table by the lilies. Inside is the only bit of knowledge about the Force that she hasn’t
learned from the man standing before her. She swallows.

“So, uh…” she starts, and he takes a step closer. Rey roots herself to her spot and forces her eyes up, to look into his golden brown ones, the ones she’d found herself daydreaming of in flashes that switched between golden brown and icy blue. She waits for him to berate her. To smirk and gloat about the fact that she’s finally here, finally wanting something from him. To say I told you so like he so rightfully deserved to.

Instead he tilts his head lightly as he takes another step forward until the three feet of space almost disappear.

“Welcome home.”

And that’s all it takes for Rey to crumble. Her eyes take his in for just a second longer before they threaten to get misty again, so she takes a deep breath and steadies herself.

This is home now.

It’s a ship floating in the darkness of space, and everything is clean to the point of being clinical, and there are probably going to be a million rules and regulations she would have to observe, and she’s suddenly on the side of the war she would have never in a billion years thought of as a place for her to belong, but it is home now. No, she wouldn’t cry. She blinks her eyes rapidly once, twice, three times, before setting them on his face. He’s studying her intently, soulful gaze taking in her every feature, brows furrowed, lower lip caught at the corner where he’s chewing it.

She reaches through the bond and finds his mind, and he’s worried that perhaps he said the wrong thing, so she smiles.

“Thank you,” she finally musters, and Kylo nods. He doesn’t move back, though. He just stands there with all the intensity only the First Knight of Ren can muster, waiting for her to make the first move. Rey takes a deep breath and repeats herself.

“So what happens now?” She asks, looking around the room. Her eyes fall on the lightsaber. Her mind travels back to weeks ago, when he’d told her she would get a lightsaber only when she earns it. So he, too, had prepared for this. Both General Hux and Kylo Ren had prepared for her return… had hoped for it, if the fresh lilies, the books and the lightsaber are anything to go by. She allows herself a small smile. The room was starkly bare, but it was hers. When she returns her eyes to him, Kylo’s worrying at his lip even harder. It’s such a boyish thing to do she finds herself staring. Then he stops and looks over her head for a long moment, out the open maw of the floor-to-ceiling duraglass windows yawning open to space. He hesitates and Rey frowns, but when she throws out her senses, she feels nothing but determination. This is important, so she pays close attention.

“Are you sure you want to be my apprentice?” He asks, eyes not quite meeting hers. Rey breathes in sharply.

Did she?

She thinks back to all of his offers to teach her, to the sudden revelation of her block, to Luke’s confirmation that he could not help her. What else could she do but learn? Rey doesn’t necessarily have to like her options, but these are the cards she’d been dealt, and Ren… well… he’d given her an option, something Luke never had. She’d take what she could get.

“I do, Master,” she replies, tasting the name on her tongue for the third time. Kylo’s throat bobs as he swallows.
“Kylo,” he prompts, and Rey frowns. Why is he speaking his own name? Then he looks down at her.

“My name is Kylo. In public, you may call me Master, and only Master, but here, in your own rooms… my name is Kylo.”

“Kylo,” she murmurs, his name a slip of silk on her tongue. She tastes it between her teeth as it rolls out, then murmurs it again. The man before her is looking at her closely, and she can feel him carefully guarding his end of the bond, but he makes no move to inch closer or step back, or even breathe. He’s allowing her to taste the name, so she does.

Satisfied, she gives a small nod.

“Kylo,” she says this time with a bit more conviction. “Alright.”

He seems satisfied by that, giving her a small upward twitch of the lips, his eyes boring into her. Would he always stare so intensely? Rey doesn’t know how long she can match him hard gaze for hard gaze when he looks at her that way, not after having seen the softer sides of him during a dance that now feels like a slice of a dream from a life lived a long time ago.

“Kylo,” she tries the name for size again, and if he had already been intense before, it doubles, “Do you… do you want to talk about—”

He knows what she’s going to say, of course. She’s sure she projected it right into his frontal lobes. She nearly shakes her head but he beats her to the punch, shaking his sharply once, twice.

“No,” he states, almost an order. “You are here now.”

That’s all that matters.

They slip back into old habits. Just like that. A handful of minutes aboard the Finalizer and it’s as though she’d never left. Except for the fact that this time she’s here of her own volition, and that makes all the difference. Kylo is holding himself still, swallowing every once in a while, but that wave of elated joy — small but persistent — keeps rolling off of him. She had never felt so wanted in her life.

She nods, then walks to her bed and motions him to follow. She could make him sit on one of the chairs at the table, but the table’s small and he looks way too big for it. So she waves her hand at the edge of the large bed and prompts him to sit. Surprisingly, he drops silently and watches her carefully, and she realizes with no small satisfaction that he’s treating this room as her turf. Her turf, her rules. It sends a thrill up her spine that she didn’t know she could ever feel at such a gesture. She nods emphatically to herself.

“Okay, then we won’t talk about it,” she asserts, “But we still must talk. Me being here comes with rules.”

Kylo arches an eyebrow. He’d been obviously expecting this. She senses amusement through the bond.

I thought you’d agreed to be my apprentice? He shoots through that glowing link, but she narrows her eyes. She wanted this spoken aloud. He senses as much and gives a small nod. Her turf. Her rules.

“I will never be part of the Dark Side.” There. The hardest one out. She would not sugarcoat this. On this, she would not budge.
“Rey—“ Kylo warns, his voice suddenly dropping, but she holds up a hand to stay his words.

Rey knows he’ll try. It’s in a dark sider’s nature to try and turn their apprentices. She had learned that much from Luke on Ahch-to. She had been touched by the Darkness and it had been Luke’s ultimate reason to turn her down, and so she would stall Kylo Ren for as long as she possibly could, or she would die trying, but she would not be of the Dark. She had sensed where that path could lead as she’d heard voices whispering in her mind to kill the very same man who now sits before her, and it terrified her to think she almost had. No. On this she would not budge.

He studies her for a very long time, somehow reading everything she thinks. His eyes turn stony and as their silence stretches she wonders if perhaps this had been the worst of her decisions, to demand that he listen right after she’d all but sworn herself to him. She almost feels him wanting to promise her that he’d fight her on it, to issue the same challenge of ‘we’ll see’ that he’d given her so many months ago. Instead, when he speaks his voice is unaffected, demanding of attention.

“You will never speak those words outside of this room, outside of this moment, ever again. Not in front of anyone. You will guard that thought with your life in front of any Knight of Ren, or in front of our Master. Do you understand?”

Rey swallows.

She hadn’t thought past Kylo himself. That’s right, there were others. Her mind travels back to a ballroom dance, to a hesitant Kylo Ren shutting down conversation about his master. A curl of dread forms in her stomach, but she stomps on it and nods. She’d keep this to herself.

“I need to hear you say it,” he persists.

“Yes,” she croaks, then clears her throat.

“Anything else?” He prompts, hands on knees, face carefully guarded.

“I will not kill just to kill,” she states, a bit more ferociously than intended. Kylo arches an eyebrow.

“Isn’t that a little too—“

“No,” she cuts him off, knowing he was about to say that she was being a little too demanding, or naive, or a myriad of things. Still, he simply stares her down.

“I cannot make you a promise I cannot keep, Rey,” he finally offers. Rey glares, shoving frustration at him through the bond, and she almost wonders why he’s so pliable all of a sudden when he finally sighs, amending, “But the order will not come from me. If you must kill, it will be your choice.”

Rey’s stomachtwists painfully at the idea of her having to make a choice to kill, but she’s killed before for survival, and that would not change now. She nods.

“Anything else?” He asks again, and suddenly Rey finds herself forgetting all the rules she’d thought of while on her way to the Finalizer. She frowns. She’d tell him when she remembered. He arches an eyebrow again, having snatched that thought, and she glowers. So instead of dropping it, she offers a third rule pathetically.

“I get to choose my own clothes.”

Kylo bites his lip to keep from smiling, and Rey nearly shrinks at the amusement rolling off him but instead she squares her shoulders. He gives her a once over that makes her shiver before his eyes settle up back on her face.
“Okay,” he agrees.

“Okay,” she repeats. On this, at least, they could agree easily.

She stands there awkwardly, having finished with the last of her bravado, awfully aware of their business conversation coming to an end. The silence stretches in the air between them like static until Kylo moves. She nearly flinches, but all he does is carefully set to removing his gloves, leaving her to frown at the rather weird gesture. He sets them carefully next to him on the bed, taking far too long to just put a pair of gloves down, before looking back at her again. This time his eyes travel to her hand. The same one Hux had kissed once. Her eyes track him intently as he slowly, gingerly, makes a grab for it.

The shock that runs through her at the touch is jolting. Theoretically, she knew his hands would be warm from his gloves. She just hadn’t realized how warm. Rey takes a step forward when he brings it close to him and inspects her fingers carefully, gently engulfing her hand in his, even more gently running a thumb over her knuckles, her nail beds, her fingertips. She inhales sharply but he barely notices, too busy studying every scrape and every old silver scar, his other hand holding onto its palm as he memorizes every dip, every tiny crease of her palm. And she realizes, through that beautiful golden glow in their souls, that he just wants to touch her, to believe she’s real, that she’s there, and so she lets him.

He keeps up his administrations while Rey stands between his knees and it feels like forever and not long enough, and she’s almost forgotten how to breathe, the only breath small hitches coming in through her nose at irregular intervals, but she doesn’t remove her hand. As he memorizes hers, she’s allowed to memorize the feel of his, and that feels important in this moment.

Then his comm beeps and the spell is broken, and Kylo reluctantly lets go of her hand. He grabs the comm and looks at it and she just catches a glance of the name Hux. Kylo looks up at her with a sardonic smirk.

“I guess it’s time for dinner.”

Had they been there that long? Rey swallows, eyes flying around the room until they land on a clock blinking the time at her. It had. The clock reads ten minutes to seven. She distinctly remembers arriving in the early afternoon. Rey turns and gives Kylo a small frown, but if he’s noticed the hours suddenly gone while they held hands, he doesn’t say anything. Instead he lifts himself from the bed, suddenly so much taller than she is, and steps off the platform, making for the front door. She can do nothing but follow. They pass his helmet and she shoots it a wary glance.

“You’re not taking that?” She asks, trying to keep her tone light.

Kylo looks over his shoulder at her and smirks.

“And have Hux decapitate me for wearing something so offensive to his rooms? No, thank you.”

So he palms the access door, and she realizes that he has access to it and frowns, watching the man step outside. She follows quickly before the door can close on her.

“Why do you have access to my room?” Her tone’s defensive, and she swallows.

“You’re my apprentice. Of course I have access. The General does, too. We will not enter unless invited.”

The reassurance felt short, and she glares at him.
“I promise. It is only a precaution in case of emergency.”

Rey huffs. Perhaps it made sense, but she doesn’t have to like it. “Do I get access to your room?”

The question is so petulant that Kylo almost laughs, and Rey only glares harder, but then he clears his throat and his voice takes on a husky tone she doesn’t recognize.

“If you’d like it.”

She bites her lip. Did she? A thought for some other time. Instead she focuses on the idea of dinner, and as if on cue, her stomach rumbles loudly.

“Hungry?” Kylo asks casually at her side, having decided to also drop the room access subject. Rey sighs.

“Starving.”

They pass a pair of doors and Rey stares. “What’s in there?”

Kylo gives her a side glance, amusement coming back to him. “My quarters.”

Of course. Rey bites her lip hard. They had just gotten past the talk of rooms, and here she was instigating it again. But he says nothing else and they keep walking, and Rey realizes that Kylo’s quarters are between hers and Hux’s. She sets to memorizing this fact, then chews on her lips.

“Did my room belong to anyone else?” She asks, mortified at the concept of someone else being moved to make room for her.

Kylo shakes his head.

“It’s just us.”

Rey nods and stares ahead, and soon enough they’re in front of the set of doors, an exact replica of every other set of doors, but the one that she recognizes in the end corner of the hall as being specifically Hux’s. Kylo has the decency to press the comm button on the wall to alert Hux they had arrived, rather than opening up the door with the Force. So, the man was… learning. Rey smiles lightly despite herself as they wait.

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Hux presses the access button on his kitchenette, watching as Rey and Kylo come into view, the door hissing aside. He nudges a fork on the table until it sits perfectly straight, leaving the Force Users to walk in.

Kylo had listened. His hands are bare and his head uncovered. Even as he enters he removes his cowl from his shoulders and sets it on the couch. Rey watches between Kylo and Hux, wondering about this new development in her absence and Hux’s lips twitch upward. It had been her absence that had forced the men closer, after all.

Rey is the first to walk to the table, and somehow it’s as though the five weeks of her absence shed away when she sits herself at a chair — her chair — to the left of his own, leaving Kylo to take the one to the right. She looks up at him expectantly, eyes having surveyed the food. Little one never changed.

It wasn’t much. Their usual dinner, really, but her face lights up in a smile and Hux can’t help but
return it with a very small one. They all take their places, finally and—

Rey looks at Hux, waiting for him to begin as she had in the past, and Hux and Kylo look at her hoping she’ll eat first, and somehow they all hold each other’s eyes awkwardly for a handful of minutes before Rey huffs.

“What are you doing?” She asks, ever frank.

Kylo looks at Hux and arches an eyebrow, and Hux looks between them both before quietly picking up his fork with mild annoyance. This would take some getting used to. But the second he cuts into his food he hears the clatter of forks and knives being picked up, and soon enough they fall into a comfortable silence. It’s not that far removed from their nights aboard the corvette, except now there is no hyperspace bubble to encase them, and Rey’s here of her own volition. Just as Hux thinks her name she lets out a soft groan that makes both men stop.

Their eyes fly to her face and Rey, realizing that there is no more sound of silverware reaching her ears, looks up with a mouthful. Rey swallows hurriedly, clearing her throat as she almost chokes in her attempt to get it down fast enough, grabbing her glass of water and sipping it with a bashful look on her face. The room suddenly feels just a little bit warmer. Still, with her Master sitting right next to him, Hux averts his eyes first for the sake of propriety. The sudden hike of heat is too uncomfortable to ignore. Instead of letting it continue he tries to diffuse it.

“What’s happened while I was gone?” He asks, focused on his steak as he cuts it into meticulous cubes. He glances out of the corner of his eye to see Kylo’s eyes fixed on his food as well, so he allows himself a glance at Rey. She stops and gives him a bright smile.

“Uhm, yes. Thank you. I honestly didn’t expect—“ she begins, looking at her hands, then at the couch where she used to sleep. “I thought…"

Hux swallows a lump of spit in the back of his throat. Kylo’s glancing up at Rey a second at a time from under long, thick black lashes, but carefully keeping himself from inserting into the conversation.

She’d thought she’d be forced to sleep on the couch again. He’s not sure whether to feel dismayed or a little exhilarated that she had thought she’d be returning to his quarters. But then he sees Kylo’s hurt expression out of the corner of his eye and it quickly turns to dismay. He doesn’t push her to continue her sentence, though.

“I’m glad they’re to your taste,” he murmurs, and they return back to their dinners, and Maker how could a meal be so awkward? Hux isn’t used to awkward. He’s used to feisty Rey and angsty Kylo, and even, to a much smaller extent, friendly Rey and a less-angsty Kylo. But awkward? Awkward would have never been on his list of uncomfortable encounters with these two in a billion years. He makes it a point to carefully guard his mind as he had done the second the door had opened. These two could snatch thoughts from him so very easily, and he would not abide for them to see him feeling twitchy.

The silence stretches on, however, and Rey finally chances small conversation.

“So… what’s happened while I was gone?” She asks, looking between Kylo and Hux.

The men’s hands freeze mid-actions, Kylo’s fork about to stab a piece of blue potato, Hux’s hovering where he’d almost brought vegetables into his mouth. His hand lowers very, very slowly. They look at each other in silence, and it’s rude to not answer her, but Hux doesn’t believe she would like to hear the answer. By the warning look Kylo is shooting him, it is obvious the Knight
doesn’t think so either. Hux sneers slightly at the man. As if he’d say anything. Then he schools his expression to calmness and looks at her, but Rey’s been around him too long. She picked up on it.

“Something bad?” She asks, brows furrowing as she lowers her own silverware.

Hux stares at her and his lips purse tightly. Then he very quickly slips into the role that he knows calms her the fastest. He breathes in lightly through his nose and relaxes his features, and gives her a smile. Rey eyes him warily.

“Nothing bad. Just work, as always.”

She arches an eyebrow and stares him down for an eternity, but she doesn’t push into his mind. Then she mumbles something about workaholics, and returns to her food. Hux smirks, and lowers his eyes back to his plate, and the meal continues quietly. Quietly and ill at ease. And perhaps it’s the fact that both men had been hoping for her to be here, sitting with them, eating a meal, that has suddenly turned what was supposed to be a simple meal together into the most uncomfortable dinner he’d ever found himself in with either of these two. He refrains from letting the sigh forming in the back of his throat slip, and simply sets his fork and knife down. Kylo’s still quietly eating, avoiding them both, but Rey’s eyes are pinned on him. She’d felt the tension in the air as well.

“You don’t have to do this, you know,” she speaks, waving her hand over the table.

Hux arches an eyebrow, “Dinner?”

He’s being facetious, of course, but it’s the easiest answer to give. Rey huffs.

“No,” she states, brows furrowing, “I mean all of this. The routine, the…” she waves her hand again and Hux just sits back and watches her. She flushes. So that’s why she’s uncomfortable. In truth, perhaps he’d been a little too eager.

“I see,” he finally provides. Rey looks at him and purses her lips. “If you’d rather dine alone…”

“What— no. I—“ she sputters immediately, looking down at her plate, and even Kylo glances up at her. Hux has to purposely relax his muscles to keep from frowning. Finally she murmurs.

“I didn’t mean to say I don’t appreciate it,” she fumbles for the words. “It’s just… You don’t have to go out of your way. You don’t have to do any of this…I’m not going anywhere.”

Hux has never heard sweeter words. He takes in a deep breath.

“Would you like to join us for dinner every night, Rey?” He asks formally, and she finally looks up at him. Good. He hated when she looked away. She bites her lip and then gives him a small nod, so he smiles.

“Good.” He replies. The tension in the air clears.

For the second time, she asks him what happens next.

No one talks about what happened between her leaving Kuat and her returning to the Finalizer, other than to ask if she’d found her way back easily, to which she gives him a wicked little glance and nods, and the subject of where she’d gone is never approached. When they get to the subject of what her return entails in terms of vaccination (again) and making sure her health is up to par, she does ruefully mention having taken out her tracker chip and Hux smirks when Kylo lets out a breathy grunt. The man had chased her through systems for days, trying to follow that chip.
“You won’t get another chip if you don’t want one,” he reassures her, and Kylo gives him a glance.

“Yes she will,” the Knight pipes in for the first time in the hour they’ve sat at the table. Rey looks at him and her eyebrows rise up fractionally.

“What your Master means to explain is…we all have one. In case we go missing.” He doesn’t mention that it was this chip that allowed him to find Kylo in the snow, half bleeding to death, but her eyes swing to his as recognition dawns on her anyway. Smart girl. Rey gives a reluctant nod.

“Because you need one,” is all Kylo gives, to which Hux nearly sighs. He intervenes, as always.

“Tomorrow you’ll be taken to be registered. It’s not hard. Just your name, birthday and biometrics then some medical tests.” He states, holding onto his glass of wine and staring at it. He doesn’t drink, though. It brings back memories. Rey shifts her weight in her seat awkwardly. He frowns.

And—

Kriff it. Of course. He hadn’t even thought about it as he’d said it. She had no last name. She probably didn’t know her birthday either. He takes a deep breath. Ever since she’d landed he’d been acting like a fool.

“Will you allow me to accompany you to do it?” He asks carefully, giving Ren a glance just to ensure this is okay with the man. It felt weird, thinking of her now as Kylo’s underling, and having to ask for permission from the Knight. Kylo nods, and Rey nods.

There. That’s settled. Then it’s Kylo’s time to speak.

“We also need to talk about your naming ceremony,” he provides, the second time he’s tried to converse. He’d have to corner the man about being a little less intense and a little more amiable during these dinners if they were to be a regular occurrence. He hadn’t minded their usual quiet dinners, interrupted only by talk of Snoke or plans, or to ask for the salt, but dinner with Rey was an entirely different beast. Rey’s eyes snap up to Kylo.

“Naming ceremony?” She asks, voice slightly quivering and eyes confused. Kylo seems to forget Hux is sitting there, as he often does when he’s around the woman. It no longer bothers Hux. He sets himself to studying his glass of wine.

“You are an Apprentice to a Knight of Ren. You rightfully deserve to pick your own name from now on.”

“Rey,” she immediately spits out. “Rey.”

She wouldn’t change her name. Kylo gives her a small smile, and it’s sweet and understanding, and oh how Hux wished he could read minds like they did. What was going through their heads? Rey seems to relax a little.

“Then you’ll be given the honorific Ren,” Kylo continues, before taking his own glass of wine and looking at it. “You may register with it tomorrow.”
Rey looks a little like she’s ready to cry, and it’s not lost on Hux. Kylo had given her his name. Sure, it was an honorific, but Rey would no longer be Rey of Jakku, a girl with no name. And tomorrow she’d have a home, documented for everyone to see that she belonged here, by their side. Kylo continues.

“You will still need to be formally named. We can discuss it tomorrow.”

Rey manages to bob her head once before she trains her eyes on her nearly empty plate, her hands under the table, undoubtedly clutching at her tunic. Hux averts his eyes, and Kylo does not look at his apprentice, so that she has the time she needs to collect herself. There are a couple of sniffs that tug at his heart strings, but he studiously drinks his wine and looks at everything but her. Then finally she speaks again.

“Alright.” It’s a whisper more than anything, but it’s loud enough for them to hear.

Kylo nods, and Hux simply watches them. This is one of those quiet moments, slowly recording in the back of his mind for some day in the far future. The day when the scavenger girl, no longer a nobody without a home, returned to them and planted herself firmly in their lives. And her name is Rey Ren. And she belongs with them both.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, :) I hope you liked it.

For Isha's bribery with Hux in white, you get Hux saying "Well then." :P She knows A++ caliber bribery, people.
Rey's back and some things -- a lot of things -- are going to be awkward, but she's home, you guys. Finally, finally.

Thank you to EjBlaKit as always for being a fantastic beta. ILU Darling.

And thank YOU all for the RIDICULOUSLY AMAZING amount of support for the last chapter holy shit. ;-; A few of you had me almost in tears, good bye, don't send help. Just leave me here with my feelings.

Instead of giving you a teaser on tumblr I'm just giving you the chapter a liiittttle earlier than I planned to. I can't seem to be able to stop spoiling you people. I hope you enjoyed the chapter!

**chapter playlist:**
- Home - Blue October
- Share the World - SPZRKT
Birthday

Chapter Summary

Kylo has some realizations, Rey gets a birthday and Hux gets a hug.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She has him wrapped around her little finger. He knew it the second she demanded to not be a dark side Force user, and he’d agreed. Stupid man. Still, she had come back to him and allowing her her demands felt like the least he could do in exchange for having her by his side. His mind had immediately calmed when she’d landed aboard the Finalizer, and he’d made a promise to himself there and then that he would give her anything if only it would keep her close. So he had.

The walk back to her room is quiet. Rey’s still a little shaken by their conversation about her naming ceremony, and despite Kylo’s desire to wrap her up and soothe her in some way — so uncharacteristic of him, to try and soothe rather than break — giving her space seems like the smartest thing to do at this time. Her small boots click on the floor beside him, two steps for every one of his, and he allows his mind to wander.

Allowing her to make such demands is dangerous for everyone. Not giving an order to kill he could do, and it could be up to her, but it could land her in trouble. Still, he mostly worries about her first demand. What if Snoke learned about it? What if, when the time came, his master dug into her mind and found this moment, found that she’d all but admitted to never willingly turning to his cause; worse yet, saw that Kylo had agreed—

No. That could not happen. He remembers Yathe. Yathe, who could conceal a galaxy if she so chose. Yathe would have to teach Rey.

Rey clears her throat by his side and he suddenly realizes that he almost walked away past her door. She’s standing by it, looking at him expectantly, hand hovering over the access pad. He leans in close and she opens the door. Kylo follows her inside quietly. The lights are dim, the only source of light coming from the blue soft glow of emergency lights. She turns to look at him then and it’s as though they’ve slipped right back to that moment before Hux had called them to dinner. The quiet, empty, comfortable space. Rey hesitates then slowly approaches her table and grabs his helmet, and Kylo’s lungs disengage. She lifts it, running her fingers through the visor and inspecting for the first time. She takes her time, studying it as he had studied her hand, and the bond flows with feelings of confusion but also acceptance. Confusion that it no longer seemed as terrifying to her as it once had been, and acceptance that it never would, yet she’s still worried that perhaps she’s slipping.

“You’re not Dark,” he reminds her in low tones, snatching bits and pieces of her internal anguish. Her eyes flash up to him and her hands tense on his helmet, then she sighs and hands it to him slowly. He takes it and props it under his arm, not ready yet to don it. He wanted her, needed her, to see him as he was, without a mask and without pretense. He pushes as much towards her through the bond and she offers him a weak, wavering smile.

“Good night, Kylo,” she murmurs. Kylo bites the inside of his cheek. He wants to walk forward, to touch her, to make sure she’s really standing here.
Instead he nods.

“Good night, Rey.”

The morning after comes in what feels like a blink, yet it also had been such a very slow night. Rey had woken up in the middle of the night with a gasp. Another nightmare. They had ebbed and flowed for weeks since the trip to Takodana, but this one just hurt. Her hair stuck to her neck and her whole body felt sticky with the sweat of fear that continued to pull shivers out of her long after she’d woken up.

She’d seen it again. Salt water and desert sand mixing into a slush that swallowed her alive, that buried her and closed off her airways, as a voice told her she was blocked. Then it had switched, and in her disorientation she had caught glimpses of a boy, and then red, nothing but red. Pain and red and fear. When her eyes had flown open she’d nearly screamed, unable to orientate herself in a room that was too large, too cold, too dark and grey and clinical and clean. She’d breathed through her panic until she remembered. The Finalizer. Her new home. She’d settled back on the sheets, eyes wide open for the rest of the night, unknowing that only so many feet away a raven haired man had woken up with a jolt from his own nightmares. She dozes in and out of exhaustion-induced sleep but does not return to the land of dreams, and by the time her eyes truly flutter closed there’s a loud ring reverberating off the walls.

Rey jumps.

She looks around bleary eyed, searching for a weapon that isn’t there, until she realizes the room is still empty and there’s a red light beeping above her door. Someone’s trying to get her attention. She walks to the door and presses her palm to the access pad, not bothering to check who it is because only two people know that this is her room. When the door hisses open, the General stands in front of her in full uniform, perfectly pressed as always, looking at her and her massive bed hair.

“Good morning,” he offers politely, hands automatically coming up to his chest and toying with the edge of his glove. That hadn’t changed in the time she’d been gone, at least.

Rey squints against the bright lights of the hall at Hux, taking him all in.

“What time is it?” She asks, slightly confused as she stands there in all her rumpled glory. Hux’s lips curl into a minuscule smile.

“Six in the morning, standard ship time. And you, Rey, are already late.”

Rey frowns. How could anyone be late at six in the kriffing morning? Then she remembers back to months ago how his alarm had always gone off at four, and he’d taken First Shift by five. As far as regulations on this ship went, she’d overslept by an hour. Well… overslept being a bit gratuitous. Rey had only seen the back of her eyelids for a few hours at most.

“Uh, sorry…” Rey mutters, because what else can she do? Still, annoyance flares up at herself. Back on board and already messing up. She steps aside when Hux makes no move to step back, and extends a hand for him to come in. “Please.”

He gives her a small look, studying her in the old T-Shirt she’d taken from Poe when they had stayed up all night, before stepping forward with self assured steps. The door hisses shut behind him. He stands stone still by the entrance as Rey walks by him.

This is strange. This is Hux entering her room, rather than her entering his. Her turf. Her rules. And
he seems keenly aware of it as he tries to stand still and not touch or look or breathe on anything except his own small bubble of personal space. Rey is surprisingly grateful for that. Much like Kylo, he’d allow her to rule over her own little castle without imposing the power they held outside of it on the rest of the ship.

Except she’s so tired she can’t even really focus on the small thrill the thought gives her. She sighs to herself and looks at the bed fondly before doing a small half circle where she stands, sleep deprived mind confused on what happens next.

“Are you alright?” Hux finally asks, head slanted just so, a degree or two in that boyish way that had made her smile before. She smiles now.

“Yeah… Yeah, yeah. Just… tired.”

Hux frowns, finally breaking his stay and taking quick steps towards her. He stands in front of her, nearly as tall as Kylo and, despite being more slender, still just as looming of a presence crowding her in. He narrows his eyes a fraction against the dimness of the room, studying her face.

“Nightmares?” He asks, and it surprises her how quickly he could deduce it. Then again, the man had basically massaged her scalp until she’d slept once. He’s aware of her issues. His jaw clenches when she nods and she frowns. Then the pressure ebbs from the slope of his jaw and he watches her carefully.

“I’m sorry to hear that. I can have a med-staff member prescribe you a sleep aid, if you’d like.” He offers.

“Thank you, General, I’ll consider it,” she replies, trying to bite back a yawn. Then Hux’s straight posture seems to relax slightly as he gives her a small, tentative smile.

“Hux,” he says and Rey’s mind flies with a sense of deja vu, then she remembers Kylo the previous evening. Hux gives her a tiny, conspiratorial smile meant to be shared between the two of them. “You once asked me if we were friends, little one. Friends call each other by their name. My name is Hux.”

Rey grins despite her exhaustion, and entirely unfazed at being called a little one. He had meant it as an endearment.

“Alright, Hux.” She replies, and Hux looks awfully pleased with himself for a moment, if only for a moment, before he masks it under the calm slip of professionalism that she’s so familiar with. Then she remembers something else.

“Wait, isn’t Hux your last name?” He absolutely smirks then, a shit-eating grin that she only catches a glimpse of in the dimness of the room. It only lasts a very small second as he reins himself back in.

“Too smart for your own good,” is all he offers, before giving her a quick, clinical glance over. “Go on. We’re already late.”

Oh. OH!

She’s supposed to be getting registered as a resident of the Order today. Rey nearly bolts towards the refresher, shouting at him over her shoulder to make himself comfortable, before stripping. She barely remembers to close the door before tugging down her underclothes, catching Hux giving her a curious glance and she thinks he’s blushing but she can’t quite tell from here in this light, so she closes the door and jumps into the shower. She has a shower! She hadn’t bothered to look the night
before, too tired from everything that had happened so quickly. There is no tub, but she has a shower! Rey turns the water to near scalding.

She’s late, she knows she’s late, and it almost hurts physically to turn the water off after thoroughly scrubbing herself down with the issued soap, already missing the hot streams of endless water as she towels off. Then she curses. She’d left her clothes outside. She wraps herself up in her giant towel and gingerly steps out, and her eyes immediately fly to the man who’s perched on a chair at the table. He’d been staring at her bed, probably running through ten different mental lists about how she’s breaking regulation by not having made her bed first, and she almost snorts, until he realizes she’s there and his eyes glue to her.

There is a flush there, even in the dim light. She can see the darkening of his cheeks. He averts his eyes quickly and Rey makes to find clothes as fast as humanly possible, rushing back into the refresher and locking the door once she finds them. When she finally comes out, fully dressed, thank you very much, Hux has stood up from his seat and is fastidiously yanking on his jacket sleeves. Rey clears her throat loudly and his eyes snap to attention.

“I’m ready,” she murmurs, grabbing her shoes and shoving her feet in. Hux drops his hands to his side and stands there, watching her, before he nods. They exit her room and no mention is made of the rather awkward near misses as he clips a serene pace for them. They may be late, but the schedule would bend around the General. His hands are clasped behind his back and he looks ever the Commander in Chief, and Rey can do nothing but walk at his side, thankful that he’s not forcing her to lengthen her stride.

“So, Rey,” he starts, looking at her out of the corner of his eye as he very carefully frames his next words, “Before we arrive, I must ask. Have you thought about what information you’d like to have on file?”

This was General Hux speak for do you know what your date of birth is, and Rey flinches. He clamps his mouth shut, having noticed, but Rey can’t blame him for it. It would come up eventually, and really, she should be glad he’s asking now when it’s the two of them versus in front of some perfect stranger that would stand there and judge her. Rey shrugs lightly.

“I admit I… I— no.” She murmurs, eyes planted firmly on her feet as they walk, trusting him not to guide her into a wall or something. He keeps to the center of the hall, ensuring to take wide turns to allow her the space to follow. Intuitive man.

“Do you have an approximation of…?”

He doesn’t finish and she doesn’t need him to, but she shakes her head. She has no clue. The count in her AT-AT had started long after she’d been able to speak and walk and talk, and count, and so while she had an approximate age of twenty, she couldn’t pinpoint a day.

“Perhaps we can choose one for you,” Hux chances. Rey’s eyes finally fly up to him, and he turns his head just long enough to give her a small, encouraging smile.

“You can do that?” She asks, and he almost chuckles.

“I can do a lot of things, but this is up to you to decide. It would be your birthday, after all.”

Rey nibbles on her lip and stops on her tracks, and he almost walks ahead of her before he realizes. He immediately turns about and rejoins her, the small smile having slipped from his face only to be replaced with a small frown.
He doesn’t speak, he doesn’t ask her questions. He just stands in front of her and lets her think. He’s a smart man, he knows this is important.

“I can choose?” She asks in a small croak, her eyes traveling back and forth between her dull boots and his much shinier ones. “But what should I choose?”

Too many choices.

Hux leans forward and slowly tips her face up by the chin, and she wonders how often he’s done that now, but his icy blue eyes have zeroed in on hers and the thought flies away quickly.

“We can wait to register you,” he murmurs, searching her face, looking for any reason to take her back to her rooms. Rey shakes her head.

No, she’d chosen this life. She would deal with what it entailed. He lets out a small sigh and she watches as his teeth catch on his lower lip for just a millisecond, then he’s releasing it and stepping back, dropping her chin.

“How about yesterday?” He asks, face curiously hopeful. Rey frowns.

“Yesterday?”

He studies her a moment longer. “The day you came back to us. It could be your birthday.”

And that’s all it takes, the chinks in the dam finally stretching into a spidery web that weakens her resolve until it bursts. Her eyes blur as she regards the floor and Hux immediately steps back in closer, brows furrowed and a perplexed look on his face, trying to figure out what he did. He doesn’t touch her. He doesn’t try to make her look at him. He doesn’t even breathe. He just stands there and waits for Rey to do something, say anything. Rey swallows hard.

What happens next is awkward for both of them, but Rey doesn’t care, she’s too busy thinking about the fact that she now has a birthday. She finally closes the space between them. Despite her usual reticence and reluctance to touch another human being — an uneasy left-over reaction from days when men tried to pry on her youth, thinking her weak — Rey extends her arms awkwardly and slowly, carefully sneaks them through Hux’s and under his greatcoat, wrapping them around his waist. She feels him tense underneath her. He’s not used to this, either, but it’s the only way Rey knows of to show how much this means to her, so she holds on.

Hux isn’t other men. Hux is a friend. As close to a friend as she has here. Slowly, slowly, and even more carefully, Hux’s arms rise up from his sides and embrace her by the shoulders. They stand there in the middle of the hall, hugging with stiff limbs for a moment before she tightens around his waist, trying her hardest not to wipe her face on his pristine uniform even as his movements engulf her in the warmth radiating from his body and his coat. Hux hugs her closer in turn, his hand sneaking to cup the back of her neck while his other arm finally lowers to her waist. The silence stretches for as long as she needs it, his chin resting lightly atop her head. It’s a strange sensation, realizing how easily she fits right under the crook of his neck and inside his arms.

She can feel his heart beating under her cheek. It does a weird stop, then tries to catch up as it beats rapidly once, twice, three times. Still, his breath is calm and soon enough his heartbeat is steadying, and she allows herself a handful of seconds to listen to it before carefully dropping her arms. When he looks at her his eyes have taken on a glassy quality that make his icy blues calm pools of crystalline water, and Rey can pick her reflection off them, she’s so close. She clears her throat, taking a step back, and Hux drops his arms slowly and lets her.
“I’m ready,” she murmurs, and he gives a small nod before turning on his heel and leading on.

They arrive at a small conference room where two witnesses sit. Captain Phasma and Lieutenant Mitaka, she remembers. Rey takes in the small, fidgety man, and his eyes twinkle brightly the second he spots General Hux. A loyal servant, then. Phasma’s in her usual chrome garb, helmet on, but she inclines her head as Rey enters and Rey can only give her a small, secretive smile. Both stand, and a third person steps out from where they’d been standing in the corner. It’s a small woman, elderly with weathered crow-feet around her eyes, uniform sharp as a tack and a no-nonsense look on her face. Everyone’s eyes turn to Hux, waiting for him to give the order. He sits himself at the head of the long conference table and extends a hand for Rey to sit to his right, and only once she carefully takes her seat does everybody else dare to lower themselves into their chairs.

“We are here because you’ve decided to become a member—” the older woman starts, only to be cut off by Hux.

“Resident,” he specifies, and Rey turns to look at him. She brushes his mind, and surprisingly, he doesn’t stop her. Instead Hux projects images, haphazardly pieced together. Residents were the wives and sons of members of the organization, bound by an honor code but not forced to operate for the First Order. Membership to the order meant she would have to act for their beliefs. Residency implied she was only along for the ride. She gives him a small, grateful smile.

The old woman nods, par for the course, and continues.

“You’ve decided to become a resident of the First Order. We will be taking your biometrics and creating a file for you today, but first, we need information.”

So Rey gives it. When asked for her name, she gives her new name and honorific, as well as her title as Apprentice to the First Knight, and she can feel that bubble in the back of her throat. She has a name now. Then her birthday, and at this point she feels Hux’s hand come to rest on her knee under the table, giving her a small squeeze that thankfully keeps her from crying. She gives the previous day’s Standard Galactic day and month, and guesstimates twenty years back. The old woman nods perfunctorily, typing all of this information into her file.

She’s made to stand in a corner where her facial structure is scanned by a small hovering droid, and that, too, makes it to the file. She watches an image of her face download and imprint in ghostly blue light. The date of file creation is inputted, and then she watches as Phasma removes a gauntlet and Lt. Mitaka removes his glove. They press their thumbs to a small pad. Two signatures. They are witnesses to her entry into the First Order. Then Hux does the same, despite the fact that he doesn’t need to. Two witnesses was enough. His biometric signature, however, would signify his endorsement. Rey swallows back a small choked sound. She didn’t think this is what they did for every stormtrooper. She’d have to ask him someday. All she knew was what Finn had told her, but Rey isn’t a child. She’s a grown woman joining of her own volition.

“Here is our standard Code of Conduct,” the little woman offers with a business-like tone and a hard push of a data pad towards Rey. Rey takes it gingerly and stares at it. “Please review all of the material and ensure you have memorized it. You will continue on from here to Med-Bay 5, and you’ll be given a thorough medical evaluation. All of this information will make it to your file as well. Once that’s done, you’ll be set to go.”

Then the woman stands and, after giving Hux a respectful nod, she extends her hand to Rey. Rey looks at it, then takes it slowly. The woman’s grip is surprisingly hard.

“Welcome to the First Order.”
Mitaka and Phasma salute and follow the woman out after paying their respects, leaving Hux and Rey to stand in the small room.

“That wasn’t so hard, was it?” He asks, lips twitching up into a half smirk.

Rey shakes her head. No, it hadn’t been.

“You endorsed me,” she finally says, and the half smirk turns into a full smile — or, really, a very small tug of the lips. Funny that she would think that as a full smile. On anyone else, she wouldn’t have noticed.

“I did.” Is all he gives her, before he starts walking to the door, leaving her to follow.

“Won’t that reflect poorly on you if I misbehave?” She asks, arching an eyebrow. Hux’s smirk hasn’t left his face.

“Then ensure you don’t misbehave,” he quips as they walk the halls towards the med bay.

“Don’t you have work to do?” She asks, finally, because by her previous experience, he should have long been gone to the bridge. His escorting her around felt so very…weird. So many things felt weird, she realizes. Not unpleasant, however.

“That would be like asking me if I need to breathe,” he smarts, and Rey huffs. He’s still as smarmy as ever. He continues. “I plan on working from my quarters today.”

Rey looks at him. She doesn’t have anything to do until Kylo calls for her, and it would be awkward to sit in an empty room by herself all day. It’s only around eight in the morning ship-side by now.

“Can I…” she begins, not knowing how to proceed on this, telling herself the only reason why she’s asking is because now that she’s a member — resident — of the First Order, she might as well make herself useful and learn. He gives her a sidelong glance and Rey almost misses the curious yet satisfied look he gives her.

“If you’d like.”

Rey thumbs the data pad containing the First Order’s Code of Conduct and then nods up at him.

He takes her through the rest of her appointments. She’s stripped head to toe and scrubbed within an inch of her life before the doctors set about prodding and poking her while she stands in a papery white robe, asking her a billion questions. They still have some of her records from her stay as a prisoner, something that makes Rey flinch, so they update what they can and fill out what they cannot with Non Applicable. So many tests are run. Allergy tests, sexually transmitted disease tests — something she scoffs at, it’s not like she’s slept with anyone for a long time, and last time she’d checked, she’d been clean — tests to determine she’s not carrying some random gene mutation. Scans of her organs and her bones and every imaginable blood test out there are run. When she comes out with a squeaky record and a clean bill of health, they finally implant a birth control chip in her right bicep, quickly followed by a small tracker the size of a grain of rice. Two little grains of rice under her skin.

She’s made to swallow about ten antibiotics, just in case, then she’s given a clear to dress. When she comes out, feeling and looking like she’d been put through the ringer, Hux is outside waiting on a bench with his hands carefully folded on his lap, one leg over the other. The exact same pose he’d assumed during her interrogation. Somehow it’s no longer threatening, though it’s still just as powerful a view as that first time. This time he’s not threatening to get rid of her. This time he’s just patiently waiting for her to be done. He looks up when he sees her and arches a brow — a question.
She nods. Everything was fine.

Hux gets up slowly, straightening his clothes and running his fingers through the sleeves of his greatcoat to smooth out wrinkles before leading her away towards his quarters.

“Where is Kylo?” She asks once they enter his quarters, the one space aboard this whole ship that feels familiar. Hux sets about to taking his greatcoat off carefully and hanging it, leaving her to follow him into his bedroom.

“Off on a recon mission with Lady Yathe,” Hux explains, and Rey frowns that Kylo hadn’t even told her he’d be going off ship, and who is this Yathe person? She huffs. Hux continues as if he hadn’t heard it. “He’ll be back soon enough. The planet isn’t far away. He should be here by dinner time.”

Rey has nothing to do but follow Hux around his rooms, and if he’s amused by this he doesn’t show it, though he certainly indulges her. He makes two mugs of hot kaf, dousing hers with cream - and Rey wonders how he knew what she liked — before walking them into his office and setting one on the visitor side in front of a seat. She lowers herself down to it and grabs the mug, taking a sip. His is black and without sugar and he seems perfectly happy to drink it that way. Rey scrunches her nose, imagining how bitter that tastes.

It turns out there’s a lot she needs to learn about. The second he starts pulling up documents Rey shifts her chair so she can read, peppering him with questions. By the end of it she’s learned that some of the weapons she’d commissioned are Finalizer-bound, that there’s a shortage of a particular kind of food stock that Rey arches an eyebrow at and Hux approves purchase of without even glancing at the missive, and there’s a bunch of messages from Captain Phasma regarding stormtroopers. Rey thinks back to her endorsement.

“Does Captain Phasma endorse every stormtrooper?” She asks, and Hux stops mid-typing to give her an amused glance.

“No. The Stormtroopers are trained from birth. Endorsements are only for adults who could potentially cause trouble,” he narrows his eyes at her and it takes her a second to notice he’s being playful. But Rey’s ears have zeroed in on the training of infants.

“So you take babies?” She asks, hands tight around her mug. Hux’s playfulness washes away and he regards her for a long moment.

“The stormtroopers are orphans, Rey, but not by our hand. They are given to us by parents who don’t want them or cannot afford to keep their children, and we compensate them in turn.”

Rey swallows, suddenly hurting. So, Finn really was an orphan, much like her, abandoned by parents who hadn’t wanted him. All the Stormtroopers would have otherwise grown up in orphanages or on the streets. Still, it twists her insides to think that the Order basically pays for unwanted children. It was just as immoral as snatching them from their homes, knowing that these children would be turned into weapons. At least, perhaps, it was preferable to kidnapping. At least they were being fed three times a day on schedule, and had a place to sleep. Perhaps they even have friends. She would have to make it a point to get to know some of the Stormtroopers.

She gives a very reluctant nod and Hux studies her for a long time, obviously picking up on her absolute distaste for the practice, but if he has any further thoughts on it, he lets it go.

He turns back to his screen and continues working, and Rey tries her best to forget about the stormtrooper conversation for the rest of the afternoon. Rey asks questions randomly when things
pique her interest and Hux responds patiently every time. Hours pass and by the end of it she’s leaning against the backrest of the chair, exhausted. Hux keeps shooting glances at her.

“You should rest,” he finally pipes in when her eyes start to close. Rey shakes her head. He frowns and she sighs.

“Room is too quiet and empty,” she whispers. *Too easy to slip into nightmares.* She turns her head and can get a clear view of her couch. Had he looked at her sleeping from this view before? When she turns to look at him Hux is bent over his data pad, checking something else.

“You can sleep here,” he offers without looking up, waving his hand out the door. Rey looks at the couch. It is so tempting. Hux is in his office, and the room isn’t dark and empty like her own rather unfamiliar quarters are.

Rey sighs. Just this once.

“Okay. Where do you keep the blankets?” She asks, and he looks up at her again.

He’s clearly amused. His nose tilts up just a little as he gazes at her from beneath red lashes, eyes traveling back and forth between her own before he shakes his head a little.

“You *are* aware that there is a bed available, right?” He asks, tone light. Oh, he’s *definitely* amused. Rey purses her lips.

“That’s your bed.” She states.

“I’m not in it,” he replies without missing a beat.

“It’s still your bed,” she retorts, feeling surprisingly defensive about intruding into his personal space.

“I didn’t say it wasn’t,” he says casually, arching an eyebrow at her, but his cheeks have taken on a very, very slight pink tinge.

Rey worries at her lip.

She really is tired. She looks at the time projecting on his holoscreen.

“Wouldn’t I be breaking some code about being lazy in the middle of the day?” She asks, and his eyes narrow slightly, glinting with interest. Most certainly amused.

“You get a one day pass from the General of this ship,” he quips, then waves her out. “Go.”

Rey sighs, finally having lost that battle, and walks out with her empty mug. Not even the kaf had helped her stay awake. She sets it on the kitchenette counter and then walks past the couch, past the threshold of Hux’s bedroom and into his bed. She wonders vaguely what side he slept on, but decides to just drop and sleep where she had so many weeks ago.

From where she is she can almost see a hint of red hair, past the living room in his office, but exhaustion finally sinks in. Rey drops into sleep.

“**You have to tell her.**”

Kylo had arrived on the Finalizer after a reconnaissance trip planet-side to a small moon where Snoke had demanded that Kylo search for old artifacts of the Empire. It had been a fruitless trip,
really, but it had allowed him to spend time discussing Snoke with Yathe Ren. By the time he’d arrived ship side he’d received a comm message from General Hux requesting him in his quarters and informing him Rey was there. Somehow he’d been been neither surprised nor upset by this.

He’d walked in to see Rey curled up on Hux’s bed through the bedroom’s open door, only to turn his head and find Hux in his office neck deep in paperwork. He walks into the office quietly.

Kylo takes his helmet off and gently places it on a chair, taking the opposite seat and staring at Hux.

They’d become… amiable… during Rey’s absence, first sharing dinners and then simply speaking without trying to antagonize each other - at least not in a spiteful way - but Kylo grinds his teeth anyway. Being told what to do had never settled well with him. He doesn’t have to ask what Hux is referring to. His bond with Rey thrummed with exhaustion coming from her end. She’d slipped right back into his nightmares.

“Do not presume to tell me what I should and shouldn’t do, Hux.” He lowers his voice, words a little harsher than necessary.

Hux is entirely unfazed by it. The General’s become used to him. Kylo isn’t sure whether to marvel at the sudden change in regard Hux holds for him, or to agonize over it. Still, he keeps his silence on the matter, eyes hard as he takes in Hux’s features.

The man simply returns his attention back to his work, and his silence is more damning than any accusation the redhead could make over Kylo’s unwillingness to admit to this one weakness. Because that’s what it is, a weakness. It irritates him to no end that he can’t control his dreams, that he can’t help but pull her in when their minds touch in the emptiness of the night. Despite her calming effect on his psyche by sheer nearness, she’s not close enough, and at night with his walls down, his hold on his thoughts slips. Kylo purses his lips, leather creaking as he clenches and unclenches his hands, trying desperately not to run his fingers through his hair. Hux only spares him a glance for a moment before focusing on his data pad.

“I need time. I’ll find a way to shield her from it,” he finally murmurs. He hates Hux’s silence.

“See that you do,” is all Hux gives as a response.

Kylo narrows his eyes and studies him. Why is Hux so invested in Rey’s well being? Sure, she now belongs to the First Order, at least in part, but Rey is his apprentice, not one of Hux’s officers. He takes in the General’s slightly clenched jaw, the stiffening of his posture. The small down turn of Hux’s full lips.

Realization hits like lightning.

The man likes her.

Not in a Must Keep Rey Happy For Our Plans manner, whatever those plans may be. No. True to Yathe’s predictions, the man before him actually likes his apprentice. Perhaps even more than likes. Kylo feels yet another little curl of heat in the pit of his stomach but refuses to act on it. He had no right to question the man when he himself had long stopped trying to fight himself over what he felt for her. And why wouldn’t Hux like her? He’d spent far more time around her than Kylo ever had. The two were certainly on far friendlier terms than Kylo himself was with his apprentice. Kylo turns the small kernel of information in his mind. Hux liking Rey isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It only meant one more ally in keeping her safe.

Keeping her safe.
Since when had he started thinking in terms of keeping Rey safe?

But he remembers Yathe’s words about Snoke’s knowledge of Rey’s ‘escape’ and his throat constricts. Kylo may be a lot of things, but a fool is not one of them. Snoke had plans for his apprentice, and not knowing what they were only set his skin on edge. Then there is also the matter of his bloodthirsty Knights of Ren. Rey could handle herself, but it never hurt to have backup. He gives Hux a once over. The other man either does not notice or does not care to acknowledge his open staring.

I guess it doesn’t come as a surprise.

Kylo had sensed Hux’s desperation for weeks since her departure, equal to his own. He had watched as the General had exploded into the hangar like a man starved when Kylo had felt Rey’s presence circling the Finalizer, having also bolted for the hangars. He worries at his lip.

Before he can say anything, however, he hears the breathy grunt of a sleepy Rey behind him as she slowly pads over to the office. Her little buns are in disarray from sleeping and her gaze has the same foggy quality that her thoughts do as he gently caresses the bond and coaxes her to open it up. She does, and all he gets is exhaustion.

Rey wanders in and stands between the two men by the side of the desk, looking between Hux, who’s busy being busy, and Kylo, who’s still staring.

“Hi,” she finally says, looking at him. “Where did you go?”

Kylo pries his eyes from Hux and looks up at her, arching an eyebrow.

“Master.” She amends quickly, with zero deference.

Kylo notices that the corners of Hux’s lips tug up for a millisecond despite himself.

“Oh a mission of no consequence to you,” he replies, immediately changing the subject, “Your naming ceremony will be tomorrow. Yathe Ren will come by your rooms as witness to your initiation, to explain the rules of the Knights of Ren as they pertain to you as a woman amongst our ranks.”

Rey immediately frowns at the gender distinction and he stops himself from mentioning it’s about sexual relationships, because that’s a subject Yathe needs to breach as an equal, not him as her Master. It would be incredibly inappropriate, not to mention awkward. He can barely hold a normal conversation with her now. Having the talk with her would just complicate everything. Still, when he offers nothing more, she nods.

“Okay,” is all she gives him, and she moves to the other chair where his helmet is resting. She picks it up gingerly and sits down, then rests it on her lap for lack of anywhere else to put it. The look Hux gives it makes it clear that the man does not want the metal bucket on his precious wooden desk. The sight of his helmet in her lap does awful things to Kylo, however. Things that make his insides twist.

“Will you be there?” She asks, this time of Hux. The General finally looks up, no longer able to avoid a conversation that had nothing to do with him, focusing on Kylo even though she’d asked the question.

Before anyone can answer her the alarm is chiming with somebody requesting entrance. Hux looks at Rey.

“Would you be so kind as to get that?” He asks, and Rey’s eyebrows rise. She’d never been given
the chance to open Hux’s doors ever. She lifts herself up from her chair and sets Kylo’s helmet back on it, taking off at a trot to see who’s at the door.

Hux rises from his chair and walks around to Kylo, leaning against his desk until his ankles are kissing Kylo’s legs.

“Be gentle with her tomorrow,” he warns. “This is important to her.”

Kylo glares. Of course he would be. He knows more than anyone else how important this is to her. Well, perhaps more than anyone else but Hux. They had shared in her episode aboard the corvette, Rey’s nobody complex. He nods. Hux gives a satisfied jerk of his head before leaning forward and tugging on Kylo’s cowl once.

“And take that off. It’s time for dinner.”

Hux walks away from him and Kylo’s left to wonder how his life had turned upside down this way. Once he’d worried about no one but himself and his quest for power, taking orders from no one but the Supreme Leader; now he had to worry about a stubborn a girl and a redhead man who acted as if he was perpetually put upon, both of whom had somehow slipped under his skin and planted themselves there, both of them bossing him around as if they have any right to.

He sighs and removes his cowl, placing it on the chair next to his helmet, then he removes his gloves and exits the office to join the other two at the dinner table.

Chapter End Notes

Rey has a name and a birthday! Rey has a name and a birthday!
(edit: earlier on i mentioned celebrations but NOPE. That's I think next chapter :) sorry lol uh, spoiler? Also, for the overly concerned about Rey's sexual experiences, it's been discussed in the comments. Yes, it is a deliberate decision and will be expanded on later in the story. Just gotta trust me with it :))

Always and forever grateful to EjBlaKit for her overall amazingness and being the best beta in the world. <3 love you bebe.

Thank you always for all the kudos (which I guess are an important thing in AO3 land? like...the measuring stick of this place?), comments (which I adore), subscriptions and bookmarks and general enthusiasm.
As always, Rey gets her way. She also gets The Talk.

You people are amazing. That's all.
Onward!

The alarm jolts her awake before she’s realized she’d fallen asleep. Rey looks around blearily, eyes traveling towards the windows staring out into space like a gaping mouth. The clock reads high afternoon. The lights above are so dim she can only pick up the outlines of the furniture by the blue glow of the safety lights. She flops back onto the tangle of sheets and stares at the ceiling.

After dinner she’d walked back to her rooms with Kylo, who seemed to refuse to let her out of his sight, and collapsed on the bed. Sleep had come eventually and Rey’d slipped in and out of nightmares that refused to grant her any proper rest, and she'd mostly spent the time in her rooms. She runs her hands through her hair and tugs lightly at her scalp. Today would be her naming day. Rey didn’t know whether to be excited or terrified over the same thing: this would cement her decision to stay.

She sighs, swinging her legs over the side of her bed then padding to the refresher.

It is nothing like Hux’s. His is large and brightly lit, and Rey regrets never having tried taking a bath in the bathtub. Hers is a little smaller, with only a shower. Still, it was a luxury she’d never had, so she strips down to nothing and steps in, standing under the hot water until her fingertips shrivel, turning over the last two days in her mind.

It’s a little scary, really, how her heart had somersaulted erratically when she’d heard General Hux’s voice demanding she state her purpose, and how it had thundered once Kylo had come forward at the hangar.

She’d made her choice and when she’d seen them both she’d realized it had been the right one.

Rey runs fingers through her quickly lengthening hair, reaching her the middle of her back, past her shoulder blades. She had never bothered with it much other than to cut it with a sharp metal edge to make it manageable, and bunning it up to keep it out of her face. Those three little buns. They had been her choice for so long, the last true thing she had of her life before Jakku. She nibbles on her lip as she feels the soaked strands, washing out the soapy shampoo and watching it go down the drain. So much had changed.

Twenty minutes later Rey can no longer stand the heat against her skin. She turns the water off and steps out—
There’s a woman in her room.

Rey jerks backward, towel tight around her as her eyes travel to the bookshelf. Her lightsaber’s still there, but it’s far. Maybe she could call it to herself—

“I mean you no harm,” comes a silky voice as a woman dark as night steps forward and flashes her a bright smile. Rey tenses.

“Who are you? And what are you doing in my room?” She asks, stepping closer to the bed, trying to walk closer to the bookshelf.

“Yathe Ren,” Yathe, inclining her head and bending at the waist, a hand held close to her chest. A greeting. “Forgive me. I did not mean to startle you. Your Master has sent me to prepare you for your naming ceremony.”

Oh.

Yathe’s lithe and willowy woman frame reminds Rey of a predator waiting to spring. Ray takes Yathe in, the woman before her clothed in leather and black from head to toe, a long black cloak falling from her shoulders. Shrewd, bright almond eyes framed by painfully high cheekbones regard her somberly, the soft full pout tight at the edges.

A strong woman, then. Rey doubted there would be any weak Knights, if they were all like the woman before her. Yathe’s arms are loaded full of black fabric and Rey frowns.

“May I?” Yathe asks.

Rey nods, a little wary nonetheless, and Yathe moves to place the bundle on Rey’s bed, her cloak kissing Rey’s bare thighs as the woman passes by.

“So, Uh—“ Rey starts before remembering that this is a complete stranger. She squares her shoulders and tries to make herself bigger than she is. “Your name is Yathe Ren.”

Yathe nods, eyeing her warily, calculating, yet keeping her hands in Rey’s line of vision at all times. She means no harm.

“Yathe,” the tall dark woman offers with a smile, and Rey can’t help but think that she’s being measured, “You may call me Yathe here. I am your Master’s second.”

“Second what?”

Yathe’s face is unreadable up until she lets out a cackle. Rey’s cheeks warm. So, Yathe was also Force Sensitive. Yathe chortles even as she responds, clearly amused, and when she gazes upon Rey again, her eyes are just a little warmer.

“I’m his second in command, Lady Rey,” Yathe clarifies.

Rey clears her throat in embarrassment.

“Oh,” is all she can reply with. Yathe’s still wearing a tiny smile as she turns around to spread the clothes on the bed, Rey stares at Yathe’s short crop of tight, coarse hair and the graceful tilt of a long neck. She’d never seen someone so beautiful. She must have projected that, too, because when Yathe turns around Rey receives a much friendlier smile.

“We must hurry. There’s a lot to go over while you dress,” Yathe speaks, giving Rey another once
over and seeming to approve. Rey’s never been ashamed of her body, but the way in which Yathe eyes her up and down makes a blush creep back up to her cheeks again. Yathe presents her offerings.

There’s a long cloak threaded with silver along the edges, and a cowl that looks similar to Kylo’s rests on top of it. Beside them there is a replica of her Jakku clothes in black which makes her heart clench. There’s also another outfit at the end of the bed. Black trousers that flare to the knees then pinch at the calf, meant to wrap tightly from knees down. A black leather jacket with far too many complicated belts and loops, a standard black undershirt and tunic to go under the jacket.

“You may choose,” Yathe says. Rey hesitates.

She’s not quite ready to give up everything about herself just yet.

She walks over to the replica of her Jakku clothes. Yathe glances at her curiously.

“What?” Rey asks, feeling uncomfortable at being stared at.

“Kylo Ren insisted you be given this option. The second set,” she says with a small shake of her head, pointing towards the much more impressive, much more complicated outfit, “had been my choice. Interesting.”

Rey refrains from worrying at her lip but only barely. Of course this one would be Kylo’s idea. She nearly rolls her eyes before taking a deep breath and dropping her towel. Yathe is a woman. There is nothing to hide. Still, she’s thankful to the Knight when Yathe looks out toward the expanse of space, leaving Rey to tug on her underthings, her trousers, her undershirt. Yathe only focuses on her again once Rey gets to her armwraps.

“Allow me,” Yathe offers, taking Rey’s arm wraps in long, dexterous fingers and slowly setting to bind Rey’s left arm. It feels strange, to be touched by a perfect stranger, but Yathe had been sent to get her ready, so Rey lets her. The Knight talks as she speaks, carefully, oh so carefully wrapping Rey’s limb: wrist, forearm, slowly over elbows.

“There are some things you must know before you are named today,” she begins. “The first being that your new name will be your name for as long as you live. There is no leaving the Knights of Ren. Your new name signifies this.”

Rey swallows. No leaving? Yathe looks up at her and stops halfway through wrapping up the crook of her elbow.

“If you wish to back out, now would be the time to do so,” Yathe explains, her eyes narrowing slightly as she takes in all of Rey’s face.

Rey shakes her head. She’d made up her mind a long time ago.

Yathe gives a curt nod and continues wrapping up Rey’s arm.

“Do you have to dress me?” Rey asks, moving her arm to indicate what she’s referring to. Yathe smiles but continues and Rey realizes that, outside from a few shared moments with Leia, this is the longest she’s spent around any female.

“Custom, soon to be Knight of Ren, is important to me.” Yathe murmurs, more to herself, before raising her voice. “This is not a custom of the Knights of Ren. It is a custom of my childhood, of my people. A promise.”

Rey frowns. A what?
Yathe continues.

“It is my promise that I will serve you, as you will soon promise to serve the rest of us. It is a promise that I will not hurt you, as I have already promised your Master. Your path ahead is not an easy one amongst the Knights of Ren, but at least from me you have nothing to fear.”

A custom of childhood. Rey inspects the woman’s face for a lie but finds none. When she tries to brush against Yathe’s mind she’s met with an immense wall of darkness, quiet as stone, and the Knight of Ren gives her a conspiratorial smile.

“You should learn to not do that, Lady Rey,” Yathe cautions, eyes glinting without warmth, “Not everyone will be as friendly as I have been.”

Rey looks down. Yathe finishes her one arm and starts on the other.

“We can never quite shed our pasts though we try. Still,” the woman chuckles, “some things never quite go away. Your Master, for example, will always be a Princess’s son. And he certainly acts like one. Even with his temper.”

Rey lets out an unbidden chuckle. Yathe smirks in silent assent.

“You would be wise to keep a few things from your past,” Yathe says.

“Are these the rules of the Knight of Ren?” She asks for clarification, feeling a little out of her depth. Yathe laughs.

“No. Just a little unsolicited advice. Woman to woman.” Then Yathe pinches her nose. “The actual rules you will adhere to are simple, really. You will obey your Master, and your Master’s Master. You will fight first and foremost for yourself and your kindred Knights, though we rarely stick to the second part of that clause. Plenty of people make their way up the chain of command by killing their predecessors. Should you fail to do so in your attempt, you will be sentenced to death. If you’re caught, don’t expect us to go easy on you.”

Rey flinches with every single rule. Yathe issues them as if she were merely discussing breakfast. The final rule comes with such a sly smile that Rey tenses.

“Lastly, the most awkward rule. Should you engage in sexual intercourse with any other Knight, you will voice full consent. If you are coerced in any way the perpetrator will be brought in for judgement. Should you perpetrate the act, you will be sentenced by your fellow Knights.”

Rey almost chokes on her spit, and Yathe laughs.

“And that is why I am giving you the rules rather than your Master.”

Rey thumps at her chest, trying to get the lump out of the bottom of her throat. It wasn’t as though Rey was a complete innocent about the concept of sex. She’d had sex once. Rey thinks back to a much younger version of herself – if her sense of time is right, Rey would have been somewhere around seventeen – when she’d spotted him. A young, chestnut haired boy that couldn’t have been much older than herself. Perhaps it had been the hormones of her youth though most likely it had been loneliness, but when he’d smiled openly at her, with none of the leering of older men, Rey had immediately felt drawn to him. She’d sacrificed a day’s worth of scavenging time in order to get to know this boy, a visitor from a planet Rey could only daydream about. He’d regaled her with stories for an afternoon and, when he’d leant in to kiss her, awkwardly and without malice, Rey had allowed it.
That night she’d invited him to her home. He’d escaped his parents usual careful watch and, as they fumbled with belts and fabric, Rey had decided that perhaps being close to another human wouldn’t be such a bad thing. She’d known nothing else other than solitude, after all. But he’d been as inexperienced as she, and the whole encounter had left her fairly empty even as the young boy planted soft kisses on her shoulder that felt foreign on her skin. She’d never seen him again. Another let down on top of having spent the rest of the night entirely too hungry after he’d left. Another lesson learned courtesy of the desert on why allowing others to come too close would always be a bad idea.

It hadn’t been coerced, however. She’d fully agreed to it. Rey eyes yathe. The woman sure knew how to get to the point fast. Yathe, still amused at Rey’s reaction, continues wrapping her arm.

“Are you the only woman Knight?” Rey asks, curious. This is her first encounter with any of the Knights of Ren, and it makes her wonder why Kylo himself wouldn’t just give her the rules, even with the… awkward one.

*Icy blue.*

*Golden brown.*

Rey’s body jolts with sudden electricity.

Yathe nods, somehow having missed Rey’s bodily reaction. Rey clears her throat and tries to concentrate on the subject at hand.

“Tough, being the only woman in the boys’ club,” Rey mutters. Yathe gives her a small conspiratorial smile.

“Not a boys’ club any longer, Lady Rey.” Yathe whispers. Rey finds herself warming up to this woman.

“Your Master has also requested that I begin giving you lessons about shielding,” Yathe adds in a murmur, “but you must discuss with him when those lessons are to begin. I will leave that up to you.”

Rey frowns but nods, and Yathe continues her work until Rey’s in full black garb. Yathe stands and grabs the cloak, prompting Rey to rise before placing it over Rey’s slender shoulders, clasping it at the front, studying her handiwork for a moment.

Rey looks at the bedside table where she’d left her bun wraps, then purses her lips.

There is no reason to keep them any longer. She’d only kept them so a family she’d never known would find her, and no one had come back. It was time to leave those buns behind.

Rey quickly twists her hair into a long single braid that falls down between her shoulder blades, letting out a shaky sigh. Yathe studies her carefully before she collects the cowl.

“Grab your saber and follow me.” Yathe orders, leaving Rey to follow silently behind after snatching Luke’s saber from its resting place.

They arrive at the Knight of Ren’s training room soon after. Yathe extends a hand for her to walk forward, and the second Rey takes a step inside the jitters start.

She’s getting a name.
To be fair, she’d had the name the second she’d insisted to Kylo that she would keep her birth name and only take the honorific, but this made it official. She’s getting a name. Just like with Hux, when she’d gotten a birthday.

Rey swallows when she meets Kylo’s eyes. His gaze is so dark she almost can’t see the golden brown, and his awareness brushes her with a tidal wave of pride and want as Rey walks closer. His facial expression, however, remains impassive. Before she can do anything but feel slightly flustered at the desire rolling off him, he speaks.

“Present your weapon.”

His voice is hard, nothing like the man whose hands had held hers so delicately only two days before. Rey unhitched the saber from where she’d clipped it to her belt.

“Kneel,” Kylo command. Rey does as requested, falling down on one knee, saber held up in her palms to Kylo. He towers so impossibly tall over her. Rey tries to keep a shudder from her spine.

“What is your name?” He asks, and Rey stares. Then, carefully, she states her name. What will now be her full name.

Rey Ren.

His lips curl up slightly and she feels a wave of contentment rolling from him. He’d finally gotten what he wanted.

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“Do you understand the rules of the Knights of Ren?” He asks, and Rey gives verbal assent.

“Do you understand that any breach of said rules is punishable by death?” He demands her answer. Rey swallows. She nods.

Will they try to hurt me? The question flows out of her involuntarily. His gaze hardens, then softens for her eyes only.

I would kill them all before that happened.

The lump in her throat swells, the intensity with which he had responded nearly making her knees waver. A promise. Another promise made.

“Do you pledge your weapon to the Knights of Ren?” He asks.

What an odd little tradition. Rey looks to Yathe standing statue-still beside Kylo, hands holding onto the cowl reverently as she stares Rey down. Customs, she’d said. Rey returns her eyes to Kylo.

“Yes.”

“Do you swear allegiance to your Master?” He asks, voice dropping just a little lower than usual. Yathe shoots Kylo a side long glance but says nothing, sticking to her silent role of cowl bearer.

“I do.”

“Then rise.”

His voice booms around the training room, and although it is the three of them, that moment feels so much more important than a simple command to get up off her knees. Rey takes a deep breath and rises, standing a foot or so away from Kylo, who’s busy inspecting her face for any hints of regret.
When he finds none, Kylo turns to Yathe and grabs the cowl then wraps it around Rey, readjusting her long braid until it lies gently over her shoulder. His fingers linger on her hair for a moment before he lifts the hood over her head, fingertips gently caressing her jawline as he places it perfectly just over the tip of her hair and down the sides of her face.

Custom. Custom is the glue that holds humanity together. For the Knights it is their quest of knowledge and power, but traditions give people a singular thing to protect, and she now understands why as punctuated by the weight of the fabric on her shoulders. Custom. She had grown without it for so long. It lays on her as heavy as the cowl. She belongs to something bigger than herself now.

"Today you become Rey Ren, Apprentice to the First Knight, and Knight of Ren in your own right. Welcome."

Yathe relaxes her stance and gives Rey a small smile, a tinier bow, and a formal welcome before bidding her farewell. Rey doesn’t miss the long meaningful glance the Knight shoots her Master. Her duties done, Yathe retreats to her rooms, leaving Rey and Kylo staring at each other.

*That wasn’t so hard, now was it?* He asks, a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips.

No, I guess it wasn’t. No blood pacts or creepy chanting, at least. Rey admits.

Kylo snorts.

"There would have been more pomp and circumstance had the other Knights been here, but they’re currently scattered all over the place. And they’re a loud bunch," he whispers with the tired voice of a man who’s constantly had to babysit children. Funny, that, since up until this point Rey had believed Kylo to be but a child himself. He certainly had acted like it in the past. Rey smiles when Kylo sends her a glare. He’d heard that.

"Come," he prompts, walking out of the room. Rey follows at a near trot, the hood of her cowl falling off her head and onto shoulders and her black cloak billowing behind her.

"You changed your hair," he observes in a murmur, staring at her long braid.

"There was no need for me to keep it as it was," she responds, staring straight ahead. Kylo turns to look at her for a moment before bringing his attention to the corridor before them. He quickens his step.

"I like it," he commends. Rey’s cheeks warm.

What she feels through the bond is overpowering. Want and need and pride and satisfaction all rolled into a high note of a golden chord that thrums and pulls her to him as though she were circling a black hole.

Rey licks her lips nervously before looking at him from the corner of her eye as he guides her up and up towards the commanders’ rooms. He’d never hurt her.

He’d said very little since she had arrived, behaving as if he was scared he’d spook her, and it had not gone unnoticed. He’d taken great pains to temper his usually volatile mind, and Rey couldn’t help but feel that he was going out of his way to be very careful about what flowed from him through their bond. It makes her itch. It smells of trouble.

"Am I allowed to go around the ship as I wish?" She asks. Kylo doesn’t slow down. He doesn’t even look at her.
“You would have to ask General Hux,” he replies. Her frown intensifies.

“Why? You’re my Master.”

“It’s his ship,” he says with wry amusement. “If he allows it, I have no reason to stop you from it.”

Rey huffs. If Hux allows it.

She thinks back to all the times she’d had to wait for Hux to allow her to do things. Waiting to allow her to go train with Kylo, against her own will, even. To allow her to follow him around the ship. To allow her to do anything. Then she remembers that she’s no longer a prisoner here. She changes tactics.

“Why? He lets you go everywhere.”

Kylo looks at her and arches an eyebrow, so she amends.

“Master.”

The look he gives her makes her grin to herself. She would be lying if she said she didn’t get enjoyment out of getting under his skin. Payback for months of dealing with him and their bond. Still, the bond glows warm and it feels surprisingly comforting now that she’s stopped fighting its existence.

“He has no choice. I go where I please,” Kylo replies smugly, head held high, a small, infuriating smirk on his lips. Rey can only imagine how that must grate on the General.

It’s all inane conversation, really, these tiny exchanges about where she can and cannot go. But Rey doesn’t know Kylo Ren. He’d barreled into her life, swept her up into his mess with the fury of a hurricane, bonded himself to her inextricably, and yet Rey doesn’t actually know him. She knows a bit of his sense of humor, and even less about his life, past or present. Mostly all she knows are the stories others have told her.

It is nice to be able to talk to the man without either one of them trying to kill each other, Rey muses, and she had decided to be on her best behavior, just as he was on his. It was she who had returned with her tail between her legs, after all.

“Is that so?” She asks flippantly, teasing, staring ahead as she lengthens her stride to try and match his. It doesn’t work. His legs are just too long.

“Why don’t you ask him?” Kylo replies outside of Hux’s doors. Rey frowns. It’s the middle of the day.

“Wouldn’t he be on the bridge?” She asks, and Kylo points towards the access pad. Her frown really intensifies at that point. “I don’t have access to his rooms.”

“Try it.” It’s not a suggestion.

Rey touches the access pad then almost jerks away when her fingertips touch the cool surface, expecting it to go red and set off an intruder alarm somewhere. And it does go red, then—

Green. There’s a beep and the doors start hissing open. Rey gapes.

“How—“

Kylo gives her a small smile and strides forward, leaving her to stare. Her eyes track his long steps
forward until he stands next to where a tall redhead is leaning against a table as he once had during her temper tantrum. Hux holds onto a glass of wine that looks untouched. His eyes land on hers and there’s the most minute of smiles gracing his face. Kylo arches an eyebrow at her in silent question, wondering why she’s just standing like an idiot at the door, holding up the sensors, but Rey can’t stop staring.

These were her men.

Not *her* men. But they were hers now. Her future. As close as she had to friends here. Her Master and the General who had given her a chance to start over, to make things better.

Kylo Ren and Brendol Hux stand tall and proud, bathed in the warm glow of frosted globes sitting on the table, designed to simulate candlelight. Upon closer inspection, she can see more of them scattered all over the living room, cloaking every open surface in warmth, a striking view against the starry expanse of space.

“What is this?” She asks, taking a hesitant step forward.

Kylo starts removing his gloves and cowl and Hux shoots him a satisfied glance before turning his attention on her.

“I realize we never quite celebrated your return, and today’s been a rather big day for you, hasn’t it, Rey Ren?” Hux’s blue eyes twinkle. Kylo’s quietly walking towards a trolley heaped with food and drink, grabbing a glass of what looks like scotch. The General had been prepared. Again.

When she makes no move to walk forward, Hux approaches her with feline grace, steps careful, measured; when he offers his ungloved hand Rey’s lungs stop for a heartbeat. She steels herself and takes it, and the shock of electricity to her nervous system is jarring, but not unpleasant. Hux regards her silently, his eyes landing on her braid and her black clothes, taking her all in leading her towards Kylo.

“What is this?” She murmurs again, feeling a little out of sorts at it all. Hux gives her another long look and his lips move upward.

“I promised you once I would try to be a friend. Consider this the beginning of a friendship.”

He escorts her to her seat as Kylo pulls out the chair for her, and Rey’s torn between itching at how sickeningly *decent* they’re behaving and trying really hard not to smile at their obvious attempts. Large hands tug the cowl and cloak off of her and Rey tenses instinctively before she forces herself to relax. It’s only Kylo. He drapes them over the back of her chair then places the chair under her as she takes her seat before taking his own. Hux has already sat down.

Her eyes rove over the table heaped with food. Then to the trolley: more food.

“You two are acting really strange,” she comments, unable to help herself.

Where did her uptight General and her volatile Master go?

“Is it hard to believe we’re not always horrible, uptight First Order people?” Hux asks, arching an eyebrow.

“Yes.” She responds, then bites her tongue. She needed to stop doing that.

“Ouch,” Kylo pipes in. She looks at him. He smirks. From her other side comes a breathy laugh.
“Rey, we’re celebrating your naming and your birthday. Just accept it, will you? I promise to go back to a straightlaced curmudgeon tomorrow, and Ren’s always… Well, Ren.”

Rey feels herself heat up three hundred degrees with embarrassment. She’d called him that once. By the look of utter sly self satisfaction on the man — which wasn’t much, really… just a narrowing of his eyes and a widening of his smile — she knows he remembered it well. Then he extends a hand to her to begin.

“Go on. We got all this for you, after all. Don’t want to let it go to waste.”

Rey stares at her plate and her stomach grumbles. She gives the men one last glance before picking up her cutlery and digging in. Waste is unacceptable. The hours pass in comfortable silence except for the sound of silverware, with Rey jumping in at random intervals to ask what sort of sauce that is, or let out a satisfied little sound that makes both Hux and Kylo give her long discreet glances.

Somewhere between the fourth dish and the fifth, Rey’s convinced Hux to let her have some wine. He gives her a wary glance, suggesting that perhaps she stick to some champagne as he clearly remembers how that had gone the last time, but she digs in her heels and he complies begrudgingly, getting up from his chair and filling up a glass for her. Somewhere deep inside her psyche she knows that if she drinks herself off her feet and falls asleep she’ll make it to her room in one piece and clothed. So after a bit of self-coaxing, Rey allows herself to relax and starts enjoying the afternoon. She also understands that this display of camaraderie is so very out of character for these men, and that they’re doing it to make her feel at home as they had promised they would if she chose to stay with them, and that makes it special in her eyes. Yes, she’d enjoy the afternoon.

Hux clears his throat.

“Enjoying your meal?” He asks, tilting his head slightly, almost imperceptibly. He gives her the same look he had when he’d told her he’d had his grandmother’s recipe prepared for her so long ago on Kuat.

Maker, had it really been so long ago? Rey nods emphatically and he gives a small, satisfied nod in return.

“We really are glad you returned,” he says, and Rey doesn’t miss the way he carefully phrases those words. She narrows her eyes lightly. He’d been rubbing off on her, his usual clinical studying of wording and intent. Rey gives him a small smile.

She doesn’t want to think about why she’d chosen to return. That wound still hurt, and it would always hurt. To be rejected a second time, to have your best friend doubt you. Sure, she’d somewhat made up with Finn, but she knew it was nothing like when they’d first taken off into space on their grand adventure. She wanted to do good somewhere, and she couldn’t do that in the Resistance. Rey looks at her plate, fighting the urge to worry at her lower lip.

“So am I,” she murmurs.

She wants to believe she’s glad of it. Some day, perhaps she would. In this moment it is all too new, too foreign, this sudden jump in station. Their shift in demeanor, so carefully constructed to ensure she feels happy and welcome. She hasn’t missed those changes, and she’s grateful to them for it.

Still, some things take time.

Hux would be lying if he said he hasn’t been holding his breath painfully for a while now. He
watches as Rey stares at her nearly empty plate, as her eyes rove over the other offerings, over the
dim lighting he’d painstakingly placed to ensure the room did not feel like the inside of a ship
hovering in the blackness of space. He watches as she smiles into the glass of wine he had so
reluctantly poured for her, as she leans back and rubs the nape of her neck against the brand new
cowl she’d been wearing when she’d first arrived. Hux had nearly stuttered at seeing her all cloaked
in black, a smaller, slender version of the giant Knight by her side. He watches now as her eyes
travel towards the couch, again and again, as if reliving the months she’d had to sleep there. He
swallows.

“So am I,” she murmurs, and breath slowly escapes his lungs.

He’s aware that re-entry would not be easy for her. He’d tried to do as much as was humanly
possible to make her feel welcome, to give her something to look forward to, and cursed sometimes
that there was only so much he could do aboard a ship meant for battle rather than comfort. Still,
she’d been amenable enough.

His mind travels to their encounter in that hall, when she’d wrapped her arms around his waist and
Hux had almost jumped out of his skin. He’s not used to that sort of closeness. That incident hadn’t
just been domestic, it had been intimate, and for a second Hux hadn’t known how to deal with it.
But she’d hugged him tighter and he couldn’t stop himself as he had cradled her into him and let her
cry into his jacket, longing for so much more than the few minutes it lasted. She’d fit perfectly in his
arms, and when she’d walked through that door he couldn’t help himself from offering his hand,
from touching her again. The sight of her long braid did uncomfortable things to his chest. It wasn’t
her but it was her, a new her, and it felt like an admission that she was finally willing to shed her
past in exchange for a future by his side. By Kylo’s side, as well.

In that moment it had struck him so quickly, so clearly. She was more to him than a chess piece. She
had been for a while. He owed it to her to try and be all the things he had offered her in Kuat, a
friend, a mentor, someone to be there for her when nobody else was. He knew as clearly as he knew
he needed air to breathe that Kylo agreed with him. Rey of Jakku — Rey Ren, now — had become
as integral to their lives as nobody else could be. And she’d done it as she did everything else, in the
blink of an eye, as furiously as a sand storm, and completely unaware that she’d done it all along.

Hux leans back and watches her carefully, and he notices that Kylo has done the same thing, happy
to sit there and bask in the glow of his Apprentice. His Apprentice. How far they all had come. From
a feral girl inside an interrogation cell to her sitting here amongst them as an equal. Because, Hux
realizes, she is their equal, even if she has to bow down in public to Kylo as his student. In private it
is clear that the roles of who issues orders and who bows down immediately reverse, and Hux is
happy to just sit back and enjoy the view.

Rey turns her attention on him with sudden realization, having remembered something.

“How was I able to open up your door?” She asks, and Hux schools his expression to prevent
another smile. He had become awfully smiley around her. Even around Kylo. These two were
seriously starting to get too uncomfortably close to him.

“I took your biometric readings and used them to give you access to my quarters,” he provides, then
tilts his head a hair, “I hope you don’t mind. You’ll be dining with us, after all.”

Rey frowns. Instead of agreeing or disagreeing, she narrows her eyes.

“Does Kylo have access?”

“He does now.” He says, arching his eyebrow at Ren, who’s keeping his face carefully blank. “I got
tired of him bypassing my security system with his magic, you see.”

Rey snorts but says nothing, picking up her glass of wine and inspecting it for a little while. She gives it a tiny sniff before drinking a long gulp, trying to get her courage from the bottom of the glass. Kylo and Hux regard her silently. When it drains and she extends her glass, he carefully refills it. He knows at this point there’s nothing else to do but watch, and he has to admit a drunken Rey is a hilarious sight anyway.

“Can I go anywhere I please?” She asks out of the blue and Hux’s attention turns to Kylo. Kylo gives a small shrug, pointedly looking at Rey again.

“Of course, why do you ask?” He asks, his own glass of wine untouched. Kylo, who seems to have learned that the best way to keep her happy was to just keep quiet, twirls the scotch in his glass with a small smirk on his face. Hux’s eyes narrow.

“My Master said I had to ask for your permission,” she provides, and he can hear her words starting to just slow down that minuscule amount that tells him the wine’s getting to her. Hux looks back at Kylo again. Kylo gives him another shrug. He’s enjoying this.

“Why would you have to ask for my permission?” He queries in a carefully guarded tone. Rey lets out a bubbly laugh as if he’d said the funniest thing on earth before shooting him a sly look.

“Because you think I’d break everything,” she provides, tipping the glass towards him. She’s not drunk, but the alcohol is starting to make her fuzzy around the edges, and he can see why she’d been so demanding of it. She wanted liquid courage. He couldn’t possibly fathom why, though.

Hux arches an eyebrow at her and leans forward to take the glass. When he tries her free hand stops him and suddenly they’re a tangle of fingers over a glass. Hux remains very still. Kylo hasn’t even twitched, though he looks awfully amused.

“Is that so?” He asks, tightening his fingers around hers to try and get her to let go of the glass. She only smiles.

“You said once that I would,” she fires back, feisty as ever, “Maybe I will.”

Hux looks up at Kylo. “Are you _trying_ to turn her into a carbon copy of you?”

He meant it as a joke, of course, because there was no way anything Rey was saying in that moment was meant as anything but a jest. Still, Kylo’s eyes darken as his pupils expand and Hux swallows down dry air. The Knight sitting across from him would _very_ much enjoy turning Rey into a carbon copy of himself. Hux shakes his head and regards Rey, purposely softening his features.

“Would you like dessert?” He asks instead and she perks up. Like clockwork. “Go on then.”

Rey lets go of the glass long enough to stand up and he snatches it from her, setting it aside. She walks around the table and goes to inspect the offerings in the trolley, giving Hux a chance to send Kylo a look.

“You indulge her too much, General,” comes Kylo’s husky baritone. Hux’s nostrils flare. “Soon my Apprentice will be too soft from all of your gifts.”

Hux shoots Rey a look, but she’s too busy with head in the trolley deciding what to pick, so he allows himself to focus on Kylo.

“And yet you sit there and let me indulge her.”
Because that is the truth: Kylo indulged her just as much, if only by doing nothing. Hux’s goal is to make her feel at home, after all. He’s almost getting defensive when Kylo gifts him a rare smile — an open, cheeky smile. Even with that scar marring his face he’s the most beautiful man Hux has ever seen. Kylo enjoys that Hux spoils her, he realizes as he relaxes.

Rey walks towards the couch rather than return to her seat. They follow, taking the high chairs while she flops herself on the couch, propping her feet up on his crystal coffee table. Hux bites the inside of his cheek to keep from saying anything. This room had been, after all, as much hers as it was ever his. Perhaps nothing has changed.

Her eyes are just glassy enough to indicate her brain is up to no good, much like they had been when she’d tried to get him drunk, and her lips are tugged up in delight as she eats her sweets. She’s popping small amounts of caramels and chocolates into her mouth and letting out sounds that make Hux’s gut twist — and he wishes for the billionth time that Ren would address that, because, really — until Rey looks at them both with a very serious expression on her face.

“This is better than Kuat’s sweets.”

He allows himself a smile.

“Glad you think so.”

He hoped they were, at least. He’d gone to very great lengths to procure the delicacies from Coruscant and other planets in preparation for this, back when he’d hoped that she would show up. He’s very glad he had gone to the trouble.

“Kuat may have a lot of things but I have connections,” he says with a tilt of his nose, proud at having made her happy with such a small gesture. Rey lets out a half breathy laugh. He loved that laugh. Then she sobers up and her eyes land on her chocolates before she gives her Master a long look.

They’re having a conversation again, he can tell. He watches Kylo’s face turn stony slowly as the Knight tries to conceal something, and Rey’s eyes narrow and her lips lift into a sly smirk, then she turns it on Hux.

Here comes trouble.

“You know what didn’t happen in Kuat, General?” She asks, all self important as if she held the answers to the meaning of life. Hux arches an eyebrow in question, prompting her on. “You two did not dance!”

Hux freezes.

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Kylo tenses as Rey speaks.

“You know what didn’t happen in Kuat, General? You two didn’t dance!” she exclaims, pointing at Hux with a caramel square. Hux freezes.

Kylo had known it was coming. The second she’d turned her attention on him and gave him that sly smirk, he knew trouble was knocking on his door.

So he has connections? She’d asked, and Kylo had sent a wave of amusement towards her. She picks up on the oddest things.
Kuat was nice, though, Rey admits after he’d given no answer, and he could feel her unease about the end of their stay in Kuat, about how she’d left in a hurry without saying a thing.

He receives memories of dancing, bathed in the hazy glow and warmth of candlelight coupled with her delight at being wrapped in his arms, being twirled about on the floor. Of how much she’d enjoyed dancing with Hux as well. Kylo’s eyes focus on hers, on her freckles, his mind returning to those dances. She’d been so soft then, dropping all her walls to let him in. It had been so intoxicating, haunting him at night after he’d stopped being angry about her departure. The way she’d smiled at him as he gave a smarmy response about being a prince, her utter pleasure at pressing his mind and hers up to Hux’s at the same time.

*It was,* he admits, *and I must say you learned to dance rather well.*

He shouldn’t have said that. That’s what started the whole mess they were in.

*I had good teachers,* she replied, trying to turn the compliment on him and Hux, but he could tell that she was proud of it. He almost smiled, until… until a wave of startling confusion and realization hit him from her end. Her eyes widened slightly then narrowed.

*But you two didn’t dance!*

*I don’t think the General would have—*

*No.* Rey had asserted, ever headstrong, ever trying to boss him around. *You two didn’t dance. You should dance.*

*Rey—*

*You should dance.*

Then she sends him another memory: long fingers around a neck. Kylo starts mentally cursing a very long, colorful string of expletives outside of their bond. Would that haunt him forever? But now he understands her insistence. In Rey’s mind, Kylo and Hux were a couple, and they hadn’t danced together. In her mind, the only logical thing was to remedy it.

She’s watching Hux as the General turns to granite in front of them. Kylo chews on the inside of his cheek.

“There is no music, Rey,” Hux shoots off, trying to stop this in its tracks.

“You don’t need it,” Rey counters, arching her eyebrows.

Hux shoots him a glare and Kylo shakes his head. He twitches his fingers and the glass coffee table begins to hover slowly, Rey drops her feet the second she feels it move. He maneuvers it so carefully the flower vase sitting on the crystal top doesn’t vibrate. Kylo sets it farther down the room until there’s a perfect square in front of Rey. A square is all they need to waltz.

Anything to keep Rey happy. He’d promised himself he’d do anything to keep her happy.

Kylo pries himself up from the chair and it takes him two steps to tower over Hux in his seat. The man’s blue eyes look almost colorless in the dim yellow light, and Kylo extends an ungloved hand, arching an eyebrow.

“This is absur—“ Hux begins, and Kylo brushes just enough Force against Hux’s teeth to quiet him. It earns Kylo a hot glare, but he releases the pressure fast enough that Hux seems to reconsider
yelling at him.

“It would not do to keep my Apprentice waiting during her own party,” Kylo provides with a low murmur. Hux stares at his fingers.

Hux places his own delicate digits in his gingerly. Funny, that a man who had orchestrated so many atrocities had hands as soft as lace. He pulls the General up and closer, and Rey lets out a happy sigh.

Hux, being the shorter and more slender man, tucks into Kylo’s arms, moving in closer at Rey’s demand. Hux places his ungloved hand on Kylo’s tunic while Kylo holds Hux’s right hand firmly in his left. His own free hand moves to rest smartly just below Hux’s shoulder blades and in that moment it’s just the three of them. The room falls away.

There is a breath, soft and slow, and Kylo can’t tell whether it is his, Hux’s, or Rey’s. Only that it exists for a moment and then dissipates, and Kylo moves.

He guides Hux slowly. The other man is tense like a tightly coiled spring under him, but those blue eyes have not left his and he’s rewarded with a view of black pupils dilating and contracting over and over against the stark icy sea of Hux’s irises. Kylo turns Hux around and Rey does sigh, and he feels her in his mind as she once again presses herself into him and then presses them both into Hux’s mind. Hux’s pupils are blown wide before the man gets a hold of himself, trying to shiver out the sudden intrusion.

Rey had wanted to experience dancing again, this time through their eyes. She’s slightly swaying her now sleepy head to a song no one can hear, as if keeping a melody for them as Kylo and Hux turn, and turn, and turn, and waltz in a small square in front of her, and it’s all too warm and too intimate at once.

Anything to keep her happy. Kylo presses that thought into Hux’s mind, and the redhead’s eyes narrow slightly, but he nods.

He absentmindedly laces his fingers through Hux’s own as reassurance, and watches as Hux swallows once, twice. He allows himself a small pleased smile. So he could, after all, shake the redhead out of his usual cool, collected calm. When he gently caresses the General’s fingers Hux nearly misses a step.

Hux never missed a step. Kylo had seen him dance.

Had Kylo known it only took a gentle caress of long digits versus planting crass imagery in the General’s mind, he would have won so many more fights in the past. He brushes the man’s fingers again and gives him a tiny smile when Hux narrows his eyes at him, gently running his thumb over the small sensitive skin between thumb and index finger. Hux’s eyes take on a particular glint, throat bobbing up and down, but Hux doesn’t stop him. Kylo’s sure he’ll pay for the small indulgence eventually, but he can’t quite bring himself to mind.

“You’re a fantastic dancer,” Hux commends, trying to clear the air of the rosy fog that had descended upon them. “Your mother should be proud.”

Kylo smiles. Thinking of his mother hurt, but this was a compliment anyway, and Hux’s tone holds no malice.

“I can say the same for you, General,” he murmurs. “Tell me, did you twirl a lot of pretty girls around a dance floor in your past life?”
Hux has to bite at the corner of his mouth to keep from smiling, and Kylo shakes his head gently. They slip back into silence.

He chances a glance at Rey over Hux’s shoulders. Her eyes have closed.

Tomorrow the hard work would begin. She would need to be prepared to face Snoke, and her true training as Knight would begin. None of it would be pleasant. This night, at least, is for her alone.

Still, Kylo holds onto Hux long after he feels Rey slip into unconsciousness, and Hux makes no move to step back even as he notices Rey’s unresponsiveness. Perhaps this night could be theirs as well.

When they stop at last at a soft sleepy mumble from Rey, the slender man’s eyes have gone glassy and distant, and Kylo can’t help the curl of satisfaction that spreads through him at the sight. Kylo looks at Rey.

She’d sleep on the couch that night. Kylo doesn’t have the heart to move her and she’s as safe in this room as she would be anywhere else, if not safer. Kylo gathers his cowl and her things, and he and Hux spend a long moment looking at each other.

They had agreed to this. They had hoped for this. Kylo had long stopped begrudging this man over Rey. When she suffered more nightmares, Hux would only be a room away.

Kylo would have to tell her soon.

He leans down and gently caresses her braid, the only part of her safe enough to touch without waking her, before nodding to Hux and taking his leave.

Had he stayed longer he would have watched as Hux leant down, softly caressing his fingers through Rey’s hair, gently running his fingertips over her braid much like Kylo had. He would have seen the General walk into his room and undress, changing into comfortable fatigues and a navy blue shirt that set off his hair like a flame in the night. Had he stayed longer he would have seen Hux crouch in front of the sleeping young woman, seen as Hux shook his head and smiled quietly to himself before slowly, carefully gathering her in his arms and bringing her to his room with slow steps; seen Hux deposit her on the left side, where the General usually slept, the side Hux had avoided for weeks. Kylo would have seen the soft caress to Rey’s cheek before Hux took his leave towards his office, leaving her to sleep while he worked.

But Kylo’s mind is elsewhere. His shoulders tense as his mind flashes white.

He’s been summoned.

Chapter End Notes

Well, then. Rey's just becoming the bossiest person in the universe. I don't think the boys mind all that much, to be honest. And Kylo continually stirs the pot. Always.

Billion thanks to EjBlaKit for her A+ help in helping make sure my stuff doesn't read like utter junk. Ty bb <3
Thank you all who have commented, left kudos, subscribed, shared, and generally been super enthusiastic about this story. Also, look ma’! I actually stuck to my posting day! Progress? Progress.
Not The Same

Chapter Summary

Well, then.

Chapter Notes

In some news! ADOT now has an aesthetic edit. You can find it on tumblr!
I made it. I hope you like it.

This way for the pretty Aesthetic Edit

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kylo’s soles click against the durasteel floors of the amphitheater, the sound bouncing around in the eerie vastness of the room. His eyes focus on the projection sitting at its leisure on the dais. Snoke is nothing like the last time Kylo had been in his presence. This version is the cool, calm and collected Master who pretends to be wise beyond measure, giving beyond compare. Too bad Kylo knows better now. He bides his time in silence until he’s acknowledged.

Snoke’s glassy blue eyes are calculating when they turn on him.

“She has returned,” Snoke’s pleased rumble reaches his ears.

Kylo inclines his head, strengthening his mental defenses. He’d left Rey sleeping in Hux’s quarters, the one place he knew she would be safe, with the only other person he could trust to guard her.

“She has, Supreme Leader.” His voice is low, every word provided with careful intonation. “She returned two nights ago, and took her vows to the Knights this morning.”

He can hear the sickening purr in the creature’s chest as it rumbles around him.

“Good. Good.” Snoke says, “And she has returned on her own.”

Yes, she had returned of her own volition. Kylo had made it clear to Yathe what her report should be.

Kylo nods.

“She is now receptive to our ways,” he provides, surprised he hasn’t felt a single thread of Snoke’s power trying to pry information from him. Snoke is too complacent, reveling in the news that Rey had come back. Kylo puts that small kernel of information in the back of his mind, where it cannot be accessed, buried deep.

“You have done well, Kylo Ren.” Once upon a time Kylo would have rejoiced at the small
compliment, basked in it as his due for being steadfast in his beliefs, for following orders as a good soldier of the Dark should.

Kylo refrains from further thought, breathing even, hands relaxed at his sides. Snoke doesn’t notice the purposefulness of the stance. He doesn’t seem to notice so many things.

“Where is she now?” Snoke asks.

When Kylo mentions that she’s in Hux’s quarters, asleep, he can see the hint of a smirk marring Snoke’s twisted features, teeth flashing, and it’s gone so fast Kylo almost misses it. Almost.

“You will bring her to me in the morning.” Snoke orders, voice placid as he leans back into his seat, hands calmly resting on the arms of the holographic throne. Then it disappears, leaving nothing more than floating dust behind.

Kylo turns around and exits he amphitheater on silent feet, now that announcing himself wasn’t a necessity.

He hadn’t been able to see it months ago. Months ago, that smile had been one of grace to Kylo Ren. Months ago, he would have perceived it as benevolent, appreciative. Now he sees it for what it is, in light of Snoke’s manipulations.

It all clicks into place. How had he missed it? He, who prided himself in seeing through people, in being able to read them? Snoke had pitted him against Hux for years, and Kylo, in his eagerness to please, had been more than happy to fight the General. After all, what was a General against a Force User?

Everything.

Snoke had pitted a quick mind against brute force, knowing full well that the fight between the two would never cease. Snoke counted on it. It had kept them too busy to see Snoke’s machinations above their heads, controlling them as he controlled everything else. A spider hiding in its lair, where he could not be reached, pulling the strings of his web.

But that smirk.

_Do you think, perhaps, that is exactly what the Supreme Leader is hoping for?

Hux had asked him that a millennia ago. Back then the General had inquired about Kylo’s inability to get Rey to cooperate, to train and learn. Snoke seemed thrilled at knowing Rey had returned to Hux’s quarters, even as she’d pledged herself as Kylo’s apprentice, which could only mean one thing. He wanted Kylo to react. Fighting Hux over Rey would mean engaging on a self destructive path, and Snoke counted on it. The ever sly, calculating fox and the ever outraged wolf, set out to destroy each other over a woman.

_Do you think, perhaps, that is exactly what the Supreme Leader is hoping for?

But why over Rey, when they’d already done such a spectacular job of being blinded to what had been right under their noses for years?

Kylo lets himself into Hux’s quarters and takes off his helmet, cowl and gloves. It’s a habit now. He scans the semi-dark space and finds it empty, so he throws out his senses. Two signatures. One strong with the Force, in the bedroom. The other in Hux’s office. The door hisses shut and he stalks forward
“Ren,” comes the greeting when Kylo enters. Hux’s eyes are glued to the work in front of him. The man never, ever seems to stop working. Kylo has to give it to him, that’s certainly some dedication.

It takes Kylo by surprise, the familiarity with which the man greets him at this hour of the night. His eyes take in Hux’s navy blue shirt that sets his golden red hair on fire. It suits him well.

Kylo lowers himself to an empty chair. It’s far too small for his frame. This office is a safe place for this conversation, clear of any cameras and soundproofed.

“She’s been summoned. In the morning.”

Hux looks up, tilting his head just so in order to look up at him without ever shifting his posture, shoulders hunched over his desk, one hand hovering over a data pad, the other clinging onto a half-burnt cigarette in mid air. Kylo continues.

“He wanted me to be angry that she’s in your room.” He explains.

“Are you?” Hux asks, tense. Kylo snorts.

“I thought we established what I feel about this a long time ago, Hux,” he says. Hux arches an eyebrow at him.

“No, actually, we never did.” The cigarette makes it to Hux’s lips as he reclines, gracing Kylo with a full view of his slender frame. A puff of smoke, then Hux explains, “We established what she feels, which only amounts to a small amount of trust.”

Kylo scoffs again under his breath.

“When was the last time you saw her fall asleep around anybody but you, Hux?”

Hux tilts his head.

Rey, the scavenger, always alert and ready for a fight. Rey would never fall asleep around anyone she didn’t trust. Kylo would know. He had become painfully familiar with her sleep cycle, had known about her mistrust of strangers, about her sleepless nights, since that fateful interrogation. She’d spent a life fearing to fall asleep should someone attack her in the middle of Jakku nights. If Hux needed proof, this was it.

Kylo gives a small, self satisfied smirk at the look of utter confusion crossing the redhead’s face.

“Why do you want her by your side?” He asks, and Hux glares.

“She’s my apprentice. What I feel for her doesn’t matter.” Kylo’s eyes have taken on a stony quality, though he knows the answer already. The pull to her is undeniable. Hux squares his shoulders in turn.

“For the same reason as you,” the man clips. Kylo studies him closely, as if truly seeing him for the first time. Glossy red locks in disarray, so becoming outside of their usual pristine styling. Prominent jaw set, unhappy at Kylo’s prodding. Kylo had asked him something similar before, and Hux’d given no answer. He knows, on a certain level, that this is just a tactical move in the face of Snoke’s manipulations. Two Force Sensitives by his side. Still…

“You like her,” he prods, and Hux tenses even further.

“Do you?” Hux asks after a very drawn out pause.

“She’s my apprentice. What I feel for her doesn’t matter.” Kylo’s eyes have taken on a stony quality, though he knows the answer already. The pull to her is undeniable. Hux squares his shoulders in turn.
“It matters a great deal, Ren,” Hux replies, tone hard, and Kylo thinks of Snoke. The creature wanted Kylo and Hux to self destruct, and what best way to do so than by letting them fight each other over a girl? He can feel it coming on… the fight.

“He wants us to fight over her,” Kylo admits, leaning forward and running his fingers over his hair. After all this, he would not give their Master one more tool against him. Hux’s posture is still tense, but it’s a different sort of tense. This one is that of a cornered man, and he watches that small tick of Hux’s eye go once, twice. Then Hux gives him a tight lipped smile.

“How unfortunate for the Supreme Leader then,” he pipes, bringing his eyes back to his data pad and relaxing, “That we long ago decided we both needed her.”

Kylo smiles. This man would never allow anything to happen to her. Kylo knew that as well as he knew that he would burn worlds to protect her. She was part of him now, floating happily in their bond. It would be like ripping out a chunk of him, and he was very unwilling to allow that to happen. He’d watched Hux suffer for weeks, waiting for Rey to return. No, the General would never allow anything to happen to her either.

“You never answered me, General…” he begins, leaning forward and tugging the data pad away from Hux. Hux immediately snaps to attention, affronted that Kylo would be so forward as to distract him from his work. It makes him want to chuckle. Hux tries to grab it back but Kylo’s too quick, and soon enough the data pad is sitting on Kylo’s lap.

“I believe I did.” Hux shoots back, glaring at him then trying to look over the edge of the desk, “Now return that to me. Immediately.”

“No,” Kylo replies, stubborn as always, and, if he’s willing to admit it to himself, enjoying this a little too much. He should just let it go. He can’t. “Just say it already.”

When had he stopped begrudging the man? When had he stopped zealously guarding Rey as his own? When had he started trusting?

Kylo can’t help himself. He’s not sure what the General’s admission will do. His mind returns to Rey’s physical reaction in the training room. To their dance earlier in the night. To the need he feels building in the pit of his stomach.

Hux’s eyes narrow to slits. “And if I do? Will you strike me down here for daring to…” To feel something for your Apprentice, the words are left unsaid. Kylo licks his lips. Hux’s eyes zero in on the motion.

Maybe it’s the darkness of the room, the hour of night, the silence of the office. Maybe it’s the stillness of the air, or maybe it was that damned dance in the living room, but when Hux leans forward over his desk Kylo can’t seem to make his limbs move. Hux reaches with his thumb and runs it down Kylo’s cupid bow, dragging until it catches against his lower lip, presses against his teeth. He wipes a small amount of dampness away from where Kylo’s tongue had run.

Somewhere in Kylo’s mind, it occurs to him that this is retaliation for hushing the General with the Force earlier. The thought flies away quickly at the warmth of the man’s thumb against his lip.

“You have no right to my feelings, Kylo Ren.” He replies, and Kylo swallows.

This is clearly a power play. He knows that. And no, he has no right to Hux’s feelings, but…

His heart stammers painfully for a second. Kylo reaches out with the Force, caressing Hux’s awareness. The man’s eyes train on his and his thumb still rests just over the jut of Kylo’s lower lip.
Kylo forces himself not to lick his lip again, to graze the burning hot spot where Hux’s finger rests. Hux doesn’t block his touch with the Force, only goes silent. Kylo has no rights to his feelings, or to know them, but… Perhaps…

Hux clears his throat, dropping his thumb and withdrawing.

“She’s sleeping now. We should wake her and inform her of Snoke’s summons. We will have to prepare.” Hux cuts off the moment abruptly, his tone turning stony.

Snoke wanted them to fight over her, which meant Snoke wanted something, and neither Hux nor Kylo would allow her to go in there ripe for the picking. The hold on Kylo’s limbs finally releases and he pulls away in slow motion, nostrils flaring as he takes in a deep breath, regaining some of his composure. Close proximity to Hux brought forth uncomfortable reactions. He berates himself for allowing the moment of weakness, even if somewhere inside of him he feels a different sort of jealousy at the mention of Snoke; a compulsive need to guard what is his.

Kylo rises, using the Force to move two of the dining chairs into the bedroom. This would take a while. When he sets them down at the foot of the bed Hux arches an eyebrow at him as he, too, enters the room.

“A little voyeuristic, don’t you think?” Hux asks, but takes a seat in one of the chairs anyway. Kylo fights the urge to roll his eyes.

He walks forward and cups the top Rey’s head, giving her hair a soft stroke as he leans into her to whisper.

“Rey?” He asks. She’s sleeping heavily.

If this isn’t proof of her trust, he doesn’t know what is. Kylo gives Hux a knowing glance. He’s rewarded with a slight darkening of the tip of the General’s ears, turning a beautiful shade of pink. The Knight caresses Rey’s hair once more. Her eyelids fly open.

She sits up, startled, and Kylo has to withdraw himself before she can bonk him on the chin with her forehead.

“What—” she starts.

Her lids flutter, trying to adjust themselves before landing on Hux. They swivel towards Kylo, and she finally gets her bearings the longer she looks at him in the eye. That tug in the pit of his stomach intensifies. He breaks eye contact, taking his seat and putting a safe distance between them. Rey drags her knees up to her chest, looking between both of them.

“I fell asleep on the couch.” She narrows her eyes at Hux. Hux waves his hand in dismissal before speaking next.

“You’ve been summoned to our Supreme Leader.”

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Her brain takes a second to register what they’re saying, all thoughts of sleeping on the couch forgotten.

“You…boss?” Rey asks, confused. Hux’s brows rise a hair, Kylo’s own rise slightly. She racks her brain in confusion.
Rey only remembers waking up in Hux’s bed after having fallen asleep on the couch. The two men before her had been dancing, and now… She looks at the clock in Hux’s room. It’s been hours.

“I would advise you not to call him that to his face, Rey,” Kylo speaks, amusement coloring his tone, though certainly not the sort of amusement she would warm up to. Rey nods. “We need you to prepare for your appearance tomorrow.”

*My appearance?* She asks in her confusion.

“You’re being summoned to present yourself tomorrow. The Supreme Leader is… eager… to finally meet you.” Her Master replies aloud, this time for Hux’s benefit. At the word eager, Rey notices how Kylo frowns and Hux’s posture stiffens. Hux beats a rhythm on his thigh, and Rey tries not to pay attention to it. It is obvious he’s doing it without noticing. She trains her eyes on Kylo.

“Will your… Supreme Leader… try to hurt me?” She asks, testing the title on her tongue. She’d asked a similar question during her naming ceremony. Hux’s lips tighten over his teeth, eyes distant somewhere above her head, and she feels her bond to Kylo thrum and burn at the thought. So, pain might be a possibility. Rey doesn’t know much about the Dark side, but by what little she’d learned and experienced via Kylo, watching him use his pain as fuel, she didn’t doubt it would be a possibility. Rey squares her shoulders.

“What do I have to do?” She asks, not even bothering to question why Kylo Ren and General Hux were sitting in the room as she’d slept.

They jump into it.

It feels a little like learning to negotiate for Kuat, except this time the men are stiff, their words are rigid. Most of the time it is Kylo who speaks, going over and over what she should say, how she should guard her thoughts and — this one he impresses upon her over and over — to never say more than is asked of her.

It takes hours, and with every passing moment the edge on the tension she’s carrying on her shoulders sharpens, especially with the realization that the men aren’t pleased that she’s being summoned. The hints are subtle but there; Hux’s hard tone, Kylo’s constant tugging and running of fingers through his hair, the set tension of their jaws. Had the summons caught them by surprise?

She knew Kylo served a Master, and by extension, that Hux did as well. She’d been aboard the Finalizer for three days. Did they not expect her to be summoned? No. They expected it, the bond to Kylo’s mind told her. They just weren’t very pleased by it.

That hesitation on their part makes it very hard for her to try and be calm.

Rey spends the rest of the night and early into the morning tangled in Hux’s sheets, discussing her appearance until her brain almost turns to jelly.

She would be presented by both men, she is informed. Still, Hux gets himself up from his chair and walks into the closet, leaving Rey to stare after him, before Kylo gets up and escorts her to her rooms. He leaves her inside then takes off to his own to go get ready.

Rey showers at light speed, anxiety gnawing at the pit of her stomach.

She walks into the room and goes through the drawers looking for clothes. Surprisingly, there’s plenty there. All of her commissioned clothes, as well as standard First Order fatigues without insignia, and, to her surprise, several more copies of her black Jakku ensemble. She’d have to have a word with them about choosing her clothes for her all the time. Still, she has little time to worry about
it as she grabs her Jakku-esque clothes and throws them on, running her hands through her hair and twisting it into a neat braid over her shoulder. Just as she’s shoving her feet into her boots the alarm alerts her to someone standing outside.

Rey grabs her lightsaber and clips it on, hurrying to the door. Outside are General Hux and Kylo Ren. Hux is holding onto her cloak, and Kylo onto her cowl. They place it over her shoulders and turn her around, Hux giving her a clinical once over. He nods and steps back. Kylo’s helmet is on and the bond is quiet. She can’t tell what he thinks.

She’s taken through halls. Down, down, down, all the way to the belly of the ship. Kylo and Hux stop before tall, heavy metal doors, composing themselves. Rey swallows hard. This is it. Kylo throws the doors open and Rey is once again flanked by them, two looming figures impossibly tall in this moment, and Rey far too small.

When she steps forward all she can see is the giant hologram of a creature from a nightmare. Even knowing it isn’t real, Rey’s hackles rise, and she has to fight with everything she has not to turn around and bolt. Her eyes land on the creature’s face, jagged and broken and wilting like the sickened vegetation of Dathomir, glossy big eyes staring at Rey in a way that makes her skin crawl. Kylo and Hux’s shoulders at her side keep her from being able to run, though. When they come up to the dais, she realizes that the two men have placed themselves a safe distance away from her. She already misses the closeness. Her eyes are forced up, despite her attempts to look anywhere else, and Rey’s fight or flight instincts are working on overtime.


