A Time for Heroes

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/10732206.

Rating: Mature
Archive Warning: Major Character Death
Category: F/M
Fandom: Game of Thrones (TV), A Song of Ice and Fire - George R. R. Martin A Song of Ice and Fire & Related Fandoms
Relationship: Jon Snow/Daenerys Targaryen, Rhaegar Targaryen/Lyanna Stark (Past Discussions)
Additional Tags: R Plus L Equals J, Canon-Typical Violence, Book and Show Canon, Incest, season 7, Season 8, More relationships tags will be added
Stats: Published: 2017-04-26 Updated: 2018-05-30 Chapters: 17/? Words: 138834

A Time for Heroes

by ScandalInTheVale

Summary

A continuation and an ending for a Game of Thrones. Daenerys is trying her best to launch a successful invasion from Dragonstone. Jon Snow is the King in the North, while Arya and Sansa must learn to become leaders in their own right. Cersei has a precarious hold on the Iron Throne with little support. Euron has his own ambitions. Bran must learn to master the past and the future in order to save the present. The Night’s King watches over Westeros intently, his time will soon arrive...
Prologue

It was only mid noon but the sun's dwindling light was failing slowly against the blackness, soon that blackness would also invite the coldness of the night. Ivar has been waiting patiently next to a stream with clear running water, for their main meal of the day. He knew the creatures of the forest would arrive to drink their fill before the evening descended upon the land.

It was a relieve to think about things that he did know. It was so much easier to take reassurances from the simple cycles of life, nature - and living. Ivar knew that there’s been too many uncertainties of late.

It all started with Mance Rayder’s mission to attack the Wall.

Ivar and his spearwife Freja were glad to escape the armoured onslaught of the southern King and his horse troops. They got away just in time, many of the Freefolk were slaughtered on that day, too many. He and Freja ran deeper and further into the Haunted Forest, while many others of the last remaining Freefolk escaped to Hardhome.

Ivar’s Grand old Nanna had the sight, and she always said that Hardhome was cursed, with the half dead who suffered there. As a child, Ivar recalled what she had told him; demons and dead things dwelled ‘round the caves and mountains, they are always lookin for living flesh with warm blood.

She told him that the demons would steal your eyes, and replace them with light, glowing blue orbs, Ivar shivered almost unconsciously at the mere thought.

His Freja had just given birth at time he wasn’t going to take any chances. Besides, he knew there was a good cave near Craster’s with some hot springs.

Despite the big loss against the Southern King, those first few moons were some of their best days. He and Freja had many days alone, together in their little paradise, they lay with each other next to the hot springs and sometimes under the stars, they hunted for rabbits and fish, they brushed the snags from each other’s hair, they cooked and ate their meals in easy-silence, they worked the hides from the meals they have caught - together. Nothing was ever wasted, neither time, nor a fresh kill.

He often watched Freja feeding their son, she often sat naked next to the steam that escaped from the hot spring. He could sometimes hear Freja sing as the sun came up while she sharpened her blade. It was easy to forget that there was once a great battle, in the shade of the Wall. How easily the moons and days passed them by.

Those spring days could never last.

Winter was always creeping upon them, like a scout that does not want to be seen. They got a stark reminder of winter’s reach when Sigurd the Thenn arrived at the mouth of their cave, merely three moons back.
Two rabbits were now drinking at the stream, they took turns to watch out for any predators, Ivar quietly took aim. As the arrow pierced the heart of the rabbit closest to him, he could hear the birds flapping their wings and screeching with relief as they were not the ones who will end up on a cooking fire this night.

Ivar was glad to collect his prize, he would still like to reach the cave before the darkness has time to find a foothold for the night. Ivar slung the rabbit over his back, there were also some roots that he had dug out of the ground during the day. The roots could be a bit tart at times, but you could keep them around for a long time, they did not spoil easily.

Ivar recalled that he had seen some snowbear tracks close to their cave, after he had left this morning, he and Freja would have to move their drying meat deeper into the walls of their cave. *The predators grows bolder and their hunting draws closer.*

Ivar and Freja have started collecting acorns and roots since the arrival of Sigurd. According to Sigurd most of the Freefolk were slaughtered and turned into the living-dead at Hardhome.

He and Freja were thinking about going to the Wall, according to Sigurd the latest crow commander and Tormund Giantsbane tried to rescue the Freefolk at Hardhome. Ivar found that very hard to believe, but mayhaps they could go to the Wall, soon it might be the only choice left for them.

During these past two moons most of the streams around them have frozen, fish was becoming more difficult to catch. The rabbits were burrowing themselves deeper into the underground. Elk and stags were disappearing, at night they could hear the pleading of the direwolves. Sometimes they could see the shining eyes of shadowcats, moving closer and closer to their fires over time.

Ivar understood nature and wild things, it was harder to look upon the suffering of Freja and their son.

As the cold winds blew stronger from the north, he could feel Freja’s hipbones and elbow bones sticking into him as he lay next to her at night, his son’s face have become more boney, it was hard lines for a babe that still suckelled on his mother's milk. Even the simplest task such as lighting a fire becomes more of a chore as the cold wrapped itself around your body like a musty old cloak.

The days are shorter now than Ivan could ever remember them being, each night more snow piles up in front of their cave.

Sigurd the Thenn was apprehensive about the Wall. According to him the Thenns fought bravely at Hardhome, their new leader did not trust this deal with the latest King Crow, but he also died at Hardhome. Has there ever been any rewards in following a dead man’s advices?

*The Freefolk does not kneel.*

Mance did not kneel, and he died, those who went to Hardhome did not kneel and they became a carrion army for the White Walkers. From the time Ivar understood his first word, he quickly understood that the Freefolk stood tall. The Freefolk did not have fancy weapons of steel, soft and
silky garments or feather beds, they had something better.

They were free men.

Ivar was proud that they could choose their own leader, and stay where they wanted to live.

But; all of the leaders were gone or dead, even fire doesn’t warm as much as it used to. He and Freja could do whatever they want, but what if you just wanted some warm broth to fill your belly?

What if all you wanted was a place to sleep, where a wolf or a shadowcat wouldn’t steal your babe in the middle of the night? What if you just wanted to see some hills without any snow? What if you just wanted some good lands, where you could plant some seeds? And what if; you could eat something that grew from those seeds?

Ivar realised in that moment that he wanted many things, but everything he wanted meant nothing to freedom, it almost seemed a bit unfair. What is freedom, against the haunted look in Freja’s eyes? It seems then that freedom is a hard price to pay, harder then the ice that has been frozen for thousands of years atop of the highest peaks of the Frost Fangs.

Ivar’s thoughts had carried him into a large open clearing, the darkness was still fighting with the last mild rays of orange light. He knew he wasn’t far from their cave.

He suddenly realized that he was surrounded by a piercing silence, he couldn’t even hear the rustling of the wind through the last drying leaves. It has been deadly quiet for a while now, he was just too lost within his own thoughts to realize it. There was a quiet serenity in the air, the last beams of light gently caressed the bright snowflakes, making the leaves, rocks and trees come alive with a glistening sparkle. For a few wild heartbeats, everything was beautiful, perfect and peaceful. Light, fluffy snowflakes gently landed upon Ivar’s face. He could feel the hair in his neck raising as the snowflakes melted against cheeks, like long forgotten tears.

He was being watched. His heart started beating more erratically and his hearing became sharper. Ivar could hear his own uneven breaths sounding uncomfortably loud. He did not want to look around, his only course of action was to retreat, slowly, to the edge of the clearing whence he came from. No sudden movements. Somewhere deeper in the forest he could hear the crackling of ice.

A sudden, unbearingly cold wind, crashed against his warm irregular beating heart, a darkness fell upon the once peaceful forest, the snow and wind whipped and thrashed against him. Trees and branches bended like twigs underneath the will of the storm. The cold enveloped and invaded his whole being. I should run; but he was frozen like an ancient root planted deep into the ground. He could feel warm tears escaping from the corner of his eyes, freezing on his cheeks and eyelashes, yet he could not look away.

Finally he saw some movement, or was it? Perhaps it was just the snow, a comforting thought; but it was false hope.

The White Walkers appeared silently through the haze and mist of a storm, he saw their their crystal clear, blue eyes first, shining unnaturally, brightly and lifelessly in the darkness. A handful
of them appeared, they kept a slow torturing pace of leisurement with a gliding gait, they moved casually and carelessly through the clearing on top of the snow.

A handful became many, and more, there could be as many as the whole Hornfoot tribe from what Ivar could see.

Ivar felt an utter desperation for his own devastation in that moment. He felt as if his warm heartbeat might be a beacon to them, a fire beacon in the night sky. Ivar could feel the warm blood rushing through his veins.

The contrast between the heat and the cold became painful, and his warm blood burned his insides.

As one they turned in unison and looked at him, they looked through his being with their unforgiving eyes, their eyes were ancient and all knowing. Ivar knew that his end was near.

The moment kept on slowing down, they encircled him, in a lazy fashion. The crackling became louder, Ivar’s mind has never felt so clear and so lost at the same time.

He could hear and feel the heat from the rushing of his blood running through his head, his irregular breathing appeared as steam in front of his own eyes. Just three more steps, and the White Walker would be within touching distance.

One White Walker lifted a great sword that was surely made of the thinnest ice, it was smooth, translucent and deadly. Some of the windswept trees reflected darkly as moving shades, upon the gleaming blade. The edge had a fine blue glint as clear as their eyes, it was the sharpest blade Ivar had ever seen, and it was swinging towards him in one confident strike.

There was nothing left for him; to do or say.

Ivar saw his son’s boney face in front of him, he could see Freja’s sparkling eyes in front of his own, a sad smile touched her lips. Oh Freja, please run to the Wall...
“The King in the North!” “The King in the North!” ‘The King in the North!’

The chanting of the Northmen was still echoing through Davos’ mind, he even heard himself through the choir of excited voices.

Davos never thought the day would arrive when he would be serving another King. He served Stannis as faithfully as possible for almost twenty years. Mayhaps, serving was just in his blood.

The day he lost his finger bones he became a servant of the realm, without even realizing it at the time.

This was now his part to play, he did not need to be a worshipper of the Lord of Light and he did not need any priests or priestesses to understand what his purpose should be. There is only one war that the whole of Westeros should be fighting right now.

He has learned that it is sometimes dangerous to serve absolutely, a loyal servant also requires an equally reliable leader.

Davos were so certain that Stannis was that man at some point in time, he would have followed Stannis to the heart of Asshai and beyond. But Stannis became corrupted by Melisandre and her prophesies. It was difficult for him to envision how one women could cause so much trials and heartbreak.

Thinking about Stannis made his heart ache, it felt as if his chest was being crushed by a war hammer. He could slowly feel moisture building-up around his eyes.

It was impossible to think about Stannis; without the vision of Shireen appearing before his eyes, her patient yet determined face as she was teaching him to read.

He could see Shireen’s eyes flickering excitedly as he gave her the wooden toy stag.
He felt like screaming, he wanted to hack Melisandre’s head off her shoulders with a blunt sword, or he wanted to see her burn in one of her own fires. ‘Sigh’

Rage did not suit him well, it wasn’t an emotion he could cloak himself into for long. He truly wanted to see Melisandre die, and the gods knew, she deserved to die. More than most.

*But Stannis was the King.*

He could never even begin to understand where things could have gotten so twisted, that Stannis would burn his only daughter at the stake, the daughter that he loved.

Somewhere inside of him he knew that Stannis was sending him away.

But he trusted Stannis to make the right decision when the time came. If anything Stannis was always a very just man. He always thought that Stannis would draw the line at hurting Shireen. But he miscalculated the situation, he placed his trust in a desperate King.

*What makes a good King?*

Davos couldn’t help but wonder, after he had just witnessed the making of a new King.

He thought he knew the answer to that question, but he was at a loss right now. He always thought that Stannis had the potential to be a good King, if he was ever given half a chance.

Stannis was strong and just. He judged people on their true merits, and Stannis was fair, to the letter of the law. He was determined and duty bound. Stannis was a good strategist and he had the will to make the hard and difficult decisions. These were all good attributes for any leader.

*He was also unrelenting and unmovable at times.*

Maester Cressen knew Stannis well, he was perhaps the person who understood him best of all. Davos recalled that Maester Cressen once told him that Stannis always suffered as the middle child. He was always second best, or the second choice, that is a hard feeling to swallow for someone as determined as Stannis. King Robert was always the first, King Robert was everything a Baratheon should be. He was big, strong and jovial, men always wanted to follow Robert.
Renly had all of the Baratheon charm and graces, he could sometimes be mistaken for a younger Robert, but he never lived through the same challenges as his brothers. He did not understand what it meant to fight or die, and that war could be truly devastating, he only understood the pageantry of tournaments.

Stannis, Stannis had has duty, that was always his one true lord and master.

Mayhaps it was all inevitable, mayhap he never stood a chance against Melisandre. Melisandre was the first person who ever told Stannis that he had a true destiny of his own.

She told him that he was the Lord’s chosen one, he was the Lord of Light’s first and only choice. Melisandre told him that he was the only one who could save the realm from impending darkness and doom. She told him everything that he has always craved to be.

He suddenly felt a rush of pity for Stannis, and his lost potential as King of the Seven Kingdoms. Stannis would have scorned my pity. Whatever Stannis was in the end, or wasn’t, or whatever he could have been, he was gone. Davos had a new King to follow now.

Davos did not really take much notice of Jon Snow initially. He knew Stannis immediately saw something in him, but he also thought it was mainly because Jon Snow was a forgotten last son of Eddard Stark.

Until Jon Snow disobeyed Stannis’ orders, and he killed Mance Rayder with an arrow of mercy.

It was an inconvenience for Stannis when Jon Snow rejected his offer of becoming a legitimate Stark and the new Lord of Winterfell. But Davos also knew that Stannis respected him more for his rejection of Winterfell, and the fact that he kept to his oath. Davos could see that he was a honourable man or perhaps he was more of a boy at that stage, it was a rare and unexpected quality amongst rapist and thieves.

But the action that really caught his attention, was Jon Snow’s expedition to Hardhome. Jon Snow completely broke with the tradition and the conventions of the Nights Watch in order to save the Nights Watch and the Wildlings. And he was killed for it.

Davos couldn’t just stand by to watch a good man die. Later on he also realized that Jon Snow was perhaps the only person left, after Stannis, who were making any plans to fight against the White Walkers. That was when he realized that he had to do something more. He only approached Melisandre as a last resort. That is one deed from Melisandre that he would never regret, for all of her burning and sacrifices she finally produced a true miracle.
He understood why Jon Snow was reluctant to execute Melisandre, she did give him his life back.

Jon Snow was not quite the same as before the mutiny at Castle Black. Davos noticed that Jon Snow was struggling. He lost most of his drive and determination after he was brought back from the dead. He looked conflicted and lost, during most of their campaigning through the North. It seemed like most of his self believe had disappeared, Davos could see that he was reliving and reviving what he saw as his failures over and over again.

Davos turned a blind eye when he saw Jon Snow looking terrified at times, especially when he was asking other people to believe in him.

It is difficult to ask others to believe in you when you don't believe in yourself.

Davos felt a bit guilty for ignoring Jon Snow’s obvious distressed, but he had also hoped that his drive and confidence would return with time.

The problem was that they simply did not have the time for feelings or emotions, when the threat of Ramsay Bolton was hanging over their heads.

When Davos saw Jon Snow charging headlong into the Bolton lines, he was certain that Jon Snow was deliberately trying to kill himself.

Or perhaps Jon Snow was issuing a challenge against the gods, “let's see if you are still willing to keep me alive!”

For one fluttering heartbeat Davos thought they were all doomed in that moment. But Davos saw something in the eyes of the soldiers, a measure of awe and respect. Jon Snow might have been a dumb bastard in that moment, especially for abandoning all of his own well laid out plans. But as a man he also tried his best to save his little brother. That is something that the Northmen and even the Wildlings could relate and respond to.

Davos was completely surprised when one after the other, the Northern Lords and even the Lords of the Vale started to cheer, and embraced Jon Snow as the King in the North.

For the rest of the night Davos tried his best to study Jon Snow closely, he wanted to know what Jon Snow thought about his new position. After the general disposition he had displayed since coming back from the dead, Davos was a bit concerned. He knew that Jon Snow needed to appear confident and strong right now, he can't show any weakness.
Davos waited patiently until the last of the drunken soldiers tumbled out of the great hall, he wanted to talk with Jon Snow.

He needed to convince him that he could really use his position as the King in the North. He was worried that Jon Snow might reject the position and his new title, just as he had done before, when Stannis offered to make him the Lord of Winterfell.

Jon Snow simply remained seated at the head of the high table, until everyone had left, Davos slowly walked about the room to make sure that they were finally alone.

Jon Snow broke the silence, “the King in North,” he repeated slowly, almost as if he was speaking to himself.

“Never, not even in my most distant dreams or thoughts did I ever believe that there would be a day when I would become a King.”

“I shouldn’t be a King, I was never meant to be the King.

My brother was a true King.

All I’ve ever longed for was to be a true Stark.”

He remain silent for a moments.

“No, that is also not entirely truthful. When I was young I wanted to be the Lord of Winterfell. Sometimes I used to play that I was the Lord of Winterfell within the godswood.”

Jon Snow appeared sad and full of turmoil.

Davos brought a chair and his ale over to the high table, he sat right in front of Jon Snow.

“Your Grace, all of us, every child, dreams of being in a better place. Every child dreams of being someone else.”

“When I was young I dreamt that I was a great admiral to a big fleet of famous warships. And in the end I became known for smuggling onions, and losing the tips of my fingers.”
Jon Snow give him a small smile with a doleful look in his eyes.

“Ser Davos, you also became known for saving Stannis and all of those people within Storms End from starving to death.”

“I on the other hand always wanted what Robb had, I wanted Winterfell, I wanted more of my father’s attention, I wanted Ice, our family sword; I wanted to be the trueborn son.

I could barely even admit these desires to myself, it was only in the deepest and darkest hour of the night, buried in the furthest corner of my heart, alone...that I could feel some of these desires appear.”

“I would give everything and my second life all over again, if I could just return to Winterfell again as it was before the war and before all of this madness descended on us all.

I at least had the chance to experience Winterfell in the best of times, Rickon never had much of a chance, my father and his mother left him alone in Winterfell when he was only a boy of six.

He’s been a fugitive, avoiding death and capture for half of his life time. He deserved better.”

Davos could only nod and agree, there was not much that one could say to that.

Jon Snow was lost in his thoughts once more.

“I saw you were watching me closely throughout the evening ser Davos?”

“I was trying to understand what you might feel towards this new position, Your Grace,” Davos replied very tentatively.

“You were worried that I might reject becoming the King in the North?”

“Well, yes that was my main concern,” Davos had to admit.

“Let me enjoy my last free moments. My reign can start tomorrow, then you can call me, Your Grace.”

Davos wanted to argue with Jon Snow’s request, but Jon Snow stopped him with one look.
“I realize that I’ve been conflicted and distracted since I came back from the darkness. I do not know if there will ever be a time when I wouldn’t have any doubts. I could not understand why I received a second chance, while so many others are gone forever. It was only during the battle, whilst I was being trampled underneath my own soldiers that I finally realized that it did not matter, I want to be alive.”

“I ve never wanted to be a King, but for some reason the Lords chose me for this position, so I will do what I can, whilst I have the power to do so. As the King in the North I could try to prepare everyone for the Long Night. No one cared, or listened to me as the Lord Commander of the Nights Watch, but mayhaps we have a small chance now.”

Davos was relieved, it might have been the most hopeful sentiment that Jon Snow has ever uttered. There was just that one small matter left, “what about Lady Sansa?”

“Sansa is the trueborn Stark, I would relinquish my title to her at any time if that is her wish, or to Bran if he is still alive. She is my sister and love her, but I am not sure that I can trust her with the defense of the North against the White Walkers. I am not sure that she would do everything within her power to fight against the White Walkers if she was the Queen in the North, and especially not with Baelish dancing around her. I don't blame her, it is difficult to really understand how big the threat of the White Walkers are when no one has seen them.”

“We are in agreement my Lord, Littlefinger cannot be trusted,” Davos added with a swig of his ale.

Davos was swiftly brought back to the here and now, when he heard footsteps outside of his chamber. It must be the changing of the guards. It was far past time for him to sleep, the night was already deep into the hour of the wolf, tomorrow the reign of King Jon will begin.

Davos could see the faces of Matthos and Shireen flickering in front of him like flames, before finally drifting off to sleep.

It was still dark the following day when Davos awoke from his slumber. It was slowly becoming darker every day, as the winter snows kept on piling-up. Despite the chill and the darkness, Davos felt renewed. This day would hold a lot of challenges.
After getting dressed and refreshing himself he stepped out of his room, the castle was already alive and excited with activity. The North was secured once again, and Davos could see servants and guards moving with a sense of hope and purpose.

As Davos slowly made his way to Jon Snow’s parlour he took in the sight of the castle for the first time. After the battle with the Boltons was finally over, Davos went on to search for the great hall. He found the castle hard, grey and unrelenting. Winterfell felt like a great dying grey breast at the time. There was no luxury, refinement or finesse it was simply a defensive structure, with cold grey stone walls. The North was a harsh place where leisure and pleasure wasn’t placed under any consideration, practicality ruled here.

But since the arrival of winter the castle has been transformed, gone was the cold hard stone and muddy walkways. In its place the whole castle shined brightly with pure white snowflakes that cover almost every surface. The walls were alive with steaming hot water. Hot water pools dotted some of the courtyards, it appeared hazy with steam rising above the cold white snow. The rooms within the castle where hot and comforting. Brandon the builder certainly found the perfect place to build a stronghold for the Starks. Winterfell was made for winter.

The smell of bacon and freshly baked bread lingered in the air as Davos finally reached Jon Snow’s parlour.

“Ser Davos,” the King of the North greeted him with a slight nod. “Your Grace,” Davos acknowledged in return.

“Join me for breakfast Ser Davos, it will be a long day, best to start off with a good breakfast.”

Davos was quite hungry after a few too many horns of ale the previous night, so he quickly delved into the fresh bread. They had been on campaign for a while now, it was a simple breakfast, but the food tasted like some of the best meals that Davos had ever enjoyed. They quickly ate their breakfast in silence.

King Jon was always a man of few words.

Davos had fully committed himself to Jon Snow’s cause. Jon Snow is the only man within the Seven Kingdoms who is willing to prepare for an attack from the White Walkers. He was their last and only hope. The whole of Westeros was facing destruction and no one is doing anything about it.
For those reasons alone Davos would follow Jon Snow, even to the ends of Always Winter. However despite his devotion Davos did not really know what type of a king Jon Snow would be. At one time Davos thought Stannis could be a good King with his devotion towards justice, but Stannis’ need to be the saviour of the realm devoured his true sense of justice.

Davos knew absolutely nothing about being a King or an advisor to a King, if he had to be honest with himself, but he would give it his all. He will try to make a good King out of Jon Snow. The one thing he did know about his new King, is that he has a compassionate heart. That was something Davos could work with, throughout his lifetime he has rarely seen a leader with a kind heart.

Maester Wolkan joined them during their breakfast. The man always had a look of fear within his eyes, all of his movements were filled with the tension of an animal that has been preyed upon quite often.

“Your Grace, a raven has arrived from Kings Landing.”

Jon Snow motioned for Maester Wolkan to take a seat at their table. Maester Wolkan appeared very reluctant, it seemed as if he was more likely to run out of the room. But after some hesitation Maester Wolkan gingerly took a seat opposite King Jon and right next to Davos.

Jon Snow pushed his plate away, “what is the news from Kings Landing?” Maester Wolkan handed a small scroll to Jon Snow.

Jon Snow did not show any emotion while reading the letter. He placed the letter in front of him. “It seems like Cersei Lannister has declared herself as the new Queen of the Seven Kingdoms and the protector of the realm.”

Davos almost choked on his bread, he knew that he was gaping openmouthed at what he has just heard.

“Cersei Lannister also instructs whomever may be holding Winterfell to bow down to her and swear fealty to her as the Warden of the North - or be branded as a traitor and an enemy of the realm.”

“Cersei Lannister has no claim to the throne, whatsoever. What happened with her son Tommen?”

“Apparently he died,” Jon answered. “Well, this is a summons we will definitely just ignore, but
we should discuss this information later when more of the Lords and Sansa are present.”

Jon Snow once again turned to Maester Wolkan, who seemed relieved that King Jon did not admonish him for the letter, yet his leg was shivering slightly, Davos could feel it underneath the table.

“Maester Wolkan, you have been a servant of House Bolton for a few years now,” Jon Snow stated as a fact yet looked at him questioningly.

Maester Wolkan affirmed what Jon Snow had stated.

“Maester Wolkan, I’d like to know everything, that has been happening within the North. I would like to know exactly what the Bolton have been doing, how Ramsay and Roose Bolton have been ruling the North.” Jon Snow stated the last part more strongly with only the smallest hint of anger in his voice.

“I want any information that you can supply about the current situation within the North and Winterfell, the Houses of the North, or any information that could affect the North in the future.”

Maester Wolkan started carefully by listing the repairs that was made to Winterfell. He told them about the alliances of other houses to House Bolton. Davos could see that Jon Snow looked furious when Maester Wolkan talked about Sansa, and the alliance between Petyr Baelish and Roose Bolton. But he mostly kept quiet and only asked a few single questions here and there.

Ramsay Bolton was one disgusting and disturbing individual. Maester Wolkan told them how Ramsay tormented the Lords of the North for taxes, Lord Cerwyn’s father was skinned alive, as well as some other of the minor Lords like the Forresters.

Maester Wolkan also informed them how Ramsay burned and sacked Winterfell. Maester Wolkan spoke about Theon Greyjoy.

But the worst was probably the tales of Ramsay Bolton using his dogs to hunt girls within the woods, and Ramsay using his dogs to kill his father's Frey wife and her newborn son.

It was almost midday when Maester Wolkan was finally dismissed. Jon Snow appeared tired after all the tales of death and destruction. This was one of the few times in his life where Davos truly did not have any words. He could only be eternally grateful, that the Boltons were forever gone.

It seemed like Jon Snow was also eager to move onto a different topic, they had more than enough
of the Bolton's for one day.

“I will speak to all of the Lord that are present in private, I have to confirm the information from Maester Wolkan. I’ve been in Nights Watch for a while, I need to understand what has been happening within the North. We need to find out how much fighting men all the Lords have left.”

“I am also worried about Sansa, she will not enjoy the news about Cersei Lannister.” Davos nodded thoughtfully, he did not like the association between Lady Sansa and Petyr Baelish, but for now he would remain quiet, since Jon Snow had mentioned his own doubts about their relationship the night before.

“Let us begin with Lord Glover, Ser Davos would you please call Lord Glover to the solar.”

They only left the solar for dinner that evening within the Great hall.

During the next few days Jon Snow met and spoke with the Lords that were present at Winterfell. Davos listened intently during all of the discussions. Jon Snow asked them about their food stores and fighting men. He also took the time to speak to them about the threat of the White Walkers, and his experiences at Hardhome.

After about a fortnight all of the Lords were once again assembled within the great hall. Only Jon Snow and Lady Sansa were seated at the dais. Davos and Tormund Giantsbane were seated close to the front. There were also a few Mormont soldiers posted behind and next to the dais looking out towards the assembled Lords.

It was almost time for dinner to be served.

Jon Snow stood up, he looked very severe and commanding with his large wolf cloak. All of the chatter died down quickly after he stood in front of the crowd.

“My Lords, the time has come for the North to move forward. We have all experienced hard times, but we have to be prepared for even harder times. Winter isn’t coming anymore, winter is here.” Davos heard a few King in the North chants, through the crowd.

“All of the Bolton, Umber and Karstark men that have survived the battle will be sent to the Wall to take the black.”
“Lord Manderly, can you spare three hundred men to lead these men to Castle Black? They should be able to remain at Castle Black for the time being, but they don't have to take the black.”

“I can, Your Grace,” Lord Manderly answered.

“I ask that all of you spare at least two hundred men each for the Stoney Shore, Bear Island, Sea Dragon Point, Cape Kraken, Deepwood Motte and Torrhen Square. There are rumours that the Ironborn are restless and that they are building a large fleet, we have to guard our shores against another Ironborn invasion.”

All of the Lords seemed to be in full agreement on that point, as they hit and stamped their horns on the table. The snow and winter wouldn't hold back the Ironborn, they were part Northmen themselves.

“In the South Cersei Lannister has declared herself as the Queen of Westeros, the Lannisters have just retaken Riverrun, the North needs to be guarded against the Lannisters.”

“Lord Manderly, I also ask that you send five hundred men to Moat Cailin. I will ask Lord Howland Reed to keep an eye on the South and to protect Moat Cailin as well. That means that you should still have about three thousand men left to protect White Harbour and the Wolf’s Den against any potential Ironborn attack.”

Lord Manderly stood up then, “Your Grace, I will remain at Winterfell with five hundred of my men while my son Wylis will remain in White Harbour and look after the city.”

“As you will Lord Manderly,” Jon Snow answered with a nod.


“Lord Cerwyn, I would ask two hundred men from you to guard Winterfell.”

“House Flint and House Norrey will be instructed to lend five hundred men to the Nights Watch.”

“Lady Dustin, I ask that you send some of your men to the Eastern coast along with the Manderly
men to guard against the Ironborn, since the Dreadfort isn’t there to protect Eastern Coast anymore.”

“Lady Mormont, I would greatly appreciate, if I were able to keep twenty of your men as personal guards.” Lady Mormont agreed proudly with one firm nod.

“Lord Royce, I will speak to you and Lord Baelish in private about the Knights of the Vale.” Lord Royce nodded sternly. Petyr Baelish did not look very impressed with any of King Jon’s decrees.

“I would also speak with Tormund in private about the Wildlings and their defense of the Wall.”

“That concludes the defences of the North, for the moment.”

Petyr Baelish then stood up, “what about the Riverlands, Your Grace?” Petyr Baelish spoke with an exaggerated mocking tone.

“The Riverland are right for the picking, the Freys are too weak to hold the Riverlands for long. The Riverlands was part of King Robb, The Young Wolf’s domain, it should be reclaimed. Lady Sansa has a claim towards Riverrun.”

Jon Snow answered Pertyr Baelish in a cold and dismissive manner. “Lord Baelish, our fight is not in the South. The Riverlands are too close to Kings Landing and they are to difficult to hold against the Lannisters, we don’t have the resources to hold the Riverlands at this time, we need to protect the North.”

“The Riverlands could be a good barrier against the Lannisters, but we will hold to your wisdom.” Petyr Baelish give a slight smile with a small bow and sat down again.

“Our main threat comes from the North, we need to start preparing against a White Walker attack.” Davos could hear some mumbling throughout the hall. Jon had spoken to each of the Lords and the Ladies in private about the White Walkers, and yet it still seemed like many were unconvinced.

“I will send ravens with instructions to all of the Northern Houses, everyone should do whatever they can to prepare. All of the food must be closely rationed from now on. Every stronghold needs to gather as much firewood as possible. Any material that can be burned must be stored, we will need a lot of fire against the wights. Any dragonglass or obsidian must be made into weapons, it is only dragonglass and Valyrian steel that can kill a White Walker.”
“All of the strongholds needs to send out scouts on a daily basis.”

The Hall remained quiet, at best Davos knew people were finally hearing about the threat, eventhough it was hard for them to believe.

“I will start listening and received petitions on the morrow. Lastly, Maester Wolkan have send ravens to Last Hearth and Karhold, their current Lords have been summoned to Winterfell.”
Jaime

Jaime found himself waiting in one of the antechambers of the throne room. He could hear whispers and shuffling coming from the throne room, as the people were finally allowed to leave. It was easy to notice that people were not exactly thrilled to be present at Cersei’s impromptu coronation.

His mind was filled with images that felt like long lost smoky visions of nightmares. He could still smell and taste all of the destruction around him.

From the moment that Jaime could see Kings Landing within the distance, he could see the turning smoke vapors arising from Visenya’s Hill, standing out like a dirty streak within the sky. When he entered through the gates he did so very cautiously, he was expecting war, murder and mayhem. He thought people would be running around like rats, trying to abandon a sinking ship.

But the scenes in front of him almost held a certain serenity. The street were deadly and ominously quiet.

He had never seen Kings Landing so silent, most traces of life had disappeared behind closed doors and shutters.

As he moved through the streets he could only hear the clicking of his horse’s hooves on some of the cobblestones. Through all of the quietness he could feel his heart racing, beating in his throat as if it was trying to strangle him.

He kept on moving even as every instinct was telling him to turn away. He had to find his family, he had to find Cersei and Tommen.

The whole city was covered in layers of smoke, ash and dust. Jaime wanted to rub his eyes, his eyes were itching and burning, but he could not take the chance - he had to remain vigilant and on his guard.

He could see some sprinkles of dust falling from the sky, he dusted some of the particles from his horse’s mane, while keeping his eyes focused on the street ahead.
It almost felt as if Jaime was moving through a charming, little painting, the arches and gutters of the buildings around him were covered in the lightest feathering of snow.

But the taste, *the taste was the worst.*

The city smelled foul, fouler than usual, as if that was even possible, it was the same foul stench that sometimes used to linger within Pycelle’s musty old laboratory. The stale air and even the moving wind was full of chemicals and vapors that made his throat constrict even more. His tongue was dry and thick within his mouth.

Jaime could only imagine that if he ever had an urge to taste lime mortar, this taste was exactly how it would taste.

Jaime had a deep feeling of dread that was clouding his mind.

Buried within the blackest corner of his mind, the corner where he hides his fear, *he knew.*

He knew he has tasted this foul smell of death before. *Wildfire*

He finally rubbed his eyes upon arriving unscathed at the Red Keep. The Red Keep almost appeared as if it was rising and floating peacefully out of the mist. Standing on top of Aegon’s Hill Jaime quickly realized that the Great Sept of Baelor was gone.

Finally, he came face to face with some Lannister soldiers. Their expressions were sullen and guarded. They avoided his gaze and questions, with silent persistence. They remained guarded while they quietly directed him into the throne room.

The throne room was as quiet as the hour of the wolf, yet it was filled to the brim with people. He could hear their monotone voices answering back to Qyburn in unison. They were surrounded by Lannister guards from all sides. From his vantage point Jaime could see that Kings Landing was bearing witness to the coronation of a Queen.

Jaime could not bare to look at Cersei in that moment, and yet he was completely unable to look away. *Tommen... Tommen... Tommen.*

All he could think about right then was Tommen, *where was* Tommen. He wanted to scream the
question, right there and right now. He wanted to look Cersei directly in the eyes, and he wanted to know what has happened to Tommen. But instead he was ushered into this antechamber.

Cersei took her sweet time. Cersei was different, it wasn’t just the different dress she was wearing, there was a coldness and a new determination within her, like a man walking towards his execution with faith and resolution.

“Tommen..?”

Cersei replied with a look of anguish. “Our boy, they killed our last boy, our dearest boy.” Jaime realized then that he must have spoken out loud.

“Why?”

Jaime stood up he wanted to take Cersei in his arms, like he has done a thousand times before. But her cold stare stopped him dead in his tracks. She did not shed any tears, she had a face of acceptance. Jaime started pacing around the room he waited patiently for Cersei, to tell him what has happened.

He stopped pacing and sat down again as soon as Cersei started talking.

“It was the High Sparrow and his band of fanatic followers,” she said with venom tingling within her voice.

“The High Sparrow bided his time, like a spider he weaved his web and waited for the right time to pounce. As soon as you left the city for the Riverlands, with the majority of the Lannister forces behind you, that was when he made his move.”

“He preyed on Tommen, he used Tommen’s goodness against us all,” Cersei snorted ironically, “a man of the faith.”

“He made Tommen ban trial by combat, and he invented more charges and accusations against everyone.”

“Loras was placed on trial, and then the High Sparrow decided that Margaery should also be placed on trial alongside her brother,” Cersei spoke with a blank look, peering far away out of the
window, where the Sept of Baelor used to stand.

“Their verdict was guilty, both of them were found guilty. They were sentenced to death, and they
were hanged at the Sept the very same day.”

Jaime could only frown at that. “I thought the High Sparrow was aggrieved about Ned Stark’s execution right next to the Sept of Baelor?”

“Well yes, Jaime,” Cersei replied with an air of sarcasm and impatience. “They were obviously sending us a message.”

“What message?”

“That they are the law, that only their Gods will decide who receives punishment, and only they deserve to mete out that punishment.”

That did make some sense to Jaime, the High Sparrow had appointed himself as the justice of the Gods. Justice and judgement from the Gods are often the easiest road to fanaticism.

“Didn’t the High Sparrow release Margaery from her trial?”

“She, was only released from her walk of atonement.”

Jaime could only shake his head, this was such a needless loss.

“Such a great irony that all of these so called fucking stewards and great warriors of penance and justice, are always looking for redemption in others instead of themselves.”

Cersei only looked towards him briefly, his philosophical interruption was unwelcome in that moment.

“That evening, after the death of Margaery, Tommen died...”
“Tommen jumped from his bedroom window. He killed himself, Jaime.”

Jaime closed his eyes, his head bent over. Cersei's last words were eating at his insides like fire, *he killed himself*. Tommen was just boy, how helpless he must have felt to take his own life! Lannisters was supposed to be fighters, lions! Lions are predators.

Before Jaime could think any further about the subject, Cersei continued. She looked at him patiently as if she was telling something banal to an overeager child.

“My trial was next. They had already taken everything from me!”

“There was nothing left!”

“They have taken my son, I was not going to reward them by submitting to their demands. They are the ones who should be punished!” Cersei said venomously.

There was a long pause, Cersei continued more quietly after that.

“I recalled, that you once told me that the Mad King had laid out catches of wildfire all over the city. That was when I realized, that I would get revenge for my shame and for Tommen.”

“I instructed Qyburn to find those jars of wildfire and to plant them underneath the Sept of Baelor.”

Cersei spoke more feverishly now as if she was in dream, there was even a pretty pink blush in her face as if she was in the throws of passion.

“I planned everything out perfectly, I waited for the High Sparrow and all of his Sparrows minions to attend my trial." Cersei spoke the last words with a great sense of wonder and satisfaction. “Then I stood and watched from the Red Keep, I saw the whole Sept glow and erupt into one burning mass of green flames!”

“I pretended that I was in the Sept in that moment, and that I could see the faces of everyone and
their utter shock and surprise at the realization that they would die right there!

“I won Jaime, I punished them, I got them back for everything they took from me and from us. A Lannister always pays his debts,” Cersei finished with smug half-smile of satisfaction.

Jaime could only feel numb in that moment. Cersei could have burned the whole city to the ground, and it still wouldn’t bring Tommen back.

Jaime just wanted to crawl into a dark corner and wait for all of the shit to pass them by.

He did not even know if he really wanted to see Cersei right now.

Cersei was staring at him in a calculating manner. He did not want to know or imagine what she could be thinking.

Qyburn suddenly took that moment to interrupt their conversation.

“I am deeply regretful to interrupt you, my Queen, but I finally have some news of the North.” He nodded towards Jaime then, “and from the Riverlands my Lord.”

Jaime did not like what he was hearing, he has just left the Riverlands. He rode to Kings Landing at breakneck speed, he was not planning on seeing the Freys again, soon, if ever. He could just picture how those dumb cunts could somehow lose Riverrun again.

Cersei looked very pleased for some reason. “What does our little birds say about the North? I ve been waiting a long time for information about the North.”

“I apologise for that, Your Grace,” Qyburn replied. “It is very difficult to get information from the North, winter has arrived and the information is often unreliable or outdated. It is difficult to sustain any little birds in the North”.

Cersei only made an impatient hand motion for Qyburn to get on with it, she was clearly not interested in the man’s logistical problems.

“There was a great big battle at Winterfell, the peasants are calling it the bastard’s battle.”
"The good news is that those traitorous Boltons have been killed, the problem is that we don't know who won the battle, Your Grace."

"You told me that Littlefinger and the army of the Vale marched North some time ago?"

This information piqued Jaime’s interest, he knew the army of the Vale was fresh, they would be a great ally. But Littlefinger was as slippery as a seasnake.

Qyburn answered Cersei after a pause, “The problem is, there are a lot of speculation. Some say that the knight of the Vale rode valiantly, and defeated the Boltons on the field. Other reports talk about an army of giants; and Wildlings that possess the minds of animals on the battlefield. Other rumours simply say that Sansa Stark somehow reunited the North to fight against the Boltons.”

Cersei looked furious, it almost seemed as if she was about to strike Qyburn’s head off his shoulders. “I want that witch’s head on a spike, increase the reward on that Stark whore's head. Now that she is not hiding anymore, people might feel more motivated to claim that reward."

*Has Brienne somehow succeeded in her mission?* Jaime felt a tinge of pride for Brienne, if the Boltons were gone then Sansa might actually be safe within the North. Brienne was a true Knight. Perhaps there will come a day when he will actually fulfill one of his oaths.

“I cannot see that incipit girl rallying hardened Northern warriors to her cause,” Cersei added dismissively.

"Yes, Your Grace," Qyburn answered demurely. “There are also the other news about the Riverlands."

“Two of Walder Frey’s sons are dead." Qyburn stated without any emotion.

Jaime was surprised and somehow not surprised at all. They were certainly not the most popular family within Westeros. In fact the Freys might actually be more despised than House Lannister these days.

“Which sons?"

“Black Walder and Edwyn Frey. They were gone for a few days, until one of the guards came upon
“Some remains?” Jaime enquired.

“Apparently, their bodies were barely recognisable. They were chopped and hacked apart into different pieces, some of their limbs are still missing, my Lord.” Qyburn replied.

“Black Walder was Walder Frey’s heir. I am fairly certain those weasels have started to turn on each other, such a shame none of them have ever had the bright idea of putting a sword through Walder Frey’s heart.” During his time at the Twins, Jaime had once again witnessed what a despicable, unpleasant and bitter old man Walder Frey truly was.

“Steffon Frey is now the new heir of the Crossings, he sent a raven to renew his oath of fealty, and they are offering a reward for any information on the deaths of Black Walder and Edwyn Frey, Your Grace.”

Cersei was still stewing about the news in the North. She waved Qyburn off then, “yes, yes, as long as they are still loyal to House Lannister.”

“There are some rumours that they might have been attacked by a massive wolfpack.” Qyburn added.

“A wolfpack?” Jaime asked.

“Yes my Lord, there are some rumours about a big wolf pack stalking the Riverlands, and the pack is lead by one big she wolf.”

Jaime did often hear the howling of wolves whilst he was within the Riverlands, he was relieved that he or his men did not run into this wolfpack. He had a strong suspicion that the dead Freys had nothing to do with a wolfpack.

Qyburn took his leave with a small bow, Jaime could see the Mountain standing outside, he was impassable, Jaime was sure that he has not moved a muscle since Cersei has entered the antechamber.
Jaime still had so many questions, he did not understand why Cersei would crown herself as the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms. He just wanted to be alone right now. With that he stood up and walked to the door, he only inclined his head a few inches, “Your Grace,” he acknowledged Cersei in an exaggerated tone, and then he left.

The next four days went by in a blurry haze. If Brienne was with him she would have kicked his arse out of bed.

He thought about the last time he saw Tommen, when he was stripped of his white cloak. Too many Kings have lost their lives on his watch. Tommen was just a confused boy who was pulled into too many directions. He was a good boy, maybe in time, under proper guidance he might have been a good and just King. But everything was going to shit within Westeros.

Cersei used his secret and his one good deed, in order to kill hundreds of people. He felt barren, every action he has taken has come back to stab him in the back.

It was sometime later on the third night, that Cersei came to him. She came to him like the girl he remembered from his youth. Cersei did not say anything, she took off her clothes and lay next to him. Mayhaps this was her idea of a peace offering, it did not matter.

*Gods help me, but still I need her.* It was an unsettling thought after all that has happened, he still wanted Cersei. He hated the fucking Gods.

He moved on top of her, and traced her high cheekbones, they did not need to talk, their bodies instinctively knew their secret language.

*It has been too long.*

On the fourth morning Jaime felt better, he could still remember the previous night, before he had even opened his eyes he knew that Cersei would be long gone, such was their practice. Jaime remained closeted within his room for another day after that evening. But for the first time in days Jaime felt the need to stand up, and freshen up.

He was still in the process of pulling on his tunic, when a servant knocked on the door and entered his chamber. The servant quickly rushed to help him with the tunic. Jaime still struggled to dress himself at times, perhaps he needed a more practical design approach to his clothing. After he was properly attired the servant stepped away from him.
“M’lord I have a message from the Queen, she asks that you would join her in the small council as soon as possible.”

Jaime approached the small council with trepidation, he has never wanted a place on the small council. But there was no one else that Cersei could trust.

The small council certainly lived-up to its name at this moment in time. Only Cersei and Qyburn were present. He sat down without disrupting their discussion.

They were talking about houses that could swear fealty to Cersei, well this was certainly going to be a short list.

He was quite sure that the rest of the Seven Kingdoms hated the Lannisters, the Tyrells were their last allies, the other Lords within Westeros will not be eager for an alliance with House Lannister. Even the small folk within Kings Landing despised them. That made Jaime wonder about the situation within Kings Landing. Before wondering and debating about some petty Lords that are too far away, they should perhaps be concerning themselves with what has been happening on their own doorstep.

“What about the people within King Landing?” Jaime decided to enquire towards the pair.

Cersei looked at Jaime as if he was speaking High Valyrian. “What about the peasants?”

Jaime knew he had to frame his approach carefully. “The people within the city are scared, they are cowering in their houses like mice. We need the trade to return to the streets, so that we could generate some income from taxes.”

Jaime could see that Cersei was thinking about what Jaime had said. Jaime quickly elaborated on the idea. “Let us release a public missive, that it is save for the people to return to their daily activities. We could hire some of the people to clean up the debris on the street. We can tell the people of Kings Landing that the explosion was an accident, it was an old unstable Targaryen stockpile of wildfire that caught flame.”

He was relieved to find that Qyburn was on his side. “Your Grace, the small folk also had some problems with the Faith Militant, their property was destroyed during some of those raids, and the small folk also enjoys their small pleasures.”
“They might not be that concerned about the loss of the Sparrows.”

Jaime felt good for a moment or two, mayhaps it might not be such a trial to serve on the small council after all. He might be in a position to do something useful.

Then Cersei finally address him directly, “Jaime, I would place you in charge of keeping the peace, give someone within the army the position or something.”

“Until the city is secured, you will go around the markets and make sure that everything is back to normal.”

Fuck. Jaime didn’t plan on himself doing the grunt work, but he nodded at Cersei all the same. This is something that Bronn might excel at. Before long he will owe Casterly Rock to that man.

Qyburn spoke softly: “Your Grace, I might have another suggestion. These are hard times, and winter is right upon us, men sometimes need some distraction during these hard times.”

Jaime was amazed at how much patience Cersei could display when she listened to Qyburn’s soft speeches.

“The Sparrows have destroyed all of the brothels throughout the city, and most of the cheaper alehouses. Your Grace, we might take it upon ourselves to open a few such establishments. It would create an almost instantaneous source of revenue for the crown.”

Jaime could see that Cersei was considering this suggestion, and Qyburn continued.

“I could send out some of the little birds, to make discreet enquiries about the merchants that are currently residing within the city. We can approach some of the more reliable merchants with propositions about a few brothels and alehouses.”

Cersei nodded, “you can get started on that project as soon as possible.”

Jaime wasn’t entirely convinced. “Such establishments could help to generate some income for the crown, but what about the security within the city?”
“As soon as men start drinking more they create bigger problems, I am not sure that the current remaining set of Gold Cloaks could handle such a demand.”

“You have just agreed to restore order on the streets of Kings Landing, the whole Lannister army is currently here, surely you can deal with this?” Cersei demanded.

Jaime agreed reluctantly, when he woke-up this morning he did not have any intentions of becoming a common soldier upon the streets, but Jaime knew that Kings Landing had a volatile population. The rest of the realm would almost certainly be against them, they could not afford any more enemies, and especially not on their doorstep.

Jaime was reluctantly content to do his part, for this new Lannister empire that Cersei was so set upon.

Jaime left after the discussions were over, Bronn might have some insights into the security of King Landing. Jaime knew that Tyrion had once used Bronn as the Lord Commander of the Gold Cloaks.
Sam could feel drops of moisture pooling in the corners of his eyes. His heart felt as if it was hammering against his rib cage and might break through his skin at any time, it was simply impossible to think about anything coherent right now. Sam realized that his mouth was very dry, and that was because it has been hanging open for a while now. Sam knew that he was gaping like a greenboy in a brothel, who saw a naked whore for the first time.

He simply couldn't help himself, as far as the eye could see there were books and books, manuscripts, scrolls and parchments. Some of the parchments looked so fragile as if they have been around since the age of heroes, while some of the books were so new that the smell of fresh leather was permeating through the air. Bookcases with rows and rows of books, everywhere Sam looked. Sam knew that some of these parchments might be a thousand years old. So much of Westeros was captured between these pages, Sam knew he would not have any idea about where to start, he couldn't help but feel overwhelmed with his task.

Sam finally moved slowly into the middle of the room next to a few tables and chairs. On the tables stood stacks of books, some of these were recently produced, Sam could smell the leather as he picked one up from a stack in front of him in a caring fashion. *Robert’s Rebellion, a true telling by Maester Yandel.*

Sam stroked the cover of the book with care, before bringing the book closer to his face so that he could truly smell the fresh leather. He placed the book down again, and turned around full-circle, the quick spin almost made him dizzy, but he could not stop himself, Sam had to see the whole room once again from the center of the tower. Sam was lightheaded with the glee he felt.

Even the room itself was a marvel to behold, instruments and looking glass captured the light from the highest point of the tower carrying it onto the lower ground. If you stood in the right place you could see beams of light reflecting in a crisscross pattern throughout the whole tower. All of the bookcases were identical, and could be moved by the lightest of touches. Everything was expertly crafted. There was no sigils in sight, this place was purely dedicated to knowledge. Sam would never be able to look through everything contained within this library, he wanted to start reading right now but he could not imagine where he would begin.

His legs were shaking and unstable, he knew that he had to sit down for a moment he was completely overwhelmed and drunk with the wonder of it all. He picked up the book that was closest to him; *The origins of the Iron Bank and Braavos by Maester Matthar.* The book was not exactly what he was looking for, but Sam has always been somewhat intrigued by the Iron Bank.
“Samwell Tarly, from the Nights Watch?”

Sam jumped in shock as he suddenly heard his own name being spoken right behind him, he almost dropped the book in his haste to get himself out of the chair. The chair toppled over with a clanging and ringing sound that reverberated throughout the whole tower. Sam could feel hot flushes of red slowly creeping up from his neck to his face, as he turned around.

The man behind Sam was clearly an important Maester. He had a long chain, and a rod of what looked like, Valyrian steel in his left hand. But the man did not have the typical appearance of a Maester or at least the Maesters that Sam had seen throughout his life time.

The man looked more like a veteran soldier, he had big strong hands and a thick strong neck. The man had the look of a bull dog, it seemed as if he would be able to stomp right through a line of enemy soldiers.

Sam was struggling to speak as his mouth was still very dry, he could only try to swallow before stammering out a whimpering “aye.”

The maester had an irritated, impatient look on his face. It felt as if the man could hit him over the head with the rod he was holding at any time. Sam tried his best not to flinch at the thought, *I have killed a White Walker.*

“I am Archmaester Marwyn.” Sam could only nod, he did not expect to see an Archmaester, and so quickly at that. Perhaps he has been gaping like an idiot within the library for longer than he initially realized.

“You were send by the current Lord Commander of the Nights Watch?” Sam could only nod.

“The landscape has changed since you have last seen the North, the Wall is far away.” It seemed as if the Archmaester was contemplating something.

“Maester Aemon was a great man, it would be difficult to fill his shoes,” the Archmaester was appraising Sam in a sceptical manner. “It is a shame that he was never held in greater esteem here at the Citadel. But alas, his Targaryen lineage was always held against him.” A sense of sadness fell upon Sam, he wished he had more time with Maester Aemon, there was so much wisdom underneath his blind eyes.
“Valar Morghulis,” Archmaester Marwyn uttered regretfully.

“You will not have much time to train as a Maester. I propose that you initiate your studies with the healing arts. That is what is mostly needed at Castle Black. You must report at the infirmary first thing tomorrow morning. Maester Embrose will be expecting you. Don't be late, there is always much to do within the infirmary, and now that winter has arrived the need will become more urgent.”

Sam stood straighter, “I will report to the infirmary, thank you Archmaester.”

Sam let out a breath that he has been holding. Sam actually started to feel a sense of relief, he did not receive the warmest reception at Scribe’s Hearth. He was preparing himself for some difficulties ahead.

“Did you have any plans for the girl and the child? You know a novice is not allowed to keep a mistress and much less his own children within the walls of the Citadel.” Sam’s quick moment of relief vanished swiftly, he could not look Archmaester Marwyn in the eyes. Sam stared at the ground and started muttering. “Well, I, we were planning..”

Archmaester Marwyn only held his hand up, as a notion for Sam to stop talking. It almost looked as if he wanted to roll his eyes.

“Go to the Quill & Tankard, tell them that Archmaester Marwyn has sent you. They might have a place for your mistress, last I heard they were in need of a serving wench. Keep her and the child away from the Citadel.”

Sam knew he was blushing once again, “thank you Maester!” Sam wanted to rush towards Gilly and little Sam, he honestly did not expect events to go so smoothly.

“One more thing Samwell Tarly, I strongly suggest that you return that greatsword to your family.” Once again the breath was completely knocked out of Samwell’s lungs, he could feel that the colour was draining from his face.

“Lord Tarly can't reach you within the walls of the Citadel, the Citadel does not allow interference from noble houses. But I am quite sure I don't have to tell you how easily Lord Tarly can still get to you, if he wishes to do so.”
“You have to be careful Samwell Tarly, even the South isn’t safe anymore. Oldtown might just be under siege very soon. News is that the Dragon Queen, Daenerys Targaryen is fast approaching with three big dragons and a massive fleet of a thousand ships. The three headed dragon will soon be returning to Westeros.”

Archmaester Marwyn was watching Sam attentively as he spoke the words.

Sam immediately thought of Maester Aemon again, he used to read reports to the old Maester about Daenerys Targaryen and her conquest of Slaver’s Bay as well as her travels though Essos. It always made the old Maester happy to hear about his last living relative. Just before Maester Aemon’s death he made a few references to the three headed dragon. On his deathbed he also believed and muttered that Daenerys Targaryen was Azor Ahai reborn, or the One that was promised. Maester Aemon believed that his relative could save the world.

Throughout their discussion Sam has come to realize that Archmaester Marwyn was obviously very well informed. Archmaester Marwyn was certainly much better informed than the desk clerk at Scribe’s Hearth. Archmaester Marwyn might be testing him, or he was likely testing him already. *I am barely in the South and the games have already started.*

Sam knew he did not have a lot of time, it might be worth the risk to test the waters with Archmaester Marwyn.

“Maester Aemon sometimes spoke of Daenerys Targaryen. On his deathbed he was convinced that she was the Prince That Was Promised and that she could deliver us all from the darkness.”

Archmaester Marwyn did not show any emotion, but Sam could feel that the Archmaester was interested.

“I came to the Citadel because I want to be of use at The Wall, learning some skills in healing would help the Nights Watch. But I also came here to gather knowledge and information on the enemies of the Nights Watch, that is my bigger and true purpose.”

Sam did not want to say too much at this moment, but he had a strong feeling that Archmaester Marwyn might be someone who could help him.

“Report to Maester Embrose on the morrow, start learning the healing arts, and I might leave some suggestions for reading materials that might be of interest to you.”
Archmaester Marwyn inclined his head slightly.

“Good day, Samwell Tarly.”

The meeting came to an abrupt end. But Sam had a sense that he might have accomplished something. It was obvious that Archmaester Marwyn was very knowledgeable, he might have some answers, or he could at least know where to start looking for answers.

Mayhaps, he could finally be of some help to Jon and his brothers at the Wall. Sam certainly did not miss the Wall, he was born in the Reach after-all, the cold and the harshness of the Wall was all encompassing. He did not miss Ser Alliser’s baiting and disapproval, but he missed his friend, Jon. He would have told Jon about the magnificent set of sphinxes he saw whilst he was entering Scribe’s Hearth for the first time, even though he knew that Jon would have absolutely no interest in statues of sphinxes, Jon did often listen to him prattle on and on, with a lot of patience.

Gilly was waiting patiently for him on a bench within Scribe’s Hearth. He was grateful that Archmaester Marwyn were able to help him with Gilly and Little Sam, it would be easier to work on his research within the walls of the Citadel if he knew Gilly and Little Sam were safe and closeby.

“I ve found a place for you and Little Sam!” Sam took Little Sam out of Gilly’s arms, he was fast asleep, Little Sam was becoming much too big for Gilly to be carried around everywhere.

As they walked together out of the hall, Sam saw Gilly look up in wonderment at the two large sphinxes, they were flanking the entrance of Scribe’s Hearth.

“Do these creatures really exist?” Gilly asked with a shiver.

“They would be scary to see.”

“No, luckily for us these are only creatures of myth, they are called sphinxes.” Sam replied with a smile.

“What does “myth” mean exactly?” Gilly enquired.

“Myths are usually very old tales and stories, and sometimes they include animals or details that
are made-up or that has never existed. Most of these stories usually tries to teach the listener a lesson, these stories are usually passed down from generation to generation.” Sam could see that Gilly was pondering the matter.

“When I was young I learned a song about an ice dragon, I was scared that an ice dragon might come to freeze us all beneath a breath of frost. But one of my older sisters told me that it was only a story, that there were no such thing as ice dragons.”

“Aye, people that do not read often carry over these tales, myths and legends by other means, such as songs,” Sam replied.

“Mayhaps, you could bring me something to read about the sphinxes and these other myths?”

“Aye, I could.” Sam answered with a smile.

As promised by Archmaester Marwyn the Quill & Tankard was very close to the the Tower. In fact it was part of the maze of islands that formed the Citadel, it stood alone on a small Island, with a short connecting hanging bridge. The Quill & Tankard was a tall building, but the inn was medium in size. The walls were made of timber on closer inspection, but it looked fresh and clean, it must have been whitewashed quite recently. The large porch looked inviting from the outside. It had the appearance of a decent type of establishment. Sam was relieved about that as well. It looked like a palace compared to the Molestown brothel. Sam was still sometimes mad at himself for leaving Gilly alone in that foul place.

The drinking hall had quite a few tables and chairs, patrons could also drink or eat on the large porch during the long summer nights and days. This was clearly not a busy time of the day, Sam could only see a group of acolytes and novices drinking around a table in one corner. A middleaged serving wench was making her way towards them. When Sam told her that he was sent by Archmaester Marwyn, she instructed them to follow her, she led them to the owner of the establishment.

Gilly was given a small room just above the kitchen area, you could clearly hear the noises and clatter drafting up from the kitchen. The room was clean with a freshly stuffed mattress of straw. The room also held two old chairs and a small table, with a washing basin on the floor next to the bed. A lamp was hanging on the opposite corner of the bed, next to the door. It was a good place for Gilly to stay, of course Sam had to make sure that the owner understood that Gilly herself was not for sale. She would just be a serving wench.

Molestown or Oldtown some things never change.
Sam had some hopes and ideas, he could perhaps earn some extra coin by acting as a scribe. He did not want to place Gilly in a precarious position. It would be better if he could actually earn the money by himself to pay for her stay within the Quill & Tankard, while she might be able to save her income.

Sam did not want to leave Gilly and Little Sam behind, but they were very well settled in. Sam knew he could not promise Gilly anything about when he would be able to see her again, but it seemed like she understood.

Sam lingered around Gilly and Little Sam for as long as possible, twilight was already well settled in when he finally left them after they had shared their supper.

Sam had to find the quarters for the novices, he had to stop a servant for directions, but he found the quarters after a time. They were quite far from the infirmary. In fact the quarters of the novices was a building that was practically the furthest from the heart of the Citadel. Sam found an empty room for himself quickly enough, the building had many small rooms and many of them were vacant.

The room wasn’t as clean as Gilly’s room at the Inn, and his room was smaller. It was dusty, and the room was overwhelmed by a desk that contained what was likely, years of old candle wax. You could see that the novices before Sam had spent countless hours reading at the desk by candle flame. Sam wished that he had a book with him at this very moment. But first he would need to find some fresh straw for the mattress and some candles.

Before Sam set off to find the supplies, he used his dagger to pry open some floorboards it was a slow process as he only had the moonlight to guide him. He knew that he had to hide the sword. He’s father’s rage about his sword must be terrifying right now, Sam hoped that his mother and sister did not have to bare the brunt of his father’s anger. His father wouldn’t have any qualms to kill him right now. The sword was not his to take, but Valyrian steel is one of only two substances that can kill a White Walker. Sam knew that his father would never believe in White Walkers until he saw one with his own two eyes, and by that time it would be far too late. The Nights Watch needed this sword. Even if Sam does not find any useful information, at least he has acquired a weapon to fight against the White Walkers.

Sam was not going to return the sword, until they have stopped the White Walkers and the Long Night, if they could stop them.

Sam spent the rest of the evening in search of supplies, he started by asking some of the other Novices. Some were helpful other less so, by the time he reached his small room again he was truly
exhausted.

But even so once he had laid himself down on his fresher straw, sleep did not come immediately. He was giddy with excitement for what was about to come. He has never felt this content, even if he had to spent this night alone. Gilly and Little Sam were safe, and Sam had access to almost all of the books that have ever been written. Sam almost felt a bit guilty about his feeling of satisfaction.

*I must find something.*

Sam was quite curious about Archmaester Marwyn, he was burning to make some enquires about the Archmaester from the other Novices that he has met briefly this evening, but he knew that it might not be wise. It seemed like the Archmaester wasn’t sure if he could trust Sam yet, Sam would have to earn his trust somehow.
Bran felt as if his insides were being torn, twisted and ripped apart, his mind and his will just wanted to stay with his father and his aunt Lyanna, as she was lying in her bed soaked with blood. Bran could smell the iron, metallic stench of the blood, but there was also a hint of fragrance from a blue winter rose. His powers was not strong enough to stay within the vision.

He felt as if he was falling, and falling, backwards into a dark abyss, he give up on what his will wanted, and suddenly he wasn’t falling anymore, he was standing. The darkness was still all around him, but the air was swirling and churning. He could smell earth and rotten plant material, it was an old and ancient smell, the ground felt soft underneath his feet. Bran knew exactly where he was, and the darkness started to evaporate like mist rolling off a hill.

He was home.

The heart tree and the black pond was right behind him when he turned around, it was very quiet and the air was surprisingly warm for Winterfell. Bran knew almost every branch and leaf from the godswoods, he used to climb around on the trees and watch everyone from far above. This was his godwood but it was also different. There was no wind or rustling of leaves, or any sounds of birds or insects.

Bran could not see anyone, so he decided to make his way towards the courtyard. Only; the armory wasn’t there, the iron gates that separated the godswood from the rest of the castle wasn’t there, the guest hall wasn’t there. The godswood was much bigger. Bran finally came upon an open piece of land, this must be the courtyard then. And Bran did finally hear some activity, from what he presumed was the courtyard or the training yard. Bran didn’t see any of Winterfell’s walls, there was one wooden structure close to the training yard.

Bran smiled to himself as he heard the familiar sounds that always ringed through the practice yard of Winterfell. Bran saw two men practicing, but they were using short swords. Next to them were two boys who were practicing as well. Most of the onlookers were watching the two boys closely, they were about the same age, or younger than Rickon. They reminded him of Rickon, their hair were wild and tangled, they were not wearing any shirts or tunics, they only wore a few skins for leggings. *Arya’s hair was often tangled as well.*

The fighting was fierce and wild, they used two crudely shaped wooden short swords. Ser Rodrik would never have allowed Bran to fight with such intent. Bran recalled the fight that he had won
against Tommen, everyone were cheering them on, Robb cheered the loudest of them all. They had worn so much padding that Bran was afraid he would start rolling if he somehow lost his footing, but that was a lifetime ago.

The boys had some of the typical Stark features, long faces and dark hair, just like his uncle Benjen.

One boy was getting the upperhand, surprisingly it was the smaller boy, he lay into the other boy with the short wooden practice sword until the other boy was lying on the ground in a ball. It was a brutal fight for two such young boys. The smaller boy eventually quit what was left of the fight, he was congratulated in the Old Tongue, the crowd around them were cheering, while the other boy just kept on lying in the dirt.

As Bran drew closer he could see that there was some building under construction. It was only halfway done, but Bran suddenly realised that he knew what was being build, it was the Broken Tower from whence he fell.

Once again Bran was being wrenched away, but he did not try to resist the pull this time. He felt as if he was floating through the air like a feather in the wind, he immersed himself into the feeling and closed his eyes. When he opened his eyes he had a blurry vision that was filled with different hues and tones of blue. He was standing, but his body wasn’t steady, he was rolling and pitching. The vision started to clear in front of his eyes, he was standing right at the prow of a ship that was cutting its way swiftly and gracefully through the sky blue waters of the sea. A mermaid with long silver hair was pointing the way forward, from the prow of the ship.

Bran almost thought about hiding himself, after he had noticed the kraken sail flapping rhythmically to the wind. Bran heard a shriek from right behind him, he did not need to look around there was a large shadow passing overhead, it was a dragon, a big green dragon. Bran has seen Kings Landing with the shadow of a dragon passing overhead, but this was the first time that he has actually seen one of the beasts for himself. The beast was fearsome and powerful, Bran could feel the air move around his face as the dragon flapped its wings, and flew higher into the air. The beast was also beautiful and graceful, as it twirled around in the sky.

Bran was disappointed when he felt the familiar strain of the force dragging him away from this vision, he wanted to see more of the dragon. He resisted the force for a few moments longer and it was just long enough to see two more dragons appearing on the horizon, one massive black dragon and a smaller cream coloured dragon.

Bran could feel the touch of light snowflakes falling on his face. As Bran opened his eyes he noticed that Meera was watching him with an expression of concern.
“You were mumbling and thrashing around.”

“It reminded me of Jojen,” Meera added a bit more softly.

“What did you see?” Meera asked after a pause.

“Dragons.” Bran replied.

“We can't stay here for too long, it is far too dangerous.”

Bran knew that Meera was right, but Bran was slightly concerned about crossing the Wall, he was marked by the Night's King, the taint of the Night's King removed the spells that the Children of the Forest have weaved through their songs, the spells were the only weapon that was currently protecting North. It was all his fault, it is his fault that Summer has died, it was his mistake that killed the Three Eyed Raven and most of all it was his recklessness that killed and doomed Hodor's life.

Bran knew beyond a doubt that he didn't just cause Hodor's death, he was really the one who were responsible for Hodor spending most of his life as a halfwit. He could not make anymore mistakes, all of the responisibility has now fallen to him.

Meera broke through into his thoughts, “what’s wrong?”

Bran did not have the courage to tell Meera what actually happened to Hodor, he felt ashamed. Or perhaps he was just being a craven. He only wanted Meera - to see the best of him.

His arm was chilled to the bone after the Night's King had grabbed his arm, he did not feel that same numbing chill anymore. Bran dragged his sleeve up to his elbow, and looked at his arm, he gave a sigh of relieve, the mark was gone.

Bran finally replied back to Meera. “Nothing is wrong, but you’re right we have to start moving.”
“I am sorry, that you have to pull me along.”

“We all need help sometimes.” She hooked her arms through his arms, from behind and dragged him to the sled.

Their journey towards the Wall was quiet. Meera was really straining herself to get them to the Wall as quickly as possible. Even if Bran felt like talking, Meera would not be able to answer, she was breathing harder and harder under the strain. She did eventually rest for a few moments, and after that she rested every now and again. The Wall wasn’t that far away, but it must have been a monumental task for little Meera, Bran knew that he has grown a lot in the past few moons. Meera was only one small girl, but she was so determined and tenacious.

Thankfully they were able to reach the Wall without any further incidents, but the darkness of the night had descended upon them rapidly, a half moon was visible in the black sky. The reflection of the moon made the Wall appear like a mountain of shining silver from some angles.

After sitting down and catching her breath Meera jumped up again. “I will quickly gather some firewood, we have to get a fire started, then we just have to hope that the patrolmen or watchmen on the Wall can see us, before we are seen by any wights.”

Bran nodded, but Meera had already left. Uncle Benjen had given them some extra flint and a dagger. They would never have survived if it weren’t for his uncle Benjen. He wished that uncle Benjen was still here with them it has been a long time since Bran had seen any of his family members, Bran knew he was going to miss uncle Benjen tonight.

Meera returned relatively quickly, there were a lot of dry wood close to the Wall. Bran needed that fire, the cold was almost creeping into his bones. Meera had a fire blazing readily enough. It was soothing to feel some warmth on his skin, and the crackling of the dry wood was reassuring, as the flames danced around fighting against the cold air.

Meera took one of the longer branches out of the flames, she stood-up and started waving it back and forth, she repeated the exercise every now and again.

“So you think the Boltons are still looking for us?”

“You’re the one with the visions, aren’t you suppose to know these things?” Meera asked him playfully.
“Aye, but I am still learning how to control these visions. The visions just appear to me, there is no sequence of continuity, I literally fall from one place to the next place, from the past to the here and now. Sometimes I have no idea what I am looking at.”

“Well, that is not very reassuring, Brandon Stark!” Meera stood up again, and waved her makeshift torch back and forth again.

Her face became more serious.

“I once asked Jojen what it was like to look into the future - he told me that it could be very a frightening experience times, especially when he lost control and the images kept on flashing and changing before him. When he was young, he was afraid that he would get stuck in the flashing images forever, and that he would never wake up again. He said that he had to learn how to centre himself, he had to be completely peaceful. He had to become completely calm and quiet in order to focus on what he wanted to see. He had to learn to remove his own emotions from his thoughts, and purely focus on where he wanted to go.”

That did make some sense to Bran.

“And practice, he practiced a lot when he was younger. He was often sick, lying around in bed with nothing to keep him busy.”

“I am sorry Meera, I wish he was still with us, he was very brave and wiser then us all.”

Meera brushed away some tears before answering, “My brother knew exactly what would happen if he made this journey, he was never afraid of dying.”

It has been a while since Meera had lit the fire, the moon has moved much higher into the sky.

The outer gate started to groan and croak under its own weight as it was lifted into the air. Meera stood up with both of her hands raised into the air, as a gesture of surrendering. Only one middle aged man from the Nights Watch emerged from the gate.

“Good evening Ser,” Meera greeted the man. He looked at both of them skeptically, and Bran
greeted the man in a similar fashion to Meera.

The man stood rooted at the entrance of the gate he did not appear as if he wanted to move any closer to them. But he answered them back.

“I’m no ser, what do you want?”

Bran knew he had to speak up then.

“I would greatly appreciate it, if you could call Jon Snow or bring him here, I need to speak with Jon Snow urgently.”

“And what do you want with Jon Snow?”

Bran realised that this discussion might not be easy, it was properly difficult to get into the Night's Watch from the wrong side of the Wall. Bran might have to take a chance and reveal his real identity, he did not really want to do so at the moment. But the man might think that they are Wildlings. He and Meera needed to be on the other side of the Wall. Meera would be save at least, even if the Boltons were still looking for him. The Night Watch was not suppose to take any side in the politics of the realm or follow any Kings, Bran should be safe, in principal. But he knew that there were no guarantees in this life.

“I am his brother, Brandon Stark.”

“Stark?” “Follow me.”

Meera kicked some snow onto the fire, and took up the reins of his sled once more and started dragging him towards the tunnel.

“Are you injured?” The man enquired.

“No, but I can't walk.”
The Nights Watch man took over the reins and gave his torch to Meera, Bran was quickly moved right into the tunnel. As soon as they were through the tunnel, the Nights Watch man give a signal, and the outer gate was lowered again. He gave his torch back to Meera.

“Wait here, I’ll be back shortly.” Bran watched as the man disappeared out of the tunnel on the other side.

“Do you think I made the right choice to reveal myself? I was concerned that the man might think we are Wildlings.”

“Well, we can't hide forever.”

“What terrifying Wildlings the pair of us would be, a scrawny girl and a crippled boy.”

Bran had to smile at that.

“What if Jon is walking towards us right now?” Bran wondered out loud.

Bran’s heart started pounding, as his blood started to rush through his veins, his whole face was getting warmer. His brother could be on his way towards him right now, Bran could almost break down and cry at the thought of seeing his brother again. They have always talked about seeing what was Beyond the Wall. It was too much for him, the waiting felt much too long.

Finally Bran saw someone entering the tunnel. There were three men, Bran almost wanted to call out Jon’s name. Luckily he didn't, because as the men drew closer Bran could see that none of them were Jon. All of Bran’s hopes suddenly felt crushed, but he tried really hard to keep the disappointment out of his face.

The Nights Watch man who met them at the gate moved one step ahead of the others, he was only a few steps away from them, “Lord Commander, this boy claims that he is Brandon Stark; Jon Snow’s brother.”

“Do you have a Direwolf?” The Lord Commander asked Bran.

“I had one but he was killed.” Bran replied evenly.
“Why aren’t you able to walk?”

“I fell from the Broken Tower within Winterfell,” Bran replied.

The Lord Commander then addressed his Night's Watch brothers. “Martyn, fetch Little Yohan and the Aurochs, instruct them to carry him to the vacant rooms in the Lord Commander’s tower, the room closest to my quarters.”

“Petyr, go and prepare that room, get two big bowls of broth from the kitchen along with some ale and water.”

After the other two Nights Watchmen were gone the Lord Commander of the Nights Watch turned to them.

“I am Edd, a friend of your brother. I think it is best that we get you and the girl warm and fed before we all freeze to death in this damn tunnel. I will come and speak with you within your quarters, a lot has changed within the North.”

“My Lord.” Lord Commander Edd, added cryptically.

It was strange being called a Lord again, Bran certainly did not feel like a Lord right now. The men that were requested arrived shortly after that, ‘Little’ Yohan and the Aurochs didn’t just pick Bran up, they lifted the whole sled and carried Bran up the stairs right into their room. Castle Black was very quiet right now, it was understandable, Bran assumed it might be sometime just before midnight. Meera followed quietly behind. Two bowls of hot stew was already standing and steaming on a table in the middle of the room along with a pitcher of water and two horns. It was a very spacious room, with a sturdy wooden bed, a wash basin was standing in another corner of the room on a small table. The table in the middle of the room had six chairs and a flamboyant candle holder, there was another smaller table and chair in the opposite corner with some parchment and ink for writing letters, the room had a decent carpet and a big hearth. There was even a big Ironwood chest at the foot of the bed.

This was a very luxurious room. Bran could never have imagined that the Nights Watch even had these types of rooms.

Petyr, a young man of about eight and ten, whom Bran assumed was the Lord Commander’s steward, entered the room and lit a fire in the hearth. He departed again swiftly after the fire was sufficiently burning by itself. The room was so big, they weren’t even able to feel the fire. But it did not matter right now, Meera fetched a bowl of stew and handed it over to Bran. Both of them
just ate and drank without saying a word, they were both ravenous. The whole situation was
slightly strange, but Bran could not really think about anything else other than his bowl of broth, it
might have been some of the best broth he has ever tasted in his life.

Lord Commander Edd entered the room and sat down next to them on one of the chairs, just as
they were about to finish the meal. He looked very cold, he rubbed both of his hands together and
he tried to blow some warm breath upon them. He waited silently until they had both finished their
broth.

“I see that my steward hasn’t fetched that ale yet, can I call upon my steward to fetch some more
broth and that pitcher of ale?”

Bran nodded, “we would greatly appreciate it.”

Lord Commander Edd, left them again, his steward must have been waiting just by the door, they
could hear the Lord Commander giving his steward the orders.

The Lord Commander returned to their room, just as he was about to sit down, Bran blurted out,
“where is my brother?” Bran couldn’t wait anymore, it felt as if they were delaying the discussion
on purpose - he wanted to see Jon right now!

“Your brother has left the Night Watch, Lord Commander Edd replied nonechalantly.

Bran was confused, “where...?” Perhaps Jon was ranging Beyond the Wall. Bran felt very
disappointed, he understood that he was not going to see his brother on this night.

“No, he quit, he left the Nights Watch for good.”

Bran was even more confused, “how?”

“You probably wouldn't believe the whole story if I told you, I hardly believe it myself, so let's just
say that Jon climbed upon his horse and he rode out of the gates. He left his position as the Lord
Commander of the Nights Watch and he rode out of Castle Black. And of course he saw fit to
dump all of it on me, as if I don't have enough problems with dead men coming back to life.” Lord
Commander Edd mumbled afterwards.
Bran must have had a strange expression on his face, because the Lord Commander smiled sardonically right into his face.

“And now the lucky bastard has even managed to upgrade his previous position, your brother isn’t here anymore because he was apparently acclaimed as the new King in the North.”

Bran was shocked and puzzled, he looked at Meera who looked just as confused as him.

The only thing Bran could think about was the Boltons.

“The Boltons?”

“The Boltons are dead, your brother and your sister took Winterfell from them.”

Bran did not even know that the Boltons have ever stayed within Winterfell, “my sister?”

“Your sister Lady Sansa, it seems like fate has deigned that I should meet every Stark within Westeros.”

It was very hard for Bran to focus or to think clearly, to have both Sansa and Jon at Winterfell was truly a miracle, he never thought that it could be possible. He has tears in his eyes but he did not care, his family was alive and they were all at Winterfell.

“Lord Commander, do you have any news about my little brother Rickon?”

“You can call me Edd or Dolorous Edd as many do.” The mirth then disappeared from Edd’s face, “your brother died during the battle of Winterfell.”

Rickon, why did Rickon have to die as well? Bran felt devastated, I failed, I didn't protect Rickon.

“I am sorry Bran," Meera said, as she squeezed his hand.

“That was a lot to take in for one night. I assume you were hiding from the Boltons yourself? Your brother has sent a raven to Castle Black, he asked us to keep an eye out for you Beyond the Wall.”
“There is something else that I need to discuss with you. Your brother have sent some Northern soldiers up to the Nights Watch. The first soldiers have just recently arrived, it is five hundred Flint and Norrey men from the Clans close to the Nights Watch. More men will be arriving soon, a few hundred Bolton, Karstark and Umber men are on their way to take the black. They will be accompanied by men from the Manderlys."

Bran’s head was still reeling after the news of Rickon, he didn't really want to focus and think about the Northern bannermen right now, but he nodded, he presumed that Edd had a point somewhere.

“Your brother is the only Lord or King who's sent some soldiers to the Nights Watch. We need these men to fight against the White Walkers."

*So this is about the White Walkers.* Bran was relieved to hear that people were preparing to fight against the White Walkers, that was his most important purpose as well.

“I apologise, that I have to address this subject so bluntly, but your arrival and reappearance might complicate matters within the North. After the big battle at Winterfell, and the death of your younger brother, I think the Northern Lords just declared your brother as the King, of course I don't really understand much of your Northern politics."

“Strength," Meera said “the North likes to follow strength."

“Whatever the case may be, I can't lose the men that have just arrived, or soldiers that will soon arrive."

“I fear your arrival might trigger the men, they might stop following orders from Jon."

So this was really all about the succession, somehow it always came back to the succession.

“The Nights Watch has always been on neutral ground. We can't allow politics to interfere with the safety of the realm. The Lords Brandon Norrey and Torghen Flint, are currently residing at Castle Black, once they figure out that you are here, they might want some answers from you."
Lord Commander Edd paused for a moment.

