

IMPERIAL DETENTION CENTER & LABOR CAMP LEG-817

LOCATION: Wobani

PRISONER: Liana Hallik, #6295A

CRIMES: Forgery of Imperial Documents, Resisting Arrest

MONTH 01_

The stormtrooper chuckled as Jyn Erso fell to her knees. She raised her shackled wrists. “You can take these off now,” she said. “Where am I going to run?”

She gestured to the long hallway and the dim glow from the illuminators above each cell door.

“It’s more fun this way,” the stormtrooper said, lifting Jyn to her feet by the binders on her wrists. The metal bands cut into her skin and grated against the sensitive bones beneath, but Jyn barely flinched. She didn’t want to give him the satisfaction.

“They’re always so . . .” The warden, a tall thin man dressed in black, waved his hand as if searching for the right word. “They’re always so *noble* when they first arrive, don’t you think?”

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The stormtrooper made a noncommittal noise as he prodded Jyn, forcing her farther down the dark hallway toward her cell.

The warden chuckled at his own joke, then apologized. "I'm sorry, it just amuses me so. I can always spot a fresh one. They stand straighter." His strides lengthened, and he passed Jyn and the stormtrooper, then turned in front of them, halting their progress. The warden grabbed Jyn's chin, forcing her to face him, but Jyn jerked away defiantly. He chuckled again. "The fresh ones still have a little fight in them," he said, wrinkling his nose at the word *little*.

When Jyn didn't rise to the bait, his face soured. "This way, prisoner." He turned on his heel and walked quickly down the hall. Jyn stared ahead, trying to keep her tired feet straight so she wouldn't stumble again and further prolong the ordeal.

"They picked you up . . . where?" the warden asked casually.

Jyn didn't answer.

The warden spun around and slapped her across the face, hard. "I asked you a question, Six-Two-Nine-Five-A."

"I was captured on a ship in the Five Points system," she said through gritted teeth.

"Captured . . . and arrested." The warden sounded

proud of himself, even though he'd had nothing to do with it. "And now you're here." He swept his arm out but didn't move. One of the cells was dark and empty. The stormtrooper nudged Jyn forward, and she stumbled into the tiny room. When she raised her wrists this time, he deactivated the binders. The light on the band blinked from red to green, and Jyn's wrists fell from the heavy metal with relief.

"I'm sure you'll enjoy our little operation at L-E-G-Eight-One-Seven," the warden said. He pronounced the abbreviation of the prison system branch in a rush, turning the letters LEG into *elegy*. Jyn felt it was an appropriate title. "Welcome to Wobani." He grinned at the words, well aware of the reputation the planet held.

"Your crimes, though not the worst the Empire has encountered, are not to be tolerated. You have done a disservice to the galaxy, and to repay your debt to society, you will work." The warden punched in a code on the biometric datapad by Jyn's door, and the metal bars slid into place, trapping her inside the cell. "You will not like the work," the warden added, his tone still mild and pleasant. "And you will not like your new home here. But that's what you get when you commit crimes against the Empire. Welcome to the worst days of your life."

The warden looked down his nose at Jyn through the bars. He smirked slightly. No doubt he was used to

criminals breaking down at this practiced little speech, but Jyn just gaped at him.

The worst days of her life?

The warden could do no more than scowl as Jyn laughed in his face.

CHAPTER ONE _

JYN ERSO, AGE 8

Jyn Erso hid in the dark.

She was not afraid of the dark. She used to be, yes, but not anymore. She knew this dark. She had been in it for hours.

Ever since she had seen her mother slaughtered.

The cave was cramped, but not as cramped as it was supposed to be. She and Mama and Papa had practiced these drills, and when they had pretended the Empire was coming and it was time to hide, they had hidden together.

Jyn was alone now.

She had a satchel with her, a few possessions she'd crammed into the bag when her mama had told her it was time. Abommy the Gig wasn't there. She'd left him under her bed, where he'd protected her from the monsters she was old enough to know didn't exist. She wished she had him now; she wished she could stroke his soft synthetic fur that smelled of Papa's clove aftershave.

Jyn shook her head. No. A toy wouldn't bring her comfort now. It was a stupid thing to wish for. She couldn't be such a baby.

Jyn clutched the necklace her mother had given her moments before she died. She squeezed her eyes shut. She wondered if death hurt. She supposed it must.

It was *so* dark.

Jyn lit a lantern. The shadows danced along the rocky interior of the cave.

They reminded her of the troopers dressed in black.

“Papa will come,” she told herself, the sound of her voice tinny and fragile in the darkness.

