

The Remembrance of Pain (Time Will Explain)

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The Remembrance of Pain (Time Will Explain)

by [Jaded](#)

Summary

Jyn and Cassian fall in love when she is 19 and he is 23, but her foster father, Saw Gerrera, thinks it a bad match and persuades her to end it. Three years later, Cassian returns to try to bridge the gap between the Partisans and the Alliance and to find a pilot with a message from Jyn's long-lost father. A battle-hardened Jyn thinks he has forgotten her, especially as she watches her friend Maia circle the captain with interest. But has he?

Rogue One/Jane Austen's "Persuasion" fusion.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Half Agony

"When pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure."

--Anne Elliot, from Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Jyn Erso is nineteen and Cassian Andor twenty-three when they fall in love against the backdrop of Onderon's lush jungles. But it's not meant to be, not then.

They fall in love in the span of a week, and it shouldn't be so. It shouldn't be normal. But this is a time of war. Normal is a luxury. And luxury is also long kisses in dark alleys, his thumb stroking promises onto her collarbone and the hollow of neck; her palms cradling his face and touching the lines of stress that form under his sad, dark eyes as well as those that crinkle around them when he gives her one of his rare smiles.

But Saw Gerrera disapproves, and he lets it be known between deep gasps from his oxygen mask. "Jyn," he says, and she feels the weight of what she owes him (her life), while she thinks of Cassian with her name on his lips, and her heart twists painfully. Her foster father thinks it a bad match, though he thinks all matches are bad in times of war, but moreso it's because Jyn's a Partisan and Cassian is a soldier of the Alliance. While both sides fight the Empire, they don't see eye to eye on many things. Cassian is here in the first place because he is trying to recruit, trying his part to repair the growing fracture, but it's too late, at least in Saw's eyes. And Saw does not care if his best soldier can help to bridge that gap. He sees it instead as losing her, and their numbers are already dwindling. He also doesn't think highly of Cassian's prospects for surviving very long anyway. He leaves it unsaid that the same is true for himself and for Jyn.

Her real father, Galen, is long gone and has no say, kidnapped when she was eight years old by the Empire. And her mother is dead from a blaster bolt to the chest, forever locked in Jyn's memory, supine in death and lying among the cold grasses of Lah'mu.

Jyn is only nineteen, but she is already a hardened soldier. But then again, she is only nineteen, a girl whose closest encounter with romance was shoving her truncheon into Codo's gut when he tried to grab and kiss her at seventeen. What does she know of love except that it's not meant for her? She only knows war.

So Saw persuades her to break it off. Cassian leaves, embittered.

At the last minute, she feels the weight of regret and rushes to find him. But it's too late (*she seems always too late*). "Cassian!" she cries out as he leaves, because for once, she cannot help herself, but he does not spare her a look as he boards his U-wing. It ends up being the last warm feeling she has for three years. Jyn is left alone, locked in the cave in her mind. When she sees the latch close once more, something cold and hard settles inside of her, and she thinks, *this is who I am now*.

In the intervening years, Jyn perfects the craft of guerilla warfare. Violence is in her bones. It colors her life the red of blood and the gold of the blast of a thermal detonation. But fighting wears on a person, and she loses the bloom of youth and what made her a girl. She learns to accept that she is just a soldier now. And Jyn takes some consolation at least in the fact that if she has to lose the brightness of youth, she can at least replace it with righteous conviction and the steady finger on the trigger of a blaster.

But when life seems settled--in the very tenuous way it can only be during times of great conflict--Cassian shows up again in her life in, of all places, the desert moon of Jedha. And she doesn't know what to think.

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“Alliance fighters? Here?” Baze Malbus grunts when he says this. The gruff former Guardian of the Whills looks disdainful, but he almost always does. Jyn’s friend and fellow Partisan, Maia, does her best to look calm and self-assured as she delivers the news, but her excitement peeks through.

The walls of the building shake, and there is a distant rumble. Dust falls into her eyes, and Jyn looks up out of habit, expecting to see the Imperial Star Destroyer in the sky; she only sees the crumbling stone of Baze and Chirrut Imwe’s home. She blinks away the dirt and her vision clears.

The Empire’s presence on Jedha has ramped up gradually over the last few months, and she smiles grimly to herself because it’s on account of them--because of the Partisans and their work--that NiJedha has been given special attention. She and Saw had watched as Stormtroopers stripped the ancient temple of its kyber crystals, and they didn't need to know why to know that it had to be stopped. It was how they had partnered with Baze and Chirrut.

Jyn leans against the wall and keeps her face impassive as she speaks to Maia. “What do they want?” she asks.

“A truce,” Maia says, breathless. “A partnership.”

Jyn rolls her eyes and thinks about how that failed once before, scrubbing her mind of the other memories of that time, of the rawness of the hurt that she hides away even from herself. “Good luck there,” she says. “Saw won’t have it. We’re better off without weak-willed politicians and their idea of a fight. They’ll only slow us down.”

“They’ve only just landed,” Maia says. “Further out where they can’t be spotted.” She pulls off her synthskin gloves. Puts them back on. It’s a nervous habit, and Jyn has warned her more than once that she’ll lose them if she keeps it up. “They relayed the message to Edrio through the comms, and I overheard. I thought you’d want to know, Jyn. It’s a small group only. Just a captain and his droid and an X-wing pilot.”

“If that’s their idea of sending their best people to impress us,” Jyn snorts, “consider me unimpressed.”

Chirrut smiles and leans forward on his stick. “It is the quality of the person that counts, not the quantity, is it not?”

Jyn is used enough to Chirrut’s cryptic questions that she knows that he does not require an answer. They are never questions so much as they are judgments.

“Maybe they are big names in the Alliance,” Maia offers trying to be helpful. “Baze, Chirrut, have you heard of a Lieutenant Shara Bey or a Captain Cassian Andor? Have you, Jyn?”

Jyn wants to scream, and she sees white as she feels the ghost of his touch and the memory of his warmth, but she swallows her horror instead. She is made of tougher stuff than the Jyn of nineteen. “I have heard of the captain before,” she says carefully. Then slowly, “We knew each other briefly a few years ago.”

“And is he important?” Maia asks.

But Jyn has no answer for Maia. She feels frozen, colder and harder than she did the day he left.

Instead, it is Chirrut who has the last word. He turns his milky eyes in her direction, and she wonders how it is possible that it is this blind man who is always able to see right through her. “Are you impressed now, Miss Erso?”

Half Hope

Chapter Summary

Jyn and Cassian reunited again for the first time, and he brings important news about the Empire . . . and about her father.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for everyone's lovely feedback on the first chapter! As always, any comments here are truly appreciated!

“Time will explain.”

--Lady Russell, from Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Jyn storms back into Saw's headquarters, Maia trailing behind two steps the entire way even though she is a good four inches taller than Jyn. Maia calls out to her, and Jyn's name echoes along the cavern, but Jyn pushes everything aside in her single-minded mission to reach her mentor--and the only father she knows.

The eyes of the other Partisans follow her as she barrels through, but she simply doesn't care. She doesn't care most days, but today most of all. What would they see now that they didn't already know? What could they say about her that wasn't already true? “Jyn Erso is reckless? Jyn Erso is aggressive? Jyn Erso has a death wish?”

Jyn shoves open the cracked and decrepit wooden board that passes for a door and bursts into Saw's quarters; she slams a fist onto the planning table by way of greeting. A data pad goes flying to the floor along with a pile of empty credit chips, but Saw doesn't turn. Not yet. He knows well enough that it is her, if not by her temper by the fact that he knows the sound of

her footsteps. He allows very few people to come upon him when his back is turned. It's one of the reasons he's survived as long as he has.

"Jyn," he says. "My child." She feels the knife twist in her belly and wonders how deliberate his choice of words is.

"Did you know about this?" she asks, hoping he'll give her the negative; sure that she won't. "The people the Alliance sent?" *Cassian Andor* she thinks and feels herself color, feels a lost wave of desire crash over her that fills her with both longing and shame.

"They did not contact us about this . . . visit," Saw says. "Not before they exited hyperspace a day ago."

"A day was not enough time to tell me?"

He puts the finishing touch on a coded message and shuts off the transmitter. She finally has his full attention. His tone shifts, and there is a touch of anger. "Typical arrogance from the Alliance." He wheezes, and only then does he turn around to look her in the eye, his eyes softening. He's the only father she remembers, and she sees that he does love her, in his own way. That whatever he does, he does out of what he perceives as her best interest (*whatever I do, I do to protect you*). "Does this trouble you, child?"

"Nothing troubles me," she snaps. "And everything does." Jyn paces.

He laughs. "Then there is no reason to meet with them! They waste our time with this foolishness. Partnership? Collaboration? The galaxy is coming apart, and they wish to hold hands and play nice as though we are children on a playground." He strikes out at the air with his hand, and Jyn thinks that if Saw Gerrera could summon thunder and rain with the power of his conviction, the skies would open up and drown them all. "I say send them away! You have my leave to tell them to return to their base. The Partisans do not need the Alliance. Saw Gerrera does not! We continue our fight, and we do it alone."

If he's testing her, Jyn fails because she hesitates. She's a good little soldier, and a leader, certainly. But she is also a follower, a follower of Saw Gerrera, and to neither argue with him

as a leader or to act as a follower should and fall immediately into lock stop, she's showing her hand. She's revealing weakness. This, perhaps, is the most unforgivable thing of all.

But she is moved by the half-life she's lived over the past three years and the realization of how empty that time has left her. Her eyes sting, and she wipes at them angrily. "Saw," she says, stepping forward, and she feels like a child again. "I have always . . ."

"Let us not speak of it," he says, then more gently, "You may send them away, Jyn. But you may meet with them, too, if you so desire. I trust you." He walks over to her, his cybertronic legs clanking against the stone floor. He puts an arm on her shoulder, and it's the closest thing to a fatherly gesture he's capable of giving. "But if you do, do not forget who we are. Who you are."

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Jyn dispatches Edrio and Staven to meet with the Alliance contingent (she tries to think of this way--impersonal; plural; *them, not us* --and get the necessary distance), and when they are brought back to base, she hangs back in the crowd of gathering Partisans.

It's common practice to cover the heads of any non-Partisan who is allowed into their camp, and their new guests are not given special consideration. They are marched in to the sound of murmurs and the movement of small weapons between hands. The X-wing pilot--Bey--is in a brown leather jacket and a green flight suit, and Cassian is in a thick blue coat trimmed in fur. A memory bubbles up before Jyn can stop it, and she thinks about how he once curled into her shoulder and told her how much he hated the cold. She remembers how much he had enjoyed the hot weather on Onderon and how much she enjoyed seeing him bare-chested and sitting near a tide pool, drinking in the sun.

But before Staven can remove the black bags covering their heads, an Imperial KX-series appears over the hill from behind them, glass eyes glowing to life. The sound of blasters flying into targeting position echoes against the canyon walls in perfect synchronization. Jyn acts before she can second guess herself, and plunging loose from her spot, she sprints toward the droid, her voice ringing out: “He’s a friendly!”

Silence follows save for her pounding footsteps. Her authority is supreme enough that the Partisans lower their weapons, but her authority does not remove their suspicions--as it should not. Healthy suspicion is fifty percent of what keeps them alive. They shift uncomfortably as she approaches the droid.

She knows him, this droid--K-2SO, Cassian Andor’s reprogrammed “friend,” and he turns his metal head toward her and seems to remember her, too. He does what passes for blinking as she approaches.

“Jyn Erso,” he says, “we meet again.”

“Kaytoo,” she says curtly and notes how Cassian’s body stiffens at the sound of her voice. Had he not known that she was going to be here?

“You’re still alive,” the droid says, and his tone is wry. “It would appear that my calculations were wrong.”

“Sorry to disappoint you,” she says.

The, turning to addressing Staven and Edrio, she says, “Unmask them and put them in temporary quarters. We’ll reconvene in two hours to discuss their proposal.”

The hoods come off. She wills herself not to look at Cassian face, but she fails. She misses it. She misses him. He’s older. He’s sadder. And his face is harder. Jyn wants to laugh at how they seem destined to follow the same trajectory in life, just apart, but instead she feels her heart stutter at the sight of him. Her silence grows grimmer.

When his eyes adjust to the light and he glances in her direction, she's not surprised to see him look not at her but through her. Maybe she deserves it, but she returns the favor and looks past him when she signals for the Partisans to break up. In order to accept that it's over, she has to behave as though it is.

"Why are you all still standing around?" she barks. "Do you think rebellions are built on hope? Get back to work!"

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The meeting goes better than Jyn expects, but then, her expectations were impossibly low to begin.

"There's a pilot," Cassian says. It's the first thing he's said to her in three years. The last thing he said to her was *Why?*

Shara Bey continues: "We have had reports that an Imperial cargo pilot has defected and that he is here on Jedha. He is claiming that the Emperor is creating a weapon with the power to destroy entire planets."

Jyn laughs. "That's a terrible lie," she says when what she really wants to say is *you're all crazy*. She looks at Bey because she still can't look at Cassian, and she lets contempt drip from her voice because the anger keeps her focused, allows her to bury any distraction that might make her appear weak or unsure. "Let's cut to the chase and to the actual reason why

we are meeting today. What does this have to do with all us? The word we received was that the Alliance wanted a truce with the Partisans. That you wanted to work together. So what does this pilot have to do with this ? With us?" She gives a sneering smile that is all teeth. "Did you lose him and you need us to retrieve him?"

"He say he was sent by your father," Cassian says at last, his tone casual. Jyn feels the blood drain from her face. If this is his revenge, he has chosen his weapon well.

My father is alive. My father is a traitor. My father is building a weapon to destroy worlds.

She grips the side of the table so that she doesn't sway. She lifts her hands and stares at her palms, and they are bleeding from where she's dug in her fingernails.

When Jyn looks up, she finds Cassian looking at her properly for the first time since he and Bey landed, and she sees what she recognizes as genuine emotion from him for the first time since she broke his heart and her own. She shakes her head at him, almost imperceptibly, wants to say *don't, I don't want your pity*. His lips part as though he understands her. She feels that he does, *because you know me still, even after all this time and distance, even after all the hurt and betrayal*.

"We can find your father," he says, and Jyn, already threadbare and worn, feels herself unraveling.

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It's cold out as night falls. Jyn can see her breath when she exhales. She rubs her fingers and heads out toward the weapons bunker to do the nightly check. Cassian and the lieutenant are back in their quarters to rest. Tomorrow they go into the Holy City with a small band of Partisans to seek out this pilot and whatever secret he holds. It's not normally a mission she would take on herself, but it was *her father* .

"What did you do to him when you met three years ago?" Maia asks, bounding with curiosity. She's joined by Cena and Waylor, sandy-haired fraternal twins Saw picked up on during a raid on Abregado-rae. They're fifteen, at best, orphaned children--and children in a way Jyn was not a child at fifteen. What did it matter if Cena could disassemble and reassemble a blaster faster than anyone on Jedha or if Waylor could slip in and out of dark streets and into sunlight like a shadow? They still laugh with joy. They still have more fingers on their hands than confirmed kills.

"What do you mean?" Jyn says and feels her pulse speeding up. Had he said something? Had he looked at her as she made her leave? Her hands ball up into fists, but there is no one for her to fight except herself.

"You said you knew him when you met a few years ago, but the captain seemed very hostile toward you, in a way he wasn't toward anyone else." Maia shrugs. "Don't think I didn't notice. I notice these things. It seemed," and Maia considers her next words before barreling ahead, "it seemed personal."

"Ah," Jyn says, then grows silent. The walk another 500 meters, and 500 meters seems to be the limit of silence Maia will accept. Maia's a good soldier in part because of her persistence and because she has the skill of speech and charm that comes in handy when information needs to be extracted without bloodshed. It's a skill Jyn sorely lacks.

"Did you hurt him somehow?" Maia asks, and Jyn feels weightless, thinks, *yes I did* . Then Maia laughs and points to her face and says, "You did! I knew it. What did you hit him with? Fist or truncheon? Or was it the butt of a blaster?"

"I hope you didn't hit hit him in the face," Cena says. "It's a nice face. It would have been a shame." Waylor ribs his sister with an elbow and giggles in agreement.

And Jyn thinks, *I hurt him, but it wasn't like that*. She stops for a solemn moment and says with a shrug of feigned nonchalance--her best acting yet: "I stunned him."

