What the Hell is Wrong with Kylo Ren?

by Tuli_Azzameen

Summary

Tongue-in-cheek tour of Reylo tropes. This time, it is Kylo Ren who is taken prisoner. Rey is given the impossible task of turning this moody, homicidal creep back to the Light, all while he awkwardly attempts to lure her into darkness. Bickering, sexual tension and poor life-choices ensue.
Have been puttering around Fanfiction for years, so I thought I might come over here, and see how I and/or my swill fair at the cool kids' table. And what can I say, I enjoy writing romances between assholes and strong women who won't take their shit. This tale should fall somewhere in the middle of the Reylo spectrum (yes, I just made that up, as far as I know), not twisted/abusive/tragic but also not entirely sweet/fluffy/fairy-tale.

Rated M for language, violence, crude humor and eventual adult content.

Chapter 1: Someone is Taken Prisoner

Kylo Ren stirred in his restraints, head drooped forward, a thin line of drool running down his chin.

Rey stood up straighter, steeling her mind against the psychic assault that was likely coming. A conscious Kylo Ren was a dangerous Kylo Ren, and the sedatives were clearly wearing off.

Rey was standing at the center of the makeshift cell. That monster was right there in front of her, but not nearly as intimidating as in her nightmares. He was strapped to a restraint chair, not unlike the one that he had once subjected her to over a year ago. His wraith-like robes had apparently been removed, leaving him in comparatively ordinary black pants and tunic, and looking rather lanky and awkward.

Of course, the knowledge that she had bested him in a fight served to bolster her courage. It also helped that the evidence of her victory was literally stamped, or rather slashed across his face, in the form of a long, red scar.

The prisoner flinched, and let out a low groan. His eyes opened, slowly rolling in their sockets and then roaming around the room.

"This is a cell," he said groggily, apparently to himself. Kylo Ren proceeded to attempt yanking his arms out of the restraints, to no avail. "I've been taken prisoner," he continued, still reciting the obvious.

Rey found herself wondering exactly how they'd managed to take Kylo Ren alive. He struck her as the type that would rather go out in a blaze of violence, than be taken prisoner. She'd only heard bits and pieces of how it had gone down, something about him refueling his ship, apparently on his own, when an elite squad of commandos managed to catch him unawares. Even so, there were apparently heavy casualties, and a medal ceremony was already in the works for the survivors. Rey supposed said commandos had definitely earned that recognition. Getting the drop on Kylo Ren could not have been easy, and had probably involved the will of the Force and/or a shit ton of dumb luck.

Then finally, the prisoner's eyes locked on Rey. "You ag-gain," he said, his words slurred. To
Rey's immense disquiet, Kylo Ren then proceeded to grin at her. Actually grin.

That was when Rey realized that while he was conscious, the sedatives were still apparently present enough in his system to affect his behavior.

For all intents and purposes, Kylo Ren was drunk.

He looked her over from head to toe, eyes lingering on her chest rather blatantly. This was definitely not the way you look at your sister or cousin. Which of course, she wasn't. Or at least it was pretty damn unlikely. The Force worked in mysterious ways, but it had presumably learned its lesson about sloppy storytelling.

"Your clothes are different," he said with the distinct irregular rhythm of drunkenness. He was no doubt referring to her new outfit of a gray vest and cutoff pants. "Looks nice."

For the briefest of moments, she thought she saw a flicker of that distinctive Solo swagger in him. But then Ren ruined it by opening his mouth again. That flash of cocksure charm vanished just as suddenly as it had appeared, in favor of a haughtiness not unlike how the General occasionally acted, when she was in a bad mood. "You look much less like some filthy desert vagrant."

"Thanks," Rey replied flatly. *Compassion*, she reminded herself. She was never going to get anywhere if he knew how much she despised him. Master Skywalker's orders had been clear. She was to use compassion to bring Kylo Ren back to the Light. The problem was, that was pretty much all her master had told her. No instructions on how compassion was supposed redeem an emotionally unstable murderer.

"Remember Padawan, history is full of Dark Jedi who were brought back to the light," Master Skywalker had told her.

It then occurred to Rey that with the prisoner more or less intoxicated, his mental defenses must have been lowered. It was the perfect time to peer into his thoughts. In terms of official Resistance records, that was what she was supposed to be doing - interrogating him for enemy tactical information. Her assignment to lead him away from the Dark Side was strictly between herself, Master Skywalker and the General.

She peered into his eyes, feeling her skin crawl as she skimmed the surface of his mind. Kylo Ren just twitched casually, as if a bug had just landed on his face.

"You don't want to do that," he informed her.

Rey took a mental step back. "Why?" she asked calmly, as if simply curious.

"A full-on mind probe is a two-way street between Force users," he recited, as if reading from a textbook. "You only got into my head before because I was in yours. That won't happen again, now that I actually know what I'm dealing with." Ren paused, and grinned at her again. "I'll make you a deal: you stay out of my head, and I'll stay out of yours."

Rey decided that she should consult Master Skywalker about that. But for the time-being, it seemed like a reasonable request, if only in the interest of building good will.

"Alright then, agreed."

The prisoner attempted to yank his arms from the restraints again. "Take these things off, will you?" he ordered imperiously.

"I'm afraid I can't."
"Why not?" Ren asked, his tone now unmistakably whiny.

"Because if I did, you could just escape when I open the door to leave. This isn't a - conventional cell," Rey explained.

It was true, this was no cell. The station had originally belonged to a criminal gang, and the gang had a large, very heavily armored vault near the center of the structure. It was thought that this was the only place they had any chance of actually holding Kylo Ren securely, so the old vault had been hastily converted to a prison. Even so, a restraint device had been thought necessary.

It seemed silly, but the fact was that the vast majority of the Resistance had an almost superstitious terror of Kylo Ren. Just as they revered Luke Skywalker as a super-human living-legend, they feared Kylo Ren as a sort of diabolical boogieman.

"You can't just leave me bound up like this forever. I thought the Resistance treated its prisoners with dignity," he said, singing the last word nasally, to emphasize his contempt.

"Yeah, well," Rey countered, "It's not meant as cruelty. It's just that we know that if you were to get loose, you'd probably kill everyone on the station."

Kylo Ren shrugged nonchalantly, as if to admit, *Yeah, I probably would.*

His expression changed abruptly to one of suspicion. "I've been drugged."

"Again for safety, while they got this place set up, and you into those restraints."

And then the unsettling grin was back. "I could teach you how to do that without drugs."

"I'm sure you could," she said, still trying to be polite.

"That isn't all, you know. I could teach you things that Skywalker doesn't even know are possible," Ren said, that hint of swagger coming back into his behavior. He was clearly making a valiant effort at being charming. But his attempt at charm, combined with his own exceedingly awkward interpersonal style made him sound less like a dark and powerful seducer, and more like a used speeder dealer.

"Look," Rey began frankly, "Before we talk any more, let's get one thing straight - I am never going to become your apprentice."

"Why not?" he whined, voice still audibly intoxicated. *I could be nice to you.*

Rey burst out laughing - she couldn't help it. The idea of this man being *nice* was too darkly absurd. This mass murderer so steeped in darkness that he killed his own father in cold blood - Being *nice*... Just then, she felt his emotions shift. Rey was now fairly competent at sensing people's feelings, not unlike a scent in the air, or the direction of the wind. And she could feel his sudden burst of hostility the moment she started laughing. She got the sense that this was a man who was often laughed at, presumably behind his back.

"Why is that so funny?" he demanded, voice raised, irritable and just generally sounding a lot more like the Kylo Ren she remembered. *I was nice to you!*

Rey's mouth dropped wide open. So *that* was his idea of being *nice*? And strangest of all, she sensed that he was being sincere. That he really believed what he was saying.
Kylo Ren apparently sensed the general direction of her thoughts. "You're still alive, aren't you?"

This was just too much. Rey's composure snapped abruptly. "Nice? You killed a dear friend of mine and you grievously wounded another!" She paused a moment, feigning deep thought. "Oh yes, and you kidnapped me, strapped me to a torture device, messed with my head against my will, and threatened to rape me!"

"I did not!" he spat back childishly. "I never threatened..."

Rey managed to cut off his feeble excuses without a single word, just crossed arms and a narrow, skeptical look. Whatever rationalization he'd been planning to give was belied by the redness blooming on his cheeks, made extremely obvious by his pallor. He knew exactly what he had been implying in that interrogation room, but was apparently at least somewhat embarrassed by the recollection.

And then suddenly, the blush evaporated in favor of that unsettling grin. His eyes flicked up under his eyelids in what struck her as a unnervingly Solo-ish gesture. He found his voice again, and that awkward swagger was back.

"It isn't my fault if you have a dirty mind that jumps to dirty conclusions."

Rey let out a high-pitched feminine grunt of indignation. "I think we're done for the day!" she sputtered, smacking the cell/vault door controls, and stomping out.

She stood in the middle of the vault anteroom, panting with agitation as the door shut behind her.

"What did he say?" came a voice, soft and coarse both at once.

Rey jumped slightly. She'd forgotten that General Organa and Master Skywalker were watching through cell/vault security monitor. Rey silently thanked the stars that there was no audio.

"Nothing useful," Rey replied nervously.

"Rex," the General began, voice all understanding and kindness. "I know what my son is like. To be honest, I think it's a good sign that he's trying to get under your skin. If I were to go in there, he'd just shut down, and I don't want to know what he'd do if Luke went in."

"He feels nothing but hatred for me," Master Skywalker added. "But I suspect that his feelings for you are much more mixed, Rey."

"I don't think I can do this," Rey sighed. "We need some sort of expert, someone who deprograms cultists, or something."

Master Skywalker shook his head. "Padawan, if we sent in someone with no sense of the Force, he would just get into their head and manipulate them into helping him escape. But you have a strong ability to resist such an attack. We can have a droid take care of his basic needs, but you can be the only sentient allowed in there, or allowed to communicate with him."

"Rey," the General began. "There's something you need to understand about my son."

Master Skywalker raised a hand, cutting his sister off as politely as possible. "Leia, I don't think it's wise for us to discuss his past. It will be easier for Rey to build compassion for him if she doesn't know."

"I know that," the General returned, audibly irritated by her brother's interruption. Sometimes, they really did act like normal siblings. "This isn't really about the past. It's about strategy."
The General turned to Rey. "Ben has always been extremely sensitive - literally. He senses things - his ability to read people is uncanny. With effort, I've always been able to do that myself in some situations, but for him, I suspect that it's more like a passive sense that he doesn't know how tune out."

Rey's brows furrowed slightly in thought. "You mean, he can read people's minds without even trying?" Rey asked. But that didn't quite make sense. His attempts to read her own mind clearly took a good deal of concentration and effort, even when she wasn't fighting him.


Master Skywalker quickly obliged. "He doesn't sense people's specific thoughts automatically. It's more like their - motivations - attitudes - intentions. I suspect that he cannot read other Force users as easily, but for the most part he usually knows someone's intentions and opinions instantly."

"I want you to succeed, Rey," the General chimed back in. "And I think that the only way you'll do that is by being completely open and honest with him. I'm fairly sure he will immediately sense if you're insincere or humoring him. And I am guessing that still drives him crazy."

Crazier, Rey thought privately.

"Don't try to hide your feelings," the General continued. "Because he will probably see through it."

"Be compassionate, but still be yourself," Master Skywalker added.

"And you must be honest with him, Rey. That's a lesson that his family learned much too late." The General's voice hitched slightly. "This is never going to work if he doesn't trust you. And it needs to work. His life depends on it." Another long, melancholy pause. "I know about - what he's done, and I'm not sure I can ever forgive him. But I am still his mother, and I still love him. Painful as his actions make that."

"Even independent of personal feelings," Master Skywalker chimed in again, "he could be a great asset, if he could be turned back to the Light. Many lives could be saved."

"I'm not quite sure what will happen, even if you do succeed," the General admitted. "Most of the brass is howling for his blood, and there are a lot of people who think he should have just been shot on site. He will be tried for war crimes, and he will be convicted if that happens. I'm going to do everything I can to delay the trial. In meantime, if you could convince him to fight for us, his life might be spared."

General Organa stepped forward, taking Rey's hands. "I know it's not fair for us to put this responsibility on you, but Rey, you are my only hope."

Master Skywalker chuckled at that, for some unknown reason.

Rey glanced at the security screen. "Do you want to talk with him?"

Leia gave what must have been the saddest smile Rey had ever seen. "More than anything," the General said quietly, and left the room.

Rey turned to Master Skywalker. "I still don't think I can do this."

Master Skywalker placed a hand on her shoulder, "If that's the case, you will fail. But I have faith in you Rey. My feelings tell me that he will find some form of salvation through you, and that the
fate of billions could hang in the balance. But I also know that premonitions cannot be taken at
face value. Only time will tell exactly how that will happen, but in my personal experience,
unconditional compassion is the only way to turn someone away from the Dark Side."
Chapter Notes

Chapter 2: [The Unsexy Reality of] Restraints

Be forewarned: this chapter gets a bit crass. I shall be polluting this little slice of Space Fantasy with a touch of Icky Realism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 2: [The Unsexy Reality of] Restraints

Rey strode down the hall, carrying a small plate of local fruits. She loved fruit, so sweet and juicy and fresh. It was quite a delicacy to the former desert dweller, and she liked it so much that she couldn't imagine why everyone didn't eat it all the time. And fortunately, the station was well provisioned with fresh produce from an agricultural settlement on the planet below.

She knew that the droid would have only given Kylo Ren a bland nutrient slurry, so she thought that bringing him something with flavor might help her get things back onto the right foot. Rey was all for any method of good-will building that didn't involve talking to him any more than she absolutely had to.

*Compassion. Compassion. Compassion.* She recited her new mantra as she tapped the various buttons on the controls, and the door slid away.

"What the hell!?" she shouted immediately, dropping the plate of food on the floor. There he was, still in the restraints, with a droid in pieces on the floor, no doubt the one assigned to help care for him. Ren stared at her, needing no telepathy to convey his message: *Well, what are you going to do about it?*

Rey crossed her arms. "Now *why* would you do that?"

He answered only with a nonchalant shrug.

Rey studied him a moment, noticing the strong feelings that seemed to be rolling off him in waves. He could keep her out of his mind, but not from sensing his emotions. And he was feeling something very strongly right now. Something that she wasn't sure how to identify. Anger? Yes, of course, but there was something else. Stress? No. Pain? Not quite. Perhaps some form of discomfort?

The answer came to her so suddenly that it burst out of her mouth. "You have to pee!"

Kylo Ren glared at her fiercely, confirming her statement.

"The droid would have helped you with that!" Rey gestured to the oddly shaped receptacle on the floor - the sort of tool used to allow paralyzed patients to relieve themselves.

"Can't you just take these things off??" he shouted, rattling the restraints. "This is ridiculous!"

Rey snorted. "Yeah, it kind of is."
A few moments of impasse, until Rey spoke again. "I guess I could..." she trailed off, gingerly picking up the receptacle, and forcing herself to meet his eyes.


Rey dropped the receptacle and sighed. "This wouldn't be a problem if you hadn't trashed the droid!"

"It wouldn't be a problem if you'd open the damn restraints!" he retorted.

"Not an option." She sighed again, sorely tempted to just let him suffer. Having to pee in his pants might take him down a peg. But no, Master Skywalker's instructions had been clear, so far as they went. Compassion. "I'll see what I can figure out. Be right back."

Rey strode back down the halls, toward the medical wing of the base. There were several medical droids in the ward, but all of them appeared to be busily attending other patients. They were not going to be any help. Rey was not about to yank a medical droid away from a wounded soldier, just so Kylo Ren could take a leak.

She spent the next several minutes running around the base. Finally, a solution presented itself.

The look on Kylo Ren's face was nothing short of horror-struck when Rey walked in with Threepio. "Nonono!" he shouted, vigorously shaking his head, all pretense of dignity abandoned.

"Young Master Ben! It has been quite a long time," Threepio chattered, apparently neither intimidated nor perturbed. "You have become quite tall! Though I must say that your behavior of late has your mother quite distressed."

"That's enough Threepio," Rey mercifully cut him off. "I'll leave you to it."

"Yes Miss Rey. I am happy to oblige. After all, I have assisted Young Master Ben with his bodily functions many times before."

"When I was an infant!" Ren bellowed over Threepio's shoulder, at Rey's receding back. She supposed that statement might have been significant, insofar as it showed him admitting to having once been Young Master Ben.

A few minutes passed, and Threepio came shuffling out. "All done, miss Rey!" he declared. He looked down at the receptacle he was carrying, and his tone became somewhat less buoyant. "I suppose I should find somewhere to dispose of this."

"Thank you Threepio," Rey mumbled, as she re-entered the vault-cell.

Ren was glaring daggers at the wall, apparently unwilling to look her in the eye. His whole face was bright red with embarrassment.

"I hope you're happy. I have never been so humiliated in my life," Ren growled.

"It was your own fault," Rey replied, desperately trying not to laugh in his face.

"I suppose I should congratulate you on discovering an entirely new method of torture. I'll keep your technique in mind, when I get out of here."

Rey ignored the comment. "Look, I've got an idea of how we can phase out the restraints, and I'll ask around about it." She paused. "That is only if you can control your temper for a day or two."
Ren sank back against the chair, and she expected some sort of grumbling assent until... She noticed a tugging at her belt. Her lightsaber as was apparently attempting to escape in Ren's direction. She grabbed the hilt firmly before it could detach itself from her belt.

"Aaaand we're done." Rey had to bite her tongue to keep herself from saying *Play nice with Threepio, Young Master Ben.*

Chapter End Notes

Poor guy. His crush always happens to be around for his most unflattering moments. I almost feel sorry for him.

Oh wait. No I don't.

And don't worry, this is about all the toilet humor y'all are likely to get out of me.
Chapter 3: Implied Stormpilot

Rey walked into the mess hall, and gave a slight, fleeting smile as she caught sight of Finn and Poe. They had apparently returned from their latest mission. But even the presence of her two best friends couldn't quite erase this Ren-induced foul mood. She all but slammed her food tray down on the table.

Finn and Poe exchanged looks. "I take it the prisoner isn't being cooperative," Poe asked carefully.

"You have no idea!" she huffed, picking up a large salad leaf with her fingers and shoving it into her mouth.

Finn gave her a sympathetic smile. "I can't say I envy you. That guy gives me the creeps. Always did, even before he tried to kill me."

Rey looked up at him, swallowing her food. "Finn, you knew him before, you have to have something useful you can tell me on how to deal with him."

"I'll tell you how to deal with Kylo Ren: Don't. All I knew was to stay the hell out of his way. Especially if he seemed pissed, but also if he didn't. The guy could go from zero to crazy like that," Finn punctuated his statement with a snap of his fingers. He then gave an abrupt, satisfied smile. "Now there's something useful I can tell you - he breaks stuff. Occasionally people too, but mostly stuff. That's his M.O."

"Already figured that part out," Rey sighed. "There has to be something more you can tell me."

Finn shook his head. "Sorry, but I really didn't know him. I don't think anyone did. Everyone was scared of him, troopers, officers - everyone. From what I could see, Ren always kept to himself. I never once saw or heard of anyone who seemed like his friend."

Poe snorted. "You'd think with all those freaky powers, he could mind-trick someone into being his friend."

Finn chuckled, leaning over and smacking his friend on the back. Friend or... Rey wondered if Finn and Poe were now officially dating.

There had been something between Rey and Finn at one time, but whatever that something was, over a year apart had killed it dead. By the time Rey had returned from her quest to Ach-to, Finn and Poe were already very, very close. The chemistry between Finn and Poe was undeniable, and Rey wished them both well.

Rey crammed another handful of leaves into her mouth. Fresh veggies were almost as awesome as fruit. "I just don't know what I am supposed to do," she said dejectedly through her current mouthful.

"Hey," Poe began, "I don't know about all that Force stuff, but I know about having to deal with jerks. The thing is, decent people gain allies through kindness and charisma. Jerks gain followers through intimidation. Based on what Finn has said, if I had to guess, I'd say that Kylo Ren is
probably the latter. Scaring you shitless is the only way he can think of to get you on his side. Maybe you just have to show him that you're not afraid of him."

Rey considered that for a moment, and realized that she actually wasn't really afraid of Kylo Ren. That was quite an accomplishment in of itself. Perhaps she could deal with him after all?

"I have to ask," she began tentatively, voice lowered and uncharacteristically awkward. "Is it common knowledge - I mean, does everyone know that he's - that the General is..." she trailed off.

"Worst kept secret in the Resistance," Poe explained quietly.

"Yeah," Finn agreed. "From what I can tell, it's one of those things that everybody knows, but no one talks about."

"At least no one with class," Poe added. "There are a handful of officers, mainly the ones who tend to disagree with the General's policies, who seem to like bringing up the General's Miscreant Son. No class."

"I see," Rey murmured. The conversation paused as the three of them ate, until Poe eventually spoke.

"So, when you're trying to get intel out of him, you're not doing any of that weird Force stuff that he does, are you?" Poe asked, with just the tiniest hint of disquiet in his voice.

"No!" she insisted. "Of course not. Not like the way he does anyway."

"Wouldn't bother me none if you did," Poe stated, regaining his usual effortless confidence. "Be cool to see you give him back a little of his own."

"I already did, remember?" Rey replied, lowering her voice again. Finn and Poe were her best friends, so she had at least attempted to explain her ordeal on Starkiller to them. Of course, they didn't seem to really understand, but they obviously wanted to, and that was enough. "I've been inside that mind before. I don't care to go back."

Poe gave a little grimace of disgust. "I don't think I blame you. Don't wanna know what it's like in there..."

That was good, because Rey was tolerably sure that she would never be able to explain it. That sensation of vile intimacy combined with a sort of compulsive morbid curiosity, with particular emphasis on the morbid part. And then there was that suffocating feeling - like abject hopelessness, fear and self-doubt, all muddled together. And strangest of all, there was a sense that these were emotions to be embraced...

"You can read minds now?" Finn asked, a little uneasily.

"Sort of. I can only really skim the surface, and it takes a lot of concentration and effort." She turned a reassuring smile on him. "Don't worry, if I was trying to read your mind, you'd know it."

"How would I know it?"

Rey smiled at him. "Because I'd go silent and be staring at you super creepily." She proceeded to demonstrate, neck craned forward, and brows furrowed in a look of intense concentration.

"What number am I thinking of?" Finn asked, feigning seriousness.

Rey leaned in, staring into his eyes. But they both exploded into a fit of simultaneous giggles...
before she could get a read.

Rey had finally drifted off to sleep, when a polite tapping sounded from the other side of her door. She just rolled over, deciding that whatever it was, it could wait until morning. She wanted to go back to that dream she was having - a little boy and a little girl playing in a field. Two little heads, dark curls and sleek brown, bobbing in a sea of tall golden grass. She intuitively knew that the brown hair belonged to a little girl. It was the same distinctive three-bun style she had worn for as long as she could remember. Could this be a lost memory? She hoped so. They seemed so happy, and Rey's stock of happy memories was pretty limited at present.

The tapping continued, along with a muffled voice. "Miss Rey? Miss Rey?"

She recognized the prim tones of Threepio, and clumsily smacked the door controls. Threepio peered in.

"Miss Rey? I am so sorry to bother you, but I do believe that Young Master Ben is in need of medical attention."

Rey groaned loudly. "I'll be right out."

She threw on a pair of pants, not bothering to tie her hair up. Her drowsy shuffle through the station gradually changed to an irritable stomp. She was fuming by the time she reached the vault-prison.

Rey slammed her fingers against the security panel and stomped into the cell. "You had better be on the brink of death!" she snapped, way too tired and grouchy to put up with this crap.

What made it worse was that Kylo Ren was ignoring her completely, pretending to sleep.

"Wake up!" she exclaimed, even louder.

No response.

Rey felt a brief moment of panic. Could he have died? How embarrassing would that be, if he just up and dropped dead on her watch? What would the General say?

She was a little startled by her own feeling of relief as she sensed that he was indeed alive. That was when she noticed the pool of blood to the immediate left of the chair.

"What?" Rey asked herself. She stepped forward, yet more irritated at having to stand so close to him, and acutely aware that this could be a trap. Rey finally observed that his left sleeve was rolled up slightly. She gave a grunt of disgust and empathetic pain, when she saw the rather nasty cut and bruising wound around his left wrist.

He must have hurt himself trying to get the restraints off. She checked the other arm - it was fine. Clearly, he wasn't quite desperate enough to risk damaging his dominant/saber arm.

Rey glanced up at his face, now even paler than usual, and then down at the fairly impressive pool of blood. Apparently he'd actually lost enough to make him pass out. Rey thought back to their fight on Starkiller, and decided that he was apparently not so tough when he wasn't bursting with rage and adrenaline.

"Idiot!" she said aloud, examining the wound more closely. It was fairly deep, likely to get infected if not treated. But she also knew what would happen if she brought a medical droid in there...
That only left one option - this was as good a time as any to practice the Jedi healing techniques she had learned from Master Skywalker.

"Threepio, get some cleaning supplies, will you. That blood isn't going to mop it self up," Rey ordered as she stepped back into the anteroom to examine the restraint controls more closely. It only took her a moment to figure out how to open one wrist cuff at a time.

She took a deep breath as she hit the proper button, knowing that her prisoner could probably do a lot of damage with one hand loose. But there was nothing for it. Rey reminded herself that she was not afraid of him, and walked back into the cell.

Rey looked at the wounded arm. She'd have to kneel down - for whatever reason, that seemed to be the standard pose for Force healing. Her first impulse was to drop down immediately to his side, the better to reach the wound. Unfortunately, there was blood all over that patch of floor. However much she may have disliked Kylo Ren, she had no particular desire to bathe in his blood. So she knelt on the floor immediately in front of him instead, scooting close enough to reach that mangled wrist.

Rey realized that she would have to touch him. After a few moments of hesitation, Rey placed a hand on the wound. She shuddered as her skin met his. It was just as cold as she had expected. That was a strange thought. When had she imagined what his bare hands felt like? Why should she have a preconceived notion about that in the first place? How weird...

She was never going to get this done if she kept getting distracted by her own thoughts. Rey began to mentally recite her new mantra.

*Compassion. Compassion. Compassion,* she thought, closing her eyes and channeling her energy into healing the broken skin. Even with the requisite nearly-absolute focus on her task, she fully expected that she'd find that enormous pallid hand around her neck any second now. For some reason, the image of him running his lightsaber through his own father came unbidden to her mind.

*Compassion! Compassion! Compassion!* She really had to focus, if she was going to heal this self-mutilating psycho. Rey searched her mind for images of peace. The first to come to mind had been from that interrupted dream, the two happy children playing in a field. That vision proved rather effective. A few minutes passed, and Rey sensed that the job was done.

She finally opened her eyes, glancing up at the prisoner. With a start, she noticed that he was now conscious, staring at down at her from the side of his prominent nose, one eyebrow arched in apparent interest.

Rey was suddenly aware of just how this must have looked. Her, kneeling right in front of him, not completely dressed and looking up at him through her seductively tousled hair... And her face not 20 centimeters from his crotch. She was fully aware of the sexual implications to this pose.

Contrary to popular assumption, Rey was no innocent girl when it came to that sort of thing. She may have lived a solitary life on Jakku, but like many lonely girls with inadequate family supports, her teen-years had involved the discovery of a rather fool-proof way of making men want to hang out with her. It was a method she’d employed several times, mainly with the interesting off-worlders who passed through Niima - pilots, bounty hunters, even a pirate, that one time - all men with stories to tell and things to teach her. However, it didn't take her long to figure out that this was not the type of belonging she wanted, and her conquests had dwindled to nothing by the time she met up with a particular orange and white droid. But not before she’d learned a good deal about sex.
Now it was Rey's turn to blush, though this was a little less noticeable on her sun-kissed complexion. She decided that brazening it out was the only sensible thing to do. Slowly, calmly, she rose to her feet, meeting his eyes fearlessly, and trying to ignore the slight smirk on his face.

"What exactly is wrong with you?" Rey asked. She had a sinking feeling that it would not be the last time she would ask him that question.

Kylo Ren didn't answer, he simply flexed his newly healed and unrestrained hand, rolling his wrist.

For a moment, she thought he might thank her. She could sense something that might have been gratitude, but for whatever reason, he refused to say it. Rey was further irritated by his lack of acknowledgement. "Why didn't you just try and chew it off?"

"Couldn't reach," he answered, a little of his old petulance returning.

"I suppose you'll fight me if I try to put your hand back in the restraint."

"That's a major possibility," he stated plainly.

Rey just groaned. "Fine. I guess you're not going anywhere, left restraint or not. I'm going back to bed," she huffed, walking out of the cell just as Threepio entered with the called-for cleaning supplies.

Later the following morning, Threepio decided to spend some of his downtime catching up with his old counter-bot.

"Artoo, you would not believe what I have discovered," he declared.

Artoo gave a little beep of interest.

"So, as you know, I have been assigned to care for Young Master Ben. So, I decided to do a little holonet research, and I must say, his crimes are quite a bit worse than I had been led to believe. I assumed they couldn't have been that bad, since the Prin-General still speaks of him fondly every now and then." Threepio paused dramatically. "He was the one who killed Captain Solo!"

Artoo responded with series of chirps.

"You knew?! Well no one told me!" Threepio whined. "Frankly, I am a little offended that the General never thought to confide in me."

The shorter droid gave another series of squeaks and buzzes.

"A loose-lipped fuss budget that would have made her feel even worse?!" Threepio echoed indignantly. "What would you know of human psychology?!"

Several beeps and whistles.

"Well, either way, I have decided that I no longer like Young Master Ben. I have known him since the day he was born, but such a crime is unforgivable!"

Artoo gave an inquisitive coo.

"Of course I will continue to follow my orders, but I have decided that I will not enjoy it."
Chapter End Notes

Foreshadowing with a two by four :)  
Please don't forget to review! I crave feedback and validation for my nerdy labors!
Chapter 4: Awkward, Hostile Flirting

Rey pushed a tech-laden repulsorlift dolly into the vault-cell anteroom. He didn't deserve this, considering all the trouble that she'd gone through to gather all these components. But it would solve some problems.

"Here we go again," she thought, opening the cell door. Rey took a deep breath, as if about to step into a foul smell.

"Morning," she said, once again trying to sound amiable. Or at least trying to sound like she didn't loathe the sight of him.

"What's all that?" he asked, looking at the contents of the dolly, expressing subtle vibes of both interest and suspicion.

"Force cage. If I install it in here, then I can open the restraints, and you can stop whining about it."

Again, she thought he might thank her, but still nothing. She proceeded to set up the telescoping ladder. The main generator would have to be affixed to the ceiling.

"This system will require your cooperation. You'll have to step into the force cage whenever the cell door is going to open. It will project a half meter circular force-field around you, thus allowing me and Threepio to open and close the door safely. Can you do that?"

"Fine," he said, eventually.

"Just to let you know, touching the inner side of the force-field will cause a pretty nasty electrical burn."

He rolled his eyes. "I know what a force cage is."

Rey stepped onto the ladder. "Now look, I'm going to get started. I know that there are a million different ways you could mess with me right now, but I am trusting you, okay?" Rey didn't explain that she trusted his hatred for the restraints more than any sense of gratitude or decency.

"I'd been meaning to ask you," she said, as she started her work, "what would you prefer me to call you?"

The temptation to call him Ben, or better yet, Young Master Ben, was undeniable. But taunting him probably wouldn't be compassionate. And considering his tendency toward wanton destruction, it would probably be wiser not to piss him off more than strictly necessary.

"Most people call me Ren."

Rey frowned. "But, isn't that what all your knights are called? What do they call you?"

"They call me Master."
"Ah. Ren it is then," Rey said.

She heard a smirk in his tone. "You'll call me Master someday."

That gave her the fleeting urge to smack his smug face. "I will absolutely never call you master."

"We'll see."

As if I would ever train under a mass murderer, she thought.

Rey nearly dropped her tools at Ren's sudden, loud crack of laughter. She'd never heard it before, and was a little surprised that it didn't really sound like villain's cackle. It didn't sound ordinary either, though. Too flat and staccato. Decidedly awkward.

"What?" she demanded.

"Not a mass murderer?" Ren chuckled.

"You said you'd stay out of my head!" she scolded.

Ren waved his free hand dismissively. "I wasn't. By now, you should know the difference between a mind probe and plain-old deductive reasoning supplemented with Force intuition. If I'd been in your mind, you would have felt it."

Rey thought a moment. Indeed, she hadn't felt that cold, invasive presence.

"Let's explore that thought, shall we?" Ren proceeded arrogantly. "You would never train under a mass murderer, and yet you already are."

"What are you even talking about?" she asked skeptically.

Ren shook his head. "You cannot possibly be that ignorant. Virtually every schoolchild in galaxy knows that Skywalker destroyed the first Death Star. Did you think that station was empty when it blew? It had hundreds of thousands of people aboard. Were all of them evil? Did they all deserve to die?"

"It was a war," Rey retorted, sounding less self-assured than she would have liked.

"Exactly!" Ren shouted, as if he'd been waiting all day for her feeble mind to come round to that conclusion. "It was a war, much like the one now. Do you think I kill just for fun?" His emotions changed abruptly, shifting from arrogance to something like offended disappointment. "You do," Ren stated coldly. "You do think I kill people because I enjoy it."

That was pretty much true. Though, at this point, Rey had accepted that her prisoner was not a monster. He was most decidedly human. A bad person, but human.

She was now tolerably sure that Kylo Ren was just insane. Rey did not know much about madness, but looking back to that confrontation in the snow, Ren had been the absolute portrait of a stereotypical crazy person - violent, disheveled and screaming nonsense at her.

Rey just glared at him fearlessly, even as she could feel his emotions shifting again - now to a crescendo of rage.

"Did I look like I enjoyed that?!" Ren bellowed furiously.

Her toolbox rattled violently, as if someone had just kicked it. She casually stilled it with her hand to prevent it from spilling, as she wondered what he was the hell he was talking about.
This outburst of his did exactly nothing to dispel her assumption that he was mad. She decided not to dignify his little hissyfit with a response.

A minute or two passed, and she sensed that he had calmed down somewhat.

"What if I call you Kylo?"

"Hardly anyone calls me Kylo, alone," he said sullenly.

"Perfect. Kylo."

He gave a huff of resignation. "I don't see why not. I think you and I are past formalities at this point, don't you?"

"I should say so," Rey replied, suppressing a chortle at the recollection of the pee incident.

"And it's not like you're my subordinate," Kylo added casually.

Rey arched a brow. "What happened to I'll be your master someday?"

"Being my student wouldn't necessarily make you my subordinate. I've accepted the truth. You have a potential on par with my own," he explained, voice colored with a strange mixture of admiration and resentment. "With the right training, you could easily be my equal. Possibly even surpass me, in some ways."

Rey was speechless. The ease with which he compared her to himself was both terrifying and surprisingly flattering. Crazy and evil he might have been, but there was no denying that he was a very talented Force user.

"You don't know how precious your gift is," he went on, still sounding somewhat cold and resentful as he continued to heap praise on her. "The odds of being born with even a fraction of your power is one-in-a-billion. For a long time, I assumed I'd go my entire life without meeting someone else who was even close to my level. Or at least no one that wasn't a close relative."

Rey finally found her voice. "Sounds pretty special, when you put it that way."

"You are special," he informed her sternly.

Rey was at least somewhat aware of her own awesomeness, but hearing it explained to her face by her arch-nemesis was a little uncomfortable. She decided to cut the conversation off by pretending she was fully focused on her work.

A minute or so passed, and she glimpsed him out of the corner of her eye. There was that menacing dark gaze, locked on her again.

"Stop staring at me," she ordered, returning to her work.

"Well then stop being pretty!" he snapped, as if it were a vile insult.

Rey wasn't sure what to say to that. The idea that Kylo Ren thought her pretty was more unsettling than anything else.

He apparently sensed her unease. "Don't get excited. It's just a statement of the obvious. You have pleasing features. That's all," Kylo explained condescendingly.

Out of the corner of her eye, Rey saw him raise his free hand to his face, running a finger down
his scar. He seemed to notice that she saw what he was doing. "No need to apologize. I was never pretty."

"You have pretty hair," Rey blurted. It took a good deal of effort not to immediately sputter a retraction. Better to play it off as the unimportant offhand nonsense it was.

Kylo emitted a subtle sense of something like shocked embarrassment. Clearly this was a man who didn't often get compliments on his appearance.

That notion fell very much like in line with her previous musings on his looks. And it was totally not weird that she had spent a little thought on his face. That didn't mean a thing. Not a damn thing.

After all, she'd only really pondered the mind boggling idea that this man was half Han Solo and half Leia Organa. Rey had seen historical holos of them both. Han Solo had been a very good looking man, and the General had been nothing short of gorgeous. She still was.

How could those two kind, charismatic and beautiful people have produced this this cruel, awkward offspring, with a rather lanky frame and facial features that were distincitive at best? Or at least such was Rey's opinion at the moment. Yes. Distinctive at best. Definitely not attractive. And too tall. Much too tall for her taste.

She supposed he did have some qualities, though. There was the hair, and then there were those eyes of his. Dark, almost black. She'd never seen such eyes on a human. Then again, they probably just appeared darker because of his black clothes and his even blacker soul. They did have that eerie flicker, like a pilot light stubbornly burning amidst endless darkness. But that was probably just the overhead lights reflecting off them.

Kylo seemed to sense the general direction of her thoughts. "I've been told that the Solo Nose tends to skip a generation, and I got stuck with it." He paused briefly. "But the gifts I received from the other side of my family more than make up for it," he added.

"Do you mean the Force or just the pretty hair?"

Kylo snorted at that. "What do you think?" he asked, actually briefly achieving a tone of light-hearted sarcasm for a few seconds.

Rey thought it a little odd for him to own up to his estranged family so freely. Indeed, he'd brought it up himself. But why be so open about it with her, after denying it to his own father? It didn't quite occur to her that, consciously or unconsciously, this might be his way of presenting himself as her first class ticket into the family she coveted.

A thought crossed Rey's mind, and she really would have liked to keep it to herself. But she supposed saying it aloud might come off as compassionate.

"There must have been a lot of pressure on you, growing up."

He gave a mirthless guffa. "That is one hell of an understatement."

"Was it?" she asked, trying to keep the conversation going.

"I have a legacy to live up to," he stated plainly.

"You certainly seem to be picking and choosing only certain parts of that legacy."

Rey felt a gust of hostility from him, and realized that she shouldn't have said that. Too soon. She
had to gain his trust first.

Rey considered that advice about being *being herself but not humoring him*, and steered the conversation toward something more benign. "I suppose you're technically the Crown Prince of Alderaan."

The hostility abruptly changed to something not unlike bashfulness.

"That," he began, wagging a finger at her, "is quite possibly the hollowest title in the galaxy. I've never used it."

"Perhaps you should," Rey said, getting back to work. "It couldn't hurt your chances with ladies."

Kylo snorted. "You think that calling myself a *prince* would make women like me?" he asked, skeptically.

"I guess it would be a step in the right direction," she said, still working. "Some women are attracted to power."

"I suppose you're one of them?" he asked, attempting to veil his interest with idle curiosity.

She glanced over her shoulder at him briefly. "No," Rey answered simply. She then reached out an arm, and one of the tools from the dolly obediently flew up into her hand. "I have enough power of my own, thank you very much."

Chapter End Notes

*Rey drops mic on stage*

I find it rather amusing that his face seems to be such a divisive issue. It seems to me that everyone either thinks Kylo is ugly as sin, or freaking gorgeous. Though there does seem to be one thing we all agree on: dude has amazing hair. I'd trade mine for his any day.

And I think the word hissyfit really needs to come up more often in regards to Kylo.

Please keep the feedback comin’. It really does make a difference!
Chapter Notes

Rumor has it that motherfucking Bloodlines is going to be awesome, but will likely kick my backstory headcannon (as portrayed below) to shit. But who cares? It’s not like I expect Episode VIII to look anything like this fic, so fuck it... I’ll just slap an AU sticker on it, and write whatever the hell I want ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 5: He Reveals Something About Her Past

An hour passed in uneasy silence, with Kylo Ren watching her work, and Rey attempting to ignore the disconcerting feeling of his eyes crawling over her. Fortunately, she was nearly finished.

After a while, she sensed a different feeling coming from her prisoner. A sort of covetous admiration.

“You’re pretty good at fixing things,” he commented eventually.

“Yes, I am,” she replied. It was more a statement of fact than self-congratulation.

“Who taught you?” he asked curiously.

“Me. I taught myself.”

There was another breeze of admiration. “Force sensitives have a tendency to pick up certain skills easily. Tech is one of them.” He paused. “I’m not surprised that you managed to survive being dropped off on a dump like Jakku.”

Rey frowned in thought. She sensed a subtext there, but couldn’t quite put her finger on it, until... she put her tools down, stepping off the ladder, and facing the prisoner. “You know something about me that you’re not telling.”

Rey still knew very little about her early years, only what she had seen in her vision on Takodana, and what Master Skywalker had told her - that she had once been one of the new Jedi padawans, until Kylo Ren destroyed it all, and she’d apparently lost all her memories of her time among them.

“You still don’t remember,” he said, smiling complacently. “I’m good.”

“What are you talking about?” she asked a little more urgently.

“Search your feelings. You’ll find it in there, somewhere.”
Against her better judgement, Rey closed her eyes to think.

“Don’t pry, let it come to you,” he suggested. “The memory itself isn’t there, but you can find some impression left in the Force.”

Rey recalled her vision from Takodana. Standing in the rain, surrounded by death. A shadowy stranger, weapon raised for a coup de gras, only to be run through from behind by a red lightsaber. And then the ominous figure of Kylo Ren approaching her.

This in turn lead her to another very different vision, bright and dry instead of dim and wet. A dark figure standing incongruously among sunny sand dunes, like the opposite of a light in pitch darkness. The figure crouched in front of her, and waved a black-gloved hand hypnotically before her small, terrified face.

“You can never leave Jakku.” The words emanating from the black and silver mask didn’t just enter her ears, but felt like they were boring into her brain, engraving themselves on her soul.

“Your family will come back for you someday,” the dark monster added suddenly, as a sort of afterthought. The creature removed a glove to reveal a pale hand, which was placed directly on her face, fingers closed gently but firmly around her small forehead. The entire world was overtaken by a sudden surge of blinding pain, vision a whirl of unfamiliar images, and his final command echoed in her mind, “You will forget everything else.”

Rey came back to reality with a gasp, finding Kylo Ren watching her curiously from the restraint chair. “I don’t suppose you’re going to thank me for saving your life,” he said calmly.

Rey eventually found her voice. “You didn’t really save my life. You spared it. There’s a difference.”

“True, but you’re just as alive.”

“Why me?” she demanded.

“ You were just a child, the youngest of them,” he said, trying to sound dismissive, but not quite succeeding. “You were no threat but also too young to be useful. You’d been earmarked to be my first padawan, but that had very little to do with it.” Kylo paused, his tone becoming more hostile as he finally stated the fact he was dancing around so awkwardly. “It was a merciful impulse. I’ve conquered those now.”

His thoughts were well shielded, but Rey still sensed that he was thinking of his father.

Rey’s mind came to another disturbing thought. “You were the one who left me on Jakku,” her tone became one of disgust. “with Plutt. Why would you spare me just to -”

Kylo cut her off. “I don’t think you quite understand, so listen carefully - I. Didn’t. Care. Jakku was on the way to Moriband, and you were too young to be useful. Your future meant nothing to me, so long as I didn’t have your blood on my hands.”

Finally, Rey’s mind came to one more conclusion. Somehow, this was the most heartbreaking truth of all, and her voice cracked when she spoke. “You told me that my family was coming back for me.” She was mortified when she felt a tear slide down her cheek. “Do you know how long I believed that?! How much it hurt to finally accept that they weren’t coming?”

“You had to stay on the planet, out of my way,” he said, almost apologetically.

Rey suddenly showed a relieved smile. “You’re lying. That couldn't be what happened. My
childhood isn't one big blank. I may not remember much, but I do have memories.” She pause to
think. “I remember my parents. Their faces are blurry, but I remember them. I remember my
mother would get home late at night and stroke my hair while I pretended to sleep. And my father
would tickle me until I screamed.” She finally began to cry in earnest. “I remember my father’s
voice. I remember it!”

*I'll come back for you, sweetheart. I promise.*

She searched Kylo’s vibes for some kind of acknowledgement that he’d been lying, but all she
could sense was profound anger. Anger so great, it was painful. Or was it pain so great that it
made him angry?

Rey could see that she was not going to get an explanation out of him, so she turned to her own
mind for confirmation. Her parents’ faces. She had to remember them more clearly. Rey
concentrated furiously on the blurry images, trying to bring them into focus.

Her mother... She was a brunette with deep brown eyes, and soft facial features, not unlike the
General. And her father, he was tall. And, yes, he had a scar on his chin. Just like...

“No...” Rey whispered. “It can't be...”

Even in her shock, she felt a small swell of hope. Could it be that Leia Organa and Han Solo
literally *were* her long lost parents? Logic told her that it was impossible, but her heart told her that
it was a dream-come-true. They had both always *felt* like her parents, or at least that was what she
assumed parents felt like.

She stared at Kylo in disbelief. That would make him her... Suddenly all that creepy innuendo had
become infinitely creepier.

He was apparently able to read the shock on her face.

“Don't be stupid,” he growled. “You'll be relieved to hear that I’m NOT your damn brother.”

The words sounded true, but she once again sensed that he was holding something back. Some
secret that he really didn't want her to discover.

“But I can...” Rey said in a dreamy murmur. “See my parents... I remember them... They were...”

“Not YOUR memories!” Kylo finally burst out, the air around him seeming to crackle with fury.

Rey took a moment to absorb the words. Only the barest hint of Jedi intuition was needed to parse
out the implications. Once she had wrapped her head around it, she knew it was true.

The memories were real. But they weren't her memories. They were his. No doubt implanted in
her mind as a placeholder for the ones he had destroyed, to make the hole in her past seem less
suspicious.

“It's surprisingly hard to come up with realistic memories from scratch!” he bellowed.

Rey suddenly felt the overwhelming urge to get this man out of her sight. She gritted her teeth,
slammed the toolbox and spare parts onto the hoverdolly, and wordlessly left the cell. She jabbed
her finger against the door controls, shutting it behind her. Then, after a moment of hesitation, she
slammed her palm down adjacent restraint control screen. Stomping off as soon as she heard the
hydraulic hiss of the restraints opening.
Threepio was back for his daily visit with Artoo.

“Things are going just fine with my assignment. I believe Miss Rey is making progress.”

Artoo gave a curious beep.

“Well, because Young Master Ben is rather afraid of her. That probably bodes well for intimidating him into giving tactical information.”

Another curious beep.

“I know because I have observed that his vital signs increase substantially when she is present. In humans, this indicates fear.”

Artoo made a longer series of beeps and whistles, followed by a high-pitched howl.

“Lust?!” Threepio exclaimed, scandalized. “Artoo, where did you even learn that word?! Of all the bizarre and frankly disturbing notions!”

Artoo launched into an unusually long string of hums and whistles.

Threepio held up a hand. “Let me get this straight - you think there will be some sort of romantic entanglement between them?! I have never heard anything so ridiculous in my entire operating life!”

Chapter End Notes

So, just to let ya'll know: you're now caught up with the stuff that was already posted on FF. So new chapters are not going to be quite so ridiculously quick...

Anyone interested in beta-ing? I assume that is still a thing. My fiance has been acting as my beta, but I think I need to fire him. Ever since he started reading this story, he’s taken to sneaking up behind me and telling me that I /need a teacher/. This is actually not nearly as sexy as it sounds. Exceedingly creepy, in fact.
Most Dysfunctional Family in the Galaxy

Chapter Notes

So yeah, just to confirm, Bloodlines does seem to have debunked this backstory, so yeah. AU. This story now takes place in a coffee shop. Or something.

Nah, I'll leave that kind of stuff for people who are more creative than me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 6: Most Dysfunctional Family in the Galaxy

After a good long cry, Rey decided that this new revelation might prove useful in this cursed mission of hers. Did it mean that she had access to all of his memories before he’d abandoned her? Perhaps she could solve the mystery of why he’d turned to the Dark Side, and this knowledge might help her turn him back?

Rey spent several hours meditating on it, but she only came up with those same three snippets. She didn’t have access to his whole history. Just those little innocuous images, no doubt just implanted to make the absence of other memories seem less unusual. She wondered why he’d chosen those particular memories. Or had those just been the first thoughts to pop into his head?

She’d also considered that blip of her father’s voice. She’d always assumed that was from the moment she was abandoned. But thinking back, it did sound an awful-lot like Han Solo. Where did that actually come from? Could that have been said when he was dropped off with Master Skywalker, as boy? What kind of father calls his son sweetheart?

Rey still had no idea how to feel about any of this. Kylo had erased her memories. But he had given her some of his own. And telling her that her family was coming back - while it had been very difficult to get over, it had given her life-sustaining hope for years.

That, combined with the false memories seemed like both the cruelest and the most generous thing that anyone had ever done for her.

She’d come to accept that the events in those memories hadn’t happened to her, but was having a lot of trouble wrapping her head around the idea that they’d happened to him. She had never imagined that this dark man had ever felt something other than darkness, let alone the giddy irritation of being tickled, or the benign fear of being caught up past his bedtime.

And having seen those two cherished memories, and the one sad one... there was something strangely intimate about it. These were the sort of things that you should only know about a close friend or a long-term lover. And she now knew them about her arch nemesis.

She just didn't get Kylo Ren. Why couldn't he give some long-winded speech about his motivations and intentions, like a proper villain?

Something else had occurred to her. In that vision, he’d appeared to be full-grown, at least physically. That would make him around thirty now. She’d never have guessed that he was that
old. Not so much due to his looks as much as his attitude. Between the tantrums, poor judgement, hatred of his parents and just general impression of discomfort in his own skin, he seemed so much like a teenager that she’d assumed he had to be barely twenty, like herself.

After the several hours of meditation, it was time for her daily check in with Master Skywalker. She approached his quarters, finding his door already open.

Rey flinched at a sudden burst of physical pain when she entered. “Your back is pretty bad today, Master. Didn’t you take something for it?”

“No, but I will, now. No sense in both of us suffering,” Master Skywalker answered.

This sort of thing happened a lot, especially when they were in fairly close physical proximity. Master Skywalker had explained that sharing emotional and physical sensations was pretty common between Force-sensitives who had spent a lot of time together, especially a master and padawan.

As promised, Master Skywalker left the room for a moment. Rey knew he’d taken his medicine, because the empathetic pain began to dull almost immediately.

“How are things going with your assignment?” Master Skywalker asked, motioning for her to enter, and then to sit.

Rey took a seat, as he continued to walk about the room, apparently rearranging things. “Better, until - I lost control of my emotions today,” she said quietly. “Why didn’t you tell me that he spared me and left me on Jakku?”

“Because I didn’t know it myself,” Luke answered simply. “I must admit that lately, I had come to suspect as much, but for most of the past several years, I had assumed you’d been lost along with all the others.”

Rey found the answer to be adequate and logical, but definitely unsatisfying.

“He told me that I was supposed to be his padawan someday. Is that true?”

Luke frowned in thought. “Yes, that had been my plan at one time. But I’m quite sure I never told him about it.” Luke shook his head, with a slight, sad smile. “Ben always did have Leia’s intuition.”

Rey knew that she should tell Master Skywalker about the implanted memories. She really should have...

But for some reason, it felt it would be like blabbing something told to her in confidence. Like this was a secret she’d been entrusted with, and not by her enemy, but by the innocent boy he’d apparently once been. A boy that, her intuition told her, had already felt more than his fair share of betrayal.

She noticed that Master Skywalker was loading belongings into a small metal case, and realized that he wasn’t tidying. He was packing.

“Are you going somewhere, Master?”

Luke gave her a gentle smile. “That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. I’ll be leaving later this afternoon. I got a tip that there are some surprisingly in-tact Jedi ruins on Dantooine. I am going to investigate.”
Rey lit up with excitement, but said excitement was quickly extinguished by the realization that if Master Skywalker had meant for her to come with him, he would have said so by now. “You're going to explore ruins? That sounds like so much fun...” she crooned.

“I know you’re skills as a scavenger would be very helpful there, but my feelings tell me that you are more needed here.”

“Do you have to go now?” This was about as whiny as Rey ever got.

Another gentle smile. “Yes. For the benefit of your mission, actually. I have been doing a good deal of research on the subject of rehabilitating Dark Jedi. So far, I haven’t found anything useful, but I have noted that some texts allude to some high-profile, successful conversion that is associated with the Dantooine Jedi. It is my hope that the ruins may hold some clues as to how this was done.”

Rey had to admit that it sounded promising. And she would have loved nothing more than to have some sort of plan when it came to this project with Kylo.

Master Skywalker produced something from his robes, and held it out to Rey.

“It’s a long range, two-way commlink. I’ll keep mine on me at all times, and I suggest that you do the same. You’ll be able to contact me any time, day or night.”

“Thank you, Master. I will.” Rey took the small device and slid it into a hidden pocket in her vest.

Both Rey and Luke suddenly looked up toward the door. Rey could sense a familiar ripple in the Force approaching - the one that surrounded Leia Organa. Even with such a short time together, Rey had already formed a connection to Leia, fairly similar to the one she had with Master Skywalker. Rey grudgingly supposed that she probably had Kylo’s stupid memories to thank for the extraordinary rapidity of this connection.

There was no need for the General to knock, and indeed, she didn’t. Leia burst in, clearly rather upset about something.

“You're leaving?!” she full-on shouted.

Master Skywalker responded in his most soothing tone, explaining how his trip was relevant to the salvation of her son.

The General calmed down somewhat, and sounded more sad than anything else. “Last time you went off to explore some ruins, you were gone for several years.”

“I will be back within a week or two, Leia. I promise.”

The General crossed her arms. “You’d better. Or I swear this time, I’ll send every big, mean bounty hunter in the galaxy after you. I’ll just sit here and hope that they remember to bring you back alive!”

Master Skywalker chuckled. “Deal.”

Leia moved to quit the room, pausing in the doorway, and directing a wistful smile at her twin. Rey got the feeling that the General was about to launch into some speech on how much she cared about her brother, how much the galaxy needed him. But what she actually said was somewhat different. “Big. Mean. Bounty hunters.”

And then Rey was alone with her mentor, once again.
“Any advice for my mission?” she inquired lamely.

Another gentle smile. “Just compassion, Rey. And keep in mind that while he did freely chose this path for himself, it has brought him neither happiness nor fulfillment.” He gave a deep sigh. “Ben Solo was an unhappy young man, and I suspect that Kylo Ren is infinitely more so.”

Rey’s eyes narrowed skeptically. “Are you saying that when he breaks things and kills people, it’s just because he’s sad?”

“I am sure it’s more complicated than that, but you should keep in mind that not everyone shows sadness in the same way. Many people, men in particular, tend to express sadness through anger.”

“Are you making excuses for him?” Rey asked, audibly shocked.

“No,” Luke answered promptly. “Again, I am simply trying to help you find compassion for him. That’s the only way he can be brought back to the Light.”

Rey shook her head. “There are billions of sad people in the galaxy, but I am guessing that most of them don’t kill their own fathers and slaughter entire villages.”

“The men in my family tend to go big or go home, when it comes to making mistakes,” Master Skywalker stated, “and I really wish I could say that I am an exception.”

“Master -” Rey murmured sympathetically.

He turned to her, suddenly smiling brightly even as she sensed his regret. “Skywalker men also have a major tendency toward whining. I hope you’ll excuse this little moment of self-pity.”

Rey had determined that she should pretend that her lost-memories conversation with Kylo had never happened. It wouldn’t be productive to walk in there and revisit a topic that was exceedingly emotional, apparently for both of them. Fortunately, she had a new secret weapon to aid her in avoiding conversations with that incomprehensible man, and it was tucked under her arm.

Rey looked down at the cell security screen, and found Kylo Ren sitting on the floor. He actually looked to be meditating, until his eyes abruptly snapped open. He’d probably sensed that he was being watched. She couldn’t help a brief chortle at the way he frantically combed his fingers through his increasingly grungy hair.

She pressed down on the intercom control. “Step into the circle. I’m coming in.”

He obliged fairly promptly, the force cage was activated, and Rey entered the cell.

“You were meditating,” Rey commented.

“Amazing, I know. How do I ever find the time with such a busy schedule?” he said, oozing sarcasm from every pore. “There’s such a wealth of activities in here.”

“About that -” Rey produced circular checkered piece of electronics from under her arm.

“Dejarik?” he said unenthusiastically.

