

Tales of Dystopia: Civil Disobedience

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Rated: PG13

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Summary: Prelude of sorts to my work in progress “Tales of Dystopia” series. In the early 2400’s, things are only going downhill for the world, particularly with the ruling class of Kents. Society is on the brink of civil war. But a house divided cannot stand. What will happen when a Kent decides to go rogue? WHAM warning.

Year 2434

Her heels clicked against the cool marble floors, echoing as she crossed the main hall in a rush. She loved the sound — one of the few things she actually liked about living in this place. Otherwise, she’d have just flown across the room. Or simply flown away from this horrible, horrible place. Unfortunately, the noise would likely draw attention to her, and that was the last thing she needed. It wouldn’t do to be caught sneaking in at this time of night — and if they did? Johanna shuddered.

“Johanna?” a voice called out her name.

Damn. Johanna felt her shoulders tense up predictably and she forced herself to relax, take a deep breath. A gust of wind rushed past her and in a moment her brother’s tall figure settled across from her. He squared his stance before her, exuding hostility, but she simply folded her arms across her chest as she spoke. She was not going to let herself be intimidated by him. “Jason. Is there something the matter?”

“I could ask you the same thing,” he replied, unconsciously mimicking her pose. “Where have you been all day?”

“I wasn’t aware I had to file a flight plan with you.”

Jason narrowed his eyes at her. “You know Dad was wanting your help today. He wants to see you now.”

“Well, I had some errands to run,” she retorted stubbornly, not giving him an inch. Inside though, her heart was pounding erratically. She knew he could hear it, that her own body was giving away her lies. But she held her ground, daring him to call her out on it.

Jason clenched his jaw, staring down his sister for a few moments, before finally breaking the silence himself. “You were with *them*, weren’t you?”

“Who?” Johanna feigned ignorance, trying to move past him and finding her path blocked as he stepped in front of her once again. With an exasperated eye roll, she looked up into Jason’s eyes and waited for him to get his words out.

“The Revolutionaries.”

Johanna blinked rapidly up at him, staying silent a moment too long for her brother’s liking. He swore and ran his hand over his face. “Jesus, Johanna.”

“I’ve done nothing wrong,” she spoke meekly, trying not to incur any more of his wrath. She shifted on her feet, kept her deep blue gaze down on the floor, low and roaming. It didn’t seem to be working.

“Do you have any idea what they’ve been saying? What they’re threatening to do to us?”

“Not us, Jason. Not all of us.”

His eyes burned into her — luckily not in a literal sense. “Goddammit, Jo! I’ve already got one idiot brother that thinks

running off and sticking his head in the sand is a better idea than trying to help out his family.”

“He’s staying out of it. I’m not sure that Jerome’s not the smartest one of us all.”

“Don’t! Don’t you even mention his name to me!”

“It’s Dad’s name, too, you know,” she retorted with another eye roll.

“Oh, trust me, I know.” The jealous hatred dripped off his words as he spat them at her. She should have known better than to bring that up to Jason. It had always been a sore spot — that Jerome had gotten their father’s name, that he was the one that got most of the attention from their father, even though it wasn’t always positive attention. In fact, nine times out of ten, it was over something negative. But that didn’t matter to Jason. All that mattered was that he was left out, overlooked and unloved. Johanna always felt a little bad for him because of that. Jason worked as hard as he could to earn the love and respect he thought he deserved, but nothing ever came of it.

Still, she couldn’t let her oldest brother go defenseless when he wasn’t even here to defend himself. “He’s still our brother!” she rebuked him.

“He’s a traitor! And so are you!”

“You know what, you’re right, Jason. Jerome is gone now, and Jada’s no help — it’s just you and me here now. We’ve got to stick together. We’re never going to get anywhere if you’re going to fight against me. You and me against the world, remember?”

“That’s not what this is about, and you know it, Jo!”

Johanna felt a little bad for trying to guilt him into that one, and she looked to her shoes briefly.

Jason cursed and ran a hand through his hair. How could he make her see how dangerous this was? She was the stubbornest person on the planet, practically. “What are you even thinking, Jo? Don’t you know what they’re going to do to you once this is all over? They’ve just about stopped negotiations — we’re on the brink of all-out war — and you want to go play with that fire? They’re terrorists, Johanna!”

“You’re just spouting off the propaganda you’ve heard from Dad. They’re not that bad. It’s not like I’m hanging around any Extremists or anything —”

“It’s not like — ? What?! Do you even hear yourself? Listen to what you’re saying. They’re not *that* bad?!”

Johanna glared at him, heat and anger pouring forth from her clear blue eyes. “You’re taking his side, Jason. I think you’re worse off than I am.”

“You think this is all some stupid game, Johanna? That you can bounce back and forth across enemy lines, play spy, and just watch what happens? They’re trying to bring down Utopia —”

“There is no Utopia! All that’s left is an outdated system with a corrupt dictator who refuses to loosen the reins because heaven forbid if he loses one ounce of power.”

Jason’s voice lowered suddenly, realizing he wasn’t getting through to her with shouting and screaming. He brushed his dark bangs out of his matching blue eyes carefully, thinking. Mindful of his words, he tried again. He genuinely did care for his sister, after all. He didn’t want to see her get hurt. “You’re gonna go and get yourself killed. You’re gonna get us all killed.”

Johanna ground her teeth in anger and stepped in closer to him, no longer concerned with stepping on his toes. “You know what? Quit bossing me around like you’re the one in charge or something! I’m twenty-two years old and you’re not the boss of me!”

“I am your older brother —”

“By minutes,” she scoffed. “And besides, it doesn’t matter what you think or say. They’re right about Dad and you know it.”

Jason’s face turned dark as he towered over his twin sister. “He’s our father. It doesn’t matter what he has or hasn’t done, we should stick by him. That’s what family means.”

“He’s a monster!”

“Enough!”

The voice boomed across the hall, echoing throughout the entirety of the hall. Johanna flinched visibly at the sound of his voice. Great. This was going exactly where she’d hoped it wouldn’t. Just perfect. She turned around slowly, bracing herself for what was to come.

Jerome Kent Senior strode firmly across the hall, a carefully controlled fury burning in his eyes and his square jaw firmly set. Johanna felt fear coursing through her, but she would stand her ground, come hell or high water.