“Look, no one believes in the threat of the White Walkers - if the men had a chance to spend some time around here; perhaps they could learn something about the White Walkers, perhaps you yourself might learn something. I only ask that if you should become the King in the North, that you would keep your brother’s orders with regards to Nights Watch intact, I need these soldiers, my Lord.”

The King in the North? In truth Bran has never given any thought to the idea that he might be a King. Why would he? If there was ever a ruler within the family it was Robb, or his father before Robb. All Bran has ever dreamed of, was becoming the first Northern Kingsguard member in the history of the Seven Kingdoms. *But those summer dreams were long dead.*

Bran’s mind jumped back to his father and his aunt in that strange tower.

Both Edd and Meera were studying him very closely.

“They have already declared my brother as the King, you said my sister was also there?”

“Aye, she was.” Edd agreed.

The last time Bran saw Jon, he was leading an expedition to kill the mutineers at that keep where they were captured. Bran recalled how audaciously his brother fought against the Nights Watch mutineers, his brother looked very heroic in that moment.

If the Northern Lords saw what Bran saw that night, then he could easily understand why they are following him.

“They are clearly not concerned with the succession then, are they?”

“It would not appear that way,” Edd agreed.

“Edd, I fear your concerns are for naught. Right now everything is as it should be, I have no intention of becoming a King. I have my own part to play.”

Edd appeared visibly relieved.
“I have to admit that I am relieved to hear that I will be keeping my men, but as I already said, I suspect the men around here might still require some kind of an answer about the subject. Lord Brandon Norrey and Torghen Flint will find out that you are here, if they don't know about it already, they will come to you, looking for answers. Mayhaps it would be best if you could speak to them as soon as possible.”

“I could,” Bran agreed, and yawned. He was really becoming tired right now, or maybe it was just the heat from the hearth, it was finally starting to fill out the whole room. It has been ages since he has felt some real heat.

“Have you seen the White Walkers, Edd?”

“Unfortunately I have, I even saw that Kingly one, they are not a very talkative bunch.”

This caught Bran’s attention,”you’ve seen the Night’s King?”

“Aye, me and your brother fought off a group of wights and some White Walkers at Hardhome, or rather we tried to fight them and then we ran. If anyone has seen what I've seen they would be erecting a permanent wall of fire around their houses. Your brother was almost killed by one of the fuckers, but Jon slew him with that Valyrian steel sword of his, and he shattered into thousands of little pieces.”

Bran realized that he actually knew what Edd was talking about, he had seen glimpses of the fight through the Weirwood, “I’ve had a close encounter with the Night’s King myself.”

“We should speak some more about this once I ve had some rest.” Bran told Edd.

Dolorous Edd looked intrigued, but he obviously knew this was a dismissal.

“Should I still send you that broth and ale?” Edd asked. “I don't understand why that steward of mine is taking so long, perhaps he is brewing the ale, if you want something done properly you better do it yourself.” He rolled his eyes.

Meera looked just as tired as Bran, poor Meera she must really be exhausted, she is the one that
dragged me around the whole day long.


“Do you need any help to get onto the bed?” “I do,” Bran replied.

Bran had to hook his arms around Edd’s neck, since Bran was likely taller than him. It was slightly awkward, but Bran finally made it to the bed.

“I will send the ale up. Goodnight.” Edd left without waiting for a reply.

“Bran are you alright?” Meera enquired.

“Do you remember the last time we saw Rickon, he wanted to protect me, and he wanted to stay with us. I sent him away.”

“Bran, Rickon would not have been any safer with us,” Meera replied.

“Osha, is probably long dead as well.” Osha helped them so much, and all she wanted to do was to escape from the White Walkers.

"Likely, yes." Meera agreed.

“Meera, you didn't ask Edd any questions about your own family?”

“I am truly sorry I would have asked; but I wasn’t sure if I should reveal that you are a Lady, it would not be good for you if everyone knew that we have been traveling together, alone without any supervision.” Sansa used to instruct Bran in the arts of knighthood, she told him how a Lady should be treated, he was so happy that she was back at Winterfell. They were back in Westeros now, and they will soon be back amongst other Lord and Ladies, Meera should be treated like a Lady.

Meera looked at him expressionlessly for a few heartbeats, “You were concerned about my
Meera immediately bursted out in a high pitched laughter. She could not stop laughing, the laughter was bubbling out of her over and over again, there were tears of laughter in the corner of her eyes. She was almost laying on the table with laughter. Bran had never seen Meera laugh so much.

“Oh Bran, I don't care about being a Lady!”

She started laughing again, and Bran knew that he was blushing and his face was probably as red as the summer berries that could be found within the godswood.

“That is very sweet of you Bran.” Meera said as her laughter had finally abated.

Bran felt quite silly, but at least he made Meera laugh for once.

“It would not have mattered if you had asked about my family. Likely, there would have been no answers to give, we are not Starks, people don't take much notice of Crannogmen.”

“Perhaps you should try to send a raven to your father,” Bran stated. What will Meera do if we return to Winterfell? Bran could not help but ponder, he wanted Meera to stay with him and his family in Winterfell.

“Perhaps, but I am doubtful a raven from Castle Black could even reach Greywater Watch.”

“We will ask Edd on the morrow.” Bran had to hide another yawn.

There was only one large bed, but Bran and Meera were used to sleeping close to each other. Bran lifted some of the pelts and fur on the one side of the bed, and rolled himself onto the side that he had just uncovered.

Everything felt perfect for once, this was the first time in such a long while that Bran have felt so save. He could feel his body melting into the warmth and comfort of the bed. It felt so good, Bran almost felt guilty. Meera joined him on the bed, she removed the biggest layers of her furs before settling herself between the layers of fur on the bed.
“This bed feels better than one I have at home,” Meera sighed contently.

Bran was happy to see Meera so relaxed, she has suffered too much on his account.

“’You could have been the King!’” Meera exclaimed after a few moments of silence.

“Aye, but I doubt it all the same."

“What did you mean when said that everything is as it should be? Have you seen something within the visions?” Meera asked with curiosity.

“I am not sure, I might have seen something but I am not sure about what exactly I’ve seen.”

“These visions and dreams aren’t always easy to understand,” Meera said.

“Haven’t you ever wondered what it would be like to be the King?” Meera asked.

“Not really.” Bran replied.

Bran thought back to his days of being the Lord of Winterfell, he quickly learned during that time that you couldn’t really do whatever you wanted to do and you had to think of everybody else before yourself. He suppose being the King might be very similar, only with even less time for yourself.

But Bran did wonder for a moment what it would be like, to be a King.

“Mayhaps you could feel a sense of pride or accomplishment if you are able to help other people, as the King you would be able to do so. Mayhaps it also feels good to have men that are chanting your name and men that look up at you.” Bran could imagine that might a good feeling.

“But when I start thinking about the White Walkers and ordering thousands of people to die - then I wouldn’t want it. I’ve always wanted to serve and save people, I don't want to send people to their deaths.”
Right now everything is as it should be. I am the Three Eyed Raven now, I could help Jon, but I would need to learn to control my visions better.”

“Fate has given you a big responsibility,” Meera replied softly.

“Mayhaps we should get some rest, it seems like I might have some explaining to do on the morrow.”
Tyrion could only thank all of the Seven Gods that this day has finally arrived. Tyrion could almost smile at the prospect, which was a great achievement so early in the morning. For the first time in a while Tyrion felt as if he could just jump out of bed and face the day. If all goes well he will finally be rid of Ellaria and her annoying brood of sand vipers.

Tyrion could not forget that he had Varys to thank for this alliance with Dorne, or rather what was left of Dorne.

When Tyrion actually opened his eyes, the light was streaming head-on through the porthole. He was sure that the sunlight was trying to impale his eyes. Now, that is something that Joffrey would have appreciated, impaling eyes on little stakes.

Tyrion was slowly feeling the effects of a headache starting to pound and grate within his head, like two stones being smashed together. He might have drank a bit more wine than usual the night before, which is really telling, at least the witch brought along some good Dornish wine. Tyrion supposed it was only right seeing as they had to stomach her presence in the confinement of a ship.

Tyrion was slowly adjusting himself to the light, but nothing will slay his spirits on this fine day!

The Dornish fleet was kind enough to meet them a league or two from Lys, that was about half a moon’s turn ago. They are close to the Broken arm of Dorne right now, according to Yara Greyjoy. Tyrion had to admit that he found the Ironborn more agreeable than the Dornish, never in his life did Tyrion think he would see a day where he would prefer someone from the Iron Islands over anyone, more signs that the world is truly turning to shit.

The Dornish were intent on seeing Queen Daenerys’s fleet land at Sunspear. Tyrion of course had made it his mission to see that they don’t land at Sunspear, or anywhere else in Dorne for that matter.

Queen Daenerys’s fleet would add greatly to the security of the coastal towns of Dorne, it seems like there is some great fear growing about the latest Ironborn reaver, Euron Greyjoy.

Tyrion did not know much about Euron Greyjoy, he could only vaguely recall something about Euron Greyjoy stealing one of his brothers wife’s and being exiled. One thing Tyrion did know was that Euron Greyjoy must be quite a character to be exiled from the Iron Islands by Balon Greyjoy, Tyrion sincerely hoped that he never has the pleasure of meeting the man, which likely meant that it was bound to happen at some point.

He has also heard some tales of Euron Greyjoy raping and reaving his way around Essos, the good
people of Westeros must feel truly honoured by his return.

Tyrion sat up on his cot, his legs dangling in the air. It is now or never, he jumped off the bed. Tyrion felt his head spinning as he landed on his feet he was still stabilizing his head against the motions of the ship when he heard a soft knock on his cabin door. That could only be Varys, the man, or rather un-man, has a way of moving about very softly on his outlandish slippers, and of course Tyrion could smell the perfume of the eunuch a mile away. Did Varys ever sleep? Varys had a way of always appearing around the corner, he was always somewhere in the room. Varys appeared truly in his element on the open seas. Maybe Varys was just ecstatic by the idea of returning to Westeros, with a massive army.

Tyrion only uttered one word softly, “enter.” And it was almost to loud for his pounding head.

Varys entered the room quietly with a bow, as was his way. “Did you and the Dornish wine keep each other's company last night, again?” Varys asked almost with an eyeroll.

There was no need to affirm the obvious, besides Varys likely knew exactly how many glasses he had.

Tyrion made his way to the washbasin, he tried his best to rub the headache out of his face with some cold water. His skin was stinging from the cold, he could definitely feel that they were much closer to Westeros now, he wasn’t sure if he should welcome the cold or spurn the existence of the cold. He decided that it was refreshing right now.

“Such a shame that our Dornish allies might be leaving us today, I hope they at least have the presence of mind to leave the wine behind.”

“You do realize that the wine you have been enjoying so much was a gift to our Queen,” Varys replied.

“Indeed, and it is my duty as the Hand of the Queen to test the wine, we can’t endanger our Queen with untested wine.”

“It would be just as foolish to endanger the Hand of the Queen with untested wine,” Varys replied.

“I am touched by your concern for me.”
Tyrion dressed himself very slowly, perhaps he did it in the hope of annoying Varys. Varys was always so eager to please their Queen.

“I know that you don't like dealing with Ellaria and the Sand Snakes, but we need this alliance your sister has become very dangerous. We already have two of the nine kingdoms, you know as well as I that Westeros cannot afford anymore wars right now.”

“That is why I am doing my best. Yet you knew Myrcella, she was just a young, sweet, innocent girl. She should not have died,” Tyrion answered in all seriousness.

“You are right my friend, and before this war is over more innocent children will surely die. We can avoid more unnecessary deaths by creating alliances instead of battles.”

“I understand, but I was the one who send Myrcella to Dorne, Cersei warned me that Myrcella would not be safe in Dorne. Cersei likely despises me even more now, if such a thing is possible. She will blame me for the deaths of Joffrey and Myrcella.”

“She will”, Varys agreed. Varys has had more than enough time throughout the years to understand Cersei.

“It is not just Myrcella, Ellaria is an unstable ally. She killed the rightful Prince of Dorne and his heir. You know perfectly well that Prince Doran had a reputation of being a wise and benevolent ruler to his people. He has ruled Dorne peacefully for years now, not to mention the fact that they have killed their own family to get where they are.”

“That may be true,” Varys relied carefully. “But the Dornish are hot blooded people, their blood runs as hot as their deserts and their peppers. They don't want peace, they want revenge and luckily for us they want revenge against our enemies.”

“You can't point too many fingers towards Ellaria. you killed your own father as I recall.”

“My father was hardly what anyone would think about as a peaceful and benevolent ruler. My father was also quite willing to have me executed, as I recall, for a crime I did not commit.”

Tyrion knew he sounded a bit defensive right now.
“That may be true, but there were many people who believed that your father was the best man for the realm.”

Tyrion laughed out loud at that, “most of those poor sods were just afraid to speak out against my father.”

“Fear is sometimes a good motivator for a leader.”

“It is a good thing we have three dragons then,” Tyrion replied with a satisfied smile.

But Tyrion wasn't done with the Dornish yet.

“They also lack any political or strategical application. If Ellaria had even a hint of intelligence she would at least have kept Trystane Martell alive. She could have married her idiot daughter to the legitimate heir. Or she could have offered Trystane Martell as a husband to our Queen.”

“Luckily,” Varys replied, “Ellaria Sand does not have you as her Hand, because that would have been a wasted alliance for our Queen.”

“We’ll become a dragon’s meal if we held-up this council meeting, do you always take so long to get dressed?” Varys inquired of Tyrion in an exasperated manner.

Their walk to the meeting chamber did not take a lot of time. Queen Daenerys used one the largest cabins on the ship as a meeting chamber. As it stood they were quite fortunate not to be the last occupants of the council.

The vipers were standing together and whispering quietly as if they were nesting. Theon was completely detached from everyone, he always seemed as if he was cowering when his sister wasn't with him.

It was at that moment that Queen Daenerys herself decided to enter the room, she looked resplendent as always. This was the first time that Tyrion had seen the Dragon Queen with long sleeves. They were now almost certainly within the waters of Westeros, or somewhere close.
Greyworm who was standing a foot or so from Tyrion and Varys, as always appeared to be very cold and stoic. It was barely visible but as soon as Missandei entered the room, she captured the warrior’s attention. He had a fleeting look of true adulation on his face, before he quickly returned his features to his stoic visage.

Queen Daenerys’s bloodrider Qhono, took a stance a feet or so behind Queen Daenerys.

“Your Grace”, most of them uttered and bowed their heads in respect as Queen Daenerys took the head of the table.

“Yara, has been delayed, one of her ships is taking on more water than it should, she’ll be here shortly.”

Of course Ellaria was quick to seize onto any opening.

“Your Grace, we are still not very far from Sunspear. The fleet could land there, we have enough supplies, and Dorne is much warmer than the rest of the Seven Kingdoms.” Ellaria said suggestively.

“It would be easier for the Dothraki to acclimatise themselves to Dornish conditions before entering the rest of the Seven Kingdoms. The white ravens have flown from the Citadel.”

Tyrion could see that his Queen was trying very hard to be diplomatic.

“The idea has some merit,” Queen Daenerys relied.

“However, I ve spoken to my Hand and he has informed me that Sunspear would not be a good location to launch an invasion from. Our ships would be far away from Kings Landing, if we tried to launch an assault on Kings Landing the capital would know about our arrival days in advance.”

“A Lannister hand,” Ellaria mumbled. Queen Daenerys silenced her protests with one strong look.

“If I wanted to march my armies up to Kings Landing,” the Queen pointed to the large map that laid on the table and moved her finger along the path as she spoke, “They would have to march all
the way through the Prince’s pass, and they would have to pass the Stormlands. Varys has informed me that the Stormlands are still loyal to the crown at present.”

His Queen was practically repeating his speech to her word for word, Tyrion almost couldn’t help but smile slightly at Ellaria.

The Queen’s mood suddenly shifted, she had a determined look on her face, her features seemed as if they were carved in stone.

“Our will land at Dragonstone, it is close to Kings Landing and I will hear no more of landing in Dorne. My ancestor Aegon the Conqueror launched his invasion from Dragonstone and I will do the same. I was born in Dragonstone, it is my birthright!”

Tyrion knew that the matter was settled at last.

“Yara has informed me that if I wanted to launch a surprise attack, I would have to plan it from here. The news will spread, and soon everyone within Westeros will know that House Targaryen has returned.”

“What do you have in mind my Queen?” Tyrion enquired.

“Your idea of taking away Casterly Rock.”

“Soon we will attack Kings Landing, Cersei and her child will have nowhere to run, if Casterly Rock was already taken from her.”

Tyrion was cringing slightly inside of himself. Tommen might be the King but he was just a boy, Cersei would undoubtedly use and manipulate him as far as she could to gain power. She has already practically wiped out the whole Tyrell family with her wildfire, so there was no way to know how far she would be willing go, she would do whatever she could to keep poor Tommen in power. In power for herself to leach from. Tyrion did not want anything to happen to his nephew, he was always such a sweet boy, Tyrion knew that Joffrey had tormented Tommen at times, it is a shame that the boy will now be used by his own mother.

Tommen was Tyrion’s main concern, Tyrion was also concerned about Jaime but he knew that Jaime could at least fend for himself. Tyrion pushed away his fears for the moment.

“That is a sound idea my Queen, I might suggest that if we are launching an attack from the sea
that we should focus on Lannisport. Cersei will undoubtedly collect some income from the trade at Lannisport, it would be wise to cut off some of her income.”

Varys looked at Tyrion and spoke for the first time during the meeting, “My Lord, I have informed you that your brother Jaime was stripped of his white cloak, your brother would now be the Lord of Casterly Rock and the Warden to the West.”

“If Cersei asked Jaime for that income he would hand it over to her without any hesitation. My dearest sister have always gotten whatever she desires from Jaime, they truly have a special bond.”

Theon and most of the Sands looked truly disgusted for a heartbeat, by Tyrion's implication. You would think they would be used to it by now, thank the Seven that Daenerys doesn’t have a brother to wed.

Tyrion continued again after that.

“It would be easier to take Casterly Rock if Lannisport was already subdued. Once we have landed at Dragonstone we could send a small token force of perhaps unsullied to capture the Castle.”

Yara had finally arrived at the meeting. She plonked herself down on a chair and lazed back as if she was taking a long bath. The Ironborn were not the most respectful, Tyrion reflected by himself for the hundredth time.

But to Tyrion’s amazement, his Queen and the Ironborn ruler, got along like a whore with a full purse. They were often within each other’s confidence. Tyrion has even heard Varys said that they sometimes amused themselves with drinking games, shame he was never invited to those meetings.

Queen Daenerys smiled at Yara, as if they knew some secret that no one else was aware of, the Sands looked quite jealous. All the while Theon was doing his best not to be noticed.

“Yara I will give you one thousand Unsullied soldiers, and another five and ten thousand Dothraki soldiers, you will sail up the western coast and take Lannisport. How fast do you think, you’d be able to reach Lannisport?”

“I could reach Lannisport just before a moon's turn or so, perhaps half a moon if the weather is extremely agreeable. But there have been a lot of unpredictable storms from the North now that
winter has arrived.” Yara answered.

This was actually the first time that Tyrion could sense some real interest from Theon, he perked-up when had heard “North” and “winter”. The poor fucker really did love those Starks. Unfortunately for Theon, if there was actually any Stark alive today they would almost instantly remove his head from his body.

Tyrion knew that he should probably have a bit more understanding of Theon’s situation, after all he himself had a terrible father. Then again having your cock removed might be a bigger problem than simply having a bad father. And according to Varys Lady Sansa somehow ended up being married to that Bolton bastard who removed Theon's cock. Life is always full of surprises.

Tyrion brought his attention back to the matters that was being discussed. Yara was still talking.

“If the fleet moves very slowly from here, and I don't encounter too many delays then we might be able to coordinate the landings. I could arrive at Lannisport, and you my Queen could arrive at Dragonstone about simultaneously,” Yara replied in an intimate fashion.

“That is exactly what I am looking for, an invasion from two fronts, targeting both Lannister strongholds. That will send a message to the Lords of Westeros,” the Queen said with a cold look upon her face.

Tyrion has just realized that his Queen has actually given Yara Greyjoy quite a large command. His Queen clearly placed a lot of trust in Yara Greyjoy.

“We could also accompany Lady Greyjoy on her mission,” Ellaria said.

Yara Greyjoy snorted in a very unladylike fashion. She did not like to be called a Lady.

The Queen give her consent. “Yes, you can accompany Yara on the invasion of Lannisport.”

Tyrion was quite grateful towards his Queen in that moment, this meant that they would not be able to see the Sands for quite some time. Tyrion knew he might have been smirking in that moment.

The Sands was likely interested in acquiring some of the well known riches of the Westernlands.
“Are there any other suggestions for once we reach Dragonstone?” Queen Daenerys enquired.

“Your Grace,” Varys answered. I suggest that we wait with any further plans until we reach Dragonstone, let me first acquire some information about the news within the realm, a lot could have changed since I've last left Westeros.”

“Once we reach Dragonstone, you should acquire news about the realm as fast as possible, we must strike as quickly as possible.”

Varys acknowledged the Queen’s request.

“Once we reach Dragonstone we should set-up a route for the food supply. Dragonstone does not produce any large scale staples, such as wheat or other grains. Dragonstone only has some small scale farming, fish is the main source of meat, the army would deplete the food stores in a day, mayhaps even faster, we need that supply from Highgarden,” Tyrion stressed.

“We could send a few ships and soldiers to Highgarden on our way to Dragonstone.”

“That would be perfect, my Queen,” Tyrion replied.

“Varys, are you sure that Dragonstone is only manned by about thirty Baratheon men?”

“I am quite sure, Your Grace, it seems like everyone within Westeros have forgotten about Dragonstone.”

“They will soon be reminded of the Targaryens, and dragons”. Queen Daenerys answered flatly.

“Are there any other matters to discuss?” Queen Daenerys asked.

“No, Your Grace.” Most of them replied, and some just nodded.

“Then this council meeting is over.”
All of them stood-up some lingered more than others. Tyrion waited until everyone had left the chamber.

“My Lord?” Queen Daenerys enquired.

“I think you should have a word with Yara Greyjoy, I suspect that Ellaria and the Sand Snakes might be interested in plundering the Westernlands of its gold, Your Grace.”

“I will talk to her, Yara could even deliver some of that gold to us, we might need it with the coming war.”

“Your Grace,” Tyrion acknowledged and bowed as he left the chambers.

Yara Greyjoy, Ellaria and her nest of vipers left the ship two days after the meeting. Yara barely had time to re-load the food supplies, and to get all of the soldiers on the right ships.

Queen Daenerys, Missandei, Varys and Tyrion himself all stood at the helm of the ship as they watched Yara and Theon Greyjoy, Ellaria and her brood sail away. They stood there as the ship became smaller and smaller, until it had disappeared entirely. Tyrion had a feeling that Queen Daenerys would miss the company of Yara Greyjoy.

The rest of the journey was very slow and uneventful, they tried to stay away from the coast of Westeros and Queen Daenerys tried to make sure that her dragons would not be seen from the coast. Tyrion was fascinated with the bond that the Queen and her largest dragon shared.

It seemed like the two smaller dragons listened or followed the lead of the large dragon. Tyrion had read a lot of books about the relationship between Targaryen blood and dragons. But it was almost magical to witness it first hand.

Tyrion has read something about skinchangers before, according to some they apparently existed within the North, skinchangers could enter the mind of an animal. But Tyrion wasn’t sure that this bond between the Queen and her dragon was of such a nature. Even though it seemed as if they could almost sense each other's conscious at times. But sometimes the dragons still displayed a will of their own, Drogon didn’t always want to listen to his mother. Tyrion couldn’t fault the dragon, he certainly did not always want to listen to his father.
Each day felt longer as the journey continued, Tyrion was eager to set foot in Westeros once again, or just any dry land for that matter.

Finally a day arrived when the peaks of Dragonstone could be seen above the horizon. Tyrion was busy reading a book and drinking some wine, when a soldier commanded him to the deck.

The deck was full of commotion, Tyrion could see the Queen, Missandei and Varys were holding onto the rails and looking far away. That is when Tyrion spotted the land ahead. You could barely see anything but they were definitely heading towards land.

Tyrion joined the others. “Dragonstone,” Missandei said as they all tried to get a better glimpse of the land and the castle.

The whole world slowed down as they crawled closer and closer to Dragonstone. Tyrion could feel a strong wind ripping through the collar of his tunic. The wind held a strong bite of coldness to it. Tyrion was in a daze the last time he left Westeros, but he distinctly remember that it was warmer on that day. The thought of being so close to Kings Landing and his family once again caused a strange emotion to surge within him.

Tyrion tried his best to gaze at Queen Daenerys without being spotted. He swore that he might have seen a single tear fall from her eyes, which was much brighter than it usually was. She almost appeared vulnerable, like a child. The Queen has been very cold and stoic these past few moons, it was rewarding to see her happier for once. Even the dragons came swooping in flying closer together, they were flying around in circles close to the ship chirping and screeching loudly. There was a sense of expectation hanging in the air like the clingy heat on a warm summer's day, it has been a journey.

The waters around Dragonstone was choppy and restless, at times the water appeared to be boiling and bubbling around on the surface. It made Tyrion feel slightly drunk whenever he stared at the water for too long. Tyrion has never seen Dragonstone, he has always wanted to catch a glimpse of the Valyrian stronghold. He wanted to see the stone that was heated and molded by magic.

Tyrion was surprised when he finally had a full view of the castle. The castle was large and well build, but it did not look much like a dragon to him. The castle was dark and grim especially against the heavy grey skies, the castle was well fortified and it stood strongly on the high cliffs of Dragonstone, but it did not appear especially exotic. Tyrion was almost slightly disappointed.

But he did not have much time to ponder the aesthetics of Dragonstone. Tyrion’s attention was drawn to the beach. There were quite a few soldiers and some standards waiting for them on the
beach.

Tyrion looked at the others standing next to him. Everyone seemed a bit surprised and uncertain.

Varys was the first person who spoke out.

“Your Grace, perhaps it would be wise to send a few Unsullied soldiers ahead. They could form up in formation on the beach.”

“No,” the Queen answered resolutely.

“This is my home, I will complete my first steps on my homeland without covering or cowering.”

“I have been waiting for this moment a long time.”

The Queen sounded quite determined, and just then Drogon decided to fly close to the ship in a swooping arc.

Varys knew better than to say anything else at that moment. Well the Queen did have three dragons to protect her. There was only about one hundred soldiers standing on the beach, perhaps a bit more. Drogon could fry all of these people to ash, before Tyrion would be able to finish a flagon of wine, Tyrion saw the destruction those dragons were capable of during the Battle of Meereen.

Those were some brave soldiers, if Tyrion saw Drogon screeching and swooping around in the air, he is quite certain that he would have ran, good thing he wasn’t one of those people standing on that beach right now.

As they draw closer to the beach Tyrion could make out some of the standards. The sliver of a white seahorse upon a sea-green ocean and a blue swordfish on a white background was visible from the ship. Tyrion could well guess who was waiting for them on the shore.

“You Grace, one of the standards on the shore is from House Velaryon. I can’t remember exactly which house that blue swordfish represents, but I know they are sworn bannerman of Dragonstone. I would have to surmise that it is the bannermen of Dragonstone that awaits us on the beach.”
“A welcoming committee?” Varys questioned out loud.

“It could be a trap, but I doubt it, the Velaryons have always been close to House Targaryen,” Tyrion stated speculatively.

They had to make the final leg of the journey by boat. They were all lowered from the ship onto rowboats accompanied by some of the Unsullied soldiers. The water was quite unstable, but Queen Daenerys did not sit down. She remained standing as they slowly rowed to the shore.

“Missandei, once we are in position, you can announce my presence.” The Queen said.

They finally hit the shore, Tyrion was really desperate for some solid ground. Of course there are always events conspiring against Tyrion. Embarrassingly, one of the Unsullied soldiers had to lift him up like a child, in order to get him onto the ground. *What would life be without its constant embarrassments.*

Drogon was flying in circles overhead just above his mother. Just as they climbed out of the boat, everyone on the beach started to kneel.

They stood about two and ten feet away from from the centre column of the welcoming party, the Unsullied surrounding them from behind them, while some also stood next to them, ever vigilant.

Missandei stepped three paces forward. In a loud voice she announced their Queen’s arrival.

“You have the honour of appearing in the presence of Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen The first of her name, Queen of Meereen and the Bay of Dragons, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and of the First Men, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Mhysa the Breaker of Chains, The Unburnt, and the Mother of Dragons!”

“Rise” Queen Daenerys commanded in a clear voice.

Almost everyone stood as one.

One of the Lord’s at the center stepped forward, he wore a white tunic with seven golden stars
emblazoned upon his chest, in a circle. The Lord had a thin face with earthy, mud brown hair, he was slender and of medium height.

“Your Grace, the man said while bowing his head. I am Raymere Sunglass, Lord of Sweetport Sound. Next to me stands Duram Bar Emmon, Lord of Sharp Point. Next to Lord Bar Emmon stands the Lady Aynne Velaryon mother and Regent of Monterys Velaryon, the Lord of Driftmark.”

“Welcome home, Your Grace. We are all sworn bannermen of Dragonstone, we are here to pledge our fealty Your Grace.”

“I accept your oaths of fealty.” The Queen graciously replied.

“As a token of our loyalty we have gathered here in order to present Your Grace; with Dragonstone.” Lord Sunglass, made a hand motion towards the Dragonstone Castle.

“Your Grace, once we heard of your plans to land at Dragonstone, we gathered our soldiers and we took the castle back from the Baratheon men, that were still garrisoned here.”

“If it pleases Your Grace, we will escort you up to the castle at once.” Lord Sunglass intoned with a serious expression.

“I would be honoured, Lord Sunglass you may lead the way,” Queen Daenerys relied in a formal manner.

It was quite a climb to reach the top of the castle, Dragonstone had one narrow causeway of stone stairs that gradually climbed and snaked onto the summit. Tyrion knew his legs was going to cramp-up tonight, it has been awhile since he had walked such a distance. A ship is only so big.

“These are not all of the Dragonstone bannermen,” Varys whispered to him somewhere along the lines. Varys was right, House Celtigar was missing. Tyrion did recall that Lord Ardrian Celtigar was captured during the battle of Blackwater Bay. Tyrion recalled the old sour Red Crab, all too well. He was one of Cersei’s lackeys, the man testified against him during his trial.

“Lord Celtigar is likely still in Kings Landing,” Tyrion replied. “The Onion Knight was Stannis’s right hand man as I recall, he probably perished alongside Stannis.”
Just as Tyrion had suspected before he attempted the stairs, his short legs were quite sore by the
time they reached the summit. The first thing Tyrion spotted was two stone dragons that appeared
to be snarling at each other with one raised claw. The dragons stood on separate posts that flanked
the entrance gate.

Lord Sunglass stepped a few paces forward.

“Your Grace, welcome to Dragonstone, and may I also present you with the heads of all the
Baratheon traitors that were stationed within the castle.”

“Thank You, Lord Sunglass, you are all welcome to attend my court.”

Right next to the gate stood a few tall spikes, all of them had heads mounted on top of them. The
scene reminded Tyrion of his childhood, the walls of Casterly Rock were often emblazoned with
the heads of traitors and criminals. Tywin Lannister loved displaying heads as an example and a
reminder of what you could expect if you ever dared to defy the man. The heads became less and
less over the years.

As Tyrion stepped out of the way for the soldiers to pass him by, one of the heads caught his
fancy. As he was studying the face, the features of the head slowly started to shift, the shadows of
the face moved and repositioned itself, until he was looking at the head of Tywin Lannister.

Tyrion could feel a sense of satisfaction warming his whole body from inside, like strong undiluted
wine. He could not stop himself from staring.

“Lord Tyrion?”

“Lord Tyrion,” he registered his name a bit louder the second time. Missandei was peering at him a
bit questioningly.

“A grisly present for our Queen.”

Missandei nodded in agreement, "Lord Varys is looking for you.”
The one thing that always stood out to Sansa about her mother’s chambers was the warmth. Sansa knew that her mother had always cherished her room and quarters that was heated by the warm water springs that ran like veins underneath Winterfell.

It always reminded her mother of the South and her warm childhood days at Riverrun.

Sansa often sat within her mother’s chambers when they were all still living within Winterfell, Sansa would always listen to her mother’s tales of the South, she could listen to these tales for days on end. She could recall how her mother spoke of herself and aunt Lysa, about how close they were as girls, how they used to share a secret language, or how they would make cakes out of mud and feed them Littlefinger. Sansa now suspected that her mother had secretly hoped that her tales of sisterly love might have encouraged a better relationship between her and Arya.

Her mother loved to speak about the natural beauty of the godswood at Riverrun, about how you could sometimes smell the sweet summer blossoms all way into your room on the evening breeze, and how the warm air would touch your skin like silk while strolling though the godswood. Her mother used to tell her about the gallantry and the smiles of chivalrous knights. Tournaments where the knights wore exquisitely carved armour, and colourful favours from their ladies. The ladies in the South wore the softest and sheerest of fabrics, stitched together with silver and golden threads.

Late summer nights where the music, wine and the dancing would fill the halls almost until the hour of the wolf.

Or how they would fill barges with flowers and drift through the cool waters of the Red Fork during summer festivals.

Her father would often leave for days, to visit some of the bannermen within the North. It was during these days when Sansa would keep herself within her mother's company, and listen to all of her summer tales, while they patiently sewed together. Sansa could always see herself in every story.

She could see herself courtesy in sheer, brightly colourful gowns, Sansa could see herself dancing with the most courteous of Lords and Princes, with brave, handsome knights fighting for the honour of wearing her favours, and the bards and musicians would be serenading her beauty all over the South.
Sansa longed to hear her mother’s wistful tone once more. Sansa always immersed herself completely within the stories. Sansa was always so completely sure that her mother must have been missing and dreaming about her warm days of youth within Riverrun.

It is strange how Sansa never noticed at the time how tenderly her mother was sewing warm shirts and tunics for her father, while she was telling these stories. Or how she could smile, and reminded herself to tell father of some small detail upon his return. Sansa did not notice how mother would complement Ser Rodick and Vayon Poole for their loyalty and steadfastness.

Her mother always asked her to sew something for her father’s return. Sansa never truly recognized how proud her mother was when Sansa presented her father with these gifts, or how proud her mother was when Robb tried to perform the latest skill in his arsenal as a swordsman. Sansa didn’t realize at the time that her mother’s room was decked out in the grey and white colours of the Starks.

She did not notice at the time how her mother’s Lady of Winter mask would sometimes slip away and show pure adulation when her father came home safely, riding into the courtyard of Winterfell.

_Sometimes we only see what we want to see._

And now all that remains of rooms filled with family and warmth, are the grey stone walls.

Her mother’s chambers still held the warmth, but it wasn’t the same and there was little to nothing left of her mother. Winterfell had been stripped of most of its valuables. Sansa was doing her best to sew and recreate what was lost, yet she knew it was an impossible task.

Sansa was waiting patiently for a summons from Jon, Ser Davos had indicated earlier whilst they were dining in the great hall that her brother would want to speak with her later.

Sometimes Jon frustrated her greatly, he did not consult with her or ask for any opinion about any of his decisions about the Northern Lords. He consulted with Ser Davos, who isn’t even a Northerner and Maester Wolkan who has been a servant of House Bolton for years. But he did not think to ask her opinion on any of the Northern matters, while she is currently the Lady of Winterfell.

But Jon was her brother, he is the only family that was with her right now, and he is only family that she has seen in years. Sansa knew that she could likely easily reason with Jon if is she had wanted to.
The man whose behaviour really concerned her more at the moment was Littlefinger. It wasn’t his actions, but rather his current passiveness that made her extremely weary. Sansa immediately knew when Jon was declared as the King in the North, that Littlefinger would be furious, having Jon ruling as the King was not part of Littlefinger’s plan. Sansa expected some action of retaliation or manipulation from Littlefinger, but there has been nothing.

Littlefinger has almost been ignoring Sansa, he hasn’t seeked her out, and from what Sansa could see he hasn’t seeked out any of the Northern Lords either, and he hasn’t tried to create any disturbances that she was aware of.

Littlefinger has mostly been keeping to himself and the Lords of the Vale. Littlefinger has been conducting himself very inconspicuously.

Sansa did not understand what to make of it all. Littlefinger only briefly spoke out about recapturing Riverrun and claiming the Riverlands once again as part of the Northern Kingdom, during Jon’s instructions for the North.

Sansa has been doing her best to watch the Lords of the Vale as well as Littlefinger closely. Sansa has noted that Lord Yohn Royce was often accompanied by Lord Horton Redfort and two of his sons Creighton and Mychel Redfort. They were sometimes joined by Donnel Waynwood.

There was one incident where the whole sortie approached Sansa whilst she was walking alone through the godswoods, or so she thought at the time. Sansa had a strong feeling that they were seeking her out. However, they soon left her alone again after Symond Templeton also emerged from the godswood.

Sansa has seen Littlefinger in conversation with Lord Benedar Belmore, as well as Harlan Hunter and less often with Lyn Corbray. It almost seemed as if Littlefinger was dividing his attention equally between all of the members of the Vale.

Just then there was a knock on the door.

“Milady, the King has asked if you would be able to join him.”

Sansa bid the man to enter, it was one of the Mormont guards.
“Milady, I am to escort you to the King.”

Sansa saw that Jon was sitting at the table with a pitcher of ale and two horns, while reading some scroll message.

“Sansa,” he greeted her warmly with a small smile.

“It seems like some of the Northern clans have reached the Wall,” Jon said after looking up from the message again.

Sansa sat down close to Jon and she poured some of the ale, for herself.

“It seems like your plans are falling into place then,” Sansa replied perhaps a bit too coldly. Perhaps she shouldn’t just try to chastise or scold Jon so often. Sansa calmed herself before continuing.

“Why didn’t you ask or invite me to any of the meetings with the Northern Lords?”

Jon did not show much emotion, but he replied after a pause. “I needed to act quickly and decisively about the defense of the North.”

He also added quickly, “and that is also why I asked for you right now, you’ve spent some time within the Vale, you’ve spent some time with these Lords, mayhaps you could tell me a bit more about them.”

Sansa did not know whether she actually liked the answer that he give her. The implication was that he needed to act independently without her guidance or advice. But he was right about making a quick decision about the defenses of the North, especially now that Cersei has proclaimed herself as the Queen in the South. Sansa knew that Cersei was a very dangerous women full of petty spite and jealousy. She still couldn’t quite grasp that Margaery was dead, and Margaery really understood how Kings Landing worked.

“I’ve spent most of my time with Lord Royce,” Sansa answered.
“Lord Royce stopped at Winterfell once on his way to the Nights Watch, his youngest son took the black. By the time I had arrived at the Wall, Waymar Royce had disappeared. Father seemed to think that Lord Royce was an honourable man?”

Sansa remembered how she and Jeyne Poole were trying their best to capture the attention of Ser Waymar Royce, they were thrilled by the idea of having a young handsome knight within Winterfell.

“Lord Royce does seem to be honourable and trustworthy. From what I’ve seen Lord Royce has been spending most of his time with Lord Horton Redfort and his son Creighton Redfort as well as Mychel Redfort his youngest son, and Donnel Waynwood. I did meet Lord Redfort once, as well as the Lady Anya Waynwood, it seemed like they were trying to work together against Littlefinger at the time.”

Jon only nodded.

“Why would they want to declare for the North? Why would they want to declare for a bastard as their King?” Jon asked without much emotion. It always surprised Sansa how easily Jon could speak of himself as a bastard these days, she almost felt like flinching when he says it out loud and so nonchalantly. When they were all still happily living within the walls of Winterfell, he often became very sombre and moody when someone mentioned the word bastard.

“It might be a way for them to undermine Littlefinger. A King has a higher authority than a Lord, even Lord Robin Arryn. Littlefinger controls Robin Arryn. Having a higher authority then Robin Arryn means that they are not completely at the mercy of Littlefinger and Robin’s wims. Robin is a spoiled child, who was cuddled too much by his overbearing mother. The boy has no understanding about what it means to rule or even to conduct himself like a Lord. She may have been my aunt, but Aunt Lysa was mad, and she raised him with her madness.”

Sansa paused, she did not really want to think about her time with aunt Lysa, and hanging over the moon door.

“Well, their only other choice was to declare for Cersei…,” Sansa said with a small smile.

Jon give her one of his rare smiles back.

“The realm might truly be doomed now, if their only choice is between a bastard and a women who
blows-up her enemies with wildfire,” Jon said with ironic amusement.

“But they could still have declared Robin Arryn as their King?”

“As I’ve said before, Sansa replied, they wouldn’t want to give Robin Arryn more power, he is too unstable and Littlefinger is the one who is really whispering in his ear.”

“It always goes back to power and control,” Jon said a little bit annoyed. “We have White Walkers and hordes of undead armies approaching us, and people are still concerned mostly with power,” Jon sighed.

Jon did not have much of an interest in power or plays behind power, but Sansa has stayed within Kings Landing long enough to understand that people will never stop wanting more.

“What are your plans for the Lords of the Vale?” Sansa decided to ask.

“I wanted to distribute them throughout the North. They outnumber the North, it might be better to separate them into smaller groups. And yet I don't see Lord Baelish leaving with them, it might be easier for Baelish to control all of them from Winterfell, where he has access to more news and ravens.”

“What would you suggest?” Jon enquired.

“I would suggest that Lord Royce and Lord Redfort should remain here in Winterfell with most of their soldiers. They don't trust Littlefinger, so they would naturally keep an eye on him. And you wouldn’t have to lift a finger.”

“Send all of the other knights and Lords to different places, like you originally planned. Make sure that Lyn Corbray, Gilwood and Harlan Hunter, Lord Benedor and Marwyn Belmore along with Symond Templeton are send to different places. Perhaps you could send Lord Redfort’s sons with some of them.”

Jon never showed overmuch emotion, but Sansa could see a certain look of approval and appreciation in his dark eyes.
“Well, it seems like you have really given this some thought.”

“I have,” Sansa plainly admitted.

Sansa spent the rest of the evening within Jon’s chambers, it was not as warm as her own chambers but it was good to spent some time together as a family. Tormund the Wildling came bursting into the room not long after their discussion about the Vale. He brought a goatskin with some unholy Wildling concoction that Sansa tried to drink but failed miserably at. Jon himself wasn't very eager about drinking Tormund’s brew.

Tormund was very eager to tell Sansa some story about a bear, but Jon stopped him before it really got underway. Sansa mainly sat with them while she was doing some stitching, but it did not matter. Sansa felt safe, Jon was really the only man Sansa felt truly safe with.

It was such a foreign feeling to be able to feel so comfortable, which made her feel slightly uncomfortable again. There were so many times during her stay in Kings Landing that Sansa thought she would never see any of her family again. Sansa always felt like a silly girl when she thought back to her days within Kings Landing.

The chamber was still very similar to her father’s chamber, she could remember how her father often used to tell them stories by the hearth. It still pained her that she had to leave the last gift her father ever give her behind in Kings Landing.

When Sansa finally retired for the evening, she walked the small distance to her chamber alone. Sansa saw that the hallway held only one guard at the moment. It was very difficult for Sansa to walk alone by herself in the evening, she sometimes held her breath as she walked, so that she could hear every sound more clearly. She saw Ramsay's death, she killed him herself but sometimes it seemed like he could just appear from among the shadows like an aberration.

That was exactly why Sansa often choose to walk alone through the halls within Winterfell, one day with enough practice she might be able to walk around Winterfell without the past trying to strangle her from beyond the shadows.

It took a while for the petitioners to actually start arriving at Winterfell, the North has always been a vast country, and the new snows that kept on falling daily did not make matters any easier. Sansa sat at the high table for the first few times, right next to Jon with Maester Wolkan on her left, while Davos was seated on the other side of Jon. All of the petitions consisted of small folk who required shelter, food and warmer clothes. Jon allowed the small folk to stay within Wintertown once again, like the Starks have done for centuries. Sansa was starting to become concerned about the amount of people that might be dependent on Winterfell’s resources.
Jon showed a great interest and understanding towards the small folk. Sansa was never close to Jon whilst growing-up. Sansa was surprised when she started to realize that Jon had some similarities with her father, it shouldn’t really have been a surprise but Sansa simply didn’t know Jon that well previously. Yet, Sansa also understood that while her father was a gracious man, he was also often a pragmatic ruler. Sometimes you have to make hard decisions in order to survive.

Perhaps Jon had a stronger bond with the small folk since his time within the Nights Watch, but Sansa had to admit to herself that she was starting to become concerned, if Jon wasn’t perhaps too kind and gentle towards the small folk.

The novelty of listening to the same petitions day after day wore off over a moon's turn. Instead of listening to petitions during the morning Sansa used the time to focus on her duties as a hostess. It was much easier during this time, since many of the Lords and Knights were gathered within great hall.

There was a lot that Sansa needed to do, she needed to make sure that all of the guest rooms were kept in a tidy fashion. She needed to make sure clothes and linen were being washed, and that the servants were doing their duties. Sansa had to make sure that the guest were receiving new water, ale or wine daily. They didn’t really have enough servants for the sheer amounts of guests. Sansa often inspected the rooms and the washing herself. It was easy for Sansa to take on her duties as the Lady of the House, this is what she has been trained for practically her whole life.

It was on one such an afternoon when Ser Davos came to find her within the washing quarters.

Ser Davos walked up to her and inclined his head, “Good afternoon Milady,” he greeted her.

“I hope I am not disturbing your work?”

“Good afternoon, Ser Davos, I am almost done here for the day, has Jon been looking for me?”

“The King is about to ride out to Wintertown, he’s got some plans for the small folk. I took the liberty of arranging for a horse to be saddled and readied.”

“I thought it might be good for the people of Wintertown to see their Lady amongst themselves.”

Sansa wasn’t really ready for riding, but she supposed that Wintertown was quite close to Winterfell.
Sansa took off an apron she was wearing and left the washing quarters with Ser Davos. Plans, what plans could Jon have for the small folk she wondered.

When Sansa arrived at the stables everyone was already waiting for them. There were about five and twenty guards, waiting in two straight lines. Jon was waiting in the middle on a black charger, while two stable boys were holding the reigns of two horses. Ser Davos helped Sansa onto a docile mare.

They left through the Southern gate, and rode east alongside the walls of Winterfell, it was a quick ride to Wintertown. As soon as they neared the town, they could hear calls and shouts warning the people within the town about their approach. Wintertown was made up of neat rows of log houses, Sansa could see smoke billowing from some of the houses, and the people were milling around trying to make why for their party of riders.

They were riding towards the centre of the town, where you could see quite a few stalls, but most of them were empty. As they rode through the muddy streets where the snow was pushed to the sides, the people were cheering for them, Sansa smiled down at the people when she heard a few calls for “Lady Sansa!” Sansa has never heard her named being cheered or chanted by a crowd before. A strange sense of euphoria descended upon her, it made her sit the horse straighter.

Jon and Ser Davos climbed off from their horses, two guards followed them as well. A large table along with a chair was brought over to Jon, he climbed easily from the chair onto the table, Jon only needed to hold his hand up in the air for the crowd to quiet down and stop cheering.

“Winter has come,” the crowd erupted into cheering once again, they quieted down after a few moments.

“This winter will be hard and cold, if we want to survive we will need to help each other. All of us need to do our part, Lords, warriors, masons, farmers, lumbermen all of us need to work together if we are going to survive this winter!”

“The Long Night is coming, and dead comes with it. But everyone of you can help.” Jon paused for a moment.

“The Starks have always protected the people of Wintertown throughout the winter, we will keep on protecting the people of Wintertown.”
People were once again cheering for the “King in the NORTH!”

Once again Jon had to wait for the crowd to quiet down.

“But you can also help yourselves!”

“From tomorrow noon I will start training for warriors, I need any everyone of fighting age, if we are going to defeat the White Walkers we need to be able to fight them.”

“Those with experience in other crafts can report to Winterfell early, we need hunters, lumbermen, carpenters and stone masons.”

“Those who are unable to report to Winterfell, can look after the children and the sick. Everyone can help against with the fight against the White Walkers!”

“I hope to see most of you on the morrow.”

After a few moments of silence the crowd started cheering once again. As they rode away they could still hear a few cheers from the people. Sansa did not really know what to make of these plans, the war could start at any time, she was doubtful that there would be enough time to train untested soldiers, then again she did know anything about soldiers.

Jon and Ser Davos came riding next to Sansa. “I am glad that you came along, Jon said to her, "Ser Davos tells me that you have been very busy with all of our guests. Perhaps you could find a housekeeper or an extra steward from the small folk within Wintertown.”

“Sometimes it is good to be occupied, you yourself have been quite occupied,” Sansa replied.

When they approached the Southern gate once again a horn was sounded, just as they reached the gate the horn sounded once again. Jon and Davos looked up questioningly at one of the centuries that was stationed at the gate, “two riders are approaching the gate, Your Grace.”

They entered the courtyard and dismounted, their horses were lead away to the stables. Sansa waited alongside Jon and Ser Davos, to see the identity of these riders.
The identity of the riders were evident as soon as they entered through the gates. It was Brienne and her squire Podrick Payne. Sansa felt a sense of relief wash over her, she had been worried about Brienne after she had heard that Cersei had proclaimed herself as the Queen, there were also some rumours that Riverrun was lost once again to the Lannisters.

Once Brienne and Podrick dismounted from their horses, they immediately approached Sansa.

“Lady Sansa,” Brienne greeted Sansa with a very serious bow, Podrick followed her lead.

“Lady Brienne,” both Jon and Ser Davos greeted her.

“I have news about your uncle and your great uncle,” Brienne said very gravely.

“You can follow me to my chambers, I will ask a servant to prepare some chambers for you and your squire,” Sansa replied.

Jon and Ser Davos was already walking away. Brienne and Podrick followed Sansa quietly to her chambers, she instructed a servant to prepare the chambers right next to her own for Brienne and Podrick.

“Tell me, what news do you have?”

“My Lady, I am sorry, I failed you,” Brienne answered morosely. “Your great uncle Bryden Tully died when Riverrun was taken back by the Lannisters.” So it seems like there was some truth to the rumours about Riverrun falling once again to the Lannisters.

“My Lady, I tried to convince your great Uncle of your cause, but he choose to remain, he wanted to fight for Riverrun; for his home. He helped me and Podrick to escape from the castle, he seemed to be a good man, I am sorry my Lady”. Sansa knew that her mother always held Bryden Tully in a high regard. He might have been useful to them.

“Your uncle Edmure Tully is still alive, but he is a prisoner of Walder Frey.” Just hearing about Walder Frey made Sansa feel murderous, she wish that he could suffer the same fate as Ramsay.
“I am sure you tried, it is good to have you back Brienne, but you’ve had a long journey, get some rest and join my side on the morrow.”

“Thank you my Lady, I will continue to protect you to the best of my abilities.” Brienne bowed again as she left the room.

Brienne did seem visibly relieved to be back by Sansa’s side. Sansa felt safer and steadier with Brienne and Podrick in tow.

Winterfell’s quartyard erupted into chaos the next day. Sansa breaked her fast early with Brienne by her side. Sansa then left the great hall to stand on the bridge that overlooks the courtyard.

The courtyard was filled with small folk. Sansa felt slightly uneasy for a moment as she remembered the mob within Kings Landing, but luckily Winterfell was full of soldiers, they would outnumber any potential mob. Sansa had to admit that it seemed like Ser Davos was equal to the challenge, he took the situation under control quickly enough, perhaps it was from his days as a captain to smugglers, Sansa thought to herself dryly.

There was only two stone masons present, there was quite a few men from the Wolfswood who knew how to gather and chop wood. Only three huntsmen stepped forward, and a young man who apparently had some experience from working in a smithy as an apprentice. Sansa was mostly encouraged by twelve women who stepped forward and offered their services as servants for Winterfell. For the most part they unfortunately seemed like a sorry lot, it was difficult to imagine most of them as soldiers or warriors.

There was about two hundred of them left, and Jon seemed adamant that they would start their training on this day. Ser Davos had assigned work for the more specialized groups, earlier.

There was not enough padding or tourney swords. They were divided into groups of thirty, one group was learning how to shoot targets with a crossbow, while the other group was taught what Sansa imagined was some basic moves with the sword.

She watched Jon going through the same demonstrations, twice between two different groups. Tormund was also there to offer some advice. Although Sansa could see that many of the men give the Wildling a dark look. But it was Jon who mostly caught Sansa’s attention, he truly seemed to be in his element. Sansa had never seen this side to Jon’s personality, he was at complete ease and command as he was trying to training these men.
“Do you see any potential,” Sansa enquired from Brienne.

“It is too early to tell my Lady, these men will need some practice,” Brienne replied.

After a while Maester Wolkan came to join them. “My Lady I am sorry to trouble you, Lord Manderly received a raven from White Harbour, he asked that the message should be received by the King as soon as possible.”

Sansa looked at Maester Wolkan for a moment or two, and pointed towards Jon. “The King is right there?”

“As I ve said my Lady, I am truly sorry to be such a bother.” The man was afraid of approaching Jon while he was busy, Sansa realized.

“I will send the King to his study,” Sansa relied to Maester Wolkan.

Sansa did not really like the Maester’s apologetic nature. It is difficult to trust someone when they are always apologizing for something. It makes you wonder if they have done something that needs apologizing for. But she also recognised the fear within the man, it is a fear that could only come from serving the Boltons.

Sansa made her way to the courtyard, as soon as Tormund spotted Brienne, he had a silly grin plastered all over his face. Sansa looked behind her at Brienne, and she could see that Brienne looked very stern and unmoving, but there was also some red colour creeping into her cheeks.

Jon finally saw and approached them, it seemed like everyone within the courtyard was looking right at her, Sansa had to suppress her discomfort.

“Brother, Lord Manderly has received an urgent message from White Harbour that he wants to share, Maester Wolkan asks that you would join him in your study as soon as possible.”

Jon then turned to Tormund, “keep on showing them the same moves I showed them, and let them all practice together against each other once everyone has learned the basic moves, they don't need swords to practice these basic moves.”
Tormund only shook his head, “you Southerners and your fighting techniques, har”. Jon only stared at Tormund, “fine King Crow, I will focus on your techniques.”

Jon left them quickly after that. Sansa and Brienne left the courtyard again for the vantage point of the bridge. It did not take very long for a servant to find Sansa after that. The servant requested Sansa’s presence within Jon’s study. It reminded Sansa of the day Jon called for her, to tell her that Cersei had proclaimed herself as the Queen.

Sansa felt as if her throat was constricting as she walked towards Jon’s study, with Brienne and Podrick one step behind. Sansa had spent the previous evening within Jon’s chamber and she had told him about the death of Bryden Tully, she did not think they could receive more bad news so quickly.

She stopped before the door of the study and took a deep breath and knocked, she waited for the guard to announce her presence.

“Lady Sansa Stark.”

Ser Davos was already there as she entered, he was seated. Ser Davos did not look overly concerned, he stood-up as Sansa entered, “My Lady,” and sat back down again. Perhaps Jon has waited for the both of them to arrive.

Sansa took the seat next to Ser Davos the door was closed behind her, Brienne and Podrick remained outside waiting within the hall.

“Lord Manderly received a raven from White Harbour, a ship has arrived from King Landing, and the sailors have reported that Daenerys Targaryen has landed at Dragonstone, with an enormous fleet; with hundreds of ships.”

Sansa did not really know what she was expecting, but she did not expect another self proclaimed Queen to arrive within Westeros. During her time at court she had only heard of Daenerys Targaryen briefly, there were some rumours that she had dragons and that she has titled herself as the Mother of Dragons, but most people did not believe in these tales.

But this girl was of Targaryen blood and the daughter of the Mad King, if she has landed at Dragonstone with a large fleet, it could only mean that she was interested in Kings Landing.
“Dragonstone has a lot of dragon glass, but it is not an ideal place to host a large fleet,” Ser Davos replied.

“She must be planning on taking Kings Landing rather quickly”, Sansa said. “It could be an advantage for us, if Cersei is focused on fighting the Dragon Queen, she will not have time to think about the North.”

“That may be true but Daenerys Targaryen also have three dragons, she might conquer Kings Landing too quickly, and then she might decide to conquer the rest of the Seven Kingdoms just as quickly,” Jon replied.

“Three dragons? Do you really believe that she has three dragons?” It was very difficult for Sansa to imagine three living dragons. When Sansa was younger she might have believed these tales.

“If you have seen and experienced the things that I have, then you would also believe that she does have three dragons. Maester Aemon at the Wall regularly received reports about her, she was his last living family member. I’ve heard a few of those reports, Daenerys Targaryen were able to conquer three cities in a very short time, and she has acquired an army and a following, she has freed thousands of slaves, it would make sense that she did have something like dragons, if you look at her results,” Jon answered her seriously.

“You, knew a relative of hers?” Sansa was quite surprised, she did know that there were any Targaryens left.

“Aye,” Jon answered with a sigh, “and now his watch has ended. He was a wise and gentle man.” Sansa could sense, a feeling of loss from Jon’s words.

“Your Grace, we should try to negotiate with her, we share the same enemies.” Ser Davos quipped in between their discussion.

“As I’ve said Your Grace, Dragonstone does have a lot of dragonglass. But dragons could be the ultimate weapon against the White Walkers!” Ser Davos added excitedly.

“Ser Davos,” Sansa replied “she is a Targaryen, she could very likely see us as her enemies, the Targaryen house words are fire and blood, dragons haven’t been known to compromise much in the past.”

Sansa could see that Jon was nodding.
“Sansa is right Ser Davos, the Starks have a bad history with the Targaryens it would be better to remain cautious.”

“History is in the past, right now Daenerys Targaryen’s biggest opposition is the Lannisters, they are holding the throne in Kings Landing, and the White Walkers are an enemy to everyone,” Ser Davos replied.

Sansa had to admit that she was growing a bit frustrated with all of the talk and planning surrounding animals and creatures that have died out hundreds or thousands of years ago, or they might just be a scary bedtime story for children. Sansa was trying her best to believe in everything Jon has said, but she has never seen magic or any long-dead creatures. It was really hard for her to take these discussions seriously at times. Sometimes it felt like everyone around her was slowly turning mad.

“I wouldn’t hold her family’s past against her, but we don’t know how Daenerys Targaryen would see us,” Jon told Davos.

“The Targaryens were the ones who acted against us,” Sansa replied vehemently,” her brother stole our aunt Lyanna, and her mad father killed our uncle and our grandfather. She should be the one making amends to us, not the other way around!” Sana announced angrily.

Sansa suddenly felt a cold rage, although she never even knew any of these relatives.

Both Ser Davos and Jon seemed to look at her somewhat surprised.

“You might both be right,” Jon said carefully. “We do need dragonglass, and she might not be open to negotiations.”

Jon paused for a moment.

“But winter is here, when Aegon the Conqueror invaded Westeros it was during the summer. The winter is our greatest ally. Daenerys Targaryen comes from the far South she has never experienced the cold, and her army has never experienced the cold, she might have to negotiate whether she wants to or not.”

Sansa smiled at Jon, “Winter has come.”
“But let us first see what she does on Dragonstone, and what her plans for Westeros are,” Jon replied.

Both Sansa and Ser Davos nodded in agreement.

“It is funny that you should mention, that our aunt was stolen, the Wildlings have a tradition of stealing their brides.”

Sansa was lost by the turn of conversation for a moment.

“They steal and rape their future wives?” Sansa was disgusted, her thoughts were threatening to go back to Ramsay.

“Well no, not exactly; but it is difficult to explain, the Wildling women are fighters, if they don't want to be stolen by a man they won't allow it, they would slit his throat while he sleeps. So the Wildlings actually choose their own husbands and wives, in a fashion.” Jon explained.

Sansa did not really understand the point of this tale. She must have appeared quite confused.

Jon smiled at her confusion, ”I am only telling you because I ve seen the way Tormund looks at Lady Brienne, I've made all of the Wildlings swear that they wouldn't steal any of the Southern women, and I am sure Tormund would keep his word, but you might want to inform Lady Brienne just in case”.

“I will try to explain this to her, maybe she will understand it better then me.”

The rest of the day went by without much further incident. Sansa spent most of her time between the kitchen and the great hall. Sansa also spent some time within the godswood by herself, it was something that she had started during her time in Kings Landing, and she found that it still quieted her mind, to spent some time there. In the truth the godswood at Kings Landing, was only a very bad imitation of the godwoods within Winterfell.

Sansa had stopped believing in the gods a long time ago, but you could almost start believing again if you spent enough time within Winterfell’s godswood.
That evening within the great hall Sansa heard nothing about Daenerys Targaryen, it seemed like the news hasn’t spread through the castle yet. Instead Jon finally assigned some duties towards the Lords of the Vale. Jon had mostly listened to Sansa’s advice about the Lords of the Vale.

He send the most potentially untrustworthy Lords to the Wall, such as the Templetons, the Belmore’s and the Corbray’s along with Creighton Redfort. He send some of the Wynwoods towards the eastern coast. The Hunters and some other smaller houses along with Mychel Redfort was sent to the western coast. It was notable that he did not send any of the Vale troops to Moat Cailin. He obviously believed that their threat from Cersei has diminished.

The next days went along like most of her days went along, Sansa had started the habit of watching the small folk train during the afternoons. Most of the Lords did not take much interest in this activity, and Sansa knew that Brienne was enjoying it as well. Sansa also liked to watch Jon as he trained the small folk. This was the first time that Sansa has ever taken an interest in her family, or at least tried to show an interest. Sansa was slowly realizing that she might have been a very self absorbed girl.

It was interesting watching the men train, Sansa often saw a different side to them on the training yard, then what she usually witnessed in the great hall.

The Lords of the Vale took their time to leave Winterfell, it has almost been a fortnight since Jon have given them their duties.

Everyone within the castle was now talking about the coming of Daenerys Targaryen, and everyone had a different opinion on the matter.

Sansa was standing at her usual place on the bridge watching the small folk learning to wield their swords. Jon and Tormund had started separating the potential soldiers and warriors, from those who did not take to the sword or fighting naturally. Even some of the women had started to appear for some sword or spear lessons. Jon did not seem to mind, just as he was always approving of Arya and of wayward ways.

The people who did not show any natural inclination towards fighting were sent on to gather or chop wood, or to train as masons. More hunters did appear after the initial days, as they later admitted that they were fearful of being hauled off as poachers.

As newer small folk arrived, the training started anew.

Sansa was watching causally from the bridge with her elbows resting on the railing, when
Littlefinger was suddenly standing next to her. Both Brienne and Podrick stepped a bit closer to Sansa, if Littlefinger saw their actions, it still did not appear to change his approach towards her. He mimicked her stance and was leaning forward on the railing with his elbows.

“Lady Sansa,” he greeted.

“You have been very busy these last few moons my Lady,” Littlefinger stated.

“These are busy times Lord Baelish, I am sure you would agree.” Sansa answered.

“Indeed my Lady, it was a shame to hear about your uncle the Blackfish, he was an intelligent and useful man to have during these times of war.”

“Your uncle Edmure remains a prisoner to the Freys?” Littlefinger said while shaking his head sadly. Of course Littlefinger knew perfectly well that her uncle was still a captive of the Freys.

Sansa kept quiet, she knew that Littlefinger would do the talking.

Some Lords have arrived in the courtyard, Sansa could see Lord Cerwyn and Lord Glover watching the training from the side of the armoury.

“This Dragon Queen will be keeping Cersei very occupied, it might be a very good time to strike out against the Freys, they deserve some retribution after what they did to your mother and your brother,” Littlefinger added.

“I would be satisfied if some justice was served against the Freys, but I am sure that you are well aware that most of our troops have already been deployed elsewhere.” Sansa replied.

Littlefinger pointed to the training yard, “It is a good thing that your brother is training more soldiers then, mayhaps there will be enough soldiers within the near future to launch some kind of an attack”.

In truth Sansa did want to avenge the death of her mother and Robb. The Freys could not remain unpunished, especially now that House Stark has been re-established. It might make them look
weak, if they are not able to punish their enemies for the atrocities they have committed against them.

Sansa was just as much of a Tully as she was a Stark. Her uncle was a captive and no one had any plans to free him from his captivity. When Sansa was a hostage within Kings Landing she always knew that her mother would try to save her from the clutches of the Lannisters.

But Jon had absolutely no interest in the Riverlands, it wasn't his family member that was currently sitting within a Frey dungeon.


There were more arrivals within the courtyard, Symond Templeton and Lyn Corbray had arrived as well. Sansa did not like the look of either men.

Lyn Corbray was a handsome man, slender and tall, but there was also something cruel within his expression. Symond Templeton wasn’t particularly handsome with his beaked nose, and his eyes was always very cold and devoid of any emotion.

Sansa had almost forgotten that Littlefinger was still standing next to her.

“It seems like your half-brother has really taken to Kingship rather quickly, I must admit I was surprised by his; vigor,” Littlefinger said.

Sansa made no effort to reply to him.

Lyn Corbray was approaching Jon, with a smirk upon his face. Jon and Tormund was deep within a discussion. Sansa could see that Littlefinger has also started to pay more attention to the scene underneath them.

“Your Grace,” Lyn Corbray said in a mocking, forgetful tone.

Within a heartbeat Lyn Corbray had plucked his sword from his side.

Sansa could see the dark grey smokey steel, it did not exactly reflect the light, it almost captured and smoldered the sunlight. Sansa could see the red reflection of a big ruby within the pommel, it
shined like newly spilled blood.

Tormund was also holding his sword out in front of him. Tormund’s sword was shorter and wider, the sword was very unspectacular against Lady Forlorn. It was a crude thing, with old brown leather on the handle.

Lyn Corbray laughed loudly at Tormund. “I was just about to ask our King if he was interested in a practice round or two before all of us set out to the Wall.”

Tormund dropped his sword, but he did not sheath the sword back into its scabbard.

“Your Grace, I would almost guarantee that you’ve never had a dual against a true Knight.”

Sansa could see that Jon had a grim expression on his face, but eyes was fierce and focused.

“I don't believe I've ever had the honour, Ser Corbray...but we will not be practicing with Valyrian steel?” Jon replied. Jon instructed one of the younger boys from the small folk to bring them two tourney blades.

Lyn Corbray had sheathed his Valyrian steel sword, he held the tourney blade with a slightly disgusted look, “I am not a squire, I was eager to test my Valyrian steel against Valyrian steel.”

Jon appeared completely unimpressed by Lyn Corbray’s insinuations. He replied very evenly; “We practice with tourney blades or we don't practice at all.”

“Tourney blades are fine,” Lyn Corbray answered in an exaggerated manner.

Sansa sucked in her breath, as Lyn Corbray abruptly launched at Jon, with a powerful arc from high above his head. Jon blocked his strike without any fumbling, it seemed like he was expecting a surprise attack from Lyn Corbray.

Everyone had stopped dead within their tracks, everyone was watching this duel with anticipation. Lady Brienne had stepped forward and she had placed herself between Sansa and Littlefinger, she was holding onto the hilt of her sword.
Lyn Corbray followed his first attack with a few powerful blows, the metal swords was ringing hard against each other. It seemed like Jon was a bit on the defense. Lyn Corbray was a tall man, and Jon was short, it was likely that he had much more power, then Jon.

Lyn Corbray pushed the attack hard with a strong intent as he slashed from the right and slashed from the left, every strike was hard and powerful. The dual had now shifted to the middle of the training yard, as Jon had moved backwards to counter Lyn Corbray’s blows.

When they reached the centre of the training ground Lyn Corbray suddenly changed his tactics. Instead of just raining more powerful blows upon Jon, he acted more cautiously and circled Jon twice before launching another attack.

Somewhere in the background Sansa could hear a horn blowing, but her focus was captured by scene in front of her.

Lyn Corbray showed much more technique during this attack, you could see that he was a swordsman who’ve practiced these techniques for ages. Instead of power and force he was using more speed and precision.

But Jon was very quick and nimble footed as well, the dual was starting to look more like a dance, and the people around them were clapping and cheering. Sansa did not know much about sword fighting but even she could understand that this was a well fought battle.

Someone like Arya would have loved this dual.

Both swordsmen came close to each, when they came close to each other again Jon punched Lyn Corbray in the shoulder, Lyn Corbray moved back quickly to stay out of the reach of Jon’s sword. The sweat was shiny on his forehead.

Lyn Corbray changed his tactics once again, he started hitting Jon with the powerful blows again, Jon moved backwards a few paces while defending these powerful blows.

But then he suddenly stopped defending, Jon was now the one on the attack. His blows wasn’t as hard as Lyn Corbray’s blows, but he was extremely fast. His movements had a graceful elegance that Sansa would never have associated with Jon or swordfighting. His movements had a finesse that some dancers would envy.
Lyn Corbray was now the one on the back foot, he was now the one who was moving backwards towards the bridge on which Sansa stood. Lyn Corbray managed to block and parry, but his movements now held less certainty, and technique.

And suddenly within the blink of an eye, Lyn Corbray was lying on his back, and Jon was standing on his right and his blunt tourney blade was pointed at his throat.

“Do you yield?” Jon asked him. The crowd was gravely quiet, while waiting for an answer.

“I yield,” Lyn Corbray stated. Jon offered him his hand, but Lyn Corbray ignored his hand stood by himself.

The crowd started cheering again, for their King.

Lyn Corbray looked at the ground, and then looked up again, “this would never have happened if I were fighting with a proper sword, I am not used to fighting with tourney blades like a squire!”

Sansa looked at the ground and noticed that there was some snow patches where Lyn Corbray landed on his back, and the ground was somewhat uneven. It seems like some of the snow that was permeated within the ground might have melted a bit, and it left some holes that was filled with snow.

Jon did not say anything in return, Lyn Corbray abruptly stormed away from the training yard. Sansa noticed that Ser Davos had appeared from somewhere and he was approaching Jon.

“That was not the most honourable of endings, to an otherwise fascinating dual.” Littlefinger observed sardonically.

To Sansa’s mind it mostly appeared as if Jon had the battle under control, but she knew Littlefinger was referring to the uneven terrain.

“Sometimes we have to take our victories every which way we can, Lord Baelish,” she replied to Littlefinger with a small smile.
“Wise words, my Lady”, Littlefinger replied also with a slight smile while inclining his head.

Sansa’s focus was back on Ser Davos as soon as he started talking to Jon.

“Your Grace, some Karstark banners have been spotted on the horizon, a group of around forty riders are approaching Winterfell”.

_The horn_, Sansa remembered.
The sea was silent, one could almost believe that they were gently floating away on a quiet lake. The waves were too weak to speak to the wind. The great waters looked like polished armour, if Yara looked closely she could see the reflection of her ship, the *Black Wind*, reflecting back to her.

Day after day the seas had become calmer and quieter, Yara knew she was well behind the Dragon Queen’s schedule. It was almost like traveling through a desert each day they would make less progress and each day the oarsmen had to work harder. The large Kraken sail was hanging limply and lifelessly in the air like a dead deer. As the seas grew calmer tensions and temperaments grow hotter.

Yara already had to stop four drunken brawls these past two days, one of which resulted in a stabbing when Elmar had somehow discovered that Lukas One Ear has fucked his favorite salt wife. Insults between the crew were flying around quicker.

More than a moon’s turn has already passed since Yara had last left the Dragon Queen. Yara knew that they must have landed upon Dragonstone already. While Yara was just about to enter the Redwyne straights, at the mouth of the Arbor. She was still leagues away from Lannisport.

The past four days have been the worst, there was barely a breeze that could move a few dried-out leaves. They were making good time at first, until they got past the Salt Shore, everything started to slow down a forthright past. The wind blew less everyday and the waves became weaker.

Yara has been trying to spare the oarsmen and the soldiers from too much rowing, she wanted them to be fresh once they arrived at Lannisport, she didn’t want to sap their strength unnecessarily. But now she couldn’t tarry any longer. Idle and frustrated crews had a way of occupying themselves with mindless deeds.

The men was sitting around listlessly, some were trying to whisper behind her back. Some men were saying that the Drowned God had abandoned them. Even the air felt thick and stale, there was a persistent thick heat that felt completely wrong for Westeros. Even Yara herself had never seen anything like this.

Yara has never cared much for the gods, but even she was starting to feel suspicious and unnerved.
It was still early morning before the sun could properly rise and break its light over the ocean. Streaks of yellow and dark red, scarlet light was breaking through the still blackened sky.

Yara had decided that it was enough. As the saying goes ide sailors never stay idle for long.

Yara would break the stalemate today by changing the routine of the sailors and by practicing some battle formations before they really entered the Redwyne straights between the Arbor and the Reach. Asha would rather have sailed around this gateway, but with the weather as it was she didn’t really have a choice, it would take too much time to sail around the Arbor and it would be hard work for the oarsmen, Yara could already see that the wind and seas wasn’t any better today.

Yara has spent the whole of yesterday making arrangements with all of the captains from her ships. Messages was sent back and forth between the ships, the closest captains arrived in row boats, to get their instruction for today. Just after daybreak their long day will begin. Yara was standing near the rudders watching over the deck and waiting patiently for the ship to come alive.

This was always the best part of the day for Yara, watching the sun win once again over the darkness, if she watched the seas for long enough she could feel the gentle waves become a part for her, almost as if her blood was replaced by the flow of the sea. Her early morning reprieve was broken temporary as Theon came to stand next to her. He was watching the smooth waters of the seas, with a slight flicker of concern.

“Brother,” she greeted Theon.

“Yara,” Theon greeted her back.

Theon stood next to her, but he remained silent, it seemed like he was trying to see or understand what she was seeing. Yara did not know if Theon would ever really understand the seas like a true Ironborn man. But he was still her little brother, mayhaps he could learn something from today.

It wasn’t long after Theon’s arrival that the deck became more active, there were more energy and enthusiasm today after the commotions and the arrangements of yesterday, everyone could sense that something would happen today, there was anticipation within in the air and everyone could forget their petty squabbles for a day.

Uller approached Yara and Theon, “Captain, I think we should start to get the activities
underway." Theon remained silent and disjointed.

Yara nodded at him. Uller rang the bell to rise all of the sleepy sailors. It wasn’t to long after the bell had rang that everyone was standing on the deck within neat rows all facing forward, they knew if they tarry to long they would be punished.

Yara strode forward with long strides, onto the deck. She looked at everyone that was gathered, and tried to look them all directly in the eyes.

“We will be practicing our battle formations today,” Yara said clearly in a strong voice that boded no arguments or second guesses, although she could see within her mind’s eye how some of the men might be groaning. It was difficult to practice battle formations, and it took a lot of effort and perseverance from everyone involved.

“I want the soldiers to take turns on the oars as well, and everyone should learn the commands,” Yara instructed. Yara knew that the soldiers wouldn’t be satisfied with playing the part of oarsmen, but the extra trained men could make a difference within a full scale naval assault.

“We will begin with our most experienced oarsman, the others will observe and take turns alongside the experienced men and learn to listen to the commands.”

Yara give a nod to Uller, who was standing to her left, just behind her with a big horn. He blew the horn three times, it was three long and strong sounds that would travel far across the water.

Yara could see scurrying all over the deck to get into position. Soon after the horn was sounded, she could hear the horns aboard the other ships echoing their answer. The ship started to move quickly she could feel the change of direction underneath her feet as she stood firm, and she could see some of the other ships within her fleet moving closer towards them, as they were all moving into the position of the pig’s head. An old but very effective tactic especially as they would be going through the straights soon. She would use this formation to make her way through the straights.

All of the ships around them answered, with two short sounds from their horns. She showed Uller four fingers when she believed that they had completed the pig’s head formation.

Uller sounded the horn again with four long strong mournful blows.

Once again the ships started to move around swiftly, and they were lining up against each other to
complete the land maneuver. Yara’s ship was stationed just behind the centre, she could see the flanks on both sides filling up. Yara waited until she saw a group of eight ship sail around the left flank to attack the invisible enemy from behind their ranks.

Yara showed three fingers to Uller, while touching the middle finger. This time Uller give one long blow on the horn and then a short sound, it was followed up by another long sounding blow from the horn.

This was another type of land formation where the centre would appear weak to enemy, the enemy was enticed to attack the weak center, while both of the flanks would surround the enemy. Yara could see that only one line of ships was forming up within the centre while the ships within the flanks increased with more rows of ships. Once they had reached the formation, each ship sounded off two short blows from their horns.

It was starting to become dark again, the exercise of practicing formations had nearly taken the whole day long, but Yara still wanted to practice one more formation.

She pointed her finger downwards and made a circling motion to Uller, he blew the horn four times alternating between short and longer sounding calls. Once again the ships started to move into position. This time all of the ships were bundling close together into a circle with her ship in the middle as they were creating the porcupine formation.

This formation was difficult to achieve within a battle, with chaos raining down from all sides, that was why Yara wanted to test the formation when everyone was already tired. After a while she could hear the answering calls from the horns on the other ships.

The ladies from Dorne, had come to watch the commotion during the first land formation. Well there wasn’t really much else to do with everyone occupied on the battle tactics. Theon had also kept a close eye on the proceedings during the day, Yara hoped that Theon was learning something about the commandments of the ships during a battle.

By the time the formation was over everyone was bone-dead tired. Even Yara could feel some of the tiredness seep into her bones, her voice was sensitive after screaming commands all day long. It was a hard day, but Yara felt a bit more confident about their prospects.

That evening Yara took her meal within her cabin, Theon and Uller joined her for the meal.
“Will we be sailing through the straights on the morrow?” Uller asked her between wolfing his food down.

“No, as I said this morning we have to take the soldiers through the same exercise.”

“Except, if the wind suddenly decides to start moving again on the morrow, then we’ll sail through the straights,” Yara replied after taking a big sip of wine. The Dornish wine was a luxurious addition to their usual fare.

“I’ve been listening to the talks of the men, they are growing fearful of these conditions, most of them are saying that we have been cursed by the Drowned God, because we’ve disobeyed the will of the Kingsmoot,” Theon stated carefully.

Uller nodded along with Theon in agreement.

Yara knew well enough what the men might be thinking and saying, sailors have always been a very superstitious bunch by nature. It was a dangerous situation, but that’s also why Yara wanted to keep them preoccupied.

“Hopefully the men will be too tired, to think about their superstitious on this night.”

And hopefully they will be to drunk on some good Dornish wine, Yara thought to herself.

“Honestly, no one wants to move ahead as much as I, but something isn’t right, we could easily be trapped between the straits.”

“I agree,” Theon replied very seriously.

Mayhaps there was some Ironborn intuition buried within Theon after all.

Yara has learned to trust her intuition and instincts on the sea, it has saved her countless of times. Uller did not seem to agree with them but he kept his trap shut, and only ate quietly without answering back.
"On the morrow we will rise at daybreak again, and soldier will have to start taking over completely upon the oars", Yara commanded.

After the discussion was over, they finished their meals off quickly and quietly. They all went to bed earlier then usual, as the morrow would promise to be another difficult day.

When Yara woke up on the morrow, the seas was still as calm and quiet as a lichyard, the ship was barely bobbing up and down. That made her decision for the day slightly easier.

They basically repeated the routine of the previous day, but it was mostly soldiers who sat at the oars. The Unsullied did exactly as they were told without any hesitation, but the Dothraki was less impressed with these instructions, they reluctantly followed the instructions. Yara pushed through their silent complaints, reluctant groans and scowling, because it give the experienced oarsmen some time to rest before they set off on the morrow.

On the following day, Yara once again awoke to a quiet sea it was becoming a repetitive exercise, she still had the same reservations as the day before, but she could not remain here any longer. *Intuition be damned!*

Everyone was woken upon daybreak once more, three strong breaths was used on the horn to signal the pig’s head formation. After they had reached their rightful positions, Yara signaled for five ships around her to move closer. Messages was dispatched to the captains of the ships. Yara instructed them to wait a while and follow at a distance of at the most a league away, they had to be on the lookout for any attack that might come from behind.

