Hope Is Ours

by Celana_Aldrete

Summary

There was no one left who could understand the weight she carried on her shoulders and how lonely she felt with it. How painful it was to think back to what she had had to give up. The memory of a family that didn’t exist. Han and Luke. She had left everything behind.

Everything but the man she shared a bond with that she could neither explain nor deny.

Notes

Hooray! This is my very first fanfiction EVER that goes into publishing. I'm so proud and excited and anxious at the same time, hehe! As you may suggest, I'm a huge Star Wars-Fan and "The Last Jedi" made me even more of a Fangirl (sorry, not sorry). So I wanted to write a Post-TLJ fanfiction and see where it leads me. I am still wrapping my head around the plot but I think I am on a good way so far. Therefore Chapter 1 is more of an introduction where the characters are standing ATM but I promise, it gets better/worse/fluffier (not "explicit" because I'm horrible at writing something like that but still, FLUFF). I already wrote some fragments for other chapters and I literally broke my own heart while writing them so yeah, HOPE YOU HAVE FUN. :-D
Please notice: English is not my mother tongue so if you find HUGE mistakes while reading, please let me know. I want to learn and get better so you can enjoy what you're reading. Hopefully! :-) 

Long story cut short: ENJOY! :-) <3
Rey awoke from a restless sleep. It was still dark; she couldn’t remember when she had fallen asleep or if she had slept for more than an hour at all. She felt bruised and even less recovered than before. But that was nothing new. She hasn’t slept well for a long time now.

She straightened her upper body and leaned on her elbows. Except for the cot on which she was lying, there was nothing in the sparse room but a table, a chair, and a shelf set in the wall containing her few possessions: Clothes, her bag which was still holding the Jedi books of Ahch-To, a small metallic ticking clock she’d made of scrap metal and the broken handle of a lightsaber. The dim light shining through a small window was reflected in it. Her gaze lingered on it for a while before she sank back into the pillow and stared at the ceiling.

She knew exactly why she couldn’t sleep, she just didn’t want to admit it. Every day Finn asked her if this night had been better than the previous one, and every day she nodded again, knowing that he didn’t believe her. But he said nothing. She hadn’t told him much about what had happened to her since leaving the Starkiller Base - most of the time she had talked about Luke, his training and the Jedi, and Finn had listened without asking too much detail. Rey suspected that General Leia had advised him to let her tell him when she was ready. But ... she didn’t know when she was, either.

On some nights she was afraid of falling asleep. Those were the nights when she felt his presence as he was lying in bed next to her. It felt like she just had to reach out to touch him. In her sleep, when she was vulnerable and her thoughts were not focused on breaking the bond between them, he was as close to her as ever. But she hadn’t seen him anymore. She suspected he was just as anxious to keep her out of his thoughts.

But even worse were the nights when she was completely alone. In which she realized how far away she was from everything. Those were the hours where she actually missed him. She would never have confessed that to herself, but she could find no other explanation for this all-pervading pain which shook her to the core and made her cry regularly into her pillow.

She wasn’t sure what kind of night it had been this time. She remembered only shadows that haunted her dreams. And she noticed that they were not the only reason she had woken up. There was a tumult outside the door. At first only steps and whispers, but they grew louder. It just had to be dawn (at least the clock on the shelf indicated a very early hour) and although the station was always busy, the noise level was unusual for such a time of day. As she found it dumb to lie around and just listen, she decided to get up - maybe she could help with something.

She quickly threw on a shirt, slipped into pants and shoes and left her room, not without bumping into a young pale-faced mechanic who darted down the corridor.

"Oh, sorry," he murmured, looking around and into her face. His expression derailed for a moment.

"It's you ..." he said absentmindedly and blushed. Rey raised her eyebrows.

"So what's going on? I heard people calling," she said, looking down the hall in confusion. The boy picked up a piece of tool that had fallen from his hand and backed away.

"An alarm ... probably a false alarm ... but I don’t know ..." he mumbled, giving her a quick look and then clearly declaring the conversation over by running away. Rey threw up her arms and tried to shout something to him, but then decided against it. She sighed. This kind of meeting
hadn’t happened for the first time.

Since evacuating the last survivors of Crait three months ago, stories had been growing around her and her powers. Of course half of it was completely covered and the other half not even close to the truth, but still ... they triggered something in people, and not the good kind of feelings.

They had managed to reach a small base in the Baroonda system in the Outer Rim on which a few remnants of the Resistance had entrenched themselves. Here, far from any civilization, the arm of the First Order couldn’t reach them yet. But their strength had diminished incredibly - totaling perhaps 500 people, maybe less. The base was on Karr, a rugged but wooded planet that had never been developed, presumably because it offered no mineral resources and didn’t seem worth living at first glance. The premises of the base were therefore partly under the ground because the surface was traversed by craters and canyons and offered no safe place for buildings. But it was probably better that way - the less they revealed the better.

The few people who had fled from Crait knew about Rey, even if they didn’t know exactly where she took her strength from. Most of them speculated that Master Luke Skywalker had something to do with it, but now that he was dead (or at least held to be), questions about Rey’s origins raised. Voices became louder that drew parallels with the new Supreme Leader of the First Order - after all, he was feared for moving things and reading thoughts. Or worse.

Rey had already forgotten how many times she'd tried to explain that she was not interested in spying on her fellow human beings or harming them in any way. Nonetheless, many had gone astray. They avoided her in the hallways, they quickly lowered their eyes as she passed or interrupted their conversations whenever she showed up. It was spooky and Rey had to admit that being alone had rarely been that difficult.

She went in the same direction the young mechanic had taken. A short time later she met other residents of the station - some nodded to her, but most of them turned away quickly. Some seemed to be in excitement while others were at least as confused by the noise level as Rey. After a few meters, Rey reached the lobby to the hangar, which contained the last remnants of the once-large X-Wing fleet of the Resistance. Bustle and unrest prevailed here too. She turned left towards the command center - if she wanted to find answers, then probably there.

But that didn’t happen because Finn suddenly appeared in front of her. His face, which lay in thoughtful folds, brightened at her sight.

"Good morning sun-Rey", he greeted her in a good mood. Rey raised an eyebrow - he made that joke almost every morning. And he would probably do it for another hundred years, for any threat of beating had not helped.

"Good morning," she replied wearily, ignoring two whispering mechanics besides her, "What's going on? Since when did everyone become early birds? "

"Oh no. They're all grumpy as ever, believe me," Finn said with a placating hand gesture, motioning Rey to come closer before whispering to her, "But there's news, and you sure don’t want to miss that. Follow me."

She followed him into the command center, which was well filled at almost any time of day (albeit with far fewer people than originally) - but something was different today. Most officers gathered around a single panel, the reflection of a holographic message on their faces. Rey's heart leapt. After all the months of waiting - could it be true?

"Is that what I believe it is?" She whispered to Finn almost reverently. He nodded.
"Yes. It's a message from an ally. They have contacted us and are waiting for our answer."

OOO

He sat between two officers, his hand raised thoughtfully to his face, his eyes fixed on General Hux who sat on the opposite side of the table. He was so fed up with that face – that conceited grin with the empty eyes that prized him and just waited for him to make a mistake. They listened to a sergeant's report informing them of the current status of the troops, but he only listened with half attention. Instead, he watched Hux's expression which became visibly more satisfied.

"The salvage of the *Supremacy* is almost complete. We were able to recover about half of the stationed fleet and machines. Despite the ... unfortunate loss of Captain Phasma, there was no vacuum that affected the strength of our infantry. Captain Sol fits in very well with his new job," the sergeant (whose name he didn’t even recognize) explained, "The troops are well prepared. If we find them, we are ready. "

At the mention of Captain Phasma Hux’ mouth corner pulled together briefly. He knew that he thought of the Stormtrooper he was incapable of killing and who almost destroyed them on Crait. Almost.

He avoided thinking about the things that happened on Crait. Something inside him rebuked him every time for losing his temper at the time. And it reminded him of the presence that still haunted him, deep into his dreams. Sometimes he saw her, sometimes not. Sometimes he wasn’t sure if he could trust his eyes or even his mind. But every once in a while he could hear her say "*monster".*

"*Monster*…

"Supreme Leader!"

He was startled. Hux looked directly at him, his eyebrows tightened suspiciously. He had no idea how long he had stared in thought, but by now a star chart had appeared on the projector in the middle of the table they sat around.

He extended his upper body and put his hand on the edge of the table.

"I'm listening," he said, noting that two officers were talking in a whisper besides him. He gave them a look that silenced them immediately.

"We just talked about the next explorations," said Hux smugly and pointed at an area in the Outer Rim that was mapped poorly, "We caught signals. Here, here and here, three systems that shouldn’t be inhabited."

"Hm," he said. He knew what Hux wanted, but waited for his next move. Hux cleared his throat and clasped his hands.

"We should focus on this section and send drones."

"And what do you expect from it, Hux?" He replied challenging and found it almost exhilarating how Hux pressed his jawbone together as he addressed him so directly, "Presumably it's smugglers. The systems there are full of criminals and pirates. At best you just waste our resources; in the worst case our drones get attacked."
"With all due, Supreme Leader ..."

How he hated it when Hux addressed him like that.

"This is not a discussion, Hux," he replied flatly, leaning back in his chair. Hux pursed his lips, searching for words. Then he coughed again.

"All right, Supreme Leader," he said, emphasizing the title in particular, "but I'm beginning to wonder if it's in your interest to find the Resistance – and destroy it."

A murmur went through the other men. It wasn’t the first time that he and Hux performed a small show of power and as far as he remembered it was mostly a draw. But he had to admit that Hux had played very clever this time. If he didn’t want to lose his face in front of his General Staff, he had to act, whether he wanted to or not.

"Indeed," he said cynically, "Well, Hux, thinking has never really been your strength."

Hux's green eyes widened for a moment. Hate flickered in them; he could see and feel it.

"Send manned search parties. If they find someone, give them the order to shoot. There aren’t many of them left and I no longer care to waste time," he said and took a deep breath, "That's my last word and a command."

He stood up; the officers followed his move and murmured their agreement. Hux also rose, but only after much hesitation.

"As you wish," Hux answered without even trying to suppress the sarcastic undertone. He gave him one last look before he turned and left the room.

It was as if a dark shadow were falling off him as he entered the elevator and went up the floors to his private lounges. It was still exhausting for him. He had been working so long to be in exactly that position as he was today. Independent. Free of commanders like Snoke. Damn it, he had KILLED for it.

And yet he couldn’t get rid of the feeling of emptiness inside him. He was so used to it – the whispers of Snoke. The voice inside his head that guided him. Used him, he thought contritely. Now, it was just quiet and he was alone. Again. Alone with his own thoughts that seemed loud, fragmented and… wrong.

He noticed something in the corner of his eye. Not much more than the flicker of a movement or a glimmer of dark brown hair, but it drew his attention. He spun around, scanning the narrow space with his eyes. But it was gone. Maybe it had never been there either.

Something in his chest contracted.

"Rey ..."

He wouldn’t allow this pain to terrorize him anymore. Only a few days left ... and he would feel complete again. He hoped, at least.
"He is out of control."

Hux looked out of the window on the bridge of the Finalizer, turning his back on the other officers. He could feel their eyes on his neck. He knew there were looks of horror and doubt.

"Hux, you can’t be serious!“ an officer named Doyle took the floor. His voice was rushed.

"I am very serious right now," Hux replied without the trace of remorse, "You have seen it yourself, back then, on Crait. He is no longer master of his senses. Who can guarantee that it wasn’t him who killed Supreme Leader Snoke – to finally get what he wants?"

"Hux!" Doyle snorted, "The very thought of this… it’s high treason!"

"Oh yes?" Hux turned to the members of the General Staff and his eyes reflected determination, "And who of you would have the guts to accuse me? You know that I’m right. You are only afraid of HIM. But I’ve lost that fear a long time ago."

A vein throbbed on his temple. He remembered only too well how Kylo Ren had choked him, how he had squeezed the words out of him. How he had thrown him around like a punching ball, like a chess figure in his own perfidious game. He had rarely experienced anything that had humbled him more and he had had enough.

"I don’t understand Hux," Doyle said helpless, "His suggestion to find the Resistance is fine. There’s nothing wrong with it."

"Are you really that blind?“ Hux snapped and his spit flew through the air, "Manned search parties! He knows that they are easier to spot than drones. He wants to give them the chance to escape. I don’t know why and I don’t CARE why. But I won’t let that happen AGAIN."

He banged his fist on the table; his face was nothing more than a bizarre grimace.

“And that scavenger! I’ve seen her, I know how powerful she is. She was the one who slashed his face open, who slaughtered our guards on the Supremacy – a GIRL. She’s a threat, a serious threat and I won’t risk anything – unless I have her under my control."

He turned back to look out of the window into the depths of the blackness of space.

"What should we do?" asked another officer, who sounded not as doubtful as Doyle. A greasy smile appeared on Hux’s face.

"Leave it to me," he said, “I’ve already made… arrangements. If everything goes according to plan, we kill two birds with one stone."
"Can we trust them?"

All remaining senior members of the Resistance had gathered in the command room. Rey had stopped counting how many times they had listened to the holo message, but she could already tell them by heart. The bearer of the message was a human - a man in his fifties, with dark skin and snow-white, short hair. They knew by now that his name was Dorovan and that he was the Captain of a Starfleet, led by the flagship *Corona*. But the more Rey saw the tall, broad figure of the Captain on the panel and listened to his message, the stranger her feeling became. She could not tell where exactly it came from. The message promised support in all matters of the Resistance - military equipment, food, fuel. But maybe that was the problem.

It sounded too good to be true.

Poe Dameron, the best X-Wing pilot of the Resistance (and no one would ever have denied that again) stepped forward. His dark eyes followed the movements of Captain Dorovan on the projector.

"... We've been waiting for a sign from General Leia for a long time, and the signal that reached us from Crait gives us hope that you are still alive and fighting - even if the station was abandoned. We are ready and waiting for your answer", The holographic ego of Captain Dorovan just finished his message again and disappeared. Poe stared at the blinking lights for a moment, then turned to the assembled crew.

"We should inform General Leia."

The attendees fell silent. Rey looked around. She was already used to Leia rarely attending meetings. After their escape from Crait they all began to realize how weakened Leia really was. She was indeed the last person to realize that she had overestimated her physical and mental strength. The First Order attack on the *Raddus*, the defense of Crait and the long journey in search of a safe haven had left their mark. But the burden of losing her son and her twin brother had hit her even harder - Rey knew that. On long nights when they both could not sleep, they had often visited each other; Insomnia was not the only thing that connected them.

Leia was the only one who knew about the mysterious connection between Rey and Ben. Rey had told her about it, hoping to take some weight from her soul. Leia had looked at her with her warm, motherly eyes - concern and affection had mirrored in them. Then she had said:

"He listened to you. That's more than I could ever accomplish.", she had smiled slightly, but then had turned serious again: "I don’t know how much of my son is still left in Kylo Ren. I would be very careful in your place."

Rey nodded and replied, "I have not seen him since Crait ... not really. I didn’t think I could even sense him after Snoke's death."

Leia's face had assumed a strange expression and she only answered:

"I don’t think Snoke is the reason for your connection. He may have manipulated it, but ... that's not how the Force works."
Rey had been thinking about her words for a long time, but she still lacked an explanation. Something deep inside her thought she already knew the solution, but it escaped her every time she wanted to reach for it - like a dream she tried to remember after waking. And until she got it, she did everything she could to break the bond between them - with walls and ramparts, if necessary. She didn’t want to risk releasing her location unintentionally.

"Poe, General Leia has appointed you as her deputy," Vice Admiral Jotis made no secret of his lack of understanding of this decision, but went on, "If you think these allies have earned our trust, then we will reply."

Poe glanced at Jotis and folded his arms across his chest. Rey could feel his conflict clearly. They all knew that as the leader of the air force, he hated nothing as much as sitting around idly. Waiting in a bunker for three long months and hoping that someone would find them didn’t fit his style. He was a hothead, but at least he was aware that the Resistance couldn’t afford more mistakes at its present strength.

"We're voting," he finally said, looking around the room, "that's a decision that depends on all of us. We are not many anymore and our hierarchy can hardly be much flatter."

Rey glanced at Finn, who looked at her sadly - unfortunately Poe was right.

"Who is voting to answer Captain Dorovan?" Poe asked and hands lifted in the air. At first hesitant, but finally the raised hands outweighed clearly. Finn and Rey also voted, although Rey still couldn’t resist the strange feeling in her chest.

"Well. Then we’ve clarified that. Give Dorovan our coordinates. Use General Leia's encryption," Poe's face took on a satisfied look that Rey found not suitable on him, but she only paid attention for a moment. As the ranks of the commanders cleared, she saw something that didn’t fit into the scene. As if a misty veil had moved between her and the others for a moment. Her breath caught. It was a knight. His leather armor was black and streaked with silver threads. He stood still between two officers who took no notice of him, and looked at her. At least that's what she thought - he was wearing a full-face helmet with metallic ornaments that reminded her strikingly of Kylo Ren's mask. She inhaled sharply. A shot of adrenaline rushed through her body, bumping the hair on her neck. But with a blink, the black knight had disappeared and the sounds of the people around her invaded her again. Rey was still staring at the spot where the figure had appeared. She noticed that her hand had moved involuntarily to the spot on her hip where her blaster usually hung.

"Oh man, I'm really hungry now. Time for breakfast. Rey, you're coming or what?" Finn turned to her, but his expression darkened suddenly.

"Rey, what is it? You're pale as a corpse!" he touched her arm gently. Rey whirled around, blinking as if she was just waking from a state of meditation. She was searching for words.

"Nothing. I'm just ..." she looked around, prepared for the strange figure to appear suddenly out of nowhere and attack her, but obviously it was gone. Rey pursed her lips which had suddenly become very dry.

"Nothing. I just didn’t sleep well that night - just to anticipate your daily question", she said to Finn, trying to smile,"I am going to lie down a bit. And now go and eat breakfast."

"Ok", Finn said with a frown and added, "Is everything alright?"

Rey nodded and grinned.
"Yeah. Just go - Rose is having rehabilitation this afternoon and she'll need someone strong to catch her if she stumbles again."

Finn gave her a mischievous look.

"You're terrible", he said, but then left it there and left. Rey watched him go - she knew he was annoyed by the topic, but he couldn't hide the fact that he felt something of affection for Rose, who had broken both legs and numerous ribs during the incident on Crait. Rey felt slightly wistful at the thought, though she didn’t know why. She left the command room, though she had no idea where to go. She felt as if she really needed to rest.

But at the same time, her fear of going to sleep had never been worse.

OOO

He stood on a platform above the lock and watched the troops. Another salvage ship had just arrived and brought remaining AT-ST to the Finalizer. Although the attack of the Raddus had demolished nearly half of the Supremacy, many war machines remained intact. Apart from the planet Crait, there had been no significant gravitational source nearby that could have caused the Supremacy to crash, leaving its remnants in the weightlessness of space. There was even so much equipment available that the remainders had to be distributed to several cruisers because the Finalizer was already running out of space. All in all, they could be quite satisfied - but the loss of the largest Star Destroyer of the fleet weighed heavy.

A young officer approached him. Fear was written on her face - her whole presence was filled with it. He sometimes wondered if there was a sort of selection rite among the commanders to decide who had to bring him news. He almost felt sorry for her. Almost.

"Supreme Leader Ren," she said, saluting him. He nodded to her. Today he had no particular interest in dealing with subordinates longer than necessary.

"General Hux reports that the reconnaissance squadrons will soon arrive at the Baroonda system," the officer said, her voice trembling. A vein twitched over his eye when she mentioned Hux, but he nodded again.

"Good. Anything else?" he asked emotionlessly and gave her a short, cool look. She froze, but his neutral reaction drew a little hope in her that the clash would soon be over. She cleared her throat.

"The Knights are on their way too," she said with emphasis, and he could read from her mind that she had no idea what the message meant. But he knew it very well.

"You can go," he replied, clearly feeling her relief. After she disappeared, he left in the opposite direction.

It was time to prepare.

OOO

"The Knights of Ren."
Leia was in her bed. Her skin had become soft and almost transparent the last few weeks and although one could tell that she was not feeling well, she had lost none of her beauty and impressive charisma. Her hair, as always, was put up in an artistic knot, as if she would always expect visitors.

Rey shuddered at her words. She had come to her after the incident in the command room - the memory of the black figure haunted her every inch she went, and she kept turning around, afraid it might reappear. Not necessarily because she was afraid of an attack, but because a memory which she had long repressed made suddenly its way back to the surface.

"I've seen him before. Not just him - others too. In a vision on Takodana,” Rey said thoughtfully, leaning forward in her chair, "Ben was there too. He was ... one of them."

"Not just one of them, he was ... he is their Master," Leia said calmly, sighing, "Han would probably have called that an idiot boy's idea, but it was much more than that. After Luke's temple was destroyed, they committed themselves completely to the First Order. They believe that darkness is the only way to balance the galaxy."

"I know," Rey's eyes became sad, "When I met Ben for the first time, I could see that in him. His idea of an ideal order. "

Leia put her hand on Reys and shook her head.

"No. That was Snoke's idea," she said quietly, "Ben just took it over. Because there was nothing else he believed in. But now…"

Rey frowned.

"What changed?"

Leia smiled reluctantly.

"I can’t tell. But Snoke is dead. Ben is on his own, the first time in ages," she said, squeezing Rey's hand, "Maybe it's time ..."

She broke off. From one second to the next, her expression changed completely. If she had been calm and loving before, only disturbance and confusion were written in her face now. Rey was alarmed.

"Leia?"

Leia's eyes were fixed straight up to the ceiling. She breathed fast and shallow. Rey could sense something was wrong. That something was totally wrong. When Leia returned from her trance, she looked at Rey. Rey didn’t know what exactly she had seen and why - but for the first time she realized that Leia was probably more connected to the Force than she had ever known herself. Leia straightened up in her bed.

"You have to warn the others," she said firmly, "The First Order is on its way."

Chapter End Notes

Yay, the Knights of Ren! I'm sure I'm not the only one who wondered where they had been in TLJ, so I decided to bring them back in my FF and believe me, it's going
to be important. Sooo, I wanted to publish Chapter 2 and set up the plot right before Christmas because I won't be online because of the Holidays but I can't wait to write and finish Chapter 3 - FIRST FORCE BOND SKYPE CALL incoming (I want them to talk again sooo badly *hearteyes*)!

So, enjoy reading and MERRY CHRISTMAS <3
Although the station's systems were outdated and had to be used sparingly due to the scarcity of resources, they could definitely not hide that a cruiser had appeared at the edge of the Baroonda system after jumping through hyperspace. And it was not an ally.

"How did General Leia know about that?" Poe stared at the monitors with a mixture of amazement and horror. They hadn't set off an alarm; not yet. The last thing they wanted was to cause a panic on the base.

"I don’t know. She ... just knew it," Rey replied, knowing that that was only half the story and reaped some skeptical looks from the other officers of the Resistance. She chewed nervously on the inside of her cheek.

"But she gave us time. Time to think about what we can do," she said, catching Poe's glance. He seemed determined, but something in his eyes didn’t please her. Was it something like ... greed?

"We should attack the cruiser," his words were more a statement than a suggestion, "We should show them that we are still here."

"That's crazy," one of the officers said, "we are not strong enough, not even close to be a real threat. We would just reveal our position."

"Maybe they already know it," Poe replied, "It's just a single light cruiser and we still have our fleet here. If they know where we are, we can use them to demonstrate our strength, to leave them uncertain about us. If not, we may prevent our discovery."

"Maybe, maybe. Dameron, this is no way to perform an operation!" the officer replied sharply, "You're putting us all in danger!"

"He's right Poe," Rey tried mediating, "It's too big a risk. I know you don’t want to sit it out like that, but we have no choice."

Poe's expression was undecided, but clearly annoyed. She had probably hit a sore spot with that. He hadn’t been in the air for so long that even the slightest view of a mission outside the planet where they were stuck made him forget his rationality. He sighed.

"All right," he replied reluctantly, "I understand. No attack. But we still have a problem."

The heads of the others turned to face him. "Problem" in the current situation was a word that people didn’t like to hear.

"The Corona," Poe said, "Captain Dorovan is on his way here. His fleet can theoretically arrive here any moment. With a cruiser patrolling the edge of the system, they certainly will not go undetected. And it’s too late to warn them; the First Order would catch the signal. Either way, they will find us."

Frantic whispers filled the room. Rey drew a sharp breath between her teeth; it was true. They were literally trapped. For months they had managed to stay safe and wait for help undetected; and now maybe everything would be destroyed within a few days? She could feel the fear of the Resistance fighters rising.
Then she could hear Leia's voice in her head.

"He listened to you."

Rey swallowed. Maybe now was the right (and the only) time to forget her own pride and face her fear directly. But it was not just fear; it was also a deep-seated desire that made her leave the command room and go to her room. A desire that frightened her even more than the mere memory of his face.

OOO

There was no other way. She had to talk to him - it was the only way to prevent the First Order from discovering them. It was risky and dangerous, but at least she had to try.

Rey sat down on her cot and closed her eyes. It would take a while to tear down the walls she’d erected because of him. She’d set up traps for herself so she wasn’t tempted when she felt lonely in those empty, cold rooms. Traps of anger, distrust, and disappointment that reminded her of the moment in Snoke's throne room. As he struck a path she was not ready to go. Not with Kylo Ren.

She slowed her breathing and tried to relax. Trying to fade out the negative emotions that made her leave him. She shuddered. She felt the pain boil up inside her. It stiffened in her chest and brought tears to her eyes. She swallowed them. The last thing she wanted was to stand in front of him like a weak, injured animal.

She hesitated a moment. Did she actually know if it was still working? What if the bond between them had come off? She had been so stubborn trying to shut him out that she was not sure if that was exactly what had caused the final separation. Maybe she lost…

Before she had finished the thought, something in her mind locked like a switch. The metallic click of the clock on the shelf fell silent and oppressive silence settled over her. She knew it had worked. It was just like the last times. It was as if he had waited for it, as if he had always stood in the shadows and had now stepped into the light.

"Hello Rey."

She took a deep breath and opened her eyes. He looked even more tired and severed than usual. His face was white as a chalk, his black hair was longer and hung in his face. The wounds of the previous fight had healed, and the scar that ran across his face and that Rey had inflicted on him a hundred years ago (it seemed) had become paler. Only his eyes were wide awake and fixed on her.

"Hello ... Ben," she replied and he had to feel how hard it was for her to speak. After all, it was her who rejected him and banished him from her mind. At least she had tried. The muscle on his right jaw twitched as she spoke to him with his true name.

"It's been a while," he said flatly. He was sitting on a bed or chair, bent over, but he was obviously alone. Rey dropped her hands into her lap. She saw that he was wearing his gloves, as always.

"Yes," she answered tersely, trying hard not to show that although she had tried to hate him, even though he had caused her so much pain, she was glad to see him alive. And it was more than that,
she knew that. But she would never have admitted it; not in front of herself and certainly not in front of him.

"What do you want?" his expression didn’t show her if he was pleased by her sight, but she noticed that he kneaded his palm hard. He was nervous.

"Wow, straight to business, huh..." Rey raised her eyebrows and pressed her lips together. What had she expected? She had broken his heart and left him in shambles, in a world of hate and anger. And he didn’t hesitate to remind her.

"You were really expecting that I would welcome you with open arms and warmth – after all that happened?" he said coolly, and although he tried to stay on the line, there was unmistakable pain in his voice, "Sorry to disappoint you."

"Well, I think I remember that it was you who tried to kill everyone and everything on Crait, so don’t blame me for ..."

She interrupted herself, took a deep breath and focused on his darkened face. No, she couldn’t challenge it now, not now. It was too important.

"I'm sorry, it came over me," she said instead. He made a sound somewhere between a laugh and a snort.

"You don’t say."

She bit her lip, gathered herself and looked directly at him.

"I am here to ask you to stop the search for the Resistance in the Baroonda system."

The silence between them was deafening. No muscle twitched in his face as he stared at her, trying to fathom her feelings. She was focused on making that one request. Everything else didn’t count. But... did she see disappointment in his face?

"No," he then said succinctly and straightened his upper body, "Anything else?"

Rey blinked.

"I know I’m asking a lot. But we are only a few, we can hardly defend ourselves. Please, Ben ..."