Rey locks her knees in place.

“So… the girl I’ve heard so much about,” the creature speaks. The Supreme Leader. Rey clamps her teeth together and holds her breath. “What is your name, child?”

“Rey,” she begins, then remembers she now has a full name. She clears her throat. “Rey Ren.”

The Supreme Leader gives her a patient, revolting smile. Rey tries to reach out with her powers. There is nothing there. This is a hologram of the creature. Snoke’s smile widens.

“Good,” he croons, making the hairs on the back of Rey’s neck stand up. A presence tries to touch her. Rey recoils, stepping back before Kylo’s large hand finds its way to her arm, keeping her in place. She forces herself to relax, stepping forward. The presence that tried to touch her had not been Kylo. She could tell them apart somehow, and it alarmed her the more for it. She hadn’t been able to touch anything.

Still, Rey had been told the creature would try. She refrains from cringing. It is foreign and slippery, oil like, trying to suffocate her senses.

“I am the Supreme Leader, my name is Snoke. You may call me Master,” Snoke provides for introduction. Rey shrinks in on herself. Another oily wave rushes through her. She prepares herself and builds up her defenses.

“I see my Apprentice has been teaching you well, Rey…” comes the delighted compliment, a low sweet croon that makes Rey want to shrivel further. She squares her shoulders and stares back instead. She would not be cowed by a hologram. Snoke continues. “Some day you will do great things by our side. With my help, of course.”

Rey swallows. It feels like dirt.
“Come, child, let me in,” Snoke urges. She feels Kylo tense in the back of her mind, though the two men beside her are statue still. Rey turns her attention to Snoke, swallowing again before lowering her defenses. What she does not want him to see she wraps behind the bond, because it feels like the only safe place, light and warm, inside her mind. The bond itself she buries so deep she can’t feel its warmth or hear its hum. Somewhere where this vile creature can’t find it. Kylo relaxes slightly, perhaps having felt the change. Snoke spares no time. Soon enough she feels the creature lurking inside her. Rey gets a vague recollection of a voice whispering to her aboard Starkiller base, but the sense of déjà vu fades as Snoke stops short—

“You’re blocked.”

And there it was.

She wants to laugh. Almost does, pulling herself back just in time. This is the third time someone has come across her block. Every time the reaction is the same. Snoke sits back in his giant holographic throne, inspecting her anew. When he speaks again, it is no longer dulcet, no longer calm with attempted friendliness. It is directed at Kylo.

“You will find a way to break her of her block. Her training must begin today, Kylo Ren, until she can be taught of our ways.”

She notices Kylo incline his head with a modulated “Yes, Supreme Leader,” and then the hologram stares at them for what feels like eternity.

When it deigns speak again, his beady blue eyes have zeroed in on Rey once more. Rey clenches her teeth.

“We will meet again, Rey,” it says, then it disappears.

Silence.

“That’s it?” She asks, turning bewildered eyes on Hux, because she can’t see Kylo’s face. Hux just watches her, then his own icy blue eyes trail up to Kylo. Kylo’s mask is letting out soft, even breaths. Rey frowns.

“It gains us time,” Kylo says, voice devoid of life behind the hydraulic hiss of his modulator.

She looks between the two of them with mounting confusion. Hux’s hand lands on her shoulder and he turns her towards the exit, guiding her by the small of her back down the steps.

“Come,” he urges. Kylo stares at the empty dais one more time before following. They don’t speak a word as they walk away. Rey falls behind on purpose. She stares at the backs of their heads, a nagging in the back of her mind as her eyes narrow.

They don’t like their Master. Rey could tell from a mile away. Yet they answered to the creature. She looks at Hux’s coppery hair, biting her lip as understanding dawns on her. This is all a means to an end, Hux’s and Kylo’s quest for power, for unifying the galaxy under one seat and finally bringing peace. She didn’t agree with any of it, but she could see it now. They did what they had to. Kylo turns his head to look at her through that pitch black visor. He probably heard all that. She doesn’t particularly care.

Careful with your thoughts, Rey. There is another Knight aboard this ship.

Rey flinches. She hadn’t thought there would be anyone but Kylo to hear her.
She nods to herself and takes care to guard her mind. She’d almost forgotten about Yathe.

The trip back is spent in silence, Rey mostly stewing in her own mind. She had signed up for this, but perhaps there is more to ‘this’ than she had bargained for.

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Kylo throws her into training. Hard.

The days after the meeting with Snoke he spends grilling her with her forms, this time with a lightsaber. He holds nothing back. He sure took his command to train to heart, Rey thinks warily as she blocks a parry that comes a little too close to searing through her arm bandage. Rey hisses and jumps back.

“Are you *trying* to cut my arm off?” She demands with a hiss. Kylo brings his cross guard’s beam down on her head in response. She twirls out of the way to block it sideways, deflecting it and sending it back to him. Kylo grunts. He doesn’t answer her, though, and when Rey tries to reach across the bond, there’s nothing there. He hadn’t been kidding when he’d said training would be hard after their meeting with Snoke.

She’d noticed that as the days had gone by, he’d become more erratic again. Colder. It was nothing like the man who had welcomed her aboard the ship. She twirls away, trying to remember her training, adjusting for single blade combat rather than a double bladed staff.

On the fourth day, when he calls training done for the day, Rey’s limbs can function just enough for her to follow Kylo out of the Knights’ training room.

She trails her Master all the way to her room and collapses on the bed. She skips dinner. The men would not miss her.

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“You didn’t tell him she was blocked,” Hux speaks, eyes on the vacant chair. He’d been holding onto this piece of information for days, having it claw at the inside of his mind in irritation. Kylo gives him a hard look before returning to his food. Rey had skipped dinner, and when he’d pressed for a reason he’d received a grunt about exhaustion and nothing more.

It’s not Hux’s place to inquire about her training. He’s not a Force user. He knows just enough about it to be dangerous.

His mind travels back to Kylo cradling Rey in his arms, sharing a barrage of images from Rey’s past, of memories that had haunted her all her life. He’d been so angry then he had failed to ask why he was being offered these images, but he had to admit to himself that those two weeks aboard the corvette had been strange to begin with. He’d deduced Rey had issues with managing the Force by her angry rants about levitating pebbles, but he had not known she was well and truly blocked.

“Why did you do it?” He asks, glancing towards the Knight. Kylo seems to have lost his appetite with that question, setting his silverware down. Hux grabs for his glass of water and takes a sip, anything to keep his hands occupied.
“It gained us time, Hux,” the man almost growls. “Or would you prefer Snoke had summoned her to wherever he is right away? It’s what would have happened had I told him.”

Ah.

Hux shakes his head.

No, having Snoke summon Rey in the flesh would do neither one of them any favors. Kylo seems to relax.

“Still, you also kept it from me.” Hux accuses, finally saying the one thing he had wanted to.

Kylo gives him a long look. “I am sure there are plenty of things you keep from me, General.”

Hux stills his features to keep from frowning. Then again, the man was right. He turns his head to look at Kylo and leans forward, grabbing Kylo by his tunic in the absence of his cowl to grab at. How easy had he gotten used to the small motion, pulling the man closer. It surprised him even further that Ren allowed it.

“No more secrets from now on.” He says.

Kylo studies his face, and Hux has to concentrate on those beautiful golden brown eyes ‘lest he be distracted by the man’s full, wide pout.

When had he started noticing these things?

“No more secrets from now on.” Kylo agrees, then untangles Hux’s fingers from his tunic with slow motions and narrowed eyes, though it’s not a warning. Just a motion. Hux smiles.

The perverse sense of satisfaction Hux gets every time Kylo Ren bends to his will is intoxicating, if only because Hux knows that the Knight would never bend for anyone, except maybe his Apprentice. He can’t help himself. Just before Kylo’s fingers try to drop his, he grabs on. Kylo’s eyes snap up to him, but Hux refuses to let go. He watches Kylo’s adam’s apple move up and down under his tunic. Hux’s lips tug up at the corners again as he holds the man’s hand in place. If this had been all it took to win against the First Knight of Ren, he should have done it sooner.

“No more secrets.” Hux reiterates.

Kylo nods, and Hux drops his hand. He would keep his word as well. Hux grabs his water and looks at it.

“In the spirit of not keeping secrets…” He starts, and Kylo lifts his eyes to look at him attentively, trying to see right through him. Hux takes a breath. That penetrating gaze is uncomfortable, but he forces himself to meet Ren’s eyes. “The homing device I gave her when she left…”

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Kylo pays close attention to Hux’s explanation of the homing device’s ability to track Rey’s motions. Hux had had the ability to find out where she was at all times, and Kylo had to control himself so he would not explode. He and Hux had crafted a very tenuous truce in Rey’s absence and he knows exploding now would undo all the work they had begrudgingly placed into this semblance of friendship. He tightens his jaw.
He’d tracked her for days. Days. And Hux had known how to get to her all along.

He must be easier to read than he thought, Kylo muses, as Hux sets to placating him.

“It was a precaution. I deleted it before Snoke could find out somehow.”

Snoke.

Kylo has to remember why he and Hux have come together to begin with: Rey. Snoke.

He could not let his temper get the best of him, even as he boils over having wasted so much time.

“You must know I intended to keep my word. To trust her to return on her own,” Hux continues, leaning forward in his chair a hair’s width so as to make Kylo see the logic in the decision.

Rey.

Rey who’s asleep two rooms down. He can feel her force signature in the back of his mind, calm and quiet now that she’s not dreaming, unbothered by his nightmares. He looks at Hux.

Hux has been keeping Kylo’s secrets as well. Kylo gives a curt nod and the General relaxes the ruler-straight set to his shoulders.

He has to agree that it had bought them time, and saved their lives, when Kylo had shown that he had followed her without success. Still, it grated.

“You will never do that again, General.” He states. Hux stiffens again, unused to and affronted by being told what to do, so Kylo continues. “And I promise the same.”

Kylo Ren had never thought he’d see the day when he would sit with this man and trade promises and reassurances. It feels too foreign, to include someone else — two people — in his plans. Still, this was just another card he’d been dealt, and he would deal with it. Hux extends his hand to shake on it, a true businessman in every sense of the word. Kylo looks at his hand.

“One more thing…” Kylo starts, swallowing hard. “In the spirit of not keeping secrets.”

Hux’s ears burn. His chest burns, his cheeks burn. He’s pretty sure his scalp is burning.

When Kylo had explained that Rey had snatched an image from Kylo’s mind — that made up image of Hux’s fingers around Kylo’s throat — Hux’s heart had stopped working.

It explains so much.

“How many more?” He croaks, clearing his throat and taking a gulp of water to ease the hitch from his vocal chords. Kylo tilts his head to the side, clearly amused.

“Only that one,” he admits, reaching to grab his own drink. Hux nods, staring at the man.

He’s not sure whether to feel angry that this had been going on for so long, or annoyed that he hadn’t known about it for so long. He glares at his water goblet so he does not look at Kylo.

“What was her response?” He asks.

He’s too curious, he can’t help himself. He’d watched her blush out of her mind every time she saw
his hands, stealing glances that she thought he hadn’t noticed, stiffening every time he’d touch her. Hux was not a touchy feely kind of man. He preferred to keep a rather large bubble of personal space around himself, but when it came to Rey, he’d found himself extending his hand to her at almost every turn. Reveling in the warmth. He would lie if he didn’t admit to being mortified, but also intrigued now by her reaction.

Instead of words, Kylo presses a memory into his mind… it’s a feeling. A ghost of a physical reaction. A memory of Kylo sensing her desire through the bond. Hux almost chokes. He covers it by clearing his throat. When he looks at Ren next, the man has the most shit eating smirk on his face. Hux almost rolls his eyes, then—

Then it occurs to him. If Kylo could sense Rey’s desire, then perhaps…

“And yours? What was your response?” Hux asks in a murmur, almost a whisper.

This time he doesn’t avoid Ren’s eyes. This time he tracks the man’s facial features, trying not to blink.

He knows it’s stupid, this, but Hux was a man who enjoyed power. He’d enjoyed subduing Ren even into removing his cowl and gloves. That twisted part of him would not let this go until he knew.

No memories come this time. Nothing. Hux’s eyes narrow. His body starts acting of its own volition as he pushes his chair back and approaches the younger man. In the space between one blink and the next it occurs to him how young Ren is. It is easy to forget that this man is four years his junior, yet the way he’s turning pale and setting his eyes on the flower vase on the table wakes the part of Hux that is predatory.

He leans in and uses his foot to push Kylo’s chair until the man’s knees come out, and he stands between them as he leans against the table. His hand reaches out and he grabs Kylo by the chin, forcing him to look up. Kylo lets out a growl. He ignores it.

“What was yours?” He repeats.

Kylo has had enough. He stands to his full height, refusing to be bullied into answering as he looks over Hux, and Hux has to bite back the smirk that almost blooms on his lips. This, too, is a reaction. Hux does not forget that the Knight of Ren only does as he wants. He’d allowed Hux to touch him. He’d allowed Hux to order him about in his rooms. He’d allowed this particular power play to take place. Yes, this too is a response to Hux’s question.

Kylo clears his throat.

“I think perhaps we’re done with dinner now,” Kylo tenses, words calm even while standing too close for comfort. Hux pushes himself back until he’s half sitting, half leaning against the table, staring up at Kylo with an arched brow. It felt amazing to be the one to fluster Ren for once.

“Yes, it seems that we are. Tomorrow, then.”

He watches Kylo collect his things and storm out the room and Hux smiles to himself.

Tomorrow, then.

He remembers Phasma’s words. You’re playing with fire, Bren.

Hux looks at the two empty chairs.
Who knew playing with fire could be so exhilarating?

The next two weeks of training with Rey are torturous. He’d done this to himself, really. Every time he sees Rey, or Hux, or both, all he can think about is his last encounter with the General.

He tries his hardest to concentrate on the training and starts skipping dinners in lieu of looking up ways to break Rey’s block.

The frustrations keep piling on. He has found nothing on how to break a Force block. Searching through the Imperial Archives provides nothing, though when he’s not training Rey or going on scouting missions with Yathe looking for old artifacts — another useless mission given to him by Snoke — he’d spent almost every hour looking for something, anything. He keeps coming up short.

When Snoke summons him once again and he stands side by side with Hux now that Rey is in their hands, the creature asks for updates about the status of the Resistance and Skywalker. He’d forgotten about the Resistance. He’d forgotten about his uncle. He’d all but forgotten about everything but Rey for months now. He’d neglected his duties.

On the first week he’d tried to meditate her through it again, and she’d balked every time he’d tried to pin her in place, but now that she expected it the trick had become far less effective than it had once been. It had turned into bickering, with Rey huffing her way through it. He’d tried to anger her into it, but what had worked on Starkiller base no longer worked as Rey saw him not as a potential threat but as her Master. He’d wavered between being pleased and being irritated at this new discovery. Ultimately, he settled on irritation in the training room and would save his pleasure about it until he was alone.

He’d tried tiring her out, driving her to exhaustion until she could almost no longer hold herself up. That had worked, a little, but never in a substantial way. He needed to find a way to get her to fight, to fight that block until it broke, but nothing seemed to come close to what would produce a satisfactory result. By the second week Kylo had been left stewing over his failure to break that stupid block. What good of a teacher can he be if he can’t get her past that one block?

When he enters the training room with Rey in tow that day he immediately ignites his weapon. It’s been three weeks since she arrived on the Finalizer, and she’s a quick study. She ignites her saber and they jump right into working through forms, not even having warmed up. He’ll pay for that later, and she will, too, but it will build up her endurance. No one got warm ups before battle.

In one particular bout he freezes her, and is pleasantly surprised when she throws off the freeze before she rams into him with a scream. She’d bypassed the block then. Another fight or flight trigger.

He freezes her again.

Rey balks over the bond, thinking it an unfair advantage since she can’t do the same to him. Kylo smirks as he steps forward.

“No advantage is ever unfair to the one who has it, Rey,” he says as he reads her mind, closing the distance until he’s standing a foot away from her. He lifts her up with the Force until she’s staring at him.

They’d been at this particular session for hours. Her hair is stamped onto her neck and her temples
and she’s breathing hard as she glares daggers at him. Kylo smiles. Her lightsaber’s been deactivated at her side once she lost her grip on it, so he deactivates his and arches an eyebrow at her.

“You will get out of this Force freeze with your powers or you will be frozen to this spot for the rest of the night.”

He walks off a few feet and sits down, leaning against the metal pillar and wipes the sweat off his brow onto his already messy, sleeveless shirt. He leans his dripping neck against the cool durasteel, arms on his knees, and watches her. Rey’s furious.

He can feel it through the bond.

She’s silently screaming expletives at him that only manage to amuse him further, but if he’d found no way to break the bond from the archives, it was time to improvise. So he holds her in place, hovering almost a foot off the floor. That incenses her. She’s frozen at his eye level for his height, not hers, and her feet dangle. Good.

One more irritant might force that centurion in her mind to give way.

He feels her struggle through the bond.

“Kylo—“ she begins, straining, and he eases up on the freeze around her throat, allowing her to have her voice. She narrows her eyes.

“What did I say about that?” He warns. Rey growls, but the reminder wouldn’t go amiss. The training room might be empty but she would do well to remember that she couldn’t address him by his name.

“Master,” she bites, eyes close to being almost slits, “You know I can’t break it.”

“You did once,” he retorts. “Try.”

Rey struggles, he can sense it, but outwardly she can’t move a muscle.

Get angry, Rey. Anger is fuel.

Oh, I’m getting angry, alright. She retorts and Kylo smirks.

Directing it at me won’t get you out of that hold.

Rey huffs.

Kylo sits back and watches her from where he’s lowered himself, and Rey struggles against his hold for hours without success. By the time he shifts in his seat, Rey’s frustrations have reached maximum. Soon. Soon she would try and succeed, then they could return to trying to slice each other’s arms off with difficult form maneuvers, something he’s thankful for. It means he doesn’t have to think.

He’d been doing too much of that since his dinner with Hux, the redhead’s face a ghost haunting his dreams without giving any indication of ever stopping. Worse yet, he worries that they had bled into Rey’s dreams as well. It could make his life extra complicated. Kylo much preferred training.

Training is easy. In training he can go on autopilot. He can do it for hours. Training keeps him from thinking about—
Kylo! Rey screams into his mind.

So, she’d found a way to circumvent his order.

Kylo doesn’t remember when he’d allowed his eyes to wander, to unfocus. When his gaze finds hers, she’s glaring at him for all she’s worth, so he gets himself up and walks over to where she’d frozen in the middle of the room, standing a foot away from her as he had before. She’s still at eye level with him.

“I ordered you to break it,” he demands.

“And I tried!” She shouts, unmoving except for the snarl that tugs her lips over her teeth. He doesn’t need the bond to tell him she’s furious.

“Not hard enough.”

How dare you?!

Kylo arches an eyebrow at her outburst. “If you were trying hard enough, you would have been free by now. Now, do you want to put some effort into it or should I have General Hux bring you dinner here and spoon feed you?”

Oh…

That had been the very wrong thing to say. He always seemed to say the wrong thing. This time, he’d tried to use that to his advantage. It clearly backfired.

Her cheeks start turning red in splotches, and her neck spreads pink, and he can feel her vibrating under his hold. She’s so close to breaking the invisible binds around her body he’s almost tempted to keep egging her on with Hux. Except she doesn’t need it, because what happens next makes his hold stutter.

Ben. She warns.

Kylo’s thought processes stop.

His hold weakens long enough for her to finally break it, and she falls to the floor in a graceless heap. Kylo’s eyes track her and hold her there, numb.

Time seems to rewind as he repeats the name in his mind, and then lurches forward.

Ben.

Ben.

Ben.

“What did you call me?” He asks in what might have passed for a rasp, or a growl, or a hiss. He’s not quite sure which. Perhaps all of them.

Rey face contorts as his words escape him. Her jaw goes slack in a small ‘O’ and her eyes widen. She scrambles up to her feet and he watches as her throat moves in repeated swallows of empty air. He can sense it… how it had slipped from her thoughts into the bond like silk.

He takes a step forward.
“What did you call me?” He barks. Rey’s shoulders turn stony as she squares them, refusing to be cowed into stepping back.

Ben.

Ben.

Ben.

“You were just holding me there and—“ Rey balks, but Kylo’s not paying attention.

That name.

That name had come to haunt him from the grave. It had come to haunt him and it came in the form of Rey’s pink, soft lips whispering them in warning, except in his mind it had sounded like a gunshot. Kylo’s chest tightens with every jerky, painful breath as it escapes faster and faster, mind running over all the possibilities of how she could have learned that name. He pushes into her mind, uncaring of the winces he elicits. He doesn’t need to wade deep. She offers up a memory. His uncle. His mother. Kylo narrows his eyes.

“Do not ever call me that again, Rey,” he growls, leaning so close his breath is starting to disturb the little hairs framing her face.

Rey, not one to be intimidated, plants her feet and stands her ground. Any other time he would be impressed. This is why she’s his apprentice after all. A weaker person would have never made it this far. Still, there was always the part of her he hated even as he loved her for it. The argumentative part. The part that just would not listen and obey.

So instead of doing as she must, what Yathe or any of his Knights would have done, which is to feel chastised and give him a deferential bow while apologizing, Rey stares at him with a stern set to her lips.

“Why?” She asks.

Kylo growls as images flash into his mind. His mother, trying to console him as he cried over a voice she could not hear but he could. His father, trying to teach him to be a pilot. His uncles Chewie and Luke, trying to entertain him or teach him. All of them whispered the same name.

Ben, Rey projects, an echo of those memories.

“It’s not my name,” he barks. “And you will not question me when I order you to do something.”

“But it is your name,” she replies, stubborn as ever as she leans back and crosses her arms under her breasts. This is how it always starts with her. She picks a fight then focuses on the one thing that will anger him to distraction.

Kylo struggles to keep from fisting his hands and taking to the wall with bare knuckles. He glowers at her through the bond, and snarls like an animal in it.

“My name is Kylo Ren. To you, I am your Master. You’d do well to remember that.”

“Your name is Ben.” Stubborn as always, she refuses to let this drop. “You may have chosen to be called Kylo, but your name is Ben. You were born to it. Just like my name will always be Rey. Your name is Ben.”
“Don’t call me that!” He yells, frustration boiling to a high.

“But why? It is your name.” She rebuffs, unimpressed by his attempts to get her to drop it through intimidation.

He throws his arms up in the air and stomps in place as he shoves images into her mind. “It is the name of a weakling! Weakness has no place here, Rey.”

He bares it all. He shows her memories of a childhood he would never show anyone else. Of failing, over and over, of trying to shed that name with every fiber of his being, even until that moment when his father had called to him over the bridge, when his father had died with a whispered Ben on his lips that had only been loud enough for Kylo’s ears, even as his eyes had swung up and landed on a scavenger.

*Another weakness.*

Rey turns to stone.

A heartbeat.

Another.

A heartbeat.

Another.

“Is that what you think I am? A weak scavenger?” She asks, tone a shard of steel.

Kylo whiplashes. He’s pulled out of his thoughts of his father and his eyes try to focus on her.

“No... No, that’s not what I—“ he starts but she cuts him off by holding up her lightsaber. She points it at his nose, deactivated.

“Weaknesses have no place here. Should I remove myself from your side? I left once, I could do it again.”

What? What...

Rey picks up on the thought.

“What, exactly?” She asks, seething, “Is that how you see me? Weak, like you believed your father weak? Because I can tell y—”

His mind is trying to catch up to what’s happening, but when her words manage to register in his mind, he screams.

“It’s not the same!” He roars, hands finally fisting as he shouts it into her face.

Rey’s pushing her lightsaber into his nose and he makes to grab for it but she hits his him with the metal handle, hard. He curses. Instead of backing down she walks forward, getting in his face.

“No? Then what is it, Ben? How is it any different? How am I not just another weakness to be exploited?”

There it is again. That infernal name.

Kylos vision flashes a blinding white, burning from the combined heat of his anger and their Force bond thrumming. It boils up from the bottom of his spine to his neck, rattling against his ribcage like a trapped animal. The growl that escapes his throat is borderline feral. His nostrils flare as he stares down at his apprentice, stubborn as a manka cat. How *dare* she question him? *He* is her Master, not
the other way around. She has no right questioning him, dragging him out with a single name he’d tried to bury so long ago, then demanding to know of his reasons. Her hair’s flying around her face as she stares him down, daring him to tell her that she’s a weakness, and Kylo breaks, pent up frustration giving way to action.

Somewhere in him their bond snaps with a shrill note as he grabs her face, large hands cupping both sides of her jaw, tugging her up until she’s forced on her tiptoes. His face comes smashing down on hers. His lips, warm and full, slam into her parted ones, and Kylo’s forgotten how to breathe. He’s forgotten how to think, really, because this is his impulsiveness acting even as his brain screams for him to stop, but he doesn’t. His lips move, face tilting to accommodate hers like a puzzle piece. It’s a kiss born of outrage when he tugs on her lower lip for her to open up to him, to surrender as she should, his chest vibrating with the unborn rumbling of the snarl threatening to rise up his throat. When she doesn’t, he growls, and tugs harder with his teeth until Rey yelps. But her mouth parts and so he suckles gently where he’d tugged, licking it and soothing it in slow motions with his warm lips and tongue, her short panted breathing heating up his mouth, his nose, before he takes her lips anew.

She tastes like sunshine. He doesn’t know what sunshine tastes like, but it must surely taste like this. Kylo allows himself in, searching, coaxing her tongue to meet his.

Rey starts sagging until he’s almost propping her up by his hold against her head, and so he allows one hand to cup the back of her neck, fingers tangling in her messy braid, while the other sneaks to her waist and hoists her up to him, crushing her to his chest.

It’s not a gentle kiss. Their teeth bang against each other a couple of times, and Rey tenses and relaxes under him as if unsure of what’s even happening. To be fair, he’s not sure either. He just feels months of frustration bubbling up when he whines into her, a soft, desperate sound against her mouth as he gives her every memory he’s ever held of her, allowing her to see herself through his eyes.

He’d pursued her, obsessed over her, desired her for so long. How dare she question him, believe he thinks her worthless, when he’d offered her the world and seen her as his equal. When he’d wanted her by his side since the day he laid eyes on her. He kisses her harder and this time it is Rey who whimpers as he presses that thought into her mind. Her whimper drags a needy growl from him and he pulls her so tight against him that her arms are pinned, and she digs her sharp little nails into his chest until it hurts, another mark to claim him as hers, and Rey kisses him back. For a second, she kisses him back, all soft lips and damp tongue. Their bond glows and hums like a symphonic orchestra, thrumming like a live thing — it is a live thing — one that revels in their closeness. Kylo feels the same tug of air shifting as he had so many months during Snoke’s twisted version of rehabilitation, as if the ground is shifting, but his eyes are closed and perhaps it’s the ferocity with which they’re fighting even in this. He demands more and Rey gives, then she turns around and tries to bring his control to its knees.

When he lets go, their combined breath is hot and hard, and he stares down at her through heavy lidded eyes, digging his nails into her waist and squeezing.

“That. That is how it’s different,” he murmurs against her swollen lips, licking his own and refraining from diving back for a second round.

Rey’s eyes flutter shut then open… and widen… and widen.

She untangles herself from his arms.

Next thing he knows, she’s bolting out the room just as Yathe is walking in, shooting the running apprentice a curious glance out the door before giving Kylo a wary one. Yathe walks up, standing a
very, very safe distance away.

“I have been summoned to Snoke. All the Knights have.” Then Yathe narrows her eyes.

It’s enough of a distraction for Kylo’s mind to snap back from his mental torture over Rey. He walks over to where his robes are piled up and digs around for his comm. He had received no mental summons. When he checks his comm, there is nothing there. Kylo stares up at Yathe. The woman’s face is tight.

“Thought you should know.”

She bows to him and walks out of the room, leaving him with not one but two ticking time bombs as his heart beats out of his chest. Kylo swallows.

_Fantastic._

Three weeks. Three weeks of being her teacher and he’d already screwed up thanks to his own stupid recklessness. On top of that, Yathe had just upturned his world.

_Fantastic._

He storms out of the training room, determined to find some other room to go destroy. That might cool him down a bit.

_____________________

Hux dines alone that night. He stares at the two empty seats at his table, regarding them with cold indifference despite the annoying ache somewhere under his ribs and the persistent twitch of his left eyelid. He purses his lips and finishes his dinner quicker than usual, then goes about reviewing Phasma’s Stormtrooper reports. He’d been lagging behind and now had to catch up to weeks worth of reports that had, up until this point, been given a hurried glance rather than fully analyzed.

He digs into his pocket and takes out a pack of cigarettes, tugging one out, clipping it to his mouth and lighting it with stiff fingers as he breathes his irritation in and out. He should have sent a question to Ren about it via his private comm, but he couldn’t be quite bothered. Rey didn’t have a comm yet. He’d have to fix that in the morning.

The door opens and Hux frowns. A tall man, helmet on and swathed in black, barges in.

“Just because you have access to my rooms does not mean you can just let yourself in any time you wish, Ren,” Hux snips, pursing his lips again when Kylo reaches the table. He looks up at the man, forced to crane his neck from his sitting position, shoulders stiff and expression blank, waiting for Kylo to speak.

Kylo stands there for a long time then shoves a pad at Hux. His eyes travel down to it and Hux frowns, a small draw of his brows.

“What is this?” He asks, tone neutral and metallic.

The hiss and draw of Kylo’s breath through his modulator reach Hux’s ears. He looks back up at the Knight.

“Please deliver this to Rey,” Kylo orders and Hux resists the urge to snarl. Since when had he
become a delivery boy? But that would have been his knee-jerk reaction months ago. This time he only narrows his eyes.

“You’re her Master, Ren. Deliver it yourself.”

Hux’s eyes travel back to his own data pad. There’s the soft sound of metal hitting wood and he lets his gaze travel to where Ren’s hand rests on the table atop the data pad he’d just set down.

“Please,” Kylo repeats. It’s sincere, at least, if stony.

Hux clamps his teeth shut, looking back at his work, but his eyes are drawn to Kylo’s hands as if by magnetism. Those hands had held him, and his heart does a small pitter-patter at the thought.

“Fine,” he grumbles, returning his eyes to his own work. “Anything else?”

Silence lingers while Hux waits for Ren to speak, to explain why he’s being made to deliver the data pad when any droid or staff could do it on Ren’s behalf, as he’d had in the past, but Kylo’s way of explaining is to let out another hissy breath through his modulator.

“Brendol,” Kylo offers in way of farewell. The first time he’s ever done so. Hux’s eyes snap up to the man’s helmet.

He licks the very edges of his teeth, not daring to let the tip of his tongue reach his own lips and give away his hesitation.

The hesitation lasts a heartbeat.

“Kylo,” Hux replies.

It must have pleased the man. The helmet that hides a beautiful face is inclined in acknowledgement, and Kylo turns sharp on his heel and exits Hux’s quarters, leaving Hux to stare after him.

When the door hisses shut Hux looks back at the data pad the Knight had left behind. He hadn’t even had a chance to ask about dinner… not that he would have, at any rate. He refused to be seen as needy.

Delivery boy, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

... Well, then.

A huge thanks to my beta, EjBlaKIt (dath-ej on tumblr) for being glorious and overall the best sort of girl in the universe.
Chapter Summary

Rey gets fed up of nightmares, Hux gets fed up with Kylo, and Kylo's... well...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It pools around her feet and slowly rushes up her ankles, her calves. Rey bends down and touches it, then brings a palmful to her mouth only to spit it out. Salt. She frowns, straightening, but the water keeps rising in waves, rushing between her legs. She takes a sluggish step forward, muscles working against the pull of water.

“Mom!”

Her head swivels. It's such a tiny voice, small and quivering and terrified. She follows it against the drag of the water now rushing to her knees, up her thighs.

Jet black hair and golden brown eyes that disappear too quickly. She strains to follow, stretching as far as she can to take longer steps.

“Mom!”

The sand under her feet starts twisting, a living, morbid, thing from the pits of hell that pools at her feet and pours over her head. She tries to look up and there’s nothing but sand falling from some invisible point in the sky, like the sands of an hour glass. Rey covers her eyes, trying to clear her line of vision. It still slowly pools on her lashes, making her eyes heavy, trying to lull her to sleep.

“Mom! Dad!”

Why can’t she see him? Where is he? The little boy? Rey turns around disoriented, her eyes quickly covering with sand and red and grit that hurts. It continues its rush down, towards the water, mixing and twisting, turning to slush. She chokes on a handful of it and coughs, taking one long step after another. Each step hurts more.

Sand. So much sand.

Red and hot and angry like the desert.

Red and sand and water turning to live quicksand.

“Dad!”

A flash of red against red engulfs her vision and Rey chokes again, the sound of plasma and burnt skin heavy against her nostrils, sand slipping past her teeth, down her throat. Into her lungs, mixing with water up to her chest. Her arms sink every time she tries to push up, and Rey rubs at her eyes but it’s no help. Her fingers are now soaked and dirty.

“DAD!”
A thump. She turns her voice towards the young child’s.

“HELP ME!” she screams, drowning. Everything’s drowning. Her voice. Her limbs. Rey reaches, but there’s nothing but blood and grit clouding her vision, and when she calls again, another voice responds. It’s not the child’s, but one she now knows so well.

“I am sorry, I can’t help you.”

Sand and salt and water and blood gag her, past her tongue. Her lungs burn as she desperately claws for air that’s not coming.

“MOM!”

Rey screams. Her eyes fly open and she bolts up and out of the bed, clawing at her chest. Blood and sand and sea water. She chokes past the tears threatening to pillow against her lashes and swallows hard, big gulps of air that aren’t enough. Her sheets had been dragged with her out of bed and her limbs are tangled, and Rey tears at them to get free as her sobs break in her throat.

When her feet finally disentangle she bolts for the door.

The halls of the Finalizer are as clinical and brightly lit as ever, and Rey allows herself just a moment to take in a deep breath as she sags against her now closed door, greedily sucking in gulps of cold air through the nose, out through the mouth. She looks down the hall. There is no one.

She knows that so far down where the hall begins there will be two stationed stormtroopers, but they’re too far to see her, or for Rey to see them. She’s alone.

The other side of the hall ends in the doors to Hux’s rooms, and between them both the doors to the one man whose actions had been plaguing her thoughts for the last three days.

She’d been avoiding him ever since he’d kissed her with such force that Rey’s brain had short circuited, since she ran from the knights’ training space and locked herself in her room. Kylo had not followed. He’d allowed her the space to think and closed off the bond. When she had tried to touch it, to see what he was thinking, she’d met an impenetrable wall, so she’d allowed her own end to go entirely mute, the distant hum of a dim glowing bond the only evidence of their shared connection.

She had seen a boy, a boy that reminded her so much of him. Jet black hair and almond colored eyes. It had always been a vague blur, a boy… but this time. Every dream just a passing horror before she would wake up and it would disappear. Now it had felt so real, intensifying every night until she could see nothing but red. Until she couldn’t breathe.

She takes a deep breath.

It had been him.

But how would she know what he looked like? Was it a vision? Rey worries at her lower lip and stares down the hall, towards Kylo’s rooms. Towards Hux’s.

She should wake her Master. She should wake him and discuss this. He’s the only one who could tell her what these visions, these nightmares were, explain why they kept haunting her nights. Rey throws her senses out and feels him next door. Awake.

She should go to him. She won’t.

She remembers the way his lips had crashed on hers, desperate, needy, hungry, and her body reacts
before she can even form a coherent thought. Her limbs weaken and her tongue runs dry, and a new sort of panic wedges itself in her ribs. Rey allows herself to imagine going into that room and facing him now in the middle of the night, in the tank top and shorts she’s taken to sleeping in. It would be like walking in there naked, with no clothes to wear as a shield and no weapon at her hip.

No, she couldn’t go in there… Rey turns, ready to place her hand on the access pad to her room, lingering.

That room is too dark. She could turn on the lights, but it’s also too empty. Rey’s tired of emptiness. She turns her head slowly back towards Kylo’s door, then further down the hall. She licks her lips.

Perhaps…

He’d helped her sleep once.

She swallows again and worries at her bottom lip, fisting her hands, one at her side and the other in midair, before taking in a long breath and turning her body again.

She had not seen Hux for as long as she’d locked herself her room, preferring to order whatever odd thing she could find on the menu and eating it by herself. She was happy to see that the small droid who had learned her name had brought her food for her, the only thing that had made Rey’s heart lift, and she’d wondered how this specific droid had been assigned to her detail. The small droid had been updated, she’s sure, because it no longer called her Prisoner Rey 3259, but Madam Rey, something that made her smile, despite herself, a few times. That droid had been her only company.

Hux had tried to contact her, of course, only once. He’d come to her room and knocked, and Rey had opened the door and refused him entrance, standing still at the door while Hux narrowed his eyes.

He’d handed her a data pad courtesy of Kylo Ren and snarked about not being anybody’s personal communication device, and to inform her Master that if he wanted anything done, he should do it himself or find a droid, before he’d clipped away at an angry pace. Rey had been left to stare at his great coat’s collar as he retreated.

The data pad had been loaded with a ridiculous amount of reading material. Rey had spent her time studying as she’d been dutifully informed to do via a pre-loaded message on the data pad that had been signed Kylo Ren.

Three days without talking to anyone but a droid.

Rey bites her lower lip, making up her mind.

She walks forward on icy feet, refusing to go back to even find shoes, and wraps her arms around herself against the chilly air. It only takes her so many steps to cross Kylo’s door, and she gives it a resentful glance, throwing out her awareness as she passes. He’s still awake. Probably tracking her passing by. That man never sleeps. Rey huffs and keeps going, then hesitates at the General’s door.

She’d been granted access to enter, but she doubts Hux would appreciate her barging in in the middle of the night unannounced. Her fingers hover over the access pad before she presses the alarm button, the one that’ll announce to the General that someone’s at the door. She shifts her weight from foot to foot while she waits, trying to stave off the chill pushing through her toes. Why is this ship always so kriffing cold? Isn’t anyone here a warm blooded human aside from herself? She shifts her weight again and the door hisses open.

Rey looks up.
General Hux is standing in his sleep wear with his arm still raised, presumably over the access pad on the other side, staring down at her with what she can only describe as complete and utter confusion, which is saying something. It’s mostly just a perplexed frown and a soft parting of his lips. Rey smiles sheepishly.

“Hi.” She murmurs, and Hux’s head of messy, coppery red hair tilts sideways.

“Hello,” he finally greets back. “I’m surprised to see you here.”

Rey fidgets.

“About that—” she starts, but Hux cuts her off, business like as always as he digs straight to the root of why she’s standing there in almost no clothing.

“Nightmares.” He states. Rey nods. This is the second time he’s been able to tell. He knows her too well.

Hux steps aside to let her enter and when she looks at him his face is absolutely blank. That look he takes on when there’s something he doesn’t want to say, or when his temper’s about to get the best of him. She frowns.

“I just….” Rey starts, looking around the room. It’s half-dim, but she can see the lights from his office are on. He’d been working. “I can come back if you’re busy.”

Hux turns her around by the shoulders until she looks at him and raises his eyebrows.

“Not too busy.”

Rey gives him a shy smile, “Okay.”

He drops his hands and Rey misses the warmth already. Hux walks towards the kitchenette.

“Anything you’d like to drink?” He asks as he lowers his head and busies himself making another cup of kaf. She follows, and she can see two empty ones already sitting on his desk. Rey lets him make her one as well. It’s not like she’d be able to go back to sleep.

When he hands her the hot drink she nearly moans around it, grabbing it between her hands even if it could probably burn. Hux looks her up and down, pursing his lips. Hux beckons her towards his bedroom with a twitch of a finger. Rey follows quietly behind. He disappears into his closet after setting his cup of kaf down on the bedside table, and Rey sits at the very edge of the bed, slowly sipping her drink — cream masquerading as kaf, just as she enjoyed it — taking the time to actually look around his room for once. She’d never stopped in it long enough to notice. It’s still orderly as always.

Hux returns with a black bundle in his hands and pushes it at her as he bends over his bedside table, pulling on a drawer until it slides open on well oiled tracks. Rey takes the bundle from his hands and spreads it in front of her. A long sleeved t-shirt. She bites her lip and looks at him, but he’s carefully avoiding looking at her, and so she quickly pulls it over her head and shrugs her arms through it. It’s not too big, not too long. Just right, though the sleeves still brush her knuckles. She’s surprised to realize that Hux’s slender figure is not that much larger than her own. He’d always seemed larger than life to her. When he finally turns around and looks at her, he’s poking at a packet of cigarettes, lighter in the other hand.

“Do you want to talk about it?” He asks around the butt of his cigarette as he leans forward, one hand igniting the lighter, the other cupping the flame. Rey’s eyes zero in on it. She watches him hold
the tip to the fire and breathe in, the hiss of the flame letting out the first puff of smoke that smells like menthol and the heavy scent of smoldering ash. She inhales and lets it go quickly, averting her eyes. Hux looks at her intently but quietly, and Rey shakes her head.

He slowly sits next to her on the bed, holding the cigarette between his bent knees as he tilts his head sideways and down to try and catch her gaze.

“Are you sure?” He asks. Rey nods. He takes another drag, lets it out after a few seconds, stares at the cigarette.

“I’m technically not supposed to be doing this,” he confesses. Rey smiles.

“General Hux breaks the rules? That’s a first,” she teases and he smirks, and the gloom is lifted from the room.

It always impressed her how he could do that. He looks at her closely and Rey has to blink hard at the intensity with which his crystal clear blue eyes move on her lashes, her nose, her lips.

“What would you like to talk about?” He asks. Rey looks around the room.

She’s not sure.

She had walked in here just so she’d have company, without a plan. Why does she keep doing that? Walking into things without a plan? Rey sighs, picking at the perfect fabric of his long sleeved shirt. Hux looks down at her hands for a long moment then back up at her. He turns and places his half-smoked cigarette in a metal ashtray and grabs her hand. Rey tenses as she takes him in. She can’t help herself, it happens every time he touches her.

It’s not a bad sort of tensing, though. Not the sort of visceral tensing of muscles ready to sprint, as hers had every time Plutt had tried to touch her when he would hand over meal portions. This is not the tensing of muscles ready to fight, either. This is just her body responding, expecting, waiting. She makes it a point to pull in air through her nose slowly and methodically. Hux scoots until his back hits the headboard, slowly pulling her up towards him. Hux swings his legs fully in and Rey almost expects him to drag her atop his body when his hand pats the side of the bed next to him, carefully guiding her until Rey’s sitting against his shoulder. He gives her a small smile.

“Well, I have nothing pressing to work on, so how about we just sit here for a little while?” He offers. It’s a lie. Everything he works on is always pressing.

Rey lets out a small laugh. Hux grabs his cigarette again, bringing it to his mouth. She watches for a little while on the exhale, her gaze following the smoke up above her head, leaning back against the headboard with a sigh. The only sound is that of the clock ticking away.

“I missed you at dinner,” he finally admits, gaze not quite meeting hers.

“You, General? Missing the little desert rat?” She teases, but her smirk fades when she takes in the absolute look of displeasure on his face, lips pursed and frowning, his lashes barely moving as he avoids blinking. Rey looks away.

“So Kylo had been trying to avoid her, too. That gives her a small sense of satisfaction. Except the reminder of why they were avoiding each other bubbles up and the satisfaction dissipates like the smoke from Hux’s cigarette. She picks at the edges of Hux’s comfortable t-shirt against her hands. Hux just regards her quietly.
“Is everything alright?” He asks, slowly reaching with his free hand and wrapping it around hers to stop her from picking out threads. “Or will I have to continue being Ren’s delivery boy in order to see either of you at all?”

Rey flushes, both at the question and at absentmindedly destroying the man’s property.

“Sorry about that,” Rey mutters, annoyance spiking. Couldn’t Ren just deliver it himself? Perhaps along with an apology?

She looks at Hux. Hux had gotten used to their dinners together. It must have been lonely to eat without her or Kylo. She immediately feels guilty. Hux is a man of habit.

But perhaps it meant that the kiss had shocked Kylo as much as it had shocked her. She remembers the way Kylo had shoved painful image after painful image into her, trying to explain without words why he hated the name. Rey had been too wrapped up in her hurt at being thought of as weakness to realize—

“Don’t worry about it,” Hux breaks into her reverie, giving her a small conspiratorial smile. He finally drops her hand. “Though I admit whatever happened must have rattled that man. He looked like a recently chastised toddler. Tell me, did you rain fire on his head?”

Rey laughs, exhausted.

*Good.*

Her head thumps against the headboard and lets out a rattly breath, finally feeling the exhaustion rolling in, staring at the ceiling. Hux remains still, awfully silent, much like he had when he’d allowed her to get comfortable before lulling her to sleep.

“He kissed me.”

The words tumble out of her before she can think and Rey almost bites her tongue, wanting to take them back as soon as they slip out, but she’d had no one else to talk to and it was positively eating at her. Hux turns to look at her as if she’d grown a second head, his brows rising, so Rey is quick to add to her tale.

“I may have… overstepped my boundaries,” she explains, “I called him something I shouldn’t have, and, well…”

She should have shut up, is what she should have done. Rey had gotten caught up in her own anger, frustration building at knowing that this man had had everything and the one thing Rey had never had, Kylo Ren had shed like an old skin he didn’t want or need. It grated. It hadn’t been her fight to fight, but she’d gotten caught up in it. By the time it had come out, it had been too late to stop, and--

Hux narrows his eyes.

“And?” He asks.

“Well, he shared a memory… of… his father,” she explains, unsure of whether she should be sharing this. When she looks at Hux, a flash of pain crosses his face. A deep wound, as if he understands exactly what she’s talking about. He nods, urging her to continue.

“I thought—” Rey grunts, fisting her hands into Hux’s t-shirt she’s wearing. “I don’t want to be considered a weakness. I came back. I won’t be considered dead weight.”
Rey’s brows furrow as she looks at Hux, determination pinching her lips as she inhales sharply. If Hux thought of her as a weakness too, Rey wouldn’t be able to stick around this place. She’d pack up her things and go, plans be damned. But when she takes him all in there’s nothing but calm warmth under his usual hard edges. Hux moves, then, lifting his arm as if to raise it over her head.

“Come here,” he commands, and Rey can’t seem to be able to help herself as she allows herself to be cradled into his side. He wraps his arm around her shoulders, giving her a small squeeze, and Rey’s senses drown in the sharp, clean smell of Hux’s cologne.

“You’re not a weakness. At least not the kind you think you are,” he murmurs, voice going low, dulcet, making Rey shiver. “Your master would burn worlds for you, do you understand that?”

His words rattle, and Rey can’t help but laugh, because that just seems so extreme. So very like Kylo Ren, though. Rey tells him as much.

“A little intense, General.” She chides.

Hux’s lips turn down in a suppressed smile, his gaze is serious despite the motion. “It doesn’t make it any less of a reality. You know I speak the truth.”

Rey drags her eyes away from him as painfully as the smile is dragged away from her face. She lets her head push into his shoulder. Hux doesn’t twitch even if it bothers him. He only squeezes her tighter.

“Are you just trying to make me feel better because you’re trying to be nice?” Rey asks, unwilling to believe that everything she’d felt from Kylo’s end of the bond might be true.

Admitting to it being true would force her to question far too much about her own reaction to that kiss.

Hux scoffs, clearly insulted at her accusation of him trying to be nice. It might blemish his perfect record as a man made of steel with no feelings. She catches that thought, shaking her head. He’d allowed her to see that, and it certainly was nothing more than a jibe at her.

“I wouldn’t say it if I didn’t believe it,” he finally responds, and his fingers trail up her arm, leaving goosebumps in their wake, until they gently caress her braid. He hadn’t commented on it at all.

“It looks good that way,” he murmurs, turning his head until his chin is brushing the top of her hair, hot breath hitting her crown, sending an avalanche of shivers and goosebumps up and down her body. Rey stays very, very still as he gently twines the long, thick braid around his fingers, inspecting her craftsmanship.

“Thank you,” she finally stutters, wondering what the galaxy had come to.

All of these small moments falling together like puzzle pieces to create a brand new picture of the reality that is her life.

To be cradled by the man leading the First Order, comfortable against the surprisingly warm muscles of his side, staring into the distance as he caresses her hair. Her heart beats faster, the same way it had when her brain had finally caught up to her mouth and she’d realized that Kylo Ren was demanding — begging — for her to open up and kiss him back. As if on cue, Hux asks about it.

“Was it good, at least?” He asks. Rey turns to look at him.

“Was what good?” She asks. Hux’s eyes lock on her lips, pupils expanding slightly. Rey nearly
Heats up out of her skin. He’d never looked at her that way before, but she could recognize that look anywhere. It’s the look of a hungry man.

“Your kiss. Was it good? The man certainly has quite the pout.”

If Rey could die from embarrassment right at that moment, she wouldn’t complain.

*Karking hell.*

“But I thought—“ she starts, and Hux laughs.

“Ren told me.” Hux says, arching an eyebrow, “You really thought we were together? Us?” Hux pinches his nose to show what he thinks of that, though it’s hardly more than teasing.

If the ship could open up and swallow her up *right this moment*, Rey would be extremely happy. She makes to jerk away and run in embarrassment, and instead he tightens his hold and pulls her even closer. She feels his heart hammering at his side and Rey clears her throat, sure that hers matches his. He’s narrowing his eyes at her, trying to pin her in place, and Rey complies.

“We’re not.” He clarifies, then his eyes travel somewhere to the opposite wall and she can feel his body heat spike. “Though I can see why you would think so… that particular image was very specifically fabricated to procure a reaction.”

Rey’s eyes widen.

“Wait so… it was *made up*?” She squawks, feeling sillier than ever. “You mean he—“

Hux smirks, “Your Master has a wicked sense of humor, and he particularly enjoys getting rises out of me. Or have you not noticed how he tends to set up a conversation specifically to make us all uncomfortable?”

“Does he succeed often?” She asks, shifting under his weight until his arm falls and his hand carefully laces around her waist. Her heart does a sad little hiccup as it tries to beat fast, then stop, then start all at the same time.

Hux tilts his head and it brings him closer. She feels his hair tickling her forehead, but she doesn’t dare move. She’s not questioning this anymore. She wanted a home, and friends, and people who would hold her when she’s feeling down, and she’s got it all. Hux smiles, a tiny thing, and his eyes soften.

“Sometimes. I think I got him once.”

“Oh?” She asks.

Hux only smiles wider but says nothing else. After a long moment, he finally works up the courage to speak again.

“Did you like it?” He asks cautiously, voice almost a whisper.

Rey closes her eyes. She had avoided thinking about Kylo’s feelings, knowing that doing so threatened to unlock a section of her mind and heart she wasn’t sure she wanted to explore, only for Hux to basically knock on its door and demand entrance. She bites the inside of her cheek, refusing to answer him. Hux hums, realizing he’s not getting an answer, but he doesn’t seem bothered by it. If she could see his face now, she would notice the twitch of full pink lips at her burning cheeks. Instead she looks straight ahead.
They sit like this in silence for a long time, Rey’s head against his collarbone, and Hux playing with a now spent cigarette, twisting it between index and middle finger. Her breathing evens out finally, and Rey allows herself to relax.

“General?” She murmurs.

Hux turns his head down, trying to look at her.

“Hux,” he corrects. Rey hums.

“Hux?” She asks again.

“Hmm?”

Their conversation is slowing down to a series of sounds, quiet and breathy and tired as the hours pass by.

“Thank you,” she finally exhales, and next thing she knows there’s a pair of very warm, very soft lips pushing into the top of her head. She feels that warmth turn into pressing heat, spreading from where his lips rest all the way down, past her limbs and her torso. He doesn’t kiss, just holds his lips there, and Rey’s eyes flutter closed for a second when his voice vibrates against her scalp.

“You’re welcome, little one.”

Hux shifts under Rey hours after she’d fallen asleep. He’d stayed in bed, legs crossed at the ankles, fingers gently playing with her braid while she let out soft breathy sighs against him, sleeping soundly. Despite the warm girl pressed uncomfortably — or, really, very, very comfortably — into his side, Hux’s mind is elsewhere as he gently caresses her silky hair.

Kylo had kissed her.

That revelation had made his body behave in ways he couldn’t even explain to himself hours before. One moment he was fine, the next he was trying hard to avoid looking at her mouth as his body impulsively tried to force him to lean forward and claim her lips as well. It hadn’t been the rational part of his brain thinking. It had been the part of his psyche that had been conditioned to competing with Ren. He knows as much now that he’d had hours to examine that reaction.

She didn’t need that. She needed to be comforted, and he’d long promised himself he’d do anything it took to keep her happy. So instead he’d pulled her into him, forcing his heart to pump blood in steady beats rather than the erratic drumming it had decided to take on.

He thinks back to Kylo’s insistence that he admit that he likes Rey.

The second bodily reaction had been his chest squeezing his lungs even as he instructed them to work properly. It had that quality that only pain could achieve, his breathing faltering and his heart trying to catch up to his mind.

He turns down to look at her again.

Knowing Kylo had kissed her made him ache in ways he couldn’t understand, this girl at his side pulling at his strings, tugging under his skin, forcing him to think about the two most uncomfortable things in the universe for him: other people and feelings. He takes in a long breath, gently looping her braid around his index finger, pinching it against his palm with his thumb. It slips like silk.
Coupled with her shifting against his body, it makes his mouth go dry. Still, he’s a gentleman, so he stays as still as humanly possible, only allowing himself to touch her hair. He watches her sleep. Soundly. Untroubled.

*When was the last time you saw her fall asleep around anybody but you, Hux?*

She’d fallen asleep in Kylo’s arms once, so perhaps that made the point entirely moot. She’s sleeping peacefully now. Which only meant her Master would be awake. Trying to avoid giving her nightmares.

How she could not believe that the man cared for her was beyond Hux’s understanding, when he so clearly put her well being above his, going as far as denying himself the rest he so surely needed. But Rey doesn’t know that. How could she?

He grabs the data pad from where it rests on the nightstand and places it on his lap with his free hand, bringing it up to life and quickly sending off a message to Ren.

*She’s here.*
- *Hux*

He leans his head back against the headboard and stares at the ceiling, letting his hand drop again and gently, absentmindedly caressing her waist with his other hand. Rey shifts. His data pad beeps. Hux looks down.

*I know.*
- *K. Ren*

Hux lets out a soft huff of air, trying to keep from waking Rey. Of course Kylo would know. His fingers fly over the board.

*She’s sleeping. You need to tell her.*
- *Hux*

There is no further response.

He looks at the clock on the wall. A few more hours and he’d need to get ready for First Shift. Rey shifts next to him once more, her bare leg bending up and over his own thigh, and Hux’s breath catches. Her knee and calf rest right in the crook of his legs, and he unlocks his ankles. Her calf falls right in the middle and she scoots closer, and Hux has to practice measured, even breaths. He rests his hand on his stomach and watches her for a moment longer, then closes his eyes. He needed some sleep if he was going to even remotely function like a human being should come First Shift.

_Slowly, Hux falls into comfortable, quiet sleep for the first time in years._
He should get up. He had First Shift to attend to, as well as the work he’d left half-done when Rey had stumbled into his quarters. Hux licks his teeth and contemplates for a second before picking up his data pad and sending a message to Phasma. He’d be there a little later than expected, and she had full control of the ship for the early morning.

Not two minutes later Phasma replies that she’d been given the same directive by Lord Ren, and not to worry about it, Sir.

Hux arches an eyebrow. This is the second time the First Knight of Ren had gone over his head, handing command of his ship to his Captain.

He hears a small breathy huff from Rey, and it’s not a nightmare, so he relaxes under her weight, his fingers lazily caressing her shoulder.

He should get up.

He shouldn’t be doing this.

He shouldn’t be touching her, or relishing in the warmth of her body pressed against his, or how her leg is still pinning his down. Hux gulps on empty air and lets a small breath escape him. Rey bunches her fingers deeper into his chest. He licks his lips and looks down at her again.

Kylo’s been up and about all night. She hadn’t woken up in a fright. Hux makes a mental note to speak with the man again. It had been almost four weeks since Rey’s arrival on the Finalizer. This was starting to get ridiculous. He couldn’t just forego sleep. Granted, it technically is none of Hux’s business, but — Hux reassures himself — he couldn’t have a weapon be completely exhausted. He’d noticed the dark circles slowly pooling under Kylo’s eyes every time he saw the man prowling the ship, made harsher by the fluorescent lights when he’d come to Hux with a tight voice about delivering a data pad to Rey. Kylo Ren had even said please. It was a sure sign of exhaustion. Hux licks his lips again.

He should get up.

He doesn’t.

Instead he allows himself to fall asleep for a little while longer.

The next time he wakes Rey’s turned from him onto her back, and Hux is finally free to untangle his arm from under her. He instead leans up on his elbow until he can watch her, feeling a little like the voyeur he had accused Kylo of being not that long ago. He pushes himself off the bed, walking towards the kitchenette and setting himself to making a cup of kaf. By the time he walks back into the room, Rey’s sitting on his bed rubbing at sleepy eyes, looking entirely too becoming in his t-shirt. Hux averts his eyes.

“What time is it?” She asks. Hux brings his kaf to his lips, letting it almost burn his tongue when he looks at her over the rim of the mug.

“Early. Go back to sleep.”

Rey frowns, then yawns with an obscene-sounding stretch that makes his belly flop, and Hux has to once again look away. Rey falls back on the bed and stares at the ceiling, and Hux shakes his head.

If sharing a bathroom had felt domestic, this was just so far past the line of intimate. He tells his brain to shut up.
Rey bolts back up, her eyes wide.

“Uh…” she starts, blushing, looking around the bed. He smirks. The realization that she’d fallen asleep in his bed with him in it had hit her like a brick.

Rey ignores his earlier suggestion of sleep as she inspects the room, then looks out the door towards the couch.

“Where is Millicent?” She asks, clearly confused and trying to clear the air, and Hux has to look down.

The cat hadn’t been in his rooms for the last so many weeks. He had been in no mental capacity to be able to take care of her, so Phasma had taken the now grown kitten into her own quarters to care for her. By the time Rey had returned he’d forgotten, too busy having his every waking thought clouded by the woman in his bed. He stares at his mug of kaf. The longer he stalls the more suspicious Rey gets, so he goes with the truth.

“I—ah… I wasn’t… I couldn’t care for her while you were gone…” he starts, then stops, reconsidering. “Busy.”

Rey’s eyes narrow at him and she says nothing, so he continues.

“Phasma’s taking care of her.”

Rey relaxes.

“Go back to sleep, Rey,” he orders, and Rey’s nostrils flare. He shakes his head, Rey looks about ready to balk. His mind returns to his thought before she had interrupted. So young, his little one.

Little one. She certainly could be, sometimes. He watches her narrow her eyes at him and it only reminds him that she’s, what, fourteen years his junior? It was sometimes easy to forget just how young she is when she’s always so strong and willful. Still, he walks forward and slowly sits on the lip of the bed when she makes no move to return to sleep.

“I’m sorry,” he offers, “I should have gotten up. You never said you wanted to sleep h—“

She cuts him off with a glare and a yank on the sheets until he’s forced to move closer or fall off the bed.

“I chose to come in. I chose to stay. I chose to fall asleep.” She says, tone hard, “You didn’t do that. It was my choice.”

Hux can’t help the small tug of his lips as he takes her face in. That’s right. No one would tell her what to do or what not to do. He gives a small shrug.

“Fine. But…” he looks at his hands, feeling entirely uncomfortable now. “You’re young, Rey. Far younger than I. Some would not see this as, ah— appropriate.”

Rey scrambles up the bed and grabs him by the chin as she kneels on the mattress, forcing him to look up, and the he shivers. His hands ache to reach up and grab her hips. Instead he forces them to remain on his lap.

“I chose to stay.” Rey intones, arching an eyebrow as if to dare him to argue. He’d lose that battle. He nods.
She has him wrapped around her little finger.

If he needed any confirmation, this was it.

That realization is so sudden Hux’s intake of air lodges itself in his throat, choking his airways. He clears his throat with a raspy sound instead and looks away. Rey, too satisfied with having bent him to her will, flops back to a seating position and her legs bounce. Hux lifts himself up from the lip of the mattress and walks towards his closet. It was time to start getting ready.

When he returns, she’s asleep once more. He makes a mental note to get Millicent back for Rey.

Hux takes over from Phasma sometime around nine in the morning, exactly five hours into the First Shift. The Captain quietly acknowledges his presence before moving to stand aside. Hux walks slowly up and down the bridge, listening to all morning reports. He nods to several things, orders changes to a few others, inspects their course. They’ve been orbiting a small, uninhabited system, waiting for orders from the Supreme Leader before moving. The other two Star Destroyers belonging to the First Order were similarly stationed elsewhere. When all reports are given he walks into the small office to the back of the bridge, closing the door behind him.

He pulls up a screen and checks all reports from the other ships. Everything seems to be in working order, which is both surprising and entirely not, considering how messed up the last so many weeks had been for him. Still, it was a testament to all the regulations he’d put in place that his fleet ran like a well oiled machine. He gives a self-satisfied nod to the empty room and continues checking down the rather obnoxious list.

There are plenty of requisitions. Hux lets out an irritated breath. He had more important things to attend to. He’d need to pass these onto someone else. Hux runs through the mental list of officers at his beck and call, zeroing in on the small, bright-eyed and at times overeager Dopheld Mitaka. The man may be over-eager but he was fantastically efficient. He’d pass these onto him. The man could always take on more responsibility.

The next couple of messages are dismissed in similar fashion until he reaches one from Kuat Drive Yards. His first shipment of weapons would be on their way, exactly two months after negotiations. The Kuati were nothing if not punctual. There had still been the two weeks it had taken Hux to return to the Finalizer to complete payment, but soon enough they would be armed again with a first wave of blasters and artillery. Hux adds this to Mitaka’s pile to follow up on.

He thinks back to the girl dozing in his bed and his ears warm, and Hux gives himself a small mental shake.

He needs to concentrate.

Concentration doesn’t last long, however, when he remembers what he must do next. The next message he sends is a rather demanding one for Ren to attend to him at once. A request, of course, as Kylo had done so many times before. That done, he goes through the rest of his documents, signing or dismissing to send to Mitaka as he deems fit. By the time Ren stalks into his office, he’s mostly worked down about a third of the list.

“Close the door behind you,” he instructs and Kylo complies, letting the door fall shut behind him quietly. Kylo removes his helmet and hoists it up under his arm, looking down at Hux from an
impossible height. Hux licks the inside of his teeth.

“You need to tell her.” He finally states.

There’s a small strangled sound that Hux has come to recognize as Kylo Ren’s attempt at holding back a growl. He looks up and arches an eyebrow.

“Is this all you’ve called me in here to discuss, General?” Kylo bites through gnashed teeth. “I can assure you I plan on doing so, when it’s appropriate.”

Hux finally tilts his head back, regarding the mountain of death standing before him.

“You mean when you’re not kissing her silly?” He snides. Kylo stops short.

Serves you right, you little— No particular thorny insult comes to mind. Hux regards Kylo intently. He frowns.

Kylo plops his helmet on Hux’s desk and Hux cringes internally. There’s going to be another chink in the wood there. He knows it. The count will go up two. He forces himself to maintain eye contact with Kylo as the man leans over his helmet and gets uncomfortably close. When the Knight speaks next, it’s with the calm collected voice of a man issuing an ultimatum.

“This is between my apprentice and I, Hux.”

So. He’s back to being called by his last name. Hux purses his lips, refusing to back down. Their noses are now inches apart.

“So it? Who was it that came to my rooms last night, and who was it that gave Phasma the order to take over command this morning? Do not kid yourself. You have dragged me into this as surely as you have Rey the second you asked me to go to her.”

There’s another strangled sound in Kylo’s throat and Kylo’s eyes narrow. It reminds Hux of a rabid, big black dog just waiting to be given a reason to bite. Hux stays very still.

This has been a thorn in Hux’s and Ren’s side now for two months. Hux had forgotten about it in her absence, but every time he sees her now he can’t help but notice the small downturn of her lips as she tries to fight exhaustion. He couldn’t allow both Ren and Rey to be permanently spent. They’d be of no use to him that way.

“When was the last time you slept, Kylo?” He asks the same question Kylo had asked him weeks ago, and the name rolls off his tongue before he can stop it.

It might not have been the smartest thing to do. He breathes in sharply as Kylo leans just a little closer, and Hux gets a perfect view of too many beauty marks and tiny moles as Kylo’s mouth parts a hair, his pupils blowing for a second until the Knight of Ren blinks it away. Then Kylo gives him a sardonic smile, tiny on his full lips.

“That’s none of your concern.” Kylo pulls back and hoists up his helmet. “If that’s all? I have actual business to attend to, General.”

Kylo had started doing this the second Hux had gotten into his face about his feelings. He hadn’t expected anything else from the man. They were two alpha males forever engaged in war with each other, except this time, while it was still about control over the other, it was… Hux couldn’t quite describe what it was. Words had once again failed him where a Force sensitive is concerned.
Whatever it was, however, it was still as passionate a tug of war for control as it had always been, just different. Hux schools his features to indifference and stares the Knight down.

“Not quite,” he replies, setting his jaw. This is why he’d called Kylo here to begin with, and he would not be derailed. This time he remembers the man’s honorific. “You will tell her, Ren. Or I will.”

Kylo’s posture stiffens slowly and he turns his head very, very carefully to look at Hux. Hux simply digs in his heels and waits for the hell he may have just brought on his head. Nothing comes. That in itself is scarier.

Kylo’s eyes flutter closed and he can tell the man’s just… tired. Perhaps tired of fighting him on everything. Hux can’t deny that he’s a little too tired with it as well.


“Where are you going anyway?” Hux asks. The man’s missions were not his concern, not really, but he’d found himself immensely curious about them. It was hard not to, after being surrounded by nothing but Force users for so long now.

Kylo turns his head and stares at the wall next to him, inspecting the boring, dull metal. Hux can’t see what he was looking for, so he just simply watches the man before him, trying not to crane his neck too hard.

“Snoke’s sending me looking for Imperial artifacts. Again. Probably to distract me from the fact that he’s summoned all of my Knights to his temple.”

Hux arches an eyebrow, leaning back to really look this time.

“Without you?” He asks, bewildered. Kylo nods and Hux gets a perfect view of the man’s chiseled jaw line setting hard, a throbbing vein popping at Kylo’s temple under his usually beautiful hair. It’s messy now with the persistent, exasperated tug and run of long fingers through it. He almost asks how he knows, then realizes he’d seen a ship depart in the logs, Yathe’s ship.

Hux’s eyes narrow.

He pushes his chair back slowly, carefully, and walks around his desk to stand next to Kylo. The office is small, and it forces him only a foot from the taller man. At least from this vantage point, he doesn’t feel like an ant looking at a giant. Kylo’s eyes lower to half mast as he takes Hux in. A quiet moment. Another to add to Hux’s growing list, now slowly intertwining with the ones he’d shared with Rey. Hux studies Kylo’s face slowly, memorizing all of it, eyes landing on Rey’s scar.

“What does it mean, exactly, to not be summoned?” He queries carefully. Kylo’s breathing slows. Neither man moves closer. Neither man moves farther away.

“It means he doesn’t want me to know what his plans are,” comes the low murmur from Kylo, eyes hard on Hux’s. “He’s—“

He’s looking for a replacement. But why involve the Knights? Why now? Why, while Rey is still blocked?

Hux looks down at the space between them, at his polished shoes criss-crossing with Kylo’s durasteel-tipped boots. When he looks up at Kylo next, Kylo’s inspecting him with that same intensity he wears like an armor. Hux takes in air sharply.
“You will take care of her,” Kylo finally speaks in a near whisper. It’s not a question. It’s a demand for a promise, the implication of Snoke’s decision heavy in the air. In Kylo’s absence, Rey would be under Hux’s care. Should anything happen…

Hux nods. Kylo returns it with a small twitch of his head.

When the Knight moves to push his hair back and don his helmet, Hux’s hand flies up and stops him mid-motion. He forces Kylo to look at him again, and Hux’s left eye twitches just enough that the Knight zeroes in on it. Hux forces himself to let out the breath he’d been holding. He drops Kylo’s hand and slowly moves his gloved hands to the man’s cowl, bunching into it the same way he had the night Snoke had tortured them both. A reminder that Kylo doesn’t miss. Hux watches the man’s face harden.

They always do this, he realizes. They dance around each other on their tiptoes, taking but never willing to give. Not unless Rey’s involved. Hux clenches his jaw for a long time, when he finally relaxes his muscles, his jaw disengages with a pop.

“You will return.” Hux murmurs, tone hard. It’s a demand. He’s not about to lose one of his Force users.

Blue eyes find Kylo’s and glue him in place for a moment that stretches onto eternity. Hux drops his hand and gives himself a small nod.

“We’ll deal with it,” he promises. We.

Kylo nods and places his helmet over his head, exiting Hux’s office quietly.

Hux watches him go, narrowing his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Always thankful to EjBlaKit for being a wonderful beta <3 go read her stuff.
When Hux arrives for dinner Rey’s already sitting there. She’d let herself in for once, he muses with satisfaction as Rey stares out the big windows into space, clearly unaware of his arrival or perhaps unbothered by it. Rey had reluctantly agreed to join him after some coaxing in the face of Ren’s departure, and for the last two days she had shown up at seven sharp, dining quietly except for small conversation, though often enough he’d catch her staring out into the starry void, distracted.

Much like right now.

Hux clears his throat, announcing himself as he sheds his coat. Rey’s head swivels around in alarm before she realizes it’s him.

“So, hadn’t noticed after all.”

He walks towards her to find a bottle of wine already open and the glasses filled. Or, really, his is full. Hers is half-way empty. Hux arches an eyebrow.

“Everything alright?” He asks. Rey nods absentmindedly and he follow her line of sight towards the view as he places his hand gently on the table. Her eyes travel down to the gesture; her lips tug up, no doubt remembering their conversation in bed. Hux shakes his head, glad she can’t see him.

“He’ll be back,” he murmurs.

He would be back. The one question would be whether he’d still be Snoke’s golden son or a cast away, which could complicate Hux’s life immensely. He purses his lips then forces himself to relax just as Rey looks up at him.

“I wasn’t thinking about him,” she retorts, eyes widening as her cheeks flush. Hux smirks and she flushes further.

Sure you aren’t… he croons to himself. She’d been informed of his leaving via their bond, he’d learned, and had been distraught since.

“I just…” she says, “I should have apologized. It’s only been a month since my return and…”

Hux studies her while she fumbles for words; Rey lets out a disgruntled huff. The stubborn girl — woman, Hux reminds himself — that he’s come to know so well isn’t one to stumble for words.
She’s determined in her convictions, bullheaded and fiery. Rey had become fidgety in the absence of Ren, her mind elsewhere even as she spent her time aboard the Finalizer.

“He knows,” he says, trying to placate her.

Rey nods once, more for her benefit than his, and he offers her a small, guarded smile, then the door beeps with their food and the rest of dinner time is a quiet affair.

Constant. Routine. Calm and familiar and right. These were things that Hux strived for. They soothed him like a balm. A place for everything and everything in its place. Well, not quite everything. They’re missing one other person.

Rey snatches glances at Kylo’s empty chair and Hux glances at Rey in the silence.

“So, what have you learned today?” He asks, tiring of the silence.

Rey smiles, a bit of her usual fire sparking in her eyes.

They spend the rest of the evening discussing her lessons. Mostly, Rey talks and Hux listens attentively. It distracts her from Ren’s absence, and that feels like enough. When the end of the night comes Rey hesitates, eyes roving over his quarters. Hux narrows his eyes, all forgotten except for the girl in front of him. Another one of his habits lately, to stop everything and pay attention to her whims. To Kylo’s whims as well.

“May I stay in your quarters tonight?” She asks, finally summoning the courage from somewhere.

“Are yours not to your liking?” He asks, though he knows why she’s requesting this. It would be the nightmares. It was always the nightmares.

Rey breathes in deeply.

“Yes,” Hux replies before she can change her mind, before he can change his. “You may stay.”

He feels silly for sharing so willingly, like a child so willing to please. Then again, these quarters have been hers since the day Hux dumped her in them with a warning not to break anything, he admits to himself. Everything from the couch to that second chair and now even his bed. Everything screamed Rey at him, a collection of memories to back up her claim. Hux simply lived here.

The thought warms him in ways he cannot describe, yet Hux could feel the unease rolling off of her in waves. She’d made it very clear in the past that she would not impose, or be considered dead weight. He walks over to her and Rey’s eyes glue to his face, traveling up the closer he gets. He gives her another small smile — one more of those things he only managed for her alone — before gently reaching out. He shouldn’t, he knows. He has no right to touch her. Still, his fingers gently caress her jawline and it’s such a thrill when her eyes widen fractionally and her lips part. A soft puff of hot breath caresses his hand. He lets his hand drop reluctantly.

“You’re always welcome here,” he reiterates. It earns him a toothy grin that sends pleasure shooting down his limbs at having made the right choice.

Good.

And this is how Hux finds himself cradling Rey to sleep as they had that first night. It becomes habit by the third night, and it seems to help. Her nightmares become less frequent.

The whole situation is innocent enough. There are no inappropriate touches exchanged, only a repeat
of that first time, Rey cradled into his side until she falls asleep as Hux caresses her hair. Surprisingly, having her nearby allows him to sleep, a miracle he’d never thought he would experience: restful nights.

Habit. Constants.

His life was made up of them, and this would soon become another one. Most nights they would talk until she fell asleep. Some nights he’d walk in to find her already dozing, and he’d carefully lower himself to her side, trying not to let the mattress sink too much. Rey would assume her place in the crook of his arm, head resting on his shoulder, and that’s how the alarm would wake them in the mornings.

Occasionally Hux wonders what Kylo would say if he saw them like this, while staring at the unlit cigarette held between his index and middle finger; his other hand gently sweeps against the baby hairs at Rey’s temple, the rhythm of her breathing pressing against his ribs. He hadn’t smoked as much since her return. Kylo would probably have a few choice words to say, Hux is sure, but he can’t bring himself to care all that much.

She had been left in his charge, after all, and Rey was sleeping soundly, and so was he. That seemed like a fair enough trade.

He turns his head and looks at Rey. She’d made him soft, if only by allowing him to see a hint of the vulnerable side of her. He would have used that vulnerability against any other person. It was coded into his DNA. With her, he finds himself wanting to protect it. He gently caresses the shell of her ear with the tip of his index finger; Rey stirs and grumbles under her breath. His lips quirk up.

His wild, clever little thing.

Except she isn’t his.

She is Kylo’s.

Hux thinks back to the Knight of Ren’s insistence that he admit to liking her. He does. He knows that now. With her tucked so preciously warm and alive against his side, with nothing but her breathing to disturb the silence, he can’t deny himself that small truth. That giant truth.

Things are moving too fast.

Five months since Starkiller’s destruction and, instead of frantically working towards building another super weapon as he’d envisioned he would be so many months ago, he’s doing this. Too fast. Still, he indulges. Just this once. Plans for bringing order the galaxy could wait one night.

Hux presses his lips to her forehead gently, giving her a small chaste kiss before closing his eyes. He needed sleep as well.

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Kylo paces up and down the rubble of the old Jedi temple, throwing out his senses for remnants of any relics. Nothing.

Most of the items of the Force, both Jedi and Sith artifacts, had been destroyed. He’d found a few holocrons in the past, having dutifully passed them on to Snoke, but the search this time is mind numbing, especially because he knows it’s meant to be fruitless, a distraction to get Kylo away while
his Master plotted behind his back. He stews about it in silence, stalking the destroyed halls, spotting old helmets and bones here and there from the bodies of fallen soldiers and Jedi. Somebody should give them a proper burial, but that person would not be him. He takes a deep breath and exits the temple, grit and dust clinging to his cowl, and he’s thankful for the air filter of his helmet.

It’s a fruitless search, but perhaps not a fruitless trip.

He spots whom he’d been waiting for. A tall, lithe figure, dressed in black from head to toe, approaches with the measured glide of a monk that has all the time in the universe. Yathe.

He waits at the temple entrance, out of the reach of the light. There is nothing recognizable about her when she’s in full garb and helmet on, layers of heavy fabrics and fingers bound in leather.

“Lord Ren,” comes the modulated hiss. It sounds nothing like her voice. Her helmet’s been tinkered with to make her voice deeper, rougher. He’d gone so far as to tease her once about it eons ago. She had not liked him for it.

“Lady Yathe,” he returns the greeting. There will be no teasing tonight.

A couple of seconds go by as Yathe stands up to full height, her leather gloves twitching over the edges of her saber as if considering. He tenses, ready to fight if necessary. What had happened?

“You know what happens if you try,” his voice rumbles, his own fingers tightening around his saber, waiting to be given a reason to ignite it. It would be one sick joke for Snoke to have his second be the one to deliver the killing blow. How fitting, to send his one friend against him.

The air remains silently tense for another moment before Yathe drops her hand and nods.

“Forgive me, old habits die hard,” she speaks, then her hands move up towards her hood. She throws it back and disengages the hydraulic system of her mask, taking it off and baring her open face to him. A surrender. It’s much harder to strike a friend when you can see their face. Kylo tilts his head, considering.

Habits died hard for all knights of Ren. Unfortunately for Snoke, Kylo had Yathe on his side, even if she needed to be reminded of her loyalties every once in a while.

He removes his own and props it under his arm, towering over Yathe even though the woman is unusually tall.

“Well, then?”

Yathe tightens her lips over her teeth.

“He’s sent us all on a chase after the Skywalker,” Yathe gets right to the point. There’s no reason to beat around the bush. “Whoever strikes him down becomes the First amongst us with his full support.”

So, Snoke had decided to replace him after all, though not by ambush as he’d originally thought. It must have still been discussed as a possibility by Yathe’s actions, though. For anyone to take his place as First, they’d have to kill him, even with Snoke’s support behind them. He had to admit, that was quite the offer the creature had made. Kylo pulls in air through clenched teeth, eyes narrowing. Why would Snoke make a move now, involving himself in the affairs of the Knights when he’d never done so before? Kylo turns the question over in his mind. The only thing that’s changed is Rey’s arrival, and the only one powerful enough within the Knights’ ranks to take Kylo down would be the woman in front of him now.
Yathe studies him calmly.

“He sent us one by one,” she says.

Kylo arches an eyebrow.

“Skywalker may be old, but he’s not weak,” he replies. Kylo himself may be young, but he’s not stupid. Luke Skywalker had been weak and passive in turning down Rey, but the old Jedi had survived against all of his Knights once. The silent thought that passes between them sparks then turns to fire.

“Seems like you’re not the only one up for replacement.”

Her words confirm his suspicions. Amongst his Knights, only Yathe had been smart enough to see through the ploy, now that she’s also aware of Snoke’s manipulations.

He lets out a long, drawn out breath, throwing his senses out through the bond towards Rey.

Kylo receives a foggy calm. Asleep, somewhere. He pushes at the bond, forcing himself into it firmly until he can not only sense her but feel her. This is new to him, trying to feel through her. It had happened a few times before — seeing through her eyes in a moment of panic, feeling through her a ghost of a touch. He’d never actively tried, however, but in that second it becomes paramount to him to check on her wellbeing.

He detects no pain. No injuries. Only soft blankets under her that press like a ghost against his thighs and… breathing. A heartbeat that is not hers against her chest. Ghostly warmth. She’s… pressed up to someone.

*Hux.*

There is nobody else she would allow around her so intimately. Not even him.

They’re sharing a bed together. He pushes into Rey’s sleepy mind. There’s no heat there, no desire, just the heady sensation of comfortable sleep, of dreamless rest. Kylo swallows, hesitating on his gut reaction for a moment before deciding this would be okay.

Good.

She’s safe. His hand absentmindedly touches the small pouch at his pocket. Snoke had not moved against her. He’d warned Hux to watch over her, since the most logical move after killing the First Knight would be to target his apprentice, but Rey was safe, which meant Snoke wanted *her* to be the only one left. Why?

He returns his attention to Yathe.

He’d been stuck on this stupid little moon searching for artifacts — but mostly pacing, waiting for the Knight to join him — for days now. It would be a few more days before he was able to return to the Finalizer, but he could no longer wait around. This new declaration from Yathe’s lips only means one thing. It’s time for him to rein in *his* Knights, to claim power or die trying. He would not allow himself to be disposed of.

“Go. Corral the other Knights and bring them aboard the Finalizer. *Quietly.* You surely know where they all dispersed to.”

Yathe knows. She always knows everything.
“Good. Then bring them to me.”

Yathe bows and turns on her heel, taking off, back towards her ship. Kylo stalks in the opposite direction toward his. He counts the days it will take. A week. A week to plan aboard his command shuttle, and however long it took for the Knights to arrive on the flagship. Time feels as though it were running too fast.

The days stretch on and Rey’s about to lose her mind. Kylo had left on a mission she’d only vaguely been informed about, leaving her to her own devices for almost a week while he went searching for artifacts for Snoke.

Thinking of the creature made her bones chill to ice. She shakes out a shudder and works through her paces with Luke’s lightsaber, grunting from the force of a particularly vicious swivel. It’s not as effective without the resistance of Kylo’s saber. She gnashes her teeth, then goes over the steps carefully. One, two. Swivel.

Kylo had informed her, through the bond no less, that he would be off ship for a week, two at most. His second in command had also left. He hadn’t had the courage to show up and tell her to her face and it grated. Granted, Rey would have probably forced him to stand outside and speak past the closed door but… she stops, feeling rather listless.

So what if he’d kissed her? It was just a kiss. Rey wipes sweat off her forehead and returns to her opening stance.

No, it wasn’t just a kiss. A kiss with no emotion she could have handled. Kylo had drowned her in a tidal wave that had left her gasping for air. She had once thought his careful block of the bond was meant to keep her out from seeing his true dark side. Now she realizes exactly why he’d carefully shielded his mind since her arrival, only letting her see what he had wanted her to see. It had set off a chain of reactions inside her own mind and Rey had given into the kiss, if only for a second, and that had scared her most of all.

She lets out an irritated breath and deactivates her saber, the blue glow disappearing from the room. She looks around once. She’d returned to do good things, not get tangled up in feelings, or to start acting like a young girl who’d never been touched. She couldn’t allow herself the distraction. Still--

After Kylo’s departure Rey had quickly fallen into a rhythm with the other constant in her life: General Hux. She’d allowed herself to be lulled to sleep almost every night now for the last week, and her mind kept coming up with flashes of icy blue and golden brown when least expected.

Like now.

Hux and Kylo were like night and day from each other, and from her. Yet somehow she kept circling them, locked onto them inexplicably even before she’d returned to the Finalizer. It had only intensified after they had gone so far out of their way to make this place home for her.

She’d felt Hux kiss her forehead the previous night and had to suppress every desire to open her eyes and stare at him. It had been chaste, but her body had responded in the same way it had when Kylo’s lips had come crashing down on hers. His proximity was both a balm to soothe and a match to set her alight in a way she wasn’t sure she minded, yet left her reeling in confusion. Thinking of Kylo
Ren did the same thing.

Too close. Hux and Rey were too close, yet she can’t seem to make herself stop when being there helps her sleep.

She takes in a deep breath while regulating her breathing. Hours of exertion helped take out the incessant itch between her shoulder blades that something, somehow wasn’t quite right, that forces were moving beyond her control, that Kylo Ren wasn’t where he should be — in this training room, training her. She shakes her head. There is no time to be worrying about men when she had come back with the explicit purpose of doing good. She thinks of Finn in stormtrooper outfitting. Rey had been aboard the Finalizer for a month and she’d done nothing about what she’d promised herself she’d set out to do, getting too caught up in training and…

Men, she huffs, berating herself and killing the thought.

She stalks out of the training room. A few stormtroopers give her wary glances, undoubtedly wondering why the First Knight’s apprentice is prowling the halls, but they mostly leave her alone. She still hears them whisper as soon as she turns the corner, however. Rey puts it out of her mind. She would make it a point to get to know them, but first she needs a few things.

Rey finds an information station, then follows it to the next one, and the next one, until she finds herself at the bridge. She’s never been able to see much of the ship, but some of it is familiar enough from her days following Hux. As soon as the doors hiss open two stormtroopers block her path. She’s not meant to be here.

“Turn around. You’re not authorised,” comes the stern voice of a stormtrooper. There’s no malice. He’s simply stating fact.

Over the stormtrooper’s shoulder she sees Hux’s head turn fractionally towards the disruption. His brows rise a degree as he spots her head visible over the stormtroopers’ plastoid shoulders.

“Let her in,” Hux demands. The troopers snap back into place as if yanked by an unseen force, back to their stoic positions at either side of the door. Rey shoots them a glance and an apologetic smile. One of of the stormtroopers shifts his weight.

She walks up to Hux and gives him an apologetic smile that he doesn’t return, and Rey remembers where she is and why she’s here.

“Do you have a moment?” She asks. Hux regards her for a long heartbeat with a stern expression, ever the commander of his ship. She’s sure he’s not usually addressed like this by his officers but then again, she’s not one of those.

“My office,” he prompts, walking away at a hard clip and leaving her to follow.

This Hux is the General everyone else knows. There are no soft smiles, no gentle touches, no warm voice. Just a leader instructing a much lesser member of his ship to fall in step. Rey takes a look around the room and spots Phasma. Phasma nods to her once in acknowledgement, and Rey speeds after Hux. Once inside their office he closes the door and—

He relaxes, his shoulders losing a degree of stiffness, his expression no longer a shard of sharp glass. He only relaxes a little, of course. He wouldn’t be the General she knows and trusts otherwise. Funny, that.

“Is everything alright?” He asks, studying her face, “I admit your seeking me on the bridge is, ah— … new.”
Rey clears her throat and looks around. She’d never been in this office.

The other one, his private one, she’d become very familiar with. This one’s new. It’s smaller and colder, but very distinctively his. Everything has a place. There isn’t a speck of dust anywhere. Rey looks back up at him.

“I need something to do before I lose my mind,” she says truthfully.

She’d mostly spent her days training by herself, but there was no one there to challenge her, and she had no idea on how to go about loosening her Force block on her own, which left her mostly staring listlessly at the walls. She’d gone over the documents Kylo had left for her twice already, learning as much as she could about the history of the Empire, of the Knights of Ren, of politics. She’d almost memorized it all. It still wasn’t enough. The only times she had human interaction was when she’d walk into Hux’s quarters for dinner then sleep.

Hux regards her with obvious amusement.

“And what would you like me to do about it? It’s not like I can train with you,” he replies, tone light. Rey pinches her nose.

“You could… help me with combat?” She poses helpfully. In truth she wasn’t sure if he could, but she’d been cradled into his side. The man was not soft. He must squeeze in exercise and combat somewhere. Hux snorts, cutting that offer short, though she doesn’t miss how his eyes brighten for a moment.

“We have sim rooms for the stormtroopers, if you’d like to try with those, though I assure you you’d be surrounded by a whole lot of sweat.”

Rey’s nose scrunches. She wasn’t unfamiliar with sweat. Still, to be dumped in a room full of people she doesn’t know, after spending all her time alone, seems daunting.

“I don’t think it would be… appropriate for me to train with you, Rey,” Hux finally says, seeing her discomfort. “You and I, well—“

“Well, what?” She huffs.

Marker, fine. He didn’t need to make such a big deal out of it. Hux still hesitates.

“Your Master is a jealous man,” he replies, as if this would explain everything and make perfect sense.

Rey bares her teeth..

“My Master doesn’t own me,” Rey snarls. Hux tilts his head and regards her. Hux gives her a tiny smile as if having suddenly realized something.

“No, I guess he does not,” he says.

“Is there anyone else who can train with me, then?” She asks perhaps a little more testily than necessary. Hux arches an eyebrow at her tone then looks off into the distance towards the door.

“There is always Phasma,” he offers.

Rey smiles at the suggestion. “Would it be okay? I don’t want to impose,” Rey says, tone hopeful. Phasma was Hux’s second. Asking her to train with Rey would mean taking her away from her
duties. Hux looks at his desk, running fingers against the wood grain.

“I will schedule her hours and then inform you. I do not doubt she would be glad to be of service.”

Rey nods. Phasma would do wonderfully.

Good. That’s one thing done. She’s about to speak when she notices Hux’s left eye twitch, his fingers curling into themselves on the surface of his desk, and stalls her next sentence. She frowns. He’s hesitating.

Then Hux reaches up and gives her cheek a small caress, his expression curiously blank.

“It’s not that I don’t want to train with you, Rey,” he finally whispers as his fingers trail down her jaw to gently cup her chin, forcing her attention on his. “You understand that, right?”

She inhales deeply, sharply, unable to look away. He can do this to her with such ease, demand her attention even as her pulse slowed, then hurried rapidly to catch up. The other side of the coin to Kylo Ren, who elicited the same physical responses, though in entirely different ways. Rey nods and Hux drops his hand, and she watches him bodily armor himself again, all business like.

“Anything else?” He asks, hands carefully at his side for the rest of this exchange.

She remembers what she’d come here to do.

“Yes. I would like to have lunch with the stormtroopers.”

His eyebrows fly up so high she wasn’t sure such a thing could be possible. Rey was used to microexpressions from this guy, not open surprise.

“You want to eat with the stormtroopers,” he repeats.

Rey nods emphatically. “You’re always here, my Master’s off ship.” And eating in my room by myself is killing me, she leaves the words unsaid. She’d so appreciated Hux and Kylo’s gesture of granting her a room, and it is perfect for when she had to spend her hours going over mind-numbing material about the Empire in silence, but she has to admit to herself that the silence isn’t so welcome during meals, or during the night. It reminds her a little bit too much of Jakku. It is part of the reason she’d taken to Hux’s quarters. Somewhere between her being dumped aboard this ship and her standing in Hux’s office Rey had become dependent on human company. Hux tenses, having entirely misinterpreted her words.

“Are our dinners not—” his words are cautious, neutral.

“What— No!” She immediately pipes in, eyes widening when she realizes where he’d been going with that, the thought floating so close to the surface of his mind she plucks it easily. “Why would you even ask—”

“Believe it or not,” he responds, his voice losing a bit of its measured tone towards a more normal one, “I do have feelings.”

Rey blushes.

Feelings. There it is. She shakes her head hard, trying to make a point, though she never drops his gaze.

“If I’m going to be one of you, to live here, I should… get to know them, right?” She asks, hopeful
that the explanation would butter him up into agreeing. He relaxes fully. Hux’s lips tilt at a corner. Smug little bastard. He’d zeroed in on her being one of them.

“Of course,” he finally offers as professionally as possible, “I will discuss it with Phasma as well.”

They face each other for an awkward heartbeat. Only a month and she’d come to rely on this man so much. She looks around before steeling herself for what she’s about to do next, since it feels like the only true way to express her gratitude. Hux looks at her impassively.

Rey steps forward and, much like she’d done once, she wraps her arms around him. This time he doesn’t tense. His arms immediately wrap around her waist.

Habit.

Contact with this man is becoming an easy habit. Hux rests his head atop her hair and they remain in their embrace for an inexplicably long time, his fingers thumbling a small circle on her spine. She finally lets out a long sigh against his jacket.

“Did you mean what you said about Kylo?” She asks. Rey should probably address him by his title even in his absence, but she trusts Hux not to rat her out.

She hadn’t meant to ask so abruptly, but it had been at the forefront of her mind for a while. He looks down, forcing her to move back in order to look at him, the movement bringing their faces uncomfortably close. Their noses are inches away from each other. When Rey tries to step back Hux’s arms tighten and hold her in place, his eyes swinging back and forth on hers as he tries to take both in at the same time.

“About what?”

Rey breathes in a little courage.

“About his doing anything for me,” she murmurs, staring at his chest so she does not have to meet his gaze. The warmth of his arms has started burning into her skin where they wrap around her, but he resolutely tightens them further. This time there’s no space between her torso and his.

Hux gives her an indulging smile, “If only you knew the lengths the man has gone…”

Rey frowns.

“The lengths?” She asks, and Hux watches her with the look of a man who knows a secret she doesn’t. Rey purses her lips.

“A discussion for another time.” His arms drop reluctantly, their embrace broken. He clears his throat as the cold air passes between their now warm chests and Rey looks at the door. When her attention returns to the General, his ears have gone slightly pink. She’s starting to recognize that one. Embarrassment.

Rey looks at her hands, realizing she’s been invading his personal space without permission an awful lot lately.

“Should I— Ah, I mean…sorry about… Hugging you and—“ she stammers. “I’ll stop.”

“No,” Hux answers a little too rapidly. She watches him clamp his mouth closed and they openly stare at each other until he once again clears his throat, “What I mean is. It’s fine.”
She gives him a wary glance, entirely unconvinced, and his eyes crinkle at the corners with a smile he’s holding back.

“Okay,” Rey finally says.

“Okay,” he repeats.

Phasma meets her outside of her rooms.

“Lady Rey,” comes the modulated sound of the woman’s helmet and Rey grins. She’s known of this woman for so long, yet doesn’t even know her face. Still, Phasma had proven to be friendly once, and Rey would be lying if she didn’t admit to being thrilled at seeing her, especially because Phasma would be her new sparring partner. She’d begged Hux again at dinner and watched him smile at her in amusement with a few words about organizing Phasma’s schedule.

“Thank you,” Rey says as a greeting, trying to get the words out fast enough, “I hope I’m not intruding with your schedule.”

Phasma tilts her helmeted head. “My pleasure, Lady Rey.”

They quickly fall in step, a quiet, companionable silence spreading between them. They go the short route this time, past the Knights’ training room. Rey stares back in confusion.

“Weren’t we going in there?” She asks, and Phasma shrugs.

“We’re going to my training room,” Phasma explains. Rey’s brow rise. Rey’s seriously impressed once they step into it minutes later. The walls are positively covered with weights, sim machines and heavy duty training equipment scattered everywhere. Rey gives Phasma a second, appreciative glance.

“Remind me not to ever pick a fight with you, Captain,” she kids. The Captain lets out a small chuckle then removes her helmet. Rey stares.

The crop of beautiful platinum hair is something Rey has never seen in her life. So bright against pale skin. Phasma herself is pretty in a way Rey would not call conventional, but it only makes her more stunning for it in her shiny chrome gear. Phasma gives her a grin. The woman’s unconventionally pretty face turns into the most beautiful one she’s ever seen, right there along with Yathe Ren. Rey grins back.

“You can call me Phasma,” the Captain says, “What would you like to attempt first?”

“Hand to hand,” Rey chimes.

Phasma arches an eyebrow and she sees a glint of teeth.

Rey narrows her eyes. “You don’t think I can take you!”

Phasma grins.

“No, I’m perfectly aware you can take me. Just no Force tricks is all I ask.”

They fall into amiable banter while Phasma sheds her armor, before starting their first bout in the middle of the room, safe enough away from all the equipment. An hour later Rey hurts in places she didn’t know she could hurt. Phasma, despite breaking a sweat, doesn’t seem all that winded. Rey lets
out a grunt where she lies on the floor.

“Okay, maybe I should have used my Force tricks,” she admits, knowing full well she has no tricks up her sleeve, and Phasma chuckles. The Captain offers Rey her arm and Rey allows herself to be pulled up. It’s nice to be able to spend time with another woman, away from all the confusion and feelings and awkward moments with Hux and Kylo Ren.

Phasma and Rey resume their combat, and Rey gives it all she’s got this time. She pulls out a few dirty tricks from her scavenger days that Phasma both grunts at and commends her on, and Rey shoots her a shit eating grin. They never devolve to hair pulling, though. That’s just undignified. When they finally finish somewhere around mid-day, both women are dripping with sweat and panting through their teeth.

“I admit, I didn’t think you had it in you,” Phasma says, large frame bent over as she rests her hands on her knees, catching her breath. Rey’s not much better off.

She’s sprawled on the floor staring at the ceiling. Rey laughs.

“Thank you.”

It is nice. This.

It makes her feel like she belongs just a bit more.

She looks at Phasma.

“Captain, I wanted to ask—“ she begins. Captain Phasma looks at her, hair stringy from sweat and plastered at the woman’s neck and forehead. Rey chews her lip. “Would it be okay if I join you and your men for lunch?”

Phasma’s eyebrows go up a little and for a minute Rey worries that she will be denied, but then she’s given a small smile.

“So you are serious about that?” Phasma asks, dropping her amazonian body next to Rey and sitting with her knees drawn up, elbows on them. “I thought Brendol was kidding.”

Rey tilts her head to look at Phasma.

_Brendol._

“Are you close friends?” Rey asks, immediately wanting to take the words back when Phasma’s open expression dulls. The woman studies Rey for a long time, considering. “It’s not common knowledge,” Phasma says, then gives Rey a small smile, “But you seem to know the man well, so there’s no harm in admitting to it.”

Rey looks back up at the ceiling.

“I admit I know very little,” she replies. She knew the man, as intense as Kylo Ren if only in a different way, smart as a whip and calculating to the core, but also gentle when he wanted to be. She had to admit he was very gentle some days. “I don’t even know his favorite color.”

“Navy Blue,” Phasma answers automatically before clamping her mouth shut, having realized her mistake. Rey laughs.

“I would have figured black,” she kids, and Phasma relaxes. “I’ll have to find out what Ren’s is.”
“Now *that* might be black.”

Rey and Phasma exchange chuckles while shaking their heads.

So nice, being able to spend time around another woman, to talk this way. Phasma stands up and offers her arm again, and Rey gets hoisted up like she weighs nothing more than a feather.

“I admit, Lady Rey, it is nice to have another woman to speak with outside of my own troops, which reminds me I must go to my troops now.” She says, then gives Rey and indulgent smile, “And you’re welcome to join us for lunch.”

So Rey joins Phasma for lunch, following awkwardly behind the mountain of Chrome. All conversation quiets in the cafeteria until all she can hear is the rasp of plastoid shifting as troopers turn their eyes towards the door. Rey looks around. Phasma’s helmet tilts in an encouraging nod before she joins the queue for food, leaving Rey to stare around as everyone else stares at her. She’d heard some of the whispers in the room.

*The new Knight.*

*The girl who’d tried to escape! I remember her. She’s Lord Ren’s student now.*

*Didn’t she manhandle someone? I thought…*  

*She’s kind of pretty.* — Rey’s face burns at that.

*Didn’t she escape twice?*

*Man, she must be powerful. Remember the hangar incident?*

So many whispers. Rey looks around, wondering what to do, until a plastoid shoulder guard bumps her on the shoulder casually, trying to make it seem as though it weren’t intentional. It seems a brave soul has come to help her out.

A small, slender, ginger boy who can be no older than eighteen gives her a crinkly grin, his chocolate brown eyes glinting. “My Lady,” he offers quietly. “People are going to keep staring the longer you stand there.”

Her brows rise.

“Follow me,” he whispers, and keeps walking. Rey follows a few steps behind, pretending she’s not following, but by the time she makes it through the food line he nudges her to follow to a table.

She can feel the weight of every stormtrooper’s eyes on her but Rey stares resolutely ahead. She looks up to try and locate Phasma; the Captain stands at a corner looking straight at her. Or at least, Rey assumes she is, but then Phasma nods. She’s pleased. Rey shoots a small, quivering smile before looking at the stormtrooper beside her. He’s inspecting her curiously.

It’s not a lewd inspection, not Plutt’s greasy side glances or the hungry looks other men had given her in her youth. It’s an honest to the Maker open look of interest. He’d never seen a Force user, she realizes, when she brushes into his mind.

*“Name’s FN-5563”*

She looks up, frowning. Rey’s not particularly the best person at initiating conversation, she knows.
She had never had the occasion to. Still, she’d promised herself she’d make the effort and he had saved her from complete and utter embarrassment, so Rey takes a good look at the slender redhead. He reminds her a little bit of Hux. If Hux were this friendly and open, that is.

“FN—…what?” She asks.

_Finn. That’s how Finn got his name._

The kid repeats his numbers.

“I will never remember that,” she admits, and he chuckles, so Rey leans in. “Is there something else I can call you?”

FN-5563 shrugs, then lowers his voice.

“We’re not supposed to have names, but the other troopers call me Lance.”

Rey grins.

“Lance. Nice name.”

They turn to their food, Lance with enthusiasm, Rey feeling a little awkward. She steals glances around the room and finds that, despite troopers coming in and out at any given time as they finish their meals, at least ten are openly staring at any time. She doesn’t blame them. She’s swathed in black amongst a sea of white plastoid. Rey clears her throat. Lance shoots her a glance, noticing her discomfort.

“Ignore them. You’ve been the talk of the ship for weeks now, but they’re mostly harmless.”

Rey looks at him over a mouthful of something purplish and soft, and surprisingly delicious.

“What have they been saying?”

He tells her, all of it, and Rey’s eyebrows keep rising until she can’t help but laugh. Wow, the Stormtroopers were a gossipy bunch.

By the third day eating with them, most of troopers seem to ignore her entirely. She’ll still get a few glances, but they’re not as overt as they had been the first day. Rey continues sitting next to Lance, addressing him by number if Phasma comes too close, before slipping right back into this new sense of camaraderie. It must be because he looks like Hux. Just a much more relaxed Hux.

At night, Rey would have dinner with Hux and tell him all about it.

Hux would indulge her, of course, like he is this specific night.

“And then, they went over a boulder and—” Rey’s gushing and Hux has an amused little smirk on his lips the whole time as he nods at the appropriate points, carefully sipping his water. He doesn’t seem to mind that she’s taken to eating with the troops, as long as she reserves dinners for him. Rey doesn’t mind either.

“Is that so?” Hux asks after she finishes the last five minutes of her energetic storytelling. Rey narrows her eyes at his obvious amusement.

“Hey, don’t laugh at me. Lance said—“

Hux frowns.
“Lance?”

Kripp.

“Uh…” Rey swallows, looking around the room. “FN-5563, I mean.”

Her amended words don’t make Hux relax, his eyes just narrow further.

“Did you name him Lance?” Hux asks, his voice careful and devoid of emotion. Rey swallows on empty air.

“I…” she frowns, then squares her shoulders. She had made a promise to herself to help these men, and she would stand by it. Rey glares stubbornly. “I don’t think that’s relevant to this story.”

“And this… Lance,” Hux begins, arching an eyebrow, unable to drop it, “What’s he like?”

Rey clears her throat compulsively a handful of times. Hux is watching her closely. Rey knows that the troopers aren’t meant to have individual names. She might have just gotten her one new friend in trouble.

“He’s… Nice.”

Hux’s eyes narrow a degree but he remains silent, sipping at his water as he studies her. Rey buries her face into her food and refuses to look up until dinner’s done.

Once they stand he waves her ahead to go get ready for bed. He’ll be in shortly after. He walks to his office and closes the door, and Rey sighs, leaving for the bedroom. It still felt weird… her sleeping here rather than her own room, or even the couch. Over the last week she had practically moved in.

It’s only temporary, Rey reminds herself. Until I figure out these weird night visions.

She grabs the black t-shirt Hux had given her and a pair of shorts she’d brought over from her own rooms, determined to ignore the last so many awkward minutes of their dinner. She takes the fastest shower she can before throwing on her clothes and walking towards the bed. Their sharing a bed had become codependent, she knew. Rey had less nightmares with someone else in the bed, and Hux seemed to actually look far more rested in the mornings than she’d ever seen him before. So they had taken to sleeping in the same bed and it was all innocent, even if sometimes she’d wake up tangled in him. She’d extract herself quickly enough, but he didn’t seem to mind, and Rey wasn’t willing to sleep by herself, so here they were. She looks around the room after carefully folding her clothes and placing them in the closet — Hux had stared at them on the floor the first day until Rey had forced herself up off the bed and folded them, and she wouldn’t make that mistake twice — then slides in under the sheets.

He’d be in eventually.

______________________

Hux turns on his holoscreen and immediately sets to looking through stormtrooper files. He finally spots the one he’s looking for.

FN-5563.

Two taps later brings up a picture that makes his brows arch. A young, slender redhead with
chocolate brown eyes and the hints of a smile just hidden under the surface.

Lance.

Rey’s new friend.

The tic in his jaw is involuntary but Hux can’t seem to be able to make it stop.

He makes a note in it that reads ‘Person of Interest’ before closing the file, then stares at the closed door, willing it to open so he can stare into his bedroom from where he sits. It does not.

Lance. Slender redhead with chocolate brown eyes and a hint of a mischievous smile.

The burn in his throat is not jealousy. It is not jealousy.

He stalks out on jerky limbs, letting out a rough grunt before entering his room. Their room. Rey’s already under the sheets, looking for all the world like she’s falling asleep on the side of the bed that used to belong to him. Now it belongs to her, and he sleeps on the other side perfectly fine if she’s there.

He walks into his closet, noting her perfectly folded clothes with satisfaction before he grabs his own sleep clothes and enters the refresher. He steps out twenty minutes later with semi damp hair and a roil of irritation that is anything but dampened. Hux slowly pulls the sheets back and scoots in next to Rey, keeping a good few inches of space between them as he stares at the back of her head.

Lance.

She’s going around making best friends with his stormtroopers and giving them names. She’s never even uttered his given name yet a pipsqueak was already being given one. He turns his head and stares at the ceiling.

“Hux?” Comes the soft whisper from the girl beside him. She’s still turned away from him. Hux narrows his eyes.

Lance, Hux growls internally.

“Brendol,” he corrects her. Rey actually turns then, rolling herself under the sheets until she can look at him. Her lips parted in surprise by his correction.

Good.

“Okay… Brendol,” she tastes the name on her tongue. Despite his irritation it sends shivers up and down his spine, but he forces himself to impassivity as Rey continues. “Don’t… punish him, okay? He’s a nice guy.”

Hux regards her for a long moment.

Rey’s head is on her pillow, her braid spread behind her head, and his eyes focus on the way she nibbles at her lower lip.

Soft.

He’s going too soft.

He pulls an arm out from under the blankets and extends it to her, making space at his side.
“Okay. Come here.”

Rey lips quirk up as she scoots in, and so they resume their usual sleeping position. Rey cocooned into his side, Hux sharing in her warmth. It doesn’t take long for them to fall asleep.

She definitely has him wrapped around her little finger.

______________________

Somewhere in hyperspace, on a ship headed for the Finalizer, Kylo Ren feels the bond to his apprentice dampen with the hazy gauze of sleep. It must be nighttime ship-side. A further probe finds proof of what he’d already known he’d find, a second body pressed against hers. Hux’s.

He paces his small ship, his mind moving away from his Apprentice and General. He’d noticed this sleeping arrangement go on for almost a week now. As long as she was safe, that was the only thing that mattered.

He returns to the pilot’s seat and drops into it. It would be another day before he arrived on the flagship. He worries at his lower lip.

Rey and Hux — Brendol — sleeping together. Kylo’s mind swims in a heady concoction of jealousy and want. It isn’t the sort of sick, toxic jealousy he’d felt before. It’s the kind that pushes on his chest because they’ve found comfort in each other while he’s stuck aboard his cold command ship by himself. It hardly seems fair. Still, he’d been the one pushing them together for so long, he realizes, he can’t begrudge them this. He main concern now would be getting back in her good graces.

She’d tried to reach him through the bond before, and Kylo had allowed a few glimpses, but he’d mostly kept it closed for fear of her seeing his meeting with Yathe… or the reason why he’d been so on edge for days.

The second he arrived on the Finalizer things would get complicated on all fronts. An apprentice that avoids him because he’d been too kriiffing rash, which still hurts when he thinks about it, and the impending arrival of his Knights. His gloved fingers drum on the armrest. He’d have to address Rey first. He couldn’t fight two wars aboard the Finalizer. Rey consumed too much of his mental space and Kylo needed to be clearheaded to deal with the Knights of Ren.

Yes. He’d address her first. He thumbs the satchel full of small gifts for Rey, then looks at his comm.

Rey first. Knights of Ren second.

The curl of dread in his stomach intensifies. He sends a message to Hux then closes his eyes, checking on his apprentice one last time, a habit he’d formed over the last week. It’s compulsory and immediate now.

Sleep isn’t such a bad idea after all.

Chapter End Notes

So, I think we’ve all had plenty of cute. It’s time for the plot to start picking back up. Look at our cute bb Rey making new friends. And Kylo, sigh. Everything seems
awfully quiet in Hux land, though... hmmm.

Thank you all to those who take the time to comment -- I write faster because of you, seriously, we all authors do. We thrive under validation -- and to all those who have interacted with me.
Hux stares at the holopad in front of him, a frown on his face, while Mitaka stands stiff as a board before his desk. He’s gone over this document twice already. Mitaka fidgets, shifting his weight ever so slightly from side to side.

“And you are one hundred percent sure that you did as instructed, Lieutenant?” Hux asks, bringing his eyes up to meet Mitaka. Mitaka swallows.

“Yes, Sir,” the little man responds. Hux feels the tic in his jaw and breathes in slowly, willing it away.

They’d begun the building of a new depot to replace the one the Resistance had turned to rubble, and the new wave of weapons from the Kuati that had originally been meant to arrive at the Finalizer had been rerouted to the small moon. As of this moment, no shipment had arrived, though he’d given the directive days ago. Hux clenches his teeth. The First Order needed those weapons. He had no doubt that the Resistance and what little was left of the Republic would be arming themselves right about now. He has no idea what Rey had told them — for she surely must have returned to them — and Hux is starting to regret his decision to delegate.

“Sir, the—” Mitaka starts. Hux cuts him off.

“If you cannot handle something as simple as overseeing a delivery of weapons, Lieutenant, perhaps we should assign you to desk duty to oversee the delivery of rations instead,” Hux says tersely and Mitaka visibly winces. No one wanted to be stuck with such a job. Once he’s sure the threat sinks in, Hux lets out a low breath. “Go. Find me a correct report of when those weapons should arrive.”

Mitaka, ever the pleaser, stumbles upon himself to agree before walking out on his fast little legs; Hux stares back at the report on the holopad, lips pursing. Mitaka had promised that he had also checked in with the other two Star Destroyers belonging to the First Order for a mis-delivery of weapons. The other two ships had heard nothing. Hux had also sent messages demanding an update, and had been told the same thing Mitaka had — No artillery has been delivered, Sir.

Hux drums his fingers on his desk, sneering at the screen. Thousands of weapons lost somewhere in space, a loss they could ill afford. They certainly had not arrived aboard the Finalizer, his ships, or the new First Order depot. Nor had they arrived anywhere else. Hux glares at Mitaka’s signature. It had been a simple enough command: make sure cargo arrives from point A to point B. He really is starting to regret his decision to delegate. He sends a message to Phasma to deploy patrols to the depot, just in case, then rubs at his face.

Hux had allowed himself to get snared in Snoke’s manipulations, then in trying to gain himself two Force users because of said manipulations, and in Rey’s return. In other words, he’d allowed himself to get distracted. Hux’s left eye twitches. He rubs at his temple, silently berating himself in the light of this new development. He’d let this slip through his fingers.