After the messages was dispatched Yara give the signal to Uller, which indicated that they would be moving forward. When the men realized that they were finally moving forward again, a loud cheer went through the ship. Yara couldn’t help but give a small smile to the cheering men, she hoped that this new invigoration would propel them forward with greater speed.

They moved through the straights as quickly as possible the oarsmen were sweating and exhausted, by the next morning Yara knew that the exist was in sight. This was the area that created the most apprehension within Yara, but an ocean of flat shimmering water lay open and inviting before her, she could not see anything.

After a while of drifting forward, Yara could hear some of the ships in the front region of the formation have started to blow on their horns. *Three short blasts*, there was potentially someone or
something ahead. Everyone on the ship quickly scurried into defensive positions, and readied their weapons and armour. One of the Ironborn men, Skate, had climbed into the crow’s nest to see what lay ahead on Yara’s instructions.

Yara stood underneath the mast, and looked up at Skate as he scurried his way along the mast onto the crews nest like a rat running away from danger.

“Can you see anything Skate?” Yara called out.

“Nothing yet,” he replied while peering ahead.

After a few slow moments he spoke out again with much more urgency and excitement, “I can see a lot of smoke straight ahead!”

“Would we be able to sail around it?” Yara enquired calmly and evenly.

“Nay, it is spreading, fast and wide and…” Yara waited as patiently as she could, “and?” Yara intoned with a hint of expectation. “And it is red.” Skate replied sounding very uncertain.

Yara looked over the deck, everyone was armed and ready, even the Sand Snakes were standing on the deck with their weapons in hand.

After a few tense moments, Yara could now also clearly see the smoke for herself, from somewhere ahead there were billowing masses of bright red smoke, Yara has never seen anything like it before. She did not know what to make of it.

She made Uller sound the bell twice, everyone should be ready for an attack.

They couldn’t avoid the red smoke clouds now, they would have to sail straight through them. Everyone was quiet and watching with trepidation as the smoke rolled and spread further against the bright blue sky, there wasn’t a cloud in sight. They all stared with wonder and amazement, Yara herself was just listening for any sounds, if there was something more to this strange red smoke, then the ships in the front should bellow-out a signal.
Yara could feel the sweat was starting to drip from her forehead, the anticipation has warmed her blood. She thought she heard some noises from somewhere within the smoke cloud just as they themselves were about to enter the red churning mists. She heard a noise again, it sounded like coughing.

Just before they enter the mists, Yara quickly instructed everyone to find some cloth and fasten it over their noses and their mouths. Men were once again running around on deck trying find any material. Some shirts were ripped apart, Uller brought her some material that came from a once white shirt, Yara knotted two of the ends behind her head, Uller stood next to her with a frown of uncertainty. There wasn’t much else to do, all they could do now was to wait.

As they entered the mysterious clouds of red smoke Yara could immediately feel that her eyes were starting to water. She couldn’t see anything ahead or around her. As they traveled forward through the red clouds, she started to taste the smoke upon her tongue and in her lungs, her throat started to feel constricted and raw. She knew the taste upon her tongue, it was sourleaf. The taste of sourleaf was starting to invade all of her senses, it felt as if she was breathing red sourleaf through her skin.

The smoke was so thick that she couldn’t even see the whole of the deck. In the distance she registered that horns were blowing, it was one short blast, *we are under attack*. The horns sounded so far away. *It was a trap.*

Yara lifted the material away from her face for a moment, to scream a command down towards the deck, “Forward!” “Full speed ahead!” “We are under attack!”

The ship pulled forward with a strong force, they were moving fast until they slammed right into another ship ahead of them. Yara wanted to scream in frustration, she couldn’t even tell if she was ramming into her own fleet. And then a ship from behind rammed into their own ship. Yara almost fell over from the force. Luckily the hit was closer to the prow of the ship and not the haul.

They were stuck and almost suffocating within the red masses of smoke, Yara could hear screaming and dying ahead of her. She could hear the sound of metal striking against metal, the ringing sound was hanging within the clouds of red smoke. She took hold of her axe, and her suckling baby in her other hand. She could hear the drawback of the string from a bow. Yara rushed towards the middle of the deck.

“Take cover”, Yara shouted, “archers!”

Yara put her blade away again and grabbed onto a nearby shield, she crouched onto the deck
behind the shield, and held the shield in the direction she thought the arrows might be coming from. Arrows started raining down upon the deck. She could hear some arrows swooshing past her head, and pinning themselves into the deck.

She felt a hard bang a few feet away from her on the deck, it was Skate, he was hit and he had toppled out of the crow’s nest flat onto the deck. She could see that a pool of blood was starting to form around him as he lay fallen upon the deck. Skate was one of the ironborn men that has supported her the longest, Yara could feel a fury bubble within veins.

The rain of arrows dried-up quickly enough. Yara looked all around her for Theon, he was standing just a few feet behind her, with a look of fear wrecked upon his face.

Yara could hear the shouting and yelling of men next to the ship, she also heard shuffling and knocks against the hual of the ship.

The attackers were coming onboard.

“To the railing, they are trying to get onboard!” Yara shouted a command.

The soldiers on the deck ran to the sides of the ship, Yara remained standing in the middle her weapons ready within her hands. Yara could see through her watery eyes that they were able to hold off the attackers for a while, all around her she heard fighting, she could hear the splintering and the cracking of wood as spears were breaking apart.

Their lines were starting to weaken as more grappling claws was thrown over the sides. One men appeared on deck, and soon another appeared. After a while more and more enemy men started to appear on deck. Uller was waiting and ready right next to Yara.

Yara recognised their sigils quickly enough, it was Ironborn men, Euron was the one who was attacking them.

It didn’t take long for someone to charge right at her with his axe, Yara nimbly jumped out of the way, and slew the man from behind the neck where his skin was exposed between his armour and his helmet.

Yara barely had enough time to pull the blade from the first attacker's neck when the second
attacker had reached her. He sliced at her from the left, and Yara jumped to her right, almost hitting the mast in her haste, the attacker made another cut this time to her right, instead of moving left as he would have expected she quickly moved further right closer to his side, and cut into his gut which was unprotected, he doubled over in pain and shock.

Yara quickly tried to make a survey of the deck, while looking out for more potential attackers. Yara couldn’t see Theon anywhere. She saw two of the Sand Snakes fighting on one end of the deck. Obara was trying to use her spear, but a spear was no place for the close quarters of a ship.

Yara saw another soldier was attacking her from the left, it was a large and tall man. He flung and heaved a warhammer towards her skull. Yara quickly fell down and rolled out of the way. The momentum of the powerful swing from the warhammer left the man slightly unbalanced, Yara quickly sprang to her feet and cut both of his legs from behind. He fell on the deck with a heavy thud, Yara kicked his helmet off and buried her axe in his skull before his arms could reach for her, his arms fell limply right next to him.

In between her fights Yara could hear the sounds of battle all around her, metal against metal, and the crunching of bones.

Another attacker approached her and he sliced low towards her middle, with his sword, Yara tried to get out of the way but she could feel the sharp edge of the sword cutting deeply into her upper leg. Somewhere in the background Yara could hear the calls of the horn upon her ship, one long blast and one short blast was followed by another long blast and another short blast.

The attacker seemed to be encouraged by his success, he tried to make another low cut which left his top-half area exposed, Yara moved backwards and threw her axe as hard as she could right into his skull, the axe neatly cleaved right into his forehead, his expression was one of shock and surprise as he stumbled and fell backwards onto the deck.

Yara looked towards the rudder in the direction of the sound, that came from the horn. Theon was still standing there holding onto the large horn. Theon has called for the porcupine formation, if some of the ships within her fleet was still able to steer it would be an excellent tactic, they might be able to attack Euron from behind as they come together to form into a circle.

As Yara was scanning all of the fighting upon the deck she saw that Obara received an axe in the back of her skull. Yara looked at the cut within her leg, it was deep but it wasn’t that bad, it will definitely require some stitching.

Yara retrieved her axe from the fallen foe. The mists and smoke was starting to recede a bit now,
just in that moment Yara was overtaken by a coughing spell. All of the bodies laid sprawled across the deck, a lot of her crew were lying around wounded, dead or dying. But still their attackers streamed upon the deck of the ship.

Another foe came towards Yara with a sword, the sword was drenched in blood, he swung the sword towards her shoulder and Yara blocked his swing with her axe. “Watchout behind you!” Yara heard from Uller who was still fighting close to her side. Yara moved to her side and swung her axe quickly, the attacker from behind had a dagger within his hands, he tried to block her blow and she hit his arm hard with the axe, she could feel the axe slicing into his bone. The man yelped in pain and held his arm as he dropped to the floor.

The swordsman was also still coming towards her at the same time, luckily Uller stabbed him from behind with his sword. Uller and Yara had often fought together. They stood with their backs against each other ready to meet the foes that was streaming in from all sides. They were quickly surrounded by seven men. As soon as the men swung any blows towards them they would block or parry. Yara managed to strike a blow on one man’s hand, the blow almost severed his hand from his wrist. He fell back but soon some else took his place. Yara could hear a scream of pain from behind her, Uller’s sword must have hit his mark.

The mists had receded even further, through the chaos of the battle Yara could see the back sails of the Silence approaching them through the clouds of red. It almost appeared as if the Silence was rolling towards them from mountains of blood.

“Yield” one of the soldiers instructed them. Yara did not yield. Yara saw that Theon was watching the approach of the silence very intently, there were also some of Euron’s ironborn men that was now approaching Theon.

Theon looked towards Yara with panic on his face, and then turned around, he ran and jumped from the ship right into the ocean.

Yara’s last hope was starting to drain away, she witness the fighting upon all of the ships that were close to her.

Yara could see that Ellaria and three of the Snakes were also surrounded by a group of Euron’s men.

Yara knew she didn’t have much of a choice or a chance, but she would rather wait and let Euron see her with her weapons. The Silence was now right next to her own ship.
The soldiers had noticed the approach of their leader, everyone was waiting patiently for Euron to climb onboard. Time stood still as she waited with Uller still right behind her.

Euron slanted onto the deck in a very casual manner, with a huge grin upon his smug face. He inspected the carnage around him with great satisfaction. Some of his mutes and creatures have clambered up right behind him. As soon as Euron's mutes and creatures appeared, the remaining Ironborn soldiers, retreated to whence they had came from. Yara knew there was no escaping now, as she was now surrounded by Euron's mutes. She threw down her weapons in a disgusted manner, Uller followed her example, when Euron heard her weapons clattering on the deck, he pretended to see her at last.

She had Euron’s full attention now, “Niece, how lovely to see you again!” Euron exclaimed with dripping sarcasm, while raising his hands into the air as if he might embrace her. “I do so enjoy family reunions!” Yara did not say anything, she knew there was no use to try and speak with Euron, there was a reason why his ship was filled with mutes.

“Such a shame how unreliable family has become these days,” Euron said with mocking pain and shake from his head, that he followed up with loud laughter.

The mutes surrounding them stepped closer to her and Uller, their hands were tied behind their backs, the knots were tied so tightly that Yara could feel the blood draining from her fingers.

“I could have found a nice husband for you,” Euron reproached.

Euron then spotted Ellaria and the Sand Snakes, they were still standing with their backs against each other and with their weapons in their hands, ready to strike like the vipers that they thought they were.

“Ladies,” Euron bowed towards them in a flamboyant motion.

Nymeria had her whip in her right hand while Tyene held both of her daggers ahead of her, Ellaria was just holding up one dagger. As Euron approached the creatures around Ellaria and the Sand Snakes left their positions, the mutes and creatures stepped three steps back, to allow Euron a better view.

Nymeria tried to crack her whip towards Euron, but it was a halfhearted attempt, she did not have
the fluidity of her full motions. A whip wasn’t exactly a great weapon within the confined space of a ship.

Euron caught the whip easily enough, he plucked the whip right out of her hands with one quick pull.

Euron inspected the whip closely, it was a finely crafted weapon.

“T’ve always wondered about anyone who uses a whip as a weapon,” Euron said while he tried to crack the whip unsuccessfully.

“It is not the type of weapon that is made for killing, you could only ever hit or capture someone with it, then again, perhaps I just haven’t been using my imagination.”

“Seize them,” Euron instructed.

Ellaria and the Sand Snakes struggled a bit, but the mutes had them all under control very quickly. Ellaria tried to speak out then.

“We are Princesses from Dorne, you could collect a big ransom for us, my Lord.”

Euron laughed in a sinister manner, “Oh, I will be collecting something!”

Their hands were also tied behind their backs.

Bring that one to me, Euron pointed towards Nymeria. She was dragged in front of Euron.

One of the mutes were holding her from behind, Euron took the whip and wrapped it around her neck, and he pulled on both ends. Nymeria was struggling feebly. Her face were starting to turn blue, her eyes were almost bulging out of her eye sockets, her struggle left her as the air was strangled from her lungs. She was already hanging limply and was only held up by the mute, her face looked swollen and purple blotches were starting to appear, but Euron kept on strangling her.

Ellaria and Tyene was trying to fight against their bonds, and muttered “no, no, nooo,” a few times.
Finally Euron dropped the whip, “It seems like I was just lacking imagination.”

Euron turned towards Ellaria and Tyene, “you will keep quiet or I will have to take out your tongues.”

Ellaria and Tyene, both quieted down after that.

Euron looked around the deck once more, “where is that useless, cockless turncloak of a nephew, of mine?”

Yara spoke up then, “Last I saw he was injured and fell overboard,” Yara replied. Yara was starting to wish that she had jumped overboard as well.

Euron walked towards Yara, “You have stolen from me,” Euron said in her direction, with a dangerous intent.

“You’ve stolen my plan to make an alliance with the Dragon Queen, that was very Ironborn like”, Euron reflected dryly and laughed afterwards.

“Put this ship to the torch, and take these prisoners to my ship!” Euron commanded to some of his creatures.

As Yara was lifted over the railing of her ship, she could see that some fighting was still going on, but it also seemed like some of her ships had turned against her, and they were now attacking her own fleet. Yara could also see smaller and lighter boats around them, with huge tubs of red sticky burning liquid that was still emitting some red smoke, some thralls were fanning the smoke.

Euron had constructed some smaller, lighter, and likely quicker vessels to launch a quick attack and sail in-between her fleet with his smoking concoction. *All of my preparations wasn’t enough.*

Yara was dropped like a sack of turnips upon Euron’s red deck, it appeared as though the deck was painted with blood. Knowing Euron the idea wasn’t to far fetched. The wind was knocked out of her lungs as she fell upon the deck. The fever of battle has left her, she could start to feel her leg throb painfully. Ellaria and Tyene was dumped beside her.
Euron looked them over, “bring that Red priest Moqorro here,” Euron instructed.

A man with scarlet red silks of the Lord of Light approached Euron, his skin was black as pitch, and his face and head was surrounded with unruly white hair.

“Stitch the prisoner, we have to keep her presentable for the Queen,” Euron quipped.

Yara felt uneasy as the R'hllor priest approach her, his face was coloured with red and orange flaming tattoos.

One of the mutes held the leather from her pants out of the way, as the strange Red priest, sew her wound together.

“Tie her to the mast after she is done, and take the others to the dungeons.”

Euron left the ship with some of his mutes.

As Yara were fastened to the mast she could see flames racing upon the deck of her ship, the orange flames were climbing along the mast, and soon the flames reached the sails, the yellow, red and orange flames were fighting against each other as they devoured the sails, Yara could hear the creaking and cracking as the wood was staring break its fight against the ravenous flames.

But the worst of all was the screaming, she hear the last desperately painful yells of her crew, as they were being consumed alive by the flames.

Yara diverted her eyes from the carnage in front of her, soon it will all be over. Yara bit down hard on her lower lip, and clenched her hands into a fist, she could feel her nails digging into the palm of her hand. For the first time in years, likely since was a little snot nosed girl Yara truly felt like crying. All she could hear was the screaming...
The pounding from the hammers of the workmen were drilling through Cersei’s head with every hit their persistency collided within her head - just like the hammers within their hands, but that is sometimes the price you have to pay if you want something done right, Cersei reflected while almost rolling her eyes.

“Lord Angus Langward, Lord Stephyn Chelsted and Lady Jenei Wendwater, approaches the iron throne to swear an oath of fealty.”

“Approach.” Bang Bang

They went through the same ritual as the ones before, they were all on their knees whimpering, simpering and Prattling like dogs that were about to be kicked for the tenth time today.

“Next,” Cersei called out to the messenger.

“Lord Morse Rolingford, Lord Thris Manning and Lord Verron Edgerton, approaches the iron throne to swear an oath of fealty.”

“Approach.”

The Lords Manning and Edgerton weren’t even old enough to shave yet, and Lord Rollingford was so old he was struggling to stand after he had knelt down. More useless allies.

“Next.”

“Ser Osney Kettleblack, Ser Osmund Kettleblack and Ser Osfryd Kettleblack, are here to swear
“Approach.”

Instead of kneeling and simpering like the rest, all three just bowed.

“Your Grace,” one of them spoke up, Cersei presumed he was the eldest one. “We fought loyally for House Baratheon during the Battle of Blackwater. We have come to pledge our swords to House Lannister, we only ask for positions to keep on fighting.”

Finally men who might be useful.

“You may reside within Kings Landing, I will call upon you when needed,” Cersei announced.

“Next.”

“Ser Raynald Westerling representing Lady Ermesande Hayford, Lady Merei Drake and Lord Harry Boggs approaches the iron throne to swear an oath of fealty.”

“Approach.”

Cersei vaguely recalled that the infant Lady Hayford was suppose to be married to their cousin Tyrek Lannister, and that the Westerlings had offered to keep the Hayford household in line until Tyrek was found.

Bang Bang Bang

Cersei almost felt like laughing at the idea of these so called Lord, she was sure that the lady Drake was dressed in servant's garb. These Lords from the Crownlands were mostly pathetic, they were little better than peasants and hedge knights.

Cersei had enough of these simpletons for one day, every simpleton only served to make the pounding in her head more persistent. She knew there were always more important matters of
discussion at the small council.

“Court is done for the day,” Cersei announced clearly throughout the throne room.

As Cersei stood, Ser Gregor immediately followed behind her, like a looming shadow. Cersei could see the look of fear as they quietly passed close to a throng of people that was gathered within the throne room. Jaime followed just as silently next to her.

Qyburn followed the whole group discreetly, he had disappeared for a while during the court session. All three of them took a seat at the small council table, Cersei would likely have to find a master of coin soon, but she was mostly surrounded by incompetent fools. Mayhaps she should recall Littlefinger, wherever the craven might be hiding out. Qyburn sat to her right, he was the only person who was really worth something these days, even Jaime has been practically useless, well he has always been more of a soldier, everything has always fallen upon herself. Cersei had to fight for the crown and the Lannister legacy, or no one else would. She has always warned her father against this, but he never placed enough trust in her abilities, how queer that he was the one who were discovered with a dead whore within his bed.

Jaime took the seat to her left, it was becoming his customary place.

“Your Grace, we have received some news from the docks, now that the markets and the ports are open again, I have been able to gain access to some information,” Qyburn stated carefully.

Cersei could sense that she was not going to enjoy this news, but it has been almost two moon’s turn without any information.

“Your Grace, we have received word about the North from a Braavosi vessel, the vessel was docked at White Harbour for a time, before arriving in King Landing.”

Cersei just stared at Qyburn, sometimes he took too long to get to the point.

“There was some kind of a battle at Winterfell, the North has declared the bastard son of Eddard Stark as the new King in the North.”

“A bastard!!?” Cersei exclaimed.
“There is more Your Grace, the Braavosi captain saw a lot of Manderly soldiers being prepared and marching out of White Harbour.” Qyburn paused for a while.

“The Vale and Petyr Baelish have also declared for the North,” Qyburn finished.

“That treasonous snake!”

Jaime shrugged, “Only a fool could ever trust Littlefinger.”

“That ungrateful little worm, he owes all that he is to the Lannisters. He would be nothing if it wasn’t for the Lannisters, we made him the Lord of Harrenhal. I want him, issue some kind of a reward on his head!”

“I want him drawn and quartered, he should be burned alive one limb at a time. I want his flesh to blacken and rot. I want to hear him screech and beg like the little rat that he is!”

Jaime had the gall to interrupt her tirade. “And Sansa Stark?” He asked Qyburn.

“She is at Winterfell my Lord, that is all that was said about Sansa Stark”.

Jaime nodded.

“I want her and Littlefinger, she and that misbegotten little monster killed our firstborn son!”

Jaime sighed, he was so transparent sometimes, he always believed the best of Tyrion, even now, after their father’s death. Jaime did his best to ignore her.

“Any word on where these Manderly soldier were marching?” Jaime asked Qyburn directly ignoring her hard stares.

“The Braavosi captain wasn’t quite certain, he heard some rumours that they might have been
marching North,” Qyburn replied.

*This is all Tyrion's fault, his birth was a curse upon the Lannisters.*

“North? That doesn’t make much sense,” Jaime said with a frown. “Why would they be marching North with the start of winter?”

“I could not say my Lord. There have been reports of Wildling incursions and the Nights Watch have asked for support against the Wildlings, or perhaps the North is not completely united as yet, and they might be marching onto one of the other Northern strongholds.”

*I will destroy all of the enemies that have betrayed me.*

“Mayhaps, but that was awhile ago,” Jaime replied doubtfully. “I would think that they would much rather march south towards the Riverlands, the Riverlands could easily declare for them without the yoke of the Freys. One might also be inclined to believe that they have a debt to pay, towards the Freys.”

“Why would the Riverlands declare for one of Ned Stark’s by-blows?” Cersei asked.

“Why would the Northern Lords and those pompous delusional Lords from the Vale declare for a baseborn son of Ned Stark, as their King?” The only amusing element about this situation was that Sansa Stark seemingly received no acclamation within the North or anywhere else.

“I met him once,” Jaime said with a far-off look upon his face.

“Who, the bastard?”

“I met the Stark bastard when we were just departing from Winterfell, he was nothing more than a sullen idealistic greenboy. He was on his way to join the Nights Watch.”

“We did receive a call for more men from the Nights Watch about two years past, where Jon Snow had signed as the Lord Commander of the Night Watch, my Lord,” Qyburn affirmed.
“Did he just desert from the Nights Watch without any repercussions, to become a King within the North? From what I have gathered, the Northerners adhere to the Nights Watch oath very sternly.”

“It would seem that way my Lord, it appears as if he has just abandoned the Nights Watch, the only other information I can gather is that many in the North believe that he is the best swordsman within the North.”

“Bastards are all traitorous mongrels, their blood reveals itself sooner or later. We can write to all of the Lords of the North and the Vale, they can't all uniformly be following a bastard Nights Watch deserter.”

“Excellent my Queen,” Qyburn replied with a small bow from his head.

“He was raised right alongside the trueborn Stark children, the Northern Lords were probably used to seeing him as a Stark. Of course Lady Catelyn would turn over within her grave if she knew that the bastard was stealing her precious children's inheritance.”

Cersei smiled at that thought. Sometimes she could see flashes of the true Jaime, and not the weak minded cripple he at times acted like. If she was Catelyn she would have strangled the child, even the honourable Lord Stark wasn’t so honourable in the end.

“Qyburn,” Jaime instructed “can you make sure that a missive is send to the Freys. Ask them to keep an eye out for any potential soldiers from the North. Of course it is just as likely that ten thousand men could easily pass underneath the shadows of the Twins without them ever noticing a thing.”

“As you command, my Lord,” Qyburn replied while looking at her for agreement.

Littlefinger was a fool to back some oathbreaking bastard over the might of the Lannisters. Cersei would gladly have forgotten the frozen wasteland of the North if it wasn’t for the fact that the North was about half the size of her whole Kingdom. They just needed the alliance of one or two houses that would be willing to betray the bastard, just like her father arranged with the Frey wedding.

Cersei felt quite satisfied with her resolution to the matter. Soon everyone within the kingdom will bow to her.
“There are more news from the docks,” Qyburn said with a certain amount of trepidation.

“Many informants from the ships have reported seeing a large Targaryen fleet.”

“A Targaryen fleet?” Jaime questioned with some disbelief.

“One ship from the Summer Ilse came from Driftmark, and they have reported that Daenerys Targaryen has landed at Dragonstone with a fleet of a thousand ships. She brings with her a massive horde of Dothraki screamers alongside her Unsullied forces.”

“And three dragons.”

"Dragons?" Jaime seemed almost shocked. “Dothraki don't sail on open waters,” Jaime replied. “This sounds like nothing more than a fisherman’s yawn.”

“There are many reports about this fleet, my Lord. The ship that came from Driftmark also reported that the Velaryons have already sworn fealty to Daenerys Targaryen.”

Jaime looked as if he had seen a ghost, perhaps a ghosts from the past.

“Varys had spoken about her from time to time within the small council. She was suppose to be a Queen in Slavers Bay.”

“It seems like she has made it to Westeros, my Queen. More than one report said that she has as much as one hundred thousand Dothraki warriors with her, they have all landed upon Dragonstone.”

It appears as if Jaime was finally paying attention to them once again, “how is she feeding one hundred thousand men and more on that barren island of Dragonstone?” Jaime contemplated by himself.

“I don't know my Lord, she might have a supply line from Braavos or Pentos.”
“We have to start - we have to prepare the city against an imminent attack,” Jaime said with some resignation.

“Prepare the city against an attack, but don't close the ports and the markets, we need the income.”

“Cersei, it might not be safe to keep the ports open, and we will have to start rationing our food.”

“Your Grace, might I make a suggestion?” Qyburn enquired carefully and softly. Cersei nodded toward Qyburn.

“Dragons are not completely invincible, Westeros has learned during the Dance of the Dragons and the many other Targaryen wars that dragons can be killed by people, from the ground. Give me some time and I will research the topic, I might have some ideas”.

“I give you leave to research the subject,” Cersei replied. This might be just what they need, Cersei wasn’t going to cower from some Dothraki whore.

“Another thing Your Grace, mayhaps Daenerys Targaryen will first try to create alliances with the Lords of Westeros, she needs more than just Kings Landing to win over Westeros, some regions such as the Stormland still remembers the Rebellion quite clearly.”

Qyburn paused.

“I suggest that we send out word, and spread some rumours.”

“What type of rumours,” Jaime enquired.

“Fearful ones, rumours about what will happen to the people with the Dothraki on their land. The Dothraki are known for raping and pillaging without mercy. They enslave anyone they capture.”

“Daenerys Targaryen has been freeing the slaves, if the reports are correct. She conquered the whole of Slavers Bay and freed all of the slaves,” Cersei said to Qyburn. “The Dothraki whore
seemingly has a bleeding heart.”

“That might be true my Queen, but the small folk doesn’t know that, and even the Lords of Westeros might be fearful of facing a Dothraki horde. How would she ever be able to completely control one hundred thousand Dothraki screamers? It might make some of the Lords and the people less likely to support her, and their only other choice would be that bastard King from the North, and you, my Queen.”

“Hmm, very good Qyburn, you should immediately make sure that these rumours are being spread, before some foolhardy idiots will have the chance to latch onto her cause.”

“I will use my little birds to start whispering these ideas within the right ears.”

Jaime became very quiet during the discussion about the Dothraki whore, Cersei has noted.

“What do you know about these Kettleblacks that have just sworn fealty to House Lannister within the throne room? Cersei enquired from Qyburn.

“They fought during the Battle of Blackwater, all three of them were knighted after the battle was won by King Joffrey and your father. Before the Battle of Blackwater they fought as sellswords in Essos. They are a knightly house Your Grace, therefore they don't receive much of an income from their lands.”

*Sellswords,* of course sellswords were nothing more than greedy whores. But greedy whores could be used and controlled.

“Jaime, mayhaps you could find a place for these men. Mayhaps we could send one of these Kettleblacks to the North, to swear fealty to the new king.” Cersei somehow needed to get her hands on Littlefinger.

“The Northerns would never trust a Southern Knight who suddenly wanted to make an alliance with them.” Of course Jaime was right, but Littlefinger needed to be punished.

“How are the renovations within the throne room getting along, the constant pounding is very disruptive.”
“The renovations are going very well my Queen. And we will be able to pay for these renovations with the income that we have received from opening those brothels.”

“Are the brothels and the alehouses doing well then?”

“They are doing well enough, we are still recruiting potential girls. And the final design for the Kingsguard’s new armour have been handed over to the smiths.”

Cersei wanted to erase any trace that the faith of the seven had ever existed within the Red Keep. She hated those filthy sparrows, they will never harass anyone again.

“This council meeting has continued for long enough, we will meet again if anything new comes to light, I have other matters to attend, so you are both dismissed.”

Cersei was frustrated, especially after the news of Littlefinger’s betrayal, she was prepared to make that cretin the Lord of Winterfell and this is how she has been repaid. Cersei would like nothing better but to douse the miscreant in wildfire, slowly starting from each of his limbs, perhaps even one finger at a time. But she cannot get her hands on Littlefinger right now.

Cersei slowly made her way to Traitors Walk, when she reached the squat flat building she was greeted by two guards at the door. Cersei tried her best to stay away from the common criminals. She should really send some of these criminals to Qyburn for his experiments, they already have too many mouths to feed. There is no use in feeding criminals.

Cersei passed by the second level of the dungeons where the highborn prisoners were usually kept, the cells were empty since most of the simpering lickspittles was burned in the Sept of Baelor alongside their High Sparrow.

Cersei finally reached the third level of the dungeons, the black sells. Littlefinger might be out of reach, but she did have someone. She reached the door, there was always a torch burning right next to the door. Cersei removed the key that she wore around her neck, and opened the door.

Septa Unella was lying stretched out and binded to the table with leather straps. Cersei lifted her smelling salt to her nose. The smell within the room was almost excruciatingly foul. The Septa tried to peer into her direction, but she was blinded by the sudden flash of light from the flaming torch, she kept on blinking her eyes rapidly, but she didn’t utter a word. Cersei placed the torch in a sheath along the wall.
The light from the torch flickered until the contents of the cell were revealed. There was nothing except for a few jugs in one corner. The cell was cold. Cersei could see that Septa Unella was shivering almost uncontrollably, it made Cersei grin smugly towards the Septa.

Septa Unella was lying completely naked upon the table, she was lying on her stomach, Cersei had instructed some of the goalers to turn her over a few days past. Her backside and her behind were full of open bedsores, her upper legs was full of blue and purple coloured marks. If she tried to move Cersei could see the pus dripping out of the sores. Her blonde hair was dull, matted tangled and dirty. Cersei could see that she had defecated upon herself. Cersei took another sniff from her smelling salts before she was completely overwhelmed by the rough smells.

She made her way to one of the jugs. As she lifted the jug she finally got a reaction out of the wench. Septa Unella was crying and pleading with her. “No, no, please! Mercy, no, no!”

Cersei took the full jug and slowly started pouring vinegar all over the pleading women. She started slowly from legs, and then she went onto her arms. Cersei took another jug after the first one was empty and she slowly poured it over her backside and her rear, just like she had wanted to do with that lecherous cretin, Littlefinger. The screams from the Septa ringed though Cersei’s head. She kept on thrashing and screaming as Cersei poured more vinegar all over her face and into her open wounds.

Cersei felt much better than she did this morning, her headache was mostly completely gone. After pouring the fourth jug of vinegar once again over the Septa’s backside, Cersei replaced the jug in the corner. She took the torch from its sheath upon the wall and walked out of the chamber without looking back. She could still hear Septa Unella’s anguished and muffled cries after the door had been closed. On a quiet night if she listened very carefully she would still be able to hear her cries even on the second floor, mayhaps she should let Qyburn see to those wounds she can't have her die off right now.

Within a fortnight all of the rumours surrounding the Dragonspawn Queen and the Dothraki savages completely enveloped the whole of Kings Landing. Everyday some mindless peasant would swear that they have seen Balerion the black dread reborn, flying over Kings Landing. One halfwit even swore that he has heard the Dothraki warhorns right at the gate. The only advantage about people’s fears was that they were trying to enjoy their last living days, according to Qyburn the taverns, alehouses and brothels were overflowing. The new Lannister stained windows within the throne room was completed within record time. More of the Lords from the Crownlands had also arrived to pledge their fealty.

Cersei was sitting onttop of her throne waiting for court to get underway, just as she has been doing these past few weeks. Ser Gregor stood silently to her right. Jaime stood to her left, with his hand
resting on the pommel of Widow's Wail.

Lord Garren Blount, Lord Darryn Pyle and Lord Ferall Darkwood approaches the iron throne to swear an oath of fealty."

“Approach.”

Lord Blount was one of the first Lords who didn’t appear as oafish as the rest, he had a strong build with light brown hair and blue eyes that were set far apart, he was somewhere in his thirties. He knelt with a straight back.

The Darkwoods were just more misbegotten long lost kin of the once powerful Darlyns that still resided within the city of Duskendale, they were little more than servants.

“Next.”

Lady Emmern Mallery and Ser Addam Marbrand, approaches the iron throne to swear an oath of fealty.”

Cersei looked towards Jaime, he give a small smile and a nod with his head towards Addam Marbrand. The two of them used to be friends when Addam Marbrand was sent to Casterly Rock as a page. Their father valued his skills as a commander and a soldier, he might be useful for their army.

“Next.”

“Tycho Nestoris, representative from the Iron Bank of Braavos.”

That dimwitted, halfwit Mace Tyrell was suppose to arrange payments with the Iron Bank. Cersei grabbed onto the armrest of the iron throne as the foreigner approached the throne, and she could feel one of the blades cutting into the fleshy part of her palm. Of course the oaf from the Iron Bank showed no respect towards her. He did not bow or kneel.

“Queen Cersei, I was sent as part of an envoy from the Iron Bank to discuss the finances of the
Cersei stopped his blabbering as soon as possible. “Ser, we do have matters to discuss. I will meet with you in private.”

“Escort him to the small council chamber,” Cersei commanded some of the Lannister guards.

The imputent meddler would have discussed the crown's finances right there in open court, Cersei should have the brazen fool locked within the dungeons.

“Court is dismissed for the day,” she announced.

She stood up before waiting for a reaction and strode right into the council chambers. The Braavosi was seated at the small council table. He did not make any attempts to stand. Cersei took a seat on the opposite side of the small council table, Jaime and Qyburn took their customary seats next to her.

“I could have you whipped for the insolence that you have just displayed! My servants have been whipped for far less,” Cersei said in a threatening manner between her teeth.

“I have no doubts about that, you have to excuse my foreign manners queen Cersei, we don’t have any King or Queen where I come from, we simply follow the numbers, and the Iron Bank of Braavos are not your servants.”

Cersei fought against herself, she wanted to see Ser Gregor grab the insolent lout by the neck and crunch his brain through his fingers like he did with that traitorous Martell prince, she wanted to see his eyes burst from its sockets.

“I ve sent my Master of Coin to Braavos, according to him he negotiated for payments to be made. One of my Kingsguard members was also brutally murdered within Braavos, he was a guest of the Iron Bank on a diplomatic mission. We don't kill our guests within Westeros.”

Cersei was still irritated by the loss of Ser Meryn Trant, now there was a man who understood his priorities. The twat give Cersei an indulgent smile as if he was about to speak to a child.

“I ve heard many reports that would invalidate that last statement.”
Cersei could feel that her blood was starting to boil, why did she have to endure such contemptuousness, she is the Queen.

“The Iron Bank of Braavos cannot be held accountable for a man’s exploitations and his perversions within a brothel.”

“And I think I should warn you in advance queen Cersei, killing or torturing me will not improve your standing with the Iron Bank. If I was to somehow succumb to some kind of an unfortunate accident, it will also not improve your standing with the Iron Bank.”

“The visit from Mace Tyrell was over a year past, the Tyrells made one payment to the Iron Bank. And since that meeting Lord Tyrell and most of his relatives have all met with some untimely deaths, quite recently. You should be able to appreciate why that might be slightly disconcerting for us; queen Cersei.”

Cersei wanted to peer over to Jaime, but she kept her gaze steadily on the Braavosi. It was dangerous to have Jaime present during these discussions. The foreign bastard might know exactly what happened to those abhorrent Tyrells. Cersei couldn’t allow Jaime to find out right now. She was just about speak when Jaime spoke out.

“Ser..” Jaime began.

“I am not a Ser or a Lord, I am just Tycho Nestoris,” the Braavosi replied.

“Tycho Nestoris, winter has just begun and winter within Westeros is much harsher than what you might experience within Essos. In truth, and I am sure you are well aware of this fact, we are on the brink of another war, Daenerys Targaryen has just landed on Dragonstone a moon’s turn ago.”

“I am not saying that we aren’t willing to ever repay back our debts, but perhaps we could come to some new understanding regarding our repayment.”

The Braavosi made a show of looking at Ser Gregor, he give Cersei another one of his deliberately annoying smiles.
“I have to compliment you on those new Lannister stained glass windows within the throne room, such exquisite workmanship! And the armour of your guards, such elegance, the attention to detail is truly astounding, you Westerosi certainly have a way of working with metal. The Iron Bank has heard about your renovations, and I had to come and see it for myself, it seems like you have somehow acquired the coin to facilitate these renovations, queen Cersei.”

“We have conceived some new methods to collect taxes,” Cersei conceded to the Braavosi.

“However, our plans are still in its infancy, thus we have made arrangements with some apprentices and workmen. You don't understand how Westeros operates, let me enlighten you. There are great advantages in receiving patronage from the crown.”

“I see, perhaps the Iron Bank would also find a great advantage from placing their patronage somewhere else. Daenerys Targaryen is only a stone throw away from Kings Landing, as you brother has just alluded to himself.”

Qyburn then spoke for the first time.

“Braavos and the Iron Bank have never looked kindly towards associating with the Targaryens.”

“That is certainly very observant my Lord Hand, it all goes back to our history with slavery and the subjection from the Valyrian Freehold. However, Daenerys Targaryen has been freeing slaves from servitude.”

“But as you may also observe I am here within Kings Landing, the Iron Bank wants to give the Lannisters a fair chance of repaying these debts, we once had a good working relationship with your father, Tywin Lannister.”

This farce of a meeting has continued for long enough, Cersei needed some time to plan.

“As I ve said we do have a few new methods of collecting taxes that have just been implemented, my Hand has assured me that the first collections have been lucrative, if the Iron Bank is willing to wait some two or three moons, I believe we would be able to adhere to the payments that were arranged originally.”

“That is all we want to hear, of course I would be obligated to remain within Kings Landing until I
would be able to collect the payment myself.”

“Of course,” Cersei answered through pursed lips. “You can enjoy the hospitality of my court.”

The Braavosi bowed his head.

“Guards,” Cersei called, two Lannister guards appeared within the doorway.

“Escort Tycho Nestoris to one of our guest chambers, and send some servants to him, make sure that he has everything that he needs.”

“Your Grace,” the guards bowed.

All of them waited until the Braavosi had left the chambers.

“Those leeches have come to suck us dry,” Cersei said vehemently.

“They were always going to come and collect their debts at some point, especially before Daenerys Targaryen can burn Kings Landing to a crisp. Perhaps we need a Master of Coin,” Jaime stated.

“I will think about a Master of Coin, Addam Marbrand's arrival might be good for us”. Cersei turned towards Jaime, “mayhaps you should go and find Addam Marbrand, make sure that he is settled in as a guest of the crown. The two of you were good childhood friends, I seem to recall.”

“That is a good idea we could always use a man such as Addam,” Jaime replied and left the chamber to pursue the man.

Finally Cersei was able to turn her attention towards Qyburn. “Make sure that your little birds keep a close eye on that foreign bastard, and make sure that he and my brother does not get caught-up in a conversation for too long. He knows too much. I don't want Jaime to find out what exactly happened to the Tyrells from him.”

“As you command, your Grace”, Qyburn offered with an inclination from his head.
“What are we going to do about this payment, Your Grace,” Qyburn questioned.

“I am not yet sure, we will have to think about something. They would leach us dry if they were given a chance, we are not their slaves.”

Slaves …

“How much of the slave trade still exists within Essos, did that dragon whore destroy everything?”

“No, Your Grace, she has only conquered Slavers Bay. Many places within Essos still have slaves, like Volantis and even some of the Free Cities such as Pentos. Of course a large part of the slave trade was destroyed - now that the Dothraki are not selling their captives off anymore.” Qyburn answered with some interest.

It felt good to arrive at some resolution, Cersei smiled.

“And how is the recruitment for our brothels coming along?” Cersei enquired from Qyburn.

“Well enough, Your Grace,” Qyburn replied with a smile in return. It was some good fortunate that Cersei could at least sometimes work with someone who shared some of her wit.

“Collect all of those peasants who didn’t make it into our brothels, they would still be good enough for slaves. We will sell them off to Volantis, there must be a great demand for slaves. Perhaps you could use some of those Kettleblacks to help with the procurement, they would have some firsthand knowledge of Essos.”

“Yes, Your Grace.

“Make sure that my brother doesn’t carry any knowledge about this arrangement.”

Qyburn was already halfway through the door, “Oh and take some of the criminals from the dungeons as well, we already have too many mouths to feed, you can also take some of the prisoners for yourself as well. Also you should see to Septa Unella wounds, since you are going to the dungeons.”
“Thank You, my Queen.” Qyburn bowed.

“We have only received minor and petty Lords from the Crownland, most of these peasants are not even worthy of being called petty Lords or hedge knights. What is the standing of the bigger influential houses from the Crownlands? Where are the Rosbys and Stokeworths?”

Cersei could see that Qyburn was eager to depart for his tasks.

“Lord Gyles Rosby died within the Sept of Baelor. Lady Falyse Stokeworth along with her youngest daughter Lollys Stokeworth and her new husband were also killed at the Sept of Baelor. Balman Byrch died in the Sept of Baelor, he was married to Lady Falyse Stokeworth. Only Lady Tanda Stokeworth the eldest daughter remains, and she has a distant claim to the Rosby lands, Your Grace.”

“Fine, fine, their time will come. I will deal with everyone who doesn’t support my claim to the throne as soon as I am done with that Dothraki whore and the leaches from the Iron Bank.

Her plan to repay the Iron Bank was masterful, it was a plan that was worthy of Tywin Lannister himself. She was going to rid herself of some unwanted elements from the city and she will be paying the Iron Bank with coin made from slavery. Cersei felt exceedingly accomplished, she always knew that she was meant to rule.

The past fortnight had started off well enough, Cersei reflected to herself as she once again found herself within the small council chambers.

Her thoughts went back to the meeting she had with Tycho Nestoris. She kept on repeating the victory she had against the Braavosi, he wouldn’t even realize that he has been outplayed.

She and Jaime was waiting upon Qyburn, who has send for their presence due to an urgent message.

When Qyburn arrived Cersei could see that his expression was grave.

“My Lord, Your Grace,” Qyburn greeted them with a small bow.
“I have received word from Dragonstone.”

Cersei made a motion with her wine glass to show Qyburn that he should continue.

“It is a direct message from Daenerys Targaryen.”

Cersei could almost feel how the colour and blood was slowly draining from her face, it felt as if some second grade maester was performing bloodletting on her.

Qyburn was fidgeting with the message between his finger.

“Your Grace, Daenerys Targaryen implores that you resign all of your titles and vacate Kings Landing, the Red Keep and the iron throne. The message states that you have no right to the throne according to the succession practices within the Seven Kingdom. She claims that the iron throne is hers by blood, family and birth right.”

“That Dothraki whore lost any claim to the throne the day her mad father was killed!” Cersei could see that Qyburn was still looking at her in a grim fashion.

“She also claims that if you don't vacate the city and exile yourself from Westeros that she would rain down fire and blood upon House Lannister…”

“...and the message was also signed by your brother Tyrion, as the Hand of the Queen.”

Cersei could feel her head exploding like the wildfire exploded within the Sept, she threw her wine glass on the floor, the glass shattered into thousands of pieces with the red wine collecting on some of the sharp edges like blood.

“So, now that little abomination has taken up arms against us!” Cersei screamed the last part.

She pointed towards Jaime.

“I have told you before that this would happen, but you never listen to me just like father! That
monstrosity has always hated us, he has always been jealous of us. First he killed our firstborn son, then he killed our father and now he has aligned himself with our biggest enemy! What more can he do before you will wake-up from your illusions?

Father has always said that he is a spiteful illmade create of low-cunning, when have you ever known our father to be wrong about anything?

That miscreation has always wanted to get his hands on Casterly Rock, he has always wanted to see us dead!” She banged her fists so hard on the table that the whole jug of wine fell over.

Cersei was breathing heavily, she felt out of breath.

“Give me that message,” she snatched the letter right from Qyburn’s hands.

“Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, The first in her name, Queen of Meereen and the Bay of Dragons, Queen of the Andals the Rhoynar and of the First Men, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Lady of Dragonstone, Mhysa the Breaker of Chains, The Unburnt and the Mother of Dragons.”

“What a presumptuous, self righteous little cunt.”

“Signed by Tyrion’s own hand.” She ripped the paper apart, and stormed out of the small council. She’s had more than enough for one day.

She found herself walking towards Traitors Walk once more, the hour was late but it did not matter much, the black cells didn’t know the difference between night or day.

By the next morning Cersei had calmed herself enough to think more clearly about their potential problems ahead, a King sometimes has to distance himself from his emotions. She recalled that her father once said those words to Tommen.

She did not want to waste any more time, she commanded that Jaime and Qyburn should report to her personal quarters directly.

“Your Grace,” Qyburn greeted, as was his practice. Qyburn was the first to arrive.
“Your Grace, I’ve started working on our plan to collect the payment for the Iron Bank. Ser Osney Kettleblack and Ser Osfryd Kettleblack, have proven to be very useful within these tasks.

“Good,” Cersei replied.

“I did not have a chance to inform you last night, my Queen, but I have received more news.”

“What news have you received?”

“A few Targaryen ships have been spotted around the city of Cuy, or Sunflower Hall within the Reach. They were docked there for a while, and the ships were loaded with food supplies.”

Cersei frowned.

“It seems like we have discovered one of their supply lines, Daenerys Targaryen is receiving support from the Reach,” Qyburn clarified.

Cersei knew she shouldn’t be surprised that the witch Lady Olenna was supporting the Targaryen. This might actually be good news for them. If that Dothraki whore was receiving support from within the Seven Kingdoms it meant that they could destroy her support. If she was receiving her food supplies from Essos it would have been impossible to accomplish.

Jaime finally made an appearance, he looked completely miserable and his eyes were red and swollen.


“We have received some better news today.”

Jaime only nodded, and fell into a seat.

“We have discovered the route of the Targaryen food supply.”
As Jaime looked up she could see that he appeared a bit more like himself.

“Qyburn has just reported that the Targaryen fleet have been collecting food supplies from Sunflower Hall.”

“The Reach?” Jaime questioned.

“Indeed, it seems like Lady Olenna is supporting the dragon whore - she still blames the Lannisters for the death of her family. We need to strike - we need to strike right now.”

After a few silent moments of contemplation Jaime replied.

“We can't attack Daenerys Targaryen directly, her dragons would incinerate any fleet that we can send against her. But we can weaken her position by attacking her food supply and her allies. If she can't protect her allies it would make others wary of joining her cause.” Jaime started to appear much more resolutely.

“We have enemies all around us, from the north to the south. But as long as they don't unite against us we can take them out one by one.” Cersei answered.

“The armies within the Reach are still very strong - they have managed to remove themselves from most of the fighting these past few years,” Jaime said deeply in thought, “but it also means that their armies are green and they would be less prepared against a battle hardened Lannister army, still it might be a difficult battle.”

Cersei could almost see Jaime as a young Kingsguard member again, resplendent within his white cloak and long golden hair. Sometimes Jaime had some of Tywin’s mind for strategy, if only he applied himself more.

“House Tyrell is gone, they are finished, only Olenna remains and she will not be there for much longer. She is not even truly a Tyrell, many other houses within the Reach have always questioned the Tyrell’s claim towards Highgarden. The Tyrells were only ever the stewards. As soon as Lady Olenna dies the bannermen within the Reach will fight against each other for the control of Highgarden.” Cersei replied to Jaime.

“And what if we were to offer that control to one of the other Houses within the Reach?” Jaime
completed her thoughts for her.

Cersei smiled and nodded.

“The Florents have always been outspoken about their greater claim towards Highgarden.”

“And most of them also supported Stannis, against the crown.” Jaime answered.

“The Tarlys,” Jaime suggested.

“It is an open secret that Lord Randyll Tarly still feels affronted by Mace Tyrell’s claims of victory against Robert,” Jaime continued, “Randyll Tarly is known as one of the best military commanders within the realm he would be a good addition to our claim.”

“Qyburn,” Cersei instructed, “write a letter to Randyll Tarly, offer him a position as the Warden of the South and the Lord of Highgarden, if he swears fealty to House Lannister.”

“How is your research of killing dragons coming along?” Cersei asked from Qyburn.

“Some dragons have died from using powerful scorpion bolts.”

“Would you be able to design such a weapon?”

“I could, Your Grace, but it might take a bit of time.”

“You can spend more of your time on constructing this weapon, some of your other duties can wait. The dragons are our biggest threat right now.” Cersei instructed.

“Is the Lannister army ready to march?”

“They could be prepared within a few days time,” Jaime answered.
“We can't prepare them to soon, there might be spies within Kings Landing, they would report our preparations to the that dragon whore,” Cersei said thoughtfully.

“I will instruct the commanders to start preparing quietly for a march towards Casterly Rock, we have to wait for a reply from Lord Tarly anyhow.”

“You will have to leave as soon as possible.”

“It is time for court, Qyburn you are dismissed, you can attend to the letter for Lord Tarly immediately, and then you must start with the construction of that scorpion.”

Late that night Jaime arrived at her chambers. It had been a long time since Jaime had come to visit her at night, she was usually the one who went to him. It was cold, yet he was only wearing a shirt.

Cersei knew that her bedroom was warm and inviting, a fire was blazing within the hearth and the room was decorated with rich warm crimson, and touches of gold. Cersei stripped herself bare in front of the fire.

It not take long for them to land upon her feather bed, Jaime was kissing her like he used to do when they were young lovers within Casterly Rock. They spend half of the night extracting whatever they could from each other’s bodies, until the early hours of the morning.

They were both flustered and sweating, Jaime was holding onto her from behind. She could feel his hot breath tingling along her neck as she was staring into the flames of the hearth.

“Cersei” Jaime whispered close to her ear.

“Hmm”

“Wouldn’t it be better if we just left everything behind, let's leave this stinking, decrepit old city.”

“What do you mean?” She enquired softly.
“We don’t have to stay here, we could go to Essos and leave the cold of Westeros behind us. We could collect and sell all of our most valuable items. We would easily be able to live a comfortable life for the rest of our days, with a few servants.”

“We could go somewhere, where no one would know that we are brother and sister, we could even start a new family somewhere else.”

“That is a lovely dream,” Cersei replied dismissively.

“It doesn’t have to be a dream, we could just leave it all behind, let’s accept this offer from Daenerys Targaryen.”

Cersei wasn’t just going to vacate her throne because Jaime suddenly had an attack of conscious after his wasted youth as a Kingsguard member. But this was Jaime, she has always known that she has been the one who had to push him forward.

“We are the last two Lannisters, we have to think about our legacy and our duty.”

“Fuck legacy,” Jaime replied more vehemently, “fuck duty - haven’t we all suffered enough for Tywin Lannister’s legacy? Daenerys Targaryen has a rightful claim to the throne, we don’t have any claim towards the iron throne, how can it be our duty?”

“Because,” Cersei answered, “we will make it our duty.”

"Thrones and legacies aren’t just handed over on a silver platter. Nobody handed over a legacy and a throne to Aegon Targaryen, he created one, and he took it. If you want to create a real legacy for yourself, you have to take it.”

“And that is what we will do, if the Targaryen girl wants a throne, she will have to take it.”

Cersei has lost almost everything she has ever held dear, she lost three of her children, she wasn’t going to give anything away.

“The world you have described, does not exist.”
Jaime has always suffered from delusions of grandeur, where his honour was concerned.

“It is convenient and even consoling at times to dream of a different type of world, but that is not the place we live in.”
Jon

Chapter Notes

Two Jon chapters was merged into one, so this chapter became slightly long.

Jon

Jon was standing on the battlements of the outer wall near the east gate, to his left the inhabitants of Winter town was scurrying along to complete their early morning tasks. Their fires created white billowing towers within the dark blue sky. The air was alive with their living noises that drifted upwards to his ears from time to time. He could hear the clinking and clanging sounds from pots and spoons as men broke their fasts, somewhere someone issued an order for a goat to be milked, he could hear the tuneless singing of a child and the giggling of some maidens.

The smell from a hearty stew made his stomach protest at the early morning start.

From the wolfswood he could see the woodsmen were dragging logs towards his position near the gate. Jon could feel the crisp early morning air was beating and whipping through the furs of his cloak, his breath was steaming within the air. Yet he didn’t truly feel the cold, he has been up at the Wall for long enough to withstand the cold.

Some of the woodsmen have started using crude sleds to carry the wood quicker through the gates of Winterfell. The snow-white valley below was criss-crossed with the tracks from the sleds, as if a small child was trying to write on fresh parchment.

Jon’s plan was to pile the wood between the inner and the outer gate, the moat had never held a lot of water and it was completely frozen over. He wanted the whole of Winterfell surrounded by wood, it was an enormous task, but he knew it would create a very efficient barrier against the wights. At Hardhome it was the wights that did most of the slaughtering.

At the perimeter edge of the village a grey stone wall was starting to snake up from the snow. Jon could hear the distant sound of hammers biting into stone. The stone was collected from the Crofters Village within the Wolfswood. Everyone needed to be protected.

Jon could hear the crunching of snow behind him as the footsteps came closer to him.
“Good morning,” Ser Davos greeted the two guards that was close to him.

“Your Grace,” Ser Davos acknowledged to him as he came to stand right next to Jon on his right hand side.

“Ser Davos.” Jon acknowledged back.

“A raven has arrived from the Night Watch, I thought I might inform you immediately.”

Jon nodded, “find Maester Wolkan and bring him to my solar.”

“The message is still within the rookery, and Maester Wolkan is tending to some of the injured within the Guest Hall,” Ser Davos answered. “I sometimes take the liberty of looking for messages from time to time, and I saw a bird within the Castle Black cage.”

“Go and find Maester Wolkan anyhow, we might need to send an immediate reply. I will go and collect the message within rookery,” Jon instructed.

As Jon strode from the battlements his two Mormont guards, Finlay and Dylan, seamlessly fell in right behind him.

Jon has eagerly been waiting for something from the Wall. This might be news about the party of Norreys and Flints that have disappeared beyond the Wall a moon’s turn past.

The stone turret stairs that winded it’s way up to the top of the rookery was slippery from all of the footsteps that have climbed these stairs for hundreds of years. As Jon neared the top of the maester’s tower he could hear the ravens cawing and quorking excitedly, almost too excitedly.

“Snow!” “Snow!” “Snow!”

Some of the ravens were chattering. Jon recalled how Sam was always trying to teach the ravens how to speak. “Snow!” Jon also recalled how Sam drove Dolorous Edd mad beyond the Wall, with his persistence to teach one of the birds to say Gilly.
Jon’s mind was far beyond the Wall, as he strided into the rookery. He wasn’t alone.

“Lord Baelish.”

“Your Grace.” Baelish replied.

“I would have bowed, but as you can see I am holding a very large bird,” Littlefinger replied with a dastardly smile.

“Maester Wolkan will appear shortly, I am sure he would be more then happy to send a message for you.” Jon told Baelish curtly.

“I wouldn’t want to bother the good maester, I was just planning on sending a message to the Fingers, it is a small spit of land but it still requires some governance from time to time.”

Jon didn’t say anything more, he didn’t have time for Baelish and his plots rights now, but he knew that he would have to approach and address the matter with Sansa at some point.

Jon took the message from the Nights Watch and made his way to his solar. He waited for Ser Davos to arrive.

After a few moments Finley announced their arrival.

“Ser Davos and Maester Wolkan.”

“Maester Wolkan, write a message to Castle Black and instruct Lord Commander Edd and all the Lords present that they are not allowed to go beyond the Wall anymore. This is an order. Send the message immediately and then you can go back to tending for the injured.”

“Your Grace,” Maester Wolkan bowed and left as quickly as possible.
Ser Davos took a chair in front of him. He was waiting to hear what the message contained.

“A rescue party of some Manderly men, along with five hundred Vale men, have gone searching for the first group, they were suppose to return after the seventh day no matter what was found. They have now also disappeared, it’s been a fortnight.”

“I told them that they shouldn’t go beyond the Wall unnecessary, and now we have likely lost a thousand good fighting men, and you know as well as I, what they are now. We are giving good soldiers away to the White Walkers!”

“Those men from the Vale, Ser Corbray and Templeton; likely - they wanted to proof that there was nothing beyond the Wall,” Ser Davos reflected.

The whole situation amounted to pure folly.

“Your Grace, have you given any thought about a resolution to the Karstarks?” Davos asked.

Jon was still planning on speaking with Alys Karstark, she has arrived six days past, but he would rather wait until the Umber heir arrives.

“I am still waiting for the arrival of the Umber heir,” Jon replied.

“Your Grace, Alys Karstark has requested permission to go and visit the Godswood.”

She was just a young girl around Sansa’s age.

“Allow her to visit the Godswood under guard,” Jon answered.

“Are there any petitions today?”

“There is a land dispute between two houses, Your Grace.”
“Let’s break our fast and then we will hear-out the petitions”.

They broke their fast quickly and made their way to the great hall. The snow has been piled up everywhere they went, it left the grounds cold and muddy. You could also see some steam escaping from the hot springs as they walked through the courtyard, it gave the grounds an eerie mood. The hot spring were like blood to Winterfell, they could mean the difference between life and death.

As Jon entered the great hall with Ser Davos next to him and his two guards following right behind, all of the people within the hall stood at once. Another one of the Mormont guards Kai, announced their presence.

“Jon Snow, The King in the North and Ser Davos Seaworth.” Jon walked to the end of the great hall and stopped the at the main table that was situated beside the hearth. Everyone sat down again, only Jon remained standing, and the two guards behind him.

“Petitioners may now approach.”

There wasn’t much of a ritual to Jon’s court sessions, sometimes it still felt strange that everyone would now stand, whenever he entered a room.

A man and a woman approached the table, the man was very stout with a burly dark brown beard, the women had dark hair and very light blue eyes, almost as light as the sky in summer. Both of them bowed.

The women took one step closer, “I am Lady Carliene Woodley, Lord Skeffington has stolen my lands, he is f…” The man in question, Lord Skeffington he presumed; his whole face started to redden. “You; deceiving witch, that land has always belong to Skeffingtons!” the man roared out his claim in a deep voice. The man had a good battlefield voice.

Jon held up his hand and they both quieted down. This was a matter that would have been better served by discussing it with their liege Lord. Which properly means that they don’t have a liege Lord at the moment.

“Who is your liege Lord,” Jon asked.
“We were sworn to House Bolton,” the Lady Woodley replied fiercely while looking him straight in the eyes.

“Lord Skeffington, what is your claim towards this piece of land?”

“The land has belonged to House Skeffington since the time of the Andals!” Lord Skeffington answered with some excitement. “Ser Skeffington came from Andelos during the invasion of the Andals, but instead of fighting he married into House Mills and adopted the Old Gods. Since that time the Lonefort and all of its surrounding grounds have belonged to Skeffingtons, Your Grace,” Lord Skeffington answered with pride.

“What is your claim to this land Lady Woodley?” Jon asked.

The Lady Woodley give Lord Skeffington a cold look. “You're Grace, he’s not given you the full story.” Lord Skeffington bristled at that, He tried to reply, but Jon quieted him and told Lady Woodley to continue.

“Many members from House Skeffington refused to swear fealty to Aegon the Conqueror, many Skeffington's fled from Westeros and joined the Company of the Rose in Essos. Some of their land was granted to House Woodley, for our loyalty.”

“During the reign of Aegon III, Lady Lysian Woodley married Lord Ron Skeffington, that piece of land was part of her dowery!” Lord Skeffington exclaimed loudly. “It was never part of the dowery, Ron Skeffington was nothing more than a drunkard who almost gambled away the whole family castle!” Lady Woodley shouted back. “A drunkard, you dare to call my kin…” Lord Skeffington shouted back.

“Silence!” Jon exclaimed loudly, he could feel a certain pinching within his eyes.

“The land in question has been in dispute for hundreds of years, what has suddenly prompted you to seek out resolution about this matter, now?” Jon addressed the the two.

“Lady Woodley tried to kill me! She set her hunting dogs on me,” Lord Skeffington replied with great offence. “If I was trying to kill you Lord Skeffington, you would have been dead, you were trespassing on my lands, and my hounds did what hounds are suppose to do with a thieve.” Lady Woodley stated in an exalted manner. “A thieve you say?” Lord Skeffington was red in the face.
and his jowls were quivering with rage.

“I’ve heard enough, I don’t have any knowledge about this land and the rights to this land. Most of the records within Winterfell perished in the fire. I will send a request for the records to Oldtown. In meantime I will divide the land equally amongst yourselves, if you can’t do that peacefully then I will give the land to someone else.” Jon stated threateningly.

“Thank You Grace,” both mumbled, they were clearly not happy about the resolution. It seemed like they just wanted to get away from the great hall.

“One more thing, what have you been doing about my instructions, that I’ve send to all of the Houses? Have you been focused on gathering wood and supplies, like I’ve ordered?”

“Aye, you Grace.” “I have,” one of them murmured.

Jon looked up around the great hall, Lord Glover and his brother Robett Glover were in attendance, Lord Royce was sitting as straight as an arrow near the front. Jonelle Cerwyn sat on the other side, Cley Cerwyn went home before the Knights of the Vale left. Lord Wyman Manderly sat close to the Lady Cerwyn. On the righthand side of the great hall Baelish was lurking, half hidden behind a pillar, he had a clear view of the proceedings and everyone’s expression.

Jon addressed everyone within the hall, he spoke loudly and clearly, “we can’t keep on fighting wars amongst ourselves. Our biggest enemies don’t have any quarrels amongst themselves, they just command.

They don’t care to which house you belong, if you come from the North or the South, or even Essos. I implore you to prepare, for the coming storm!” Jon concluded with some vigor, he tried to look all of Lords and Ladies straight in the eyes.

“You are both dismissed.” They shuffled their way out of the great hall.

Four Winterfell guards approached next. A young smallfolk girl was weeping behind them. Between them they held two young men, their clothes were tattered and muddy, but underneath the dirt Jon saw Bolton armour.

One of the guards, Will, stepped forward. “Your Grace, these two Bolton soldiers have killed this women’s husband.” They pushed the girl forward, until she was standing in front of them. She was a scrawny wild thing, her eyes were red and rimmed with tears.
“What is your name, girl?” Jon tried to ask kindly.

She wiped the tears from her eyes with long brown coarse, woollen sleeves, “Fran, milord,” she answered hesitantly. Will spoke from behind her, “That is the King in the North, you should address him as Your Grace.” Will tried to tell her softly from behind. “Pardons, Your Grace.”

Jon waved his hand, as if to say that it did not matter. “Fran, can you please tell me what happened?” Jon asked.

“We are farmers from around the Sheepshead Hills, we were on our way to Wintertown, just as our parents and grandparent have done before us, in winter time. We had our waggon with most of our belongings with us. Six leagues away from the Kings Road we were attacked by these two men.” Some tears were streaming down her cheeks again, and she was sniffing. “We were still about twenty leagues from Winterfell, when those two men attacked us they stabbed my husband Edrick from behind, and cut his throat, they took our wagon with our horse and all of our supplies.”

Jon waited patiently again, as Fran was now almost crying hysterically.

“They took the goat” she was sniffing and trying to stem the flow of her tears. “The goat,” she sniffled between tears.

“My little Angie drank the...goat's milk, she managed to choke out, between her sobs. “I, ...I don't have any milk to feed my babe.”

“The goat” she croaked out once again.

Everyone was silently staring at the girl’s heartbreaking cries. Jon knew this tale was unlikely to have a good ending.

“What happened to your babe?” Jon asked her between her sobs and cries.

“I, he died, we were to far away, I couldn’t reach Wintertown in time, I couldn’t feed him,” she said with a grasp, her sobbing and sniffling quieted down.
“When I reached Wintertown, them two,” she pointed towards the two young Bolton men, “was living in a hut with our wagon”.

Will spoke out again, “we did find some women’s clothes and the clothes from the babe in their hut, Your Grace”.

“What do you have to say for yourselves?” Jon asked the two young Bolton men.

One started to speak and ramble, “we were starving, we didn’t have anything we were lost.”

“I give a decree that allowed all of the remaining Bolton soldiers to join the Nights Watch.” Jon replied sternly.

“We are only squires, we followed our Lords into battle as is our duty. I dont want to join the Nights Watch. I am sixteen, I have a girl.” he trailed off more silently at the end.

The other young Bolton soldier started to cry, “we didn’t mean to kill anyone, we just wanted to get away.”

Jon silenced the two young Bolton squires. “Fran, he address the girl, she was strangely calm now, her blue eyes shone brightly against the red in her eyes,”I cant give you back your babe or your husband, I can only give you a small measure of justice.”

“Take them to the courtyard,” Jon ordered the guards,”and find two blocks”.

All of the Northmen quickly stood-up and left for the courtyard. They knew exactly what was about to happen. The Lords of the Vale followed with more uncertainty. Jon and Ser Davos along with his guards followed behind.

The courtyard was filled with people, a lot of smallfolk were training within the courtyard or waiting to get their training started. Jon pushed through the crowd, in the middle the Winterfell guards were holding the two captives. The air held a certain thickness of expectation.
The two Bolton squires were standing with their arms tied behind their backs, they were each flanked by two guards, two blocks have been found within quick time, and was placed before them.

Jon came to stand before before the first Bolton squire, “what is your name?” He asked the squire, the tears were now streaming down his red cheeks. “Karlton,” he stammed “Karlton Snow, Your Grace”.

“Karlton Snow, you have been charged with murder and thieving, you have been found guilty, do you have any last words?” Jon spoke clearly and evenly. “I will join the Nights Watch, please Your Grace, have mercy I was only a squire,” he was pleading and sobbing. He looked younger more like a boy, when he was crying, I was stabbed and murdered by a boy .

He was pushed down by the guards, he kept on struggling. “Karlton Snow, I would advise you to hold your neck out, if I miss your neck, this will only become painful for you.” He settled down then, but Jon could see that he was still shaking and shivering.

“I, Jon Snow, the King in the North sentence you to die.” Jon flung his sword from high, it only took one strong slash from Longclaw and his head was rolling in the mud. Blood was starting to seep into the mud and snow. Jon moved onto the other squire, he was very pale.

“What is your name? Rolland Grieves,” he answered. Jon placed both of his hands on the pommel of Longclaw as the sword was pointed into the snow, the blood from Karlton Snow was dripping off the blade.

“Rolland Grieves, you are guilty of murder and thieving, do you have any last words?”

“Only, that I am sorry for my crimes, we never thought it would go this far, please send word to my father, tell him that I tried to die bravely.” People so often don't realize the consequences of their actions. Rolland Grieves went to his knees by himself, the guards let go of him. He held out his neck. It only took one hack from the Valyrian steel to slice his head clean off. The snow around Jon’s feet was starting to turn red. At least he died bravely .

“Burn the bodies”, Jon instructed to the guard closest to him. “Will, take the girl to the kitchens, tell Nella to feed her, and place her somewhere with the other servants.” The girl was just staring at the ground silently, at the red snow, a bright dash of colour.
“Petitions are done for today,” Jon announced unceremoniously. A servant ran to him with a cloth, he wiped the blood from Longclaw as well as he possibly could, before returning the rag.

Ser Davos walked alongside Jon until they have reached his solar. Ser Davos looked more grim and serious then he usually did. Jon poured a horn of ale for the both of them.

“Many of the Northern Lords still aren’t taking the threat against the White Walkers seriously.” Ser Davos nodded. “What do I have to do; to make them realize that our biggest enemy might soon be upon us?”

“You can just keep on trying, Your Grace, that is the best all of us can do.” Davos replied.

“I fear, I am going to have to start visiting some of the biggest stronghold within the North, or I will need to go to the Wall to see that no further follies are committed. But I am not sure that we will have the time.”

“And no one has send any word of gathering or collecting dragon glass.” Davos included.

“I saw Lord Baelish. I saw him in the rookery earlier today, he was sending a message. I would like to see his head roll on the ground! But my sister insists that the Lords of Vale are only here because he remains here. With the continued disappearances at the Wall, half of the Vale knights that came here might soon be gone.” Jon speculated sardonically for a moment.

“It was good to send most of the troublesome Lords to the Wall, they cannot forge alliances with the White Walkers.”

“That would seem highly unlikely,” Jon smiled. “Although, Craster did manage to make some kind of an alliance with them.”

Ser Davos looked confused.

“Craster was Gilly’s father, he gave his baby boys to the White Walkers, in return he wasn't killed.”

“What would the White Walkers want with babes?” Ser Davos questioned. “Wish I could say, Ser
Davos. They are our enemies but we know so little about them.”

“I will be going into Wintertown to look for more recruits, Your Grace.”

“I should go with you, but I wanted to visit the Godswood, this afternoon.”

“Go, visit the Godswood Your Grace, I can go by myself or with some guards, I am sure there will be a lot of talk about the executions today.”

“Could you also instruct Maester Wolkan to sent a raven to Oldtown and make a request for the records of the Skeffington and Woodley land? Also ask the Maester to send a message to Lord Grieves about his son’s death.”

“I will, Ser Davos replied with a nod. “Thank You, Ser Davos.”

Jon took an oilcloth and a rag with him to the Godswood. When he reached the entrance to the Godswood he instructed his two guards to remain next to the gate. Jon understood well enough that they were keeping him safe but some days he would just like to walk alone, some days he felt like a mother hen with everyone following him around. It was something to get used to, I weren't born to be a King.

Jon walked to the middle of the Godswood like he’s done a thousand times before, the Godswood was the one placed that remained completely untouched from the war and destruction that Winterfell had to endure. One could feel truly at home here, the leaves gathering on the floor of Godswood felt like a mattress, one could smell the earth and something strong and ancient. But today the woods was covered in snow, it smelled of winter and new rain upon the dry ground.

Jon made his way to the heart tree. The black pond still looked the same as always, the water wasn’t frozen. Jon could clearly see his own reflection upon the pond. He recalled that old Nan once told them a story of some vain Stark, who looked so often within the depths of the pool, at her own reflection that the pond trapped the Lady within its depths. On nights when the moon is full you are suppose to still hear her calling out like a wolf, she was always looking for someone else to trap within the pool, as that is the only way that she could ever return as the beauty that she once was.

Jon dipped his sword within the black waters, he cleaned the blade as well as possible with the rag that he had. Jon could see the ripples and patterns upon the blade, lovely and lethal at the same
He moved towards the Weirwood tree, seeing the long sorrowful face was like peering into the face of someone that he has known for a long time. From somewhere behind, Ghost came padding along silently. “Ghost!” He placed his sword next to the rock, and he started scratching Ghost behind the ears. After a while Jon sat down on the rock, Ghost lay curled up beside his feet. There wasn’t a lot of snow around here, the leaves from the tree blocked most of the heaviest snows.

Jon started to slowly and carefully oil the sword, just like father used to do. *Father always said that a man should look after his own weapons.* Jon could recall how he and Robb used to fight each other with sticks underneath the canopy of the great tree. Longclaw was glistening.

Ghost’s ears pricked up, Jon could hear footsteps approaching him. A girl appeared through the snow, Jon recognized her, from when he first laid eyes upon her briefly within the courtyard, it was Alys Karstark. Her hair was kissed by fire. “Your Grace,” she inclined her head slightly, but she remained tall and straight. She was suppose to have guards with her.

“I thank you for allowing me to leave my room.” Jon nodded, her guards finally came up from behind, when they saw Jon they both bowed. “Your Grace”.

“I ve been looking for an opportunity to speak with you, but your guards and your man Davos have advised me that you are very preoccupied, Your Grace.”

“The days are shorter and there are a lot that needs to be done.” Jon replied gruffly. Her guards moved out of view once again. Jon kept on oiling his sword slowly.

“We have met before, you and I. When I was nine or ten we came to Winterfell for a harvest feast. We stayed at Winterfell for a whole moon’s turn, my father was hopeful that I could somehow charm Robb.” Alys Karstark give a sad smile. “But Robb only tried his best to get away from an annoying little girl. I wanted to play with the boys, just like I’ve always done with my own brothers. All of the boys ran away from me, all except you. You were a very solemn boy.”

Jon was starting to recall something of the time she spoke off. It was all so very long ago, a different lifetime, where everything was right and Starks filled the halls of Winterfell. Sometimes Jon wondered if all of those times ever actually existed.

“You humoured me, we even fought with sticks in the Godswood.”
“That was a lifetime ago.” Jon replied. “Aye” she answered sadly, as whips of her red hair was blowing in the wind. “The best of House Karstark lost their lives within the South. The Riverlands have been drenched by our blood. We’ve bled for your brother.”

“And then your brother Harald took up arms against us.” Jon replied. Alys Karstark remained quiet for a time. She was staring off in the distance, but she wasn’t really focusing her gaze somewhere.

“The best of my family truly died within the South, my brother Harald was a craven and a deprived man.” That confession surprised Jon somewhat. “My father loved Harry and Torrhen, they were his pride, my brother Harald was always bitter about the fact that he was only the third son. When the dark wings brought the tidings of father’s death, Harald held a feast. You see my father left him behind, he was afraid that Harald might somehow stain the family name within the South. Harald was always different, he once skinned one of my brother’s favorite hunting dogs, and placed the head of the dog on his pillow. My father was completely broken after the deaths of Harry and Torrhen, but he was broken even further when Lady Stark freed Jaime Lannister, who strangled Torrhen.”

Jon could never understand why Lady Catelyn would let the Kingslayer go, she always hated him, but she was also a practical women in some ways, she wasn't completely without some sense, Jon knew. Lady Catelyn would have hated seeing him seated where his father always used to sit.

“My dearest brother Harald,” Alys Karstark said mockingly, “was planning on giving me over to Ramsay Bolton, even though he knew perfectly well what Ramsay might do with me. That was until your sister came along, of course Roose Bolton wasn’t interested in a Karstark when he could get his hands on a true Stark.”

Jon could feel some rage starting to burn inside of him for Littlefinger.

“So you see, despite all that has occurred between our families I still owe your family a debt, I would have been married to Ramsay Bolton if it wasn’t for your sister.” Alys Karstark said ironically. “Everyone within my family have died, almost everyone within your family have died, but we are still alive, if we continue this blood feud between our families there will soon be no more Stark or Karstark blood left to spill.” Alys Karstark had a fire burning behind her clear blue-grey eyes.

“I don't have much left to offer, to truly show my fealty, I will support your cause where I can,” she pleaded with him. “The only thing I have...I could offer you my hand in marriage, I am still a maid; I promise” Alys Karstark announced while suddenly looking shy.
“That won’t be necessary Lady Karstark,” Jon replied resolutely. Jon wasn’t sure but he might have blushed. *Ygritte would have been laughing at me.* “Call me Alys, everyone else does, in truth I’ve never been much of a lady,” she smiled at him shyly.

Jon could recall that Alys had a sword strapped to her hip as she rode into Winterfell. Alys had Sansa’s kissed by fire hair, but in truth she reminded him of *Arya*. Almost every time the horn at the gate was sounded, Jon had hoped that it was his little sister that had returned to them. She was still somewhere out there according to Lady Brienne. Alys was watching him intently.

“Alys, I had been a part of the Nights Watch for a while. In the Nights Watch you are told to forgive all previous sins, all of a man’s previous crimes are forgotten, because everyone on the Wall swears an oath of fealty to the realm, but unfortunately it is not always that simple. You might just be an example to us all.” This time it was Alys who blushed.

“Our families have spilled too much blood for lost causes already, there is only one war that matters now. I would accept the support that you have to offer, and you must swear fealty to House Stark in front of a Weirwood tree.”

Alys fell to her knees in front of the Weirwood tree. “I Alys of House Karstark swear to always follow House Stark and Jon Snow as the King in the North, I swear upon wood and iron, I swear this upon ice and fire.”

“I meant that you would have to swear fealty in front of the North.”

“Oh,” she uttered slightly embarrassed. She got up from her knees and dusted some of the snow and dirt from her dress.

“Now you have to excuse me Alys, I really do have some tasks that I want to see through, today.”

Jon stood up from the rock and sheathed Longclaw before walking off, Ghost trotted silently behind him. When he reached the entrance of the Godswoods both of his guard once again followed him like a pair of ducklings. Jon walked through the courtyard where he took the heads of the two squires earlier that day. The courtyard was almost empty now, the blocks and blood on the ground was gone, everything was once again the same as it had been this morning. No one would ever knew that two lives were lost this morning by looking at the ground.

Jon reached the Maester’s Turret, it was almost the same as it had always been when Maester Luwin was still here. There were shelves of bottles with all types of concoctions and manuscripts, books were almost lying around haphazardly. Maester Wolkan sat behind an old oaken desk.
“Your Grace,” the Maester jumped up when he saw Jon. “Maester Wolkan, I’ve send Ser Davos to you earlier about two letters.”

“Yes, Your Grace I’ve compiled those letters, I was going to take them to your solar for you to sign.” Maester Wolkan shoveled some pieces of parchment around, until he held the two letters. He handed them over, Jon quickly scanned both of the letters. It seems like Maester Wolkan was holding his breath. He handed a quill to Jon and placed the ink in front of him. Jon signed the letters and handed them back to the Maester. “Have you send that message to Castle Black?” Jon enquired.

“I have Your Grace. Those Stuffington or Woodley land are very fertile lands, it is protected from the harshest elements by the mountains.”

“What did Roose Bolton advice regarding the situation?” Jon asked. Maester Wolkan thought a bit, "Roose Bolton always enjoyed a quiet land, he told them that if he ever heard from them again he would take all of their lands, and no one would ever hear from them again.”

Jon was just about to exit the room when he thought back to Littlefinger. “Have you noticed that any of the ravens have gone missing?”

“I don’t know Your Grace, there was a raven from the Vale that disappeared,” the Maester answered with uncertainty.

“I want you to report any missing ravens to me, as well as their likely destinations,” Jon commanded.


It was almost time for dinner, Jon might as well make his way towards the Great Hall, the skies were quickly becoming darker, Jon could hear chattering and laughing coming from the great hall. I must have spent more time within the Godswood then I realized. Servants have started to light some torches around the courtyard.

When Jon entered the hall everyone stood. They waited until Jon had reached the high table. “You may be seated.” They all sat down and continued with their drinking.
The Master of Horse, Garren was already seated at the table, he has been invited to the high table this evening. *Know your men*, that was something his father always used to say. Funny how Jon himself was almost never invited to the high table, he reflected dryly.

Garren was in what was likely his finest clothes, yet he still smelled of horse. Ser Davos was seated beside him. Jon took a seat besides Ser Davos, some serving girl quickly arrived with some ale and placed it in front of Jon.

“Your Grace, some scouts have reported to Wintertown an Umber party has been spotted two days hence.” That was good news, Jon wanted to conclude the business from the battle. “Three more groups will report for training on the morrow,” Ser Davos said in a low voice. “That is good to hear, we will have a lot to do.” Jon listened to Garren’s discussion about horses for the rest of the evening. Somewhere during the evening a serving girl told him that Sansa took dinner within her rooms because she was busy.