"You really think that you can beg me for something?" he stood up; his presence was still breathtaking and disturbing at the same time. Rey noticed that he was wearing a cape she had never seen before. It was night-black, floor-length and shouldered into solid armor. It had to be the robe of the Supreme Leader. Something in her chest cramped.

"Ben, we can’t attack you even if we wanted to. We are only..."

"... a filthy band of rebels who have driven us to the brink of annihilation in the past. Yes, I know exactly what you are," he replied sharply, "And if that’s the only reason you came here for, then I have to say that you’ve wasted your time and energy."

Rey felt tears again in the corner of her eyes; out of anger, despair and sorrow.

"Your mother is here, too!" she snapped, getting up too. She barely reached up over his shoulders, but she knew that her height did not say much about her strength. They were equal; always.

A shadow passed over his face that Rey couldn’t identify.
"She was on Crait, too," he said, though he didn’t sound as self-confident as he did before. It was a painful wound he tried to avoid and hide. Unsuccessfully.

"And I’m still here, too! You can’t say that this doesn’t mean anything to you!" the words slipped out, but they provoked a clear reaction. His rigid expression derailed for a moment. It was replaced by something that Rey had seen there before; it was only a brief flicker that passed before it could be understood. He took a deep breath.

"No, don’t give me that, Rey. You had your chance." he answered and now she felt his pain swinging back and forth between them. It was as if it was hers, and it was, probably. She shook her head, searching for words.

"I can ... I couldn’t. You left me no choice."

"You should be here. With me. I saw it," he said slowly and emphatically, the memory of his outstretched hand, his request to go with him and leave everything behind burning in Rey’s head. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Ben, please ..."

"STOP CALLING ME LIKE THAT."

He hurled something against the wall in his room. It crashed to the ground and splintered. Despair and rage flared up in his chest - and something else that Rey could not interpret. But exactly the same feelings rose in her, tore her apart, overwhelmed her like a flood that bursted dams and washed everything away that was good and right.

"Well then, SUPREME LEADER," she spat out; she could not stop herself from saying the words even though she knew that they would hurt him more than his real name. She wanted to give him a load with her blaster, and at the same time she wanted to touch him, to embrace him and never let him go. Her disgust and longing fought a losing battle in her mind. Tears ran down her face.

"Go to hell," she hissed softly, unable to prevent it. Her anger and despair took over and suppressed every other feeling for him. He turned around; his face was a mirror of hers. She already regretted her words as he approached her and stopped only a few inches from her. A few centimeters and yet half the galaxy.

"I’m already there," he whispered. She could still see the tears on his cheeks. Then he disappeared.

The connection broke so suddenly that Rey staggered backwards. The sounds of her surroundings invaded her and made her tremble in confusion. She still felt as if she could feel his breath on her skin. But he was gone.

"Ben. BEN!" she shouted into the emptiness of her room, overwhelmed with grief and pain, knowing that it was his turn now to build a wall and shut her out.

OOO

He hated it. He hated that he couldn’t forget her. That she was always there like a thought in the back of his mind that he could neither grasp nor get rid of it. That she managed to give up his
cover, which he had laboriously built over the last few weeks and months. She managed to hurt him so much with just one word that he wanted to kill someone just to get rid of that nagging pain in his guts.

And yet he knew he could never kill her.

He had sworn it. He had even sworn it to his former Master Skywalker that he would destroy her. But when the time came - when he faced her again - in reality and not over that strange connection that still existed between them - what would he do?

After Snoke revealed that he had been the one who created the bond between them, he had felt betrayed. Betrayed by the Force that not only gave him his strength, but also made something possible that he didn’t even thought was feasible: he had confided in someone. He had confided in her. But now that he knew the connection still existed - and more, they could obviously control it to a certain point - he was back at the beginning. And the thought that he might have made a mistake became more and more present.

But hadn’t she also made a mistake? Had she not acted against her own vision? She could have left the Resistance behind and didn’t. And even now she stood behind an ideal that might not have been one. Just like him.

"Master Ren."

He had noticed their presence a long time before they even entered the Finalizer. He took a deep breath; It was time to restrain himself. After all, he was as powerful as he ne never thought before; and he wasn’t dealing with any lower sergeants here. He got up and turned around.

All six had come. He realized that they had probably never seen him without his mask; and so it was for him. He didn’t know who was under those helmets, but their auras were so pithy that he would have recognized them among thousands. That has always been Snoke's credo - strength through unity, loyalty and blind obedience. Though that had not used him much, he thought grimly, but he was careful to keep his emotions out.

"My friends," he said, knowing that he would never really call any of Ren's six knights a friend, but at least they were closer to that title than sycophants like Hux. He indicated a nod, which the six knights acknowledged with the hint of a bow. He knew that their loyalty was always to the Supreme Leader; nonetheless, he would have to make some claims to their obedience.

"I'm glad you're here," he said, his gaze resting unusually long on the foremost man of the six knights, "It's time to regroup our powers now that Supreme Leader Snoke is dead. The First Order needs you."

And he needed them too, he knew that. He sensed that he wouldn’t be able to make the last few steps on his own. Not as long as the memory of Rey's tears tormented him.

Chapter End Notes

Them feels! Force Bond Skype Calls are back and this is not going to go the way you think (or something like that). Anyway: *googles fluffy pictures of Porgs to feel better again*

Hope you had wonderful holidays! :) <3 Thank you for the Kudos and Bookmarks, I am happy that there are already users who read and like it <3
The infirmary in the camp on Karr was rudimentary, but at least they had managed to provide the injured after the escape of Crait so far that no one would sustain permanent damage. And the last remaining patient was doing well too, Rey acknowledged.

Rose has made tremendous progress in the last few weeks. Rey sensed that this was not only due to her general tenacious condition; it was also Finn's dedication that spurred her on her way to recovery. Finn would probably have said that he just owed her after all that had happened, but Rey had suspected that there was more to it than that. Whenever Rose had to get up (or wanted to, she ignored the instructions of the medical staff regularly), he was immediately on hand to help her. During the rehabilitation classes, in which she slowly regained the mobility of her legs, he took care that she didn’t step too much. Even in the evening, when Rose had fallen asleep long ago, he always stayed a bit longer, mostly under an excuse. But Rey had already seen him once or twice just sitting in the chair in front of Rose's bed and watching her sleep.

During her visit today, she felt nothing of this relaxed mood. After the devastating encounter with Ben, Rey didn’t know what to do with herself and her feelings. She had hoped that she could at least find some distraction with Finn and Rose. But it turned out that the message of the approaching First Order had already reached the infirmary. Finn and Rose were talking nervously when Rey entered the room.

"Hello Rey," both said at the same time. They sat upright; Finn in his chair, Rose in her bed. They watched her attentively as she sat down.

"Everything OK? You look even worse than usual," Finn said, frowning. Rey didn’t answer; she felt sick and her heart was still throbbing too fast in her chest. But she just couldn’t talk about it. She knew that Finn and Rose would never understand. She shrugged and pressed her lips together.

"We'll find a solution, don’t worry. The First Order won’t spot us."

Rose’s confidence sounded naive in her ears first, but Rey appreciated the good intention. She smiled lightly at Rose.

"We'll see," she said, clearing her throat, "How do you feel, Rose?"

"Better," said Rose, and her eyes darted to Finn, "so good that I am likely to leave the station tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Finally."

"That's great!" Rey was genuinely happy for her. She had slowly gotten to know the young mechanic after their arrival on Karr, and after a short time she made friends with her. There was something warm and optimistic about her that Rey sometimes missed between the hardened faces of the Resistance fighters, even though she knew that hardness and rational thinking were probably the better guides in their current situation. But at least Rose's sweetness reminded her that there was something else hidden deep in the turmoil of the war.

"Yes. Finally, she can get on my nerves outside rehabilitation too," Finn said with a playful sarcastic undertone, earning a scowl from Rose.

"Yes, I can’t wait to finally get my stun gun back," she responded quickly and Finn's grin froze.
The memory of his attempt to desert was probably still in his bones. Rey laughed with them, though she felt a subtle touch deep inside her when she saw them so intimately. She thought of Ben; his wounded words, the grief in his eyes and the terrible revelation that he had become what he had hated so much. Maybe he was not quite there yet, but he was on his way. He seemed farther away than before but at the same time so close that she literally felt his breath on his neck.

OOO

He was training harder than ever. Two of his Order members had agreed to it; it was the first time in months that he faced nearly equal opponents. It was not only a challenge; it was necessary too. Since Snoke's death his thoughts had been empty and aimless. Being able to reunite with other Force-sensitive competitors gave him a goal. The goal to fight the emerging light in his soul, to become the leader the First Order deserved. At last.

His lightsaber activated with a pulsating sound. He felt the Force flow through his arm, guiding his movements and putting them in the right places. It was a heat that filled his body and sharpened his gaze. When the two knights rushed towards him at the same time - one with a fighting staff, the other with two short swords - he avoided their blows as if they were nothing. His lightsaber bounced off the staff with a monstrous crash, urging the knight back. He took a swing; the second knight whirled around and stopped his second blow. His face twisted into a strained grimace; he felt waves of the Force build up between them and ebb away like whirling air masses. With a growling battle cry, he pushed the warrior away and parried another attack from the other knight.

Again and again their weapons clashed; Sparks flew and crackling tension filled the air. After a few minutes, he was already sweaty and breathing heavily, but it was not enough. It was not enough to get rid of the empty feeling inside him, to get the sight of her eyes out of his head, to erase the memory of her skin. He was beating them harder and harder. His opponents seemed to sense his insecurity which was accompanied by his aggressiveness, and reacted with just as much harshness and purposefulness. He had already forgotten how passionate the other Knights of Ren had always been; Snoke had been an excellent teacher. They were not only strong but also skilled in using the Force to foresee his attacks and turn his anger into a disadvantage for him. Soon he saw himself cornered by both. Not only did they work together but they were also deadly warriors on their own.

He fought off a blow with the staff, fought his way, and hurled the second knight with an invisible punch of power. He could feel a hint of surprise in the air but his attack had not been hard enough. The knight caught the blow in the air, landed on both legs and stormed at him again. He roared like a predator; he attacked the fighters with everything he had. His powers and emotions overwhelmed and flooded him like glistening white light. He could feel his hatred raging and consuming him. He had felt it before, countless times as it seemed to him. Once his temper had been the source of his power, but this time it was harder than ever to control it. He sensed it, but was unable to stop himself – like a murderous animal inside him that finally made its way out of its cage, ready to bite and rip something apart.

With a brutal blow of his sword, he threw one of the knights to one side; the second one was not so lucky. Without being able to do something about it, his throat was suddenly in the ever-narrowing Force grip of Kylo Ren. He wanted to kill; someone should finally feel the same pain that blazed in his own soul. He felt the attention of all the knights facing him at the same time. Something was out of control. Whatever it was.
The knight made choking sounds through his helmet. Sweat beaded from his forehead as his power pooled his grip, ready to give him the last, all-important blow. But then… something changed. 

"Ben, stop it."

The voice went through him like a bolt of lightning. It was gentle, but determined and powerful. His eyes wandered around the hall where they were training. In the mirrored wall he could see himself clenching his fist, his face contorted with rage. He gasped; his arm sank down and he heard the breathless knight fall to the ground like a wet sack. Then it was quiet.

"Leave," he heard himself say. The blood rushed in his ears as the knights escorted their injured comrades away. Feelings of confusion and helplessness whizzed through the air like arrows, but they didn’t hit him. When he was alone and felt only the thunderous hammering of his own heart, he turned around.

"Not you."

Luke Skywalker stood in front of him, just like the last time he met him on the battlefield on Crait. His Jedi robe was as clean as ever, and even the image of his lightsaber hung from his belt. Only this time he had a pale aura around him, unlike the projection he was fighting months ago. He felt his hatred flare up in him again.

"I told you that we’ll see each other again," Luke’s Force ghost had his hands folded in front of him, giving him a calm look that only made him angrier. If he hadn’t known that it didn’t work, he would probably have chased his lightsaber right through his chest.

"What do you want?" his voice was aggressive; he just couldn’t stand this face. Luke cleared his throat.

"Well, I obviously stop you from killing your lackeys," he replied without a trace of sarcasm, adding, "And I’m coming to talk to you - about Ben."

"Old man, you are too late," he replied, making an indifferent sound, "there is nothing left to discuss."

"That is not true. I know how much you are torturing yourself and this performance here was just another proof," Luke approached slowly, knowing that he couldn’t escape him no matter how hard he tried, "That’s not you, Ben."

"What do you know?" he spat and out of habit, his red lightsaber activated with a crashing noise, "As if you were ever interested in WHO I am!"

"I know that I failed. I should have believed in you. I didn’t, and I still regret it," Luke replied sadly. He stopped for a moment, but he didn’t back off.

"So what? It makes no difference to me anymore," he said firmly, "I don’t need anyone who believes in me anymore. I don’t need anyone."

"I think I once heard your father say something similar."

"Shut up!"

He pushed his lightsaber into the ground with a powerful sweep. A hot, whirring sound filled the room as the blade hit steel and burned a hole into the ground. There was no muscle moving in Luke’s face.
"You can rage as much as you want, you won't be able to shut other people out of your mind and your heart," Luke replied tonelessly, "I know what I'm talking about."

"Leave me alone," he hissed, suppressing anger and aggression, "I didn’t want to hear your sermons in life, and certainly not in death. I don’t need you; I've never needed you, UNCLE."

"Indeed, I've probably become useless to you," Luke answered calmly, "And what about Rey?"

It felt like a punch in his stomach.

"You just want to make me feel bad about her. You know nothing," he averted his eyes from his former Master.

"I know enough," Luke's voice echoed eerily in the training room, "Being one with the Force gives one some sort of advantage, you know. I know that you've long given up hope of what Han or Leia could have given you. A hope she has given you back and that you now push away from you."

"She's gone," he barked. "She turned her back on me as everyone did. Her choice was the Resistance."

"No," Luke shook his head, "her choice was Ben Solo. It's not her fault that all you gave her was Kylo Ren."

For a brief moment his breath caught. The words exploded in his ears like a whip.

_Her choice was Ben Solo._

When he spoke again, his voice was barely above a whisper.

"What do you want to hear from me?" his lower lip trembled with suppressed anger, "That I need her? That I need her so much that I can barely breathe? That I'm empty and incomplete and ... nothing without her?"


"Maybe you just had to hear it yourself," he said, and disappeared with a wink.

OOO

Rey stood at the entrance to the hangar, watching the actions on the landing pads anxiously. The last remaining X-Wing pilots, including Poe, had gathered and conferred one last time. Mechanics and technicians made their final checks and sent the droids to their wings. It wouldn’t be long before the heavily shrunken fleet would rise. Maybe for the last time.

Poe had to vote again. Rey felt anger; Votes were always something that could be used to shirk responsibility. And Poe seemed to want exactly that in his role as a replacement general. The plan was to keep the cruiser of the First Order busy until their allies arrived. A suicide mission from her point of view, but most of the officers had decided, probably sentencing the last airworthy fighters to die. Rey couldn’t believe that Poe really let that happen and she was not the only one. Chewbacca, despite Poe's request to join the operation with the Millennium Falcon, had also strictly refused (and who would bother a 3-meter Wookie more than necessary). Rey also feared
that this might be the last escape route again, if the plan failed. The First Order would not back
down. Not this time.

"Rey, you’re coming?"

Finn had appeared next to her and pulled her out of her thoughts. She shook her head.

"I don’t know if I really want to watch this," she replied and her gaze rested on Poe, who stood at
a distance and gesticulated. He looked extremely tense and nervous.

"I know. But we can’t do anything," Rey knew that Finn had voted against this mission too, but
he seemed to take a neutral position in the altercation. He probably hoped more that the
reinforcement would arrive on time. She sighed.

"OK," she turned and wanted to follow Finn into the command room. But something in the corner
of her eye caught her attention for a moment. It was nothing more than a shadow, and for a
moment she thought it was the knight she had seen before, but then she heard a familiar voice in
her head. Only for a few seconds, but she immediately knew what it meant.

"You win. This time."

She gasped and stopped. Finn noticed after a few meters that she didn’t follow him and looked
back at her in confusion.

"What? What's happening?"

Rey searched her mind, trying to reach for him, but he was already gone. Disappeared behind a
thick wall where she could no longer reach him. He had just opened for this moment and she
sensed that something was wrong with him, but she could not fathom what it was. She only knew
that she had to be very fast now.

"We have to stop the fleet!", she called and sprinted off, past Finn, who watched her helplessly.

"What the…?"

Rey reached the control room breathless in which the officers of the Resistance already looked at
the control screens and watched the upcoming launch of the aircraft. As Rey rushed in, all heads
turned to face her - some astonished, some dismissive. Rey pointed to communications officer
Konnix who kept in touch with the pilots.

"Call Poe, now! We need to stop the X-Wings!"

The audience whispered. Otherwise, Rey was neither a fiduciary nor did she have much to say in
gatherings. The officer stared at her as if she were crazy.

"What’s that supposed to mean? Who are you that you think you can give such orders?" Vice-
Admiral Jotis took the floor and blocked the way for Rey. She made a defensive gesture.

"This is not about me, but about our pilots. They have to stay on the ground. The cruiser of the
First Order will leave without discovering us. I know it."

Jotis snorted.

"How do you know that? Did a little bird whisper that to you? Or Master Luke Skywalker?" he
snapped, giving her a suspicious look, "I don’t know what you're up to or what you're imagining
after you've thrown some rocks around, but that's not how we work here in the Resistance."
"No, you prefer to make your pilots commit suicide, SIR!" Rey replied, anger blushing on her face before she squeezed out, "You have to trust me. Please!"

Jotis shook his head.

"Trust and loyalty have to be earned, Rey. Next time bring a few arguments, then we talk," he said condescendingly and turned away from her. The communications officer looked at her with a mixture of skepticism and doubt, apparently not sure if she should follow her orders, but the other officers' eyes on her quickly made her return to work. Rey stomped angrily with her foot.

"Damn!" She hissed and felt Finn's hand on her shoulder the next moment.

"Rey, leave it. Whatever you have in mind ... you’d better leave it," he said calmly. Rey appreciated that he wanted to backtrack her, though he was as surprised as any officer in the room, but he couldn’t understand it. She stared at the blinking dots on the radar and thought of Poe and the others. What would happen to them? What...?

A signal sounded. Rey had never heard it before, but it didn’t sound good. The commanders of the Resistance spun around; the view of some of them remained almost immediately on Rey. Jotis rushed to the desk of Konnix.

"What's going on?"

Konnix pressed different buttons but no one seemed to respond to her orders. She shook her head.

"Sir, I ... I don't know," she looked around and looked at Rey and Finn; Panic was in her eyes, "The X-wings ... something is not right. There is ... something."

Chapter End Notes

Back again with the next chapter - I hope you like it! <3 And I hope you started 2018 just right! Here's to another year full of force-bonding and undeniable feels. :D Happy New Year!
"What do you mean - retreat?"

Hux growing displeasure was otherwise very welcome to him, but this time it wasn’t about ousting him. He had made a decision that wasn’t easy to understand - and which he himself could not fully understand - and it was necessary for him to remain strong. More than ever.

"It means exactly that, Hux," he replied, noticing the glare of the commanders at the counters beside them, "Return the Destructor. Immediately."

Hux chin fluttered for a moment, as if he was searching for the right words he could say to his commander-in-chief, but he remained strangely calm.

"May I also know the reason?" asked Hux and his right eye twitched nervously, "We haven’t even started looking. With a little more time ..."

"I've changed my mind," he replied emotionlessly, "I have no interest in wasting resources on the Resistance. They probably are not even ready to fight, let alone pose a threat to us."

"And the scavenger girl? The killer of our leader?" Hux drilled on, not taking his eyes off him for a moment. He seemed to study every movement in his face and to archive it in his memory. He held his gaze, only the treacherous grinding of his jaw might have indicated that the question bothered him.

"Let her be my concern," he replied, "this is a personal matter for which I don’t need your stormtroopers."

"But Supreme Leader ... what if the Resistance finds allies in the meantime?" Hux didn’t want to give up easily, he sensed. He took a step closer to his General.

"Who else should join forces with them?" he challenged, "Do you really think there's anyone left who wants to join this jumbled bunch? Do you doubt the strength and influence of the First Order, Hux?"

Hux pursed his lips. His eyes seemed to scan his facial expressions. Then he lowered his eyes.

"No, of course not," he replied, "Excuse me ... Supreme Leader."

He narrowed his eyes, trying to read something out of Hux's expression, but found nothing that made him seem suspicious. No need to spend more time with him than necessary. So instead he nodded and turned to the communications officer.

"Follow the command and collect the fleet."

He turned and left the bridge with big steps. When he was out of earshot and sight, one of the commanders turned to General Hux and looked at him questioningly.

"Should we really carry out the order, sir?"

Hux looked at the spot where the Supreme Leader of the First Order had stood, even though he
had long since disappeared. An inconspicuous smile formed on his lips as he crossed his arms behind his back and turned to the bridge.

"Yes," he said. "Just do it. Everything is going according to plan."

The officers exchanged glances, but didn’t hesitate to execute their orders. Hux took a few steps before he reached the window and stared into the cold, empty darkness of space. Yes, everything went according to plan. It was almost too simplistic for him how predictable the once mighty, unapproachable Kylo Ren had become. He couldn’t reach for a final explanation yet, but he remembered a conversation he had had with Supreme Leader Snoke a long time ago - a conversation that had prepared him that this very situation would happen one day.

"Ren is strong in power but weak in spirit. One day, perhaps he will betray us all, because his personal concerns stand in his way. I can’t see when and if this hour will ever come, but when it's here, I need your full loyalty, General Hux. So that the First Order can survive."

Hux was not about to break that promise. Not now, where they were so close to succeed and break the last resistance against their new order. It would happen in a way that would brand him irrefutably "unscrupulous" - but he didn’t care. It was worth it.

"Lieutenant Jensen, what about the *Supremacy*?" Hux asked after a few moments of silence in which only the beeping of the control panels had filled the room, "Do we already have access to its backup system?"

"Not yet," replied Jensen, a young officer on Hux's right, "The attack of the *Raddus* has partially destroyed the control units of the databases. We have to bridge it first, but I think we will be able to save most of it."

"How long?"

Jensen turned to Hux.

"A few days, maybe a week."

Hux nodded.

"Excellent," he said, smiling. One week or another wouldn’t make any difference anymore.

OOO

"What game are you playing here?"

Vice Admiral Jotis was about to grab and shake Rey by the collar. She took a step back, but returned his gaze with the same intensity and contentiousness. The beeps of the equipment had become louder - all instruments seemed to play crazy at once.

"Which game? Do you see me doing anything, sir?" Rey said venomously, and her gaze fell on the communications officer, desperately trying to figure out the panel's unmanageable orders and failing miserably while doing it. Nothing seemed to help; even the locking mechanism of the locks and launch pads through which the X-wings should fly outside no longer worked. Rey was secretly relieved that the launch of the planes was delayed, but she told the truth: she actually didn’t do anything. She even doubted that she had the power to block all X-Wings, disrupt the
radio, and even block the base itself. But who else could do that?

"Leave her alone, Vice-Admiral," Finn jumped in and stepped to Rey's side. "Why would Rey sabotage the launch? And how? Don't you think that's very far-fetched?"

Jotis clenched his hand into a fist. He was a handsome, tall man with a long beard and cropped hair, and was an imposing figure, but Rey was far too upset to give him the respect he deserved as a former commander of a Resistance battleship.

"Most of all, I think it's pretty striking that it's happening right now," Jotis replied, giving Rey a condescending look, "And from all we know, our Jakku scavenger is not unskilled in dealing with the Force. Surprising, but that's the way it is."

Rey gasped. She knew that her reputation among the remaining Resistance fighters was not very good, but Jotis's voice spoke of an arrogance that hurt her on a level that she herself had not thought possible. She thought that by now she could overlook the fact that she didn't have a rich background story, but it still hurt - the thought of being a nobody in the eyes of the battle-hardened Resistance officers who had been waging this war longer than she could think. And it awoke a longing in her, which she immediately repressed again. Not now.

"As I told you, it's not me!" she repeated in a firm voice and she could feel that not even half of the officers believed her.

They heard a commotion in front of the door and seconds later Poe stood in front of them. Hetore the helmet from his head and sparkled angrily in the round. Sweat was on his forehead. With a bright, confused beep, his droid BB-8 followed him - the clueless stringing of his noises made Rey realize that not even the droids knew what was going on in the station.

"Can anyone explain to me what the hell is going on out there?" Poe asked excitedly and made a sweeping motion with his arm, "Nothing works anymore! We couldn't even fire our guns if we wanted to!"

"Ask her," Jotis nodded toward Rey, "She wanted to stop the launch anyway. Coincidentally."

"Rey?" Poe's expression became helpless, "What ... what should ... what do you have to do with it?"

"Nothing!" Rey defended angrily, "I am not doing anything! It's true, I didn't want you to fly because the cruiser of the First Order is about to retire anyway ..."

"How do you know that?" Poe stepped up to her suspiciously; a frown creased between his eyebrows. Rey waved.

"Nevermind. I don't know what's happening out there. Someone else wants to stop you from starting. Probably because he's just as aware that you're in danger ..."

Rey's face froze to an ice block. She suddenly felt like scales fell from her eyes. How could she be so blind? She was not the only one on the station who was Force-sensitive. In fact, she had been the one to get all that started.

"Leia," said Rey softly. Then she stormed out of the command room without another word.

OOO
She didn’t know why and how, but she knew it was Leia. She tried to concentrate, trying to locate her in the torrents of the Force, but it was as if Leia would prevent it. How could she miss it? How could she not notice what was going on? She was suddenly terrified. She feared for the only woman in this huge complex who could at least begin to understand what was going on in her. The woman who had lost so much - all except the last fighters for her cause, who she now tried to protect with her last strength. Rey thought of Luke, the sense of peace she had felt right after his earthly cover had passed. How could she not have noticed that Leia longed for that feeling too - after all that had happened to her?

Rey skidded across the floor as she reached the door to Leia’s room. She pounded the button to open the door, but it didn’t respond. Rey stood on tiptoe to look through the window of the lock into the room behind it. She heard footsteps approaching - Finn and Poe had followed her.

"Leia!"

Rey slapped her hand against the milky glass. She could see her outline behind it; she stood stiff in front of her bed and didn’t move. She also made no move to open the door.

"What is she doing?" Poe tried the door opener again and failed too. Rey took a step back.

"She wants to stop you from killing yourself, you fool!" she snapped at Poe, reaping a puzzled look from both Poe and Finn. Poe wanted to say something loudly, but Finn stopped him with a wave of his hand.

"Rey, damn, you have to stop this secrecy," Finn said emphatically, "We have no idea what you're talking about. Would you please explain what's going on?"

Rey shifted uneasily from one foot to the other and bit her lip. She couldn’t imagine a more inopportune time to explain what was going on inside her and especially in her mind. That she felt this connection and could hardly fight it, that Leia obviously knew more about it than she was even aware and that the damned Supreme Leader of the First Order had decided to spare them, even if she had no idea why. How could she explain that without listening like a maniac?

"I can’t," she said helplessly, "I can’t explain it to you. Not now. Not as long as Leia spends all of her power in there to protect us!"

Poe’s right eyelid twitched, but he said nothing. Rey knew that Leia meant something to him - in a strange way that presumably neither he nor she could explain, but the concern for her general prevailed at that moment. Even if Rey guessed that the matter was not settled yet.

"How do we get her out of there?", Finn examined the door, but found no clue to open it from the outside. Poe hit the door opener again, then changed his mind and fished for the blaster he wore on his belt.

"Step aside," he instructed the two of them and got ready to fire, pointing the barrel at the control knobs that operated the door’s closing mechanism. But before he pulled the trigger, a loud signal sounded - and the door automatically pushed aside.

"Leia!"

Leia had collapsed on the floor. She wore her sleep clothes and her hair hung tangled in her face. It looked as if she had slept, but her expression was peaceful and dreamy as if she was experiencing a particularly beautiful dream and was not lying in the middle of the floor in a neglected rebel station.
Poe rushed to her and lifted her upper body. She was still breathing - flat and fast, just as Rey had experienced it once before, but she was alive. Her skin was even paler and more translucent than before and they all realized for the first time that Leia was no longer the young, battle-hardened princess and rebel. She was marked by life, loss and death.