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She walks back from the bunker alone, sending Maia, Cena, and Waylor to bring the evening guard their share of rations. That is, Jyn is alone until K-2SO walks up to her and pauses, peering down with his golden eyes.

"What are you doing?" Jyn demands, stepping back as he invades her personal space. She thinks, *like programmer, like droid*.

"I am performing a visual scan."

"Why?" she asks. She is already so tired.

"I am making a visual map of you."

Her lips tighten and her patience frays, but she asks anyway, "For what reason?"

K-2SO cocks his head as though the answer is obvious, but he elaborates nonetheless.

“I overheard Lieutenant Bey asked Cassian what he thought of you after the meeting,” K-2SO says, not insignificantly. “And he said, ‘you were so altered, he should not have known you again.’” K-2SO leans in. “I see no difference, but I am taking a scan so that if his memory continues to falter, I can provide him with the data that will confirm your identity since we are to be, so it appears, allies.”

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They go into NiJedha the next day and meet with Chirrut and Baze.

Jyn takes lead. Cassian hangs back in the archway with Shara Bey. Outside, Codo and Staven stand guard. There air practically crackles with tension. Something is happening or about to happen. The stink is in the air.

“A pilot you say?” Baze huffs. “We’ve heard of no such defector, but we have noted the increase in security patrols.”

Jyn draws her scarf back around her head and nods to the Guardians. “Let me know if you hear anything.”

“Be safe until then, Little Sister,” Baze says.

“I’ll keep an eye out,” Chirrut smiles.

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They return to base with no leads. Jyn grits her teeth and throws her things to the ground when she gets to her bunk. She stays there until hunger curls itself into her stomach and turns her into a beast.

In what passes for the commissary, Jyn refills her flask with water from the purifier and stuffs a ration bar into the pocket of her vest. She puts a stale piece of bread to her lips and takes a bite that crumbles onto her chin. Everything tastes like sand, but two more bites quiets the growling inside of her.

A murmur of voices from the hall floats in, followed shortly after by Cassian Andor and Shara Bey. Jyn curses under her breath, but stays rooted in her seat. This is her territory, not theirs, and she'll not be driven out. With them are a gaggle of young Partisans asking about the Alliance. Maia and Cena are at Cassian's elbow. Codo has his wandering hands slapped away by Shara Bey. Jyn thinks that if they hadn't arrived here with the claim of a planet destroying weapon on the horizon, she would have guessed they had come to recruit away the Partisans with dreams of galactic glory.

"Are all rebels so beautiful?" Cena had asked earlier in the morning, and Jyn had pretended that she was still asleep. "I'd join if Saw wouldn't kill me for leaving first."

Jyn takes another bite of bread and stares at the walls. Her mouth tastes like ash.

"What are the Core Worlds like?" Maia says to Cassian, and she reaches out and touches his shoulder. Her fingers linger there, and Jyn flinches. Cassian does not.

They had touched each other like that not so long ago, quickly and impulsively and with tenderness. How easily had that fallen away? How easily had it been replaced with another person's touch?

"They are not so different from other worlds," he says. "Perhaps more populated. Sentient beings tend to follow all the same patterns. Love and lust and power and sorrow."

"I think it would be amazing to see," Maia says. "I've only known the Outer Rim."

"Perhaps one day, then, Maia," Cassian says, and he smiles at her, his eyes soft.

It makes Jyn want to kill something beautiful.

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The next day their mission is washed out by a rare Jedha rain. Jyn sits alone on the ledge, binoculars in hand, scanning the perimeter of their compound. Her rain gear flaps in the wind and does little to keep her dry.

She knows Cassian is nearby, knows that he is watching her and pretending not to. But he won't say a word to her, and she's just as stubborn and returns his silence.

Her hands fold together, unfold, and back again. She refuses to look at him. Her eyes shut, and she is thankful for the rain.

Jyn wishes he would leave. Jyn wishes he had stayed.

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Over a cup of cooling caf, Maia leans over the table and says, not bothering to lower her voice, “Do you think it’s possible to fall in love in a week?” She turns away from Jyn for a moment and throws a glance over her shoulder. Maia covers her mouth and laughs. “Or maybe just one day?”

It would be easy for Jyn to judge Maia harshly for thinking about love and romance in a time like this, but Jyn understands that it’s not Maia who is the oddity. It’s her. Everyone else has someone they are fighting for, whether they are living people or memories of the dead. Jyn knows that she’ll die for the cause; but someone worth living for? She has no one.

She stares into the brown sludge in her cup and swirls the liquid around. It leaves muddy streaks that cling to the white ceramic and smells as wholly unappetizing as it looks. She can see Cassian on the other side of the room, about ten feet away, pretending not to watch them. His eyes look hard and troubled, and she thinks, *he’s left off his spy mask today*, but then again, maybe that’s not it. She’s not sure if he’s gotten worse at hiding it or if she simply knew him too well, even now. The thought rattles her.

Maia makes a noise in her throat, wanting an answer. “Do you?”

Jyn looks up, meeting Maia’s dark-eyed gaze. “No,” she says flatly and takes a sip. If she sees Cassian’s eyebrow quirk, she won’t acknowledge it. “I don’t.” The caf leaves a bitter taste in her mouth. She takes another.

Tell Me Not

Chapter Summary

What's an Austen AU without a parlor scene?

Chapter Notes

Feedback and comments are cherished. Thank you to everyone who has read, left a kudos, or written a comment so far!

Also, special thanks to my same brain, frangipani, who isn't even that into rebelcaptain but puts up with me chattering about my fics and helps me make them more interesting with discussion and friendship!

“His cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than anything.”

--Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

The heavy rains continue into the night, and a flash flood washes away a new Rodian recruit. All that's left of him to bury is a satchel of rocks from his homeworld—a sentimental reminder of where he had come from and who he had lost. She is surprised by her sadness.

She takes on the job herself of clearing out his bunk and redistributing his weapons and clothing. Jyn tries to commit his name to memory—*Earreautieu*—but she knows it'll have slipped from her thoughts by the time the next rains fall. She pockets his half-empty flask of Rodian spice liquor for herself before she locks the room.

The more grizzled Partisans are holed up for the night in fitful sleep. They cradle their weapons in their arms as they slumber, and she knows this is probably the nearest they'll get to comfort. The rest of the Partisans are in a deeper part of the hideout further down in the catacombs. There's a space there where they can joke and laugh and find shelter from the realities of war and slaughter. Jyn knows that's where she'll find Waylor, who is in need of new boots. Earrautieu's should will do well to fit his still-growing feet.

She walks down deeper through the Catacombs of Cadera. The louder their voices become, the closer she gets and the sound amplifies her sorrow. She's never felt that this camaraderie was meant for her. Maybe because Ersos never lived very long. Maybe because she's seen too many friends die and decided she didn't want to waste her time always in mourning.

The room is lit by a series of lanterns and glowrods, and her comrades are all bathed in orange light. In the archway to the room she opens her mouth to call out Waylor's name, but she sees Cassian sitting on the far end and the name dies on her lips. She lets her eyes linger on him for longer than she should, and catalogs in her mind that his beard is thicker and his eyes more shadowed than when she saw him the day before. But she would know his face anywhere, no matter how different he'd looked. She'd know it if she went blind, in the way Chirrut knows every scratch and wrinkle in Baze's face. She's never forgotten Cassian, no matter how much she has tried, and she has tried hard. He's relaxed now. His arms are propped up on his knees, and he's leaning in to hear what Dajo Koda has to say. She tries to imagine Cassian looking at her like that, but she draws a blank.

Silently, she finds Waylor with his sister and shoves the boots into his hands. She can be in and out without a word, she thinks, but Cena sings her name and drags Jyn away from the exit, pushing her to sit on a chair next to Kullbee Sperado and Magva Yarro, imploring her to stay and have fun.

Jyn could leave, easily, but she's doesn't. She tells herself lies about how it would draw too much attention to go after Cena's little show, that it would be a poor example for the younger Partisans to brush them off where she is wanted. But even Jyn doesn't believe the falsehoods she feeds herself. She wants to be near Cassian, to hear his voice even if he'll never say her name again the way he used to. It's a simple and harsh truth, and she hates herself for it.

"What's it like being in Rebel Intelligence?" Maia asks Cassian, her voice cheerful and loud. She was sitting when Jyn walked in; she's now standing. "Do you go undercover often?" Maia moves closer to Cassian. Their knees touch and he doesn't move away. "Have you ever had to kill or seduce your marks?" Maia leans a hand on her cheek. "Or both?"

A feeling within Jyn stirs, a tingle at the bottom of her spine that travels up her back and stings her throat. But it's not Maia's doing. Jyn felt this way for years, has noted and let it fade a little bit each and every day. It's something that has slowly erased her around the edges. No, it's not jealousy. It's something worse: it's regret.

Jyn watches Cassian shift in his seat, sees his posture straighten as Maia body comes between them and Jyn can longer see his face. She wonders faintly if he had seen her when she first walked in, but Jyn remembers Maia's words: Cassian is Rebel Intelligence. He is a spy. Of course he's noticed. He would be dead twice over if he was that easily distracted.

Jyn pulls open the flask and takes a long draw. Handing it over to Magva, Jyn leans back and shuts her eyes. Why would she think it was her attention that he wanted now? She should not be so foolish.

Magva and Kullbee resume their quiet conversation, and Jyn lets her eyes travel again across the room to Cassian. Once, she feels him looking at her, observing her in his subtle ways, his brown eyes tracing the ruins of the Jyn Erso he once loved to wonder at whatever it could have been that had once charmed him. She sees him then glance her way a second time, more obviously, and when Maia turns, Jyn suspects that they must be speaking of her. Bending her ear, she listens. She does not hear the question; only the answer:

"Jyn's the fiercest, most brutal one of us all."

It's meant as a compliment.

Cassian looks at her again, more open and obvious in his gaze, and the look is the final frost that drops the last leaf of the tree. Jyn wishes he would not look at her at all. His cold indifference is worse than anything.

She takes the flask and downs another drag of liquor, knowing it will only flush her cheeks. It will do nothing to warm her inside. "Earreautieu is gone," she tells her comrades after a long moment when the spice liquor has burned its way down her throat.

“A shame,” Magva says. “So many gone so young.” Her eyeblack has dripped down onto her cheeks, and it makes Magva look like a grimmer warrior in the quiet of the room than Magva in a firefight during the day.

“Have you told Saw yet?” Kullbee, the old gunslinger, asks, his question in the same cadence as the sound of his devout evening prayers that she hears every night floating through the caves. She doesn’t know what species he is, only that he is a man of faith gifted with a deadly shot.

“I will,” Jyn says, brushing her hair behind her ear, “but in the morning. He doesn’t need this burden today. There’s too much planning already for tomorrow.”

“He’s lucky to have you,” Kullbee says, stroking the white fur that hangs from his chin. Jyn stares at her hands. “The weight of the galaxy is on his back, but with you by his side, you help to keep him upright.”

“I might not always be here,” Jyn muses. It is a thought that has been churning in her mind now for months: her longevity; her mortality. Benthic has been nipping at her heels from the day he arrived, and she does not doubt he’ll step into second-in-command if she dies, but Saw needs less a right-hand warrior than he needs a conscience. She looks over to Maia, pretty, clever, silver-tongued Maia, and wonders if Saw might one day listen to her the way he does Jyn, if she could be up to the task of keeping Saw’s fervor bent toward justice. Lately, she’s wondered if she has been up to that task, either.

Jyn’s the fiercest, most brutal one of us all.

Magva chortles low and deep, a veteran’s laugh. “If you keep fighting the way you do, girl, that will be true. You’ll sign your own death warrant.”

“Is this the way of all the Partisans?” Shara Bey asks, joining them in their corner. Jyn glances up to see the X-wing pilot’s hand reaching out for the flask. Jyn hands over the metal container and watches as Bey tips it to her lips and grimaces as the taste makes contact with her tongue.

“This is simply the way of Jyn Erso,” Kullbee says.

“No one is as good as hand-to-hand as our Jyn,” Magva say, and there’s an odd sort of pride in her face.

“One fighter with a sharp stick, with nothing left to lose, can win the day,” Jyn says. They are Saw’s words with her voice and both their conviction.

“And Jyn Erso has nothing left to lose?” Shara Bey asks, tilting her head so that her black curls fall across her forehead. “I can’t believe that.”

“Believe it or don’t, lieutenant,” Jyn says. “What does it matter?”

“Shara,” the pilot says, sitting down across from Jyn. “You know you can call me ‘Shara.’”

“Believe it or don’t then, Shara,” Jyn says, and lets the air around her fill with silence.

Shara Bey shrugs and pulls out a necklace hidden beneath her fatigues. A ring hangs from the end, and the pilot turns it over and over in her hands. Jyn touches the hollow of her own throat, and remembers that she stopped wearing her kyber pendant years ago. She’d put it away, her mother’s pendant, when it began to burn cold against her skin. How long had it been since she had given it up? She looks at Cassian, at the upturn of his mouth as he talks to Maia and Cena, and she remembers: almost three years.

“What time do we leave tomorrow?” Shara asks, her voice low.

“Before daybreak,” Jyn says.

Shara raises her eyebrows. “And?”

“And what?” Jyn repeats. “We search for the pilot.”

“That’s all the information you have?”

“You’re Rebel Intelligence, you tell me,” Jyn shoots back. “You’re the ones who came to us. How much more do we need besides what you’ve already said? His name is Bodhi Rook. He’s an Imperial pilot. A local boy. We know he is somewhere in or around Jedha. We keep our eyes and ears open. If we find him? We grab him. We go.”

Shara stares at her, unblinking at first, then she turns her head quickly, flashing a quick look over her shoulder to Cassian. Jyn tries not to follow, but she slips and her eyes chase after him.

“And what about your father?” Shara tries.

“I don’t know my father,” Jyn says. The question makes her uncomfortable because she has no answers for herself. She presses her fingernails back into her palms, fits her jagged nails into the red-brown half-crescent scabs that have only just dried over. She pulls one off with a flick of her nail, and blood blossoms like a desert rose. “I haven’t seen him in fifteen years.” She closes her fingers around her wound. "It doesn't factor into tomorrow."

Magva makes to pass the flask back to Jyn, but she declines with a wave of her hand.

“Do you trust us?” Shara asks after another long pause.

“Shouldn’t that be my question to you?” Jyn replies. “Aren’t we the wild cards? ‘Any means justifies the end?’ The ones without rules or a moral compass?” The combativeness feels good and eases the pressure she’s felt building inside since Maia delivered the news of their arrival.

“Cassian trusts you,” Shara says quietly, and that is the blade that slices quickly and cleanly through her. “And I trust his judgment.”

Jyn casts her eyes to the ceiling. As her throat begins to close up, she swallows. She runs a finger over her weeping wound. "He doesn't trust easily," she says hoarsely and thinks he was wrong to have ever trusted her ever.

"No, he doesn't," Shara says. "So when he says he trusts someone, I take that word as his bond."

"And trust has to go both ways," Jyn says.

Shara murmurs in agreement before she slides her necklace beneath her tunic. She hums softly to herself. It sounds like a lullaby or maybe an old folk song from a planet far away. Shara keeps shooting looks at her, and Jyn thinks she has something else she wants to say to her but hasn't worked up the courage or the method. Jyn's not wrong.

"I know that you and Cassian met each other once, a few years ago," Shara says slowly, meeting Jyn's eye. "He didn't say exactly how except that you had met on Onderon and that things didn't work out."

"With Saw?" Jyn deflects. "No."

"Maybe," Shara says, unconvinced. "I just wondered . . . he's been behaving differently since we've gotten here."

Jyn digs into her lie and ignores the flash of skepticism on Shara's face. "I wouldn't know." But she can't help but to dip in a toe. "How would you say he is different?"

"He smiles too easily." Shara laughs with a little huff of breath, as though it's the most ridiculous thing to say.

“Cassian--” Jyn catches herself and turns it into a question, “--the captain doesn’t like to smile?” She looks at how his eyes crinkle as he speaks to Maia, Cena, and Waylor, and her own eyes burn. He had smiled at her too many times to count all those years ago. She’d felt in her own hands the uplift of his mouth and the rounding of his cheeks as they drew close together. The acid drips from her voice now. She tastes it on her tongue. “You could have fooled me.”