“Johanna.”

His voice was hard steel, grinding out the syllables of her name with a sharp edge as he spoke. It sent a shiver up her spine. There was no undercurrent of love or affection in his tone, not that there usually was, and she’d never felt so cold and distanced from him in her life. Intellectually, she knew he was a bad man, but he’d never said her name like that before. It only cemented the conclusion she’d already arrived at in her head. She knew her stance.

Still, it was a frightening stand to make. She swallowed thickly. “What?”

“We need to have a discussion. In my office, please.”

Johanna felt her throat go dry. She didn’t go in his office. Not with him. Not ever, really. “We can talk right here, right now.”

He shook his head ever so slightly, making Johanna even more uneasy. “No. This is a conversation we are going to have in private. No negotiations.”

“Sir —” Jason cut in, trying to protect her, in spite of his earlier words.

“Jason, go check on your sister.”

“But Dad, I want to be a part of this —”

“Go check on Jada!” his father roared at him, fury burning in his eyes.

Jason squared his jaw. He knew better than to call him ‘Dad’ to his face. Jerome Sr. always demanded to be called Sir. They’d call him Dad when he wasn’t in the room, but when addressed he was always Sir. The only exception was his oldest daughter, Jada. She could do whatever she wanted. But Jason supposed there was a reason for that.

“Fine,” he retorted sharply. Jason spun on his heel and stormed out of the room. If they wanted to hash things out without him, they could.

Johanna watched her brother storm off almost with a pang of regret. As much as she hated her father, Jason loved him. It was a shame that he couldn’t at least be loved in return.

“Johanna.”

Her father’s voice captured her attention once more. She set her jaw firmly and strode past her father on her way directly to his office. “Fine. Let’s talk.”

Jerome sealed the door behind her as they both entered. He gestured for her to take a seat, but Johanna simply folded her arms across her chest and stared him down. /Fine. Two can play at that game./ Jerome squared his stance across from his daughter, and waited.

Exasperated, Johanna finally broke the silence. “What exactly are you wanting to talk about?”

“You know what.”

“Enlighten me,” she sniped right back at him.

“You’re not to get involved with the Revolutionaries.”

Silence followed his words. Johanna felt the blood draining from her face and she shifted nervously. So they were finally going to do this. The gloves were off and this was it. Johanna crossed her arms in defiance, stubbornly refuting his command. “I’m an adult. I can do whatever I please.”

“Not so long as you’re under my roof, you can’t.”

His words spoke of a threat. She narrowed her eyes at him.

“Maybe I don’t have to stay here, then.”

“You don’t get it, do you, Johanna? I am your father —”

“Oh, are you now? Are you my father? I couldn’t tell. I thought you were just this evil dictator who wanted to run the world and ruin everybody’s lives.”

“And what does this make you? Some crusading little bitch who wants to have her cake and eat it too?”

Johanna’s eyes flashed with anger. Suddenly, she slapped him hard across the cheek, leaving an actual red mark in her wake. She’d hardly expected it herself, but Jerome really wasn’t expecting it. Faster than she could even react, he grabbed her wrist in a firm grasp and held her there. Johanna gasped in surprise and pain, looking up at her father incredulously. His eyes burned with rage and hatred, a slight red glow emanating from them. She pulled against his hold on her, but he refused to release his iron grip.

“Let go of my wrist,” she demanded.

He enunciated his words slowly, so as not to be misheard. “You do not ever try to hurt me or speak to me that way again. Understand? Trust me, it’ll be the last thing you do,” he growled out his warning.

Her nostrils flared. “I’m a grown woman. I can speak however I choose, with whomever I choose, and do whatever I like. And that includes being with the Revolutionaries. Now let me go!” She yanked again, but again found he wasn’t budging.

“You will NOT be having anything else to do with this revolution thing. Or else. Are we clear?”

“Why? Because you’re afraid they’re right?”

“Johanna,” he growled menacingly.

“You’re a monster, you know. Everyone knows it. You’re a dictator, a tyrant —”

Jerome’s rage flared again and he pulled her into him by his grip on her wrist, causing her to yelp. “I’m no monster! I do what I have to do to keep Utopia in check. That’s my job. *They’re* the monsters! Trying to overthrow me — trying to kill me! Trying to kill us all! And you know what they did to your sister!”

“Oh, please. That was as much your fault as it was anyone else’s!”

“Yeah. My fault they tried to kill her when she was a baby and messed her up for life. Just like it’s my fault they’re wanting to attack us now. You know they can’t win, and you’re just going to split your family in two even more. Back out, Johanna.”

“You have no excuse for how you run things —”

“I have EVERY excuse!” He roared at her, grip tightening impossibly more. “I don’t need anyone’s approval of what I do! And I don’t need my own daughter selling me out like this! Understand?!”

Johanna cried out in pain as he wrenched her arm around tightly. “Let GO of me!”

“DO you understand?!” he hissed at her.

Johanna closed her eyes tightly against the pain and the swirling emotions inside of her. Her pulse was racing and her eyes were watering and she couldn’t escape him. He was so much stronger than her... a wave of panic washed over her, and started to take over. With an almost manic cry of effort, Johanna pulled with all of her strength and ducked as her father was flung over her head.

For a few seconds, there was complete stillness.

Then he crashed to the ground behind her.

At least he had finally released her wrist as he landed with a grunt. Johanna’s eyes widened at the implications of what she’d just done. Fearfully, she looked on her father’s form.

Jerome was livid. He snarled at her as he leapt to his feet and crowded her into the corner. “What the hell did I just tell you?!”

“I-I didn’t mean — you wouldn’t let me —”

He grabbed her arm fiercely and immediately twisted it behind her. Johanna shouted out, feeling his fingers dig into her

flesh. She could practically feel the process of bruises forming. “How dare you!”

“Please! I didn’t mean to —” she was cut off with a cry, by even more intense pressure on her arm.

“I do,” he hissed into her ear viciously, “what I want. End of discussion.”

Johanna’s eyes started to brim with tears she was having trouble blinking away. She had to fight back. She had to fight back.

She stomped heavily on his toes then turned to elbow him in the gut. Knocking the wind out of him was her best bet to secure her release and finally flee.