"Leia," Poe said softly, stroking her hair lovingly as if he was talking to his own mother. And Rey felt like he did that right now. She noticed a sting in her stomach.

Slowly and heavily, Leia opened her eyes. A dark shadow lay on her face; it brightened slightly when she recognized Poe, Rey, and Finn. She raised her hand feebly, and Rey gripped it worriedly.

"Poe ..." Leia said softly and in a fading voice. Poe held his breath.

"Yes, I am here."

"Fine," Leia replied, "Good. So I can tell you personally that you are an idiot."

Rey and Finn exchanged an astonished look. Poe raised his eyebrows.

"I don’t understand…"

"At some point, Poe Dameron ...", Leia said and closed her eyes, "At some point I'm not there anymore to stop you from putting your crazy ideas into action. Someday…"

She fainted again, and Rey felt a wave of pain wash over her.

OOO

Every inch of his body ached. He felt it deep into his subconscious. It wasn’t like when he looked his father directly in the eye and took his life; watching his lifeless body fall into the depths and take so many memories with him. It was a different kind of pain. As if the last threads that still hung on her were severed forcibly. He felt her power dwindle. She was not gone yet, but she had hit the road. She wanted to leave. She would go. She had chosen her destiny and was now where he could no longer reach her.

"Mother…"

Back then, when Han Solo died by his hand, it had been an attempt at liberation. An attempt that failed, he had to admit. But she ... he could never have killed her. Although he had tried to hate her, even though he had tried to separate himself from her. But some wounds never truly healed.

He concentrated and tried to find her. But he failed again. She slipped through his fingers like sand; like a distant memory that was fading away, a little bit more every second. He tried to recall the moment when he saw the bridge of the Resistance cruiser and felt her presence, for the first time in so many years and after locking her out for so long. He had seen no anger and no disappointment in her. No grudge or hatred for killing the love of her life.

He had only seen regret. And this memory would haunt him for the rest of his life.
Chapter End Notes

The next chapters are getting pretty intense - but I'll do it for our space princess. *fist in the air*
Thanks again for the kudos and bookmarks, I really really appreciate all of them <3
Rey awoke with the uneasy feeling of being watched, but then realized that it was her aching neck that had roused her from sleep. It cracked dully between her shoulder blades as she stretched and sat upright in the chair. It was dark; only a small nightlight was lit on the table next to Leia’s bed. She breathed calmly and evenly and seemed to sleep dreamlessly. Rey looked around; she was alone. Finn had been gone a long time ago, but Poe had decided to watch over Leia with her until she regained consciousness. He had to leave the room in between, for which she didn’t blame him. After the chaos in the hangar there was much to do. Rey leaned back in her chair, giving the sleeping Leia a worried look.

Rey could barely feel her anymore. Her aura was weak and hardly noticeable, let alone somehow gaining insight into her thoughts. Her act today might have cost her the last bit of strength she still had, but she still did it, knowing that maybe there was no going back afterwards. Everything for the Resistance.

The door opened, and Poe entered. In his hands he carried two steaming cups of Caf. Rey gave him a slight smile as he sat down and handed her a cup. When Rey took the warm cup between her hands, she noticed that her fingers were freezing cold.

"So you can get some color on your face again," Poe explained, taking a long sip of his own before leaning back in his chair. Rey nodded him thanks.

"By the way, you were right," he remarked after some time of silence, in which they had only listened to Leia’s breath. Rey turned around.

"About what?"

"The First Order Cruiser," Poe leaned forward, resting his elbows on his thighs, "It disappeared. Did not even send search drones. It was just there and then ... gone. If we had started, they would have discovered us."

Rey avoided his eyes and took a sip of Caf. It was scalding hot, but she swallowed it anyway, death-defying.

"I know you don’t really want to talk about it, but ..." Poe cleared his throat, "How did you know?"

Rey didn’t answer at first. She already found it difficult to open up to Finn although she appreciated him as a friend. It was another thing with Poe - she didn’t know him for so long and even though she liked him, she had the feeling that he was ... different. Harder to judge than Finn or Rose. He was a daredevil, and not only once did she feel that he could be quite a womanizer when he got the opportunity, but that was not the point. He was too involved, both physically and mentally. And finally, she knew that he had once been Kylo Ren’s prisoner, as she herself had been, but his encounter with him had not gone so well.

"The Force," she said then, "I can use it for more than just moving rocks. But you probably know that."

"Yes," he answered, and she realized that he was a little impatient, "Yes, I know that. I have seen what Leia can do thanks to the Force. But I haven’t heard that you can foresee the future."
"It was not a vision of the future. Not really," Rey replied evasively. "It's more of a ... feeling. I just knew it. I know ... that's certainly not the explanation you wanted. Actually, it's not an explanation at all."

Poe sighed.

"No," he confessed, "but I suppose I have to live with the fact that most people only tell me half the truth."

Rey's mouth twitched slightly upwards. Finn had told her the story of Vice Admiral Holdo and Poe's doubts about her. She looked back at Leia's bed, but still felt Poe's eyes on her.

"Maybe you'll tell me the whole story someday," he said slowly, and something in his tone felt strange; it was actually something she could feel. But it was a strange feeling - it was like it did not belong to her. She just nodded and quickly took another sip of her drink, but the odd impression remained. Whatever it was.

She almost swallowed it up because suddenly she saw that Leia's eyes were open and staring at the ceiling. Then she glanced over at them with a glassy look. Poe also stood up, startled.

"Oh," said Leia in a husky voice, "Caf. I could need one too."

Rey glanced at Poe, whom he replied with a nod: "I'll be right back."

He walked quickly out of the room, leaving Rey and Leia alone. Rey reached for Leias hand and touched her gently.

"How do you feel?" Rey asked as she moved her chair closer to the bed. Leia indicated a shake of the head.

"Miserable," she said, "But I've experienced worse. Most of all, I am very, very tired."

Rey nodded casually.

"The X-Wings ... they didn't start. Because of you," Rey squeezed Leia's hand lightly, "You prevented the First Order from discovering us. You ..."

She hesitated, but Leia's warm gaze encouraged her to continue.

"You did what I couldn't do."

Leia's lips twisted into a slight smile.

"Oh Darling," she said softly, "you have to stop selling yourself short. You are so much ... more. I only did what needed to be done to stop these stubborn bucks from their suicide mission. So it would be worth it."

"I don't understand ..." Rey made a helpless gesture, "So what would be worth it?"

Leia closed her eyes for a moment and Rey thought she might have fallen asleep again, but then she opened her eyelids and suddenly Rey knew from whom Ben had inherited his eyes.

"You know the answer."

Rey paused.
"That’s impossible. He can’t…"

"He can. And he has. He warned me about the cruiser, he asked me to make sure that we kept our heads down until he could force Hux to abandon the search. So you all can be safe. I agreed. I knew it would cost me my last reserves of strength, but I didn’t tell him. And it's the price I was willing to accept," she sighed, "I think this was the first time he had been selfless about something."

"But ...", Rey searched for words, "I talked to him and he refused. I don’t understand why he has changed his mind. And why..."

"I think he was disappointed," Leia surmised, "So many times I've seen how sad Ben was as a kid, when Han came home after a long time and just talked about his experiences as a smuggler instead of listening to Ben. You both ... you seem to have an extraordinary connection. And the first thing you ask him for after weeks is a matter of the Resistance. Maybe he was hoping for something different than that."

Rey thought of the disappointment and pain she had read on his face and mind. She hadn’t imagined it. All at once the bad conscience spread throughout her. He was the new Supreme Leader - he had no reason to help, even if she begged him. And yet he did.

"How ... how did he get in contact with you? Did you see him?"

"Rey ... I carried him under my heart for nine months, and he never really disappeared. He is always there, in one way or another," Leia's voice became scratchy as she spoke; she coughed and continued, "I've always been a very pragmatic person, you know. I've never believed in that one great love that clouds your mind and makes you float. I loved Han. But never in the same way as I love Ben."

Rey felt a lock in her throat. Even though Leia and she had come closer to each other in the past few weeks, she had always avoided talking more about her son than necessary. It just hurt her too much.

"That's why it was so hard for me to let go and realize that my sweet little boy is dead. Gathered by something dark that was imposed on him just because he falls into Vader's bloodline. It's so unfair," she pressed her lips together, "He couldn't do anything about it. He was just a kid."

"Your son is not dead," Rey whispered, "his conflict ... it is still there. I felt it very clearly."

"Maybe. But don’t be naive, Rey. He will never be the same as he used to be. Not if he doesn’t want it himself. But ..." she blinked exhausted, "There's ... something in him. Something that was not there before."

"What?", Rey felt that Leia squeezed her hand and looked at her attentively. She smiled lightly and dreamily before falling back to sleep.

"Hope."

OOO

Rey felt it clearly. She couldn’t see him - but she knew he was there. He resisted the connection as best as he could, but he still couldn’t hide his presence. She sat on her bed; Poe had sent her to
sleep because, according to him, she almost looked like a walking dead woman, but she found no
sleep. The sun rose, and a fine streak of light fell on the shelf in the wall and the things that still lay
there, dusty and useless. She had not once hit Ahch-To’s books, she realized, and she didn’t really
expect an answer to her questions in those old, fat tomes.

"You don’t want to talk to me, do you?" she asked into the emptiness of her room, but received no
answer as expected.

"I just wanted you to know that I understood something," she continued, her eyes scanning the
room, but still no figure appeared, "I understand now that I was ... wrong. I thought you might be
able to strip Snoke like a cloak. That I just had to help you get rid of him, and that everything was
fine. But..."

She took a deep breath.

"Maybe that's not possible. Maybe too much has happened for that. Maybe I can’t save you."

She had only whispered the last sentence; It was incredibly hard for her to admit that fact. But
Leia had made one thing clear to her: someone who didn’t want to be saved wouldn’t be
converted by anyone. No matter how hard you tried.

"But what you did, even though you didn’t have to ..." she looked down, "It shows me that
maybe not all is lost yet. That there is ... something else. Nothing absolutely good, but nothing
absolutely bad either. And I want you to know that I will not give up this hope. You are still
something… to me."

Her room remained empty and quiet, but she couldn’t shake the feeling that he had heard every
single word. He was not angry or upset; but he understood.

"If you need me ... you know where to find me."

She left her room without turning back. A touch brushed her neck as she went out, but maybe she
had imagined it too.

OOO

He sat in his usual place around the meeting table, his hands folded in front of his face. The
projection of a star chart hovered over the table; it showed a part of the Outer Rim, at which he
stared; He looked through it rather than really studying it. With a wave of his hand, he rotated the
map and focused on the systems and planets near the Core. He saw Coruscant, Naboo, and an
empty spot that had once been the Hosnian system, but had now been erased from the map. But
his eyes remained the longest on a distant, green planet. He knew him, very well. However, he
had not set a foot on it for ages. There were too many memories, too many emotions attached to it.
He even avoided to think about it.

He kept the map spinning, scanned most of the names of the systems and stars until he found it: a
desert planet named Jakku, floating solitary in the darkness, as far out in space as anyone could
imagine. His face twisted into a thoughtful expression.

How can you do it?

How do you do it, you, who came from nowhere?
You came out of nowhere.

You are nothing.

But not to me.

He heard footsteps approaching. With a snap of his fingers, the map diminished, and the planet disappeared. In its place, the image of the galaxy floated above the table in all its glory and cast pale light rays on his face.

The footsteps slowed and stopped, followed by a few moments of silence in which only the clatter of the monitors and computers could be heard. Then someone cleared his throat.

"Supreme Leader."

He rubbed his temples.

"Hux."

Hux rose face appeared in front of him. The projection of the star map alternated light and shadow on his skin, making him appear even sicker and more exhausted than he already was. Only his green eyes were full of ambition and zest for action, as usual.

"Supreme Leader, I'm sorry to bother you," Hux said, his tone clearly indicating that he didn’t care much if he interrupted him on something, "but we have some important issues to resolve."

"What issues?" he fixed Hux with his eyes; he didn’t seem to want to hint again at the failed search for the rebels, but he was prepared for the moment.

Hux didn’t wait for him to ask him to sit down; he just did it. He leaned back in his chair and returned his gaze.

"The future," he said succinctly, "Now that the Resistance ... has disappeared, it is time to look forward. To think bigger. We still have the upper hand in the galaxy and the last remnants of the Senate will soon join us. We must..."

He made a defensive gesture.

"Hux, spit it out. What do you want?"

Hux pursed his lips insulted, but collected himself again.

"I want to rebuild the Starkiller Base."

He could not help it; a faint, nasty laugh came from his throat as he heard Hux's suggestion.

"Really, Hux? That's our masterplan? We do the same thing again? Like the Empire at that time?"

"I thought that was exactly what you wanted, Supreme Leader," Hux replied, his eyes narrowing, "you who uphold Vader's heritage so much. I'm sure, Supreme Leader Snoke ... "

"... would tell you the same if he hadn't been sliced by a lightsaber," he replied pointedly, his eyes falling on the star chart in front of them, "A galaxy may be captured by weapons, but they won't hold it together. What we need is fear."

"Fear," Hux repeated flatly, "You can stir up fear with weapons too, you realize that, right?"
"Fear of the unknown is far more effective," he replied with conviction, ignoring Hux tone, "People have feared me, even though they only knew my name and rumors. And they still do. We will keep that. Not by threatening every human being to blow up his home planet. Where nothing is left, nothing can be ruled. And our fleet is still big enough to keep the systems under control."

Hux said nothing, but his mind worked behind his forehead, he could see it.

"So what do you suggest, Supreme Leader?" he said and it sounded like he was squeezing the words out between his clenched teeth.

"The Knights of Ren," he replied, "It's time they get a task within the First Order. Instruct Captain Sol to use them for reinforcement in the future. They will take my place, which I held under Supreme Leader Snoke. We still have a lot to do."

With his last sentence, he looked again at the map of the galaxy and at the vast fringes that were still unexplored. A vast mass of stars, planets, and systems, largely eluding the control of civilized systems, but that would change. He would change it.

And create a new order.

"As you command, Supreme Leader," Hux' sarcasm was unmistakable, but there was something else in his voice; something he couldn't quite interpret. Hux got up and started to move away, but turned to face him once again.

"You know, Supreme Leader ... the Force may be useful if you don't want to get your hands dirty," he said with a puzzling undertone, "but there's nothing like a well-timed and targeted blaster shot when people start to lose fear to the sleight of hand."

He didn't answer. Normally he would have smashed Hux against the wall for such a statement; but something was wrong. He could not reach for it yet, but something warned him to be careful. To be much more careful.

Hux steps moved away quickly and he was alone again. Even if he never really felt alone.

But there was something else. For a moment he thought it was the connection that called him again. A movement in the Force that was strengthening in his chest. It was like a wave slowly building up near the coast, finally breaking on the rocks. He felt it approaching.

Something happened.

OOO

Rey had to sit down. She was suddenly dizzy in the head and even breathing was difficult. Actually she was about to go to the infirmary to accompany Rose on her last day out of the hospital bed, but she couldn’t go one step further. It hit her abruptly, in the middle of the corridor.

She knew that feeling. She had already felt it once, not long ago.

She fell to the ground. Her heart was racing in her chest, cold sweat on her temples. She gasped.

For a moment she saw him. In front of her, at the end of a long room, at the front of a polished table. He had his lightsaber activated and cut a chair in half in blind rage. The back of the chair fell
to the ground, traversed by the fiery-bloody welts of his laser sword. He looked at her, glassy-eyed and pale-faced. Then he disappeared.

"Ben ..."

Pain seemed to be what united them. No matter how hard they tried to shut each other out.

Rey knew that he had felt it too.

Leia Organa had started her last journey to the stars.

Chapter End Notes

Again: Thanks for the kudos and bookmarks <3 and no, I'm not crying, you are.
"Rey, it's time."

Rose's fine, petite voice ripped Rey out of her thoughts. For the first time in weeks, she had picked up the two halves of the lightsaber and looked at them. There was still some energy in it, like a machine running on reserve, but she doubted that she could ever put it back together. Building lightsabers was complicated, and perhaps her experience as a scavenger gave her some insights, but the crystal inside was broken and she had no idea how to replace it. With a long sigh, she put the remnants of the lightsaber back on the shelf.

"You look nice."

Rey smiled sadly at Rose. One of the officers had loaned Rey a dress and a cloak of plain black linen for the funeral; she had absolutely nothing suitable that she could have put on and she would rather not have gone there than to wear her old gulf from Jakku. But actually, that was ridiculous; Leia certainly would not care if she was dressed like a Tusken Raider.

"Thank you. But I don't feel like it," Rey replied and she felt the lump solidify in her throat again, "I've never felt so miserable."

"Yes, I can see that," Roses voice trembled slightly, "You were close to her, weren't you?"

Rey nodded, though she didn't really know if that was true. Was Leia close to her? She had felt connected to her, and she was the only one she could really confide in, but at the same time she felt as if she had known too little about Leia. Now that she was gone, there were so many questions she wanted to ask her. So many things she didn't know, so many memories that had never been shared. Rey had grown up with the stories of the Rebels and the Empire, heard the myths about the Jedi, and how Darth Vader had been vanquished. But now there was nobody left. Nobody who could tell first-hand. She had wasted too much time.

"Let's go."

Rose hobbled a bit, but had a crutch to support, though she had only accepted it with clenched teeth. She thought it made her seem weak. But Rey had only complete admiration for the young mechanic; judging by the severity of her injuries, it was a miracle that she could still walk. She laid her hand encouragingly on her back as she walked, and Rose thanked her with a small smile.

It was absolutely quiet on their way towards the hangar. Most of the others probably went to the ceremony some time ago, but it was not just the absence of the people that weighed heavily on them. It was also a stifling, numbing silence that had embraced them all. It was grief, more than Rey had ever felt. The whole station was full of it, she felt it everywhere, no matter where she went. The loss of her chief general had hit them in the heart, more than they all could express. In those moments, the power to sense the feelings of her fellow human beings was much more of a burden to Rey than a gift, and she didn't manage to shield herself completely from it. It numbed her thoughts and made them rotate in circles, over and over again. Especially when Rey was among other people, the pain seemed to take her completely, like a tightening vise. That was also the reason she had been looking for loneliness more than ever lately. It was just easier to bear right now.
When they reached the hangar, it was almost empty, except for a few technicians and the droids left for emergency. But at least in this case, they could temporarily catch their breath. No cruiser of the First order had appeared again on the radar. He had kept the promise he had made to his mother. Nonetheless, that fact had not changed that even more people were looking at Rey with suspicion now – the rumors about her strange premonitions had spread. Rey didn’t want to know what was going on behind her back, but right now she didn’t care. Everything had become less important at the moment.

They went through a door and up a narrow staircase - Rose made it almost without Rey’s help, dogged and ambitious as she was. The Resistance General Staff had decided to hold the ceremony on the surface of the planet. No one expected an attack at the time and Rey felt as if everyone was glad to get some fresh air. The walls of the station had never seemed as close to her as they did now, and she slept even less than usual. Rey thought wistfully that she had enjoyed sitting and talking to Leia in those sleepless moments, but most of the time, she forced herself to interrupt those thoughts. It hurt too much.

"Hello you two."

Finn received them on the surface and helped Rose climb through the door which was more of a trapdoor in the sandy bottom than a real entrance. Rey stepped out into the fresh air and took a deep breath - the wind was rough and dusty on the planet Karr, but it also carried a resinous note of trees from the nearby woods that reminded Rey a bit of Takodana. The sky was gray and cloudy and made it seems as if it had adapted to the mood of the people. Hardly anyone spoke, even though almost all officers, mechanics, technicians, pilots and soldiers were present. Rey felt one or two eyes on her, but today most of them were busy with their own thoughts. Rey pulled the hood of her cloak over her head and hid her face as she moved closer to the glass sarcophagus that was Leia's final resting place until she was ceremonially cremated.

She looked as beautiful and impressive as she had been in life. Her steel-gray, hip-length hair was braided next to her in a loose braid and adorned with purple flowers that Rey didn’t know, but she'd heard they were growing somewhere on the canyon rocks. They were not necessary to strengthen Leia's beauty, which she had kept until old age, but they still gave her a loveliness that made her look almost like a young woman. Her hands were folded; Rey saw that someone had taken the ring from her finger and put it on a lace around her neck. It glittered in the few rays of sunlight shining through the clouds. Rey felt the knot in her chest again.

"Are you okay?" Finn put a hand on Rey's shoulder as she looked at Leia. Rey nodded heavily.

"Yes," she replied, "She looks so ... peaceful."

She felt Finn tighten the pressure on his hand.

"Yes. I wonder if she ... well ....," Finn shrugged, “if she's up there somewhere ... watching us. And wondering if we can do it without her.”

"If she's anywhere, she’s probably wondering why we're staring at her that way."

Rey and Finn laughed softly, even if it seemed inappropriate. But it took a little bit of the burden away that lay on her heart. They mingled with the crowd as Vice Admiral Jotis approached and stood in front of the sarcophagus. The few conversations fell silent immediately.

"My friends," Joti's voice was powerful but saddened; Rey still thought of his behavior in the command room with some annoyance, but today was not a day to complain to anyone. She lowered her eyes.
"We don’t want to think about war today. About fight, misery and pain. We want to think of the woman without whom no-one of us would be here today. General Leia Organa was extraordinary in everything she did, and she never did it for herself alone. I have come to know her as a remarkable strategist, but above all, I valued her pragmatic and open character. She was our leader, but most of all, she was our protector. I know she wouldn’t want me to just endlessly sip licorice here,” he smiled faintly, and some did so too, "So I ask you, don’t forget her and the reasons she gave her life for. Think of her as our general, as our leader and as our friend."

Rey felt empty and cold inside. She suddenly had the feeling she knew even less about Leia than before. So many people knew her better than she ever did. She didn’t know what it was like to have a mother; And yet she felt like she was losing one. When Leia’s sarcophagus was taken away, she felt more alone than ever. She resisted the eternal desire that burned in her at such moments more than ever, but she realized that it was getting harder and harder. She wanted to see Ben. Even though she knew how wrong this desire was. He was light-years away, as far away from her as one could imagine, but at the same time she knew he was the only one who could understand that feeling. Maybe more than he liked.

"Do you want to go downstairs? Have a drink, talk about something else?"

Finn and Rose stood next to Rey and turned their faces to her. Rey saw that Rose was crying; she sniffed, her eyes flushed, and Finn had one arm comforted around her. Rey was searching for words.

"Please give me a moment," she said faintly. Even though the two of them were the people in this huge complex she liked best, she just could not endure their presence now. Finn just nodded uncertainly as Rey turned and left the assembly. She didn’t go far away; After a few dozen meters, the ground turned into a steep, rugged cliff that ended in a crater-like canyon. The wind grew stronger and hit Rey sharply in the face.

She was okay with it. So she could tell herself that this was the reason for her tears.

OOO

Rey stared at the wall where her bed stood. The night had long since fallen, but she didn’t sleep, once again. No peace had spread inside her, even when the tears had long since dried up and the feeling of loss slowly faded. There was only emptiness. An emptiness that Rey hadn’t sensed in such an intensity for a long time. Rey felt like she was shrinking; as if her body was lying in an endless empty space, big as a cathedral, in which the echo of her thoughts repeated itself thousands of times. It drove her crazy. She pressed her palms against her eyes, but nothing changed. At such moments, Rey wished for the endless hot desert of Jakku and the small, makeshift apartment she had set up in the remnants of a weathered AT-AT. It was small, but it was hers. And it was enough. But now she was here, gripped by grief and pain, and she had never felt so out of place.

A noise made her sit up. Or rather, the absolute absence of any sound caught her attention. But she was not afraid of what she would see. Not this time. She turned on the other side and froze. It seemed like he was also lying in his bed. Millions of miles away and yet as close to her as possible. A blanket lay over him, his upper body bared. The last time she’d seen him like this, he had seemed like a mountain to her that no storm or earthquake could ever touch. But now he only seemed vulnerable and fragile. His pale skin tensed over his muscles. It had to be difficult for him
to open up again for the bond that still existed between them. But maybe he had felt the loneliness in her, realized how much she wanted to see him. How much she needed him.

"Today was Leia's funeral," Rey said softly, sliding her hands between her pillow and her head. The utterance of the words left her with a sting that she didn’t know which of them really felt it. He nodded.

"I know," he said bitterly. They fell silent. Rey wondered if she had sensed that he was there during the funeral, but she was probably too busy with her own grief to notice him. She looked at him; she noticed that his contours had rarely seemed as clear to her as now. She could literally feel the warmth of his body. He took a breath and his voice shook.

"I wish I had been there."

Rey could feel his sorrow to the depths of her own consciousness. She felt no grudge against him at the moment, just compassion. It wasn’t possible for her to feel anything else than this.

"She wasn’t in pain. She just fell asleep and ..." Rey groaned. She was unable to speak on. The memory was still too fresh for her. She saw that his upper arms were cramping, as if he had to stop himself from smashing something again.

"No, you don’t understand. It’s my fault. I would never have ... I wouldn’t have, if she ... " his eyes glazed over as he spoke, "I can never ask for her forgiveness."

"Ben," Rey interrupted him gently and her dark eyes searched his, "Don’t do this to yourself. You can’t torture yourself forever. She never wanted that."

"She hated me."

"No!"

Rey pulled her left hand out from under her pillow, hesitated for a moment, and then laid it on his cheek. For a moment she thought her hand would fall right through him, but then she felt his warm, damp skin under her fingers. Both trembled under the touch; Rey felt the feelings she had hidden behind thick walls for so many months, making her way back to the surface. Warmth spread from her fingers in her arm and her whole body, and suddenly her heart raced as if it wanted to jump out of her chest.

"Leia loved you so much. She never gave up on you. Not really."

"But I gave up on her. Like I gave up on myself."

His confession hurt Rey, although it was probably more of sorrow and self-mortification than selflessness. She ran her fingers carefully over the scar on his cheek; it had turned pale, but she still could feel it clearly. Like the scars on his soul. He shivered, but he let her do it.

"Do you remember Starkiller Base – the forest?" Rey whispered, brushing a strand of black hair from his face. He pulled his eyebrows together in a thoughtful expression.

"You could have killed me then," he said flatly. She hesitated for a moment before answering.

"I wanted to, at first."

There was no feeling in his eyes, as if he had accepted that fact, like the air he breathed.

"But you didn’t. And not on the Supremacy either," he said, blinking, "You just ... left. Why?"
Rey noticed a slight reproach in his voice, but said nothing. She thought for a moment. She hadn’t thought about it for a long time because there was nothing for her to think about. It was just like that. She had woken up in the burning Supremacy, the pieces of the destroyed lightsaber, and the unconscious Kylo Ren on the floor. She remembered that she had stood over him, almost as close as they were now, but there hadn’t been any anger. She remembered that, just as she did now, she had brushed his hair from his forehead and cast one last, disappointed look at him before she left the throne room. She couldn’t have killed him.

She doubted she could ever do it.

"I had to go. Because I’ve decided so," she said then, and her voice was little more than a hint, "But if I had killed you, I would have given up any faith that our vision is more than just smoke and mirrors. And I was not ready for that. And I am not even now."

He looked up. All at once she could see in his eyes what Leia had been talking about before her death: a glimmer of hope. At that moment it was not Kylo Ren who looked at her, but Ben Solo - deeply broken, but not lost. Not yet.

Rey put her hand in the hollow between his neck and collarbone. She could feel goose bumps forming on his bare skin. A yearning sound came from his throat and she realized that she was not the only one waiting for this for so many hours and days. He had forced himself to shut her out, and she understood that he had his reasons for it. But he couldn’t hide the fact that he had longed for her as much as she did.

He raised his hand to his chest and touched her hand gently. A feeling rushed through her body, mind and soul that made her heart jump and her head dizzy.

"Are you staying here tonight?" he asked, sounding like the boy who lived deep beneath the layers of fear and hate. She nodded.

"I'll try," she said, not admitting that she didn’t want to be alone either, but there was no doubt he knew that. She realized how the fatigue and memory of the events of the past few days were slowly overcoming her. As Rey dawned into sleep, she could still hear him whispering her name:

"Rey ..."

