Not so long ago

by TheLibrarian (es101wx)
"You were staring," suddenly said Tywin Lannister's cold voice, somewhere near her right ear. Aelinor turned her head to look at him, calm as if he wouldn't be the most powerful man in the Seven Kingdoms.

"Was I?" she asked innocently. There was something in her voice, something in her brief smile - amusement, Tywin registered. How could she be amused?

"Yes. You were. In the Septon - you were staring, my lady."

"Well, of course I was. Everyone was staring. The royal couple was so..."

"You were not staring at the royal couple," he replied, irritated. This time, she had the good grace to look away. He was right. She couldn't care less, frankly, of King Joffrey's wedding celebrations. She had had more interesting things to look at - Tywin Lannister being the more interesting of them all, to be honest. She has always had a thing for the man, after all... Although he was clearly old enough to be her father's older brother.

"I'll concede - maybe I was looking at something else." Lord Tywin's lips twitched. He was amused, she could easily tell.

"Someone, I dare to say." Aelinor Marbrand's upper lip curled. She was good at games too.

"I think I'll concede that, too. But I fail to understand why this should be your concern."

"Because you were staring at me, my lady?" Alinor's feigned indignation was a true masterpiece.

"Surely you'll be perfectly aware that you're quite good-looking yourself, Lord Hand?"

The Old Lion loomed almost threateningly over the young woman - who, to his great astonishment, didn't seem threatened at all. "What game are you playing at, Lady Aelinor?"

"No game at all, I assure you. I'm just stating that I'm a woman with an excellent eyesight, who happens to like to indulge in looking at what she finds attractive. Nothing more, nothing less."

"Still, you still seem to have something in mind."

"Oh, Lord Tywin," she smiled, and brushed lightly a finger over his crossed arms, "Of course I have."
Chapter 2

To Aelinor great pleasure, she soon heard the Hand's footsteps following her. She stopped, turning suddenly on the spot in order to face him.

"Yes, Lord Hand?"

"I don't recall I dismiss you, my lady." He had spoken plainly, his head slightly tilted towards her, his right eyebrow arched. Oh, for the Seven Gods, she thought, Behave yourself, girl! You're no some wanton daughter of Dorne, you're a lady of the West, you can't possibly be aroused by a raised eyebrow!

The problem was - she was. Although she had ever been a stiff, rigid young woman who held brain, intelligence and manners in higher regard than physical attractiveness, well, she definitely had a thing for that man. After all, she told herself, he was the perfect mixture of attractiveness and, well, all the rest. There was something about him that attracted her, affected her deeply: and she knew perfectly well that he would have never look at her in the way she hoped if she wouldn't be able to raise his curiosity before his... yes, well, that. She needed to be careful. And brilliant, of course, but the brilliant part has never been a problem before.

"I was under the impression I had imposed my presence on you for long enough."

"As it happens, I am under the impression that having your presence imposed upon me wouldn't be distasteful at all..."

"Lord Tywin!" Aelinor exclaimed, her perfect imitation of pure indignation bursting in its full force again. "Weren't you the one complaining about me staring at you in the Great Septon?"

The corner of the man's lips curled upward and Aelinor knew she had just gained his interest. "I was complaining about your choice of...Framework?"

"Oh," Aelinor nodded, modestly, "I see..." She looked at him with a soft smile, a rush of blushing spreading over her bosom and neck. "So I - oh, nevermind."

"Were you about to ask whether you drew my attention or not?"

"Sort of?"

"I'd say you intrigued me, my lady," Lord Tywin said, the very tip of his fingers grazing absentmindedly her waist. He was making her move backward, slowly but deliberately, and he didn't stop until he had her lean against a tree. Then, he lowered his head and spoke quietly against her ear. "And I'm not the kind of man who's easily intrigued, believe me."
Aelinor was upset.

And she was still leaning against a tree, and she was short of breath, and she was aroused, and she was... Well, she was _alone_. Tywin Lannister had gently grazed the fabric under her breast with his thumb and left a foreshadowing peck on the basis of her neck - a second later, without a word, he was gone. And she, on the other hand, was fuming.

Her anger and frustration, however, were soon forgotten - as soon as the screams started. King Joffrey was dead.

King Joffrey had been murdered.
"I'm not sure why I'm here."

