Summary

Bodhi, Jyn, and Cassian make it through adversity, to the stars.

Well, to a star.

Notes

I'm weak and I love Rogue One. \(\_\(\_\)`
Chapter 1

Jyn never forgot the moment when her mother’s body slumped to the ground. Nor did she forget the man responsible—a man whom she only knew as a friend to her family. She couldn’t remember that early time beyond fragments, nor did she wish to, but even with her parents’ warnings, she had felt a lingering familiarity, something like trust.

Orson Krennic was the first to take that from her, when he took her mother. Then he took her father, too, turned Galen Erso’s life into one of relentless misery and desperation. He drove her into a childhood hidden with Saw, trained up to fight the Empire, to fight anyone. And if anyone could call it a childhood, she’d lost that, too. Even these last few weeks … she’d lost Saw again in the wreckage of Jedha. That was Krennic. It was Krennic who shot her father’s engineers around him. He’d ensured that Galen lived his last moments in horror, if she could trust Cassian.

She did. Or she had—Cassian, like all the rest, was gone. That memory burned more hotly than the rest. After everything he’d seen and done, a shot from Krennic took him, too, his body tumbling down and down, and she could only cling to the sure knowledge that Cassian would haunt her to her own grave if she abandoned the mission for his sake.

And she’d done it. She’d sent the plans, she didn’t care what lies Krennic told, she didn’t care if he shot her down like Lyra if she could take him down with her—

A blaster fired. Not Krennic’s. Not hers, but he dropped nonetheless, nothing but a huddled pool of white at her feet. And behind him stood a man, dressed in a mix of old clothes and Imperial uniform, his blaster still raised even as he leaned heavily on machinery.

He was ragged and weak, but it didn’t matter. Cassian.

She rushed to him, as fast as her leg would let her, bracing herself to bear the weight of a compact man at least half a foot taller than she was. He stumbled, but managed to hold himself upright as he grasped her, his breaths harsh and shallow. He’d made that climb like this? He might be made of kyber, himself.

Though Krennic didn’t stir, she turned to look at him. And with Cassian’s shuddering breaths in her ear, her mind alight with memories of her father and mother and Saw and, Force, Kaytoo, fury rushed through her again. She was going to blow Krennic’s heart out of his chest if it was the last thing she did.

She took a step towards Krennic—and Cassian’s grip tightened, pulling her back.

“No,” he muttered into her hair. “No. Let’s … go.”

He was really here, had really made it. His voice made it true more than his weight did. Even as she panted for air, the knowledge settled on her, deep and tangible. He was alive. They were alive. But not if they stuck around this place. She couldn’t hear anything on the other side of the door, now. The stormtroopers must have tried a different route after they destroyed—after they killed Kaytoo. She’d have to assume so, anyway; it was their only hope.

And they didn’t have much time. Whatever strength had carried Cassian up that wall was clearly fading. Despite his best efforts, he’d already begun to list against her, and Jyn had to wrap her arm around his waist, his good arm slung over her shoulder. In her shape, it’d be hard enough to get out of here alone, but carting around an injured man? And she wouldn’t leave him. She couldn’t. Not
Cassian.

All the way, he’d sworn, and though he asked nothing of her, she took it as her own promise. They would die together or live together. She hit the switch, and the blast-door slid open, revealing—

Nothing. Nothing except Kaytoo’s shattered remains.

In the general hubbub of battle above and below, a louder, clearer sound emerged. Jyn carefully shifted Cassian’s weight and glanced back.

Dread pulsed through her. An Imperial shuttle hovered at the end of the catwalk, not quite even with it, but an easy jump up for fresh reinforcements. On its side, a porthole opened, and the pilot stuck his head out.

“Jyn? Jyn! Is that Cassian? Come on! We’ve got to get out of here.”

“Bodhi!” She wasn’t sure she’d ever been more relieved to see someone in her life. Except Cassian two minutes ago.

With some effort, she managed to swivel them both around, Cassian muttering indistinctly to himself. He didn’t seem delirious, just annoyed with himself, which she could only regard as a good sign. Bit by bit, they made their way to the end of the catwalk. From here, the jump that had looked so easy seemed very much less so, even for her.

“Chirrut and Baze?”

Bodhi’s anxious expression turned somber. She knew even before he shook his head.

“It was Chirrut who—” He gulped. “I’m sorry. I wanted to save them, but …”

“You did the best you could,” said Jyn, doing her best to hoist Cassian onto the railing. His breaths sharpened to gasps as he just managed to clamber over, hair and face damp with sweat. He must have hurt his legs in the fall. He could hardly have not.

“Kaytoo?” said Bodhi.

More grieved for that damn droid than she would have imagined a day ago, Jyn replied, “Didn’t make it.”

Cassian mumbled, “Kay…?”

Jyn inhaled, looking down at the porthole. There was only way thing to do—jump. Even if Cassian …

“All right?” she whispered.

Jaw tight, he nodded. With a single quick breath, he flung himself down, falling through the porthole and right where Bodhi waited to help them down. That was more well-intentioned than anything else; Bodhi had a certain wiry endurance, but nothing like Jyn’s and Cassian’s strength. He couldn’t do much more than stagger under the weight.

And Cassian screamed.

She hadn’t even known he could. And she never wanted to hear it again.

Kay, she thought numbly. Kaytoo would have helped him. She could hardly picture Cassian without
“Wait,” she said, and half-ran, half-limped down the catwalk and into the operations chamber. Stupid, stupid. Even if he could be salvaged, she’d never be able to carry the wreckage. Stupid—

She dug into the bits and pieces of metal, the fragments bruising and cutting her hands, oil smearing them, no point to any of it. With a burst of adrenaline, Jyn wrenched the head from the crumpled torso and caught it as it rolled, dull eyes and broken wires turning her stomach. Nevertheless, she seized it. Kay had dug data out of that other droid from the head, hadn’t he? She held it under her arm and sprinted, as much as she could, to the catwalk.

“Jyn, we have to leave now,” Bodhi was shouting.

She wasted no more time, just climbed over the railing, ignoring the twinges in her leg. They were about to be worse, but she could see Cassian near-collapsed over Bodhi. She’d live. Hopefully. Jyn jumped.

It was every bit as bad as she expected. Hot pain pierced up her leg, knocking her breathless. She didn’t cry out, but lurched into the wall, nearly doubled over. Kaytoo’s head dug into her ribs.

She sucked in a gulp of air and managed the few steps to where Cassian, gasping, struggled to pull himself away from Bodhi. “I can take care of him. Go, go, get us out of here!”

“Right—right—”

In the instant it took her to set down Kaytoo’s head, Cassian had managed to straighten up and stumble to the nearest wall, teeth clenched and hand fumbling for purchase. Jyn caught him about the waist again, a little lower this time; his ribs couldn’t be in good shape. There, something damp and sticky clung to her fingers.

Chilled, she tugged him away from the wall.

“I don’t,” he mumbled. “You should …”

“We have to get you off these legs,” said Jyn. She looked around the shuttle, and to her mixed relief and dread, saw a cot just around the corner from the main door. The furthest end of the shuttle from here. At maybe a third of that distance, however, a pair of long, sturdy platforms stretched low against the wall, piled haphazardly with battered equipment.

“All right, we’ve got”—she glanced up at his drawn face—“a bunk. Come on, let’s … you can lean on me. Just one step. And another one. And …”

Together, they made their way down the shuttle, Jyn’s shoulders and back aching. Her leg radiated pain with every step; Cassian wasn’t the only one who needed somewhere to rest. Even once they got there, she had to grip the top platform for leverage, knee bent against the side of the lowermost shelf while she knocked equipment out of the way and helped Cassian perch on the edge. He didn’t so much sit as tumble in the right direction, ducking his head with a grimace. Jyn all but collapsed beside him.

“Bodhi,” she called out, “are there any emergency kits in this thing?”

He darted a quick look back from the cockpit. “Should be one in each compartment. Regulations.”

She wrapped the fingers of one hand around the bars bracing the shelf above them and
twisted around, her other arm still wrapped about Cassian, steadying him against the motion of the shuttle. Her eyes narrowed, she scanned the mess for anything like a kit.

“I’d kill for a third hand right now,” Jyn muttered.

To her surprise, Cassian gave a short laugh; then he started coughing. When he wiped his mouth, she couldn’t miss the blood on his hand. She’d already guessed that he had some broken ribs. One, or more, must have perforated his lungs. He could take pain, but not much more outright damage.

“I’ve got to …”

He nodded and grasped the bars with his good (better?) arm. As fast as she could, Jyn scavenged through the assorted piles of ventilators, hydros, pipes of indistinct purpose, and general trash. She’d almost given up and decided to try a different compartment when she caught sight of a clear, thin box of some kind, pushed towards the rear. Gritting her teeth, she crawled onto the bunk, dragging herself as much by the bars above her as her knees. Sure enough, the box had a medical insignia beneath the Imperial one. She snagged it and forced herself to clamber back. Please, she thought. Please, please—

She flipped open the lid and exhaled. Three bacta patches.

“All right. We can do this.”

Beside her, Cassian remained motionless but for laboured inhalations, his hand clamped so hard about a bar that she half-expected it to bend. Then, slowly, he turned to look. His expression was still frozen in lines of strain, but his unfocused gaze settled on the bacta. He said something, so breathless that she couldn’t quite make out.

“We’ve got to deal with that wound. But you did something to your ribs.”

“No,” said Cassian.

She peeled open the bacta, praying that the now-smooth flight of the shuttle meant something good.

“All right, Krennic did.”

“No,” he said again, and pushed the bacta away. “Your leg.”

“We don’t need any more heroes today,” said Jyn sharply. “You’re in far worse shape. I’ll manage.”

“Patches will not heal this. I …” Cassian drew a thready breath. “Better one whole than two injured.”

She didn’t know whether to take that as pragmatic calculation or real concern. With him, it could be either, or both. But he was right. If something went wrong—worse—then they’d need Jyn for any chance of survival. And it’d be a far better chance if she were in one piece.

Reluctantly, Jyn nodded. She yanked her boot off, wincing, and rolled her trouser leg up. Then she pressed the patch against her leg, the bacta cool and squishy against her hand. But it felt warm on her leg, a pleasant heat that sank deeper and deeper into her muscles. With one last bright burst of pain, something inside snapped—and then it all faded to nothing. She tested her weight. Nothing but some residual soreness, the same as the other leg.

All right. Unrolling her trouser and stuffing her foot back in the boot, she tried to decide where to even start with Cassian. To go by the blood still sticking to her hand, the blaster had done significant damage. The broken ribs, agonizing enough on their own, appeared to be slicing into his
organs. And then there was whatever he’d done to his legs.

“Okay. Hold on.” She didn’t even bother telling him to get rid of his shirt; she knew he couldn’t do it on his own. Instead, Jyn tore it open herself, buttons clattering to the floor. Not the circumstances I imagined.

Just once or twice.

Jyn bit back her horror at his chest, mottled with so many bruises that she could hardly make out the more serious damage. And she was no medic; she’d treated her share of injuries over the years, but mostly her own.

“How bad is it?” she asked.

He didn’t say anything, glance flickering vacantly about. Panic crackled under her skin.

“Stay with me.”

She caught his face in her hand. “Which hurts worse?”

After a long pause, he tilted his head to the right. Hoping it meant an answer, she plastered the second patch against his right-side ribs. His gaze remained unfocused, but he drew a quick rasping breath. Jyn held the patch to him until it turned dry and flabby, her free hand scrambling for something in the kit to staunch the blood-caked wound in his side. She didn’t even pause before snatching up the third bacta patch and pressing it to the wound. It didn’t heal much, but she managed to clean and bandage it with the rest of the supplies.

“That’s as good as you’re going to get for now,” Jyn told him, not sure that he even heard. They could only hope there’d be something beyond for now. “You can sit down.”

Cassian’s eyes shifted across her face. She chose to take that as promising, and with her arm about him, peeled his fingers off the bar above them. When she managed to steady him back onto the bunk, he exhaled, sounding a little better. And he managed to look at her properly.

“Thank—you.”

He didn’t appear quite as ghastly as before, though disoriented and exhausted, and still in evident pain. His hair fell over his eyes, sticking to his sweaty skin.

“All the way,” she said quietly. Cassian closed his eyes.

“Jyn—” He coughed. Less blood this time.

“Quiet,” said Jyn, draping her arm about his shoulders just in time for an abrupt swerve of the shuttle. Suppressing a flash of dread, she pushed his hair out of his face. Something, fear or affection or some terrible combination of both, shivered in her chest. “That’s an order, Captain Andor.”

His mouth tugged, a little. Another good sign, she thought firmly, even as their flight slowed to an airborne crawl.

“I’ve got you,” she told Cassian. “You’re safe. Bodhi—we’ve got Bodhi and the shuttle.” She reached for one of the cloths she had used, found a clean patch, and wiped off his face. “We’re going to get out and it’s going to be fine. You’re going to be fine.”

Her voice held steady. But she didn’t know who she was even trying to persuade. Cassian, in any case, didn’t open his eyes—just leaned a little more against her. That would have meant nothing from many others. From Cassian ... he must be dazed, the injuries and that impossible climb getting to him,
but he didn’t trust easily. Neither of them did.

The shuttle lurched, and Jyn steadied herself as she’d learned as a girl, shifting her hips and feet to a balanced, ready stance, forcing her inhalations to an even beat. Without Saw, she’d be dead a hundred times over. The Rebellion, too, had he not delayed the Death Star long enough for all this to matter at all. She still couldn’t forgive him, exactly, but her memory of him had gentled. After leading so many to their deaths, she understood that better now, the fire that had consumed his life. Not love, not pleasure, just a dream that took and took and took, until there was nothing left to give. Jyn looked down at Cassian, his ashen face and broken body, and swallowed.

“How are we going to get out of here?” she shouted at the cockpit. From here, she couldn’t see much of it, much of Bodhi beyond his back.

“I’m … I’m still figuring that one out,” said Bodhi. “They’ll shoot us down on the spot if they suspect anything. The Empire isn’t exactly cautious about their people.”

He’d know.

“Can you hide with the other shuttles?”

“That’s what I’m trying to do!”

Cassian straightened a little, shivering. He muttered, “Bodhi.”

“Stay here,” said Jyn. “Don’t fall. I’ll be back.”

“Right,” he said faintly. But he had strength enough to grip the bunk, so she risked leaving him and ran to the cockpit.

In the viewscreen, shuttles clustered like buzzing insects. Some, damaged, careened about. The others dodged and soared slantwise.

“We have to get out with those,” said Bodhi. His hands were clenched on the controls, his face tight.

“Do it,” Jyn told him. He nodded, his expression mingling resolve and terror. He was a brave man: braver than those with more nerve. But they’d need nerve to get through this. “You’re doing great. Just keep going, Bodhi.”

He nodded. As soon as they had space, he turned the shuttle again.

And an enormous grey sphere gulped up the viewscreen. It loomed, impossibly vast, over all else in the sky, over Scarif itself. Her father’s other child.

Jyn’s head swam. No time for that, she told herself sternly, and wet her lips. *The next chance, and the next.*

“We’ve got to get closer,” she said. “Then we … we’ll find a way to split off. It won’t be as noticeable in the shadow of that thing.”

“And we’ll be harder to hit.”

Jyn clasped the back of his chair. “That, too.”

Under Bodhi’s careful hands, their shuttle fell in with the rest of the train headed towards the Death Star. She could feel her pulse through her entire body, thudding a rapid beat in her chest, head, everything. Jyn counted the seconds, the ships, anything to fill her mind, kept glancing back at
Cassian.

Vaguely, she thought, *I should have made him lie down.* They might be able to get him to the cot, now. But Jyn couldn’t make herself break away from the Death Star. When its acid-green laser pierced through the sky to Scarif, she swallowed a scream. Anyone down there who might have lived didn’t now. Certainly not Baze and Chirrut, who in a matter of days had become more family than anyone in years, who had called her *little sister.* Gone, even in death.

*I am one with the Force, and the Force is with me. I am one with the Force, and the Force is with me. I am one with the Force—*

At least Krennic was dead, too. If Cassian’s shot hadn’t killed him already. She rather hoped it hadn’t, that Krennic had woken to feel his failure, that after he killed her mother and chained her father to that monstrosity, he’d lived to see it turned against him. She hoped he’d seen that fatal light coming at him, and died in fear.

They drew nearer, the Death Star devouring more and more of their vision, shuttles swarming towards it. Bodhi flew with wide eyes and trembling body, while horror nearly froze her limbs.

No. No.

“They’re thinning out,” she managed to say. “When you’ve got a chance, take it. I have to go back to Cassian.”


Her leg felt as heavy, as burdensome, as it had before the bacta. But she wasn’t a pilot, and Cassian wasn’t strong enough, and Bodhi had never failed them. Never failed her father, either. Jyn squeezed his shoulder and turned back. Squaring her own shoulders, she walked straight and tall—as tall as she could get—down the hall. If she died now, she wouldn’t be cowering. And she wouldn’t be alone.

She got to Cassian without disaster, which seemed an accomplishment at this point. Once more, she reached out to brace him, strengthened by the brief respite. For his part, he looked more alert, though hunched and wheezing.

“What …?”

“Hang on,” said Jyn.

Cassian wrapped his good arm about her waist, eyes closed again, and Jyn held him close, touching his clammy forehead while something clenched in her chest and the pit of her stomach. Her throat burned.

“Just a moment now.” Once more, she stroked his hair back. “It’ll be over soon.”

His eyes fluttered open. Clear and dark, they met hers. He said hoarsely, “Your father would be proud of you, Jyn.”

She smiled. In this moment, both frightened and tranquil, she had no desire to shut her own eyes, look away, anything. One way or another, this was it.

And Bodhi’s voice cracked out. “*Jyn!*”

She’d never heard him so panicked, even at the very beginning. Foreboding raced over her skin.
Without thinking about it, she held Cassian closer.

“What is it?” she said.

“I can’t do anything! I can’t—there’s a tractor beam! The Death Star is pulling us all in!” She heard a clatter, frantic yanks on switches. “I … we got the plans off. That’s what matters. We got the plans off. They can’t make us talk. They can’t make us do anything.”

Jyn and Cassian stared at each other, horrified.

He managed to grate out, “They can try.”

She needed no explanation. Everyone knew what the Empire did to political prisoners. Better to have exploded in the sky, been irradiated on Scarif.

“And it’ll be a hell of an effort,” she said grimly. Her blaster still rested on her hip. She could … if someone did it, it would have to be Jyn. She thought of Bodhi, all fear and determination. She thought of Cassian’s uncompromising faith. Of herself, the resolve that had carried her this far. Bile choked her, even as the Death Star tugged them closer.

Wildly, she looked around the shuttle. There had to be something she could do. Some last hope. Rogue One couldn’t end this way.

Cassian said quietly, “Jyn.”

“No!” She hated the calm on his face, shattering the mask of pain. Had he never expected to live?

A suspicion crept on her, near to certainty: he wasn’t going to live, with or without the Empire. At his side, blood soaked her bandage. Every breath he took whistled and shuddered. She hadn’t even begun to look at whatever he might have done to his legs, under those Imperial trousers.

Imperial trousers. Imperial officer’s trousers.

Jyn turned to look at the cockpit, knowing what she’d see. A slim man in the uniform of an Imperial pilot. Even part of an Imperial droid.

One last chance.

“Sorry,” she told Cassian. The emergency kit still lay beside them, contents jumbled from her desperate search. She seized a stim shot and plunged it into his shoulder.

Cassian didn’t even flinch. He looked bewildered, though.

“Bodhi, don’t fight the tractor beam! We can’t let them sense anything. Just—help me, I have to get Cassian to the cot. Are there any clothes around here? I need a jacket!”

“I don’t think his modesty is our biggest problem right now,” said Bodhi, but he sprang out of his chair.

“Get Kaytoo!” she added.

Baffled, he picked up the droid’s severed head and scrambled after them, while Jyn tugged Cassian to his feet. He muttered something to himself that she didn’t understand, but didn’t really need to.

“Just one last task for you,” she said, and strangled fear. “This way, captain.”
Even weak and confused, Cassian understood orders. His steps were uncertain and shuffling, his face twisted in pain, his gasping breath the stuff of nightmares. But he obeyed, supported by Jyn, Bodhi, and whatever drug the stim shot had poured into his veins. They got him across the shuttle.

Jyn kicked everything off the cot and, with Bodhi’s help, managed to lower Cassian onto the cot.

“A jacket,” she snapped.

“Jyn—”

“Now!”

With a slightly frightened look, he raced into the adjoining hall. In the meanwhile, Jyn helped Cassian adjust his weight on the cot.

“All right. Now I just need you to look like you’re suffering.”

“Not … a problem,” mumbled Cassian.

Jyn huffed a laugh.

“Jyn?” Bodhi ran up, panting, a neatly folded grey jacket on one arm and Kaytoo’s head clutched in the other. He eyed her uncertainly.

“Still sane,” she assured him. Taking the jacket, she searched for the rank. Major. Too noticeable. She tore off the last two columns of plackets, crumpled it up, and rubbed the material over Bodhi’s dirt-stained shoulder.

“Oh—”

She handed it to him. “Put this over him. Try to get some blood on it, but don’t hurt him.”

She saw understanding dawn over Bodhi’s face. Without another word, he bent down to Cassian.

Jyn sprinted back to the bunk, where she grabbed the emergency kit and the cloths she’d used to wash her hands when she treated Cassian. They were covered with oil from Kaytoo’s body and blood, hers and Cassian’s.

Good.

Back at the cot, Bodhi was gently touching the jacket to Cassian’s wounds. Jyn just handed him one of the cloths to smear over the jacket, and used the sleeve to wipe cold sweat off Cassian’s face. His hair was stiff with it.

“You think this will work?” whispered Bodhi.

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “But it’s worth the try.”

She considered Bodhi, his cargo pilot’s uniform, his intense face. Easy to identify, if you knew what to look for. Without hesitation, she smeared the cloth still in her hand down his cheek.

Bodhi sputtered. “What the—”

“We can’t let them recognize you.”

He looked at her, at the rags in their hands. Then he scrubbed them over his face, until Jyn gave a
“Even if this works,” Bodhi said, “I can’t hide behind dirt forever. I’ll give us all away.” He swallowed.

“No martyrdom,” Jyn said firmly. Her mind raced. “Stormtroopers. You’ll have to hide with the stormtroopers.”

Bodhi considered it. Then he said, “Right. I—I’ll find armour somehow. We’ll figure it out.”

“We will.” Jyn clasped his shoulder again. “This is more than my father ever asked you to do. But I think he’d be proud of you, too.”

He smiled.

Abruptly, the shuttle vibrated around them. Not much, but Jyn and Bodhi pressed their hands to the floor. She could see Cassian’s teeth sink into his lip, the premature lines in his face deepening.

Jyn wrapped her fingers around Cassian’s good hand and looked at Bodhi. “Ready?”

“Time to play nice with the tractor beam,” he said, with a nervous laugh. Setting Kaytoo’s head down against the wall, he ran back to the cockpit. Jyn stayed with Cassian, lies whirling through her mind. She shifted only enough to press her other hand over the failing bandage on his blaster wound. His gasp tore at her, so she did her best to ignore it.

_Please_, she thought. She couldn’t tolerate the idea of Bodhi tortured again, Cassian dying a nameless Imperial prisoner, Jyn herself devoured by this terrible sister of hers. _We can’t die like this._

The shuttle swung smoothly down. They had to be nearly in the hangar by now.

Cassian’s lips moved.

“What is it?” said Jyn.

“What … am I?”

She stared at him. With an effort, he jerked his chin downwards, towards his chest, where Bodhi had spread the jacket.

The rank. Cassian was trying to get the story straight, even as he bled out.

“Captain,” she said, and forced a smile. “You haven’t been demoted.”

“Good,” he managed to mutter, as he had long ago. Two weeks ago. His hands tightened on hers. “Jyn. Listen.”

The shuttle was dropping rapidly. Jyn leaned in. “Yes?”

“If they … if …” He coughed, blood on his lips again. “Three one five jay eight oh ar six one eight five.”

Totally bewildered, she just frowned at him.

“_Remember._”

Jyn had no difficulty memorizing codes. She’d done it countless times, breaking through compounds
and safes and identities. 315J8OR6185. She just had no idea what it meant, if anything.

“We’re landing!” shouted Bodhi.

“I’ve got it,” Jyn told Cassian, and waited there, frozen at his side, until the shuttle settled onto something solid. It only slightly jarred them.

*Good landing*, she thought, a shriek stifled in the back of her throat.

Bodhi came running from the cockpit.

“How is he?”

Jyn set her jaw. “Needs care, fast. Are you ready?”

They looked at each other over Cassian’s head. Bodhi gulped and nodded.

Below, she heard a rattle, then the telltale *whoosh* of oxygenation. Voices in her own accent. And Bodhi clattering down the ramp.

“Someone help!” he screamed. “My commander’s down—there was a Rebel attack—*help!*”
Chapter 2

Jyn couldn’t make out what their audience said. But she heard the voices rise from a murmur to something sharper and sterner, a stolid wall against Bodhi’s babbling. After what couldn’t be more than a few sentences, heavy steps clunked up the ramp.

She tried to count the number of newcomers, but the precision of their march muddled her hearing. At least two, probably more.

Waiting a beat, she let Chirrut’s mantra cycle through her thoughts. Her parents had worshipped no gods, nothing but the Force. It was as good as anything.

Then, sinking into this role as she had sunk into so many others, she banished all superstition from her mind. Imperial soldiers did not cling to such things. Not if they wanted anything like a career.

“Raka, hurry!” Jyn shouted. Her voice cracked. “We need a medic. He hasn’t got much time!”

She twisted her head to look back at the ramp, careful not to change the pressure on Cassian’s wound. A single officer strode towards her, flanked by four stormtroopers. Bodhi, looking even filthier against the white armour and precise grey uniform, trailed after.

“Your pilot said something about a man down,” the officer said, as he stepped on board the shuttle. It brought him within direct sight of Cassian’s wound. A single officer strode towards her, flanked by four stormtroopers. Bodhi, looking even filthier against the white armour and precise grey uniform, trailed after.

“I beg your pardon, Lieutenant,” Jyn said, thankful for her mother’s accent as she’d never been before. “I’d get up, but—”

Cassian moaned. It sounded entirely genuine. In his condition, it might even be genuine.

But probably not.

The lieutenant switched on the com at his wrist and held it to his mouth. “We need another medic in Hangar B! We’ve got an officer here in critical condition. I repeat, a medic in Hangar B, urgent.”

Jyn breathed. As he switched the com back off, she said,

“Thank you, sir. My commander would thank you, too, if not for …”

“Indeed,” said the lieutenant. “Who is he? Name and rank?”

She could nearly have screamed. Somehow, she hadn’t thought that far. Names—of course they’d need to have names! And just hope no one checked them. He had to have counterfeit identities, probably more than she did, but she didn’t know any of them. It wasn’t like they had talked about it. It wasn’t like they had talked that much, period.

You’re no better than a stormtrooper.

Suddenly the Rebellion is real for you? Some of us live it.

“He’s a captain,” she said.

“Captain,” Cassian mumbled. The lieutenant’s attention snapped back to him. “Captain Cass …” His voice trailed off, slurring the end of his name into mush.
Horror squeezed Jyn’s heart, tightened an invisible hand about her throat. Even like this, she never once imagined that he might be the one to give them away. He couldn’t be that out of it already, could he? She squeezed his hand as painfully as she could.

“Cass … ein Wil … lix,” he said.

“Captain Willix,” said the lieutenant. He returned his gaze to Jyn, eyeing her haphazard gear. Hopefully eyeing her gear. “And you are?”

_Hallik_ was too similar. And too wanted in five systems. But after a life spent under dozens of pseudonyms, her mind fell blank of anything but reality. _Jyn Erso of Rogue One, daughter of Lyra and Galen Erso._

“Lyr,” she said. “Sergeant Lyr. I’m aide-de-camp to Captain Willix.”

“I see,” said the lieutenant, his neutral voice unreadable.

There was nothing to do but brazen it out. “We were posted on Scarif, sir. Rebels infiltrated the facility and attacked the base.”

“So I’ve heard,” he said grimly. “The three of you are lucky to be alive.”

Cassian coughed up more blood.

Letting her face go blank, Jyn said, “Yes, sir.”

The lieutenant looked nearly abashed. He crouched down to consider Cassian.

“What happened to him?”

“I’m not entirely sure.” Not daring complacency, she ran a reel of her greatest embarrassments through her mind until she felt blood rise to her cheeks. “The Rebels knocked me out and stripped me.”

“Oh,” said the lieutenant, with another glance at her body. “That explains it.”

Jyn repressed her instinctive response. “I couldn’t have been out for more than a few minutes. When I woke up, I … I found what clothing I could and went looking for the captain. I discovered Captain Willix collapsed in the archive itself. As far as I could guess, he actually climbed up to try and hold off the Rebels. Alone, since his droid had been blown to pieces.” She inclined her head towards Kaytoo’s skull.

With only the briefest glance at the decapitated droid, he said, “A brave man.”

Her throat felt tight again. “Yes. Very brave.” Where were the damn medics? “He’d been shot. And fallen, a long way. I don’t know how many bones he broke, but definitely his ribs. By then, the Rebels had got away. When I found him, he climbed the wall of the archive until he got to the point where I could help him.”

The lieutenant whistled. “Not a soldier we want to lose.” Turning back towards the ramp, he muttered, “Where are those damn medics? Ah!”

Despite everything, hope rose in her chest. Jyn followed his glance, and almost cringed. Three Imperials in white, just like … but no. Their uniforms had none of Krennic’s crisp precision, hanging on them like bags and covered in stains and mended strips. Each carried some sort of analysis device,
sticking out of a long-pocketed belt—so long it nearly approached an apron. With them, they wheeled a far more technical-looking cot than this one, its assorted apparatus squeaking and clinking.

“Finally,” the lieutenant called down. “Did you stop in the mess hall on the way here?”

The medic who appeared to be chief, a spare, middle-aged woman with fly-away hair, only shook her head. “I take that to mean that this is our man.”

All three of them rushed up the ramp. After one glance at Cassian, the chief medic snapped, “Out of my way, all of you.”

Cassian had stopped his periodic groaning and gasps, and lay quietly enough, blinking like a sleepy child. No doubt he was sleepy, but Jyn had seen too many quiet deaths to grant that. Every time he closed his eyes, she dug her nails into his wrist until he winced, the slow beat of his pulse continuing under her fingers. If felt as if her own life somehow sustained his, spilled from skin to skin. Like he would die if she lifted her hand from that terrible wound, even for a moment.

“I said all of you.”

Reluctantly, Jyn squeezed his limp fingers one last time and stepped back. There, she could do nothing but stand there, rinsing Cassian’s blood off her skin while the medics transferred him to the medical cot. Helpless, she picked up Kaytoo’s head, ignoring the others’ bemused expressions.

“Careful, now,” warned the woman, while the two male medics hoisted up the furthest end of the gurney to keep Cassian even as they went down the ramp. Jyn hurried with them, the lieutenant keeping pace with her while Bodhi and the troopers trailed after. At least it looked less like open insubordination this way.

Jyn barely paused to look around the hangar. They weren’t the only ones arriving in bad shape; she saw at least a dozen other men being carried in stretchers, some protesting and others no better than corpses. Cassian, to her horror, much more closely resembled the latter. Otherwise the hangar was large, the usual bleak grey, and filled with Imperial ships and Imperial soldiers. She didn’t need to know more than that.

Not yet.

She almost had to run to keep up with the medics, one running some beeping remote over Cassian’s body even as they rushed him to med bay. They chattered at each other in near-incomprehensible medical babble, only a few familiar words popping up here and there. Contusion and punctured and compound fracture.

The lieutenant, easily keeping pace, said, “You managed to escape the facility with him like … this?” He gestured ahead of them.

“Barely. It was madness,” replied Jyn. “He was in better shape before we had to jump into the shuttle. This pilot came looking for survivors and found us.”

“Laudable,” said the lieutenant, apparently allergic to full sentences. “I had been under the impression that Captain Willix was his commander?”

Jyn allowed a note of disdain to touch her voice. “He’s a cargo pilot. He thinks all officers are his commanders.”

The lieutenant snorted. “Rightly so.” He cast a brief look at the stormtroopers and Bodhi, and gave a sniff.
“Thank you for your service, Raka,” said Jyn. “Now clean yourself up and report for duty.”

“Uh,” Bodhi said. “But the captain—”

The lieutenant’s brows drew together. Jyn, glancing back, said sharply,

“That was not a request.” She dared not apologize, even silently, but she thought one as fiercely as she could.

“Right—of course—I beg your pardon, sir. Ma’am.” He saluted and jogged away, back to the hangar. Hopefully, the uniformity of Imperial architecture would provide some direction. He could make it, as long as he didn’t get recognized, or reveal anything, or lose his nerve, or fall into any of the disasters that her ready imagination provided.

*May the Force be with you.*

“How long have you been assigned to Captain Willix?” the lieutenant asked.

“Six years,” said Jyn. Six years ago, she’d been waiting for Saw. But she always passed for older. “He more or less inherited me, to be truthful. My father was one of his father’s engineers, and …” Everyone knew that Imperial Starfleet ran on personal favours and obligations mixed in with nepotism. Whether he disapproved, participated, or anything else, it would be likely enough. And maybe she wouldn’t have to manufacture an easily questioned narrative this way.

“Ah,” he said. “Then I commend you, Sergeant. You might have saved yourself with none any the wiser. Not everyone shows as much loyalty and discipline in the midst of disaster.”

Jyn held her head high. “He is my captain, sir.”

In the hall, dozens of officers, troopers, and droids made their way in both directions. All gave the medics a wide berth, paying little attention to Jyn beyond the occasional bemused glance. Still, she knew she passed her death with every single one of them, hers and Cassian’s both. By the time they reached the med-bay, Jyn felt like she’d never been so exhausted or neurotic in her life.

Their three medics rushed him through. A fourth, posted at the door, peered over his spectacles at them and lifted his datapad.

“Patient?”

“He’s a Captain Willix,” said the lieutenant. “Another one out of Scarif.”

The medic’s lip curled. “This fucking planet. I never want to see it again.”

Who knew? She could agree with the Imperials about something.

“No one’s going to disagree with you there. This is his aide, here,” the lieutenant went on. “She’ll tell you everything you need to know. I have to get back to the hangar.”

“Thank you for your assistance, Lieutenant,” said Jyn, saluting him.

The lieutenant gave a crisp nod, then turned on his heel and strode away with his troopers.

And that was that.

Before she could relish her survival of the first obstacle, though, she had a new nameless Imperial to deal with. He tapped his datapad. “Captain, he said?”
“Yes,” said Jyn.

“Full name?”

“Cassein Willix.” She could only hope it wasn’t some nonsense that he’d come up with in the moment. The bloody, barely conscious moment.

“Height?”

“A hundred and seventy-eight centimeters,” she said, grateful that she’d looked him up in the Alliance databank. There wasn’t much there, of course, but Jyn didn’t follow dangerous blaster-toting men into warzones without digging up everything she could find about them. Even if follow might be putting it strongly. And if she’d paid more attention to the none under spouse and children than his weight and birthdate.

She didn’t dare provide the latter. If Cassein had developed any real identity, it wouldn’t be identical to Cassian’s. Though with that awful name, who knew?

“I’m not sure,” she told the medic. “His age has a way of changing every time he gives it. I think he’s about thirty-five.”

Almost ten years younger, in fact. She wasn’t the only one to wear herself older than her age. And she’d have known it even without the databank. *I’ve been in this fight since—*

It was only two decades ago that disaffected senators started whispering and plotting together. Two decades ago that the Republic tottered on its last legs. Two decades ago that Cassian Andor was six years old, and chose his path.

Definitely better that they didn’t have the details.

The medic snorted. “One of those. Well, it should be good enough. Let’s see.” He glanced over his shoulder at the bay.

To Jyn, it wasn’t much different than the usual grey expanse, touched by gleaming white, and interrupted by curtains and the occasional glass wall. Medics and their assistants rushed this way and that, while droids drifted about, their toneless voices cutting through the hubbub.


Her throat felt raw. “Will he live?”

“Preliminary diagnostics should be coming in. Yes, there they are.”

A good Imperial would stay dispassionate, show nothing but dutiful concern. After she’d come this far, she couldn’t afford to fall apart now. But she’d never pulled anything on this scale before, and she wasn’t a spy, and somehow she couldn’t unclench her fists or breathe quite right. She’d have to do her best, that was all. And hope that, once more, it might be enough.

“What’s his condition?” she demanded.

The medic whistled, scrolling. “Lucky to be alive.”

Jyn was already tired of hearing that.

“Blaster took off a chunk of flesh. There’s a lung damn near shredded. Did he have a bad fall?”
A bad fall. She nearly laughed. “Yes.”

“Figured.” He nodded to himself. “With that many fractures. Quite a bit of blood loss, too, though that’s from the blaster … he’ll be in full immersion for sure. Looks like they’ve called for the bacta already.”

It wasn’t really anything that she hadn’t already guessed. Maybe more bone damage. Part of her felt the same lingering horror as before, echoing around and around her mind from the moment she saw him fall. But a rather greater part was relieved. This massive base would have bacta, lots of it. Probably enough to buy a small planet. And he needed it. They couldn’t even think about escape until Cassian recovered.

“Good,” she said crisply. “I’d better go see him before—”

She’d only taken two steps when the medic seized her arm. Pale and weedy as he looked, his grip held her fast.

“I don’t think so.”

_Force, no._ Had something come up in the records? Cassien Willix wanted for something, or proof of his nonexistence, or …?

She ignored the pounding in her ears. “I beg your pardon? My commander—”

“You’re a contaminant, Sergeant,” said the medic. He gestured at her filthy clothes. Filthy everything.

Jyn winced.

Not unkindly, he said, “He’ll already be under. But if the two of you were on Scarif, you’ve got work to do. Have either of you been posted here before?”

She shook her head.

“Then you’d better go to requisitions.” He gave a slight smile. “Your captain’s going to want a place to sleep and halfway decent equipment. You can serve him better waiting in the quartermaster’s line than than moping around here. The nearest one is easy to find. Just take the elevator up to Hall M27, hard right, two lefts, and you’re there.”

Peering past him, she thought about refusing. Just sticking around here and insisting I have to see my captain until someone let her. But this wasn’t the Rebellion. It wasn’t even the Partisans. It was the Empire. The Death Star. There would be no _someone_ here. At best, they’d probably throw her into a cell for re-conditioning. At worst, well, Cassian himself would be horrified at throwing away their cover over sentiment. It wasn’t like she could do anything to help him, anyway. Or Bodhi, or herself.

Just one thing: keep this charade rolling. She might not have ever enlisted, but she was a Rebel agent now. Just like Cassian.

She said, “Oh, of course. I should have thought of that—the battle rattled me a bit. Elevator to M27 and right, left, left?”

He nodded. “If he does wake, we’ll tell him where you’ve gone. Stressors are a liability to recovery.”

Jyn flashed a smile, more confident than she could begin to feel. “I’m sure his lungs will thank you. I’ll be back when I’ve been decontaminated.”
As she walked away, her entire back prickled. She felt like a dozen blasters must be trained on her at once. But she strode through the hall with as much purpose and assurance as she could muster, and nobody so much as lifted a blaster. Just a few eyebrows.

In the elevator, an ensign looked her up and down. “What the hell are you wearing?”

“Lost my armour on Scarif,” she said curtly.

To her surprise, the bemusement on his face dissolved into sympathy. “Damn. I heard it’s a nightmare down there.”

“It is,” said Jyn.

“And you didn’t have armour? You’re lucky to—”

She fixed her eyes straight ahead. “I know.”

Awkwardly, he shuffled. Neither said another word for the next fifteen minutes, until L14 blinked on the screen.

“That’s mine,” he said. Jyn, practicing her best sneering Imperial, didn’t deign to respond.

Though the ensign towered over her—he must have been well over six feet—he seemed actually intimidated. He stared at his feet until the door opened, and bolted out into a long empty hall.

Not someone destined for glory, she thought. They could only hope that the Death Star contained more like that than like Krennic. Possible, but she dared not count on it.

The door closed, and for a wonderful two minutes, she was alone. Jyn nearly slumped against the wall in relief. Or maybe the floor. Her legs ached, thighs to the soles of her feet. She’d give just about anything for some rest. Instead, she squinted up at the ceiling. There might be cameras. She didn’t see any, but that didn’t have to mean anything. She stayed straight as a protocol droid.

M27 flashed over the screen. Jyn inhaled, locked her hands behind her back, and marched through the door.

Another stage cleared.

Quartermaster Brakas was considerably taller than the ensign, and had far broader shoulders. With weathered skin and bristly eyebrows over narrow eyes, he seemed perpetually angry, not helped by the fact that he never spoke in anything below a shout, except when he dropped to a hoarse whisper. To her relief, he also spoke in a heavy Rylothian accent. Everyone else had talked like they walked off the HoloNet. However far Cassian’s self-command went, she felt it wouldn’t extend to faking an accent under anaesthia.

In any case, though Brakas’s uniform bore only the vaguest resemblance to regulation—his jacket open over an oil-stained shirt and floppy trousers—nobody appeared to pay attention to it. Jyn had no difficulty guessing why. Both muscular and tending a little to fat, he looked like he could snap anyone in two, and very much wanted to. His assistants scurried anxiously at every barked order.

She noticed all this because she spent three hours waiting for him.

Privately, she’d doubted the supposed ease of the medic’s instructions. But at the last left, she turned and saw four lines of people waiting beneath a sign that read QUARTERMASTER, the lines
extending nearly all the way down the hall. Soldiers chatted with each other. Petty officers grumbled and pointedly checked their chronos. And at least a third looked as battered and filthy as Jyn, most ragged and several in non-regulation gear.

Not the way she would have chosen to buy time, but there it was. As her nerves and muscles screamed at her, Jyn determinedly reminded herself that every moment of escaping attention was a moment Cassian had in the bacta tank. And one for Bodhi, if he’d …

Jyn clasped her mother’s crystal, then shoved it under her shirt. He’d be fine. He had to be.

In the crook of her arm, Kaytoo’s head stared vacantly up at her. She bit her lip and turned the face into her elbow.

She would have waited still longer, her gaze fixed on the quartermaster’s bald head, had not one of the assistants taken it upon themselves to count up the survivors. Two hours in, Brakas abruptly wheeled about.

“All of you out of Scarif! Over here!”

Several of those nearest Jyn gave her dirty looks. She ignored them and pushed forward with the others. Even then, she ended up at the end of the Scarif line. In most situations, of course, she would have elbowed and fought her way to the front, never mind her size. Now, she reluctantly gave way to necessity and let herself be shoved to the back.

* Bastards, * she still thought. Cassian had better be grateful.

Then she felt sick, mind alight with the memory of his blood on her hands, on his mouth. She hadn’t forgotten. But just for a moment, *Cassian* had meant the cool-headed spy, somewhere out there glowering at the unworthy, not the man who carved up his own body getting to her.

Soon, she promised herself. He’d be himself again, preaching about the cause, and she, well, she’d figure out what she was. Maybe a Rebel. Definitely free.

The minutes ticked by, filled by Brakas’ shouting and the clacks of the machines along the walls, where some of the assistants took lesser requests. Jyn, grasping Kaytoo’s head as she’d once clutched her stormtrooper doll, tried to think of anything but *this*. The plans had gotten out. The Rebels should be carrying them to the high command at this moment. Maybe those gutless senators would finally do something.

*Something*, in the best case, would be destroying the Death Star. Even if they were all on it. Though she didn’t want to die, it’d be worth it.

But she wasn’t going down without trying her damnedest to pull them all through.

“*You!*” snarled Brakas.

Jyn nearly jumped.

“What’s your identification code?”

*Fuck.*

“I’m here for my commander,” she said, mind racing.

Brakas rolled his eyes. “Then what’s his?”
They had nothing to lose now. Jyn hesitated, then took one last leap.

“Three one five jay eight oh ar six one eight five.”

Grumbling to himself, he typed it into the tech station in front of him. His scowl didn’t shift, and her whole chest shuddered. She held Kaytoo tighter.

“Captain Cassein Willix?” Brakas demanded.

In that moment, she could have kissed Cassian Andor. Blood and all.

“Yes,” said Jyn. “It’s just the two of us. I’m his sergeant. The rest of the team didn’t make it. No equipment, either.”

“Cry to someone who cares,” he said. “All right. Two quarters—”

“One,” Jyn said.

Brakas fixed his glare on her. Horrifyingly, she was reminded of Saw.

“I don’t know what you all got away with on Scarif. On the Death Star, there is no fraternization.”

“Fraternization?” Jyn shook her head violently. “Ugh, no, nothing like that. Captain Willix was very severely injured, and he never listens to the medics. Or anyone. He’ll fu—uh, disrupt his recovery if I don’t keep a close eye on him.” She dared an exasperated smile. “Officers, you know how they are.”

Brakas snorted, but he regarded her with something almost like friendliness. “Sure do. Damn idiots think they’re invincible, when half are the brats of some politician or other, and the other half convinced they’re martyrs.”

“Exactly,” said Jyn, in her most long-suffering tone. Turning it conversational, she added, “Captain Willix is, well, he’s a bit of both. But he’s a good commander when I can keep him in line. Helps that he’s not Coruscanti. Neither of us are.”

He lifted a brow, typing into the station.

“Says he’s Alderaanian.”

“Right,” said Jyn. Bail Organa’s planet? An odd choice, but she’d think about that later. She gestured at her mouth. “And me, well, it’s my mother who came out of Imperial City, not me. I’m from the back-end of nowhere, but I figured out pretty fast that the higher-ups don’t need to know that.”

Brakas actually gave a short laugh. “Good for you. Okay, it’s all in. Captain’s quarters for two, F1813. Datapads, comms, so on. Full set of uniforms—” He gestured at one of the assistants. “Give him measurements for both of you. Should be ready within a standard day.”

“Thanks,” Jyn said. She glanced at the impatient crowds, and gave him a sympathetic look. “Good luck, Sergeant.”

“I’ll need it,” muttered Brakas.

Once again, she walked away unscathed. And this time, as she headed over to the outfitter, she didn’t even feel a target painted on her back. Not safe—that’d be idiotic—but not, at this instant, in danger from the very ordinary people around her. Maybe she was just tired.
Jyn hoped so. She didn’t want to like anyone here.
Chapter 3

Jyn didn’t know what it said about her that she could recall Cassian’s measurements from a glance at his Alliance profile two weeks ago, but had no idea of her own.

Didn’t matter, anyway. The assistant sighed and sent her to an adjoining chamber, where hovering, ball-shaped droids measured some half-dozen men and one other woman, all in various stages of undress. Ten minutes of pokes and prods later, a slightly more human-shaped droid handed her a provisional uniform, and she escaped back to the requisition center.

Then she had to wait for the assistant again. Adjusting her grip on Kaytoo’s head, she imagined what he’d say, were he—what he’d say. If there was anyone who would find it as ridiculous that she stood there in lines while Cassian fought for his life and Bodhi tried to escape torture, it had to be Kaytoo. An excellent use of your time, Jyn Erso. There’s a seventy-eight percent chance of your being caught and killed or blown into smithereens in the meanwhile. Just so you know.

At last, the assistant looked at her again. In a bored voice, he said, “Are you requesting a new K2 unit, as well?”

“Absolutely not,” said Jyn. She caught herself. “Not yet. We’re hoping to extract valuable data from this one.”

“Measurements, then?”

She didn’t feel seven inches shorter than Cassian. She gave them anyway, the assistant sent in the order, and she was free.

In a trapped-in-the-Empire sort of way.

It took her an hour of vague advice, wrong turns, and wandering identical halls to figure out the way to Room F1813. It took another hour just to get there, by which point she felt like her spine might collapse on itself. She typed Cassian’s code into the key panel and stumbled inside.

Like everything else in the Death Star, Cassian’s quarters were a sea of stark grey metal, bleak, severely regular, and devoid of anything like character. She had no doubt that a thousand other chambers looked just like this one.

A square room with two hard beds on either side. Two metal dressers and narrow closets. Two short lockboxes. Bright, steady lighting. And a refresher.

A refresher. Her mouth nearly watered. If a Starfleet captain didn’t rate luxury, he at least got decent amenities. And for Jyn, it was the closest thing to luxury she’d had in a long, long time.

All because they were caught in the Death Star, she reminded herself, and dread welled up in her again. This was a nightmare. They’d be dead in an instant if anyone guessed the truth, or anything remotely approximating the truth. She’d give just about anything to escape, if she could be sure of taking Cassian and Bodhi with her.
Still, she might as well enjoy this while she had it. Jyn set Kaytoo’s head in one of the boxes and headed to the fresher. There, she found a sink, mirror, toilet, and—Force, a shower. A tiny one, but with real water and soap. She could almost have cried.

Jyn set down the Imperial uniform and started peeling off her own gear, so caked with sweat and dirt that they stuck to her. Never mind that. Wincing, she tore the cloth and leather off her skin as fast as she could. In the mirror, she could see whole streaks of bruises—not like Cassian’s, but bad even for her.

She was alive. Nothing else mattered.

Jyn stepped into the shower. When hot water poured over her, she—maybe she did cry. Just a little. At her feet, the water swirled brownish-grey, even before she began relentlessly scrubbing herself. The soap suds in her hand darkened, too, but she could actually see her skin. Jyn blew stands of clean hair out of her face and smiled.

*Force be with you,* she thought at Quartermaster Brakas, then remembered what he was. Oh, well.

Now the water poured clear and clean down her body. Jyn lathered up her hands one last time and washed her necklace clean, polishing the crystal as well as she could. She didn’t think it had saved the mission, saved her. Cassian had done that, and Bodhi, and Jyn herself. But still, she thought of breezing through regulations, Bodhi slipping under the radar, Cassian in bacta, and closed her hand over it.

*Thank you, Mama.*

Ten minutes later, Sergeant Lyr stared back at her from the mirror. At her breast, the crystal shone bright.

She hadn’t come this far to turn back now. Lyra, wherever she was, would understand.

With a sigh, Jyn untied her necklace, sliding it into one of the pockets of her trousers. Then, last of all, she picked up her cap and set it on her neatly parted hair.

Jyn saluted Lyr and strode out.

This time, she managed to find her way in a mere eighty minutes. Bolstered by her uniform, she just marched up to a stormtrooper and asked for directions to the bay on the seventh floor of Quadrant G Northeast. Like most, he obeyed without question.

As she approached the medbay itself, though, her sense of achievement faded. It had been six, nearly seven hours. And she’d heard nothing of Cassian or Bodhi in that time. Nothing of the plans. Nothing at all.

The same medic as before stood at attention in front of the doors.

“Oh,” he said to Jyn. “It’s you again.”

“And you’re still here,” she replied. “Who are you, anyway?”
“Corporal Pralit.” He covered a yawn. “You missed my off-shift. I just started again.”

“Ah,” said Jyn. “Well, as you can see, I’ve been disinfected. May I see my commander now?”

“Let me check his status. Willix, right?”

She nodded, and he tapped into his datapad. After a moment, he swiped across the screen, as lazily as he did everything else. Jyn suppressed the urge to throttle him.

Cassian would be … he wouldn’t be …

She forced herself to even breaths. There was nothing that Jyn, herself, could have done for him. She’d handed him over to—yes, the Empire, but it had been the only way! They all would have died otherwise, or worse. And leaving him alone, well, she had left him to the best care the galaxy offered. It would have been suspicious to stick around like a fretful wife or sister; he’d be the first to say so.

“Alive,” said Pralit.

Jyn closed her eyes, then opened them. To her horror, her legs felt weak and unsteady, almost gelatinous. She hadn’t been off them since before Scarif.

“And?” she demanded.

“He’s been in and out of bacta all day,” he said. His eyes scanned the screen in front of him. “They’ve scheduled another treatment in an hour. Looks like the bones are healing well, so it’s got to be the lung.” Pralit scrolled down. “Oh, sepsis. That explains it.”

“Explains what?” she said.

“Blaster wound must be infected.” He gave her a patronizing look. “It’s shock to the immune system. Usually from bacteria. Even if he’s awake right now, he won’t be able to string two sentences together. But if you insist on seeing him, I can give you access.”

“I insist,” said Jyn.


Walking into the med-bay, she hardly saw anything or anyone in front of her. She just repeated Bed Thirty-One until someone led her to a room with two female medics, a droid, and a man in a raised bed. Behind her, the door slid closed, and the roar of the bay disappeared into the hums and gentle beeps of the machinery.

“You’ll be Sergeant Lyr?” said the smaller of the medics.

“Yes.”

Jyn stepped forward to look down at the man. Cassian, of course—unmistakably Cassian. At the same time, she could hardly see Cassian in the person lying there, weak and pallid and silent. At least a dozen different wires connected him to the machines, as if he were the droid instead of Kaytoo. Liquid slid down the tubes, most of it clear, some bright red.
Cassian himself didn’t so much as stir at her approach. She had seen him sleep before, of course, in
snatches between Yavin IV and Jedha and Eadu. But if anything, he’d seemed more off-putting
asleep than awake. Still tense, still indifferent, just devoid of any sort of animating spirit, with neither
his usual concentrated zeal nor his occasional half-smiles. Now, though, he lay peacefully, the
premature lines on his face smoothed out, eyelashes motionless on his cheek.


“Induced coma,” the medic said. “It’s preferred to anaesthesia for prolonged bacta treatment.”

“Good idea.” As long as it didn’t mean anything in itself, it might be for the best. Force knew what
Cassian could say under anaesthesia.

Dryly, the medic replied, “Thank you for your input.”

Jyn would have prickled at another time. As it was, she only half-heard. She kept her eyes fixed on
Cassian’s chest, the slow, even rise and fall of his breath. Her pulse slowed, as if somehow
constrained by his.

With an effort, she remembered where she was, who she must be. She turned to the medics.

“He reacts poorly to anaesthesia, doctor. You are Doctor …?”

“Esten,” the medic said. She didn’t bother to introduce the taller medic, who remained silent and
exuded an air of deference.

“Dr Esten, what is the captain’s overall condition?”

“Stable,” said Esten. “He’s lucky—”

“Oh, clearly.”

Esten rubbed the bridge of her nose. “Lucky that he didn’t completely shatter the impacted bones.
Apart from the ribs, comparatively few were broken, and all have responded well to treatment. The
fractures in the tibiae are still healing, but the kneecaps, femura, and so on are in good shape. He’ll
walk like it never happened.”

“Apart from the ribs,” Jyn said. She looked back at Esten, whose pale, shrewd eyes peered out from
beneath an uneven fringe of greying black hair. She could have been almost any age between forty
and sixty, but certainly gave the impression of the latter.

“The ribs are a concern,” Esten acknowledged, “chiefly for the sake of his lungs, though they are
healing at a typical pace. We have no reason to expect any unusual degree of trouble.”

There was always reason to expect trouble. Especially now.

“The blaster wound is a greater concern,” Esten went on, “thanks to septic infection. It has been
treated and I believe is now controlled, but we’ll be keeping him under observation to make sure
there are no recurrences. If it heals improperly, there could be permanent damage to the surrounding
tissues and nerves.”
“Right.” At this rate, she’d have to break him out of med-bay. But at this rate, he wasn’t going anywhere soon at all. Brusquely, she added, “What sort of timeline are we looking at?”

Esten regarded her with palpable distaste, which Jyn considered promising. Sympathy would be dangerous—recognition of a deeper attachment, or a different one, than might be expected to exist between a mid-range captain and his aide. And if she disliked Jyn for the sake of an unknown patient, presumably she was a dedicated physician.

“Anything from a few days to a few weeks,” she said. “It depends on his response to the bacta.”

They certainly didn’t have a few weeks.

“Very well,” said Jyn. “When do you expect him to come out of the coma, doctor? I do not mean to waste time watching him sleep.”

Esten’s jaw twitched. “Hopefully tomorrow afternoon, Sergeant. But he will not be equipped for any serious demands on his attention.”

“Of course,” said Jyn. “I will return tomorrow, then.”

She turned on her heel and stalked out of Cassian’s hospital room, through the med-bay, and then out the main entrance, beating back the hot pricking of her eyes all the way. She felt faintly soiled. More than faintly. Did it feel the same to Cassian?

*Everything I did, I did for the Rebellion.* Not the words of a man who enjoyed the choices he made. Not even the words of a man who believed them right, except as necessary sacrifices for a greater moral end. Perhaps he hated this near as much as Jyn. But Cassian had the cause to live by, even his darkest paths lit by that clear, shining purpose. Jyn—she didn’t quite know what she had, even if she managed to claw their way out of this place. She believed, she hoped, she cared about the fight. She did now. And she wouldn’t give up, ever. She just … she couldn’t see herself existing in Cassian’s stark simplicities, everything bleak or brilliant.

In any case, she felt as if she walked backwards, back to Lianna. None of this for the cause, for some great end, just survival. But not hers alone, she reminded herself. Cassian’s and Bodhi’s. They needed her. That was a cause in itself.

“Lyr!”

Lost in her thoughts, Jyn had been paying little more attention on the way out of the med-bay than the way in. Now her head jerked up.

“Pralit,” she returned, and glanced past him. A chill raced over her skin.

A stormtrooper, heavy blaster in hand, stood waiting.

“This trooper insists on speaking to Captain Willix,” Pralit told her. “Some sort of official message.”

Jyn squinted at him. “Captain Willix is not in any condition to receive visitors, official or not. I am Sergeant Lyr, his aide-de-camp.”

The trooper saluted her and stood at attention. “RK-1301, Sergeant. I have an urgent message for the captain with regard to his last post.”
She’d know that voice to her death.

Bodhi.

Jyn and Bodhi walked purposefully towards nothing in particular. Nobody paid the slightest attention; audacity, she thought, once more carried the day.

But she had only rarely seen lone stormtroopers. Even in costume—in uniform—vigilance gnawed at her.

In a clear voice, she said, “The message, trooper?”

“Uh,” said Bodhi. “It’s with regard to his previous post, at the Scarif facility. Confidential.”

“Of course it is,” she said impatiently, and headed towards a random elevator.

The moment its door closed behind them, Bodhi took off the helmet and rubbed sweat from his face. “So I’ve—”

“Put it back on,” ordered Jyn. “You can never be too careful, trooper.”

Bodhi stared at her, then peered up at the ceiling. “There’s no—right, right. Sergeant.” He put the helmet back. “Well, there’s good news and bad news.”

“Bad news first.” She punched in the numbers for her floor. The elevator just beeped at her.

“Captain Willix feared that the Rebel attack on the Citadel had a … uh, a more specific aim than crippling the facility. He was right.”

“Oh?” This elevator must not even be on the same system. Not that it mattered. She chose Floor Q13(G) and hoped it wasn’t busy.

“The Rebels definitely took something from the Citadel. The brass are furious, so it doesn’t seem like it’s been recovered. That’s what my commander says.”

His commander? Jyn wished she dared ask what on earth he’d gotten himself into. And how. Instead, she said,

“A file from the archives, I imagine. And what’s the good news?”

Bodhi shifted his weight from one foot to the other, head dipped as he adjusted his grip on his blaster. Jyn swallowed.

“Well?”

“We managed to track the file, or whatever it was, to the ship that received it. I wasn’t told the name, but apparently it was some sort of consular vessel en route to Alderaan.” His voice wavered. “We tracked the ship and captured the passengers.”
Abruptly, she felt very far away, cut off from her own body, or some temporary occupant of it. The plans had got out. They really had. And then the Imperials had retrieved them anyway. It was all for nothing. Chirrut and Baze. Kaytoo. All those soldiers who had followed her and Cassian to horrific deaths—all of it, every sacrifice, every moment of it, for nothing!

She laid a hand on the wall of the elevator, steadying the body that trapped her. A very ordinary, clean hand, she saw. No filth, no blood. Not even under the nails. Callused skin over functional bones.

Some small, remote part of her could think of nothing but clenching the hand into a fist and beating it against the walls until it bled, until the bones all broke and—and—

*Doesn’t seem like it’s been recovered,* he’d said. Even if it had been, of course, a random stormtrooper wouldn’t be told. But stormtroopers might well be told if the higher-ups were enraged over something. They’d be the ones sent to recover the plans, wouldn’t they?

Jyn lived again, the pulse at her throat entirely her own.

“All the passengers?”

Bodhi paused, then nodded. “Yes. Darth Vader himself captured Princess Leia and is bringing her here.”

“Princess Leia,” said Jyn, trying to think of who the hell that was. The Rebellion had a princess? Of course it did.

“She’s the daughter of Queen Breha of Alderaan,” he said. “And Senator Organa, though she’s had his seat in the Senate for a couple of years.”

“This Princess Leia is a traitor?”

“A Rebel spy,” he affirmed.

*Like Cassian.* Soon there would be another Rebel here, on this very … well, on this moon-sized base. She might end up hundreds of miles off, or not. But nevertheless, here.

And a captive.

“I was transferred to this quadrant only today,” Bodhi said carefully. “I had no trouble, since Princess Leia and all the rest of it has everything in an uproar. That tells you how chaotic it is right now.”

Through a veil of horror, she replied, “Her capture is … is certainly good news. I am surprised that I hadn’t heard it yet.”

“Nobody knows the details,” he said, “but my commander says that she’s still managing to cause trouble.”

“I can believe it,” said Jyn. Despite her best intentions, her voice shook, either from fear or that sliver of hope. She herself couldn’t have said. But she thought: if they’d gone after this princess to seize the plans, and captured her, and she continued to cause them trouble … she must have done something with them.
Probably.

And whatever it was, if the Empire captured everyone onboard, then—what? Were the plans hidden? Lost with the ship? Or somehow passed on before the capture?

Jyn sent the elevator back to the med-bay’s floor. As they walked out, towards the correct one, she said,

“That doesn’t seem particularly confidential.”

“It’s all the transfers,” said Bodhi. “And the excitement, I think. Things have a way of getting out.”

Jyn thought of her father, and her voice trembled again. “I suppose so.”

During the hour it took them to reach Cassian’s quarters, Jyn either barked orders at Bodhi or closely questioned him, ignoring his nonsense answers. With anyone else, she might have enjoyed it. With Bodhi, she just felt like slime.

Yet again, she wondered how someone as fundamentally decent as Cassian did it. And this was just making someone feel bad, maybe. Not sabotage and assassinations and who knew what else.

*Sabotage.* She didn’t think anything they might manage could seriously harm the Death Star. But maybe something—plans or no plans, maybe they could make some use of their presence here. Secret cards up the sleeve for the Rebellion, even though the Rebellion itself could have no idea.

At the door, Bodhi said uncertainly, “Sergeant?”

“What?” she snapped.

“Are you … inviting me into your quarters?”

Despite everything, she had to repress a smile. He sounded profoundly unenthusiastic. A good wrinkle if anyone happened to be observing, and hopefully genuine if they weren’t.

“Don’t be absurd,” said Jyn. “I just need your comlink code in the extremely unlikely case that Captain Willix wants to hear you personally. It’ll only be a few minutes.”

She typed in the passcode and marched inside, pretending not to care whether he followed her or not. After a pause, he marched through just before the door snapped back into the wall.

Jyn sat down on the nearest bed, exhaling a quick breath. “Thank the Force.”

Voice still muffled, Bodhi said, “Have you checked for—?”