Jon was tired that evening, yet he lay restlessly upon his bed that night. Most of his Lords still didn’t believe in the treat of the White Walkers, that was a great concern to him. But he also struggled to fall asleep because he was always fearful that he might not wake up again. He didn’t dream anymore, all he could see in his dreams was a darkness, it was like falling into an abyss every night.

The Umber party did arrive two days hence, just as the scouts had predicted. Jon was in the courtyard when the horn announced their presence. The Umber party only consisted of five Umber guards, a steward and a boy. He wore the Umber chains around his chest. Rooms had already been prepared in advance with guards assigned to them, some thirty Manderly guards was also standing within the courtyard awaiting the party.

Jon was training with Tormund, he always give you some good practice because he had so much energy. Thus Jon was drenched in sweat, his hair within his neck was wet.

The Umber party stopped within the middle of the courtyard. The boy and the man who Jon assumed was his steward dismounted.

“We seek an audience with the King in the North,” the man announced loudly over the courtyard. Everyone had stopped what they were doing to look at the new arrivals.

Jon stood behind them, he dropped his tourney sword, and approached the party from behind. His guards were right next to him, and the Manderly guards stepped forward. Jon stopped a few feet in front of them.
“You have my attention.” The boy had a look of fear upon his face, but the Steward ignored the guards.

“I demand that guests rights should be taken before we continue any further, as has always been practiced within the North,” the man declared stiffly.

“What is your name Ser?”

“I am Harrold Roux, Steward to House Umber.”

“I decline your request for guestrights, Harrold Roux. Guestrights are usually given to allies.”

“Take these men to the chambers we have prepared for them, and bring Harrold Roux to my solar,” Jon commanded. The Manderly guards stood next to them within the blink of an eye. There was tension within the air for a moment or two, but Harrold Roux nodded towards the Umber guards and they dismounted. They went willingly with the Manderly guards, and Harrold Roux walked alongside three guards towards the great keep. Jon walked towards the great keep, he was joined by Ser Davos.

Before going to his solar Jon quickly stepped into his chambers to refresh himself somewhat. The ice water felt good on his face. ‘What are your plans for the Umbers?’ Ser Davos enquired.

“That depends on them and this Harrold Roux, I didn’t like the hostility he tried to display, but I also want to move on from this continued tension from the battle, you know well enough that we have more important battles to fight. If Harrold Roux carries too much of a negative influence with the Umber boy, then I would have to do something about it.”

Four guards were waiting outside his solar inside the hallway. Ser Davos stepped inside before Jon, Harrold Roux was standing still and facing the door.

“Sit,” Jon commanded as he entered the chambers. His guards wanted to follow him into the chamber, but Jon showed them that they should remain outside.

“Where is Harmund, what will happen to the boy,” Harrold Roux was sitting right on the edge of his seat, Ser Davos came to stand on his right side with his shortened fingers on his pommel, Jon stood behind his desk.
“The boy is fine for now; I prepared some guest chambers when I heard about your arrival, as for what will happen to the boy in the future; that depends you.” Harrold Roux sat back within the chair.

“He is just a boy of ten, he did not fight against you,” Harrold Roux replied.

“My brother Rickon was also just a boy, he never caused anyone any harm and yet House Umber handed him to the monster Ramsay Bolton, and killed his direwolf.”

“You let the Wildlings into the North,” Harrold Roux said accusingly.

“So you send my brother to Ramsay Bolton and fought against House Stark!” Jon exclaimed. “You could have come to me directly!”

“The Wall was closer to the Last Hearth then the Boltons. The Nights Watch pleaded with all of the Lords within the North to help us fight against the Wildlings. None of the Houses from the North gave the Nights Watch any support, the Nights Watch had to face one hundred thousand Wildlings alone, until King Stannis came to save us. If they had managed to get through the gates at that time, all of the North would have been raped and plundered.” Jon could feel fury starting to pump through his veins, he almost felt like smashing his desk in half.

“Where was House Umber then?”

“And now you appear before me making demands, issuing threats within my courtyard,” Jon stated sharply. Harrold Roux’s head slumped forward, he held his head within his hands. After a while he lifted his head again, he looked defeated.

“I ve been a steward of House Umber for over twenty years, we have always just supported the Starks. Your brother Rickon lived with us for a while, he and Harmund used to play together. The Greatjon was adamant in protecting your brother and following House Stark, the trouble started when Greatjon died suddenly. Smalljon was incessant to do things differently from the Greatjon. They hated each other. The Greatjon thought that the other houses within the North might rally to Rickon’s side one day. When Smalljon heard about the Wildlings this side of the Wall, he started to plot and plan. He decided that the North could change, and he wanted to do the opposite of his father. He decided to kill Shaggydog and imprison Rickon, mostly he decided to offer his support to the Boltons.” Harrold Roux appeared slightly pained.
"I was just trying to look out for the boy, I raised him, he is almost like a son to me. I thought a show of strength might be good."

"What is Lord Harmund Umber’s thoughts about the matter?" Jon questioned.

"Harmund grew up with the stories of the Starks, as I’ve said he was friends with Rickon, he was very confused when Rickon was taken away."

Jon kept his silence for while.

"I will give the boy one chance," Jon could see the relief on Harrold Roux’s face, "but he must swear an oath of fealty tonight for House Stark; in front of the Weirwood tree."

Harrold Roux nodded, seriously.

"And I want the support of House Umber, any support you can offer, food or fighting men. In the meantime it is best that Harmund Umber remains within Winterfell, you could stay with him or I will assign someone else to look after him."

"Your Grace," the man began to protest, "the boy needs to be among his people he needs to learn how to rule the Last Hearth, he would be the safest amongst his own people."

"When the Wall falls the Last Hearth is the first castle in line with Castle black, believe me Harmund Umber will not be safe. You tried to display a show of strength today and you give me five guards," Jon stated.

"We were attacked by bandits along the way, Your Grace!"

"Where?"

"Near Long Lake, six of our men were killed."
“Five or eleven, that isn’t much of a difference, have you even started to make any preparations against the White Walkers like I’ve commanded?” Jon asked severely.

“Nay, Your Grace.”

“The boy will remain here, on the morrow you can send a message to the Last Hearth and command them to start preparing immediately,” Jon commanded.

“I will discuss this matter at dinner tonight, and Harmund Umber will swear his fealty in front of the heart tree, you may go and rest now until tonight.”

Davos opened the door and called for the guards. “Take Harrold Roux to the guest chambers that was prepared for the Umber party and make sure to keep your watch over them,” Jon ordered. Harrold Roux stood up and walked out with the guards.

After a few moments Jon realized that his shoulders were completely tense, his right hand was in a fist, he opened and closed his right hand, and give a long sigh. Jon fell back into the chair, he suddenly felt very tired.

“That was well played, Your Grace,” Davos said with a slight smile.

“Ser Davos could you please make sure that there are torches within godswood. We don't want to fall and stumble there in the dark.”

“Aye, Your Grace”.

That evening Jon went to the great hall early, he took his customary seat between Ser Davos and Sansa, he watched everyone closely as the hall was slowly filled with people.

When everyone was present within the great hall as far as Jon could see, he stood up, and the whole room quieted down. Jon could see sigils from some of the houses hanging at the back of the hall, just like it used to be. The biggest sigil was the one of the Starks within the middle, Jon suspects that Sansa might have something to do with that.
“Lady Alys Karstark and Lord Harmund Umber, come to the front.” Both Alys Karstark and Harmund Umber approached the high table, they stood about eight feet away. Jon could hear a few whispers with the hall.

“Alys Karstark and House Umber, have both betrayed their oaths of fealty to House Stark,” Jon said sternly, “do you have anything to say for yourselves, before my judgement is made?”

Alys Karstark was the first to react. She went on both of her knees, just like she did within the Godswood. “Your Grace, I ask for mercy towards House Karstark we have betrayed our oaths, and I cannot change that, I could only serve House Stark much better within the future, I am the last Karstark left I would swear fealty to House Stark again, and forever remain in your debt.”

Alys Karstark remained on her knees, with her head bowed forward.

Harmund Umber looked like he was frozen on the spot, it appeared as if he was trying hard not to cry.

“Lord Harmund Umber do you have anything to say for yourself?” Jon addressed him. It seemed like he remembered what he had to do. The boy went down on one knee.

“I plead for mercy, for House Umber, Your Grace. We have always supported the Starks I was raised with the tales of Bran the Builder and Theon the Hungry Wolf. I would forever swear fealty to House Stark as the last surviving Umber,” Harmound Umber spoke in a boyish voice that was quivering slightly. He remain on his knee like Alys Karstark.

Jon stood silently for a while to create the sense that he was deliberating the matter.

“Alys Karstak and Harmund Umber, you have to swear a blood oath in front of the heart tree as we did in the olden days. You both have to support House Stark with supplies, and Harmund Umber will remain here in Winterfell as our ward. If you adhere to my ruling in this matter, you may both keep your land and titles.”

“Thank You, Your Grace,” Alys Karstark said clearly, the Umber boy muttered a “thank you”, after Alys Karstark.

“You may rise,” Jon commanded. He turned to one of his guards, please go and light some torches within the godswood. The guard bowed his head and quickly made his way out of the hall. Of course the torches was already in place, the guard would just be scouting the Godswood in
“Before we move to the Godswood, let’s all first drink a toast to a united North,” Jon declared. He held his horn in the air with “unity” and he gulped down some of the ale and sat down again.

“Unity,” was repeated throughout the hall and the men were drinking either wine or ale. After a while Jon stood again, “House Karstark and House Umber have promised to swear fealty to House Stark, let us then bear witness to these vows.”

Most of the people took their drinks with them, some even took jugs of ale and wine with them. Jon was just about to walk off, when Sansa grabbed him by the arm. Jon sat down again next to Sansa, Ser Davos was also about to walk off but remained. They all watched silently as the hall slowly emptied. Only Lyanna Mormont remained seated with them on one of the front benches.

“Jon,” Sansa addressed him directly, “you can’t just let them go free!” Sansa addressed him urgently. They broke a sacred oath, they committed treason they should be punished for what they have inflicted upon House Stark.”

“Lady Sansa is in the right these houses should be punished for their betrayal,” Lyanna Mormont agreed fiercely.

“The Umbers killed Rickon’s direwolf, they are responsible for Rickon’s death! Traitors are suppose to die!” Sansa said with some cold fury.

“House Mormont remained loyal to House Stark, Mormont men died fighting against the Umbers and the Karstarks.” Lyanna Mormont’s eyes showed flashes of fire and anger.

“You are right Lady Mormont, House Mormont was the first House who took up arms for our cause. House Mormont will always remain our first and truest ally, I am not sure that I will ever be able to repay House Mormont in all of my life time.” Jon spoke with Lyanna Mormont with sincerity.

“Should I truly kill a ten year old boy and a sixteen year old girl who was nowhere near the battlefield on that day? They had absolutely no say in the decisions that the heads of their houses made for them.”
“That is just the way our world works, they don't have to be killed they can be stripped of their lands and titles or they could be imprisoned.” Sansa stated coldly.

“That is not the way our world has to work. How different would I be from Ramsay Bolton, if I just kill these children, Ramsay also killed the heir of his enemy who had nothing to do with any of the decisions that House Stark has made! We don't have to repeat all of the decisions of those in front of us, we can only try to create a better land.”

“Killing the Umber boy and the Karstark girl will not bring Rickon back to us. It will not work to imprison them or to strip them of their lands and titles. They would just grow more hateful and vengeful towards House Stark in time. I only have two options, I either I have to kill them or pardon them.

Do they deserve to die for simply being members from House Umber and House Karstark?”

"Jon could see that most of the fury had left Lyanna Mormont’s eyes. “Lady Mormont and Ser Davos could I please speak with my brother alone?”

“Can I escort you to the Godswood Lady Mormont?” Ser Davos asked Lady Mormont. Lady Mormont raised from her seat and took Ser Davos’ arm. Sansa waited until they were gone.

“I saw you in the Godswoods”, Sansa stated flatly, Jon was confused for a moment. “You and Alys Karstark, I was there,”

*The Godswood was certainly brimming with people on that day, first Alys and now Sana was also somehow there.*

“I don't trust Alys Karstark, she is trying to play you for a fool with her maiden in distress mummers act.

“You don't understand how our world works, and the games that people can play when it suits them, you have been stuck at Castle Black living within a vacuum.” Sansa paused for moment.

“You don't understand and see the reality of the world, people will lie, cheat and steal to try and manipulate you, now that you are in a position of power. People would do anything to save themselves.”

Jon did not know if he should be angry at Sansa, she was speaking with great sincerity. He wondered if Sansa has ever really given any thought to what all of the Nights Watch brothers might be doing at the Wall. *Ygritte once believed my lies, and she died for it.*
“You are a good and honourable man, people will always try to take advantage of you. Just like father,” Sansa added softly.

Jon took Sansa’s hand within his own and squeezed it softly. “Father was a better man then I could ever hope to be. You might not believe this, but mayhaps I have told some lies of my own, mayhaps I’ve done some manipulating of my own.”

Sansa looked at him with doubt in her eyes.

“I don’t want to chop a ten year old boy’s head off, he didn’t have a choice or a say in the decisions Smalljon Umber made. The same goes for Alys Karstark, she had no impact on the decisions Harald Karstark made. She has lost just as much as we have in these wars.”

“I was a prisoner of the Lannister’s, it is very common to imprison the children of your enemies.”

“Harmund Karstark will be staying at Winterfell. What did the Lannisters achieve by making you a prisoner? Likely you have only hated them more, and now they might wish that they did kill you. We have mostly managed to create cycles of hate and vengeance. Someone is killed and his children try to avenge him, in the process his children will be attacked again by other children, and on and on it goes. We don’t have to follow these rules we are not Boltons or Lannisters, somewhere someone just has to stop the cycle of vengeance.”

“Why do we have to stop the vengeance? It might be all that remains after everything else is gone,” Sansa answered.

“Sansa, I have grieved for all that we have lost, Rickon should not have been killed, he was just a boy. I tried my best to save him, whilst he was still alive and it wasn’t enough, he was still shot down like a deer right in front of my eyes. The men who are responsible for his death are dead. But we are still here, we are still alive, we don’t have to make the same choices as Ramsay Bolton.”

Jon raised from his seat, he held his hand out to Sansa, “come on the people outside will be frozen into ice sculptures by the time we reach the Godswood.”

Jon could see that Sansa wasn’t completely satisfied, but if she didn’t understand right now, then he would not be able to change her way of thinking right now. But she still took his arm as he escorted her through the woods and snow within the Godwood. The cold within the Godwood was almost painful against the heat of the hearth within the Great hall. The Godwood glittered and
shined, as the dancing flames from the torches flickered within the icy darkness. Jon felt at home.

They made their way past all of the spectators, the Weirwood tree was encircled by a row of torches. The flames made the red leaves look like drops of newly spilled blood. Alys Karstark and Harmund Umber were standing right next to the thick white base of the tree, with some guards around them. Jon stood near the rock, and Sansa remained by his side. There wasn’t a lot of chatter, but it died down as soon as they realized that Jon had arrived.

“We come before the Old Gods to witness House Karstark, and House Umber swear a blood oath.” Jon’s voice carried further within the quietness of the Godswood, Ghost appeared from somewhere beyond the darkness, beyond the flames, he sat next to Jon on his left hand side.

Ser Davos came forward and handed a dagger to Alys Karstark, she made a cut on her left hand and give the dagger back to Ser Davos. She knelt right in front of the tree, and placed her hand on the white trunk.

“Hear my words and bare witness my vow. I, Alys Karstark of Karhold swear by the blood of House Karstark that we shall faithfully follow and remain vassals of House Stark, and Jon Snow, The King in the North.” Alys Karstark arose from her knees, the white trunk of the tree was smeared with her blood.

Ser Davos then handed the dagger to Harmond Umber, he made a cut in his left hand without flinching. He knelt in front of the Weirwood tree and placed his hand on the trunk just like Alys Karstark did, he repeated the same vow. Whilst he was reciting the vow you could hear the flapping of wings, three ravens came to land upon one of the lower branches. After Harmond Umber had completed his vows one of the ravens flew around the tree, quorking and screeching. One of the other ravens started to speak, “snow, snow”.

Jon saw the two prints of blood upon the tree, as Harmond Umber stood up again.

“Snow.” “Snow.” “King.” “Snow.” The raven screeched loudly. It was curious, I've never heard anything like this before.

“Snow.” “Snow.” “King.” “Snow.” The raven screeched again before flying back into the darkness where it came from.

Many of the Northmen, from what Jon could see, went down on one knee and started chanting
“The King in the North!” “The King in the North!” “The King in the North!”

Their voices echoed against the cold and the darkness. Light snow started to fall wet upon his face as he lead the people back into the Great hall. The heat from the warm hearth was a thankful respite after the cold of Godswood. Jon stayed within the Great hall for a time as the wine and the ale started to speak more, but he still retired early.

He was inhumanly tired when he laid down upon his bed at last, every ounce of energy that he possessed has disappeared, and for once he easily fell asleep.

It was almost a fortnight after the evening within the Godswood that the news Jon have been silently dreading; eventually arrived at Winterfell.

It was late in the evening, Jon was just about to retire when he heard the banging against his door. “Your Grace, Maester Wolkan brings an urgent message.”

“Enter,” Jon replied. Maester Wolkan was shoved through the door by his guards. “Your Grace,” Maester Wolkan bowed. “I am very sorry to disturb you at this hour, but I've just received a raven, I thought you might want to see this message as soon as possible.” Maester Wolkan held the message out in front of him almost as if he was holding a sword.

Jon’s eyes was quickly drawn to the wax upon the message, the wax was scarlet red and it was imprinted with the three headed dragon, fire and blood.

Jon took the message, “thank you for bringing the message immediately, speak to no one about this message.” The maester quickly took his leave, Jon waited until his departure to break the wax seal.

The Usurper and all of his offspring have perished. Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen is the rightful ruler of the Seven Kingdoms, by all of the laws of gods and men.

Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, Conquer and Queen of Meereen and the Bay of Dragons, hereby summons House Stark to attend Her Grace, Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen at Dragonstone, to swear an oath of fealty for House Targaryen. Ignoring this summons would be accepted as a declaration against House Targaryen and as a hostile act.

At least she didn’t threaten to burn Winterfell down, well not directly. Jon laid within his bed, he knew he would get little sleep on this night, in his head he was creating contingency plans and plotting his moves. Ghost was curled up next to him and sleeping soundly. There was so much that
He was awaken with an insistent hammering upon his door. “Your grace told us earlier to get Ser Davos as soon possible,” the muffled sound of a guard’s voice came through the door. “Just give me a few moments” Jon answered in return. Jon quickly refreshed to the best of his abilities, although it still felt as if he had been run over by a herd aurochs. After what felt like a lifetime he finally let Ser Davos in.

“Your Grace,” Ser Davos greeted as per usual. “Get us some ale and something to break our fast,” Jon ordered from the guards.

“Ser Davos, we have received a raven from Dragonstone,” Jon could see Ser Davos’ eyes grew wider with understanding. Jon placed the message in front of Ser Davos, he looked at the scarlet seal before reading the letter.

“We will need to give some kind of a reply to this message.” Davos said.

“We need dragonglass, we have spoken about this.”

“Aye, but I can't just hand the North over to her.”

“We could negotiate, the North is vast and the Vale is also allied to the North, she would have to do some negotiating, she can't take every kingdom within Westeros by fire and blood.” Ser Davos reasoned.

“I am not sure that she would be willing to negotiate through ravens or delegates, you have read that summons, she seems like a very self important type of ruler. She already calls herself the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, while most reports have stated that she has only taken Dragonstone thus far.” Jon answered.

“I meant that you should go to Dragonstone, Your Grace,” Jon appraised Ser Davos skeptically. “We can get more than just dragonglass she has dragons and a large army. She is known as a liberator of slaves, it might appeal to her ego if she was able to become the saviour of the realm.”

“Hmm, that is a very good argument Ser Davos, Daenerys Targaryen might be a saviour but I've also heard tales about her burning and crucifying other leaders alive. Targaryens have always been
known for taking whatever they want. This Queen seems no different.

“Kings and Queen are fickle creatures, Yo…, Ser Davos grimaced, umm well pardons, Your Grace.” Jon laughed and Ser Davos joined in his laughter. “You know Ser Davos, those were my exact same thoughts when Stannis demanded that I should convince Mance Rayder to kneel to him.” Davos’ expression changed when he heard the name Stannis. I shouldn’t have mentioned Stannis. “I wasn’t born to be a King, I wasn’t even born to be a Lord, I ve never wanted to be a King,” Jon laminated almost by himself.

“But you were chosen by the people,” Ser Davos answered.

“Aye,” Jon couldn’t help but answer with a deep sigh.“If I go to Dragonstone she might keep me as a hostage.”

“You have to make her understand that the North would not be easy to take,” Davos replied. “It is a risk,” Davos admitted, but everyone within Westeros would have to start fighting together sooner or later, you could ask for parley or guestrights before entering Dragonstone.”

“Guestrights didn't help my brother,” Jon stated matter of factly. He thought back to some of Maester Luwin’s lessons.

“Dorne was able to elude the Targaryens by hiding within the sand and between their hills, we might be able to apply the same strategy now that the North is covered in snow. We could hide underneath the snow from the dragons, but there is no hiding away from the White Walkers, we can't fight a war from the North and from the South, but you are right everyone will have to stand together against the White Walkers eventually.”

“You have done all that can be done for the defenses of the North, Your Grace. We need a stronger weapon.”

Jon picked up the summons, today will be a long day. “We will have to send back a reply.” Jon contemplated. Jon opened the door and addressed the guards, “Find Maester Wolkan and Lady Sansa, send them to my solar urgently,” Jon ordered. Ser Davos and his guards followed him to the solar. Jon decided to pen a message himself.

I, Jon Snow the King in the North, will be arriving at Dragonstone soon. Jon signed the short message, he sealed the message with white wax and with the Stark seal. The message was short but
he didn’t want to make any commitments or create any expectations. Besides he could send another message from White Harbour.

Maester Wolkan arrived quickly after he had been summoned, as was his manner. Jon ordered the Maester to send the message immediately.

"Your Grace, before I leave you, you said that I should report any missing ravens." Maester Wolkan reminded him. "Have you noted any missing ravens?" Jon asked. "Not so much a missing raven, but we suddenly have a Kettleblack raven," he answered. "Kettleblack?" Jon wondered out loudly. "They are a small knightly House within the Crownlands," Maester Wolkan answered. Jon must have learned about them, but the Crownlands wasn't a big priority for a bastard from the North.

"Thank you, Maester Wolkan," Jon finally dismissed the man.

Jon waited somewhat anxiously for the arrival of Sansa. He had a feeling that Sansa was still unsatisfied with the decision regarding the Karstarks and the Umbers. In the meantime Jon had sent Ser Davos to see how much stone was still available for the building of the wall around Wintertown.

Sansa took her sweet time to arrive. She greeted him curtly “brother”, before taking a seat in front of him.

“Sansa we have received word from Dragonstone,” her eyes held a flash of uncertainty, but only for a moment. Jon give the summons to her, and waited while she read the message. She put the message down slowly.

“Me and Ser Davos have discussed the matter, we will be leaving for Dragonstone as soon as possible.”

“Why? You can't possibly mean to swear fealty her!” Sansa exclaimed.

“No my plan is to negotiate with her.”

“How are you going to negotiate with her? She orders you to attend to her at Dragonstone and to swear fealty. She could have invited you to Dragonstone for negotiations, but she didn’t. Her status as a Queen and a conqueror are highlighted, throughout this letter. Once you set foot on Dragonstone you will be trapped there. It is an island fortress.”

“The mission wouldn’t be without its risks, but it could save the realm.”
“The realm? Jon your place is in the North at Winterfell. This is not a risk, it would be reckless to give yourself over to the mercy of this women. Since we last spoke about her I did some enquirees about her. She completely destroyed Slavers Bay, many of the Lords within Meereen was crucified alive. She has burned noble families, there are stories about her feeding noblemen to her dragons.”

Sansa went quiet for moment, “you can't go South.”

“Father went South and he died, Robb went South and he died. I was a prisoner in the South, and who knows what might have happened to Arya. Uncle Brandon went South and he died, our Grandfather Rickard went South and he died, our Aunt Lyanna was taken in the South and she was raped and murdered. Don't you understand?

Sansa almost pleaded with him now. “We are Starks, we are of the North, we wither and die within the South, like winter roses.”

“If you go South, you will die, just like all of the rest.”

Jon felt a sense of home and belonging that he has rarely felt within his life. Sansa included him as a Stark without even thinking about it. He almost wanted to smile, but stopped himself.

“You don't understand the South, the South is filled with liars, and with people who want to use you. I was just like you once I did not understand.”

“For these past few moons, I have done my best to prepare the North against any attack. But it isn’t enough. I ve always known that it wouldn’t be enough. I ve seen the Nights King and his army of the dead kill thousands of men within the time it might take you to walk straight through Wintertown. I can beg and plead with everyone to prepare themselves, but men will only prepare to the amount that they believe in the threat in the first place. My next plan would have involved visiting all of the larger castles to see their provisions and preparations personally.”

“That is not such bad plan, it would be better then becoming a prisoner at Dragonstone,” Sansa replied.

“And everywhere I go I would see the same doubt upon everyone’s faces. Every time I raise this subject, I know that many do not believe in these claims. You think I haven’t seen that same look of doubt edged upon your face?” Sansa flinched.

“I don't blame you, if someone had told me a few years earlier that there are icy creates with dead
armies lurking beyond the Wall, I wouldn’t have believed it either. I understand the reluctance to commit to this idea, but that doesn’t change what I need to do. I still need to be prepared for what I have witnessed, even if no one believes it.”

“Why does it have to be you?” Sansa asked.

“Because no one else are doing anything about this, and someone must, the whole realm could be completely destroyed within two moons, should the Wall fall. You wouldn’t be aware of this because I haven’t announced it, but we have lost a thousand men beyond the Wall this past moon’s turn. The majority of them were Vale men.”

“A thousand men,” Sansa asked surprised.

“Aye”, a thousand men have disappeared without any word. Even if you don't believe in the White Walkers, you would have to agree that is slightly worrisome.”

“I will go to Dragonstone and I will try to create an alliance with Daenerys Targaryen. The North is not completely defenseless against her, and we will make sure that she understands that. Winter is our truest enemy, but it is also our greatest ally. The Dornish were able to resist the Targaryens because they could hide and they knew their land. The North could be exactly the same within winter time. Daenerys Targaryen and her forces would be ill equipped for true winter conditions, most people below the Neck are ill equipped for true Northern winters.”

“If I should become a prisoner or die, you should make her come to you.”

“That will be our strategy, and besides I am a Snow not a Stark, mayhaps I might be impervious to the curse of Starks within the South.” Sansa didn’t find his attempt at humour amusing.

“You could also suggest a marriage alliance,” Sansa said after some contemplation.

“A marriage alliance?” Jon has never really given the idea much thought. “Why would she want to marry me? She was born as a true Targaryen Princess, and I was born as a bastard.”

“You are also a King now, and Daenerys Targaryen will have to wed someone, she will need an heir, she cannot create security within the realm without an heir, and she has no other Targaryen kin left.”
“You are right that could potentially create a lot of strive,” Jon agreed, “but I still doubt she would want to marry a bastard.”

“Who else is she going to wed then? My cousin Robin is a child and he is a simpleton and a fool. Her other option is Jaime Lannister, who killed her father, and who currently has a relationship with his sister, who has declared herself as the Queen in the realm. The Tyrells are gone, I guess there might be some Greyjoy to marry,” she trailed off, “I can't even think of anyone else.”

Jon laughed, “Don't make me pity the women for her marriage prospects.” Finally Sansa gave a small smile back.

“We have a lot to discuss, before I depart.”

“Lets start with Lord Baelish,” Jon could see that Sansa became more tense.

“I will accuse him of treason against house Stark, he must be executed before I leave, you can bare witness to his crimes.”

“We cant just execute Petyr Baelish, the Vale would leave.” Sansa replied.

“I am highly doubtful of that, Lord Royce often looks at Baelish with thinly veiled disgust.”

“Littlefinger has fought behind House Stark, and you want to execute him, yet you are willing to pardon the Karstarks and the Umbers who fought against us? Littlefinger can be a very resourceful ally, if he can be used correctly,”

“Baelish is not the type of man one can use, he is the type who uses others. Littlefinger literary took you and gave you to the Boltons, while both Alys Karstark and Harmund Umber did nothing against us.”

“We could have given their lands to our allies,” to which allies, Jon thought to himself sardonically. If he give that land to the Wildlings, the Northmen would have been up in arms, so that only left Baelish and the Vale.
“There is no point in keeping the man alive, as long as he is breathing he would be making plans to undermine or betray us. I caught him sending off ravens by himself the other day, and Maester Wolkan has informed me that he has been sending ravens to the Kettleblacks, who are in the Crownlands, so he is plotting something. But if you are not willing testify against him, then we are at an impasse.”

Jon decided to change the subject.

“As I ve said there are a lot that needs to be done. I want to depart two days hence.”

“I want to use Lady Brienne to oversee and continue the training with the small folk, I've been keeping an eye on her in the yard, she is a good fighter and I believe she has the right temperament for it. Could you ask her? Jon enquired.

“I believe she would be gladded by the offer,” Sansa answered.

“You will have to rule in my absence, that is why I called you here. I know, I might not be departing at the best of times. There are always something that needs attention within Winterfell, I will be leaving you with a lot tasks and duties. I can try to show you what I've been doing. You are the rightful heir of Winterfell in any event.” Sansa smiled. Jon could see that she paying close attention now.

“My biggest concern is our food supply, most of the men went South during harvest time, we don't have enough food to last the winter. I have created hunting parties to collect game, some of the storerooms and granaries underneath Winterfell are now cold enough to keep the meat frozen for a long time. I’ve also thought of sending some fishing men out to the lakes, we could stock-up on some fish. Ser Davos and I have spoken to some of the woodsmen, they often use roots and acorn paste to survive, that is another food source I am planning on exploring.”

“Is it wise to keep on adding small folk to Wintertown when we don't have enough to feed everyone? Sansa asked.

“I am not just adding more people to feed, I also try to use these men and women.” Sansa nodded.

“I have another food source to explore but I would have to discuss the matter with some of the Lords. I've also been meaning to ask if you could take some women from Wintertown and teach
them to sew.”

“I could,” Sansa replied tentatively.

“We should also go through the accounts on the morrow, and I am also very concerned about all of the reports regarding outlaws and bandits, it sounds like most of them are errant Bolton soldiers, which means that they have nothing to lose right now and they will just plague the smallfolk and the countryside. However, I don't want you to concern yourself over the bandits and outlaws, I will make arrangements to address the situation before I leave.”

Jon tried to show Sansa the whole of Winterfell. They first went to the storerooms and granaries, and took stock of their current supplies. Later Jon showed her how the wood was being gathered and placed within the moat.

Ser Davos joined them while they were busy looking upon the piles of wood. After overseeing the stockpile of wood they also went and watched over the restorations that was still being made all over Winterfell.

Before going to the great hall that evening Jon spoke to Lord Wyman Manderly in private in order to secure passage for himself, Ser Davos and about fifty household guards, from White Harbour. Jon asked Lord Manderly to signal his son about their arrival in advance. Jon took his time to make his way to the great hall after his discussion with Lord Manderly.

He asked the steward, the newly appointed steward Errol Cassel, to make quick preparations for a trip to White Harbor.

Jon was reflecting upon their stocks and food supplies that he and Sansa oversaw as well as the preparations for his journey, as the first course had been laid out.

Jon could feel the apprehension growing within himself, the flickering flames casted dark shadows on everyone's faces making them appear almost sinister. Jon stood, and the hall was quiet.

“My Lords and Ladies, we have made preparations to defend the North from all sides. We have done the best that we can with the men and resources that we have. However, there is more that can be done.”

“Winter is here and we will be hit the hardest, it would become even more difficult if we have to fight during these times, even in the best days of summer the North can be a hard and unforgiving land, we always require more resources and supplies.
“The great war is coming, and we are the first defence against the White Walkers we have to do everything we can to fight for the North, but fighting and winning aren’t just achievable with war or weapons, we could also forge alliances.”

“We need alliances if we are going to survive this winter.” Jon could hear whimpering and mumbling through the crowd. “Daenerys Targaryen has invited all of the rulers in Westeros for negotiations. I will sail to Dragonstone and try to create an alliance with her.” The people were quiet for a moment, and then a storm erupted as everyone started talking at once.

One armed Harwood Stout stood, “some may have shorter memories than others, my liege Lord Willam Dustin died during the rebellion against the Targaryens.”

Lord Galbart Glover also took a stand, ”my youngest brother Ethan was just a squire and yet he died alongside Brandon Stark, on the orders of a mad King”

Rickard Ryswell supported the others, “my brother Mark Ryswell also died during the rebellion,” he then addressed Jon directly, “your own aunt Lyanna was the brightest flower within the North and she was killed and kidnapped by Rhaegar Targaryen.”

“And more of us will keep on dying if I don't forge an alliance with someone else. Westeros is in a state of ruin, due to all of the wars. Who else could we align with?” Jon asked seriously over the crowd.

“We can't forge an alliance with the Lannisters, they are responsible for slaughtering even more Northern family members then the Targaryens. Cersei Lannister has just declared herself as the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, and she has just killed thousands of religious followers with wildfire.”

“Or should we try to forge an alliance with the Greyjoys who has never honoured any agreement they have ever made, whilst they have always invaded the North?”

“We can't make an alliance with the Riverlands, the Freys are now the Wardens of the Trident, the Reach, the Stormlands and Dorne don't have any reason to align themselves with us.”

Jon give the people a bit of time to think about the matter before he continued.

“A Targaryen isn’t the best option, but it is the only option. The Lannisters and the Greyjoys are her enemies as well. Daenerys Targaryen was a babe during Robert's Rebellion, she has freed a lot of slaves, but more importantly she has three big dragons. What will happen once the Lannister
army and the Greyjoy fleet have been engulfed by flames? Where would she look to go next?”

“Dragonglass and Valyrian steel are the only two known methods to kill White Walkers, the fortress of Dragonstone is standing on a mountain of dragonglass.”

“Lord Horton Redfort stood next, you may be right Your Grace, but the Targaryen girl is a conqueror, conquerors always want something in return, and Targaryens have always taken what they want.”

“You may be right Lord Redfort, but I still need to try and make an alliance with her.” Jon replied.

“If we look back in history, then none of us should be allies, we have all killed and murdered each other throughout history,”

Lord Yohn Royce spoke next, “the King is right, most of us have seen Harrenhal. It was the greatest and biggest castle and it was almost completely destroyed within a day by dragonfire. We could try to align ourselves with the Dragon Queen or we could just wait for our turn until she is done with the Lannisters. Jon nodded towards Lord Royce.”

“I will depart for Dragonstone the day after tomorrow, if you have any matter to discuss you can come and see me on the morrow, my sister Lady Sansa will be ruling in my stead” Jon was finally able to announce.

Most of the murmuring and whispering had disappeared, it seems like everyone have reached a tentative agreement. Jon knows that the Northern Lord and even the Lords Of the Vale might not relish the idea of a Targaryen alliance, just like my Nights Watch brothers didn’t approve of the Wildlings, but all of the other options have been extinguished.

Jon felt bone weary and tired, he felt relieve when he was able to retire to his chambers that evening.

Jon was standing on the outer battlements watching the woodsmen pulling big logs towards the gate, as they did every morning.

It was early and the sky was grey and overcast. In the courtyard servants were bustling to complete the final preparations for the journey South.

Jon had just come from the Wildling camp, Tormund was his first goodbye for the day, Jon smiled as he thought of Tormund’s last boisterous laughs and heavy pats upon his back. Jon wished that Tormund could have gone with him, but he also knew that the Wildlings would be safest at East
Jon wanted to watch over Winterfell one last time before his departure. Since regaining Winterfell again Jon had hoped that he would never have to leave again, but that was always a futile and childish dream.

His thoughts easily went back to the last time he left Winterfell, even Lady Stark’s last condemnations at Bran’s bed was a sweet memory now. He remembered how Arya’s eyes brightened and twinkled, when she saw the little sword upon his hands. He could still see his father riding off on the King's road for the last time, after he had told him that he was a Stark, and he never told me about my mother, Jon clenched his right hand.

“Your Grace, a servant called, “your horse has been saddled and everything is ready.”

Jon walked as slowly as he could to the courtyard. A light powder of snow had started to feather down all around him. He could feel the light snowflakes melt on his face like tears. He touched some of the warm stones before descending into the courtyard, he could feel the heat from the hot water springs though his supple gloves. The guards were neatly stacked into two lines, with direwolf shields upon their backs, ready to ride out of the gates. Sansa stood to the side with a cold impregnable expression on her face. Ser Davos was already saddled and staring ahead of him.

As Jon reached Sansa he could see that the snowflakes were melting in her Tully red hair, just like the last time I saw Robb. “Farewell, sister”. Jon noticed that Littlefinger was standing a few feet away, it almost blackened his mood, especially since Baelish tried to speak to him in private about the North the day before.

“I made this for you, it wouldn’t do to have you walking around like a pauper King within the South.” she said with the slightest of smiles.

“Thank You Sansa,” Jon smiled back. He grabbed her and hugged her, while Sansa appeared cold from the outside she held onto him fiercely. “We will see you home soon,” she whispered to him.

Jon placed Sansa’s gift in his saddlebag, before climbing into his horse, Garren was holding the reins of his horse. Just before reaching the entrance he looked back and waved for the last time. As they trotted through the gates some of the small folk was lining the road and waving as they went past. He looked back over his shoulder to Winterfell for the last time, the sun had appeared through some of the clouds, rays of sunlight enlightened the castle making it appear like a snow castle, while two direwolf standards were flapping lazily upon the gate.
They reached White Harbor during the mid afternoon on the eighth day. Their party was met by a honour guard, about a mile from the city walls. The honour guard consisted of ten guards with blue-green woolen cloaks, they carried silver tridents instead of spears and their helms had a seaweed motif.

At the head of the party was a big man, he was stout and he had a merman sewed upon his tunic, he didn't carry a trident spear like the others, and his helm was inlaid and accentuated with silver, modeled after the merman’s head on the Manderly sigil. Behind the party Jon could see the crisp white walls of White Harbor, and the edge of a white castle peering over the white walls, Jon presumed that was New Castle, the seat of House Manderly. The white washed walls was almost blinding within the direct afternoon rays.

The man took off his helmet, his hair was grey but his eyes was still fierce, he bend his head forward, “Your Grace it is a honour to receive you at White Harbor. I am Ser Marlon Manderly, Commander of White Harbor, it would be an honour to escort you and your men to New Castle.”

Jon was impressed by the honour guard, simply because it meant that the Manderlys where sending out scouts, and following his instructions.

The walls were high and thick, as they approached the wall a deep horn was sounded, the sound reverberated through the walls. The streets were neatly cobbled, rows of white washed houses lined the streets. Jon could see that wood has been neatly piled all along the houses. Their party made their way through a square, with a big fountain in the middle, a mermen with a trident in hand stood tall within the fountain of clear water. They turned left and the street had steps build into it, they made their way up towards the castle.

Jon looked toward the sea that stretched out far beyond the city, the street was lined with marbled mermaids every few feet, “that is the Wolf’s Den your grace Ser Marlon Manderly pointed out. The Wolf’s Den stood in strong contrast to the serene white buildings, it was black and crumbling, with houses built precariously near to its base. With each step, as they climbed higher the two harbours were taking shape underneath them. When they reached the top of the hill Jon could see the mermen sigil with its green hair flapping on top of the castle. Another party was waiting for them, Jon saw more soldiers with sea green cloaks, and trident spears. There was no mistaking Lord Wyman Manderly’s son he was almost as fat as his father, and a plump woman with yellow hair stood right next to him. They dismounted, and their horses was taken immediately.

“Your Grace, House Manderly and White Harbor are at your service, I am Ser Wylis Manderly and this is my Lady wife Leona,” both of them bowed. A servant came forward with bread and salt, Jon and Ser Wylis Manderly both ate from the bread and salt.
"I thank you for receiving me on such short notice Ser Wylis and Lady Leona, White Harbor is a splendid city, and a great representation of the North." Jon managed to clobber some words and sentences together. In truth he didn’t really know what courtesies a King was suppose to observe. Jon has only ever seen two Kings in his life, and that was more than enough, King Robert and King Stannis, both of them were terrible examples of courtesy.

"Your Grace must be exhausted after traveling so quickly to White Harbor, we have prepared chambers for Your Grace, tonight we will hold a feast in honour of Your Grace’s victory over the Boltons. In the meantime Your Grace, and your men might do with some rest before the feast.” Lady Leona said. Some servants stepped forward, they were all dressed in blue-green colours. “Take our guests to their chambers.”

"You would have to excuse my tardiness Your Grace, I would have escorted you to your chambers myself, but I still have to oversee some preparations for the feast.”

"Thank you for your hospitality Lady Manderley,” Jon said.

Jon and Ser Davos were followed by Finlay and Will, they followed a servant through a few bending passages, they stopped at a chamber with oaken doors, “this is your chamber Ser Davos,” the servant pointed out. “Thank You,” Ser Davos replied. Another servant had appeared from somewhere to look after Ser Davos.

A few feet further they stopped in front of a white door, it was a weirwood tree door. The servant opened the chambers, these are your chambers Your Grace, the man said with a bow. “I will send up a tub and some hot water immediately.” the man said. “What is your name,” Jon enquired. “Mark, Your Grace.” Mark left the room.

The chamber was large, a small fire was burning in a hearth. There was a finely woven rug upon the floor, a porcelain washing basin had blue winter roses painted on its side, and a chamberpot that matched the basin. The drapes and the curtains were made of blue, grey and green silk. Parchment and ink was neatly laid out on a desk in one corner. A round table stood almost in the middle of the room with six chairs, a glass jug of water, and glasses were standing on the table. A chaise of dark blue silk stood near the table. It was a room fit for a King, and Jon almost felt somewhat out of place, but it also made him think that the Manderlys had more resources that could be used.

Lady Loena Manderly escorted Jon and Ser Davos, to the great hall herself, his two guards had been replaced in the meantime by Dylan and Kyle, one Mormont and one Winterfell guard. As they entered the great hall Jon could see a cushioned throne on the other side. Inside, the great hall was decked out with planks, that were notched together as if the hall was on the inside of a ship. It was a wondrous hall, with paintings that reached the ceiling. Even the floor was painted with black seaweed, and bones. Jon could see sharks and other fish swimming on the walls. They walked past
rows of tables with soldiers, he saw some of his own men, and some petty Lords who were seated closer to the dais. There was a lifted dais with a great table just before the throne. Lord Manderly was already seated at the middle of the table, he stood with some difficulty. “Your Grace”, he greeted.

Jon knew he was likely expected to say something as everyone was looking at him. “I and my men are honoured to have been received so warmly by White Harbor, and the most gracious of hosts Lady Loena and Lord Wylis Manderly.” Sansa would have been so much better with these courtesies, Jon could not help but think to himself.

Lord Manderly held his wineglass up in the air, “a toast to the King in the North, and his great victory over the Boltons, long may he reign!” The crowd echoed the sentiment. “Long may he reign, the King in the North!”

“Let us also drink a toast, to those that were lost during this battle, and the battles before.” Jon added to Ser Wylis Manderly’s toast.” Many names could be heard throughout hall as people drank to their fallen family and comrades. The people were a bit more sombre after their toasts.

Jon sat down quickly after that, it did not feel like a great victory when he was visiting Rickon’s gave within the crypts, it almost felt as if he had to try and explain to his father’s statue what happened to Rickon. But this was a feast, and I’ve likely just blackened the whole mood of the feast.

Jon was seated right next to Lord Wylis Manderly, next to him was an open chair and right next to the open chair sat Ser Davos. Two buxom girls approached their dais, and climbed upon the dais. Lady Leona Manderly stood, “Your Grace, allow me to introduce my daughters to you”, the first girl stepped closer, she had thick long brown hair that was made into a braid that hung over her shoulder. She easily stepped into a graceful, flowing curtsy, “I am Wynafryd Manderly, it is an honour to make your acquaintance, Your Grace”. Somewhere within Jon’s mind he could suddenly recall how Sansa once tried to teach him how to speak with Ladies. Complement their names, tell her she has a pretty name, a prince should always help a Lady with her chair. Jon stood, “that is a lovely name, my lady.” The empty chair was obviously meant for Lady Wynafryd, Jon held out the chair for her.

“This is my youngest daughter Lady Wylla,” she took her daughter's hand and pushed her into Jon’s direction. “Your Grace,” she curtsied but it wasn’t as fluent as her older sister, she had blond hair that was coloured dark green. Jon had never seen a girl with green hair, her green hair accentuated her bright, lively green eyes. “It is an honour to meet you my lady.” Jon said and finally took his seat again. Ser Davos had followed Jon’s example, he had also stood-up, and he introduced himself to Lady Wylla and helped her with her chair. No lady has ever curtsied for Jon before in his life. Sometimes it felt as if all of these events were happening to someone else, and he was just being given a window into some else's life.
The first course started to arrive, Lady Wynafryd informed him that it was the white flesh from a crab. It was fried in butter with lemon juice, pepper and salt. Jon’s glass was filled with sweet white summer wine. As the evening wore on the dishes became more greasy, Jon could see that the fat was dripping from Ser Wylis’ chins. He ate heartily from every dish, after all of the dishes was first offered to Jon.

“I could take you on a tour through the castle and the Wolf's Den, Your Grace,” Lady Wynafryd spoke a lot, “I am afraid I would be leaving on the morrow, mayhaps when I return my Lady.”

“Do you really believe that Daenerys Targaryen has three large dragons?” Lady Wynafryd asked. “I believe that she does, when you have seen the things that I’ve seen, believing in dragons becomes quite easy,” Jon answered. “According to some reports we have heard that she has renamed Slaver’s Bay to the Bay of Dragons. My sister likes to hear stories about her exploits,” she told Jon. “And you my Lady?” Jon asked. “I enjoyed exploits, as much as any young girl might, when I was younger, but now I am concerned about the people of White Harbor, fire devours.” Jon nodded in agreement.

Jon could hear Ser Davos had Lady Wylla in stitches, and after a while he could hear her proclaim loudly “I told my grandfather, that it was the wolves who took us in and helped us in our hour of greatest need!” Lady Wynafryd blushed next to Jon, “my sister also enjoys Stark history,” she tried to explain. As the evening wore on Lady Wynafryd’s chair inched closer and closer to Jon’s own, she was so close that he bumped into her full breasts with his elbow more than once, and their legs were rubbing against each other underneath the table from time to time. Jon tried to move his chair closer to Lord Manderly, but it was difficult with Lord Manderly eating with his elbows right on the table. He didn't say much between his bites, his mouth was too preoccupied to formulate words. After taking a few morsels from the eight dish Jon was sure that he would be able to survive without food for half a fortnight.

One dish had hot dragon peppers and spices, which came from Dorne according to Lady Wynafryd, they were so hot, that Jon wolfed down two glasses of wine in quick succession, he was starting to feel the effects of the wine, and he started to see more sea creatures on the walls, krakens and leviathans tangled in great battles, crabs climbing through the bones on the floor. A prowl from a ship was mounted in one corner, it was once a proud mermaid. Jon was thankful that there was no dancing at this feast.

Somewhere in-between the sixteenth course, Ser Wylis informed him that he had received important news that he would share with Jon on the morrow. Jon also made sure to confirm that he and his men would set sail on the morrow. Jon started to grow more tired as the evening became longer, he bid everyone at the high table a good night and retired after the eighteen course. A servant led him and his guards back to his chambers with the bone-white doors, through darkened passages.

The sun was already high when Jon awoke, he had just finished washing his face, when his guards announced that there was a servant. “Your Grace, Lord Manderly enquires if you might be ready to
receive him.”

“Just give me a few moments,” Jon replied. He dressed quickly, after a while the servant reappeared it was Mark from the day before, and behind him serving wenches was carrying more dishes of food, Jon told the guards to let them through. There were two different types of bread, with butter, cheese and jam. Bowls of fruit that was neatly cut into squares. Dishes with prawns, snails and fish cakes, with a jugs of ale. Jon poured himself a horn of ale. “Lord Wylis Manderly, Your Grace,” Will announced. “Let him in.”

“Your Grace.” Lord Wylis Manderly greeted. “I’ve arranged for us to break our fast within your chambers. I hope that was not presumptuous of me.”

“It is fine Lord Manderly, you did mention that there was some news to discuss last night?”

Lord Manderly immediately sat down and started stacking his plate, he applied the butter thickly upon the bread. Jon sat down opposite to him, and started placing some fruit on his plate.

“I’ve received a raven from Castle Black just four days past.” Jon was rather impatient to hear from any news at the Wall, but he was also apprehensive as well.

“I’ve received word from Ser Raymann Hoode, he has served House Manderly for twenty seven years, he is the Captain of my Household guard, and I trust him unequivocally.” Lord Wylis Manderly paused for a moment.

“Let me be honest, Your Grace.”

“We didn’t really believe in any of these White Walkers or dead army claims. But we felt it was at least good that we were preparing for war, during these times.” Jon felt a slight fury cooking inside of him, he was clenching his right hand into a fist, but he also understood why it was so incredibly difficult to believe that White Walkers might be lurking beyond the Wall, but Jon was starting to get slightly impatient to get to the point.

“I sent Ser Raymann Hoode along with the guards that was ordered to the Wall, to investigate the matter and to try and understand what was actually happening at the Wall. When Ser Raymann heard that the Northern Mountain Clansmen had gone missing, he thought that it might be a good opportunity to go beyond the Wall and to see what is out there.”

“He has just arrived back at Castle Black, Your Grace. A small group of about sixty men made it back. He wrote a message of what he saw beyond the Wall, and that is what I received four days
past. He reported that two White Walkers were leading an army of dead thralls. The dead men who attacked them was the Flints and the Norreys, whom they were trying to save in the first place.”

“They were followed for days, by the dead men. Some men tried to attack a White Walker directly and their weapons were shattered from the cold.” Lord Wylis shuddered visibly. “They were eventually able to burn some of the dead men and escaped.”

“Your Grace, I do have to apologise for not taking this threat as seriously as we should have, I would do anything in my power to help fight against the White Walkers, White Harbor can do more.”

Jon nodded, it almost felt like a small victory.

“We could send more men up to the Wall, Your Grace.”

“We could but if the Wall somehow fell all of those men would die, the Wall is undefendable from the South. Winterfell is the key to the North, it has always been the first line of defense against any threat from the North, but we don't have the resources to feed entire armies at Winterfell.”

“For now I would rather see that you take care of these bandits and outlaws that have been terrorizing the countryside, they are killing people without burning the bodies, it seems as if most of them are Bolton men, they don't have anything to lose.”

“I will recall Ser Raymann Hoode back to deal with these outlaws, Your Grace.”

“I could send more food and supplies to Winterfell, Your Grace.” Lord Wylis Manderly answered.

“That would be very helpful Ser Wylis, however I was also thinking about something a bit more sustainable. Winterfell has survived many of the darkest winters due to our glass gardens, the glass gardens were destroyed when Winterfell was sacked, I would like to rebuilt those glass gardens, but we need glass from Myr and that is expensive.” Jon stated.

“There is a ship that would soon be departing for Tyrosh, it would be simple enough for them to steer their way towards Myr along the way,” Lord Wylis Manderly contemplated.

“As I've said Lord Manderly, Winterfell was sacked we don't have the coin for glass from Myr, but
mayhaps we could make a deal for a loan,” Jon questioned.

“Aye, let us drink to a new understanding between White Harbor and Winterfell.”

“I will send some men and merchants on the ship that is bound for Tyrosh, but I would advise that we bring some glassblowers from Myr to Winterfell. They would be better equipped to construct those glass gardens,” Lord Wylis Manderly advised and Jon acquiesce to his point.

“I could also send a few servants along to help mine for Dragonglass,” Lord Wylis Manderly added. Of course that would be very helpful, but a temperamental Dragon Queen could just as easily burn them all to ashes. “That would be helpful Ser Wylis,” Jon accepted.

“Prepare White Harbor, as well as possible, stack your walls with materials that can burn and train your soldiers to use fire. Keep the small folk safe behind your walls, because if they die they will just become soldiers for the Nights King,” Aye Your Grace, Lord Wylis Manderly concurred, the fat upon his neck jiggled as he nodded along.

“I think you can now appreciate why I am eager to depart on this journey to Dragonstone,” Aye Your Grace, “you could depart immediately.”

“Thank You Ser Wylis.”

“There’s more,” Lord Wylis Manderly said quickly, “we’ve received word from the South, all of the Frey men at the Twins have been killed.” Lord Wylis Manderly was looking at Jon questioningly.

“There was some type of message left, something such as; The enemies of House Stark shall be a gift to the wrath of the Gods - Winter is here.”

“Well, I suppose that means that the Freys would no longer be a concern of ours then,” Jon supplied. It meant that the Lords of the North would be less inclined to wage more wars within the South. It was a puzzling occurrence, but it didn’t diminish the threat of the White Walkers.

“Aye, Your Grace, my brother Wendel was killed at the Twins, it was good to hear that justice has been done.” Jon nodded silently.

“Again, I thank you for your hospitality Ser Wylis, I think it might be time for me to depart from White Harbor, I would ask one last thing, could you send a message to Dragonstone that I’ve
departed from White Harbor?"

“I will, I will also send for your men and escort them to the docks. Your Grace must also take twenty of my household guard, I’ve arranged for three ships to sail to Dragonstone, a war galley, a cog and a fisherman’s ship, it is a much safer way to travel.”

Jon was standing on the powl of the cog, as the ships manoeuvred their way out of the inner harbour. Jon could feel a tightness within his throat, as he left the North behind for the first time in his life. He could see the white houses lining the coast, with their slate gray roofs. *Stark colours.* Jon remembered how he once rode out of Castle Black before saying his vows. He thought to himself back then that he would never see Pentos or the green of the Reach. He was nothing more than a greenboy back then.

He finally understood, *I am of the North and I belong in the North.* For some reason he thought of Ghost with his white pelt, and red eyes just like a weirwood tree. Tormund had warned him that the trees couldn’t watch over him in the South, *wolves belong to the North,* he said. Jon kept on watching as White Harbor became smaller and smaller, until there was nothing left of the North to see.
Tyrion II

Chapter Notes

Jon and Daenerys finally meets.

Tyrion

Tyrion caught himself yawning with his whole mouth hanging right open. Maester Pylos had finally found a more detailed map for Tyrion to pore over. Unfortunately, a detailed map did not really improve their current predicament, but Tyrion tried his best to study the map regardless of the hour. It was late and everyone have now likely gone to rest for the night.

The problem was that Dragonstone simply wasn’t big enough. The castle overshadowed one side of the island and a smoking mountain with cliffs dominated another part of the island. Somewhere in between there was a small space to land, whilst on the opposite end there was the small village of Dragonstone with a few fishing boats. The Dothraki refused to make their tents close to the smoking mountain. That left very little space for eighty five thousand Dothraki and about seven thousand Unsullied forces. We were not suppose to stay here for long, Tyrion reminded himself in vain.

They settled themselves within Dragonstone in a few quick days, it was easy to off load and unpack the ships with so many hands at their disposal. But since that time they have been sitting in limbo, lingering and biding their time. Everyone’s tempers and nerves were frayed to the very last thread. Just this morning bloodrider Qhono told them that three soldiers who were part of Khal Moro’s tribe, challenged and killed four soldiers who were previously part of Khal Pono’s tribe. Tyrion shuddered to think how many more Dothraki will be dead on the morrow, now that those who previously rode within Khal Pono’s tribe will want their justice in blood and braids.

The Queen’s whimsical constitution, after finally reaching her place of birth has slowly eroded, day by day, into a cold dismissive fury. Even the rows of gargoyles were looking at him askance. He rotated the map halfway to the left, if I could just see something from a different angle. He looked at the harbour again, the natural harbour wasn’t very wide. They needed more land, he rotated the map further, land or space. And then he thought of the ships, they were all able to fit onto the ships, could the ships be lashed together, and could the ships be used as an extended dock or land area? Tyrion honestly felt like patting himself on the back. This is something that could work, instead of patting himself on the back he celebrated his idea by gulping down a glass of wine.
He climbed off from the wooden chair he sat on, his legs felt almost numb and his left calf started to cramp up, he tried to stretch the leg out in front of him, while holding onto the chair for stability. And that was how the servant boy found him. Tyrion could see a look of surprise register on the boy’s face before he schooled his features.

“My Lord Hand, Lord Varys has asked for an audience in the chamber of the painted table.”

“Varys!” Tyrion exclaimed although the serving boy was long gone, it is about fucking time. Never in his life did Tyrion think that a whole army of thousands could be grinded to a standstill due to the tardiness of one bold eunuch. At the moment it was only the dragons who seemed satisfied with their lot, they were gliding and sweeping through the air of the smoking mountains. Tyrion collected the map he has been studying and tucked it safely into his tunic, a map could easily get lost again within a library. Tyrion made his way past the gallery and eventually through the inner wall of the stone drum to reach the stairs that would take him to the uppermost room of the great keep. By the time he reached the room with the painted table he was quite exhausted, but luckily it was just Varys waiting upon him.

“Good day to you my old friend,” Varys greeted him with a friendly bow.

“What took you so long, you were suppose to return after three or four days?” Tyrion couldn’t help but demand from Varys. “I was starting to think that you might have switched sides, again.”

“Do you have any idea how difficult it is to find a place for almost ninety thousand people upon Dragonstone?” Tyrion admonished Varys.

“We all have our challenges.” Varys replied almost nonchalantly. “Most of my little birds have been taken over by Qyburn it was difficult to get the right information. And information is the most crucial section of any campaign.”

Tyrion knew Varys wasn’t wrong but he was not in the mood for sermons about the whispers from little birds. “So? What have you learned?”

“Perhaps we should wait for the Queen to arrive. Then I don't have to share everything twice, but you might want sit down for this.” Tyrion didn't like the hint that he had heard within Varys’ voice. He sat down near King Landing on the map, and started pouring himself a glass a wine. Tyrion was already on his second glass of wine when the Queen finally entered the chambers.
“Your Grace,” both of them almost greeted as one, and Varys bowed. The Queen's two bloodriders remained outside the door. Queen Daenerys looked refreshed and ready for the day despite the fact that it was actually late at night.

“Your Grace, I do apologize for my tardiness, some of my little birds haven't been as reliable as I had hoped. But I have managed to gather some reliable whispers.” The Queen just stared at Varys in silence, she has been eager to get this invasion started for days now.

“King Tommen is dead.” Tyrion could almost feel the colour and heat draining from face. “How?” Tyrion always had a deeper understanding with Tommen, they were both second sons, with an older brother who took up most of the attention and devotion. Of course in Tommen’s situation his brother also happen to be a cruel and vicious little shit.

“Then, Kings Landing is without a King?” Queen Daenerys exclaimed, she looked surprised and intrigued.

“A new Queen was crowned, Cersei declared herself as the Queen.” Of all the dumb shit my dearest sister has ever done… Queen Daenerys looked furious she was shaking with rage, Tyrion was almost fearful that fire would come pouring out of her mouth if she spoke.

“How can she crown herself as the Queen? She has no right to that throne, who supports her claim to the throne?” Queen Daenerys demanded to know. “I would burn her and the Red Keep to the ground!” A fleeting look of concern crossed Varys’ face.

“My Queen, many of the most notable Lords and Ladies died within the Sept of Baelor. Cersei holds Kings Landing through sheer terror and fear. The Gold Cloaks and the Kingsguard answers to her. She has locked down the whole city.”

Tyrion realized that he was shaking his head in disbelief, “how did Tommen die?”

“One of the servants saw him fall from his tower room; he killed himself.” Tyrion felt a real feeling of grief and desperation wrench through his whole body. How desperate, alone and powerless that boy must have felt for him to take his own life?

“Apparently he jumped from his window when he saw the Sept of Baelor burning, with his wife, Margaery Tyrell inside,” Varys added solemnly.

Tyrion now understood Cersei’s plan, “she has nothing left to lose”, Tyrion answered
emotionlessly. This was Cersei’s last play, she has always craved power, her devotion towards her children was the only contrivance that kept her in check. The only other person she held in any regard was Jaime. Tyrion had almost forgotten about Varys, and that the Queen was with him.

“Then we can start our invasion immediately!” Queen Daenerys ordered with hard resolution. “I will take Kings Landing and the common people will support me, once Kings Landing is taken the rest of the Seven Kingdoms will fall in line, there is no one else who has any claim to the iron throne!”

Their Queen is right, there is really no one else left with any claim to the throne, the other Kingdoms would never support Cersei. Between Cersei and her father the Lannister name was loathed throughout all of the Seven Kingdoms and probably beyond. Tyrion nodded along with Queen Daenerys’ line of thinking. It might not be such an ambitious task to take over the Seven Kingdoms right now.

Varys appeared pained. “Your Grace, unfortunately it might not be that simple.”

“According to my whispers, the Pyromancer's Guild are still producing substantial quantities of wildfire for Cersei. She and her Hand Qyburn, have been stashing the wildfire all over the city. The whole of Kings Landing might be one spark away from total annihilation.”

Tyrion grimaced, the Mad Queen, funny how history seem to be mocking them, Tyrion recalled how Maester Creylon once told him whilst growing up, that history makes fools of us all at some point in time.

“It doesn’t matter, fire cannot kill a dragon, I could easily destroy the Red Keep by myself. I would have liked to walk into my ancestral home but if there is no other way then I would take Kings Landing without the Red Keep.”

Tyrion could see that Varys was almost looking at the Queen with something akin to pity.

“We can't take Kings Landing with dragons,” Tyrion finally spoke out. “The whole population of Kings Landing would be killed by wildfire. Cersei would kill everyone if her own end was near, and the dragonfire could ignite all of the caches of wildfire. Everyone would die.” Tyrion said with a sigh.

“Besides, I am not even sure if dragons would be able to withstand that much wildfire, Your
Grace. All of the dragons were incinerated when the fourteen flames of Valyria erupted, wildfire burns in a different manner than other fire.”

There was silence.

Finally Tyrion spoke out, “let us all retire for the night, we will not resolve this matter tonight, I will think about a possible solution during the Night.”

Queen Daenerys nodded towards Tyrion, she stood and simply walked out. Varys bowed and left him behind. Tyrion took his time to make his way to his chambers. He removed the map before clambering onto the bed, he just lay on top sleeplessly, right in the middle of his big feather bed, he did not close his eyes that night. In the morning Tyrion waited until he could hear the servants scurrying about the halls and walkways. He refreshed himself before leaving for the painted table chamber. He got the attention of a serving wench along the way, and told her to call maester Pylos to the chamber with the painted table, along with a lot of parchment, ink, and wax. The next serving wench he found, he asked her to speak with Queen Daenerys’ guards about meeting him in the chamber with the painted table, he also sent for Varys. Tyrion made his way to the chamber as quickly as possible.

He sat in the same place as the night before, he tapped his fingers impatiently on the table as he waited. Queen Daenerys arrived quite quickly, her eyes were slightly red, she probably didn’t get a wink of sleep either.

“Your Grace”, Tyrion greeted, the Queen was clearly not in the mood for pleasantries. “Do you have any plans for Kings Landing and your sister?”

“I might have an idea, Your Grace.” Tyrion paused, ”I propose that we try diplomacy as our first method of attack.”

“Diplomacy?” The Queen did not appear to be very impressed by such a suggestion.

“Yes, your Grace, we might as well use a disparate approach since pure force is not a good option at the moment. We will not be appealing to my sister, as I said she really has nothing left to lose right now since all of her children have died. We will try to reach my brother.”

Queen Daenerys had a disgusted expression on her face, “the man who swore to protect my family, and stabbed my father in the back?”
“Yes, my Queen I am referring to that very same man, my brother Jaime has no interest in power or ruling and he is the only person that my sister trusts and that she might be persuaded to listen to.” Queen Daenerys looked very unconvinced, Tyrion could see that she almost sneered when he mentioned that Jamie wasn’t interested in power.

“I understand that this information might be very difficult to believe, but my brother has never been interested in power, my father concocted scheme after scheme to get him out of his Kingsguard’s vows and to become the heir of Casterly Rock. But Jaime never took the bait. Jaime wouldn’t be interested in holding Kings Landing either, if he was concerned with power wouldn’t it have been much simpler to crown him as the King, instead of my sister?” Tyrion tried his best to appeal to the Queen’s more practical side. “Westeros has never had a Queen before, and my sister is already not much of a beloved figure.”

Queen Daenerys looked irritated, “fine, fine what do you have in mind then?’

“Lets send a message to my sister, we’ll command that she has to vacate the throne that she has no right to, and that she must exile herself from the Seven Kingdoms. The message should just offer a small amount of clemency. Cersei herself would never leave, but the message is something that might appeal to my brother Jaime. He would think about the offer. I will also sign the message myself, Jaime would know that he could trust my word.”

The Queen looked contrived, “we’ll send the message.”

“But your sister deserves to die for what she did at the Sept of Baelor, our allies will demand their justice. We shouldn’t be offering her promises of clemency.”

Maester Pylos had arrived with a writing support block, while two servants were carrying parchment and ink. “Your Grace, my Lord Hand,” Maester Pylos acknowledged them. He took a seat and the servants placed all of the equipment before him. He arranged the parchment and ink, and he sat ready with the quill in hand.

Tyrion was not in disagreement with his Queen, but she did not comprehend how dangerous Cersei could be. Their best chance right now was to work through Jaime, but it might take some time.

“Maester Pylos, I hope you have a lot of ravens ready.” Tyrion stated. “They are always ready my Lord,” the maester answered.

Tyrion started to dictate the letter for Cersei. While he was busy describing what he wanted from the letter, Varys also slipped into the chamber. Varys listened keenly to the context of the missive.
Varys would understand what I am trying to do. Maester Pylos handed the letter to Tyrion after he had completed the writing of it. Tyrion quickly glanced over the letter and give it to Queen Daenerys. She signed the letter.

“We have a lot of messages to send out today, we should ask all of the main Lord's within the realm to swear fealty to our cause.” Tyrion concluded.

“I am the only rightful ruler of the Seven Kingdoms, I will summons all of the Lords within Westeros to swear fealty.”

“It is just a harmless courtesy to ask, Your Grace. All of the Lords within Westeros would understand the meaning, you will get more flies with honey than vinegar,” Varys supplied.

“These Lords should understand exactly what my position is. I will give everyone a chance to swear fealty even though many of these Lords fought against House Targaryen. I want a new understanding between Westeros and House Targaryen, but I also don't want any compromises they will know where they stand right from the start.” The Queen announced resolutely.

Tyrion understood his Queen’s position, a King can be magnanimous at times, but he or she in this case, should establish her position of command.

“We already have alliances with three of the nine Kingdoms, we can create alliances with most of the other Kingdoms. Who is in control of the Stormlands?” Tyrion enquired from Varys.

Varys looked down for a moment before returning his gaze. “Storms End is currently held by Mathis Rowan, he is a bannermen of the Tyrells, but he holds Storms End for the crown, Storms End is a great castle, he might not be interested in going against the Lannisters.” Varys replied.

“What about some of the other prominent houses within the Stormlands, such as the Staedmons, Connningtons, Wyldes, Bucklers or the Carons?”

“After the Battle of Blackwater, Lord Alesander Staedmon easily bent the knee to Joffrey, Lord Ronnet Connington was last seen riding out alongside your brother to take Riverrun back. Lord Ralph Buckler and Lord Casper Wylde also quickly swore fealty to Joffrey after the battle of Blackwater.”
“Lord Bryce Caron was slain in single combat by Ser Philip Foote, as a reward for his services your family awarded him with Nightsong, it might be unlikely that he would support anyone else. Most of these houses declared for Renly at first, but after his death most of these houses fought for Stannis at the Blackwater.”

Tyrion started to realize that it might be a long day.

“It sounds like these men change alliances as often as I chance my dresses, they will quickly be persuaded to swear fealty once they are reminded of the dragons.” Queen Daenerys give her assessment.

“You might be right my Queen,” Tyrion agreed. “Lord Eldon Estermont testified against me during the trial he is definitely one of Cersei creatures.”

“Lomas Estermont his brother, kept on fighting for Stannis, his head is outside on one of those spikes. His son Andrew Estermont remains at Greenstone but he might not be enthused about an alliances now.” Varys answered ironically. Tyrion felt like he might punch himself in the face, or that he could hit his head upon the table.

“What about the Tarths, Swanns or House Penrose? House Penrose have married into House Targaryen, they might be interested in an alliance?”

“House Tarth seems to be fully aligned with the crown, Lord Selwyn Tarth’s daughter accompanied Jaime to Kings Landing after he was freed from his imprisonment, and she was recently spotted within the Lannister camp at Riverrun. Lord Gulian Swann and Lord Benyr Penrose are not interested in wars, Lord Gulian Swann claims he is to old and Lord Benyr Penrose is still at an age where he often listens to the advice from others. They might be persuaded to swear fealty easily, but they are not going to contribute anything to our war efforts.” Varys reflected.

“As long as they swear fealty, for now,” their Queen stated. “They are some of the principal families within the Stormlands, any sign of fealty from the Stormland’s bannermen are important, because they all supported the Baratheon claim strongly during Robert’s reign.” Tyrion added.

“Lord Arstan Selmy is another older Lord who isn’t interested in wars right now,” Varys continued. “House Dondarrion is somewhat of a mystery at this stage, Lord Beric Dondarrion was last instructed by Lord Eddard Stark to find and bring Gregor Clegane to justice, when he sat on the iron throne in Robert’s stead.” Tyrion could see a mask of disdain appear on the Queen’s face, with the mention of Robert and Eddard Stark.
“Blackhaven is still operating and conducting business as if Lord Beric Dondarrion was still alive. There are rumours that Blackhaven has received instructions from Lord Beric Dondarrion until recently, yet there is no trace of the man he has disappeared like a ghost,” Varys concluded.

“These are strange times,” Tyrion shrugged. He certainly never thought he would ever see a living dragon, or that he would be planning an invasion with a Targaryen Queen against his mad sister. *Yes, these are strange times indeed.*

“The Crownlands have always been loyal Targaryen supporters, what is the situation within the Crownlands?” Tyrion asked.

“We might be able to gain the most support from the Crownlands, some of the Crownlanders were killed during the incineration of the Sept of Baelor, but some of them also fear your sister’s wrath, and they are close enough to Cersei for some legitimate concerns.” *My dearest sister would have them killed and tortured if she suspected any deviation in their devotions.*

“We’ll send summonses to the Rosbys, Rykkers, Hayforts, Brunes, Stokeworths, Stauntons, Masseys, Hoggs and the Buckwells,” Tyrion instructed towards maester Pylos.

“House Darry has always remained very loyal supporters of House Targaryen,” the Queen added. “The Darrys have all been killed, the Freys have taken over the Darry castle,” Varys answered to the Queen. This time Tyrion thought he saw a fleeting look of sadness upon the Queen’s visage, but he couldn’t be sure.

“The Riverlands was completely destroyed during the War of the five Kings,” Tyrion added. “I don't need little birds to tell me that the Riverlands will be devoid of any support after the Red Wedding.” Tyrion sighed. “And your brother has just kindly secured Riverrun and the Riverlands for the Freys once again. Although Black Walder and Edwyn Frey have been killed, apparently they were mauled by a wolfpack somewhere near the Twins.”

“A wolfpack?” Tyrion frowned towards Varys.

Varys give a small smile, “there is a true wolfpack hunting within the Riverlands, all of the injured men from the war are easy targets for wild animals, they have now gotten a taste for human flesh. Apparently the pack is lead by an enormous she-wolf.”

“I guess I should avoid walking around in the Riverlands then, I would be an easy target for a hungry wolf.” Tyrion reflected dryly. His Queen did not appear very engrossed with their current discussion. Tyrion decided to push ahead with their real discussion.
“What about the Vale, their forces haven’t fought in any battles, they are still intact and completely fresh?” Tyrion would love nothing more then to see the dragons circling above the Eyrie, the thought made him smile. Varys had informed him of Lysa Arryn’s death on their way to Volantis, but her little brat Robin would shit himself if he saw a dragon. Varys appeared almost troubled now.

“There were other important whispers I wanted to inform you about, Your Grace. But it was late and the news regarding King Landing seemed much more significant at the time,” Varys rambled on. Their Queen only narrowed her eyes.

“The Vale has already declared for a side.” That did surprise Tyrion, it wasn’t often that the Vale would bestir themselves from their honourable mountains for anyone. Fuck, the Vale declaring for Cersei has Littlefinger written all over it. Tyrion could see that his Queen’s gaze was becoming darker.


“There was a great battle at Winterfell, the smallfolk are calling it the Battle of the Bastards, the Starks have retaken Winterfell.” Varys announced. Tyrion was somewhat shocked, he did not think there were any Starks left. Could Sansa have a hand in this? Tyrion still felt a slight resentment for his loyal wife. The Queen was flushed with fire and anger.

“It is very difficult to get information from the North, but my sources tell me that the Vale has declared for the King in the North.”

“How? There are no male Starks left, Lady Sansa was the key to the North.” Tyrion wondered.

“Well it wasn’t a male Stark, it was a Snow. The whispers I’ve heard from the North is about some mythical battle where the bastard son of the late Lord Eddard Stark, rode at the head of an army consisting of Wildling forces with skinchangers and giants, along with the Knights of the Vale, and they took Winterfell from Ramsay Bolton.”

“Jon Snow?”

“Yes, that is the name of the bastard, he was declared as the King in the North.” Tyrion almost felt slightly strange, he hasn’t thought about Jon Snow in ages. I knew a sad, angry bastard boy once.
His Queen and Varys was looking at him.

“I’ve met him, we traveled together to the Nights Watch. “Didn't he take his Nights Watch vows?” Tyrion pondered.

“According to my sources he was the Lord Commander of the Nights Watch, before he left to fight this battle at Winterfell.” This was strange to Tyrion's mind, he would not have guessed that Jon Snow would abandon his vows and become an oathbreaker. But then again perhaps anyone can change, especially if you are left behind at the Wall while your whole family dies off, and his brother Robb Stark did break an oath to marry a Frey girl.

The fact that Jon Snow somehow still became a King after breaking his Nights Watch oath just shows how much the Boltons were despised within the North. And Sansa was married to a Bolton, how would that work.

“Where is Lady Sansa?” Tyrion asked.

“Apparently she also resides within Winterfell, some have speculated that she is now the Lady of Winterfell.” For Tyrion this sounded like a very strange arrangement.

“If I cant attack Kings Landing right now, then I will have to deal with the North. I will take Winterfell from them!” the Queen declared. “Perhaps we can land two forces on either coasts, it would be difficult for them to deal with two advancing armies at once, they probably don't have a lot of soldiers left after the war they have lost. We’ll strike them with a strong force and make an example of them, the other Lords will soon submit.”

“That would not be a good idea, Your Grace. Winter has started, there is a reason why the Stark words say; winter is coming. Winter is their biggest ally.” The Queen did not look convinced. “I've been to the Wall during summertime, and the cold can invade every strand and sense of your being, it becomes difficult to move and walk. You might think it is cold right now, but the North is something else, during the winters the snowfall can bury a man, Your Grace. We don't understand the cold.”

“I can't attack King Landing because your sister is holding the smallfolk hostage, and I can't attack the North. How will I ever get my throne? I’ve come to Westeros to take the throne, which was taken from my family. I must take some kind of action or otherwise my claim wouldn’t be taken seriously.” His Queen was not completely wrong, they also couldn’t just sit around and do nothing, and they couldn't feed the Dothraki on Dragonstone for an extended period of time.
“We have only arrived my Queen and we are creating alliances. It would be best to take the kingdom with the least amount of bloodshed. Westeros has suffered, you don't want to add to the suffering, and it will only become worse now that winter has arrived. Let us work on creating alliances first,” Tyrion cautioned.

“I don't want to create unnecessary bloodshed, but I also need to show my strength. I can't just allow two other Kings to rule within the kingdom that is mine by right, that sends a message of weakness and compromise, and I've compromised enough,” the Queen answered.

“I don't disagree, Your Grace, but let us atleast send out these letters and find more alliances. The Starks are not my sister, we might be able to reason with them, we’ll summons them to swear fealty like the rest of the Lords.” The Queen nodded towards maester Pylos.

The Queen left after the discussions was over.

The Queen was not entirely wrong in her assessments, but Westeros was also very different from Meereen. You can't rule without the support of the nobility, alliances and support was what kept a King in control of the realm, except if you have dragons. But what happens when you burn the whole kingdom down, there wouldn’t be anything left to rule over. His father never allowed any opposition against him, but he also understood the importance of creating alliances.

Tyrion helped maester Pylos with the summonses for the rest of the day, he read and signed every letter.

He followed the maester to Sea Dragon Tower, where he made sure that every raven was sent. That night Tyrion only required two glasses of wine to fall asleep.

Tyrion was peering over the great hall, it was quite empty but it was also the first official occasion where Queen Daenerys was seated upon the dragonstone throne. She sat straight, strong and attentively. Their focus was on the man in front of them, Lord Arnold Buckwell, he was a stout, solid man with dirty blonde hair, he bowed in front of the Queen.

“My family has always served House Targaryen faithfully, my brother Jarmen Buckwell was send to the Wall because he refused to bend the knee to Robert Baratheon, I will once again pledge House Buckwell to House Targaryen,” Lord Arnold Buckwell stated with pride.
“You may rise my Lord, House Targaryen is honoured to have the support of House Buckwell,” his Queen answered gracefully, as she looked down upon the man.

It has been just under a moon’s turn since Tyrion had last dispatched the Queen’s messages all over the realm. Everyday he grew concerned, sometimes it felt like he was lying in a bed of hot pokers. The Dothraki have become increasingly difficult to control, and their foodstores was low. However, this day had started off better than the last few days, as some Tyrell ships was spotted very early this morning, and the Queen had finally received her first pledge of fealty from the Crownlands.

A serving girl came rushing into the great hall, she was out of breath. “Your Grace,” the girl finally managed to gulp out between breaths. Lord Buckwell and Lord Sunglass looked at the girl with some irritation, for her impertinence. But his Queen only waited upon her patiently.

“Your Grace, Brown Rat, has asked that I come to you immediately!” His Queen smiled at the girl reassuringly, “go on.” “Your Grace, Lady Olenna Tyrell has set foot on Dragonstone, she demands to be carried up the stairs!” Tyrion could hear himself groaning, just what we need more demands and complaints.

Tyrion turned to some servants that was standing to the side of the great hall. “Well, do we have a litter?” Tyrion enquired from them. The servants looked at each other before one spoke out. “Nay, milord”. Fuck, “get a chaise or something and tell the Unsullied or some Dothraki to carry her up the stairs to the great hall.”

“Qotto,” the Queen commanded to one of her bloodriders. “Go with these servants and find other men to help you.” Qotto had no expression he just immediately followed the Queen’s orders.

“Your Grace,” Lord Sunglass was trying to draw the attention within the room towards himself. “Before Lady Tyrell arrives, allow me to address a matter of the utmost importance.” Lord Sunglass was a very middling sort of man, with his unspectacular mouse brown hair chopped very shortly, and cold icy blue eyes on a thin face. It almost appeared as if his face might crack, if he would ever manage a thought of mirth within his life.

“The usurper Stannis Baratheon was a follower of the Lord of Light, he sacked and burned the Sept on Dragonstone along with the statues of the Seven, I ask that the Sept should be rebuilt, Dragonstone should return to the faith of the Seven, as it was in the days of your ancestors,” Lord Sunglass concluded.