It worked, momentarily.

Jerome recovered in just enough time to catch the ends of her hair and pull. Johanna gasped sharply as she was yanked back, tears immediately flooding from her eyes at the pain. Jerome’s arms wrapped around her shoulders from behind, trying to keep her still as she flailed and squirmed to get away.

Her eyes went wide. She pushed back with all the speed and strength she could muster, slamming him hard into the wall across the room. He grunted in pain, loosening his grip so Johanna was able to break free of his arms and really start fighting back. A brief feeling of victory rushed along her spine as she looked at her father’s laboured breathing, but it was quickly followed by guilt and remorse. She relaxed her stance slightly, brushing a long strand of jet black hair behind her ear to compose herself. “Dad, stop. Please. I don’t want to hurt you.”

He couldn’t hear her over his own rage. Instead he charged at her, knocking her back into the desk extreme force.

Johanna choked back her sob, black locks of hair tangling in her face. “Dad —”

“Shut up, Johanna!”

His arms came up around her neck this time, and she choked in his arms. Scrambling frantically, she did everything she could to try to escape. She kicked, flailed, tried to pry his arms away. “Dad,” she rasped out, hoping to have some sort of effect.

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut UP!”

His grip tightened. Johanna dug her nails into his flesh as hard as she could, coming close to drawing blood. Her vision was blurring. She could hold her breath for a long time, but it was the pressure that she couldn’t withstand. He was so strong...

That’s when the panic began sinking in.

Jason slammed every door he had to walk through to travel from one side of the manor to the other, where his older sister’s room was. Luckily, the noise didn’t draw any attention, as the house was mostly soundproofed from room to room. His father was always paranoid that someone could be listening, especially those with sensitive ears. Jerome Kent Senior trusted no one, not even family and relatives. Perhaps especially relatives.

Just as well, Jason thought. It wasn’t like anyone trusted him in return.

His anger wasn’t satisfied though with the slamming of doors. Jason still seethed, gritted his teeth in frustration. He hated being cut out like this, completely sidestepped and removed from the equation. He was always treated that way. They had no respect for him, even though he was practically the most loyal of them all. To this day, this very moment, Jason Kent would do anything for his father, in spite of how he was treated in return. It only made Jason hate himself all the more, but he couldn’t help it. What he wouldn’t do for one shred, one iota of love or admiration or even respect from the man he’d like to call father. But no. He finished last on his father’s lists of cares. If the four of them were to be ranked, from most to least cared for, Jason was sure that the order would go: Jada, then Johanna, and then Jerome Jr. and himself. Of course, his father hated Jerome for everything he did — but hate was at least an emotion. There was nothing left

for Jason, he thought bitterly to himself.

He finally reached his oldest sister’s room. The door swung open even as he raised his hand to knock, and he was met with wide, deep brown eyes and a tangled mass of brown locks. “Jay?” her voice whispered quietly, sweet and innocent sounding. The sound was repeated in his brain, a slight nudging of his consciousness that always came whenever he spent time with his sister.

“Hi, Jada.”

He felt another nudge in his brain as she quickly ushered him in, and he couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled forth. “Okay, okay. I’m here.”

She closed the door firmly behind him, sealing him once again from yet another hallway. He couldn’t help but smile at his sister’s antics. He glanced around the room, taking it all in — the bright colors splattered on the walls, the papers and clothes strewn about everywhere, and the giant smile on Jada’s face. At 27 years of age, Jada might have been older than him physically, but because of her mental development, it was like having a seven year old around most of the time.

“Red?”

Jason grinned. She was lucky, actually. She had the advantage of telepathy — that in spite of being unable to voice all her thoughts and actions, she could still communicate to them what she meant with a little nudge of the mind, impressing onto their brains without words exactly the sentiment she wanted to get across. It was amazing, honestly. She was the strongest at communicating telepathically out of anyone they’d ever known to exist. Perhaps even the original Kryptonians.

“Yes, Jada, I like the red.”

She looked gleeful at that, and ran across the room to her paints. She gracefully picked through her paints with the wonder of a child, finally settling for a blood red one.

Jason smiled on at her before his thoughts drifted back to what could be happening on the other side of the estate. He wished everything wasn’t lead lined so that he could either spy or eavesdrop on the two of them. He knew Johanna was getting in trouble — not that she didn’t go looking for it herself. After all, she wouldn’t be in this situation if she hadn’t gone along with the Revolutionists in the first place.

Jada was in the middle of emptying her tube of red paint onto a table that she’d somehow appropriated into a paint palette of sorts when she suddenly stopped and turned back to face him. “Jay?”

Her face wore an expression of concern, and he knew that she was only reflecting what she saw in his eyes and felt in his heart. He put on a shallow smile. “I’m fine, Jada.”

She hopped over to him, a serious expression on her face and she was trying to communicate with him so rapidly that all he could feel was an almost bubbling sensation in his consciousness. He laughed at that, prompting a quizzical brow arched in his direction.

“I know, I know! I’m sorry, Jada. I’ll be more focused. You can paint.”

He felt a different sort of emotion coming from her mind, something playful and mischievous, when suddenly she tapped him on the nose with a finger coated in red paint. He frowned teasingly, and she squealed as she ran away from him, her bare feet leaving footprints of multicolored paints across the hard wood flooring. He chuckled at her as she returned to her activities, spreading colors on the walls haphazardly. Today’s dominant color appeared to be red, and she kept streaking it everywhere she could reach in her current space, even across the previous day’s projects and over completed works from long ago. He wondered at that for a few moments, but he brushed it aside. So she had a new favorite color. It didn’t matter that it was a color on the Revolutionary flag. There was also green on the flag,

and she didn't seem to be using that. He was thinking too deeply about it. In fact, he was surprised she hadn't picked up on it yet.

When he glanced up at her again, he found her standing stock still. He felt ice start dripping into the pit of his stomach. "Jada?"