“Maybe it’s the way he is on missions,” Shara says, “I’ve never been assigned with him before, but he’s never like this when we are on base. I couldn’t help but wonder, though, if it had something to do with you.”

"He doesn't smile at me," Jyn says carefully. “So I can’t imagine why you’d think that.”

“Can you not? It's interesting though, no, that you are the exception.”

“I don’t mean anything to him, if that’s what you’re implying,” Jyn says with finality, and her voice hitches as she trips on a memory of his back receding as the gate to his ship slammed shut. She can almost smell the acrid scent of jet fuel and ozone in her nostrils. “We only knew each other for a little over a week.”

“What a week that must have been,” Shara says.

Jyn purses her lips; shrugs.

Codo comes around, and for a moment Jyn is grateful for his interruption. It doesn’t last long, though. “Such pretty faces shouldn’t look so sour,” he says, and Jyn’s face twists with aggravation. She already has very little patience for him when he’s silent. When he speaks, it sets her temper on edge.

“You’re lucky you’re good with heavy repeater, Codo,” she says coolly, “because I see very little use for you otherwise.”

He spits at her feet and calls her a barrage of slurs. Jyn laughs, covers her mouth with her hands and play acts delicacy. “You think I haven’t ever been called all those names and more? Sit down, Codo, and leave us alone. This conversation is for adults.”

“I’m talking to Shara, not you, Erso,” he grits. He leans over Shara and sniffs her hair.

“Back off, kid!” Shara says, flinching away, her earlier tolerance and annoyance now turned to anger.

Maia’s laughter flits across the room, bright as the tinkling of a prayer bell. “She’s obviously not interested, Codo. And not that it matters,” Maia says, gliding toward them, “but if you had any sort of observational skills, you’d know that she was already taken, too. But you don’t.”

“What?”

“The ring on her necklace. She has a sweetheart.”

“A husband,” Shara says.

Kullbee lights a cigarra, and the smell of t’bac seasons the stale cavern air. “You and the captain?” he asks, inhaling. The smoke curls in the lantern light.

Jyn turns and stares not at Shara but at Cassian, and their eyes lock. She can’t read him right now, but she had wondered. If not Shara, perhaps someone else. Three years was a long time, especially during war, and the loneliness in each other that had filled when they were together had been vast and deep. When he left, she’d filled hers with blood, but what had he done?

Shara’s “no” breaks the spell, and Jyn tears her eyes away.

“Not that it matters,” Jyn repeats, forcing the strength back into her voice. “No one wants you, Codo. Get that into your head and stop wasting time.”

“You’re one to talk,” he spits. “No one wants you, either.”

“And yet you don’t see me complaining about it like a whiny nerfherder,” Jyn says, kicking one leg up onto the table. “Isn’t that interesting?”

Cena runs up and peers around Codo’s back, her hands grasping his sides as though he were the thick trunk of a tree. “He’s still mad that Jyn wouldn’t kiss him!” she laughs and flits away before Codo can strike her with the back of his hand.

“He tried to kiss Jyn?” And it’s this quiet question from Cassian that makes Jyn freeze. Her blood slows to a trickle.

“Oh, yes,” Cena says, running back to Cassian’s side.

“She turned him down?”

“Yeah, and better! She beat him with a truncheon.”

Cassian’s voice is sharp; curious. “When was this?” he asks. She hadn’t told him about Codo’s attempted kiss because what had Codo mattered when there was Cassian? They’d had little more than a week together, and she hadn’t wasted that time talking about someone who hadn’t mattered.

“Jyn is not easily persuaded,” Cena says. “Especially by such a clumsy oaf--oh you know you’re an oaf, Codo!” She jumps as Codo takes a swipe. Cassian raises a hand and warns Codo away from the girl. Then he steps forward.

“Except by Saw Gerrera?” Cassian asks. He’s closer to her than he’s been since their meeting. His voice is measured, only tinted with a hint of curiosity. She hates him a little for it.

“Saw’s word is law with the Partisans,” Kullbee says, but Jyn barely hears him.

They crowd in the room is already small and intimate, and the Rebel captain’s question draws the remainder of the room’s attention. Jyn seethes and curses herself for staying as long as she had. But she won’t back down now that’s she’s here. She backed down once before, and all it did was make her into this wounded animal.

“The world is coming undone, *Captain*. We do what we have to in order to win.” Jyn stands up, jutting out her chin. The fight in her rises. She wants to beat him beat him bloody with her fists and slam him against the wall until he shatters like she did when he left. She wants to see the Cassian she loved one last time. Not this stranger with the closed-off face. Then she wants to wish him away so that she can try all over again to forget him, even if it means she’s back to zero. “Some of us live this rebellion,” she says and feels her face twitch, barely able to hold his eye. “And some of us will die by it.”

His pupil dilate, and he looks at her, dangerously intent. Her heart races. “You think I don’t live by that rule?” he says, his tone casual and light, but his back is ramrod straight, the tension building in his body. “I’ve been in this fight since I was six years old.”

“You don’t think I know that?” she snaps, catching herself too late.

“You’re not the only one who has lost everything.”

Her eyes burn. She chokes down a tearless sob. Composing herself, she says, “Then we seem to be in agreement.” Silence is his only response.

“What is your sweetheart’s name, Shara?” Maia says, breaking the tension. She slides between Jyn and Cassian and it makes him jump back two steps.

“Kes,” Shara says, but her worried eyes dart between Jyn and Cassian, and the furrow in her brow is deep. “He’s a sergeant with the Alliance.”

“How can you bear to leave him?” Maia sighs. “How does he leave you to go on his missions? Forgive me if I’m too much of a romantic,” she says lowering her voice to a hush, touching her hand to her own breast, “but we have so little time for romance here. Saw forbids it. But some of us need the distraction! Otherwise life is so gloomy!”

“We love each other, but we love the cause, too,” Shara says. “That’s important. It’s always been important. It’s why we work. It’s how we can.”

“And you fight for it together,” Cassian says, tearing his gaze from Jyn, and she feels the phantom pain of the rip.

“If I loved a man like that,” Maia says, “I would always be with him. Nothing should ever separate us. I’d rather die with him than be safe with anyone else.” Maia turns and smiles at Cassian. Jyn looks away before she has to see his face.

“I think that’s enough for tonight,” Jyn says quietly. “We have an early day tomorrow. Break this up. Get some rest.”

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In his first week on Onderon, he had pulled her to safety from a landing pad exploding with bombs and she'd taken a vibroblade to the ribs when she jumped and slashed the trooper she saw bearing down on him after he had been slammed unconscious against a hanger deck. That injury had left a perfect half-crescent scar on her left side; just another one for her collection. Back then, that had been enough for love, enough for a confession that had left them both breathless.

He had been the one to say it first, startling himself and her. It was the first time anyone had said those words to her since she was a child.

"I love you, too," she had blurted in response, stumbling into his arms. The surprise on his face made her think it had as long for him, too. "But we hardly know each other," she had said. "There hasn't been the time."

"There has been enough time for me," he had said, tracing her lips with his thumb, and she knew what he said to be true. "I know you, Jyn." And she knew him.

They'd been young then.

How the years had aged them since.

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The dust in the walkways blur her vision further, and Jyn has no glowrod to light her way. She's glad, though, because the darkness hides her face and her embarrassment. If any of the Partisans saw her now, they'd never follow her into another fight. It's dark enough that she's little more than a lurking shadow in the hall, and she thinks it's good enough as a disguise. But someone finds her anyway when she's halfway to her quarters. His hands reach out for her in the twilight of the cave, and she doesn't have to see him to know that it's Cassian. She hasn't forgotten his firm but kind touch.

"What was that back there?" he hisses, and his emotion is raw and unfiltered. His hand wraps around her bicep. "Isn't it a little dramatic? 'Some of us die by it'?"

Jyn jerks away, and he lets his hand fall. "It's not your job to worry about me."

"You are saying that I can't?" His voice is even again; seemingly unaffected.

"Didn't we give that up years ago?" Her voice grows small, and she's not so good at hiding her emotions. In the distance, she hears the shuffle of feet.

"You gave it up," he whispers, *you gave me up* left unsaid, and he's somehow drawn closer to her. She can smell him, a mix of blaster oil and Jedha sand, and her instinct is to fall into his embrace. But she collects herself, picks herself up before she falls.

"I have no control over how you feel, *Captain*." Jyn pulls away from him, her eyes adjusting to the dim light. Her lips quirk up, and her smile shakes on her face. "And the only person who told you to stop was you. You didn't need my permission."

He looks at her, calm. Too calm. "You told me to go."

"And you left," she says. "We both made choices back then. I'm trying to live by mine."

Footsteps draw nearer, and Jyn hears Maia's voice call out, "Cassian?"

Jyn doesn't ask him to take her leave. She just goes as the light of Maia's glowrod draws nearer.

"I was looking for you!" Maia says. "Shall we walk together back to your bunk?"

Jyn slips into the dark. She lets herself vanish like a ghost.

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Jyn dreams of Cassian that night. It's the not the first time, but he's never been this close before. The dream is so vivid that she jerks awake before sunrise, her brain screaming like it wants to escape from her body. She has to tell herself it's not real and curls up on her cot and draws her legs to her chest, her body chilled with sweat.

She's had nightmares of him yelling at her before, of him leaving, of him dying and turning into dust. She's woken up raw and frustrated after a dream of him buried between her legs where she can still feel the softness of a smile pressed into her thigh. But this dream might be the worse of them all: the two of them, sitting on a bunk together in their sleep clothes and pouring over a mission brief on their data pads. In her dream she knows that it's only one

quiet moment during the war, but she feels content in it nonetheless. In the dream, he offers her his hand, and when he reaches it out, she takes it. When he touches hers, Jyn knows it's the life they could have had together. It was then that she had woke.

She shuts her eyes tight.

When she opens her eyes again, the chrono glows 0500 hours. It's time. She dresses, leaves her bunk, and walks into the Jedha dusk. Her truncheon and blaster are clipped to her belt. Her hold out blaster is in a holster under her tunic. There is one vibroblade tucked away in her vest, one in her boot, and under one of her sleeves. That blade is the one she'd forgotten to wipe clean after the last scuffle with Stormtroopers. She scratches off the dried blood with a nail. Alone in the morning, she tells herself as she breathes in the dry desert air that this is the last moment she'll let herself ache for Cassian Andor. She wraps her scarf around her head and waits for her soldiers to file in.

Today she has a pilot to find.

That I Am Too Late

Chapter Summary

Led by Jyn, the Partisans and Alliance go into occupied Jedha City in search of a pilot with a message.

Chapter Notes

Thank you again to everyone who has been so kind to leave a message or kudos!

Also, some of the text here is a remix of Austen, so it may ring familiar, and some of it a remix of some lines from Alexander Freed's *Rogue One* novelization. Both are done with great love and respect.

“ . . .one half of her should not be always so much wiser than the other half . . .”

--Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

The three transports that will take them into NiJedha idle in the dark, the exhaust drifting lazily skyward. Jyn checks the fuel gauges and then the weapons crates in the vehicle that will take her, Maia, Staven, Dajo, and Magva into the city. Kullbee does the same for the one that will take him, Cassian, Shara, K-2SO, and Weeteef. The Tognaths, Edrio and Benthic, round out the group on a shared land speeder.

Before she gives the go to leave, Jyn jumps off the back and finds Kullbee for one last word. When she feels Cassian's eyes following her, she reminds herself of her earlier promise to herself. She doesn't need his scrutiny, his judgment, nor his pity. There's too much on her mind today, too much at play.

“Check near the temple and find out what you can,” she says to Kullbee. “Edrio and Benthic will search the perimeter of the hanger in Sector 5. We’ll be in the marketplace. We’ll rendezvous at Chirrut and Baze’s at 0100 hours and regroup if the pilot is not found before that.” They press their hands together. It’s the closest thing she has to friendship, these moments. “It is as the Force wills it,” she tells him as they break, repeating her mother’s old saying for good fortune. Jyn says it out of habit, not belief, because what had the Force gifted Lyra Erso except bad luck?

Staven and Kullbee start up the trucks, and the rumble of the transports breaks the quiet of the morning. Edrio and Benthic take off first to scout ahead. It is then when Saw makes an appearance, his silhouette emerging from the shadow of the cave. He stops and stands at the entrance to the hideout, a sentinel at the door to his kingdom. His face is placid and observing--but Jyn has only known it as such when it is not thrown back into a fit of righteous passion. It’s the first time Saw has seen Cassian since he and Shara arrived on Jedha, the first time they have laid eyes on one another in over three years when Cassian had parted with her so bitterly. There’s a look exchanged between the two men, and Jyn can only guess to its meaning. She sees it happen as though in slow motion. A darkening of Cassian’s face. A tip of the chin by Saw. Then her mentor—and the only father she really knows—disappears again inside his bunker. She tries not to linger on the thought.

When light begins to prick at the horizon, the blue of dawn turns the desert pink and gold, and they are off.

They are halfway to the Holy City when the sun finally rises full in the sky. Jyn can see a sand storm swirling in the distant horizon. From what she can make out with her macrobinoculars, it’s not a big storm--merely an annoyance--and not enough to jam up the filters and render their transportation useless. She tell her team to cover their heads and put on their masks, and Staven passes the message along to the other group. They are going through, not around. They can’t risk losing this pilot if he has vital information about a super weapon . . . and about her father. Every extra minute it takes is a minute lost, and she won’t be the one to risk it with excessive caution. It is a lesson that she’s learned the hard way. She doesn’t want to make that mistake again.

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It is Maia who finds a face to fit the name. She pulls Jyn into an empty market stall with a burnt red awning and opens her hands. Maia makes a holo projector appear out of nowhere, like a summoner's trick, and with a flick of finger, a picture springs to life.

The pilot's name is spelled out in Aurebesh, and his face turns slowly, a three-dimensional hologram of the most-wanted man on Jedha after Saw Gerrera. "There you are, Bodhi Rook," Jyn breathes. Then turning to Maia, she directs, "Show the others, quick. Let everyone know that if they see him, they grab him--and he is not to be harmed. We need him alive." Maia nods and breaks to leave, but not before Jyn grabs her by the arm and holds her back for a second. "You did well, Maia," she says kindly; uncharacteristically. "I'm proud of you." Maia grins, but something takes hold and her pleased expression falls away.

Her voice hitches. "Are you alright, Jyn?"

Jyn is taken aback and feels her confusion color her face. "I'm fine," she says, unsure. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"It's just. . . you don't usually say . . . it's not like you . . ."

It's not like you to be kind? Jyn thinks.

"Just go," Jyn shoos, her irritation flaring, and Maia obeys. But something is rumbling inside of her--she feels it. Maia has seen it, too, and it frightened her. But Jyn has no time to dwell on what she might look like to others on the outside looking in. There's no time to think. They have to keep moving. She has to keep moving.

Traveling south through the ancient city, Jyn moves quickly and scans the narrow streets and wide alleys looking for clues--looking for a face. She undoes her scarf and reveals her own face. If this Bodhi Rook is a defector with information, he has to be looking for someone with whom to share it. Defectors didn't usually go through Alliance channels declaring their intent to leave the Empire if they wanted to disappear and never be found. Saw Gerrera is the most likely possibility as his contact, especially if this pilot carries a message from her father. By extension, Jyn is the second on that list. Though her face is not as well-known as Saw's, Jedhans in the information trade could find her if she allowed it.

The streets are full of the sound of a city: vendors hawking their wares and citizens bartering, the sound of food sizzling in hot oil, and the chants and prayers of pilgrims on their way to the destroyed temples that are still holy, though stripped bare of their splendor. Above her comes the rumble of starships and the unsettled whistle of the wind. She listens in particular, though, to the sounds of a city under occupation: Stormtroopers demanding scandocs, the sound of blaster fire, and the eerie silence that follows when someone is killed or disappeared, followed after by the nervous shuffle of bystanders shifting away and making themselves invisible.

In the market, Jyn finds A'waail'i, the bread seller who speaks little but hears everything, and the old woman tells her about a family named Harville whose dead daughter once had an understanding with Rook before he went off to work for the Empire. "Find them in the Holy Quarter just beyond the market," she says, and Jyn slides her a credit chip and pays her for her information and a sweet bun that she mashes in her hand.