Aelinor suppressed a smile. There were men - she was perfectly aware of it - who, facing a terrible event, used to indulge themselves in wine, and those few words were exactly the kind of words she could have imagined on such men's lips. Not so predictable they are on the lips of Tywin Lannister, who clearly was as far from drunk as he always used to be.

"I'm sorry for..."

"Oh, please", he growled. "No one in their right minds could possibly be sorry for Joffrey's death. He was a cruel, sadist fool. Nobody will miss him."

"Lord Hand..."

"I know, I know. And I will prosecute his murderer, of course. But you can't ask me to feel sorry for that abomination." Aelinor's eyebrows arched silently. "The younger one, I mean," he almost smiled.

"Why are you here, my Lord Hand?"

"I don't know. Maybe today's events were too much tiresome and I needed a place where to hide for a moment."

"I'm glad you chose to come to visit me, I can't deny it."

"I was under the impression you wouldn't have judged my opinions about this mess."

Aelinor put her embroidery back into the basket at her feet, and rose. She wasn't particularly tall, still there was something in her, something in her posture, which made her seem majestic - Tywin Lannister, the man who had conducted an almost monastical personal life since his wife's death, felt the uncommon sensation of a stir in his lower regions.

"I'd never dare to judge the Hand's judgement," she said.

"Without a king, we could argue that there's unlikely a Lord Hand," he grinned.

"So am I in here all by myself? What a pity..."

"No, not exactly all by yourself," he stated, his hands sneaking easily over her hips and landing unashamedly on her bum.
"So maybe you do know why you're here, after all," she panted as his mouth assaulted her throat and lavished it with hot kisses. "Not so long ago you told me you didn't, but - oh!"

"Not so long ago you were just a staring young woman in the Great Sept. I assume things can change pretty fast, whenever they're required to"

"I guess you're right... Good grief!" Tywin stopped his ministration and chuckled against her cleavage. "So," she breathed, "why on earth did you stop when we were in the garden? Clearly, it's not because of not wanting such...activities... to take place..."

"No, not because of that, no," he laughed, keeping kneading her left breast absentmindedly. "But it was risky. Too risky. There were people around, and I was about to...well, to take you, against a tree. I doubt it would have been...decent or proper." His lips lowered hungrily over her bosom, kissing their way from her neck to the valley between her breasts.

"I'm quite positive there's no one else in there, you know," she said softly as his hands began to unfasten her bodice's ribbons. "So this time you'd better finish what you've started, or..."

"That's exactly why I'm here."
Tywin Lannister closed hungrily his fingers on her hips, his mind focused on nothing else than the pleasure of that moment. Her daughter's son was dead. His own flesh and blood - and he quickly chased away the thought, was it true? Was Jaime...?

He grunted, then, needing to silence those thoughts, lowered again his mouth and caught one peaked nipple between his teeth. Aelinor shivered and hold his head in position guiding his ministration with the pressure of her nails on his neck.

"I want you," he growled, his hands busy in rolling her gown up her legs.

"Oh, don't be silly," came her prompt reply, and he stood for a moment - but she wasn't talking about the wanting part, and unhooked the incriminated garment with no effort at all. "It's better this way, isn't it?" she asked as the fabric pooled softly at her feet.

"You minx," he breathed, and scooped her up, finally putting her on top of the round wooden table in the further corner of the room. Amused, Aelinor opened her legs to welcome his slender figure and instinctively her hand reached for his member, now desperately needing someone willing to take care of it. Aelinor pressure was sudden and unexpected and at first, Tywin almost froze - a few moments later, though, he was buried all the way into her, beginning to move according to her moans. Long strokes which made her shiver and whimper against his chest; strong, short movements which made her head fall back; gentle nips on her shoulders, possessive kneadings of her breasts - it was intense and it was somehow desperate, but as soon as Lady Marbrand's lips came near Tywin's ear, murmuring a little, ragged *Fuck me*, the Old Lion knew he was on the very edge of his ultimate disarray.
"Get down," he ordered. Aelinor hopped gracefully down the table, a little perplexed but amused by that sudden change of heart. Tywin Lannister seized her from the waist and kissed her deeply, mercilessly exploring her mouth with all the hunger that only one of the most controlled man in the Realm could show. Everything, in his actions, was urgent, ravenous: his tongue battling with hers, his fingers buried in her flesh - his member, hard against her belly, slick of her own juices.