She didn't respond at all. Not a word, not a sound, not any sort of mental outreach or touch whatsoever. Jason carefully walked towards her, circling wide around her to get a look at her face. She never acted like this anymore, and it was starting to worry him. Once upon a time, she'd had episodes like this. Being such an intense feeler, she had often picked up on distant pain and troubles from others, even though they were entirely unrelated to whatever she was doing at the time. They would find her, huddled in the corner, hair draping over her eyes, or shrieking in fear of some disaster or another. At times, it had even bordered on precognition. Whether she had responded to some sort of intense emotion or an audible cue still wasn't clear, but the way she was acting now definitely was reminiscent of those times.

"Jada?" he repeated, a note of panic creeping into his voice as he saw the blank, ghostly, unseeing expression on her face. He watched a drop of red paint drip from her large brush and on to the floor. He shuddered and reached an arm out to nudge her shoulder.

She screamed bloody murder before he'd even touched her.

Jason's arms automatically went up in a motion of surrender, thinking perhaps he had pushed her too far. But then she wouldn't stop screaming, the sound rattling her throat until her voice went raw. Jason had to cover his ears out of fear that they might actually start bleeding.

"JADA!" he tried to shout over her noise, trying to get her attention telepathically too. But the more he tried to reach out to her, the emptier and farther away she felt. It was like her brain stopped functioning.

That scared him.

Jada started pacing blindly, frantically, pulling her hair with more strength than she should. Red streaked her face and hair as her long forgotten, paint-streaked palms spread across it. Panic seeped through her every move.

Jason had to stop her. He finally found a way to put his hands on her shoulders and steady her for a moment, even though she cried and shrieked still. "Jada. What is it? Please, Jada, stop."

She gasped for air, unable to take a breath in all that time, before she screamed again. Jason winced. "Jad — Jada, please!!" "Jo!" She gasped out on another wave of tears. "JO!!"

Suddenly, that pit that was slowly sinking in his stomach had the bottom ripped out from under it. He swallowed thickly, looking for his voice and only able to find a whisper. "Johanna?"

Jada's only response was to shriek louder, and on the heels of her cries, Jason turned and bolted out of there as fast as he could. Her scream was ringing in his ears still as he raced down to his father's office. His heart pounded, his stomach felt queasy and there was a distinct lack of presence in his mind where both of his two sisters should have been. Bile crept up his throat as he burst through door after door, fearing the worst.

He needed to know what was happening down there.

She squirmed in pain, tears flowing freely down her cheeks as she fought for oxygen, for escape of some kind.

He hadn't let up yet.

Instead, he was hissing things into her ear: horrible, spiteful things that sickened her and frightened her to death at the same time. And she couldn't escape, couldn't retaliate any more than what she already had.

"You should have listened to me, Johanna. We would have been fine. Look what you've done."

She whimpered and he brought a hand up to clench over her mouth, trying to muffle her cries even more. Her cries only made

him angrier.

"I'm going to have to find a place for you, now. Some kind of cell... I can't trust you anymore. You'll just run off and tell those little friends of yours all about what a gigantic monster your dear ol' Dad is and fight even harder."

She shook her head fiercely, or tried to, but he held her firmly in place with a sick laugh. In a flash of sudden anger, Johanna bit down sharply on his hand, prompting her father to swear and take his hand away. She saw her opportunity and she took it. Johanna snapped her head down as best she could and trained her gaze on the arm still around her neck, focusing all her power on it.

Jerome howled in pain as she burned his arm with her heat vision. He felt his flesh burning, the smell of it overwhelming his senses. Pain racked his body, and his rage took over. He reached across Johanna's shoulders to grasp her chin. In one swift motion, he wrenched her head in the opposite direction, directing her fiery gaze away from his arm and the searing pain that remained. Flames came to life across the room, setting the office space ablaze and painting the room in a sick, reddish glow.

Then came a sickening, snapping sound, and the red beams just stopped.

It took him a minute to come back to himself. But as his youngest child's form grew limp in his arms and her head lolled against his chest at an unnatural angle, it suddenly struck him what he had just done.

Reeling, he dropped her, immediately backing away. His eyes were glued to her body, the way she was laying there, her arms spread out haphazardly and her blue eyes unnaturally open, long black hair mangled around her head.

He froze. And then, in a wave of emotion that he hadn't felt in years, Jerome Kent Sr. dropped to his knees and tears rolled down his flaming cheeks. He cried, genuinely cried, his hands forming fists as they came up to brace against his forehead. He bit his lip fiercely, tasting blood, and slammed his fists against his head repeatedly.

He had just killed his own daughter.

Suddenly, the door was wrenched open behind him. Jerome snapped his head back, startled to see his son, Johanna's twin brother standing there, looking horrified. It was then that Jerome finally noticed the flames that still licked their way across the walls.

Jason quickly expelled a breath of icy air, extinguishing the fire where it blazed. Once it was out, he finally glanced around the room — and he saw her, sprawled unnaturally across the middle of the floor, his father on the absolute edge of the room, on his knees and looking more defeated than he'd ever seen him.

They locked eyes suddenly, and Jason felt his breath catch in his throat. "Dad," he whispered hoarsely, barely able to speak past the burning lump in his throat. "What have you done?"

Jerome shook his head back and forth fiercely. "I didn't — She wouldn't — I don't —" He found no words to explain the moment. Instead, he slammed his eyes closed again at the image, trying to banish the memory from his brain.

Jason watched incredulously as his father processed it all behind closed lids, before neutralizing his expression once more and shoving any remorse he might have had aside. When his eyes opened once again, they were cold, hard and devoid of any emotion whatsoever, as usual. "We don't have time for this. We need to do something about it before anything else happens."

Jason wanted to vomit. "How —?" He didn't even try to mask the indignation in his voice. "How can you just push it aside like that? Do you realize what you've done?! You... you killed her! You killed your own — you're a murderer!"

"Jason," his voice warned, low and gravelly. "Now is not the time to talk. We need to act."

"When will it be time?!"

"Jason."

The look his father was giving him was cold and steely, but there was a glint of something new in them, something akin to acknowledgment, a cry for help of sorts. And that was what did it. Because if he didn't snap again and kill Jason as well, then that note of pleading behind his gaze was what would do him in.

Jason had gone over two decades waiting for a look even remotely like this one.

"Take care of this. I can't — can't..."

Instead of offering any more of an explanation, Jerome simply brushed past him and strode quickly out of the room.