As she leaves, she tears a bite out of the soft roll and doubles her pace. She drops the half-eaten bun in the hand of a hungry boy who scurries off as she continues onward. Pushing through a pockmarked alley, she passes a group of scavenging Kubaz and exits through a curtain that brings her back into a narrow but packed city street. It's there that someone brushes against her before shoving her back so that her feet almost come off the ground. She feels her hackles rise, her hand immediately on her truncheon.

"You better watch yourself!" the man snarls.

She looks up at the barely human face and smiles coldly before noting the bulbous-eyed Aqualish next to her assailant. She knows she can take them both and keep moving without wasting more than thirty seconds of her time. A crack against the windpipe and a quick blade to the gut and the crowd wouldn't even stir. She's deciding whether or not to act, but her

body is moving faster than her mind, her arms have already begun to move with the intent of someone who has been spoiling for a fight.

But before she can strike, she feels hands grasp her arm, pulling her back. “No, no--” and it’s Cassian Andor out of nowhere, pulling her into the softness of his blue coat, leading her away. “We don’t want any trouble. Sorry.”

She pulls away from him as soon as she can, and he stands, quiet and staring at her. Does he feel apologetic or disappointed in her? She cannot tell. Her heart thuds in her chest even though the danger has since passed, and she struggles to meet his eyes.

“I have a lead,” Jyn says at last when he doesn’t speak. “Have you found anything?”

He shakes his head and glances around him, scanning. “What information do you have?”

She tells him of the Harvilles and together they move into the upper levels of the street that overlooks a plaza. They had worked together like this when they had first met on Onderon, working seamlessly as a team as though they had always known one another. Back then, there could have been no two hearts so close. Now they are as strangers; worse than strangers.

From up there, Jyn spots an assault tank turn the corner to join a garrison of Stormtroopers who are protecting a shipment of kyber. The white of their armor shines in the sunlight, and she thinks how easy it would be to pick them off from up here if she didn’t have other business to attend to. But the mission is Rook. This is a distraction.

Cassian seems to know what she’s thinking and touches her arm to draw her attention back. “We have to hurry,” he says. “This town is ready to blow.”

Something is amiss, and they both know it. But worry niggles at her mind as they move down the street into the plaza—it’s something more than the constant danger of a city under siege, but she can’t yet put a name to it. Before she can say anything to Cassian, they both feel the resonant crack of an explosion, and the city walls shake as passersby scramble away with barely contained panic.

Reacting instinctively, she and Cassian dash for cover in the shelter of a doorframe. Jyn squeezes tight against him, her body pressed into the crook between his arm and chest. Her adrenaline is high, but she doesn't miss the flutter of her own lashes nor the tightness in her throat that has nothing to do with the firefight.

"We gotta get out of here," he says, his voice strained, and she nods, all the while trying to read the battlefield through the chaos. Was there another rebel cell in NiJedha? Where had the explosion originated?

Then she sees a familiar face standing amongst the rooftops, and the curses that exit her mouth make Cassian turn to her.

"Benthic!" she spits. "That fool!" And though she can't see him, she knows Edrio, his eggmate, must be near. Two fools.

"What?" Cassian asks. "What is it?"

She gestures toward Benthic standing in the cover of rooftop entrance to a building of apartments. "He's gone rogue," Jyn says. Her anger bubbles hot, her fury ready to consume her. "This wasn't the plan! We are not here to attack kyber shipments! They're compromising the mission."

Jyn reaches for her blaster and pulls it up and targets Benthic's head, ready to play judge, jury, and executioner for defying her orders. She hadn't pegged him as being such a conniving idiot that he would risk something so stupid simply to risk in Saw's favor, but she had been wrong about people before. Her finger wavers over the trigger. She still has a bead on him.

Jyn is the fiercest, most brutal one of us all.

"Jyn." Cassian say her name. He shakes his head, *no*, and she feels her rage drain away. She grinds her teeth together and lowers her weapon.

“Fine,” she grits out. “I’ll deal with him later.” She looks up at Cassian. “How do you propose we get out of here?”

He gestures with a jerk of his head to the opening of an alley. There are two points of cover between where they are and the way out an adjacent alley. “You go first,” he says, “I’ll cover you.”

Nodding, Jyn spies the path ahead: a Stormtrooper keeled over dead, an old pilgrim bleeding on the stairs to the entrance of a home. And then she sees beneath the awning of a shop a little ten-year-old girl, wailing with tears and paralyzed where she stands in the middle of the war zone. Jyn dashes towards her without thinking.

“Jyn!” Cassian screams, but she hardly hears him, and she doesn’t stop running toward the child.

The tank open fires as she grabs the girl around the waist and lifts her off her feet. The girl is a feather, light as air. Sparks explode around them off the stone walls, blowing metal shrapnel that cuts into her skin. Before she can drop the girl somewhere safe, a woman steps out and intercepts the girl. The child twists out of Jyn’s arms, screaming in relief, and the mother and daughter disappear to safety.

Run, she thinks as though they can hear her, *run and do not stop*.

Another cluster of fire rings out, and she’s exposed, an easy target. Cassian is waving to her, his face ashen, but she can’t reach him through the exchange of fire. Then she sees him step dangerously out of the shelter of the doorframe. His blaster is up, aimed at the rooftops. She wonders if he only stopped her from shooting Benthic so that he’d get to do it himself. But she sees the tank turn its gun toward him.

“Get back!” she screams, and runs to take shelter next behind a crumbling wall, barely a two-foot high. She searches above her and sees Benthic joined by Edrio. She wonders if either of the Tognaths have seen her or Cassian, but either they haven’t or they don’t care because of what happens next.

She recognizes the sound of the grenade before she sees it, even amongst the roar of vehicles and the sound of blaster fire. Then she sees it--a glint of sunlight catching against the metal casing of a grenade. It's a Partisan bomb, she knows.

She wonders if she was fated to always die by the hands that had taught her such violence. It seems all too appropriate.

The grenade bounces and rolls within five meters of her and her poor excuse of cover, and her body begins to move without her thinking, muscle memory driving her toward cover even if she's running directly into the line of fire. Every cell in her body is screaming *not yet*, *I'm not ready yet*.

“*Jyn!*”

Jyn feels the boom in her teeth, and then she is airborne, launched in flight. Her eyes fill with stars.

She not aware of when she lands--she only knows that she does, and she feels the pain that follows. It radiates from her chest out, and she feels her breathing quicken as it becomes more shallow. Someone calls her name again, she thinks, but the sound of blaster fire volleying against ancient stone drowns out the specifics. Her nose is filled with the scent of burnt plastoid armor and iron. She hears a half-finished scream. Is it her own?

Jyn still fights to get up—it's the one thing she knows how to do--but her will is ebbing out of her by the second. Her left hand drops to her chest, resting on the spot where her pendant used to lie, but it's been gone for years. When she had first met Chirrut, he had told her, “The strongest stars have hearts of kyber.” She wishes she had it now, wishes she had her heart and could hold it her palm and be close to her mother if this is to be her end. It's been years since she's allowed herself to feel the depth of that loss, and she marvels at how fathomless it feels.

As she fades into darkness, Jyn only has enough strength to open her eyes and lift her hand. She sees blue and brown and reaches to touch the sky, wanting to reach someone--her mother, her father, Saw, even Cassian--but she falters and falls short. Her arm drops again. The weight of her regret suffocates her lungs, and she realizes that maybe all this time she's

been the biggest fool of them all. A sigh escapes her, and the last thing she sees as she closes her eyes is the thick red of her own blood staining her fingertips.

She hears her name called again. She goes to follow the sound.

And Such Precious Feelings Are

Chapter Summary

Jyn wakes, as though from a dream. She's alive now, but can she survive herself?

Chapter Notes

This took me about a week longer to write than I wanted, but this clocks in at 5K, so I hope that makes up for it. Thanks to everyone who has stuck around with me, and thanks to all the new readers, too! I hope you enjoy this installment.

“He could not see her suffer without the desire of giving her relief.”

-- *Persuasion* by Jane Austen

“I am surprised,” she says to Saw.

This is the first time Jyn Erso meets Cassian Andor.

“What surprises you?”

“That you would allow him to be here. That you’re open to being persuaded or at least playing at it.” Jyn is nineteen years old but feels as though she’s lived a thousand. She eyes the Rebellion lieutenant with interest, trying to get a read on him. “He thinks he can get us to work with the Alliance?” She scoffs. “I don’t even believe that’s the real reason he’s here.”

Jyn looks again at the stranger before her. His hands are clasped behind his back, and to the untrained eye he looks casual, like a traveler on a holiday taking in the sights. But she knows that he is not. “He’s a recruiter. A spy.” She wipes the sweat from her forehead with the back of her glove. It’s a hotter-than-usual day on Onderon. “I don’t trust him.”

Saw laughs. He knows all of this already. A hand falls on her shoulder, and the man who is her father but not her father gives her a gentle pat on the back.

“He is an ends to a means. He gets his informant, and we get the firepower we need to blow the Imperial supply lines in Iziz.”

“You don’t believe that he’s here for the reason he says?”

“Only as much as you believe that he could sway any of us to their side, my child.” Saw smiles, unsteady and wry. It disconcerts her, she sees it so rarely.

She turns away and looks at Cassian Andor again, and her eyes narrow. He’s not what she expected, but she’s expected very little from the so-called Rebellion. He’s tall, but not too tall, thinner than she expected, dark haired, dark eyed, and a little mysterious around the edges. Recruiters usually were built like supermen; big like Codo, sun-kissed and muscular to lure young men and women away into the idea of *this is what you can become* or *come and be with me*. They were open and gregarious. But not this Andor. Quiet and closed off, he is an unknown quantity. She thinks that this makes him a little more dangerous.

“I need you to watch him carefully when you go to extract Julsta,” Saw says. “Be on your guard around him.” Saw makes to leave, then turns. “If it comes down to it, don’t hesitate to kill him.”

Jyn clips her blaster to her belt. “I won’t let him out of my sight.”

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*Jyn doesn't remember the details of the mission, but she remembers everything about him.
But is it a memory or a dream? Or is she simply dying?*

*Red stains her eyes. Cassian, she wants to cry out, but even if she spoke, would he hear her?
Would he want to?*

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In Iziz, they're squeezed together tight in a dark alley. Jyn's so close to him that she can see the flecks of color in Cassian's eyes, even in the shadows of the afternoon. Then, just before they can reach him, Julsta Rhedmein is taken. They abort their plan and tear through the jungle, thorns shredding their disguises as they dive out of the line of laser bolts. The mission veers toward total loss.

Failure has a way of making people unpredictable, and her guard is up because she doesn't know Cassian Andor and what he will do now that his informant is compromised and he has no more need for the Partisans.

But he doesn't try to kill her, and she doesn't try to kill him. Nothing so drastic.

Instead, they hide out in a cave for two days sharing a single ration bar in silence until her stomach growls and she breaks the quiet with laughter that bubbles out unbidden. They've barely spoken to one another until then, always looking and assessing instead, but now words begin to spill out as whispers along the walls of the cave, and when they look at each other they aren't cataloging each other's weaknesses anymore; they're seeing.

That second night they sleep close enough to feel the radiation of the other's warmth, but they do not touch. They wake when the sounds of morning drift into the coolness of the cave, and they feel safe to leave when the sound of hissing comms grow further and further away.

They emerge into the afternoon to plan, drawing patterns in the dirt until they are satisfied they'll succeed. Jyn comes up with an idea on how to rescue Julsta, a small stroke of genius, and Cassian reaches out and touches her knee just so. They look at each other a long minute, and Jyn thinks that the smile in his eyes is reflected in her own.

When the sun begins to set that night, Jyn strips naked to wash off two-day's worth of grime and oil. She steps into a warm tide pool and holds his eye as she sticks one toe in, then two. Cassian sits at the edge, unblinking, turning a flat pebble over and over in his hand. He watches her as she submerges herself, and she lets him. She doesn't invite him to join her, but it doesn't mean she didn't want to.

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Jyn feels the breath in her chest and remembers the taste of his mouth. He had tasted like caf and cream and life beyond the killing fields.

She wants to live and have the chance to know that again, even if it is impossible that she ever will. The chance is enough.

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They make their way to the Imperial hangar in Iziz's industrial district and extract Julsta Rhedmein, who is still whole save for two freshly missing fingers and some psychic wounds. But this is not before bombs rain down from the sky and Stormtroopers descend on the two of them, firing on all cylinders.

It is there that Cassian saves her and Jyn saves him.

You don't believe that he's here for the reason he says?

Only as much as you believe that he could sway any of us.

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A scream rips out of her throat but finds no sound, and Jyn feels hands on her neck; someone tearing at her. She struggles against it like a drowning woman, her hands shooting out, pushing through her own pain in panic.

“Jyn!” *Her name.* “Jyn!” *Cassian.*

Darkness becomes light, and when she can see, she finds him hovering above her, his dirty hands shaking as he is tearing at the opening of her tunic and mopping up blood with the sleeve of his own shirt. He’s straddling her, knees against her thighs, worry etching deep lines into his beautiful, exhausted face as his fingers ghost over her collarbone, searching for any damage that has gone deep inside of her. She sighs more with the pain of memory than injury, and she lets her body relax into the ground until it feels as though she touches the earth with every part of her body.

“Stop, stop,” she says, her voice hoarse. “I’m okay.” She tries to push his hands away and he resists.

“You’re not okay!” Cassian puts a Bacta packet up to his teeth and tears it open. When it comes in contact with her skin, Jyn jerks in pain. The cool Bacta feels at first like burning, and she hisses, but the relief that follows is almost immediate.

“It’s just a flesh wound,” she murmurs, her eyes blinking and opening shut, her hand falling to her wound. There’s a chunk of shrapnel embedded in her skin on the spot where her kyber pendant once rested, and she pulls at it with her fingers and yanks it out with a grimace. Warm blood blossoms on her chest, and Cassian’s face collapses in concern.

“What is wrong with you?” he growls, his frustration painted all over his face. He grits his teeth and pulls out another Bacta patch and swipes it across the wound, the medicine and his fingers painting an arc across the her skin just above the swell of her breasts.

“Just a flesh wound,” she repeats, and she tries to sit up but fails. Her whole body is a bruise.

He says her name like a curse at the same time he takes her head in his hands and lowers it gently back down. “You’re in shock. You don’t know what you’re talking about.” He strokes her hair absently, then pulls away, his head spinning around and surveying their surroundings. They’re in the middle of a battle, she remembers, they have to move.

“We have to find Rook. We’re wasting time,” she breathes as she listens to a distant explosion and the sound of tanks leaving the plaza. A stone wall crumbles just within her line of sight.

“You need more medical help. You’re no use to yourself in this condition.”

She suddenly remembers Edrio and Benthic then, and her anger flares hot and bright. She tries to sit again and makes it, barely. “I’m fine.”

“You can barely sit up. What makes you think that you can walk?”

The sun is high in the sky; it is almost noon and time for them to all regroup. In the distance, there is a clank of an Imperial droid heading toward them. Fear tries to settle inside her chest, but she boxes it up, files it away. She sees that the droid is alone, and with relief, that the droid is Cassian’s.

“I thought the plan was to extract a pilot,” Kaytoo says as he looms over them both. “What happened here?”

“Jyn was hurt trying to save a child caught in the crossfire,” Cassian says, the tension in his body falling around him. He slumps back on his heels. “She was hurt in a blast.”

Kaytoo’s eyes blink with light. “Dear me. Why would you do such a thing?” The droid leans lower and judges her in the way he does. “You haven’t a mother’s feelings. Why would you risk your life and the mission for a mere child?”

“Kay!” Cassian snaps, but Kaytoo merely approximates a shrug and steps back.

“We need to get to Chirrut and Baze’s,” she says. Her chest still aches from the impact and the cut, but she knows what internal bleeding feels like, and this is not that.

“We are already here,” Chirrut says, appearing from behind Kaytoo. He leans on his staff and smiles. “You should have waited for us if you were going to get into a fight. Don’t take all the fun for yourself.”

“I didn’t start it,” she says.

“For once,” Baze says in his low voice. He shakes his head.

“If we are done talking, we have to get going,” Cassian says, brushing himself off. Jyn watches the careful mask of the spy slide back on. His shoulders straighten, his face placid save for the thousand-yard stare that she thinks will never leave him even if they ever live to see peace.

Pressing her hands into the ground, Jyn tries to push herself to her feet, but it’s still too much. She’s dizzy. It’s possible that she has a concussion, a mild one if she’s lucky. She needs help, but she’s reluctant to ask for it. She’s always been reluctant to ask for it, especially now.