*Bugs.* With all her paranoia, she hadn’t thought of that. The privacy of the captain’s quarters had seemed like a sanctuary, or the closest thing they had to it.

“No,” said Jyn, and they spent the next several minutes combing the quarters for any sort of surveillance devices. They found nothing, which might or might not mean they existed.
“Never mind,” she decided. “I’ll risk it. We have to be able to talk openly somewhere.”

Bodhi, helmet in his arms, heaved a sigh of relief. “And there have got to be hundreds of thousands of people on this thing. They won’t be watching every random stormtrooper or NCO.”

That made sense. But her nerves still buzzed. She sat down before her legs could buckle.

“I can’t believe we did this,” Bodhi went on, and flopped onto one of the beds, armour and all, staring at his helmet. “I mean, I didn’t really think we could, even when I was trying.”

“You know what they say,” said Jyn. “Fear’s a great motivator.”

“Fear? You?” He turned his head to look at her, brows lifted in almost comical surprise.

She had always been afraid. Afraid of capture, death, loss, betrayal. Always something. The fearless didn’t live for survival alone, as she had. It made for a small, desperate life, but it had been hers. She didn’t even realize how miserable it was, until—

“Yes, me,” she said, meeting Bodhi’s eyes. The fearful didn’t always live for survival, either. “Maybe you noticed that I’ve been a bit over-cautious here.”

He gave an uncertain smile. “I’m not sure we can be over-cautious here. Not if we’re going to survive.”

“We have to do more than survive,” Jyn said. She desperately wanted to lie down, as well, but couldn’t bring herself to do it. Instead, she leaned her elbows against her thighs, chin against her curled hands. “They’re one princess away from getting the plans back. We’ve got to figure out a way of stopping them.”

“Or none of it mattered.” She could hear his gulp from across the room. “But what can we do?”

“I don’t know.” Jyn didn’t think she’d ever been so exhausted in her life, even with Saw. Her head felt like a patchwork of a thousand different bruises, every muscle ached, and she hadn’t eaten for hours. Still, she forced herself to think.

Break Princess Leia out once she gets here, Jyn’s instinct said, but they’d never get away with it. Not with no path of escape. Track down the princess, maybe, see what she’d done with the plans. They could figure out their next move from there.

And there couldn’t be a next move until Cassian got better. Squeezing her eyes shut, Jyn pressed the heel of her hand against the jabs of pain in her forehead. She couldn’t help Cassian. Not now; she’d done all she could for him.

“You saw Cassian in the hospital, didn’t you?” said Bodhi. He was no Jedi, nor Temple monk either, but she still eyed him. “He’s the spy, not us. He must have some ideas.”

“He hasn’t woken up yet,” Jyn replied. If she could, she’d wipe the memory of Cassian limp in that bed from her mind. Forever. “They’re keeping him under until the worst is over. So not many ideas, no.”

She regretted the harshness in her voice as soon as she spoke—regretted it with Bodhi, if few others.
Rather to her surprise, however, he didn’t flinch or even look that somber.

“How is he?”

“Alive,” said Jyn grimly. But no need to make things worse than they already were. She managed a tight smile. “The doctor thinks he’ll make a complete recovery. It’s just a question of when.”

“When,” he repeated. Sitting up, he set the stormtrooper helmet aside. “No way we’ll get away with this for very long.”

She honestly didn’t know.

“The Willix thing is real,” she said at last. “I mean, what goes for real with Cassian. He gave me his code while you were shouting for help. It’s how I got all this.” Jyn waved at the quarters.

“So we might make it.”

*If the Rebellion doesn’t have the plans.* She didn’t feel the need to say it aloud. “It’s possible.”

“I can keep my head down,” said Bodhi. “Is that all we do now?”

“No.” Jyn’s hands balled even tighter. “We need to find out everything we can about what’s going on. Listen to the troops’ gossip, that commander of yours, anything you can hear. But don’t risk your cover. I’ll do the same thing.”

With a heavy breath, Bodhi nodded. “All right.” He rose, his face strained as his armour jangled against him.

“And Bodhi?”

He blinked over at her.

Her thoughts felt sluggish, but they latched onto one thing. With a final effort, she managed to get to her own feet and walk over to him.

“If your unit gets deployed, go. It’ll be your best chance at escape.”

Bodhi did flinch that time. “But you and Cassian—”

“Go,” repeated Jyn. Setting her fists on her hips, she scowled up at him. “One of us living is better than none.”

He hesitated, turning the helmet over in his hands.

“You can try and get word to the Rebellion, let them know we’re stuck in here.” She didn’t think they could seriously do anything, but you never knew. Either way, if Bodhi got out, it’d be—worthwhile, in its way. Even if she and Cassian died the way she’d started out, stuck in an Imperial prison.

Finally, he nodded. “I will. But I don’t think it’s very likely for this unit. It’s a mess. Anyway, while I’m here, how am I supposed to get information to you or Cassian? If someone notices that we keep meeting up, then …”
“We can’t meet,” she agreed. For once, though, it was a problem with an easy answer: the very pretense on which she’d led him inside. “Give me your comlink code. I’ll sync ours up as soon as we have them.”

A bit sheepish, he read off the string of letters and numbers, readily accepting that she’d remember. She would, of course, but the easy faith touched her nonetheless. She didn’t even wince when Bodhi suddenly wrapped his arms around her, the panels of his armour biting into her bruises.

“We’ll make it,” he whispered. “Somehow.”

“The same way we’ve done everything else,” said Jyn. Awkwardly, she returned the hug. “May the Force be with you, Bodhi.”

With a determined smile, he put the helmet on his head and headed to the door.

“And with you, Jyn.”

Chapter End Notes

In the OT scripts, the Empire's navy is called "Imperial Starfleet." I cling to it because I find it deeply amusing.
As Bodhi marched out of her quarters, Jyn stayed in the middle of the room, staring at the door. It slammed down behind him, and she still did nothing.

With a low *whirr*, it locked. Jyn staggered to the nearest bed and collapsed.

It was hard, and narrow, and an unimaginable relief. Finally, she let her muscles relax, soreness cascading through her body. She’d learned long ago that it was a worthwhile, and necessary, trade for constant tension. When you lived off your body, you had to take care of it. Pretty rich coming from Saw, but still.

A vague thought that she should remove her uniform touched the edges of her mind. A wrinkled uniform would draw more attention than none at all. But she let her tired eyes close, just for a moment, and immediately sunk into unconsciousness.

Jyn slept like the dead for ten hours. It might have been more, if not for the banging on her door. Blearily, she opened her eyes and fumbled for a chronometer. Nothing. Nothing at all, just air. Her other hand lay numb under her cheek.

“Sergeant!” someone shouted. “This is Requisitions!”

*The Death Star.*

Grumbling to herself, she crawled out of bed and made it to the door. A pair of stormtroopers stood outside, a long metal cart between them.

“Here are the supplies requested by Captain Willix,” one of them said.

“How punctual,” said Jyn, in her closest approximation of chilly approval. She’d have to ask Cassian how he did it. “Bring them in, troopers.”

Obediently, they wheeled the cart into her quarters. She chose to assume it wasn’t an elaborate plot to kill her; that seemed unlikely, when they could just shoot her if they wanted. No elaborate plots needed on the Death Star, except her own.

Again, she couldn’t help but imagine Kaytoo. *A seventy-one percent chance against being riddled with holes may be technically favourable odds, but I would hardly consider them good. Not that I’m the one with weak fleshy organs at stake.*

She didn’t think they’d exchanged above three civil sentences, but she’d give an arm to have him back.

*Not an invitation,* she thought at the Force.

At a gesture from her, the stormtroopers unloaded piles of uniforms and underclothes onto Cassian’s bed, along with chronometers, communicators, standard-issue datapads, a cylinder, emergency packages, and assorted other kits she didn’t recognize. Last, they lifted a long, flat, evidently heavy metal box off the cart.

One of the stormtroopers gestured at the passkey on the large box. “The code is”—he checked his datapad—“Zero six one five eight five six two seven nine two. Any questions?”
“No.”

“Then sign here.”

She paused. Everything she’d managed so far had passed under the shield of Cassian’s persona. The more of a data trail she left, the more likely it was to be caught. But she couldn’t think of anything else to do, so she went over and scribbled out *Isidar Lyr* as indecipherably as possible. The stormtroopers just saluted her and rolled the cart out.

Jyn seriously considered going back to sleep. There’d be no standing orders for the nonexistent Sergeant Lyr, after all, only whatever Willix was supposed to be doing. By now, though, she felt decidedly awake, and almost queasy with hunger. She showered and dressed, the fitted uniform actually more difficult than the other one. She’d just have to say she’d gained weight on Scarif, she decided, trying to replicate the regulation folds.

On the way out, the new lockbox caught her eye. She stopped, then turned back and ran the stormtrooper’s code through. Sure enough, the box clicked open.

Jyn smiled. Not the tight half-smile she allowed herself now and then, not the amusement that sometimes broke through reserve or fear, but a real, open smile.

The box was full of blasters. A good long rifle with assault and sniper settings. Three mid-sized ones, variations on the usual Imperial standard. Two smaller ones. Still grinning, she set aside the maybe third-best one she’d stolen from Cassian two weeks ago, and shoved the smallest of the standard-issue blasters into her belt.

Imperials didn’t do much well, in Jyn’s view. But they made damn good weapons.

Snatching up her comlink and a datapad, she headed out to find a mess hall. It didn’t take long; each floor of each quadrant turned out to have one, full of mildly repellent smells, humans crammed into lines and clusters, and cooking droids. Jyn didn’t like crowds, but she was *very* hungry. She headed in, ignoring the little flashes of pain as people jostled her bruises.

It took forty minutes to acquire some sort of slop. In the meanwhile, she listened as closely as she could to the conversations around her. But even the other NCOs—no, just the NCOs—didn’t talk about anything important. She learned that a new speeder had come out, and either rendered the old model obsolete or made it seem like a Corellian fighter. She learned that Brakas’ conviction that no fraternization existed on the Death Star was a pleasant fantasy. She learned that nobody much cared about Scarif beyond the archivists, and even some of those viewed the disaster as a blessing in disguise, should it further their dreams of overhauling the filing system.

“No standardized format,” a tall man said heatedly, “yet no decent encryption, no redundant systems, no duplicate copies, no failsafes, nothing! No wonder that place looked like a gold mine to the Rebels.”

“Not any more,” said the woman he spoke to. “It’s all gone now.”

The man groaned.

Also, Jyn learned that everyone hated the food. She couldn’t judge them for that much. It tasted as awful as it smelled and looked. She’d had worse, though, and she was starving. Jyn all but inhaled it, to the amazement of the Imperials around her.

“Been awhile?” said a corporal.
Jyn wiped her mouth. “Just a day. But it was a long one.”

“Scarif?”

She nodded.

Indifferently, he said, “Heard it’s hell down there.”

She just nodded again. Even for their cover, Jyn wasn’t about to willingly dredge up memories of the little bit she’d seen from their vantage point in the Citadel. The corporal, in any case, seemed no more interested than he was in his stew, but he kept talking pleasantly enough. To her annoyance, however, he said nothing of substance beyond his opinion that things would be better with Governor Tarkin running the Death Star.

“Can’t be worse than Krennic,” said a sergeant across from them, one of the only female ones Jyn had yet seen. “Backwater creep who thinks he’s better than the people doing the real work. I saw him flouncing around in that cape once, like he’s Darth fucking Vader. Ugh. It’ll be just our luck if he made it off. I bet he has.”

Jyn felt an unexpected glow of benevolence. Cheerfully, she said, “No, he didn’t. Some Rebel shot him in the back.”

“Good riddance.” The sergeant poked her fork into an indistinct mass at the bottom of her stew, and lifted it up to peer at it. “Think it’s safe?”

“No,” said the corporal.

She ate it.

“Let me know if you get the runs,” he said.

“Fuck you, Zekheret.”

He grinned. “Is that a promise or a threat?”

Pointedly turning towards Jyn, the sergeant said, “Anyway, who are you?”

“Isidar Lyr,” said Jyn, fear spiking beneath her rib cage all over again. She let her smile turn roguish. “I’d tell you what I do, but I’d have to kill you.”

“I’m Bain Efrah,” she said. “Mind killing him for me?”

Jyn laughed. “No problem. But you’ll have to hide the body.”

“It’s a deal.”

“You can try,” said Zekheret. Jyn glanced at his hands, wrapped as loosely as possible around the utensils, as if they might contaminate him. His skin was pale and smooth. She doubted he’d seen a day of action in his life. “I’ve got a foot on you both and twenty pounds of muscle.”

“Because that matters so much against a blaster,” Efrah replied. Leaning towards Jyn, she said in a perfectly audible whisper, “This is why he’s still a corporal.”

“Hey!” he protested.

An indistinct alarm touched Jyn. She rose, mumbling something about her commander, and picking
up the metal dishes. “I’ll see you around, maybe.”

Zekheret winked at her. “Hopefully.”

Behind him, Efrah rolled her eyes. “Later, Lyr.”

As Jyn strode away, her muscles remained strung tight. She didn’t think anything of moment had occurred, much less that they suspected her. She didn’t feel like she escaped death with each body she passed. Yet something in her screamed danger, and it didn’t stop until she made it out of the mess hall.

Far too many people, Jyn decided. For as much of her life as she’d spent in cities, Jyn didn’t like them, the way you got stuffed in with strangers at best and left to rot at worst. And the Death Star seemed like nothing so much as the unholy spawn of Imperial City and every military base in the galaxy.

Beyond that, she—she didn’t much like intelligence work, either. Not this undercover nonsense. It was one thing to become another person; it was quite another to just pretend, ceaselessly.

But it had to be done, if they were to have any chance of accomplishing anything in here. Jyn thought of Jedha, of Chirrut and Baze and Kaytoo, the laser striking Scarif, her father dead in her arms. Cassian in her arms, too, gasping out codes and blood.

She squared her shoulders and marched on.

With little else to do, Jyn stalked the halls of the Death Star, trying to listen to everything without drawing suspicion from anyone. In two hours, she heard nothing but the tedious or inane, and finally gave up, wandering down to the med-bay. A new medic was stationed at the door, both less irritable and less accommodating than Pralit. But he added her comlink code into Cassian’s information and said someone would contact her when he woke, so she supposed it counted as success.

Nevertheless, she started when the comlink buzzed. Thankfully safe—safeish—inside an elevator, Jyn switched the button to accept the channel. Cassian shouldn’t be awake yet. Had something happened? Had …

“Sergeant Lyr?” said Bodhi.

She smiled. “This is Lyr. What is the situation?”

“Uh … normal. I’m in a fresher.”

Jyn stayed silent for a moment. Then she said, “Good for you?”

“Alone,” he added. “So. It, uh, turns out I have substandard aim, but that’s not as unusual as I thought it would be.”

Jyn, who had outrun her share of stormtroopers long before Jedha, nearly snickered. “I imagine not. Well, as long as you aren’t demoted to sanitation …”

“You can’t be, really,” he replied. “There’s a rotation, so nobody gets—we’re supposed to be equal, right? My unit’s rotation ended just before I arrived.”

She said, “Lucky you.”

Bodhi’s laugh was a little shrill. “That’s me.” He cleared his throat. “Anyway, my commander
decided to just have all the new transfers practice with the rookies until they can get us straightened out. So I am … fine? I think.”

“Glad to hear it,” said Jyn. “Does your commander have a name?”

“JA-1813.”

“JA-1813,” she repeated.

“We mostly just call him the Commander.” His nervous whisper dropped still lower. “It’s quiet around here, but he says we should be ready. Darth Vader himself is bringing Princess Leia here to be questioned, and anything could happen after that.”

*Darth Vader.* The name sounded vaguely familiar, apart from Efrah’s sneer at Krennic. Must be someone important, since she’d never paid much attention to the inner workings of the Imperial hierarchy. And not military, with that … title? It sounded like a title.

Whoever he was, if he managed to extract this woman’s secrets—Jyn’s stomach roiled. Maybe she’d hold up. If she had anything like Cassian’s resolve, she might. But Cassian was extraordinary. Jyn trusted *him*; that trust did not extend to everyone else in the Alliance. It didn’t extend to anyone else in the Alliance. And she knew nothing of Leia Organa.

“He’s right,” said Jyn. “Be ready. Whatever happens, we’ve got to be prepared for it.”

“I’ll try,” Bodhi said.

*We’ll need to do better than try,* thought Jyn, but—it wouldn’t help. Bodhi’s nervous attempts had accomplished more than all her years of escapades, anyway.

They clicked off, and Jyn checked the time. 13:05. Still early, but just in case, she headed to the med-bay and lurked outside. Fortunately, as it turned out: not fifteen minutes later, her com buzzed again.

A toneless voice said, “Sergeant Isidar Lyr.”

“Yes?”

“You are the primary contact for Captain Cassen Willix. Captain Willix is currently being removed from his final full bacta immersion.”

Another jolt in her chest, this one a mix of relief and anxiety and hope. “Thank—”

The channel broke. Undoubtedly it had been a droid, and not one with Kaytoo’s sophistication. She sprang up, barely pausing for the gatekeeper’s authentication before racing into the bay.

*I’m his sergeant,* she had to remind herself. Three times. His aide, not his—whatever she and Cassian were. More than ally, less than … she didn’t know. Something in her prickled at the idea of them as less than anything. They’d lived more in these three weeks than most did in decades. Risked more, done more, for the fight and for each other.

That wasn’t helping. Lyr, she reminded herself. She had to be Sergeant Lyr, faithful right hand to a difficult but heroic captain. She had never been anyone like that, but she had been people unlike herself many times. She could do this.

Slowing her steps to a confident stride, Jyn pushed *welcome home* and *all the way* and *your father would be proud of you* to a distant corner of her mind. Isidar Lyr did not care about such things. She
cared about serving the Empire in general and her commander in particular. She respected the
captain’s good qualities and worked to ameliorate the bad. She valued the good working relationship
built up over a half-dozen years. In those capacities, and those alone, she concerned herself with
Cassein Willix’s welfare.

“Ah, Sergeant. You are extremely punctual.”

At the door to Bed 31, Jyn halted, then turned around to sneer at Dr Esten.

“Yes, I am.” She compressed her lips. “I received the alert about Captain Willix. Has he regained
consciousness?”

“No.” Esten jabbed at the passcode panel so quickly that Jyn almost couldn’t track the numbers.
Almost.

50477.

She led Jyn into the room, very much as it had been before. An assistant waited in the corner.
Machines hummed, if fewer of them, only attached at the wrist. And Cassian lay in the bed, still
disturbingly pale and tranquil.

Jyn blinked. “You shaved him.”

“Yes,” the assistant said. “It’s standard procedure.”

“He’s going to murder me.”

A muscle in Esten’s jaw twitched. “He will not be murdering anyone soon, Sergeant. Now—”

“Don’t underestimate him.” With a glance at the vitals, Jyn barrelled past to sit herself in the chair
beside Cassian’s bed. It was the only chair.

“If you have any higher concerns than the state of your commander’s beard,” said Esten, “we have
placed a full medical log in his file. It contains a complete list of his diagnoses, the treatments
prescribed and given, and his status at each stage. He should regain consciousness at any moment,
but you may wish to consult it while—”

Jyn made a dismissive gesture. “Later, perhaps. I trust you haven’t killed him.”

“No,” Esten said tightly.

Cassian’s hand lay within inches of hers. Foolishly, Jyn recalled grasping each other after he shot
Krennic, his fingers clutching at her waist as they waited to get blown out of the sky, her nails
digging into his palm and wrist every time he faded. She felt swamped by the impulse to reach out
again, comfort herself with their lives running together, hold that link fast and corporeal. Instead, she
clasped her hands in her lap.

The minutes ticked by, silent but for Cassian’s slow breaths and the others’ shallower ones, and the
assistant checking on Cassian’s vitals now and then. Nothing, Jyn had thought, could seem longer
than those hours in Requisitions, but this did, stretching on and on and on.

Something beeped on one of the machines, and Jyn tensed up.

“Is he—”

Cassian opened his eyes.
Now, she couldn’t help it. Jyn seized his hand, the tension in her body at once dissolving into relief and tightening still further. He blinked several times. She’d never seen him less like himself—dazed, pale, beardless. Nevertheless, here he was. She just had to hope for the best.

Jyn retained the presence of mind to say loudly,

“Captain Willix? Do you recognize me?”

Cassian’s dark eyes focused, glancing from the machinery on his right, to Esten, to Jyn, to the data station and assistant behind her. Then they settled back on Jyn.

“Yes,” he said. Trying to sit up, he immediately started to cough.


Although the doctor could not have appreciated the usurpation, she said nothing, just gestured at her assistant, who filled and brought a cup to them. Esten herself handed the cup to Cassian.

His hand shook—not enough to spill the water, but until the fall, Jyn had never seen him anything but steady. He regarded either his grip or the water with distaste.

“No contaminants, sir,” she assured him. “We’re safe on the Death Star. All friends here.”

Esten snorted.

“Allies,” Jyn amended.

“Good enough,” said Esten. “I may not say this again, but for now, listen to your sergeant. This is Medical Bay Three on the finest Imperial facility in the galaxy. You’re in good hands, Captain Willix.”

Cassian’s gaze flickered to Jyn, and she nodded. Without another moment’s hesitation, he gulped down the entire cup of water.

There was trust, she thought, and then there was trust.

He coughed again, but when he spoke, he sounded more human. “What … happened?”

“You were shot in a Rebel attack on Scarif,” said Esten. “You fell a considerable distance and fractured many of your bones in the process before Sergeant Lyr rescued you. You’re lucky to be alive.”

“Lucky?” Cassian looked down at himself. “Clearly.”

With a triumphant smirk, Jyn said, “I loaded you into a shuttle and tried to escape Scarif, but I wasn’t sure you’d make it, sir. Thankfully, the Death Star showed up then, and I took the liberty of seeking access. You’ve been in bacta ever since.”

“Not the entire time,” said Esten. “But frequently, yes.”

“How … long?” His careful speech might be affected, but Jyn didn’t think so. His breathing remained shallow, every exhalation near a pant, and his voice hoarse.

Belatedly, she detached her hand. “Just over a day, sir. I requisitioned a set of quarters and equipment, so everything will be in order once you get discharged.”
Cassian looked at Esten, who had walked to his other side and now studied him with a neutral expression.

“I am ready to go now.”

“Absolutely not,” said Esten. Jyn, to her own dismay, agreed with her. He looked even paler than he had asleep, drawn and exhausted.

She forced a laugh. “Captain, I feel certain you don’t get discharged until you can walk under your own power.”

“I can—” Breaking into another coughing fit, he scowled.

“Mmhmm.” Esten sounded even more unimpressed than when she spoke to Jyn. “We didn’t spend all these hours and resources on you to see you throw it away. I know your sort.”

Even through his coughs, his eyebrows rose.

“I doubt that,” said Jyn scornfully.

Esten ignored her. “And you can go back to working yourself to the bone after I’ve washed my hands of you, Cassein Willix. You will remain under observation until all possibility of complications has been eliminated.”

Cassian glared at her.

“I rescind my doubts,” Jyn said. She levelled a stern look at him, noticing his increasingly heavy blinks as he tried to keep his eyes open. “Captain, you’ll be no good to anyone in this state. You need to rest. We’ll get everything straightened out once you’re better.”

“Quite so,” said Esten.

He mumbled something that couldn’t have been complimentary to either, but didn’t protest further. Jyn could only consider that proof that he had no business going anywhere, and nearly said so. Instead, she held her tongue like a proper aide, a half-dozen poorly defined emotions churning inside her as he leaned his head back against the pillows. In moments, he was asleep again.

“Some exhaustion is to be expected,” Esten said coolly. “He should be more himself once he gets real sleep and the bacta finishes its work.”

“Very well,” said Jyn, the flash of panic subsiding into mere worry. She rose, and turned to Esten. “I will leave him to rest, but remain nearby. Contact me when he wakes again or if his condition changes.”

A flicker of irritation crossed the doctor’s face. “Of course.”

“Also,” said Jyn, watching the irritation deepen, “I would make a suggestion, though naturally I would not dream of questioning your expertise.”

Esten’s mouth pursed so tightly that her lips all but disappeared. In a voice dryer than Jedha, she said, “Naturally.”

“I gather that excitement of any kind can have dangerous effects in this stage of recovery.” Jyn dared another glance at Cassian, working to hold her blank expression. “It would be best, I think, if those around him refrained from mentioning any news. Good or bad, I fear the effect on him may be
harmful."

Don’t tell him about the princess.

Esten looked startled, annoyance fading into a sort of reluctant respect. “Very likely. I already reached that conclusion, but your judgment does you credit, Sergeant. You may be assured that he will hear of nothing from us.”

Jyn nodded and left. Sooner or later, he’d have to hear about the fate of the plans—sooner, certainly. But not yet. And not from a stranger.

Her thoughts briefly drifted to Esten. She seemed as competent and disciplined a physician as Jyn first hoped. Part of her, in fact, wished it hadn’t been necessary to hide behind antagonism. She didn’t want to make friends of Imperials, but she respected skill. Skill wasted on the Empire, though.

Why did someone like Esten do it? The pay? She imagined so for Brakas, but surely Esten could find work anywhere. Maybe she just wanted reliable equipment and regulations. Maybe she wanted to see the galaxy. Maybe it had seemed the most straightforward career for whatever reason. Maybe anything. But it didn’t seem malice, at all. Jyn couldn’t help but wonder how many people like that filled the Empire. How many Bodhi Rooks were there with just that bit less awareness and courage, and no Galen Erso to prompt them down another path?

More of them than men like Krennic, she felt sure. And far more of them than resisted the Empire in any capacity. Those like Esten probably never harmed another person in their lives, while Force knew how much blood Cassian had on his hands. No doubt she lived a life of conscience, while Cassian clung to desperate hopes every time he pulled a trigger. But, well, if you could live a life of conscience under the Empire, what was your conscience worth, anyway?

Already tired, Jyn stalked into the waiting area. Three others sat there; all of them looked like murder when she tapped her fingers on the arms of her chair, but she had to do something. She couldn’t just sit here and torment herself with ethical philosophy. Finally, she took out the datapad and brought up her supposed commander’s profile. She’d have to learn it all, anyway, and sooner better than later.

Cassein Willix, she discovered, was a thirty-four-year-old man from some Alderaanian backwater. He’d attended university in the ancient planetary capital itself, and still listed Aldera, Tiratlan as his off-duty residence. He spoke something called Serepta natively, along with Basic, Huttese, and for some reason, Rodian. He was an only child, both parents dead, with no other kin. He owned a KX droid. His skills mixed command training, actual field experience, and proficiency with data programming, specializing in droids. He’d occupied posts throughout the galaxy, under a wide variety of commanders, his record of service detailed enough that even she would have readily accepted his existence had she not known better.

Jyn, something of a connoisseur of false identities, nearly whistled. It was one thing to manufacture a basic one, though even that could be difficult enough. But to manufacture one at this level of complexity, and maintain it—that took doing. Cassian aside, Rebel intelligence must have some first-rate people.

Not that she hadn’t learned that much on Scarif. But though all the Partisans had some experience of everything, she’d specialized in slicing. This would have taken her months with far better equipment than she’d ever touched. And the records went on past that, seamlessly linked to real outposts, real bases, real officers. Yet nobody had ever broken the identity. Amazing.

Jyn spent the next hour admiring and memorizing Cassein Willix’s information, until Bodhi contacted her. She left the med-bay to talk, however discreetly, in some semblance of privacy. They
had little enough to exchange, however, beyond assurances of mutual survival. He hadn’t discovered much today except the name of the planet where Darth Vader caught up with Princess Leia—Tatooine. Some Outer Rim hellhole controlled by Hutts, but more to the point, astrographically near to Scarif. She hadn’t gotten far. The only thing like good news were rumours that Vader sent troopers to the surface of the planet. But the Death Star stormtroopers neither knew nor cared about the details; they only mentioned it at all in sympathetic dismay at the idea of a mission on Tatooine. Rather to her horror, Bodhi apologized for the paucity of news.

“I’ve learned less than that,” said Jyn. “Most of all, I want you to take care of yourself. Don’t do anything dangerous.”

“Anything dangerous? On the Death Star? No, ma’am.” He laughed, then hurriedly said, “I didn’t mean—”

“I know what you meant,” said Jyn. Then, as far as she dared, she told him about Cassian waking up. “A great relief to us all, of course. He was tired, but acted exactly as Captain Willix ought.”

“Thank the …” Bodhi coughed. “Uh, the doctor. That’s—that’s great.”

“Yes,” said Jyn. The word felt harsh in her mouth, and entirely insufficient, yet nothing else fit.

He started to ask more, but broke off. Jyn couldn’t quite hear; by the low murmur of voices, it didn’t seem disastrous. Bodhi returned with a groan. “We’re headed to the shooting range. I’ll report again soon, Sergeant.”

“See that you do,” she replied, in her most sergeant-ish tones. She hoped he didn’t take them too seriously.

Afterwards, Jyn thought of exploring or eavesdropping more, but she couldn’t bring herself to stray that far from the med-bay. With the drugs and bacta draining out of Cassian’s system, anything could change. If he needed her, she meant to be there.

It was evening, or what went for evening on the Death Star, when her comlink rang again. This time, the voice that came through sounded very human.

“Sergeant Lyr? Please come to Bed Thirty-Nine immediately.” Jyn could hear raised voices in the background. “The captain is, uh, alert.”

“Of course.”

Cassian causing trouble sounded vastly more hopeful than Cassian wan and accommodating. In what might be record time, Jyn rushed down the now-familiar route to 39. On the way, she wondered if Esten had noticed her memorizing the code, or simply forgotten. Instead, she found the door still withdrawn into the frame, the passage open.

Even before she got there, she could hear Cassian.

“I am an officer in his Imperial Highness’s fleet,” he was saying, his accent much heavier than usual, and his voice much quicker. But there was nothing thin or breathless about it. “I have much better things to do than sit here wasting my time and yours!”

Jyn laughed outright.

“Please speak more slowly, Captain Willix,” said Esten, in the tone that Jyn already recognized as striving for patience. “I cannot understand you.”
“I—am—a—Starfleet—captain. Can you understand that much?”

“Of course, but—”

“Good evening, sir,” Jyn said, walking up behind the doctor.

For the first time, Esten seemed relieved to see her. “Sergeant Lyr. Perhaps you can talk some sense into the captain.”

Doubtfully, Jyn turned to look at Cassian. The moment she did, relief washed over her. He sat as straight as ever, features set into the same unimpressed glower, colour high, and arms crossed over his chest. It was somewhat more impressive when he wasn’t wearing a hospital gown—somewhat—but she’d never been happier to see Cassian Andor scowl. Jyn bit down hard on a smile.

“Perhaps, Lyr, you will talk sense into the doctor,” he snapped, still in that deliberately thickened accent.

Jyn glanced between them. “What am I talking sense about?”

“I am healed, but—”

“He is not healed! Three of his ribs are still fractured, and the regenerative process has not completed on that wound. There remains possibility of infection, and considering the history of septicemia—”

“No history,” he insisted. “One incident.”

“One incident yesterday!”

“The Empire doesn’t pay me enough for this,” Jyn muttered. The assistant, huddled in the corner, gave her a look of intense agreement. “Captain, you demand an immediate discharge?”

“Captain or not,” said Esten, “he does not have the authority to demand anything within these walls.”

Jyn rubbed her forehead, pretending to ward off an incipient headache. In reality, it had long since arrived. “He demands it of me, I meant.”

“You don’t have any authority, either.”

She wasn’t sure, but she thought Cassian might be genuinely annoyed.

“Doctor,” he said, “you do not seem to comprehend the urgency of—”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Jyn, deference already grating on her, “but may I have a moment with Dr Esten?”

He stared at her, eyes narrowed. Then he grumbled, “Fine.”

Willix was a hell of a charmer, thought Jyn, amused as well as tense. He and Lyr made quite the pair.

“Doctor,” she said, tugging Esten aside, “what is his real status at the moment? He seems much more … energetic.”

“He demands it of me, I meant.”

“Of course he does, after that much bacta,” Esten muttered. “Anything but a drastic improvement would be disaster.” She hesitated. “I do not expect major problems at this point, but I am not in the habit of paranoia. The ribs will be extremely painful as they heal. Infection is a real danger. And for the sake of his lung in particular, he must be kept from over-exertion.”
“I can manage the exertion,” said Jyn. “I requested shared quarters because I knew I’d need to keep an eye on him. If he no longer needs specific medical care, perhaps we can move him to his quarters and he can recover there. Could you provide me the necessary instructions?”

“Certainly not,” Esten said, though she seemed thoughtful. “You have no training. You won’t know how to recognize infection.”

“He’ll need some exercise, won’t he?” She glanced at Cassian, who was giving an exceptionally good impression of a man on the verge of bolting. “I can bring him here for a daily examination if you think it necessary. It seems an unfortunate waste of valuable space and equipment to just keep him shut up here.”

That seemed to give Esten more pause than anything else. “How far are his quarters?”

“I’m not sure of the distance. There’s about half an hour of walking altogether,” said Jyn. “The rest is just waiting in the elevator for an hour.”

“Hm. That’s still too long on his feet, I think, at least immediately.” Esten’s mouth twisted to the side. “With a hoverchair, perhaps …”

Jyn did her best not to look too excited.

“And I don’t want him eating that refuse in the mess hall. I’d have to send a pack of nutrient milk with you.”

Cassian stopped pretending not to listen and said, “I will not live off nutrient milk.”

“If it’s good enough for Darth Vader,” retorted Esten, “it’s good enough for you.”

He regarded her with even more disgust than before. “I am not a cyborg.”

“You will be if you try my patience much further,” she said, turning back to Jyn. “You’ll need to keep him drinking water, too. No alcohol.”

Jyn could nearly have punched the air in victory. Instead, she dared not even smile, just giving a dutiful nod. Cassian, whom Jyn doubted had been drunk a day in his life, groaned.

“Oh you can stay here another three days,” Esten told Cassian severely.

“Ah, no.”

At a word from Esten, the beleaguered assistant ran for a hoverchair. The doctor, meanwhile, triple-checked Cassian’s vitals and re-bandaged his wound. To Jyn’s surprise, it hardly existed at this point, beyond a long scab and still-shiny skin.

“Will his ribs need bandaged while they heal?”

“No,” said Esten. “That actually impairs recovery. They’ll fuse on their own. Just have him take deep breaths in regular sessions to help the lung.”

“I’ll put it in his schedule,” Jyn promised.

The assistant returned in short order, pulling a large, floating chair after her, the arms and undersides covered in buttons and panels that Jyn couldn’t have begun to understand. Beneath the seat, a metal bar extended in winding circles until it reached a flat black surface. Cassian eyed the chair with suspicion.
In fairness to Cassian—or rather, Willix—it did look like it might double as an execution device. But most things on the Death Star did.

Esten, her mood improving by the moment, extracted a square metal box from a cupboard, then marched over to the chair. When she pushed one button very much like all the other buttons, the metal circles on the chair somehow bent aside, and she set the box on the bottom surface. With another touch of the button, the bar wound back around.

She and Jyn both moved to assist Cassian, but he rolled his eyes and walked over to sit in the chair, wincing as he did so.

“I hope your pride was worth that,” said Esten dryly.

“It was.”

While he made himself comfortable in the chair, or some approximation of thereof, Esten reached into the cupboard once more. This time, she extracted two black bottles that she handed over to Jyn as Cassian peered at the panel nearest his hand.

“You’ll want these, Sergeant,” she said.

Jyn squinted at the bottles, but she couldn’t see any identifying labels. “What are they? Nutrients?”

Esten lowered her voice. “Sedatives.”
Getting Cassian out of the medical bay had to be a higher priority than literally anything else. Even so, Jyn didn't look forward to the strain of pushing the chair around the Death Star. Since she'd never actually touched a hoverchair before—seen them, but never got near enough to touch—she didn't really know what it would be like.

It turned out that you didn’t push them so much as … direct. Also, the medical bays had their own elevator system. Imperials still surrounded them, but Imperials of a less suspicious stripe.

Though they couldn’t be sure.

“There,” Jyn said in a loud voice, leaning down to Cassian’s ear. There was something to be said for standing taller than him. “Now, isn’t this better, captain?”

“Yes,” said Cassian, without a trace of the irritability of moments earlier. He turned his head to look at her, eyes intent on hers. “You’ve done good work.”

Embarrassingly, she felt a rush of gratification. She had done good work, and she didn’t need him—or anyone—to tell her that. But it mattered, in a foggy way, that he thought so. Of course, his opinion of her work as an undercover agent of the Rebellion had to be more pertinent than his opinion on any other subject. Almost any other subject.

Your father would be proud of you, Jyn.

“Then I hope you’ll recommend me for a promotion, sir,” she said, leading him into the hospital elevator.

In his haughtiest tones, Cassian replied, “I may consider it.”

The door closed with two nurses, some sort of technician, and four droids inside. It limited anything they might say, even under the words, but she couldn’t regret it too much. Wandering the Death Star with a man in a hospital gown seemed—not something to foster respect, even if she couldn’t think Cassian had too many concerns for his dignity around Imperials. And perhaps it was better that they couldn’t say anything remotely meaningful out in the open.

“I hope Dr Esten didn’t torment you too much. You seem in better spirits already,” she remarked.

Cassian sat very straight in the chair, but without the vibrating tension of before—if anything, a deep, quiet stillness that she nearly envied. She’d never been a quiet person, never wanted to be, didn’t want it now. But sometimes, she’d give anything for a moment’s peace.

“The doctor means well,” he said calmly. No doubt he’d have shot Esten between the eyes had it allowed for their escape. “I simply prefer to be an undesirable patient.”

One of the nurses snorted. “Pulled one over, did you?”

Cassian’s smile at him was positively sunny. “Only a small one. The ribs are healing, you see—but they can torment me in my own bed as well as this one. Isn’t it so?”

The nurse laughed outright. “It is.”

Glancing from one to the other, Jyn felt unsettled. More than unsettled. It was a lovely smile, and
utterly wrong on Cassian’s face. Not the smile alone, either, but the easy good humour that pervaded his voice and demeanour. The features that had always struck her as sharp and suspicious now seemed entirely open and guileless. Friendly.

“You’re an officer, aren’t you?” the nurse was saying.

“He’s a captain,” said Jyn, eyes narrowed.

“Not many like you that far up.”

Something—she couldn’t have said what—flickered in his expression.

“You mean this?” He gestured at his mouth. “True. The admirals are kind enough to overlook it. On account of my genius, you understand.”

“Modest, too,” said a technician. “But where are you from?”

“You would not have heard of it,” said Cassian.

“I know a lot of places. Try me.”

“Sareia,” he said, and laughed (laughed!) at their blank faces. “I told you. It is a district on Alderaan—a very small district. Many farms.” That opaque nothing shifted in his face again. “Today I would be a nerfherder, if not for the Empire. I joke, but I am very grateful.”

“Aren’t we all?” said the second nurse, a woman. “Bless Tarkin and his vanity projects.”

The technician said, “Are we going to bless Vader while we’re at it? I hear he carved through those Rebels like cheese.”

“No,” the woman replied. “You’ve got to draw the line somewhere.”

Cassian added, “Well, Lord Vader is not exactly—how do I put it? Known for employment opportunities.”

They all laughed, except Jyn and the droids. Even if she’d understood what the hell they were talking about, she didn’t think she would have laughed. She couldn’t tear her mind from Chirrut and Baze and carved through Rebels like cheese.

The sign on the elevator pinged red.

“Good luck with the escape,” said the first nurse. “And the ribs.”

“My thanks.”

The others filed out into a busy hall, droids and all. This time, though, nobody joined them. The instant the doors closed, Cassian’s pleasant mask dropped.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Jyn informed him.

“As am I,” he said, grimacing.

That was some relief, though by the pinched look that crept into his face, it came from raw pain as much as anything else. Distracted by that horrible charm, she hadn’t noticed him turning pale again. He retained the same quietness as before, but held himself stiffly every time the elevator stopped or started. Jyn wanted to do something, and hated that she couldn’t. Halfway to clasping his
shoulder, she withdrew her hand. It seemed grossly inadequate, and—and embracing a dazed and bleeding Cassian felt very different from touching an upright, alert one.

She tried to think about something else. To go by her comlink, they had forty minutes left in the elevator.

“I figured you were playing it up,” she said. “With Esten. I wouldn’t have imagined that you liked med-bays much in the first place, though.”

“No,” said Cassian, accent thinning out again. “But one grows accustomed.”

By ten. Jyn had known all the Partisans’ medics by name. Hell, most of the time, she’d known their families when they had any, and most of their histories. They felt almost like old friends, all the more as they tended to live the longest. Nothing like the sterility of Imperial hospitals, naturally, but she’d found herself less prickly around them as she got used to the needles and scolding and smell of burned flesh. You could get used to anything, really.

“Yeah,” she said. “One does.”

The elevator jerked to a sudden halt. He didn’t cry out, but she recognized his sharply indrawn breath as the nearest Cassian equivalent.

Jyn touched his shoulder, after all. “All right there?”

“Yes,” Cassian said, his voice full of the same tight frustration that she would have felt.

He glanced up at her, and a faint half-smile tugged at his lips. That smile she knew, careful and wry and somehow encouraging. It always seemed like something drawn out of him against his will, stifled and unguarded all at once. “Thank you.”

He probably wasn’t used to people sticking around, either. For the Rebellion, sure. But she hadn’t saved him for the Rebellion. She saved him because she didn’t want him to die.

On some unclear instinct, Jyn smiled back, still more cautiously. “I haven’t got us this far for you to fall apart on me now.”

The doors creaked, and opened to a pair of doctors. They peered into the elevator.

“Is this going down?”

“No,” said Cassian.

“Oh—pardon, then.”

The doors closed again. A simple mistake. Still, anger rushed through her, cold and quiet. Jyn didn’t even hesitate this time, just gripped Cassian’s shoulders and held him as steady as she could. She could feel his muscles tighten when the elevator jolted up, but no worse. Thankfully, he didn’t say anything about it.

“Not the intellectual trust of the Empire, I think,” he remarked.

“No.” Jyn gave a short laugh. Casting about for something of enough moment to distract them, but not too much, she went on, “Tell me about this Darth Vader. I keep hearing about him.”

As she spoke, she released her grasp on him and moved from behind the chair. She kept one hand on the side to hold it steady, but she wanted to see his face. Jyn always preferred to look at people when
she talked with them. You never knew what their faces might give away.

Of course, she knew perfectly well what Cassian’s would give away. Nothing—or nothing that he didn’t intend to reveal. But he wasn’t quite himself at the moment. In any case, she liked to look him in the eye.

“Darth Vader,” he repeated. True to form, his face had gone entirely blank. “You did not hear the name before?”

Jyn said, “It sounds familiar, so I must have at some point. I don’t remember the details, except that he’s Imperial.”

“Yes,” said Cassian. “He is certainly that.”

“From what I gather, he’s involved with Starfleet in some way,” she went on. “But the title doesn’t sound military at all. Darth?”

Leaning back into the chair, Cassian rubbed at his chin. Then he pulled his hand away and frowned at it.

_Not my fault_, Jyn almost told him. The thought was immediately followed by another: _I like it better the other way._

Wisely, she kept her mouth shut.

“You are right,” he said at last. “Lord Vader is not affiliated with any specific force or institution. He serves the Emperor directly.”

“But what does he do?”

“Whatever Emperor Palpatine wishes him to do,” said Cassian grimly. “In general, I believe he acts as a … a sort of special agent of the Emperor. Therefore, he does not often have command over significant forces, as the admirals do, but also cannot be commanded by them. Darth Vader is simply Darth Vader.”

“Huh,” said Jyn. She understood civilian contractors and the like, but this seemed very different. It seemed bizarre, frankly. She still didn’t quite know when or why she would have heard of him. When she tried to call the man to mind, she saw nothing.

Cassian’s gaze shifted to the featureless grey panel of the wall nearest him. He fell silent for several seconds, brows knitting into a frown—a moment’s weakness, or something he felt no need to conceal. On general principle, she suspected the latter. But when his eyes met hers again, they were intent and grave.

“It is worth mentioning,” said Cassian, “that Lord Vader does not require significant forces. He is one, in himself.”

Her skin prickled. “What do you mean?”

“He communes with the Force.”

Impossible. Jyn thought of her mother, and reached for the crystal. Inevitably, her fingers only brushed her bare throat. _Trust the Force._

Every word that came to mind would betray them. She could only stare at him, hand still at her
collar, grasping air.

“Imagine Chirrut,” he said, “if he were a black-armoured cyborg with a laser sword enforcing the Emperor’s will.”

“So … nothing like Chirrut,” said Jyn. But she remembered Chirrut, blind, fighting off troops with a staff. She’d had no difficulty believing that he walked with the Force. Though Jyn never depended on it herself, as she never depended on anything, she believed. She was Lyra Erso’s daughter, and nobody could take that from her.

“The abilities,” Cassian said evenly. “Vader has those, also, only much more so.”

“I find that hard to believe,” said Jyn.

“Regardless.” He made a slight, aborted gesture which she couldn’t begin to interpret. Then his glance dropped to his hands, loosely curled around the analgesics and sedatives. “He is a Jedi.”

“A Jedi?”

“You know what—”

“Of course I know!” Jyn exclaimed. She couldn’t mention her mother here, but— “They were all killed.”

“With Vader’s assistance,” said Cassian.

“That’s who’s here?”

His head jerked back, eyes blazing. “Darth Vader is here? You are certain?”

“Soon, if not yet.”

The sign flashed $H29(G)$ only a moment before the elevator lurched to a halt. From this side, she could see that Cassian held his body not just still, but rigid, his jaws clamped together. Under his breath, he grated out something Jyn didn’t quite catch and probably wouldn’t have understood anyway. He looked very tired in the instant before the door opened.

Cassian smiled warmly at the doctor waiting outside. Jyn buried herself in Lyr.

“Excuse us,” she said, moving the chair aside to make room. “We’re headed from Bay Seven up to F One.”

“Long way,” remarked the doctor. He strode inside without hesitation. “Only nine floors for me.”

“Congratulations,” Jyn said.

Cassian’s expression hardened. “Sergeant!”

“Pardon.”

The doctor shrugged it off. He seemed more interested in Cassian, studying him with what Jyn could only hope was professional interest. “You look like hell, young man.”

In better circumstances, she might have snickered at anyone calling Cassian young man. He was one, of course—only four years older than Jyn—but she’d never thought of him that way. Then again, she hadn’t thought of herself as young in a long time, either.
“We just escaped Scarif,” said Jyn. The truth weighed uncomfortably on her tongue.

The doctor scrutinized Cassian again. “Then you look very well.”

“Thank you,” he replied. “I am in one piece, which is more than many can say.”

“Almost one piece,” Jyn corrected. “And not that much if you refuse to follow Dr Esten’s instructions.”

The doctor clapped her shoulder on his way out. “Good woman.”

As the elevator headed back up, Cassian pried his hands off the arms of the chair and wiped his forehead. He started to say something.

“Don’t,” said Jyn. She had to unclench her jaw, futilely searching again for proof of surveillance. “You … shouldn’t talk, sir. Not until you’ve had some more rest.”

Cassian didn’t argue, which probably said more than anything else. He just nodded and leaned his head against the back of the chair, features settling into neutrality between jolts of the elevator. When it finally reached F1, Jyn almost thanked the Force aloud. Instead, she led the chair out into the current med-bay, and tried to figure out how to get back to the hall she knew.

As they escaped the elevator, Cassian straightened up in the chair, alert once more. It was easier with him along; the minute they left the medical area, he flipped from pleasant and smiling to dignified and faintly embarrassed. They got directions within moments. Since he knew the structure of Imperial bases better than Jyn did—something that did not surprise her in the slightest—the directions actually helped, some. It only took another forty minutes to find his quarters.

In that time, they hardly spoke except to confer over which ways to turn. Jyn didn’t mind; she had enough to dread in the conversation ahead. Her fingers tapped his passcode into the panel before he could lift a hand, her thoughts whirling around the plans and Princess Leia and the very concept of an Imperial cyborg Chirrut wandering about.

The door slammed behind them.

“This is it,” said Jyn. “Home away from home.”

Cassian had already lowered the chair. His gaze drifted about the quarters, from the furnishings to the scattered requisitions to Jyn’s rumpled bedding.

“Well done,” he replied. The detached tone should have weakened the compliment, turned it into something else, but instead only deepened it. Without effort, this time, colour rose to her face.

“Of course,” she said airily, turning her head away. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Cassian rise from his chair.

Instantly, Jyn jerked back around.

“Do you need help?”

“No,” said Cassian, and to her relief, it seemed true. Despite the hand pressed against the right side of his chest, he walked over to his bed without difficulty, his gait even. At the sight of the blasters, he drew a quick breath. Though his face immediately tightened, his voice went light. “It is good to see that your priorities remain in place, Jyn.”
Jyn had gone for years at a time without hearing her own name. But the last day and a half without it felt longer.

“Well, naturally.” Not trusting the sudden recovery, she walked over. “I’m the one who spent three hours in Requisitions—three hours terrified out of my mind, by the way—so I think I should get the rifle.”

Cassian gave her a look that could only be described as polite incredulity. “I will believe you terrified out of your mind when I see it. Also, your hands are too small.”

Graciously, Jyn ignored the latter observation. She admitted, “Maybe not terrified. But damn nervous.”

“Ah, well. You had reason for that,” said Cassian. His mouth thinned. “We all do.”

She hadn’t wanted him to hear about the plans from anyone else. But she didn’t want to say it herself, either. Least of all right now, when he seemed held together by bacta and willpower.

Unexpectedly, Cassian saved her.

“Is there a shower in the refresher?” Evidently, he’d seen the uniforms piled past the box. As he bent to reach for them, though, he grimaced. Before Cassian could wreck himself further, Jyn snatched up the clothes.

“Yes.” She pulled aside a single set of clothes and handed them over, feeling more than usually triumphant. “With water.”

“Water?” His mouth twitched. “Then you must give me a moment.”

He headed straight for the shower, slower than usual, but still without a limp or slump. When he disappeared into the fresher, Jyn turned away. He’d have to be in a lot worse shape for her to offer help with bathing. Instead, she closed the blaster case and lugged it over to her side of the room. Cassian would have to ask for the code, which entertained her as far as anything could. Or he’d do some spy thing and steal one, which all things considered, would be even more amusing. She smirked to herself as she divided the rest of the requisitions between the two halves of the room, clearing off the beds.

It couldn’t have taken above three or four minutes, but Cassian walked out in Imperial uniform just as Jyn shoved the last of the kits into her drawers. If not for the damp hair in his face, she’d have suspected he never showered at all.

He looked less pinched but also more exhausted; he hadn’t buttoned the jacket at all. Without a word, she pointed at the bed.

With Cassian, she didn’t have to worry about some pathetic attempt at flirtation. He simply nodded, walked over, propped up the pillow, and carefully laid himself down. Then he said,

“What is Darth Vader doing here?”

Pathetic flirtation might have been better.

Jyn sat down, heavily. She was tired, too. Alone with Cassian, she let herself slouch on the edge of her bed, arms dangling over her thighs, looking at the dull metal floor while she tried to organize her thoughts. But she couldn’t think of any way to soften the news, and probably wouldn’t be any good at it if she did try.
She lifted her gaze to meet his, both unflinching.

“It’s the plans,” Jyn said. “We did get them out.”

“You did,” said Cassian. The half-smile briefly touched his mouth again, his eyes warm.


“Leia Organa,” he said immediately. He frowned. “What was she doing at Scarif? She should not be …”

“You know her?” A flare of interest lightened the gloom, a little.

“I do,” Cassian replied, his face and voice very neutral. He paused, then added, “She also works in intelligence.”

“Ah,” said Jyn. She didn’t know if that made things worse or better. “A Rebel princess senator spy.”

He focused on her again. “All imperial senators have diplomatic immunity, but most of our allies in the Senate lack … vision, courage, serious commitment to the cause. They are allies, not Rebels. Not truly.”

“I noticed,” said Jyn. “And Princess Leia?”

“Born into the Rebellion,” Cassian said. “Her father is one of its founders, her mother one of our strongest supporters. It is all she knows. But they are … over-cautious. Princess Leia joined the Senate in order to provide us with a true Rebel agent in the government, one positioned to gather information and ready to act when needed.”

“Someone with nerve, you mean?” She remembered the dithering senators, mumbling about their constituencies and petty fears. “And—hope?”

Someone like you, she thought. Not that the daughter of royalty on a rich planet could really know what it was like to lose everything, whatever six-year-old Cassian’s everything had been. Probably not much different from Jyn’s own. Nevertheless, a Rebel spy with the guts and determination to turn lifelong belief to dangerous action? That sounded familiar enough.

“Exactly.” Cassian seemed pleased, or something like it. “You understand, of course.”

Two weeks ago, of course would have been the last phrase from his lips. Hers, too. But Jyn knew what it was to grow up in the thick of revolution, either steeped in it or ground down completely. Or both.

“Of course,” she said, at some level pleased that he understood. Jyn rather thought she would like to meet Leia Organa. Damned unlikely, now. She couldn’t imagine the Empire would keep her alive for long.

All light fled his face. “How far did she get?”

“Sorry?” How did he—

“How far?” At her expression, he sighed, then winced. “No, I have not heard the news. In fact, Dr Esten and her associates went so far out of their way to prevent my hearing it that I knew something significant must have happened. At this point, it would most likely be connected to the plans. They
seemed relieved, so it must be bad. You suggested that Vader had some involvement, and he is relentless. He would not arrive so quickly without success.”

She should have expected that, really. Now, at least, she didn’t have to figure out how to break it to him.

“Tatooine,” said Jyn.

“Tatooine,” he repeated. But he didn’t seem particularly demoralized; he just folded his hands over his ribs and examined the ceiling, as if some solution might be found there. “Not far, but she had a mission there. She might have … perhaps.” He shook his head. “There is no way to know, unless …”

“You were only partly right,” she said, and was petty enough to relish his slight surprise as he looked her way again. “That is, Vader only partly succeeded. Bodhi says—oh, we hid Bodhi with the stormtroopers.”

“Bodhi? With the stormtroopers?” Cassian considered. “Yes, that would be the only way. Is he holding up?”

“Seems like it,” said Jyn. “There was enough chaos and incompetence for him to slip through the cracks. He’s keeping his head down and picking up what he can. More than I’ve been able to. Apparently, stormtroopers gossip like schoolchildren.”

“Yes.” He went back to contemplating the ceiling. “What did he hear?”

For herself, Jyn hoped and dared not hope, all at once. She had no idea which, if either, Cassian would feel.

“According to the troopers,” Jyn told him, “a detachment got sent to Tatooine’s surface after Vader captured Princess Leia.” Feeling her fingers tap her knees, she pressed them flat. Cassian, irritatingly, remained so still that she squinted to make sure he hadn’t fallen asleep. “They don’t know much, they’re just—sorry for that unit. And Bodhi says their commander is twitchy because the admiralty’s in a foul mood over the princess. She’s still causing them trouble, he says.”

“She would be,” said Cassian. “Good.”

“Yes,” Jyn said crisply. “She must have ejected the plans somehow. Maybe they’ll keep her alive if they think she might talk.”

He was silent for a long moment. Then he said, “It is possible. As long as they do not find the plans, themselves.”

A very real possibility. Jyn felt cold, but she didn’t want comforting lies. She never had, and least of all from Cassian, now. Or ever—but in the circumstances, lies were not an indulgence any of them could afford. Everything depended on pooling their knowledge and discoveries together, on truth and trust.

She got to her feet and walked over to the hoverchair, where he’d abandoned the two bottles of drugs. As she picked them up, Jyn asked,

“Will she?”

“Talk?” At that, he did stir, if little beyond an adjustment of his shoulders, a tightening of his interlaced hands. “I do not know, for certain.”
Jyn unscrewed the lids, examining the shapes of the pills. It was the only way to know the difference, since Imperial standards evidently didn’t extend to labels. There, sedatives on the left, analgesics on the right. Something easier to think about than the forthcoming torture of a daring, determined woman. Jyn stuck them in the crook of her elbow and bent down to extract a tin of nutrient milk.

“What do you think?” she asked.

After another of his careful pauses, Cassian said, “I do not think she will tell them anything.”

“She’s that good?”

“No,” he replied, startling her. From here, Jyn could see the strain in his face, despite the measured calm of his voice and body. “The princess is not an ideal agent—she has little ability or interest in concealing her thoughts, and less in accepting orders.”

Jyn snorted.

“I know what you think of that, but in the field, information is often limited by problems of time and interception, and in many cases would never have been shared at all,” said Cassian. “Intelligence depends upon the obedience as well as the resourcefulness of our agents.”

“Yet here you are,” she said.

“I had the relevant information in this case.”

“You only had my word,” said Jyn sharply.

“As I said,” he told her, “I had the relevant information in this case.”

Without intending it, Jyn felt her mouth pull, just a bit. Her own near-smile, drawn out against her will as much as Cassian’s. She had to press her lips together to break it.

Cassian added, “I had enough, I believed, to act on my own judgment. I could not live with doing otherwise, knowing what I did. But it is not a decision I made lightly, or ever will.”

She didn’t quite know what she thought of that. Not when the relevant information had been trust. It was not something she gave lightly, either. And in an abstract way, she could understand why the Alliance kept its secrets close, even from those who gathered them. At the same time, she’d never think it defensible to surrender all choice and conscience to others. A choice made out of obedience remained a choice, even if responsibility rested more heavily on the one who ordered it. And a choice made with the understanding that you lacked vital information, but your orders came from those who had it, those you trusted? Well, that was it, wasn’t it? It always came back to trust, in the end.

Jyn thought of the spies and saboteurs who had come with them to Scarif. They’d come because it was right. How many of them seriously expected to live? Cassian had all but said they went to die with honour. But he didn’t say, didn’t need to say, that they trusted her because he trusted her. A testimony good enough for Captain Andor was good enough for them. She didn’t flatter herself that they’d ever have followed her without Cassian at her side. Good faithful men, and Force knew what they’d done out of that faith to go hunting redemption.

It depends sounded feeble, an excuse of the weak-minded. But it depended. Cassian would have been wrong to murder her father in cold blood. Horribly wrong. If he hadn’t known the truth, though, or if Galen really were a willing Imperial collaborator, prepared to unleash more
monstrosities on the galaxy, then—?

“Would you have made the same choice a month ago?” she asked.

This time, he didn’t hesitate. “No.”

“Good enough,” she said. “You—we probably should avoid making those choices lightly, as long as we get to the right ones in the end.” Jyn lifted her eyes to the metal walls around them, felt the weight of her Imperial uniform. “The trick is figuring out what those are. Everything gets so … unclear.”

Cassian regarded her with a thoughtful expression, plainly surprised. She felt sure he’d expected condemnation, not solidarity.

“Yes.” He cleared his throat. “This is Princess Leia’s weakness.”

“She sees too much uncertainty?”

“No,” replied Cassian. “She sees none at all.”

“Ah,” Jyn said. Young, she thought. Or a zealot, more than Cassian. The prospect was mildly terrifying.

“I supported Princess Leia’s appointment,” he went on, “only because the qualities necessary for this particular role were not ones she lacks, like restraint and subtlety, but the ones she possesses. She has a strength of mind and will equalled by very few, great courage, a resolve I have never seen shaken.”

Jyn exhaled. “We have to hope we still never see it, then.”

“I would not have wished this on her,” said Cassian, as somber as she’d ever seen him, “but if it must be someone, there are not many I would trust more to resist.”

“Good enough for me,” Jyn said. They couldn’t do anything about it yet, she reminded herself. If she knew anything, it was how to confine her attention to what she could do something about. All right. They needed to keep flying under the radar. They needed Cassian recovered. They needed information. At the moment, there was really only one of those to deal with.

“You’ve got to rest again.” With her free hand—the other held nutrient milk—she extracted Esten’s bottles from her elbow. “I’ve got analgesics and sedatives here, but Esten said they don’t mix. Pick your poison.”

Cassian looked at them doubtfully. “I do not want Imperial drugs, Jyn. And certainly not Darth Vader’s milk.”

“In that case,” said Jyn, “I’ll choose, and pour it down your throat.”

His eyes narrowed.

She added, “Don’t bother pretending you’d stop me. You can barely ride an elevator.”

Cassian glanced from her, to the bottles, then back again.

“Give me the sedatives.”
Ten minutes after swallowing the sedatives, Cassian still peppered Jyn with questions. He wanted to know every word she spoke to the quartermaster, the doctor, the NCOs in the mess hall. He wanted every name she’d heard, no matter how trivial. He wanted every detail she’d manufactured about Isidar Lyr, every hint of a hint from Bodhi. He wanted directions to everything she’d seen, her estimates of distances and descriptions of architecture.

In any other circumstance, Jyn would have told him where he could stuff his questions. But he needed to know, if not all of it at this exact moment.

“Do sedatives not work on you?” she finally demanded. She could almost believe he’d built up some sort of resistance. Maybe Draven just dosed his people until they turned immune or dropped dead.

“They’ll work,” Cassian replied, with the slight lilt she was starting to recognize as amusement. “Eventually.”

Jyn rolled her eyes and flopped back on her bed, one knee propped up. After everything, there was an odd relief in annoyance.

“My turn,” she said.

“I have been unconscious for almost two days,” said Cassian. “I know nothing you have not told me.”

His voice steadied as he spoke, flattened into his usual sober practicality. Maybe more. Definitely more. Well, he wouldn’t like that, would he? Jyn knew that Cassian trusted her, probably more than any other living person, but it didn’t mean he cared to depend on information from an untrained third party.

He could talk about agents lacking information, and it might be true enough for most of them. But not for Cassian himself. He wasn’t some foot soldier—whatever went for foot soldiers among spies. He had status and authority, when he chose to use them. He’d raised the forces for their mission before Jyn or anyone else had any idea it’d happened, the Alliance leadership knew who he was, and he seemed to know just about everything there was to know about everyone. She didn’t believe for a single moment that he had a habit of depending on others.

Another thing they had in common. Those were racking up, really. At this rate, they’d turn out to be twins separated at birth.

Ugh.
“You know nothing about the Death Star, maybe,” said Jyn. “But I’m curious about Willix. I’ve never seen an identity slice like it. And I’ve seen some good ones.”

“Have you?”

On the point of answering, she scowled. “I didn’t think you hurt your eardrums. I said Willix, not Hallik.”

Cassian didn’t reply, which could mean anything from finally starting to drift off to simmering anger. Jyn chose to take it as compliance.

“I checked his profile,” she went on, “and I don’t know whether to be more impressed or disgusted. Who put that thing together?”

“Disgusted?” said Cassian. “By what?”

Another one of his non-answers. Relevant this time, though, so she let it pass.

“You, or someone—probably multiple someones—went to enormous trouble with Willix,” she told him. “That level of detail … it’s incredibly difficult, and dangerous, too. Easier to get caught that way.”

“Yes,” he said, tone betraying nothing.

“And then you chose Cassin for your secret spy name? Really?” Even lying down, she shook her head. “And I thought Lyr was bad.”

“I did not choose it.” Somehow, his unchanged voice managed to sound slightly offended.

“Well, who did?”

“The Willixes, I assume,” he said.

After one bemused moment, her thoughts adjusted. “He’s real?” That made more sense—the risky accumulation of detail, the easy clearance. “You stole the entire identity of an actual Imperial captain?”