“Yeah. Holo-chess is the only leisure activity I could find around here, that’s portable and doesn’t involve small pieces you could chuck at me,” she explained. “I can’t leave it in here with you, but we can play when I’m here.”
This seemed like an excellent notion to Rey - she was hoping that this would mean that they wouldn’t have to talk to each other quite so much.

“I haven’t played dejarik since I was a kid,” he grumbled.

“Perfect. I’ve only just learned, so we should be evenly matched.”

“As we are in most things,” he commented, as if to himself.

A short silence as Rey sat on the floor and began to set up the board. He likewise sank down to a crouching position.

“Skywalker’s left the station,” Kylo stated.

Rey supposed there was no point in lying. “Yes, last night.”

“Pity. I was hoping that I could kill him on my way out of here.”

Rey snorted. “You seem pretty confident that you’ll be leaving.”

“My mother is still here,” he shifted the direction of the conversation blatantly. “My family has a talent for dragging other people down into their drama, but it seems to me that you dove in pretty freely.” He shook his head. “Oh, and make no mistake, you have been sucked in. The fact that you’re sitting here talking to me proves that you are neck-deep in their bullshit.”

“Your mother thinks there is hope for you,” Rey said simply.

“My mother is a fool and a hypocrite,” Kylo growled. “She hates the New Republic almost as much as I do, and yet she fights tirelessly to maintain their power.”

“She cares about you.”

“She cares about the Cause,” he retorted. “She only wants me back because I have a head full of enemy secrets, and because she wants a spare trump card for when Skywalker finally bites it.”

Rey’s mouth fell open at the sheer bitterness of his statement. Bitterness and - either complete idiocy or willful self-deception. Or both. “Is that what you tell yourself?”

Kylo glared at the floor for several seconds. “Are we going to play, or what?”

Chapter End Notes

Where my KoTOR peeps at?

Oh and in case you have not yet noticed, each chapter is named after a different Reylo trope :)
Chapter 7: Learning to Pity the Monster

Rey sighed, pushing the dejarik board toward Kylo, through the shimmering wall of energy that separated them. This particular type of force cage allowed things to pass into the cage, but not out. That made it possible for them to both reach their respective controls. She activated the board. “I believe the convention is that the player who lost the previous match gets to make the first move. That would be you, if I recall correctly.”

The last word had barely come out of her mouth when she decided that was a foolish thing for her to say, and really wished that she hadn’t. Rubbing his humiliating defeat on Starkiller in his face was not likely to make him more cooperative. But to her surprise, she sensed no gust of hostility from him. On the contrary, his face bore a smirk of benign amusement, as if he admired her spunk. Or at least that was what he wanted her to think. The feelings she sensed were rather unclear.

Kylo’s first move was a good one, but completely predictable. She immediately knew the best counter. Unfortunately, he seemed to know the most effective way to get around her counter, again, a good move, but entirely predictable.

Several more moves seemed to prove that they were indeed evenly matched, but the game was getting slightly frustrating. He knew how to use push to his advantage - one of the more basic strategies. She knew because she’d just recently been shown the importance of this type of attack.

“Chewbacca taught you to play too, didn’t he?”

Kylo made a point of keeping his eyes on the board. Rey sensed something subtle in his feelings. Something negative, but not hostile. Guilt?

“How is the old walking carpet?” he asked eventually, still pretending to focus on the game, but not actually making a move.

Rey felt a swell of hope. He actually cared enough to ask. She stopped attending to the game for the moment, to better focus on the conversation. “Better than he was a year ago. He took - what happened pretty hard.”

“Back on Kashyyyk, I take it?” Kylo asked. He was making a concerted effort to sound casual, as if this was an entirely normal conversation about an old acquaintance who hadn’t shot him in the gut, and been entirely right to do so.

“No. He’s been doing supply runs to -” Rey just barely stopped herself. Kylo may have been a POW, but he was still an enemy. Maybe that was the only reason he was asking about Chewie in the first place. She shifted the subject slightly. “Somewhere. The Falcon has been signed over to him by the way. I trust you don’t mind?” Rey couldn’t help adding a little barb.

Kylo’s answer was soaked with dark, self-deprecating humor. “I’d say I’ve forfeited any right to an inheritance, wouldn't you?”

Self-deprecating or not, hearing him allude to patricide so casually was almost more than she could stomach. Rey's hands left the game board, and she toyed with the idea of punching him in the face.
Kylo grinned, wagging a finger at her. “You still want to kill me,” he sang tauntingly, as if it were a children's rhyme.

Rey took a deep breath, realizing that he was trying to get a rise out of her. “Not really. But I would rather like to beat a proper sense of shame into you.”

All his air of snotty sarcasm seemed to dissipate, revealing a cloud of bitterness. He gave one of his joyless laughs. “As if you could teach me anything about shame,” he paused, his voice raising slightly. “It’s your move.”

Rey returned her attention to the game, and several seconds of silence passed. Rey then decided to steer the conversation back to the topic that had seemed fairly promising earlier.

“I saw Chewie last week, just after you were captured. I mentioned it to him. Do you want to know what he said?”

“You want to tell me,” he said with an affectedly indifferent shrug.

“He told me that you weren’t all bad. That you were -” Rey paused, trying to think of a word in Basic that matched what Chewie had said, “sick.”

“Sick,” Kylo echoed, latching onto the word. “Sick. My family would think that,” he looked up, meeting her eyes briefly. “I’m not sick. This is just who I am, and they still can’t accept it. A lot of unpleasantness could have been avoided if they did.”

Rey thought of what Master Skywalker had said the previous day, about how Kylo's decisions had not brought him happiness. “Do you enjoy it? This life that you’ve made for yourself?”

“That’s irrelevant,” he replied irritably. “I have a destiny.”

“What exactly is your destiny?” Rey asked.

Kylo answered without hesitation. “To follow in my grandfather’s footsteps.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know. I’ve always known,” he told her firmly, just as he’d made a relatively clever move, his Savrip taking out Rey’s K’lor slug with a single blow.

Rey sensed that he wasn’t really being evasive. It sounded like that’s what he genuinely believed. She gathered her courage. The opening was too tempting.

“Could it be possible that you’re wrong?”

He looked up from the board again. “No. I’m never wrong about things like this. That’s not arrogance. It’s literal fact,” he stated calmly, not really defensive, again as if he he really believed it.

“But you’re not happy,” Rey pronounced, her Ghhhk slipping into striking distance of his Savrip.

“Power is more important.”

“Then you admit that you’re not happy.”

Rey’s Ghhhk engaged in a brief scuffle with his Savrip, giving it a shove, but not quite killing it.
He threw his head back with a small groan of annoyance. “Happiness is an abstract concept that only exists in advertisements and religious rhetoric.”

“So you’ve never felt happiness?”

“Of course I have, don’t be stupid,” Kylo snapped. Just then, his Savrip moved to counter-attack, pushing Rey’s Ghhkhk back. “But there’s a difference between a moment of happiness and a mythical sustained state of happiness.”

“It comes from within,” Rey recited, recalling one of the holos that her master had given her to study, “From accepting yourself and your life as it is. From ceasing to always want more.”

Kylo rolled his eyes infuriatingly. “I suppose you’ve achieved this state yourself?”

“Well, no,” she admitted. “I’ve a lot more training to do.”

A long pause, in which they both focused on the game. Several moves passed, and before long, Rey’s poor Ghhkhk was no more.

“So, this mythical state of happiness,” Kylo began, “do you actually think that a guy like me deserves it?” There was no regret in his vibes, just a sort of grim curiosity.

“I don’t know, do you?”

Rey’s scrappy little Molator stepped up to the murderous Savrip.

“I asked you first,” he retorted.

Rey sighed. “My inability to decide what you deserve saved your life at one point.”

Kylo gave a little grunt of disappointment as his Savrip went down, and flickered to nothing. “You think I am utterly and completely despicable.”

“If you believe that, then you’re not trying very hard to get an accurate read on me,” Rey stated honestly. Or at least it felt honest.

He gave a condescending chuckle. “I don't need to read you to know that. I haven't put any actual effort into reading you in quite a while. Now that I know who and what you are, the inner workings of your mind are frankly not that interesting.”

Rey gave a little grunt of offense. Was that asshole calling her a simpleton? “Excuse me?!”

“That’s a compliment!” he insisted, his raised, grouchy voice belying the content of his statement.

“How is that a compliment?!”

Kylo seemed to regain some control over his tone, and briefly became unnervingly sincere, his eyes meeting hers for the first time in several minutes. “There's very little deception in you, therefore there's not much point in reading between your lines. Whatever you say or do, you actually mean it.” His voice fell to a low mutter, regaining its usual grumpiness, his eyes dropping away from hers and onto the floor. “That's a rare quality.”

The holographic monsters went into their idle animations, as if bored by all of this prattle, and eager to resume the fight. But the two players were too engrossed in their discourse to notice.

Rey once again took the reins of the conversation, leading it back to potentially productive territory. Strangely, his compliment made it a good deal easier to make her statement. “I DON’T
think you are *completely and utterly* despicable.”

**Mostly, but not completely,** she thought. **The General seems so sure.**

A sudden burst of intuition hit her. “*But you* do. *You* think that you are utterly and completely despicable.” She narrowed her eyes in thought, studying him, concentrating furiously on his emotions. If she could draw out this little moment of insight, if she could actually *understand* him, perhaps she would actually get somewhere with this mission.

And then, epiphany struck. Her voice became smooth and dreamy, as if spoken directly from the Force-saturated center of her being. “The hate that you use for your powers, it’s mostly for yourself. That’s why you…”

Rey felt a sudden sharp tug on her belt, instantly snapping her out of her sagacious semi-trance. Kylo was attempting to acquire her lightsaber again. Just as before, she was able to stop it with firm grip around the hilt. She shook her head, realizing that this had become his way of asking her to leave. Apparently, the conversation had become a little too *real* for his taste.

”*Nice try.*” She pulled the dejarik board away, and stood calmly. “See you tomorrow.”

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Artoo and Threepio were once again engaged in their daily visit. Threepio had been mulling over that absolutely preposterous notion of Artoo’s for much of the day. And of course, everyone was entitled to Threepio’s opinion.

“I think that a romantic entanglement between those two is absolutely impossible.” Threepio declared firmly. “There is no way, no circumstance in which it would be at all likely.”

Artoo countered with a curious chirp.

“Well, where do I begin!? He has been most decidedly unkind to Miss Rey and her loved ones, and Miss Rey clearly despises him!”

Artoo began a particularly prolonged series of what seemed like every beep, hum, buzz and whistle in his repertoire.

“Literary and cinematic precedents?!” Threepio exclaimed. “And who is this *Mister Darcy* you speak of? Never mind, I refuse to hear it! It is against my programming to break the fourth wall!”

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Chapter End Notes

I freely admit that my motivation to write is not as intrinsic as it should be. Reviews make a difference!

For the record, as a bit of a Janeite, I find the Pride and Prejudice comparison kind of iffy. Yes, both stories involve sexual tension between two people who start out despising each other, but I don't recall much in the way of kidnapping, patricide and mass murder. On the other hand, I think I'd die a happy woman if ep. VIII involves Kylo delivering a train-wreck of a marriage proposal, and then getting his ass kicked (either verbally or physically). And now that I think about it, that doesn't sound quite as far-fetched as it probably should :)

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Chapter 8: Sympathy for the Devil

Two days had passed since that last disastrous conversation, and things seemed to have settled into a routine of sorts. Rey would bring the dejarik board and a container of cut-up fruit. They would play, sitting on the floor on opposite sides of the force cage, and Rey would toss him a piece of fruit every now and then. She could have handed it to him due to the one-way force cage, but she didn’t want to touch that shimmering wall of energy unless she had to. She’d received enough electric shocks in her life to know when she shouldn’t push her luck. So, she just threw the snacks at him.

The rapport had built to the point that she felt it might be time to bring up a more controversial topic. Something productive to her mission. They had just concluded their most recent holochess bout when Rey finally built up the nerve.

“So, you think it’s your destiny to follow in your grandfather’s footsteps?”

“I know it’s my destiny,” he corrected her.

“How do you know?” she asked. Rey expected that he would now explain that Snoke had told him, and she could in turn cast some doubt onto Snoke’s motives. A clumsy approach, but it was all she could think of.

“I just know,” he answered simply.

“But how do you know?” Rey asked, flinging him a small piece of fruit.

“I just know!” he shouted, snatching the morsel out of the air irritably, as if it were an offensive insect. “There are some things I just know.”

Rey tossed a piece into her own mouth, chewing as she spoke. “Like an intuition?”

Kylo paused and ate his morsel. Apparently someone had taught the prince not to talk with his mouth full. “Not really, it’s more like - I just know. It’s like I’ve always known.” He glanced up at her briefly, his tone turning defensive. “I’ve always been this way,” he snapped, as if she’d just called him a freak to his face.

“That’s quite a talent,” she commented honestly.

“It would be, if I could control it,” he grumbled. “But I can’t just look into the future. I just know something or I don’t.”

“Do you know anything about my future?” she asked brightly, trying to lighten things up a little.

He didn't answer.

“I'll take that as a yes. Tell me,” she suggested casually, as if it were a completely ordinary thing to talk about. It couldn’t possibly be anything important...
“I shouldn’t. Some of it would upset you.”

Her eyes narrowed skeptically at the notion that he was so worried about her feelings. “Well, now I really want to know!”

“Fine. I’ll tell you one thing,” he looked up at her, meeting her gaze with that dark stare, but speaking calmly. “You will be my death.”

She was speechless for several seconds. “Well, you seem awfully at peace with the idea!”

It occurred to Rey that he’d implied that this was the *least* upsetting thing he knew about her future. That notion was so ominous that she flatly decided to put it out of her mind. Instead, she briefly reflected on how this premonition seemed rather at odds with Master Skywalker’s prophecy that she would be the one to save him. Perhaps he was so far gone that killing him was the only way to save his tortured soul?

“There’s no point in worrying about it. It *will* happen,” he explained calmly. “If I take steps to prevent it, those steps will just take me closer.”

Rey felt a twinge of preemptive guilt, realizing that she didn’t wish Kylo Ren dead... or at least she didn’t want to be personally responsible for it.

Kylo instantly sensed her feeling. “I appreciate the sentiment, but don’t trouble yourself. One way or another, you’re going to be the death of me, but I have no way of knowing when, where, how or why. You’d be surprised at how little the outcome matters when you don’t know how you get there, and predictions may come true, but never in the way you expect.” She felt his vibes shift more clearly in the direction of his usual bitterness. “That’s what the Light does. It moves you around -“ he gestured at the dejakir board, “like pieces in some infinite, cosmic game, for some grand, unfathomably complicated plan. It doesn’t give any say in the matter.”

Something suddenly occurred to her. She thought of echoed, eavesdropped words, heard on Starkiller.

*“Han Solo. I’ve waited for this day for a long time.”*

The idea hit her so hard that she gasped, and it took her a moment to regain her composure.

“How long ago did you know that you would kill your father?”

His expression darkened, and she felt a burst of emotion from him. She’d touched on the subject before, but she’d never had such a strong reaction from him. It was a gale of negative emotions of all kinds - sadness, fear, regret, anger - hitting her like the blast of cold air, as she’d sprinted out of that cavernous chamber on Starkiller.

Kylo continued to look down at the board. His answer was a long time in coming, and said surprisingly calmly, considering the strong feelings she sensed in him. “I don’t remember a time when I didn’t know,” he raised his eyes to hers, and his voice turned menacing. “If you tell my mother, I will destroy everyone you have ever cared about.”

Rey knew she should have rebuked him for such a cruel threat, but she didn’t. “You have my word,” she said earnestly. Not so much because she feared for her friends’ safety, but out of simple human decency. That revelation was so obviously, deeply personal to him.

“So, you knew, even as a child?”

“Yes,” he answered tersely.
It had been a while since Rey had realized that Kylo Ren was six-foot-two of human train wreck, but for some reason, that one sad fact seemed to find it’s way through the chinks in her emotional armor, just as it had with his. She actually started to tear up. It was combination of her empathic reaction to his strong feelings, and her own cursory musings on what it must have been like for a child to live with such terrifying knowledge. No wonder he was crazy.

Absurdly, Rey even felt the brief urge to give him a hug. She should have shaken off the thought immediately, but she didn’t. Instead, she extended a hand to him, fingers slipping through the one-way force cage. Luckily, she felt only the brief pin-prick of static energy as she passed the rest of her hand through the barrier.

“What are you doing?” he asked, staring at her hand suspiciously.

She groaned a little at his obtuseness. “It’s a gesture of support and trust, customary when you hear that something horrific happened to someone that you even slightly care about.”

“I don’t want your pity,” he huffed childishly.

“It’s called sympathy, you idiot. Just accept it.” Her fingers twitched, beckoning.

Slowly, gingerly, he extended his hand forward until their fingertips met. Her petite hand closed firmly around his enormous fingers. He was warmer than she’d expected, the skin of his hand surprisingly soft. The gloves must have prevented them from callousing.

“There. Was that so hard?” she asked.

He finally met her gaze, but let out a sudden loud crack of laughter. Rey was so startled that she yanked her hand away from his. “What?! What is it?!”

Kylo was laughing so hard that it took him a good thirty seconds to answer. “Your - your hair,” he managed, still laughing uproariously.

Rey reached up to the top of her head. Every loose strand of hair was standing straight up. It must have been the static energy from the force cage. She startled laughing herself.

They laughed together.

“Hey!” A familiar voice called to her from somewhere behind her, as she passed down a hallway later that afternoon. Rey smiled as she turned to face Poe Dameron.

“What’s up?”

“You busy?” he asked politely.

“Not too busy to chat with a friend for a few.”

“Good, ‘cause there was something I’ve been meaning to talk to you about,” Poe explained, a little uneasily. Rey sensed that he was hiding something - a sense that she often got from other people, but never from Poe.

“So, it’s about this assignment of yours, with the prisoner.”

Rey was starting to get the impression that this was not going to be one of Poe’s entertaining yarns about some recklessly awesome thing he’d done in his x-wing.
“Rey, people are starting to talk.”

She frowned. “Talk?”

“About you - getting a bit too friendly with the prisoner.”

Rey gave an high grunt of indignation. “What?!"

“It’s just that - they see you going to visit him everyday - ”

Rey cut him off, “I am following orders! I’m supposed to get tactical information out of him!”

“I know that, but other people - they just see you going to visit him, and bringing him presents - ”

She interrupted him again. “Presents?! I bring him FOOD! The only other things I’ve brought him are a sleeping mat and a toilet!”

Poe raised both hands in a warding gesture. “I know that, Rey-”

“No one would be saying this if I was a man! Why the hell do people even care? What business is it of theirs?” Rey huffed. She'd never been to highschool, so the notion of mean-spirited gossiping was unfamiliar and exceedingly offensive to her.

“Rey,” he began in his most soothing tone. “Me and Finn just thought you should be aware of the talk. Of course we don’t believe a word of it. We know you’re just doing your duty, and you’re playing good cop because that’s a completely legitimate interrogation strategy.”

She was still getting the feeling that Poe was hiding something. Rey supposed that made sense, in this context. Some of the specific things he had heard people say about her must have been downright vile.

“But Rey, there is some serious stuff going on, about Kylo Ren,” Poe continued, sounding unusually serious. “Most of the higher-ups really want him dead as soon as possible, and they usually get their way. A lot of people have lost friends to him or his men, and emotions are running high. And that’s not to mention the political bullshit. The General’s enemies are jumping all over this. Hell, I think Colonel Farr is now openly gunning for her job.” Poe put a hand on her shoulder. “Me and Finn really don’t want to see you get caught up in the crossfire.”

Rey huffed. “Duly noted.”

“And Rey, don’t tell anyone I told you this, but -” Poe paused and grimaced. Rey sensed indecision in his vibes. “Don’t get attached to him.”

Like an old married couple.

Artoo and Threepio were once again chatting it up in the droid maintenance room. But the chat sounded a good deal more like arguing. Then again, that was par for the course, for them.

“Artoo, really. The very notion is deplorable -”

Threepio stopped mid-rant, as another droid entered.

“Why if it isn't my dear friend, BB8!” Threepio declared cheerfully. “I am glad you are here, as this way, I can hear the opinion of an astromech that's isn't famously eccentric.”

Artoo gave a little snort of disdain.
“Now then, BB8, do you think that there is any chance of a romance between Miss Rey and Young Master Ben,” Threepio paused, his voice dropping to what he no doubt thought to be a very sinister tone, “also known as Kylo Ren, the infamous war criminal and murderer, whose very name strikes fear into the hearts of all decent sentients?”

BB8 squeaked adorably.

“There, Artoo! You see, the thought had never even occurred to BB8!”

Artoo turned to his plucky little protege, and launched into a lengthy explanation.

Threepio immediately cut in, once Artoo had finished. “Artoo, just listen to yourself! You sound ridiculous! It’s not like we are living in some sort of intergalactic fairy tale, or some morality play about redemption against all odds!”

BB8 responded with a short burst of coos.

Threepio let out a scandalized gasp. “BB8, you actually think Artoo might be correct?!”

BB8 made his little uh-oh noise and zoomed out of the room.

Threepio attempted to cross his arms, but found that they were not flexible enough. “Well, you just rethink your position on the matter, Artoo!”

Artoo let out a distinctly raspberry-like buzz as Threepio shuffled out of the room.

Chapter End Notes

Next time...

Chapter 9: Escape is Suddenly Necessary
Much as I have enjoyed writing all of these Silence of the [Space] Lambs convos, there comes a time in a Reylo fic's life, when one has to help the other escape from somewhere.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 9: Escape is Suddenly Necessary

“How’s it going?” Rey inquired as she entered the cell, the following day.

Kylo rolled his eyes. “Why do you bother asking? I’m still in prison.” He paused. “I don’t suppose you could install a shower in this thing?”

Rey looked around, actually considering the logistics of his proposal.

“No. Even if I rigged up some pipes in the ceiling, there’s no drain,” she told him, genuinely apologetic. The guy was looking pretty shabby, and she wasn’t sure if she wanted to know what he smelled like, up close.

“I haven’t bathed in several days,” he whispered through gritted teeth, as if there was anyone else to hear him.

“Oh boo-hoo,” Rey mocked, “I once went thirteen years without bathing!”

Kylo’s face scrunched up in obvious disgust.

Now it was Rey’s turn to get defensive. “I did clean myself,” her voice dropped to a mumble, “with sand.”

“Sand?” he echoed incredulously.

“It’s entirely sanitary if it’s been baking out in the sun.”

“Sand,” he repeated.

Rey crossed her arms. “Do you think people on desert planets use water for bathing? Try something like that on Jakku and you’d probably be dragged out into the street and shot.”

The look of disgust hadn’t left his face.

“Crown prince indeed!” Rey exclaimed derisively. “If you think that washing up with sand is nasty, you should hear about protein recycling. Or how a reclamation toilet works.”

“I think I’ll pass,” Kylo stated. His tone actually turned to something like polite entreaty. “Could I at least get some clean clothes, maybe?”

“I suppose I could probably find a uniform that will fit you.”
“No,” he said, politeness evaporating abruptly.

Rey crossed her arms. “You know, I’ve heard this saying before - something about beggars and choosers.”

“If our positions were reversed, would you take a First Order uniform?” he snapped.

She considered this for a moment. “Not unless I absolutely had to, I suppose.”

“Exactly.” Kylo paused, apparently trying to shift back into polite entreaty mode. “I do have some spare clothes on my shuttle.”

“Is it even on the station?”

Kylo’s eyes shifted toward the ceiling, as if examining an imaginary sky for weather patterns. “Yeah, she’s here.”

“Well I guess it can’t hurt. It’s not like you’re going to make a rope and escape out a window.” Her voice raised. “Threepio!”

The golden droid shuffled in. “Yes Miss Rey?”

“Young Master Ben,” Rey began, having waited days for an excuse to call him that, “- says there are some clean clothes on his shuttle. Would you go grab them, please?”

If Threepio had a face, it would have scowled. “I hardly think that is necessary!”

“Don’t ask him to do things,” Kylo chimed in. “Tell him. He’s less likely to talk your ear off with his opinion if you give him a direct order.”

“Well I never!” Threepio exclaimed.

Rey decided to take this advice. “Just go get the clothes and bring them back here,” Rey said a little more authoritative.

Threepio shuffled off in a huff, and Rey noticed that Kylo was now grinning broadly at her.

“What?”

“I told you, you’d call me master.”

Rey furrowed her brows. “I did not!”

“Yes you did.”

She thought a moment. Young Master Ben... “Damn it!” she shouted over Kylo’s chuckle. “Well, it won’t happen again.”

“We’ll see,” he told her, still smiling.

Rey was about to get out the dejakir board when she suddenly frowned, catching the sound of footsteps. “Someone’s coming. Not Threepio.”

“Several someones,” Kylo corrected her, still crouching at the bottom of the force cage.

An officer came in with several men, Finn and Poe among them. Rey recognized the officer as
“Colonel, I believe General Organa said I am the only sentient who is allowed in this room,” Rey said, trying to strike a balance between confidence and respectfulness.

Farr ignored her statement, pulling out a datapad. He began to read, sounding very cold and official. “Ben Solo, also known as Kylo Ren. You have been lawfully tried by military tribunal. You are hereby convicted of crimes against humanity and other sentients. Multiple witnesses have testified that you ordered the murder of the inhabitants of Tuanul village, including noncombatants…”

Rey looked at Finn and Poe, knowing that they must have been the witnesses. “Why didn't you tell me you were testifying?”

“We were given a direct order not to,” Poe explained solemnly. Rey's eyes widened, realizing that Poe had sort of been trying to warn her the other day.

Finn stepped forward, putting a hand on Rey’s shoulder, and she felt an abrupt wave of hatred emanating from Kylo.

“We're here now, for moral support,” Finn explained softly, as Farr droned on. “We thought this might be tough for you.”

“... Sentenced to die on this day at 0900 hours,” Farr finally concluded.

Rey’s eyes widened - only a single glance was needed to confirm that the rest of the party was a firing squad, followed by the realization that it must have been just about 9:00 by standard chronometer. They were definitely fast tracking this execution, no doubt to get it done before General Organa could interfere.

“Good. I hate long waits,” Kylo muttered.

Rey turned to the Colonel. “But the General said the trial wouldn't even start until-”

Farr cut her off, and proceeded to confirm her suspicion. “The tribunal felt that that the General could not be objective regarding this case, so she was not informed.”

Rey’s panic was rising. “But - he has important enemy tactical information!”

Colonel Farr looked at the condemned prisoner curiously, apparently willing to hear him out.

“Tell them!” Rey looked at Kylo pleadingly. She hoped that his sense of self-preservation was strong enough to make him refrain from being a stubborn jackass, and just make something up.

“Tell them... about... that... um... new superweapon!” she prompted.

Hey, it worked pretty well for Finn.

Rey’s hope had apparently been in vain. Kylo stared back, too proud and/or stupid to attempt talking his way out of this.

“I'll see you in hell,” he spat, rising to his feet.

“Idiot!” Rey shrieked at him.

“Ready!” Colonel Farr yelled stoutly. “Aim!”
The firing squad obediently raised their weapons.

“Be strong, Rey” Finn whispered soothingly. “It’ll be over soon.”

Rey’s heart, already feeling as if it was lodged squarely in her throat, suddenly threatened to leap straight out of her chest. She could feel that familiar tugging on her belt. Her lightsaber was once again trying to free itself from her person.

In that moment, she finally understood one of Master Skywalker’s lessons that she’d never quite grasped the importance of, on how inaction can be an action. Rey’s conscious failure to stop the lightsaber would change the course of her entire life, and indeed, the course of galactic history.

The next several events occurred in extremely rapid succession. The saber flew away from her, but not toward Kylo. Instead, it ignited in midair and flew toward the other end of the room, deflecting the burst of fire from the panicked squad as it flew, and then abruptly skewering Colonel Farr against the force cage control panel. This in turn opened the cage just in time for the saber to fly into Kylo’s hand, and to deflect subsequent fire. Kylo then raised his other hand, holding the rest of the party in paralysis, as he stepped forward to do a little executing of his own.

“Stop!” Rey shrieked, stepping between Kylo and the others. “They’re my friends!”

And to her immeasurable surprise, the saber stilled in his hand.

“Consider this a personal favor,” he told her, telepathically. Communicating in that way felt unsettlyingly intimate, as if whispered by lips a few millimeters from her ear.

But Kylo still apparently felt compelled to gloss over his act of mercy further. He continued to hold Finn, Poe and the five-man firing squad in paralysis, and spoke menacingly. “I’m leaving you alive so you can tell everyone what happens when you try to hold me.” And with a wave of his hand, they all fell unconscious.

Kylo glanced down at Finn, twitching with murderous frustration at passing up the opportunity to kill him. It probably helped that Rey had just referred to him as a friend.

Rey regarded the crumpled form of Colonel Farr. He was most sincerely dead. She felt a fleeting moment of regret, before recalling that the guy was a dick, anyway... That was a terrible thing to think; she’d been spending entirely too much time with Kylo. Being a dick did not warrant murder. But it did make it slightly more palatable. And she supposed it could have been construed as self defense.

And thus Rey was alone with an armed and entirely unrestrained Kylo Ren.

Rey gathered her nerve and put out her hand. “Give me my saber.”

He hesitated, looking the weapon over. Kylo no doubt recognized that it was made using components of the family heirloom he coveted. Indeed, she had cannibalized that cursed saber for parts to make her own, as Master Skywalker had suggested.

“Kylo, it’s mine,” she stated, unable to keep the nervousness from her voice.

He huffed as he closed the blade down and handed it back to her.

General Organa had spent the last several hours glued to a tactical display. She’d had a strong but vague sense of impending calamity all morning, and was just waiting for enemy fighters to appear.
That was, until a shiver went up her spine, and she was inundated by a more specific feeling - something a mixture of Force perception and maternal instinct.

“Ben,” she whispered. She reached out to him with the Force, but found his mind closed to her, as always. Leia switched tactics, shifting her attention to Rey.

“Rey, what happened?”

“General Organa?”

“Yes, what’s going on?”

“They finished the trial behind your back. Colonel Farr came in with a firing squad...”

Leia couldn’t help gasping aloud. Treason or not, her next telepathic statement came without a moment’s hesitation. Her son may have been a murderous ingrate, but he was still her son.

“Rey, you have to get him out of here!”

Well then, Rey had her orders.

Threepio shuffled up the ramp to the derelict command shuttle, Artoo rolling close behind.

“Thank you, old friend. I could never have disabled the security system without you.”

The prissy golden droid began to look about the main cabin of the shuttle, making occasional little irritated sighs.

“Artoo,” Threepio began, still searching for the rumored clean clothes. “I have been thinking... Miss Rey should not have anything to do with Young Master Ben, in that respect! Miss Rey’s parentage is still unknown. She could even be a relative of his, and such things are taboo among humans,” Threepio explained knowledgeably.

Artoo gave a series of beeps and whistles.

“I know that the odds are 9-quadrillion-to-one, but you must admit that the Skywalker family has a tendency to attract strange coincidences. Master Luke and the Princess had been friends for years before they discovered that they were siblings.”

The little blue droid gave a more prolonged series of beeps and hums.

“You know who Miss Rey’s parents are?! I find that very hard to believe.”

More beeps and hums.

“You were there when Master Luke adopted her? Well, do tell! Do tell!”

Artoo gave a terse chirp.

“Sworn to secrecy? Come now Artoo, you don’t trust me, after all we have been through?”

Artoo responded with a distinctly snotty-sounding buzzing noise.
“I will have you know that my mouth is sized precisely to factory specifications!”

Chapter End Notes

I asked myself “how much is too much when it comes to cramming Han Solo lines in Kylo Ren’s mouth?”
Myself informed me that there is NO SUCH THING!

Next time...
Chapter 10: Have to Escape Together, For Some Reason
Chapter 10: Have to Escape Together, For Some Reason

Rey crawled ahead through the ceiling ventilation system, with the newly-sprung prisoner following immediately behind her. She was trying not to think of what a spectacular view Kylo Ren had of her ass.

“Here,” she told him, gesturing to the grate in front of her. Once loosened, she pulled it aside, and proceeded to jump down from the high ceiling, her companion following suit. Luckily, there appeared to be no one in that particular hallway.

“There,” she whispered, gesturing to a large door only a meter away. “Take a ship and get out of here.”

He stuck his head into the doorway, and retracted it promptly. “Where’s my ship?”

She stared at him, aghast. “How should I know? Just take that fighter!”

He glanced at the nearby vintage A-wing, face wrinkling in apparent disgust.

“I. Want. My. Ship,” he said threateningly. “This hanger is only tall enough for snub fighters. Where do they keep larger ships?”

Rey thought a moment. “Probably in the big one, down at the end,” she told him, gesturing down the hall.

Kylo took off running.

Rey shook her head, muttering to herself. “You Solos do get attached to your ships...”

“I heard that!” he bellowed irritably.

She stepped forward to follow, but stopped abruptly. She felt that distinct ripple in the Force that surround the General. Kylo apparently felt it too, slowing to a stop just before Leia Organa appeared several meters down the corridor, and directly in their path.

Rey could feel the tension rolling off both Kylo and the General, as they saw each other for the first time in years.

“I know it was you,” Leia said. But there was no accusation in her voice. It was something much more like - gratitude. That didn’t make any sense...

Kylo made no answer.

“I know you were the one who sent the warning that Illenium was the next target. I will never, ever be able to prove it, but I know.” The General paused, swallowing what was either a sob, or her pride. “Whatever you’ve told yourself, what you did to your father does not define who you are.”

Rey watched in complete fascination, dying to know how this would play out. Kylo just stood
there, his face not quite visible from where Rey was standing. He slowly walked toward his estranged mother, the mutual tension escalating with every step. Rey desperately wished that she could have seen the look on his face. Murderous anger? Abject shame? Tender affection? It could have been any or all of those.

Rey’s hand found it’s way to her side, and hovered over her saber. She was sure as hell not going to let another murder happen right before her eyes. At the same time, she certainly didn’t want to hamper any potential heart-felt reconciliation. Perhaps that was the way she would help redeem him?

He stopped just in front of his mother, and Rey could see that sad smile spread across the General’s face.

“Ben, nothing will ever stop the conflict in you.”

Rey felt a burst of unmitigated pain emanating from Kylo, as if the unpalatable truth his mother was speaking was another bowcaster bolt slamming into his gut.

“But you could at least choose to be on the right side of that conflict,” Leia told him, all but glowing with tragically unconditional love.

Rey saw Kylo hang his head for a moment, and then raise a hand, as if he was about to pull his estranged mother into a hug. But instead, Kylo’s hand formed into a pinching motion, and the General fell unconscious. Kylo caught her as she fell, and laid her out on the floor, cradling his mother’s head in one hand, to keep it from banging against the ground.

Fortunately, Rey could feel that the General was alive and unhurt, but she still felt compelled to scream at him. “What the hell is wrong with you?!”

He ignored her, proceeding to roll his mother onto her stomach, arranging limp limbs in a sort of flailing position.

“What are you doing?!?” Rey demanded.

“Saving her from a firing squad of her own!” he shouted furiously, more defensive than ever.

“People will automatically assume that she helped me escape! Militaries have a term for that type of thing, one that’s pretty consistently tied to execution. But they’ll be less suspicious if it looks I attacked her.”

“Oh...” was all Rey could think of to say. This would have been a logical time for her to consider how her own actions were likely to call her loyalty into question. But like most people, Rey’s mind wasn’t always at its most logical in the middle of a crisis.

All she could think of was the perplexing dichotomy she’d just witnessed. He could have killed his other parent, but he hadn’t.

As usual, he sensed the gist of her thoughts. The habitual bitterness of his vibes increased exponentially, a constant whisper into a deafening roar. “There would be no point! I already made my grand gesture, and a hell of a lot of good it did me!”

Before she could say anything, Kylo turned on his heel and took off again, and Rey immediately moved to follow. Luckily, Kylo’s ship actually was in the larger hanger, as predicted. He strode in without any apparent hesitation, right past several mechanics. Said mechanics, being unarmed and unstupid, backed away wordlessly. They weren’t armed, but Rey knew perfectly well that they were going call someone who was.
The ramp to the command shuttle was already down. Kylo stepped onto it, but stopped abruptly.

“Where's my lightsaber?”

Rey’s jaw dropped. “I have no idea! It's probably in a court evidence locker! It might not even be on the station anymore!”

He stepped back down the ramp, and loomed over her threateningly. “I. Want. My. Saber.”

She stepped forward, staring back without fear.

“You WANT a punch in the face!” Rey shouted. First the ship, and now the lightsaber. She’d had it with his spoiled brat bullshit. “I am not going to let you run all over this station, killing everyone you come across, just to find that shoddy excuse for a lightsaber!”

Kylo took a step forward anyway, and Rey ignited her weapon, standing directly in his path. She may not have been able to read his mind, but she had the instincts of a fighter. She could tell he was about to make a move.

“Try it Kylo. I dare you!”

He glared at her. “You won't kill me.”

“Do you care to stake your life on that?” she asked fiercely. “Care to prove your own premonition wrong?”

Luckily, Kylo Ren was not quite dumb/arrogant enough to face Rey when she was armed and he wasn't.

“Some rescue,” he muttered, his murderous glare fading as he walked back up the ramp, almost casually. He was apparently trying to salvage his pride by pretending he didn't much care, one way or the other.

But yet again, he stopped at the top of the ramp, and turned to Rey.

“What the hell are you waiting for?!” he shouted, beckoning to her with his hand. “Come on!”

“What? No!” Rey exclaimed.

He threw up his hands, in a way not unlike how the General often did in moments of frustration. “Everyone is going to know that you helped me! If you stay here, you'll end up in that cell right where I was!”

Security finally arrived at the hangar, in the form of a dozen or so heavily armed men.

Rey’s eyes flinched shut, and she walked up the ramp. “I have a bad feeling about this,” she declared, as the Force required this to be said every now and then.

The interior of the shuttle was not what she'd expected. Somehow, she'd assumed that it would be all red-tinted lights, swirling smoky miasma, and a layer of rancid black grease over everything. In fact, it was rather tidy, and well lit.

Kylo threw himself into the pilot seat and immediately began initiating the launch sequence. Without thinking, Rey took the copilot's seat. She watched him curiously, wondering if he actually knew how to fly this thing. She suspected that he must have had some lucky do it for him.

The shuttle lifted off, it's massive black wings slowly opening, like some big, evil butterfly.
Unfortunately, the ship had been parked off the side, and one wing scraped against the wall as it unfurled. Both Kylo and Rey flinched at the metallic screeching.

Rey leaned over, reaching for the main controls. “Let me! I can -”

Kylo shoved her away. “Strap in and shut up!” he shouted. She reluctantly complied, fully expecting to find herself surrounded by a fiery explosion any second.

To her surprise, he seemed to get it together, and managed to get the shuttle out of the hangar in one piece.

“Do you know how to program a nav computer?” he barked at her as they flew into the darkness.

“Yeah,” she said, turning in her seat to the computer. “Where are we going?”

“No idea,” he grunted. “Just punch in coordinates for somewhere in open space. Something not on an established trade route -”

He stopped mid-sentence, eyes narrowing, as if trying to identify a faint strain of music. Rey’s response was similar.

“They’ve alerted the sentry ships,” she murmured.

“Five,” he added. “Coming in from 1.27.”

“We need to get out of here!” Rey declared, returning her attention to the nav display.

Kylo rolled his eyes. “Thanks, Grand Admiral Obvious!”

“No time to enter a new destination,” Rey continued, frantically jabbing at the display. “It’ll just have to be one of your saved coordinates.”

“I cleared them out, just before I was captured. You'll have to input from scratch. Doesn't matter where, for the moment.”

Sure enough, there were no pre-programmed destinations in system memory. Interesting that he'd had the foresight to wipe out potentially sensitive tactical locations just before the ship fell into enemy hands.

“You're crazy! That'll take several minutes! Those fighters -”

“Leave them to me,” Kylo growled.

They could hear the high-pitched hiss of the approaching x-wings.

“Do you have a gunner position?!”

“Don't need one,” he grumbled. “Now do the damn computer!”

The ship suddenly jolted. They were taking fire.

“It's just a magpulse,” Rey explained hopefully. “They're trying to disable us.”

“I'd imagine that's more a favor to you than it is to me,” Kylo muttered. “Now do. The Computer.”

Again, she reluctantly complied, watching him out of the corner of her eye. His hands moved over
to the weapons controls, just as the first x-wing flew into view. But that wasn't likely to do much good. The x-wings were so much more nimble than the lumbering command shuttle, he'd never get one in his sights long enough to get a target lock. Even so, Rey imagined the pilots in those ships, men and women who could easily be acquaintances from her time on the station. Even if there was only the slightest chance of him actually hitting something...

“Mag pulse only!” Rey leaned over again, flicking the switch that toggled between laser and ion cannons. “They're not trying to kill us either!”

Kylo turned to her with a scowl. “YOU-” he bellowed fiercely, holding up a finger for silence, “are lucky that I owe you one!”

Surprisingly, he made no move to switch the cannons back. Instead, he immediately began to fire. Even more surprising, he appeared to be operating the rear guns. Blind, and not even attempting to use the targeting computer.

And one by one, the x-wings were going down.

Fucking Skywalkers.

Meanwhile, Rey was still frantically programming the computer, fighting the overwhelming urge to be distracted by the spectacle of someone using the Force to augment their piloting skills. She’d heard Master Skywalker talk about it, but she’d never actually seen it. But all she could do was hear Kylo muttering, intelligibility fading in and out.

“Hold still... hah... you little shit... bit closer... have you now... hah!”

“Shields at thirty percent!” Rey declared, as an alarm began to sound.

“Twenty percent!” she corrected herself, panic rising.

“Then hurry the hell up!” Kylo ordered.

“Almost - almost got it - almost - got it -” Rey muttered, licking her lips in concentration. Another alarm sounded. “Shields at ZERO percent!!!”

The ship gave particularly alarming lurch, and a third alarm sounded. “Sublights are dead,” Kylo announced sternly. She wasn't sure, but she thought she saw him mouthing some phrase containing the word baby. “It’s hyperspace or nothing.”

“Almost - almost - almost got - it - done!” Rey exclaimed, slamming her fist down on the enter switch.

“Hit it!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time: I Hate You - I Know

Don't forget to review! It helps keep my lazy ass motivated!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 11: I Hate You - I Know

The shuttle rocketed into hyperspace, and Kylo sank back in his seat, letting out a quiet but strangely vulnerable sigh of relief. He discreetly patted the console before him, as if commending a well-behaved pet.

Rey stared at him. “You’re a damn decent pilot,” she stated flatly.

Kylo tilted his head back, rolling his eyes in that distinctly Solo-ish gesture. “Did you really think I wouldn’t know how to fly, coming from my family?”

A small clanking noise came from behind them, and they both turned to find Artoo and Threepio.

“What the hell are you two doing h - ?” Kylo stopped himself, apparently recalling that Threepio had just been sent to bring him a fresh set of clothes from his ship. Rey sensed confusion and annoyance from Kylo, and she was tolerably sure that it was genuine - he was surprisingly easy to read when he was flustered. “Well why the hell is Artoo with you?”

“I required his assistance to disable the ship’s security system.”

Kylo groaned. “I have no use for either of you.”

Threepio actually seemed to sense his own danger. “I would be most grateful if you could return us to the station,” Threepio said nervously.

“No possible,” Kylo stated. “Go get into the starboard cargo hold, and close down. If I hear even a single peep out of either of you, you’ll be floating home. In pieces.”

For once, Threepio seemed to know what was good for him, and mounted no protest. The two droids obeyed, shuffling/rolling toward the cargo hold, and shutting the door behind them. Kylo reached forward and flicked a switch, apparently locking the door from the outside. Rey found it more than a little disturbing that the ship even had that feature, and got the feeling that she’d probably been locked in that cargo hold herself, at one point.

Rey left her seat and began to pace about the cabin. No more than fifteen minutes had passed from the execution announcement to the present moment. There had been no time to think, until now.

“I shouldn’t be here. I could have told them that I was your hostage,” she realized. “They would have believed that. I didn’t have to go with you,” her breath came quicker in rising panic as she continued to reason things out. “But those men, they saw me get on your ship without a fight. They’ll never believe that I’m here against my will. As far as the Resistance is concerned, I’m a traitor! I won’t be able to continue training with Master Skywalker! I can never go back!”

Kylo stepped into her personal space, and Rey looked up at him. “They’re like my family, and I can never go back!”

“It’ll be - okay,” he said quietly, making a earnest but decidedly awkward attempt at being
comforting. Rey felt a fleeting moment of panic when he placed a hand on her shoulder, in apparent mimicry of Finn’s gesture of support earlier.

This should have been terrifying, him standing so near, without a forcefield separating them. Last time they’d been this close, he’d had her checkmated against the edge of a crumbling cliff. It really should have been frightening. But instead, Rey found herself distracted by the thought that he didn’t smell that bad, considering how long he’d gone without bathing.

But... definitely a little funky.

And then her eyes snapped open at a sinking suspicion. “That’s exactly what you’d want. You wanted to get me away from them so you could be my teacher.”

“Rey...” he said, almost gently.

Rey swatted his hand away from her shoulder. As soon as that one heartbreaking thought crossed her mind, she instantly knew it was true.

“You planned this!” she shrieked in his face. “This was your plan all along!”

Kylo looked downright sheepish. “Something like that...”

Rey turned away from him with a howled sob. “You allowed yourself to get captured! You knew they would send me in! You knew I would end up feeling sorry for you and helping you!”

“Rey, I -”

She whirled back around to face him, eyes already red and puffy from her angry tears.

“How many times are you going to ruin my life!?” Rey screamed at him, running out of the main cabin through a nearby door.

“At least once more!” he shouted at her receding back.

Rey was desperate to get as far away from him as possible, even on this cursed tiny ship. She quickly found herself in the crew quarters, sat down on a bunk, and proceeded to cry her eyes out. She was so upset, so distracted by her own misery, that she didn’t hear the noises at first. Crashes of shattered equipment, and absurd howls of rage.

Sad or not, Rey shot to her feet and stomped back into the main cockpit chamber. Sure enough, her emotionally unstable companion had done an impressive amount of damage to the nearby equipment, considering that he was sans lightsaber.

Rey briefly reflected on the fact that Kylo was clearly somewhat attached to this ship, and yet didn’t hesitate to wreck it up when upset. She decided that it was a good thing he was single. Or at least she assumed he was. What person in their right mind would date him?

“What the hell is wrong with you?!”

She shoved him away from the damaged console with the Force, and he seemed to let her. Rey frantically examined the shattered screen and exposed wires, pulling back a panel for better access.

Of course, Kylo just stood there, sulking. Rey didn’t bother to look at him; she got to work immediately. In the back of her mind, she felt a strange tinge of gratitude (amid a generous helping of resentment) that she was being distracted by the necessity of doing what she did best. Then again, this was time that could have been spent repairing the sublight engines.
“Don’t just stand there!” she barked after a minute or so of diagnostic work. “Go find me some tools! And get Artoo!”

She was too focused on her task to be surprised when he immediately moved to follow her order. He returned promptly with a mercifully well-organized toolbox. Rey snatched it from his hand without a thank you. That jerk deserved no such appreciation. Artoo came rolling up a moment later, and the two techies engaged in a frantic exchange of technobabble.

“Might I be of assistance?” Threepio enquired cheerfully.

“No!” Rey and Kylo shouted, in perfect unison.

“Typical,” Threepio grumbled, shuffling back into the cargo hold.

Within a few minutes, Rey was wrist deep in wires, attempting to loosen a module, wedged in against the shattered display screen.

And then suddenly, the interior of the ship went pitch black. Artoo gave a low dwoooooo, and activated his small headlamp.

“Blast, it’s wired in with the primary life-support system - that’s light, climate control and air scrubbers. At least we’ve got grav,” Rey explained tersely, all the more frustrated at the notion that she was technically the one who had broken it. “If we’re lucky, Artoo and I might be able to get the system back online before we’re dead.”

“Even without life support, it’ll take days for CO2 levels to become toxic,” Kylo stated, still sounding a bit pissy.

“Oh yes!” she said, dripping with irritable sarcasm. “It’s such a relief to know that we’ll freeze to death long before we suffocate!”

She attempted to continue her work, but Artoo’s small headlamp was a bit too dim for efficiency. “Do you have a portable lamp?” she demanded.

“Hell if I know,” he answered, his tone not quite as hostile as his words.

Rey pulled out her lightsaber, opening the bright blue blade. It was more than enough light to work by. She spent the next minute or so fumbling with it, trying to find a way to hold it up and work at the same time.

But she quickly determined that it wasn’t possible, and shoved the hilt into Kylo’s hand, even as she had the fleeting urge to shove the blade into his stupid, crazy face. “Hold this,” she commanded. Sure enough, he didn’t argue. Rey proceeded with her work, trying not to think about the fact that Kylo Ren was standing immediately behind her, with a drawn lightsaber. Strangely, it didn’t even really occur to her that he could have killed her at any moment.

She quickly fell into the zone, that meditation-like state of absolute focus on her work. Hours passed, and she didn’t seem to notice as the temperature began to approach zero, nor did she notice when a black cloak was draped over her shoulders.

And finally it was done. The lights flicked on, the O2 fans whirred to a steady hum, and the maintenance controls flickered to life on a neighboring panel. Rey stood, grunting as she straightened her back, and the cloak fell to the floor. Kylo closed down the lightsaber, and handed it to her unceremoniously.

“I hate you,” Rey announced wearily, not looking at him.
“I know,” he replied, sounding almost equally exhausted. “You're tired. You can sleep in my bed.”

Rey was almost too worn out to rebuke him. “That’s not funny.”

Kylo Ren tilted his head back in that Solo gesture of annoyance. “By yourself. I’ll take a bunk in the crew quarters, and you use my bed. You can lock the door from the inside, if that’ll help you sleep better.”

Rey just nodded, shambling toward the captain’s cabin, and falling asleep as soon as her face met the pillow.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Co-Dreaming

Much love to my commentators! Your feedback completes me.
Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 12: Co-Dreaming

Have to find the girl.

Smell of ozone and diluted bleach-based cleaning products. Walking down a long, immaculately clean corridor. View strangely yet appropriately tunnel-like, an oblong window surrounded by black. Hall filled with the rhythmic thud thud thud of heavy jackboots, striding forward below.

Several troopers walked in the opposite direction. Each muttering “milord” as they passed, tone always some varying mixture of fear and respect. Usually heavy on the fear. Fear of what they knew they could not possibly comprehend. Fear of power. Fear of ever having that power directed at them.

Fear that was ordinarily savored not unlike a pleasant scent on the breeze. But this current feeling was much more exhilarating. This heady mixture of single-minded aggression and this strange flutter of nerves. Not fear - that feeling was all too familiar. It was something else. Something harder to place.

Must find the girl.

More troopers passed, still delivering solemn greetings. Not even a single “milord” was answered with so much as a nod. It wouldn’t do to be overly familiar with these pawns. The hierarchy, the natural order must be maintained. Even if there wasn’t a more important matter at hand.

The girl. Have to find the girl.

Finally nearing the end of the hallway, jackboots stopping at the threshold of a lift. Even the powerful had to wait. Toes tapping impatiently.

The girl. The girl. The girl.

The closed doors ahead were made of highly polished metal, yielding a mirror-like appearance.

Regarding the reflection. A familiar mask. Head to toe in black.

No. Wait. Not head to toe.

No pants.

Oh motherfucking hell, not wearing pants! Black tunic and tabards. Black boots and spats. And nothing but pallid legs and dangling junk in between!

How could such an oversight have occurred?! Dear Force, who had seen?! What the -

A loud tone sounded, and the lift door opened abruptly.

 Revealing a young woman, face more familiar than it should have been. Jaw dropped in
Revealing a young woman, face more familiar than it should have been. Jaw dropped in unmitigated disgust.

Rey woke, face turning against her pillow. What a strange dream... But she was still too tired to think about it. She drifted back to sleep.

She woke again sometime later, feeling fairly well rested. At least, she did until she finally got her bearings, and recalled where she was.

Her heart sank at the recollection of the previous day. She was stuck on a ship, with Kylo Ren, and with no apparent opportunities to escape. And worst of all, she was there due to her own stupid mistake.

She sat up in bed, and took stock of her surroundings. The captain’s cabin was really more like a small sleeping compartment than an actual room. The decent-sized but one-person bed took up virtually the whole space. The rest was just a tiny area, presumably for dressing, and several storage cabinets built into the walls.

Rey noticed that one of the cabinet doors seemed bigger than the others. She opened it to discover that it led directly to the refresher. She supposed that it might be appropriate for her to wash up before meeting either death or perpetual torture/servitude, and she was in no hurry to face the consequences of her misstep.

She noticed that the ‘fresher was already wet, and her first thought was a sense of luxury. For a ship this small to actually have a water-based hygiene system was almost unheard of.

Rey then realized that Kylo must have been in there first. There did seem to be a separate door leading to the rest of the ship. Even with such luxuries as running water, there was still only room for one refresher. She supposed she didn’t blame him for bathing, especially since it had been over a week since he’d had access to such facilities.

She undressed and turned on the water. A sudden thought struck her - with that separate door to the main cabin, it would be very easy for him to walk in on her. And then there was the notion that if she’d risen only a few minutes earlier, she could have accidentally walked in on him. For some reason, that seemed even more distressing. So distressing that she felt her cheeks flush in embarrassment. Yes. Definitely just embarrassment.

Rey discovered some sort of cosmetics dispenser integrated into the wall. It was soap of some kind, and she proceeded to pump some onto her hands. She shuddered at the scent. It smelled like Kylo Ren leaning in much too close during that fateful interrogation. Not a bad scent in of itself, aside the from the negative associations. It smelled like dried herbs, like something that had once been green and vibrant, and was now blackened and dead inside.

Well, there was nothing for it, and she soaped up, trying not to think of the scent. It was nice stuff, definitely the nicest soap she’d ever used. And it made an excellent shampoo. Apparently it was nothing but the best for the Crown Prince of Alderaan.

Her shower concluded and she dried herself off. She took her time in dressing and arranging her hair. Finally, she felt unable to stall any longer. She drew in a deep breath as she opened the door to the main cabin, as if she were about to jump off a seaside cliff.

Kylo was hunched over a holomap display. She was not a bit surprised to see that he’d readopted his usual ghoulshiful robes. At least he didn’t seem to have the mask. His hair was still wet, making him look rather like a wet Loth-cat.
“Caff?” he asked.

Rey just stared at him, uncomprehending.

“Caff?” he repeated.

Rey still just gaped, her brain unable to process this mundane question, coming from the likes of him.

“Do you want. A cup. Of caff?” he asked slowly and clearly, as if she were an idiot.

“No. Thank you,” she muttered.

“Feel better?” he asked, sounding almost as if he cared.

Rey didn’t even bother to answer. “So, what’s our E.T.A. at whatever First Order dungeon you’re dragging me off to?”

Kylo stared at her, and she could sense his slightly offended disappointment. As if he was actually hurt by her assumption. “We’re in open space. It seemed the most logical place to go, while we come up with a plan.”

Rey frowned in confusion. Did he just say we?

“We have a couple of options,” he explained, taking a few steps toward her. “The easiest and safest choice would be for you to come with me, and willingly become my apprentice.”

Rey looked him straight in the eye. “The only way you are taking me to the First Order is in a body bag,” she stated resolutely.

“I could arrange that!” he shouted, wagging a finger in her face. “Or I could just take you prisoner again,” he added menacingly.

Rey just continued to stare, immovable and defiant. “And I could just escape again.”

“C’mon,” his tone softened considerably and he flashed that grin that was inexplicably less unsettling than it had once been. “It wouldn’t be so bad. I promise I’ll bring you fruit and pretend to like you.”

Rey couldn’t help giving a slight snort of amusement before she spoke. “No chance.”

“Well, I could just dump you on the nearest inhabited planet,” Kylo snapped.

“My favorite option, so far,” Rey commented.

He let out a low groan of frustration. “I guess I could advance my timetable, but it would still be better if you let me train you for a while. But I suppose it’s the only good option.”

“And what’s that?” Rey asked, a little nervously.

“We skip directly to killing Snoke.”

Her mouth dropped open. “What?” Rey stammered. She could not have heard that right.

“We kill Snoke,” he repeated. “I am sure that I can take him down, with your help.”

“Isn’t he - your - don’t you -” Rey sputtered.
“He has nothing left to teach me,” Kylo explained icily. “At this point, he’s just holding me back. His time is over, and mine is finally beginning. It’s my destiny to take his place. To accomplish what my grandfather intended to. To rule.”