The ship had continued to run as it always had, with him at the helm on the bridge, and Hux had operated with the borrowed time he’d earned from destroying the D’Qar rebel base, but time felt as though it were speeding up for him. As if it were running short. Hux and Kylo would only be able to keep up this ruse of following Snoke’s orders for so long, now that they knew the creature’s
intentions, and that complicated matters further. He reminds himself of his goal before he’d been trapped in this game of cat and mouse. It was much harder to think of restoring order to the galaxy when looking out for your own skin.

As if on cue, he receives a message.

A summons.

It always unnerves him how Snoke would summon him just as Hux would turn his attention to the creature. He dons his overcoat and walks out stiffly towards the amphitheater, preparing himself for playing his role of faithful servant. He grinds his teeth, arms ending in tight fists swinging at his side robotically as he goes down level after level. When he enters the amphitheater, Snoke’s projection is already looming over the space. Hux prepares his mental defenses.

He gives a perfunctory bow, then waits for what must surely come.


He’s not used to Snoke being so forward. There’s usually some flowery talk about some bigger power first. Still, he acquiesces.

“We are having a… minor issue… with the delivery of the weapons to our new depot, Supreme Leader,” Hux says. Calling this creature his leader makes him internally cringe, but he hides that distaste as well as he can. Snoke studies him closely.

“And the girl?” Snoke asks. Hux relaxes his facial muscles so that he doesn’t intensify his frown. A small red flag starts waving in Hux’s mind. Another to add to the list of many.

“She is…” he says, then reconsiders. “Learning.”

Snoke nods, and Hux feels the gentle caress of the Force like oil over his mind. He slams up all his walls around everything he does not want inspected. Snoke doesn’t push. This is all technically business as usual. As long as Hux gives the creature nothing to suspect, Snoke would treat Hux’s walls as an attempt to protect his personal life. Instead Hux offers up half-memories. Rey’s recent excitement at joining the troops for lunch, for one. Or her shadowing him in his private offices, learning about his work.

Snoke lets out a low pleased rumble.

“And Lord Ren?” Snoke asks, releasing his grasp on Hux’s mind and retreating. The question is another red flag.

“The First Knight has been off ship,” he says carefully, wondering why he’s being asked this. Snoke should know exactly where Ren is. Unless…

Hux stomps on the thought for some other time.

“So, in his absence, you’ve been minding my apprentice?” Snoke asks, eyes glinting with unfriendly amusement. Hux chews on the side of his tongue for a moment. His jaw pops.

“Yes, Supreme Leader,” he says. Snoke smiles. “Her presence has been most… enlightening.”

It was vague nonsense, sure, but he would not admit to what her presence had become. Still, Snoke must have sensed his hesitation because he pounces like a predator eyeing its next meal.
“Ah, I see…” Snoke croons, “I sense it in you.”

“Sense what, my Lord?” Hux asks carefully, shoulders stiff. Snoke’s smile turns indulgent, it makes Hux’s stomach roil.

“Hmm,” Snoke hums, thumbing his long, sickly fingers against his twisted, decaying lips. “I would have never thought you a man to harbor weaknesses, General.”

Hux turns stony. He keeps silent, knowing that Snoke would elaborate if given enough time. The creature had a habit of enjoying the sound of its own voice.

“You should mind yourself, General, that your affections for my apprentice do not lead you astray from our cause.”

*Which one?* Confusion rocks him as the thought bubbles up in his mind and Hux hurriedly buries it right before he feels Snoke trying to brush into his mind again. He sets his eyes straight ahead, his gaze on Snoke’s hologrammed robes, past the blue hue towards the raised dais. He swallows and takes in air slowly, methodically, as he feels Snoke attempt to pry again.

When Snoke speaks again, the rumble of the creature’s voice is laced with amusement.

“Well go on, General, find your weapons,” Snoke says, and Hux can’t help but notice the amount of condescension in the creature’s tone. “We will speak of our next move against the Resistance then.”

He’s been dismissed, the hologram slowly disappearing. When it dissipates in a haze, Hux gets a clearer look at the dais. He purses his lips, then takes a step forward, and another. He drops off the audience platform, the heels of his boots clicking, the sound reverberating off the walls as he takes the first step up the set of stairs.

He’d never attempted this. He takes another step, and another, up and up and up. The energy coursing through him spikes the higher up he goes, up to where a throne usually projects. When he stands at the very top, he stomps down hard. The sound bounces around the room, then he feels it. The vibration. A hollowness beneath his feet that bounces against something else.

Temple stones.

The thought of Snoke’s reach into his awareness makes Hux’s skin crawl. Something would need to be done about those stones, in time. He looks at the room from this new vantage point, imagining himself and Kylo prostrated at the bottom like roaches. Hux sneers.

Hux walks down the dais steps hurriedly, relief flooding him with every step he takes away, feeling a bit more like himself the farther away he gets from them. His mind focuses again on the problem at hand. The weapons. The Resistance could have gotten a hold of them, perhaps. He wouldn’t put it past the rats to steal what isn’t theirs.

Thinking of the rebels brings up Rey’s face and his gut twists. It’s not shame, or remorse, but guilt. She had been one of theirs not that long ago. Hux exits the amphitheater and sends Phasma a message to take over while he goes to find Rey. She was on their side now, and her information could be useful. She would be training by herself now, in Ren’s absence.

The thought of Ren drops on his shoulders like lead, tension spreading until his neck hurts. He hadn’t heard from Ren, and Snoke had asked him of his whereabouts as though Hux should know. It gnaws at him, how casually the creature had tried to play off Ren’s sudden *disappearance* as if he had no idea where his apprentice was.
He shoves the thought aside. Rey first, Ren second.

He finds her in the Knight’s training room, working through what looks like very complicated forms with swift, brutal strength. Hux leans against the doorframe to watch her for a moment as he’d done so many times in the past, taking her in, a whirlwind of black fabric and saber light. Watching her like this reminds him of why he’d wanted her by his side to begin with. She senses him and stops, though, turning to look at him from the center of the room, chest heaving from what must have been quite the workout.

Hux straightens up off the doorframe, and Rey gives him a small smile, trotting to close the distance. He swallows his desire to tuck her flyaway hairs behind her ears, reminding himself why he’d sought her out to begin with. Rey regards him with a clear, open expression that makes his stomach clench again.

“How can I help you, General?” she asks. Hux watches her silently.

This would not go well.

“A moment, please,” Hux asks, clasping his hands behind him so they don’t find their way to her waist. Rey nods, turning off her weapon. He turns around without a word and leaves her to follow, not missing the small look of confusion that crosses her face as he does so. They walk in silence for a long time before he opens the door to a secluded meeting room and ushers her in. Rey walks in tentatively, throwing a curious glance at him before he closes the door.

“What is it?” She asks. Perhaps she’s learned to read him too well. That would be his fault of course. Hux chews on the inside of his lip, always unsure of how much to give her.

“Sit,” he extends his hand to one of the room’s chairs around an oval meeting table. Rey perches on the edge and looks at him. He takes in a deep breath.

“This complicates things. Feelings. This is why he’d been so hesitant to allow himself to admit that he likes her, because now he has to bring up the one thorn between them, and there’s no way to sugarcoat it. Hux takes the seat opposite her.

“I need your help,” he admits. It would be easier to coax her into this than to wrangle information from her. Rey’s main goal in life seemed to be trying to help, so he appeals to that sense of duty in her. When he explains what he needs from her, the new location to the rebel base, Rey turns to stone.

“No,” she responds, tone resolute.

It feels a little bit like four months ago, when he’d asked her the same thing about D’Qar. Hux takes in a deep breath.

“You said you wanted to help, Rey,” he says, tone cold. For once he doesn’t beat a rhythm with his fingers to distract her. Rey narrows her eyes at him.

“I said I wanted to help. I didn’t say I only wanted to help you, Brendol,” His name on her lips makes him mentally cringe. Chastised like a child. He squares his shoulders as she continues. “I want to help everyone, not just your side.”

“Rey,” he starts, trying to keep the pleading from his voice. “The Supreme Leader has been—“

Rey’s eyes narrow. “The Supreme Leader?” She asks. He watches her lean back into her chair, trying to move away from him. He changes tactics.
“Do you not remember how we helped each other the last time? I can’t help you if you don’t help me, little one,” Hux extends his hand out for her to take. She fists her hands on her lap and he drops his. It seems on this, a small gift for a small gift would not work. He lets out a long sigh.

“Weapons have gone missing, Rey. Weapons you commissioned,” Hux reminds her. “I can’t help but think maybe your friends may have gotten involved.”

“They would never do that,” Rey retorts, brows furrowing and nails digging into her tunic. Hux has to bodily refrain from reaching out to grab them.

He’d been too intimate with her, touching her at every chance he could, craving her proximity. Except none of that mixed well with work. Hux rotates his head until his neck pops.

“How do you know?” Hux asks after studying her for a long time. Rey stiffens and glares back at him. He purses his lips. “That’s right, you don’t.”

“Let me help,” Rey says. Hux frowns.

“Didn’t I just ask you for your help not two minutes ago?” He clips, frustration bubbling. Hux was not a man to ask for anything. At least not until Rey.

Rey shakes her head hard from side to side.

“Not that sort of help, Hu— Brendol. Let me help in my own way,” Rey says, tone pleading, beseeching him to see things her way. Hux thinks back to Snoke’s words, about his affections clouding his mind, diluting his goals. Yet what goals were those if Snoke seemed to be—

He frowns. Rey’s head tilts, regarding him as she would a puzzle.

“Excuse me,” he murmurs, rising from his chair and turning to leave. Then he stops. Turns around slowly.

He had no right to take his temper out of on her. Hux walks back to her and finally does what he’d denied himself. He tucks a couple of hairs behind her ear and watches as her expression softens once more. It pleases him, that small change. He wouldn’t promise her something he could not deliver. Instead, he gives her a smile and a different sort of promise.

“See you at dinner,” he says. Rey nods and he drops his hand.

Hux leaves the woman that’d been driving him to distraction behind and clips at a hard pace towards Mitaka’s cramped little office. When he arrives, the lieutenant is neck deep in documents, still looking for where he’d gone wrong. When Mitaka sees him walking in, the little man jumps to attention so fast his chair rocks a little.

“General, Sir,” Mitaka offers, face paling.

“At ease, Lieutenant,” Hux says, walking in and rounding the desk. Mitaka moves away, leaving the seat open for Hux. He takes it and glares at the mess of open documents in front of him.

Weapons are going missing.

They’re nowhere to be found, not on his ships and not on his depot. He glares at the screen, eyes narrowed. Hux starts pulling up documents and comparing them side by side. He thinks back to the first morning after Rey had slept in his bed, when he’d assigned these documents to Mitaka.
He scans all signatures. Hux uses his override code to access his workstation from Mitaka’s office, then checks his own messages. Hux double checks the timestamps. Mitaka’s sweating bullets over his shoulder, trying to find where he went wrong. Hux ignores him, trying to piece together a timeline.

He triple checks signatures, accesses the database, scrolls down, down, until he finds it.

A time skip. A deleted record. He cross-references against Mitaka’s own inbox. His eyes narrow further; it had taken the message twenty minutes to arrive. His message should have been instantaneous. Hux opens up the command notice Hux had sent him and stops. Stares.

The command notice in front of him authorizes for a shipment of weapons to change course not once but twice, from the Finalizer to the depot, and then to— when he tries to open up the file which would contain the classified coordinates, a square box screaming ‘ERROR’ at him appears in his line of sight.

Hux looks down at the bottom of the document. It’s his signature.

He accesses his own classified messages, checks the log of messages sent, something he wasn’t in the habit of doing, too used to having his missives addressed immediately. Nothing. He checks through deleted records, nothing. Hux overrides all systems until he finds something only he knows of: A second partition where all information pertaining to the Order is duplicated, much like the one he’d built to track Rey. Turns out his fastidiousness has served him right this time.

Hux’s eyes track down the time stamp until he finds what he’s looking for. It looks like any other message he’s ever sent, except it was sent during that twenty minute window. He’d sent plenty of messages, but he doesn’t remember this one.

It’s addressed to the Kuati vessel. A direct order to redirect shipment to—

He tries opening up the classified coordinates and once again is met with an error.

“I did not authorize this,” Hux says, tone harsh.

Mitaka’s eyes widen, realizing he’d acted on the wrong command, believing it to be Hux’s. He’d acted as instructed, and then Hux had flipped on him. No wonder Mitaka had been sweating bullets. He’d thought he’d messed up, when none of it had been his fault. Hux’s signature had been forged.

Go on, General, find your weapons.

Hux grinds his molars, taking in a deep drag of air, then looks at Mitaka.

Hux narrows his eyes at him. “You’re a faithful First Order officer, are you not, Lieutenant?”

Mitaka almost trips over himself to nod, eyes wide. Hux gives a mirthless smile.

“You will keep your silence regarding this, do you understand?” Hux orders as he lifts himself up from his chair. He then turns on Mitaka. “The repercussions for doing otherwise will be severe, Lieutenant Mitaka.”

Mitaka’s head bobs up and down rapidly as he stutters out, “Y-yes, General. Anything you’d like.”

“Good,” He says, “I hear Lord Ren’s tactics in wiping memories is not particularly pleasant.”

Mitaka nearly chokes. Perhaps he’d been cowed by Ren too often.
“Yes, sir.”

“Fantastic. at ease, Lieutenant. I will contact you again soon,” Hux turns on his heel, leaving the terrified lieutenant behind. He hated having to resort to intimidation the same way Kylo did, but word of this couldn’t spread.

Hux walks at a hard pace towards the bridge to relieve Phasma, mind reeling. He’d been led on a wild goose chase much like Ren had over artifacts, wasting a week, wrapped up in Rey and his own damn sense of self preservation. Snoke had counted on it.

When he gets to the bridge he sends a message to Ren. He knows now he’s being monitored, so he sends the only safe message he can:

Where are you?
- Hux.

______________________

Arriving soon.
- K. Ren

Rey’s comm beeps. She’d been included on a message to General Hux. Rey frowns, and as if on cue, feels Kylo’s Force signature strengthening, their bond glowing lightly at the promise of proximity.

Rey looks around the table at Lance and the other troopers. She’d been making strides with the stormtroopers in the week and change that Kylo Ren had been gone. Rey knows she’s pushing her luck with Hux and Kylo, demanding that they allow her to roam the ship, to talk to the stormtroopers, to remain decidedly in the side of the Light. Still, this is what they’d signed up for when they allowed her to return so they would deal with it, Rey decides. Her conversation with Hux regarding the resistance had only cemented her need to make this a reality.

Lance is busy gushing about his blaster pistol. The kid likes his guns. A few other troopers whose ID numbers she doesn’t remember, but who offer no nicknames, have jumped into the conversation. They’d been hesitant at first, looking at her sideways when they thought she couldn’t see them, but it’d been clear that they were curious, drawn to the novelty of a Force user sitting amongst their ranks. So, Rey makes herself be as interested as humanly possible on the minor details of the trigger’s drag and the accuracy of the shots. She’d ask questions and get laughed at when she wouldn’t quite get it, but she refused to give up, explaining that the only high-capacity guns she’d seen were eons old. When the troopers had learned this they’d had a field day, bringing her up to date on the technological advances of their weaponry. Rey had found herself surprisingly interested once it came down to the nitty gritty of assembly.

Her enthusiasm seems to earn her a notch of respect from the troopers, and once the conversation turns to ships she’d schooled each and every one of them. A few of them look up at her comm’s beep, then at her, far more appreciatively than they had before. Rey grins in self satisfaction.

There are still a few around the room who eye her warily, and Rey thinks she sees a few give her angry, scared glances, but she swallows and focuses on the ones who are being friendly. She would make it a point to try and befriend as many of them as she could, but she could only do so much in one day. She looks back down at the comm.

“Excuse me,” she says to Lance, who raises his eyebrows. “I must attend to Lord Ren.”
Lance’s eyebrows keep traveling up and his voice hushes.

“Really? What’s he like? Is it true he keeps the ashes of his enemies?” Lance whispers, the other troopers all leaning in, waiting for her to spill all of Kylo’s secrets. Rey smiles wider.

“Perhaps some other day,” she murmurs, before leaving the cafeteria with a small nod to Phasma.

It takes her exactly five minutes to find him. She hears him first, his self-assured stride bouncing off the walls as the heels of his boots meet durasteel floor. He stops for a second, helmeted and garbed in black, and Rey takes in air. This is the first time she’d seen him since their training room incident. She squares her shoulders as he approaches on much more silent feet, slowly walking towards her and stopping two feet away. His helmet tilts and she feels him try to brush against her though the bond. Rey lets it go silent, irritation bouncing around her mind in tandem with the weird, erratic beating of her heart.

“What’s a girl like you doing here?” he murmurs through the hiss of his modulator when she gives no indication of letting her guard drop. He moves past her, his arm guard brushing her arm wraps, and Rey follows behind, staring at the back of his helmet. She can see some of his glossy hair peeking through from underneath, curling into his robes, and has to kill the curious desire to reach up and touch it, see if it’s as soft as it looks. They walk in silence, Rey refusing to talk until he does.

When they reach his rooms she hesitates at the door as it shuts behind her but he simply keeps walking in, disengaging his helmet.

Are you just going to stand there?

Rey huffs, taking a step forward until her presence no longer holds up the sensors, flinching as the doors slam shut and they’re plunged into semi darkness. He’s not in a good mood. She could feel it as soon as she detected his arrival, so Rey stands where she is and waits for him to say something.

In the dark, like this, with only moonlight to illuminate him, he looks like he could be Death itself. Rey fists her hands at her sides and waits. She can do nothing but wait. She would apologize, but only if he did first.

“Rey…” he begins, as though he’d heard that. He probably had. Rey keeps her silence. Kylo lets out a sigh and gets to removing his cowl and gloves, throwing them on the bed as he pulls them off with frustrated tugs. “At least stop hovering by the door.”

When Rey makes no move to step forward, a wall of resentment slams into her before it’s quickly retracted.

“I won’t touch you again, if that’s what you’re so worried about,” he says, still facing the large bedroom window.

His room looks much like hers, if slightly bigger. There are no books, though, and she notices there’s a second door. When her eyes and her interest veer towards it, Kylo interrupts her thoughts. That room is not for you to investigate.

The words are clipped and cold, and so she pulls her attention away immediately, focusing back on him. If this is how he planned on making up for his harsh behavior and his sudden disappearing on her with nothing but a hasty word via their bond, he was starting off on the wrong foot. The longer they stand there the more tense it becomes and Kylo lets out a grunt.

He gives in first, turning around and striding towards her until he’s standing a few feet away, calling for the room to light the room to 50%. It’s light enough that she can see his movements but still dim
enough that she can’t trace every single mole on his face. Rey frowns. Kylo looks around as if grasping for a point of conversation.

“Were you alright while I was gone?” he asks. Rey shifts her weight. That had not been the question she’d expected.

“Yes,” she replies, unsure of what else to say.

It always felt like this, when she had to face him on her own rather than with the General in the room. She licks the back of her teeth and stares at the space between them, not quite able to bring her eyes up to meet him. The air’s thick with tension and Rey tries to breathe through her nose rather than her mouth, twitching her fingers fisted at her side as they both avoid each other’s gaze.

“Did you learn anything from the documents I left you?” he asks again.

“Quite.”

One word answers are safe. She catches Kylo as his nostrils flare.

“We will need to review all that information later, as well as begin your training with Yathe,” he continues, addressing her schooling as a brand new apprentice to the First Knight of Ren. Rey nods and then they fall back into silence.

It lasts a while, and Rey’s starting to wonder why he called her here and if she should just simply leave when he lets out a pained sigh.

“Rey, we must talk.”

____________________

Kylo had received the message from Hux right as he’d landed, then decided to deal with the General after dealing with Rey. He’d followed their bond — the ability to being able to navigate the ship to her location a fairly new development, but one he wouldn’t complain about — and found her half-way to the cafeteria. He’d deal with Rey first, then Hux, then the Knights, then…

So many things to deal with.

He’s almost starting to regret the decision. Rey stares at him with deadened eyes, waiting for him to say something.

“I am sorry about what I did.”

He thinks back to all the times he’s felt her pressed up into Brendol Hux and tries not to chew on his lip. For a moment during that kiss he’d felt her reciprocate, but Kylo is not Brendol, and he has never had a way with words.

Kylo’s hands clench at his side at her irresponsiveness. He forces his fingers open, stretches them. He would not do what came naturally to him, he would not intimidate. He’s the one apologizing, after all.

“I shouldn’t have,” he says, regarding the kiss. “It was… not the best way to show you what I felt.”

Rey looks away then, and he can see a small creep of color crawling up her cheeks. He stomps down on his desire to reach out through the bond and find out what she’s feeling.

“No, it wasn’t,” she replies. He nods.
“I—“ he begins again, drawing sharp breath through his long nose, “You don’t have to fear me. I will never touch you again.”

Rey looks at him then and she frowns.

“That’s not what I want,” she replies, and he frowns then.

Maker, but this is uncomfortable.

“I don’t understand,” he replies.

How could this tiny woman always, always put him in this position? Baring himself open to her, stripped of his power, left open and confused for everyone to see, and yet somehow always coming back for more?

“We have to train together,” she explains.

Ah…

*Training.*

“Of course,” Kylo says as neutrally as possible.

How had he dared hope for more?

“And you’re my Master,” she continues. Kylo arches an eyebrow.

Funny she should mention that. She certainly circumvented his authority over her at any chance she got, like a child pushing her boundaries to see how much she could get away with. Rey huffs. She’d heard that.

“Your training will continue as it always has,” he reassures her, changing tactics and looking into the distance somewhere above her head. He’d apologized, and she’d somewhat accepted it. It would be the best he could hope for. If only the ship would just open up and swallow him whole now so this conversation could be over, Kylo could die in peace then.

The minutes stretch on.

“I don’t know you,” Rey admits, and Kylo turns his head to look down at her just as she’s shifting her weight. He frowns.

“Excuse me?”

“I don’t know you,” she repeats, louder, slower, as if trying to make him understand with just four words. “I don’t… know anything about you. I don’t even know if I like you as a person.”

That’s a bit of an ice shard to the heart, but Kylo simply closes his side of the bond more firmly and watches her impassively, letting her continue.

“I only know what others have said. I only know you through your mother’s eyes, and your uncles’ Luke and Chewie’s eyes. Even through Brendol’s eyes.”

Kylo’s eyes widen then narrow.

*Brendol.*
So, they were on a first name basis now. Kylo bites the inside of his cheek but says nothing. He’d pushed them together. He could deal with this.

“I know you through the stormtroopers’ eyes, and—“

“The stormtroopers?” he interrupts, incredulity tinging the question. “How would you even know me through the stormtroopers?”

Rey gives him a smile. It’s the first one he’s seen in two weeks. He cherishes it while it lasts.

“I eat lunch with them now,” Rey sounds awfully pleased with herself.

Kylo shakes his head lightly. Fine.

“And—?” he prompts her to finish her sentence. He’d invaded her space with no regard for her feelings and she deserved to say whatever she might say to him. Rey takes a deep breath.

“And… I just don’t know you through your eyes. I don’t even know what your favorite color is.”

“Green,” he replies.

Rey’s eyes fly up to him. He smiles. He’d always liked the color. It had become his favorite after he’d seen so much of it in her mind, the awe with which she beheld such a simple thing.

“I would have thought it would be black…” she mumbles, looking down, then back up at him, determination draping over her features. “The point is, you can’t just kiss me and do all that… whatever that was… and think I’d be okay with it. That’s not how this works.”

Kylo’s nostrils flare again. He bodily forces his hands to remain relaxed.

“Whatever that was…” he repeats, then rolls his neck to try and control his temper.

So, all of his feelings being displayed to her, all of the months of agonizing over her and her well-being, all of those sleepless nights he’d spent wanting her by his side, and then even more sleepless nights trying to shield her from his nightmares; it had all become… whatever that was.

He breathes in deeply.

She’s not done, though.

“You can’t expect me to be okay with it when… when…” Rey looks around the room, trying to find the words again. “You killed your father. Right in front of me. You hurt my friends. You took me against my will—”

“You’ve made yourself painfully clear about that in the past,” he bites, then curses mentally.

He deserves this. He deserves this from her and more. He shouldn’t be trying to shut down her argument when, for once, she’s willing to talk to him. Rey’s jaw clenches once, then disengages with a soft pop. He lowers his eyes and bites his lower lip, curling in his shoulders to make himself smaller.

*Let her talk, you fool.*

The void the silence creates spreads, but in true Rey fashion, once she’s spilling her frustrations there is no stopping her.
“Yes, I made myself clear, but apparently not clear enough. You can’t just…” She steps forward, and when she pushes her hand under his chin to force him to look at her, Kylo swallows as her fingers absentmindedly trace the bottom portion of the scar she’d given him. Rey drops her hand. “You can’t just barge in and take, Kylo.”

His name rolls off her tongue so easily, and it pleases him and hurts him all at once. She calls Brendol by his given name. Kylo may have been what he’d picked, but it doesn’t feel as genuine when she addresses him as if trying to make him understand. Still, he can’t give up on this one. He’d made the choice to adopt Kylo Ren as his new life. He couldn’t just give it up for a soft word on a pretty girl’s lips. Somewhere, his mind offers the very unbidden thought that he already has. Kylo torches that thought and focuses on her.

“What would you like me to do, then?” he asks, holding back despite his desire to just reach forward and grab her hand. He’d become soft. So soft. One girl and a handful of months and he’d become this.

“Give,” she says, and Kylo takes in her long braid and her dark clothes. His mouth goes dry and he forces his brain to concentrate on her words. “Let me know you. Let me in.”

Kylo tenses.

Let her in?

His eyes fly towards the closed door of his grandfather’s shrine. He’d never let anyone in but that helmet, speaking of his anxieties and his doubts in the middle of the night. He’s not even sure he knows how to let anyone in. Her eyes follow his, and he forces himself to pry his eyes away from it. Rey gives him a curious glance but then stares at his chest. If he were honest with himself, he’s not sure he could maintain eye contact for more than a few seconds. He deflates a little.

“Okay,” he murmurs.

Rey gives him a very small, quivering, hesitant smile.

“What would you like to know?” he asks. “And no, black was never my favorite color.”

Rey grins, shaking her head. She takes a step forward and he inhales, taking a step back. It feels important to keep space between them. She doesn’t seem hurt by it.

“Okay, what’s your favorite meal?”

He breathes in deeply.

Hux’s message had sounded rather impatient, he hadn’t been able to spend a moment with his grandfather in weeks, and his Knights would be arriving soon. He’d deal with them in order, after he dealt with Rey. He had a lot to make up for, and he’s pleasantly surprised she’s not just bolting and grabbing a ship to depart the Finalizer. Whatever happened during his absence must be a blessing. He’d indulge her.

He tells her his favorite meal, he has no favorite flower, his favorite planet, and anything else she might need to know, until he remembers why he’d promised to face Rey to begin with. He takes in her relaxed demeanor, the easy smile on her face as she teases him about Dejarik one more time, and Kylo sighs. Just when he’d finally gotten her to drop her walls, he’d have to end it.

“There is one more thing we must discuss,” he says. Rey guards her expression like clockwork. He cringes mentally. “Your nightmares.”
This would not end well.

He tells her all about it, rushing through the words, trying to get this out as fast as humanly possible and bracing for the storm.

“You,” she starts, tensing where she sits. Her hands grip into her trousers, “You mean I haven’t been sleeping because of you? Why didn’t you tell me!”

Kylo straightens his shoulders, makes himself look bigger, tries to deter her from picking a fight.

“I was trying to find a way to make them stop. It’s not like I can tell my brain to shut off.”

They slip into their bond, and the argument goes on in their heads while their postures remain tight and ready to spring.

You could have warned me!

Rey...

No, do you know how long I’ve been going with these things? Night after night? You should have warned me.

I know.

See, this is what I mean. Taking. You just...

Kylo growls, knowing where this is going.

“I am TRYING here, Rey!” He roars, throwing his arms up. “I don’t know how else to stop it. You’re constantly in my brain. It’s not like I can tell it to be silent when the one thing that is remotely quiet in my mind is our Force Bond!”

Rey stops, jaw tense.

“Our bond isn’t quiet,” she replies tersely.

“It’s quieter than everywhere else,” he grumbles, breathing himself back down. When her eyes take on a sad expression he frowns, “No. Don’t you dare pity me.”

“I’m not pitying you,” she balks, taking a step towards him.

“Yes, you are. Don’t you dare lie to me. It’s painted all over your face. You’re projecting it into me. I don’t need your pity. I am trying.”

“Well, try harder, then!”

Kylo breathes in deep.

They’re devolving. They’re slipping right back into antagonizing, what they do best. He throws his head back and looks at the ceiling as if hoping it would offer him some answers.

“I am trying,” he murmurs after a while.

“Fine,” Rey clips, looking entirely unsatisfied with that answer. He turns to reassure her again but his comm beeps.
"Dinner."

- *Hux*

Chapter End Notes

Note's short and sweet today. Hope you all enjoyed the chapter and thanks again to all who take their time to comment, as well as those who leave kudos and bookmarks etc. You're all lovely.

And thanks for the 1k+ comments and 400 kudos. Look at ADOT, getting all grown up now.
Sleeping Arrangements

Chapter Summary

The nightmares are brought up, and nobody's happy about it. In the meantime, airs of strange things start stirring aboard the Finalizer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Are you always this demanding, General?” Hux hears Rey from behind him as he settles into his seat. He’d been informed of Ren’s arrival and then been left to wait after a rather long, stressful day, so he’d sent them a message to join him.

“One of my best qualities, I hear,” he smarts, looking up at the First Knight and his apprentice.

He takes in the dark cloud floating above their heads, Rey sporting a scowl and Kylo looking both thunderous and sullen, Hux cringes. All sense of playfulness evaporates out of him immediately. Kylo glares at him as if their bad mood were his fault, eyes hard and cold. Rey lets out a small huff. Hux arches an eyebrow in response.

“Welcome back, Ren,” the greeting is not quite warm, not when his tone has never been able to reach a warm tone, though he tries to mean it, however cautiously. Kylo only glares harder as he and Rey take their seats to either side of him.

Oh, this dinner would be fun. The two Force Users dig in without even acknowledging him.

Children.

Perhaps these meals together might not have been a great idea after all. The three of them just can’t seem to be able to have a pleasant evening, even after a month of invading each other’s personal spaces. He wonders who would be the faster of the two to pull a saber on him if he were to push the wrong buttons tonight. However impulsive Kylo might be, Rey could quickly turn to a raging fire. Hux decides silence is his best weapon here.

The crushing silence carries on for what feels like infinity, until Rey finally clears her throat, obviously uncomfortable with the silence as well. Hux lifts his eyes and watches the exchange, tight-lipped when Kylo lets out a soft grunt.

“How was your mission?” Rey asks of Kylo. Kylo’s muscles tense, then relax, then tense, as if trying to decide on whether to be angry at her addressing him, or pleased. Mostly he just goes tense, shooting Hux a glance on reflex. Hux tries hard not to pop his jaw or frown.

“Uneventful,” Kylo replies, as vague as humanly possible.

She would have to know eventually, but plunging her into the depths of just how dire their situation had just become would be a sure fire way to spook her.

Rey hums, though irritation flashes on her face, before she turns back to her food.
“Well, at least you have returned,” Hux murmurs, trying to help Rey. That earns him another glance from Kylo for his efforts. Hux’s lashes flutter as he stares down at his dish, having lost all appetite.

Thinking of the Supreme Leader -- the title flashing through his mind in mockery as he suppresses a sneer -- had an uncanny ability to make his food look far, far less appetizing.

“You’ll be happy to know I’ve informed her,” Kylo grumbles, forking a piece of meat as if spearing a human in the middle of a fight.

*Probably me,* Hux muses.

“Informed me?” Rey asks, brows furrowed.

A heartbeat.

“Informed me of what?” Rey presses, narrowing her eyes at Hux.

Hux’s muscles tighten by degrees. He looks at Kylo. Rey looks at Kylo.

Then her eyes go wide.

“You knew!” She accuses as though it were Hux’s fault. “You knew of the nightmares and you didn’t tell me? And we’ve spent how much time in the same bed––”

Rey stops, alarmed, realizing what she’s said. Hux feels the blood drain from his cheeks, waiting for the impending storm from Ren. She glances at Kylo nervously before working herself up to a fury over the situation. Hux bites down hard, drawing a sharp breath, ready to dig in his heels.

Ren, however, is still calmly eating his food and not looking up. Hux frowns.

He looks at Rey again.

So this is why they’d walked in so tense.

*Thanks, Ren.*

How is it that this is *his* fault now?

“It wasn’t for me to tell you,” Hux says, voice hard as he looks at Ren, his heartbeat still up in his throat while he waits for any *twitchy* behavior from the Knight, “It was Ren here who needed to say something sooner.”

“And I did,” Kylo growls, still avoiding everyone’s gazes.

Rey’s face goes red, and not with a pretty blush, and a vein in Hux’s temple throbs. She shoves herself back from the table, her chair’s legs screeching, then storms off with muttered words about stupid men. Hux turns on Kylo the moment she leaves the room. If the Knight had any plans to kill him for sharing a bed with his apprentice, he would have done so by now.

“Couldn’t handle it with more tact, could you, Ren?” Hux hisses under his breath.

“*You* forced my hand before I was ready, *Hux,*” Kylo growls, obviously too done with this conversation.

They stare each other down as Hux hears the door to his bedroom slam.
Hux drops his napkin on his plate, sneering at the Knight before scraping his chair back and walking away to go do what he does best: try to salvage the situation.

Kylo grumbles something as Hux passes by, jabbing his food with such force Hux can’t help but imagine it as anything other than Ren skewering someone. The table rattles.

Definitely me, Hux amends his earlier thought.

It strikes Hux that they’re all starting to behave like a bunch of married—

Hux frowns. He shakes his head and opens the bedroom door, following her inside, ready to apologize.

Only he finds her half naked, about to pull her chest strap off and Hux immediately glues his eyes to the floor, turning around to rush back out the door.

“Wait,” Rey calls to him, choosing instead to just leave the wrap on and throw his t-shirt over her semi bare frame. Had she been sleeping in the same bed with him without her chest wrap? His stomach does a weird somersault as his body reacts. Hux sets every single thought crossing through his mind on fire then extinguishes the desire immediately. He only faces her when she’s decently dressed and commands him to look up.

“You should have told me,” she accuses, cutting right to the thick of the matter. Never let it be said that Rey Ren beat around the bush. She’s standing there with her braid undone, in his t-shirt and her sleeping shorts, and Hux has to swallow thickly.

“I’m sorry,” he finally says. Apologies were starting to come too easily. Rey doesn’t buy it.

“Call him in,” she commands. Hux gives her a long look.

Instead of needling her about trying to order him around, he turns around on stiff legs until he can see Ren from the door.

“Her Majesty demands our attention,” he calls out, voice dripping with sarcasm.

Ren snorts, and from behind him Hux hears a small huff. Kylo makes a pained show of lifting his massive frame from the chair and walks over with languid steps. It allows Hux to see the man’s reaction when he takes Rey in, bare legs, messy hair flowing down her shoulders, Hux’s t-shirt hanging just a tiny bit too large on her frames as the edges of the sleeves brush her knuckles. The man’s reaction is exactly how Hux imagines he himself must have looked had he allowed his reaction to be physical. Well, at least it wasn’t just him.

“Yes?” Kylo asks roughly, and Hux revels in watching Kylo’s discomfort because it keeps him from feeling that way.

“You two are impossible,” she chastises.

Hux’s head snaps to the side to give her a look. Since when had she become this mouthy?

Ah, yes.

He thinks back to Kuat.

To her chastising him for not making friends.

To her threatening to take his head off.
To her escape attempts, calling it *going for a stroll*.

To her denying him an audience when she’d first arrived.

She’s always been this mouthy.

She’s holding herself as though she were a queen and they her servants. Rey looks at Hux.

“You,” she repeats, “should have told me.”

Hux arches an eyebrow. Definitely a queen to her servants. Perhaps decades from now they would look at this and smile fondly. Now, Hux just regards her silently. The little thing had claws and fangs, evident in the way she holds her body, tall and proud, as she chastises them like children despite the height, weight, and age difference between them all. A month. All it takes her is a month back aboard the Finalizer and she’s bossing them around.

“And you,” she points to Kylo, completely ignoring the fact that she’s supposed to be *his* student, not his Master, “you should have definitely told me.”

Kylo and Hux exchange a glance.

“And now I’m going to bed,” she announces to the air, then walks robotically to Hux’s bed and scoots in. She doesn’t even hesitate. It’s not Hux’s bed anymore. It’s hers. He just sleeps there. When she finally makes herself comfortable she studies them both for a long time, eyes flicking between the both of them as the gears turn in her head.

Brendol Hux II, in full uniform, nose held up high and brows furrowed as he regards her through colorless eyes in the light; Kylo Ren, Darkness made flesh, towering over everything and everyone, broad shoulders stiff and eyes narrowed at his apprentice. The two most powerful men on this side of the war, and she’s chastised them as surely as if she’d caught them with their hands in the jar of sweets.

Hux can sense her anger all the way from where he stands. It’s the same anger he’d seen that day she’d gotten drunk, except there’s no alcohol involved this time. Hux does the only smart thing he can do. He keeps quiet. Ren seems to have the sense of mind to do the same.

“Now, are you two just going to stand there?” She finally says.

“Excuse me?” He asks, eyes narrowed, lips tight over his teeth. He won’t deign justify the slight rise of his voice on the curl of that question mark. Kylo Ren echoes the sentiment.

“You,” Rey points at Kylo. “This is all your fault. I’m tired of nightmares. You said our bond is quiet, and it’s strongest when we’re close. So you’ll stay here and let me sleep.”

Her frown is so deep he almost can’t see the hazel of her eyes.

“And you, you’re just as guilty as he is,” she turns her eyes on Hux. “I should be angrier at you, but this is your room.”

So, she’d stay despite her anger?

*So very full of surprises, little one,* Hux thinks to himself. He looks at Kylo, who’s busy looking at Rey. He turns back to her as well.

“You surely must be joking,” he finally manages to speak, looking at Ren for back up.
Kylo’s gaze hasn’t shifted off his apprentice and Hux can’t help but get snared in the rise and fall of tension as they stare each other down, like an undercurrent of electricity trying to stand the hairs on the back of his neck upright. Hux takes in a deep breath.

“You’re not,” Hux says.

The silence stretches.

“You’re very serious about this.”

“One of my best qualities, I hear,” she parrots back his earlier snark.

It becomes a staring match, Hux’s eyes slowly shifting between Rey and Kylo. They in turn look at him, waiting for him to make a decision.

It is his room. He has every right to kick them both out. He most definitely should kick them both out. Put his foot down and demand they leave immediately, and how dare she demand this from him — but Hux had never slept as well as he’d had in the past handful of days she’d spent curled into his side. Kylo looks positively exhausted.

Hux had cradled Rey to sleep many a nights through her nightmares. The nightmares he’d known of and had said nothing about. He was also just as guilty.

He runs through the list of reasons — never excuses — of why he should tell them to leave. He takes in Kylo’s expression, very carefully devoid of any feeling, and Rey’s slanted hazel eyes, set under lowered brows and a hard frown. The small tic in Hux’s left eye returns, much to his perpetual annoyance.

Why could nothing ever go as planned with these two?

He’ll regret this eventually, he knows. Hux tells himself it’s because he can’t have his weapons exhausted; after all, what use would they be to him that way? It has nothing to do with the darkness he’d noticed pooling under Kylo’s golden brown eyes so often, or the way Rey’s countenance screams that he will either allow her this or she’ll walk out and go elsewhere, and… well… He’s started to enjoy sleep lately.

Yes, surely that’s it. His weapons can’t be exhausted, and he’s allowed Rey so many things already. Has allowed them both in so, so far.

“Fine,” he relents.

Kylo hasn’t moved. Rey narrows her eyes again at the Knight. That electrical charge jolts through Hux again, and he’s certain their combined Force powers must be doing something, causing the shock of goosebumps running up and down his arms. He fights the urge to shudder, to make the goosebumps disappear.

“Fine,” Kylo Ren finally assents with a growly breath.

This was not how Hux had imagined his night would go. He’s entirely certain it hadn’t been Kylo Ren’s plans for the evening either. Hux inhales once, twice, then exhales slowly, letting the beat of the passing seconds try and abate the tension in the air. It does not.

“Well, then,” Hux says, once it’s clear no one else is about to speak. There’s nothing else to say, though, so he walks into his closet on stiff legs.
Hux changes into his sleep clothes in the refresher and Kylo, who’s too big to steal one of Hux’s shirts, strips to just his trousers. Hux and Rey both avert their eyes at the riot of scars the man wears proudly. Hux takes the right side of the bed as Rey scoots into the middle, and he cradles her into his arm like normal, and Kylo very stiffly lies flat on his back staring at the ceiling by her left. He can feel the heat radiating from Kylo’s shoulder hitting the soft downy hairs of his arms. What lunacy.

“No more secrets,” Rey demands of them both. Hux and Kylo glance at each other, but Rey’s closed her eyes as if the matter’s been settled.

After long minutes, Hux finally speaks.

“Is she asleep?” He asks.

Kylo turns his messy, lovely head of hair and regards him quietly. The Knight takes on a far away look, probably checking in on Rey’s sleep a way that Hux can’t, then nods.

Hux’s hand absentmindedly toys with her hair while Kylo watches the motion, but Hux is too busy looking at the opposite wall, towards where the surveillance camera is. He’d made sure to disable them that very same afternoon, after his audience with the Supreme Leader. Snoke must not have known of the surveillance cameras, or had never tried to access them, otherwise he would have long ago known what Kylo and Hux were up to and both men would have been dead by now, but it was a precaution nonetheless.

“He’s moving weapons around,” Hux says, “The possibility of it being anyone else is practically non-existent, and I’ve looked. Thoroughly.”

What a long, exhausting day it had been.

Hux looks at Kylo, lying stony next to Rey. Hux tries not to focus too hard on the exposed skin and scars, swallowing as he focuses on the man’s face instead. Kylo laces his gigantic hands over his bare stomach, face turned to Rey for a long moment before speaking in what passes for a hushed tone: a deep chested rumble.

“He’s also sent my Knights on what could only be called a suicide mission,” Kylo says, the other piece to the puzzle.

Hux hums, careful not to shift Rey next to him even as his hand continues to caress her auburn locks. Kylo says nothing, perhaps happy to just be able to watch, and it eases a bit of the static anxiety in Hux’s chest, the gnawing, ant-like crawling under his skin abating just so. His mind returns to more pressing matters.

Five months ago Hux would have laughed at this, talking about the Supreme Leader in bed with Kylo Ren, with a girl sandwiched between them, as if they were discussing the weather. There’s nothing funny about this conversation, however.

“And you?” Hux asks.

Kylo reaches out with one hand and touches the ends of Rey’s hair peeking out from under Hux’s fingers, stilling them both in a silent touch. Hux is surprised, the man could have gotten up and walked away the moment Rey fell asleep, but he’s still in Hux’s bed. He’s even more surprised that he himself is allowing it. Hux narrows his eyes at the handsome, raven haired man on the other side of the girl they had silently yet fervently promised to protect.

Kylo meets his gaze and offers a lopsided smile, so tiny Hux would have missed it had he blinked, then drops his hand. An apology, then, for the messy situation at the dinner table.
“I imagine whoever’s left would come after me eventually,” Kylo says then snorts under his breath, “I’d love to see them try. Whatever the case, he wants her specifically, yet I can’t figure out why. She’s only just started training and her block is still there,” Kylo says, tilting his head towards Rey. Hux has to refrain from tightening his hold on her protectively.

Hux turns the pieces in his mind, trying to find the edges where they fit together, looking for a way to decipher the creature’s plans from these fragments of information. Too many fragments. He feels Kylo brush into his mind, listening to his thoughts, and allows it. Easier this way than speaking out loud.

Snoke’s obvious disinterest in the affairs of the order, his attempt to get rid of the Knights, including his strongest one, the removal of weapons meant to go to Hux’s men.

Hux had not authorized that re-route, but it had been his signature. He’d spent all day tracking documents, looking through the rank and file for any discrepancy in personnel. Nothing. Everything had been as squeaky clean as was the order of the day, except for that one abnormality...None of it made sense. Unless...

Unless Snoke is trying to untangle himself from both the First Order and the Knights of Ren, Hux muses, the gears in his mind turning. The Republic had been all but destroyed, and the annoyance that dared called itself a Resistance had only ever been a gaggle of guerrilla fighters. He looks at Rey.

The final piece.

Hux narrows his eyes.

“He asked about her,” he murmurs. “About her progress.”

Kylo can see the events unfolding as Hux pieces together mental images for him. If it were possible for the giant man to become any more tense, he had. He watches now bare muscles contract, coiling like springs with tension, and swallows thickly. He looks away, but continues offering up images.

The future spreads across Hux’s mind like a chessboard, Snoke slowly taking out the pieces. All the pieces. All of them but Rey. Kylo growls and Hux hums, disrupting the Knight long enough to hush him, while gently caressing Rey’s hair.

He, too, is boiling with anger. It crawls up his arms even as Rey’s silky strands try to soothe him. It spreads over his chest, warming his chest uncomfortably, contracting his nerves until his fingers tingle painfully. Anger, however, would not save them. Hux stashes it away for some other time, looking at Rey.

The final piece, and he couldn’t quite fit her anywhere. Where did she fit in all of this? He chews on the side of his tongue, sharp enough to very nearly draw blood.

“We’ll have to tell her soon,” he murmurs. Rey shifts and he holds his breath. He looks at Kylo. Kylo shakes his head, she’s asleep.

“That until she can join us,” Kylo murmurs, golden brown eyes settling on his apprentice. “And that will require training.”

Training and breaking the block, Hux imagines. His brain catches on Kylo’s use of ‘us’ and he turns it around in his mind. Suddenly it is the three of them. Rey would need to be told, but he agrees that it would all happen in due time. Still, that would require stalling, operating under Snoke’s thumb until then, pretending to be loyal servants.
Hux could pretend. He was, in fact, a great pretender. The question would be for how long. Until Rey could join them. They had snared her in this, after all.

“If your Knights come for you…” he starts. Kylo sits up, the bed shifting slightly.

“They are my Knights,” Kylo retorts, voice low while looking at Rey. Having this conversation over her sleeping form may not be the best idea, but here they are. Hux takes in the man’s chest covered in silvery scars. “They will bend the knee or they will die accordingly. I won’t let them touch her.”

Hux lets out a soft breath.

“I don’t doubt it,” he replies noncommittally, then looks at Kylo.

“Where could he be moving weapons?” He asks. He knows Snoke prefers to lead from the shadows, but the creature had to have a stead somewhere. Kylo bites his lower lip.

“I cannot tell you that with certainty. He must have surely moved from his seat after his meeting with the Knights. He always does.”

Another complication, then. Hux focuses on the girl sleeping sandwiched between them before he musters the courage.

“About this—“ he starts, meaning to discuss this new… sleeping arrangement.

“Let’s not,” Kylo cuts him off. “I owe her this much.”

When Kylo looks at Rey, his usually hard gaze softens again. It remains soft as Kylo looks up at Hux, for just a second, and he forces himself to swallow the air lodged in his throat.

As if summoned by their conversation, Rey shifts and groans. The conversation comes at an end, then, with a single glance. They’d been doing this more and more often. Communicating without words. This time, the natural end to this treasonous conversation comes heralded by the fluttering of Rey’s lashes as she pries her lovely eyes open.

Rey sits up a little, untangling herself from Hux’s side.

“Why are you two awake? Sleep,” She grumbles, voice thick and groggy even as she glares. While their conversation had moved on past the nightmares, Rey’s mind was still obviously stuck on her irritation with them. It makes Hux want to smile. Kylo simply regards her quietly from under thick, black lashes, his head pressed against the headboard, a downturn to that infernal pout of his.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Hux chides, tone light. He pulls her back down. “Go back to sleep.”

Rey snorts but rests her head on the pillow between Hux and Kylo. Kylo gives Hux an odd look, perhaps at the new nickname, or perhaps at the familiarity with which he deals with her between his sheets, then grunts, sliding down on his back. Hux follows. All three of them stare at the ceiling before closing their eyes.

They would end up sleeping together out of codependency, two who can’t sleep because of nightmares, who can only quiet them as they float inside their own blessedly quiet Force bond, and a third who simply finds that sleep comes easier when there’s someone else in the room. Someday, people would make it out to be far more romantic than this. Romantic is not what Hux would ever call it. The two Force sensitives would agree.
Rey wakes up cocooned from both sides in warmth. Her lids are heavy with sleep, the back of them colored dark red, and her mind is still hazy. She inhales once as she doses in and out, trying to pull her consciousness back to alertness. Warmth. So much warmth. Warmth and heartbeats. Not her heartbeats. Sensation returns to her limbs so very slowly, starting with her head pressed up against something hard yet soft. There’s a strong something cradling her in, and sensation starts slowly rolling past her shoulders to where she feels a limb. Not her limb. It’s wrapped around her waist. Awareness continues past that limb to another…a second limb? This one’s thrown over her hip, tugging her closer to a second warm surface. Down and down her body gains sensation. Legs. Not her legs. Her one leg is draped over something, tangled in two others and her other leg is caged between a much larger, much heavier one and the soft sheets. She inhales again.

Heartbeats. Not her heartbeats. One pressed against her ribcage and the other against her shoulder blades.

She frowns, eyes still closed.

Legs? How many legs were there?

Soft, slow breaths. A set of them not her own. One caresses the top of her head, quick and tempered like its owner. The second is heavy, hot against the back of her neck, drawn out to fill too-big lungs inside a too-big frame.

Rey’s eyes snap open.

Her body jerks up into a sitting position and arms that had encircled her, both pale, one giant and one slender and wiry, fall at her sides. Their owners wake. Rey stares down at them as she turns, trying to untangle herself from the mess of limbs under the sheets, and gets a look at the two men sharing the bed with her, watching them as they go through the same realization. In her haste to sit Hux’s and Kylo’s arms flop on each other, one to Kylo’s chest, one on Hux’s stomach. One of Kylo’s hands lands on her lap, grabbing onto her sheets absentmindedly.

She looks at the clock, then back at Hux and Kylo, who’re looking at each other while their brains catch up to reality. They jerk away the same way she had, untangling their legs from each other and putting space between them.

Hux’s hair is in a surprisingly endearing disarray and Kylo’s falls right back around his face as if by some force of nature, always meant to be perfect. Her own hair’s flying wild everywhere.

They’d slept.

All of them.

And not a single nightmare. She gives them a small, satisfied smile as they turn to stare at her, bewildered. Rey and Kylo had slipped into their bond as soon as the larger man had lowered himself to his pillow and closed his eyes. She’d coaxed him to float closer, pulling him into the warm glow they shared and wrapping the cord around them like a security blanket. In it, it had been perfectly calm. Two awarenesses circling each other throughout the night, and a third life signature not too far away in the Force, snoozing by their side.

Without a word, Rey gently picks up Kylo’s arm from her lap so that she can get up, pushing the blankets off, his fingers gently wrapping around her own for a moment before he lets her go. The men follow on cue.

She hadn’t been sure it would work but she’d decided to try anyway. When she’d stormed into
Hux’s room in a whirl of annoyance she’d gone about taking her clothes off in jerky motions, fuming about them not telling her about the reasons she’d been suffering nightmares. She’d felt awful once she’d truly seen the exhaustion in Kylo’s eyes, felt it through their bond. If she had nightmares and received bits and pieces of his dreams, his nights must be hellish. So many times she’d managed to catch some rest, so many times she’d wondered if he’d ever slept. He’d tried to stave off sleep in order to spare her. It made her cringe at her screaming at him to do a better job of trying to fix the problem, her chest aching at her own inconsiderate behavior despite having just yelled at him about his own.

So Rey had decided to improvise.

If the Force bond, by Kylo Ren’s own admission, was a quiet place for him, then Rey would utilize it as best she could. In part because she felt bad and in part because she felt desperate. Still, she wouldn’t be who she is if she had not given them a piece of her mind first. So she’d chastised them as she would children for keeping this from her and then promptly ordered him to get in. Rey had known for a long time that close proximity intensified their bond. It was at least worth trying, she’d told herself, and then gave Hux a particularly hard glare to get him to cooperate. This had also partly been his fault.

The fact that it had worked was miraculous.

Hux starts getting ready for his usual shift on the bridge, Rey and Kylo leaving to their respective rooms to go change.

Meet me in the training room, she gets through the bond while water beats down on her hair. Rey turns her head up towards the spray of hot water. She steps out and dresses as quickly as humanly possible, perhaps a little too eager to return to her training. She bolts for the training room, unclipping her lightsaber as she reaches the doors, then skidding to a stop.

Kylo is standing in the middle of the room surrounded by three other people, all swathed in black, holding helmets that jump at her. She’s seen those masks before, in what she had once imagined to be a nightmare. A tall, lithe woman turns her head towards Rey and gives her a small smile. Yathe.

The motion makes the other two’s heads turn: a burly, giant blonde man and a much shorter, skinnier one with almond eyes and a ruthless expression on his face as studies her. Rey swallows as Kylo turns his attention to her, towering over everyone.

There would be no training today after all.

______________________

Captain Phasma walks into his office and snaps off a salute, and Hux instructs her to close the door. It would be her first report in person in days. The woman had very graciously agreed to train with Rey and had looked ridiculously amused at the Force user’s request to eat with the stormtroopers.

“At ease, Captain,” he orders, and Phasma relaxes.

The helmet comes off. This could only mean trouble.

“Yes?” He asks, bracing himself. Phasma’s helmet only came off for two occasions, when she was about to give unsolicited advice or when she was about to tease him. The look on her face says this time it is both.
Phasma takes a seat.

“There is no way to put this but plainly, so I will ask you now and get it over with: What is your interest in FN-5563?” She asks, and her eyes twinkle with some sort of private knowledge. Hux arches an eyebrow.

“Do I have to start providing a reason for being interested in one of my troop members, Phasma?” He asks, tone hard. It was far too early for this nonsense.

She gives him a sweet smile.

“It is very rare that I get a notification about General Brendol Hux accessing a file and making a personal note about one of my men, Bren.” Phasma speaks, narrowing her eyes.

So, this first.

“What’s it to you?” He clips, muscles going tense and his jaw clicking, “I am within every right to access those files.”

Phasma laughs. Of course she would laugh. “It wouldn’t have anything to do with the fact that young FN-5563 happens to look a little like you and has suddenly become very close friends with your little pet project, would it? That wouldn’t be the reason I found a Person of Interest footnote at all.”

Hux’s shoulders square back and he stiffens by degrees, narrowing his eyes at his Second in Command.

“Careful, Phasma,” he sneers, “You still work for me.”

Phasma regards him quietly, head tilted to the left just so, entirely unfazed by his attempt at intimidation. He’s starting to wonder if having made friends with the woman had been such a great idea.

“I am only an interested party. You owe me, at least, for having me dedicate so much time to training with her. Though, I do admit, she’s nice. I like her. Spunky little thing.”

Hux snorts, dropping all pretenses.

**Spunky.** If only Phasma knew what Rey had forced Kylo and Hux into in the bedroom.

“She mentioned a… Lance,” Hux speaks the name, foreign on his tongue. “She named him.”

Phasma only grins. It sets his teeth on edge, and Phasma delights in dragging it out, knowing something he doesn’t.

**Friends**, indeed.

“She didn’t name him,” Phasma says after the long pause. “The men do give each other nicknames, you know?”

Hux leans forward slightly and arches an eyebrow, looking down his nose at her. Phasma shrugs, a clear act of subordination. He should set out a punishment for this. But this is Phasma.

“It’s harmless, I assure you. Remembering number sequences gets complicated after a while.”

He lets out an irritated breath. How many things had gone under his nose that he’d been oblivious
to? The irritation has nothing to do with Rey befriending someone who looks like him. Not at all—
Hux’s brain catches up to Phasma’s words.

“It’s his nickname,” he repeats. Phasma nods.

So Rey hadn’t named the kid. Hux had gone on his own personal vendetta with some slip of a child
about three hundred levels below his rank because Rey had taken an interest in the stormtrooper —
Was it because FN-5563… Lance looked like him? — and it had been a nickname all along. He’d
resented a child and offered his given name to Rey over a nickname.

Hux had not felt shame often in life, but this certainly was high up there in the minuscule list of
instances.

He clears his throat and digs for a cigarette in the pocket of his greatcoat, fumbling around for the
lighter in the side drawer of his desk. Hour of the day and present company be damned. Rey was
driving him to do things he didn’t think possible for him to ever do.

Phasma knows better than to comment on his smoking.

“She’s made quick friends with a handful of the troops,” she comments, running covered fingers
over the shiny exterior of her helmet. Hux narrows his eyes lightly.

“Is that so?” He asks, though he knows as much from Rey’s stories.

Phasma continues touching her helmet, a tiny, tiny smile on her lips. Hux’s eyes narrow further.
When she looks up, the smile’s been replaced by impassivity.

“Would you like me to do anything about it?” She asks. Hux takes in the woman’s perfect platinum
hair, her pale lashes, the tiny upturn to her lips that she’s trying to fight. He knows the troopers are
Phasma’s children, and realizes now that she indulges him far more than he’d known up until now,
but… He had allowed Phasma to let the rumors spread. Having Rey know the troops wasn’t
necessarily a bad thing, as long as it didn’t undermine him.

It also made Rey ridiculously happy. She spent most of her dinners with him regaling him with tales
about the things she’d learned, and what she had learned about the Order via the Stormtroopers only
helped reinforce his own personal goal of having Rey accept her place of leadership by his side.

His lips curl in the beginning of a smile before he remembers where he is and with whom.

He shakes his head in response to Phasma’s question.

“Let them,” he replies, pulling up his holoscreen to avoid looking at Phasma, “She can be the much
softer face of the First Order.”

Phasma snorts, entirely unconvinced, then laughs. “That girl may be cute but you should see the
bruises she’s left me with. There’s nothing soft about her.”

Phasma’s voice is tinged with a hint of pride and Hux takes a moment to observe her over the side of
the holoscreen, amused at what he finds there. Phasma’s respect at being bested right along with
incredulity at Hux calling Rey soft. Phasma likes her. He lets the corners of his lips lift up slightly.
Good. Rey earning Phasma’s respect goes a long ways in his books.

“I can’t say I’m inclined, no,” he responds about the bruises. Phasma smirks.
“Anything else?” She asks. Hux drums his fingers on his desk, staring at the corner of his holoscreen, at the projection of the mess hall, eyes zeroed in on Rey chatting with his troops. If Phasma notices that he’s looking at it, she says nothing.

He’d gotten jealous over a *stormtrooper*.

Still, there were more important things to discuss. He switches it off.

“Actually, Captain…” Hux leans forward. Phasma mirrors him. “Those troops we deployed to the depot—”

The rest of the conversation is carried out in hushed tones. Treason is always best whispered, carefully and behind closed doors.

Chapter End Notes

In the words of General Brendol Hux II: WELL, THEN.

’bout time.

Thank you always to my beta, EjBlaKit, so glad your computer's back ;--; <3 And thank you all who take the time to read and comment about each chapter, you guys make my mornings and my days and give me life. Thanks for all the kudos, the shares, the bookmarks, and literally everything.

**EDIT:** Chapter updated with some minor edits to a few words/sentences.
Rey suffers from some foot-in-mouth moments, and consequently gets a few reminders. Welcome to the Finalizer School of Hard Knocks.

Other than meals with the stormtroopers, shielding training with Yathe, and sparring with Phasma, Rey’s been confined to Hux’s rooms for a week. She’d fought Kylo on this, hating the idea of being tucked away like a fragile piece of glass while he waited for his Knights to arrive.

“A precaution until I can present you to them,” Kylo had said, tucking a wayward strand of her hair behind her ear in apology, and she’d stewed about it since.

After so many days, it had started bleeding into her interactions with the troops. When Rey had asked a handful of men and women their names, they had given her confused glances then given their identification numbers instead, tones hurried and wary while shooting Phasma sideways glances. Her frustration at not being permitted her freedom to roam had seeped into her words when she’d spoken next.

“Why do you do that? Why can’t you all demand that you be allowed to be given names, or the freedom to choose one for yourself? Just because you’re a troop force doesn’t mean you all have to be invisible,” she’d clipped.

The conversation had dropped immediately, every single trooper around her trying to hush her. A few had quickly removed themselves from the table, shooting Lance apologetic looks and Rey somewhat guarded ones. Once she’d managed to pipe down, she’d apologized for her delivery if not exactly for her words, and continued showing up every day.

In the days to follow, Rey would feel more caged than ever.

Rey had caught a couple of glances from new Knights, all of them curious as to whom this new person walking around, calling herself the Apprentice to the First Knight, was. She glared right back, refusing to be intimidated, until they looked away with amused smiles on their faces. She hated Kylo’s arrangement the more for it. It wouldn’t matter how much she stood up for herself if he deliberately kept tucking her away from view, as if trying to shield a newborn bird from the elements.

By the sixth day, she’d asked Phasma to stop for a moment after lunch, and Rey had entered her room in a rush. The room hadn’t been touched in weeks, with Rey only entering it to collect belongings as needed. Hux had quietly made a space for her in his closet, so she’d silently also started moving her belongings. She’d also noticed a second, empty space. Kylo’s, though there was nothing there but a single pair of sleeping clothes. Those would be replaced at night by Kylo’s cowl and helmet, the saber remaining on the nightstand every night. Inside her rooms, she’d collected Luke’s Holocron, pocketing it before joining Phasma.
She nods to Phasma once they’re at Hux’s door. The Captain waits until Rey places her hand on the access pad and enters the room before she returns to her own duties, leaving Rey to stare at the inside of Hux’s empty quarters with a sneer.

Tucked away like a newly hatched bird.

A soft purr comes at her feet and Rey nearly jumps at the furry sensation rubbing against her calf, only to look down and grin from ear to ear.

“Millicent!” She bends over and picks up the kitten — a kitten no longer, really. Millicent had been well taken care of, turning shiny and heavy and fluffy in all the right places.

Rey walks over to the couch, taking out the Holocron and setting it aside for a moment as she busies herself with rubbing behind Millicent’s ears. It’s the middle of the day and, as per Kylo Ren’s instructions, she would not be training with him while he convened with the Knights. Annoyance curls in her gut. Millicent, unknowing of Rey’s problems, only purrs harder at the attention and curls up on Rey’s lap as if nothing had ever changed.

Well, at least *that* is one small comfort. Rey sighs, then picks up the Holocron and turns it around in her hands. She spends the rest of the afternoon frustrated, trying to find ways to pry it open. At one point Rey even tries to use a knife, and despite her jamming and prying, the Holocron neither scratches nor budges. She growls at it.

By the time she’s resorted to hitting it against the edge of the table, Hux walks in. Millicent is back in Rey’s lap, refusing to move no matter what she does.

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“United at last, I see,” he teases when he spots Millicent, taking off his gloves and placing them on the small table by the side of the entrance. Rey grins, thoughts of the Holocron temporarily forgotten.

“I thought she was with Phasma?” Rey asks, rubbing behind Millicent’s ears. The cat gives her an appreciative purr.

“And now she’s here,” Hux replies, busying himself with taking off his coat and unzipping his jacket right in front of her. This time he doesn’t tease her about needing a better view like he’d done eons ago. He barely notices he’s undressing. “I assumed you’d like to have her back.”

Rey keeps rubbing Millicent’s ears and smiles. Millicent’s return feels a little like an apology for what had transpired a few days prior. Her silence seems to prompt Hux on.

“You can have her. Permanently, I mean. If you’d like,” Hux says, carefully inspecting his nails, the hems of his sleeves. “I barely have time to care for her, and she likes you.”

Rey tilts her head. “Are you gifting me Millicent?” She asks. Hux smiles to himself.

“She likes you more than she likes me, I think,” he says.

Rey grins, pinching her nose as she looks at Millicent. Yes, she’d forgive him for his keeping secrets from her. Just as she’s about to say something, though, the third and last dinner attendant ambles in, busy removing his helmet. Kylo Ren’s terrifying metal mask comes to rest next to Hux’s gloves, quickly joined by his cowl and his own set of gloves. Kylo takes in air quickly and wanders over to her. He’s about to offer his hand for her to take so he can help her off her chair, a new habit of his that reminds her of the General, when his eyes land on the Holocron.

“Where did you get that?” He asks, voice low and awfully even. Rey’s gaze follows his, to the diamond-shaped metal block.
Rey chews on the inside of her cheek, gently placing Millicent to the side and picking it up.

“It—” Rey turns it around in her hand, “Your u— Sky—Skywalker gave it to me. A gift. He said it would teach me to heal, but I can’t open it.”

Kylo snorts. Rey tries to decide whether it’s at the gift coming from Luke, whom she knows Kylo considers a total failed waste of space, or her inability to open it, or both. She decides it’s about her inability to open it when a minuscule smile spreads over his lips, and swallowing at having stared too long.

She’d caught herself staring, over the last week, while he slept. Looking at his face, so very young, while he draws breath through barely parted lips. Rey looks away. Kylo lowers himself to the seat next to her and Millicent bares her little fangs at him before scooting off. The tabby runs away into the bedroom. Rey arches an eyebrow and Kylo rolls his eyes, then takes the Holocron from her, examining it closely.

“You need the Force to open it,” he explains, twisting it as he inspects it, the Holocron looking so much smaller in his much larger hands. Kylo places his hand on her knee, his thumb rubbing into her skin, an absent-minded gesture. Rey tries not to jump at the touch. Then she feels it. He draws from his own Force ability, his touch feeding it to her through the bond, and returning it to the Holocron. Rey pays close attention. He weaves it into the tiny grooves as one would a key in a lock, and Rey watches with fascination, feeling through him as the internal mechanisms disengage. Hux watches curiously, having already placed the order for their meals.

A small hologram appears, hovering between Rey and Kylo. It’s a small creature, robed and aged and it reminds her a little too much of Maz.

“Who summoned me?” asks the woman. Rey looked at Kylo, and he inclines his head for Rey to speak.

“I have,” Rey says, feeling a little out of her depth. “Are you…”

“I am but a recording, Artificial, if you will,” the small woman speaks. “You may call me Zah. There is little essence left of me here. Enough to interact with you though it is limited. What do you wish from me?”

Rey glances at Kylo, but his eyes are narrowed in on the holographic little Jedi projecting from the object on his palm. Zah turns her eyes on Kylo and gives him a once over that makes his eyebrows furrow, then returns her attention to Rey.

“You can teach me to heal?” Rey asks, remembering Luke’s words.

“Yes,” the Holocron replies, succinctly as possible. Rey’s brows rise. Kylo frowns further, and Rey senses frustration from him. “What do you know of healing?”

Rey frowns, taking the holocron from Kylo’s hand. He does not protest. “Nothing.”

She listens with rapture to the small creature give its introduction to healing via the Force. She barely notices as she stuffs her food into her mouth as quickly as possible once it arrives, then disappears behind the bedroom door with the Holocron after hastily excusing herself. Kylo and Hux watch her go with mild amusement, but she doesn’t mind. She plops herself in the middle of the bed and places the Holocron in front of her, listening. Millicent immediately curls up at her side.

Kylo walks in not long after, gingerly lowering himself to the mattress and watching her as she listens to the Zah creature. She feels both his interest and distrust at a Holocron of the light, but he
says nothing. Hux follows soon after, going to the refresher to get ready for bed. Rey looks at Kylo.

“Can you heal?” she asks him, after Zah has stopped. Kylo shakes his head.

“Migraines at best,” he says, nibbling on his bottom lip. Rey tries not to openly stare. “Healing is a power of the Light.”

Zah looks at Kylo, then nods at Rey. “He is right, young one. The Dark Side knows nothing of healing.”

She senses more than sees Kylo’s stiffening shoulders, but he blessedly remains quiet as Zah speaks of the differences between both sides.

“You will need to practice often, child, in order to be adept at healing. Once you learn, however, you can heal most things.”

“Most?” Rey asks, and Zah nods.

“Most,” the little hologram says, “Unfortunately, the closer someone is to death, the harder it is to return them to our world.”

Rey and Kylo both frown at this, so Zah changes course. “But not to worry. I can teach you to heal. You will need something or someone to practice on, however. I do not recommend healing yourself as a means of learning. It is often best to project your powers outward into another living creature.”

Rey bites her lip. She can’t access her powers.

As if having heard her thoughts — He probably had — Kylo reaches forward and shuts off the Holocron. Rey’s eyes snap up to his, and his gaze softens.

“You will learn,” he promises. Rey refrains from letting the soft sigh escape from between her lips, looking down. He leans forward and tips her face up by the chin with his thumb and index finger. “I promise.”

How many promises had he made her now? Looking at him like this, it was hard to remain angry at his having kept the nightmares from her, when he’s so very eager to please. Rey offers a tiny smile. She’d promised herself that she’d try and give this man a chance. It had been her, after all, who had pleaded with him to let her in. She could scarcely get to know him if she kept shutting him out. Still, his sudden amiable demeanor gives her hope that she might also be able to push her luck elsewhere.

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“About training, will I learn with the other Kni—“ she starts. Kylo drops his hand, pursing his lips.

It is in his anger and frustration that she feels him grow bigger. She wonders sometimes If it is perhaps a skill of the dark, to be able to make oneself seem infinitely larger than life when necessary. She swallows.

“No,” he says. Rey grinds her teeth, and so he softens his voice. “There are…” he begins, looking for the words.

Rey bites her lip. He’d been trying, as promised. Trying to speak, rather than lash out. Over the last few days, every time she’d demanded something, or pushed, he’d pulled back and used his words rather than his muscle. He continues.

“There are… certain things I must address with my Knights before I introduce you, Rey,” he says. Rey tightens her grip on the Holocron, and so he reaches forward and takes her hand, prying her
fingers away and engulfing them in his own. When he speaks next, it is just above a whisper. “Do you trust me?”

Rey stares.

He had done nothing for her to deny him her trust. Sure, his past and her own were still a sore thorn in their sides, but he’d been trying. He’d done nothing but look out for her well being. She swallows.

She could learn to trust him.

Rey nods. Kylo smiles, pleased, rubbing his thumb over her knuckles gently, taking in her expression to see if it bothers her.

Ever since waking up cocooned in his arms, Rey can’t seem to be able to make herself fight him as hard as she had once; so instead of withdrawing, she watches his large thumb turning little circles on the back of her hand, massaging it there. Time stretches then speeds, and the room sways while they slip into their force bond. It is a similar sensation to wrapping themselves in it at night, except this time the hum encompasses all of her awareness.

The spell is broken when Hux walks in. The General looks at their holding hands, then at Rey and Kylo in turn. Rey can’t quite tell if that’s a smile tugging at the man’s lips, or just the light, but the spell is broken nonetheless. Kylo drops her hand and walks to the refresher to change for bed. Rey stares at the Holocron.

Hux scoots in behind her, arm bumping into her back as he leans over and looks at the Holocron. It is too close, his breath on her shoulder, the smell of his cologne and his soap, the dampness of his hair. She steals a glance over the side, but he’s busy narrowing his eyes at the Holocron in her one hand.

“Did you learn anything?” He asks, curious as a cat. Rey smiles and holds it up to the light for him. Here, without Kylo to watch, she can admit to her fears.

“A little, but I can’t do anything about it,” she sighs, “I need the Force for this.”

Hux looks at her, and it brings his nose so very close to her face. He gives her a tentative smile. “You’ll figure it out, little one. You’re smart, and your Master can help you.”

Is that another promise? She tilts her head to get a better look at him, taking in his long, coppery lashes as they flutter mid-blink, and watches as Hux’s eyes drop to her lips. She licks at them nervously, on instinct. The motion draws him closer, barely a millimeter, but it stops her heart.

A throat clears.

Hux snaps to attention, withdrawing from Rey, shoulders back as he returns to his senses, and Rey’s cheeks flush when she takes in Kylo’s pupil-blown stare. It disappears on the next blink, leaving her to wonder if she’d imagined it, but instead of focusing on it she turns and deposits the Holocron next to Kylo’s saber on the bedside table.

They all slip into bed quietly, same as always, with all three of them staring at the ceiling in silent agreement that sharing a bed is nothing more than a necessity to help them all get sleep, even as they all know they’ll wake up tangled in each other the next morning. Rey looks at them both and draws in air. She’d been the mastermind behind this arrangement. It’s too late now to regret it, plus she has to admit that sleeping without nightmares is the best thing that’s happened to her in a long time.

_Icy Blue. Golden Brown._
Her mind provides that getting sleep is not the only good thing that’s happened to her in a long time. With that disquieting thought, she closes her eyes, then feels a small little purring bundle walking up the bed and plopping itself on Rey’s stomach. Rey opens one eye to find Millicent pawing at her, trying to make herself comfortable. From one side she hears Hux’s breathy snort, and from the other a tiny groan from Kylo. That’s right, Millicent dislikes Kylo. Rey grins.

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“Concentrate,” Yathe barks while Rey struggles to do the very same thing she’s being ordered to do.

She finally throws up her arms and groans, and Yathe stares at her hard, swatting Rey hard across the shoulder blades with a whip of the Force. The woman does not mess around when trying to teach someone. It reminds her of Kylo’s method of teaching: do or die. Rey grunts. It forces her to sit straighter.

“You cannot shield something with precision if you allow your mind to wander, Rey,” Yathe says. They’d come to address each other by name in the week that Rey had spent training.

Kylo had spoken of lessons with Yathe for mental shielding, reminding her that she would do well to keep her thoughts well concealed in the face of the Supreme Leader, a thought that makes her hairs stand on end, and so Rey meets Yathe for lessons daily before joining Phasma for lunch.

The thought of Snoke must have floated too close to her awareness. Yathe narrows her eyes, leaning in towards Rey until their faces are inches apart.

“Careful, Lady Ren,” Yathe whispers, “Do not let your impatience betray you. There are others here who can read your mind just as easily as I, when you’re so willing to be read like an open book.”

Rey grits her teeth. She nods, then takes inhales deeply. Yathe leans back, satisfied, while Rey slowly starts building up her walls.

Whereas Kylo’s teachings involve shielding thoughts behind silence, Yathe’s method shrouds them in darkness, until it is as though there had been nothing there to begin with. A vacant mind cannot be read when there is nothing there, or so it would seem. Rey starts feeling the beads of sweat at her temple. This takes far, far more concentration than Kylo’s basic lesson on shielding. Then again, Rey had far, far more dire secrets to hide.

Yathe probes into her mind, testing her, and when the image of Kylo comes up, the Knight plucks it. She arches an eyebrow at Rey, but thankfully Rey had managed to hide the thought attached to the face.

“Why do you think of your Master?” Yathe asks, slanted eyes curious.

Rey clears her throat, shifting uncomfortably in her seat as she feels Yathe try and probe further. She slams the woman out, and when Yathe grunts, she smiles. She may not be quite able to produce darkness, but Rey had quickly found that she could force people out. She’d done it once with Kylo Ren. It wasn’t always effective, but it had worked this time.

“You would do well to never try to forcefully eject, your Master might not take kindly to it,” Yathe warns, and Rey gets a distinct impression she’s not talking about Kylo. She swallows.

Reminders of Snoke keep cropping up everywhere for her, and the more she has to think about the creature, the more Rey feels as though there is something she’s missing. Rey nods obediently.
Just as Yathe opens her mouth to speak again, however, her attention shifts towards the door. A large figure in chrome enters the room. Rey and Yathe both stand as Phasma removes her helmet. Rey watches Yathe bow to the Captain, a small dip at the waist, and Phasma inclines her head in turn. Rey wonders if bowing is an actual custom of Yathe’s, or if she just likes the platinum-haired woman. Rey had certainly never seen Yathe bow to anyone else but Kylo Ren. Rey has to crane her neck to look between them both.

“My ladies,” Phasma greets, giving Yathe a small, guarded smile before turning to Rey. “Are you ready?”

Rey looks at Yathe, and Yathe gives her a small nod. “We will continue your lessons tomorrow,” the Knight says before giving Rey and Phasma another small bow and departing. Phasma tracks the woman for a moment before turning to Rey.

“I heard about your words to the stormtroopers,” Phasma says. Her tone’s not quite as friendly as it usually is. Rey cringes. Still, she won’t apologize.

“I asked a simple question, Captain,” Rey says, steeling herself for the pain Phasma could bring down on her head. “They deserve names, do they not? You have one, Hux has one, why not them?”

Phasma studies her for a very long time, face stony. Reading her is sometimes harder than reading General Brendol Hux. Rey tries not to swallow or itch away the tinge of dread curling up her arms.

Phasma turns on her heel, clipping long steps out the door, and Rey almost bites her tongue.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. She only had Phasma for a friend here, and Yathe, to an extent, and here she goes alienating one of the two.

Rey berates herself, wondering if she should follow, when Phasma walks back in and arches an eyebrow.

“Are you not following?” The Captain asks. A bit of strength leaks out of Rey’s legs in relief, and she sprints after the woman. They walk the rest of the way in stretching silence, with Rey’s tongue glued to the roof of her mouth to keep from saying anything stupid again, until Phasma finally speaks again.

“They are good men, Lady Rey,” Phasma says, and Rey can’t help but notice the tinge of pride in those words. “Good, hardworking men. They are also meant to follow orders.”

“And why can’t they both follow orders and be individuals at the same time?” Rey asks, tilting her chin up.

Phasma looks at her, and Rey has to force herself to meet the woman’s level gaze.

*Keep your mouth shut*, Rey berates herself again. Still, that part of her that came back to help these men couldn’t let it go.

Phasma’s brows furrow, and though they keep walking, it’s as though the Captain does not need to look ahead in order to know where she’s going. That, combined with the piercing look Rey’s given, makes Rey almost want to excuse herself and walk away. Phasma doesn’t need to speak in order for Rey to know what the answer would be.

*Finn.*

All it takes is a name, a shred of individuality, for a man to break rank.
“They have nicknames,” she defends. “How is that any different?”

Phasma hums, one hand holding her helmet under her arm, the other clasped behind her back. She finally stares ahead.

“Nicknames…” Phasma says, as if thinking about it, but mostly deflecting the question. She looks again at Rey. “I know you’ve been giving them nicknames.”

Rey swallows. She had. The few troopers who had had no nickname of their own: Marla, a buff little woman with stick straight hair and olive skin who looked like she could benchpress any man in that room, and Pip, an old stormtrooper (by Rey’s standards, really. Pip could be no older than forty) the size of a boulder, who wore a perpetual frown at Lance’s sass. He had smiled once for Rey, though: the time she’d named him Pip.

Rey looks ahead while Phasma studies her, trying hard not to run in the opposite direction. She had come to help. If it meant having to confront her one sort-of friend here, she would. She’d done it before with Finn, and it had hurt far more then. Rey could do this.

“I have. They deserve something,” she responds, resolute to appear brave. She would not apologize.

Phasma gives her a long look before her lip curls up at one corner.

The amazonian woman nods, “So, Marla and Pip, huh?”

Rey chokes a little. “Wait, you knew?”

Phasma grins, “Lady Rey, there is nothing I do not know about my troops. I’ve known since you started speaking with FN-5563 — Lance, to you — that first day in the cafeteria.”

When Rey turns three levels of pink, Phasma laughs. “He looks a little like our esteemed Commander, does he not? Though I do admit his eyes have something of Ren in them.”

Just as Rey turns to give Phasma a wild look, to which the woman responds with a smirk, Lance struts up to her and bops her on the shoulder.

“Lady Rey,” Lance greets, making for Rey to follow him to the food line.

Rey follows him and they sit at their usual table, except this time it’s mostly empty. Rey stares at her meal. Perhaps she’d spoken too quickly about change. She pushes her blue beans around while Lance hurriedly shoves his face full of food. It had been a handful of days now since she’d caused the little stir in the cafeteria, and mostly the stormtroopers had stayed away.

She must have looked positively pitiful, though, because a moment later she hears the scrape and push of plastoid. Rey’s eyes snap up.

Pip.

He gives her a tiny, indecisive smile, but it lifts her spirits higher than anything else could today. Rey grins, then clears her throat and looks back at her food.

“Pip,” she begins, starting on an apology, though still resolute in not dropping the nickname, “What I said before—“

She’s cut off by a rough hand reaching out and touching her arm. When she looks up, she can see the sheer amount of effort it takes him to do such a small thing. The man had never had any interaction with another Force user. For all he knows, she could have been made of fire and he’d die
just from touching her. Rey fights the urge to smile, he’s projecting so hard.

Pip had been one of those who had taught her about Stormtrooper blasters those first few times in the cafeteria. She looks at the white hairs slowly cropping up in his dirty blonde hair, and thinks about how he’s known nothing but a Stormtrooper’s life.

“No,” he says, then lowers his voice. Lance has stopped eating as quickly, he’s barely touching his meal, really, but he keeps his eyes averted. “No.”

She frowns at him. Is it agreement with her words? Is it a reminder never to do it again? Pip is not a verbose man.

Rey sighs, then looks at her plate. Her eyes land on her muffin. She picks it up and splits it three ways, then gives them a small apologetic smile. The men grin and take a piece each, and this is how Rey spends the rest of lunch. Sharing food and trying, as hard as it may be, to make friends with these men all over again.

This quiet will last for another few days.

The next time she loses her temper, however — after several lashes to her shoulder blades from Yathe, a near run-in with the short Knight of Ren whose name Rey doesn’t know but who keeps making her hairs stand on end, and grumbled words to Phasma over getting a beating during hand to hand combat — Rey is not in a good mood.

Phasma skips lunch to attend a meeting that Rey also knows Hux is attending, leaving Rey at the cafeteria doors before walking away with purposeful steps. Rey joins the same table she’d always had, a near constant now, and watches as Marla sits down, along with a few others. Perhaps she hadn’t lost them all completely after her previous outburst.

They all give her small glances and Rey tries to paste on a smile, but eats without offering much conversation. She’s gotten to know a lot of new people in these lunches, and can remember at least two dozen of them by nickname if not ID numbers. Pip has set a muffin aside for Rey.

She takes it with a thank you then glares at it.

She’d confronted Kylo that morning, having learned that the rest of the Knights of Ren had finally congregated. Fifteen total, if she were to count her Master. That had seemed like so many more than what Luke had mentioned. She’d only expected seven. There were so many more.

She picks at the muffin, ignoring the worried glances Lance, Pip, Marla, and everyone else at the table keep shooting her. They might have accepted her into their fold, if only because of Rey’s sheer stubbornness to keep showing up every single day, but Rey still stands apart, an Other. Sometimes, like now, they treat her as such.

“Are you alright?” Lance finally asks, and the others lean in closer. Perhaps they expect her to explode in a burst of anger that would make Kylo Ren proud, she muses, only to feel her cheeks flame a little.

“He looks a little like our esteemed Commander, does he not? Though I do admit his eyes have something of Ren in them.

Rey can’t quite meet Lance’s gaze, the one she now knows reminds her of her Master. She eats a chunk of muffin so she doesn’t have to speak. Lance shrugs and returns to his meal, while Rey’s mind returns to Kylo Ren.
Fifteen Knights. She remembers Yathe’s warning that Rey’s path would not be easy amongst them, and has to take a deliberately hard swallow in order to keep the muffin from lodging in her throat.

Rey looks at Pip.

“Do you like your jobs?” Rey asks before she can even think about it, trying to distract herself from Ren.

A few people shrug, a few sort of nod but not really, and Pip gives her a very self assured ‘yes.’ Rey hums.

Lance shrugs, “It pays decent. They feed us, we have beds, and the off-ship trips aren’t that bad. Believe it or not, most of our time is spent patrolling or being sent on recon missions.”

Rey looks at Lance and arches an eyebrow. They have beds, not homes. She’s about to say something about it when Pip speaks up.

“Do you like your job?” Pip asks, the most he’s ever said. Rey laughs.

“I don’t think you can qualify an apprenticeship as a job,” Rey replies, though sometimes dealing with her Master certainly felt like one. Pip grunts something like agreement. Rey looks around, and her eyes catch on a cloak passing the main entrance. Dark as night. She catches a glimpse of a boot, a hint of a helmet, and a long tail of jet black hair, listening to the suddenly obvious and loud stomping sounds of his stride. She bites her lip. The knights are prowling the ship, and that particular Knight had been setting her teeth on edge.

She’d never even talked to him. Didn’t even know his name. But he’d studied her so closely the first time she’d entered the training room that the unease imprinted on her skin would not abate upon any sighting of the man. Lance pulls her back from her thoughts.

“So, you promised us once, what’s Lord Ren like?”

Rey laughs, shaking her head.

“Is it true he has a shrine to his grandfather?” one asks, then someone else says, “Are those ashes really ashes? Or is it a litterbox?”

On that, Rey chokes. Lance cackles, Marla throwing a piece of food at Lance’s face with a stern ‘you’ll get us in trouble!’ but the grin on her petite face is brilliant. Even Pip cracks a smile.

The troopers were serious gossips. She diverts them instead, turning the conversation to herself so as to avoid talking about Ren directly. She tells them of having left — though not quite the reason why — then chosen to return to study under the man. She tells them of her training, a bit of it. They all seem awfully intrigued by this concept of opening stances and saber duel forms. Rey grins. She also tells them about where she’s from, and having picked the name for herself.

At this, everyone’s eyes lower. The naming thing.

It was a little too close to home. Lance immediately eyes his food, and Rey finally grunts.

“Seriously, aren’t you all tired of being addressed by a number?”

Her first mistake had been to not moderate her voice.

The whole room falls quiet.
Rey cringes.

*I’m here to help these men.*

“Well, well, if it isn’t the little bird.”

Rey swivels on her feet, hackles rising immediately as the Knight of Ren approaches. She notices almond shaped eyes first, dark and malicious, as they take her in from the crown of her head to the tip of her boots. He approaches on languid steps, head tilted just so as he inspects Rey, the sharp edges of his face shifting as his jaw works, and Rey’s instinct is to back away. She plants her feet and sets her shoulders instead, though not before throwing a glance over his slender shoulders at the hall. She’s alone.

She’d left the cafeteria in a hurry after that cringe-worthy lunch, watching as all the stormtroopers once again retreated into themselves at her question regarding their names. Rey had escaped with hurried, muttered apologies, faking a call from Lord Ren in order to get away and collect her thoughts, taking shortcuts and walking through empty halls to avoid further embarrassment. That had been her mistake.

Rey clamps her mouth shut and stares the Knight down. He approaches her as he would a scared rabbit, an animal of prey eyeing its next meal. Rey inhales deeply. He doesn’t seem bothered by it.

“So, you’re our Master’s little jewel,” he speaks with an accent she can’t quite place. She’d heard a few similar ones on Jakku… somewhere from the mid-rim? She narrows her eyes in a frown, and he smiles.

“I am not Lord Kylo Ren’s jewel,” she bites, shoulders tensing even as her fingers itch to grab her lightsaber. He holds his palms up, a non-threatening stance, but Rey can’t help but stiffen further as a smile unfurls on his features. It is not a kind smile.

“Who said I meant Lord Kylo Ren, little bird?” he asks, stepping closer. Rey finally steps back. She hates herself for the glance she takes over her shoulder, fear spiking. When she looks at the Knight his smile has intensified. “But where are my manners? It is only fair that you know my name as I know yours. You may call me Rojan.”

Rey tightens her lips over her teeth.

“How do you know my name?” she asks, refusing to even address his greeting. Rojan’s brows rise.

“Why, the Supreme Leader, of course,” Rojan drawls, trying once more to take a step closer. He tilts his head from one side to the other, inspecting her with the clinical precision of a master surgeon trying to find where to dig in his scalpel. “He has asked about you often, little Rey. I thought perhaps you would have known?”

Rojan steps back just as Rey hears clomping steps approaching, just as she feels anger radiating through her bond, an anger that she had not felt before. Rojan straightens, giving her an indulgent smile as the glint of malice disappears from his eye.

“Ah, our conversation must come to an end. Perhaps another time,” Rojan murmurs, just as Kylo Ren comes into view.
Rey feels Kylo’s grumble reverberate through her as if it were inside her own chest, their Force bond flaring hot. Kylo comes to stand next to her.

“Rojan,” Kylo says in a tone that implies anything but a pleasant greeting, “I thought I had made myself clear that you and the others were to remain in your rooms unless summoned.”

Rojan bows, all deference, turning to Rey for a second before letting his chocolate colored eyes land on Kylo.

“My apologies, Lord Ren,” he says, “I saw your apprentice and couldn’t help myself. We’re all curious, after all. What a lovely girl.”

Kylo steps forward. It’s a single step, but with it he seems to grow to twice his size. Rey shifts until she’s shielded behind him, hating herself for her desire to run. Kylo tries to pull her into their bond, to soothe it away, even as he looms menacingly over Rojan.

“You were given orders, Knight of Ren. I suggest you follow them.”

Rojan tenses. “Careful—“

“Now!” Kylo barks.

It is, perhaps, a testament to Kylo’s power. She’d never seen it before, the raw nature with which he handles this one Knight. He’d been nothing but soft with her, and the realization lands like a brick against her ribcage.

“As our code commands, I live to serve, Master,” Rojan sneers even as he bends at the waist in deference, hand to chest, yet Rey hadn’t missed the way the Knight had flinched. She looks at the back of Kylo’s head. Rojan’s eyes lift and land on Rey, searching, long ponytail of ebony hair falling in wisps over his shoulder.

“We’ll see each other again, Lady Ren,” Rojan promises. It’s a threat, she’s sure of it, but he covers it quickly enough. “At your introduction.”

The end of his sentence curls into a question and Rojan focuses on the Master of the Knights of Ren. A question? A dare?

Kylo’s hands are fisted at his sides and he gives a curt nod, and so Rojan turns around and walks away on light feet. When they can no longer hear his steps, Kylo rounds on Rey.

Rey feels him soften through the bond, though the way he looms screams of held tension in his muscles. She can feel it as if it were her own.

“Are you alright?” he asks. Rey nods, then frowns.

“I— Fine,” she replies, then glances around him down the hall Rojan had walked. “Who is that?”

Kylo’s face goes hard. “You’ll know in due time.”

Rey drops it. She follows him until he deposits her in Hux’s rooms again before he relaxes. Kylo reaches out with his mind, and Rey brushes into his awareness. His face softens, and in a bold move his hand moves up to touch her, then he hesitates and stops.

*May I?* Comes from the bond, a soft, hopeful little question. It makes Rey smile. Perhaps her words had finally sunk in as she watches him internalize her request to ask, never take. Rey nods, because
what else can she do when he’s being so gentle? It’s not like the man hadn’t held her to sleep for days now, along with Hux.

He lets out a soft sigh, the bond thrumming with pleasure as his thumb reaches out and caresses her jawline tenderly, so different from his barked command at Rojan.

*You’re not a weakness, Hux had said once, at least not the kind you think you are.*

Rey shivers.

“Trust me,” he pleads as he drops his hand. Rey looks at it at his side, thinking of all the subtle hints and Kylo’s not so subtle kiss. He’d been doing this so often, reaching out and touching her in any way possible, and Rey had found herself never quite pulling away. She nibbles on her lip then looks around at Hux’s quarters. She’d asked to be let into his life, into this life. It was time to let him into hers.

“Would you help me with the Holocron?” Rey asks. Kylo frowns, obviously caught unawares, then his head dips down and he looks at her from under half-hooded lashes.

“Of course.”

Rey smiles, touching him through the bond absentmindedly. He’s putting her above everything else once again and it doesn’t go unnoticed. Her mind travels to Kuat, when he’d mentioned he’d offered her the world. Rey bites her lip and nods.

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Later that afternoon, Rey’s head snaps up when the door hisses open, letting in the other constant in her life: Hux. Kylo’s eyes follow hers and Rey’s lips quirk up in a smile until she notices the tense set to his shoulders, the downturn to his lips. She looks at Kylo. It’s far too early in the day for Hux to be in his rooms.

Hux walks towards them with clipped steps and, entirely disregarding Rey, turns to Kylo.

“May I have a word with your apprentice?” he asks.

Rey immediately recoils at being addressed that way, her frown intensifying.

“I’m right here, you know?” she asks, but Hux doesn’t take his eyes off Kylo. Kylo frowns, and Rey knows they’re talking without words again, perhaps Kylo dipping into Hux’s mind. She wonders if this is how Hux feels every time he’s excluded, but has little time to wonder as Kylo lifts himself up off the couch carefully and walks out the door, excusing himself on account of Knights of Ren business, and exits the room on quiet, long steps.

Hux’s eyes follow the Knight and, as the seconds stretch, trepidation curls in Rey’s gut. She hadn’t seen this expression on the man since the last time he’d pulled her aside to ask about the Resistance, weeks ago.

This could not end well. Rey steels herself, taking in the squared angle of Hux’s stance, the hard-set jaw, and her breaths slow until she’s almost holding them in. When he finally looks down at her, it’s with the same warning gaze of eons ago, once upon a time, over a data pad as he informed her not to betray his trust.
She swallows.

No, this could certainly not be good.

“My office,” Hux says, tone low and careful. He turns on his heel and leaves her. Rey purses her lips.

She follows behind him on silent feet, then stands at the door once he takes his seat. Hux gestures for her to take one across the desk.

“I’d rather stand, thank you,” she says. Hux arches an eyebrow, but says nothing, leaning forward and lacing his fingers in front of him, stretching the silence until her stomach does small somersaults.

Rey can almost guess what this is about. Almost.

He proves her right.

“‘Seriously, aren’t you all tired of being addressed by a number?’” he finally says, repeating her words from earlier.

Rey pinches her nose, refusing to look away.

The clock on the wall ticks uncomfortably away as Hux regards her with icy blue eyes that remind her of chips off a glacier. Rey fists her hands at her sides.

“I—“ she begins for explanation, only for him to hold up a hand. Rey stares at the hands that had so often touched her, held her. She cringes internally.

“No,” Hux says. It takes an act of the Maker for her not to jump at his tone. “Lance, I allowed. You made a friend and I allowed it.”

At that her blood boils. Rey breathes in deeply, opens her mouth to defend herself, and Hux, always a step ahead, slams his hand down on his desk, standing up. She actually jumps this time.

“Do not interrupt me,” he barks. “Lance, I allowed. I thought, sure, it would do her well to get to know my men, to make herself at home. You said you wanted to get to know them, but what you spouted out there today is a direct undermine of my command, Rey.”

The anger that started to boil in the pit of her stomach suddenly turns to ice, then lead. He’d never raised his voice at her. Not once. Not when giving her a hard learned lesson about what she had once thought of as good and evil, not when she’d denied him information that could aid his cause. Not once. Not until now.

Hux pins her in place with his stare for a moment longer, then extends his hand to the chair again.

“Sit.”

It is not a request this time.

Rey walks on leaden feet into the room and sits down. Hux walks around the desk and closes the door, even though there’s nobody else to listen to him except Millicent. Rey can feel him behind her, listens to him inhale sharply before he lets it out in one long, slow breath. When he stands before her his eyes are no longer shards, though his edges are still sharp enough for her to cut herself.

How had he known?
Rey closes her eyes for a second. No, of course he’d known. The man knows everything that happens aboard his ship, and news of her outburst in the cafeteria would travel quickly, an apprentice to a Dark Lord stirring dissent amongst the rank and file at lunch time.

I’m here to help those men. I’m here to help those men. It becomes a mantra as Hux pulls the seat next to her far enough that when he sits, he’s in her direct line of vision, daring her to try and avoid him. One leg over the other, an emperor at his leisure.

She’d certainly gone too far.

“You will not do this again,” he warns, much like he had when he’d deposited her in his quarters all those months ago.

I’m here to help those men.

Hux drums his fingers on the arms of the chair, his eyes locked on her mouth as he waits for her to say something. Perhaps to defend herself.

Rey purses her lips then takes in a deep breath.

“I promised to help,” she says. Hux arches an eyebrow, and she forces herself to keep her eyes on his. “They are people, Brendol. They deserve a name.”

“They are soldiers,” Hux corrects, tone hard. “You have done enough damage with this… Pip… and who’s the other?” He can barely hold back a sneer, “They are soldiers, Rey. My soldiers. You would do well to remember whose side you’re on now.”

That does it. Rey’s snaps up and she straightens her shoulders.

“I am on nobody’s side,” she hisses, fingers tightening on the armrest. “I came back to learn from Kylo Ren, Hux, but I don’t owe you or anyone else my allegiance. You would do well to remember that.”

Perhaps it’s the way she returns to his last name. She watches his nostrils flare. Hux closes his eyes for a moment, and when she brushes his mind she feels him trying to compose himself, to rein in his anger. She holds her breath.

“I thought you wanted this to be your home,” he finally says when he opens them again, not quite meeting hers. There’s hurt there, but his annoyance has not abated. His knuckles are white on the armrest, the tic of his left eye that she’s come to know twitching every handful of seconds. “Or do you no longer want my friendship—?” Hux cuts himself off, then amends. “Do you no longer want this arrangement?”

Rey looks down at her hands. Breathing shallow. She can feel her cheeks heat as lead pools in the pit of her stomach, shame weighing her down at his tone of voice, at the question he hadn’t quite finished.

“How could you think that?” She asks, running through the list of promises the General had offered her and delivered on.

“I don’t know what to think, Rey, when you do something like this — why don’t you enlighten me?” Hux asks, voice carefully blank. It drives into her heart like a knife. Funny, how this would be her first real spat with the man. All others pale by comparison when it’s personal like this.

“You are my friend,” Rey finally murmurs. Hux’s drumming resumes.
“Funny way of showing it,” he grumbles. Hux never grumbles.

It brings her eyes up. “What do you mean?”

Hux blinks very, very slowly, as if trying to wait for her to catch up. His head tilts, and she can sense tendrils of his annoyance still simmering under the surface. His brows furrow, just a hair, then he sighs. A long, drawn out sound. The kind that makes her feel as though Hux is trying to deal with a child, and containing himself. Her shame intensifies.

“What do you think, Rey? You just went behind my back and tried to upturn the way I have my troops organized, the sense of order I have worked so hard to foster and maintain. Blatantly, might I add. That’s not how you show a friend you care for them.”

“But I do care!” She balks, chest twisting in pain at the implication that he thinks otherwise. Rey blinks hard.

She does.

Rey looks at Hux anew, taking in every single detail. The tilt to his regal nose, the pale, coppery lashes she’d found herself dreaming of before, the displeased downturn to his lips. Hux holds himself straight, trying to meet her gaze as she inspects the slope of his jaw, the set of his shoulders, those blasted beautiful hands she had agonized over in the past — that thought brings up a second set of beautiful eyes unbidden — and back up to his face. She meets icy blue and swallows.

“I care…” she murmurs, heart hammering out of her chest.

She cares. She cares a lot more than she’d thought, and it takes him questioning her for her to admit it to herself.

It must have shown on her face, the sudden way in which her shoulders deflate, her cheeks pinken. Hux’s frown is no longer entirely annoyance. He looks at her hands tightly wound into the gauzy fabric over her tunic, and he shakes his head. It’s not a head shake meant for her, but for himself. He lets out an exasperated sigh and leans in, grabbing her by both sides of her face gently, forcing her to meet his gaze.

It’s the same hold Kylo had on her when his lips had come crashing down on hers. Rey’s heart starts beating wildly and against her desire for it to do so. His thumbs stroke over where Kylo had that same afternoon.

“Why can’t I stay mad at you?” He asks, though he’s not quite asking her. “Why, even when you’re driving me insane?”

He licks his lower lip, then frowns, and stares at her lips, her eyes, then back down, studying them. Rey stops breathing, holding herself as stiffly as possible while his words play over and over in her brain, rattling around. She brushes into his mind, and all she gets is a wall of determination. He doesn’t seem to notice, or at least, doesn’t try to stop her. His hand moves until his thumb brushes the pad of her lower lip, a feather’s touch. He leans in, then…

Hux regains his senses and breathes softly through his teeth, tilting Rey’s head down until he can place a soft kiss on her forehead.

“Please don’t do it again,” he murmurs against her skin, and the spot burns. Everywhere he’d touched burns. It burns with the touch of his skin just as much as it burns with her shame, at knowing she can’t promise him that.
I’m here to help those men.

Perhaps he knows that, because when he looks down at her again, it’s with narrowed eyes as if trying to find out what other mischief she’s about to get into. The man has an uncanny ability for reading people and knowing things.

“Go on,” Hux urges, “I have work to do.”

Rey studies him again. She’d forgotten who this man was, General Brendol Hux, right along with Kylo Ren. In her anger and her tunnel vision upon her return, Rey had not once quite noticed the degrees to which these men had bent to her every whim. She’d forgotten that they are not soft men. Not like Finn and Poe. Another reminder today, from both of them. She’d have to remember that.

Rey clamps her mouth shut, then nods. She’d have to learn to pick her battles aboard this ship. There would be so many of them.

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When Hux finally exits his office, Rey’s gone. He can hear Millicent purring in the bedroom.

Ah… There she is.

He shakes his head and leaves his quarters, still with hours left to dinner time, and comms Phasma to join him. The whispers had spread like wildfire, as they always did where the stormtroopers were concerned, and Hux had let his anger get the best of him, but perhaps the message had finally gotten through to Rey.

He turns to work. Work is a perfect way to stop thinking about the woman, about her lips, about the way he’d nearly taken them despite himself. She’d admitted to caring, and his stomach had done a really painful backflip, coupled with the feather-light beating of butterfly wings that had just almost made him do something he could potentially regret. He’d been doing that an awful lot lately: just barely stopping himself. She’d admitted to caring, not to loving him. In her eyes, he was probably only a friend. So he’d kissed her forehead, a bold thing on its own, and decided that he’d focus on work for the rest of the evening, pushing thoughts of her soft pink pout, of that quiet moment, to the back of his mind.

He’d spent the rest of the afternoon looking into the massive pile of documents arriving in his inbox, as well as trying to figure out where Snoke could have moved those weapons unsuccessfully. The galaxy is a great big place.

Hux rubs his hand down his face and pinches the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger. Snoke might be arming himself, and he’s stuck in a position where he can do nothing about it until Rey’s block is gone, until Ren reins in his Knights, until Hux is in a place to mount a counter strike. The only thing allowing him the time to see this through had been Rey’s own deliverance of D’Qar to him, but even that had been months ago, and it might mean him fighting two wars on opposite fronts. Any move now might give his intentions away to the Supreme Leader — Hux sneers. It’s becoming harder and harder to think of the vile creature that way. All Hux can do is wait, and make contingency plans, if his fear is true. A well planned strategy is worthless if executed sloppily.

When Phasma reaches him in his office on the Bridge, he’s neck deep in reports. Every single officer who’d heard a stormtrooper speak about having a name. He suppresses the need to groan.

Rey would be the death of him. The last thing he needs now are rowdy troopers breaking rank.
Phasma takes a seat silently.

“You need to contain this,” Hux informs the woman before him. Her helmet comes off, though thankfully, she remains silent.

Hux turns to look at Phasma, frowning. The helmet coming off and Phasma being silent were never a good thing. He’d pulled Phasma into the situation with Snoke, telling her everything that would be pertinent to her station without incriminating her too deeply. That had been the last time Phasma had sat without her helmet and been silent.

He leans back, deactivating the screens with a twist of his wrist and turning his undivided attention towards her. They sit in silence for a long time.

“What is it?” he eventually asks.

Phasma studies his desk, her helmet, then looks back up to him.

“I was thinking—“ she says, and Hux arches an eyebrow. Phasma notices the look on his face and snorts. “I’m serious, Bren. Given what you’ve told me about…” Phasma drops her voice to a whisper, she clears her throat. “The men like her, Hux.”

Hux grunts, rubbing his hand on his temple. Of that much he’s aware. He tells Phasma as such.

Phasma beats two fingers on her helmet, shifting uncomfortably. He’s never known her to shift uncomfortably ever. Hux frowns.

“So why not?” She asks, narrowing her eyes at her gauntlet, her voice almost at a whisper. “Why not let her spread dissent?”

“What is it?” he eventually asks.

Phasma studies his desk, her helmet, then looks back up to him.

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“So why not?” She asks, narrowing her eyes at her gauntlet, her voice almost at a whisper. “Why not let her spread dissent?”

“Excuse me?” He asks.

This is Phasma, right? It certainly looks like her.

“Did someone hit you over the head? Are you asking me to let her undermine us both?” He motions between them. Not but hours ago he’d finished shouting at Rey over the exact same thing. He could laugh, it’s such a ridiculous notion.

Phasma smirks, a bit of herself returning.

“It’s not that far-fetched, Bren,” she says, turning her helmet on her lap and looking at the visor, studying the chrome glint as if questioning its significance. Hux watches her closely. Phasma is the only person who knows Hux has a soft spot for the Apprentice to the First Knight of Ren, but what she’s saying is insane. “You’ve already allowed rumors to spread about her, to show her as equally strong to you and her Master. The men like her.”

Phasma straightens, face serious as she looks up at Hux. “You know I care for those troops, or I wouldn’t say any of this. They’re mine to lead, mine to oversee.” And to indulge, Hux thinks wryly but says nothing. Phasma continues. “But if Snoke is doing what you’ve said he’s doing, then— I don’t think shifting their allegiance from one Force user to another, a charismatic one on our side, is such a terrible idea.”

Our side.

With those simple words, Phasma had drawn the line that Hux had tried so hard to never voice by himself. He studies the woman in a new light. Phasma must hold Rey in very high regard to even
think much less suggest such a thing. He licks his teeth, tapping his index finger on his desk to the beat of the clock, counting the seconds.

Phasma purses her lips.

“The men like her.”

Hux narrows his eyes, turning over Phasma’s words in his mind over and over again. Rey’s face flashes in his mind’s eye.

The final puzzle piece.

“They do,” he agrees.

Chapter End Notes

YOU GUYS. You beautiful people are lovely and amazing and thank you for the super warm welcome to the falling-in-bed-together scene last chapter :P It made me all warm and glowy inside. Thanks for the comments, to those who are still reading and still commenting, and I apologize in advance already for the NEAR BUT NOT QUITE KISSES. *shrug* Hux is doing his thing, who am I to rush him?

Also, everyone welcome Millie back. She's all grown up and no longer a teeny tiny kitten.

Thanks to EJBlaKit who is continually an amazing human being, and thanks for betaing this thing ;-; <3 ilu. Good luck with your new job bebe.

That's it. Early-ish chapter because THE WRITING BUG HAS BIT ME AGAIN AND HERE I AM, A SLAVE TO IT.
Lady Rey

Chapter Summary

Happiness can only last so long...

Chapter Notes

I promised one I would never have monster chapters, but a lot of important things happen here, so here we are. Grab a cup of something warm and tuck yourself in, it's a bit of a long one. Onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*They had been careless, Hux thinks, as he watches it all happen in slow motion.*

Previously:

Rey had spent the last week frustrated. The list of frustrations was long, but this particular one was not just irritating, it was infuriating.

“Try again,” Zah urges for the billionth time. Rey closes her eyes. She’s practiced trying to feel inside of Millicent with the Force while the cat slept, the only creature that would stay still long enough. It should be harmless, she promises herself, trying to sense where Millie’s organs are as one would examine something under a magnifying glass. Except, no matter how hard Rey pushes at the block, she can barely summon a trickle of power to sense Millie’s heartbeat. Nothing more. The intricacies described to her by Zah eludes her.

Rey groans.

She’d asked Kylo to activate the Holocron, then he’d excused himself again. She’d barely seen any of him except for dinner time. A couple of times he’d come back with scratches on his arms and Rey had frowned, her frustration intensifying. With all she’d learned from Zah about healing, about imbuing muscles and skin cells with power, to knit them together and close wounds, she couldn’t even quite heal a scratch on Kylo.

He’d watched her passively while she attempted to heal a wound on his hand once. Rey had ended up throwing her arms in the air, irritation curling in her gut at her failure after having convinced him to let her try, despite his reticence, partly out of a deep seated stubbornness to prove herself, and partly because she’d felt guilty.

It did weird things to her insides, seeing him wounded. It was a stark reminder of how she’d cut him open to die almost a lifetime ago, quickly followed by the memory of how he’d held her in his arms
until she cried herself to sleep over her stupid Force weakness. She’d tried to atone for her sins by attempting to fix these wounds now, rationalizing it as practice, but it did little. Every time she’d fail Kylo would shake his head patiently and tell her ‘you tried’, then he’d wrap a batca patch around the wounds and quietly walk away, much to Rey’s growing sense of shame.

She knew it was the Knights who had inflicted them, yet the more she’d inquired about the Knights, the more he’d close down until there was nothing left but stony silence and detachment. He would train with his Knights during the day, then train her separately at night, only speaking when necessary. When she’d asked if she could join the Knights in training to spare him the doubled work, he’d given her a dead stare.

No, she could not join. Not yet, he’d always say.

*Once you’re ready. Once I am ready. You’ll know in due time.*

His resistance, coupled with her anxiety that she might have finally pushed him too far away, drove her mad. Right along with this stupid little diamond-shaped holocron.

Rey drops her hands from Millie. Millicent does not approve, meowing at her, so Rey rubs behind her ears.

“You must tap into the Force, child,” Zah instructs, patient as only Artificial Intelligence could be.

“I am trying,” Rey groans, rubbing her fingers down her face until the tug is almost uncomfortable.

How often had she judged others for trying?

She’d memorized all the information Zah could give her, remembering Luke’s words that the Holocron could not guide her, only instruct her. So Rey had contented herself with learning everything she could: She now knew more of human anatomy, as well as the basic concept of slowing a heartbeat down, of maintaining it, of speeding it up; of knitting up muscle and stunting bleeds, of preserving organ health for a small amount of time. She knew all there was to know, and could practice none of it.

She couldn’t even fix Kylo’s scratches.

“Do or do not, there is no try,” Zah says. The words wash over her with a sense of Deja Vu she can’t place, but she sighs, then looks around the room. Rey grumbles.

She’d been stuck here for days. Other than for lessons and lunch, Rey hadn’t seen anything outside of Hux’s quarters except the way to and from those two specific things, and never on her own. Yathe would escort her to and from an empty training room, Phasma would escort her to and from hand to hand combat and lunch. She’s starting to feel like the two women had become her handlers, and she again a prisoner inside Hux’s rooms, by Kylo Ren’s own request no less.

As if summoned, Rey hears the tell-tale hiss of a door opening. Only one other person would be free to come and go at this hour. Kylo walks towards the bedroom and stands at the door, hands fisted at his side, dressed in formal garb, helmet on and cowl drawn. She can’t remember the last time she’d seen him this way. There’s a draw and push of air through his modulator before he reaches out through the bond.

*It is time.*
Kylo’s muscles tense and strain, a trapped animal within his own skin, as he leads the way towards the training room, the sound of his footsteps bouncing off the walls like a drumbeat even as Kylo mentally wraps himself in silence. Rey follows behind him, struggling to catch up while also trying to maintain the two feet distance he’d demanded of her.

Weeks of preparation, of keeping her confined despite her annoyance at him, weeks of approaching each one of his Knights, of pacing when neither Hux nor Rey could see him, would all culminate in this meeting. He grinds his molars, thankful for the cover of his helmet, and listens to Rey’s hurried steps, to the drag of fabric on the floor. She’d collected her cloak and cowl from her room, and he’d helped her put them on with extra care. She’d be presented today. A big moment for her at the worst possible time for him, as it would only herald what he’d have to finally confront fourteen of his Knights about. In hindsight, her introduction to the Knights of Ren would be minor by comparison.