“My Hand will see to it, Lord Sunglass.” Lord Sunglass bowed his head,”thank you, my Queen.” As if rebuilding a Sept was of the utmost importance. Lord Sunglass and Lord Buckwell moved a bit further away from the throne. Tyrion moved himself closer to the Queen, “Your Grace, I think
we should start treating Dragonstone as your court and capital city, invite Lord Buckwell to stay and to bring his family. It would undermine some of my sister’s power within Kings Landing.”

The Queen nodded, “I will invite Lady Tyrell to stay with us well.” Tyrion could not imagine that the Queen of Thorns would be impressed to see him. “A wise decision, Your Grace.”

“Lord Buckwell,” the Queen announced loudly, “you are welcome to remain within my court and you can send for your family as well.”

“Escort Lord Buckwell to one of our guest chambers.” The Queen commanded.

“Thank You, Your Grace, it would be a honour for House Buckwell to be a part of your court and counsel.” Lord Buckwell answered just before leaving the great hall.

“Lady Olenna Tyrell of Highgarden,” a servant announced. Tyrion felt somewhat relieved that Missandei wasn’t here to ramble off his Queen’s titles, he knew Lady Olenna wouldn’t be impressed by titles. Lady Olenna strode into the great hall, with some of the Dothraki soldiers behind her, they looked exhausted.

“Your Grace.” Lady Olenna acknowledged without any further signs of respect. “I am honoured to meet you Lady Tyrell,” his Queen replied. “It is a great pleasure to meet you again Lady Olenna,” Tyrion added with a tight smile.

“Spare me the courtesies Lannister, if you wanted to show some true respect for your elderly guests, then you could have deviced a plan to get me into this castle without dying from exhaustion along the way.” Lady Olenna almost waved him off like a fly.

“I brought supplies from the Reach, and I want to know what you have planned for Cersei, Your Grace,” Lady Olenna demanded.

“Lady Olenna, I am grateful for your supplies and support. You have traveled a long way, perhaps you could rest today and I will discuss all of my plans with you on the morrow. You are welcome to reside within my court for as long as you please.” The Queen answered gracefully.

“I am honoured, Your Grace, but where else was I supposed to stay? In the village? I will not remain here for long, I just want to know what will happen with Cersei.”
Tyrion stepped in quickly, “please escort Lady Olenna to one of the guest chambers, she’s had a
very long journey,” Tyrion commanded.

Lady Olenna moved out of the great hall behind the servant. His Queen seemed somewhat
bewildered, Tyrion wanted to chuckle, he has never seen his Queen slightly bewildered.

“And that is the Queen of Thorns,” Tyrion supplied needlessly after Lady Olenna has left the
room.

“Could you see to the rebuilding of this Sept? I am going to look after my dragons.”

Just after eating his dinner alone, Tyrion was called to the war room, he made his way to the top of
the stone drum tower as quickly as his stunted legs allowed him. Of course everyone was just
waiting for his arrival.

Varys quickly supplied the reason for their impromptu meeting. “We have received word from
Winterfell.” Varys produced a message from within the folds of his robe. Tyrion could see the
white wax with a snarling direwolf upon it. He was slightly surprised, he was almost sure that the
Northerners would just ignore a message from House Targaryen. He never really thought that he
would see a Stark sigil again, then again I also never thought I would see much of the Targaryen
sigil ever again. He could not really read much into the expressions of Varys or his Queen or even
Missandei.

He took the message tentatively and read it out loud. “I, Jon Snow the King in the North, will be
arriving at Dragonstone soon.” The message was signed in the same hand. He must have written it
himself. The handwriting was neat and precise.

“It seems like your plans might be coming together, he is on his way to swear fealty.” his Queen
voiced her impression from the message, with more mirth than he has seen from her these last few
days. Varys had a more cautious look on his face.

“Is he swearing fealty, he is still calling himself the King in the North?” Tyrion voiced his question
out loudly without expecting an answer.

“If he sees himself as a King wouldn’t he have legitimized himself, if a bastard has the power to
become a Stark wouldn’t he use that power?” Varys questioned.

Tyrion was vividly brought back to the first time he encountered Jon Snow outside the feasting
hall of Winterfell, the boy had a lot of anger. Never forget what you are, that was the advice Tyrion give him at the time, mayhaps he was actually following that advice.

“You’ve known him before, what would you deduce from this message?” Varys prodded him further.

“He was a boy of few words, and it appears as if he has remained a man of a few words. I can't speak to his intentions,” Tyrion replied with a shrug. “Perhaps you should see what information you can gather about him,” Tyrion suggested to Varys. “I have made enquires as soon as I heard the North had a King, but as I’ve said, finding information from the North is often difficult, finding information about bastards can be even more difficult. However, I will try to gather some progress on my original enquires tonight.” Tyrion was very unsurprised to hear from Varys’ own words that he was sneaking around in the middle of the night, he had always suspected as much.

“I am worried about Yara and our Greyjoy fleet,” the Queen uttered her concern. “Shouldn’t we have heard from her by now? Lady Olenna has returned with the ships that I send to Highgarden for supplies.”

The situation was slightly disconcerting, but there have also been reports about hail and snowstorms the closer you get to the North, the distances might have been similar but the road or ocean to Casterly Rock was more challenging.

“The path to the Westernland are more difficult, Your Grace.”

“I want to send the Unsullied to Casterly Rock as soon as possible, if Lady Olenna arrived here then Yara should be close.”

“Yes, Your Grace,” Tyrion agreed it was time for action.

When Tyrion reached his chambers a servant was waiting for him.”Milord, I made some enquires within the village about building the new Sept, there is a man who will come and see you on the morrow,” the servant informed Tyrion. “Thank You, Mynhard, is it?”

“Aye, My Lord Hand.”

That night Tyrion did not sleep, he spend the whole night drawing up plans for Casterly Rock. The longer he thought about the Rock the clearer his vision and drawings became. He could almost still see the exact layout of the sewer system in his mind’s-eye. The Unsullied could enter through the
sewer and take the castle easily. *I would have enjoyed to see my loving father’s face if he knew that Casterly Rock was taken.* Tyrion grinned by himself at the thought.

*All I’ve ever wanted from him was my birthright and some acknowledgment.* And now Casterly Rock belonged to Jaime, *even in death Tywin Lannister somehow got his way.* Jaime never wanted Casterly Rock, and yet it does rightfully belong to him. His first act of revenge against Cersei will be to attack Casterly Rock that rightfully belongs to Jaime, who saved his miserable life. “*The Gods are truly cunts,***” Tyrion toasted out loudly to himself with his wine glass in hand.

Tyrion sat with his plans and kept his wine glass full until the first rays of light streamed into his chambers. The servant from the previous night arrived just after Tyrion had washed his face, the sting from the cold water had shook some of the wine from his head.

“All I’ve ever wanted from him was my birthright and some acknowledgment. And now Casterly Rock belonged to Jaime, *even in death Tywin Lannister somehow got his way.* Jaime never wanted Casterly Rock, and yet it does rightfully belong to him. His first act of revenge against Cersei will be to attack Casterly Rock that rightfully belongs to Jaime, who saved his miserable life. “*The Gods are truly cunts,***” Tyrion toasted out loudly to himself with his wine glass in hand.

The one man had a bearish look about him with tufts of blond hair, the man next to him was tall and looked very strong, his face was full of scars and some pox marks, he had long dark brown hair with a big beard, the third man was smaller than the other two. The scars made Tyrion think more of a warrior rather than a potential stone mason.

“My Lord,” all three of them bowed. “I am Ser Rolland Storm,” the tall scarfaced man greeted. “I apologise in advance, we deceived your servant to a degree.” Tyrion tried to recall every step of his walk towards the great hall, and how many guards he saw on his way, *are there even any guards near to me?*

“We served King Stannis, however we left his service as more followers of the Seven started to burn. We have stayed within the village for a while now. Even Lord Axell Florent, Queen Selyse’s own brother was burned in the flames for following the Seven, we served Dragonstone but we had no choice but to abandon Dragonstone,” the man spoke earnestly and fiercely.

“And what do you want from me, Ser Rolland Storm,” Tyrion asked with conviction he did not really feel.
“We want to serve your Queen, we have served Dragonstone for a time and we would like to do so again,” Ser Rolland answer simply. “And why have you waited until now to appear?” Tyrion asked.

“We’ve heard all of the other Baratheon soldiers were butched, and then we heard that the Dragon Queen are accepting oaths of fealty from everyone. You, yourself are a Lannister, Lord Hand.” Tyrion was starting to think that killing everyone within the castle and mounting their heads upon spikes might not have been the most prudent of choices.

“You would have to swear an oath of fealty to our Queen first,” Tyrion answered. All of them bowed. “And what about the Sept?”

“I was the castellan of Dragonstone, Ser Gerald Gower served as a master in arms for a short time, and Omer Blackberry,” he pointed to the smaller man, “served as a steward, he would know who can be used to build your Sept.”

“The Queen will be holding court later today, you can swear fealty to her then, I will speak to the Queen beforehand, in the meantime you will have to remain under guard.” Luckily Tyrion did finally recall that there was four guards posted near the entrance of the great hall.

“You can just remain in one of the ante chambers of the great hall until the Queen calls for you,” Tyrion added. They did not look very impressed but they walked with Tyrion to one of the ante chambers. Tyrion called the four Unsullied guards and explained that they needed to guard these men for awhile.

Next he went in search of Varys, he found him in the war room, overlooking the view of the sea. Again Tyrion was struck with the notion that Varys never sleeps. “Have you heard anything about a Rolland Storm, he was the castellan for Stannis?” Tyrion enquired from Varys.

“Not that I can recall right now, there is certainly a lot of interest in bastards these days,” Varys observed. “That is what happens when all of the best legitimate members of a house dies off within times of war,” Tyrion observed in return. Tyrion called a servant and ordered something to break his fast, “I want the bacon crispy and black, with bread and a lot of butter, and some ale to wash it all down.”

“The Bare Maiden brought some good news this morning, Varys replied. “What news?”
“More houses to swear fealty to our Queen. The *Bare Maiden* belongs to House Rykker but it seems like they have formed a coalition with some of the other houses, representatives from House Staunton, House Stokeworth, House Faring and House Slynt are all onboard the *Bare Maiden,*” Varys replied.

“I thought Littlefinger was in command of Harrenhal these days? I sent Cersei’s lickspittle Jonos Slynt to the Wall,” Tyrion questioned.

“The Slynts had already become a noble house during that time, therefore Harrenhal was taken from them but their title remained. Apparently this is one of Janos Slynt’s sons that has arrived.”

The servant returned with Tyrion’s burned bacon and dark thick ale. The bacon was crispy, and the butter melted into the warm bread. Varys only ate some of the bread.

“What brings you to our little war room so early in the day,” Tyrion requested from Varys while chewing on some of his bacon. “I came to look upon the map, you might yet still; want to kiss me today,” Varys answered with a slight smile in one corner of his mouth. Tyrion almost gagged at the thought. “I highly doubt it.”

“Don’t speak so quickly, you should at least listen to the details of my strategy before judging its worth,” Varys answer with one raised eyebrow. “What is this esteemed plan of yours,” Tyrion asked with a certain sense of boredom. “I might have arrived at the perfect solution for the Dothraki,” Varys announced slightly smugly. “Fuck,” Tyrion groaned,”now I might have to kiss you, so what is this solution?”

“Now you will have to wait until our Queen arrives to hear the plan, since you didn’t believe in its merits earlier.” Tyrion just rolled his eyes, while biting into a piece of bread.

“Lady Olenna has demanded an early meeting to hear about the progress in our war efforts,” Varys informed him. Of course Tyrion was well aware of her demands since he had the great pleasure to meet her upon arrival, she just never struck him as someone who would be moving around at the crack of dawn.

“Just what anyone might need in the morning, a flower,” Tyrion added dryly. “We could be waiting for half a day upon a Lady and a Queen, you might as well loosen your tongue about those plans for the Dothraki.”

“You may be right my friend, so I will indulge you,” Varys answered with feigned exasperation.
“House Buckwell already swore fealty us, according to my little birds Lord Symond Staunton has just arrived upon the Bare Maiden, to swear fealty to our Queen,” Varys explained almost as one might explain to a child.

“Look at the map,” he instructed. Tyrion looked, he was sitting right next to the Neck, he looked over the Vale and the Riverlands but he did not see what he was suppose to see. “You will have to be slightly more indulgent with me today, I’ve had a very long night.”

Varys gave a long sigh, “the Stauntons are from Rook’s Rest,” Rook’s Rest was on the coast right next to Dragonstone but on the mainland, “the Buckwells are from Antlers,” Varys added. Antlers was right in line with Rook’s Rest. “What is next in line?” Varys asked with a smug type of smile.

“Harrenhal?” Tyrion questioned.

“Indeed, what better place to keep thousands of Dothraki soldiers, and it is close enough to the capital that it would place some pressure on Cersei. We can march the Dothraki straight onto Harrenhal thought the territory of our allies. Highgarden can also supply them easier from the land.” Varys answered.

“Right, it sounds perfect but isn’t Harrenhal occupied at the moment.” Tyrion enquired.

“You brother appointed Ser Bonifer Hasty as the Castellan of Harrenhal, just before he returned to the capital, after winning Riverrun back for the Freys. Ser Bonifer Hasty has his Holy Hundred soldiers with him, which is actually just eighty six men.”

“We don’t want to antagonise what is left of the Seven after Cersei’s little display within the Sept of Baelor, people might resent a horde of Dothraki attacking a group of holy warriors.” Tyrion replied.

“They would resent such actions.” Varys agreed. “We are not going to attack Harrenhal, we just have to send a letter to Ser Bonifer Hasty.”

“He truly loved Queen Rhaella, he would surely want to help the daughter of the women that he has always loved,” Varys finalized his argument.

“Seven hells, this is actually a good plan!” Fuck, it might be brilliant but Tyrion did not want to
give Varys to much acclamation, it might just give him a bigger head. “We have to start making arrangements immediately.” Tyrion called a servant and asked him to get maester Pylos.

Just as Tyrion called the servant, Lady Olenna appeared.

“Lady Olenna,” both him and Varys greeted by bowing their heads.

“Lord Varys and my Lord Hand,” Lady Olenna spoke to them in such a fashion that Tyrion wasn’t sure if it was meant as a courtesy or an insult. Varys quickly pulled a chair out for Lady Olenna and seated her near the Reach.

“Let me send word to our Queen,” Tyrion started. “No need.” Lady Olenna replied, “I was told she is on her way to these chambers.”

“I've heard some gossip that you have ascended to the position of the Hand for the Queen,” Lady Olenna said while looking at him, “pity how malicious gossip can be accurate at times.” Tyrion was starting to grow tired of her thorny barbs.

“I might be a Lannister, but I have just as much reason as you to despise Cersei. I killed my father because he judged to have me executed, but Cersei was the one who facilitated my execution with her lies,” Tyrion challenged with a hint of anger.

“Finally, I get to see some gumption!” Lady Olenna exclaimed.

The Queen finally arrived, “my Queen”, all three of them acknowledged. Their Queen took a seat upon Dragonstone, or where Dragonstone was suppose to be on the map.

“Lady Olenna you came to enquire after our war efforts?” The Queen turned her attention to Lady Olenna.

“When I arrived upon Dragonstone I was sure that you would be occupied with conquering Kings Landing, instead Cersei Lannister is still sitting prettily on her iron throne, Your Grace.”

“Lady Olenna, I would happily burn and bake Cersei Lannister within the Red Keep until her bones
turns to ashes, however she has arranged stockpiles of wildfire throughout the city. One misguided flame can obliterate the whole of Kings Landing,” the Queen answered seriously.

“Then how in gods name are you planning on killing her, Your Grace? King Landing might just be a lost cause, it is a stinking waste of a city.”

“Lady Olenna,” Tyrion decided to place himself into their discussion. “We do have a few plans in motion, but unfortunately we have to take a more long term approach right now.”

“You might not care about Kings Landing, but I still intend to rule this city and the Seven Kingdoms. I understand your burning thirst for vengeance better than most, but the people within Kings Landing are my people to protect right now.”

Lady Olenna sighed, “what are these so-called plans?”

“We will create pressure upon Cersei, and choke all of her power systematically.” Tyrion replied. “We are creating alliances, most of the prominent families within the Crownlands have already sworn fealty to us, Houses such the Buckwells, Stauntons and the Stokeworths. Cersei will soon be surrounded by the opposition.”

Tyrion took the plans that he spent the whole night on out of his tunic, he unfolded the parchment. “This is the underground lay-out of Casterly Rock.” Tyrion could see that both the Queen and Varys looked intrigued. “We have been planning on sending some Unsullied soldiers to take Casterly Rock. We will also evacuate the Dothraki horde to Harrenhal quite shortly.”

“We are doing what we can my Lady.” Varys supplied.

“Khaleesi,” bloodrider Qhono called to their Queen from the entrance of the chamber, “the white dragon has been screaming the whole morning.”

The Queen flew to the entrance in a hurry. “Excuse me Lady Olenna, I trust you will be able to find the answers you seek from my advisors,” and then she was gone.

“We have also started to place some gears in motion that could strike at Cersei internally, a blow to her internal circle would be the most effective,” Tyrion added.
“My Lady as you may surmise, we are aligning all of the components to create more pressure on Cersei. Our plans might take a bit a longer now, but we will strangle her in time,” Varys supplied.

“She wouldn’t even be able to feed the capital for much longer, without the support of the Reach.” Tyrion paused for a moment. “The peasants already revolted during Joffrey’s time, they could easily do so again. I was there during the revolt, and we could easily all have been killed.”

“Well, I suppose I don't really have much of anything then - but to be patient,” Lady Olenna answered. “The only picture I want to see is Cersei dead, buried or burned it doesn’t matter. She took my future from me, I want to see her die before I croak myself, that is all I have left now.” For once Lady Olenna was sincere.

“Cersei will die, Lady Olenna, even if I have to strangle her myself.” Tyrion tried to console her in his own inefficient way. Lady Olenna only nodded.

“You sent for me my Lord,” Maester Pylos addressed him. “I have,” Tyrion answered. “Would you excuse us Lady Olenna we do have some other urgent matters of state to discuss regarding this new King in the North.”

“I heard that some of the Freys were torn apart by rabid wolves,” Lady Olenna supplied nonchalantly. “Perhaps I should have made an alliance with this King, at least his enemies seems to be dying,” she said as she left the chambers.

“Maester Pylos, you have to write an urgent message to Ser Bonifer Hasty at Harrenhal,” Tyrion commanded. Varys dictated the message for maester Pylos.

Tyrion was standing next to Varys on the side of the Dragonstone throne, the Queen has just gotten herself ready to hear more oaths of fealty, for the afternoon. Someone had arranged a few chairs in front of the throne, the great hall was starting to act more as a real throne room.

“I made some enquiries about Rolland Storm,” Varys whispered to him. “He is the bastard brother of Lord Bryce Caron, he was killed by Ser Philip Foote during the Blackwater, as a reward your father give him Nightsong.”

“Then, I can't see a reason why he would support Cersei,” Tyrion answered back. “In fact he could be useful, if there are no other heirs to Nightsong then he might become the Lord of Nightsong if we legitimize him,” Tyrion speculated. “Indeed,” Varys replied, “it could be our first support from
the Stormlands, and he is also a well renowned warrior, he helped Stannis to retreat safely back to Dragonstone from the Blackwater.”

Ser Rolland Storm and his companions, Ser Gerald Gower and Omer Blackberry were the first ones to bent the knee to their Queen. Lord Gilbert Faring was the fourth man to swear his fealty.

After him Lady Tanda Stokeworth approached the throne. She bent the knee, but she also declared her fealty for all to hear. “Your Grace, my House has suffered greatly through Cersei Lannister, my sister and her new husband, along with my mother Lady Falyse Stokeworth and her husband Ser Balman Byrch was killed during the explosion in the Great Sept, I would provide whatever support I can to house Targaryen, Your Grace.”

“I am grateful for any support you can offer Lady Stokeworth,” the Queen acknowledged.

The next man to swear fealty was Danos Slynt, he bemoaned the fact that both of his brothers Morros and Jothos Slynt was killed in the Sept of Baelor during the wildfire explosion. Lady Amarys Rykker’s husband, Lord Renfred Rykker also died in the Sept of Baelor, her son and the new heir of Duskendale Lord Jonothor Rykker swore fealty to their Queen. Lord Symond Staunton’s great uncle Seton Staunton was a Septon who served within the Sept of Baelor. Most of them seemed quite eager to bent the knee to the Queen.

“Seven hells, did Cersei blow-up half of the fucking Crownlands?” Tyrion couldn’t help but wonder. “It appears so,” Varys answered with a shake from his head. Tyrion always knew that Cersei had a certain inclination towards cruelty and prettiness, but this seemed like madness to him. I can't believe that Jaime would stay with her after this, Cersei must really have a magical cunt.

“You are all welcome to reside within my court, and you may send for your families as well,” the Queen announced.

The great hall cleared out slowly, they had time to prepare rooms for all of their guests in advance since the Bare Maiden was spotted quite early. “We have one big problem with your plan to relocate the Dothraki to Harrenhal. We don't have any men to lead the Dothraki to Harrenhal.” Tyrion voiced his concern to Varys.

“We can't just send the Dothraki off by themselves to trundle around Westeros.”

“No we can't,” Varys agreed. “The Queen doesn’t have any trustworthy men around her to lead the
Dothraki, since Daario stayed in Meereen and Ser Jorah contracted grayscale. We will have to appoint one of these new Lords for the task.”

“Who did you have in mind”, Varys enquired.

“We will have to use Lord Sunglass, he was the first man who swore fealty to us and he does have a stern, commanding type of presence.” Varys did not look entirely convinced. Of course Lord Sunglass had the humour of a bear with a toothache, the man was austere, gaunt and slightly to fervent in his worship of the Seven, but they didn’t really have much of a choice at this stage, the Dothraki required strong leadership.

It took almost a fortnight to finalize and make all of the necessary arrangements for most of the Dothraki to depart from Dragonstone. Tyrion could see relief edged upon the faces of most of the Lords and Ladies, as a large portion of the Targaryen fleet sailed off again. Eighty thousand Dothraki warriors and their horses left Dragonstone for Harrenhal.

Tyrion was just reflecting that the Dothraki at the very least seemed to be obeying Lord Sunglass, which was naturally a huge relief. Lord Sunglass also took about a thousand of his own soldiers along with him.

Tyrion was once again seated at the neck of the painted map table, they were still trying to arrive at a strategy for Casterly Rock since they haven’t heard anything from Yara yet. Tyrion was starting to grow more certain that something might have happened to their Ironborn Queen.

“Milord Hand, maester Pylos sent me to deliver this urgent message,” a young servant boy addressed Tyrion.

The seal on the message was broken, the wax had a green-blue tint, with the image of a merman holding a trident. His Queen and Varys was looking at him with curiosity. Tyrion had to wreck his mind to remember were the sigil came from, of course I could just read the damn letter, but where is the fun in that? North, it was from the North, a coastal house. “The message is from house Manderly,” Tyrion announced to his audience.

Her Grace, Daenerys Targaryen,

His Grace Jon Snow, the King in the North, has set sail from White Harbour with a Northern envoy upon the day this message was written, he will sail directly to Dragonstone from here.
I, Ser Wylis Manderly, acting Lord of New Castle and White Harbour, and protector of the Wolf’s Den, forward this message on behalf of my King, His Grace Jon Snow, the White Wolf and the King in the North.

Tyrion looked up from the message, and saw the expectation reflected within the Queen’s eyes. “A message from the White Wolf apparently.” Varys had a frown on his face.

“Ser Wylis Manderly has forwarded a message to us, from Jon Snow, he has already set sail to Dragonstone.” Tyrion announced. Varys took the message from him, and read it over for himself.

“Somehow, I don't get the idea that the King in the North will be interested in bending the knee from this message,” Tyrion reflected ironically. Varys handed the message over to their Queen. Her eyes were cold as she read over the message, she crumpled the message in her fist and threw it on the table.

“I just want to rule Westeros peacefully, I give this usurper a fair chance to swear allegiance to me, even though the Starks helped with the sacking of Kings Landing, and they murdered my brother’s innocent children! Viserys might have been mad, but he has always warned me about the usurpers dog’s.

He always said that they were more dangerous and calculating than the idiot usurper himself. I give them a fair chance. This so-called King isn’t even a real Stark, but it seems like he is intent on continuing his father’s treasonous traditions. I could easily roast him and the North for what they have done to house Targaryen. My whole family was eradicated because of the usurper and his dogs! The White Wolf, pfft, such defiance will not be tolerated, I do not give second chances,” she ended fiercely.

Tyrion has seen the Queen in rage before when the slave masters tried to take over Meereen, but this was a different type of fury, it was the type of anger that has been allowed to fester and recuperate unchecked for years.

The Queen stood up, “I will be with the dragons if you have very urgent need of me.” She walked out of their war chamber with a few big strides.

“Well, something tells me our Queen knows fuckall about Robert’s Rebellion.” Tyrion announced nonplussed. Varys almost appeared as if he had to stifle a grimace. “Were Mormont and Selmy nothing more than sycophants?” Tyrion questioned loudly to himself. “When I met the Queen for the first time, she told me that she knew what her father was, and I had assumed she understood what happened during the rebellion, someone is going to have to tell her the truth before Jon Snow
arrives.” Tyrion was looking at Varys.

“Who better to tell her the truth about her family then her trusted Hand,” Varys answered smugly. “You were there when the whole rebellion occured, wouldn’t it better if you spoke to her?” Tyrion questioned. “No one trust tales from spiders.” Tyrion groaned inwardly, of course I will have to be the one who will shatter her last precious childhood fantasies.

“I have asked you to gather what information you can about Jon Snow, you’ve had enough time I would assume.”

“I have gathered what information I could, as I’ve warned before, generally no one cares to look at what bastards might be doing.” Tyrion waved his hand for Varys to continue.

“He was in the Nights Watch, after a big battle at Castle Black against the Wildlings he was chosen as the Lord Commander, and then he allowed thousands of Wildlings to go through the Wall and enter the North, he give them some land on The Gift.” Tyrion was sure his mouth might have been hanging open like an idiot. “He let Wildlings through the Wall and give them Northern land?” Tyrion questioned again. “That is what the whispers are telling me,” Varys shrugged. “After the Wildlings was settled, he left the Nights Watch and he used the Wildlings as his personal army to attack Ramsay Bolton. They won the day, because the Knights of the Vale fought on his side.” And what about Lady Sansa?” Tyrion questioned.

“There are some rumours that she might have spend some time within the Vale, alongside Littlefinger.”

“Of course Littlefinger was somehow involved,” Tyrion rolled his eyes. “He is the one who took her from Kings Landing, I am just unsure about how she ended up in Winterfell married to Ramsay Bolton.” Varys answered. “You know for a fact that she escaped the capital with the help of Littlefinger?” Varys nodded. Maybe it was that little weasel that had something to do with Joffrey’s death. Tyrion could still feel the anger easily engulf his insides, at the thought of being accused whilst everyone knew he wasn’t guilty. Tyrion pushed his mind to focus on the discussion at hand.

“I still don't understand how or why he is the King in the North?” Tyrion questioned. “From the information you have given me he broke his Nights Watch vows, and consorted with the Wildlings; Northerners take the Nights Oath seriously and they hate Wildlings. Mayhaps we should just have sent out messages to all of the Northern Lords like we did with the Crownlands.” Tyrion reflected.
“That wouldn’t have helped, according to my sources the North and even the Vale are fully behind him.” Varys replied.

“How, did he conquer every holdfast? Has he usurped his sister’s claim to the North?”

“You seem surprised, isn’t this exactly what those Sand bastards did in Dorne?” Varys questioned.

“I’ve met this kid, we have traveled on the road together for a while, from what I’ve witnessed he seemed very much like your typical Stark.”

Varys laughed, “clearly you haven't met a lot of Starks, Lord Eddard Stark was a honorable man but not all of the Starks have always been married to their honour.”

“You may be right, now that I recall he did have some bitterness and resentment about his situation. I suppose this is why you don't raise your bastard son with your trueborn children, the bastard son would just be faced with what he could never have every single day. Leave that bastard in the local village and he would never know what he was missing. I am just concerned for Lady Sansa she was my wife, not so long ago,” Tyrion reflected.

“We will have to be careful, if he isn’t interested in bending the knee why would he come here? As our Queen just rightly pointed out, she could very easily roast him or keep him as a prisoner, why would anyone want to take that risk?”

Varys agreed, ”it doesn’t make much sense, perhaps he has something in his reserve.”

Suddenly it hit Tyrion. “Oh, I think I might understand his intentions! Of course, I should have seen it much earlier.” Tyrion hit himself on his forehead with his palm. “My guess is that he wants to make a marriage alliance!”

Varys smiled and nodded along, “I think you might be right my Lord Hand, who doesn’t want to marry the most beautiful women in the known world, with three dragons. But would he actually be marriageable to our Queen?” Varys questioned. “She will need heirs at some point.”
Tyrion tried to picture Jon Snow again, as when he last saw him, he had doe eyes as black as the night, with sorrow in it depts, and raven curls, *sure he was likely marriageable enough for any maiden*. But their Queen was a woman and she has loved men, she was married to a Dothraki Khal, Jon Snow was just a boy when he last saw him. “I am not sure if he would be a suitable consort for our Queen, he is a bastard, then again if he actually holds the power of the North and the Vale then he might be very suitable, the North and the Vale alone is practically half of the Seven Kingdoms.” Tyrion answered thoughtfully.

“Once our Queen takes the Seven Kingdoms, she will need to have heirs or otherwise the realm would easily fall back into chaos. But there is still some time left, and as you have pointed out there might be other more suitable prospects,” Varys reflected.

“We’ve spent enough time on this subject, I think we understand the situation now. I will give our Queen some time to cool down and then I will discuss Robert’s Rebellion with her. You mentioned earlier that more houses have come to swear fealty?”

“Yes, Lord Fenmore Rambton and Ser Oswell Kettleblack.”

Tyrion had walked through the corridors of the stone drum as slowly as possible, he became less certain of his words as he neared the Queen’s personal chambers. Two Unsullied soldiers flanked her doorway, he wondered if it was perchance still too early in the day. The guards announced him, and Tyrion entered the Queen's private sitting room. It was empty. He immediately moved to the table and poured himself a glass of wine, while waiting for the Queen. He sat in the chaise next to the hearth, the Queen’s rooms were very warm, you could almost be lulled into a false sense of security.

The sitting room was filled with the east, there were colourful drapes and silks that covered most of the walls, the floor was laid out with thick colorful rugs, there were large pillows were one could easily lounge on the floor, alongside short tables. There was also four chaise lounges, with normal standing tables next to them. After a while Tyrion stood up again and tried to count some of the folds on the drapes and curtains.

His Queen eventually appeared, she looked a bit concerned, Tyrion couldn’t fault her for that emotion, he did not visit her private chambers very often, but the matter of Robert’s Rebellion needed to be dealt with.

“Tyrion,” she called him by his first name. “Your Grace,” Tyrion bowed. Missandei appeared right behind the Queen and Tyrion greeted her as well. “I have a very important matter to discuss, but you also don't have to concern yourself over much, this isn’t a matter of life or death.” Tyrion tried
to put her at ease. The Queen and Missandei sat down on the opposite lounge chair.

“Young Grace, yesterday it came to my attention that I needed to discuss some of the history of the Seven Kingdoms with you. The Queen only lifted an eyebrow and peered at him more intently.

“Well, more specifically Robert’s rebellion.” He could see the Queen’s eyes throwing out flashes of fire. Tyrion has always heard that Targaryens have purple eyes, yet the Queen actually had green eyes, however Tyrion could almost swear he saw flashes of lilac within her eyes right now, as her anger was awoken.

“You mean when the usurper and his dogs stole the throne from my family.” the Queen corrected him. “Yes, I am referring to that event.” Tyrion continued on bravely.

“Allow me to tell you the history of Robert’s Rebellion, the story that every child within Westeros is taught.”

“The usurper was able to tell everyone whatever he wanted!” the Queen exclaimed.

“History is written by the victors, that is true enough.” In truth Tyrion has never given Robert’s Rebellion much thought, he was never really interested in such recent history. “Your Grace, should at least understand what the people of Westeros have been taught from birth, it is good for you to understand what exactly your people believe.” The Queen give a long sigh but she did not try to interrupt him again.

“Let me think about where I should start.”

“Your grandfather arranged that Aerys and your mother Rhaella would be married, they didn’t have much love for each other but they did their duty. Everything within the realm was quite hopeful at that point, your great grandfather King Aegon V was a good King. However a lot changed after the tragedy of Summerhall, where King Aegon died. Perhaps that was actually the start of the Targaryen downfall,” Tyrion analysed for himself, and the Queen frowned.

“During that tragedy of Summerhall your brother Rhaegar was born, your brother was born shortly after your mother and father was wed. Your grandfather ascended to the throne, but he only ruled for a very short period, and then your father Aerys inherited the throne. Despite the tragedy that they suffered at Summerhall, your father’s reign began with a great sense of hope and expectation. You see your father was able to befriend most of the more prominent Lords within the realm, and the people really liked him.” Tyrion could see that the Queen had a far away look upon her face, and her green eyes that were spitting fire earlier now looked more glassy. So far so good.
“But soon your mother started to birth stillborns and she miscarried, the years kept on ticking past without another royal baby. These stillborns and miscarriages was probably the start of your father’s paranoia, at first he thought it was the gods who punished him, and then he started to think that people were poisoning the children, he killed one of his own mistresses, and he killed wet nurses. But it was the Defiance of Duskendale when Lord Darklyn imprisoned your father for half a year which really accelerated his madness. Your other brother was born quite a few years after Rhaegar, as I am sure you know.”

“Your father’s madness grew worse as the years passed he refused to leave the Red Keep, and he refused to be touched, as a result his hair was long and tangled, and his fingernails was yellow and a few inches long, all of his punishments became more severe over time.”

“That is the background I can give you before I start with the rebellion.” The Queen silently nodded at him to continue.

“Brandon Stark the heir of Winterfell was in the Riverlands, he was just about to get married. His sister Lyanna Stark had left Harrenhal where she was staying to attend his wedding, but she never made it to the wedding, she was abducted a few yards from Harrenhal by Prince Rhaegar. When Brandon Stark heard the news he was furious, he and a small group of Northmen rode to Kings Landing in search of Rhaegar and his sister, he went to the Red Keep and demanded that Rhaegar should come out and face him. From what I understand it was rumoured that Lyanna was very beautiful, she was the rose, and the pride of the North. A year earlier your brother already caused a minor scandal when he won the Tourney of Harrenhal. He choose Lyanna Stark as his Queen of Love and Beauty, he rode right past his wife and placed a crown of blue winter roses in her lap.”

“Rhaegar wasn’t in Kings Landing, and your father arrested Brandon Stark and his companions. He then summoned Lord Rickard Stark the father of Brandon and Lyanna to Kings Landing, to answer for his son’s crimes. Lord Stark arrived but your father placed him on trial, Lord Stark choose trial by combat, your father agreed but he said that the champion of House Targaryen is fire. He suspended Lord Stark in the throne room with his armour on, and made a fire underneath him, he brought Brandon Stark in as well, and placed a sword just out of his reach, if he could reach the sword, he could set his father free, but he was tied to a strangulation device, the more he reached the more he was strangled. Your Father did this in the throne room, while five hundred people watched as Lord Stark was boiled in his armour and Brandon Stark was strangled.” His Queen had a vacant far-off look in her eyes, so he continued.

“The middle Stark, Eddard grew up in the Vale, he was a ward of Jon Arryn, along with Robert Baratheon and they became friends, Robert was also betrothed to Lyanna Stark. Next your father demanded from Lord Jon Arryn to send both Eddard Stark and Robert Baratheon’s heads to him. Jon Arryn refused, and Eddard Stark escaped to the North while Robert Baratheon went to Storm's End, they all called their banners. Lord Eddard Stark also married Catelyn Tully, who was suppose to wed his brother Brandon, while Lord Jon Arryn married her sister Lysa Tully, and so the
Riverlands joined their cause."

“A few battles were fought, there was a battle at Ashford and Summerhall, but the main battle was on the Trident, somehow Rhaegar had been found and he was leading the Royalist army. The battle was very equal but Robert was a beast on the battlefield, and he was just looking for Rhaegar on the field, he finally came upon your brother Rhaegar at some point. They fought in the waters of the Trident until your brother was hit in the chest by Robert’s warhammer. They say all of the rubies flew from his chestplate and fell into the weeping river that ran red with blood.” Tyrion could see that Queen Daenerys had tears in her eyes, but they were silent, solitary tears.

“The rebel forces scored a victory, but it wasn’t over. Robert was injured and remained on the Trident, he offered for his maester to take care of Barristan Selmy before looking after him, which delayed his progress. So Eddard Stark rode out to the capital instead, but when he arrived the city was already sacked.

You see my dearest father didn’t fight with the rebels, he waited to see which side was winning before making his move. My father was the Hand of the King to your father for many years, and my father had saved your father before, during the Defiance of Duskendale. Your father thought that my father had come to save him again, and he was also persuaded by the Grand maester, to open the gates. My father sacked the city, and commanded one of our worst men, Gregor Clegane to find Elia Martell and kill her children. Your brother Rhaegar’s children was killed before her eyes, and she was raped and murdered. The story goes that the children’s bodies were wrapped in scarlet Lannister cloaks so that people wouldn’t notice how much blood there truly was, and they were presented to Robert Baratheon as he sat on the throne for the first time.”

“Eddard Stark left the capital and lifted the siege at Storm's End, were Robert’s brother Stannis was being starved out. Eddard Stark went to find his sister but she was dead, he returned to Winterfell after his sister was found. Meanwhile your mother and your other brother was at Dragonstone. Robert instructed his brother Stannis to take the castle. But Ser Willem Darry managed to escape when a storm broke most of the Targaryen fleet.” And now the Queen was crying, Missandei consoled her. It was strange, he had never seen her so vulnerable.

“This is what almost every child within Westeros learns, my family was part of the rebellion and I can tell you that those are not lies. I hope you can understand why I had to tell you the truth about the rebellion, especially with Jon Snow on his way. I can't allow you to call the Starks usurper dogs within his hearing, you would have been making a fool of yourself in front of the whole court, my Queen.” Tyrion spoke hard and seriously to the Queen.

“The Starks had more reason than anyone to rebel after your father killed Lord Rickard Stark and his heir Brandon Stark, and after Lyanna Stark was kidnapped as well, and that is unfortunately the hard truth.”
The Queen wiped her tears on her sleeves, and she looked more like a girl then a Queen. “My brother Viserys always told me that Rhaegar and Lyanna Stark ran off together, and that they loved each other. But Viserys never told me about my father’s madness, or that he killed those Starks in the throne room,” the Queen replied sadly.

“As I said the story within Westeros is that Lyanna was kidnapped.” Tyrion shrugged. “Ser Barristan Selmy has also spoken in such a manner that made me think that Rhaegar and Lyanna loved each other. He said that Rhaegar loved his Lyanna, but his love lead to thousands dying.” the Queen recalled.

“As I said Your Grace, I have never really studied the rebellion and I’ve never given it much deeper thought, I suppose it is possible. Mayhaps you could one day record that in your own history books.”

“But that is in the past, we have to think about the here and now.”

“So why would this Jon Snow then even want to come to Dragonstone? He wouldn’t have any reason to seek an alliance with someone from a family who killed a lot of his family.” the Queen questioned.

“As I said that was in the past at least some twenty years past, everyone involved with the rebellion has died off, at the moment the Starks would be more interested in killing Freys and Lannisters. Which they have already started with.”

“I would still have to be careful, from the information you have given me it sounds like the man is an oathbreaker, and he has stolen his trueborn sister’s title.”

“Yes, that is what it sounds like,” Tyrion confirmed. Tyrion stood-up. “Tyrion,” the Queen spoke to him directly, “thank you for providing me with the truth.”

“It is what I am here for. Will you excuse me my Queen, I still have some matters to attend to within the village.” The Queen excused him.

He was glad to be done with this task. It must be strange to grow-up with the idea that your family is good and righteous, and then to have that ideal vision about your family completely ripped from your life forever. This is a problem that Tyrion of course would never encounter, *my father and my loving sister have always been cunts right from the start.* Tyrion set out to see some stone mason
Their court was growing, and that afternoon Lady Tanda Stokeworth came to see him about helping to supply the Dothraki while they stayed within Harrenhal. Tyrion also gave directions to the guards and the patrol ships to report any approaching vessels, he did not see the Queen for the rest of the day.

Four days after Tyrion’s discussion with the Queen an early patrol boat spotted some sails, with a blue-green merman. Tyrion was slouching half upright, fast asleep in a comfortable chair within the library, after his discussion with the Queen he became slightly more interested in Robert’s Rebellion, he was asleep with a book about the Battle of the Bells upon his lap, when a serving boy came to wake him.

“Milord, Lord Varys requested your presence within the council chamber.” Tyrion thanked the boy and he quickly disappeared. The candle next to him was burned out. He could feel a dull ache at the back of his eyes. As he walked through the rooms and corridors of the stone drum keep, the flames from the torches was flickering his shadow upon the walls, it was still dark, but he could see that the light from the skies was starting to win out against the darkness of the Night. Tyrion shivered as he could feel the cold of the early morning prickle his skin.

Varys was waiting for him right next to Dorne at the painted table, his hands was folded into his wide sleeves, and he was perfumed and ready as always, while Tyrion himself likely smelled like a wine soaked rug within a brothel.

“Our patrol boats have spotted an envoy of Manderly ships” Varys informed him. Tyrion was actually surprised he had prepared himself for the arrival from the North in about a fortnight after they had received the message from Ser Wylis Manderly. That second raven must have been slightly delayed.

“One of their ships is war gallery,” Varys informed him. “I didn't even realize the North had any war galleries,” Tyrion answered. “How long do we have before they arrive?”

“The patrol men suggested that they should reach the shore of Dragonstone by late morning at earliest.” Varys replied. “I will send someone to inform our Queen later, it is still quite early.”

He left Varys behind and made his way back to his own chambers, some rays of light were trespassing through the grey of the early morning sky. After reaching his chamber Tyrion called for the servants to bring him a bath and some hot water. It took a while for the hot water to reach him, and the water cooled off far too quickly. He dressed himself and felt much more refreshed
after his quick bath. He ordered bacon and bread to break his fast, and he send a message to the Queen about their Northern arrival.

The Queen send a message back to him that he should meet Jon Snow with an envoy. Tyrion ordered a servant to prepare bread and salt, later he was called to the courtyard of the castle where twenty Dothraki soldiers had assembled as part of his welcoming party. The sun was climbing higher into the sky. Tyrion and the Dothraki bloodriders made their way through Dragonstone’s throne room. Dragonstone was now truly starting to resemble the court of a ruler, clearly court gossip was already raging through this makeshift court of the Queen. All of the Lords and Ladies within the castle was assembled neatly in front of the Dragonstone throne, with a clear path in the middle that lead straight to the throne. Many of their courtiers were whispering together, everyone was eager to see some interaction between their Queen and the upstart bastard who called himself the King in the North. Tyrion was much less eager, but the situation was unavoidable now.

Tyrion made his way out of the great hall into the front courtyard, there was a litter waiting for him with eight servants to carry him to the shore of Dragonstone. Tyrion smiled with relief as he climbed into the litter, well at least he wasn’t heavy. After the fiasco of having Lady Olenna carried up all of the stairs in a lounge chair, he actually took her advice and made sure that there was a litter available to use instead. And that was the only fruitful contribution from her visit.

Once they had reached the lonely shore with its stoney dragonscale-like formations, Tyrion ordered the litter and the soldiers to stop. He immediately send the litter and the servants back up again, the Northern envoy did not need to know that he was carried to the shore. He arranged the Dothraki soldiers in two straight lines and he stood at the end. The sun was still climbing higher into the sky, how is it, that I always have to wait for envoys, he wondered to himself. He shifted his weight from leg to the other leg, the Dothraki didn’t show any sign of strain. Finally when the sun was already hanging in the noon sky, a boat was spotted by a tall Dothraki soldier, Tyrion did not have to wait long to see the boat.

The boat was approaching the shore at a snail's pace, as the boat approached the beach, his vision became clearer. Jon Snow was standing at the head of the boat he was staring ahead of himself with a steely expression. When they were near the shore he jumped out, and he started to pull on the boat from the front, while his soldiers behind him was almost struggling to keep up. He set his course in Tyrion’s direction with long determined strides, a middle aged man followed almost alongside him.

Tyrion remembered the sullen, sulky boy with ringlet curls who was beating a practice dummy outside of the great hall of Winterfell while his family was feasting. As Jon Snow approached Tyrion could see that the uncertain boy was gone. He wasn’t dressed as one would expect a King to be dressed, he wore the typical Stark armour, his sole concession to decoration was a gorget engraved with two snarling direwolves facing each other. His hair was tied behind his head in an austere manner. There was only ten personal guards with him, five were Stark men while the other five were clearly Manderly men carrying tridents as spears. The man with him was likely an advisor, but he was dressed more as a merchant then a Lord.
He finally stopped in front of Tyrion, he could see that Jon Snow’s gaze had fallen to his Hand of the Queen pin. “Jon Snow!” Tyrion exclaimed with a smile and held out his hand. He didn’t know what he should call him now, it would feel strange to call him, His Grace, and he was sworn to his own Queen he couldn’t just acknowledge anyone else. There was a silence that stretched for a few moments, and everyone looked at each other. But Jon Snow did shake his hand. “My Lord of Lannister.” he replied in return. Tyrion noticed that he carried a few scars upon his face, that wasn’t there before. He is warrior, Tyrion quickly realized.

“Queen Daenerys has asked that I should welcome you upon the shores of Dragonstone, since I told her that I knew you once.” Jon Snow only nodded in reply.

“My men will take your belongings to the castle, unfortunately it is quite a steep climb up to the castle, if you are tired from your journey, I could arrange to have you carried to the top by litter. “That will not be necessary,” Jon Snow replied. They started to walk up the stairs, Jon Snow had to slow his gait in order for him to tag along.

“Was this your first trip upon a ship?” Tyrion enquired. “No,” he answered. “Or perhaps it was your first time on the open waters of the sea?”

“No it wasn’t,” he answered. “We only received the message from Lord Manderly four days past. “Did you have to sail through any storms to get here?”

“There was some minor storms as one would expect with the arrival of winter,” he answered.

“How is Lady Sansa doing?” He was truly curious about Sansa, did Jon Snow truly usurp her claim, and was she really married to Ramsay Bolton.

Tyrion saw a darkness and a shadow pass over Jon Snow’s face, “Sansa is doing about as well as she could be doing, after what she has experienced.” He replied bluntly.

“I was concerned about Lady Sansa after she had disappeared, and I was arrested. My father forced us to get married, I tried my best to help her.” Tyrion was rambling.

Jon Snow the boy had very few words, and now he was a man of few words.
“Sansa did inform me that you showed her some kindness.” Jon Snow replied after a while. Just as they were very close to the top Drogon suddenly swooped past, he dived straight towards them and just before crashing into them headfirst he flew straight over their heads instead, Jon Snow and the man that was following him, quickly fell to the ground. Jon Snow’s reflexes was quick but he didn’t show any fear. Drogon flew so close to them that they could have touched his legs as he passed them by.

“You have just been welcomed by Dragon,” Tyrion stated. It was a strange reaction from the dragon. Tyrion had never seen the dragon behaving as he did today, generally he wasn’t interested in people. Their party made their way through the entrance with the two dragons snarling at them. They made their way to a small ante-chamber, just outside of the great hall, there was a small table with bread and salt, Tyrion picked up the bread and salt and held it out to Jon, he ate the bread and salt slowly, while Tyrion copied him.

“I hope guestrights still means something here,” Jon Snow stated.

“It does”, Tyrion answered. “I am going to have to ask you and your men to surrender your weapons.” Jon Snow took his sword belt off reluctantly. It was quite a long sword in length and Tyrion was surprised to see that the pommel was actually the head of a white wolf on closer inspection. His guards followed his example and handed their weapons to the Dothraki. Tyrion took the sword belt from Jon Snow's advisor. “My Lord? Tyrion questioned. “Ser Davos Seaworth,” he answered. *Our missing bannerman.*

Two Unsullied guards were posted at the entrance of the great hall with spears held upright. Tyrion nodded at them and they opened the two large doors. It was a long walk to the other end of the room, they walked past all of the other Lords and Ladies, all of the eyes within the room was focused on their procession to the front. The Queen was sitting regally and proudly upon her throne, wearing her striking black and red Targaryen regalia with her shiny silver-blond hair, she stood out in strong contrast against the dull rocks, her presence consumed the whole room. Tyrion would have liked to look over his shoulder to see Jon Snow’s expression upon seeing his Queen for the first time. Missandei was standing faithfully alongside the Queen. They came to a halt about twenty feet away from the Queen.

“You are being approached by the Bastard of Winterfell!” Missandei announced loudly and clearly throughout the great hall. Tyrion could only grind his teeth together in a response. He suddenly recalled how Robert once announced him as the Lannister imp in front of half the court, in order to shame Cersei.

“And may I also present, Ser Davos Seaworth,” Tyrion announced clearly. The Queen looked from him to Ser Davos Seaworth with speculation in her eyes. Tyrion left the Northerners in front of the throne and went to stand right next to his Queen as he always did.
“You have the honour of appearing in the presence of Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen
The first of her name, Queen of Meereen and the Bay of Dragons, Queen of the Andals, the
Rhoynar and of the First Men, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, Lady of Dragonstone,
Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Mhysa the Breaker of Chains, The Unburnt, and the Mother of
Dragons.”

Tyrion may have been imagining it but Jon Snow looked almost impatient as Missandei recited all
of their Queen’s titles. Ser Davos Seaworth quickly give two steps forward towards the throne, the
Dothraki placed their hands upon the pommels of their swords, Ser Davos Seaworth didn’t seem to
notice he starting talking before anyone else had the chance.

“Your Grace,” he bowed “Lord Hand”, “my Lady” he bowed elegantly with a touch of mirth
towards himself and Missandei as well.

“Allows me the great honour of presenting my King to you properly.” He waved towards Jon Snow
with exaggerated mannerisms, pointing with both of his hands towards Jon Snow, and bowing
towards him as well.

Your Grace, my Lords and Ladies, you are all in the presence of His Grace, Jon Snow the White
Wolf of House Stark, The Chosen King in the North and of the Vale, the Lord Protector of the
Northern Kingdoms, Leader of the Wildlings, the Reborn and the bastard of Winterfell, Ser Davos
Seaworth added with smile at the end.

Ser Davos Seaworth stood sideways while giving his mocking spiel on Queen Daenerys’ titles, he
spoke to the whole of the great hall, not just with the Queen. Tyrion had noticed that Jon Snow has
given Ser Davos Seaworth a hard look when he started and again when he mentioned something
about the redborn, I’ve heard something about being redborn again in Essos, but he couldn’t recall
from where. The audience also gasped in shock when Ser Davos Seaworth openly declared Jon
Snow as the leader of the Wildlings. The story about him leading the Wildlings through the Wall
must clearly be accurate then. He didn’t want to know what his Queen made of this situation, he
peered towards his Queen and as expected she had a look of cold fury within her eyes.

A servant again came forward with the bread and the salt, and his Queen ate some of the bread and
salt with a swig of wine, Jon Snow and Ser Davos took some bread and salt as well. Tyrion wanted
to establish very clearly that guestrights was still important within Westeros, otherwise it becomes
difficult to treat with anyone peacefully. The Freys really fucked that up for everyone.

“Ser Davos Seaworth,” the Queen addressed him in a strong voice. “Just call me Davos or Ser
Davos, You Grace.” Tyrion couldn't decide if the man was impertinent on purpose or just woefully
imprudent.

“Ser Davos Seaworth, the Queen stated again, much harder this time. You are one of the bannerman sworn to Dragonstone, and yet here you stand right in front of me declaring your allegiance towards the North.”

Next she addressed Jon Snow directly, “Jon Snow you have answered my summons very expeditiously, can I conclude that you have arrived at my court to swear fealty and your alliance to House Targaryen as your forebears have done?”

“We won't swear fealty to House Targaryen or your cause. But I'm willing to discuss an alliance.” The great hall was silent as a crypt, it felt as if even the air might be afraid to move. Both monarchs were looking at each other without backing down from the challenge. His Queen was the one who broke the silence, but she did not look away.

“You refuse to swear fealty and bent the knee to the rightful Queen of the Seven Kingdoms? Your ancestor swore fealty to Aegon the conqueror, and your companion Ser Davos Seaworth swears his allegiance to you whilst he is my bannerman. This is treason, why shouldn't I just have you both executed? Tyrion could see that the Queen was furious, her eyes was aflame.

“You can kill me but it wouldn't make any difference with your standing in North, and there is a bigger enemy that we should all be concerned about.”

He wasn't completely wrong, Cersei was a much bigger problem for them right now, she had the capital, and the throne within the capital. They had something in common, they both wanted Cersei dead.

“My family has ruled the Seven Kingdoms for three hundred years, the throne and the Seven Kingdoms are mine by right through all the laws of gods and men, if the North and the Vale doesn’t swear fealty to me then you are an enemy of mine.” The Queen declared with some veracity.

“Rights?” Jon Snow questioned her, he suddenly had a sadder look upon his face. “You speak as if rights are something simple, something that is edged out in stone. But what right do any of us really hold over the lands we die and live upon. Before House Targaryen came to Westeros the south belonged to the Andals for six thousand years. The blood of the First Men runs through House Stark, and House Stark has held the North for eight thousand years. What is eight thousand years against three hundred? A drop within a jug of water.”
“You are not even a true Stark.” The Queen told him.

“Aye, I am not a Stark. And some men would say that House Targaryen lost any right they had to the throne and the Seven Kingdoms after they lost the throne during Robert’s rebellion.

Rights, and the throne itself doesn't really matter. All of these squabbles will soon melt away like snow.”

Tyrion intercepted their discussion quickly, “Your Grace, our Northern envoy has come a long way, let's allow them some time to rest and then we can meet with them again, tonight over a private dinner where we can continue this discussion.”

“He nodded to a servant and a Dothraki guard, please escort our guest to their chambers that we have prepared for them, and see that they have everything they need.”

“Court is dismissed for the day,” he announced in the Queen’s stead. They made their way to the council room in silence. Somewhere from behind Tyrion had noticed that Varys was tip-toeing after them.

Tyrion couldn’t let that line of discussion continue in front of their whole court, it is one thing to have philosophical discussions in private, but it is not something that the court needed to hear. All of them sat down at once, while the Queen’s guards remained stationed at the door.

“He refuses to bent the knee!” The Queen stated she was obviously in disbelief.

“Your Grace,” we have offered guest rights to him, so I propose that we should try and understand what his purpose is in coming to Dragonstone tonight at the private meeting.”

Tyrion was curious, if he was looking for a marriage arrangement then he was going about it in a very peculiar manner. Usually you would try to court your intended not antagonise her, especially not when she was the mother of three fire breathing dragons.

“Your Grace, I propose that we should show more courtesy and diplomacy tonight.” the Queen’s focus has now shifted, her eyes narrowed towards him.
“What do you mean? You were the one who told me that he is a oathbreaker, and he tried to renounce my rightful claim to the throne in front of my own court!”

“I meant let’s forgo the petty humiliations, such as continuously alluring to the fact that he is a bastard.”

“I was trying show him his rightful place, according to the information you have given me he has usurped his own sister's rightful place, and he wants to steal half of my Kingdom that he has no rights to, and on top of that he has crowned himself as a King of two of my Kingdoms. Don’t you think it is time that someone should show him what his real place is?” The Queen asked with indignation.

“My Lord Hand,” Varys tried capture his attention. “I ve seen many Kings, and even more great Lords, and rich men. I’ve almost never seen a less entitled man before in my life. For someone who has declared himself as a King, I would have expected much more arrogance. I find the contrast interesting, you’ve known him before what have you gleaned from the situation?

It was a strange situation, Varys had the right for it. The Queen was watching their discussion closely. Jon Snow certainly wasn’t dressed as King and he thought about how Jon Snow simply jumped out of the boat and started pulling the boat in by himself, he didn’t act like a King. And yet there was a certain quiet air of dignified authority and determination about him.

“My Lord Spider,” Tyrion addressed Varys, “I believe you have the right of it, mayhaps we are missing some information about this situation. He might be a Snow, but he definitely has the Stark grimness. Mayhaps we could understand more if we knew what he wanted.”

“Would you excuse us for a moment,” Tyrion inquired from Varys. “Of course my Lord Hand, I was just on my way,” he bowed and left the chamber. Since Tyrion had tried to explain to the Queen what occurred during Robert's Rebellion the bond and trust between them have grown deeper.

“He isn’t as unassuming as you and Varys are trying to paint him. He still denied my claim to the throne for everyone to hear.”

“Perhaps, you are right my Queen, but you also immediately placed him in a defensive position when you completely denied his authority.” Tyrion answered.

“But he has no right to any authority! As a bastard he isn’t entitled to any authority according to the laws of Westeros.”
“That may be so, and yet we can see that your own bannerman is following him around quite happily, so he does hold some authority whatever the laws on paper might say. My repulsive nephew was the King, and yet everyone knew that it was my father who was actually the real King. So it would be better if we didn’t just completely ignore his authority tonight at dinner.”

“Fine,” his Queen answered curtly. “I just don’t enjoy seeing this man, or any man stealing authority away from his sister. My own brother never give me any authority and he sold me to the Dothraki, like a common slave.”

“And you know what my answer or advice about the situation would be, Sansa Stark isn’t any concern of ours,” the Queen nodded with resignation. “However, I do believe Your Grace, that you truly don’t need to be concerned about this situation, from what I know about Jon Snow, I doubt that he would undermine his own sister completely.”

“You may have the most rightful claim to the throne but that doesn’t mean that you don’t have to win over the people, Your Grace.”

“I will win over the people by seeing that justice is done within the realm,” she answered. “That may be true for a good long term strategy, but we can still use alliances right now, especially with my sister on the throne.”

“Don’t try to show, Jon Snow what his rightful place is. I am a dwarf. I’ve even been called a twisted demon monkey by some, men have always tried make me understand what the rightful place for an aberration such as myself should be.” The Queen looked at him with regret in her eyes.

“Just as sure as I am an Imp, I can tell you quite confidently that men have always tried to put Jon Snow in his rightful place as well. You are not reinventing the wheel here, Your Grace.”

“You are not doing anything different from the rest of the world by trying to make him understand that he would never have a rightful place. Throughout his life he has always been told that he is a bastard, people have made sure that he understands it.”

“You know that it doesn’t matter to me which title a person might have been born with.” the Queen answered somewhat defensively.

“Of course Your Grace, but that is not what you showed to Jon Snow just now. He has every reason to believe that you are just like most of the Lords within Westeros, who places themselves on a pedestal above others.”
“I still have some preparations to make” the Queen stood and left quickly. Tyrion just shook his head to himself. The Queen always had good intentions for the most part, but her execution wasn't always on point.

Tyrion arrived early for the private dinner, it was in a chamber near the great hall, the chamber had to be prepared in advance, but it wasn’t a bad idea in general, his Queen will likely have to host a few private dinner discussions in the near future. It seemed as if the Queen had brought some of her eastern drapes and silks into the room, there was a foreign smell of burning incense, they had even managed to find some flowers from somewhere. Tyrion sat down and called for some wine, *I might as well get started*.

The Queen and Missandei arrived while he was already busy with his second glass of wine, it was a good Dornish red wine. It had been a while since Tyrion had the pleasure of such a good wine, which meant that the evening was already off to a good start. He wondered if Varys was perhaps creeping around somewhere behind the drapes. The door creaked open.

“His Grace, Jon Snow, the King in the North accompanied by Ser Davos Seaworth of Cape Wrath,” a servant announced the entrance of their Northern envoy. Tyrion nodded toward the Queen, clearly she has altered her strategy.

Missandei stood, “You have the honour of appearing in the presence of Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen The first of her name, Queen of Meereen and the Bay of Dragons, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and of the First Men, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, Lady of Dragonstone, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Mhysa the Breaker of Chains, The Unburnt, and the Mother of Dragons.

Both Jon Snow and Ser Davos inclined their heads towards the Queen. It wasn’t a large table, the table could only seat about eight people. Jon Snow sat at the head of the table on the opposite side of the Queen. It seemed as if he was trying to appear more Kingly, he wore a black tunic with a white direwolf embroidered on his right breast, the direwolf had red eyes, Tyrion could recall that Jon Snow’s own direwolf also had red eyes. It was a very simple garment, but the embroidery was very well done.

Their first course of fish arrived, it was smoked with spring onion and garlic. The dishes was first presented to the Queen and then to Jon Snow. There was a silence in the air as everyone started to eat. Tyrion thought he might as well break the silence, “so you said the trip down to Dragonstone didn’t take too long?” It was Ser Davos who answered him, “it actually went very well it took us just over a fortnight to reach Dragonstone. Some of the water were a bit more ragged than usual, but we didn’t encounter any big storms as one is likely to get at the start of Winter.”
“So I take it that winter has actually started? It is colder in Westeros than when I left here, but it always takes longer for winter to reach within the south. I can’t imagine how the Wall must feel right now.” Tyrion could feel a shiver run up his spine at the thought of the cold of the Wall, he had never experienced such cold before, and the gods know he will hopefully never have to experience it again.

“The snows are falling in the North, when we left Winterfell the snow was already falling two to three inches deep every night,” Ser Davos was the one who answered him again.

“Winter is here,” Jon Snow replied solemnly.

The next course was brought over, it was peppers stuffed with crab meat and rice. The King and the Queen was just glaring at each other, from over the table. Tyrion decided then that small talk was likely not going do much for these two. Tyrion decided that he should try to get to the point.

“King Jon,” Tyrion started, it felt strange to suddenly call him a King. “help us to understand, you have come all the way from Winterfell to Dragonstone in your own capacity and yet you are not interested in swearing fealty, we are always happy to receive any guests, but why have you traveled all the way to Dragonstone?”

“Because the Long Night is coming, and I need dragonglass,” he answered.

Tyrion tried to keep his facial expression even. Dragonglass? This is not what he expected.

“You spoke about an alliance earlier?” The Queen finally spoke out.

“Aye, it would be in our best interest to create an alliance but if that isn’t possible then the dragonglass will have to do,” Jon Snow answered curtly.

“If we did reach some agreement or made an alliance, how much soldiers would you be able to provide for my conquest of Westeros?” the Queen asked.

“Right now, none, but…” Jon Snow was trying to answer, but the Queen interrupted him.
“You were the one who proposed an alliance and yet you are not willing to provide anything for the alliance,” the Queen frowned, “in case you haven’t noticed I have three large dragons, I am not the one who needs an alliance, I can easily just take the North and the Vale for myself, right now I am not seeing much of a reason why I shouldn’t do just that.” The Queen stated in somewhat of a threatening manner.

“If it was so easy, why haven’t you taken Kings Landing yet?” Jon Snow asked her. Tyrion could see that his Queen was becoming angry again, but she did well to make sure that her anger wasn’t to obvious.

“Because I am generating support, I don't just want to start a full scale war, but I will if I have to, the Slave masters of Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen has learned that lesson to their own peril,” the Queen answered with some good conviction.

“When Aegon the conqueror invaded Westeros he was never able to subdue the Dornish, the dragons was useless in Dorne, because the Dornish could hide in their mountains and their sand.”

“You can try to invade the North but we will use a similar strategy as Dorne. Winter has come, and we will hide beneath the snow, you would never be able to find us.”

“I have more than just dragons, I have a hundred thousand Dothraki soldiers and eight thousand Unsullied, we could easily find you in your snow, Aegon never had a large army with him, but I came prepared.” The Queen smiled sweetly after her words of destruction.

“I would gladly invite your southern armies into the North, you and your southern armies have never experienced true cold or winter conditions, your soldiers wouldn’t last a fortnight within the North. You should ask Lord Tyrion he has experienced some winter conditions, but the winter is already colder than what he experienced at the Wall during the summertime.

And you can kill me if you want to, my sister is ruling in my stead and I've already given her direct instructions about how to fight against the dragons.”

_Fuck, this again wasn’t going well_ , Tyrion knew he would have to jump in again. Tyrion picked up his dagger and hit it against his wine glass. “Children, children, there is no need to fight! We just have to try and understand where everyone is coming from.”

“King Jon, why wouldn’t you offer us any soldiers if we were willing to make an alliance with the North, and what the fuck do you want to do with dragonglass?”
“The true war lies to the North, the throne and any southern war is meaningless. We don't have much time, the great war will soon start, if the Night King and the White Walkers and their army of the dead passes through the Wall, then the whole of Westeros would die.” Jon Snow paused.

“We need to prepare for the great war, and everyone will need to fight together.”

This was first time Tyrion had seen Jon Snow truly passionate, his eyes burned with a fierce determination. Maybe he has spent too much time on the Wall.

“White Walkers?” Tyrion finally manage to blurt out.

“Ser Willem Darry who helped us to escape from the Usurper’s warth, sometimes used to say that the White Walkers would take us when we didn’t behave.” The Queen answered with a slight hint of sadness.

“Your Grace,” Ser Davos addressed the Queen directly. “The Night King is amassing an army of the dead, his army will soon be larger or it might already be larger than any southern army. The Night King reanimates the dead, men don't just die in death they become thralls of the Night King. Sitting on the iron throne will not change that.”

Tyrion shook his head, “Can you hear yourself? Are you trying to tell me that White Walkers, snarks and grumpkins exists? You have to excuse me when I say that I don't believe in children's stories.”

“I have fought against these childhood stories, I've seen the White Walkers kill thousands of men in a matter of a few heartbeats, I've seen the Night King reanimate everyone that was killed in that moment, by simply lifting his arms. I've fought against dead men who wanted me dead, wildlings and Nights Watch brothers alike. I have fought against a White Walker who shatters any normal weapons. I've been living these childhood stories!” Jon said fiercely.

“Your Grace.” Jon Snow addressed the Queen. “Everyone thought that the dragons were gone, and you managed to birth three dragons. Dragons are fire made flesh, is it truly so hard to believe that White Walkers might exist?”

“White Walkers, are ice remade into flesh.”
Tyrion could see that it seemed like the Queen was actually considering what Jon Snow said, *has the whole world gone fuckking mad?*

“Your Grace,” Tyrion said to his Queen in a somewhat condescending manner. “Dragons are creatures that died out a century or two ago. When I first came to King Landing, I located and looked upon the dragon skulls, dragons are animals. No one knows if White Walkers ever existed, there is no proof that they ever existed.”

“You don't build a seven hundred foot Wall to keep out the Wildlings,” Ser Davos answered.

“Dragons are magic, Lord Tyrion,” the Queen answered, “I've seen magic. But Lord Tyrion is also right, dragons are known to all, there is nothing to say that these White Walkers exists.”

“What would you have me do about the matter?” She asked Jon Snow.

“Fight! We all have to fight against the White Walkers together. We have to stop them before they can get past the Wall. Everyone needs to prepare.”

“So you want me to fight these White Walkers in the North, yet you are not willing to bend the knee, and you are not willing to help me fight for the iron throne?”

“The North has suffered, bled and lost too much, from fighting unnecessary wars within the south, there is only one war that matters. The iron throne doesn’t matter, if the White Walkers get south then everyone would die. If you want to be the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms shouldn’t you think about your people first? What will it matter when you sit upon some throne when everyone within your Kingdom are dead?”

Tyrion could see that the Queen was furious, she was red and boiling with anger. “I care about my people, I have saved thousands of slaves, what have you done?”

The meeting was going wrong again. Tyrion decided to just blurt out something.

“Why have you let the Wildlings through the Wall?” There was silence for a moment, everyone had time to compose themselves again.
“Because, I knew they would have been killed by the White Walkers, and they would have been more dead soldiers for the Night King.”

“You grace and Lord Tyrion,” Davos answered, “we have given you a lot to think about. It is not easy to hear and understand how any of this could be possible. I serve, His Grace Jon Snow, because he is the only man who would at least try to fight against the White Walkers. He was almost lost to us forever,” Jon Snow give Ser Davos a hard look and Ser Davos paused for a while before continuing, “he has risked his life again and again, he can't fight the White Walkers alone.”

_Hmm, that was an interesting exchange I might have to figure out what that is about._

“You grace, we are truly grateful for the hospitality you have received us with. You didn’t need to listen to us, you didn’t even need to allow us access to the island. As I ve said this is a difficult matter, you should at least have some time to think about it. And Mayhaps we could just mine some dragonglass in the meantime?”

“Ser Davos is right, it has been a long day for us all. I would kindly ask your leave to retire for the evening, you have been given a lot to think about.” Jon supported curtly what Ser Davos said.

The Queen only nodded her head.

Jon Snow stood and Ser Davos followed, “thank you and goodnight, Your Grace,” Jon said emotionlessly before walking out of the chamber.

There were still two courses left to serve. The Queen was still somewhat flustered from her earlier fury.

“Lady Olenna comes to me demanding justice, many of these Lords who have sworn fealty to me, has lost someone in that damn wildfire blast, they all cry for fire and blood, and yet I delay my attack on Kings Landing to spare the people, and this Jon Snow comes here and tells me that I should start thinking about the people!”

“I almost feel like burning down the whole North right now, while I wait for your plans to develop within and around Kings Landing.”
“I am afraid that Jon Snow might have been right,” Tyrion sighed. “It might be impossible to attack the North during winter time, your soldiers wouldn’t last within the North. We might not have much of a choice, we might have to make an alliance with the North until summer comes again, but that could take years.”

“I have dragons, and the Unsullied can withstand almost anything,” the Queen answered.

“No army can withstand hunger and the cold, the North is vast and if they abandon their castles you would never find them even with your dragons,” Tyrion answered.

The Queen was clearly very frustrated, she wore an expression of cold anger. “What about these White Walkers,” the Queen asked.

“I honestly don't know, in truth this is not the first time I've heard this claim, Jeor Mormont, Ser Jorah’s father have also send letters from the Nights Watch, and he pleaded for more men to fight against the White Walkers and the dead, he was a honourable no nonsense type of man, he had no reason to lie.”

“Jon Snow was the Lord Commander after Jeor Mormont was killed, Jon Snow reminds me a lot of his father, who was also a honourable man. The problem is Northerners are a superstitious bunch, I've read a few books were some maester have speculated that the White Walkers might just have been a different tribe of Wildling from beyond the Wall, and I think that explanation makes the most sense. Perhap there is a tribe who pushed the other Wildlings to the Wall and now they might also want to get across the Wall? There are some very strange tribes beyond the Wall from what I've read.” Tyrion speculated while the Queen nodded along. “That sounds like a reasonable explanation.”

“I have never actually met a King before,” the Queen suddenly contemplated. “I've lived with a magister, I met men from the noble and ancient houses within Meereen along with slave masters, I was wed to a Dothraki Khal, I bedded Daario who was the leader of a sellsword company and I've met Lords from Westeros, but never a King.”

“The only King I've ever known was my brother Viserys, but he was only a beggar King. Jon Snow seems very different from all of these men. You and Varys might have been right, for someone who has proclaimed himself as a King he does not have the arrogance which one would expect.”

Tyrion didn’t understand what she was trying to say. “Well he wasn’t born to be a King, I doubt bastards receive any training in that field of study.”
“And yet he does seem to inspire a certain loyalty from my bannerman. I want to know all that there is to know about him, and I want to know who he speaks to and what is being said while he is here to mine for that dragonglass.”

“So you are going to allow him access to the dragonglass?” Tyrion asked somewhat surprised.

“You are the one who just told me that I should make some alliance with the North. Besides if he remains here then we might learn more about what is really happening in the North and your sister might think that we have some agreement with the North.”

“If there is actually anything North,” Tyrion mumbled. “That is actually not a bad play my Queen, it might make Cersei uncertain if she heard that the King in the North is here.”

“It has been a long day, I think I will retire for the night.” The Queen left their little dining chamber.

Tyrion didn’t understand how Jon Snow had became the King in the North and an oathbreaker. Perhaps he should try and approach Ser Davos, there might be some answers that he could provide. And then he suddenly understood it to a degree, Jon Snow hasn't abandoned the Night Watch, he left the Wall but he is still trying to fight against the White Walkers.
Sam II

Sam

Sam could feel himself grimace as he pushed his needle and thread through a lump of skin, his fingers felt clumsy and bearish as he tried his best to tie the thread into a neat knot. He peered over to Yanus, he seemed to be taking the procedure in his stride.

Sam shook his head at his own squeamishness, for weeks he has been fetching water and cleaning bed pans and yet, for some reason the idea of pushing a needle through living skin made him feel nauseous and lightheaded. It felt like this was his first experience, during all of his training days, thus far, that he has actually started to learn something that might be applicable for the battles to come. Therefore, Sam felt frustrated that he was bumbling his way through his first real task.

Distraction, he needed some type of a distraction. Sam’s thoughts immediately went to Gilly, it didn’t take much for his mind to visit the previous night. When Gilly was nakedly asleep in his arms, as he pondered his various distractions and challenges, he then came to the conclusion that when Gilly was by his side, Sam often felt like a man that could accomplish some great deeds. He could almost feel her steamy, steady breath, hot within his neck. Sam could feel a tingling sensation run through his spine. Unfortunately, he was not in Gilly’s warm embrace. He sighed as he peaked at Yanus, he had already completed his first cut of stitching, and was moving onto the next cut; that was made by maester Ebrose upon the rib cage of what was once the full carcass of a pig. Even the idea of hunting and skinning a creature never held any appeal for Sam.

Without much warning the pig in front of him morphed into Gilly, he was now threading a needle through Gilly’s pale, lifeless skin. The vision made him stumble backwards, the pleasant tingling sensation was replaced by a cold grip of heaviness upon his chest, the hair in his neck was standing on end, his legs felt weak. Sam fell backwards into a chair closeby with a deep sigh. I am exhausted. All of the late night reading was starting to take its toll.

“Samwell Tarly!” Maester Ebrose announced loudly behind him. Sam jumped out of the chair, “Maester”, Sam acknowledged. Maester Ebrose ignored him and went straight to the pig’s rib cage. He inspected Yanus’ stitches with a nod, and shook his head at Sam’s pitiful attempts.

“Stitching is one of the most important skills for your silver link,” Maester Ebrose stated matter-of-factly.

“Yanus, keep at it, if we are lucky we will have a living carcass for practice, on the morrow. Samwell, come with me.”

Sam removed his overall and bloodstained gloves, he quickly washed his hands at the water basin in the corner of the room. Maester Ebrose was already part-way out of the door, Sam tried his best to hobble after maester Ebrose.
“Come along Samwell,” he said as he waited for a moment, “there is a meeting within the chambers.”

Sam’s thoughts went back to when he first arrived, he acted as the cupbearer for one of their meetings within the chambers. They walked in silence though a few narrow stone passages until they arrived at the living quarters of the Archmasters. The buildings around this section were older and more grandiose in their design. Sam barely had time to admire the design and curvature of the roofs. The meeting within chambers was held within a secluded library, that was only accessible to the Archmaester. Sam was burning with curiosity about the titles that was available within this library.

A large round table occupied the centre of the room. A few of the maesters were already gathered at the table. Sam made his way to the side serving-table, the undeniable smell of fresh pastry wafted its way into Sam’s senses. It reminded him of home, there were pastries of different shapes and sizes, with honey cakes and lemon cakes. Sam took a big clay jug with Arbor gold and poured his way around the table. Sam was just about to serve some of the Dornish red, when the last two maesters arrived. Maester Ryam took the main seat with his golden rod, he tapped on the table twice.

“We have received word from Crakehall, there are rumours of an enormous Greyjoy fleet that is amassing around Pyke, they will soon take to the open sea, or they might have casted their sails already. Maester Tybone warns that they are on their way to Oldtown.”

“Pfft,” Maester Norren replied, “how can the Crakehalls know the minds of the Greyjoys? Balon Greyjoy has been sitting on his hands ever since that lacklustre invasion of the North.”

“Balon Greyjoy is long dead, according to the latest reports his long lost brother Euron Greyjoy has now taken command of the Iron Islands and the Iron fleet,” Archmaester Castos replied.

Maester Norren appeared slightly colourless for a moment or two after the revelation. “I will go and speak to Leyton Hightower,” Maester Norren declared. “His whole army is still intact he barely lifted a finger during the war of the five Kings. Oldtown should be fortified and prepared, it would be a disaster if the Citadel was attacked.”

The other maesters nodded along with Maester Norren. They continued to discuss some possible ideas for defending the Citadel, while Sam arranged some of the pastries and cheese upon serving dishes.

Archmaester Perestan address the group after the talk surrounding the Ironborn had died down a bit.

“Maester Wolkan from Winterfell has requested some information about a land dispute between the Woodleys and the Skeffingtons.”

“Such a request does not concern the members of a meeting within the chambers,” Archmaester
Ebrose replied.

“Indeed,” Archmaester Perestan answered back. “The more prudent fact is that Maester Wolkan requested this information in the name of Jon Snow; the King in the North.”

Sam almost dropped the jug of wine, it hit the serving table with a loud bang. Jon! He almost blurted out loud.

“It seems like the rumours have been confirmed,” Archmaester Castos answered questioningly. Archmaester Perestan placed a raven scoll in the middle of the table, Sam could see the direwolf of house Stark stamped into white wax.

King in the North? How could Jon be the King in the North, Sam felt confused and euphoric at the same time. He was delighted to hear that Jon was alive and doing well, but the King in the North, how did someone like Jon suddenly become a King?

“So, it would seem like the North is back under the control of the Starks.” Archmaester Raym stated needlessly.

“A bastard Stark,” Archmaester Guyne pointed out.

I should write a letter to Jon! Sam reflected joyously, as he served the pastries and cakes to the assembly of Archmasters.

“Archmaester Marwyn has asked me to speak about Daenerys Targaryen on his behalf. He wants to send a proper delegate to the Dragon Queen, he says that we will soon need the Dragon Queen and her dragons.” Archmaester Ebrose spoke his words with caution. “He has even suggested that he should go to the Dragon Queen himself.”

Archmaester Raym appeared visibly contrived before measuring out a reply to Archmaester Ebrose.

“Dragonstone already has a maester. Maester Pylos was quite competent at his studies, as far as I could remember. Archmaester Marwyn understands quite well that we- as the examples and Archmasters of the Citadel- do not involve ourselves in the politics of the realm and frivolous superstitions.

Where is Archmaester Marwyn? He could have attended this meeting in his own capacity.”

“He is gathering information about the Ironborn from the docks,” Archmaester Ebrose replied.

A few heartbeats of silence passed through the room, Sam almost instinctively held his breath, he was sure everyone could hear every breath he took. Archmaester Norren finally braved the silence.

“Have we received any requests from Kings Landing with regards to a new Grandmaester,” Archmaester Norren enquired.

A few moments of silence passed through the group once again.
“As long as Qyburn remains by the Queen’s side there will be no request from Kings Landing. The man is an abomination and an embarrassment to the Citadel!” Archmaester Guyne replied venomously.

“We should be represented within the capital, we should have a seat on the Small Council,” Archmaester Ryam answered angrily.

“One of his creatures has been parading openly alongside the Queen.” One of the maesters complained as Sam placed the jug of Arbor gold back upon the side table.

“An abomination,” Archmaester Ebrose confirmed again, “but there is nothing to be done about the situation at the moment.”

“As long as Cersei Lannister remains in power, Qyburn will remain useful to her.”

