

The Great War by Taylor Swift and How Every Line Relates to Xaden and Violet in Rebecca Yarros' The Emphyrean Series

Disclaimer: I read these three books back to back, so some of the plot blends together and I forget where the plot of one book ends and the next begins but it shouldn't really affect the analysis!

If you want my full playlist for these books: [Emphyrean Series Playlist](#), the songs move mostly in chronological order since I added playlists as I read the series!

My knuckles were bruised like violets

They both fight a lot, specifically on the sparring mats, so their knuckles are always bruised. Could also be interpreted as "like Violet's" from Xaden's point of view, as Violet notoriously is always bruised somewhere

Sucker punching walls

To sucker punch is to punch without warning or being provoked. Basically meaning the speaker is admitting they overreacted to a given scenario. Xaden is known for doing anything to keep Violet safe and typically it is an extreme that could be an overreaction to the given situation.

Cursed you as I sleep talked

This can best be applied to the manifestation of Violet's second signent, dream walking. Violet can watch other people's dreams, and more specifically she learns she can make herself a part of them. During Onyx Storm she does just this in Xaden's dream with The Sage. The "you" in this line isn't Xaden it would be The Sage or more generally the war against the venom in general. The only dreams she's gone into have been nightmares about the people she loves losing against venom, which causes her pain and fear, which feeds her need to fight in the war.

Spineless in my tomb of silence. Tore your banners down, took the battle underground

Throughout Iron Flame, Violet sees herself as weak or inferior compared to Xaden and other's. When Xaden keeps secrets from her she doesn't confront them head on since she's scared of what they could be and what that would mean. So rather she succumbs to her feeling of inferiority and stays silent, even when Xaden begs her to ask the hard questions. Going back to the end of Fourth wing and the beginning of Iron flame, the couple is going through a lot of trust issues. Violet struggles with taking Xaden back when he spent the last year keeping some of the biggest secrets from Violet. Violet reacts in anger "tearing his banners down" and fighting only when no ones around, in secret. You could also interpret this literally, in the scenes in Iron Flame when they really did battle underground. The Interrogation Chamber fight that started the revolution. Then the fights that occurred with the wardstone chambers.

And maybe it was egos swinging

It was. These two are both on high horses thinking there is only one way to build trust. Violet's ego refuses to be left out while Xaden's ego refuses to let her in.

Maybe it was her

If you interpret this from Violet's point of view "her" would be Cat. Cat heightens (both magically and not) Violet's feeling of weakness and sense of inferiority when it comes to Xaden during Iron Flame, which sets off a lot of tension between the rider and flier but also between Violet and Xaden as she deals with Xaden's past lover and how to remember she's just that, a past lover. On the other hand, if you interpret this from Xaden's point of view "her" would be Violet. Xaden realizes he's not keeping Violet out because of his ego but rather because all he wants is to keep Violet safe, essentially making Violet herself the "weapon" in all his arguments.

Flashes of the battle come back to me in a blur

They both literally have dreams, and flashbacks of the battle in Ressen that deeply affected them as people and them as a couple. They both also will get triggered by certain actions or words on the battlefield that elicit memories of past traumatic battle experiences.

Each chorus will be loosely in relation to each book in order (chorus 1: fourth wing, chorus 2: iron flame, chorus 3: onyx storm)

All that bloodshed, crimson clover

Bloodshed is obvious, the amount of loss and violence these two experience throughout their relationship and life is insane. However, the contrast with "crimson cover", which symbolizes love, promise, and commitment, paints a picture that though the two experience so much violence and go into battle they come out stronger through the commitment they have to each other and the people they protect.

Sweet dream was over

Violet had lived protected in Basgiath unknowing of what was going on outside the wards. After fighting in the battle against Venin in Ressen her "sweet dream" of thinking the enemy was gryphons was over and the real war was about to begin.

My hand was the one you reached for all throughout the Great War

Violet is constantly the person that Xaden clings to when he fights. Though at this point he has yet to admit his true feelings for Violet he is in love with her and fights with Violet as the main priority. He sits with her for 3 days after she was poisoned, another example of continuously reaching for her in all ways possible.