Fourteen.

His fingers stretch and contract, tension stretching through every vein and bone, and the sound of creaking leather sounds foreign to his ears, his helmet too heavy on his neck. He’d been spending far too much time ungloved and unmasked, thanks to Rey and Brendol. Weeks of preparation. Kylo’s only hope is that this doesn’t blow up in his face.

When they enter the room he finds all fourteen Knights, fully garbed and masked, waiting for him in a semi circle. He comes to a stop in the middle, Rey quick to do the same behind him. She stops exactly where she should, two feet behind.

“Ah, the little bird.”

Kylo’s head turns infinitesimally towards the modulated source. From the other side, he hears a snort from Yathe.

“This is not the time, Rojan,” she admonishes. Rojan holds up a hand in acquiesce and Kylo refuses to itch the annoyance at Rojan’s words in the back of his mind. Right next to that itch, he can feel Rey start to send distress signals in the bond.

He motions for her to stand by his side, and notes as she squares her shoulders as she steps forward, gazing at all the masked creatures before her, face stern and determined despite the curl of fear he can sense through their bond.

“Unmask,” Kylo orders.

One by one the Knights of Ren take off their helmets with a rustle of cloaks and cowls, and Kylo reads Rey’s mental reaction to every one of them. She regards them all warily, except for two. Yathe is met with respect and admiration, to which Kylo smiles underneath his helmet. Rojan is met with nothing but resentment and distaste. He’d have to keep that in mind. He had heard the tail end of Rojan’s goading days ago in that hall and had had to bodily contain himself from Force choking the Knight for his insolence. Kylo could not afford to alienate these people now. When all faces are bared, he removes his own.

“I present to you Lady Rey of the Knights of Ren,” he says, voice projecting over the room, “She has taken her vows to our cause, and is under my protection.” Kylo’s eyes rove over all the Knights, watching raised eyebrows and frowns, though no surprise. Only Yathe and Rojan’s expressions do not change. “You would do well to give her the same deference you do with me, is that understood?”

A heartbeat.
Another.

He waits for the nods of assent while Rey holds herself to her full height, refusing to be intimidated by the measuring stares of those around her. One by one, the assents come. In the face of what Kylo had come to address, Rey’s introduction seems minor. He’d timed it this way, expected it. The less commotion his apprentice created, the easier it would be to keep her under the radar of hostility. As it is, the fourteen Knights before him quickly turn their shrewd gazes from Rey to Kylo.

Good.

“Have you felt it?” He asks, taking them in one by one. “Surely you believe me by now.”

They had to.

Kylo had approached each and every one of his Knights individually, gauging their moods and reactions until, by their own admissions, each one revealed Snoke’s orders to him. Except these were his men. Only one, Anaj, had dared defy him. He’d returned to Rey covered bruises that day, only to watch her struggle trying to heal a minor cut. Anaj had decided that he would chance fate, and Kylo had given him a parting gift before the Knight had left. So Kylo had used Anaj’s actions as a bargaining chip with the Knights to gain time.

Anaj had chosen to chase Skywalker instead of remaining aboard.

Using the Knight's departure to his own advantage, Kylo had promised each and every remaining Knight that Anaj would die by Skywalker's hand, appealing to their sense of self preservation. So, when Kylo and every Knight on the Finalizer felt the scream of Anaj's death through the Force, like a word on a breeze, Kylo had been given all he needed.

A Knight fights first and foremost for himself.

“Well?” He prompts.

One by one, thirteen Knights nod. Even Rojan reluctantly inclines his head.

“You have been promised a throne that has never been Snoke’s to give,” Kylo begins, and Rey turns to look at him. Kylo grinds his teeth. Keeping her in the dark had been a small price to pay. She’d hate every minute of this, as Kylo hated himself for it, but he could hardly risk having her be found and challenged in the halls before Kylo cemented his position as the Knights’ Master. It had come too close with Rojan.

“He wants us all gone,” Kylo continues.

A slender, pale man who looks far too young and to innocent to be amongst this rank turns his bright green eyes on Rey. Kylo tenses. Timken is a ruthless Knight whose specialty dealt in assassination. That he looks at Rey first makes Kylo’s hairs stand on end.

“And her?” Timken asks. Kylo feels Rey’s alarm as the Knight attempts an intrusion into Rey’s mind. He presses into their bond, helping her enforce the walls and silence she had so carefully practiced with Yathe. Rey’s eyes narrow at the slender man. Good.

“She is no consequence here,” Kylo almost growls. Rey tenses beside him. “You know what you must do. You need no further proof.”

“If you go after Skywalker,” Yathe finally speaks, breaking file to come stand beside Kylo, a clear declaration of her loyalty. “You’re guaranteed to die the same cowardly death Anaj has. Is that what
you want for what we have built, Timken?” Her voice is steady and crystalline, yet edged to a sharp point. “Snoke lied to us. That is the simple truth. Or do you think that if you, by some miracle, manage to kill both your Master here and a Jedi Master with far more training than you, you’ll actually be given the First Knight’s title? You’ll be ruling ashes and no more until your own untimely death.”

The Knights look at each other, hands over sabers and weapons.

They consider it. Ruling over ashes is still a chance to rule.

“He would never let you be First Knight, any of you,” Kylo finally says, hands splayed at his side, waiting to be given a reason to ignite his weapon. “You will be disposed of just as he’s intended for everyone in this room, and then your legacies will evaporate. If you want it, you can go. There’s the door. I will not stop you. Try and chase after Snoke’s false promises of glory. Follow Anaj’s footsteps. If you do not die by Skywalker’s hand, you will die by mine after your pathetic failure,” Kylo looks at all of them across the room, taking in their expressions. “Or you can stay, bend the knee, and help us. Help us unseat this traitorous creature who has used us and our fervor for his own gain.”

There are grunts and whispers, and Yathe’s hand carefully rests on her saber. All the Knights notice. If it came down to it, Yathe and Kylo together could easily slaughter them and leave the training room to become their tomb.

Kylo makes the same promise he’d made Yathe once.

“I would never lie to you.”

The tension rises and rises, the temperature spiking to match. And then it drops by degrees for every Knight that bends the knee, one by one, thirteen in all, until they’re bent over their helmets. As customary, they present their weapons. Kylo finally allows himself to draw in a breath. The last one to kneel is Rojan, willful as always, but he, too, finally bends. A pin could be heard if it were to drop right this moment.

Kylo looks at Yathe only to find her on one knee, gifting him with a feral, triumphant grin. Kylo nods his head, giving her his blessing. Yathe gracefully stands and takes towards the Knights, taking low, practiced steps as she presses a feather light touch to each and every Knight’s head. They are, in many ways, just as much hers as they are his. As they receive Yathe’s acknowledgement, they lift their heads. Their eyes land on Kylo.

“Soon, brothers. Soon, it will be time to hunt,” Yathe says, and for the first time in a long time, Kylo allows himself a smile.

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*What does that mean?* Rey asks immediately through the bond, her hackles having risen at the mention of Luke Skywalker, at the sudden revelation that Snoke wants Kylo gone, but mostly, at the increasing fear that she’s gotten way in over her head.

*Not now. We have time.* Kylo’s response rumbles along back to her.

Rey turns her head infinitesimally towards her Master, then returns her eyes to the kneeling Knights. They all watch Kylo Ren, and Rey swallows. So this is what true power looks like, Rey muses, regarding the thirteen prostrated Knights. A frown makes a permanent home of itself on her face.
Kylo gives her a mental dismissal, something about future plans she needs not be concerned about just yet, and Rey exits the room, grumbling to herself.

*Not Now* extends well into the day, the events of the Knights bending the knee digging at the back of Rey’s mind. She tries to ask him again, and once again he gives her a *Not Now, we will discuss it tonight*. Still, to placate her, Kylo eases up on the grip he’s had regarding her wandering the ship so, for the first time in weeks, Rey walks towards the cafeteria by herself without Phasma to escort her.

When she enters she’s met with Lance’s cheeky grin and a small twitch of Pip’s lips. Her table had been growing, despite her absolute blunder last week. Rey is resolute to keep her mouth shut this time regarding individuality, choosing instead to try a different, softer angle. Pleasantries are exchanged and Rey notes with satisfaction that a second table has been pushed up to join hers.

Perhaps they are only curious about Kylo Ren’s apprentice, but Rey prefers to think that in some dark corner of their subconscious, they are also curious about living a life where they can be seen and treated as human beings. Whatever the reason she gladly accepts the new company, and, with a little help from Lance, coaxes them into giving her their nicknames. A few are ridiculous and hilarious: Shark, Toy, Clubfoot; names taken after incidents or experiences. None of them are a true name. Still, it’s better than a serial code, so Rey smiles at each one of them. The few who have no alias, Rey names. Perhaps this is why they’d joined, to belong to something else. It starts quietly, but by the end of the naming everyone’s laughing. All other tables silently take notice, shooting them curious glances.

Hux had told her not to do it again, but Rey wouldn’t rest. She’d just deal with him later. This is why she’d come back. She had twenty people she had not known almost two months ago giving her cautious smiles as they departed the room. Phasma is nowhere to be seen.

Rey bites her lip at the thought, then looks at her tray. It’s empty, a few crumbs long forgotten. Once upon a time she would have never left even that. She collects them with her index finger then pops them in her mouth before Lance takes the tray. He deposits it for the kitchen to collect then gives her a cheeky grin.

“I see your overseer is not here today,” he teases, and Rey laughs. Phasma was anything but.

“Would you like me to walk you back, Lady Rey?”

Rey’s brows rise and Lance immediately flushes. He starts stammering.

“I mean, only if you’d like, you don’t have to, I know you’re above my rank and—“ he says, then clears his throat. “I didn’t mean it that way.”

Rey grins and looks at the gangly younger man. She squints at him. The poor man’s blushing bright red. When she brushes his mind she finds that all his worry is over whether he’s overstepped the boundaries of his friendship, and worrying about whether he’d get in trouble for speaking to a superior that way. Rey blinks. She’s not a superior. She’s not anything.

Rey pats his shoulder.

“Of course,” she says. The hints of elated relief on his face nearly makes her giggle. Poor kid.

She waits for him to lead the way until Lance stops down the hall, turning to her with a frown.

“I…” he starts, then looks around him, as if waiting for the walls to speak to him, “I’m sorry, I don’t actually know where we’re going?”

Oh.
It’s Rey’s turn to look at the walls. That’s right. No one really knows that she’s basically been living with the two commanders of the First Order in Hux’s rooms. Rey nibbles on the inside of her cheek then sighs. She could lead him to her room, but Luke’s Holocron and her belongings are now all in Hux’s quarters, and Rey is not one to lie to someone she considers a friend when she’d so willingly moved into Hux’s private space.

“General Hux’s quarters,” she says, trying to sound braver than she feels. Lance’s eyebrows fly off his face.

“The Commander?” he asks in a near squeak. “I’m not authorized to go that way!”

Rey brushes into the boy’s mind, only to be met with his stream of consciousness: _Oh Maker what if the Commander is there? General Hux would have my head. And doesn’t Lord Ren have his quarters there? I wonder if he really has a shrine, but then, no one does, do they? And why is Lady Rey—_

Rey dips out of his mind before she can hear something that would make her want to run. Instead she smiles.

“Well, I am, so you can just follow me. I’m your superior, after all.”

She’s not his superior. She’s not anything. But perhaps she could attempt to pull rank if somebody asks as to why Lance is there. She nudges him into walking, listening to the sound of plastoid shifting over plastoid. She’d been aboard the ship long enough to have started tuning out the sound and has to force herself to _focus on it_. Is that what happens to everyone else? Is that why Hux can’t see them as anything other than soldiers? She bites her lip, giving Lance a sidelong glance. He resembles Hux a little too much. What she imagines Hux might have been had he been a kind man, a gentler man. She sighs then slows her step, forcing Lance to slow with her. She had never had the chance to speak with him outside of meals, and this might be her one chance at learning more.

“Lance?” she says, and Lance turns to look at her.

“Yes, My Lady?” he asks, and his tone of voice is so open that she almost wants to cry for the boy. For a boy for whom titles come a little too easily. She’s no lady.

“Do you think I have been too forward in the past? Asking you and your troop mates about your names?” It’s a sore point for many, but Lance had offered her a nickname willingly. If there’s anyone Rey could have this conversation with, Lance might be her best choice. “I didn’t mean to hurt or offend by it, I hope you understand.”

Lance regards her silently, carefully slowing his step even further, before he offers a small smile.

“You don’t have to apologize, My Lady. It’s just that not all of us are willing to think about such things. For us, this is all we’ve known. This is our life, our certainty. It’s not so bad as all that, but we do wonder, sometimes…” Lance trails off, looking above his head. “People like Pip… he’s a veteran here, and he’s not even that old. But he’s survived through a lot more than most of us, and he’s set in his ways. He’s loyal.” Lance shoots a glance over his shoulder, as if fearing that Phasma may crop up anywhere. “After the traitor left, they buckled down on us. Fear of another breaking rank, you see. Security, scheduled meals, reviews and reconditioning…” Lance sighs, “It was hard for us, you see. And, don’t get me wrong, not all of us are like Pip, but this is all we’ve ever known. This is our life, our home, our livelihoods.”

Rey cringes when Lance shoots her a glance. The traitor. Finn. Finn didn’t even deserve a name anymore. He was simply known as someone who had defected and failed his comrades and made
them suffer for his actions.

“We have friends here. It’s the closest to family we’ll ever have,” Lance finally finishes. It twists Rey’s insides.

“Do you remember them— your family?” She asks in a murmur, but this is all too normal for the boy, who simply shakes his head without looking upset or insulted at the prying. He shrugs.

“Nah,” he says, then another small smile comes across his lips. It’s a secret smile, carried on even as he walks and his eyes take on a far away look. “I like to think about them sometimes, what they might have been like.”

Lance’s tone of voice drops to almost a whisper as he steps closer, and Rey watches him look over his shoulder more than once for prying eyes and ears. He’s hoisting his helmet under his arm, which is a clear breach of protocol, but Rey figures she can talk anyone out of troubling him about it, use compulsion if need be. The only two people who could resist her compulsion advances were Hux and Kylo, and she knew Hux would be on the bridge. She senses Kylo’s presence clear across the ship. A new development, this, figuring out where he is at all times. Rey sighs.

“Yeah?” she asks.

Lance looks at her, then smiles.

“I think, if I had known them, my mother would have been stunning, like me!” Lance cackles and Rey laughs. “And Dad would have been some high ranking person, good job, a comfortable life… or maybe they were farmers. I don’t know. I guess I’ll never know. But it’s easy to imagine sometimes.” Lance sighs, “I wonder who they are, sometimes.”

Rey smiles, a wavering thing, pain twisting in her chest. Lance’s parents had given him up willingly. Were compensated for him. Rey could sympathize, though, having spent so many nights trying to imagine versions of her own parents while drowning in a meaningless life on Jakku. How many more were like Finn? Like Lance? Like Pip? Like herself?

“Me, too,” she admits, sighing. “I never knew my parents either.”

Lance turns to look at her with a small frown, so she nudges him into walking faster. It’s a needless motion. A short, almond-eyed Knight of Ren with silky jet black hair comes around the corner. Rojan Ren takes in Lance and arches an eyebrow and Rey starts to feel as though she’s being chased around the Finalizer. The man’s eyes settle on hers just as Lance throws on his helmet and stutters an apology that Rojan ignores. The way Rojan looks at her, with the curious nature of a large predator, she knows he’d heard her talk.

“Lady Rey,” Rojan drawls, voice dulcet and terrifying even without his helmet. Rey squares her shoulders, and Lance shifts.

It brings Rojan’s attention to the young boy.

“You’re dismissed,” Rojan orders. Rey immediately steps closer to Lance, but Lance remains silent. He’s been given a direct order by somebody higher on the rank ladder than he, even if, technically, the Knights had nothing to do with the Order. Rey grabs Lance by the arm, pinning him in place as she looks Rojan straight in the eye.

“I don’t believe that’s necessary. He’s escorting me,” Rey says, words acidic on her tongue. Lance, stuck between two people who far, far outrank him in any possible way, frets while Rey and Rojan engage in a staring match. It becomes clear to Rey that the Knight before her is not used to having
somebody say no to him. She arches an eyebrow and his eyes narrow.

No, certainly not used to it.

Rojan’s lips curl into a soft smile, revealing sharp, glinting white teeth. He nods to her, taking a small bow.

“Ah, I can see why our esteemed Master has chosen you as his Apprentice,” he purrs, then gifts Rey with a stomach curdling grin. To anyone else it might even come off as friendly, but Rey knows better. Rojan looks at Lance once again, before swinging his gaze back to Rey. “Would you do me the honor of letting me escort you instead?”

Her lips turn down in a barely contained grimace. Lance, however, not wanting to be stuck in the middle of two Force Users who clearly dislike each other, very apologetically excuses himself, mumbling something about rounds. He walks off at a fast clip, and Rey’s left to watch the last of her hope walk away, white plastoid clacking as he goes. Rojan’s eyes follow her line of vision before he turns to her and extends his hand.

“Shall we?” he asks. “I would love to speak with you. We’ve had so very little time to get to know each other.”

“No, thank you,” she says. “We can talk right here.”

She’s definitely not walking with this man all the way to Hux’s quarters. The idea of sharing knowledge of such a private space with this man is revolting. Her mind immediately travels to the two men who share it with her, and her heart starts beating like a battering ram against her ribcage. Ever since Hux questioned her desire to remain with them. It had hurt, then, even as two pairs of eyes flashed across her vision. Rey blinks, trying to push those same pairs of eyes away from the immediate surface of her mind, stashing those feelings away for later inspection and glaring at Rojan.

The Knight hums.

“What a wilful little bird,” he muses, then shrugs lightly. “I assure you, I am simply curious, after what you’d said to your friend.”

He’d been listening. Rey looks over his shoulder, the way Lance had gone, and swallows. She relaxes her facial muscles until there’s nothing but a vacant look on her face. Silence. Silence prompts more truth than questions ever could.

It works even on the Knight of Ren. Rojan extends his hand to her. “About your family. It is so very unfortunate, don’t you think? Never knowing your family.”

“What are you trying to get at, Rojan?” Rey finally spits out, tired of his roundabouts. “Either get to the point or please move. I have places to be.”

At her tone, Rojan’s eyebrows rise. His eyes twinkle. His eyes kriffing twinkle, as if Rey were only an impetuous child. A chuckle escapes him.

“Wilful indeed,” he mutters, more to himself than to her. His voice rises to a normal level again when he addresses her. “Why, aren’t you curious? Has your Master not tried to find out your parentage for you? I know the Supreme Leader has.”

Where her heart had stammered before, now it stops, a dead weight in her chest that pulls at her
veins, chilling her blood. She swallows, and Rojan seems to delight in her confusion. He tilts his head to the side, long, shiny pony tail swinging with the motion.

“Oh,” he says with the air of a man who has discovered a precious morsel tucked away. A flaw. A weakness. “He hasn’t? Well, pity then. I guess we’ll never know.”

Any other time Rey would have lashed out. Instead, she places her hand on her saber. Rojan’s eyes follow the motion and his smile spreads further, but Rey keeps her eyes on his face. He could be lying. For all she knows, Rojan could be lying. He’s probably lying. She’d met plenty like him on Jakku, speaking carefully for their own personal gain. Still, in the back of her mind a seed of doubt plants itself. It’s quickly buried by her anger as an uncharacteristically strong wave of overprotectiveness takes over her thoughts at his tone.

“No, guess we never will. You did, after all, just bend the knee to Kylo Ren. Or do you so quickly forget who your Master is?” she reminds him. Rojan’s brows travel up, up, up. His easy smile flees from his face and he stands up just a little straighter. He’s frightening. Rey had seen worse, she recalls an image of a mountain of a man swathed in black, red cross guard ignited.

Yathe’s words about Rey having to carve a hard path through the Knights suddenly floats to her awareness. So Rey does the only thing she can do: she smiles, pulling in bravery from a deep well within her. Rey studies Rojan anew. She’d never seen him fight. He’d done nothing but be a particular brand of unsettling with her, but she could take him. Maybe. If it came down to it. Rey steels herself, hoping her strong front will dissuade the man from any attempt.

It seems to work well enough. Rojan gives her a once over. “No, Lady Rey, I have not forgotten,” he says with clear amusement, then shrugs, “Still, I speak truth. What a pity.”

Rojan bows again, a mockery, really. She’s a new apprentice, barely a Knight in her own right, though the title means nothing. She hadn’t come back here to get entangled with Knight business, having done so as a necessary evil in order to gain a teacher. Still, it rankles, the way he walks off with a knowing smirk on his lips.

He’s planted a small seed. Rey turns around the second he’s out of sight and bolts for Hux’s rooms, nearly running up corridors and lifts, eager to get away from Rojan’s proximity, or any other Knight’s for that matter. He could be lying.

Surely, he’s lying, right?

Why would Snoke look into her parentage?

The Knight had pried into her conversation with Lance and abused it, her logic tells her. The Knights were predatory creatures. She knows this. Still, she’d long given up on the idea of finding a family. It would be useless now, wouldn’t it? Surely this was only just another ploy to unsettle her.

That had to be it. She bites her lip, wishing desperately to reach out to Kylo and ask him for help, but he’s probably busy and it wouldn’t be her place to pull him away. Rey slams her hand on the access pad to the General’s quarters and breathes a sigh of relief once it beeps green and the door hisses open.

Rey enters the room in a hurry, only to find Hux sitting in his office. The cigarette clipped between his lips sags a little as he’s caught unaware, before he rights himself and his brows lift.

“Here so early?” he asks as she also asks a similar question.

Hux’s lips quirk up, then he extends a hand to a chair in his office. He answers first.
“As it is, I was waiting for you,” he says. Rey looks at him, wary. The last time she’d been in his office she’d traded rather heated words with the man. He’s completely composed, though, not a hair out of place, calm and self-assured as always. When she hesitates a little too long, he arches an eyebrow.

“I don’t bite, I assure you,” he teases, putting out the cigarette on a tray, the smile on his lips extending just a little further.

Of course he doesn’t bite. Even despite their spat. The difference now is that Rey knows that while he doesn’t bite, it doesn’t mean he can’t. In fact, the man could probably rip out chunks of flesh and sinew with a few carefully selected words. Every night he curled her into his side, Kylo never too far away, and Rey fell asleep to the thudding of their heartbeats. Even so, she’d waited every night for Hux to reproach her again. Surely he already knows what she’s been up to in the cafeteria.

She looks at the floor and sighs. This new sleeping arrangement is starting to mess with her head. Hux sighs as well, bringing her out of her reverie, and Rey walks in and hurriedly takes a seat.

She brings her legs up, tucking them under her as she waits for him to speak. Hux looks at the motion but says nothing, instead smiling again at some secret thought only he’s privy to, then his eyes land on her face and the smile fades. Rey licks her lips, ready for a second upbraiding. What could she have done wrong now?

Instead Hux leans back in his chair, elbows on the armrests, and tents his fingers in front of him. He studies her for a very long time and only speaks when Rey starts fidgeting.

“I have waited over a week to say this,” he begins cautiously, letting his fingers lace together as he leans forward and places them on his desk, “I thought — perhaps — it would be easier now, with some time between what we said.”

Hux’s throat bobs up and down and Rey forces herself to keep her eyes glued to his. Her mind starts whirring a million miles an hour.

Of course.

He’s going to take back what he said. About not being mad at her. He’s going to take back the kiss to her forehead and he’s going to say he’s changed his mind, that he doesn’t want her here—

Hux smiles gently.

“I am sorry, Rey.”

Rey tries not to pinch her eyes closed and fails. She wonders if he’s gotten Kylo to sign off on it, with the way the First Knight kept closing her off from the bond and repeatedly telling her to stay in their quarters. It would explain a lot.

Their quarters.

No, Hux’s quarters. She’d have to take her things out of his closet.

Here it comes.

“I shouldn’t have yelled at you. It was crude of me.”

Her eyes snap open again and she gapes. Hux shakes his head.
“Wait, so you’re not going to kick me out?” she asks, and Hux stops mid whatever word he was about to utter.

He frowns, looking at her from the tip of her hair to the tip of her boots, then back up.

“What?” he asks.

Any other time Rey would have been thrilled at catching the man off-guard, but in her own anxiety, she can only chew on her bottom lip. And, for the first time in a long time, Hux laughs. Or, really, chuckles. Rey blinks.

“I see,” he finally pries himself off his seat and moves around the desk to stand in front of her, extending his hand in offering. Rey takes it without hesitation, allowing herself to be pulled up. He doesn’t let go. Instead he guides her out of the office, his long fingers carefully wrapped around hers, until they reach the couch. He prompts her to sit, hand still in his, then takes the seat next to her. Only then does he look at their intertwined hands, not that Rey can focus while her blood’s pounding in her ears. He studies her face, notes the flush, then looks down at their fingers again, a careful smile on his lips as he rubs tender circles on the back of her hand.

“Why would you think I would ever do that?” he asks. “Haven’t I made it painfully clear that I want you here?”

Rey swallows, her blood pumping faster than she’d ever thought possible for her heart. He wants her here. Finally, finally, after Rey nearly suffocates from holding in her breath, does he finally let go.

“I just,” she starts, words failing her. Her mouth doesn’t want to work, really. Her words get caught in her throat. This is too close. “I—“

Hux narrows his eyes at her, suddenly serious even as his ears flush. “You what, Rey?”

Rey looks at her hands, currently resting so close to his own. He’d only barely pulled away when he’d dropped her hands. At the motion, Hux grabs them again, then gives her a careful look, trying to decipher whether she’s willing to allow him this. Rey keeps her hand still in his, swallowing hard.

“I just, I thought,” she takes in a deep breath. “After what happened last week…”

Hux turns to look at her properly, and the look of concern on his face is the final crack on the bursting dam.

All the pent up frustration — all the doubt — she’s carried for weeks starts rushing out in a flood. Rey heats up by degrees as the words tumble out.

“I clearly upset you, and Ren has been distant, and I just thought that maybe you just had finally decided you no longer wanted me around. That I served no purpose, that maybe I just cause too much trouble.” She looks at her hand in his, swallowing thickly. “And I thought, perhaps, you’d decided you no longer needed my help. I have offered it before, and you never… And when you’d asked me if I cared…” she looks at him.

Somehow, finding bravery to stare Rojan down had been far easier than this. Finally digging into her heart and tearing out hard suppressed fears and emotions, presenting them for him to see, and awaiting his judgement. She’d been so caught up in her own goals that it had taken these two men finally putting distance between them for her to realize how much she’d come to expect their proximity, to crave it, to feel warm and protected in it. Hux doesn’t blink, crystalline eyes boring into her very soul.
She murmurs the rest. “I care. I care about you, and I care about Kylo, even if he’s difficult to deal with, but I also know I’m not the easiest to deal with either, okay? Yet I care about you both. You both have been kind, you’ve given me a home, and you’ve done everything you’ve ever promised you would, but I’m trying to do the right thing here. And I just—”

Hux’s free hand rises and he places two fingers to her lips, index and middle finger, effectively silencing her; her face burns. The contact sparks, and Rey has to refrain herself with all the willpower she’s ever possessed to keep from licking her lips nervously. When her vision finally focuses after her rather panicky admission, she finds the very corners of his lips have tugged up just slightly. He’s pleased. His hand shifts until he’s cupping her cheek, his thumb caressing her skin with a feather-light touch. Rey swallows.

“How long enough,” he murmurs. A soft breath escapes her chest through her teeth.

“What?” she asks, a whimper rather than real words. Hux’s smile spreads a little further. He tucks a wayward strand of hair behind her ear.

“To realize the depths of our devotion to you, Rey,” he says. “Your master’s had a lot on his mind lately. I know it’s little in the way of comfort to hear from me, but I am sure he’ll tell you when it’s time. Still…” Hux sighs, bringing her hand up to inspect her knuckles like he’d once done under the moonlight.

It’s so much more real, here. Looking at him in his pristine uniform, with his General’s bars proudly displayed on his right arm, as the man’s eyes narrow slightly when he turns her hands over, running a thumb down the middle of her palm. For a moment she wonders if he finds them acceptable, calloused hands from years of hard work. Nothing quite like his, soft and perfectly manicured. Hux smiles to himself.

“Surely you have noticed his desire to please you at every turn, to put you first. Even I have noticed it, since the very day he came back to you. It shouldn’t be so hard to believe now, should it?” he says, turning her hand over again as if he had all the time in the world. In truth, perhaps he does. She studies him closely, letting him do as he will with her fingertips while he inspects them carefully, much like Kylo had upon her return. That, too, makes her heart stammer. Hux continues, licking his lips. “Why do you doubt us? This is your home.”

Rey had thought her heart had been stammering out of her chest before.

By now it’s grown legs and decided to try to escape out of her throat.

Hux is entirely aware of it, she’s sure—— of the pounding drum of her heartbeat. It should be loud enough for him to hear. The way he smirks to himself proves as much. Hux lifts her hand up, towards his lips, and gently brushes them against her knuckles. A reminder of what he’d once promised her.

She can’t take any more. She inhales, and it’s hard to breathe, and yet—

The doors hiss open and Kylo Ren enters in a whirlwind of anger that suddenly slams into her with the force of a spaceship jumping to hyperspace. He’s cloaked, masked, and furious.

Even Hux seems to have forgotten that his lips had only just a second ago been pressed to her knuckles as he turns, then he regains his bearings and slowly lowers Rey’s hand. Surprisingly, he doesn’t let it go. It sits on his knee, covered by his.

Sensation comes rushing back through the bond. Kylo had kept it closed for so long that she’d
almost forgotten what it was like when he pushed his moods towards her this way. It’s like trying to
dig in her heels to weather a sandstorm without any protection. But the storm calms, lasting only long
enough for Kylo to take in the room and its two current inhabitants.

There’s a sharp exhale of modulated breath.

Kylo removes his helmet, propping it under his arm. When he finally looks at her, it’s with pure,
unadulterated relief. The First Knight walks forward, dropping to a knee in front of both Rey and
Hux. He spares the General a cautious glance before looking at her, studying every bit of open skin,
checking for wounds. As if to prove Hux’s point, he reaches out through the bond.

*Your emotions were rioting. I thought you were in danger*, he says. *I thought— I came as soon as I
could.*

Rey’s knees would have buckled had she been standing. For the first time, he’s finally opening up,
their shared Force bond thrumming like a live artery. She can barely understand why she’s so
relieved, much less truly appreciate it for what it is as she looks over his face. Hux watches,
unmoving, his hand still over her own. Kylo’s hand reaches out, and she can feel it, his desperate
boldness when he finally places a gloved hand on her cheek, as it engulfs the side of her face, and
the First Knight looks at Hux.

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Hux stares at the Knight as Kylo kneels in front of Rey, robes pooling at his feet, brushing Hux’s
shins. An unbidden image floats up to his awareness; sudden and clear and so very vivid, as if he’d
seen this happen in a different life. A circlet of gold, a red saber. The image dissipates like a wisp of
smoke on the next blink. Perhaps his imagination is finally getting the best of him.

His eyes land on Rey again.

She’d admitted to caring for him, and for the man prostrated at her feet, and the part of Hux that is
logical tells him that he should suppress the sudden twinge inside his chest, threatening to burst with
pride and something entirely too foreign. Pride he’d allow himself to feel. He had labored towards
this for months, and he’s always been a man to think of life as a collection of milestones.

Every other emotion he will ignore, if only for his own self-preservation. The press against his lungs
whenever he allows himself to think of those emotions is a little too uncomfortable to contemplate.
He rubs a small circle on the back of Rey’s hand.

The motion draws Rey’s eyes down away from Ren, and the Knight’s gaze follows. Hux’s
immediate reaction is to stiffen, a hard-coded leftover of his days in the Academy to any situation in
which he’s drawn attention to himself, but he resolutely keeps her hand in his, looking between Rey
and Kylo, daring them to make him stop. Rey’s eyes are full of wonder and no small amount of
confusion. Ren’s face, however, sports a minuscule smile. Hux’s seen this before. In his office, when
Kylo had hounded him to admit to his feelings. Kylo’s knowing smile now reeks of self-indulgent
pleasure at finding a clue to prove his point.

Hux breathes in slowly, quietly, and waits for the Force users to focus on each other again. He much
prefers to be the spectator from the shadows. It is his nature to observe. Observe and digest, then
figure out how to use it to his advantage.

He mentally shakes himself. No. There would be no advantage-taking here. Hux blinks and allows
himself to be swept up in the electrical undercurrents passing between Rey and Kylo Ren.
Kylo finally looks back up at Rey.

“Are you alright?” he asks, more for Hux’s benefit than Rey’s.

Kylo had stormed in just at the right moment, stomping through the doors to announce himself just as Hux had allowed himself the indulgence of touching her, of once again feeling her skin against his lips. Yet Hux knows that the question has nothing to do with that moment. Perhaps he’s been spending too much time around these two, decoding the silent messages shared by a glance, the unspoken words, reading between the lines. The press against his lungs increases and he works to stabilize his breathing.

Rey’s eyes rove over Kylo’s features before she lets out a long breath.

“Yes,” she says, “I just… had a bit of an unpleasant run in with Rojan Ren.”

He should get up and leave. This conversation does not include him, if Kylo’s murderous expression is anything to go by. Hux pats Rey’s hand and releases it, moving to get up. He wouldn’t be welcome here. Just as he’s about to finally lift himself up two sets of eyes, golden green and golden brown, swivel on him and pin him in place.

“Stay,” Kylo says. It isn’t a question.

Rey doesn’t even have to speak her agreement, he knows that look on her face well enough. Hux purses his lips, then makes a show of retaking his seat, crossing his legs and resting one arm on his lap, the other on the couch’s armrest. As if the matter’s been settled, Kylo turns to Rey. It should annoy him, the way the man treats Hux as if he’s only there to do Kylo’s bidding, still, he’s curious.

“What did he say?” Kylo asks carefully, though the even tone does little to disguise the dark wave of annoyance churning right under the surface of the man’s calm demeanor. Hux’s eyes narrow slightly at Rey’s straightening back, at her biceps twitching with tension when she looks at Kylo, though her own hands are placidly resting on her knees. He listens to the soft inhale-exhale of breath, Rey’s and Kylo’s unconsciously matching breathing patterns as their chests rise and fall at the same time. How curious it is. He’s seen this happen in the past, an unconscious synchronization between the Force users. Then Rey breaks the spell and shoots Hux a nervous glance before speaking.

“He… I was speaking with, ah, a friend. About not knowing my parents—“ Rey says nervously. Hux doesn’t miss the second nervous glance from the corner of her eye. A stormtrooper, then. “When Rojan appeared. I think he was listening in. He said…”

Hux narrows his eyes, but it takes little for him to notice the way Kylo’s hands are fisting on his knee in front of Rey, so he interjects.

“He said what, Rey?” Hux asks, carefully regulating his tone into an encouraging one, sparing Kylo his outburst. The Knight had never had the most gentle of approaches. “You can tell us. Perhaps if you tell us the whole story, we can help.”

Rey finally looks at him, and he allows her a smile to ease her into speaking. He knows she’s nervous about his reaction to her antagonizing his troops, despite his request that she drop it. Not that it mattered now, after Phasma had brought up the potential gain of having Rey do as she wished. She takes in a deep breath, steeling herself, but instead of speaking she projects memories into both Kylo and Hux’s minds.

He watches her conversation with Lance and feels an echo of her discomfort, only to watch Rojan appear, to listen with ears that are not his own as Rojan taunts her. Hux has to forcefully maintain a
passive stance when Rojan asks about her parentage, when he mentions the Supreme Leader.

It all ends too quickly, but when his vision returns to him and he is no longer seeing through Rey’s eyes, the room coming back into sharp focus, Kylo’s on his feet and turning around in a fury. He only manages to take two steps towards the door.

“Is it true?” She asks, a whisper. It stops the Knight in his tracks. “Has Snoke looked into my parentage?”

Kylo turns around, his expression guarded. He looks at Hux. Hux licks his lips.

Right. He’s the one with a knack for speaking. Rey turns to look at Hux, frowning.

“Is it true?” She repeats, her tone hardening. Hux gives a small shake of his head.

“He might have been taunting you, Rey. If the Supreme Leader had been looking into your parentage I am sure your Master would have been informed, or at least tasked with it. And he would have told you about it,” Hux finishes, giving Kylo a pointed glance.

Rey turns to Kylo, eyes studying him warily. There is obvious mistrust there still, despite the steps they had both taken to coexist. How easy it is to forget the past these two share when they slide into bed next to him, Hux muses.

“Would you have?” She asks.

Kylo grunts.

“Do you even need to ask me that?” Kylo says. Hux opens up his mouth to speak, only to be silenced with a stern glare. Kylo turns to his apprentice again. “When have I given you reason not to trust my word?”

Rey frowns, lips curling down, and Hux is sure she has quite the list of reasons, so he once again interjects.

“What Kylo means is… of course he’d tell you,” he says, eyes pinning Kylo in place hard. “There is no reason to believe that Snoke is looking into your parentage. It is—’’ he looks for the right words: irrelevant, unimportant. None of those words would accomplish anything but to upset her. Rey redirects him, however.

“Why would he be interested in me to begin with?” She asks, narrowing her eyes at Hux before turning to Kylo. “It had always been you.”

Kylo recoils as if slapped and, not for the last time, Hux wishes he could read minds the way these two do.

“You’re a powerful Force user, Rey,” Hux explains, trying to divert the conversation away from her parentage, a sore spot for her. “Of course anyone would be interested—“

“But I’m blocked. Even Snoke knows this,” she cuts him off again, looking more and more confused between them. “What could he possibly want with me when he has fifteen other Force users—“ Rey stops herself then narrows her eyes, turning to Kylo. “What aren’t you telling me?”

Kylo looks at Hux, Rey looks at Hux, and Hux looks at the space between them.

“Brendol?” She asks, withdrawing from him a little.
“I don’t think this is the time to discuss this,” he says, shooting Kylo a warning glance.

“No, I think this is the perfect time to discuss this.” Rey says tersely, fisting her hands on her lap. “Why is Snoke interested in me, exactly?”

Kylo closes his eyes for a second, having rooted himself to the spot where he’s standing. He breathes in slowly, then out through his nose. He can see it painted on the man’s face, the choice: to tell her now or lose her trust forever.

“Rey,” Kylo’s rumble escapes his lips, and he walks forward to once again kneel at Rey’s feet. He extends a hand, imploring, and, when Rey doesn’t take it, he purses his lips. “Snoke has always had an interest in you.”

Hux clears his throat.

No.

No, no, no. This is a little too close for comfort. The glare that he’s granted from Ren could slice him open and skin him alive, so Hux shows his displeasure by setting his shoulders, lips tight.

“Ren,” he begins. “I don’t think—“

“No,” Kylo cuts him off. What was it with these two, always cutting him off? “You said it before. We’d need to tell her soon.”

“We didn’t agree to it this way,” Hux retorts, and Rey glares.

“Excuse me, but I’m right here! Would you please talk to me instead of about me?” She says, tone reaching a new high in her annoyance. Hux’s nostrils flare, but before he can say anything else, Kylo continues.

“I brought you to the Finalizer on orders from Snoke, Rey,” he says, and Rey stiffens further. “After your awakening… Snoke felt it. He wanted you to be brought up to him—“

“So you mean you never wanted to teach me?” She reproaches, and the hurt in her eyes is heartbreaking. Kylo’s head rears back to look at her fully.

“What? No! My offer has always been real, I wanted to teach you,” he responds, but Rey’s not having any of it.

Hux can see it on her face, searching the space above Kylo’s head, eyes swinging from imaginary dot to imaginary dot as she connects them. She turns to Hux.

“And you?” She asks, narrowing her eyes, “Did you keep me here only because Snoke wanted you to?”

Hux’s chest constricts. “Rey—” He starts.

She continues.

“Starkiller,” she says when she looks him in the eye, and though it is a simple statement about his base it sounds more like an accusation on his character. It twists like a knife. He swallows, trying to reach for her hand, but she tugs away. “I was part of the downfall of Starkiller. Is that why you were so angry with me?”

Hux purses his lips. She looks at Kylo.
“And then Snoke told you to bring me to him?” She asks. Kylo’s lips have set in a hard line, but then he gives a dejected nod, “I never lied to you. Rey, I wanted to teach you.”

Rey’s already moved on from him, unheeding of his promises. She turns back to Hux. “And so you… kept me here. A prisoner. Not for Kylo, but for Snoke?”

Every word he wants to say sits on the tip of his tongue, yet the look on her face freezes him in place. Anything he says now might make it worse, and how could he do that? He owes her so many explanations, so many. A full picture. Except Rey won’t accept them, not when she’s looking at him as though he just broke her heart.

“Rey, that’s not—” he says, but his expression and his sudden change in demeanor must have given him away. Her voice lowers, and for once Hux curses her quick mind when her lower lip quivers. She’s going too fast, every single thing they had carefully hidden she’s plucking up by connecting dots based on her own experience aboard his ship. He curses himself.

They had been careless, Hux thinks, as he watches it all happen in slow motion.

“Except,” she turns to Kylo, “The Knights bent the knee to you. What you said about dying by Skywalker’s hand, about all the Knights dying. One of them did, didn’t he? You mentioned him. Did he go after Skywalker? Is that why you called them all here?”

“Rey,” Kylo and Hux begin at the same time, but Rey zeroes in on Hux.

Rey brushes into his mind, and before he can build up his walls, she’s inside. Hux hisses, the intrusion not a caress as her touch always had been, but a jab straight into his consciousness. Kylo has turned into a stone statue, god like and broken at her feet. Rey zeroes in on every memory of Hux, of every precaution, of his thoughts aboard the Finalizer regarding her.

No.

NO, NO.

“Snoke wanted me, and you…” her voice breaks, and despite Hux’s efforts to shield those memories, she picks the most painful ones. The ones he knows will shatter what little trust she’s given him. “You wanted back in his good graces. You just kept me here for your own gain…” She asks, her voice a pained murmur.

“Rey,” he grits through his teeth, trying to push past the painful intrusion of her mind probe. She’s misinterpreting everything, only seeing what she wants to see. She’s ruthless, and he can finally appreciate Kylo’s desire to see her firmly on the side of the Dark. What a magnificent opponent against the Jedi she would be. “Please, let me explain.”

Rey finally lifts herself up from the couch. Kylo falls back on his haunches to avoid being kneed in the face, but he doesn’t seem to make an effort to stop her, so Hux does. When he reaches up to take her hand, to pull her back, Rey yanks her hand out from his grip.

“Don’t touch me,” she seethes, turning angry hazel greens on him, chest rising and falling erratically to match Hux’s own stammering heart. “And save your explanations. You promised me no secrets… you said…” her voice breaks and her throat moves painfully fast, swallowing over and over as she finally exposes some of herself to him. “You said this was my home, but I see it was never more than a prison.”

Each word is a jab to the heart. Hux tries to grab for her hand again, but Rey’s already sprinting out the door.
“Ren!” Hux growls at Kylo to try to push him into action, but Kylo’s only staring dejectedly at the spot where she’d been sitting. A vein in Hux’s temple throbs; he lifts himself up the couch to follow, only to be stopped by a massive hand to the elbow.

“Let her go,” Kylo says, never quite looking at him, echoing the same words Hux had said to him a lifetime ago on a ship to Kuat. “She won’t listen until she calms down.”

Hux rounds in on Kylo.

“How would you even know that?” He barks, then realization hits. Right. The Bond. That blasted stupid bond he so irritatingly cannot feel, always excluded from. “She might go.”

At that thought Hux finally comes back to his senses. He presses a button on his comm, the one that initiates a command to lock down the Finalizer. No ships would be leaving, and hopefully no ships with Rey in them. He breathes in deeply and rubs at his face, wanting against all his rational thought to run after the woman rather than sit here.

“This was not the plan, Ren,” he accuses. Kylo only grunts. “All we’ve worked for. Did you have to tell her now?”

Kylo finally lifts his eyes, still sitting on his haunches now a foot away from where Hux stood. “We would have lost her if we hadn’t.”

“We will lose her now!” Hux almost shouts and gets to his feet, his control on his temper hanging by a very thin thread. “Or do you truly think she might forgive this? We kept this from her, right after promising her this could be her home.”

“Easier to forgive if she learns it from us rather than from someone else, don’t you think?” Kylo says and Hux lets out a sharp breath.

“She’s our one trump card where Snoke is concerned, Kylo,” he explains, trying with all his might to be patient in the face of what feels like impending doom. All of his plans had fled out that door. Kylo straightens, a sharp glint to his eye. “We lose her, we’ve opened ourselves to immediate destruction.”

“Is that all you see her as?” The Knight growls, “As your next super weapon?”

Hux recoils, but before he can move back, Kylo has him pinned by the wrist. He looks down at the man. Despite his anger, he’s still exactly where Rey left him on his knees. Golden brown eyes root him in place, and a spark flies between them. Hux is unable to look away. His comm beeps. Lockdown has been initiated. He can’t pry his eyes away from Ren.

A couple of heartbeats later, painful seconds where Hux is forced to face himself, he sighs.

“No,” he finally admits, though stops short of admitting to what his treacherous heart wants to scream.

No, she’s not just a weapon. Not anymore. But Hux can’t allow himself to feel more. It could easily be his undoing.

Kylo tilts his head then moves on his knees until he’s directly in front of Hux, and in that moment Hux can see Kylo Ren for what he is: a lonely man, a scared man, a man who has come to resign himself to losing what he cares about because he always has. Hux frowns, then closes his eyes and inhales deeply.

“You love her,” the Knight says and Hux’s world rocks a little in place. He lowers himself to the
couch weakly, bringing him closer to Kylo’s line of vision. They sit there looking at each other for a long time. Hux licks his lips, but Kylo refuses to let him look elsewhere. When Hux tries, there’s a small push of air hardening around him. The Force.

Is this where he chooses? His heart stutters.

He can’t allow himself to feel anything more for her. He has a life plan, a goal to make it out of this war alive, to forge a future for the name of Hux. That had always been his plan, his dream, his driving force. He can’t think of her, or of the man in front of him, as anything more than allies.

“You do,” Kylo repeats, narrowing his eyes.

Hux swallows.

“Do you?” He asks.

Kylo nods without missing a heartbeat, and Hux’s lungs jam themselves up in his throat. The Knight’s admittance to loving the woman is not unexpected, but its delivery is. Kylo Ren is opening himself to Hux, if only to open the door for him to do the same. A small gift for a small gift.

Except he can’t give that. Not when admitting it could upend his world. So instead he appeases Ren in the only way he can.

Hux reaches forward, carefully placing his hand on Kylo’s head and pushing back the hair from his face. “I hope you know what you’re doing.”

How touch starved must he be, that Kylo Ren’s eyes flutter shut for a moment as he leans into Hux’s touch? Hux forces his lungs to re-engage and work as they should, but it only lasts until Kylo opens his eyes again.

“Trust me,” the Knight says. Against his better judgement, Hux nods.

Kylo’s lips twist up slightly, and Hux’s chest warms, a small flush creeping up his collarbone. He makes to withdraw his hand, but Kylo uses the Force again to pin him in place. Hux gives a single shake of his head.

“Why do you do this?” He murmurs, eyes locked on his hand buried in Kylo’s beautiful crown of hair. “Are you testing me, Ren? Trying to see if I’ll finally bend to your will?”

Kylo watches him, kneeling between Hux’s knees in a surprisingly uncharacteristic display of submissiveness. He knows it for what it is. An interrogation in which Hux spills his heart out without a question being asked. His heart is still erratic after Rey’s departure, and so he allows himself to speak.

“Why are you two doing this to me?” He asks himself, “What do you expect to gain from seeing me finally bend, Ren? I have nothing to offer but myself and my wit.”

“Those are enough,” Kylo says, a tiny smile playing on his lips. The smile of a man who’s known he’s been right all along.

His heart stops and Hux almost forgets that not a moment ago, his carefully crafted plans were crumbling around him. His eyes snap to Kylo’s, and finally Kylo moves. He leans up, caging Hux in when he places giant palms down on the couch, on either side of Hux’s hips. Hux tries to move back, but he’s kept in place by a Force push gently pinning him. The push goes away as Kylo leans forward, golden brown locked on icy blue, and the hairs on the back of Hux’s neck prickle the
second he feels Kylo’s warm breath tickling his cheek. He swallows. Kylo smiles, ever predatory, but there’s warmth in his gaze. A warmth that makes Hux’s gut twist uncomfortably, though not unpleasantly.

“What do you think you’re doing?” He asks, trying and failing to sharpen his tone.

Kylo chuckles.

“Proving a point,” Kylo murmurs, and for a moment he thinks the Knight’s lips will meet his, but Kylo only turns his head until his nose is gently caressing into the hollow of Hux’s cheekbone.

“And what point is that?” Hux asks, and his voice stammers for a moment. There’s a rumble deep from within Kylo’s chest. Another chuckle, dark and becoming. “And this is really not the time for games, Ren.”

“This,” the Knight says, ignoring Hux’s barb as his nose rubs so very gently into Hux’s skin. “This is my point.”

“I’m afraid I can’t see it,” he clips, but Kylo only chuckles again.

“You’re not pulling away, Brendol. That is my point.” Kylo moves his face until his lips gently caress Hux’s earlobe. “Just like you didn’t pull away from Rey’s hand. My point is—you can’t help yourself.”

Hux’s eyes flutter closed for a second, thankful for the blanket of jet black hair that obscures half his face to Ren. He inhales, something woodsy and spicy and mouth watering, then snaps his eyes open.

“That’s not a declaration of love, Ren.”

Kylo pulls back, a self satisfied, shit-eating grin on his face.

“For men like you, Hux, it most certainly is.”

Hux narrows his eyes. Impudent little man (though, really, there is nothing little about him). How dare he.

“Why are you doing this?” He asks, tone hard. Kylo finally pulls back, though his hands are still caging Hux in. Kylo shrugs.

“I can’t help myself either.”

Hux frowns, taking in Kylo’s face anew: freckles, too-prominent nose, too-wide lips, beautiful eyes, strong cheekbones, weak jaw, mismatched features arranged into god like beauty.

Is that an admission of love, then? Is it only snark? Is it an admission of attraction? Attraction, he could understand, despite how frustrating it was for him to reciprocate it, something he would only admit to himself begrudgingly.

Hux’s nostrils flare. Wordplay is meant to be something he excels at, yet with Kylo’s lips so close, it’s hard to think. The man is screwing with his mind. Hux changes the topic to something safer, though it is only safe by a small margin.

“We must go after Rey,” he says, clearing his throat, trying to regain his composure. Hux was a man of granite to his officers, to his troops, to anyone outside of this room. Yet the two people he’d tried to impress his iron will on the most, were the two very same people who pried him open and left him
out to dry, weak as a babe.

Kylo’s eyes take on a far away look, then he shakes his head.

“She’s far too angry,” Kylo grunts, “Would probably claw the skin off our faces rather than talk to us. She needs time. Let her calm down first, then we can explain everything.”

Hux closes his eyes, partly to digest that mental image and partly to stop staring, for he knows he’s been staring. When he opens them again, there’s another knowing smile on Kylo’s face.

“Wipe that smile off your face, don’t you know we have bigger problems here? She dug into my mind, but only saw pieces. I have to explain,” he clips, but it only makes Kylo smile wider.

The Knight’s display of meekness ends. He rises until he stands to full height, no longer looking for Hux to give in. Kylo extends his hand for him to take, and Hux stares at the man’s gigantic fingers.

Is this what Rey felt like?

Before he can take them, however, the hand drops abruptly as Kylo’s attention turns away, as if jerked by some unseen string.

Rey stalks the halls like a shadow, fuming as she brushes her tears away with the back of her hand, the burning at the back of her throat making her want to tear it out.

They’d used her. She's not stupid. She had known from the beginning that she had been, for better or worse, nothing more than a prisoner. But she’d returned, she’d returned because she had found no other home elsewhere, and she’d been promised one here.

Kylo had promised her a mentor, and Hux had promised her a home and people who cared. He’d basically sworn the same thing to her again only ten minutes before the truth had come exploding out. It had been so easy to connect the dots, once Kylo had admitted that it had been Snoke’s orders that had landed her on the Finalizer, rather than his own desire.

How stupid of her, to truly believe that these men could think of her as anything but a prisoner. Every few moments she feels Kylo cautiously checking in on her, but perhaps the men had finally learned their lesson about giving her space, because nobody came after her and Kylo doesn’t try to speak. She slams her side of the bond closed, refusing to have even this tethering her to the monster. Except her traitorous mind can’t think of him as a monster anymore, and that only adds to the hurt. What good is it to care for people who had never truly cared for you?

Her limbs ache from the strain of flying through the halls, but it feels better than destruction, and she’d considered it. Rey had almost taken her saber to her room, sitting silent and empty, making a further mockery of broken promises and her broken heart, but that would have made her like him. So instead she chose to flee the higher levels of the ship and make her way down into the belly, getting as far away from them as she could. With angry steps she rushed through a prison cell that now allowed her miles rather than a handful of feet of space. Her mind was swarming with unwanted, painful information.

She had to contact Luke or Leia. If a Knight had died trying to get to him, then their location could have been jeopardized.

Rey goes to the nearest information station. She couldn’t contact the Resistance from one of the main communications rooms, but there must be a data pad somewhere. Rey could easily scramble the
connection after doing what she must. She blinks at the glow of the screens, trying to see past tears she didn’t realise she still had, swallowing her pain like a ton of bricks.

She’d known when she’d returned. She’d known that she’d be stepping right back into their mess, that they’d let her go not because they’d suddenly felt bad for her, but because she’d fulfilled her side of a bargain. Yet… Yet Rey had hoped, after her return, after they had gone through such pains to make her feel wanted, that she could truly make a home of this place.

Hair pulls as she yanks out her braid, uncaring of the strands falling about her shoulders, uncaring as she tears off her clothing in the middle of the hallway. It doesn’t matter who sees her. She won’t dress in black and be this person anymore. They had picked her clothes. She refuses to be dressed like a doll that belongs to them. Rey strips until she’s left in only her undershirt and trousers, purely for modesty. Black is scattered about her feet like rotten bread crumbs.

How stupid, to allow herself to open up to them. Thinking of Hux’s gentle smiles and Kylo’s intense desire to please hurt most of all. Had it all been a farce? Was it all just a ploy? Keep the stupid little girl happy until Snoke had a use for her? Rey bites down a sob and punches a button, zooming in on the floor plans. A communications room.

She uses careful compulsion on two stormtroopers once she gets there, sending apologies to the Maker in the process, as she gently guides them away from their patrol. Looking in both directions down the hall, she slides into the room.

Rey takes her saber to a lock and pulls out a data pad, not feeling the least bit sorry about it. Small damage to a lock could scarcely begin to repay the betrayal. She stashes the data pad in a pocket and flees the room.

The Falcon.

It must be somewhere aboard. Rey had not heard about it being destroyed. She’d send a message to the Resistance, destroy the data pad, then find the Falcon and escape. Rey looks up towards the ceiling, trying to see through layers of steel and cables, towards where she can feel Kylo’s pulsing on the other side of the bond. She swallows hard. Hux must still be there. Rey stamps down on her frustration, unwilling to further tear at the gash barely containing her breaking heart. She finds a deserted observation deck and stares out over the railing at the impressive view. Endless black peppered by gleaming white and red, blue and gold. It’s a breath of fresh air, a break from cold clinical walls and blinding sterile lights. Rey leans against the railing, and finally, here, in the silence, she allows herself to break.

A cage. This would be her cage.

She stares down at the hundred foot drop. A part of her brain that’s too tired to rely on logic wonders why they’d stack two observation decks on top of each other. But the drop allows her an uninterrupted view of space, so much bigger than herself. She wonders at the other galaxies out there, at the other lives she might have lived elsewhere, instead of this one crumbling around her.

No. This could not be her cage.

She’d come back to do something bigger than herself, even if she had to tackle it one morsel at a time. Rey ignites the data pad, fingers flying as she scrambles signals, reroutes connections and, finally, once she’s sure that she’s safe from being tracked, contacts the Resistance with what little information she remembers.

Rey holds her breath as she waits, the holographic screen hovering over her palm. The connection’s
static hits her ears like dead noise, drowning out everything else, and her heart starts to despair that she won’t reach them. Then a face appears.

“State your purpose,” a man on the other side says, only long enough for him to register Rey’s face.

The man frowns, and Rey holds her breath. Then he stands up from his chair and walks away. The beating of Rey’s heart has reached a crescendo when someone familiar shows up.

General Leia Organa.

“Rey?” The woman asks, the connection dangerously close to cutting out. “Rey? Where are you?”

“I can’t say, General,” she says, rushing through her words, feeling the walls close in on her even in this wide open observatory. “Are you alright? I have troubling news. Luke—“

Organa’s face hardens with sudden understanding.

“Luke is fine.”

“You have to move, General. You have to move now. Your location may have been compromised—“ Rey says, and Leia nods.

“I know, child. Rey, is this connection secure—“ the older woman says, but the connection almost dies, precarious as it is, and the hit of static that reaches her ears is so loud she cringes.

“Lady Rey?”

Rey swivels.

A pair of eyes meet hers, so close to her face, then focus on the hologram of General Leia Organa, leader of the Resistance, and Rey’s heart thunders. She freezes. That, perhaps above all else, would be her mistake.

“You’re a traitor!” The owner of those familiar eyes hisses, and everything else happens too fast.

One moment she’s standing, ready to open her mouth and speak, and the next large hands are on her. Her feet are no longer steady on metal plating. There is no railing before her. There is only space. Air roars past her ears as she falls. Falls down the hundred foot drop. It feels like flying, except flying should not feel this wrong, she muses almost absent-mindedly, her hair whipping about her face, obscuring her view. Energy and adrenaline course through her veins, but it has nowhere to go, nothing to do but keep pushing through her muscles, her nerves. The ground and the walls and the ceiling twist and turn with her.

She had once thought returning would cost her her life. Rey just didn’t think it would be this way.

She’d expected her life to flash before her eyes like a holo-movie, fuzzy at the edges, muted and lonely like her time spent surviving the monotony of Jakku. Instead there are only snippets. Finn’s face, Poe’s. BB-8’s excited beeps. Han solo’s cocky smile, his exasperated sigh as he hands her a gun. Chewie’s roar. Maz’s advice. Leia’s face, and her faith in Rey doing good elsewhere.

And, despite her hurt, brightest of all these images streaking past her mind’s eye, are two sets of eyes: golden brown and icy blue.

She had wanted to do so much more with her life.

What about all those planets she’d never get to see?
All the green ones?

Green.

Suddenly she screams, the sound exploding violently from her lungs.

It lasts for only a second.

Rey calls for the only person she knows will hear her.

*KYLO!*

Chapter End Notes

This note is just going to be me thanking EjBlaKit and owing her my soul for all the work she's put into this with me. We're 17 chapters out from being done guys... back in the teens for this crazy story. Thank you all who're still reading, commenting, sharing, being overall amazing people, and who have stuck it out with me so far :)
Chapter Summary

After Rey's fall, Hux and Kylo rush to Rey. Let the manhunt begin.

Chapter Notes

A warning: things get a little itty bitty bit bloody. I wouldn't go so far as to label it gore, but either way you've been warned should you read ahead.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Kylo bolts out of the room and Hux mentally curses. Nothing good could ever come from the First Knight of Ren shouting his apprentice’s name — for he had shouted, not once, but several times — as he barreled out of their quarters like a man on a rampage.

He grabs his greatcoat then follows, lengthening his stride; even then he has to hurry to try to catch up to Ren, the Knight’s cowl and robes flowing behind him furiously as they descend towards the belly of the ship.

“What happened?” he asks, hoping Ren will put his connection to Rey to good use and find out, but Kylo only speeds up, fists clenched and breathing labored as he charges ahead like a bull preparing for a fight. He had seen the nasty end of Kylo’s temper, had been on the receiving end of it once, but any prior experiences paled to this.

This cannot possibly end well.

“She’s hurt,” Kylo growls at him, taking off at a run. Hux curses again, this time openly and loudly, before he activates the comm on his wrist.

“Captain,” he says, still at Kylo’s heel, though keeping up is starting to become a struggle, even with his long legs, greatcoat just hanging on, not that he notices. He follows blindly, trusting Ren to know the way to Rey for the both of them as he brings his wrist up to his lips.

“Yes, Sir,” Phasma’s voice reaches him from the bridge.

“Commence complete lockdown immediately,” he orders, “We have a situation.”

By the anger rolling off of Ren’s shoulders, Hux steels himself for the worst.

“Yes, Sir,” Phasma replies, then she turns her attention elsewhere, giving out the command for lockdown. He hears the echo of the alarms overhead through his comm, the delay from the communication device a heartbeat too slow to match the screeching of red-lighted sensors going off overhead. Good. Everyone would be forced to stand still this time, unlike his first order to lock down the hangars.

“Hand command to Mitaka and follow my tracker, Captain,” he says. Phasma would follow the
tracker in his belt. “Join me and Lord Ren immediately.”

“Yes, sir.” Phasma salutes again then the connection dies.

Down and down they go, the dread curling in the pit of his stomach intensifying as the seconds tick inside his mind. She’d gone quite a ways. The *woo-woo-woo!* of the alarms raise the hairs on the back of his neck, Hux’s eyes adjusting to the red glow cast over the halls. He doesn’t even know where he’s going, and it’s taking too long. A panicky sense of deja vu crashes through him, of a time when he’d flown down similar halls to get to Rey upon her return. The memory lodges itself in his gut, a shard of glass trying to tear his insides. He quickly loses track of all the turns they’ve taken.

Kylo knows, however, the man hurrying to their destination pulled by a rope that leads straight to Rey, a dog chasing a bone. Sure enough, he’s on the right track. Hux’s step falters at the first lump of black gauzy fabric strewn on the floor. Their rushed near-run turns into an all-out sprint, passing pieces of clothing he’s come to recognize as Rey’s, following them like a sickening little trail. His select choice of swear words only gets more colorful as they pass until, finally, Kylo stops in front of a pair of doors to an observation deck just long enough to send them flying off, metal screaming, trying to resist the push yet inevitably giving at the Knight’s power. Hux nearly runs into Kylo at the Knight’s abrupt stop, and only then does the situation finally become painfully clear.

His heart twists, refusing to engage.

His eyes zero in on her face, eyes halfway lidded but unmoving, and time slows as the ticking of seconds starts up in his head again like a time bomb.

*Thump-Thump.*

Blood. Blood spilling around her like a sickening halo, spreading slowly, soaking her hair. Why is her hair out of its braid?

Blood. She’s losing so much blood.

Thump - another weak heartbeat.

This is his fault.

*Thump—Thump.*

He’s going to lose her.

After all of this, he’s going to lose her. And it’s his own damn fault.

*Work, you useless organ,* he berates his heart as he struggles to bring in air, his eyes landing on an arm and a leg bent at entirely unnatural angles, his mind already providing a billion reasons as to why this is all his fault.

No. No. He can’t fall apart now. Not even for her.

*Especially for her.* If he loses it now he can’t save her.

Kylo rushes forward, and only then does Hux have the sense of mind to move. Hux yanks him back by the shoulder, fingers digging into Kylo’s cowl and making a home of themselves there. Kylo turns around with a roar, baring teeth, arms stretched out to either side and fingers spread and curled to project imaginary claws.
“Stop,” he barks at the feral man before him, though when Hux speaks again it is almost in a whisper. “Is she alive?”

That seems to make Kylo stop, his eyes focusing once more, if only for a moment, before glazing as he checks on her. He waits with baited breath while he listens to Kylo’s own short, panted ones.

“Barely,” Kylo replies, and Hux nods.

Barely. Barely is enough, and this is his fault — Oh, the ways in which he would agonize over how this is his fault — but barely would have to be enough.

No, Hux won’t allow himself to fall apart. Not here. He tries his hardest not to look at Rey’s mangled body, approaching instead on precise steps and looking upwards towards where he knows there is a second observation deck. At least a hundred feet. His eyes turn back on her, forcing himself to focus and try to think clearly despite the horrible ache in his chest. Kylo Ren would certainly not be the voice of reason here. So Hux sets about to shutting his own down, shrouding himself with layers upon layers of efficient detachment, even as everything else in his brain screams to him to do otherwise.

He needs to keep it together, if only to keep her alive.

“Do not move her. She’s probably bleeding internally,” he glares at Kylo then turns on his comm and hails for a medical unit. Kylo turns around, robes rushing around his ankles as he steps closer and kneels in the puddle of blood quickly spreading from her head. For all of Hux’s amazing memory, this is one sight he’d rather forget. Hux steps forward, calmly removing his coat and draping it over Rey’s half naked torso. It would stain, his mind muses, even as he gingerly brushes a blood soaked curl of hair away from her face.

“Keep her alive,” he commands, gently placing a hand on Kylo’s cowl again. Kylo doesn’t snarl, not this time. Instead the Knight gives him a pained look. Oh, for all of the masterpieces in the galaxy, none were as tragic as what Kylo’s face twists into as he turns to look as his apprentice, massive body curling over her protectively.

“I can’t,” Kylo finally croaks after an eternity, gloved hands on either side of Rey’s head, leather smearing with sticky red blood.

“Do anything,” he says, not caring what or how Kylo manages it. The man swallows, then nods. He closes his eyes. Cold air passes through Hux, then electricity, but he ignores it, looking instead at the scraps of what must have once been a holo pad, at the long cracked tube at Rey’s waist. A saber. His gaze swings up again towards the observation deck.

“She never even ignited her saber. Not a fight, then,” he says, though his mind tries to provide a much more terrifying scenario. Kylo Ren confirms his worst fears for him. There was no simple falling over that railing. She would have had to jump… she’s on her back. No matter her anger, she would never jump to her death.

“She would never slip, nor jump.” Kylo says, voice cracking.

No, she wouldn’t.

Why was she here in the first place?

His eyes find the destroyed data pad’s bits and pieces scattered on the floor.

The med team rolls in with Phasma in tow, and Yathe Ren, though he only just barely has time to
wonder how she’s made it here when the chaos of white medical robes, metal contraptions and life units whir as they crowd Rey in, forcing Hux and Kylo back.

“We have to move her, Sir,” a doctor says, and Hux turns on him. They’re wasting precious seconds.

“Do it,” he orders, but Kylo shakes his head. He lifts his hand to use the Force, and he watches as the medical team collectively flinches.

Hux steps up to him, placing his hand on Kylo’s shoulder. “Ren—“

Kylo screams and yanks himself out of his hold only to be frozen in place. He can feel it under his fingers, muscles that were once twitching now paralyzed.

“Yathe! I swear—” Kylo snarls, entirely deranged, and Yathe arches an eyebrow, entirely unimpressed.

“You’re in no condition,” Yathe says.

Hux turns to Phasma. Having anyone here to antagonize Kylo is the last thing he needs.

“Why is she even here? I put the ship on lockdown.”

“I went to her quarters and brought her here,” Phasma says, giving Yathe a small glance before giving Kylo a pointed one. Ah.

Right.

Smart woman.

Yathe turns to the doctors.

“Allow me,” she says, then carefully lifts Rey up with the Force, long, slender fingers extending outward. Rey rises from the floor like an invisible slab had been slipped under her. It makes Hux think of a rag doll being suspended in air, half covered in his greatcoat. The doctors and nurses move away, terrified by the Force though they’d often been subjected to Ren, watching in awe as Rey is levitated onto the bed. The only thing that moves is her hair, sopping wet with her own blood as it drip drip drips all over the bedsheets. A head wound. Her skull should have been shattered everywhere like so much broken glass, but when he looks at where she’d lain, there’s only blood.

Yathe lowers Rey ever so carefully, her other hand held out towards Kylo where she holds him in a freeze, before they both drop to her side. Kylo’s muscles start twitching again, the snarl on his face having faded in the face of Rey’s blood raining over the Finalizer floor and her Med Bay bed unit.

The medical team hooks life support to Rey immediately and attempt to stunt her bleeding, then take off at a run, the bed whizzing between them an inch off the ground and picking up speed. Yathe looks at Kylo, but Kylo’s already taken off after the bed, uncaring of anyone else.

How many seconds?

“What happened?” Yathe asks. Hux purses his lips and takes off after Ren. Phasma removes her helmet and the women exchange a glance, a beat too long, before following.

This is all his fault. He should have never let her walk out of that door. He should have stopped her. He should have run after her like he’d kriffing wanted to.

She’s alive. Barely, but alive. Still, she could die, and his heart almost dies right along with her at the
thought. It had been all his fault.

No, he could not lose it now.

The halls are blessedly empty, at least. When he finally makes it to the med bay, it’s to a commotion.

“Lord Ren, please—” he hears as he finally rounds the corner, having lagged behind for a second to collect himself.

_The last thing Rey needs_, he reminds himself.

“General, Sir,” one of the nurses greets, brows turned up in pleading. Hux gnashes his teeth, placing a hand on Kylo’s massive forearm to pull him away from the nurses. They’d been trying to bodily move Kylo out of the way despite their fear.

_As if that’d ever work._

The nurses step back meekly.

“Ren,” he says, tone carefully neutral as he schools his expression to stone. Kylo turns to him, and any scrap of logical thinking the Knight may have held is gone from his eyes when he bares his teeth. Hux clenches his own.

A diversion.

He needs a diversion. Hux turns to the doctor.

“Will she live?” he asks, leaving no room for nonsense. The doctor stutters, then rights himself, remembering that he’s addressing the General of the flagship.

“Sir,” the doctor says, looking between Kylo Ren and Hux. He then looks behind him, towards Rey, and Hux’s eyes follow. She’s being moved, aided by Yathe, into a bacta tank. “She’s lost a lot of blood. All we can do now is put her in a bacta tank and infuse her with new blood before we attempt any surgical proc—“

Hux’s eyes narrow.

Slicing her open. He remembers the way her two limbs had bent, the pooling blood under her head. The doctor gets some courage from somewhere and clears his throat.

“—Before we attempt any surgical work to repair the damages to her limbs and her cranium, then she’ll remain in a bacta tank until she’s healed completely.” The doctor looks at Kylo from the corner of his eye. “This will be a long process, sirs. The best that can be done is to allow us the space to work, and hope she survives.”

The doctor once again clears his throat, “It is a miracle she’s survived this long. Her heart should have stopped, or burst. She should have bled out immediately, her skull should have shattered completely. Let’s consider ourselves lucky.”

Phasma steps up, probably sensing Hux’s mood. She gives Hux a look that’s both stern and pitying and meant to silence him. Hux almost hates her for it. How easily must he be displaying his emotions, for his own Second in Command to look at him that way?

Yet…

Yet, it’s not entirely unfounded.
He would *raze* this place to the ground if he was given the wrong set of news, if Rey did not survive this, though he’d probably have to compete with Kylo on who could do it first. No, Kylo and Hux would do it together, and what beautiful destruction it would be.

Phasma senses it. Yathe as well, the woman instinctively standing between them and the door.

“Thank you, doctor,” Phasma says on Hux’s behalf before turning to face him. She eyes Kylo warily, who has turned to stone before them. “General, I will personally guard the doors. Nobody will come in or out.”

“As will I,” Yathe says, eyes pinned on Kylo Ren. Kylo finally seems to focus enough to take in *his* Second in Command. Yathe stands tall, proud and resolute, and even Hux can tell she would guard that door with her life, the dangerous glint in her eye that of a woman on a mission.

Kylo grunts, but it’s a pained thing. Hux inhales.

“She’s in capable hands. Leave them to their work. We have our own to do.”

And oh, do they.

Whoever did this would *pay*, and Hux would delight in turning their skulls into paperweights.

*

*Thump-Thump.*

*Thump-Thump.*


*Should she recognize those voices?*  

*Thump…*

*

It takes a heartbeat. Another. Another, until finally, Kylo can compose himself. He takes in Yathe’s narrowed gaze, silently telling him to try and calm down, and so Kylo turns inward and reaches out towards Rey, towards the weak yet steady glow of the Force Bond.

So, so weak.

But this is preferable to the shattering scream that had crashed into him before, splintering his vision as the bond that tethers him inextricably to Rey started hurting, hurting, *hurting*; trying to squeeze all air out of his lungs until he could hardly breathe, yanking at his heart in an effort to unhinge it from its resting place.

The bond is fragile but still humming, and it is the only hope he’s got that she will, maybe, *maybe*
make it through this. He would not imagine the other possibilities, because it would be like tearing out his own heart and dying a slow death with her.

Somewhere in his panic-addled brain, Hux’s words cut through.

“She’s in capable hands. Leave them to their work. We have our own to do.”

Yes.

He looks ahead, at the gaggle of medics and nurses surrounding Rey, and all he can see is her limp arm, slim wrist and small hand floating lifelessly in bacta. Kylo breathes in.

*Do not trust your eyes.*

He turns inward. She’s there, tucked in the back of his awareness. Kylo turns to Hux, brushes into his mind, and for once, Hux doesn’t stop him. Hux doesn’t go silent, he doesn’t slam up walls. He allows Kylo full access, and it’s like drowning in his pain all over again, Kylo’s anguish doubled by Hux’s despair, though the General does a far better job at retaining his composure.

Kylo would spend the next three weeks sharing his mental space with Hux constantly, a fear of losing him too wedged between his ribs, but for now, there were other matters to worry about. He is being allowed in, and Hux holds nothing back, yet floating quickly to the surface from underneath all the pain, the panic, the fear of Rey’s death, is an inky blot of rage that coats Hux’s immediate thoughts, his usually crystalline eyes colorless and sharp.

*Thump-Thump*

*What is that? Why does it hurt?*

*Thump-Thump*

*Pain… and…*

*Thump-Thump*

*Cristalline eyes, colorless and sharp.*

*Thump…*

The Force bond hums, just a little louder, and Kylo immediately wraps himself around it protectively.

*Rey?* He calls, but there is nothing. No answer. No sound.

Yet she’s there, and that counts.
Kylo Ren turns around in a fury and thunders down the hall, Hux at his side.

He would find whoever did this and he would murder them.

*

Thump-Thump

Fear...? Whose fear?

Thump-Thump

Rage and...

Thump-Thump

A warm glow.

She navigates to it instinctively.

*

The Knights are called.

“WHO DID THIS?!” Kylo screams as he enters the training room, Hux on his heels, but no one answers, so Kylo gets to work.

Kylo rips through memories of the last hour to find the culprit. They offer it all up willingly, however. Their master, when outraged, was a force to behold, and none of them would chance a fight. They had bent the knee, after all. Once they have all been thoroughly scoured for information, they’re dispersed to all corners of the ship to hunt, with specific orders to bring the culprit back alive, if found. Kylo Ren would not give anyone else the benefit of carrying out the execution, except perhaps the General standing next to him. He could share. Maybe.

For the next five hours, every Knight takes on hundreds of stormtroopers, looking for any memory of somebody shoving Rey off an observation deck, while Hux examines the security footage and Kylo paces the small office.

“This is all my fault,” Kylo chants behind him, growling the accusation over and over, “I shouldn’t have let her go.”

Hux’s eyelid twitches as he inhales.

No, Kylo shouldn’t have. But neither should he.

“Stop talking,” Hux demands as he replays the footage again. It’s like watching his worst nightmares coming to life on loop.
Rey, entering an observation deck.

Rey, standing over a railing, staring out into space and sobbing. The sounds break his heart again, and again, and again, and he steels himself when he once more feels Kylo brushing into him with the Force. He does not shut the man out. Misery loves company.

She ignites a holopad, and Hux can’t tell what’s exchanged, but clearly hears a name, spoken a bit too loud in Rey’s panic: General Organa. He swallows, afraid to even think on this, refusing to let his anger boil over when he needs to think clearly. Hux is under no illusion that Rey had ever shifted her moral compass, always pointed decidedly towards justice. He had half expected it for months, really, and Rey had all but shouted at him that she was not on his side. He stashes the hurt over this for another day, focusing on the ghostly blue projection.

Hux skips a handful of seconds.

“Lady Rey?”

Kylo’s head swivels towards the hologram instinctively. It had been him who had demanded that everyone address her by the title. Kylo’s face twists, the scar marring him pinching. That name, another thing that had been Kylo’s fault.

And Hux’s.

He had certainly never discouraged it, despite knowing how much Rey hated it. He, too, had teased her about it once. Swallowing and breathing are becoming increasingly hard tasks to perform.

“You’re a traitor!”

There.

But that’s all he gets.

A bare hand, shoving Rey from a strategic place outside of the camera’s reach. Whoever did it knew exactly where the cameras were positioned. So he gets to watch with mounting horror as Rey freezes, gets shoved, then disappears from the camera’s view. There would be nothing to glean from this bit of footage other than the painful realization that, in his distraction with Kylo — while he was too busy making admissions about his affections - Rey was falling to her death.

He doesn’t switch the camera to the second feed, the one from the deck below. That bit of footage would show her finally crashing in a heap. It had been painful enough to watch once, his blood chilling at the resounding crack of bone on metal floor. Kylo, however, demands he play it again.

He averts his eyes as the Knight watches, hands planted on the panels in front of him. Masochist, perhaps.

“She slowed herself down,” Kylo says, talking to himself. Hux narrows his eyes, then replays the footage.

Over and over, they replay it… and… sure enough.

Rey’s fall slows about an inch from the ground. He hears the cracking noises, but there’s no spray of blood exploding around her. There’s no violent bounce, at least, not as violent as it could have been. It had been just enough to avoid death.

“Do you think she…?” Hux asks, and Kylo grunts, then resumes his pacing.
Hux replays the first clip.

Perhaps he’s a masochist himself, he thinks, as he goes through it all with a fine-toothed comb, his insides twisting the longer he does it.

She could die.

They could lose her, and it would be his fault.

“I shouldn’t have let her go,” Hux finally murmurs to himself, repeating the same words he had hushed Kylo for. “This is all my fault. I should have made her stay, tell her the whole truth.”

* 

**Thump-Thump**

*Strands of red hair…*

*Focus now.*

*Strands of…*

**Thump-Thump**

*So much pain. Why? I am right here.*

**Thump-Thump**

“I shouldn’t have let her go,” a voice says, and it belongs to the head with strands of red hair, “this is all my fault.”

**Thump-**

“I should have made her stay. Tell her the whole truth.”

**Thump-**

* 

In the end, it is Kylo who finds him. A slip of a boy no older than nineteen, who looks a little too much like Hux, though his eyes are brown and soulful. Kylo’s throws the boy against the wall with such force that the stormtrooper’s head cracks and bounces. Hux watches with a sneer on his face, a pistol drawn, waiting, waiting so very patiently, for his turn.

*
Fear curls inside the bond, a fear that is not his, and Kylo stumbles. Rey. It is Rey.

No, it could not be, could it? She's inside a bacta tank, unconscious. He stops, letting the stormtrooper — the child — fall the five feet to the ground as Kylo turns to look at Hux.

“Can you confirm it is him?” Hux asks, feet firmly planted as he thumbs the pistol’s grip, waiting to be given a reason to use it.

Kylo freezes the kid in place, snarling.

“Who are you?” Kylo asks the stormtrooper, wanting nothing more than to reach in and break his neck. He had seen Rey’s face in this child’s mind the second Kylo had approached him. Whereas every other man had simply thought to run at the monster standing before him, this child had thought of Rey. Why?

“Lance, isn’t it?” Hux asks, voice hard and cutting as he walks up to the trooper, his heels clicking languidly on the brushed metal floors as he moves closer and addresses the young man. Lance visibly swallows.

“General, sir, I—“

“Did you do it?” Hux snarls, tone low, pressing the mouth of his pistol to Lance’s throat, the pistol Phasma had quietly handed him before they’d left the Med Bay. “Did you do it? If you dared hurt her, know that what awaits you is far more painful than a bullet to the head.”

Lance’s eyes widen, he stutters, turning three different shades of sickly green even as he pales. “I—I—I—“

Kylo’s hold on him strengthens, the boy chokes. Hux sneers, turning to Kylo.

“I do need him to talk, Ren,” Hux scoffs, then tilts his head to get a better look at the stormtrooper.

Kylo presses himself inside Hux’s mind, trying to see what he sees. Slender boy. Sharp edges, though not quite sharp; Lance has not seen the worst that humanity has to offer yet. Pale face, a straight nose, and hair that trick Hux’s eyes into believing he’s staring at a mirror when he focuses on the coppery red locks. Kylo retreats, easing up on the Force choke, if only just barely.

“We can do this the easy way, or the hard way. Where were you?” Hux asks, eyes narrowed and pistol still pointed at Lance’s throat. The stormtrooper looks confused for a moment. Kylo watches the pistol’s mouth bob with the repeated motion of the stormtrooper’s swallowing. Panic crosses
Hux is leaning in, Lance’s face, then returns and makes a home of itself in his eyes. Hux leans in.

“Alright, then, the hard way it is…”

Hux walks out of the prison cell, knuckles bloodied. It’s not his blood. When he finally looks up, Kylo scowls, the sound of leather creaking as the man turns his hands into fists, so tight he can see the gloves stretching over hard knuckles. Kylo had been on a rampage to exact his revenge, and though Hux could barely hold it against him, the man had a habit of killing first, asking questions later.

Hux stares at the bits of skin, not his skin, collected under his fingernails.

He should have let somebody else do this. Bloodying himself was not a pastime of his, unlike the Knight before him. Still, if anything, it had been a fantastic way to let out his pent up rage. Kylo narrows his eyes at him.


“Perhaps you’ll have better luck,” he offers, waving towards the door of the cell currently holding his look alike. “I have others to see to.”

He’d thrown all of Rey’s friends into cells, the security footage replaying in his mind. Nobody else would have reacted with the venom with which her attacker had acted, not when faced with a Force user. Nobody else on this ship knew she was blocked; no one would see her, lightsaber at her waist, and assume her weak. Nobody except, perhaps, a friend. Though the Knights of Ren were busy searching minds all over the ship, Hux and Kylo had decided to take on her acquaintances personally. He grinds his molars in frustration, then moves onto the next cell.

And the next.

And the next.

And the next.

In the end, his fists hurt, but it’s a small price to pay. He finally feels much more collected, an empty vessel for his thoughts. Still, no confessions come, and Kylo’s mental digging is fruitless. He would have to send the lot of them to reconditioning after this.

His comm beeps over the screams of the cell next door.

Rey’s being prepped for surgery.

He collects Kylo, then makes his way down to Med Bay One, Ren following him much like a shadow— certainly as silent as one. Hux’s teeth hurt from clenching and unclenching his jaw, but the pain forces him to focus. Perhaps he’s not that different from Ren after all. When they finally reach the Med Bay, an unhelmeted Phasma and Yathe are quietly talking to themselves as they guard the doors. Phasma straightens upon seeing him and snaps off a salute. Yathe turns around and, after studying Hux for a moment, gives a bow of deference to her Master.
“She’s entered surgery,” Yathe says, addressing them both.

“Thank you,” Hux says, remembering his manners, then turns to Phasma. “Return to the bridge and relieve Lieutenant Mitaka, Captain.”

Phasma snaps off another salute, gives Yathe a small smile and a nod, then takes a sharp about-turn, the heels of her boots clicking off into the distance.

“I can stay and guard, if you’d like,” Yathe offers, hand resting on her saber at her hip, long black robes swishing with the motion. Kylo shakes his head.

“Join the other Knights in the search,” The First Knight of Ren instructs, “I’ll guard the doors.”

Yathe bows once again, this time to both of them, before taking off in the opposite direction. Hux would have to remember to thank the woman eventually. He doesn’t know the knights, but she’d done him a favor. Hux could scarcely go on a manhunt while worrying about guarded doors. When his eyes find Ren, golden brown eyes are pinned on him as though Ren were looking for any anchor to which he could hold onto.

The moment stretches between a heartbeat and the next, realization rushing up on them in waves: there’s nothing else to do but wait. Wait for a Knight to say they’ve found the culprit. Wait for the surgeons to finish their work. Wait with baited breath to see if she’ll survive this.

Hux quietly digs into his pocket and pulls out a packet of cigarettes, leaning against a wall as he cups flame to smoke and ignites the little stick. He stares at it, acknowledging it for what it is: the first of many to come. Kylo starts pacing. This would be their pattern of behavior for much of the next three weeks.

#

Ah…

*Thump-Thump*

*He sure is smoking a lot.*

Rey steps out from seeing through the golden rope, closing her ears to the deafening sounds around her, all of them screaming the same thing: pain, anguish, regret, fear, uncertainty, self loathing. Sometimes there are two sets of emotions, though she knows neither one of them is hers. The redhead’s, then.

She floats, and time loses meaning.

*Thump-Thump*

*Hmm…*
Twelve hours later, Kylo’s still pacing, and Hux is still smoking, and neither one has slept. Phasma reports again, and on her heels, Yathe. The women look at the men’s sorry states and basically demand that they go rest, with promises that they will guard the doors. The Finalizer has been cloaked and moved to the borders of the outer rim, shields at maximum strength and the whole ship on lockdown. No one would be moving or doing anything until Hux said so.

Kylo refuses, hackles rising at the idea of leaving his post. Hux looks at the Med Bay doors. She’s still in surgery.

“Come on,” he finally says, and Kylo rounds on him. Hux arches an eyebrow. “You can’t guard her if you drop dead.”

Try me, Kylo’s expression says. He would guard those doors until the end of days. So, Hux changes tactics.

“Suit yourself,” he says, turning around and putting out his tenth cigarette. “I’m going to bed. Captain, please update me as soon as they’re done.”

It would be a few hours yet. He really should try and catch a few hours of rest, no matter how much his mind and body resist the idea.

He walks away without waiting for Ren, then the corners of his lips turn up as he feels Ren press into his mind — an awkward, careful thing… an image of them… together on a bed without Rey. There is nothing of the Knight’s petulance in this. Hux’s chest twists at the thought, at the knowledge that they’ll be missing one other, but returns the same image to the man in confirmation. What good would it do for them to stay apart, anyway, after having spent so many weeks sharing the same bed? It’s a selfish thought, really. Hux much prefers to sleep with somebody else there. As it turns out, Kylo Ren does not like to be alone. Poor, sad and lonely beast. Without fail, on Hux’s last footfall, he hears the echoes of Ren’s boots following behind.

Chapter End Notes

As always, a huge thank you to all who are still reading, and especially to those who are still commenting, sharing, and just being overall amazing. I can’t believe you guys are still with me here. UGH.

SORRY THIS CHAPTER’S SO ANGSTY AND PAIN-FILLED. I tried to keep it from turning into another monster chapter, but here we are 5k+ words later anyway. Oops.
Bacta

Chapter Summary

Hux and Kylo get a bit of a heart to heart in, and basically move shop to Med Bay One between terrorizing everyone aboard the finalizer and reporting to Snoke.

Chapter Notes

You guys, your comments the last chapter made my life. I love it when you all go sherlock holmes on me. Thank you all for taking the time to read, comment, guess, and generally be amazing in interacting with me. Your words and enthusiasm have given me life. For being such good troopers, you guys get this :) enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The halls are deserted, silent now except for the echoes of Hux’s footfalls. Behind him, Kylo follows on silent feet. He could go from announcing his presence so easily, a resonating gong with every step, and yet he now follows behind Hux like a shade. Hux doesn’t look back to check, though.

Instead he focuses on his fingers, trembling and bloodied, knuckles bruised. He licks his lips, inspecting them, and chews on the inside of his lower lip. That would hurt in the morning. Hux lets them drop to his sides again and stares ahead as they make the slow, silent march up towards their quarters. One step in front of another, he tells himself, counting them in his mind. The count carries them both farther away from Med Bay One.

Their steps slow as they ascend, putting off the inevitable. Still, the inevitable arrives, as it always has. Hux steps through the doors to be greeted by the dark emptiness of their quarters, his eyes landing first on Rey’s couch-- The same couch where he’d promised her a home only minutes before she’d fled in a furious whirlwind. Then comes Rey’s chair, tucked neatly into the dining room table. Kylo comes to stand next to him and follows his gaze for a heartbeat too long before walking slowly past him and towards the bedroom, leaving Hux to watch him go, taking him in: the lead-footed steps, the slumped shoulders, the sluggish way in which Kylo goes about removing his cowl, then his gloves. Kylo lets them fall where they may, the fight finally seeping out of him, and only then does Hux follow. He sheds his own jacket and drapes it over a chair before entering the room, stepping over Kylo’s discarded clothes.

They move robotically, lowering themselves to bed with a gaping space between them, the tick-tock of the clock trumpeting the absence of one other, and though neither one speaks both are focused on the same sound. It becomes glaringly obvious that Rey had been much of the glue holding them together.

Kylo breaks first, turning his head slowly to face him, and Hux drags in air slowly through his nose until Kylo looks away.

“I’m sorry.”
It is Hux’s turn to look this time, brows furrowed and lips downturned at Kylo’s apology. He tries to remember any occasion in which Kylo Ren had ever uttered those words to him, but his memory fails him. He stays like this a second longer, taking in the man’s profile.

“For what, exactly?” he asks, unwilling to let the moment slip through his fingers. Kylo swallows, the motion drawing Hux’s attention for a second, before he forces himself to concentrate.

“I should have listened. Had I listened—” Kylo starts, a shuddering breath escaping him, only for it to turn into a grunt as he lifts himself up and sits on the edge of the bed, gifting Hux to a first-row view of the battlefield of scars marring Kylo’s back. Hux laces his fingers on his abdomen over his white undershirt and tries to count them. He loses count quickly enough, so instead waits patiently for Kylo to continue.

“I should have listened.” Kylo repeats, digging his massive hands into his raven hair, running them through anxiously, and though the list of things Hux believes Kylo Ren should have listened to extends the length of this ship, he remains quiet. Silence procures more confessions than questions ever did.

But Ren does nothing. Nothing except stare ahead, away from him, while the wide expanse of muscle before Hux’s eyes twitches and shivers visibly under too-pale, too-hot skin. It tricks the eye into believing the scars are sentient, that they move and writhe of their own free will. Hux finally lets out a low breath.

They need to sleep. His own heart may be crushing itself to powder, but there’s beauty in logic, in taking steps, one in front of the other. Sleep first. One step.

Hux sits up, running his hands through his own hair and mussing it, strands falling over his eyes and away from its usual careful styling. He could kill for a cigarette. Still, he’d had plenty, and burning his lungs to a crisp now would do him no good. He lifts himself from the bed and walks around it, one step in front of the other, until he’s standing between Kylo’s spread knees. Kylo doesn’t look up.

It’s as though he hadn’t even noticed Hux obstructing his field of vision.

Hux runs his hand carefully through Kylo’s messy hair, so beautiful even after Kylo’s constant worrying into it, then closes his fingers close to the scalp and tugs back. It shouldn’t hurt, but it’s enough to garner Kylo’s attention when he’s forced to finally meet Hux’s gaze.

“Don’t fall apart on me now,” he says for both their sakes. “She’s not gone yet.”

Yet.

That single word would haunt him all night, and for many nights to come, but Ren needs to hear it, so Hux provides it. He can’t get through this one on his own, not without crippling consequences. It rankles to admit it to himself that the tight rein on his judgement exists only to keep Kylo Ren from spiraling further. He probably would have allowed himself to spiral right along with him, otherwise. Hux eases up on his hold when Kylo nods. He hesitates for only a second, biting on the tender-soft skin on the inside of his cheek, before letting the same hand fall to caress the hollow of Kylo’s cheekbones. Kylo leans into it, seeking warmth wherever it may come from, even if it’s from somebody less than qualified to provide it.

Ah, godlike and broken had, after all, been an apt comparison.

“We’ll get your apprentice back,” he murmurs, wanting to believe the words even as he provides them for Ren’s benefit. “And we will make whoever did this suffer dearly for their efforts.”
Ren’s lips twitch up slightly, igniting within Hux a twisted sense of pride at having made him smile. Yes, of course Kylo would like that. Hux himself is not quite opposed to the idea. A quick death would not be punishment enough.

On the next blink, the angry need for revenge coursing through his limbs cools down when Rey’s face flashes in front of his eyes. Kylo opens his and looks up and, oh, Hux could lose himself in that grief-stricken gaze, in too-wide pupils that threaten to swallow him whole. He blinks rapidly, pushing away the desire to let it happen, to let Kylo’s eyes drag him in. He licks his lips, finding Kylo’s gaze again, his mind returning to the conversation they were engaged in prior to Rey’s fall.

Rey’s fall. The ache in his chest spreads to his limbs, tingling all the way to his fingertips, mingling with the heat of Kylo’s body against his palm. It drives him, that feeling.

What he’s about to do is the stupidest, most reckless thing he’s ever done. Yet, in the light of the day’s events a sense of urgency settles over Hux’s chest and stays there, pressing down, harder and harder until he either finds a way to lift it or allows himself to be crushed by it. He’s very nearly about to lose Rey. Hux looks at Kylo. He can’t lose this man, too, he realizes with astonishment. He can’t. He’d wanted him once, a mighty weapon at his side. Except his wants now are for entirely different reasons. Maddeningly confusing reasons, but reasons nonetheless.

Hux swallows.

“You asked me if I loved her,” He says.

Kylo snaps to attention, and the corners of Hux’s lips turn up. Of course Kylo would, Hux muses. Except this isn’t a game of cat and mouse anymore. Not like the games they’d played for months. He swallows painfully once more, recognizing this for what it is: a desperate need to find a foothold, to steady himself in something stronger than he in order to weather this storm. Funny, that Hux would anchor himself to the most volatile, unsteady thing in this whole ship. Hux, who’s used to being the steady, unmovable force. He lets out a low breath again.

“You asked me if I loved her,” he repeats, tilting his head and once again caressing Kylo’s hair. “If I loved you, by extension, when I failed to back away. When I failed to give you an answer.”

Hux breathes in deeply, but Kylo has forgotten his grief perhaps for only a moment, now that he has finally pinned Hux exactly where he wants him. The Knight’s hands come up to cup the back of Hux’s knees. Hux lets him, heart thundering out of his chest at the small contact.

“Non-answers aren’t declarations of love, Kylo,” he murmurs, his long fingers trailing through shiny, silken locks of hair. It feels good against his skin, the warmth of Kylo’s scalp burning into his palm. “They aren’t.”

Kylo tightens his hold on Hux’s knees, as if afraid that Hux will change his mind and stop talking. That he’ll move away. He can sense as much, when Kylo presses image after image of their precarious position into his mind. He smiles. Here it comes, the stupidest part.

He’s playing with fire, and he’s willing to get burnt.

“Except when they are,” he whispers, then amends, worrying openly at his lower lip. “I think.”

“You think?” Kylo rumbles, pulling him closer, and Hux lets himself be pulled. He chuckles, digging his nails into Kylo’s scalp. There’s only so much he’d allow. Kylo hisses and, after a hard squeeze to his thighs, the Knight eases his grip. Good.

“You are puzzle pieces. You, and your apprentice,” he says, resuming his soft caressing. At the
mention of his apprentice, Kylo’s face takes on that pained look that makes Hux’s heart turn on itself. “And despite all your twisted edges, none of which match with where I envisioned my life would take me, somehow you’ve made yourselves fit, right in there, so close I can’t figure out how to remove you any longer.”

Is that a love declaration? Hux has never had to declare anything in his life, much less affection. He clears his throat, twisting a lock of hair around his index finger.

“Do you want to remove us?” Kylo says, moving up to grasp Hux’s wrist, forcing him to stop. The words are neutral, and yet… and yet Hux thinks that maybe, just maybe, he’s learned to read Kylo Ren a little too well. Hux’s heart stammers. “I didn’t say that.” He replies.

He can’t dislodge them anymore, and he’s not entirely sure he wants to.

Kylo smiles but it’s a weak, self-conscious thing. A true moment of weakness for the First Knight of Ren, who despite his violent demeanor and snarky attitude about everything, apparently needs a steady, unmovable force of his own.

He feels Kylo press into his awareness again and lets him. For allowing him to, Kylo turns his head and gently places a soft, tentative kiss to the inside of Hux’s wrist. A plea, a small gift bestowed upon Hux for being a good boy. It makes his heart stop then run at a million miles an hour. Then he looks at the clock, trying to clear his vision. He’d been standing there for a while. Hux looks back at Kylo. Six months? Six and a half? It had taken six months and change for his world to upend itself. This had never been part of the long term plan. It feels as though he were living in an alternate universe, where suddenly Rey of Jakku and Kylo Ren had inched themselves under his skin until they had become part of him, muscle and sinew, blood and bone. It’s not love. Or perhaps it is. He’s not the best person to make that call, having never experienced it.

He clears his throat and steps back, dropping his hand. Kylo lets him go.

“We should sleep,” he says, moving back to his side.

Hux lies down, facing away from Ren. He might regret every single word, every single thought he’d allowed himself to speak and think in the last twenty four hours. If regret ever arrived, he’d chalk it up to exhaustion and the dire circumstances, he heartily promises himself. They’d been forced together by circumstance and a thirst for power, then for survival. Nothing more. Nothing except a girl now floating inside a bacta tank.

The lights go off. His eyes close, and his mind starts to drift when he feels it again… Kylo pressing himself into Hux’s consciousness. He sighs, the sensation now becoming painfully familiar, and allows it. Misery loves company.

Sometime during in the night he’s enveloped in warmth from his shoulder blades to the end of his heel, a body pressed to his running ten degrees too hot, and searing hot breath against the small hairs on the back of his neck. He shivers, and an arm snakes through Hux’s midsection and pulls him back. Hux refuses to acknowledge it, faking sleep. A whisper so soft he’d miss it if it weren’t by his ear, sleepy and seductive, and Hux forces himself to keep his breathing steady.

“You’ll be mine one day, General. When we’re both brave enough…”

Kylo falls asleep quickly enough, emotional exhaustion finally having won. Hux manages exactly zero sleep.
Thump-thump

Love?

Thump-Thump

...Love.

The search does not stop for love declarations, however. A few hours later, the men are up and at it. Hux continues interrogating and Kylo joins the ship-wide hunt. There are thousands of men, and no leads. In the meantime, Phasma is in charge of the bridge and the stormtroopers have all been confined to their sleeping stations unless specifically requested. The stormtroopers take it in stride: it means no going on rotations, or patrols, and a surprisingly unending amount of spare time to joke and gossip without the ever watchful eye of their Captain. For many, this would be as close to a vacation as they’ve ever experienced, despite the rather intrusive digging of the Knights of Ren—that alone is enough for plenty of men to piss their pants. Otherwise? It’s not so bad.

But the more people are searched the more the gossip starts flying, and after so many days even the stormtroopers are starting to look at each other warily. Word’s gotten out that Lady Rey was injured. Still, there are no leads. Even so, one particular squadron has noticed the sudden disappearance of twenty of their own, all of them friends of the Lady, and so it catches like wildfire. It’s bound to happen, on a ship where everything has come to a stand-still.

Except, the longer it takes, the more volatile General Hux and Kylo Ren become. Kylo has taken to destroying almost anything he can get his hands on and, surprisingly, Hux lets him. Short of burning the ship down, the General is perfectly fine with Kylo Ren terrorizing half his fleet and Force choking the other half. The petty officers themselves have been so cowed they will not approach either man unless absolutely necessary, choosing instead to try and dump the responsibilities on their peers. The Knights suffer at the hand of their master, despite their stellar job in mind-searching, and most of them retreat to their rooms to avoid the man’s ire, using Yathe as their mediator. This girl must be quite a girl, the whispers fly. Only Captan Phasma and Yathe Ren seem to be strong-willed enough to approach Hux and Kylo without flinching. The longer this goes on, the more pins and needles people are forced to walk on.

Must be quite a girl.

Three weeks, and during those three weeks, Captain Phasma becomes the de facto leader of the Finalizer as well as the other two star destroyers in the First Order, but dealing with Hux is a handful as it is. Yathe, in the meantime, takes over training with the Knights. There’s nothing to do but train. Train and avoid the walking hurricanes by the name of Brendol Hux II and Kylo Ren.

The only time the men calm down seems to be whenever they’re around Med Bay One, crowded around a specific bacta tank. Kylo looms over it, as if trying to push himself through the glass so he
can float beside his apprentice, or perhaps instead of her. Hux gently presses a hand to the tank and makes a million promises of retribution against her attacker the second she wakes up. It’s becoming painfully clear that they would not find the culprit without her help. In their anger, they have even forgotten about informing their Supreme Leader, their thoughts wrapped up in Rey’s well being. They’d pay for that.

On that first week, all reports are brought down to Hux while he sits outside of the med bay, having decided he could work from just about anywhere, rather than having to do it from his office on the bridge. Kylo Ren, when not terrorizing the staff, the troopers, the officers, or his Knights, joins Hux and — for once — tries to help. Anything to keep him distracted.

By the second week, it seems everyone on the ship has made an unanimous decision that, for the sake of everybody’s well being aboard the Finalizer, it would be best if the General and the First Knight were kept by the girl at all times. Their meals suddenly start being delivered to the Med Bay along with the reports and the doctors arrange for a sitting area comfortable, secluded, and quiet enough for the two men. Yet the days stretch and, with no updates on either Rey’s recovery or leads on who shoved her, the tension rises astronomically and everybody else walks on eggshells.

So, Kylo returns to his daily pacing, and Hux returns to his incessant smoking. The doctors give Hux side glances, but if they want to say something about the detriments of smoking ten cigarettes a day, they know better than to speak up now. The doctors come in regularly, eager to give good news, but for those first two weeks, there’s nothing other than her vitals are stable. The surgeons do report that the surgeries were a success, but until Rey wakes up — if Rey wakes up once brain activity returns completely, her vitals strengthen, and her wounds heal — only then would they be able to verify for sure about lasting damage. Kylo growls through that and Hux grinds his teeth.

Permanent damage.

By the third week, everyone is literally avoiding the Med Bay. The meals are delivered by droids, the doctors make themselves scarce unless absolutely needed, and the nurses try to make themselves blend in with the walls. They hear Hux and Kylo shouting at each other about how to find the culprit, and the nurses bolt out of the Med Bay as fast as their legs can carry them. When the commanders are arguing, nobody intervenes. A silly nurse had made that mistake of interrupting a particularly heated spat and had ended up rubbing at her throat, choking through her tears. A present from Ren. Nobody dares intervene any longer. Nobody possibly could. Nobody except maybe the girl in the bacta tank, and she can do nothing more than watch through Kylo’s eyes, floating in and out of consciousness. Her awareness drowns in someone else’s, experiencing life in fits and spurts through someone’s mental headspace since she cannot use her own.

Despite their differences, they still make it to their quarters every night, and there the layers are peeled back to reveal two men that have been worn raw to the bone for three weeks.

They quietly lie in bed every night, but something shifts when Kylo searches for comfort, a weakened wolf pup searching for anything and anyone that will give it affection, and Hux gives it until it comes so very naturally. Some nights, the roles reverse. Hux is so tired and bedraggled that it is Kylo who will instead give, gently rubbing a thumb between Hux’s shoulder blades, pushing against week-old knots until the General groans. Two men who had never given an inch are now depending on each other to make it through this. They sleep close, the other’s gaze the last thing they each see before closing their eyes, and when the mornings find them tangled together, they no longer jump. Not quite as sharply, anyway. It has become a game of ignoring the way Kylo’s forehead will press to Hux’s, or the way Hux’s hands will find their way into Kylo’s hair. They get up and dress, and the pain of their new every day routine begins anew.
They are forced to answer a summons from Snoke, who, once again makes his displeasure known. It is *not* a pretty thing, but they play their roles well: obedient servant to the Dark side and perfect little soldier boy commanding armadas. The reports to the Supreme Leader are more frequent, and so much more worrisome.

It soon starts driving Kylo Ren back into his rooms, where he hadn’t been for so very long.

On one night, he’ll sit in front of his mangled grandfather’s helmet, propped on its perfect little shrine, and beg for guidance. Yet the helmet will only repeat what he’d been told for so very long.

*Turn her.*

*She’s too important.*

*She could make you powerful.*

And just like that, Kylo Ren becomes more and more agitated. He would try to carefully probe the helmet once, something he’s never tried, looking for his grandfather in the Force. More frustrating than anything else, his grandfather quiets. He had received *nothing* else since Rey had entered his life. Perhaps, one day, he’d have to probe further. He storms out of there and towards Med Bay One, and on that specific day even Hux has a hard time controlling him. At the end of that particular day, Kylo asks forgiveness in the quietest way he can. He places a kiss to Hux’s inner wrist, and so Hux does something he’s only ever done for Rey. He leans forward and gently presses his lips against Kylo’s temple, holding it there. It’s not a kiss, but Ren melts under him. Apology accepted.

Three weeks of this, yet Kylo continues returning to the helmet, for there’s nobody else who will listen to his deepest, darkest secrets. Kylo has learned to trust Hux, but not quite this far. Not with this. Not yet.

*Thump-Thump*

*What is that mask?*

*Thump-Thump*

*It feels so wrong…*

*Rey wraps herself in the glowing warmth of the bond. It’s safer there, she thinks, as she scurries away from the Darkness.*

*Kylo enters the room where Rey is kept for the fourth time that day. He can only take it in short bursts, seeing her limp body floating in the milky opalescence of bacta. He swallows, licks at his lips,*
and closes his eyes. It’s a deceitful thing, seeing her this way. He has to concentrate on closing his senses and turning to the bond where he knows that, as long as it remains glowing, she is still there. She’d made it through surgery, the thin scars where she’d been sliced open slowly knitting together and healing. There would probably be faint ones left marring her beautiful skin, but at least they would be nothing like her mark on him, a constant reminder he’d chosen for himself. He’d refused treatment for it, raging against the doctors who had wanted to place him in a similar bacta tank. Ironic, that he’d find himself standing next to one, praying the machine would do its job and leave her without a constant reminder of her own trauma.

If only he could help. He would give anything to be able to.

Hux walks towards the door quietly, leaning against the door frame and watching him without a word. Kylo doesn’t need to turn around to sense him. He’s still pressed into Hux’s mind, seeing through him, feeling as the General feels. It’s such a rudimentary connection, nothing as intense nor as refined as his Force bond with Rey, but it has been the one thing saving him from complete insanity for three weeks. He’d found solace in Hux’s steadfast drive to see himself, to see Kylo and Rey, through this. A beacon often times wrapped in rage, but always with laser focus: finding who did this, and making sure Rey lived. Those two goals Kylo could always get behind.

Hux clears his throat, though he doesn’t need to.

“Can’t you help her in any way?” Hux asks, a question that Kylo has seen floating in the back of Hux’s mind often enough. “With the Force.”

Kylo purses his lips. “I am a Dark force user. Healing is not in our nature, nor in the nature of the dark side of the Force.”

There’s a beat of silence.

“And through the bond?” Hux murmurs, and Kylo can sense both Hux’s wariness at the bond as well as something else, something faint. Jealousy. Kylo blinks. He almost turns around to gape when Hux walks forward and comes to stand by his side.

“The bond,” Hux continues, the words of a man who, for all of his understanding of the world, of war, still struggles with the Force. “She’s not Dark. Is she? But she’s connected to you. Is there anything?”

Kylo frowns.

The bond.

The bond has stood as its own little entity, apart from everything inside his brain and his soul, bright and untainted; tethering him to Rey since the day he touched that glowing ball of light during his mockery of rehabilitation with Snoke. Hux watches him closely.

Kylo frowns, a vague memory floating to his mind. He lowers himself to the ground into a sitting position, fighting to remember, to bring it back. Anything useful, and then, after so many minutes…

Kylo closes his eyes and focuses his breathing, falling into a meditative trance. It is in moments like these, between waking and sleeping, between alertness and meditation, that the hum intensifies. He inspects it in the safety of his room, his consciousness flying to it and wrapping around it, hovering but never touching, like a moth drawn to a flame.

His breathing matches the hum inside his mind, falling in step with the glowing little thrum of energy lighting up the darkness of his thoughts; his aches start to dissipate, his body stops sweating, and
ever so slowly, a strength he did not know he could possess, after so many days of brutal training, seeps back into his limbs. This renewal of strength is not because of meditation. It had never happened before, no matter how deeply or how long he meditated. This is new.

Kylo’s eyes snap open. He looks at Hux, then at the bacta tank, and on the next breath he allows the room to fall away. Kylo reaches towards the bond, strokes it, coaxes it, and gently matches his breathing and his power to the hum inside his mind. He closes his eyes again, then starts guiding his power towards the girl floating before him. The girl floating inside his mind.

The more Snoke presses, the more Kylo digs in his heels, until, one day, he’s forced to admit what he’d been hiding for so long. Rey may have broken her block. She’d stopped herself an inch off the ground. Hux gives Kylo a knowing glance, but they remain silent.

“Ah, wonderful news…” Snoke croons, steepling his fingers, and for once the creature delivers them no pain. Their reward, Kylo thinks with a suppressed sneer as the hologram disappears. Once they walk out of the room, Kylo stares resolutely ahead.

“May does not mean she has,” Kylo reasons, when Hux asks him tersely. “It buys us time.”

Time. They were running out of time.

“She will be taken from us,” Hux warns, “give the vile creature too much and he’ll find a way.”

“Over my dead body,” Kylo promises, and after a heartbeat, Hux projects his agreement into Kylo Ren’s mind.

For the rest of the week, Snoke leaves them curiously alone. To oversee her recovery, Snoke explains with a sickening smile, though the creatures know she’s not out of danger yet. The hairs on their necks stand, but they bow just the same. Yes, they would need to oversee her recovery. Kylo spends every waking moment in front of Rey’s tank, sitting cross legged on the floor, meditating for four, ten, twelve hours on end. Hux makes sure he eats, but otherwise simply watches him over the pile of work in front of him; his brows furrow when, for the first time in weeks, Rey’s heartbeat completely stabilizes. It strengthens. There’s brain activity.

The doctors announce that Rey should be waking within a few days.

Good.

Waiting with your veins split open for three weeks, wondering if you’ll lose the one girl you love, is a very long time for impatient men.

They watch as the bacta tank drains, Rey’s body falling from where it’s been floating slowly to rest on the cold metal table. Droids rush in to check her vitals immediately, and a doctor rushes past them
giving them a hesitant, anxious look. If she doesn’t make it through this, it would be on his head. He runs over to Rey as the droids are cleaning her down, when a nurse comes in and gives them a perfectly professional smile, trying not to whimper in front of the two of them standing sternly there.

“General, sir, Lord Ren,” she greets, “We will be cleaning and dressing her shortly. If you’ll please wait outside?”

Hux arches an eyebrow and takes a deep breath, and Kylo looks entirely unwilling to move. He’s wearing his helmet, for once. Probably so that the whole world can’t see his facial expression on this specific day. Hux places his hand on Kylo’s forearm to bring his attention to him.

“Perhaps we should give her her privacy, Lord Ren?” he proposes, and all he hears is the modulated breathing of a man who’s barely holding himself together by a very short leash. Hux gives him a tiny, imperceptible tug and Kylo gives a reluctant nod. He watches the nurse let out a soft breath as they turn and exit. They’re made to wait outside for twenty minutes. Kylo paces the hall back and forth like a trapped animal looking for a fight, and Hux can do nothing but lean against the wall and smoke one cigarette after another until he’s gone through five of them, carefully keeping the tremble out of his hand.

Finally the doctor comes out and both men immediately stop stone-cold. The doctor flinches involuntarily.