He started to turn her, but she stopped the movement.

"No," she stated, plainly. "Not this time, not the first. You'll finish me the way I say you'll finish me." Tywin smirked, intrigued by her apparently limitless self-confidence.

"Pray it will be worth the effort," he nodded.

"Oh, it will be." Aelinor smiled mischievously, then grasped him by his shoulder and guided him to her favourite armchair, where she made him sit. "Let me see..." She bent over him, her hand open to caress his balls and shaft. For a moment, the Lord Hand thought she was about to kneel and work him with her mouth. He didn't know that Aelinor Marbrand didn't kneel in front of any human being.

A moment later, though, he looked, delighted, as she began to lift her left knee in order to straddle him - he reached for her as soon as she'd been in position, probing her wet entrance with his fingers, massaging her clit with expertise.

"Where have you been all this time?" he asked, playfully probing into her wetness with a finger.

"What counts is where I am now," she tried to cope, her breath laboured, "and this means here, with something to finish."

Tywin Lannister grasped her young lover's hips and impaled her on his cock in one, fluid movement. "Something or someone?" he asked. Aelinor's plan had been to start slowly, savouring the friction of their new position as long as possible - three stokes later, though, she was riding him with a fervour she'd had no idea to have in her.
Chapter 8

Tywin Lannister, Lord Hand of a mad king who was now dead, was thrusting madly inside the tight and willing cunt of a woman younger than his daughter and he was about to spend every single drop of himself in her. She was wild, she was passionate - and while she was fucking him with no mercy she still was apparently able to maintain her best aura of a strict, decent, no-nonsense woman. Seven Gods, what a pleasant surprise.

Her breasts were pressed against his chest as her hips moved frantically, increasing pace and friction and eliciting moan over moan from either of them. Tywin's right hand left its place over her bottom and reached between them, at the point where they were most intimately connected. "I want you to come for me, my lady," he stated, in a matter-of-fact voice. His fingers circled her clit and she arched her back, letting go a guttural moan.

"Only...if..." She panted between his thrust and ministrations, "Only if...you...come...for..." But she couldn't bring herself to finish the phrase, for the combination of the work of the Old Lion's cock and finger in her lower regions and his teeth sunk into her shoulder sent her over the edge. Aelinor came trembling, stars exploding behind her closed eyes as she rode the wave of her orgasm.

Tywin Lannister was still hard inside her, pumping with the familiar rhythm of a man very near to the edge. "You're gorgeous," he said through his ragged breath. Lady Marbrand suddenly came back to herself.

"Stop, my Lord, stop... You can't afford a bastard. Not right now." She considered, trying to slow his erratic motions.

"Afford?" he growled. "I can afford whatever I want." His fingers held strongly onto her hips, but she seized his wrists and forced him to let her go.


"You're right."

"I know," she smiled, slowly lifting herself from his lap. "I know," she murmured again, as she kissed him and let him kiss her back ravenously. And she bent her knees in front of him.

"What..."

"I owe you a favour, don't I?" Aelinor smirked, taking Tywin's member between her breasts and starting to massage it.

Few thrusts later, he was totally spent - and she, on the other hand, was glad she had managed to remove the upper part of her dress along with the gown: her maid would have never believed it has been an accident, if she hadn't.
"I have to say - you amaze me." Lord Tywin's voice was deep, baritonal, and a bit nearer to her ear than she had expected. But she didn't turn towards him - instead, she kept standing still in front of the great window, looking outside, a pleased grin bending her lips upwards. "I'd never expected such a strict, apparently proper young woman could be so..."

"Wanton?" she suggested.

"Willing."

His hands were on her hips, so softly she could have thought he had forgotten them, as his lips indulged against the little skin that the cut of her dress left exposed on her shoulder.

"Why shouldn't I be willing? You're one of the most attracting men I ever laid my eyes on."

"And powerful."

"Yes, and powerful. But being powerful doesn't mean necessarily being a good lover, too; when you, on the other hand..."

"Oh. You think I was good, then." His arms started to sneak around her, joining over her stomach; the movement caused a slight adjustment of their position, and she recognized quite easily the pressure against her lower back.

"No," she replied with a smirk, as the Old Lion's right hand continued its journey till landing safely against the fabric over her mound. "I think you were great..." Aelinor admitted, pushing absentmindedly backward against his growing erection.

"That's better."