Always remember

This line is detached from the previous and the following, it's a plea. In this case it's a plea from Violet to herself. In Fourth Wing and the beginning of Iron Flame her plea to herself is to remember what they're fighting for. To remember who/what she lost on the Ressen battlefield and fight for Liam.

Tears on the letter

During Iron Flame, while Xaden is stationed in Samara, he sends many letters to Violet in hopes to regain her trust. He gives her background about his family, stories of his childhood. Though she never cries, they do elicit a lot of emotions from her. Can also be used to describe when Violet finds Liams unsent letters to his sister, Sloane, while she didn't cry over the letters she did cry over Liam and held him in his last moments. The letters being the last thing she has of him.

I vowed not to cry anymore

Violet creates a mental box where, whenever she's in pain, whether emotional or physical, she puts the feeling in the box "for later" so she doesn't cry.

If we survived the Great War

By the end of Fourth Wing Violet's motto of "I will not die today" starts to feel impossible as she realizes what she's really up against. "If we survive" becomes a more common thought rather than "When we survive".

You drew up some good faith treaties

A common theme in Violet and Xaden's relationship throughout Iron Flame became trust and faith in one another. This line relates most to Violet's point of view, as Xaden sets the compromise that she's allowed to ask him whatever questions she wants but he may not always be able to give a complete answer. Violet feels this goes against being truthful since Xaden is still lying by omission, while Xaden thinks this is the best solution because if Violet truly loved him she would have faith that what she needs to know is what he tells her.

I drew curtains closed, drank my poison all alone

The more I think about this line the more I hear it through the mind of Xaden. Originally it resonated more so with Violet since she tried so hard to shut Xaden out and deny him those 3 words after he kept so much from her. However, once getting to the end of Iron Flame and into Onyx storm it reflects Xadens intentions when and after turning venom. He literally "drinks his poison all alone" when he allows himself to become the one thing he hates the most in order to keep Violet alive. Then shuts Violet out immediately (for her own protection obviously), from his mind and their bond that allows them to communicate mentally. The end of Onyx Storm shows Xaden completely breaking and turning full venom, then leaves Violet alone, and married and in

charge of an entire kingdom. Once again “drinking his poison all alone” and shutting violet completely out.

You said I have to trust more freely

Back to Violet on this line, once again the majority of Iron Flame for this pair is them trying to figure out how to trust one another. Xaden continuously begs and begs Violet to trust him more even when he keeps secrets, and Violet refuses. She doesn't believe that they should keep secrets and that's why she can never truly trust Xaden.

But diesel is desire, you were playing with fire

While Violet was trying to figure out how she could trust Xaden, he refused to allow them to sleep together. They had switched roles in that Xaden now refuses to separate sex and feelings while Violet had so much desire she needed Xaden. The line of the song is saying that the desire is so strong but the other person was playing with fire, basically knowing they're risking going up in flames but taking the risk anyway. This is how Xaden and Violet are with each other the whole first act. You could even take it a little more literally and realize that when Violet's emotions are heightened she wields lightning and so therefore Xaden is literally playing with fire.

And maybe it's the past that's talking, screaming from the crypt, Telling me to punish you for things you never did. So I justified it.

If you group this line with the previous in the verse and relate it to the same trust issues these two have with each other throughout Iron Flame, this line would best be seen as their past in regards to their parents. A past that tainted their relationship from the start. Each of them holding grudges towards the other for what their parents did, which fuels so much of the anger they have towards each other. During Iron Flame Violet discovers what her mom did to Xaden and the promise he made with her, to keep Violet alive in the quadrant in exchange for the lives of the rebel's children.

All that bloodshed, crimson clover

Taking a different observation on this than the previous chorus. That the crimson in “crimson clover” is simply blood, meaning a clover with blood. A clover signifies luck and hope, in this imagery we imagine a clover covered in blood. This specific metaphor can be used at the end of Iron Flame, they go into the last battle in Basgiath with a lot of hope of defeating the venom, and were lucky enough to get the wards back up before it was too late. Until we find out that over all the hope and luck, Xaden had turned venom, and given the ultimate sacrifice. The blood on the clover is the loss of Xaden's soul for the hope to continue the fight.