And just like that, Jason was alone with his sister again. He swallowed thickly, unable to stop the tears that welled up. He knelt quietly by her body where she lay, ghosting a hand gently over the curve of her face, the sharp point of her jawline. A trail of blood ran underneath her nose and pooled slightly on the ground where her face rested. "Jo. Johanna," he spoke in a soft, tear-muddled voice. "No, Jo, please, no. It's you and me, remember? You and me against the world. You can't be... You can't let him win. Please, Jo." He smoothed a hand over her tangled black locks, wishing he could see the blue eyes they shared once more with life in them. He wished they hadn't fought earlier, that he hadn't drawn attention to the issue, that their Dad hadn't been home to hear them, or that she hadn't been so careless about what she was doing in the first place. "Please, Johanna," he begged once more, before finally just breaking down in tears over her slender frame.

He wasn't sure how long he spent like that before he had no more tears to cry. His eyes felt as though they were swollen shut, completely dried out, and his mind was completely blank, devoid of all thought and feeling. He stared at his sister numbly, unable to look away.

And to think, all she'd been trying to do was prove that their father was a bad man.

That thought clicked with something in Jason's brain, and suddenly his mind was running a mile a minute and he was struggling to keep up with them all. He carefully laid her body back down on the ground where he'd found her, then stood up to pace frantically back and forth across the space. Every so often, he'd glance at her, then turn away, only to glance back on his next turn.

She had proven what a monster their father was. She'd died to do so. Johanna Kent was physical proof of that.

Jason hesitated, though. If his father was already this far gone, there was nothing to stop him from doing the same to Jason. Or Jada, even. How could he possibly deliver this as proof? He'd never make it out of the house. And even if he did, he'd lose everything in the process — his father, his last living sister, his home —

But then again, a picture couldn't hurt. Just in case. He could decide what to do with it later.

He couldn't let his twin sister die in vain.

A young man, maybe 24 years of age, stood around in a dark alley uncomfortably. His hands shook. His eye twitched. He desperately wanted to pace, but unfortunately that would only draw more attention. He huffed a sigh and carded a shaky hand through his short, sandy brown hair.

Sam couldn't help it — he was nervous. She should have been here almost an hour ago. He'd have thought it was a trap if it weren't for how adamant she'd been when they met yesterday. Of course, because of the danger of this promised mission, they only sent him. He was essentially a pawn in the Revolutionary army, easy to spare, and if this went south — well, he knew better than to pretend there would be a pleasant outcome.

He tried to force himself to not look at his watch again, but he did anyways. He groaned. It was already nine-fifty. She was supposed to meet at eight. He'd give her ten more minutes before

bailing. Maybe she'd just lost track of time. Or forgotten. It wasn't entirely impossible — after all, it had been a week since they'd all met last. Then again, she had quite a memory, thanks to her genetics. And she'd been so determined, so sure of herself last time... They weren't sure whether they could trust her, but she'd promised this information, and they had to choose the lesser of two evils. And Johanna Kent was certainly made of a lesser evil than her father.

Another man walked past and collided with Sam's shoulder. "Hey, watch it, buddy," he retorted, with a dark glare.

The man turned on him quickly, and Sam was taken aback by the bright blue eyes that had been previously hidden under his hood and that mop of black hair that hung over his eyes. His words got caught in his throat as he realized that they matched Johanna's eyes, that this must be her brother, Jason. Sam swallowed thickly, readying himself to run in the other direction if it came down to it — if he recognized him as part of the revolution.

Jason's eyes narrowed and Sam knew he'd been made. He fought to keep his lunch down and turned on his heel, when the other man's hand grasped his wrist and spun him back firmly. Eyes closed, Sam braced himself for whatever violent reaction was to come, but in fact, none did.

"Walk with me."

Sam opened his eyes quizzically and saw the other man already walking away. Confused now, he had no choice but to follow him for answers. He quickened his pace to catch up with him and fell into step alongside the man. They didn't speak for a while, just walking in what seemed to be an aimless pattern along the darker streets of Metropolis, the grime and the lack of care evident in the piles of garbage that lined the streets and the dilapidated conditions of the buildings. It wasn't anything like what Sam had been used to back home, but he'd sworn that he'd do anything to bring the ruling class of Kents down, and here he was. Aligned with the Revolutionaries, working as their copy boy and not getting a hell of a lot out of it.

Until now, that is. He was their last chance at a breakthrough, and if he could do this, it could possibly turn the tide of the war. And Samuel Lynn might finally get a chance to make a name for himself in this world.

Sam finally found his voice. "I don't understand. You're —"

"Shut. Up."

"But why —"

"I said, shut up."

Sam closed his mouth with a click and allowed the younger man to take charge for now. They walked a ways in silence, Jason's form tense and hunched, and Sam's curiosity only grew as he watched how many times the guy looked over his shoulder in fear. Eventually, Sam couldn't hold his tongue much more, and he spoke in hushed tones. "I was under the impression that you were entirely against the Revolution, and what your sister has been trying to accomplish."

Jason skidded to a halt and Sam forced himself to stop alongside him, meeting very clear, blue eyes as he answered head on. "Oh, I am. Don't get the wrong idea at all. I think your revolution is entirely misguided."

His brows furrowed in confusion. "Then why —"

"Why am I here, so clearly meeting with someone from the other side?"

Sam closed his mouth and nodded solemnly.

"Because. Despite the fact that you guys have no idea what you're dealing with and you're completely dismissing all of the good that the Supers have done in the past, you are right about my father. He is a monster."

Sam felt his pulse spike, hope rising in his chest. "Really? That's good news then — well, not good news exactly, but — what makes you think so?"

Jason paused a moment, considering, before finally pulling a manila envelope out of his jacket and handing it over. “Because he’s a bastard and he needs to pay for what he’s done, no matter the cost.”

Sam took the proffered envelope cautiously out of his hands, a sinking feeling forming in the pit of his stomach. His fingers shook as he peeled back the seal, nervous at what might be inside. Taking a deep breath, he finally pulled the glossy pages out of the folder and looked at them.

He blanched at the images of blood and death that stood off the page. The sickening twist of her body, the way she nearly stared right back at him — oh, hell, he was going to puke. Sam’s hands started to tremble at the realization of what this implied. “She — she’s — how?”