"Oh," she exhaled, arching her head against his shoulder as he started to massage her through her dress. "You're insatiable, my Lord."

"Lions tend to be, yes." His teeth closed over the naked flesh of her shoulder and she shuddered, still over excited from their previous intercourse. Her nipples were hard and aching against her corset.

"But I've just finished to redress myself..."

"That can be easily taken care of."
Chapter 10

There there, he did it! thought distractedly Lady Aelinor as her gown was quickly rolled up, this time for good. Her hands were firmly on the windowsill and there she was standing, only slightly bent forward - she had tried to bend more, but Tywin had stopped her: apparently he liked it more this way... So typical. Why should he have liked the easy way? He was Tywin Lannister of Casterly Rock, for goodness sake!

She heard - she felt - him briefly pumping himself to get ready and shivered: why on earth had this man such an effect on her? She had never been wanton, she had never been particularly bold neither, still in that room, with him, she felt ready to behave like a...woman of ill repute! She should have been ashamed of herself, she was perfectly aware of it. Yet she couldn't. All she could think of was to please this man, however he'd like - and take a good deal of pleasure herself, too.

Slowly - more than she had expected, and more sweetly, too - he aligned himself with her opening and entered her, accompanying the movement with a gentle pressure of his hand against her belly. Aelinor exhaled.

The feeling of having him buried inside from that position, although not exactly comfortable, was overwhelming. She had the sensation of being able to perceive everything, every single fiber of her body, thanks to that connection; oddly enough, he took an unhurried pace, made of long strokes and deliberately slow retreats: it resembled...No, she thought, it's impossible... She rejected the notion and mentally rebuked herself. It was just coupling. Just fucking, nothing else.

Yet, the way he was keeping pushing and pulling out, so excruciatingly slow, was the most erotic thing she had ever experienced - she had to admit she wasn't the most seasoned of the women, but that was...was...

Lord Tywin grabbed her left leg and lifted it to rest against the windowsill: even more uncomfortable, she thought for a moment - a moment after she felt so filled up by his cock she really believed she'd passed out. He was thrusting harder, now, and she suddenly felt aware of her breasts, constricted inside her corset and unable to go along with that new rhythm. Her left hand raised and reached blindly behind her, looking for him, trying to keep his mouth against her neck at the angle she liked most.

"I'm coming," he grunted against her skin.

"You can't"

"I know." And he stopped. Suddenly. Out of pure willpower. He slid out of her like it was perfectly normal and helped her to remove her leg from the windowsill and Aelinor turned over to thank him - but she noticed how rock hard he still was, how slick he was from her wetness. She felt a rush of pride, and one of admiration: one for being the one to have such an effect on him, the other for the strength he had just shown in interrupt their...well, fucking, so all at once. Aelinor smiled and moved closer to him, her fingers slowly closing around his member.

"May I?" she asked amusedly, starting to pump.

"Mh," growled the Hand of the King; his hips rocked almost imperceptibly, increasing the friction against her hand. Where had that woman been all those years?, he asked himself. In a nursery, probably, answered a distant voice inside his brain.
But it was just a voice, and rapidly faded away as soon as he exploded, spending every drop of himself in her gentle hand.
"So... What happens next?"

"I believe you'll need some rest," came - unexpected - Lord Tywin's reply.

"Thank you," she said softly, impressed. "I was asking about the murder, though..."

"A trial, then. Here, here, let me-" He stopped. Has he really been about to say, help? Frozen, he lowered his eyes on his own hands, gently closed over Lady Aelinor's in order to help her hooking her golden necklace. He tried to remember when he last helped a woman to clasp her jewelry. He couldn't remember.

"You'll conduct a trial against your own son."

"I have to. He killed the king"

"Are you sure it was him?" Tywin looked at her in the mirror - he took in the image of that woman, that young woman, and her hands graciously crossed over her belly; and he looked at himself, behind her, amazed by how fascinating the picture was.

"Trials are for such things, you know. I guess we'll see."

"Would you really execute your son? I mean - I, sorry, I..."

"No need to apologise," he smiled tersely. "He's no son of mine"

Lady Aelinor turned to face him, a sad smile on her lips. "No need to be harsh," she whispered.

"They say all dwarves are bastards in their father's eyes, my lady"

"Still, it's harsh"

"Are you judging me, aren't you?"