Then she sees from the corner of her eye movement, Cassian crouching down next to her, his left arm sliding under her knees, his other wrapping her around the back and under her arm. She begins to protest, but the fight dies before it reaches her lips. He lifts her like she weighs nothing, like he never forgot what it was like to hold her.

Though he will not look at her, she thinks she understands him now, better than she has since he entered her life again. He hasn't forgiven her for letting him go, but even now, he cannot be unfeeling. Whatever condemnation he had for their past, whatever resentment he still felt from her abandonment of him, he could not see her suffer without wanting to give her relief. It's a reminder of how they had once felt for each other, and the remembrance of it is both pain and pleasure, so mixed together that Jyn does not know which one prevails.

"Which way?" Cassian asks Baze.

But the big man grunts without a response and holsters his cannon instead. "Give her to me," he says, reaching to pull Jyn from Cassian's arms. "You are also hurt, and we will move faster this way." Jyn notices then a tear in Cassian's pant leg, blood mottling the fabric around his left calf.

Cassian hesitates, but it doesn't last. He shifts Jyn carefully into Baze's waiting arms and follows behind them in silence the rest of the way.

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They are gathered in Chirrut and Baze's home along with Shara, Maia, Staven, and Magva. The rest are straggling in or watching guard outside. Baze is tending to her injuries, and Cassian stands in a corner near the window. She looks up now and then to see how his eyes dart as he watches people pass by, and she doesn't miss the quick glance he sends her direction. There's not time to think about what it means, though.

Mere minutes later, after the last of the Bacta salve is dried on her wound, Jyn sees Benthic and Edrio enter the archway of the house. She acts without thinking and goes at them at a dead run, but Baze holds her back with one hand and stills her anger.

“Stop it,” he growls.

Jyn’s no longer running, no longer ready to attack, but she thinks about how Benthic and Edrio endangered their mission and how she and Cassian could have died back in the plaza and her anger is renewed. The wound in her chest pulls open when she jabs a finger in the direction of the Tognaths. “You are dead,” she snarls. “Both of you. You pull that kind of stunt again and I’ll tear out your breathing tubes here and now just to watch you die.”

“If these Rebels here are not liars, then the kyber is the fuel for this supposed super weapon!” Benthic spits. “It is our responsibility to stop this when we can.”

“Our responsibility is to find the pilot and you compromised us.” Jyn breaks free from Baze. “You saw us in the square, didn’t you?” she says, pointing to herself and Cassian. “And you shot anyway? Those were Partisan bombs!”

Benthic has no reply, but his eggmate speaks. “The greater purpose is more important than any one person,” Edrio says. “Or any two.”

“Heed your own advice, then. Don’t think Saw won’t hear about this.”

“Are you threatening us?” Benthic asks, tilting his head, amused. He considers her with his pale gray face. “You are in a precarious position as it is, Erso. Saw’s sentimentality will only go so far.” Benthic struts forward. “You think the rest of us don’t hear things? We’ve heard whispers about you for years. If the rumors are true, perhaps you are the daughter of the Imperial scientist who is actively collaborating with the building of this super weapon. How long do you think you will last if this is the case? How long will your place hold?” His hand touches his weapon. “I wonder what the Empire would give us for you?”

“Benthic!” Maia cries. “Stop it!”

Jyn lunges forward again, and she's blind with rage when she hears him click off the safety on his blaster. But she's blocked and stumbles aside, her injuries have her winded with little exertion. Cassian has stepped in her way enough to slow her down. He turns his head toward her and gives the slightest shake of his head and seems to say, *Leave it. Leave it. That's it.* She shrugs him off, but he holds her with his stare for longer than she thinks he will, and the time allows her anger to drain away. *The mission*, she reminds herself. *Bodhi Rook.*

Hands drawn into fists, she gathers her wits. "Enough of this." Jyn turns to Maia, whose eyes have seen death many times before but who seems shocked now to see people she thinks as her comrades--her family--threaten one another. *Better that she see that now*, Jyn thinks, *before blindness to it finds her dead.* "Maia, show them all the holo."

Jyn touches her chest. There's a throb of pain between her lungs but she pushes it down. She can't show pain. Not to Edrio to Benthic to Maia to Cassian. She cannot show her hand; she refuses to be weak. Maia fires up the holoprojector and Jyn turns and hobbles back to the only seat in the room as the pilot's face spins into focus. "This is the Bodhi Rook. And this my plan."

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They fan out, breaking into small groups. Half go in search through the city looking for a face; a smaller group climbs high, hidden in plain sight amongst the high plaza walls to survey and provide cover. And then there is Jyn and her group: Cassian, Maia, Shara, and Kaytoo. They will go find the Harvilles as they should have done hours ago and get answers if there are any to be had. Cassian, Maia, and Shara are there to charm and cajole, and she is there to lead. Jyn moves them quickly through Jedha City and hopes that they are not too late, that the Harvilles haven't already been threatened into silence or killed.

Each step makes her wince, and she feels the toll breathing takes on her stamina. She knows she should rest, but she cannot. The knowledge that her father is alive, is out there, burns her up inside.

My father is alive. My father is a traitor. My father is building a weapon to destroy worlds.

“You still need a medical droid,” Cassian says quietly as they pass close together through a narrow street. They pause in the dark spaces and his eyes drop to the wound on her chest and travel up the curve of her neck until he’s looking into her eyes.

Self-consciousness isn’t something Jyn has felt in a long time, but she feels it now under his unwavering gaze. If he doesn’t think she should lead, she thinks he should say something, but he remains inscrutable and silent. Taking the scarf from around her head, she winds it around her chest and covers the blood-soaked collar of her blue tunic. “Just slap some more Bacta on me,” she says through gritted teeth while at the same time she feels heat in her cheeks at the memory of his hands sweeping across her skin. He looks at her again.

“What?”

“Jyn--”

She leans against the wall. “I don’t need your pity. ”

“It’s not pity.”

“Then what is it? I can do this. I’m a little hurt--”

"A little!"

"--not dead."

"Jyn--"

Shara and Maia pass between them, and Shara casts a curious look but has the sense to keep moving. Maia though, doubles back and reaches out to touch Cassian on the arm at the same time she looks to Jyn.

"Everything okay?"

"It's fine," Jyn says, breaking free of his orbit. "Keep going."

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The Harvilles are easy to find but harder to crack.

Jyn drifts toward the father and stands near his side. She only has credits to offer when she knows that what they need is bread or safety or their daughter returned from the dead. Their silence is understandable. On Jedha, life is always on the edge of death, and they've already lost one child. She watches them hold their remaining daughter as precious, as close, and Jyn feels envy flare in her belly.

It ends up being Maia who breaks the code and allows them to spill their secrets. “Tell me about your daughter?” she asks, her voice a lullaby. “Was she kind? Was she beautiful?”

“She was gone too soon,” the mother says through fresh tears, and Jyn can see how her sun-weathered skin has been carved up by this grief. But Maia’s gentle question leads to a holo, then to a history, then to an admission that Rook had hidden out with them for the past two days but disappeared before dawn.

“He left because he did not want to stay with us too long and endanger us. He said he had lost something that needed to be found. That he had hidden it somewhere in the depot.”

“At the hangar?” Jyn asks. *A message from my father?*

“Yes, that,” the old man says.

They give their thanks and take their leave of the Harvilles. But Jyn hangs back a moment and waits for the others to leave first.

She presses an untraceable credit chip into the mother’s hand. “Don’t think twice. Take this and get as far away from here as possible. Take your daughter and get off this moon as soon as you can. Go and don’t look back.”

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Jyn comms Kullbee and Dajo and tells them head toward the hangar, one group taking the north entrance, the other the eastern near the landing pads. Her own group heads to the southern entrance, the nearest one to the Harvilles. But on their way there, blocking the side street is a X-wing starfighter.

“One of ours,” Shara says darkly to Cassian, jerking her chin toward the faded rebel insignia on the ship. “We’ll have to check the databanks to see if that’s one of our missing pilots.”

“It wouldn’t be difficult to climb across,” Jyn says, surveying it and pushing the group into a corner for cover, “but it would leave us exposed. Let’s--” but before she can get out the next words, a Stormtrooper barks from behind her.

“Halt! Stop there!”

They all turn and face yet another garrison of troopers and more tanks. Too many to fight, Jyn thinks, but her hand drifts to her truncheon and she sees that Cassian has the same idea, one hand already on his blaster. On instinct, they push up against one another, back to back, Cassian guiding Shara behind them with his free hand, Maia skittering into the shadows. K-2SO hides in plain sight, a Rebel in the body of an Imperial droid.

Jyn stares at the Stormtroopers, suddenly eager to entry the fray, almost glad to have nowhere to run.

“Where are you taking these prisoners?” The squad leader is speaking to Kaytoo.

“These are prisoners?”

“Yes,” the squad leader says. “Where are you taking the prisoners?”

“I am taking them to--”

Jyn looks to Cassian and reaches for her truncheons as the Stormtroopers approach. Cassian shakes his head. *Wait for a chance*, he mouths. The troopers approached with cuffs ready to snap into place. Jyn braces herself and waits for Cassian's signal.

"We'll put them with the other prisoner," the trooper calls back into his comm. "Get the convey here now."

It is then that Chirrut's voice rings out. "Let them pass in peace!" he calls. Walking into the square, the red of his robes swinging, he holds out his staff as though he is the kind of blind man that needs a cane for a guide, as though he is not the most clear-eyed of them all. When he stops, he leans on his staff, smiling before his audience of hostiles. "The Force is with me, and I am one with the Force. And I fear nothing, for all is as the Force wills it."

As the Force wills it, Jyn thinks. *My mother's prayer. The "good luck" of Lyra Erso.* Her hands tighten on her weapon.

"Hey! Stop right there!" The squad leader's voice is angry, the voice of a person unused to being disobeyed. She recognizes the sound because it is what she hears when she speaks.

"He's blind!" a second trooper calls out.

"Is he deaf?" the squad leader asks. He turns back to Chirrut who is approaching again, his voice a pitch angrier. "I said, stop right there!"

Chirrut raises one foot from the pavement and the squad leader fires a single shot. Jyn wants to shout in warning, but it is too late for anyone to intervene. But Jyn has faith in Chirrut if not in the Force, and if the Force wills it, if Chirrut wills it, he will live.

Chirrut twitches his head and the bolt misses him as the energy of the blaster burst against a building. The distraction is enough. Cassian yells, "Go!" and they both spring into action. Her truncheon slips out and like an extension of her arm, and she swings it sharp and fast and

straight into the head of the squad leader. She's hurt and graceless, but she will do what needs to be done even if they have to carry her back to Saw in pieces.

She catches another advancing trooper by surprise, taking advantage of his shock and throwing her shoulder into his chest. Her own chest aches as she makes contact with the plastoid armor. Sending a curse into the air, she doesn't stop. She drives her truncheon into his skull again and again until the trooper is down and she is viciously certain that he won't be getting up again. She is covered in blood--his, hers.

To her left, Cassian and Shara's opponents are also down with some help from Kaytoo. Jyn spins and sweeps her leg into another oncoming trooper, and pulling her blaster she fires into his heart. Smoke sizzles from his breast plate, and the trooper slumps to the ground, motionless. When she looks up, she sees Cassian pushing Maia to the ground and shielding her from a whizzing blast; sees Chirrut standing calmly over a pile of bodies.

Jyn rolls her aching shoulders and feels the warmth of her own blood now seeping through her scarf. Maia sees this and runs over in worry, but Jyn shoos her away and yells at her to run for cover. The fight isn't over, and a second squad of reinforcements is here: the prison patrol or perhaps another troop alerted by the commotion. They had taken care of the first wave of troops, but there are now more Stormtroopers than they can possibly manage with the firepower that they have. Her senses flare with panic, and she feels feral and cornered, which only makes her want to react more recklessly.

Jyn hears the crackling snap of a particle bolt, but when she turns to look, none of the new Stormtroopers have discharged his or her weapon. One by one they fall, victims of the quick and precise shot of a sniper.

Baze Malbus comes into view, large and silent and stern. Baze Malbus, once the most devoted guardian of them all.

"You almost shot me," Chirrut says.

"You're welcome," Baze replies. He fires a shot into the windshield of the prison convey, and the trooper at the wheel falls and rolls out the side and onto the ground in an explosion of glass.

“Is he Jedi?” Cassian asks of no one, his voice hushed with the doubt of a man on the verge of a great discovery. When they had known each other before, she had told him her mother’s stories of the mystic warriors and guardians of the Republic in the dark quiet of a cave on Onderon. She had placed her kyber pendant in his hand to let him feel the warmth of the stone as it touched his skin, and she had asked him if he believed in the legends.

She watches his face, lingering on the softness in his eyes. It’s been ages since she’s seen him this way. He looks younger, as though wonder found its way back after leaving him as a child.

“No Jedi anymore,” Baze says. “Only dreamers like this fool.”

Chirrut shrugs with the nonchalance of a man of great faith. “The Force did protect me,” he says.

Baze booms, “I protected you!”

All the while, Shara is drifting toward the convey, her weapon drawn. Jyn motions with her head to Cassian, and he follows her quickly and silently. They blow the lock with Cassian’s blaster, and he punches the lock as Kaytoo pries the doors open.

Inside, they find a man in an Imperial flight suit shaking with fear. His head is covered in a black bag, and his ankles and arms are shackled. He cowers, his hands covering his head, and he’s saying over and over, “No, no, no.”

Jyn and Cassian hop into the back, and Cassian pulls the bag off his head.

The prisoner’s eyes are glued shut at first, and then he is trembling as he readjusts to the light. Jyn sees the needle marks in his neck and know that he’s already had one round of torture at the hands of the Empire. He’s lucky he’s not already dead.

“Are you the pilot?” Cassian demands, crouching down and looking at the man’s face. “Are you Bodhi Rook?”

He refuses to respond, but his face matches the holo. They have their mark.

“We are here to help you,” Cassian says in a soothing voice.

Jyn steps forward and pulls the pilot’s face around so that he looks at her. He’s young, just a few years older than she is, and his terror swallows him up so that he looks smaller than he really is. “Are you the pilot?” she repeats. “Do you have the message?”

He blinks at her, and she sees his fear suddenly recede like water at low tide. “I’m the pilot,” he says, suddenly calm. He blinks at her again and the stars in his eyes clear. “I know who you are,” he says, the shaking in his voice disappearing.

“How?” she says, rattled.

“Your eyes,” he says. “You’re Galen’s daughter, aren’t you?”

Gone

Chapter Summary

The search for a missing hologram, a new friendship blossoming in war, and a girl falling out of the sky.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the delay in updating! And thanks for sticking around (or finding this story for the first time). I'd love to hear what you think!

Special thanks to frangipani for being such an amazing reader and really helping me out with some of the themes in this chapter!

“We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves.”

-Anne Elliot, from Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Jedha City crumbles around them, but Jyn can only hear her own voice, the echo of panic and desperation that she can't keep trapped inside. There's a weight against her chest, and she is breathless with both fear and an awful hope.

“Where in the hangar? Where exactly?”

Jyn is pushing Bodhi Rook hard: to remember, to move. Her hands are on his shoulders, her voice rising above the distant din of explosions. She needs to know where the holochip is,

where he hid the message. *Her father's message*, she thinks, *his message to me* even when she has no idea what it may contain. "Have you seen it? What does he say?"

Bodhi's still all mixed up, and she knows she's shaking him further, perhaps shattering the last brittle bones that haven't broken and the resolve that's held him together for this long, even if it is only by a string. But she doesn't care, not right now. She's shaking him as though by force of will she can dislodge from him this kernel of information and along with it fifteen lost years.

"Jyn, stop! It's too much. Let go." Cassian's voice pulls her back into the present, and she freezes, her fists still clenched around Bodhi's dingy gray flight suit. Overhead, the Star Destroyer glides west and reveals the sun. The flimsy haze of the afternoon reappears, spilling into her eyes, and Jyn looks up to see the faces of Shara Bey, Chirrut Imwe, and Baze Malbus looking upon her. And then there is Cassian. Cassian seems to float toward her, the shadow of him fading into her while all his dark edges soften until he seemed to disappear into his own halo. She swallows hard and releases the pilot.