“My commanders, thank you for waiting,” he begins. Hux waits patiently and Kylo’s standing there in all of his permanently intimidating glory. “Regarding the patient… You’ll be able to see her soon. She’s alive and stable.”

Hux lets out a long breath through his nose, his eyes narrowing. There’s something else.

“However, please know that the fall was— …hard is the kindest way to put it — on her. She will wake up soon, but she suffered a lot of trauma. Scans show her brain function is normal, by all medical measurements, but… you should prepare yourselves. She may wake up but she may not…” the doctor hesitates and Hux’s eyes narrow further. Kylo’s not breathing. He can’t hear a thing from the modulator. “She may not be the same.”

And there it was.

Hux swallows then gives a curt nod, dismissing the doctor. The man scurries away before he can become the latest victim to either Kylo Ren’s saber or Hux’s bare hands. The number of incidents from both Hux’s temper and Kylo’s tantrums had mounted rather rapidly. It was now an open secret that General Hux and Kylo Ren must be attracted, even if a little bit, to Lady Rey. What other reason could there be for their erratic behavior?

Kylo and Hux look at each other for a silent, pregnant moment before nodding at the same time.

Hux wraps all the steel he can around himself and braces himself. Rey’s been moved to a med-bay bed, comfortably settled in her white patient gown, covered to the chest with extra layers of warm bedsheets to keep her temperature controlled, an IV tube pushed into her one arm and several other cables connected to her temples to keep track of vitals.

Hux comes around one side of the bed and Kylo stands on the other, leather-covered hands that had crushed so many opponents tightened around the metal bars of the bed’s guards. Hux keeps his hands on the metal bars on his side, trying not to squeeze. They stand there for a long moment before Kylo moves to try and grip her shoulder, see if she’s responsive. Hux holds up a hand and Kylo’s fingers curl into themselves like the end of a question, turning his attention on the General.
Hux shakes his head, the hand that he’d held up gently moving to card through Rey’s still damp hair. He swallows, taking in her features. She looks so frail. Her skin’s pallid, her freckles faint, tinged with a sickly purple pink underneath skin that’s been floating in bacta goo for three weeks. His heart clenches. Kylo reaches up and removes his helmet, turning on silent limbs and gently putting it on a chair. Moments like these Hux wonders at how gentle the giant can be. How quiet. He would hate for a deathly silent Kylo to ever sneak up behind him. When Kylo turns around he understands why the man had kept his helmet on until just then. He’d guessed right.

His face is a riot of emotions. So many, all crossing his strong features all at once, underlined by anger, by fear. Anger that this had happened to her. Fear that she would not be the Rey they knew. He looks back at her and hesitates, then throws all caution to the wind. He'd been doing that so often with Ren, what was one more time? He’d indulge.

Hux leans down, still gently caressing Rey’s scalp. His face comes close to Rey’s and he roves over her brow, the gentle slope of her button nose, her beautiful lips.

“You have to come back to us, Rey.” He whispers, unsure and uncaring of whether Kylo can hear him, “You have to fight this, and you’re so good at fighting.”

Hux sighs, bringing his hand down from her hair to gently touch the hollow of her cheekbone.

She’s on a bed and perhaps when she comes to, she won’t ever be the girl that had haunted him for months. And he realizes that he doesn’t care anymore. He doesn’t care if he’s heard, or seen doing what he’s doing. He’d wanted this for a long time, he thinks, though never under these circumstances. Still, he wants it. He needs this now more than ever.

“Come now, darling. Will you be a good girl for us?” he swallows, his chest knotting as his thumb draws gentle strokes on her cheek.

He leans forward, taking a deep breath. Underneath all the clinical smells, she still smells like herself. Like sand and sunshine, an inherent thing hardcoded into her DNA. He lets his eyes close and his ears pick up on the soft, ragged breaths of a man across from him who’s watching intently. When he finally moves closer and tilts his head, he feels Rey’s eyelashes press against his cheek, and he bites his lips, licks them gently, makes them warm for her before closing the final little gap of space. His lips find hers and his body rocks with electricity, and it hurts. It hurts how she fits against his face like a puzzle piece, and her lips are warm despite the cold of the room, and it reminds him of a time so long ago when he’d felt those same lips against his thumb. He’d pulled a dirty rag from her then. Now he tries to pull her out of her sleep. To drag her back. His lips move gently, carefully, relishing the feel of her under him. And he knows she won’t return the kiss, she can’t, but this is enough.

He pulls back reluctantly after what feels like an eternity. His eyes flutter open again, slowly, and he looks at her from under hooded lids that blur out the rest of the room until it’s only her in his line of vision.

“Be a good girl for me, Rey. Can you do that? Can you return to me? Please.”

His whisper’s turned to pleading and there’s nothing else but the two of them, and a third person standing there quietly drinking it all in. Then he notices it. A flutter of dark, rust-brown lashes under him. His heart stops beating, then seems to try and catch up by doing a somersault in his chest.

“Rey?” comes the husky voice of the Knight on the other side of the bed, reminding Hux to pull back and give her space to breathe. Kylo’s glossy locks fill his vision as the man leans down too,
trying to get a closer look at her. They're no longer a General and a warrior standing there, but two men drowning in their own worry.

Her lids twitch weakly, lashes fluttering, and Hux and Kylo hold their breath.


They wait until it physically aches to hold in air, and then her lashes flutter once more.

Rey’s eyes slip open so slowly Hux finally clenches his fingers against the metal railing of the bed. It's excruciating.

He echoes Kylo’s question in a soft murmur: “Rey?”

Her eyes go around in a circle looking ahead of her, painfully prying her eyes up to the ceiling, trying to get her bearings. Disoriented. Kylo and Hux stand still as statues.

Then she notices them and Hux swallows hard. Moment of truth.

Rey frowns a little, eyes narrowing slightly, and he’s already starting to despair that she can’t recognize them, and swearing as he promises to personally kill every single one of the bastards who planned this, when her nose pinches.

“Hi,” she croaks from a throat that hasn’t seen use in three weeks, then she gives a tiny smile, “You two look horrible.”

Hux’s knees buckle, and he’s thankful for the bed’s metal rail as he forces himself to lock them in order to keep from sagging. Kylo just straight up sags inward, his forehead landing on Rey’s collarbone in a moment of unguarded weakness, the first he’s allowed himself publicly since her accident. Rey flinches, and Kylo immediately jolts up, looking at her as though he’d broken her in that single motion. Then she laughs at Kylo, and it’s weak and raspy, but it’s her laugh, and Hux could cry.

She’s back.

Chapter End Notes

MAN. I COULD HAVE BEEN SO MEAN TO YOU GUYS AND DRAGGED THOSE 3 WEEKS OUT! But, because ain't nobody got time for that (seriously, I could write dissertations on those 3 weeks, but we gotta get to the good stuff here), here you go. ALSO, LOOK AT THAT.

*smiles* too bad she was asleep, no? Or was she?
Rey is finally awake after three weeks in a bacta tank and, in true Rey fashion, she takes the leap and starts building her wings on the way down.

**Chapter Notes**

**THIS IS REY'S SHAVE AFTER SURGERY** - I got a few comments that some people were a little confused about what happens with the hair situation in this chapter so, this is being posted at the beginning rather than at the end for visual aid.

Thank you for watering your local author plant in the comments section the last two chapters. I had a rough writing week and coming back to read through the beautiful things you've left me, and getting to share in your enthusiasm all over again, helped me get through this one. Enjoy!

“How long was I out?” Rey manages to ask despite the croak that passes for her voice being barely recognizable. It feels like she’d swallowed a handful of Jakku sand, she thinks, trying to clear her throat.

Kylo and Hux stare at each other. Rey notices the small crack in their usually impenetrable expressions. They’re afraid. Afraid that anything out of them now will upset her, or worse, make her shut down and push them away. She doesn’t need to brush into their minds to see it, though she does so unconsciously anyway. It’s a habit by now. When the silence stretches on a beat too long, however, Hux turns to her.

“Three weeks,” he says, lips parting again as though he has more to say but he’s interrupted by a cheery nurse barging in, effectively cutting him off. His lips curl down in displeasure and Rey’s eyes travel to them automatically.

Had that been a dream?

Rey pulls her mind back from wandering and looks at the nurse, but the nurse is busy shooting nervous glances at her commanders. That prompts a memory; a glimpse of terrified nurses running from the med bay. Doctors looking haggard. Two men shouting in a room to the side about losing something.

Rey blinks.

“I see you’re awake!” The nurse greets, cutting off Rey’s train of thought. “How are you feeling?”

Rey looks at Kylo and Hux, at the freakishly sterile white walls and the brush metal machinery, then at the nurse.
“Like death,” Rey replies truthfully, though with no small amount of humor. Her bones ache and she’s starting to get a headache, but in light of the situation — of not having died — a bit of humor could do no harm.

Everyone in the room flinches. Even Kylo, who surely must have read her intentions through the bond.

_Okay, then. So much for humor_, she cringes.

“I’m… fine,” she corrects. “Achy, but fine.”

The nurse nods, punching something into her data pad. It gives Rey enough time to look around the room again. When her eyes land on Kylo’s concerned face and Hux’s withdrawn one, Rey turns her eyes down to her hands. Every time she looks at Hux, all she can focus on is his lips. She’d dreamed of them, she thinks, right before waking. It had been the last dream in a long string of dreams she’d had, presumably while floating in bacta, and her heart tightens at the thought—a beautiful dream; one that filled her with hope and warmth and… one that was unattainable.

_It wasn’t a dream, Rey_, Kylo murmurs through the bond. Her head whips around to look at him despite the painful twinge in the back of her head but he immediately casts his eyes down, chewing on his lower lip. So, Rey dips into their bond, testing the waters. It hadn’t been a dream? What she finds there is nothing but awe and… longing.

_It wasn’t?_ Rey shoots back, and Kylo shakes his head minutely for her eyes only, feeding her a memory of his own. What she had thought had been a dream had happened before his very eyes. Rey’s heart starts stammering as she looks at Hux again. Those warm, pink lips had been on hers.

The heart monitor starts screeching at them, displaying all of Rey’s shame in a fluorescent white line that hikes and dips erratically. Hux frowns and the nurse looks just a little panicky before she approaches Rey and cups her forehead.

“Are you feeling alright?” The nurse asks. Rey nods, working hard to control her breathing.

“I’m fine,” she says, avoiding Kylo’s eyes because Kylo is the only other person who knows exactly why her heart had tried to escape her ribcage. “When can I go?”

The nurse gives her a skeptical nod. “You’re cleared to go, if you feel up to it.” she reads over Rey’s chart, narrowing her eyes lightly. “There are things you must keep in mind, however. Your body’s still healing. It will take a couple of days for the bacta to exit your system, and you should avoid putting unnecessary stress on your body. No exercising, no heavy lifting, no extended walking.”

Rey nods and takes it all in stride. The last thing she wants to be doing is exercising or lifting anything. She can barely lift her own head off the pillows she’s been propped up on.

“We’ll have an airlift bed ready for you shortly. Then we’ll transfer you to—”

“My quarters,” Hux interjects before Rey can speak. She turns startled eyes on him. He had never openly discussed their sleeping arrangement. It had been a well kept secret. When he turns to look at her, he arches an eyebrow, and Rey remembers who this is. Her eyes once again travel to his lips.

It hadn’t been a dream.

Which meant...

Which meant that every other thing she’d thought she’d dreamed of while unconscious had been
real. Could it be real? The longer she concentrates the more flashes come to her. Hux, smoking far too much. Kylo, pacing up and down halls. The destructive energy that had shrouded them for… what had Hux said? Three weeks? She bites her lower lip and looks at her hands again, trying to focus.

She had seen so much. In her unconsciousness, her brain had whispered that, perhaps, in a different world, where these men cared for her, they would have acted as they had in those dreams: chasing down whoever dared hurt her, trying to keep her alive by all means necessary. She had thought she had died, until she’d realized she had been floating in darkness. Now she can see it for what it is: Kylo’s awareness and the Force bond.

Heartache. Fear. Desperation. Anger. Determination. There had been so much of that. But there had also been…

Rey pinches her eyes closed, trying to bring back those emotions, to make sense of weeks’ worth of jumbled thoughts rattling inside her.

Desire. Comfort. Longing. Love… Those had been like whispers on the edge of a cold, dark night. But they had been there nonetheless, and Rey had experienced them through Kylo Ren. Suddenly, more images start coming in. Rey blinks.

You’re projecting, Kylo says, his usually harsh demeanor simmering down to nothing but a caress through the bond as he supplies the empty spots in her memories with those that had been ingrained in his.

They hadn’t been dreams. Not a single one, she realizes, as he keeps pushing more and more things into her mind. Soft kisses given to a warm wrist. Murmurs whispered in the night. Promises made for retribution should Rey not make it out of this, and…above it all… just two men who wanted her back. Her gut clenches, her chest tightens. Wasn’t that what she had wanted, after all?

There are less savory memories there; ones she pries away from him despite his reluctance to offer them. It had been the equivalent to a manhunt. She looks at Hux, who’s busy talking with the nurse about post-surgery care, and her lips can’t help but twitch up at the intense look on his face as he internalizes the nurse’s instructions. Probably already planning everything down to the second, including her meals. Rey shakes her head, but then turns to Kylo, retreating into the bond.

What did you two do to my friends?

Now’s not the time, Rey.

Then when?

When you’re better, his tone drops to a regretful murmur.

Rey narrows her eyes.

He immediately shut her out the second she tried to push farther. She had only gone so far as to see him issuing commands to the Knights to go searching, but nothing else. She tries to push in again and he blocks her.

When she meets his eyes, though, they have turned a darker shade of brown. Cold and resolute, so unlike their usual golden warmth. Resolute. He’s resolute to keep her out and she’s just too tired.

Fine. Rey drops it, looking back down at her hands.
By the time Rey’s being mobilized, Hux and Kylo following like an honor guard, Rey’s eyes have drooped. Her head drops back onto the pillow and she flinches, her hand instinctively going to the back of her head.

It’s been shaved. She runs her fingers through the short-buzz — three weeks in a restorative tank seems to have sped up the hair growth — and finds a thin scar hidden just underneath. It’s still tender. Rey runs her fingers through the shaved hair. It extends along the bottom of her neck.

_Huh._

She lowers herself back a lot more gently this time, but the nurse was right, healing would take time. She falls asleep, only vaguely registering that a pair of strong arms swathed in black have carried her inside and deposited her in Hux’s bed. When she comes to, Hux and Kylo are sitting outside. Kylo jerks up immediately, his attention magnetically drawn to her, prompting Hux to also turn towards the bedroom door. Rey blinks her eyes sleepily while listening to Millicent’s purring, the cat having made itself at home on the other side of Rey’s pillow.

She watches them approach. Their steps are so cautious. Rey sits up slowly, her back screaming in protest, and sighs as she rubs her hand down her face. Everything feels a little foggy.

“How are you feeling?” Hux asks, the first time he’s addressed her since the med-bay. He looks a bit like a cornered cat, curious yet fidgety, waiting for any reason to bolt.

“Tired,” she says truthfully, then braces herself. She looks at Kylo leaning against the wall, having withdrawn to a place she can’t quite reach him. He’s donned his helmet, refusing her a glimpse of his expression and, surprisingly, Hux does not demand that he remove it. Rey thinks she knows why. The man is as easy to read as a book. In the absence of Kylo’s features, she turns to Hux.


“That’s to be expected,” he says, tone measured as he takes a step forward. The longer he stands before her the more his composure seems to leak away at the edges, and she takes in the haggard expression on his face, the dark circles under his beautiful crystal clear eyes.

“Rey, we have to talk.”

Yes. Yes they would have to talk. She wants to know what they’d done to the stormtroopers. Kylo’s resistance in showing her more of what happened immediately needles at her. She can feel his distaste at this stray thought of hers floating to him, but says nothing on the matter other than _‘We did what had to be done.’_

The glow of their bond grows orange, irritation curling around her at his reluctance to open up further. But then she looks at the General and something else prickles at her. If she were to ask about what happened while she was unconscious now, she’d also have to talk about the reasons she’d ended up very nearly dying to begin with. At the end of the day, her anger had driven her to contact Leia Organa. Their enemy. Did that now make her their enemy, too? This is the second time she’d gone running to Organa. Rey swallows.

No.

Too soon.

“I’m sorry,” she says, chickening out at the last second. “I’m tired.”

She hates herself. Hates that she hesitates. She had trusted these men and they had come as close to
breaking her heart as anybody had ever come, yet still she avoids confrontation. Yet… well… she’d seen them care. After her accident, with Kylo’s added memories, she’d seen them care. They’d cared enough to save her life, to agonize about her well being as they brought her back from the brink of death, and still welcomed her back into their quarters.

_Hux’s quarters_, she amends immediately.

Hux steps back, his hands flying behind his back and she’s sure he’s curling them together. She bites her lip.

“Of course,” he says, tone neutral even though his brows sag a little. It makes her ache, that small display of dejection.

She would address them, Rey promises herself as she falls back asleep. Just… not now.

______________________

When she finally wakes, the clock reads late evening. Millicent is pressed against the small of Rey’s back, purring away. It’s a small comfort that allows her to get her bearings. Her mind immediately supplies that she’s home, but the thought of home hurts, so she focuses instead on Millicent’s purring in the darkness of the room.

She should get it over with. Rey closes her eyes and seeks out Kylo, finding him in his quarters. Awake. The bond blooms to life, Kylo having waited patiently for this moment — for her to reach out to him. It is second nature now, to allow herself to be drawn by him, her soul forever gravitating towards his the second they allowed themselves to open up.

*I’ll be there soon*, he says without her asking. Rey sighs, nodding to herself even though he can’t see it.

Well, that’s one of them.

Rey focuses her energies outward towards the golden glow of the living room. She shifts, looking for a second awareness she knows so well. Hux’s. She doesn’t need to, though. When she looks out, she can see a shock of red hair past his office door. He sits at his desk and glares at it, fingers drumming on the surface. Not working, for once. Hux runs a long hand down his face and rubs away at his lack of sleep, and Rey worries at the inside of her cheek.

“This is your home,” he’d said. It makes her ache.

She had wanted this to be her home. Had hoped…

Rey steels herself and brushes into Hux’s mind. He immediately swivels, a puppet on a string, and his eyes fixate on her door. He can’t see her in the darkness, but he’s looking straight at her. She could have called his name, but this seemed… easier. She’d done it so many times. She watches him as he approaches.

“Hello,” he murmurs once the lights have been set at seventy percent, standing stiffly at the door.

“Hi,” she says. He doesn’t move, awkwardness filling the space instead.

“You don’t have to stand there,” she says, “this is your room.”

“It’s our room,” Hux replies without missing a beat.
A couple of heartbeats later while Rey tries to find the on-switch for her lungs, Hux gives her a small smile. He must have seen through her hesitation.

“It is your room as much as it is mine, Rey,” he says, finally taking a tentative step forward, then another. “And your master’s. Rey...”

He comes close to the bed, finding the bravery from somewhere to sit at her feet. He looks like there is so much more he wants to say, yet Hux only manages her name like a prayer. Kylo walks in on silent feet not that long after and, for once, the helmet’s nowhere in sight. Rey brings in a deep breath through the nose, out through the mouth, then extends her hand for Kylo to sit on the other side, facing her, while she props herself in the middle of the bed and crosses her legs. He lowers himself down painfully slowly.

Another deep breath. This would need to be done. She would tell them everything. But first… first…

“How about we try this again?” she asks, twisting her fingers together on her lap. “Tell me everything… from the beginning.”

And so they do. Kylo Ren and General Hux bare their minds painfully open for her to inspect, to dissect every thought, every memory, even as they offer them up for her while discussing the events that had landed them all here, sitting on a bed with their future hinging on a threadbare tightrope. Rey is made privy to seven months worth of memories of events she could now fit in next to her own like puzzle pieces. What had once been a foggy recollection, plucked and torn from Hux’s head, suddenly became an expansive painting.

Rey won’t lie. A lot of it hurts. It’s that visceral reaction to finding out that so much had been kept from her, and Rey starts meditating, trying to clear her head of her own feelings so she can listen to what they’re saying and showing her.

A lot of it hurts but… a lot of it also made sense. Would she have hesitated to gain the advantage if presented with the opportunity? Seven months ago she would have screamed that she would never stoop so low as to behave like these men.

Seven months ago was a long time, however, and things weren’t always so black and white. Hadn’t it been Rey who had bargained away for ships in order to gain an advantage? Hadn’t it been her who had turned tail and run back to the Resistance the second she could, offering up anything she’d learned for an even fight? And hadn’t it been her who then wiggled herself out of Resistance captivity by playing the few cards she’d held close to her chest? Hadn’t it been her who had, despite everything, contacted Leia Organa about the Knights of Ren?

Yes, it hurts, but she’s no longer as naive as she had once been. She can see why they’d done it, even if she could not stomach the reasons behind it. She could see it clearly, and suddenly so much made sense. Snoke had been a driving force in every decision these men had made — They had been, after all, looking to secure their survival. And who was she to judge that? She of all people knew about what it took to survive. It wasn’t excusable, yet it had been about doing what was necessary.

Rey clenches her teeth and stares at her hands for a long time after the tale is done.

Survival.

“Thank you for saving my life,” she says after everything’s said and done. There was nothing else she could say, in light of all this.

Hux clears his throat, but Kylo beats him to the punch.
“You don’t need to thank us,” Kylo says. When Rey finally forces her gaze up to meet his, he lets out a long, strained grunt. “Why, did you think we’d simply let you die? Do you really think so little of us?”

“Ren,” Hux warns, and Kylo surprisingly falls obediently silent. Hux’s eye twitches as he regards Kylo before he turns his attention to Rey.

“Rey,” Hux says, voice soft, and Rey knows that Kylo is letting Hux speak because the General is the one who knows his way around words. Even his tone is meant to calm her down, to soothe her into listening. She frowns, in part because it works and in part because she’s annoyed, so she focuses on her fingernails. They’re safer than anything else in this room.

“Rey,” he says. It’s his usual tone, but she’s been around him too long. Under that carefully constructed intonation, he’s pleading. “Look at me. Please.”

It’s the please that does it.

“I know I have my faults. The list is extensive, really, but… the promises I made — the promises we made — were not lies. You successfully helped save lives within days of being here with me, and whipped the Kuati into doing your bidding within an afternoon. You can do great things here, build something great at our side. This is your home.” Hux reasons then amends, remembering why he’s even saying all of this. “If you want it to be. You just need to trust us.”

Rey purses her lips.

“What you did wasn’t right. Trust is earned, General.”

There’s a miniscule wince from Hux. “Then let us try to earn it back.” He extends his hand out to her, though, and holds it there. She looks at it, then at Kylo.

Kylo, finally having lost his grip on his short leash, lets out a throaty sigh as his eyes close, running his fingers through his hair. A tic. When his eyes open again, they are deep pools of onyx that threaten to pull her in, a black hole beckoning for her to get lost in, but his expression is as serious and composed as she’d ever seen it.

“One chance. That’s all we ask.” Kylo offers, taking on a diplomatic tone she’d often heard from Hux but never her Master. She was used to hearing him demand for things, never asking nicely, much less offering them. “If, after everything’s said and done you’re still unhappy here, you are welcome to leave. I will not stop you. The General will not, either. You can go and do as you like, and you will never have to worry that the First Order or the Knights will track you. You won’t be touched.”

Her eyes widen with every word.

This. This is the most he’s ever said to her this way. The first time he’s ever calmly opened up and offered her anything other than tutelage, and he’s offering her…

Freedom.

*Give*, she’d begged of him once. *Give instead of take.*

She watches him closely, images of two men shouting about losing her somewhere in a med-bay meeting room. Nights spent agonizing over her well being. Promises whispered into the night about getting her back. Murmured nothings about love, never quite a declaration, though perhaps the bigger for it considering their sources. She looks at Hux, then down at his hand.
Love. Those words had been about love.

Freedom or…

Their willingness to let her go again decides her. She’d learned to trust once, and Rey better than anyone else knows that if she walks away now, freedom will only last so long. There would be no freedom until this war ended, but freedom could also be won. Maybe, maybe she could have both.

Rey reaches out and places one hand in Hux’s, shaking it as she would shake on a business deal well made. Her heart sings when she watches the tension dissipate from Kylo’s hard-set shoulders, at the tiny quirk of Hux’s lips.

“Maybe this time we can do this the right way,” Rey says, exhaustion setting in.

When she tries to touch on the subject of her contacting the Resistance, Rey is quickly told they could discuss it later, Hux providing some non-answer about having work to see to. Rey narrows her eyes, dipping back into Kylo’s mind as she’s often used to doing because he seems to know everything.

They’d known.

Security footage, Kylo provides with a sigh, finally. She frowns, but he shakes his head. Rest. We can discuss it later. There’s nothing we can do about it now.

Rey bites her tongue until she can almost taste blood but nods. They’d known. Of course they’d known. How could she think she could just sneak off into a secluded area to commit her treachery without them knowing? And yet… Kylo brushes a strand of hair away from her face and gently touches her cheek.

You were justifiably angry. We’ll discuss it later, he repeats, putting the matter to rest.

Hux retires to his office, no doubt to work himself to the bone, and Kylo excuses himself. She feels him roaming the ship late into the night until, eventually, he stays still enough for her to realize he’s walked into his quarters. Rey curls up with Millicent and dozes off, thankful for the space they’ve afforded her because there’s only so much she can trust so quickly, but the bed feels a little too big and too empty.

That night she dreams of Kylo’s eyes and Hux’s lips.

In the morning, Rey makes her way towards the refresher on stiff, disused legs. She wouldn’t let a handful of weeks in bacta turn her into a weakling, no matter how much her bones ached and screamed. It is precisely because they ache and scream that Rey finally decides she will try out the tub. She’d been offered it, once, but had never dared. She looks at it now.

The thing is huge, and probably could hold more water than Rey had ever seen inside a container. This wasn’t Ahch-to’s seas. This was fresh water for bathing. The thought makes her giddy, her muscles begging with anticipation, and Rey sets about collecting a bar of soap, bottles of shampoo and conditioner that smell surprisingly floral; not Hux’s usual scents, or Kylo’s — something for her, perhaps? — She also grabs a towel. Rey drops them on top of a brushed-metal cube that serves for a stool then lowers herself slowly into the tub once the water’s going.

So much water!
She has to force herself to sit and remain seated as the water goes up her toes, her ankles, her shins. When it reaches the space between her legs, she gasps, a brand new sensation if not necessarily unpleasant, but she stays resolutely at the bottom of the tub and watches the water rise with awe. Up her thighs, her stomach, her breasts. By the end of it, Rey’s floating under near-scalding water that makes her muscles tense and relax until a groan escapes her.

It’s a stolen moment of happiness and wonder, and she’d cherish it as well as she could, letting the heat work out her aches. Then she grabs the bar of soap and slowly works up a lather, cleansing herself until the water turns milky and hides her features. The bar of soap shrinks visibly, but she can’t make herself feel bad about the waste. Happiness and wonder. Calm. Baths certainly were one of life’s few pleasures, she recalls Hux’s words with a smirk.

It only lasts so long though. Rey tries to reach for the shampoo bottle and the small stool tips over when her elbow knocks painfully into it, sending its contents flying; Rey lets out a loud curse as the thing clanks shrilly on the floor.

She leans over the side, up and out of the tub, body dripping everywhere as she tries to reach for the bottle, but it’s just far enough away that her fingers stretch uselessly.

Kriff!

That comes out louder than she thought, but it’s met with yet another loud curse that isn’t hers. Rey twists with a yelp to find Hux at the door, his eyes wide and lips parted. As hard as he tries to look at her face, his eyes swing down, only to catch her bare chest. Rey plunges back into the milky water in the tub as her cheeks turn twenty degrees too hot and they stare at each other dumbly.

“I thought you were at the bridge,” she says and Hux blinks then yanks on his already pristine sleeves.

“I… I’m sorry. I ah- I thought you’d hurt yourself,” Hux says after clearing his throat for the tenth time, his face having turned a flattering pink. He yanks on his jacket harder than necessary and turns to leave but then Rey’s senses snap back.

“Oh,” she rasps, then clears her throat. Maker but did the water just turn hotter? “I- Hux?”

She watches him flinch, but he stops, so Rey continues on bravely. “Oh, actually. While you’re here… would you mind passing me those, please?”

He turns to look at what she’s pointing at, zeroing in on the bottles. Then everything seems to register at once and Hux straightens. His eyes fly back to her face, then to the bottles again, and a small bit of the old General Hux she knows comes creeping back when his lips twitch up.

“I see…” he says. He hadn’t even noticed the mess she’d made when he came in. Probably too busy being taken in by her breasts. Rey looks down into the water as if she could see anything, self consciousness at the edge of her mind.

Rey burns that thought away. No! She would never do this. She had never been ashamed or self conscious of her body and would not start now. Not because suddenly a man that made her heart stutter had gotten a glimpse of them.

Hux is cautiously avoiding looking at her as he collects the bottles and rights the stool, yet before Rey can mutter her thanks he sets them on the floor. Away from her reach.

“I… Brendol?” she asks, confused. Hux turns around to look at her face, and only at her face, before that cocky smirk returns.
“It only took you months to accept my offer,” he murmurs, then starts undoing his jacket. Rey panics.

“What are you doing?” she asks, her cheeks heating up even more. She’s sure she’s bright red by now. Hux arches an eyebrow, daring her lecherous thoughts to go farther, before turning around and hanging his jacket on a towel hanger. He then carefully, meticulously, folds up the long sleeves of his white undershirt and sits down on the stool.

“Helping you,” he finally says, before reaching forward. Rey immediately moves away, water sloshing. Some of it lands on his trousers but he barely seems to notice. Or maybe he just doesn’t mind.

“I can do this by myself. I’m healing, not comatose,” she offers lamely, but Hux simply reaches forward until he can turn her around by the shoulders, that cocky smirk having returned.

“Shhhh,” he urges, gently removing the tie from where Rey had plopped her hair in a bun atop her head, “Allow me.”

Rey fights that battle with herself for a second longer but only a second longer once she feels his fingers digging into her scalp. He very carefully massages it, loosening the strands, and Rey lets out an entirely undignified little groan that drags a chuckle from him.

“Rinse,” he murmurs, and Rey lowers her head down until it’s all wet. He then begins working her up to a lather. Rey’s eyes fall shut. His fingers are as she’d always imagined they would be. So very skilled, she muses, even as another soft whimper escapes her throat. He must find it amusing because, when she looks up at him as her head lowers back, he’s wearing a tiny little pleasured smile on his face.

It’s not so much washing her hair as him stroking her, massaging and touching her head as though it were sacred ground, but by the time he moves towards the nape of her neck, he hesitates. He’s so, so careful. Even his breath stops when his fingertips ghost over the now mostly healed scar there.

“Does it hurt?” he asks. Rey bites her lip.

“It aches,” she admits with a sigh. Rey wraps her arms around her knees under the water, her eyes closed to half mast as she stares ahead. He doesn’t touch it again, gingerly washing around it as she lets her head fall forward to grant him access.

This is too intimate. Too familiar.

“I am sorry,” he says finally, and she knows it’s about more than the scar. Rey lets the apology roll down her spine with a sigh.

He instructs her to rinse again, and she steals another glance up at his face. He’s still studiously not looking elsewhere. Then comes the conditioner. This, too, gets spread down her locks slowly, a silent prayer or a silent plea with every stroke, every caress. He takes his time, and she lets him, thinking of the kiss in the med bay. Her heart stutters when his fingers brush down her bare shoulders. He traces yet another surgical scar.

“Does it hurt?” he asks again. Rey shakes her head. This one’s in a less sensitive spot.

Hux runs his thumb down it with feather-lightness. He does it again then grips her shoulder gently and gives it a soft, tentative squeeze, his thumb running a small circle there. Rey’s forgotten how to breathe by now, sitting naked in a tub with only a sudsy, milky veil for coverage. He combs his fingers through her hair, untangling it gently, before once again instructing her to rinse. When she
finally sits up again his fingers gently slide over the sides of her neck. His thumbs caress where her jaw meets her earlobes as he cups her head in place and presses a soft kiss to the back of her head.

“I thought I’d lost you,” Hux whispers. A pained grumble.

Rey’s breath hitches. She turns around to look at him and he doesn’t pull back, letting his hands drop into the water as he leans forward until he’s at her eye level. Water sloshes again but he doesn’t notice even as it drips on his perfectly shined boots.

“What?” she asks, heart thundering. She can barely hear herself over it.

She’d heard similar words before. In another world. From an entirely different person yet with the same pained strain in its lilt. The corners of Hux’s lips turn down when he can’t make them go up, not quite managing the encouraging smile he wanted to give. He’s shedding all of his layers for her.

No. Not all of his layers. She can see him trying to guard his heart behind the very last translucent wall he possesses and it makes her own heart twist.

He reaches up again, running a wet thumb down the length of her eyebrow, smoothing the little hairs there.

“I thought I’d lost you,” he repeats again with more conviction. It’s still hardly above a whisper. “I thought…”

There is a crack in his composure. A splintering, thin as a spider’s web, a fissure in bone. Hux buries his hand in her wet hair, licking his lips as he avoids her scar, cradling her and pulling her closer. His other hand moves to her shoulder, slides over it, wet skin on wet skin, until it rests between her shoulder blades. He pulls her closer, closer, his eyes tracing hers. Her nose. Her lips. Back to her eyes.

“I thought I’d lost you, little one,” he murmurs, lips a hair’s breath away now. “And I could not abide that. Not when losing you would kill me.”

Rey tries to stammer out his name but gets cut short at ‘Bren’ when his lips finally collide with her own. It’s a gentle, reassuring thing. He tastes of mint and kaf and Rey didn’t know she could enjoy that taste so much, but Maker, she’s paralyzed. She can sense the need that rolls off him in waves but he’s a patient man. He only holds his lips to hers, never pushing, never bruising, and waits for her to grant him access. Rey lets out a breathy sigh, and it’s all the encouragement he needs. He gently kisses her top lip, her bottom one, carefully and methodically guides Rey through a kiss that lasts forever and not long enough. Goosebumps trail the back of her neck and he soothes them down, tilting her head to allow him more, and Rey’s body warms in the cooling water. In this, like in everything, he is exact. Calm, collected and patient. Rey’s eyes finally fall shut, not being able to keep watching him from under the tiny space between her lashes, melting into his touch as she allows herself to kiss him back. Rey finally works up the courage. She parts her lips and gives his lower one a nervous lick, a tiny tug as Kylo had done to her once. Hux groans into her mouth, his hand falling deep into the water to grip at her waist and pull her in closer, losing a bit of his impeccable control, bruising her with the sheer hunger of his kiss. It is only when Rey lets out a moaned whimper that Hux relaxes his hold and slowly pulls away, swallowing hard. Rey can’t quite think or hear over the thrumming of her heartbeat.

She hears something else, though. That deep chested rumble could cut through thunder and she’d hear it. Anywhere in the galaxy, past an infinite amount of obstacles, she’d hear it. Kylo clears his throat at the door. Rey turns slightly dazed eyes on him, her body tensing in expectation. Of… of what?
Apprehension grips at her stomach. Would he respond negatively to this? And why would it matter, anyway? Rey looks at Hux. His ears are burning red but he’s somehow managing to look far more composed about this whole situation than Rey is, those glorious lips of his — now swollen from trying to devour her — set in a soft line. The rest of his expression is curiously… calm. He doesn’t care that Kylo saw them.

Things are going too fast. Only yesterday she’d agreed to trust and now… When she looks back at Kylo again there’s a small smile on his lips. He’s leaning against the door frame, hands shoved into black sweatpants, eyes dark and hair damp. It curls around his ears, brushes against the soft slate-grey shirt he’s wearing. Just back from training and fresh out of his own shower, then.

*You look good against his lips,* Kylo purrs into the bond, but then Hux clears his throat. The General isn’t privy to Kylo’s thoughts as Rey is. This must be incredibly awkward for him. Rey sinks under the water to her chin, trying to cool down her body. Why had she chosen a hot bath again? Even the lukewarm water can’t calm her down now.

*Why would you say that?* She asks, defensively. It wasn’t Kylo Ren’s business whom she kissed or didn’t. But then he projects an image of what he’d seen. It steals her breath away. He’d been there for most of it. Had patiently waited for it to end.

*I only speak the truth,* sweetling, he shoots again. Maybe it’s what he had just been witnessed to that makes her Master so bold, but the endearment slams into her. She’d always been Scavenger. Or girl. Or Rey.

Never this.

How had he known to come in, anyway?

*You’ve been projecting for an hour.*

*You’re enjoying this way too much,* she retorts. It’s a lame retort but what else is she to say? Kylo’s smile widens.

*I can’t say I disagree.*

Hux, having realized he’s not getting out that door unless Kylo moves from it, has started meticulously unrolling his sleeves again. His cheeks are pinched red. Rey bites her lip.

*I only just agreed to give you a chance.*

*Then give us one. He loves you,* nevermind the fact that he’d never be able to outright say it. Not yet.

Rey chokes a little. She could just drown in her embarrassment. Her Master, telling her about the feelings of another. Her Master, whose body she had daydreamed about right along with Brendol Hux’s in the night, whose eyes had haunted her.

She must have projected this because she suddenly gets a wave of self satisfaction from Kylo Ren.

She could drown. Maybe she could just… lower herself the whole way into the tub and drown.

*Don’t even think about it,* Kylo growls at her through the bond and, before he can stop her, Rey snatches a mental image. It’s her, floating in a bacta tank, the chemical goo too similar in color to the milky water she sits in now.

Rey finally meets his eyes.
Okay.

Fine.

He wanted to play it this way? Fine. She’d play it this way. Rey steels herself and sits up a little straighter.

*And you? You seem to know so much about everyone else.* She demands. She wants to know. *Needs* to know. If she was going to stick around and give this — whatever *this* had just turned into — if she was to give it a chance then…

*You know my feelings for you already, Rey,* he responds, heartache lanced through that admission. *Don’t make me admit again to something you won’t reciprocate. Not when you don’t trust me, or my word. Don’t make me beg.*

Ah, but these men would kill her, what with their stopping her heart from beating normally at every turn. Hux has now caught onto the silent conversation, watching them curiously as he leans back, head propped against the wall. He doesn’t interrupt, though, happy to simply watch. A twisted part of Rey, the part that Luke had warned her would never belong to the Light, piques at his words.

*Would you really beg?* She asks petulantly, calling out his bluff.

*Do you want me to? I would, if you let me.*

Yeah. These men would kill her.

*Why are you suddenly being this way?* Rey asks, never breaking eye contact, thankful that at least in the bond her voice doesn’t shake. Kylo looks at her from half lidded eyes as his nostrils flare.

*I’m not letting you slip through my fingers again,* is all he gives for an explanation before he walks forward. Hux, perceptive as always, hands Kylo a towel when he hovers in that direction. Rey looks at them as they lock eyes before Kylo turns to her.

He spreads the towel open, eyes carefully pinned on her own. Hux is avoiding looking at her, determined in averting his gaze.

But Kylo had all but admitted he wanted her, and Hux had basically turned her silly with a kiss, and neither man seemed to be the least upset or uncomfortable at the fact. She had accused them of not caring and so they had turned around and proven with everything they had, with everything they could, that they more than cared. And it’s all moving too fast yet she’d promised herself perhaps she could have both love *and* freedom, and though she could win the latter somehow, the former required more. It required a different kind of bravery. What she feels isn’t love. Not yet, anyway. She has nothing to compare it to, not when Finn had felt more like a brother. It’s not love, but she could learn.

She could learn, and she is not ashamed of her body.

Rey stands up. Let them stare. Let them look at the scars she’d won, the ones that proved she’d survived. Water rushes down her body and she listens to the *woosh-woosh* of it as it moves around the tub, wet hair falling over her shoulders and down her back as she keeps her hands placidly at her side. If they wanted her, they’d have to take her with all her imperfections or not take her at all.

Kylo’s eyes absentmindedly fall on a scar at her hip before he consciously jerks his eyes right back up and for the first time *ever* she sees him flush. She smiles. Ah, but that twisted part of her that Luke had warned her about is still alive and thriving. Hux had once said that there was nothing but power,
power and those who made a grab for it. Right here, at her most vulnerable, she’s wielding more power than she ever has. She’s making them look. Really look. Not at her as a weapon, as an ally, as an apprentice or a Force User.

They have to look at her as a woman now, as a person, and if this is what they wanted a second chance for, they’d have to look.

Hux finally clears his throat and Kylo wraps the towel around her with jerky motions. Rey might regret this later. This baring of her body, this laying of her emotions at Hux’s feet and demanding more from Kylo Ren. She might take a nap, wake up and regret everything, then truly drown herself while they’re not watching, but for now, she feels powerful. Powerful and wanted. And what a beautiful thing it is. Her veins sing with a force she had not felt before, crackling along her nerves and tingling at her fingertips, and the Force bond glows in response.

Her sense of power only lasts as long as it takes for Kylo to collect her into his arms and carry her out like a fragile china doll. Hux walks off into the closet to change out of his soaked clothes. Rey frowns.

“I can walk just fine,” she snips, suddenly feeling small again. Kylo smirks but says nothing until he deposits her in bed.

“Doctor’s orders. Can’t have my apprentice injuring herself again.”

Rey grunts.

Who says I’m still your apprentice? She barbs.

Kylo snorts audibly.

Aren’t you?

Rey shakes her head, refusing to rise to the bait, then turns around to work on her hair. Her hands are quickly, gently, pushed away. When she turns to look, Kylo’s lowered himself behind her. She arches an eyebrow.

“You let him wash it,” he explains in a dulcet little murmur, “let me braid it.”

Rey frowns.

He waits.

He waits and Rey aches to see what he’s thinking, get a glimpse at what he’s feeling. She can’t help herself. It’s like having a part of herself sectioned off and living elsewhere, and she has this burning need to sense it at all times. The bond has become second nature now, and touching it only brings relief. When she looks, she feels a small bit of resentment — no, not resentment, though something close — at the knowledge that his relationship with her was nothing like hers and Hux’s. She’d allowed Hux to touch her so intimately, and though Kylo had enjoyed the view — cherished it, in fact — it also gnawed at him that he could never get so close.

She bites her lip and picks at her fingernails, spending a little too long on each breath as she tries to make up her mind. On the tenth breath, she does.

Rey had learned to trust once. She could do it again. She would not be cruel.

She nods, then smiles at the wave of relief washing over her through the golden rope.
His large fingers are so very gentle Rey blinks. For an incredulous moment, Rey wonders if her hair will look as good as his. Kylo chuckles behind her, but gets to work slowly. Down and down he twines her hair in an intricate fishtail braid. When his fingers brush the scar, he stops. A similar reaction to Hux’s.

“It’s fine,” she promises, and though he continues working, she can feel him tense the lower he goes. When the braid reaches the general area of her now scarred shoulder blade, he stops again. Rey holds her breath as he runs gentle fingers over it. He would know if it hurt. He could feel her pain as surely as she could feel his.

Rey closes her eyes, then snaps them open once again when Kylo leans against her head and presses a kiss to the back of it. What was it with Kylo and Hux always repeating similar patterns?

“I’m sorry,” he murmurs against her head. He waits for her to tense, to shove him off, but Rey finally gives in. She’s too tired to fight, and his gentle caresses are soothing. It’s all the encouragement he needs.

“I’m sorry,” he repeats, placing another kiss lower on her head. Rey lets her head droop. He repeats the apology as he presses his burning mouth to her scar at the nape of her neck. When he finishes her braid, he lays it gently over her shoulder to rest in the valley of her breasts on her towel, only to place both hands on her bare shoulders. He kisses those, too, worshipping her as he quietly whispers broken apologies.

I’m sorry.
I’m sorry.
I’m sorry.

Kisses that burn against her scars. He won’t touch the other ones. The lower ones, the ones in more indecent places, but these… these exposed little silver veins that prove that she survived, that she’s made of tougher stuff. These he will worship like a man who needs for nothing more but her approval. A man full of awe that he’s found his equal.

I’m sorry.
I’m sorry.
I’m sorry.

He hugs her close around the waist and she lets him hug her, and only when her eyes open at half mast again does she notice that Hux has come out of the closet to stand behind Kylo. His one hand rests tangled in Kylo’s damp hair, the other tenderly resting in the crook of her neck.

I’m sorry.
I’m sorry.
I’m sorry.

Hux’s and Kylo’s apologies echo in her mind like a melody beating to the same drum.

I’m sorry.
Then the moment comes, the one that Rey had dreaded the second she’d woken up and realized she wasn’t dead. She hears Hux’s question above her as Kylo immediately hugs her closer, overprotective to the core.

“Rey…?” Hux asks cautiously, though she can still hear the anger boiling under his words. “Who pushed you?”

Rey stares dead ahead. She feels Kylo’s breath against the crook of her neck, his hair tickling her ear. Feels the wide chest against her body tighten, a coil ready to spring. She feels Hux’s fingers squeezing into her bare shoulder, waiting on the bare edge of patience, ready to destroy.

So, they hadn’t found out who it was yet. Rey had hoped—

She closes her eyes, fighting the burn in the back of her throat.

Why does time always seem to slow to extend her misery when she needs it to pass so much faster?

She takes in a deep breath. She’s a grown woman, not a child. She won’t cry. She had survived Jakku, she had survived Starkiller, she had survived death. She is made of iron and grit and she would not cry.

“Lance,” she replies, her chest constricting painfully even as Kylo also tries to hug her closer. “It was Lance.”

Chapter End Notes

A bazillion thanks to my lovely beta EjBlaKit, for whom without we would never be here so early in the week (though you guys get to lose out on her A++ commentary. One day I'll scencap a ton of them and post them for the lol's because she's hilarious). I planned on posting sometime around Sunday because IRL man, but Ej somehow managed to get through this so fast. YOU GUYS SHOULD GO GROVEL AT HER FEET LIKE I DO.

Comments always, always, always welcome. 50% of why I write is so I get to talk to you about it. <3

"Sweetling" is a pet name borrowed from my other Reyux fic, Manners. It was going to be initially given to Hux, but Hux already is set in his ways, and Sweetling is close to what Kylo would have otherwise called her: Sweetheart. Except, idk that Kylo would have borrowed it from Han in this story. Too much pain there.

And finally: ART! We got arttttt!

Kylo kisses Rey, by the beautiful, ever wonderful sexy-mary

And a reminder that Jennity is still creating a podfic for ADOT! Here's where it is housed. She's recorded all the way to Block (Ch. 13). So far it's 8 hours of delicious ADOT reading and you should all go listen.
Rey pleads for more time. She makes very convincing arguments. Kylo Ren and General Hux are not particularly pleased, though both get a few pleasant surprises.

“Don’t hurt him.”

Hux’s hand tenses involuntarily on her shoulder at her pleading tone before relaxing. Kylo’s hold tightens protectively and Rey has to let out a huff to signal she needs air. He loosens up only just so.

“Please,” she turns to meet Hux’s and Kylo’s eyes. “Don’t hurt him.”

Their minds reveal nothing but hard, cold anger, so Rey breathes in deeply, instinctively doing what she’s always done best: improvise.

“Please,” she asks again. “Hold off until I can see him in person.”

Hux narrows his eyes at her pleading tone, but it’s the only part of him that moves.

“You are asking me to postpone punishment of one of my men, for attempted murder of one of their superiors, because you want to see him?” He asks, tone blank. Rey still picks up on the hard edge with which he spits out punishment.

“What’s the punishment?”

“Death,” Hux replies, his usually bright pale-blue eyes cold and cloudy. She winces then looks at Kylo.

Kylo is decisively silent. The matter of the stormtroopers and, ultimately, their punishments is Hux’s domain. She would receive no backup from him. When she probes into the bond she finds nothing short of murderous rage. Her nostrils flare as she brings in another sharply inhaled breath.

Fine, she thinks, choosing instead to go right to the heart of the matter. I’ll just do this on my own.

“You two asked me to trust you and I agreed. I am asking you for this one thing.” She feels, more than sees, them tensing further, Hux’s expression closing off immediately.

“You know why he pushed a ... superior,” Rey continues, finding it amusing that Hux would refer to
her as such when she cannot pull rank on even the stormtroopers, “and I assume you’re already holding him, otherwise you two would not still be here. So, please. Just until I can see him.”

Hux lets out a sharp, annoyed breath.

“Fine.” Hux agrees, except an agreement from General Hux never comes without stipulations. “One week. Then he’ll be executed.”

He looks as though he entirely regrets ever having taught her the ropes of ... negotiation. Rey bites down on her tongue and doesn’t push further. Maybe, maybe she really has been around these men too long. She’s learning rather quickly just how far to push her luck, and right now she’s very close to the limit.

This is the most she’d get from him for now. Stalling would allow her to find a way to help Lance. The thought of the young man makes her chest pinch painfully, but it’s the right thing to do. She couldn’t send a man to his death because he acted based on her actions. Still, the idea of her friend sitting in a cell aches.

“Thank you,” she replies and offers them both a small smile. Kylo’s still staring her down so hard she starts to feel a little warm, and so her eyes swing to Hux’s. He’s no better. Where Kylo is all fiery intensity to scorch her skin off, Hux’s demeanor could easily give her frostbite. Then…

Hux’s eyes fall closed and he presses a thumb between his brows, easing the frown there. It’s such a human action, such an outward expression of annoyance, that she does a double take.

“Excuse me,” he says. “I have matters to attend to.”

He leaves before Rey can say anything else, but not before leaning over Kylo’s shoulder and planting the lightest of kisses on Rey’s forehead, tender and warm. Rey’s lashes flutter weakly at the gesture. Hux’s hand, the one still in Kylo’s hair, gently strokes her Master once before the General walks out of the room.

Maybe he’s not mad at me, perhaps? She wonders, then repeats her mantra:

I am here to help those men.

Kylo lets out a half scoff, half grumble, probably having heard that, then shakes his head and runs his fingers through his hair anxiously.

You will be the death of me, he says, pushing his well of anxious annoyance at her decision to let Lance go unpunished — stalling, he thinks into her — yet underneath it all she can feel his hesitance to allow the tenderness they’d shared a moment ago to slip through his fingers.

Rey bites her tongue. He and Hux may be unhappy about it, but for her own ease of mind, she needs to see Lance first. Now to address the other elephant in the room.

“Kylo?” She begins. Might as well do it now. “You said we could discuss this later. What I called Leia O——”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Kylo says, the growl boiling in his diaphragm making his voice deepen. Rey purses her lips.

“Is it because she’s your——”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it, Rey.” He repeats. Yeah, that’s exactly why he doesn’t want to
talk about it. Rey clicks her teeth shut. She had learned her lesson about pushing this man into talking about things he didn’t want to talk about. Still, they would have to address it eventually. Kylo sighs when she lets him know as much.

“Yes,” he says, putting a lid on the subject before moving on. “As it is, there is something else we should address first.”

Rey frowns, but Kylo simply rises from the bed and walks to the closet, leaving her to track his every step. He walks like he belongs here, so differently from his hesitant gait that first time she’d forced him to stay the night. Rey bites her lip. When he returns, his hands are full. In one hand is her holocron. In the other… Bits of metal? Bits of metal and a pouch.

“What’s that?” She asks, sitting up a bit straighter and eyeing the metal pieces and the pouch. You can take the girl out of Jakku, but you could never get the scavenger out of the girl. Kylo smiles, having realized the same thing, and also at having successfully distracted her.

He gently puts the pieces in front of her in a row. First, the holocron. Then, the rest— Rey’s chest tightens, her hands shaking in her lap. Twisted, bent aluminum metal glinting jaggedly at her, and a cracked blue stone.

“Is that…” she begins, her lip quivering.

“Yes,” Kylo murmurs, touching the cracked kyber crystal gently. With reverence. His birthright, cracked and broken like the man gently caressing his fingers over it. How fitting.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers, because despite her thinking of the saber as Luke’s, then as hers, it had always truly been his. “I’m sorry. I—”

“Apologies won’t put it together, Rey,” he sighs, painfully tearing his eyes away from the stone. When he looks at her, his eyes are cloudy and dull. “As it is, perhaps it’s for the best.” He then pulls open the pouch, dumping out the contents on the bed in front of her knees.

“I was going to have you build your own soon anyway,” he admits as two colorless, but otherwise identical kyber crystals roll onto the bedspread.

She touches them with the same reverence Kylo had touched Luke’s. Her eyes rove over the remaining items. Metal parts. The beginnings of a saber. Kylo’s eyes track her expression as she inspects them, giving her a tiny, hesitant, hopeful smile when her eyes meet his.

“Where did you get these?” She asks, entirely too out of breath. His smile widens, pride blooming in his gaze.

“I’ve been collecting the parts slowly for you,” Kylo says, tilting his head as he studies her face. “But the time to give them to you had never seemed… appropriate. I’m sorry I am gifting them to you under these circumstances.”

Rey swallows thickly, looking back down at the crystals to collect herself and keep the tears at bay.

“Why two?” She asks, running her fingers gingerly over the crystals once again.

“You do better with a staff,” he explains gently, “this will allow you a double ended saber. The rest of what you need should be more easily accessible, but the crystals are the most important part. You can start building it once you feel better.”

Rey nods dumbly, picking up the small pouch and toying with the strings for something to do with
her hands. Then she feels a small weight inside. She frowns, digging into it. Perhaps a metal bit
snagged on the inside lining?

“Wait, what’s this?” Rey asks as her fingers grab onto a string. She pulls it out. It’s a long silver rope,
and on it dangles a small green stone, glinting in the light. Rey looks at Kylo slowly. If his eyes were
hopeful before the look he’s giving her now is just utter naked vulnerability.

“I remember your favorite color being green,” he says, swallowing once.

Rey’s lower lip quivers.

“For me?” She whispers.

She had never been given something so beautiful in her life. It’s such a small thing, really… a shiny
rock the size of her thumbnail on a silver cord. Yet… She looks up at him and this time he doesn’t
shield himself. She can feel the waves of elation, their undercurrents trying to pull her along, his face
looking so much younger than his years.

_Do... you like it?_ He asks.

_It’s beautiful_, she replies softly, her eyes still on the glittering stone.

“He holds it up expectantly so Rey turns from where she’d been sitting, exposing her neck to him.
Her heart stutters as he lowers the pendant over her head and in front of her chest, as it rolls off the
towel to rest right between her breasts, over her heart. Rey looks at it and blinks rapidly as Kylo
secures the closure. Then he leans in and gently, tenderly kisses right over it.

Maker but how is she supposed to _think_ when he’s doing this?

She had agreed to give him a chance and karking hells, Kylo Ren is _taking it_. She closes her eyes.
Even so, she’s unable to stop herself from acknowledging what now passes between them. Rey and
Kylo had been dancing around each other for _so long_ , at times stepping on eggshells and raging
dangerously at others, but always, _always_ locked in their dance. This… this feels a bit more like a
waltz, slow and steady like the one they’d shared once upon a time.

_I can stop if you want me to_, he murmurs, regarding his rather brazen displays of affection. Perhaps
he had felt her hesitate. Rey certainly hoped she hadn’t just accidentally projected her thoughts.

_Inhale._

She turns to look at his hand on her shoulder as it gently rubs circles on her skin.

_No_, she says after considering for a moment. _I don’t mind. I… I enjoy it._

Kylo lets out a soft ‘ _hmmm_’ , pleasure overflowing their connection as he once again tenderly gifts
her with another kiss to her neck.

_Exhale._

“There is one more thing,” he murmurs as he pulls away from her skin, and Rey finally remembers
that for her to remain upright, she needs to keep breathing continuously and not devolve into a
boneless mass of galactic goo. She thanks the Maker above for the distraction, righting herself
quickly, and turns around to look at him as he grabs the holocron. “I want you to try something.”
Rey looks down at it, apprehension immediately flooding her previously fluttery stomach.

“I’d like you to try opening it,” he says, holding it up to her. Rey frowns.

“You know I can’t—”

“Try,” he beseeches. “If you need guidance, dip into my thoughts.”

Rey looks at him, pursing her lips. Kylo smiles. She looks at the holocron again then, because she’s never done this before, she mimics what she had seen Kylo do before. Rey places her hand on his knee — Kylo failing to contain his absolute delight at even this small touch, given willingly — then places her other hand on the holocron. Maybe she doesn’t need to touch him, but she doesn’t know if this would work either way.

“Close your eyes,” he instructs, and Rey does as told quietly. “Now… breathe in deep, find your silence, and search. What do you find?”

Rey frowns, but she turns inward and, after a long breath, puts Kylo’s lessons to good use. Surprisingly, silence comes so much easier this time. She feels herself empty, a vessel waiting to be filled, and other than the Force Bond in the back of her mind her body is light, airy, and… Rey feels something rise like a tendril of pale blue smoke, light in its presence but heavy nonetheless, its essence slowly filling her, then moving through her. The Force. Kylo speaks just above a whisper, in a nearly hypnotic tone.

“There it is,” he says, dipping into their bond to experience it with her. “Now… grab it.”

So Rey tries, her mind focusing on the impossibility of grabbing onto smoke, but she tries nonetheless. When she touches it, it solidifies and becomes something else, something electric, jolting, an exposed live wire. Like plasma coursing through her veins, Rey’s nerves sing.

“Guide it to the holocron, Rey,” Kylo instructs and Rey acts on instinct. She bunches her fingers into the knee of his sweatpants and opens her eyes, then smiles as this new power she’d never quite felt before, never like this, suddenly bends to her will. The holocron parts open like a lotus flower, and Zah’s projection comes to life.

“Fight or flight, after all. You faced certain death and won...” Kylo muses, his lips resting on her temple, and oh the pride that runs in rivulets off him and threatens to drown her. He’s so karking proud. Proud and… relieved. Rey turns disbelieving eyes on him. “You finally did it. You’ve broken your block.”

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Hux stares at the closed doors of his quarters, his hand hesitating over the access pad. There’s only been two instances in his life in which he’s ever hesitated to enter his own rooms: His first night with Rey as his guest and now. He licks his lips. He’d avoided seeing her all day, equal parts of him warring on the fact that he’d fallen head over heels for her, and that this very same attraction had made him agree to give the pipsqueak in a prison cell an extra week of life.

He glares at the access pad as if everything were its fault, then places his digits on it and waits for the green beep. His doors hiss open and on the first step his brain starts to itch. He’d spent his day with his teeth on edge, collecting reports of operations and checking in with Phasma, who had so graciously kept the Finalizer running like a well-oiled machine, as well as taking in her personal reports. The Captain had delivered troubling news.

He would need to act quickly and his first order of business would be to find Ren. Except, Ren is
nowhere to be found. His eyes instead fall on Rey, curled up on her couch with a book, dim lamplight bathing her in a warm, inviting glow.

He takes a moment to watch her as she loses herself in the pages, then clears his throat. Rey flinches, wide-eyed at being caught entirely unaware. A small amount of his anxiety dissipates with the upward curl of his lip. She never changed. He could find comfort in that.

“Sorry,” she blurs out immediately, sitting up and setting the book aside. Millicent gives a reproachful meow from where she’d curled herself into Rey but she ignores her, her gaze decidedly on Hux, though there is unease in the hazel depths of her eyes.

Hux inhales, taking in her face. He’d acted on impulse in that refresher, and for once doubt creeps into him. Perhaps she regrets it now: kissing him. His gut clenches at his own insecurity, but he masks it well enough.

“Are you alright?” Rey asks, frowning.

Well, perhaps not quite well enough. She’d learned to read him too well.

“Yes,” he says, forcing his expression to blankness with a reminder of why he’s here earlier than usual. “Where is Ren? He wouldn’t answer my comm.”

“Training,” Rey grumbles. “And I can’t join so…” she holds up the book sheepishly, giving him a blinding smile. He’d caught her by surprise, after all. Hux hums.

Oh, but he couldn’t ever stay mad at her. Sure, she’d basically manhandled him into giving her what she wanted, but when she smiled at him that way…

“I’ll return later,” he says, but Rey stalls him.

“Wait— Brendol?” She asks, and when he turns to look at her again he catches a slip of pink tongue that makes it hard to concentrate. “Can we talk?”

Hux frowns, then sighs.

I was wondering how long she’d wait for this.

“Please,” she adds when he says nothing. No, he could never stay mad at her. Hux finally moves from where he’d rooted himself to the floor, walking over to one of the high backed chairs and taking his seat slowly. Rey watches him as he crosses his legs, laces his fingers on his lap, and he in turn notes the way her throat bobs with repeated nervous swallows.

A minute passes, then another, until she finally speaks.

“I contacted the Resistance,” she admits, lips set firmly. Hux licks the inside of his teeth, his eyes taking her in slowly.

“I’m aware.”

“And?” She prompts.

“And nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing?” She asks. “Aren’t you going to ask about what I said? Aren’t you—” Aren’t you mad at me? Aren’t you going to scream at me? Aren’t you going to call me a traitor? He imagines the infinite endings to that question, then takes in a deep breath and sets aside the part of
him that tells him he should be mad at her.

He had chosen his path the second he’d bulldozed through the ship to save her life. Had chosen it the second his lips had met hers. He’d chosen her, and... well, he’d always be who he is: A General with goals and visions for the future. The only difference is now he can make a small amount of space in that future for somebody other than himself, and he’s very unwilling to let go. In truth, he’d made two spaces. One of them larger than the other, and slightly more troublesome, though the owner of the second space was proving to be quite troublesome herself.

There’s also still the matter of Snoke. Hux could hardly throw her in a jail cell when her role in this galactic game of chess is so much more important than that of a single stormtrooper. He takes another deep breath.

“Did anything you relay to Organa have anything to do with my ship and crew?” He asks, keeping his tone carefully even.

Rey, in her eagerness to prove herself, shakes her head so hard he imagines she’d give herself a crick in the neck. He smiles.

“That’s all I need,” he says, choosing to answer all of her unspoken questions. “I am not mad. I won’t scream at you. You’re not a...” he stops, unwilling to even whisper the word. “You didn’t fail me. The Knights are not within my jurisdiction. You will need to discuss that particular issue with Ren.”

Rey grumbles.

“I tried. He’s adamant about not discussing it now.” She sighs, “Still, I just—”

Hux exhales sharply.

“Are you so eager to have me find something to fault you on, little one?”

Rey squares her shoulders, the look of shame crossing her face quickly replaced with determination as she stares him in the eye.

“You’re sending a man to his death for something I did, Brendol!”

“You didn’t push yourself,” he responds calmly, though feeling anything but.

Her insistence where this kid is concerned sets his nerves on edge. He tries to tell himself it has everything to do with the double edged sword he’s teetering on, and not the fact that jealousy creeps up whenever he envisions Lance. Hux grinds his molars and refuses to indulge the thought.

“He pushed you,” he continues.

“Because I contacted the Resistance!” Rey clips, then thinks better of the situation and takes a deep breath, working herself back down. “What I’m trying to say is... I do not want a man to die because of something I did, Bren.”

Hux blinks. The nickname had slipped through her lips so easily, so thoughtlessly, and yet it sounds so very right on her lips. How could he be so deep in for a girl who looks at the world so very differently from how he does?

“We have proof he pushed you,” Hux says, the man in him warring with the soldier he’s always been.
“Show it to me,” Rey demands. Hux clicks his jaw closed. They sit there for a long moment before he finally relents. He lifts himself up from the chair and walks towards his office.

Hux ignites his holoscreen. He had made sure to hide this evidence. Had wiped it from all records on account of being able to hear Rey call out Organa’s name, keeping a copy in a side partition for his own records. He accesses the partition and brings up the video, playing it for her and watching her flinch out of the corner of his eye when she’s called a traitor and shoved over the edge.

“You can’t see him,” Rey finally says, brows rising. His pull down and closer into a frown.

“That is his voice,” he says, but Rey has turned bright eyes on him.

“Yes, but you can’t see him,” she repeats. She sounds so hopeful, and oh how it grates. Hux has just enough patience in him to not roll his eyes.

“We have voice records to compare against, Rey,” he explains calmly, arching an eyebrow at her. “They match.”

“Digital voice records can be altered,” she retorts while jutting her chin out.

That’s it.

“Are you trying to let a murderer walk freely after you almost died?” He snaps, bringing his hand down on the off-button for the screen a little too roughly.

Rey flinches but stands her ground at his side. From where he sits, he has to look up at her while his face hovers around her waist.

“I’m trying to save a life! It was my fault to begin with!” She responds, heat rising to her cheeks as surely as her temper does. Her fists are at her side as she stares down at him. “It’s my word against your proof, which is flimsy at best, and if you show that then you’d have to show why he did it and punish me, too.”

He turns his head robotically upward until he can look at her. She’s looking down at him and her eyes are set with a look he knows means she’s not budging, and Hux’s annoyance is mounting because…

Well…

She’s right.

Hux closes his eyes and finally lets out a low breath, rubbing the bridge of his nose before pinching it tightly with his index finger and thumb.

“That’s out of the question.”

He expects her to gloat. Or to at least say you know I’m right. And after she does, he’ll probably get up from this chair and walk out of his rooms, possibly skip dinner and bedtime altogether, and go stew on the bridge about the fact that this is the situation he’d willingly let her put him in; Rey knows he won’t punish her the same way Hux knows he needs air to live, and the whole ship knows there is an entire squad of suspects currently jailed. Questions would soon start being asked the longer he delays.

“When did you get so good at this?” He murmurs, more to himself than to her, really. But then he feels it. A small hand pulls his away from his face where he’d started rubbing, a second hand turning
him by the shoulder then tipping his chin back until he’s forced to look up at her again. She gives him a tiny triumphant smile.

“I had an excellent teacher.”

Hux lets out a tiny snort as he takes in her freckles.

“Everybody knows you were hurt,” Hux says, cringing internally at knowing it had been partially his fault. “They do not know the reasons why, and I am unwilling to make it public. Yet, if news spread that we know who the culprit is and we don’t punish him, it sends a very clear message. I can’t have my men thinking that they can undermine my authority, rebel and kill as they wish.”

“You promised me a week,” she murmurs, searching his eyes. Hux is careful not to say anything, or move.

“A week won’t change anything, Rey. Only prolong his suffering.” He says. “Now that we have confirmation that it’s him, I have asked for the other incarcerated troopers to be released. They will be sent to reconditioning. The news that FN-5563 is still imprisoned will spread.”

“You incarcerated my friends?” She mutters in disbelief, her fingers pulling away from where she’d held onto his hand. Before she can say anything more, however, he holds onto her wrist.

“I am aware they are your friends, and that is precisely why we put them in cells. It was a very high chance the culprit would be one of them. We couldn’t run the risk.”

As it turns out, I had been right, Hux feels like saying — the one thing he would be right on — but holds back. She doesn’t deserve that low blow and the following heartache. The hurt that flashes through her face is still palpable anyway. Still, his little wild thing had a heart of gold.

“Don’t send them to reconditioning,” she says. “I want to see them, too.”

Hux stares. What was it with her and wanting to see every kriffing soul aboard this ship? Then again, of course she would. That heart of gold of hers... Hux breathes in deep. This time, however, he agrees out of sheer guilt. That sad look of hers would be his undoing.

“Anything else, your majesty?” He asks, the nickname only reserved for when she turned particularly demanding. It must amuse her, because Rey’s lips twitch.

“Yes,” she says, and Hux is entirely unsurprised by it.

What he is surprised by, though, is what happens next.

Rey hesitates for just a second, searching his eyes as if looking for answers, then her gaze falls to his lips. His heart stutters when she moves to stand right between his knees, so close he can smell her soap through the fabric of her sleeping t-shirt— his sleeping t-shirt — and when her hands gently rest on the sides of his face his heartbeat does a somersault. He could just lean in and brush his face into her navel if he wanted to. He can sense her hesitation, clear and wavering in the air between them. He can see it.

She tilts his face up, slowly, carefully, bending at the waist until she’s hovering over him. He can’t tear his eyes away. Can’t blink when he feels tendrils of hair caress his cheek. Rey licks her lips and his eyes fly to them, and where his heart had stopped before this time it jams itself right under his adam’s apple, unmoving despite his repeated, desperate swallows. Rey lets out a soft breath.

“I don’t...” she begins hesitantly, looking for a second like she’s about to lose her nerve so Hux
finally does what he’d deprived himself of so often before. He brings his hands up and places them on her hips, keeping her in place.

So needy, he thinks. He’s become so needy. He’d judged Ren for grabbing him by the thighs before, only to turn around and do a similar thing with Rey. He should chastise himself for it. That could wait for another day, though.

“Yes?” He asks, gently rubbing tender circles on her hips, and it feels so right to finally allow himself to do this. Rey’s pupils dilate at the sensation.

“I admit, I don’t know how to do this…” she says, swallowing as she very carefully attempts to caress his cheek. He feels all of his previous annoyance leak away with every soothing motion of her fingers. “This… love thing… I don’t—”

The word bounces around in his skull. She’d said the word love; a quiet whisper, but still. He exhales sharply, ready to lean up into her and devour her, but holds back just enough despite the minute whine that threatens to work up to his throat. No. She had started this. She would have to lean down and kiss him, she would have to confirm for him that she’d wanted that kiss in the bathtub just as much as he’d craved it. He wouldn’t drag it out of her.

Maker above but this woman would drive him crazy.

His thumbs press into the soft skin of her hips.

“I can’t say I know how to very well, either,” he admits, swallowing thickly. Rey smiles, losing a degree of her nervous airs at knowing she’s not alone in this. Emotional investment, as it is, is a rather new concept to him. One he’d developed in direct reaction to this woman and a particular Knight of Ren. Rey chuckles nervously before breathing deeply, finally cupping his cheek and gently caressing him. Her other hand moves to run into his hair, disturbing his usually perfectly groomed hairstyle. He watches her intently.

Her fingers run through again and Rey’s face lights up with wonder at the motion, then she gives an impish grin.

“What?” He asks, desperate to know what’s going through her head as she cards her fingers through again, strands of red falling forward on his forehead and around his ears.

“I managed to disturb your cool facade,” she says, delighting in her own small accomplishment of messing up his hair while internally Hux wonders if she knows just how very true her words ring and to what extent she’d disturbed the cool, calm and collected demeanor he’d constructed for himself. He very much doubts she does.

“Hmmmmmm,” he lets out, a low, soft sound in the back of his throat as he pulls her in closer. Eager. Perhaps a little too much so. Still, he waits patiently, happy to simply caress her.

When Rey lets out a soft, pleased sigh, Hux grows bold, running his hands down her thighs, past her sleeping shorts, feeling the trail of goosebumps under his fingertips. Her eyes meet his.

“I want you to trust me, please,” she pleads, tone low, searching his face. “I want— I don’t…” Rey lets out a soft breath before continuing on bravely. “I can learn to love. You and Kylo. I can learn.”

She looks so determined. Hux’s nostrils flare at the thought, his mind already running with a million different scenarios in which Rey loves her Master and him, and he has to bite hard on the inside of his cheek, focus the pain and the blood-flow elsewhere so his body doesn’t behave like that of a teenage child. Rey’s eyes widen, mistaking the action for displeasure as she stammers.
“I mean, if that’s—”

“I’d like that,” he croons before she can chicken out. “I’m sure your Master would, too.”

Rey sags forward and he allows himself to lean up, letting her forehead gently connect with his. When she meets his eyes, he smiles. He wants her like this, and up until this moment he’d never known how much he’d wanted her like this. His and Ren’s. But Rey looks like she’s just made up her mind, and so he’d take it slow. He’s a patient man. He would keep wearing the silken gloves with which he’d always handled her until she instructed him to take them off.

Rey finally lowers herself until her lips meet his. It is chaste and gentle and the most arousing thing he’s ever experienced, the warmth of her seeping into him, spreading to his limbs. Hux tugs her until she lowers herself onto his knee, cradling her in with an arm around her waist, determined to give her her first lesson. Yes, he could take it slow.

He keeps his hands firmly over her clothes at all times, letting her explore his lips gingerly. That is, until Rey undoes his jacket and plants her hands on his chest, hungry for closeness, only a thin undershirt separating bare skin from bare skin. He allows his fingers to roam then, gently caressing her naked back as he dips under her t-shirt, teasing just at the edge of indecency while reveling in the warmth of her just the same.

For the next twenty minutes Hux teaches her how to kiss. He starts out slow, nipping gently at her lip and asking her for entrance. When she gives it with a soft whimper, Hux buries his hand in her hair and tugs her closer, guiding her from one kiss to the next until she’s panting against his mouth. By the end of those twenty minutes, Rey’s turned to putty in his arms.

______________________

That night Kylo walks in to find a disheveled Hux, glassy-eyed and looking awfully pleased with himself as he tries to work out the wrinkles from his clothes. His jacket’s open, his dog tags are dangling over his shirt, and Hux’s ears are a glowing pink. Rey’s no better off, all bruised lips and red cheeks, her breath still short and gaspy as they slowly make their way out of Hux’s office.

He arches an eyebrow, unable to keep the smile off his lips.

Rey had been projecting into the bond so hard he’d had to stop training and retire to a quiet observation gallery where he could sit down, close his eyes, and wait it out. Still, by the end of those twenty minutes his body — or more specifically, his cock — had started to complain at the absolute barrage of emotions rolling through him through the Force bond, feeling Rey go from hesitant to aroused. They had done nothing more than kiss, he knows, yet it had very nearly set his skin on fire to feel ghosted kisses against his own mouth, precise yet deep and intense.

When her eyes land on him, Rey’s blush only intensifies. By the time she’d finally realized she had left the bond open and shut it quickly, Kylo had been nearly panting, breathing hard through his nose to keep himself in check. Then… then she’d opened it again. Gingerly, as if afraid that he’d refuse it. He’d set himself to the task of coaxing her to him until Rey had carefully started sending him feedback. Had she wanted him to feel included?

Yes, he decides, even if it had only been a handful of minutes. Plus he could hardly complain. He’d enjoyed it, getting to be part of their shared exploration of each other even in this small way.

Still, she can’t look him in the eye now as she clears her throat loudly and announces that she’s going to bed. She’s not very hungry. Kylo nearly rolls his eyes.
Hux watches her go with sheer want in his eyes before turning to Kylo, running a hand through his messy hair and taking in a deep breath. Rey had been quite busy.

“Would you join me in my office, Ren?” He asks, extending a hand towards the office door. Kylo removes his cowl and gloves and lets them fall on the couch next to his helmet before following. When he finally lowers himself to a chair and props a foot on Hux’s desk, something that makes Hux twitch, Kylo laces his fingers on his chest and arches an eyebrow.

“Did you enjoy yourselves?” He asks, trying and finding it entirely hard to let go of a situation in which he can watch Brendol Hux squirm. It also keeps him from thinking too hard on his own arousal.

Hux snorts, his ears turning a light shade of pink, but Kylo notes with great pleasure that Hux is entirely unashamed of admitting to it.

“Greatly,” Hux says. When Kylo says nothing, Hux gives a curt nod. “But we’re not here to discuss that. Have you heard from Snoke?”

“No,” Kylo replies. “Though I doubt it’ll take much longer.”

It would be any time now. Rey had finally healed, and if Hux’s words in the past were any confirmation, the creature had a habit of dipping into First Order records. Her discharge from the med bay would be recorded plain as day for everyone to see. Hux hums.

“Phasma reported today. We rerouted troops a month ago to the new depot being built. When they arrived, the stores were empty, the hangars deserted.” Hux says, tone flat. Kylo recognized that tone.

“Where are the troops now?” Kylo asks.

“Reassigned to the other two star destroyers, along with a handful of my officers. They are some of Phasma’s most trusted men, should things…”

Should things spiral. Should they find themselves in need of regrouping sooner than necessary. Kylo Ren and General Hux couldn’t be everywhere at once.

“Are you sure they can be trusted?” He asks and Hux nods.

“I would have sent Mitaka, but he knows of Snoke’s meddling with our files, and he’s one of the best officers I have on board the ship. I need to keep him close.” Hux explains.

“Snoke emptied out the depot,” Kylo says. “Without informing you.”

Hux nods once again, jaw muscles tensing as he runs his fingers through his hair, a bad habit he must have picked up from Kylo himself. Then Hux digs into his drawer and pulls out a smoke. Kylo watches silently as the man goes about the ritual of lighting it and taking that first menthol-laced drag and exhale.

“He’s arming himself. He must have used Rey’s injury as a cloak under which to move. Those weapons Rey commissioned never showed up, and now the depot runs dry,” Hux says, staring at his cigarette and turning it between his fingers. “But I can’t mount a campaign without proof and preparation. We’re still under supplied, even counting all the ammo and troops on the other two star destroyers.”

Kylo narrows his eyes.
“You have friends elsewhere, Brendol,” he murmurs, dropping his foot from the desk.

“What sorts of friends?” Hux asks, his head tilting a minute fraction with a frown.

Kylo smiles.

What Snoke doesn’t know would most certainly hurt him.

“We’ll have to include Rey before she is summoned,” he muses, once he has finished explaining as he remembers the shit storm that had raged due to their keeping information back. Hux nods. They would not repeat that mistake again.

Hux blows gauzy-white smoke to the side, away from Kylo, before he gets up and walks around the desk, tugging on Kylo’s hand gently. “Come.”

Kylo follows, his eyes glued to Hux’s fingers — Index and middle finger hooked to grab three of Kylo’s — as they enter the bedroom. Rey’s sprawled on the bed, already asleep. Hux tsks, but looks at her affectionately.

It takes his brain a moment to register what’s happening as he gets into bed when Rey, rather than being magnetically drawn to Hux’s side, curls up into his. He looks at her, at the green pendant dangling from her neck, and swallows. His gaze falls on Hux. Hux wears a minute smile on his face.

Icy blue eyes meet golden brown and the General’s smile widens, pupils blowing for a second. Hux likes the view.

Kylo wraps his arm around Rey, careful not to wake her, while Hux procures a data pad and a cigarette. Then Hux runs his fingers through Rey’s hair, moving onto Kylo’s absentmindedly, as he turns his focus towards work, no doubt sending rather sensitive messages out. Kylo allows it. It had happened before, while Rey floated inside a bacta tank. The warmth of those fingers is an odd comfort as he floats to Rey and wraps himself and her in their bond, where nightmares cannot reach them.

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Rey paces in front of the cell door. On either side sit two stormtroopers, ramrod straight and decidedly not looking at her. The second she had stepped outside of Hux’s quarters, she’d noticed the change. Stormtroopers stood a little straighter, a bit more stiffly, as if starched inside of their armor and fatigues. They would only relax once she walked past them, making her more and more uncomfortable the further she went.

It had been a long trip to Lance’s cell.

She’d tried to brush several people’s minds on her way there only to find that every mind held a deep wariness of her. There was curiosity, yes, and she imagined it was because nobody had expected to see her alive, but mostly… the stormtroopers tried their best to avoid her notice.

Rey had finally informed Hux and Kylo that morning that she would go see Lance, and though she could see the way Hux’s lips stiffened and Kylo’s eyes hardened, they had both nodded. Hux had immediately had two stormtroopers waiting to escort her outside. Those same stormtroopers attempted their best at blending into the wall now. At least nobody was trying to push her off of other decks, though, so Hux had done a good job of hiding her conversation with Organa.

She takes a few more hesitant steps before facing the cell door she’s been avoiding for the last twenty minutes, feeling the anxiety rolling off the stationed stormtroopers.
Deep breaths.

*Here I go.*

“Go ahead, please,” she says to the stormtrooper on the left. The trooper punches in the code to open up the cell door. Rey’s gut clenches at the hiss, blinking her eyes rapidly as she tries to prepare for what’s inside.

She takes a step in, then another, focusing on the slumped figure in the interrogation chair. Rey flinches as she takes in his sorry state. His head’s tilted back towards the light, every single pale-yellow bruise, every red welt, and a new purple bloom on his left cheekbone screaming at her. His eyes are closed.

Sleeping, perhaps?

“Lance?” She murmurs, taking a step closer before she can lose her nerve.

Not sleeping after all. His eyes open, looking around disoriented. Then chocolate brown eyes land on hers and widen, and Rey’s heart breaks when he immediately jerks on his restraints like a scared animal.

“Lance,” she repeats, taking another step forward before remembering something. She stops, inhales sharply, dropping her hand from where it had lifted to reach out and touch him. Rey bunches her hands into her trousers at her sides.

“May I speak with you?” She asks, voice low as she tries to keep it from trembling.

Lance stiffens, a vein in his neck popping.

“I have nothing to say to you,” he says, spitting at her boot. Rey drops her head for a moment to hide the sob that works its way up her throat.

Deep breaths.

She remembers a time when she’d been in a similar situation, a time when a different redhead had stepped into her cell and asked her the same question she had asked. Rey takes a deep breath and decides to follow in the steps of Brendol Hux, nodding.

“As you wish,” she says, taking a step back and watching Lance’s eyes widen with disbelief. When the door slams closed between her and her former friend, Rey allows herself to think on what had just happened. She’d come full circle.

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The next day she shows up to Lance’s cell and, much like Hux had done, she requests that his restraints be removed. The interrogation chair is taken away and replaced with a small cot, and she forces Hux to give the command to take his restraints off entirely. When she steps inside, Lance bolts up like a scared rabbit.

Rey enters unarmed. A small show of faith, knowing full well that he could attempt to hurt her, yet… he looks so beat up and small that she doubts he’d even have the strength to try.

“May I speak with you today?” She asks once more.

Lance narrows his eyes at her and once again gives her the same answer: I have nothing to say to
Rey nods, feeling her heart shattering further as she once more takes a step back.

She does it the next two days until, eventually, Rey wears him down. By the time she enters his cell on the fourth day, with now only three days to figure out how to fix this before Hux decides to take matters into his own hands, Lance finally looks up and sighs. He’s exhausted, but his bruises are healing. Rey would not allow for anybody to touch him, much to the man’s surprise when he speaks—

“You’re a traitor and yet I am the one in a cell,” he says, eyes hard on her, “what could we possibly talk about?”

Rey drags in air painfully through her nose, glad that the doors are shut and she’s the only one inside. Lance is curled up on his cot against the wall, arms around his knees, shivering. She bites her lower lip, noting that he’s avoiding the blanket she had procured for him earlier.

“I just want to talk,” she says.

“So talk,” he bites, voice cracking with the effort.

She finally grabs courage from somewhere and steps closer, dropping to her knees at his feet and looking up. Lance frowns, disbelief once more crossing his face.

“I am so, so sorry, Lance,” Rey says. Lance flinches at his name on her lips but, true to his character, like the strong man he is, his gaze never wavers away from hers. She takes some comfort in that.

“I know you believe I am a traitor. Many would, but… if you let me… I can explain.”

Rey lets him stare her down, lets him search her face for any hints of lying, and in turn watches him as his head tilts sideways, blood-crusted hair pasted to his temple, shirt dirty and smelling of stale sweat.

“Why should I?” He finally asks.

A small glimmer of hope blooms in her. Rey bites her lip.

“Because you’re my friend, and...I would hope, if you let me…” Rey begins then stammers. She’s not good at doing this like Hux is, she’s also not good at sounding authoritative in the face of Lance’s open mistrust like Kylo can be. So she goes for truth. “I will tell you everything. Everything I know, at least, and I will find a way to get you out of here. You just have to trust me.”

You just have to trust me.

How many times had she been asked for her trust and been hesitant to give it? Now Rey hopes desperately that Lance will.

His eyes narrow.

“Why would you get me out of here? It’s your word against mine,” he scoffs, and she can hear his thoughts as if he were screaming it: you’re the commanders’ girl. They would never choose me. Rey closes herself in to stop listening to his thoughts, but he continues. “Why would you do that, when letting me die would basically cover your hide?”

“Because it’s the right thing to do,” she says. Lance only inspects her face, his silence stretching on
for minutes, though it feels like hours.

Then Lance lets out a small shudder and she sees a tiny hint of the boy she had befriended in his eyes, something that reminds her so much of her old self. Perhaps self-preservation would win inside of him after all.

“Okay then, let’s hear it.”

She lets out a sigh of relief and, over the next two hours, spills her guts out like she’d never had in her life. She starts at the very, very beginning. Not at her capture, or even at Starkiller base. No. She starts with Jakku.

When she finishes, Lance looks stunned.

“So you want to...to... free us?” Lance asks, bewildered.

Rey nods.

“Why would you do that?” He asks, baffled, as if he had heard her tell a tale of tigers and boys in the open sea.

“Because you’re all people! You deserve better.” Rey responds, fisting her hands. She stares him down, daring him to tell her she’s out of her mind. He does her one better.

“You’re insane,” Lance laughs, a mirthless laugh that yanks at her heartstrings and pulls on fears she’s carried for a long time now. Still, this is more than he’d given her in days.

“Maybe,” she agrees.

“And what you said about… about…” Lance’s voice drops, as if scared he’s being watched. They’re not. She had made certain of it.

She had practiced for days on other cameras. On the ones in Hux’s rooms. She’d projected the Force at them for hours, trying to feel the mechanisms as Kylo had taught her to with the the Holocron, until she’d watched them turn on then off. These cameras are decidedly off. Whoever’s on the other side would never dare question a Knight of Ren’s need for privacy.

“About?” She prompts, and Lance licks his lips.

“About...the... Supreme Leader…” he says nervously. “Is that why you…?”

Rey nods. Anxiety pools in her stomach at what Leia must have thought when the connection died. Rey tries not to dwell on it. One step at a time. First get Lance out, then deal with the vile creep Hux and Kylo were so wary of.

Lance frowns, a full-body shiver running through him. He inspects his bloodied wrists.

“Please don’t tell anybody,” she asks. Lance laughs.

“Who would I tell and who would even believe me? And even if I were to believe all this, about you and how you met the tr-- Finn,” he corrects, swallowing hard. Finn’s name on Lance’s lips gives her a small amount of hope that perhaps he believes her and accepts her story. “Even if I were to believe all of this, about the Commanders, about…” he stops, thinking better than to continue. “How exactly do you plan on getting me out of here? I am sure they have proof.”

Rey takes a deep breath. She has no plan yet. This seems to just be a reoccurring thing with her, she
muses, then shoves the thought aside.

“I’ll figure it out,” she promises, then looks at him and bites her lip.

Lance laughs bitterly again, but perhaps trusting him with all this information has helped. He no longer looks at her with hate in his eyes.

“That sounds promising.” Lance says, and it sounds a little like the old him. Rey smiles before chewing on her lower lip.

“What happens when a stormtrooper does something… bad? Like, horrifically bad?” She asks. Hux had said death, but that thought chills her veins. Lance shrugs.

“They just…sort of… disappear, really,” he says, confirming her suspicions. Rey’s eyes widen.

“Wait, so there’s no trial?!” She asks, horror streaking past her features. Lance gives her a side smile that is anything but happy.

She would need to find a way. She needed something. Anything.

Then a lightbulb goes off in her head.

No advantage is ever unfair to the one who has it.

The words float into her mind as if just waiting for her to snatch it. Kylo had told her that once, in a training room, after freezing her in mid-air for hours. She realizes with a startled gasp that she has an advantage, and Lance had delivered it right into her lap.

“It’s not your word against mine,” she says, her face lighting up. Lance tilts his head, so she smiles. “It’s my word against mine.”

Rey bounces off from the cot where she had carefully perched herself and runs off, hearing Lance’s words of ‘What? where are you going?!’ behind her as she bolts, her guards following at a trot when the door shuts behind her.

She runs, entirely disregarding her doctor’s orders, all the way up, until she barrels onto the bridge. This time, the troops guarding the doors make no move to stop her entering — had she been granted access? — and by the time she comes to a skid in front of Hux, Rey’s out of breath.

“Lady Ren,” Hux says, barely managing a blank expression.

“Your office?” She pants, hairs flying out of her braid around her face, her chest beating wildly. Hux frowns.

He tilts his head towards the small office and walks off at a clip, leaving Rey to follow. She probably shouldn’t be on the bridge, but this could hardly wait. When he closes the door, his shoulders are still tense, guarded. He knows she’d been visiting Lance.

“What can I help you with?” He asks, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly. If she hadn’t known him so well, she would have barely noticed.

“I demand a public trial.”
A few things worth of note.

1. A reminder that Jennity now has 9+ hours of ADOT recorded for your enjoyment. go listen here!

2. We were gifted this drawing of Hux's kiss to Rey in the med bay. UGH. SO LOVELY. Thank you, sexy-Mary!

3. someone asked me what the alternative title to this fic would be in a fanfic writers game on tumblr. This is it:

There is no Peace, Only Angst
There is no Calmness, Only Fire
There is no Serenity, Only UST
There is always Chaos
And Lucy is the Harbinger of Pain
(the ADOT Code)
Lucky little bird

Chapter Summary

Rey kindly requests a public trial. This should go well.

Chapter Notes

WOW WHAT IS THIS HOLY SHIT. Look, ma, an update.
To recap, because it's been like a month since I updated: Rey is currently standing in Hux's office, demanding a public trial. Lance is currently in a cell, Hux is wondering how the hell his life ended up this way, and Kylo's been very intense lately (but when isn't he?)

Thank you guys for reading, and commenting (always love those. plz talk to me), and being generally the most supportive bunch of people I've ever met. I write for/because of you <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“You demand a public trial,” Hux repeats Rey’s words carefully, tone blank as he intones every word after having spent a few too many precious seconds staring her down. Rey’s lips purse in that stubborn way that tells him she’s already made up her mind, no matter what comes out of her mouth next.

“I request a public trial,” Rey amends, though her expression is no less determined. The sudden display of humility is solely for his benefit.

She had come storming onto the bridge like a sandstorm — which he’d expected and had already prepared for, having granted her access in preparation for this moment — and though part of him wanted to sigh in relief at seeing her back to her usual self, the other part of him, the more reasonable part of him, cringed at her entrance nonetheless. The last time she’d barged in like this it had been with very specific intentions in mind. This time it could only be about one thing.

He’s been proved right.

Hux’s nostrils flare, a lump of annoyance lodging itself in his throat as he forces himself to remain silent. He’d allowed her so much in regards to the stormtrooper, starting with foolishly letting her befriend the pipsqueak despite his reluctance (he’d never admit to it being possessiveness), but this is pushing it.

Rey makes a face at him. She clearly snatched that thought up.

For a moment Hux seriously dislikes Force Sensitives at large, though he’s finding it harder and harder every day to aim his distaste at her. Why had he allowed himself to get tangled in emotional
attachments, again? What would a public trial accomplish, other than turning his ship into a bigger gossip mill? Hux lets out an irritated, sharp huff of air on the exhale, about to open his mouth to say no when—

“It would allow you to save face,” she holds up a silencing finger, counting the benefits of her plan. “If you allow the wronged — or in this case, me — to press charges and deliver the... penalty. We all win. You said it yourself, this situation put you between a rock and a hard place. This way, you’re absolved of meting out punishment.”

Hux arches an eyebrow.

Ah.

“I’m listening,” Hux says.

He’d been agonizing over what to do with the stormtrooper ever since his nickname had fallen from Rey’s lips. As much as he dislikes the idea, she might just be delivering him a tactical advantage on a silver platter. Hux may be head over heels but he’s still a strategist at heart and Rey knows it.

*She’s using it to her advantage, else she would have never approached me.*

He has to give her credit. He’d half expected her to demand he be freed, or help him escape. But this is Rey he’s talking to, the same woman who’d won him over with her wits, and she knows exactly which buttons to push.

“Your fear was that if you didn’t punish him, that your men would think they could get away with murder… figuratively speaking, of course. Well, If you’re not the one to decide his punishment, then —” Rey says in her best business-like voice, and the words take him by surprise, something that happens so very rarely. She’d already made up her mind that he *wouldn’t* punish FN-5563, despite Hux’s desire to do exactly the opposite. She ignores his irritation and continues, holding up a second finger, “No message is sent that they can undermine your authority without consequences.”

“And let me guess, you’ll be the one undermining my authority by setting him free?” He asks, trying and failing to keep the razor edge off his voice. Rey frowns at him and juts her chin out. He hates that he loves when she does that.

“Who else would do it?” She retorts.

Hux inhales sharply and holds it for a moment. Of course. Hux steers the conversation away towards logistics, trying to avoid a repeat of a fight over her constantly going over his head.

“How exactly do you plan on proving his innocence convincingly without incriminating yourself?” He asks.

Were this any other situation, he’d be the only one Rey would have to convince of anything — he *is* the top commander General of the ship, after all, and they are *his* troops — but to make the trial public added a whole new layer of complications.

Rey waves a hand in the air as if proof is inconsequential.

“Are you going to give him the recording to defend himself with?” She asks, exploiting his one weakness. There it is, the button she needed to push.

Hux drums his fingers on his desk, long fingers tapping a methodical pattern, leaning against the edge while working to compose himself, torn between being impressed and boiling over at her
Rey sees right through his attempt at composure, as usual. Another thing to add to his list of minor annoyances. Her eyes swing to his drumming fingers momentarily before she looks up at him with regret, quickly replaced by determination.

“I thought so,” she continues, pacing the small office space and taking three long steps before she’s forced to turn around and walk the other way; it gives him the time to watch her braid swing with every turn, the way she chews on those lips that make his lashes flutter.

“A trial requires proof, Rey. From both sides. If he demands it, I can’t deny it,” he lies.

“You’d do that?” Rey turns bewildered eyes on him. Only so many days ago he’d basically told her he’d never let anybody see the signs of her treachery, but by now they’re just splitting hairs.

“There are rules, little one,” he drawls, attempting to sound bored while watching her resume her pacing, this time with more agitation. It gives him a small amount of satisfaction to know that, at least in this, he can hold his ground. This woman most definitely would give him white hairs, but if she insisted on doing this, then he would make her do the leg work. An unsolicited lesson.

Rey waves her hand in the air again with a calm expression on her face, holding her cards close to her chest. A traitorous part of him is pleased. This isn’t the little scared mouse that had once sat in his office helplessly debating over her morals — save lives or give up her convictions. No. This woman has slowly learned how to make a grab for power and, at least in his case, she’s learned to wield it by any means necessary. Her moral compass may still point towards justice, but the use of her means to achieve her desired end have shifted dramatically. He almost smiles, then Hux shakes his head. Somehow Rey of Jakku could kiss him silly one day and then, the next…

They are polar opposites, him and her, and yet somehow she does not begrudge him that fact. She doesn’t begrudge that he acts as a General must. What a tantalizing realization, that. He can’t find it in him, then, to hold this against her, either. Her mind had been, after all, the first thing he’d been drawn to. And oh what a beautiful thing it is. Her mind and her charm.

Thoughts of her charm veer his train of thought elsewhere… to a conversation carried out in hushed tones with Phasma. One involving the stormtroopers and Rey.

*Perhaps…*

Hux can’t help himself. He latches onto that one thought. He *could* let himself spare one stormtrooper in exchange for thousands, really, even if it would annoy him immensely to watch FN-5563 walk.

She gets what she wants. He gets what he needs.

*At the same time, it could also backfire spectacularly.*

“You have three days,” he says. “Then we’ll hold a public trial for FN-5563. You better know what you’re doing, Rey.”

Rey nods, muttering to herself as she paces back and forth in front of him, lost in her own thoughts.

“No advantage is ever unfair to the one who has it.”

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*That afternoon, Rey is finally allowed to join the Knights in training.*
“Are you sure?” Kylo asks just as they’re about to reach the door to the training room, his scar pinching from his frown as he looks at her with concern. Rey instead gives him a bright smile and nods.

“Yes. Thank you for letting me join,” she says, and Rey almost laughs at the way his ears tinge pink. She had basically begged him to let her join, promising him that she was feeling up to it. When he’d finally reluctantly agreed, promising her she could join in the afternoon after he took care of some business or another, Rey had done something she had never thought she ever would to show her gratitude. Rey had leaned forward and slowly, gently, placed a soft kiss to his lips, heart thundering out of her chest. The look on his face, surprise and adoration, had made the bold move worth it, though.

For the rest of the morning Kylo’s end of the bond had glowed, warm and bright, as if floating on a cloud. It had made her giggle. She could feel it no matter where he went on the ship.

The glow is dim, now, as he stares at her and looks for any indication that she may still not be fully healed. Rey nearly rolls her eyes, but that might give him reason to say no, so instead she waits patiently for Kylo to stop worrying. It takes a while, but he finally extends his hand towards the training room, and Rey’s nerves vibrate with excitement.

She’d been itching to train for days now, having spent the better time of her week in bed or on the couch, her only other reprieve from boredom the few times she made it to Lance’s cell.

Sure, the break had been nice, heavenly, in fact. Kylo and Hux had gone out of their way to spoil her. Hux would show up throughout the day without needing to, just to check in on her. He would quietly place gentle kisses on the top of her head on his way to his small office, always asking her if she needed anything. She would have never expected something like this out of General Hux, but Rey couldn’t help but smile. She had turned bright pink at those touches, remembering their shared intimacy in his office. It was adorable, really, the way he kept showing up.

Unlike Hux, Kylo would only allow himself to touch her when Rey allowed, choosing to shower with attention in quieter ways, though no less intense for it. He’d show up to bed with both her breakfast bowl and his, gently set hers on her lap, and eat breakfast with her in silence, shoulder to shoulder and elbow to elbow, then wait patiently until she finished all of hers. Whenever she commented on it he’d say he was only looking out for his Apprentice’s health, but she could hardly miss the small smile threatening to curl at the edges of his lips. He’d repeat the exact same process for lunches and dinners while Hux locked himself up in his office late into the night. Rey could sometimes hear the conversation if she strained her ears, but figured if he’d wanted an audience Hux would have left the door open. By the time Hux came to bed, he looked positively run down, so Rey would simply curl up next to him and fall asleep. The man was preparing for war, after all.

Still, despite the attention, and perhaps because of it, Rey brimmed with anxiety and expectation at the opportunity to finally jump back into something more physical. She’d spent the better part of her otherwise monotonous recovery time practicing with Millicent and the Holocron, but that wasn’t enough, either. She needed to sweat. She’d never been made for an idle life. Being promised she could join training had been the highlight of her week.

As soon as she enters the training room, though, Rey very nearly reconsiders. Every Knight stops what they’re doing, some freezing their sparring mid-swing, and turn to look at her sudden appearance.

“Well, well,” one of the many sweaty bodies standing around with practice weapons speaks, and Rey narrows her eyes with recognition. Rojan steps forward from his spot in the back of the training room. Of course he’d be the first to say something.
“The little bird’s broken wings have been mended,” he says.

“Rojan,” Yathe immediately warns, approaching until she’s standing between Rojan and Rey, though only Kylo and herself would see it for what it is. Yathe gives her a deferential bow. “Good to have you back, Lady Rey.”

Yathe looks up and gives her a small smile. She doesn’t wink, or grin and show all teeth. Yathe’s far too composed for that, but her eyes shine bright and it makes Rey feel more welcome than she thought she would, so she gifts the Knight — her friend — with a smile. It’s a power move on Yathe’s part. If she’s to show deference, the other Knights must, too.

From the corner of her eye, Rojan inspects her like a predator would an injured creature, and he the hungry dog, is waiting for her to falter. Kylo notices it, too.

*Are you feeling up for a challenge?* Kylo asks. Rey glances at him. There’s a dangerous glint in his eye as he looks at Rojan. Rojan had been itching for a fight with her for as long as he’d known of her existence. Rey rolls her neck until it pops. Well, then… fine. If it was a fight he wanted, it was a fight she’d deliver on.

*Absolutely.*

The corners of Kylo’s lips twitch upward.

“Rojan,” Kylo barks, his voice booming around the training room, amplified by the empty space. Rojan straightens up instinctively. “Come forward. You’ll be Rey’s partner for this round.”

Yathe shoots Kylo a sharp glance but Kylo’s eyes are pinned on the shorter Knight strolling languidly forward. Rojan disregards his Master’s glare, focusing on Rey with a smile.

“Well, it would be my honor to be your first,” Rojan says, his drawl dripping with a sticky glossiness that makes the hairs on Rey’s neck stand. Revulsion quickly rises up her throat, but she keeps her expression level, even as Kylo stiffens at her side, doing that funny thing he does that makes him seem… larger than life. Perhaps it’s only looming, but it’s enough to give Rojan pause.

“Practice weapons only. You go until first strike.”

Kylo tosses Rey a staff and Yathe tosses Rojan what Rey assumes must be the Knight’s preferred weapon: a long staff with two blunt spikes on the ends that, with a hard yank of Rojan’s hands, quickly extends into a pair of rather deadly-looking nunchucks.

Rey swallows on instinct as the other knights spread out and give them a wide berth, forming a semi-circle. She looks at Rojan more closely as she steps forward, then at the weapon in his hands. That looks like it could inflict some serious damage, even with blunt spikes.

All other Knights eye Rey with a mix of interest and caution, but they’re far enough away that when Rojan whispers, they cannot hear.

“I’ve been waiting for a long time for this chance, little bird,” Rojan says, feinting forward. Rey takes a step back and immediately curses herself at the smirk that spreads on his lips, then crouches into her opening stance. Kylo glowers in the back of her mind. He’d picked up on Rojan’s words. “Lucky little bird, having been found in time, I hear. It’s a good thing, though. I almost thought I’d lost my chance then.”

Rey narrows her eyes. Yeah. She’d been ready for a fight as well.
“Come and get it, then,” she hisses, swinging her staff behind her—

Then she *jumps*.

*Oh, if this isn’t what her body *craved*, muscles tensing then lengthening as she pushes power into them. Her new access to the Force is a dizzying drug as she simultaneously grabs onto the tendril of white blue smoke, turns it to plasma and drives it into her limbs, jolting her body into moving.*

Rojan’s quick, though, not that she expected anything else from a Knight of Ren. Her staff misses his shoulder as he pivots out of her reach, twisting so quickly Rey almost misses the movements of his arms when the chain of his weapon wraps around the end of her staff.

*Kriff—*

He *yanks* , knees bent to ground himself as he forces Rey to propel in his direction, trying to dislodge her hold on her staff. Rey grinds her teeth with a grunt, her grip relentless on the handle of her weapon, and angles herself to kick. Rojan releases her staff, untwisting the chain in one swift motion as her body tumbles forward, so she uses his trick against him by twisting her staff and tangling it back in the chain, using momentum to swing her body in a semi circle then kicking at him hard. The force of the move sends *Rojan* spinning this time. It’s a short-lived win, though, as he nimbly catches himself, the grating sound of his boots skidding on durasteel greeting her ears. Rojan crouches, hand dragging on the floor for stability. Still, the murderous glare on his face as his eyes land on his weapon tangled on her staff sends a spike of pleasure through her spine.

He’d expected this to be *easy*, she muses, crouching once more into an opening stance. Rey grins at him, sharp teeth glinting.

*She could* take his weapon for her own and beat his ass, but Rojan had been taunting her for *far* too long. This is not over yet. She shakes his nun-chucks off her staff then kicks them towards him, thrilling in satisfaction when Rojan glares before he pulls it towards him with a tug of the Force.

They spend the next fifteen minutes tangled in a raging, graceless dance where Rey very nearly gets a spike through the neck, and Rojan barely avoids a cracked skull. Her limbs *ache*, but she refuses to let that stop her as she works through every hitched-up heaving of her chest, bringing in air at all costs. It’s a fight to the first strike, but they both manage to keep avoiding a hit, and Rey’s anger starts boiling in the pit of her stomach. Still, the longer she goes the more cracks appear in Rojan’s self-assured stance. When he finally snarls at her through sweat and heavy breathing, Rey returns it with a grin.

In the back of her mind, her bond to Kylo thrums.

Kylo, her *Master*, stands with arms crossed as if what he’s watching is nothing but common-place amongst his subordinates. Inside their bond, however, it’s an entirely different matter. The longer she pushes Rojan the more satisfaction rolls off Kylo’s end. He wants to show that his apprentice would not be cowed, and Rojan of all people is learning *very* quickly that she could fight with the best of them. Months and months of training without the Force had allowed her to hone her combat skills. Now, aided with the power that had escaped her for so long, every movement feels like an extension of her, as easy as breathing despite the ache settling in her bones and the stitch in her ribs. Her jumps go higher, her thrusts are forceful, her spins hard enough to destabilize her opponent — a man much stronger than her — and send him skidding, and it’s glorious until—

Rey freezes mid-step. Her weapon clanks to the ground as body rises off the ground, ears popping from the pressure of a Force Hold around her throat, and Rey’s starting to see floaters when Kylo opens his mouth to scream a command, yet this time she has *power* on her side.
She digs into herself, wraps her own power around herself until she can feel the edges of Rojan’s hold. She finds a weak spot, a single thread from where the hold can unravel, and tugs—

Rey drops down hard on her feet, but before Rojan can recover from his shock, she throws her hand out on instinct, lifting him off the ground like he’d done to her and spinning him around like a top with so much force Rojan’s hair falls out of its tie. She doesn’t question the sheer force of the attack, or the way in which she’d instinctively set the man to spinning mid-air. Instead she runs at Rojan and rams her staff into his back, sending him through the air and letting him fall to the ground on his face.

“HIT!” Yathe calls when Rojan falls on his stomach with a grunt, just barely managing to save himself from a broken nose. Rey pants, eyes turning on Kylo, and there’s a smirk on his face.

OH.

So that’s where the knowledge to lift and spin Rojan had come from. A Force Bond did come in handy when learning new skills, after all. Kylo’s smirk turns into a pleased smile that widens for only a moment. The corners of her lips tug up before she turns on Rojan, the Knight struggling to lift himself up off the ground.

Well done, sweetling, Kylo croons over the bond before tilting his head at Rojan.

“Lady Rey wins,” he proclaims, and Rey’s eyes swing around to all the other Knights. They may still be watching her warily, but suddenly there’s a hint of respect there.

Rojan turns to her, wiping at his face, his hand coming away red. He’d saved his nose but managed to split his lip open.

“Well done, little bird,” Rojan drawls. Rey bristles, as does Kylo. “Who knew you had it in you. Two out of three?” He proposes and the room goes deadly silent. It’s clear by now that Kylo favors his apprentice.

It’s Yathe’s laugh that breaks up the tension.

“What, like getting your ass handed to you once wasn’t enough?” She calls out. “The lady will train with me. It’s been a long time since I had a woman to test my skills on. You can’t have them all, Rojan.”

Yathe’s brows rise suggestively a few times.

It’s exactly what they all needed. The stiffness in the air dissipates as Rojan rolls his eyes and walks off to pair with a different knight, undoubtedly to lick his sore-loser wounds with violence. Even Kylo snorts, but he gives Rey’s shoulder a reassuring squeeze as he walks by. She’s safe with Yathe.

The rest of the afternoon is spent with Rey getting her ass handed back to her by Yathe, though she does manage to learn quite a handful of useful tricks.

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By the time Rey and Kylo wander in from training, it’s seven sharp. Hux tilts his head at the sight. They’re both visibly exhausted, but where Ren is perfectly operational Rey looks like she’s ready to fall on her face, hair plastered to her temples and her black fatigues in near tatters. Hux’s brows rise, his nose pinching in distaste.
“You two will shower before dinner,” he remarks. Kylo scoffs while Rey lets out a pitiful little groan, her eyes falling on the table loaded up with dishes, and though his own food might go cold, Hux refuses to let them sit at the table sweaty and smelling of a training room.

To think his quarters used to be a quiet, near-sterile sanctuary once.

“Come on,” Kylo tugs Rey’s elbow gently and guides her towards the bedroom. Hux rises from his chair and follows, watching Kylo sit Rey down on the bed. She looks boneless.

“Hard day?” Hux asks, resisting the smile tugging at his lips when Rey flops back on the bed and lets out an even louder groan.

“Yathe is the devil,” she complains, covering her eyes with an arm thrown over her face. “A very, very skilled, strong devil, but one nonetheless.”

Kylo chuckles low in his throat, kneeling at Rey’s feet and tugging off one of her boots. “Welcome to training, sweetling.”

Rey tries to look down at him and Kylo only arches an eyebrow back at her, stuck in their silent conversations as Hux watches and twirls the wine in his hand.

“Hmmm,” Hux lets out noncommittally. He doesn’t doubt her. He’d watched Kylo take on Yathe by himself before during moments of boredom in which he’d turned on the security cameras in the training room, smoking a cigarette as he watched the two Knights pummel each other nonstop for an hour.

Kylo removes Rey’s other boot, then looks up at her with a minute frown that Rey returns.

[Yes, Hux decides.

And Rey must have granted it, Hux muses, watching as she allows Kylo to then strip her of her fighting clothes — first the shirt, which she barely fully sits up and lifts her arms for — then her arm guards, and finally, in one swift motion, her fatigues. Rey flops back on the bed in her underclothes and stares at the ceiling.

“Can I just go sleep?” She asks.

“No,” Kylo responds matter-of-factly, gently grabbing her hand and tugging her up into a standing position, murmuring. “You have to shower then eat.”

Rey grumbles and disappears into the refresher, leaving Kylo to sit on the bed and rid himself of his own boots, and Hux’s eyes lower to half mast. Curiosity piques him, twirling his wine again before taking a step forward. What would it be like?

Kylo stops mid-motion, hands reaching for the zipper of his boot. Maybe he snatched the thought? Hux would never know, though he’d also long ago stopped blocking both Rey or Kylo from looking into his thoughts. Hux steps forward, setting his glass on the nightside table with a small clink, licking his lips before slowly turning around and giving Kylo a once-over.

“Like what you see?” The Knight asks with an arched eyebrow at Hux’s open staring.

He does. He has to admit it to himself as his eyes land on Kylo’s neck, muscles straining under the sweat-slick hair plastered there. Hux reaches forward and gently removes a few hairs from Kylo’s forehead, getting a better view of the Kylo’s eyes as he lets out another noncommittal hum.
“What’s it like?” He asks, watching Kylo’s ears turn pink. When he moves to grab the fabric of
Kylo’s shirt and tug, his fingers graze over muscles twitching underneath, as if anticipating a strike.

“What’s what like?” Kylo asks, voice low and scratchy. Hux’s eyes fall on Kylo’s hands tensing in
his lap, desperate to bunch into his fatigues. He meets Kylo’s eyes and smirks.

“Submitting,” Hux muses as he tugs Kylo’s shirt free of the man’s pants. Kylo lets out a growl that
sets his skin on edge. “Enough to kneel at her feet and undress her.”

“Would you like to find out?” Kylo says, voice choking slightly. Hux chuckles.

“Hmmm,” he murmurs, listening to the spray of the shower in the refresher, enjoying the game of cat
and mouse too much, even if the man before him would never be a mouse, much like the girl in the
shower. They are more like rabid wolves, really.

He thinks back to Rey sitting on his knee, to his fingers digging up underneath Rey’s shirt, trailing
up between her shoulder blades, thumbs caressing her sides, dangerously close to her breasts before
letting them fall to her waist. She’s a tiny thing, all of her nearly fitting within the cups of his palms.
Kylo is anything but small. Would his skin feel the same way? Burn the same way until it became
part of his fingerprints?

Hux tugs until Kylo’s forced to lift his arms so that his shirt can go over his head, his hair falling
back down to frame an impossibly beautiful face. Underneath Hux finds what he’d already known
he would find: an expanse of chest covered in scars, twitching under the sudden attention. Hux lets
the shirt drop next to Kylo on the bed, then places his hand on the man’s shoulder, circling his thumb
into the tender flesh. It burns, but not like Rey’s skin had burned, soft and inviting. This is like
having a coursing fever, threatening to consume, and the corner of his lip goes up when Hux notices
Kylo tracking his every move.