Aelinor closed her eyes for a brief moment, wondering what to do. "No", she said, plainly. She raised her hand to his cheek and caressed him - lightly, affectionately. "No, I'm not."

Tywin Lannister lowered his head and left a brief, small kiss on her lips. "I'll have dinner in the Tower of the Hand, tomorrow evening. Would you mind to join me?"
Chapter 12

She knew there was food. She had seen it. She could smell it even now.

But they were not eating it, and of this fact, she was particularly aware. Truth to be told, he was actually devouring something, but it was her mouth rather than the good things on the table. He had welcomed her rather warmly, considered he was Tywin Lannister, and there had been a little talk, and then... Well. Then - she had no idea whatsoever how it had happened - she'd found herself pushed against a wall and kissed by a man who clearly knew very well what he was doing.

It was a pleasant unfolding of events, she couldn't deny it. It was extremely different from their previous encounter, too. No rush, no pressure. It was slow and sweet and Lord Tywin was clearly enjoying in taking his time with her - the firm but discrete presence of his hardening member against her lower belly was unmistakable and, truth to be told, very welcomed.

"But I did invite you here to eat. You must be hungry."

Was it a sort of apology? She couldn't trust her ears.

"You seem quite hungry yourself," she pointed out smirking.

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly. Aelinor's brow furrowed.

"And you regret it because..."

"Because I almost didn't know you until - what? - three days ago? Because I spent an entire afternoon making sex with you, and after that, I invited you here, in my very own quarters, in the very heart of the Red Keep. I regret it because in the space of a single afternoon you clearly weakened me at the point I can't help to wonder how would it be, for example, bringing you up to the solar and taking you right there on the stone pavement...or just lifting you against that round window and making you scream knowing nobody would see us..."

Aelinor stood still, trying desperately to suppress a smile. "So you'd have me naked against a window? What a nasty boy," she teased him. "I'm flattered, though."

"You'd better be. I'm not used to such..."

"Amenities?"

"Yes, it's a good wording. Amenities. I like it." The kiss was warm, wet, excruciatingly sensual. Tywin's hands were on her bum, gently pressing her body against his erection. It was no forcing, though, it was rather a hint, and she found quite easy letting herself get lost in the sensation. Her hand reached out to his front. "What are you doing?" he asked, now aware of how dark her eyes suddenly were.

"Giving you an appetizer, I guess. But first you have to know - I never, never kneel in front of a man."

"Am I sensing a but?"

"But you are the only one I can think to make an exception for. Too many nights I've dreamt to-" Her voice faded. She hadn't planned to admit such a thing.
"Wait. You're saying you...had dreams about me? About sucking me?" He was amused, and frankly, Aelinor couldn't bring herself to blame him.

"Perhaps."

"Well, what can I say. Bring it on, then"
Chapter 13

Tywin Lannister was a powerful man.

He was Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Warden of the West. And he was Hand of the King, Savior of the City. He was the Lion of Lannister.

And yet there it was, at the mercy of a young woman loosely related to his own mother. Totally at her mercy. Literally in her palm. She was on her knees in front of him - first time she knelt in front of a man, if what she'd said was true - and she had just closed her lips around his manhood, slightly sucking the head while caressing his thighs. Her hot-moist mouth was all around him, taking him slowly, slowly, until it reached the base. Then she pulled back, putting extreme care in caressing the shaft all along with her tongue, almost reaching the tip again. She was bobbing her head back and forward, her left hand busy massaging his balls; as soon as she pulled back completely, releasing Tywin's cock with a soft pop, her mouth lowered again, kissing and licking him from base to head and back - no hurry, just lust: Tywin grabbed her hair as gently as he could, trying to second her movements without being rude.

Her hotness was overwhelming and he felt on edge - and he felt disappointed by himself, too, for his body was betraying him more than he'd ever thought possible. For the first time in years, he just wanted: he wanted to take her, to fuck her senseless, to make her scream his name with all her voice. He wanted to leave her spent and sated, and wanting for more. It was foolish, he knew it perfectly well. She was younger than his own children. She was a lady. And - oh sweet gods! - she was almost choking herself with his cock, every bit of it, as her tongue rubbed gently the underside of his length. She started to suck and suddenly his fingers closed around her hair - she moaned, and the echo of her moan reverberated all the way through her throat: something Lord Tywin found extremely stimulating. In some bizarre way, he thought, that wasn't just sex: there was - but he had no idea on which basis - a connection between them, a sort of bonding: as he suddenly came, he knew that bond was something worth to be deepened.