The young Jedi just barely suppressed a laugh. “You actually intend to take over, and become King of the Universe, or whatever?”

“Supreme Leader,” he corrected her. “And yes.”

Rey scratched the back of her head awkwardly. “Kylo, I’m not sure you’re Supreme Leader material.”

With his short temper, tendency toward tactical errors and utter lack of charisma, she couldn’t think of anyone less suited to be a head of state.

She felt a gale of hostility from him. “I don’t think I asked for your opinion on the subject!”

Rey glared at him, and he seemed to calm down relatively quickly.

“Regardless, it’s the only logical way to proceed,” Kylo explained, making a clear effort at being persuasive. “I assume you intend to return the the Resistance, and this is your best option. Killing their worst enemy probably trumps aiding and abetting their second-worst enemy. They’ll almost certainly welcome you back.”

Rey considered that for a moment. She imagined the horror-struck faces of Finn and Poe when they heard that she’d run off with Kylo Ren. And then she imagined the joy she would see there when she explained - no - lied that she’d had a plan this whole time, that she’d only teamed up with Kylo Ren in order to destroy the greatest evil in the galaxy.

And then she realized. “It would be ridiculously easy for you to double cross me. This would be the most efficient way for you to get me back to the Order without a fuss, and then you could do - whatever you want with me.”

Kylo didn’t bother to deny it. “I guess it’s too much to ask for you to trust me.”

“Far too much,” Rey said flatly.

Kylo Ren took a step forward, and reached up slightly, as if he might take her hand. But he seemed to think the better of it. Instead, he just locked eyes with her. For once, he actually succeeded at being persuasive without resorting to torture. “Is the prize not worth the risk? Besides, as you said, you could just escape later, couldn’t you?”

Rey sighed deeply. “What do we need to do?” she said, by way of acceptance.

Threepio and Artoo were both wedged into the cargo hold. Threepio could have closed down, but his processors were apparently too occupied by the subject that he had been pondering for days.

“I still do not think there is any chance of them making a couple. They are simply too different, and they are bickering with one another half of the time, anyway.”

Artoo responded in a series of his usual beeps and whistles.
“This is nothing like the Princess and the late Captain Solo!”

Artoo gave a brief retort.

“I see no similarity. Captain Solo may have been a little rough around the edges when they first met, but he was no murderer!”

Another brief retort.

“Who is this Greedo? I’ve never heard of such a person!”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry to those of you that expected a steamy dream - I believe this is a classical literary technique known as, um, jerking the reader's chain :p (heh, like I know shit about writing)

But fear not, this fic will thoroughly earn its "M" rating.

Next time: Forced to Work Together
Chapter 13: Forced to Work Together

“First I need a weapon,” he told her, smirking triumphantly at her assent. “We should have gone back for -”

“Don’t even start!” Rey cut him off. “Can’t we just worry about that when we get - wherever we’re going?”

“No. There’s a decent chance that Snoke suspects something. I am not going anywhere near The Order without a lightsaber.”

“I’ll just have to make you a new one,” Rey said brightly. Between her tech skills and Force ability, she was one hell of a sabersmith.

“Excuse me!!” he growled. “I know how to construct a lightsaber!”

Rey crossed her arms. “I beg to differ. That one I saw you with before wasn’t even stable, and I don’t imagine the one you replaced it with was much better. And plasma vents are just stupid.”

“They’re useful in battle!”

“Useful for cutting your own hand off!”

Kylo ripped off his right glove and held up an enormous pale hand. “This is flesh and blood, I’ll have you know!”

He proceeded to wave the hand in front of her face childishly. Suddenly, his fingertips brushed against her cheek, apparently by accident. She might not have even noticed, if not for the way his hand froze in place, eyes wide, lips parted in trance-like focus, as his index finger lightly traced down the side of her cheek, and over the line of her jaw.

The whole interlude barely lasted two seconds. He seemed to snap out of his brief romantic reverie, hand plummeting back down to his side, before she had the chance to realize that she had been equally transfixed.

And then they were right back to bickering.

“Whatever, fine!” she exclaimed, resuming the argument without missing a beat. “YOU will make a new lightsaber. Most of it can be made from modified blaster and vibrosword components, but quality crystals are pretty rare.” Rey thought a moment. She supposed there was the underwater crystal cave on Ach-To, but there was no way she was bringing Kylo Ren there.

“The most time-efficient way would probably be to just buy one.”

“Can you do that?” Rey asked curiously.

“You can buy anything,” he informed her. Kylo then stepped back over to the holomap, and
began searching through various systems. “Nar Shaddaa,” he announced.

“That’s a planet, right?”

Kylo rolled his eyes. “A moon. You really are just an ignorant scavenger, aren’t you?”

“Well excuse me, I’m not some prince who grew up travelling the galaxy!”

“Anyways,” he continued. “Nar Shaddaa is a densely populated moon. It’s like a sketchier version of Coruscant,” Kylo explained. “It’s deep in Hutt space, so we’re unlikely to run into any old friends. And the economy is one big black market. I’m sure that would include rare antiquities.”

“Rare antiquities?” Rey echoed. “That sounds expensive. I’m guessing you have money?”

Kylo’s expression fell. The spoiled prince hadn’t even thought of that. “Damn. I have an expense account, but the Order will know exactly where I am if I use it. More suspicion is the last thing we need.”

“Can’t they track your ship, anyway?”

“Not this ship, scavenger,” he retorted proudly.

A short pause, and Rey gave her first suggestion. “We could sell your ship, buy a cheaper one, and -”

Kylo interrupted her. “No chance.”

“Well, we can’t sell the droids,” Rey stated. She expected him to argue with her, since he so obviously didn’t want them there, but strangely, he actually agreed with her.

“No. They have too much historical significance.” Kylo paused. “I have enough blasters for a whole squad in the port-side hold. Won’t be needing those anytime soon.”

Rey walked over to said hold, and examined the contents. “These ones - used but in good condition - worth around three hundred apiece, times twelve - and those ones are worth around six. That brings us to - about 2700.” She turned to Kylo, finding that his eyebrows raised at her appraisal skills. “Do you think that’s enough?”

“Probably not.”

Rey thought a moment, and felt a little dirty for what she was going to suggest. “I suppose we could mind-trick a dealer into giving us a really good price.”

“I’m not a thief,” Kylo Ren declared.

Rey crossed her arms again. “I suppose you’d prefer to kill them and just take the crystal?”

“No!” he insisted, apparently horrified by the idea. “I don’t - do what I do for money.”

“Says the man who has never had to worry about money in his life, until just now.” She paused to think. “I suppose we could take jobs. Techs are always in demand, so that shouldn’t be hard for me. What about you? Do you have any marketable skills?” Rey’s face suddenly came alight with excitement. “I have it! We could get you a job at a wrecking yard! You are quite talented at breaking things!”

Kylo glared at her.
“Well, are you going to give any ideas or are you just going to shit all over mine?” Rey inquired.

Sullen silence.

“What else can you tell me about Nar Shaddaa?” she asked.

“Not much. Haven’t been there in years. Controlled by Hutt-affiliated criminal gangs. Lots of refugees. Slaves make up a decent percentage of the population.”

“That’s it!” she declared, face once again bright with excitement. “You could sell me!”

Kylo looked at her as if she’d literally just gone insane. She proceeded to explain. “With my tech skills, I’m probably worth a good bit of money. And with your fancy clothes and snooty attitude, you could totally pass for a slaver. You sell me at an auction center, take the money, and then I’ll just run away later that night. Anti-escape chip implantation is a fairly major surgery, so they probably won’t do it right away, and they don’t even bother half the time.”

“How do you know so much about slavery?”

“Lot of escaped slaves on Jakku.” Her tone turned wistful. “For a while, I thought that my parents might have been...” She trailed off.

“It sounds risky,” Kylo said, “what if you can’t escape?”

Rey grinned at him. “If I can escape you, I can escape anyone.”

He smiled broadly, melodramatically fanning his face with his hand. “Oh Rey, such flattery!”

She gave a little snort of laughter, and turned her mind back to the issue at hand. “It’s our best option. We can make some money quick, and it won’t offend your delicate sensibilities. Rey paused, and realized that for a moment, she’d forgotten who she was dealing with. “Or would this still count as stealing? Slavery is legal in the Order isn’t it?”

“Not human slavery,” Kylo declared piously.

Rey gave a little grunt of disgust, and this apparently gave him the urge to elaborate.

“And if you must know, I don’t particularly approve of the institution, in general.”

She studied him, and sensed his apparent sincerity. For a brief moment, she toyed with the idea of being optimistic about his potential redemption. Perhaps he had maintained some sort of moral center, after all? But only a few seconds of consideration were needed before she realized that this apparent distaste for slavery was more indicative of hypocrisy than anything else. Possibly some sad form of cowardice as well. He disliked slavery, but was not only unwilling to do anything about it, he also continued to fight on behalf of a regime that supported it. And then she recalled...

“Oh right, it’s only because you worship your grandfather, and he was born a slave,” she said knowledgeably.

Rey felt his feelings shift to something like admiration. She got the sense that this was a subject he would happily discuss for hours.

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“You’ve studied his life?” he asked, all fanboyish excitement.

“Master Skywalker told me a little.”

The cheerful approval suddenly vanished from his aura, in favor of barely contained hostility. “He
The cheerful approval suddenly vanished from his aura, in favor of barely contained hostility. “He never told me any of that.”

“With good reason, apparently,” Rey commented. She then tried to steer the conversation in a more productive direction. “But this plan - do you have any better ideas?”

Her question was met with more sullen silence.

Slaving it was, then.

Most of that day was spent in repairing the sublight engines. Naturally, Rey was doing all of the real work. Kylo seemed intent on looking over her shoulder menacingly, so she decided to put him to work, by handing her various tools and spare parts.

As Rey worked, her mind eventually settled on that strange dream she’d had. She knew that for a few bizarre moments, she’d seen the world through his eyes. It was almost as if she’d been dreaming his dream. And most ominous of all, she vaguely recalled reading that this was a sign of the sort of gradual Force bond that tended to form between close companions.

That was a truly terrifying notion. So much so, that she was willing to bring it up in conversation, in desperate hopes of reassurance that it wasn't so.

“Did you dream last night?” she asked, trying to sound as casually disinterested as possible.

Kylo frowned at the odd question. “No,” he answered, with his usual hint of grouchiness.

Rey gave a discreet exhalation of relief. Relief that disappeared abruptly when Kylo decided to elaborate. “Not about anything interesting or important, anyway. Stupid stuff. Why?”

She felt a knot form in the pit of her stomach.

“No reason,” she answered, a little too quickly.

Kylo shot her one of his patented dark, intense stares. “Why do you want to know?”

“Never mind! Random curiosity!”

Kylo tilted his head to the side, and gave a little grunt of frustration. “Rey, I can see right through a good liar. And you are not a good liar.”

That snotty comment seemed to help Rey find her nerve again. She crossed her arms, and stared back fiercely. “What are you going to do? Interrogate me? Torture me again?”

His mouth dropped open in what seemed like genuine shock. “I never tortured you!”

Rey found her own mouth forming into a similar expression, not so much at the words he had said, but at the sense that he absolutely believed them to be true.

“If that wasn't torture, then what was it?!”

“Enhanced interrogation?” he offered with a sheepish shrug, vibes briefly showing a touch of the self-doubt he was ordinarily so good at hiding, and then back to his usual self-righteous pissyness. “Rey, if I had tortured you, you wouldn't have walked out of that room five minutes later, without a mark on you, and lucid enough for what I'm guessing was your first attempt at a mind-trick! I was exceptionally gentle with you.”

Even independent of the content of his statement, his use of that word, gentle, really got to her,
and she suddenly felt compelled to clarify certain things to him.

“Let’s get one thing straight. This -” she paused, trying to think of a word other than partnership, but couldn’t, “- partnership is strictly professional and temporary, do you understand? I still despise everything you stand for!”

Kylo craned his neck forward and glared at her intensely. “Likewise.”

Once again crammed back into the cargo hold, Threepio seemed inexplicably unable to stop chattering on this subject.

“A woman as clever and independent as Miss Rey would never stoop to a relationship with a mass murderer.”

Artoo gave a buzzing squawk and a few beeps.

“What do you mean you have seen it happen before? That’s absurd. Besides, such a relationship would be dangerous for Miss Rey. She deserves better than to be with someone who has abused her.”

The shorter droid countered with a short string of coos and chirps.

“I know that they are on opposite sides of a war, but it is still a serious human taboo for a male to strike or even threaten a female!”

Artoo sounded several chirps and hums.

“No! As a matter of fact, I am aware that she kicked his - bested him in a duel during the Battle of Starkiller! But -”

The squat droid interrupted by adding a few whistles and beeps.

“That does not mean I think that females are inherently helpless and incapable of standing up for themselves!”

Chapter End Notes

Should I add "Artoo is a dirty Reylo" as a tag?

Next time: He is Over Protective - Sort of
Chapter 14: He is Overly Protective, Sort of

Rey spent the journey to Nar Shaddaa repairing the sublight engines, and she kept Kylo busy fetching tools and parts for her. At least then he wasn't staring at her creepily from across the room.

The ship left hyperspace and slowed to a stop. A moon, gray bisected with lines of glittering gold, grew large in the cockpit window.

“Do you speak Huttese?” Kylo asked, gazing out the window. “That’s likely to be the primary language among slavers.”

“Some. Do you?”

“Only enough to order a drink and ask where the spaceport is.”

“That could be a problem. You should be the one doing all of the talking, to emphasize the difference in status.” Rey paused. “Fortunately, we do happen to have a protocol droid on board.”

Kylo shook his head. “We can’t get Threepio involved. He’s the kiss of death to any ruse.”

“I suppose so,” Rey conceded. “His programming is way too out of date for advanced functions like deception.”

“Then I guess we’ll have to make him think it’s real.”

Kylo opened the hold, summoned Threepio, and proceeded to explain his entirely genuine intention to sell Rey into slavery.

“But sir!” Threepio protested vehemently. “The course of action you propose is fourteen different kinds of unethical!”

Kylo stepped forward, looming over the droid. “And you will help translate all fourteen, or I swear you’ll be on the first transport to the Spice Mines of Kessel!”

It was then that Rey learned that droids were in fact capable of sullen silence.

An hour or so later, the shuttle was parked on an abandoned mid-level rooftop platform. The padawan, pseudo-Sith and the protocol droid set out onto the streets of Nar Shaddaa, winding their way between dingy skyscrapers adorned with flashing fluorescent billboards.

Rey glanced over at Kylo as they strode into the throng, sensing a somewhat heightened stress level as he pulled the hood of his cowl closer around his face.

For her part, she found the atmosphere both exciting and unnerving. As usual, Kylo sensed the feeling. “You’ve never been on a city planet before, have you?”

“No,” Rey admitted. “There are so many people - so much energy. But it smells kind of weird.”

“That’s the stench of decay and desperate living. Being this close to the Hutt homeworld probably
doesn’t help, either,” Kylo explained, gesturing to the snot-green orb, hanging in the sky.

“You don’t care for Hutts, I take it?”

“Who does?” Kylo snapped.

“I guess it makes sense that you wouldn’t like Hutts, coming from your family,” Rey commented slyly.

“That has nothing to do with it!” he insisted.

“Ah, so you’re just a racist then. Also not surprising.”

“Shut up!” Kylo whirled around to glare at her, causing the hood of his cowl to fly off.

Rey squinted curiously at what she saw. She’d never seen him unmasked in broad, natural daylight. And in that moment, she discovered that his hair was not actually flat blue-black, as it had always seemed in the cold artificial light she’d seen him in before. It was deep brown. Very nearly black, but with a distinctive warm-toned sheen that went a long way toward establishing a bit more of a family likeness.

And then Rey realized that she was staring at him. She averted her eyes as he threw his cowl back on, pausing a moment to adjust it.

“Miss Rey,” Threepio said quietly, taking advantage Kylo’s distraction. He no doubt thought he was being exceedingly crafty. “You need only give me a signal, and I shall attempt to create a diversion, while you flee.”

Kylo turned around once again. “Kessel!” he hissed.

Rey sighed. “No thank you, Threepio.”

Threepio cocked his head to the side in confusion. “Miss Rey, I must admit, I am quite baffled by your apparent acquiescence. Being sold into slavery is all but universally considered to be a highly undesirable outcome by sentient lifeforms.”

Rey realized that she had slightly underestimated Threepio’s understanding of human behavior. Fortunately, she was able to come up with a decent explanation. “Threepio, has it occurred to you that I might consider slavery to be preferable to the alternative - being stuck with him?”

Threepio seemed to find this to be perfectly adequate justification, and continued to shuffle behind them in silence.

Only another quarter-kilometer more of walking, and they arrived at the large, permacrete entrance to the local “Sentient Merchandise Distribution Center.”

They were greeted cordially by a Rodian male as soon as they entered. As expected, the greeting was delivered in Huttese, and dutifully translated by Threepio. “The proprietor extends his gracious salutations, and inquires as to your purpose at his establishment.”

“I have - a girl to sell,” Kylo answered stiffly.

Threepio interpreted the statement, and the slaver’s corresponding question. “He wishes to know the age of the merchandise .”

Kylo glanced at Rey, hesitating for a moment. “About twenty, standard.”
Threepio continued to translate obediently for the duration of the conversation.

“The proprietor inquires as to her skills.”

This time, Kylo’s answer was more forthcoming. “Tech. She is highly skilled at starship maintenance and repair.”

The slaver seemed to respond with another question, but Threepio hesitated to translate for several seconds.

“What did he say?” Kylo demanded impatiently.

“He asked if the merchandise is trained in - the closest translation is pleasure, but the vagueness of this statement leads me to suspect that it may be a euphemism of some kind.”

Rey looked at Kylo, curious as to his reaction. Sure enough, his pale cheeks flushed bright pink as he delivered his sputtered response. “That would be a waste of her talent.”

The slaver gave a shrug-like gesture along with his next statement, again translated by Threepio. “He says that he has an associate who can train her in pleasure at once.”

The slaver produced a commlink, presumably to call the aforementioned trainer.

Kylo stepped forward, staring at the slaver intensely, and the air in the room seemed to hum with energy. “There is NO need for the girl to be trained in - that.”

The words seemed to enter the slaver’s brain directly, and he answered immediately, without any apparent need for translation. The slaver’s response was delivered in an eerie monotone, and Rey was not a bit surprised when Threepio translated the statement as all but identical to what Kylo had said.

“And no one will touch this girl,” Kylo added, even more menacingly.

“The proprietor says that no one will initiate physical contact with this piece of merchandise,” Threepio translated.

Rey rolled her eyes. There was hardly a woman in the galaxy who was less in need of such gallantry. If anything untoward were to happen, she could have easily handled it herself.

The slaver launched into a fairly lengthy statement, again interpreted by Threepio. “The proprietor says that he will show the girl at the next auction. Buyers will inspect her and place bids, and you will take payment directly from the buyer, less the proprietor’s fee of eight percent. The next auction is in only 10 minutes, so the girl must be made ready immediately. He will see to her in his office. You may wait here.” He then crossed the room to a nearby door, beckoning for Rey to follow.

“I would prefer to monitor my - investment in person,” Kylo stated awkwardly.

The translation of this statement was met with an indifferent grunt, and they shortly found themselves in the adjacent office. The slaver proceeded to throw open a large trunk, and began digging through a pile of clothing. Rey quickly noted that this clothing was of the sexy-underwear variety.

“What’s that for?” Kylo asked.
Threepio maintained his usual prim tone as he interpreted the response. “The proprietor says that human females fetch a better price when thus attired.” A skimpy, metallic brassiere was held up for Kylo’s inspection.

“Is that really necessary?” Rey couldn’t help but ask.

Threepio obligingly translated the question, but the translation of the response was delivered with something like a scandalized gasp. “He says that - oh dear - he says that naked is equally effective.”

This would be a pretty good time for a little of Kylo’s misplaced gallantry. Rey turned to him, only to find the him grinning at her evilly. Or - not quite evilly. Mischievously?

So much for chivalry from a Knight of Ren. She could see that he would be no help.

“My current clothes will be fine,” she said, her voice taking on that preternatural calm. The slaver once again responded without waiting for Threepio to translate.

“The proprietor says that her current clothing is adequate.”

“The girl should at least try it on,” Kylo declared suddenly, words accompanied by that strange thrum of energy, and lips still spread in a twisted smile.

“The proprietor has decided that she should try on the garments.”

Rey scowled at Kylo. “The girl will do nothing of the sort!”

Threepio was now quite clearly confused as he translated the response. “The merchandise will not...”

“The girl really should just try it on. It would look great on her,” Kylo stated, eyes locked on Rey’s face, and chuckling at the look of indignation it bore. That overgrown brat was messing with her, she realized. She knew perfectly well that it wasn’t simple lechery. He was probably just using this as an excuse to test her powers against his, and of course, to get under her skin. Or could it be the other way around? Her mind briefly touched on that suggestive threat he’d made while interrogating her.

This time, the slaver gave no response. He was just staring blankly at the two of them, and continued to do so for over half a minute.

“Something appears to be amiss with him, but I am unsure as to what,” Threepio said, sounding thoroughly perplexed.

“Hey!” Kylo shouted at the slaver, clapping his hands loudly. Still no response.

Rey snapped her fingers in front of the slaver’s face a few times, with similar results. The push and pull of conflicting Force persuasion seemed to have had some sort of effect on his mind.

“Kylo, look what you did! You broke his brain!”

“Oh as if I could ever make you do anything!” he countered, rolling his eyes. “If I could, do you
“You sat in that prison just to manipulate me into helping you with your megalomaniac bullshit!”

The shouting seemed to be enough to snap the slaver out of his vegetative state. He shook his head, and mumbled something, promptly translated by Threepio. “The proprietor begs your pardon. He was distracted for a moment, and asks you to repeat what you just said.”

Rey and Kylo glared at each other in a fierce, prolonged staredown. After what felt like several minutes, Kylo finally broke the silence, speaking in an irritable grumble. “I was just saying that her current clothes will do fine!”

The slaver obediently agreed with him.

Despite being allowed to continue wearing her street clothes, the next half hour was even more degrading than Rey had expected. She was trotted out onto a small stage along with two other women, and was then poked, prodded and leered at by several potential buyers. One even had the nerve to demand a look at her teeth.

The whole process was very unpleasant, not least because she knew that the other two slaves on stage were unlikely to escape so immediately. And there wasn’t much she could do about it, under the circumstances. At least, not at the moment.

In the end, it was a short Twi'lek man who outbid everyone else. He ended up buying the other two as well. Rey watched as Kylo took a small case of money, and of course, repeated his Force-persuade enhanced demand that no one lay a hand on the girl.

The Twi'lek motioned for Rey and the others to follow him to a nearby speeder, and the captives complied.

“Did you have something to say to me?” Kylo called after her.

Rey turned and shot him a confused look. What could she possibly have to tell him that could be said in front of the slavers?

“Goodbye?” he prompted.

“Um, goodbye,” she said, still confused.

“Goodbye whom?” He was now smirking that evil little smirk.

She finally got it. So that was what he was playing at - he wanted to make her call him master, again. The jerk.

All the slavers were watching her curiously, no doubt wondering if this girl was more insubordinate than they’d been lead to believe.

Rey suppressed a string of expletives, in favor of a more appropriate response.

“Goodbye - not-my-master.”

Night had fallen on Nar Shadaa by the time Rey strolled out the front gate of the syndicate compound she’d been sold to, head held high. Her escape had been so easy that she wasn’t sure it should even be called an escape. With her talent for stealth and mind-tricks, it was no wonder that
nobody was even attempting to hinder her flight.

But she hadn’t walked much more than a few meters out of the compound when she sensed a familiar presence. She turned and found Kylo standing in the shadows of a nearby alley.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded. “I thought the plan was for you to wait on the ship?”

“I altered the plan,” he informed her, with his usual nonchalant shrug. “I take it things did go smoothly, after all?”

Rey noticed that his vibes smacked of serious disappointment. That didn’t quite make sense. If he was so unhappy to see her, then why wait just outside, like this?

Only the slightest bit of Force intuition was needed, and then it hit her. “I bet you were hoping that things wouldn’t go smoothly. That you’d have to intervene.” She paused to grin at him. “You wanted to rescue me!”

He didn't bother to deny it, simply changed the subject. Kylo glanced around, no doubt noticing that she was alone. “I’d thought you would have insisted on meddling - freeing the others. But I take it that you decided against it.”

Rey shot him a triumphant smile. “Oh I did. I just did it the smart way.”

“Which is?”

“I waited for the opportunity to catch our owner alone. He and I then had a little chat. He suddenly had a change of heart about slavery, due to my very persuasive argument. He decided to legally free everyone he owns, and to give them each a considerable sum of money to start their new lives with. He’s signing the documents right now.”

Kylo grinned at her, shaking his head. “You and I could do a lot of damage to this economy, between the two of us.”

Rey could sense his vicarious pride in her, no doubt more in her cunning than her altruism. “You know, I am a member of this special organization of Force users, you might have heard of them. They travel around and do nice things for people, and -”

“Shut up!” he shouted, smile vanishing in an instant.

Rey noticed a that he was carrying a small disposable bag in one hand. “What’s that?”

He gave a grumpy huff, and thrust the bag out to her. “Peace offering!” he snapped, tone most decidedly unpeaceful. “I know you only had the clothes on your back when you left, and you’ll be stuck with me for at least another few days. I guessed at the size.”

Rey hesitated to inspect the contents. For those few moments, she was all but certain that she’d find something along the lines of a black leather bustier and matching thigh-high boots.

In fact, it appeared to be several identical sleeveless tunics, not unlike the one she was wearing. There also seemed to be a pair of pants at the bottom of the bag. Of course they were black, but she supposed she couldn’t complain.

For a moment, she considered trying on one of the shirts over the one she was wearing. She even went so far as to grab the corner of her vest to take it off. That was when she recalled the miniature commmlink Master Skywalker had given her, still tucked in that hidden pocket on the inside of her vest. It took a good deal of self-control to hide her pleasure at that discovery.
“As you can see, none of it is - revealing,” he stated, with his usual defensiveness. “And earlier - I was just messing around, okay?”

Useful as the clothing was, Rey couldn’t quite bring herself to thank him. It was probably just another attempt to manipulate her, no different from taking off his mask in that interrogation room. He knew he’d crossed a line earlier, and was only making amends because he needed her for his plan.

As they walked back to the ship, she found herself stealing glances at him. What if she was wrong? What if the bra incident had just been a bit of light-hearted teasing, albeit somewhat inappropriate? And what if he actually did feel bad about it?

No. This was Kylo Ren, she reminded herself. This was a cold-blooded killer. Or perhaps hot blooded? That sounded more like him. Either way, he was a murderer, who no doubt planned to double-cross her the moment Snoke was dead.

The walk back to the ship concluded in silence, and Kylo disappeared into the ‘fresher as soon as they arrived.

“Miss Rey! I am so very glad to see that you have escaped!” Threepio declared excitedly. “Though, I am exceedingly puzzled by your decision to return here. Would it not be wise for you to flee? Your captor typically takes an average of twenty four point five minutes to bathe. That is ample time for you to get well away from him!”

“No, Threepio.”

“But Miss Rey, you really must flee! That monster all but certainly means to do you harm. Have you forgotten that he killed Captain Solo and goodness knows how many others?!”

“I haven’t forgotten!” Rey shouted, irrationally angry at the droid’s judgemental tone. But she immediately felt bad for yelling, Threepio was such an easy, helpless target, and there was no real satisfaction in berating him. “Threepio, do you think I am stupid?” she asked the droid, matter-of-factly.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Do you think I am stupid?”

Threepio took a good thirty seconds to process this query. “Based on data extracted from observations of your behavior, my algorithms place your full scale intelligence somewhere in a 95% confidence interval, spanning portions of the high-average and superior ranges, with a normative strength in fluid reasoning. Therefore, by most colloquial definitions, you are not stupid.”

“Then please trust that I know what I am doing,” she sighed, walking in the direction of bed, and pondering the question of whether she in fact did know what she was doing.

“There is something of a difference between intelligence and judgement,” Threepio stated, as he shuffled into the cargo hold.

Next time: He’s Not Bad Company, When He’s Not Being an Asshole
Chapter End Notes

Please keep those comments/reviews coming! Feedback is my drug and I need my fix!

Next time: He's Not Bad Company, When He's Not Being an Asshole
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 15: He’s Not Bad Company, When He’s Not Being an Asshole

With Kylo in the refresher, Rey knew this was the ideal time for her to contact Master Skywalker. She had a feeling that such communication should be kept secret from Kylo, lest his murderous resentment for his estranged master spawn one of his trademark hissyfits.

“Master Skywalker?” she whispered into the device. “Master Skywalker? Are you there?”

A few seconds of silence, and then she smiled at the sound of that warm, familiar voice. “Rey? What is it?”

Rey hesitated, but only for a moment. There was no way to sugarcoat this. “Master - I kind of - helped Kylo Ren escape.” She paused briefly, immediately launching into an explanation of what she hoped he would consider mitigating circumstances. “They were about to execute him, and it all happened so fast! There was no time to think! Master, I’m so sorry.”

“You helped him escape, to save his life?” Luke queried, voice as serene as ever.

“Yes.”

“Rey, I am so proud of you!” he declared, his smile all but audible through the commlink.

Rey frowned. She had expected that Master Skywalker would probably forgive her, but this?

“Master?”

“Your assignment was to show compassion for Kylo Ren, and I can think of no more profound way you could have done that, than to risk your life and reputation to save him.”

“It was the General’s order,” she said bashfully, cheeks flushed with self-satisfaction.

“Even so, it was an order you chose to follow. Just as following orders does not negate an evil deed, it also does not negate a good one.” Master Skywalker paused. “I should ask, is everyone safe?”

Rey sighed. “He killed Colonel Farr, but everyone else is fine.”

“I am sorry to hear about the Colonel, but I must admit I am relieved. Only one casualty - things could have easily been much worse.”

“Too right. He would have killed quite a few more if I hadn’t asked him not to.”

There was a brief, silence. “He consciously spared lives? Rey, now that is good news”

Rey shook her head to herself. “I don’t think it was compassion though. He said it was a personal favor. I think he just did it because I asked him. He showed compassion for me, someone who had just saved his life, and I think that’s pretty different than actual unconditional compassion for strangers.”
“Perhaps he was using you as an excuse,” Master Skywalker said thoughtfully.

“What do you mean?”

“Most people feel guilt when they do something cruel or ruthless, but I suspect that Kylo Ren has been conditioned to feel guilt when he does something kind or merciful. And that guilt likely eats away at him, just as guilt always does.”

“If anything, he ought to feel more guilt, not less,” Rey commented, ignoring the point.

“Guilt is a form of fear, Rey. And fear is a potential path to the Darkside.” A brief pause. “But I’m getting off topic. Rey, I also have to ask, are you okay?”

Rey gave another sigh. “I’m actually not sure. You see, I’m kind of on his ship.”

“So, you did go with him.”

Rey tensed at just how unnervingly unsurprised Master Skywalker sounded. Unsurprised and not even remotely upset. If she hadn’t known better, and of course she did know better, she would have said he actually sounded slightly pleased. “Yes. As I said, there was no time to think. I feel so stupid.”

“I ask again, Rey, are you safe?”

“I’m really not sure. I mean, he’s shown some interest in my welfare, but...”

“What do your feelings tell you?”

Rey closed her eyes, meditating on his question. “My feelings tell me - yes,” she said, shocked by her own conclusion. “He would never hurt me.”

“There you have it.”

She shook her head again, as if to dislodge this confusing notion. “But of course he won’t hurt me. He needs me for his plan.”

“Plan?”

“Yes, he wants me to help him kill Snoke.”

A brief silence on the other end of the line. “Be careful, padawan. He has his own agenda.”

“I know. He told me himself. He wants to become the Lord of the Galaxy, or whatever.”

“How do you plan to proceed, Rey?”

“I’ve already agreed to help him, but it’s not like I have much choice under the circumstances. Do you think it’s a good idea?”

“What do you think you should do?” Master Skywalker asked.

Rey both loved and hated the way he always turned her questions back on her. “My feelings are kind of silent on the matter, but my mind tells me that it’s a logical course of action. If Snoke were killed, it would destabilize the Order, and make them that much easier to push back. I think there’s no chance that Kylo will succeed at taking over, and even if he did, he’d make a shambles of it. With a impulsive, hot-headed lunatic at the helm, we might be able to defeat them, once-and-for-all.”
Rey felt a little flutter of conscience at the notion that she was more or less planning to take advantage of Kylo's idiocy and/or insanity. But why should she feel bad about that, when he was almost certainly planning to double-cross her as soon as Smoke was dead?

“Well then, it sounds like you don’t need my advice after all.”

Rey gave a little satisfied smile to herself, happy to have her master’s approval for this crazy mission. But there was still the matter of her original assignment.

“Master, am I to still try to bring him back to the Light?”

“Of course.”

Rey flinched. She was really hoping that he’d tell her not to worry about it, for the moment. “I still don’t know what to do, Master. I really need some guidance on this,” she said pleadingly.

“Padawan, you’re thinking about this too hard.”

She felt a little burst of irritation. “Master, with all respect, this task you’ve given me is hard.”

“Rey, I’m sorry, I can’t give you some magic words that will instantly save him. I would suggest that you stop thinking about it in those terms. It is unlikely that you will ever outright talk Kylo Ren into leaving the Dark Side, and if you did, it would be worse than meaningless. This is a decision he will have to make for himself, for it to carry any weight.”

“Then what am I supposed to do?”

“To be completely honest, I do not know how Kylo Ren will be saved, only that you will have a hand in it. But based on what you’ve told me, my educated guess is that simply being in contact with your bravery and compassion may potentially start him down the path to the Light.”

Rey’s eyes widened at the sound of the ‘fresher shutting off, and she spoke in a hasty whisper. “Look, I’ve got to go. I’ll contact you if anything happens. Force be with you!”

Finding a suitable lightsaber crystal proved to be even more difficult than anticipated. They’d been to half a dozen purveyors, with no luck. It seemed with the start of this new galaxy-spanning war, arms manufacturers were buying up virtually all of the weapons-grade crystals around. Over the course of the past few days, it felt like they’d been all over that particular quadrant of Nar Shaddaa, and hadn’t seen a single one. They weren’t having much luck with manufacturing suppliers, so they decided to take a slightly different approach - jewelry stores.

Rey and Kylo had a established a sort of routine during the past few days of searching. Each morning, they’d wake, eat rations, and walk to the next holonet-generated lead.

As they walked, Rey again sensed a somewhat heightened stress level from Kylo, as soon as they entered a crowded area. She decided to broach the subject. “You don’t like crowds, do you?”

“No,” he grunted, not looking at her. “They’re too noisy.”

Rey perceived that he didn’t mean that literally. “You can sense all of their intentions?”

“Yeah.” He began gesturing to various people in the crowd. “That one is sneaking off to sleep with his brother-in-law. That guy over there, he’s nervous because the bike is stolen. Those small-
“Show off,” Rey commented, “but genuinely interesting.”

“Genuinely distracting,” he corrected her.

“Can’t you tune it out?”

“Not really.”

“If that’s why you don’t care for crowds, how is it that you function in your military capacity? You lead armies.”

“That’s different. Disciplined soldiers are quieter.”

“You mean brainwashed soldiers,” Rey cut in, thinking of the stories Finn had told her.

Kylo didn’t even try to deny it. “Their intentions are straightforward. Loyalty to their government, their comrades and their own hides, usually in that order.” Kylo gestured at various passersby. “But them - a mob. Their intentions are a chaotic whirl of empty hedonism, pathetic fears and petty ambitions.”

Rey began to ponder what it must be like to sense other people’s intentions, lies and biases all the time. No wonder Kylo had such a low opinion of sentient life. He instantly knew the worst about almost everyone he met.

She supposed that he probably paid more attention to what people thought of him, personally. It was just human nature. Suddenly his self-consciousness made a lot more sense. Every time someone in his presence had an unkind thought, harsh criticism, or negative judgement about him - it was as clear to him as if they’d said it straight to his face. This was a man who had probably been brutally, hurtfully insulted, every day of his life.

That might have included loved ones as well. Kylo was probably painfully aware of the disappointed expectations that all parents have, and most good parents tactfully keep to themselves. She wondered if he’d sensed their concerns about potential Dark Side orientation. Knowing that his parents thought he might be evil, combined with his premonition about killing his father - again, it was no wonder that the man was crazy.

She knew that he probably sensed what she was thinking about, and waited for some sort of outburst, but none came. It seemed that he didn’t want to acknowledge the matter. Instead, he continued quietly narrating the intentions of random passersby. Rey found this surprisingly entertaining. It seemed to appeal to her innate curiosity, and to some extent a sort of benign version of schadenfreude, that she didn’t know she had.

She also noticed that a significant number of sentients seemed to warrant only a single comment from Kylo: creep. Over time, Rey came to observe that this label was given exclusively to humanoid males who gave her more than a fleeting glance.

After a good half-hour, this amusing if not wholesome pastime was inevitably interrupted. A somewhat emaciated Trandoshan jumped out in front of them, waving a blaster, and yelling at them in some guttural, hissing language, presumably Dosh.

“So you know what he’s saying?” Rey asked Kylo. This was one of only a few times in history when anyone had ever wished that Threepio was present.
“No, but he means to rob us.” There was a brief pause as Kylo took a moment to study the attacker. “He’s a glibbiter. Dying for a fix. He’s likely to try something crazy.” Another thoughtful pause. “But the blaster isn’t functional.”

Rey reached down to her hip, and heard a low chuckle of dark delight from her companion. He assumed she was reaching for her saber. But instead, she pulled out the pouch she used to hold the small amount of money she had claimed for herself. She pulled out a few chits, and offered them to the Trandoshan with a warm, infinitely compassionate smile. “You are going to use this money for a nourishing meal. You’ve just realized that spice is ruining your life. And you will now find the inner strength to overcome your addiction.”

The Trandoshan muttered something unintelligible, accepted the money, and went calmly on his way.

“What the hell was that?!” Kylo snapped, a moment later. “I’ll have to sell you again if you make a habit of this!”

“His life may be a mess, but it is worth a few chits.”

Kylo rolled his eyes. “You do realize that a basic mind-trick is not going to take away a chemical addiction? It’s exceedingly unlikely that he’ll turn his life around and become a contributing member of society.”

“More likely than if I had killed him,” Rey answered smugly. “And besides, leaving a trail of dead muggers wherever we go wouldn’t be keeping a very low profile, now would it?”

He just groaned, shaking his head, and projecting an air of contempt. But at this point, Rey had spent enough time with him to be able to see past surface emotions, in some cases. And beneath the contempt, there was - that jealous admiration, again. She was beginning to wonder if Master Skywalker was right about Kylo using her as an excuse to be merciful and/or kind.

Perhaps she was making progress with him, after all? Or could it have been that it was her understanding that had changed? Perhaps he wasn’t really a villain? Perhaps no one was. Now that she thought about it, she’d seen plenty of examples of ordinarily mean people doing nice things and nice people doing mean things. Perhaps Kylo was a more complicated version of that phenomenon.

Then again, the only real kindness he'd shown was toward herself. There was the sense she’d had when she’d escaped the slavers, that he’d wanted to rescue her. But that was probably just a macho ego trip thing, right? Even still, it was kind of - dare she even think the word cute in relation to Kylo Ren?

This thought prompted her to articulate a fact that had been bouncing around in her head all day.

“Kylo?” she asked, glancing over at him.

He responded with a grunt of acknowledgement, eyes still front and center.

“You’ve actually been fairly helpful and civil these past few days. I just wanted to say that I have noticed, and I do appreciate it.”

Kylo muttered something that might have been your welcome or possibly don’t rub it in.

“You know,” Rey went on, “you’re actually not bad company when you’re not breaking things. Or killing people. Or threatening me.”
“Yeah, well,” he said eventually, “you’re not bad company either, when you’re not being a pain in my ass.”

Rey sucked her teeth and stared pointedly at his scar. “If anything, I’ve been more of a pain in your face.”

“Shut up!”

To Rey’s surprise, Kylo’s exclamation was accompanied by a noticeable chortle of amusement, and no burst of hostility. Had she been admitted into the exclusive, or more likely non-existent club of people who were allowed to make fun of him?

“Watch your mouth, or I might change my mind about liking you,” he continued, chuckle tapering off.

Rey felt a slight burst of warmth in her chest at that. He liked her?

“Me? A dirty, desert vagrant?” she teased.

He elaborated, still avoiding her gaze. “You’re honest, and you have a backbone. And you’re loyal, even if it’s to the wrong people.”

She couldn’t resist. “And I’m pretty,” she added, grinning at him.

“And you’re pretty,” he muttered, briefly glancing over at her.

Just then, she got a sense that she’d been getting from him more and more lately. The sense that he was hiding something. An emotion of some kind. Something that he really didn’t want her to perceive in him.

Kylo and Rey walked finally arrived at the searched for jewelry shop - the one that supposedly specialized in kyber crystals.

The clerk, a middle-aged Togruta woman, met them at the door. She gave them the once over, no doubt noting the quality of Kylo’s clothes, and her face immediately formed into the excessive, unflappable smile of a career saleswoman.

“Hello and good day! Is there anything in particular I could show you?” she asked, successfully guessing that they were Basic speakers.

“I am looking for a crystal. Kyber variety. At least a centimeter in diameter.”

“Ah, a man who knows what he wants! I’m sure it was love-at-first-sight for you two,” she declared cheerfully. She then leaned in to Rey, her upbeat tone turning conspiratorial. “I’ll bet he pursued you relentlessly.”

Both Kylo and Rey were struck completely dumb by the awkwardness of the moment. What that woman had said was somehow completely inaccurate and dangerously close to the truth.

“Right this way!” the shopkeeper exclaimed, leading them to a display case. “You are quite fortunate, I have several different specimens in stock - kyber crystals are so beautiful, and have such a colorful history, no pun intended. In addition to various industrial uses, did you know that according to legend, they were commonly used in Jedi laserswords? So fascinating!”

“I am looking for a red one, if at all possible,” Kylo stated.
The woman laughed. “That would be quite something! I am afraid that true red kyber crystals do not exist in nature. I have read rumors of ancient religious cults creating them artificially, but -” the woman turned to Rey. “What is your favorite color, my dear?”

“Blue,” she answered, thinking of the ocean that once only existed in her dreams.

The shopkeep pulled out several blue crystals, explaining the properties of each one, while Kylo tapped his foot impatiently.

“I want a red one,” he repeated.

The woman flatly ignored him, keeping her attention on Rey. “You know, I think green would suit you best. It would bring out the color of your eyes! I forgot to ask, were you planning on having the gem set in a pendant or as a brooch?”

“Do you have anything similar to red?” Kylo demanded.

“Sir, with all due respect, your wife will be the one wearing it. Shouldn’t she decide on the color?”

Again, a long, excruciatingly awkward silence.

“We’re not married,” Kylo eventually sputtered. Rey let out a little exhalation of relief that at least one of them had the nerve to set the matter straight.

The shopkeeper smiled delightedly. “Oh I see! Now I understand! Congratulations on your engagement! I wish you had said so sooner! Here, let me show you some stones that are more appropriately sized for a ring!”

At this point, Rey was about ready to crawl into a hole and die. She was fairly sure that Kylo had similar feelings - she could feel the mortification radiating off him. She knew his face was probably as bright red as the crystal he sought, but she couldn’t bring herself to look.

“I need a kyber crystal,” Kylo ground out through gritted teeth. “Ideally red. And at least a centimeter in diameter.”

The shopkeep blinked at them, and her smile faltered for just a fraction of a second. “Yes. Of course,” she said, still cheerful, but noticeably less so.

Several crystals were laid out in front of them, several that were varying shades of bronze, one lavender and one that appeared almost black. “I suggest this one,” the woman said, pointing at the lavender. “Purple is a very popular color this season, and I can rarely keep them in stock.”

Kylo ignored her, picking up the black crystal. “What about this one?”

“That one? Sir, it’s barely worthy of a setting. Surely your - lady would prefer something more colorful.”

Kylo held up the crystal to the ceiling, shutting one eye, and peering up through it, at the overhead light. He then tossed it to Rey, presumably so she could do the same. She did so, observing that while the crystal appeared black from a distance, the light showed through as a deep, burgundy red. She turned to Kylo, finding that his lips had spread into a satisfied smirk. “I’ll take it.”

Threepio may have hated the idea of Rey and Kylo Ren as a couple, but he sure did love to talk about it. A lot.
“If they were to get together, it would set a very bad example for other young girls.”

Artoo gave a distinctly angry-sounding series of beeps.

“I AM NOT breaking the fourth wall! Miss Rey is already a living legend for the Resistance, and therefore a role model for other young women!”

Artoo retorted with several beeps and chirps.

“I did not say that Miss Rey exists only to be the shining, flawless example of modern feminine empowerment! Such an expectation is indeed rather unrealistic and would be difficult for typical females to relate to. But placing herself in a position of vulnerability to such a man - a modern, empowered woman does not need a man!”

The little blue droid interrupted with a high trilling coo.

“I know you never said she needs him.”

Artoo continued his beepy explanation.

“I suppose being empowered does not preclude a woman from wanting a man,” Threepio conceded. “But she could certainly chose a better one! What about Master Finn? I have observed they get along exceedingly well.”

Another series of chirps.

“Of course Miss Rey should make her decision based on her own desires. I am simply stating that choice you are alluding to would be the wrong one!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Drunken Fluff

Oh and "glibiter" = space-tweeker. One of many vastly useful bits of information Wookieepedia has to offer!
Chapter Notes

More non-Bloodlines compliant backstory here. I was just dead set on them having this conversation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 16: Drunken Fluff

Dinner was just about finished, and it was getting late.

“You know,” she giggled. “I am starting to think this juma juice stuff is alcoholic.” She raised up a disposable cup full of bright yellow liquid.

Kylo snorted. “You didn't know that Nar Shaddaa juma is alcoholic?”

She giggled again. “Nope! I just saw that it was juice.”

They both laughed uproariously.

“Ignorant scavenger,” he intoned affectionately. “Maybe you’d better slow down then.”

Rey shot him a defiant glare as she took another swig. She may have had very little experience with intoxicants, but she was not about to let him boss her around. Particularly since dinner had been his idea.

Earlier that evening, Kylo had announced that he was sick of eating preserved rations, and wanted some real food. This statement was met with much teasing on his snobbishness, seeing as Rey had counted herself lucky for every ration she’d got, only a year earlier.

Regardless, spending a bit of money on something tasty didn’t sound like that bad of an idea, especially after Kylo pointed out that she had sold herself into slavery to get him the damn crystal, so he should at least buy her dinner.

They had an agreeable little stroll through a nearby line of street vendors, exchanging pleasantries about the various sights and smells, and picking up anything that looked good. Rey decided that this was definitely not disturbingly similar what she imagined a date might be like. No. Not like a date, at all.

She was a bit surprised to discover that her companion’s taste in food was not quite as narrow as one might have imagined for a member of an alien-phobic regime, but not exactly adventurous either. She would have expected him to be one extreme or the other. For her own part, she was mainly looking for fresh fruits or veggies, to no avail. Produce was a rare luxury on this farmless planet. The closest thing she could find was some beverage called juma juice. Juice sounded like a good alternative for fruit, and she proceeded to buy two liters of it.

There was no actual table on the command shuttle, so they had spread their feast out on the floor, in a sort of bizarre indoor picnic.

Rey reached forward for a small, frost-covered container. She dipped a finger into it, pulled out a
Rey reached forward for a small, frost-covered container. She dipped a finger into it, pulled out a lump of its contents, and slurped it directly into her mouth. Kylo rolled his eyes, handing her a disposable spoon.

“What is this stuff?” Rey crooned.

“It’s called ice cream. It’s an Anoat delicacy, I think. Never thought to see it all the way out here.”

“Well, wherever it’s from, it’s amazing!”

Kylo smirkingly watched her scarf down the ice cream for a minute, before speaking again. “I’ve been meaning to say - I’m sorry.”

Rey eagerly awaited elaboration. What was he sorry for? Destroying the New Jedi? Abandoning her on Jakku? Murdering Han Solo? Force pushing her into a tree so hard that it gave her a concussion?

“I’m sorry for the mess the other day. With the console.”

That was it?

Rey nearly gave an automatic response along the lines of that’s okay. Even tipsy as she was, she was rather aware that it was most definitely not okay. But she also supposed that him apologizing for anything was probably a pretty major step for this self-righteous asshole.

“Apology accepted.” An amusing thought fluttered through Rey's mind. “It's too bad I didn't know someone like you back on Jakku. I could have just followed you around, and collected the wreckage. I would have made my fortune and grown fat as a Hutt.”

They both laughed again, and then Kylo’s tone turned wistful. “Sometimes I wonder how things might have turned out if I’d taken you with me after all. If I’d been training you all this time - you would have been so powerful by now.” He smiled broadly at the mere thought of it, and took another drink.

Rey rolled her eyes - a gesture that had curiously found it’s way into her regular repertoire after spending all this time with Kylo. “You really do have a boner for power, don't you?”

Kylo coughed, nearly spitting out his current swig.

She ignored him, and considered what he’d said about her training. This brought her mind to a question that had been haunting her for days. And at the moment, she actually had enough booze in her to risk bringing it up. “Kylo, did we know each other, when we were both training under Master Skywalker?”

“Only a little,” he answered casually, apparently now recovered from her crass comment. “I was like, thirteen or fourteen by then, and couldn’t be bothered with anyone more than six months younger than me. I was already an arrogant prick.”

“How old was I?”

“Don’t know. Little. Maybe four or five. You were the youngest Master Skywalker had taken on.”

She tried to keep from grinning at the notion that he was buzzed enough to let ‘Master Skywalker’ slip out.

“Did he say anything about my family?” Rey asked eagerly.
“Not really. He just went somewhere off-world for a few days, and came back with a little girl. You used to follow me around. It was really annoying.”

“Did I?” she asked. Rey had no access to any actual memory, but she was highly amused at the mental image she invented, a little girl tripping along in the shadow of a sullen teenager, yanking on his tabards to demand his attention.

“Oh yeah. You used to ask me stupid questions, sometimes the same question over-and-over. And you’d bring me little presents of rocks or shiny pieces of trash,” he paused to chuckle. “A scavenger even then.”

“I must have liked you,” Rey commented.

“Hard to fathom, I know. But back then - I was good at faking good. Slowly killing myself, trying to be what everyone wanted me to be.”

“Ugh,” Rey groaned. “We were having a perfectly enjoyable conversation, and somehow you managed to turn it into something depressing about yourself. You are such a buzzkill.” She started giggling. “That’s what your Sith name should be, if you ever get one. Darth Buzzkill.”

“I like the sound of that,” he laughed.

The conversation stagnated for a moment before Rey’s mind wandered back to their previous topic.

“Master Skywalker must have said something about where I came from!”

“He did say that you came from a Force-sensitive family, but wouldn’t say more. I was curious, but the old jerk wouldn’t tell. He buried it deep too, I was never able to get a read.”

“A Force-sensitive family?”

“I’m guessing it’s someone interesting, otherwise he wouldn’t have gone through so much trouble to hide it.”

“What does your intuition say?”

“Nothing, really. Intuition only really works when you have something to go on,” he explained. “I just had the best idea!”

“Hmm?”

“You know where Skywalker is, don't you?”

There was no point in denying it. “Yes.”

“You tell me where he is, and I could get your family-secret out of him. It wouldn't be easy, but I could do it.” Kylo told her, wagging a finger in her face. “Now, I'm not going to lie to you - I will kill him when I'm done, but at least you'd know.”

“I think I'll decline,” Rey said, smiling in spite of herself. “I appreciate the spirit of the offer though. It's actually kind of sweet, albeit in a very violent and disturbing way.”

“Me in a nutshell,” Kylo declared.
They both laughed again.

“C’mon, you must know something about my family,” Rey insisted.

“All I can remember is he said you’re an orphan, and he wouldn’t say who’s.”

“An orphan...” she murmured dejectedly. That meant that her parents were almost certainly deceased. “Do you think he was telling the truth?”

“Yeah, pretty sure.”

She felt as if her heart had crashed into the pit of her stomach. A pair of tears rolled down her cheeks. “I knew it was a long shot, but I guess I still kind of hoped that I might find my parents someday,” Rey whimpered.

“Don’t cry,” he ordered softly. A large, black-clad arm shot out, and pulled her into a sort of half-hug against his shoulder. She didn’t push him away, to the surprise of them both. The air seemed to fill with the scent of dried herbs.

“You can have my family,” he offered, his tone both cheeky and earnest at once.

That got a smile out of her. “I would give anything to have your family. They’re amazing,” she told him, oblivious to the implications of his statement.

“By all means, take them! I insist! I sure as hell don’t want them! ” he exclaimed, apparently also ignoring implications. “They clearly think highly of you.”

“You think so?” she asked, perking up.

“Otherwise, they wouldn’t have sent you to deal with me. They must have a high opinion of your competence and loyalty.”

“Deal with you?” she echoed. “Is that what I’m doing here? Dealing with you?” She playfully jabbed a finger against his chest. “Well, are you dealt with?”

“You’re drunk,” he informed her. “I think I’d better confiscate this.”

He reached for her drink, but she swatted his hand away, taking another sip just to spite him. “You’re not - not the boss of me! And besides, you’ve had at least as much as I have!”

“I’m also bigger than you. And half Corellian.”

“Well, you aren’t sober. I’ll tell you that much,” she stated confidently.

“How would you know?”

“Because you’re smiling a lot.”

“Maybe that’s not why I’m smiling.”

Rey was too far gone to take that bait. Her mind had already wandered to a new topic. One even more dangerous than her previous questions.

“Why did you - you turn to the Dark Side?”

Drunk as she was, she fully expected some sort of hissyfit. But his reaction was dismissively casual, as if it were a mundane question he was sick of being asked. “Why does it even matter?
This is what I am now, and it’s sure as hell too late to go back. I don’t care what Skywalker says, you can’t just unlearn things. I can’t go back to being the person I was back then, anymore than you could go back to being the person you were several years ago.”

“I could so,” Rey protested.

“Could you? Could you take up right where you left off on Jakku? Live your life just as you did before? Can you honestly say that you wouldn’t use a mind trick to get all the portions you could eat? Maybe do a little meddling to improve the lot of the others?”

Rey frowned, by way of conceding the point. Her hazy mind skittered over to a slightly different topic.

“You haven’t said anything about the Dark Side. I’ve been stuck with you for days. I would have - would have thought that you’d be going on and on about - about harnessing your passions and Sith rituals and all that stuff.” She turned to look at him. “But you’re not.”

Kylo seemed to catch the implicit question. “You are ill-suited to the Darkness,” he sighed, with unmistakable disappointment.

She frowned again. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You have too little fear. And too much compassion.”

Rey smiled. She decided she’d take it as a compliment, even if it probably wasn’t meant as one.

“You do have anger, though,” he added, tone lightened somewhat, as if trying to soften the criticism. “Oh yes. You have anger. I’ve felt it. But all the damn compassion gets in the way. Taints it. Makes it useless. And the lack of fear...”

Kylo studied her, eyes running back and forth across her face, as if reading words on a page. But with his arm still over her, her head still pressed to his shoulder, their faces were now perilously close as he looked down at her.

Rey turned away from his scrutiny, but made no attempt to escape the arm around her. She felt her cheeks flush, but that was probably just the alcohol.

“Oh, there it is,” Kylo whispered. His lips spread into a lazy grin, his words becoming a cocky sing-song. “There’s your fear. I - found - it.”

His arrogance prompted her to turn her face back to him, and she stared at him fiercely. “Then maybe your head can find its way out of your ass!”

Kylo threw his head back and laughed heartily, chest bouncing against her cheek. Rey felt her lips forming into a smile in response to the sound of that awkward, staccato laugh. It was the one he always got when he found something genuinely funny, as opposed to just ironic or stupid.

“That’s exactly what I’m talking about,” he explained. “You’re no stranger to fear. It’s just that you’re so good at overcoming it. You feel as much fear as anyone. But somehow, you’ve kept it from becoming a part of you. You’re accustomed to ignoring it. Almost as if you’ve been immunized against it.”

She felt his chest deflate in a deep sigh that smacked of that covetous admiration he so often showed her.

“I could turn you though!” Kylo declared abruptly, voice raised with his usual defensiveness. “I
could do it! I’ve just decided - not to. For now.”

“Why?” she asked. Rey noticed that her eyelids seemed to be getting exceedingly heavy, no doubt due to the late hour, compounded by the alcohol.

His tone turned less hostile. “Turning someone like you would take a lot of work. You’d have to be broken completely.”