“Wouldn’t you like that?” Hux tsks, but gives Kylo an indulgent, minuscule smile that the Knight
returns. Kylo shakes his head, opening his mouth to speak—

Then Rey’s comm beeps on the bedside table and the mood evaporates immediately. Hux and Kylo
look at each other, then towards the refresher door.

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Snoke studies the holograms of his apprentice, his General, and his newest acquisition as they enter
the amphitheater and walk up to the platform, leaning back in his seat aboard a satellite command.

The girl — Rey, he thinks with amusement — steps forward without hesitation. That, too, delights
him. She leaves General Hux and Kylo Ren behind, and Snoke resists the urge to smile. Good. He
would make her his.

“Knight of Ren,” he greets her with a low croon, taking in Rey’s face. It’s a blank mask, one that she
wears well as she looks up at him. The General boy must be teaching her well.

The thought leaves quickly enough when Rey bends at the waist in a deep, deferential bow that makes Snoke’s nerve
endings spark. Yes, she would be his yet.

“Supreme Leader,” she says.

Snoke reaches out through the Force with the aid of the amphitheater’s amplifiers, caressing her mind
carefully. Unlike the two men behind her, he needed to be gentle… gentle as he’s only ever been in
one other occasion. It would not do to spook her when she’s come willingly. What he finds there,
though, is… nothing. Her mind is entirely blank.
Ah, but it seems Kylo Ren has been teaching her well, too.

Snoke smiles nonetheless at his formal title on her lips, continuing his search. Further in, he feels what he’s looking for: the Force. His eyes narrow though Rey does not try to shield herself — there’s nothing but darkness there, an empty void ready to be filled.

Good.

“You’ve recovered well,” he praises, “I am eager to test your newfound strength in person.”

The moment the words slip out of his mouth, Snoke senses as his prized possession stiffens. It is not a physical stiffening, but somewhere within her the Force hardens. He hums mentally to himself, making a note of her reluctance and sets to soothing her fears.

“Do not be afraid, child. I am a very benevolent ruler, and you are very strong with the Force. I see you have managed to break your block. I only wish to know the extents of your power. Kylo Ren was right, you are stronger than you know.”

The small hologram of the girl staring up at him nearly makes him smirk as she looks over her shoulder at Ren, a startled look in her eyes before she turns back to him and tilts her chin up defiantly. Yes, she has more backbone than Kylo Ren ever did. She’d do quite well for his plans.

“There is something I would like to request, Supreme Leader,” Rey says.

A request? Snoke tilts his head sideways, turning the words over with interest. She’s coming to him and making a request? Very interesting…

He once again carefully delves into her mind. Whereas he’s always driven into Ren, this girl he will treat with silk gloves. His touch of her awareness is but a gentle caress, and he watches as a minute holographic Rey purses her lips and squares her shoulders the longer he remains silent, refusing to back down.

Spunk. It would be useful to her, in time.

“And what is that request, child?”

“A stormtrooper,” she says, clearing her throat and raising her voice to make her point crystal clear as she offers up her memories willingly. Snoke blinks in surprise, then contemplates her words while he sifts through them. The boy had snuck up on her and shoved her for no apparent reason.

“He tried to kill you?” He asks. Rey nods. “What is your request?”

Rey swallows hard and he’s reminded of a child…a true child… though all humans are children in his ancient eyes. She could barely be over twenty years old, a blink of an eye in his lifespan.

“I would like to know his motivations.”

“Why, when you barely survived? If you had not been found in time…” Snoke says, his voice trailing off as his mind replays the memories she’d offered up to him. If she had not been found in time, he would have been very displeased. “Wouldn’t it be best for you to kill him, to claim your revenge, and be done with such an insignificant annoyance?”

Snoke gauges her reaction to his question. Would she attempt to kill him? Would she succumb to the Dark Side? How far could she be pushed?
“Are you ordering me to, my Lord?” She asks.

His chest rumbles. No, he wouldn’t order her to. If the stormtrooper were to die, he would want it to be by her hand, on her own time. What a delightful thing. Snoke had assumed whoever injured her would have been caught and disposed of by now.

“I will let you do as you wish,” he says. “This once. Consider it a gift given in good faith as my newest apprentice. Use it well, little one. Once you have learned of his… motivations, kill him. Then you will travel to me. It is high time I tested you personally. Patience is not an infinite resource, my little apprentice. You would be wise to remember this.”

The girl before him acquiesces by once again bowing deep, the two men at her side mimicking her actions. He had almost forgotten they’d been standing there. Pleased, Snoke lets out a soft chuckle and waves his fingers at them in dismissal. He could stand to gain from this.

“Until next time, Knight of Ren.”

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Rey leans against the wall the second they’re out of Snoke’s amphitheater, head pressed against the smooth surface and breath coming in short, anxious puffs. Hux licks his lips anxiously, remembering a time when he’d vomited all over the floor in a similar spot after a summons. Kylo’s already moved in behind her, automatically folding himself around her body over-protectively, the very essence of Kylo Ren’s nature when it comes to Rey.

“Are you alright?” Hux murmurs as he moves closer, and Rey gives him a small smile that doesn’t quite reach her eyes. He can barely blame her.

“I will be,” she says. Then, as if finding it somewhere within her, Rey straightens to her full height and shakes her head, forcing Kylo to take a step back to give her room. “I…”

“What?” Kylo asks, probably for Hux’s benefit, since Hux himself can’t simply dip into her mind. Hux gives him an appreciative glance, the most he can manage after forcing himself to allow being stared down by the vile creature they are still calling their master.

“I just— He ordered me to kill with no regard for life,” she begins, a deep frown marring her beautiful face. Somewhere inside him a heartstring tugs, but then Rey looks from Kylo to him with a new sort of understanding there. He knows the look very well. He’d worn it as a child, once, when it had been his turn to learn what would be demanded of him in years to come, and the ease with which it was demanded. He’d long learned to steel himself against empathy, but he ached to see Rey come to the same realization.

“So this is what you’re fighting against,” she murmurs, and her eyes drop to her boots. Perhaps in her mind, Kylo and Hux had always been the true evil… the end game…

“Everybody is disposable in war, Rey,” Hux says as he steps in close and grabs her small hand in his gloved one, giving it a reassuring squeeze and pulling her away from the wall. “Especially to creatures like Snoke.”

Rey’s lips turn down then she looks at him and Kylo and her face takes on that determined look he’s come to adore.

“Not in this war,” she declares, squaring her shoulders. “Not if I have anything to say about it.”

Kylo and Hux exchange a momentary glance, the corners of Hux’s lips quirking up. Bullheaded girl.
But the momentary wonder at this little fireball standing between them ends quickly enough when Rey’s lip loses some of its determined stiffness and she looks at the amphitheater’s doors, eyes clouding over.

“Will you excuse me? I need to… check on something…” she says.

Before any one of them can balk, Rey silences them with a look. Then, because it’s Rey, she gifts them both with a sweet smile. “I’ll join you for dinner soon.”

For the first time ever, Hux watches as Rey walks away, her steps long and sure, as if she owned this ship herself. Kylo voices his thoughts in a low murmur. “I bet you’re imagining her in First Order garb right about now,” Kylo teases, a small respite from the gravity of their situation. Hux snorts, though he can hardly find it in him to disagree.

“She did wear my coat once,” Hux muses, tugging on the soft edges of his leather glove. “Perhaps someday she’ll wear one of her own.”

It is Kylo who snorts this time. “She’s a Knight first and foremost, Brendol.”

She is air as she walks away, and Hux watches until the heel of her boot and the tip of her braid disappear around a corner, then turns to Kylo and for once allows him a small gift, an amused, mischievous grin.

“As much as it pains me to admit it— I can share, especially since you’ve learned to play nice, Knight of Ren.”

Hux’s eyes travel back to the Amphitheater, the moment cut abruptly short. He would need to do act soon.

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Rey makes a beeline for Lance’s cell, mind already whirling, replaying a single question on loop. It had gnawed at her since she’d left the training room that afternoon: Rojan’s sneering face, and, more specifically, his words.

Lucky little bird, having been found in time, I hear.

She hadn’t put much stock into the barb that afternoon. Rey had shouted into the bond for all she was worth when she fell. Of course Kylo would find her... but that also left one question unanswered. Rey had picked an observation deck well out of the way, taking pains to redirect patrols via compulsion...

She finds Lance splayed on his cot. He no longer jumps when she enters, though the smile is still slow to come to his lips.

“Hello,” she says, the door closing inches behind her. She would treat this as his space, no matter how dreadful it is. That’s when the smile finally reaches his eyes.

“Hello,” Lance says, sitting up. “Have you found a way to save me yet, or am I doomed for a spacing? If I am, promise me you’ll send me without a helmet.”

Rey frowns. Is that a joke? Is he losing hope so quickly?
“Lance?” She asks, taking a few steps forward. Lance moves aside, making a small space for her on the cot to sit on. It’s such a small thing but it crashes into her with a wave of relief. “Can I ask you something?”

Lance shrugs. “Sure.”

Rey looks at her hands as she sits down. How is she supposed to approach this? One wrong word and it could destroy everything she’d worked so hard to foster between them.

Surprisingly, it is Lance who takes the initiative. He moves from her side and crouches in front of her, forcing her to look at him by taking up all of her personal space in front of her line of vision. His red hair’s dirty and there are dark circles under his eyes, but the bruises have faded and he’s no longer a caked up mess of blood and scratches, yet despite it all, he looks at her with concern.

Maybe she hasn’t lost her friend after all.

“What is it?” He asks, confusion streaking past his face.

Rey chews on her lip some more. She had promised Hux and Kylo that no lives would be thrown away if she had something to say about it, and she would be lying if she said the first face to cross her mind hadn’t been Lance’s. Snoke had nearly *purred* about having her kill him.

“How did you know where I was that one day?”

Rey watches as Lance’s every thought crosses his face in slow motion, too scared to blink in case she misses something even as she steels herself for the worst. If he’d followed her, then Rey would know that he’d planned this whole thing out. If he’d followed her, then that would mean that he hadn’t been truthful with her all those weeks in the cafeteria, when they’d shared their friendship willingly. Lance’s face contorts with panic, then…

Confusion.

Realization.

Bewilderment.

“I…” he says. “I don’t… know.”

“What do you mean?” She asks. Lance’s face falls.

“I can’t remember.” Lance explains, blinking rapidly again, his thoughts so loud that Rey plucks them with ease, but they’re a jumbled mess.

Rey purses her lips.

“What do you mean you don’t remember?” She asks, something akin to hope mixed with dread curling in her stomach and rising up to her chest. “Lance? Where were you before you found me? Did you follow me?”

Lance’s eyes swing like planets violently falling out of orbit.

“I don’t remember.”
Her heart pounds in her ears, the hiss of the doors to Hux’s quarters barely registering above the rush of blood. Her eyes immediately fall on Kylo and Hux at the dining table, their food untouched and their heads bowed closely together, deep in discussion. Both of them turn startled expressions on her. Not at her sudden entrance, no, they’ve become used to that by now — but at the look on her face. Rey nearly trips over herself and Millicent in her haste to get to them.

“A Knight did it.” Rey rushes out, her chest aching from exertion. She’d run as fast as she could.

“Slow down, Rey,” Hux says, setting his data pad aside. They’d been working, after all. “A Knight did what?”

“Lance,” she explains, swinging her arms in front of her and motioning up and down her body. She would explain the details later, but she needed to get this out of her chest now. Hux wanted an argument to grant Lance his freedom? Well, she’d found it. “He was under compulsion. A Knight did it.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter!
Super short note because after a month of not writing I have very little news lol

Thanks as always to my AMAZING beta EjBlakIt, without whom this story would suck major balls =) And thank you all for sticking it out with us.
Weakness

Chapter Notes

After three millenia, we are back with an update. Holy crap. Thank you for your patience and, for those of you still reading and commenting, for sticking with this story ;--; I love you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A Knight did it.

Rey’s words reach Kylo’s ears slowly, struggling to cut through the thick fog of his disbelief as he tries to make sense of the declaration. His eyes sharpen on her features as she stares at him with parted lips and wide, wild eyes. She can barely gasp in air, the ghost of her breathlessness squeezing at his lungs, his vision quickly dimming as disbelief is replaced by rage. Rey stumbles up the steps towards him, her hair falling out of her braid and framing her face in disarray, no doubt from running. She looks at Hux, who has turned to stone in his seat, much like Kylo has, and inhales deeply, readying herself to explain.

“He couldn’t remember,” she says, her eyes lingering on Kylo. “I— I wanted to find out how he knew where I’d be. It occurred to me, after…” her words waver, and Kylo knows she’s thinking of their audience with Snoke. His hands slowly close into fists where they rest on his lap now, Hux similarly holding onto his data pad with an iron grip as realization hits them both with equal force. They hadn’t thought clearly. In their panic, they hadn’t looked deep enough. As a result the true enemy had been allowed to roam these halls, had been given plenty of chances to pounce again. But how? How, how? His bewilderment begins to mix with a new sort of panic.

He’d looked in the minds of his Knights. He’d searched them all for any interaction with Rey—

Any interaction with Rey.

He lifts his eyes to Rey’s and everything replays in his mind in slow motion, reflected on her beautiful hazel eyes: Kylo, bolting from Hux’s quarters. Kylo, finding Rey broken and bleeding on the cold durasteel floor. Kylo, shedding his own humanity in a split second and giving in to his feral need to kill. Back then, it didn’t matter who, so long as he avenged what was his, what had been forcefully taken from him. Hux yanking him back into a semblance of sanity long enough to realize she wasn’t dead. He’d looked, he’d looked thoroughly. Or at least, Kylo thought he’d looked thoroughly… but he’d only searched for Rey, chasing her face while tearing through countless minds for any elusive hint of who could have attacked her. Not once had he considered…

“How which Knight?” He asks, his vocal cords straining to regulate his tone. The look of dismay on her face inches him just a little closer to the scream he’s been holding back.

“I don’t know,” she admits, shaking her head as her shoulders deflate. “I was gentle, like Zah taught me, and I searched carefully for a long time. There’s a block there, buried very deeply. I tried to bypass it but somebody tampered with his memories. I don’t understand.”

Kylo does, however. His brain provides the word as easily as breathing: power. Somebody tried to get her out of the way to get to him. And it was useless now. The order could have been given hours
before Rey had been struck, it’s been weeks since then. Human brains could only handle so much messing with before they warped. Kylo continues recalling the events of that night, seeing red no matter how hard he tries not to as he remembers the boy. He’d looked… confused. When asked where he’d been, Lance had looked confused. And Kylo hadn’t even noticed.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

He gets up, intent on righting this if it meant disemboweling every single Knight in the process, his chair scraping back as he makes a grab for his saber and his helmet, only to be stopped by a hard grip on his arm. Kylo growls as he swivels, his face contorting into a snarl, but Hux simply looks at him.

“I will deal with this,” Kylo warns, and Hux tightens his hold on him. Kylo should shake him off immediately, but something about the way Hux is looking at him stalls him, even though his instincts tell him to move.

He’s losing time.

“What? Are you just going to gather them in a room and chop off all their heads at once? Kill now, ask questions later?” Well, that was one idea. Maybe he’d become too easy to read. Hux lets go of his arm carefully when Kylo gives no inkling of bolting. “You can hardly get them to confess by rounding them up and screaming at them, and if you go one by one, you’re only causing noise and allowing the culprit time to escape. The second you announce this, you lose.”

Rey bites at her lip as she looks at him, and Kylo doesn’t need to dip into her thoughts to see what she’s thinking.

Hux is right, and Kylo can ill afford to jump into action without a plan. It had been his irrationality and tunnel vision that had landed them in this mess to begin with. He closes his eyes for a moment, fingers itching to ignite his saber and take it out on something. Instead he lets his palms relax.

“Then what do you suggest?”

Hux looks at Rey, “There may be another way.”

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Kylo enters his quarters for the first time in… well, he can’t remember the last time he’d been here. He needed to be here, however, even in the face of Rey’s concerned looks (and Hux’s, to a much lesser extent). So he’d taken his leave and left Rey and Hux to talk about the trial, and how they could lure the culprit out, choosing instead to seek sanctuary in the one place he knew he could let his guard down entirely.

It no longer feels like it is his, however. He looks around the spacious room, cold and dark and uninviting, so different from Hux’s quarters. He hadn’t noticed it up until now, his empty walls, shelves, and untouched bed a stark contrast to living with Rey and Hux. Oh, sure, Hux’s quarters were still very much Hux’s, freakishly clean, a place for everything and everything in its place… but there, there are hints of life. Rey’s saber and his always resting on one of the night tables, Hux’s ashtrays, white lilies on the table; the much larger closet now filled with clothes for three, and Millicent, walking between everyone’s legs and purring for attention. There was life there, most of it brought about by Rey’s ability to fill any space she inhabited with light. These quarters, by comparison, feel like a cold tomb.

His eyes veer towards a single door, now shut, and his body moves of its own accord.
Beyond that door is his grandfather, ready to welcome him and listen, a voice in his head beckoning him like a whisper on the breeze, and Kylo can’t deny his need for guidance, for solace, any longer. It would keep him from giving into his fury. He walks towards the room on silent feet, slowly taking the dark leather seat and placing his saber in front of Darth Vader’s half-melted helmet like an offering, the minutes stretching before him and his grandfather while he looks for the words that can’t seem to materialize when he needs them most.

Where does he start?

Part of him feels…

Kylo stops.

Feelings. He scoffs, cutting off his previous train of thought. Feelings are the sole reason he finds himself seated here, now, hanging his head in shame as he desperately tries to tread water in a toxic concoction of his own making, a concoction made up of anger and fear. Those feelings had plagued him his whole life, intensifying ever since his saber had plunged into Han Solo’s chest. That reminder makes him itch now; it makes him itch that he’d failed in his goal of turning to the Dark when he’d taken his father’s life. It makes him itch that he’d never quite shed those familial bonds no matter how much he tried to lie to himself. It makes him boil now that he’s once again suffocating with anger and fear, though now for entirely different reasons. Anger at the betrayal of one of his Knights. Fear at almost losing Rey. Fear that he could have lost her again and he would have been none the wiser as to why. Fear that he still might. So many failures. So many fears.

He takes in a deep breath and lifts his eyes, his gaze falling on the sockets of Vader’s helmet, empty and lifeless, and Kylo smiles.

Solace. Guidance.

“Grandfather,” he says, hoping his greeting will be welcomed. He removes his gloves and reverently touches warm fingertips to cold plastoid, feeling the grit of grime and soot melted into it, and not for the first time, he wonders how it got there. He’d never been given a straight answer about his grandfather, not by his mother, certainly never by his uncle, and Snoke seemed more interested in reminding Kylo of Vader’s failure than teaching him about the events that led up to said failure. It was a black blot on the legacy he’d been entrusted to carry, a secret that had died with the man who once wore the mask, forever unknown to Kylo Ren, master of the Knights of Ren.

That thought brings him back to why he’s here to begin with. Kylo removes his hand, letting it drop to his knee.

“Grandfather,” he repeats, but only silence greets him. He sighs, hanging his head again. Will he not receive an answer this time? Is he not worthy of at least that much? “One of my Knights has betrayed me.”

Once the admission is out, he can’t seem to stop. He speaks words of malcontent. Words of fear, and of fear of betrayal. If a single Knight had tried to, there would be nothing stopping the others, no matter their promises of fealty. When he looks up at the helmet again, he receives… something. He feels it there, a whisper of smoke, a silent touch. His grandfather. Would he be given answers now? Kylo reaches into the helmet, not with his hand, but with the Force, eager for anything that may be bestowed upon him. Still, he does so carefully, afraid to break the spell, to disrupt the frail bond there.

What he gets instead is not what he’d expected—
Good. She’s free of her block now. Soon. Soon, she’ll be yours.

Kylo frowns. What is this? He hadn’t said a word about Rey.

He stares at the helmet in front of him. He listens. It’s a whisper, barely there, echoes of words he’d heard so long ago. But it’s not aimed towards him. It’s not his grandfather talking. It’s not the calm, cool whisper that would lull him, make him feel safe, needed… this one is childish, needy, greedy.

Kylo holds in a breath. This is familiar, but… not… the words are not directed at him. But If not…

Kylo probes further still. Where he had been careless and hasty when looking into the minds of his Knights and Hux’s troops, here he exercises a level of patience he had only been asked to exercise under Luke’s tutelage, his uncle’s teachings swarming him uninvited: *the Force moves through us, it is us, and should be handled with care.* Kylo’s fingers tremble, lead forming in his stomach as it drops, but he forces his eyes to close nonetheless so he doesn’t have to look at his grandfather’s mask while trying to search into its essence. *Funny,* a thought floats in a dark corner of his awareness, I don’t even know what my grandfather looked like. He breathes in slowly, allowing his mind to enter a trance as he searches… there’s an awareness there. Not his awareness. Yet it is there, and the longer Kylo breathes and allows himself to open up, the more he sees… the wisp of smoke he had once told Rey to grab, the Force, floating from the helmet towards…

Towards him.

He follows it, careful not to touch it even as he trails it towards its source, a pinprick so faint in the vast darkness he nearly misses it. Yet he follows it relentlessly anyway, until the voice speaks again, gleeful and malicious.

*She’ll be yours to conquer the galaxy with.*

Not his thought.

A dissonance. A web-thin crack, a disparity between what Kylo had conveyed and what he had expected to hear. He'd expected his grandfather. This is clearly not him.

Kylo had never wanted to conquer the galaxy. He only wanted to restore peace. Why would he be told— Confusion floods him, and from somewhere else, a gentler voice… an old friend, the self-assured reminder in the back of his mind that his father’s words had always been true.

*Snoke is using you for your power.*

That feeling again, uncomfortable against his ribs. He listens closer.

He had never attempted this: reaching into the helmet. It had always been a one-sided interaction, Kylo would open himself to the Force and his grandfather would speak. Simple as that. But he senses something else there, something that reminds him a little of his bond to Rey, except… not. This is warped, black, hidden in the darkness, a single thread on a spider’s web. A link? A link to what?

The pain of realization is bone-white and pervasive. It is no longer his grandfather’s voice, but Snoke’s.

It had never been his grandfather’s words. It had never been—

Why had he not checked sooner?

Why is he even asking himself that question? He knows *why.* Because, somewhere deep inside him,
he had clung to the belief that this was his goal in life, and doesn’t the delusion of having his grandfather’s icon guide him make the goals that drive him all that much sweeter? Worse yet, he’d believed. He had searched the edges of the universe for this helmet, only to find it and latch onto it as his only hope moving forward, his driving force, his reminder of the bigger picture every time he endured torture or took a life.

He’d believed.

His hands shake as he pulls his awareness out from the helmet, out from whatever Force is anchored to it, waiting for him to open up for it time and time again in his life. He had been careful. So careful. It almost makes him laugh. He’d been so careful that he’s sure he wasn’t noticed. As careful as Kylo’s master himself. He should have known. Helmets don’t hold awarenesses. It may be a relic of the dark, but it had been nothing but a tool, a disguise much like his own, a disguise that was exploited. Kylo had once told Hux that Snoke had a weakness, and weren’t weaknesses beautiful things when they could be exploited.

His fingers tremble as he inspects the empty sockets, the open maw where a head had once been cradled. He touches the charred and melted plastic, feels once again the galactic dust that clings onto it even after all these years, old bolts welded together by the heat that melted the mask into its grotesque snarl, reality once again crushing him under its weight. It is nothing but a bucket of bolts, and he’d been nothing but a gullible fool.

A roar pierces the empty air like a knife. Vader’s helmet bounces off the opposite wall with a sickening crack where Kylo throws it, and there’s a new wound to add to the disfigured mask that makes a mockery of him.

A hiss of red plasma, a deep breath of air.

Kylo screams, screams like he’s never screamed, he screams until he feels his vocal cords beginning to shred, his saber meeting the shrine he had so carefully built to the dream of a man who had left him long ago, just as everyone else had. When he’s done hours later, there’s nothing left but smoke and rubble.

The horrible thing about weaknesses is that they can be exploited. That is, after all, what weaknesses are for.

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They find him on the floor, face streaked with tear tracks and his own blood from where his saber had singed him as Kylo had swung, torn, shredded without care, whether it be him or the space around him.

“Kylo!” comes a voice from somewhere far away.

Kylo stares at the helmet across the room. Or, really... the remnants of the helmet. It’s gone now, hacked to pieces still smoldering as they melt and twist, cool and blacken further. He can’t recognize the name over the sound of his own mental screaming as he further digs at his mind, nails digging into the skin of his hands while inside he claws at stone walls that refuse to give, stuck inside the same dungeon where he’d once shoved a young Ben Solo. Stuck with himself, and his father, and his mother, all looking at him silently with pity in their eyes. A sob wrenches through him when he once again hears the name called out.

He wants to look up. He wants so desperately to reach out to whoever calls him, even if it’s not his real name. Or is it?
Ben.

Ren.

Ben.

Ren.

They sound like one and the same now, yet simultaneously foreign. He wants to look up, but he’s paralyzed, having spent himself before crumbling.

“Kylo!” this time it’s clearer. He feels his body move, though it’s not him moving, but something moving him. His chin is forcefully tilted, and when his vision stops blurring, different colors register. Hazel flecked with gold. Icy blue. Kylo tries to open his mouth but nothing comes out but a croak, a half-choked sound of despair that makes no sense to his ears.

“Ren,” the name comes from the face the icy blue eyes belong to. He blinks.

Ren? So he’s Ren?

Yes. He’s Ren. Not Ben.

The little boy with jet black hair and bright, sad brown eyes takes a step back inside the dungeon, face contorting with pain, and Kylo — No, Ben — turns around and tries to call out. Don’t go. Not yet.


Fitting, if he does go insane. He’s not sure who he’s supposed to be right now, when the only thing he had left had been wrenched from him. Fitting that it would be by his own hand. He’d set an exemplary record of forever ruining things for himself all his life. Wasn’t it his fault that he’d opened himself to be used, after all?

His eyes blur again, losing what little focus he’d gained.

“Kylo?” a much gentler voice. Light and bell-like. He recognizes that one. His vision sharpens slightly, but despite his slack jaw and slightly parted lips, nothing comes out but another gurgled cry.

When was the last time he’d cried like this?

Ah. Yes.

He’d been young. So young. He remembers clinging onto a stuffed toy, waiting for word that his parents would come save him. It had been a political abduction, but in the hours he’d spent in that cramped little compartment under the floor with nothing to keep him company but a stuffed animal and darkness, a voice had spoken to him. Had told him to stop crying. Only boys who were weak cried. Ben Solo was weak.

He’d stopped crying.

That voice…

Kylo’s vision whites out again as everything loses focus. He’d also stopped talking back then, until his mother and father could do nothing more than watch, finally sending him off to Luke’s when they could no longer figure out a way to fix him.
The Ben Solo in his dungeon takes a step closer to him again, reaching out a hand slowly, and Kylo recoils, his parents watching him silently, judging and pitying. He looks at Han Solo’s face and his chest squeezes again.

There’s no more turning back.

There’s no way out.

Somewhere in the murky waters of his awareness, he hears Rey’s voice again. That’s right, Rey. Han Solo had ultimately brought them together.

“BEN!”

The shout finally snaps him back. It’s Rey. He blinks rapidly, jerking back when he realizes she’s crouching in front of him, hands on his face, looking at him with so much confusion and pain in her eyes he wants to hide. He wants to hide from her, and from Hux — That’s right, Hux. How could he forget those icy blue eyes? — Hux watching him with brows knitted together. Rey’s hands fall to her lap and her frown deepens.

“What happened here?” Hux asks finally. Rey cuts him off, once again touching Kylo’s face.

“Come back to us,” she whispers.

Rey knows, and he knows that she does because from the darkness inside his stony dungeon there’s a light, bright and warm, and when he focuses on it the stones start to crumble away while Rey tries to wrap him in it. She knows. She’s probably seen it all.

_I have_, she replies, swallowing rapidly as her eyes flood with tears. _Come back to us._

Hux crouches next to Rey, slowly reaching out and dipping his fingertips gingerly under the hair falling into Kylo’s face, moving it away from his eyes with the gentlest of touches.

“Kylo?” Hux asks.

He swallows rapidly. He’s not… Kylo, now…? Is he? Does he have the right to be? Did he make that choice on its own, or was it influenced? There are too many names and they all feel foreign. He jerks away instead, putting distance between them. He doesn’t want them to see him like this. He doesn’t want for them to see him broken, to see him useless. Would they think him useless if they learned the depths of his thoughts right now? He slams his side of the bond shut just in case, Rey’s face twisting with pain, but she doesn’t push him farther.

If they learn how useless he is, they might leave him. And then what would he have? He gave up his life, his father, his mother… thinking of his mother hurts. Thinking of his father is like having his nervous system stabbed repeatedly. If they learn that he’s worthless, then he’d really be alone.

“Leave,” he croaks out at the man and woman crouched in front of him. “Now.”

He doesn’t deserve them, either. They’re strong where he is not. They know who they are and what they want. He doesn’t even know whether he has a right to be. After all, the foundation of his hopes and dreams, the rock he’d anchored himself to for years, had turned out to be a lie; metal and plastoid and Snoke, controlling him from afar. So many times. He’d reached out to that helmet so many times, been reminded of his grandfather’s failures so many times. Been told he needed to right that legacy so many times.

His grandfather’s failures… what had they been again?
Kyle Ren had once thought he still had free will.

It is Hux who finally breaks the silence, “We’re not going anywhere.”

Silence.

“Kylo?” Rey asks. “Ben?”

“Don’t call me that,” he finally manages. He’s not sure which one he’s disagreeing to. “Go away.”

“No,” Hux and Rey respond in unison. He sags.

The last vestiges of his dungeon disappear, taking with it Ben’s and Leia’s and Han’s sad eyes, and his vision finally clears.

He is Kylo.

Rey reaches over and grabs one of his hands, trying to tug him up, and when the bulk of his weight refuses to shift Hux quietly moves in and pulls Kylo’s arm over the heavy wool of his general’s coat. It takes some work, and a lot of muscle, but finally they get him upright. Kylo allows himself to be led — dragged, more like — out of the now destroyed room, the door closing on the wreckage behind them as Rey and Hux maneuver him to his bed. When he’s finally deposited on the edge and he slumps into his seat, Hux purses his lips.

“Now, please tell me what happened.”

He doesn’t answer. Rey answers for him instead.

“It was Snoke.”

Hux frowns, turning to look at Rey before his left eye twitches and understanding dawns on him. The general had always been quick on the uptake. When the same icy blue eyes land on him, they are… soft… and warm… and Kylo almost breaks because he finds pity there.

He doesn’t want their pity. He doesn’t want their pity!

“Go. Away.” He repeats again, harder this time, his voice shredded.

“We’re not leaving,” Rey replies, walking forward until she stands between his knees. She looks back at Hux, standing two steps aside, and Hux’s expression relaxes as he, too, steps in behind Rey. What happens next is a bit of a blur to Kylo, his eyes too damp to remember the details, the crisp edges, but he’ll remember nonetheless.

Hux walks behind Rey, slotting his arms through hers at her waist level and resting his chin on Rey’s shoulder, his hands reaching out, threading past Kylo’s neck with a silken touch and into Kylo’s hair, pulling him close. Rey’s arms wrap around Kylo’s shoulders, helping Hux pull him closer until his face buries into her abdomen, and when they hug him close Kylo finally breaks. His massive arms come up to wrap around Hux, successfully caging both Rey and the General between his knees and in his arms as he clings to them and sobs.

Kylo allows himself to cry like a child, like the little child that had been told that boys who cried were weak, because he is weak, and what’s the point of hiding it now? He sobs and lets his side of the bond open up again because he’s too tired to maintain the shield, and he hates himself all the more because this is not who he was supposed to be. He was supposed to be strong, detached, unfeeling. He was supposed to weather the worst the universe could throw at him, walk through hell
and come out smiling. But he is weak, and the two people in his arms haven’t given up on him, so he cries.

Rey lets out soft, soothing noises as she pets his hair and rubs his back, Hux’s strong hands holding him upright, and when Kylo finally lets his arms fall from the embrace, he falls back on the bed and stares at the ceiling.

It takes a moment to register when he feels a pull on his shoes. His eyes fly open and Kylo sits up on his elbows, his eyes landing on Hux, who’s kneeling on the floor, his fingers swiftly and deftly undoing the laces of Kylo’s boot. The General doesn’t look up at him, and Rey only gives him a tiny smile as she reaches towards the zipper of his tunic. Kylo panics. His hand grabs at her wrist, stopping her mid-motion. He can’t have this.

He doesn’t deserve them. They would leave him one day, and he can’t start deepening his attachments. Rey purses her lips tightly, shoving his hand off and once again moving towards the zipper.

We’re not leaving you, she sternly tells him over their bond. Hux finally looks up, having undone Kylo’s second boot. The man has an uncanny ability of being able to tell when Rey and Kylo speak through the bond.

“What?” He asks, cocking an eyebrow.

“He seems to have gotten this idea in his head that we don’t need him, and that we’ll go away because of that,” she replies through a frown and pursed lips. Hux’s brows rise even further, then he’s standing, moving around Rey to look Kylo fully in the eye.

“Whatever gave you that idea?” Hux asks him, but Kylo can’t manage to say a word. Saying it out loud would only cement it as truth. Hux sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Whatever nonsense you’ve gotten into your head, Ren, dismiss it right now. We will get him back for this.”

It occurs to Kylo that he mostly hasn’t said a single word at all other than ‘go away’ to these two this whole time, so he licks his lips, swallowing to try to wet his throat before speaking, then gathers his courage.

“Why?”

Why stay? Why do anything? Why help him when, for decades, he hadn’t been able to help himself? He, who’s supposed to be stronger than both of them. Why let the deadweight stick around? He knows he’s spiraling into a pit of self loathing he can hardly come out of, he’d known it the second he took his saber to the helmet, but he can’t really stop himself. He’d always been a roughly constructed structure made out of layered matchsticks and glue, painted to look like he was made of solid rock. Hux tries to strip those layers now as he gives him one piercing look, then lets out a minuscule sigh.

“Are you really going to make me say it out loud?” Hux asks, and Rey takes advantage of the distraction to finish undoing the zipper of Kylo’s robes, tiny, slender hands making quick work of it as she pushes it open and off his chest. Not that he really notices. Kylo’s eyes are glued on Hux’s face, and he’s holding his breath while he waits expectantly.

Hux finally shakes his head, the mattress dipping as he leans forward on one knee, grabbing Kylo’s chin to keep him in place.

“Stupid man,” the General murmurs, but the words are warm as they caress Kylo’s cheeks, Hux’s...
breath closing in. The whole thing happens quickly, yet so slowly, and all Kylo feels is electricity when Hux finally lets his lips close the gap and meet his. His veins receive a shock at how warm Hux’s lips are, how full and soft they feel, and Kylo’s lids flutter closed of their own accord to stop the newly-formed dampness wetting his lashes from turning into tears.

Pathetic. He’s so pathetic, crying because of a kiss.

Hux kisses him like he’s made of glass, and perhaps right now he is, his thumb gently caressing Kylo’s chin. Kylo sags into himself, a sob squeezing his lungs that he refuses to let loose as he allows himself be kissed, and when Hux pulls away with a tiny smile, it takes all Kylo has to hold onto that sob. Hux leans into his ear.

“We love you, you fool,” Hux whispers, as if saying it too loudly would shatter the pre-arranged order of the universe. “Or had you really not noticed? I love you. She loves you. We’re not going anywhere.”

Kylo clings to those words, closing his eyes and finally leaning forward, placing his lips on Hux’s while trying to believe what he just heard with all his might. He’s fully aware that neither he nor the two people before him really understand the concept of love, but somehow they had all, in their own ways, tried to forge their own definition of the word. Perhaps they would finally find out together. Hux allows Kylo to kiss him, kissing him back and making his head swim. He had promised Hux that they would be together, once, when they were brave enough. Funny that it would be Hux who would summon his bravery first. The roles had reversed.

Rey steps back and gifts them both a tiny smile, kind and pleased, as she looks between them.

— Kylo starts, only to be cut off when she dips in and replaces Hux, kissing him hesitantly at first, yet...gently, softly, drawing him out of the pit of hell he’d dug for himself. Hux’s fingers take where Rey left off, tugging Kylo’s shirt from his trousers, and the rest of the moment goes just as quietly. Kylo starts to wonder if their plan had been to distract him with kisses all along in order to get him to do as they wished, to try and get him to rest, but then Hux slowly removes his great coat and Kylo’s head snaps up fast enough to leave him dizzy.

The General hangs the coat from a peg on the wall, then comes back and slowly works the buttons of his jacket, head bowed as he goes about undoing it with dexterous fingers. Then Hux looks at Rey with a small frown, and Rey smiles, some sort of silent understanding passing between them. Kylo steals a glance at Rey, who leans forward and places a gentle kiss on his forehead with a hum, slowly pushing him back into the bed until he’s sitting with his naked back against the headboard. Rey crawls up after him, sitting back on her shins to watch him, her hands held loosely on her lap as she gives him a tiny smile. She looks... meek, hopeful, a little scared, but determined. Kylo watches her stealing glances at Hux, who has undressed to his small clothes… but underneath all that, he can feel their bond glowing. It’s warm, inviting, just like the woman before him.

Hux climbs up behind Rey, his knees cradling her hips as he places his hands on her shoulders, pulling her against his chest. She looks up at Hux and a silent question passes between them once again. Hux waits for a hint from her, and when she smiles Hux’s lips curl up. The two have developed some sort of non-verbal language Kylo can only marvel at. Long, slender fingers move to caress her cheek gently before the General looks at Kylo, daring him to keep his eyes on them. So Kylo does.

He watches Hux slowly wrap his arms around Rey, holding her left arm gently in front of her as he begins to undo Rey’s arm wraps, unwinding it. Then comes the next arm as Hux dips his head in and gently kisses the tip of Rey’s ear, and Rey leans into it, her eyes never leaving Kylo’s face. She’s looking for something, he knows. She’s looking for any sign that this is not okay, that he is not okay,
and he can feel her teetering on an edge, so he opens the bond to her, pulls her closer in it, and revels in all that it gives in return.

*You don’t have to do this,* he reassures her, because he knows she’s doing it for him; there is a nervousness floating through her to him, but when he tries to examine it, dipping into her mind, he finds that she’s nervous about *his* reaction, not about what they’re doing—

*I’m doing this for us. I want this for us,* she corrects him, sighing when Hux lowers his lips to her neck. *Don’t you?*

His eyes move to Hux only to find him looking straight back, and Kylo’s chest tightens. Hux carefully removes Rey’s clothes piece by piece, adoringly peppering her with soft touches and kisses as he goes, unwrapping a present for Kylo to see until she’s just as naked as Hux himself. He’s offering, Kylo realizes. *They’re* offering. *They’re* offering comfort. *They’re* offering themselves to him, proof that they are his, and his alone, and they intend to go nowhere. Rey leans forward, grabbing Kylo’s hand and cradling it between her much smaller ones, pulling at it until it rests against the valley of her breasts, running her thumb over the web connecting his thumb to pointer finger, waiting, ever waiting. He closes his eyes and breathes in deeply, so very close to breaking point. He has never been one to control himself well, much less during emotional turmoil.

He opens his eyes and looks at them before him.

He’ll be Kylo. He’ll be Ben. He’ll be anyone they want him to be, if only they’ll stay by his side. He leans forward and finally, finally lets his lips find Rey’s, his fingers moving to her waist, hands digging into the soft velvety skin that hides toned muscle underneath; he nips at her lower lip, needy, desperate. He hadn’t imagined in his wildest dreams that this is how it would come to pass. Hux lets out a satisfied hum, lowering his head again, slotting his lips into the crook of Rey’s neck, one hand gently caressing Rey’s stomach, the other trailing up Kylo’s forearm until his thumb presses into his collarbone, then up, past his fluttering pulse, and back down. Rey sighs against Kylo’s mouth when his hand slowly teases down—towards her center—and Kylo could cry. This is the most physical contact he’s had with any one person in years, much less two people. Sure, he’s not unfamiliar with carnal pleasures, but intimacy… now that, that is another matter entirely—

His eyes open when that thought skitters past; he hesitates, inching away from her lips. Hux pulls back, feeling Kylo’s muscles tensing against his touch, looking between them.

“I have done this before,” she murmurs nervously after snatching the worrying thought from the surface, then grins, her cheeks turning a bright shade of red that the dim lighting of his room can barely conceal even as she refuses to shy away. “Though I can’t say it’s been this sort of… arrangement.”

Hux lets out a tiny huff of air and Kylo looks at him, then chuckles. An *arrangement* is an understatement. Kylo, Rey and Hux would be the least expected *arrangement* anyone could ever think of, yet here they are, slowly losing themselves, entwining together in a dizzying, intoxicating sequence of kisses and touches until it becomes hard to tell whose touch is whose in the darkness.

Rey plants a soft, chaste kiss on Kylo’s lips as a token of reassurance, then turns her head and does the same to Hux. He’s sure she must have her reservations, and he can hardly guess at Hux’s thoughts, but he does not dare pry. He’ll take anything they are willing to give. Instead he leans forward, moving his hand to cup Hux’s cheek and pulling him forward over Rey’s shoulder. He had promised the General would be his, someday, when he was brave enough. He’d be brave enough now.

Kylo kisses Hux deeply, fervently, forgetting the foggy pain that clouds him when Hux parts his lips
and seeks out his tongue, forgetting about everything when Rey, caged between them dips her head slightly and suckles at a tender spot on Kylo’s neck, every caress shared between them soothing and warm and feeling of home. He forgets about the world, letting it fall away except for them, feeling Hux’s nails grazing his ribs and Rey’s petite hands pressed against his chest, kissing his General and caressing the apex of Rey’s thighs until she lets out a soft little moan that sets his nerves on fire.

Kylo clings onto them like a lifeline, whining when Rey finally pushes him away gently, and when he’s about to complain, Hux silences him by grabbing his chin and making him pay attention. So he moves back, once again sitting with his back against the headboard as Rey licks her lips nervously, her fingers on the elastic band of his underwear.

“Lift your hips,” Hux orders, ever the commander.

Kylo obeys quickly and quietly, lifting his hips long enough for Rey to pull down his underwear all the way to his knees. Then she moves back, allowing him to kick them off completely, Hux making quick work of removing Rey’s underwear, thumbs hooking under on both sides of her hips and moving them down. She wiggles out of them with a little bit of help, her hands pressing into Kylo’s thighs to stabilize herself while Hux pries them out of the tangle of her legs, tossing them carelessly over the side.

“Good girl,” Hux murmurs to Rey, kissing down her spine until she shivers, and Kylo is treated to the sight of her breasts quivering with the motion. His mouth runs dry, eager to dip in and devour.

Instinctively, he reaches out, cupping her breasts with his massive hands and kneading them. Rey’s lashes flutter, and she lets out a tiny sigh bordering on a hard breath, sitting up to allow him better access. Behind her, Hux dips back in again to kiss Rey’s shoulders and anywhere else he can reach, the General’s hands busy as one dips down Rey’s body, quick to find a warm wetness he plans to thoroughly work further, his other hand on Kylo’s chest, tweaking and caressing a quickly hardening nipple.

Then Hux looks up again, his voice managing to be both husky and authoritative, “sit back and touch yourself.”

Kylo blinks slowly, the command searing through his veins and jolting him with a need he didn’t know had been there all along. He had teased Hux about dominating him for so long, and yet here he is, taking orders like a well trained puppy. He sits back, grabbing his half hard cock in his hand and using the tip of his thumb to collect the bit of precum at the head, slicking himself as he gives languorous strokes up and down his shaft, wondering what Hux is playing at.

“Good,” Hux croons, a smile spreading on his face, “now watch. Isn’t she beautiful?” Hux murmurs, one hand moving to grab one of Rey’s pert breasts, tweaking and kneading just as he’d done to Kylo, the other hand slowly moving as Hux slides his fingers between Rey’s folds until she’s panting against the General’s chest. Her nails dig into Kylo’s thighs. It makes him stroke himself a little faster, squeeze a little harder.

“She is,” he murmurs, surprised when the words come with a small hitch.

Hux is relentless, touching Rey until her chest is rising and falling sharply, eyes half closed and head resting against the crook of Hux’s shoulder, who hasn’t bothered to touch himself once. He continues slipping his fingers into her folds, in and out, teasing her wide and open, toying with her and making her whine into the cold room air until the sounds of her wet arousal sloshing against Hux’s fingers reach Kylo’s ears. It’s slow, and torturous, and Kylo’s not even sure he’s going to last through this if he’s forced to watch these two touch each other, so he grinds his teeth and tries to even out his breath even as he throbs in his hand, unsure of whether he should beg or cry or both. A
small whine escapes his lips, unbidden, yet deep and needy, and that is what finally makes Hux relent on Rey.

The General licks Rey’s earlobe, tugging on it and nipping until her eyes snap open, and then he pulls away and smiles.

“You did good, little one,” he murmurs, taking his soaked fingers into his mouth and hollowing his cheeks, then letting them fall out with a nearly inaudible pop before Hux places his hands on Rey’s hips and urges her forward.

Ah, but he was readying her for him, Kylo thinks. Rey moves up, giving Hux a pouty look because he stopped, the blush on her cheeks high, and Hux smiles at her like an indulging parent as he, too, moves in closer, forcing her to straddle Kylo’s lap or run out of space. Kylo inhales sharply, his muscles tensing on instinct as his hand stills, and when Rey finally places her hands on his shoulder for support, his whole body quivers.

They have been so quiet until now, just as they have always been in all things, mutual understanding passing between them in the silence. It passes through them now. There is no going back from this. Kylo would panic, he would panic and run if his very being didn’t scream at him that he wants this. He might regret this tomorrow, they all might, but for now, he wants. He needs. Kylo places his hands on Rey’s hips, guiding her above him, and watches slowly as she grabs him and positions herself, sinking onto him until he’s enveloped in her slick, velvety heat to the hilt. His head falls forward with a groan, falling on her chest, and he hears Hux murmur words of appreciation for Rey as the General positions himself behind her and deftly begins rocking her on Kylo with well applied pressure on her hips.

Kylo groans, his muscles aching from the effort of sitting still. It’s too much. It’s too much and not enough all at the same time, and the hesitant coiling heat inside of him quickly unspools and spreads, reaching all the way to his fingertips, to his toes, as Rey rides him. Soon his groans are joined by Rey’s whines and moans over the sound of Hux’s praises, and when she starts clenching and unclenching on him Kylo knows he’s about to lose his damn mind. Forget about comfort. Though there is that part of him that wants to grind into her, to let himself feel, to dig himself out from the darkness, his body quickly starts overriding sense and feeling with a primal need to fuck. He wraps his arms around Rey’s waist to stabilize himself, nails digging into her as he angles his hips and thrusts, and oh, but it feels so wonderful.

Hux pulls Rey up slightly, letting Kylo keep her in place as he instead moves to circle her clit, dragging a high pitched gasp out of her and a breathy curse as Hux applies pressure and Kylo bucks his hips upwards, picking up the pace and cursing into her skin.

He wants to fuck. He wants to ravish. He wants to lose himself in Rey, then in Hux, and fuck them both until they split apart and Kylo himself loses consciousness, then he can forget about everything.

He feels all traces of rational thought start to slip away from him, morphing until he is more beast than man as he rams into Rey. He should worry about hurting her, but any time he tries to slow down Rey digs her nails into his shoulders, urging him to pick up the pace, to pound her faster, the sound of skin slapping against skin driving him wild.

So he lets go, he tilts his head to look up at her, and Rey’s head is thrown back onto Hux’s shoulder. Hux watches him closely, eyes burning, sharp shards of glass as the General’s nostrils flare, his own
unattended-to erection grinding into Rey’s ass with every one of Kylo’s thrusts, but the feral smile Hux gives him only drives him further.

“Come on, little one,” Hux whispers into Rey’s ear, never once taking his eyes off Kylo’s face, “make him beg.”

Rey lets out a low hiss, her eyes opening at the command as she pushes Kylo back down, bottoming out on him and pinning him with her thighs until Kylo lets out a soft little whine, and both Rey and Hux smile. Now that she knows exactly how Kylo likes it, has been taught by Hux’s careful guiding hand how to ride him, she grabs the reins and presses him into the headboard, gyrating her hips until Kylo’s vision starts to blur and his muscles go lax, watching as she rides him for everything he’s worth with a little bit of Hux’s help in stabilizing her, her moans rising, rising, until the air is filled with Rey’s desire.

She rocks and uses him for her pleasure until her body clenches around him, slick with her arousal, and Kylo can’t remember anymore why he’d cried earlier but he wants to cry again. He leans forward and grabs her waist again, unable to contain himself as he pounds into her, his teeth finding the soft skin of her shoulder and biting down to keep from sobbing, and maker he wants to cum so bad.

“Please,” he begs into Rey’s neck, unable to keep the shudder out of the word as his whole body shakes with pent up need. Rey starts whispering, cursing, sometimes in languages he doesn’t even understand, her body damp against him with the sheen of sweat they have both worked up as Rey grinds down on his him and her inner walls tighten, “Please cum for me, sweetling. Please.”

Perhaps it’s the endearment that pushes her over the edge. She tightens on him until it’s almost painful, letting out a long string of curses as she milks him and rides out her orgasm, her chest heaving from exertion and her thighs quivering from exhaustion, and when she finally rolls her hips one last time Kylo takes over the pace, thrusting and fucking into her until he shatters inside of her, snarling like an animal into her skin as he pounds as deep as he can, pushing all of his cum into her body, wanting to mark her as his permanently, to stay inside of her and drown there.

He sags into her, completely spent, aware of Hux watching them as Kylo and Rey come down from their high, and when he looks up he sees with startling clarity that they’re not done, not if the look on Hux’s face is any indication. Hux leans in and claims Kylo’s lips, hungrily demanding entrance and claiming his tongue, exploring as he sees fit. There’s none of the gentle kissing of a half hour ago, and Kylo understands that where Rey was to provide comfort, Hux wants to provide him with more. To mark that Kylo is theirs, theirs and theirs alone. When Hux pulls back, both their lips swollen and glistening, the General hums into his mouth.

“Well done, pet,” Hux praises, sending a shiver down Kylo’s spine. So, the General had had a nickname for him after all. “Now that you’ve satisfied our little one, it’s time you satisfy me.”

Oh, but that shiver would never work itself out of his spine, and he gasps when he feels as Hux takes Rey’s and Kylo’s cum combined and slides it down towards Kylo’s ass, his body twitching at the sensation. Without thinking Kylo’s hand reaches out to the small bedside table, pulling open the drawer and taking out a small bottle of lubricant that he quickly drops into Hux’s free hand. Hux looks at him with raised brows and an all-knowing smirk on his face.

“Hmmm,” Hux hums, “you’ll satisfy me just fine, I see.” Hux teases and Kylo swallows, but he can’t deny he’s looking forward to it. This is Hux taking care of him, and though next time — next time? Would there be a next time? — Kylo promises to himself he will be the one claiming Hux, he lets Rey sit up and slides his body down as Hux slicks two fingers and slowly works them into Kylo one by one.
When Rey tries to move off them both, Kylo pulls her by the hips.

“Wait—“ she tries to complain, no doubt exhausted, but Kylo only gives her a soft smile.

“Let me taste you,” he asks, watching as a visible shiver runs up and down her arms. She leans down and gently kisses him, and Kylo hooks his arm around her thigh and pulls her until she turns around, facing Hux, then yanks her down until she’s sitting on his face. God, she tastes wonderful. He can taste himself on her but he hardly cares, immediately digging his mouth into her with enthusiasm. Rey jumps, letting out a squeal that she muffles with one hand.

Hux isn’t having any of it, though. He immediately pulls her hand away from her mouth, leaning forward and finally kissing her the way he’d wanted to all night, devouring his little one as he scissors and fucks his fingers inside Kylo’s tight asshole, working him until he’s wide open while simultaneously exploring Rey’s mouth, suckling on her tongue and nipping on her lips, his hand tugging on her braid as he forces her to open up deeper, to moan into the open air as Kylo devours her below.

“Good,” Hux whispers into Rey, “Good, darling. Sing for us. Nobody else can hear you here. Be as loud as you want.”

Kylo groans his agreement as he pushes his tongue past her folds, searching for her clit, desperate to make her cum all over again, this time in his mouth, nearly screaming with frustration when he feels Hux remove his fingers, and he can’t quite think coherently when those fingers are replaced by Hux easing his hips forward.

Where Kylo has length going for him, Hux has girth, and as Hux starts slowly working himself into Kylo’s now slicked, loose entrance, Kylo yanks Rey down on his face harder in order to muffle the noises coming out of him, though they can still be heard over Rey’s own as she grinds and twists her hips into him, chasing a second, quickly building orgasm. Hux is gentle, at first. He slides in slowly, his only vocal response that of a slow, drawn out hiss as Kylo sucks him in, his body so desperate to show his own eagerness when Hux pushes Kylo’s legs up and apart, and Kylo can’t think straight when Rey’s hand wraps around him as she leans forward to kiss Hux, Hux’s hips drawing back slowly before snapping in with a hard shove.

Hux does this a couple more times before setting a punishing pace, and if Kylo thought he was about to lose his mind before, he’s certain there’s nothing left of it now as Rey’s delicate hand jerks him off while Hux rams into him over and over and over, Kylo’s vision warping and whiting out as he attempts to make Rey come again.

It won’t take him long. Maker, it won’t take him long. He’s going to cum all over them and if he wanted proof that he’s at their mercy, this is it. His muscles tighten and Hux hisses again.

“Cum for me,” Hux demands, his voice broken and his breath coming in sharp gasps as his hips snap, again and again, into Kylo relentlessly. “Come, little soldier, and prove to me that you fucking love this.”

He tries to respond, but Rey grinds herself into his mouth harder until he can barely bring in air, her eyes screwed tight as she stutters on his name.

“K-Kylo, please.”

He’s not sure if she’s begging for his benefit or hers, but she’s close, so close, clenching on his tongue as she rides him, so Kylo moves a hand up and shoves two fingers into her, pumping her in tandem with Hux pumping into him, while sucking on her clit. It’s all she needs. Rey convulses
above him, squeezing him in her tiny hand so hard Kylo’s vision blurs again. Two sharp shoves of Hux’s hips have him cumming a second time, and this time whatever gurgles escape his mouth make no sense to his ears, but he lets them out anyway while his mind screams. He clenches around Hux, feeling full and exhausted and like his nerve endings are on fire. The General finally lets out a very uncharacteristic curse as he, too, spills himself into Kylo until he’s spent.

Hux pulls himself out to avoid collapsing on top of Rey, who’s curled herself over Kylo’s body, jerking away from his mouth as her body spasms, then she finally falls over on the other side of him, and there they lie, naked and exhausted and covered in cum and sweat, trying to suck in air like the ship didn’t have a big enough oxygen supply.

Kylo finally breaks.

He cries again, like a simpering child, because he has nothing else left in him to give other than tears. Kylo throws his arm over his eyes as the tears slip out silently, and Maker but he’s pathetic, crying after having the most mind-blowing sex he can remember; but he’s tired, and the bodies of his lovers on either side of him feel good as they both move to tangle their legs with his, Rey leaving tiny kisses on his chest and Hux placing gentle ones atop his head without asking anything else of him. They offer comfort in any way they can, and Kylo wonders if perhaps he’s not entirely damned, if, perhaps, in a past life, he did even a tiny amount of good, because he certainly doesn’t deserve these two people beside him, but here they are nonetheless.

With that thought in mind, Kylo finally gives in to aching bones and a tired mind, succumbing to sleep.

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Hux opens his eyes at the sounds of rustling sheets. They had all fallen asleep in Kylo’s bed, Rey not long after Kylo, leaving Hux to watch his two lovers for a few minutes before he, too, had to give in to the siren call of rest. He turns his head slowly, looking over Kylo’s head, the massive man having turned his face and buried it into the crook of Hux’s neck earlier in the night. He watches now as Rey quietly slips out of bed, and it’s light enough that he can see her movements though not entirely clearly, yet dark enough that she can’t see his eyes half opened as she throws on her clothes quickly and tries to stealthily leave the room.

Hux frowns, wondering where she’s going at this time of the night, his eyes falling on the clock before he once again looks at Kylo. He could hardly fall asleep now, knowing she’d left without warning either of them. So Hux stares at the ceiling and waits out the minutes, listening to the tick-tock of the clock while drumming his fingers on his stomach and remembering the events of hours ago.

He doesn’t regret a single thing. He’d enjoyed himself. Thoroughly. But he wonders if Rey had regretted it, finally working up the courage to leave the bed in a hasty retreat. His insides churn with concern at the idea. He’d been the one to initiate it, after all. He’d seen Kylo, breaking to pieces before him, and could think of no other way to reassure his lover that he and Rey would not be deserting him other than to prove, once and for all, that they were willing to give him more than words. In the world of Brendol Hux, words were a dime a dozen but promises bound by action were few, and precious, and had Rey not wanted to participate, Hux would have still gone on without her. He’s glad she had decided to stay, however. His body tries to valiantly rise up to the occasion again when he thinks about her naked body pressed up against his. He hadn’t had a chance to play with her, to feel her, touch her, make her his— no, this night had been all about Kylo… but he would soon. If she let him, that is. If she didn’t absolutely regret everything that’s happened.

Just as he’s finishing that thought, the door opens. Hux looks at the clock again. Fifteen minutes have
passed. His eyes narrow slightly, wondering what she’d gone to do for fifteen minutes — it’s not like Ren’s rooms didn’t have a refresher, if she needed to clean herself up — but he stays silent nonetheless as she approaches the bed, watching her strip herself of all her clothes once more and sneak into bed silently.

_Hmm,_ he thinks, but in his exhaustion, it’s all he can manage to think.

Rey curls herself up into Kylo’s side, snuggling the giant and quickly leaning to place a soft kiss on Hux’s arm, the one cradling Kylo, and Hux finally allows himself to let out a small sleepy sound. This had all been for Kylo. Broken man. Beautiful man.

Hux could worry about Rey leaving the bed tomorrow. He could worry about Snoke tomorrow. He could worry about war tomorrow. For now he was needed _here._ In the morning they would formulate a plan, as they always do, but for now, Hux closes his eyes again and allows sleep to claim him, his fingers gently carding through Kylo’s hair.

Chapter End Notes

Merry belated Christmas :)

A GAZILLION THANKS TO MY BEAUTIFUL BETA EjBlakIt (Darth-Ej @ _tumblr_) who beta’d 10k words in a single evening. She’s a motherfucking champion. Also the most wonderful friend and beta anybody could ever ask for.
Chapter Summary

The day of the trial has arrived.

Chapter Notes

And we're back!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She wakes to the ticking of the clock. The night had been long, her sleep peaceful, and Rey’s eyes finally open to take in Kylo Ren’s face. Or… is it Ben now? She can’t tell anymore. All she can tell is that her head’s nestled atop his bicep, her hips are pinned to the bed by a strong arm, and there’s nothing else to disturb the quiet but the sound of his breathing. Rey’s lashes flutter for a moment, still heavy with sleep. She forces herself to blink a few times, to disperse the fogginess trying to drag her back into relaxing, into sleeping, and uses the moment to study the man she’s pressed up against.

It hadn’t been all that long ago that Rey had seen his face for the first time, unmarred by the scar now crossing it from eyebrow to collarbone. She’d thought it beautiful then, and young. So very young, which had been a funny thing to think considering she’s far younger. But she’d thought it beautiful then. She finds that she still thinks him beautiful now, made more so by his lax expression. There isn’t tension in his jaw, or a stern downturn to his lips. There isn’t a perpetual frown there, just his face at its most peaceful and vulnerable. Rey smiles, chewing on her lower lip.

She’s fully aware that she’d jumped the gun last night, choosing to ride the twin waves of desire and emotion she’d received from both Hux and Kylo, barely stopping to think about whether she had rushed into it because all she could feel from Kylo had been pain and a crushing distrust. Not a distrust in her, or in Hux, but distrust nonetheless. Distrust he’d aimed at himself, thinking that she’d find him weak for it, that she’d leave, and her heart had shattered. How many times had she thought the same thing about herself on Jakku? Aimed her self loathing at herself, blamed herself for being left behind? She couldn’t stop herself then. She’d wanted to envelop Kylo in a safe cocoon and keep him there permanently, having seen herself in him, a broken child who grew up and stitched himself together in the best way he knew how. One who’d survived a monster puppeteer pulling the strings from the shadows, though certainly not unscathed. Kylo Ren had a lot to make up for, a hard road uphill towards atonement, but last night had been the first step.

Things would get complicated now, she knows. It had driven her to act in the middle of the night, but she can’t regret it. Not when she gets to look at this man and wonder what he could have been, what he might yet be.

Then Kylo speaks.

“Stop thinking so loudly,” he murmurs, cracking an eye open to look at her. Rey startles, a flush crawling up her skin at having been caught unaware. She’d been too deep in her own thoughts.
“Ah—” she begins, but is stalled by Kylo’s hand as it gently crawls up her arm, the heavy, warm weight of it reassuring when he cups her cheek. “How long have you been awake?”

Kylo — Ben? — smiles, a soft gentle smile meant for her. It disappears too quickly.

“Since you woke up,” he admits. “Before that, even. Hux wants you on the bridge.”

Rey frowns. “He does?”

So Kylo — Ben? — had already been up and about. He sighs.

“Kylo,” he says, having sensed her hesitation. His face twists with barely contained pain, his emotions held in an asphyxiating grip. “Here, I am Kylo. I do not know how to be anybody else,” then he leans in and gently brushes his lips against hers. “Though you may call me what you wish when we’re alone.”

Rey’s lashes flutter, her mind’s eye returning to a fairly heated fight in the training room when she’d called him by his given name. Then just last night… Rey closes her eyes, refusing to think on it, on what had changed, despite her inability to contain the sudden bloom of hope inside of her bearing Leia Organa’s face. Kylo stiffens, then relaxes, consciously forcing himself to stillness.

She licks her lips anxiously, searching his face. “Are you okay?”

He’s silent for a few moments as he unflinchingly stares back, allowing her the time to search him, to see him. Her eyes land on the scar she’d given him, as familiar now to her as the scars she bore from years past. Rey traces it and watches him swallow, priming his vocal chords for the answer he must give. It is a brave answer, but a lie nonetheless.

“I will be.” He says. “There’s no longer any room for breakdowns.”

His golden brown eyes darken, his face morphing from that open, young face she’d only just been considering minutes ago to the one he wears like a second mask, jaw clicking, muscles tensing, brows growing closer and downward in the beginnings of a hard frown. Now he is Kylo Ren, and today there’s a traitor to catch. That reminds her of his previous message. Hux is waiting for her.

She makes to move, pushing the blankets away from her and sitting up. Before she can swing her legs out of bed, however, Kylo stills her with a touch to her wrist, and when she looks down at him he’s back to being Ben, young open face and feelings worn on his sleeve.

“Do you regret it?” he asks, her mind flooding with memories of their night together from his perspective. It’s like watching herself in a holo movie, the images making her skin flush and her blood heat up. Her instincts tell her to look away, but it’s not as though he hasn’t seen everything there is to see, so instead she smiles.

She could regret it, but finds that she doesn’t. Rey leans down and places a soft kiss on his lips, far less brazen than the ones she’d given him the previous night though still just as symbolic. She doesn’t need to say the words. The sudden vibrant, warm orange glow of the bond informs her he understands. Rey gets out of bed and goes to get ready. She has a long day ahead.

Hux’s first order of business is to move the Finalizer to wild space. He’d already given instructions to Captain Phasma to collect the squadron FN-5563 — Lance, he thinks wryly — belongs to and
have them assemble in one of the auditoriums, earning himself a sharp look from Phasma before she left to carry out his orders. He’d also received the day’s reports, made other immediate arrangements regarding the trial, including putting Mitaka in command on the ship, and generally covered his bases in the event of impending disaster. Now all that’s left to do is wait for Rey to show up.

She’d come back to bed hours later, tip-toeing into the room in a failed attempt at silence, though Hux had faked sleep nonetheless as she’d curled herself back into Kylo’s shoulder blades. She was up to something, but he’d have plenty of time to find out what after this whole ordeal is over. Hux cracks his neck, staring at the clock in his office. So much hinges on this one morning, on Rey’s desire to give Lance a fair trial, yet last night’s discoveries have him on edge. What else is he missing? How deep do the puppeteer’s strings go?

He looks at the clock again. She should be here soon to set her precious trooper friend free.

Well, she had certainly proved his innocence, one way or another, Hux muses with wry amusement. Still, it is not a matter for laughter.

Then there is the matter of Ren. Hux had woken up to find him walking around like a living chip of ice. He’d had all but become used to Ren’s raging tantrums, but this is different. This is new. This was a whole new level of hatred and anger that chilled even Hux, along with lowering the temperature in the room. Hux had readied himself silently, allowing Ren the space he needed to collect himself while Rey still slept, and hasn’t seen him since.

Hux drums his fingers on his desk to keep from rubbing at his temple, adjusting the cuffs of his jacket and checking the rank bars on his greatcoat. Anything to keep from getting up and pacing. Then the door opens.

Rey is a vision, clad head to toe in black, wearing a coat he recognizes. He’d commissioned it for her for their trip to Kuat. Over it sit her cloak and cowl, her braid neatly laid over her shoulder, a perfect little Kylo Ren miniature in the way she holds herself. If not for her nervous expression, Hux might have done a double take just to make sure he’s facing the right person. He still does a double take, though for entirely different reasons.

“Ready?” he asks, once more tugging on his gloves. Rey inhales deeply.

“Yes, I— actually, no,” she corrects, fidgeting with her leather gloves before snapping out of it, chin tilting up.

This should be good.

Rey rewards him for that stray thought with a vexed look before clearing her throat. She’s in all-business mode, which he can respect despite the fact that his eyes keep wandering to her lips. He steels himself.

“Before we go, I have something to… discuss with you.”

“Oh?” he asks.

They had discussed the matter of this trial ad nauseam, Rey having woken him up in the middle of the night, whispering his name after he’d fallen back asleep. He’d thought she wanted… well… Hux had reached for her in his half-asleep state, hauling her over Kylo and pulling her on top of his chest, ready to bury his face in her neck when she’d placed a hand on his mouth and stalled him. No, she wanted to discuss Lance instead. Still, she’d stayed curled up on him as they spoke, so he’d swallowed his pride and discussed her fears with her. Hux had a hunch this discussion would not be
about the trial.

“I— Okay, before you get mad at me, please listen to what I have to say,” she starts and Hux’s eyebrows rise. Oh, this should definitely be good. “Just— before you pop off a button, please listen.”

*Pop off a bu*— What now? He narrows his eyes a single degree. Well, fine. He could slip into General of the First Order mode, too.

“I make no promises,” he says, standing a little straighter and motioning her to sit. “What would you like to discuss?

Rey follows his lead, leather-clad fingers clenching and unclenching nervously as she takes her seat, though she stares him in the eye. Hux remains silent, waiting for the deluge. By the look on Rey’s face, it’s coming any time now. As soon as she finds her courage.

“I called the Resistance.” Rey says.

_That_ was not what he’d thought it would be.

“Excuse me?” he asks.

“I asked you to hear me out first!”

“Are you out of your— Rey!” Hux hisses, his temper heating and cooling as if undecided on whether he should turn icy or have his anger flare. Rey holds up her hands to keep him from screaming. Which he wouldn’t do, but he certainly feels like trying it at least once.

“I also asked you not to get mad!” she implores, “Just _listen_ first.”

She _must_ be trying to give him a heart attack. Maybe that’s her plan, kill him slowly either from making his heart burst or his head, whichever comes first. “And I told you I made no promises! What in the Maker’s name do you think you’re doing?” he finally barks, losing all traces of composure for the very first time since his youth. “The reason we’re in this mess to begin with is because of you contacting the rebels. What were you—“

“Just _listen!”_ Rey says and Hux bites his tongue.

He should not lose his temper. Not today. There are bigger things to accomplish today, and he’s never _been_ one to do this, to shout and, what had she called it? Pop off a button. Hux closes his eyes for a moment, taking a slow steadying breath before he dares look at her again. She takes his silence as her cue to keep talking.

“I contacted Lei— General Organa because of Ben,” she says, looking over her shoulder nervously as if waiting for Ren to jump at her for saying his name out loud. It would take a long time for either of them to get used to it. “I…”

“Yes?” he prompts when she hesitates, his hold on the arms of his chair tightening to keep from doing what he _wants_ to do, which is to shout at Rey for her recklessness. Rey takes a deep, composing breath. When her eyes land on him, there’s something there he hadn’t seen before: regret.

“When I left you… when I left, back on Kuat… I went to the Resistance. It took me a while to find them but I did, eventually… with a little help.” she says, the admission stilted on her tongue, reluctant. The subject of where she’d gone those five weeks she’d been away from him had always been shoved under the rug, never to be approached by either side. It was her business what she’d done, and he respected that. Still, the thought of Rey turning to the Rebels had niggled at him in her
absence. Hearing her admit it is no less frustrating, but she has more to say, so Hux remains silent.

“It wasn’t easy,” she admits with a small, unamused smile. “They would have kept me prisoner, I am sure. I had to say goodbye to my friends, to what hope I’d found of belonging after Jakku.” Rey’s lower lip quivers and despite himself, a need blooms in him. A need to comfort her, to tell her she now had new friends, a new place to belong, but still he holds back. It is the wisest choice, and he’s still angry. “I had to rethink what I wanted to do with this newfound purpose."

Rey looks at him then, and her smile is a bit warmer this time. “I thought— if I couldn’t help from there then, then perhaps I could help from here. You’d promised me that I could, after all.” Rey exhales and then once again squares her shoulders. “But I also made a promise to General Organa. A promise to look after her son. I contacted her because she has a right to know, Brendol. After all of what’s happened, Leia wants her son back, and could you blame her?”

No, Hux thinks. No, he can’t. He would have given anything to be looked at the way Han Solo had looked at Ren in his dying moments, to have a parent’s faith, so unyielding in its fervent belief that Ren could be saved, that they would entrust his life to somebody like Organa had done with Rey. But he hadn’t had any of that, so what little empathy he finds within himself for his enemy comes to him through Rey’s eyes, an orphan girl who grew up just as lonely as he did. Still, he’s no longer an impartial party, not after everything that’s happened. The more days that pass the harder it becomes to disassociate himself from the threads that now link him to Rey and Kylo.

Sentiment would be his ruin.

“But that’s not all there was to your call with Organa, was it?” he asks.

Rey shakes her head, her expression determined once more. Despite his anger, Hux listens, realizing a little too late that Rey Ren has conditioned him to pay attention when she looked at him that way.

“I told her about Snoke and about our plans to bring him down,” she confesses.

“Our.

That’s right. Hux had made this Rey’s fight long before either one of them had even known that she would one day find herself here, but this was not part of the plan. A throb starts behind his right eye, a migraine threatening to bloom.

“Rey.”

“No, please,” Rey interrupts. “Let me finish. You asked me to trust you. I asked you for the same, and you promised…” The look on her face is both one of nascent hope and of dread. 

Of rejection, perhaps.

“I did,” he says, and even as his mind reels with the knowledge that Rey had, once again, reached out to his enemy, the way her eyes gleam make the admission worth it.

“So, if you trust me, I just ask that you hear me out.”

Hux studies Rey’s face closely, lacing his fingers together and inhaling sharply. He can already see where this is going so he puts a temporary stop to it before things spiral out of control. That, and he needs to compose himself before attempting to launch into that particular can of worms.

“Later, perhaps,” he finally says. “We have a public trial to attend to, after all.”
It’s not much, what he’s given her, but Rey nods nonetheless, burying her disappointment at not being able to corner him into this conversation immediately. It’s not a no, though.

She could work with that. She nods again, this time to herself, and stands up.

“Right,” she says.

When they reach the office door, Hux pauses, hands clasped behind his back to keep from reaching out to her. He’s walking on thin ice again, and he needs to draw a line between work and pleasure. That line had started to blur a bit too much as of late.

“Are you confident that you can pull this off?” he asks, giving her an out one more time. Nobody outside of him, Rey, and Ren are aware that there would be a trial. He could comm Phasma and call off the whole thing.

Rey tilts her head, looking over his shoulder for a moment before she turns her bright smile on him.

“I can do it.”

There’s a low buzz in the air when Rey and Hux enter their destination. Rows upon rows of cold auditorium benches are taken up by the plastid-armored bodies of stormtroopers, helmets on even here as they await and murmur amongst each other. Their captain stands to the side of the platform where a lone microphone stands at attention. They have been sitting here for fifteen minutes now, and as the time stretches, so does the whispering of the eighty stormtroopers waiting for something to happen. Twenty are missing from their company, cherry-picked from the gathered platoons, and though the remaining troopers all wonder what has happened to them, nobody dares voice it here. Those whispers are reserved for quiet corners and out-of-sight rooms where their superiors could not hear them.

Still, they are all glad for their helmets though nobody would dare say it now. Whatever comes out of this gathering can only be bad news, some whisper. No company had ever been called out on its own to await their commander. They had all stood as part of one homogenous army to hear speeches in the past, sure, but this doesn’t have the feeling of a rally.

The whispers die abruptly the second they spot General Hux, a walking legend even within their own armada. So young, yet so powerful. The man who decides their fate. And here they sit — all eighty of them — waiting for General Hux to approach the microphone. Behind him trails one other. Most troopers had heard of her, or seen her in passing, though a few had gotten to know her. Plastoid shifts as troopers strain to get a better look at her from around the auditorium.

Twenty-some people missing. Those who had gotten to know her aren’t here, they know.

They all stand when their General greets them, snapping off a crisp salute as one. General Brendol Hux does not bat an eyelash, though the girl beside him flinches and her eyes widen in awe. It is this that finally wrenches a physical response from the General, his head tilting to look at her. From the giant projection screen above the platform, every trooper notes how the General’s lips turn up at the corners. Pleased, they all think in unison. Right.

“At ease,” Hux turns to the troopers, “Please sit.”

This is new. They had never been asked to sit. One trooper looks to the next, starting a chain
reaction, communicating through body language in a way only troopers can. Confusion. Then the first brave soul takes his seat. Everybody else follows like a line of ants, every eye turning to their commander as Captain Phasma turns on her heel and joins her troops. The Captain remains standing, blaster at attention, her helmet tilted upwards to look at the projection above the platform.

“You are gathered here today to bear witness to unprecedented history in the making amongst the First Order.” The General says, and the room collectively tenses, waiting with bated breath for the next words. The stormtroopers are nothing if not a curious bunch. “You may have noticed that twenty of your own have been missing ever since Lady Rey Ren’s unfortunate accident. Today, there will be a reckoning. There is no room in this Order for betrayal, no room for disobedience. We deal with rule breakers with a strong, swift hand. Yet the First Order is also fair. For the sake of that fairness, and for the sake of transparency, you have been brought here today to witness that which encompasses both of these ideals: a public trial.”

Not a single trooper dares whisper, or move, or even draw breath. A public trial has been unheard of.

“While you are here personally, know that this is truly public for the sake of fairness, and of transparency. Every person on this ship will now be able to see this trial as if they were sitting in this room. Due to the severity of the actions that have led us here — I, as the Primary Commander of this ship and leader of your troops, have allowed the Lady to make the final decision. What she decides will be upheld, and respected, no matter the choice she makes.” The General finishes, then he turns towards the Lady Ren and all stormtroopers lean forward as if pulled on an invisible chain.

Hux twitches his finger and two stormtroopers walk in, flanking a third person… one they all know, though they had hardly expected to see him like this. There’s a collective noise, the muffled, strangled gurgle of a crowd that cannot decide on collectively gasping, grunting, or choking.

The boy’s hands are bound and, despite the trooper armor, he wears no helmet, his face projected bigger than life on the screen above the platform. FN-5563, known to some as Lance, had always been the troublemaker of their group. Loud and playful, but always regarded by many as a smaller brother. One of the ‘kids.’ He enters now as a man fated to die would enter coliseum of old, ready to meet his Maker, waiting for the lions to be released; lead-footed and eyes downcast up until the point where he’s forced to kneel, his escorts’ guns aimed at his back like executioners.

Then Lance’s eyes find the Knight of Ren’s.

What happens next passes in the blink of an eye: Rey’s lips twitch upward. Her eyes are bright and her shoulders set, and to anyone who does not know her, she simply looks like she’s happy to finally have her assailant in her grasp. Yet in a Med Bay across the ship, Pip and eighteen other of his comrades watch as Lance gives one of his cocky smirks in return, and they all wonder the same thing at the same time: Why?

______________________

Kylo Ren waits in the shadows, watching Rey’s crazy plan for the stormtrooper projected on a screen across the now empty hangar. The ship is eerily quiet except for the screens, everything having come to a stand-still, the echoes of thousands of the holoscreens and data pads bouncing from every single room and every single hall. It’s as if the ship itself, the cables and panels, bolts and durasteel beams are talking when Hux once again speaks of transparency. He nearly snorts at the irony of that statement, just barely reminding himself to stay quiet. Between Hux and himself there are enough dirty secrets for the whole of the First Order. Still, this suits him just as well.
He unclips his saber and hunkers down away from prying eyes, having forgone his helmet entirely. He needs his peripheral vision clear. Even a minor vision impairment now could cost him everything. His eyes fall once again on the screen, cameras zoomed in on Rey’s face, registering the tiny upward quirk of her lips. Stubborn woman.

When the camera falls on the stormtrooper, Kylo’s rage boils and he has to stomp on it to simmer down, waiting until he can direct it to the rightful recipient. It is not the kid’s fault, he reminds himself. FN-5563 had been used, and Kylo Ren knew a thing or two about being used, about being expendable. He focuses on the trooper on his knees, memorizing his features, thinking back to the night he’d dug into the boy’s mind. He should have spotted it then. He should have spotted the memory gap. But Kylo had been too wrapped up in his own grief and anger to notice. He had not looked deep enough, had not been careful enough.

Story of his life.

And now the kid’s life is being saved by the one person who stood to lose the most, yet Kylo can’t say he’s surprised. Just a night ago it had been Rey who had also pulled him out from the pit of despair he’d dug for himself. She’d been his guiding light, much like she is being FN-5563’s now. Last night he’d allowed himself to be Ben. Now he must once again bear the shroud of his chosen name, if only for self-preservation, though a small part of his brain provides that he will never again truly be Kylo, no matter how much he wishes he could be.

*Han Solo had been right, after all.*

He forces himself to focus. For now, he would be Kylo Ren, and Kylo Ren has a job to do. He realizes with a start that he had missed most of what Hux had said to the troopers, his eyes blurring before focusing once again as Rey steps up to the microphone.

“There will be no trial today,” Rey says as she turns to the crowd. The camera focuses on it, and it’s as though she’s speaking right to him, looking him in the eye. “At least, not the kind you expect—with dragged out evidence and counter arguments. The only kind of trial here is one of justice, and courage on Lance’s part to trust me with his life. It is true, Lance pushed me.”

The camera turns to Lance, who flinches, but his eyes are still on Rey. Then the view returns to Rey’s face, unblinking hazel eyes hard set as she speaks the next words. From his side of the bond, he can sense her nervousness right along with her resolve. Kylo focuses on the hangar floor now, eyes roving over the empty space while he listens to Rey’s words for his cue.

“He pushed me, but he is innocent.”

There it is. His cue. Any time now somebody would burst through into the hangar looking for escape, and he’d finally know who had betrayed him.

Rey continues in her sing song voice, lulling the crowds until the whispers die down. “He was used. I am a Force User, and I know first hand how easy it is to manipulate somebody when there is malicious intent. Lance was used.” She emphasizes the trooper’s nickname and the crowd is so very chillingly quiet, somehow understanding that the tides are shifting, that something bigger than themselves is taking place. “I know this is terrifying for all of you. It should be terrifying. After all, what keeps me and mine from doing the same to all of you? But know this, all of you. Whoever did this was trying to get to Kylo Ren, my Master and your Commander. It was nothing but a power play, one in which an innocent person was made to do unspeakable things.”

Kylo misses the way Rey turns to look at Lance and gives him a warm smile, but he can feel the warmth flowing from her either way. This Lance kid is precious to her. Kylo immediately closes off
his side of the bond, refusing to let jealousy trickle through. It’s better this way anyway. What must come next should not be experienced by her. Still, her voice tickles his ear even from a screen. He hears her take a deep breath.

“And I will not allow it to happen again to any of you. You may not know me, but you matter. You matter to me. Just like Lance matters. I just ask you to trust me.”

Big words for such a tiny thing, Kylo thinks, scanning the hangar entrances. He doesn’t doubt her, though. Rey had proven time and time again that she would walk through fire for the things she believes in.

Kylo listens while setting his thumb on the on-switch for his saber, waiting to ignite.

Any time now.

“You are people,” she continues, “not tools.” It’s so quiet he can hear Rey swallow. Then she says the words there is no coming back from.

“Remove your helmets.”

Rey’s public trial had turned into a trial of courage.

The rest of the momentous, moving speech is lost to him when two bodies burst into the hangar. Two faces he knows so well.

Kylo steps out of the shadows.

Perhaps the handful of minutes had only been seconds, slowed down between one blink and the next until time had stretched itself thin. The next blink happens much more rapidly as Kylo’s eyes take in two pairs of slanted ones, betrayal bubbling in his chest.

Kylo ignites his saber, opening into a stance as he waits for somebody to make the move first — the tall, lithe woman cloaked in darkness, or the knight with an oily smile and mischief in his eyes. Kylo waits, each breath pulsing in the air like a heartbeat, the three of them locked in an open staring match.

“Going somewhere?” he asks.

Yathe slowly moves her arm, igniting her weapon, and Kylo’s eyes narrow at her, flashes of their life and friendship flicking past his vision as the plasma beam of her weapon zooms to life, red and angry, though far more stable than his own.

Yathe, whom he had taken under his wing, trained and made his second in command. To whom he had confided in and trusted with his life, the white of Yathe’s eyes glint yellow under the fluorescent, cold lighting of the hangar as her dark cloak falls still. Ready to flee or ready to fight?

The hum of her saber mixes with the erratic crackle of his.

Then Rojan ignites his weapon and lurches forward, ready to cut his way out of this ship or die trying.
Ey, guys <3 Sorry for THE CLIFFHANGER (TM) - But I stopped at the natural stop for this chapter, otherwise we would have been here for this one for too long. Now we know who it was ;p everyone who blamed Yathe please send your apologies to her quarters via droid.

As always a massive thanks to Ej (ejblakit / darth-ej on tumblr) for being the literal best. 12 CHs TO GO BITCHES.
Chapter Summary

Rojan finally gets what he's had coming for a while, as does Hux.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Kylo, your left!”

Kylo swivels on Yathe’s warning, guarding left. It had taken a split moment for him to realize what had just happened, and another quick second for him to fall into a two pronged attack, Yathe falling in step with him until they have Rojan exactly where they want him, right between a wall with no exits and certain death.

The knight fights hard, though, harder than any Knight ever should, but Rojan stands no chance against the Master of the Knights of Ren and his Second in Command. He’s a rat facing down two wolves, and he’s treated as such.

The fight that follows is bloody, dirty, but Rojan has little room for victory when Yathe and Kylo cage and corner Rojan until he’s dancing on a knife’s edge. Kylo has to give it to him — he fights ferociously, swinging and aiming for weak points that would make any other man or woman bleed. They are well aimed, indeed, but Yathe’s saber slices at Rojan’s hamstring and Kylo’s drives deep through the shoulder of Rojan’s swinging arm, the man crumpling like so many crushed autumn leaves. Rojan won’t bleed, not from these wounds, the plasma immediately suturing the skin, scorched flesh stinking up the air as Rojan’s eyes roll into the back of his head.

Yathe switches her saber off and drops it to the ground, holding up her hands in preemptive surrender at the look on Kylo’s face. “I mean you no harm.”

“I know.”

Yathe heaves a breath, “One can never be too careful.” The steel tip of her boot pushes into Rojan’s side, rolling him over to look at the damage on his hamstrings.

“What do we do with this piece of filth now?” she asks.

“Put him in a torture cell. I’m not done with him yet.” Kylo orders, picking up Yathe’s gleaming saber and handing it back. Yathe grabs it, then narrows her eyes at him.

“Did you doubt me?” she asks, tilting her head. There’s no apprehension there, no resentment.

“One can never be too careful.” Kylo smiles. To her credit, Yathe does as well.

“Good,” she mutters, her nose pinching into a grimace he hasn’t seen since her childhood years as she teases, “Let your guard down and I’ll steal your girlfriend from under your nose.”

Kylo snorts.
Same old Yathe.

“Why did you really do it?” he asks. One wrong move and it would have been her head. Yathe looks at him for a very long time, and when she speaks next the teasing has drained out of her tone of voice.

“She happens to be my friend.”

Yathe turns and holds out a hand, sending Rojan up into the air with none of the careful movements she’d used with Rey. Rojan flings up like a bag of potatoes and hovers behind them as they walk out of the hangar and towards the lowest levels of the ship.

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“…And that’s all I have to say,” Rey says, her voice dropping a little now that her bravado has been spent on delivering her speech.

Her eyes scan the rows upon rows of stormtroopers, each of them so very different from the next. It is easy to take them all as one when they all wear identical helmets, identical plastoid armor over identical military issued garb. With their faced bared to her like this, however, she sees people. Her heart swells, turning to Hux so she can see his own reaction. Outwardly he displays nothing, so she dips inside his head. He’s left it wide open for her, the intrusion as familiar to him now as though she simply resided in his mind permanently. His eyes scan the crowd much like she had done yet inside she feels a small wavering, his thoughts a wire suddenly allowed to release its taut tension. He’s seeing the troopers as she has. When confronted with so many individuals, it’s difficult to think of them as simple numbers.

She would teach him humanity yet.

Rey turns back to the crowd and nods, her exit off the stage about to be far less regal and self-assured than her entrance had been. She dismisses the troopers behind Lance with a wave of her hand, uncaring of whether she has the right to do so. To her surprise they back off immediately without so much as a glance in General Hux’s direction, snapping off a salute and getting off the stage. Lance watches after them for a moment before he turns a wide grin on Rey.

The stormtroopers in the audience do not twitch, watching with expectant eyes as Rey bends over and extends a hand to the man still on his knees, and when she pulls him up there are no cheers, no fanfare, no outward displays of excitement. The whole auditorium is shrouded with a heavy, reverent silence. Rey searches the auditorium, looking for chrome armor. What she finds is a small, pleased smile on Phasma’s beautiful face. The Captain had been the first to remove her helmet. The gears of change grinding forward don’t always do so loudly.

She once again looks at Hux, who regards her carefully, hands tucked behind his back and feet firmly planted under his shoulders, the very picture of a soldier himself. When she nods he in turn nods to Phasma, who gives the order for the company to move out. The sudden sharp sound of eighty bodies turning as one makes her nearly jump out of her skin, something which draws a minute smile from Hux. She may have unmasked them but they’re still soldiers. Not a single helmet goes back on as they exit in a neat orderly line, and only when the auditorium sits empty and he gives the order for the cameras to be shut off does Hux dare move closer, the sharp clicking of his shoes echoing in the recessed corners. He comes to stand before her, giving her an appraising once over before gifting her with a smile she’s rarely seen, one which is more cherished because of that. It’s brilliant.

“Pleased?” he asks.
“Yes,” she says truthfully, unable to keep from meeting his smile with one of her own.

Hux lets out a soft little huff of air, as much a sign of laughter as he’s willing to give before he gently cups her cheek and brings her forward, stooping his head until his lips land gently on hers. He works her slowly, the only contact that of his hand on her jaw and his lips on her lips, opening her up until she yields to the softness of his mouth on hers. Then he pulls back until they only brush, the smile returning along with the whispered words.

“You’re glorious.”

The compliment rocks her to the core, but before he has a chance to say anything else his comm goes off. He looks at it, annoyance flashing on his face at being interrupted before falling stone calm once he reads the message. Rey doesn’t get a chance to see it, though. He’s too quick to stash it under his sleeve.

“Go on, wait for us in our quarters,” he says. Rey frowns, but he simply plants another soft kiss on her, this time to her forehead. “I believe there’s a trooper waiting to escort you.”

She hears the sound of shuffling plastoid and looks over Hux’s shoulder only to see a hint of red hair flash away in the corner. When she looks at Hux he has a thoroughly satisfied look on his face, eyes glinting with barely contained mischief. He’d known Lance had been there all along. His lips quirk up into a smile before he steps around her, exiting the other way and leaving her to find Lance.

When she finally finds him Lance’s face matches the color of his hair.

“I didn’t mean to spy,” he immediately defends himself. Rey tries and fails to keep her own blush from showing. Lance clears his throat. “I’ll act like I didn’t see that.”

She brushes into his mind once, gently, only to read his mortification at having caught his two commanders kissing. She nearly snorts at that, then Rey shakes her head. Well, it’s not like it would be a secret forever. She changes directions.

“Are you alright?” she asks. Lance gives her a goofy grin.

“On a scale from one to not dead? I am doing spectacularly,” he says, then moves out of the way so they can both exit into the hall. It’s deserted. “Shall we?”

The walk back to Hux’s quarters is silent, well… as silent as can be with the whispers that follow them every time they turn a corner. She can hear the troopers speaking clearly once they think she’s out of earshot, talking about the kid who survived and his girl savior, and she would smile over that but she has a bigger reason to smile now. Every stormtrooper on their path stands as straight as possible, snaps as sharp a salute as he or she can, but there’s one noticeable difference. Their helmets are missing. These were not the stormtroopers in the auditorium; Rey had very well memorized those. No, these were fresh new faces, and though they still behaved as fit of a soldier she can still see the glimmers on their faces, the awed wonder they try to keep behind a sharp expression and a front-facing gaze. The way some lips quiver, their owners trying to keep from doing so. Silent change. Giant change. Rey nods to a few of them and though most are not yet ready to acknowledge the greeting, a few bold ones bend their heads a single degree. They’d found hope.

It may only be just now spreading slowly aboard the Finalizer, and she may not know yet that somewhere else aboard the ship a handful of troopers are uploading their hastily recorded feeds to the holo-net, nor does she have any way to know that on the bridge Dopheld Mitaka is sending that same recording to the other two First Order ships, but as she walks along with Lance she feels the Force around her vibrate with a renewed surge of energy, of lightness and life. She hadn’t felt this
since Takodana, and it catches her by surprise.

She bids her goodbyes to Lance at the door, watching him walk off rapidly as if still afraid that he shouldn’t be in this wing of the ship and Rey smiles. Some habits die hard. Then she opens the door and is greeted by Millicent’s purring as the tabby works her way around Rey’s calves, furiously rubbing herself against her in a not so silent pleading for attention while Rey starts discarding layer after layer of clothing right in the living room. Moments like these she misses her Jakku clothes, the lighter fabrics a stark contrast to these cumbersome layers. How Yathe could handle being dressed in heavy fabrics and wools from neck to toes would always be an enigma to her. At the thought of Yathe Rey looks towards the door, sudden dread spiking in her system.

As if on cue Kylo opens up his side of the bond.

Everything’s fine.

That’s all she’s allowed before he closes it once again without so much as allowing her to respond, leaving her blinking at the open air at the abruptness of it all. Rey looks around their quarters, though. As safe as a fort. She returns to her task, slowly removing her coat. She’d done her part. Now all she can do is wait. Wait and prepare for whatever is thrown at them next.

By the time Hux enters the torture cell, Kylo and Yathe Ren’s victim has been turned into a bloodied pulp. The man — Rojan, he remembers from Rey’s shared memories — screams at him, then laughs a madman’s laugh. Hux sneers, quietly stepping to the side to avoid a ball of bloodied spit aimed a little too close to his shoes. He’d been called here as a witness, no more, but it seems this Rojan character has it out for him as well.

“So, this is the rat,” Hux offers for a greeting, his lip curling into a sneer, taking in Rojan’s sweat-slick hair plastered to his quickly paling face. Such a bothersome little creature. “Dying?”

“Not yet,” Kylo says, holding out a hand towards the man as the air chills around him. “But soon.”

“Wouldn’t this be better witnessed by your other Knights, Ren?” Hux asks, turning to Kylo. Kylo simply returns his stare with one of his own before scoffing, hand still outstretched.

“He doesn’t deserve their presence.” Kylo says, carefully stroking the on-switch of his saber with his other hand as if he’s considering just turning it on and ending this quickly. It’s Yathe who stops him with a hand to the wrist, the amazonian warrior turning sharp eyes on him.

“He doesn’t deserve a Knight’s death, either,” she murmurs. The look of insult on Rojan’s face tells Hux all he needs to know. So this is why he’d been shackled to a chair. Hux does a thorough assessment. There’s blood dripping all over the place, but the wounds he can see have all been cauterized by what he can only assume is saber plasma. He looks at Yathe’s hands, then Kylo’s. Bloodied hands, the latter more so than the former. Hux pinches his nose in disgust then once again turns to Rojan, who’s busy glaring at Yathe and Kylo in equal measure.

So, being denied a Knight’s death is an insult. A very grave one, it seems. Hux stashes that tidbit away for later like some sort of curious bit of trivia he might need someday, remaining silent nonetheless. This is not his torture show to run.

Then Kylo stretches out long fingers and Rojan’s expression shifts, his face contorting into a snarl before his throat rips open in a scream. And scream he does, until he no longer can, slack jawed in a silent scream as his almond eyes start to glaze over. Kylo is relentless, pushing until blood starts
trickling out of his prey’s nose. If it weren’t for Yathe, Rojan would have very few precious minutes of life left.

“Kylo,” she warns. “Dead men can’t talk.”

Kylo’s hand lowers reluctantly. *Very* reluctantly.

“Why did you do it?” Kylo growls. Rojan’s head slumps forward. Hux almost thinks the man must have passed out before the chuckling begins, raw and gurgling as though Rojan’s vocal chords have been entirely shredded. They probably have been.

“That girl has turned you into nothing but a simpering fool.” Rojan spits. “A spineless idiot, too besotted to see what was right in front of your eyes. Did you really think that your cutesy promises of never lying to us would ever do anything? Anaj was an idiot to go after the Skywalker, but you’re an even bigger idiot if you think you can go after Snoke! You’ll pull us all down, and for what?” Rojan struggles against his bonds, against the stone collar snugly fit around his neck. Hux had heard of those. Force inhibitors. They were believed to have all been destroyed. He knows for sure Kylo doesn’t own one, so his eyes fall to Yathe. What a dangerous friend to have. He’s certainly glad she’s on *their* side.

Where Yathe is composed Kylo seems to be twitching with a pent up desire to just kill this man, only held back by Yathe’s hand to his wrist. Seeing Kylo’s response eggs Rojan on, who cackles. “You wanted us to cosign our lives to your death wish? And what happens *if* you defeat Snoke? Do you think that’ll stop others from trying to hunt us down? Power, Kylo Ren. You’re too weak to wield it.”

This time, it is Kylo who laughs. “You call me a spineless fool, and yet you were the one who resorted to using a *stormtrooper*? A non-force user? Really? Who’s the spineless one here, Rojan?” The last of that question comes as a growl, Kylo leaning forward and looming over the other man until he’s visibly taking up all the space. It reminds Hux of a lion opening up its maw to devour. “I should tear you limb by limb—“

Hux tilts his head, watching carefully as Kylo then leans back.

“But you don’t deserve that either, do you, you worthless piece of garbage?” Kylo mutters, shoving Rojan’s head with the Force into metal back of the chair. *That ought to hurt*. Ronan’s eyes start unfocusing from the pain. Kylo then turns to Yathe. “Get what we need, then finish it.”

Then he strides out of the room, leaving Hux to watch his retreating lover’s back. Yathe’s already moved on to her task.

“Did you report to Snoke?” she ask. Rojan spits at her boot, then throws back his head and croaks out a laugh.

“You stupid bitch. You’re just as stupid as Kylo’s dumb broad.”

Oh, he should not have said that, Hux tuts silently.

Yathe ignites her saber, ready to strike, but this time it’s Hux who intervenes. “He doesn’t deserve a Knight’s death, weren’t those your words, my Lady?”

Yathe looks Hux up and down, Rojan’s teeth glinting red as he smiles. He’d tried to get a rise out of Yathe, to get exactly what he wanted. Too bad for him. Yathe’s saber switches off.

The next half hour passes slowly, Hux at soldier’s rest against a far wall, a smoke to his lips as he
watches the woman before him perform methods of torture he had never even thought possible. He makes a mental note never to cross Yathe. Despite the ingenuity of the violence, Hux doesn’t leave. He’d been called in as a witness, after all, and he could hardly say he didn’t find it pleasing to see Rey’s would be murderer punished. Morbid, perhaps, but not unpleasant.

At last, once Rojan is bleeding from almost every orifice, Yathe steps back and surveys her handiwork. To his benefit, Rojan refused to give up any information. The Knights of Ren are certainly made of strong stuff, Hux concedes. Anyone else would have pissed themselves and spilled everything they did or didn’t know to stop the pain.

Yathe turns away from the unconscious Rojan and wipes her hands on her black cloak, grimacing. “I promised once I’d never do that again.”

Hux hums. “Then put him out of his misery.”

Yathe scoffs, continuing to wipe her hands though her eyes fall on her saber, the only true weapon she has.

Hux considers, tilting his head, his mind traveling back to the woman he’d held in his arms only an hour ago, his eyes landing on the bastard now passed out in the chair.

“Fine,” he mutters, prying himself off the wall and exhausting his cigarette on the leather restraint on Rojan’s arm. He walks over to a panel in the wall, to a weapons cache. Torture isn’t pretty by nature, but sometimes extreme measures were needed. He selects a pistol from a hook and, without much fanfare, walks around the chair and engages it. Yathe takes a step back as Hux takes a step forward.

Leave it to Kylo Ren to always make Hux clean up his messes. Still, this time, he’s willing to get his hands just a little dirty.

Outside the cell, the resounding noise of a bullet shot to the forehead bounces off the walls, but there’s nobody else there to hear it.

By the time he makes the walk towards his own rooms some massive shift has happened aboard his ship. Everywhere he goes stormtroopers salute him while staring him straight in the eye. Of course they all look away a second later, far ahead over his head where it’s safer for them to look, but their unmasked defiance tells him all he needs to know about his plan’s success. Rey’s humble words had struck a chord deeper than any of his most inspiring speeches could. It should bother him, but all’s fair in war, including sabotaging his own track-record if it meant solidifying his men’s loyalties. The only difference is this time they’re rallying behind Rey. As long as they rallied behind Rey, they won’t rally behind Snoke.

All’s fair in war.

He enters his quarters to find Rey and Kylo seated on the couch, Rey peeling back blood-soaked layers off Kylo’s shoulders from where he inevitably got hit during his fight. Rey looks up at him, brows high on her forehead and wide hazel eyes questioning. He gives her a small smile before nodding his chin at Kylo, quietly telling her to continue as he makes his way towards their bedroom and hangs up his greatcoat. They are fine, all of them are fine and safe at least for now, and the most immediate danger has been removed. He can allow himself a second to breathe slowly.

He hears Rey from the living room admonishing Kylo and telling him to stay still, that she’ll take care of his wounds and no, he would not just rely on bacta patches, then smiles. She might just win that argument. Yet, after the rather unappetizing task of putting down a rabid dog, Hux’s mind is more interested in getting rid of any trace of it on him than he is listening to Rey and Kylo bicker. He
sheds his clothes and folds them neatly then quickly steps into the refresher, walking into the shower and turning the water on to scalding hot.

He loses track of the minutes while standing under the spray, using the white noise of rushing water to dampen the noise in his head while he compulsively starts planning ahead. It’s what he’s always done. Rey and the storm of change she’s brought with her may have altered some aspects of him on a near molecular level but this is one that would never change. He’d bought them some time by making the ship disappear. It would be nearly impossible to trace them, but there is always the chance. He needs to move ahead fast or—

The door opens. Hux looks up, blinking.

Rey slips into the shower, uncaring that the water’s entirely too hot. He immediately feels behind him, turning the water until it’s a little bit more comfortable. Rey reaches forward and turns it right back to scalding, looking up at him with a cheeky smile as her hair gets wet.

“Is he fine?” Hux asks. Did Kylo win the battle over the bacta patches or—? But the question is just a delay mechanism. This is the first time they’ve been truly alone in a long time, and Rey’s standing in front of him completely naked with a shy smile on her face, and that thought brings to mind the fact that the last time they’d been alone he’d been yelling at her. He attempts to clear his throat but fails, nevertheless reaching forward and placing his hands on her naked hips, glad that the water has already cleared away whatever vestigial remains of Rojan’s demise may have been on him. He’d hate to sully her.

“He’s fine,” Rey says, blinking rapidly to keep the water from her lashes. He shifts ever so slightly, taking the brunt of the water on his back so it doesn’t spray into her face. “I got him to sit still long enough. He’s in bed now.”

Ah.

Which meant…

They were truly alone.

“Asleep?” he asks. Rey grins.

“Asleep.”

He’s not being greedy, he tells himself. Just like his kiss in the auditorium where the pipsqueak — Lance — could see it had nothing to do with him marking his territory. Still, it’s nice to have her all to himself for once. He’d craved that for a long time. He would be lying, however, if he said he’s not curious as to what would make Rey sneak in, so he stands tall and looks down at her. “What brings you here?”

The blush on Rey’s cheeks is worth it. He’s not one to tease, not really, but he could get accustomed to doing so just to see that reaction.

“I needed a shower,” she says, tilting her head up at him. Hux smirks.

“Really?” he asks, instinctively moving closer, fingers pressing into her hips to pull her in. Maybe it’s the fact that he has finally found a small pocket of downtime in which to indulge. Maybe it’s the fact that she’s finally safe, that their irritating argument prior to the trial can’t reach them here past the steam and the closed ‘fresher door. Maybe it’s because he hadn’t been able to touch her last night. “Is that all?”
Rey quirks an eyebrow at him. She *tries* not to smile, tries being the key word.

“And I wanted to talk,” she says, placing a small hand against his bare chest.

Oh but she would drive him to insanity. He tilts his head back from where he’d leaned in, looking down at her in a new light, except Rey laughs and shakes her head, wrapping her arms around his waist and moving in closer. She’d been teasing him!

*All’s fair in love, too, I suppose.*

He tugs her against his chest and leans his head down, planting soft kisses to her small shoulder as he reaches behind her and slowly starts undoing her braid. It’s amazing how things had developed. He still remembers the stiffness of their first hug, the awkwardness of limbs caged around each other as they both tried to adjust to this new development. Now it comes easier. Natural, even, and he’s happy to just stand there in the shower and hold her, though not without letting his fingers roam. He feels the scars against his fingertips, traces them gently as Rey slowly but surely starts returning his affections, planting gentle kisses to his collarbone. He inhales sharply, letting his fingers wander over the velvety softness of her skin, the task made so much more efficient by the slickness of their shower as he runs his fingers over the dip of her lower back and further down, squeezing a handful of skin and pulling her hips closer. Rey sighs contentedly into him, but when he does it again she tenses. He pulls back, suddenly remembering the previous night.

She’d said it hadn’t been her first but…well… Kylo’s well endowed. “Are you sure you’re up for this?”

Rey chews on her lower lip, so he leans in and kisses it just to get her to speak. Here in the privacy of his own rooms he can allow himself to be as openly affectionate as he wants. It seems to help her relax. She nods, her next words whispered. “Can we go slow?”

Oh, he could go *so* very slow. As slow as she wants him to. He hums against her mouth and forces her to open up, letting his fingers rise up her back and over her shoulders, then back down her sides, resting his thumbs right under the swell of her breasts. She’s so small it feels as though her ribcage could all fit between the palms of his hands. A little higher and his thumbs graze hardening skin. He smiles against her, finding a pert nipple already pebbling. “As slow as you want.”

So Rey wraps her hands around his shoulders and Hux gathers her by the hips, hefting her onto his waist and taking careful steps towards the bench built into the wall. It only takes a little maneuvering for him to sit down, Rey straddling his lap. She whimpered when her weight settles on him, his body already quite eager though he focuses instead on building her up stroke after stroke, caress after caress until she’s dripping on him. He runs lazy circles over her skin, moving down until he finds that taut bundle of nerves. Rey keens and quivers on his fingers and he leans his head back, taking in the view. It’s such a wonderful sight, but he needs more from her.

“Rey—” he says, breathing turning sharp as the name suddenly takes what little air he’d been holding in his lungs. Rey’s eyes snap open, her cheeks and collarbone red and not from the shower. “Kiss me.”

She smiles and dips in, and where he’d been the one to direct their intimacy last night, orchestrating every movement of hers like a master musician, this time Rey’s hips start moving on their own above him, after settling her knees on either side of him. He groans into her mouth and she, bold little thing she is, takes it as an opening to coax his tongue out, trying new things and experimenting with others, and he happy to oblige and let her, swallowing up her little panting noises. He would be lying if he said that her nails digging into his shoulders weren’t quickly driving him wild. Yet he waits, and only when Rey finally takes him in hand and gingerly starts lowering herself does he finally allow
himself the room to respond, a soft curse rolling off his tongue when she rocks him in and out of her once. Over and over she rolls her hips, and only when her discomfort gives way to pleasure does he finally grind up into her, bouncing her on his thighs to drive himself deeper.

Rey only seems to have enough words in her to whisper his name and “Oh, Maker;” which sends a sharp needle of satisfaction through him that he’s been elevated to such heights, and by the time she tightens on him while riding out her rushing orgasm there is no place for the Maker anymore, just Hux. Good.

It doesn’t take him too long after that, stuttering sweet nothings into her ear, nipping at her neck as he worships at her feet and drowns in the feeling of her, praising her for the good girl she is even as she continues using him for her own pleasure. He’s willing to let her do just about anything she wants to him. On the second quickly succeeding orgasm of hers she finally collapses on him, and the shower now feels infernally hot but he bears with it anyway. He’s far more interested in listening to Rey’s hiccupy giggle and hard panted breaths instead, fingers caressing her torso once more.

“I don’t want us to fight,” she says, voice low against his ear. Hux stares at the ceiling, at the water raining from above.

“Did you try to seduce me into agreeing to that?” he asks, Rey swats at his chest without looking at him, dislodging a chuckle from his diaphragm. She’s no seductress, but it doesn’t take him much to get excited where she’s concerned, if he’s being entirely honest.

“No,” she says. “I did this because I wanted to. They’re not related.” Rey pulls away from the crook of his neck and looks at him, face set and serious, and his smiles at his wild little thing. Wild no longer, really, though still as headstrong. “I’m serious. There are things we need to talk about.”

Hux tilts his head back against the tile wall and looks at her for a moment again, trying to memorize everything there is to memorize. He reaches up and dips his fingers into her hair, combing it away from her face and behind her ears, cradling her there as he leans forward and gently kisses her lips. He will never tire of the way she melts every single time.

“Alright,” he says. “I’ll listen. That’s your reward for today.”

Rey arches an eyebrow. “My reward?”

Well, he hadn’t necessarily told her of Phasma’s suggestion, but he’d hardly seen a reason to. As much as it pains him to admit it to himself, Rey would have managed to do this with or without his planning anyway. He’d just given her a silent, helping hand. When it’s clear he’s not going to elaborate, too busy caressing her cheeks, Rey tsks at him then changes the subject.

“I really am sorry I went behind your back,” she says. Hux’s brows rise. She’s learned well.

She’s sorry she went behind his back, she’s not sorry that she called the rebels. How he can find it in himself to both be proud and exasperated is beyond his capacity to reason it out. Yet it’s been a long time since she’d first landed in his rooms as a guest, a very long time indeed, and seeing her change has in its own way been its own small wonder.

“Come on, little one,” he says, “we can discuss this when we’re both clean and dry.”

They make quick work of washing each other, Rey making him stay seated so she can wash his coppery red hair while he busies himself running a loofa up and down all of her, gently running it between her legs to wash his mess off her thighs. Rey whimpers but doesn’t budge, and soon enough they’re back outside, freshly cleaned and thoroughly fucked, and being stared at by a very awake
Kylo.

Kylo only smiles that shit-eating smile of his before he once again covers his eyes with his arm, naked torso blessedly free of new wounds and no bacta patches in sight. He pats the sheets beside him and Rey crawls in slowly, though there’s no hesitation now. Hux looks at them both in his bed, weighing the pros and cons of crawling in after her or returning to work.

A single pocket of downtime with no immediate dangers. Not yet, at least. Phasma and Mitaka would have everything in hand for just another hour.

Ah, but he really needs to stop rationalizing his desire to just be with these two. He compromises with himself, though. A half hour. He could afford a half hour. Let Rey’s handiwork spread through the ship like flame on gasoline before he stepped onto the bridge. He crawls in after Rey.

A moment later Kylo speaks, eyes still obscured by his giant arm.

“That was a wonderful speech, Rey,” he says, dark humor laced through the words. “But you know what it means, right?”

Rey nods. Hux’s temple throbs on cue as if it had just been waiting for the words. If the stormtroopers had all seen the video, it wouldn’t take long for Snoke to see it as well. Despite it all it is Rey who grounds them once again with her unfailing optimism. She snugs herself in between Kylo’s body and Hux, looking at the ceiling as she makes a promise for all of them.

“We’ll be fine. I can do this.”

Hux just hopes she’s right.

Chapter End Notes

Eyyyy sexytiems. Our ginger general finally got some. Also bye bye, Rojan. A calmer (ish) chapter! one of the few we have left before things start ramping up again towards the finish line. Hope you enjoyed and thanks to all of you still reading. I know I sound like a broken record by now saying this (lol) but honestly, it's been almost a year since I started this crazy story and I'm always perpetually moved by all of you who take the time to read and discuss it here with me, and the levels of enthusiasm some of you still have for this story T-T ilu. thank you.

And thanks a billion to my lovely internet wife and beta EjBlaKit / Darth-Ej (Tumblr) for the ridiculously quick turnaround on this one. (also, all of you who aren't reading her Demonology_101 reylo story, what're you waiting for?)
Countdown

Chapter Summary

It's hard for the trio to hear themselves think when the drums of war start beating.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2AM, Standard Time.

The crono on the wall, the only thing left unscathed in the room, ticks a steady rhythm as Kylo surveys the wreckage he’d left behind. He’d avoided re-entering this room the previous day, but the hours are long when nightmares creep around the corner. He’d woken up from yet another one. Kylo had shielded Rey from his turmoil all night, and in doing so had left himself open. Now he crouches before his grandfather’s helmet — what’s left of it, anyway — staring at it and trying to make sense of it all. It’s the only thing he can do, attempt to make sense of it and keep his rage in check.

He hears the low hiss of the door opening in the other room but doesn’t move, having recognized Hux’s life signature long before he’d announced his presence. Hux is silent as he enters.

“Is she still asleep?” Kylo asks, eyes trained on the mangled helmet. Hux comes to stand next to him, the smell of a cigarette wafting to Kylo’s nose from where Hux holds it at his side.

“Yes,” says Hux. “For now.”