The ache in her is deep, and she feels it all now as she watches Cassian settle besides her. What if she let it go? she wonders. *What if she let it all go?*

Cassian leans down and speaks to Bodhi quietly. "I'm Cassian Andor, a captain with the Rebellion. We've been looking for you." Bodhi nods, tiny snaps of his chin up and down. "You remember where you hid the card, don't you?" Cassian coaxes. The tone of his voice is honeyed and kind, the voice of a man who made you believe that you could trust him. "Can you lead us to it? We will protect you."

Bodhi nods again, more sure this time, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down in time with what must be the wild keening of his nerves. "There's an entrance near the Blue Gate," he says, the words pouring out. "It's a service entrance. I know the code once we get past the guard. We can get in, but we need to keep the group small or it will look too suspicious. I could go by myself, but . . ."

"We'll go with you," Cassian says. He slides his blaster in his holster and tilts his head at Jyn as if to say, "Do you agree?"

He's so close; she hadn't realized how. She can see the stubble on his face; the loneliness in his eyes, pain from a long-ago hurt. Her heart stutters, and she is breathless again. "Are you ready?" he asks her.

She pulls herself together because she has to and gives him her affirmative even though her tongue is thick in her mouth. He stands first and then she sees him reach out his hand to her, an offer to help her up. She hesitates, flooded with uncertainty, with longing; her selfish heart wanting what it can't have. But she finds her senses and finally takes it, and he hoists her to her feet.

"What are you—" she starts, surprised when his hand stays wrapped around hers, when he gives it a gentle squeeze.

"Are you sure you are okay to do this?" he asks. His voice is low. Private. Intimate. It makes her shiver.

"I said I was fine," she says, shakily. And she is, in all things save for him. Her blood is lava, running slow and hot in her veins, and she's been struggling since the day he walked back into her life. She can admit that now. Long-dormant desire uncurls from within her like smoke from a mountain, and she can't tear her eyes from him. *Cassian Andor*, she thinks. She had never loved anyone before him; no one since.

He finally releases her hand, and after doing so, reaches down and touches the wound on his calf. He pushes his lips together in pain. Her eyes flicker down to his injury. "Are *you* okay?" she asks, and something lights in his eyes. He's a wounded animal smiling, just like she is. At times they are so different, at other times the same creature. It reminds Jyn of why and how they had once fallen in love so hard and so fast.

"Never better," he says, and she finds herself mirroring his wry smile with her own.

"Well, let's go then."

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Jyn's first kill comes when she is eleven years old. Saw has enough sense to keep her directly off the lines of battle until she had gone through her womanhood, but *eleven*, she thinks later, *did she ever even have a chance at a childhood?*

It's a clinical thing, that first death at her hands, a dropped thermal detonator into the open top of an Imperial tank, but the distance is not far enough to keep her an innocent for much longer. She hears the death screams, sees the fire, and has to stick snapped cigarras in her nose to rid her of the acrid smell of burning flesh and plastoid armor.

Even then, she knows burning was a terrible way to die. It is a thing of nightmares. But even at eleven there is no time for her to be haunted by it; there is still so much death still to come, so many more battles left on the horizon. And Saw leads her there, holding her by the hand. The time to mourn or regret; to have a breakdown? Those moments are fleeting; an isolated minute that occurs right after a sentient's last breath, and then it is gone and she is on to the next.

Faceless troopers are the easiest in their sameness, in their uniforms of oppression and their tinny, inhuman voices, but the guard at the Blue Gate is her father's age, his cap a little crumpled and not at regulation. He looks kindly, but he reveals himself to be not. His voice is gravel and too many years of smoking, and it's that voice that threatens Maia when she tries and fails to charm her way in, it's his hand that points the blaster at Maia's head, finger on the trigger. And so it has to be Jyn's who sinks the vibroblade deep into his carotid artery, Jyn who drops him before he can kill Maia, and Jyn who wipes from his face his sneer of power.

With Baze's help, Jyn drags the dead man's body to the control panel to open the gate, and together they hide his body back in the guard station. Bodhi's face is pale, as is Maia's, but Cassian is silent beside her as he hands her a cloth to wipe the blood from her cheek and hands before they move inside.

In the shadows, taking cover as uniformed Imperial officers pass by through the cargo entrance, she feels Cassian's hand come to rest on her back the way it used to on Onderon, warm, assured and possessive. But she can't decide if she feels comfort at the familiarity or torture that it's a gesture without everything meaningful behind it, not like it was before. Shimming away from him, Jyn turns to the Imperial defector, burying the confusion that washes over her when what looks like hurt flashes across Cassian's face as she draws away.

"How far do we have to go, Bodhi?" she whispers.

"Down this hall and past the courtyard," he says, his lips tight. "We go left once we get past those guards, and it's not that far to the next hangar bay. I hid the card in a small room just beyond that. A little storage area." He attempts to look courageous, but he looks terrified, but she thinks that if he believes hard enough he'll find that it's real thing that lives inside of him. "It's not far, but there's a lot between it and us."

"It'll look awful crowded with all eight of us in the corridor," Jyn remarks, gesturing to the narrow passage between their current and target locations.

"Jyn's right. We are too big of a group to go together," Cassian agrees, and he splits them into two factions.

Jyn wants to protest when he keeps her with him--they should each take lead in separate groups--they are the two with the most leadership experience and the two best at close-quarters combat, save for Chirrut, but he gives her that silent look, the one that is a whole speech, and she swallows the fight. With her are Cassian, Bodhi, and Maia. Together, they can retrieve the message while Baze, Chirrut, Shara, and Kaytoo look for the high ground and provide cover when they need to make their escape.

"The closest exit will be in the courtyard we'll pass over there," Bodhi says, pointing to the corridor entrance. "If we can steal a transport, we can sneak out without being detected."

"If we're lucky," Jyn says, and she sees Bodhi's hand tremble as he lowers his hand.

They split just before a garrison of troopers enters to load a ship with cargo, and Jyn and her group slip into a cramped corner hidden behind a pile of abandoned salvage--broken wings and rusted engines.

Cassian moves toward her and speaks to her quietly, his head inches away from hers. "We have to move fast. Do you and Saw know the usual movements of the troops at this base?"

She leans in, close enough to hear his breathing. "They're suppliers and guards mostly, though aggressive as Stormtroopers usually are. We stopped our bombing raids a few weeks back, so they've relaxed a bit. They're lazy. But after what Benthic and Edrio pulled earlier, they're probably on high alert."

He gives a small, almost imperceptible nod.

Across the room, the leader of the troopers begin to motion for team to line up and file out. It's their chance if they only wait. The minutes tick away. Crouched, her legs begin to ache. They continue to wait.

"You've changed," Cassian says softly, when he thinks only she will hear. "You would have argued with me back there before, when I split up the team."

She licks her dry lips and tries to imagine reassembling a blaster to keep herself centered. "I'm practical," she says, "not stubborn."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," he says, and the lightness in his voice surprises her.

"I've grown up," she says. "I'm not nineteen anymore, you know."

Cassian's eyes soften and he sucks in his cheeks as she meets his gaze. "No, you're not. But you still have that fire inside, though," he says. "Don't you?" His voice thick like it was on the day he first kissed her in the jungle just outside of Iziz, his hands running through her hair until he bun came loose around her shoulders. And Jyn doesn't mean to, but she shuts her

eyes and it almost feels real, the memory of his breath against her neck and the soft graze to her lips that followed

It's a strange thing, talking to him again this way, and Jyn feels lightheaded, not sure if it's Cassian or the blood she's lost over the course of the day. She sways and leans against the wall and hears Maia's blaster click loudly behind her. The noise swings her back to reality, and she pulls her hands to her own weapon, ready to fight.

"What is it?" she says, turning.

Maia's face is slack as she shakes her head and says, her words tremulous, "It's nothing. Everything is fine." She looks to Jyn all of her nineteen years now, a girl putting on a brave face. A girl who had a childhood and could still be afraid of war.

Jyn puts her hand on Maia's shoulder. "Is everything alright?"

"I said it's fine," Maia says, and Jyn hears the echo of her own words.

"It's okay to be afraid," Jyn says. "Everyone is afraid sometimes."

"I'm not afraid." Maia's eyes grow bold and bright. And she says defiantly, "And you're *never* afraid, Jyn."

"I'm not someone you want to emulate, Maia," Jyn says.

"Why not? People look up to you. People admire you."

"Don't be like me," Jyn snaps, and it's a final warning. Something inside her twists painfully. *We're all such good little soldier girls*, she thinks, *such lonely little monsters in training*. "I promise you, you don't want to be me. Be *better* than me."

But before Maia can respond, before she can ask Jyn *how* or *why*, Cassian's voice cuts in. "We're almost clear. When the last trooper is out the door, we need to move, and quickly."

Jyn lets go of Maia and reaches to grasp Bodhi's arm and drag him forward. She says, "You know where it is. You can lead us."

Bodhi nods wordlessly and jerks forward to move. But then he pulls back and spins to look at Jyn. "I wanted to tell you--your father. Galen. He spoke about you. A lot."

"He did?" She swallows and feels the hollowness inside her fill with light.

"He loved you very much. He wanted me to let you know that, wanted to me to tell you if I saw you. And I promised him. He told me that he didn't know if you were alive or dead, but he hoped--hoped that you were. He said that if you were somewhere in the universe, still alive, he hoped that you were happy whether you were still fighting or if you had picked a quiet life, maybe with a family somewhere on a farm."

Sudden, surprising tears threaten her eyes, but she holds it in. She thinks of the moss green hills of Lah'mu, of the black sand beneath her toes, the sea air whipping through her braids. She thinks of her father's warm embrace, of her mother's lullabies.

Bodhi looks up at her, a faint smile, a faraway look in his eye. "He told me that he called you his 'Stardust.' You know, my own mother had a pet name like that for me. 'Kavi.' It means 'servant of the fields.' I think she hated it that I flew, that I was military. She wanted me to work on a farm like she did growing up. She was always worried about me. As a child, she wouldn't even let me hold a knife. I don't know if she was afraid for me or just thought I was the one who was always afraid. Maybe she was just sorry for me, for who I turned out to be." He scrubs his face with his hands. "Kavi," he repeats. "That's what she called me."

She takes his hand again, and squeezes it like she would have a brother if she had ever had one. "You're a local boy, aren't you?" she asks, her voice choked. "Jedha born? After this, after we get the message, we'll make sure you get home to your family."

Bodhi shakes his head. "I...I don't have anyone left. My mother, she died a few years ago."
Bodhi shakes his head. "And Rilka"--the Harville girl's name--"she wanted to get married and settle down, but I thought I had to work. Get money to get us both off this rock. I shouldn't have waited. I shouldn't have . . . for what, a handful of credits? And now she's . . . she's . . ."

"Gone?"

His lips tighten, a painful smile. "Gone."

"We do what we think is right at the time," Jyn says, a lump building in her throat.
"Sometimes it isn't, but we try. We can only try to do our best; what we think is right in our heart at the time."

"That's what Galen told me, too, you know," he says.

Jyn has a hundred questions. Some she wants the answers to--more that she doesn't.

"He said--he said that I could get right by myself. He said I could *make* it right, if I was brave enough and listened to what was in my heart. Do something about it."

Jyn nods silently, thinking of her papa's voice from across the stars. *Everything I do, I do to protect you* .

But there is no more time to talk, and Cassian gives the signal for them to move.

Shifting in a quick line, Cassian first, Jyn at the rear, they silently made their way to their next hiding spot, breathless with fear, yet riding high on adrenaline.

"It's in that room," Bodhi says, "just past that data console," and he starts to shake again with nerves. The room is small, and he seems to realize the next course of action. "I have to

go alone, don't I?" he asks nobody in particular.

"We'll cover you," Cassian says, putting a reassuring hand on Bodhi's shoulder, and Bodhi shakes his head in silent agreement. His hands curl into fists, and he strikes one against his own chest as though it will strengthen him.

"I can do this, I can do this," he mutters, but he seems unconvinced.

Jyn reaches over, grips his shoulder. "I can see what my father saw in you, Bodhi," she says, and she believes it. She believes in him even though it's only a feeling. "And I know you can do this. If no one has ever told you this, I'm telling you now--you are brave."

"This is for my mother," he says absently, "and for Galen." Jyn nods, fighting back sudden tears.

"For your mother," she says, "and for Papa."

Bodhi moves across the bay, his feet taking him faster and faster toward the room, his body rigid with fear. But he doesn't stop, even when an Imperial tech walks in and gives him a second glance.

In the distance, the sound of blaster fire rings, followed by the grind of armored vehicles roaring to life. She wonders who it is--if it's Benthic and Edrio or Magva or Baze--but she's more concerned with time. It's an unexpected complication, one that eats away at their opening to escape unscathed. And the closer the battle comes to them, the less time they have for the chip. Bodhi disappears into the alcove and the seconds seem to tick away to eternity, but then he reappears, a disc palmed in his hand, his head nodding *yes yes, I have it yes*.

But when he's halfway there an explosion rocks bay. Jyn covers her face and falls to the ground with a thud. Twisted and hot durasteel smashes against the wall and to the floor, followed by the scatter of shattered transparisteel like confetti at a life day celebration. The TIE fighter that had been sitting whole between them and Bodhi is now in flames, and the hangar is engulfed with fire.

“Bodhi!” Jyn screams, but he doesn’t hear her. Her lungs are filling with smoke, and she grapples to reach Maia who is choking besides her. Cassian reaches out and grabs her by the arm, and like a train, she grabs ahold of Maia and they rush for the nearest exit.

The door leads to a stairwell that leads to a rooftop, up two more flights to fresh sweet air. Tears flow down from her eyes, washing away the soot and ash, and Jyn struggles back to her feet. “We can’t leave Bodhi!” she yells, her ears still ringing, but the hangar is in flames and they’re trapped. She turns to look at Cassian, and he’s frantic, searching for an exit out. They’re trapped on the rooftop, the building on fire below them.

“Look!” Maia calls out, pointing to the courtyard below them. In the shadow of the rising smoke, Jyn sees two figures emerge into the open. Shara Bey and Bodhi Rook. “He’s okay!” Maia says. “They’re okay!”

The relief that follows is swift and short-lived, because another explosion rocks the courtyard, and Jyn’s eyes trace back to a tower across from where she stands. There is a turbolaser mounted atop the adjacent building, the turret wrapped in scaffolding. It’s a newer model, smaller for use planetside, controlled remotely instead of manned on site, one she and Saw had scouted months back when they had planned a strike on this very target. Whoever it is manning the controls fires into the courtyard, blasting a hole in the middle of the clearest exit for Shara and Bodhi out of this wretched place. They’ve been spotted, and they’ve been found out, because turbolasers were meant to repel ships, not blow up people.

Jyn can see the exit Bodhi mentioned before, but there’s a line of troopers in the way, and the cannon besides. This wasn’t supposed to be a suicide mission, but most missions weren’t usually meant to be.

There’s no trace of Chirrut, Baze, or Kaytoo, and the rest of the Partisans are all elsewhere, unaware that they have found Bodhi and the holomessage. Jyn looks at her blaster and her truncheon and thinks of how their firepower is nothing against the cannon. But for all its armor plating, the cannon isn’t invincible. It too, has guts, guts that could be torn out with hands, guts of copper wire and microchips that can be set on fire if its vulnerable belly is ripped wide open. She steps towards the edge of the building, holds out her arms, and measures with her eyes.

It is three stories to two, she sees, with maybe nine, ten feet between. The wind is at her back, and she's done something like this before--jumped from one building to another to escape a bounty hunter back on Brentaal IV who was after anyone remotely connected to Saw Gerrera--her being the prize trophy.

She then takes three steps back, glancing back to see how much of a running start she can get. But what is the experience of leaping once while at full tilt? It's not something she can count on helping her now. She can only rely on her gut, and on all the times she's had to throw herself out of danger, had to leap out of the line of fire. There are angles and trajectories to consider, equations that would give her guidance or probabilities, but for all her father's genius, math has never been her strong suit. She had always been so fully her mother's daughter: passionate, rash, and bold.

"I need thirty seconds and full cover," she says to Cassian. "I can disable the cannon, clear the way for Shara and Bodhi to escape."