“That is enough for today, we’ll discuss the Ironborn matter upon further information.” Archmaester Ryam declared after some mumbling from around the table.

Two of the maesters quickly left the chambers while the remaining maesters huddled closer together and spoke to each other in muffled tones. Sam quickly stuffed his mouth with pastries. He couldn't help but to close his eyes with sheer delight at the light buttery dough, he has not tasted something so delicate in quite some time.

“Tarly!” Maester Ebrose suddenly called out to him from the doorway. Sam almost choked on his last bite.

“Come along.” Sam quickly shuffled after maester Ebrose until he was caught up with him. They moved in a south-eastern direction, after a while Sam realized where they were heading. They were heading towards the quarantine ward. Sam has been delivering food to the quarantine patients, but he has never really had any personal contact with the patients from the ward.

“I still have to visit the quarantine ward,” maester Ebrose stated unnecessarily just before they entered the section. Before entering the quarantine section it was mandatory to wear protective gloves and overalls. Sam and maester Ebrose quickly dressed themselves in the necessary protective clothes in an antechamber, before entering the ward.

Sam was anxious about meeting the people that were truly sick, these were the people that needed the help of the Citadel the most. It was a new opportunity for Sam to expand his knowledge, he wanted to pay as close attention as he possibly could to archmaester Ebrose. It was part of the reason why Sam had wanted to become a maester, he wanted to help those that were truly suffering. He wanted to be able to give people a sense of hope, that is what knowledge can bring, a sense of hope. They walked past a few empty cells, maester Ebrose finally stopped in front of a door, he knocked on the door and entered at the same time. The cell was small, there was just
enough room for a bed and a small nightstand with a jug of water and a wooden cup. There was a table with a parchment full of notes, as well as a bookcase with some supplies such as clean rags and bottles filled with all types of potions.

The first thing Sam noted as he entered the room was the smell of sickness, it was a sweltering, clammy smell with a hint of sweetness that filled the air within the room, there was also an undercurrent of an old foul sour smell.

A small boy lay quietly upon the bed with some furs pushed up under his chin. Maester Ebrose took the parchment from the table and called out to the boy. “Jaymer” he softly called out three times until the boy opened his sky blue eyes. His eyes were dull like an old dog, his eyes remained unfocused as consciousness and recognition started to seep through his mind, he was suddenly struck by a fit of coughing. Even before the boy was struck by the coughing fit Sam had noticed that his lungs were rattling with every struggling breath he took. Maester Ebrose signaled for Sam to hand the boy a clean cloth and some water, the cough almost rattled though Sam’s own bones, beads of sweat appeared on the boy’s forehead. The boy’s hands felt frail and skeletal, even though the gloves, as Sam helped the boy to drink some water.

Maester Ebrose asked the boy a series of questions, “how did you sleep”, “did you cough more”, “are you hot or feeling cold”? The boy answered in a croaky voice while sounding out of breath. “Bring me his chamber pot,” the maester instructed Sam. He peered over the content of the bowl, and motioned for Sam to follow his example. The chamber pot mostly contained vomit, mucus and blood. Sam replaced the chamber pot next to the bed, and he watched as maester Ebrose wrote something on the parchment. Maester Ebrose give the parchment for Sam to read, as he looked over the bottles of medicine. He took the parchment back, and made more notes.

Maester Ebrose told the boy softly: “Try to get some sleep, I will send an acolyte with a potion.”

They left the room quietly, Sam wanted to enquire about the boy, but maester Ebrose silenced him, “later, we still have other people to see.” They walked past one room and stopped at the next, once again the oppressive smell of sickness hit strongly though Sam’s senses. It almost consumed his mind as the sweet stifling smell invaded his body and head, Sam did his best to suppress any gagging reflexes.

This chamber was bigger than the first chamber, each side of the room held three beds that were stacked right on top of each other. The room contained six women, most of them where suffering from a severe fever. Bowls with water stood on their nightstands. Master Ebrose checked their fever, and inspected their bodies that were covered in sores. Sam did not quite know where to look as he helped with the procedure, he did not want to blush but he could feel the heat spread towards his cheeks. Sam once again had to inspect their chamber pots. Maester Ebrose scribbled some notes on the parchment that was located on a table in the middle of the room. Sam tried to look over his shoulder to see what he was writing, they left the chamber as quietly as they entered.

The next chamber was three doors onwards, maester Ebrose knocked lightly on the door. “Enter,” Sam could hear a man’s voice answering on the other side of the door. The smell in this room was not as distinctive as with the other rooms. A man was sitting upright in a chair next to the bed. Sam did not immediately notice signs of any affliction. “Maester,” the man nodded politely as they entered the chamber. Then Sam saw his hand, he has seen it before on Shireen’s cheek, the man
had grayscale.

“Ser Jorah Mormont,” maester Ebrose greeted back. Sam could only register one word within his mind, Mormont. He was gaping at the man. Sam realized he must have said it out loud as the other men were staring at him intently. “Pardon me Ser, are you related to Jeor Mormont of the Nights Watch by any chance?” Sam asked, although he already had an inkling.

“Lord Commander Jeor Mormont, was my father,” Ser Jorah answered sadly whilst looking down to the floor.

“I served under your father,” Sam answered plainly.

Archmaester Ebrose give Sam a stern look, and Sam restricted the words he wanted to say. “Ser Jorah, how has the grayscale progressed, and are you feeling any side effects?” Maester Ebrose continued his examination, and looked at some of the afflicted parts.

“Ser, your grayscale infection is continuing at a normal pace for this type of affliction. I must warn you- Ser; you need to start making arrangements. Draw-up your will and make your final preparations. I can send an enquiry to the docks; to ask after a boat that might be sailing close to old Valyria.”

“We can't do anything for you.” Ser Jorah only give a small resoluted nod towards the maester. He has accepted death before.

They left the room as silently as they came. Sam wanted to understand how Lord Commander Mormont’s exiled son came to be within the Citadel suffering from grayscale. “You have some questions?” Maester Ebrose enquired. Sam did not know where to start, he wanted to know about the condition of the young boy, and he was curious about Ser Jorah Mormont.

“Grayscale can be cured, I’ve seen someone- Shireen Baratheon, she was cured from grayscale,” Sam finally uttered.

“Grayscale can sometimes be cured in children,” the maester answered nonchalantly as they moved closer to the regular quarters of the infirm.

Sam felt downcasted, “has grayscale ever been cured?”

Maester Ebrose seem to contemplate the question for a few moments, “there was one maester his name is Mandryk, he did cure a few advanced cases.”

“Then we might be able to cure Ser Jorah Mormont!” Sam exclaimed.

“His methods were not acceptable to the Citadel, for some reason I can't recall,” maester Ebrose answered. Sam almost did not hear his reply because he was already thinking about how he could get his hands on maester Maldryk’s work, it must be in the restricted area. Sam’s mind went back to the boy.

“Can anything be done for the boy?” Sam asked after a pause. The master give a long sigh before answering,” the boy was born with lung sickness, there isn’t much more we can do for him, he has already lived longer than anyone expected him to.”

“And those women?”
“They are whores from the docks, it seems like they were all visited by the same Tyroshi sailors.”

“Let me tell you something Samwell, no one wants to die alone in a small, irriguous corner of the Citadel. People want to die with their loved ones by their side, these people come here out of sheer desperation, we are their last and only chance, unfortunately we can only do so much. Sometimes all of the knowledge in the universe is not enough to stop the inevitable. Not everyone is meant to live.”

“You are just in time for the noon rounds, lunch should be starting soon.” Sam made his way to the kitchens, feeling somewhat dejected and sluggish. “What happen to you?” Yanus enquired.

“I accompanied Maester Ebrose on a visit to the quarantine wards”

“Oh, I haven’t done that yet,” Yanus replied intrigued. You might not find the experience so interesting if you truly knew what it meant.

It took a great deal of concentration from Sam to make his way through the rest of the day. He was almost haggard at the end of the day, as he made his way back to his little cell. He had promised Gilly that he would visit her and little Sam tonight. The first thing he did as he entered his room was to fumble for a candle, it took some time but he could finally see his room through the light from the candle. The first thing Sam noted was that his books have been moved. Sam had piled the books in his possession into two separate stacks before leaving his room, one stack he wanted to take with him to Gilly, and another stack he wanted to read in his own time. One of his books was lying open on his desk. Sam could feel a sense of panic striking him fiercely, the sword, he quickly searched for his father’s sword underneath the floorboards. He sat down flat on the floor panting with relief when he realized that the sword was still safely nestled away.

After catching his breath Sam slowly stood-up and made his way back to the desk. Sam closed the book, and he found a note underneath the book. You might find something useful in here. Sam looked at the title, the Jade Compendium. Sam paged until he found the place where the book was left open; "There will come a day after a long summer when the stars bleed and the cold breath of darkness falls heavy on the world. In this dread hour a warrior shall draw from the fire a burning sword. And that sword shall be Lightbringer, the Red Sword of Heroes, and he who clasps it shall be Azor Ahai come again, and the darkness shall flee before him."

Sam did not know what to think, he was not sure if this was actually useful information, but at least it spoke about the Long Night. Stannis’ Red priestess also spoke about a Prince That Was Promised, and creating dragons from stone. It was not tremendously helpful towards Stannis.

It would certainly have been useful to have a magical sword that could slay the White Walkers and their minions alike. Sam almost laughed at the idea, but then he thought about Valyrian steel. Could this simply be some exalted reference to Valyrian steel? Of course Jon had already told Sam about slaying a White Walker with Longclaw.
Sam had almost forgotten about the news of Jon during his busy day, *the King in the North. How did Jon become the King in the North?* Sam could still remember the Nights Watch elections, Jon refused Stannis’ offer to become the Lord of Winterfell, and now he was suddenly a King. It was difficult to think of Jon as a King, then again Jon has always had a certain nobility or a sense of duty about him that could perhaps be seen as Kingly. *Did he really abandon his Nights Watch vows?* Sam took some clothes and a stack of books with him before he left the room. He pondered this question, and the rest of his day as he made his way to the *Quill and Tankard.*

He crossed the rope bridge slowly and saw the lanterns burning on the porch of the inn, but there was no one outside. Sam could hear voices before entering the common room. Only one of the tables were still occupied, Sam sat down in the opposite corner, as Gilly was still busy cleaning the room.

Sam recognised two of the people at the table. Mollander was a regular at the *Quill and Tankard,* or so Sam assumed, because he was always there whenever Sam arrived, he was hard to miss with his broad shoulders and club foot, and then there was Roone, Sam had seen him a few times in the quarters of the novices. They didn’t pay any attention to Sam. A pasty-faced man tried to grab Rosey’s arm as she served them some ale, but Rosey elegantly twirled out of his reach and give him a smile with dimples in her cheeks, before hurrying towards the kitchens. Behind the counter her mother- Emma was watching closely.

After some time Gilly came to him, Sam’s mind almost immediately felt lighter as he watched Gilly walk towards him. “I will be done in a moment, I just have to clear those few tables in the corner,” she pointed towards a spot on their right. “Where is little Sam?”

“He is in the kitchen, Selly often saves some treats for him.” Sam wanted to reach out and take Gilly’s hand but she turned around to quickly and made her way towards some of her last tables.

One of the acolytes that was drinking in the corner made his way to Sam with a confident grin and a hop in his steps. “You shouldn’t let everyone see that you are taking books out of the Citadel,” the young man spoke with a hint of authority. He was comely with sheer, glowing brown skin and raven black hair, he did not appear to be from Westeros but there was a slight twinge of a Dornish accent that carried through his bellowing voice.

Sam felt tongue tied for a moment, “ah, well I was planning on taking the books with me again,” he replied unconvincingly. “If you say so,” he nodded along knowingly, “I am Alleras.” He held out his arm. Sam stood and quickly shaked his hand, “Sam”.

“Don’t look so concerned Samwell, I am sure every novice and acolyte have taken one or two books out of the Citadel,” Alleras replied with some mirth in voice. And then Sam registered that Alleras called him *Samwell.* Alleras must have noted the questioning glance upon Sam’s face, because he give him a perceptive grin.

“I assume you found the book that I left for you?”
“It was you who left the book and the note,” Sam asked surprised. “Yes, err well no, archmaester Marwyn asked me to leave the book and message somewhere you could find it.”

“Thank you, can you please thank archmaester Marwyn for me as well,” Sam asked.

“Of course, and a good evening to you,” Alleras inclined his head slightly, “I really have to leave now, it is rather late.”

“Goodnight to you as well,” Sam answered in kind, but Alleras had already started walking towards the door.

Sam heard the pasty-faced youth complain towards the others, “all of the serving wenches only have eyes for Alleras,” he sounded quite annoyed by the fact. But the others just laughed at him, “you are only jealous because Rosey was friendlier with Alleras!”

Before Sam could listen to their conversation any further, Gilly was standing right in front of him, she smoothed out her apron with both of her hands as she waited for him. Sam could finally take one of her hands in his own. She did not show much of a reaction. “I am done, we can go now,” she stated evenly.

“What about little Sam,” Sam enquired. “We can get him a bit later, I've just checked in on him.”

Sam took all of his books and followed Gilly up the stairs.

Sam placed the books on the table, then he immediately went to Gilly and kissed her deeply, they were both breathless when he finally let her go. She seemed slightly surprised. “It was a long day, and I have missed you.” Gilly smiled at him, “did you find anything?”

“Perhaps- I think, I might have made some progress,” Gilly was pouring horns of ale for them before she sat down by the table next to him. “I acquired some interesting news today; Jon is now the King in the North!”

“You do not seem very surprised?” Gilly shrugged, “Starks have always been Kings, haven't they,” Gilly questioned in a rhetorical fashion. “In all of the songs and tales I've heard beyond the Wall, the Starks have always been the Kings,”

“They did rule the North for a long time, before the Targaryens came along,” Sam consented, “but Jon is a brother of the Nights Watch and he is a bastard.

“Everyone knows he is a Stark, and you don't follow all of the Nights Watch vows.”

“I only meant that Jon tends to the follow the rules more scrupulously than I do,” Sam explained with a slight grin.
“Mayhaps, the people of the North will listen to Jon now that he is the King,” Gilly supplied.

“I suppose, you might have a point,” Sam acknowledged thoughtfully. Sam thought back to the night when he led Brandon Stark through the tunnel in the Wall, at the Nightfort. What are the chances of a crippled boy surviving beyond the Wall? Then again, Sam himself somehow survived beyond the Wall, no one would think that was possible.

“I met Lord Commander Mormont’s son.”

“Is he also studying to become a maester,” Gilly questioned. “No, he is a knight, he is one of our patients, he’s got grayscale,” Sam answered joylessly.

“I am sorry Sam,” Gilly paused, “but Princess Shireen was cured from her grayscale?”

“She was, but it seems like the treatment for grayscale are better received by children.”

“Is there anything that you can do,” Gilly asked.

“There is some type of treatment that has been successful, but maester Ebrose deems the treatment too dangerous.”

“If there is something that can be done, shouldn’t someone at least try,” Gilly questioned while folding some clothes.

“Did you mayhaps find a book about Hardhome,” Gilly questioned with interest as her gaze shifted towards the stack of books on the table. The problem was that there wasn’t much on any written pages about the disaster of Hardhome, the maesters of the Citadel have scant interest in the happenings beyond the Wall.

“I might have found something.”

Sam pulled the book they were discussing closer to him. It was a large green volume, the name was imprinted upon the leather of the cover. There was also a symbol imprinted upon the cover underneath the title. Sam traced the symbol softly with his fingers, the symbol was two circles, one small circle that was surrounded by another slightly bigger circle. Sam traced the words before reading them out loud, “A History of Natural Disasters.”

“Thank you Sam,” Gilly supplied excitedly. “I think we should go and fetch little Sam, now.”

“I will collect little Sam whilst you finish up here,” Sam volunteer. There was a lamp hanging on the stairs, but Sam still walked down carefully, there were no noises coming from the common room, with every step Sam took he could hear the creaking and moaning of the stairs, he tried to move more light-footedly, but every sound he made was amplified within his own ears.

Sam glanced towards the common room once he reached the bottom of the stairs, it was dark and silent, the only light came from some smouldering embers that was still flickering inside of the hearth. Sam first looked towards the last flickers flames, but then he noticed some small movement to the right of the hearth, Sam tried to focus his vision within the dark. He saw two people embracing and kissing, he quickly looked away and went into the kitchen, but he was sure that it
was Rosey and one of the acolytes that was seated at the table. He collected little Sam from Selly, little Sam was ecstatic to see him. Sam picked little Sam up, he quickly moved through the common room to the stairs without looking into the direction of the flames again.

When they entered Gilly’s room she was dressed only in her shift, and she had started to page through the book about natural disasters. Little Sam hobbled to Gilly once he put him down, “mama”, he threw his arms around her legs. Gilly took Little Sam and placed him in her lap, she brushed his hair with her hands and give him a kiss on the crown of his head. “Look,” Gilly pointed towards the book, “this is where mama is from.” Sam came and stood behind Gilly he rested his hands on her shoulders and moved closer to see what Gilly was pointing at. Little Sam pressed and pointed his with fingers on the spot and then he tried to turn the pages with his hands, he soon got bored of sitting still, and squirmed down from Gilly’s lap towards some of his toys that was laying around in one corner of the room.

Gilly was looking over a map of the North. “I didn’t know there were two different Starks in the North at one time,” Gilly stated while still studying the map. Sam frowned, he has never heard anything about different Starks controlling the North. Then again, perhaps it was a cadet branch that existed once, such the Karstarks.

“Any news, or are there anything interesting that is happening around here,” Sam asked as he thought about his encounter downstairs. “Emma is selling Rosey for one golden dragon,” Gilly looked towards little Sam before continuing, “Rosey is a maiden recently flowered.”

“Oh,” Sam finally concluded what she meant. Rosey might not stay a maiden for long, and Emma will be short of her golden dragon.

“Mama, look!” Little Sam exclaimed excitedly. He was throwing some small wooden figures towards the chamber pot. Gilly shot up from her place at the table and swiftly made her way to little Sam. “Dont throw your toys around, and I’ve told you to stay away from the chamber pot,” Gilly addressed little Sam sternly as she picked up the the small wooden animals. “It's late, and time for bed,” Gilly told little Sam as she picked him up and placed him in a small makeshift bed. She stayed with him as he quieted down.

Sam sat down at the chair Gilly had just vacated, he peered at the map Gilly was studying earlier. The map was not actually a part of the book, it was a loose map that someone had placed inside the book. It looked to be much older than the book, the parchment was yellow and brown in some places.

The North was divided from the Weeping waters just beyond the Dreadfort right through the middle of the Wolfswood. The upper-half was dark, and there was a rose next to the word Stark, the lower-half of the map was lighter and this Stark had a direwolf next to it.

It was slightly peculiar, Sam has never learned anything of two different factions of Starks. I should make a copy of this map, he will ask Jon about it if he ever sees him again. Sam stood and
went to little Sam, he give him a goodnight kiss, just before he fell asleep.

Both Sam and Gilly sat down quietly at the table again, Sam opened the *Jade Compendium* and read the marked passage again. “What are you frowning about,” Gilly enquired with a whisper. “Archmaester Marwyn left this book for me,” Sam whispered back as he held the book in the air for Gilly to see. Sam read the passage for Gilly, “he marked this passage.”

“I do not see how this passage is very useful” Sam stated with a shrug. “It sounds like the things that Red Witch said,” Gilly stated with a shiver. She did not enjoy Mance Rayder’s execution.

What could a religion from the east know about the White Walkers in Westeros? It was something to ponder. *Fire does kill a wight, the R’hllorist does worship fire.* That was the only positive connection Sam could make.

“I learned how to execute stitches today,” Sam decided to venture onto another topic. “Unfortunately, I was rather terrible at the task, Yanus did much better than me.”

“You can always practice your stitches,” Gilly suggested. “I will need to do better, it is an important skill for any maester.” Gilly stood and started rambling through a chest that they have brought with them from the Wall. She laid some clothes and materials right before Sam on top of the book.

“You can practice on these.” She also handed Sam some thread and a needle with a small smile. Sam started to arrange the materials, he threaded the needle and started working on his stitches. By the end of the night Sam was contemplating the great irony of his situation, here he was doing the sewing, while Gilly was scrutinizing the books contently.

It was still dark outside but Sam could hear his name, he was holding Gilly tightly within his arms. The heat from her naked skin was warm against his own. It was Gilly who were calling him.

“Sam, you have to get up.” He gave Gilly one slow kiss before finally opening his eyes. He always tried to leave the *Quill and Tankard* early, but it was becoming harder as the air around them became colder. Sam leisurely sat up in the bed, he rubbed the sleep from his eyes and stretched with a long yawn.

Gilly started to sit up as well. “No, stay in bed,” Sam instructed and she layed back down again, pushing the blankets to her chin. Sam was just about to stand from the bed, when he recalled the meeting with the archmaesters on the previous day.

“Gilly, I want you and little Sam to be very careful, there are some rumours of Ironborn reavers that might be approaching. One of the maesters even spoke about garrisoning Oldtown with soldiers from the Hightowers. I will try to look in on you and little Sam as soon as possible.”

“Aye,” Gilly nodded seriously. Concern started to intervene with Sam’s constitution the more he thought of the Ironborn, *they are a curse to all of Westeros.* Sam loathed the idea of leaving Gilly and little Sam behind, but he give Gilly a final peck and made his way to the door in the darkness.
The Ironborn gossip became more grave and dire by the day. Servants whispered about sending their families away, or stockpiling food in case of a long siege. Of course Sam knew well enough that Ironborn reavers were not interested in long sieges. Rumours started to spread from the docks; tales about the fearsome Ironborn captain Euron Greyjoy, tales of his torture and plunder were never far away.

Sam started to notice some Hightower guards patrolling around the Citadel. Cooking oil from the kitchens where send to some parts of the city walls, in case of an attack. Shame they are not preparing for the White Walkers in such an enthusiastic fashion, Sam thought to himself at some point. Whenever Sam came upon other novices they were discussing the potential of an Ironborn attack, but Sam could only think about Gilly and little Sam.

After a few days of speculation and deliberation the loathsome Ironborn fleet was finally spotted from the west. The first two days after the fleet was first spotted were very tense, everyone was in a peculiar state of strained expectancy. It was difficult to sleep and concentrate on everyday mundane tasks, the constant restrictions and lingering dread could be seen on everyone’s faces. The whole atmosphere lightened as soon as everyone realized that the ironborn fleet was sailing past Oldtown. The maesters held a celebratory feast, even-though no battles were fought. Even the novices received some of the spoils.

On the third morning billowing columns of smoke could be seen escaping from the sea. Huge columns of blood-red smoke started to appear close together, most were puzzled by the phenomenon, but most people also started to believe that the smoke had something to do with the Ironborn fleet, it could not be a coincidence that these bleeding columns of smoke appeared at the same time as the Ironborn fleet.

A strange sense of quietness and apprehension descended upon everyone at the Citadel once again, by midnoon pandemonium broke out in the halls. Servants were squirreling about trying to find anyone, acolyte or novice that might have experience in the healing arts. Sam was busy with library duty when a servant ran to him and ordered him to report to maester Ebrose immediately. Sam ran all of the way to the healing wards.

Injured men were being dropped off at the Citadel in wagons. Sam was one of the earliest to arrive, and he immediately tried to locate maester Ebrose.

“What happened,” he enquired as soon as he saw maester Ebrose. He was directing others about where they could place the incoming injured men while he was stitching a nasty gash on the side of some man’s head.

“There was some kind of a battle at sea, the Ironborn attacked another fleet,” maester Ebrose answered Sam very absentmindedly. “Take those with arm injuries to the next room,” maester Ebrose shouted to someone. Sam was almost completely dumbfounded by the sudden onslaught of injuries, he was standing around like a dimwitted fool.

“Samwell,” the maester yelled Sam out of his gawking state, “grab some needle and thread, and start stitching!” Sam quickly turned around to look for the items. Sam swiftly returned to maester Ebrose’s side after he had found the items, “where should I start?”
“Anywhere, just try doing something useful!”

Sam went to a middle aged man that was the closest to him, he had a gash on the right side of his midsection, some of his blood was obscuring the visibility of the cut, Sam quickly ran to get a clean wet rag. He washed the cut as well as he could. The man was staring at him intently with dark eyes. “Have you ever done this before,” he asked. Sam had to admit that he has never stitched a wound on a living person, but he’s had some practice. “Nevermind,” the man almost shouted, “just get on with it.”

Sam held his breath for a few heartbeats, and then he plunged the needle through the man’s flesh, the man groaned and grabbed onto the bed. Sam tried to stitch the wound as well as possible.

He might have been holding his breath throughout the whole procedure, it was horrible to plunge a needle through living flesh.

The chaos and madness reminded Sam of the battle at the Wall. But that was different, Sam was fighting for his own survival as well as the survival of his fellow brothers- and Gilly. The chaos at the Citadel was something else, this was the first time that he was truly responsible for the survival of other people. Sam felt helpless and awkward as he tried to help the first few men with their injuries.

But after helping the first few people Sam started to find his rhythm, he suppressed his own feelings and discounted them from his mind. It almost felt as if he was watching himself work from the corner of the room, he dealt with all different types of injuries and started screaming out instructions, he was driven yet he did not feel like himself. Even as darkness descended upon Oldtown Sam did not really notice, he was only concentrating on what was happening right in front of him. Somewhere during the evening maester Ebrose acknowledged him with a nod. It was already very late when the flow of injured men seemed to end. As everything became slower Sam started to notice his own tired and aching limbs.

“Samwell,” maester Ebrose touched him on the shoulder from behind, “you did well.” Sam was too tired to think about maester Ebrose’s acknowledgement, he went to check in at some of the other rooms and offered his help where he could. The first rays from the sun was threatening to strike back at the darkness, when Sam found himself on his way to his little room.
Davos gave two quick raps on the heavy oak door in front of him, the panels were so thick that the sound of his knocks were almost muffled. The door immediately opened a few inches, and Davos could see a beam of light growing wider as the door was opened. It was morning, but the grey skies held onto the darkness, the sun was struggling to raise against the heaviness of the cold morning air.

“Ser Davos?” The Northern soldier greeted and questioned him at the same time. “Good morrow, Finley” Davos greeted back. “I just wanted to see if your accommodations were respectable, and if you are receiving regular meals?”

“Our accommodation and meals have been more than fair,” Finley answered promptly. Davos nodded, “that is good to hear”.

“Kai, Isak and Arros, are with the King right now, I remained to guard our own quarters.” Finley appeared slightly dejected. “We can’t guard the King properly without our weapons,” Davos noted some concern in his voice.

Davos sighed, “we are here on a mission of peace, we cannot carry weapons around. Just make sure that the King is always protected and that you, yourselves, remain on guard.”

“Aye,” the soldier sighed unconvinced.

Davos couldn’t blame the lad, they were in the south, surrounded by foreigner soldiers and they were all unarmed. How could they protect their King? “Keep your eyes and ears open, if anything of values happens or if you hear about anything no matter how insignificant, I want you to report it to me.”
“Aye,” Finley answered again, with a grim expression on his face. *Northerners do tend to have a perpetual affinity for grimness.*

The guards were situated lower on the ground, whilst Davos and King Jon’s chambers were on the upper reaches of the Windwyrm tower. Davos climbed the unnaturally smooth stone steps as he’s done a hundred or mayhaps a thousand times before. Davos could feel his contracting emotions constrict within his chest. *How often did I climb these stairs for sweet Shireen?* Too many times, the memories were as fresh in his mind as early morning dew. Selyse kept Shireen away from prying eyes within the solitude of the Windwyrm tower. *And now, we are being kept in isolation from the rest of the inhabitants of the castle within the Windwyrm tower.* For a tower that screamed with deviance it was quickly gathering a history of loneliness.

The old smuggler finally stopped in front of two large double doors, the Targaryen sigil was carved into the wood, exactly as Davos remembered. He gave three quick taps upon the door, and then he waited. One door opened to reveal a Manderly guard.

“Ser Davos,” the guard greeted, “the King has already left, he went to the village. He said that he will see you in court.”

"Are Isak and Kai with you perchance?" Davos enquired. "Aye," the guard confirmed. *So who is guarding the King then,* Davos wondered.

“Thank You,” Davos answered kindly to the guard before he slowly started making his way back to his own chambers, there was still some time left before the Dragon Queen held her daily session of court.

Garth was still valiantly stationed outside of his quarters, he nodded towards Davos and opened the door. Some dishes were neatly arranged on a side serving table, Davos served himself and started eating lazily. The drapes were opened and a small fire was slowly flickering in the hearth. This room was much better than his previous chambers at Dragonstone, and it was covered in black and red silks, it was impossible to miss the imposing Targaryen colours. The Targaryens always had a certain sense of grandeur about themselves, and this Dragon was no different from what he could remember of growing up in the shadows of the Red Keep. They used to ride through the streets of Kings Landing with the finest steeds and silks. Davos could still see Rhaegar Targaryen’s long silver-blonde locks whipping through the air, and the crowds cheering as he rode past.

Davos was lost far away in the heart of his childhood memories, when there was a knock at the door. “Ser Davos, a servant has arrived with a message from Tyrion Lannister,” Garth announced through the door.

“Let him enter.” He answered as he took a napkin to wipe some crumbs from his mouth.
The servant came into the room then bowed his head, “Ser Davos Seaworth,” Davos didn’t recognize the man.

“The Lord Hand, Tyrion Lannister has kindly requested your presence, at your earliest convenience. I will wait outside until you have broken your fast,” the servant questioned as he glazed over the dishes on the table.

“No need, I am done here, did the Hand ask for me or the King?” Davos questioned as he stood from his table.

“He asked for you specifically, Ser.”

Davos followed the servant on the sloping steps of the Windwyrm tower, he was faced with a line of Dothraki warriors as he stepped out of the tower, they were standing guard just a few feet away from the entrance of their tower. Davos was slightly apprehensive, this was the first time, since their last eventful dinner, that he has seen any member of the Dragon Queen’s council, along with the Dragon Queen herself. King Jon was growing more restless as time went on. Davos remembered that Tyrion Lannister was eager to usher them out of court on the day of their arrival. He wanted to make sure that they were seen, thus Davos and the King was planning on visiting the court. Maphaps it will make Tyrion Lannister uncomfortable to see them there, as it did on their arrival.

As they walked past the courtyard, Davos could once again hear the sound of swords clanking together. They made their way to the big Stone Drum tower, heading towards the eastern side of the keep, torches were burning all alongside the walls. The two finally stopped at a door that appeared very similar to all of the others doors within the corridor.

“Ser Davos Seaworth; to see you my Lord,” the servant announced after he had knocked.

“Enter,” Tyrion Lannister called.

It wasn’t the biggest room within the castle, and the room was completely overtaken by a huge rosewood desk. Tyrion Lannister looked even smaller behind the enormous desk, the room was decorated not with the Targaryen colours but with the scarlet-blood red from the Lannister coat of arms. The Hand of the Queen sat comfortably on a cushioned chair.

“Thank you, Mynhard,” Tyrion Lannister acknowledged towards the servant.
“Welcome Ser Davos Seaworth,” Tyrion Lannister smiled and gestured towards the chair in an extravagant manner. “Please, do take a seat, it has been a while since we have last seen each other.”

“We have been right here the whole time,” Davos answered likewise with a slight smile.

“I have been slightly busy, it is a huge undertaking to establish a new court. How is your accommodation, I hope our hospitality has been adequate.”

With a nod Davos agreed. “Your hospitality have been good enough, however King Jon has expressed some concern about gaining access to his ship.”

Davos quickly realized that Tyrion Lannister liked playing games. Davos himself wasn’t opposed to the idea of jousting through words, but he never experienced much of these types of games while serving Stannis, and Jon Snow would likely have just as much interest in court games as Stannis. *You can't battle against the Night's King with words and subtleties, the White Walkers are the wrong subjects for courtly games.*

Tyrion Lannister ignored the suggestion of their imprisonment, he immediately started talking about a different subject. “The reason why I have invited you here, was to ask for your opinion.”

“My opinion?” Davos repeated.

“Well. I presume you might be acquainted with Gerald Gower, Rolland Storm and Omer Blackberry?”

Davos was somewhat surprised by Tyrion Lannister’s question.

“They used to serve Stannis and Dragonstone,” Davos explained easily. “Stannis left them behind when he sailed for the Wall.”

“Why did Stannis predestinate them to castle duties,” Tyrion asked with a hint of curiosity.
“Stannis was a harsh taskmaster, he always expected discipline and obedience. He despised laxness and incompetence. You can be rest assured, if Stannis trusted these men than these men are trustworthy.”

“And yet, he left them behind at Dragonstone?” Tyrion concluded with a perplexed expression.

“They refused to convert to R’hllor.” Davos did his best to suppress his contempt for the Red God, that had wrongfully taken Shireen from their world.

“Ahh, the Lord of Light, strange practices and believes, the High Priestess of Volantis has been been very helpful and supportive of our Queen.”

“Pffft,” Davos grumbled. Tyrion didn’t miss his negative reaction.

“You are not a follower of the Lord of Light?...And yet you left with Stannis while these other men did not?”

“I was the Hand of the King, for Stannis. But Stannis also required some trustworthy men to guard his home.”

“Now you serve the King in the North, you strike me as a loyal sort of fellow, how did you come to serve Jon Snow, who is suppose to be part of the Nights Watch? What happened up in the North?”

Davos sighed, there was no use to think back to the past.

“The past is gone, it is the future we should be concerned about. King Jon was chosen and declared as the King by a hall full of Lords and Ladies. Jon is the only person who is trying to save the realm from destruction, he is doing his duty. It was a simple choice - there was never really a choice, I choose to serve a man who serves the people.”

Davos tried to pick his words wisely, he wanted to use words that would make Lord Tyrion Lannister listen to the threat. “Soon it will not matter which King you descend from, or which castle you were born in. The White Walkers don't care for any distinctions, if they get past the Wall, the whole of Westeros will be laid to waste.”
Tyrion tried to speak, but Davos continued. He needed the Hand to understand. “Your Queen has birthed three fire breathing dragons just as the White Walkers have reappeared, I am not the most religious man, but it seems like fate has designed some salvation for the realm.”

“Have you ever seen dead men walking?” Tyrion Lannister asked him more seriously now.

That was a difficult question. “Aye...and no.”

“Well?” Tyrion Lannister asked looking perplexed. “Which is it, yes or no? “This is an unequivocal question, Ser Davos.”

“Both, but it’s not my place to say anything...it is not my story to tell...I’ve seen things that no normal man would ever believe. Have you ever heard about wargs my Lord? Wargs can slip into the skin of an animal and see through their eyes and dominate the animal’s directions. Would any normal man believe this is possible?”

Davos didn’t wait for a replay, “I would never have believed this was possible, and yet I’ve seen this ability with my own eyes among the Wildlings.”

“We learn about giants as children, and yet I’ve seen a giant with my own eyes.” Wun Wun was more loyal than most men Davos had known, the loss of Wun Wun brought a soft sadness to Davos’ heart, he might have been the last of his kind.

“And now, I’ve also seen dragons,” Davos added wistfully.

For once it seemed like Tyrion Lannister was a bit lost for words.

“All of these things I’ve seen with my own eyes. I’ve not seen a White Walker yet, lucky for me, the men of Nights Watch have seen them, Jon Snow has fought against them. I have no doubts about their existence. Everyone believed the dragons were dead, and now they fly once more. Is your Queen willing to risk her whole realm?”

Tyrion Lannister climbed off his chair, and momentarily disappear behind the great wooden desk. He walked around the desk and faced Davos head-on. “My Queen has dragons, as you have just pointed out,” Tyrion answered with a smile. “You have to excuse me now, it will soon be time for court, except if you were perhaps planning on joining our court proceedings; I have yet to see you or Jon Snow attend.”
“I was actually planning on visiting your court today my Lord.” They walked together in a comfortable silence on their way to the great hall, for a while. Until Tyrion Lannister asked about his former wife.

“Lady Sansa, is doing much better than anyone would expect.” Davos replied as he thought about the terrors the lady might have suffered at the hands of Ramsay Bolton.

“So, why was she not chosen as the leader of the North?”

“The North needs more of a military leader right now, someone they can follow into battle, that is my guess,” Davos answered thoughtfully, "but she is currently ruling while King Jon is here. Lady Sansa has suffered a lot, I expect she is happy to be home and to be reunited with her family.”

“I suppose that makes some sense,” Tyrion Lannister reflected.

“Jon Snow did not ask to become a King, he was just chosen, these are hard times to be a ruler. But King Jon will do his duty, he will do what is best for the North and the realm.”

The Hand glanced his way, “you have a lot of confidence in King Jon, Ser Davos.”

“Aye,” Davos replied with a small smile, “he is a good man.”

“Good men do not always make for the best of Kings.” And with that, they reached the great hall.

A few Lords were already seated at the front, it seemed like everyone was trying to sit as close to the stone throne as possible. Davos stood at the back, he was sure it would be better to look upon the mummerly from afar. From what Davos had observed of Tyrion Lannister he was sure that the dwarf controlled everything that was said, and the amount of power that was displayed at court. Holding court is an act to show the nobles where their own feeble power comes from.

The great hall of Dragonstone was build for intimidation, it was cavernous and cold unlike the dragons of the Targaryen sigil, that was engraved upon the cold black floor. The natural rock formations from Dragonstone was the centre point of it all, the stone throne had the appearance of Dragonscales. The Targaryens of old choose the perfect destination to escape the Doom of Valyria.
Of course Davos has walked past the stone throne quite a few times in his life, Stannis evaded the great hall, it was too Targaryen for him. And now the Targaryens are back once more.

The great hall at Winterfell had a completely opposite effect, it was warm, intimate and welcoming, the fire in the hearth burned day and night, meals and mead were frequently served. It was a place where people lived and breathed.

Tyrion Lannister took his place on the right side of the throne after a short discussion with one of the other Lords. Missandei walked straight and evenly to Tyrion Lannister’s side. “You are in the presence of Daenerys Stormborn…”

Davos’ mind started to wander, one of these days I would be able to announce that damn list of titles by heart! Ser Rolland Storm stood to the side of the hall. King Jon was nowhere to be seen, he did say that he might attend, but might isn’t a confirmation. Well there is always the morrow.

“Your Grace, a few Lords and Ladies have arrived, they are ready to swear fealty to House Targaryen once more,” Tyrion’s Lannister’s voice echoed strongly throughout the great hall.

“We welcome any Lord who is willing to serve House Targaryen with open arms, please approach my Lords,” Queen Daenerys commanded from her rocky chair.

“Ser Davos Seaworth,” Davos heard his name from behind. Omer Blackberry stood next to him. “You are a sight for sore eyes, I was told that everyone from Stannis’ army perished within the North. I would never have imagined that we should meet each other once more at Dragonstone, under a Targaryen banner.”

“The realm changes too quickly these days, alliances are forged and forgotten within the blink of an eye.” Davos answered solemnly.

“I would have followed Stannis if I had the chance, but as Stannis grew closer to the Lord of Light his trust in the followers of the Seven wavered. Stannis is dead, and I refuse to follow Cersei Lannister,” Omer Blackberry answered a bit defensively.

“I don't blame you my Lord, I am not a servant of R’hhlor; and I will never be,” Davos answered with some venom in his voice. “I loved Stannis once, he give me a future when I had none. I have always tried to serve him well... But he was a tortured man in the end. He made unforgivable mistakes, and the choices he made decimated him and his whole family.”

There was a short silence between them, and Davos concentrated on the scene in front of him once
more.


“House Pyle has served House Targaryen faithfully for many years, I offer my sword in victory or defeat, we vow to serve House Targaryen faithfully once more.” He took his sword out and bend the knee in front of the Dragon Queen, as she acknowledged him with a nod. It seem like Jon and the Northern contingency was the only group that was not allowed to carry weapons, and Tyrion Lannister pretends that we are not prisoners.

“Please allow me to introduce my family, Your Grace.” A whole group of people stepped forward.

“I will be honoured to receive them Lord Pyle,” the Queen answered in a less commanding tone than before.

“This is my wife, Lady Leesa Pyle. My oldest daughter Ryne Pyle, Geena Pyle is my second oldest daughter, and then there is Kathryne Pyle. This is my oldest son Phillip Pyle, and our two youngest, Ailene and Stephen Pyle. Lord Pyle was clearly brimming with pride at his large brood, they all stood neaty in line, even the younger ones. The oldest two girls was clearly at a marriageable age, they were both very presentable.

“Lord Vernon Thorne, Please step forward,” Tyrion Lannister announced. Thorne, Davos hoped that this Throne did not keep in touch with his long lost kin at the Wall.

“What happened at the end, we have heard conflicting reports, with Stannis, I mean.” Omer Blackberry questioned from Davos.

“I wasn’t there at the end, Stannis sent me away to Castle Black whilst he fought at Winterfell. The snows around the North falls deep, the men were weak. The Bolton army destroyed Stannis’ force. There was nothing to be done.”

Omer Blackberry nodded.

“Lady Meegan Byrch, please step forward.” Tyrion called out, continuing the process of swearing fealty.
“I Meegan Byrch from Byrchwood Castle swear fealty to House Targaryen, House Byrch will follow House Targaryen forevermore.” The women went down on both knees and struggled a to get up again.

“I have been told that you are now supporting, the self proclaimed King in the North. You are not planning on supporting Queen Daenerys then?” Omer Blackberry asked.

Davos almost snorted, “I've seen more than enough from Kings and their quests for that damn iron chair.”

“Yet, you still swore fealty to the King in the North? Apart from Cersei Lannister there are no other possibilities.”

“I didn’t bend the knee for Jon Snow, I just followed him. I was there when the Lords and the Ladies of the North proclaimed him as their King, he never asked for it. There is only one cause that is worthy enough for a war... and that is the protection of the realm. That is what I am fighting for.”

Omer Blackberry nodded, “we should speak more and share some mead.” Davos smiled, “Aye, that sounds like a plan.”

“Your Grace please allow me to introduce my wife, my son and heir along with his wife and our grand daughter.”

“I would be honoured to meet them Lord Harte,” Queen Daenerys replied.

Varys the spymaster slinked as unobtrusively as possible to Tyrion Lannister’s side, he whispered something in his ear. They nodded before Tyrion Lannister addressed the court.

“My Lords and Ladies, it is with my deepest regret that I have to halt our court proceedings for the day. Lord Fairing and Lord Harte, I apologise, we will formally introduce your families to the court upon our next meeting. The Queen has urgent business to attend to.” the Queen looked towards Tyrion Lannister with a focused intensity as he dismissed the court.

“What could this urgent business be about,” Davos wondered out loud. “I’ve received some news from the docks earlier this morning, there was a battle at sea. It appears as if Queen Daenerys might have lost her Ironborn fleet, there were some Dothraki and Unsullied soldiers onboard as well.” Davos received an answer from Omer Blackberry although he never expected one. Davos
decided to push his good fortune a bit further. “Who could have launched such an attack, the Royal fleet is almost nonexistent, and Lannisport has never been known for their naval command?”

“It was the other Greyjoy - Euron Greyjoy, some say that he is one of the best captains on the seven seas, others say that he is one of the cruelest.”

“Aye, I’ve heard about the man, he was banished from the Iron Islands, they say he cuts out the tongues of those he captures.” That was a small detail that Davos had always remembered about Euron Greyjoy. The Greyjoys were feared within Westeros and Essos alike, and Euron Greyjoy was feared the most.

Omer Blackberry, appeared as if he shivered at the thought. “The Queen owns a massive host, but it sounds as if she might have lost about ten thousand men.”

“That is a lot of men,” Davos reflected.

“You have to excuse me Ser Davos the Queen might have need of me.”

“Of course,” Davos replied, “you can visit me at any time.” He nodded and made his way to one of the smaller exits out of the great hall.

This was an interesting development. The Queen might be a bit more persuaded to make an alliance if she had just lost one of her allies, or she might just be more determined to destroy her enemies, it was difficult to say. Davos could only hope that the corpses from the battle remained safely on the open sea, gifting the Night's King more corpses to command was not the best of strategies.

Dragonstone was quiet for the duration of the day from what Davos could gather, the castle’s black and grey walls loomed ominously against a grey and darkened sky. Davos had already finished his dinner alone when there was knock on his door.

“King Jon,” Arros announced from outside.

“Good evenin’ Your Grace.” Jon acknowledged his greeting.
“We missed you at court today.”

“I doubt my presence would make much of a difference.”

“It could make a great difference, just the fact that you are a King and that you are able to share a hall with Queen Daenerys would show her that you are eager for an alliance.

And it also diminishes her own power, if another King can move around her court with impunity. Tyrion Lannister will not enjoy that, didn’t you notice how quickly they shuffled us out of the throne room the last time?”

“We can force them to deal with us, at the moment we are out of sight and out of mind.”

Jon narrowed his eyes, “impunity?” Jon gave Davos a small smile. “Have you been practicing your reading, Ser Davos?”

“Unfortunately, not as much as I should, Your Grace.”

“Fine, I will go to court on the morrow. The White Walkers don't hold court, we don't have time for these games,” Jon answered slightly displeased.

“That may be true, but we are prisoners here, so we might as well do what we can,” Davos tried to reason.

“That is why I went to the village today, I can’t sit around here and do nothing while the North is in eminent danger.”

“Did you have the guards with you at least?”

“I took Gareth with me, I didn’t want to attract too much attention.”

“One guard without weapons…,” Davos felt like rolling his eyes. “Your Grace, Dragonstone is a small island fortress, the villagers knows everything that happens on this island; they hear all of the news before it arrives at the castle. They knew exactly who you were.”
King Jon only pouted his lips slightly.

“I went to the village to try and arrange for a fishing boat to take us back to our ship,” Davos had to admit that it was a sound enough plan. The only problem was that the villagers were strong Targaryen supporters, if Queen Daenerys wants them to stay on this island then they would keep to her orders. Then again, some men would do anything for a golden dragon.

“I can't just stand around on the cliffs everyday, I should be at Winterfell, I should have been preparing the North for the coming storm; instead I am anchored here.”

Jon was a man of action, he was not the type of man who could sit around and do nothing.

“Have some patience Your Grace, we have arrived at Dragonstone asking Queen Daenerys to believe in monsters and ghouls. It will take some time for the rest of the realm to understand the danger. In any event we might soon make some progress, court has been suspended for the time being. Queen Daenerys has just suffered a defeat at the hands of the Ironborn. It sounds as if most of her Ironborn fleet was devastated.”

“The Night's King doesn't have to do anything, Westeros will just tear itself down over the iron throne before the Wall could be breached.” Jon supplied faintly.

Davos grimaced at the thought.

“All of the best soldiers in the realm are busy killing each other, while the army of the dead is growing. You are right Ser Davos, I do need a bit more patience. I have to convince Queen Daenerys to fight with us. But she is certainly very single minded, it will not be easy.”

“Your Grace,” Davos tried his best not smile, “you yourself can be quite stubborn and single minded.”

Jon give him an exasperated look but Davos just smiled sweetly in return. Jon had been pacing the room whilst he spoke to Davos. He was making his way towards to the door before Davos stopped him.

“Your Grace, might I suggest that you should visit the training yard. Ser Gerald Gower has just regained his position as the Master in Arms. Stannis give the position to him previously, he is a
good man. Perhaps it might be helpful to pass some of the free time we have these days in the training yard.”

Jon nodded towards him, “that is a good suggestion”, and he left after their discussion.

The next few days churned away excruciatingly, slowly. It was clear that Tyrion Lannister was trying to keep any information from their ears for as long as possible. The elaborate court sessions remain suspended. Even Davos’ immortal patience was starting to unravel slightly.

But for the moment at least Davos was content. The living scent from the pine trees evoked an imperturbable sense of quietness and serenity within Davos. Davos could almost imagine that if he remained rooted within this place for long enough that he would once more hear the girlish giggles from Shireen. It was easy to envision her once again running and hiding through the bushes and shrubs, as she liked to do before Selyse decided that she must stop spending her time on frivolous activities, and that she should start learning from old Maester Cressen.

The heavens above were blue and tranquil, it was one the finest days since their arrival upon Dragonstone. When Davos strolled through the gardens he could feel the rays of the sun touching his neck even though the wind still held a chill within its breath.

It was during times such as these when Davos could well understand how the Northerners arrived at the conviction of praying to the trees. The trees and the greenery surrounding him offered a blissful repose of fortitude against the questions in his heart. Davos found a small, broken branch of a tree, he picked it up and took a seat on a nearby stone. In the comfort of the garden surrounding him Davos began to carve.

Davos’ mind wandered to the time when the Umber boy and the Karstark girl swore fealty to King Jon. The Godswood was a very different place from Aegon’s pleasure gardens. Davos shivered as he thought back to the cold snow. The Godswod was dark and ancient, one could easily believe that the Weirwood has witnessed the Age of Heroes, the bare branches from the trees looked more like long fingers and tentacles that could grab you within the shadow of the moon. The Godswood was soundless, even the insects of the night did not dare to make any noise within the natural ancient fortress, and yet the Godswood was also alive. Everytime Davos has entered the Godswood he has felt a thousand eyes staring towards him, the eyes from the face on the Weirwood tree follow you around lazily. But the most unsettling thing from that night was the bloody handprints on the bark of the snow-white tree, it almost appeared as if the tree was drinking the blood, the blood was quickly absorbed by the bark. The only sound Davos had ever heard from the Godswood was the screeching of ravens.

Small shavings of wood was falling from his hands as he chipped away at the wood figurine. The shape of a wolf’s torso was taking shape underneath his knife. Davos didn’t know what he would do with the wooden figure but he kept on carving.
Davos could hear the footsteps of the servant that approached him before he was able to see the man. “Ser Davos, Lord Tyrion Lannister has kindly asked for your presence in a matter of some urgency.”

Davos was slightly stiff, but he stood as gracefully as his limbs would allow. He placed his half-done wolf in his pocket along with his knife.


Davos tried to steel himself for more of Tyrion Lannister’s games. He might be more interested in an alliance now, but he would try his best not to display that interest. It wasn’t lost on Davos that Tyrion’s servant knew exactly where to find him.

Just outside the periphery of Aegon’s Gardens, Omer Blackberry was waiting. He approached Davos as soon as he saw him.

“Ser Davos, I apologise if I took you away from your respite.”

Davos gave Omer Blackberry a slightly painful smile. He has done more than enough resting for now. “You have an urgent matter?”

“Yes, let me explain on our path towards Lord Lannister,” he spoke with a slight tremble of trepidation. Davos’ interest has now been fully awakened.

“As part of my duties, I decided to conduct a full inspection of the dungeons. During my inspection I came upon Septon Barre.”

“Septon Barre?!” Davos was quite surprised, he knew the Septon was imprisoned under the instructions of Melisandre at some point, but he just assumed that the poor man was burned into ashes alongside the other men which were taken captive for trying to defend the Sept against Melisandre. It was hard for Davos to understand why he didn’t realize how far Stannis had fallen even at that time. He did nothing while men were being burned alive.

Omer Blackberry broke through his thoughts, “the Septon is unwell. As you might imagine he is thin and sickly, and his mind is disturbed.”

“Wouldn’t a maester be more helpful? I am not sure what I can about the situation.”

“The maester is with him, but he refuses any treatment. You might just be the person that Septon Barre knows the best, you have been around Dragonstone for quite some time. Perhaps you can speak with Septon Barre and persuade him to take a sleeping draught.”
“I will do my best to help, but honestly I never knew Septon Barre that well.” They climbed the stairs inside of the Stone Drum to the first floor, Davos could hear the sounds of screaming and scraping as they made their way through the servant's quarters. Davos had a strong feeling that the screams had something to do with Septon Barre. It was not a comfortable feeling. As they moved closer to their destination the screams became louder and more unnerving.

Tyrion Lannister was standing in the hallway trying to offer directions and advice. “Get something to bind his wrists again,” he ordered loudly.

A foul stench hit Davos full in the face right before he came to a still stand next to Tyrion Lannister. Septon Barre was half binded to a wooden chair. The armrest on the one side was broken off. Four Unsullied soldiers were trying their best to contain the man. He was laughing and screaming hysterically. Half of his clothes was torn off, his hair and beard was a dirty tangled, moppy mess. Septon Barre ran as fast as he could, being half binded to a chair, right into the wall, and some of the legs of the chair broke off as well. He sounded more like an animal than a man when they tried to restrain him again, he scratched at their faces with long dirty fingernails.

Tyrion Lannister finally spotted Davos right next to him, he had a grim expression on his face and looked towards Septon Barre again. The Septon was always a very dignified man during his years of service at Dragonstone, Davos couldn’t help but feel some pity for the man. The four soldiers almost had Septon Barre restrained again. He had a cut on his forehead that was starting to bleed from his bump into the wall. “Septon Barre,” Davos announced loudly to gain his attention. “It is Davos - Ser Davos Seaworth, I ve come to see you.”

Davos walked closer to Septon Barre, step by step. He stopped his thrashing and clawing.

“Ser Davos?” Septon Barre questioned in a small voice.

“Aye, it is Davos,” Davos stopped right in front of Septon Barre. The Septon reached towards him with a shaking hand. Davos ordered the soldiers to step away with his eyes and a tilt from his head.

The Septon took both of his hands and touched all over Davos’ face, like a blind man, although Davos was sure that the man wasn’t blind. Davos just stood silently by as the Septon touched all over his face and arms.

“It is really you, Ser you have to help me, these minions of the Great Other are trying to take me.” Septon Barre pleaded in a desperate voice.

“Septon these men are not soldiers of Great Other,” How could one explain what has happened around Dragonstone to a man who did not posses all of his senses.

“These men are just sellswords, they don't work for the Great Other,” Davos tried to explain.

The Septon began to shake and he shook his head vigorously, “no, no, No.” He started to scream louder again.
“Septon,” Davos made sure he gained his attention again, “I want to help you.” Davos took his
hand as he spoke, and looked him straight in the eyes. He waved the Unsullied soldiers away with
his other hand.

Once again he repeated, “I want to help you.” Davos bend down and untied the fastenings that
were still connected to the chair. Once Septon Barre was free he led him to the bed, and sat down
next to him.

“Septon I think you might be grievously ill.” Septon Barre shook his head. “Have you eaten
anything?”

“He hasn’t eaten anything, he had thrown or spilled all of the broth we have tried to administer,”
Omer Blackberry supplied from behind.

“Septon I know you must be very hungry, I know that I was hungry when Stannis finally decided
to release me from the dungeons. You should try and eat something.”

Omer Blackberry tentatively stretched out his arm and gave Davos a bowl of broth. Septon Barre
shook his head as the broth came closer to him. Davos took the spoon and tasted the broth.

Septon Barre took the spoon from Davos and tried to collect some of the broth within the spoon,
but he was shaking so much that the broth dripped off his hands. He had an anxious look upon his
face. Davos took the spoon from him and started to feed him. He was clearly very hungry and
almost choked as he tried to devour as much of the broth as possible.

“Bring me some water,” Davos instructed. The Septon gulped the water down quickly as Dovos
held the glass for him.

“There is also some wine that Maester Pylos have prepared.” Omer Blackberry told Davos. He
handed Davos another cup. Septon Barre started to shake his head vigorously again. Davos
pretended to drink some of the concoction before holding it to the Septon’s lips. He drank the
potion eagerly.

“Lie down Septon, you need some rest, I will be right here by your side.” Septon Barre laid down
meekly, and Davos remained sitting by his side. But he started speaking again.

“Ser Davos, I have to speak with you,” he uttered urgently.
“The Lord has spoken to me, there are things that you must know. The Lord has been guiding you Ser Davos Seaworth, you are on the right path, but there is more that you need to know. I must speak with you alone.”

“We will speak, get some rest first, I am right here.”

Luckily the Septon quieted down and fell asleep rather quickly. Davos breathed a sigh of relief as he walked over to a washing basin, he washed his hands, arms and face. Davos closed the door quietly behind him and joined the other two in the hallway.

“You could have given me a bit more information about the Septon’s condition before arrived,” Davos chided Omer Blackberry. Both Omer Blackberry and Tyrion Lannister appeared slightly apologetic.

“The situation required immediate attention, and Omer suggested that you might be able to help.” Tyrion Lannister finally offered.

“The man is quite clearly delirious, I hope the sleeping draught will allow him some comfortable rest for a while.”

“Maester Pylos used a few drops of sweetsleep.” Omer Blackberry answered. Davos shook his head. “How could Septon Barre have been locked within the dungeons for so long?” Davos questioned. “Dragonstone has been practically abandoned for a long time,” Omer Blackberry offered unconvinced.

“What did maester Pylos say, is he completely mad or deranged? Will he ever regain his own persona again?”

“Maester Pylos cannot make a definitive prognosis. If he eats well, and his other ailment are treated than he might regain his wits.” Tyrion Lannister answered.

“If you would excuse me my Lord, I still have a few duties left for the day.” Omer Blackberry nodded towards Tyrion Lannister before he quickly made his way out of the long corridor.

Davos wondered if there was truly any reason for Septon Barre to regain his wits. The Faith of the Seven was practically destroyed. The Great Sept was gone, the High Septon and the whole structure of the Faith has been eradicated.
Davos was just about to take his leave when Ser Gerald Gower decided to join their party.

“My Lord Hand,” Gerald Gower acknowledged Tyrion Lannister first, “It is a great pleasure to meet you again Ser Davos, we were under the impression that you might have perished alongside Stannis.”

“Likewise, Ser Gerald, but as you can see I am still here.” Davos declared.

“Your King informed me that you were the one who suggested that he should seek me out for training.”

“Aye, that was my advice to him.”

“Your King, has been very useful.”

“That is good to hear, but I can't say that I am surprised to hear that.” Davos answered in a playful tone. Davos could see that Tyrion Lannister give Gerald Gower a suspicious look as he kept on referring to Jon as a King. But Gerald Gower completely ignored Tyrion Lannister and his stares. Mayhaps he was just oblivious.

“The Northerners fight with a different style to us Southerners, they use more blunt force and they are more opportunistic in some aspects. Their fighting style lacks for elegance and sophistication from the outside, nonetheless it can still be very effective and brutal.”

Davos nodded along attentively, his knowledge about fighting styles were severely lacking. Ser Gerald seemed quite happy that he was in a position where he could discuss swordsmanship.

“Your King and his Northern guards, have been able to provide my young charges with a wider form of practice.”

“King Jon, is very apt at training men himself, he has provided a lot of training within the North.”
“Indeed,” Gerald Gower agreed. “I must admit that I would dearly enjoy to see your King dancing within a proper dual. The Northerners might have a more bearish fighting style, but your King has a certain grace to his movements that I have rarely witnessed.

I have only seen it once somewhere long ago, but I can't recall where.” Ser Gerald shook his head as if he was trying to loosen his lost memories.

“It will not be easy to witness King Jon in a duel, he is not the type of man who wanders about looking for duelling opponents. I’ve seen him in the thick of battle and I can only hope that he will not see another battle soon.” Which Davos knew was a useless dream, especially if the White Walkers crossed the Wall. Tyrion Lannister was starting to appear more disinterested the longer their conversation continued, until he heard his brother’s name.

“Your brother,” Gerald Gower addressed Tyrion Lannister, “Ser Jaime is another man that I have witnessed who fights with a mesmerizing elegance.”

Tyrion Lannister’s whole countenance darkened somewhat. “Ser Gerald Gower, I presume you came to see me?”

“Yes, I wanted to discuss the Dothraki fighting style and weaponry.”

It was time for Davos to remove himself from the discussion. “I bid you both a good day, it was good to see you again Ser Gerald.”

“Thank you Ser Davos, I am grateful for your assistance.” Tyrion Lannister greeted.

The Red God and Melisandre have destroyed far too many lives. Davos could feel a sense of anger growing within his gut. No one should have the right to destroy other people's lives in such a manner. If he had any notable skill with a sword he could have gone to the training yard, and he could've hit something, instead Davos had to settle for a long walk around the castle, he didn’t return until very late.

Only two days had passed since Davos’ fateful meeting with Septon Barre until he was summoned once again by Tyrion Lannister’s servant. Davos was fast asleep, when he was woken up from insistent hammering at the door, at first he thought they were under attack. His guards tried to apologise for the intrusion, but Davos was too sleepy to pay them any mind.

Half of his mind was still asleep as he stalked behind the servant with his torch, the wind cried and complained around the corners of their tower, the gargoyles and dragons threw long dark shadows
in their path, the night was strangely quiet, Davos was sure that these creatures could haunt your dreams. He jumped to the side as a bat suddenly flew right beside his head, he could feel the wind from the bat’s wings graze his neck.

_A bloody moon during the hour of the wolf_, it was not a sight that Davos has seen very often. This caused him to shiver, he was finally awake enough to realize that he wasn’t dressed properly, he could feel a chill run down his spine. Davos never grew accustomed to Dragonstone.

When Stannis resided here Davos often had a feeling that the castle was objecting against their presence, it felt as if the stone dragons would awaken one day and burn them for taking their home. Davos had visited many a strange city, and foreign ports but Dragonstone still remained one of the most foreign of places to him.

As they stood outside the Stone Drum Davos could feel the mist rising from the ground, his skin felt wet, slick and icy cold, he heard some faint crying and wailing coming from somewhere beyond the walls. The mist made it seem as if the shadows were churning and twirling, one could be forgiven for thinking that the shadows might come alive. The guards outside barely acknowledged them. The steps and the corridors felt longer and further than ever, as they moved ever closer to their destination Davos could hear a strange chanting emanating from somewhere in front of him. The chanting had a wild, unnatural sound, it was so peculiar it sounded like more than one voice. Davos felt the hair in his neck stand on end. He was met with almost the same scene as two days past. Tyrion Lannister and Rolland Storm was standing in front of the door looking uncertain and exasperated, next to them stood three unsullied soldiers and two Dothraki warriors and a few servants. The Dothraki had a look of terror. “Maegi” one said to the other. When Davos and the servant arrived, the two Dothraki warriors left. Tyrion Lannister was still dressed, while Rolland Storm was only wearing his breeches and a shirt.

“Ser Davos, I am terribly regretful to disturb your rest. I would not have bothered you again with this problem if there was any other way. He is completely ignoring us and he has barred the room from the inside. The courtiers within the castle are growing fearful. I cannot let this go on indefinitely.” It was the first time that Davos had seen Tyrion Lannister appear somewhat lost.

“Ser Davos,” Rolland Storm greeted.

“Has anything happened with Septon Barre? I visited him earlier in the day, he was meek and quiet at the time.” Davos enquired.

“Nothing has happened that we are aware of, he has been wailing, screeching and chanting since midnight.” The chanting went softer just as Rolland Storm voiced his objection. A great bolt of lightning hammered the stone drum, and everything was clear and visible for a heartbeat.
Davos rapped on the door, “Septon Barre! Septon Barre, it is Davos Seaworth, please let me in.”

It was quiet for a few moments, and then the Septon started wailing and screeching in an inhuman key, it sounded like a wounded animal crying in frustration at his last breaths.

Davos knocked and hammered on the door pleading with the Septon to open the door, but his screaming and crying just intensified.

Davos could smell a burning scent coming from within.

“We have to open the door something is burning!” Davos exclaimed.

“Get some axes or anything that can break the door open,” Tyrion Lannister ordered harshly towards two servants that were standing around. It felt like they had to wait for half of the night, in reality the servants moved as fast as they could. Just before the Unsullied soldiers were about to start hacking away, smoke started pouring out underneath the closed door.

The door was made from a heavy oak, at least it wasn’t ironwood. The soldiers hacked and swung their axes, with only torch light to guide their strides. After a time there was a big enough gap to lift the wooden plank that was barring the door.

The door was finally flung open and all that Davos could see was billows of dark grey smoke. Septon Barre had gone quiet as soon as the door was opened. Davos waited for the Unsullied soldiers to step into the room first.

He followed the soldiers into the room with a sense of trepidation, every one of his senses was fully awake. He could hear the footsteps of the Unsullied on the stone floor, his eyes and nose was watering from the smoke in the air. He could feel the heat on his skin as he moved closer to the centre of the room, he could feel beads of sweat running down his temples. The smoke was starting to become thinner as it evaporated through the doorway. Davos came upon a big fire within the middle of the room. Septon Barre was sitting on the ground with his legs crossed, staring into the flames, his head and his beard have been shaven thus his eyes became more visible in his thin face, they were wilder than ever before, his eyes were transfixed on the flickers of the dancing flames. His chest was full of cuts and blood was pouring all over his naked body. The Unsullied soldiers stood around him.

“Get some water to snuff out the fire, get Maester Pylos and a garment,” Davos ordered loudly to no one in particular. Rolland Storm had slowly followed behind him, he stood a few feet away.
“Make it quick,” he added to the list of orders. Tyrion Lannister followed behind him.

Davos approached the Septon slowly, as one might approach a wounded animal.

When he reached the Septon he bent over to make sure that the man wasn’t seriously injured. Septon Bare suddenly grabbed at his chest and shirt.

“I ve seen him Ser Davos!”

Davos jumped back in shock. “He has spoken to me Ser Davos.” The Septon quickly jumped to his feet, with an agility that Davos would not have thought possible. The soldiers moved closer towards him. Some servants started to arrive with buckets of water. Davos could see that the Septon had tried to burn everything that was flammable within the room. His linens and bedding along with his bed and some chairs were all smoldering in the centre of the room.

One servant arrived with a long winter night gown, he handed the garment to Davos and moved away as quickly as possible.

“Septon would you please put on the night gown.” Strangely enough the man gingerly did as Davos asked.

“Ser Davos, you have to tell him, he has to know.” the Septon urged. “Who are you speaking of,” Davos decided to humor the man until they have gotten the room cleared and the maester had arrived.

“I saw him, I saw a great chamber of ice, far, far, away, he lives in the ice. He watches over us all… You must tell him!” His last words were urgently spoken.

Maester Pylos finally arrived with a concoction in his hands, he give it to Davos. “Please drink some of this wine Septon,” Davos almost pleaded with him.

“No,” he screamed. He darted to the side, but one Unsullied soldier caught him. He trashed around for a bit but luckily the soldier didn’t fight him too much, and he quieted down again.

Davos tried again. “Septon, the maester just wants to look after your wounds, you will feel better if you take some of the wine.”
He looked down towards his chest. The thin night shirt was soaked in blood and clinging to his emaciated body.

“I will drink the wine; but first I must tell you what I saw.” The room was quiet, the last embers had finally been snuffed out. Everyone was staring at each other silently.

“Alright, Septon I will listen to what you have to say, let me just quickly speak with this man,” Davos pointed towards Tyrion Lannister. They stepped to one side of the room.

“You will have to prepare a new room for the Septon and make sure that there is almost nothing that can burn within the room, he just needs the bare necessities.” Davos suggested.

“Some people within these walls are very superstitious, I have already been visited by more than one of our patrons who seems to believe that it is a bad omen to have the Septon screaming and crying throughout the night.” Tyrion sighed.

“I heard you have some plans for sending some ships to Oldtown, in order to collect some of the injured men from the Ironborn battle? Send the Septon to Oldtown on one of the ships, in the meantime you might want to house him somewhere else perhaps in the Sea Dragon Tower there he would be close to the maester but remain out of sight - and out of hearing distance”

“You seem to be quite well informed about our plans,” Tyrion Lannister answered with a slight smile. “But you are right, that sounds like the best plan.”

“Make sure that the room is prepared, and I will try to make the Septon drink from the cup of wine, then he can be moved to Sea Dragon Tower.”

Tyrion Lannister nodded, he made his way towards Rolland Storm with the instructions.

Davos moved back to the Septon that was now sitting on the floor again. He sat beside him, “Alright Septon what have you seen.” The Septon looked at him calmly before he began speaking in a preaching type of voice.

“I have seen great fires, I’ve seen thousands of fires within the night sky. I’ve seen the moon dance with the sun and fall from the sky. I’ve seen the eye of the Lord watching over us all. I have seen a blanket of mystique fall upon this world.” His face became more fervent as he spoke.
He grabbed Davos’ arm urgently.

“They must be stopped! He watches over us all from his throne of ice. You have been following the right path, the Lord of Light has guided your way. The Lord of Light watches over us all Ser Davos.” Davos felt chilled, it felt as if Melisandre was speaking to him once more. How could the Septon of all people suddenly worship the Lord of Light. In that moment he just wanted to be somewhere else, how could the right path ever have meant that a little girl should be burned?

“I have seen everything in the flames, the great war will soon be here, but the Lord of Light will guide your way.”.

The room was becoming lighter, the sun will soon rise.

“You have to tell him Ser Davos - tell him!” Septon Barre grabbed the cup and drank the concoction in one swig. They sat in silence for a time, finally Septon Barre laid down on his side and fell asleep. Some of the sun’s orange glares was overwhelming the darker shadows of the night.

The two servants brought a stretcher of sorts, Tyrion Lannister instructed the Unsullied to remove the sleeping Septon. Rolland Storm followed behind them, but he nodded towards Davos before he left the room. The man looked so peaceful while he was asleep it was strange to think of the carnage he created.

“Well ser Davos it appears as if I am in your debt, and you know what they say about Lannister’s and debts.” the Hand stated playfully.

“Thank You,” Tyrion Lannister said sincerely.

“I knew the Septon, I might not have known him very well, but I knew him once all the same. He didn’t imprison himself, he was just another unfortunate victim of this war. As someone who knew him once, it is my duty to try and do something my Lord, although I fear I did very little. “

“Call me Tyrion, not everyone would see it as their duty, Ser Davos.”

“I’ve never been much of a knight, just call me Davos”

“Well Davos, knights do not always have to fight with sword and lance, sometimes you only need understanding and a bit of mercy to work with the downtrodden.”
“I spoke with Jon Snow the day before, I found him brooding on the cliffs. He reminded me once more that he only came here in search of dragonglass. I have spoken with Queen Daenerys about the dragonglass, I think she might grant your request.

She usually walks about the eastern posterior of the castle in the early mornings, before meeting with her dragons. Perhaps if you or Jon met with her alone, she might be more inclined to listen to his requests.”

Davos was bone-weary after the events of the morning, but he could feel some of his energy returning with the news that they might be able to mine for dragonglass. He and Tyrion shook hands before he left to find Jon. As Davos stepped outside he noticed that it was still quite dark, it was darker than he imagined it would be, the darkness was lingering more by the day.

He greeted the Northern guards with a smile, he was just about to climb the steps to Jon’s quarters when he remembered that he must have the look of a man that has been whoring all night long. He quickly made his way to his own chambers in order to refresh himself, you can’t meet a King or a Queen stinking of smoke, ashes and sweat. As he was dressing there was a rap on his door. “Ser Davos, the his Grace the King is here.” Jon was always an early riser.

“I will be out in a moment,” Ser Davos replied. It was incredibly bad manners to make a King wait outside of your doorway, in fact it was unforgivable, but Jon wouldn’t quibble about small matters of etiquette. Davos quickly tied his belt, before he stepped out.

“Ser Davos,” King Jon greeted.

“Good morrow, Your Grace,” Davos replied with mirth.

“My guards informed me that you were called to the castle?”

“Aye,” there was; a complication with the Septon that I told you about.”

“Were you able to help?”

“Aye, but I fear Septon Barre has lost his wits completely. Tyrion will send him to Oldtown, it would be too difficult for him to stay here, and with the destruction of the Great Sept of Baelor there might be nowhere else for him to go.“

“I am sorry to hear that,” Jon answered with a grievous expression.

“Tyrion has told me that you have spoken to him about the dragonglass the day before.” Davos
questioned.

“I did.” Jon answered curtly.

“Tyrion has discussed the matter of the dragonglass with the Queen, he thinks that he might have persuaded her to allow us to mine some of it.” Jon’s grievous expression became lighter and more questioning.

“He suggested, that you should meet with the Queen on her morning walk. She will be alone, so there will be less pressure for her to perform in a certain way. I was just on my to collect you, Your Grace.”

“According to Tyrion she wanders around the eastern side of the castle, early in the morning.”

Two guards filled in behind them noiselessly, as they started moving towards the stairs within the tower.

The eastern side of the castle was littered with walkways on the face of the cliffs. The rising sun lounged around lazily within the sky like a half golden egg. The cliff-face was painted in orange and yellow hues.

The dragons glided around in the sky, their silhouettes looking like imprints upon the sun. They were twirling and dancing upon the horizon. Davos realized that the dragons were playing, playing who could ever guess that dragons might be playful creatures.

“The dragons are fascinating creatures,” Jon remarked as he scanned the horizon with interest. “They are also deadly creatures, Your Grace, that one almost grabbed you on the day we arrived.”

Davos saw the petite figure of the Queen standing on a terrace beneath them. Her long silver hair shined like a beacon against the green hill. She was also watching her dragons.

“The Queen,” Davos pointed towards her softly. Jon nodded and made his way down the stoney stairs, the wind billowed against his cloak, giving it the appearance of wings.

Davos tried his best to hear what they were saying to each other, but the wind was blowing to erratically, their voices refused to be carried to his ears. They stood next to each other, both of them seemingly studying the dragons. They made a striking contrast, Jon with his raven black hair, and the Queen with hair as silver as the sun’s reflection upon a stream.

They were not standing far apart, and from what Davos could tell they were not exchaging any
harsh words as they did during the dinner meeting.

Jon turned around, he made his way back in quick steps. The Queen turned around and watched as Jon walked up the stairs, Davos was too far away, but he might have seen a look of speculation and attentiveness upon her face. She watched until she could no longer see him.

When Jon returned to his side, he seemed somewhat bemused. “The Queen will allow us to mine the dragonglass; and she will also provide men to help us mine.” It has been a while since Davos had seen Jon Snow smile.

“I will have to start mining immediately, this dragonglass will have to be reworked as soon as possible. Mayhaps I should find some stone masons, they might be able to work the dragonglass into weapons. Then we will be able to send weapons and unfinished dragonglass to the North as soon as possible.” Jon’s thoughts immediately returned to his fight against the White Walkers. Davos tried his best to suppress a yawn.

“You must be very tired, Ser Davos. Get some rest, I will go and find the stone masons. I have already discover where the dragonglass might be hidden.”

“Thank you, Your Grace. I suggest that you locate Omer Blackberry he is the steward of Dragonstone, or Rolland Storm the Castellan. One of them could send someone with you to help with the villagers. And please take a few guards with you. You might find Omer Blackberry around the kitchen area during this time of the morning”

Jon quickly took-off with a renewed vigour. The guards quickly trotted after Jon, before he was lost from sight.

As Davos made his way to the Windwyrn Tower he could hear the birds singing and chirping around him. He took his time, and watched the sun’s rising in full. Davos broke his fast before he lay upon his bed with almost all of his clothes still on. He thought about what Septon Barre said, was it simply the ravings of a tormented man? Even if he were inclined to listen to the Septon’s advice it was nothing more than nonessential words strung together incoherently, he has certainly had more than enough of R’hillor and his band of fire worshippers.

Davos awoke somewhere in the afternoon long past midday when the guards in front of his door were changed. He was disorientated, it felt as if he might have been asleep for days. He stretched his sleeping limb before getting out of bed. He washed his face and hands before exiting his chambers.

“Good afternoon,” the guards greeted kindly, Davos greeted them in return. “Has the King returned yet?”
“Nay, he went to village, than he came back and collected the Manderly men, but he has not returned.”

Davos left the confines of the Windwyrn Tower, he walked past the smaller courtyard on his way to the Sea Dragon Tower. A servant girl existed the tower just as he was about to move towards the narrow turnpike stairs. “Girl,” he called out and she stopped in her tracks. “Do you know where I might find Septon Barre?”

“He is directly underneath the maester’s chambers.”

“Thank You,” Davos answered politely.

He made his way up the twisting stairs, two Unsullied soldiers stood in front of a door.

“Septon Barre,” Davos questioned.

One of the soldier nodded and open the door for him.

The room was dim, there were almost nothing within the room. Septon Barre lay quietly on a pellet upon the floor. There was a jug of water and a empty horn next to him. Davos sat down on the floor next to the resting Septon. He lifted his blankets, to see if his wounds were treated. The Septon did appear to be clean, and Davos could see that some ointment were applied to some of the cuts.

He sat quietly with the Septon for a time, and left just before twilight descended on the Castle.

When he reached the Windwyrn Tower, the guards informed him that Jon has returned.

“Is the King in his chambers?” Davos enquired.

“The King went to the gardens,” Kai replied.

Davos turned around and leisurely made his way towards Aegon’s gardens. He smelled the faint scent of pine and wild roses just before he reached the garden, Dylan was standing at the edge of the garden, he greeted the Northern guard. *Where would Jon go?* He scanned the edges of the garden, before moving towards the centre, he found Jon sitting on a large rock in front of an ancient oak tree. Jon turned around and saw him before he could move any closer.

“Ser, Davos,” he greeted expressionlessly.

“Your Grace, I hope I am not disturbing your prayers.” Davos moved closer respectfully. “Kai informed me that you were here.”
“Tormund told me that Old Gods can’t watch over me in the South, because all of the Weirwoods have been hacked down long ago.”

“I have stopped praying since I have returned from the darkness. It doesn’t seem as if there is anyone worth praying to,” he reflected matter of factly.

“I came here because it has been years since I have seen trees with green leaves and it has been years since I have smelled the scent of fresh flowers.” Jon paused before adding grievously, “and it might be years before I see it again.”

“I have never been much of a believer in the gods myself, Your Grace. I’ve visited many ports and strange cities, I haven’t found one god that seems to be worth the effort. Although I must admit I do admire the simplicity of the Northern gods. You have no temples, no priests to spread the word, and no priests to make any collections, or offer any absolution. There are no sacred scriptures and rules to obey. In fact I still don’t quite understand how the Northern gods operates.”

“Old Nan, one of our old nursemaids, used to tell us that the trees and the land watch over us all, our prayers are answered through the winds, plants, animals and the snows. When you hear the wind rustling through the trees, it’s the gods who are answering your calls.” Jon paused for a moment and continued, “when I was a child I used to believe that the gods were answering my prayers.” Jon appeared wistful as he thought back to his childhood.

“There is something extraordinary in nature that makes one want to believe the gods,” Davos answered thoughtfully.

“However, I strongly believe that we as men have to make our way, you have to look out for yourself no god is going to save you. And you have to work hard if you want to achieve something more. We may be born as peasants, bastards - or even as a slave, the gods are not going to change your position or your life. You have to apply yourself if you want to change your destiny.” Davos ended his words strongly.

“I wish someone could have told me that before I ever joined the Nights Watch. As a bastard I was so certain that it was my only path, where I could serve with pride, and where I could remove the shame from my family for having a bastard within their mists. But I was a stubborn greenboy, and probably wouldn’t have listened.” Jon added with a slight smile.

“We are all stubborn little shits at some point, Your Grace. If you didn’t join the Nights Watch than no one would be fighting against the White Walkers.”

“Hmm, I am not so sure about that,” Jon answered ironically.
“My father used to pray and contemplate his decisions, after every execution. He lost his head all the same, my brother was butchered in the great hall of the Freys. They were both great men, the best of men truth be told, and yet here I am. I am the one that has remained,” Jon spoke in a tired voice.

Nothing ever made much sense, who knows why an innocent girl such as Shireen had to be burned at the stake while terrible men seems to be thriving, Mathos never had any time to learn anything about life, mayhaps he should have been praying for himself, instead of wasting his prayers on his godless father.

“Your brother and your father never joined the Nights Watch, they wouldn’t known anything about the Night’s King and the army of the dead. We can’t change the past, you are here; and you have just secured the dragonglass.”

“We are here now,” Jon agreed, “I was just wondering about what might happen if we somehow survived the White Walkers.”