Then she fell asleep. Their hands were intertwined between them, united in their grief and sorrow and connected by the Force that flowed through them like a river of crystal clear water. And neither of them wanted to let go that night. When Rey awoke the next morning after a long and exceptionally restful sleep, she found the right side of the bed empty. But she could still feel his warmth as if he had just gotten up and gone.

Chapter End Notes

I think this is my favourite chapter so far, but it was also one of the hardest ones to write. Some of you who lost beloved ones too may understand. Thank you for reading and liking <3 more Reylo incoming, I promise. :)
It became impossible for him to ignore her.

It was not like he was seeing her all the time, though he could swear that more shadows than ever haunted his thoughts. But he felt her. All the time. All over. It became more and more difficult to concentrate his mind on something else. Sometimes he caught himself staring thoughtfully at his hand, recalling the feeling as their hands touched. When he took her hand in his and he realized that Luke had been right. He couldn’t shut her out anymore, and he suspected that the Force had its ways if he tried anyway.

The Force.

Something had changed. And it was not just this gigantic big hole that his mother's death had torn to his core.

His thoughts had been silent that night. The thoughts that chased him through sleepless nights and waking moments as long as he could remember. Where once was hatred, there was now affection. Where once was anger, there were now serenity and peace. Where once an eternal battle between light and dark raged, there was now something like… balance.

A balance.

He remembered talking to Luke once, many years back when he was a young Padawan and his uncle's treachery was still in the distant future. He had said then that it was the balance of the Force that the Jedi wanted. Peace, knowledge, balance, harmony - these were the words of the Jedi Code, the highest values and goals. But slowly doubt began to germinate in him. Doubts whether the Jedi were hung up on an idea that couldn’t be fulfilled, at least not in the way they thought. Like the Sith, who sought to preserve their power based on passion and unconditional devotion.

Let the past die.

Weren’t these his own words? Maybe it was the answer to the questions that moved him; the question of why he couldn’t oppose neither the dark nor the light side and why he felt exactly the same in Rey when he was close to her. Anger and rage flared up in her as well, but they were not as strong as his. It was as if she was his reflection – as if she was a scale that balanced his dark side and caught his hatred like a jar. The same way he felt her light and absorbed it like a ray of sunshine after a long, dark night.

He had made a decision. He had to get to the bottom of this strange feeling. And he had to go to where it all started. Where he had heard Snoke's voice in his head for the first time and had fallen into this consuming darkness. Where his uncle betrayed him, and he had turned away from everything that once meant something to him.

"Prepare my ship."

The officer at the other end of the internal communication channel immediately confirmed his orders, though his voice was uncertain. It didn’t happen every day that the Supreme Leader of the First Order left the command ship, especially Snoke had hardly been seen by anyone before.
It cracked briefly in the line.

"Supreme Leader, should we order a support squad to the launch pad that accompanies you?"

He hesitated for a moment, then pressed the button for transmission.

"No, I'm flying alone."

Short, unsettled silence.

"As you command."

He put on his cloak, gloves and boots before fastening his lightsaber to his belt. He wouldn’t need anything else - he would hardly have to defend himself where he went, and even if he did, he was prepared for it. No reason to carry more than necessary - or even to travel with stormtroopers. Besides, he thought to himself, he had no interest in Hux knowing more than he wanted him to. He didn’t trust him; but at least the First Order was more important to Hux than internal quarrels. He hated to admit it, but he needed Hux. Not as a human, but still as a general.

"Where are you going?"

He had felt her even before he heard her. He had turned his back on her, but glanced over his shoulder at the sound of her voice. She sat on her cot as usual, a blanket over her shoulders and something in her hand that looked like a book. He felt her perplexed look on the nape of his neck, accompanied by something that was probably worrying.

No one had cared for him for a long time.

"I have to go," he said. "Not for long, but I have to. I have to investigate."

"I see."

He turned to her and she lowered the book as her gaze met him attentively. He looked down at the weathered cover and the yellowed pages; it felt like he'd seen it before. He knelt in front of her, but resisted the urge to reach out for her hand again. He feared that he couldn’t let her go afterwards.

"This book…"

Rey followed his eyes.

"It's one of the Jedi writings of Ahch-To," she said, shrugging, "They're not very enlightening. Most of them contain just... metaphors and descriptions of meditation techniques. I have not touched the books for months. I just thought…"

She looked shyly in his face.

"You feel it too, right?"

He nodded slowly.

"I see we had the same idea," he replied, "That's also the reason for my trip. I want to... find out what happens. And why the Force is connecting us. Still connecting us."

"If you want to go to Ahch-To and look for the first Jedi Temple, then you should know that there is nothing left there," Rey said with sadness in her voice and pointed at the book, "That's all that's left, I think."
"I'm not going to the first Jedi Temple," he replied, "but to the last one."

Rey's eyes widened in surprise, but she understood what he was getting at. She nodded.

"Are we going to see each other?" she asked, and he realized that she was actually scared that he would shield himself from her and break the connection again.

He wasn’t sure if he could ever do that again.

"I think so," he said, "if the Force wants us to."

The corners of her mouth twitched slightly, but her expression was bitter, as if she didn’t quite believe him.

"Yes ... the Force," she closed the book in her hands. For a moment she sought his gaze; she and her hazel brown eyes that made him forget that she was not really there. He felt his heart skip a beat. Then she was gone.

OOO

His Command Shuttle was ready at the ramp, waiting for him to start. A few astonished glances accompanied him as he walked into the departure lounge, his face laboring and determined. He couldn’t deny that this intimidated atmosphere appealed to him in a certain way - or even flattered him. They had respect for him, they feared him. They had done it before and now even more. But he also knew that this didn’t apply to everyone.

He glanced up at the command unit. He could feel Hux’s hostility even at that distance - a flicker of disgust reflected in his green eyes and thrown at him like a rubber ball, but it was still too short to say what was really going on behind his high forehead and the ginger hair. Out of courtesy, Hux indicated a nod he barely noticed, but he preferred it anyway if Hux didn’t ask questions. He would leave him in charge. For now.

"Master Ren."

He turned around. Two of his knights approached him, both dressed in their usual black robes and helmets, but one with a distinctly defensive posture than the other. He also knew why: It was the knight whom he had relentlessly locked in his invisible grip, and who at least had a faint idea of what powers were slumbering in him when the dark side inside him took over. The soldiers and mechanics around them looked at them, equally curious and skeptic.

"Where are you going?" The knight, called the Monk, approached him cautiously; his voice was deep and manly despite the metallic distortion of the helmet he wore, "And why are you going alone?"

"That's my business," he replied firmly, leaving no doubt as to his words, "I won’t need your help. You now have a task within the First Order. I expect you to fulfill it and represent me during my absence."

"Task?!" hissed the second Knight barely audible, but still with a recognizable indignant undertone. He shot a derogatory look at him.
"What did you say?"

"Master," the Monk interrupted quickly, "the Rogue doesn't mean it that way. But I think we all wish to be more supportive. As a unit. And not as ..."

He lowered his voice.

"... as ordinary henchmen."

He wrinkled his nose.

"You are no henchmen," he answered angrily, "you are warriors and you are committed to the First Order as I am. The days when we're gazing through the galaxy like dirty bounty hunters are finally over. This thing is more important than any one of you."

The Monk and the Rogue straightened up. He felt the resistance growing in them.

"Master ... with all due respect ..."

"Supreme Leader," he corrected forcefully, stepping dangerously closer to them, "you have to integrate into this hierarchy. You are now part of it. And that's my last word. And the next time you look me in the eye, you take off those ridiculous masks you're still hiding behind. Do you understand?"

The knights were silent, although he could feel that they wanted to say something else. But they didn't dare to contradict their leader once again. He knew that intimidating his closest allies was not the smartest tactic, but under no circumstances he would have said more than necessary. He felt exactly that they were trying to fathom his feelings, to recognize his motives. He locked himself against it as best he could. Despite all this, he still faced Force-sensitive individuals; it would be reckless to forget that.

"I'll be back in a few days," he said, then he entered his shuttle. The last time he had seen it from within, they had encountered the Resistance on Crait - he remembered well how his anger had filled the room like a cloud of ash and dust. He had seen how Luke Skywalker's projection tried to stop them. How he had challenged and mocked him. As he took control of his shuttle and the engine started, his hands gripped the joystick so tightly that his knuckles would probably have stood out if he had not worn his gloves.

He sensed that his former master was close. And where he went, it would not get better.

OOO

Hux had followed the Command Shuttle's flight until it had taken the leap through hyperspace and vanished with a brief flash. Hux looked down at the launch pad. The two knights were still standing there - they too had followed the start of the shuttle with their eyes. Her conversation with the Supreme Leader had not gone well; he could tell by the gesture.

"I knew his personal interests would eventually get in his way," a slimy smile spread across Hux's face as he turned to the communications officer next to him, "Use hyperspace tracking. I want to know where he's going."

The officer followed his orders without hesitation. With each passing day and every decision Kylo
Ren made, the ice beneath him became thinner and more fragile. He just didn’t know it yet. And Hux was sure that the noose around the neck of the Resistance would contract soon enough. It would not be long.

He pursed his lips.

"And tell the ... knights that I want a conversation with them."

OOO


Rey wiped sweat and dust off her forehead and lowered her fighting staff. She didn’t know what time it was or how long she was training. The sky of Karr was still clouded, no sunbeam pervaded the thick layer of gray and purple clouds. Rey suspected that it was a peculiarity of the season that currently ruled the planet. At least she couldn’t remember seeing a cloudless sky in the past few months.

Nevertheless, she was glad to be outside; she had more or less slipped out of the ward to spend some time on her own. She needed the change from the monotonous life under the rocks. Here she had time and her mind free to think.

Ben would go to Luke's Jedi Temple. Rey wondered how much sense that made - if the vision she had seen was true, the building had burned to the ground. Was there anything else there that could give any indication why these things were happening? And what happened anyway?

Rey looked down at her hand, which was flushed and showed first signs of blistering despite the strips of fabric she tied around her palm and joints for protection. It was as if she could still feel his touch, as if he had left a scar that tugged, whenever she thought of him. She still felt his skin under her fingers, the warmth of his body and the electrifying energy that emanated from him. Why did she feel all this - why?

And why had she felt so safe that night? Why did it feel like… home?

A noise made her spin around. For a moment she thought she recognized the tall, black figure she had already seen once - in the command room, unnoticed by the rest of the crew, but with alert eyes that seemed to look directly into her soul. Reflexively, she raised her staff.

"Hey! It's me!"

Finn raised his arms protectively over his head. He grinned - apparently thinking she was fooling around. Rey blushed in embarrassment when she realized it was only her best friend, and quickly dropped her weapon.

"Sorry. I thought you were ... someone else."

"Who, Jotis?", Finn dropped his arms and slid them casually into his trouser pockets as he approached, "I know that guy can be a hell of a head, but you shouldn’t beat a vice admiral anyway."

Rey ignored her brief shock - and the tiny disappointment that she had actually expected someone else - but smiled at Finn amused as she moved her staff aside and swept over her sweaty face again.
"So you’re training?" Finn asked unnecessarily, indicating her weapon.

"I had to get out," Rey replied, "My unit is too tight for that and I can’t think clearly under the mountain. I am not used to it."

"Hmhm," Finn hummed thoughtfully, "Me neither."

He looked expectantly at Rey for a few seconds, as if to encourage her to continue. But Rey didn’t really feel like talking. She wanted to spend another hour exhausting herself and then falling into bed. At least that was her plan. Almost always worked.

"Rey ..."

Finn’s worried voice teased her. She knew that he meant well, but at that moment, when she was desperately trying to sort out her thoughts, she would have preferred to just say nothing.

"Finn, if you want to ask me again, if everything is alright ... please leave it," she replied tense, "I ... I appreciate you worrying, but I can handle it by myself. Yeah? Oh please, don’t look at me like that."

Finn had taken on a pouting expression - the kind that always made her laugh because she knew she was probably taking herself too seriously at the moment and he just wanted to cheer her up. But her laughter was still wistful and a bit forced. The uncertainty gnawed at her like a ravenous rodent.

"Finn, please ..."

"Oh, Rey," Finn gestured as if wiping away his own thoughts, "I know you well enough by now to know that you're not exactly an open book."

His expression became more serious.

"I never asked you for much. You gave me much more than the First Order ever could. But there’s one thing I want to ask you anyway," Finn reached out his hand as carefully as possible and touched her arm, "Please be honest with me. You don’t always have to tell me everything that bothers you. But you should know that you CAN if you want. Always. I owe you so much and that's why I want to give you my ear and my shoulder when you need them. And ... my weapons and my foot to kick, too. So basically everything."

Rey smiled slightly. She appreciated his enthusiasm, but if she couldn’t even be honest with herself, how could she be with him? She sighed deeply and frowned.

"OK. If I can ... then you will be the first I tell everything. Promise."

"I never asked for anything more," Finn said cheerfully, grinning broadly, "How about you change your clothes and we have a few with Rose ..."

Both of them flinched at the same time. A noise rose as if a storm had suddenly approached; Wind and dust swept over them, blocking their view for a moment. Rey held her hand protectively over her face. For a moment she panicked - she could hear the sound of machines. They roared and thundered like a herd of wild animals. She peered upwards between her fingers at the sky.

A glider broke through the cloud cover and for a moment the sun cast a beam across the plateau. It was a bright white ship, streamlined and perfectly smooth, and seemed more modern than any she'd ever seen. It sank lower and Rey realized that it was heading for the Rebel Station hangar.
She felt Finn's arm catch her. His voice trembled with excitement.

"This is not a First Order glider," he shouted over the noise, "These are ... these have to be Leia's allies!"

OOO

Captain Dorovan was in fact a lot more imposing than his holographic self. His skin was of a dark cocoa brown that brought out his pale blue eyes. His hair was cut short and white like the glider which he and the members of his general staff had landed on Karr. Although at first glance he appeared to be a priest, as Rey noted, it quickly became clear that Dorovan was certainly not just a leader, but a genuine soldier as well. He wore a tight leather combat uniform and a blaster that Rey probably couldn’t have lifted with two hands.

"Captain Dorovan, we are immensely relieved that you made it," Vice-Admiral Jotis was receiving the crew just as Rey and Finn secretly (and dustily) crept back into the station. Poe noticed her arrival and acknowledged it with a raised eyebrow.

Dorovan shook Jotis' hand, but didn’t appear to be interested in a conversation. His eyes literally scanned the pilots, technicians and officers present, while Jotis went on.

"We have not been able to contact you for a long time, because the eye of the First Order was on us ... luckily we remained undiscovered, but ..."

"Where's General Organa?" Dorovan's voice was strong and melodious, echoing eerily in the hall. Rey's impression of a priest only increased. Jotis swallowed and hesitated before answering.

"Captain ... General Organa ... she died a few days ago," he said slowly, sadly, “I'm sorry.”

Dorovan's scathing eyes turned to him.

"She died?" he asked and his lips formed in a surprised expression, "That's ... well, that's very unfortunate. General Organa was a close confidante of mine. We didn’t talk for a long time, but still ...”

His gaze swept over the people in front of him and stopped at Poe.

"The Air Force Leader, if I'm not mistaken - Poe Dameron?" He left Jotis with a confused expression on his face and approached the surprised Poe to shake his hand, "Your name and deeds are well known throughout the galaxy."

Poe gratefully took his hand.

"It's an honor, sir."

Rey could see Poe blush, but she knew perfectly well that those words flattered him. To be praised by such an impressive personality, that certainly didn’t happen to him every day. Rey poked Finn amusedly in the side and pointed to the crimson Poe - but then she noticed that Dorovan's eyes were on her. She froze. His eyes were piercing, almost hypnotic. And he went straight for her. Suddenly she was terribly embarrassed that she and Finn were covered in sand all over.
Dorovan stopped right in front of her - he was almost two heads taller than her. Almost everyone turned to face them in surprise, and Rey felt the attention suddenly turn to her. She didn’t like that.

"Ah."

Dorovan folded his hands over his stomach and nodded to Rey.

"You have to be the scavenger girl. The girl I've heard so much about."

Chapter End Notes

So, work started again at Monday so the next chapters gonna take a while, but I'm still writing every free minute and enjoy every second of it :) 
Also: YAY, over 100 Kudos <3 I am so happy! Thank you so much! :)
Through The Darkest Valley

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The sight had been revealed to him so many times before, but this time it was indeed the first time his hands trembled with excitement as the distant, green planet appeared before him.

Chandrila was a pearl of the galaxy. Green, lush meadows, crystal-clear lakes and the freshest air that one could only breathe characterized the planet. Although it housed numerous people and cities, the people of Chandrila endeavored to preserve their untouched nature as well as possible. That's why there was nothing for miles, except meadows, steppes and water. It was an indescribably beautiful piece of earth.

And yet he found it incredibly difficult to slowly put his glider into landing mode and steer the planetary surface. He hadn’t been here for years. The last time he had left the planet, he had fled with six of Luke Skywalker's students after leaving a bloodbath and scorched earth. The memory of that night still shone brightly in his memory, though he had tried to forget it. It had been the last act - the last act in Snoke's drama, which he had meticulously prepared for years. But there was something else. Something he was even less fond of right now than the burnt Jedi school.

Chandrila was his home planet. He had spent his childhood here, in his parents' house, on the edge of the Chandrilian capital Hanna.

He could see the city on the horizon when he had passed the edge of the atmosphere - the opulent glass towers, the white villas, and the mosaic-like fields. But they were not his goal. At least not his primary one. The academy had been many miles to the east, in the middle of nowhere, where no one lived except Squalls. He knew that it had been his mother's idea to build the new academy here – so it enjoyed the protection of the New Republic, without being too much in the public eye. Here there was peace and seclusion, without being in nowhere. Maybe, he thought now, it had been a way to stay in control. Control of some very powerful individuals, who had to earn the trust of the inhabitants of the galaxy after decades of being a myth.

Ironically, maybe just that control had made happen what had happened.

He flew over the ground at a height of several hundred meters, crossing rivers, lakes, and grassy seas, watching. He had landed here so many times, but after so many years, the landscape had changed significantly and become unfamiliar to him. Strange as something that was lost long ago. His grip on the controls cramped; he felt that he was close. It was a sense of a negative aura, as if he were entering an area that had been cursed. And in a way, it was.

He throttled the drive and went into descent. He was almost there. Even if the environment looked completely different than then. Nature had recaptured what had once been theirs. He knew that the Chandrilans had always followed that wisdom - everything man built but no longer used was left to nature to restore new habitat in abandoned homes, buildings and huts. Decay and resurrection were so close together here that he could literally grab it. He landed his glider in a valley on the edge of a small lake glittering in the sunlight. He took a few deep breaths in and out, then opened the hatch and stepped outside.

The sun was pleasant and a faint wind brought a smell of grasses, moisture and earth. He didn’t remember when he had set foot on a planet for the last time. He had already become so used to the darkness and cold of the endless universe that he had almost forgotten the feeling of warm sunshine and a breeze on his skin. Still, he shivered as he moved away from his glider. He pulled
his cloak tighter around him, knowing that the cold came not from outside, but from within.

He only had to take a few steps up a hill. He remembered clearly that there must have been a well-
trod path here, but it was completely overgrown and forgotten. Like the ruins that revealed
themselves after a few meters. He swallowed hard. The last time he had been here, the building
had been on fire. A huge fireball that rose up to the night sky and filled the valley with the blazing
and crackling sound of the flames. Now there was only a skeleton of blackened masonry and
decayed wood, overgrown with shrubbery and grass, passed like a feather in the wind. There was
nothing left that reminded of the former temple, built by so many hands and filled with so much
life.

Ben.

No.

Don’t do it.

He shuddered. Startled, he turned his head in all directions. It was as if the wind was whispering
to him; as if it was bringing the voices of the past to him. Or was it the vivid memory that deceived
him?

"Rey? Are you here?"

He merely whispered the words and didn’t really expect an answer; he would have felt it if she
had been there. But right now, he felt like he needed her more than ever by his side. Walking
alone through these abandoned ruins filled him with fear for the first time in a long while. He hid
his shaking hands under his cloak and went ahead. With every step he took, it seemed like he was
diving a bit into the past; something he had actually avoided for a long time. Wood and stone
crumbled under his feet, and here and there a mouse-sized animal ran away through the rustling
bushes with a squeak. He walked through a heap of rubble that had once been the entrance portal
- how many times had he crossed it, mostly running, because he was late for class? It felt like a
dream. A long-ago dream that felt strange, as if it didn’t belong to him.

That was true. This dream once belonged to Ben Solo.

He stopped, his eyes on the ground. He saw something under the rubble and the dusty wooden
planks - he could not remember having consciously perceived it in the days of the academy, but it
had obviously been there before. He saw a sign in the marble floor, which, despite the fire, still
shone white from the ashes. Artfully incorporated, but of course faded after all these years and no
longer as glamorous as before. A circle, divided in the middle, one half marble, the other black
obsidian. And in the middle the rudimentary representation of the galaxy, in line with both halves
of the circle. He knelt and wiped dust and earth from the drawing. It was…

Ben.

He looked up - and startled.

In front of him stood a girl. At least that's what he thought at first. But then he realized that she
could not really be there. It was like a ghost, a vision that had come true in the midst of the ruins of
the temple. Not tangible, but visible. Maybe it just existed in his head.

He heard a distant child laugh. The girl smiled shyly and then ran off. As if in a trance, his gaze
followed her - she was at most four years old, small and petite and wrapped in a light robe. But the
most striking thing about her was her face - it was narrow and delicate and surrounded by thick
black curls. And her eyes ... he had already seen those eyes. They haunted him day and night.
These hazel brown eyes.

The girl disappeared a wink later. And the children laugh passed.

Instead there were screams. Screams of children, of adolescents. He could hear them in his head, shrill and terrified. They drove him through the mark and leg.

*Ben.*

*Don’t do it.*

*Please.*

*Spare them.*

They didn’t stop, they got louder and louder. He felt his throat tighten. He heard the crackling of fire, he felt the heat, the rage, the furious anger that flooded through him light glistening white light. He saw the starry, royal blue night sky, illuminated by the glow of the all-consuming flames and the crackling fire.

And above all the hoarse, heavy laugh of a man. Or at least something like a “man”.

"STOP!"

He fell backwards on the hard-stone floor. Suddenly there was air in his lungs again, the sky above him had returned to its pale light blue and the silence of the valley pressed on his ears. He felt the sun on his skin and heard the singing of a bird somewhere in the distance. He had forgotten that he was here - here, now. He had forgotten that he was not there anymore. He had forgotten them. All of them.

"No matter how hard you try, the past has its ways to catch up with us."

He scrambled to his feet. He was ashamed that this had happened to him. Exactly him and under the eyes of his uncle.

"I already had a feeling that I'm meeting you here," he said, turning around. The pale outline of Luke's image was hard to see in the sunshine, but he was there, staring at him with his big, instructive eyes. Did he also perceive it? Had he seen the vision the same way he did?

"Why did you come here?", Luke crossed his arms over his chest, but didn’t take his eyes off him for a moment. He snorted contemptuously.

"I thought the Force gives you such a tremendous edge in knowledge," he replied sarcastically, "so you should know the answer."

"You came to find answers about the Force," Luke replied, unmoved and without the slightest sign of anger in his voice, "although I think you still ask the wrong questions. It is no longer a question of whether there is a balance of the Force or not. It's just about how it can be achieved."

He made a soft sound that sounded like a laugh, but nothing seemed less funny to him than this situation. Casually, he tapped the dust and grime of his cloak and pants - his eyes wandered over and over to where the girl had appeared in his vision. He didn’t dare to ask Luke about it, and gave his former master only a wordless, frowning look.

"You heard them, didn’t you?" Luke continued unperturbed, "The others. You heard what you didn’t want to hear then."
"Yes," he replied flatly, "I was probably too busy processing the treachery of my own uncle at the
time."


"I expected this answer. And you are right. I should have acted differently, I realize now," under
his beard appeared a sad smile, "I should not have left you to the claws of the monster, just
because I was afraid of it."

He glared at his uncle, but he sensed his perpetual resentment against him faded a bit. The echo of
memory still resonated in his head as he realized that those many young souls hadn't died through

"It's the one thing to fear the presence of a monster," he said softly, "but it's quite another when
you open the door for it and let it in."

Luke thoughtfully stroked his beard before answering.

"It's not up to me to undo things," he admitted sadly, "but it's up to you to change things for the
better."

"How?" He made a helpless gesture, "After all the things I've done, I've become a monster myself
that everyone despises."

"A sacrifice will be necessary. But when the time comes, you'll know it's worth it."

He looked doubtfully at his former master. Luke's face brightened slightly.

"You know ...," he said, his ghost settling on one of the blackened remains of a wall, "I'm starting
to understand what she sees in you. I didn't see it back then, out of fear and selfishness. But she
taught me a lesson."

"She?"

Luke nodded again. He could feel a light pink glow on his cheeks and he hid it by turning away
from his uncle. Luke cleared his throat.

"That night, when I felt you on Ahch-To and saw what connection you share, I first wanted to
prevent her from going to you. I thought it was a mistake. But she fought like a predator," he put
his hand on his shoulder, as if suddenly a well-known pain was tormenting him, and sighed, "And
she's still fighting."

He didn't answer. Instead, he was glad that Rey and the connection to her was not active at the
moment. He looked at the spot where his vision had revealed before.

"I've seen my past," he said, adding after a hesitation, "Does that mean ... that I have seen my
future too?"

He could see Luke's gaze and smile even now.

"Now you start asking the right questions."
"You killed Snoke?"

Stunned, several pairs of eyes stared at Rey - she had rarely felt as uncomfortable as she did now. Only Dorovan gave her a knowing, almost paternal look that disturbed her even more than the faces of Jotis, Finn and Poe. Finn had thrown his arms up in an uprising gesture when Dorovan told him why he already knew who this former nobody and scavenger of Jakku was. Previously it was only Leia who had known what had really happened after Rey's departure from Ahch-To. And now she was faced with the fact that every single word she'd ever said about it was now put to the test.

"Why, what, and how ...?", Finn got up and walked up and down the command room. All but a handful of officers had been sent outside; Finn wouldn’t have been in the conversation either, but Rey had insisted. A mistake, as it turned out. But at some point she would have had to tell him. Didn’t she?

"I wanted ...," Rey began, startled and continued, always knowing that many eyes were on her, "I wanted to tell you that I was on the Supremacy. For real. But I couldn’t. But…”

She shook her head.

"... but I didn’t kill Snoke. I was there when it happened. But it wasn’t me."

The helpless facial expressions around her only intensified. And Rey could not blame them - at the moment everything sounded like it had been fancied by a madman.

"And who was it then?"

Poe's voice was sharp as a razor. Rey pressed her lips together but couldn’t answer. On Dorovan's forehead, a small wrinkle had formed and Rey returned his gaze with the same skepticism.

"But Captain Dorovan," she said doubtfully, "How do you know about Supreme Leader Snokes death?"

Dorovan's face smoothed slightly and he laughed softly.

"I have my sources, Rey, though I cannot tell you," he replied, "and these sources undoubtedly say that it was the scavenger girl who murdered the powerful Supreme Leader. It has even been confirmed by his closest henchman and the search for you has been declared as his "top priority".".

Rey jumped as if she had hit the back of her head.

"Kylo Ren?" she exclaimed shrilly.

Dorovan nodded and leaned back in his chair.

"As far as we know, he is now the new Supreme Leader of the First Order."

Rey sensed that Poe also flinched next to her. He definitely hadn’t forgotten his encounter with him - even though he was tough. But penetrating into the most private realm of man - thoughts and memories - left its mark. Rey knew that. She sank down in her chair. She didn’t understand anything anymore. Did he deceive her? Did he just use her to finally capture her? But why had he then called off the search? Was it all part of a game - did he want to lure her out in a particularly devious way, win her trust and stab her in the back? Suddenly pictures appeared in front of her inner eye. Pictures of her own execution; and all her friends had to watch. Knowing that she had betrayed them and weighed them in false security.
And all because of him?

"Rey!"

Finn suddenly stood next to her and she felt that he was angry. She had never seen him like that before - at least not to her. But instead of roaring, he had lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Why didn’t you say anything? I thought ...," Finn searched her eyes, "I thought we trust each other."

"Of course we do," said Rey quickly. "But some things ... some things I have to do alone. Do you understand that?"