“He killed her.”

Some part of him registered the way Jason said those words, how his voice shook with barely constrained emotion. But he couldn’t seem to wrap his head around it. “You... you killed her. She’s dead.”

“Whoa, buddy. Back up. I didn’t kill her. Dear old dad killed her. That’s why I’m giving this information to you.”

“Why? Why would he — why are you —?” The image on the page before him started to swim before his eyes, and Sam could barely pull himself together enough to string a complete sentence. This was the closest Sam had ever come to death. He’d never lost anyone close in his life. Yet here was an image of the girl he’d gotten to know over the course of several months, and she was dead. He felt a hand gently rest on his arm, and he jerked away quickly, eyes finally snapping up in a panic to meet the younger man’s.

Jason’s hands lifted in a gesture of surrender. “Hey. Calm down a minute. You got a name?”

He squared his jaw before answering, chest still heaving with panic. “Sam. Samuel Lynniss.”

A bitter huff of laughter escaped him before he could stop it, and Sam glared at the super across from him. “Sorry. It’s just... Sam’s kind of a Kent family name. Might want to think about changing it, if you’re wanting to be a better part of this Revolution.”

Sam’s glare didn’t let up, but he recognized the truth in his words. He’d been teased about it for a while now, sometimes harmlessly, sometimes accusingly — calling him a Sympathizer, or a traitor. It wasn’t like he could help the name he was given. Twenty-four years ago, it had been a popular name, for that very reason. He shook his head to clear it and get himself back on track. “Why are you giving this to me?”

Jason sighed and shifted his weight uncomfortably. “Because. I might not have supported what my sister was trying to do, but she died to do it. It’s not worth her life if nothing came of it.”

Sam’s nostrils flared. “So that’s all this is to you? Completing a transaction?”

Jason squared his stance in return, towering above him. “Listen, I’m sorry, but it’s not my place to get involved. I know he’s a monster, and he killed my sister, but he’s still my father. And although Jo was adamant you guys weren’t Extremists out to kill us all, I don’t trust a single one of you. Blood is thicker than water, and that’s all there is to it.”

“What about loyalty to your sister? What about her sacrifice? Is it that meaningless to you?”

“I didn’t have to do this!” Jason exclaimed, offended by the sudden turn their interaction had taken. “It’s none of your business what I choose to do from here on out. I just thought it was something the world ought to know.”

With that, he spun on his heel, and strode away in the opposite direction. Sam couldn’t believe how dismissive he’d been of his sister’s death. The wheels spun in his head. “You’re going to regret this. You could be doing so much more for us.

Your sister would have wanted you to!”

Jason stopped, about twenty feet away, and turned to stare back at him with a gaze full of ice. “I’m already doing more than she’d expect out of me. I want that out there in the news cycle as soon as possible, and that’s all that matters.”

With that, he rocketed through the air and left the young man behind.

Sam glanced back at the pictures in his hands and couldn’t tear his eyes away from her face. He’d met Johanna several times now — he’d been one of her main correspondents over the last six months or so, and she was a really incredible young woman. He held a great respect for her — she was a testament to the argument that not all of the Supers were bad, and it made him rethink his convictions several times over.

But now she was dead.

His gut churned. Who was really left to care about? This wasn’t about just a change in the order of things anymore. This was bigger than any politics.

He wasn’t going to go back to the Revolutionists with this information. He was taking it straight up the line, to the Extremists.

City of Smallville

“Jerome!”

The high-pitched voice that squealed his name into his ear brought a grin to his face, which he in turn applied to the skin of her neck. She giggled, half-pushing him away coquettishly and at the same time encouraging him to do more. He growled in response, attacking her with more fervor. God, he loved this woman. She gasped against his neck heatedly, and he brought his lips back around to meet her own, skin sliding against skin.

A sharp pain sliced through his head like a hot blade, and suddenly Jerome Kent, Jr., was reeling, pulling away sharply.

His girlfriend sat up in confusion and hurt. “Jerome? Everything okay?”

Pounding, aching, trembling. He held his head in his hands, wincing and trying to shake the pain away, but with no such luck. He didn’t understand what could be causing this feeling. It certainly wasn’t Kryptonite — and besides, this felt like it was coming across from a long distance.

“Lise,” he breathed through the agony. “Help me.”

And with that, he slumped over and passed out.

Jason found his eyes latched on to every type of monitor he came across. He was searching, desperately, for any hint of his news to hit the wavelengths, or for his sister’s picture to crop up somewhere. For the story to get picked up and suddenly be everywhere, and they couldn’t stop it. And then everyone would know.

That idea sparked an interesting mix of feelings inside of Jason. For one, he was filled with righteous indignation, followed by an overwhelming sense of justice. His father deserved this. He’d gone too far this time. And then, grief would strike at his heart, for his lost sister, his twin. He ached for her to come back. Jada was practically in a catatonic state since Johanna had been lost, and she sat, spreading paint along the floorboards mindlessly, every now and again telepathically sending severe jolts of pain out to anyone who could feel it. And yet, all the while, his father kept busy, did his job as he continued to see fit and that just made Jason want to vomit.

But then, there was another emotion. One that didn’t just flare up suddenly and fizzle away. One that started low in his gut and reached up from his heart and just settled there — the only uncomfortable part of it coming with how easily and comfortably the thought sat with him.

It was a realization. A realization that Johanna was dead. Jerome was gone. Jada was mentally unfit. His father was the

only thing standing between him and the opportunity to make things right in the world again.

And his father was a murderer.

And underneath that realization rested a certain amount of greed.

His father would be condemned, arrested, perhaps put to death for his crimes. And then Jason would be in charge, free to fix things to how they were supposed to be. He'd have all the power, there would be nothing he couldn't do... He just needed to wait a little longer — he glanced back once again at the display across the room, still without catching any tidbit of the information he'd handed over.

It was starting to make him nervous. It had been more than two days now, and still nothing. The longer it took, the more that fear started to gnaw at him. He was so close, and yet still so far. This was the only card he had left to play — if things didn't pan out for him with this, he was done for. A part of him became worried that maybe he had put his trust in the wrong person, and his message hadn't been received... but then again, there could be a number of reasons as to why the information hadn't shown up yet. Perhaps the censors were better than he'd thought, and they were just struggling to push it through.