The bombs were closer

The threat of venom being the bombs in this line as they continue to get closer and Violet struggles to get the wards up in order to protect Artia. The end of Iron Flame the venom invade

Basgiath after Jack Barlowe takes down the wards, bringing the “bombs” closer than ever. The riders fight to take down wyvern and venom. While Violet and her Squad are fighting to get imbued and fire the wardstone, losing her mom in the process, Xaden was fighting The Sage on the front lines, leading him to turn venom, meaning the metaphorical bombs that have been a strain in their relationship are even closer.

My hand was the one you reached for, all throughout the Great War

During Iron Flame the couple battles with Xaden’s new normal. Trying to figure out how to keep him, him. The only person that can stand between Xaden and his control is Violet, in both keeping control and losing it. Throughout all of their battles where Xaden threatens to lose himself it’s Violet who reaches for him and who he reaches for in order to find and keep his control.

Always remember

Another plea of remembrance, this time towards Xaden. Violet begs Xaden to remember to keep control, remember what they’re fighting for, and that if he loses himself he loses the Great War of themselves in the process.

The burning embers

The burning embers are a result of the “bombs getting closer”, the destruction of the venom is everywhere, not just in the cities but within their relationship. Also could be taken literally as Violet wields lightning and has the strongest power in centuries, making her the key to taking down the venom and winning the war.

I vowed not to fight anymore

By the end of Iron Flame Xaden and Violet reach a place where they’re done fighting. They both realize keeping secrets from one another is no longer beneficial and promise each other to be more open, no more question games, just honesty.

It turned into something bigger

The bridge of this song is the epitome of every single ending of these books, both Violet and the readers realizing this war is just getting bigger and bigger. Since the bridge of a song is typically the most intense and emotion filled and also what rounds out the end of the song it makes sense that this bridge perfectly encapsulates the feeling of reading those last few pages of the books. At the end of every book in this series we are left with finding out something insane making the conflict of the story even bigger. In Fourth Wing we get insight into the revolution, Brennan’s alive, and that venom are real. At the end of Iron Flame we see Xaden turn venom. Onyx Storm leaves us with questions of those lost 12 hours, Xaden giving up the control he worked so hard to keep, and then marries violet just to leave her. The struggles these two face in their relationship constantly get bigger and bigger.

Somewhere in the haze, got a sense I'd been betrayed

Using the same plot points from above, every time something is revealed it leaves both Violet and the reader constantly feeling more and more betrayed by what happens and how it's "resolved". When Violet finds out about Xaden aiding the gryphon fliers, supplying them with weapons and helping them. Then to find out that there's a greater war against the venom that Xaden and everyone else in the kingdom has been keeping from her. Ending with her discovering that her brother is alive and didn't die 6 years ago. All she feels is betrayed. All the people she trusted and loved had betrayed her and kept so much from her. The theme of betrayal continues into Iron Flame and once she starts to feel confident in her and Xaden's relationship, he does the ultimate betrayal to both Violet and his revolution, he turns venom. While my delusional girl, Violet, is able to sweep the sense of betrayal under the rug because of her overwhelming love for Xaden, it doesn't stay gone. There are moments throughout Onyx Storm where Violet feels hints of betrayal there's nothing as big as the end. When Violet is constantly trying to reach for Xaden throughout the battles and he's iced her out, she's understanding. When she realizes that he fed from the Earth's power in order to save his dragon, his friends, his kingdom, and his girl, she felt betrayed but also had a hint of understanding. It's not until the very end, when she reads the note that he left, telling her not to look for him, "it's yours", that the full feeling of betrayal washes over her. With no memory of what happened there's no other feeling besides confused betrayal. This and the previous line are quite possibly the most impactful lines in this song and how much it relates to not just Xaden and Violet but the emotions of everyone, including the readers, while going through the events of these books.

Your finger on my hairpin triggers

Hairpin triggers are a highly sensitive trigger that can make something go off with even the slightest touch. Saying that the other person in the relationship knows what triggers the narrator. I'm sticking with Violet's pov for the rest of the bridge because it's what makes the most sense to me. Basically saying that Xaden is constantly on the edge constantly on the verge of triggering violet. I see this most in Onyx Storm as Xaden is constantly teetering on using too much power, especially when it comes to protecting Violet. While Violet begs him not to. It's symbolic that the only thing that makes Xaden threaten to lose that control is Violet (until the end) while Violet is also the only person that seems to bring Xaden back into control, in a way she has control over if the trigger gets pulled.