"This unilateral actions lead nowhere, at least at the strength that the Resistance currently has,"
interposed Vice Admiral Jotis; Rey saw that his distrust, which he had always had in his eyes, was now supplemented by the confirmation that it was justified. Finn ignored him.

"Why were you there, all alone?"

Rey hesitated, but didn’t quite manage to banish the disappointment in her voice as she answered.

"I don’t know it myself."

Jotis snorted contemptuously, but Dorovan silenced him with a slight wave of his hand. Everyone looked at him as he got up and towered over just about everyone present by at least half a head.

"It doesn’t matter how and why Rey was on the Supremacy," he said calmly, "At least it doesn’t matter for me. But I think we all agree that the fact that Snoke is dead greatly benefits us. Even if, of course, we are dealing with a no less powerful adversary in his place."

"What are you aiming for?" Poe asked, but more curious than skeptical. Rey looked up.

"I'm saying that, whether or not Rey actually killed Snoke ..." Dorovan continued, folding his hands, "... we suppose the First Order believes that. We have the regicide in our ranks. And we will take advantage of that."

Silence settled on those present. Rey realized that Dorovan's words hung heavily in the room, but no one knew exactly what he meant to say. After a few moments of silence, Rey straightened up in her chair.

"And how?"

Dorovan looked at her with his penetrating gaze - and she already regretted asking.

"By becoming our weapon, Rey. Our weapon against the new Supreme Leader of the First Order."

OOO

His parents’ house still looked almost exactly like it did in his memory - except for the vine plants that were now completely out of control. But since Leia had built up the Resistance and Han had decided to roam the galaxy again, no one had really taken care of the property. The garden with the little fountain was weathered and overgrown; the front door was torn off its hinges.
Everywhere nature had started reclaiming its territory. But still, it was like taking a step back into his home after a long time. He still remembered where his room had been on the first floor - it had a large glass front overlooking the nearby lake. Leia had tried to give her home the typical Alderaan charm and she had definitely succeeded.

He sat on the ground floor and stared out into the dusk through one of the milky windows. He had made it here unnoticed, at least he thought so. He couldn’t feel any other human soul around; the house was out of town, surrounded by nature, as Leia had wished, and he didn’t think anybody would come looking for him. So he risked it and lit a small fire in the fireplace of the room, which had once been something of a lounge. He remembered that Leia had often received deputies and senators here - but the cozy furniture on which he often fell asleep while listening to the crackle of the fire had disappeared. Instead, there was nothing but bare marble floor now, covered with dust and crackling foliage. He sat down on the floor and watched the dancing flames as they snaked around the dry wood.

He could hear them again. Somewhere in the back of his mind. He didn’t think he would ever manage to forget them anymore.

The people who died by his hand.

The crackling of the embers went out and silence settled on him.

"Rey."

He sensed that she was angry. He didn’t know why. But she had turned her anger on him, he was aware of that.

"You are a liar."

He looked up. She stood facing him, her hands clenched into fists, her face twisted into a furious grimace. Her hazel brown eyes glowed dangerously.

"Yes, I am also glad to see you," he replied sarcastically, looking up at her, "but you don’t seem to be chatting."

"You!" She bared her teeth, "You told them I killed Snoke! Do you know what that means for me? How dangerous that is for me? And all because you are a ... a coward!"

He wrinkled his nose.

"A coward?"

"Yes, right, a coward!", Rey gave back venomously, "You make me the enemy number one, declare my seizure to the highest goal, and besides, you insinuate yourself into my confidence, so you can show me. The great Supreme Leader who grabbed the killer, the stupid scavenger girl! Is that what you want?"

There was a sudden flicker of anger in him. He didn’t know if it was just Rey's feeling that jumped over him, but it made him stand up.

"You really believe that?", he snapped at her and Rey's eyes widened, "After everything that has happened, after everything that has happened between us - do you really think I would cheat on you like that?"

He took a step toward her, but Rey didn’t leave the spot.
"What else am I supposed to believe?" she replied sharply, "Obviously, you are only using me. You are using this connection to manipulate me. I should have never listened to you."

Her words hurt him; she felt it very clearly, as if it was her own pain. For a moment, doubts arose in her; doubts about her own words.

"I never lied to you," he replied softly, "Never. You are the only person who can say that. I was..."

He was searching for words.

"When you disappeared from the Supremacy, I was angry. So incredibly angry. I was alone again and I didn’t think that everything would end like this. It had not occurred to me after seeing this vision. And then I realized that I... that I had taken Snoke's place now. Whether I wanted it or not. But..." he bit his lower lip, "I panicked. I had to tell Hux something so I could stay in that position. The only position that gave me enough power to protect you."

Rey snorted.

"Yeah, sure. You don’t believe that yourself, do you?" she snapped, "I don’t need a protector. And don’t say that you don’t like this... position. The mighty Supreme Leader, to whom they are all at their feet..."

"Stop calling me like that."

Rey was startled. She remembered that he had used those words before - when she called him Ben. He came closer again - she stifled the impulse to go back, even though he was so close to her. Way too close.

When he took her hand and laid it on his chest, it went through her like lightning. She sensed his emotions rise in her like water that hit a rock. She gasped. She could feel his fast, powerful heartbeat; it was as if she felt her own heart hammering against her chest.

"You know I'm not lying," he whispered. "Search your feelings. My feelings. Our feelings. You know it."

Rey felt the emotions threatening to overwhelm her. She knew that the bond between them was getting stronger - she could barely deny it. But she had never noticed it in that intensity. Her fingernails clawed at the fabric of his shirt. Rey realized that an uncomfortable mood was spreading between them, as if they were going too deeply into something they had been forbidden to do. She barely managed to look at him, though she couldn’t deny the attraction between them.

Then she shuddered. She felt his fingers trace the contours of her face. The touch was not the worst; it was the streams of the Force that flooded every square inch of her skin and sent a chill down her spine that made her whole body tremble. Goose bumps spread on her arms and neck.

"Ben..."

He wrapped his muscular arms around her and hugged her close. He buried his face in her neck; his warm, quick breath slid over her skin like the delicate stroke of a feather, yet he kindled a fire inside her. A fire that warmed her, that gave her security, and at the same time gave her the feeling that a spark was enough to set them on fire and burn them to ashes.

"We shouldn’t do that," she breathed, but it was impossible for her to leave his embrace. Maybe she didn’t want to. His body trembled as she touched his neck and wandered her fingers through his black curls.
"I know," he murmured, "you can go anytime if you want to."

She inhaled the scent of his skin. It didn’t feel like he wasn’t really there. Not anymore.

"I know."

Chapter End Notes

Well, long time no update. But here it is, a long chapter and hopefully an enjoyable one too :-) aaand all of my Reylo-emotions are back at once. Wonderful. *creeps back into tumblr*
Finn stared into the full and steaming cup of Caf that stood in front of him. Getting up early was not something he wasn’t used to - during his time with the stormtroopers, the generals had often enjoyed chasing them out of bed even in the middle of the night - but today the knock on his bedroom door woke him up way before sunrise. He yawned heartily and took a sip of Caf - it was not very good, but at least it brought him up to operating temperature.

It was Poe who had gotten him out of bed. While Finn was still wondering how the pilot made it to look so good at that time of the day, Poe had asked him – or ordered him – to get dressed and meet him in the canteen. Immediately and alone. Before Finn could protest, Poe was gone, and Finn surrendered to his fate. He hated this secrecy - even more since he knew Rey had kept secrets from him.

He set his cup on the table in front of him with a little too much momentum and looked up when he noticed a movement on the edge of his field of vision.

"You really must have a good reason to order me here at this time," he said as Poe sat down in front of him with a hot drink as well. He looked at him critically.

"Couldn't you have said what you want right away? Then I could have stayed in bed at least a little while longer."

Poe shook his head.

"I wanted to make sure no one was ... listening at the door or something," he replied in a lowered voice, though the only other person nearby and across the hall was a droid preparing breakfast. Finn's expression darkened.

"What's happening? That doesn't sound like you at all," he drank another sip of Caf, screwed his mouth a little and eyed the pilot appraisingly. He seemed a little nervous. Poe folded his hands on the table and looked attentively at Finn.

"Finn ... do you trust me?" he asked suddenly, looking as if the question had more or less burst out of him. Finn looked at him confused and stuttered his answer rather.

"Yes, of course ... I mean ... what? Why ...?" Finn cleared his throat and nodded encouragingly, "Of course I trust you! Who, if not you?"

"Fine," said Poe curtly, "that's ... good. Because I need you now by my side. Do you understand?"

"No not really."

Poe let out a sigh.

"Look ... that Dorovan is here, along with his fleet ... a huge fleet, I swear it, I've been watching holo shots ... Finn, that's a sign. Things are going on ... and I think Dorovan and the Resistance officers will sooner or later decide to attack the First Order. The last hit."

Finn felt a little uncomfortable. He saw something in Poe’s eyes he had never seen before. He was
"How do you imagine that?" Finn leaned forward, "I mean, you know the First Order fleet as well as I do. It is...

"... weakened. Ever since Holdo destroyed the *Supremacy* and damaged several other ships," Poe interrupted excitedly, waving a hand as if to reassure himself, "We can do it. With Dorovan's help. He observed the rise of the First Order from exile after being forced to leave his home planet. He had too many contacts with the Resistance. He wants it just like we do, I know we can do it. Finn, we can free the galaxy, once and for all!"

Finn stroked over his temple thoughtfully, pausing for a moment while Poe looked at him expectantly.

"Okay, let’s say ... I'd support you," he replied, "No matter how crazy it sounds in my opinion. What is my part? I mean, you don’t tell me that for no reason, right?"

He saw that Poe's jaw was pacing up and down nervously, as if he was chewing on the inside of his cheek.

"Yes ... I mean, there is a reason," he said hesitantly, biting his lip, "but I think you won’t like it."

Finn looked at him long and scrutinizing until the penny dropped.

"It's about Rey," he stated, leaning back, "Poe ... what's the point ...?"

"I'm sorry, but ...," Poe shrugged, "I feel like ... I cannot trust her. Not after what Dorovan said."

"After all she did for us?" Finn asked angrily, "After risking her life to save us?"

"Finn, she was on the *Supremacy* and didn’t tell us!", Poe snapped, "Are you saying that she walked in there, got rid of the Supreme Leader and then left again in peace? Finn, something's wrong, and you can’t deny it's weird."

Finn pressed his lips together.

"What do you mean by that?" Finn asked, not without slight doubt in his voice. Poe kneaded his hands and took a long pause before answering.

"What if ... what if Rey makes common cause with the First Order? I mean, what do we actually know about her?"

Finn snorted.

"I know her - better than you do, definitely. And if you really think she would betray us that way, then you're a damn idiot."

Poe drew in a sharp breath but seemed to control himself again at the last moment and cleared his throat.

"I know that Dorovan has a ... plan for her. And reasons to trust her. But you remember how she reacted when he spoke of using her as a weapon against Kylo Ren. Let's say, she was not pleased."

"Who would?", insisted Finn, "Would you like to be the one to meet him? As a human shield? I certainly don’t. And we cannot ask her to do that either."
"I just want to say ...," Poe interjected, trying to assume a mediating tone, "... that it might be better to keep an eye on her. If it's true and an attack is planned, then we need to know which side Rey is on. Without any doubt."

Finn threw Poe a long, furious look before taking his cup of Caf into his hand, sipping it and putting it down on the table with a clatter. Then he got up.

"I don’t doubt her."

OOO

Rey woke up on the floor of her room. At least that’s what she thought. Nothing seemed to be the way it was before, when she opened her eyes and realized that she had spent the night curled up in the warm embrace of Ben Solo. Her head lay on his arm and snuggled against his chest; it had to be a terribly uncomfortable position, but he didn’t seem to have moved the whole night. She listened to his regular, deep breaths for a while, trying to decipher the situation somehow. She had barely any memory of the previous evening - they had quarreled, but had simply failed to separate. A sense of guilt rose in her. After she accused him of using her, she never thought it would end like this. What had she done?

But it was not like she could do anything about it. It was as if the Force had determined what was happening. She had felt this incredibly strong bond; she had felt him, down to the bottom of her soul. It was as if they had been one for one night. Not physically - though she had to admit that his skin felt incredibly good on hers - but spiritually and on a level she had not thought possible. She sensed that at the pure thought of it, cold sweat stood on her forehead again.

The connection between them had never existed as long as it had been this night, and she didn’t feel like it was breaking soon. The silence that otherwise lay upon them like a cloth was now comfortable and calm as if they had been wrapped in a cocoon.

She felt at home.

Rey put her hand on his chest just as he had done the night before and looked up at him. Her eyes met and Rey was a little startled.

"Are you watching me sleep?" she asked, feeling his heartbeat go a little faster under her palm, "That's scary."

"No," he said simply, indicating a shake of the head that she barely noticed in his pose, "I'm thinking."

"Hm," Rey hummed and added after a pause, "Have you ever watched me sleep? When the bond was active, but I didn’t notice it?"

He looked at her for a long time, then shrugged and the corners of his mouth moved slightly upwards: "Maybe."

Rey grinned. She tried to suppress it, but failed miserably.

"Was that a joke? Ben Solo ... jokes?"

Slight redness settled on his face and she realized that he was a little uncomfortable. She smiled.
"You should do that more often, it suits you."

His expression became more serious again.

"I haven't had much to laugh for, you know."

She stroked the fabric of his shirt, but didn’t answer. She understood what he meant by that. She looked down at him and noticed that his cloak lay like a blanket over them; she didn’t remember if he or she had spread it over them.

"What a night," she said softly. She felt his hand move on her. It lay on her hip, at first gently, as if he wanted to avoid touching her, but now with a noticeably more pressure, as if he was afraid that she would disappear.

"Yes," he replied, "I can’t say what happened. All I know is that you were ... angry. And called me a coward."

Rey made a sound that resembled an embarrassed laugh.

"I'm sorry," she breathed, "I was really mad at you. But it's ... okay, I think. I know now that you are not lying to me."

"I doubt I could, even if I wanted to," he replied, "I ... feel you. All over."

Now it was up to Reys face to turn red. She quickly looked away and fixed her eyes on her hand, which lay on top of him. They were silent for a moment, then he put his hand on hers and embraced her fingers with gentle pressure.

"What is that?"

Rey felt the Force moving between them, like a river or electric current in a closed circuit. It pulsed like a force field that had been protecting them, and if she hadn’t known better, she would have thought they were not where they were. As if they had entered an area far away from space and time, where there was nothing but them and the Force. She didn’t know how long they were lying there; it could be an eternity or only a second.

He blinked.

"Sun’s rising."

Rey looked up at him and noticed something; as if a ray of sunlight was reflected in his dark eyes.

"Where are you actually? I didn’t ask you. Did you find the Jedi Temple?" she involuntarily moved closer to him, as if the knowledge that he was not right next to her, but on a planet somewhere in the galaxy, let them drift further apart. She sensed that he hesitated for a moment before answering.

"Yes, I have," he said then, "On Chandrila. My home planet and the place where Snoke ... found me. I had to come back here to work on a few things. I know that now."

"Did you find out what those things were?"

He returned her gaze and for a moment something flashed in his eyes; short and energetic, but at the same time as fleeting as the touch of a summer breeze.

"Yes," he replied, "But ... I can’t tell you what they mean. Not yet."
Rey thought for a moment.

"That's alright," she replied, "you don't have to tell me."

"I'll tell you," he insisted, "but I don't think that this is the right time and place right now."

He looked back into the distance and watched something that Rey couldn’t see. For a second, Rey thought she heard the encouraging chirping of a bird somewhere in a distant tree, where it sat and announced the new day. But maybe her mind was just playing tricks on her.

"It is wonderful. Just as I remember it," he lifted his head a bit, then dropped it quickly. Rey noticed that she was still lying on his arm and that he probably was in pain now. Embarrassed, she straightened on her elbow and looked down at him. He looked so incredibly fragile, like a little boy talking to an adult for the first time. When she indicated that she wanted to pull her hand away from him, she felt him gently squeezing it again.

"I wish you were here."

Rey returned the pressure, not knowing if it was even possible for her to separate completely from him again. Probably not after this night.

"Yes, me too."

OOO

Finn paced nervously and furiously in the room, his hands clenched into fists and his face twisted into an annoyed grimace. Rose sat sleepily in her bed, leaning against the wall, holding the stained pillow she slept on tight against her chest. She yawned heartily before the snorting Finn began to let go of his tirades for the third time.

"How dare he? And I thought he was my friend. Our friend," he said emphatically, "How can he think that Rey ran over to the dark side? How?!"

If anything had been within his reach, he would probably have kicked it. However, Rose had much less stuff than him or Rey; she had moved into the room only a few days ago, and she had nothing but clothes to store or put down. So Finn had no choice but to kick the wall angrily - and promptly release a curse and cry of pain because he had hit his toe.

He had come straight to Rose after the conversation with Poe; He didn’t quite know why, but he felt he had to talk to someone. Although a small part of him asked why he had not actually gone directly to Rey and told her about it. But that was also the part of him who reluctantly admitted that there was a little bit of truth in what Poe had said.

"Finn ...," Rose said softly and unmistakably tired, "you have to understand him. Of course, it's ... weird that Rey was obviously all alone on the *Supremacy*.

"Please, not you too," Finn interrupted her imploringly, but Rose waved her hand.

"No, listen to me," she replied. "If you look at it from his point of view, it's probably weird. Poe is worried and he is the leader of the Air Force. Of course he wants to know everyone on his side."

Finn stopped and looked at Rose directly.
"But why should Rey ...? No, that makes no sense. He fantasizes about something."

"If it’s a comfort to you...," Rose smiled lightly and let her legs dangle from the bed, "I trust Rey, fully and completely."

Finn looked at Rose silently. Her small, slender figure who was capable of such amazing powers, carrying a heart of gold deep inside her. Rose, who looked so delicate, but could stand more than he could ever imagine. Rose, who had rescued and kissed him at the Battle of Crait.

He smiled.

"Yes, that comforts me a bit," he said, feeling the anger slowly drop from him. He sat down on the bed with Rose. As if by chance her knees nudged each other, but nobody seemed to want to pull his leg away.

"Maybe ...," Finn's thoughts wandered for a moment, then he said, "Maybe I'm just scared. Scared that I'm wrong. Although I cannot imagine in my dreams that I'm wrong. "

Rose nodded, then laid her hand encouragingly on his shoulder.

"Go to her and talk to her. I think she needs you now as her friend," her voice sounded just as optimistic as ever, and it also made the rest of anger in his stomach fizzle out. He returned her warm, confident gaze - perhaps a moment too long, because for the next moment he had to suppress the impulse to simply pull her over and kiss her. Instead, he stroked one of her sleep-ruffled strands of hair out of her face, almost a loving gesture.

"You're right," he answered and his mouth twisted into a pitiful grin, "Sorry for waking you up so early."

"It’s alright," said Rose, though he didn’t quite believe her, and shrugged, "I have a lot going on today anyway. My first day in the hangar - and obviously I can look after Dorovan's glider right away because someone told him I'm the ... best damned mechanic in this damn station."

She looked at him with a mixture of frowning and cheerfulness. Finn laughed.

"And I'm not even sorry I said that!", he replied and avoided her hand, which wanted to pinch his arm. He got up quickly; not without putting his hand on her knee for a moment.

"Thank you. I mean ... thank you. "

They looked each other for a long time, as if there was a deep bond of understanding; a tie that probably began with a taser and was sealed with a kiss.

"You’re welcome," said Rose, smiling.

OOO

Finn was a little embarrassed that he probably would wake another person up so early in the morning, but after talking to Poe (damn, Poe!) And talking to Rose (sweet, sweet Rose) he knew he wanted to get rid of it once and for all. Immediately. Rey should know he supported her, no matter if she could ever tell him what had happened on the *Supremacy*. Of course, he would have preferred if she could just have told him, but one step at a time. When he stood in front of her
bedroom door, he still had to muster his courage before he knocked. It remained silent on the other side of the door.

"Rey?"

He knocked again. It was still very early, but he didn’t really believe that Rey really slept so long and so deeply that she noticed nothing and no one. He also knew how long she had been suffering from insomnia. He knocked again.

Something was rumbling in her room. It sounded like Rey had fallen out of her bed; or against it. He listened for a moment, then knocked again.

"Rey, it's me, Finn. May I come in?"

Silence again. Finn was tempted to press his ear against the door, but then he heard a murmur that clearly came from Rey but didn’t make any sense in his ears.

"I have to go."

He stood stiffly in front of her door, and all his enthusiasm seemed suddenly to have left his body.

"Rey?"

"I’m coming, one moment."

Her voice was nervous, almost a little annoyed. He could hear it even through the door. He suddenly felt terribly stupid. Maybe Poe was right - and something was going on with Rey that he didn’t understand.

The door opened. Rey's hair was still disheveled from sleeping, but her eyes were wide awake and a little worried. Besides, she wore exactly the same clothes she wore the day before, and it looked as if she had slept in them.

"What is it?"

He didn’t like her tone at all. It seemed to him he had just caught her doing something forbidden; as if he had burst into something that was none of his business. He felt out of place.

"I'm sorry I am bothering you so early ...," he said softly and doubtfully, "I just ... I just wanted to talk to you."

Rey looked at him in confusion for a moment, as if she were just realizing that he was really standing in front of her. A sigh broke out of her throat.

"Yes sure. What ... what is it?"

Finn realized that his lips were suddenly very dry and he didn’t know how to start. Before, he had known exactly what he wanted to say, but somehow he could not shake the feeling that the Supremacy was not the only thing that Rey was hiding from him. To be honest, he had that feeling for a long time.

"I...

He hesitated.

All at once, Rey had opened her eyes - startled and scared, as if she had met a ghost at that moment. But he saw that she was not looking at him, but fixing a spot behind his right shoulder
with her eyes. He turned and followed her gaze, but beyond the white stone wall he saw absolutely nothing that could have caught her attention. He looked at her again; this time with a deep frown on his face.

"Is everything ok?"

He didn’t know how many times he had asked that question in the last few months; too often. And he already knew that she would not give him an honest answer. Rey twitched as if she was awakening from a kind of trance. She rubbed her forehead as if she had forgotten what she was about to say.

"Yeah ... all right," she said unconvincingly, "What ... what did you want to talk to me about?"

Finn’s chin pushed forward a bit. Then he sighed deeply.

"Forget it. Another time. Sorry for the disturbance."

He turned on his heel and left without turning back. He expected Rey to follow him; or at least calling his name and wanting him to turn around. But nothing like that happened. As sure as he had been earlier, that he would support Rey anytime and always, he was uncertain now if he would ever succeed. Maybe Poe was right.

Maybe he didn’t know her at all.

Chapter End Notes

Mean Finn is mean, but I promise, mean Finn isn't going to stay forever.
I'm sorry the next chapter took sooo long! I was so busy at work and I had to take a break from the fandom because it was nearly consuming everything of my life :-D but now I had inspiration again to finish this chapter and I can say - we are slowly coming closer to the end. And boy oh boy, the ending is going to kill me, I know it. Anyway: Thank you for comments, Kudos and Bookmarks and I hope you are enjoying the new chapter <3 Hope the next one won't take so long :-D
Before The Storm

Chapter Notes

Oh man, I'm so sorry for the delay of the next chapter :-( work was really rough the last weeks, I never had any time to write and, you know, you need the right mood for some reylo-ish content ;-) but, here it is now and we are really close to the end. I really want to finish this story as I like it that much and want to give it a proper ending. I still have so many ideas in my head but I should focus on the ones that makes most sense for the end of the story. Man, I'm so pumped! :-) I'm starting to write the next chapter soon, it's going to be... well, you'll see. In the meantime, enjoy some fluff and force-bond and some mean guys. Yey! <3

It felt strange when the Finalizer came in sight and he started to land. As if he didn’t belong here. The huge ship looked as threatening and frightening as a dark shadow trying to take over. There was nothing tangible, nothing that he could put into words, but he felt the darkness creeping closer, taking possession of him and poisoning his thoughts. He knew that feeling, even if he hadn’t felt it for a long time. That's what it had felt like when Snoke slowly sneaked into his subconscious as he replaced the light and darkness took over. But unlike then he knew now that he couldn’t extinguish the light inside him. Not while she was there, in his mind, in his memories.

Rey.

He now knew that she was the reason; that it was her who pulled him into the light. Maybe she had always done it; perhaps the Force had always provided her as his counterpart to prevent him from completely succumbing to the dark side. It explained his occasional pity, his struggles with his decisions, his inability to completely ignore the death of his parents. It explained why he had never been able to ban Ben Solo.

In a way, he thought, he had probably found him on Chandrila again.

His ship landed exactly where it had left two days ago, and as the engines slowly died and the exit hatch opened with a hiss, he felt as if there was a wave of hostility; a feeling that could only come from one on board in this intensity.

When he left, he was already expected by his general. Hux received him with an icy look from his green eyes; but there was something else in it. Something ... waiting. As if he was a snake, who had lain long and patient in the shadows, waiting for its victim before it struck. But it wasn’t time for the attack yet. He was still waiting.

"Supreme Leader," said Hux, hands clasped behind his back as usual, with a narrow smile, "how was your trip?"

He adjusted his cloak. He suddenly felt very uncomfortable.

"Uneventful," he replied coolly, "how was it going on during my absence?"

Hux leaned back a little; his smile remained.

"Uneventful," he replied, "We've got the last intact units of the Supremacy. But otherwise ...
uneventful. You can rest assured, Supreme Leader."

He didn’t like how Hux emphasized the word. He had always had a certain mockery and ridicule but this time there was something completely wrong in his voice. He looked at him, trying to fathom his feelings, away from the hate he threw so blatantly at him, but he couldn’t see what lay behind. It was like an invisible wall that had slipped between them. His jaw muscle twitched nervously. Since the connection with Rey had become so strong, he felt as if his thoughts were blurred, his powers scattered and aimless, as if he alone was no longer able to bundle them together. Were these first signs of this weakness - wasn't he even able to see beyond the simple thoughts of his First General?

"You look tired, Supreme Leader," said Hux, cocking his head slightly, "you should lie down for a while. To recharge your batteries."

His forehead curled.

"Since when are you worried about my health, Hux?" He responded aggressively, "keep your advice to yourself. Tonight - General Assembly. We discuss the further procedure."

Hux pursed his lips, but didn’t seem impressed at all.

"As you wish," he said flatly, taking a step aside to let him pass. He gave his general a cold glance again before leaving the launch and landing ramp. His annoyance at Hux's sight and at his own weakness, dragging him down like a weight on his neck, had not even made him realize that the Knights of Ren had seen him coming back from a distance. They kept themselves covered; but at another time, under different circumstances, he might have noticed that something about them had changed.

And that the hostility he had felt as he left his glider didn’t come from Hux alone.

OOO

Rey was restless. She was roaming through the bunker like an animal in a cage. Her thoughts raced through her mind like Podracer. The long corridors, the faces of the people, all this seemed so unreal to her. She suddenly felt completely ... incomplete. She couldn’t express it otherwise.

Ben.

It was much more painful not to think about him than to do it. He was in her head, in her thoughts, as if he was standing next to her, constantly watching her. Sometimes she had to look over her shoulder to make sure he wasn’t really doing it. No day had passed since that strange, confusing night, yet she noticed something in her that was already wishing to see him again. She had to force herself not to call him in her mind, or even scream for him, but she couldn’t deny that every fiber of herself demanded to be with him. And she guessed why, but she didn’t find a clear explanation yet.

Ben had been on Chandrila looking for answers to find out what was happening between them.

Maybe they had found it?

With many confused thoughts in her head, Rey sat down at one of the tables in the canteen – which was almost empty; mealtime was over – and opened one of the Jedi books, which were still
dusting on their shelves in her room. But she refused to believe that there wasn’t at least one sentence in those ancient books that could somehow give her enlightenment. An enlightenment of how Ben and she could manage to unite their powers beyond the Force bond. Or how she managed to end it forever. Either way, there was no other solution. She couldn’t stand it anymore.

She took a sip from a mug standing in front of her and grimaced in disgust. She’d asked the droid which was giving out the food for something strong to drink - something really strong. The droid hadn’t quite understood what she wanted, but with some good will and a lot of finger gestures, it had managed to serve her a golden liquid from a dusty bottle. Rey hadn’t been able to decipher the label, but it reminded her of the Cheedoan Whiskey that Unkar Plutt had drank in huge quantities and thought it was good enough for her. Unfortunately, the stuff tasted more like fermented acid than whiskey, but still, a pleasant, warm feeling spread through Rey’s stomach, so she decided it was right for the moment.