Not as impressive, to be sure. But in another way, more so.

“Mm.” He yawned, and she didn’t know whether to take it as a good sign or misdirection. “The name is common on Alderaan. That we share it is … happy coincidence.”

“You don’t quite share it,” she remarked.

“A dialectical variation.”

Misdirection, Jyn decided. She felt pretty sure that nobody with that many drugs in his system should be able to think the words dialectical variation, much less say them.

Though, common on Alderaan—now that was a distraction. But it kept coming up. Princess Leia of Alderaan, the Rebel spy en route to the Death Star. Her father, the senator from Alderaan who’d founded the Rebellion and actually listened to Jyn’s speech. Cassuin Willix, a farmer out of Alderaan turned Imperial officer. When she thought about it, she felt as if saw something out of the corner of her eye, something she should pick up but couldn’t quite make out. Presumably not as happenstance as it seemed, in any case.
She settled for, “Seems odd that the Rebellion would go after some random officer out of Alderaan. It’s as friendly territory as you’ve got, isn’t it?”

*Dialectical variation* ran through her mind again. Cassian-Cassein. His accent when he dropped into Willix—not much different to her ears, just more pronounced, an easy method for soothing Coruscanti superiority. The way he spoke of Princess Leia, respect and familiarity blended together. He’d weighed in on her appointment, analyzed her strengths and weaknesses, been told when and where she was supposed to be.

“Unless they wanted an Alderaanian,” Jyn said, before he could reply. “Specifically.”

“It was not … essential,” Cassian said. “Preferable, yes.”

“Because of Princess Leia?” asked Jyn. “The Rebellion wanted someone to keep an eye on her?”

“To assist her,” he corrected.

“Right. So they used Willix as her … aide or something?”

Cassian said, “No. An Imperial officer is not an aide to a civilian. But one might occasionally be placed to, ah, protect a senator suspected of Rebel sympathies.”

“Might be?” Pointlessly, she tugged at the grey material loose about her thighs, rubbed the material between her fingers. One of the higher quality fabrics she’d ever worn, really. “If spies whispered in the right ears?”

“Yes.”

If she got out of here, she was burning this uniform. And Cassian’s. But a laugh tickled her throat, too.

“I suppose said spies suggested that an Alderaanian princess might be more likely to lower her guard around an Alderaanian officer,” said Jyn. “Such as, say, Cassein Willix.”

“So I hear,” Cassian replied. “Of course, I was not personally present.”

“Because you had to be Willix.” Despite everything she’d done and lived, her head still swam, a bit. “A Rebel spy, pretending to be an Imperial spy, pretending to protect a different Rebel spy while in fact keeping tabs on her for the Empire, but actually doing it for the Rebellion because she’s invaluable but unreliable. Is that it?”

“Almost,” he said. “The princess’s temperament was a consideration, but we would not expend these resources simply to monitor her. The primary concern was that any transmissions she sent or received would be intercepted. By the nature of her assignment, the Rebellion needed direct contact with her, yet could not risk it. And there were other agents in Imperial City struggling to coordinate under the conditions there.”

Then, she understood.

“You were the Alliance liaison,” said Jyn. “Right there in Imperial City. And that place is a cesspool.”

Cassian replied, “I spent two years there and would be happy never to return.”

“They couldn’t send just anyone, could they?” Not to Coruscant. Otherwise, delivering messages
seemed a bit below his pay grade, if he was paid at all. But then, Cassian set loose in Imperial City probably got up to far more trouble than misinformation and passing orders.

She would, anyway.

“Thank you,” said Cassian. He yawned again. This time, she suspected it might be real.

“They needed someone who wouldn’t slip up,” Jyn said, more to herself than him. She thought of the shifting accent again. “Once the Alliance stole Willix, they … what? Looked at their best agents and picked the closest to the real thing they had?”

“More or less.” He definitely sounded sleepy now.

“Let me guess,” she said. “A real Alderaanian wasn’t essential, but preferable. You had the right skills and looks, so you got to be Willix. That must have been a fun conversation.”

“Very exciting,” muttered Cassian. “General Draven said ‘Andor, we need someone to be this Alderaanian farmboy we’ve turned up. You’ll be posted in Coruscant to support Princess Leia.’ And I said, ‘yes, sir.’ ”

That startled a laugh out of her. She had no difficulty whatsoever believing it a precise account, though not one he’d have related in a clearer frame of mind. Most people, of course, grew less careful as they drew near sleep, but she wouldn’t have thought Cassian one of them. She certainly hadn’t noticed anything of the kind back on his ship.

Then again, back on his ship, he hadn’t been twenty minutes into a heavy dose of Imperial soporifics, either.

“Any chance of Willix showing up somewhere and mucking things up?” she asked.

“No,” said Cassian, with utter certainty.

Jyn decided she didn’t want to know.

They fell into gentle silence, the room quiet but for the low hum of electricity and their own breaths. Even Jyn, her nerves well-honed after a life on the run—not to mention two days on the Death Star—found herself relaxing as Cassian’s breaths evened out. She didn’t feel sleepy, just a peculiar sort of peace.

When his head shifted, Jyn looked over at him. “Cassian? Are you awake?”

“Yes,” he said, drowsy but coherent. “At the moment.”

“I need your advice.”

“You?” He opened his eyes and blinked at her. “From me?”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” she said. “I mean your, er, professional expertise.”

Cassian squinted. “What?”

“In your line of work,” said Jyn, “do you try and pick up as much information as you can, wherever you find it, or focus on getting everything you can from a few good sources?”

“Both,” he replied through a yawn. “If only one is possible, though, a reliable source is worth a hundred gossips.”
She’d been afraid of that.

“Why—”

Unconvincingly, Jyn said, “I was just wondering.”

“Mm.” Even the tired murmur managed to sound skeptical. But the drugs had finally done their work. Cassian closed his eyes, and in another moment, slept.

On the bright side, Cassian slept like the dead. He didn’t snore, or talk in his sleep, or toss and turn.

On the dark side, Cassian slept like the dead. After he’d nearly been dead. The quiet was one thing with both of them alert and attentive, but quite another with Cassian unconscious and silent. Every few minutes, Jyn surrendered to the urge to go over and make sure he still breathed.

Inevitably, he did. If anything, he seemed better: not limp and fragile, not strained and pale. Each time she checked, more colour had crept into his face, more lines smoothed themselves away. He was fine, she told herself. The ribs would hurt, but Esten had pulled him out of danger. Esten and Force knew how much bacta and Jyn, getting him care and getting him out. He’d live. As long as the rest of them, anyway.

Her stomach growled for an hour before Jyn worked herself up to leaving. Even as she headed to the mess hall, her thoughts whirled. Bodhi—she’d not heard a word from him since before she extracted Cassian. It probably didn’t mean anything, except that he had no news, or no solitude. But it might. He might be suffering treatment harsher Saw could ever dream up.

This didn’t help, Jyn told herself sternly. There was no reason to torment herself over things which hadn’t happened, and which she couldn’t affect even if they had. Bodhi possessed more nerve and wits than either of them had given him credit for; he wouldn’t do anything foolish, and he’d at least try to contact her if something went wrong. On their end, she and Cassian were resourceful and resolute. Jyn knew how to survive, one step after the other. Cassian knew how to turn each step towards an end. If a way out of this existed, they’d find it. And if a way out of this didn’t exist, they’d face that when it came.

Nevertheless, Jyn ate as quickly as she could manage in the mess hall. It was only half-full at this hour—tomorrow she’d see what she could do about cultivating people. For now, her own calculations occupied her.

She ran through the cons of the situation, obvious as they were. Trapped in the Death Star. Princess Leia captured and dragged onboard by Imperial Chirrut. Her forthcoming torture. The fact that Imperial Chirrut existed at all. The fact that the best case scenario had all four of them blown to smithereens. The possibility of getting caught and either killed, themselves tortured, or both, at any moment. No method of escape except a ship, which they had no immediate way of acquiring.

Pros, she told herself. Supplies, medicine, and secure quarters—all obtained without suspicion. Bodhi absorbed into the stormtroopers and already picking up valuable information. Cassian able to walk, on the mend, and fully functional intellectually. Jyn no worse for the ordeals of the last three weeks, not to mention the last three days. They had a top-notch shot in Jyn and an honest-to-the-Force sniper in Cassian, and a full case of blasters. If they did manage to fly a ship, they had two pilots, Cassian good and Bodhi excellent.

Could be better. Could be a hell of a lot worse.

Jyn tossed away the tin dishes, stalked back to the quarters as fast as her legs would take her, then
checked on Cassian for a seventeenth time. Still asleep, still fine. Crawling into bed, she willed herself to sleep.

After twenty minutes, it worked. She slept like a steel beam, and didn’t wake up until a drawer rattled by her head the next morning.

Someone was muttering, “Toçè an aqqi d’estida i anayà—”

Jyn recognized the voice, however breathless, if not the words. What the …?

“Cassian?” She rubbed her eyes.

A few feet away, he bent down with stray equipment in his hand and clothes draped over his arm. But he was already showered and uniformed. His other hand pressed against his side until he glanced up at her.

“Jyn,” he said civilly, and went back to picking up clutter.

She jolted upright. “What are you doing?”

“Inspection,” said Cassian.

Her heart thudded. “Now?”

“No.” Straightening up, he dropped wrinkled uniforms into a bin she hadn’t noticed. With an unpleasant sucking sound, the floor of the bin vanished and the clothes slid down a chute. The floor slid back into place. “If there is one.”

Whatever amount of sleep she’d gotten, it wasn’t enough. Jyn gave up on de-coding him and said, “Cassian. Use whole sentences and stop straining your ribs.”

Cassian replied, “I think they are better.”

“Sure they are,” said Jyn. “What were you talking about?”

“Imperial bases usually hold regular inspections.” With the kits in his arms, he made his way over to the narrow closet near the door. He set them out in neat lines. “On a base of this size, with this many troops, I do not know. If we do get inspected, though, and are in violation of code, it may raise suspicions.”

Oh. She had no difficulty believing him compulsively neat by nature—his Alliance quarters looked it—but this had seemed excessive and then some. Pragmatism, though, she could respect. Getting up, Jyn turned to him.

“Right,” she said. “At the least, it might draw attention. Fine, but I don’t know regulations and you … stop. I’m going to get dressed and then I’ll do it. Don’t touch my bed.” His was already neat, folded at precise angles. “Actually, don’t touch anything. Just sit.”

She didn’t seriously expect him to sit down. Sure enough, although she took the galaxy’s shortest shower and didn’t even try to figure out her jacket beyond a few buttons, she emerged from the fresher into pristine quarters. All the pairs of requisitioned items had been divided between each side of the room, every one exactly opposite to its brother. The blaster case had disappeared. Nothing but her rumpled bedding interrupted the blocky regularity of the place. It made her want to do something stupid, like carve JYN ERSO WAS HERE into the wall.
Cassian leaned against his dresser, datapad in hand, just as he’d leaned against the terminals in the Rebel council room. A little more stiffly, but all things considered, it seemed a good sign.

“Not much for orders, are you?” she said, and regretted it as soon as she spoke. That had been one of the odder twists of their fight after Eadu—I disobeyed orders! It should have been the pillar of his defense, the fact that he had defied the command she accused him of following. But even with every observation warped by rage, she couldn’t misunderstand the horror in his voice. Not at the Alliance, not Draven, not even Krennic, but at himself for balking at a pointless murder.

That was before, Jyn reminded herself. In the end, he defied all those generals and senators for her, personally shot Krennic. Really, it meant more that he’d done it despite his temperament, not because of it. Yet she felt certain those veins would always run through his character, an underlying inclination towards devotion and obedience.

Not that she didn’t have her own. If something in him never stopped whispering there are rules and you have your orders, something in Jyn never stopped urging her look after yourself, no one else will and just keep running. She knew perfectly well that it’d get louder when not drowned out by overpowering necessity.

If Cassian’s mind followed the same direction as hers, he gave no sign.

“No orders?” he repeated. “It depends on where they come from.”

The moment’s ambivalence passed. Jyn snorted.

“Don’t think about trying to call all the shots just because you outrank me here.”

“I outrank you everywhere,” said Cassian, with a suspect quirk of his mouth.

All right, she might have brought that one on herself.

Absent a good rebuttal, Jyn said, “If you’re going to help me with these, then help. How am I supposed to do the folding thing?” She tugged the blankets and sheets off her bed, and looked at them in some dismay.

Setting down the datapad, Cassian walked over to stand beside her. He snagged one of the blankets in her arms.

Jyn scowled up at him. “That was a question, not an invitation. Actually, go lie down. I can follow instructions, when it’s worth my time.”

“Moving helps with the breathing,” he said. When she looked skeptical, he added, “I will not break. You can do the worst of it.”

“The analgesics would help more,” she grumbled, but went along with it.

Together, they shook out the sheets, and Jyn tucked them around the mattress according to the Empire’s absurd specifications. The pillow had to be precisely centered in its case, equidistant from each end, and the blanket folded six centimeters from its edges. If anyone had told her two weeks ago that she and Cassian Andor would end up making beds in the Death Star—

Somewhere between appalled and bemused, Jyn held up the blanket while Cassian measured out the edges. She could barely see him past the top.

“Here, take this,” he said, holding out the folded edge to her.
Jyn reached for it, even as she did her best to keep the middle held high. “Must have been a pain to do yours by yourself.”

“Yes,” said Cassian. He looked over the blanket at her, and in an instant, the bizarre domesticity of it all just struck her as funny.

“I’ll admit it. I did not foresee this,” Jyn told him.

Though she couldn’t see Cassian’s mouth, his eyes crinkled. “Nor I.”

For some reason, the quiet—which had settled comfortably as they worked—turned heavy once more. Hastily, she said,

“So Willix is supposed to be some farmboy who got picked up by Starfleet and made a career for himself?”

“He was, yes,” said Cassian.

Jyn thought of asking if he’d killed the real Willix, or if someone else had done it. But she supposed it made little difference, in the end. Cassian would have pulled the trigger, even if he hadn’t done it this particular time. And she didn’t exactly have a habit of weeping over Imperial officers. The lower ranks were one thing, and civilians, but the officers—the Krennics—they saw it all. They knew what they did.

“I take it you weren’t actually a farmboy,” she said, because she couldn’t imagine it in a million years. “From—what was it, Seraiah? The place you talked about when you were lying your head off in the elevator.”

“Sareia,” said Cassian, gesturing for her to help fold the blanket down the middle. “No. I come from Vaesda. No farms.”

“We had them,” Jyn said suddenly. “I don’t remember the planet much. But it was green. My parents had a farm. More an experiment than anything for Papa, I think, but Mama liked to make things grow. When we left the house, we’d see fields for miles and miles.”

As soon as the words left her mouth, she felt perturbed. More than perturbed. Those scraps of happiness before the Empire ripped it all apart—she never spoke of it. Not ever, to anyone. Yet she’d found herself talking without hesitation, as if there were no barrier between her memory and her voice. As if the walls shut out danger instead of trapping them in it.

They shut out people. The next best thing, she decided, calming as she looked over at Cassian. He didn’t count. Not—of course he counted as a person. Just not a threat.

To her, anyway.

For several moment, Cassian worked in silence. Then he said, “Would you go back?”

No sprang to her tongue, without thought. But she did think.

“I don’t know,” she said slowly. “It’s not … I wasn’t born there. I’m a natural citizen of Coruscant.” She held the folded middle while Cassian measured the other edge. “You already knew that, I’m sure.”

Too worn or too himself for an explanation, he only said, “Yes.”
“So there’s not much point, with my family gone. But I don’t know.” It was home, for that little while. The only one she ever had, really. Somehow she didn’t imagine that the dim early years under Krennic’s thumb had been anything like a home.

*Welcome home* flashed into her mind, her memories flung from that dimly-remembered apartment in Coruscant to the Rebel base on Yavin. Maybe he meant the Rebellion, but she hadn’t. It wasn’t the Rebellion who stuck by her at Jedha. It sure as hell wasn’t at Eadu. It wasn’t the Rebellion who marched at her side after the snarling fight on the ship. Or ever.

When she murmured *I’m not used to people sticking around when things go bad* to Cassian, she meant it for him, thanks and explanation and apology rolled up together. As near as she got to any of them. He had to know that. He did know—he’d tilted towards her as she spoke, leaned in to listen and to promise, their steps falling into sync from opposite directions. She never saw him do the same thing with anyone else, not with his soldiers, not Bodhi, not Kay. It wasn’t Captain Andor who told her *welcome home*.

Jyn still didn’t know exactly what Cassian meant. She wasn’t sure Cassian knew what he meant. But it had something to do with the fact that they stood in the Death Star, Jyn all but twitching with nerves while Cassian concealed what must be agony, and they felt something like safe.

“If we live,” she said, “maybe I’ll go, someday. See if it brings anything back. They get harder to remember—the good things.” She could feel the weight of the crystal in her pocket, even as she took the blanket and carefully laid it down.

“Yes,” said Cassian once again. Jyn thought she heard something rough in his tone—maybe just weariness, maybe more.

“If your people didn’t have any farms,” she said, “I guess Willix’s district would be pretty far off from yours.”

“Three thousand miles away, in a different country,” said Cassian, the harsh edge fading into mere annoyance. Not with her, Jyn suspected. “I never saw it in my life, except pictures.”

“I thought it might be something like that.”

He smiled at her, more easily than usual. “Also, Vaesda was four thousand feet higher.”

“Up in the mountains, huh?” Jyn had little knowledge of Alderaan, beyond the chain of spies spun out from Bail Organa. But she’d heard about the mountains.

Though he didn’t seem offended, he only said, “Pull the blanket towards the foot. About three inches. Yes, there. And now left—your left.”

Jyn sighed. But she didn’t doubt that any Imperials who passed by would prove at least as obsessive. She tugged and straightened the material, bent the corners into correct shape, and ignored Cassian’s retreating steps.

“There,” she said. “Good?”

When she turned, she saw that he’d returned to his dresser, and now had a nutrient milk in one hand and pills in the other. Green pills—those would be the analgesics, not the sedatives.

Cassian gulped down the medicine and walked back over to examine the bed. He glanced from one end to the other.
“Good.”

“Another trial survived,” said Jyn. “Barely.”

She didn’t want to think of how much he would endure before voluntarily taking Imperial drugs. Maybe he was just being sensible again. But probably not.

“You pull us through again,” Cassian replied, as lightly as he ever said anything. But he looked at her with an even more intense expression than usual, his gaze very steady.

Jyn didn’t say you’re welcome; she didn’t need to. She just nodded, and silence fell again, perhaps the easiest yet.

The quiet only broke when Cassian said abruptly, “The Anduçelos.”

She started. “What?”

“The Anduçelos Mountains,” he said, his voice very even. “Vaesda was up in them, yes.”

He took a drink of the milk, his gaze flicking away. Uncertainty, she’d have thought, in anyone else. Maybe in him, too. It should have punctured the peace—but didn’t. Cassian himself seemed taken aback by his words, as if he hadn’t meant to say them. No more, Jyn thought, than she’d planned to babble about her parents’ farm.

She hazarded, “Those are the ones surrounding Aldera?”

“Yes.” He shifted his weight. Just a little, but even that much was unusual, from him. “They have ilum deposits. At least, in Vaes District they do.”

That focused her attention. Ilum, inert in itself, turned explosive under treatment. Jyn didn’t know the details of the process—she never took after her father that way—but she knew varying amounts of it went into blasters, starship cannons, bombs, just about anything. Saw kept his precious stores sealed up tight, but he showed a cache to her once and told her all about it. He told her, too, that Galen used to experiment with the stuff. Now, she felt sure that had been for the Death Star. There probably wasn’t enough ilum in the galaxy to power this thing. But on the smaller scale, it had incredible power. Ilum mines could level the towns that prospered around them.

“Damn,” said Jyn. “I thought Alderaan didn’t have weapons.”

“It doesn’t,” he said, with a touch of satisfaction. “We are good Imperial citizens. We do not use the ilum, we sell it.”

And funnelled it to the Rebellion, no doubt.

“What is it like? I mean, Vaesda,” she asked, trying to replicate his pronunciation. “Not ilum. I know what that’s like.”

“I am sure you do,” said Cassian dryly. “It was … I do not remember very much. I was very young. I remember the nyrfa—a sort of cattle that lives up there—and the mines and the cold.” He paused. “Mostly the cold. The snow never went away, and the mining towns were filthy. But it could be beautiful, away from the cities.”

Thinking of the farm, she said, “That usually helps.”

He shrugged. “Your world was green, you said. Mine was white. On bright days, everything shone.”
“Didn’t it blind you?” Jyn asked.

“Yes,” he replied, an unfamiliar animation lighting up his face. “My sister and I had goggles to shield our eyes, but only hers worked right. She was older and always climbing something, so she kept the good set, and I would take mine off. That was why I missed rocks and sticks in our way, and Rana when she jumped down behind me, and the clonetroopers.” Before Jyn could do much more than register that one of these was very unlike the others, Cassian said quickly, “Your jacket is wrong.”

“What?” A clumsy detour, but of course, the jacket was wrong. She’d only bothered with a few buttons, since it never hung right, in any case. “Oh, these ones are too small. I don’t know why, I gave them the measurements—”

“The pleats,” he said, and reached for her shoulders.

She stiffened. Though Cassian must have noticed, he pretended not to, just caught his fingers under the awkward folds of material and adjusted something, then tugged a little. The whole thing immediately loosened—still not exactly smooth, but at least not tight.

“That’s better,” admitted Jyn. “I suppose I should have guessed that even Imperial jackets have procedures.”

“Yes. They do, that is.” With an odd twist to his mouth, he added, “Also, the buttons go behind the flaps, not through … and …”

“Oh, fine. You fix it.” She unbuttoned the jacket all the way and unbelted it, rather amused that his gaze swung up to her face at the first button, and fixed there, despite the full layer of (regulation!) undershirt beneath the jacket. Though, for a fully dressed woman, she herself felt odd.

Cassian looked profoundly uncomfortable, but without further hesitation, pulled one side of the jacket to her shoulder, and held the material taut. He didn’t try anything, of course, touch her in any way that the requisitions droids hadn’t, but Jyn nonetheless felt blood rise to her face. Cassian wasn’t a droid. And he could be—unsettling, even as he said in a dispassionate voice,

“It has to be completely smooth, no wrinkles, or the jacket will not hang correctly.” He pulled the other flap over, fastening it. “Here, you button from beneath, only through the one layer. The top one must lie flat.”

As he buttoned the jacket down to her waist, Jyn glanced down, pretending to something like detachment as she watched Cassian’s fingers move down her body. Even trivial mistakes could be dangerous, she reminded herself. If anyone had paid attention to the jacket, it might well have been as disastrous as recognition. That was all.

Anyway, he had broken ribs.

Jyn cleared her throat. “I suppose I had better go down to the mess hall and”—her lip curled—“make friends. Is this supposed to be that loose?”

“You fold at the waist,” said Cassian, reaching down to tuck down pleats she hadn’t noticed while Jyn lifted her arms and thought virtuous thoughts. “It is stiff enough to hold, so the belt does the rest.”

Thankfully—for a certain value of thanks—he stepped back, and Jyn buckled the belt herself. He didn’t correct her, so she supposed she did it right.

“Am I a proper Imperial now?” she asked.
“You look one,” said Cassian.

He could split too many hairs, but she’d take this one. Jyn smiled, a little unsteadily.

“Jyn.”

When his hand touched her shoulder again, she nearly jumped. Instead, she just returned his gaze, while Cassian searched her face for—something.

Quietly, he said, “Be careful.”

She nodded. “I should be back in about an hour. Don’t assume I’m dead unless it’s three, and you haven’t heard from me. Get some rest.”

As she ducked out of their quarters, into the hall, she glanced back over her shoulder. Cassian hadn’t moved, just stood there by his bed, frowning after her.

“Don’t worry, captain.” Jyn allowed herself a smile, slight but genuine. “I won’t do anything you wouldn’t.”

Chapter End Notes

1) “Cassian set loose in Imperial City probably got up to far more trouble”: Jyn is right, incidentally. While Cassian’s primary role was coordinating with Leia and cleaning up the Coruscant network under the Emperor's nose, he had plenty of undercover work of his own.

2) Toçè an aqqi d’estida i anayà—: "Then clothes over here, and over there—" He's grumbling to himself. (For various reasons, I don't choose to represent his native language with literal Spanish, though there are some Easter eggs for Spanish-speakers in the names.)

3) “Three thousand miles away, in a different country”: from Cassian's point of view, it's basically like they went "you're Spanish, right? Oh, Brazilian? Good enough."
“Lyr!”

Jyn halted so abruptly that she rocked back on her heels, panic sprouting once more. She’d almost made it to the mess hall, too, the smell of oil and seven-syllable ingredients infiltrating the corridor. But—

But the voice sounded friendly. Altogether bewildered, she turned towards the person who’d called her. A tall man in uniform, like most men around here. As he drew near, she could see the face beneath the cap: fine-boned, angular, handsome. And familiar?

“We meet again,” he said grandly.

The corporal, she realized. From … yesterday. It had only been yesterday.

“Zekheret, isn’t it?” said Jyn.

He gestured for her to lead the way into the hall, and easily matched his steps to hers. “That’s right. Zek to the ladies.”

Dryly, she replied, “Zekheret it is, then.”

He just chuckled, joining her in one of the lines. To Jyn, he seemed very young, though he had to be several years her senior. Cassian’s age, maybe—an even stranger thought, all the more as he resembled him a little. She could hardly think of anyone more unlike Cassian, even Cassian at his most pseudo-charming.

“Not a lady?” Zekheret asked, with an easy smile. “Or just not interested?”

Jyn couldn’t calculate odds like Kaytoo, but she did her best, thoughts racing. In general, she preferred to avoid flirtation. She wasn’t good at it—too harsh, too withdrawn. No matter what her name, she struggled to pretend to a trust she didn’t feel, to patience (much less liking) for nonsense and games. But it served her well, now and then. Jyn had never been one to throw away an advantage, and being young and attractive could go a long way in certain situations. Some people dropped their guard.

Zekheret seemed likely to be one of them. But it would complicate everything, particularly given whatever restrictions the quartermaster had talked about. And she didn’t know how long they’d be here, but—probably not long enough.

Also, the idea made her skin crawl.

“No allowed to be interested,” Jyn said, trying to sound regretful. She thought of Brakas. “My captain takes a dim view of fraternization. And he’s very, uh, observant.”

“Oh,” he said, with a look of understanding. “Keeps a close eye?”

Sighing, she said, “We’re in the same quarters.”

Zekheret’s brows rose. “Maybe he just wants you for himself.”
“No, no,” she said instantly, and tried to banish memories of Cassian’s eyes intent on her, hers on him. Suspicion and respect, fury and trust, and—oh hell, who knew? They both ran so hot and cold that Jyn rarely knew all she felt at any given moment, much less Cassian. “Captain Willix is … I think he sleeps with a copy of Starfleet regulations under his pillow.”

“Oh, one of those,” said Zekheret, still friendly. “You have my sympathies, then. My commander wouldn’t notice a code violation if it danced naked in front of him.”

“I hate you,” she grumbled.

He laughed. And rather to her surprise, he stuck with her, even after they received their food at the front of the line and she started searching for a table. Apparently he still held out hope, or at least preferred to remain with her. As Jyn was one of only a half-dozen women in the entire hall, and the only one under about forty, she couldn’t feel that flattered. Nevertheless, she recognized the opportunity for what it was. An easier one than she’d expected, really. He might have been a bastard. Or she might have had to actually strike up conversation with someone on her own.

As they made their way to a table near the door—“the fumes aren’t as bad,” said Zekheret—Jyn noticed that the pitch of the hall’s hubbub seemed considerably lower. Not that she had much in the way of comparison, but at least yesterday, it’d been loud. Now, it sounded more like a general murmur, a buzz of noise that did nothing for her already strained nerves.

“Is it usually like this?” she asked Zekheret. “Not quiet, but …”

“No,” he replied, poking at the chunks of maybe-former-lifeform in the stew. “It’s because of Vader.”

Jyn’s spine stiffened before she could help it. To go by the behaviour around the room, though, even Lyr would react; she let herself stare at him.

“Darth Vader? He’s here?”

“Got in this morning,” said Zekheret readily, “with that Rebel whore.”

Jyn stabbed her meat with unnecessary force. “The—excuse me, who?”

As pleasant as ever, he replied, “Leia Organa. You haven’t heard? She’s a traitor.”

“I heard … something,” she said. “I don’t pay attention to politics, honestly. Captain Willix points me and I do what I’m told.”

It might be the biggest lie she’d told in the whole time here. Maybe her life.

“Anyway, she was fucking Tarkin,” he went on. “They say that’s how the Rebels got our plans.”

Jyn considered her stew. It hadn’t hurt her yet, but she didn’t think it would mix well with the fury and disgust roiling in her stomach. She took a gulp of water instead.

“The plans were transmitted from Scarif,” she said, at last. “I was there.”

“Oh,” said Zekheret, looking a little sheepish. “Right.”

Maybe, Jyn thought, she should have picked someone with a few more brains. Not that she had picked him, as such.

“But they had clearances and such, right?” he was saying. “She must have gotten those from him.”
“Uh, sure,” she said. To their left, she could see salvation coming. Or as good as it got in this place. “I mean, I’d have thought Tarkin would be more careful. But I’ve never seen Princess Leia. I guess she must be something else.”

Indifferently, he said, “If you like them small and shouty.”

Jyn’s opinion of Leia Organa rose still higher.

“You’ve seen her in person?”

He snorted. “An Imperial senator? Are you kidding me?”

Walking up behind him, Efrah smacked the back of his head.

“It’s those lady-hands you’ve got,” she said. “Anyone would think you were some governor’s brat.”

“I’d be an officer, then,” replied Zekheret.

“True enough. I should have thought of that,” Jyn admitted. She shifted to make a place for Efrah, though half the table was clear. “Oh, you haven’t got your food yet, have you?”

“I did an hour ago.” Efrah climbed onto the bench beside her. “And I’m still alive, so you can stop having vapours over the soup, Zekheret. What were you pestering her about, anyway?”

“Don’t you know about it?” he demanded, just as Jyn said, “Have you heard the news?”

“Well, of course.” Efrah snagged Zekheret’s cup and took a gulp. “Just gone, can you believe it? They’d better have a replacement in mind, or we’ll be putting out fires all over the galaxy.”

Jyn didn’t even have to feign her stare now. “A … replacement?”

“We’ve killed her already?” said Zekheret. “Well, I guess they will need a replacement, then. But trouble all over the galaxy?”

“Killed—” Efrah’s gaze darted between the two of them, her face blank. “What are you talking about?”

“What were you talking about?” Jyn asked.

Efrah had let her hands rest on the table, loose and relaxed. Now they tightened into fists as she leaned forward, her eyes wide.

“The Imperial Senate,” she said. “It’s gone.”

Gone? Jyn’s thoughts jerked back to her desperate speech to the Alliance leadership, the senators declaiming or muttering about their constituencies, about risks and responsibilities. She’d thought it useless cowardice even then, shrugging off the sacrifices the real resistance had made over the last twenty years. The sacrifices both her fathers made: Saw in bits and pieces, a wreck of a man in the end, Galen tormented by the grinding work of subterfuge. Like Cassian. Maybe the real reason he couldn’t make himself pull the trigger—but, too, it was every Partisan or Rebel who gave up all they had, or could have had, to resist the Empire. Saw and Galen had given the Alliance the chance for it all to mean something. And they threw it away for politics, for that worthless Senate.

“What do you mean gone?” she said.
“The Emperor ordered it dissolved,” said Efrah. “I just heard from Commander Noalakkai.”

The senators might not have known this was coming. Obviously they hadn’t. But they had to know something. You didn’t get three days from total dissolution without any signs of danger.

Zekheret, who had managed several spoonfuls of soup, wiped his mouth. “Huh. What’s he going to do with the senators?”

“Send them home, I imagine,” Efrah replied.

Jyn couldn’t help but say, “Except Princess Leia.”

“That’s what we were talking about,” added Zekheret. “I can’t believe you didn’t hear. Darth Vader is on the Death Star, right now. He captured the princess and brought her here.”

Efrah dismissed this with a wave of her hand. “Oh, that was hours ago. I’m sure he’s already questioned her.”

Probably, Jyn thought, she should do something to divert any possible suspicion. Eat, make a fuss over the taste, drink, adjust her cap. Anything. She’d known what fate awaited Princess Leia here. But her fingers felt like lead.

“Then it’s over.” Zekheret brightened, despite just managing dainty sips from his spoon. “We’ll have the right locations if we don’t already, go pulverize them, done.”

Even Efrah looked disgusted.

“That’s what got us into this mess,” she snapped.

“The Rebellion is my fault?” said Zekheret. He rolled his eyes. “Really? I know you always have to blame me for everything, but even you’ve got to draw the line somewhere.”

Efrah didn’t crack a hint of a smile. “That kind of thinking!”

“What—”

One of her fingers stabbed the table. “It doesn’t matter what the fuck you think, or me, or Lyr, or any of us. But that shit goes all the way up. Oh, there’s no real threat, the Rebellion is just pitiful holdouts on the fringes of civilization. We could wipe the whole thing out if we really tried.”

“Well,” he said, “we could.”

Jyn tried to think of a response that would sound appropriately Imperial. But she wasn’t really sure; taking Efrah’s side could be suspicious, but taking Zekheret’s might freeze her out. And while Zekheret made for an easy source, she felt sure that Efrah would be a better one.

She kept her mouth shut.

Efrah all but snarled, “It’s been twenty years.”

Uncomfortably, something about her voice reminded Jyn of Cassian. Her eyes did, too, though they were blue—it was just the expression, hard and intense.

“Twenty? No, that’s not right,” Zekheret protested. “They’ve only been around for a few years. If you’re going to count every gang of terrorists as the Rebellion, you’ll have to go back a lot further than the Empire. They’re just one more, only a little bigger and better-organized. Everyone says so.
We’ll take them down, no problem.”

“Like at Scarif?” Efrah jerked her head at Jyn. “She could tell you all about that.”

“I’d rather not, thanks,” said Jyn.

“Maybe,” she went on, “we could have wiped them out a thousand times over if we’d taken them seriously. Probably, even. But we haven’t. It’s all rah-rah-rah, we’ll swat them aside any day now, and meanwhile hundreds of thousands of people are dead.”

A lot more than that, Jyn thought, remembering Jedha. But they wouldn’t count those ones, would they?

“Let me know when your everyone can explain how the hell they got a fucking fleet,” said Efrah, her voice still pitched low and furious. “We only saw what didn’t escape, and even that much was more than the cobbled garbage and scrapmetal it’s supposed to be. Those were built as Rebel warships.”

“They were?” said Jyn, dredging up a sympathetic smile for Zekheret. “How do you know?”

“The design’s all wrong.” Efrah knit her brows, and Jyn didn’t need the sudden chill on her skin to recognize danger. “You were at the battle, weren’t you?”

“Technically,” she said. “Rebels knocked me out pretty early. I spent most of it running around the Citadel trying to find my commander.” Jyn gave a short laugh. “Very heroic, I know.”

“Oh, so you didn’t see much,” said Efrah.

Jyn dared not move a muscle, certain that anything would betray the relief that swept through her.

“Not battle-wise. We had the spies and saboteurs to deal with.”

“Anyway,” Zekheret said, apparently bored with a conversation that drifted too far from him, “you’re sure about the ships?”

Efrah nodded. “The commander’s sure. He’s been ranting to anyone in earshot for hours. Plenty of that fleet must have been built from scratch. Do you know the kind of resources that takes? The kind of money? And now it turns out they have people in the Senate.”

“Not any more,” he said smugly. “And if Commander Noalakkai’s talking about it, the admiralty is paying attention now.”

“Right,” said Efrah. “They won’t listen to Tagge, but the officers who answer to him start complaining and it’s a sure thing.”

Jyn wondered if she dared ask who the hell Tagge was. Her face must have asked it for her.

“He’s one of the admirals keeping this place running while the directors and moffs go around fucking things up,” Efrah said, but she sounded calmer. “Noalakkai is our commander. He’s pretty mellow, for an officer, but he idolizes Admiral Tagge.”

Zekheret eyed her with the air of an engineer who’d discovered instant travel. “So that’s why you’re in a snit! Commander N’s going around infecting people.”

“It’s not a disease.”
“Pity,” remarked Jyn. “An epidemic of good sense might have saved a lot of our men on Scarif. As far as we heard, there were maybe thirty Rebels in the initial attack. They slipped right in and lit the Citadel up like Empire Day.”

Efrah smacked the table. “That’s exactly what I’m talking about!”

“Exactly what Commander N is talking about, you mean.” But much of the assurance had drained out of Zekheret’s voice and face. He frowned as he picked his way through the rest of his stew.

At his wrist, his comlink buzzed. He scowled, then switched it on.

“Zekheret here—yes, sir. No, no difficulty—I’ll be there, sir.” With a deep sigh, he flipped it off.

Jyn glanced at her own wrist, and nearly sprang right up.

It wasn’t a call. It was nothing. She’d forgotten the comlink altogether. If Bodhi tried to contact her—if Cassian did—if either of these paid attention—

“So how’d you end up here?” Efrah asked her. Hands relaxed on the table again, her stiff spine slumping, she didn’t look particularly threatening.

Jyn knew better than to trust it.

“Scarif,” she said, blinking.

“Scarif,” said Jyn blandly. In some indistinct recess of her mind, she wondered about the woman
she’d stolen her black gear from, back on Scarif. From what she’d seen after they knocked the real
Imperials out, that woman had been little taller than Jyn, and the uniform fit easily. How had she—

It didn’t matter, she reminded herself. And with any luck, the hapless pair had still been unconscious
when they got vapourized. She pushed the thought out of her mind.

“But you couldn’t get a commission out of it?”

“My father’s an NCO,” said Jyn, “so, no.” The my-father-served-his-father story wouldn’t work with
what she’d discovered of Willix’s history, though. In a second, she jettisoned the story she’d invented
for Brakas. “He did Captain Willix a favour, about ten years ago. So, the captain did us one. He’s
never had reason to regret it.”

“Lucky,” Efrah said.

Jyn shrugged. “Could be worse. Could be better. It’s a living, and the captain’s a reasonable man. At
least I get to see more of the galaxy than cement on Coruscant.”

If Efrah doubted her, she gave no sign, just nodding thoughtfully. “All expenses paid trip around the
stars?”

“Pretty much, if you don’t get killed,” said Jyn. “We ended up earthbound in Scarif, but it was
practically a paradise, and safe as anyone could get. Seemed like it, anyway.”

Efrah snorted a laugh. “That’s what we all thought.”

A month ago, Jyn would have left the already-tense discussion at that, found some way to escape.
But now she couldn’t stop at get out alive. She wasn’t a thief any more, but a spy, or the next thing
to it. She just needed to find some way to get things moving the other way.

With scarcely a pause, Efrah added, “Sorry about Zekheret. He means well.”

Jyn saw her chance, and went for one of Cassian’s tricks. Turn the tables. “Oh, is he your—?”

“Gods, no,” said Efrah, appalled. “We were in basic training together. I don’t know about yours, but
ours was … rough. We teamed up. He needed someone with brains, and I, well, women in Starfleet
can always use someone watching our backs. You know.”

You didn’t have to be in Starfleet to learn that. The problem was finding people to watch your back
who wouldn’t shoot you in the back.

Jyn thought of Baze and Chirrut, faithful without a home to protect. Kaytoo with his blaster, sealing
off the blast-shield. Cassian urging her to keep going while he stopped to cover her, a moment before
his body struck beam after beam. Bodhi escaping with the shuttle, waiting those few precious
minutes when she ran off to seize what she could of Kaytoo—he couldn’t have known what she was
doing. It must have seemed insane. Yet he stayed.

“Yes,” she said quietly. “He’s trustworthy, then?”

“Definitely,” Efrah replied. “I mean, he’d fuck a droid if it stood still long enough, so I had to drum
not interested into his head a few dozen times. But he’s not a problem once he does figure it out.
He’s got a weird streak of chivalry.”

Rebel whore, she remembered.
“ Seems like it,” said Jyn, in her best approximation of Cassian’s neutral tones.

“And he’s a good friend,” Efrah said, with what seemed peculiar force. She cast a sideways glance at Jyn. “I can tell him—how old are you.”


“You’re a few years younger than me, then.” Efrah’s fingers drummed a quick beat against the table again. “And good-looking, which is worse.”

Jyn stared at her. “Sorry?”

Whatever ambivalence had beset her passed. In her usual decided manner, Efrah said,

“I don’t know how much time you’ve spent on bases like this, Lyr, but younger women sometimes have … difficulties here. I’m in administration, so I can’t be any help, but I could try and get your schedule coordinated with Zekheret’s, if you want.”

“I’ve never been anywhere like the Death Star,” said Jyn, frankly enough. It bought her a moment’s consideration, along with a moment’s discomfort. “But I would hope that’s not necessary.”

Efrah shook her head. “I wouldn’t bet on hope, if I were you.”

_I should bet on trust, instead?_ In fairness, she had no particular reason to suspect her of anything unusually nefarious. If Efrah did suspect something, counter-infiltration seemed involved and unnecessary—she could just inform someone. Jyn would be captured and killed, like Princess Leia.

She suppressed a shudder. “I’m mostly shut up with my captain right now; he’s convalescing, and requires … supervision. But if I need someone once I have real duties, I’ll let you know.” Jyn hesitated, then added, “Thanks.”

Shrugging, Efrah said, “No problem. I figure we’ve got to stick together.”

_I hate spying_, Jyn thought.

_________

_I hate spying_, Bodhi thought.

Somehow, he’d never imagined that it would involve quite so much time in the fresher. But regularly chatting with an NCO over his comlink had to seem suspicious. He might not be a hardened double-crosser like Galen or Cassian, or even tough and savvy like Jyn, who’d gotten them all this far. But he knew all about escaping notice in the Empire, and that would _not_ be it.

Even going to the fresher too much would be dangerous, when he was allowed at all. At best, it’d look medical, and stormtroopers didn’t get the royal treatment officers did. So, most often, he waited until he had something he really needed to say, and stuck around as long as he dared until it went through.

He had something now. He had to tell her about Princess Leia, and he’d been waiting an _hour_. His unit had the night shift, so at least he wasn’t on duty now—in theory, he should be sleeping—but that didn’t make it less nerve-wracking that she didn’t respond. A few minutes, sure. Half an hour, forty minutes? All right. But it had never been this long. Anything could have happened to her. And to Cassian, as helpless as he could ever be.

In the shuttle, Bodhi’s heart nearly stopped when Cassian screamed. He’d needed Jyn to walk, and
absolutely coated her hand in blood from that wound—it’d been simple to smear that jacket with the blood because there was just so much of it. Despite the horrible battle, it made Bodhi feel sick whenever he thought about it, even with Jyn assuring him that they were doing better on that end.

Jyn herself, at least, had been in good shape when Bodhi last saw her. Last spoke to her, even. But he wouldn’t know if something happened to her. She was as brave as Galen, but not—not exactly subtle. If she tripped up in her lies, if she didn’t and she still got caught—Force.

Other troopers passed in and out of the fresher now and then, but he hardly heard them. Just the thready dadadada of his pulse, beating inside his skull like the galaxy’s creepiest drumsticks. Bodhi tried again, his throat and chest and stomach all burning and tight and awful.

Seconds ticked by. Nothing, then nothing, then nothing, then—

The channel clicked on. She was there!

“Sergeant?” he said.

But she didn’t say anything. He couldn’t hear anything but an odd sort of crackle, as if the comlink were being pressed against something. Bodhi’s heartbeat ticked up again.

“Sergeant, is that—”

“Identify yourself,” someone said coolly. A man. Not Jyn sprang into Bodhi’s mind, but before the thought could panic him further, another stumbled right after it.

“Captain?”

Chapter End Notes

Needless to say, it’s extremely unlikely that Leia slept with Tarkin (ew). But I have always thought there was a nasty sexual undertone to his treatment of her, while Leia is even more repulsed by him than Vader, who literally just tortured her. He also seems genuinely betrayed that Leia lied (lied!!!!) to him, while Vader is pretty much "duh?" So I do tend to assume that Tarkin was creeping on her and Leia, as a spy, pretended not to be revolted, and the whole deal spawned some rumours about them.
Chapter 8

The comlink went so utterly silent that Bodhi worried he’d lost the connection. Several seconds passed. Then:

“Yes,” Cassian said. “This is Captain Willix of robotic research and development. Identify yourself.”

His voice was subtly different than usual. A little in the accent, mostly in tone. Colder, Bodhi thought, yet not as cold as he could sometimes get.

“RK-1301,” he replied.

“RK?” said Cassian. Something that might be amusement bled through the altered voice. “Very well. State your purpose.”

“I had a message for Sergeant Lyr. I … er, I’m not sure what happened that it went to your com, instead.”

“This is hers.” Now he definitely seemed amused. “She appears to have forgotten it. What message?”

Bodhi’s brain caught up with his relief. The last time he talked to Jyn, Cassian had just woken up. She said he was coherent, but exhausted. He didn’t sound it—well, of course coherent, but also clear and strong and careful, not tired. Then again, he could probably sound like anything if he felt like it. And if he was still recovering, he shouldn’t hear.

“Trooper?” Cassian prompted him.

“Uh,” he said. “I—I’m in the fresher. I don’t think anyone else is here.”

It was so bald a tangent that even Bodhi winced. And with Cassian, of all people? He remembered the sabacc games during their long hours in hyperspace; the only time they managed to drag Cassian into one, he’d crushed them all. Even Jyn, who cheated.

“That does not matter,” said Cassian, which genuinely startled him.

Bodhi blinked at his wrist. “It doesn’t? Are all transmissions …?”

“Unlikely,” Cassian said. “But if you constantly switch between one way of thinking and another, it is more difficult to hold to what you must be. Do you understand?”

Now he sounded like a cross between Bodhi’s strictest Academy instructor and his favourite uncle.

“Yes, sir.”

It made for a very strange cross, Bodhi decided. But Cassian seemed to fall into it naturally. This must be how he talked to his other recruits, his real ones.

Though it didn’t get much more real than this.

After another pause, Cassian said patiently, “Lyr’s message?”

“Oh … well, I …” He knew he was babbling. “Where is she?”
“The mess hall,” said Cassian. “I take it Lord Vader has arrived with his prisoners.”

Relief whipped through him. His knees might have buckled with it, had he been standing. As it was, Bodhi leaned against the nearest wall.

“That’s what they’re saying down here.” He gulped. “It’s Princess Leia and her crew. I don’t know if you heard—”

“I have,” Cassian replied. He didn’t sound dismayed. He didn’t sound anything, really. Somehow, that cold, even tone comforted him more than open sympathy could have. “Are you familiar with Lord Vader?”

“I don’t think anyone is,” said Bodhi. “I know about him. In a general way.”

“He is a Jedi,” Cassian said.

“What?” Bodhi’s mind flew back to Jedha, to the temple, the old stories. Chirrut and Baze, everything. “That’s … that’s illegal. Isn’t it?”

“Nothing is illegal for the Emperor’s agents,” Cassian told him. “Stay away from him. Do not take risks.”

Distantly, Bodhi felt his nails digging into his wrist. He was so useless, really. They’d all have died if not for Jyn, or been imprisoned—he’d be questioned all over again, worse than Gerrera by far. But he’d saved Jyn and Cassian, Bodhi reminded himself. All their brains and nerve wouldn’t have protected them if they’d been on the surface when the Death Star razed Scarif. He’d done his part in the mission and he’d saved them and … and even now, he could do something. He just didn’t know what.

It occurred to him that he might be making things too complicated. His sister always said that he did. Probably the veteran intelligence officer on the other end of the call would say the same thing.

Bodhi asked, “What should I do?”

He half-expected to hear nothing.

“Note everything that you can,” said Cassian. “Learn the routines, and pay attention to any changes. Listen to what the other troopers say, particularly those higher up the ranks, but remember that rumours are not always reliable.”

“Don’t get excited and don’t panic?” he said, his heart still thudding.

“Yes.” There was a pause, and then an odd sound, a sort of shallow hiss he wouldn’t have thought possible from Cassian.

“Is something wrong?”

“Ribs,” Cassian said succinctly. “Remember, also, that nothing is worth endangering your position. If you must choose between information and your safety, choose safety. Every time.”

That did not sound very much like him.

“Really?”

“We cannot achieve anything from the grave,” said Cassian. “For now, our work is to learn and to wait for opportunity.”
Okay, *that* sounded like him.

“Yes, sir. I understand,” said Bodhi.

“Good.” Cassian’s voice shifted again, to something that wasn’t so much Captain Willix or Captain Andor as the fellow prisoner in Gerrera’s cells. The man who’d freed him when he couldn’t do much more than gibber, and in a peculiar way, seemed teammate as much as leader afterwards. “Do not forget. Be careful.”

Despite the dread and fear that clung to him, for himself and the others, despite the memories of battle and the horror of the Death Star, the horror that nearly swallowed him when he had to leave Jyn and Cassian in Imperial hands, the one worn and the other bleeding to death—despite it all, Bodhi felt something like hope. And courage, too. He mustered up his nerve.

“You, too.”

Jyn thought she would finally be free once they left the mess hall. Instead, Efrah hesitated as they walked into the corridor, locking her hands behind her back.

“Have you been given any sort of orientation?” she asked.

“No,” said Jyn, already bracing herself. “Captain Willix went straight into bacta, and I’ve been dealing with requisitions and the doctors and—all of that. I don’t think he’s even been assigned a commander yet.”

Efrah said, “Can he walk?”

“Yes,” she replied. “It’s the ribs. They’re broken and he had a punctured lung, so he’s on strict bed rest. It was all I could do to get him discharged to his quarters, last night.” Jyn saw another chance, and seized it. With her best attempt at a wry look, she said, “Perhaps you could tell me which hoop I should jump through next.”

“Certainly,” said Efrah. “In fact, I can show you. I have two hours until my next shift, and I’m in logistics.”

Jyn felt immediately suspicious. The great Imperial sisterhood, or—? But she couldn’t see an easy way to refuse, or a particular reason to do so.

“Thank you,” she said, her bare wrist itching. “I need to check on my captain before I leave the floor, though. We’re in F1813, but unless that’s too much trouble, I’d be grateful.”

“F1813? That should be on the way,” said Efrah instantly.

Jyn, unsure whether she’d stumbled into a lucky break or a trap, just nodded. They walked the short distance—comparatively short distance—to Cassian’s quarters in near silence, for which Jyn could only feel grateful. She’d half-expected further interrogation. Then again, nobody talked much in the halls. Cassian hadn’t, either. Another regulation?

At the quarters, Efrah remained a few feet behind as Jyn typed in the code. Some other protocol, no doubt, but it might give her a moment to make sure Cassian didn’t give anything way. If he’d ever given anything away in his life.

When the door whooshed up, however, she found the room empty. Apart from its very cleanliness, it looked like Cassian had never been there at all. Jyn’s heart jolted.
“Captain?”

She didn’t hear anything, except Efrah moving towards her.

“Is there a problem, Lyr?”

A trap, Jyn thought wildly, but when she turned around, Efrah betrayed nothing but bewilderment. Although she’d moved to the doorway, beside Jyn, she made no attempt to do anything but glance inside. Nothing like a formal inspection, but thank the Force for Cassian’s paranoia, anyway.

“It’s Captain Willix,” she said, only then remembering that she stood right where the door would normally crash down. Nothing happened. Some sort of sensor. But why the hell was she thinking about the wiring when—

Cassian stalked into the room from the opposite direction. At the sight of them, he came to an immediate halt.

The fresher. Jyn almost laughed, all the more as his blank face somehow went blanker. She just remembered to salute.

“Captain.”

“Sir!” said Efrah, all but vibrating with deference.

Cassian’s glance flicked from Jyn, to Efrah, to Jyn. Nothing about his face changed at all, but that meant nothing. For all she knew, he might find the whole situation entertaining. Her eyes narrowed.

“At ease, sergeants,” he said, walking over to them. “Is there an emergency?”

“No, sir,” said Jyn. “Sergeant Efrah, here, offered to help us navigate the bureaucracy. If I have your leave, captain, I will go with her.”

“You do,” he said, without a trace of gratitude. Or anything.

“And if you are well enough to manage on your own,” she pressed.

Cassian’s brows lifted, his expression transforming in some indistinct way from neutral to haughty. “As you see.”

He did look better, in fact. His posture was straight as ever but less stiff, his complexion completely back to usual, his face devoid of the strain she’d already grown accustomed to. Some of it would be the analgesics, but—

“Yes, sir,” muttered Efrah. Though her manner remained as professional as ever, colour crept up her neck.

Jyn rested her hand against her pocket and prayed for patience.

“Do you need anything before I go?”

“Yes,” he said. “Either you or the quartermaster missed some basic necessities. I have placed a full list of what I require in your datapad. Take it to Requisitions and do not leave without a satisfactory affirmation.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. “It will be hours before I return, in that case.”
“Very well,” said Cassian indifferently. He moved aside and gestured at her dresser. “Your datapad is that way, Lyr.”

While Jyn felt reasonably sure he was running at maximum Imperial bastard for Efrah’s sake— nothing she hadn’t done with Esten, really—she couldn’t escape a sense of annoyance as she walked past. She also couldn’t escape a sense that something else was going on.

Walking over to the dresser, she risked a glance over her shoulder. Cassian had moved back into place, standing in the middle of the doorway and saying something in a quiet voice. She couldn’t make out the words, but she recognized the warm, easy tone from the elevator. He probably had that horrible smile plastered on, too.

Turning past the bed to her dresser did improve her mood, however. The datapad itself looked exactly as she’d left it; she wouldn’t have known he’d touched it. But her comlink, which she knew she’d left on the bed, sat neatly beside the datapad. Jyn dared another look at the door— Cassian had stepped closer to Efrah, effectively blotting her out. He was still talking to her, saying something that provoked a low laugh.

Hastily, Jyn bound the comlink around her wrist, just visible under the sleeve. She didn’t know how peculiar it would seem for an Imperial soldier to forget basic equipment, but she didn’t feel like finding out.

Datapad in hand, she headed back.

“—must have been extremely difficult, sir.”

“Anything for the Empire,” said Cassian.

Jyn cleared her throat.

“Ah, Lyr.” He moved again. “I’ll expect you to take note of everything. We have a great deal to learn.”

“Yes, captain,” she said, striding past. “Make sure you rest.”

Both women saluted him, and headed out together, Jyn doing her best to keep the grinding of her teeth inaudible. Even with her near-certainty of the game—if this could at all be termed a game—her hands itched to punch something.

“Captain Willix said Rebels shot him in the attack,” said Efrah, sounding impressed. Evidently the hall regulations only applied to the other halls. Or not at all. Hell if she knew.

“Yes,” said Jyn. “He dropped right off the archives and down to one of the platforms. Hit a few beams on the way down.”

“So that’s why you spent the battle looking for him. I wondered.”

She hadn’t asked. And Jyn hadn’t seen any trace of curiosity—nothing to dilute her relief as Efrah appeared to accept the explanation and return her attention to Zekheret. More suspicious than ever, she gave a short nod.

“He’s my captain.”

Efrah cast a quick glance at her, unreadable except a very slight, very knowing smile.
“Well, now I can see why you’d stick around that deathtrap for your captain.”

“Oh?” Her fingers tingled. Puzzled for a moment, Jyn realized she was gripping her datapad so tightly that she’d cut off blood from her fingertips. She forced herself to relax her grip.

Very solemnly, Efrah said, “His cheekbones would be a great loss to the galaxy. You’re a true hero, Lyr.”

Jyn snorted. “Just doing my part for the Empire.”

She didn’t even look at the requisition list until Efrah had led her through a labyrinth of departments and officials and questionnaires. At every other turn, Jyn expected it all to turn into some complex trap. After all, Lyr had no data trail, beyond what little her errands had grafted onto Willix’s. If anyone started digging around, they’d turn up that dangerous nothing. But nobody seemed to care about Lyr at all, except as proxy for an officer.

Maybe it helped that the officer in question had been a triple agent. Or quadruple—she lost count somewhere in there.

At any rate, she emerged an hour and a half later with a commanding officer for Cassian and a sketchy map of their quadrant in her head. Once Efrah headed off to her shift, borderline-friendly as ever, Jyn prayed she hadn’t signed any inadvertent death warrants and headed back to Requisitions. This time, at least, the lines didn’t look so miserably long.

Still, she had an hour’s wait, two hours after she left Cassian. And before that, Efrah had said that it’d been hours since Princess Leia’s arrival. By now, she must have been questioned. No, Jyn thought. Tortured. No point in polishing it up. She might have cracked, given up the plans or the base or the whole damn Rebellion. She might have held firm, even against a Jedi—Cassian believed she had it in her, and he certainly wasn’t one to overestimate people. Or she might be dead. They didn’t know, and they had no way of knowing.

Jyn checked her comlink. Nothing from either Cassian or Bodhi. Though it wouldn’t be safe here, anyway. She sighed, nevertheless, and switched on her datapad.

A message flashed over the screen.

_Comlink: 36050682961
If sensitive location, replace audio: 975 (clear), 615 (uncertain), 248 (emergency)_

Jyn instantly programmed Cassian’s comlink code into her own com, fixing the other three into memory. Sure enough, the message vanished before she’d finished typing.

She suppressed a burst of sheer excitement. Enigmatic messages with secret codes were much more her idea of spying than gossiping with a boyish flirt and pretending to bond with an inscrutable sergeant. Or—not her idea of it, not at all, but an idea, like something from a good holodrama.

She knew it was silly. No doubt he’d have just told her the codes directly if she’d come back alone. Unless he fell asleep, which was … a very real possibility, in fact, and probably the reason he left it in the first place. He couldn’t know who’d be around when she read it. It made perfect sense to be cryptic.

Still.

The childish pleasure lasted no more than a few moments. Jyn’s thoughts returned to Princess Leia,
the flawed but dauntless spy locked somewhere in this place. Maybe near, maybe distant, but—no, it had to be near, didn’t it? If she could trust Efrah and Zekheret that far, his reassignment was part of a general reshuffling to increase security in their prison, on account of the new captives. Of course, Princess Leia might be held elsewhere, and of course, they might be completely untrustworthy. But their information coincided with Bodhi’s, and certainly with the level of chaos around the princess. It seemed most probable by far that she was here, in this very quadrant.

Being tortured.

*I can’t do anything about that*, Jyn told herself, even her mental voice thin. *I can’t do anything.*

She’d help if she could do something—she would, now. But with only a vague guess at a location and no way to escape, anything they might do could only throw away what little advantage they had. Best case, it’d get Jyn and Bodhi killed, and Cassian left to fend for himself when he could hardly walk.

The thought only twisted the knives in her chest further. Cassein Willix could be as much of an ass as he liked; if anything happened to Cassian Andor because she took a pointless risk, she’d … Jyn didn’t know what she’d do. But abandoning her team for something not just dangerous, but utterly futile, that would be more than stupid. It’d be wrong. Lyra, Saw, the Rebel leaders, they all ran through her mind. You had to look after your own in this galaxy. Cassian was hers—Cassian and Bodhi were. She’d led them here and she’d get them out, if she could find a way to do it.

Jyn understood Leia Organa’s value, she heartily pitied her, but she couldn’t help her, and she wasn’t about to risk Cassian for her. She didn’t even know what the woman looked like. Hell, she didn’t know what Alderaan looked like.

She considered the line still winding ahead of her and then her datapad. All right, she could fix one of those.

Jyn swiped the screen to the standard database and typed out *A L D E R A A N*. Immediately, a long page of statistics and descriptions appeared on her pad, alongside a picture of a vast, icy mountain range, its jagged peaks beautiful and terrifying. That wouldn’t be the whole planet, of course, but she remembered Cassian saying *my world was white*. As she shuffled forward in the line, Jyn touched the picture.

A data entry scrolled down. *The Anduçelos Mountains, a large mountain range surrounding the planetary capital of Aldera.*

Cassian’s home. It felt unreal.

She flipped back to the main entry. Most of it didn’t much interest her—a radius of some four thousand miles, high water content, plenty of nitrogen and oxygen, average temperature on the cold end of temperate. A population of seven billion. Five thousand known languages. One of seven planets in the larger system, but the only one to independently support life, and home to the vast bulk of the system’s residents.

Without much better to do, she kept skimming downwards, examining the pictures that flickered along the sides as she went. Fine, now she knew what Alderaan looked like. She could read something more interesting. Or … talk to someone.

Jyn paused, and stifled the impulse to glance over her shoulder and to her sides, make sure nobody watched her. It wouldn’t mean anything to them if they did, but she still felt hunted. Ignoring the feeling, she selected *Districts*. 
The list that rolled down, *Aldera* to *Zyxei*, was longer than she expected. It didn’t matter; she almost immediately saw the only one she cared about, towards the end. Not that she expected much accuracy from an Imperial database, but you never knew.

*Vaes District* showed no images except a smaller picture of the mountains, focused enough for her to make out a grey and unattractive town nestled into a crag. Even the description told her little that she hadn’t guessed from Cassian, except that the district had no unified government, but instead operated as a loose confederacy of small, independent cities. Each city used a different dialect of standard Alderaanian; unlike the people in the capital beneath them, few Vaes residents spoke Basic at all. They had a subarctic climate, scarce resources beyond the deposits of ilum, so on and so forth. Still not interesting, but rather to her surprise, the official list of cities did include a *Vaesda*.

She hesitated again, longer, but pressed down a last time.

The entry for Vaesda contained no pictures at all, no statistics, no descriptions. It consisted of three sentences:

*Vaesda was one of the principal sources of ilum during the Clone Wars. His Imperial Highness the Emperor Palpatine, then Supreme Chancellor of the Republic, ordered clonetroopers stationed in Vaesda to defend the city and the mines from Separatist sympathizers, but to no avail. Though the troopers bravely defended Vaesda, either Separatists or Vaesdi collaborators ignited the mines, and the resulting blast reduced the city to rubble.*

Biting her tongue, Jyn closed out the entire database. She didn’t have any clear idea of what had actually happened, but she’d seen plenty of Imperial propaganda in her time. Separatists raiding remote cities on Alderaan? Right, when nerfs flew. But she didn’t imagine Imperial propagandists would take the trouble to concoct an entirely fictitious story for a brief databank entry on an obscure mining town. Anyway, Cassian had mentioned clonetroopers. No doubt Palpatine really did send them there. No doubt the place really had been wiped off the map.

And, she thought, no doubt this was what Cassian meant when he said he’d lost everything at six, and turned it to fighting the Empire. He was twenty-six now, so twenty years ago. The year *before* the Empire. Something must have happened that year, something to do with Alderaan, but she had no idea what it was. She’d never paid much attention to Republic history; she couldn’t even remember it.

Jyn’s thoughts swerved back to Princess Leia. *Born into the Rebellion*, she remembered Cassian saying. She hadn’t put it together at the time, but—exactly how old was Leia Organa? Even with her father as a founder, she couldn’t be much over … what, seventeen or eighteen? All their hopes rested in the strength of an adolescent girl?

Older than she was when Saw left, Jyn reminded herself, and stepped up to the front of the line.

The quartermaster glared at her, though less ferociously than he did at everyone else.

“You again,” he grunted.

“You’re good with faces,” she said, doing her best to strip any overt flattery from her voice. Bringing up Cassian’s list on the datapad, she handed it over and sighed. “My captain woke up.”