A hand comes to rest on Kylo’s head, stroking gently. Kylo instinctively tenses then relaxes, a reflex that Hux ignores with a gentleness Kylo could have hardly fathomed the General possessed as long fingers comb through the length of his hair. It’s the sort of understated comfort only someone like Hux can offer even as the rest of him stands stiff as a board, cigarette to his mouth, dragging in nicotine as he, too, inspects the mess Kylo had made. Kylo half expects him to go into a rant about having to pay for repairs. Nothing comes. He appreciates both the silence and the comfort.

“Shouldn’t you be asleep?” Kylo asks. Above him, Hux lets out a hard exhale— as close to a scoff as he comes.

“The days of peaceful sleep are over, I’m afraid,” says Hux, his hard tone quickly turning regretful. “Pity.”

Kylo nods, the first time he’s truly dared move in over an hour. He’s sore from crouching but the discomfort barely registers. Pity indeed. Rey had brought a respite into their lives, lulling them both with promises of peaceful rest, and Kylo and Hux had both willingly accepted it, but even that could only last so long. At least she’s asleep now. Let her sleep while she’s able. Kylo certainly can’t. He’s too busy turning circles inside himself for answers that won’t come. After a moment of silence, Hux points his half-spent cigarette at the helmet, ash sprinkling on it. Kylo feels nothing.

“What do you plan to do with this?” Hux asks.

Kylo chews on his cheek, bare fingers reaching for the helmet. He feels a hum there the second he touches it, knows it for what it is now, and closes his mind as tightly as a tomb. The logical thing to
do would be to destroy it. Hux takes his silence for indecision — which perhaps it is.

“Does this work the same way as your bond with Rey?” Hux asks.

Kylo tilts the helmet, inspecting the crevices, scratching the surface. “Not quite,” he answers truthfully. It is nebulous at best even to him, but he understands now he’d always been targeted. This helmet only seems to amplify that connection somehow, dependent on Kylo’s devotion to it. He wonders if it would wane now. He turns it again. Hux hums.

“But you were able to connect to the other side somehow,” Hux says, the emphasis on the connection borne from a lack of a better word, though Kylo understands what Hux is trying to say. He nods. Hux hums again.

“Can he sense you?” Hux asks.

“But if I’m careful.” Kylo says, amusement flaring that he had beaten his Master at his own game—

Then it hits him. Hux had deftly guided him to the realization. When he looks up he finds a glint to Hux’s eyes, one Kylo knows well. He’d seen it the day the General had been given permission to fire Starkiller. Hux strokes Kylo’s hair once then drops his hand, finishing his cigarette before snuffing it out on the helmet in Kylo’s hands. Kylo watches the motion. He should be offended. He still feels nothing.

“I’ll leave you to it, then,” Hux turns to leave, “might as well take over bridge duty early.”

Kylo doesn’t watch him go. Instead he checks to make sure his bond to Rey is securely shut, protected and impenetrable in a calm corner of his mind where Rey floats in her sleep, before focusing outward.

No advantage is ever unfair to the ones who have it.

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Rey stands alone on the dais, swallowing hard as her staring match with Supreme Leader Snoke continues. The creature studies her from high on above, ancient, pale blue watery eyes unblinking. As for her, Rey tries her best to keep her thoughts empty and the bond hidden. She has seen the levels of torture Kylo and Hux have endured at this creature’s hand for disobeying orders, and so she had come to this audience prepared to suffer the same. Instead she waits and tries not to fidget with her hands, forcing them to remain lax at her sides. This is a test, she thinks. A test to see if she’ll break first.

When it becomes apparent that she won’t, Snoke finally leans forward, gnarled fingers curving around the armrests of his throne.

“Explain yourself, Knight of Ren,” he says, his voice a rumbling echo in the amphitheater. Rey blinks twice, allowing her eyes to regain some moisture, and sets them on the creature’s collarbones. It’s easier than staring at the decaying, drooping flesh; the gaping hole behind taut sinew at his jaw. The spot she focuses on isn’t much better. She wets her lips.

“I acted according to what would be in our best interest,” she says.

Time to test her acting skills.

Snoke watches her for a moment longer. He hasn’t attempted to invade her mind as he’d done in previous times, choosing to let her damn herself. Or perhaps showing trust? Snoke remains silent, so
she dares look him in the eye again.

“I had noticed… discontent,” she begins, choosing her words carefully. “Among the troops and the officers.”

Rey doesn’t mention Hux or Kylo, but by the way Snoke’s gaze sharpens on her, the way he leans forward expectantly, hanging on her every word, she can almost sense that this is where his mind has traveled to. It only helps her if he assumes as much. Rey swallows again, a nervous reflex.

“So I thought— What would I accomplish in killing the stormtrooper?” Rey explains, squaring her shoulders to make herself seem taller, more commanding. “Nothing. I would accomplish nothing except to create a gap between us. But if I saved him, if I—“ she stalls. Snoke had made it very clear what he thought about compassion, “If I acted as though I had compassion in me and spared his life, then the rest of the stormtroopers would perhaps learn to look up to us Force users. To you, who are the one from whom I take orders. Make them believe we are kind Masters worth fighting for. It would solidify their alliance to your cause, My Lord.”

Her eyes once again fall on the creature’s collarbone. Having a giant hovering over her is nerve-wracking, even if it is a hologram. Snoke leans back and once again considers her, a silent judge. She’s never been one to quake in her boots but the desire to do so is not without merit. She looks down at them, making sure they’re not shifting in place, trying her best to look the very picture of subservience. He could buy her story, or he could call her bluff and make her writhe in pain. Rey hopes for the former and steel herself for the latter.

Then Snoke laughs, a gravelly, sickening chuckle. “You are worthy of your title, Rey.” Rey glances up instinctively at the sound of her name. He regards her with a minute smile on his face. “Compassion is a weakness for which there is no place in the heart of a Dark apprentice, but cunning—Ah, you are cunning. It will serve you well.”

There it is. The oily caress of Snoke’s awareness brushing against hers. Rey hastily throws up walls and Snoke tenses visibly, so she lets them drop immediately and instead uses Yathe’s teachings. Let the creature think it had been a reflex to attempt to throw him out. When Snoke finally dips in, there is nothing there for him to find except her pride at having saved Lance, which Snoke can take as he will. He appears pleased by her apparent acceptance of the intrusion.

“Good,” he praises. Rey forces a smile. “Very good.”

The croon makes her skin prickle so she stands straighter. Snoke drums his sharp nails on his throne, examining the recesses of her mind. He removes himself when he finds nothing else, and Rey notes how he does it almost carefully, as if afraid to break her nascent trust too soon. He’s up to something; she just doesn’t know what yet.

“The time has arrived for you to come to me,” he says. Rey had feared those words. The hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

“I need more time—“

The creature doesn’t like that, a dangerous look twisting his features as he once again leans forward, this time with none of the patience with which he’d moved before. Rey nearly flinches but catches herself just in time, the sudden spike in her breathing making it difficult to speak when she opens her mouth next.

“My lord,” she says, tone placating immediately as she throws the first excuse she can think of at him. “I need more time to solidify the work I have begun here. There was a Knight—“
“I felt his death, Rey Ren,” Snoke says impatiently. “Mouthy little creature, that one. But he is inconsequential. You, on the other hand—”

“Must ensure they do not think me a coward,” Rey balks, this time truly annoyed. For the first time Snoke frowns. Yes, she thinks, balling her fists at her side. They would not think her a coward. “I must win them to me, as I have begun to do with the stormtroopers.”

This, too, pleases Snoke, who sees only power and the means to it. Let him think Rey wants to take down Kylo. The words are never said, but she knows this is what Snoke wants in the end. She’s not sure why, but it’s clear the loathsome creature wants his current apprentice dethroned. She knows things Snoke does not, however, and that is her advantage to utilize.

“Two weeks,” Rey pleads, throwing out an arbitrary deadline. Nothing too short that she would be undermining herself, nothing too long that he would suspect her.

The silence that follows is suffocating.

“Do it swiftly, my little apprentice,” Snoke says, “but do not dally. You will come to me, or I will come to you. Either way, we are to meet in two weeks.”

Her throat tightens, the weight of his order etching itself into her bones. There’s no room for haggling here.

“How do I find you? I do not know where to go.” Rey would not let him come her way.

What happens next threatens to destabilize her feet from the ground. One moment she’s staring at Snoke, the next her mind is rocked with the force of Snoke’s intrusion. He plants an image in her mind. It takes up her vision, blurring the edges of the amphitheater where she stands and making her eyes water. When he finally removes himself from her head, the map is burned into the back of her eyelids.

“Two weeks,” Snoke says.

And then he’s gone.

Rey sags on the platform, falling to her knees and gasping in air as she stares at the empty spot where the throne had been. Her nerves finally catch up to the reality of her situation, nauseating bile threatening to spill from her roiling stomach. She swallows it down before taking a shuddering breath, cold sweat beading over her body. She’d made it through an audience alone.

Rey leaves the room on trembling legs, beginning the shaky journey back to the top levels of the ship, and rapidly regaining her composure the farther away she moves. Everywhere she goes stormtroopers watch her with rapt attention. Their focus helps her center herself, and Rey smiles as a few take the initiative to nod to her versus the other way around. She returns those with a bright smile, watching a few of the older men flush and the women fight their desire to beam back. Her title has changed from Lord Ren’s Apprentice to The Girl Savior, whispered around corners in low tones, and though being called a savior makes her feel foolish she’s glad that the stormtroopers have met a second day with their faces proudly bared.

The elation is soon overshadowed by her anxiety. Two weeks. She has two weeks. Rey makes her way to the bridge, choosing to seek Hux first before speaking to Kylo. Talking with the General about the rebels is… easier… by a long shot. Which isn’t that long, to be honest.

She finds him standing at the very end of the room, staring out towards the vastness of space. Rey tips her head as the stormtroopers turn to acknowledge her entrance and salute, trying to conceal her
startled expression. The officers manning the switchboards all glance at the display with equal parts astonishment and intrigue before returning quietly to their work. Except for one, that is. A short, slender and nervous-looking officer nods to her. She had seen that same deferential nod before, from that very same person, but aimed at General Hux. Rey scratches through the cobwebs of her memories looking for a name to add to the face and quickly finds it—Lieutenant Mitaka. He’d signed off on her paperwork when she’d become part of the First Order.

Maker, that seemed so long ago. Rey nods to him and returns his quivering smile, watching the high color rising to his cheeks with amusement before she quickly crosses the bridge towards Hux.

Hux turns his head slightly to acknowledge her before facing the open sea of stars again, jaw tense and a small twitch to his left eye she’d often noticed but had never asked about. She wants to ask if he’s okay, but he beats her to the punch.

“Are you alright?” he asks. Rey dips into his mind, searching. His concern at her audience with Snoke washes over her immediately so she nods and he relaxes a degree before once more turning to her. “Would you mind stepping into my office? It seems I have a promise to keep.”

A flash of a memory skitters past of a time when Hux had admonished her for daring to think he’d promised her anything. Rey smiles despite herself and follows behind him until they’re out of earshot behind closed doors. In the end, she’d gotten what she wanted.

Hux leans against his desk, legs crossed at the ankles, the most relaxed he allows himself to be, as he motions for her to sit down. Rey takes it, straightening her back against the chair so she can look up at his beautiful, sharp eyes.

“What did you and Organa discuss?” he says, weighing his words carefully. Rey chews on her lower lip. “Aside from Kylo’s new predicament, that is.”

Straight to the point, this one.

“I proposed the idea of… collaboration,” Rey says, words as even as she can keep them, drawing on extra reserves of courage and strength she had believed she’d emptied after her audience with Snoke. Hux opens his mouth to retort so she holds up a hand, rushing to prevent a silence that Hux can interrupt. “You have said it yourself. We’re undermanned, undersupplied—“

“Don’t worry about the supplies,” Hux says tersely.

“We’re still undermanned,” Rey says immediately. “They have some of the best pilots in the galaxy; for certain the best pilot in the galaxy, and men whose strengths lie in guerrilla warfare.”

Hux’s mouth clicks shut. He’s listening now.

“It is what we’re about to try and pull off, isn’t it?” she asks to cement her point.

“It is. That doesn’t change the fact that they’re the enemy, Rey.”

Of course he’d say that. And to an extent she can understand. When the enemy has always worn the face of the rebels it’s hard to think of them differently. Rey had only been in this war for days and already decided she’d hated Hux and his ilk. She can only imagine what a lifetime of indoctrination would be like. Actually, she doesn’t need to imagine. She’s staring right at it.

Rey sighs, throwing up a hand in the air. “What enemy, exactly? You destroyed the Republic, Hux. They destroyed Starkiller. Right now we’re all just two sides of the same coin struggling on its last leg. A gaggle of guerrilla fighters on one side, a broken band of struggling, though well trained,
soldiers on the other.”

Hux stiffens, the downturn of his lips informing her very clearly that he resents being referred to as a band of anything, but though the First Order’s numbers far exceed the Resistance’s they are nothing compared to what they’d been months ago.

“They would never agree,” Hux counters, as close to conceding her point as he’d ever get. Rey snorts.

“Leia said the same thing,” she says. She looks Hux in the eye, tilting her head sideways. “But we all want the same thing, don’t we? We all have a score to settle with the same creature. We could use their insight.”

Hux purses his lips, arms now crossed in front of him like a last ditch effort to keep this ridiculous idea - in his eyes at least - as far away as possible.

“We need all the allies we can get, Bren,” she pleads even though her tone is as calm and collected as she can make it. Being seen as desperate is the last thing she wants. “We have very few as is. Or would you rather we be fighting a war on two fronts? I bought us two weeks, then I either show up at his temple or he will come here.”

Hux turns stony. He looks like he want to argue. She knows he wants to argue, that he’s fighting his own internal conflict, one she’d had to fight for herself once— betray his convictions and accept Rebel help, or potentially give up his and his men’s lives. The tiny, tired exhale he lets out is all she needs. Of course he doesn’t want to fight a war on two sides. Nobody would. It’s a death sentence to do so, and two weeks is not enough time. She doesn’t have to say it out loud for him to acknowledge it. It’s now or never.

“Have you told Kylo of your plans?” Hux asks.

What little backbone she’d worked up immediately liquefies, her eyes falling from his and landing on the green stone dangling from her neck on its silver rope, resting on her breast atop her shirt. This time Hux does sigh.

“Not yet,” she says, looking back up. “I will once we’re finished here. I— He won’t like it,” she continues, narrowing her eyes at him because she doesn’t need to say anything for Hux to know she’s including him as well. “But I can try and make him see reason. His estrangement from his family is in no small part thanks to Snoke, after all.”

Hux tilts his head sideways as if trying to calculate her odds, fingers drumming absentmindedly on his forearm. Rey’s eyes drop to follow the motion, blinking, and when Hux notices he smiles a wistfully. Then he straightens and puts out a hand for her to take.

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend, I suppose,” he muses before pulling her up to her feet. “I promised to listen, Rey. So I will listen, nothing else.”

Rey smiles up at him. “That’s all I ask. And in return?”

Hux’s brows stitch together for a moment before he leans in and places a soft kiss on her forehead. When he pulls back the look on his eyes is far away, studying her features carefully before he releases her hand.

A small gift for a small gift.

“Nothing in return.”
Warmth blooms in her chest and spreads. Slowly it rolls over her bones, flows through her veins, in her nerves from her chest to her fingertips. It’s foreign, this feeling, a new sort of warmth that has nothing to do with physical desire. She’s not sure what to say, so she says nothing, choosing instead to reach for his hand again and give it a small squeeze.

“I need a moment of your time before you go,” he says, clearing his throat uncomfortably as the moment finishes washing over them. “Will you follow me?”

Fifteen minutes later finds them in the med bay area. Rey throws confused looks at Hux’s profile though, as usual, he acknowledges none of them as he walks at a sedate pace. Her mild irritation is immediately forgotten when he leads her into a room and she’s met with twenty soldiers standing at attention. They immediately snap off a salute as one, twenty sets of eyes on her. She finds a pair she knows well— Lance’s. Then Pip’s. Marla’s.

When she turns to Hux he’s standing at her side, hands behind his back and a blank look on his face.

“Meet your detail,” Hux says to the group of men and women before her. Rey frowns and looks at them all, taking in their familiar faces. The wounds she expected to see there are all gone, including Lance’s. There’s not a single bruise to be found. If anything, he’s pink-cheeked and healthy, fiery red hair shining like a newly polished crown. He must have seen quite a lot of bacta in the last twenty four hours, she thinks. Hux spares Lance a cursory glance before turning to Rey.

“Lady Rey, meet your new guard.”

Her new— what? Every single trooper smiles, and she has to consciously put effort into not gaping. Rey chews on her bottom lip, resisting the urge to run at the stormtroopers and throw herself into their collective arms. She instead looks at Hux.

“Isn’t this… excessive?” she asks. Who needs twenty bodyguards?

Hux’s jaw twitches with a suppressed reaction as he surveys the platoon in front of him, and though the slight change in his tone of voice is probably unreadable to everyone else, Rey hears both exasperation and amusement in his words when he says, “We offered them reassignment. They requested this of Phasma upon their official release from the medical unit. Firmly requested it.”

A few of the stormtroopers blush. Marla, the shortest woman of the bunch, stands up straighter. Pip purses his lips, torn between smiling and remaining as stoic as ever. Lance throws a wink at her that he immediately wishes he could take back, projecting the thought extra loud when Lance catches Hux glaring at him.

“They’re officially at your command, Lady Rey,” Hux says. It feels so weird to have him call her by a formal title.

“I see…” Rey says, suddenly feeling awkward. Hux raises his eyebrows at her, tilting his head sideways, waiting for her to do something. “Uh— At…ease…?”

The stormtroopers relax to a soldier’s rest at once. Hux nods as if this is perfectly normal. He then turns to Rey, lowering his voice for her ears alone. “Get used to leading, Lady Rey. The sooner the better, preferably. You will need it if your plans come to fruition, after all.”

He sounds proud. She can feel it. He also sounds patient, the way he had on their trip to Kuat. Is this another lesson being imparted, then? Rey stares but he gives her no chance to say anything, taking a step back and returning to his usual no-nonsense, all-business voice.

“I must take my leave now.”
Rey regards the men and women in front of her. The second Hux is out of sight she walks towards them, forcing them to release their standing positions as she throws herself at them, forgetting her reservations and cupping faces, touching arms and heads and anywhere she can reach, relief flooding her in waves. These troopers may be her guards, but they’re her friends. Pip chuckles and pats her shoulder gently, if not a tad awkwardly, when she hugs him.

“I am so sorry. I am so, so sorry,” she repeats over and over. “None of that should have happened to you.”


“Reconditioning is very unpleasant, miss,” Marla shudders, filling in the blanks where Pip’s usually short speeches lacked for Rey’s benefit upon seeing the confused look on her face.

Rey cringes, remembering some of the things she’d learned while shadowing Hux. She could imagine just how unpleasant it could be, and would wish it on no one. “You all want to stay?”

It is Lance who answers.

“Yes,” he says without skipping a beat. “They gave us the option, undergo reconditioning and help us forget, then either stay here or be reassigned. The Commander even gave us a personal apology,” he says, awed, then makes a face. He’d been the one to suffer the most at the Commanders’ hands. “But you did promise you wanted to help us. We…” Lance lowers his voice and looks at his comrades, his Adam’s apple bouncing up and down as he chokes back the croaked breaking of his words. “We chose to stay and remember. We want to help, too.”

Rey could cry.

But she doesn’t. She remembers Hux’s words from only a few minutes ago. Learn to lead. The sooner the better.

“Alright, then,” she says, ensuring the med-bay is empty before motioning them all to take their seats where they can—the floor, the beds, a few chairs. Lance stands next her, having already heard this story. Two weeks. She has two weeks.

The countdown to doomsday starts ticking inside her head.

Rey looks at the cameras in the med-bay and sends tendrils of the Force into them, quickly shutting them off. “You need to know what you truly signed up for. What I’m about to say stays in this room.”

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“Somehow I knew I’d find you here.”

Kylo cracks an eye open to see Rey entering the training room. He closes it again, breathing slowly as he tracks her steps, hears her dropping to the floor across from him. He opens his eyes again to see her mirroring him, legs crossed and hands palm up on her knees—a meditative position.

Are you alright? He asks without a second thought, slipping into their bond having become as easy as breathing to them both, an indispensable form of communication he can hardly imagine going without. Rey licks her lips, picking at the thread of her trousers under his scrutiny. He can sense hesitation in her.

We have two weeks, she says, quickly replaying all of her audience with Snoke like a holo-movie for
him, Kylo sensing her fear and uneasiness spike. Before he knows it his hands are in fists on his knees— so much for meditating.

*I won’t allow him to take you,* he says, to which Rey smiles.

*Of course not,* Rey responds. *I’d never allow him here.* Then she offers up the rest of her memories. Snoke had given her a precious clue.

Kylo had spent all night staring into Vader’s helmet, sensing for the connection there. Every time he found it, it slipped through his fingers, Snoke’s thoughts as nebulous as the wild space surrounding them. Kylo’s main goal had been to extract his location and yet—

Rey chews on her lower lip.

*May I?* Kylo asks.

She tilts her head at him, an unbidden memory bubbling up and into his awareness. Once upon a time he’d demanded entrance, demanded he be given a map. Kylo cringes. He hadn’t been exactly subtle, too busy trying to impress her, too busy giving into his own curiosity of the little scavenger.

*You’ve learned,* she says. Rey grins at him, offering up the map for him to pluck from the surface with ease. *I don’t know where this is but…*

*I know where,* Kylo responds, turning it inside his head. Vjun. It makes sense. There’s a Force nexus there. Kylo swallows down a bitter snort— for a creature that despises sentimentality, he sure picked well when he chose Vjun, Vader’s haunting grounds. The thought angers him, makes his skin crawl and his blood simmer, but one look at Rey and Kylo reminds himself of the bigger picture. Not here. He couldn’t lose it now.

*Ben?* She asks as if on cue, reminding him that he’s Kylo no longer. He is Kylo out of convenience now.

*I’m fine,* he lies. Rey sees right through him but says nothing, so he once more turns the map inside his head. *Have you told Hux?*

Rey hesitates once more, forcing him to stop his inspection of Snoke’s coordinates to look at her. She swallows, shifting her weight from one side to another uncomfortably while thumbing the necklace he’d given her with a sort of anxious twitch. He narrows his eyes.

*Rey—*

She flinches then sighs, the sound disrupting the eery silence in the training room. When she finally looks up at him it’s with both regret and determination warring on her face, the faint traces of which he can feel through the bond.

*About that,* she says, their bond glowing orange. Tensing. *Remember when I asked you if we could talk about Leia?*

Now it’s his turn to tense. This again.

*What does she have to do with Hux?* He asks, unable to see the connection until she shows him. Rey closes her eyes and opens up to him, an invitation if he’s ever seen one, so Kylo closes his own eyes and wades into her thoughts. He immediately regrets it.

What he finds is his mother’s face reflected in front of his eyes as though it were him sitting in the
What happened to you, child?” General Leia Organa asks. Kylo tenses at the words. It’s the first time he’s heard her voice in a long time. “You disappeared. We couldn’t trace you— what happened?”

Rey flinches, remembering the reason why. There’s a phantom pain that courses through Kylo’s veins as though that pain had been his own. She’d disappeared and nearly gotten killed.

“It’s… it’s a long story,” Rey says, and though she’s reluctant to rehash what happened, she eventually finds it in herself to do so.

Kylo’s back stiffens, his spine turning wooden as he watches his mother’s reaction on Hux’s data pad, the one which she’d stolen out of his nightstand and messed with the settings so she could contact the Resistance.

“But I am alive! Alive and well now,” Rey promises Leia, who narrows her eyes.

“Alive and well,” Leia deadpans. Rey fidgets. Kylo nearly snorts. Rey had been foolish to think she could get anything past his mother. Then Leia says the only words that can cut through him as easily as a blade. “And my son? Is he… is he okay?”

The second he tries to yank himself out of the memory Rey grabs onto their mutual bond and hauls him back in place, her iron clad hold refusing to let him chicken out of seeing this.

“I—” Rey begins, trying to find the words. “No. No, he’s not.”

The dismay on Leia’s face is heartbreaking. The panic even more so. “Ben, is he alive?” Leia asks, voice breaking in a way only a mother’s could. Kylo grinds his teeth, torn between wanting to see her in pain and… and wanting it to stop. His heart squeezes painfully at the look on her face at Rey’s next words.

“Depends on what you consider living,” she says. “Outwardly he’s fine, but… he broke, Leia. He’s…”

Rey explains what she’d seen that night while he fell apart piece by shard-sharp piece, what he’d allowed her to see. She paints a bloody, visceral picture for Leia, and Kylo — Ben? — shattered before her. Kylo once again tries to escape, and once again Rey keeps him in place, so instead he attempts to breathe normally and get through it.

“I knew it,” Leia seethes, eyes welling with angry tears as she looks around the room she’s in desperately. It’s a rebel base room, dark and damp, and by the low hiss in Leia’s voice Rey knows that no one else is supposed to know of this conversation. “I knew it was Snoke. That twisted, perverse, vile son of a—“

Rey blinks through the following string of colorful swear words on the former princess’s tongue. Then Rey dares broach the subject of the elephant in the room.

“It’s why I need your help, General.”

By the time the memory is over Kylo is sweating, his breathing hitched and sharp and aching in his throat with unshed tears he didn’t know he still had left in him. Rey reaches forward tentatively, trying to offer comfort, but he leans out of reach on instinct.
“You had no right,” he spits out, teeth bared. Rey purses her lips.

“Kylo.”

“You had no right!”

“I had no choice!” she says, pushing at him another memory, this time of him kneeling on the floor staring vacantly at his hands, the wreck he’d caused still smoldering all around him. Then another, a memory of Snoke, telling her she’s got two weeks. “We have no choice.”

He can hear it as though it were his own thought, the ticking inside Rey’s mind. She had replaced her counting of days on Jakku with something worse.

“Trust me,” Rey pleads, trying to make him see reason. *Please trust me.*

Rey tries to reach for him again, whispering the same three words into his mind over and over again, and though his instincts tell him to *run,* he hangs in there and feels her fingers sear into his skin, feels the fight leaking out of him. He surveys the face of the very same girl who’d tried to stitch him back together only so many nights before.

*Girl no longer. Scavenger no longer.*

He’d watched her change, watched her take what was thrown at her and face it with nothing but spunk and determination, watched her nearly die once because of it. He’d watched her endure, overcome, grow. Watched her take the odds and beat them. Why can’t he do the same? Why can’t he be more like her?

He’s tired. So, so tired. With a deep breath he pulls away. Rey instantly balks, pain, regret, and panic leaking through the bond. She’s afraid she messed up.

*Be—Kylo?*

He inhales sharply, closing his eyes. He’s drained. Even the anger and the rage inside of him is nothing but embers and ashes now. Perhaps her words to his mother had been right. He’s finally broken completely.

“How Hux know?” he repeats his earlier question. Rey swallows visibly and nods.

Right. He may be drowning in his own self inflicted pain but the universe keeps moving.

He runs his fingers through his hair, closing them into a fist close to the scalp, letting the pain center him—No.

The universe keeps moving. When he finally gathers up his courage to look at Rey, to bare all of it before her, all he can manage are three words.

“I need time.”

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That night they all fall asleep knowing that it’s the last true night of rest they will get, Hux spooned into Rey’s back while she drapes herself over Kylo’s shoulder and silently begs for forgiveness. Kylo says nothing, and when another raging tear sneaks past his lashes she wipes it away in silence. Hux watches on.

Hux had contacted Organa using the same rigged connection Rey had set up on his data pad. By
some miracle, he’d begrudgingly managed to come to a mutual agreement to listen to what the other had to say for Rey’s sake. He falls asleep making lists, itemizing every single outcome and the likelihood that they could go wrong, then attempting to find ways to mitigate those outcomes.

Beside him Rey worries about her friends, and about her lovers— about Hux’s meeting with the rebellion, one which he had refused to bring her along for in case things went wrong.

“For your own protection,” Hux had said. She had only ever seen him truly scared twice. Once, when she’d read his mind and plucked haphazardly at his memories and that very afternoon as he’d very sternly told her that he refused to put her or Kylo in danger. Rey had found it endearing, his sudden overprotectiveness at odds with both his character and the fact that they were preparing for battle.

She worries about Kylo, worries even as he twitches underneath her, muscles tight as a coiled wire waiting to spring. She tries to soothe it away, pulls him into the bond for sleep, hopes that they can find some rest. There would be little of that from now on. He’s reluctant at first, but she can feel his exhaustion. He gives in eventually, after almost an hour of fighting it, and even then sleep is restless for both of them.

In the morning Kylo and Rey see Hux off as he takes a nondescript vessel and sets the coordinates for the one place they all doubt Snoke would ever turn an eye to— the old, bombed out depot Rey had given up D’Qar for. It is a useless place now and Snoke cares little for useless things, Hux had reasoned sarcastically, knowing his and Kylo’s life had been deemed just as useless as that pile of rubble. Perfect place to meet with guerrilla fighters, then.

The knot in Rey’s stomach tightens further at the thought, even moreso as Kylo and Hux share a gentle kiss in the empty hangar before it is Rey’s turn to bid her goodbyes, then watches as Hux departs and Kylo turns around without another word, leaving her alone to stare after him. She had never thought she’d see the day when he would turn his back on her, much less feel it twist her insides as much as it does now. She looks around the hangar, wondering if she’d done the right thing or simply managed to alienate herself from Kylo and sent Hux to his death, but the cold floor offers no answers.

She’s alone.

Just her and the countdown in her mind, the ticking inside her head morphing into to the thunderous sound of the drums of war.

Chapter End Notes

A tonnnnn of thanks to my lovely wifey and beta EjBlaKit / Darth-Ej for the work on this chapter ;;; couldn’t do it without you, bebe.

And a billion thanks to all of you who’re reading and commenting with every update.
Welcome to the final arc of this story. WE’RE OFF TO WAR, KIDS!

EDIT:

important info:
1. Vjun - A planet in the outer rim that used to be home to Vader in Legends.
2. **Force Nexus** - or vergence, is a term used to refer to any location where the Force, or any particular aspect of the Force, was unusually strong.
Hux steps over the rubble of his once pristine depot, surveying the wreckage left behind by the Resistance nine months ago. He never thought he would find himself here, but fate has a funny way of keeping him on his toes. Had he had a sense of humor, he would have laughed.

Instead he stares at the open clearing where a Resistance transport idles, its sole passengers all standing together eyeing him warily in turn. He recognizes two of the three, immediately biting back an annoyed exhale as his eyes land on the first of them: tan skin, sleepy eyes, a sharp jaw and hair beautiful enough to rival Kylo’s. The pilot that had gotten away from his grasp with the traitor before Starkiller’s collapse. What had been his name again?

The other is less recognizable, yet no less threatening for it. A Wookie. Hux cocks an eyebrow and lets his eyes fall on the third person, the one he had not so long ago become painfully familiar with.

General Leia Organa, the living legend in the flesh, stares him down as a queen would her subject, with a dignified calm that speaks of years, decades, of handling situations like this one— and of getting what she wants out of it, he thinks wryly. Organa may be shorter than the pilot by two heads and shorter than the Wookie by many, many more, but it’s clear who’s in charge. Hux has to begrudgingly admit he’s a bit impressed. Just a microscopic bit.

He straightens his spine, expecting Mitaka to do the same at his side, though Hux refuses to verify as he crosses the long distance towards his reluctant welcoming party.

“General Organa.” He imbues as much civility as he can afford into that greeting, reminding himself of why he’s here with a nod of acknowledgement. Her companions receive no greeting, though they do not seem awfully affronted by it.

“Hux.”

Well, that’s a wonderful start. If only he could be just about anywhere but here right now. How does one even attempt a compromise with the leader of the opposition they’ve hated and worked endlessly to thwart for so long?

“I admit, I imagined something different.” Organa says by way of greeting, immediately sizing him up. Hux barely manages to keep his eyebrows from creeping up, maintaining a rigid posture and a tight lipped expression. “When you contacted me I thought it had been a cleverly placed trap.”

“And by that you mean what, exactly, General?” he asks. “Please, don’t hold back.”

Yes, he’d rather she spoke her mind. That would give him an excuse to turn heel and return to Rey with the awful news that it had not worked out, and they could go back to the drawing board and have this play out his way.

No, you told her you’d hear the rebels out.
Since when had he developed a moral compass? And since when had it pointed so absolutely towards Rey?

Organa’s lips tilt up at the edges, inspecting him once again before turning eyes to Mitaka.

“You’re not at all what I expected.”

It takes all he has to keep the disdain off his face. Instead he brings his hands up, leisurely wasting time by pulling at the edge of his glove before once more looking at her. “And what did you expect?”

He waits for her to quip about his age, as everyone often does. Or about the fact that he is, indeed, a General of the First Order. Instead Leia Organa hums.

“Your name,” she says, looking him square in the eye. Are all Skywalkers so cryptic, or is that just a trait inherited along with a royal title?

“You look nothing like your father.” She elaborates, the words more a sting than a blow now that he’s older, but sting they do nonetheless. A muscle in his jaw tightens, forcing the tic in his left eye to bloom anew, though his forced blank expression remains the same. Of course. “Though I see something of him in your eyes. Come.”

She turns on her heel, climbing up the armored hatch of her transport, then turns again when nobody seems to be following. Stern eyes fall on the pilot, then on the Wookie, and only then do they move, though not without throwing Hux and Mitaka one last glare.

Hux looks at the transport, the gears in his head turning as he takes in every detail of the thing. It looks like a child took ten different ships and mashed them together into a single monstrosity, one he knows for a fact contains a knockoff version of a hyperdrive he had helped engineer, if his spies had the right of it.

“Insurance,” Leia Organa says, waving at the ship, then at the Wookie. Of course, the pilot to man the ship, the Wookie to keep them in line in case things went south— preferably by killing them on the spot while Organa makes a quick getaway. Mitaka is a fair fighter, but he very much doubts Mitaka or himself could win a brawl against a creature over several feet taller than either one of them, and infinitely stronger. Perhaps he should have brought Phasma instead.

Stop. You came at Rey’s request. So have they.

“Common ground,” Hux offers smoothly instead, hoping to ease the atmosphere as much as possible despite his absolute desire to do otherwise. It takes a gargantuan effort not to feel for the pistol strapped to his thigh holster. “My planet, your ship.”

Leia smiles, an appraising glint in her eye, as if she had expected nothing else from him. Or perhaps she had. He steps forward, the tense weight in his shoulders refusing to shift while he listens to Mitaka following on his heels.

Once inside, General Organa makes introductions.

“This is my best pilot, Poe Dameron,” she says, pointing to the gorgeous man with the sleepy yet intense looking eyes. Dameron inclines his head with a soft ‘charmed,’ while looking anything but. Then Organa points to the Wookie. “And Chewie.”

The Wookie — Chewie lets out a roaring cry that sounds very unfriendly even to Hux’s untrained ears, but the creature makes no move of aggression, choosing instead to stand in the corner, though
Hux doesn’t miss the strategically placed bowcaster.

“Lieutenant Mitaka,” Hux says, indicating the shorter man at his side, thankful that for once Mitaka doesn’t seem to be starry-eyed nor his usual fearful sniveling self. That only seemed to happen around Kylo Ren. Here he’s ramrod straight and sharp as a tack, looking every bit an accomplished, well trained member of the Order.

Leia nods, all business, extending her hand to two of the transport chairs. She takes one opposite him, crossing her hands on her lap as if she were sitting on a throne rather than a rack-suspended seat, Poe Dameron taking the other one, the one closest to the cockpit should he need to make a run for it. Hux waits a second before doing the same on the opposite side, Mitaka mimicking Poe. The silence spans another couple of heartbeats before General Organa speaks.

“Before we begin, I want you to know I am only doing this for Rey’s sake, so I must ask— why is she not here?” the woman says, grinding any hopes Hux had of not getting Rey involved in this to dust, though he can hardly say he’s surprised.

“She is training. As I informed you earlier, our timeframe has been, ah— shortened,” Hux replies.

“And is this training something she could not have done while on her way here?” Leia presses, as mule headed as Ren himself. Who is the exact person he had hoped he wouldn’t have to bring into this until absolutely necessary, though perhaps there is no better time than the present.

“She is training with your son, General,” Hux says, watching the General’s face for a shift in expression. “I hardly believe she’d be able to do that aboard my shuttle.”

To her benefit, General Organa betrays nothing. It seems she will not allow herself to be swayed by sentimentalities here, even if he’s sure a bout of sentimentality had driven her to agree to the meeting to begin with. There’s an upward tick of respect in Hux’s tally for this woman.

“I see,” General Organa says, then laces her fingers on her knees and leans forward. “Well, I suppose we will have to do without. Explain the situation from the beginning, if you would, General.”

Despite himself, he finds himself talking, his words stilted as he picks and chooses what information to give out while still maintaining truthful integrity. When he’s finally done filling in his enemy with nine months’ worth of highly classified information, at least, as much as is pertinent to this situation, the sun is setting.

“And what do we get in exchange?” she asks.

“A timed cease fire,” he says. “Mutually agreed upon, of course.”

“Absolutely not,” Organa counters Hux’s offer. “How am I to know that you will uphold your end of the bargain once all is said and done? Or that you won’t simply exterminate my men the second your mission’s complete.”

Hux narrows his eyes, counting the seconds slowly in his head to keep the throbbing at his temple in check.

“That street goes both ways, General.” His voice is soft. The sort of softness that hides sharp edged steel under a whisper of silk. “I have, until this moment, given you everything you’ve wanted to know, which is more than you deserve. What assurances do I have that you won’t simply board my ships and sabotage this mission the moment you have an opening? A ceasefire has already been helpful to you since this very depot was destroyed, has it not? Oh, don’t give me that look. You
know as well as I that it was not luck that allowed your pilots to escape this moon’s atmosphere.”
Hux looks at Poe, who at least has the decency to swallow hard. “Nor was it luck that allowed you
to escape D’Qar unscathed, allowed to you to build your numbers.”

“So you honestly expect me to believe that you will keep your word because Rey asked this of
you?”

“I would think my very presence and this gentleman’s ability to sit here right now, instead of having
been buried months ago, proves that,” Hux says, once again looking at Poe. Leia purses her lips,
sitting back in her chair, but says nothing. She knows that the only reason she hadn’t ended up with
her pilots’ destruction tainting her hands red had been because of Rey. And she knows that Hux
knows it.

“You’re just trying to save your own skin, General,” Leia counters, leaning forward. There is no
malice in her eyes, just a certain awareness of truth.

Hux tilts his head sideways slightly. “And your son’s. Or have you so quickly forgotten about him
while deciding what would be more advantageous to your rebel cause in these negotiations?” It is a
cruel accusation to leverage against a mother, but he will use whatever means necessary, in this case,
for he had promised Rey that he would try. Then there’s also the part of him that has become fiercely
overprotective of Ren. When Leia says nothing, Hux continues. “We may not see eye to eye
politically, but I believe here, at least, there’s a common goal. Take the deal.”

Oh, he’s fighting dirty. He knows he is. Leia’s face hardens, probably so as not to betray the hurt and
anger that slices through her, though Hux thinks he sees a twinge of it flash in her eyes before she
checks it. What a formidable woman.

Then she does the unexpected.

“No.” She says.

Hux is not a man to be surprised often, but this…

“Excuse me?”

“I said no, General Hux. While I will fight for my son’s return to the Light until my dying breath,
you will not coerce me into agreeing with you by dangling him in front of me like a honeyed carrot. I
agreed to listen, nothing more.”

Oh, what a formidable woman. How far would she go for her beliefs? A memory comes to mind. Of
a time when Rey had turned him down in a similar manner when he’d tried to negotiate a room for a
trip to Kuat. Maybe that’s his problem. Maybe he just has a weak spot for women who shut him
down. The gauge of respect ticks higher yet. That, and he’s also perhaps too surprised to be angry,
but more so, she’s also given him exactly what he’d wanted from the beginning. A reason to leave.

“Then I believe our negotiations are over, General,” he says, standing up and righting his greatcoat
at his leisure. The Wookie twitches, looking like he wants to pounce, so Hux pulls an imaginary
piece of lint off his sleeve and, without looking up, offers Organa a flinty smile. “Don’t bother. Your
ship, my planet, remember?”

He’s practically bluffing. There are no sentries in the shadows, nobody to call for backup. Not when
bringing men rather than making the lone trip with Mitaka would have been a red flag for Snoke that
Hux is moving.

But Organa doesn’t know that. Let her think there are watching eyes everywhere.
She motions for the Wookie to stand down, rising from her chair with a swift grace that belies her years.

“I have fulfilled my agreement with Rey,” she says, shrewd eyes focusing on Hux’s, hoping to glean from him more than he’s already given. Too bad for her that, while she now knows the full story pertaining Snoke, he’s given her very little to use against him later. Their war would continue as it always had, just with one less monster lurking in the shadows. He refuses to look away, however.

“You will be allowed the courtesy of leaving this moon’s atmosphere without being tracked. Once outside of it, that courtesy ends. I suggest you jump to hyperspace as soon as possible.” He says, feeling entirely satisfied at the uneasy look that crosses the pilot’s face. Leia Organa, however, simply studies him.

“We’re the same, you and I,” she says, after a moment’s leaden scrutiny. He feels a soft caress, much more subtle than that of Kylo’s or Rey’s intrusions— more like a breeze than a hurricane, a flowing awareness, and for a second he wonders if either one of them is trying to reach him this far out. Would that be possible? His mind immediately starts whirring, coming up with scenarios in which his absence has been noted and the rug pulled out from under him.

“I’m afraid you’re wrong,” he replies, shelving his thoughts for a later time, his gaze sharpening on Organa and his lip curling with derision. For the first time since he landed, she gives him a genuine smile.

“Not about this.”

The halls are cold as Rey makes her way through the Finalizer, passing stormtroopers who give her big smiles before trying to hide them behind veneers of professionalism everywhere she goes—smiles that she returns readily while practically trotting towards the training room. Hopefully she’d make it in time.

She rounds two more corners, the soles of her boots clicking rapidly as she increases her pace in hopes that she’ll find Yathe before the Knight of Ren took her leave from the Finalizer, then skids to a halt when she spies Captain Phasma entering the training room ahead. Rey tilts her head, walking slower yet and masking her steps as best as she can as voices rise and travel to her ears, then chooses to stand to the side to give Yathe and Phasma their privacy, trying and failing to keep the small smile off her face at Phasma’s sweet words of endearment.

A moment later, Yathe’s silvery voice calls out.

“I know you’re there, Lady Ren,” a voice calls, and even from here Rey can hear the amusement in those words, “You’re about as silent on your feet as a happabore charging through a market. You might as well come in.”

Rey flinches. She thought she’d been quiet. She walks into the room, a sheepish smile on her face, to face the source of that voice. Yathe’s eyes twinkle as they meet hers, Rey immediately nodding her head in acknowledgement before turning to Phasma, exchanging the same greeting with the Captain.

“Sorry to interrupt,” Rey says. Phasma gives her a small smile, her pale features turning uncharacteristically warm and pink, which seems to amuse Yathe to no end.
“It’s alright,” says Phasma, dropping Yathe’s hands, though not without giving the woman another squeeze before letting to. “I was just leaving.”

With one last tender look directed towards Yathe, and one last nod of her head for Rey, Phasma once more becomes the hard Captain they all know and admire, walking off at a hard clip. Rey looks at Yathe, eyebrows raised, a motion which Yathe mimics before cracking a grin.

“She’s not very into displaying her affections publicly,” is all Yathe gives for explanation, the edges of her eyes soft with a private smile.

“I can see that,” Rey grins, remembering the hard outer shells her partners display to the world and knowing Phasma’s own reluctance to show her underbelly has everything to do with her own training. “I came to bid you goodbye before you took off. It will not be for long, I hope?”

“We can hope.” Yathe inclines her head once more, her eyes hardening, then she regards Rey for a long moment. “You will be fine.”

Rey straightens her spine in an attempt to stem the shiver running down it, the fear she’s been feeling in her bones for days now quick to try and assert itself over her. No, she would be fine, just like Yathe promised. The ship is in wild space now, and all the Knights would be departing the ship immediately, scattering so as to avoid another repeat of the last… incident. Still, it makes her uneasy to see her fellow knight and friend depart. It’s one less friendly face around. Rey swallows.

Yathe tilts her head, taking in Rey’s valiant attempt at trying to keep her face impassive, then closes the distance between them and places long ebony fingers on Rey’s shoulders, bowing her spine until her forehead meets Rey’s— an equally uncharacteristic display of affection for Yathe.

“Remember my promise to you when we met, Rey,” Yathe whispers for her ears only. “You are not alone in this, friend.”

Rey closes her eyes and breathes in deeply, then nods.

They would be fine. They would be fine. They would be fine. Rey clings to that belief like a mantra.

“You’re right. Thank you,” Rey says, and Yathe pulls back after another second of quiet inspection.

“Good,” Yathe says, giving Rey’s shoulder one last pat. “And remember what I said. We can never quite shed our past. Whatever happens now, don’t let go of that past. It will serve you.”

Rey blinks, staring at Yathe, who only gives her one last bright, if quizzical, smile before collecting some gear off the weapons racks.

“Do tell Captain Phasma I will comm her soon,” Yathe says, walking slowly out the door with a laugh. “She left in such a flustered hurry I couldn’t get a word in.”

Rey watches her go, about to sprint after her to ask what she meant by holding onto her past when the commlink at her wrist beeps. The thought of running after Yathe is completely forgotten when she reads the missive. It’s from Kylo. The first few words he’s directed at her in a week now, even if indirectly. Hux is back.

She takes off in the opposite direction Yathe went, heart hammering in her chest as she heads for the hangar Kylo specified. It takes her a while to get there, and by the time she’s entering the mostly dim hangar Hux’s ship ramp is lowering. There’s nobody else there except for Kylo, waiting with his back to her as the ramp creaks down, standing on a beam of light coming from the control center. Rey looks up and sees a lone Phasma there at the controls, no doubt initiating the closing protocol for
the hangar now that Hux’s ship has arrived, and erasing all traces of the landing. Just in case.

Rey quickly walks towards Kylo, stopping a handful of feet away from him nervously. He’d already noticed her arrival and hadn’t even bothered to acknowledge her, physically or via their bond; Rey could lie to herself about how deep the sting of that rejection runs, but she’s quickly become used to them, so chooses instead to focus on Hux. Kylo can brood all he wants.

Her chest fills with air and she holds it there when she finally sees Hux’s crown of red hair, eyes widening to try and sharpen her vision. Hux nods to Mitaka, who gives a sharp salute and quickly takes off, before slowly walking towards them. And still she holds her breath. Waiting, waiting, waiting.

Hux shakes his head, shoulders tense and tight-lipped. That’s all he needs to do and Rey’s harbored hope deflates like a popped balloon.

The light in the control room goes off — Phasma returning to the bridge — leaving Hux, Kylo and Rey standing in the dim red glow of the safety lights. Hux greets her first with a kiss; slow and gentle, as if afraid of bruising her, before placing his hand on Kylo’s cowl and bunching up his fingers there, some sort of symbolic action Rey doesn’t know the meaning of. Down the bond skitters a single whisper of relief, only to be replaced with mind numbing weariness, before Kylo tightens his hold on the walls that had lowered for Hux on instinct, and blocks her out.

God, she could scream. How much longer would he shut her out like this? She’d much rather take his screaming and destruction than this glacial shoulder he seems to have developed just for her. The destructive outbursts were usually aimed at consoles, and lasted far, far shorter, at least.

**Kylo?** Rey sends out through the bond. She’s met with silence at the other end and lets out a tiny sigh, turning to look at Hux, who’s eyeing them both warily.

Well, if Kylo wouldn’t say a word.

“So now what?” she asks.

Hux spares Kylo one last sharp glance before focusing on her. “Now we revise our plans.”

______________________

“Alright,” Rey says, sitting with her legs crossed on the bed while she fidgets with the hem of her sleeve for something to do with her fingers. “Can you tell me everything that was said again, *exactly* as it was said, from the beginning?”

She’s been badgering Brendol for information now for a half hour, and Kylo has to give it to Hux, he’s bearing it with far more patience than he himself ever could.

“Rey,” Hux says, eyes narrowing.

Well, nobody said Brendol Hux’s patience was quite endless. Kylo leans back in the chair he’d gravitated in the room, muscles still and breathing soft. So much so that, had it not been for their bond tethering them permanently together, he thinks Rey would have forgotten he’s sitting *right there*.

So this is what she’s like when she’s scheming with Hux, he muses. She’d learned well.
“Please?” she asks.

Hux glances at Kylo before facing her again, no doubt despising having to recall this bit of his travels and the ultimate outcome _again_ while in his presence. But he begins the retelling nonetheless, knowing full well Rey won’t let it go until he does. By the time Brendol once again mentions his mother’s answer, glancing at Kylo again with pursed lips, Kylo’s shoulders are tense as boulders and the annoyance he’d carried all week has turned into a raging headache. As for Rey, he can feel her trying to check in on him every once in a while like a shadow, too scared to confront him but always lingering on the other side of the bond, even if she’s not looking at him outright. He hates how they both dance around him as if he might be an easily spooked cat.

Kylo grinds down on his teeth and stares ahead, past their faces, focusing on an empty spot of nothingness.

_Calm. Restraint. Even breaths._

He’d been telling himself the same thing for days now.

Rey’s near whisper finally breaks the silence.

“My two weeks are almost gone.” She gnaws on her lower lip before looking up at Hux then, for the first time all afternoon, dares look him in the eye. “I can go to Snoke.”

Those five words yank him and Hux straight to attention, and he finds himself talking before he’s fully processed her suggestion.

“No.”

That _no_ comes out as more of a bark than a word, the sound of it startling to his own ears. It certainly startles Rey, who looks as if she’s been slapped. It’s the first time he’s spoken to her since that incident in the training room, and of course, his first word is a resounding rebuttal. But he _can’t_ let her go.

He may be mad at her, but—

“I can gain you time,” she balks. “He’s begun to trust me. If I can put him at ease that I’m…” the sentence dies on the tip of her tongue like a flame deprived of oxygen. She doesn’t _know_ what Snoke wants her to be. Kriff, Kylo and Hux barely know, either. The repulsive creature has kept that card very close to his chest, no matter how many times Kylo has used that connection to the helmet, tried to exploit it to delve deeper, to find Snoke’s innermost secrets. It’s been part of why he’s barely seen hair nor hide of Rey’s for a week, though he knows it’s been driving her batty.

“If your mother won’t help us, then it only makes sense that I go,” she repeats stubbornly. She _had_ learned well. Despite her disappointment, Rey has adopted a tone he has come to recognize, one he’d heard on few others. He’d heard it on Hux, sure, but he’d also heard it plenty of time on his mother. It’s that _tone_ that brooks no nonsense and demands to be listened to. “If time is what we need to gather resources—”

Hux scoffs. “He’s right, little one. It’s not like I— we don’t have the means to do that on our own. Yes, their… _creative_ thinking would be appreciated,” Hux sneers, his face saying exactly what he thinks about having even entertained the idea to _collaborate_, “as would be not having to worry about them sandwiching us between two potential fights, but we don’t _need_ them. Nor do we need to make compromises. To put you in such a position—”

Rey turns her flinty glare on Hux, nostrils flaring. He can sense her scavenger nature kicking in,
senses her as Rey sees herself cornered two against one and starts looking for the most effective way to fight it.

“How?” she asks.

“How what?” Hux repeats, arching an eyebrow.

“How are you gathering resources, then?”

Hux looks at her for a long moment, weighing his options, hands casually resting on his crossed legs on the other chair, but Rey has long since stopped fidgeting due to prolonged observation. She simply sits a bit straighter and stares Hux down with equal impassivity. Then Hux lets out a soft breath.

“I can’t tell you that,” he says, holding up a hand when Rey opens her mouth to argue, “not that I don’t want to. But you keep being summoned by Snoke, and I’d rather he didn’t accidentally… stumble upon that information.”

“Are you saying you doubt my abilities to hide that information?” Rey asks, eyes narrowing, and Kylo has to bite the inside of his cheek to keep the unbidden smile from blooming. The part of him that’s not angry at her, the part that loves her with every fiber of his being even if she stepped on a very sensitive nerve in the training room, thrills at her very defiance.

Maybe that’s exactly why Snoke wants her. He’s never met somebody as headstrong.

Hux, clearly a smart man, one who appreciates keeping his head where it is, shakes it and gives Rey a placating smile, immediately letting himself slip into a hypnotically soothing lilt.

“I could hardly doubt your abilities, Rey. You’re as strong as he is,” he says, pointing to Kylo, who simply arches an eyebrow in response. “But I also have learned not to underestimate the power of a creature a millennia years old. The less people who know this, the better. He seems to have left Kylo and I to our own devices, probably thinking us inconsequential at this point, which has worked in our advantage. But not so much you.”

“His interest in you only grows,” Kylo agrees, the first full sentence he’s truly said. Rey looks at him, her cheeks tinging pink. “I can’t tell why, but I can sense the sentiment nonetheless. Hux is right.”

“Which is exactly why I should go!” she says, pointing at Hux as if she’d stumbled upon an aha! moment with which to argue. “If I show, then he’ll think I’m interested in whatever it is he wants, and I can convince him that I have work to do here yet. Make it easier on him. Turn everyone against…”

Against you, she wants to say. But there’s something else she’s not saying, though she has to know it as well as he. She would try to convince Snoke of a lie at her expense. One in which she could be caught, and killed for it.

How far?

How far is she willing to go for the bigger cause? How much would she sacrifice for it? For his mother? For Hux? For him? How far would he let her go into what could very well cost her her life while he sits back and watches?

And so it becomes painfully clear what he has to do. Kylo lets them go back to arguing, Hux once again takes the lead on dissuading Rey, listening as they talk around in circles with a few instances in which Rey manages to wrangle whatever bit of information she can out of Hux. It is only when they
finally exhaust all possible arguments, Hux informing them both that he has missed a week’s worth of reports and must go to the bridge immediately, that Kylo finally moves.

Rey watches him quietly, sitting still on the bed as she’d done so many times as Kylo goes about shedding his tunic and trousers, exchanging them for training clothes.

“Are you still mad at me?” she asks. Kylo glances at her out of the corner of his eye before returning to his task, resolutely mute, for which he earns an exasperated sigh.

“Not that it matters now, but I thought I was doing the right thing,” she says, hesitating. Her moment of hesitation rings so loudly, in fact, that he hears her flip flop between Ben and Kylo in his head as if he had thought both names up himself. In the end she doesn’t call him either, simply staring at his back, waiting for him to say something.

He finishes dressing quietly then grabs his lightsaber and clips it on his belt, turning on silent feet towards the door. A sharp pang of desperation from her hits him square in the chest. Loneliness.

It makes him hesitate, makes him slow down until he’s come to a full stop at the door. Kylo closes his eyes, taking in a deep breath.

“I know. You should rest,” he says.

Her loneliness turns into a single ray of hope between his ribs.

Kylo opens his eyes again and leaves, letting the door fall closed behind him. That’s about as much of an olive branch as he’s willing to offer right this second. He instead chooses to spend the next four hours working himself ragged in one of the training rooms, actively pouring out years’ worth of pent up rage and resentment until little remains of the abused training gear in the room and he’s drenched in sweat and barely standing. Until there’s nothing left in him but a blank void, which he will need.

In moments like this one he remembers his uncle’s words, the words he knew by memory and had tried so hard to forget.

_There is no emotion, there is peace._

Those words had felt like poison in his veins once. Now he repeats them in his head over and over, trying to gather some of that coveted peace that had eluded him for so long.

_No emotion. Peace._

_Emotion. Peace._

_Peace._

_Peace._

_Peace._

After he finally gets himself through a shower, chokes down a meal, and paces inside his now old, empty quarters — eyes flickering every so often to the closed door from which the stench of burnt metal and plastoid still emanates, trying to strengthen his resolve — Kylo sits down on his bare mattress and stares at the holoprojector in his hand, gathering his courage.

In another minute he will send a message to a similar device, one he’s sure must still be in the hands of the person for whom the message is intended and, with luck, still operational. He takes a deep
breath, closes his eyes for two seconds, then begins his recording.

It starts with two words.

“Hello, Mother.”

Chapter End Notes

**Prop of note:**

1. **Resistance Transport** - it's the same one we see in the movie! and we got to learn an interesting tidbit about it.

WE ARE BACK! Sorry it's been so long! for those of you who follow my other stories, you'll know I put ADOT on pause to finish A Proposal by Any Other Name (note to future reference, do not try to finish two big longfics at the same time, it's exhausting). Well, Proposal's now complete *dries proud tear* and so we're back here! Thank you all for your patience. And a huge thanks to my lovely, lovely wifey Darth-Ej/EjBlakit for being the best beta and wifey a girl could hope for.

There are now 9 chapters left! Less, if I manage to condense a few plot points, but we'll see how that goes once I start working on the next few chapters. I'll update the chapter count if the plan changes.

Also, I started a new fic (I know, I know). A reylo retelling of Hades & Persephone, because why not. Check it out:

**Aegis (In This World or Any Other)**

And finally, thank you a billion for reading still and being with me! And please let me know your thoughts in the comments section. IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE TALKED WITH ANYBODY ABOUT THIS STORY. I MISS IT AND YOU GUYS. T-T Come talk to me, please. That (1)+ for this story in my inbox always makes me happy.

Hope you enjoyed!
Kylo’s eyes rove over the wide expanse of grassy flower field, which stretches like a needy lover towards the shore. Beyond it, beyond the sandy beach he’d once played in as a child, the sea rolls placidly in a way it could only do here. The smell of salt in the air washes over him as he waits just a moment longer, indulging in what, at any other moment, he would have called a disgusting wave of sentimentality as he listens to the cawing of birds from above.

Few people remember Chandrila— few are left alive who knew Ben Solo had been born here on the day the Galactic Concordance had been signed. Most of them are dead now, wiped away by a terrifying sunbeam and scattered like so much dust along with the remaining ash of the Hosnian System. Few, except for his mother, his uncle, Chewie and—Kylo prayed to a Maker he’s not quite sure he believes in that he isn’t right in this assumption—Snoke.

But Snoke hadn’t attempted to breach his mental walls for a while now. A worrisome thing, this, but easily ignored in the face of his meeting today. Perhaps this is why his mother had sent him these coordinates, to try to appeal to his sense of nostalgia.

He sneers, turning away from the stunning view as he yanks uncomfortably at his civilian jacket, desperately wishing for the safety of his cowl and helmet, or the flowing fabrics of his armored tunics. Here he is vulnerable, his skin the only defense he has between his internal organs and the dangers of his existence. He looks too much like his father in these clothes- the same broad shoulders, similar height, impossibly, eerily familiar facial features staring back at him every time he unconsciously turns his head towards a reflective surface, though Han Solo would never wear the same scowl he does now. Too similar. That familiarity nestles in his chest like claws as he cringes at the sensation of his pilot’s jacket rubbing against his biceps.

He should have never agreed to come.

But then again, hadn’t he been the one to send that message first?

Kylo stops and takes in a deep breath, his fingers itching with the desire to curve around the hilt of his saber. He’d left his weapon behind in his ship, a nondescript vessel he’d picked up with a little help from Hux, and now he feels the absence of his saber hilt dearly. But it had been his idea to propose these terms. He would abide by them.

One look up at the tall, imposing building where he knows his mother is waiting for him and it takes all he has in him to steel himself and march forward. He can feel them up there, on the top suite where he’d been born, two life signatures he’d never be able to scrub from his mind.


He feels as though he’s walking to his death.
Perhaps he is.

He plants one leaden foot in front of the other, and by the time he’s outside the doors his heart is thundering, and not from exertion. This is the first time he’s seen his mother in… how long? Kylo—no, Ben—tries to count back, to recount the last moment he saw her, the last word he said to her. What had it been? He can’t remember, though it must surely have been some offhand, bitter remark like every one he’d ever exchanged with her in his youth, his attitude turning acidic and his belief in her love withering until he’d stopped calling her Mom and started calling her Mother.

He breathes in deep, trying to calm himself, knowing that beyond those doors the woman who gave him life can feel him just as well as he can her, two distress signals colliding with each other with every passing second, though hers is laced with hope and his with dread. Before he can run out of courage, however, the doors slide open.

There are moments in his life he remembers with clarity—moments that shaped him, moments that drove him. Moments that sit suspended in afternoon light or decaying darkness. The moment his eyes meet that of his mother suspends, but he can’t decide how to categorize it. He’s aware of his uncle, only a hand’s length away from his mother’s shoulder and yet… and yet, he only has eyes for her, and for the relief that sags her face, her eyes taking on the red tinge of unshed tears no matter how hard she tries to hold onto composure.

His Mother.

The wife of the man he had killed, the man whose face he bore now, marred only by a scar Rey gave him as a reminder of his mistakes. So many mistakes.

His mother takes a step forward and Kylo fights his instinct to step back. Instead he watches her as she moves from his seething uncle’s side and towards the middle of the room. He will have to meet her halfway if he wants this to work, so, after another short moment of hesitation, he reminds himself of why he’s here and steps forward.

This is for Rey, he chants over and over until the words drown the sound of the blood rushing to his ears. He’d never felt as much a child, or as scared, as he does now. Just as he steps into the room and the doors fall closed behind him, Luke walks up to his mother, her twin and eternal guide. If only Luke had been there for her more often, for him, then none of this would have happened.

Kylo - Ben - grinds his teeth and stashes the bitterness away. Hux had done his part. Now it is his turn to do his.

“Ben,” Leia’s quivering, pleading whisper of a greeting hit his ears, and his composure starts to crumble. He sucks in a breath.

“Mother,” he says, watching for the fallout. Instead he sees his mother’s eyes soften, the war inside her raging as she tries to decide between doing what’s right and doing that’s right for her. For him. He can see it and feel it in his very veins, her desire to run forward and embrace him as she’d done so many times when he was a toddler, as she’d tried to do so many times during his teenage years on the few occasions she was able to visit him. And yet he sees the part he played in the fracture between them.

He used to think she didn’t visit him enough because she didn’t love him, would sidestep those hugs or grind his teeth and bare them on the rare occasions he’d allowed physical contact, believed he should have been loved more, nurtured more, guided more, listened to more, and blamed her and his father for doing neither of those things. Now, like a film being lifted from his eyes, he realizes he’d been forced to distance himself by that voice inside his head that he hadn’t been able to name before.
Snoke.

Still he roots himself to the floor and waits. Too many years have passed and neither Kylo nor Leia remember what it is like to run into each other’s arms like they did during his childhood, the simple action purged from their muscle memory, and the intimacy of such affection from their brains. Not only that, but he’s sure his uncle would run him through if he even twitched the wrong way towards Leia Organa.

She makes to move and Luke immediately halts her with a gloved hand to the elbow, Kylo’s eyes falling to his uncle’s reminder of what can be lost to the Dark, and a reminder to Kylo of his uncle’s weakness—or at least, he had believed it to be weakness. Leia returns the sentiment, her hand gently landing above Luke’s mechanical one, making sure to grasp true skin as she gives him a hard yet encouraging smile. She needs this, and Kylo stands stock still.

“Ben,” his mother says, now with more conviction as she steps forward. “You came.”

There’s a spike of emotion so forceful coming from Kylo’s end of the bond that Rey’s world nearly destabilizes, the floor seeming to shift under her feet. He had come to bed three days ago, wrapped her up in his arms and made sweet, tender love to her — perhaps as an apology for his cold shoulder treatment the last week and a half — and Rey had melted in his hands like so much butter against heat. Then she’d woken up and found his side of the bed to be cold. He’d gone—just gone. Hux wouldn’t tell her where he was, and Kylo’s resolute silence from his side only drove her madder. She could still feel the swell of his emotions sometimes, when his hold on his mental walls slipped slightly, but he never allowed her more than just flashes of emotions.

Like now.

Rey stops, placing a hand to the cold durasteel wall, looking down the long hall towards Hux’s door. She’s covered in sweat, ribs aching and legs quivering from taking on five stormtroopers at once. She’d given as good as she got, but Pip had a way of overpowering her even without him having access to the Force, the man too strong and large, and she’d wanted to train without the unfair advantages her powers gave her. So she’d nearly been beaten to a pulp, but she’d definitely beaten Pip, Marla and Lance to a mushy pulp of their own by the end of their training.

Now she’s on her way back to her quarters, hoping for a meal and a shower before she must meet all of her guard. How Hux expects her to lead is beyond her, but their meetings were advancing, at least. She had managed, through them, to learn more about the troops, to gauge the atmosphere by sending them out to talk. Stormtroopers loved to talk, and gossip, and Rey had a direct line to the heart of the armada via her twenty stormtroopers. Slowly they planted a seed, with careful words here and there woven through the daily camaraderie of men and women doing grunt work. Slowly, so very slowly, the tides were changing and stormtroopers were starting to wonder what a life as individuals could be. Slowly they were starting to believe that such an idea could be worth fighting for.

The idea of a shower and a meal is dashed, however, as Kylo’s pent up anxiety slams into her. He’d been edgy for days now, and Rey could imagine him pacing—could almost see it, at times, flashes of his ship’s cabin while he travelled in hyperspace—to where, she doesn’t know, but she could see it. This wave of emotion feels different somehow. Raw. Unnerved. And gone just as quickly as it had washed over her.
Rey breathes in deeply. No, that shower and meal can wait. Instead she quickens her pace and makes a straight line towards the bedroom, finally doing what she’d been putting off for fear of what she might find, but the onslaught from Kylo finally pushes her to the brink. She grabs the holocron and summons Zah.

“Hello, youngling,” the hologram of the small Jedi greets her, “What would you like to learn today?”

Rey takes in a deep breath, wetting her lips as another wave of emotion from Kylo barrels into her, anger and apprehension so tightly woven together it nearly leaves her breathless. Rey sees a flash of old hands trembling before her and smells the brine of sea water. Then just like that, it’s gone, and Rey’s desire to break through Kylo’s walls, to find out what’s happening, intensifies.

In this subject, at least, Rey knows that she knows little. Time to rectify that. Before another wave hits her, Rey’s words rush out. “Do you know anything about Force Bonds?”

Kylo stares at his mother’s hands as she she sits across from him, as straight-backed and graceful as always, the only give of her nerves the minute tremble in her fingers as she laces them together. His uncle stands at her back, a mixture of resigned sadness and deep seated anger in his eyes. Unlike Kylo, Luke Skywalker is armed, his saber hanging at his hip within easy access. Kylo had chosen to come unarmed, knowing very well he could easily be attacked and be left fairly defenseless, but he needed to make a show of trust that he was here for the right reasons.

For Rey.

“Talk,” Luke finally barks after the silence stretches uncomfortably thin. Kylo glares, then schools his face to nonchalance. Luke isn’t the only one with deep seated anger over the past.

Fine. He’d talk.

“I am here on Rey’s behalf,” he says, cutting off any potential leads to conversations about his past, his father, or any other subjects which may detract these negotiations from the end result he desires. A frown marrs Leia’s face, no doubt seeing through his intentions, and Luke’s eyes flash with grief, but the Skywalker siblings have made time their servant, learning to mask their emotions with deadly grace. In the blink of an eye, both Leia and Luke wear twin reticent expressions of emptiness.

Luke is, for once, better at it than his mother.

“On Rey’s behalf?” his mother asks, voice steady, though there’s a whiff of hurt there that makes his nostrils flare. He clears his throat and looks at a point in the distance above her head, trying to simultaneously ignore the mutinous look on his uncle’s face.

“Yes.” There’s nothing to say but the truth, nothing that he hadn’t already said in his missive before, so he cuts to the chase. “I have come to request that you… reconsider.”

His missive to his mother had included a similar message. It was at his urging that they had agreed to meet here, which has him questioning his own rash decisions now, though he was surprised by how quickly his mother’s agreement to the meeting had reached him. In his mind, Leia would have wanted nothing to do with him after…

_Snake’s using you._

Those words still haunt him. Thinking of his father widens the hollowness in his chest, and it is with effort that he forces himself to meet his mother’s eyes. Why had he not listened when he’d had the
chance to escape this hell of his own making?

As if reading his thoughts, Luke’s face boils with anger, mustache quivering even as his uncle’s eyes take on the quality of ice. “You have no right to—“

“Luke,” his mother whispers, placing a gentle hand on his uncle’s fist at her side, her eyes never leaving her son, and it takes everything Luke’s ever had in him to contain himself from striking Kylo down. Even he can see that much. His uncle would be well within his right. Kylo knows that now.

“I believe I made my decision clear to your friend,” Leia says, her voice having taken on the tone of a diplomat, leaving no room for budging or second guessing herself. “I will not endanger the lives of my men to fight his battles for him.”

Kylo’s jaw works silently, erratically from side to side as he fishes around for the words and the demeanor he needs instead of giving into his base desire to shout, reminding himself he’s unarmed.

After a moment,

“Our battle, you mean.”

“This was never our battle,” Luke seethes.

“Wasn’t it? Perhaps it should have been,” Kylo retorts before his mother can referee this fight. “Perhaps, if you both had paid attention earlier, we would not be here.”

He had tried. He had tried to keep his resentment in check, had tried to speak diplomacy in the way his mother always did, with a quiet voice and a big presence, but he had never been intended for diplomacy like his mother, just like he’d never be a good man with simple worries like his father, no matter how much Kylo looks like him in these clothes.

“You will not blame us!” says Luke, spitting out the words like venom. “You will not blame us for your actions. The choices you made, the lives—“

“The choices I made! You have no idea about what choices I’ve made, the things I’ve lived through. I am guilty of many things, uncle, and will bear that guilt for the rest of my life, but perhaps if you and mother and father had taken the time to see me for the boy I was rather than a broken thing to fix, we wouldn’t be here!”

Luke, despite his anger and his hate — feelings he should not feel, given his Jedi ways — winces, and though Kylo’s words were aimed at his uncle they have wedged themselves deep in his mother, and Kylo immediately regrets it. Another thing to bear the guilt of. When he looks between them he knows there’s nothing else to say about the choices he’s made or the things he’s been through. Rey had gone through his head many times in the past. She undoubtedly relayed those horrible truths to his mother, who must have then told his uncle, if the anguish in Luke Skywalker’s eyes is anything to go by.

Kylo takes in a deep breath, trying to compose himself even though his nerves have been exposed raw for all to see. He blinks, looking at his mother but addressing his uncle.

“Once this is said and done, you can take me to task for every atrocity I have committed, if you wish. You can finally take your revenge on me, Uncle.” Kylo wonders if his uncle truly would seek revenge, knowing that Leia’s presence and Luke’s attempts to uphold the Jedi code are the only things keeping him from slicing Kylo in half right now. He eyes the hand sitting on his uncle’s saber hilt, the fingers twitching. He very much doubts there’s any familial love left there. Or maybe there is. Maybe the anger is the only way his uncle knows to manifest what’s left of it.
“But I am not here to speak about me. I am here on behalf of Rey.” he continues. Kylo lets the words linger, hoping Luke will have caught onto the unspoken sentiment: you’ve already let her down once. Just like you let me down.

“You let her return to…” he wavers for just a moment, thinking about Rey, about Hux. He’d damned near spilled their relationship on the table. He amends, “You let her return. Undoubtedly for a purpose, so why squander that effort? This is the closest we’ve ever been to being on the same page. Please reconsider your decision, General. I give you my word that no harm will come to your men from us.”

“Your word counts for very little at the moment, Ben,” his mother says, eyes narrowing, though everything in Leia speaks of a desire to believe him with every fiber in her body. He can feel it coursing through him, and feels the chasm growing between him and his mother.

A flash of a memory returns again, of him running into her arms, caked in mud and as happy as he’d ever been as a child. The sound of her laughter as she greeted him, uncaring that he’d dirtied her bright white robes with his muddy cheeks, had haunted him for years. He gifts her with a wry smile.

“It is all I can offer.”

“Does he know you’re here?” Luke asks with no small amount of suspicion. “Snoke?”

This question alone confirms Kylo’s suspicions about Luke knowing the whole story. He shakes his head. “I have learned about his ways. He can no longer reach me, and his attempts have all but stopped.” he lets out a dark chuckle, “he assumes I am now useless, his hopes pinned on Rey to replace me — though for what reasons, we have not yet found out. Snoke does not bother with useless things. It won’t be long before he attempts to dispose of me and others. Which is why I’m here.”

Maybe there is some familial love left in his uncle after all. For all of his hard edges and icy glaces, his uncle’s jaw locks and a throb starts at his right temple.

Leia looks at Luke, the twins holding some sort of silent conversation Kylo isn’t privy to. He waits patiently, or at least as patiently as he can while feeling Rey in the back of her mind, trying to probe into their bond, attempting to coax him to open up so she can find out what he’s up to. He inhales deeply, quietly, and fortifies his walls. He won’t raise her hopes if there’s no hope to be had.

Then his mother nods at him and Kylo can finally breathe again. He inclines his head in acknowledgement, suddenly feeling at a loss for words. What else is there to say now?

There’s so, so much to say and not enough time to say it. Not enough words. His mouth feels as though it were full of glue, leaving him to swallow uncontrollably before he gets up to his feet, suddenly feeling like his limbs are too long and his body too clumsy compared to the boy Leia and Luke knew. Were he to try to say anything now, he’s sure it would all come out stilted and garbled, so he doesn’t try. There will be time later, perhaps. If he survives, there will be time. Time for him to put his thoughts in order, to learn how to speak again, to ask for the forgiveness he doesn’t deserve. There will be time.

He just has to see it through.

He rasps his throat clear once, twice, then nods again and turns to leave, hoping that he won’t find himself on the wrong end of a lightsaber.

“When this is all over.” As if reading his thoughts, his uncle calls out the threat — the promise —
from behind him, leaving the rest unsaid. Kylo’s not stupid enough to believe that he’ll survive this in one piece, but he stops and nods at his uncle nonetheless. Maybe death would be a good repayment for his sins.

He thinks he hears a soft apology as he leaves the room, delivered in his mother’s voice, but he’s not sure whether it’s addressed to him or his uncle. Yet he answers under his breath, unable to do so more loudly.

“Me, too.”

“What do you mean there’s more to it?” Rey asks, staring at the small projected Jedi master before her. She’d been drilling Zah on all the knowledge the Holocron possessed about Force bonds, and yet the more she asked the more confused she became. Two hours in Rey feels as though her world’s turning sideways.

“The Force flows through us. Binds us. It is the thread of the universe, of *our* time in the universe, young one,” Zah continues with those disaffected eyes only a hologram of a long dead creature can possess. “It can be bent and stretched taut, snapped back in place and manipulated if only you are strong enough.”

The creature looks at Rey as though this is all the explanation she needs, and Rey huffs, opening her mouth to ask further questions when the door hisses open. With a click of her teeth, Rey nods to the Jedi master before closing the holocron. She would have to ask her questions later.

Hux wanders into the room, looking exhausted and with a persistent twitch in his right temple. He immediately tugs off his gloves, discards his greatcoat and quietly moves to hang it in its usual place while Rey follows him with her eyes. When he finally returns, Rey beckons him towards the bed with an outstretched hand. The fact that he follows quietly feels like a small success, even if his flop on the bed is as ungraceful a motion as she’s ever seen from him.

“Not a good day, I take it,” she says and Hux snorts, eyes glued on his boots as he toes them off unceremoniously.

“Not yet done, I’m afraid,” he responds, starting on his jacket. Rey hums. He hadn’t joined her in bed the previous night, choosing to stay up at all hours, working in his office much like he’d been doing for a week now, and looking the more run down for it. She eyes his temple, seeing a vein pop again. She may not be able to take his exhaustion away, but perhaps…

“May I?” she asks, gently placing a thumb on his temple and running it along that pulsing vein. Hux looks up for a moment, body tensing with some primal knee-jerk reaction to the possibility of being subjugated to the Force, but a moment later he sighs and nods. Rey smiles, gently grabbing his temples. She may have had to fight tooth and nail to learn from Kylo over the last nine months, but learn she *did* . Getting rid of a headache comes in handy indeed.

She massages his temples and watches with supreme satisfaction as Hux turns into putty underneath her fingertips, copper lashes fluttering until they shadow his cheeks, the lines of stress disappearing from his brow and the corners of his mouth. Such a rare, blatantly unguarded display of trust. She would cherish it.

A few minutes later he opens his eyes and gifts her with a small smile.

“Thank you,” he says, leaning forward to kiss *her* temple. “Though I am sure it will be for naught. I
must return to the bridge in an hour.”

*And probably get another headache.* Rey flashes him her dimples.

“Then I guess I’ll have to do it again later. Have you heard anything from him?”

Hux looks at her sideways as he gets ready for the very short, very deserved nap he should have taken hours before. He shakes his head, acknowledging Rey’s hesitation. Neither one of them has truly known what to call Kylo in private, between the two of them. It is easy in public, where everyone knows him as the once masked, yet still fearsome Kylo Ren. It’s entirely different in private, when it’s just the two of them and their partner’s secret. Yet despite the small shake of his head, Hux tucks a strand of hair behind Rey’s ear and kisses her again, as if to soften the blow.

“He’s on his way back.”

*Of course* Hux would hear it first.

“Don’t hold it against him, little one,” the general says, “there are certain things he must do alone, from what he said. I imagine having you in his head isn’t conducive to achieving that.”

It’s the small, amused smirk on Hux’s face that finally brings down her annoyance. Not that it stops her from grumbling.

Realistically, she understands that Hux is right. There are moments when she wants to act and just be by herself, for herself, without interference; Kylo would of course want to do the same. She knows that having Hux there to keep her abreast is Kylo’s concession to her curiosity. Yet everything she’s learned — or tried to learn — with Zah now sits in her awareness like an itch, and she needs Kylo here in order to try and understand those things better, to put the true strength of their bond to the test after so many months of living with it. Something she can hardly do with the man going off to Maker knows where.

How much more can they accomplish if they probe further? Would it be possible? Zah made it sound as though it could be done, as long as the power—the connection—was there.

“The second he gets back we’re establishing another rule: *no leaving me out of things.*” She grouses.

Hux chuckles. “Of course.” Then, as if trying to take her mind off it, he changes the subject. “How is your day going?”

Rey launches into her report about the stormtroopers. Fifteen minutes later, she’s almost out of breath, yet the happiest she’s been in a while.

“I have to meet them soon, but seems our words have reached them. Troopers on the other two ships have begun to permanently remove their helmets,” she beams, knowing how much it grinds on Hux’s gears sometimes, though the corner of his mouth twitches upward for a moment as he stands to unbuckle his trousers. Then her brows furrow and Rey gnaws worriedly at her lower lip. “They’re uneasy. Gossip is spreading. There are rumors that the troops will soon have to prepare for battle, and the ships are being moved. Are we moving now? Without Kylo on board?”

Hux’s hands have stopped where they held onto his buckle, white knuckled grasp holding the belt in midair as he stares down at her, all easy teasing gone from his face to be replaced with sharp, glacier cold intensity.

Then he closes his eyes for a moment and slowly, as if it takes all the effort in the world, he buckles his trousers back up and picks up his jacket, beginning the process of redressing again.
“I guess troop gossip does have its uses after all,” he muses. “I allowed the rumors to spread. I was wondering when he’d openly move.”

It only takes a half a heartbeat to know who he is. “So you’re just letting him move the ships?”

Hux smiles at her. A razor smile that speaks louder than words: he’d planned for this. Had been waiting for this very moment, in fact. Had, perhaps, orchestrated it like moving pieces on a Dejarek board. That smile alone makes Rey believe all the more that he’d set it in motion rather than the other way around.

“Reach out to Kylo, if you can. It would be faster than more conventional means, then follow me.” He says, voice suddenly slipping into General Hux’s tone, wielding her bond to Kylo like he would any other weapon — which would have at one point in time been hilarious, given his distrust of it, if not for the suddenly dire situation they’re now in — as he finishes dressing, no doubt about to return to the bridge once more. Then, with a certain finality that makes the hairs on Rey’s neck stand, Hux announces the war she’d fearing for months now,

“We’re out of time.”

Chapter End Notes

In the words of my lovely beta: "IT'S SHOWTIME, BITCHES!!!! WOOOOOOOOO!!"

Let me know what you guys think. I miss chatting with you all ;0;
Sacrifices

Chapter Summary

The things we all do for love.

Chapter Notes

A giant, sobby, watery mess of a thank you from my tear ducts to you for having carried ADOT over the 1k kudo milestone. I never in a million years expected it to get this far. Thank you, friends.
Anyway, here we are. All errors are mine and will probably be fixed in the morning lol it's been a long day.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

T-Minus Five Days.

Hux drums his fingers on a closed fist behind his back with every step he takes. The drumming grounds him, gives his brain something to focus on that is tangible—a low count. A steady beat. One, two, three, four, from index to pinky finger as he makes his way through the upper halls of his flagship. He keeps an ear out for Rey, listening to her quick footsteps as she trails him, but knows better than to say anything while she’s got that glazed look in her eye that tells him that she’s currently speaking with Ren, so instead he makes it a point to slow his step and guide every footstep, avoiding tight corners and narrow spaces.

The stormtroopers around them stand at attention as they pass, often nodding their acknowledgment. It’s not an acknowledgment of him. That sort of awed-struck look in their eyes has never been for him, but for Rey, while in a single breath reserving their sharply snapped military salute for Hux’s station. It no longer bothers him, though he’s far too proud to fully admit that it ever did, and the stormtroopers have continued to do as they always have in terms of respect. So Hux tilts his chin down in turn and continues his drumming, the clicking of his heel and the gentle tapping of his fingers against his gloves centering him, distracting him from his exhaustion.

Oh, how he misses sleep. He had been right to never allow himself to grow too comfortable with the respite Rey had brought into his life (a small silver lining to the generally disruptive storm that her very presence had created, even if it’s been for the best), never allowed himself to be lulled by the promises of rest in favor of continuing his work. That doesn’t mean he can’t miss the concept. The last time he’d seen some shut-eye that extended longer than a few measly hours snatched here and there between long stretches on the bridge had been…

He can’t remember.

Was it a week ago?

He promises himself if he wins this war, he’ll let himself sleep for a full forty-eight hours and kill anybody who tries to wake him.
It’s a silly promise to make— one he’ll never carry through with, of course— but it’s the principle of
the matter in promising as much that allows him to carry on for however long this might take. And if
he doesn’t win… well, death sounds like an *awfully* long sleep, and far less pleasant. The proverbial
carrot and stick, as it were.

His grim train of thought is broken when he hears Rey’s voice chime behind him.

“He swapped ships for a faster one and will be boarding in twelve standard hours. Also, your
package has been delivered,” she says, finally speeding up until she’s standing next to him rather
than behind him. He looks at her from the corner of his eye, catching the frown marring her beautiful
features before he once again focuses ahead. “What package?”

“The one he delivered to Organa.”

Rey stops for a second, startled, and Hux mentally shakes his head. It would be like Ren to keep
pertinent information to himself. Hux will have to talk to him about it. His family may be an open
sore he refuses to discuss with others, but Ren would have to learn to speak about it eventually, if
only so Hux would stop having to smooth things over every single time.

“You sent him to meet his mother,” says Rey, her expression shifting as if something has finally
clicked in understanding. “That’s why he kept blocking me out, the bastard.”

He smirks. Leave it to Rey to love somebody fiercely and still call him names.

“He sent himself, actually,” says Hux, allowing her to catch up to him once again. “It was his idea. I
simply provided him the means to get there.”

“He failed to mention this.” Rey accuses, lips turned down in a tight frown. For all that Kylo — Ben
— would give Rey the world, it is obvious he still struggles where his family past is concerned.

He hums. He can hardly blame the knight. His own past is rife with sour tasting memories about his
father Hux would rather never discuss, not even with those he loves most.

They have gotten so, so far in their relationship since Rey had first arrived aboard this ship, he
muses, and yet Rey and Kylo still continue to grow by clashing. He supposes they know no other
way, at this point, though he’d be lying if he said he’s not been an active participant in his own
clashings with the both of them. For all that they love each other (and what a strong word that one
is), certain habits die very hard and their relationship is too new, still fragile.

But Hux makes another silly promise to himself: they will have time. They will have time to learn to
grow together, to buff away the sharp edges all three of them possess until they not only fit
comfortably but meld together. This, too, will help see him through however long this takes. A
promise of a future is a powerful motivator.

“I’m sure he’ll discuss it with you when he arrives, or you can pry it out of him with that link of
yours.” Rey snorts at his usual dismissal of their Force bond, knowing full well he doesn’t really
mean it. For some crazy reason, he finds himself wanting to lighten her mood, not that this is a recent
development. “Or maybe tie him up and get it out of him that way.”

“Bren,” Rey says, voice lowered and full of exasperated exhaustion as she rolls her eyes. Hux
smirks.

“I’m sure he’d enjoy it, pet.”

“And I’m sure you would enjoy watching,” she quips, her cheeks flooding with color despite not
looking like *she* would enjoy it right about now. “But I wish he’d simply told me. Or at least not kept you from telling me. It’s a trust thing.”

Hux glances at her again out of the corner of his eye as he guides them down another hall, towards the situation room.

“I know.” He says nothing more, knowing it’s futile to try and assuage her further. Ren will let him and Rey in when he’s ready to and not a second before, and they both have more important things to do right now. He opens the door to the situation room and ushers her in.

“What’re we here for?” Rey says, looking around the room warily. She had only been here once before, and that had been to watch her friends *not* get blown out of the sky by the grace of a flimsy promise she had managed to extract from him.

“To fill you in on what happens next,” he responds. Hux sits and motions to a chair beside him, pulling up a holoscreen. Just as he’s typing away his access code, Rey leans forward, palms flat on the massive table, wariness and curiosity battling for dominance on her face.

“Why hadn’t you before?” she asks, watching as he pulls up a map of the galaxy and zooms in on a series of moving dots. Hux taps one, zooming further in.

“Because this part depended entirely on Ren’s crazy plan to plead on your behalf that the resistance reconsider their decision,” he says as he opens a second screen to the side. Rey turns to look at him, her intense, sharp hazel eyes turned a vivid shade of green in the blue cast of the holoscreen. His stomach does an oddly anxious somersault with the knowledge of what he’s about to divulge next as he taps his finger on the moving dot. “And he succeeded, Maker knows how. But it was you who gave me the idea, actually.”

“Me?”

Hux nods, his stomach doing another flip. “When you left. You were given a tracker to the Finalizer, if you recall.”

Rey nods slowly, eyes narrowing as she tries to piece the puzzle together. Hux points at the moving dot on the galactic map. “This is Leia Organa’s envoy.”

“You’re tracking her—” Rey’s head whips around, wide hazel eyes pinned on his and he swears he can see the little wheels in her head turning.

The moving dot crawls across the screen and Rey turns to watch its trajectory as it moves outward, toward the outer rim but away from the rough location of the Finalizer. Hux then points to two dots moving at the same speed not too far away from each other though certainly too far ahead of Organa, yet traveling in the same direction. “These are our ships.”

She turns to once again look at the dots, zooms out just long enough to bring into view a scaled portion of the galaxy, and Hux feels a small thrill run down his spine as she leans into it and traces a path with her fingernail, looking for the connections of his plan, the fragile threads of his spiderweb. After a moment, she sees it.

“No, not just us tracking her—she’s tracking *us*—”

“Correct.”

“—You were tracking *me*. When I left.”
His stomach gives a third, violent flip, as though attempting to bottom out at his feet while he waits for the other shoe to drop and he’s not sure which one would be worse, Rey’s anger or her disappointment. Her leaving and subsequent return, and every single emotional investment and bad decision they had all made, had shredded them to ribbons once. It had only been by Rey’s grace that he’d been allowed the chance to glue it all back together into something new, yet once again he thinks of how new things can be so very fragile.

Hux inclines his head, though. “Yes.”

“How long?”

“A single moment. I knew of your whereabouts for exactly fifteen minutes before I severed the connection. You were on Takodana, I believe.”

“So you could have used it to know where the Resistance had rehomed.”

“Yes,” he responds promptly and truthfully. Trust, she had said, was the current issue she was trying to work through with Ren. He would not allow this to be the case here.

“But you didn’t.”

“No.”

Rey tilts her head, considering him, and still Hux waits for the other shoe to drop. Rey lets out a soft breath, then turns to him with both apprehension and admiration. “Remind me never to try and outsmart you,” she says with a small smile, as though she hasn’t already done it a billion times whether she’s aware of it or not, and Hux can finally breathe again. He leans forward and places the gentlest of kisses on her lips, a finger cradling her chin to steady them both as he pours into her a quiet apology for what he’d done, and when Rey leans into him he sighs at her acceptance.

The moment is cut short when the screen beeps.

_Ah. Right on time_, Hux thinks wryly at the interruption, opening one eye to peer at the crono on the screen. He gives Rey’s lower lip another soft peck before pulling away and making sure his uniform is as pristine as always, allowing Rey a second to compose herself before he accepts the transmission.

A few quick taps and the map before them relocates to the second screen to the side, allowing them a perfect view of Leia Organa’s wizened face and her larger than life personality. Apprehension spiders itself down Hux’s limbs, along with a thin amount of respect for the woman that he very determinedly ignores as he straightens his back. Behind her, Hux catches a glance of people walking to and fro, of orders being given and passed about in hushed tones, and the wary faces of several onlookers among which stand two people he had not expected to see anytime soon. FN-2187 — Finn, Rey had corrected him several times — and his once-captive Poe Dameron.

He has to give it to Organa. She can mobilize a crew fast.

“General Hux,” Organa’s greeting is flat, lifeless. Everyone on both sides of the screen stiffens. It’s not out of friendship that they have all gathered here. At least, not out of friendship to him. Rey shifts at his side and Organa’s eyes follow, the woman’s features softening immediately and her voice losing a degree of iciness. “Rey.”

“Leia,” Rey says, “Thank you for agreeing to this.”

General Organa waves away the thanks with a gentle hand, giving her a wry smile. “Thank me once
we make it through this in one piece.”

Hux finds himself echoing that sentiment silently in his head before he and his Resistance counterpart launch into business.

“We have locked our course for the moon base you have given us coordinates to, General,” says Leia, a shrewd expression on her face. “I expect there will be no surprises waiting there for us?”

“None that you should not already expect, General,” Hux replies, jaw tight and eyes narrowing. Of course, she has no reason to trust him, but that doesn’t make it any easier to have to reassure her of it. He’s a man of his word, after all. Organa arches an eyebrow at him before giving a silent nod.

“And Ben?”

“He will be arriving aboard our flagship in twelve hours,” Hux says, and has just a second to realize his faux pas before Leia’s expression shifts again. For all intents and purposes, Hux shouldn’t know Ren’s actual name. Leia inspects him anew, and it is Rey who interjects with a gentle clearing of her throat.

“Is there anything you’d like us to communicate to him?” Rey asks, successfully pulling the intense scrutiny off Hux and onto herself.

“I’m afraid anything I may say to my son will have to be done in person,” Leia says, eyes big and dark and wise, and yet so, so very sad before she once again turns that all-knowing gaze on him. Hux resists the desire to shift, annoyed at himself by the way General Organa seems to command all the air in the room even when she’s not there. “We should be arriving within a day. Please do make sure the shields are lowered, General Hux. I would hate to have my ships cindered on a misunderstanding.”

Hux sniffs. Who does she think he is?

“All provisions will be waiting on a concealed floating station off the main coast—Trooper suits, uniforms, gear, TIE fighters, etc.”

“Uniforms?” Rey asks, finally piping in for the first time in minutes. She had spent her time looking at Finn and Poe instead, the three of them holding some sort of silent conversation over the transmission. It is clear the pilot and the traitor have been ordered to remain silent, for they haven’t even so much as twitched. The former shakes with what must only be cold fury at the prospect of First Order stormtrooper outfitting, the second looks piqued with interest, no doubt at the TIE fighters, yet both remain decidedly silent. Rey swallows. “You’re not taking them head on?”

For a split second, General Leia Organa and General Brendol Hux II become one, sharing the same brainwave across systems, two master tacticians ruthlessly moving the chess pieces across a very large chessboard. Leia’s lips quirk up slightly, inclining her head just as Hux speaks.

“A wise young woman once told me that the First Order was… how did you put it? Ill-equipped for guerrilla tactics. But we do have well-trained soldiers and vast resources, and seeing as we have spent enough time playing in each other’s sandboxes—” he gestures towards Organa, who only raises an eyebrow. It is, by now, an open secret that both organizations have spies in each other’s camps, “—it seems we have managed to find a way to utilize those strengths. Our resources, their fighting skills.”

Rey looks at him, then at Finn and Poe behind Leia. A well trained First Order soldier and a fantastic pilot known for pulling some crazy stunts (never let it be said that Hux does not do his homework on
his opponents and potential allies, especially after they have managed to escape from his grasp once).

“You’re infiltrating the ships,” she states, and everyone watches as a smug smile splits Poe Dameron’s face and Finn stands straighter. “You brilliant people, you’re infiltrating the ships!”

The idea of letting the resistance infiltrate his ships leaves a sour taste in Hux’s mouth, after what they had done to get inside and blow up Starkiller, but Hux schools his face into a mask of indifference when Dameron chirps in that they’ll do what they’re best at no problem, piece of cake, really, earning a tired glare from Organa and a grin from Rey. These are no longer his ships, he reminds himself. Snoke commands them now. He’ll be happy to see them burn.

“Will the codes you provided us work?” Organa asks.

“They will work,” Hux says, to which Leia narrows her eyes with her usual amount of suspicion. Maker help him, the thing he does for Rey and Ren.

“How can we be sure? If the shields don’t lower we’ll be opening ourselves up to attack.” She’s no doubt aware that First Order access codes to lower the shields and the docking bays change almost weekly, a precaution Hux himself had put in place to avoid the very sort of threat he and Rey’s ragtag team of fighters now present. But they were always his ships first and foremost, and Hux is not without tricks up his sleeve.

“They will work, General.”

The rest of the meeting goes in much the same way, with Organa asking questions and verifying information, Hux responding, and Rey pausing the rapid-fire exchange to ask for clarification every once in a while. Her part in all this has not been brought up yet, not until they’re once again alone, but it helps to keep her fully informed.

At some point FN-2187 and Poe Dameron are called away, Leia manages to extract a promise from him again that her troops will not be hurt in this exchange. He gives it readily, if begrudgingly so, and by the time the transmission ends Hux’s temples are positively throbbing.

Rey quietly makes another grab for his temples when she notices him squinting to block out the light, trying to put off an impending migraine, and gives him a sheepish smile. “I’m sorry you didn’t get to sleep, it was my fault.” she shakes her head and sets to work.

He stares at her from under lowered lashes, taking in the furrowed brow of concentration while she draws from her infinite well of power—power that seems to be growing every day, augmenting until Hux feels it in the air, in his bones like an electric undercurrent whenever he’s near her. He gently grabs her wrists, long fingers dwarfing the gentle curves of them as he pulls her fingers away from him. Maker, how can somebody be so powerful and yet so delicate? So easy to snap? He must protect that which has become so dear to him. Hux brings one of them up to his lips and kisses the inside of it, smiling at the small shiver she gives in response.

“And my role in all of this? How can I help?” she asks, practically ripping the smile from him. Hux’s jaw tightens before he makes himself relax, but she’s not done yet. “I’m not going to stand aside and let them put themselves in danger without aid. You know this, right?”

Hux nods. To argue the point would be to start a fight he’s sure he’d lose anyway.

“Your face is too recognizable to join their party, Rey. You can’t possibly infiltrate the ranks without at least one or a few thousand troopers recognizing you.”

“I know that. But there must be other ways I can help,” she says, the downward turn of her lips
awfully endearing. “I won’t just sit by waiting to confront Snoke.”

Confronting Snoke would be plenty, he thinks. It would certainly be more than he’d ask of anybody, especially her, without knowing what it is Snoke wants beyond the utter destruction of Hux’s life and everything he’s worked so hard for, but maybe…

“We’ll blow him out of the sky before that happens.”

Rey snorts, letting him know what she thinks of that. “It won’t be that easy.”

Hux’s left eye twitches, but he extends a hand out to Rey to take nonetheless. They’re not done yet.

“No, I suppose it will not be.”

He wraps his fingers around hers. Rey no longer hesitates to touch him. She seems to crave it now, instead, her own fingers intertwining with his and offering him an absentminded squeeze, something she’d grown fond of doing in private. The door opens and shuts behind them. His mind is so far away he doesn’t think to release her, as he usually does, the warmth of her hand comforting against his even through the leather of his gloves.

So distracted is he by the torrent of items he must check off his mental to-do list that he doesn’t hear Rey clearing her throat. She does it again, and when Hux turns to look at her, frowning, he finds her cheeks have flooded pink and her eyes are glued to their intertwined hands, then nervously dancing around at all the troopers currently watching with rapt interest. His thoughts snap back like a rubber band, placing him firmly in the now.

Instead of letting go, however, he pulls her closer. Hux wraps her fingers over his forearm, unable to contain the smirk twitching at the corners of his mouth as he guides her in the same manner he had a million years ago when she dazzled a crowded ballroom with her beauty and those enticing gowns. He may not be particularly fond of public displays of affection, but the way her face glows and her cheeks flush more than make up for the indiscretion.

“No need to be shy. It’s hardly a secret by now.” he says. Rey straightens, eyes darting about. If he were capable of full-on laughter, he’d have given into it by now at her low hiss.

“What do you mean it’s hardly a secret?”

He chuckles, squeezing her hand over his arm once. Apparently, she’s not that particularly fond of public displays of affection, either. Hux might have allowed his ego to be wounded had he not been certain of her affections, but he’d spent the better part of the last few weeks with her wrapped in his and Ren’s arms whenever they found a free few minutes.

“Your beloved stormtroopers are not the only ones who like to gossip, darling. Turns out the kitchen staff who deliver our meals do, too.” he teases, but nonetheless guides her towards a more secluded hallway before dropping her hand, taking shortcuts for her benefit. “Or have you changed your mind on allowing them the free will to... ah,” he pauses, enjoying Rey’s puffed up face as she glares up at him. “Do as they damn well please.”

“Oh shut up,” she says, rolling her eyes before looking about. They had wandered far from the top levels, and though the ship is a very large place, she’s no doubt caught onto the fact that they were making their way towards the bowels. “Where are we going?”

Hux wets his lips before looking into her eyes, demanding her attention. He hates this part.

“Actually, there is something rather important you can do to help.”
12 Standard Hours Later.

Where are you?
- K. Ren

Bridge.
- B. Hux

And Rey?
- K. Ren

Occupied. Meet me in my office. I have something for you.
- B. Hux

Kylo frowns and puts away his commlink and makes straight for the bridge, reaching out through his bond to Rey but meeting a wall. She’s blocking him out this time, and though he can sense her aboard the finalizer, it’s… muted. So he stomps his way up from the hangars towards the bridge, exhaustion deep in his bones. Meeting with his mother had zapped him of everything he had to give, far more than he wanted to admit he’d given, and all he wants to do is find the nearest bed and collapse, but there are more important things that need to be done first.

When he enters Hux’s office, he finds Hux looking very much like how Kylo feels. There are dark circles under the general’s beautiful glacial eyes, and frown lines etched on his forehead as he goes over documents and sends missives at the speed of light.

“You look like shit,” he comments, dropping heavily into a seat before Hux. Hux looks up without really looking up, a minor tic present at his temple.

“Thanks for the input, Ren. I hadn’t noticed.”

Kylo snorts. At least the general’s wit isn’t suffering due to exhaustion. He runs his hands through his long black hair and sighs, tugging at his roots. Kylo reaches out again, feeling for Rey. She’s still resolutely blocking him, even though she must be aware that he’s back, but he figures he’ll deal with it when he sees her. She’s probably meeting her gaggle of troopers, all of whom follow her around like an adoring brace of ducklings following their mother. She doesn’t seem to be in any danger, if anything, what he gets from her are waves of calm composure, so at least he can relax for a moment and deal with things one at a time. He’s been emptied of everything he had to give, and outside of a lame quip about Hux’s appearance, there’s not much else to give, so he gets straight to the point.

“What did you want?” he asks.

Hux puts his datapad down, pushes the stack of neatly arranged flimsies to the very edge of the desk until it’s cleared of any clutter, then leans back in his seat.

“To thank you.”

Kylo blinks. “There’s nothing to thank me for.”

“Oh the contrary,” Hux says, pushing his chair back and getting up slowly, and that’s when Kylo’s nose picks up on...something. A gentle smell wafting from Hux’s person as he approaches. “I imagine it must have been… taxing… to do what you did for us.”

Kylo lets out a soft grunt. He’s not about to tell him just how taxing it had been. The things he does
for love.

He watches as Hux rounds his desk and moves closer, pushing Kylo’s chair by a leg as he’d done before until the general’s able to stand between his knees. Hux’s fingers reach for the zipper of Kylo’s overtunic, and that scent he’d spied becomes stronger.

It sends heat through his veins, the electrifying thrill of the scent of man on his partner as Hux tugs the zipper down a bit more and runs his naked fingers over Kylo’s protruding collarbone. When he looks up, Hux’s eyes are nearly black.

“Know that this is one of the very few times you’ll be able to get away with this,” Hux says in warning before his other hand travels to his belt, unbuckling it quickly with nimble fingers and pulling it away from his First Order uniform. “So do be sure to enjoy it, won’t you?”

Kylo smirks, fingers twitching away from his chair’s arm and towards Hux’s hips. It’s not the sort of welcome he had been expecting, but he certainly won’t say no. He makes quick work of divesting Hux of his jodhpurs, pushing them down to Hux’s knees and quickly looming over his favorite redhead. They may be off by an inch or two in height, but Kylo dwarfs Hux nonetheless, so he leans in and breathes in deeply at Hux’s neck, working to undo his jacket. Hux goes pliant, limp as he rests his hands on Kylo’s chest and closes his eyes, his breath hitching, and Kylo chuckles.

He knows he’s being given something precious as thanks, and plans on taking full advantage of it. The smell on Hux’s fingers is oil, and a probing leathered finger down Hux’s spine towards his entrance confirms Kylo’s suspicions. Hux had prepared himself. Ever the efficient man.

“Don’t mind if I do,” Kylo purrs, prodding and eliciting a soft sigh from Hux. Oh, he’d certainly enjoy it.

Kylo kisses up Hux’s neck as the general slowly strips him of his clothes, the two of them a mess of limbs until they’re standing nearly naked, Hux’s trousers at his feet and Kylo’s hanging off his hips, too impatient to push them down and rid themselves of their boots as Hux turns and presents himself, eyes narrowed at Kylo to remember how this sort of obedient submission will be very infrequent, and as Kylo licks his lips and eases himself in with a groan, he thinks to himself that he’s never been happier to answer a summons.

______________________

Inside the throne room, Rey waits for Snoke to finally say something while she stands ramrod straight, eyes pinned on the vile creature as she works to keep her breathing even. She had felt Kylo’s arrival and had half a mind to run to him to give her a piece of it regarding his actions, but she’d already been standing exactly where she is now, having said nothing after her late summons. She had informed Snoke that she wished to speak with him, and promptly received a message letting her know she would be summoned at his convenience.

A double-edged sword, her Master’s whims. On the one hand, she’d had time to prepare, speaking with Hux about what she was to say and when, and allow herself to build her mental walls slowly until they stood onyx black and strong, guarding her Force bond to Kylo. On the other hand, as the hours passed and she received no summons, it only allowed fear and anxiety to infest her like a sore left exposed too long.

She tries to temper her annoyance even now, waiting for Snoke to say something, but can easily understand why Kylo always seemed to be on edge. She’s only met with Snoke’s hologram a handful of times. She can hardly imagine what it would be like to be subjected to this just because it wants to. He hadn’t said a word after she’d mentioned that she was ready to go to him.
Just when she thinks she might be developing a crick in her neck from staring up, Snoke leans forward, eyes narrowed. There’s a brush against her mind and Rey reflexively opens up. She’s already hidden what she wanted to remain hidden.

“I am eager to finally meet you, my little apprentice. Have you accomplished everything you set out to do?” Snoke says, his voice grating the same way her scratcher used to sound when pushed against the wall of her AT-AT on Jakku as she marked the days. That scratcher’s noise used to be a comforting sound, once upon a time. Snoke’s voice, by comparison, makes her feel like needles are being jammed into her brain. She lowers her head in an acknowledgment and forces a small smile on her face.

“Yes, Supreme Leader.” Rey parrots. “Though I fear that there is much I do not know yet.”

Snoke waves his hand dismissively, a rumble in his chest vibrating through Rey's limbs and prickling up her skin with goosebumps of disgust.

“It will be soon remedied,” he promises, a small satisfied smile slicing his gruesome mouth, the gaping flesh at his cheek stretching taught. He digs through Rey’s minds to verify her words, and Rey offers up half-truths, though in all of them there are satisfied troopers. She makes it a point to offer up images of a disgruntled Hux and an anxious Kylo Ren, relieved when Snoke inspect them then moves on. “I am pleased. You have done well. Though… I sense there to be some discord there.”

The way in which he caresses her with the word discord makes Rey want to shriek. It leaves her feeling oily, used, despite Snoke having never placed a finger on her. He seems to be enjoying himself.

“Yes, Supreme Leader,” Rey lies, hiding her amazement at how a creature like this one can be so easily lied to. Then again, perhaps it is the fact that nobody up until now has dared lie to him that makes him blind to the fact that somebody is. A fact that Hux and Kylo have exploited brilliantly, and now it is her turn to do so.

“Which is why I wanted to speak with you. I want to advance my training, yet feel that Ren has been holding back… perhaps out of resentment that you have seemingly stopped favoring him. I would like to resume my training with you,” Rey says, letting her voice chime innocently. “Ren does not know that we are currently meeting. Neither does Hux. If I take a ship now and leave, they may wonder.”

Snoke considers her, eyes narrowed. “Let them wonder. They will know their place soon enough.”

Rey grits her teeth and hopes it lends her a sense of credibility.

“Forgive me, my lord, but Ren is an expert pilot,” she says, hinting at the fact that she’d been captured once already. “If they were to feel threatened… I thought, perhaps—”

“Do you fear confrontation?” Snoke asks, and Rey stops short. Has she backed herself into a corner? Rey gathers her scavenger’s courage and tilts her chin up indolently.

“I am not afraid of a fight.”

“And yet you are wary of leaving on your own.”

“I would rather not confront them, not by myself. I am not yet sure I could, yet with your power as my Master at my side… What I mean to say is, I would appreciate backup.”
Snoke leans back, stippling his fingers together and considering her again, and Rey prays that his thoughts have gone where she hopes they would.

“You wish to remove them.”

Yes! Rey thinks. The spark of excitement makes Snoke leer, having entirely misconstrued her reaction, but it is the reaction she wants. The spike of adrenaline in her system at his assumption that she wants Kylo and Hux removed is all she needs. Rey inclines her head. Snoke seems to be positively purring where he sits.

“Do you wish to take their place at my side? Their power?”

Rey nods, standing straighter and keeping herself from clenching her fists. Keeping the nausea from working up her esophagus at the way he’s raking his eyes up and down her figure takes monumental effort. “If I may be so bold, My Lord.”

“I will give you this, then,” Snoke says. “A gift to you, my young apprentice, in exchange for your commitment. You may ask them to transport you, and once here, we will deal with them.”

“Thank you, Supreme Leader. By your grace, I will be strong. And the sooner I can begin, the stronger I will be.”

Snoke chuckles. “You will make a wonderful ruler one day. Go.”

She’s been dismissed. Snoke’s hologram disappears along with the pressure pushing against her skull, and the nausea once again tries to overwhelm her. She sags for a moment, then sprints out of the room. She will spend no more time there than necessary.

It’s done. Soon there will be resistance fighters, and her friends Poe and Finn, getting involved in a fight just because she asked it of them. And because Kylo begged his mother on her behalf, because she’s sure that nothing short of begging would make Leia put her men in danger, and Rey’s been selling lies like they’re trinkets at Jakku’s junkyard of an outpost.

Rey clips a fast pace upward, one level after another, until she’s sprinting towards their quarters where she can sense Kylo, and where she knows she will undoubtedly find Hux filling him in on today’s activities. The closer she gets the angrier she feels, yet with the anger also comes relief that he’s back and in one piece. She finally opens her side of the bond as the doors open, and finds Kylo and Hux looking rather pink-cheeked and fucked out, but her mind’s reeling because the sight of Kylo’s face makes her both want to punch him and kiss him.

Instead she stomps over to him, allowing all of her anger and fear and happiness and relief to flow through, and throws her arms around his neck. He stumbles back a step, though his reflexes are as quick as ever as he wraps his arms around her to catch her.

“I hate you,” she mutters into his neck, “I hope you know that. And you have a lot to explain.”

Kylo tenses beneath her, turning to look at Hux with a perplexed expression. Hux simply shrugs, pouring himself two knuckles of scotch while Rey squeezes around Kylo’s massive neck and clings on. It is clear from his end that he had expected… well, her throwing herself at him wasn’t it. Then he tugs her in closer and buries his nose in her hair, and sighs.

“I know.” Kylo murmurs, hugging her tight enough to cut off circulation, and Rey forgets her anger for a moment.

Maker, she missed him. Perhaps it’s the fact that death may loom so close to their doorstep, but for a
moment she chooses to forget her anger, and the upbraiding she has in store for Kylo can wait for just a moment. For a moment she shoves Snoke and his ugly, twisted features out of her mind, and clings onto one of her lovers while the other watches contentedly. How Snoke could ever believe she’d hurt either of these men is beyond her, but she will do what she has to do in order to protect them and what they’ve grown to have.

Hux takes a step forward. Rey vaguely notes that he seems to be moving stiffly, but puts it aside when Hux tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and runs a finger down her jaw, Rey’s other cheek pressed up against Kylo’s chest. “Did he buy it?”

Rey licks her lips and nods.

“We’re good to go.”

Chapter End Notes

—

talk to me, bebes.
Did you enjoy Kylo's present as much as he did? ;)

—
Hux takes a long pull of his scotch, smiling at Rey over the rim of his tumbler and wishing he had a cigarette instead. He needed one after having to sit back and wait for Rey’s meeting with Snoke to be over. Kylo had been a perfect distraction, certainly, at least as far as Hux’s body was concerned, but having to sit and wait for once had clawed his nerves raw.

*Maker, where are his cigarettes?*

He pats his pockets, but they’re empty. Hux suppresses a tired sigh. One step closer to being done with all of this. Just a few more and they will have sealed their fate one way or another.

“Now,” he announces, shifting his weight to his other hip and feeling the delicious soreness between his thighs Kylo had gifted him, ever present despite his constant worrying. Not that he’d also ever say a word out loud about how much he enjoyed it, of course. For a single ridiculous moment, Hux muses about the fact that he’s still keeping secrets, though these happen to be of the lewdest nature. He takes another final swig of alcohol before setting his glass down, looking at their bed longingly from where he stands as he motions toward his office. “If you two will follow me, please.”

Kylo reluctantly lets Rey go then falls in step behind her. The day’s almost coming to an end, but their work is nowhere near done. This is the reality of war, Hux thinks. Rest is for the dead. Phasma is no longer on the Finalizer, and neither is Mitaka, which means his breaks from the bridge are few and far between, so he better stop dawdling.