“Broken?”

“Your spirit. But the methods involved - I don’t care to use those on you,” he said, voice lowered, as if confessing something shameful.

“A merciful impulse?” she murmured against his tunic.

“No. A selfish one,” he corrected her. “I have no desire to break your spirit. I like it the way it is.”

Rey leaned back, peering up at him through half-hooded eyes. “You’re complicated,” she pronounced.

“You like me because I’m complicated,”

The last thing she recalled was Kylo glancing down at her, clearly trying to gauge her reaction. But all he would have seen was her, fast asleep against his shoulder.

A brief reprise of the infamous bridal-carry most likely followed. Rey woke the next morning, neatly tucked into bed.

“And what about Master Finn? He has been so kind to her! I think they would make a splendid couple.”

To Threepio’s surprise, Artoo gave a little beep of agreement.

“Ah well, at least we agree on something. And would you also agree that Master Finn is a charming young man of impeccable character, who could potentially be an excellent partner for Miss Rey?”

The little blue droid gave another beep of agreement, followed by a slightly longer string of whistles and chatters.

“Why do you think it is unlikely?”

The astromech gave a brief response.

“Insufficient barriers and conflict for an epic love story? Now who’s breaking the fourth wall?!”

Artoo elaborated with a few chirps and hums.

“And you think that Master Finn is more interested in Commander Dameron? You only say that because it supports your conclusion.” Threepio’s tone turned sour. “Perhaps you do not favor a romance between Miss Rey and Master Finn, due to some sort of deplorable, archaic bias against mating between humans with differing dermal melanin levels!”

Artoo’s responded to the accusation with an indignant squawk.

“Well, I say that it is relevant!”
Artoo’s next response was a rather flustered-sounding group of buzzs.

“Alright! Alright! You have demonstrated sufficient outrage to indicate that melanin levels are not a factor in your opinion on this matter.”

Artoo continued with several beeps and coos.

“No, as a matter of fact I am not biased against mating between humans with differing religious and political affiliations. But that does not change the fact that Master Finn risked his life for Miss Rey, and has always been unwaveringly kind! That is quite a bit more than her other supposed suitor can say! Of the two of them, Master Finn is the one who deserves her. The murderer in the next room certainly hasn’t earned Rey’s affection. That is an irrefutable fact!”

The little blue droid gave a brief retort.

“I never said that Miss Rey is a fee to be earned! You are twisting my words around! You must admit that there is an extremely significant correlation between kindness and the development of romantic attachments.”

Artoo began a long string of whistles and chirps.

“No I do NOT think that females are machines that automatically dispense sexual favors whenever a male inputs any kindness into them!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Just Fuck Already

So yeah, the Threepio/Artoo arguments may or may not be inspired by some of the vitriol that gets flung at Reylo shippers, in certain dark corners of the internet. Personally, I find the whole “controversy” morbidly fascinating, from a sociological perspective.

And ice cream is totally a thing in Star Wars. In ESB, one of the fleeing Cloud City residents is quite clearly carrying an ice cream maker.

Please don't forget to comment! It really does mean a lot to me!
Just Fuck Already

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 17: Just Fuck Already

Rey kicked off her pants and crawled into bed. It had been a long day of gathering various other lightsaber components. And Kylo had been stern and awkward all day. That was, even more stern and awkward than usual.

*He's hiding something,* Rey thought for the dozenth time. She had been pondering this for days, but it was becoming more and more obvious. He was definitely hiding something, and putting a good deal of energy into it too. Rey could sense that it was some troubling emotion, but she couldn’t tell what. At first, she'd been all but sure it was guilt. He felt guilty about his intention to double cross her.

But that didn’t quite make sense. Her memory of the previous evening was a little hazy, but she could have sworn he'd said that he was no longer planning to turn her to the Dark Side. Then again, a man capable of patricide was almost certainly also capable of lying. But if his plan was to knock her over the head (either with the Force or the old fashioned way) and drag her back to the First Order in chains, why hadn’t he done it by now? Why come to Nar Shaddaa at all?

Perhaps it was something a good deal more ordinary. He was a man, alone with a pretty young woman. And she was pretty. He told her so himself.

Rey thought back to that unsettling threat he’d made on Starkiller, telling herself that she was definitely not obsessing over it.

*I can take whatever I want...*

At this point, she was fairly sure that was just bluster. He had been trying to scare her. Men had a tendency to assume *that* was the worst thing they could possibly threaten. Besides, if he intended to take advantage of her, wouldn’t he have done that by now as well?

Perhaps it was something comparatively innocent. A simple crush? Rey had dismissed that idea out of hand the first time it had occurred to her. He was so obviously heartless that it hardly seemed possible.

Or was he?

But the more she thought about it, the more sense it made, what with the wanting to rescue her the other day, and being downright sweet (albeit in his own twisted way) the previous evening.

She found herself thinking that his face not quite so funny-looking, his stature not that lanky, and his manners not that awkward. Or rather, all of these characteristics were still there - but somehow, not in a bad way. She found she sort of enjoyed his dry sarcasm and cynical honesty, and he was actually rather handsome, in some unconventional tall, dark and dangerous sort of way. Some of his features were distinctive, yes, but taken as a whole, she now found that his countenance was a pleasure to look at. That was, when he wasn’t scowling - something he seemed to be doing somewhat less often in her presence, lately.

This increase in her perception of his attractiveness was purely coincidental. It had nothing to do with her determining that he was almost certainly attracted to her. Yes, that had nothing to do with
it. Nothing at all. He'd simply grown on her, now that she knew there was more to him than one
dimensional wickedness.

*Perhaps that’s the way that I am supposed to bring him back to the Light,* she mused to herself,
still trying to fall asleep. Perhaps she had to *literally* seduce him? Rey supposed she was willing to
take one for the team, if it meant saving the galaxy. She had no fear of the male body, nor did she
have an overly sentimental attitude toward sex.

Yes, take one for the team. If she did it, it would be as part of her mission. It would have nothing
to do with the way his eyes seemed to smolder whenever he looked at her. And it definitely had
nothing to do with the supposition that the fierce strength and graceful precision he showed in
battle might also be applied in *other* types of movement. As a matter of fact, she would have been
surprised they wouldn’t be. It was hard to imagine Kylo Ren as anything but a particularly intense
and untamed lover.

Rey let out a deep sigh, staring up at the ceiling, rubbing her cheek against his pillow. It smelled
faintly of him. Dried herbs. She didn’t mind the scent now.

No, she had to think about this logically.

Using someone’s infatuation to manipulate them seemed kind of messed up though, even if it was
Kylo Ren. But Master Skywalker had told her that she couldn’t *make* him turn back to the Light,
that she would have to lead him to making that decision on his own. Playing on romantic
inclinations seemed like a fairly effective way to influence someone...

This was a dangerous line of thought, she knew. She really should talk to Master Skywalker
before trying anything. Discussing the potential redemptive effects of her vagina with her middle-
aged, celibate Master seemed likely to be uncomfortable for them both, but who else could she
consult with?

Rey reached into one of the storage compartments in the captain’s cabin, sliding her hand between
the black bundles of cloth. No communicator. She could have sworn that was exactly where she
hid it...

She pulled out the black bundles, emptying the cabinet completely. Nothing. Perhaps a different
compartment? Still nothing. She was starting to get a bad feeling about this. Could he have found
it?

Rising from the small bed, she righted her undershirt-nightgown, and opened the door. She gave
the ship a quick mental sweep - nothing. He was almost certainly asleep. So, she crept across the
main cabin, silencing each foot fall with the Force, until she arrived at the door across the way.

There was no actual door on the crew quarters. Clearly this was a man who did not trust his
subordinates. Rey peeked her head in. He was fast asleep. She immediately noticed that he was
quite a bit too tall for the under-sized bunks, and was scrunched up on his side. Rey had to
suppress a giggle at the sight of this dangerous man, literally curled up asleep, like some harmless
baby animal.

She wondered if the communicator might be hidden somewhere on his person. The weirdo slept
almost fully clothed, trousers, tunic, inner robe and socks. If so, there was nothing she could do.
Even she wasn’t stealthy enough to search his clothes without waking him. She looked around the
small room. There wasn’t much in the way of storage, but there was a small waste-bin built into
the wall. That slot called to her.

Slowly, carefully, she pulled open the trash chute. The hinges were well lubricated, and it opened
without a sound.

Rey’s heart sank when she saw the contents. There it was. The comlink. Broken into tiny little pieces. Only someone as knowledgeable as her could have even identified it as a former comlink, and even she wasn’t skilled enough to repair it.

She had the sudden overwhelming urge to kick him, sleeping puppy or not.

“What are you doing?”

Rey nearly jumped out of her skin, and let out an involuntary startled gasp.

“What are you doing in here?” Kylo reiterated.

Now there was an idea. He would probably be furious if she admitted that she’d been looking for the comlink. Perhaps a lie - she was lonely, she had a nightmare, she missed him... And then she would sit down on his bunk, he would put an arm over her shoulder, and the seduction could commence, right then and there.

He sat up slowly, gaze locked on hers. No, she couldn’t quite bring herself to go that far, at this point. Even if he was looking at her with those smoldering eyes of his...

Better to just take her chances with the truth. He would know if she was lying anyway.

“You stole my comlink,” she stated calmly.

“You had a comlink without telling me,” he countered.

“Well sorry I didn’t give you an inventory of everything I happened to have on my person when I helped you escape a firing squad!”

Kylo gave no response, sliding off the bunk, and drawing himself up to his full, rather intimidating height. He certainly did like looming.

“You were talking with him,” he accused, in his most menacing tone. Which was pretty damn menacing. “You’re lucky that thing didn’t have tracking capabilities, or I’d be on my way to kill him right now!”

“Luke Skywalker is still my master!” she stated firmly. “I will talk with him whenever I like.”

His lips tightened, showing his gritted teeth, a cloud of rage enveloping him. He clearly wanted to break something. Possibly her neck.

Rey decided that he was welcome to try. The notion of dealing him another humiliating defeat was looking pretty attractive right now. For some reason, she thought it might be rather satisfying to kick his ass, unarmed. Hand-to-hand. Body to body...

“When did you take my comlink?” she asked abruptly.

She felt like she really needed to know. As if the timing of this action might distinguish it between sabotaging an enemy and betraying a friend. And more than anything, she wanted him to tell her that he had taken it days ago, before they’d admitted enjoying each other's company, before that pleasant stroll, before they’d spent the better part of the previous evening laughing together.

Kylo didn't answer.

A theory occurred to her. “Did you take it last night, while I was drunk?”
He still maintained silence, even as look of shame on his ever-expressive face told the whole story, without any need to examine his vibes.

“You did!” Rey stammered. “You put me to bed like some -” it took her a moment to find the right words, “- considerate gentleman, and then you went through my things!”

“Technically, I was going through my things. You'd just hidden your things with my things,” he muttered.

Rey was about to ask how he even knew to look, but then figured there was no point. It was probably that eerie intuition of his. Another thing he just knew.

And then she suddenly came to the conclusion that she couldn't stand to be in the same room with him for another second. She half-turned toward the captain's cabin.

That was when she realized that his hand was clamped round her arm. She wasn't sure if he'd grabbed her just now, or whether he'd been touching her this whole time.

They just stood there, staring at each other, each waiting for the other to make a move. Rey found that she had mysteriously lost interest in fleeing the room. She was not going to let this comlink-smashing jerk push her around, and it felt like breaking eye-contact would be tantamount to admitting defeat.

Kylo stepped forward. They were now standing toe to toe, and she had to crane her head back to maintain the deadlock state. They were standing so close that she could feel the heat of his breath on her face.

The eye contact was only broken by his occasional, all but imperceptibly brief glances at her lips. Flustered as she was, Rey knew exactly what such looks foreshadowed. She suddenly felt very aware of her half-dressed state.

This was her cue to run! Or at least take a step back and attempt to explain how much she loathed him.

A cue that she wasn't taking...

“Go back to my bed,” he ordered, voice somewhere between a growl and a purr. She could feel his breath quicken against her face.

“That’s where I was going anyway!”

“Go back to my bed!” he repeated, as if he hadn't even heard her, finally releasing her arm in order to point at the captain’s cabin. Rey got the feeling that he was taking a bit too much pleasure in saying those words to her.

A thought came into her head, so strange and unanticipated that it didn't even feel like her own. 

*Just kiss me!*

But the standoff continued as before, only now, his lips had twisted into an arrogant smirk. She hesitated for a few more moments. She refused to acknowledge what she was waiting for. But the anticipation of whatever it was had her chest rising and falling in pant-like mini-gasps, as if the tension in the air was literally affecting her ability to breathe. She then abruptly turned around and walked across the main room toward the captain's cabin. Her heart was pounding at the expectation of heavy footfalls immediately behind her, followed by...
Large hands grasp her shoulders, and she is shoved roughly against the wall, pinned by relentlessly grinding hips, that generous mouth muffling her sighed half-hearted declarations of hatred.

She shook her head, as if to dispel these imagined images, and this flood of bodily sensation that she was tolerably sure a Jedi was not supposed to experience.

But she actually made it to the cabin without being yanked into an aggressive seduction. She shut the door behind her, threw herself down on his damn bed and silently cursed him and his damned smoldering eyes.

Threepio’s argument had taken on a decidedly acrimonious tone. It seemed that the closer their human passengers got, the more desperate he was to prove that they wouldn’t end up in a relationship.

“Now you are just throwing out information to support your own conclusions!”

Artoo gave a brief chirp.

“I know that is how a debate works! I do not want a debate! I want to be RIGHT!”

Artoo remained silent, as if to dare his companion to come up with a new argument.

“You may have refuted every one of my reasons against it, but -” Threepio paused, and then, miraculously, launched into a brief moment of actual self-awareness. “I am having a visceral reaction against the idea of this romance occurring, and I feel the need to shout this from the proverbial rooftops. I am projecting my black-and-white worldview onto these two people, and have not yet recognized that I exist in a galaxy full of moral ambiguity and dysfunctional romances! Therefore my argument is based on my emotional reaction and preexisting beliefs. That is why you will never refute my arguments. Because they are based on emotions and beliefs, not cinematic and literary analysis!”

Threepio gave a meaningful pause before continuing his speech. “And my emotions and beliefs are VALID, Artoo! You cannot tell me NOT to feel a certain way, just as I apparently can't convince you to feel that way too! And telling someone that their beliefs and feelings are wrong is probably the single most reliable way to provoke a hostile reaction!”

Artoo gave a distinctly apologetic coo.

“No, I do not hate you. But I would thank you to be less condescending.”

Artoo responded with an inquisitive chirp.

“Alright! I shall try to be a bit less churlish and self-righteous.”

The astromech gave a longer series of whirs and whistles.

“I heartily agree with you there, my friend. Neither of our opinions are at all likely to affect the course of future events.”
Chapter End Notes

Next time: Someone is Deflowered

Thank you to all my commentators! My motivation to write is shamefully extrinsic, so the feedback keeps my fingers typing!
Someone is Deflowered

Chapter Notes

Adult content in this chapter. And if you expect the narrative to treat this subject matter more seriously than everything else in this story, you will likely be disappointed. Also, a touch more icky realism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 18: Someone is Deflowered

Kylo stood, hunched over his unfinished new saber, swearing quietly to himself every so often. Rey couldn’t help peeking occasionally, but thus far had done fairly well at keeping her commentary to herself - but at this point, it was getting late and he was still nowhere near having a functional weapon.

“Don’t connect it there, the power cell has to - ” she suggested, and he cut her off.

“I know how to do this!” he snapped through his teeth.

Rey shrugged and stepped back to lean against a nearby wall. “Okay, but it’s going to overheat as soon as you power it up.”

Kylo ignored her. He worked for a minute or so longer and attempted to open the blade. Sure enough, the weapon erupted in a small shower of sparks and smoke. He dropped it on the floor, with a grunt of startled pain, holding his burnt hand by the wrist.

Rey shook her head, walking toward him. “That’s what happens when you ignore my tech advice.”

He whirled to face her, all but glowing with anger. “Why can't you - !” He paused, throwing up his hands in obvious frustration, “be WRONG some of the time!” he finally shouted, kicking the unfinished saber.

“Give me your hand,” she said, completely unperturbed. He didn’t comply at first, so she just reached out and grabbed him by the wrist. He hissed with discomfort when she slapped her palm down on his, and none too gently.

“Baby,” she muttered, abruptly sinking to a Force-healing kneel, and proceeding to channel her energy into his burned hand. Healing took a little longer than it should have. Rey found herself oddly fascinated at the sight of her petite, tan hand atop his humongous pale one.

“Done.” As soon as the word came out of her mouth, she noticed that his fingers had closed around hers. She rose to her feet, finding that they were now standing intimately close.

She looked up at him. Curiously, she didn’t attempt to pull her hand from his grip, even when he began to pull her toward him. Carefully, silently, almost in slow-motion, as if he were trying to catch a wild bird, easily startled into flight. Indeed, she could see that he was all but holding his
breath in suspense as he drew her into a most decidedly unplatonic embrace.

He was staring at her, wide-eyed, lips parted in intense focus, and she stared right back. It didn’t take Force intuition to predict where this was going.

“This isn’t a good idea,” she stated in an airy whisper.

“No,” he corrected her, voice stern but soft, eyes still locked on hers. “It’s a terrible idea.”

Rey braced herself for the impending kiss, but none came. After a few moments, She realized that he was waiting for her to make the next move. The man who could take whatever he wants, was apparently shy.

Her hands slid forward across the rough fabric of his outer-robe and then around onto his back. She rose to her tiptoes, her mouth nearing his.

That was apparently all the invitation he needed. It began with a slow, tentative press of lips, as if to test the water of a bath. Warm. Soft. Not spewing violent threats at her. These were the lips she felt inclined to get better acquainted with.

But that sweet, shy, tender kiss only lasted a few seconds before it escalated into deep, insistent gulps. His arms tightened around her, pulling her upward, as if he was just barely suppressing the urge to carry her off to bed, right then and there.

He tasted like rain. Like clean, fresh water - the kind you couldn't get on Jakku. Like that first droplet to hit her tongue, during the first rainstorm she could remember ever seeing. And just like then, she felt the rather compelling desire for more. She allowed her tongue to slide past his lips, lightly caressing his. For a few disappointing seconds, it seemed stolid and unmoving, as if it took him a moment to process what was happening. But he quickly seemed to get with the program, and tongues began a swirling cycle of advance and retreat, a slick, velvety reenactment of a particular battle in the snow. A duel of the tongues, if you will.

Neither knew who was winning, and neither cared.

A random word seemed to materialize in Rey’s mind. Breathe. That was strange. She decided to ignore it.

One of his hands slid up her neck and he buried the fingers in her rapidly unraveling updo. The other hand found its way to the small of her back, occasionally inching lower, as if preparing to launch a surprise attack on her ass, but waiting for more favorable tactical conditions. Rey was engaged in some exploration of her own, hands sliding between the layers of wool around him. There must have been a body in there somewhere. As she perused, her hand not-quite accidentally brushed the crotch of his trousers, fingers not-quite accidentally running along the rigid length beneath. His low growl pushed past the gasket of their fused lips, his tongue thrusting deeper into her mouth, an oral pantomime of what was so clearly on both their minds.

After an a few seconds, she pulled her face away from his. “This doesn’t change anything. I still hate everything you stand for,” she told him, trying to sound serious.

“Mmm-hmm,” he agreed as he reclaimed her lips, apparently unwilling to delay the next round of kissing by speaking actual words.

Their feet mysteriously began shuffling in the direction of his bed, neither of them sure who had taken the first step.

And there was that word again. Breathe. Why did that one word keep pushing it's way to the front
of her mind? She again decided not to think about it.

Instead, she reflected on how tired she was of being perfect all the time. It was her turn to do something foolish, dammit. And besides, this was not really that much worse than that one time back on Jakku, with the pirate.

The back of Rey’s knees hit the side of his bed, and she fell onto it with a soft, ungraceful thump.

“You do realize that this isn’t going to turn me into some imaginary, perfect Ben Solo?” he warned, towering over her.

Rey was momentarily shocked. She’d never heard that name pass his lips before.

“As long as you realize that this is not going to turn me into your apprentice. With benefits or otherwise.” She paused to smirk at him. “Now take off your clothes. I can’t figure them out.”

He hesitated a moment, but eventually complied, each black layer falling away to reveal more and more white skin, like the opening of some dark, needlessly elaborate flower. But the graceful shedding of clothing was interrupted by some clumsy hopping as he removed his boots, and a mercifully brief whiff of sweaty-boot-feet.

She was pleasantly surprised by most of what she saw. There was actually a wiry strength to him, not unlike herself. But his whole torso seemed covered in scars, even though modern medicine could usually prevent them. Most prominent was the large violet pucker where he’d been shot a year ago, and the long pink trail from her saber, slithering from one pale, well-toned shoulder, and then up across his neck and face.

And then there was the eager, rosy phallus protruding before him, as if reaching out to her, demanding to be noticed and tended to. In due time, she decided.

Rey sensed that he was rather uncomfortable by the time he was completely disrobed. She had to recall that this man had once rarely removed his mask in front of others, so being completely nude in front of another person was probably pretty far out of his comfort zone. She also recalled the hints he’d dropped suggesting insecurity about his own appearance.

But there was something bizarrely enjoyable about having the subject of her nightmares standing before her, naked and trembling with desperation for her approval. Rey had a pretty good idea of how to distract him from his insecurity. She kicked off her pants and underwear, and unceremoniously threw off her shirt and support garment with one efficient stroke.

Her plan worked splendidly. He watched her utterly transfixed, his breath hitched the moment her top came off.

_Breathe damn you!_ The thought was much more urgent now. Rey realized that the commands were coming from him, but clearly not directed at her. She was inadvertently skimming the surface of his mind. That was - something with implications she didn't feel like pondering at the moment.

Kylo then exhaled in a long, quavering sigh as his eyes roamed over her slender, tan form, taking particular care to study each petite pointed breast, and the downy mound between her thighs.

His hands slowly floated toward her, but stopped in midair. His eyes met hers in a silent question.

“Yes, it's okay,” she said. He didn't need to be told twice. Both hands met with a breast, long ivory fingers ghosting over the rounded undersides, thumbs lightly grazing the tip of each firm nipple. His touch was almost ticklishly gentle, as if these pliant lumps of flesh were something fragile, like some exotic fruit, easily bruised.
She quickly grew frustrated with that maddeningly shy caress, and pulled him onto the bed.

“You’ve done this befo...” he commented, words becoming less clear as the full span of their naked flesh converged, and his lips parted in a silent moan.

She frowned in thought briefly, and finally gave voice to her intuition. “You haven’t,” she stated, pushing him back to a sitting position against the adjacent wall.

“I’ve had more important things to focus on,” the thirty-year-old virgin explained, voice taking on a little of his habitual defensiveness.

“Oh whatever,” she said with a brief, dismissive swish of her hand, as she crawled into his lap. There were plenty of good reasons why she shouldn't have sex with Kylo Ren, but his being inexperienced wasn't even in the top ten. Plenty of good reasons that she consciously decided to ignore, in favor of riding out this strange erotic inertia that seemed to be shoving the two of them together. At the moment, consummating the attraction felt entirely inevitable, and yet not necessarily like some grand romantic destiny. Simply an event that would occur, for better or for worse.

Kylo gave another shuddering sigh as she positioned herself, the warm curls of her sex brushing against him.

“Are you sure about this?” he asked tentatively, his hands fisted in the bedclothes beneath him. It seemed unclear whether this statement was an attempt at being gentlemanly, or if he just really couldn’t believe she actually wanted to fuck him.

Rey stared into his eyes, their usual smolder seeming more like a roaring blaze. “No. I'm not,” she sighed as she lowered herself down, sheathing him in one liquid motion. He let out a low, ragged groan, hands grasping desperately at her hips, eyes lulled in the delirious flood of sensation.

And elsewhere in space and time, it was as if dozens of Reylo haters suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced.

She drew a gasp in through pursed lips. This felt different. There was that usual pleasant feeling of fullness, but it seemed very unlike any of her previous encounters - she felt herself nearing her peak already. Her ability to engage in rational thought was rapidly waning, but she couldn’t help wondering what was happening here.

Perhaps the thrill of forbidden pleasure with her enemy? No, that didn’t seem likely. The nervous-but-enthusiastic virgin beneath her couldn’t have seemed less like a villain, if he tried. And she was fairly sure it wasn’t any special quality of the cock she encompassed, either.

Rey shifted her hips, eager to start the next wave of their sexy little battle, instinctively seeking the climax just barely out of her reach. His fingers dug into her hips, forcefully holding her still. “Wait,” he panted.

She gave a slight huff of disappointment, slouching forward to let her forehead rest against his, their breath mingling. Rey took the opportunity to run her fingers through his dark mane - it really was glorious, and managed to distract her while he steadied his nerves.

“Ready?”

He answered her by releasing her hips in favor of a gentle grasp around her waist, and giving a experimental upward thrust of his own. They moaned in unison.
Their eyes met, and suddenly, she understood what was happening. She could literally feel what he was feeling, and what he was feeling was fucking amazing. This was apparently a fringe benefit to a Jedi’s superhuman empathy, and their extreme physical and emotional proximity. Or could it have been - no, she couldn't have formed a Force bond with him. Those were only between master and padawan, right? Only between Force users who were extremely close companions. Either way, it was a handy amenity, when in bed with a novice. He probably had no idea what he was doing, but he apparently didn't need to.

She saw understanding wash over his strained features as well. Suddenly, this was no insecure virgin. The realization of their physical empathic link seemed to fill him with some sort of macho confidence.

Rey felt herself pushed back off his lap, and suddenly, she was beneath him, pinned by his body, and that blazing stare. The lovemaking commenced with eyes locked, bodies rocking together in a silken, languid rhythm... And then rapidly devolving to an outright pelvic pummeling, his face tucked in against her neck, breath coming in hot puffs against her ear, pausing every now and then to steal a bruising kiss. She clutched his shoulders for dear life, letting out a small feminine grunt with each stroke of his hips.

Now this was how a villain was supposed to fuck!

Naturally, it didn’t last long. The delicious, escalating tension was rapidly approaching it's intended conclusion, the feeling raw and physical but also with an unfamiliar transcendent quality. A swell of energy.

It was as is this fleshy connection was somehow affecting their connection to the Force. As if all the power in the galaxy was caught in a gravitational pull toward interlocking naughty bits in an overwhelming tremor, building to a pulsing burst of sensation, as they both belted out a duet of shared climax. For a few seconds, it was as if the awesome power of life itself had exploded out from their unified being.

Rey and Kylo collapsed in a sweaty pile of sated exhaustion. He was laying flush on top of her, a big, heavy, bony blanket, unmoving. For a moment, she suspected that he'd fallen asleep.

And then he suddenly seemed under the impression that he was crushing her, and moved to roll off.

“Stop,” she commanded, grabbing his ass before he could slide out.

“What?” he panted, clearly confused.

Rey shifted under him, freeing a pinned arm.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Trying to avoid making a mess of your bed,” she explained, attempting to grab some of their discarded clothing, on the floor. It was just out of reach. Rey then recalled that she didn't have to reach for anything. One of the bundles obligingly flew into her hand.

“It needs to go under us,” she told him, hardly able to believe that she had to explain this. She attempted to shove the dirty clothes under them, but couldn't quite get it in there. She attempted to lift herself up to accommodate, the two of them still fully joined. For a few seconds, they seemed engaged in some sort of pornographic two-person crab-walk.

Finally, the cloth was in place, and she gave him permission to withdraw. He obediently rolled off her, and for a moment, she found herself missing her heavy, sweaty blanket. That was, until he
pulled her into a tight embrace against his side.

“I don’t suppose you have any oral contraceptives on board,” she whispered, acutely aware that the proof of their passion was slowly oozing down her thighs.

“No,” he answered, panting tapering off.

Rey suppressed a giggle at her own concern - worrying about something so ordinary while laying naked in the arms of her arch nemesis.

“That is probably the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life,” she murmured sweetly.

He looked at her, studying her face. Searching for regret, but finding none. At least, not yet. Not while still in the midst of endorphin-soaked afterglow.

“That was definitely the stupidest thing you've ever done,” he corrected her.

She glared at him.

“I've done a lot of stupid things,” he added, followed by a long pause. “Who was the pirate?”

“What?”

“The pirate,” he repeated. “You thought of him briefly, earlier.”

So, apparently he had been skimming her thoughts right back. That made sense.

“Him? No one. No one important, anyway. And that was years ago,” she replied, genuinely dismissive.

“You slept with him though,” he countered, making a valiant attempt at sounding as if he didn’t care, and failing miserably.

“Not that it’s any of your business, but yes, he and I had a brief - thing. It wasn't serious. He did ask me to leave with him, but I said no.”

“Because of the compulsion I gave you, to stay on Jakku?” He almost sounded apologetic. Almost.

“No,” she said simply. “At least, I don’t think so. That didn’t feel like the reason. It was more because I would have been utterly dependent on him. I'd have had to rely on him for everything. He would have had complete control over me. That’s not the sort of life I want. And I don't think I could ever trust anyone that completely, to be entirely at their mercy. Possibly Master Skywalker, I suppose.”

Rey felt Kylo's aura shift into resentment, and she realized that this was probably not the time to bring up his estranged former Master.

“No more talking,” Kylo stated coldly.

His gaze seemed to become as tragic and unfathomable as ever, and now, she actually felt like she was in bed with Kylo Ren. She peeled her eyes away from his in favor of resting her head against his chest.

The act itself had been rather natural and enjoyable. Hell, she even suspected that this was the sort of thing that people meant when talking about mind-blowing sex. But this... laying in bed with him, legs intertwined and her head on his chest - only now did she feel like a traitor. It wasn’t
anyone’s damn business who she slept with, but cuddling with the enemy just seemed wrong.

And yet, in that moment... But that was just the damn endorphins talking.

“Are you going to sleep in here tonight?” she asked, unsure of what answer she wanted him to give.

“It’s my bed,” he replied. A short silence, and he seemed to pick up on her unease. “No more thinking either,” he added, pulling her closer and shutting his eyes.

“Rey?” he whispered a minute or so later.

“Yes?” she said, a little nervously. She had a sinking feeling that he was about to tell her that he loved her.

He spoke softly, and without opening his eyes. “I’m still going to kill Skywalker.”

So much for instant vagina redemption.

She just shook her head and chortled, running her fingers through his dark curls. “Sure you are, Kylo. Sure you are.”

The silence in the cargo bay was deafening. If Threepio had a face, he would have had his mouth hanging open in dumb horror. Miss Rey and Young Master Ben hadn’t exactly been quiet. And Threepio knew what those sounds meant - knowledge no doubt acquired to prevent him from opening the wrong door at the wrong time.

Artoo let out a triumphant, distinctly snicker-like series of chirps.

“You shut up!”

Chapter End Notes

Please comment, I am dying to see what you guys think of this one :)

Next time: Snoke’s Order to Breed

Yup, we’re hitting most of the major tropes. Or at least the ones I like, and that fit in the story.

Credit to Old-Archetype on Tumblr for coining the term “Magical Vagina Redeeming Power TM.” Needless to say, the vagina lines in this fic are a nod to that. If y’all haven’t seen that art/comic, do look it up. It is one of my favoritest Reylo things.
Snoke's Order to Breed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 19: Snoke’s Order to Breed

The hyperdrive hums as the planet grows large in the cockpit window. Blue peeks through gaps in the swirls of cloud - mostly ocean. Definitely the right place.

Toes tapping impatiently against the floor, whole body seized with a tension that seemed to radiate out from the chest. Excitement. Nervousness. Elation.

The Knights are all sitting in the back, masks facing forward in disciplined silence.

“Leave the girl to me. If anyone engages her, I'll have their head,” they are told, for the umteenth time today.

The ship jolts - they've landed on the island. Her island.

The ramp is descending. His hand falls to pat the side of his belt, only to find that - oh fuckfuckfuck, where is his lightsaber?! Of all the times to forget it!

And then, the nonsensical but strangely unsurprising realization that he's butt-assed naked.

Looking up, the descending ramp reveals that she's standing right there, weapon at the ready. Her face is a fearsome mask of righteous vengeance as she charges forward toward her naked, all-but-defenseless foe.

Rey woke from this strange dream with a face full of tousled dark hair. There was no moment of confusion or disbelief. She was in bed with Kylo Ren.

She blinked a few times, and took in the view, the long, fair-skinned form beside her. He looked so ordinary - naked and sleeping, he could have been anyone, any random attractive man, even one who wasn’t a murderer and half-insane. He was lying on his stomach, face partially obscured by the only pillow, which he had apparently commandeered at some point during the night. Stripped of his black robes, he looked less ghoulishly pale. And there were actually no scars on his back. Of course there weren’t. He wasn’t one to run from a fight, only from the unconditional love of his family.

Bizarrely, she didn’t feel upset. As a matter of fact, her first thought was that she should be screaming, right now. She should jump out of this bed, pull at her hair, and rant about how disgusted she was with herself.

But she wasn’t.

That wasn’t to say that she was thrilled to wake up next to her arch nemesis. This felt more like a natural disaster. Like something that should have been anticipated on some level, but wasn't, and now that it was here, there was no point in making a fuss over it. Like something that was bound to happen sooner or later, and she really should have been better prepared for it.

Most of all, she wasn't upset for one simple reason: nobody would ever know, unless she told them. And she sure as hell wasn't going to.
Fortunately, he’d rolled over at some point in the night, so disentangling herself without waking him wasn’t that hard. He was a fairly heavy sleeper, and didn’t stir as she got out of bed. She looked him over again, noting that his mouth hung slightly open, and there was a small dab of drool on the pillow. There was something both amusing and slightly unnerving about seeing him like this, so utterly vulnerable. For some reason, that felt even more inappropriately intimate than knowing what his cock felt like.

Rey sat on the edge of the bed, and spent the next few minutes finger-combing the sex-tangles out of her hair. She then stepped into the ‘fresher, washed up, and glanced at herself in the mirror.

“No one ever has to know,” she told her reflection cheerfully.

She emerged out the other door. Her clothing was scattered around the entrance to the captain’s cabin, and she took her time in dressing.

She then found herself standing in the middle of the command shuttle, at a loss for what to do with herself. At a loss, until she noticed the unfinished lightsaber on the floor.

An hour passed, engrossed in her work. She never would have admitted it, but building a crossguard saber was just challenging and novel enough to be genuinely enjoyable.

Rey eventually sensed that her companion was finally awake. She watched the door to the captain’s cabin in the reflection of the panel in front of her. Kylo poked his head out the door, frantic look on his face until he laid eyes on her, standing by the workbench. She saw his expression and posture relax when he saw her.

*He was afraid that I'd be gone,* she realized.

His head was then retracted back into the bedroom, and he proceeded to shower and dress himself, taking at several times longer to complete the process than Rey had.

Kylo emerged from the ‘fresher some time later, damp hair making him look rather like a wet cat once again. He opened his mouth to speak, but she held up a hand for silence. She braced herself for a hissyfit, or at least some defensive tirade on how he could have done it all himself. Instead, he waited quietly as she finished.

“It’s got your stupid plasma vents,” she muttered, as she turned to face him, tossing the lightsaber hilt at him. He caught it, opening the blade immediately, and she felt a little flutter in her chest at the way his face lit up with an almost childlike smile of delight.

The blade itself was rather unique, a deep, blood-red glow around a core of black so dark that it seemed to suck in the surrounding light. The symbolism was all wrong - Kylo was a man with many evil deeds in his past, but there was supposedly some light deep down - his mother seemed absolutely sure, and Rey was increasingly able to believe it. But to look at his weapon, one would think that the depths of his soul were as black as they come, and irrevocably so. That's probably why Kylo was so thrilled with this new saber - it made him seem utterly committed to the Darkness, an image he seemed rather intent on projecting, especially to himself.

“I had to pull out most of your wiring, and start again,” Rey explained. “You were using the wrong sort of resistors for this color temperature, and your soldering is absolute shit.”

Kylo seemed to ignore her jibe, too rapt by his new toy. “This is a thing of beauty.”

Rey felt a warm swell of pride. “I assume you’ll want to add some enamel or grips or something, to give the hilt some more character,” she told him, trying to sound humble, but with more than a
little self-satisfaction seeping through.

He swung it around for a few more seconds, before speaking again, his tone turned somewhat more like the irritable grumble he usually had. “Is there anything you don’t excel at?”

For one mad moment, she wanted to say staying off your cock, apparently, but she shook it off. Rey turned a sunny smile on him. “Letting you boss me around.”

He snorted, lips spread in a grin.

And then they were staring at each other. There was that smolder again.

Rey silently told herself that it wasn’t relevant, now that they’d gotten the sex out of their respective systems. Even so, it was hard to pry her eyes away. She eventually broke the silence, putting out her hand. “Give it here, I still have to add the stabilizer sled, to keep the components from rattling around.”

Kylo reluctantly handed back his prize, and Rey got right to work, unscrewing the pommel and pulling out the crystal-adorned electronics. “This won’t take much more than an hour or two.” She paused. “Your saber is pretty much done. What now?”

He stalled for several seconds before answering, as if it was an ugly topic. “We’ll meet up with the Finalizer.”

“Is that where Snoke is?”

“No. He has his own ship, but it never stops moving. Even I don’t know his coordinates at any given time. But from the Finalizer, I can contact him through official channels, and find out. He’ll want to see you in person, and that’s when we strike.”

Rey arched a brow, pondering how odd it was that Kylo didn’t seem able to contact Snoke directly from his shuttle, or even telepathically. She got the feeling that this wasn’t because Kylo couldn’t do it, but rather because he didn’t want to be at Snoke’s beck-and-call. This in turn made her wonder how long he’d been planning this betrayal.

A few hours passed, and they landed on the Finalizer without incident.

“It should be graveyard hours, so personnel will be minimal,” he explained. “If we pass anyone in the hall, don’t say anything. If anyone asks you a question, I’ll answer for you.”

Rey glared at him.

“You played slave once before, to help me out,” he reminded her, pulling up his cowl. “Now do it for your own safety.”

“Fine,” she answered reluctantly, as the craft set down in the hangar.

“We’re going directly to the audience chamber,” Kylo announced, striding down the ramp, pulling his cowl closer about his face.

“Snoke won’t be able to read my mind via holo, will he?”

“He can, and he will. Don’t fight him.”

“You don’t get to tell me what to do with my own brain!”

Kylo threw his hands up in frustration. “You still don’t trust me!” he accused, hostile tone just
“Of course I don’t,” Rey stated matter-of-factly. She tensed, half-expecting this to turn into a conversation about the state of their relationship.

“Hear me out then!” Kylo demanded. “I’m going to let you in on a pretty big secret, about mind-probes,” he paused drawing in a breath for what turned out to be a long mansplainaiton. “A sentient brain is packed with vast amounts of information. To read through it line by line would probably take months - something that neither I nor Snoke have the time or patience for. I’m only able to get what I need out of someone’s brain in a timely manner, because even untrained fools will instinctively attempt to hide it. What they don’t know is that by trying to hide the information, they may as well be holding up a neon sign saying here’s my secret! That tells me where to look, massively streamlining the process. From there, it’s only a matter of breaking through their defenses, which are virtually always pitiful. Present company excluded.” He paused, shooting her a brief cheeky grin. “Even if you are able to shut Snoke out of that part of your mind, the mere fact that you are doing so will tell him you have an important secret. And given the context, it wouldn’t take a genius to surmise that the secret is a plan to assassinate him. Do you understand?”

Rey gave a brief huff.

“So if you go in there, mind open and calm, he will probably have a look around, find nothing of interest, and leave,” Kylo continued. “The odds of him stumbling on our plan are astronomical if you just let him do his thing. Please promise you won’t fight him.”

Rey felt a little chill, not caring for Kylo’s wording one bit. “I wont promise! And do you have any idea of the metaphorical implications of what you’re asking me to do? To just be passive and unresisting while some evil guy does his thing?!”

“This is important!” Kylo shouted. But he wasn’t angry. Everything about him, face, voice and vibes all suggested fear, and she was fairly sure she’d never heard him speak so earnestly - except perhaps when he’d delivered his offer at the edge of that crumbling cliff. “Look, this is about more than just keeping secrets. If you push back, you’ll end up in his head, and you do NOT want that.”

Rey crossed her arms and glared.

“Rey please,” he was pleading with her now, fear still evident.

“What are you so afraid might happen?”

His vibes bristled at her use of the word afraid, but he continued to speak entreatingly. “If you only ever trust me about one thing, trust me about this.”

She sighed deeply, and nodded. Whatever it was that he was afraid of, it was so scary that he didn’t want to talk about it. And anything that frightened Kylo Ren that badly was probably something she should avoid. She briefly wondered if this might be relevant to the mystery of Kylo’s fall from grace. Could it be that all it took was one glimpse of Snoke’s mind, and he instantly became a violent nutjob? No, that probably wasn’t it. She strongly suspected that Kylo’s instability had been a long time in the making.

“And if you feel yourself starting to panic, just think about sex,” he added.

“What?!”

“Snoke finds the idea of physical intimacy repulsive. If you start thinking explicitly sexual thoughts, he’ll be disgusted, and will more than likely rush his exit.”
“Is this a strategy you’ve used often?”

“It works,” Kylo stated.

Rey snorted. “He must think you’re a complete and total pervert, by now.”

By then, they’d reached a large door, which opened automatically at Kylo’s approach.

“Remember, just stay calm and passive. This is extremely important.”

Rey nodded, taking the opportunity to do a bit of deep breathing. She also reflected on the irony of Kylo Ren, the man that could be accurately, if somewhat simplistically described as a walking black bundle of flustered aggression, had just ordered her to be calm and passive.

They stepped into the audience chamber.

Kylo walked forward onto a large platform, activating some lights in the floor. Nothing happened at first.

“Just wait,” Kylo advised, without looking back at her.

Rey supposed that Snoke might be busy. For a few moments, she entertained the mental image of some shadowy, evil-looking figure, hastily stumbling out of a ‘fresher, clutching a towel to their nakedness, and then diving toward a comm console.

A few minutes of awkward silence, and finally, an oversized hologram appeared at the other end of the room. It depicted what was either a deformed human or some humanoid alien species Rey could not identify.

“You have completed your quest?” the hologram asked in a stern, booming basso.

“Yes.” Kylo motioned for Rey to join him on the platform. She complied, staring forward at the hologram, trying to look fearless.

“So this is your scavenger,” Snoke said, tone suddenly lighter, sounding not unlike a kindly old man, delighted to finally meet a relative’s much-talked-of significant other.

Rey was slightly nettled by the implication of ownership. As usual, Kylo sensed her attitude. He reached over and placed one large hand on her back. For a second, she was further annoyed by this apparently possessive gesture, but he then began to lightly stroke the area between her shoulders. She realized that he was trying to soothe her, no doubt to keep her mouth shut. And damn it, it actually sort of worked.

“Come forward, child.”

Rey stepped forward, still discretely taking deep calming breaths. She wasn’t sure how she knew when Snoke entered her mind. There was no strange headache, no feeling of ethereal tendrils slithering through her thoughts, as there had been when Kylo did it. No sensation at all, actually. Only the instinctive notion that there was another presence between her ears. Counterintuitively, that made it ten times more terrifying, to know he was in there and she couldn’t even feel it. She almost wished that Snoke would start narrating what he saw, as Kylo had - at least then she would know where he was, and what he saw.

_Deep breaths. Calm. Calm._
“She has no loyalty for our cause, as of yet. But that is to be expected,” Snoke ruled. Another long, nervous silence before he spoke again. “She has great compassion for you, Kylo. This is a weakness, but one you can use to your advantage.”

Rey narrowed her eyes, rather annoyed at the way Snoke seemed to be talking as if she wasn’t standing right there, or as if she were too stupid to understand.

Another moment. “But she is not in love with you. I am sorry.” Snoke said it with rather decently feigned sympathy, as if he’d been rooting for his protege and was genuinely saddened to hear of this apparent rejection.

Rey tensed, briefly losing her calm. She was livid at what Snoke had said. How dare he! True, she didn’t fancy herself in love with Kylo Ren, but that was none of Snoke’s damn business! And she could feel a sinking burst of dejection - probably just hurt pride - emanating from Kylo. Rey felt a strange, territorial irritation that someone else had taken him down a peg. Bruising Kylo’s ego was her job and no one else’s!

But she quickly realized that she had to calm down. Deep breaths. Calm. Calm. It was no use - the notion that Snoke had access to deeply private feelings such as whom she did and did not love, was too unnerving.

She recalled what Kylo had told her, about how impure thoughts might drive Snoke out. Rey found the idea of Snoke knowing anything about her sex life rather distasteful, but at the moment, it seemed vastly preferable to having him continue to poke around amidst her soul’s deepest secrets. Besides, if Kylo had been using this strategy as much as he’d implied, she suspected that Snoke had probably seen her, or some idealized imaginary version of her, spread her legs plenty of times already.

Rey briefly closed her eyes, thinking of the previous night, of Kylo’s body bearing down on her, of his savage, desperate kisses as their mutual pleasure mounted, of that fascinating, almost sob-like sound he made when he...

“You have bedded her!” Snoke announced, his tone sounding surprised and intrigued. “Well done,” he added, as if commending a little brother for finally getting laid.

There wasn't much in the way of disgust in the deformed hologram’s voice or expression, though there was a brief twitched sneer. Suddenly, Rey began to doubt Kylo’s advice. Could he have been making that up? Could having her think about sex have been his underhanded way of boasting his conquest to his superior?

“You must beget offspring as soon and as often as possible,” Snoke declared. “The issue of not one but two powerful Force users is something the galaxy has not seen in generations. The existence of such issue could change the galactic balance of power.”

Rey rather wanted to tell Snoke to go beget himself. She half-expected Kylo to say as much, but what he did say was a good deal more disconcerting.

“The line will be strong,” Kylo stated grandly.

Suddenly, the quest for contraceptives seemed a good deal more urgent.

Snoke’s attention seemed to fall back on Rey, and she again had that vague, numb feeling of his presence in her mind. She immediately jumped back onto the naughty-thought’s strategy, without regard to whether Kylo had been lying about it. She began to ponder events that had not yet occurred, and yet, for some reason, she could envision no other partner than the one standing
stiffly beside her. At first, she thought of being bent over the front console of the command shuttle, and being fucked mercilessly, the air filling with lurid moans.

But her mind then seemed to wander to other things, to that generous mouth pressing to her breast, tongue swirling around a nipple, while long white fingers worked between her slick folds until she was about to scream. Of him gently laying her down in a proper bed, whispering sweet, rather un-villainous words as he finally slid inside her...

And strangely enough, the hologram’s face actually did wrinkle in revulsion, the deformed head inching back, as if Snoke wanted to put as much distance between himself and the scavenger’s vile imaginings. Rey felt the unnerving presence evaporate almost instantly, like water on sunbaked sand.

The oversized hologram seemed to regain its dignity quickly. “You will bring her before me in two days time. Coordinates will be transmitted. In the meantime, I suggest you speak to General Hux. He has been whining about needing your expertise on tactical minutiae.”

The hologram flickered to nothing.

“Two days?” Rey echoed.

“Yeah,” Kylo answered thoughtfully. “The waiting period could be a sign of trouble, but it’s not like we have a choice. We’ll just have to stay on the Finalizer until he transmits coordinates.”

Threepio was still scandalized, and it seemed that being proven wrong had neither quelled his interest in the subject, nor his interest in bitching about it.

“Stop the galaxy, I want to get off!” he exclaimed to his silently gloating companion. “I would have never believed it if I hadn’t heard the sounds indicative of sexual congress myself! What a shocking turn of events!”

Artoo responded with a rather smug series of chirps.

“You made a lucky guess, nothing more!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Reluctantly Stashed in His Quarters
Thanks again to everyone who took the time to review! Each one genuinely brightens up my day!
Chapter 20: Reluctantly Stashed in His Quarters

Kylo promptly strode back out of the audience chamber, and Rey rushed to follow as he continued through the halls.

"What about the droids?"

"They can stay on my shuttle," he replied, in a *why-should-I-care* sort of tone.

"But your, um, people will have access to it, won't they?" Rey found that notion rather worrisome. Both droids were probably loaded with sensitive information. She didn't mind Kylo being near them - not because she trusted him, but because his preferred method of extracting information wouldn't work on a droid. But she had no doubt that there were technicians aboard the Finalizer that could easily pull data from Threepio and Artoo.

He shrugged. "We'll lock them in the hold. They'd need a plasma torch to cut through those doors, and trust me, the techs wouldn't dare to screw up *my* ship without my express permission."

They walked back to the hangar, and reboarded the command shuttle to do just that.

She briefly opened the hold to address the two droids. "We're leaving you in here for now. Please keep quiet."

"Miss Rey, before you go!" Threepio began. "I must caution you against further intimacy -"

Rey shut the hold door in the protocol droid's face before he could finish whatever he was jabbering on about. She still felt a little uneasy about leaving the droids alone on the ship, so she decided to add another layer of security.

"What are you doing?" Kylo asked, noticing that she was doing more than just locking the hold door.

She didn't answer him until she'd finished. "I just engaged the anti-tampering alarm, and changed the passcode."

"To what?!" he demanded.

"None of your business, that's what!"

Kylo glared fiercely at her. "It's *my* ship!"

"And what's to stop you from giving your techs your express permission to mess with the droids, other than what I just did?"

He opened his mouth for a retort, but only let out a groan, throwing up his hands as he began to stride off the ship, and out of the hangar.

"That's what I thought," Rey muttered, following closely. She still didn't put it past Kylo to go behind her back, if he thought he wouldn't get caught. But with that alarm engaged, then at least...
she'd know if the droids had been tampered with, which she suspected he wouldn't do in first place if he thought she'd find out about it. He may not have had much of a moral compass, but he did obviously care about her opinion of him.

They walked a good quarter kilometer before Kylo finally stopped beside a particular door, tapped in a code, and walked inside. She followed him in after only a brief moment of hesitation

So this was where the monster slept. The room was fairly compact, and decorated with nothing but sleek, nondescript furniture. The only truly unusual luxury the room featured was a decent-sized window, allowing for a great view of... utter blackness. Rey also suspected that it was a two-room suite judging by the layout, but the bed seemed to be in the main living room, for some reason. The door to what was supposed to be the bedroom was shut, and she could feel waves of cold air wafting from it.

Kylo noticed her looking at the door. "That's private."

Rey stared at the door curiously for a few more seconds, and by the time she looked away, Kylo was standing beside the bed, belt already on the floor, and shrugging out of his various layers.

"Are you going to bed already?" she asked, confused. It was barely late afternoon, by the daily rhythm they'd been living by.

"It's the middle of the night here. May as well get used to the schedule," he said. Now stripped down to an under-tunic and trousers, he sat on the bed and began to fuss with his boots.

Rey realized that he meant for her to join him. To sleep in his bed.

The idea in of itself was not offensive. It would have been a little silly to be shy about it, considering the events of the previous evening.

What really bothered her was the presumption. He had automatically assumed that she'd be fine with it. She would have been much less irritated if he'd actually said something about it, some brief statement that there was nowhere else to put her, or even that he wanted her company. But instead, he seemed to be under the impression that them sharing a bed from now on was so obvious as to pass completely without explanation or comment.

Rey sensed that some clarification on the state of affairs between them was needed. The sentence came out a little more brutally than she meant it to.

"Kylo, I'm not your girlfriend."

She saw his fingers freeze against his boots, and he averted his face, as if turning away from a cold breeze.

"I never said you were," he grunted, pulling off a boot.

"Good. Because I'm not," she added unnecessarily.

His face was still turned away, but she could see his mouth open, as if he wanted to say something. She could feel how badly he wanted to articulate whatever was on the tip of his tongue. For the first time since the previous evening, she got that sense that he was hiding something.

He hadn't actually said anything, so why was it that she felt her pulse racing, and psychological hackles up, as if they'd just had an argument?
She just stood there absentmindedly gazing at him, until she realized that she was watching him undress. She could think of nothing else to do but undress herself. She was able to slip out of her vest and pants fairly quickly, so they ended up getting into bed at the same time.

It was a fairly large bed, and there was a good half-meter between them. Kylo reached a hand toward the door, and the main light switched off.

They lay side-by-side and still, like two wooden dolls. Somehow, it reminded her of some sort of showdown, two adversaries, each waiting for the other to make a move, but both completely ready for battle to begin. But a few minutes passed, and nothing happened.

"Sleep," he ordered, rolling over and making a show of ignoring her.

Rey rolled over in the opposite direction, as if to say you're not ignoring me, I'm ignoring you.

"I'm glad you're not in love with me," he began abruptly, still facing away. "Because that would mean that you loved the person I could be, not the person I am. Just like everyone else."

Damn it, what was she supposed to say to that? In that respect, she found his little moments of emotional vulnerability just as annoying as they were poignant. She never knew what to say. Or... was it just a plea for pity sex?

Well, if that's what he wanted, then he could forget it. At least pending an attitude adjustment and the acquisition of some contraceptives.

And that was the rather unsatisfactory ending to the evening.

Rey woke, mind fully occupied by the dream she'd had. This time, not of Kylo being embarrassed about something, but that same dream from a few weeks ago. The two children playing in a field of tall, golden grass.

She found her companion already dressed, sitting on the edge of the bed, pulling on his boots.

"Where are you going?"

"I do actually work here, you know," he replied sarcastically.

"And what am I supposed to do while you're gone?"

"Not setting any explosives would be a good start," he suggested. "Do you know the technique for lifting very large objects?"

"Um, yes," she answered, somewhat bewildered by the abrupt change in subject. "You manipulate the air around the object, not the matter itself."

"Very good. I want you to practice that while I'm gone. You can use the sofa or something."

"Why?"

Kylo looked at her, brows furrowed, as if she'd said something completely nonsensical. "Because I said so."

"Don't you talk to me like I'm one some underling who has to obey without question!" Rey sat up in bed. "I may do what you ask, but only if you explain why."

He groaned, glancing at the chrono by the door. "I don't have time for this, but..." He leaned in,
lowering his voice. Rey braced herself for another mansplaining. "Listen very carefully. Snoke himself is a broken-down old man, and his powers are weak in every way except perception. Killing him won't be difficult, but getting through the Bogan Guard will."

"The what - guard?"

"Snoke collects Force-sensitive corpses. That's why you haven't seen any of my knights - they're all out hunting. They bring the bodies back to Snoke. The bodies then go into his lab on a stretcher, and a few weeks later, they walk back out on their own two feet."

"He brings them back to life?"

"Nothing so benign. They aren't alive. They're less than dead. If alive was one, and dead was zero, the Bogan Guard would be a negative ten. You'll know them as soon as you see them. You'll feel them. They're like a hole in the Force. And they are absolutely mindlessly loyal to Snoke."

"Have you ever fought them?"

"I've - faced them before, but never really fought one," he answered, a little evasively. "He keeps several of them around him at all times, specifically to protect him from Force users."

Rey snorted. "There's only one real Jedi left in the galaxy. Is Snoke really that scared of Master -"

"No," he cut her off. "He's that scared of me."

"Why is he scared of you? I thought you'd kept your plan a secret."

Kylo chuckled. "You really don't know much about the Sith, do you?"

"I thought you weren't a Sith."

"I practice the techniques of the Sith, but I'm not particularly observant of the religion or customs. I'm not a Sith, but Snoke is. They have - almost a tradition of apprentices killing their masters. The Sith think of it as virtually inevitable. Theoretically, a master should be proud to have trained an apprentice strong enough to surpass and destroy him. But I have a pretty strong feeling that Snoke doesn't think of it that way. And besides, he has been killed by his own apprentice before."

"So these guards of his - it sounds like they're pretty much just droids made of rotting-meat. That doesn't sound so bad."

"Let me finish," Kylo barked. "They have two abilities that you'll have to watch out for. First, if you let them touch you, your ability to manipulate the living Force will disappear entirely, leaving you just as vulnerable as any random jerk on the street, until contact is broken. It cancels out everything - telekinesis, telepathy, mind-based attacks - everything. But that's not the worst of it."

"Despair?"

"If you get within a few meters of them, they can project it at you. It clouds your mind with - it's beyond sadness - it will make you feel absolutely certain that there's no point in fighting, that nothing matters, that no one has ever or will ever care about you," he paused locking his gaze on hers in one of his signature intense stares. "That's why I need you. You've spent most of your life fighting against feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness and loneliness. You've fought them every day, and you won every single time."
Rey felt those words hit her like a punch in the chest. She'd never thought about her life in such depressing terms, but she couldn't deny their truth. She'd been abandoned by her family, treated like dirt by everyone, and constantly worked herself to the point of exhaustion just to stave off starvation for another day. Even with her Kylo-induced delusions about her family’s return, deep down she knew that all she had to look forward to in life was to become one of the weatherbeaten croans who scrubbed each day's haul.