“Happens to the best of us,” said Brakas. He scanned the datapad. “Kit 2X97NE4? What the hell is that?”

“I have no idea,” Jyn told him, and winced. “Captain Willix just said that either you or I don’t
understand basic necessities.”

“Fucking officers.”

Jyn gave him a look of intense sympathy. “He’s usually not this bad. I think it’s the bed rest getting to him.”

Brakas, typing into his tech station, muttered something she didn’t recognize. Then he said, “Ah. Droid repair tools. Fine, I’m running it through. What’s the ID?”

Droid repair—she almost grinned as she rattled off the code. Cassian must have found Kaytoo.

“Right. Willix, here he is.” Brakas slid something on the screen. “There, all in. He’ll have his supplies by morning.”

“Thank you,” she said emphatically.

“If you dare, tell him he can cheer up now,” he added.

Jyn, more at ease with the rough quartermaster than any of the others, scoffed outright. “What for? The supplies?”

“The Star’s on the move again. He’s going home.”

Every cautious response dried in her mouth. “He’s what?”

“Haven’t you heard?” Brakas handed the datapad back to her. “We’re headed to Alderaan.”
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Hey, everyone—it's been a hell of a month. My grandfather nearly died (terrible! but he's doing better now) and I got accepted into a PhD program (:D). Also, this chapter grew to absurd proportions and I've ended up splitting it. On the bright side, it means the next should come a lot more quickly and have actual plot.

Thanks, as ever :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jyn hadn’t thought any elevator ride could possibly feel longer than the one that took Cassian to their quarters, with the possible exception of the hellish four minutes she spent hurtling through the Citadel with Kay’s head. Yet the entirely painless trip from Requisitions seemed like it must be the longest of her life.

When the doors finally opened on their floor, she had to remind herself that everyone would notice if she tried to hurry. I can’t run. Can’t run. Can’t run. The mantra circled through her head as persistently as Chirrut’s ever had. With all the composure she could grasp, Jyn marched out of the elevator and down the halls.

It must have been good enough; nobody paid attention to her, though by the time she reached the door, she’d burned through so much of her resolve that her fingers shook as she punched in the code. She stumbled inside, never more grateful to hear the door slam shut behind her.

Everything was exactly as she’d left it, except Cassian. He lay stretched out on his bed, asleep. Probably he needed it—she hoped he hadn’t smoothed his way with Esten’s sedatives—but Jyn didn’t hesitate on her way over to him. She only paused in the very act of reaching down to shake him awake, realizing it would rattle his ribs. Pretty much anything from the shoulders down could.

Jyn almost settled for just flicking Cassian’s hair away. It had fallen over his face again, which she always found intensely irritating, for some reason—not that it mattered—but, no. Instead, she touched his jaw.

“Cassian. Wake up.”

His eyes flew open before she’d finished speaking. After one blink, they focused on her.

No drugs. Thank heavens that his antipathy to Imperial everything extended to sleeping aids.

“Jyn?”

She yanked her hand back, and Cassian sat up, wincing a little as he braced himself on his hands. With as much time as she’d spent around soldiers, and in her own head, she knew better than to offer help.

“What happened?” His face tightened, but only to his usual expression—guarded and alert.

During all those empty minutes on the elevator, she’d had time to decide how to tell him. Jyn said,
“Darth Vader has interrogated Princess Leia and they’re taking her to Alderaan.”

Cassian’s eyes widened, a twist of surprise unmistakable for a full second. Once, she thought that she would give anything to see him shaken out of his equanimity. Now she realized she’d been a fool. Only disaster would do that. Disaster for everyone, not just himself.

“To Alderaan?” He climbed out of bed, and along the edges of her mind, Jyn noticed that it seemed less painful, the movement quicker and more fluid. “That cannot be true. Why—”

“You think I’d lie to you about this?” she said sharply.

“No,” said Cassian, without appearing to think very much about it. “I do not see … if she talked, they would have killed her and go straight to the base, not return her home. If she resisted, they still—you are certain?”

“It’s what I heard,” Jyn replied, mollified, “and it’s what Bodhi’s hearing, too. We must be hours into hyperspace by now.” Her skin crawled. She didn’t mind going into hyperspace, never had, but not even knowing it had happened was something else. Papa, did you have to make this thing so big?

He nodded absently, hand curling about the bar of his bed frame as he leaned into it. But his grip stayed loose, the line of his body contained rather than stiff. “I heard that Senator Organa was headed back to Alderaan. That might have something to do with it, but …”

“They can use her against her father.” Jyn’s mind skittered back to the green fields of her home, the stormtroopers searching the house as she huddled down to watch. Krennic’s voice, more familiar than his face. It was years ago now, but those few minutes burned clear and precise in her memory, even while everything around them faded. You’ll all live in comfort. “As a hostage.”

“The Empire doesn’t usually take hostages,” said Cassian. Though they stood just feet apart, he let his gaze drift around the room as they talked, studying everything without settling on much of anything.

“Sometimes they do,” she told him. “Or they try.”

At that, Cassian’s eyes immediately lifted to hers. “You?”

Jyn gave a short nod. She had meant to leave it at that, but the inexplicable impulse to speak, to remember, struck her again. Before she could suppress herself, she said,

“My mother and me. They meant to take us with my father, to—” Her brain caught up with her mouth. She could have stopped there, almost did, but instead, she gave a strangled laugh. “To keep him honest, I suppose. But my mother attacked them, with a unit of stormtroopers right there, and I … I hid.”

Sometimes it seemed that she’d never stopped. Even with the Partisans, and certainly after, until she lost her father, as well. Until … perhaps after that, too. Until she calmed enough to think, Galen’s explanation of his painstaking sabotage sifting into Cassian’s indignation and Saw’s horror. Everything had whirled inside her mind, around and around and around: the slight burden of a child’s body in her arms, her father’s weight dragging her down, some of us just decided to do something about it—all of it fusing into a bright clarity.

“That is how she died?” said Cassian, very calm. “Stormtroopers?”

If he hadn’t been, she would have drawn back in an instant. As it was, Jyn considered him carefully, wary of pity and warier of weakness. She saw neither, nothing beyond interest touched by a hint of
sympathy. But Cassian was not a chance ally who would turn on her the moment it benefited him. She knew him, as well as she knew anyone. Probably better. He might sacrifice her to fight the Empire, but no sooner than himself. She’d do the same, these days.

“Yes. She tried to kill the director who took my father.” Jyn’s lip curled. “Krennic. You met him.”

He lifted a brow. “I did?”

“Well,” she said, “you shot him. In the Citadel.”

“Ah.” Cassian considered that, then met her eyes again with a slight smile. “Good.”

Smiling back, Jyn felt less gratitude than fierce satisfaction. “Good.”

After a long moment, they both looked away; she couldn’t have said which did it first. Maybe neither. Comfortable and uncomfortable all at once, she folded her arms over her stomach and examined the featureless floor. It was almost a relief to return to existential dread.

“If the princess won’t collaborate with them,” Jyn said, “she could be turned into a hostage to hold over her parents. That does happen. The question is how probable it is.”

Not a question she could answer, frustratingly. She didn’t want to keep asking for Cassian’s judgment, as if she couldn’t reach any conclusions on her own, or trust the ones she did reach. She’d got them this far, Jyn reminded herself. Survival and endurance were her strengths. Information and analysis were his.

She glanced up at Cassian again. Deliberately or not, he’d also folded his arms and fixed his eyes on the nothing beneath them. Between his Imperial uniform and thoughtful frown, he made for a peculiar mirror of herself, both opposite and the same.

“Not very, at the moment,” he said, at last. “If they gave up on extracting information and found another use for her, they would not balk at exploiting it. But it’s been less than a day. It is highly improbable that they would give up after so short a time.”

Jyn, through sheer insignificance, had managed to avoid torture in her assorted exploits. But she’d been knocked around by Imperials plenty, enough to grasp the horror of a day’s concentrated attention. Maybe she grasped it better than him, in some ways. More than a day was the sort of thing that churned out Saw Gerreras, as immediate survivors or vengeful mourners. Cassian was right, though, that the Imperials didn’t seem to understand the traps they sprung on themselves. None beyond a few naysayers, anyway. A day of torture would ordinarily be a trial run for them.

“You said that Darth Vader is a Jedi,” she reminded him. “It could have something to do with that. He’ll have his own ways of knowing things.”

“True.” His head still tilted down, Cassian looked back over at her, the shrewd calculation in his face nothing like the simple, straightforward assertiveness he’d shown around Efrah. Exactly as he’d been at Yavin, though. “The real question is why they would even pretend to offer a chance at survival to a traitor. The Empire does not tolerate the appearance of weakness.”

“The Empire uses fear,” said Jyn. “That’s why the Death Star is so—ridiculous, really. Actually destroying whole Imperial planets is a terrible idea. It’s the power to do it that’s meant to cow people, with a few atrocities to back it up. Is the royal family popular on Alderaan?”

“Yes,” he said, without hesitation. “Very. Queen Breha has little power beyond Aldera, but enormous …” Unusually, Cassian seemed at a loss for words. He gave a slight wave of his hand.
“Stature. The senator did have real power, and is a great advocate of, hm, Alderaanian principles and interests.”

In that order, to go by the naked approval in his voice.

“Then killing their daughter above the very surface of the planet would be a serious blow,” she said. “They’ll make a martyr of her, but they don’t see that. Perhaps the idea is to put fear of the Empire into Alderaan.”

“Then they do not understand Alderaan,” said Cassian firmly. But he nodded. “Which is likely enough. It wouldn’t be the first time.”

Jyn thought, again, of the opaque disaster that had happened on Alderaan while she toddled in Coruscanti apartments. Whatever it was, they’d only managed to turn Alderaanians into implacable enemies of the Empire. Senators and six-year-olds alike.

“I’m sure,” she said, remembering her father, the havoc she wreaked with the Partisans, the greater havoc with the Alliance. Her mouth tugged to the side. “The Empire excels at underestimation.”

“It does.” Another obscure something shadowed his face as he stood there, considering. It took her a few moments to recognize; she’d seen it in others, countless times on countless faces, but never so unobtrusively. And never in him.

“What is it?” Jyn demanded.

Cassian tilted his head inquisitively.

With a sigh that hopefully buried her dread, she said, “I didn’t know you could feel fear, Cassian. You’re afraid of something, though.”

He stared at her. Not angry, but—taken aback. No doubt most people didn’t read him that easily. Or at all.

Most people didn’t know him. And most people weren’t her.

“I fear you are right,” he said slowly, “and that this is a hostage situation.”

“But?”

“But not the one you propose.” His face had gone smooth, his voice very even. “The Empire is not trying to extract information from Queen Breha or Senator Organa. Princess Leia is the one who has what they want, not her parents. And everyone she cares about is in Aldera, at this moment. Everyone she has a duty to protect, also.”

Jyn caught her breath, more in horror than shock. She wasn’t surprised at all; though she hadn’t thought of that, it must have lurked somewhere in the back of her mind. Not consciously, not the bleak lines traced from one point to the next, but root and soil of the strangling fear she’d felt from the moment she heard.

“You think Aldera is the hostage?” Of course. Of course it was. She’d been on Jedha, on Scarif, she knew how few qualms the Empire had. But— “We’re not talking about an Outer Rim facility. I know it’s your home, but it’s also the capital of a Core planet. If the Empire wrecks Aldera, that … it’s one of the most beloved cities in the galaxy.”

“Yes,” said Cassian. Before she could think to stop him, he strode over to his chair and extracted one
of the reviled nutrient milks. “It is a popular city, that is. An important one.”

“Not your home, then,” she said, keeping a sharp eye on him. He’d just briefly touched a hand to his side, and only when he bent down, so nothing seemed very alarming. Still, whatever he might say, Jyn knew he was exactly the sort of person who would sabotage himself at the earliest opportunity. She should know.

Unsealing the milk, Cassian gulped down half the tin. “The Rebellion is my home.”

He did not, she noticed, say it was their home. Just his. Absurdly, she felt herself smile.

“Of course.” Jyn paused. “And you’re from Vaes, not the capital.”

Cassian eyed her with open curiosity. “I am. Not that it will make a difference if the Death Star attacks.”

She remembered Jedha, the destruction that radiated out from the immediate wreckage.

“No. If Aldera falls, it will pull down half those mountains with it,” said Jyn. “To go by the Holy City … that would wreck a quarter, maybe a third of Alderaan outright. Devastate the planet. They couldn’t hide that. It would be—”

“Idiocy,” said Cassian. A lot more things than that, but the utter contempt in his voice managed to encompass all of them.

“Well, yes.” Small comfort, but Jyn hung onto it. Jedha had been bad enough. Even the Citadel had. “If the Empire collapses a spire of Aldera, the galaxy will know. You’ll have recruits from a hundred planets begging to join.”

“Even I would not choose that method of getting them,” he said, and drank the rest of the milk.

She felt sure that, three weeks ago, Cassian wouldn’t have so much as considered saying a sentence that included the words even I. In fact, Jyn felt sure that he still wouldn’t, with—almost anyone else. Not that it told her anything she already didn’t know or couldn’t guess, from what he’d said on the way to Scarif and before. But nevertheless, shame made for its own sort of faith.

“Obviously,” said Jyn. “Let’s hope the Empire isn’t stupid enough to do it.”

“They were with Jedha,” Cassian replied.

Jedha, home to a dozen faiths. She’d heard enough in the ship to know that a good quarter of the men who followed them were either Jedhan or religious. Another snare that the Empire had built, then latched onto its own foot. Throat tight, she nodded.

“I—” He ran his fingers through his hair, pushing it out of his eyes. “I don’t mean that we should despair, only that we need to understand the situation as it is. That is not comforting, I know.”

She told him, “I don’t want comfort.”

Once Jyn bullied Cassian into taking another dose of analgesics and lying back down, she escaped into the fresher to wash. Her skin had felt clammy with cold sweat for hours. Though lies and tricks came as nothing new, she’d never depended so incessantly on them, on keeping quiet and unobtrusive for days on end. It wasn’t a taste for subtlety that had left her with assault records under half a dozen identities.
“Cassian?” she called out, tearing off the miserable suffocating jacket.

He sounded completely alert. “Yes?”

“Don’t go back to sleep. I’m going to have to take you to Esten in another”—she checked the time, calculating the assorted detours—“half-hour.”

“I wasn’t planning on rest,” he said.

“Okay.” Jyn soaked a rag and started washing her face. “Since we’re being realistic, everything we just said assumes that Princess Leia hasn’t revealed anything, and won’t. Last night, you thought she would probably resist. Just how sure are you?”

“We can never be sure,” he said. “From what I know of her, I would say it is very much more likely that she will not speak. At the least, I believe that breaking Leia Organa would require more than a day’s work.”

For all the talk of uncertainty, a bright vein of assurance ran through his voice.

Jyn caught her own eyes in the mirror, wide above the cloth that hung over most of her face. “How well do you know her?”

There was a pause from the room: not a long one, but a pause nevertheless.

“Well enough,” said Cassian. “I helped train her.”

She started, the cloth dropping from her hand. It didn’t matter. She’d already scrubbed her face red, as if she could somehow scour herself clean of Lyr and Lianna and all the rest. Jyn picked the cloth up and tossed it into the sink, washing her hands.

“And you were her handler,” she said. “Liaison. Whatever it was.”

“For a time,” he replied. With what seemed real distaste, he added, “The network in Imperial City was a disaster. I already had to spend months there.”

She’d known at least a dozen excellent engineers forced to work with shoddy materials. Cassian sounded exactly like every one of them.

Jyn smiled at herself. Probably, he wouldn’t appreciate the comparison. But professionals were professionals, the galaxy over. In another life, he might have fit in just fine with the Partisans’ perpetually aggrieved technicians and medics.

“I bet you did,” she said. “Well, if you’re the one who trained her, I can take your word for it.”

“Not the one,” said Cassian. “There were several of us. Intelligence couldn’t afford any negligence with Princess Leia slated for work under the Emperor’s nose and no local support worth speaking of. I assisted.”

Sure you did.

“Sounds like you.” With a sigh of relief, Jyn unpinned her bun. Remarkable, really, how petty inconveniences could live side-by-side with terror, but she was almost tempted to liberate some of Cassian’s pills. At least the headache subsided as she shook out her hair. “Captain Teamwork.”

“Thank you,” he said dryly.
“So,” said Jyn, walking out of the fresher, “is that why you got saddled with my case?”

“What?” Cassian had been typing something into his datapad, but glanced up as she entered his range of vision. He looked surprised—perhaps at the question, though it seemed odd that one of his quicksilver reactions would linger that long. Quickly, he returned his gaze to the datapad.

She headed over to her bed. “Experience dealing with difficult women. Unless my impression of the princess is very wrong.”

“Not very, I think,” Cassian said. “But I would not describe her that way, no.”

“Really?” said Jyn, privately amused that the denial extended only to Leia. “What was she, then?”

If he noticed the amusement, he didn’t share it. Even graver than usual, he replied, “Not a woman, and not particularly difficult.”

“Not—” Then she remembered. “A girl, you mean.”

“Yes,” he said flatly. Though he didn’t look away from his datapad, he reached around to switch it off.

She knew that. Or she’d guessed, at least, just a few hours ago, before everything managed to degrade from terrible to nightmarish. Jyn slouched against her bedframe, the metal cold against her bare arms.

“Right. Born into the Rebellion,” she said. “Just how old are we talking about, here? The Rebellion itself can’t have been around that long.”

“She was fifteen when I trained her.” Leaning his head back, he laid the datapad aside, even that small movement careful and controlled. “Four years ago, but she was already a Rebel through-and-through. She’d do anything.”

Cassian, she thought, was not one to use *anything* carelessly. And—Force, nineteen. Not as young as she’d feared, but still, the fate of the entire galaxy hung on the fortitude of a nineteen-year-old girl.

*Only three years younger than me*, Jyn had to remind herself. In fact, Leia would be closer to her age than Cassian was, if only by a year. But those three years gaped open behind her; nineteen-year-old Jyn Erso felt a lifetime away. Then again, so did the twenty-two-year-old Jyn of a month ago.

She shifted uncomfortably. These days, her skin didn’t seem to fit quite right, aside of the chills and sweats. Aside of Lyr. Lianna Hallik would never have contemplated a fraction of what Jyn had risked in the last day alone. Certainly, she wouldn’t have risked her survival in probably-doomed attempts to protect the galaxy and the people she cared about. Lianna didn’t *have* people to care about. But Cassian, however restless, fit within himself as he’d always done. He behaved differently with her, yes—frank and loyal where he’d once been slippery. But he remained what he was, knew what he was, even if he despised it.

Jyn, though. It would be easier, in some ways, if she had died. Jyn Erso would mean only a criminal turned unconventional hero, and there have an end to it. Instead, she lived, somewhere within Isidar Lyr. And if she kept living, then what?

“The Rebellion’s existed for nineteen years?” she asked, because she had to say something.

“Twenty,” said Cassian.
“The Empire itself has only been around for nineteen,” Jyn pointed out. That extra year, again.

His fingers folded over his stomach. He held them loosely, the gesture casual rather than tense—or she’d think so if he made casual gestures.

“The Empire is daughter to the Republic. There wasn’t much difference by the end.” Cassian turned his head to settle a sober gaze on her. “It is all the same people, after all.”

She’d thought that more than once. Krennic, Tarkin, her father—they’d been part of the Republic. This strange Darth Vader had, whatever he once called himself. Literally everyone out of their teens. Jyn herself had babbled her first words under the Republic, taken her first steps, even if she didn’t remember them. The Alliance could gild the Republic’s memory all they wanted; she’d learned of its incompetence and corruption at Saw’s knee. Even when she rejected the rest of him, she easily held to that contempt. A Rebel, though?

“Is that so, Captain Andor?” Jyn folded her arms.

“Don’t sprain your tongue,” said Cassian. “Yes. It is.”

“And you want to bring the galaxy back to the way it was?”

The planes of his face hardened. “No.”

With no apology whatsoever, she said, “Sorry. I thought you were an officer in the Alliance to Restore the Republic.”

“The Rebellion,” he told her. “I don’t care about the Republic. I care about fighting the Empire, about democracy.”

“And if we win?” Jyn demanded. She, herself, didn’t know why it offended her so much.

He blinked, gentling in some indistinct way to the Cassian she’d already grown accustomed to. “Then the galaxy will be free.”

Not if they didn’t have something to replace it. That was the trouble with idealists, they didn’t think of the hows and what thens—but they had the senators and generals for that, of course. Their Republic, however flawed, would be something. It was Cassian, specifically, who didn’t care. As if you could care about democracy and not about government. Plainly, he’d never thought of an after.

Neither had she, in all fairness. But she never expected to live that long.

Jyn pressed her lips together. He wouldn’t have, either. Part of her wanted to live just to spite … something. The galaxy, maybe.

“This is the stupidest argument we’ve ever had,” she said.

Just like that, Cassian broke into a smile. “Have we disagreed about anything?”

“I don’t think so.” Unsure what she’d been waiting for, Jyn let herself fall onto her bed and shifted about on the mattress until she felt comfortable. Ish.

“It’s only been a month,” he said thoughtfully. “Give us another week, and I’m sure we can surpass ourselves.”

Without intention, without even thought, she laughed. Another thing foreign to Lianna, but she couldn’t mind this one—even though Cassian, as ever, stayed quiet. But he regarded her with the
pleased, softened expression he got sometimes, one that seemed to share in whatever she felt. Useful for a spy, no doubt, but she’d never seen it directed at anyone but Kay.

“I’ll withhold judgment,” said Jyn. “But really, why is the Rebellion against the Empire older than the Empire? They must have formed it for a reason. Senator Mothma and Senator Organa and …”

“Senator Amidala,” he said. “Others took part, but the three of them were the true leaders.”

She couldn’t begin to remember all the names she’d heard at the Council, but that one sounded unfamiliar. “I’ve never heard of her.”

“She died early on,” said Cassian. “It was Senator Mothma and Senator Organa who kept the dream alive.”

Jyn managed to hold off her instinctive flinch, but her breath shuddered in her chest. In those days of the infant Rebellion, Saw had been … what? Out there, somewhere. Probably bombing something. Probably right about the Republic before anyone else could see.

“Senator Organa in particular,” he continued. “He was the most committed to resistance, to action. Mothma preferred caution back then—most did.”

“Still do,” said Jyn, irritably.

“Imagine what they were like before the Empire.”

That provoked another laugh. “The mind boggles.”

“Mothma, at least, didn’t trust the Chancellor,” Cassian said. “She worked to raise concern and build contacts, I’ve heard. I don’t remember, but it seems likely. She’s always understood that better, and she didn’t have Senator Organa’s reasons.”

He stopped there, plainly considering his words. Only a moment’s hesitation, yet all that she needed. Senator Organa of Alderaan, fiercer and more urgent than the others. Clonetroopers in the Alderaanian snow; clonetroopers sent to Organa’s planet by Palpatine himself. An ostensible Separatist raid that wrecked an Alderaanian city, and its valuable mines, and the lives of its children. Cassian at six, drawn into a fight that had scarcely begun, and Cassian at twenty-two, training the senator’s daughter, and Cassian not an hour ago, saying that the Emperor had underestimated Alderaan before. Twenty years, not nineteen.

“Organa was angry about Vaesda,” Jyn said, “wasn’t he?”

From his bed, Cassian drew a quick breath. The hands loosely clasped on his torso twisted together. But he didn’t say anything, or look at her.

“I don’t know what happened,” she added. “Beyond the Imperial version. Propaganda, obviously.”

He unlinked his fingers, which tapped an irregular beat against his stomach. “There was a certain amount of sympathy for the Separatists on Alderaan. Not the methods, but—we believe in the right to self-rule, to democracy.”

“You have a queen,” said Jyn.

“We have twenty-eight queens,” he replied, “and nine other heads of state, who all happen to be the same person.”
She squinted over at him. “Saw was always more about tearing governments down then explaining how they worked, but I’m fairly sure that doesn’t make sense, anyway.”

“Alderaan is not one state,” said Cassian, finally tilting his head enough to meet her gaze, his own direct and clear. A faint but unmistakable pride touched his face, his voice quickening. “It is a confederation. Each country has total rule of itself, apart from a handful of planetary matters—and those are decided by the Senate of Alderaan, not the queen. Like I said before, Queen Breha has little real power, except as Viceroy of Aldera.”

“A figurehead.” Saw did have plenty to say about those. “So there was a bit of sedition on Alderaan, after all?”

“The Emperor—the Chancellor, then—saw it that way,” he said disdainfully. “He thought anything other than cheering on the glory of the Republic counted as sedition.” Cassian shifted, a little, fingers tapping that unsteady beat all the while. “There were some protests, that sort of thing.”

“They sent clonetroopers over protests?” The Empire did it all the time, and she’d heard of many worse wrongs perpetrated by the Republic, but not many that nonsensical.

“Protests supposedly funded by the Separatists. Who were supposedly threatening the mines.” The flash of pride had drained out of his voice. “We only ever had a few raids, that far into the Core, and all of them failures. The real reason was that Senator Organa signed a pointless petition that offended the Chancellor.”

“A petition,” Jyn repeated. That sounded even more inane. “And posting clonetroopers in one city was supposed to teach all of Alderaan a lesson?”

“No.” Cassian’s lips thinned, but he didn’t turn away, this time. “It was supposed to teach Senator Organa a lesson.”

Jyn, half-leaning on her hand, nearly fell back in sheer annoyance. The Republic might have been better than the Empire, but only because literally anything would have been. In what sort of byzantine hellscape did anyone post troops to—but her mind caught up with her. She’d seen it before, on the petty, backstreet scale that she’d lived. Minor ringleaders, thief takers and the like, corrupt officials.

“They meant to prove that Organa couldn’t depend on his own people.” Remembering Ioanath Vyld’s takeover in her quadrant of Imperial City, her eyes narrowed. “That he couldn’t protect his own people.”

Cassian nodded. With unmistakable resentment, he said, “It was a humiliation.”

It was a protection racket, she thought. Undermine trust, offer better deals, extract a price later. But it hadn’t worked. Not as intended, anyway.

Jyn had seen Cassian’s resentment before, too. Not on him. Others, though—the approach could backfire, if you were clumsy about it, or underestimated someone’s level of support. One misjudgment, and supporters wouldn’t consider it an opportunity but an insult to them all. She’d probably seen divide-and-conquer tactics fail more often than succeed, meet with the same sullen indignation. And Cassian’s could only be absorbed from others; he wouldn’t remember it, at his age.

“I’m guessing a lot more people than the senator felt humiliated,” she said.

“Everyone did.” Cassian slipped back into his usual reserve, hands flattening into restraint. “Vaes is poor and cold and filthy. Most people on Alderaan didn’t care about it, didn’t even think about it.
But everyone cared when the Chancellor sent clonetroopers there.” He paused. “For our protection.”

“I bet putting Alderaanians under Republic guard for no reason did wonders with the protests,” said Jyn.

“After a manner of speaking,” Cassian said, with a quirk of his mouth.

She thought about it. “I think I’ve misjudged the Empire. I thought antagonizing their own citizens and sacrificing thousands of troops for indulgent gestures was their own innovation. They couldn’t even do that.”

“No,” he agreed. “Well, the Chancellor believed he’d made his point once Vaesda blew. He expressed condolences, withdrew the troops, and everything seemed to quiet down. But Senator Organa had rushed home to Alderaan as soon as he heard. He saw it with his own eyes, and—you were right.”

Jyn didn’t bother pointing out that Cassian had neatly skipped past the obliteration of his home. They both knew. It wasn’t like she said much to him about the Partisans.

“Organa lost interest in petitions, I take it,” she said.

“The Chancellor really thought that he’d taught him a lesson,” said Cassian, which was answer enough. “I suppose he did, if not the one he intended.”

Jyn’s memory flashed back—Lyra, crumpling to the ground, and Galen, passively acceding. Or Krennic thought so. But he died knowing he’d failed.

Someday, she promised herself, the Emperor would, too. They all would.

Chapter End Notes

1) "Senator Organa": Of course, it's Leia and not Bail who is the current Senator Organa; he must have resigned his seat to her. But "Princess Leia" always seems to supersede that, and in any case, it's always going to mean Bail to Cassian.

2) "her father’s weight dragging her down, some of us just decided to do something about it": Bodhi told Jyn that her father inspired him by saying he could "do something about it," so when Cassian lashes out with the exact same words—well, I think it's notable that it's where their argument ends and she's gung-ho about fighting the Empire when we next see her. I definitely imagine that it's the thing that hit her hardest.

3) "Actually destroying whole Imperial planets is a terrible idea": while the characters definitely know in RO that the Death Star can destroy planets, they've only seen focused attacks on individual cities/stations so far. Those are still devastating and massive strategic missteps (as Vader rightly points out), of course, but less than the Death Star's capabilities. Jyn and Cassian don't underestimate the Death Star so much as they overestimate Tarkin & Co's intelligence.

4) "Twenty years, not nineteen": Of course, I'm thinking of the proto-Alliance in the ROTS cut scenes. I'm somewhat ambivalent about the scenes as they actually exist, but I've always been very interested in the idea of them, and I'm definitely intrigued by the
fact that the Rebellion was first formed as resistance to the Republic's government in that year leading up to the Empire's formation, not as a consequence of it afterwards. And also by the fact that Bail Organa is very noticeably more forceful and intense than, uh, everyone. (Though I like to imagine that Padmé shifted more to his side, given how close they seem at the end of ROTS.) Anyway, that coincides with Cassian's age well enough that I don't really see the need for Clone Wars handwaving. At least for me, it was more interesting to imagine how a small boy could have gotten swept up in that very early phase of the Rebellion, and Bail's much more decided antagonism to Palpatine was the obvious opportunity.

5) "Senate of Alderaan": partly inspired by the ROTJ script, mostly by Alderaan's Earth-like imagery. I like the idea of at least some places having a sort of commonwealth/autonomous communities rather than one unified government. I was thinking specifically of something like the historical Corona de Aragón with bonus democracy.

6) "Protests supposedly funded by the Separatists": The fic is mostly my place to hide from RL politics, but, uh. *whistles*

7) "A pointless petition": Specifically, the petition under discussion in the cut scenes. It seemed the obvious catalyst, even if Sith Lord vs Strongly Worded Letter is amazingly disproportionate. (While Cassian a) doesn't personally remember this and b) doesn't know Palpatine is a Sith Lord, he is ... ah, not exactly a fan of fighting tyranny through petitions.)

8) "Ioanath Vyld's takeover": Completely unimportant. I just liked the idea of Space Jonathan Wild floating around some seedy underbelly of Coruscant.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

"Plot" was probably putting it strongly for this chapter. It's more ... coping mechanisms and feelings.

Minutes passed in the amicable silence Jyn had come to associate with—not just Cassian. With them, here.

When they weren’t having nonsense arguments about nothing. And even that had been more snide venting than a real fight.

It occurred to her that, for perhaps the first time in years, she didn’t want to fight. Not him, though she itched to do something, something more than the interminable waiting. But she didn’t want to fight Esten or Brakas or Efrah, either. Even that idiot Zekheret.

She didn’t want to think, either. Even as she craved action, she felt a deep weariness in her mind, some reservoir drained out. Bodhi, Princess Leia, the Rebellion, her father, Alderaan, Kay’s head, Baze and Chirrut scattered and reunited in the Force: they all spun orbits through her head, together and separately, and she was tired.

“We got you assigned a commanding officer,” Jyn said, sitting up. “Commander Tor—he’s in cryptanalysis, I think. Esten’s reports were on your record and sent through, so hopefully he won’t need any justifications.”

“Good,” said Cassian. She couldn’t tell if he was tired or not. Probably, since he’d been sleeping when she woke him, but he didn’t look it. Not more than usual. “Did you learn anything else?”

“Not much. There’s some dissent in the ranks, apparently. It seems like a small minority, but runs up to some general called Tagge. Efrah and her superiors don’t agree with how the Empire is fighting us.” She rubbed her face. “Fighting the Alliance. They think Starfleet is too overconfident and too passive. Can’t disagree, really.”

“No,” he said, and then— “Did you agree with her out loud?”

“More or less. I tried to stay out of it at first, but I backed her up when she was arguing with Zekheret about it.” Under her breath, she gave a short laugh. “Pretended to regret the Imperial mistakes on Scarif.”

“Zekheret?”

Oh. She’d forgotten to tell him, forgotten that Cassian couldn’t know anything she didn’t tell him. Even now, Jyn wasn’t quite used to that.

“He’s a friend of hers,” she told him, “a corporal. Apparently they’ve served together for years. He’s a sort of pleasant fool—they’re very brains-and-brawn. I figured that she’d be a better target.”

The word felt dirty on her tongue. In a fight, she might lump people into back-up and bystanders and targets, but it seemed a very different thing with those she knew by name, talked with, ate with.
She’d never thought of Efrah that way. Still, if she hadn’t used the term with herself, she couldn’t take it back, either. It wasn’t wrong.

“Hm.” With his face wiped clean of anything like an expression, Jyn couldn’t tell if the sound meant approval, disapproval, or something else altogether. Regardless, she shrugged it off.

“It’s harder to get Zekheret to stop talking than to start,” she said. “I could focus on him, but …”

“No, you made the right call,” he replied, and now she could hear the approval. It didn’t matter, she told herself. Much. “Just be careful.”

“I am.” She rested her palms against her back, pressing her spine straight. The series of cracks sounded loud in the room, more painful than they were. At least that particular discomfort faded, while the panic she’d marinated in for her hour in the elevator subsided to … she hardly knew. One more problem to be solved or survived. “Efrah said she’s helping me because women in Starfleet have to stick together. I don’t know if it’s true. I can believe Starfleet is rough enough, but she’s difficult to read.”

“You don’t need to know,” said Cassian.

On the face of it, that sounded insane, but she supposed it didn’t make much difference pragmatically. Jyn checked the chronometer on her comlink again. She still felt grimy; she’d much rather shower before they left on another multi-hour odyssey through the bowels of the Death Star.

_I should have done it before_, she thought, feeling rather ridiculous for caring at all. But she’d had no clean clothes in the fresher, which would be one thing with Cassian in a drugged sleep, and quite another with him awake and half-recovered. In fact, he was sitting up again now.

She asked him, “Either way, act as if she’s trustworthy and assume she’s not?”

“Something like that,” he said, glancing at her as she headed over to the drawers, mind made up. “You don’t need to act too credulous. Lyr isn’t, unless you’ve changed her.”

Jyn shook her head. “I—she’s been pleasanter, outside the med-bay. But not exactly warm and approachable.”

Cassian looked at her again, his mouth tucked into the usual flat line. But his eyes crinkled up, alight where they stayed cold through so many of his smiles.

She added, “I’m sure that’s a shock.” A week ago, it would have been bitter. Now, Jyn felt a peculiar quiet amusement, something peaceable and friendly.

“I will live through it,” said Cassian. He did smile, then, if only for a moment. “In this case, some doubt will be suitable. Efrah probably expects it.”

“So I need to be grateful, yet suspicious,” said Jyn, opening a drawer to extract a fresh uniform. Then she snorted. The drawer was full, all the clothes folded with sharp exactness, divided into piles by type. “Speaking of which—”

He made an indistinct sound in his throat that suggested nothing in itself, but seemed undoubtedly a Cassian sort of laugh.

“You did my laundry?” She looked over her shoulder, narrowing her eyes at the man on the bed. “You’re supposed to be resting.”
“Droids did our laundry,” he said, exuding guileless confusion.

“Droids?” She peered around. “I see so many of them in here.”

“I assume droids,” said Cassian. “The clothes came out of the chute a few hours ago.” With a regretful note, he added, “They only took fifteen minutes to organize.”

Well, Jyn thought, everyone had their own ways of going stir-crazy. But her own mood lifted a bit, knowing it wasn’t just her.

“Pity that the Empire is so tediously consistent,” she told him, taking out each article of the uniform and tossing them on her bed. “Otherwise you could have colour-coordinated them, too.”

Though Jyn still had to relegate their multitude of problems to the periphery of her mind, she felt more alive after the shower. Toweling her hair dry and dressed in a fresh shirt and trousers, she wandered out to the common area. Cassian had gotten up and leaned against his dresser, apparently lost in thought.

“There you are. We need to head out in a minute.”

His eyes darted from her face to the towel and back again, which could have meant anything, if the same startled look as before hadn’t stolen onto his face. Again, it only lasted a moment before he withdrew into his usual impassive composure, but long enough. That could have nothing to do with her completely banal remark.

Cassian replied, “Yes, I suppose so.”

Maybe he hadn’t roomed with women much. Odd, but there certainly didn’t seem many in the Rebellion. She herself had spent so much of her life crowded in with strangers that it never even occurred to her to feel self-conscious. At least not about trivialities. Mostly.

She didn’t feel self-conscious now, either—just amused that Cassian did. It was such a little thing; it must be, or he would have concealed it.

Jyn dropped her towel into the laundry chute and moved towards the hoverchair.

“Ah.” He took a decided step back, eyeing the chair with distaste. “I can walk.”

To be fair, she considered it for a full three seconds. He did seem to be walking without trouble. More to the point, while slim and not much taller than average, Cassian towered over Jyn and heavily outweighed her. Without some sort of assault, she couldn’t move him anywhere.

Instead, Jyn stared him down. “Yes, but you won’t.”

“Why—”

“I didn’t save our skins to get killed by Esten,” she said. “I’m supposed to be supervising your recovery, remember?”

Sure enough, he saw reason; grumbling under his breath, he made his way to the hoverchair and sat down. Cassian in a nutshell, really.

Jyn removed the last nutrient tins from the chair’s compartment and turned the chair around.

“You can say it,” she told him.
He seemed genuinely puzzled as he glanced up at her. “Say what?”

“I wasn’t the only one who saved us,” said Jyn. After their hours on the Death Star, it took awhile to recognize the edge to her mood, the crawling of her skin and twisting heaviness in her stomach that accompanied it. She’d grown accustomed to dread, even more than usual, and the shifts between danger and safety made it somehow worse than the prisons she knew, where there was only danger. She forced herself to inhale. “I couldn’t have done it without Bodhi flying and your codes. I don’t think I’d ever have slipped past without him screaming in his uniform and you—”

“Bleeding?” Cassian said, sober-faced.

“You bled magnificently.” Some of the clanging of her nerves quieted. Striding back to the fresher to comb her hair and recover her clean jacket, she added, “The Alliance should give you a commendation.”

“Make sure you remember that if we get out of here.”

When would have insulted her. From Cassian, anyway.

“I’ll speak for you as long as you speak for me,” she said, trying to replicate his jacket protocols from the morning.

“Of course.” He sounded as light as she’d ever heard him—and then only with Kay—but she didn’t doubt that he meant it. Cassian was all slippery duplicity or blazing sincerity, with none of Jyn’s comfortable in-betweens. Perhaps if they got to know each other better, that would change, but privately she doubted it. She wasn’t sure they could know each other better, just—more.

Jyn scowled at her reflection. The jacket looked … her size, which was an improvement, but not right.

“Oh, fine.” She stalked back to the hoverchair, hat in hand. “Fix it, will you?”

It couldn’t have sounded less like a request. Without so much as a twitch of his facial muscles, Cassian managed to look amused.

“Almost right,” he said, reaching out to adjust the jacket at her sides. Every brush of his fingers was brief and careful, even when he smoothed down the fabric with an expression of intense concentration. She tried to think about—not that.

“You broke half your bones very effectively, too,” she said.

“And I contracted an infection,” said Cassian. “I am a man of many talents, clearly.”

Jyn glanced down at his bent head and ran her tongue over her teeth. “I’ll take care to mention that.”

“Thank you.” He dropped his hands. “There you are.”

She stayed in place as she clapped her hat on her head, not wanting to seem unsettled. She wasn’t—it wasn’t—anyway.

Jyn fled to the back of the hoverchair and steered it out of their quarters. The silence might have been easy enough, stained only by the low murmur of machinery and distant footsteps. But just the act of stepping past the door wound her nerves up again. She wanted out—and maybe she often did, but never so much, like a living thing that fed on her. Desperately, she reached for something to say, anything.
“See? I did know what you were thinking.”

“No,” said Cassian. “That is not at all what I thought.”

“Oh?” A trio of NCOs nodded as they approached. She was tense, not stupid, so she met their eyes and nodded back.

He stayed quiet even once they passed, their stretch of the hall clear again. Normally, she would retreat into her own mind, but it didn’t make for a welcoming place at the moment. Instead, Jyn poked the back of Cassian’s neck, gratified when he flinched.

“I am of little use until I recover,” he said. “I must regain my health to return to my—to our efforts, and I must do it as soon as possible. I was reminding myself of that.”

“Otherwise known as listening to me?” said Jyn. “Good.”

Cassian just sighed.

After several minutes, the clusters of officers and soldiers growing larger and more frequent, he said,

“You would have done it in any case.”

She frowned. “What?”

“Survived,” said Cassian.

Jyn almost glanced around to see if she’d missed half of some silent conversation. If so, she wasn’t privy to it.

“What are you talking about?”

“You said that I believe you would have failed, without us,” he said, voice very even. “That is wrong. You would have found a way.”

She shouldn’t have been that gratified, or even that surprised. Yet startled pleasure ran through her, a prickle on her skin and along her nerves. She couldn’t define it beyond that, but she felt it bright and formless in her mind, blotting out thoughts and words. For several seconds, Jyn blinked at the back of Cassian’s head.

It’s not true, she thought at last, veering around an obnoxious crew of officers. They’d stopped in the middle of the hall, apparently oblivious to everyone trying to pass through. Without the suits, the codes … hell, the shuttle. I’d never have made it on my own.

Not a welcome thought. But she wouldn’t have, unless—Jyn pulled her mind back from useless detours into speculation. Survival would have taken some doing, at the very least, more than she suspected she’d had in her at the end. If Cassian thought differently, then … well, three weeks ago, he certainly wouldn’t have.

But turn that around, and: in three weeks, he’d come to think higher of her than she did. And she thought quite well of herself, really.

“I might have,” said Jyn. “I’m good at surviving. But everyone’s luck runs out, eventually.”

“Luck,” Cassian said contemptuously.

She smiled.
In a considerably more benevolent frame of mind, Jyn made their way through the blocky turns of
the halls, pooling her recollections of the med bay path with Cassian’s. Luckily—ha!—their
memories exactly coincided, and they arrived even earlier than she’d anticipated.

He was right about luck in this case. Jyn would have been dead by ten if she hadn’t learned to
memorize every route she took, and dead again by eighteen if she hadn’t kept doing it. She couldn’t
imagine it was much different for Cassian, a Rebel spy from childhood. Nothing but talent and
training and practice. And the Force, naturally.

In a stroke of actual fortune, the analgesics held through the hour-long trip in the elevator. People
walked in and out, the two of them rarely alone for more than a few minutes, but the shuddering
stops didn’t do much more than irritate both. Jyn, in particular, was bored and impatient enough that
it took very little effort to revert to Lyr as Cassian crammed himself into Willix.

“—I’m hoping we get shore leave,” another captain was saying as they approached the ninth floor.
“We lost out with Scarif, obviously, but maybe Aldera? I’ve always wanted to see it. They say the
mountains are unbelievable.”

“Yes, rather,” said Cassian.

“A bit chilly, of course,” he went on.

“A bit.”

The captain grinned. “Though the women aren’t, I hear.”

“Oh, do you?” Jyn snapped, obscurely grateful for Lyr.

She’d tried her best to put Leia Organa out of her mind until she could do something. But she didn’t
know of any other Alderaanian women; when she thought of one, she thought of the princess,
captured and tormented in Galen Erso’s creation. She could hear Zekheret again, his laughing small
and shouty and repellent theories, see Senator Organa speaking up in that cluster of cowards—

Hot with anger, Jyn looked over at Cassian, who had said something she didn’t hear. He was smiling
more widely than before, meeting the other captain’s gaze even more steadily. Somehow, the man
seemed to take this as friendly.

Ignoring Jyn, he said to Cassian, “You know any?”

She could have sworn the temperature plunged ten degrees.

“My mother,” said Cassian, unblinking.

The captain flushed. “Ah. Didn’t realize, sorry.” As soon as the door opened to Floor Nine, he
hurried out.

“Well,” Jyn said, “if we all die, there’s one person I won’t regret.”

Cassian’s wide smile faded to a tug of his mouth, barely perceptible and vastly warmer. “I’m sure we
could find a few more.”

She didn’t know if she’d even regret Efrah and Zekheret. Maybe. Jyn liked fighting and she liked
winning, but she wasn’t really bloodthirsty. She wasn’t even—she’d thought of herself as callous,
both by necessity and as a matter of pride, but she was starting to think perhaps not. Just practical.
“I don’t want to tell you how to do your job,” she began.

Cassian lifted his brows, eyes gleaming. “Since when?”

Before Jyn could stifle the impulse, she wrinkled her nose. It was childish—in fact, she didn’t think she’d done it since she was a very little girl.

“Remember that I saved your life, captain.”

“And I owe you a life debt for that,” replied Cassian, sobering.

“What?” Vehemently, she shook her head. “No, you don’t. You saved my life first, and you took the worst damage getting to me.”

“You’re not helping yourself,” he pointed out, amusement flickering back into his face.

“As if you’re any better,” said Jyn haughtily.

“So what is your advice, sergeant?”

Almost prim, she said, “Baring teeth and locking stares are signs of aggression in most species.”

Cassian’s lips pressed together, but the smile lines at the corners only deepened, and his eyes stayed bright. “Is that so?”

“Including humans.” She let a few seconds tick by. “Which you must know.”

Don’t get careless, she didn’t say, because she didn’t need to. Another addition to the things she’d never have imagined a week ago—that she’d be the one urging caution. Urging Cassian to caution. But he was tired and injured, and obliteration by the Alliance remained their best hope. This might well be a suicide mission, as much as the strike on Scarif had been for all the others.

But it wasn’t any reason to give up. She refused to give up, as long as a single strand of hope remained. It was hard to believe that he, of all people, felt any different. But she had to be sure.

“He wasn’t dangerous, in the circumstances,” said Cassian, plainly understanding. “Nor useful.”

He sounded like the Cassian she’d first met, his tone cool and analytical. She welcomed it now.

“That’s what goes for blowing off steam with you?” The sign on the elevator blinked to Seven, and she let uncertainty drain out of her. “Good to know. But maybe you should get a hobby.”

“I have not given up,” he said quietly. “Don’t worry. I will be with you to the end.”

Remembering the collapse of Krennic’s body on the catwalk, Jyn pushed the hoverchair out of the elevator and into the med bay.

She said, “I know.”

“I’m impressed,” Esten told them. “I thought I’d have to send a search party.”

Cassian, perched on the edge of a bed, scowled. Jyn glowered, too, aided equally by her own fear and Cassian’s chest. He’d disrobed to the waist at Esten’s command, and entire swaths of bruises still mottled his torso, faded from mauve to browns and yellows. An improvement, and she’d seen worse—she’d seen him worse—but it still turned her stomach.
“We need to get back to work,” he said, effortlessly slipping into Willix’s growl. “That means following your orders, regrettably.”

“You have better sense than I expected.”

Jyn gave a pointed cough.

“Or she does,” added Esten, giving her a nod of distant respect. About as much as she could hope for, all things considered. “Okay, lift your arm—just a little, don’t strain it. I need to check the blaster wound.”

As she bent to examine his side, the quiet weighed down until Jyn felt like screaming. They had to get out. She couldn’t see a way, just yet, but even if she had, they couldn’t seize it with Cassian still more bedridden than not. C’mon, Esten, she thought, as if his condition rested on the doctor’s whims rather than his own body. He wouldn’t get a clean bill of health, obviously.

She’d known he wasn’t better yet. But she hadn’t thought he was still this badly off. How much had the drugs and his own reserve hidden? Jyn lifted her eyes to his face—meeting his gaze could be difficult, this close, or … not difficult, but complicated. She wanted to look away, or keep looking, her nerves strung tighter than ever, or collapsing into dangerous ease, affinity and alienation wrangling in her mind. All messy and heavy and more than she quite knew what to do with, but at this point, better than looking at his battered body.

“Looks good,” Esten announced.

They both blinked at her.

“The wound is completely healed, no trace of infection. Let me get my scanner to check your bones.” She recovered the scanner from a nearby tray, and began dragging it up and down in front of his chest, never touching him. At irregular intervals, the scanner screeched out high beeps, some short, some wailing for seconds. It only gave a few near-inaudible blips when she ran it over his legs.

“Hm. Interesting.”

“What’s interesting?” Jyn demanded, dreading the worst. She pressed her palm against the crystal in her pocket.

“These are healing much more quickly than I expected,” said Esten.

Jyn and Cassian both exhaled.

“It’s not an unprecedented rate,” she went on, squinting at him, “but still… perhaps the bacta. I haven’t had many patients receive that quantity. It’s not like we can experiment with this sort of damage.”

“We can’t?” said Jyn, thinking of her father. “News to me.”

“Well, it’s hardly public access,” she said irritably.

Cassian looked from one to the other, then asked, “I can return to active duty, then?”

Considering the bruises still blotching most visible skin, Jyn repressed hope. But maybe, if—

Esten gave a strangled laugh. “Are you out of your mind? No. Tomorrow, I want you to try walking around for about fifteen or twenty minutes every other hour, breathing deeply. You can start eating
solid foods, but you”—she pointed at Jyn—“bring it to him. I don’t want him standing in those lines. Make sure you get plenty of fluids and rest.”

“How much longer is this going to take?” he said, voice slightly rising. “I have duties, doctor, I must—”

“Not until I say you do,” said Esten. “Don’t think you can triangulate with command, either. I’m putting my recommendations straight into your file.”

His eyes narrowed. “How kind of you. Dr Esten, you don’t seem to understand—”

“How much pain have you been in?” she asked. “On a scale of one to ten.”

Frowning, Cassian said, “I don’t know. Five, perhaps.”

Esten glared at him.

“Eight.”

“Eleven,” said Jyn.

He shot her a look of betrayal. “Thank you for your contribution, Lyr.”

“He’s actually taking your medicine,” she informed Esten.

“Good to hear.” Esten set the scanner aside. “Come back tomorrow. I’ll give you some bacta patches for your chest. If the bones fuse at the same pace and your pain subsides significantly, you might be able to take up some very limited duties the day after.”

“But I—”

“Thanks,” said Jyn hastily. “I’ll see that he follows your recommendations.”

“Be sure you do,” Esten said, in what passed for a friendly tone. Walking over to a cabinet, she extracted a set of large, squishy bacta patches and handed them to Jyn. She muttered, “Keep the analgesics going.”

“I will.”

“My ears are not broken,” said Cassian.

Esten ignored him. “Until tomorrow, Captain Willix. Sergeant.”

The moment she left, Jyn and Cassian brightened.

“That could have been worse,” she said, tossing his clothes over to him. “Do you need help?”

He was already pulling on his shirt. It would have been much more interesting if she didn’t wince with him as he worked his arms into the sleeves.

“No, it’s fine,” he said, and shook his head at her skeptical glance. In the space of the gesture, he got half the shirt buttoned. “I expected worse.”

He’d be used to changing quickly, of course. She was, too, when it didn’t involve regulation uniforms.
“So it does hurt,” Jyn said, snagging the jacket away from him.

“Some.” He grimaced again as he climbed off the bed. “Not eleven.”

Pretending not to hear, or at least not to care, she said nothing and stuffed his coat under her arm. She pushed the chair towards him.

“I need my jacket—”

“No, you don’t,” she said firmly. “Yesterday you left here in a medical gown. And it’s terribly wrinkled.” She scrunched it up some more.

Cassian inhaled what she could only assume to be a calming breath. Then, once again, he sat in the chair.

“I am really not in much pain,” he told her.

“You will be,” said Jyn, handing him his bacta patches and datapad. It came out more threatening than she intended; his pills were obviously wearing off, and they had another hour in elevator hell. “Ah, I didn’t mean …”

His mouth twitched. “I know.”

The ride back up to their floor wasn’t quite as bad as Jyn expected, but only just. Enough drugs lingered in Cassian’s system to cushion the jolts and shudders of the elevator, or he’d recovered enough, but it was still awful. Fewer people joined them, thankfully; it must be a slower hour. Jyn even tried to hail Bodhi’s comlink during a long solitary stretch. The call failed, but they often did in the moment, between his night shift and the relentless scrutiny he lived under.

It must be a nightmare. Bodhi really got the worst of it.

The elevator jerked between floors, then hurtled up. Cassian’s breath hissed.

Probably.

Forty minutes up, her comlink buzzed.

“Trooper,” she said, relieved. “Are you secure?”


“No, no. Just an update.”

“I haven’t heard much else,” he said. “I mean, people are still talking, but not about anything new. If something’s changed, nobody here knows about it. The Commander is still saying the princess is a troublemaker.”

“That’s a mild way of putting it,” said Jyn. Cassian, settled again, gave a low hum of agreement.

“Uh, it’s … not the word he used.” After a pause, Bodhi added, “Any of the words he used.”

“I can imagine. Well, no change is better than the alternative.” Jyn glanced at Cassian. “Isn’t it?”

“At this point,” he said.
Even through the distortion of his helmet, she could hear Bodhi’s voice cheer. “Is that Ca—Captain Willix? Both of you are there?”

“Yes,” said Jyn. “I was just taking him to an appointment in the medical bay. We’re done now.”

“Oh.” The comlink crackled as the floors whooshed past. “I hope he’s … well, how are you, captain?”

She adjusted the comlink on her wrist, then moved her arm over to hold out near Cassian’s mouth.

“I’m fine now,” Cassian said. With each word, she felt his breath on her hand. Obviously, it’d be much stranger if she didn’t. And they’d spent enough time in close proximity that she’d often felt it before, against her cheek or ear or temple. Her wrist was nothing. Still, the skin over her veins tingled.

“He’s better,” she corrected, yanking her thoughts and her arm back. “Which is to say, only some of his bones are broken now. And I assume none of them are puncturing his organs any more.”

“Puncturing—!”

Cassian’s fingers curled about her arm and pulled it back. “Ignore her,” he said. “I will be completely healed in two or three days.”

“But if you keep telling him to ignore me,” she retorted.

They heard a fuzzy sort of squeal, and then Bodhi’s nervous laugh.

“Sir, with all due respect,” he said, his voice clear once more, “I haven’t gotten this far by disregarding what Sergeant Lyr says.”

“Thanks,” said Jyn, grinning triumphantly at Cassian. “And the doctor said it might be two or three days if everything goes as well as possible, which has not exactly been our experience. He’ll have to be much luckier than we’ve been so far.”

“I’m not sure luck’s had anything to do with this,” Bodhi said. “I’m not sure it exists.”

Now it was Cassian who smiled, though his gaze dropped to the com. “You’re a wise man, trooper.”

“I … well, I … thank you, captain,” said Bodhi, sounding a bit puzzled. “I—I’m glad you’re up there together. And safe.”

Jyn and Cassian looked at each other. In a peculiar way, the warmth of emotion in her chest felt gentle: not fierce or anxious or exhausted, but something soft she saw reflected in his face. Mild and fragile as it was, the feeling seemed to drown out her usual intensity, and his.

“As are we,” Cassian said at last.

Through a thickness in her throat, she added, “RK. You stay safe, too.”

“Yes, ma’am.” said Bodhi.

Like them, he spoke with an unfamiliar note in his voice. Not quite the same as theirs—but she thought she could hear a laugh in it.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I meant this to be a chapter where Things Finally Happen. But then it became my happy place during the month and a half from hell, so it is … not that. But it is a chapter with Jyn, Cassian, and statistical averages.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jyn woke early the next morning, in the closest thing to a good mood that the Death Star allowed. Bodhi seemed frankly better than she’d ever seen him, Cassian really was healing, and they had at least an idea of a timeline for his recovery. This half-life didn’t feel so narrow and desperate now, aimless survival from one hour to the next.

Some part of her still wondered at that, that less than a month from Lianna, her own survival could mean so little. But if her identities had never been so remote and involved as Cassian’s, Jyn was starting to feel that they might have been much more so than she’d realized, more than Lyr. Not only was she not Lianna, perhaps she hadn’t ever been Lianna. Perhaps—

She shoved the thought away. She’d dwell on that later, if she had a later. For the moment, Jyn settled for making her bed under the dim lights, not even trying to remember the insane protocols. She felt sure that Cassian would correct everything after she left, anyway. And he needed something to do, didn’t he?

Jyn glanced over at the opposite bed, where the man in question huddled in fitful sleep. Last night’s sedatives must have worn off. Even so, something about Cassian’s unconscious body struck her as odd. She scowled at him for a good five seconds before realizing.

Since their escape from Scarif, if it could be called an escape, she’d only seen him lying flat on his back. Now, though, he slept as he had before, curled on his side like a child. A wary child, maybe—back pressed to the wall, his one visible hand in a loose fist near his face. She slept the same way, but it seemed odder in a man only a couple inches short of six feet. Or maybe just in another person.

A good sign, Jyn decided. He looked uncomfortable, but not agonized, which he would have been twelve hours ago. She let him sleep and headed to the fresher.

Towards the end of the eight-minute shower she allowed herself, Jyn thought she heard sounds from the room. Someone talking?

Undoubtedly, Cassian had woken up and barrelled past his limits, or found some vital rule broken, or whatever. Secure in the knowledge that she’d hauled him into recovery and he’d have to take himself the rest of the way, she left him to it and enjoyed the last of the water.

Jyn was pinning her hair back when she heard a loud metal clang. At that, she rushed out of the fresher, one hand going to her hip. Her empty hip. She had yet to find a way to secret away blasters in her close-fitting uniform, and with her batons abandoned on Scarif, she had nothing else. Anything, even Saw’s sharpened stick, would have been better—at least made her feel less naked and exposed every time she ventured out of the quarters. But Jyn wasn’t one to mourn things she could do nothing about. She’d stuffed the more unobtrusive blasters into various accessible corners.
of the room, if … oh, she knew six blasters wouldn’t save them if it came down to that, but just in case.

She was headed towards the nearest cache as soon as she slipped out of the fresher. No attack, however, seemed to be forthcoming; Cassian stood at the door, a large metal crate at his feet, talking to someone she couldn’t quite see.

“Yes, that should be all,” he said.

Jyn still hovered next to the wall beside the fresher, where normally a tiny table and chair folded out. Only when the door closed did she withdraw her hand.

She didn’t believe for a moment that she had escaped Cassian’s observation. Out of indifference or some obscure courtesy among spies, though, he pretended not to notice. Instead, he knelt down beside the crate and tapped something that creaked open the lid. Then he started pulling out assorted plastoid kits and stacking them neatly beside him.

He was evidently looking for something in particular. Curious, Jyn wandered over, even as Cassian rose to his feet with a case very much like all the others. Black, rather flat, squarish—it told her nothing.

Almost nothing, that was. It looked awfully small for a droid repair kit.

“Found your basic necessity?” asked Jyn.

His pretense, whether politeness or insult, did not extend to feigning surprise. Cassian turned to her, a peculiar uncertainty on his face.

“It’s not for me,” he said, and dropped it into her hands. “Except my peace of mind.”

Jyn’s curiosity and residual annoyance froze, transmuted to genuine surprise.

“You requisitioned a present?” she said, disbelieving.

“A necessity,” corrected Cassian. “That much was true.”

Yet that unsureness lingered about him, foreign to the Cassian she knew. Whatever he’d ordered might be necessary, but certainly not basic. Now deeply intrigued, Jyn unlatched the case.

Inside lay three of the tiniest blasters she had ever seen. They could fit in the palm of her hand—the two smaller ones, anyway, but the third wasn’t much bigger.

“They look like toys,” she murmured, taking out the largest blaster. Flat on her hand, it extended barely past her middle finger. She’d meant to judge its weight and balance, but there was barely anything to judge. Her datapad must be heavier.

“It’s not a toy,” said Cassian.

Jyn looked up at him, not even bothering to contain an unsteady smile. “I imagined not. How much can they … ”

The unnatural hesitation vanished. “There are only a few energy cells in them. You can feel that, right? Maybe three or four shots a piece.”

“For emergencies, then,” said Jyn.
Cassian nodded. “As matters stand, any situation where you would want blasters has probably gone too far to be saved by them. But you never know.”

“I always want a blaster,” she said, honestly enough, but she could feel her smile deepen.

The familiar suggestion of one softened his face. “True.”

“So I can hide these under my clothes? They look small enough.”

“That’s the idea. There are straps in the crate,” said Cassian. “The blaster you have there should fit in your boot.”

“That’ll be comforting,” Jyn said, without a trace of irony. Even if she couldn’t realistically use them, the mere idea of being armed eased the dread that walked with her.

He replied, “For both of us.”

Jyn wasn’t entirely sure how to take that. By now, she’d seen Cassian risk himself for her over and over, heard him scream her name too many times, through too many disasters, to think he didn’t care about her safety. But all three of them cared, teammates and survivors and companions of some sort. She worried about Bodhi, and to go by last night’s call, Bodhi slept easier knowing that she and Cassian were together, able to look after each other. Of course Cassian would find some measure of comfort in knowing Jyn had weapons on her when she wandered about the Death Star. She’d feel the same, were their roles reversed.

Well, she would feel … she didn’t know. Jyn slid the blaster back into the case and headed over to her dresser, not even considering the possibility of returning the full kit to Cassian. The weapons were all hers this time. Whoever Jyn Erso turned out to be, she wouldn’t ever be helpless again.

Not that she wished helplessness on any of them. Jyn’s thoughts drifted back to Bodhi. She did worry, she did care. After little more than a fortnight, he felt like a sort of brother—was a sort of brother, perhaps, given his devotion to her father. Cassian didn’t feel like anything of the kind. Not a brother, not even exactly a friend: just Cassian. Yet, she cared more about him.

In her mind, she could admit that; she wasn’t one for willfully deluding herself. And she’d bet that he cared more about her than anyone else, as far as that went. It was … half the time, they drifted together so naturally that she didn’t even notice until she saw how close their faces were. The other half, they froze or flinched away at any meeting of their eyes, exchange of smiles, the very prospect of physical contact.

Caring meant ready partnership and unthinking attraction, ease and awkwardness, a muddled something that defied every category she tried to put on it. All in all, she felt more unsure than anything else, and more unsure still about what it meant to Cassian. For all their differences, he had a way of reflecting Jyn back at herself, his suspicion and camaraderie and anger and vulnerability tracking precisely with hers—maybe real accord, maybe habits of a lifetime. She didn’t even know for sure if he shared the layer of entirely shallow attraction she felt.

Everything had been so much clearer on Scarif, when they’d been united in purpose and means. When everything was life or death, not this fragile in-between.

“Oh,” said Cassian, who had been unloading the rest of the crate. “There’s something else. More of the same, however.”

He dropped another case, flatter and broader than the first, onto her bed. If Cassian never did casual well, at least around her, this seemed somewhat less convincing than usual. Jyn wandered over, sat
down, and opened it up.

_Holy Force._

She could see what he meant by “more of the same,” but these weren’t tiny, emergency-use blasters. They were knives, a low row of them, all of different sizes and functions. But they were all quite evidently weapons. Her finger stung when she tested the edge of the nearest blade.

“You seemed to favour hand-to-hand,” remarked Cassian. “I didn’t think Willix could justify truncheons, but these should be easy to hide. Not quite as suspicious to reveal, either.”