He knew better than that though. There was something else going on with this, he could feel it. And the wait was killing him.

Patience, he reminded himself as yet another ad flicked to life on the monitor across the way. It would all work out in good time. It had to. Because if it didn't, then they were all royally screwed.

It had been three days, and Jerome Kent Jr. still didn't have any reasonable explanation for the pounding in his head except for the gnawing in his gut. For some reason or another, he just felt like something was wrong. He couldn't seem to reach out to any of his family to make sure they were okay, and that was starting to worry him. He sat numbly, skimming the stations for anything to distract him, get his mind off the terrible feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Elise's hands came around his shoulders soothingly, and he instantly relaxed into her caress. "That feels perfect, Sweetie."

She rubbed his shoulders in silence for a few moments before finally deciding to speak up. He'd been down ever since he'd had that feeling the other day, and Elise couldn't just go on watching him sulk and worry. It was hurting her as much as it was him. "Don't you think you should go back there? Check things out? I mean, honestly, Jerry, you've been so tensed up lately and you have no idea why — it's ridiculous to live in fear like this."

"I'm not going back there unless I absolutely have to," he cut off that thought quickly. Jerome knew he was not going to get a hero's welcome if he went home — ever. As long as his father was in charge and Jason was still around, home was never a possibility, and she knew that as well as he did.

"What about my parents? Surely we could stop by or have them look into something —"

He scoffed and launched to his feet. "Your parents? Come on, Elise. They hate me. You know it, I know it."

"They don't hate you, Jerome. They just... don't know you that well."

"Yeah, all they know is my name, and that seems to be enough for them. Or do you not remember how that first — and need I remind you — last 'family dinner' went?"

Elise sighed and pressed a hand to her forehead in frustration. She obviously was not getting through to him with this. "Okay. Then what do you want to do? Who can we reach out to? Because you can't just go on like this, babe."

Jerome closed his eyes and released a long, deep breath. He knew she was right, and it wasn't fair of him to keep this bottled up, put her through this. "I know. I'm sorry. It's just... I don't

know what's wrong, but it's driving me nuts. I think it's something to do with Jada, but I don't have a clue what... Maybe I can still get in touch with Lanie, she might have some idea of what's happening out there..."

Elise stopped listening when she saw the breaking news report pop up on the monitor over her boyfriend's shoulder and her heart dropped out of her chest. "Jerome," she spoke softly, keeping her tone as even as possible and her eyes riveted on the screen.

"What?"

He saw her blue eyes frozen in terror as she looked past him and he followed her gaze. When he realized what he was looking at, he felt his stomach clench with the urge to throw up and an icy dread settle in his bones. He swallowed thickly before giving the command in a muddled voice. "Unmute."

The set was unresponsive, and he continued to watch the scenes unfold before him in silent terror. Jerome raised his voice and repeated himself, starting to shake. "Unmute!"

The sound came on instantly and it was too much. Words were flying at him faster than he could really comprehend, everything was loud and obnoxious — Jerome's sensitive hearing couldn't take it. It didn't matter. He could hardly hear over his racing heart anyway.

Johanna.

He felt his mouth grow dry at the sight. The image of his sister's mangled body was uncharacteristically crude and flattened on the display, and yet it somehow was the one thing jumping out at him. It was all he could see, and suddenly the intense feelings of unease he'd been having made sense.

"Elise," he whispered, unable to get any other sounds past his tongue and out his mouth. Funny how he could feel such dryness in the back of his throat and yet his cheeks felt wet.

She seemed to understand what he was asking, though she was having trouble voicing it herself. She cleared her throat and wiped away some of the dew from under her eyes. "It seems... They're saying someone in the Kent family killed her."

It took him several long moments of collecting himself before he was finally able to filter out the sounds and piece together what had happened. Processing it would be an entirely different matter, one to be dealt with later. Here and now, it was all he could do to think at all.

"Now if you're just tuning in, you're probably wondering about these images on the screen. This came in only just this morning — that Johanna Kent, of the ruling House of El, has been brutally killed. Images appear to indicate that it was a matter of brute force that delivered the final blow. With apparently no Kryptonite involved, our only logical conclusion is led to be that she was murdered by one of her own kind."

Jerome's heart skipped a beat. Her own... that meant his family. Someone in his family killed his little sister. A rage started to boil up in his chest, replacing the anguish and lingering tears in his heart.

He had a perfectly clear idea of who had done it.

"I have to go back."

Elise's stormy eyes went wide. "Jerome, no! You can't go back there! If you think that somebody snapped a-and hurt her —"

His dark brown eyes flashed at her, and he raised his voice at her, nostrils flaring violently. "She's not hurt, she's dead, and it's not just anybody who did it, it was my father!"

"Even so," she prodded, "What makes you think they'll do anything less to you? If he did do this? You know what he's capable of. What he'll do to you."

"I never thought he would take things this far."

His voice cracked mid-thought, and suddenly Jerome was sinking, curling in on himself in anguish as he was brought to his knees. Sobs wracked his body, the only comfort coming when

Elise knelt down beside him on the floor, encasing him in her arms. He could feel his body shaking, stuck in between that strange place between complete hysteria and existential awareness. His sister was dead. She was killed; murdered by her own family. He was her older brother — he should have been in charge, been there to protect her. Instead, Johanna was left fighting for what was right all on her own. His heart clenched painfully at the realization that it could have been him that was dead right now. It should have been him.

The thought only made him cry harder.

Elise felt her heart break a little more for Jerome as she tried her best to soothe him, whispering soft hushes into his ear and telling him it would be okay — even though in reality, they both knew nothing would be okay. But that didn't matter. She had to hold it together, for his sake. He'd already given up so much, by renouncing his father, his family ties, running away from a terrible situation and trying to create a new life with her. She knew what she'd been getting into when she met him, but what could she do about it? It had practically been love at first sight. And it hadn't mattered who his family was or that his father specifically happened to be the authoritarian governor of the sovereign of Utopia — that their genetic line had been in charge since the catastrophic Temporal Event in the mid- 2300's and the ban on dimensional travel had been put into effect. They were just kids, hopelessly in love and not caring who saw. And if people looked down on that — because he was a direct Kent descendant and things were tense between the Supers and Non-Supers, then that was their problem. It was easier this way, in many ways.