But as Kylo had said, somehow, she kept going. It wasn't that she never felt unhappy or discouraged, it was just that she could snap herself out of it relatively quickly, before it could consume her. The way she saw it, this wasn't a talent, but a survival mechanism - she didn't have spare time or energy to waste on sadness. She was quite good at focusing on the tasks at hand instead of dwelling on her feelings. She'd just reason her way out of it, or get her mind off it by working at a skill. Solve problems instead of brooding over them. Speak to herself positively instead of tearing herself down. Over the years, she supposed that she'd gotten pretty good at it. She didn't even recall feeling that sad, most of the time, and it had never before occurred to her that this was at all remarkable.

Kylo stepped forward, his hand lightly tracing the path of a tear she didn't know had fallen, still staring intensely. "You have so much experience successfully battling sadness that you may be able to overcome the despair, and fight them more effectively than I can."

"Why do you think you can't?" she asked, her voice cracking almost imperceptibly. "My feelings tell me that - you've known quite a bit of sadness in your life, too."

They'd been maintaining eye-contact this whole time, but something passed between them then, that was a little too intense for either. As if they'd had both only just consciously realized that they were a pair of lonely souls, struggling under the weight of some grand destiny they'd never asked for. Their gaze broke apart, and he removed his hand.

"That doesn't mean I'm any good at dealing with it," Kylo resumed, regaining his usual stuck-up grouchiness. "By now, I think you know that emotional regulation is not my strong suit."

"That may be a bit of an understatement," she commented, still considering what he'd said. He made it sound almost as if the ability to effectively cope with adversity was some sort of mystical superpower. Perhaps from his perspective, it was. And that was an interesting sentiment coming from a man who literally did have mystical superpowers.

He cracked a smile. "Look, I really need to go."

"Where are you going?" She wasn't quite sure why she wanted to know, but she did.

"I told you. I have work to do," he said, continuing to prepare for his day. Rey didn't take any particular notice when he picked up a medium-sized black bag, tucking it under his arm.

"Off to kidnap some other girl?" she inquired, only half-joking.

Kylo smiled at her, his tone a mixture of defensive and patronizing. "No need to get jealous. You can think of me as an old-fashioned, one-victim sort of kidnapper."

Rey scowled at him. "I am no one's victim! Least of all, yours!"

He just stood there, staring and grinning at her evilly for several seconds.

She rolled her eyes. "You are a real creep, you know that?" she commented as he turned to leave.
Kylo paused just before the doorway, looking back over his shoulder, still grinning. His tone was arrogant and wistful both at once. "Only for you, sweetheart."

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Hux is Kind of a Dick

I know some of you were hoping for smut. But fear not, there shall be more sexy times eventually.

And as always, your comments/reviews mean a lot to me :)

Fun fact: very early drafts of The Star Wars script describe an early version of the Dark Side as the Bogan [Force], and it apparently worked by making people lose the will to fight. And I am a huge dork.
Chapter 21: Hux is Kind of a Dick

But the front door of Kylo's quarters opened to reveal a man, apparently standing just outside. Some clean-cut, most likely high-level officer with red hair. It was difficult to tell whether he'd just stomped up to the door, or had been standing there waiting.

"Ren!? Where the devil have you been?!"

Kylo glared up at the ceiling, as if imploring the Force itself to give him patience, stepping to the side, as if he hoped to hide Rey's presence.

"Five weeks without a single plan vetted! Five weeks -" the officer stopped mid-rant, noticing Rey. "I assume this is the slip of a garbage picker you've been obsessing over?" he said, tone sounding just as unimpressed as his words.

By this point, Rey was rather done with condescending men who spoke about her as if she wasn't standing right there. "Slip of a garbage picker who beat your best warrior," she announced fearlessly. She sensed a brief burst of pride from Kylo, either at her audacity, or her acknowledgment of him as the Order's best.

"She's got spunk," the officer commented, sounding bored. "Shouldn't she be in a cell?"

"She is my apprentice," Kylo declared. "And she's here with the express permission of Supreme Leader."

"I can't say I'm that surprised," the red-headed officer stated, shaking his head. "You spend the better part of a year hunting down the untrained waif who humiliated, disfigured and left you to bleed out on an imploding planet. And then you decide to take her on as your protégé. How characteristically whimsical." he paused, shooting Kylo a skeptical look. "You actually seduced her to the Dark Side?"

"And other things," Kylo replied, clearly trying to sound ominous, but mainly just sounding proud of himself.

The officer arched a brow, even as he gave his condescending response. "Too much information, Ren. I think you're confusing me with someone who gives a whit about where you stick it. Frankly I couldn't care less, as long as you do your duty - which you have have been shirking for several weeks."

"Convenient that your opinion matters so little to me," Kylo snapped. "And that my objectives have priority over yours."

"I wonder if that policy will remain in place after I report on the vast amount of time and resources you've devoted to chasing a girl."

"And I wonder how many dozens of better-qualified officers are standing in line for your job. Either way, I think they outnumber my potential replacements by quite a bit."

Rey knew a macho pissing match when she saw it. This needlessly confrontational discussion
wasn't really about policy, but about who was the bigger man. She decided that these two idiots should just get a ruler, drop their pants and have done with it.

This idea in turn let to some surprisingly engrossing notions about what else those two idiots could do with their pants off. But no sooner had those thoughts crossed her mind, when Kylo whirled around, shooting her a horrified glare, eyes narrowed, and shaking his head chidingly.

The officer apparently tired of the argument. "If she causes any trouble, any trouble whatsoever, I am holding you personally responsible," he stated as he turned on his heel and walked away.

Kylo took the liberty of making an insulting gesture at the officer's back.

"Did you really have to tell him?" Rey demanded, once the man was out of earshot.

Her companion turned to face her. "Look, first of all, you're literally in my bed. And next, thanks to your little outburst, he knows that I haven't tortured you into complete submission. And if I told him that I brought you to the Dark Side using my immense interpersonal charm, he wouldn't believe me. But knowing - what I implied, he'll just assume that you've converted because you're infatuated with me. At least that's remotely believable, since that sentiment has a well-known tendency to be completely irrational."

Rey conceded the point with a quiet huff.

"Alright, I seriously should go. There are meal bars in the front cabinet." He turned back to the door. "Don't do anything stupid." He stepped out, but before the door could close, he stuck his head back in. "Or clever."

The door shut behind him, leaving Rey alone in the room. After a few moments, she decided she may as well get up and go about her morning routine.

She stepped into the 'fresher - a utilitarian, polished steel affair clearly designed for easy cleaning rather than aesthetics. At least it had separate toilet and shower stations.

As she prepared to bathe, she reflected on what Kylo had said. In particular, she was focused on him all but telling her, to her face, that he was just using her for her specific ability.

Rey glanced up at the mirror. "What's wrong?" she asked her reflection, affectedly playful. "Did you actually think that he brought you here because he likes you? Because you're pretty? You know perfectly well that he didn't."

She had no idea why that notion bothered her at all. Why should she be disappointed when she knew that he'd thought of her only as a tool, from the beginning? The only thing that had changed was that now he probably thought of her as an easy tool, useful for one other thing in addition to helping him get his hands on greater power.

She bathed and dressed. At that point there wasn't much else to do but practice with the sofa, as he'd said. She was a good fifteen minutes into said practice by the time she realized that he'd never really explained exactly why he wanted her to do this, and she'd never asked for clarification. Either way, it was practice with the sofa, or stare at the wall.

The day passed slowly, but by the end of it, she felt that she had gained a lot more control when it came to picking up and maneuvering large objects.

Eventually, Rey sensed a familiar presence approaching. She felt a little flutter of excitement as she set the couch down gently and precisely where she'd found it. But her excitement promptly died when he walked in the door and she got a good look at him - and the familiar filigree-adorned
black mask that she'd assumed she'd seen the last of.

Rey gave a little grunt of disgust and distress. "Ugh, I thought you lost that ghastly thing!"

"I commissioned a new one."

She shuddered at that grating metallic basso.

"Well, take it off when you're in here, will you?!

"These are my quarters. I can do as I like!" the mask growled.

Rey's aversion was so great that she felt zero hesitation or remorse in telling Kylo how to dress in his own home. "I flatly refuse to be in the same room with you while you wear that thing." Rey declared vehemently. "I'm perfectly happy to sleep on the shuttle."

The hideous mask emitted a low growl as it was yanked off, and then pitched through a nearby glass accent table. A pair of small cleaning droids emerged and immediately began vacuuming up the mess.

Rey stared at him, arms crossed, entirely unmoved by the mini-hissyfit. "Are you quite finished?"

"Yes," he grumbled.

"Good. And thank you for that little reminder of who you really are."

The conflict was abruptly diffused when an unfamiliar protocol droid came shuffling in with a tray of food. "Supper is served, Milord," it said primly, laying it's bounty on a large onyx table in the corner.

Kylo shrugged. "Shall we?" he grunted, still sounding annoyed. Rey answered only by plopping herself in a dining chair. Kylo approached, and Rey immediately realized that there was only one chair at the table. She stood, feeling a little awkward for taking his seat.

"Don't get up," he barked. Kylo left the table for a moment, returned with a non matching, but serviceable chair, and took a seat.

Rey was rather distracted by the mouthwatering aroma coming from the tray. Without further ado, she reached for what she assumed was her plate, and eagerly began to eat. It tasted even better than it smelled - apparently First Order big shots ate pretty damn well. She could help letting out a little hum of pleasure at the nuanced taste. Before she knew it, her plate was clean - really and truly clean, every last morsel licked off with gusto. She looked up to find her companion smirking at her, and barely halfway through his own dinner.

With no food to distract her, the silence at the dinner table began to seem a little awkward. That was when Rey asked what felt like was both the most mundane and the most bizarre thing that had ever come out of her mouth. "So, how was work?"

"Borning," he replied. "I was in tactical meetings all day."

Rey considered that. It struck her as a little odd that so many people seemed to want his opinion on military strategy. In her admittedly limited experience with him, he seemed rather prone to rash and foolish decisions on the battlefield.

As usual, he seemed to sense her opinion, and instantly became combative. "I don't always make stupid tactical decisions. Only when you're around. I am pretty good at this stuff, you know. They
wouldn't put up with me if I wasn't." He paused. "That's the biggest weakness of fanatical regimes like this - they feed off each other's overconfidence until no one has the sense to speak up when they've bitten off more than they can chew. It's my job to rein them in when I foresee failure."

"So, you're a sort of military tactical psychic, is that it?"

"Sort of. You don't always need the Force to see the future. More often than not, all it takes is some damn common sense."

Rey suppressed a smile. It sounded so much like something General Organa would say.

The rest of the meal passed in silence. Rey waited until he'd finished eating to bring up the subject she'd been considering on-and-off for most of the day.

"Could you teach me how to do a Force faint?"

His smile was just as broad and triumphant as if she'd asked for a lesson on Force lightning.

"It's not really a Dark power, is it?" she asked, a little defensively. "I'd imagine that it's useful for non-lethal takedowns."

Kylo rubbed black-gloved hands together eagerly. "We'll need someone to practice on."

Rey hadn't thought of that. "Oh, well - maybe not then. I don't want to mess with some poor, random stormtrooper."

His smile turned most decidedly evil. "What if it wasn't a stormtrooper?"

A quick holo-call was made, and after a few minutes of Kylo mansplaining the basics of the technique to Rey, the redhead General, apparently named Hux, came stomping in. "What? This had better be impor-?"

Kylo gave a casual flick of the wrist, and Hux froze in place.

"Aren't you going to get in trouble for this?" Rey asked uneasily.

Kylo snorted. "No. I'll just pluck out the memory while he's down. No problem." He beckoned to her, still grinning wickedly.

"Shouldn't we put him on the sofa, so he doesn't hit his head?"

"Whatever," her companion stated indifferently. A quick Force push, and Hux was sitting awkwardly on the couch.

Rey stepped up to the paralyzed ginger, reaching toward his face.

"Visualize it, the components of his brain," Kylo instructed. "Go on past the mind, the thoughts and feelings are irrelevant. You have to get to the core."

Rey did so - this was rather interesting, she could almost see visual representations of different areas of the mind - emotions, memories, cognitive faculties.

"Now, reach for the area that gives off the strongest Force aura. On a simpleton like Hux, that should be the center for basic biological functions. Do you see it?"

"Yes," she murmured.
"Give it just the lightest little pinch."

Rey frowned. "What happens if I do it too hard?"

"He'll die," Kylo explained, sounding entirely unconcerned.

Rey gave an uneasy hum. "Maybe I shouldn't..."

"He pulled the trigger on the Hosnian System, Rey. That should be enough moral justification, even for you."

She took a deep breath, and lightly pinched at the visualized structure. Sure enough, Hux's eyes rolled back and he collapsed into a red-crested heap on the couch.

Kylo gave her an appreciative pat on the head. "Nicely done. Keep practicing, and eventually it becomes fairly automatic." He then proceeded to place his hand on Hux's forehead. "There. He won't remember a thing."

Rey studied her tutor for a moment. "You can kill that easily? Why not just always do it that way?"

"It's not very sportsman-like, now is it?" he replied.

"You're sick," Rey said flatly.

"No, I'm just utterly despicable. Haven't we already been over this?"

"Whaaaaa?" Hux mumbled, sitting up.

"General!" Kylo snapped irritably. "You weren't paying attention to a word just I said, were you?!"

Hux just blinked several times.

"Grown man, spacing out," Kylo grumbled rather convincingly. "We can discuss the matter when you're less distracted!"

The ginger General stood, and left the room wordlessly, looking authentically embarrassed by his own apparent distractedness.

Rey turned to Kylo. "How often do you mess with that man's head?"

Kylo grinned, just a touch of Solo-swagger creeping into his manner. "Not nearly as often as you'd think, considering how entertaining it is."

Chapter End Notes

Kylo: I don't always make stupid tactical decisions, but when I do, there's a hot scavenger girl involved.
Next time: Compatible Kinks

So yes, there will be smut. But don’t get too excited, my stuff tends to be pretty vanilla.

And a huge thank you to everyone who has taken the time to comment! You keep my fingers typing!
Chapter 22: Compatible Kinks

"Kylo, there's something I need you to do for me." She hesitated, barely able to believe that she was asking him this particular favor. "I need you to find some oral contraceptives."

He made no answer, and she sensed a wave of awkward discomfort in him. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"You heard Snoke, he wants us to breed. It will look pretty damn suspicious if I march up to the pharmacy window, and ask for contraceptives."

"Kylo! This is important!" Rey groaned.

"So is us both living long enough to face Snoke!"

"Well then," Rey began, tone softened to a seductive murmur, "I can think of a way to persuade you."

His lips spread into a mischievous grin. "Like what?"

"Like this!" and with that, she shut her eyes tight, and began pointedly thinking of the nastiest, ball-slappingest sex she could... featuring Kylo and that ginger General. Kylo wouldn't literally see it, but he would definitely sense what she was thinking about.

"Stop that," Kylo commanded through gritted teeth.

"You're almost as bad as Snoke," she declared smugly. "Except you can't tune it out, can you?"

"Stop that, dammit!"

"Get me some contraceptives!

"I told you, I can't! Now knock it off!"

"Get me some contraceptives!"

"I CAN'T! Fuck!" He seemed to will himself to something remotely resembling composure. "You really have a knack for torture. Maybe I can turn you after all."

Shit. He had a point. Tormenting someone with imaginary sex acts between them and someone they hated - this was not the Jedi way.

She sighed. "Well, if it's not possible, then next time, you'll just have to at least -"

"Next time?" he cut her off eagerly, curiosity aroused, possibly in more ways than one. Her thoughts about Hux might have irritated him, but he certainly snapped out of it, remarkably quickly.

But there was also sincere surprise in his tone. Rey realized that Kylo must have assumed their
previous sexual encounter was a one-time-only lapse in judgement. She wasn't quite ready to acknowledge that she’d told herself the same thing. But at the moment, the notion that she would never go to bed with this man again was looking more and more unlikely. And... undesirable.

She felt her face flush.

"Next time?" Kylo repeated, stalking toward her, generous mouth spread in a smirk.

And there was that swagger, the one he'd only ever really shown when intoxicated, and even then still fairly awkward. But this time, he actually projected a surprisingly unalloyed sense of cocksure charm. And that, combined with the air of power and threat that anyone with sense felt in his presence... Was absolutely panty-melting. She felt her skin erupt into goosebumps, and she unconsciously ran her tongue across her lips.

"Maybe!" Rey sputtered, uncharacteristically embarrassed by her own sexuality. "If I feel like it. And you're nice to me."

Somehow, they were now standing toe-to-toe. One of his hands raised, fingertips meeting her chin. The distance between their faces slowly began to close.

Suddenly, a loud chime sounded. Kylo stepped back. "What?!" he shouted at the comm console, not bothering to hide his irritation.

"You're needed on the bridge, sir," the console informed him.

"Can it wait?" Kylo enquired, gaze slithering down his companion's body, and back up to settle on her mouth. She briefly wondered if he was aware of how the trajectory of his eyes made his intentions so ridiculously obvious. Probably not. Or could that be the point of the mask? Maybe he wore it so he could ogle women undetected.

There was a long hesitation before the console answered, as if the officer on the line had never heard such a nonsensical response in his life.

"I don't believe so, sir," the console answered, at length.

Kylo grunted in frustration as he turned, and strode toward the door. "I'll be right back," he grumbled, wagging his finger at her as he exited.

Rey was left, standing in the middle of the room, on her own. And she quickly got to thinking... she needed contraceptives. And she had a fairly strong inkling that she needed them before he got back.

Well, if he wasn't going to help her acquire some, then she’d just have to do it herself. Rey approached the door control panel. She was about to crack it open to hotwire it, but on a whim, she decided to see if it was unlocked. It seemed unlikely, but it was worth a shot.

To her amazement, it was indeed unlocked. The door slid open, revealing a long, immaculately clean corridor.

Rey began to walk down the hall. She knew that contraceptives would likely be kept in the infirmary, and she knew where the infirmary tended to be on an older star destroyer. She decided that was a good place to start.

However, her progress was very slow, due to constantly having to duck into corners to hide from passersby. She began to form her plan as she crept along. She would wait until the pharmacist was alone, and use a mind-trick to get the contraceptives.
After a good thirty minutes of sneaking around, she finally caught sight of the pharmacy window. To her immense chagrin, she saw that it was staffed by a droid. An un-mind-trickable droid.

Rey ducked into a nearby dim, empty control room to reformulate her plan. She quickly settled on a new course of action, stepped into the doorway to the corridor, and watched the passersby.

Her mark had to be a woman. Unfortunately, while they may have kept more females around than the old Empire, men still made up the vast majority of the First Order. A few women passed, but each of them was walking with someone else. Rey wasn't confident in her ability to trick two people at once. She continued to bide her time.

And finally, a lone woman appeared in the hallway. The armored and helmeted figure bore no outward signs of being female, but Rey sensed that it was.

Phasma had a talent for walking down the wrong hallway at the wrong time.

Rey jumped out in front of her.

"Who the devil are you?" the chrome soldier demanded.

"You see me here all the time. There is nothing unusual about me. I am completely forgettable."

"I see you here all the time. There's nothing unusual about you. You are completely forgettable," Phasma repeated obediently, even adding a little contemptuous emphasis of her own. Rey knew that was a sign of a fairly strong mental constitution, not easily tricked. Hopefully Rey's aptitude for the ability was strong enough to keep this plan from turning into a disaster.

"You forgot to pick up some short-acting oral contraceptives! You'd better go get some now!" Rey prompted.

There was a brief pause as these two women's wills collided. For a moment, it seemed as if Phasma would resist - but her mind gave way with an abrupt woosh.

"I forgot to pick up some short-acting oral contraceptives. I suppose I'd better go get some now."

Rey ducked back into the empty control room, and peeked out to watch her dupe. Phasma walked right up to the pharmacy window, and spoke with the droid briefly.

Phasma then walked back up the corridor, carrying a small packet.

Rey jumped out in front of her once more. "You don't need these contraceptives after all. You should give them to me so they can be properly disposed of."

"I don't need these contraceptives after all. I should give them to you so they can be properly disposed of," Phasma stated, obligingly holding the packet out to Rey.

Rey snatched her prize. "This exchange was in no way out-of-the-ordinary. There is no need to mention it to anybody."

Phasma once again echoed helpfully, and went on to whatever she had been doing before.

Smiling triumphantly, Rey jumped back into the dim control room, eagerly tearing open the packet, and popping the pill into her mouth. This might not have any effect on potential repercussions of their first encounter, but would at least make future encounters relatively safe.
That was, if having an affair with Kylo Ren could *ever* be said to be safe.

Either way, Rey figured this was good enough. She figured that it took a fairly decent amount of bad luck to get pregnant from a single, horny mistake, but she did at least know not to press her luck by risking it again.

She noted a presence approaching. Instinctively, she took a step back into the shadows just before a familiar figure darkened the doorway.

"There you are!" Kylo shouted, pulling off his helmet. "What the hell do you think you're doing?! I've been hunting all over the damn ship!"

Even through the angry yelling, the subtext was clear - he had been worried about her.

"I told you to stay in my quarters!" Kylo ranted on, panting with agitation. "You're on my turf now! From now on, you do what I tell you! Okay?!"

He was crossing the room now, slowly stalking toward her again. That was when Rey noticed something in his vibes that wasn't anger or concern.

It wasn't until she was shoved up against a wall with his tongue halfway down her throat, that she realized that he was absolutely beside himself with urgent lust.

He kissed her with such ferocity that some small, animal part of her brain told her that this creature might literally eat her, and that now would be a good time to run for her life.

At the same time, this conflicted with other urges coming from that same primitive corner of her brain. Now might have also been a good time to admit that she did have a bit of a fetish for the dangerous and forbidden. And besides, she was no fleeing prey. She was damn well going to face him like a fellow apex predator, and repay him in kind for whatever he intended to dish out.

And it figured that *hunting* for her would be his kink. He'd probably been stroking himself to this exact scenario for months.

She could all but see the fantasy in his mind, tracking her through the corridors of his stronghold, and finally cornering her in some semi-private place. How she would melt in his arms, inexplicably passive and unresisting. Even in his daydreams, she only *allowed* him to touch her, as if he didn't dare imagine that she might ever actually *want* him to.

"Tell me to stop," he taunted, face darting forward to her neck, lips closing against her skin.

She grabbed him by the ass to pull him even closer, answering in an alluring purr. "Stop telling me what to do!"

He let out a low, quavering moan, as if she'd said not what he expected, but something ten times hotter.

Emboldened by his reaction, her other hand flew forward to join its fellow, this time with so much gusto that there was a rather satisfying thwap, as her palm hit his ass. He drew in a sharp hiss of breath against her neck, teeth grazing her skin as he continued to suckle at her pulsepoint.

If he kept that up it was going to leave a rather embarrassing mark. One of her hands smoothed up his spine, and up into his hair. She grabbed a handful of his glorious curls, and yanked his face back up to hers.

He didn't seem to mind, and that deliciously deep kiss eagerly resumed, one of her hands still
buried in his hair, the other still groping at the swell of his ass. One of his hands was similarly engaged, while the other broke away to wave in the direction of the door control panel. The door obediently shut and locked.

The hand then reached down to grasp behind one of her knees, lifting it up to facilitate more intimate contact. Crotches met with a delightful friction, the rigid mass straining against his trousers, hard and searing as a hot coal as it ground against her sensitive center.

"Tell me to stop," he repeated. No longer a dare, but a helpless plea.

Rey leaned away and glared at him. "I am having a hard enough time taking responsibility for my own actions right now. I am sure as hell not going to take responsibility for yours too. Make up your own mind - are we doing this or not?"

Kylo's answer involved no words, and yet it could not have been more clear. He stepped back and began to fumble with his belt. It took a good while to adjust his layers of clothing enough to accommodate the anticipated activities. Rey's preparations were similar, in that while they involved fewer layers, she had to completely remove her pants. For the first time in her entire life, she found herself thinking that she might want to invest in dress. Or maybe she could borrow one from Kylo?

They both finished with their clothing around the same time, and he pulled her close. Still-gloved hands grasped firmly against her bare thighs, lifting her petite frame up onto something. She supposed it was a control panel of convenient height, and hazily wondered where he managed to find such a soft cushion in a place like this.

She was slightly impressed that this newly deflowered novice acted as if fairly familiar with this relatively advanced move. Then again, as someone who routinely rummaged around in other people's secrets, he probably had witnessed all sorts of perversion. On an intellectual level, he probably knew more positions than she did.

Appropriate parts freed from the confines of his elaborate robes, only a little more fumbling for the right angle was needed, and he immediately plunged into her welcoming heat, letting out a sigh-moan of something like relief, as if a fire in his flesh had just been quenched. She simultaneously threw her head back, but gloved fingers grasped firmly at her chin, roughly tilting her face back down to meet his. The kiss was loose and sloppy and delectable, filling her mouth with gyrating tongue and feral grunts, as he began to shove against her.

Fingers still tangled in his hair, she reveled in each upward surge of his hips, the slick internal caress of his cock, and the stolen sensations of a man acting out a long-held fantasy with his literal dream girl...

Near the other end of the ship, a stormtrooper sat in front of an array of security monitors, reflecting on how this was without a doubt, the most boring job on the Finalizer.

Until this moment.

"Seventy-two," she whispered at a nearby peer. "Check it out!"

The second trooper approached, his eyes apparently falling on the screen his companion was gesturing to. "Oh-ho-ho!" he crowed at the display. The monitor showed a dim but unmistakable image of a couple that was fucking, literally fucking, right there in some unused control room.

"I know right!"
The troopers watched snickeringly for only a few seconds before they both froze at some approaching footsteps.

"What's going on over here?" their commanding officer inquired disinterestedly.

The first trooper reached forward in an attempt to discreetly deactivate that particular pornographic monitor, but in her panic, she hit the wrong switch - the one that patched in the audio feed.

The room filled with an unmistakable masculine grunting, mingled with a woman's sighs. So much for keeping their superior's nose out of this.

"Um," the first trooper stated, gesturing toward the frantic televised humping.

"Ugh!" the CO grunted in apparent disgust. "Disgraceful! I want their operating numbers! Do a facial scan!"

The first trooper promptly complied. "Nothing sir."

"What do you mean, nothing?!" the officer shouted incredulously.

"Scan results inconclusive. Neither matches anyone we have on record."

"That's impossible!" the CO declared, shoving the two troopers out of the way, and studying the screen more carefully. He didn't recognize either, but that could have easily been because the two faces were pressed together so absurdly. Neither was in proper uniform, even partially. After a second, the officer's eyes fell on something roundish sitting on a nearby control panel, in the background. Something black and helmet shaped. With a rather distinctive chrome filigree pattern about the visor.

"Gods below!" he blurted out in obvious shock. "Turn off the display! If you value your lives - he may already know you saw!"

"Sir?"

"That's Kylo Ren," the CO whispered through his teeth.

"Noooo waaaay!" the two troopers howled in unison.

"Damn," the second trooper went on to add, "I always assumed Ren was - I don't know what, but not the type to bang hot chicks in public!"

His CO was too rattled to rebuke him for his crudeness. "I'm told he puts a high value on his privacy, and I don't think I need to tell you what happens to people who upset him!"

The first trooper deactivated that peculiar display as ordered, and the officer seemed to regain some of his dignity. "This never happened. I want NO gossip about this incident," he said awkwardly.

"What incident?" the troopers chorused dutifully. The officer nodded and all but ran out of the room.

The two troopers looked at each other.

"Dude," the first trooper declared.

"Dude," the second agreed.
Chapter End Notes

Please take the time to review. I really want to know what you thought of this!

Next time: The Force is a Mean-Spirited Bitch

I'd also like to mention that the next chapter

And credit to my fiance/beta for the line about borrowing Kylo's little black dress.
I'm sorry, I actually wish I had something entirely lighthearted and goofy for you, this of all weeks. I really really do. But instead, the angriest chapter of the whole fic just happened to be coming up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 23: The Force is a Mean-Spirited Bitch

Still pinned against the console, Rey slackened into boneless relaxation, face nuzzled against her companion's neck, her hair fluttering from his warm, gradually slowing breath. The interlude had ended very satisfactorily, but she did notice the absence of that strange, existential swell of power that had concluded their previous encounter.

But the afterglow quickly dimmed, and she realized just how ridiculously they'd just behaved.

"Get off, Get off," she sighed.

"Too late," he panted cheekily.

Rey groaned and shoved him away, in order to climb off whatever fixture she'd been propped up on. She gasped as she suddenly felt herself falling, and would have toppled over if not for his arm, still hooked under her shoulder. She found her feet, and looked back, confused, only to see that she hadn't been held up by some unused console - there was nothing there.

"Oh," she said blandly, realizing what had happened, and feeling a little foolish for not being more aware of it. She moved to retrieve her pants, no doubt leaving a trail of slime in her wake as she crossed the room, like a snail.

She spared a thought for the poor soul who'd have to clean up the mess. Finn had worked sanitation. With a shudder, she pictured the look his face might have if ordered to mop up Kylo Ren's spooge.

As always, Kylo sensed her concern. "Floors are cleaned by droids." His tone turned irritable, as if he'd only just recalled the horny wild goose chase she'd led him on. "Are you going to walk back with me, or would you prefer to sneak around some more?"

"Fine," Rey grunted, pulling up her pants.

"I'm going to have to put on my mask," he warned her, offering her his arm.

"Then I'll have to not look at you," she retorted as he made good on his warning, and they exited the room together. The journey back to his quarters passed uneventfully, though they did attract a little attention. It seemed that every trooper and officer they passed attempted some sort of double-take. No doubt the shock of seeing Ren walking arm-in-arm with a pretty young woman.
Contrary to her statement, Rey did glance over at him at one point.

"Put your hood up," she muttered.

"Why?" the mask asked.

"Because without it, the helmet literally makes you look like a giant walking penis." She paused. "Or is that the point?"

The mask emitted a strange rumble, that could have been a grunt of disgust, or a guffaw of amusement. She wasn't sure. Either way, he complied promptly.

Kylo considerately removed the mask as soon as they were safely back in his quarters.

"What were you doing in there, anyway?" he asked curiously.

"If you must know, I was acquiring some contraceptives. No thanks to you."

Kylo responded with a frustrated sigh. Suddenly, Rey got the sense that he was hiding something again. Something important. For some reason, she felt compelled to ask.

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you."

Rey felt a rising apprehension. What had he been doing on the bridge? She probably should have thought of it sooner, but she realized that he almost certainly knew the location of the Resistance station he'd escaped from. Were they preparing for an attack? Damn it, it was getting harder and harder to remember that they were still on opposite sides of a war.

Her fear was evident in her voice. "What? What's happened?"

Kylo shook his head wearily, averting his gaze, almost guiltily. "You're going to be mad at me."

That did exactly nothing to reassure her. "What? Kylo please -"

"I explained several days ago - you'll be upset if I tell you."

She frowned. It took her a moment to figure out what he was talking about, recalling their conversation about his prophecies regarding her future. "Out with it, Kylo. What is this destiny that's going to upset me so much more than getting you killed?" she demanded, still stuck on the idea that her friends might get hurt.

"You are going to be mad at me," he repeated. His eyes slowly rose to meet hers, as if he was effortfully forcing himself to make eye contact. Kylo's vibes were a confusing jumble, giving her the sense that he was both terrified and excited to see what her reaction would be.

"Kylo, please!"

Kylo gave a long sigh of resignation before the denouement. "You are pregnant. Already."

"WHAT?!" she literally shrieked at him.

Time stopped. Her eardrums pounded with a deafening silence.

Oh shit. Oh shit oh shit oh fuck!
had to be wrong. It *had* to be. And yet... And yet... The sense of those words positively reeked with repugnant truth. Nonono.

Every inch of her skin went cold and her guts roiled. An effervescent sinking feeling, as if the pit of her stomach had gone into freefall.

"I told you you'd be upset!" he shouted defensively.

She retched almost without warning, more from the stress than any actual physical symptom. The bitter contents of her stomach erupted from her trembling lips and onto the floor, like a cruel joke, told far too soon.

Before she knew it, she was being carried across the room, and was deposited in the bathroom. She spat into the sink, and took the offered cup of water without looking at him.

Swishing the liquid around in her mouth, she attempted to process this revelation.

"How - how could you know?" she asked stupidly. Of course, he *knew* because he *just knew*, simple as that. She revised her question. "How long have you known?"

Logic obscured by emotion, she decided that it couldn't have been long. It'd barely been two days since they'd first slept together.

"I knew it was going to happen the same time I knew you'd be the death of me. When I caught you in the forest. And about 24 hours ago, I dreamt... Anyway, it's already happened."

Rey closed her eyes, resting her hand on her own forehead, as if she'd developed a sudden migraine. Her words came out surprisingly calm. "Wait wait wait. You're telling me that you've always *foreseen* two things about me - that *I'd* get *you* killed and you'd get *me* pregnant?"

"Yes," he stated simply.

"Well, that certainly explains your behavior on Starkiller," she said in an almost morbidly amused whimper. The staring. The innuendo. The abrupt shifts back and forth between intimidation and cordiality. It actually made sense now.

Rey stumbled out of the bathroom, and threw herself onto the nearby sofa, ass first. She sat in silence for a moment, desperately trying to gather her whirling thoughts.

This wasn't happening; this wasn't happening; this wasn't happening...

"Rey, it was going to happen," he explained with an air of jaded surrender, as if he'd heard her frantic mental denial. "Destiny -"

"No!" she shouted irrationally.

This could not be happening to her. Not happening. No. Just a bad dream or something. Yes, a bad dream.

"Rey, that's just how prophecy works. Ask Skywalker sometime, if you see him before I kill him. Any steps to prevent it would have either failed or made it more likely to happen some other way -"

"Some *other* way?!" she stammered incredulously.

"That's what the Light does!" he insisted, glancing at the ceiling. "It *uses* you for some grand,
unfathomable plan! You have no say! No choice! You're just some piece on an infinite dejarik board, moving wherever the Light wills. Destiny -"

"Fuck destiny!" she wailed, even though the Force does not approve of that word. "Fuck destiny! Fuck the Force! And fuck YOU!"

He walked behind the sofa and placed a hand on her shoulder, radiating a confusing sense of gentleness and patience.

"Don't touch me," she snapped, slapping his hand away. He compromised by crouching down next to her.

"Look, just humor me. Search your feelings. With your aptitude, you probably knew it too."

Rey gave an irritable huff and closed her eyes, even having no idea why she should oblige him. With only the barest hint of focus and effort, she immediately recalled the dream about the two children playing in a field. Two heads, one dark and curly, and the other light and sleek, bobbing in a sea of golden grass.

"Twins," she murmured.

"What?" Kylo demanded, jumping up. She gave no response. "What did you see?!" he asked, even more urgently.

Her eyes snapped open, and she spoke in a weary groan. "Twins."

She saw his expression utterly transform - terrified awe, not unlike the way he'd looked at her when she'd shoved him out of her mind, on Starkiller.


"Yeah, well it is."

No. Not happening. This was absolutely not happening. A bad dream. A bad, BAD dream!

Kylo flopped down on the couch beside her, and she let him. For the moment, she felt slightly more charitable toward him now that he was surprised too.

"Twins," he repeated. "I don't recall where I heard it, but they can run in families."

"Damn Skywalkers," Rey muttered. She leaned back, eyes flinching shut. An idea materialized in her mind. One as simple as it was novel... In the blink of an eye, she had a family. The idea was so poignant that she finally began to weep, without quite understanding why.

But the notion that should have been profoundly comforting, really just intensified her emotional turmoil. And this was overtaken by a much darker idea - more of a recollection. It was just after their initial escape...

He'd told her that he'd ruin her life at least once more.

Only moments ago, he'd just explained that he'd foreseen her pregnancy, but it wasn't until that memory crossed her mind that she realized the full weight of the fact. Like his capture, this was probably just another thing that was supposed to look like an accident, but was actually completely premeditated.

"You knew. You bastard, you knew! You could have at least - at least it would have been less
likely!“ she sputtered indignantly.

Just a bad dream; just a bad dream.

Could it be that she was even less to him than a short-term lover? That she was nothing more than a broodmare for some twisted, dynastic ambition? Chosen not because he liked her, but simply for her strength in the Force - thus ensuring minimal dilution of that cursed Skywalker bloodline that he put so much stock in?

This added insult to injury. More than insult. More like - heartbreak probably felt something like this...

Either way, this accidental pregnancy had just become a wrong he had intentionally done her.

And there was that look, as if he was shocked and hurt by her assumption. "It's not like that," he choked out in a pitiful whisper.

She just ignored his statement. The lying sack of shit. "And there's nothing I can do, is there?" she stammered aloud. "I'm committed to the path of the Jedi. Jedi respect all life, they probably frown on... even life that's half you." The last word was pronounced with unmistakable spite.

"Rey..."

Even after such a hurtful statement, she felt only a wave of concern from him, and for some reason, that just inflamed her anger all the more. How dare he pretend to care about her, after what he'd done!

"What do you have to be worried about?" she demanded acidly. "Your part in all this is done!"

He looked at her, and she could both see and sense that what she'd said cut him deeply. Good. She wanted to hurt him. Even pick a fight with him. One of his prophecies had just come true, why not the other?

Rey stood, and her hand found it's way to the lightsaber at her hip. The weapon seemed to ignite of it's own accord, and she held it at the ready as she stood facing him. She was behaving irrationally, and she knew it. But she didn't care.

She waited for him to arm himself, but he just did nothing.

"Draw your weapon, Ren!" she commanded darkly. He had done this to her. He had pretended to care, while only using her, manipulating her without a shred of regard for her feelings, or even her free will. How could he do that to her?! How could she have been so blind?!

But he just stayed where he was, crouching on the floor, his vibes screaming for her to do it, to strike him down and end his trainwreck of a life.

"Why won't you fight me?!" she sobbed.

At length, he finally spoke, rising to his feet very, very slowly, as if afraid to spook her. Even with the emotion of the moment, his tone was low and soothing and ever so slightly annoyed, as if trying to talk an idiot off a ledge. "Because there's open space on the other side of that wall, and this is a small room. Actual dueling in here is going to get us both killed."

She felt the protective subtext, and hated him for it. And he still just stood there, staring at her with those sad-puppy eyes, his vibes now projecting a sense of tragic disappointment.
Rey’s laugh was completely devoid of mirth, or anything except the most profound bitterness imaginable. "What? Why should you be unhappy?! What did you think was going to happen? Did you think I would feel obligated to marry you or something?! You? An evil, patricidal, mass-murdering lunatic?!

Kylo’s posture went rigid and his eyes grimaced shut, as if flash-frozen by the coldness of her words. After a moment, he turned away, walking a few paces toward the door.

"I think I’m going to break some things," he stated flatly, taking care that she didn’t see his face as he left. He paused in the doorway, speaking quietly, as if to himself. "She really does think I’m a monster." The door slid shut behind him.

Rey just threw herself onto the couch, and cried in great, wet sobs of self-pity. What had she been thinking!? Why the hell did she have to sleep with him?! Him?!

"It was only once!" she howled at no one in particular. But she immediately felt stupid for saying it, knowing perfectly well that once was all it took.

How could she not have seen this coming? Even independent of any Force premonitions, common sense seemed to scream the inevitability of this course. That's the way things always went, she knew. Two mature people in a stable relationship always seemed to take months or years to get pregnant. But put a young woman - practically a teenager - into bed with some jerk she that she should’ve had nothing to do with - of course she'd get knocked up immediately.

In the span of a few minutes, this affair with Kylo Ren had gone from a disturbingly pleasurable tryst that no one ever needed to know about, to a relationship with lifelong consequences, that would inevitably become public.

She imagined Finn and Poe's faces when she told them - their look of shock and disgust and betrayal. She began to sob even harder.

Perhaps she could lie and say she just hooked up with some random guy? She'd rather be labeled a regular slut than a traitorous one. But... People would suspect. Everyone knew that she'd gone off with Kylo Ren, and with his distinctive features, at least one of the children would have enough of a resemblance to corroborate those suspensions.

And why did this have to happen now? With him? Why couldn’t it have been with one of the half-dozen or so previous lovers, back during that lonely, adolescent experimental period, a few years ago?

But that was ridiculous, she realized. While the father wouldn't have been an emotionally unstable war criminal, on a practical level, it would have been a thousand times worse. She had a hard enough time feeding herself back then, let alone children, and she wouldn't have been able to scavenge efficiently with children to mind. She supposed that's where she'd gotten the ingrained sense of urgency when it came to contraception. A sense of urgency that had only failed her once.

With a shudder, she recalled how disturbingly mundane it had been, to see a woman carrying a baby through Niima one day, and then carrying nothing but a look of numb despair the next. The horrifying realization that that could have been her, that her current situation could have been much worse, somehow managed to activate the miraculous resilience that was such an integral part of her character. Through sheer steel willpower, she forced herself to see the positive.

Really, this wasn’t so bad. She'd been abandoned on a desolate planet as a small child, and she'd lived through so many attacks, serious injuries and dangerous bouts of starvation than she could recall, not to mention the traumatic events immediately following her departure from Jakku.
Getting knocked up - this was nothing. Or well, not nothing, but by no means the worst crisis she'd ever gotten through. Besides, she had a support system now.

Her thought from earlier came back to her, the one about family. She had a family. Definitely not the one she had in mind - but it was a family. Those two - really not more than microscopic parasites at this point - undeniably belonged to her and she to them. They were her true family. Not surrogates borrowed from an errant son... and even those surrogates - now that she thought of it, there was actually one tiny upside to her children's paternity - Master Skywalker and General Organa and the late Han Solo - they were now her family too, in almost every possible way.

Given this long-standing obsession with family, Rey quickly found the general idea of motherhood was growing on her. It was terrifying, but not terrible. She'd always imagined herself maybe having children one day, if her circumstances permitted. But definitely not so soon, and while she hadn't had much in the way of preconceived notions about the father, but it sure as hell wasn't a violent and neurotic enemy.

Even so, she still wasn't exactly pleased by her situation. It was just that her attitude had gone from "Oh dear Force no! Nonono!" to "Well shit. What do I do now?" She'd come to the conclusion that this was not the time for tears, but the time for problem-solving.

Kylo. He was the real issue. What would he do? This was a man with some seriously messed up notions about family, and he was obsessed with his own heritage. He wasn't likely to just let her go off and bring them up on her own.

That seemed like the most logical option - to run. As soon as Snoke was dead, she could sneak away, and spend the rest of her days raising her children in some far-away, isolated corner of the galaxy. Voluntary exile did seem to be standard Jedi practice, whenever things got rough.

Her feelings told her that in such a case, Kylo would come after her. If she ran, he would give chase. If she hid, he would hunt for her.

But she imagined that a confrontation under such circumstances would probably involve some pitiful mixture of threats and begging, as opposed to fucking like rabid monkey lizards and/or a duel to the death.

It had been a while since she had accepted that he would never hurt her, at least not intentionally. As a matter of fact, she got the distinct impression that he would willingly die for her, if the opportunity arose.

The thought hit her like a ton of duracrete.

He is in love with me.

The words had not been said, and it made almost no logical sense, but she knew that it was the truth as soon as the idea crossed her mind. And that changed everything. The thought settled in her mind like a warm, black cloak, draped over her. The idea that someone - anyone - he - loved her.

He wasn't a manipulative psychopath out to ruin her life for his own ends. In a way, that was giving him too much credit. He didn't have the self-control or people skills for such an elaborate, emotional ploy.

No, Kylo Ren was just a lonely, lovesick idiot desperately grasping at what was almost certainly the only positive human connection, either physical or emotional, that he'd experienced in the several years since he'd destroyed poor Ben Solo.
All those assumptions that he was only using her, that she was nothing more than a tank in which to grow his heirs, softened considerably. It didn't make his failure to inform her of that premonition okay, but it made it much easier to understand. Could he have been telling the truth earlier - that he saw her pregnancy as just another destiny he thought he was helpless to avoid, like killing his father?

His inescapable curse...

His Skywalker broodmare...

His irresistible temptress he could never hope to be worthy of...

Rey was all of those things to him. It seemed so obvious now, the idea that things were not so obvious. She should have realized it before. That's the way things always were with Kylo. Nothing was ever simple. Nothing was ever as it appeared.

She felt a pang of guilt for what she'd said earlier, that disgusted comment about marriage being completely unthinkable. That was exactly what the poor fool had in mind, she realized. Marriage, or something like it.

She really had to consider all of her options. The idea of a long-term relationship with him still seemed far-fetched and almost certainly ill-fated. He may have loved her and she may have grown relatively fond of him... Perhaps it wouldn't be that bad. She was getting disturbingly good at dissociating the man in her bed from the man in her nightmares.

But it would never last. Her lover was already showing signs of being clingy, controlling, and emotionally demanding, not to mention the tendency toward murder and wanton destruction. He would almost certainly grow utterly dependent on her, and she would inevitably get burnt out with the responsibility to soothe his tortured soul.

Whether in a week or a year, the relationship would implode, and Kylo was, by his own admission, not exactly a portrait of emotional resilience. If he were allowed to become dependent or finally lose his mind completely.

It would never work, she told herself. Between their diametrically opposed political and religious beliefs, his temper and her independent streak, they would be fighting constantly. He must have known that, right?

Then again, considering his upbringing, he probably thought it was perfectly normal for a man to shack up with a morally superior woman who argued with him constantly, and was a decade younger.

But what about their respective career paths? She was committed to the life of a Jedi, and long-term relationships were forbidden. And besides, she couldn't exactly bring him back with her. She had a feeling that even killing Snoke wouldn't be enough to redeem him in the eyes of the Resistance. Killing one bad guy did not exactly make up for killing who-knows-how-many good guys, and Han Solo had been revered almost as much as Luke Skywalker.

And aside from helping to take out Snoke, she had no intention of helping him to murder his way to becoming King of the Galaxy, or whatever. And she was fairly sure she knew exactly how that would turn out - the idiot was going to get himself killed.

But... He did come from a long line of gifted political and military leaders, and had been raised by a senator. He had served as Snoke's apprentice and de facto second in command for several years, and people did seem to think highly of his prowess as a battlefield tactician. What if he actually
succeeded? Would she be his consort? She was sure that independent of the moral implications, such a position would have its perks. But the notion of being the queen of half the galaxy may have appealed to some women, but not to this unrefined, fiercely independent scavenger-turned-Jedi. Rey was fairly sure that she couldn't think up a life she was less suited for, if she tried.

And that wasn't to mention the fact that it would end up becoming exactly the sort of relationship she had always been averse to. One where she was entirely dependent on someone else.

But then what the hell was she supposed to do? She couldn't leave him, and she couldn't stay with him either.

And how the fuck was she supposed to fight Snoke's despair-inducing guards tomorrow, with this crisis weighing on her?

Chapter End Notes

This chapter/trope was originally titled "Feminist Icon Reduced to Skywalker Broodmare." Buzzkill, I know, but I hope it this chapter was at least a welcome distraction from real-life problems.

What can I say, it's my favorite trope to play with across fandoms. Why? Because I'm just not that creative, and I'm tolerably sure that unexpected pregnancy is literally the oldest plot-device there is. Instant drama/conflict.

And frankly, we should all probably get used to the idea - in my mind, that is the strongest argument for two-sided/requited Reylo inevitably becoming canon. Disney paid billions of dollars for Star Wars. They are not going to let it die with Episode IX. And that means they need a new crop of Skywalkers. We already know that Kylo is The Skywalker of the new cast. Which means he has to breed... and the audience has already been introduced to a female character of childbearing age, that Kylo has already shown an irrefutable interest in. Thus, distasteful as many might find it, Rey's probably gotta take one for the good of the franchise. Literary and cinematic analysis all suggest that Reylo will become canon, but Disney's bottom line absolutely demands it.

The walking-penis thing - I just had to put that in there. I literally shout that at the screen every time I watch TFA. Every. Single. Time.

Next time: Angsty Sex
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 24: Angsty Sex

Hours passed, and bedtime, or what she assumed was bedtime, came and went. He was still gone when she finally settled in. Of course, falling asleep was even harder than usual. She did have a plan, of a sort, but she still couldn't help but dwell on her little predicament. Or rather, two little predicaments.

She lay awake for a good long while, until he eventually came in.

"I know you're awake," he stated, approaching the bed. "Should I take the sofa? That's customary in situations like this, isn't it?"

"It's your bed," she mumbled.

Kylo undressed partially and slid into bed, keeping a respectful distance. A few moments of tense silence passed before he spoke. "Don't worry. I'm guessing that both the Solo Nose and the Skywalker Madness both skip a generation. They probably won't be like me."

She rolled over to face him. "What I said - that was -"

"Completely honest," he reached out a hand, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face, his sad smile reminding her eerily of the one his mother tended to get, whenever talking about him. "I wouldn't have you be otherwise."

Another long silence, this time broken by Rey.

"I've been thinking..."

She felt a burst of hope from him, at her words. Her heart sank at the thought of what he must have been thinking, no doubt some foolishly optimistic fantasy about companionship, family and the promise of belonging and acceptance. It was such a strange notion, the idea that he might long for the same things that she did, and consequently, she felt absolutely wretched for what she was about to say.

"I want you to make me forget about the pregnancy."

She felt his hopes shatter almost as if they were her own, but forced herself to keep talking. "I can't stop thinking about it. I'm not sure I can center myself with that weighing on me, and I know I'll need to be calm and - resilient if I'm going to fight those guards."

Rey half expected him to launch into some speech on how she should harness the power of those emotions, but he said nothing.

"I can just find out about it later, the way a woman is supposed to," she paused, her tone becoming more entreating. "I know you can do it, if I don't fight you. I will be wide open. I know you can."

Still no answer.
"Please, Kylo."

"How - how much do you want to forget?" he asked at length.

She scooted closer, taking his hand. "Just the pregnancy. I can live with the rest."

"I might -" a long, excruciatingly awkward pause, with yet more pauses springing up every few words. "I might even be able - to make you think that it - it was - that the father is - someone else."

Rey's mouth fell open, both deeply saddened and deeply moved by that offer. She could feel how much it cost him. Any lingering doubt as to the nature of his feelings for her, vanished in that instant, destroyed by the idea that this arrogant prince might be willing to relinquish any claim on his own precious bloodline, to spare her the distress of knowing that the father was a monster.

Even after spending a good chunk of the evening fretting about her children's paternity, his offer was surprisingly un-tempting. "No. Just - make me forget that I'm pregnant, so I can focus."

She felt a swell of relief in his vibes. Not quite so devoid of pride after all. He pulled her into a firm embrace, kissing her forehead before placing his hand on it.

"I'm trusting you, Kylo," she reminded him. She was acutely aware that with her defenses lowered like this, he could have done any number of things to her mind. He could probably make her forget his misdeeds, maybe give her the compulsion to stay with him, perhaps even convince her that she was deeply in love with him...

"Shhh," he whispered soothingly. "You know me better than that."

Did she?

Another thought occurred to her. "Oh, and in the unlikely event that I acquire some more juma juice, don't let me drink it."

"I won't," he told her, voice as soft and sweet as the touch of his fingers on her forehead. "Still your mind."

Rey took a deep breath, slipping into meditation, and then - that blinding flash.

She gave a little gasp of pain.

"Are you okay?" he asked, sounding rather concerned.

"Yes, yes," she said dismissively. "Just a sudden headache. It's gone now. Go back to sleep."

He kissed her on the forehead slowly and repeatedly. She felt a little burst of warmth in her chest. It was such an endearing gesture for him to adopt on account of a brief headache.

He was being genuinely sweet, and not even in a creepy way, either. Sweetness is kind of like compassion. She decided she should reward this behavior.

Rey tilted her head upwards, placing her lips in the path of his forehead kisses. His mouth met hers, paralyzed for a moment, apparently hesitant to proceed. That was, until she ran her tongue along the seam of his lips, her fingers sliding into his hair and pulling his face closer.

All coy pretense was abandoned, suddenly he was above her, his knees between hers. His arms slid under her back, encircling her completely, hands grasping her shoulders almost too firmly, as if she were about to slip through his fingers. The glint of his eyes was just barely visible in the dim
light, bearing down on her with that smoldering stare, locked on her mouth as he leaned in. Arms still tight around her, he delivered a devastating kiss, face nuzzling down against hers, lips parted wide as they descended, as if he intended to swallow her whole.

Rey hazily recalled that she had been mad at him about something, but she couldn't for the life of her remember what. Must not have been important.

"You wear entirely too much clothing to bed," she said, slipping her hands between the crossed folds of his tunic. He followed suit, clumsily pulling her out of her night shirt. One large hand settled lightly against her chin, fingertips catching her bottom lip briefly before smoothing down the side of her neck, over the ridge of her collarbone, and then on down to settle on a breast. His touch was much more confident now, fingers and palm kneading against first one, then the other.

She gave a huff of disapproval when his mouth left hers, a huff which immediately turned to a sigh of excitement as his lips slid lightly down her midline, veering off course to join in the appreciation of her breasts. His tongue danced lightly across the tip of a nipple briefly, before his full lips slowly closed around it.

A moment later, his face continued its journey downward. Was he going to...

"Kylo?"

Rey gave a sudden gasp at the first brush of tongue. Apparently, he was.

The first touch of his tongue was light and shallow, but was followed by a long, penetrating lick, as if he'd been tasting some strange delicacy, and found that it wasn't half bad.

"I want to give you some pleasure of your own," he whispered into the coarse down of her sex.

She could immediately tell that he had never done this before, but he at least seemed to know approximately what he was supposed to do down there. He immediately zeroed in on the swollen bud of her pleasure, experimenting with different strokes and pressures. This combined with his ability to sense her feelings gave him quite a bit of an upper hand in that arena. He could instantly tell what was and was not rocking her world. It was such an unfair advantage that if it had been a game, she would have said he was cheating. He may have been inexperienced, but after a few frustrating minutes worth of learning curve, he had her writhing against the bedsheets with the best of them.

"I want to do everything to her," she heard him think. "I don't care if it takes forever. I hope it takes forever."

She found herself particularly enjoying his little appreciative groans, the rumble of his baritone voice spreading across her skin like a shiver. This got her to thinking - was he also feeling this? Would he automatically come with her?

Overcome by curiosity, Rey pushed him away, onto his back, deftly shucking him out of his trousers, and lowering her face down toward his hips. She wanted to know how this worked with what she had finally come to accept as a Force bond.

She had to know. For science. Or whatever.

He let out a quavering growl, as wetted lips slid down around him. Such a surprisingly clean taste, she noted, like his mouth. She wasn't sure why it should be surprising, but it was, as if she'd subconsciously expected his body to taste as bitter and tainted as his soul. But finding that it didn't, she commenced with a slow, bobbing caress of lips and tongue. He remained stock still, fingers lightly ghosting over the back of her head, as if he wanted to make sure she was actually there, but
was afraid to interfere in any way.

Interesting. She could feel something, but she had a hunch that it was not quite the tense waves of bliss he seemed to be enjoying. In this context, the ghost of his sensation was frustratingly faint, and served only to feed a wanton desire for release of her own. She should have let him go on a bit longer, earlier...

As usual, Kylo apparently sensed the gist of her thoughts. Large hands gently lifted her head away, and then moved down to her waist, manhandling her until she was on all fours. He didn't waste a second, slipping into her effortlessly.

"Fuuuuucckk," he pointed out unnecessarily, plunging in again and again in rhythm with her pounding heart.

In that moment, Rey found that she could recognize a strange poetic beauty in what they were doing. The very idea that the most vulnerable part of him was buried deep inside the most intimate part of her. For the first time, she thought that perhaps this act was sometimes more than two people getting off on each other. That it meant something.

Mind, she wasn't quite sure what it meant, only that it might mean something.

"Rey..." he said in a hoarse whisper, just barely audible above the slap of his hips against her ass. She found she rather liked the way he said it, the want, the desperation, as if he were calling for water as he died of thirst.

"Rey, please..." Kylo intoned. Please what? She knew perfectly well how much he was enjoying their current activity. What did he want her to do?

"Rey, please..." he began to chant, like a spell that would make all his dreams come true. Hot as it was, she continued to wonder what he was asking for. She was all but pinned against the bed, there wasn't a whole lot she could actively do at the moment. On a whim, she placed one of her hands over his, where they pressed into the mattress, small tan fingers interlacing with large pallid ones.

"Rey - please - stay with me..." The words seemed to materialize next to her ear, as if spoken directly by the proverbial devil on her shoulder.

She fought the urge to smack him, even as her heart clenched at the sentiment. This was NOT the time to discuss the matter!