“I’m touched,” Jyn said lightly, to hide the fact that she really was.

The last time she’d received a gift, it … well, it’d been blasters and knives then, too. One of each. These ones, though, didn’t mean abandonment. Teamwork, maybe. Where she’d been a beloved burden to Saw, Cassian trusted her as his eyes and ears. She was a valuable asset to be supported, not a ticking bomb. That meant something different than caring, but it mattered, too.

Anyway, these were much _better_ blasters and knives.

“You’re welcome,” he said, looking almost as intensely uncomfortable as when he’d been pinning her jacket over her breast.

Her own feelings again, mirrored back. Whatever the cause, there was something at once satisfying and unsettling in that.

Setting the useless quandary aside, Jyn buried the knives under her uniforms and helped with the new equipment. Her glower seemed to be getting more effective; Cassian only managed to say _you don’t need to_ before giving up. Instead, he unloaded the crate with what looked like minimal discomfort, while directing Jyn in the actual organization of the equipment, mostly in a narrow closet by the door.

Soon enough, however, he started carting equipment over to the closet himself. It couldn’t have been too uncomfortable; she didn’t even realize he was right behind her until he stacked his kits on the next shelf, one well out of her reach. Force of will kept her from jumping in surprise; force of pride kept her from insisting that she could do it, since—she couldn’t.

As Jyn hoisted up a box of nutrient bars, she noticed that Cassian had gone entirely still, despite the kits remaining in his arms. Though outside her full range of vision, she could feel his gaze fixing on her; she hadn’t lived this long by ignoring the realization that she’d caught someone’s attention. Sure enough, when she glanced back, he was studying her with a bemused expression, as if some unexpected truth had only then struck him.

“What?” she demanded.

He stared down at her. “I should have … I forget that you are small.”

“I am not small,” she said. “I’m average on Coruscant. We can’t all be freakishly tall.”

“That is not a compliment I get everyday,” said Cassian, soberly enough, but with a suspicious tilt to his mouth. “Or any day.”

“It wasn’t a compliment,” Jyn told him. She wasn’t short just because he spent his time with six- and seven-foot menaces. And that was exactly the way he used to look at a specific seven-foot menace, when Kaytoo’s asides passed from obnoxious to endearingly absurd. Endearing to Cassian, anyway.
She scowled.

“All right.” The good-humoured patience in his voice was the same she’d heard before, too. Had anyone else been present, Jyn expected the next thing out of his mouth would have been she means well. Instead, he asked, “What are your plans?”

“Another exciting day of skulking around the Death Star and talking to Imperials,” she said. “Hopefully I can get something new out of Zekheret or Efrah, but there might not be anything.”

Cassian set a robotics kit on a shelf two feet above her head. “Probably not much until we reach Alderaan.”

That particular dread threatened to linger. She couldn’t do anything about it, Jyn reminded herself. No sabotage they might cobble together would dent this thing, or free Princess Leia, or do anything but expose them and ruin any opportunity they might have to make a difference. And Bodhi would be left by himself.

“True,” she acknowledged. “Even in the best case, Efrah’s only going to know so much, and say less.” She cast a sideways glance at him as Cassian turned a little, placing the last kit—she didn’t recognize the label—onto an even-higher shelf. In profile, the bones of his face stood out sharply, fine and severe from jaw to brow. “But you might have better luck with her.”

“Me?”

“She admires your cheekbones,” Jyn said.

Cassian stiffened. Even in profile, she could see the planes of his face go smooth and impassive.

Flatly, he said, “I noticed.”

The tone—tonelessness—caught her by surprise. Jyn knew that Cassian didn’t care for plastering on Willix’s smarm in general, but she hadn’t really thought of it in terms of flirtation. Not beyond his grating behaviour when she’d come by with Efrah, anyway. Certainly she’d never wondered whether he liked trading on his looks any more than she did.

Apparently not.

“Right,” said Jyn, in her most nonchalant voice. “A terrible burden.”

He didn’t reply at first, rearranging the last kits. She felt almost … seventy percent certainty that it had nothing to do with Imperial stacking protocols.

Damn. Kaytoo had definitely rubbed off on her.

Cassian said, “You’d know, I’m sure.” He still didn’t look at her.

Jyn blinked. Well, that answered one question.

“I suppose.” As usual, words only came to mind in a jumbled mess. Jyn cleared her throat. “It can be … useful. More if I were any good at that sort of thing.”

He gave one of his short not-laughs. “Do you usually need to be?”

“No,” she admitted. “Most people don’t think straight if they find someone attractive. Not completely.”
Now he did turn her way, sympathy cracking his empty expression. “Yes.”

Some impulse had her adding, “But I don’t like it either. Using—I’ll take a fair fight any day.”

The sympathy softened to something else, a shadow of a smile at his mouth. “Or an unfair one, I think.”

“At my size, you take what you can get.”

Cassian really did smile at that. “Your average size?”

“Yes,” she said, and ducked away to retreat back to the refresher. No, not retreating. She had to finish pinning her hair back. And now she had those—basic necessities. Jyn snatched up the straps in the crate and the weapon cases in her drawer as she headed into the fresher; whatever else Cassian might help her with, she drew the line at hiding knives in her clothes.

Thankfully, the straps were easier to manage than her actual uniform. As she attached a slender knife to her left arm, her mind wandered to the earlier conversation, and she thought of Zekheret.

“Oh!”

“Is something wrong?” Cassian instantly demanded, voice sharp even from the other end of the quarters.

For a spy, he could be very high-strung. She’d seen less jittery nerfs.

“No, it’s only that I remembered something I had to tell you.” She bound the one holstered strap over her shirt, carefully positioning one of the blasters in a tiny, flat holster. “You’re the reason I’m celibate.”

A moment of utter silence passed. Then Cassian said,

“Pardon?”

“If anyone asks, I mean.” Jyn closed her jacket and did her best to navigate the assorted folds and tucks and buttons. At last, she seemed to have it right. It hung as Cassian had fixed it both days, the tiny blaster entirely concealed.

Another long pause lingered while she worked.

“Is there … a reason to expect that someone might?” said Cassian, sounding nearer. And baffled.

“I’m not sure.” She twisted pieces of her fringe back and clipped them against her skull. “The corporal I was telling you about, Efrah’s friend, is extremely friendly.”

She settled her cap on her head and strode out of the fresher. Sure enough, he had drawn near, leaning against the bars of her bed with a familiar frown. Before Jyn could even settle her remaining weapons back in her drawer, Cassian snapped out,

“Did he—”

“No, nothing like that.” Weapons deposited, she turned to him, the quirk of her mouth more wry than anything else. “He simply appreciates my, uh …”

Cassian’s brows rose. “Cheekbones?”
“As it were,” said Jyn. “They don’t see many women here, of course. There’s Efrah, but it sounds like she beat her rejection into him. So he tried some ridiculous flirtation with me, and I blamed you.” She shrugged. “Told him I have a very by-the-book commanding officer, who is strict about policies and codes of conduct and the like.”

Not too far from the truth, really. To go by the suspicious glance he gave her, the same idea crossed Cassian’s mind.

“Ah.” Not pursuing that line of inquiry, he said, “I don’t tolerate fraternization?”

“Right.” A heavy weight seemed to hang on every word, and Jyn couldn’t even guess at his opinion of this wrinkle. Nevertheless, she persevered. “I didn’t figure we’d be around long enough to get anything out of him that way. It turns out Zekheret says everything that enters his head in any case.”

Without betraying anything else, he looked sympathetic again. “It’s probably for the best.”

“In the interests of honesty,” she said, “it’s also because he’s a bit sleazy. I was afraid I might throw up on him.”

“Definitely for the best, then,” said Cassian.

That surprised a bright grin out of her. He returned it, his crooked smile exactly the one that had scrambled her thoughts after she beamed at him on the shuttle.

They weren’t scrambled now.

At least, she didn’t end up with her hand on his arm, torn between enjoying the simple pleasure of it, embarrassment at Cassian’s clear astonishment, and trying to figure out how it had even happened. She felt easier now: not easy, but not inclined to run away, either. And Cassian betrayed neither Willix’s smooth charm nor his own earlier shock, just ducking his head as if nobody had ever smiled at him in his life.

“Zekheret’s been friendly enough since,” she went on, indistinctly relieved, “so he seemed to accept it.”

“Or he doesn’t believe you,” said Cassian, pragmatic as ever.

Jyn shrugged. “That’s why I wanted to make sure you’ll back me up. It won’t be a problem to look rigid and threatening every time he ogles me, will it?”

He considered her.

“No,” Cassian said. “Not a problem.”

Once again, Zekheret caught up with Jyn outside the mess hall.

“Morning, Lyr,” he said cheerfully. Either he or Efrah had mentioned at some point that he was twenty-eight—she didn’t remember which. But he seemed as boyish as ever.

“Good morning.”

Behind her, Cassian shifted to her side; she suspected her head had blocked his insignia from view. It wouldn’t matter if he’d taken the hoverchair, but he insisted on walking—though she only relented
because of the short distance and Esten’s orders.

Zekheret glanced at him and immediately straightened to attention. “Captain!”

Cassian, true to his word, eyed him with open disdain.

“This is Corporal Zekheret, sir,” said Jyn. “He and Sergeant Efrah—the one you met—have been showing me the ropes.”

Just Efrah, really. But if she didn’t mean to put effort into cultivating Zekheret, she didn’t see any need to alienate him, either.

“I see.”

At the sound of Cassian’s voice, Zekheret started. It was Willix’s accent rather than Cassian’s, apparent even in those two syllables, but she still felt a dash of vicarious annoyance.

Cassian either shared it, or pretended to. He waited for Zekheret to stiffen back to attention, then let a few excruciating seconds pass. Impressively, he also managed to look down his nose at a man both older and taller than he was. If they lived, he’d have to have to teach her that one.

“At ease, corporal.”

Relieved, Zekheret relaxed. “You must be Captain Willix, sir.”

“Yes. Did you need something?”

“Ah …” Zekheret’s gaze darted to Jyn, then away. “No, sir. Only making sure that Sergeant Lyr was, uh, safe.”

“As you see, no Rebels have killed her yet,” said Cassian. He made a peremptory gesture at Jyn. “With me, Lyr.”

By pure strength of will, she kept her hands from clenching. Willix was supposed to be an asshole, she reminded herself. Willix, not Cassian. As he sneered his way into the hall, she repeated it as a mantra. Not Cassian, not Cassian, not Cassian.

So she wasn’t actually going to punch him in the teeth.

In the hall, Jyn made Cassian wait at a table while she fetched breakfast for both of them. He complained, of course, and that time she wasn’t quite sure where Willix ended and Cassian began. She supposed it didn’t matter.

“Dr Esten said—”

Succinctly, he replied, “Damn Esten.”

“I’m pretty sure she outranks you, sir.”

Something flickered in his face, an infinitesimal change that took him from haughty and sullen to uneasy.

“Lyr, I can walk. I don’t want you waiting on me.”

Cassian, she decided. Cassian talking nonsense, but it took the edge off her irritation.
“That’s unfortunate,” said Jyn.

He regained shades of Willix. “What it is, is distasteful. I’ll—”

“I’ve done more distasteful things,” she retorted. Lyr, she reminded herself. She had to be Lyr. “And so have you, captain.”

Cassian grimaced, but she’d won. Jyn, aided by the spectre of Esten, extracted his promise to sit down at the table and stay there. After a tedious half-hour in line, she returned to find Cassian entirely subsumed in Willix, drumming his fingers on the table.

She set his tray in front of him. Carrying two hadn’t been much of a task for someone who’d done far more things requiring far steadier hands, but she shook out her wrist anyway.

He peered at the brownish globs in the bowl. “What is this?”

“I don’t think we want to know,” said Jyn.

A few minutes later, Efrah and Zekheret homed in on her, seeming to appear out of nowhere in that uncanny way they had. Zekheret did in particular, which given his size, seemed rather a waste. He didn’t have the brains for spying, but anyone that quiet and blindly loyal should be in some sort of operations beyond prison duty. At least if it were up to her.

Not that Imperial incompetence was her problem. Or a problem.

“—Princess Leia, herself?” Cassian was saying.

Efrah nodded. “The Rebels transmitted plans for the whole Death Star to her. She disposed of them somehow, though. Darth Vader himself has been questioning her.”

She supplied accounts of the days since Scarif, Zekheret interjecting now and then, and Jyn silent. None of it seemed new, and Cassian talked more smoothly than she did, so she was glad enough to give way to him. She confined herself to observing the three of them, almost amused to see Cassian thaw from Willix the arrogant bastard to Willix the affable officer. If she hadn’t known better, Jyn would really have thought they’d gradually overcome his contempt as they made themselves helpful. Efrah and Zekheret certainly seemed eager to win the respect—or escape the displeasure—of an officer. It didn’t mean anything like certainty, but she saw nothing to raise suspicion.

Not wanting to seem too obvious, Jyn took out her datapad and swiped through random public infobanks articles while the other three talked. After another quick survey of Zekheret’s earnest face and Efrah’s flushed one, she pretended to deep interest in Indigenous flora of Corellia and Dancing forms among Togruta. Then Human height (Core planets) caught her eye, and she nearly smiled.

A minute later, she actually did.

Cassian broke off from Willix’s opinions about regional governors to cast her a quizzical look.

“It’s not important, sir,” said Jyn.

He nodded and turned back to the others, but Efrah tilted her head. “Oh, I think we could all use something to laugh at. It’s been a rough few days, hasn’t it?”

“It’s not funny,” she replied. “I just discovered I was right in a discussion that the captain and I were having earlier.”
“Oh?” said Cassian.

Efrah glanced between them, then said, “I’m guessing you’ll have to be more specific. There are so many things for us to be right about, aren’t there?”

“Modest as always,” Zekheret said.

“Well.” Jyn summoned up her most pompous tone. “The average height of a human man on Alderaan is one hundred and sixty-seven centimeters. The average height of a human woman on Coruscant is one hundred and sixty-one centimeters.”

Willix’s smile shrank into Cassian’s, lighting his eyes. “You’re really doing this, Lyr?”

“I’m nothing if not thorough, sir.” She handed the datapad over. “I stand at one hundred and sixty centimeters, while you stand at one hundred and seventy-eight. That’s eleven centimeters above the mean on your planet, while I am only one centimeter beneath the mean on mine. You are tall. I am average.”

“Almost average,” said Cassian.

Efrah laughed openly.

Zekheret, grinning, said, “What does that make me? I’m a hundred and eighty-two centimeters.”

“A giant fool,” Efrah said, with what Jyn could only assume was a friendly shove.

“Vader’s on this ship, and you’re calling me a giant?”

She ignored him, her blue eyes once again fixing on Cassian. “You’re Alderaanian, captain? I didn’t realize.”

Skimming something on Jyn’s datapad, he made an indistinct noise of assent. Jyn herself felt an uncomfortable chill prickle all up and down her spine. Maybe danger, maybe the reminder of whatever nightmare awaited them in the cradle of the Rebellion.

Zekheret blurted out, “Oh, that’s why—uh—I mean, you’re going home, then. Sir. Have you heard? We’re headed for Alderaan.”

Jyn’s and Cassian’s eyes met.

“Yes,” she said. “We’ve heard.”

After Jyn returned Cassian to their quarters, she fidgeted at the door.

“My uniform?”

He glanced down, then back at her face. “It looks fine.”


Cassian shook his head, but let it pass. “You’re armed?”

“Two blasters, three knives,” she said, distinctly satisfied. It only lasted a moment. “I suppose I’d
better go ... skulk. At least get some sort of timeline, if I can. And you—be careful, all right?"

He said, “You stole my line.”

“It happens. You put things better,” said Jyn, shrugging. “Don’t walk too much, either.”

“Fifteen minutes every hour,” he assured her.

Like usual, the quiet seconds that passed were heavy, awkward, but not unpleasantly so. They swallowed as they looked at each other, eyes wide and steady, lips parting over hesitant smiles. Somehow they’d drawn near again, Jyn’s head tilted up and Cassian’s bent towards her, so near that a jolt would have them—well, it’d have her face in his shoulder. But still.

“May the Force be with us,” he murmured.

“Now you’re the thief,” said Jyn.

“Sometimes.” Cassian turned away, to the panel at the door. After a pause, he laid his palm against it. “But you can’t claim that one.”

Unperturbed, she replied, “Sounds like something a word thief would say.”

As the door hissed open, they both eyed it as an enemy. Jyn sighed. But she settled for a brusque, “I’ll be back for meals.”

With that, she slipped into the hall, and Cassian was alone.

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone is curious: Jyn is mostly right, or would be on Earth. By the largest surveys, the average height for a woman in England is 161.9 centimeters or 5 feet 3.5 inches (so self-serving rounding, but the right ballpark), while the average height for a man in Mexico is 167 centimeters or 5 feet 5.5 inches. Officially, Felicity Jones is 5'3" and Diego Luna is 5'10", so by statistical if not Hollywood (or military!) standards, she's not actually that tiny.
Chapter 12

Unless Bodhi found an opportunity to escape, they couldn’t do anything until Cassian recovered. Or rather, they might find a way for Jyn and Bodhi to escape, ideally with the location of the plans, but she refused. Instead, they had to wait for the bacta to do its work, and gather as much information as possible to prepare for the day when the attempt might be worth the risk, without Cassian as dead weight. Resting, and strictly adhering to Esten’s advice, was his greatest contribution right now.

Cassian reminded himself of that for the seventeenth time. Jyn refused to leave him, a realization that strangled the breath out of his throat on multiple occasions, for multiple reasons. In her place, he would have done the same—had done the same, so despite the differences in feeling, he didn’t try to persuade her out of it. Not with escape near-impossible, anyway. And once his damn ribs healed, he could be of use even stuck here, if the plans remained hidden long enough to eventually find a way out.

Willix held the whole subterfuge together. While Cassian didn’t care for undercover work, he itched to do something. As Willix, he could. His data trail left opportunities that the nonexistent Lyr couldn’t have. He just had to recover.

So every hour on the hour, Cassian dutifully wandered about the halls near his quarters for fifteen minutes. The limited time provided little chance of seeing anything, but he was still pathetically relieved to walk by himself again, even with his nerves on high alert in the open. He also dutifully took the Imperial analgesics, so he didn’t even hurt.

On his fourth perambulation, he caught footsteps behind him. The halls saw enough activity that it wasn’t extraordinary; he could hear any number of footsteps at this moment, all around him. Only one set, however, seemed exactly synchronous with his own.

Maybe coincidence. Maybe not. Pretending to adjust his gloves, Cassian let himself slow, then return to his original speed. Sure enough, the tread behind him did the same thing. He held up a lieutenant with a demand for directions, and the steps vanished altogether. They began again as soon as he headed to his quarters.

He could think of any number of possibilities, none of them good, few short of disaster. Jyn would be back soon, to make the danger more daunting, but openly contacting her might escalate the situation. As he approached the passcode panel, Cassian considered his options, fear flickering in him.

He didn’t bother trying to repress the feeling; he was often afraid, and had no difficulty acknowledging it. He’d learned long ago to accept fear as the warning it was, keep going, let it sharpen his senses and quicken his reflexes. Denial only made it paralyzing instead of useful.

The steps had fallen out of unison with his own, instead speeding up. Their possessor would be here in a moment. Instantly, Cassian switched from observation to action, swerving without warning.

“May I help you?” he demanded, and then had to tilt his head back. Regardless of Jyn’s opinion, he was not a tall man, but neither was he a short one; he almost never had to strain to meet another man’s eyes. This one, square-built and fair-haired, must be at least six and a half feet. After a glance at his insignia, Cassian softened his tone to respect and his posture to deference. “Sir.”

The giant, who horrifyingly reminded him of Draven, gave a faint smile.
“At ease.” He grasped Cassian’s hand with a force that nearly wrenched his arm out of its socket. “Captain Willix, I presume?”

“I am,” said Cassian, extricating himself. “I did not expect you to come so far, Commander … Tor?”

The smile broadened.

“Good,” Tor replied. “I need a word with you.”

That didn’t require a tedious physical journey to track down a subordinate. On the Death Star, it was very little less.

“Yes, sir?”

“Privately,” he said, with a nod at the door.

Mentally categorizing the blasters that Jyn had stuck into various corners of their room, Cassian tapped in his passcode and led the commander into his quarters. He had to be grateful that he’d re-made Jyn’s bed after she left; Tor glanced around with an approving look.

“I don’t trust comlinks,” said Tor.

“Ah.” With a grimace, Cassian gestured at the hated hoverchair. “Do you mind?”

“No, no,” Tor said, waving him ahead. He watched closely as Cassian leveraged himself into the chair. “I didn’t realize you could walk yet, captain.”

“For short periods.” He peered up at the man, not even having to fake a grimace. From here, Tor really was obscenely tall.

The commander must have felt the awkwardness himself. He glanced around, then sat on the edge of Jyn’s bed.

“How soon can I expect you back on your feet?”

Silently reminding himself to sanitize the bedding, Cassian said, “Dr Esten said that I may be capable of half-duty tomorrow or the next day. Full recovery will be longer—a week or two, I think.”

With a thoughtful nod, Tor took out a small datapad. “I took a look at your history when I received your assignment, captain.”

Cassian could think of nothing to say that wouldn’t already be on the record or look vastly more suspicious than anything in it. He kept his mouth shut and waited.

“Quite a lot of analytical training—that’ll be why you got assigned to my division. But I see that you’ve been in combat a few times.”

A few. He inclined his head.

“Commanded a small battleship.” Glancing up, Tor’s brows rose. “Very small. You’ve been stationed on Corellia, Naboo, Coruscant … coordinating security, it looks like. Men and droids?”

“Yes, sir,” said Cassian. He cleared his throat. “Mostly droids.”

“Understandable,” Tor said dryly. “Then you were reassigned to—the Senate? A bit below your pay grade.”
“My pay didn’t change,” he replied.

“Mm. Says here that you commanded the security detail for Senator … Organa?” The man’s voice, already lighter than Cassian’s, rose higher over the name. “Which—ah, Princess Leia. The traitor.”

“Yes,” said Cassian. He held his breaths even, counted in his head to keep his heart to its regular beat, and not the pounding rush it seemed to be considering. He had long practice with both, particularly in the last few weeks. Even more particularly in the last few days. “We had no proof of treachery then, and I never saw any for myself, but Colonel Jerox preferred to keep her under close observation. He hoped she would be less guarded with me than the other available officers.”

She certainly had been. He could remember Leia, all of sixteen, yelling at him about not telling her how to hide bodies. He remembered his younger self, too, struggling not to shout back at her, snarl that she wouldn’t need to know if she would just listen—

Then again, he remembered everything.

“Why you?” the commander barked out.

“I’m Alderaanian, sir.”

Tor grunted. “I saw that. Well, your record ends there. A few months ago. You were on Scarif in the meanwhile?”

“Yes. The destruction of the station”—Cassian coughed—“was undoubtedly necessary, but destroyed all local records. I worked in robotics.”

“The droids again, eh?” Tor set his datapad aside, and Cassian did his best not to look too obviously tempted.

He could only imagine the amount of information, high quality information, that must be stored right there, nearly within arm’s reach. In more productive circumstances, he could take it and run. As it was, any theft or death would be quickly detected and traced to its source, at least one involving a high-ranking officer. He had nowhere to run and no capability of doing it, anyway. Instead, Cassian wrapped himself in polite obedience and waited.

“An interesting history,” said Tor. “Directionless, some might suggest.”

“Versatile,” Cassian said quickly.

Tor gave a short laugh. “Perhaps. Certainly, we could find any number of uses for your skills, if not for one thing.”

Alarms rang in his head. With a puzzled frown, Cassian searched the commander’s expression. He’d gone from wry to grave—more than grave. Outright somber.

“What is that, sir?”

Tor’s eyes, cold and unwavering, fixed on his own. “You’re a spy.”

Jyn hated the Death Star.

Hated, hated, hated it.
Not that she hadn’t before. Every time she thought of Baze and Chirrut, she felt a breath away from Lyr shattering around her. And Kay—though she hoped he might be resurrected yet—so thrilled with the blaster, and then Cassian screaming his name. All the spies and saboteurs she hadn’t known, who followed her (followed Cassian, but he’d yoked himself to her), dead by stormtroopers or bombs or the terrible light her father had spawned. Jedha, desecrated to feed it and then obliterated—Saw—and less directly, her father and mother—Force, she hated it.

At the same time, she was petty enough to hate it not merely as evil manifest, but simply a place. In particular, the place where she happened to be stuck, with no way out, no ability to take advantage of an escape route even if she had one, and too many dangers and opportunities to stay holed up in Cassian’s quarters. And it took so long to get anywhere. The size of this thing seemed completely asinine; the underlying mechanics couldn’t require this much space, could they? Besides that, the people were either untrustworthy, inane, malicious in a casual, colourless way that bothered her far more than concentrated malevolence, or some combination of them all.

She spent hours talking or eavesdropping on perfectly horrible people, along with a handful of ostensibly decent ones who couldn’t be decent at all, or they wouldn’t be here. Jyn understood keeping your head down; however intolerable now for her personally, she had no room to judge that after the last six years. But actively participating in it was something else altogether.

She didn’t regret the presence of Brakases and Estens who made things somewhat less relentlessly terrible, or even the Efrah and (maybe) Zekherets. That was only for her own sake, though, and Cassian’s. In a way, they seemed worse than those who probably celebrated Life Day by kicking puppies.

Ugh.

Bodhi contacted her once; he assured her that he’d encountered no problems, and the rushed training he and the other new stormtroopers received had left him sort of shooting properly when he didn’t get nervous. However, he had no further information, not even gossip. Relieved over him and exasperated with the universe, Jyn stayed as encouraging as she could until the connection broke, then slipped into a fresher and slammed her fist against the wall.

It was safe enough; for obvious reasons, the women’s freshers generally stayed empty. Jyn suspected they wouldn’t exist at all except for the sheer amount of space the architects had to fill. In a normal base, the personal quarters would probably be less (comparatively) lavish, too, even for officers.

Cassian’s ribs should really heal faster. Not that he could help it, but as often as she’d worked alone, this wouldn’t feel so blandly sickening with him around. Especially if she didn’t have to worry every time he got out of bed.

Out of sheer impatience and aggravation, Jyn decided that she wanted to hear his voice. He might have advice or something, and he’d probably appreciate a distraction, anyway. She opened the connection.

The first time, it failed. She must be too far; they should probably figure out the stronger hand-held comlinks. Jyn made her way to an empty elevator; while she hadn’t travelled far enough down that she needed to account for a full hour in her schedule, dinnertime would be soon enough that she should probably start heading back. She tried the com again; it connected, but she only heard static. The connection had gone through, but he wasn’t answering.

Probably asleep. He needed his rest, too, but … she felt uneasy. After five minutes, Jyn tried for a third time.
“Willix.” Cassian’s voice came through, sharp and clear.

A bit too sharp, in fact. Almost tight. Every nerve in Jyn’s body twitched into high gear.

“Sergeant Lyr, sir,” she said, in her most professional voice. “Calling to inform you that I should be available for immediate assistance in … thirty minutes or so.”

“Thirty?” repeated Cassian, in the same strained voice. “Very well.”

Jyn paused, then said, “I hope I haven’t disrupted any important matters, captain.”

To her horror, she heard Cassian say something inaudible—not mumbling, but as if he spoke from a distance. To someone else. Was he on one of the prescribed walks, or worse?

Even more alarmingly, she heard another voice, a man’s, but higher than Cassian’s. This one, also, remained too distant to make out, but sounded much too near for a casual passerby. And she heard nothing else, none of the background hubbub she’d expect in public, not even the groans and hums of machinery. No, everything suggested that she’d caught Cassian in his quarters, and a stranger with him. There, now.

“Oh, no,” said Cassian. “We were just finishing up, I think. Is that right, sir?”

She heard an affirmative sound from the other man. Not merely a stranger, but someone Cassian, a captain here as well as in the Alliance, would call sir.

The hairs on her neck nearly stood up.

“Is there anything urgent, sergeant?”

Cassian’s voice had subtly changed, turned heavier and more emphatic. Jyn took a gamble.

“Yes,” she said. Wildly extemporizing, she went on, “That is, not urgent, but I think potentially significant for … for any future posts. I believe it best to confirm with you in person, if that’s acceptable.”

“Yes, certainly,” said Cassian. “I’ll expect you in half an hour, precisely.”

Jyn took a deep breath, all thoughts of hunger fled from her brain. “I’ll be there, sir.”

A good twenty minutes earlier, Cassian found himself gazing at Commander Tor with a neutral expression and his ears ringing. You’re a spy echoed in nauseating circles while he calculated probabilities as fast and well as he could, without Kay.

Ruthlessly, he shoved away the flood of loss and hope. He could see only two routes before him, and one almost certainly impossible. They’d just have to bet on the other.

“Oh,” he said. “Well, yes.”

Tor gave a satisfied nod. “Good.”

Logically, Cassian knew that his heart could not actually have stopped. Yet he certainly felt like it had taken up beating again, enough that he clung to the last scraps of fear. Relief, he knew from long experience, could be as great a danger as panic.
He permitted a touch of curiosity to touch his face.

“I had not imagined,” he said, threading his way by each word, “that there would be any need for my services in that capacity. Not here. Surely the Death Star must be secure.”

“It seems so,” allowed Tor. “There is no possibility of any breach in our defenses, of course, and if there were, no weapon to rival it.”

Cassian, ever the good soldier, listened respectfully.

A pity Jyn isn’t around to hear this. Not that she’d dare gloat openly, but she would enjoy it, and he’d see the traces. A sneer of the soul, as it were.

“However,” Tor went on, “as I’m sure you know, the Core worlds provide the bulk of our officers. Coruscant, Brentaal, Corellia.” He settled another meaningful glance at Cassian. “Alderaan.”

The usual irritation was a drop next to the ice in his veins.

“Of course.”

“And the princess of Alderaan is a prisoner on this station. I believe she enjoys a great deal of … local popularity?”

“Yes,” said Cassian.

“That’s to be expected,” Tor said. “No blame to you, Willix, but many of our worst problems have come out of Alderaan. It’s a hotbed of sedition, entire towns have blown themselves to smithereens rather than submit to the rule of law, and resources disappear into the hands of smugglers and pirates.”

_Blown themselves to smithereens._

It had been a long, long time since Cassian had to work so hard to keep his expression steady. For a few seconds, he didn’t even realize his teeth were clenched together.

Sloppy, he tried to tell himself, but he’d already flown past that. With perfect clarity, he remembered the dazzling rays of light reflected off the snow, Renalia’s fingers strong and firm about his own smaller ones as she led their way. Firm right up to the moment that she halted just outside of town, her hand dropping. In an instant, she shoved him behind the nearest snowdrift, rougher than she’d ever been with him. It hurt, and then more when she tumbled down over him, but she clapped a hand over his mouth before he could complain.

When she snuck forward to peer about the edges of the snowdrift, Cassian followed, shielding his eyes and squinting until he saw what she did. Clonetroopers marched about the perimeter, the sun flashing off their armour. They hadn’t noticed the two of them yet, but they would find them eventually, and that meant trouble. Nobody was allowed out at this hour, edging past mid-afternoon, without leave. Already, though the sun shone brightly enough that he peered out of half-blinded eyes, Vaesda looked aflame.

_Cassian, no._ She pulled him back even as he tried to understand. Then, without warning, he felt the good goggles drape over his face, Renalia’s hands tightening the straps on the back of his head. _You’ve got to get to the caves. Not by the mines, understand? The far ones. Don’t stop for anything. Don’t make noise. Don’t look back. Just run._

Puzzled, he mumbled, _Rana?_
You don’t need to know why. Just do it.

He nodded. Cassian and Renalia had their squabbles, but she was five years older, and he idolized her. When she spoke in that tone, he always obeyed.

Promise me.

_I promise, _he said, all the more confused when she knelt to wrap her arms around him and kiss his hair. She was a kind and affectionate sister, but rarely soft about anything. And he didn’t see how he could run with her holding him like that, though he didn’t mind. He liked hugs more than she did.

_I love you, Cassian, _she said, almost casually, the way she always said anything that mattered. Then her painful grip on him fell away. _Now go._

And Cassian ran. Luck or the Force kept him alive, and his own obedience brought him to the caves beyond the blasterfire and real fire and everything. He only disobeyed once, early on, glancing back as he snuck down towards the city. But he couldn’t see Renalia at all, just a dark shape sprawled on the snow, well past the drift they’d been hiding behind. It couldn’t be her, not unless she’d run forward for some reason, and that didn’t make any sense at all.

He wouldn’t understand until the next day, when the Queen’s men pulled him from the rubble, shouting _we’ve got an eighth down here and it’s a child! _Until a man with soft robes and soft eyes asked him his name, and he just begged him, _where’s Mama? Where’s Rana?—I’m Cassian, Cassian Andor, but Rana—Renalia, my sister, you’ve got to find her—_

“—the old senator was a troublemaker since before the Empire, the princess is a traitor and spy, and that queen and the planetary council turn a blind eye to open disrespect for the Emperor.”

Tor halted long enough that Cassian assumed he’d finished his catalogue of Alderaan’s sins.

“I’m aware,” he said. “You’re concerned about the Alderaanian officers?”

“Not you, Willix,” Tor assured him. “You more than proved your loyalty on Scarif. Now it’s time to prove your competence. With certain events”—he stopped, frowning at his hands rather than outwards. Not quite certain of something? Or ashamed. “With Leia Organa imprisoned and slated for execution, we want to know what sort of unpleasantness might result. Alderaan may have produced problems, but it’s produced some damn good officers, too. And Tarkin isn’t above airlocking the lot of you just to be safe.”

“I imagine not,” said Cassian, the words and bland tone automatic. He’d always known that he might die in undercover work; even the best identity could be blown, often by the most trivial mistakes. Though he dreaded the possibility and took every precaution, he understood that discovery would probably mean his death. But Cassian had never imagined dying under an identity, because of it.

One part of him felt almost outraged. Even as a child, he’d always been able to fool or escape Imperials. Not once had the Empire succeeded in capturing him; very rarely had they grasped enough to try. If he died because of that traitor Willix—

The other part, more insistent, thought of Jyn. Bodhi might be able to make it, if he kept his head down. He had no known connection. But Jyn would never keep her head down. She’d keep trying, even without Willix’s documentation shielding Lyr’s total lack of it. Willix’s death would mean Lyr’s transfer, and they would immediately discover that there was nothing to transfer.

Jyn might find a way to survive it, as she survived everything. Cassian knew she’d kept him alive, though he didn’t recall how. His memories of their escape, such as it was, remained a haze of agony.
and blood and Jyn’s hands on him, in his hair. Very little would astonish him at this point. That said, he trusted that she could find any chance of survival that existed, not that she had some Jedi-like power to manufacture chances that did not exist. If her last chance died with him, that would—no.

“We’re on a tight schedule,” Tor told him. “Half-duty, we can work with that, but we’re talking about a matter of days, here. This is your chance to compensate for your failure with Princess Leia.” He tried not to feel offended on Willix’s behalf.

“As you know, I’m sure, she refuses to reveal what she knows. That’s where you enter. You’re as Alderaanian as they come.”

Cassian was getting tired of that. “I am, sir?”

With a vague gesture at his face, Tor said, “Look it, sound like it, all of that. It should help.”

He was very tired of that. Nevertheless, he saw the opportunity gleaming beyond his fingertips, for the Rebellion and Jyn and his own survival.

“With Princess Leia?” said Cassian. “I don’t quite follow, commander. The idea that she might be susceptible to one of her own people plainly proved false. I doubt I could get anything out of her that Lord Vader didn’t.”

“Of course not.” Tor looked appalled. “However, if any of the Alderaanian officers retain some sentimentality towards her, her resistance may provoke some of them to attempt contact, or even to break her out. Either would mean the loss of valuable men.”

“What one does, we all pay for?” Cassian kept his voice flat, but a little dry. Even Willix wouldn’t contemplate his own death with perfect sangfroid.

Rather to his surprise, Tor grimaced.

“I’m afraid so.”

“That would be a loss,” Cassian remarked. “So I am to hunt down any … seeds of sedition among the Alderaanians, until the execution? Is there a particular date?”

“That depends on—various factors,” said Tor. “In any case, it will happen, and soon. Your vigilance will not end there, either. Princess Leia may prove more dangerous as a martyr than a traitor. For now, we’ll begin rotating Alderaanians into her vicinity, and you into taking command of security.”

With a thin smile, Cassian said, “Throw the doors open and see if anyone steps aside?”

“Precisely. In the meanwhile, you can’t investigate the entire station, but you can take the measure of the sector’s Alderaanians at meals and meetings and the like. I’ll send you a list.”

As Tor consulted his datapad, Cassian said,

“I can’t be the only one placed to … observe.”

“Of course not,” said Tor, without looking up. “We would aim to neutralize the threat in any case. This is simply happy coincidence.” Now he did glance over at Cassian, blocky features inscrutable. “An Alderaanian spy landing here is more luck than we ever anticipated. Yet here you are.”

Cassian considered him.
“Yes,” he said. “Here I am.”

It wasn’t the first time Jyn fought the temptation to dash down the halls, toss all her careful work aside to act, however disastrously. But it was certainly the most difficult. She strode towards their quarters at her most determined stalk, letting just enough worry leak through to justify it.

The effort distracted her so much that she didn’t notice a massive figure approaching until he said, “Sergeant Lyr.”

Pausing, she lifted her eyes. Then she lifted them much higher; if she had to crane up (just a bit) with Cassian, this man forced her entire head back. He must have at least six inches on Cassian, well over a foot on her, and he was built like a mountain. A head of slicked-back yellow hair lent a certain absurdity to him, but couldn’t diminish the overpowering impression of enormity.

She’d never seen him in her life. Jyn was certain she’d remember if she had. And she remembered everything, anyway.

“Commander,” she said, taking in the squares at his breast, and then making a leap—“Tor?”

He gave a crisp nod, and a clap on her shoulder that nearly brought her to her knees. “Good luck.”

With that, he passed on down the hall, leaving Jyn with considerably less terror and considerably more confusion. A high Imperial officer coming this far to—what? Welcome a subordinate onboard?

Frowning, she darted into the quarters. To her total lack of surprise, Cassian wasn’t resting, but pacing the chamber with some sort of humming device in his hand. He seemed completely unhurt: better than he’d looked since before he fell, in fact, if thinner and slower.

“Cassi—”

He held up his hand, which would have been infuriating, if not for the fact that she didn’t rush into rage for no reason. She could put two and two together.

Jyn snapped her fingers and mouthed scanner?

Cassian nodded.

“Sorry it took so long, captain,” she said. “Damn elevators.”

Cassian made a short, laugh-adjacent sound. “Can’t disagree with you there. I’m fine, anyway.”

The scanner’s hum remained low and constant.

“No pain?”

Pausing, he actually looked taken aback. “No, actually.”

Jyn narrowed her eyes. “When did you last take your analgesics?”

“After you left,” said Cassian. “About three hours ago.” He switched off the scanner and exhaled. “Well, if he left equipment, I can’t find it.”
“Commander Tor?” At his sharp glance, she added, “I met him, if you can call it that, in the hall. He wished me good look and just about crushed my collarbone.”

With a slant of his mouth that needed no interpretation, Cassian said, “He is tall.”

“He is horrifying,” she retorted. “What was he doing here?”

“He realized that I am a spy,” said Cassian, with perfect calm. He placed the scanner in an open kit on his bed.

“What?” Jyn thought about Tor’s cordial greeting in the hall. “Wait—what?”

“An Imperial spy,” he amended. “Supposedly based on Willix’s posts, but it should be in the file. That’s how I was able to get …” Cassian gestured vaguely at the closet, then walked over, kit in hand, and neatly stacked it. “Everything.”

“Right, you’re a quadruple agent, or whatever it was.” Letting her muscles relax, Jyn tossed her cap—she particularly hated the Imperial hats—onto her bed. She pressed her hands against her back until it cracked.

“Triple,” Cassian said. He turned back to the closet, fixing some trivial problem he must have noticed. “I think.”

Jyn yawned. Though curious about whatever their supposed commander had wanted, the panicked urgency had drained away. Mostly, she felt tired. Dinner and then the hours consumed by Esten’s nightly examination loomed ahead.

We’re alive, she reminded herself. They had their limbs; Jyn and Bodhi had perfect health, in fact, and Cassian would soon. If they survived. The grind of inconvenience and danger couldn’t compare to death and horror.

“He wants us to spy on someone?” She wandered about the room, checking the locations of all the hidden blasters. No changes there.

At first, Cassian didn’t say anything. Maybe he was distracted by whatever had bothered him in the closet, but if so, only briefly. He emerged while Jyn was still surveying blasters, his implication of a smile deepening when he saw her. Not mocking, not even amused—she couldn’t have said what, exactly, it was.

“Multiple someones,” he said. With no more explanation than she had offered, he yanked the blanket off her bed and tossed it into the laundry chute. As he did, and after they sat on their respective beds, Cassian reported the entire conversation he’d had with Tor. Word-for-word, she suspected.

“It’s a trap,” said Jyn.

“Of course.” Tentatively, he leaned forward enough to drop his arms on his thighs, bringing their eyes nearly level. “The only question is for whom.”

Jyn searched his face, her own mind racing. “Do you seriously think they’re concerned about Alderaanians defecting to help the princess?”

“It’s possible,” he said, startling her. “The Organas are very much beloved on Alderaan. More than they were under the Republic. If Commander Tor can be trusted that far, there is no intention of letting Princess Leia live. Any bargain they might offer is a lie. People have defected over less.”
Her brows rose. “Really?”

“Yes, though I don’t think it’s at all likely that these ones would,” Cassian said. “Not here. Someone like Tor considering that they might, though? Perhaps.”

“All right, perhaps.” She tried to think over all the details stuffing her head. “He didn’t say anything about Aldera?”

“Not directly,” said Cassian. Turning his face to the side, a little, he wet his lip. “But he did specify that he wanted the observation to continue past the princess’s execution. He seemed—I wouldn’t say upset, but …”

“Troubled?” Jyn suggested.

“Yes.” He looked back at her, steadying.

“If they are planning to attack Aldera,” she said, half to herself, “then that is what they’re really worried about, isn’t it? Imperial officers on this thing would probably shrug off the death of a traitor, no matter who it is. Destroying their capital and wrecking a good chunk of the planet around it? That’s different.”

“Very different,” said Cassian grimly. “Alderaan has no weapons. Even officers on the Death Star might think twice about seeing their planet attacked for no reason. Of course, there’s another possibility.”

“It could be a trap for us,” Jyn said. Always alert to danger, she couldn’t help but favour that option. “They’re putting you in the perfect position to communicate with Princess Leia. Even to help her escape, if we take the chance.”

He nodded. “Exactly. It’s very elaborate for potential mid-level traitors, but if they suspect we’re spies for the Rebellion, identifying and questioning us becomes important.”

“Right.” She felt a certain warmth at we’re spies for the Rebellion, at the sheer truth of it. And a little at the sheer ease with which he folded them together—Cassian, a hardened Alliance agent of twenty years, and Jyn, guerrilla soldier turned thief turned thief for the Rebellion. Rebel spies had a nice ring to it.

“Well,” said Cassian, “either is likely enough. So there is only one thing we can do, at the moment.”

“Wait and see,” Jyn supplied. It better have a nice ring, for this. “We can’t contact her.”

“Not yet.” Something like her own frustration settled on his face. Like all his expressions, though, it passed quickly. He straightened up, resolute again. “But we’ll be there.”
Chapter 13

Again, Jyn and Cassian dutifully made their way to the medbay. Again, Dr Esten scanned Cassian’s bones. To their vast relief, she announced that his ribs had continued to improve at the bacta-accelerated pace, and should be healed altogether within seven or eight days. For the present, she approved increasing hours of half-duty through the coming week.

Back in the elevator—bored rather than cringing—they both sighed with relief.

“For once we do have good luck,” she said, just to needle him.

Cassian leveled a long-suffering expression at her. “There’s no such thing as—”

“I know,” said Jyn, smug.

“And if there were,” he went on, “we’ve already had plenty.”

Doubtfully, she said, “Really?”

He didn’t reply except for the familiar, fractional tug of his mouth, something warm in the gaze intent on her face. Since Cassian almost always looked at her like that, Jyn saw no need to bother analyzing it. It wasn’t like she glanced elsewhere when they talked. And she, too, felt a certain difficult warmth when she considered him, one she suspected might be just as visible in her own features. Not to strangers, not most people, but—most people wouldn’t catch the flickers on his face, either. And Cassian wasn’t most people.

For all that acknowledged reciprocity, though, it still came as a surprise when the elevator jolted and a half-stumble had them plastered together. They must have drawn within a few breaths of each other, but Jyn hadn’t noticed.

She didn’t think Cassian had, either, to go by the flush matching hers as they disentangled themselves. He kept one hand hovering near her waist where he’d braced her, the imprint of his fingers lingering.

“All right?” he said, just as Jyn burst out,

“Your ribs—”

“They’re fine,” said Cassian, colour still high. “I took the pills right before we left. I won’t feel anything for another hour.”

She eyed him suspiciously, but let it pass as the elevator pinged. Only with that did they remember to back into a suitably professional distance, both stumbling a little. Cassian looked self-conscious and Jyn felt sure she did, too; she certainly felt it. They’d simply recreated the hand’s-width distance that allowed for collision in the first place, but she hadn’t noticed.

Well, why shouldn’t they? It was better to stay close in this place, anyway. You never knew what might happen.

All the more now, she decided over the next few days, with Cassian properly venturing out as Willix. Nevertheless, that proved less exciting than she hoped. Their commander, reasonably enough, decided that immediately assigning a Scarif evacuee to the quadrant’s prisons seemed unlikely to foster confidences. Cassian probably wasn’t yet fit for it, anyway. Instead, Tor ordered
him to oversee the cryptanalysts for the first two days. The delay chafed, but after the hours upon hours of dredging up scraps, Jyn couldn’t help feeling like a child in a candy store as they observed Imperial techniques, Imperial knowledge, and best of all, Imperial intelligence codes.

Without anything but slight nods, they split up to survey as much as possible. While Cassian occupied himself with snapping out occasional commands or corrections, Jyn didn’t imagine that a mere aide could get away with it. And she didn’t want to. Instead, she cleared her mind of everything but committing as many details to memory as possible, covering a significantly wider swath than Cassian. He had the role to maintain, and she could see traces of increasing weariness as the hours rolled by; Jyn couldn’t do anything about those, but she could remember.

They hardly spoke on the way back to their quarters, expressions unchanging. But when the door shut behind them, they grinned at each other.

Shyness still crept between them, but slower and fainter. Cassian’s crooked smile turned uncertain, Jyn’s hesitant, and still they stayed where they were. He handed over his datapad without a word.

Needing no explanation, she began tapping out codes into the pad’s records, everything she could remember, as precisely as she could remember it. Once she’d finished, she handed it back and waited as Cassian added his own observations. That might have been correcting her record, but Jyn didn’t think so; she’d seen more and had less to distract her, so her memories should have priority.

“Can you secure it?” she asked, once his own taps ceased.

“Yes, I think,” said Cassian. “Better than yours, certainly.”

“I should hope so. Mine’s just nuts and bolts.” Jyn paused. “If we get back, this is going to be …”

“Worth its weight in kyber,” he supplied.

Eyes meeting again, they exchanged satisfied looks. *If*, thought Jyn, always *if*—but now, a more promising one than ever.

That first day, after they finished Cassian’s shift and ate lunch, he insisted that he wasn’t tired and could stay with Jyn on her surveillance tours. She just scoffed and pointed at the bed.

“Esten—”

“I know,” said Cassian irritably. But as ever, he listened to reason and lay down. He was asleep within five minutes.

Jyn stayed long enough to feel reasonably sure he wasn’t about to do something foolish the instant she left. For all his caution, Cassian followed his instincts, whether they led to pragmatism or wild danger. If he felt it necessary, he’d risk anything.

She understood, and that was why she kept a suspicious eye on him for a good half-hour. Still, it felt odd—a bit creepy, really—to just sit there and watch him sleep.

*It’s not my fault,* she reminded herself.

Cassian didn’t completely relax in sleep, but Jyn could see years fade from him. As usual, her fingers itched to push his fringe back and irritate him by ruffling up the strict part in his hair. Even softened in rest, he had a sharp, angular face, all the more after days without real food and his clothes hanging on him before that. Imperial severity did nothing to help.
As if somehow aware of her wayward thoughts, Cassian shifted, turning his face into the pillow with a soft noise in his throat. Irrepressibly, she wondered if he ever made the same noise while conscious, or—

_Death Star_, she reminded herself.

Anyway, the movement had mussed his hair. Obscurely satisfied, Jyn left him to his probably-terrible dreams, and headed out for another day of eavesdropping on tedious conversations.

Five hours resulted in little beyond junior officers sulking that they’d have no shore leave on Alderaan. She’d never seriously anticipated that, but it only confirmed her fears. None of the senior ones seemed to anticipate a landing, either, though a major talked vaguely of a reconnaissance team. Jyn didn’t quite see the need for that, even if they intended a full military occupation rather than the attack she feared. Of course, there were always unknown nooks and backstreets in cities, and beyond them hidden routes and cavities. But those seemed hardly significant in this case.

As she returned to their quarters, Jyn decided that Cassian might know more about the higher levels of Imperial ineptitude. They could discuss the reconnaissance issue. It wasn’t like she didn’t mean to pass on everything she heard, of course. Unless he still slept, but—the thought came with some dreariness—there was no hurry. The next week alone seemed to stretch out in an endless, featureless corridor.

As it happened, he was not asleep. Jyn’s train of thought swerved as soon as the door rose halfway to the recess above, even before she stepped through.

Cassian sat at the table usually folded into the furthermost wall. With his right hand, he held an unfamiliar tool—pincers of some kind. With his left, he steadied Kaytoo’s severed, upside-down head.

“There you are,” he said, not looking at her. Since he had a wire from inside the head caught delicately in the pincers, Jyn didn’t take it personally. She darted inside, sealed the door back down, and overpowered a certain amount of queasiness as she strode over to the table. A weakness, perhaps, but she didn’t like corpses.

“There I am,” agreed Jyn. She sat down in the narrow, metal chair attached to the table. “Ah … how’s that going?”

“I don’t know yet.” With slow, precise movements, Cassian disentangled two wires and then set the pincers down. He looked over at her, to all appearances very alert. “He took severe internal damage.”

“Internal damage?” Until now, she neither knew nor cared about the technical details of droid construction. All her work was with raw data.

“The head itself didn’t get the worst of it. You see?” He gestured at the mostly smooth metal. “The main frame must have. But everything is connected.”

She did see the head. Specifically, she saw the vacant, unlit eyes.

“Like a person,” said Jyn.

With one of his warm looks, Cassian nodded. “Yes. Not as much as most organics, but shocks to wiring in the legs can affect the whole system. At a certain point, central functioning stops, even if the data core is intact.”
“So there’s a chance that it is?” The head still unsettled her, but it receded into something like insignificance. “I thought there might be. I hoped.”


Awkwardly, Jyn nodded. To go by the colour on his cheeks, Cassian didn’t feel much more comfortable. He picked up the pincers again.

“Willix’s record says that he’s some kind of droid programmer,” she said. “You really are?”

To her vast relief, he turned Kaytoo’s head about, the eyes now fixed on the wall instead of Jyn.

“More or less.” With an indeterminate quirk of his brow, Cassian went back to carefully separating wires. “I’m nothing to a real specialist, of course. I haven’t had … ah, time for that.”

She doubted that he’d have made a profession of it in any case. Many people suffered the same sorts of losses they had, but few turned those losses into a cause at age six, and never swerved from it in twenty years. A man like that would always find something to fight.

“I did get a few years of training when I was a boy, though,” he added. “Not only droids, though that’s where it is most useful.”

Just as she’d gotten a few years of training as a girl, Jyn thought. Hers had taken a different direction, slicing data and breaking codes rather than building new ones—a microcosm, perhaps, of the difference between Saw and the Rebellion. And the Partisans didn’t have the people or the time to spare for dedicated training in anything. They learned the necessities as they went, or burnt out, or died.

“I imagine,” she said. “So you’ve got robotic spawn wandering around? Let’s hope I meet some eventually.”

“They’re not—” Cassian shook his head, then tilted it downwards. “Anyway, you already have.”


He made a choking sound. At first, she could only hope he wasn’t about to cry—hard to imagine with him, but he’d turned his face away and pressed his lips together and—oh.

“Er, no,” said Cassian, laughter running beneath the very slight tremble in his voice. “I reprogrammed him. He was already himself—Imperial droids develop like any others, if they manage to avoid wipes. They’re just coded with constraints on their behaviour and processes. I managed to strip those out with Kay and leave his consciousness intact.”

“Just took them out?” Jyn didn’t know whether to be skeptical or impressed. “I don’t know much about droid programming in particular, but Imperial protocols are usually pervasive.”

“You’d know,” he said, tugging at wires again. Despite the matter-of-fact tone, the sudden flash of respect in his face left her sure that he himself had only just remembered that. “It took months. Almost a year.”

Well, that was more believable. If less impressive.

She lifted her brows. “A year?”
“I was eleven,” said Cassian, setting the pincers aside.

Jyn swerved back. “You were rewriting Imperial code at eleven?”

With Saw, she’d had all sorts of training by eleven. But though she was a top-notch slicer these days, back then she barely knew what it was. Data work required a patience she only managed to grasp in her teens. Not that she couldn’t have managed it, if necessary. In some other universe where she’d been passed to the Rebellion instead of the Partisans, she felt sure she would have. Competed with Cassian, probably.

Something about the idea chilled her. Not the cold discomfort that Kay’s head provoked, but a shiver that ran over and under her skin. It was easy to envision that life, a more orderly, more cautious version of the one she’d led with Saw. If Lyra had survived, if she’d stayed, she likely would have turned to the Rebellion. The very year that Cassian wrangled with Imperial codes, Jyn might have walked into the Yavin base as a girl instead of a woman, hand-in-hand with her mother instead of cuffed. If—

Cassian’s face smoothed out, which could mean anything. “You can’t believe it? Gerrera must have had you doing more than that.”

“No,” she said, after a moment’s consideration. “He was always more about blowing things up than figuring out how they worked. It was my mother who had me learning.”

“Your mother,” said Cassian carefully.

“I’m not insane.” Jyn fiddled with the pocket of her trousers. “I mean, before she died. She had some sort of laboratory, and she’d teach me while she worked, and have me help her with experiments when I got older. You wouldn’t believe how much I could tell you about rocks.”

“There’s not much I wouldn’t believe about you,” he said, dry tone at odds with a faint but almost sweet smile. “She was a geologist, I think?”

“Yes,” said Jyn. She could feel a peculiar softness drifting over her thoughts and face, unsteady and involuntary, but pleasant for all that. Not happiness, but perhaps some near cousin to it. Distracting herself, and hopefully him, she lifted the crystal out of her pocket by the cord. “She was the one studying kyber crystals, originally. This was hers.”

When Cassian reached out with his free hand, Jyn nearly twitched. From the moment that her mother bound the kyber crystal around her neck, she’d fought to keep it. The necklace was the one thing she could claim as entirely her own, and she had not retained it this long by letting it fall into the grasp of others. Holding herself very still, she said nothing, letting the crystal dangle between them.

“Kyber,” he repeated, fingers only just brushing it. “This has the power to destroy worlds?”

“You’d need a bit more,” said Jyn. After all these years, she studied the planes and edges, the way light gleamed along them, somehow different against Cassian’s hand. “My mother never imagined—she didn’t care about practical applications. And she didn’t trust the Republic.”

“Good for her.” He lifted his eyes to hers and instantly pulled his hand back.

“I don’t mind,” she said, surprised to find it true. That in itself made her uncomfortable, and she hastily changed the subject. “So the Rebellion started you on data work? At six?”

He paused, then shook his head. “It was just political dissent and mercy missions then. The missions became a cover for sedition soon enough, though, and it was easier to pass them off as helping war
victims with actual war victims there.”

It only took a few seconds to put that together. “Your job was being a tragic orphan?”

“Many tragic orphans,” said Cassian.

She gave a short laugh. “Of course. You were that convincing?”

“Yes,” he said frankly. “I was valuable because I could remember the stories I needed to tell and act
them out, but I looked small and”—he gestured vaguely—“pathetic.”

“I can imagine.” Looking at him now, she really could. His fine-boned features, often harsh, lent a
certain delicacy to his face when he felt like it. He’d already shaved off a good half-dozen years with
his beard, looking like a remote relation to the Rebel captain she’d met less than a month ago. As a
literal child, no doubt Cassian could have turned himself into something fragile and pitiful when
needed. “Missed your calling on the Holonet, did you?”

“My sister used to say so.” He looked startled as soon as the words left his mouth, and quickly got to
his feet, picking up Kay’s head and taking it back to the lockbox.

She already knew there had been a sister at some point, but it struck her as odd, nevertheless. There
was something profoundly solitary about him, as she felt in herself. Until he mentioned Rana and her
goggles, she’d assumed he must be an only child, too.

Jyn pocketed the crystal. “She was older, right?”

“Yes. Five years.” Cassian, half-kneeling, fiddled with the lock on the box. Re-setting it, no doubt; if
she had succeeded in preserving Kaytoo’s data, not much could be more dangerous for discovery.

When he rose and turned back towards her, he looked friendlier than she’d expected from the clipped
answer. Baze, she remembered, had thought he looked like a friend. Baze, of all people—but she
supposed she’d thought so, too. The realization of his real plan for her father had come as not just
horror, but a shocking betrayal. After so many breaches of trust, she never imagined it from this man
she’d known for little more than a fortnight.

Maybe time didn’t matter much in war. When it came down to it, Cassian probably hadn’t imagined
himself choosing faith in Jyn over the Rebellion, either.

He said abruptly, “She used to tell me to cry to get us out of trouble.”

Jyn nearly laughed. “You can cry on demand?”

“I could as a child,” said Cassian, looking uncomfortable.

“Useful.”

The discomfort vanished, his eyes brightening in one of his incomprehensible changes of mood.

“Well, yes. When I was … eight, I think, I had to be this girl rescued from Fieris—”

“Girl?” she said.

Unperturbed, Cassian replied, “Back then, I looked more …” He gestured vaguely at his face.

“Ambiguous. I wasn’t even human all the time. So they had me with, you know, curls and grime and
dust everywhere, and when Imperial troops came to examine the ship—we had crates of blasters—I
just started crying and screaming. I didn’t have to pretend not to understand the questions, since I
didn’t speak very much Basic yet, and kicked and bit every time anyone came near, while the senator apologized and—ah, they left quickly.”

Jyn, imagining a tiny curly-headed Cassian shrieking and biting Imperial officers, gave up the fight and snickered. “Sounds satisfying.”

To her alarm, he broke into the bright, dimpled smile that he usually reserved for lying, absent the usual traces of coldness. “Very.”

She felt a bit like he’d brained her with one of her new blasters. It was profoundly unfair. Not to be outdone, she let herself return the smile without any attempt at restraint, her own as light and vibrantly alive as she felt in that moment. Not triumph, not relief, not even hope: just the sheer pleasure of their coexistence.

Gratifyingly, Cassian looked a bit dazed.

“I’ve never cried on cue,” she admitted, “but—all right, I’m sure you can guess that Saw didn’t laugh much.”

One of his hands had rested, curled, on the table. Now he flattened it out. “Gerrera? I wouldn’t have imagined it, no.”

“Well,” she said, “let me tell you what happened when I was ten.”

The transfer to prison duty proved less interesting than Jyn hoped, though she’d known better than to expect it.

They were posted in a prison only a few floors above the entrance to the Death Star. The lower ranks, of course, did most of the actual work of feeding, guarding, and terrorizing captives. Minor officers oversaw them, while the current commander stood guard at the main terminal, keeping track of changes, managing personnel and prisoners, issuing orders, and dealing with outside interference. It was profoundly dull—all the more so for Jyn, stuck at Cassian’s side with vastly less authority to do anything.

She did, at least, have somewhat more freedom. As often as they dared allow, she strode up and down the halls, trying to inconspicuously take the measure of other staff and memorize the structure of the prison. The rest of the time, Jyn stood by while Cassian chatted, in a standoffish way, with the sergeants, corporals, and lieutenants who answered directly to him. Soon, she was just about ready to drill a hole in her brain, not assisted by the sheer amount of time it took to travel between the prison and their quarters.

Bodhi laughed at her. “Boring is good, sergeant.”

“Sure it is,” said Jyn.

“Any moment that those … Rebel scum aren’t causing trouble has to be an improvement.”

She felt rather like a proud aunt. “More or less. Who knows what they’re planning, though?”

“We’ll figure that out when it happens,” Bodhi said, firm despite the faint edge of shrillness. “How is the captain?”

“Much better.”
His voice settled into good humour. “Really?”

“He stole my blanket last night,” she told him, almost as entertained by his strangled laugh as she’d been by Cassian’s guilty face. “In fairness, I kicked it off at some point. I run a lot hotter than him.”

“I bet everyone does,” said Bodhi. “Remember what he wore when we met? It’s not—it wasn’t all that cold.”

Hurriedly, she said, “Right! I didn’t need more than a scarf, and he was huddled in that fur coat. It’s not like he’s from a warm climate, either.”

“He’s told you where he comes from?” Bodhi asked, sounding startled.

“Alderaan,” she said. “Up in the mountains, too! There really is no excuse.”

“Oh, like—”

Jyn’s throat tightened. “Yes.”

“Have you seen …?”

“No.” Though the risk of interception wouldn’t come from those physically near, Jyn still peered about the women’s fresher. Completely empty, as usual. “We don’t want traitors looking at us. And it’s a nice post, when all is said and done. We’re not risking any appearance of … conflict of interest.”

“Huh,” said Bodhi. Without a body to study, face and gestures, she couldn’t quite tell if he understood. After what he’d managed so far, though, she couldn’t seriously believe that he didn’t.

Putting Cassian and Princess Leia aside, she asked Bodhi about news from his end. But apart from the same hints she’d heard about a reconnaissance team, he could report nothing. He felt sure his rudimentary combat skills had improved, he got along with the other troopers—Jyn nearly shuddered at the thought—and his commander seemed satisfied with all the transferred troops. They couldn’t hope for much more than that.

As far as Jyn and Cassian’s own duties went, they picked up nothing suspicious from any of the officers, Alderaanian or otherwise. Jyn felt no surprise, but it came as a twisted relief; this way, they didn’t have to choose between their cover and what passed for decency here. Instead, the first three days in the prison dragged on vacantly. By the end of the third, she found herself looking forward to the arrival of the sneering officer who always relieved them; Jyn hadn’t bothered to learn his name, but she knew his shift had been moved to accommodate Cassian’s.

He resented Cassian and alternately insulted and leered at Jyn, but he was very nearly pleasant as he marched through the door.

“Lucky bastard,” he grumbled.

“Excuse me?” said Cassian.

“I hear we’re coming out of hyperspace,” the officer said. “Ten minutes or so.”

Jyn’s fist clenched behind her back, pulse ticking in her ears. Exchanging a glance with Cassian, she swallowed the hot lump in her throat.

“About damn time,” she said.
“You said it. Now you can go see, but I’m stuck in here.”

“A pity,” replied Cassian, clapping his shoulder. With that, they strolled out, the usual silent halls hectic with officers and stormtroopers and the occasional droid.