But she also knew that the guilt of leaving had to be eating away at him right now.

"Jer," she begged with him quietly after several long minutes. "This is not your fault, you know that? Whatever she did... well, it wasn't deserved, but it certainly doesn't mean it was unprovoked. Who's to say the outcome would have been any different had you been there?"

"He — he would have tried to kill me instead," he spoke softly on a snuffle, wiping a hand across his face to try and sober himself up. The tears still came, but the panic was slowly ebbing away.

"I know, but how would that have helped any? Then you and your sister would probably end up dead, and nothing would have been prevented."

Jerome knew she was right — as usual. He would have told her so, but a sentence on the news suddenly grabbed his attention from the display set and he focused back in on it again.

"It has now been confirmed that these pictures were taken four days ago —"

He jolted to his feet. "Four days?!"

"—And it makes you wonder, really, what were they thinking? They're hiding a murderer, just to protect one of their own? I bet they all knew about it all along, and it's a scandal that it's come out into the media at all. The Kent family literally just tried to get away with murder."

"Oh how the mighty have fallen. Makes you wonder what else they're hiding."

"We don't even know which one of them did it yet — my money would be on the one and only Jerome Kent, Sr, himself. Although I wouldn't put it past the twin."

"Then there's the older son. Jerome Jr? He's been out of the picture for nearly a year now, but who's to say even what happened to him. He took off about as soon as the conflicts began. Or maybe he's just been "missing" in action all this time, too."

"What about the oldest girl? She's been off her rocker ever since she was a toddler, and has that unhinged feel to her — but she'd probably not be strong enough for this sort of physical

abuse."

"Did you see that bruising on her skin? Ugh. Terrible."

Jerome felt his blood run cold as a realization struck him like a bullet. "Oh, God."

Elise frowned at him confusedly, standing up herself and brushing some imaginary dirt from her pants. "What is it?"

He turned haunted brown eyes up to meet hers. "This is it, isn't it? This is how it's going to begin."

Elise paled as she realized what he was implying and tucked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear nervously. "You don't think they'd actually use something like this to get the war started, do you?"

"Wars have been fought and lost for less. And there's a lot of reasons why the people are rebelling — this is just the pot stirrer they needed to gain the last of their support."

"We've been in a state of cold war for years, Jerome."

He wished he could believe her, but the moment the thought struck his brain, it stayed with him. The Revolutionaries were going to use this to their advantage. He didn't see how they couldn't. The only other problem with that was Jerome didn't want to be dragged into the middle of it.

The more he thought about it though, the more sure he became of himself. This was going to be the motivation they needed to start an all-out civil war. So far, it had all been about counterculture and rebellion, drawing the public's attention to the fact that the Kents were no longer ruling in their favor, and hadn't been for some time now. People had begun to take sides.

There were the Sympathizers who were still believers in the ideals of Utopia and that the Supers were on the right side of the law, even if they were a bit misguided at the current time. Then there were the Revolutionaries, who touted the ideals of Utopia and claimed that the Supers were no longer honoring their commitment to society. It was the responsibility of the Supers — an essential part of their social contract — to maintain Utopia and its standards. And if they no longer could hold up their end of the bargain, then it was about time that their power be taken from them.

Then, of course, came the Extremists. Who believed that Supers should be completely ousted, overturned, imprisoned, and in some of the more drastic cases, executed. At first, the concept had gotten them no supporters, but as time went on and things quickly began to roll downhill, the tide shifted. The Extremists were gaining more and more support. As were the Revolutionaries.

Jerome sighed. How he'd wished to have been born as a normal, non-Super. Especially throughout his teenage years, as the conflict had begun to grow worse and he was expected to do more and more. He'd put up with it for nearly ten years before finally snapping and running off like this. He'd been on the run like this for almost a year now, with Elise for most of that time. His family had never even met her — excepting Johanna, who had met with them twice just to check in.

A thought idly came and went, one he'd been considering more and more often lately. But this time, with the world on the brink of an all-out civil war, Jerome actually gave it more than a couple seconds of thought. He finally turned and took his girlfriend's hands in his own nervously. "Elise. I love you. You know that, right?"

"Of course I do. And I love you too. But we have more pressing matters right now —"

"No time like the present."

"Jerome," she sighed. "I get it, you love me. Now go find Lanie. This is more important."

"Elise," his tone grew sharper, and with a patronizing eye-roll, he finally got her attention. "Things are about to get really messy around here. And not just here, everywhere. I don't know if we'll have to do anything with this upcoming war or not — I'd

rather not — but in any case, I want to have someone to come home to. Someone I love, and cherish, and that I could protect at all times, keep you safe.”

Her brow furrowed in confusion. “Jerome, I’m lost.”

“Marry me.”

His reply stood alone in the echo of the screen chatter behind them. Elise felt her heart stop then start again. “What?”

“I can’t lose you like I just lost Johanna,” he explained. “I would die without you. You’re the only person who keeps me sane in this life. And I love you. God, do I love you! And I’ll have a reason, if I ever do need to leave, to come back home to you. My wife. A lot of the world is going to start changing, but you and I, we’re the one thing I want to stay the same. So, Elise Janelle Westbrooke, will you please, *please* marry me?”

Elise started crying again, though for an entirely different reason than before. She nodded, barely able to bite back her grin. “Yes. Yes, I will marry you, Jerome.”

Jerome managed a grin and kissed her soundly in return. “Thank goodness. I was really worried that would backfire on me.”

She laughed, a light sound that filled him with delight. He was glad he could still make her laugh, even on the worst of days.

“Let’s go now. Before any more of the chaos breaks out.”

He grinned at her. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. I want you to be my husband already.” She caught a glimpse of the display monitor once again and sobered up.

“Unless you want to wait — maybe until after a funeral or something so you can recover.”

He shook his head. “I’m not going to be wasting any more of my time without you. If anything, this just goes to prove that.”

Elise nodded, lowering her head and ignoring the words on the screen for now. Soon enough, they’d have to face the music. But for now... she managed another grin.

“Okay. Let’s go get married.”

THE END