As soon as humanly possible.
Chapter 14

There was something different, about her, Tywin was sure of it. From time to time he took his time gazing at her during their dinner, and he had to admit he liked what he saw, he liked it a lot. Her conversation was smart, spirited; her behaviour, impeccable; her manners, simply perfect. No one in their right minds could have guessed the pleasure she had given to him just an hour before: elegant and well bred, she was glowing with an aura of spotless perfection.

They have been talking about politics and religion for at least half an hour, with mutual interest and intellectual satisfaction; it was almost as if no king had been killed that very day, Tywin found himself thinking - how much easier would it have been, knowing her under other circumstances? She had stopped him - twice - from emptying himself inside her, pointing out it was not the time to conceive a child - a bastard. It has been remarkable: not many women would have quit so easily the chance to trap such a man... As the dinner and their conversation went on, he found himself ever more intrigued by her witty good sense and her knowledge of how the world worked in their times. Aelinor brought a piece of cake to her lips and he froze, mesmerised, pondering why on earth the first woman he had met in years able to hold a candle to Joanna should have been so outrageously young. Marry her surely would have brought him a great deal of satisfaction, he thought with a smirk, but it'd have made him laughing stock, too...

He put down his fork. Did the word marry have just emerged in his mind?

"You haven't told me why, though," he said, trying to shoo the thought.

"Why, what?" Aelinor smiled amusedly.

"Why did you do what you did - before dinner, I mean"

"I'm afraid you'll have to be more specific, my Lord," she mocked him. "I did lots of unpredictable things, today, before dinner"

Lord Tywin looked at her with a smirk which perfectly mirrored her own and moved to pour wine in both her glass and his.

"Before dinner, in here. Why? You said you never kneel, still, you knelt in front of me. Why?"

"You are the exception, I told you."

"Yes, you did. But what I'd like to know is why."

Aelinor inhaled, her lips tightened, his fingers lightly tapping the wooden surface of the table. For the first time that day, she felt uncomfortable. She weighed her options - the kind of mental process which was completely useless when your counterpart is the most clever man in the Seven Kingdoms.

"I had a crush on you, you know. When I was younger." Tywin Lannister leaned against the backrest, sincerely taken aback. A crush on him. Who ever thought it possible.

"Younger, I see," he said dryly, trying to conceal his brief unease. "Still, your juvenile crush - of which I thank you, of course - doesn't explain your demeanour of today, does it?"

"What do you want, Lord Tywin?" she asked abruptly. "What should I say? What do you want to hear?"
Chapter 15

With a lion's grace, Tywin Lannister pushed back his chair and rose. He walked slowly towards Aelinor, in silence, his footsteps muffled by the large, thick carpet. He stopped only as he reached her chair - he was close, too close not to be intimidating, but Aelinor's eyes were lowered again, fixed on an invisible point of the floor.

"Men of my age tend to..." he started, and suddenly stopped: what the hell was he doing? Showing weakness? But the young woman's head twitched towards him, and there were no traces of her previous annoyance. She seemed concerned. "Men of my age tend to have small faith in young women, you see. They're usually more driven by things such gold and power rather than by conversation or attraction when older men are involved... And as we know I owe a great deal of both gold and power - but a significant deal of years, too."

Aelinor didn't speak, instead, she took gently his hands in hers and kissed them affectionately. Surprised, he let her do, watching her from above - her auburn hair neatly styled, the way her neck angled, the soft, warm sensation of her lips pressed against his palms. "As I've previously stated, I can't care less about power... And I've got gold of myself, you know all too well that my family is rich. Of course, if you want to talk about age..." She smiled softly, almost to herself, then lifted her eyes looking directly into his. "I dare to say, our recent activities point in a direction that's an entire world apart from the idea of labelling you as an old man."

Lord Tywin's lips curled and he bent over her, claiming that smile for himself - the kiss was slow, savoury, as if it was another delightful course of their meal. Despite his predominant position, his exploration of her mouth was all the way gentle, lustful, so definitely hot that turned her insides and awoke every pleasing sensation still dormant in her. When the kiss finally broke, he couldn't help to notice the faster rhythm to which her bosom now raised and lowered with every breath. His fingers slid along her neckline, shamelessly brushing the soft, warm flesh beneath.