“Was it my duty to secure the dragonglass, or am I suppose to secure an alliance with the Dragon Queen, or will I fight against the White Walkers for Winterfell? I am not sure how much time I have left.” Jon spoke the last sentence softly as he stared far away into the distance.

“I am not a person who knows anything about the will of gods and fate. We all have to die at some point, you might as well make the most of it, Your Grace.” Jon give Davos one of his sad smiles. Jon is likely even younger than Mathos was, and he has seen more than men who have survived four times longer. He was still a child when he joined the Nights Watch, fighting against the White Walkers alone is a heavy burden to bare.

“I have only acquired two stone masons from the village, the rest of them are busy rebuilding the Sept. The Manderly soldiers have started to clear some of the rubble out of the cave.” King Jon abruptly changed their discussion.

“Was it difficult to locate the dragonglass within the cave, Your Grace?”

Their conversation was interrupted by footstep. Both of them clearly heard the crunching of leaves. Both of them looked in the direction where the sound came from, and Queen Daenerys appeared through the clearing. They all stared at each other for a moment, before the Queen finally broke the silence.

“Ser Davos Seaworth, and... erm my Lord.” She greeted tentatively.

“Your Grace,” both of them acknowledged in return.

“It it a beautiful day for visiting the gardens; it is a shame that the day is almost over. Have you
made any progress with your quest to find the dragonglass?” The Queen displayed a more open disposition than Davos has ever seen from her.

“I was able to locate a cave with a few dragonglass deposits.

You should come and see the deposits before we start mining them, they have a certain harsh, natural beauty, but it might be better if we removed some more of the rubble first,” Jon added as an afterthought.

“Just let me know when you are ready, I am curious to see this dragonglass for myself.” The Queen answered with a slight smile. Jon stood abruptly from the stone he was sitting on.

“Thank you, for allowing us to mine the dragonglass,” Jon spoke with great sincerity.

“I will send some of my soldiers to help you on the morrow.” The Queen offered.

“We would be grateful for any help,” Jon answered.

“Well, there are a lot that still needs to be planned, we will leave you to enjoy the gardens in peace, Your Grace.”

“Oh,” the Queen answered half bemused, “good luck with your plans.”

Jon inclined his head, and Davos made a half bow before they walked off. Davos turned around just as they were about to exit the clearing, and once again he noticed that the Queen was staring after Jon. She quickly turned around when she noticed that Davos was looking. This time he was much closer, therefore it was much easier to interpret her look, it was a look of interest and curiosity.

When they were far enough away, Davos finally spoke, “I am not sure the Queen really wanted us to leave.”

“I am sure the Queen has better things to do with her time, than sitting around and making small talk with us; and we do have some important plans to make,” Jon answered slightly indulgently.

“What did you discussing this morning, Your Grace,” Davos asked, his curiosity got the better of him. Jon frowned towards Davos, there might have been a slight irritation in his glare.

“I was just wondering, because you seemed to be on much better terms.” Davos held up his hand defensively.

“Our brothers and the dragons,” Jon answered nonchalantly.
“We have to calculate how much dragonglass each ship can carry.” Jon contemplated with a calculating expression. Davos could see that Jon had no interest in discussing the dragon Queen any further.

“I am definitely not the right person for those calculations. We should speak with the captains of the ships, and perhaps maester Pylos could help.”

Jon focused all of his attentions on the logistics of the task ahead as they made their way back towards the Wingwyrm Tower.
Bran II

Brandon

Bran was sitting on the balcony, or rather the wooden walkway right outside of the room he has been sharing with Meera these past few days. Lord Commander Edd was kind enough to make an allowance for him to place a chair on the deck, so that he could watch over the constant activity that was always present within the courtyard of Castle Black. Some snowflakes were drifting lazily to the ground. The snowflakes appeared like a curtain from where Bran was sitting. He was wrapped snugly between black Night's Watch furs.

Since Bran had arrived at the Wall, the days had gone by so quickly. He was mostly asleep for the first few days, at some point Bran had awoken to find that he couldn’t recall if it was morning or afternoon, he didn’t know if he had slept through the night or if he had just woken up in the afternoon. He and Meera were so tired from days of fleeing Beyond the Wall. Bran’s head has finally started to function more normally again these past two days. He was fully awake the day before, and he slept soundly last night. Meera had broken her fast with him this morning, but she went back to bed. He let Meera be, she was the one who dragged him around, he could not begin to understand how exhausted she must be. Lord Commander Edd left both of them in peace, some of the stewards within the Nights Watch brought them regular meals, ale, wine and saw to their general needs.

Lord Commander Edd had warned Bran upon his arrival that Lord Brandon Norrey and Torghen Flint would probably want to speak with him about the succession within the North. Bran met these two Lords just the night before, in the great dining hall of Castle Black. They greeted him affable enough, but beyond that interaction they didn’t display much interest in him.

Bran was watching as the Mountain Clans men trained and fought against each other. They fought with clubs, sticks and tourney swords. Some of them had axes, maces and spears. Some of their weapons were crude and unsightly but they fought with a dangerous ferocity.

Bran could hear two voices communicating with each other, underneath the walkway he was sitting on, at first he didn’t know who the voices belonged to, but he to listened their conversation since he had nothing else to do.

“Your men are very well trained Lord Brandon.” the one voice spoke.

“Aye. I’ve been training the men hard ever since the rest of the North decided to campaign within the south.” Lord Brandon answered with a bold, proud voice.

“I knew there could only be trouble lurking within the south, so I’ve trained my men harder, I
know a day will come, when we will have to fight.”

“You are not wrong Lord Brandon, going south have never meant anything good for us Northmen. Most of the forces within the North have been destroyed. The men haven’t done the proper harvesting, half of the North will probably starve during this winter.”

“We have collected what we can, but you know as well as I do that harvesting within the mountains have never been easy.”

“It was foolish to go south with winter approaching, the Clans understands and remembers the true North. The Lords below the Gift quickly forgets what winter actually means.”

“At least we might have some peace in the North now that the Boltons are gone.”

“We might,” Lord Brandon answered speculatively. “But the North is still overrun with Bolton outlaws from what I’ve been hearing.”

“They are desperate men, desperate men do not shy away from any crimes no matter how heinous.”

“What about Brandon Stark?” The other man asked after a pause. “Who will be the King in the North now that Brandon Stark has returned to the North?” Bran wished in that moment that their voices could have been louder, he wanted to silence any other voices and the clinking sounds from the men that were practicing within the courtyard.

“I should think that Jon Snow will remain as the King in the North; he has already been chosen, hasn’t he?”

“Aye,” the other voice answered tentatively. “But Brandon Stark is the eldest living son of Lord Eddard Stark and Lady Catelyn Stark.”

“He could be the Lord of Winterfell then, Lady Sansa Stark is currently acting as the Lady of Winterfell from what I understand. Lady Sansa and Jon Snow were able to reach some type of an agreement, they are both older than Brandon Stark, I don’t see why anything needs changing. Jon Snow has been making many arrangement to try and secure the North.”

“He seems to be doing well enough, but that doesn’t change the fact that he is a bastard. What happens in the future? What will happen if Lady Sansa’s sons started a war against the bastard’s sons?” The voice questioned very seriously.

Lord Brandon apparently found his question quite amusing, Bran could hear him laughing boisterously. “Torghen, the odds of us surviving this winter is quite dim. Why do you concern yourself with obstacles that you would never have to experience yourself?” Bran had an inkling that it might have been the two Clan leaders who were speaking to each other, but Lord Brandon Norrey’s words finally give him the confirmation.

“I am concerned for the lives of my children, and their children after them. If it is possible, I would
like to see them live within a peaceful land.” Torghen answered slightly offended.

“You must appreciate your children a great deal more than I do mine.” Lord Brandon Norrey laughed again.

“Jon Snow was raised alongside his brothers and sisters, how often do you see that? They all get along very well from what I’ve heard. Starks are not southern turncoats, they’ve never fought against each other. Besides, Jon Snow was literally just unlucky enough to be born on the wrong side of blanket, everyone knows that his mother was a Lady, everyone knows where that bastard comes from.”

“Oh, I haven’t heard anything about this?” Torghen enquired with interest.

Lord Brandon Norrey laughed again, “you should venture past your mountains every now and again, I honestly thought this was old news.”

“I was at the tourney of Harrenhal, of course I didn’t spend any time with the High Lords upon their specially erected pavilions, and I wasn’t invited to balls where the High Lords and the Princes practiced their manners and their mummerly. But I was there all the same. Brandon Stark drank with us one night,” Lord Brandon Norrey reminisced about the past fondly, “the Starks may be High Lords but they also don’t care much for southern manners and knights.

Now Brandon Stark, he was a wild one, he could outdrink us all.”

“So I’ve heard.” Torghen Flint confirmed.

Lord Norrey spoke about the past with longing in his voice. “In fact that bastard has somewhat of a look of his wild uncle - he has the same hair. People talk; people spoke about Lord Eddard and Ashara Dayne. I only saw her once, she was a great beauty. But by the end of the tournament everyone was only talking about Rhaegar Targaryen and the rejection he displayed towards his wife.” Lord Brandon Norrey paused for a few moments. “Anyhow, Lord Eddard took the greatsword ‘Dawn’ to Starfall, after the death of Ser Arthur Dayne, and he returned North with a babe.”

“The North was safe when Lord Eddard ruled the North, you could walk through the fields and forests without any fear of being assailed; the realm was safe.” Bran thought back to the quiet reassure his father could display when he spoke to the bannermen. He wish his father could have guided them now, he would have known what to do.

“Aye,” Lord Brandon Norrey agreed.

“I think we should speak with young Brandon Stark, we should hear his thoughts about his bastard brother being the King.” Torghen Flint surmised.

Lord Brandon Norrey answered him with strong conviction, “Brandon Stark is a young boy. A young crippled boy. His brother is a grown man who has fought in battles. I’ve heard from my cousin, who is married to a Hornwood, according to him Jon Snow almost slew half the Bolton army by himself. The man is a demon on the battlefield.
I bare Brandon Stark no ill will, I would always protect the Starks and die for the Starks. But bastard or not Jon Snow is much better suited to be the King in these times of war. Winter is here, now is not the time for noble deeds or a knightly conscious.”

“I am still going to speak with Brandon Stark, you can join me, or you can look the other way, it makes no difference to me.” Torghen Flint replied with some intent of his own.

Just after he had spoken a horn could be heard throughout the courtyard.

“I am sorry Bran,” Meera spoke softly from behind him. She must have heard part of the conversation.

Bran shrugged, “it doesn’t matter.” Once Bran had woken up from his fall, and he was lying broken upon his bed, he quickly understood that many things were lost to him forever, and that people will always speak about him as if wasn’t a whole person. At least he still had his mind, Hodor spent most of his life as a halfwit, because of me.

Meera brought a chair from their room and she sat next to him. Everyone were running around trying to find a position from where they could see what was happening within the courtyard.

“Clear the courtyard!” Lord Commander Edd shouted. Lord Brandon Norrey and Torghen Flint joined Lord Commander Edd along with his steward, and two other men from the Nights Watch.

“That man should not have spoken about you like that.”

Bran shrugged, “he is only speaking hard truths, I am a cripple.”

“That does not make it right, you can still think and rule, you don't need your legs to be able to rule.”

“Mayhaps, but the men needs someone who will stand with them on the field, they need someone who is willing to lead them by example, it makes them feel more self assured, I am not that person. I have accepted my fate and the part that has been reserved for me. It would be better for me to concentrate my efforts on mastering my greenseeing, rather than concerning myself with the thoughts of some bannermen. ” Meera only shook her head.

A column of men rode into the courtyard, their seegreen cloaks were strange amongst the bleakness of Castle Black. The man in front of the column wore armour of silver and green that was shaped and overlapped like fish scales, he rode his horse upright with a strong frame. The man carried the seegreen meerman banner of House Manderly. “Ser Raymann Hoode,” a boy announced loudly to everyone in the courtyard, Bran assumed it was his squire. He climbed off his horse easily. Lord Commander Edd and the rest of the men inclined their heads, and greeted the man.

“We have accompanied the Karstark, Bolton and Umber traitors, they have been sentenced to take the black.” the man announced with a clear voice. The King has also instructed us to remain at Castle Black and watch over these men until they have acclimatized to the Nights Watch, we bring some supplies with us as well.”

Lord Commander Edd knew about these arrivals, he told them about it on their first night. Lord
Commander Edd thanked Ser Raymann Hood, and told them that rooms have been prepared for them within the King’s tower. But Ser Raymann Hood first wanted to make sure that all of the new Nights Watch recruits were settled and probably watched over, before he retired.

Castle Black certainly had the space for a lot of men, although many of the towers were run down and delipidated. Bran and Meera remained outside for a while and watched over the organised chaos that has descended upon Castle Black.

That evening one of the stewards brought some new clothes to their chambers and they were invited to attend dinner. The clothes were not really that new, it was only something new for Bran and Meera. They both received thick woolen tunics and breeches, along with some cloaks and even some small clothes and boots. They quickly dressed into their new clothes, Meera dressed behind a screen that was brought in for her. It was a very simplic style, but Bran almost felt like a different person after he was dressed in the lighter woolen fabric. Bran thought about throwing his old sodden pelts into the hearth, but Meera ignored his instructions. “They could still be cleaned and used by someone else.” Bran was very dubious about the whole idea, but he knew Meera wouldn’t change her mind so didn’t try to ask her again.

Lord Commander Edd’s personal steward arrived to escort them to the Shieldhall, he was accompanied Little Yohan. Little Yohan easily lifted Bran within his arms as if he was still a small boy.

“Will the other men who have arrived today be joining us tonight?” Meera enquired from the steward.

“Yes my Lady, that is why I was sent to accompany you, I have to introduce you to our guests. That reminds me, I dont have the pleasure of knowing your name?” Meera looked over to Bran, just before they left the room, Bran was the one who answered the steward. “You have the pleasure of addressing Lady Meera Reed from Greywater Watch.”

“Oh,” the steward fumbled slightly, he obviously didn’t realize that Meera was actually a Lady. “It is an honour to meet you my Lady.” He bowed and they left the confines of the warm room. Bran could immediately feel the cold air sting against his warm face. The courtyard and the towers were well lit by hundreds of torches, there were still quite a few men milling about. Some of the men greeted them with a quick nod whilst others just ignored them completely. They could hear talking and chattering from the men just outside of the Shieldhall, almost all of the doors and windows were tightly shut, but there were some light that poured out of an open window. Bran felt slightly nervous, hasn’t been anywhere near such a big gathering of men, since the time when King Robert came to Winterfell. He was so excited to see all of the knights in their finery, those were some of the best days of his life, and yet he hardly thought back to them at all.

They entered the Shieldhall without much notice. The heat from the hall made Bran’s cheeks and nose feel aflame after the cold night air. The hall was filled with smoke and delicious smells that only served to make Bran hungry. Most of the men were drinking and some of them were even laughing, which was quite at odds with the general sombre feeling around Castle Black. The steward lead them to the high table, Ser Raymann Hood, Lord Brandon Norrey, Torghen Flint and Lord Commander Edd were already seated at the table. The steward cleared his voice before he announced them to the rest of the occupants at the table.
“Lord Brandon Stark from Winterfell, and Lady Meera Reed from Greywater Watch.” Petyr announced clearly. All of the men at the table stood, Ser Raymann Hoode took Meera’s hand and pulled a chair out for her. They were both seated in the middle of the table. Two horns of ale were placed in front of them along with some cutlery.

Ser Raymann Hoode was seated to their right, and he was the first one to speak with them. “I am honoured to meet you Lord Brandon and Lady Meera, I didn’t realize that a Stark was present at Castle Black.”

“I have just recently arrived, Ser Raymann Hoode,” Bran answered. “Just call me Raymann, everyone does, I have to admit that I am very curious about how you came to be at Castle Black. Everyone within the North are under the impression that you have died.”

Ser Raymann addressed Bran very directly, he didn’t try to make small talk or issue any apologies, Bran liked his ways.

“I escaped from Winterfell after the Boltons had sacked it, I was trying to make my way towards Castle Black. I wasn’t sure which bannerman could be trusted, at that point I could only trust my brother. I met Lady Meera and her brother along the way, and they have protected me. On my way to the Wall I found out that my brother wasn’t at Castle Black, he was ranging Beyond the Wall, so I went Beyond the Wall myself. I sent my little brother to the Umbers, before going Beyond the Wall.” It made Bran feel very helpless to think about Rickon, what good was it to be the Three Eyed Raven if you couldn’t protect your own family?

“That sounds like one incredible story Lord Brandon Stark,” Ser Raymann replied, even the two Mountain Clan leaders were looking at him with interest. “Just call me Bran, everyone does,” Bran answered with a smile in order to lighten the mood a bit. “We found them outside of the tunnel only eight days pass.” Lord Commander Edd confirmed part of the tale.

Ser Raymann must have noticed something upon his face when Bran spoke about the Umbers and Rickon. “Brandon, I can assure you that justice have been served upon the Umbers, and the Boltons. In fact I’ve just brought all of the remaining survivors from the battle at Winterfell, the King has sentenced them to take the black.” Ser Raymann appeared slightly uncomfortable after he had spoken about the King. Just like the rest of them he probably understood that there might be some problems with the line of succession. “Thank you for you service, Ser Raymann,” Bran answered in order to break the moment of silence.

“You shouldn’t really be thanking me, I haven’t done anything, I didn’t fight against these men on the field of battle, I am only following orders.” Ser Raymann replied. Almost everyone at the table were staring intently to their plates. Ser Raymann looked around before addressing the obvious question.

“Now that you have finally returned to the North, will you be taking on a different position, my Lord?” Bran was tired of issues regarding succession, and he was tired of the tiptoeing around him. He decided that he would address the issue directly, and hopefully he wouldn’t be bothered with it again. Meera was looking at him intently.
“There are no need to change any positions within the North, my sister Sansa is the Lady of Winterfell, and brother Jon is the King in the North. I congratulate you my Lords, you have chosen wisely, I believe that my brother might be one of the only men within the realm who has the fortitude to fight for us in the great war to come, I just want to go home to Winterfell and see my family again.”

All of people looked at him slightly surprised, and some of them appeared to be relieved.

“Brandon Stark,” Torghen Flint addressed him directly, “you carry wisdom beyond your years, mayhaps you will one day be a ruler with great wisdom.”

“How are the new recruits settling in, Lord Commander?” Brandon Norrey asked. “It is still too early to say, every single person who’s ever joined the Nights Watch thinks about leaving the Nights Watch, as soon as they walk through the gates. We have posted centuries all along Castle Black, come the morrow we will see how many deserted during the night.” Lord Commander Edd answered expressionlessly. Brandon Norrey didn’t reply he just took a few sips from his ale. It made Bran slightly curious about the Lord Commander.

“Lord Commander,” he questioned, “how did you come to take the black?”

“Ignorance, youth, ale and a persuasive Nights Watch recruiter. I suppose youth, ale and ignorance goes hand-in-hand, add a persuasive Nights Watch recruiter and stupidity are abound to ensue. I was drinking at an inn, a Night Watch recruiter came along, and he convinced me that I would be doing a noble deed; that I would be fighting for the glory of the realm by joining the Nights Watch,” Lord Commander Edd sighed, “the Nights Watch recruiter also told me that women love men in uniforms; well, as I said, mainly stupidity.” Bran could hear Meera giggle softly beside him. “You are protecting the realm from the White Walkers,” Meera told Lord Commander Edd. “Honestly, it might not all have been that bad, we mostly sit around by the fire, drinking ale and retelling the same old stories of past glories, but of course the White Walkers would decide to return after being gone for eight thousand years - as soon as I set foot in Castle Black.” Lord Commander Edd sighed again.

“Do you have any knowledge about the White Walkers, my Lady?” Ser Raymann asked from Meera.

“Our paths have crossed Beyond the Wall.”

“How did you survive this encounter?” Ser Raymann asked slightly shocked.

“Through sacrifice,” Meera’s eyes became slightly misty, “sacrifice and dragonglass.”

“I would like to know more about this encounter, but perhaps at another time.”

“Lord Commander,” Bran decided to ask for what he really wanted, “I would greatly appreciate it, if you would be able to spare a man or two, to take me to the weirwood grove Beyond the the Wall on the morrow, I might be able to help you with the fight against the White Walkers.” Everyone turned and looked at Bran.

“Ah,” Lord Commander Edd answered, “I can definitely see some of your brother in you, it seems
like you might have the same propensity for making dubious decisions.” Bran only frowned.

“We’ll speak about this, let us first enjoy our dinner without the White Walkers.”

They finished their dinner more quietly, Ser Raymann told them of their encounter with some outlaws on their way to Castle Black. When the meal was over Little Yohan and Petyr escorted them back to their room.

Bran wasn’t really tired, he sat upright in the bed, and Meera sat on the other side. “Do you think they might allow me to train with the men?” Meera asked.

“It has been awhile since I’ve had any training, and it would be good for me to practice with experienced men.”

“I don’t know we have to ask Lord Commander Edd, Bran answered with uncertainty. He wasn’t sure it would be a good idea for Meera to spend too much time with men that fought for the Boltons, and there was no other woman at the Nights Watch.

“What did you think of Ser Raymann?” Bran asked her.

“He seem like noble-type of man,” Meera answered simply.

“He reminds me of the knights from the tales, I hope we get to see him fight,” Bran pondered, “a true Northern Knight, there aren’t many of them.”

Their discussion was interrupted by Lord Commander Edd, his steward knocked on the door and announced him before he entered.

“We have to talk about how we will get you back to Winterfell, I’ve spoken about it too Ser Raymann.”

“Ser Raymann will escort us back to Winterfell?” Bran questioned excitedly.

“He will supply Manderly guards to escort you safely back to Winterfell, he himself has to return to White Harbour.”

“Oh,” Bran answered slightly dejectedly.

“But, unfortunately you wouldn’t be able to make the trip immediately. The Manderly soldiers have to stay at the Nights Watch for now, we don’t have the authority or the power to keep all of these new Bolton, Karstark and Umber men under control. They would first have to acclimatize to the Wall. And I don’t want to spread word about your arrival to Castle Black, it seems like the outlaws are terrorizing the countryside. If they got word about a Stark travelling about, they might just decide to kidnap you, your brother would lob my head off if something were to happen to you on your way to Winterfell. So you will have to remain here for a little while longer, my Lord.”

Bran sighed, “I understand, Lord Commander. If I have to remain at Castle Black for longer, would you please allow me to visit the weirwood grove.”

It was Lord Commander Edd’s turn to sigh, “what do you hope to accomplish with the trees?”
“It is difficult to explain, but I am the Three Eyed Raven.” Lord Commander Edd raised his eyebrows and nodded.

“I can see through the weirwood, I have greensight, if I master my skills enough, I wouldn’t need the weirwoods anymore.”

“The sight?” I’ve heard the Wildlings speak about the sight.

“You spoke about Hardhome when we arrived at the gates,” Bran confirmed.

“Aye,” Lord Commander Edd answered.

“I saw what happened at Hardhome, I didn’t realize at the time you were speaking about Hardhome, because I didn’t recognise the name, but I saw it. I saw the Night’s King watching from the mountain upon his horse, he sent thousands of wights over the edge of the cliff, they were all broken but they just stood up again. You and Jon ran for the docks and climbed into a boat, the Night’s King followed you onto the dock, he raised his arms and all of the dead Wildlings were reanimated. There was a giant with you, he just waded right into the sea towards some ships, while swinging a huge log.”

The Lord Commander appeared slightly surprised.

“I don’t know if I will be able to spare the men at the moment, I am not making any promised but I will try to accommodate you. This isn’t Winterfell, we don’t have servants and guards to watch over people.”


“Lord Commander,” Meera asked, “I don’t want to be a bother, I would just like to ask if it would be possible for me to train alongside the men. The Lord Commander brought his right hand towards his forehead and he started massaging his temples with his thumb and middle finger. “The seven save me,” he mumbled barely audible.

“Lady Meera, I am not sure it would be a good idea for you to spend too much time with the men, especially now that the Night’s Watch have so many new brothers. “Although,” he paused and looked at Bran, “your brother has decreed that all of the women within the North should be trained as well, you see what I meant with dubious decisions?” Lord Commander Edd looked back at Meera. “However, it is best that both of you try to remain mostly confined to these chambers.”

The Lord Commander’s steward appeared at the doorway, he was out of breath. “Lord Commander, there is a Wildling women with a baby in the tunnel!”

Lord Commander Edd just stared at him, “she wants to join the rest of the Wildlings, she is sure that her husband was taken by the White Walkers.”

“Where?”

Petyr frowned, “in the tunnel, Lord Commander?”

“No,” Lord Commander Edd looked towards the heavens before continuing his questioning, “I meant, where was her husband taken by the White Walkers?”
“Oh, I didn’t think to ask, Lord Commander.” Petyr answered regretfully.

“Excuse me,” Lord Commander Edd offered towards Bran and Meera, “I will have to attend to this matter myself.”

Bran nodded, and Lord Commander Edd left swiftly.

The next morning they were awoken by the blearing from the horns at the southern gate. The room was shadowy and bitter cold. Bran instinctively sat upright to see if the fire was still burning within the hearth. Bran could only see a few coals flicker through the darkness. They could hear a lot of shuffling and talking as a group of men were making their way towards the courtyard. The biting cold didn’t seem to impede Meera unduly, she quickly shot out of bed after she had greeted him. She stretched and placed some more wood upon the fire in the hearth.

Meera rubbed her arms with both of her hands, “It’s cold today, isn’t it?” She tried to pour some water for them, “even the water is half frozen.” Meera stepped behind her screen, she stepped out from the screen with a big cloak. “Let me see if I can find us something to eat and drink,” she explained as she left the room. It gave Bran a chance to take care of some of his own toiletries.

It wasn’t long after that when Petyr appeared at the door.

“Good morrow, my Lord, I saw Lady Meera heading towards the kitchens and I thought that I might see if you need anything?”

“Thank You, Petyr. Could you please hand me my cloak, and I don’t know if you would be able to help me to get outside?”

“Outside’, the steward questioned, “it is freezing cold outside, if you sit around in one place for too long you will get frostbite.”

“I just want to see what is happening outside, there isn’t much for me to do within my room all day long, I am a Stark we have icy blood running through our veins.” Bran reassured him proudly.

The steward looked at him skeptically, as he handed his coat to him.

“I will send for Little Yohan to help you,” he answered and left the room.

Meera returned before Little Yohan had a chance to appear. She smiled as she entered the room, “look what I got for us!” It was a plate stacked with warm bread, Meera placed the plate on the bed between them and they both started eating. The bread was thickly sliced with warm butter dripping onto his fingers.

“Did you manage to learn what the commotion at the gate was about?” Bran asked between the bites.

“Apparently, it was deserters that were brought back by the guards. They tried to escape during the night.”

“Lord Commander Edd did mention that he had posted guards outside,” Bran pondered between
They were just about finished when Little Yohan arrived, “Good morrow, milady, milord.” He had a kettle with him.

“Petyr asked me to bring you some mulled wine,” he held the kettle up and place it on the table, “he also said that you want to sit outside?”

Meera stood from the bed she took the plate to the table, and she poured some of the mulled wine for them. “Would you like some wine as well,” she asked Little Yohan. He was surprised, “ah, thank you milady,” he said and half bowed at the same time. He placed two chairs outside, and moved Bran to one of the chairs.

“Are you going to watch the judgments, milord?”

“I don’t know,” Bran answered.

“They caught quite a few deserters last night, and two men froze to death. Lord Commander Edd will start passing judgement as soon as he has broken his fast. He will do it in the courtyard.”

“Oh, then I guess I will be watching,” Bran stated. Little Yohan quickly drank his wine and left.

Soon enough a group of disheveled men with long faces, were marched right into the centre of the courtyard, they were bedraggled, their clothes tattered and they appeared to be in disarray. Some of them were in chains, Bran heard the clinking of the chains as they slowly made their way towards the centre of the courtyard. There were much more deserters than Bran thought there would be.

They struggled to make their way through the snow, their feet dragged trenches through the piles of snow. The snow was almost falling down like a waterfall, and an icy wind occasionally blew the white flakes sideways. The sky was almost rayless, it was slate-grey and overcasted, it was difficult to see what exactly was happening. Long frozen rivets of water was stuck to the railing of the walkways. Bran almost wondered if the sun had disappeared forever. He was warmly wrapped in his furs, but the biting wind still managed to chill his insides every now and again, Meera appeared uncomfortable next to him.

“The punishment for deserting the Nights Watch is death,” Bran heard Lord Commander Edd speaking. Five men were brought to a platform, all of them had a chance to say their last words before a noose were placed around their necks, they were standing on barrels which were kicked out from underneath them. Bran imagined that he could hear the sound of the rope snapping, as the men’s full weight fell against the rope.

Bran’s attention was distracted from the scene in front of him by a group of men that made their way towards them upon the walkway, Little Yohan was right in front.

“Milord” Little Yohan addressed him, “the Lord Commander has instructed us to take you and Lady Meera Beyond the Wall to the weirwood grove.

“Oh,” Bran managed with a slight smile. He did not really believe that Lord Commander Edd would grant permission for him to travel to the weirwood trees, Beyond the Wall, especially so
soon after the conversation of the previous night.

“If you are ready, we can leave immediately, my Lord.”

“I am ready.” He looked at Meera and she nodded.

Little Yohan picked him up, they quickly made their way past the executions. Ten men were following them with torches and spears. A sled was ready and waiting for them inside of the tunnel. Little Yohan waved his torch and the gate creaked open. Bran was blinded and dizzy for a few moments, he couldn’t immediately register where the sky began or where the land ended, all he saw was white snow. They pulled Bran along and struggled against the winds, the flames from their torches were threatening to blow out. Bran kept his eyes shut through most of their walk, the wind and snow left a terrible sting within his eyes, regardless of his efforts to keep them closed.

It was easy to recognise the weirwood grove, the trees held a strange serenity. The wind and snow blew past the great trees. The weather was much better within the middle of the weirwood grove. All of the men stared at the sight with astonishment, as the red leaves shone brightly against the pure white piles of snow. Bran just knew he made right choice to try and come here.

They settled the sled between the grove of trees, one man removed some blankets and two tourney swords from the sled. “Hobb packed some food and something to drink if anyone are hungry.” One of the men told the rest. Bran asked Little Yohan to place him by the biggest weirwood tree. The tree held an ancient expression of wisdom.

“Lady Meera,” one of the men addressed her, “the Lord Commander asked me to train with you,” he held the two swords within the air. Meera smiled happy.

“I would be grateful, for a bit of practice,” Meera answered sincerely.

“I am Iron Emmett.” He threw a sword towards Meera, and she caught it deftly with one hand, they slowly started to circle each other. Bran wished he could have practiced sword fighting with Meera.

Little Yohan was still standing next to Bran, he watched the pair of fighters intently.

Bran wondered if the duty of watching over him like a nursemaid was a nuisance to these men.

“I apologise that I’ve taken you away from your true duties at Castle Black, Little Yohan.”

Little Yohan shook his head, “just call me Yohan,”

“In truth, I would much rather sit around here than watch one hundred and six men being hung, milord.” he answered with a shake from his head.

Bran shook his head as well, “it is a shame that the Nights Watch should lose all of those men, the Nights needs those men, but the punishment for desertion has always been death.” Bran knew this all to well.

“In truth not all of the men are always killed for desertion, but these men were sentenced to take the black due to taking part in a rebellion, they didn’t join the Nights Watch out of their own free will, so the Lord Commander cant take any chances. It is a bleak business, milord, they will be hanging men all day long.”
Bran grimaced at the thought.

Yohan sat down with his back resting against the weirwood tree closest to Bran, he took out some wood and a knife. Bran could just make out the shape of a wolf.

“Where are you from Yohan?”

“I come from the Stoney Shore, me and my brother were both sent to the Nights Watch as soon as we were old enough. There were never enough to feed us all. My brother died at a mutiny Beyond the Wall.” Yohan had a sad expression for a fleeting moment.

“I am sorry to hear that.”

Yohan nodded and started carving on the wood.

Bran watched the face of the weirwood closely, he felt nervous. Bran took three deep breaths before he touched the tree.

He was in complete darkness, but he knew he was spinning around uncontrollably. In the next moment he was suddenly standing on solid ground, he could feel his legs and feet again, he wiggled his toes to make sure that he could feel his legs again. He smelled wet leaves and the air felt moist and warm. Bran reached out with his one hand and he could feel the gnarled surface of a tree. The darkness fell away before his eyes.

He was standing in the godswood of Winterfell with his hand touching the weirwood tree. The godswood was summer-green. His father and uncle Benjen were standing next to each other, both of them were staring at the tree with young, mournful faces. It was uncle Benjen who broke the silence first.

“I am going to take the black.” Uncle Benjen spoke softly while his eyes remained focused on the heart tree.

“You don’t have to take the black, you can stay here...or we could find you a keep and bride,” his father almost pleaded.

“I can’t stay here Ned,” uncle Benjen answered.

His father turned towards uncle Benjen with a heavy look upon his face after a long moment of silence, “it is your choice; but we have already lost so much - the pack should always stay together...that is what father used to say.”

Uncle Benjen turned and gave his father a grief-stricken smile.

“You have a new pack now; and Starks have always manned the Wall - we will always be a pack.”

Bran was almost knocked off his feet by a forceful wind, he was falling into an endless dark pit. Bran shut his eyes tightly, it was difficult to keep his eyes open, with the force of the wind and his
fall. Panic started to spread within him, he knew the ground was close, he tried to slow down his fall but it was impossible. Just as Bran was about to crash into the ground, he found his feet on solid ground once more. His breathing was faster after the panic of the fall, Bran took a few slow breaths to steady himself.

It was still dark when he opened his eyes, but it wasn’t the pitch darkness of his dream it was simply night time. Despite the dark, the air was pleasant and warm. Bran could hear the songs of nightly insects. The heavens were well lit by a luminous full moon. Bran went down on his haunches and touched the sprightly grass, he was standing on an open plain.

The placidity of the moment was broken, by hundreds; nay, thousands of fires that appeared in the night sky, they were burning their way towards the ground.

Once more Bran was plucked straight from the scene, he was moving very quickly now. He flew across a black ocean of dread. When he flew too close to the black waters, creatures tried to grab at him with long shadowy limbs, they were men once; dreamers lost to time. Bran knew all of these things even though it was pitch dark all around him.

It was still night time when Bran landed on his feet again, but this night was much darker, it was almost completely pitch-black.

A terrifying scream pierced through his thoughts, a cold shiver of despair made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end. He heard more voices and grief-stricken screams echoing towards him. His first instinct was to run away and hide, but he kept on moving forward, the outlines of a tower stood right in front of him, he could see the flames from torches flicker and moving, as people were running around in panic. Something dreadful was happening here.

Just before he could enter the castle he found himself in a small clearing with a few burning torches. Some roughly clad men were holding onto men and women, everyone within the scene looked more like Wildlings. The men and women were struggling and fighting against their captors. One woman was brought forward, she was crying and pleading, but her cries fell on deaf ears, a man sliced her belly with one clean swipe, his blade was a crudely made obsidian dagger. Her body slumped but she was held upright. The man with the dagger, ripped her intestines out of her body, the women’s eyes were wide with horror as she could see how her own insides were threaded from her belly. The man laughed, as he gave one last final tug on the silvery, wormy inerts, to dislodge them completely, he handed the insides over to another man, and he threw it over a heart tree. Bran could feel a nagging revolution pushing against his throat. He moved passed them as quickly as he could.

Bran was just about to enter the tower, when a group of men dragged a young boy that was crying through the door.

The tower wasn’t constructed from stone it was a wooden tower. Inside it was one big room that had the appearance of a great hall. There were a few crudely made long tables and chairs lying
around broken and scattered, the room was well lit, and Bran could see everything. Everywhere he looked men and women were being slaughtered, they weren’t just killed, they hacked into pieces with bronze axes. Bran’s feet felt sticky and slippery underneath him, he was standing in a pool of dark-red blood. The floor was almost covered with pools of blood. The stench of death and blood embedded itself within Bran’s mind, he felt nauseous, he legs were weak underneath him.

In one end of the hall a group of men were watching all of the death and slaughter with anticipation, one man spoke with great satisfaction to the rest of the group, but Bran couldn’t understand a word any of them spoke, they were all speaking in the old tongue. Another man sat completely alone in the opposite corner of the hall, his eyes were wide with shock, and his face was full of dirty steaks, it was tears that were flowing from his eyes, he rocked back and forth but he didn’t take his eyes from the terror in front of him, and he was left in peace.

Within the group, a few of them were holding a man down, he was thrashing and screaming in rage. The one man spoke again, Bran presumed that he was the leader, he pointed into a direction. Four men brought a woman over to the group, she was crying and struggling feebly, as both of her hands had been cut off, they ripped her clothes off and threw her to the ground. The women had beautiful golden hair, but it was matted with clumps of blood and dirt.

They held her down with her legs spread open, the man almost broke free as he tried to reach for the women in one last mad rush of fury. Bran knew that she was his wife or his lover. It appeared as if the man was going mad with rage and pain, he just screamed and screamed uncontrollably. One of the four climbed on top of the women. Bran felt a rage within himself, for the man and everyone else who were being broken and slaughtered, Bran made his way to the other end, towards another open doorway, he didn’t need to see anymore.

There was another building outside of the great hall, this building was made of stone. Bran didn’t want to be here anymore, he has seen enough, enough! He heard children crying from within the building right in front of him. Bran couldn’t leave, his body felt like a deadweight, caught where it shouldn’t have been, he knew he would have to go forward.

On his right hand side men were nailed to crosses, their skin were being peel off between screams of anguish.

The small stone building was a kitchen of sorts, Bran could see two huge cooking pots. A group of children were standing close together, some of them were desperately holding onto each other, and others were crying. One of the boys was thrown into a well.

A boy was grabbed from the group, a man took a red hot poker and burned the child’s eyes out. The boy screamed in gut-wrenching agony as the poker sizzled into his eye sockets. Bran could feel the pain sting right through him as the boy’s voice rang out. He was thrown into the well, the well, I’ve seen it before...

Bran ran out of the kitchen, he wanted to get as far away from the Night Fort as possible. He could hear some wolves howling far in the distance. Bran ran into the darkness without a care about where he was going.

He was blinded for an instant and completely out of breath as he was thrown into a room with
many candles. Bran was still trying to collect all of his senses, when arrows flew right over his head, Bran looked up, the arrows were raining down from a gallery, and he was standing on a platform. He turned around just in time to see both his mother and Robb fall onto the floor. “Noooo!” he could hear himself screaming.

For a moment his vision blurred out, and he was trapped in a very small room. He felt an intense rage, anger and bloodlust fuel him from inside, as he growled.

He was inside of a Direwolf, Greywind.

He felt the intense pain and cold of death as arrows struck deep within his flesh, he cried and raged as he felt the coldness spread over his heart.

Bran’s vision came back, Robb was kneeling, stumped and heartbroken next to a woman lying on the floor. He struggled to get himself up again as his body was riddled with arrows.

“Mother,” he uttered forlornly with a sense acceptance.

“The Lannisters send their regards.”

Bran tried to run to his brother, but he tripped on a body that was laying on the ground.

“Bran saw his mother scream in great anguish as she slit the throat of a girl she was holding right in front of her. Bran tried to get up, “MOTHER!” He called out over and over again, but nothing happened. Bran couldn’t feel his legs and he couldn’t stand, he was just a cripple once more. But he called for his mother again. He was finally upon his knees when his mother’s throat was slit from side to side, her last cries of misery and torment - gone forever from this world.

Bran fell down on his hands and knees, he was heaving and gagging when he realized that it was now his mother’s blood that he smelled and tasted on his tongue.

“Bran!” “Bran! “Bran!” “BRAN!!!”

Bran was shook so violently that his teeth clattered together. He was confused for a moment, everything around him was white, the stench of blood was still nestled within his mind. He couldn’t help himself, he retched and threw up again. He felt completely exhausted and out of breath.

“Bran, are you alright?” He heard Meera ask. Bran grabbed her arm.

“Meera...I saw..”

“Don't speak, we will get you back to the Wall as soon as possible.”

Bran felt completely immobile, he was too tired to lift his arms or raise his head. Bran could feel himself being lifted into the air and placed on the sled.

Bran could see that a lot of men were gathered around his bed, Lord Commander Edd was there as
well as the two Lords from the Mountain Clans and even Ser Raymann, their faces were tinged with distress. Meera was next to him the most the most of all. Nights and days passed them by. Bran knew that he could wake-up from the deep sleep he was in, if he wanted too. But he didn’t want to be awake if he was constantly struggling between grief, sorrow, terror, dismay, resentment and bitterness. His mind replayed every scene he saw next to the weirwood tree. His heart and head felt as if they might burst, as if he was carrying every single person’s last emotions with him and experiencing them over again. Until one day - he finally understood. The Three Eyed Raven watches and observes, Bran himself can’t live through the people he that he sees within his visions. He has to remove himself from all emotions and from any feelings. Bran’s heart was heavy from his sorrows for one last time, but he understood and he finally decided to open his eyes.

Meera jumped straight from her chair. “Bran!”

“Bran, you are awake!”

“I was so worried about you!”

“I known,” Bran answered evenly.

“What happened to you?” Meera wanted to know. “You had a fever for many days?”

“I saw my mother and my brother’s deaths, more importantly I’ve learned how to become the Three Eyed Raven.”

Meera smiled at him with uncertainty.

“You had to witness the death of your mother and your brother?” Meera shook her head with dismay.

“You are awake, that is the most important thing,” Meera appeared gleeful.

“I should go back to Winterfell,” Bran answered.

Meera had a look of concern on her face, “a lot has happened around here,” she paused, “you were asleep for just over a moon’s turn.”

“Has Ser Raymann returned yet?” Bran asked.

Meera frowned, “you knew that he has left?”

“He left along with the men from the Vale; in search of Lord Brandon Norrey and his Mountain Clan’s men.” Bran answered with little infliction.

“Aye, he couldn’t stand the daily hangings any longer, he said it was bad for the morale of his men to watch the hangings everyday, he said that he would find out for himself what is truly happening Beyond the Wall, because he needs to be at home with his people.” Meera repeated the words she had heard before, slightly bemused.

“Ser Raymann and the men from the Vale wasted their efforts, all of those Mountain Clan’s men are long dead.”
Bran was sitting on the deck watching over the courtyard, when the horn on top of the Wall was sounded loudly throughout Castle Black, men started streaming into the courtyard from all different directions.

“Rangers returning!” Bran heard excitedly. Even Meera came out of her own room and stood next to Bran, he has noted that he saw less of Meera everyday.

A group of about sixty men dragged themselves to the middle of the courtyard. Petyr ran towards them with a few wineskins. Ser Raymann gulped the contents down greedily, and passed the wineskin to a man close to him. Everyone was deadly quiet, they were waiting for him to speak. The men all had a bewildered look within their eyes and postures.

Torghen Flint broke the silence, “what happened with Lord Brandon Norrey, were you able to find him?” He asked anxiously.

Ser Raymann grimaced, “oh, we found him, or rather he found us.” The men started whispering between themselves. Ser Raymann held his hand in the air to silence the crowd.

“Men, I went on this rescue mission to learn what is really happening Beyond the Wall. I wanted to see it for myself, like many of you here I didn’t fully believe in the claims that the White Walkers have returned to Westeros.

But it is all true, the White Walkers are back, I saw them with my own eyes.” Ser Raymann had a look of fear within his eyes.

“We were just beyond the Wall for three days, when they fell upon us.” Ser Raymann started shivering with a haunted look. “Half of the men that attacked us were from the Mountain Clans, I even saw Lord Brandon amongst them.” The crowd started shooting and screaming. Lord Commander Edd quieted them down again. “They were all dead, they had gaping open wounds and strange blue eyes, and they were trying to kills us. A few of us managed to escape by using fire. There were two White Walkers with them. Lyn Corbray fought bravely against one of the White Walkers he managed to hit the White Walker, and it shattered right before our eyes. But the other White Walker stabbed him in the back from behind.” Ser Raymann sighed, “we had to leave his sword behind.”

_A Valyrian steel sword lost Beyond the Wall, such a wasted effort._

“You have to excuse me,” Ser Raymann said, “I have to go and warn the others, and I have to send a letter to Lord Manderly immediately!”

Ser Raymann rested for two days, while the men of the Nights Watch made preparations for his departure in the meantime. On the third day after his arrival back at the Wall, Bran and Meera were finally able to leave Castle Black behind, Ser Raymann agreed to take them back to Winterfell, on his way to White Harbour.

When Bran saw the white capped towers of Winterfell over the next hill, something stirred inside of him.
Arya sniffed the aroma of meat cooking on an open fire - the longer she stood still, the stronger the smell became. She has been traveling close to the Kingsroad for these past three days, but she didn’t try to ride on the Kingsroad directly, that would just be foolhardy. Her stomach was growling like a wolf.

Arya decided that she should take a chance and see who might be cooking and burning a fire so brazenly. She secured her horse before stalking off into the darkness, a half moon was hanging in the sky. *As quiet as a shadow,* she couldn’t help but think about her lessons from her old dancing master as she was stalking her prey.

Her hearing intensified, she could hear every dry twig or fallen leaf as loud as a horn within her ears. The smell of the meat incified, she could practically taste the salty goodness on her tongue.

Arya could hear a man and a woman speaking, the group had chosen a completely inappropriate position to camp for the night. They were close to the road in the middle of a clearing. Arya could easily watch them from a few dried out shrubs. They had a rabbit on the fire and even a pot and kettle. A tall women with dark hair was tending to the pot on the fire, while a young couple were holding hands and sitting on a fallen log nearby. They had one small tent that was positioned under a tree. A man with light brown hair and a shaggy beard were sharpening arrow points by the fire. Childish giggles erupted from the small tent.

It would be easy to take their meal from them. All Arya had to do was to take out the man by the fire, and than she would be able to control them if she grabbed one the children within the tent, or the young buxom wench on the log. Or she could just silently slit their throats when they fall asleep.

But they were just a bunch of small folk, they held no threat for Arya. She slowly reversed her way out of the shrub to get back to her horse. She didn’t really want to start any fires by herself, they were too easy to notice within some of the open plains of the Riverlands, and there were a lot of people travelling on the Kingsroad. Arya had to be content with acorn paste these past three days, *a bleak fare if there ever was one,* she could imagine that acron paste was exactly what dried out parchment would taste like. She craved something more, something to sink her teeth into.

Arya petted the horse before she swung herself up in the saddle, she started to whistle tunelessly in the darkness as she moved along with an easy posture.

“Halt!” she heard.

“Who goes there?”
Arya jumped off her horse and led him into the clearing she was just watching a few moments ago.

“Good evening,” she greeted the group with a friendly nod.

The man who was sitting by the fire earlier was now standing closer to her with a bow and arrow pointed in her direction. He relaxed his stance somewhat when he saw that she was just a girl.

“My name is Brienna,” she told them, she looked at the rabbit longingly, “Do you have anything extra to share?” She asked him politely.

The man and women looked at each other with a lingering doubt.

“I have some coin,” she touched the small pouch by her side to emphasise her proposition.

“Are you alone?” The women asked suspiciously.

“Aye, is just me now,” Arya answered with some affliction in her voice. She tied her horse to a nearby tree with some dry grass underneath. The women nodded, and Arya slowly made way to the fire.

“These roads could be very dangerous for a girl on own,” the woman scolded Arya in an almost motherly fashion.

“Aye,” she agreed, “that is why I am staying off the main road,” she pointed towards the fire, “but your cooking smells really marvelous,” she added with a grin.

“Why are you traveling alone?” The young lad who sat on the log asked her directly, as he looked at her sword. They were more suspicious than small folk usually tended to be.

“My father is,” she paused, “was a soldier, I used to travel with him everywhere, but he passed away recently,” Arya answered sadly while staring into the flames.

“What brings you to the Kingsroad?” Arya asked to no one in particular.

The man with the bow sat down by the fire again and placed his bow next to him, he finally spoke, “my name is Edric and we are on our way North.”

“North,” Arya repeated, “I am on my way North as well.”

“I figured as much,” the man answered with a slight smile, “you sound like a Northerner.” He leisurely started working on the arrows again.

“My name is Seylena, this our eldest son Benjamin and his wife Rose. They are newlyweds,” the women supplied needlessly, with a tender smile.

Arya nodded in their direction but they only has eyes for each other. “And my youngest two Myrk and Adeline are trying to break down the tent,” Seylena spoke louder so that the two could hear their names, and they quieted down a bit.
“We left the North and stayed with my sister in the Crownlands, once the Boltons took control of the North it was too dangerous for us to stay.”

Edric continued the story were his wife stopped, “we were farmers on the Stark lands - Roose Bolton’s bastard had a gruesome reputation for torture and maiming, I couldn’t take the chance to remain there at his mercy.”

“My sister and her husband are servants to House Rykker,” Seylena said with pride, “we knew we would be safe with her. But now the North has been reclaimed by House Stark, or so we have heard, just as well, the Crowlands isn’t so safe anymore.” Seylena shrugged as she stirred the pot.

“The North remembers,” Arya answered without thinking.

“You are a true Northerner,” the man observed with a grin.

“How did you end up in the South?” He asked.

“My father was a foot soldier in the Stark auxiliary forces. My mother died when I was very young, so my father had no choice but to take me with him when the war broke out. We were stationed near Riverrun during the Red Wedding.

“The red wedding was a disgraceful act,” Edric interrupted her tall tale. “Excuse me, please continue.”

“My father died after a strong bout of the bloody flux and I couldn’t go back with the Boltons in control of the North, my family have always fought for the Starks.”

Arya could not help herself, she wanted someone to share some of her revenge, “I’ve heard that Walder Frey and all of his sons have been murder.”

Edric and Seylena both looked at Arya wide eyed.

“It is the hand of the Gods that have struck them down, the Gods can’t abide the breaking of guestrites.”

“You choose a good time to head back North, the North might soon be the safest place within the realm,” Seylena spoke knowingly, as if she had some secret information.

“How so,” Arya inquired. Seylena looked around as if someone might be eavesdropping, and she spoke in a softer voice.

“The Mad King’s daughter has just landed in Westeros with thousands of soldiers, she means to take back her father’s throne.”

Arya was genuinely surprised she has heard nothing about this. Arya knew the tale of Robert’s rebellion all too well, she knew that there were a prince and princess in exile. She tried to rack her brain for more information. She had never cared for stories about princes and princesses, that was Sansa. But she was also certain that she has heard something about this.

“The Targaryen Princess,” she finally asked.
“Aye,” Edric replied. “But she a Queen now, she has conquered a lot of cities in Essos.”

“And she has three dragons,” Benjamin blurted out, this was the first time that he showed any interest in their conversation.

“Many people claim that she has three dragon,” Edric confirmed.

Dragons, that is what Arya has heard before, but she didn’t take it seriously.

“That is stupid, the dragons are all dead,” Arya said.

Seylena came closer to Arya, she looked around again before she almost whispered: “A lot of people have seen these dragons, as I’ve said before, my sister serves the Rykkers, they have gathered some information about the Dragon Queen, and just before we left they were on their way to swear fealty to her, right under the Lannister Queen’s nose. They didn’t want to fight against the dragons and they can’t stand Cersei Lannister, she killed Lord Rykker with her wildfire blast.”

“She will not just hand over the iron throne to the Targaryen girl,” Edric confirmed what his wife said.

“So you see - the South will soon be at war again, I told my sister that she and her husband could come and stay with us in the North, we have already met many other people who are travelling North now that House Stark is control of the North again.”

Arya was quite taken aback by the news of the Dragon Queen, could she really have dragons? If she is planning on conquering the South what is to stop her from trying to conqueror the North as well? Arya didn’t voice her concerns towards her companions. She did not like this news at all, she needed to get back to the Winterfell as soon as possible.

The mention of Cersei made her think about her list, Cersei deserves to die, her reign will only lead to more pain and suffering for others.

The stew was finally ready, the rabbit was perfectly cooked, and the leek and carrot stew was very flavorful. “Your stew taste delicious, Seylena,” Arya complimented her.

Seylena beamed at the compliment, “there is more,” she answered with a smile. “I have to feed the little ones.” The two children, around three and four years of age, sat quietly in front of Seylena, she made sure that they finished all of their food before they went to sleep.

“You should stay and travel with us, you can’t travel alone with a pouch of money,” Edric stated. “You don’t have to pay us, your father served as a soldier, it is our duty to look after you.”

“Thank You,” Arya answered honestly. They talked for a while longer next to the fire, Seylena was stifling some yawns.

“I will take the first watch,” Benjamin volunteered very quickly, when he saw that his mother was becoming tired.

Arya made a bed for herself close to the fire. She laid back and tried to look at the stars, there
wasn’t much to see. The clearing was too small, therefore her vision was mostly obscured.

In Winterfell the stars speckled the night sky like dust, and the air was always crisp and clean.

Arya didn’t have to wait very long for Benjamin to flounder, as soon as everyone dozed off he quietly went to Rose’s bedroll. He helped her up, and they ran hand in hand beyond the trees.

Arya backed her bedroll away without making a noise. She left three golden dragons in the bowl she ate from, it was probably more money than they have ever earned.

Arya certainly didn’t care, there was some justice in handing out some of Walder Frey’s gold to a family from the North.

The next four days passed very peacefully. Arya did discover that a lot of people were travelling on the Kingsroad towards the North. It would have been easy enough for Arya to work her way into the throng of travelers, and go unobserved but she preferred to remain hidden in the shadows. Especially after she had learned that the Lannisters had send some of their soldiers to the Twins.

Arya wondered if she should have left the Northern family - they were not really able to protect themselves.

On the fifth day after leaving the Crossroads Inn, there was no mistaken her location. She could easily smell the damp marshes and grasses of the neck. Arya did not venture far from Kingsroad here. Despite the arrival of winter, the marshlands still left a strange damp sticky feeling upon your skin. Father had often told them about the marshlands when they were young, and how effective they were at protecting the North from any southern invasion. Arya knew exactly what dangers lurked just beyond the deceptive grass. She had no intention of coming face to face with a lizard-lion, stepping on poisonous bog snakes or slinking away - slowly into the depths of the swamps.

Arya’s path crossed with many travellers on the Kingsroad, but she still traveled much faster now that she was using the proper road.

It was still early, the darkness were lingering on the edge of the azure, the morning dew was transformed into icy droplets that shined liked crystal when the rays from the winter sun gently lay upon them, when Arya was able to distinguish the peculiar shape from some of the fallen towers of Moat Cailin. Massive building blocks laid carelessly scattered over the marshland. Old Nan said that the bog devils from the marshlands were skinchangers who enslaved the giants to build a great castle for themselves. Arya could almost believe these tales when she saw the size of the building blocks for the first time on her way down to Kings Landing. The Marsh Kings were punished for their enslavement when the towers kept on collapsing - eventually they just had to leave the towers crooked and misplaced. The lesson being that you can't create anything good form defective foundations.

_I miss Old Nan and her tales before the hearth._ Arya wondered if Old Nan was still alive, she was very doubtful - it was only a fleeting moment of fanciful thinking.

When she finally saw Moat Cailin in all of its glory her insides felt frail. She stood rooted in the same place until the sun was properly exposed upon the green marshes. She couldn’t take her eyes from the Stark direwolf that was flapping and running with the wind.
Until this moment Arya hadn’t dared to believe that her family was truly back. She listened to all of the tales of everyone around her - they told her that her family held Winterfell once again, but she didn’t really dare to believe. The grey direwolf upon the Gatehouse tower was the first tangible evidence that the North was under the control of the Starks once more.

Arya’s cheeks were icy cold, she took off her glove and absentmindedly brushed her cheek. The coldness on her cheeks were tears that were almost turned into frost by the chilling wind. For some reason Arya thought back to the last time she saw Jon. She tried to hug the life out of him on that day, it was her way of telling him how much she would miss him, and it was also her way of trying to ward off the fear of leaving Winterfell for the first time. *I never wanted to leave.*

Arya could feel hot tears sliding over her frozen cheeks. She janked her glove back on again, and angrily wiped any trace of tears from her face. *Seven hells,* she didn’t want to appear like a simpering little girl when she had to see the guards within Moat Cailin. *Stupid,* she scolded herself.

She rode her horse as fast she could until she reached the gate.

“Halt” she heard. She climbed off her horse, the poor animal was breathing so heavily into the cold air it looked like he was steaming right next to her.

“What is your business in the North,” a stern looking man questioned her.

“My father was a soldier to House Stark, he died at the Red Wedding, I wish to return home to our little piece of land, which my father left for me.”

“Do you have the will with you?” The man questioned. Arya didn’t expect such a strong line of questioning.

“My father couldn’t write and I can't read, I am his only child and kin, there was no need for a will. Ser, I just want to return to my home, I wasn’t able to return to the North with the Boltons in control of Winterfell, because I refuse to bow down to those turncoats!” Arya announced the last part a bit harder. Some of the other travelers around her stared at her, but they nodded their heads in agreement. The stern soldier swallowed uncomfortably.

He regained his composure quickly, “it is not safe to traverse the North alone, some of the Boltons have turned outlaw. It would be better if you attached yourself to a group of people before entering the North.

“Do not concern yourself Ser Knight, I know exactly how to treat those Bolton swine!” Arya announced loudly as she laid her hand on the pommel of Needle, some of the people around her were laughing behind their hands.

The soldier turned red and stepped aside for Arya to enter. Arya climbed on her horse again and passed him by with a small smile of satisfaction.

As soon as Arya saw the man’s trident spear and his sea-green cloak - from close by, she knew it was a Manderly guard. The Manderlys died at the Red Wedding, but they didn’t have the backbone to stand against the Boltons, Arya was sure that some of the Manderlys would be embarrassed by this fact, or they should be.

The North was covered in a thick tapestry of snow as far as the eye could see, plains, hills, grass and trees were all submerged under soft layers of snow and frost. Arya’s traveling became slower,
hunting became more scarce, she was glad for her acorn paste. She remained on the Kingsroad, she didn’t want to risk her horse. The snow that covered the ground was very deceptive, it could be two feet deep in some places with uneven ground underneath. She passed some larger groups of people on her way to Winterfell.

Arya had been traveling within the North for almost a fortnight, by now she was used to the up and down trodding over the white hills, she knew that Winterfell was the only castle next to the kingsroad within the North. She had just reached the top of another hill one late afternoon when she finally saw Winterfell’s peaks upon the next hill. The whole castle was completely transformed into a winter snow castle, Winterfell seemed unrecognisable to her, but she felt a surge of emotion rush thought her heart. Long last memories flashed through her mind, she remembered her brothers training in the courtyard with her father looking proudly from above, investigating the crypts and Bran climbing around in the trees, she remembered how Jon used to mess up her hair.

Arya had never seen Winterfell during the winter, but she knew she was home, she was still far away but she could make out the white of the Stark banner.

Father always said that winter was the hardest time, but winter is also a time for wolves.

She made her way slowly to the castle, she wanted to appreciate every angle and sight of the magnificent snow castle - her heart was pounding within her throat the whole time. The last time she tried to reach her mother and her brother she was only moments too late, and she will never have the chance to see them again. But she longed for her father the most of all. Would Jon even want me back after some of the things I have done? She was suddenly filled with doubts, no, she shook her head, Jon will always want her no matter what. She moved ahead quickly before her nerves failed her completely.

Arya fell back on her own bed with her arms spread wide, just as she used to do when she was younger. He lay quietly and stared at the ceiling, she thought about poking Meryn Trant’s eyes out, she envisioned herself deliberately sliding her knife over Walder Frey’s scrawny neck, she could see all of the Freys choking and gagging within their own great hall, and Needle sticking into Polivers throat.

Just than she heard a scratching sound at her door, she was ready to ignore the sound, but it became more insistent. She stood and opened the door carefully.

“Ghost!”

She threw both her arms over the direwolf’s neck and hugged him closely for a while. Ghost just sat down patiently and allowed her to hang onto his neck for a while. I guess this is the closest I am going to get to seeing Jon again, for now. She finally released the direwolf’s neck, Ghost was staring at lovingly with his strange red eyes.

“Come on in, boy.” she invited. Ghost didn’t need any second invitations he jumped strait onto her bed and made himself at home between the furs. There wasn’t a lot of room left for her on bed, but she didn’t mind. She arranged herself next to Ghost and scratched his head. Ghost was almost the most approachable of all the direwolves. She wish Nymeria could have come with her to Winterfell, but she understood why Nymeria would rather run around with her own pack behind
It was so bitterly disappointing to discover that Jon wasn’t home, her spirits slumped completely. It was even more perplexing to find out that Jon had gone south to negotiate with the Dragon Queen. Starks do not belong in the south. Sansa did say that she implored Jon to remain within the North but he was adamant. Everything within Winterfell has changed but at least Jon still sounded the same, that made Arya smile to herself. Sansa has definitely changed, she reminded Arya of their mother and she is so tall now.

Arya was dejected to hear that Rickon had died as well, after losing Robb and her mother she was sure that they have lost more than enough.

The thought of Rickon made her melancholic, *I never even got to know Rickon properly.* Arya just remembered Rickon as her irritating brother who just wanted to run after her and Bran. He was always dirty and messy, poor Rickon hardly had any time to even know mother and father, he must have been very lonely…

“Cersei, the Mountain, Ilyn Payne…”

Arya knew she woke up at some point during night to climb in between the furs, as she just fell asleep next to Ghost.

Arya awoke early to find that the fire in her hearth had burned out during the night, truly it was her own fault she didn’t add more wood to the fire before falling asleep, but the room still had some heat from hot water running through the walls. Ghost stretched himself lazily on bed. She let Ghost out of her room before she refreshed and dressed herself as quickly as she could. The castle was still slumbering, but Arya did greet a few guards as she made her way along the bridge to the ramparts. The morning sun made the frost shimmer, it was beautiful and stingingly cold, Arya has never felt so cold in her life. But the cold also felt strangely refreshing and reassuring, *I am home.* She moved along the ramparts in a northern direction, the walls were stacked with barrels and arrows. She looked out towards the plains, there was nothing to see but miles and miles of snow, all of the green hills were completely gone - it was beautiful and remote. She came to a standstill over Winter town, the town was full of activity and it felt alive. It surprised Arya that there was now a wall around Winter town, Sansa did tell her that a lot of rebuilding are being done. The frozen moat underneath her was filled with firewood. Arya watched quietly as farmers and merchants made their way into the square of Winter town, the stalls were slowly filled. The main street became a hive of bartering and selling.

It was almost peaceful to view people from such a distance, but Arya knew that she would really prefer walking down the street - right in the middle of the town. She would stop to listen to the latest gossip. When you are in between the people you can see the route that the potato farmer choose to walk every day, you could see which people often talked with each other. You could see which men left the tavern or the whore house early in the morning, or you could see if people are trying to hide something, there was always much that you could learn from observing people closely.
Arya was eager to use one of her faces to visit Winter town. She wanted to know what was being said about Jon as the King, she wanted to know if anyone could be a threat to House Stark, and this type of gossip could often be found on lips of servants. Now that she was home, she would protect her family at all costs.

The smells from the market and the sight of food made her hungry, Arya decided to make her way to the great hall, that was where they always ate.

There were a few people present within the great hall, Arya was surprised to find Sansa seated at the head of the table so early in the morning, Brienne stood right behind Sansa. Sansa used to enjoy sleeping as late as possible. But it was even more surprising to find Petyr Baelish right next to Sansa, even his chair was slightly turned in Sansa’s direction, and he was sitting much too close to her.

Arya could almost instantly feel a cold fury rise within her, she instinctively touched Needle’s handle.

She took a seat on Sansa’s left side. “Morning,” she greeted.

Petyr Baelish stood from his chair and bowed.

“Good morrow, my Lady. I was rejoiced to hear the news of your safe return. It is a tragedy that Lady Catelyn isn’t here to witness this day, she would have been overjoyed to see both of her daughters safe - within Winterfell.” Petyr Baelish spoke with a wistful expression of her mother. She felt her anger coiling itself more tightly within her.

The last time she saw the treasonous snake he was trying to create a more advantageous alliance, for Tywin Lannister.

“Aye,” she answered sadly and looked away. She wonder if he recognises her now or if he recognized her then. Arya didn’t want to reveal her true feelings to Littlefinger at this time. Sansa told her the day before that Littlefinger was here and that he has helped them, but she was not expecting to him find him right on Sansa’s lap at the head table.

“Milady, can I get you some wine?” A serving wench enquired from Arya as she brought her a serving dish with bread and cheese.

“No, get me some ale.” Sansa give her a look but she didn’t say anything.

“Where is Bran, you said that I would meet Bran today?” Arya enquired as she started eating some of the bread and cheese.

“I have arranged for Bran to receive some of his meals within his room. We can visit him later in the godswood.” Sansa had a strange expression whenever Bran was mentioned.

“I have to announce your return to North, you can join me for petitions. Not all of the Lords are here, but we can still make a formal announcement,” Sansa stated in a Lady-of-the-House type of manner.

“Why?” “Some of them have already seen me, and most will probably know soon enough.”
“It will be good for the North to see that we have survived despite the recent troubles, it is also good to have a show of strength and unity.”

“Alright,” Arya agreed, she would rather have preferred to remain more in the shadows but as a Stark you didn’t really have much of a choice, and she didn’t want to begin a disagreement with Sansa so soon after arriving home.

“We will have to find something else for you to wear, you can't appear in front of the Lords looking like a peasant.”

Arya groaned, “I am not going to wear a dress.”

“You don't have to wear a dress but we could definitely find something more suitable for you.”

Sansa stood, “let me go and arrange something, when you are done breaking your fast - go to your room, I will send something more appropriate. After that you can return to the great hall.” Sansa briskly made her way out of hall, before Arya had a chance to say anything. *Hmmm, Sansa is really acting like the Lady of Winterfell.*

“Lady Arya, you have achieved a great feat by disappearing from Kings Landing so successfully. Even Varys, the spymaster, couldn’t find a trace of your existence. It is not easy to hide away from Varys and his little birds, it takes some true skill. Did someone help you?”

“I had a bit of help here and there.” Arya didn’t want to listen to Littlefinger a moment longer than she had to. She drank and ate as quickly as possible.

“One day you should really inform me how you have accomplished such a deed.”

“You have to excuse me, Lord Baelish, as you’ve heard I have to wear something *more appropriate*.”

“Of course, my Lady,” he stood and bowed as she left.

She walked to her room at a leisurely pace, and plonked down on the bed, she barely had time to sit before there was a knock at the door. A young serving girl entered - with what appeared to be a few different garments. She placed the clothes on a chair next to the hearth and scurried out of the room again. Arya sat for a few moments longer before she made her way to the clothes.

There were two different tunics and some shirts, one pair of breeches with a mid length cloak and even some small clothes. Arya was pleasantly surprised, the pieces were well made and they appeared comfortable. It was actually quite good to be wearing some different clothes and new small clothes. She strapped Needle around her waist to complete her look. She had a looking glass within her room as a child, but it wasn’t here anymore, so couldn’t really see her appearance.

Sansa was already waiting at the main table when Arya arrived, she give Arya a small smile when she saw her approach. “Thank you for the clothes, you choose well.”

“I will make some better tunics for you, but this will have to do at such short notice.”
They waited a few moments for the Lords and Ladies of the North and the Vale to arrive, the servants brought horns and tankards of ale for them as they arrived. Ghost casually strolled into the great hall and sat right next to Arya.

Littlefinger walked to their table with a very satisfied look upon his face, Ghost stared at him with cold murderous eyes.

“My Lady, I have just received this message,” he said as he held up a raven scroll. Sansa read the message quickly without showing much emotion.

“Are you certain?” She asked.

“I am quite sure my Lady, this news comes from a reliable source.”

She nodded, and he moved to stand at the side of the great hall.

Once Sansa had deemed that the necessary Lords had arrived she stood and the hall quickly became silent.

“My Lords and Ladies, I am happy to announce that my sister Lady Arya has returned home to the North. House Stark is stronger than ever.” The Lord and Ladies in attendance cheered. Sansa quieted them down again.

“I have just received some important news - Walder Frey is dead, along with all of his sons and his grandsons.” There was complete silence within room, and then the room bursted into a crescendo of cheering, “the North remembers!”

Arya felt a great sense of satisfaction, she could see all of those Freys choking to death in their own vomit. She doubt that anything could ever bring her such enjoyment again, mayhaps killing Cersei.

Sansa held her hand in the air, and hall quieted down again, “now that we have received some good news, it is time to hear the petitions.”

One Lord stood, “is there any news of the King in the North?”

“Lord Cerwyn, my brother has barely had time to reach Dragonstone, as soon as I receive any news, I will inform all of you.”

A guard stepped forward with three women, two of them held babies within their arms. There were seven children of differing ages standing around them. They were a raggard looking bunch, the women were thin and gaunt, and the children did not look much better.

“Will.” Sansa acknowledged the guard, and he stepped a few paces ahead of the group. “My Lady, these women have requested an audience with you,” he answered with a hint of uncertainty.

Sansa nodded. The guard waved one hand forward to show that the women could now speak to the Lady of the North. The women in the middle without a baby in her arms stepped forward, she had dirty blond hair that was equally tied and tangled together on top of her skeletal looking head.
“Greetings milady, my name is Aynne, this is Jenna,” she said and pointed to her left, “and this here is Rowenda. We’d like to have your permission to stay in Winter town.”

“The King in the North has decreed that all the small folk may reside within Winter town, as has always been the practice at Winterfell.”

“My Lady,” Will spoke again, “they are already staying in Winter town, but their presence have caused some disruptions.”

“Why is that?” Sansa inquired.

“They were servants for House Bolton, my Lady.”

“Did you serve House Bolton - where are your husbands,” Sansa asked severely.

“Aye, we did Milady, my husband took the black, Jenna and Rowenda’s husbands’ve both died.”

“I deny you and your party the permission to reside within the walls of Winter town.”

“Milady,” the women cried and pleaded, “please, we didn’t have a choice.”

“You always have a choice. Will,” she instructed, “please escort them out.”

“We didn’t have choice.” Could still be heard as Aynne and the others left the great hall.

Arya felt frustrated and angry for those women, as if they ever had much of a choice. Arya knew that she will have to learn what has been happening around Winterfell, and she might have to keep an eye on Sansa and Littlefinger. Or she will have to speak with Sansa; soon.

“Do anyone else have any matters to addresses?” Sansa asked, no one came forward or mentioned anything.

“Petitions are over for the day,” she declared. Everyone started shuffling their way out of the great hall.

“Let’s go and see Bran, he should be in the godswood, or on his way to the godswood.”

Arya walked next to Sansa, she remained quiet until they walked into the courtyard, Ghost walked on her other side. The courtyard was filled with people doing all manners of activities, they were practicing their fighting with all kinds of weapons, even young girls were practicing.

“My Lady,” Brienne addressed Sansa, “I would see to my training now, if that is fine with you.”

Sansa nodded and Brienne attached herself to the massive training exercise. The preparations almost seemed excessive for winter times - it was difficult to fight wars during these icy conditions, but as long as the Lannister remained alive, Arya supposed that no preparation was to excessive.

“Are you sure you can really trust Brienne, she is still walking around with Lannister gold.” Arya observed.
“Brienne has saved my life, she was mother’s sworn shield, she is the most trustworthy person I know.”

“Are we planning on attacking the Lannisters?”

Sansa frowned, “no.”

“Even the girls are training to fight,” Arya said with a smile.

“That is one of Jon’s proclamations as the King,” Sansa answered with a sigh just as they reached the entrance of the godswood. Ghost quickly disappeared through the trees, his white fur made him practically invisible.

“You don't approve?”

Sansa appeared contrived, “it is not that I don't approve, per say,” she paused as if she was searching for the right words.

“I have been trying to make your homingcoming a bit easier, to hold off on some of the issues we are faced with, but I guess I cannot do so any longer.” Sansa lifted her dress slightly as they walked on the snow within the godswood.

“What do mean?”

“Jon is making all of these preparations because he believes the White Walkers are coming for us all.”


“Yes - he believes that the Night’s King has amassed a massive army Beyond the Wall, and that he will soon, somehow, get past the Wall and attack the North. He says that he has fought against the White Walkers and dead men.” Sansa looked uncomfortable and uncertain.

“He said that he has fought against White Walkers and dead men, Beyond the Wall?” Arya tried to understand exactly what Sansa was saying.

“According to him the White Walkers can rise people from dead, these people become thralls of the White Walkers, they have an army of undead.” She clarified carefully.

“He even claims that he himself has died,” Sansa almost whispered as if someone might hear her. “But he was brought back to life by a Red Priestess.”

“Oh,” this intrigued Arya. “Jon was dead?” She asked, she almost broke down and cried at the thought. She don’t know what she would have done if she had reached Winterfell only to find that Jon was dead, it would have been too much.

“Where did he find a fire priestess?”

“Stannis Baratheon had a Red Priestess with him, and they stayed at the Wall for some time.”

Fuck, “I hope Jon hasn’t turned into some Lord of Light worshipper!”

“No, he exiled the Red Priestesses from the North.” That made Arya slightly worried, what if Jon died again and the Red Priestess wasn’t there to bring him back to life again?
“This is why Jon went to see the Dragon Queen, isn’t it?”

“Yes, he wants to create an alliance with her to fight against the White Walkers and there are dragonglass deposits on Dragonstone, apparently it kills the White Walkers and dead men - and fire, fire also kills dead men.”

“Hmm,” was Arya’s only answer. That’s why there is suddenly a wall around Winter town and firewood within the moat. They had finally reached the heart tree, Bran wasn’t there. Sansa had stopped walking and she was trying to decipher her reaction.

“I will help with the training,” Arya finally answered.

“So you don't have any qualms to believe that the White Walkers are coming for us all?” Sansa asked slightly dumbfounded.

“Why should I? Clearly Jon is doing whatever he can to try and safe the North.”

“You haven’t seen Jon in years, we have all changed so much.” Sansa answered slightly sadly. “And I have just told you that he claims that he was dead.”

“Well; Jon still sounds very similar.” *Is he still the same?* Arya wondered for a moment.

Sansa looked down towards the ground, “I never knew him well enough to answer with certainty.”

“Does he sometimes remind you a bit of father?” Arya asked. Sansa nodded, “then he still sounds the same, he was always more like father than any of us.”

Sansa’s eyes became misty when she mentioned their father. The air was charged with sadness, even the face on the Weirwood tree appeared more sombre than usual.

“And, I have actually seen someone who was brought back from the dead by a Red Priest.”

“You have seen someone being brought back to life?” Sansa asked with a disbelieving tone.

“Aye, there are a lot of strange things happening within this world, and I have seen some of it, if dragons are flying around again and people are coming back from the dead, then why can't there be White Walkers as well?”

“Just wait until you see Bran, he claims that he is the Three Eyed Raven, he says that he can see everything that is happening at the moment and everything that has happened within the past.”

“What do you believe?” Arya asked.

“It scares me to think about it, Bran was always such a sweet boy...and now. Unfortunately, it seems like he might be speaking the truth. He really isn’t the same anymore.”

Arya found that Sansa was not exaggerating about Bran, he was acting quite strange, or rather it was the way he didn’t react or show any emotions. Bran knew about her list, that was interesting.
However, in general Bran’s condition did not bother her as much as it seemed to bother Sansa. It seemed to be a fairly similar concept to the idea of becoming no one, Bran could still find himself somewhere, especially now that he was back in Winterfell.

She was very excited and intrigued by the dagger Bran had given her. She went to her room and studied it for a while. She could almost imagine that the dragonbone handle felt warm to the touch. It had a magnificent sheen that almost seemed to be layers of shine and sparkles on top of each other, it had different dimensions when you moved the blade or held it to the light. The ripples within the Valyrian steel give the blade an extra deadly kind of beauty, it was truly a remarkable piece. She practiced with the knife for the rest of the day until it was dark outside. Such a weapon required special skill and attention to wield it properly. She finally strapped the dagger onto her sword belt before she left her room for dinner that evening, and she still wanted to have a talk with Sansa.

One of the servants told Arya that Sansa was in their father’s solar. Two Mormont guards were posted outside. One of the guards announced Arya’s presence before they allowed her to enter the room. Sansa was sitting with two massive ledgers in front of her. Arya sat down in one of the chairs in front of the large ironwood desk, she placed her feet on desk and sat back in the chair. That seemed to get Sansa’s attention. Sansa give her a look that her mother might have given her.

“Your feet does not belong on the desk,” she finally said sternly.

“Fine,” Arya said while rolling her eyes. “You have always struggled with your sums,” Arya observed.

“Yes - that is why I am trying really hard to focus.”

“I will help you with the sums,’ Arya offered.

“Thanks, but even that will probably not change our situation or improve our shortages.”

“I ve come to talk with you,” Arya said more seriously.

“I am listening,” but Sansa was still peering at something in the ledger in front of her.

“Why in seven hells is Littlefinger hanging around here?”

Sansa finally dropped the ledger in front of her.

“The forces of the Vale follows him he is the Lord Protector of the Vale - and he helped us to win the battle of Winterfell,” Sansa answered mechanically as if she had given this exact same answer to others before.

“He can't be trusted,” Arya just began to speak but Sansa interrupted her.

“Do you honestly believe that I do not realize that the man cannot be trusted?” Sansa asked almost slightly offended.

“No, but if you didn’t interrupt then I could have told where I last saw him.”

“Where did you last see him?” Sansa inquired, slightly more interested.
“The last time I saw Littlefinger he was making an arrangement between the Tyrell’s and Tywin Lannister. And look how that worked out, the Tyrells have all practically been destroyed and Littlefinger is still happily playing his games.”

“That must have been some time ago,” Sansa replied, “where was this?”

“At Harrenhal. The point is, he was happy to align himself with the Lannisters and the Tyrells when everything was going well for them. When everythings falls apart he is the only one who keeps on doing well for himself.”

“That is very observant Arya - Littlefinger is good at playing and understanding people, I am learning from him,” she almost replied with pride.

“I despise and admire him in equal measure.”

“How long until he aligns himself with the Dragon Queen,” Arya asked.

“He won’t, I know exactly what he wants, and the Dragon Queen will never give him what he wants. This is what you have to endure as a ruler, you have to work with unpleasant people who you despise, and you have to outthink them,” Sansa answered knowingly.

“Sure, I could see that you sometimes have to work with people who you don't like, but Littlefinger is beyond that - he should be avoided at all cost.”

“Like it or not - my alliance with Littlefinger saved Jon, he would have been dead if it wasn’t for the knights of the Vale,” Sansa spoke vigorously.

“Why are you trying to disagree with me, Littlefinger is lecherous cunt!”

“Arya!”

“Oh come on, don't tell me you have never heard the word cunt before?”

“That doesn’t mean that you have to repeat those types of words, you are still supposed to be a Lady and you are always a representative of House Stark.”

“There is no one here to impress - anyways I came here to say that I could always poison Littlefinger.” Now that caught Sansa’s attention.

“If Littlefinger just dies from poison, no one would be able to point any fingers, and the Vale could just continue their alliance,” Arya pointed out the obvious.

“Pfft,” Sansa snorted unlady-like, “even if I wanted to poison him, I would not have the coin to pay for expensive poisons.”

Arya smiled brightly, “I have poison, or I could make the poison.”

“You brought poison with you,” Sansa asked slight bewildered.

“Aye, we could use the Strangler, that is a painful death where the person is choked to death from
the inside, it works quite quickly.” Arya thought back to the way all of the Freys rolled on ground gasping for breath. “Or we could use Wolfsbane, it works even faster, but the person basically dies before he even realizes it, or we could use the Tears of Lys, the person takes a day or two to die, but it appears as if the person died from the pale mare. All of these poisons are colourless and odourless.”