"Rey, please - please stay with me," he repeated in a breathy sigh.

She frowned against the pillows, rather annoyed. Rey really had no desire to have a serious discussion on the future of their relationship while he was balls deep in her.

She suddenly rocked up onto her knees, shoving him back until she was all but sitting in his lap. But before she could maneuver further, she found herself held in place, her back tight against his chest, enveloped by an embrace that was simultaneously cherishing and frighteningly strong. One of his hands closed authoritatively around a breast, the other dipped down, fingers splayed out on her belly, fingers cupping her sex, and thumb pressing into her navel.

He held her in that intensely possessive pose, still fucking her as hard as he dared, but his words sounded like an abject plea. "Rey, please."

Quick as lightning, she shoved him backwards again, escaping his arms, whirling around and pushing him down onto the bed. Within moments, she was riding him mercilessly. She
immediately lowered her face down to his for a deep, prolonged kiss. That ought to shut him up.

The glorious tension built for only a few more seconds until they once again shared a tremulous climax, moaning into each other's mouths as the sensation crested.

Before she knew it, she was nestled up against him, surrounded by strong arms. She actually had no concern about making a wet spot on the bed, this time. She was too preoccupied by the certain knowledge that he would repeat his entreaty from before. He would beg her to stay with him, and she no longer had an excuse to ignore the question.

She waited. And waited. But he said nothing. Her nervousness only escalated, and she began to wish that he'd just get on with it.

"I never stopped thinking about you," he finally started. "From the moment I saw you in the forest. You've always been on my mind. I used to think it was hate. Some new, more intense version of hate. I had to find you. I had to prove my power to you. To myself. I believed that I would only ever be as powerful as you thought me to be." He paused. "It took months to find your damn island."

Rey tensed. So he knew? Well, then there was one less safe place in the galaxy.

"That's right. I found it. I saw it in your mind. Then it was just a matter of searching the hole in the map for habitable, aquatic planets. But by the time I got there, you'd already left." He paused, his vibes turning to something like embarrassment. "I may have - wrecked up your little house."

Rey gave a snort of amusement. "You are so predictable."

After a moment, he elected to get on with his speech. "I knew you must have met up with the Resistance. But I also knew I couldn't launch a frontal assault on them. If I did, you'd have rushed straight into harm's way, and would probably been hurt. And that's never been a specific goal of mine, even when I thought I hated you." He paused. "I could have gone after your friends, used them as bait. I could have. But I didn't," he explained almost sweetly, as if describing something excessively noble and romantic. "So I decided that I would have to be brought to you. And getting captured on your own terms - it's more difficult than it sounds. That ruse was a pain in the ass."

"That ruse killed several people," Rey pointed out bitterly.

His retort was as vehement as it was abrupt. "And I would kill several more for every step it would get me closer to you!"

Rey drew in a little gasp. For the very first time, though also the second time that day, she realized that he loved her. More specifically that he was madly in love with her. With a particular emphasis on the madly. There was something a little frightening in the idea that this dangerous man felt such a dangerous emotion with regards to her. And the words he'd just said - she couldn't think of more potent reminder of just what sort of fire she was playing with. Just because he loved her, didn't make him a good person. He was still twisted and ruthless. So of course he would love her twistedly and ruthlessly.

His vibes shifted into resentment. "If you're going to ponder what a bastard I am, I'm going to go sleep on the sofa. When you're this close, you may as well be shouting it in my ear," he growled.

Rey's reaction to his sudden snottiness surprised them both. She laughed. Fully and heartily, and for several seconds before speaking. "Kylo, you are the only person I've ever heard of who can get this grouchy so immediately after getting laid."

She felt his lips spread into a smile against her neck, anger vanished as quickly as it had appeared.
It was almost as if her amusement was literally contagious.

They both lapsed into silence. Rey waited for him to launch back into his monologue, or more likely, finally get to the point - to repeat his plea from before. With each passing second, she felt herself becoming more tense with anticipation. Exactly what kind of anticipation, she couldn't have said, whether it was more like waiting for a treat, or waiting for a blow to fall.

But minutes passed, and nothing. She didn't even sense that he was holding something back. He seemed to have lost his nerve so completely, that he had no desire to regain it. She wondered if her thoughts on his faults had changed his mind, that he now thought she hated him. Rey felt the temptation, the inexplicable temptation, to reassure him. To tell him that it didn't matter. That she didn't care.

Unfortunately, it did matter. She did care. It was just - she'd realized that she wished she didn't.

"We should sleep," he told her anticlimactically. If he sensed her disappointment, he gave no sign of it. "Big day tomorrow." He pulled her closer, placing another kiss on her forehead. "If you can't get to sleep, I could always - make you sleep."

"No!" she said, a little too forcefully. "No, thank you," she corrected herself. Rey suspected that he meant well by the offer, but she was still deeply weirded out by his bringing it up. She couldn't think of any circumstance in which she would have ever allowed him to mess with her mind again, let alone ask him for it.

She settled in beside him, but felt a brief burst of irritation at the cold dampness that covered a significant portion of what had already become her side of the bed. Without a word, Kylo grabbed her by the waist and rolled her bodily over him, until their places were reversed.

As she finally began to drift off to sleep, she reflected on the idea that Kylo may have been twisted and ruthless, but there was definitely something to be said for a man who volunteers to sleep on the wet spot.

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Chapter End Notes

Heh, Kylo's got the cheat codes to sex.

Next time: Becoming his Dark Apprentice

As always, thank you to my reviewers. You have no idea how irrationally excited I get when I read each new comment.
Chapter 25: Becoming his Dark Apprentice

These clothes. These hateful clothes. Clearly tailored to look like Jedi robes, and all in white. Not the beige his uncle wore. White - white. Mom probably believed that sending them was wonderfully thoughtful. Wonderfully motherly. But he knew what these clothes really were.

They were a declaration that all this was not temporary, as he’d originally been told. He hadn’t been sent to take a break. This was not an interplanetary time-out. This was a permanent exile. Banishment. At least until his uncle managed to fix whatever was wrong with him.

And there was something wrong with him. A nameless, gnawing something.

Not having to go home - that was a good thing, wasn’t it? Now he won’t have to see the soul-withering disappointment in his father’s eyes, nor the flat-out denial in his mother’s. He still can’t decide which bothers him more, his mother’s refusal to see him for who he is, or his father’s wish for him to be someone else.

He hated these clothes. Scratchy and new and as white and pure as his mother’s misplaced faith in him. And as if that wasn’t annoying enough - a sudden tug on one of his rear tabards.

Tug-tug-tug. Just ignore her. She’ll go away if you just ignore her.


"What?!" he shouts. He immediately feels guilty. There may be something wrong with him, but he knows the difference between right and wrong, and he knows where yelling at a four-year-old orphan falls along that continuum.

But something strange happens at the sight of that little face, surrounding those bright hazel eyes. The world turns inside out and suddenly she’s in her own body, and she is no longer staring down at her younger self, but at something much more bizarre, something that she never thought she would see in a million years. Standing before her is a barely adolescent Ben Solo. That abstract concept now flesh and blood, complete with sullen glare and padawan braid. Weird as this is, even weirder is the fact that she is taller than him.

"This is a dream," she stated.

His glare turns to a look of horrified recognition. Somehow, she gets the impression that he is a hundred times more embarrassed being seen like this, than being seen running around Starkiller with no pants on.
Her eyes focused on the ceiling of his quarters, and she immediately turned to find that Kylo was newly awake as well. His face bore the same sullen glare as in her dream, as he shot up to a sitting position.

"You saw that, didn't you?!" he accused.

"Not on purpose!" she shouted, voice raised to match his.

It was then that they both noticed the chiming sound coming from the comm console, across the room. Kylo rose, throwing on a single layer of his discarded robes.

"Don't fool yourself into thinking it means anything," he growled, activating the console controls, presumably the one that doesn't include visuals.

"A coded transmission from Supreme Leader Snoke just arrived for you, sir," some officer told him.

Kylo ended the call without an acknowledgment. "That was quick." He spent several seconds examining the coordinates on the monitor. "He's close. Only a few minutes worth of hyperspace away."

"Why?"

He took a moment to consider. "He's probably trying to catch us off guard. He may suspect something, and he's keeping close by the fleet, just in case."

Rey felt her stomach clench in anxiety. "Maybe we shouldn't -"

"No. He's afraid. That's a good thing. It means that we have some chance of success." Kylo walked across the room, picking up a metal case, left by the door, and placed it on the table, beckoning to her. "Time to get dressed."

"More clothes?" Rey muttered. She opened the case, and was not remotely surprised by what she saw. She didn't even need to unfurl the bundle to know that they were robes almost identical to his own.

"Really?" she grumbled, rolling her eyes.

"You're supposed to be my apprentice. You may as well look the part."

Rey supposed he must have brought these in last night, after he went off on his own. She couldn't recall why he'd left for so long - it must have been to get the uniform. But - "These must be custom - how did you get them made so fast?"

"People tend to drop what they're doing and snap to it when I have a request," Kylo explained with a nonchalant shrug.

"I can't imagine why," Rey commented.

"Come here," he said, voice unusually soft. "I'll show you how to put it on."
It took several minutes to don the complex, layered garment. She couldn't help thinking that there was something almost unbearably nurturing and domestic about the way he helped her dress. On some level, it seemed far more intimate than being *undressed* by him.

"Done," he announced. He then stepped away and began to don his own elaborate outfit with practiced ease.

Rey glanced around for a mirror, but saw none. She just did an adorable twirl, watching the way the tails of the surcoat fluttered. Once she had turned, she found him just staring at her in silence.

"Does the Darkness make my butt look big?" she asked, giving her hips a suggestive waggle.

Kylo just grinned and gestured to the door. "Time to go."

The walk to the command shuttle was rather rudely interrupted, when that ginger General appeared in their path.

"Coordinates?!" Hux shouted, eyes narrowed in obvious suspicion. "You've always avoided seeing Supreme Leader Snoke in person like a plague, in the past. What are you playing at?"

"He wants to meet my new apprentice," Kylo answered, sounding mildly annoyed.

Hux shook his head. "Yes, your apprentice that was an enemy combatant this time last week, and is known to have a talent for defeating Force users."

Rey needed no intuition to catch the subtext: this guy didn't believe she had switched sides, and he seemed to suspect their plan. Kylo just stood there in silence, and Rey realized that it was up to her to rectify the situation.

She drew in a deep breath, trying to envision Kylo, when he'd chased her through the forest. That terrifying creep vibe that she'd recognized the moment she set eyes on him.

"You came here alone, General," she observed, glancing around at Hux's lack of an escort. "That was stupid." She glanced up at Kylo. "Master, may I kill this one?" she asked sweetly, with what she hoped was an unsettling grin. "I'd like to show you just how good a scavenger is, at taking things apart. One. Piece. At a. Time."

Hux's face remained a pinched mask, but the slight crack in his voice betrayed his fear. "No - no need for that." He turned to Kylo, and lowered his voice all the way to a whisper. "I just wanted to say that in the unlikely event that you actually succeed in whatever you're planning, I want in," Hux told him, as stern as a death threat, before turning on his heel and exiting at a stride just shy of a run.

"Do you think that was sufficiently dark?" Rey asked, once Hux was gone.

Kylo was flat out leering at her. "That was quite possibly the sexiest thing I've ever..." Kylo trailed off distractedly, glancing about their surroundings. It only took her a moment to realize that he was looking for some isolated corner to whisk her off to.

"Don't even think about it," she told him, trying to sound serious, but with a slight note of girlish amusement breaking through. She then elected to change the subject, the better to get his mind off of - things that could wait until later. "Do you think he meant what he said? That he'll join you?"

"Sort of," Kylo huffed. "He just hedging his bets, making sure that he's on the winning side, whatever that is. That's arguably how he's risen to where he is now."
They boarded the command shuttle, and sat side-by-side in the cockpit, as the the surrounding stars streaked into bright lines.

"So, what exactly is your plan for taking out Snoke?" Rey inquired.

"The plan is that there is no plan," Kylo replied flatly.

She stared at him, mouth agape. "Wait wait wait. We're going to assassinate a head of state. Who is also a powerful Force user. Without a plan?"

"If we went in there with a plan, he would sense it immediately. The only way we'll have any element of surprise is if we make things up as we go along."

Rey felt her lips forming into an ironic little half-smile. "You really are a Solo, aren't you?"

"Shut up!" he snapped, tone devoid of the light-hearted amusement that her jibes were usually met with, these days.

Rey just reflected on the recklessness of his plan. "We're going to die, aren't we?"

"No," he insisted. "Ruling is my destiny. I can't really do that if I'm dead, and I'm sure as hell not going to let him hurt you. I've forseen the endgame, and I'm never wrong about these things, remember?"

"There's a first time for everything," Rey pointed out.

"True," he conceded. "Prophecies never come to pass in the way you assume they will." He turned to look at her, his trademark intense stare incongruously paired with a reassuring grin. "Let's keep a little optimism, here."

"Right, right." After all, she was supposed to be the cheerful, resilient one.

"Oh, but one thing," Kylo added. "Don't be fooled if he plays dead."

"Plays dead?"

"Yeah. Snoke has the ability to go into stasis, when badly injured. It looks like death, you might even feel a death-rattle in the Force. Handy card to have up your sleeve, really. Remind me to teach you sometime. Anyway, my point is that if his head is still on his shoulders, assume he's not dead."

They both lapsed into silence, and it felt like only a matter of minutes before they arrived at Snoke's ship. Rey pressed her face to the cockpit window like an excited child. It was huge - not unlike a Super Star Destroyer, but she could recognize external weapons and sensor arrays different from any she'd ever seen. Her inner techie was suitably impressed.

"Artoo!" Kylo hollered, as the ship set down. The droid rolled up, followed by Threepio. "Keep an eye on the hangar. Fire her up as soon as you see anyone freaking out. We're going to have to get out of here in a hurry."

Artoo responded with a short, squeaky query. Rey opened her mouth to translate the question, but Kylo answered immediately. She supposed she shouldn't have been surprised that he understood Artoo, but she was.

"Freak out means -" he paused, apparently trying to think of an operational definition. "Running. If you see anyone running, then get her ready to go."
"We're running for it, afterwards?" Rey asked.

"Yeah. Gonna lay low until the worst of the in-fighting has blown over. Wait for the rivals to come out of the woodwork, and hopefully take each other out."

The ramp descended in a puff of steam, and they stepped onto Snoke's ship together. There was an officer and several stormtroopers waiting in the hangar. Kylo proceeded to exchange what seemed to be boring, militaristic pleasantries. Rey didn't bother to listen. Her attention was too rapt by the two creatures standing behind them.

She knew them the moment she saw them. Bogan Guards, they were called. The ones Kylo had warned her about. The ones that could supposedly suck the Force right out of you, and destroy your will to fight.

They were robed in threadbare cowls of dark burgundy, not unlike a simpler, less form-fitting version of what Kylo wore. But the most unusual thing about their appearance was the mouths - which were grotesquely absent, as if surgically sealed up. There was also the color of the skin - a pale olive green. For a second, she assumed that this must have been related to their essentially being reanimated corpses, but on closer inspection, their flesh was not rotting. They were Miralian. Two middle-aged Miralian females, facial features strikingly similar. Almost certainly sisters. Rey felt a moment of pity for them. These two women had probably been going about their lives, minding their own business, right up until the day they were hunted down by masked strangers. They'd probably never even known why they were being targeted.

The smell was gut wrenching too, like chemical preservatives layered on top of the musty stench of the desiccated corpses she used to find. And they didn't feel like sentient creatures; there was no sense of their being individuals with thoughts and aspirations, not unlike droids. But unlike droids, they didn't seem to think, but there were emotions. Or rather, one emotion. An overwhelming sense of sadness. As if they were completely unaware of their own existence, but could somehow also fully comprehend what had been done to them.

"Don't pity them," Kylo ordered telepathically, apparently sensing her thoughts. "They're not sentient. Putting them down is the best thing you could do for them, really."

"So much sadness," Rey replied in kind.

"They don't actually have feelings. That's the shadow of the despair they can project at you."

"I don't feel any different," she pointed out.

"It's not a passive power. They have to actively direct it at you."

Rey thought a moment. "The word Bogan, where have I heard that before?"

"Probably Skywalker. It's an ancient term for the Dark Side."

Rey recalled that Kylo had said he'd faced them, but never actually fought them. And then she realized - "Snoke used them against you before, didn't he?"

"Punishment," he muttered aloud, striding forward across the hangar, and into a nearby corridor. Rey was a little relieved that the officer and those undead guards hadn't followed. The hallway was almost comically long, and just barely visible at the end, a large set of double doors.

Suddenly, it felt like there was so little time. The quest was coming to an end, and with too many questions still unanswered.
"Kylo, why did you turn to the Dark Side?" she asked, getting the rather disconcerting feeling that this could be her last opportunity.

"I don't know," he answered quietly.

Rey groaned. "We may be about to die, Kylo. This is kind of the customary time for dark confessions."

"I said I DON'T KNOW!" he shouted, loud and fierce enough to make her jump. He sighed, and went on to the necessary elaboration. "There's a seven week gap in my memory from around that time. It's like one minute, I was arguing with Skywalker, and the next, I was standing over you in the rain. I DON'T know what happened. I don't know why I did it. I don't know if I was the one who killed the padawans. I'm not even completely sure that the others are dead."

"The other students might be alive?" Rey murmured in shock. "But, the bodies -"

"Wasn't them," he answered tersely, as if it were an irrelevant detail. "Do keep that to yourself though. I'm the Jedi Killer. It wouldn't do for people to find out that I may or may not have actually killed any Jedi." he paused, sighing deeply. "After all that - I just went along with it. It didn't feel like there was much choice. I couldn't just go home - my family didn't want me, and my Knights kept talking about how powerful I was, how what we were doing was the right thing - anyway, there's your dark confession."

Rey considered what he had said - an answer that just raised infinitely more questions.

"So, you were mind-wiped? Was it Snoke?"

"Possibly. Or I did it to myself."

Rey frowned in thought. A strange idea popped into her head. "Could it have been Master Skywalker?"

Kylo gave no response. But it wasn't a thoughtful or reticent pause. He was acting as if he hadn't heard her.

"Kylo?"

"What?"

"Could it have been Master Skywalker?"

Again, no answer. Just a blank stare, as if she hadn't said a thing.

"Did you hear what I said, Kylo?"

"You didn't say anything," he replied, sounding irritated and slightly confused.

Rey did the only logical thing she could think of. She just repeated herself again. "Do you think it could have been Master Skywalker who erased your memories?"

Just like before, no response save an expectant look. As if he literally hadn't heard her.

"Well?!" he snapped impatiently. "Say what you're going to say."

It took a good deal of effort not to gape at him. The way he was behaving, it was weird, even for him. He seemed to be able to hear her just fine, such as when she'd asked him if he had heard what she said, but every time she asked if Master Skywalker could have been the one to have
tampered with his memories - he acted as if it had gone in one ear and out the other.

Her gut told her that she’d just stumbled on something. Something big. And it couldn’t have come at a worse time. The door at the end of the hallway was drawing near. She knew she should have probably dropped the subject, but the next question was already on her lips.

"Why do you want to kill Master Skywalker?"

"Because, I just do," he grumbled. Rey studied his face and vibes as they walked, and was again rather puzzled by what she found. There was no bitterness in his vibes - just confusion. She got the sense that that he didn’t know why he wanted to kill his uncle, any more than she did.

There was a long pause, and when he finally spoke, it was with a palpable sense of hasty relief, as if he’d been caught in a lie and had just thought of the perfect excuse. "He made me what I am, as much as Snoke."

Rey groaned. "Oh take some damn responsibility, won't you!"

"Responsibility!?" he bellowed, the air around him crackling with with fury. Strangely, that was actually kind of reassuring - now he was behaving more like himself. "Don't presume to know what it's like to be me! Because you don't! You don't know what it's like to be at war with yourself! To never be sure of anything! To never know what's right or what to believe, but that you'll be held absolutely accountable if you choose wrong! To know that no matter what, you'll just keep stumbling blindly forward toward some destiny that you know you'll never comprehend!"

She rolled her eyes. "That's called being an adult, Kylo."

For a moment, she thought he might launch into a full-on hissy fit, but instead, he actually cracked a grin, chortling briefly.

"What's so funny?"

He turned his smile on her. "It's not every day that I'm called ordinary," he chuckled. He took her hand as he slowed to a stop before the ominous doors. They were huge up close, made of solid stone, and carved with what she supposed were Sith runes. It seemed ridiculously out of place on a starship.

The doors began to open automatically, sliding away at an absurdly slow pace, the stones creating a grinding growl that made her think of that chasm opening up after she'd first defeated Kylo.

Rey then suddenly found herself yanked into a tight hug, a brief but firm kiss pressed to her lips.

"For luck."

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Chapter End Notes

Next time: Snoke is One Sick Fuck

Reviews are love!
Chapter Notes

If my humble swill was worthy of such an honor, I know who I'd dedicate it too. When I was a young child, in the dark ages of the late 1980s, there was only one princess truly worth looking up to, and I've shed many tears at the passing of the delightful person who brought that princess to life. She will be dearly missed.

And Leia will feature fairly prominently in later chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Graphic violence in this chapter.

Chapter 26: Snoke is One Sick Fuck

Two pairs of matching jackboots clomped forward, down a long set of wide, steep stairs, and into the main audience chamber. Snoke stood from his stone throne as they entered, evil but cordial. Rey was a little surprised by his size. He was inhumanly tall, but she had expected a veritable giant, based on Kylo's having asked her to do all of that practice moving huge objects. She also took note of the solitary guard standing immediately behind his throne.

"Snoke. Your time is up."

Kylo didn't waste a moment, igniting his saber as he came to a stop at the base of the stairs to Snoke's throne. Rey felt a twinge of confusion and embarrassment. She'd expected Kylo to make some extended speech on the motivations for his betrayal, but he seemed to be cutting right to the chase. Frankly, it struck Rey as a bit rude to murder one's mentor without an elaborate preamble, no matter how much they deserved it. Then again, the whole idea of assassinating someone politely seemed a bit silly.

Snoke's thin, beak-like lips quirked into a smile, and he raised a hand. Kylo flinched, and Rey instantly sensed that Snoke was probing his mind. Kylo's saber stilled in his hand and he just stood there, staring blankly. He was clearly doing exactly what he'd told her to do, the other day - to be passive so as to avoid calling attention to important secrets. But that didn't make sense. Why go through such discomfort when he'd already revealed his traitorous intentions? What was he afraid Snoke might find out? What secret was so worth protecting?

After a few seconds, Snoke fell back in his chair, lowering his hand with a sneer of disappointment. His eyes left Kylo, and he gazed off into the shadows. "Subdue them."

Snoke's thin, beak-like lips quirked into a smile, and he raised a hand. Kylo flinched, and Rey instantly sensed that Snoke was probing his mind. Kylo's saber stilled in his hand and he just stood there, staring blankly. He was clearly doing exactly what he'd told her to do, the other day - to be passive so as to avoid calling attention to important secrets. But that didn't make sense. Why go through such discomfort when he'd already revealed his traitorous intentions? What was he afraid Snoke might find out? What secret was so worth protecting?

After a few seconds, Snoke fell back in his chair, lowering his hand with a sneer of disappointment. His eyes left Kylo, and he gazed off into the shadows. "Subdue them."

And from those shadows, emerged a horde of Snoke's undead guards. There was at least twenty of them, and they showed a good deal more diversity than the First Order usually employed. Robed as they were, Rey spotted a diminutive Gand, a bulbous-headed Bith, and even a snail-like Ithorian. She immediately noticed that they did not appear to be armed, but somehow that was even more disquieting. The only conceivable reason a bodyguard wouldn't be armed, was if they did not need additional weapons.
Snoke's guards seemed to split into two groups, one heading toward Kylo, the other toward Rey. She frankly felt a little insulted that Kylo seemed to have twice as many shambling toward him. He was clearly perceived as the greater threat.

Eyes focused on her incoming attackers, Rey heard the low thrum of Kylo's saber, and took that as her cue to fight. Within a split second, her own blade had ignited, and she swung it in a vicious downward cut, slicing well into one guard's head. She whirled to engage the next nearest foe, but by now, the several remaining guards had each raised a hand, much as a Force user would.

There was no burst of kinetic energy, nor a flash of lightning, but she felt it just the same.

She gasped when it hit her. At first, it didn't seem too different from getting her wind knocked out of her. But hidden under that sensation, creeping, cold and insidious, was the despair that Kylo had warned her of.

This was a disaster. How could she have been so stupid as to agree to this? This was stupid. This was pointless. Why was it her job to save the galaxy? Why was she always the one getting dumped on? Why should she care about being a hero, saving other people? Why should she care about others when no one cared, had ever cared, would ever care about her?

She took a step backwards, but her boot caught at the tails of her surcoat, causing her to stumble back into one of the creatures behind her. Its outstretched fingers brushed the back of her neck, so cold that they seemed almost slimy. That skin-crawling sensation seemed to snap some sense into her for a moment. These thoughts she'd been having were one of the Bogan powers. They were trying to sap her will to fight, make her give up. She gritted her teeth, raised an arm, and attempted a hearty Force push to shove the approaching fighters back.

But nothing happened. A blast that powerful should have sent them flying, but not a one even faltered. Then she recalled that other power - when they touch you, the ability to use the Force disappears, and the one behind her still had it's freezing fingers on her neck. With a jerk, she jumped away from it, freeing herself from its touch. She instantly attempted another push, but again nothing.

Before she could regroup, she once again began to realize the futility of all this. What was the point? What could someone like her, a worthless garbage picker, hope to accomplish in a situation like this?

Dimly, in the back of her mind, she was still aware that her mind was being manipulated, but somehow that didn't seem to matter. She knew that it wasn't real, but she was too stupid, too weak, too pathetic to do anything about it. She was going to fail. It was inevitable. She would always fail at everything. Forever.

And there was also the pain. She felt so consumed by sadness that it literally hurt. She hunched over, legs going wobbly at the knees, as if physically weakening.

But the next thoughts seemed to have a different flavor. A bittersweetness in place of a sour sting. If there was no point to any of this, she should just give up.

Yes, that was the sensible thing to do. Just give up. Just stop fighting. She'd been fighting for so long. So so long. She should just rest.

Rest. Just lay down and rest. It would all be over soon. Just rest.

Rey slowly fell to her knees, there was no need to stand anymore. Just lay down and rest. Just rest. Just rest.
But then, amidst the toxic thoughts, she heard a voice. Faint and ethereal. The same word, again and again, but difficult to make out. It sounded just like the voices she'd heard when she'd first touched that cursed lightsaber. The voices that, Master Skywalker had told her, belonged to people who were not alive.

But that didn't make sense. This voice wasn't calling her name. It sounded like - it almost sounded like it was saying...

*Mother!*

Yes, she was almost certain that's what it was saying, and it kept on going, each repetition sounding more and more urgent.

*Mother! Mother!*

How could that be possible? Could it be her own dead mother? But that made no sense, either. Or - was it possible that the voice belonged not to someone who was dead, but someone who wasn't yet alive? Someone who didn't yet exist, and yet had already left their footprints in the Force. Little footprints. She felt like the answer was on the tip of her tongue, but she couldn't quite grasp it, her mind still clouded by despair.

*Mother please!*

And from somewhere deep inside, she summoned the will to fight, even if she couldn't quite consciously understand why. She just knew that she couldn't give up now. That wasn't who she was. She had to fight it, but fighting it not with a stave or a lightsaber, but the way she used to on all of those cold, lonely nights in her old AT-AT. She would reason her way out of it, use intellect to control her emotions.

But she wasn't sure she could, her thoughts were so fuzzy and slow. So slow. And - she still felt so tired and physically weak. For a moment, she felt as if she might topple over, but instinctually, one arm flew out to brace herself against the nearest object - the arm of an undead guard.

Her eyes widened. Her mind cleared. Suddenly, she no longer felt the need to rid herself of the despair.

Because it was gone. Vanished in a flash of glorious lucidity and cautious optimism. Intellect restored, her mind raced to analyze her situation. The despair must have disappeared for a reason, and she had to figure out what that was, and how to use it to her advantage.

She stood up straighter, and released the Bogan guard's arm. But as soon as she had, she felt that suffocating sadness, rushing in as if though an open airlock. Then she re-grabbed the arm, and it was gone again.

So that's how this worked...

"Touch them!" Rey screamed. She looked up over the creature's shoulder, trying to see how Kylo was faring.

She felt a pang of pity when she caught sight of him. If she'd been faring badly, he'd apparently been faring much worse. He was surrounded by undead guards, literally curled up in a quivering ball on the floor, head between his hands, tears streaming down his pallid face, features twisted in a look of frantic agony.

It was so pathetic that it might have even been funny if it wasn't the man she loved that was
suffering so acutely.

"Touch them!" she shouted. For a moment, their eyes met, and he managed to respond with a weak shake of the head.

Stubborn fool, she had to make him understand. "Touch them! They're using your own Force empathy against you! If you're cut off from your powers, they can't touch your mind!"

Kylo bit his lip, raising one hand, arm trembling with the strain of even such a small, simple movement. With a twitch, his palm met the nearest creature's ankle. His eyes instantly widened, the pitiful look vanishing from his face.

Satisfied that Kylo was no longer completely helpless, Rey set about the task at hand - these creepy things had to die. Or rather, die again.

Her left hand clamped down around the arm of that particular guard, and she opened her saber with her right, swinging it at the other shambling attackers, cutting clear through two of them and halfway through a third. All three keeled over.

She turned to face the others, still grasping that one guard's arm. She attempted to yank it to the side, allowing her to continue fighting the others. But by then, the one she'd been grabbing seemed to catch on and began to struggle mightily. Rey grunted, desperately trying to maintain her grasp on the guard, lest she lose her will again, swinging it back and forth in a bizarre, gruesome dance.

Just then, she caught another glimpse of Kylo, now on his feet, and mowing down opponents like a boss. But what caught her eye, was the object in his left hand. It only took her a moment to realize that it was the severed foot of a Bogan guard. He'd apparently sliced it off, creating a much more manageable talisman against their creeping despair, and it seemed to be working splendidly. Travel sized for greater convenience.

In that moment, Rey was pretty sure that was the cleverest thing she'd ever heard of, and instantly drew her saber across the forearm of the struggling guard. Free from her grasp, the thing stumbled and fell backwards, leaving its disembodied hand in Rey's grip.

There was no time to ponder just how disgusting this was. She immediately set about dispatching her four remaining attackers. Two were still standing behind her and one was standing in front of her, arms still outstretched, attempting to cast their net of sadness over her, apparently too dumb to realize that it wasn't working.

Rey spun her saber ahead in an wide, elegant figure eight, arching into a shimmering twirl behind her back. All three of them fell to the ground in pieces. That only left the one she'd been grabbing before, now struggling to its feet. Rey stepped into a forward lunge, running the creature through, and then jerking her saber to the side, cutting it in half at the torso for good measure.

All of her attackers lay at her feet in grotesquely twitching heaps, and she tossed the severed hand away in disgust. She turned to check on Kylo again, but he still seemed to be working his way through his own foes, no doubt because he'd had so many more assigned to him. He seemed to notice that Rey was no longer fighting.

"Take him out!" Kylo shouted, gesturing to Snoke with his eyes.

Rey looked to the Supreme Leader, still sitting calmly on his throne, a bland smirk on his face, as if he were a simple spectator without a care in the world.

She strode toward him, saber blazing and ready for the kill. But even as she climbed the steps of
the dais, Snoke still just sat there, grinning almost warmly, as if his favorite grandchild was climbing into his lap. Even stranger, that lone guard was still standing behind him, and made no move to protect its master.

Rey reached the top of the stair, Snoke well within the reach of her blade. He wasn't making any attempt to defend himself or flee. Somehow it felt wrong to cut off the head of such a helpless old creature.

"Do it!" Kylo bellowed, slashing through the last of his opponents.

Helpless or not, Snoke had to die. He was the murderer of billions, oppressor of billions more, and he had seduced poor sweet Ben Solo, destroying his family in the process. Rey sucked in a breath, and with a flick of her wrist, her saber bisected the old, wrinkled neck, and the head of Supreme Leader Snoke fell to the floor, rolling almost comically down the steps of his throne.

Rey blinked, noting a very bad feeling about this. It shouldn't have been so easy. Just as her ears caught the sound of Kylo closing down his saber, they also caught the sound of Snoke's ominous, decrepit baritone. For a moment, she thought it was coming from the severed head, but she quickly realized that it was actually emanating from that last Bogan Guard, still standing on the dais.

"Well done girl," it intoned. "You have passed your very first test. You have killed a defenseless old man for your own ambition."

She sort of wanted to argue with him. This wasn't a matter of ambition. It was a matter of good versus evil.

Rey backed down the stairs to stand beside Kylo, and quickly sensed a wave of apprehension from him. Of all the possible outcomes he'd anticipated, Snoke's consciousness migrating into another body was apparently not one of them.

The undead eyes of the last guard turned on her companion. "My compliments on your taste, Kylo. She is indeed worthy of becoming your - "

A ridiculously long, dramatic pause passed, until Snoke said something that surprised exactly no one. "Replacement."

Interestingly, Rey sensed absolutely no shock from Kylo about that latest revelation, but there was definitely still that anxiety. "Rey, get to the ship. I'll catch up with you," he ordered.

"No!"

"Dammit Rey, just do it!"

"You are not my master!"

"Come now Kylo, I don't have all day," Snoke interjected, his new vessel calmly ambling down the stairs, toward them. "Destroy me. You've intended to take my place, and indeed you shall. Strike me down and I will trade this corpse for yours."

Rey had definitely sensed fear from Kylo Ren before, but never like this. She could feel abject terror washing over him. As if he'd suddenly come face-to-face with his absolute worst nightmare.

"You can't. You don't have the power!" Kylo shouted.

Zombie Snoke shook his head, his tone softening to something almost paternal. "I have been
tinkering with your mind since you were little more than a boy. I absolutely have the power to take it over, under the right conditions."

"No," Kylo whispered irrationally.

Snoke continued on. "You shall rule the galaxy, and with the girl at your side."

"You mean my soulless husk," Kylo retorted, backing away, shaking his head with each step.

Snoke chuckled. "What makes you think that you have any soul? After all you have done?"

Kylo glanced at Rey. "I have enough of a soul left to know that I don't want yours, Snoke."

"Well then," Zombie Snoke began, producing a lightsaber from each sleeve, opening them into bright red blades. Tonfa-style, Rey noticed, her inner sabersmith intrigued in spite of herself.

"Face me, Kylo."

Even as he radiated a sense of fear and fury, Kylo stood there, his own saber still closed and cold. Rey found that she was actually rather impressed by her companion's self-control, thus far. But at the same time, she could also sense that his aggression was held back only by the barest thread of logic.

"Don't let him bait you," she whispered, giving voice to intuition. Snoke clearly wanted to fight him, and there must have been a reason for that, almost certainly having to do with this intention to take over Kylo's body.

"Give in Kylo," Zombie Snoke urged. "The girl will be so much easier to control when I become you. And think of the power your spawn will have! With the right reproductive technology, the girl could be kept in-pup at all times. I could create a small army of Force users. And they will all belong to me!"

And then, Rey literally felt that thread snap.

"NO!" Kylo's new saber ignited in a burst of red-black, and he charged the undead tyrant with a bellow of rage.

"Stop! Stop!" Rey shrieked, both in his mind and aloud. Of course, there was no response; he was too beside himself with wrath. "Idiot!" she added. Couldn't he see that this was what Snoke wanted? Was he not paying attention to Snoke's implication that they would have to both be dead for this to work?

Fortunately, Snoke was so confident in his own ability to manipulate Kylo Ren's emotions, that he was actually parrying each strike. Or perhaps Snoke was trying to arrange things so they would deliver fatal blows to each other simultaneously. Who knew with those weird Sith rituals. Either way, Rey knew that it would be a matter of moments...

Only her Jedi training kept her from outright panicking. She glanced around the room, mainly looking for the closest exit. Perhaps she could Force-faint Kylo and drag him away?

But then she noticed a pair of dead Bogan Guards on the floor at her feet, and she heard the gist of Kylo's explanation echo in her mind. They are a vacuum in the Force. Touch them, and your ability to manipulate the Force will vanish completely. And I'm talking all powers, telekinetic, mental, everything... Rey reached out a hand in the direction of the two corpses. She sensed that cold, emptiness. Of course that property remained after they'd been killed. They were already dead to begin with.
A plan crystallized in her mind almost instantaneously - if Snoke's Force powers were disabled, he probably couldn't possess Kylo's body. She reached out both arms toward the two corpses with the Force, attempting to lift them. Of course, nothing happened - she couldn't touch them with the Force. And then she recalled Kylo's lesson a few days earlier, how he'd wanted her to practice lifting large objects, and it hit her - that was the only way to move the Bogan Guards around, was to do so indirectly, as if lifting something huge. It was really quite fortunate that it occurred to her - that idiot should really have been more clear on the subject.

After all that practice with the enormous, heavy sofa, she should be pretty good at doing that. Without wasting another moment, she grasped hold of the ambient Force energy surrounding the corpses, and hoisted them up in the air. And with a massive shove, she hurled both of them at Snoke.

Direct hit! Snoke gave a startled grunt as he went down, pinned prone on the floor under the two corpses.

Kylo seemed startled too, but flustered as he was, he appeared to understand instantly. He immediately rammed his saber downward, skewering the two corpses before driving his blade into zombie Snoke's heart. He then promptly pulled out the blade, and lopped of the Supreme Leader's head in one final stroke.

Rey watched with her heart in her throat, feeling as if she might die of the suspense. She wasn't at all sure exactly how this body-snatching thing worked, so it was entirely possible that Kylo was now possessed anyway.

Or could it have been the opposite? Snoke had arguably made Kylo Ren what he was, so maybe now that he was dead, everything would change. The evil wizard had been defeated, so perhaps the enchanted prince was now free of his curse! Perhaps the dark mantle that was Kylo Ren would disappear, revealing that perfect, fantasy Ben Solo!

Rey continued to watch as Kylo Ren let out a howl of rage, and began to slash the pile of corpses into smoldering, gory ribbons, and once that was done, he proceeded to stomp on the remains. He was so clearly beside himself with anger that she half-expected him to piss on it.

He was clearly not behaving like a cold, calculating tyrant nor a sassy-but-morally-pure human confection. This had all the earmarks of a good-old-fashioned Kylo Ren hissy fit. He was still himself.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: I love you; I know

Some of my awesome Australian readers have pointed out that Bogan is Australian slang for redneck. While that's not what I was going for (the Bogan Force as the Dark Side is now canon, mentioned in Rebels), I fully embrace the notion. If you're bored, I encourage you to read this chapter again, picturing Snoke's guards not as zombies or space Dementors, but as drunk, mullet-wearing rednecks.
I Love You - I Know

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 27: I Love You - I Know

A few more moments of senseless carnage, and the appropriate level of catharsis was apparently achieved. Kylo Ren straightened, closing down his saber, and turning to Rey with a smile of complete adoration. "I love you!" he hollered, starting toward her.

Rey smiled in turn, allowing the words to seep right into her heart. There was only one response she could think of, and you, dear reader, would have known exactly what it was, even if it wasn't the title of the chapter.

"I know!" she answered, throwing her arms around him, giggling euphorically as he covered her face in kisses.

He stopped abruptly, as they both sensed a large group of sentients approaching.

"Damn," Kylo muttered. "He must have had a silent alarm."

No less than thirty heavily-armed Stormtroopers marched down the sloping stairs at the head of the room, followed shortly by some unfamiliar officer.

Kylo and Rey reignited their sabers, as the officer looked over the scene. His eyes settled on the Supreme Leader's decapitated corpse, still slumped on his throne.

"Blast them! Blast them both! Do not stop until they're down! And then - just keep shooting!"

Rey held her saber at the ready, trying to keep from panicking. She was fairly competent at blaster deflection, but she'd only ever taken on one or two opponents at a time. This was at least ten times that, and all of them had the high ground and a clear shot.

If she was going to survive this, it wouldn't be using her conscious senses. Her eyes closed and she emptied her mind like it had never been emptied before, surrendering all control to the Force as the hail of blaster fire commenced.

Seconds passed. Or was it minutes? Hours? Either way, the screeching of the blasters had stopped. Somehow, she'd survived.

Rey's eyes opened, and she gasped at what she saw. Dozens upon dozens of lights hung in the air in front of her. She stood at the center of a starburst of laser bolts, all converging on her, some within centimeters of her body.

"Step out of the way," came a familiar voice. She slowly turned, eyes falling on Kylo, alive but possibly worse for wear, one tense hand outstretched in her direction. "Get out of the way," he repeated. "I can't hold this many forever."

Carefully, she took a few steps back, and then the suspended blaster bolts rained down on where she'd been standing. She looked up, and saw that their attackers, lying in ostensibly lifeless piles on the stairs.
"We have to get to the ship," Kylo announced, posture not quite as upright as usual. In the back of her mind, she knew he'd probably been hit, but wasn't at all worried about it. This was Kylo Ren. The man was a tank. She'd seen him take a hit from a bowcaster - the unholy hybrid of a high-powered blaster rifle and a missile launcher - and keep right on fighting. Therefore, there wasn't a doubt in her head that a peck or two from a common blaster was something he could walk off without flinching.

"C'mon!" she shouted, taking off at a run. She stopped suddenly after a few meters, sensing that he wasn't as close behind as he should have been.

"Hurry up!" she ordered.

"I took one to the knee. It's kind of physically impossible for me to hurry anywhere."

Indeed, he could barely walk, giving a hiss of pain with every labored step. Rey gave a groan of irritation, and stomped over to him.

"What are you -"

She didn't bother to answer, bowing down and nudging her shoulder against his stomach.

"Don't!" Kylo yelped as he was hoisted up into a fireman's carry on Rey's shoulder. As soon as his weight was on her, she felt a sudden burst of pain in her abdomen. She supposed that was to be expected considering that her burden weighed a good deal more than she did.

"Shut up," she grumbled. "You're lucky that I'm ridiculously strong!"

Kylo seemed to resign himself to his fate as Rey started up the stairs, stepping over piles of motionless troopers. She was breathing heavily by the time they reached the top, but managed to pick up her pace as she started up the hall. Even she couldn't run with such a cargo, but she did manage an impressively brisk walk.

Of course, they did run into a few more adversaries on the way. Lightsaber in one hand, Rey deflected the comparatively modest amount of blaster fire coming in from the front, while Kylo managed to deflect any coming in from the rear, inelegantly flailing his blade back and forth as he hung over her shoulder.

Just before reaching the hangar, they met two less conventional opponents. It was the two undead guards they'd seen before, the Miralian sisters. They just stood there before her almost expectantly, as if waiting for orders.

Rey took a moment to consider, recalling that those poor creatures had never asked for the terrible existence they'd been given. Perhaps she could take them along? They were sort of like droids. But no, that seemed neither practical nor desirable, considering their terrifying powers.

"What do you want?" Rey asked.

One of the mouthless guards looked pointedly at her lightsaber.

"Oh," Rey replied, understanding. "Be at peace then," she intoned, striking off both heads with a single stroke.

Finally, they reached the command shuttle. Rey lugged her companion up the ramp and then placed him on the floor, grunting as she straightened her back. "I'm going to be sore for days. Why do you have to be so damn big?"
Artoo let out a high-pitched squeal at that, for some reason. Threepio was apparently somewhat confused by this. "Of course that's what she said. She just said it!"

Rey paid the droids no mind, and hopped into the cockpit. She wasn't particularly familiar with Upsilon class shuttles, but whatever she hadn't picked up via observation was quickly sorted out via intuition. After starting the takeoff cycle, she scrolled through the nav display, selecting the first set of saved coordinates she saw - Nar Shadda.

She was about to try to out that trick of jumping to Hyperspace directly from the hangar, when a massive object appeared directly in their path. The Finalizer. Already lifting off, she attempted to fly round the obstruction, but knew perfectly well that they'd be obliterated by the Star Destroyer's turbo lasers within moments.

But nothing happened. The Finalizer's guns remained absolutely silent as the lumbering command shuttle flew up and over it's hull. As they passed, Rey imagined that she could see that red-haired General watching from the bridge, muttering that he'd better get a Grand Moff-dom out of this.

The cockpit window exploded into starlines, and they were safely in Hyperspace.

Rey leaned back in the pilot seat, allowing herself a sigh of relief. Only then did she notice how sweaty she was. Her tunic was positively soaked. She absentmindedly raised a hand to her damp shoulder, and frowned when she felt the very slightly viscous texture of her sweat. And that her fingers were now tinted a disconcerting rust color.

She jumped out of her seat as she realized that her tunic was actually sopping with blood, and it definitely wasn't hers. She whirled around and rushed to check on her companion.

Kylo was kneeling on the floor, hunched over slightly.

"Where's the medkit?" she demanded, knowing that blaster wounds were beyond her skill at Force healing.

He shook his head. "Don't bother."

"Drama queen!" Rey groaned as she knelt beside him, shoving him back into a laying position on the floor. She reached forward and began to husk away the layers of bloodsoaked black cloth. The dark robes didn't show blood, and their ratty texture made it difficult to tell where he'd been hit. "This is nothing! You'll be totally fine," she declared, just before her eyes finally fell on bare skin. What she saw took her breath away.

He weakly raised a hand, wagging a finger at her, as he often did. "You were finally wrong about something. I'm glad I was there to see it."

He wasn't just hit once or twice. His whole torso was peppered with blaster wounds, more than she could count at a glance. There had to have been severe trauma to virtually all his internal organs. A tear ran down her cheek at the sickening realization that he must have sacrificed self-defense in favor of defending her. In so doing, he'd left himself open.

Her eyes met his in a silent question, as to whether she had guessed correctly. Sensing her thought, he answered with nothing but that signature cocksure grin.

And even worse, that damned prophecy of his came to mind, that she would be the death of him. Perhaps that didn't necessarily mean that she would kill him herself, but rather, that he would die for her sake?

"I'm getting the medkit!"
She whirled to run, but he grabbed her by the wrist, enormous fingers gripping as inescapable as steel binders.

"Stay with me," he pleaded through gritted teeth. He was afraid. Even without Force empathy, she could see his fear written clearly across his face. "I'm going to try, but not totally sure I can - if I don't make it, tell my mother I'm sorry," he entreated.

Those words hit her like a punch in the gut.

"Tell her yourself, you cowardly shit!" she retorted, voice cracking even as she yelled at him.

He let out a self-deprecating chuckle, which promptly turned into a self-deprecating cough, accompanied by a blob of bloody spittle. Without thinking, she attempted to dab it away with her sleeve, but there was so much that it only ended up smearing the blood across his face.

"It'll be okay," he promised her weakly. "Just need to meditate for a sec, and then -"

"No!" she interrupted him. She knew enough about Jedi death to find that statement extremely ominous. "Did you forget your stupid own plan? Snoke is dead. You have to go off and be King of the Universe or whatever!"

He just grinned at her pitifully, eyes closing.

"Dammit Kylo! You don't want to go out like this!" She choked back a sob. "Don't you dare die! If you do, I'll tell EVERYONE that you were killed by Stormtroopers! You'll go down in history as the pathetic Darth Vader knockoff who was killed by common fucking Stormtroopers!"

"Would you PLEASE shut the hell up?!" he suddenly snapped, hoarse and unsteady, eyes opening. "I'm trying to concentrate here!"

She went silent, not so much because he had ordered her to, as because she didn't know what else to say. In a moment like this, one could only say everything or nothing, and everything is pretty hard to articulate.

His eyes slowly closed, his voice even weaker. "I'll come back sweetheart, I promise."

And then, muscles clenched with pain or stress suddenly relaxed, as if he'd just drifted off to sleep in her arms.

"No! Kylo?!"

She immediately let out a sudden whimper of physical pain. Her hand instinctively flew up to her chest, and she doubled over, as if all the strength had gone out of her. Wasn't that what a Force death-rattle was supposed to feel like?

He was gone.

"Nonono!"

Rey had shed plenty of tears in her life, but in that moment, she cried as hard as she could ever remember doing before. She knelt on the floor, rocking back and forth, cradling his head in her hands, his once glorious hair spread out in limp, sweaty ribbons in her lap, her tears carving clean, white rivulets through the blood smeared on his face.

Threepio and Artoo stood, watching somberly from the other end of the main cabin. Ever polite, Threepio reached up to his head to doff an imaginary cap. Artoo let out a low, mournful coo.
Rey continued sobbing until her whole face throbbed. It felt almost as if her heart had migrated into her skull.

"I love him," she heard herself whisper almost inaudibly, as if she were literally explaining it to herself. Somehow, it felt like that elusive everything that she couldn't wrap her head around, until this moment.

It was the very height of cliche, to realize that she loved him, as he lay newly dead in her lap. But tired as the trope was, that didn't stop it from being true.

After all, it was only in a moment like this that she could have ever allowed herself to acknowledge such a feeling. Consciously loving him had always been rendered impossible by her own pragmatic nature, the certain knowledge that any future they might have together would be tumultuous at best, and tragic at worst.

But in a moment like this, their future together was irrelevant. He was dead. There was no future. Her feelings no longer clouded by common sense, her heart's true inclination could shine forth clearly, no matter how irrational it was.

Threepio's aural sensors had picked up Rey's whispered declaration of love, and he was deeply confused by it. He actually wanted to argue with her, try to talk some sense into her, but his programming clearly indicated that this would be extremely rude so immediately after the commencement of the mourning process. But it was so perplexing! How could she possibly love him? Neither for the first nor the last time, Threepio reflected on the mystifying nature of human behavior.

But the droid was distracted from his reverie by another twinge in his sensors. He didn't hesitate even a moment, he had to inform Miss Rey. He may have disliked what Young Master Ben had become, but Miss Rey's distress was just - too distressing.

"Miss Rey?"

She ignored the damn protocol droid.

"Excuse me, Miss Rey?"

"What, Threepio?!" she shouted furiously, particularly irritated by how inappropriately cheerful the droid sounded.

"Judging by your behavior, you seem to be under the impression that Young Master Ben is deceased. But my sensors have just detected signs of life. His heart is functioning at approximately one beat every two minutes. This is highly abnormal for a human, but does suggest that he is not technically dead."

Rey's eyes snapped open. "Stasis?" she murmured hopefully, just now recalling Kylo's warning about Snoke's ability to play dead when badly injured, and Kylo's implication that he had learned the technique himself. She lowered a hand down to hover over his face, she tried with all her might to sense some faint ember of life. Searching... Searching...

And there it was!

"STASIS! He's in stasis!" she shouted ecstatically. After several seconds of giggling in sheer, unadulterated delight, she glanced back down at Kylo's pitiful, blood-smeared face. "You idiot!" she exclaimed, laughing even as she berated him. "You could have just told me that you were going into stasis! But nooooooo, you had to be all mysterious and dramatic!"
Chapter End Notes

Next time: Someone is Nursed Back to Health

So a few more chapters to go, but I am on the fence as to whether it needs more smut. What do you all think?

Please don't forget to review. I am shamefully dependent on external validation to keep cranking out this crap.
After a few more seconds of delighted laughter, Rey realized that while Kylo was alive, he was still in really bad shape. What was even more disconcerting - she had no idea how long stasis could last. Was there a time-limit? She had no doubt that he would die pretty immediately if he came out of it without some pretty intensive medical intervention. She had to get him to a hospital, and fast.

She carefully laid his head back on the floor, and jumped over to the holo-terminal. They were already in route to Nar Shaddaa, so it made sense to get him treated there, especially since a Hutt planet was probably one of the few places in the galaxy not crawling with people who wanted Kylo Ren dead.

At the same time, she'd seen enough of Nar Shaddaa to suspect that she couldn't just take him to any hospital, assuming that these establishments were as grimy and full of shady characters as the planet was in general. But with such a large population, there had to be a few good-quality medical centers, if only to cater to the wealthy.

Rey quickly located a hospital that seemed likely to provide decent treatment, located in one of the fanciest sectors. Reading between the lines of the holoweb advertisements, the place was known for catering primarily to elite mobsters. Rey reasoned that this spoke highly of their potential discretion, good security and experience at treating blaster wounds.

The remaining hours of travel were spent digging out the medkit, and carefully placing tiny bacta patches on a few of his wounds. It felt a little silly, but it was better than just sitting there and doing nothing but fret about the possibility that he could die at any moment.

A few hours of travel time, and they finally arrived, setting down on the landing pad of a particularly upscale building. As soon as the ramp lowered, a pair of droids came trotting up with a hover-stretcher, and within seconds, the unconscious Kylo was loaded up, and pushed into the foyer, followed closely by Rey, and less closely by Threepio and Artoo.

They all approached what seemed to be the receptionist's desk. Seated there was a pretty, young Twi'lek woman, in a form-fitting white dress, and quaint little white cap.

"What is the nature of the complaint?" she inquired in chipper, flutey Basic.

"He's hurt," Rey replied inarticulately.


The receptionist nodded in acknowledgment, turning back to Rey. "Do you have an account with us?"

"No..."

"Alright then," the woman said, making a mark on her datapad. "How will you be providing payment?"
"Payment?" Rey echoed lamely, face falling.

The receptionist's expression hardened abruptly. The cheerfulness of her voice disappeared in favor of just barely veiled contempt, and seemed to drop an entire octave. "This isn't some Core World utopia. Payment is required up-front. If you cannot pay and have nothing of value, then I suggest that you take him to one of the charity hospitals in the Refugee Sector. Good luck with the waiting list."

"I have a ship!" Rey announced desperately. "Upsilon class, perfect condition, upgraded everything!"

*And not trackable by the First Order,* she added privately.

The receptionist fiddled with her datapad for a moment, and her brows shot up. Suddenly, she was all smiles again. "Right this way!" she declared sweetly, motioning to the double-doors behind her.

"Sorry," Rey whispered to her unconscious companion. She knew he'd be furious when he found out that she'd bartered away his ship. But it couldn't be helped. And besides, it would serve him right for making her think he was dead.

"I will need the patient's name," the pretty receptionist explained cheerfully.

Rey flinched. She needed an alias and she needed it now. Of course, Ben Solo was the first thing to come to mind, but she couldn't use that. For all she knew, the link between Ben Solo and Kylo Ren was common knowledge in the First Order. She had no doubt that his rivals were already hunting for him, and would love to take him out while he was helpless like this.

She needed a name. A name. A name. ANY name!

"Darth Buzzkill!" she finally blurted.

"Darth - Buzzkill," the receptionist muttered dutifully. If she found the name silly, she was doing a good job of hiding it. "And you are - his wife?"

"Yes," she answered, surprising herself with her own lack of hesitation.

Within moments, Kylo was pushed into a high tech exam room, while a suit with a data pad rushed out to the landing pad, no doubt to appraise the shuttle. Rey waited just outside the exam room, watching through a window as various droids buzzed around Kylo's helpless form.

The next hour passed exceedingly slowly, and Rey jumped up from her waiting room seat at the sight of the attending physician - a floating, black spherical droid.

"Mrs. Buzzkill?" the droid inquired.

"Is he going to be okay?" she asked eagerly.

"Prognosis is uncertain due to the anomalous nature of the case," it said, its voice surprisingly human, considering its appearance. "Injuries of this type are almost always instantly fatal to a human, but for some reason, he remains alive. We have normalized his vital signs, and with intensive bacta therapy, survival seems likely. I estimate that if he were going to die, he would have already done so."

Rey opened her mouth to ask further questions, but the droid just kept on talking. "However, the
case is so unusual that it is difficult to predict the future course. If I were able to determine the factors contributing to his survival thus far, I could give a more reliable prognosis. Preliminary scan and bloodwork results are all well within normal limits, save for an extremely elevated midichlorian count."

Rey rolled her eyes, but the droid continued on obliviously. "But this metric is generally considered of little importance. Therefore, in the absence of any medical reason for his survival, I have no choice but to conclude that he must simply have an extraordinarily strong will to live."

"But will he be okay? Will he recover?"

"With proper treatment, I don't see why not. Brain function appears normal. Several weeks of full bacta immersion will be needed to repair the extensive damage to his internal organs and a life-support belt will need to be utilized in the meantime."

"When will he wake up?"

"The patient is under heavy sedation. He will be kept unconscious until the conclusion of bacta therapy, as is standard practice." The droid paused. "There is the matter of his leg."

"What about it?"

"The flesh below the lesion on the left knee has been severely blood-flow deprived, and is essentially dead. This is unusual for this type of injury, and I suspect it could be the combined result of the lesion and poor circulation owing to his extremely slow heart rate at the time of admission."

Rey supposed it made sense that there would be some sort of medical side-effect to the whole stasis thing.