Jyn and Cassian turned to each other, wide-eyed.

“Do you think—?”

“I don’t know,” he said quietly. She felt her skin heat with the pounding of her blood, but he was pale.

She could think of nothing else to do. Neither, plainly, could Cassian. Without another word, they walked together towards the nearest available viewport. It took a good ten minutes, with other officers clustered like insects in front of pane after pane. Jyn and Cassian had only come to a standstill when the relentless light of hyperspace fled, darkness illuminated by the gleaming planet in front of them.

*Alderaan.*

Cassian stared unblinkingly at his world. He’d told her that it wasn’t his home; the city of his birth had been blown to rubble twenty years ago, its place entirely supplanted by the Alliance. Yet he still talked of Alderaan with pride, echoed resentments he could only have absorbed second-hand, admired the senator, murmured Alderaanian to himself when he thought her asleep.

She’d never had anything like that. Jyn could hardly call Coruscant home, and the rest of her life was spent hopping from town to town and planet to planet. *Home* meant people, not places. These days, it meant Cassian.

In that moment, she couldn’t regret it. Jyn suppressed the urge to reach for his hand, not knowing if she wanted the comfort for herself or for him. Instead, they both stood perfectly straight, gloved fingers clenched at their sides.

“Alderaan,” said someone watching from the next panel. “There it is, thank the Emperor. We’re finally out.”

A sergeant replied, “I’ve never seen it before. You’re sure we won’t get shore leave?”

And without warning, without explanation, green light lashed towards the planet. The same horrifying light she’d seen as they fled Scarif, but brighter and more poisonously vivid—Jyn and Cassian’s hands did fumble together now, dread choking her—and with a blinding flash, Alderaan exploded into fire.

Gasps and chatter echoed meaninglessly in her ears, nothing tethering her to the galaxy but the crushing grip of Cassian’s fingers. She couldn’t look at him, look at anything but the fading ring radiating out where billions of people had lived, thirty seconds ago.

*Papa,* she thought numbly. *Papa, I’m so sorry.*

“Yes,” said the first officer. “I’m pretty sure.”
Cassian gasped.

Nothing from him, Jyn had thought, could be worse than his scream in the shuttle. But this was. A catch of his breath, barely audible, but out in the open with Imperials clustered all around—

Her own breaths burned, dozens of hot needles stabbing from her lungs to her throat. And though she’d squeezed her eyes shut, Alderaan kept burning, too, the explosion seared against her eyelids.

*Papa. Cassian. Papa … the plans, we’ve got to … Force, Cassian.*

Did Bodhi know yet? He’d played his tiny part in the construction of this thing, and he was what he was; he would suffer. But not, Jyn hoped, like them.

Perhaps it was a kindness, in a way, that the rest of their team had died. They would never see this, the very thing they’d fought to prevent. They’d hoped to stop it from happening to any planet at all—far less Alderaan, home to so much.

A million languages, she remembered; it had only been a few days ago that she absently scrolled through the databank entry. Some of the languages would survive: the standard Alderaanian that Cassian’s dialect came from, and other tongues preserved by off-planet Alderaanians. But not most, surely. It was nothing to the slaughter of billions, and yet—she thought of the picture she’d seen of the Anduçelos Mountains, of the wreckage of Vaesda, of Aldera. All of it gone, just like that.

Jyn and Cassian had considered the eradication of *Aldera* a catastrophe. If, by some miracle, she opened her eyes now to only the capital razed, she’d count it a relief. Scarif was nothing to this. Even Jedha was nothing to this.

Not since Saw abandoned her had Jyn felt so desperately alone, swallowed up in a vast, silent isolation. Nothing to compel her to action, no action to take, just a miasma heavy enough to crush her under its mass. The voices around her might as well have been animals or holograms. Even the plating under her feet seemed an illusion, part of this elaborate pretense that she stood firm and upright, unchanged from what she’d been two minutes ago.

Yet she did stand there. She wasn’t alone.

Hesitant, Jyn stilled at the clutch of their gloved fingers—Lyr wouldn’t risk it, would she? Even if she and Willix were lovers, they’d be more careful. But Willix was Alderaanian too, and Cassian’s hand readily curved into hers.

*Fuck Lyr,* Jyn decided, too tired to make sense of the thought. In the horror of the moment, she could only be Jyn Erso, standing with Cassian Andor.

His comlink buzzed.

It was the long-range com, secured in his jacket, not the short-range one at his wrist. Bodhi wouldn’t need the handheld to contact them.

But he couldn’t know they were so near. Could guess, but in this moment, maybe he hadn’t put it together.

*Please let it be Bodhi.*
As slowly as before, Cassian withdrew his hand from hers and extracted the comlink.

“Willix,” he said, his vacant tone at odds with the ground roughness of his voice.


For a long, dragging moment, he said nothing. Jyn dared a glance up at him; Cassian was colourless. Even his mouth was, beyond a few streaks of blood drawn by the teeth digging into his lip.

“Yes,” he grated out.

“Your presence is required at a meeting in Quadrant G North, Floor 18, Council Room 11872.”

And worse, again. By impulse, she pressed a hand to the pocket in her trousers, where the kyber crystal was secreted away. All is as the Force wills it. All is as the Force wills it. All is as the Force wills it.

It couldn’t be, could it? Not this.

“According to whom?” said Cassian, in a pale approximation of Willix’s usual arrogance. “I am a captain in his Imperial Majesty’s forces. I cannot be summoned by droid. Who is presumptuous enough to try?”

“Governor Tarkin,” the droid replied, with a distinct note of satisfaction. “The meeting begins in two hours. I suggest you start finding your way, captain.”

It clicked off before Cassian or Jyn could reply. Not that it mattered; they only stared at each other in horrified silence as the seconds ticked past.

“You’re not going to,” she whispered. “You can’t.”

He looked down, and then up again, strained but determined. “I have to obey orders from my superiors. And from Governor Tarkin himself—” Cassian’s voice broke off. After a deep breath, he continued, “You must understand that, for your own sake at least.”

Her own sake. If Willix defied an order from Tarkin himself, it would mean imprisonment at best. Certainly a closer scrutiny of his records, of Jyn herself, perhaps even of Bodhi if they confiscated the comlinks and managed to decode them. It would ruin all hope, instead of merely thinning it.

Jyn swallowed. “I understand, sir.”

“You can retire to our quarters,” added Cassian. “I’ll return when the meeting ends, and … oh, I almost forgot. Your datapad, Lyr.”

He handed over the datapad. His, not hers, full of their memorized notes and codes. If anything happened, and she somehow survived, she would be able to pass the information on.

Of course he would think of that. Her hands trembled under its light weight—but so did his. Despite Willix’s condescendingly pragmatic tone, Cassian looked frightened before all expression closed away.

Gazing back, Jyn could feel the wideness of her eyes, the hot sting behind them. This might well be the last time she ever saw him. And she couldn’t offer any comfort, to him or to herself—couldn’t be seen grasping onto him, kissing him as she’d often wanted to do, embracing him one last time.

It might not be the last. It might … she didn’t know what it might be. No one knew. There was no
need to turn alarm into despair just yet.

Jyn mouthed, Be careful.

Solemnly, Cassian nodded.

May the Force be with you.

“Captain Willix?”

Both of them started, turning around to face an ensign, hardly more than a boy. His own comlink hung from a limp hand, his skin ashen and covered in a layer of sweat. After one muddled moment, Jyn managed to recognize the vaguely familiar face. Fiander Zelin, one of the youngest of the Alderaanians moved into the prisons.

“Ensign,” returned Cassian. He straightened into full military posture, hands locking behind his back. Jyn, now standing behind him, eyed the clasped hands. Between one instant and the next, an idea seized her. An impulse, rather. Discreetly, she dropped a hand to her right thigh.

Zelin babbled, “I … do you know about some sort of urgent meeting? For the lower ranks, maybe—a droid just commed me about it, and I’m not sure …”

“It’s real,” Cassian assured him, snapping into full spy mode. “I’ve been invited myself. Governor Tarkin himself ordered it.”

Zelin looked even more sickly. “Governor Tarkin …? But we haven’t—I haven’t done anything!” His voice had gone shrill.

“Mind your tone, ensign,” Cassian said sharply. Then he gentled, a very little. “I imagine it’s to commend us for our loyalty to the Empire. You may accompany me.”

Jyn stepped forward, as close to his back as she could manage without drawing attention. She jostled his hands.

Understanding the hint, his fingers opened. Jyn glanced around; nobody appeared to be paying the slightest attention to them. But she didn’t trust anything. Instead, she stumbled into him and, under the cover of the sudden imbalance, pressed her mother’s crystal into his hand.

Jyn didn’t know what Cassian thought of that, what he believed. If it would mean anything to him at all. But his fingers instantly closed around the crystal, his grip tight enough that the sharp edges must be digging painfully into his palms, his torso expanding with a deep breath. Good enough. She could do nothing else.

Protect him, Mama.

She knew the Force didn’t work that way.

Please.

Few people, in this moment, could appear more suspicious than a known Alderaanian spy walking through the Death Star with kyber in his hands.

Cassian didn’t care. If kyber crystals meant little to him personally, Lyra Erso’s meant a great deal. Jyn had held onto it through all the turmoil of her life, from Saw Gerrera’s prize soldier to the Imperial prisoner who somehow managed to smuggle it into Wobani. She prayed with it on the way
to Scarif, and only yesterday, she twitched at the foreign brush of his fingers over the crystal’s edges. Now, it lay within his hand.

He doubted that Jyn cherished any possession more than this one. Yet she gave it to him—a comfort while he lived, irrevocably lost if he died. Had he some relic of Rana’s, would he have gambled with it like this?

For Jyn, perhaps. If he thought it useful. By now, Cassian knew he would balk at very little when it came to helping Jyn. But in all probability, he wouldn’t have thought it helpful, thought that far at all, any more than he would have imagined gaining anything from Jyn’s crystal. In any case, there was nothing left of Rana. Nothing but a child’s bones in a mass grave. No, that was gone, too.

Cassian’s vision blurred. He hadn’t seen it since he was a child himself, perhaps ten or eleven. There’d been little enough to see: cold earth, a wide memorial plaque. It took him a good fifteen minutes to find Llora and Renalia Andor on the long list of names. At the time, he felt little beyond confused repulsion, and he never returned. His mother and sister existed in his memories, not bodies under the ground; the grave meant nothing. Yet something in him shuddered from the truth that it really was nothing, now.

He tightened his grasp on the crystal; through his gloves, it warmed his cool hands. Maybe the lingering warmth of Jyn’s body—even on this march to possible death, he shepherded his thoughts away from that—or maybe something else. He didn’t know. At that, Cassian didn’t know what he believed about the Force at all, beyond the reality of its existence. He reserved his faith for the cause. The dream of liberation, given shape by the Rebellion. And by Jyn. A Jedi could appear before him, and it would matter less than this chunk of rock.

He believed in Jyn. In a way, that mattered more than loving her.

As if from a distant transmission, he could hear the boy beside him chattering on, Willix replying with something of his usual smooth confidence. Cassian couldn’t have reported the conversation for the life of him. Not anything, except that he disliked Willix more than ever. He always had, but in this moment, he seemed less a disagreeable role Cassian was forced to play, and more a person in his own right, stealing Cassian’s skin.

Of course, it was really the other way around.

“Do you—do you know why it happened, sir? Did the queen do something?”

Something? He almost laughed. Breha Organa would have been executed long ago if the Empire had a fraction of Cassian’s knowledge. Yet in the end, it hadn’t been Queen Breha who drew Imperial vengeance to Alderaan, or even Senator Organa. This was retribution against their daughter. He supposed he could take a scrap of relief from that. The odds of Princess Leia betraying the Rebellion, never high, now hovered about infinitesimal.

“I haven’t heard that she did,” said Cassian. “Calm yourself, ensign. I’m sure the governor will explain everything.”

So far, his feet had carried him with little attention on his part. He forced himself to focus on their surroundings, make sure they headed in the right direction. Yes, remarkably enough.

At the sight of a fresher, he seized opportunity.

“Ah, one moment.”
It was thankfully empty. Cassian slid Jyn’s crystal into one of the pockets hidden in his trousers. He could still feel it, but the chance of failing Jyn and the Rebellion no longer lay in the hands of casual observers. He cared about that, at least.

In the mirror, he checked that the kyber was concealed in the folds of the uniform, then drew near to splash water over his clammy face. Tor was right, he thought distantly. He did look Alderaanian.

He might not have, given an unlucky roll of the genetic dice. His father, he gathered, was some sort of offworlder poverty tourist. But Cassian and Renalia both favoured their mother, Cassian in particular. Everyone said so; one of his uncles (ably aided by Renalia) half-convinced him that he’d come from a cloning factory instead of the hospital, and his grandmother affectionately called him Lloran. He looked what he was: a son of his mother, of Alderaan.

However much he disliked hearing about it over and over—Alderaanian or exotic or interesting-looking or whatever else—he’d never felt anything but pride in that. Now he felt a good deal more than pride. For the first time in a while, his face did him no favours, but … well.

A creak of the door had him washing his face again. And a sniffling moan had him turning about.

“Ensign,” he said tiredly. “Don’t make me report you for unprofessional conduct.”

Cassian had no intention of reporting him, of course. But the ensign might as well paint a target on his back if anyone else saw this. All the more from someone as quiet and obedient as Cassian had found him, until now, and too obscure for any real fallout.


A boy, he thought once more. Nineteen—but that was Leia’s age. Just a few years younger than Jyn, a few more than Cassian. Old enough to rebel, and old enough to choose the Empire instead.

“I—I—I’m sorry, sir. But I can’t … I don’t understand.” Zelin scrubbed his wet eyes. “We didn’t do anything!”

“We’ll just have to wait for the governor’s explanation,” said Cassian.

Elsewhere, he’d have tried a different tack; Zelin might as well have a giant RECRUIT ME sign hanging about his neck. But if the Rebellion had its way, he would never leave the Death Star. None of them would—Esten, Efrah, the whole lot. Did Jyn realize? She must know, intellectually, but … Force, he hoped so.

Anyway, Zelin might be a spy.

“Alderaan doesn’t have any weapons. Didn’t,” he said. “I don’t understand.”

“You have enlisted in his Imperial Majesty’s fleet,” replied Cassian. “That’s all you need to understand.”

He turned on his heel and walked out, certain his sniffing shadow would follow. He’d met hundreds like him. Sure enough, Zelin hurried to catch up, and remained blessedly silent the rest of the way. Maybe he’d caught the warning; maybe he’d given up fishing for treason.

It didn’t matter. In that hour, nothing much did.

_In the elevator, Jyn’s heart stopped racing. It had to, eventually. She no longer heard the rapid patter_
of her pulse in her ears, or sensed it in her neck or wrists. She sensed only her heart, itself—which sounded saccharine and melodramatic, but was entirely true. It felt like metal walls closed in on the literal organ in her chest, slowly warping and crushing it into a gnarled, leaden lump of dead flesh. Over and over, she forced herself to breathe through the seething pain, through the chokehold of her own circulation. More than once, she had to press her closed fist to her mouth, swallow down bile.

_Just_ once, she reached for her mother’s crystal. But no, she’d given it to Cassian. One more thing the Jyn of a few months ago would never have imagined. The crystal lost not by some mischance, nor—at long last—by force, but freely given away, to a Rebel spy. Perhaps a doomed Rebel spy.

_No_, Jyn thought fiercely. She would give up hope when her fears became certainty, and not a moment earlier. Cassian was alive, down there. Or up, or … or somewhere. After everything they’d been through together, were together, she’d know. Wouldn’t she?

Jyn was pretty sure the Force did work that way, or could. But she wasn’t Chirrut, or even her mother. In the Citadel, after Cassian fell, she hadn’t known that he lived. Rationally speaking, it was just as possible that she wouldn’t know if he died.

Damn rationality. She _would_.

Her comlink buzzed.

With a jolt of pure fire in her chest, Jyn fumbled to accept the call. “Lyr speaking.”

“It’s me,” said Bodhi, voice breaking over the two words.

For the first time, she felt a wave of raw disappointment at hearing from him. She swallowed it; Bodhi mattered, too.

“Trooper,” she managed to say.

For a few seconds he didn’t speak. Then, breathless and unsteady, he stammered out, “I … I don’t … I’m not sure how …”

“I know about Alderaan,” said Jyn.

“Oh, thank the stars.” Then he gasped. “I didn’t mean—”

She slumped into the corner of the elevator. “I know.”

“You must have heard right away,” Bodhi said, with the sort of hoarse, desperate rapidity she remembered from those first days after the escape from Jedha. “It just happened, didn’t it? I only found out a few minutes ago.”

Jyn thought of trying to shield him, but she was too tired. Tilting her head back, against the wall, she said,

“I didn’t need to. We saw it happen.”

“Saw?” Without seeing him, she could perfectly envision his blur of shock and horrified sympathy. “Both of you? The captain, too?”

“Yes.” There was nothing else to say.

After a long pause, Bodhi muttered, “Fuck.”
Jyn almost—well, she was nowhere near to a laugh, but her face twitched. “Language, trooper.”

“Uh, Force.”

Her brows rose, though nobody could see it. “Blasphemy, trooper.”

“Right, right. Stars. Star. I don’t know. The captain, is he …” Bodhi faltered. “How’s he taking it?”

Against her will, Jyn’s mind cast back to Cassian’s gasp, the grasp of his fingers on hers, in the middle of a crowd of Imperials. Cassian, who had dared no more than the merest brush of her crystal, clutching it as he left to whatever awaited him.

“I don’t know,” she said honestly. “He—he’s not here.”

It was lucky, in a way, that they’d chosen the stormtrooper disguise for Bodhi. Given the tremor in his voice, Jyn could only imagine how transparent his face must be in this moment. Not that hers was much better. “He’s not? Why? Where is he?”

“He got called to a meeting,” she said, forcing her own tone to something even and controlled. “With Governor Tarkin himself.”

“What?”

She slogged on. “I think all the Alderaanians did. There was an ensign who got the same order.”

For a good twenty seconds, Jyn heard nothing but his occasional ragged breaths, and then nothing. “Trooper? Are you there?”

“Yes,” he choked out. “I’m … yes. What sort of meeting?”

“We don’t know. But the captain thought—he knew open insubordination would be worse for everyone.” Especially me.

“Right,” said Bodhi faintly. “Do you know—”

“I don’t know anything.” She sounded flat, not harsh, but she felt a flicker of guilt nonetheless. Cassian was one thing, Bodhi quite another. “Neither of us do, beyond that. Or we didn’t. I suppose Captain Willix might know what it’s all about at this point.”

After another long hesitation, he said, “I hope so.”

Jyn envied him. She didn’t know what to hope.

Council Room 11872 (Floor 18, Quadrant G-N) was in chaos. The moment that he entered, Cassian met with a cacophony of at least eight languages, only four of which he remotely understood. Apart from three stormtroopers clustered in a corner, helmets in their arms and faces drawn, Alderaanians mingled with little regard to rank or division. Not far away, a corporal demanded answers of a major. On the other side of the room, a private who couldn’t be much more than eighteen had broken into sobs. So had a colonel. Others wandered together without appearing to much notice it, or anything, their eyes dazed and unfocused. Those Cassian could sympathize with, more easily than the furious or grief-stricken.

Or—no. He couldn’t. They were Alderaanians, fellow mourners, but Alderaanians who had joined the Empire. So few did. These ones were traitors who betrayed everything their planet stood for. They grieved not because a world had been destroyed, but because it was their world. Their homes,
their memories—

Their memories—more than his. Cassian’s head swam. Not just their homes, the places where their memories lived, but their families. He had no family, hadn’t seen his homeworld in years, hadn’t called it home in much longer.—Hadn’t called anything home, except the Rebellion in an ideological way, and Jyn in a much more visceral one. Alderaan was more a legacy than a place he belonged to in any meaningful sense. The horror of seeing the planet of his birth ripped into fire could only be a fraction of what Leia felt, and even these idiots, too.

Didn’t they realize? The Empire had shattered their world before their eyes and herded its people into one chamber and they thought—what? They’d been brought together out of the kindness of the admiral’s hearts? Given space to breathe and grieve for no other purpose than that? Absurd. There must be another reason. Someone must be watching, somewhere. Waiting for one or all to betray themselves, most likely.

Surreptitiously, Cassian took in the room again, even as waves of anger still washed through him. Just as absurd as theirs, if less dangerous. They were all going to die, regardless of what happened here. Hopefully.

Not like this, he thought. Not like animals going to slaughter.

He supposed some of the mourners might be plants, but he didn’t think so. Even the general seated at one of the tables, the only person who outranked the weeping colonel, had yet to break his blank stare from the wall beside him. By looks, he might or might not be Alderaanian; provisionally, Cassian assumed he was.

Two majors. Both babbling. And—those four seemed his only superiors here. It made a certain amount of sense, actually. Alderaanians had the lowest enlistment rate of any Core planet, and sooner or later, those few generally found ways to get themselves thrown out. Or defected outright. At the best of times, they tended to be amenable to subversion. It didn’t make for long Imperial careers.

And after this, Draven would have him recruiting up one side of the galaxy and down the other. If they ever got out. Perhaps even Jyn, too—

Selfishly, Cassian wished she were here. Not really here, in danger of her life, but with him in some way.

He flattened a hand against his pocket, the rough edges of the crystal tangible even through his trousers and gloves. She’d done her best.

—People were still crying. Force, did they want to die? It was possible.

They were Imperials, he reminded himself. Servants of the Empire, enemies of the Rebellion. They’d kill him without a thought if they knew what he was. Or send him off to be tortured, more probably. If they had the presence of mind for that much.

Perhaps they thought that would protect them, minutes after the Empire wiped out a planet of Imperial subjects. Perhaps they didn’t think at all. They supported tyranny and cruelty on a vast, careless scale, the subjugation of countless peoples on countless worlds, and never imagined that it might be turned against them. This was their world.

They were his people.

No. That was the Rebellion. His surveys of the room finally took in what he’d been looking for.
Expecting, at least: a recess high in the wall, no more than a foot on any side, and something black and blocky within. Cassian kept his gaze moving, and his feet, too, searching for a better angle, and let his glance drift past the recess again. Sure enough, he could see a faint gleam from here. A camera.

He knew it.

Voices still clamoured around him.

“—hundreds of years, and—”

“Who cares about your fucking house? My daughters—”

“I can’t believe it. I can’t. It must be a … a trick, or a test, or … it’s not real. It’s not.”

“Someone’s going to pay for this. Whoever it was. We’ll make—”

Thoughts, emotions, suspicions: they all slipped into alignment, the junction as smooth and exact as the pieces of an engine or a droid clicking into place. For the first time in a long, long while, Cassian set the Rebellion aside.

“Diçelà!”

He’d been thrust into leadership before, if never like this. He knew how to make his voice heard.

The room didn’t go entirely silent, as he’d ordered, but fell quiet enough. Withdrawing to the habits of command, he demanded,

“Are we or are we not soldiers of the Empire?” His own language felt strange on his tongue, almost foreign. “Is this how we conduct ourselves?”

“Conduct ourselves?” a lieutenant repeated incredulously. “The Empire has—”

Cassian interrupted before anyone could incriminate themselves further. “The Empire does not tolerate this sort of display, this … impropriety. If the admiralty were to see you all like this, at this moment, you’d be lucky to end up in the brig. Remember who you are, men. Remember where you are.”

Nobody said anything, which he considered an improvement. Every eye seemed to be fixed on him.

“Governor Tarkin should be arriving soon,” he went on. “We’ll get an explanation then.”

If he doesn’t have us all killed.

“What could possibly explain this?” demanded the colonel.

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

“I don’t know,” Cassian said. “I don’t know more than any of you. None of us had warning. But many of you are coming very near to open insubordination. How do you imagine the governor, or the admirals, or the Emperor will look upon that? After our people provoked such a response?”

The room was truly silent, now. When the general drew a breath and rose from his chair, the sounds jarred.

“You heard the captain,” he snapped. “Find some self-control or you’re going to end up in the
airlock.”

He made a dismissive gesture, and as the others drifted into more decorous grief, walked straight over to Cassian. Not a scheming type, evidently.

“You’re quite the loyal soldier, captain.”

“Thank you, sir.” Willix, Cassian decided, would be gratified but uneasy. Not something he found difficult to manufacture, given that he felt that exact combination every time he interacted with Draven.

“Who are you?”

“Captain Cassein Willix,” said Cassian. “Sir.”

The general gave a difficult-to-interpret snort. “That so?”

He wouldn’t have thought that his muscles could wind tighter or his brain go on higher alert, but—apparently he’d underestimated himself. Every nerve in his body seemed to fire at the same time, lighting each one into shrieking alarm. His hands were icy under his gloves, his head hot, his feet tingling.

_Jyn_, he thought desperately, imagining the safety of their quarters. Only safe as long as he lived. For her, and the codes, there was nothing to do but brazen it out.

“Yes, sir.”

The man held out a hand. “General Cassio Tagge.”

_Oh._

Allowing himself a cautious smile, Cassian shook the hand and ran through his store of Alderaanian languages. “General. You’re from … Pheled?”

“Xàvilun,” said General Tagge. Cassian had been off by a province. “Serèp for you, Willix?”

“Yes, sir. A small district there—Sereia,” he lied. It was _Jyn_ who had the truth from him: he not only had never seen Serèp, he’d never set foot on its entire continent. Intelligence hadn’t wanted to compromise Willix’s identity, however, so Sereia it was. Cassian dug up as many facts as he could find, and hoped nobody asked for more. Since Willix rarely interacted with any Alderaanians at all, except Leia, he had yet to encounter any particular problems. But now?

Xàvilun, he thought. Not all that close to Serèp, but well out of the mountains. Tagge might know enough to pick up on the discrepancies.

“I haven’t lived there since I was a child, however,” he said. “I barely understand Serepta any more.”

“Well,” said General Tagge, “it’s not likely that you’ll need it, will you?”

As realization struck all over again, they both went pale.

“No,” Cassian said tightly. “I imagine not.”
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Confession: nearly all this chapter has been written for weeks. I wanted it to be longer, but every time I tried to push it forward it kept not working. So I’m letting it fly free, at a mere *squints* 3.9k. (Which I think means it's at 70k now? I DON'T EVEN KNOW.)

“What a fucking disaster.”

Zekheret’s eyes went wide. “What are you talking about?”

After two hours of silence from Cassian, Jyn’s patience with everyone but Bodhi had dropped to its nadir. Two hours—it would take him more time than that to get here, even if the meeting were entirely benign. But he would have contacted her, wouldn’t he? His datapad lay beside Jyn, at this moment, but he had both of his comlinks. Whether he had the presence of mind to use them, she didn’t know.

Jyn felt sure, though, that Cassian wouldn’t want her to panic yet, pragmatic as he was. Very probably, Cassian wouldn’t want her to ever panic, least of all for him. Not that he’d said … well, he didn’t think about himself much, beyond his convictions and instincts, and his role as an agent of revolution. If he were dead—something in Jyn recoiled, but she couldn’t deny the possibility—if he were dead, spying on Imperials and carrying codes to the Rebellion had to be the best way to honour his memory.

He would expect her to keep slogging through this charade, carrying on the fight in her own way. As she expected of herself.

So she’d dragged herself to dinner, sitting with her not-friends and trying to look less murderous than she felt. Better than sitting in the quarters and torturing herself.

“Alderaan,” said Efrah.

“Wasn’t it a Rebel planet?” Zekheret asked.

“Stars, you’re an idiot,” she told him. That sentiment, at least, Jyn could wholeheartedly agree with. “There’s no such thing as a Rebel planet. Every planet has loyal Imperial citizens and Rebel scum.”

He frowned, perplexed. Jyn silenced herself with a gulp of protein water.

“Are you sure?”

Efrah rolled her eyes. “Of course I am. You’ve already forgotten that Captain Willix is Alderaanian?”

“Oh.” With an expression of discomfort, he shifted on his bench. “He’s probably not a Rebel.”

“Probably?” She shook her head. “Sure, he might be plotting against the Empire between getting shot by Rebels. Right, Lyr?”
“It’s … possible?” said Zekheret uncertainly.

“No, it isn’t,” said Jyn, letting some of her fury touch her voice. “He’s a hero. He almost died for the Empire.”

“That’s true,” he said, and chewed his lip.

“I can’t believe—” Efrah just gave an exasperated sigh. “Look, Lyr would see it if anyone would. They’re in the same quarters, remember? And he couldn’t even walk until a couple of days ago. I’ll take a wild guess that you haven’t seen him transmitting any files?”

“Of course not.” True enough. She’d transmitted the plans, after all.

“There you go.”

Jyn still had no idea whether she thought Efrah what she seemed, or not. As they’d agreed, it didn’t make a difference in the end; she had no choice but to regard every word with suspicion. Still, if it weren’t all an elaborate trap, Efrah’s bizarre infatuation with Cassian likely had something to do with her faith in his loyalties. Jyn almost hoped they’d escape unscathed just so she could report that to Draven. We were saved by Captain Andor’s bone structure, sir.

“But seriously, Zek,” Efrah went on, “don’t you see how this must look? Maybe if it’d been some Outer Rim backwater, Tatooine or something, but it was a Core planet, a popular one. People will be angry—you have no idea how angry.” Her thin face turned grim. “I don’t know what they were thinking. For every Rebel who died today, we just made ten more.”

He flinched.

“There must be a reason,” said Jyn. “Even Captain Willix said so.”

“Where is he?”

Jyn shrugged. “No idea.” Quadrant G North, Floor 18, Council Room 11872. “Governor Tarkin called all the Alderaanians onboard for some sort of meeting. I’m guessing they’ll be done soon.”

“Governor Tarkin?” repeated Efrah, eyes narrowed. “That’s … that’s bad. Maybe.”

“Now I really don’t understand,” Zekheret said.

Both women ignored him. Jyn, attention solidly fixed on Efrah, ate with little consciousness of her food and waited for her to process whatever was going through her mind. It took a good minute.

“Risk assessment,” Efrah said at last. “It’s got to be.”

Zekheret asked, “What?”

She exhaled through clenched teeth. “Every fucking Alderaanian on this station just lost property, at the least, and probably their homes, families, friends. Their whole world, literally. People have betrayed the Empire over less.” Efrah considered that. “In fact, everyone who has betrayed the Empire did it over less.”

“Well—I guess,” he conceded. “So they think all of them are going to defect?”

“No,” said Efrah, summoning up patience from Force-knew-where, “but Command is going to want to evaluate them, I bet. There are people up there who can read a face like a datapad.”
“But traitors wouldn’t just show it,” he replied, a glimmer of sense in his eye. “I mean, I wouldn’t. Nobody’s going to go around saying ‘fuck the Empire’ to Governor Tarkin, right? Unless they want to die.”

“They won’t be evaluated in person.” Efrah picked up her spoon and began to eat, with considerably less enthusiasm than Jyn had manufactured. “Not primarily, anyway. I bet anything there’s some kind of surveillance.”

**Surveillance.** Force, of course there would be. A meeting with both Tarkin and the Alderaanian Imperials had seemed terrible enough. But the real danger would be before. Cassian, though, he’d realize that. Wouldn’t he? He was always so much on his guard. But he hadn’t been in that last moment, clinging to her hand and readily carrying her kyber crystal into a high-level meeting on the Death Star. She hadn’t thought of that danger at the time, either, no more than he—

No, he’d realize that much. However overwhelmed in that first moment, he’d recovered himself enough to sneer at the droid, and approximate Willix to that private he’d tugged in his wake. And the Empire had no subtlety about surveillance, after all. Or about anything.

“There’s always people watching, aren’t there?” said Zekheret. “Even the entrance to the prison has two or three cameras.” He brightened up. “The prison! I know how I could help!”

Jyn and Efrah eyed him, united by doubt.

“There are tons of Alderaanians working there. I could spy on them and find out if any of them are plotting against the Empire.”

Efrah coughed. “Uh—”

“I know what you’re going to say. I’m too loud and stupid.”

“I wasn’t going to—”

“But I’m not loud when I don’t talk. On-duty and such,” he said. His expression edged towards sulky. “Nobody ever notices me.”

Not for the first time, Jyn tried to wrap her mind around the fact that he was older than Cassian.

Efrah had already dropped her fork and pressed her fingers to her temples. “I wasn’t going to say that. It’s dangerous, that’s all. Traitors are too nervous to get away with it, most of the time—they’re twitchy and they make stupid mistakes. But they’re desperate, too, and they’ll do anything. I don’t think I’ve ever heard of one who didn’t leave a trail of blood behind him.”

He gulped. “Somebody’s got to stop them, though. If they’re there. We don’t even know that.”

“Governor Tarkin has plenty of people to keep an eye on problems,” said Efrah. “There are spies, strategists, all that sort of thing.”

“You’re sure?” Zekheret asked, brows still knit in what went for thought with him.

“Yes, I’m sure. And I’m sure he knows that there are people who might be mad, or go mad, over this. You don’t need to get in the way of some crazed Alderaanian with a blaster, okay?”

His features smoothed over, the customary smile reappearing. For a reason that Jyn couldn’t begin to fathom, it heightened his faint resemblance to Cassian.
Grinning, Zekheret replied, “Sounds like you want me after all.”

“What?” Efrah looked both appalled and shocked. “Speaking of crazy—”

The grin grew into a smirk. “Suddenly, you care an awful lot about me staying intact. I bet you can’t stand the thought of anything damaging a gorgeous guy like me.”

At another time, Jyn might have been genuinely entertained by either Zekheret’s impenetrable smugness or Efrah’s incredulity. In this one, she felt no more than a tickle of amusement in some remote corner of her mind. She’d suddenly remembered the message that Cassian left on her datapad all those weeks … no, days ago. His comlink, and the codes to send if either landed in a difficult situation. She’d committed those codes to a much more permanent memory than the Imperial ones. 975 for clear, 615 for uncertain. And 248 for disaster.

Beside her, Efrah picked up an inflatable muffin and threw it straight at Zekheret’s head. “It’s called friendship, you ass.”

Surreptitiously, Jyn checked the comlink at her wrist. The tiny digital screen showed nothing.

Laughing, Zekheret caught it in mid-air. “A friendship muffin? Is that what we’re doing now?” He turned the muffin in his hand. “Um, I’m still hungry, actually. Am I allowed to eat it? Because—”

“Fuck off,” she said.

“Right.” Jyn got to her feet, doing her best not to fiddle with the comlink. It all but burned on her wrist. “I’m feeling a bit unwell, so I’ll just leave you two to your … friendship. Have a fun night.”

Efrah looked tragic.

“Sure thing,” said Zekheret, with a wink that thankfully eradicated all trace of Cassian from his face.

“I’m going to clobber you on the mat,” Efrah informed him. “Yeah, should be fun.”

He beamed. “I guess you’ve got to let out that tension one way or another.”

“Keep on going, and you won’t have to wait for a mad Alderaanian to kill you—”

Ignoring them, Jyn tossed aside the remains of her meal and hurried to her quarters. Cassian’s. Whatever it was. Regardless, it felt almost like the first time she had entered, exhausted and anxious and desperate. With the closet of supplies shut, it looked very much the same, too. Stark, pristine, flawlessly neat: a place altogether empty of signs that any actual beings made any sort of home here.

No more so on his side than her own, however. As usual, Cassian—who remained inflexibly painstaking as to their cover and fastidious in himself—had adjusted everything before they left that morning. He still seemed convinced by the day that disaster might follow if each centimeter of the room were not restored to exact military correctness. Just as it was now: a stronger sign of Cassian’s presence than any mark of character could be.

Half in a daze, she walked over and slid his datapad under her clothes, alongside the knives and extra blasters. The clothes were her uniforms, made to exactly fit her body, and the weapons the ones Cassian ordered for her—this was their space, as far as any space on the Death Star could be. It would not look one iota different if Cassian were actually here, sulking on his bed with a quarter-dose of analgesics down his throat.

Jyn’s eyes burned all over again. Her hands, too, where her fingers clenched into fists. She hadn’t
hauled him this far to lose him now, to something so unbearably stupid.

Horrible beyond description, yes. But Efrah had been right. It was so very, very stupid. Almost as stupid as Cassian dying in Willix would be. To die in the course of spying was one thing, however awful; to die for something that didn’t even follow from his activities as a spy was just nonsense. It couldn’t happen, not to Cassian. She’d seen his chest, unscarred but for the obvious—the same with his face and hands. And this might be the end?

Jyn assured herself, yet again, that it wouldn’t, that she knew it wouldn’t, that the worst possibility was not possible at all. She knew the truth, but didn’t need to repeat it to herself.

The real truth was that the people who cared most for her always left, in some fashion or another. They chose separation, voluntary separation, and presented it as the expression of their love, without giving her any choice in the matter. Without giving her even an explanation, until long after the fact.

Cassian had explained himself. He almost always did, except on Eadu. Even then, he’d provided a false one, rather than not bothering with anything at all. And he’d come back so many times, every time, and if she’d known his faith and respect for little more than a month, that was a month more than she had from anyone else. He had explained this last departure as well as he could, too—she understood, she saw the necessity for all of them, and particularly for her—she—

After everything, the universe couldn’t take this from her, too. It couldn’t take everything and everybody she ever loved, except at the very end, and then snatch that last away too. Surely she was allowed one thing of her own, inviolate.

Raw exhaustion swept over her, so heavy that she felt light-headed with it. Her leg gave a convulsive twitch, and everything out of her direct line of sight grew blurrier. Struggling to kick off her boots, she sat heavily on a bed, not paying much mind to which. But it seemed suitable that it was Cassian’s.

Once again, she missed her crystal, while regretting nothing. She wanted it around her neck, and wanted it safely with Cassian—safely?—as some fragment of herself. She’d gone back for him, too, protected him as far as she could, from Jedha to here, she’d … she didn’t want him to be alone, down there. Literally alone: fine, she couldn’t help that. But not cut adrift from the galaxy, with no one to mourn anything but the valuable operative or admired leader. She couldn’t let him think that. He might be those to others, but not Jyn. He was her partner, her—her—her person.

It sounded ridiculous, even to her.

Undoubtedly it would sound even more so to Cassian, who could make anything seem reasonable and right. And that in Basic; Force knew how he sounded in his native tongue.

For herself, though, it was no less true for its inanity. At her most articulate, without tiredness and fear pressing on her, Jyn didn’t think she could have found any better term for it. Cassian was a person beyond this role or that, beyond the Rebellion, and the person she cared about the most, who also cared the most about her. She didn’t need to wrap it in words to feel the importance of that.

Jyn lay down on his bed, too weary to think anything of it beyond the fact that she wanted to be there. Curling up, she turned her face into his pillow and closed her eyes.

By some grace of the universe, she neither tossed or turned, nor terrorized herself with nightmares. She slept easily and pleasantly, only jarred awake by some slight motion near her hand.

Her eyes flew open. But the room was entirely empty. Pulse picking up, Jyn blinked sleep away and
tried to figure out what must be very obvious—

The comlink vibrated again. A message, not a call.

Jyn caught her breath. At this point, she couldn’t even blame herself for the *don’t be Bodhi, don’t be Bodhi* that stampeded through her mind. Forcing herself to exhale, she twisted her wrist so that the comlink fell right before her eyes, then activated the screen with her other hand.

It flashed a confirmation request—yes, yes, fine—and a sender code—Cassian’s, that was Cassian—and then, at last, the message.

615.

He was alive.

Cassian was starting to wish that Tarkin would just show up and be done with it. He and Tagge had managed to discourage anything like open sedition, but they couldn’t discourage grief. He didn’t try, didn’t want to, it was only—he didn’t deal well with weeping, except when entirely divided from himself, and they *never stopped*. Even the quieter second hour passed in a blur of vacant faces and stammered languages and shaking bodies, all against the white noise of that ceaseless sobbing.

Now and then, he thought it might seriously drive him mad. Cassian wanted the sound to go, and everything else too—but the sound was worst—and of course it didn’t and couldn’t. He should be the one to leave, but he couldn’t get away. There was no escaping each other, however much he wanted it.

Desperately, Cassian wanted *Jyn*, though she was Jyn and not a crutch. He couldn’t help it. He wanted her as herself, reflective and furious and solemn and unrelenting. And reliable, which sounded ridiculously tepid, but it mattered. She was just about everything that could matter in another person. He’d already leaned on her too much, but even so, he occasionally let himself entertain the idea of calling her comlink. Not for anything foolish, just to hear her even voice cutting through the clamour. But that was foolish in itself.

Cassian sent off the silent code, instead, for *unsure of risk, no emergencies*. He could give her some relief, if not himself.

“—sir, I know, but—what’s the point, if there’s nothing to go home to?”

He focused on the boy in front of him. Older than Zelin, perhaps closer to his own age. Definitely a man, but they all seemed—

“The galaxy is not Alderaan alone,” he said sternly. “There are countless beings on countless worlds who depend on the Empire’s strength, and suffer in this endless war.”

This one, a sergeant, bit his lip but gave no other sign of emotion. A danger. Perhaps to others, perhaps himself. It was the quiet ones that Cassian worried about, insofar as he did at all.

“I know. But they’ve still got their world.”

“Listen to me,” said Cassian. “Our planet is gone. Nothing can change that; we can only discover the reason it had to happen. But Alderaan was not just its soil. It was its languages, cultures, principles—the people were always the truest Alderaan. Now, we are the only Alderaan. Every one of us who draws breath keeps some part of it alive. That is *the point*, sergeant.”
The other man gulped. “But what about the ones who aren’t … good? Most of the survivors, aren’t they going to be criminals and Rebels and such?”

“I don’t advise you to concern yourself with traitors,” Cassian said coolly. “They aren’t just betraying the Empire, you understand. Alderaanians are a people of peace. Those ones have turned from what makes us who we are.”

At this, the sergeant nodded thoughtfully and drifted away. The fact that they were soldiers on the Death Star appeared to have altogether eluded him.

“A people of peace, are we?”

The thud of General Tagge’s boots had already grown familiar. Not a man much given to subtlety.

Cassian’s brow quirked. “As it were, sir.”

For several long moments, they stood together in silence—long to Cassian, anyway. Then the general said,

“How many here answer to you? Directly.”

“About a quarter,” replied Cassian, taken aback. “Maybe a third. The men stationed in the quadrant’s prison.”

“Ah, explains it.” At his open bewilderment, Tagge gave a shrug. “You take a remarkable interest in the … general welfare, captain.”

Cassian’s entire life had been dedicated to the general welfare. He managed a respectful inclination of his head.

“I don’t want to lose good men because they’re shocked and upset where almost anyone would be.”

“Not you,” observed Tagge.

Go away.

It was a childish thought, indulgent. But Cassian just wanted everyone to go away and be quiet and let him crawl into his bed for a good few days. He’d never been one to turn his face from reality, he … only for a little while. He’d never been quite this tired, either.

“I came from nothing, sir,” he said at last, struggling to care. Jyn, he reminded himself. Jyn, and the codes, and Leia, and Bodhi. And he wanted to live. “I was nothing, until the Empire provided me with opportunity. I have not lived on Alderaan in a long time—it is different for me, I think.”

“I see.” The general’s face cleared further. “You might be the only one here who did not lose your world today.”

I lost it twenty years ago.

“Probably so,” said Cassian. “I don’t mean that I am not Alderaanian. Only that it has been the people, and not any particular place, for many years now. That much was true. I am doing what I can for the Alderaan I know.” He looked thoughtful. “I might also say, general, that while the event is, ah, a disturbance, I am hardly shocked.”
Tagge studied him with shrewd, narrowed eyes. “You had been informed?”

“Not as such.” Cassian visibly hesitated. “My orders, sir, come from Commander Tor. Of—”

“I’m familiar with the commander,” said Tagge, the probing glance settling. “And his division. I understand.”

Hopefully. It was perhaps the only time in Cassian’s life that he wished he could just announce that he was a spy.

“I was not told much in particular, but enough to guess that something was coming,” Cassian went on. “Something monumental, in relation to Alderaan. So this was not altogether a surprise. That helps, I’m sure.”

Not that he’d noticed it helping, but who knew, really? Maybe, if he had stronger attachments to his homeworld, if he and Jyn hadn’t waited in dread for days, he would have shattered apart with Alderaan.

Or maybe not. Leia had evidently kept her head and her priorities straight. They were trained to that, to the Rebellion above all. Not in itself, precisely, but what it meant, what it stood to achieve. The dream of freedom, and the countless tiny chances and hopes that sustained it. Liberation for the galaxy in its entirety, system upon system and sector upon sector, came before any single person’s life or family or home, always.

Always, always, always.

He didn’t imagine what the choice had been like for Leia. A near impossibility, or simple for all its horror—Cassian didn’t know. For himself, the metal plates of the floor felt a bit steadier under his feet, more real. He was Cassian Andor of the Rebellion, sometimes a soldier and always a spy, a captain who had gone rogue because he believed it necessary and believed in Jyn Erso. And once, long ago, he had also been a refugee of Vaesda on Alderaan, a murdered city become a murdered world. That was the Empire, beginning to end, what every willing agent of it upheld.

“I imagine,” said General Tagge. He was still ashen.

Something clattered outside. People, more people. They both glanced towards the entrance.

“That’ll be our lord and master,” Tagge muttered. He clasped Cassian’s shoulder as he headed to the door. “Keep an eye on these fools, Willix.”

“Yes, sir,” Cassian said blandly.

If he’d left well enough alone, he wouldn’t have to string together more lies now. He could just cower in a corner somewhere, like so many others were doing, and look shell-shocked. That might not be much of a stretch. He’d be as safe as anyone in this room could be. Still, if he left other Alderaanians to get themselves killed in unthinking rage, even Imperial ones, he’d be—

Not them. Jyn had been wrong about that. But not as much better as he should be. Now, he could say that he’d done what he could.

The door opened, and a tall, bony man strode through, flanked by two aides and a half-dozen stormtroopers.
With the same precision as his aim, Cassian’s mind could always distinguish between danger and urgency. His hands shook unless he needed them steady; fear and shame swamped him unless he needed a clear head.

At the sight of Governor Tarkin, everything slid away. Dread, guilt, uncertainty, longing—it all receded, every thought narrowed to a sharp point.

Firstly, he had to survive, for Jyn and for the priceless data she carried. She’d sent a cautious response: received, 975. For now, she flourished under the shade of the Willix identity. Moreover, Cassian was the only one whom Leia would recognize (much less trust) if the opportunity for contact did come. And only the stars knew how much more Bodhi could take.

The other orphans of his planet stood about him. He had to help them as well as he could, without compromising the overriding priorities of the Rebellion and Jyn. Some scenario might arise in which they made for valuable recruits. Even if not, he felt a certain imperative to preserve what remained of Alderaan, as long as it did not conflict with anything else.

Cassian stood at attention, kicking a boy near him who only gaped at Tarkin, then glowering at the newly-widowed sergeant. In himself, he allowed only the tension of a soldier facing one of the chief authorities of the Empire, unshielded by the usual chain of command. Everything else seemed very far away, perceived but unfelt.

With a silent wave of his hand, Tarkin set them all at ease—ha—and glanced around. Not a stupid man, to go by the alert shrewdness in his face. He was foolish, unimaginably foolish. But not stupid.

“Sons of Alderaan,” he said.

The governor looked like he might have been killed once already, and dug up again. But the voice was smooth and rolling, the accent exactly Jyn’s. Coruscanti—educated Coruscanti. Not that Cassian didn’t expect that much. It might have been a pleasant voice to hear, in other circumstances. Not these. Though Cassian disliked killing, always, he suspected that he could cut Tarkin’s throat and sleep like a nyrf.

“I must express my deepest regrets for this unfortunate necessity,” Tarkin went on, now chilly but reasonable.

Of course.

“Necessity?” snarled out the widower.

Cassian did his best to shoot a murderous look at him. It didn’t take much effort.

He had thought about this and concluded that it didn’t pose a major risk to either objective. Willix had orders to ingratiate himself with the other Alderaanians, specifically because Tor had anticipated that this might shake their loyalties. Princess Leia or no Princess Leia. And Cassian had the cushion of Willix’s limited attachment to Alderaan. Some horror would be appropriate, but contained by loyalty to the Empire that had plucked him from nothing. Willix’s memories of Alderaan would be of brief official visits, perhaps the occasional shore leave. He owned—had owned—a little property near Aldera, but Willix, dedicated officer that he was, would not have been there in the recent past.

Not, in fact, since the accident that would have noticeably altered his face to anyone who knew him
well. Willix had become extraordinarily diligent.

It wouldn’t be pure self-denial, either. For Willix, service to the Empire would mean seeing the galaxy with a blaster on his hip and, retroactively, a beautiful woman at his side. Until he was selected to oversee surveillance of Princess Leia, he wouldn’t have thought of Alderaan in years.

“As I am certain you realize,” said Tarkin, “you have been gathered here on account of this … regrettable incident.”

Nobody said anything. Nobody, Cassian thought, dared.

“You are all loyal soldiers of the Empire,” he went on. “You may think that you have been overlooked. Through no fault of your own, you have lost homes, and perhaps valuable property.”

The widower stirred, hands clenching at his side.

Don’t do it. Don’t—

“Property?” he burst out. “You say we lost property? My daughters—my wife—how many others? There can’t—you can’t—you’re a monster, you—this is an atrocity, a—a—”

An officer hushed him. “How dare you disrespect the governor?”

“Oh, I quite understand,” Tarkin replied, and turned to one of his guards. “This soldier is overwrought. Escort him to a more suitable location.”

Silently, Cassian wrote that one off.

It would have been better, in some sense, with a fight. But despite his wild eyes and voice, the sergeant yielded himself to the stormtroopers without resistance, docilely stumbling away with them. Did he know? Perhaps reunion with his family seemed the most palatable option, if he could even think that far. Cassian didn’t understand that in any visceral way; he’d always grasped at survival, even as a child, his sister’s body cooling in the snow behind him. Intellectually, though, he knew it happened.

The rest of the room remained quiet and still. Nobody dared meet anyone else’s eyes. Cassian himself fixed his gaze on the governor’s skeletal profile.

Tarkin favoured the men of Alderaan with a thin smile.

“If you believe the Empire has forgotten you,” he, “let me assure you: it has not.”

Jyn did not wake up, exactly. She was too exhausted for that. But her mind wandered from anxious dreams towards anxious consciousness, a dim awareness that something near her had changed.

She stirred in Cassian’s bed as a draft of chilly air swept over her. Someone must have left a door or window open. No, wait, not on the Death Star. It was just cold. Even without the draft, it was cold.

Nevertheless, a muted thud sounded like the door closing. Jyn should have been alarmed, but her instincts stayed quiet, sensing no new danger.

The intruder drew a breath, quick and sharp. But she still dozed without concern. Desperate for sleep, Jyn squeezed her eyes shut. She’d wake up, just not now. The chilly air poked at her, though, held her fast.
“S’cold,” she mumbled to herself.

“That’s what blankets are for,” said a man, less chiding than—fond? That couldn’t be right.

With another muffled sound, something soft settled over her. It was cool, but less so than everything else, and took only a few seconds to warm up, insulating her from the rest. Jyn sighed, burying herself deeper in the blanket. If not for the hair in her face, catching unpleasantly in her mouth, it’d be perfect. Death Star perfect, anyway.

She blew at her fringe, but that only resettled it, and the strands clinging to her mouth kept clinging. Jyn grumbled wordlessly.

By some miracle, a hand lifted her hair away from her face and tucked it back, fingers tangling gently in the locks. Nobody had done that since … she was too sleepy to remember. Saw in the early days, maybe. The sensation was no less pleasant for the drought, her entire body tingling. Jyn couldn’t hold back a soft, contented sound.

The man caught his breath again, then stroked the last few strands out of her face.

“Go to sleep, Jyn.”

“Mm.” Some remote, contrary part of her wanted to force herself awake, just to reject the order. But she was too tired, and too safe. Jyn slept.

Not for long, of course. She was accustomed to operating on as little rest as she could manage without risking herself. No more than two or three hours passed before she opened her eyes again, mind nearly clear. Only the last few shreds of drowsiness clung on.

Their quarters had settled into the dark dimness that passed for night here, the Empire’s parody of twilight. Jyn could feel cool air on her face, but at some point she’d acquired a blanket.

That tugged at her memory, though she couldn’t quite pin it down. Jyn peered around. The low light deepened into true black in crannies and corners. The closet, looking like the void of space. The opposite bed, empty. Cassian sitting at the fold-out table, elbows on the surface, head leaning against his clasped hands as he muttered to himself. The words were unfamiliar, and more chanted than spoken, like Chirrut’s mantra or a child’s rhyme. She could just glimpse her mother’s crystal hanging from his fingers. He must have—

_Cassian?

Her eyes flew wide, the last wisps of sleep burning away. Jyn scrambled out of bed.

“Cassian!”

He leapt up at the same time, the room’s lights flashing to full brightness. With the crystal still dangling from one hand, he breathed, “Jyn.”

“You—they—you’re …” She couldn’t shape her shock and relief and raw joy into words, could hardly think. Contrary impulses seized her; she wanted to rush towards him, make sure it was all real, but some other part of her felt bolted to the floor, still and safe. Jyn took an awkward, abortive step forward, then hesitated.

Though he hadn’t half as much reason for fear, Cassian stared at her with all her own incredulity.

“Jyn,” he murmured again. His step towards her was more a small stumble, near as graceless as he’d
been in the shuttle.

It was enough. Jyn barrelled right into him, gripping his thin body, his arms closing warm around her. She pressed her face into his shoulder, knowing she’d leave it damp, and not much caring. Now, at last, she could cry.

She did cry, silent as ever, hands pressed against his back, the protrusion of his bones. Cassian grasped her waist and shoulder just as tightly, her kyber crystal swinging against the small of her back, his breath shuddering against her hair. They’d both bruise, but it didn’t matter. Unless it did.

Jyn stiffened. “Your ribs—”

“They’re fine.” He only clutched her more, settling his jaw against the line of her head. “I’m fine.”

That was good enough for Jyn, close enough to have felt even the most restrained wince. He seemed better. He seemed better here.

She shifted, adjusting her grip to close the last fractional gaps between them. Once again, she turned her face into Cassian’s chest. Jyn’s tears had dried up, but the memory of dread had not. She soaked up the living warmth of his skin through the cloth, the rapid beat of his life against hers. They lived. They’d lived, again.

Jyn could have kissed him, as she’d wished to before. She might have, if it hadn’t required pulling away. As it was, they huddled together in the dark, their shivering breaths carving up the silence, minute upon minute.

When they managed to separate, Jyn and Cassian moved to the table by unspoken mutual consent. Just as wordlessly, he pressed her crystal back into her hands.

It might have seemed a rejection. But she’d never meant to surrender it forever. Jyn wrapped the cord around the crystal and stuffed it back in her pocket before they sat down.

Another long moment passed, not uncomfortable. At last, she said dryly, “Did it save you?”

“Perhaps,” said Cassian. He paused. “Could I borrow a knife?”

Puzzled, Jyn eyed him. “Depends on what you want to do with it.”

“Break a chip,” he replied, easily enough.

“Is it valuable?”

“Very.” Cassian said.

Huh. Jyn shrugged and fetched the smallest of the knives he’d procured for her. Cassian thanked her in a flat voice; then, true to his word, he extracted a chip from his pocket and placed it in front of him.

She expected a slow disassembly, the fastidious, painstaking approach she’d grown accustomed to. Instead, Jyn had time only for an instant’s surprise—a credit chip?—before Cassian stabbed the knife downwards.

“What the—!”

He was completely expressionless. Sensibly, Jyn seized the knife.
“That’s a terrible way to destroy a datachip. It probably didn’t even get past the casing.”

She slid the chip closer to herself, studying for weaknesses. It wasn’t like she had a habit of destroying money, but she’d occasionally had cause to wreck datachips with dangerous files, and incriminating scandocs, and the like. It couldn’t be that much different. There, Jyn thought; the code strips would be vulnerable. Stabbing was ridiculous, but she sliced sideways while Cassian quietly watched.

“Okay, the scanning bands are weaker, and here, where the halves are sealed. I think it’s just some sort of adhesive.”

He should know that. Jyn would bet he did know that. But it had been a long day.

“I’ll get another knife,” she decided, and returned with the second-smallest. Only then did she relinquish the first back to Cassian.

In silence, they attacked the credit chip. Or rather, Jyn attacked it, while Cassian reverted to his usual methodical precision as they pried open the lighter metal of the bands and dug into the seams, layer by layer. He might have been chopping vegetables.

“Are you a good cook?” she asked.

The words fell heavily between them.

“Yes,” said Cassian, after a long hesitation. His jaw tightened. “Jyn, you—”

“I thought so.”

Now his attention genuinely focused on her. “You … why?”

“The knife.” She gestured at it with her own. “You don’t hold it like a weapon. Only blasters.”

Frowning, Cassian glanced down at his hand. He didn’t seem bothered, just bemused.

“But,” Jyn went on, “you do hold it like you’re used to it.” She thought it over. “Of course, there are other explanations. That just seemed the most likely for a soldier.”

He didn’t say you’d know, though it hung between them nevertheless, aided—perhaps—by his quick glance at her. So little expression accompanied it that it might have meant anything, really.

“I see.”

Forestalling any conjuration of Saw, Jyn held her jaw tight and then asked, “How did you learn? Your father, or …?”

Belatedly, it occurred to her that a six-year-old probably didn’t pick up much in the way of cooking skills in the mountains of Alderaan. Or hadn’t when they existed.

“No,” said Cassian, voice even. “I don’t know who he was.”

That hadn’t occurred to her, either. “Oh. Not anything?”

“He was a tourist, I gather. My uncle said something about it.”

Jyn’s brows rose. “Did Vaesda get many of those?”
“No,” he said, “but some people like to see poverty in person, or whatever it is. I think he was one of those, though I suppose there must have been more, since he was my sister’s father, too. I never knew—people don’t say much at that age.” A slight movement of his shoulder might have been a shrug. “I never cared, in any case. I don’t look like him or anything like that.”

They fell back into the rhythm of their work, Jyn managed to yank out another strip. But the thin grating noise preyed on her nerves.

“It was your mother, then?”

Cassian flicked another Jedi-fast glance her way. “Her family, a little. I was very young.”

It took a moment to make sense of that. “Right. I meant, she’s the one you look like?”

“Ah, yes.” He moved a little. “Rana had me half-convinced that I came from a cloning factory.”

Jyn smiled: faintly, but for real. You had to mean it, she thought, at times like this. Grasp the scraps that came to you, like meals in prison.

The next silence settled more lightly: not as heavy a weight, but not as heavy a barrier over the unspoken, either. Jyn’s chest clenched, a burst of real, bright pain following it. But she said nothing until they reduced the chip to bits of wire and metal and plastic.

Jyn tapped her knife against the pile. “How many credits?”

“Ten thousand,” said Cassian.

She blinked several times. “I don’t think I’ve ever touched that many in my life.”

“Neither have I.” Carefully, he set his knife aside. “It’s nothing to the Empire, I suppose.”

Without any real fear, Jyn picked up the knife, turned on her heel, and packed both back into their case. A whisper of relief ran through her. She truly didn’t think him dangerous—not to himself, certainly not to her—but, well, this was not a moment when she could feel ease at weapons lying within his grasp. They’d destroyed the ten thousand credits (a small part of her whimpered) and shouldn’t need blades for anything else.

“Probably not,” Jyn said, sitting down again. She clasped her hands in front of her, since she had to hold something. Not Cassian; he seemed like he might fly apart at a breath, for all his composure. Maybe because of it.

She inhaled, steadying herself. *Ten thousand credits.*

“Compensation,” she said, nudging the rubble. “That’s what this was?”

“Yes,” said Cassian. This time, when he lifted his gaze to her, it held, and fissures ran into the blank shell he’d drawn about himself. His lip curled. “For our *losses.*”

Of course. Of course, she’d known it had to be that, but hearing it aloud, paired in their voices—Jyn felt like the air had been punched out of her lungs. She couldn’t think of any comfort to offer. She couldn’t think there was any comfort to offer, or receive. Only the thoughts pushing relentlessly on, while she forced herself to breathe.

Maybe it would help, for both of them.

“They had one for everybody?” she asked. “Even you?”
He nodded.

“And none left over?”

A flicker of interest brightened his expression. “No. One for each.”

“They might not have brought any other chips they had,” Jyn murmured, half to herself. “Maybe they stripped some vice-admirals dry for the appearance of decency.” Not much of an appearance. If Tarkin, or whomever, thought this would prevent outrage, he was a fool. Not that she didn’t know that already.

“No,” Cassian said again, more emphatically. “They wouldn’t have had enough, if not for—” His voice didn’t so much crack as snap into silence.

She wet her lip. “Someone didn’t make it?”

On the table, he straightened his hands into flat planes, skin pulled tight. “A sergeant.”

“They killed him to make the numbers work?” she said incredulously.

“No, no.” Cassian’s eyes stayed fixed on hers. “There was a sergeant who had family planetside. A wife and children—little girls, I think.”

Despite her best intentions, Jyn flinched.

“I don’t have proof,” he added. “Tarkin ordered him escorted to a more, ah, soothing location.”

“Like space?” said Jyn.

“I assume.” Tentatively, he touched the pile between them. “This was supposed to be his. General Tagge told me they would have arranged for my compensation either way, but in the event, they didn’t need to.”

Her stomach twisted. “Then Jedha and Scarif were just … practice runs. If they had this, this bandage arranged down to the man, but without accounting for you—so, before Scarif—”

“It was always going to be Alderaan,” Cassian finished, fingers closing. “Always.”

“Yes.” There was nothing else to say. Looking down at his hands, she could see red blooming on his palms, where his nails bit down without relief.

A burst of frustration seized her, formless and impotent. Jyn thrust the remains of the credit chip off their table in one impatient sweep of her arm, then grasped Cassian’s clenched hands and pulled his fingers away from his palms. To her surprise, it didn’t take any particular effort; he gave way readily, hands pliant against the curve of hers. When she started to pull away, though, he grasped at her wrists, his fingers gentler on her than himself.

It had been the work of a few seconds, clearly unplanned. A flush rose under his skin. At the first twitch of his hand, though, Jyn tightened her own grip. Altogether, she thought it might be the most involved hand-holding of her life.

In fairness, that wasn’t saying much.

They neither spoke nor moved for a good minute. Then, in the tone of a man confessing his darkest sins, Cassian muttered,
“I can’t think.”

“We’ve had plenty to think about today,” said Jyn frankly. “You in particular, down in that meeting.”

He stirred, though his hands remained steady. “They were so stupid. Crying and shouting and—there was a camera right there, but they wouldn’t stop crying.”

From someone else, it might have sounded astoundingly callous. From Cassian, it just seemed bizarre, almost hysterical, even while he spoke in the same low voice as ever.

“I can imagine,” said Jyn.

“I had to do something. They’re Imperials, but—”

*Oh.*

That wouldn’t have mattered to Jyn. She knew only too well that Imperials up to their ears in the Empire’s atrocities could be ordinary people with friends and families and homes. Would Bodhi have ever found his path out without Galen? Galen without Lyra? Not everyone lived on hope and creed. Most needed an actual person to show the way, just as she had. And Jyn was the last person to assume that all Imperials fell beyond redemption just because they weren’t there yet.

When she rushed into trouble to help people—which occurred with unfortunate regularity—Jyn didn’t ask after their political allegiances. It was for their sakes as people, not personal friends or potential allies. People mattered in themselves, deserving or not.