Mama had said, “Trust the Force.” Jyn tried. She tried to believe. To hope.

The hatch above her rattled. Jyn sucked in a scream of fear as the door opened and a man’s face peered down.

A sob escaped her. *Saw!* He had come to save her!

But not Mama. He was too late for Mama.

“Come, my child,” he said. “We have a long ride ahead of us.” He reached his hand down into the cave, helping her up.

Jyn looked into Saw’s face, hesitating for just a moment to take his hand. The last time she’d seen him, he’d brought her and her family to Lah’mu, to make a fresh start after they’d left Coruscant. Mama and Papa had drilled into Jyn the different scenarios that might happen if—when—the Empire found them.

“And this,” Mama would say, showing her how to operate the comm tower. “If the worst happens and

you need help but Papa and I aren’t around, you press this button here, and Saw Gerrera will come.”

And every time, Jyn would reach out for the button, eager to hit it right then. “He never visits!” she’d say as Mama pulled her back, chiding her daughter that he was to be summoned in emergencies only.

Now Saw’s jaw was set in a grim line. There was no smile on his lips, no joviality in his eyes like the last time she’d seen him. A long scar cut through his left eye, making the lid droopy. His eyes bulged slightly, his lips turned downward. The rain streaked his bald head. He looked angry.

Jyn reached up and slipped her small pale hand through his dark calloused one. He squeezed her fingers gently, and she gripped his back, holding on as if she were drowning and he was the rope pulling her back to shore.

“We have to go,” Saw said.

Jyn swallowed her fear, her sorrow. She nodded.

The air smelled clean, fresh after the cool rain, as she and Saw ran back through the field toward Jyn’s house. It seemed extraordinarily odd that the world was sleeping around them, beautiful and still, but Mama was . . .

“There were troopers,” Jyn said, tugging on Saw’s hand. She bit her lower lip as she silently chastised herself. She should have counted how many soldiers

had come to the farm. There was the man in white, the man Papa worked with sometimes. And the black-armored troopers. And . . .

She should have paid better attention. But it had all happened so *fast*.

“No one else is here,” Saw said.

Her home and the farm equipment—a comm tower, irrigation units, a droid harvester—were the tallest objects in a sea of gently waving skycorn. A shirt fluttered up, caught by the breeze, soaring like a ghost against the night sky before wafting back down.

Jyn was pretty sure the shirt was her father’s, the one that was frayed at the cuffs and always smelled like him, a mixture of cloves and dirt and grease and something else, something cold and hard. But before she could grab the shirt and wrap it around her, the wind picked up and blew it away.

The closer they got to Jyn’s house, the more laundry flapped in the breeze, scattering throughout the grasslands and disappearing in the night. And then she saw the laundry basket, and the depression in the grass, stained with blood.

Hope surged in Jyn’s heart. Her mama’s body wasn’t there.

But she knew, deep down she *knew* it wasn’t because Mama had survived. No one could survive a blaster shot to the chest like that.

Jyn bit the inside of her cheek, tasting the metallic tang of blood. But she didn’t say a word.

Saw moved with purpose, flinging open the door to the farmhouse. Jyn followed silently, a waft of bitter smoke making her nose crinkle. The troopers had started a fire that still sputtered in the kitchen, singeing the bright wall a sooty black.

Saw knew where to look—the work cabinet, the hidden nooks and crannies, the floorboards under the carpet. It was all empty.

He cursed. “They took it all,” he growled.

And they took him, Jyn thought in dull shock. *They took Papa.*

Her eyes watered, but not from the smoke. Even though it had been Saw who’d come to save her, not Papa, she’d still hoped that maybe he would be there. Hiding. Waiting. For her.

But he wasn’t. He was gone.

Broken crockery littered the floor. Jyn knew her father had tried to destroy his work before he’d told her to run. There would be nothing left. Papa wouldn’t let there be anything left.

Saw narrowed his eyes and whirled on Jyn. “Your pa have any secret hiding places? Something the Empire wouldn’t know about?”

Their home was ransacked, and while Mama had been able to destroy some of Papa’s research, the

Empire had come too quickly. She pointed to where the safe was hidden in her parents' room, but it was empty. The log case was missing, and Papa's file bank was gone. She peeked into her own room. The black-clad troopers had even upturned her bed and shredded her dolls, looking for more of Papa's work. She wasn't sure if they'd found anything. But it didn't matter anyway; everything was in Papa's brain. And they had him now.

"We need to jump planet," Saw said gruffly. "Think, Jyn. Anything else of your father's work that may be here?"