"You are a remarkable woman, my lady."

"You're not upset anymore, then, for the way I stared at you in the Sept?"

"Definitely not, definitely not," he nodded. "I regret to say I'd like to keep you awake for the next hours, but tomorrow is a bad day and I need to be at my best, so..."

"...Do rest," she smiled, again, and as her smile reached her eyes Tywin heard a little, weak voice in the back of his head. She had less than half his age and her hair was auburn but despite it all, she was keeping to remind him of Joanna. That’d have been dangerous. *Dangerous? What on earth do you reckon could be dangerous? You won't plan to see her again, are you?* Her fingertips raised to brush his cheek, grazing his sideburns absentmindedly. Her intention had been that of a brief, chaste peck on his lips and a swift leaving - as she found herself pinned against the door with the Hand's kisses lavishing her throat and cleavage she realized how naive she had been. Tywin Lannister had voted himself to almost abstinence for years, was his impatience really so unexpected?

"Better to stop, now, or my noble speech about duty will be waste parchment," he exhaled against her mouth, apparently with no intention whatsoever to let her go.

"Meet me tomorrow?" she asked hurriedly. The Old Lion looked at her with no apparent trace of emotion.

"You know I should not."
"Yes, but you know I will be waiting for you in my quarters." With a final, playful peck on her lips, Tywin Lannister let his smirk grow wider.

"And you know I'll be more than willing to put an end to your wait."
Chapter 16

Sex, thought Aelinor that night, lying awake in her bed. Nothing more. Nothing less. Pure, simple, great - still, sex.

No feelings. No strings. No castles in the sky.

He was the most powerful man in the Seven Kingdoms; she, on the other hand, was nothing more than a young lady from a minor noble house. Still, she had been able to draw his attention - and, even more important, to pique his interest. Hadn't she feared to sound silly even to herself, she'd probably have indulged in thinking how that man had been her forbidden dream since she had learned about sex. She had no idea why, but the simple thought of him had always been enough to make her wet. The events of the day, therefore, were keeping her awake, quietly smiling and counting every part of her body that at the present moment was aching.

Aelinor closed her eyes and let her hand travel downwards to tantalize herself - soft fingers brushed against velvety skin, all the way dreaming of other fingers, other hands. She was wet just for thinking about him and her clit was ready to be stimulated and give her pleasure in reward; as she circled it with one hand, the other found her breast, kneading it rhythmically, pinching the nipple from time to time - mimicking Tywin's acts, while in her mind the picture of him, of his face buried against her breasts, was becoming stronger and stronger. Panting from the scenario inside her mind, she probed her entrance with a finger, teasing, until she finally inserted it: it was both hers, and his, and she arched her back against the sheets, thinking of him and how he had had his way with her that very afternoon.

A second finger slid inside together with the first; Aelinor pumped them slowly in and out, all the time massaging her clit with her thumb and her breast with her free hand. She should have suggested something like that to Lord Tywin, too: the simple idea to think about him touching himself could make her extremely wet, and oh-so desperate for release! So desperate, her own fingers betrayed her - not being able anymore to find what she was looking for, she settled for the idea of a surrogate: the spare candle on her nightstand was far from being the best solution, but it would have worked, with the right amount of imagination...
The day had been long, the wait, excruciating. She hadn't tried to reach him - of course - and the hours had gone by slowly, minute by minute.

_He won't come_, she kept repeating to herself. _He's busy. He never accepted to come and see you, in the first place._

Still, she had never left her chambers. _Just in case._ She had read, she had written letters, she had embroidered and sewn. She had eaten and taken a nap.

And now, she was bored to death. _He won't come, girl. Accept it._

The sun was starting to go down and there Aelinor was, looking at the sky, wondering how much the events of the previous day had been a mistake. She didn't move, she didn't even _flinch_ when the door clicked open.

But she didn't smile, either.

She waited. She was good at waiting, after all.

"I took the liberty to ask your servants to provide dinner. They say you didn't eat much, today." She didn't reply. Lord Tywin appeared in her visual field, then - clearly tired, with dark shadows under his eyes, but with a sort of crooked smile playing on his lips. "I know. I'm sorry."

That _definitely_ caught her attention. Had he really just apologized? Tywin Lannister?