The doctor droid continued on. "With intensive bacta therapy, it may be possible to save the limb, but the likelihood of complications would be high. Therefore, I recommend replacement with a high-quality prosthetic."

The droid just looked at her expectantly, and she realized that it was waiting for her to give permission.

"That's a big decision to make for someone else," she murmured. "I wish I could ask him."

"Miss Rey, if I might?" Threepio chimed in brightly. "I recall that as a child, Young Master Ben had a somewhat unsettling fascination with amputation. At times, he seemed to think of it as a badge of honor, or some sort of right of passage. Unless his attitude has changed drastically, I think he is unlikely to object to the proposed procedure."

Rey arched a brow. Little Ben must have been one seriously weird kid. She turned to the doctor. "Proceed."

Inside the next hour, Kylo was submerged is a bacta tank, clad only in a modesty cloth, life-support belt and a breath mask, his dark hair wafting about his stolid, pale face. Rey found herself rather resentful of the mask, even if it wasn't as intimidating as his other one. She disliked it simply for the heinous crime of obscuring his face. His beautiful, distinctive face.

From that point on, there was nothing to do but wait by his side, ready to defend him if anyone managed to track him down. Days passed. And then more days. And more days after that.

At first, she tried to pass the time by chatting with Threepio, but she quickly grew tired of his habit
of pointing out how unwise her relationship with Kylo was. In truth, Rey was fully aware of this, and didn't need it rubbed in her face all the time.

After she'd tired of Threepio's well-meaning but annoying sermons on feminine empowerment and exiting "abusive" relationships, she really had nothing to do. So she found herself obsessing over that strange conversation she'd had with Kylo, just before they fought Snoke.

She recalled it clearly. How he seemed to tune her out every time she suggested that his memories could have been altered by Master Skywalker. No matter how many times she repeated it, he still acted like he literally hadn't heard her.

It was almost as if he had some sort of Force compulsion - as if someone had manipulated his mind so he could not comprehend the notion that Luke had been the one to erase those memories.

If it wasn't for this, she would have made the extremely plausible assumption that it had been Snoke, but why would Snoke go through the trouble to hide Master Skywalker's involvement? No, given the evidence, it seemed much more likely that Luke had been the one to both erase some of Kylo's memories, and to do so in such a way that made Kylo psychologically unable to realize who had really done it.

But why? After a good deal of thought, she came up with the theory that it must have been part of some failed early attempt at bringing Kylo back to the Light. That made sense. It really did... But then why was her gut insisting that it wasn't true. Why was it insisting that she'd only just scratched the surface of some other huge secret?

During these weeks of waiting, she had nothing better to do than ponder the mystery of Kylo's absent memories.

That was, until she developed an extremely worrisome case of nausea and no-period.

Being in a hospital, a test was not hard to acquire, and before long, her pregnancy was confirmed. For the most part, she went through her process all over again. Starting with panic, followed by self-pity, onto the eventual realization that this wasn't the end of the world, and finally, the transition into problem-solving mode. The only real difference from her forgotten previous experience with these feelings, was the relative absence of rage at Kylo. And that was even after she surmised that this was probably the extremely upsetting thing he knew about her future, but wouldn't tell her.

The problem was, she found it rather hard to be furious with a man who was comatose in a hospital, because he'd been shot nineteen times while protecting her.

She was much more focused on what to do next. Just as before, running away to birth and raise the children in permanent exile seemed like the most obvious choice. But just as before, she came to the conclusion that if she spent the rest of her life hiding, he would spend the rest of his hunting for her.

And would she be honestly able to say that she didn't want to be found? Building a life with him seemed daunting to say the least, but she also found that she was rather averse to the idea of never seeing him again.

Of course, the idea of bringing him back with her also crossed her mind. But she was absolutely certain that even in the exceedingly unlikely event that she talked Kylo into coming back with her, he'd just end up in front of another firing squad. Or, well, she supposed that him helping take out Snoke might count for something, but his betrayal was so clearly based on self-interest, that it seemed very unlikely to completely cancel out his many other crimes. At best, his sentence might
be commuted down to life in prison, and for a man like him, was that really any better?

Staying with him seemed almost equally ill-advised, appealing as the idea might have been in the short term. As per his own plan, she assumed that once he was well, he would set about overthrowing the First Order and taking the dictatorship for himself. Just as before, it occurred to her that considering other people's apparent admiration of his tactical brilliance, he might potentially pull it off. And considering that he'd come from a family literally full of generals and senators, and had served as the right-hand of a dictator for the last several years - he might not make a complete shambles of it.

If she were to stay with him, there were only two directions that her role seemed likely to go. The first and most probable was that she would be dragged even deeper into Kylo's scheme. That would almost certainly mean becoming his apprentice and/or one of his knights in very truth, and she would consequently be expected to help him intimidate his allies, and murder his rivals.

She envisioned herself, black-clad, masked, a red lightsaber in her hand, and heavily pregnant, waddling menacingly into battle, most likely pausing amidst the carnage to pee every fifteen minutes. Paragon of independent learning that Rey was, she had already read up on the various discomforts and inconveniences of pregnancy.

Even independent of the absurdity, fighting and killing to propel a bloody coup in a fascist regime was anathema to all of her beliefs, both Jedi and otherwise.

Though, she supposed that she could stay by Kylo's side, and attempt to guide his ever-whirling moral compass in the right direction. She could continue her mission of turning him to the Light...

But the thing was, now that this goal had become so hopelessly complicated by true love, the idea of using his affection to manipulate him sounded even more distasteful than it did before. That wasn't to mention that simple common sense told her what was likely to happen if the central focus of a relationship was changing and controlling your partner. Said relationship would be very likely to go up in extremely dysfunctional flames.

That left the other potential path for staying with him. To remain by his side as a simple companion, completely uninvolved in his plans. To do no more than keep him company whenever he wasn't off killing people, and to wait longingly by a window whenever he was, her belly growing ever bigger.

Assuming that he actually succeeded in taking over, she would be his consort. On a practical level, she knew she would be expected to exemplify the obedience required of all his subjects, and stand silent and pretty by his side at ceremonial occasions.

She could see it now - herself sitting at some formal dinner party in a fancy dress, covered in priceless jewelry, licking her plate obliviously while some off-planet dignitaries watched with their jaws on the floor.

Once again, she was quite sure she couldn't imagine any other life she was more ill suited for, or that was less likely to make her happy in the long run. There would be the consolation of his company, and the no-doubt rewarding experience of raising a family. But regardless, she would be forced to do all of this, to live the rest of her life and raise her children, while acting in a role that was the complete antithesis of all that she was.

Delicate. Passive. Dependent. Everything that Rey wasn't and had no desire to become.

Somehow, that seemed like the most offensive choice of all, even more so than becoming Kylo's dark henchwoman, or fleeing to a deserted island and never seeing him again.
After spending many hours lamenting the shittiness of her available choices, she was right back to the idea of leaving him again.

It made the most sense to leave before he woke - that way he couldn't try to stop her. She had a feeling that on some level, he'd rather see her in a cage than see her leave. He would feel absolutely awful about holding her against her will, but he might do it just the same. Leaving sooner rather than later would eliminate that terrible choice for him.

But she was just as certain as ever that if she ran off like a thief in the night, without explanation or farewell, it would break his heart. Kylo had a hard enough time managing his emotions as it was. This was a man who wrecked up rooms after minor disappointments. She shuddered to think what he might do if nursing a broken heart. Entire planets might suffer.

If she treated Kylo like some deranged monster to be fled in terror, she had very little doubt that he would act like one.

On the other hand, it seemed remotely possible that if she treated him like a rational human being with feelings, he might - just might - rise to the occasion.

Chapter End Notes

Can't you just picture five-year-old Ben Solo chattering excitedly to an increasingly horrified Han and Leia, about how someday he'd lose his first limb like a big boy, and then he would put it under his pillow for the Limb Fairy...

Next time: Smut, Now With 50% More True Love

Don't forget to review <3
Chapter Notes

I decided to post a few days early... Happy Valentines Day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 29: Smut, Now With 50% More True Love

She wasn't sure exactly how this worked, but had a fairly strong hunch that it would.

That night, she forsook her comfy cot in the corner of Kylo's hospital room, and instead, she curled up on the floor beside Kylo's tank. It had a bit of a shimmer, she noticed. The healing goo was held in not by glass, but by a force field.

Those shared dreams usually seemed to happen when they were sharing a bed. She had to get close to him.

Her eyes closed. Sleep. She really had to sleep. This wouldn't have been the first cold floor she'd bedded down on. It actually kind of reminded her of that cold stone "bed" in her hut, on Ach-To.

...And suddenly she is there, standing amid green meadows and mossy crags. But it is different. The climate is temperate, and she is fairly sure the island is bigger, and atop the hill in the distance, there are no ruins, but a shimmering white castle.

It is like a fanciful, idealized version of Ach-To, as if rendered by an artist who'd never been there, but had been given a brief, vague description, and had filled in the details with imagination. It is like her nightly bedtime fantasy from the old days.

Rey supposes her subconscious had made all of this up, so she silently commends it for having such good taste.

She turns a full three-sixty to take in the landscape, and finally, she spots him. Standing a few meters away, his back to her, his hair and surcoat fluttering in the wind.

"Can you hear me?" Rey calls out.

Kylo answers only with a slight nod.

"Are you going to remember this when you wake up?"

"This is a lucid dream, so yes," he replies a little snottily, his back still to her. "You're here to tell me that you're leaving."

"I have to," she tells him, voice as soft as if she was already trying to calm a tantrum. "They'll be pulling you out of the bacta tomorrow, and tapering off the sedatives. I have to be gone before then. If I wait for you to be awake and well, you'll try to stop me."

For the first time, Rey realizes that she isn't at all concerned that he might try to keep her by force.
After all, she's beat him in a fight before. What she really fears is that he might be sweet, and she would consequently lose her nerve.

She waits for some sort of reaction. She really wants to gauge his mood before giving him this next bit of information. But he still just stands there, his back to her.

"I'm also here to tell you that I'm pregnant." Again, she waits for his reaction, but there was none. She is more suspicious than ever that somehow, he'd already known. Still, somehow she has this strange deja-vu-like feeling that it's not something worth getting upset over. "It's twins. I've decided that I am going to give birth on the station, the one where you were held. I'm sure that your mother and uncle will be there. And if you can be civil, I'd like you to be there too."

Of all the aspects of her plan, this is the least thought-through. She simply has faith that General Organa will make it work.

He gives another slight, not-particularly-reassuring nod.

"That means that you can't kill your uncle," Rey clarifies.

Kylo lets out a disappointed groan. "Can't I just kill him a little?"

"Not even a little."

He still hasn't turned to face her, but she sees his shoulders slump, like a sullen child.

There is a long pause before her next, all important statement. "I also wanted to tell you - to make sure that you understand - that I love you."

Finally, he whirls around to face her. His expression is one of stunned fascination, as if she's just snatched that lightsaber out of the cold air of Starkiller, all over again. His vibes project a sense of disbelief, as if he had just been given a gift so far beyond his dessert that he is sure it has to be some sort of trick. She sees his eyes searching her face, his sense searching hers, needing some sort of proof before he'll dare believe it.

"I do love you," she confirms. "For some mad reason, I actually do." She pauses, and her voice turns smooth and dreamy, as if her next statement is some sort of foreknowing. "I love you in a way that I will never love anyone else."

His expression suddenly changes to something like melancholy disappointment, his gaze drops to the ground. "Are you sure - are you sure that it's me that you love, and not - my potential to become someone better?"

"No, Kylo," she groaned, irritated that her feelings were being questioned. "I am not in love with Hypothetical Perfect Ben Solo. I don't even know him, and frankly he sounds rather dull."

It wasn't Ben Solo that she'd gradually grown to sympathize with during those tense jail cell conversations. It wasn't Ben Solo who had made her laugh that night on Nar Shaddaa. It wasn't Ben Solo who had taken nineteen blaster bolts for her. And it definitely wasn't Ben Solo who had fucked her brains out against the bulkhead of a Star Destroyer.

Suddenly she is in his arms, face pressed against his shoulder. He holds her so tightly that she couldn't have escaped if she'd wanted to. This was convenient, because at the moment, she's fairly certain that she never wants to leave.

He was muttering something into her hair. At first, she thinks he is saying you're beautiful, but after several repetitions, she realizes that he is in fact saying you're a fool. This doesn't bother her,
because she agrees completely. She is a fool to love someone like him, and she knows it. He had nearly died saving her life, but he is still the same person that he always was. Moody, ruthless and at war with himself. This is a man who is dangerous just to know, let alone love.

But she has more to say. "I love you, but that doesn't change the fact that you and I are on different paths. Those paths crossed for a while, but they're still going in very different directions. You believe it's your destiny to rule the galaxy, and I believe it's my destiny to become a Jedi Master. Those destinies are mutually exclusive, and we both know it. I really wouldn't mind seeing you every now and then, if we can manage it. But being together every day is never going to be possible for us."

She pauses, waiting for him to argue, waiting for him to protest, to beg her to stay with him, to declare an intention to go back with her - consequences be damned, or to propose they elope, spend the rest of their lives evading the terrible clutches of fate.

He says nothing. There is only tacit agreement that a life together is impossible. For some reason, it is only then that her eyes randomly decide to start tearing up.

"This isn't goodbye forever," she says, as much to reassure herself as him. It occurs to her that he is taking this almost suspiciously well. No tantrum, not even begging her to stay. Then she finally realizes why.

On some level, people have a general tendency to use their parent's relationship as a template for their own, and his parents had lived apart for most of their marriage. Consciously or subconsciously, he not only thinks that a gap in age and ideology was no obstacle to a loving relationship, but neither was living largely separate lives.

That or he is just making a real effort to keep it together. Probably both.

Rey has said her peace, and somehow, she expects the dream to end. But they're still standing there, holding each other. After what felt like an appropriately long time, he released her from his arms, and they both survey their surroundings. Their eyes settle on the hilltop castle.

"Want to have a look around?" he asks casually.

"Sure."

They climb the mossy steps to the chateau, and as they walk, Rey recalls some practical matters they need to discuss.

"So, when I leave, I can sneak onto your ship and send your coordinates to your knights, and they can pick you up. That is if you think that's a good idea."

Kylo nods.

"Are you sure?" she hesitates. "You're pretty badly injured, in real life. You're in a hospital. You've - um - been shot quite a bit."

"I noticed," he says, rolling his eyes.

"You - you also have a prosthetic leg. A good one though. They say you won't even notice a difference."

He just shrugs, and she thinks she can see a very slight, wry smile.

"Kylo, you're rather defenseless at the moment. Do you trust your knights to -"
"They wouldn't be my knights if I didn't. I can sense people's loyalties, remember?" He pauses, frowning. "What do you mean sneak onto my ship?"

Rey sighs deeply. This is not going to be pretty. "I bartered it, for your medical care."

"WHAT?!" he bellows. "YOU SOLD MY SHIP?!"

She steps up to him, glaring into his face fearlessly. "What the hell was I supposed to do?! I had nothing else of value! The slaver scheme takes two!"

She feels him calm down a little, but he's still quite clearly pissed. "You should have asked me," he grumbles.

"Ask you?! You were a hair's breadth from dead!" she shouts furiously. "You Skywalkers and your whining! If you're going to be King of the Universe, you can just get a new one! A whole fleet of new ones! Or you can steal it back before you leave, I REALLY don't give a shit! But I am NOT going to apologize to you for doing what I had to do to save your life! YOU can get a new ship, but I can't get a new you!"

That shuts him right up. Rey makes a mental note that a screaming a back-handed declaration of love was an effective way of calming him down.

He just grins. "Even in our dreams, we're fighting."

They walk through the vine-encrusted doorway. This being a lucid dream, of course the first room they look into is the bedroom. There is a large bed in the center of an enormous high-ceilinged room, given a touch of privacy by the glittering transparent satin, hanging in irregular swathes around it.

Hand-in-hand they walk straight to the bed, both knowing perfectly well that this is their destination anyway. He pushes aside the curtain for her to enter, and he follows close behind, pulling her to him by the waist.

"You're going to leave as soon as we're done, aren't you?" he asks.

She doesn't deny it.

Kylo nods, as if she's given a lengthy explanation, and he's understood perfectly, even if he doesn't agree. Rey tips her head back, demanding his kiss, and he gives it, his succulent lips closing slowly against hers. Very slowly. In a way, it's not unlike the first time, but also completely different. It is as if he is moving in slow-motion, but there is no hesitation there. She doesn't sense even the shadow of nervousness in him, and there are no stern self-reminders to breathe.

That is when she realizes that she is the one who has forgotten to breathe. She is the one who is nervous. If his movements are slow, hers are nonexistent, lips frozen under his, hands stuck tight to a single spot on his back.

"What's wrong?" he asks, noticing her hesitation.

She answers before she's really caught up with herself, staring up at those smoldering eyes of his. "It's just, I've never done this with someone that I'm in love with."

The words just fall from her lips, unconsidered, but absolutely true, she knows. She had half a dozen partners during her lonely experimental period a few years ago, and she'd kind of liked some of them. But even as she was desperately searching for love, she never imagined for even a
moment that she might have found it.

And now she finds herself wondering if she's going to do things correctly, if there are things that you're supposed to do differently when you're in love, and if so, what are they? How does one do them? And when?

Kylo's eyes fall shut, and he gives a quavering sigh. He's savoring her words, as if he's never heard anything so beautiful, and knows he'll never hear their like again.

"That's okay," he says with a soft sweetness that she didn't know he was capable of. "I have."

Rey blinks as she realizes what he means, that he's been in love with her since well before they first went to bed together. For once, the imbalance of sexual experience is reversed. She is the novice, and he is finally her teacher.

His hands rise to her face, settling on either cheek as he kisses her again, so light and gentle. But he pulls away a moment later, smirking sheepishly. "Actually, I still have no idea what I'm doing."

"We'll figure it out together, then," she rules, as his lips close in on hers again and she surges up to meet his mouth. His lips part against hers and their tongues converge and slide into more intimate contact, as if making love on their own account. It is not a duel this time, but a dance, swirling and elegant.

Kylo's hands leave her cheeks, gliding down the curve of her neck and onto her shoulders, fingers slipping beneath the edge of her clothing. Somehow, she's not wearing her ordinary outfit anymore, but a silky wisp of a robe. His hands continue across her shoulders, taking the robe with them, and it flutters to the floor, as he sucks her bottom lip in between his. He has apparently been similarly attired, and his robe just magically disappears, now that it is no longer wanted.

Finally, her hands have remembered how to move, and one departs from his back, stealing along the skin of his sides. They smooth over the pucker of his bowcaster wound, and then to the rigid proof of his desire, closing around the searing, silken shaft. He grunts against her lips as she begins to caress him, his teeth lightly grazing against the lip he suckles.

After a few strokes, she frowns in confusion. She glances down, and she could swear that his cock is noticeably bigger, despite being respectably-sized in the first place. Perhaps the wishful thinking of a dream? Well, two could play at that game. She draws in a deep breath, puffing out her cheeks absurdly, and suddenly, her breasts have gained a cup size or two.

"You didn't need to do that," he chuckles.

"Neither did you." She pauses. "I'm not sure, but I think you're probably supposed to be yourself for this sort of thing."

He nods, and in the blink of an eye, their respective anatomies are no longer exaggerated.

She takes hold of him and resumes her caress, feeling his rising lust as if it's her own. After a moment, he grabs her by the wrist pulls her into a tight embrace, one arm supporting her back as he lowers her down to the bed.

He is hovering over her, looking as intense and dangerous and tantalizing as ever. But the contents of his vibes give a new flavor to that smoldering, ravenous stare. Something intensely sentimental. A confusing jumble of feelings, of desire and greed and adoration and jealousy. And probably more besides, feelings that might be unique to this man who seemed to feel everything so keenly.

The fingers of one hand comb slowly back through her loose hair, and the other glides lightly
down from her shoulder. It pauses briefly to scoop up under her breasts, and then moves on, roaming down to the curve of her hip, to her thighs. She gasps as his hand whispers over her sex, and his brows shoot up in surprise. The novice was apparently unaware that mere fingers could accomplish such sensations. But his face is almost comically serious as he slips his fingers into the slick crevasse of her femininity, and he begins to experiment.

Again, she can tell that he's never done this, but just as before, he can feel which movements she likes, which she dislikes and which she absolutely adores, and pleasure coils in her belly. She lets out a deep sigh, and suddenly, that luscious mouth is on hers again and he seems to devour her cry of pleasure. His fingers keep working relentlessly below as she steals tiny gasps against his lips.

Her hands clutch at his back, and he's still kissing her, his tongue flicking against hers like a bobbing flame. She feels that sweet tension winding tighter and tighter deep inside her, until it's ready to snap. Finally, she lets out a rather inelegant cry against his mouth.

His own desire all the more urgent now, within moments, he is in position, and her legs wrap loosely around him. He stares into her eyes as the tip of his cock pushes past her sopping folds, and his sigh fades into a course of panting as he slides slowly, so slowly, one millimeter at a time, until fully immersed in the sleek grip of her bliss. Her legs lighten around his waist, arms firmly hooked under his, until they are in the most intimate double embrace imaginable.

"You're mine," he sighs. The words are sharply possessive, but the tender way he says them, he sounds almost in awe, as if his statement was preceded by an unspoken I can't believe...

He pauses to press a few kisses to her neck before he begins to move in a smooth sway, exquisitely unhurried. So slowly that unlike before, she can keep pace with his movements, hips rising to meet his. It gradually becomes a liquid, rolling motion, like the waves crashing on the shore outside, a constant give-and-take, an effortless cycle of demand and indulge.

It is lovely, but she knows it won't last. With a little thrill of excitement, she wonders how long he'll be able to hold out before he begins to pound into her with feral abandon. She could feel him trembling with the strain, see him chewing on his own lips, each breath coming in as a soft gasp, and back out as a sigh. But still, he wouldn't give up. His stubborn streak seems to be creeping in. He will make this last for as long as he can stand to, as if he might be able to delay her departure indefinitely.

"It's okay," she tells him.

He stills against her, searching her face for she knew not what. "Tell me it won't be the last time."

Rey's answer slipped out without a single thought, as if the notion was produced by something other than her brain. "It won't."

Eyes still locked, Kylo gives a low grown, arms tightening around her, cradling her against his chest, his soft sighs becoming staccato grunts as he picks up speed. Only a few faster thrusts, and he finally spills into her in a pulsing burst of simultaneous rapture, her sharp cry mingling with his.

Kylo's face nestles into the crescent of her neck, nose nuzzling her throat, chin resting between her breasts. Her arms and legs are still around him, and he's still inside her.

It then occurs to her that once again, they've had fantastic sex, but it still lacked that sense of power, of oneness with the Force, that they'd experienced the first time. And then she realizes why it only occurred then - it was because that must have been when their twins were conceived. The Force is created by life, and they had literally been creating life.
"If we stay together, you'll stop loving me, won't you?" Kylo asks softly. "Eventually, you'll get fed up with my temper and my whining."

Rey only has to consider this for a moment to realize that it's true. She loves him, but she's almost certain that he was probably best in small doses. And sweet as it would be to deny this fact, in the end it would have been much more cruel. At the same time, focusing on the practical seemed likely to soften the blow.

"Both of us would be miserable if dragged down each other's path. I would absolutely hate living as a queen or whatever, and training as a Jedi with your uncle - I have a feeling that would be equally out-of-the-question, from your perspective."

He nods thoughtfully into her tits. "You know, given the choice between keeping you by my side and watching you slowly learn to hate me again, or having parsecs between us, but knowing that you still loved me, I think I'd choose the latter," he paused, smiling mysteriously. "I think I'd like looking out into the vastness of space, and knowing that somewhere amid those stars, you were out there, loving me."

Rey smiled into his hair. "That might be the corniest thing I've ever heard," she tells him, knowing that he can feel the soft, warm sensation in her chest, created by his words.

As he chortles, she notes a phantom poking sensation on her back. A faint voice fills the air. Mrs. Buzzkill? Mrs. Buzzkill?

"I'm about to wake up," she laments hastily. "This is goodbye, for now. Don't get yourself killed."

"No!" he insists, suddenly panicked. He holds her even tighter in an all but bone-crunching embrace. So much for letting her go gracefully. "Not yet! Not -"

... And then she was on the cold floor, staring at a nurse's shoes.

"Mrs. Buzzkill, are you -"

"I'm fine," Rey said, climbing to her feet.

The nurse gave her an odd look, and departed.

Rey stood, gazing at Kylo, inert and defenseless in the tank. On a whim, she reached forward, palm pushing through the bacta containment field. Slipping through the warm goo, her little, tan hand closed around his huge, pale fingers.

She was blinking away tears as she let go, her hand descending to rest absent-mindedly on her lower belly.

She walked out of the hospital, Threepio and Artoo in tow, glancing back every now and then, as if hoping to spot him running to catch up with her. Fortunately the shuttle hadn't been sold off yet, and she was able to disable the security. She toyed with the idea of stealing his stupid ship, but that would have meant risking the hospital staff throwing him out on the street, half-recovered.

Rey approached the comm console and scrolled through the names on the display until she found one with the surname Ren. She placed the call.

"Yes, Master."
The display flickered to life with the image of the random knight, head respectfully bowed. Rey supposed she shouldn't have been surprised that it was a woman, but she was, and couldn't help sizing her up. She looked human or possibly Echani, a few years older than Rey. Her hair was white, shorn short save for vertical spikes at the center, her ears, nose and brow glinting with piercings, her eyes and lips heavily lined... But by no means unpretty for all that.

"Your master is indisposed," Rey stated.

The spiky head shot up at the sound of an unfamiliar voice. The knight stared at her incredulously as Rey continued on. "His orders are for all of you to meet him at the coordinates I'm sending. Make sure you're not followed."

Rey hit the control to transmit their location.

The pierced knight gaped at her for another second or so before finding her voice. "Who the hell are you?"

Rey felt her lips spread in a grin that probably looked more smug than she meant it to. "I'm his girlfriend," she declared, and hung up immediately.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to all my reviewers! You make my day on a regular basis.

Next time: Friends Don't Understand Why She Loves Him
Chapter 30: Friends Don't Understand Why She Loves Him

The journey back was a long one. She supposed she could have borrowed some money against Kylo's ship, but she didn't want to risk him experiencing some sort of complication, and being unable to pay for treatment. So she decided to travel as a refugee, hopping from ship-to-ship until she got to where she was going.

After a few weeks of travel, she finally arrived at the Resistance Station that she'd left what felt like a lifetime ago.

At this point, Snoke's death was common knowledge throughout the civilized galaxy, and any self-respecting news-buff knew that he'd been assassinated by his second-in-command, Kylo Ren. People who were really in the know had even heard that he had an accomplice, some unidentified young woman.

So, by the time Rey landed on the station, everyone knew what she had done. She was not only welcomed back with open arms, but with celebration. She was a hero! A new Luke Skywalker! Suddenly, everyone was her friend. Every time a glass was raised, it was raised to her, and there was much talk of her being on the fast-track to high command. Rey even had a medal ceremony of her own, presided over by General Organa herself. Apparently she had sworn off officiating at those pompous events decades ago, but she made an exception for Rey.

Aside from General Organa and Master Skywalker, no one was more glad to see her than Finn and Poe. They both insisted that they'd never listened to the talk even for a moment. They'd never doubted her loyalty, and always been sure that somehow, she knew what she was doing.

It seemed that everyone had completely forgiven her for freeing Kylo Ren, war criminal or not. In fact, the prevailing assumption seemed to be that she had been manipulating him. Everyone seemed to believe that Rey had cunningly taken advantage of a black-hearted villain's ambition in order to destroy an even greater evil. And like the Rebel Alliance before them, the Resistance didn't seem to mind when it's operatives went rogue, so long as they were successful.

But amid the endless parties, Rey was still very aware of her two little, ever-growing situations. For some reason, she decided to tell General Organa first. That just felt right.

The grandmother-to-be's response was not hard to anticipate. The moment Rey explained her condition, Leia had thrown her arms around her. Leia had then explained that from the very first moment they'd met, she'd always known that somehow, they would be family, and she'd never dared hope that it would be like this.

Master Skywalker came next. Just as when she'd initially freed Kylo from prison, Rey had
expected her master to be shocked, but forgiving. She was only half-right. Luke was compassionate, but didn't show even the slightest flicker of surprise. If Rey hadn't known better, she would have thought that he'd foreseen this development.

Rey also took that opportunity to ask her pressing questions about Ben Solo's fall.

"Master, he told me that he had no memory of turning to the Dark Side, and I have this feeling - did you erase those memories?"

She hadn't really expected more than some cryptic riddle of a response, but Luke's answer was actually fairly straightforward, so far as it went.

"I cannot tell you at this time," he told her serenely. "Not until I have seen my nephew face-to-face, and seen his reaction to me. And I suspect your pregnancy will make that confrontation quite inevitable."

Rey then recalled that bit of hopeful news she'd winkled out of Kylo. "He told me that the padawans might be alive!" she announced gleefully, watching for her master's face to light up.

Luke showed nothing but a mysterious smile. "I'm afraid I left out some details regarding my trip to Dantooine..."

She immediately caught his implication. "That's where they are hiding, isn't it!" She paused, realizing what this meant. Her voice suddenly filled with betrayal. "You lied to me!"

"Now Rey," he said soothingly, "I didn't lie to you. I really was looking for information on the rehabilitation of Dark Jedi. I just didn't mention that this wasn't my main objective."

"But you said they were dead!"

"No, I said they were lost."

"If you knew they were on Dantooine, that doesn't sound very lost to me." Rey narrowed her eyes, both furious and hurt at being deceived by virtually the only person she truly trusted. "Either way, you implied something that wasn't true, and did nothing to clarify! That's functionally identical to a lie!"

"Rey, your point of view is valid," he sighed. "I just couldn't tell you the real reason for my trip to Dantooine. I knew you'd be spending a lot of time with my nephew, and he is notorious for extracting information. I couldn't risk him finding out where they were."

Rey opened her mouth to argue, but closed it again. That was actually a pretty good excuse, and she supposed that she couldn't complain that she'd been lied to if lives were on the line. She really wanted to think that Kylo wouldn't have moved to wipe them out, at least not independently. But if Snoke had found out, he would have certainly ordered a massacre, and she couldn't say for certain that Kylo would have had the guts to outright refuse.

"Besides," Master Skywalker resumed, "I was thinking that sometime in the next few days, you and I could travel there together. Given some time, I can teach you some more advanced techniques for shielding your thoughts, prior to seeing my nephew again." Luke smiled. "You know, your old classmates were thrilled when I told them that you were alright and had found me. They're quite eager to see you."

Any lingering resentment at being lied to vanished in that instant. It was such a moving thought, the idea that for all this time, there actually had been a small group of people somewhere, wondering what happening to her, worried about her well being, and longing to see her again. It
sounded so much like her fantasies of a lost family...

She mulled this idea over with tears in her eyes, but she quickly came to another question. "If they've all been hiding on Dantooine, then why was I left behind?"

"I actually don't know," her master said. "I wasn't there. The evacuation was overseen by a trusted friend, someone who used to help out at the academy. I'm not sure what happened to him, either. I'd imagine he may have ended up on Jakku as well."

Later that day, she recalled that with enough concentration, she'd been able to retrieve something about her abandonment. Once she was on her own in her quarters, she drew in a deep breath, and slid into meditation.

She could see it happening. She looked down at her feet, trotting up a ramp to a nondescript shuttle, an old man and several older children in line before her. Her ears filled with claps of thunder and someone's shouting. Probably the pilot.

"We have to go NOW... NOW... Can't wait any... has to be NOW!"

Suddenly, Rey froze in place, her little head bobbing up, as if she'd caught a scent on the breeze.

"It's Ben!" she exclaimed, yanking on the old man's sleeve. "It's Ben! He's back!"

The old man looked stricken, gently taking her little hand. "Rey, Ben is gone."

The pilot was still shouting. "... have to go NOW!"

"No!" she insisted. "He's here! We can't leave without him!"

"Come Rey, we have to go. The pilot says -"

She yanked her hand out of the old man's gentle grip, turned on her little heel, and sprinted out into the pouring rain.

"Rey! Stop! Come back! Rey!" she heard the kind old man calling out. She caught the sound of splashing as he attempted to run after her, his old legs no match for those of a child.

She glanced above and saw the ship zooming off into the night sky. Then she looked out ahead to the seven dark figures off in the distance.

Rey came back to the present with a gasp. A lot of things had just started making sense.

There was one more conversation to have before she departed for Dantooine, and she had a feeling that this would be the hardest. She had to tell Finn and Poe.

She put it off for several days, telling herself that she couldn't find a truly private place to talk, but when she spotted them in a deserted rec-room, she knew the time had come.

"There's something I need to tell you guys," she announced quietly.

Both men just looked at her, expectant and attentive.

She took a deep breath. "I'm pregnant."

The few seconds of tense silence was broken by Poe. "Was it -?" he seemed unable to utter the name.
"Yes."


Meanwhile, Finn had already jumped to his feet. "I'm going to kill him! KILL him!"

Rey grimaced, knowing that they must have thought. Or, well, she didn't have the nerve to ask exactly what their assumption was, but whatever it was, it wasn't good.

"It wasn't like that," she said wearily.

The combination of her vague denial and the meaningful look that accompanied it was apparently enough to imply that whatever had happened between her and Kylo, it had been with her consent.

"Son of a bitch must have messed with your head!" Poe exclaimed abruptly, as if he'd just solved a riddle.

"No," Rey said flatly. She suppressed a chortle at the idea that Poe was repeatedly referring to General Organa as a bitch. "It wasn't a mind trick."

"How do you know?"

"Because!" she replied a bit more vehemently. Her first instinct was to say because he wouldn't do that, but she supposed that wouldn't do much to convince her friends, both of whom had never had anything but calloused cruelty from Kylo. "I can defend against those."

The room then went very, very quiet.

"Guys, I know it sounds crazy, but he's actually not that bad. That is, if he likes you." She knew she needed to elaborate, but how could she make them understand, when she didn't quite understand it herself? Then she had an idea, something much more straight-forward. "He very nearly died saving my life, you know." She supposed that she didn't need to specify that they'd already done it several times before that.

"Really?" Finn said, sounding much more confused than impressed.

"Yes."

Another long, long silence.

"Look," she began, sensing that neither of them was convinced, "it just sort of happened."

Yet more excruciating silence. The expression on both their faces, it was as if they were looking at some incomprehensible puzzle, not a good friend. It seemed like they literally couldn't imagine why their dear friend could have been intimate with the very personification of evil, someone who had harmed them both. It was almost enough to make her actually doubt her own feelings. Almost.

"Please say something!" she demanded in desperation.

The two men glanced at each other. Apparently their relationship was at that stage where entire conversations could occur with a look. Poe was the one who spoke. "I think we both need some time to process this."

Finn met her eyes. "But we're here for you Rey," he told her, patting her on the shoulder. The two of them then left the room.
The two remaining days before her departure were hard. Finn and Poe clearly hadn't processed her revelation yet. They were never mean, nor did they seem to avoid her. But each interaction seemed guarded, every conversation felt sparse, every hug not quite so warm.

She had never been so glad of her ability to sense people's feelings, because without it, she might have thought she'd lost her two best friends. But she sensed that their behavior wasn't out of any judgmental hatred.

This was simply the silence of genuinely having no idea what to say.

Fortunately, the trip to Dantooine was an excellent distraction. As it turned out, there were only three padawans left. Apparently, there had been eight at the beginning, but three had gone home to their families, and two had lost faith and set off to make their own way in the galaxy. The three that remained had apparently taken up residence in an abandoned underground homestead, their time split between subsistence farming, practicing the Force abilities they'd already learned, and occasionally earning some extra cash by taking care of local kinrath infestations.

Their apparent leader was a Nautalan woman, who had squealed with delight at the sight of Rey. Many hugs and happy exclamations followed.

The next several weeks were some of the happiest of Rey's life, thus far. Exploring the ruins was a blast, and getting to know her old friends was almost equally fun. The other padawans didn't seem at all upset when she told them of her pregnancy (indeed, it was getting more obvious every day), even when she told them who the father was. Rey supposed that having known Ben Solo probably made it much easier for them to wrap their heads around the idea of someone hooking up with Kylo Ren.

Of course, Rey took the opportunity to ask questions about Ben and his fall, but was thoroughly disappointed. They told her that, just as she'd assumed, Ben was sort of reckless and moody, but basically a good person. That was about it, though. None of them seemed to have any insider information on his fall, saying that it was not long after his family history became public, and he'd just run off without a word to any of them. However, there was one thing they all agreed on. They all shared a strong hunch that whatever had happened to Ben Solo, it was much more complicated than a bad apple falling to the Dark Side out of sheer, innate wickedness.

Her days spent hanging out with her friends and tinkering with ancient computers, Rey's evenings were more subdued. Every night, she would hop onto the holoterminal on Luke's ship, to check up on galactic news, each time knowing that she might learn of Kylo's death.

But it was nothing but good news. Amazingly, over the course of a few months, Kylo had taken control of the First Order, rebranded it as the New Empire and named himself Supreme Emperor. No one even seemed particularly surprised by this.

Rey supposed that his success was mainly because he had been Snoke's second in command for several years, and was therefore his most obvious successor. But she also seemed to gather that while the man may have been awkward as hell unmasked and one-on-one, he could play the role of shadowy wizard-dictator to perfection.

As a matter of fact, he seemed to be taking the whole mystical dark tyrant-messiah thing to new heights. In some ways, he seemed to be more of a religious leader than a traditional head-of-state. Kylo was one of the only people in the galaxy who used the Force openly, which must have made him seem very godlike to most people. And Kylo's personality was surprisingly well suited for his current role.
He would have made a terrible politician. Politicians were supposed to be level-headed, consistent, and easy to relate to. But gods, they were actually supposed to be mysterious, otherworldly, incomprehensible, not to mention their well-known tendency toward wanton destruction whenever someone pissed them off.

Rey also supposed that his success might have had to do with his ability to sense intentions. Not only could Kylo spot a traitor from a klick away, but he always knew everyone's price. For almost any given person, he could always come up with threats they would never defy, and bribes they would never pass up.

Once she was satisfied that he'd pulled it off, sleeping became a bit easier, at least in terms of stress level. Pregnancy was not a very comfortable state of being. Every once in awhile, when she couldn't sleep, she'd toy with the idea of going outside, of gazing up at the stars and wondering if he was doing the same. She never actually did it, but the thought had definitely crossed her mind.

As her pregnancy progressed, it became more necessary to consider the long-term plan. Rey knew that Kylo would not be satisfied with a walk-on role in the children's lives, but a traditional shared-custody arrangement wouldn't work either. The twins couldn't exactly spend three days a week and every other Life Day with their father, not when their parents were separated by so many light years worth of distance and ideology. And for a young child to split their time between two so vastly different households, an Imperial Court and a Jedi Academy, would no doubt be very confusing.

Considering that difference in ideology, Kylo was unlikely to agree to both of his children - potential heirs to his dark empire - being raised as Jedi, and she already knew he was not above kidnapping. And she sure as hell wasn't going to let him take them both.

She'd consulted with Luke on the subject, and it was his suggestion that she ultimately ended up settling on. The children would be split up. One would stay with her, the other would go with their father. It was the only way that made any practical sense, in these bizarre circumstances. Luke had also pointed out that this might help maintain equilibrium in the Force.

The Skywalkers had been supposed to bring balance to the Force, but all they had ever done was throw it completely out of whack. Maybe the cycle could be broken with this next generation. Perhaps if one was brought up in the light, and the other in semi-darkness, the Cosmic Force would be less prone to catastrophic over-corrections that tended to cost millions of lives.

But Rey was horrified by the idea of giving up one of her children. They were a part of her, both spiritually and literally, and this arrangement would mean rarely seeing one of them again. But even so, both her brain and her gut told her that this was the right course, even as her heart protested. She hated the idea, but felt this odd certainty that this was the way things were supposed to go. She couldn't quite explain it, but she wondered if this was what Kylo meant when he said he just knew things. Perhaps the reason would become more clear with time.

Either way, on some level, it meant going through her emotional-resilience process all over again. Anger at the situation (and indeed at Luke, who suggested it), followed by pervasive sadness, and finally something remotely resembling acceptance. Whether that acceptance would last beyond birth remained to be seen, regardless of this feeling of unavoidable destiny.

This meant making the terrible choice of which of her children she would raise, and which she would be a virtual stranger to.

She already felt like she knew them.

Her son came through the clearest. A charmer, that boy. One of those rare individuals with natural
charisma, no doubt the gift of his grandparents. His charm and kind heart would earn him the loyalty of his friends, and the grudging respect of his opponents. Her son would be the kind of guy you would bend over backwards to help, simply because he seemed like he would do the same for you. Like her, he would be resilient too. Her boy would be the sort of person who could go through hell and come out the other side a better man.

Her daughter was much more clouded. Rey sensed little of her own resilience there. A sensitive soul, her daughter. And above all, Rey had a strong feeling that her daughter would be the sort of person who was easily misunderstood. But she was a good person, Rey was certain of that. Her girl had an enormous heart. She would love deeply, and do everything she could to be loved by others. Rey suspected that this might be her daughter's greatest strength, but also her greatest weakness. She would form connections easily, but might also be easily influenced. The sort of person who might have a hard time discerning the difference between right and wrong, when it came to winning and/or keeping the love of others.

This in mind, the most obvious choice would be to send her daughter, this tiny likeness of Anakin Skywalker, with Kylo. They would understand each other. But the more she thought about it, the more she wondered if that was the right choice. Perhaps her son, her charming, likable, resilient son, should go with Kylo? Her boy seemed much less likely to be caught up in the manipulative schemes of a royal court, and less likely to be shattered by imperfect parenting.

She was understandably concerned about what kind of father Kylo would make, left to his own devices. His recklessness. His emotional instability. His dark beliefs. What might he do in hopes of making his heir stronger in the Dark Side? Again, her feelings told her he would be a decent father. She was almost completely sure. But almost completely sure was not enough when it comes to your own child.

If only there was a way to keep an eye on him, not so much because she didn't trust Kylo, but for her own peace of mind...

As she neared the end of her pregnancy, it seemed like a good time to go back to somewhere with easy access to medical care. She could no longer put off her return to the station.

Her arrival was met with quite a different reaction this time. Her pregnancy was ridiculously obvious at this point. Carrying twins, and with her tiny frame - she looked about ready to pop. Everyone seemed to know. She trusted that Finn and Poe had respected her privacy, it was just that most people could do basic math. Everybody knew who she'd been alone with just under nine months ago, and this fit well with all of those old nasty rumors.

Every room went silent when she entered it. All that talk of promotion came to an abrupt halt. Most people wouldn't meet her eyes for more than a moment. Some flat-out refused to speak to her. It seemed that people could forgive her for freeing a despicable war criminal from prison, but sleeping with him - that majorly crossed a line.

Fortunately, this general coldness was what finally brought Finn and Poe around. Seeing Rey treated so cruelly activated Finn's protective streak, and Poe wasn't far behind. Suddenly, the awkwardness was either gone or exceedingly well hidden. They were constantly at her side, hugging her, laughing at her jokes, rubbing her belly, chattering excitedly about the natal shower they would throw for her. And all of this was done very publicly. Her friends were making it abundantly clear that they knew and didn't care.

To that end, Poe developed a rather endearing, if a bit confusing habit. Whenever he was talking with Rey and someone passed within earshot, he would drop the current subject and loudly
announce something to the tune of people needing to keep their noses out of Rey's private life. This led to some very strange conversations...

"So there I was, this old Interceptor is on me tight, so I shut the S-foils and YOU TELL 'EM TO MIND THEIR OWN VAGINAS and I switched the shields to double rear..."

Finn's approach was a little more graceful. At one point, he informed Rey that people often tried to prod him with questions about her, thinking he might be privy to juicy details. Whenever this happened, Finn would tell them that he didn't know and had never asked, and would point out that Rey had been in extreme danger at the time, and was cut off from everyone she knew and trusted. He would go on to explain that people do strange things in intense situations...

When Finn told her this, she was moved almost to tears at the idea that he'd defended her so articulately.

Some days later, she found herself pondering this while she was supposed to be meditating. She kept snapping out of her focus on nothingness, distracted by these weirdly intermittent pains in her back. She decided to get that checked out once she was done.

The more she thought about it, the more Finn's explanation actually made her uneasy. Because it wasn't true. What had happened between her and Kylo wasn't a matter of a scared, lonely girl seeking comfort. Considering her history, Rey was the last person who was likely to have an extreme reaction to being alone and unsafe. But at this point, she'd all but given up on attempting to communicate how and why she'd fallen in love with him.

She would never be able to explain her reason for loving Kylo. But then again, love doesn't need a reason, does it?

Rey had just come to that thought when she noted a warm, spreading dampness in her trousers. There was no moment of panic. Several days early, but she'd been told to expect that possibility. She simply rose to her feet, calm but ungainly, and waddled across the room to a nearby window.

"You'd better get your ass here, quick." she whispered, gazing out into the black.

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Chapter End Notes

Just for the record, I do want to clarify that the whole trope chapter title thing is NOT aimed at making fun of other works or authors. It's really me making fun of myself for a lack of originality. On some level, the tropes are just my way of cloaking my cliches with an "I meant to do that."

Do please review. I really depend on those to stay motivated.

Next time: Han Solo's Revenge
Chapter Notes

Brace yourselves for yet another confused jumble of feels and semi-crack.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 31: Han Solo's Revenge

Threepio and Artoo stood a few paces from the birthing room door.

Artoo gave an inquisitive chirp.

"Do I still disapprove of Miss Rey and Young Master Ben? Why ever do you ask?" Threepio replied coyly.

Artoo responded with a buzzing grunt.

"I never really disapproved of them! I always knew they'd end up together. I simply - pointed out potential drawbacks. And besides, you must admit that their relationship does not seem likely to have a pure, saccharine-sweet happily ever after." The protocol droid paused. "If anything, I disapprove that Young Master Ben has not married Miss Rey. It is extremely rude to impregnate a woman without first having a formal nuptial ceremony!"

Artoo gave a short beep.

"Indeed, it will be good to see another generation, if only because it will mean that the Skywalker lineage will not end with that human disaster." Threepio's tone turned even more prim and arrogant than usual, as if trying to inspire envy, "I'll have you know that I received a NannyBot programming upgrade, the other day. I am now equipped with extensive general knowledge about child health and development. I can only assume this will mean that I shall be assisting in infant care."

Artoo chirped.

"They gave you the same upgrade? That's absurd! Why would they do such a thing? It's not like you can change a diaper!"

The little blue droid gave a longer string of buzzes and beeps.

"What do you mean, a rolling baby monitor?"

Artoo didn't exactly answer the question with his next series of chirps and coos.

"Why would I mind helping to care for Young Master Ben's offspring? It's not their fault that their father is a black-hearted villain."

Artoo gave a buzzing squawk, followed by an extended succession of beeps and hums.

"Yes, yes, I am aware of all that. I suppose you're right. If both Miss Rey and General Organa think there is good in him, it is likely that they are correct."
Where is he?

Rey had been so certain he would show up that she hadn't even worried about it until now. He would sense when her time came, and he already knew where to find the station. She'd even sent Finn and Poe away, lest Kylo turn on them, and Luke had agreed to keep a low profile amid the proceedings.

But Kylo wasn't here yet, and that was all she could think about. Well, that and the pain, something vaguely resembling an exaggerated, writhing menstrual cramp from the very depths of hell. Oh, and the thousand things that could go wrong with this process. And the thousand things that could go wrong afterwards.

"Come on darling, you can do this," Doctor Kolonia crooned, as Leia patted her hand. There were other people in the room too. Luke was standing discreetly in the back somewhere, and there some medical droids, probably some nurses, and who knew who else. The cone-like shield at her hip helped maintain modesty to some extent, but Rey found she had never cared less who had a first class view of her vag.

She vaguely registered someone else coming in. "General," the young officer stated, urgency in her voice.

"This better be important, lieutenant," Leia snapped.

"Ma'am, there's a shuttle that's demanding to dock with us. It's a model used almost exclusively by the Fir- New Empire, but it's transmitting a diplomatic white flag signal. Our scanners indicate that the weapons have been disabled."

Rey felt her lips spread into a smile, in spite of everything else.

"Did the pilot identify himself?" Leia demanded.

"He identified himself as - " the lieutenant cleared her throat awkwardly "- Darth Buzzkill."

Leia glanced at Rey, who managed a weak nod, and then turned back to the officer. "Do you have that team assembled?"

"Yes ma'am."

"All men you know to be level-headed? No itchy trigger fingers?"

"No one with a history of rash action, ma'am."

"Stall that shuttle for a few minutes and then allow them to land when I give the signal. I'll meet them myself."

I am not going to cry, Leia told herself. This was an order, as serious as if she'd been sending a squadron on a suicide mission. I am not going to cry, and I am not going to scream at him.

She felt her throat tighten as the dark shuttle slowly set down and the ramp lowered, enveloped in steam. She expected to feel all sorts of mixed feelings, seeing him again, but she knew this wasn't the time to get into it. What he'd done to Han would have to become the bantha in the room, for right now.

But strangely, she found that it just slipped her mind at the sight of that dear face.
"You're not wearing that ugly mask," she commented, as he strode down the ramp.

"I'm less conspicuous this way," he replied flatly, avoiding her eyes.

Leia held up a hand for him to halt as he reached the bottom of the ramp, and turned to one of her subordinates. "Search him."

Her son let out a grunt of annoyance, but complied, helpfully spreading his arms and legs. That little groan might have been the most wonderful thing she'd heard in years. It was so Ben.

An officer moved forward, and was literally trembling with fear as she patted down the terrifying visitor. "No weapons, ma'am."

Leia nodded, and gestured toward the hangar exit. "This way."

Her son fell into step beside her, the two of them flanked at front and back by several armed guards. His walk was brisk. Hurried. Her much shorter legs made it hard to keep up.

"I came as soon as I - is she alright?" Ben asked, sounding endearingly concerned.

"Who, Rey? Of course she is. That girl is damn tough." She paused. "Not that it really matters, but I approve completely, by the way. She's a wonderful girl."

"I noticed." His eyes were still front and center as the two of them proceeded through the halls of the station. It wasn't her gaze he was afraid to look at, she realized. He was trying not to see the bantha, too.

"Do you know about this plan?" she asked.

"Sort of."

Leia nodded. "Look, I am exceedingly familiar with the concept of two people having amazing chemistry but completely incompatible life goals. But - if the two of you decide you want to disappear together, just say the word. I still have some connections. I could make that happen for you."

Ben still refused to meet her gaze, but she saw him grimace, his profound frustration written clearly across his face. He wanted to elope with Rey. Desperately.

But he was choosing duty over desire. Putting what he saw as the greater good before his personal life.

Just as she always had, herself. That thought was both wonderfully heartening and extremely depressing.

"You know, I am actually rather proud of you," Leia heard herself say. There was a part of her, a big part of her that was more than a little dismayed by the idea that her son was now arguably the very sort of tyrant she'd fought against since early adolescence. She found the idea of so much power on only one person's shoulders deeply disturbing.

But those were shoulders that she had made, shoulders pulled, pink and squealing from her body... Maker, did she have birth on the brain, on this, the day she would become a grandma.

She had to admit that the way Ben had gone about seizing power was nothing short of brilliant, and while it was a bloody coup, it could have easily been much bloodier. And he couldn't possibly
be as bad as Snoke. She could only imagine the good Ben might do. "I'd probably brag about you all the time if I didn't think it would land me in another court martial. *Hey everybody, my son rules half the galaxy!* Of course, I would have preferred if he got to that position through an actual election, but what kind of mother would I be to nitpick your accomplishments?"

She saw his lips quirk into the slightest, little grin, but he said nothing, still avoiding her eyes.

"I heard you were moving to outlaw alien slavery," she continued, desperate to keep the conversation moving. The better to avoid that damn bantha.

"Yeah."

"It means a lot to Chewie, you know."

Ben gave a quiet grunt of acknowledgement.

"The cartels are going to fight you on that, though," Leia pointed out. "And some of them have militias large enough to -"

"I have a plan, mom!" he groaned. His tone sounded as if she'd been nagging him to come home from a party before curfew.

"What kind of plan?"

"The kind that I'm not going to tell someone that I'm still technically at war with."

Leia snorted. "That's my boy," she said quietly, patting his arm.

He flinched at her touch and then finally turned to look at her, meeting her gaze for the first time. His tone became heartbreakingly earnest as they approached the birthing-room door. "Mom -"

"Don't," Leia interrupted him, her voice cracking as she held up a hand for silence. "There'll be time for us to talk things out later. Right now, you've got bigger problems," she added, gesturing to the door.

He nodded and stepped into the room.

Rey's sigh of relief couldn't have been more sincere if he'd just shown up to rescue her from some unthinkable peril. He walked right into the room without a moment of hesitation, striding past Luke without even a glance. It seemed that the only way Kylo could control his murderous compulsion was to outright pretend that it's subject wasn't there.

In a moment, Kylo was crouching at her bedside, and took her hand. He grimaced at her touch, even through his glove. "So much pain!" he announced, sounding idiotically surprised.

"Childbirth has been known to do that," Kolonia replied distractedly.

"Could there be something wrong?" Kylo demanded.

"If you can't deal with it, don't touch me!" Rey ground out through gritted teeth. Dear Force, how was she supposed to get two entire human beings out that little hole!

"No!" he retorted, fingers tightening around her hand. Kylo's face formed into a defiant frown, apparently intent on suffering through this with her.

He only lasted a few seconds. Kylo abruptly sucked his teeth, reflexively dropping her hand like a
hot pan, and he shot to his feet. "The pain!" he declared, tone frantic with worry. "This can't be normal! Something has to be wrong!"

"Get a grip, Ben!" Leia shouted.

This time, Kolonia didn't even acknowledge Kylo. Big mistake. Kylo raised an arm, fingers outstretched toward the good doctor. Kolonia let out a startled yelp as her feet began to drag across the floor toward the fretful warlord.

But just before the doctor's neck could meet his fearsome grasp, Kylo's eyes rolled back into his head, and he keeled over backwards, collapsing into an unconscious heap on the floor.

Rey lowered her hand, fingers relaxing from the pinch-like position they'd been in. She had no idea how she managed to summon the focus at a time like this, but she had.

Kolonia blinked in confusion, but seemed admirably unfazed. "Is he going to be alright?"

"He's fine," Leia sighed. Her face bore that exact look that mothers get when their child has a tantrum in the middle of the grocery store.

The next chunk of time passed in a haze. Hours seemed like minutes. Minutes seemed like years. It was such a strange, distorted whirlwind of agony, joy, relief and exhaustion.

And suddenly - for it did feel sudden - she had a baby nestled in the crook of each arm, both sucking at their own personal nipple. These dear little people that she'd made, these spirits now given shape that she could see and touch and smell. Everything about them was so soft and warm. Their silken, fur-like hair. Their clean milky scent. Their flawless, chubby little hands that grasped onto anything they could reach. She could actually feel what they were thinking, these primitive wordless sensations of comfort and pleasure on the surface, and the feeling of cautious optimism underneath, the sort of sensation one gets at the end of a terrifying, dangerous experience. A sort of wordless sense of I am so glad that's over. Their day had been at least as stressful as hers had been.

Leia placed a hand on her shoulder. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes," she said without thinking. That seemed like the best way to get through this.

Leia approached the unconscious Kylo, now slumped in a chair just beside the bed, her hand brushing his forehead. He grunted as his eyes snapped open.

"What the -"

He stopped short at the sight of Rey, sitting up in bed, a baby at each breast. There was that look again, that look of awe and disbelief, as if he were staring at a genuine goddess.

Leia walked over to Rey, gently scooping up her grandson in her arms. The infant immediately started crying the moment his little mouth left the nipple, and for a moment, Rey was fairly sure she was going to die.

But then, for a split second, she noted that her baby girl briefly stopped sucking, and a whisper seemed to materialize in Rey's mind. "It will be alright, mother." It was oddly soothing.

Leia stepped toward her son, presenting him with the squealing baby. For a moment, Kylo drew back, as if afraid to touch him, something too fragile, too pure for the likes of him. But Leia wouldn't have it. With her free hand and with consummate tenderness, she pulled off his gloves,
and then maneuvered his arms into the proper position. She placed the infant into them.

The baby stopped crying the very moment, the very second he was in his father's arms, and Rey felt the sharp pang in her chest vanish. His little eyes even opened, seeming almost to be examining Kylo's face, making tiny grunts and coos. Even across the room, Rey felt a spark of recognition pass between her son and his father. A sort of wordless sense of Oh, it's you. You're finally here. I've been waiting.