"Jyn." Cassian's voice wavers with warning. He's been watching her. Reading her. Assessing her. She feels determination set on her face, feels a little bit of hysteria and a lot of madness slip out. She shakes her head at him, thinks, *you can't stop me. You can only help me.*

Cassian explodes suddenly, grabbing her by the shoulders as though he can keep her. "No, Jyn! I know what you're thinking of doing. Don't you dare. What you're thinking is insane!" He corrals her between himself and doorway, and his face is a foot away from hers, close enough she can see the tightness in his jaw and how dark his eyes have become, near enough that she can feel the way the heat radiates off of his body.

"I have to," she says. "I have to jump. You know this is the only way out alive. It's only nine, ten feet. It's an easy distance. Give me thirty seconds of cover and I can do it. I've done it before. Then I'll find a way for you and Maia to get out of here, too."

"An easy distance? Have you lost your mind? You want to jump directly into the line of cannon fire? There are Stormtroopers everywhere!" Both his hands are pressed against her, and his expression is cold with fear. "You can't. I won't let you."

"What other choice do we have, Cassian? The building is on fire, our friends are trapped. What other choice do we have?"

You can't risk yourself like that, Jyn. I won't let you."

Jerking away, she throws off his arm. "Why do you care what happens to me?" It's a ragged cry, and Jyn is almost grateful that the sound of cannon fire masks the edge of hysteria in her voice. "Bodhi has the chip. We need to get him and *it* out of here. It's no use if he gets blown to smithereens. Our mission is to get the message out of here. *That* is the only thing that matters."

Cassian recoils. "You think the message is the only thing that matters?"

"Yes."

There's such sadness written all over his face when he looks at her that she reaches out and allows herself to touch the curve of his face, her hand cupping the line of his jaw. His beard is rough against her fingers. The sound around her narrows, and she focuses in on her own breathing. In the distance, he can hear Baze shouting for Chirrut just before there's a volley of rapid blasts from his heavy repeater cannon, followed by the shrill scream of returned fire.

"What do I have to lose?" she says, and she searches his face and wonders if she even believes her own words anymore.

"What do you have to lose?" he repeats, and it's half a question and half an answer.

"I have to do this," Jyn says. She allows herself the luxury, the fleeting pleasure of tracing his jaw, watching his lashes brush close. Her voice is low, as though she almost doesn't want him to hear her, as though she's afraid to put words to everything she hasn't allowed herself to feel for so many years. It's not a confession she gives him now, but it's as close as she can get to something raw and real. "Do you trust me, Cassian? Because I still trust you."

His voice is hoarse, and she can barely hear his response over the continuing fire, but she hears it--something she once said to him, something he has not forgotten. "I do," he says, "and trust goes both ways, doesn't it, Jyn?" Cassian reaches out and takes her hand, and Jyn

expects him to grasp it again like he did before or to pull her in with a soldier's shake, but she feels him tangle his fingers with hers, and she wants to ask *why* but can't. "Don't die," he says, fingers still tangled with hers, and when she laughs, he looks at her as though it is music coming from her lips.

"I'll try not to," she whispers, and they touch foreheads, forgetting for a moment that this isn't them anymore, that this isn't allowed.

He releases her hand and she walks to the edge of the building to wait for her moment. When it comes, Jyn pulls back and breaks into her run, her arms and legs pumping, her heart thudding in her chest. At the precipice she thinks, *it is as the Force wills it* and leaps. She feels herself let go.

The cold air around her seems to hold her aloft, and she stretches and reaches to pull herself over the abyss, her vision turning white, the sun in her eyes.

Do you trust me, she thinks.

I trust you. And his voice isn't a phantom or a memory. It's in the here and now. He is with her.

Her straightens her legs as she is ready to land, and her feet strike the stone of the rooftop, the balls of her feet absorbing the hit, pain bursting into her shins, and she rolls, her scarf unwinding as she falls. Cassian cries out her name from the rooftop, but she can't focus on that--she has to concentrate on climbing one more tower and disabling the cannons. Arms burning, legs like jelly, she pulls herself up the scaffolding around the weapon's base, the metal cutting into her hands. She thinks of the ladder in her bunker on Lah'mu, of seeing Saw's face as the light flooded in, and she climbs.

Blaster fire sings through the air and singes her sleeve, and she hears Cassian firing and sees the Stormtrooper sniper fall to the ground just beneath her. "Climb!" Cassian yells. "Climb!" He fires another shot and another trooper spins and falls, armor clattering against stone, and she imagines the opening to the bunker again, the glow of her little lamp swallowed up by the sunlight coming in, of Cassian's face shining down at her in the darkness this time around. Jyn gives one last pull, muscles on fire, and goes over the top.

Throwing her leg over the last rung of the scaffolding, she braces herself against the bar at her back. The cannon is still firing, but there is no one there to stop her. It is her against the computer systems, and for her, it's an easy assassination. Simple sabotage, she reminds herself, blasting open the panel, covering her face as sparks explode before her eyes. Prying the panel open is harder than it should be, but the work once she gets in should be easy: there's no need to rewire, reroute. She just needs to disable it and clear the way for Shara and Bodhi to make it out of the courtyard without being blown up.

The first test Saw had given her to prove her mettle was like this. He had given her a box and three minutes to disable a thermal detonator. But there is nothing that would explode in her face here. It should be easy.

But nothing is ever so easy.

Jyn swings wild as a bolt comes whizzing past her head, losing her grip for a moment, almost falling. And then she hears Maia's voice ring clear through the sounds of the battle and what Jyn sees strikes her heart with more fear than Stormtroopers with blasters aimed at her head.

"No, Maia!"

Jyn rights herself in time to look and see that Cassian's arms are out, trying to hold Maia back, but even from where she is perched, Jyn can see the terrible determination on Maia's face. She's going to jump, Jyn realizes. Why is she doing this?

But Jyn knows why. She only has to look to herself to know.

"I'm coming to help you!" Maia cries, and Jyn turns her head and watches in helpless horror as Maia breaks into a run along the same path she had taken just before leaping. "I am determined!"

Maia was supposed to take her place when she was gone, Jyn thinks. She wasn't suppose to follow every step, every reckless move.

“No, Maia!” she screams when she sees the girl mimicking her own path across the rooftop.

Cassian makes one last plea to Maia, but it falls on deaf ears. His hands cannot stop what his words could not stop, either.

Maia is young, rash like Jyn but in all things--in love and in battle-but she miscalculates her jump. Her trajectory is wrong and she hits upon the ledge. Her arms struggle to make purchase, but the stone crumbles and she loses her grip. Maia, like a rag doll--like Jyn's Beeney--falls from the sky, her body hitting an awning on its way down and landing on the ground with a sickening thud.

Maia is unmoving; still; gone. Jyn feels a tremor in her hands and feels a terror that tells her to look away, to keep working on disabling the cannon. Cassian fires another shot down to take out another sniper who has his rifle trained on Jyn, and the sound of blaster fire frees her from the cage in her mind. Striking the panel with the butt of her blaster, Jyn pries it open with her fingers already raw with cuts and blisters. Red, green, and blue wires spill out, and with her weight behind her, Jyn pulls. She tears out the cannon's innards, and it bleeds oil all over her hands.

The cannon grows quiet, and the afternoon is, for a moment, still.

The peace does not last for long.

Forever

Chapter Summary

The escape from the Imperial base. A message from a ghost. And a goodbye.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was made so much better by my same brain, frangipani, who continues to be supportive of this fic especially, even though Rogue One is not her fandom. So much thanks to her!

And thank you to all you readers who have commented and have waited these past three months for an update. I hope that this chapter does not disappoint after the long wait!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I must go, uncertain of my fate . . .”

--Frederick Wentworth, *Persuasion* by Jane Austen

The first dead body Jyn ever sees is her own mother's, and she has very little time to process it when she sees her next only weeks later, and then her next, and the next after that, and on and on until she is almost entirely numb. But there is still a part of her that feels it keenly—the pain, the fear, the sink of despair—and it's a thread at her center, a strong but thin filament burning brightly. It holds and it holds though every loss, every death, but she knows one day it will burn and break, and that light, too, will be extinguished.

Maia lays motionless on the ground, and Jyn allows herself a brief moment to think, *I never had a sister* before she lifts her blaster and fires directly into the heart of a rushing stormtrooper before barreling down the stairs to ground level. Cassian is still trapped on the rooftop of the burning building, and she needs to find him a way to safety. There is a feeling

inside of her chest as she scrambles down the steps that feels ready to go supernova, and it is this: she will not lose him, too.

There's a weapons store at the bottom, and Jyn quickly scans the walls, grabbing charger packs and a grappling hook gun. On the wall is a case of detonators, and she shoves one into her pockets before turning to the door, careless enough to be fast, careful enough not to blow off her own hand or end her life in a supremely stupid way. The door is jammed when she presses the button to slide it open, and she has to use brute force to pry it open, leveraging her small but strong body and pulling it with all her might until the mechanism wheezes and opens wide enough for her to slip through.

The air outside the building is black with smoke, and Jyn chokes on the acrid air, her eyes watering as she tries to find a clean patch of sky from which she can breathe. Red bolts slice through the air, and the stone wall above her explodes into pebbles as the ground shakes beneath her feet. Jyn runs and ducks behind the first thing she can find that will bring her cover: a stack of cargo just within sight of where Maia lays.

Maia's arm is twisted behind her back, and her pretty face is bloody and pale. And then Jyn sees it: a flicker of movement, the almost indecipherable rise and fall of Maia's chest. For a terrible moment Jyn is frozen in place because Maia is breathing. Maia is not dead. But she will be if she stays where she is.

A mortar whistles overhead and Jyn instinctively ducks at the sound as it explodes in the courtyard, adding more fire to the building where Cassian is trapped. There is the crackle and pop of melting machinery and the burnt smell of melting plastiarmor. A TIE fighter tears across the sky, chasing some unknown thing, and there is the roar of a distant Star Destroyer. When the winds carry away the smoke she sees Cassian's form appear at the edge of the roof, searching, always searching, for a way out. He spots her below and they lock eyes as more blaster fire comes screaming from the east.

Maia or Cassian. Jyn has to pick one, and she knows she cannot pick both. Time ticks away, agonizing and slow, and she is given the terrible reminder of mortality and of the feeling of wanting not just to survive but to live. All this takes but a split second, but when it comes, her decision is quick and swift, driven not by pity but by pragmatism. And so she also gets to choose the way she hadn't chosen three years ago. She chooses Cassian.

Sprinting from cover through a clearing free of smoke and debris, she aims the grappling gun toward the corner of the building with the least amount of flames and fires. She makes to scream out his name, to draw his attention to her plan, but before her tongue can untangle and form the words she hears her own name ring out from above.

“Jyn! Watch out!”

Two shots, clear and true, whiz by her and she hear the dull thud of two bodies hitting the ground, the rattle of Stormtrooper armor, the clatter of blasters skittering out of the hands of the dead. She looks up at Cassian and he nods, and she gestures at the hook and the rope and he sprints toward it and begins to rappel down the side of the burning building. She runs toward him as he drops and sees him roll when he lets go of the too-short rope. He’s unhurt and quick, and meets her halfway.

“Jyn!” he says, and relief floods his face though she is the one who should feel it.

“Are you okay . . .” she begins, but her next words are muffled by Cassian’s arms wrapped around her, relief and fear on his face, and it wakes a hunger inside of her. He pulls away, recollecting himself, and says, “We gotta go,” taking her by the hand, pulling her toward the gate.

“But Maia!” she gasped, jerking his arm back.

“What?” Cassian stares at her.

“She’s alive.” Jyn gestures with her blaster. “We have to get her.” Then her voice falters. “I can’t leave her.” The full impact of her injuries hits her suddenly--the cuts in her flesh, her whole body bruised purple like a plum--and she doubles over, grimacing. Cassian gathers her in his arms, helping her back to her feet.

“We have to go, Jyn,” Cassian says, his voice gentle, patient, infuriating. He’s right, but he’s also not her.

“You know I can’t.”

Shots ring out again, this time from above, and Jyn grabs an armload of Cassian and hauls him into an alley. But the blaster fire is not aimed at them--instead it is picking off Stormtroopers where they stand. When Jyn gets a second look--she sees how it is: Magva and Benthic, making up for his earlier recklessness by getting their backs. The clang of an Imperial droid gets closer, and Jyn raises her blaster, points, but waits to shoot.

“There you are, Cassian,” Kaytoo says. “I see you have managed to not get yourself killed despite finding yourself once more at Jyn Erso’s side. You realize she increases your chance of casualty by 76%, don’t you?”

“This is not the time for this, Kay,” Cassian grits through his teeth, reloading a new blaster pack into his targeting rifle. “We have to rescue Maia.”

“Who?”

“You know who.”

“Oh. The *girl* .” Kaytoo turns his metal head and swiveled his glass orbs toward where Maia still lays. A whirl of machinery follows and Jyn thinks that he must have been zooming in, because he says next, “She is technically not dead. Just almost dead.”

“Kay!” Cassian cries, his voice anguished.

“But she has a 22% chance of survival. My risk analysis . . .”

“If we don’t rescue her now then she has a zero percent chance,” Jyn snaps, jumping to her feet. She feels Cassian’s hand grab her shoulder, drawing her close.

“I’ll go.”

His words snap her to her senses. “No!” she says sharply, then slows down, lets her temper cool. “No, let Kay go. He’s faster and can carry her more easily.” Jyn’s eyes flicker to the splatter of blood on his tunic, and her hands fluttered with want, but she has enough restraint left in her to pull them back into fists and ball them at her side. “And you are still hurt. “

With both herself and Cassian covering K-2SO with blaster fire, the reprogrammed Imperial droid is able to lift Maia into his mechanical arms and carry her toward them. Maia is limp, a broken doll like Jyn’s Beeny who she had once loved so hard but had lost an age ago. If they can at least get Maia to Baze and Chirrut’s, they could maybe give her much-needed medical care, however primitive, but Jyn know the path there is not an easy one, but those are decisions; what they need now is action.

The south gate is now unprotected, thanks in large part to the Partisans on the rooftops, but then Jyn hears the second reason why. Dust whirls around her feet, and she covers her eyes with her gloved hand, blaster still pointed out as a precaution, and as the air clears she sees it: a ship with its ion cannons aimed at them--but in the cockpit, the faces of Shara Bey and Bodhi Rook.

“We’ve commandeered a ship!” Shara shouts as the ship’s cargo door opens and she waves them in. Dust billows in Jyn’s face, dust devils rising around her. “Go, go!” Shara shouts at them over the roar of the repulsors. “Let’s get the kriff out of here!”

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Rain comes rarely to Jedha, but when it does, the dry, barren fields spring to life, a carpet of rare orange and purple blooms that stretch across the normally arid lands. Baze had spoke of

it often, of how for a few weeks the wildflowers brightened the desert moon that was his home before withering away, painting Jedha green before the return of the incalculable winter.

And so the rains that had washed away the Rodian recruit, Earreautieu, just days before now bring life back to Jedha in the tiny green shoots that push their way through rock and sand. Jyn had not seen the velvet tops of flowers when they had left during the dark of the dawn, but here now, in the late evening of the day, they reach up toward the last rays of sun.

Had it just been this morning when they had left in search of Bodhi Rook? Jyn feels as though she has lived a lifetime in just a few hours.

Along the ridge she sees a convey kicking up dust. Magva, Kulbee, and the other Partisans, along with Chirrut and Baze had combed in through the secured transmitter to let her and Saw know that they were on their way back while Shara had flown them back to safety in the stolen Imperial ship. And then there is Maia. They rush her into what passes for the the med center in the Catacombs of Cadera, where Jyn holds a crying Cena in her arms, the girl's heart seeming to break in half right before her eyes at the sight of her friend carried in, a broken doll in the arms of the dashing captain they had daydreamed about. The image now is not the romance they had talked about just days before but the tragedy that was the day in and day out of their lives.

"In war, sometimes people die so others may live," she wants to tell Cena, but the words catch in her throat, and she swallows them because Jyn feels the waking drumbeat of something that's been gone from her heart for years: hope. And she thinks, *Maia cannot die today.*

Cassian is inside with Maia, though he's helpless to do anything as the derelict Two-Bee med droid sedates a half-dead girl. Jyn shoots Cassian a parting look, and he returns it, his expression tinged with the same look of pain when they had parted three years ago but without the bitterness. But when she goes he does not follow, and Jyn realizes that she had hoped that he would.