She skimmed the pages, which provided only instructions for proper meditation, and skipped the chapter on medicinal plants and survival techniques on alien planets. Annoyed, she set aside a book, opened the next, tried to decipher faded signs and to learn from the intricate language used in the books. Some people that were trying to get a Caf for refreshment gave her a frowning look as she slammed another book with a groaning sound. She ignored the curious eyes and turned to the next book. It was so old that the pages began to crumble as she looked through it. It seemed to be a lot older than the others and was full of dates and times that were very far in the past. She realized that it was a sort of history of the Jedi Order and its origins; however, the data hung loosely together, as if someone had kept this book as a kind of diary. There were notes of wars and battles; from meetings and councils. But no indication of something that helped her further. Rey was about to put this book aside as well when she noticed a single entry. The date was well before the battle for Yavin, even around 150 years ago. She squinted and read:

"And those who have left our order to seek more balance in the Force; they will not accompany us in the coming battles. Where will they be when the Jedi die?"

"Balance," Rey murmured, searching for more clues, but found only further descriptions of the war between Jedi and Sith, good and evil, life and death. No balance. For centuries. Was this the solution?

What if Ben and she ...?

"Rey."

Rey jumped when she heard her name. For a moment she thought he had read her mind and appeared next to her. But when she turned her head, it was Poe who looked at her. Still a bit suspicious, but not angry anymore. His eyes wandered between her and the books. Hastily, Rey slammed the book and brushed the dust off her clothes.

"Yes," she said, "what do you want?"

"Dorovan wants to see you, he sent me for you," Poe replied, cocking his head to one side, "He's waiting for you in his room. I'll take you there."

"Dorovan?", Rey grimaced, "Why?"

"No idea," Poe answered with an impatient undertone, "He only said that it had to be now."

Rey thought for a moment, then decided to put her suspicions aside for a while. She nodded, stuffed the books back into her pocket, and drank her drink all at once, even if it shook her
properly afterwards. Then she followed Poe with some distance.

"Did you ...," began Rey, as they reached the corridors, and cleared her throat, "Have you seen Finn anywhere?"

Poe hesitated for a moment, then shook his head, "No. Not since yesterday."

"Hm," Rey hummed and said nothing. After her morning meeting with Finn outside her bedroom door, she was embarrassed by her own strange behavior. But she couldn’t have explained to him why she was so disturbed and unfocused. How could she explain it? She didn’t even know exactly what was going on with her either.

"By the way..." Poe fell back a little and looked at Rey from the side, "I wanted to apologize. I was rude and unfair to you because of the thing on the Supremacy. I shouldn’t have distrusted you."

Rey looked up in surprise. Was he serious?

"How ... where does this change of heart come from?" she asked, and Poe shrugged.

"I remembered what you did for us. That was all," he said, and a slight smile appeared on his lips, "I owe you my life and for that I should show some more humility. Sorry."

Rey returned his smile. At least she seemed to have one friend left here.

"It’s alright," she said, "Can’t blame you."

They fell silent until they finally reached the room Dorovan had occupied during his stay. It was off the side in a part of the compound Rey had never stepped on, even though she had been here for months. It smelled even more stuffy here than it already did.

"Here it is," Poe pointed with his hand to the door, "Just go in. I am waiting here for you."

"Oh, that ... that's not necessary!", Rey said hastily, and she sensed that she was blushing. Poe grinned.

"Surely, without me, you won’t find your way back," he replied with a wink that left Rey with a stab in her chest (which she knew that it wasn’t her who felt it). She coughed briefly, then she entered.

OOO

Dorovan sat at a small desk with his back to her. The room was bare, like most Rey had seen from the inside. A bed, a cupboard, a table, two chairs. Nothing more. The room was filled with dark twilight as Rey entered. Dorovan’s face was dipped in a pale, blue light that came from a small holo board. He read something. When the door closed behind her, he looked up.

"Ah, Rey," he said absentmindedly and deactivated the board, "great that Poe found you right away."

Rey didn’t say anything but sat down on the chair on the opposite side of Dorovan when he pointed at it with his hand. She couldn’t tell why she was still uncomfortable with the captain's
presence. He had something very fatherly, but at the same time something disconcerting on him, as if he was a sleeping giant just waiting to awaken. His pale blue eyes studied her with interest, while Rey tried more or less unsuccessfully to avoid his gaze.

"So you wanted to talk to me?" She asked and curiosity was in her voice, despite all the caution she admonished herself. Dorovan nodded.

"Yes. I thought, after the discussion we had recently, you prefer to talk to me privately," he said, "Without admirals or pilots listening."

The restless feeling in Rey grew without her being able to do anything about it. She figured it had something to do with the conversation at the command center; the conversation that turned out different than she expected. Again, she wondered if Finn was still mad at her. And then, if Dorovan wanted to pursue his plan and use her as a weapon.

She decided to interfere. Maybe it was the disgusting drink that gave her a little bit more of courage, but she already knew what he was going to talk about.

"Yes, about that," she said slowly, clearing her throat, "Captain, I don’t think I can do anything about ... Kylo Ren ..."

"Oh, you get right to the point. I like that," Dorovan interrupted her almost amused and leaned forward, "And be sure that you enjoy my fullest confidence to that. Let's say ... I know what you are capable of."

Rey raised an eyebrow.

"How do you know that?", She replied sharper than intended, "We don’t know each other. And whatever your whistleblower told you, I'm sure he only told you half the truth. I didn’t kill Snoke, I wouldn’t have been able to."

Dorovan's expression didn’t change as he continued.

"I'm not interested in how well you can handle the lightsaber. But the Force. And how you can use it to finally stop Kylo Ren."

Rey hesitated.

"You want ....," she searched for words, "you want me to use the Force to kill him ...?"

Dorovan smiled smugly.

"Now we’re talking."

Rey shook her head.

"Captain ... you ... that's not how the Force works!" She said, barely suppressing the anger that seethed inside her, "The Force shouldn’t be used to destroy! It's a part of life and death, but it's not a weapon you use like a plasma gun!"

"The Sith could do it, too," Dorovan replied steadfastly, "they used the dark side of the Force to do harm. And the good thing is - you wouldn’t even use it for evil things. You would use it to bring peace to the galaxy. You would wipe out evil, pure evil."

Rey just barred herself from uttering what was really buzzing in her mind but collected herself at the last moment.
"That’s not any different," she said, gritting her teeth, "I would use the Force for something bad. To take life is something bad."

"Just as Kylo Ren did?"

"He didn’t ...," Rey interrupted herself, "He has ... that's exactly the same! I would do what all users of the dark side have done so far and ... I don’t want that."

Dorovan's face darkened a little.

"I think you don’t understand what power you have Rey ... and how important it is to us," he said, "We're about to fight back. The First Order is weakened. We could finally end this war once and for all. Don’t you understand that?"

"No, you don’t understand," Rey replied incensed, "That doesn’t change anything! It would only give the dark side even more strength. Even if Kylo Ren was dead ... it wouldn’t be ..."

All of a sudden Rey realized something.

*The Force wouldn’t be balanced.*

The Force needed them.

Both of them.

"That’s a shame."

Dorovan's voice ripped Rey from her thoughts. His face had lost all paternal warmth. It was replaced by a strange expression that Rey couldn’t read. He stood up; his imposing appearance still disturbed Rey, but the defiance in her made her stare steadfastly at him with a fixed, resolute look. Dorovan sighed.

"You can go," he pointed to the door with his hand. Rey thought for a moment if that was a feint to lull her to safety, but then she got up without another word and went to the door. She turned around again - Dorovan had activated the holo board again, but he didn’t look at her anymore. Rey pressed her lips together and left the room.

OOO

"What happened? Rey, talk to me!"

Poe had a hard time keeping up with Rey as she stormed off with her fists clenched, heading for her room. She hadn’t said a word, but she sensed that Poe was more than curious about what had happened between her and Dorovan. Even more so, why she was so angry. Rey ignored Poe but knew that he wouldn’t let go so easily. When she reached her room door, she turned around again - Dorovan had activated the holo board again, but he didn’t look at her anymore. Rey pressed her lips together and left the room.

"Your friend Dorovan is a fool if he thinks the First Order can be beaten so easily," she said angrily, "He's going to kill us all!"

"But ...," Poe frowned, "But ... Rey, he just wants to ..."
"... bring peace to the galaxy, yes, I understand that," Rey replied, "but at what price he doesn’t care. I knew it was too good to be true when he arrived here. He wants ... he wants to take advantage of our hopeless situation and bring us to do something that we can’t do."

"How do you know that?" Poe shook his head, "Rey, we have a real chance with him. You can’t just throw that away."

"I'm not throwing anything away, I'm taking responsibility," hissed Rey, "and you should do that too. Leia gave her life to save you, and you just want to follow some runaway captain into a battle we can’t win?"

"Better than sitting around waiting for the First Order to find us," Poe's jaw twitched nervously as he looked at Rey, but when he spoke again, his voice was unusually gentle.

"Leia wanted peace. And you ... we could finally do it."

Poe came uncomfortably close as he spoke. Rey remembered that he had talked to her like that before - at Leia's bedside. She involuntarily backed away a step, but already felt the cold stone wall in her back. Poe put his hand on her shoulder; the touch made her wince slightly.

"Poe ... you don’t understand ..."

"Rey, I know you're scared," he said gently, "but we've come this far. Thanks to you. We would be such a good team, I always knew that. Why don’t you try it?"

Rey felt him tighten the pressure of his hand on her shoulder. He was too close to her. She could feel the warmth of his body and her heart beat uncomfortably against her chest. Her thoughts were suddenly erased as she looked into his brown, alert eyes – so real in front of her as rarely anything she had seen lately. Her mouth felt very dry all of a sudden.

"Poe ... don’t ...

Poe smiled.

"Don’t be afraid," he said, "I feel it too."

Something in Rey's mind settled like a switch. Her hands shot up and lay defensively on Poe's chest.

"What did Dorovan promise you to pull me to his side?" she whispered, her voice filled with anger, "Did he think your charms were enough, or would you have to get me to bed first?"

Poe hesitated.

"No ... Rey, I would never ..."

"Oh no?", Rey pushed him away, "For weeks you avoid me, then Dorovan comes along - and suddenly it is so important that I join your cause? That we become 'a team'?"

Poe chewed on the inside of his cheek, she could see it.

"Rey, you just don’t understand ..."

"I understand very well," she said venomously, "but I won’t take orders from him. From nobody."

Poe made an aggressive sound.
"Orders? Rey, you have a gift that can bring us victory, and you resist it for whatever reason! Why? What is it with you?", he exclaimed angrily before grabbing Rey's hand and pulling it roughly, "Or did they take you on their side? On the Supremacy? Are you one of them? Tell me, damn it!"

Rey tried to dodge him, but his grip was strong, and she still had the wall behind her back.

"Poe, you’re hurting me!"

"You ... you are ..."

Poe fell silent as though he had swallowed. Rey stared into his wide-open eyes, but couldn’t tell at first why he had stopped talking so suddenly. But then she noticed it. The familiar deafening silence that weighed on her like a cloth.

"No..."

Poe made a choking sound. The hand, which had just clutched Rey's wrist, slid to his throat. He scratched his skin with his fingernails, as if trying to solve something that wasn’t there. He gasped - his skin, at first flushed with anger, now turned slightly bluish. He croaked and groaned, gasping for air and stumbling backward.

"No! Poe, no!", shouted Rey, but although she knew exactly what happened, she couldn’t stop it. She looked around desperately.

"Stop it! Please stop, you’re hurting him!"

Poe's eyes were bloodshot as he looked at Rey. A completely confused look stood on his face.

"Please! STOP IT!"

Something fell off Poe like a dark shadow. He gasped and sucked the salvaging air into his lungs as he scrambled up from his half-squatting position and backed away from Rey.

"You ...", he groaned, "you ... traitor."

Then he ran away in the direction from which they had come from.

OOO

"He wanted to attack you."

Rey paced up and down her room, unable to calm herself down. She sat down, then got up again and jumped onto her bed, slamming an angry hand against the wall. Then she turned to Ben. She glared at him, but he made no move to retreat or disappear. Although she stood elevated, he was still impressively tall. Anger rose in her - anger at herself for letting it come so far. Anger at Poe for allowing himself to be influenced by Dorovan. And anger at him because he just couldn’t control himself.

"I can take care of myself," she replied angrily. "You shouldn’t have done that. Poe is my friend, despite all this. Half of the Resistance already thinks I'm crazy and if they knew the truth then ... "
Then they would really have a reason to think I was crazy, she added bitterly in her mind.

"How could you do that at all? I mean ...", she gestured towards the door, "Since when can you ... use the Force through the bond?"

"The bond is stronger than ever," he replied, "but I think we already know that."

A slight blush settled on Rey's face.

"You shouldn’t have done that," she said again, "It's dangerous and I don’t know ... I don’t know what's happening now."

The thoughts in her head rolled over. From Poe's perspective, it looked as if she had attacked him - or as if she was completely crazy. She couldn’t forget the expression in his eyes. He had called her a traitor.

Ben lowered his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, "It was just ... I could feel so clearly how angry you were. It was like it was me. I was so helpless. I wanted to ... do something. I wanted to protect you. I don’t know why it worked. But I saw him ... as clear as I see you now. It was the first time I saw anything else than ... you."

Rey felt the anger in her dwindle a little.

"Did you attack Poe because of that?" she asked, "Because you ... realized that I was angry at the moment? And because I couldn’t do it?"

He was silent for a moment, as if he wanted to think his answer very carefully. Rey felt how it was working inside him.

"No," he said then. He took a few steps closer and Rey felt her heart beating faster. Not the way it had happened while she was talking to Poe.

"No. I did it because I could not stand him... touching you."

Rey nervously chewed on her lower lip.

"I'm not yours," she answered firmly, but in a low convincing voice. He looked at her for a long time, veiled like a deep lake whose bottom she couldn’t see. He stepped toward her, but unlike before, Rey felt no impulse to retreat. She felt the fingers of his right hand touch her left. A gentle stream of energy spread from her fingertips throughout her body. She remembered Poe's touch, which had seemed empty and forced; Ben's closeness was the exact opposite; it was like arriving, completing her own self.

"No. No you’re not," he said softly and looked up at her, "But I think you are ... my light side. Whatever that means for us."

Rey's heart stopped for a moment.

"Your ..." she started. After all that she had experienced - after all that she had felt - perhaps this explanation sounded most plausible of all. She clasped her hand in his and gripped it tightly.

"Then you are my dark side," she answered. "We are ... the balance."

He nodded as he pulled her close and put his hot forehead on hers. Rey felt the waves of the Force
spreading; how they filled her and how she greedily sucked it like a drug she didn’t get enough of. She knew now, even if she had let Poe or anyone else get so close to her, he would never have understood what it felt like. He could never understand what it felt like to be "one." Rey remembered their first encounter when Kylo Ren tried to penetrate her mind. Now she couldn’t imagine being without him - without that permanent presence in her consciousness. It would be there as long as she lived.

"Ben ..."

She wanted to think something else, to say something, to do something. But then…

... something changed.
At first, Rey couldn’t say what changed. But within the blink of an eye, the mood between them shifted. Their bond, which had felt clean and powerful from their first encounter, suddenly seemed to get a crack. As if someone was forcibly trying to break down the walls to sever the connection. Rey looked at Ben. She felt his confusion and the rising panic in him - he felt it too. Then he turned his head to one side - and froze.

"No…"

Rey followed his gaze and her eyes widened in horror.

It was a knight. She didn’t know if it was the same one she had seen before, but he was there, crystal clear as if he was standing in front of her personally. Except that he didn’t. She didn’t know how he did it, but he had managed to invade their connection; a foreign body that could only gain access to their bond with the utmost brutality and concentration. She gasped.

Ben let her go and his red lightsaber instinctively inflamed with an explosive, crackling noise; With a sweeping momentum, he attacked the knight, drew the blade of his sword across his body, but it went straight through him. The knight didn’t move an inch from the spot. Instead, he looked at them for a moment, as if in triumph, then he disappeared.

"What ... how ... how did he do that?" Rey got off her bed and noticed that she was shaking; Sweat stood on her forehead. He didn’t answer at first; his eyes searched the surroundings, but the knight remained gone. He deactivated his lightsaber; his mind was racing, she could literally see it.

"I don’t know," he replied truthfully, "I don’t know what ...

He turned slowly to her.

"Since the bond between us exists, I have had these dreams over and over again," said Ben, "Shadows. Always shadows. I always thought that it was you. I thought…"

Ben’s eyes turned glassy. They reflected fear and a terrible realization. He stepped up to her and touched her arm gently.

"Rey, our connection is no longer safe," he said emphatically, "They were able to infiltrate it. We have to... we have to see each other. Now."

"Ben ...", Rey searched for words, "how ... why?"

"It may be too late already," his eyes became pleading, "Please, Rey. Take the Millennium Falcon
and go. Now!

Rey felt the connection between them weakening. She wanted to reach for him, but he was barely a shadow of himself. Her hand reached into the void.

"But where?" She called, and his answer was more of a voice in her head than she really saw him speaking.

"Doesn’t matter. I will find you."

OOO

"Ouch!"

Rose shook her hand. A fine strip of blood flowed from her finger. The cut was not that deep, but it was itchy. Without further ado, she put her finger in her mouth, sucked the blood from her skin and went back to work.

Dorovan's glider was pretty much the most elaborate piece of technology Rose had ever seen. There was hardly anything she couldn’t fix or had already repaired, that was certain - but this device deserved all her attention. The pilot had told her that there was an error in the kernel after they landed on their planet. Thanks to Finn's tireless efforts and praise for her abilities, it was up to Rose to find and eliminate the mistake. She sighed as she looked at the small cut on her finger. It wasn’t worth mentioning, but she couldn’t wait to rub Finn's nose what "dangers" in foreign starships lurked on her. She grinned and went back to her work.

"BB-8, please hand me a bigger wrench," she murmured absently, reaching out from under the control panel she was lying under. A series of friendly beeping tones told her that the little droid had heard her, and moments later his gripping arm appeared with the required tool.

"Thanks," she said and took it, "I'll be ready soon, but I think we'll have to reboot the system first."

BB-8 answered with a squeak and rolled away. Rose could hear him pulling out his interface arm and accessing the glider's control unit. Rose tightened one last bolt, then came out from under the console.

"Okay, let's see what we have here. Switch off the main power supply," she ordered the droid, and BB-8 obeyed instantly while Rose wiped her oily fingers on her overalls. If this worked, then it was high time to pat yourself on the back, that much was certain.

The lights on the panels died, but with a twist of his arm, BB-8 restored the power and the glider woke with a humming, quivering sound. One light after another flared, but a whole row remained silent.

"Oh no."

The error message on the screens remained the same: System kernel error.

"Damn, I thought the manual override would be enough," Rose muttered thoughtfully, scratching her head, "All right. BB-8, please take another look at the fault memory. And the main system configuration. The problem lies deeper."
BB-8 fevered and let his arm circle. Rose sighed and looked over the consoles out into the hangar. It had to be after noon - her stomach growled uncomfortably. The breakfast didn’t last long. Maybe she would ask Finn later if he had lunch with her. And maybe she would lie down for a moment, because one of her legs started to hurt again ...

"Hm?"

The excited beeping of BB-8 drew Rose's attention. His electronic eye was on her, and if she hadn’t known better, she would have thought it looked worried.

"What's going on BB-8?" Rose asked, looking confused at the flashing lights in front of her, "Did you find anything?"

BB-8 was chirping excitedly - his interface arm was spinning wildly. Rose made a reassuring hand gesture.

"Slow down, I don’t understand anything at all!", she interrupted his beeping tones annoyed, "What does that mean, 'you know this identifier'? And which directory is 'the same'?"

BB-8's eye turned to Rose again; he tried to formulate his message more clearly, which was difficult for him, due to the importance of his discovery. Rose focused on his wildly beeping tones - and with each buzzing and whimpering, her expression became stunned.

"What does that mean?" She asked slowly, "The ship we stole from Cantonica? The weapon dealer's ship? You mean, he is ...?"

With a hiss the entry hatch of the slider closed. Rose spun around.

"Was that you?", She turned to BB-8 in alarm, but he said no with a whir. Rose took a deep breath.

"I have a bad feeling about this."

OOO

Rey disappeared, and he found himself alone in his premises. An icy cold had seized his body and made him tremble to the core.

Was he too naive? Had he overestimated both of them? He had thought the bond between them was something pure and perfect. Something that had far more power than either of them could understand. But he had missed something. He had let his feelings overcome and lost sight of the essentials.

He had forgotten that there were enemies not only on the side of the Resistance.

He considered and weighed his options. If Rey could make it, he would find her, he was absolutely sure of that. And he knew her well enough now - she could do it. She was clever, the Millennium Falcon was still one of the fastest ships in the world, and besides, the Knights were not after her. Not yet.

He felt them. He sensed their presence. He felt their attention turn to him. How could he ignore them?
Hastily, he reached for his coat, which he had thrown carelessly on the ground after his return. He would take his glider, he would go. And he wouldn’t return, he knew that now. Wherever he went, he would do it with Rey.

A noise made him freeze in his motion.

The door opened and Hux entered. His everlasting, harsh expression had disappeared, replaced by a slimy, grinning grimace. His green eyes sparkled with zest for action.

"Hux!"

He straightened his upper body. He hadn’t expected that it was Hux who would suddenly turn up. He had felt the knights - he had felt that they were nearby. What was going on here?

"Supreme Leader, I am extremely sorry to disturb you, but ..." Hux took a step towards him, his hands folded behind his back, "... but it is a matter of extreme urgency."

"What matter?" he tried to answer as unperturbed as possible, but the suspicious demeanor of his First General was somehow ... scary. The snake had reared up - it was ready to strike and sink its fangs in him. He would never have thought that Hux could ever cause something like fear in him. It was also less fear for himself, as he thought to himself.

"Well ...", Hux paused for a long while, just staring straight at him before closing, "Your arrest, Supreme Leader."

His eyes widened in shock. Suddenly anger exploded inside him. Gleaming, bright rage, which had long dormant in him, but which he had suppressed because a small voice had always reminded him that he needed Hux. Maybe that had been a mistake.

"How dare you, Hux ...", threatening he took a step toward the redhead, "You’ve completely gone crazy!"

"No, I don’t think so. On the contrary, I never saw things as clearly as I do now," answered Hux serenely, smiling mockingly, "And besides, I've waited a long time for it."

He raised his hand. He felt the Force rush through his limbs like the blood in his veins.

"Then you'll probably have to wait even longer," he hissed aggressively, and his hand formed that merciless grasp that had already got tens of people to obey his orders and obey him. How many times Hux had already felt it, he didn’t know anymore. He would make up for his mistakes. He would not let him get off easily this time.

His eyes were on Hux's throat, but ...

... nothing happened.

He felt the Force in every cell of his body, felt it surround him and flow around him like air. But he was unable to attack Hux. Hux grinned widely.

"Oh, I completely forgot that ..." he said in a disgustingly loud voice before gesturing at him, "Get him."

It hit him like a blow. Six figures dressed in black stepped into the room behind Hux, all with the same gestures as himself. He was powerful with the Force, but he couldn’t do anything against six Force-sensitive knights who all had their focus on him at the same time. He felt her power knock him to the ground; He bounced on the mirrored floor of his room and could just keep himself on
his knees. Something pulled his upper body up and before he could do something about it, the shaft of a short sword hiz him in the face and a punch in the stomach. The pain exploded in his guts; he tasted blood on his tongue. He saw stars flicker in front of his eyes, while two pairs of arms raised him to his feet. Four black and silver masks stared at him - he could feel their disgust and hatred despite their hidden gaze.

"You ...", he breathless breathed, "you protect him, this ...? Traitors!"

"Guard your tongue, Ren!" Hux spat out angrily and pulled a silver device out of his pocket, "The only traitor in this room is YOU!"

Hux activated the device, which he identified as a holo pad. It played a recording - and at the same moment he felt the blood in his veins froze to ice.

It was a shot from Snoke's throne room. He saw himself from an angle from high above, escorting Rey in handcuffs to Snoke. How Snoke tormented and tortured her as she tried to fight him and failed. How Snoke wanted him to kill her. And how the lightsaber activated on his throne and cut him in half.

How could he forget it? He had thought the Supremacy database had been destroyed with the ship. He had assumed that there was no evidence.

He was the fool.

"Hux ...," he swallowed the blood that gathered in his mouth, and looked the general in the face, "Hux, it's not as you think. Snoke used all of us ... All of us. I had to ... there was no other way."

"There was no other way but to assassinate our Supreme Leader, ally with the enemy and slaughter some of our best warriors?"

Hux pointed at the holo-pad in which now the fight took place, which had finally set the throne room on fire. He could feel the tension, and especially the anger of the knights, which was focused on him. He had killed their leader - and he knew they wouldn’t forgive.

"Hux, please ..."

"Oh, Ren, you want to beg?" replied Hux sweetly, "Just as you begged her? Her, that miserable, filthy scavenger girl?"

He saw himself standing in front of the ruined throne and the dead Snoke. He saw him asking Rey to join him and work together to create a new order for the galaxy. He saw it and for the first time he regretted not having gone with her immediately.

"That is her."

One of the knights - the Monk - pointed to the holo record. He froze.

"That's the girl. I've seen her, plain and clear," the Monk nodded, "Whatever it is, but she's Force-sensitive, just like him."

"Oh," Hux looked surprised and amused at the same time, "What a strange coincidence."

He saw Rey in his mind's eye, her hazel eyes wide with shock. How she twisted and screamed in pain. He saw how she was struck by the sword of a knight and how the light in her eyes died with her. He could hardly bear it. A roar came from his throat that he couldn’t control. He fought against the grip of the two knights, but their power held him mercilessly.
"Don’t you dare harm her, you filthy bastard!" He screeched with rage; He wanted to tear Hux to pieces right in front of his eyes, but the Force of the knights kept him in check. Hux eyes widened in surprise.

"Look at that. The scavenger girl means something to you?" He said and laughed hoarsely," That makes it even more exciting."

Hux dropped the holo-pad back in his pocket and pulled out a communicator instead, in which he spoke only a few words: "Prepare the cell, it's time."

He bared his teeth like a wild animal.

"You've planned that," he growled. "It's always been your plan. I should never have trusted you for a second."

"You know, Ren ...." Hux sighed for a long time, folding his hands behind his back again, "The thing with trust is the same as with loyalty. So hard to get ... and so easy to lose."

As if on command, the knights reinforced their grip on him. He groaned; not in pain, but mostly because he knew he had lost. He had risked everything - and lost.

"Oh, and of course there's one thing left ..."

Hux grinned cheekily into his face.

"Of course you'll be sentenced to death for treason, but I suppose you knew that, Ren."

He felt a heavy blow to the back of his head. Then everything went black.

---

Rey stared into the emptiness of her room. She was unable to move. She felt something collapse inside her. A wall that had just kept her previous, fragile worldview, but now she was slowly aware that there was no other way. And no return. The image of the triumphant knight burned in her head, just like Poe's bloodshot eyes staring at her as if she was evil in person. She didn’t know what impact it would have. She feared the worst. But was there really anything else that kept her here?

Leia was gone. Finn didn’t speak to her. Poe was as far away as ever. And Dorovan ...

Rey made a decision. Maybe it was the only reasonable thing she had left, though it looked unreasonable at first sight. She turned and began to pack her belongings. In her mind she could already see her fingers flying over the falcon's control panels, getting it ready for departure. She had no idea where she was going, but she would find him, she knew that.

She paused as she reached for her bag of Ahch-To's books. And startled.

There was nothing left on the shelf in her room except for the lightsaber that had broken when she fought with Kylo Ren. But it was not broken anymore.

The handle was whole again.
Unbelieving, Rey picked up the lightsaber. There was no doubt - it worked. She could feel the crystal react almost excitedly inside, pulsing like a beating heart as she touched the handle. With light pressure of her thumb, she pressed the button on the shaft, almost convinced that nothing would happen. But then the sword activated with a humming sound and the bright blue blade went out as if it had never done anything else.