“You have all of these poisons with you?” Sansa asked again.

“Aye, and I suggest we use the Tears of Lys, no one would ever know.”

“You seem to know a lot about poison,” Sansa seemed quite concerned, Arya almost laughed at her expression.

“I don't know Arya, I think we could still use Littlefinger for a while longer - everything do not always have to be solved by violent measures.” Sansa finally stated as if she announced her final verdict on the matter.

“How could vermin be useful to anyone?” Arya asked with deadly intent.

Arya was disappointed but not entirely surprised, she will just need to keep an eye on Littlefinger for now. Perhaps I should just have poisoned the cunt without saying a word, perhaps I might still do that.

“Why did you send those women away?” She suddenly asked, she was tired of speaking and even thinking about Littlefinger.

“They worked for the Boltons, and as I have just pointed out to you - we already have food shortages.”

“Servants hardly have any choice in who they work for, it was a group of women and children they hold no threat to us, I am sure Jon would not have sent them away,” Arya accused.

“No, he probably wouldn't have, but the hard truth is that we can't feed everyone. That is something Jon will have to learn for himself. Unfortunately, someone has to make the hard choices around here.” Sansa replied harshly.

“Hard choices?” Arya snorted,”you are not the one who is making the hard choices, you will not have to watch how these people will slowly, struggle and die.”

“It is not just about the food supplies, everyone needs to see that if you betray House Stark there will be consequences,” she answered.

“Those Lords will care nothing for the consequences of a few serving women. But I guess they just have to prove how useful they could be to you; like Littlefinger, and you would be willing to work with them.”

“You have never cared for the small folk!”

“That is not true, I am more than willing to welcome any servants of House Stark - I am not going let the our small folk starve in order to feed servants from House Bolton, and that is my final word.”

“Well then, you should have nice evening consorting with Littlefinger, my Lady,” Arya bowed and
she left the room in a huff.

How can Sansa be so stupid, she wants to keep Littlefinger alive but she is fine with killing off the small folk who did nothing wrong. The situation made her really angry. She stormed off to the godswood to practice her water dancing for the rest of the evening, she was in no mood to sit around and take part in fake pleasantries within the great hall. She will start training the small folk on the morrow.
Jaime II

Chapter Summary

I apologize for the hiatus. I have cleared my schedule a bit and I will now be updating every 2 - 3 weeks. I seriously want to finish this story before the start of season 8, and there is still a lot to write.

Jaime

*A Lannister doesn’t concern himself with the opinion of the sheep,* that is what the great Tywin Lannister would have said with scorn in his voice; if he saw that Jaime was squirming under the scrutiny of a mere serving wench. Then again, his father would not condone his relationship with Cersei either, *few did*, Jaime laid back on the bed again. He did not know if it was a good idea for the servants to see him and Cersei in bed together, somehow it did not feel completely right. *But this is what I’ve always wanted.* And yet, he felt self-conscious at being laid bare, a twine of doubt was slowly unraveling in his mind. He almost averted his eyes when Cersei’s serving girl saw him in her bed. He has always wanted to be able to live and love right by Cersei’s side, but it did not feel that satisfying in this single moment.

Jaime waited until he could not hear Bernadette’s discreet footfalls on the polished tiles any longer. He stretched his arms out, but he could still feel the tension pinching within his neck and shoulders. He dressed himself with a certain sense of trepidation and inevitability, which only seemed to increase by the day.

He left the confines of the Red Keep with one Lannister soldier following in his wake, once out in the open streets he made his way in a northeasterly direction, bypassing the putridity of flea bottom. He moved closer along the eastern wall of the city, it was a peaceful and quiet area with more upmarket inhabitants. The white washed houses and slate-red roofs were cosily bunched together, with trees and vistas of plantlife. There was no signs of any wildfire explosion around these parts. There was no sign that the Ironborn fleet was anchored just beyond the city walls. Jaime knew if he was walking along the city walls he would have been looking right at the fleet. He passed Rhaenys Hill, as he moved closer towards his destination, he could easily distinguish the smell from the sheep and pig market, the streets became rowdier as he neared the Dragon’s Gate.

A white curtain was fluttering wistfully in one of the second story windows as Jaime slowed his pace to account for the extra pedestrians on the street. Jaime could recall how Ser Arthur Dayne’s cloak was fluttering rhythmically right before him as they once moved through the streets of Kings Landing, people used to watch them with awe and veneration. The bystanders barely looked at Jaime in his Lannister armour.
They reached East Barracks in good time, two members from the City Watch was stationed outside of the main entrance, they immediately acknowledged Jaime’s presence. He has made a few appearances at the Barracks since his return from the Riverlands. One of the City Watch men immediately led him to the quarters of Ser Addam Marbrand. However, he was lead to Ser Addam’s personal quarters instead of the usual study.

“Ser Jaime Lannister, to see you milord.” The guard announced just before he opened one of the double doors to Ser Addam Marbrand’s personal solar.

Jaime often found his way to Ser Addam Marbrand, since he was elected as the Commander of the City Watch. It often felt like a welcome retreat against the constant surveillance and bootlickers of the Red Keep.

“Please be seated Ser Jaime,” Ser Addam offered as he was fastening his sword belt. The room was decked out in the earthy browns and oranges of the Marbrand sigil. It was simplistic but the fabric was of good quality, and the style of furnishing held a silent eloquence.

“Can I offer you anything to drink, Ser Jaime?” Ser Addam enquired before he sat down at his desk. Jaime nodded and Ser Addam poured him a glass of dark red wine.

“Ser Addam I have to hail your efforts of the day before. The City Watch conducted themselves with praiseworthy efficiency.”

Ser Addam did not show much emotion about Jaime’s high praises but Jaime could still sense some satisfaction emanating from Ser Addam.

“I am just doing my duty, Ser Jaime.”

Euron Greyjoy’s parade through the streets of Kings Landing, almost went too well for Jaime’s taste. The inhabitants of Kings Landing was a fickle bunch, Jaime was surprised to witness their joy and celebrations at Euron prancing and fluttering through the city like a vulture at the sight of a fresh corpse.

It was almost disappointing to see no resistance from the mob.

“In truth I did very little, the mob was very well behaved, Ser Jaime.”

“I believe you should actually direct some of your gratitude towards the new alehouses and brothels. I have been told that they were offering a pint or two of free ale in honour of Euron Greyjoy’s victory, just before he set foot in the city.”
This was certainly one of Quburn’s plans. Jaime had his doubts about a disgraced maester taking up the position as the Hand of the Queen. However, Quburn has only displayed a homogenous efficiency to the position in every aspect or subject. In fact he was displaying such efficiency, that Jaime knew he was not really needed in the small council. He might be the Septon Barth of this generation.

“May I be as bold as to speak my opinion?” Ser Addam asked somewhat tentatively, yet he still displayed his usual self assurance.

“You may speak plainly.” Jaime invited.

“It is not my place to make any recommendations, however I feel I must warn the Queen’s council about the unreliable nature of the Ironborn and Euron Greyjoy in particular.”

Ser Addam displayed far too much diplomacy for a moment.

“Those are well measured words of advice, Ser Addam,” Jaime sighed, “the Ironborn can only be described as a fucking leech upon the society of Westeros.”

Ser Addam made an acknowledgement with his glass before he took a swig of wine.

“Euron Greyjoy had some part in the sacking of Lannisport, even Balon Greyjoy wasn’t able to control his brother. And, well, I have also discovered that Euron Greyjoy mutilated all of his captives by cutting out their tongues and making slaves of them.”

Jaime held the exact same thoughts about Euron Greyjoy, he would much rather welcome him with a sword through the heart than letting him near Cersei, but he did not have much of a voice in the matter.

“The Queen understands men like Euron Greyjoy, she has always been surrounded by ambitious men, and most of them were far more competent than Euron Greyjoy.” Jaime could hear the resentment in his own voice.

“We need allies, and Euron Greyjoy has a strong fleet, you can accomplish a lot with a strong fleet,” Jaime was almost reasoning with himself. “That does not imply that he will be trusted.” Jaime did not want think of the subject anymore.

“Is there any other news or problems that requires my attention?”
“There is somewhat of a problem with women that have been disappearing, and now it is not just the women but men as well.”

A small emotion of trepidation crept into Jaime’s bones.

“Have you conducted an investigation into the matter,” Jaime asked as casually as he could manage.

“We have, we found two of the girls working in the brothels. It seem like they did not want to inform their families about their newest occupation. But most of these women have just disappeared into thin air. Some have been missing for weeks. Some of the small folk have started to grow weary."

Now wasn’t the best of times to antagonize the smallfolk with the Dragon Queen on their doorstep.

“I have heard that someone could easily disappear in Flea Bottom for a few copper pennies.”

“Use some of your best men to investigate the matter, I will secure more resources for more men.”

“How many people have gone missing?” Jaime asked.

“The current count stands at one hundred and thirty two.”

The number were much higher much higher than Jaime anticipated, that was indeed an alarming amount of people to disappear.

“Make it a top priority.”

Ser Addam nodded.

“You will need to make these arrangements swiftly. I have another task for you.” Ser Addam didn’t reply he left Jaime to complete his purpose.

“The Lannister forces will soon march back to the Westerlands, Casterly Rock might soon be under siege. I want you to march with the army once we leave Kings Landing. I will give you the command of a garrison. You will stay within the Riverlands, I suppose you have heard about Walder Frey and most of his kin?”

“I have,” Ser Addam Marbrand simply acknowledged.
“The Riverlands are rudderless at the moment, most of the houses within the Riverlands submitted to Lannister rule because they had a knife at their throat. The Frey’s were mostly a bunch of cravens, but they still served the function of uniting the Riverlands. I fear that another war could easily erupt.”

“No one is shedding any tears for the Freys, most people believed that they had it coming.”

“It is always difficult to decide what people might deserve or what they might not deserve.” Walder Frey was a lecherous old cunt, but did all of his children deserve to die? That was difficult to say. The people likely shared similar thoughts about the Lannisters, would anyone care if their whole family was destroyed in one fatal swoop? He knew the answer.

“I want you to garrison at Castle Darry. Amerei Frey currently stands as the Lady of Darry. You would be able to keep an eye on the Riverlands from there. The Riverlands are under Lannister control, but you know well enough that the control is tenuous. We can ill afford another war in the area, therefore you would have to use your discretion in order to avoid more fighting.”

“Do you believe that the Targaryen Queen will try to attack Casterly Rock?” Ser Addam enquired.

“It is a possibility, especially now that she has Tyrion advising her.“ Jaime couldn’t help but to add bitterly. He didn’t want to contemplate Tyrion’s treason at this junction.

“We are just waiting for a reply from an ally, before we will be ready to set off. I advice that you make your preparations quickly. Make sure that a proper investigation can be launched into these missing smallfolk, despite your looming departure.”

Jaime needed to be sure that the matter would continue to receive the proper attention. Jaime could reinstate Bronn as the Lord Commander of the City Watch, but he didn’t believe that Bronn would truly investigate the matter. And Bronn has been serving well as his right hand man.

After another glass of wine and some discussion, Jamie left the barracks. He followed a different route back to the Red Keep, he tried to stay clear of the street of Sisters and the wildfire desimation.

Upon entering the perimeter of the Red Keep he was approached by a Lannister servant with some urgency. “Ser Jaime, her Grace the Queen has ordered you to attend the small council meeting with all haste.” The servant bowed and left just as quickly as he, appeared.
The small council immediately stopped talking as soon as Jaime appeared. Quburn greeted him as politely as ever with a nod. “Ser Jaime.”

Cersei had an impatient expression on her face. The small council suddenly had an earnest looking man seated to Cersei’s left. He stood red faced, Quburn took it upon himself to make the introduction. “Lord Garren Blount, our new master of coin.”

“Pardon, me Ser Jaime.” He quickly moved two chairs on, and sat down again. Jaime took his customary seat next to Cersei.

“We have received word from Randyll Tarly, it is time to put our plans into motion. Jaime; you and the Lannister forces stationed within the city will ride for High Garden. You will teach the Tyrells and the rest of the realm a valuable lesson.” Cersei spoke to him in her Queenly voice.

“There are no Tyrells left, only Lady Olenna, and she is Redwyne.”

The one corner of Cersei’s mouth curled into a cruel smile. “Precisely, now the rains weep o’er his halls, and not a soul to hear.”

“You will route that old hag, and drag her out of her keep, and bring her to me, I want her to feel the shame of her final defeat, I want to parade her in chains throughout the streets!”

“Cersei,” she looked at him in anger as he used her name instead of her title. “Lady Olenna was very popular with the smallfolk it might not be wise to humiliate her publically. She is also an old lady, how would it appear if we go around whipping old ladies through the streets?”

He could see that Cersei wasn’t impressed by his plea. “She has already lost everything that is important to her, Margaery and Loras meant more to her than anything else, and they are gone. Nothing you can do to Lady Olenna would ever compare to that.”

Cersei looked more thoughtful, ‘Fine, but then you will have to get rid of her, she is a traitor to the crown.” Jaime was taken aback for a moment, he didn’t have any reason to kill Lady Olenna, she was just another victim of this never ending war, he understood why Lady Olenna has decided to support the Dragon Queen. Will it ever end? He could not help but wonder. His throat felt dry and swollen, but he nodded his understanding towards Cersei.

“Good, I have already recalled all of the remaining Lannister forces within the Westerlands and the garrisons at Lannisport and Casterly Rock, to Kings Landing. They will protect the Capital
while you are in the Reach.”

“That vile, malicious imp has always wanted Casterly Rock for himself; so we will give him Casterly Rock.”

“I don’t understand,” Jaime could not help but utter before thinking.

“I have instructed that all of the food supplies and valuables within Lannisport and Casterly Rock should be brought to Kings Landing.”

Jaime felt the slight tremors of anger starting to roar inside of him.

“It will take a fortnight or longer for them to reach the capital,” he stood and started pacing around the room. “And they will have to get pass the whole Dothraki army at Harrenhal.”

Cersei was livid in return, “I still don't understand how a whole horde of savages can pass through the Crownlands without anyone noticing them.”

Lord Blount shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

Of course, he suddenly realized, “when did we receive word from Lord Randyll Tarly,” he asked Quburn directly. Quburn didn’t flinch, “seven days past, my Lord.”

“If you attended the small council meeting you would have known.” Cersei added with boredom in her voice.

“Out!” Everyone, “out!” Jaime ordered harshly. Lord Blount jumped from his chair like a frightened deer, he was gone in the blink of an eye. Quburn waited until Cersei nodded in his direction before he left.

“In case you have forgotten, I am the Commander of the Lannister army, I am not a child or one of your lackeys.”

“Correct, and as the Commander of the army and one of the most important Lords within the realm it is also your duty to attend the small council meetings.”

Jaime knew he could have attended more small council meetings.

“You have also commanded me to keep the city secure, it is not easy to keep the peace after someone burns the most holiest of churches!”
Cersei looked at him indulgently, she showed no reaction to his condemnation.

“The Lord of Casterly Rock should not patrol the streets like a common Gold Cloak. It is time that you accept your place.”

“Sit down,” Cersei ordered, “we can discuss the rest of the plans.”

“It hardly seems as if I am needed for any plans,” Jaime mumbled, but he took a seat.

“You will attack Highgarden, and you have to collect all of the riches from Highgarden, along with the food and harvest from the surrounding area. We will cut off the Dragon Witch’s food supply.”

“Lord Tarly will join the forces from the Reach he will take command from the reserves, at the right moment he will attack the Reach from behind.”

“You have discussed this plan with him?” Jaime asked.

“He suggested the plan, he is one of the best commanders.”

“He could be leading us right into a trap.”

“He might, which is why you will need to plan for that option as well.”

“And Casterly Rock?” Cersei was quiet for a moment.

“I have promised Casterly Rock to the Iron Bank, as soon as the deed arrives I will hand it over.”

“You did what?” Jaime roared.

“Casterly Rock is meaningless to us right now!”

“Casterly Rock is mine - you have NO right to give it away!”
“I have every right, I am the Queen.”

A self-proclaimed queen with no rights to any throne. Jaime didn’t say it out loud.

“Father would turn over in his grave if he knew what you have done.”

“Father was no sentimental fool. Our hold on the capital is much more important right now, than a stronghold hundreds of miles away. Let that little monster take the Rock, he has always wanted your birthright.”

“Only there will be nothing to hold and nothing to gain.”

“The Iron Bank believes they are getting their paws on our goldmines, they don't know that the mines have dried up. When you return with the riches from the Reach we can repay the Iron Bank and we will get the deed to Casterly Rock back again. I have secured the full backing of the Iron Bank.”

She paused as if she was waiting for an applause.

“You don't seem to be listening to me?”

“What do you want me to say? We were not born in Kings Landing we are Lannisters from Casterly Rock.”

Jaime felt absolutely nothing for Kings Landing, the Red Keep or the Iron throne. He simply wants an end to the war. They have already lost too much in this war. All of my children are gone. This obsession of Cersei will get them all killed, every last Lannister.

“You never compromise or gamble with your stronghold, that is one of the first lessons every highborn child is taught.”

“That Dothraki whore will abandon Casterly Rock very quickly, she will have much larger concerns when she no longer has a food supply.” Cersei added knowingly.

“I was not referring to the Dragon Queen; you just gave Casterly Rock away.” Jamie felt a frantic anger raging from within. He’s had enough, if he listened to one more word from Cersei right now he might just strangle her. He stormed out of the room without looking back.

He really had no choice but to ride out and take Highgarden, he need to be sure that all of the riches from the Reach were secured or they might just lose Casterly Rock.
Cersei has gone to far this time. Holding onto the Iron throne right now was pure folly, he knew it. The Lannister legacy had nothing to do with Red Keep, this was purely Cersei’s own madness and vanity.

The great Tywin Lannister used to prattle on and on about legacy and the family name. And what has it brought him? His father was dead and no one particularly cared, people respected him but he was never well loved, no one mourned for him. No one cared that House Frey were gone, no one will ever mourn for the Lannisters.

But Jaime had no choice now, his fate was sealed, he will have to see it through until the end.

The final preparations to leave Kings Landing took three days, Jaime ignored Cersei as far as possible. Most of the preparations were already made, but Jaime still couldn’t bare to see Cersei.

It was the early hours of the morning when Cersei arrived at his chambers. He was already dressed for departure, which was still hours away but he could not sleep. Cersei entered his room soundlessly as the guards at the door did not obstruct her entrance. He was looking at himself in the mirror, when Cersei appeared in his line of vision.

“Cersei,” he greeted dispassionately.

“You are leaving today.” Cersei started needlessly, Jaime did not give her any response.

“Before you leave there is something you should know. I am pregnant.”

“What?” Jaime finally broke his silence, all of the feelings and emotions from the past days swam within his head.

“I am carrying your child, we have something to fight for.”

“When did you find out?” Jaime could not help but ask.

“Late last night, Quburn confirmed it.”

“Cersei,” she held up her hand.
“You will ride out today and do your duty, you will make sure that our child has a future.”

He couldn’t help himself, he swept Cersei in his arms and held her tightly against him, “we will fight for the future of this child; together.”

Cersei pulled away slowly and nodded. “I will leave you to continue your preparations.” She turned to leave as quietly as she appeared.

“Cersei,” I forgot to inform you that Ser Addam Marbrand is leaving with the army, you will need someone trustworthy in the position of Lord Commander of the City Watch, someone who can protect you.”

Cersei gave him a slight smile, “I have the perfect man for the task.”

Has he been given a second chance? Perhaps the gods are not always such cruel twats.

It was mid-morning when Jaime finally galloped through the Kings Gate. The sun was already planted high within the air, he had Bronn and Ser Addam next to him as they set out on the Roseroad. Jaime was aware that some people would notice that they are traveling in the wrong direction to reach the Westerlands. They needed to march very quickly. It was easy enough, the troops were fresh and battle-hardened. The Roseroad was well kept. They passed the Kingswood Forest on the first day before they made camp.

The grass and fields became greener as they moved ever closer to Highgarden. He drove the army hard, they reached Bittersteel during the late afternoon as night started to threaten the last rays of light. Jaime, was thinking of stopping and making camp, when the scout Commander, Ser Barryn Swyft appeared with two scouts in tow.

“Ser Jaime, these scouts have reports of a great religious gathering just a few feet ahead.”

Jaime didn’t like the idea of running into more sparrows. He sighed and climbed off his horse, while Bronn held onto the reins. He moved a bit further from the group and mentioned for Ser Barryn and the two scouts to join. He could see that the scouts were nervous as they approached.

“How big is this gathering?”

“It might around one thousand people,” Ser Barryn answered.

One scout stepped forward, he was fiddling with a piece of parchment in front of him while looking down. Ser Barryn pushed him forward.

“Milord, they were waiting for us. They knew we’re we was planning on hiding to scout out their camp.”

“Why did they let you go?”
“They gave us a message to bring to you, Milord.”

“Me specifically or anyone in charge?” Jaime did not enjoy the sound of this. The other scout spoke out then. “They said the message was for the Kingslayer.” The scout went red as he said the word _Kingslayer_.

“Pardons Milords,” he quickly added, “that’s what they said.”

“Is that the message?” Jaime pointed towards the piece of parchment that the other scout was still holding between his fingers.

“Aye, Milord.” He handed over the small piece of parchment.

_You will be granted a second great deed, Kingslayer. Seek me out. Kaynarra_

The message did not make much sense to him, however the words second great deed stood out to him.

“Who is this _Kaynarra_?”

“It’s their Priestess, Milord.”


“They made sure that we knew they serve the Lord of Light.”

The Lord of Light, Thoros of Myr was a priest for the Lord Light. Yet from what Jaime could recall he was always drinking and whoring with Robert. It didn’t appear as if the Lord of Light held any strict scriptures about the behaviour of their followers.

“Where they hostile?”

“Nay, but they had a lot of fires.”

It made Jaime uneasy that a group of a thousand people knew exactly where to locate them. Jaime made a quick decision. He spoke with the two scouts.

“Go back and tell these people that I will meet with this Kaynarra; quickly!”

Ser Barryn looked at Jaime questioningly. “Perhaps it would be better to just avoid these fanatics, Ser Jaime.”

“I want to know how these people knew our traveling plans. Bronn?,” Jaime order loud enough for Bronn to hear, “get twelve of our elite soldiers.”

Ser Barryn give a slight bow and moved away. Bronn arrived quickly enough with a dosen soldiers clad in finest of Lannister arms, right behind him.

“We are quickly going to visit a bunch of fire worshippers.” Jaime stated as if it was an everyday occurance.

“Those fuckers have a bad affinity for burning everything and everybody in their path.”
“Have met followers of this Lord of Light before?”

“I have seen some of them in Essos, the Fire God is very popular around there.”

“So I have heard, Jaime answered, “I am sure you have some fascinating tales about them.”

“No, I stay away as far as I can from those fuckers, they are crazy.”

Jaime did not ask Bronn anymore questions, the answers he was providing wasn’t very reassuring or helpful. They did not have far to travel, Jaime could smell and see burning and flames close to the road, right next to the bank of the Mander. Before they could reach the camp two young men and a group of children appeared beside him. They bowed.

“We ask that you leave the horses behind and join us on foot. Your horses will be looked after. It isn’t far to walk and you can take your men with you.”

Jaime dismounted and the others behind him followed reluctantly. The children took over the reins from the horses. They followed the two men on-to the left side off the road into a clearing. Jaime did not know what to expect.

In the clearing stood one old hag with tattered red ropes. She coughed as they approached, it sounded ancient and dry, like old leaves and dried-out twigs that were crushed together. Jaime held his hand in the air to show the others that they can stop. He moved forward by myself.

“Ser Jaime Lannister,” her voice was surprisingly strong and clear.

“How did you come to know that I was traveling this way?” He decided to get right to the point.

She almost smiled at him indulgently. Jaime has never seen anyone this old, there was weariness and wisdom buried deep within her eyes.

“I know nothing by myself it is the Lord of Light who showed me that you will pass this river.”

Jaime felt slightly irritated by the old crone.

“You have a great destiny ahead of you Kingslayer, it might be the greatest density of all. The Lord of Light will grant you the power to perform a second great deed. You have never received acknowledgement for your one great deed.” Jaime started to feel slightly unsettled, did she somehow know that he saved Kings Landing from the wildfire?

“Yes.” She answered him as if she was reading his mind.

“You are all just playing at war right now, the great war will soon be upon us,” she continued.

Well that seemed rather obvious, any war that included three dragons was bound to become a great war. You would think that a fire priestess might be more interested in the Targaryen with three fire
breathing dragons.

“The great war is between the living and the dead, the time draws closer as the days become shorter. You will perform a great deed once more, but no one will ever sing any songs about you, Kingslayer.”

“What do you want from me,” Jaime asked. Jaime think he understand her purpose now, she likely wanted some payment for telling him his future.

“I want nothing from you Kingslayer, the Lord of Light instructed me to deliver his message, and so I have done, for the night is dark and full of terrors.” She turned around and simply shuffled away from him. Jaime turned around and left as quickly as he had arrived.

It was already dark and the chanting could be heard from the camp of fire worshippers. Their flames flicked and danced high into the night sky. Jaime moved his army past their camp and over the Mander. The commanders did not think it was a good idea to set up camp in the darkness, but Jaime did not listen. He did not want to be close to the fire worshippers.

Jaime send Ser Addam away with a garrison of about four thousand men. He would have the difficult task of slipping past Harrenhal without being seen.

Jaime lowered the pace of the march for the next three days. He wanted to make sure that they had enough stamina left to fight as soon as they arrived at Highgarden. The Reach had an incredible countryside, the trees were still wearing their leaves, and some crops were still ready to harvest. There was little sign of winter around here. They spotted a scout here and there, but Jaime left them alone since he knew they were likely reporting back to Randyll Tarly.

Jaime dictated the march in such a manner that they would arrive at Highgarden just before noon. Jaime was quickly notified when Highgarden could be seen. He made his way to the front of the train. This was the first time that he has ever seen Highgarden. The castle was picturesque, it was built on different levels with many tiled open air verandas overlooking the hill. Vines filled with fruit snaked lavish pillars. Heavily styled gardens surrounded the castle with hundreds of fountains. There was even pools on many of the different level, the wall were so white that almost blinded Jaime’s eyes. It was paradise, but it was no place for a siege. There was a wall around the castle, but the wall was more suited for growing vines than housing archers. There would not have been much of a choice, the soldiers from Highgarden would have to meet them on the open field. Which was exactly what they were doing.

The soldiers from the reach were in a formation to meet them head on. They were standing on a hill, they held the higher ground. The Lannister forces would have to charge up the hill to capture the castle. He could see the green banner with the huntsman flapping lazily from behind the center. Jaime ordered Bronn to quickly line up the troops. The Lannister army has had a lot of experience they aligned themselves easily, such as the well running cogs of a sawmill. Both armies just
started at each of a while, Jaime was starting to sweat underneath his heavy armour, as the sun was baking them head-on.

“Well?” Bronn demanded after a time. They have discussed all of the battle strategies, many of the heavy cavalry were hanging back in case they needed the extra power. Jaime nodded towards Bronn, he bellowed out the first orders. They first send out heavy infantry, and they were followed closely by a light cavalry charge. The soldiers from the Reach did not move. Jaime held his breath at first clash of shields and swords. Mayhem soon erupted, it was difficult to say who was winning. Four blasts from a horn was echoing through the valley. Lord Tary’s forces moved forward as one, the soldiers from the reach were caught between two armies. Jaime finally send out the heavy cavalry to close off the flanks. Most of the soldiers simply surrendered, it was almost too easy.

Jaime took a small garrison and made his way to the castle. Lady Olenna was waiting for them in one of the ante chambers of the great hall. Jaime made his way over to the serving table. He poured two glasses of wine. He sat down in front of Lady Olenna and poured the poison that he obtained from Quburn in one of the glasses, and slowly moved it in front of Lady Olenna.

“So this is how I am meant die then?”

“It seem a bit ironic.”

“Cersei wanted to drag you through the streets, I convinced her otherwise.”

“How very noble of you.”

“I should properly not be saying this, but I understand why you turned against the crown after your family died. I did not think you deserved to die in such a humiliating manner.”

Lady Olenna smiled, “it is easy to make confessions to a man on his deathbed.”

“Do you think I honestly care how I die, I died the day Margaery and Loras were murdered.”

“Did Margaery and Loras deserve to die, according to your scale? Margaery had her ambitions but she still would have been a good Queen.”

“Does Cersei deserve to die for causing the death of your son, Tommen?”

“Your poison is nothing but a balm to soothe your own conscious.”

“Cersei did not kill Tommen.”

“No, it is worse; her actions hurt the boy so much that he thought he couldn’t continue to live
within this world.”

Jaime grimaced at her words.

“I don't blame the boy, to have your wife killed in cold blood by your own mother would be
difficult for most men accept.”

Something must have shown on his face, because Lady Olenna started laughing. “Oh, your poor
fool, don't tell me you didn’t know that Cersei was responsible for Margaery and Loras’ death.”
She smiled and shook her head.

“Did you anyone even told you that she used wildfire to blow up the sept with everyone inside. She
even killed your own uncle.”

Jaime felt distraught and confused for a moment. he almost couldn’t concentrate on her prattling in
the background. “You see I had never seen the poison work.”

Did Cersei actually kill everyone including Margaery and Uncle Kevin? Is Lady Olenna lying to
me? It seems unlikely that Lady Olenna would just lie to him at this stage she has nothing to lose at
this moment, and nothing to gain from lying. She already drank the poison with gusto.

“She want me to know; it was me.”

The last words caught his attention, Cersei will be ferocious once she learns that Lady Olenna was
the one who killed Joffrey.

Jaime stormed off as fast he could. He found Bronn waiting outside for him. “Find the treasuries
and carry off any valuables. We will make camp outside of the castle tonight.”

Bonn frowned at him, “the castle has nice feather beds that we can sleep on.”

“We will stay outside of the castle, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in the area.”

“This is a nice castle, it seems to me like this castle could use a subject that is loyal to the crown.”

“The Dragon Queen will properly try to take back this castle from whoever holds it, you don't want
to be here when the dragons arrive.” Bronn only rolled his eyes.

They spent almost a fortnight traveling through the Reach and collecting the harvest from all of the
farms they could find. Randyll Tarly insisted that they send some of their prizes over to Kings
Landing in advance and Jaime agreed. Jaime felt more tired by the day, intimidating farmers all day
long was not his idea of great work. But he was doing what needed to be done, Jaime’s only drive
and focus right now was to create a future for his child. Kings Landing needed food supplies for
the winter, if he was going to start creating a future for his child. If he had to intimidate every in
farmer in the Seven Kingdom to create a future legacy for his child than he would do it.

And yet he could not help wondering in the back of his mind how Cersei was going to corrupt this
child. Joffrey was a tyrant, and Cersei destroyed Tommen with her own pettiness. Jaime vowed
that he would take on, a more active role with his future child. It was his last chance. They were
moving very slowly towards Kings Landing, there was hundreds of waggons that had to make the
journey to Kings Landing.
They had passed Fawnton and they were just making their way past the Kingwood forest, that was when they finally met the Dragon Queen and her Dothraki horde for the first time. Of course it would be Bronn who would notice that something wasn’t right.

The ground was shaking and vibrating underneath them, with the approach of thousands of Dothraki, their hooves were pounding the ground like thunder. Jaime’s heart started to beat faster to the rhythm of the hoof-beats. This was the last thing he wanted, they were so close to Kings Landing. Sweat started to roll from his temples as his heartbeat increased. Archers and infantry men were quickly in place and standing their ground. Jaime tried to conjure up all of the tales he has heard about the Dothraki. Slaves and death were all his deprived mind could come up with at the moment. The whole hoard rode over the field as one, some even standing upright in their saddles.

But the worst came when saw the big black dragon swooping forward just above the hoard. It was Balerion the Black Dread come again, it was the first time that Jaime has seen a true monster. Jaime quickly lost any sense of hope that he had, his fleeting hope was replaced with dread and despair. The roar from the dragon reverberated through his head. His insides turned into jelly, he experienced a sense of fear that he has not felt often in his live. He knew the men around him all felt the same way, but they all stood their ground. These were brave men and they were all about to die.

The dragon spewed his flame from hundreds of feet way, Jaime saw noting but bellows of orange and red flames infront of him, one breath from the dragon obliterated their lines. Men who were standing upright and ready to fight just a few moments ago, were gone. The flames had dissolved them into thin air.

There was no time to process the attack. The Dothraki raiders followed as close to the dragonfire as they dared, they crashed into them like a hammer. Any semblance of a line was completely scattered. Somehow Jaime could hear his own voice over rampage. “Retreat!”

“Fallback!” “Archers regroup, to me!” “To me!” He repeated the order a few times.

When the some of the dust and smoke settled Jaime was miraculously surrounded by a group of archers. “Knock your arrows!” As the dragon came within good shooting range, Jaime gave the order to fire. The arrows didn’t even chip one scale on the dragon, they simply bounced off the dragon’s thick scales. They need to fire the scorpion bolts.

The dragon made a quick turn in the air, he was ready for another dive. Jaime knew there was no use in trying to keep their lines in check when the dragon would just burn through them all. This was a different type of war, it would be much better if the army was scattered. “Break apart, no lines!” “Scatter” His throat was completely dry from the screaming, he wasn’t even sure if his voice could be heard anymore. The dragon's flames obliterated hundreds of food wagons and
valuables in one sweep. “Lookout!” Jaime screamed at Victor Hetherspoon. He was almost unhorsed by a Dothraki raider in the process. He could feel the heat upon his armour before he saw the violent flames overhead. He has never felt such heat, it felt as if his flesh might be cooking within his armour. Victor Hetherspoon his childhood companion, was turned into ashes right in front of him, his ashes evaporated with one powerful thrust from the dragon’s wings.

Jaime felt the bile push up in his throat, as he tasted that his mouth was full of ashes. He could have cried in that moment, but the tears dried within his eyes from heat. Surely this was hell. *This is what hell must be like.* But somehow he rode through the fighting men, he kept on ordering them to scatter and to run for the woods. He was not sure how he was still sitting on his horse, he was not sure how his horse was still galloping, the sweat rolled down the horse’s neck and flanks. They past men who were screaming in anger and men who were screaming in anguish. Jaime could hear the sound of horses dying.

And then he suddenly saw her right in front of him, he immediately recognized her white Targaryen hair. She had landed a few feet from the fighting area, and she was trying to remove a scorpion bolt from the dragon’s thick hide. All this destruction was from just one dragon, three dragons will completely destroy the Seven Kingdoms. The words from the Red Priestess sprang into his mind, *the Lord of Light will give you another great deed.* He saw a spear standing upright. Maybe this will be his one great deed. He pushed his boots into the horses sides, and spurred him forward at full speed. Everything to his sides disappeared he could only see Dragon Queen in front of him. It felt like he was running towards his greatest mission, and likely his death. She was oblivious to his approach. He felt blood rushing through his veins with urgency, the horse must have felt it as well because they were going faster and faster, the target was becoming bigger. He readied his body for the impact as he had done in hundreds of tourneys.

The dragon roared, he blew out an orange bolt of dragonfire. Jaime could only see red in front of his eyes. He was hit with an enormous force, and he was falling. He realized that he has somehow fallen into the Blackwater Rush. He wasn’t falling, he was sinking like a rock. Jaime could somehow see other bodies in armour around him who were sinking as well. He did not try to resist, the water was cool and calm, he could not hear the screams anymore or taste the ashes of dead Lannister soldiers in his mouth. He was completely at peace with himself, therefore he did not try to resist, he felt numb. The cool dark depths of river seemed like a sweet reprieve.

His peace did not last for long, he was being pulled to the firestorm above once more.
The beach was eerily quiet. For a moment it seemed as if everything was suspended and frozen in time. Even the sea was quiet as light waves rhythmically lapped against the deceptively sharp claws of the rocks, surrounding Dragonstone. The skies were cheerfully blue and bright, the sun’s rays shined as bright as diamonds upon the water. Everything was perfect in that moment which was a sharp contrast as to how Dany felt. Dany could hear the crunching of sand underneath her boots, as she shifted her weight from one leg to the other, she stood with her hand on her hip. The grey dusky, lower sky, still somehow hung downtrodden just above the battlements of Dragonstone, as smoke from the castle filled the air. Dany could feel her own dissatisfaction and vexation burning within her blood. Dany has been stranded on this island for weeks, the weeks of inactivity has made her impatient and irate.

The timeless scene in front of her was broken by the screech of a dragon, Rhaegal, she knew the cries of her children, like only a mother could.

“What are you suggesting specifically?” She demanded hotly from the Northman in front of her.

“The Lannisters have taken Highgarden,” he stated the obvious. “Highgarden is one of the richest kingdoms within the Seven Kingdoms. Supplying food to the capital in times of winter and war has always been a big concern. The Lannisters would sack Highgarden, and they would try to gain as many provisions as possible, just as they sacked the Riverlands. They will take their time to gather as much provisions as possible, because Highgarden was one of the few remaining Kingdoms that hasn’t been hit by the wars.”

After another cry from Rhaegal, Jon Snow continued. “You could gather your forces at Harrenhal -
send a raven ahead. Harrenhal is closer to Kings Landing than Highgarden, if you move fast enough you might catch the Lannister army before they re-enter the capital. You can retake their stolen loot, and hit their army rather than the people of King’s Landing.”

It was such a simple idea, Dany might just be able to execute this plan, traveling by dragon and boat was much faster than a slow moving army.

Some of Tyrion’s colour had drained from his face, he was looking intently to the sand at his feet. Varys were standing with both of his arms crossed, his hands were hidden within the folds of his sleeves. He was also staring towards the ground.

Dany turned to face them, “can this be done?” She demanded strongly from the pair of them.

“It could be feasible,” Tyrion ventured tentatively. “If we can be assured that the news regarding the sack of Highgarden is fresh news.”

“The news came from a raven that was sent before Highgarden was sacked, the news arrived quite early, Your Grace.” Varys assured her.

“Your Grace, might I also suggest that you just take back the loot and let the men be. All of this fighting will just increase the odds against the living. You shouldn’t be killing capable soldiers who can fight against the undead. You have birthed the first living dragons in a century, they shouldn’t be used to burn living men. Mayhaps this wonder was born into this world once more to kill the Night King and his armies, that is the true enemy.” Jon Snow ended with conviction.

Dany’s fury was half forgotten when she realized that she might have a viable plan against the Lannisters, but Jon Snow managed to ignite her anger again. The man was a thorn in her side, with his insistence on grumpkins and snarks as Tyrion liked to say. She has already given him the dragonglass and he hasn’t given her anything in return. Another one of Tyrion’s ideas.

“Thank you for your advice Jon Snow,” Dany answer him coldly, directly on his name, “you will have to excuse me as I have a battle to plan.” She turned and walked away without looking back. She could hear that Tyrion and Varys was following close behind.

And yet...at the same time she almost didn’t want Jon Snow to be wrong about the White Walkers. If it was all just grumpkins and snarks as Tyrion has stated numerous times, then it meant that Jon Snow was a highly deranged man, although he was stubborn, practically to the point of stupidity.
He never struck her as a deranged type of man, in fact he seemed like a quite practical type of man, she might have to start questioning her own perspective about the people surrounding her more closely. *He did show me those painting within the cave, the Children of the Forest must have made them for some reason.* When Jon Snow spoke so casually about the Children of the Forest, Dany realized that she knew nothing of the tales and the history of Westeros. She has only heard about the Children of the Forest once or twice in her life. It was not difficult to see that Jon Snow was probably raised with hundreds of tales about the Children of the Forest. But, Dany didn’t have any time to contemplate her childhood right now, there was a battle to plan.

She flew up the daunting stairs that snaked against the hill with various twists and turns, her anger propelled her beyond exhaustion. Lady Olenna placed her trust in House Targaryen. She was one of the first to do so, and now she was butchered in her own home by the same people who already killed off her whole family. *Where was the justice in that? I promised Lady Olenna that she will get justice for the crimes house Lannister have committed against her family,* and now it will never happen. *Cersei and Jaime Lannister have to be stopped,* she repeated it to herself a few times. They have caused too much destruction within the Seven Kingdoms, she was the only person left who could bring them to justice.

She reached the room with the painted table well before her tired advisors. Dany immediately started to look at the map in front of her. Kings Landing and the Red Keep felt just as remote to her as ever. She tried to judge the distance between Harrenhal, Kings Landing and Highgarden. Harrenhal was almost twice as close to Kings Landing then Highgarden, she should be able to get her Dothraki within distance of Kings Landing fast enough. Varys and Tyrion entered the chamber with beads of sweat on their foreheads, Tyrion immediate ordered some wine. She waited a few moments for them to catch their breath.

“Is this a feasible plan?” She enquired again as she had done on the beach, although she has already decided on her course of action, she still asked their opinions.

“It seems like a reasonable plan, You Grace,” Varys answered as he glanced at the table. “The report also stated that the Lannister army was traveling along the Roseroad. It might be a good idea to catch the Lannister forces unawares, just as they exit from the Kingswood forest.”

Her eyes narrowed slightly as she looked at the location on the painted table. It was far enough from Kings Landing, but if they strayed too close to the forest, the Lannister Army would be able to find some cover for themselves. It would have to be a quick attack. “Do you have any further information about their current location?”

“They have been lingering within the reach, according to my latest sources they were last seen around Honeyholt,” he supplied.

“And how old are these latest sources?” she asked casually as she stood to take a closer look at the
Reach. Honeyholt was even further away from King’s Landing she noted.

“About a fortnight, Your Grace.”

A lot could have happened within a fortnight. She looked to the table once more in order to judge the distances between the big landmarks, “and how long does it take to travel from Honeyholt to King’s Landing?” She didn’t receive an answer. Varys and Tyrion was looking at each other with a hint of uncertainty.

“About a moon’s turn; for a large army, I would guess.” Tyrion finally answered while staring deep into his glass of wine. Tyrion was still sulking like a child who was chastised for stealing something sweet from the kitchens. It made Dany feel irritated once more, they would not have been sitting here discussing these plans if Tyrion’s own plans hadn’t failed them so miserably. She’s had enough of his attitude.

“My Lord Hand,” she addressed him more formally than she would normally do when they were alone. When this meeting is over you will make the necessary arrangements and you will leave for Harrenhal; immediately!”

“You will be pursuing this plan, Your Grace?” Varys verified. She nodded.

“Your Grace, many of our fastest ships were sent to Oldtown. I might suggest that we ask Lady Rykker if we could borrow her ship, it is a smaller and faster vessel.” Varys supplied.

“Make whatever arrangement you have to make, arrange for an escort with one of these Lords to get you to Harrenhal as quickly as possible,” she instructed towards Tyrion. “Lord Varys, I presume you still have some contacts within Essos?” She didn’t really give him a chance to answer back.

“While we are gone you will secure food for us from Pentos or wherever you can, Cersei and Jaime Lannister has just destroyed our major food supply line.” At least the Dothraki were mostly being fed from Rosby and Stokeworth.

“You will sail for Harrenhal today,” she directed towards Tyrion, “I will fly to Harrenhal on the morrow. And I don’t want a word of this plan breathed outside of these walls, this is meant to be a surprise attack.” She was ready to dismiss both of them when Lord Varys spoke once more.
“What about Jon Snow, Your Grace, he obviously knows about the plan,” Varys enquired.

“According to your sources he doesn’t have any allies around here, so whom would he inform?” She questioned with a hard stare.

Varys bowed in agreement.

Finally she was able to dismiss them both, Tyrion haven’t said much throughout the meeting, she hope his abhor might have cooled by the time he reached Harrenhal. She didn’t have time for his moping at this crucial stage.

She moved quickly through the corridors of the Stone Drum to reach her chambers. Missandei had joined Jhiqui and the rest of her handmaidens while she was on the beach. They greeted her by bowing their heads when she arrived.

“Willa,” she ordered, “please go to the kitchens and ask them to prepare a package that would be sufficient for a day or two. I only require dried fruits and dried meat.” She did not plan on stopping anywhere along the way, she wanted to go to Harrenhal directly.

She turned, addressing the next item she will need. “Merei, can you pack two or three outfits for me, I need to travel light.”

“Jhiqui and Alyssa, both of you would have to pack very quickly. You will be leaving Dragonstone today, you will sail with Lord Tyrion.”

“Alyssa, you might have to enquire from Lord Tyrion when exactly you will be departing.”

Alyssa curtsied before her and quickly left the room. Jhiqui might not be that useful for her on this trip, but Jhiqui missed her husband, it would give the girl an opportunity to see her husband again. When Willa returned she could pack some necessary items.

All of her handmaidens left one by one, each of them immersing themselves in their tasks. Only Missandei remained. “Is there anything I can do, You Grace,” she enquired.

“You will have to stay behind, I need someone I can trust to stay here. I need you to keep an eye on everyone even Varys, you must also receive any new Lords or Ladies that might arrive for court.” Missandei is one of her most trusted advisors, and dearest friend, but Dany didn’t need her on the battlefield.
“I am not sure that I am equipped to watch over everyone, Your Grace.”

“You don't have to spy on anyone just watch out for anybody that might do anything out of the ordinary.” Dany herself did not exactly understand what she was looking for, but it was hard to completely trust all of these new Lords and Ladies that have arrived at Dragonstone, it was quiet when they first landed here, but now the traffic within the castle practically increased by the day.

“I will, Your Grace. How long will you be for gone, Your Grace?” There was an edge of concern to her tone, softening Dany's heart for a moment.

“I am not sure,” it was the best she could do at the moment.

“Please ask Willa to pack some of my most important personal belongings,” she asked Missandei before she left.

She went to check in at the kitchen before she made her customary long walk to the cliffs. This was always the best time of the day for her. After long days of listening to everyone’s complaints and problems it was always a relieve to spend some time with her children. All three were waiting for her at the edge of the cliff, they expected her arrival. Dany started petting and scratching them in their favorite places. It always amused her how the dragons could turn into little kittens when they received a bit of attention. They even had their own purring sound.

“I am going to leave tomorrow, I will finally be able to face my enemies. I am going to have to leave you behind,” she looked into the red eyes of Viserion and the brightly bronze eyes of Rhaegal. She could hear the sorrow on her own voice. Since she locked both of them away, she was loathed with the idea of leaving them behind. But she know she couldn’t take three dragons, that would be too much. “You must look after each other,” she instructed them, “I will return as soon as possible.”

She stayed with them for longer than usual, and reluctantly made her way back to the castle. When she returned she learned that Tyrion, Jhiqui and Alyssa had already departed from Dragonstone.

All the items she had asked for was placed into a leather bag that could be flung over her shoulder, the food was packed in a separate compartment, she could easily reach for something while she was sitting on Drogon. That night she ate with her remaining handmaidens, they feasted on succulent buttered chicken and a few other dishes. Willa even sang a few Westerosi songs for them, Dany did not know any of the songs, but they were cheerful songs and Willa had a sweet
It was the first night since her arrival in Westeros that she fell asleep quickly, and slept soundly through the night. Anaraz helped her to bath and dress quickly the next morning, it was cold to get dressed before sunrise, Willa stoked the fire in the hearth higher and higher, yet Dany could still feel the cold seeping through her woolen undergarments. She instructed Merei to create some dresses for her with fur. It was so cold she was almost thinking of just getting back into bed, but once the sun started to appear and the warmth from the flames had spread through her chamber, she decided that it would be best to leave as early as possible.

Missandei walked with her to Drogon. They hugged before she climbed on top of Drogon’s warm scales, it was a great relief to feel Drogon’s heat against her body, his heat was a sharp contrast to the crispy morning air.

Dany could feel herself getting lighter as Drogon suddenly leaped off the cliff. It still made her heart race to watch the waters approaching them so quickly. Just as they were about to collide with the dark, deep waters of the ocean, Drogon propelled himself sharply into the clear air. Every single time they cut through the air, Dany was amazed once more. There was nothing quite like flying, it is the freest and most unburdened that Dany ever felt. She wasn’t hampered or restricted by anything when she was flying on Drogon’s back, it was her purest moments of freedom and euphoria with no constraints. She closed her eyes as the frigid air combed through her hair, she could feel the energy from Drogon’s powerful shoulder, nothing mattered to her in that moment, the world was always perfect from high in the sky.

Even the icy air did not feel so daunting from Drogon’s back. Reinvigorated, she leaned into Drogon, slightly veering them off the intended course to allow herself a glimpse at her greatest desire. The night before she had decided that she would fly over Kings Landing.

Kings Landing always felt so remote to her she wanted see her last goal. She spotted some ships moving towards the same direction, away from Dragonstone, she was sure that these ships would be moving towards Kings Landing. She followed the direction the ships was travelling towards, and it didn’t take that long to spot the silhouette of the great city against first orange rays of the morning. She felt something stir inside, when she saw the outlines of a great brown-reddish castle. This was her family’s true home, this is what her ancestors have created. She thought about all of her endeavours and struggles, the death of Rhaego and Drogo was the first thought on her mind, she remembered her time in Qarth and the sorrow she felt when her dragons had disappeared. The hundred and sixty three children that were left to rot alongside the road, still made her heart ache and her blood boil. She thought about the desperation she felt when she and her most trusted advisors were surrounded by Harpies in the dirt of the fighting pit. She even spared a thought for Daario. A hundred different feelings and memories raced through her head. It feels as if she has lived for a thousand years. She has survived and endured, and she could burn the Red Keep to the ground right now.

The day before she might have done it, but today was another day, she will restore House Targaryen to it former glory. Drogon made an arch in the air and she flew as close to Kings Landing as she dared. She hoped that someone would report her flight to Cersei Lannister, it made her so angry that the woman was able to hold the lives of thousands of people in the palms of her hands. They were slaves to Cersei Lannister’s whims and cruelty. Drogon could feel her anger, he...
screeched an angry cry that cut through the chill of the winter air. Cersei’s time will come, she will stop her. Drogon’s wings started to flap harder and they quickly lifted into the horizon. The tears in her eyes dried quickly as Drogon flew faster.

She flew the whole day long, the novelty of the flight began to wear a bit more thinly by the time the sun almost started to disappear. She had followed the river the whole day long, she saw the water widening quickly into a great lake, with a small island in the middle, the God’s Eye. Harrenhal was the monstrous structure somewhere right ahead of her. It was a collection of half-begotten, ungainly black towers that erupting out of the earth at unnatural angles. It appeared as if the tops of the towers had all been broken off, like dried twigs. She had never seen anything that was as big. She landed right on the main road that lead onto the castle, on the eastern side. As the dark shadow of the monstrosity fell over her she felt a certain sense of trepidation. She did not feel welcome here. Men started pouring out of the gates, Zhavvorsa she heard them murmuring through the crowds.

It didn’t take to long for Lord Sunglass to make an appearance, he was accompanied by a tall, gaunt looking man with a stern face.

“Your Grace,” he immediately bowed when he saw her next to Drogon. “It is a great honour to receive you.”

“Lord Sunglass,” she nodded. She greeted the Dothraki in their own tongue as well.

“Allow me to escort you inside, we weren’t expecting you.” She walked next to Lord Sunglass though the massive curtain walls, there were rows and rows of arrow slots, the wall might have been four or five times the size of the walls at Dragonstone. The sun was now falling fast, but she was still able to identify some black scorch marks all around the walls of the towers. When they entered the main courtyard she could see the flames of hundreds of fires. Most of the Dothraki were huddled into small groups around the fires. A blanket of cold was quickly descending upon the castle as the sun’s last rays withered and waned against the night. Lord Sunglass escorted her to a far off tower that was somehow more intact than the rest.

Dany was escorted to what she presumed was some type of a receiving room. She was placed next to a hearth that was the size of three wagons, yet room still held an belligerent chill. The room was simply too large to heat properly. She was seated in a chaise next to a small table that was engraved with various bats in flight. Lord Sunglass poured her a glass of wine.

“Your Grace, Ser Hasty will find proper accommodation for you.”

“Can you also find me someone that might act as a handmaiden, and I will need some hot water for a bath.”
“Harrenhal houses one of the greatest bathing houses within Westeros, Your Grace.”

A bath house with thousands of Dothraki milling about. Of course the Dothraki did everything in the open, but she was far past those Dothraki days and they were in Westeros now. She must have frowned at him because his whole face was slowly turning red.

“I will find some water immediately,” he said and quickly scurried off.

The tall, thin man who accompanied them stepped forward, he bend the knee right in front of her. “Seven blessings, Your Grace, I am Ser Bonifer Hasty.” He introduced himself quite formally.

“You may, rise Ser.”

“I am the castellan of Harrenhal, I will make sure that your stay at Harrenhal is adequate.”

His manners and speech was exactly what Dany has always envisioned a knight to be.

“Thank Your, Ser Hasty.”

He stood gracefully and started to retreat from the room, but half-way out he stopped and moved closer to her again.

“If you could excuse my impertinence,” he paused, “you have the look of your mother.”

Dany was completely taken by surprise.

“Did you knew my mother, Ser?” Dany could hear the eagerness within her own voice, her heart was beating in her throat.

“I knew your mother once,” he confirmed with sadness in his voice.

“Your mother was the brightest and purest of flowers, she was gentle and nurturing as only the
Mother could be. Yet she was the strongest person I have ever met.” Ser Bonifer Hasty was looking far beyond her when he spoke the words, it seemed like he was revisiting the past.

“She suffered and survived through misery and tragedy, yet her elegance and grace never wavered, and her sweet nature never soured.” He was quiet for a moment as a serving girl entered and curtsied.

“Excuse me, Your Grace, I will see to your accommodations now.”

Dany was in a daze when she finally followed a servant to the chambers that was hastily prepared for her. She did not know how far she walked or the path she took. Her room was lighted by what seemed to be a hundred candles, a copper tub with water was steaming next to the hearth. She felt exhausted.

“I will be in the adjoining chamber if there is any need of me, Your Grace.” The serving girl informed her before vacating the room. Dany’s few garments were draped and airing on a lounge sofa. Dany easily sanked into the hot water.

This was the first time that Dany has ever really heard anything about her mother. Viserys never really mentioned their mother, he far to consumed with his need to take the throne. He only cursed the fact that most of their mother’s jewels were stolen. She never had an inkling that she might have resembled her mother. Her mother sounded like the perfect women and Queen, it made her feel desolate that no one ever spoke about her. Queen Rhaella might have been the best of them all.

She didn’t know who or what her family really was at this point. It started with the realization that her father was mad and paranoid, she finally understood that he tormented the realm.

She has been thinking a lot of her family since she arrived at Dragonstone, the worst realization was when Tyrion finally told her exactly what her father had done. It is one thing to know that someone might be mad, it was entirely different to hear about their deeds.

And then there was Rhaegar. Viserys never knew Rhaegar, she understood that now. All of his words were lies and half-truths, although he probably believed every word he spoke. Dany still couldn’t consign her mind to the idea that Rhaegar was just a kidnapper and a rapist. At this point she should probably just expect the worst from her family. The bath was cooling rapidly, she climbed out lazily and toweled herself dry in front of the hearth.
However, despite his honesty, Tyrion never knew Rhaegar. Rhaegal practically grew-up in front of Ser Barristan. Ser Barristan called him the finest men he ever knew. Ser Barristan was a knight of honour, he also spoke about her father’s madness, she didn’t understand the conflicting reports.

She sighed as she pulled on the one night shift she brought with her.

She buried herself in the thick covers and blankets that lay on the bed. She felt completely and utterly alone, she usually had her handmaidens as companions. The castle felt hostile and antagonistic. Her dreams didn’t treat her to kindly either. She was tormented with dreams of blood and fire. She saw dragons clawing and scratching at each other while hovering over the Gods Eye. The waters boiled with blood, their cries and screams of anguish filled the air.

It didn’t get any better as the days ticked by. At night she was tormented by the thoughts of her family and the ghosts of Harrenhal. She and Lord Sunglass crafted out a simple plan for their attack. He would lead a smaller party of Dothraki and some Unsullied, that should be arriving with Tyrion, behind the main host. Their task would be to collect all of the food and supplies from the Lannisters.

Tyrion and the Unsullied that were stationed on Dragonstone, finally arrived late on the fifth night, she was already retired for the night so she send a message with the serving girl that Tyrion should be ready to ride out on the morrow.

It was easy for the Dothraki to ready themselves, they were hungry for battle and they were used to traveling and conquering.

Tyrion was clearly dreadfully tired, but he still greeted her with a smile. The sun was still half way to noon when they all left Harrenhal in a massive train. Dany was grateful for the open road, she felt stifled and desolate at Harrenhal, she hoped that she would never have to see the place again. Dany finally had a chance to speak with Tyrion alone when they were riding, almost at the head of the cue.

“I hope your journey wasn’t to uncomfortable, my Lord.”

“I have barely slept a wink these past few days, my legs are stiff and immobile, it feels as if a dragon might have landed on my back, but other than that it was extremely productive, I can't say that I have ever traveled so swiftly.” He added with a one-sided smile.
She smiled at him sympathetically, “you did well to arrive here so quickly.”

“I have a strong suspicion that my constitution well not be improved by the end of the day.”

It was good to have Tyrion back by her side she realized.

The Dothraki were very well adapt at covering large swaths of land. They made camp near the spot of their planned ambush, sometime after dusk. According to Tyrion they received some news at the Antlers. The Lannister forces was on their way back to the capital, but Dany wanted to know exactly where they were. She couldn’t afford anymore mistakes.

Thus Dany had the idea of flying over the Roseroad and locating the army in the dark. Tyrion thought it was a very dangerous idea, but he also admitted that it was a good idea.

It was easy enough to follow the road in the darkness, since there was a half moon in the sky. It was easy enough to spot the lights and tents of the Lannisters army. She didn’t fly to close, it would not be good if their surprise was ruined. She could have burned the whole camp down quite easily, but she wanted to take back their supplies. Tyrion was waiting for her outside of her tent by the fire. She was stiff and cold when she climbed off Drogon, but she felt renewed and refreshed after her draining stay at Harrenhal.

“Well?” Tyrion asked. She came and sat next to him, the fire was slowly helping to pump some warmer blood through her veins.

“They are camped quite a few leagues away, we just have to send some scouts in the morning.”

Tyrion nodded and he took a swig of wine from his pouch.

“Lord Sunglass has discussed some problems with me, regarding the Dothraki.”

“What problems?” He questioned.

“Well they are experiencing problems with the cold, they don’t have enough skins and furs to keep them warm. A few of them have contracted some disease of the lungs.”
“Why hasn’t Lord Sunglass informed us about this problem?”

“He said that he has sent some ravens.” At this news Tyrion pinched the bridge of his nose, sharing her frustration.

“He has sent some of them hunting, but it is not enough. I think we might have to buy some fur and skins from somewhere in Essos.”

“That will be expensive, I suppose they might gather some loot and warmer garments from the battlefield tomorrow.” Tyrion shrugged.

“Have you gathered any other news on your way here?”

Tyrion thought for a moment, “nothing much, only that my sweet sister has now turned into a whoremongerer, apparently she is now running all of the brothels and alehouses in King’s Landing.”

Dany found it quite distasteful, how could a Queen use her influence and power to create flesh markets? But she wasn’t in the mood for Cersei Lannister this night, she will deal with her enemies on the morrow.

“Ser Bonifer Hasty informed me that he knew my mother.” She decided to share with Tyrion.

“Yes, that is why Varys knew he could send the Dothraki to Harrenhal.”

“How, so?”

“Varys informed me that your mother and Ser Bonifer Hasty loved each other quite deeply.”

Dany was taken by surprise with the information.

“Ser Bonifer Hasty was not a fit consort for a Princess, he is only a landed knight. And your mother had her duty, she had to marry Aerys.”
“Ser Bonifer Hasty told me that my mother was a very good woman.”

“I am sure she was, Your Grace. I have never heard a foul word about her, and the poor woman was married to your father. I have been doing a bit of reading since we had the discussion about your father, apparently he had quite a few mistresses.”

The more Dany learned about her father the more she didn’t want to know anything about the Mad King.

“And the Starks?”

Dany was curious after Jon Snow had taken her to see the cave paintings. She simply wasn’t used to men treating her casually. Men were often in awe of her and her dragons, or they wanted to intimidate her or they wanted to bed her. All of her relationships with the men around her was always quite distant. It was strange how Jon Snow simply grabbed her arm and led her through the cave, she was so shocked in that moment, she practically forget to breathe. Which is why she has been wondering over the incident.

“What about the Starks,” Tyrion questioned her back.

“We both have terrible families, but from what I have seen it seems as if the Starks might be a close family.”

Dany concluded in the end that Jon Snow was just used to having women around him. He was raised with his sisters, he was just used to being quite casual around women.

“Ah the Starks,” Tyrion sighed.

After a moment of silence and a sip of his wine Tyrion spoke of his time in the North so many years ago. “I was drunk for most of my visit at Winterfell, and I spent more time in the brothel than in the castle, but yes it was not difficult to see that they were very close.”

It was exactly as Dany has thought, her conclusion was confirmed.

“The Starks are like those families in children’s songs and tales.”
That reminded Dany that she has never read the books Jorah gave to her as a wedding present. She missed Jorah’s advice he had a good understanding of military matters, and that was something she needed right now.

“Then again, the first time I ever saw Jon Snow he was standing alone in courtyard, you see he was not allowed to attend the feast in King Robert’s presence.” She glanced at him sideways when he call Robert a King, but he just continued. “So I guess we all have our little problems.”

“Wasn’t he close to his brothers and sisters?”

“He was. As I was leaving the Wall he asked me to help his younger brother, Bran, and he often spoke about his youngest sister. He spoke of his older brother as well.”

Viserys mostly just touched Dany when he thought it would injure her in some way, especially as she got older. He was more like a real brother when they were younger. But those memories and whatever love she once felt for her brother faded as he grew crueler, she could scarcely remember his kindness anymore. She wondered what it was like to grow-up with real brothers and sisters.

“Théon was their prisoner, and he was treated more like a ward and a brother. I think he wanted to be a Stark.” Tyrion reflected.

“All of the people in the North wants to be part of the Stark family, that is why they are so eager to declare for them - I think.”

They spoke about more details around the camp before they finally retired for the night.

They disbanded their camp just before sunrise, and sent some scouts ahead. It felt like the longest day of her life. They had moved into position quite early in the morning, waiting quietly with a Dothraki horde was not an easy task, it took all of her willpower and command to keep their silence and attention during the day, and it took most of the day for the Lannister forces to finally make their appearance. Dany’s heart was almost beating outside of her chest when she finally mounted Dragon, Lord Sunglass was standing at the ready with his forces. While Qotto led the horde that would launch the main attack.

The battle only lasted a few heartbeats. Dany felt invincible as Drogon swerved and dived for
every attack. Her enemies were vanquished into dust before her eyes, she had never felt so
powerful. She felt god-like when dragon’s breath scorched whole legions into dirt and dust. She
could feel the heat rising up from the ground, the flames were so high she couldn’t even see what
dragon was burning at times. She could taste her victory as billows of flames decimated
everything in its path. She wasn’t sure that she would ever be able describe the experience. She and
Drogon was divine in those moments, far above the rest. She had the power to annihilate everyone
underneath her, she was more of a deity then a woman. In that moment she felt that dragons were
meant to rule everything.

Until Drogon started tumbling and falling to the ground. First, she only knew how strange it was
when it felt like her insides were falling to ground faster than she was, she was nauseous and dizzy.
And then Drogon’s anger seem to collide with her own emotions, his rage could have burned
anyone there, friend or foe.

The battle was a monumental success, they collected shiploads of flour, wheat and barley. There
were some more expensive items such as wine and cheese, as well as gold and other jewels. Her
Dothraki were satisfied. But Tyrion decided that he would once more be a thorn in her side, with
the two Tarly men. It frustrated her because it made the whole battle feel like less of a victory than
it was.

Thinking back on the battle and the aftermath made her ire against the Lannisters raise. She wanted
to return to Dragonstone as quickly as she could and plan her next assault, but she also wanted to
make sure that the supplies and gold they took from the battle reached Rook’s Nest. The progress
was slow and she could feel Drogon's impatience, he wanted to return home.

They reached Rooks Nest on the eighth day, the ships were finally loaded, Dany decided that she
would fly back to Dragonstone immediately. Dragon was somehow able find his way over the
open waters, she understood that Dragonstone felt like home to him. It was in the shadows of the
afternoon sun when she spotted the dark grey towers of Dragonstone. *It is good to have somewhere
to return.*

The rest of the day was strange and fantastic at the same time. From Dragon somehow allowing
Jon Snow to touch him, to the sudden reappearance of Jorah. Dany wanted nothing more than to
spend the rest of the day talking to her old friend, but Tyrion and Qotto was already waiting for her
at the gates. Tyrion give one of his genuine smiles when he laid his eyes on Jorah.

“Your Grace,” Tyrion bowed formally.

“My Lord,” she acknowledge in return, “when did you arrive.”
“Just the day before.”

She nodded. “I think you have to inform the court of our victory I have been evading the nobles the whole day long. It would be better if it was formally announced in court.”

“More people have also arrived to pledge fealty.”

“Gather the court, I will give a formal announcement of our victory. In the meantime, I will get changed. I am not doing pledges of fealty today, that can wait until next time.”

Tyrion waddled off in a different direction when they reached the courtyard, while Qotto followed her to her chambers.

Willa and Missandei were waiting for her, “Your Grace”, Willa performed a perfect curtsey while Missandei just gave her a smile, though Dany could see the worry in her gaze.

“Welcome back Your Grace,” Missandei greeted with a slight bow. “We were glad to hear of your victory. Though, I heard Drogon was shot?”

“Drogon is fine, it was merely a flesh wound.”

“That is a relieve to hear, Your Grace.”

“I have to get ready for court, Missandei can you arrange a very informal dinner for after court is done, in that same antechamber we used previously?” Her friend happily left to make the arrangements as Dany ordered Willa to help her change into more striking clothes.

Willa quickly dressed her into a dress that was more befitting of a Queen. She made sure to wear Targaryen black and red.

Dany then made her way through the dark corridors of the Stone Drum, she passed the main courtyard and slipped through an opening just before the kitchens. As she approached the great hall from behind she heard the chattering of the Lords and Ladies that were already assembled in the great hall. Just before she stepped into her throne room, she arranged her face into her queenly
mask.

Everyone stopped talking and immediate stood as she made her way to her throne. With Tyrion announcing her in the place of Missandei.

“You have the honour of appearing in the presence of Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen The first of her name, Queen of Meereen and the Bay of Dragons, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and of the First Men, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, Lady of Dragonstone, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Mhysa the Breaker of Chains, The Unburnt, and the Mother of Dragons.”

Jorah was standing right next to Tyrion. It was a relieve to see him by her side again.

“You, may be seated,” she ordered.

“We have just won a great victory against the Lannister forces. Most of their army have been destroyed, my bloodrider Qotto showed exemplary skill in this battle, and Lord Sunglass led our forces with poise and precision. They are the heroes of the battle. Most of the Lannister forces have been decimated and we have collected some food stores.”

The room burst out into an applause, “long live the Queen!” Long live the Queen!”

The crowd quieted down after a few chants. Dany was just about to announce that court is done for the day when Jon Snow suddenly jumped from his seat.

“May I approach, You Grace?” He addressed her respectfully.

“I have just returned from battle, and a long journey, Jon Snow,” she replied in a warning tone. 

*How can Jon Snow petition from me, when he refuses to be my subject.*

He made his way to the front, he wore finer clothes than he usually would, it was the same tunic he wore to dinner on their first night, the silk embroidery of the white direwolf almost shined on his chest.

“I congratulate you on victory.” He stated gravely.
He didn’t wait for a reply, he simply turned around and address the hall directly. Dany could feel her annoyance and vexation rise. He was trying his best to undermine her authority. She could have him cartered off and locked up, Qotto was already gripping the pommel of his arakh.

But he was probably just going to moan about the White Walkers again, he will just be making a fool of himself. She signaled for Qotto that he could stand down.

“My Lords and Ladies, you don't know me, people from the South always think that Northmen are superstitious. You have no reason to believe a word I say, yet I ask that would think about your future and the future of your children and your grandchildren.” His voice had a stern and serious tone that brought about a silence within her court, allowing everyone to hear his words.

“There are creatures within this world that we don't understand, the dragons have been gone for over a century, and yet your Queen has birthed three large dragons herself! We have all been raised with tales of giants, the Children of the Forest and” he paused for a few heartbeats, “White Walkers. We knew these stories as children’s tales, however, we are still left with the evidence of a seven hundred foot wall within the far North. You don't build a seven hundred foot wall to keep out a few primitive Wildling rayders.” He allowed that thought to sink in.

“The White Walkers may have been gone for eight thousand years, but I have to inform you, regrettably - they are back.”

Dany could hear some snickering and laughing

“The White Walkers?” Someone questioned out loud, their tone mocking.

“Aye, the White Walkers.’ Jon Snow answered more forcefully.

“They are back and they are amassing a massive army, of the undead. They can raise the dead to fight for them. Everyone who dies is a potential soldier for their army.”

“The White Walkers kills anything that is alive and breathing, they don't just kill the living, they also bring the darkness and the cold as well.”

They were still laughing and chattering, Jon Snow had to raise his voice.

“All I ask of you is that you would be prepared, send ravens to your castles.
Gather more firewood, the undead foot soldiers can be killed by fire.

Gather and craft dragonglass into weapons, White Walkers can be killed by dragonglass.”

A few murmurs had started up again, some no doubt questioning Jon Snow’s sanity while some others were wondering about the dragonglass.

“If the White Walkers are allowed to sweep through the Seven Kingdoms; then we are all going to die, there will be no future for anyone, are you truly willing to risk the lives of your children?” He paused, allowing the weight of what he just said to be felt by the entire court.

“You may think I am just a Northern fool, or a madman. But I had no reason to come to Dragonstone, since my uncle and my father was killed by the Targaryens; my aunt as well. But I came here, because I know that there are greater enemies than Targaryens or even Lannisters. Everyone in the realm will have to band together, this is the War for the Dawn.”

If Jon Snow had spoken to her in such a manner the first time they had met, she would have been far more receptive to what he was trying to say. Instead it seems like he is set upon testing her patience. And yet...he sounded so earnest and sincere that she was almost tempted to believe him.

Before he could continue one of the Lords stood up, he was short and round, with dark blond fluffs of hair. He looked young but he was already suffering from hair loss. Dany couldn’t recall his name.

“It is all good and well to speak of such noble intentions; when you yourself are an oathbreaker and a murderer! My father did everything that was asked of him, he did his duty, and he was sent to the godforsaken Wall, only to be murder by you!” He pointed his finger at Jon Snow. All of the Lords and Ladies when quiet, they were now fascinated by the drama that was unfolding.

It was Tyrion who spoke, “Lord Slynt, it was I who sent your father to the Wall, he betrayed the Hand of the King, and he gleefully killed some babies as well.”

Lord Slynt’s face was growing red with anger, he was starting to resemble a tomato.

“We don't hold the sins of the father against the son, my Lord. But you would do well to learn something from his example. There is a time to speak and there is a time to remain quiet.”
Tyrion looked around the room, as a warning for against any more outbursts.

“Court is over for the day.” Her hand declared.

Dany heard more whispers and laughter as she descended from her throne and departed from the great hall. Missandei was waiting closeby as he had just returned from the kitchen.

“Your Grace, I have made the arrangements for dinner.” Missandei informed her.

“Thank you, Missandei. Can you ask Anaraz and Jhiqui to pour me a hot bath?” Missandei bowed in agreement before she left, leaving Dany alone with Tyrion in the hall.

“You are invited to dinner as well, my Lord.” She address Tyrion.

“I have a few matters that require my attention, but I will join you a bit later my Queen.”

She finally felt refreshed as she and Missandei made their way to the antechamber. Jorah was already waiting for them. All three of them simply sat down at the table and began to eat. There were no ceremonies or announcements, she was eating dinner with her closest confidants.

She told Jorah about her re-conquest of Meereen and her losses thus far. He was surprised by Cersei Lannister’s methods of securing the Iron Throne for herself, and becoming the Queen of Brothels. Dany was quite curious about his remarkable recovery. She had just asked Jorah how he was cured from the greyscale.

When Tyrion also choose that moment to arrive. He settled himself into his seat before addressing the man who brought them together.

“Ser Jorah Mormont, I am glad to see you well, though I am curious how did you manage to find a cure for a disease that is incurable?” He spoke as he poured himself a glass of Arbour Gold.

“I was just about to tell the Khaleesi about my journey.” Jorah answer with the slightest of smiles in her direction. “Then I choose the perfect moment to arrive!” Tyrion declared happily.

“We have to drink a toast to your recovery, now you will have to start again from the beginning.”
“At first I thought about going to Qarth, I was in the process of booking passage for myself to Qarth when heard that some of the red priests within Volantis have been able to cure many people from strange diseases. Unfortunately, the red priests refused to hear my case. They send me to the weeping healers of the Sorrows, I wasn’t able to locate them. I started to lose faith in my ability to find a cure for the disease. But I decided that I wanted to see the Seven Kingdoms for one last time. As a last resort I went to the Citadel. The Arch Maester of healing, was ready to send me off to Valyria. But one brave lad saved me. He served under my father, in the Night’s Watch.” Jorah became slightly misty eyed when he spoke of his father.

“He was only an apprentice, but he saved me because of the love he had for my father.”

“Your father was a good man.” Tyrion answered solemnly. “Who is this lad? I met a few recruits when I traveled up to Night Watch.”

“Samwell Tarly,” Jorah answered.

Dany felt for a moment as if she might sink into the ground.

“Samwell Tarly?” Tyrion questioned him.

“Aye.”

“Well, it is always fascinating how all of the families within Westeros are connected to each other. We had an interesting encounter with some Tarlys very recently.” Tyrion was looking at her with a look full of accusation.

Jorah looked slightly confused between the two of them.

Dany felt slightly regretful for a moment, but she became angry with Tyrion as well. What does Tyrion want from her, nothing will bring those Tarlys back, they took up arms against her and they betrayed Lady Olenna.

“Lord Randyll Tarly and his son and heir Dickon Tarly, have recently been executed by dragonfire.”

“Oh,” was the only reply Jorah made, he had a look of dread and disappointment on his face.

Dany wasn’t about to start explaining herself, every other ruler would have done same. She gave them two choices, she can't just change her word within public, what type of a message would that send? She gave Tyrion a look of warning.

“They sided with the Lannisters,” she stated plainly. Jorah nodded gravely, it seems like he accepted what happened.

There was tension in the room.

“Samwell Tarly said he was sent to train as a Maester because the previous Maester had died, he said that he was sent to the Citadel by Jon Snow.”

The colour drained from Tyrion’s face.
“Your Grace, would it be possible to speak alone after dinner?” He asked her demurely, his whole attitude had suddenly changed. She tried to read the sudden change, but she found nothing.

“We will speak on the morrow.” Jorah again looked between the two of them again with a confused expression.

He started speaking again. “I was just wondering how Jon Snow came to be at Dragonstone?”

After throwing himself another glass of wine Tyrion seemed to return to his more usual mood. He sighed and then he chuckled by himself.

“I think the whole of Westeros might be going mad,” he declared, “from my dearest sister burning the Sept of Balor to the grumpkins and snarks of the North.”

“You are going to enjoy this,” Tyrion looked at Jorah with a deadpan expression, ”you heard that speech he gave in the throne room - he is convinced that the White Walkers have returned.” Tyrion snickered in his glass.

Jorah remained silent and expressionless. Tyrion continued, “there might be something up there,” Tyrion conceded, “your father has also asked for help, but our Queen cannot help the North when they refuse to bend the knee.”

“What exactly did my father say?” Jorah asked with some concern in his voice.

“You father asked for more men and supplies for the Wall, because of the Wildlings and the White Walkers. He claimed that he was attacked by a dead man in his chambers. He sent us a rotting hand.” Tyrion scrunched his nose at the rotten hand.

Jorah’s face changed from concern to utter dread, Dany couldn’t remember if she had ever seen this look in his eyes before. Dany couldn’t even remember such a fearful look when they were travelling through the desolate sands of the Red Waste.

“You claim that you knew my father?” He didn't give Tyrion any time to answer.

“If my father said there are White Walkers, then they exist.”

“What do you mean?” Tyrion asked, Dany completed his question, “you believe, Jon Snow?”

“I believe in my father, he wouldn’t say the White Walkers are a threat if they don't exist.”

“Mormont, it has been a long time since you have seen your father,” Tyrion tried to reason.

“Aye, you have seen my father more recently, how would you describe him?”

Tyrion was quiet.

“We have to seek Jon Snow out immediately, I have to speak with him.”
Tyrion changed his tactics, “it has been a long day for all of us, we first have to discuss this issue more amongst ourselves before we approach Jon Snow.”

“Your Grace, our Master-of-arms, Ser Gerald Gower has been pestering me with a request that some of the Dothraki should train with his men. He wants them to be able to fight against different styles of combat, since Qotto has returned perhaps he can help?”

“I will instruct him to report to the training yard.”

“Khaleesi, allow me to help with this training. I can help with the translations, and I fear that I have been weakened from the greyscale, I need the training.”

“You can join the training,” Dany agreed. It would actually be a relieve to have Jorah there, she knew that he would be able to work with the Dothraki and the Westerosi Lords. She missed Jorah’s sage advice and understanding.

After their discussion about the White Walkers they were all very quiet, Dany realized that she was extremely tired herself, especially after her time Harrenhal. She excused herself first, Jorah wanted to accompany her to her chamber, but she had two bloodriders by her side. She needed some time think. She slowly made her way to the chambers.

Dany has seen some unbelievable sights in her lifetime, the warlocks of Qarth was properly the strangest, they could somehow multiply themselves and change their shapes. Her children was magic, and they were born from blood magic.

Jhiqui and Anaraz was waiting for her, they helped her out of her dress, they untangled and brushed her hair for bed. They made sure that the fire in her hearth had enough wood before they left her chamber. It was good to return to her own chambers after being away for weeks, but she still felt cold. Ever since Dany has arrived in Dragonstone she hasn’t felt at ease, she was born here but she wasn’t truly home. Perhaps I will only feel at home when I reach the Red Keep.

Westeros was a cold and grey compared to Essos, the storms around Dragonstone were often frightening. Her ancestors build this castle, but it was still foreign to her. She pulled her blankets under her chin and shivered in the cold bed, despite the fact that a bed warmer had been used.

She trusted Tyrion, but he didn’t understand what she has seen, he did not understand magic. Drogon trusted Jon Snow, no one else has touched Drogon since he was a baby. Jorah has experienced more of the wonder and magic in the world. She thought back to the cave, and the paintings in the cave. Jorah did not seem to have any doubts that these White Walkers might exist, and yet, what would it actually mean if they did somehow exist?

Dany bolted upright in her bed she was suddenly awake, she had a feeling of misgiving, she began to shiver as a strong chill seeped into her bones. A crow was screeching and cawing on the window sill. “Corn. Corn.” The crow flapped and flew around in the room. “Corn.”
Her heart was beating uncontrollably fast, it was still dark but the full moon illuminated the outlines of her chambers. The fire in the hearth was completely extinguished, this is the coldest she has ever felt in her life. A shiver ran down her spine as she realized that the window was wide open.


The crow was sitting on the window sill again. The dream she had before she was awoken by the bird suddenly came back to her, it was twilight and I was standing on a mountain of Ice, a crow flew closer and started pecking on my forehead, I chased the bird away and saw a dark forest ahead of me. But the forest was filled with bright blue glowing orbs. It was eyes; somehow I knew it was eyes, hundreds of eyes - they were watching me closely. She could feel a cold sweat breaking out on her forehead. “Dawn!” The crow screeched before it flew off into the night.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!