Soldier down on that icy ground, looked up at me with honor and truth, broken and blue, so I called off the troops

I'm taking this two ways because well, I can. First way (and arguably the most important way, though it doesn't have an impact on their relationship, it still needs to be here) Liam... When Violet holds Liam as he dies she thanks him for being her friend he responds with "it was

my honor”, while he’s looking up at her, broken, and blue. (I can’t go into anymore detail without getting emotional so I’m leaving it there.)

Now to relate it to Xaden and Violet’s relationship. Walk with me here okay. Iron Flame ends with the huge battle at Basgiath, there’s a storm, it’s cold, icy maybe. Violet finds Xaden once the battle is over, he’s alive but something’s off, he feels distant. Finally he turns to Violet and she sees the red rimmed eyes staring back at her. Xaden looks at her in the most broken way, because he just gave up his soul in honor of protecting Violet and the rest of the riders. So while maybe he turned into the thing he hates, he did with honor.

That was the night I nearly lost you, I really thought I'd lost you.

The night that Xaden turned Violet had thought he was dead. Unable to reach him through their bond, she assumed the worst. She saw him fighting the sage but never saw the outcome and without their mental connection she panicked thinking she had lost him.

We can plant a memory garden. Say a solemn prayer, place a poppy in my hair

We’re flashing forward to Onyx Storm. They’re planting a memory garden for their relationship and Xaden’s soul that he sacrificed to Violet. Also could be symbolism of Violet having her memories erased. Poppies often represent remembrance and death especially for fallen soldiers. Once again a metaphor of how Violet is now mourning the loss of Xaden, though he’s not dead, he’s gone, she may have his soul but she doesn’t have him.

There's no morning glory, it was war, it wasn't fair

(For the rest of the song we’re interpreting for Xaden’s POV) Xaden has always been a realist in their relationship. He knew there was no cure, he knew there would come a time where he would lose his control and end up channeling from the earth. Though Violet was certain she would never lose him, he always knew. In this line he’s saying there’s no more waking up and seeing the better side of things, there’s no more what ifs, it’s war, and he did what he felt he needed to do and though it may not feel fair to Violet, that’s just how things go in war.

And we will never go back to that

While in the song this may be more of a positive promise of not going back to the place they were at with the fighting, and secrets, but in this case it’s more so seen as a declaration of leaving, Xaden’s note, that him turning full venom changes everything, and they’re never going to be able to get back to a normal place or have the relationship Violet craves.

Bloodshed, crimson clover. The worst was over.

In Xaden’s eyes the worst thing to him was giving up his control to become the one thing he despises most, and he did just that, and then turned around and left the one person in his life that he would risk everything for. The pain of leaving everything he loved behind, the worst, is over.

My hand was the one you reached for. All throughout the Great War.

Xaden recounts during his chapter how he can feel Violet constantly reaching for him down their bond trying to see if he's there, if he's okay. He is who Violet reaches for time and time again throughout that final battle against Theophanie.

Always remember

A plea from Xaden, to both himself and Violet. To himself he reminds himself of Violet;s love. He notes during his chapter that he faintly hears Violet's final "I love you" as he channels from the ground, he says he lets it slip past the shield before completely locking her out. He allows himself to keep that one final message to remember her by. He doesn't return the phrase in that moment, and while we don't know any specific details of what occurs during those missing 12 hours, we can assume that Xaden wants Violet to remember him and his soul before turning.

We're burned for better

Well yes! Xaden being the little pessimist that he is when it comes to himself as a dark wielder, he thinks that this final outcome is what's best for him and Violet

I vowed I would always be yours

He. Gave. Her. His. Soul. and they got married in the temple of Dunne, vowing that him and his soul will ALWAYS be Violet's.

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'Cause we survived the Great War

*And at what cost????????????????? Technically they did survive the great war **as of now** since the wards are up at full strength thanks to the irids, but like how do they survive the rest...*