"How ...?", Rey slid and rotated the shaft through her hand, as she had always done. The sword felt as light and familiar as if she had been training with it every day since Crait, and yet something was ... different. She couldn’t put her finger on it yet, but the currents of the Force that spread from her hand felt different. More powerful, more intense and ... more balanced than before. It was like a touch from ... him.

Rey was startled. The sword was broken when they fought and struggled for it; when they knew that they wouldn’t follow each other's path. Was it whole again because they had decided on a common path?
Rey slipped the sword to her belt and hid it under the mud-colored robe she threw over her shoulders.

They would figure it out. Together.

She took what she owned and left her room, heading for the hangar. She met no soul on the way there - it was early afternoon, and many were probably in the canteen to get something to eat. That was only good for her. The fewer people, the better. The thought of not saying goodbye to either Finn or Chewbacca, Rose, or anyone else hurt her. She felt something in her trying to convince her to turn back. It told her that it was not too late to decide otherwise. That she ran headlong into a trap from which there was no escape. But she ignored it. The last time she had turned down his offer, she still had hope that everything would turn out well. She had thought of her friends sitting in the escape pods on the way to Crait, dreading their lives. They were still in danger, she knew that. But something in her also told her that perhaps now was the last chance to get out of this fight. That was not her war. It never was.

Rey reached the hangar unnoticed. She was a little queasy already. Why was nobody here, not even a mechanic or a droid? Not that she wanted to complain, but still - she felt uncomfortable and watched. And at the thought that for the first time she would climb into the Falcon completely alone and fly it, she got a little nervous.

She listened to the hangar's silence, only interrupted by buzzing control panels, then decided that perhaps now was the best option, and ran. The Falcon stood some distance away from the shrunken air fleet, slowly setting some dust on it. Chewbacca still kept it in good shape - probably because of Han - but it hadn’t been flown for a long time. Hopefully, this scrap mill still held what it had promised for decades.

Rey started walking towards the hatch. She pounded on the button that started the opening mechanism, but ...

... suddenly she knew she had failed.

"Stop."

Rey turned around. She already knew who was standing behind her even before she saw him.

"Captain," she said, dropping her shoulders. Dorovan stood towering behind her, flanked by two bodyguards in white robes, both pointing their weapons on her.

"Where are you going, Rey?" Dorovan asked smugly, folding his hands in front of him. "Why do
you want to leave us so quickly without a word?"

"None of your business," Rey replied sharply, and in her mind, she wondered if she could manage to disarm both guards with her lightsaber before one of them shot. She decided against it.

"I have something to do."

"Well, that's unfortunate," said Dorovan. "Unfortunately, I can't let you go."

"Why? Who gives you the right?" Rey hissed, but soon froze. Poe had appeared at Dorovan's side, studying her with a condescending look; his face was still marked by the pain he had suffered. Rey's mouth wordlessly formed his name, but he looked straight through her. Her worst fears had come true.

"I'd say the right is on our side in this case," Dorovan said, glancing at Poe before adding, "Rey, you're under arrest now. Because you attacked a fighter of our cause. And ... for high treason and collaborating with our enemy."

Rey narrowed her eyes to slits.

"You'll never get away with that," she hissed, watching the guards take a step toward her. Dorovan chuckled, which sounded like a nasty laugh.

"We'll see."

OOO

"Leave us alone."

He tasted blood on his tongue and his head was roaring. He felt like his mind was being held by an iron claw. He knew that these were the knights who controlled him. He noticed, not without a little bit of venom, that they had to spend almost all of their energy on him. There was a reason why Snoke had chosen him as leader.

He heard the scraping of boots on the ground, which slowly moved away. He kept his head down. They had tied his arms on his back and had forced him to his knees, where he sat and waited. Waiting for them to finish venting their hatred on him, whether they were doing it on his body or in his mind. It hurt deeply. But it hurt him even more that he had to cut his connection to Rey, radically and completely. It was incredibly difficult, but he couldn't let them find her and hurt her. And they would, if they had the chance. So he had to endure it, alone.

He had to do it for her.

A new pair of shoes appeared in his field of vision, shiny black and immaculate.

"Well, Ren, how are you feeling?"

Hux's rasping voice reached his ears, their dull echo echoing off the black mirror-smooth walls of the cell they had put him into. He ignored him and said nothing.

One of the boots hit him so hard under his chin that for a moment he saw glowing flashes in front of his eyes. With a suppressed moan, he fell back onto his back and stared into the face of his
hated red-haired adversary.

"Answer me, you worm!", Hux jabbed with clenched teeth, but then seemed to remind himself to be inwardly again and instead kneaded his gloved hands in suppressed rage.

A hoarse laugh came from his throat.

"Oh yes, Hux, you like that, huh?" He etched and lazily leaned on his elbows, "At last you can pay me back, you've been waiting for that, right?"

Hux lips twisted into a shallow smile.

"I admit it has its charm," he replied, "but I'm not necessarily a friend of brute force."

"Oh," he snorted. "That's new. Did you say that to your father before you killed him?"

Hux laughed.

"So I am in good company, Ren," he said unimpressed and cleared his throat, "but I'm not here to chat. I'm here to negotiate what we call conditions."

He frowned at Hux, but didn’t answer. Hux pursed his lips and continued:

"You're going to die, Ren, the only question is how much publicity we want. But I think it will be clear that I take your position to finally give the First Order the glory it deserves. I'm going to finish Supreme Leader Snoke's work, something you didn’t do."

His expression darkened.

"So that's the reason," he said in a low voice, "you couldn’t bear that he preferred me."

Hux folded his hands behind his back as usual.

"Well, of course, I've often questioned what he finds on a rat like you," he replied flatly, "I assumed it was ... the Force. The power he saw in you. Vader's power, Vader's blood. But now, having to realize that you have betrayed your grandfather and thus all of us, I think it is in his sense that someone takes the throne that is worthy of it."

"How did you do it?", he asked abruptly, and he felt the pliers tighten around his head, "How did you draw them to your side?"

Hux looked at him condescendingly and seemed to weigh his words carefully.

"That wasn’t necessary," he said then, "You have done that yourself. They knew that something was wrong - the recording that proves your betrayal was a mere formality. They watched you. And her, the scavenger. I have no idea what's going on and what these knights mean by the fact that they've seen her - but I don’t care. I just know that she will probably still be very useful to me."

He scrambled to his knees again. If he had had his hands free, he would probably have put them around Hux’s neck at least now, squeezing until he died agonizingly and miserably under his hands.

"Don’t you dare," he hissed. "That's just between us."

"Well, she seems to mean something to you. Whatever this something is," whispered Hux, "And since I don’t care what you consider appropriate or fair, I take the right to use her as I like. In fact,
she’ll be the reason why the First Order strengthens and the Resistance collapses and is eradicated."

"You disgusting ..."

He wanted to say something else, wanted to shout out his anger, but suddenly there was pain in his head, in his thoughts, in his subconscious, which reached down to his soul. He could hardly suppress a cry of pain; The ringing in his ears and the pressure behind his eyes was almost unbearable.

"We're done here," he heard Hux's dull voice; it sounded as if his ears were filled with cotton wool. He stared up, stunned, and recognized the outline of two knights approaching him as Hux's gaunt figure departed.

Then there was only blazing heat. And he screamed, screamed although he knew no one would hear him.

OOO

The cell did not differ much from the room Rey had called her home over the past few months, but without her belongings, which had been something she'd been able to cling to, it just seemed empty and bleak. She didn't know how much time had passed since Dorovan's bodyguards had thrown her in here. She had lost all sense of time. She just remembered how naive she had been and jumped right into Dorovan’s trap. She didn’t know why, she had no idea what his motive was. But she had hardly distrusted anyone as much as she distrusted him, she was sure of that. Sadly, she thought of Leia and wondered what she would have done in this situation.

"She wouldn’t have given up," Rey said to herself, and that was exactly what she did herself. This was just another obstacle, nothing else.

But then she thought of Ben. And she wondered if he had managed to leave the Finalizer. Wondered if he was looking for her. At the thought that he might fall into the hands of Dorovan, she felt anxious. But on the other hand, he was powerful and skilled in dealing with the Force. What would he do? And what would she have wanted him to do?

Save the Resistance?

Save himself?

"Ben?"

She sensed that he was close. And yet eternally far away.

Something was wrong.

The silence above them, swallowing every other sound, felt wrong. Torn and incomplete, as if she was seeking shelter under a holey roof through which the rain dripped. As mysterious as the connection between them had been, it had always managed to do one thing: it had given them security. They had always known that only both of them existed at the other end. But now she wasn’t so sure anymore.

At first she didn’t see him. She couldn’t see anything; there was something in the air like thick fog
that took her sight. She only felt him, far away, like a thought in the back of her mind. She turned her head over and over, scanning every corner of her surroundings, but she didn’t see him. There was only ... emptiness. And something that hurt her. Deep inside, barely perceptible, but there.

_He was in pain._

Suddenly she realized that it wasn’t the Force that created this scenario. The Force would never have kept them away from each other; if she knew one thing, then that the Force had always tried to create and consolidate this bond over and over again. No, that was different. It was Ben. He locked her out, trying to cut the connection, keep her off. For whatever reason.

Rey concentrated and closed her eyes. The pain in her was real, as real as it could be. She focused on it; it was the easiest way to find him, she believed. She listened to her inside, looked for him, called for him, but she got no answer. But she didn’t want to give up; she had never given up and she would not start now.

"**BEN!**"

Suddenly there was something that like a crack in the glass. He wasn’t strong enough to shield her anymore. She struggled against it, banging her mind against it like a battering ram thundering against a barricade. Again and again. At some point ... his resistance finally gave way. And her hand touched something. She hadn’t even noticed that she had stretched it out in a trance. She opened her eyes.

He lay at her feet on his knees, his hands tied behind his back. Blood dripped out of his mouth and out of one ear. His hair hung wildly over his forehead and stuck to his skin. He wore neither armor nor cape; and what he wore was marked by the physical pain that had been done to him.

"**BEN!**"

Rey dropped to her knees and carefully took his face between her hands. He was wet with sweat, but his skin was freezing cold. For a moment she thought he had fainted, as slumped as he sat on the floor, but then he looked up, slowly and deliberately. His dark eyes were full of pain, fear and horror, but also full of longing for her and her touch. She felt his face clinging to her hand as if it was comforting him. A sigh came from his throat.

"I'm sorry," he said and a shadow crossed his face, "They got me."

Rey stroked his cheek with her thumb and a tiny, encouraging smile appeared on her lips.

"Me too," she replied, "Guess we both messed up."

"You shouldn’t have come," his voice trembled, "I didn’t want you to come."

"I know," she replied, "You tried to cut me off. But I can ... I can’t ... what did they do to you?"

He looked at her and his eyes were wet with tears. His right eye was bloodshot and a violet shimmering bruise appeared on his temple.

"They knew it," he whispered, "they knew there was something there. They felt it. Rey, we were so reckless. They knew it all the time, they were watching us."

"Who?", Rey tensed. She thought she already knew the answer.

"The knights," he answered, and Rey saw her worst suspicions confirmed, "They were there. I should have seen it. They were there when we ... were close to each other. I underestimated them,
all the time. And Hux. They know everything... about what happened on the Supremacy."

Rey felt an ice-cold hand reaching for her heart and clutching it tightly. She knew what he was talking about. She had seen the knights - not just once. Most of the time they were shadows, nothing more than a movement in the corner of her eyes, but she had seen them. Or maybe she’d thought she’d feel Ben's presence and overlooked it – ignored it. But now she felt foolish that she had trusted blindly. They were not the only Force-sensitive beings. Maybe some of the last but not the only ones.

"You have to go."

He spoke the words reluctantly, but emphatically. Rey stroked his hair out of his face and shook her head.

"I won't leave you alone," she insisted, "I won't let you go through all this alone."

"And I can't let them hurt you," he replied softly, trying to avert his face from her, but the movement seemed to cause him physical pain. He groaned.

"I don't care," Rey said hastily, "I don't care what they do to me. I can't..."

"They will execute me," he interrupted, and Rey's eyes widened, "You can't do anything. They know everything. They think I cooperate with the enemy. And somehow... I think I do."

There was a smile on his face that Rey couldn't reciprocate. Anger boiled up inside her and tears gathered in her eyes.

"I'll come for you," she said, "I'll save you. I take the Falcon and I ..."

She hesitated. The memory of her having landed in a cell not too long ago, waiting for whatever her former allies had in mind for her, came back painfully. But she had to succeed - somehow. She could not stand the thought that he ...

Ben shook his head.

"You can't save me," he said, and his expression deepened sadly, "I will pay for what I did. Even if that means that we will never see the sunrise on Chandrila together. I'm sorry."

"NO."

Rey threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. She buried her face in his black hair, clawing her fingers into the fabric of his shirt as if she could stop him with her physical strength.

She felt like he tried to break the connection; hot tears flowed down her face.

"You have to go," Ben said, his voice crisp and teary at the same time, "They are coming. They know that you are here. I can't let them hurt you."

"I won't leave you alone!"

"Let go, please."

"Never."

As soon as the words were spoken, Rey felt pain. Glistening, bright pain in her head, as if a lightsaber was drilling through her forehead. She felt Ben shivering beneath her and suppressing a scream; he felt it too. It was not her pain, it was their pain - the knights were there, she saw the
shadows in her thoughts pulling at her and trying to tear them apart. There were a thousand
needles in her skin; there were glowing coals in her chest and flashes of light behind her eyes. She
screamed; she didn’t know if she was really screaming or if it was all in her head, but it didn’t
matter. The pain was real. The shadow grabbed her, tore at her, invaded her mind. Like black tar,
it flooded her heart and took her breath away.

"LET GO."

Ben's voice touched her ear as through a mist; she felt his lips against her cheek and his hot breath
on her skin. And then a single, small word:

"Goodbye."

Something in her tore.

She fell to the ground, gasping for breath. The cold stone floor under her fingers felt dull and real,
but it wasn’t. Not for her. She was wet with sweat and shivering at the same time. She didn’t think
that her legs could still carry her, so she sank down on the floor and curled up like a baby. She
screamed, but it was too late.

Tears streamed down her face as the emptiness flooded her like water, along with the knowledge
that Ben, miles and miles away, endured both their pain alone.
"Rey! Rey, what happened? Talk to me!"

Rey felt that she was picked up by a strong pair of arms and gently laid on the bed in her cell. A hand stroked her face, but she hadn't had the strength to even open her eyes. All the bones in her body ached. It seemed like she had fainted on the floor, overwhelmed by her feelings. Now there was nothing left. Nothing except the echo of a distant memory in her hollow, empty body.

"What did you do to her? Are you crazy?!"

Dumbly, Rey heard a voice so full of anger that it caught her fading attention. She knew that voice. It was Finn. Another distant voice answered him, but the words made no sense in her head. Finn made a sound somewhere between a roar and a snort.

"Are you out of your mind? So that's thanks for everything Rey did for you? Resistance, pah, don't make me laugh!"

Again the other voice answered and again Finn made a contemptuous noise.

"Alright, alright! Can I at least stay with her until she’s awake?"

He was apparently allowed to, because Rey heard how the door closed, without taking steps away. Instead, a moment later, she felt Finn sit on the edge of her bed and his hand reaching for hers. Annoyed, he murmured something she didn't understand, but it probably contained several swear words. She rolled a little into the gut that was caused by his body weight, but it was fine. The real warmth of his body was comforting.

"Rey ....," she heard Finn say and he sighed, "What's going on here? That's all ... wrong. I don't believe you attacked Poe. And if you did, I'm sure he deserved it."

His voice was grim and a little satisfied. Rey felt tears gather under her eyelids. She realized now how much she had missed talking to Finn. He had always understood her somehow. In one way or another. He was still her friend. She felt a wave of affection and squeezed his hand lightly. Finn gasped.

"Rey, are you awake?" he asked in a hushed voice, returning the pressure of her hand, "Say something, please."

Rey opened her eyes, slowly and deliberately. The cell was dark, it had to be later evening or night. She glimpsed at Finn's face, lit by the glow of a candle on the tiny table beside the bed. He looked worried and sad.

"Finn ....," Rey breathed and once again she couldn't stop the tears from running down her face, "Finn, I'm so sorry ..."

He took her cold hand in both of his hands and pressed it firmly, "There is nothing to apologize for."

A small smile fell on Rey's lips as she wept silently. With joy, because Finn was back at her side. Aggravated, because she was dumb enough to get herself into this situation in the first place. And
because of grief, because her heart yearned for something too far away to reach.

Finn said nothing until Rey's tears dried up. He did nothing except stroke her hand and stay with her. And that was enough for the moment.

OOO

"Everyone's getting ready for the fight."

Rey crouched on the bed, arms tight around her legs, her back to the wall. She felt a little lighter now, but the hopelessness of her situation still weighed heavily on her. Still listening to herself, she waited for a sign, but her mind remained silent. She hadn’t felt so lost for a long time. The only consolation that gave her an infernal fear at the same time was that she probably would have noticed if he ...

But then there was Finn. He studied her steadily, but at least he didn’t treat her like a raw egg or even a criminal. Although Rey still had not told him what had happened. She was afraid of that, but she also knew that Finn would eventually have to hear it.

"Then Dorovan is serious," Rey said sorrowfully, "We will attack the First Order."

"Hmhm," growled Finn, "They’ll start before sunrise. A suicide squad, if you ask me. But I don’t know what else we should do. Poe is ... full of energy."

Rey flinched involuntarily.

"He hates the First Order," Rey stated, and Finn nodded.

"Who doesn’t?" he replied with a short, sarcastic laugh, "I would rather fight them sooner than later. It's just ... I don’t know if that's the way to go. It's only a clash of hate and hate. And in the end, maybe we'll have the same problem again, and a new First Order will emerge ..."

Rey gave Finn an attentive look. She knew Finn had been tired of fighting for a long time, but those words were new to her as well. A little hope bloomed in her. Hope that he might understand what was going on inside her.

"What happened, Rey?", Finn seemed to have noticed that something was working in Rey's head, and pursed his lips, "You know, I have offered you that you can talk to me about everything. You don’t have to tell me everything, but I would like to know how I can help you. If I can help you."

Rey shrugged.

"I'm not so sure myself," she said, taking a deep breath, "I don’t want to keep anything from you. I am just afraid."

"You don’t have to, at least not in front of me," Finn said, adding with a grin, "I can still remember the blow with your wand when we first met. Let's just say I'm more scared of you!"

Rey couldn’t help smiling a little.

"There is ... maybe something you can do. Although it sounds crazy," she said slowly, adding hesitantly, "I have to ... I have to go to the Finalizer."

Finn’s face darkened.
"Oh, what's crazy about wanting to get into the enemy's main ship in the midst of the biggest battle? Pfff, easy!", he replied after a short break, but when Rey's eyes hit him, he waved off, "All right, just joking. But seriously, Rey: why would you want that? That's ... phew."

"A suicide squad," Rey added, not without some self-irony, "I know. But there is no other way. I have to go to meet ... Kylo Ren."

A deep crease formed on Finn's forehead when he heard the name. For a moment it seemed to have made him speechless. Then he just asked: "Why?"

Rey couldn't figure out if he was upset or curious. She felt her pulse speed up. The moment had come.

"There is a reason for that. I will tell you what happened. After Ahch-To. Then maybe you’ll understand it."

Finn looked surprised at first, then leaned forward and gestured for her to listen attentively. She bit her lip.

"You remember the last time we saw Kylo Ren, do you? Starkiller Base?"

"Hmm, no, never heard of it. Not ringing a bell."

"Finn!"

"I'm just kidding. Yes of course. Painful, but still. And then?"

And then she told him everything. About the mysterious connection that existed between them and that had obviously been forged by Snoke – or not. About the fight on the Supremacy, which eventually led her to the Resistance on Crait. About the conversations with Kylo Ren that made her understand him better (though she purposely missed some of the details that seemed too intimate to her). And everything she knew about the balance of the Force that she believed that Kylo Ren and her were the ones who could do it if they got the chance, unless one of them was executed first.

When she finally finished speaking, she felt relieved, but worried. Finn's expression alternated between bleak and astonished and something else she couldn’t interpret. She took a deep breath as she finished her story.

"I know, that sounds pretty made-up."

Finn ran his hand over his chin and thought in silence. Then he frowned.

"Is he here?"

Rey raised her eyebrows.

"Who?"

"Well, Ren. Or Ben or whatever. Is he here right now ... in this room?"

Rey snorted.

"No of course not. Do you think I would tell you all this if he were here?"

"I don’t know. If only you can see him, theoretically he could be anywhere, spying on us or
watching us through the window ..."

"Okay, you don’t believe me," Rey said resignedly, dropping her head. Finn made a defensive gesture.

"Of course, I believe you! But you must admit, it's a bit scary."

Rey shrugged.

"I can’t help it. He is just ... there. And no matter how many times we both try, we can’t solve the connection."

*And we really don’t want it either*, she thought secretly, but she didn’t say it.

Finn studied her face and said nothing. Rey wanted to know what was going on in his head. For someone who didn’t know what the ways of the Force meant - and Rey didn’t know if she could even count herself in - it was all a huge puzzle. The Force, a balance, determination ... could someone like Finn even understand what it meant to be guided to one thing without knowing what the future brought?

Rey already wanted to add a comforting explanation to her story, but Finn suddenly widened his eyes as if he had just been struck by the flash of knowledge.

"Holy Bantha crap!"

Rey was surprised. In her head she could clearly hear Luke's voice admonishing "LANGUAGE!" And she knew that Finn would certainly haven’t cared about that. He jumped up and pointed at Rey with his forefinger.

"You're in love with him!"

Rey sat there, stunned, shaking her head.

"Excuse me?"

"Of course! Now the whole thing makes sense. And it also explains your insane idea of going back to the *Finalizer*. You want to save him because you LOVE him!"

Rey's mouth opened slightly. She had really expected every reaction, but certainly not this one.

"That's crazy."

"Yes, it is indeed. Rey, do you realize what kind of person Kylo Ren is? Perhaps the Force may see it differently. But it doesn’t change what he did."

She looked at him with a mixture of suspicion and disappointment, searching for words. But there was nothing she could answer. Instead, she just whispered:

"No it doesn’t."

"But why ...?", Finn wrestled with himself, "Why do you want to risk your life for him then?"

"Because ...", Rey could feel the tears coming again. The memory of the pain they had both endured came back with brutality. The memory of their attachment, of the feeling she had when she was close to him. The memory of his warmth and the smell of his skin.

"Maybe ... it is because there are certain feelings," she said quietly, sounding more like a
confession to herself than to Finn, "I know he did all those awful things. I can’t change them. But that doesn’t mean that there is nothing good left in him. I’ve seen it. I know he's redeemable, I know he wants it himself. Leia and Luke also once believed it, I know it. I can’t let him die without at least giving him the chance to change for the better. There is a reason why the Force created this bond, why we were forced to confront each other. I just can’t let him die. I can’t…”

Again the tears fell, but Rey wiped them away energetically. She had cried enough; it was time to pull herself together, even though the faint echo of the pain Ben suffered echoed in her mind.

"I have to ...," Finn said, running his hand absently through his hair, "I have to ... just drop that. I will ... I will come back. Promise."

Rey didn’t believe him; she wondered if he believed himself. She knew it was a lot to swallow. Even for herself. Now that she had uttered the words, she was sure they were true.

How in the galaxy could this happen?

Finn turned and walked to the door without saying another word. Rey saw that a guard was standing in front of the door, letting him out. Then the door closed again.

Rey lay down on the uncomfortable bed and stared at the ceiling. Why had she done that? Why did she open herself to him? It was futile. Only Leia understood what was happening between Ben and her. And Leia was not there anymore. There was no one left who could understand the weight she carried on her shoulders and how lonely she felt with it. How painful it was to think back to what she had to give up. The memory of a family that didn’t exist. Han and Luke. She had left everything behind.

Everything but the man, sitting in a cell on the Finalizer, waiting for his execution.

OOO

The hangar was bustling with activity as Finn arrived, driven by his own thoughts. Pilots, droids, mechanics - everyone was up and preparing to take off the remaining machines. Everything suddenly went very fast. Dorovan seemed to have been planning the strike against the First Order for a very long time, waiting to know the Resistance at his side. Finn guessed that this had more to do with prestige than actual combat strength. If the Resistance, which was recently under famous General Leia Organa's command, decided to do so, then it meant something. Not just for them, but for all other free races in the galaxy.

The conversation with Rey bothered him, more than anything he had ever thought he knew. The idea that she saw her biggest enemy – even more so, that she even talked to him and got along with him – demanded all the understanding he had. And it was still not enough. He understood why she had hidden it, and suddenly her strange behavior lately made sense. But at the same time, he also thought of what Poe had said. What if Rey made common cause with the First Order? Wasn’t this strange connection to Kylo Ren proof enough that something was wrong here?

And yet ... he couldn’t forget her face when she had confided in him. How her face had lightened as she talked about Kylo Ren - or Ben Solo, as she called him. How dejected she was when she said that he had “cut the connection”, whatever that meant. And above all her deep sorrow and the tears she had shed. That was not just sadness. It seemed that something had been taken from her. Something essential, something vital without which she couldn’t go on. It was so important to her
that she wanted to go the most dangerous place in the world to save him.

She wanted to save him.

Was that something you did for the sake of your enemy?

*I know that he is redeemable.*

"Finn!"

Poe's excited voice echoed over the murmurs of busy mechanics and pilots in his direction. It took a little while until Finn had completely returned from his thoughts and could focus his attention on the leader of the flight squadron.

"Everything okay?", Poe came up to him with big steps and patted him on the shoulder, "There's no time to mope now, man!"

Finn forced a narrow smile.

"Everything's okay," he said, adding hesitantly, "I was just visiting Rey."

Poe's mood immediately turned 180 degrees, Finn could see it in his face.

"You heard what she did?"

"Rumors say. I wanted to hear it myself," Finn said, straightening his shoulders. Poe's eyelid twitched nervously.

"I hate to say it, Finn ... but I was right about Rey," Poe said and a short sigh broke out of his throat, "I'm sorry. I know you like her. I didn’t expect that either."

"Poe ...", Finn took a breath, "Poe, I don’t think Rey changed sides. I just can’t imagine it."

Poe looked at him for a long time. Finn could see him tensing his jaw muscles as if he were clenching his teeth.

"So you think I'm lying?" he said suddenly. Finn blinked in surprise.

"What? No! No, I don’t think that!" he insisted, "But Rey is ... she would never have done anything to you."

"Oh yes, she did," said Poe unimpressed, "I don’t know how she got you or what she said, but you don’t know ...." he interrupted himself, as if something had occurred to him he didn’t want to remember. It was probably like that.

"I have no time for it," his voice had become noticeably more annoyed as he spoke again, "The final preparations are nearly finished. That reminds me ... you didn’t happen to meet BB-8 on the way?"

Finn decided that it was better to let the subject "Rey" rest, but shook his head.

"No," he said, "but I think he accompanied Rose this morning when she was called to repair ..."

"Rose isn’t here either," Poe replied abruptly and his eyebrows contracted slightly, "Quite unreliable, considering that every helping hand is needed here. If you see her ... she should send me my droid. I won't fly without him."
Without another greeting Poe turned on his heel and disappeared in the crowd of officers and fighters. Finn looked after him thoughtfully for a while, even when he could no longer see him.

Then Rose's face appeared in his mind's eye. Her smile, her warm and honest manner, her good-natured heart and her determination, which she sometimes used with a blaster. And suddenly there was a bad feeling in his stomach. A worried, anxious feeling.

He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a small, silver device. He turned on the communicator and pressed the send button.

"Rose, where are you? The whole bunker is in a dazzling mood," he said into the device and waited.

He knew Rose could be quite absorbed in her things once she concentrated on something. He waited, waited, waited. But there was no answer. He tried it a few more times, but the communicator remained silent. He sighed. Probably futile - certainly Poe had already tried to reach her.

Where was she?

He put away the communicator and struggled through the excited crowd to the end of the hangar, which he knew had Dorovan's glider parked there. Rose had been ordered there - more than that, he himself had actually been the deciding force that had led the captain to use her for the repairs of his glider. Suddenly Finn regretted it.

The glider came in sight and was ready to take off, it seemed. Finn scanned the area with his eyes, but again no trace of the mechanic. But at least he saw the captain standing at the entrance to the glider, talking animatedly to an officer.