She didn’t usually think it through like that. She felt and she acted, as on Jedha. Jyn suspected that had gone a long way with Cassian. She also suspected that he would never have done it himself. Saving individual strangers for the value of their existence, irrespective of personal merit or usefulness—no, that wouldn’t be familiar to Cassian. Least of all with Imperials. However many greys he contained in himself, he did not think in them.

“They’re Alderaanians,” Jyn replied. She hesitated, then added bluntly, “There aren’t that many of you now. It’s reasonable.”

“Reasonable,” echoed Cassian. “You think that?”

“I know it,” said Jyn, allowing no argument. “Anyway, they’ll be ripe for recruitment, if we can figure out a way to get off this thing.” She squinted at him. “I’m sure you thought of that, too.”

“Yes. Among other things.” He’d already been focused on her, but something about his attention shifted, tightened, turned his intent gaze still more intense. Prickles charged along her spine and skin.

It wasn’t unpleasant. Rather the opposite. Jyn took a deep breath.

“Have you slept yet?”

Cassian shook his head.

“Well, you should.”

When he didn’t respond, except to look at her blankly, she got up and pulled him to his feet. As with his fingers, it turned out to be simpler she expected; he complied without resistance, rising at her slight tug and drifting after her, towards his bed.
Jyn couldn’t say whether his easy surrender extended to actually sleeping. But he climbed into bed and fitted himself against the wall as he usually did, eyes closing.

She dimmed the lights again, trying to think of something to do. So far, it always seemed that there was some task or maneuver that needed done—far short of what she’d like, of what she hoped to accomplish in the end, but something. Not the smallest problem befriended her now, only an aimless tension building up, gut to throat. Though she was still sleepy, her few hours of rest kept her from the kind of profound tiredness that would force her into sleep.

A good twenty minutes passed before Jyn remembered that she had forgotten something. Bodhi! She slipped out of the quarters and made the call.

Thankfully, he answered right away.

“Sergeant.” Bodhi’s voice was mechanized, steps clanking in the background. He must be on duty.

“Trooper RK-1301,” she snapped out. “The captain has returned.”

For a good few seconds, she could only hear the clatter of armoured boots. Then he said,

“Good news, ma’am.”

“Yes,” said Jyn. “You can expect orders by zero seven hundred.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She clicked off, because she had to. No doubt Bodhi felt thrilled and relieved, but neither dared suggest it. Would they never get off this damn shell?

Jyn gave up and returned to the quarters, wincing when the door crashed shut behind her. Inevitably, Cassian stirred—she froze in place—but he only murmured something she didn’t understand and turned his face into his pillow. In a few seconds, his breathing evened out again.

Unable to think of anything else, she crawled into her own bed and tried to sleep. It must have been an hour before she managed it, and less than that before she jolted upright in bed. Her dreams had been a confused jumble of Alderaan convulsed in fire and Lyra crumpling to the ground and Cassian’s body shattering against the archives, the sticky mess of his blood coating Jyn’s hands, clinging all the way up to her elbows. Lyra’s blood, too, Alderaan’s, but they were gone already. Cassian stared accusingly at her as he bled out, eyes and hair turning ashen with his skin, the puddle beneath them spreading and spreading.

Cassian—

Jyn gasped for breath, unable to silence herself altogether. Neither could she help turning to look at the opposite bed, Cassian alive and whole, dark hair falling over what she could see of his face. He was fine. As fine as he could be.

Every time she tried to force herself asleep, she woke the same way. The corpses terrorizing her varied: sometimes her mother, sometimes her fathers, sometimes Baze and Chirrut and even Bodhi, in an array of combinations. Once it was even the little girl on Jedha, half her face ground off. But without exception, Jyn dreamed of the faceless, nameless dead of Alderaan. And without exception, she dreamed of Cassian, dying as she tried desperately to save him, never fast enough, strong enough, enough. Even he left her, last of all, over and over and over.

More exhausted by the dreams than the fractured cycles of her sleep, Jyn pulled her blanket away
and swung her legs out. She felt half-crazed, stretched to something thin and taut. Hands clenched on her knees, she listened to Cassian’s breaths. Was his mind tormenting him, too, or did it reserve that to waking hours? He moved again, restless, and—she didn’t know. She didn’t. She just, she couldn’t …

Jyn took one step forward, almost swaying on her feet. Another step, and another, and she stood at the side of his bed. Though he’d shifted enough that his back was flat against the mattress, instead of defensively wedged into the wall, Cassian still lay as far to the opposite side as he could go. And he was slender enough that another person might easily fit in the neglected space, at least someone Jyn’s size.

She shouldn’t—or—Force, she didn’t care. As unobtrusively as she could, Jyn crawled into bed beside him, right where she’d slept before. She took care not to touch, but she could feel the living warmth of his body.

He didn’t respond, which should have been a relief, but she couldn’t believe it. Not without sedatives.

“Are you awake?” she whispered.

After a long pause, Cassian said, “Yes.”

Too tired to think, too tired to guard herself, Jyn fumbled for his hand. As soon as their skin brushed, his fingers laced through hers.

Neither spoke again. They simply lay together, hand-in-hand, until they fell asleep.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

There have been a lot of tangents in this fic, but (finally) this chapter takes us to one of the major plot points from the original outline. Enjoy :)

Five nights passed before Jyn and Cassian managed to sleep separately.

Before Jyn did, at least. Maybe he would have managed it, left to his own devices. Maybe not. Though neither said much of anything beyond “do you …?” and “move over,” he grasped at her when she reached for him, the shape of their nails imprinted on each other’s skin. Neither did much of anything, either, except nestling together in the dark, the close press of their bodies almost required by the narrowness of the bed.

Jyn slept poorly, her nightmares bizarre and erratic, though she couldn’t remember many details. She didn’t dream of Alderaan, at least. A mercy: otherwise, no hour passed without the explosion playing out in her mind, a singularity that dragged every thought towards itself. In its flaming shadow, little else seemed quite real—but, of course, little else was real. She was Lyr, drowning in pretense day after day after day.

She grounded herself with what little she had. Bodhi’s voice, anxious and determined. Cassian’s hands, as steady and cautious with a blaster as with the mess of wires that had been Kay, but shaking when they clung to each other at night.

This might be the end, she realized. Not because of suspicion, necessarily; they’d seen no signs of that. Because this could become their lives, permanently, not a brief detour. Perhaps the Rebellion would never recover the plans. Perhaps Cassian would never get them posted elsewhere. They’d just stay here, all three of them, suffocating onboard this thing, with a trail of dead planets behind them.

Then there was the better scenario she’d often considered: perhaps the Rebellion would manage to snatch up the plans, and they’d finally face the death they escaped on Scarif. Jyn still didn’t resent the possibility of death, if they could take this monstrosity with them. Not in itself. But she sure as hell resented the idea of dying in Imperial uniform, dying politely—

That had been Bodhi’s life. And Cassian’s, in a different way. They would accept it without complaint, if it really achieved the most for the Rebellion and the galaxy. Jyn, though … oh, she’d accept it. She had to. But the hope of more than this, when and later, animated her as much as determination. If her life would go on and on, but only ever as this … if …

Jyn shifted closer to Cassian’s probably-not-sleeping body (they pretended to believe each other on that point), and did her best to push it out of her mind. They had plenty of trouble without inventing more. Anyway, she would do whatever was necessary to keep fighting the Empire. At any cost.

On the sixth day, just before the end of Willix’s and Lyr’s shift, a new order came through the prison. Princess Leia was to be executed for high treason.

There would be no trial or ceremony. Though Tarkin might be fool enough to make a martyr out of
“We’ve got to get her out of there,” Jyn said urgently, as soon as they escaped into their quarters. They hadn’t breathed a word even in the apparent obscurity of the lifts.

“It isn’t possible,” said Cassian, almost dismissive. He unbuttoned and refolded his jacket, in exactly the way he always did. Jyn all but tore hers off.

“Then we have to make it possible!”

“How?”

It was more attack than question. Jyn prickled even before he picked up her crumpled jacket, shaking it out, then dropping it into the laundry chute alongside his own. But she didn’t have an answer, after all the others she’d improvised. They didn’t have a ship. Any movement would be seen. Any disappearance of the sacrificial prize would kick off a manhunt. Even if they somehow managed to secret her away in their quarters, it would only paint a target on all their backs.

Her own understanding did nothing to improve her mood.

“You’re the spy,” Jyn retorted, more mildly than she intended. But Alderaan burned behind her eyelids, and she wasn’t heartless. Had never been, really.

“So are you,” said Cassian, sitting down with Kay’s head. It could hardly be recognized as such, by now, with so much of the internal wiring detangled and bent out into an array of metal roots—it looked more like a particularly incompetent drone than a droid. “You seized just about every chance in this place before I even woke up.”

“Not quite.” She didn’t bother demurring further; she knew perfectly well what she’d accomplished. “We can at least talk to her, find out where she sent the plans.”

Without looking at her, Cassian extracted yet another wire. “And hope no one is listening?”

“I know it could be a trap,” Jyn said, impatient. She thunked onto the chair opposite him. “But what’s the point in surviving if we don’t try anything?”

His shoulder twitched in a shadow of a shrug. “Surviving long enough to achieve something.”

“I thought rebellions were supposed to be built on hope.”

“Reasonable hope,” said Cassian. He bent the wire aside and reached inside, each movement slow and careful. Then he frowned and sighed.

“Was Scarif reasonable?” she asked.

“We knew it wasn’t a trap.”

“I knew,” said Jyn, bracing herself for something she couldn’t quite define.

“That’s good enough for me.”

Around them, Alderaan was crumbling from asteroids into flame, yet the corners of her mouth bent. Just a little, just … they were alive. They could have died a dozen times over, in fear and pain, but they lived. Not any sort of life she wanted, but not one devoid of small pleasures, either.

“I suppose,” she grumbled, “that you’ll say we had a plan for escape from Scarif, too.”
Cassian glanced up. He didn’t smile—she doubted he had it in him right now—but his gaze changed, softened, in a way that she couldn’t assign to any particular muscle or shift of colour.

“Well, I won’t now.”

She rolled her eyes.

For a few long seconds, he snipped and adjusted wires. But his attention almost immediately returned to Jyn, and he set down the wire-cutters.

“They didn’t find the plans on the ship,” he said. “They didn’t find them on her. We know that much. Either she transmitted them to the Rebellion or sent them away. If the first, our work is already done, and there’s no point in risking ourselves for it.”

“That’s not likely, though,” said Jyn.

“No,” he agreed. “They would have attacked before Alderaan. Certainly afterwards. It’s much more probable that she managed to smuggle them planetside before her ship was boarded. In that case, she herself probably doesn’t know where in particular they ended up.”

Jyn exhaled through her teeth. “Okay. We’d be risking everything for information we have no way to pass on, and which likely won’t tell us anything we can’t already guess. I know.”

They’d talked about it before. She knew. But—

“How long does this go on?” she asked quietly. “Keeping our heads down and backing away from risks and … how long is it worth it?”

Cassian looked straight at her, dark eyes very clear. Jyn expected one of his well-turned declarations, his way of slicing through layers of difficulty and complication to some simple, burning core. *Rebellions are built on hope. You’re not the only one who lost everything. It was for a cause I believed in, a cause that was worth it.*

“I don’t know,” he said.

She almost laughed. “Seriously?”

“I only … weigh things. What might be gained, what could be lost.”

Jyn couldn’t really see Cassian living by risk-reward analyses. He was too zealous for that, too instinctive. Too much like her. But then, she’d never had a devoted strategic analysis following her around and spouting probabilities. And once, she really had been more cautious, in some ways—always conscious that the slightest error could bring down an entire mission. Everything had to be perfect. *She* had to be perfect.

“If we didn’t have valuable information of our own,” said Jyn suddenly, “would you weigh this differently?”

His gaze didn’t falter. “I might.”

“It’ll make a difference, if we can survive. And there’s no way to help Princess Leia. So.” Jyn had to swallow an unpleasant taste in her mouth. In her imagination, probably. “I still don’t like it.”

“I don’t either. But some risks—” Now, his glance dropped to whatever lay within the wreckage of Kay’s head, the tip of his tongue wetting his lip. A nervous tell, not a trick, unless letting her see it
counted as a trick. She decided it didn’t. “Can’t be taken, can’t be … contemplated. You know.”

She did. Her father had been an intolerable risk; but she remembered, too, killing a man who’d seen her planting a bomb and opened his mouth to shout. There’d been blood everywhere; they didn’t have enough blasters and she was better at hand-to-hand, and she told herself that he was a collaborator, someone who would sooner run to a stormtrooper than resist, they’d taken out an entire facility, and *the cause comes first, the cause comes first*. Saw drilled that into her head from childhood—

Less than a month later, he left her in a bunker.

“I do,” she said, tired. “So we’re just going to stick around until … what is a reasonable chance even going to look like?”

Cassian shrugged and picked up the wire-cutters again. “Reassignment, perhaps. Anything that takes us off this thing.”

“Then we make a break for it.” Frustration still crawled over her, if less of it. “Hopefully without drawing attention, I suppose.”

He peered inside the head. “Hopefully.”

Jyn wasn’t going to bet on that. Sure, it would be a pity to lose Willix and Lyr, for all that she hated pulling Lyr over her skin. She could well have had to pull worse things, or more difficult ones. And they’d never have lived this long without them, certainly not in comfort. Nevertheless, she’d give up far more than a useful identity if it meant escape.

“A ship,” she muttered, more to herself than him. “We need a ship.”

Cassian made a low sound of satisfaction, and Jyn twitched.

“What?”

With one last cut, he dropped the wire-cutters and reached inside Kay’s head. It only took a few seconds for his hand to re-emerge, fingers folded over something flat and square. When he opened them, she saw that the square was small, a good deal smaller than his palm, and an unassuming mix of metal and plastic.

After all, one datachip looked very much like another.

“Is that him?” she exclaimed.

“Maybe,” said Cassian, but his mouth was soft and his eyes bright. “I’ll have to check if the code’s intact. It could have taken damage—probably did, and so much developed organically … well, not organically, but …”

“Right,” Jyn said. She eyed the datachip. “If it is intact, more or less, you can get him pestering us again?”

“Yes. Hopefully.” With care, he set it aside. “I may be able to requisition parts. Willix is supposed to be a droid specialist. And escape would be easier with Kay. We might even manage to extract Leia, if everything comes together fast enough.”

“So we need a security droid shell,” she said. “And a ship. And an excuse to leave. With a stormtrooper, and maybe a sentenced Rebel spy.”
“Right.” He picked up the head, and carried it back to the safe, Jyn grimacing. Kay’s face looked even more disturbing before, with the mass of aimless wires and the knowledge that no part of him remained within. “Then we can go home.”

“The Rebellion?” she said, doubtful. They’d never been what she would consider hospitable. She might not know what hospitable even looked like, but really? “That’s supposed to be home?”

For him, maybe. For her, she couldn’t quite believe it. Not in itself, anyway.

“Just about anything is, right now,” said Cassian, which … okay, granted. “As long as we—”

Abruptly, he knelt to deposit the head and lock the safe. Something seemed to be wrong with the latter.

“As long as we what?” she prompted.

Cassian fiddled with the lock. “As long as we manage to slip under the Empire’s radar. It shouldn’t be too difficult, if we can get out.”

“I’d like to register serious doubts about your idea of difficult,” said Jyn. Her mouth was doing the thing again. Not a smile, exactly, but something akin. Well, she was the reasonable one, really. Everything always had to be impossibly difficult or impossibly simple with Cassian.

He appeared to give up on the lock, or fixed it. Rising to his feet, he gave her a wry look and said, “Noted.”

They both left it at that, without any particular acrimony. They couldn’t allow acrimony, she thought, aggravation simmering. Not that she wanted a fight, least of all now—_for every Rebel who died today, we just made ten more_—kept flashing through her mind—and not that she actually felt angry at him. Or herself. Or anyone, specifically.

But she was so tired of reasonable. She needed to do something. She needed, they needed … Force, she didn’t know.

Jyn said nothing of this to Cassian. In fairness, she often said nothing about most subjects. That came naturally, though, and this total containment was anything but. She could sense the tension all but bleeding off both of them; it felt like one more push would have her screaming and carving up the walls, or Cassian cracking into springs and bolts. Or both.

No, she wasn’t angry at him. Nevertheless, Jyn kept to her own bed, and stayed awake half the night in even deeper frustration. She’d gotten used to the consolation of touch, breath and flesh and thrumming blood all together, the comfort in reaching out and finding a ready welcome. She craved more than she resented. But she shouldn’t get used to it. Shouldn’t she? If they ever got out, it would all change. They weren’t … they were … she couldn’t afford dependence. It didn’t feel like that, but if the mere act of sleeping in her own bed kept her awake and fretful, well—

She drifted off a good two hours after Cassian’s breaths turned slow and deep. Two hours after that, she jerked awake once more, remembered horrors all tangled up in her mind.

Stay, she thought dimly, too dream-lost to know who she meant. Don’t leave me here alone. I love you, come back, don’t go—

Cassian slept on, and so did everyone else she ever loved.

“Better turn off the irresistible charm before she swoons,” said Efrah. For all her professional dismay over Alderaan, her sardonic ease had yet to falter. “Coffee, Lyr?”

Jyn grunted. “Please.”

Through an incipient headache, Jyn listened to Zekheret and Efrah talk. Since they periodically dropped something useful before it filtered its way down to Bodhi, that could be worth the time. At least the coffee, and perhaps the bit of soup she managed to hold down, quieted the sharp stabs in her skull through the chatter. Efrah complained about her much-admired commander losing credit for something to Krennic and now Tarkin, while Zekheret boasted of half-baked plots to infiltrate Alderaanian spy rings.

“What Alderaanian spy rings?” Efrah finally snapped.

“The ones I’m going to find!”

She dropped her head into her hands. “Zekheret. You know you’re not in intelligence, right? This is not exactly your skillset.”

“Intelligence never finds anything,” he said, which Jyn suspected might be only a slight exaggeration. Apparently the Rebellion had been plotting circles around Imperial spies for years.

“First of all, that’s not true,” said Efrah, “and second of all, it’s not your problem! You’re a prison guard now. Do you know what kind of trouble you could get into? Even if all the Alderaanians onboard spontaneously built a major espionage operation in the last week, which they haven’t—I don’t know where you’re getting this ridiculous idea, anyway—”

“I’d want revenge if my town got destroyed,” he said simply, “and it doesn’t even have running water.”

To Jyn’s exhausted surprise, Efrah turned pale. “Don’t say things like that, Zek.”

Plainly unswayed, he shrugged and nodded his head towards Cassian’s approaching figure. They’d planned that: Cassian would lag behind so that Jyn alone joined her supposed friends at first. They’re your assets, he said matter-of-factly, and she felt at once exasperated, proud, and chilled. Regardless, it would let them keep an eye on the gap between their behaviour with Jyn alone and Jyn with Cassian.

“Okay, it’s not all of them,” Zekheret said. “I just have to find the dangerous ones.”

“You don’t have to find anyone,” said Jyn, forcing herself to engage. “Willix and I are keeping track of things, okay? Nothing gets past us, I promise.”

“You wouldn’t know about it if it did,” he insisted. “I mean, obviously.”

Efrah gave Jyn a look of sympathetic irritation. “If you want to strangle him, I won’t stop you.”

Cassian’s approach had brought him within earshot (if he’d ever been out of it). He settled himself beside Jyn and said,

“Who is Lyr going to strangle?”

“Me,” said Zekheret brightly.
Cassian’s brows rose, his voice going soft and almost slippery. “You really should tell me these things, Isidar.” He lingered unpleasantly on her n—on Lyr’s name.

“You’d be the first to know, sir,” said Jyn. Were all his roles as repellent? She supposed it made sense for Imperials, or most Imperials, but it still felt uncanny to see Cassian’s high-strung resolve replaced by Willix’s slimy assurance. Maybe the next would be … no, she couldn’t think of a next.

They headed to the detainment centre with Zekheret, whose shift overlapped with theirs. As he headed off, Jyn snagged his arm.

“Remember, you’re here to oversee prisoners. Not pester other soldiers.”

He heaved a dramatic sigh. “Tell her to mind her own business. I’m fine.”

With nothing else to do, she left him to the prisoners and the imaginary spy ring. Not my problem, she told herself, unless he actually managed to turn up something. And he’d be the first to reveal it if he did.

After an exciting morning of standing in place and running errands for Cassian’s arse of an alter-ego, a buzz against her waist and exchange of glances had Jyn escaping into the women’s fresher. Empty, thank the Force.

She unhooked her hand-held and switched it on. “Lyr.”

“Sergeant, ma’am,” said Bodhi. “Checking in.”

“Good. Any news?”

She started when he replied, “Yes.”

“Really? What is it?”

“Well, maybe,” he said. “I think.”

“Spit it out, trooper,” said Jyn, trying to choke down a flare of excitement. If he didn’t know for sure if it counted, it couldn’t be that monumental. She might have already heard, anyway. Still, the hope of change, even slight change, rushed in her blood.

“They’ve sent a contingent to Dantooine,” Bodhi said.

Booted feet clattered past the door. Too quiet for stormtroopers, too sharp for prisoners. Two … no, three guards or administrators. She waited for them to pass, just to be careful, then said,

“And?”

“We didn’t hear about it at first. They must have been sent … I don’t know, almost a week ago.”

Jyn frowned at the floor and moved from the door, turning away and dropping her voice.

“Right after …?”

“Yes,” said Bodhi. “I think so.”

Had Leia talked, after all? But the base was on Yavin 4, not Dantooine. They had others, of course —maybe she’d hidden the headquarters by directing attention to a minor operation? Cassian would know, but she could hardly ask him here.
She took a deep breath. “Interesting. Good job.”

Even floors away, she could hear his quick exhale. “Thanks.”

“How are you holding up?” she asked.

“Good,” said Bodhi, sounding surprised. He paused. “Sort of good. My aim’s a lot better.”

She coughed over a sudden laugh. “Glad to hear it. Stay safe.”

“You too,” he replied. Before Jyn could disconnect, he quickly added, “Wait! How … how is he holding up?”

“The captain?” said Jyn, as if he would care about any other man here.

“Yes.”

She thought about it. Cassian, inflexible by day and trembling at night. Cassian outside their quarters, adhering to his role with unflinching determination, and Cassian within them, slicing up ten thousand credits.

“I don’t know,” she said. “It’s a … strange situation.”

“That’s one word for it,” said Bodhi soberly. “You’re still in the prison? Have you seen—um, her?”

“No,” Jyn told him. “Direct interaction is too risky. She’s not much of an actress, apparently. And we can’t just walk out with a Rebel slated for execution. But I’ll update you if anything changes.”

She switched off the handheld, just in time to hear a strangled,

“Lyr?”

She whirled around. Zekheret stood at the door, framed like a holopic, his mouth open. He stared at her with bugging eyes.

“It’s you!” he burst out. “The whole time, it was—you’re—you—”

Jyn’s skin went numb. By will alone, she maintained her usual expression.

“What are you talking about?” she snapped, then scowled. “And what are you doing in the women’s fresher?”

A mottled flush ran up his neck and cheeks, wrecking all resemblance to Cassian. “I—well—that’s not the point! You’ve been spying! For them!”

“No,” she said desperately. “This is a misunderstanding.”

He shook his head, eyes still wide, and pulled out his blaster.

“You can’t talk your way out of this one.” Zekheret waved the blaster in her face. “Isidar Lyr, you’re … you’re under arrest as a Rebel traitor and a spy.”
Chapter Notes

I like to answer all my comments when I post a new chapter, but my wrist is screwed up (probably not helped by writing this chapter!), so I can't this time. I'll try to get to them when I have the time/comfort, but I did see and appreciate them all :)

Jyn burst out laughing, only to break off as surprise and irritation flooded Zekheret’s expression. She stared at him.

“Wait, you’re serious about this? You actually think I’m a Rebel spy?”

“Of course,” he said indignantly, and waved the blaster again. Slamming his free hand on the switch for the (damnably silent) doors, he gestured for her to walk through. “I’m taking you to—to—away right now. Don’t resist.”

Jyn’s heart beat a dizzying, deafening beat in her head and chest, but she had no serious hope (reasonable hope, hah) of dodging him in the fresher. She heaved a sigh and walked out.

“This is the most ridiculous thing that has ever happened to me,” she said, holding up her hands. Force knew what he might shoot with all his flailing around.

Zekheret stepped through, steadying the blaster in his hand, but he looked faintly uncertain. “You’re the most ridiculous thing! You said—I heard you—you want to rescue Leia Organa, you said so! Do you think I’m stupid enough to believe there’s another reason?”

Maybe.

“I didn’t say anything about rescuing,” said Jyn. “I said that we couldn’t just walk out with her.”

“Because it’s too risky,” he retorted. “Not because you don’t want to. That means you’re a Rebel.”

Her own voice echoed in her ears. The next chance, and the next.

“Or perhaps it means that I’d like to be something other than an officer’s plaything.”

The blaster twitched downwards, just a little. Jyn’s instincts urged her to track its movements, prepare for whatever weak opportunity she might seize. She didn’t dare, instead lifting her eyes to the ceiling, doing her best to seem exasperated. It didn’t take much effort.

“Huh?” said Zekheret.

She exhaled through clenched teeth. “Do you have any idea what the last princess of Alderaan would go for?”

“Go for?” he said, with every appearance of bewilderment. “I’m sure she’d do anything to survive, but—”

“Sell for, you idiot,” snapped Jyn. “There are markets for certain kinds of … collectors. The Hutts,
Black Sun, at least hundreds of others. They’d give me more for her than I could earn from the Empire in twenty lifetimes.”

Enlightenment cleared his expression, though his lip curled. “You’re talking about selling people?”

In any other circumstances, her opinion of him would have inched up. Slightly. As it was, she buried fear and desperation as far down as she could.

“What difference does it make?” said Jyn. “She’s just going to be executed otherwise. Is that supposed to be better?”

“How should I know? I’ve never died!”

“Well, I’m going to if you turn me in, so—”

Zekheret grimaced. “Wait, you and Willix … you’re … he knows about this?”

“No, of course not,” she said impatiently. “The whole point is to get away from him. From all of this.”

With another tremble of his blaster, he peered around. Of course, virtually nobody ever came to this small stretch of the halls, which turned sharply away from the main entrance to enclose the women’s fresher and little else. It didn’t even have cameras, except those at its far end beyond the doors and pointed into the main hall. If she could figure a way out of this, nobody would have to know. Not that she could expect Zekheret to keep his mouth shut, even in the best eventuality, but at least it would give her the time to—to—well, to try something.

“Efrah’s never said anything about that,” said Zekheret. “Or talked about leaving.”

“She’s too young for a decent pension,” Jyn replied without hesitation. “That’s why I haven’t just retired. I haven’t risked my life this long to live on scraps.” She paused, letting her eyes drop. “And—look, not everyone’s as strong or quick as Efrah.”

“That’s true,” said Zekheret, shades of his usual warmth lighting his face. For a moment, his tightened mouth softened into a slight smile—so slight that it seemed almost shy, something she would never have expected from him—before disappearing. His brows knit together. “Maybe you’re lying and maybe you’re not. If you’re not … I don’t like you anymore, but … ugh.”

Jyn could sympathize with the last, at least.

“I’m not either. Quick, I mean. Efrah’s always been the brains,” he went on. Then his eyes widened. “That’s it! I’ll take you to her.”

Jyn’s heart nearly stopped. “She’ll be asleep. Didn’t her shift just change?”

“This is more important,” Zekheret replied, now firm. He gestured towards the main entrance—the cameras—with the blaster. “Go on.”

_I’m going to die_, she thought, even her mental voice going shrill. She nearly laughed. _I’m going to die because this idiot has a crush on his best friend._

“Fine,” she said, because she couldn’t think of anything else. She slouched over to the space in front of his blaster, doing her best to exude annoyance.

Bodhi might scrape through, as just another stormtrooper. Cassian … he’d be the one to get attention.
Perhaps the identity would be good enough. He might live, if a spy who’d missed a treason plot in his own quarters could survive it. But he’d have eyes on him constantly. How long would it take to escape? If ever?

She wanted him to live, and she wanted to live for her own sake. She’d always demanded survival from the universe, even with her mother shot before her eyes, even on the streets of her birthplace, in Wobani, on Scarif with Cassian apparently dead and Krennic’s blaster pointed at her. Never for a moment had she welcomed death.

But—she couldn’t help it—couldn’t help thinking of Cassian, of drifting together without noticing and awkwardly holding hands and fussing over each other, *I’ll pour it down your throat and be careful*. Her sickened terror when she thought him dead, and the blanket he tucked around her when she dozed through his return. Cassian climbing after her with cracked bones slicing up his lungs, and Jyn holding him in those moments before the tractor beam caught them, stroking his face and hair.

*Just a moment now. It’ll be over soon.*

She didn’t want to leave him. Least of all now, when she’d kept him at arm’s length only last night. What if he thought, after, that she’d been angry at him, or resented him, or—Jyn blinked rapidly. If there was any chance, she had to keep her eyes clear.

As she moved forward, part of her mind calculated the possibility of dodging the blaster and taking Zekheret out. Vanishingly low, Jyn concluded. She was fast, but not that fast. A toddler couldn’t miss her at this distance. He was supposed to be good at hand-to-hand, too, with all the advantages of height and weight.

The other part of her mind just wished she’d climbed into Cassian’s bed one last time.

“Wait,” said Zekheret suddenly. They’d walked perhaps four steps. “You’ve got a … whatsit, an accomplice.”

“Yes,” Jyn said, with no idea where his sluggish thoughts had taken him.

“If it’s not Willix, he’s out here somewhere.”

She tried to guess if she could she extract some hope from this. Who the hell knew?

“Yes.”

“Okay,” he said. “Um. Turn around, give me your blaster. I should have done that first.”

She obeyed, after a fashion, handing over the regulation blaster that she wore openly. Zekheret didn’t check for any others. After all the plots she’d executed, it was honestly a bit embarrassing to get tripped up by someone so stupid. All because he was a disgusting voyeur, no less.

“I don’t want to get shot in the back,” he explained.

“Right,” said Jyn.

“I mean, by the accomplice. But also you, if you’re lying. Where is he?”

“I don’t know. He’s not carrying a tracker.” She paused. “But not far, I wouldn’t think. He tries to stick near the prison.”

“You’re friends, right? If he sees us, he’d try to kill me?” Zekheret twitched, his gaze darting wildly
Jyn thought about Cassian. “Probably. Sorry.”

“Fucking—” He glanced over his back, then past her, then back again, all but vibrating. “Okay. You walk behind me. Anyone who shoots from behind is going to have to get through you first.”

Jyn elected not to remind him that he was twenty-one centimeters taller than her and considerably broader.

“Fine,” she said.

“And keep your hands behind your back. I’ll be checking. If you try anything, I’ll shoot.”

“Got it,” said Jyn, locking her left hand about her wrist. Zekheret narrowed his eyes at her, then nodded, and she fell into step behind him.

Jyn inhaled, indifferent to his frequent, nervous glances in her direction. She was Saw Gerrera’s best soldier and saboteur. She could activate explosives from any angle, without a hint of movement in her exposed side. It was nothing to switch on the comlink at her wrist, and press the numbers she’d hoped never to send.

2 4 8.

In an instant, Cassian’s unnoticed breaths turned to fire in his lungs. His pulse stumbled and his ears rang. But he’d never thought so quickly or clearly in his life.

“Odd,” he murmured, eyes on the comlink’s tiny screen. Then he jerked his head at the two guards. “You stay here and watch this door, understand? Nobody comes in or out.”

“Yes, captain,” they chorused.

As soon as he rounded the corner, Cassian unholstered his blaster. Releasing the catch, he kept it at his hip as he moved silently down the hall and then made his way towards the women’s fresher.

People called him cold-blooded, he knew. Never before had it seemed more true. Every particle of life in him felt like ice, except the relentless thunder in his head. His mind screamed in counterpoint —

**JynJynJyn**

“Lyr?” he called out. “What sort of glitch?”

Cassian stepped past the cameras pointed his way, and through the door to the tiny corridor. Then he froze to a halt.

A body lay sprawled on the floor. And behind him stood Jyn, blaster in hand.

*Her* blaster, some distant corner of his mind observed. The miniature one he’d procured for her. It smoked slightly, not built for … much of anything. But he’d hoped it would keep her safe if all else failed.

She stared at him, dead-white, and Cassian hit the panel to close the door.

“Lyr,” he said, longing to use her real name, and moving forwards. “What happened here?”
Jyn released an unsteady breath and lowered the blaster. “He came sniffing around the fresher. Overheard a discussion with our friend.”

“Enough to …?” he asked, only holstering his own weapon when he got within arm’s reach. Cassian laid his hand against her back, not sure which of them he sought to comfort.

“No. Just guessed,” said Jyn, still pale. She shifted closer to him without appearing to realize it, away from the corpse. “I had to tell him about selling the princess on the black market.”

He blinked, then said, “A pity.”

“Yes.” Cassian could see her jaw tense, feel it in her muscles as she looked at … was that Zekheret? Whomever. “I was trying to survive.”

He let his fingers splay against the small of her back, felt her relax a little against his touch. That didn’t mean anything, not in a moment like this, but—maybe—anyway, he was glad it helped.

“I understand,” he said gently.

She exhaled another ragged breath: a sigh, perhaps of relief. Then she straightened and angled her head back to look up at him, her face expectant.

“Well,” she said, almost sounding like herself, “what next?”

Now he understood the urgent call. She had plenty of experience with killing; he suspected she had much less with hiding bodies afterwards.

Nothing in this corridor, Cassian concluded; it consisted of little other than the walls, ceiling, and fresher. They’d have to find another solution, and hope nobody else ventured this way.

“Come on,” he said, prodding Jyn around the body.

She was already shaking her head. “If anyone finds him, they’ll know it was me.”

“They’ll definitely know it was you if they find you with him,” said Cassian. “It’s time that we need. And maps. This way.”

Jyn looked doubtful, but silently assented, matching her steps to his. Or perhaps he did to hers. Not that it mattered. At the door, she darted through and took in the halls, then nodded at him. *Safe.*

As far as Rebel spies with a corpse on their hands could be, at least. Cassian locked the door panel behind them—potentially suspicious, less so than a murdered corporal—and led the way to the main room.

“No signs of trouble, captain,” one of the guards chirped at him.

Cheerful Imperials were the worst, honestly.

“Good, good,” he replied, striding over to the terminal and opening the prison schematics. There had to be something. After all this, there had to be—

*Huh.*

Jyn stood stolidly by while Cassian did … something at the terminal. He kept switching the power of some technology or another—off, on, off—while muttering to himself, giving every appearance of
fretful irritation. Something of a natural state for him, but if she didn’t know that he’d just found her with a dead body, she would never have remotely imagined it.

Jyn had thought he might … oh, she didn’t know. Of course Cassian wouldn’t betray her to the Empire. Cassian wouldn’t betray anyone to the Empire, and she knew he cared for her. She knew, too, that he was an assassin and undoubtedly had carried out worse killings. He didn’t have any right to condemn her. Still, he could be very absolute about some things, and who could say that finding his partner with the murdered corpse of an asset she’d shot in the back wouldn’t be one of them? Certainly, she didn’t judge herself by him, or by anyone. But that didn’t make her completely indifferent to the contempt of people she loved.

There’d been none of that, though. Just curiosity and concern, her muddled disgust and fear and triumph dissolving into the warmth of his hand.

(Some part of her hadn’t wondered at all. That part had simply assured her he’s coming, he’s coming while she stared down at the body of a silly, stupid man she’d extracted information from, and laughed at, and eaten meals with. It wasn’t the same, when you knew someone. Even Krennic, monster that he’d been; leave it, Cassian had urged, and these days, she felt glad that she’d listened. But now—)

“This is Captain Willix,” Cassian said, projecting his voice at the intercom. “There has been a minor electrical malfunction. All personnel are to remain at their posts until the situation is resolved. Repeat, all personnel remain at your posts.” He switched the system off. “Except you two. Go find a tech to deal with these cameras.”

“What if it’s a plot, sir?” said one of the guards, the less obnoxiously chipper one.

Jyn and Cassian both scowled.

“It’s a small issue with the camera system,” he said, “not a mass revolt. Go. That’s an order.”

As soon as the door shut behind them, they turned to each other, once again mere inches apart.

“What ideas?” she asked.

“One,” said Cassian. “We need to bring him here before they get back.”

Without hesitation, she swerved and raced towards the little corridor they’d left behind, Cassian just behind her, unsealing the door. Nothing seemed changed, Zekheret’s body lying where it had first crumpled. Wait, hadn’t his hand originally fallen under his torso? She didn’t remember it stretched out like that. But she’d hardly focused on the details.

Jyn hurried forward to help Cassian turn the body. Her skin chilled when she felt its warmth; even before she grasped his shoulder, she suspected the miserable truth.

Zekheret was still breathing. Barely, his mouth smeared with blood, eyes glazed, his only sound a low moan. Stretching his hand seemed all he had in him to attempt. But he’d been here the entire time, caught in a slow and lingering crawl to death, rather than the quick one she thought she’d given him. There must be some weakness in that blaster, maybe a structural mistake. Fucking Empire and its fucking incompetence—

He croaked, “S … spies …”

Cassian shot him.
It came between one blink and the next, before Jyn had narrowed her horrified realization to action. She didn’t flinch; her nerves were too good for that. But she would have liked to. Instead, her gaze swung to Cassian. He looked distant, almost vacant—an expression she’d seen before, among some of Saw’s people. Not ones who made it, most times. Some people weren’t meant for war.

Jyn snapped her fingers in his face, and Cassian twitched back to his usual intense focus.

“We’ve got to get him down the corridor,” he said. “Fast.”

Without another word, she hurried over to take Zekheret’s shoulders, closing his empty eyes as she passed. For all that she’d despondently calculated his weight earlier, it wasn’t so difficult now. She only grunted a little when she had to bear the bulk of it, while Cassian smacked one hand on the door panel.

He didn’t bother with much more than a cursory glance into the corridor. It wasn’t like it mattered at this point. Either the Force would stay with them, or not.

Zekheret’s weight lightened again as Cassian took on his share, right until they dropped him at the end of the corridor.

“Now what?” she demanded.

“Wait here.” Cassian dashed into the front chamber, clearing the corpse in a careless leap. “It should be … there. Don’t lean on the wall.”

Jyn straightened, standing by casually. As casually as anyone with a body at her feet could, anyway—right until she did jump back.

Even someone with nerves of titanium couldn’t expect the wall to start grinding open, after all. With it came a truly grotesque smell.

“What the—?”

She didn’t have time to wonder. Cassian hurried back, and they hoisted Zekheret’s body up. Jyn could only cling to the hope that nobody would come through for another minute. Even Cassian wouldn’t be able to talk their way out of this one.

“Ready?” he muttered.

Jyn nodded. *One, two, three.* Together, they tossed Zekheret’s body into the reeking chamber below them. With a sound disturbingly like a *slurp*, he sank beneath the water.

Maybe water. They both stared downwards for a single, impractical moment.

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“Trash compactor,” said Cassian.

“I guessed,” Jyn replied. The water churned, and she backed away, unsure what she felt beyond disgust. In one last rush, Cassian settled behind the terminal again and sealed up the trash chamber. Its vile odour lingered for a minute, or she thought it did. *That* would cover even a decomposing body. If nobody found it first.

Jyn shuddered.

In the event, a good seven minutes more passed without disruption. Jyn had time to wash her hands, recover her comlink from the fresher, and check if Zekheret had left any blood on the floor (no).
Cassian fiddled with the cameras, wiped them, fiddled with them again.

They dared not talk, much less of what they’d done together, but his glances said we’ll see if this works and are you all right? as clearly as his mouth could have done. Jyn didn’t trust her own face to speak for her, inexpressive as it could be; instead, she hovered as near as she could, letting their arms brush, and focusing on the tingle in her skin.

Alive, alive, alive. She’d survived, yet again—she lived—they lived, together.

Jyn concentrated on the warmth of their bodies, side-by-side, and shoved the memory of Zekheret’s staring eyes and bloody mouth into the shadow of Alderaan. He hadn’t cared about the deaths of billions. Even Efrah only cared in pragmatic terms; they’d joked about friendship muffins while Jyn sat in terror and Cassian schemed for the lives of a roomful of Imperials.

With the slow breaths her mother taught her, long ago, Jyn laid a hand over the kyber in her pocket. But it didn’t comfort her as much as usual. Wherever Lyra was, whatever she was—

Force, Jyn hoped she hadn’t seen.

The return of the guards, a technician in tow, thankfully jarred her out of her thoughts. The latter, after the galaxy’s least enthusiastic “I hear there’s a problem, sir,” immediately started running through data on the terminal before striding around to check the cameras.

“I don’t see anything wrong with the wiring or hardware, captain,” he announced. “All the lenses seem in good shape, too. The data’s fried, though, so I’m thinking it was some kind of power surge. We get problems with those pretty often. All the systems are connected—idiocy, if you ask me—so a glitch on the other side of the Death Star can fry circuitry over here. It’s a nightmare. Whoever designed this place must have been insane.” He paused. “Sir.”

Thank you, Papa.

“Ah,” said Cassian. “Good to know the trouble is nothing significant.”

“Well, probably. It’s difficult to know for sure,” the technician replied. “Pity about the data. Did you do anything that might have affected the power flux?”

Jyn dared not twitch a muscle. Cassian, on the other hand, gave one of Willix’s haughtiest shrugs.

“Perhaps.” He waited a beat. “I turned them off and on again several times. It can help with droids.”

The technician visibly suppressed a grimace. “Yes, well. Cameras aren’t droids. If it happens again, please send for one of us immediately.” He coughed and saluted. “Captain.”

“Of course,” said Cassian.

With the technician gone, the guards returned to their posts, Cassian rescinded the lock-down, Jyn stepped back to a slightly more appropriate distance, and the two of them spent the next two hours in nerve-wracking boredom. Nobody seemed to notice anything, except two other NCOs passing through the corridor and complaining, damn Zekheret couldn’t stick to his post if his life depended on it.

Well, she thought, they weren’t wrong.

When Jyn and Cassian reached their quarters, she struck the panel and all but bolted inside, barely
waiting for the doors to enclose them before she started tearing at her jacket. Her own desperation tripped her up, had her fumbling at the material and buttons.

“Jyn, wait,” Cassian said from behind her.

“No,” snapped Jyn. She mumbled to herself, “Get it off, get it off—”

He strode past to face her and caught her wrist in one hand, his grip just tentative enough that she didn’t immediately attack. Jyn was considering it when he reached for her jacket and, with what seemed little difficulty, unfastened a button from its hidden eyelet. As before, he kept his touch light and brisk, devoid of anything that might even hint at the inappropriate.

She could have done with a little inappropriate right then. Nevertheless, the steadiness and reserve of his hands on her felt so familiar, reminded her so much of before, that it seemed to trigger something of her mood at the time. Her mind cooled, and when Cassian hesitated at her belt, Jyn said,

“I’m good.”

“All right,” said Cassian, quickly turning to unburden himself of his own coat. Without saying more, he disappeared into the fresher with a set of sleep-clothes, and stayed there long enough for Jyn to change, unpin her hair, and check her comlinks and datapad for updates.

She supposed the thin linens were no less Imperial than the grey wool, but they felt less tainted. By the time Cassian emerged from the fresher, she had unlatched the table from the wall, and settled on her usual side with some approximation of resolve.

He took a step forward, then paused.

“Thanks,” she said briefly.

Cassian just nodded and sat in his chair, something uncertain in his steady gaze. Since Jyn felt pretty damn unsteady herself, she didn’t feel the need to assume anything from it.

He began, “Is it … are you …”

“This isn’t the worst day of my entire life,” Jyn said, not for comfort—to either of them—so much as truth.

“That says more about your life than about today,” said Cassian.

She thought about it. “Yes, probably.”

That much had to be the same for both of them. Again.

“It might be the most disgusting thing I’ve done, though,” she admitted.

A shadow of that empty look from before flickered in his face. “You didn’t do it. I—”

“Yes, I did,” said Jyn, not prepared to negotiate that point. “I just didn’t do it alone.”

They looked at each other across the table. She’d felt herself hardened into calm, but something warm and shivery seemed to have broken loose, nearly had her trembling again. Nearly had her crying. She stared at his one visible hand, splayed on the table as it had splayed against her back, said you’re not alone before his actions did. Alone, this would have been—not unbearable. But worse. Infinitely worse.
“I sent the number to you before I shot him,” she said, unsure why her voice sounded so soft and distant. “I already knew I was going to kill him.”

She could hear him exhale. “You didn’t—”

“Don’t,” said Jyn. “Don’t. I want, I need to tell you. Just listen. He overheard me talking to Bodhi. Not proof, but he had his conspiracy theories already, so it didn’t take much. I had to convince him that I wanted the princess for some, some Hutt prize or such. I think I did—he wasn’t sure, was going to bring me to Efrah.” She watched her hands clench into fists. “He said she was stronger, brighter than him, and she knew what to do.”

Cassian, obedient when it suited him, made only an indistinct sympathetic sound. When she lifted her eyes, though, his had gone soft, and didn’t waver from her face.

“He was right,” Jyn went on. “About Efrah, I mean, infatuation aside. I figured she’d see through it all. Sentient trafficking? Me? Even if she did believe it, people would notice a corporal leading a sergeant at blasterpoint. We can’t afford that kind of suspicion. I knew …” She swallowed. “I knew I’d have to kill him, if I could find a way.”

He opened his mouth, then shut it.

“The thing was, I convinced him you didn’t know about any of it”—Cassian started, but remained silent—“and he guessed that I’d been talking to someone else. So he decided to make me walk behind him, to block his back while he guarded himself from the front.” When Cassian’s brow furrowed, Jyn gave a hoarse laugh. “Right? Force, what an idiot.”

Her hand hurt. Jyn slowly relaxed her fingers, saw a fleck of blood in her palm. Not Zekheret’s; one of her nails had a ragged edge, enough to break a little skin. More blood on her hands from talking about murder than committing it.

“It was all over by then, of course,” said Jyn. “I didn’t know that the blaster wouldn’t have the power for a clean shot. I meant to kill him, I thought I had.”

To her unreasonably vast relief, Cassian reached across the table for her aching hand, something soothing in the slide of skin on skin, the curve of bones and cartilage beneath. If Bodhi hadn’t saved them on Scarif, they would have flashed into the Force like this, somewhere on that terrible battlefield—their bodies joined in death, whether mingled bones or dust. She didn’t wish for that, but she wished less for any other end.

Not apart, she thought at the Force, never known to care for such things. If it happens, let it be together.

But maybe the Force did care. It had preserved her through the worst disaster yet, and then both of them, brought them to this point, sitting together hand-in-hand.

“That’s why I called you before,” she said.

At his bewildered glance, Jyn untangled her fingers. Cassian went completely blank—something twinged in her chest, no don’t I didn’t mean rattling in her head—but he turned puzzled again when she laid her hand cross-wise over his.

“Look,” said Jyn. She nodded at their fingers, her scarred knuckles against the pleasant smoothness of Cassian’s skin.

His expression cleared. “You know how to fight your way out of trouble.” Idly, his thumb brushed a
“When it’s possible.” She brushed back, not sure if it was more passive-aggressive or affectionate. “And you know how to get out of trouble without fighting at all—when that’s possible. I figured that I’d need help with that.” It was easier to stare at their hands than his face, more emotions than she could name jostling in her throat. “I’m not sorry you came.”

She’d needed him, and he’d been there. More than that: she’d needed him, and known he would be there.
Chapter Notes

Eep, it's taken longer than I wanted to write this, but... here we are at last!

Cassian stayed quiet for a good minute. Jyn, more comfortable with silence than speech, had no difficulty waiting him out.

At last, he said, “Disposing of a corpse is not the way I would have chosen to be … useful to you.”

“Not the way I would have chosen to fight,” returned Jyn. She lifted her eyes, unsurprised to find him earnest and somber. He looked very much as he had those weeks (days?) ago in the hangar, saying every time I walked away from something I wanted to forget—

“I’ve never done that before,” she added.

“Killed someone?” said Cassian, understandably taken aback.

She almost laughed. “No. I don’t know how many people I’ve killed. But not like that, never. I don’t … I knew him.”

His fingers tightened on hers, painlessly. In a very quiet voice, he said, “I understand.”

Her eyes burned worse than ever. She had to hold them wide open, breathe through the choking tightness in her throat.

“I know. I know you do.”

Jyn looked at Cassian, wearier than she had been since the terror of that first day. The dependency that had unsettled her a day ago seemed nothing now, the palest triviality. What did it matter? By day, their unwavering partnership carried them from one breath to the next. By night, it cocooned them in comfort and something like intimacy. They were dependent on each other, for now. Why pretend otherwise?

Cassian seemed to feel the same, or near enough to pass for the same. For a time that Jyn couldn’t have measured had she cared about its length, which she didn’t, they relapsed back into easy silence. Or—of course it wasn’t easy at all, not after today, and Alderaan. Natural silence, both scarcely moving but for the occasional exchanged glance or stroke of fingers. Zekheret’s final idiocies rolled through her head, and the splash of his body, and how she’d never liked him because he was such an arse, but utterly human in it. She still didn’t like him, he’d just been …

Useful. Jyn tolerated his entitlement and callousness and raw stupidity because he was talkative. All the more with a pretty girl, and Efrah looking on. She used him, then discarded him when he became a liability.

A laugh bubbled up in her throat. Saw would be proud.

Your father would be proud of you—
She acknowledged the thought, and pushed it away, because she could think of nothing else to do. Long ago, her mother had taught her that, or tried. Probably it was warped beyond recognition, filtered by that ragged childhood. Nevertheless, she focused on the faint sounds around her, the white noise of machinery and electricity, the shifts in their bodies and low, matched breaths. The cold metal of the table, the warmth of Cassian’s hands, the catch of her scars against his smooth skin, yet matched in the familiar callouses along the underside. A spy’s hands above, a sniper’s beneath.

Jyn opened her eyes to grey, and darker grey, and the occasional white. Cassian’s shirt, the edges of their blankets. Near black for his dresser and his hair, brown in the fringe falling about her face, and his eyes, and along the lid of the laundry chute.

At some point, sleep seemed a possibility. Jyn disentangled herself and went looking for her sleep-clothes. Only after she draped them over her arm did she realize that Cassian might think—something. But when she glanced his way, he was just pulling out his own clothes.

With a sense of distant relief, she went to the fresher, changed, then sat blankly on her bed and waited for Cassian. She didn’t want to be alone. After last night, though, maybe—not that she’d pushed him away, she just slept in her own bed, a perfectly normal thing to do. And the shower would hardly swallow him up. It was only that she found it easier to rest when she could see him or hear him or touch him, or all at once. Dependency be damned: she had lost enough.

When Cassian emerged, Jyn blinked up at him, her mind still blank. She didn’t mind; she’d rather it turned off altogether.

He headed over to her, then hesitated.

“Do you need”—a shrug encompassed the galaxy—“anything?”

“Probably,” said Jyn.

Cassian considered her for a long moment, then turned away so sharply that she recoiled despite herself. It even cut through her haze, up until he headed back to her, one hand closed over something she couldn’t see, the other carrying a nutrient milk.

He sat down beside her and opened his hand, tipping some pills into hers. The sedatives?

Jyn frowned. “I don’t need …”

“Just for tonight,” said Cassian. “You’ll need your rest for tomorrow, all right? There are going to be questions.”

Right. Tomorrow. She gazed at the little tablets in her hand.

His voice went tight. “Jyn, you can trust me.”

That sliced through the fog of her thoughts, too.

“What?” She lifted her eyes to his, incredulity flaring in her, all the more at the frozen stillness of his face. “Of course I trust you. It’s … I don’t like …”

Cassian’s expression relaxed and he passed over the nutrient milk. “Yes, well, neither did I.”

Graciously ignoring that, Jyn popped the pills into her mouth and gulped them down with the milk. By the time that their tang faded from her tongue, her thoughts had already drifted back to the—the event.
“Do you think they’ll find the body?” she asked, staring straight ahead. “I suppose it depends on how often they check the compactors. And how recognizable it would be after compaction.”

He drew a deep breath. “Jyn—”

“I don’t imagine the stink will give it away. The trash smelled worse, and that disappeared when it closed back up. Maybe it’ll just decompose down there.”

“Jyn,” said Cassian, his hand grasping her shoulder, “don’t.”

She glanced at him, then looked quickly away. “I can’t help it.”

“You need to lie down,” he told her. “Find something else to think about until the sedatives start to work, or talk about, if that’s easier.”

“Talking is never easy,” muttered Jyn, but she scooted a few inches back. Cassian, however, only shifted slightly, one hand half-curled, half-splayed beside his leg. Every line of his body seemed rigid, while somehow giving the impression that he might bolt at any moment.

She waited a beat, and sure enough, he wet his lower lip. The lights had started to dim with their quadrant’s manufactured evening, but Jyn thought she saw his colour rise.

“What?” she demanded, somewhere between puzzled and impatient.

“Nothing,” said Cassian hastily, drawing back and setting his hand on his thigh. It clenched into a fist, his breath going harsh.

“Obviously,” Jyn said. Alderaan? Something else?

He twitched, then caught his lip between his teeth. “I, uh …” His fingers spread out again. “You don’t have to … I mean, if you mind, then I … I’ll understand, but I … ”

She wasn’t sure she’d ever seen him so viscerally uncomfortable. He avoided her eyes, his own glance slanted away, fixing on the blanket spread beyond her rather than her face, flicking aimlessly to the wall, her pillow, back to his own lap, the folded-up table, laundry chute, fresher drawer. What the hell did he want from her? It couldn’t be trivial, to leave him fumbling the request so badly, plainly expecting refusal yet asking anyway, at a moment like this—

Oh.

“I don’t mind,” Jyn said, not quite willing to acknowledge the relief that swam through her. She pulled down the corner of the blanket nearest the wall and crawled beneath, flopping onto her back. “It’s fine, just”—she tugged at the blanket—“hurry up. I’m cold.”

Cassian closed his eyes and exhaled, then managed a faint smile. “Thank you.”

After turning the lights the rest of the way down, he slid beneath her blanket, and they adjusted themselves on her small cot. It had been awkward, those first few nights, finding ways to arrange limbs and bodies without too much. But they’d fallen into a little ritual of it by now, familiarity in the shifts they made about each other. Jyn dragged herself down, far enough that her arms—bent above her head—wouldn’t jab his face, while Cassian stretched himself out in a narrow line, hands folded on his stomach.

It felt almost too familiar, beyond what a couple days of greater ease could account for, reminding her of something altogether different. Not them at all. After seconds of fumbling through memories,
she managed to grasp the right one: her parents, lying side-by-side on a blanket, watching the stars. Galen had started to point out the constellations to Jyn, explain but Lyra hushed him. Leave it, just let her look.

Cassian had said that, too, breathed leave it into her ear and propelled her into escape. Not at all the same, but it drew the memories together, the people: Galen and Lyra, Jyn and Cassian. In another life, perhaps they would be lying just like this, staring into a sky lit by stars, instead of the artificial nothingness of the Death Star’s nights.

“Do you ever imagine it?” she asked abruptly.

The darker darkness of Cassian’s head tilted her way. “Imagine what?”

“What we—what you’d be like, if things were different.” Jyn had to concentrate to bridge her thoughts. “Without the war, or … or if the Empire weren’t as bad.”

“No,” said Cassian. Hesitation rather than withdrawal coloured his silence, for all that she could hardly see him. He didn’t need to say that he knew no other life than this. “Do you?”

“Not much,” she admitted. “Not just me, anyway. But it’s different for you.”

With sleep creeping on her, it was difficult—more difficult than usual—to frame it in words. “I was a soldier, and I liked it. It’s other things that were so, so … hard. But you’re not a soldier.”

Jyn stopped, but found no easier speech in the silence. Cassian didn’t help; he just waited, his breaths uninterrupted.

“I didn’t mean—of course you’re actually a soldier, sort of, it just—it’s not right. Not everyone’s made for it.”

That did manage to extract a response. “You can’t know, Jyn.”

“Yes, I can,” she insisted. “I’ve seen it before. People like you.” Jyn scowled in the general direction of his head. “If you say there’s no one like you, I’ll punch you.”

There wasn’t, as far as she’d known, not in an overall way. She didn’t imagine he’d known people like her, either. It was just obnoxious to say so.

“I wasn’t planning on it,” he said gravely.

She gave an unsteady nod. “All right. I mean people who … not personality, but, like you with Zekheret. Most people can get used to anything, but some, they … don’t. Just never belong in it.”

“I do,” said Cassian. “I chose this. I’m—this is who I am.”

“But you’d never have chosen it without the Empire,” she replied. “Right?”

The next silence fell heavier.

“Neither would you,” he said. “You hate letting individual wrongs pass when you could be doing something about them. It’s brawling you like, not war. If we didn’t need to fight for the whole galaxy, you’d be … I don’t know, mauling kidnappers.”

Jyn nearly giggled, which was definitely the sedative. But the idea of fighting people like that did
appeal to something in the roots of her being. She’d much prefer it to skulking around Imperials, and even more to the life she’d lived with Saw. Maybe this didn’t fuck her up the way that betrayal and faithlessness did, or the same way as Cassian, but she supposed she wasn’t all that suited to this life, either.

“That’d be nice,” said Jyn. “But it’s still … I bet you wouldn’t have anything to do with mauling anyone at all. Maybe couldn’t even shoot a blaster.”

“Force forbid,” he murmured.

“You’d have to be fighting things, though. Like me. You’re like me, aren’t you?”

“In some ways.” Cassian cleared his throat. “Most of them.”

Warmed by muddled satisfaction, she swept on, “But you’re more about big fuzzy problems than ones right here. Right there. A cause and all that. You’d always have one. And rules, you’d fight with rules.”

After a pause, he asked, “Are you insulting me or complimenting me?”

Jyn didn’t deign to answer. “A lawyer,” she decided. “Sentient rights or something. You’d like that much better.”

A much longer pause followed her.

“Yes,” Cassian said at last, sounding surprised. “I would.”

Obscurely satisfied, Jyn yawned and stretched her arms above her.

“Maybe,” she mumbled, “someday, we’ll …”

Another wave of dazed exhaustion swept over her, and Jyn curled up, burying her head in his shoulder without much thinking about it. Closing her eyes, she slept.

For hours more, Cassian did not.

Jyn woke without the pleasant haze of Cassian’s sedatives, but with the rather more pleasant haze of Cassian’s body. She was half-sprawled over him, face pressed into him, with her arm folded over his chest and the centre of his sleeping-shirt grasped in her fist. Cassian himself must have been awake long enough to notice; his arm lay over her back, his hand against her neck.

With someone else, she would have been surprised, furious, knowing what the tangle of their bodies must mean. With Cassian, she felt only a moment’s curiosity, wondering how it had happened. He wouldn’t have taken advantage; after a month, she knew that. Beyond trust, his part in the half-embrace was tentative rather than intrusive, his arm slung up to her shoulder and hand cupping her head. He seemed positioned to brace her more than anything else; Jyn had a strong suspicion that he hadn’t wanted her to wake up.

Someday—after—

She dared not follow the thought. Hope was one thing, expectation quite another. But it reminded her of something she couldn’t quite pin down. Had someone said … she had a good memory, but she couldn’t recall. It must have been last night; she remembered staring up at the vacant ceiling, something about soldiers, then nothing.
Jyn set that aside, focusing on the present. If she had to face this horrible day, there were worse ways to begin it than intertwined with a person she loved, and his hand in her hair. It would be the easiest thing in the world to kiss him awake.

Jyn considered his sleeping face, then jabbed him in the chest.

“What the—”

She sprang out of bed and headed for her drawers. “Time to face the music.”

“The music?” he said, rubbing his eyes. He still looked tired. “What music?”

“Consequences,” said Jyn. She glanced back, then immediately repressed the image of Cassian in her bed, hair and clothes rumpled. “Do you need the fresher before I shower?”

“No, go ahead.”

They did sound like her parents. Again, she shoved the thought away. It wasn’t all that difficult; she just narrowed her attention to Zekheret’s body, that last fraction of a moment before Cassian shot him, the smell of the trash compactor.

As Jyn washed her hair, her mind flicked through eventualities. Nobody had come for them, and the Empire was not slow to act; she had experience to attest to that. They must not have found the body, or at least not associated it with Jyn and Cassian.

Good, she supposed.

After Cassian dressed, they checked the time and discussed scenarios and alternatives until they left for breakfast. Jyn rather hoped to miss Efrah, but instead, found her hunched at the usual table, alone.

“Morning,” said Jyn.

Efrah gave a bare nod to Jyn and scarcely more to Cassian. “Lyr. Captain Willix. Have you seen Zek? Apparently he didn’t report last night.”

“No,” Jyn replied, bile in her throat. She didn’t look at Cassian, and didn’t imagine his face would reveal anything right now.

“If I recall correctly,” he said calmly, “some other guards mentioned that he left before the end of his shift. I didn’t see a need to go out of my way for correction; we had some trouble with the camera systems at the time.”

Efrah tapped her fingers against the table. “It wouldn’t be all that unusual for him to leave his shift early. I’m sure you’ve noticed that discipline is not exactly severe here.”

“We’re used to it,” Cassian said.

Reluctantly, Jyn stirred herself to take up her share of the burden. “The Citadel was hardly better. The Rebels didn’t have much of a problem sneaking in, I’m afraid.”

With a disinterested nod, Efrah said, “But he’s never failed the final check-in. For all I know, he went exploring deeper in the Star and got lost—I wouldn’t put something like that past him. It just seems strange.”

“Very strange,” Jyn acknowledged.
“And he had that stinger in his cap about some plot or another,” said Efrah. “I don’t know. Usually, he waits around to pester me.”

By force of will, Jyn managed not to grimace.

“I can believe it.”

“I’ll order a search if he doesn’t appear for his shift today,” Cassian said.

Just as firmly, Jyn refused the gulp that itched at her throat. “We’ll discover the truth then.”

Imperials turned out to be about as good at searching as they were about mini-blaster manufacture. The scouts summoned to drag Zekheret to the brig—nobody but Efrah seemed to doubt that he’d wandered off on his own—scanned the halls, fanned out into the deeper corridors, but turned up nothing. They detected a life form in the compactor, but apparently expected to find it, and didn’t bother searching further.

“What the hell is down there?” Cassian muttered, once they dragged themselves back to their quarters. She’d never seen him so baffled.

“No idea,” said Jyn, peeling her jacket off. Now, the decent-quality wool itched at her, every moment of every hour. Only force of will kept her from burning the whole thing up. But she did remember wondering at the slurp in the compactor as they’d tossed Zekheret into it. “Think it ate him?”

They glanced up at each other, equally grim.

“No idea,” Cassian replied.

Neither tried to shield each other from the raw repugnance of the whole thing, or water it down. Nor did they risk telling Bodhi. They could only endure, together.

And they did. They talked over possible suspicions together, how they might respond to enquiry, to accusation and capture. Jyn’s thin identity would not bear close examination. They carefully did not talk about Alderaan, though Jyn dreamed of it by night, more than of Zekheret. Cassian, she suspected, dreamed of it by day, too; when they relaxed as far as they could in their quarters, he sometimes went vacant and staring. Jyn just cleaned her blasters and waited for it to pass, then moved onto another discussion, spoken or unspoken.