He gestures to the chairs before pulling up a screen with a few practiced flicks of his fingers. Rey perches on the end of hers expectantly as the screen blinks blue and Kylo leans back into his seat. Their collective exhaustion seems to clog the air around them, but despite Rey’s pale, drawn face, Hux’s dark circles and perpetual migraine, and Kylo’s general lethargy after his return, their minds are alert and that’s all Hux can ask for. They have made it this far.

“Once we jump to hyperspace, the trip to Snoke’s command satellite will take approximately a hundred standard hours. The plan is to jump out far enough away that we’ll be outside of range before launching an attack, but before that happens…” Hux pulls up a recording he’d placed in a shadow partition, feeling a little filthy every time he has to resort to such measures, but better safe than sorry.

The window blinks awake, displaying a familiar face. Lady Tiagha of Kuat’s honored House Purkis, stocky, beautiful, sharp and shrewd in her stunning hunter green gown comes to life before their eyes. Rey perks up and Kylo tilts his head sideways, recognition and a certain smugness flashing across his gorgeous eyes while she stares in bewilderment.

“Well, that’s one face I certainly never expected to see again,” she says, scrunching up her nose with mild distaste.

Hux can hardly blame her. After all, she’d beat the Kuati at their own game fair and square with their own stick, but he remembers how it had left her feeling soiled with the knowledge that she had become too much like one of them, ruthless and conniving. The last thing Rey would have expected would be to see Lady Tiagha’s knife-sharp eyes staring back at her. Hux hits play.
“General Hux,” Lady Tiagha’s recording begins, choppy with static, “It is good to hear from you again. We have received your funds in full. We are very eager to help you in your endeavor, and thank you for choosing our drive yards.”

Hux stalls Rey’s questions with a finger.

“Her Majesty sends her regards as well, reminding you that, should Lady Rey Ren ever wish to join us, a position is always open for her. She is a wonderful negotiator.” There’s a small smile gracing Tiagha’s eyes that don’t quite reach her eyes, her amusement dry but present, and Rey lets out an uncharacteristic chuckle.

“They’re offering me a job,” she says, unable to keep her amusement at bay. Kylo snorts, Hux rolls his eyes, and Rey’s silly grin widens. He had not informed her that the Kuati had tried to snag her right out from under his pristine fingernails, that he’d clung onto her as best as he could even as he prepared himself to set her free, and knowing that the Kuati have not forgotten about her produced a knee-jerk reaction out of Hux he’s not particularly proud of even now, but that’s the least of his worries.

Tiagha continues.

“We would be happy to accommodate your request regarding the delivery of your commission, and understand your urgency. Fear not, we will exercise our utmost discretion in the matter.” The static does little to dim the chiming sound of Lady Tiagha’s voice, but it is short lived, the woman having kept her communications as succinct and business-like as humanly possible. In the next breath, the screen goes blank.

Rey turns to Hux then, arching an eyebrow. “I almost forgot about… all that. It feels like it was so long ago. What did you commission?”

“Nothing you had not already commissioned yourself,” Hux says, pointing at the space where a moment ago Lady Tiagha had shared her overly vague message. “I only worked to, ah—expedite the process.”

He had spent the better part of five months sneaking funds out of the First Order coffers, scrubbing records, manipulating numbers, cutting budgets to keep officers paid while syphoning credits, and completely emptying his own personal wealth in order to do get those ships built faster; if it meant stealing from Snoke himself and putting himself out on the metaphorical street, then all the better for it. A risky gamble, but a worthy one. For all intents and purposes Hux now stood a penniless man, but a poor man alive is better than a rich man dead.

“Negotiations have been underway for a while now,” Hux continues, allowing himself a small moment of victory after having spent almost every waking hour sequestered in one of his offices to try and make this happen without suspicion from prying eyes, “The Yards were encouraged to begin working around the clock for the last few months for the highest bidder—us. All eight star destroyers you commissioned are now ready for duty, a full four and a half months ahead of schedule, as are all the TIE fighters and weapons. Now it’s just a matter of arming the ships.”

“Lady Tiagha approached me the night of the celebration ball and made her sympathies known,” says Kylo, filling in the gaps in Rey’s knowledge of how it all went down. “Your little stunt with those ships now works to our benefit. We hadn’t told you before because Snoke could easily get the information from you if he grew suspicious and determined.”

“But now that he thinks I’m on my way…” she says, turning to Hux. He’s thankful that she doesn’t look like she begrudges him this, considering how very against she is regarding any form of
withholding of information. It’s a tactical move, and the bright sheen in her eyes reflects that she understands. He could pin her against the wall and kiss her. “So we actually do have the weapons. The ships.”

“Correct.”

A part of him wants to puff out his chest with pride. He had told her they had the means, and he would find a way, and Rey had continually only given him dubious glances. Now he can prove that he was, indeed, right all along. Well, except for one thing.

“Contingent on them arriving when we do, yes, we have the ships. You provided us the pilots.” he finishes.

A list of names comes up on the screen: Resistance pilots assigned to this mission, provided by General Organa. Poe Dameron’s name is amongst them, along with a small picture of the dashing man. There’s also a small picture of the traitor, who, for lack of a surname is listed as Finn Trooper. It’s a tally of potential casualties more than a list, and Rey winces at seeing the faces of her friends there. It’s an awful reality of war, having to prepare for accounting the dead, but a necessary one.

“My own officers have also been mobilized,” Hux continues, pulling up First Order file after First Order file. Amongst them Dopheld Mitaka’s, and an unmasked Phasma. They would be joining the ships from Kuat.

“I wish I could have known prior to, done something more to help. You two have done so much already.”

It is Kylo who speaks first, voice hard and eyes harder. “You already have. You’ve been the bait, as ugly a reality as that has been, and the only reason we’re still here is because you are. Do not doubt for a second that had Snoke wanted us gone, and you had not been aboard this ship, he would have destroyed it.”

Rey lets out a small, strangled sound as she tries to free her hands from Kylo’s, who in his fervency had nearly cut off her circulation. Hux tsks, watching her pry them out from Kylo’s grip with some difficulty.

“He’s right. You’re the reason we’re here, in one piece might I add. Stop wishing you had done more. You’ve already done enough. We didn’t tell you because we couldn’t. But now that we’re free to, know that all of this is possible because of you.”

She had given them a reason to fight, all of them, and selfishly, Hux thinks she had given him a reason to live, to look forward to a future. Really look forward to it, for once in his life. He was no longer searching for acceptance, fighting dirty to make his way to the top for recognition, drowning in a pit of helpless desperation of his own making. He no longer needed his father’s approval, or Snoke’s, or anybody’s but Rey’s and Kylo’s. Whatever happened between them, to them, was private and need not rely on anything but that which they give with good intentions. It lifted the burden off his shoulders. He can only hope he can, in some way, lift theirs.

Rey looks between them and Hux wishes he could take her worries away, his heartstrings tugging hard when he notices that her eyes harden to keep from misting over.

“But—”

“No.” Kylo repeats. It is a final command, and for once Hux echoes it. He will not have it, not when she’d had to stand in front of that vile creature and lie to his face, over and over, while Hux and Kylo
grit their teeth and acted the role of servile, meek little mice. She had done more than she could possibly imagine, and it took more balls than most of his men had, trained and prepared for a life of hardship as they’d been.

“Phasma, Mitaka, and a small group of trusted officers will be boarding and flying the new destroyers, along with your general and pilot friends. They will meet us on Vjun’s airspace and turn the numbers to our advantage.” Hux says, wanting to put some distance between them and the tension that had once again risen even as nervous anxiety bubbled up in his stomach. The exchange of such massive ships from Kuat hands to what were, for all intents and purposes, a small band of rogue combatants with a target on their back, was a tricky one.

“As are the remaining knights not currently infiltrating the star destroyers Snoke stole,” Kylo adds. It had been his idea once he’d disbanded his knights. A brilliant one, really. Having a force sensitive aboard each ship could prove to be helpful should enemy soldiers attempt to overtake them.

“And the remaining resistance pilots will man the TIE fighters.” Rey says, slotting the last pieces of the puzzle neatly in place.

Hux nods, inspecting her face closely. A small voice inside his chest whispers that he hopes she’s proud. He can’t remember when it became imperative that he please her, but it happened nonetheless, and this is no different. For his part, Kylo has been attempting the same with renewed effort ever since their last fuck up… all family drama notwithstanding. And so both he and Kylo look at Rey, waiting for a response.

For a moment, she simply stares at the blank screen, leaning back in her chair, braid over her shoulder, while Kylo and Hux wait for her to validate all their efforts.

“And the troops?” she asks. Hux knows why immediately. Her face draws in and her brows pinch, and it’s clear that she’s none too happy about the concept of involving her newfound friends.

“On standby unless needed. With luck, nobody will leave this ship or the others except for the pilots, and this battle won’t spill onto Vjun.”

A minute later, Rey nods.

“Great,” she says. So much planning, so much twisting of words, and all she has to say is great. And yet… that seems like enough. Kylo nods and Hux powers off the screen. They look at each other. This might be the last time they truly get a single moment to just stand still in the quiet of their own bubble and allow themselves to just...be. What will their lives look like after? He muses.

Up until now it has been a never-ending struggle to get to this point. A perpetual battle. But what happens after? After the enemy is defeated? Will they stand all three like this again, or will what they’ve constructed fall apart once the threat of pending danger has dissipated if it ever does? He had told Rey once that they would all learn love, but the small amount of anxious doubt still eats away at him.

He shakes his head quietly and the spell is broken, and Hux straightens. “I will return momentarily. There is something I must do on the bridge first. Go on without me.”

Rey and Kylo get to their feet and Hux follows them out the door, making for the main exit as Rey picks up Millicent and takes her into the bedroom, trailed by a silent Kylo.

The bridge is all but deserted. He has sent out his most trusted officers on their own missions, keeping only those absolutely necessary to man the Finalizer and its guns, even so far as to pull in
petty officers still wet behind the ears to try and fill some spaces. Even then, his bridge crew has been cut by more than half. Yet that’s all he needs right now.

They don’t need to know that they’re going into battle with their own comrades. Not yet, anyway. The outcome would be the same regardless, given Snoke’s desire to wipe the slate clean and decimate the First Order now that the Republic was practically non-existent. Either they would live, or they’d be blown up to pieces, and that’s as basic as he could make the math on this. He gives the order to put the ship into hyperspace, gives the coordinates, and informs his officers of the timeline. Once he sees that flashing, blinding speed of hyperspeed, he heaves a sigh of relief. They cannot be reached here. Hux quickly puts the men on rotation so that they can get some much needed rest, then makes a beeline for his own quarters.

When he returns to his quarters, Rey and Kylo are sitting on the bed facing each other, eyes closed and poses mirrored in one of meditation. He skirts around them slowly and into the closet, hanging his coat in place and slowly working himself out of his clothes, Millicent purring at his ankles after having grown tired of being ignored by the others.

He returns and still they remain immobile. Hux watches them for a moment. He had wanted force sensitives to defend him, to hand him a win, and he had gotten them both. He just had never imagined he would be watching them sit on his bed, Kylo’s chest bare and comfortable sweatpants riding low on his hips, Rey with her legs bare and in a flimsy set of shorts and tanktop for sleepwear, hair out of its braid and looking like she’s concentrating with everything she’s got. Whatever they’re up to, Hux has no part in it. He shakes his head at this turn of events and leaves them to their magical mumbo jumbo while he heads for the living room, pours himself another two fingers of scotch and sits back at the head of the dining room table, watching the lights pass by the massive viewport.

One hundred standard hours. Hux takes a swig of his scotch and leans his head back against the chair while Millicent finds his lap and makes herself at home.

Rey breathes in deep, a bead of sweat forming at her temple, air falling in and out of her lungs as she tries to grasp at the edges of the Force bond. On the other side, Kylo himself repeats the motion.

Together they test the boundaries, circle it, come close together then stretch it to snapping point, the faint hum of it rising to an angry buzz as it flares and heats up, and Rey can hardly hold onto it. They had never attempted to see what they could do with this thing, other than talk to each other, but based on what the holocron had told her there was more. Rey was interested in more, especially if she was going to have to live with this bond to him in her very soul for the rest of her life.

Once upon a time both of them had despised it, this connection that tethered them to each other by some thing neither of them felt powerful enough to control—in fact, in many ways it had controlled them. It had forced them together, it punished them if they were apart (sometimes with nightmares, sometimes with the simple knowledge that their other half was somewhere else), it made it near impossible for either of them to be something other than two halves of one whole, the feeling of being incomplete like a phantom limb she could still feel. So she’d decided that she would, for once, take the matter into her own hands and find out exactly what this bond was. It was high time, anyway.

She had explained what she’d been taught to the best of her abilities, trying not to get frustrated at the look of utter confusion and wariness painting Kylo’s face when she said that it could be more. He had been tempted by the promises of more in his life, and look where it had led him. Yet he’d complied for her sake if only because he, too, had noticed the oddities. The moments of lost time whenever they entered a deep state of synchronized breathing, of mutual meditation, a seeming shift
around them that neither one could explain.

*You’re tugging too hard,* Kylo warns as the bond glows red and a pinprick of pain blooms behind her eyes. Rey grunts inside the bond and releases it, and once again it snaps back like a rubber band, resuming its soft warmth as if nothing had happened.

*You didn’t tug enough,* Rey complains, and feels a wave of mild amusement tinged with annoyance from Kylo’s end. *We must do this together.*

*You were fighting me,* Rey, he counters gruffly but also lets go, and their bond falls silent, the stress seeping away from the string of light that they cling to, soul to soul, and emitting a soft hum that has become as part of her as her own thoughts. She almost doesn’t hear it now. Once upon a time she couldn’t shake it.

*We can figure it out,* Rey says, more of a promise to herself than anything else. *We just have to…*

But it is no use. They haven’t figured it out for hours, doing nothing but pushing and pulling, trying to control their bond but getting nowhere, and her bones are starting to ache. They’re doing it wrong, she knows it. And so does Kylo. He can feel her aches and pains as if they were his own.

Rey rolls her neck, hearing it crack-crack-crack down as she stretches and tries to shove her irritation back. Kylo sits across from her, still and silent as he studies her features, the air suddenly thick with the taste of unresolved issues. They’d been practicing — well, *practicing* being a fair exaggeration of what they were attempting to do — for hours now. Avoiding what surely he knew was coming as well as she does.

Well, better now than never. Without much preamble, Rey’s words spill out. “Why didn’t you tell me where you were going?”

She tries, she *tries* to keep the accusation out of her voice, but it’s hard when this just feels like a culmination of months of them dancing around each other on pins and needles. Her eyes are pinned on her fingers and she feels a little like a coward for not meeting his gaze. Here she is, accusing *him* of something, and knowing full well that he’s definitely in the wrong this time, but she can hardly make herself look up, scared of what she might find there, and even more scared of knowing that what she fears is rejection.

There’s a moment of silence, Rey’s ears straining to pick up on the soft little stuttered sigh he lets out. It sounds tired, resigned.

*“Hux would have told you why,”* he replies, as if that solves or answers anything.

*“Hux told me *where* you went, and only *after* it was all said and done,”* Rey chances a glance. Kylo’s eyes are stormy, beautiful even in their exhaustion, his lashes cutting dark shadows over his irises. He watches her with a sort of wary consideration that makes her itch. *“He didn’t tell me why, and even if he had, I want to hear it from you.”*

*“I didn’t want you getting your hopes up.”*

*“That’s not for you to decide,”* she balks, and Kylo tilts his head sideways, his never ending scrutiny working its way under her skin. She will not shiver, she will not shiver, she will *not*—

*“I’m aware of the many times I’ve failed you, Rey, unintentionally and otherwise,”* he says, *“but this time it would have been different.”*

*“No,”* she says, narrowing her eyes. *“It wouldn’t have. I would have rather you told me and it had all
gone wrong than you not tell me at all and keep me wondering where you’ve gone. And why. And if any of it was my fault to begin with.”

He opens his mouth to speak but Rey beats him to it, all of her frustration finally spilling out.

“Look, I know we’re off to fight. I know we could potentially die in this, that tensions are running high, and that I messed up before. I know I haven’t given you much reason to trust me. I know all that. I know it, okay? And I’m sorry, for everything.” Rey stops, licking her lips. “I’m not sorry I told your mother. I’m not sorry, because she cares, and I care, and it’s about time something got done—Snoke’s a predator, he’s an awful blight in everyone’s existence but mostly yours, and your mother needed to know.” Rey drags in a long, deep breath that borders dangerously close to shattering as she once again meets his eyes, preparing to do something she’s always hard a hard time doing. “But I am sorry about how it went about… I am sorry.”

He had made her pay for her indiscretion. He had shut her out for over a week, barely speaking to her, his cold shoulder the temperature of a deep buried glacier until it started eating at her. And then he’s gone, just like that…

“You left, okay?” she says, trying to keep the trembling out of her fingers. “You blocked me out in every way possible, which I get it, I deserved that. But then you left. You made love to me and then you were gone.”

That hurt the most, really. He had come into the room, defenses lowered until Rey felt as though she were drowning. She’d lived her days on a desert planet and nothing felt as arid and bleak as that week she’d spent skirting around him, only for him to walk into that room long after she’d exhausted herself, the dam opened and she’d drowned in everything that was him, clinging onto his broad shoulders for dear life as he worshipped her. Then their lovemaking turned to frantic, desperate fucking because he couldn’t get enough and was trying to fuse them together via his touch and Rey wanted him under her skin. And then he’d disappeared and she’d woken up in a cold bed, the force bond between them informing her that he was nowhere near. Not even aboard the ship.

Her first panicked thought was that his forgiveness and subsequent love making had been his goodbye.

Which all now adds up to her feeling a frantic need to crawl to him, claw into his heart and burrow herself there because next she knows the bond is undulating with a strange mix of adoration and sadness towards her, and she can hardly take much more of this.

“I didn’t want to be the one to let you down again. I know I have. We all have, in one way or another, and I haven’t given you much of a reason to trust me, either. Not as much as I should have,” he says, brows furrowing. She can hear his next thought as clearly as if he’d spoken it out loud. The only person who hadn’t let her down or given her reason to doubt him had been Finn, and Rey realizes that Kylo may be harboring no small amount of resentment and jealousy over that. She would laugh if not for the current thread of conversation. Rey sighs.

“Ben.”

His eyes snap back up. It’s a leash, she realizes. His name is a leash and he’d willingly given it to her and Hux, and she’d snapped it for the first time in the way that counted. She’d used it to gain his attention, and he’d jumped readily.

“I am sorry.”

He continues studying her, sitting straighter now that she’s addressed him. Not his alter ego, not the
Another heartbeat, and Kylo inclines his head slowly, features crumbling in that overly expressive way of his. He can’t help himself. That face was made to express emotion with every twitch of muscle underneath. She wants to lean in, grab him, and kiss it all over, but they’re both too wounded and too wound-up, and any move she makes may shatter the delicate truce they’ve just achieved. Rey holds still.

Then Kylo extends a hand towards her, fingers lax and wearing an expectant look on his face. Rey twines her fingers through his carefully, allowing herself to be pulled close. She kneels between his bent knees, sitting back on her calves as he takes her other hand and mimics her, lacing their fingers together until they’re sharing body heat. Then he gives her a soft smile, gaze dancing on her eyes.

“Let’s try this again.”

She immediately feels the hum of their bond, calling, calling, calling, and closes her eyes, rising up to meet him in the middle. Moments later their breathing synchronizes. A few moments more and she feels her heart beating in tandem with his, their pulse mirrors of each other. Hours later, after exploring and tugging and generally wrestling with their bond, trying to get it to do as they want, their heartbeats are pounding erratically though they have not moved a muscle.

In a divine moment of unconscious action, one neither Rey nor Kylo notice, time skips then stops. The stormtroopers passing viewports and the officers on the bridge all drop what they’re doing and gape as the ship seems to stop moving, though they can still feel the engines whirring, staring out towards space in a collective daze as they take in the strange phenomenon of hyperspace light frozen in time. Outside the bedroom, a content Millicent flicks her tail as she takes in the view from her owner’s lap who, for once, is fast asleep.

T-Minus 12 Hours

It wouldn’t be long now before they jumped out of hyperspace, Hux muses as he oversees the tearing down of the amphitheater where he and Kylo had screamed and bled. He stands still, watching as workers dismantled the dais where Snoke’s usual hologram projected onto, dragging giant chunks of stones away. He still had no clue as to how Snoke had managed to plant those stones aboard his flagship, seeing as Hux usually had a tight rein on the building of his destroyers, but it is too late to wonder how now.

Eyes narrowed, he waits until he hears a distinct set of steps coming up from behind him, and Hux thumbs a small piece of smooth rock between his gloved fingers. Rey walks up, staring at the mayhem with a cocked eyebrow from behind the glass separating them and the chaos. A moment later, they’re joined by yet another set of steps—more like stomps, really. Loud, lumbering stomps that mark Kylo’s attempt to announce himself. Hux knows first hand that the man can be deathly silent when he wants to be.

The three of them stare at the organized chaos in silence until Rey speaks up.

“Why are there stones under that platform?” she asks. Kylo snorts, and Hux is bound to agree.

“A question I would have loved answers to myself, but I suppose it comes as no surprise now. It’s simply one of Snoke’s many weapons.” he says, and Kylo interjects.

“They’re temple stones,” he says, eyes narrowed at the ancient markings. Sith and Jedi markings
etched one over the other from what Hux can only assume would be factions reclaiming said temples when these stoned belonged to standing structures. “They act as… vehicles. Amplifiers, to be specific.”

A light goes off above Rey’s head and her eyes widen, recoiling a step back on instinct before she catches herself and valiantly steps forward again. Hux continues turning the small bit of stone in his hand. He’d had it sanded down on a moment of absurd weakness. Had a small hole punched through it, perfect for a chain to go through it. He extends his hand to Rey, presenting it to her though his eyes don’t move away from the chaos beneath. Rey grabs it and turns it, inspecting it with a frown.

“For you,” he says, telling himself that presenting her with a small stone of all things was only ridiculous insofar as the fact that he was gifting it, but quickly deciding that, if those stones could be conduits of power, even a small one could be used as a weapon. It was justification enough. Kylo looks over at him, arching an eyebrow.

“None for me?” Kylo ribs, and Hux wants to scoff.

“You’re dangerous enough as is,” he replies, for which he earns a wickedly smug smirk before Kylo steps close to Rey, takes the stone from her fingers and moves behind her. He gently, tenderly moves her braid aside before unclasping her necklace and sliding the chain through the hole in the stone, dragging it over her shoulder until it comes to rest next to the green pendant he’d gifted her. Rey stares at both stones, one dull and onyx black, the other a glimmering jade, a small smile on her lips before she tucks the necklace safely back under her tunic, and Hux tries not to think too hard about how those stones will dangle between her breasts.

“What will happen to those?” Rey asks, gesturing towards the platform.

“They’re being dumped off board,” he says, hands immediately moving to rest behind his back as he assumes his usual stance, a soldier at ease.

He wouldn’t leave that cache up to chance, choosing to have the massive stones dumped off board into hyperspace. They would fall out of it, dispersed Maker knows where across all corners of the galaxy. He was fine with that, as long as they didn’t remain aboard his ship, where Snoke could touch them, especially not when they’d be dropping out of hyperspace close to a Force nexus, or whatever Kylo had called it when explaining to them why they were headed for Vjun.

Rey nods, Kylo and Hux flanking her as they continue looking down onto the amphitheater. He had watched Kylo from up here many a times, unable to hear what was being said through the thick glass but still able to read the Knight’s body language. He’s sure Kylo had done the same to him many times, standing silently to watch him get berated or praised by Snoke without being able to understand a word. Probably another of Snoke’s plans, keeping them pliant by sowing discord. Every time a massive stone is hauled out of the room, it peels back another layer of Snoke’s control, and with it a small amount of his tension. He would walk into this fight a man free from under Snoke’s thumb no matter the outcome.

“We’re jumping out of hyperspace in twelve hours,” he comments, finally turning to look at Rey and Kylo. “I suggest you use that time wisely.”

And spend it wisely they do. Kylo spends his time training, focusing, prepping for a fight that may just take everything he’s got. Rey spends her time amongst the troops, lighting a fire that starts running wild on gasoline, and Hux— well, Hux spends it in his office on the bridge, twirling a bottle of water between his fingers, thinking back to a time when he’d wondered if he even had a future. That seems like so long ago.
He’s done everything he can. As soon as they jump out of hyperspace, Hux would deploy the signal jammers he’d tailored for the ships Snoke thinks he stole from under his nose. He’d blast recordings of Rey’s speech to the troops anywhere and everywhere a stormtrooper stood, because he better than anyone knows the power of propaganda. He’d disable their shields and wait for backup, and then he’d try to bring Snoke down before the creature knew what hit him.

He’d prepared for this. He’d spent nights agonizing, planning, foregoing sleep in favor of clandestine communication with expert engineers and seedy outsider slicers alike during long hours under the guise of improving his ship, all while planning instead to use those same weaknesses against the ones he had once commandeered. There weren’t many; he had, after all, been the one to design those ships. But as Rey had proven to him once after repeatedly escaping from where he’d put her during her first days aboard, there were some. And he’d found every single one of them.

He has it all figured out, he tells himself. There’s nothing else he can do but wait. He spends his time in Rey and Kylo’s arms, the three of them making the most of the little time they have left before they stare at the ceiling, talking late into the night, waiting. There’s nothing to do but wait.

Twelve hours later they jump out of hyperspace behind a moon whose magnetic field scrambles their situational signal, effectively hiding them in plain sight. Yet it takes little time before Hux’s best laid plans start crumbling before him, and he remembers his father’s words.

*Plans, boy, are only but spiderwebs. Even the best constructed ones can collapse.*

Chapter End Notes

This fic is going to be shorter than I intended (ha!). I have no specific number yet, but I will be shaving off 2-3 chapters, it seems. I initially wanted to stretch out some things, but I think ultimately decided it would be pointless and stretch things out longer than needed. For the sake of moving along, it's better if we just jump straight into it. Finally those stupid temple stones come out of the room! It's been how many chapters? 20? or so? lol.

Anyway, I don't know that I'll be able to finish ADOT in time for TLJ, but I'm certainly going to make an effort to at least get CLOSE to finishing it, so you guys will probably see a few more chapters sandwiched close together in the next 3 weeks... which hurts no one, right? ;)

As always, thank you, friends, for your love and support and words of encouragement. It means the world to me <3
Chapter Notes

Hellooo! I know it's been eons, so here's a recap: we left our idiots about 12 hours before they dropped out of hyperspace on their journey to confront Snoke, and all sorts of machinations from almost a year worth of Hux’s efforts about to come into fruition... maybe. ;p

This chapter is unbeta’d (my bb wife is busy and so I'm taking on these chapters on my own, and will probably go back in a few weeks and beta them properly), so I thank you for your patience with it and acknowledge that any and all mistakes are my own. Thank you guys for sticking it out with me. Two more to go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The best laid plans are spiderwebs. They can collapse. His father had warned him of that, once. Hux watches as his start crumbling over the span of what could have been minutes but feels like hours.

BACK

Kylo swings his saber in a wide, feral yet practiced arch paces away from Rey’s hunched form as she goes about double checking the wiring on her dual saber one last time. She had been building it slowly, ever since he’d gifted her the parts, and every once in a while he would hear her mumble via the bond. The words are painfully familiar to him. He had repeated them often while building his own saber, memories of which Rey had used in order to guide her own handiwork, and it seems they have worked their way into her subconscious, latching onto his via their bond as she tunes everything out and continues working.

He wishes that her chanting in the back of his head as he practices were something he could claim annoyed him, but it is soothing, guiding him through his stance for the tenth time like a metronome.

There is no emotion, there is peace.

He crouches low, swings out, lifts and rams his saber into an imagined foe with intents to disembowel, then takes a step back.

There is no ignorance, there is knowledge.

A twirl of his saber before he brings it down overhead, ripping through the air. Down, then back, and his stance lowers as his legs spread. Cutting in half from head to sternum in one move.

There is no passion, there is serenity.

He snarls at nothing in particular, the next move requiring he swing the heft of his body to put more power into his saber in a semi-circle, using his center of gravity to stabilize himself and his knees to keep him grounded.

There is no chaos, there is harmony.

He charges at nothing, jabs, makes to pulverize, cut in half, decapitate, maim—all the things a Jedi’s...
weapon would never be used for.

There is no Death, there is—

Rey stops and his step falters. He had synchronized to her breathing, to her words and her focus, and without it his next arc turns lazy. Were he in a fight, that might cost him his life. But then he hears her shuffling off the mat and jumping to her feet, her sabers pumped into the air as she lets out a cry of success. He turns in time to see them ignite and smiles. Rey twirls on the spot and by the time she’s facing him again, small yet powerful body falling into a defensive stance, both sabers have been joined in the middle to form a short-staff.

She’s so happy with herself, and Kylo’s pride on her behalf soars. He lowers his saber and takes languid, confident steps towards her like the cat about to eat the canary, a smirk touching his lips at the way her brow rises.

“Well done,” he praises, his saber turning a slow circle in his hand in friendly goading, “now let’s see what you can do with it.”

Rey snorts, but she’s eager. More eager than she’d ever been to join him in combat, and out of the fog of his memories Hux’s voice returns to him, ‘You gain more from a person if you give them something to strive for.’ Hux had been right, of course. Kylo had gone about attempting to train her the wrong way, and it had taken plenty of stumbling to find the right one. Rey had been given plenty to strive for, now, and the way she now crouches, ready to face him head on, tells him more about her determination to succeed than anything else.

That’ll serve her well. They’ll be facing Snoke in a matter of so many hours. Probably. If Hux had it his way they would never see one on one combat. Kylo snorts at the thought.

“What’s so funny?” Rey asks, unaware of where his thoughts have taken him, and Kylo smiles.

“Nothing,” he replies, then steps into his own stance.

A minute later, they’re fighting. This one’s different, though. This one’s less a brawl and more of a dance, one in which he knows that she leaves her left side open when she’s distracted, and she knows that his right foot will step back so many degrees at the exact moment his saber starts swinging down, facing out, knee bent to propel his swing. He knows she’s fond of feinting first right, then left, and despite being right-dominant, her left arm swings with more force, and thus he would have to angle their enemies towards that side. She knows his blind spot, and that his side where Chewie fired is now a weakness, knotted with the scar that was left after having destroyed muscle almost irreparably. Thank the Maker for technology to help fix it, but it was still sore almost a year later, and would be for a long time, inhibiting the way he could turn his torso that way.

They know each other too well, and so there are no winners or losers to their sparring. Good, he thinks, sweat beading on his brow and Rey’s chest starting to rise and fall rapidly with exertion. Not that it stops her from swinging that double sided saber like a third limb when joined together, or extensions of her own hands when separated into individual weapons. He had been right in his desire to see her build such a short staff. Jakku had beaten that proficiency into her, and he had worked her through saber wielding and fighting forms for a while now. It would all serve her now.

Or at least, he hopes it does. The fact of the matter is that no matter how much preparation goes into a fight, it can all go head over tit in a second. His own fights with her had proven that to him, back when she’d been untrained on Starkiller. He smiles fondly at that memory.

Rey uses his moment of distraction against him, knocking his saber from his hands with the butt of
her own and swiping his legs from under him, and he falls on his back with a painful grunt.

She grins at him, deactivating her saber and offering her arm for him to haul him to his feet, and for once, Kylo feels peace. No matter what happens next, he has this. He has Rey, he has Brendol. He could weather the storm.

He couldn’t have been more wrong.

FORWARD

Hux had had it all planned out. It was what his life had been built on, really. Brick by excruciating brick, his life had been built on a foundation of regimented ideas that were then to be carried out with pinpoint precision. There could be no room for mistakes just as life had never afforded him room for second chances. So when his ship jumps out of hyperspace and he watches as, within minutes, Snoke’s destroyers are rounding the moon, his heart stutters; Snoke’s command vessel travels between them, coming face to face with the *Finalizer* just as Hux has given the order to deploy signal and shield jammers. He blinks hard once, the only roiling moment of perplexed confusion he allows himself before he stomps on the emotion and reminds himself that he’s all but won, and is halfway through his demand that the cannons be readied when Snoke cuts in, the massive hologram of the vile creature’s face cutting the bridge in half and blocking Hux’s view of anything else.

It was not something the creature had made use of often, having always preferred for the full intimidation of a larger than life, full body projection down in the guts of the ship, in the amphitheater away from prying eyes and listening ears. Not this time, however. This time Snoke’s massive, scarred face and disgustingly smug eyes sneer at him, and it takes all the steel in Hux’s spine to root himself to his spot rather than taking an instinctive step back, his resolve bolstered by a sense of triumph even in this small gesture of defiance.

“So good of you to join us, General,” Snoke greets. Around them, Hux’s officers make themselves smaller, trying to blend their black uniforms with the consoles, eyes wide and bodies flash frozen in fear. They had never seen the true leader of the First Order. Not like this. Hux makes himself larger in their stead, borrowing courage with narrowed eyes and refusing to back down. “I was wondering when you’d show up. It was only a matter of time, I suppose.”

His mind reels. What does he mean, he was wondering?

Hux thinks back to all his preparations, all his well-made plans. He combs the last week for any indication that may have given him away, reviews every interaction he’d cataloged safely away in his mind, and comes up with nothing. Nothing. There is nothing he can think of that could have given him away. No, Snoke must be referring to Rey’s ruse about Hux delivering her to Snoke’s lair.

He straightens his back once more, plants his feet firmly on the bridge and squares his shoulders, the muscles on his left eye already trying to twitch themselves into the beginnings of the most annoying tic he’s ever had.

“So, no honorific, General,” he greets.

Snoke’s eyes widen then narrow at the lack of honorific. Hux would never allow himself to whisper the words *Supreme Leader* ever again. They would have to cut out his tongue first before he ever uttered that honorific again. And yet the thought cheers him, lends him a sense of peace that, however fraught, he desperately needs now so he can keep a clear head—he must remain calm, because he can hear the seconds ticking in his head, spy the vastness of space all around him, and aside from Snoke’s two star destroyers and a much larger satellite station behind them, bruise black and shiny enough to reflect the stars, Hux’s backups are nowhere to be found.
It is hard to keep himself from clenching his jaw, to keep his expression even and his nostrils from flaring as he evens out his voice, trying to gain himself time, and he only barely just manages, but he manages nonetheless. The enemy ships have their weapons engaged, already hot and waiting for the order to fire, belying Snoke’s seeming amicable welcome. Hux’s own cannons are only just now warming up, and the shield jammers he deployed aren’t quite done yet. He needs time. He needs more time.

A moment of terse silence stretches on between them before Snoke smiles again. “I am pleased to see you’re finally growing a backbone, General,” Snoke goads, “though perhaps it might be a little too late now.”

“We are here as requested.”

Snoke hums.

“Yes,” the revolting creature hisses, half pleasure, half amusement. “It took long enough, I dare say. How was your trip?”

He’s being baited. He knows he’s being baited. Hux thinks quickly on his feet, his eyes surveying his crew. They meet his eyes, some frightened, some vacant and resigned, and he gauges their desire to run. Despite the fear, these are his men. They may be frightened, resigned, but they all show the same determination to see this through. Snoke had always been the true leader of the Order, but they have always been faithful to him, especially after Hux made Snoke’s previous hostile activity as he armed himself known to all. They would stay through the fear and fight. And if not to him? Well, a certain brunette Force user had given them a new reason to stick around and fight. Had given them all a new kind of hope for the future.

He only hopes the soldiers and officers aboard Snoke’s ships can do a similar about turn.

His commlink beeps.

The signal jammers have been fully deployed. Hux’s eyes shine as he looks at Snoke’s grotesque smile, and gives him one of his own.

“Pleasant enough,” he responds, voice airy even as his white-knuckled grip behind him tightens further. He will not give this creature a win. His eyes move past Snoke’s hologram to the two other star destroyers. He needs time. “Lower your weapons.”

Snoke chuckles. “And if I don’t?”

“Stand down.” Hux says once more, eyes narrowed to slits.

“I don’t think so.” Snoke sneers.

“Have it your way.” Hux murmurs, relaxing into his pose and drumming his fingers around his closed fist, at ease in his soldier’s rest.

One.

Two.

Three.

And then the sound begins, like a slow melody, the soft echo of Rey’s voice as she ardently speaks to the stormtroopers in the auditorium. The recording is everywhere, surrounding his senses, and
Hux watches with satisfaction as the hologrammed monster’s face registers recognition. Her voice plays aboard his ship. It plays in the hangars, in every room and every hall and every single stormtrooper armory, and he knows for a fact it’s playing on every single screen, station, personal communications device and sound system aboard his enemy’s ships. He waits, one beat, another—

—Snoke’s face morphs, features twisting with surprise, quickly replaced with agitation. The voice of an angel to eat away at the rot from the inside along with visual proof of Snoke’s plan to decimate the order. The creature reaches frantic fingers forward, trying to subdue him as if Hux held the off switch to the recording, but there are no temple stones to aid him this time. Never again. Hux smirks before letting his features go carefully blank. The veneer of fake amusement disappears from Snoke's visage only to be replaced with cold, righteous fury. Hux would have laughed, but instead he settles for a hard blink, until his former master throws his head back and laughs, the sound reedy and unused, grating on his brain like nails against durasteel.

“That’s it? That’s what you have? Did you really think you’d be able to get past me with a simple speech from a silly girl?” the creature goads, the sound reverberating around the walls, but there’s mild panic there. Hux suppresses the shudder from his spine and glares.

“Much has gotten past you before.”

“You think too highly of yourself, you insufferable grunt,” Snoke replies. Hux just about manages to keep back a snort. Look who’s talking. “And you have very little you can use against me. Or will you try again, Starkiller? Will you destroy everything in your path to get what you want?”

“I have everything I want,” Hux said. Somehow, it both surprises him a great deal and none at all to know that those words are the bare, naked truth. He does have everything he wants. It may not have been everything he thought he should have wanted in life, but when he thinks on it, his wants and his needs have become the same, and he’s content in the knowledge that while he wages this war, they are safe somewhere aboard this ship. Any moment now his reinforcements would arrive and Hux would have no need for buying himself time by taking to this loathsome creature.

But Snoke had always known where to strike best and cut deepest.

“You are outnumbered, General,” Snoke throws out Hux’s rank out there like an insult, and he knows, he knows he shouldn’t rise to the bait, but Hux had never been proud of much in his life, and the derision with which Snoke addresses him now rankles. “You’re outnumbered and outmanned. I will give you a second chance. Only one more chance, to stand down and submit. It’s what you’ve always been good at doing, after all.”

That’s it. That’s all it takes for Hux to bare his teeth. It’s supposed to be a smile, but it falls short by several parsecs, his fists clenched and hackles rising. Snoke laughs at that.

“A rabid cur after all,” says the vilest creature in the universe, tapping his chin as if seeing Hux for the first time. “And we all know rabid curs bite the hands that feed them, isn’t that right, Brendol?”

Snoke’s humanoid features take on a look of sickening glee.

“Stand. Down.”

“No,” Snoke hums. “I don’t think I will. You may choose to strike if you so wish. In fact, I encourage you to! You see—” he says, and Snoke’s head is replaced with a recording that makes Hux’s heart thump painfully, “—I have everything I need.”

“Cannons ready, sir,” comes the voice of one of his officers from somewhere a million miles away.
But he doesn’t hear those words. All of his senses have zeroed in on a single thing: the recording in front of him, as he watches Rey tug relentlessly on Ren’s arm, trying to… to what? Stop him?

Her voice plays over the recording of her inspiring speech to the stormtroopers like a specter’s echo, but where her speech sounds hopeful, the Rey in front of him screeches desperately at Ren to stop. ‘Stop, where are you going’, she shouts, tugging, and having as much success at stopping Ren’s determined stride as a kitten would at stopping a full grown, rearing manka cat. The minutes stretch as the two battle down one hall, then the next, or really, Rey struggles and Ren keeps walking, and then the unimaginable happens.

Ren pivots and shakes her off with a snarl and Rey, caught by surprise at the sudden aggression, cracks her head on the wall with a sound so grotesque Hux flinches in sympathy. She’s mostly unharmed, though obviously dazed as she hunches into herself before once more attempting to stand. Hux’s eyes widen in horror.

Ren would never do such a thing; he would cut off his own limbs first rather than hurt their lover.

The screen shifts on Snoke’s low chuckle and the hairs on the back of Hux’s neck stand.

Ren is alone, though Rey’s voice is not far behind, one hand extended towards a helpless low officer who struggles to breathe while being given instructions in a voice too low for Hux to understand.

The screen shifts.

The room’s dark. Rey’s voice is no longer around. Ren must have found a way to lose her in his quest for… his quest for what?

Then the lights of an unused hangar come on, so very blindingly bright, and Hux curses. Ben Solo — no, Kylo Ren, that stomping stride is all Kylo Ren, Death made flesh — boards the rustbucket that made the Kessel run in twelve parsecs. In another room, the harried officer authorises the opening of the hangar and opens the shield. He must be under Ren’s compulsion, because otherwise, Hux can’t possibly imagine how one of his own men, under penalty of death, would disobey his orders from only a few hours ago.

The screen shifts.

Snoke laughs.

Rey, cursing, sprints towards a TIE fighter and breaks it off its leash in a move that sends chills of deja-vu down his back. Her friends must have told her how they escaped because it’s like watching history repeat itself for Hux.

And then she’s gone. And his ship’s shields have lowered, Snoke’s face returning to goad him as he gives a cruel, sickening smile and says,

“Fire.”

The hologram disappears. Hux sees cannons in the distance heating up to fire, then blasts of what will surely crush the rest of his half-breached shields coming towards him even as he spots two ships in the distance, a TIE fighter and a Corellian freighter, flying towards Snoke’s command vessel at record speed.

The first hit of Snoke’s attack is world-shattering. It rocks the Finalizer, sending all the alarms blaring in a riot of yellows and reds as the rest of his shield is shattered and he begins taking fire from three other ships with no way to defend himself without endangering Rey or Ren, yet all he can think
of in that single stupefying moment is:

Where did it all go wrong?

****

‘Did you really ever think you had finally managed to get rid of me?’

Those words had shattered through Ben Solo’s hold on reality, caught unawares donning his tunic, hands on his armored robes. The robes fell off his hands though, because he had known that voice all his life and had dared to hope he had finally broken free of its hold.

He hadn’t.

It was Snoke.

‘How foolish. Then again, you never did manage to stop being your father’s son.’

He stood, frozen in his static shock, eyes glued on Rey’s calm face as she, too, went about readying herself for battle. Not that they would see any if Hux had any say in it, but to be forewarned is to be forearmed. They had just exited hyperspace, and if the hum of the shields was any indictment, they would be coming into contact with enemy ships in a few hours.

But none of that mattered. Not when his head was being inundated with the voice Kylo had once foolishly believed to be his grandfather’s. How cruel, that, yet how utterly unsurprising.

‘I killed your father,’ the voice changed, now matching Ben’s darkest and most recent nightmare. ‘Well, I didn’t. You did. At my command.’ and Ben’s head drowned in images and sensations of Snoke’s gloating. It was not like his bond to Rey. Nothing like his bond to Rey—

‘Ah. Yes. I finally see it,’ Snoke said, attempting to caress the bond. Kylo slammed Onyx walls around it, through it, making Rey jerk and turn to look at him, perplexed, but he couldn’t let her see. No, he could never let her see this. ‘I admit, I am impressed. You managed to hide it from me for so long, just like you managed to hide the fact that you figured out the enigma of Vader’s helmet… but you’ve brought her here now. That’s all that matters. You’ve brought her to me.

‘Just like you have given everything else to me. And will continue to, because you are such a well-trained boy, aren’t you? And I’m not done with you. Your training was never finished, remember? but when I’m done with you, know this. I will take your knowledge of your mother from your head—ah, yes, there it is. Chandrilla. How nauseatingly nostalgic—’ Ben slammed walls around this too before Snoke could get a hint of what he and his mother had spoken about on Chandrilla, but Snoke had seen enough. ‘When I am done with you, I will kill your mother. I will kill your uncle.

‘And then, finally, you will kneel. As you should have knelt from the beginning, BEN SOLO.’

If Snoke was looking to bait him, he would not succeed. Ben Solo, Kylo Ren, would not let him succeed. He fisted shaking hands and drew himself to his full height, ignoring Rey’s alarmed expression.

“Ben?” she asked. But he could hardly hear it. “Ben what’s wrong?”

‘You thought you could break free,’ Snoke’s disembodied voice goaded. ‘Thought you could use your little trinket toy of a bond to the girl as a way to bypass me. You are wrong. You have given me a way to her,’ Snoke laughed, ‘through you.’
And suddenly Ben knew what he had to do, and he could wait no longer, the bile rising in his throat in alarm and panic at knowing his bond to Rey had been exposed fueling his limbs as he spun on the spot, grabbed his saber, slammed walls upon walls of barbed defense around his bond to Rey and forcefully shoved Snoke’s provoking laughter out, then promptly left, Rey on his heels.

“Ben? Ben!” she called. She ran to meet him. She tugged his hand, then his arm, then tried to step in front of him and bodily stop his march towards the hangar, all her efforts rolling off him like waves. He would put a stop to this now. He would, before he could be used again to hurt what he cared about most. He must, he must.

He couldn’t hear her, couldn’t see her, even when Rey had for so long now become the only guiding light in his life. He couldn’t stop himself if he wanted to, because he was running on fear alone, though his face betrayed nothing. Snoke was no longer in his head, yet the echo of that laughter chilled his marrow, and he couldn’t hear her, couldn’t see her.

He was vaguely aware of the fact that he dislodged her, but he couldn’t remember how, just that she stopped following. And that was what he wanted, was it not? For her to stop following so he could go to Snoke and do what must be done without endangering her. Hux would look after her. She would be safe. Their bond would be safe. Their future would be safe.

The chain of events that followed is a blur, but he’d managed to jump on his father’s ship, and after all that, now, back in the present, he finally allows himself to laugh.

It is a manic laugh. A shuddering, frenzied, desperate yet elated laugh. Because he will be free, one way or another, and he’s walking into Snoke’s trap and he knows it, but he will be victorious. He will. Or he will die trying. And Hux will protect Rey. He’s so busy laughing he doesn’t notice the TIE fighter hot on his heels.

****

“Hux?!!” Rey’s panicked voice comes over the speakers after Hux received signal of communication. His heart leaps into his throat and he takes a step forward as if he’d be able to reach her just by doing so, then plummet to his stomach at her following words.

“Hux? Bren?”

“Rey,” he croaks, unable to feel his fingers any longer as he’s cut off all circulation from the white knuckled grip he’s kept on the railing by the viewports. “Rey, what’s—”

“I don’t know what’s wrong. He’s blocked me out, Brendol. He just—he lost it. He took off. I tried, I tried to stop him, I don’t—”

And then her transmission is cut off with a loud curse from her end as she dives to avoid oncoming traffic. Snoke’s released his dogs, hundreds of TIE fighters taking to the void of space. Her TIE spins, as does the Millenium Falcon, and in the next blink he’s lost her. He’s lost her, unable to differentiate one ship from the next, until Rey’s voice comes through once more.

“I’m okay, I’m okay! But we could use some backup here!”

“TIE FIGHTERS NOW!” Hux screams his command, and watches as his own take to the air, nevermind the fact that he can’t inform his pilots which ship to defend in the chaos before him, his TIEs only differing from Snoke’s by the fact that his have all been given special forces insignia, painted white instead of red, quick flashes of the stark paint zipping by in the havoc.

A second blink later he loses sight of Rey and Ren both. He has to remind himself Rey is an
excellent pilot, and so is Ren. It’s the only thing that’ll keep him on his feet now.

“I’m going after him, Hux!” calls Rey, then her voice hushes, “I think he’s going after Snoke. I don’t know what happened, but… If anything—if anything happens out there… I… I love you, and so does he, you know that, right?”

He can’t swallow past the lump in his throat. He can’t. He’ll end up drowning in his own saliva if he swallows past it, he’s sure. His heart has sunk to the floor and her words are the nails currently holding it there. But he has to say something, he has to say. He’s never really said the words. Never so openly, so vulnerable to either of them in private much less in front of so many, and yet—

“I know,” he croaks, his throat constricting around the words as he forces his airways to fucking work already so he can say the most important words he’s ever tried to utter in his life even as his ship is taking fire and his infantry isn’t here and where the fuck is the resistance— “I know, I love you t—”

But he’s cut off, their channel taking static on the end of Rey’s ‘shit!’ as a volley of enemy fire hits the Finalizer.

His mind whites out. Did she get hit?

No. No, no, no. No!

So, this is how his sanity begins falling apart. A detached part of himself examines that and finds it curious.

“FIRE!” Hux screams, a savage cry for vengeance that he can hardly hold back, though at least his officers’ tactical training and logical thinking skills seem to be more grounded than his at the moment, because they aim. Not at Snake’s vessel, no. They know what precious cargo Snake’s vessel is about to receive, seemingly more aware of Rey’s status than Hux is in his pained haze of fury, and said officers wouldn’t dare endanger their precious Force users, so they aim at the other two star destroyers.

The problem with being outgunned and outmanned three to one, however, is that for every hit Hux gets in he received two more, and soon the east wing of the Finalizer has been shut down and isolated due to damage, and two of his cannons are down, taken out by TIE fighters even as his own race to take out enemy TIEs. It’s a mess. Such a mess. And Hux’s plans have collapsed.

He can’t see Ren’s ship. He can’t spot Rey’s fighter. He’s lost sight of the goal.

Like the spider web he'd failed to fortify.

He’s a dead man.

He’s a dead man and this was all for nothing. His life flashes before his eyes in quick succession, snapshots of vibrant images, and none of them happy ones. They’re just a collage of bad decisions, all leading him here, from the moment he dared hope that his father loved him as more than just a chess piece to move on an intergalactic chessboard, to this very one. He had gained so much, had dared hope—

Another hit rocks the ship, each strike making it impossible for his crew to draw enough power to fire up the backup shields when it’s taking everything to continue shooting, shooting, shooting. In the meantime, his own TIE fighters try and fail to form a defense. Ships rise only to be shot right out of the sky, lives winking out of existence, and he soon to join them.
He’s about to lose everything.

And then, just like that, he hears Savoy’s voice.

“Message incoming from an enemy ship, sir.”

“Which one?”

“The command shuttle, sir. It’s a white flag.”

Chapter End Notes

I had to call him a rabid cur, even if it’s from TLJ. That’s just too good an insult not to use it lol
**Same As All Other Red**

Chapter Notes

Wow shit look at this what kind of magic trick—

hah.

actually, hELLO! SURPRISE! We're back with a new chapter!

This chapter is also unbeta'd, cause wifey is busy, so again, any mistakes are my own and will be fixed in due time (when I get some sleep and can look at it again without my eyes glossing over mistakes). Otherwise, I hope you enjoy! *rubs grubby hands together*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Shit!” Rey curses, the expletive directed just as much at the incoming fire she had spun to avoid as the fact that she’d lost sight of the *Millenium Falcon*. She tunes out static sound of the line that just a few minutes ago had delivered to her some of the sweetest words she’d ever heard—Hux’s ‘*I love you*’—mostly so she can concentrate on piloting this strange contraption as but also so she can figure out where Kylo had disappeared to.

“I can do this,” the words leave her in a strained whisper, Rey drowning in her own sense of deja vu, “I can *do this*.”

She swerves right, then left, and finally goes into a wild tailspin that rattles her teeth yet narrowly helps her miss fire to her left wing as two other TIE-Fighters collide and go up in a violent plume of sparks and fire and smoke. She swears again, eyes scanning the expanse of space as more and more ships join the dogfight, the enemy star destroyers bleeding TIE fighters into space while an army of Hux’s own rushes to meet them. Then she spots a flash of white in the distance, the *Falcon* pirouetting in a way only the son of one of the most talented pilots in the galaxy could achieve against the hazy halo of Vjun’s atmosphere, and Rey mutters to herself as she hastens to follow.

“I can do this,” she repeats to herself, and hopes to the Maker she’s right. She can only trust Hux to have their back, and for Kylo to know what in the hell he’s doing, running off like that with no warning and no backup.

Unless one counts her, she supposes. Rey takes a deep breath and braces herself. Here goes nothing.

****

Being inside his head feels like he’s woodenly operating from behind a sheer veil, a haze that allows him to see *just* enough for him to know where to aim his father’s ship, which hangar to drop into, and where he must go from there, like a puppet drawn by a string.

And still he goes. He has no other option but to go.

He doesn’t notice that he’s being followed, so intent is he in the voice that now goads him on, one step at a time, towards the one place he knows his enemy awaits: the throne room. Such a gaudy thing, a throne room, and yet there had been many times Snoke had promised him a throne beside
his. The thought curdles in Kylo’s stomach, and still he goes.

Snoke laughs, echoes that resurface just long enough to remind Kylo why he’s here even with the knowledge that he’s being baited into a fight he may yet well lose. He had believed himself to be free of the torment, to have finally gone undetected even if for a few months, a few weeks. He had hoped that Snoke had finally, finally given up on him. Of course that wasn’t true. How could he have so foolishly hoped?

*You are a fool, like your father,* Snoke had once taunted him, years ago. Now the words reverberate through him.

How had he dared hope?

Of course Snoke hadn’t left. Of course he hadn’t.

‘And here you are,’ Snoke chuckles in his head, making Kylo’s step falter before speeding up with rage. ‘I have had access to you since the time you were in the womb, child. Such a long time, by your human standards. Did you really think I had forgotten how to worm back in? The pathways to your psyche are as familiar to me as my own hand.’

Why? Why wouldn’t he shut up?

‘Much more so than yourself,’ laughs Snoke, ‘who thought you could block me out permanently. Foolish.’

The urge to scream is suffocating him. Why won’t Snoke shut up? He would do just about anything to rip that creature from his mind, anything at all, if it finally meant peace. It eats at him, that laughter, that *crooning*, that awful, oily smugness. Kylo can’t even counteract it by curling himself into his bond with Rey. He would die before letting even a hint of the filth currently consuming him touch what has become sacrosanct. But he craves it, oh, he craves her.

Just a small amount of Light, of everything that is good and fair and warm.

Snoke laughs again.

‘You think you can keep her safe from me,’ the voice goads. ‘You really are a fool. The only reason you have ever had her has been because of me. Everything she is is because of me.’

Kylo recoils. He doesn’t notice that Rey’s life signature nears. That she’s entering the hangar just as Kylo himself is approaching the throne room, levels above. He doesn’t notice that she keeps battering at the bond, trying to break through impenetrable barriers to get to him.

He doesn’t notice when she catches up to him, twenty yards behind him, how she cries his name when he crashes the throne room’s doors open. He doesn’t notice that he keeps battering at the bond, trying to break through impenetrable barriers to get to him.

He doesn’t notice when she catches up to him, twenty yards behind him, how she cries his name when he crashes the throne room’s doors open. He doesn’t notice that, somehow, the halls of this abomination’s ship have been curiously empty, that he hasn’t had to fight his way through anything but the crumbs of Snoke’s voice in his head like the bait to the box before the string is pulled.

He notices nothing, because between one minute and the next, he’s not just seeing red, but white. Blinding rage white at Snoke’s next words.

‘How can you think she is anything but mine? How, when it was I that molded her into what she is, I, who broke her block? Oh, you silly child. Did you really think your child’s play—the mockery you called ‘training’—would ever have helped her any? Or that all your Knights were truly ever yours? Did you think you could keep secrets from me? It was I who broke her block! I who gave her the key to her power! And you think she is yours. Fool.’
Memories slam into him in a horrible collision of panic, fear and rage. He had almost lost her. He had watched her bleed, snarled over her prone body, held back by the thin leash Hux had managed to keep on Kylo’s sanity, her life leeching from her slowly then suspended in pearlescent bacta a moment’s breath away from death.

He had thought the danger had ended with Rojan. He had thought…

Snoke laughs.

That laughter is as good at driving Kylo to stark white madness as any method of torture available to mankind. Perhaps more so.

‘Of course I knew everything. I am everything, you insolent little boy.’

Kylo had almost lost her. Lost everything. How could he have thought it was ever only Rojan? Rojan, who always put self interests above loyalty? He should have known when the Knight had taunted Rey about her parentage, about who was her true master, all those eons ago. How had he not seen it?

It had been Snoke all along.

And he hadn’t seen it because he’d been too angry, too full of hurt.

‘A life sacrificed for hers was not even a gamble. It was nothing, when she’s such a jewel. I gave her her power. And now it is mine.’ Snoke continues to goad, ‘Just like I gave you your power, and you were mine. But you are flawed. Broken. Brittle. You are not worthy of the throne I offered you at my side—No, you are not. But she is…”

He doesn’t notice that he’s been standing there, at the threshold of the lair of the most evil creature in the galaxy, staring in horror as Snoke’s lips morph into a sickening smile, all teeth and triumph while the words drown Kylo where he stands like an oily sludge until he can barely breathe. He doesn’t notice—until he does.

Rey careens into him, trying with all her might to stop the slide of her boots, and Snoke’s smile widens even further, pulling on rotten tendon and putrefied flesh, the gaping hole in his cheek vacuuming air and expelling it as Snoke shortles from his seat and speaks, not in his head, no, but to the stale air of the room.

“Thank you for delivering her to me.”

And then the world around him tilts on its axis as Kylo reaches behind him on reflex, grabbing Rey’s wrist and igniting his saber. The oxygen around him disappears and his stomach lurches, Kylo’s bones creaking with the pressure of sudden movement, threatening to be crushed to powder inside his body as he fights desperately and with all his might to hold onto Rey. He won’t let Snoke have her. He won’t.

He won’t.

When Kylo blinks next, the throne room is gone.

****
A white flag.

Were they serious?

“Ignore it,” Hux barks at Savoy, who flinches but goes onto do her duty as commanded. In the meantime, Hux tries to focus on the fight below, but his eyes keep veering off towards the command ship.

He couldn’t stop himself. It is a sickness. His heart had taken off, quite literally, and flown to Snoke, and he could hardly concentrate himself on the fight when he is stuck here, waiting for the inevitable. The logical part of him berates him for his stupidity, for wasting precious moments on something that is out of his control when he should be focusing on what’s important—he should be focusing on winning.

“Sir?”

“What?!” he barks once more as a volley of fire power hits too close to the bridge, rocking him in his boots.

“Sir, the message is urgent.”

Why would Snoke possibly want to gloat now so urgently? Where the hell was the resistance?

And just as the thought crosses his panic-addled mind, the screens behind him screech that company has arrived. Eight brand spanking new star destroyers jump out of hyperspace to form a wall of defense between him and the enemy ships, tiny TIE fighters crashing and disintegrating on contact at the unexpected obstruction. Some of them are his. Most of them are the opponent’s.

A crazed smile curls on Hux’s lips, and the vindictive part of him latches onto the feeling to keep himself from spiraling further.

“Put. him. Through.”

Oh, the moment of victory. Sweet, sweet victory. Sweeter revenge. Finally. He will win this now.

Eight faces show up on the screens, each one of them in charge of a star destroyer: Phasma, Mitaka, General Organa, The Traitor (who’s looking mightily nervous to be on a bridge of his own), Poe Dameron (who looks far too excited about the same prospect), Luke Skywalker (the legend in the flesh, who knew), A furry giant Wookiee Hux vaguely remembers as Organa’s awfully violent body guard, and two more of Hux’s men, flanked by wraith-like figures Hux can only imagine are some of Kylo’s Knights.

They all nod at him, taking their cue from Organa, who’s obviously the one in charge of this party, but Hux’s eyes are focused out the view port. That is, until the view is obstructed by Snoke’s hologram.

Except—

It’s not Snoke. It’s Yathe.

Everyone else is privy to this conversation, as he is. All nine acting commanders of the star destroyers frown, perplexed, but none more than Hux.

Before he can even utter a curse, Yathe holds up her hands—
“Don’t shoot.” she says, addressing all but looking at what Hux imagines is the corner of the screen with Phasma’s face, Phasma, who looks like she’s been slapped and betrayed. Yathe addresses Phasma, “I’m sorry, I couldn’t tell you.” then the rest of them, explaining for their benefit, “I’m Yathe Ren, one of Kylo Ren’s Knights. My mission was to infiltrate and take control of the ship, crash it, if I could.” On another screen, Phasma tenses, but they both understand this is the life they’ve pledged themselves to, so she says nothing while Yathe continues, “Except the ship is empty. What little crew there was—and there wasn’t much—has been eliminated. There were no guards to stop us. The few troops inside have been isolated. You can now shoot to your heart’s content, just let me and my men board an escape shuttle first, yeah?”

He can already feel it, the change in the air. The determination as eight faces set, some turning to him, others looking at Organa for direction—a slight that Hux barely notices—and Leia’s opening her mouth to speak when Hux leans forward, knuckles aching from his grip on the rail.

“Do. no.t. fire!” he calls out. Everyone tenses as he lets out a deep breath, tuning out the rest of the universe and focusing his attention in the way he’d learned to as a child, tuning out everything from his senses but the single object of his focus.

“What do you mean the ship is empty?” Hux manages through the parched, painful grip around his throat, “Where’s Snoke? Ren? Did you see Ren? Rey?”

“Where is my son?” General Organa pipes in.

Yathe frowns, confused, “The cameras show his seat is empty… we didn’t—”

“It’s not empty. Why would it be empty? Snoke contacted me from that very same vessel just fifteen minutes ago.” He feels like screaming, but he enunciates the words as calmly as he can while wanting to yell instead. How can Yathe, one of the smartest, most cunning people he’s had the pleasure of knowing, however shortly, let herself be fooled? “Ren took off on a ship and Rey hot on his heels towards that blasted command shuttle. It’s not empty.” He could feel that truth in his bones.

“Where is Ren?”

The lightbulb goes off in Yathe’s head. “There were no guards…” She’d been had.

“It’s a trap.” it is the sharp steel in Organa’s voice that finally cuts through the angry fog of Hux’s mind. He turns to look at her. In a moment, Yathe disappears from the shared projection, bolting towards what Hux would assume is Snoke’s throne room.

“Organa, you have command of the fleet,” and just like that, Hux turns around and flees for the hangar. He doesn’t look back. He doesn’t see the nodding of understanding and glint of knowing in Organa’s eyes as she says, “alright boys, let’s get this party started, shall we?”

He doesn’t care what happens to the star destroyers. To any of them. To anyone except two other people. So he gives up his post entirely and runs. His legs have never moved so fast in his life and were it not for the adrenaline driving him his lungs would surely explode, but he keeps running until he finds his own First Order command shuttle.

He slams his hand on the access pad, waiting for the latch to give and the ramp to lower, when he hears the thrumming of boots on durasteel. A glance behind him and he watches as twenty stormtroopers show up, armed to the teeth and faces rigid with determination.

“How did you find me?”

“The captain tracked you to the hangar, sir. She sent us as reinforcements.”
Hux bites back a groan despite Phasma’s good intentions. He’s losing time. Precious minutes he doesn’t have and can’t afford to lose. “There’s too many of you, you’ll only slow me down. And you don’t answer to Phasma. You answer to me.”

“With all due respect, sir. We don’t answer to you, either.”

No. No they do not. Lance’s face is flushed with exertion from running from wherever Marker-blasted hole of the Finalizer he’d been in before being sent on his way. Marla looks ready to snap somebody’s neck, and the giant Rey had so ridiculously named Pip looks at him hard enough to gouge stone with his eyes.

There would be little accomplished in fighting this. He looks at his little doppelganger with his massive set of blasters and nods. They’re not his men. Hux nods again, this time to himself. “Choose five of your strongest and follow me. Whichever one of you can fly a trooper shuttle, take one and bring the rest.”

They don’t even bother saluting, not that Hux has the time to expect deference as he starts climbing the ramp while Lance dispenses orders like a well trained officer himself—perhaps he’d been wasted as a trooper, Hux muses—and everyone breaks to their assignments. Hux barely gives the command shuttle’s ramp enough time to finish closing when he takes the pilot’s seat and takes off.

Once outside the hangar, Hux dives into hell.

In the distance he watches as an enemy Star Destroyer starts going up in flames and tilts dangerously towards Vjun, the colossal groan as it breaks in two giving Hux goosebumps as he throws every bit of ion power into his engines to get him past it before it explodes into an inferno. Lance and his men brace themselves behind him, latching themselves into seats and grabbing onto any piece of free real estate they can to stabilize themselves while at it because Hux is practically flying like a maniac to avoid fire and debris and crashing TIEs and an exploding destroyer, eyes on Snoke’s ship, hellbent on exhausting every shred of luck and unnatural skill he’d ever been afforded in his life.

And just when he’s halfway to Snoke’s ship, a hologram of Mitaka’s face crops up on his dashboard.

“Sir,” Mitaka greets. “The Lady—Yathe—has confirmed. Snoke is not in the ship. Neither is Ren, or Lady Rey.”

Panic. Hux can taste his panic.

“I have tracked Lord Ren’s belt tracker to the surface of Vjun, sir. I am sending you the coordinates now.”

What? How?

He must really have lost it because none of this made any sense. They had headed for the ship—

“It’s a temple, we think, Sir.”

Hux spins around with such force one of the stormtroopers—Pip, he thinks—let’s out the most colorful array of expletives Hux had ever heard in his life, but he doesn’t care who gets hurt. Not really. He just dives nose first for planet fall without a word as Mitaka’s connection breaks.

He had watched Rey nearly die once. He had sat back and watched as Ren went out, mission after mission to be potentially killed off and done nothing. He had watched them both get away from him and fly straight into danger again. He’s done watching.
Is it suicidal? Yes.

Does he care? Not particularly.

It turns out, when forced to choose, the amount of things and people Hux couldn’t care less about is astounding.

Hux laughs, a crazed, relieved laugh. The stormtroopers behind him shift, because they’re in a death can being maneuvered by a madman, but they’re here to save their Lady and so they remain silent while Hux continues to chuckle like a lunatic.

Relief. All he can feel is relief, now.

When forced to choose, the amount of things and people Hux couldn’t care less about is astounding, and that in itself tastes like freedom. After all, what holds a man back when he has precious little to lose? And the things he’s got to lose are in danger as is, so there’s practically nothing holding him back now. He handed his fleet to Organa, his power and his men and his title as Commander. All he has left now are somewhere on the ground, and he’s determined to go retrieve them.

He enters the temple coordinates into his navigational system and makes for Vjun’s atmosphere.

****

When Rey’s feet finally find purchase under her, it is to find that the view of Snoke’s throne that Kylo’s body had blocked had been entirely replaced by a completely different space. For a moment she forgets what she came to do, following after him, as her eyes take in the dusky, musty yet magnificent space around her.

It makes her think of an ancient auditorium, but without seats, heavy stone upon heavy stone rising from its hexagonal foundations towards the skies to an impossible height only to end on a sharp, dark dome, wildlife trying to make its way through every crevice. It is ancient. It feels overwhelmingly ancient. And wrong.

But nothing’s more overwhelming or wrong than the sheer amount of force thrumming through her very bones. This place holds power, a kind of power she had never experienced in her wildest dreams, an entity drawing breath with every second and the small stone Hux had gifted her thumping along like a second heartbeat in response. Kylo shifts, uneasy. He feels it, too.

“A Force Nexus,” he mutters, and the spell of silence is broken with the cracking, jarring sound of his lightsaber igniting once more. There is no time to wonder how they managed to move through time and space to land here, in a place they had not been before, as if the ground had been pulled from under them, not dissimilar to that feeling Rey had often experienced with Kylo of losing time, of things shifting under her very feet without her knowledge or her will.

Kylo’s other hand moves to shield her, and from a distance, Snoke laughs.

Rey imagined him to be taller. Still, it is a fearsome thing to behold.

“Did you really believe you could have her?” Snoke says, and though she has no idea what this is all about Rey knows the creature is talking about her. “She would have remained a powerless nothing without my intervention.”

“What’s he talking about?” she asks, but not without the presence of mind to ignite her own weapons.
“Stay out of it, Rey,” Kylo warns, “don’t listen to him.”

Snoke swings his arms. He has not bothered to procure a weapon of his own. In fact, he looks plainly unbothered as he takes a step forward and gestures to a missing audience. “Of course he would say that. Don’t listen to him! Ha!”

It is clear Kylo is letting Snoke talk, despite his warning not to listen to what the vile humanoid has to say. Rey dares attempt their bond again. For once, she finds it open. Just a touch. Enough for her to whisper through,

*Got a plan?*

Kylo gives no indication anything’s happening, feet apart and knees bent in a clear display of defense just waiting to shift into murderous offense. Snoke doesn’t seem to care.

*Yeah. Don’t die.*

Well, what a bloody plan that is. Rey moves sideways just enough to cover Kylo’s left flank, the one he still can’t quite protect since taking Chewie’s blaster fire. She unclips her sabers, joins them, then spins it back, body half turned towards Kylo’s side in a protective stance as she bends her knees. Her saber ignites. Snoke’s eyes glint with triumph.

*You should have stayed behind.*

*YOU shouldn’t have run off without a word! What were you thinking?* She balks. *You’re in no position to tell me what I should or should not have done.*

Kylo lets out a mental sigh and she can feel his weariness, but he’s still somehow blocking her out—or, rather… Rey feels around the edges of their bond, tentatively touching until she realizes once and for all that he’s not blocking her out, he’s holding her in. Her eyes travel to Snoke.

*Not now, Rey…*

She can feel his exhaustion, and it doesn’t take long to figure out what’s going on. Snoke must be ready to pounce.

*Drop the walls. I can handle this,* she urges.

*No.*

*You need your strength, you can’t—*

*I said no, Rey.*

Oh, but this man makes her want to scream some days.

*I can handle him.*

*You can’t.*

*Ben—*

Kylo takes in a deep breath. Rey mimics him. Snoke looks amused but does nothing except continue to talk.

“You think you can defend her,” he says pompously, “but who was it that taught you to wield that
weapon?"

Luke, Rey thinks. There’s a tremble of amusement from Kylo at Rey’s immediately rising up to defend him, but it quiets down again as he takes in Snoke. Rey, for her part, watches his motions and mimics them. They slowly begin to part, Kylo to the right, Rey further to the left in the beginnings of a two-pronged attack. They are the same, him and her, opposites in every way, yet the same, and that would be Snoke’s downfall, she thinks. For now, she keeps that thought to herself as Snoke’s eyes track them.

Snoke tsks.

“Children,” he says in that patronizing tone of voice that has always set Rey’s nerves on end, and her eyes narrow when his attention turns to her. “Whatever happened to civil discussion? It seems I have overestimated you, but we can still talk.”

Well, that’s just plain laughable, so Rey laughs. The look of tender parental concern fades from Snoke’s visage in a heartbeat, leaving behind lightning-scorched anger. “Come.”

“No, thank you, I’m fine right here,” Rey says. All pretenses are off now, but then again, Snoke must have realized it the second she stood by Kylo’s side. Kylo continues his predatorial prowl and Rey mirrors him, leaving Snoke having to step back or risk turning his head either way to keep them within his peripheral vision, leaving himself open to attack on the other end.

“Betrayal. How dull.” He snaps his fingers.

At the sound, guards materialize from the only entrance to the vast room, slick black armor and deathly weapons held at the ready as they fan out behind Rey and Kylo, effectively trapping them in, the anvil to Snoke’s hammer.

Rey swallows, her veins like electric wires humming with the adrenaline coursing through them as she tries to find any possible way they could escape swiftly. They could fight this some other time, maybe—

There will be no other time, Rey.

Rey cringes at the words, but she knows Kylo speaks true.

Then drop the shield. If we do this together, if we join, we may have a chance, Ben. Our powers combined are better than otherwise, but you need to drop the shield—

No.

Stop being so stubborn!

If I drop it, he gets in. Is that what you want?

I can handle him!

She could feel their chances slipping away on his stubborn desire to keep her shielded and safe, and it chafes at her because the longer they stand here arguing, the more chances Snoke gets to win. She knows they can do this. She knows it. If he would only just listen.

No, you listen— Kylo begins, but whatever else he’s about to say dies on a stuttered thought as a familiar voice screams behind them.
“SNOKE!”

Rey turns on reflex, hazel eyes meeting wild, stormy blue ones, and she just has enough time to scream “No!” when Snoke’s words rend the air as he once again tsk, then sighs with a muttered, “Of course he’d get underfoot.”

Then the air shifts again, space squeezes and darkens and threatens to shatter her bones and asphyxiate her, and in the next moment, they’re gone. Moved.

Again.

****

“Snoke!”

Hux’s eyes meet hazel ones and he feels the air rush back into his lungs with relief again. She’s alive. His eyes look for Kylo, and he’s alive, too. Stormtroopers rush behind him, then ahead of him, and aim blasters, he hears a snide comment from Snoke about getting underfoot, a shout from Rey, and then, only then, does he register the dozen or so armed guards who pivot on their heels and aim their weapons at the stormtroopers. At him.

But he can’t seem to really register the danger he’s in, because his eyes have unfocused, then once again refocused on a point in the distance where only a second ago stood Rey and Ren, and now, just like that, they’re gone.

Gone. Again.

They’re fucking gone, slipping right through his fingers and snatched from his grasp again.

The last of his restraint shatters.

For years, he had kept a quiet hold on his mind. Iron cold and hard as steel. It had allowed him to survive. It had hidden parts of him he subconsciously had demanded be hidden. It had protected him from the worst of the pain and hurt and abuse life may have thrown at him and allowed him to thrive. A quiet hold on an unnaturally cunning mind.

That hold has shattered, his heart ramming against his ribcage en tandem with the second heartbeat of latent, unraveling lunacy slamming through his nerves, his veins, his very marrow, a rush of energy devastating in its power to destroy ripping away the pieces of him layer by layer as he steps forward.

Around him the fight parts like the sea, the guards more preoccupied with taking down the bulk of Rey’s angry escort than the single, seemingly unarmed man stepping forward towards the middle of the room, fingers twitching at his side. He doesn’t notice them.

Just like he doesn’t notice the chaos on the steps of the temple and the skirts of grass and nearby forest as Snoke’s remaining troops are alerted to Hux’s arrival, only to be met by a charge led by Yathe Ren and her Knights, with Phasma right behind them with a legion of her own, Skywalker rushing up the steps while flinging people out of the way with the sheer power of his Force abilities alone, saber ignited and face like thunder. Everyone must have abandoned the destroyers, maybe, or destroyed them. Hah, destroying the destroyers. The sky is lit up like a Coruscanti celebration, TIE Fighters and Star Destroyer debris entering the atmosphere and catching on fire—or maybe like the fireworks after the Empire was defeated. He had seen holovideos of that day, of people celebrating his people’s fall—but he doesn’t notice that. He doesn’t hear any of that. His sanity has finally dissolved, and he’s focused on a singular thought.
Snoke took them.
Snoke took his dream away from him again and how is he to find them now?
The rush of electricity coursing through him crackles wildly, the fissure in the dam cracking and expanding, and he hears nothing else even as the fight spills into the temple.

Somewhere, a guard aims for Phasma’s head. In Hux’s peripheral, were he paying attention, he would have seen Yathe decapitate the would-be assailant with a screamed ‘don't fucking you dare!’—The guard falls to the floor and his weapon makes a dull clank on the stone floor. And still Hux floats in his own bubble of turmoil amidst the chaos.

It feels overwhelming.

Everything is overwhelming. Threatening to choke him, to cut off his airways and yank his nervous system out of him, and so, with no other outlet and no other way to free himself of that overwhelming feeling, Hux screams again.

“SNOKE!”
The name reverberates against the walls of the temple and a pulse beats into him in response. It all feels so wrong. Ancient and wrong, this place. He shouts again.

And again.
And again.

Until his fifth shout is cut off short by the sharp pain that stabs into his back and protrudes from his chest. Snoke’s name dies on a surprised gurgle.

Hux looks down, hands rising to cup air at his side as he watches the tip of a sharp, bloodstained blade glint for a second before being ripped out from him. And he no longer has Snoke’s name on his tongue. Nor can he scream.

So he mutters it into the ground as his body thumps and his cheek kisses the floor, the power he’d felt now lulling him.

‘Rey’ he whispers.

His blood is red. Just like that of the stormtroopers he’d seen bleed before. He had known it was all the same color, yet seeing it pooling oh so very slowly as his heart beats hard as if to try and outpace then purge the impending death from him, that makes it real. It’s all the same color.

‘Ben…”

Funny. This is how he’ll die, and he hadn’t even had a chance to fire his blaster.

‘Rey…”
The room is getting cold.

He retreats into himself.
Can I just say? I love that Star Wars has sort of introduced its own version of “travel” within time and space in Rebels because I’ve been messing with this time-space continuum nonsense since the moment Snoke was shifting the room around Kylo during (ch) “Rehabilitation” two years ago and so in a small way I feel vindicated and canon compliant when I have these idiots shifting the very fabric of the universe through the Force. That is all.
Unbreakable Bonds

Chapter Summary

This is the story of three individuals drawn to each other with the gravity of two massive giants circling a scorching sun; like titans forever locked in an interstellar dance, slow and steady, to a song nobody else is privy to...

Chapter Notes

Mistakes are mine ;o; it was hard to see what I was doing while sobbing into my laptop. Will fix when I'm, you know, cool as a cucumber again. Thank you for reading. Enjoy.

EDIT: As of March 30th, 2018 -- Chapter was edited and a few minor details expanded on! If there's anything else to fix that I didn't catch, please let me know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Her feet land softly, a stark contrast to the hard charred rock upon which she and Kylo are deposited and Rey has only a second to spare for her surroundings. Her body boils, the heat a suffocating blanket attempting to smother her and crush her to the ground with its gravity, threatening to turn her into the same glowing fire that cracks a jagged lattice across the planet surface as far as the eye can see. Her stomach roils at the smell of the acrid fumes scorching her windpipes, and Rey sways slightly on her feet before forcing her knees to lock, her weapons drawn and lighted, the echo image of Hux standing at the temple entrance looking at them imprinted on the back of her eyelids still.

"Mustafar," Kylo says past the curl of a sneer, but she’s not the one being addressed. He’s looking straight at Snoke, who stands about thirty paces away smiling at them. Rey understands, though. She understands that this is no longer Vjun, and that Mustafar is systems away from the temple they’d been standing on. She understands that this is a show of power, a manipulation of the Force so strong it has bent space, and that for some reason she doesn’t understand, this little trick of Snoke’s is supposed to be symbolic. By the way Kylo shakes, she understands who it’s directed at.

"A fitting place for your last stand, don’t you think, child?” Snoke comments, spreading his arms as if showing his kingdom and chuckling, the timbre of that voice raising Rey’s hackles in the process. “Though I doubt you will be so lucky as he.”

“What’s he talking about?” she asks in a moment of confusion even as she feels Kylo’s walls around her strengthen, separating her from the rest of his mind. Enough that she can’t even speak with him via the bond anymore. She’s been truly insulated, locked in as strongly as if a real cage divided her and Kylo. Snoke laughs harder.

“You won’t be able to shield her for long, not if you wish to fight,” Snoke purrs, “not if you hope to have a chance. Come now, why not just let those walls fall?” he goads and Rey stares with yawning understanding.
“Is he in your head already?” Rey asks. Kylo’s jaw muscle jumps. “Ben, is he?”

He is. Kylo doesn’t have to say anything for Rey to understand that Snoke is invading the same sacred space Rey had shared with her lover, the headspace that had become an extension of her own, that she had come to know the very recesses of, though perhaps not as well as she’d thought; Snoke’s presence is a scourge upon everything it touches, and it is trying to reach her. Only Kylo’s defenses stand between that monstrosity and Rey’s own mind, leaving Kylo’s concentration splintered.

Snoke is right. He can’t maintain those shields and have a hope of winning a fight against one of the strongest Force users in the galaxy at the same time.

“Let them fall, Ben,” Rey says, outwardly agreeing with Snoke. It makes her feel filthy to do so, but there is truth in the creature’s taunts. Yet she uses his name, the name he allowed her to use, to bring her closer to him, so that he may remember why she’s asking him to drop them, and who asks it of him. This is where they fight for their future, one in which he need not hold onto the worst of the past, only the best that could be, if only he allows her to fight this alongside him.

“No.”

“I can take him.”

“No, you can’t,” Kylo grits his teeth, fist tightening around the hilt of his ignited saber, sending sparks flying into the air, the hiss adding to the cacophony of thundering lava under their feet.

“That’s for me to decide,” Rey balks, one eye on Kylo, staring at him accusingly, the other on Snoke, who only chuckles.

“He’s right, you know,” Snoke cuts in, taking a step forward. Rey and Kylo instinctively take a step back, which only seems to amuse the supreme leader more. “It has taken him thirty years to find a way to do this, and even then he can only keep me at bay…for now.”

The implication hangs thick in the air, as thick as the volcanic vapors razing through her lungs. It makes her bristle. She’s stronger than they give her credit for, and though she understands where Kylo comes from—his innate nature demanding he protect her from harm—she could defeat Snoke. She knows it.

Her eyes travel back to Kylo, but Snoke’s not done taunting. His feral predatory glee heightens, yellow teeth glinting as Snoke continues his assault. Divide and conquer is the strategy of the day, and it just may work.

“Did you ever figure out why I wanted her?” Snoke asks, and Rey’s ears twitch. She throws Snoke a wary glance and steps closer to Ben, the hum of her sabers a soothing balm to her senses as she slowly starts repeating the Jedi Code—it calms her, sharpens her attention, keeps her in check—

“She will give me the next generation of powerful Force users,” Snoke crows, “her power and mine will finally be the perfect vessel! The vessel I thought you would be, but you are too weak.” The words ring inside Rey’s head like a hammer, over and over, her skin prickling uncomfortably and her stomach once again threatening to turn with nausea as Snoke confirms the horrible truth to the Mustafar air, “but she will be. Her children will carry her strength and will be shaped in my image!”

It takes all Rey has to contain her shock and her desire to vomit at Snoke’s repulsive words. She had known she was wanted for something and imagined it to be for her power. She hadn’t imagined it would be for this. The thought of carrying Snoke’s child—could such a creature even… no, she
would not think about that. She would not think about being used as a breeding mare for Snoke’s evil spawn. It would only lead to fragmented madness. But that’s not what finally breaks the camel’s back. No, what finally breaks it are Snoke’s next words,

“Too bad you rebelled. You could have had the sloppy seconds once I was done with her, had you not.”

Kylo screams, a roar of fury that makes the very ground shake. He charges. She joins in the battle cry, wearing her rage like warpaint. How dare he? Her legs move, her muscles pumping with adrenaline as her feet pound away the distance towards her enemy. How dare he? How dare this creature think she could be used then discarded? She’s had enough of being discarded, she’s had enough of being tossed aside after she’s served a purpose, she—

Is stopped with a scream that turns from fury to pain, her feet leaving the ground as electricity pulses through her, trying to fry her brain, the sound of her agony slowing Kylo’s step as he pivots to find her stalled, floating, screaming, and he standing in between her and the odious Supreme Leader. Snoke laughs, and Rey understands.

She’s the weak link. She’s compromising Kylo’s ability to act, because his ruthlessness stops at the crossroads where his desire to see Snoke die and his desire to see her live meet, between his destiny and her pain. So he stops and Rey screams for him not to, and Kylo’s eyes fill with anguish. She can feel him, wanting to reach out to her via the bond, to lend her strength, but knowing what would happen if he does.

“Attachment,” Snoke sneers, “it has always been your weakness after all, young Solo.”

Kylo snarls at Snoke, saber pointed at the creature’s neck, his free hand curled to bare the claws he doesn’t really possess. Snoke tsks.

“One more step and I will crush her.”

She is the weak link.

Rey manages to find her voice, hoarse and cracking as she fights the second wave of agony coursing through her veins, purple lightning crackling up her thighs, arms, around her torso and neck, and she fends off the dizzy nausea and blur of her vision to focus on Kylo. She can’t manage the words, and so hopes her silence will. She can fight this. She can fight.

Kylo’s face falls. He takes a step towards her and the lightning electrocuting her neurons intensifies until the scream she’d been holding at bay worms itself out of her throat, stopping him again, yet she refuses to look away and watches as his face contorts into all the words he cannot say.

If Kylo were to acquiesce, Snoke gets in. If he doesn’t, she dies, and that will break him beyond repair. Snoke wins either way.

Please, she whispers into the unmoving walls surrounding their bond, hoping against all hope he can hear her. Please.

This isn’t just his fight, and she doesn’t know how to convey that to him. She doesn’t know, because for almost a year now she’s been trying to get that through his thick skull—this is their fight—but he’s never been good at letting go. Not of his past. Not of control.

Much like her, really. Maybe that’s why they’ve been circling each other for so long, pulled along into orbit with the gravity of planets. They are alike in ways others are not and could never be. Him, her, and one other. They can’t let go of their pasts, or of the little control they have managed to
wrangle from the vast and cruel universe over their fates, and so in holding on they hurt themselves.

She looks at him up close and begs him to give in. To yield.

Too many heartstopping seconds later, Kylo hangs his head and the walls around her collapse. Then everything happens too quickly.

The bond flares to life, bright and never ending, their souls singing their exultation at once again being reconnected in the most intimate of ways, only for a darkness deeper than any black hole to wrap itself around it, long tentacled tendrils of evil gripping between them and **squeezing**, trying to rip and destroy and maim them once and for all as she hears Snoke’s head in her mind and finally, **finally** knows what it feels to be truly violated and robbed of every piece of herself when Snoke laughs a victorious, manic laugh.

She tries to pull back, tries again to throw back up walls even as her throat shreds with every howl and shriek of pain, her mind being invaded with things that have yet come to happen, things that may, things that will never, but all of them similarly vivid and believable as corruption sets in and Snoke tries to snuff out the Light inside her. She can’t hear or see or feel anything, and every second that passes the darkness threatens to choke the life out of her as it works relentlessly at severing her bond to Kylo. She can barely hear him begging her to hold on— to hold onto **him**, to hold onto **them**. She can’t see him crumpled on the ground, folded in on himself on his knees as he too joins in the screams, Snoke’s violent attempts to rip them apart, literally and figuratively, having brought him so very low.

She finally understands what it means to sever a bond, and somewhere dimly in the back of her mind she regrets ever thinking she wanted to. If this bond dies, her soul dies with it. She becomes a husk of who she is, and that’s worse than death itself. So she tries, she tries her hardest to listen to Kylo beyond the cage of darkness, to cry out his name, the one that brings with it tenderness and hope. She can’t feel her body anymore. Her fingers have become numb, her sabers clattering to the ground as Rey breathes through a coal-hot, raw windpipe and tries to gain oxygen. She can’t feel much. But her mind—

Her mind is her biggest treasure. You can kill everything else, but if the mind lives, then there’s a chance.

“Give in,” Snoke croons, “Give in, dear child. See all the things you could be at my side,” he sings his lies and bombards Rey’s mind again with visions of blood at her feet and jewels about her temple, of palaces and wealth and **power**. Of all that could be until she begins to forget she is Rey of Jakku, the scourge of Snoke’s power attempting to erase everything she’s ever been to replace it with Darkness until she has to fight to keep onto her meager memories.

So many memories she had wanted to forget. So many years of loneliness. So many made up stories to keep her sanity from fracturing, of parents who never loved her coming back, of lives she’d never live waiting around the corner for her, of her finally finding her place in the universe and becoming the belonging she’d always sought. That belonging is now gasping on the floor trying to crawl his way towards her. Whatever she feels, he must be feeling tenfold.

Sweat drips down his face and blood trickles down his nose and his eyes strain, bulging as he crawls towards her, soot smearing his hands and his face and his lashes and burning his eyes until there are tears, though she’s not sure whether it’s the soot or the fact that she can see herself through his eyes as she hangs limply four feet in the air, her screams having turned to whimpers. Funny, she can hear them so clearly and so loudly inside her own head.

It hurts, to see him like this.
Maybe he was right. Maybe letting Snoke in was the worst idea she’d ever had.

Maybe this is where they die. And yet, she would rather die like this than die a slave. She would never be a slave to anyone. Not to Plutt, not to the Resistance, not to the First Order, and certainly not to Snoke.

She’d rather die cracked open and bleeding but free.

Rey can only pray that wherever she goes, she may find Kylo again. And Hux.

Hux.

Where is he now? Is he still standing there, shell-shocked, wondering where she and Kylo disappeared to? Would he know, should they die, where their bones lay? Would he mourn them in the same soul crushing way as she mourns the fact now that she may never see him? She looks at Kylo and knows he’s thinking the same.

And that’s when the screams begin, the screams of another awakening far, far away from where Rey and Kylo gasp for air and writhe and suffer, as if a deity has finally bestowed upon them the gift of reprieve for understanding that the key to salvation is to let go. Somebody else has finally, finally let go, and he calls them from beyond the veil of time and space.

It screams, and screams and screams, the voice amplified by the Force nexus on Vjun until it can reach them here, seeking and desperate and full of hate where another’s own control unravels, that voice reaching high in his awakening, and it does so for Snoke.

The echo of that fear, of that anger, of the rage contained within that single name carried on the voice of none other than Brendol as it travels through the Force sends a shock of surprise through her system as equally powerful as it does through Snoke, who accidentally relinquishes his hold on her, though his hold on the bond is less easily shaken. Yet there are hair thin cracks in Snoke’s resolve, and that’s all the opening she needs.

Words from a long, long time ago echo once again as Rey finds her words through clenched teeth, lightning burning brightly on her tongue between the gaps of them as she hisses the words at Snoke, who for a single moment looks confused, displaced, as he listens to his name being shouted with loathing by a disembodied voice.


“No,” Snoke whispers to her, though Rey knows he addresses the disembodied voice.

That voice is now her beacon. She drops like a hot coal Snoke held too long, her body collapsing to the ground in Snoke’s confusion, Kylo finally able to drag in a lungful of air as Rey starts fighting the hold on the Force bond, yanking and throwing all the power the Force had ever granted her into it to wrestle it from Snoke’s hold.

Kylo staggers to his feet slowly, joints quivering from the effort even as she, too, attempts to rise. Kylo’s saber ignites and he joins in the tug of war, and this time, this time it is not Rey and him fighting each other for dominance. This time they work in tandem, a well oiled machine against the evil trying to tear them apart, and Kylo looks her in the eyes from across a distance of mere feet that feels like galaxies apart and smiles.

She finally hears his voice, the soothing balm of his thoughts against hers as the cracks in Snoke’s hold widen, deepen.
Rey takes in a deep breath, her sabers now safely back in her hands. Then she smiles. Brendol’s voice cuts through the air, enraged, and Snoke’s eyes widen slowly as realization dawns.

That would be Snoke’s undoing. He assumed too much and knew too little. He thought he could control the uncontrollable. Rey remembers Luke’s words.

_The Force moves through us. It surrounds us. Penetrates us. Binds the galaxy together._

It had bound her to Kylo, and now it called to her in Brendol’s voice.

So Rey lets go.

She finally yields, feels it moving through her, watches the thread connecting her to Kylo flare to life as he, too, gives up control. That’s it, that’s all it takes. Letting go. It is up to the Force, now. And so they let it, and slowly it begins to flow in a loop back and forth, back and forth, until her heartbeat and his are the same. It pushes and pulls until her thoughts mirror his, until there is nothing between them but a void beyond anything they can imagine. Bigger than the galaxy. Bigger than the universe, stretching to the horizon on all ends, a mirror of soot grey skies dappled with lights and below their feet, the same. They stand on churning water like an impossibility, though the surface is as still as glass. All she can see is Ben, all he can see is her, and she finally understands.

They are mirrors of each other.

Rey takes a step towards him and the ocean below her feet, the mirror of her skies, rumbles a titanic, colossal groan. Nothing ripples. It’s just her feet moving and his step matching hers as they walk towards each other across the impossibility that is forever, the many lives they may have lived and the many times their souls may have inched closer only to bring them to this moment. They give in, their fingers reaching, reaching, until finally they touch and they _become_.

They become their bond, entwining fingers shining the same bright light of their connection and the skies groan and the mirror-sea tilts upside down violently and she can’t fell whether it is her or her reflection standing right side up and so they _pull_.

They pull against Snoke’s hold and shatter it. Her vision comes back to the now. Snoke shouts, a dusty sound of surprise that delights Rey’s ears as she gets a last glimpse of Mustafar. They _pull_ and again Rey focuses on that beacon. Brendol, their lover and friend and partner, the third soul missing from this equation.

They pull, and next thing her feet land on are the dusty yellow stones of a temple on VJun, having rearranged the very fabric of the universe as destiny demands of them.

For a moment everything stops, the sudden reappearance of three Force users shaking the fight into stillness, and Snoke, frozen to where he’s been forced to reappear.

The stillness breaks when Kylo _screams_, launching for Snoke. Rey falls immediately into action, guarding his back against slick-black armored guards whose weapons deflect her saber as if she were simply meeting practice swords. Luke rushes to help Kylo, Yathe falls at Rey’s side, guarding her flank, with Phasma single handedly defending a circle she’s made in the middle of the room along with a redheaded _pipsqueak_—as Hux had taken to calling Lance—and five other stormtroopers turning enemy soldiers into pincushions.

Rey slashes, stabs, screams her feral scream all the while her Force bond to Kylo loops, pushes, pulls, and lends her and him power they could never attain on their own. It courses through her
veins, through every single nerve ending. It powers her legs and her arms and encloses her heart to keep it from bursting as she fights and fells her enemies one by one. It gives her double mirrored vision as if she were fighting inside two bodies. One fights Snoke, shoving power into Kylo’s already vicious thrusts, and one fights inside herself as she cuts a bloody path towards what has her heart racing out of its cage.

There’s beautiful red hair fanned out on the temple stones, soaking up blood. She recognizes that hair. She’d run her fingers through it intimately many times.

Snoke screams when Luke finally reaches Kylo, former master and apprentice remembering how to fight as if years hadn’t eclipsed between them, muscle memory powering them forwards in their battle to break through Snoke’s power. The creature isn’t physically strong. If Luke and Kylo get near, that’s it. That’s the end. But he’s powerful, and he’s engaged in a battle of wills with Luke, hands outstretched towards one another, using the kind of power that makes the very stones of the temple creak under pressure, while Kylo fights off guards and cleaves his way towards Snoke while defending Luke’s side.

But their power is nothing compared to that of the two true strongest Force users in the galaxy, who have just learned to tap into their power as they fine tune their loop, the zooming force of their power buzzing in her ears. They’re unstoppable, and the very Force Nexus upon which they stand on these temple stones amplifies that power until Rey’s done away with her enemies and in one silent, deadly move, Kylo has breached Snoke’s bubble, shattering it like putting a fist to glass.

It takes so little for someone to die. So little for power to be extinguished.

Kylo roars one last time and between one blink and the next, Snoke’s head rolls across the floor.

Rey doesn’t see it. She doesn’t get to experience the triumphant moment of victory when the evil of the universe is defeated. She doesn’t feel Kylo’s exultation because there is none there. Just a hollowness in her chest that she knows originates with him and mirrors itself in her, made worse by the fact that she’s finally made it to her destination, where her troopers have swallowed her into the safe space they’ve created as they continue fighting.

Brendol Hux II lies on the ground in a pool of his own blood, his life seeping from him as his heart slows down, and Rey falls to her knees while her heart by contrast hammers away at breakneck speed. She searches for a pulse. Kylo’s back is to her. He’s defeated the devil, and yet now faces his biggest fear: his uncle.

No.

No, no, no. No, please, don’t end let it end like this.

She begs. She begs to the Force as she turns Hux’s body around so she may face him, his blood now seeping into her trousers despite her attempts to staunch the bleeding with her own hands. She starts ripping his clothes away frantically, trying to get to the wound. Lance attempts to help and she swats him away in her panic, only for Phasma to take his place. The fight still rages on outside amongst the piling bodies and the fire still raining from the sky, but the temple itself is now deadly quiet.

Kylo doesn’t say anything. He can see as well as she what state Hux is in even as he faces his uncle, a sort of cold war settling between them as they stare at one another and refuse to look away, some sort of silent conversation passing between them even as Kylo’s heart begins to shatter over Hux’s limp, bloodied body.

Then something marvelous happens, and she feels it as though she had been the one to make the
Kylo gives up.

He gives his uncle one last sad, defeated look, Rey’s disembodied self watching as he then looks down at his saber, and Rey feels with hands that are too big as the grip he maintained slackens and the saber falls.

It clatters to the ground, the hollow clang echoing off every surface, off every being. Kylo gives up and readies himself to meet his fate just like he’d promised his uncle he would, because now he can maybe die a redeemed man as he starts flowing all of his power into Rey for his last act of salvation. Saving another.

Rey, with Phasma’s help, has stripped Hux to his waist, chanting a desperate string of *no, no, no* and *please don’t die and please don’t leave me* that now encompasses both Hux and Kylo as her fingers dip into Hux’s wound. The tears rolling down her cheeks stain Hux’s face and her hands and her soul and blur her vision until she has to blink them rapidly away or be blind, searching frantically for a pulse that quickly fades.

*Please don’t leave me, she cries, please don’t die, she pleads, please don’t let them go like this* she prays and hopes there’s really a Maker. Her body hums with power and her fingers have never felt so sensitive nor her senses so alive. Please stay.

Rey closes her eyes and remembers the Holocron’s words about bringing things back from the dead while the last of Brendol’s heartbeats rings a loud gong before echoing away—so she dives for it. She plunges into the darkness of Brendol Hux’s mind and pushes her fingers into his heart and clings onto that last heartbeat.

She clings on for all she’s worth, fueling her power and Ben’s into Hux until she feels herself splitting. She digs her nails into that heartbeat and holds it there, suspended between life and death as she willingly exhausts her own Force signature and Ben’s, two lives willingly given for another, and cries with the effort of it all over Hux’s prone body.

This whole fight... This whole fight has taken so little time and yet so long, and she’s not willing to give it up now, so she holds on until she’s so deeply inside Brendol she is now three different beings at once, living inside the cavernous dark of Brendol’s fading awareness as she begs, an imploring supplicant to a dying man, *please stay. Please don’t go. I don’t know what I’ll do without you.*

Her voice is joined by Ben’s. Strained, hoarse in its whisper. It says only one thing.

*Brendol.*

A light sparks.

An awakening.

The Force flows through us. It penetrates us, binds us.

The essence of Hux’s connection to that Force, kept hidden behind so many compartmentalized prison bars Snoke had never found it and Hux had lived unaware of, flickers at the sound of his name, at Rey’s pleading, at Kylo’s beckoning.

It is small. So small. Small enough to be almost insignificant. Cold and blue where Rey’s had always been bright and blindingly white, manifesting itself in cunning and intelligence and uncanny luck instead of raw strength and battle skills. But it’s there, and it pulses as if in recognition. Like calls to
like, after all, and even as he dies Hux gravitates towards the two other kindred spirits trying to pump the breath of life into him with each desperate second that passes.

Their battles now are not the kind that make it on the history pages. This battle for their lives, Kylo at the hand of his uncle and Rey’s holding onto Hux’s, these won’t be recorded anywhere but the pages of time no one is aware of.

But they are won.

In the darkest of moments, hope alights bright. Rey and Kylo reach Hux just at the same moment Luke deactivates his saber, having seen a younger version of himself in Ben and thus once again found hope, for the good in Ben lives by a code long instilled in him that the Light in a man wins when he puts down his weapon. And like calls to like.

A Force bond shines brighter than the stars, becoming the beacon this time, as a lone pulse of light nears it, seeking warmth and Light and life, and the second it is within reach Rey and Kylo reach out simultaneously and hold onto it by the skin of their teeth as Hux lets out a shuddering gasp, lashes fluttering open before they once again fall against his cheekbones.

Rey can’t remember the rest.

It is a blur of movement, Luke leaving the temple to go back to the fight outside, Yathe following to help cut them a path out towards safety; Phasma shredding the drapings off Rey to use as bandages and wrapping up Hux with a soldier’s speed and precision so the flow of blood can be stymied.

She hardly remembers boarding Hux’s command shuttle, Kylo carrying Hux’s body with singleminded focus like a living, moving, grotesque pieta with Rey’s fingers digging into Hux’s side as she tries to keep the general from further bleeding out, knitting muscle and sinew with what few powers she learned from an artifact of the Light she had once been gifted by a reluctant but kind Jedi Master, her cheeks tight with dried tear tracks and her heart unable to slow down enough for her to breathe.

She doesn’t remember the escape out of Vjun’s atmosphere, too busy curling up around Hux’s body to keep him in place as her and Kylo’s bond continues its incessant loop, dragging Hux in closer, closer, closer. It keeps him warm, it keeps him alive. It knits him to them inextricably, fibrous filament of power by fibrous filament, until he’s becoming them, no longer blue and cold but bright and warm and white, the three of them leeching away the color until they are simply an entity.

She doesn’t remember landing on Ahch-To, though the steps all the way to the hut Luke lived in are infernal and take too long and leave her winded after exerting so much power and physical energy, but this is the end of the world out here. No one can find them unless they want to, except Luke, who somewhere between Snoke dying and him shutting off his saber had decided that lives were worth saving and fighting for again.

She almost doesn’t remember the next two weeks they spend holed up in that hut. But this is the land of the first Jedi temple, where power converges in ways it could nowhere else, and so Rey feeds off of that and the broth and food that Kylo brings her as she stays glued to Hux’s side, mending him from the inside out in the crudest of ways because she knows of no other. Hux’s beloved science and medical advances may save his body, but she’s trying to save something else, and she knows bacta won’t fix this—this shredding of who Hux has fundamentally been all his life now that he’s been torn open at the very core.

It takes two weeks, and she sleeps next to Hux, her hand on his healing chest, while Kylo sleeps upright seated against the makeshift bed, guarding against the night and waiting for the moment they
make it through.

That moment comes when Hux’s fingers dig themselves into Kylo’s hair, seeking the familiar in his sleep, whose sudden jolt at the touch rouses Rey from her restless sleep.

They’ve made it through. Kylo’s shoulders slump with the sudden removal of weeks’ worth of tension, becoming boneless as he lets out a shaky breath, and Rey starts crying for no reason other than she can and she’s alive to do so and for once she doesn’t have to worry about whether she’ll be alone while the tears fall.

Kylo reaches a hand, reluctant to move so as not to dislodge Hux’s from where it rests tangled in his hair, and twines his fingers with hers, giving her a soft squeeze.

They made it.

And so Rey takes in a deep, wet breath, wipes her tears, and gives him the first genuine smile she’s been able to muster for a while now as relief sweeps through her. She places her head back down on the little pillow and gives herself into sleep, letting the sounds of Ahch-To’s seas lull her into a peaceful rest, her mind aware now of not one other being but two floating warmly inside the Force bond.

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Hux’s eyes crack open on a beam of pale yellow light, his first deep breath making every cell in him ache as he tries to sit up, the motion tugging at the newly healed scar bisecting his chest over his heart. He looks at the rough-weave shirt he’s wearing and tries to lift it for a better look, but that aches, too, so he drops it. He looks around.

He’s alone.

Inside a hovel of a little stone hut that looks like it belongs more in a history holo than his own surroundings, but the last he remembers is getting stabbed, so he won’t complain about hovels and huts. He’s busy being confused about the fact that he’s alive. And...despite his initial assessment, he’s not alone.

At least, not inside his… head?

There’s a hum in his ears and he can hear echoes of conversation inside a corner of his mind that make him feel as though he may have truly finally gone insane in death, but when he hears a shout outside, Hux discards that thought and wanders out slowly, shaky hands feeling his way along the wall for strength and direction until he makes it to the door and to his surprise finds the source of the voices.

The dialog in his head matches their sparring outside. Kylo mumbles to Rey to keep form while Rey whacks him in his flank and tells him to stop dropping his defenses, and Hux listens to the running commentary while watching them.

Yet, of course, his curiosity eventually gets the best of him. This new thing… he remembers Rey talking about it, once. Maybe she’s the one doing this? But no, there’s something else there. A loop, made of white warm rope sitting firmly inside him that demands his attention and continues to point out to him that he’s not the man he used to be in any capacity. And if the running commentary goes one way, then it must...go the other. He thinks a cautious yet biting thought at them.

You two are ridiculous.
Practice weapons drop as if Rey and Kylo had been burned simultaneously. Hux manages a watery smirk.

They immediately run towards him, weapons forgotten, Rey running on agile legs and Kylo on long ones that eat up the distance in the blink of an eye.

“Bren!” Rey shouts when she finally reaches him, by which point Kylo’s already hovering like a worried mother hen, arms spread out as if to wait for him to wilt like a frail flower. Hux would sniff, but he’s too exhausted to manage even that. Yet the sight of his lovers, of his life—because these two are his entire life—makes the heart he’d been stabbed through beat with a new sort of ache, intense and rending yet warm, all-encompassing in its happiness. He’s alive, and so are they.

“Are you alright?” she asks, hands reaching for his face. For the first moment he realizes the itch. He’s grown a beard, or the beginnings of one, scruffy and none too soft against her warm hands, but she doesn’t seem to mind. She looks at him and for a moment he can see through her eyes, his reflection projected back at him in a world disorienting moment of vertigo. He blinks and it’s gone.

He’s tired. So tired, but alive.

I’m fine, he thinks before speaking, because that’s a habit he’s always had. Thinking before speaking.

Except he can’t control this connection, so his words are spoken into Kylo and Rey’s minds as though through a very, very loud megaphone. They smile. Twin smiles of relief, Hux notes.

This… this is something weird. New, and weird, but not unpleasant.

They handle him as if he were broken, and in a sense Hux thinks he is. Broken and patched up together and part of something he doesn’t entirely understand, but he’s alive and breathing and for once in his life he’s not alone, so he doesn’t complain.

“How long has he been out? His beard tells him it’s been a while.

Dead.

He’s not sure who said it. Maybe they both said it. The sound is ferocious inside his head, bouncing around his skull. Hux’s eyes blur. This will take a while to get used to. The thought doesn’t linger for too long. Rey leans in and kisses him gently, sweetly, as though she would rather do nothing else for the rest of her existence, only for her lips to be replaced with Kylo’s once she finally moves to hug him close. There they stand for precious seconds out of the infinity of them they now possess.

When Kylo finally stops kissing his lips so he can kiss Hux’s temple and brows and nose and cheekbone in one of the most tender displays of affection Hux has ever experienced, brushing his long hair out of his eyes with gentle hands, Hux’s eyes shutting closed with the early morning sun beating on his face, what finally settles over him is peace.

“The war?” he asks, not really caring about the answer. He stopped caring somewhere between realizing Kylo and Rey had left the ship and falling to the ground, unwilling to die but dying nonetheless both physically and with the knowledge that he wouldn’t see his lovers again, his bitterness at the fact that he had finally found something worth truly fighting for and it would be taken away from him before the fight was over eating at his slowly stopping heart. And yet he is here, wondrously alive, feeling the warmth of the sun and breathing unfamiliar air, surrounded by what matters most to him.
“Over,” Kylo says. Rey smiles and fills in the extra gaps while Hux listens with half an ear, more concerned with the way his heart seems to be beating in tandem with two others, the pulsing a soft melody in his head. He fights to focus again. The Resistance and the Order were disbanded, the Knights of Ren now under Yathe's leadership and practically gone, choosing to remove themselves from the galactic struggle as they should have a long time ago. The only information they've been receiving has been delivered by a furry Wookie once a week. Other than the three of them, there's no other soul on Ahch-To. They are free. Kylo presses his cheek to Hux’s as he moves to stand behind him and Hux is sandwiched between them in a gentle hug.

Eventually they move closer to the cliffside, Hux mindful of his aching chest and current weak body, the three of them staring out into the horizon silently as they digest this beautiful, terrifying new bit of information.

They are free.

Freedom is a powerful drug. It is also a daunting possibility. Salty winds ruffle his hair and he can taste the tang of sea mist along with the warmth of his lovers’ embrace, and he has nothing to his name to offer them in return for their love and care but his heart, and he has never felt more alive in his life.

“So…” Rey says, but it is Kylo who completes her question. “What now?”

Hux smiles. They’re not asking him. Not really. He’s got as much a clue as they do. Yet there is one thing they all must do regardless. One thing that they are now afforded the luxury of time to do without imminent danger, the luxury of a future they fought and bled for.

Hux leans his head to kiss the closest head to his; Rey’s.

“Now,” he sighs against her temple, “we endure.”

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A new government is born out of the ashes of old a few months later. With no Republic and no First Order the galaxy turns to the one and only person with the ability and the brass balls to guide an intergalactic alliance: General Organa.

Except Leia does not want a throne. She just wants better for the galaxy, and she’s never been unbiased. So she hands the seat of power to the most unsuspecting: Rey.

She is named Keeper of the Peace. Keeper of the Treaty that binds every system as one under newly developed galactic law in peace, spearheaded by an orphan girl with no biases and now a long line of advisors from both sides, Leia and Hux taking on the roles of teachers and primary advisers. They eye each other warily even as they unanimously agree to it because there’s nobody else left for the job, but there’s a newfound respect there, not to mention family ties… for it is Luke (who decides to stay, this time, while Rey gets him and Kylo to entertain idea of starting a new school again) and Leia who watch on as Rey, Kylo and Hux marry each other in a small private ceremony, dressed in robes of white as they exchange golden rings and sworn promises of fealty that run deeper than blood, fealty now seared into their bones as their souls exist together once and for all eternity.

And it works. The peace sticks, this time, even with the struggles (both personal and political) and near misses. Rey and Kylo continue to learn how to grow in the only way they know how, with stubborn attitudes and high temperaments, but they learn, because nothing can come between their devotion to each other and to Hux. And Hux? Hux likes it exactly where he ends up: behind the scenes in the strategy room next to Leia, pulling galactic strings while Rey learns to rule with all the
grace and wisdom of a queen — though she absolutely refuses to be treated as such — Kylo at her side, her faithful guardian, her beloved husband, until it is time for her to look for a new Keeper.

That was her idea. It would be up to each Keeper alone to find a new one, another humble orphan with no ties to legacy or dynasties who may then learn from the previous one, to raise them up from their suffering and instill in them hope and a desire to better the kind of world from which they came for the next generation, on and on, until the end of time. She refuses a monarchy, for her future children will be reared far away from the drama of politics when the time comes, a promise she made to herself. So Rey is the first Keeper of many, but never the last, and that suits her just fine. It makes this new, fledgling adventure easier to endure.

And they endure, as they promised they would, until their story passes into legend, then into myth, never a footnote, because from them the universe demanded greatness. Not that they’d ever complain, not when their reward became the kind of love legends are made of.

Chapter End Notes

THE END.

I never thought I’d get to this point, and I have so many words I have suddenly found myself with very few. They all run together and jumble into mostly this blubering mess of gratitude to all of you who took the time to be here with me over the last two years while I wrote this thing that was never meant to be as much of an epic as it felt it was while I wrote it.

So thank you, friends, and I hope it was enjoyable, and especially thank you for taking the time to read and comment to all of you who did. You kept me going, and for that you will always have my immense love and affection. Thank you for all the kudos (and if you made it this far and liked it, please consider gifting the fic with one!), and the art, the podfic and playlists, and all the cool things you’ve made to show your appreciation. But most important, thanks for being here for me and for having both given me your friendships and believed in my work. It means the world to me.

End Notes

For more updates and SW nonsense, follow me on tumblr over at @lucidlucy.

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