"What do you want?"

A guard with a white hooded cloak and a fairly impressive blaster rifle slid into view. Finn involuntarily took a step back, but his concern for Rose was now his top priority.

"I have to talk to Captain Dorovan," he said as convincingly as possible. The guard eyed him appraisingly.

"And you are ...?", he asked, but Finn could already tell by his tone that he would never let him through. Finn thrust his chin aggressively, ready to reciprocate, but then one hand dropped onto the guard's shoulder.

"It's alright. I know the man," Dorovan said quietly, giving Finn a reassuring look as he stepped to the side of his guard, "Not by name, but ... I know him."

"Finn," he said quickly, cocking his head, "Captain ... Sir, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but it's important."

"Speak. But quickly, we don't have much time left," urged Dorovan, making a quick gesture. Finn swallowed.

"Captain, my friend Rose ... she is a mechanic and should fix your glider today. Together with a droid of the BB series. But both disappeared. I ... we need her. Now."

"Ah, I remember," Dorovan said quietly, "The most gifted mechanic I was recommended to."

Finn looked at him attentively. Dorovan gave him a long, appraising look that Finn couldn't read,
but which seemed to reinforce his uneasy feeling in his chest. Then he shook his head slightly.

"I haven’t seen her," replied the captain, and continued busily, "I must now prepare my speech to the Resistance fighters. If you excuse me ...
"

Before Finn could answer, the captain and his bodyguards had disappeared. Finn stood stock still, unable to move. He knew with absolute certainty that the captain with all their hopes for the future had just lied to him coldly. He had no proof and almost certainly no one would believe him if he said so, but he was absolutely sure of that.

Something was wrong.

He suddenly felt incomplete. Full of worry and fears that he didn’t know he was capable of. Of course, he had often worried about his own welfare - in fact, it had mostly been in the first place, for example, when he had tried to steal a rescue capsule - but now there was the concern for Rose. Something had happened. And this, in the midst of the last refuge of the Resistance. And under the eyes of a man he didn’t know what to think of him. Poe seemed to blindly trust Dorovan. But if Finn knew one thing, then blind obedience was not something he wanted. Not anymore.

He made a decision. But he knew he couldn’t do it alone.

OOO

With a thump, as if a wet sack fell to the ground, the guard collapsed. She felt a little sorry for him - Rey didn’t think he had the slightest idea who he was guarding in this cell. She grabbed him by the shoulders, dragged him across the floor into her cell, removed his blaster, and then carefully closed the door, firing a well-aimed shot at the lock mechanism. That should last for a while.

She didn’t know exactly where her power came from. Since she’d woken up, she hadn’t felt she could move even a stone a millimeter. But her conversation with Finn had aroused something in her. A small, flickering flame that seemed to feed on anger. Anger, because Finn didn’t believe her, because Dorovan played this wrong game, because Poe was such a miserable fool. It seethed inside her and she felt new power awake inside her. Power, who now unfortunately the guard felt when she thundered his head against the next wall and fell to the ground.

She felt it pulsing in every fiber of her body as she pushed the locked cell door aside with a wave of her hand. A warm feeling that flowed through her like a stream of hot water and filled her to the tips of her fingers. She had experienced that feeling before - when the cave on Ahch-To called after her and dragged her to it.

Anger was the path to the dark side of the Force, Rey knew. But right now, it was all she had left.

She pushed herself into a doorway and weighed her options. Once the fighters left, the hangar would be nearly empty. She didn’t think anybody would go into battle with the Falcon, so she would probably still find it there. But then there were still people in the control center. Would they stop her? Did they even have the tools to do so? Rey didn’t remember seeing anything that could prevent her departure, the station wasn’t designed for that. But she couldn’t risk a mistake either.

Then she heard fast steps approaching. Rey gasped tightly. Someone came down the hall. She knew this aura.

"Finn!"
She raised her blaster to be sure, but she knew it was Finn. With a little cry, her friend turned around and instinctively jerked his arms up.

"Hell, did you scare me!" he exclaimed, "How did you ...?"

"I don’t have time. Come on, hide!", she grabbed him by the arm and pulled him into the doorway, "They can’t see me."

"How come I never get the chance to save you?" Finn said morosely, pulling a pout. Rey had to smile a little; she remembered too well how she had run into Finn's arms under similar circumstances on Starkiller Base. Then she became serious again.

"Why save me? What did you intend to do?"

"I wanted to get you out of the cell," Finn said, adding after a pause, "I'll help you out of here. So you can take the Falcon and get to the Finalizer."

Rey looked at him attentively and surprised.

"So you believe me?"

Finn sighed softly.

"I don’t know if you can call it that. But I think you'll have your reasons, even if I don’t understand them yet," he said, then with a noticeably more serious voice, "But I need your help."

Rey nodded; that Finn helped her steal the Falcon made her mission a little easier.

"What is it?"

"I have to sneak on Dorovan's glider to get into the main ship," Finn explained quickly, "I think ... that Rose is there. I think something happened to her."

Rey looked at Finn long and doubtfully. She had no idea what was going on here and what Dorovan had to do with it, but there was a seriousness and worry in his eyes that she had never seen before.

"Rose ...?" she asked thoughtfully, "Why? What does she have to do with all this?"

"I don’t know," Finn replied truthfully, "Maybe I'm wrong. But I can’t ... I can’t let myself be wrong. Maybe for the same reason as why you want to save Kylo ... Ben Solo. No idea. From now on we don’t talk anymore about who feels what for whom, but we do what is right. Good?"

Rey noticed that Finn blushed slightly. She smiled and nodded.

"Good," she said, touching him lightly as if in confirmation, "What are you suggesting?"

OOO

"FIRE!"

A reddish glow illuminated the hangar and a distant explosion announced that at the other end of
the hall a fuel tank had come too close to the fire. Sting flames blazed across the crowd and those who had no way to extinguish the fire in any way went to safety quickly. The panic was palpable in the air, even clearer than the soot and heat – that was how Rey felt as they squeezed through the fleeing people, their hoods drawn low over their foreheads. They hadn’t made it yet - only when she was behind the controls of the Millennium Falcon and saw the immensity of the universe she might feel reasonably safe.

“I can’t believe that ‘fire’ was the best idea we had,” Rey murmured while following Finn. He didn’t seem to care that much.

"Simple but effective," Finn said to her as they stopped in the shadow of an X-Wing and looked around, "They will handle it. And they are too distracted to pay attention to us."

"Don’t shirk it," Rey reminded him, "There are still two guards standing in front of Dorovan's glider. I can see them - and feel them."

Finn ignored her comment.

"Can you do it again?" he asked, pointing in the direction of the fire, "So with ... the Force and all? That worked well."

Rey pressed her lips together. She was reluctant to admit that at the same time she was pleased and frightened by this power, which seemed to feed purely on the thought of vengeance on Dorovan and the First Order. In fact, it has never been so easy for her to move or even control things. Luke had warned her again and again how seductive the dark side could be. And now, all of a sudden, it seemed to be more accessible than ever.

What if she couldn’t control it anymore?

"I'll try," she said, though not without aversion, "Keep your eyes open."

She could see the guards in her mind's eye, as if they were standing in front of her. Their mind was like an open book to her; easy to read, easy to change. At least that's how she felt. She had done it before - she would be able to do it again. It was like taking two dolls in her hands, turning their mind randomly and like joints. Then she spoke to them - with an inner voice that didn’t sound like her at all. But she knew what she had to say.

As if grabbed by an invisible string, the two guards in front of Dorovan's glider turned on their heels and walked away.

"It worked!" Finn shouted. "Where did you send them?"

"To the other end of the bunker, I think," said Rey, hiding her trembling hand under her cloak, "but it doesn’t matter. You have to go now."

Finn turned to her. Concern was written on his face - more than she could bear.

"Don’t look at me like that, Finn," she said. "Everything will be fine."

"I can only hope that you know what you are doing," Finn replied and a small smile appeared on his lips, "And that we meet again."

Rey smiled.

"I hope so too."
And then she hugged him. Hugged him as hard as she could, trying to memorize every detail of him, from the warmth of his body to the sound of his voice. She hid her fear well under a mantle of silence, knowing that perhaps her hope was in vain this time.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter may feel rushed, but there's still so much that's going to happen so I needed to speed the story up a little. Hope you enjoy it anyway :) next chapters will be intense.
Also: Finn's ma boy <3
Thanks for your comments, bookmarks and Kudos. As always! <3 I'm glad if you're having a good time reading my story :)
DAMN, long time no chapter! I am so sorry, real life was extremely busy and I had no time to write. But we are so close to the end and I really really really want to finish this story. My heart belongs to it. I am going on, I promise, and I hope some of you are staying with it til the end :) Hope you're enjoying the new chapter. Spoiler: Sad Reylo-reunion <3 Thanks to everyone for reading, commenting, kudo-ing and bookmarking <3

The first jump through hyperspace had been like a step into another world for Rey. To see this infinite blackness, to feel the vibrations of the machine beneath her, was something that breathed new life into her spirit, which had been battered by the gloomy life of Jakku. Also, because she was experiencing it with someone that could mean something to her. But Finn was not here today; Rey looked at the empty co-pilot chair beside her and sighed. No Finn, no Chewbacca ... no Han. Rey noticed the memories trying to regain space in her mind, but she pushed them back. She had to stay focused. What lay before her would not be easy.

She flew off without a specific target, but she knew exactly where to go. It was like a thread on which she drew, where she hauled herself along and kept walking, into the labyrinth. She didn’t know who was responsible for this thread or where it would lead her exactly, but it would be the right place. She was well aware that this might be her last flight - that at the end of the thread there might be no turning back. But she had accepted that fact the moment she entered the Millennium Falcon.

She was not afraid to die. But she was afraid of the moment when that faint glow in her that showed he was still there died away. It was infinitely distant, too far away to reach him, but at least he was still there, he lived and flickered, as if he wanted to show her the way with his light. A spark in the dark.

"Don’t you dare die on me, Ben Solo," Rey muttered to herself, checking the instruments again. It was not far, she knew it. The question was: What would she find?

She wondered if Finn felt the same. He had squeezed himself into the glider as quickly as possible, presumably into some part of the small cargo hold, hoping not to be discovered. Rey had watched him for a long time before she had started her own journey. Undisturbed, by the way - nobody had tried to stop her. Although she didn’t lose the feeling that nobody wanted to stop her either. Slowly she really felt as if she was suffering from paranoia.

She just hoped Finn would find what he was looking for. The long evenings he'd spent on Rose's bed had at least given her an idea of his feelings for her. Even if he didn’t want to admit it to himself. She couldn’t even blame him. Affection, compassion or even love - these were things that had been trained off the stormtroopers. But maybe, she thought, Rose would be able to tickle those feelings in him. Anyway, she had rarely seen him so determined as today.

You want to save him because you love him!

Rey stared into space. Finn's words shook the very foundations of her own self, unable to admit it. She had not thought about it, had not allowed her thoughts and feelings to control her. But the
She had not thought about it, had not allowed her thoughts and feelings to control her. But the more she thought about it, the less she knew why she really did this trip. This enormously dangerous journey.

Did she do it for the Force? Had the hours with Ben shown her that there was more to it than just the two of them - that the Force was striving to bring them together, the two that seemed to be made of light and darkness?

Or did she do it ... because of him?

She couldn’t deny that there was something there. He made her feel that there was someone who understood her, without any “ifs” or “buts”. He let her forget that there was no one else in the dark - nobody waiting for her or coming back to her. He made her realize how alone she had been and how at home she felt now.

She was not ready to be alone again.

She throttled the hyperdrive's energy supply. She was there.

Although the First Order fleet had been drastically decimated, the sight of the cruisers was still overwhelming. From a distance, Rey counted at least four of them, as well as innumerable smaller warships, bombers and gliders. And the fleet was probably not even complete. Amidst the gleaming black and gray war machines, the Finalizer were enthroned like a dark shadow moving silently through the darkness, like a predator ready to go. Rey's heart made an unpleasant jump. Now that she was here, her insecurity became stronger again. The thread on which she hung plucked and pulled her in one direction, but something else troubled her. At first she didn’t know what it was - Rey had absolutely no idea about strategic warfare. But as she saw the ships, she almost felt like they were expecting someone. As if they expected an attack.

Rey's stomach tensed nervously. She thought of Finn, Poe and the planned attack of the Resistance. And hoped for the first time that Dorovan's fleet was really as big as Poe had always mentioned.

Rey continued to throttle the speed of the Millennium Falcon, pondering. She would never make it to the Finalizer unseen, that was sure. But what then? Would she have to fight her way? It had been easier the last time. She had known that he was there and awaited her. This time, she could be happy if he was alive before she reached the ship.

Suddenly, the Falcon shivered under a shock.

Instinctively, Rey took the controls to avoid a supposed obstacle and turn the ship around. But the machine did not react; only a piercing, booming tone told her there was still life in it. She reversed the power, tried to turn back, but it was futile. The instruments no longer obeyed her.

Instantly, she realized that it had to be a tractor beam that caught her. The Falcon moved forward, heading straight for the lined-up battleships. Rey dropped her hands, who were clutching the controls, and stared outside. A small voice in the back of her head muttered to her that she had probably just fallen into a trap.

But it made no sense. Why would they bother and capture her when a shot from one of the Star Destroyers was enough?

She simply sat and waited while the ships passed her, and she approached the Finalizer.

Waiting had never been a problem for her.
It was quiet. The voices of the pilots and officers had slowly faded and only the steady humming of machinery and equipment could be heard. Finn decided that perhaps now was the best moment to risk it, and carefully reached his head out of the hatch in which he had squeezed himself. He had spent the flight between toolboxes and something that looked like an animal had recently been transported in it - not very comfortable, but at least he hadn’t been discovered here. Nevertheless, he firmly held the handle of his blaster, which was in his belt, as he ventured out of hiding.

The glider was empty and the access hatch was open. When Finn took a look around the corner, he saw no guards standing outside the entrance - but that could be fooling. How gladly he would have had Rey by his side now. Not only because she could have distracted soldiers, but because a supportive hand would have done him good. It was the first time he jumped headfirst into something instead of running away. All alone, no safety net, no escape pod that could have taken him away, without a smart pilot to join.

But this time, he also knew that he was not just doing it for himself.

Quickly he looked around again to make sure there was not someone on board. But then something caught his attention. Something shiny metallic, carelessly lying in a hatch embedded in the slider's wall.

It was Rey's lightsaber. He recognized it right away, after all, he had already had it in his own hands and fought with it. But it was not broken anymore. But what was it doing aboard Dorovan’s ship? Finn could only guess that it had been taken off Rey when Dorovan caught her escaping. Finn reached for the lightsaber and closed his hand around the handle. Even he could sense that life was in the weapon; it was as if something was pulsing inside the handle. There was no doubt. Finn decided it was better to have the sword in safer hands and put it in the inside pocket of his jacket.

Then he quickly left the glider and looked around. The hangar of the mothership, which the ship had apparently headed, was huge. At least ten more gliders and small warships were stationed here, all brilliantly white and ready for action. Finn could not suppress an impressed sound as he looked around.

In the distance, he spotted a handful of mechanics bothering at an open glider. He adjusted his jacket so that no one could see the blaster on his belt, and decided it was best to act as inconspicuously as possible. So he walked casually past the mechanics, who greeted him with a casual nod and then returned to their work. Inwardly, Finn sighed in relief. Presumably he would hardly attract attention; he simply looked like a pilot of the Resistance, thanks to Poe's jacket. And that would hopefully cause no further suspicion.

He chose one of the aisles that branched off the hangar and moved on. He had no idea where to start looking. The ship had to be huge, as Poe had described. If it was nearly as big as the Supremacy, then it would probably take forever until he came on a track. Even when he didn’t even know if Rose was really here. But if something had happened to her, that was the first clue. And after that ... he would see what came.

He met more men and women in the corridors, but nobody took any notice of him. The inconspicuous variant had obviously been the right one. Still, every once in a while, he looked around the corners with a certain fear. He was looking for a clue, a prisoner complex, or something similar.
"Rose, where are you?" he mumbled to himself and the concern grew inside him. What if he was not there in time? What if they took her away? What if ...?

"Finn?"

Finn startled. A surprised beep followed by an excitedly whirling ball took him by surprise.

"What the...? BB-8? Rose?!!"

The little droid rolled around him like a puppy that was happy to see its owner. Rose ran towards him, red-faced, but apparently uninjured.

"Rose! What? Where are you coming from?"

Finn ignored the excited BB-8 and stormed toward Rose. Without thinking, he embraced her and literally pulled her off her feet. Rose gasped for air.

"Yes ... yes, I am also happy to see you... Finn ...!"

Finn put her back on her legs and took her face between his hands.

"Why the hell are you always saving yourselves before I'm there?!!"

A slight smile appeared on Rose's face.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you were looking for me."

"Yes ... no ... all right," Finn let her go and cleaned imaginary dust off his jacket, "I'm glad you ... that you're fine. But ... what happened?"

"Long story," she said, but then she became serious: "Anyway. Finn ... please tell me that the Resistance fleet has not left yet."

Finn frowned.

"Why? What happened?"

"Have they left or not?"

"Well ... yes, I think so. They're leaving for Karr at dusk, which is likely to be soon."

Rose sighed.

"Then it's probably already too late."

OOO

"It was very stupid and naive to come here. To come back here."

Hux's rasping voice caught Rey on her way down the Falcon's hatch. Several blasters were aimed at her - more than she could count. She felt the looks of the stormtroopers through their helmets; vigilant and attentive. Then she saw the red-haired General's smug grin and felt the small, hot flame lick inside her.
She had never met him face to face, at least not really. He must have met her somewhere along the way, maybe back when she first met Kylo Ren and got caught in his clutches. She had felt Hux presence, his aversion to Kylo and vice versa. It was so present and so distinct that she could feel it without even looking at him. But now she recognized that aura in him again, that almost tangible hatred, the foul stench of a power-hungry man who felt no empathy. He was just like Supreme Leader Snoke, Rey noted.

"For finding that stupid and naïve, you're doing a lot of work, General Hux," Rey said with a sidelong glance at the stormtroopers clutching their blasters aggressively.

Hux' lip grimaced to a slack smile.

"I knew you would show up here sooner or later, scavenger," he replied, emphasizing the last word very strangely, "you are much more predictable than you might think."

Rey's expression didn’t change, but she was a little unsure. What did he mean?

"Where is Kylo Ren?", she then asked and her eyebrows contracted. The light in her still flickered. Now that she was here, stronger than before. But it was still weak, infinitely weak. She wondered if he could feel her. Did he know that she came to find him?

*Hold on. Just a bit longer.*

"That's how the land lies," said Hux sweetly, "and I thought this would be a particularly amateurish attempt of your esteemed Resistance to assassinate or ambush us."

"I'm not interested in war," Rey replied firmly. "That's not my fight. I'm only here because of Kylo Ren. I know you hold him captive."

Rey pressed her lips together, unsure if she should even utter the words. But then she added: "If you free him ... we'll disappear. Nobody will know what happened. We will just ... go and never come back. I can promise you that."

Hux stared at her for a moment, then let out a loud laugh that could not have sounded less amused.

"Your courage is impressive, I must admit," he replied smirking, "but you didn’t seriously think it would be that easy for you, would you?"

Rey pursed her lips but didn’t answer.

Hux made a sweeping gesture and pointed toward the end of the hangar, where several stormtroopers flanked a gate.

"After you?"

Rey hesitated and took a deep breath.

"And if I refuse?"

Hux grinned widely.

"Then you'll probably die right here, and your story is over. Do you want that ... Rey?"

His tone of voice, his green eyes sparkling with aggression, the strange emphasis on her name - all that was fuel for the flame in her breast that seemed to feed on everything Rey could see and feel. She heard the metallic click of several blasters which took the safety catch off. Then she craned
her chin.

"Let's go."

With the certainty that still many weapons were aimed at her, she followed the General of the First Order into the depths of the ship, accompanied by several soldiers. She knew that the Finalizer was not even as big as the Supremacy, but she soon lost her bearings in the dark corridors. Hux's rigid, straight-lined body was almost strolling in front of her, his hands folded behind his back.

"No handcuffs?", Rey asked after a while of silence and fixed the General's back with her eyes. He didn't turn to her, but she knew he was smiling.

"That wasn't necessary," he replied, "and you'll soon understand why."

Rey felt the blood throb in her ears.

"Why are you doing this?", Rey tried not to sound intimidated, but failed to do so given the overwhelming power she faced, "Supreme Leader Snoke is dead. The Resistance is outnumbered. Why do you want to continue this war?"

Hux answered after a short break. His head jerked briefly in her direction.

"There can be no question of wanting," he said flatly, "I have to. For the good of the galaxy. I know that Jakku's scum like you doesn't understand this, because you decided long ago to stay out. But the galaxy needs order. Our order."

"Does the galaxy feel that way too?" Rey replied aggressively, seeing a vein throbbing on Hux's temple.

"That's not important," he replied, "I'm not one who gives up his beliefs for a filthy scavenger."

"Why do you hate Kylo Ren?"

The question hit the General abruptly, Rey could see and feel it. His jaw muscles tensed in silent rage.

"Because people like him are weak. Weak and manipulatable. Because people like him don't deserve to have so much power," he gave her a sidelong glance, and in his eyes, there was pure hatred, "People like him … and you."

Rey swallowed. All at once she realized many things that the mysterious General had previously kept secret.

"However, that won't be important for much longer."

They stepped through a door and apparently reached the command bridge of the Finalizer. Rey froze. Every officer and soldier seemed to be gathered here to serve the desks and panels. Every screen flickered with records and pictures, maps and patterns that Rey barely understood. But one thing was for sure: that was not normal operation. The First Order had gone into attack position and were preparing.

The Resistance would fly directly into a trap.

"You know what to do."

Something tore Rey to the ground. It was not a physical force or a body - it was the Force of two
knights who knocked her to the ground. They had hidden their auras in front of her, waiting for a moment when she was too distracted to notice them. Rey tried to resist, but the power of two Force-sensitive beings was too much for her. She looked up on all fours and saw two masked knights approach her with their hands raised.

"You wanted to know why you didn’t get any handcuffs," Rey heard Hux say, "Do you think, I don’t know that this won’t be an obstacle for you?"

Rey clenched her teeth. She glared at the two knights, but they seemed unimpressed. She straightened herself up using all of her strength, but it wasn’t enough to get up. Hux had turned to an officer, then looked back at Rey.

"Just be patient, Rey," he said softly, "It won’t be long."

"What are you going to do?" Rey felt the knights' strength searching her mind and reaching for her as if they were looking for something. She did her best to banish them from her mind, but they acted with far greater brutality than Kylo Ren had during his interrogation. Something hurt in the back of her head; she was not sure if it was really her pain she was feeling.

"Oh, you're sure to be thrilled," said the General, full of anticipation, "you know, I'm reluctant to leave anything to chance. It is necessary to plan for a long time, much longer than you would expect me to do. But that's why I'm still here and you ... are down there. And ... ah, speaking of the devil."

Rey gasped when she felt it. It was as if a lever clicked into her mind. She knew he was there even before she saw him.

OOO

"Ben."

He looked awful. Flanked by two knights, he lurched into the room, accompanied by several armed stormtroopers and the dismissive looks of the officers, who paid little attention to the spectacle. His black hair hung tangled in his face; he was wearing nothing but his shirt and pants. There was nothing reminiscent of the former leader of the Knights of Ren. Or the Supreme Leader.

The two knights forced him to his knees, which wasn’t really necessary. He couldn’t stand for a moment; with a terribly painful sound, he fell forward and hit the ground. He too wasn’t shackled. Apparently, they no longer thought they had to.

"What did you do to him?"

Rey felt that the Force of the knights that lay on her somehow relaxed. Maybe she succeeded on her own; maybe the knights just had fun torturing them. She scrambled to her feet. With a few steps Rey was by his side and threw herself on her knees. She turned his lifeless body to one side and inhaled sharply. He had numerous bruises on his face. On his temple was a half-encrusted laceration. Rey carefully rested his head in her lap and brushed the sweaty hair from his forehead. His eyes were half closed; she couldn’t tell if he was looking at her, much less recognizing her.

"Ben."
Rey felt the Force moving between them, like a small plant reaching out to the sun. Her emotions fluctuated between horror and sheer relief that she was here, that she had arrived in time, that he was alive. His eyelids flickered, and when he looked at her, tears gleamed in the corner of his eye. One of his eyes was bloodshot and shimmering red and purple.

"Rey."

His voice was little more than a hint. Rey smiled desperately and felt her eyes wet.

"Yes. Yes it's me. I'm here."

He swallowed hard. Talking seem to hurt him.

"No ... no you can't be her," she heard him whisper, and it sounded like a realization would hit him very hard, "She ... she's far away. She is far away from me. She was just a dream. A dream that I thought would come true."

A tear rolled down his cheek.

"Just a dream..."

He fainted. Rey felt his mind wander aimlessly, like a lost star in the middle of a deep black night. She had always known how broken he was in his heart, how miserably he tried to reassemble the fragments of his being. Now it was as if the pieces had fallen to dust, as if he was looking for something he would never find again. Again, anger flared up in her, it ate through her soul and her skin like an animal.

"What did you do to him?", she looked up and fixed the knights with her eyes. They didn’t move a millimeter from the spot; they were just looking down at her as if she were a bug they would love to step on.

"He got what he deserved," Hux's voice echoed in the room, "Disgusting traitor that he is. Speaking of it ..."

Rey looked up. On one of the screens, apparently a radar, a large number of ships had appeared. Her heart stopped for a beat. That had to be Dorovan's fleet.

"The Resistance will not be beaten so easily. We still have allies out there," Rey angrily yelled in Hux's direction, as he looked out expectantly through one of the front windows. He just glanced around for a second, but long enough to make Rey's blood freeze in her veins.

"No, Rey. You are alone."

OOO

"What does this mean?"

Finn turned pale. His hands searched for something to hold on to, otherwise he would have fainted immediately. Rose, though she had just escaped captivity, looked him straight in the eye as if she needed to make it more understandable. The truth was so terrible that he wanted to run away immediately.
"It's exactly that, Finn," Rose said, her voice desperate, "Dorovan is an ally of the First Order. He lied to us. The whole time."

"What...? Why didn’t anyone notice? ", Finn leaned against the wall behind him; he felt that the strength left his legs. Rose looked around helplessly.

"All that ... it was a deception. He may have been an ally of General Organa, but today he is an arms dealer. BB-8 found out."

The little droid beeped excitedly. Rose sighed.

"When I was supposed to fix Dorovan’s glider, I apparently accidentally made an encrypted connection available. With that, BB-8 was able to access the ship’s voice logs and identifiers," she glanced back at Finn, "Remember the glider we stole from Cantonica? It had the same ID. BB-8 recognized it. The glider belongs to the man to which this belongs. The arms dealer who supplies the First Order. DJ mentioned him and ... "

Rose bit her lip.

"When I realized what that meant, I immediately wanted to go and tell someone. But I didn’t get that far."

Finn looked down at her sadly.

"It's not your fault," he said, clenching his lips, "But ... are you really sure about Dorovan? That would be ... well ...

"I'm sure," Rose insisted, "I told you, BB-8 read the voice logs. Dorovan was in contact with the Finalizer the whole time. The whole damned time when he was with us and infiltrated us. We should never have trusted him!"

Finn swallowed.

"That's ...", he searched for words, "But how ... how did you escape? Where have you been?"

Rose's angry expression was replaced by a gentle smile. She patted BB-8's head.

"These idiots actually thought they could paralyze BB-8 by manipulating its control unit," she said, "Good that I wear hairpins ... and know how to get a droid back afloat. I was back out faster than those guys could say pot-race."

"I knew why I recommended Dorovan to you," Finn said boldly, but Rose's eyes silenced him. He took a deep breath.

"OK. So we know now that we are on the mother ship of our enemy," he said, not without some irony in his voice, "What are we going to do now?"

"How did you even get here?" Rose asked curiously.

"I crept into Dorovan's glider," Finn replied. "It wasn’t that easy. But at least..."

He stopped and broke off.

"I have an idea," he said quickly, grabbing Rose's shoulders, "Rose, do you trust me?"

Rose looked at him in surprise and said after a pause: "Yes ... yes, of course."
"Fine," said Finn, taking her hand, "Remember later that you said that."

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!