Without exchanging another word on the subject, they slept curled in Jyn’s bed each night.

Officially, Zekheret was classified as away without leave. Unofficially, those few with an interest in him assumed he’d ventured too far into the labyrinthine halls of the outermost layer of the interior shell, and either starved, suffocated, or burned to death, depending on the location. It wasn’t unprecedented, apparently. Another one of her father’s legacies.

On the second day, Jyn forced herself to touch Efrah’s shaking hand, as sympathetically as she could. She did feel it, as far as she felt for anyone except Cassian and Bodhi, and of course, herself. But for those first few days, everything outside their quarters seemed alternately surreal and terrifying.

By the fourth, her fog started to clear. They’d escaped their worst danger so far; they might escape yet. She felt almost cheerful as Cassian started running through Kay’s data chip on their terminal, searching for damage to the code.
“How is it?” she muttered, smoothing her gloved hands over her trousers. It wasn’t suspect, she told herself. Nobody would be surprised at a supposed robotics expert—maybe a real one—evaluating the code for a valuable droid.

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“Some damage,” said Cassian, and disappointment burned from throat to gut. “But it’s base code.”

Jyn dredged up what little she knew of droid workings. Slicing hadn’t exactly prepared her for the restoration of one of the Empire’s most deeply encrypted models.

“You can find that in any KX unit?” she asked.

He nodded. “And my notes at home.”

Home. It seemed very far away, right now. But Yavin 4 had never been home, anyway. Jyn had no idea if the Rebellion would even welcome her; the plans, as far as she could tell, were still lost. Bodhi, at the least, would have known about an attack, and never mentioned it in his regular updates. Perhaps Princess Leia knew. But with Zekheret’s disappearance, and tighter security than ever, they dared not risk it.

As long as the plans remained lost, they would live—and how many would die? But she didn’t let that linger long, fixing her attention on here, now. It was enough to see Efrah withdrawing into herself, hollow-eyed; to see Cassian combing through Kay’s code, nothing yet irreparable; to gather as much information as she could observe, and bury it on the datapad, ciphered to Scarif and back.

Jyn didn’t think Efrah had returned Zekheret’s feelings. Still, there were many kinds of love. When Efrah told them that she was being reassigned to Admiral Motti’s flagship, it came rather as a relief. A danger, too, of course, but almost worth it to escape her grief, and her suspicion of something worse than the search had uncovered.

Sometimes she thought of turning to Cassian as they lay together, of scraping her teeth over his skin, pressing herself to him, finding some comfort in his body. She didn’t think he would turn her away. Even by day, he drew as unconsciously near as she did, clasped her hand whenever she reached for his, seemed as anxious at separation and jolted by unexpected touch as Jyn herself.

But she dared no disruption to what peace she had, if something went wrong; and in her more honest moments, she admitted that she didn’t want that. Not right now, not because they were afraid and desperate and had little else, not because of what they’d seen and done and escaped together. Not like this.

On the fifth day from Zekheret’s death—no, murder—Jyn and Cassian stood at the main terminal, somewhat restored to their usual mix of boredom and terror. She idly looked through the datapad’s encyclopedia, periodically questioning Cassian about his progress with Kay and delivering commands into the speakers.

They lifted their heads without much interest when the doors opened. But immediately, their attention sharpened.

Two stormtroopers led a Wookiee—a Wookiee—into the detention area. Oddly, the stormtroopers seemed of noticeably different heights: one quite tall, the other barely regulation height at all, if that.

“Prisoner transfer from Block One-One-Three-Eight,” said the smaller stormtrooper, sounding distinctly nervous even through the helmet.

The princess’s block. Had the Rebellion come at last? For Princess Leia, of course, not them, but it didn’t matter. She just would have thought they’d send people more … competent, unless Cassian
was parsecs better than the entirety of Rebel Intelligence. Not impossible.

Jyn turned to Cassian, but he was staring fixedly at the Wookiee, then flicking his glance to the cameras.

The Wookiee was the Rebel?

Both the stormtroopers had tensed up, but the Wookiee growled something, and the taller one shook his head at the other. Jyn nearly rolled her eyes.

“There is only one prisoner in Block One-One-Three-Eight,” said Cassian, voice edged with Willix’s distinct blend of pleasantness and pomposity. “Lyr, fetch her.”

“Yes, sir,” Jyn replied. Maybe, if they were very lucky, she would never call him that again. She allowed Lyr a glower at his back, to which the Wookiee gave a sound that she suspected was amusement, and allowed herself a scattered appeal to the Force.

After staring at the princess’s cell number more times she could count, Jyn needed no reminding of the code. Heart racing, she punched it into the cell’s panel.

The door slid open, revealing a girl in white, curled up on what went for a bed—more like a bench. Immediately, she sat up, and eyed Jyn with contempt.

Jyn nearly returned it. She could scarcely believe this girl in impractical robes, even more impractical coils of dark hair over her ears, and a face still rounded with baby fat, could possibly be Cassian’s protégée.

“Who are you?” demanded Princess Leia.

The princess had received the plans, hopefully knew where they might be relocated, and withstood the destruction of her homeworld and probable torture. Nothing else mattered, Jyn decided.

She took off her cap.

“I’m Jyn Erso,” she said, “and I’m here to rescue you.”
Chapter 20

Leia looked blank. “You’re who?”

Of course, they hadn’t told her Jyn’s name. The agent who’d received the plans, her father’s plans, carried them and protected them, didn’t know who she was. Jyn exhaled through her teeth.

“Jyn Erso,” she said impatiently. “I’m here with Cassian Andor.”

“Cassian Andor?” Leia’s large eyes went enormous. “That’s impossible!”

The princess sprang up. She was tiny: thin and easily three or four inches shorter than Jyn. It didn’t keep her from launching herself forward before Jyn could respond.

Only for a moment, though. Jyn had scarcely turned on her heel when they heard a blaster shot, then something crashing—no, shattering—in the detention security area.

Cassian!

Raw instinct sent Jyn hurtling forward, panic and height carrying her right past Leia. She didn’t hear any clamour beyond the whatever-it-was breaking. Cassian would have said something if he were in danger, to warn her and another spy away. But—but—what could even shatter, anyway, except …

Cameras, Jyn thought, desperately praying: and sure enough, Cassian stood upright at the station, one hand in the air to silence others, and a distinct note of irritation in his voice.

“—these shoddy contraptions—”

“Yes, captain,” someone said through the intercom. “We understand completely. No idea how it could have happened.”

“You’d better get an idea,” said Cassian. Sure enough, the cameras hung brokenly from the walls, part melted, with only a few jagged edges where their lenses had been. Jyn breathed properly again.

“Yes, sir. We’ll investigate the matter.”

“Good,” he snarled, and switched off the intercom, just as Leia caught up with Jyn, nearly slamming into her back. In fairness, she straightened right away and moved to the side.

“Andor?” she said incredulously.

Cassian turned towards them, even more unreadable than usual. He inclined his head to the princess.

“Açatal,” he said.

Leia, lips tight, responded,

“Tanain.”

A full three seconds passed, the shards of plastiglass forming some sort of counterpoint in Jyn’s head. She didn’t know if she ached for the Alderaanians, or for Cassian in particular, or herself (Papa), or
“Maybe someone could mention how we’re going to get out of here? *Not in code?*” demanded the larger not-stormtrooper, distracting her just enough that Jyn bothered to look their way.

Both men had blasters out—they, or more probably the Wookiee, had apparently understood Cassian’s hints—and seemed to have only just removed their helmets. Both were pleasant-looking enough, the one taller than Cassian and attractive in an even, strong-featured way, the other a blond, blue-eyed boy only a few inches taller than Jyn, his face as soft as his companion’s was sharp. *Boy* might be a bit much, but he couldn’t be more than twenty.

“That gives us a few minutes,” said Cassian.

Jyn ignored that to focus on the maybe-Rebels. “You’re with the Rebellion?” she demanded. “You can get us out of here?”

“Yes!” said the blond one. “I’m Luke Sk—”

“No,” the other burst out. “We’re definitely not.”


“I didn’t sign up for another rescue!”


Han, if that was his real name, turned to them. “Listen. We’re here to rescue the princess, not …” He eyed them. “Whatever you are.”

Leia looked him up and down. With considerably more contempt than she’d directed at Jyn, she said, “You didn’t even plan an escape route? Some rescue!”

Jyn, giving them up as hopeless, made her way over to Cassian. “You got any ideas?”

“Maybe you’d like it better in your cell, Highness,” Han snapped.

“Walk out the way they came in,” Cassian murmured to Jyn. “But it’d be suspicious. And they’re not exactly convincing.”

Jyn glanced over. Luke, clearly the brains of the operation, stood a little aside, trying to contact someone on his comlink. Han was still sputtering at Leia while she furiously shot back. Meanwhile, the Wookiee peered at the ceiling, managing to infuse the gesture with immense long-suffering.

“Look,” Luke told the princess, giving up on his ally (Jyn assumed) on the comlink. “We’ve got your Artoo unit. I’m here with Ben Kenobi. We just—”

“Ben Kenobi?” Leia exclaimed. “Where?”

The name meant nothing to Jyn, but Cassian’s eyes went wide.

“You’ve got to be joking.”

Luke shook his head. “He’s training me in the ways of the Jedi,” he said proudly. “Well, right now he’s disabling the tractor beam. But he’s my teacher.”

By raw exertion of will, Jyn and Cassian managed not to ask any more questions about that. Cassian
already had the local schematic open on the terminal, and they ran through its lines and curves, trying to find a solution where she knew pretty well they wouldn’t. They’d already had to make someone disappear, and—

Leia deserted her squabble to march over to them, peering down at the terminal. “What about that compartment right there?” She pointed at the rectangle that made up the trash compactor. “It doesn’t look occupied.”

Jyn choked. “Er, no, but—ah—”

“It’s for trash,” said Cassian. “Definitely a last resort.”

“We don’t have time for anything else,” Leia said impatiently, and reached past to activate it.

“Uh—”

“Come on!” she called out to the others. Luke came running right away, but Han hesitated, exuding skepticism.

Leia had plainly never hesitated in her life. She rushed over to the compartment doors, Luke towed by her sheer force of personality. Han, grumbling inaudibly, followed his Wookiee friend towards her.

Beyond them, the doors scraped open, the compactor’s stench filling the air. Trash-stench, thankfully, and not dead body-stench—though the first would probably cover the latter, and—

Han, in a tone of utter conviction, said, “I am not going down there.”

“If you want to die, I won’t stop you,” retorted Leia.

Jyn’s patience frayed. Under her breath, she said to Cassian, “We have to go with them, don’t we?”

“With Leia,” he murmured back. “And they’ve got a ship.”

That sealed it. With one shallow inhalation of the repugnant air, Jyn extracted Kay’s datachip, dropping it into her jacket’s inside pocket.

“Do you have one of your knives on you?” asked Cassian.

She had all of them, and three blasters. Neither understanding nor hesitating, Jyn passed a knife over, and watched as he cut a tear in his sleeve and then a long, shallow cut on the skin beneath it, squeezing the top of his arm to splatter blood on the terminal. A cover story, she realized. Of course. Cowardice in the face of a Rebel attack wouldn’t look nearly as bad as open betrayal, if they could sell it. If they had to sell it.

*That’s the man I know and love,* she almost said wryly, then remembered and bit it back. She didn’t know when the thought of love had first come to her, by its proper name. Everything felt so simple and natural that, now and then, she almost forgot they hadn’t talked about it.

Han said, “I don’t want to—look, it’s going to take more than—”

“Then into the chute, flyboy!”

Suiting actions to words, Leia jumped down, Luke in faithful pursuit. Han heaved what might have been the galaxy’s most dramatic sigh, and followed them. His leap into the trash compactor was immediately followed by the sound of blaster bolts rocketing around the armoured walls of the
“We’re going to die,” muttered Jyn.

“Maybe,” Cassian said, not at all reassuringly. He triggered the command to shut the compactor doors, and they raced around just in time to throw themselves through the closing gates. Jyn could only hope that it wasn’t the compaction hour.

Inside, she grimaced from the fall and the memory of the last time she’d launched something in here. No point thinking about it, unless … no. Dread still climbed over her, though, diminished by Cassian landing behind her with only a quick exhalation, and not at all diminished by the smell or the trash-ridden water. Trash and—no.

She focused on the others. Han looked disgusted, while Luke and Leia were screaming at him in such perfect synchrony that Jyn could hardly tell their voices apart.

“Will you forget it?”

“Put that thing away!”

Han bristled. “Absolutely, Your Worship. Look, I had everything under control until you led us down here.”

The hell he did. Behind her, Cassian scoffed under his breath.

“It could be worse!” Leia said.

And something groaned.

Maybe the compactor was changing levels, Jyn told herself, even if it sounded more like an unearthly moan than anything else. She might believe in the Force, but she wasn’t superstitious; she drew her blaster, at the same time as Han and Luke.

The Wookiee howled.

“It’s worse,” said Han.

Luke gave an odd sort of jump. “There’s something alive in here!”

No. Not alive.

“That’s your imagination,” Jyn and Han said, in near as exact unison as Luke and Leia.

Han twitched, undoubtedly out of the same irritation that Jyn herself felt. A bit more than irritation, fine.

Cassian sloshed forward to stand at her side, broadcasting allegiance. A small relief trickled through her at that, and perhaps him. At any rate, they stayed together in their patch of filth, while Han didn’t seem to have anyone but the Wookiee. Maybe Luke, but she didn’t get the sense that they knew each other well.

Luke screamed, “Something just moved past my leg!”

“It’s probably just an arm,” she said without thinking.

Han froze in place, no longer even trying to move through the churning waters, and slowly turned to
stare at them.

“Just a what?”

Even Luke glanced up, eyes wide.

Jyn shrugged. “It’s not as bad as it sounds.”

“Not quite,” Cassian said.

She glowered up at him.

“Traitor,” she muttered, and even she could hear the total lack of conviction behind it. Jyn rolled her eyes.

“Who are you people?” demanded Han.

Leia, for her part, seemed to be preoccupied with navigating her own area of water, entirely unconcerned with all of this. She’d probably disposed of a few corpses in her time, too. The Wookiee, meanwhile, was busy howling at the walls. And before Jyn or Cassian could manufacture a response to Han, Luke yelled again.

“Look! Did you see that?”

Han turned back around. “What?”

With a choked shriek, Luke crashed underwater, seized by—something. Something with tentacles, and a single staring eye rising up like a periscope, and … Force, that thing had probably eaten Zekheret. She’d seen plenty of bizarre Imperial procedures at this point, but what the hell? Who kept a tentacle monster in a trash container? Was this her father’s idea, or some other … innovation?

She struggled through the water to help, while Han and, surprisingly, Leia screamed after Luke. He surfaced once, a tentacle around his neck, yelling something about blasting it. But Jyn didn’t know how they could hit it without being as likely to blast Luke as the thing; Han tried, but concern kept his aim low. Cassian, predictably less concerned with the lives of strangers, did shoot at the tentacle around Luke’s neck and hit it, but the shots seemed only to irritate it. The whatever-it-was dragged Luke underwater again.

The walls shuddered, and Jyn stiffened. She and Cassian shared a horrified look, but before they could think of anything else, the water bubbled where Luke had been, and he burst upwards, inhaling great heaving breaths.

“What happened?” said Leia.

“I don’t know,” Luke gasped. “It just let go of me and disappeared.”

Bad, Jyn thought. Very, very bad.
stop it. Slow it, maybe, if Luke’s droid friend got around to checking his comlink in the next minute and a half, and had the tools to hack into the Death Star’s computer system. At least it was impractically unified, care of Galen Erso, and—

Cassian knew his mind was spinning, a foolish rush from one thing to another, with Jyn right here and death closing in on them again.

“One thing’s for sure. We’re all going to be a lot thinner!” said Han.

At least he wasn’t as much of a fool as that one.

The walls kept closing in, the beams making only the weakest of obstacles. Irresistibly, the water rose higher up their legs. Far higher on Leia, and even Jyn. They weren’t going to die by crushing, of course. It’d be drowning. It couldn’t be punishment for Zekheret, the galaxy didn’t work like that, but …

“Jyn,” he said, and jerked his head at the nearest pile of trash. “You need to get up there. I can help, just—”

She scowled. “No, I’m not—” Then she broke off, her eyes flying wide open. Without another word of protest, she turned to grasp at the pile of trash, clambering out of the water. Cassian instantly whipped about to support her as she scrambled up, keeping her from sliding back whenever a chunk of wet trash slipped under her feet.

Luke was shrieking at the unresponsive droid through his comlink, Han and Leia shouting at each other, but Cassian ignored these beyond registering their existence in the back of his mind. He could only think of Jyn. She came first, always, and must live the longest, able to seize any last chance that might somehow arrive. Only when she managed relative stability high up the pile did he bother paying attention to the others.

“I’m trying!” Leia struggled up much more slowly than Jyn, weighed down by her robes. Han, at least, was trying to help her while the beam bent further. But the next few moments only brought the water higher, the walls nearer, and this was officially the worst idea that Leia had ever come up with —

From Luke’s comlink, a prim robotic voice called out,

“Are you there, sir?”

“Threepio!” he screamed, while the others sucked in their breaths.

“We’ve had some problems,” said the droid, his tone distinctly petulant.

“Will you shut up and listen to me?” Luke shouted. “Shut down all garbage mashers on the detention level, will you? Do you copy? Shut down all the garbage mashers on the detention level!”

The walls ground closer. Perhaps the last seconds of Cassian’s life ticked on—his hand somehow found its way around Jyn’s ankle—

And the compaction stopped.

Leia and her would-be rescuers shouted in relief and victory. Cassian couldn’t; he barely raised his voice unless a role called for it. But he was smiling as he turned back to Jyn.

“Can you help?” she said.
All processes scraped to an absolute halt. Jyn, who almost never asked for assistance of any kind, was reaching out to him—reaching out because she had only the one hand to do it with. The other was clenched above her head, her fingers closed about a large datachip.

Kay’s datachip.

Kay.

In that moment, Cassian loved her.

Not that moment alone, of course. Loving her wasn’t a revelation. It wasn’t even the first time he’d thought it; he didn’t know when that had been. But his mind spun a tight orbit about it, unable to track any other data. *I* love *her*. *Jyn*. *Jyn*, *I* love you, *I*—

As inexorably as the water had risen, his whole body leaned towards her, like some withered thing towards the sun. And Jyn tilted her face down, just as she’d lifted it up in the hangar on Yavin. Inverted, but mostly the same, her eyes as soft and wondering as his must be. He couldn’t identify her expression beyond that, beyond *good*, because nobody—nobody except Jyn, rather—had ever looked at him that way in his life. Like he was the star and not her.

This time, though, her smile didn’t tremble on her lips the way it had before, uncertain of itself. She grinned down at him, bright and triumphant.

Nothing could have prevented him from smiling back, feeling it invade his entire face. “*Jyn*—”

This was why Jyn had offered so little protest, he understood now. She must have remembered that she took the datachip before Cassian could do it. She’d put it in her pocket, and she was so much smaller that the water might easily have swamped the little datachip. This miserable place might have killed Kay more thoroughly than any stormtrooper, and Jyn had thought of it, before herself.

“*Jyn,*” he murmured, so little between them that she must feel her name on her own mouth, “*Jyn,* I —”

Neither looked away. They stood here, trapped with four other people, surrounded by stinking trash and quite possibly the rotting corpse of a man they’d murdered, and he couldn’t think of anything but looking at her and kissing her.

“*Cassian,*” she breathed, and he did feel it—*his* name, his name on both their mouths as they leaned that fractional distance closer. The others were still shouting and laughing in relief, maybe seeing them and maybe not, and who cared—

“Listen to them,” wailed the droid. “They’re dying, Artoo! Curse my metal body! I wasn’t fast enough!”

Inevitably, Jyn and Cassian opened their eyes, pulling back enough to meet each other’s glances. She looked exactly how he felt: annoyed, amused, and awkward, all at once. With equally resigned sighs, they stepped apart.

The droid, Threepio, was still in vapours.

“*It’s all my fault! My poor master!*”

Luke, to his credit, rushed to reassure the panicked droid that they’d made it. What sort of bastard could have programmed that one? Droids developed personalities through their lives, like everyone else, but almost never fear. He’d only seen it at the hands of careless or malicious programmers. Or
amateur ones, simply re-imagining the traits they saw around them, without regard for convenience or utility.

“You did great,” Luke told Threepio, with every appearance of earnestness. Cassian’s evaluation of him ticked up. “Hey … hey, open the pressure maintenance hatch on unit number … where are we?”

Han disentangled himself and checked the panel. “Three-two-six-eight-two-seven.”

With that, Threepio—or more likely, the R2 unit who seemed to be accompanying him—managed to deposit them in an unused hallway. It wasn’t one that Cassian found particularly distinguishable from any other ones, but at least didn’t seem that far off from the section they did know.

All six of them emerged from the compactor like a herd of swamp creatures. Han and Luke did little to dispel the impression, shrugging off their armour like shells, while the other four did their best to wring the water out of their clothes. Jyn and Cassian had both lost their caps, though Jyn’s hair was at least still pinned back, while Leia adjusted her coils.

“If we can just ignore any more female advice,” said Han, “we ought to be able to get out of here.”

Cassian glanced up, genuinely startled. He’d thought the man an ass, but not that much of one. Dismissing him after one narrow-eyed look, he turned back to Jyn. She’d gone motionless at his side, jaw tight and face blank. Cassian, who knew perfectly well that she could and would maul a man over less, kept his hand on her arm.

“Can I have the datachip back?”

Jyn scowled, but her focus on Han broke. She pressed the chip into his hand.

“Thank you,” he said quietly.

She nodded, with a solemn glance that seemed to comprehend all it meant. Beyond them all, Leia turned her back on Han, trying to look haughty, and about halfway succeeding.


Chapter End Notes

Cassian and Leia's brief exchange is simply:

"Princess."
"Captain."
Chapter 21

There were some things that Han Solo had not expected from a simple escort mission from Tatooine, like:

- Jedi banthashit right in front of his eyes, on the Falcon herself.
- Reaching the planet where he was supposed to get paid, only to find it in pieces.
- Getting sucked into a giant, floating, planet-killing Imperial fortress.
- The kid proxy-bribing him into rescuing a princess.
- Picking up two stranded Rebels who had somehow passed themselves off as officers, and who might very well have hidden a corpse in the trash compactor they all ended up in.
- Ending up in a trash compactor and nearly getting crushed, right after his ticket/friend (somehow they were friends now?) nearly got eaten by some tentacle … thing the Empire kept in the trash for no reason.
- Meeting not one but two attractive girls, who promptly gravitated to another, smaller man and proceeded to snarl at Han.

Literally nothing about this was good. Nothing! Except the friendship, he guessed. Maybe.

“I don’t know who you are or where you come from,” the princess told him, teeth clenched, “but from now on, you’ll do as I tell you. Okay?”

The hell?

“Look, your Worshipfulness,” said Han, “let’s get one thing straight! I take orders from one person! Me!”

“It’s a wonder you’re still alive,” she snapped.

The male Rebel shifted his weight, in a subtle but clearly broadcasted movement that reminded Han of Bib Fortuna in an odd way. Not looks (thank the gods), but old Bib had a sort of … dutiful menace about him, same as seconds-in-command the galaxy over. He wasn’t violent like the other goons, wouldn’t go out of his way to harm you, but he’d kill you in your sleep if it helped Jabba. This guy, he definitely seemed a more likely killer than the girl—something about the eyes.

Right, Han told himself. Escape. Then he was getting the hell away from all these people. Especially the princess. A pity about Luke, but it already seemed like you’d have to peel him away.

At the moment, Luke was babbling through the comlink at that droid of his, while the male Rebel said something to Princess Leia, back in their code or whatever it was. For no particular reason, both irritated Han.

“Never got an answer to my question,” he said. “Who are you and why should we help you?”

The girl, who’d been busily (and suspiciously) trying to contact someone on her comlink, looked incredulous. “Help us? We’re the ones helping you!”

“Wait,” said Leia, out of nowhere. “Jyn Erso? Erso—that’s—”

Jyn Erso. Nice easy name there, three letters then four. Han immediately committed it to memory.

“And you?” Han asked, looking the still-unknown man up and down. He was weedier than Han,
and maybe five-nine, five-ten. Not short, but definitely not tall like Han. It made for an obscure comfort; Han straightened up even more.

The man opened his mouth, probably to lie, but the princess said haughtily,

“He is Captain Cassian Andor of the Alliance. What were you again?”

“Han Solo,” Han said, and had to add, “captain of the Millennium Falcon. Seems like we’re all captains around here.”

Erso tried the comlink again. “Yes, well, we’ll be dead ones if we stick around much longer.”

I like her, said Chewie. Not sure about the other one.

“Yeah, neither am I,” Han muttered. “So if you’re the great helpers here, you got any plans?”

Erso and Andor glanced at each other. Without a word exchanged, they turned back to the others.

“You’ll have to be the prisoners now,” replied Andor. “You tried to threaten us and we handled the situation like proper officers and so on. It’s risky, but the only way.”

“Not with me there,” Princess Leia said, without hesitation. “You wouldn’t have anything like that clearance. We just have to make a break for it. Now.”

Luke cleared his throat. “We could split up. One group takes Chewbacca, the other goes with Princess Leia.”

“Then I’ll—” Erso began.

She barely managed those two syllables before Andor interrupted her.

“No. Absolutely not.”

“It’s the only way,” she said impatiently. “I know, but do you want to trust our chances without them? We’ve got to get out of here!”

“I’m with you there, sister,” said Han. “If your captain here can make a decision, then—”

“I am making the decisions,” Princess Leia retorted, which he really should have expected. “Luke’s right. He and that walking carpet will be the prisoners, and the two of you”—she jerked her head at Erso and Andor—“can keep an eye on them. I’ll find something for this one to do.”

Incredulous, Han said, “This one?”

Walking carpet?! said Chewie.

“No,” Erso told Leia. “I’ll go with the two of you. I’m the muscle, Cassian’s the liar.”

Andor actually looked gratified.

“Keeping an eye on us, huh?” said Han.

She shrugged, but the princess accepted the amendment to her decree, and Han didn’t see that it made much of a difference one way or the other. He’d have liked to keep Chewie closer, sure, but he’d have a better chance as a fake prisoner than if they tried to hide a seven-foot Wookiee with two traitors and a … well, him.
As far as Erso went, it wasn’t like Han felt intimidated by the muscle of a thin woman maybe three or four inches taller than that miniature toy of a princess. Though, sure, he’d seen enough of the galaxy to know that good nerve and good instincts went a lot further than size. If Andor reminded him of Bib, Erso reminded him of the higher-level thugs—not the pathetic temporary hires (pathetic except for Han, obviously), but Jabba’s own people. If his instincts weren’t off (they weren’t ever off! usually!), someone like that might be useful. *Might* be. If she didn’t club them behind their backs.

Not that she had a club.

Probably.

As Andor marched Chewie and Luke away, Han assured himself that it wouldn’t be the last time he saw them, and that he certainly hadn’t just made a colossal mistake. A lot of colossal mistakes.

Han and Erso stalked after Princess Leia, and he muttered, “I still don’t trust you.”

“Good,” replied Erso. “You shouldn’t.”

He glared down at her. It was a good ways down, which should have felt better than it did. “Well, that’s reassuring.”

“I’m not in this for you,” she told him, face devoid of all expression. “And I’m not in this for whatever you’ve been promised.”

“Yeah?” Han said. “Then what are you here for?”

“The revolution,” said Jyn Erso.

On the one hand, Jyn was finally leaving this Force-damned monstrosity. On the other, she might be doing so via the rifle blast of any one of a million stormtroopers. They’d done so much, and to die now? With these strangers? And with Cassian off wherever-the-hell-he-was, maybe talking his way out of trouble and maybe … anything. He could be dead already, and she wouldn’t know.

No. She’d already had this argument with herself. She would know. The Force owed her that much.

But she didn’t know where he was. Even during those hours of horror when she could only guess at Tarkin’s plans for the Alderaanians onboard, she at least knew where he’d gone. Now, they meant to meet at the hangar bay, but she had no idea what route would bring them all there, if at all.

Cassian had better odds of survival than she did, surely. He could fall back on the excuse he’d prepared ahead of time, and on the pair of acceptable prisoners in front of his blaster. Jyn, though—if she died, she’d die alone.

With Leia and Solo, technically. But she didn’t know them, so: alone.

The comlink on Jyn’s wrist buzzed. With a jolt in her chest, she checked the number and breathed again, clicking it on in total indifference to the newcomers. She’d tried to contact Bodhi over and over, but until now, heard nothing.

“Sergeant!” Bodhi’s voice crackled urgently. “Are you down here? I’m alone, but—”

“Bodhi, get to the main hangar,” she said. “As fast as you can. We’ve got an escape planned.”

“Is that why there’s an old man going around throwing pebbles? I tried to distract the others, and—”
“Throwing pebbles?” Solo demanded, then shook his head. “What am I thinking? Of course he is. That’s the guy who says he’s a Jedi, he’s supposed to be disabling the tractor beam.”

The skepticism, Jyn understood. She could only hope it was misplaced. If they’d risked everything for some lunatic—

But Luke, however naive, seemed bright; she didn’t think he’d be fooled by a madman. Possible, though. Very possible. She spread her free hand against the crystal in her pocket, praying with all her might—please be a real Jedi, please be a real Jedi.

“Uh, okay,” said Bodhi.

“Just get there,” she said. “You’ll be looking for—wait, is that thing your ship?” She pointed out a junker unceremoniously parked in the hangar.

Solo puffed himself up. “Sure is.”

“You’re braver than I thought,” Princess Leia muttered.

“Nice,” he said. “If your boy there knows ships, she’s a YT-1300f Corellian light freighter. Taken some damage between … one thing and another.”

“I know ships,” said Bodhi. “If I can get there, I’ll find her.”

“May the Force be with you,” Jyn told him, and switched the comlink off. Then, catching a faint, distant-sounding beat, she shoved Solo and Princess Leia around the nearest corner, back the way they’d most recently come from. After all these weeks on high alert, she could pick up the sound of stormtrooper boots in her sleep, even through the thick muffling of the door.

“Troopers,” she hissed. “Go!”

Once the stormtroopers passed by, not appearing to notice anything unusual, Jyn scouted ahead with the dubious protection of her disguise. Then she gestured the others forward.

“More sneaking around,” Solo grumbled. “I hate this.”

You and me both.

The thought came without warning or expectation, no less deeply-felt for its silence. Silent because she was trying to hide from Imperial forces in the worst Imperial base in the galaxy. Solo, apparently, wouldn’t recognize a clandestine operation if it slammed the butt of a rifle into his head. But her unspoken commentary kept finding their way into the mouth of this two-bit scoundrel, in grunts or mumbles or snide asides. She didn’t like it. She didn’t like him.

Mostly.

“Maybe you’d rather get shot by stormtroopers,” Leia said acidly.

Jyn liked her, though. Still hard to see Cassian’s protégée in her, or really any kind of covert operative at all, but—she liked her.

Solo started to respond, and Jyn hushed him. How the hell was she supposed to bring these people through this place? She’d handled plenty of difficult teams before, but never one quite this … this … them.

Fine. She’d manage it the same way she managed everything: taking risks where she could,
brazening her way through when she couldn’t, and refusing to accept failure. It’d gotten her this far.

*I had Cassian, though,* some rogue part of her mind pointed out. *Not these people.*

Cassian had been in bacta and then bedridden for days, she reminded herself. And bleeding out in the shuttle, before that. She’d saved them all then, and if any possibility remained, she’d do it again.

In the event, though, it didn’t take much. After perhaps ten minutes, her careful, zigzagging creep between halls crossed right into the others’ more direct path.

Cassian still had his blaster to Chewbacca’s and Luke’s backs, so he seemed to have sold the story, or escaped questioning in all the chaos. Before she could say a word, however, they heard a new crew of stormtroopers headed their way.

Cassian turned sharply towards her, but Jyn shook her head and started backtracking. He couldn’t be seen near the princess, not if—

Unexpectedly, Solo saved them. Sort of. Maybe on accident. At any rate, his patience exhausted itself; raising his blaster, he ran firing and yelling in the direction of the stormtroopers, Chewbacca loping behind him as they chased their way to what seemed like certain death.

“Well,” said Leia, admiringly, “he certainly has courage.”

Cassian gave her a disappointed look.

Luke snapped out, “What good will it do us if he gets himself killed?”

“Thank you,” Jyn said.

Although his entire face lit up, Luke only grabbed Leia’s hand and said, “Come on!”

“You two, that way. Turn left, left, right, and then down to the entrance once the path is clear,” said Cassian, pointing towards one of the less obvious passages to the hangar. Even officers went out of their way to avoid that route; it involved an extension bridge and a very deep abyss.

Galen had been nothing if not creative.

“We’ll try and divert anyone who comes,” Jyn added. “Go!”

After only a moment of hesitation, Luke and Leia raced away. While Cassian stayed very still, scanning ahead of them, Jyn turned to hold his back and watch Luke and Leia. They ran hand-in-hand, their speed and easy synchrony startling her. Between those and the matching white clothes, they looked almost like wayward children.

Nothing of the kind, of course. Luke definitely seemed the brains of his little group, and Leia was a co-leader of the Rebellion itself. A co-leader who knew where she’d deposited the Death Star plans, if perhaps not their current location. Her life mattered more by far than Jyn’s and Cassian’s.

Once again, Jyn heard the approach of a stormtrooper contingent. Luke and Leia vanished into the doorway to the bridge/abyss just in time, leaving Jyn and Cassian alone once more.

Jyn swallowed, meeting Cassian’s eyes. There was nowhere left to hide.

Only, as ever, words.

“Jyn,” he murmured, to her relief. She couldn’t be Lyr in this moment. She couldn’t. Cassian
exhaled, then tilted his head closer, breath on her cheek. “Thank you. For everything.”

Her pulse pounded in her ears, its beat steady and strong. She didn’t want to be anywhere else: not alone.

She said, “I—”

Ahead of them, the nearest door spiraled open, and the contingent’s leader halted in … well, she couldn’t exactly read expression from their helmets. Surprise, maybe.

“Sir!” his mechanized voice bellowed. “We are in pursuit of Rebel infiltrators! Have you seen them?”

“Of course we’ve seen them,” snarled Cassian, sliding right back into Willix. “Look at us!” He gestured at his torn sleeve and the water dripping under their feet. Really, Jyn thought, the true surprise was that nobody had smelled any of them. Not that those helmets would let much through.

The leader’s helmet dutifully moved slightly as he considered them.

“They stole our weapons and headed that way,” she said, pointing to the leftwards passage, which curved well away from Luke and Leia’s, deeper into the Death Star. “They must be looking for something. What are you waiting for?”

“Nothing, sergeant!” said the trooper. “This way, men!”

Jyn and Cassian watched them slowly march off. So slowly that she couldn’t deny a burst of suspicion. Once that door closed behind them, she said,

“Are your escapes usually this easy?”

He looked grim. “No.”

Remarkably—or not—they all made it to the hangar bay. Cassian and Jyn simply strolled there, Luke and Leia dashed in, and Solo and Chewbacca arrived just after.

“You got a ship of your own?” Solo asked.

“No,” said Cassian.

Solo rolled his eyes. “What kind of captain are you, anyway? And why should I trust you on my ship?”

“They’re with the Rebellion,” said Luke impatiently. “Of course you can.”

“Look, kid, that don’t mean—”

“[I know they’re trustworthy,]” Leia said, eyeing the group of stormtroopers between them and the ship. “What’s good enough for me is good enough for you.”

“No, actually,” he snapped. “No, it isn’t. I want to know—”

Jyn tried to count the stormtroopers. Not too many; they might be able to take them. Shoot them all, fly away, jump into hyperspace: it sounded so simple. Simple if those proved all that stood in their path. Almost certainly, though, there’d be more. Didn’t matter, though. They had to try.
Jyn looked around at the others: another petty criminal, an armed Wookiee, a Rebel princess, and a boy looking to be a hero. And Cassian.

One last chance.

“It’s classified information, okay?” she said. “Never mind, we’ve got to find our friend and leave.”

Solo jerked his head at the stormtroopers. “Through that?”

As if on cue, the troopers turned and rushed towards something Jyn couldn’t see. But the others, standing a little ahead of her, could.

Luke gasped. Desperate to find and crush this latest obstacle, Jyn tried to peer past him, but a sudden movement of Solo’s blocked her way. Jyn gave up and grabbed Cassian’s shoulder.

“Is there anyone who might be Bodhi?”

“About fifteen,” he muttered. “I don’t know how—”

“Now’s our chance!” said Solo. “Go!”

There was no more time. Sickened, Jyn ran for the ship.

---

**Ben!**

Luke ran with the others, but he couldn’t help turning back. Ben had to make it out. He was one of the last Jedi, he was the last person that Luke knew from before the Empire turned his life into charred wreckage, he was—he was a **Jedi**! He couldn’t just die like a normal person … but he was fighting a Jedi, too, wasn’t he? A giant evil cyborg Jedi—that had to be Darth Vader, didn’t he? Anakin Skywalker’s murderer, aiming to be Obi-Wan Kenobi’s, too, his red lightsaber swinging down against Ben’s blue one.

Ben had looked old for a long time, almost as long as Luke could remember. But he’d never seemed fragile until this moment, shrunken next to Vader and surrounded by stormtroopers.

Luke didn’t understand what happened next. Ben told Vader something, something that Luke couldn’t hear, and then he—he just closed his eyes and lifted his lightsaber and—

Vader’s lightsaber slashed right through him. But Ben left no broken corpse behind, not even bones like Owen’s and Beru’s, dutifully buried in the sand. Nothing but robes, drifting quietly to the floor.

Vader kicked them.

“*No!*** Luke screamed. It wasn’t possible, it wasn’t.

Blaster shots fired past his head. The stormtroopers were coming at him, but a wild fury filled his head. He could fight them off, no problem. He’d kill them all.

Leia cried out, “Luke, it’s too late—”

“**Blast the door!**” Han and Jyn shouted at him.

That much penetrated Luke’s red haze. He shot the door control panel, no problem, got ready to take out the rest. Everything seemed so clear, like this. And the stormtroopers kept missing, except one, who wasn’t shooting at all. Through the haze, Luke hardly noticed that one. Not until the trooper
lifted his blaster at last, only to shoot another stormtrooper in the back.

What?

“Bodhi!” Captain Andor called out. “Up here!”

What?

Jyn’s voice rose again, bright and excited. “Bodhi? Come on!”


Ben—

Right. Death Star. Escape. Rage still coloured his thoughts, but not rage alone. The princess. They’d come here to save the princess, to get her out of here. And he didn’t want Han to die. And there were all these honest-to-goodness Rebels to help, Threepio and Artoo and Jyn and Captain Andor—

He was already running, scaling the ramp to the *Falcon* as fast as he’d done anything, trailed by the friendly(?) stormtrooper. Once he stumbled inside and the doors slammed closed, all anger drained out of him. All everything drained out of him. He could barely make his way to the table, even surrounded by Leia, Jyn, the droids, the captain, and the stormtrooper.

Luke collapsed at the table.

“Bodhi,” Jyn said again; astonishingly, her voice trembled. “You’re all right?”

The trooper called Bodhi threw off his helmet to reveal a pleasant, if sweaty face. He gave a slight nod, though his eyes were wide and his breath uneven.

“Yes,” he panted. “I’m fine. I … we made it. We made it!” He tugged and tore at his armour, flinging the pieces aside without consideration for much beyond the droids. Luke watched numbly. He couldn’t seem to feel much interest, his mind registering information without significance. Even his skin felt cold.

Something fluttered over his shoulders. A blanket. And the princess with it, her expression as warm and kind as he’d seen it so far.

“I can’t believe he’s gone,” Luke mumbled, half to himself. He *couldn’t* believe it. He didn’t understand it. Everyone was gone. He liked Leia, and Han and the others, but he hardly knew them. Ben, Luke’s strange old neighbour from childhood, was all that remained of his life before all this came. The droids, and—the memory of Owen and Beru flashed back to him, so sharply and vividly that Luke almost saw the smoking bones in front of him, and—the ship rocked, lifting off, and it should have mattered more than it did.

“There wasn’t anything you could have done,” said Leia gently.

Luke wanted to believe it. He really wanted to.

Just beyond them, Bodhi yanked off the last piece of his armour. With that, Jyn’s stern face broke into a wide grin. She barrelled forwards, nearly toppling over Artoo, and drew Bodhi into a tight hug.

Something uncoiled in Luke’s tight chest. Not all the way, but a little. When the princess pressed her hand to his, it uncoiled a little more.
“I’m so glad,” Jyn said, voice cracking as Bodhi returned the embrace, his arms clutching her tight and his face pressed into her shoulder. Captain Andor didn’t quite join their hug, but he stayed close to Jyn, and clasped Bodhi’s shoulder, and suddenly they were all looking at each other and crying. Jyn’s face crumpled, tears slid from under Bodhi’s squeezed-shut eyes, and though Luke couldn’t see the captain well enough to tell, he said something that made the others smile even as they cried, his tone low and rough with feeling.

It was nice, Luke thought. Even now, it was nice to see people happy.
Chapter Notes

I had some extra time/energy for writing, so I ran a poll at Tumblr and Dreamwidth about what I should write/update next. I really should have guessed that it'd be this. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jyn never knew that joy could consume her mind as wholly as fear, burning everything in its path until she could feel nothing else. Her entire body ached with it, not just the ribs caught within Bodhi’s crushing embrace, nor the skin pinched under Cassian’s grip, first at her shoulder and then her waist. They were all going to bruise, but who cared about that when they lived, they’d all lived, and now stood there like one many-limbed creature, together and free, jackets and armour cast aside.

She laughed wildly and cried wildly and couldn’t tell the difference. Bodhi mumbled a few words between choked sobs, no more comprehensible than Cassian, who talked because of course he talked, bright strings of Alderaanian that made even Princess Leia smile at them.

In that moment, all other dangers, all other troubles faded to ash. Nothing existed except living—the reality and mutuality of survival.

Then Han Solo came running around the corner.

“Come on,” he said. “We’re not out of this yet! Any of you have experience with aerial combat? Get to the second gunport!”

“I have,” Cassian said, and launched himself up the ladder so quickly that Solo jerked back.

“Two of you, go help Chewie keep an eye on things,” he ordered, and raced up after Cassian.

Leia was off and running before he’d finished talking. Luke scrambled to his feet beside Jyn, but before he could do more, Bodhi shook his head.

“I know their patterns, I’ll help.”

“What patterns?” said Luke, his voice rising, but Bodhi was already skidding around the corner.

“Flight patterns,” Jyn told him. “He was an Imperial pilot before he defected. Let’s go.”

“We’re all going to die. See if we don’t,” said the protocol droid in despairing tones. Threepio, Jyn remembered. He turned about and stalked towards the cockpit, accompanied by his astromech friend. Jyn followed them, gesturing at Luke to come with her. Unnecessarily: he seemed relieved at the chance to do something. She knew the feeling.

A sudden shot rocked the whole ship. Threepio, despite his completely rigid casing, staggered backwards, while Jyn and Luke barely managed to hang onto the wall. The R2 unit sped into the cockpit, angrily whistling.
By the time the three of them managed to stumble into the back end of the cockpit, Jyn saw why.
Things were on fire up there. Literally on fire: a clump of exposed wires had gone up in flames. The
R2 shot a cloud of something that extinguished it—useful for an astromech, she supposed—but a
single droid could hardly hold the entire ship together.

The ship shuddered again and Threepio, plainly terrified, tottered with it. He’d have tipped right into
another pile of hot wires if Luke and Jyn hadn’t grabbed him. They half-supported, half-dragged him
into one of the extra seats at the back of the cockpit, and belted him in while he spouted statistics like
some incompetent cousin of Kay’s. While Leia and Bodhi called out directives to Han and Cassian,
Jyn and Luke hung onto the last chair, neither opting to sit down.

“You have many days this exciting?” he managed to say, his smile sickly.

“No,” said Jyn, with perfect honesty. “It’s mostly a lot of waiting.”

Like now. She’d just take up space at the viewscreen, already crowded with three, and the ship had
no more gunports. Jyn supposed it was lucky, in a way, that she’d learned to wait; otherwise,
passively staring down another potential death would have eaten at her. Even now, it seemed
difficult to believe that, after everything, a handful of damn TIE fighters could bring them down.

But of course it was possible. She might die with this collection of strangers and Bodhi. And without
Cassian—well, they’d burst into flame at the same time, so together in that sense, but it didn’t feel
like it. Even with Bodhi, she felt very alone.

“That’s another down,” Cassian said, voice calm through the intercom.
Leia replied, “There are still two more of them out there!”

“They’re going to swerve back, make a lateral shot,” said Bodhi, and Chewbacca managed to evade
the strike.

“So,” Luke whispered to Jyn, “do you know if the Rebellion has much in the way of credits? I sort
of promised Han a huge reward for helping the princess escape.”

“Sort of?” said Jyn.

He shrugged, the gesture somewhere between bashful and insouciant. “Okay, just promised.”

Jyn, trying to think of anything but possible impending death, said, “I don’t know.” She remembered
all those senators in their fine robes, sneering at her father and her and the idea of dirtying their hands
with anything, while people like Saw and Cassian tore their souls apart for the cause. “Probably.
Some people seem to have plenty.”

“Oh, good.”

Adjusting her grip on the chair, Jyn asked, “When did you have to promise this?”

“We took the route to Alderaan, but it was in pieces, and then the tractor beam dragged us in.”
She felt very cold. “I see.”
Another TIE fighter exploded—that’d be Cassian's work. But little more than a second or two passed before they heard a triumphant shout from Solo.

“We did it!” cried Leia, hugging Chewbacca and a stunned Bodhi. It was something to see Bodhi smile, after everything.

She wasn’t smiling, herself.

When Luke made his way forward to peer through the screen in person, Leia caught him in a close embrace, too. He was still hugging her back, laughing and repeating that’s it! you did it! to her and Bodhi and Chewbacca, when Solo came through the back.


“This has not been my idea of a celebration,” Threepio informed him. He was still belted into his chair and showed not the slightest inclination of moving.

“I’ll give you that,” said Solo.

“Don’t worry,” said Jyn, “we were just going.”

Beside her, Luke fidgeted. Solo was his friend, she remembered.

There were really too many people in here. She felt almost suffocated—but when Cassian slipped in, she turned to him in relief. Being alone in a crowd felt even worse than being alone in solitude.

“All right,” Solo said, “I’ll need coordinates for the hyperspace jump.”

“I can do it,” said Cassian.

Luke, surprisingly quiet, moved aside to let the two of them through, while Chewbacca growled something under his breath and made his own way past them, nearly bowling over Bodhi on the way there.

“No way are you screwing around with her navicomputer,” said Solo.

“A direct route is too dangerous,” Cassian told him.

Leia nodded. “They let us go. It’s the only explanation for the ease of our escape.”

“Easy?” echoed Solo incredulously. “You call that easy?”

“Yes,” said Cassian.

The astromech droid gave a few short beeps, and Threepio lifted his head.

“He says—”

“They’re tracking us,” Leia insisted.

Solo shook his head, more at Leia than Cassian. “Not this ship.”
“Anything can be tracked,” said Jyn. “It doesn’t matter how special you think your ship is.”

He finally appeared to notice that people other than the princess existed. Spinning his chair about, he glowered at Jyn.

“She’s a lot more than special, and I don’t have the fuel, anyway. You know much about ships?”

“I know about tracking devices,” Jyn said.

Cassian’s arm slightly brushed hers, though it didn’t seem to mean anything. But very little meant nothing, with him, and she felt—not lonely. Just annoyed.

“Well—”

“Vanimas vi t’alaçialta,” Cassian told Leia.

“Toçè min terimpo,” she returned. “Kanimas pelì quiladha.”

Jyn didn’t understand, of course, but she didn’t really feel like she needed to. “Right. We need to get out of here now. Just get us into hyperspace, someone.”

“Dantooine,” said Leia, with a firm nod at Cassian. “We’ll need to be careful coming out of hyperspace, but there’s a base on Dantooine.”

Solo, clearly suspicious, stared at her. But Leia just lifted her chin, and grumbling, he turned around to punch the numbers into the navicomputer. The ship creaked alarmingly—Cassian eyed the various clumps of wires in alarm—but launched ahead nevertheless, black fading to familiar blue-white streaks.

“We’re safe,” Bodhi breathed.

The nearest thing to safe, Jyn privately amended. Nobody was really—

Solo scoffed. “In this galaxy? Nobody’s safe.”

“As safe as anyone’s going to get under the Empire,” she said, hating that she almost liked him.

“That’s right,” said Leia, twirling around to take everyone in. Her gaze focused on Cassian. “Okay, we’ve got three of you. How many made it out?”

“Three,” he said.

She flinched. Luke, on the other hand, looked admiring. Bodhi just seemed tired.

“Damn,” said Solo, actually sounding impressed. “How long have you people been in this fight?”

“Six weeks,” Jyn replied, just as Cassian said,

“Nineteen years.”

Solo squinted at him. “You can’t be much older than me. You mean—fighting-fighting, or just
throwing things at stormtroopers?”

“I’m twenty-six,” said Cassian. He and Jyn exchanged a long glance, one child soldier to another. “And I mean fighting.”

Jyn, Cassian, Bodhi, and Luke escaped the cockpit as quickly as they could, leaving Solo and the princess to their mating dance.

Bodhi, for all his confidence earlier, trembled. “I think—I think I need to sit down. It’s been … I need. To sit down.”

“Me too,” said Luke cheerfully. With that, he swivelled and marched back down the hall, while Bodhi paused and glanced uncertainly at Jyn and Cassian.

“It’s fine,” Cassian said. Jyn nodded.

Plainly relieved, Bodhi ran ahead to keep up with Luke, who wasn’t any taller, but lacked anything like Bodhi’s tentativeness. As far as Jyn could tell, he abandoned all hesitation once he set his mind on something. Probably someone good for Bodhi to have around just now.

She and Cassian waited until Luke’s and Bodhi’s footsteps completely receded. Once everyone seemed to be out of hearing, she said,

“Dantooine?”

“There’s a base there,” he replied, the lines about his eyes suspiciously crinkled. “Not a lot of people on it anymore.”

“As in …?” Jyn was pretty sure she already knew.

Cassian smiled. “None.”

She couldn’t help but smile back. “I think I like her.”

“So do I.”

Despite the stale air, they both inhaled deeply. The Death Star’s had been cool and evenly cycled and utterly inescapable. Now, they breathed in their escape. Standing there in their Imperial boots and trousers and shirts (and weapons), Jyn’s mind fell pleasantly blank. Not even the earlier ecstasy filled it, just—relief. Relief from fear and danger and choking desperation, from even the urgent sanctuary they’d formed about themselves. They didn’t need it now: not as it had been.

She forced herself to stir. “We’d better find that tracking device.”

“I’m not sure we should,” said Cassian, frowning down at her. Or, not at her, just near her. Even with the others dispersed, they’d instinctively stayed close. She supposed she could pretend to be surprised.

Instead, she tilted her head. “That’s one way to bring the Death Star into range. Throw everything
we’ve got at it.”

“I’m not sure how much we’ve got at this point,” he admitted. “Not after Scarif.”

“We can only fight with what we have,” said Jyn. “And the Rebellion is doomed anyway if we don’t take that thing down. It has to be now.”

Jyn and Cassian headed back to the hold, unsure if Leia would have returned or not. They didn’t see her, but they did nearly slam into the two droids as they turned a corner. The astromech gave a friendly beep.

“Greetings,” Threepio said. “We have not been properly introduced. I am C-3PO, human-cyborg relations and protocol. This”—he kicked in the R2 unit’s direction—“is my counterpart, R2-D2. Don’t mind Artoo’s appearance. He can be very useful when he puts his processors to it, and very troublesome too.”

Artoo beeped something that made Cassian smile.

“Really, Artoo!”

“It’s nice to meet you,” said Jyn.

Threepio considered her, his optical lenses flickering. In a more cheerful tone, he said, “Thank you, ma’am.”

Together, the four of them made their way to the hold, Cassian asking a startled but pleased Threepio about his probability mechanisms. Once there, they found Luke and Bodhi at the dejarik table, the former lost in thought, the latter—Jyn smiled—asleep. He deserved it.


He clearly spoke to Jyn, or maybe Cassian. Nevertheless, Threepio instantly replied,

“I was on my way back here, Master Luke, but Artoo slowed me down.”

Artoo gave a screech that needed no interpretation. Luke laughed.

“I’m sure that was it.” With a more ambiguous expression than usual, he turned directly to Jyn and Cassian, and lowered his voice. “Have you seen the princess? I know nothing could have happened yet, but …”

“No,” said Jyn. She headed towards the table, keeping an eye on Bodhi. Behind her, she felt more than saw Cassian follow. “She might be fighting with Solo again.”

“Right,” Luke said. When she sat down, he forged on, “So, um. Where do you come from? It’s got to be more interesting than Tatooine.”

Tatooine. An obscure planet, but she’d been there. Lots of opportunities, so to speak, if you knew where to find them. In any case, it wasn’t so obscure that she wouldn’t recognize the nearest system.
to Scarif.

“I’m not sure,” she told him, recognizing the distraction for what it was. “I’ve lived in a lot of places. I was originally from Coruscant, though.”

He straightened up so far that he nearly bounced. “Coruscant? Wow! That’s definitely more interesting. Probably in a bad way, but still. Imperial City?”

Jyn nodded.

“You sound like it,” he said thoughtfully. Dark blond hair flopped as he tilted his head back to peer up at Cassian. “And you, captain? Are you from Coruscant, too?”

She couldn’t help but stiffen, turning her head to check up on him. But Cassian appeared as agreeable and unconcerned as Willix at his best, and gentler. He said,

“No, I’m not. You said you’re from Tatooine?”


Artoo gave an interrogative beep. Threepio said,

“You don’t understand six million forms of communication.” He turned to Cassian. “Tanain, pela n’elenças.”

“Thank you,” said Cassian, still impenetrably pleasant. Jyn bit the inside of her cheek, not knowing what to do and hating it.

“I really am sorry,” Luke told him. “We hoped, we were trying to get the plans to Alderaan before anything happened.”

“The plans?” Jyn scrambled to her feet, pressure ringing in her ears as Cassian’s face went from distant warmth to shock.

“Where?” he said urgently. “Where are they? You never got to Alderaan, did you?”

“No,” said Luke, blinking up at them. He pointed just past them, at the droids. “Leia hid them in Artoo. They’re right here.”

Right here. Right here.

Everything seemed slow and blurry, like hyperspace in reverse. At Artoo’s soft beep, Jyn took one tentative step forward, and then another. She laid her palm on the top of its casing.

“You haven’t … haven’t lost them?”

“I should think not,” Threepio said. “Artoo insisted, absolutely insisted, on taking them to an Obi-Wan Kenobi. Then we followed General Kenobi and Master Luke to this absolutely dreadful city full of dust and grime and sand—you would not believe how much sand I have in my joints—and then we escaped onto this ship. But then we had to hide in that awful Death Star. Master Luke convinced Captain Solo that the Rebellion would reward him if he helped, which of course they will, and the two of them came up with their plan. I managed to fool Imperial soldiers, not that it was very
difficult, and here we are.”

Jyn didn’t even try to follow all of that. Luke said something, but she had no idea what, her attention fixed on Artoo. He whirred, the sound more curious than anything else.

Cassian was already on his knees before the little droid, looking him right in the … well, dome. “We’re the ones who transmitted the plans. Jyn and Bodhi and I. You’ve saved the Rebellion, R2-D2. The whole galaxy, if we’re lucky.”

Jyn couldn’t believe she was going to fucking cry again.

“Thank you,” she said, her voice cracking. Even with Luke there, and Bodhi in an exhausted heap beside them, and the droids, she couldn’t bear any more separation. She reached out, closed her fingers over Cassian’s shoulder, felt the slope and tangible reality of him. Him, and her, and this.

Artoo gave a softer whirr.

“He says,” Threepio told them, “that he doesn’t need thanks. He says it was an honour to serve the Rebellion.”

“I know what he said,” replied Cassian, and it was almost a relief that his voice broke, too, that his shoulder relaxed into the sudden grip of her hand. “I know.”

Eventually, Jyn had to escape it all. Something other than the ecstasy of escape from the Death Star and gasping relief of the plans’ recovery, but some quiet space where she could settle her own mind. She would have remained, were it Cassian alone, but between Luke, the two droids, and the plans: no. Cassian gave her a sympathetic smile and nodded towards the hall.

She’d only just turned the corner, pausing to consider which route would offer the most solitude, when Princess Leia came stalking towards her in a fury. She nearly jumped.

“Did Solo do something?” asked Jyn.

“He’s an utter mercenary,” Leia snarled, with a furious gesture at the cockpit. “I don’t think he cares about anything—or anyone!”

Jyn blinked. At this point, she couldn’t say that she deeply cared for Han Solo one way or the other, but neither did she consider him heartless. A bit callous, yes. Not this. But people said all kinds of things in rages; she knew that perfectly well.

If Jyn could endure no further joy, she certainly had no space in her mind for rage.

“I don’t know,” she said vaguely, then realized she did need to chance Leia’s anger. She’d meant to tell her, just—they’d had larger concerns. “Princess?”

Leia had already turned to storm the rest of the way through the hall. “Yes?”

“We wanted to help you earlier,” said Jyn, eyes fixed on Leia’s face. It bore no signs of her captivity; neither did any other part of her, even her wrists. With the Empire, Jyn felt sure that meant nothing
good. “I’m sorry we couldn’t.”

Leia frowned, some of the fury clearing from her face. Then she gave a shrug.

“There was no point,” she said. “It would have just gotten us all killed.”

All right, now Jyn could see Cassian’s protégée in her. She gave an uneasy nod.

“Anyway,” said Leia, “it’s all over now.” She cast a glance back towards the cockpit, and frowned again. “Are you headed in there? Maybe he’ll pick up some decency.”

Jyn seized her opportunity.

“We’ll see,” she replied, and headed straight for the cockpit. Maybe Chewbacca had returned from whatever he was doing in the control room by now, and they could just talk at each other. She darted inside—but no such luck. Solo sat alone at the controls, sulking at space.

“What do you want now?” he demanded, not bothering to turn around.

“Some peace and quiet,” said Jyn. She felt a certain relief in being able to say it without concern for anyone else. Solo wouldn’t care, and had no ground for judging her in any case. It was almost soothing.

“Oh.” He still didn’t bother facing her. “Fine.”

Jyn slumped into the co-pilot’s chair, reaching for her pocket. The datapad and Kay’s chip remained in her discarded jacket, but she’d kept the kyber crystal at her side. Now, at last, she could afford to hold it in plain sight, concentrating her attention on its planes and points. Here, it grew into a rough edge; there, it’d been worn smooth, by Jyn or her mother before her. Hyperspace caught inside its rugged facets, illuminating the whole.

If Solo recognized its value, he gave no sign of it. For a few blessed minutes, he did leave her in silence. It was not a peaceful one; he kept glancing back at the entrance, features drawn into irritation or guilt, or maybe both at once. Eventually, Jyn heaved an unsubtle sigh.

Solo slouched deeper into his chair. “Whatever you’re going to say, I don’t want to hear it.”

“Wasn’t going to say anything,” returned Jyn. It struck her that she sat in the exact same pose as him—legs stretched out, torso tilted back into the chair. She straightened, but didn’t bother moving her legs; they were comfortable. “Do I really seem like the lecturing type?”

Solo barked out a short laugh. “You’ve got me there. So. You’re Alliance, right? Is there seriously going to be a reward for all this?”

“I’m … Alliance-adjacent,” said Jyn. “And I don’t know. Maybe we’ll all get locked up. Or promoted. Or paid.”

“Right, you’ve only been in it a few weeks.” Solo eyed her curiously. “Look, the kid’s in this for the usual. Wants to be a hero.”

Waiting, Jyn realized that she’d started slouching back again. Oh, who cared?
He waved his hand in the general direction of the cockpit’s entrance. “The princess and the captain, though? They’re true believers.”

She couldn’t disagree. Nearly all of them believed in the Rebellion—maybe even Solo, in his way. But there was belief, and then there was belief that drowned every breath and particle, swallowed up any possibility of another life.

“They are,” she said, emphatic.

Solo shook his head. “People like that, they’re dangerous for you and me.”

Her eyes narrowing, Jyn demanded, “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” said Solo, with a tap of his fingers on the control panel, “that those two aren’t in it for glory. I know the type. They’ll do anything for their cause and take everyone else down with them.”

She couldn’t disagree with that, either.

“They already have,” she replied. “Done just about everything, that is.”

Jyn thought of Zekheret. So have I.

Solo’s sharp gaze turned intent, focused. “Wouldn’t have pegged you for it, though.”

It wasn’t any of his business. Not really. Nevertheless, she found herself saying,

“I’m not. Or I wasn’t, at first. The Rebellion offered me something I wanted.”

His brows rose. “Yeah? What was it?”


Solo gave a short laugh; as if in sympathy, a panel beeped behind him. “Sure.”

“I was in a labour camp,” she said impatiently. “Twenty-year sentence. They busted me out and offered to set me up with a new identity in exchange for help from some contacts of mine.”

Something in her twisted at the easy dismissal of Saw, but she wasn’t about to get into that with Solo, of all people.

The burst of skepticism faded from his face. “Oh, that kind of freedom. Okay.” He paused, shifting back to face the main control panel. He still seemed tense, unsure. “And that’s it?”

She hesitated too, trying to fix on the reasons that would register the most heavily.

“You’re in this for real now,” he said. “Something must have changed your mind.”

He wanted to be recruited, Jyn thought. Maybe not consciously. But he obviously saw himself in her as much as she did the reverse, and needed to understand. Someone else who closed his eyes to the Imperial insignia stamped over the galaxy, and someone else who pretended that it didn’t bother him, that there was no hope for anything better.

In bright colours, Jyn remembered Cassian leaning down to her just a few weeks ago. His dark eyes
had been intense, and his voice matter-of-fact. *Rebellions are built on hope.*

She jerked her head towards the doorway. “They’ve got some convincing people. You’ll find out if you keep sniffing after the princess.”

“Sniffing—!” He didn’t look nearly as offended as he sounded. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. Sniffing. Are you joking? I’ve never … well—” He scowled at her. “Where’d you even get the idea of me liking her? I don’t!”

“Sure,” said Jyn.

He grumbled to himself.

“You shouldn’t keep your feelings back like that,” she added. “Tell people what you really think about her.”

“I’m trying *not* to think about her,” he muttered. He’d gone back to tapping his fingers on the main panel, the patter of his nails scraping her nerves. Jyn got up. She’d find somewhere else quiet.

“I—”

“Still, she’s got spirit,” said Solo, a crooked smile on his lips as he swung his chair slightly towards her. “What do you think? A princess and a guy like me …?”

Sympathy reared its uncomfortable head again.

“A guy who stays out of her fight?” Jyn said. “No.”

With that, she left.

Chapter End Notes

Alderaanian:

Cassian: *Vanima vi t’alacialta.* [We have to get into hyperspace.]
Leia: *Toçè min terimpo. Kanima pelì quiladha.* [Then it doesn’t matter. We can say anything.]

Later, Threepio: *Tanain, pela n’elenças.* [Captain, I express my sympathies.]

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