"No," she said in a small voice.

"Then we're going."

Jyn started to move toward her room, but Saw put a heavy hand on her shoulder, stopping her.

Jyn swallowed, one hand moving to clutch the crystal necklace her mother had given her. She had left everything once, when her family had abandoned Coruscant. She could do it again. At least she had her satchel.

Jyn left the house first, and she heard something metallic and heavy drop on the wooden floorboard in the farmhouse before Saw closed the door. He grabbed her elbow and pulled her along; she almost had to run to keep up with his long strides. They were only about fifty meters away when the house exploded. Jyn

stumbled at the sound and felt a whoosh of heat wash over her. What was left of the last place she called home burned, the yellow-orange flames licking at the pale grass and threatening to start a field fire.

Saw didn't stop walking. He didn't even look back at the fire or at Jyn. His shuttle was waiting for them, and Saw bounded up the boarding ramp. Jyn paused, glancing back at the smoke.

There was nothing left for her there.

CHAPTER TWO_

Jyn sat beside Saw in the cockpit of his ship. She stared straight out the window, watching as they soared through the clouds of Lah'mu. The ring that circled the planet in a constant white rainbow arched overhead, and then they broke atmosphere. The sky turned black, speckled with white stars, a glow of light from the reflected sunlight on the planet's belt just visible.

Jyn gasped.

Saw glanced where she was looking and nodded grimly. A Star Destroyer hung in the blackness of space, the sun illuminating the underbelly of the ship.

They'd sent a Star Destroyer for her father.

Papa is on that ship, Jyn realized, her eyes widening. He was somewhere, somewhere *there*, just out of reach but so close.

Saw was busy at the controls. His ship was so tiny compared with the Star Destroyer, a flea next to a giant, but his mumbling curses informed Jyn that he was worried about being spotted. Within seconds, they were well past the Destroyer, and in minutes, they'd

lurched into hyperspace. The blue-gray stream of lights out the window made Jyn blink, hard, her sight blurring not just with the light but with the unshed tears that were building in her eyes.

"Hey, kid," Saw said, swiveling his chair so he could see Jyn fully. "I . . ."

He stopped. Jyn knew he was going to say he was sorry, but there was something in his eyes that made her realize he knew just how futile those words were.

She stared at his face, wondering at her memories of him being funny and kind. His dark skin made the puckered scars near his left eye stand out. He looked angry. Except for his eyes.

"I don't want to talk about it," Jyn said, pulling her knees up to her chin and wrapping her arms around her legs.

Saw's expression grew hard. "Too bad," he said, "because I need to know why the Empire came after your father like that."

"You knew why my parents went into hiding," Jyn said.

"I knew bits. But I had no idea they'd send a Star Destroyer after him."

Jyn had to admit she was a little surprised too. She knew her father was important and that he'd worked as a scientist for the Empire before fleeing Coruscant and going into hiding on Lah'mu. She knew some of

what he did. Mama and Papa had said never to tell anyone about Papa's research, but she could trust Saw. Mama had.

"He studied crystals," Jyn said, pulling the necklace her mother had given her from under her shirt. She slipped it over her head and handed it to Saw when he held out his hand.

He turned it over in his palm and held it up to the light, squinting at the clear crystal. It was, Jyn knew, a kyber crystal. Not a very good one, not worth a lot of money. Papa had worked with very good kyber crystals when he worked with the Empire. He liked rocks.

"I know about the crystals," Saw said, handing the necklace back to Jyn. "But your father must have been working on something else, something more concrete. Something they want. The Empire doesn't just come down like that for crystals."

"That's all he worked on," she insisted.

"That you know of," Saw said darkly. "Did he say anything when the Empire came? Anything at all—maybe he told you something that could be a clue."

Jyn closed her eyes. She could still hear her father's voice. *Jyn, whatever I do, he'd said, I do it to protect you.*

And then he had gone with the man who killed Mama.

"No," Jyn told Saw.

Saw turned to the window and stared at the blue-gray

light of hyperspace. "There's something more here," he said, mostly to himself. "Since Coruscant, Galen has been working on something big, I know it. We have to figure out what it was."

Jyn felt tears burn in her eyes. Her father had been working on a broken harvester droid the night before the Empire came. Not some big secret. But she knew Saw was right. Mama and Papa talked about it, late at night when they thought Jyn was asleep. Research and crystals and fears. She wished she'd paid better attention. She wished she could at least understand *why* all this was happening.