There wasn't a single doubt in Rey's mind that these two would be everything to each other.

Meanwhile, Leia had retreated to the corner, and was now quietly weeping into her brother's shoulder, uncharacteristically overcome by the mixture of emotions this scene produced. Luke escorted her out of the room, whispering faintly to her. This left only the new parents.

Kylo stared down at his son for a long while, and then glanced over to his daughter, still in Rey's arms. "They're so perfect." Kylo murmured, voice cracking in something between a laugh and a sob. He raised his eyes to Rey. "You really do excel at everything, don't you?"

She smiled. "I didn't make them entirely on my own."

"Yeah, but I only helped with the fun part," Kylo pointed out.

"True," Rey conceded. She reached to the bedside table, picking up and handing a bottle to Kylo. "Here. Fresh squeezed."

The new father carefully put the bottle to the baby's lips, and the little one eagerly began sucking. Kylo's eyes still rested on his infant son. "I dreamt about him. Almost every night, lately."

Rey frowned, a tight sensation sinking in her gut. "Only him?"

"Sometimes it was all of us together, but it was usually just me and him."

"Things about his future?" she asked anxiously.


"You foresaw my pregnancy, didn't you?" Rey sighed. She already knew the answer, but there was no accusation in her tone. She would not sully this sacred moment with a shouting match. That would probably be later.

He got that sheepish look. "Partially. It was only him, at first. Her -" he smiled warmly as his free hand brushed the baby girl's head. "I never saw her at all until recently." He again raised his eyes to Rey's. "I know what that means. I know what's coming. And I've had several months to make some sort of peace with it." His tone suggested that this peace was shaky at best. That was okay though. She felt much the same way.

Rey nodded, a tear slipping down her cheek. There was a tightness in her chest, as if the snare of fate was drawing shut around her heart. Fate. Why did it need to be this way? And why was she so damn sure that this was what she was supposed to do? Why...

But she looked at Kylo, still gazing adoringly down at their son, his vibes positively shimmering with compassion.

Compassion. That made sense. What could ever be more selfless, more caring, more empathetic, than parenting?
Rey gasped at a sudden insight.

"That's it," she whispered, amazed. Fortunately, Kylo was to rapt by the little bundle in his arms to notice her statement.

Luke's prophecy. That was how she would help redeem Kylo, in the end. By allowing him to take their son.

It would mean the end of the wars, both for the galaxy as a whole, and the agonizing conflict that roiled within him. It might even have bearing on that last prophecy, the one that she would be Kylo's death. Perhaps this way, that death would simply be metaphorical, and she would never have the blood of her soulmate on her hands.

But their son would not fix Kylo. That wasn't his responsibility. He would simply be the catalyst, the inspiration, the motivation. And he would do it simply by existing, by needing his father, by being himself. It might be overnight, it might take twenty years, but Rey knew it was going to happen. That was why she'd been so unsettlingly sure of partially giving up one of her children, all this time.

It wouldn't be Kylo's wild, needy passion for Rey that would gradually bring him back to the Light. It would be his pure, selfless love for their son, and the innocent, unconditional love their son would have for him.

Following Vader's footsteps indeed...

Rey was distracted from her epiphany, by a sudden grunt of alarm from Kylo. "What's that?! Is he sick?!"

A pale blob of spit-up was dribbling down the chest of his surcoat, small but absurdly conspicuous against his dark robes.

But the full extent of Rey's exhaustion quickly set in, and she ended up taking a short nap. Which lasted for several hours. At one point, she vaguely registered Kylo climbing into her hospital bed, snuggling up behind her, her waist gently encircled by his arms.

When she finally woke up for real, it was to the sight of Leia and Kylo fawning over the babies. There was no apparent tension between them. They were even smiling.

Rey instantly knew they must have talked things out, while she rested. She had no idea what was said, and decided that she didn't want to know. It was between them. Even so, she strongly suspected there were tears shed on both sides, and Rey could sense that while the past might never truly be forgiven, it was now much better understood.

But the idyllic scene of father and grandmother was cruelly interrupted. One of Leia's men burst in the room. "Ma'am, it's the admiral, again -"

"Stall him!" Leia snapped impatiently.

"I don't think I can, ma'am. He says he is deeply concerned about the security of the station. He says he is readying the fleet to check in on us."

"Damn. He's been tipped off." She turned to her son with a deep sigh. "I really, really hate to rush you two, but it sounds like we have to wrap things up, or things could get ugly."

Within minutes, they had moved to a small conference room, the twins left behind for a thorough
check up from Kolonia. Rey lowered her aching body into a chair at the table, adjusting the white shawl-like garment that she'd thrown over her hospital shift.

Rey gave herself another reminder not to think. Destiny and redemption notwithstanding, that was the only way she'd get through this. She drew in a deep breath. "I am willing to let you take our son back with you. On one condition." She paused. "You are to take my representatives as well. They will independently monitor his well-being, and report back to me."

The look on Kylo's face was one of hurt. "You don't trust me to take care of our son?! You're not exactly an experienced parent either!"

At this point, Rey's emotions got away from her. "I'm not the one with a history of running away from or murdering my close relatives," she muttered acidly.

That comment resulted in an upended table, and Rey burst into tears.

"Ben, knock it off!" Leia ordered. "And Rey, seriously! You're in a tough situation, you've spent the better part of a day in terrible pain and you're flooded with hormones, but being nasty is not going to help anything!"

Kylo was apparently moved by Rey's tears, returning to his seat. "Who are the representatives?"

"Threepio! Artoo!" Leia called out, summoning the droids from the other end of the room.

Artoo rolled up with a beep of acknowledgement.

"Yes madam?" Threepio said cheerfully, clueless as ever.

"You'll be leaving with Ben."

"WHAT?!!" Threepio exclaimed.

Artoo let out a snicker-like series of chirps.

Fortunately, Leia knew how to handle the fussy protocol droid. Pander to his self-importance. "Threepio, this is a huge honor. I'm putting you in a critical position of extreme trust. You will be watching over my grandson, and reporting back to Rey on his development and well-being."

The idea of sending Leia herself had been seriously discussed at one point, and that probably would have happened if it hadn't been politically impossible from all angles. Instead, it would be the two droids who had loyally served their family for generations.

Threepio may have been a fussbudget who worried about every little thing, and while that tended to be obnoxious, there were worse qualities in someone assigned to watch over a child. But while Threepio was devoted to the family, he was also rather excitable and cowardly. Artoo had to go as well. An unflappable voice of reason, who would never, ever chicken out of his mission, who would roll headlong into any danger for his masters, dragging Threepio along, kicking and screaming.

They worked best as a team, anyway.

"And," Leia continued, with added sugar in her tone, "you'll be serving in a royal household. It doesn't get much more prestigious than that, for a protocol droid."

Threepio seemed to mull this over for several seconds. "I accept," he declared, his tone back to it's usual primness. "But I feel obligated to point out that this arrangement is highly unorthodox!"
Twins separated at birth and children having a mysterious, long-lost parent may be entirely mundane, everyday occurrences in this galaxy, but a nuclear family would be much more traditional!"

"No one is going to be long-lost," Leia explained patiently. "And the twins will know each other. That's much more than Luke and I had growing up, in terms of our biological family."

Meanwhile, Kylo had one palm to his forehead, as if he'd just developed one hell of a headache. "You're making me take Goldenrod with me?"

"If you have another candidate, speak up," Leia replied.

"REY!" he burst out, jumping to his feet and turning toward the mother of his children. So much for resigned composure. "YOU! You can keep an eye on me to make sure I'm a decent father! Fuck destiny! Come back with me! We'll make this work!"

Rey drew in a deep breath, her voice only cracking slightly as she spoke. "Kylo, this isn't a matter of me pulling up roots and giving up my career, for my family. It's not even a matter of giving up my religious and political beliefs. Asking me to go back with you is asking me to become a different person. I would be pretending to be someone else every day of my life. Spending my time either lazing about a palace, or murdering people for no other reason than because you said so? Can you imagine me as a dark empress?"

"I do every single day!"

Her calm evaporated into a cloud of raw emotion. "Why do you have to make this harder than it already is!? What you're imagining is me in a fancy black dress, and not the actual reality! You are asking me to become someone that I'm not! Our children would have a moping lie of a mother! And it would be exactly the same if you were to come back with me! That would be asking you to change who you are, and that's a decision people need to come to for themselves!"

She considered informing him of her hunch that his redemption, and possibly even his life would hinge on his experience as a usually-single parent. But she wasn't sure how the destined outcome might be affected by him knowing.

"You wouldn't have to be different! I wouldn't ask that of you!" Kylo protested, flatly ignoring the possibility of returning to the life of a Jedi. Stubborn jerk.

"Wouldn't have to be different? You were born and bred for a life like that, but I wasn't! And besides, I am widely known to be a JEDI! The Jedi have been vilified in your territories for decades! What do you think is going to happen if you, the Jedi Killer, show up with a Jedi wife!? A Jedi queen! Do you think that's likely to go over well?!"

"It wouldn't have to be public!"

"Oh, yeah, because that worked out sooo well for your grandfather!"

Now it was Leia's turn to jump to her feet. "That's enough! Sheesh, the two of you!" She glanced at Luke, sitting unobtrusively in the corner. "Were Han and I ever this bad?"

"No comment."

Rey and Kylo spent the next several seconds in a prolonged, intense staring match. Eyes fiercely locked, as if they were back at the edge of that crumbling cliff. This time, it wasn't crackling lightsabers between them, but that third option. The one that they were both afraid to speak aloud, of running away together, of giving destiny the middle finger and leaving the stupid galaxy to fend
for itself.

"Kylo," Rey whimpered, "you seemed to accept the reality of our situation, several months ago. You even seemed to accept it ten minutes ago."

Rey suspected that this would be the point at which he'd announce that he had an armada ready to jump, and would be taking his family by force. But then she caught a faint, echoed whisper on the air. "Mother. Father. It will be okay. It must be."

Kylo flinched. He'd heard it too. Finally, the vehement look on his face seemed to soften. He sat back down, albeit with a grouchy *hmph*.

"Ben, this will go both ways," Leia interjected. "You will have a representative to watch over your daughter, too."

"Who?" he asked suspiciously.

"Me, silly!" Leia exclaimed. "Allowing this little visit of yours is going to destroy my last shred of professional integrity. My military career is over. Seems as good a time as any to retire and become a full-time grandma."

There was that look again. The one of stunned awe. But even in her distress, Rey sensed Kylo's confusing mix of gratitude and jealousy. His mother would do for his child what she never did for him.

A long silence as Kylo considered the plan. "When do I - we get to see you? The two of you."

"As often as we can," Rey stated resolutely.

He sighed. "Meeting is going to be dangerous. I have enemies, Rey. Enemies that wouldn't hesitate to hurt my family. I can keep our son safe, because he'll never be far from me, but you and - I can't let anyone find out about you two, and that's inevitable if I'm seen constantly coming and going somewhere. I am *always* watched."

Just then, that lieutenant came running in again. "General! The fleet is on it's way!"

The whole party was walking to the hangar, Rey and Kylo carrying their respective infants, Leia just behind them, and Luke quietly trailing behind, like a silent shadow. In the very back was Artoo, Threepio, and a hovering cradle/pram full of baby supplies - clothes, blankets, toys, diapers, and a lactation sample to be synthesized.

Rey glanced to her side, and noted what a surreal image her two men made, this imposing black-clad figure, with a white-swaddled infant in his arms. She could just about envision him, masked and cloaked, stalking the bridge of the Finalizer, a baby slung across his chest, barking out orders one moment, and cooing affectionately at his son the next. That would probably become part of Kylo's mysterious, demigod-like image. A virgin father.

"Kylo, do you have a name for him?"

"Anakin."

Rey rolled her eyes. "I'm surprised you don't want to name him *Vader.*"

"Who says I *didn't*? But I thought it might upset you. And my mother."
For a moment, Rey reflected on the minor irony of the name he’d chosen for their son, considering her premonitions that their daughter might be prone to the same foibles as her great grandfather. Hopefully that wouldn’t be the case though, as she’d be raised under the watchful eyes of Luke and Leia, both tragically familiar with the signs that something might be going wrong.

"What about her?" he asked, gesturing to the infant in Rey’s arms.

"Ashla."

Kylo groaned, apparently familiar with this ancient term for the Light. "Skywalker's idea." He apparently got over his annoyance quickly, shifting the topic back to the situation at hand. "The first meeting will be on Nar Shaddaa," he said, summing up the prior conversation.

"Yes."

"In no more than a standard month or two, depending on when I can sneak away, unnoticed."

"Yes," she sighed.

The hanger suddenly filled with the echo of rapid footsteps. Doctor Kolonia was all but sprinting into the room, a stricken look on her face. She went directly to Leia, whispering something in her ear, as she handed her a pair of film print outs.

The two new parents had the exact same reaction, knowing that these must have been the lab results from the twins' check-up, and both noticing the worried look on the doctor's face. They both dove forward to snatch the film from Leia's hands. "WHAT IS IT WHATS WRONG ARE THEY OKAY?!" They shouted, questions muddled together as frantic babble.

Rey happened to get her hands on the film first.

"It's the midichlorian count," Leia announced, as Rey attempted to read the film.

At that, Kylo threw his free hand up in the air, bellowing in frustration as he turned away from the group. "Oh who cares about the damn midichlorians! The way she came running in here - I thought one of them might be DYING!"

Rey was just about equally relieved, but she kept her eyes on the film. The first slip was labeled Baby Girl. There were dozens of readings, so it took a moment to find the midichlorian line. The reading was just as anyone might have expected.

Midichlorian Count: 25,000 ... 99.999999 %ile

She then flipped to the other Baby Boy slip, finding the matching line there. She frowned in confusion. This possibility hadn't even occurred to her.

Midichlorian Count: 0 ... 0.0000001 %ile

"That's impossible, isn't it?" Rey murmured. Yes. Several different kinds of impossible, if she recalled correctly. Besides, she’d felt both of them equally. And there was that instant bond between her boy and his father. Those things strongly suggested Force sensitivity. But perhaps she was wrong. Those numbers - her son had the Force, but he would never be able to wield it. It was there, but he would never hear it speak to him. Or could something else be going on...

"I triple checked," Kolonia stated, still looking nervous. "He is entirely healthy though. Everything else is typical."
"Why, what is it?" Kylo asked flippantly, as if out of idle curiosity.

Rey swallowed hard, as she held up the film for him to see.

Kylo's brows shot up. "Zero?" he read, his eyes then falling on the infant in his arms.

Leia, Kolonia, Luke and Rey all looked on anxiously. Rey suspected that there were only two reactions Kylo was likely to have. He would either weep and howl, as if this were some debilitating disease, or he would hand the child back in disgust, demanding to raise their Force sensitive daughter instead.

But he just kept gazing down at that little face, letting the print out flutter down to the floor. There was no disappointment in his vibes. If anything, it was something like relief. After several seconds, he let out a lighthearted chuckle, and then spoke quietly, as if addressing his son, and his son alone. "It doesn't matter."

Eventually, he looked up at the rest of the party, finding them staring at him in disbelief.

"What?! What did you think I was going to say?! He's my son!" He rounded on Kolonia, pointing accusingly. "YOU! You came running in here because you thought I would freak out. You ran to catch me before I left because you thought I'd toss him out an airlock when I found out! You're sick for even thinking it!"

Kolonia was slowly backing away, no doubt due to a very reasonable expectation of being killed at any moment.

"He's my son!" Kylo repeated, with added finality, as if to say that this was the only explanation anyone ever needed on the subject.

Then the damn lieutenant came running in again. "General, the fleet will be -"

Leia cut her subordinate off with a groan. "Ben -"

"I know," he snapped. He glanced down at his daughter, in Rey's arms. Apparently on a whim, he shrugged out of his cowl, and handed it to Rey. Somehow, she knew what he intended for it, and wrapped it around the baby in her arms. She then reached up to the white shawl over her shoulders, handed it to Kylo, and he did the same. The whole exchange was wordless.

Rey stepped closer to them, her two men. She leaned over, pressing a kiss to her son's head, and she was pulled into a hug. Her free arm found its way around Kylo, the two of them embracing, their children gently sandwiched between them. For a moment, this odd family of theirs was a giant, living ball of symbolism. Dark with a little speck of light, light with a little speck of dark, endlessly wrapped around each other.

A few moments later, Kylo took a step back, giving her that trademark intense stare. "Are you sure about this?"

Rey thought of those billions of lives, of potentially having to kill the love of her life, and most of all, she thought of how much Kylo already adored their son. "Yes. I am," she stated, a tear running down her cheek.

Kylo squeezed her hand for another second or so. Too soon, far too soon, he was striding up the ramp, followed by the droids and the pram. Threepio was already chattering about the apparently inferior quality of the diaper wipes provided.

The shuttle lifted off, and Rey stood, watching as it began to disappear into the vastness of space,
holding Ashla close against her chest, her tear falling onto her little face. "Mother -"

"I know, sweetheart," Rey replied telepathically.

Leia put an arm over her shoulder. "Those bonds don't break, Rey. Believe me, they stretch from one end of the galaxy to the other."

"He'll love our son more than he's ever loved anyone," Rey reminded herself. Her heart sank at a disturbing realization. "But loving your child doesn't necessarily make you a good parent."

"No, it doesn't," Leia agreed. "But it's a damn good start."

Rey sighed. "I just hope this acceptance of our son's - of Anakin's - being different - I hope it lasts."

Luke was now standing with them, no longer keeping his distance, now that Kylo was gone. "What do your feelings tell you?"

Rey closed her eyes. "They tell me, yes."

"Besides, it'll be good for Ben," Leia said, her vibes projecting an odd sense of ironic wistfulness. "Raising a child that's very different from himself, that he knows will never be like him." Leia chuckled. Her voice lowered, and she looked up at the ceiling. "That's your revenge, isn't it, you old scoundrel?"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all of my commentators. It is flattering to know that so many people have such strong feelings about this goofy little tale of mine.

Next time: What the Hell is Wrong With Kylo Ren?
Chapter Notes

The following has been added to the tags for this story:
“Unbroken families are not a thing in Star Wars.” In my personal interpretation, broken families have always been a fundamental part of Star Wars. That said, my story isn't quite over yet.

And now, back to our regularly scheduled programming. Check your TFA headcanon at the door....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 32: What the Hell is Wrong with Kylo Ren?

"Ah-hem," Kolonia spoke up. "Those test results - they really are literally impossible. Even plants and insects have some midichlorians."

"In my experience, data that is literally impossible almost always is." Leia pursed her lips in thought. "If the test was done correctly, but the result was impossible, that could only mean that there must be some error in the test itself."

Kolonia shrugged. "Those tests have been the same for thousands of years. I am unfamiliar with the more mystical aspects of midichlorians, but I do know that they are living organisms. As such, I suppose they could be prone to mutation." Kolonia remained silent for a few thoughtful seconds. "Well, there is also - " she turned to Rey. "Do I have your permission to disclose some private medical information, Rey?"

"Sure," Rey replied, unconcerned. These people had just watched her give birth, what medical fact could she possibly have to hide?

Kolonia turned back to Leia. "Rey also has a count of zero."

A strange thing happened then. Rey heard the statement, but somehow, she didn't understand it. She heard the sounds in the words, but the words didn't make sense. As if they were in a foreign language.

"What?! But Rey is a Force user!" Leia exclaimed. "Rey, why didn't you mention this before?"

"Mention what?"

"I told her years ago, on D'Kar, during her first checkup," Kolonia explained. "Rey, did you forget?"

"Forget what?"

Leia turned to Luke. "Your silence is getting pretty suspicious, here."

Luke took the hint. "There is another known case of an individual with undetectable midichlorians."
Leia's eyes narrowed, turning her formidable intellect toward solving this riddle. "Palpatine. No one knew he was a Force user. He came from a wealthy, prominent family, he would have had a count at birth, and if it was high, the Jedi would have been informed. But the Jedi had no idea." She paused. "Rey, your family - is there any chance they were from Naboo?"

Rey just blinked, hearing the words, but not understanding the question. And somehow, her sudden inability to comprehend her own native language didn't strike her as at all unusual.

Leia repeated her question.

Again, Rey heard her, but didn't comprehend.

Leia then became more frank. "Is there any chance that you could be related, however distantly, to the Palpatine family?"

Still nothing. As if the words had gone in her ear, and gotten lost on the way to her brain.


"I put a block on her, when she was a child," Luke explained softly. "A block on her ability to comprehend information that could lead to her biological family."

"Luke! How could you?!"

"Leia, it was for her own safety. You know as well as I that there are still radical anti-Imperial factions out there, and there were even more back then. People who would happily hurt someone just for being a member of that family. They killed Rey's parents, and would have killed her too, if I hadn't found her in time. It wasn't realistic for me to expect a young child to keep a secret that big, and some of her memories were extremely traumatic."

"So she is related to -"

"Yes. Her great, great grandfather."

"I had heard rumors that he was married and divorced, decades before even becoming a senator." Leia paused. "Does Ben know?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure."

Leia suddenly started laughing. "You mean - my son, the new emperor, asked her to be his empress, not even knowing that she's a Palpatine. If anything he should probably be her consort."

"Apparently."

Leia was still chuckling. "I shouldn't be surprised. My biggest enemy turned out to be my father. Of course my second biggest would be at least a de facto in-law." She grinned at Luke. "Tell me. Are we ever going to escape these bizarre coincidences?"

"Unlikely."

"The Force?"

"Is it reversible, whatever you've done to her brain?"

"Yes. The block is shallow. There are things I could do to remove it, but I think you'd agree that this is not the time. She's under quite a bit of emotional stress as it is. But perhaps someday..."

Leia considered this. "So, you think my grandson might be Force sensitive after all?"

"Almost certainly. But I wouldn't be surprised if his powers remain latent until adulthood, in the absence of intensive training. Not unlike Rey and her great grandfather."

"Rey, honey, are you alright?" Leia asked. Now this question made sense.

"Fine," Rey replied calmly, suddenly regaining her train of thought. She had this vague feeling that something interesting had just happened, but couldn't put her finger on what it was.

Kolonia just gaped at all three of them. "You really must be the strangest family I have ever heard of."

With that, the annoying lieutenant appeared again. "Ma'am, Admiral Ackbar is waiting for you in hangar one. He's got Admiral Statura with him, too..."

Leia sighed deeply. "If you'll all excuse me, I think it's about time for me to resign in disgrace. Again."

Luke, Leia, Rey and Ashla all took off for Dantooine the next day, intending to make its golden, grassy plains their home.

As soon as they'd landed, Rey sought out the holoterminal, Ashla still in her arms. She tapped at the controls with her free hand, navigating to the obscure message-board that they'd agreed on. Public, but tucked away in one especially boring corner of the Holonet. Even if someone did stumble upon it, it would seem like nothing more than some random nanny's blog posts about her charge.

Rey smiled as she noted that there was a new entry.

Young Master is well. He seemed to have a slight tummyache last night, but is better now. Feeding, vital signs and bowel movements are all typical. His father has announced an intention to carry him around for most of the day, to all but the most formal, ceremonial occasions. So far, he has made good on this. He is also working on arranging a secure method of making direct holocalls, and believes this should be ready in the next few weeks.

Sincerely,

NannyBot #1 & NannyBot #2

Even after being reassured that things were going well for Anakin, Rey still found her absent child weighing on her mind. However, there was one order of business that she suspected would distract her from her heavy heart.

She found Luke meditating in his quarters. "You've faced your nephew. Now tell me what happened to Ben." Rey was impressed by her own authoritative tone.

There was a long silence before Luke spoke. "Ben and I -" he paused. "No, I should start at the beginning." He sighed deeply. "Ben began hearing a voice in his head when he was a child. From
what he told me, it started out benign and flattering, telling him that he was special and destined for great things. But it gradually became much more sinister. By the time he reached adolescence, it was outright preaching Dark Side rhetoric, about dominating the weak, using rage as a tool, that sort of thing. Of course, when Leia figured out what was going on, she was extremely concerned. She sent him to me specifically to teach him how to resist.

"Fortunately, fending off mental intrusion by a distant stranger is not particularly difficult, once you know how. Ben learned how to consistently shut out the voice within weeks. By then, he had taken a genuine interest in discovering his powers, so he decided to stay on. For years, things were fine. Ben had an obvious affinity for both Light and Dark, but he kept it under control. He grew into an intelligent, compassionate young man, though with his mother's temper and his father's recklessness.

"As you know, he and I often went on expeditions for Jedi lore and artifacts, which eventually took us to the Unknown Regions. It was during this exploration that he and I began to stumble on signs of a possible new, dark power rising in the galaxy. We investigated, and eventually discovered the true terrifying extent of the new threat - a regime that rivaled the Empire, that seemed to have some sort of secret super weapon not unlike the Death Star."

Rey arched a brow at how articulate Luke was being. It sounded almost like he'd rehearsed this. She supposed that was understandable. It wasn't like he would have had much else to do during his years of solitude.

"Unfortunately, that was also around the time that - certain facts about my family history became public. Leia's influence in the Senate vanished overnight. As Force users, Ben and I were under even more suspicion. There was a prevailing assumption that I was training an army of dark Jedi, and it was only a matter of time before someone came in to shut the academy down, or possibly worse.

"Our credibility was less than nothing. Attempting to alert the public would only serve to put the First Order on their guard, and possibly hasten their plans. There was nothing Ben and I could do but try to figure out a way that we could all but single handedly destroy, or at least cripple this new evil."

Rey almost laughed out loud. Two men deciding to take down an entire empire by themselves - that was the most Skywalker/Solo thing she'd ever heard.

"The only practical way we could do that without an army, was to assassinate Snoke," Luke continued. "But we knew that getting close to him would be extremely difficult.

"That was when Ben came up with the idea of becoming Snoke's apprentice for the purpose of assassinating him. In retrospect, the voice in his head was almost certainly Snoke trying to entice him, so we knew that Snoke would accept him as a pupil.

"Of course, it would not be that simple. If he were to approach Snoke with such an agenda on his mind, he would have been destroyed, so Ben suggested that I erase all of his memories of the plan. The problem was, without those memories, how could Ben know to accomplish his objective? So we decided to utilize a Force compulsion to create a deep-seated, irreversible desire to destroy Snoke."

Rey's face lit up with sudden understanding. "That's why he didn't seem able to comprehend what I was saying, when I suggested you might have been the one to erase his memories!"

Luke nodded. "Giving him the inability to even suspect that his mind had been manipulated was essential. But even so, there were still problems with the plan, since Snoke would definitely sense
Ben's intention to kill him, if not the plan behind it. After much discussion, we came up with the idea of including a motivation in the compulsion itself. That was to destroy Snoke in order to take his place. We knew that Snoke was unlikely to be suspicious if that was Ben's objective. The Sith considered such ambitions to be normal, even desirable."

"That's why he wants to rule the galaxy," Rey murmured. "It's a compulsion."

"Yes. The possibility of Ben succeeding in this ambition was nothing more than a potential side-effect. Though it was our hope that if Ben could take power, he could prevent the use of the super weapon. Ben was absolutely sure that there was no way Snoke could ever corrupt him enough to condone such wholesale slaughter."

"And you did all this to him?" Her mind filled with the notion of poor Ben Solo as an unknowing pawn shoved into darkness by his own uncle.

"It was mostly Ben's idea, actually." Luke gave a long pause. "Ben knew that Snoke would torture him to the Dark Side, and he knew that this would destroy his life in every way that mattered. But - how was it that Ben put it - what was one man's integrity compared to the lives of billions."

Ashla, quietly dozing up until now, suddenly began to cry, just as Rey's mouth dropped open in shock. It seemed almost impossible to wrap her head around the idea that Kylo had once been this fearless, selfless boy who willingly gave his life to save the galaxy. Then again, destroying your own life to save so many - that sounded less like martyrdom, and more like common decency.

Without thinking, Rey pulled a breast from her tunic, and after a few more whimpers, Ashla began to feed.

"I probably should have stopped him anyway," Luke explained, "tried even harder to talk him out of it, regardless of the fate of the galaxy. His decision was made while he was still grappling with the discovery of his family's dark legacy. In some ways, I think it was a relief to him, the idea that his affinity for not-entirely-Light-sided powers might have been a matter of genetics, not a fault in his character. It was the more external aspects that really ate away at him. Overnight, he'd become this pariah. With his ability to sense opinions, every time he introduced himself, he could feel people's suspicion, their assumption that he was somehow tainted, fundamentally evil."

Luke's tone turned even more wistful. "In a way, I think that's why Ben decided to go through with our plan, even knowing what it would cost him. It was his way of - I don't recall exactly how he put it, but it was something along the lines of telling the galaxy to go fuck itself. They all think I'll become Darth Vader? Well they're right, and in doing so, I'll be saving all of their ignorant, hypocrite asses."

Rey snorted. Brave martyr Ben Solo suddenly struck her as a lot more like the man she knew. It sounded just like Kylo to save the galaxy out of spite.

She considered the story for a long moment. "So, all this time, he's been so deep undercover, that even he doesn't know he's on a mission?"


This explained a lot, but there were still unanswered questions. "Then why is he obsessed with killing you, if you never had any real falling out?"

Luke gave a slight, sad smile, just like the ones that Leia sometimes got. "It was my gift to him. The only thing that I did to Ben's mind without him asking me to."

Rey immediately understood. "You gave him a compulsion to kill you?! Why?!"
"I was sending my nephew, the closest thing I would ever have to a son, on the most dangerous mission imaginable. I knew that even with all of our planning, Snoke might catch him out as a spy for the enemy. But what better cover could Luke Skywalker's spy have had than to go before Snoke filled with a burning desire to kill Luke Skywalker."

"It was for his protection?" Rey asked, stunned.

"Yes. And that's the main reason why I went into hiding. I knew that Ben would be tenacious in the pursuit of this goal. And independent of having no particular desire to die, I didn't want Ben to have to live with the inevitable guilt of killing family." Luke grimaced. "I never imagined that that Han would..." he trailed off, seeming unable to put words to this particular tragedy. Her ever-serene master was even tearing up.

"Master -"

Ashla began whimpering against her breast, and Rey stroked her silky little head soothingly.

"All this time, I've wondered," Luke murmured. "Wondered if I might have botched that compulsion. That somehow, I made it extend to his father as well."

"No!" Rey realized Kylo must have never told his uncle about his patricidal premonitions, and in light of these revelations, she suspected that this could have been part of Snoke's manipulation. She was sorely tempted to explain all of that, but recalled how she'd promised never to tell his mother. That probably meant he didn't want his uncle to know either. But she couldn't let Luke suffer like this. "Master, he said something to me - something I gave my word never to tell - but - trust me, what happened to Han Solo - it's not your fault."

Luke studied Rey's face for a long moment, clearly trying to confirm whether she was telling the truth. He apparently found it, and let out a sigh so deep that it sounded like he'd been holding his breath since the day his friend died. Rey could feel it, like a weight had literally been lifted from her master's shoulders. "Thank you. You have no idea how much it means to me, to finally know that, for sure."

The baby had quieted, now right back to sucking.

Rey realized that there was still one question left unanswered. "If all of this was a plan, why did you send me in to bring him back to the Light?"

"That was always the long term goal," Luke continued, regaining his composure. "Once Snoke was dead, it was both of our hope that I could redeem the man my nephew became. I even added trip-wire, that if he ever returned to the Old Academy, he would forget the last few months again, hoping that this might be the best way to save him. It clearly didn't work, but when I met you, it became obvious how I should best go about saving him. Of course, I had hoped to bring the two of you together after Snoke was dead. But when the Will of the Force dropped him in our laps a year ago, it seemed as good a time as any to start him down that path."

"The compulsions, can they be reversed?"

Rey may have loved Kylo for who he was, flaws and all, but if stripped of the desire to rule the galaxy and kill his uncle - a life together might actually be possible.

"No. They're implanted deep. As fundamental as his personality itself." Luke must have noticed the way Rey's face fell at his statement. "But, it is possible that, like most obsessions, they will fade away gradually. The fact that he was able to keep from attacking me the other day, suggests that his urge to kill me may already be simmering down."
"And the compulsion to rule the galaxy?" Rey asked, excitedly. She noticed that Ashla had stopped suckling, almost as if she was listening intently.

Luke shot her a sympathetic smile. "If I had to guess, I think that one might stick longer. People in my family have always lusted for power. Whether to do good or evil, they certainly like having it."

Rey nodded. "I think I need some time to think."

"Understandable."

But as Rey approached the door, one more thing occurred to her. "Does Leia know?"

Luke nodded. "I told her, shortly after he was captured."

"You waited *that* long to tell her what happened to her son?!" Rey felt all the more outraged at this, now that she too was a mother separated from her boy. How could he!

"It was the last thing that Ben and I ever argued about," Luke explained, shaking his head. "I thought that his parents deserved to know what he intended to do, from the beginning. But Ben insisted that it was better if they didn't know. He thought that if they knew the truth, they might come after him, and get hurt - a tragically plausible concern, as it turned out. But Ben thought that if his parents believed he was truly a lost cause, they'd be able to forget about him and move on with their lives." He paused. "Ben was the one making the sacrifice, so it seemed right to defer to his wishes. Or at least that's what I thought until I felt Leia's emotions upon seeing him again. After that, I just couldn't justify keeping it from her any longer."

Ashla suddenly started bawling at the top of her little lungs. Rey gathered her up closer to her chest. "I think she must need a diaper change," she announced, and left the room, thoughts whirling.

The crying had tapered off before Rey could get across the courtyard, to their apartment.

"It's so sad. So sad... But I think Uncle Luke means well, mother."

Rey frowned, glancing down at her daughter. "Don't tell me that you understood all of that..."

Ashla answered, but not telepathically. She replied with a brief, crude raspberry that left a blob of snot on her little cheek.

*I'm going to have to watch what I say around you, aren't I?* Rey concluded, coming to a stop at the center of the courtyard. On a whim, she tilted her head back, gazing up at the stars as she attempted to gather her thoughts, to process all of what she'd just been told about Kylo, and the man he had once been.

"Is that why father has so much angry stuck in his head?" Ashla asked silently.

Rey considered this. *So that's what's wrong with him...*

It wasn't just his dysfunctional family or his ability to hear other people's judgemental bullshit. He'd told her once that he was stumbling blindly toward a destiny he'd never comprehend. Apparently that wasn't just melodramatic whining. It was the literal truth.

But it probably even went beyond that. Between the mental redaction and compulsions from Luke and the dark psychological torture from Snoke, Kylo's poor mind had been manipulated so much
that it was a wonder that he was as sane and stable as he was.

Chapter End Notes

Alternate title for this chapter: The Narrative is Hijacked by Authorial Headcanon

And yeah. I am totally cherry picking from pre and post Bloodlines ideas. Meh.

Next time: It's Complicated
Chapter 33: It's Complicated

Two little heads, one dark and curly, the other light and sleek, bobbing in an endless sea of golden grass, the air full of their laughter. Anakin and Ashla were always so happy to see each other. The first hours of these reunions were always characterized by hyperactive joy, and this visit was no exception.

But it was the other exceptions that worried Rey. This was unusual. Kylo had sent Ani and the droids ahead, without him. Very unusual. Out of the many dozens of family visits, he had never done that before.

"Threepio, did he say when he was going to get here?"

"I'm afraid not, milady. His Majesty said only that he had some things to take care of, and that he was sending Ani ahead, as he knew how much this time means to you all." The protocol droid paused. "I am sure there is no need to worry, milady."

Rey frowned, turning to Leia. "Why does he keep calling me my lady?"

Leia snorted. "He's addressing you as a royal concubine."

Rey's mouth dropped open. "A what?"

"I beg your pardon," Threepio interjected. "But I believe the term mistress is more appropriate."

Rey gave a little feminine grunt of indignation. "Leia, your droid called me -"

"Oh get over yourself Rey. If you don't want to be called his mistress, then you'll just have to marry him."

Rey's eyes widened, her lips pressing into a thin line. Leia chuckled, and walked over to check on the twins. In this area, the grass was at least waist-high on an adult, so the children weren't always visible.

"Threepio," Rey spoke at length. She couldn't quite help herself. "Does His Majesty have any other mistresses?"

"To my knowledge, no," Threepio replied cheerfully. "While I do admit that I am apparently no expert in human relationships, I have see no evidence of him having any other companion of that sort. I believe His Majesty seeks to project an image of being above such desires. As far as most people know, his heir is a genetic clone."

Rey nodded, oddly reassured. Her mind returned to more important matters.

He still wasn't here. What could that mean?

This was particularly nerve-wracking as this marked the first visit since he'd revealed that he knew where Luke's temple was, during the last meetup. However, without even being asked, Kylo had given his word that he would not touch it. As Rey and Ashla's home, it was sacred. Though he
did certainly imply that Luke was fair game if he left.

Allowing him to visit them here on Dantooine was a huge leap of faith, even if they were several hundred klicks from Luke and the temple.

That was why his lateness was making her so nervous. There was a chance, however small, that he was betraying her. That he couldn't pass up this golden opportunity to attack the temple, knowing that Rey and Ashla weren't there. Rey was almost certain that he wouldn't do it. He knew that she'd never forgive him. And he would be risking the armistice with the New Republic. Then again, maybe that was the point. Perhaps he'd finally finished cleaning up Hutt Space, and was turning his forces back on the New Republic. The First Order had been infamous for breaking treaties, perhaps the New Empire was returning to its roots?

No. He wouldn't. Her feelings told her that he wouldn't... But she became slightly less sure of that with every passing minute that he wasn't here.

Artoo let out a sharp beep, and Rey felt her lips curl into a smile, even before Threepio translated. "Artoo says that Shuttle Buzzkill has just appeared on his scopes."

Within seconds, a dark, raptor-like silhouette appeared in the sky, and landed daintily in the field, next to Ani's modified TIE.

A dark figure descended the ramp at a brisk stride. Kylo looked much as he always had, clad in black from the neck down, unmasked in accordance with her preference. However, the quality of the garments had changed over the years, no doubt to reflect his promotion. His robes were now comprised of rich velvets and silks, his battle-worn cowl replaced with a full-length black cape that fluttered majestically behind him as he walked.

Much as Rey hated to admit it, the jerk looked downright regal.

"You're late!" Leia hollered.

"I was held up!" he called back, stepping off the ramp.

"Another coup?"

"Something like that!" Kylo returned, walking toward them. Rey noted that the bravado in his voice sounded a little strained.

"You know, a constitution might help with that, Ben!" his mother retorted.

"Don't call me that in public!"

Leia gestured to the open field, deserted except for immediate family. "What public?"

"Okay, then just don't call me that," he grumbled, even as he opened his arms for the hug he knew his mother wanted. The sight of that enormous man hugging his petite mother never failed to bring a smile to Rey's face.

The hug continued for a second or two more, and Leia leaned leaned away, looking at her son's face. "What is it?"

"Political drama."

"Such as?"
Kylo sighed. "It sounds like my family tree is likely to become public. Again."

Leia's face took on a look of concern. "They know that you're -"

"Yeah." Kylo paused. "With a little finesse, I can get people to focus on the Vader part, but -"

Leia finished for him. "If they fixate on the *me* part, you may lose the support of the hardliners. Possibly the central subsectors too."

Rey frowned. Gratifying as it was to see Kylo getting along with his mother, their conversations often veered out of Rey's political depth. "What does that mean?" she asked.

Kylo turned to her with a smile. "Just that my professional life is likely to get a little stressful for a while. Don't worry about it."

Rey didn't like the sound of that. "Will the you and Ani be in danger?!"

Kylo approached her, pulling her into an embrace of her own. "Have some faith in me, will you?" he said, a little grouchily. "Besides, I'm already determined to not think about that today. Today is for my family."

Somehow, being in his arms like this was enough to make her agree with that sentiment.

"I'll leave the two of you alone," Leia said knowingly, walking several meters away, and focusing her attention on the children.

Melting into his embrace, it took Rey a good minute or two to recall what she'd been angry about. "What the hell were you thinking, sending Ani here by himself?!"

Kylo flinched, releasing her. "I programmed the flight plan myself, and he wasn't alone. Artoo had the controls, and he's been flying longer than both of us put together. Besides, and Ani is already a great pilot. He's learned so fast, and his reflexes are so good, you'd never know that he's not Force sensitive."

"He is descended from some of the best pilots in the galaxy," Rey commented. "But -"

Kylo interrupted before she could finish. "He's already as good a pilot than any idiot flight officer I could have assigned him."

"He's eight!" Rey finally burst out.

"Rey! Ben!" Leia hollered at them from a distance, distracting Rey before she could catch the ominous subtext. "You've been together for less than five minutes, and you're already fighting! Ben comes by it honest, but what's your excuse, Rey?"

Kylo turned a triumphant grin on his baby mama. Needless to say, it was pretty unusual for his mother to take his side in an argument, these days.

With that, the twin's focus finally shifted away from their play, and they were running up to their parents.

"Father!" they shouted in unison. Ani held back slightly, considerately giving Ashla priority. She
sprinted up to her father, was swept up into his arms, and Kylo swung her around adorably.

Despite having already hugged his mother several hours ago, Ani took the opportunity to get another hug from his own rarely-seen parent.

Getting a hug from Ani always felt a little risky. There was always the chance that she wouldn't be able to let him go.

"Father, I have a present for you," Ashla announced as she was placed back on the ground. She produced a string of iridescent purple seeds. A few days previously, she'd taken it into her head to make a necklace for her dad.

Kylo dutifully donned the home-made trinket, even if it looked rather absurd among his black velvets. "It's very pretty, sweetheart."

Then, to Rey's surprise, Ani reached into his own pocket. He then stepped up to her. "This is for you, Mother."

The boy produced a small bag, and placed it in his mother's hand. She accepted and opened it with appropriately exaggerated eagerness. It was a necklace - apparently, even with a galaxy between them, the twins had both had the same notion. It was gaudy gleaming metal, studded with faintly glowing jewels. It was without a doubt the ugliest piece of jewelry Rey had ever seen, but she supposed that meant her son had picked it out himself. Even his father's dubious taste wasn't that bad.

She donned the necklace, the ostentatious pendant looking very out of place among the tans and creams of her robes. Rey pulled the boy into yet another hug.

"Did you have something to ask your mother?" Kylo prompted.

The boy apparently remembered. "Mother, father says I am old enough to construct my first training lightsaber."

Rey tensed. She'd argued with Kylo about that, last time - whether it was safe for a non-Force sensitive child to wield a lightsaber. After much debate, they'd settled on his only ever being given a training saber, able to give a slight stinging shock, not slice off limbs.

"Would you help me?" Ani continued. "Father says you are the best sabersmith in the galaxy. Much better than him."

Rey noted Kylo's slight blush of embarrassment. He clearly hadn't meant for the boy to say that much. She glanced down at Kylo's hip. Sure enough, there was the saber that she'd made for him, years ago. It had some grips and enamel added, but it was still the same weapon he'd been ineptly working on, just before... certain events leading to Anakin and Ashla.

Now, Rey had never really had any particular ego trip in regards to an emperor - the most powerful man in the known galaxy, no less - being in love with her, forsaking any number of desirable women who no doubt threw themselves at him. But the idea that, despite employing the finest engineers in the galaxy, he still carried the sidearm that she had made for him - that made her swell with pride.

"That's true Ani. Everyone has things they do well, and things they need to learn more about. Your father needs more to learn more about constructing lightsabers," Rey looked up over her sons shoulder, and smirking at Kylo. "You both need a teacher."

Kylo rolled his eyes along with his snort of amusement.
"So you'll teach us, mother?" Ani asked excitedly.

"Of course. First thing tomorrow."

With that, Ani and Ashla were rushing off to resume their play. And then suddenly, Ani was on the ground. Before Rey had a chance to figure that he must have tripped, Kylo was already crouching at his son's side, examining Ani's scraped knee.

No, not crouching. Kylo was kneeling. And his hands - he was healing the scrape, Rey realized. She was hard pressed to keep her jaw off the ground. That type of healing was a staunchly Light-Sided power.

Rey exchanged a glance with Leia, apparently also watching. Rey got the impression that Leia knew the significance of what she was seeing too. Leia may not have been a padawan, but she lived in a Jedi temple, and was not above sitting in on lessons.

It was coming true. That premonition Rey had, years ago. Slowly but surely, Kylo's love for his son was leading him back to the Light, or at least in its general direction.

Within seconds, Ani was off and running again, and Kylo was walking back over to her. "I never feel like more of a father than when I heal his boo-boos myself."

The twins were finally asleep, curled up in their little blanket fort on the floor of the Falcon. Leia sat reading at the gaming table. But she kept losing focus on her book, pondering the political implications of what Ben had told her, earlier. The knowledge that the emperor was the son of Leia Organa, former leader of the loathsome Resistance - that was likely to create a big enough scandal to threaten his rule.

But after considering this for the past few hours, Leia concluded that her son was safe, in the long run. After all, Ben had a political ace-in-the-hole, and didn't even know it. His long-time lover and baby-mama arguably had more right to his throne than he did. Oh, but Luke still hadn't told her about her great grandfather yet. Leia decided to prod him about that. She understood never finding the right moment to break some disturbing news about someone's ancestry, better than anyone. But she also understood the pain that could arise from that procrastination.

Palpatine still enjoyed a positive image in the New Empire, so if Ben were to show up with Palpatine's descendant on his arm, two little Palpatines in tow, it would be the PR move of the century. Leia had no doubt that Rey would swallow her pride and agree to a marriage alliance, if it became necessary for her family's safety. And Leia decided that she'd probably enjoy teaching Rey, how to behave like royalty. Wouldn't be easy though. Rey had only recently started using a fork consistently.

That was probably just a daydream though, born of Leia's lingering tendency to think like a politician. Realistically, if things were to go wrong in Ben's empire, the most obvious option would be for them to finally run away together. Perhaps Leia would go with them. Someone would have to keep them from fighting like rancors.

Leia smiled a little uneasily at the thought that one way or the other, things were likely to change for Rey and Ben in the very near future. Or perhaps Ben would succeed in keeping the uproar to a minimum, and things would go on as they were. Who knew...

Just then Rey emerged from her bunk. Leia tactfully pretended not to notice as Rey donned her cloak and slipped down the gangplank.
Leia wasn't one to judge them for these little rendezvous of theirs. Her son had always been reckless and temperamental, and in truth, Rey, with her iron will and occasionally sharp tongue, was not exactly what most would call easy going. That in mind, coming together only occasionally, and parting before the urge to kill each other took hold, seemed sensible. That wasn't that different from a good chunk of her own marriage.

And that's kind of what her son and de facto daughter-in-law had. This was no tryst, no friends-with-benefits. It was a marriage, albeit one that was only visible a few days per year.

"Some things never change," she said quietly to herself. "But this may not be one of those things."

Rey wanted to think that Leia didn't notice her as she slipped out, for fear that she'd report it to Master Skywalker. She knew he wouldn't quite approve of these midnight rendezvous, though she could always argue that technically she was not breaking her Jedi vows. There was no Jedi prohibition against hooking up, only attachment. At the same time, she could just imagine Master Skywalker's face, the look of incredulity and condescending amusement he would have, if she were to claim that her relationship with Kylo didn't involve attachment.

But Rey had no intention of stopping these interludes. The sex was just too excellent. Yes, that was the reason. The main reason. Definitely the main reason. After these few years, she'd managed to train him up a bit on bedroom matters, and because of their bond, he was a fast learner. And now that he was a fairly competent lover, the combination of physical and empathic pleasure seemed to roll and build into a sort of feedback loop of absolute ecstasy.

Rey crossed the open field, beige robes fluttering in the wind. Kylo was already waiting for her, leaning against the open ramp to his shuttle. She knew he was trying to look dashing, and damn it, he was succeeding.

She smirked, recalling that very first visit after the twins were born, the one where it had been an entire year since she and Kylo had been alone together. The one where they'd more or less tackled each other the first second no one was looking. How, after a frantic clash of lips and tongue, he'd scooped her up and carried her off to his shuttle, only this time, they left a trail of discarded clothing in their wake. They didn't even make it to his bed.

Or there was the most recent encounter. Instead of walking over to his shuttle like a good girl, she'd veered off into the forest. He'd understood instantly, sprinting after her. She led him on a delightful hunt through the woods, intending to bait him along a path, said to lead to a waterfall. There was no more exotically erotic location, as far as she was concerned, former desert creature that she was. Unfortunately, her unfamiliarity with waterfalls backfired. She had never imagined that they would be such damp, dirty places. Instead of making love in some moonlit mossy bower like the star-crossed lovers they were, they'd fucked right there in the mud, like a pair of rutting hapabores.

But she wasn't in the mood for such shenanigans. Tonight, they would talk and touch and kiss and make love on the shuttle.

Without a word, they walked up the ramp, arm in arm. Once they'd reached the main cabin, Rey noticed the small feast of snacks, carefully laid out on the lounge table. The lounge table that she was fairly sure he'd installed for her.

"A picnic on your shuttle!" she exclaimed happily. "Just like - I guess that was our first date."

Kylo grinned mischievously, sitting at the table. "I suppose it was. Unless kidnapping you counts."
Rey glared at him, even as she elected to sit in his lap instead of her own chair. "You are such a creep."

After so many years, it was now surprisingly easy to laugh about certain aspects of their first real encounter. But only certain aspects. There were some events from that time period that would never be anywhere near funny.

As usual, they always seemed to end up on the same subject. "How has Ashla been?" he asked, arms encircling her snugly.

"Well," Rey paused. "She definitely has your perception. Ashla reads people like an open book. Frankly, it's a bit problematic because -" she searched for the right words.

"Adults find her unsettling, and other children are afraid of her," Kylo cut in, voice tinged with bitterness.

Rey wasn't surprised by this statement. Over the past few years, she'd learned quite about about Ben's youth, if only because Leia always seemed to be muttering Just like Ben. Just like Ben. Just like Ben. Rey found this both interesting and somewhat disconcerting.

"People who don't know her, yes. But I've been working with her on keeping those little insights to herself." She paused again, just now realizing that she'd been running her fingers through Kylo's hair. It was still more beautiful than any man's hair had a right to be. "And then there's her prescience..."

"What about it?"

"It's almost impossible to surprise her. She just seems to know things - things that haven't happened yet, or things that there's no way she could have ever heard of. You know, first thing this morning, she told me that father is going to be late because he has to fix a sandal."

"A sandal?"

"She's eight, Kylo. She doesn't know what a scandal is." Rey paused. "She knows things from the past too. When she plays with her dolls, half the time, they're acting out some historical event that I know for a fact she's never been taught."

"Interesting," Kylo commented sincerely, even as he began nuzzling her neck.

The sensation of his mouth brushing against her skin seemed to spread throughout her entire body, in the form of a warm chill. It took her a moment to regain her train of thought. "How has Ani been doing?"

"He's fine," Kylo returned, just a little defensively. "He's growing and learning, just like kids are supposed to."

"You're not - punishing people in front of him, are you?"

"No. I always send him away first." He paused. "And I haven't needed to punish someone in a while."

"You're giving him opportunities to play with other children, right?"

"Yes, yes," he groaned, finally leaning away. "My advisors and officers fall all over themselves to get their kids into a playdates with Ani. I've even built a playground and a garden for him, in the Keep." Kylo smiled at her. It was that smile. The one that was all roguish charm, seamlessly
mixed with his air of dangerous power. "Lots of fountains and flowers. You'd like it."

"I'm sure I would," Rey sighed, knowing what was coming.

"You should come back with me," he stated casually, as if offering her a drink.

Rey groaned. "I really wish you would stop asking."

He grinned at her. "You know, there is a fairly straight-forward way you could make me stop asking."

"No Kylo."

She wouldn't do it. She wouldn't sacrifice her beliefs and become his obedient consort. A woman with no destiny or ambition or purpose outside of standing behind him and looking pretty, dooming their relationship to an unavoidable power differential.

He didn't seem upset in the least by her refusal. He knew what her answer would be long before she said it, because he'd asked her so many times already. At this point, it was less a question than a tradition.

Even after knowing him for years, there was one way in which Rey was still slightly afraid of him. There was always the concern that he might just snap, and abduct her and Ashla. Between his questionable emotional stability, it didn't seem that unlikely, and with his infinite resources, she knew he could succeed. There was always a chance she would wake up to find herself and her daughter dragged from their beds, to spend the rest of their lives imprisoned in the gilded cage he'd built for himself and Anakin. But she supposed there were worse fates, even if it meant giving up her autonomy.

Rey realized that it was actually a good thing that he continued to ask her to return with him. Because asking implied that she still had a choice in the matter.

But there was one question, one never yet asked, that Rey lived in constant fear of, even more than the abduction scenario. She was terrified that he might someday offer to run away with her. For them to take the children, leave the New Jedi and New Empire far behind, and spend the rest of their days pretending to be normal. Because this was an offer she was not entirely sure she could turn down.

As usual, her companion seemed to sense the gist of her thoughts. "I wish I could," he said with unmistakable regret.

Rey wondered if he was referring to kidnapping or elopement. She wondered, but only briefly. There was no point in pondering such distinctions with this man.

She turned her most alluring smile on her companion, slowly running a finger down the brocade front of his surcoat, creeping toward his cock, millimeter by millimeter. "Of course, you could always move in with me. I'm sure Master Skywalker would be alright with it, if you can prove that you deserve a second chance. And I'm sure your mother could talk him into giving a dispensation for our relationship."

Kylo's vibes darkened slightly. "I am still going to kill him, you know." This was said with much less hostility than such words probably warranted. It sounded less like an ominous warning to her, than wishful reassurance to himself. "Someday. When I get around to it. And I have nothing better to do. I guess."

Rey rolled her eyes. "Shut up and take off your clothes, will you?"
Thank you so so so much to all of my reviewers/commentators. I will make a point of replying to any questions or comments posted for this last chapter. I adore you all, and I would never have finished this tale without your feedback and validation. A special thank you to PerryDowning, for being awesome and supportive through these last few chapters.

And thank you to my husband for having a look-see at my chapters.

Now, bonus content...

I don't have plans to write a sequel to this story, but I will give you some bullet points that have been kicking around in my head, just in case you require extra closure. The following are posted entirely as food-for-thought and/or amusement.

Outline #1

The foreshadowed political shitstorm ensues, apparently initiated by a resentful Hux. Kylo is deposed and thrown in carbonite, and his son flees to get help from the rest of the family.

It is determined that the only way to save Kylo is to rehabilitate his image. With the aforementioned arranged/political marriage. Conveniently enough, the last of the old imperial family has already borne him two children.

Rey will have to embrace her family's dark, regal past in order to save her family's future. Like most adults, she will have to realize that your destiny and your life-goals are rarely the same thing.

Leia teaches Rey how to behave like royalty. The Princess Diaries in Space follows.

Hux eventually interferes, and decides that marrying a Palpatine might further his own ambitions. His unsuccessful attempt to romance Rey is made particularly awkward by Rey's strong suspicion that Hux has zero sexual interest in women, and that their respective taste in men may be surprisingly similar *wink*.

Lil' Anakin's Force powers suddenly become apparent at the most dramatic possible moment.

Everything turns out right, largely thanks to Leia's political know-how, and Ashla's creepy foresight. Rey gets over herself, becomes empress, frees Kylo, and there's a
big fancy wedding. Everyone lives relatively happily ever after, with Kylo as Rey's consort.

The end.

Outline #2

Kylo's engineers develop intergalactic travel.

Foreshadowed political shitstorm occurs.

Rey, Kylo and their twins run away to some primitive planet called Earth, where no one will ever find them. They settle down in suburbia. Leia goes with them.

Apparently the OT "a long time ago" was during WWII. The current ST "a long time ago" is the 1970s.

Shit tons of culture shock.

The first and second acts are something along the lines of That 70s Show With Space Wizards.

Rey becomes an engineer for NASA, and Kylo becomes a stay-at-home dad.

Rey and Kylo have to figure out that this is highly unusual. Haters hate. Haters get Force choked. Haters are mind tricked into forgetting said choking. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Kylo gets a seat on the local school board, and rules it with an iron fist.

The third act is A John Hughes Movie with Space Wizards.

After several years, Anakin becomes a Ferris Bueller-like figure, the scamp that people can't help but like. His Force powers manifest when he develops his first crush. Floating pears occur.

Ashla becomes something like Allison The Basketcase from Breakfast Club, but with freaky powers. She grapples whether to use these powers to punish bullies or help fellow outcasts.

Meanwhile, Leia becomes a legendary activist for gender and racial equality. She is eventually elected President of the United States.

The end.

In Conclusion...

Feel free to visit me on Tumblr, for updates on future stories, and occasional smartassed Reylo-centric comments. I'm Tuli-Azzameen.

Stay awesome, and don't forget to review/comment!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!