Leaving Cena to be comforted by her brother, Jyn goes outside for air and to plan the next step. There is always a next step, the next move, the next strategy. To stand still is to die, but then it is what she does next: she stands alone at the mouth of the caves and waits with the

silence. It gives her time to think with a mind already racing, but when Jyn thinks of anything these days, her thoughts always stray to Cassian Andor.

The field of green before her reminds her of the time on Onderon when they had lain atop his blue coat in a grassy field and held one another in what felt like the last safe place in the universe. She had loved him. He had loved her. It had felt like forever. Or she had thought so back then. She had been sure of it once, but maybe it had been an illusion like how safety and home were illusions, but it had felt real. Back then it had been enough.

The wind picks up and blows the loose hair around her face against her cheek, and Jyn wraps her arms around her torso to make her way to where Shara and Bodhi are working on the ship. When Jyn reaches the top of the ramp, Shara wipes her brow and says, “We’ve run a full scan of the ship and stripped it of any tracking devices that might lead the Empire here.”

“Thank you,” Jyn murmurs, her eyes catching on a smear of blood on the bench behind Shara. She wonders who it belongs to, then decides that it hardly matters.

Bodhi comes near, a step behind Jyn, nervous and humming with energy, his hand full of torn wires. “How is your friend?” he asks, eyes darting around. “The girl?”

Jyn shakes her head. “I don’t know. Breathing but unconscious. Two-Bee is working on her, but we don’t even have enough Bacta to heal anything bigger than a cut.”

He rubs the top of his head with his hand. “What is her name again?” Bodhi asks, and this small consideration makes Jyn’s heart twist in her chest. In war, so quickly names were lost as one by one the people who once loved the dead or dying died themselves. Maia had been an orphan when Saw had found her, and she had no family left. Maybe that was why she had clung so hard to the idea of a quick romance, why she had set her eyes on Cassian and had seen the rest of the universe before her. Jyn could empathize. She had looked at Cassian like that once.

“Maia,” she tells Bodhi, and he nods and repeats the name to add to his memory.

“Do you have the holochip with you now?” she asks at last. Bodhi nods and pulls it out from his flight suit pocket. “We’ll need to see it,” she says, exiting the ship. “Saw and I.” At the bottom of the ramp she stops short. Cassian is there, hands folded, wind in his hair, his thousand-yard stare trained on her. Jyn swallows hard and pulls herself up tall. “And Captain Andor, too.”

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“Saw, if you’re watching this, then perhaps there is a chance to save the Alliance.”

Galen Erso looks like a man dying in the rain. His holoimage flickers cold and blue, his face at once that of a ghost and of Jyn’s last happy memories of childhood. She’s been waiting to see this message since Cassian told her that her father was still alive, but the intersection of anticipation and reality starts a war within herself because she is still so angry at him.

Besides her are Shara and Cassian. Cassian shifts, his boots grinding against the gravel on the floor. He casts a look at her but stays where he is, and she is left alone to stew in her anger that quickly flares into rage the longer she looks at her father’s projected image. He is there but he is still not there.

From the corner of her eye, Jyn can see Saw watching the message as well, his face impassive, his hands resting on his cane. Saw had been her mother’s friend, not her father’s, and fifteen years of Imperial collaboration on Galen Erso’s part had to give him pause, had to make him suspicious of not downright antagonistic. It is how he has survived this long. It is how Jyn feels, and who had taught her to see the galaxy this way if not Saw Gerrera?

“Perhaps there’s a chance to explain myself,” her father continues, “and, though I don’t dare hope for too much, a chance for Jyn, if she’s alive, if you can possibly find her. A chance to let her know that my love for her has never faded and how desperately I’ve missed her.”

From the ruins of her heart, she feels more than sees the light from the open hatch of her cave, white and cold. *Your love?* she thinks bitterly. Love said with just words was not love if there was no action behind it or the wrong kind. Hadn’t Jyn learned that over and over again over the twenty-three years of her life? That when you let go of love, when you did nothing to grab at it, to hold it to your chest as though it were the last breath left, it meant nothing in the end? She had committed this sin herself, of letting go, and he—the father of her blood—he’d let her mother die. He’d gone away with the man in white. And he had never come looking for her, not even once.

Jyn says nothing though, not to an image that cannot speak back, and the recording keeps playing.

“Jyn, my Stardust, I can’t imagine what you think of me. When I was taken, I faced some bitter truths. I was told that, soon enough, Krennic would have you. As time went by, I knew that you were either dead or so well hidden that he would never find you. I knew if I refused to work, if I took my own life, it would only be a matter of time before Krennic realized he no longer needed me to complete the project.”

In the message, he continues to work his mouth, words, excuses spilling out, her father trying to *justify* fifteen years. She had had known children amongst the Partisans, children like she had been once, who had lived and died in those fifteen years, and those who had died before they had reached their fifteenth name day, and she wishes, not for the first time, that Galen Erso had also died long ago, a heroic memory. She could at least love him then. She could at least not have her heart break again.

Her legs wobble and it feels as though the earth is moving beneath her. She turns her head to Saw, childishly wanting him to hold her, to stroke her hair and shush her until she is calm the way her mother did when she had bad dreams, but Jyn sees his eyes flicker with a *no*, as though he understands her yearning and is warning her away from it. Fragility and weakness. Softness. That’s what he’d see, and she could not let him, could not let him see her bleeding out like this because while she could staunch physical wounds, this one she could not.

Her father's message continues: "So I did the one thing that nobody expected. I lied. I learned to lie. I played the part of a beaten man resigned to the sanctuary of his work. I made myself indispensable, and all the while I laid the groundwork of my revenge." His voice grows steadier though the image weaker. "We call it the Death Star. There is no better name, and the day's coming soon when it will be unleashed."

She hears Cassian draw in a deep breath—horror, shock—confirmation of all their worst fears breaking through his steady, carefully structured demeanor. But when he speaks, what he says aloud is "Jyn," a though her name is a tether and he knows that she needs something to keep her from floating away, lost in her own nightmares.

Then her father turns, as though afraid himself, and releases the next words, the ones everyone else is waiting to hear. "I've placed a flaw deep within the system. A flaw so small and powerful, they'll never find it." There is a long, deep pause.

It is important, his message, vitally important. Bodhi Rook had risked his life to deliver it. They all had to get it, to simply reach this moment in time. But it isn't what Jyn wants to hear. *The cause, the cause, the cause.* It is all she has lived and breathed most of her life, especially the last few years, but here he is now, her father, back from the dead, and it is still about the cause; about his work, and she cannot help it: it feels unfair.

The urge to leave surges through her. She's heard enough. Cassian and Saw can hear the rest, can fill her in. She spins and heads toward the archway to go outside, but Cassian is beside her in an instant, his hands grasping her by the fingers. The warmth of his skin pulls her back to the present. She's conscious of the callouses on his hands, of the gentleness in his grip. *Come back, Jyn*, he seems to say. *Stay.* They are the words she should have said to him when he left her on the landing pad on Onderon three years ago. When she let him go. Tears threaten again in her eyes, heavy like the blackest storm clouds across the horizon, and she shakes them away.

And then her father speaks again, and this time it is to her, his daughter—to her and not some abstract idea that is Jyn.

"Jyn, if you are listening . . ." He slurs and stumbles with his words, the steadiness crumbling away.

And she is listening now. She is rapt. Jyn steps forward, breathless and in a daze. Her ribs ache; she is conscious of the healing wound on her chest.

“My beloved, so much of my life has been wasted. I try to think of you only in the moments when I’m strong, because the pain of not having you with me... Your mother. Our family.” Her father pauses, and she can almost feel the pain that lances across his face in her own body.

Galen Erso was her father; is her father. Her papa. She blinks, blinded by a new well of tears. “The pain of that loss is so overwhelming I risk failing even now. It’s just so hard not to think of you. Think of where you are, my Stardust.”

Had he had any idea back then on Lah’mu where she would be now? That she’d be turned into a child soldier? A weapon for others and for herself? Had her mother when they had made the call to Saw Gerrera? When her mother had left her to die in a chilly field, smoking in death from a blaster wound to her chest?

“I assume logically, rationally, that you fight with the Rebellion.” Her father smiles, a wavering thing, a sad thing. “It’s difficult to imagine Saw steering you any other way, and you always had the same anger--the same insistent sense of righteousness as your mother. But if you left the Rebellion and Saw behind but this message still finds you? You make me no less proud, Jyn.”

Jyn’s jaw aches, her mouth clamped shut to hold in the screams the way way the hatch of her cave had been built to hold her in. Her legs are jelly. She suddenly feels an arm around her back, steady hands holding her up. *Cassian*. She cannot look at him, but she sinks into him and lets him be her crutch.

Her father continues, the image blurring in and out. “If you found a place in the galaxy untouched by war--a quiet life, maybe a family--if you’re happy, Jyn, then that’s more than enough.”

She feels Cassian’s grip tighten around her then, his hand sliding across her belly, pulling her body into his, and she allows herself to be held this time. She can’t see his face, but she feels the tension in her arms and in that split second, like a dream, she sees the fullness of the life

that they missed out on having *together* if Saw had not persuaded her--and she convinced herself--to let him go.

If you're happy, Jyn.

A quiet life.

A family.

Her father's image blurs, then snaps back to life, but she can hardly hear, the roar in her ears like that of the sneaker waves on Lah'mu crashing against the basalt rocks and the black sand shore. Her father's words began to fade, the holoprojector sputtering out the last of his message.

"Saw, the reactor system, that's the key. That's the place I've laid my trap. It's well hidden and unstable. One blast to any part of it will destroy the entire station. You'll need the plans, the structural plans to the Death Star to find the reactor. I know there's a complete engineering archive in the data vault at the Citadel Tower on Scarif. Any pressurized explosion to the reactor module will set off a chain reaction that will destroy the entire station ____"

And then like that, the message cuts off and her father is gone again.

Shara's voice cuts through the eerie silence. "We have to let the Alliance know. Cassian, you'll need to--" but her words come to an abrupt stop when her eyes find Cassian, when she sees Jyn still wrapped up in his arms. Shara's expression doesn't escape Jyn's notice, and she gently eases herself away from Cassian as his arms release her. But it's already too late to hide anything from Shara Bey.

"I'll make the call to Draven," Shara finishes at last and exits the room, though not before sparing them both a second, knowing look.

“My child.” Saw motions for Jyn, but his face ashen. He’d been the mythic hero of her life, always so strong, so determined, so zealous, but he looks frail now, weighed down by his unwieldy armor. When she had been a child she had mirrored his expression of strength until it had felt true for herself--her face carved with new lines, with pride, with ferocity. The spilled blood of their mutual conviction had greater than the blood that surged in her veins, or so she had believed, and had been so since the moment Saw had scooped her up, still in braids, and taken her away from death.

Saw leans against his staff now and places an arm on her shoulder, a rare gesture of affection. “This is greater than we both could have ever feared, Jyn.”

She gazes up at him, terror clenching her stomach. The Partisans fought with blasters and cannons, with thermal detonators and guerilla tactics, but the Empire had a planet killer. *The Death Star* . It was like trying to dig to the other side of the planet with a spoon.

Saw’s gaze drifts then past Jyn and onto Cassian, and Jyn follows it. Cassian is standing stock still, hands clasped behind his back, but the shadow of exhaustion clouds his face. But he is determined. That hasn’t changed about him. And she feels the determination build within herself.

“Do you need to be persuaded?” Saw wheezes, raising his wizen hand to her cheek, the rough, dry skin of his palm against her soft cheek. *He understands*, she realizes, and this is his blessing. Jyn reaches up and grasps his hand in her own hand. She knows what she has to do, and Saw knows what she must do. The tears begin to fall, and she lets them. Pressing a kiss to his hand, she gives him a broken smile. She knows that this is a kiss goodbye. He knows it, too.

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Jyn packs her things in a brown satchel: weapons, gloves, a scarf, a datapad with a shattered screen, and then as almost an afterthought, her mother's kyber pendant. It's beneath ten layers of clothes and knives and ration bars and dust, still wrapped in soft gray leather. She unfolds it and holds it up to the morning light as she says goodbye to the room, looping the necklace over her head. The crystal doesn't touch her skin--she has on too many layers--but she feels the way it burn anyway.

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"I'm going with you," she hears Bodhi say to Cassian where they are loading up the ship. His voice wavers but there is insistence there that makes Jyn pick up her step.

"We're going too," Baze says from where he and Chirrut are reclined against the cargo.

"They're all going," she says, approaching them. She shoves her pack at Cassian. "If I'm coming, so are they."

"Is that really your call?" Cassian asks, his tone more curious than aggravated. He takes a step closer to her and she has to tilt her head up to look at his face. Her hand twitches and she has to flex it to stop. She wants to drag him down by the collar and make the world disappear.

But Bodhi coughs and there is a sudden and joyous cry from the Catacombs. Cena and Waylor sprint out toward Jyn, arms waving.

“Maia is awake!” Cena says, bending over and breathing hard. “Two-Bee says she’ll live.”

“But she may not walk,” Waylor adds.

“Where is she?” Jyn asks, already beginning to head toward the med bay, but Waylor puts an arm in her way, blocking her.

“She wants to see, Captain Andor, Jyn.” He gives an apologetic look.

Cassian startles for Cassian; the slightest shift in his mouth, the line of his lips tight.

“But not me?” Jyn asks, unable to hide her hurt.

“She just asked for the captain,” Cena says, apologetically.

“Fine,” Jyn says, snapping back to herself.

Cassian reaches out and gives her the briefest, lightest touch of the hand before he runs back to the caves. “I won’t be long.”

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“Come with me to the base,” he had said to her once on Onderon. He’d kissed her on the shoulder then as the neck of her tunic had opened, revealing bare skin. She’d been sitting in his lap, the two of them hidden away near a river. The sun had felt so warm that day.

“What happens if do?” she had asked.

“Then we’ll be together,” had been his easy reply, and she had kissed him deep and hard, her fingers dancing on his spine underneath his shirt, not knowing then that this would come, in the end, to be untrue.

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When Cassian returns, he’s not alone.

Two-Bee follows him, along with Kaytoo, and between them, Maia on a stretcher. She’s sedated again, peaceful in sleep though her hair is still matted with her own blood from the fall.

“We can give her better care back on base,” he tells Jyn without her having to ask. Then in a quieter voice as he passes, “I should have stopped her from jumping. It was my fault. Mine alone.”

“It’s not--” she starts, but he shakes his head and cuts his way to the cockpit while the two droids settled Maia in for the trip, her body braced between the care of Chirrut and Baze, Bodhi at her feet, gazing at her dazedly.

Shara is with them, watching the whole exchange.

“What?” Jyn says, harsher than she means to be. Shara circles around her, patting her X-Wing helmet in her arms. It makes a hollow sound that bounces off the walls of the ship. In a lighter tone, Jyn continues. “Is there something you want to say, Shara?”

Shara nods, her dark curls bouncing around her cheekbones. “Maybe.”

“And?”

“I just wanted to tell you that I’m glad that you’re coming with us.” Shara walks down the ramp to head to her X-wing and turns just before she exits. “For a number of reasons, but mostly because I don’t think Cassian would be coming back with me if you weren’t too.” There is a small smile on her face, in the upturn of her eyes. Then the ramp closes and Shara is gone.

From where Maia rests, K-2SO’s footsteps clang against the floor, his metal steps heading toward the cockpit to join Cassian. Jyn turns heel and follows after him. *Cassian*. She sees the back of his head, his hands lifting the headphones to his ears. His name is just on the tip of her tongue when the cockpit doors close, and frustration clamps her mouth shut. She doesn’t know what she would have said anyway, she tells herself, and moves to the back of the ship.

Through the transparisteel, Jyn sees Saw, his hand in the air, bidding her farewell. The ship rumbles to life and lifts off, and Saw gets smaller and smaller before he disappears. Cassian hits the jets and the ship cuts through the atmo. Jyn grabs ahold of crash webbing and braces herself as she sees the starlines explode out the small viewports. They are on their way to Yavin IV. To her father. And to the Death Star.

Chapter End Notes

All of Galen Erso's quotes are from Rogue One the movie and/or the novelization by Alexander Free (anything that is not quoted in the movie). All other text is mine.

End Notes

I wrote up an outline of this on tumblr, but decided to expand this into something that read more as a story and less as an outline.

Find me on tumblr at [@operaticspacetrash](#)

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