She forced herself to remember the way things used to be. On Coruscant, when her father had openly worked for the Empire. She had been littler then, and easily distracted, but even she knew that her parents weren't happy. When they'd moved to Lah'mu, things seemed better. More relaxed. Mama taught her every day, math and science and literature and history. Papa worked in the fields, and at night he continued his research, but it wasn't like on Coruscant. He didn't work until he collapsed, mumbling to himself, ignoring her. Things were better.

But there had still been that undercurrent of fear. It spiked occasionally, when the comm tower picked up static, or when Mama and Papa insisted they have a safety drill. They invented scenarios of bad things that

could happen and told Jyn what to do. Papa liked to pretend it was a game, but Jyn knew better.

There wasn't a scenario for if Mama died, Jyn thought. They had a lot of plans, but none of them ended with Jyn alone. They would hide, run, survive. Together. Mama had never thought about what would happen if her body burned in the grass while Jyn hurtled away from her through hyperspace.

But when she looked at Saw, she knew that wasn't true. He was her parents' plan if the worst happened. They hadn't wanted to tell her that; they hadn't wanted her to think about just how bad things could get, but Jyn knew it to be true.

Saw was her last hope.

His eyes were red-lined, and he sighed heavily as he ran a hand over his smooth head. As if he could feel her eyes on him, he glanced down at Jyn, and he tried to shoot her a reassuring smile. But then he said, "I don't know what to do with you, kid," and any comfort she'd felt disappeared.



The farther they went from Lah'mu, the more surreal the journey felt to Jyn. She half expected this all to be some sort of mistake, and when they finally stopped flying, they'd be back home, everything normal again.

But when they dropped out of hyperspace a few

days later, it wasn't beautiful green-and-blue Lah'mu that was waiting for her. It was an asteroid belt.

Saw sat up straighter, and Jyn watched as his attention zeroed in on the viewport. "We're coming up on Smuggler's Run," he said. "Strap in."

At first, it was just a few stray asteroids, but soon they were in the thick of it, the shuttle lurching up and down, left and right as Saw expertly navigated the ship through the onslaught.

"I like Wrea," Saw said. "The belt keeps people away. It's quiet."

Wrea. The planet they were going to. Jyn's body slammed against the safety harness as Saw swerved around another asteroid. It suited him, to live on a planet so difficult to reach.

When they cleared the asteroids, Jyn saw Wrea. It was smaller than Lah'mu, and bluer. *Water,* she thought. With little land masses of green and white and brown scattered over the surface, the islands big and long like fingers clawing their way through the ocean.

Saw flew the shuttle straight down, landing in a small clearing surrounded by craggy rocks. Wrea was cold, and the air smelled like salt, but she couldn't see the ocean. She could only see rocks and tangled scrub brush. As they approached a broken comm tower, Jyn realized there was more to it than just the base. A door was carved into the rock, a heavy blaster-proof door

that Saw accessed with a biometric lock. The metal squeaked when it slid open. Lights cascaded down a long hallway bored directly into the stone.

Jyn lingered in the doorway, looking around at the small rocky island. At the top of a hill that seemed as if it were made of one giant boulder was a comm tower. Or at least part of one. The other half lay broken and rusted at the base.

“Not used since the Clone Wars,” Saw said, walking past Jyn and into the outpost. “The natives aren’t exactly friendly, but they stay off this island.”

“What are the natives?” Jyn asked, jogging to keep up. The door whisked shut behind her, closing her in the dank stone hallway.

“Wreans,” Saw said, winking. When Jyn didn’t respond, he peered at her, noting her nervousness. “They’re water creatures, and they stick to the deep. You’re safe.”

Jyn nodded, swallowing. She didn’t believe him, though. She didn’t believe in “safe” at all.

CHAPTER THREE _

The outpost was bigger than it appeared from the outside. Built directly into the rock, it had three doors on either side of the main hallway, which ended in a common room larger than Saw’s shuttle. He stood in the hallway a moment, as if considering his options, then he opened the door immediately to his right. It was an old office and had obviously been used for storage. “This do?” he asked. Jyn wasn’t sure what he meant, so she just nodded.

He led her down the hallway. Jyn looked at the other closed doors curiously, but he didn’t pause. The large common room seemed to be half cave, with a stone ceiling curving up. Jyn didn’t like it at all. It was too much like the cave she’d hidden in.

A long table stood in the center, and cabinets had been built into the wall. Saw set Jyn down at the table and opened a can of nutritive milk for her. From her seat, she watched as he went back to the hall, to the first room, and started clearing stuff away. He worked