"Don't be. You had more important things to think of. It's been a hard day, isn't it?" In her mind, the words have been cold, just a step inside the boundaries of good manners; her voice, however, had betrayed her, coming out warm and worried. She sighed.

"I'd rather not to talk about it. Would you mind?"

"Not really. No."

Tywin bent down until his hands closed around the armrests of Aelinor's chair. He remained this way for a few moments, looming and intimidating, until, "Thank you," he murmured, just before capturing her lips with his own.
"I was under the impression you were quite upset," he said, quite amused, looking at her from the other end of the table. Aelinor shot him a puzzled glare. "You were upset when I arrived, don't even try and deny it..."

"I was," she admitted it, putting down her glass - which immediately he refilled. "I just don't grasp why you should think I've changed my mind."

"You were smiling, my lady."

"Oh, was I?"

"You were, indeed. Smiling at yourself. Just moments ago. Therefore, I asked to myself: what's happened? But I am not the one who can answer to it. I'm asking to you - what's new?"

Aelinor weighed her options, trying to cope with the heat spreading from her neck towards her cheeks. It was quite embarrassing, to be honest. *He spent a whole afternoon relentlessly fucking you, why should this be embarrassing?* "I was wondering... I guess there is a possibility that my...what did you call it? Oh, yes, my juvenile crush, is not entirely over. That's it. Happy, now?"

"I'm quite positive I am not familiar with the meaning of "happy". But I can assure you, I am glad to hear it."

"Good." They ate in companionable silence for a while, exchanging nothing more than a look from time to time. Oddly enough, it felt so normal, so familiar, that Aelinor for a moment couldn't help to think of how much she'd have liked to make a habit of those meals together.

"I like you, too, you know." Again, her eyes darted towards him. "I like the way you think, the way you talk. You're a well-bred lady, still, you have more backbones than every single lady I've met in my life. Save perhaps for - no, nevermind."

"I assume it's the tiredness speaking," she smiled, eager to make him forget that misstep. He nodded. "Would you like to lie down for a little while?"

It's been his turn to smile, now. "Is this an indecent proposal?"

"Not exactly, no," she replied, standing up and approaching him. "But our evening will be more interesting, once you'll be rested, don't you think?"

"Mh." Tywin accepted her outstretched hand and followed her to her bedroom. As he sat down on the mattress, though, his hands sneaked quickly around her waist. "I'll only have a rest if you promise you'll remain with me."

Aelinor locked her fingers behind his neck and smiled. "I never planned otherwise."
Chapter 19

When Aelinor finally opened her eyes, she registered three things: first, the sun had definitely set down; second, recognizing the shapes of her objects was almost possible although the candles in her bedroom were still unlit; third - and last but not least - there was someone gently breathing against the skin at the nape of her neck. *Fourth*, a strong, possessive arm was draped around her mid.

Aelinor smiled in the dark, pleased; a few moments later, though, she was trying to sneak away from the sleeping form who was holding her, for her corset was killing her and she couldn't wait any longer to remove it. The grip around her waist tightened.

"Where are you going?" asked Tywin's sleepy voice against her skin.

"It's dark. I thought it would be useful if I lit some candles."

"I like darkness," he stated. His voice was clearer, now - and his lips more insistent against her neck. His hand found her breast and began to massage it, but she hissed. "Is everything alright, Aelinor?"

She froze. It was the first time he called her by name, and it had happened out of concern: she disentangled from him and sat on her bed, facing him with a soft smile.

"You never called me 'Aelinor'."

"It's your name, isn't it? And quite a beautiful name, I'd say."

"Still-"

"You didn't answer: is everything alright? Did I hurt you?"

"No, not you... This damn corset did," she complained, twitching. "That's why I was sneaking out of bed. I can't keep it on any longer."

"Oh, that's interesting, you know..." He smirked. Then, with that severe elegance, only Tywin Lannister in the whole world had, he got up and move to her side of the bed.

"Interesting?" she asked, tilting her head back, in order to better look at him.

"Well, yes, that's interesting... It's just the kind of problem I am positive I can help you with."
Aelinor was on her back, sprawled, granting a full range of possibility to the man towering above her. She was quite amazed by the skilfulness of his fingers, which were, at the moment, busy with the strings of her corset - he had an uncommon way to do it: while their first experiences together had been...well, *urgent*, almost *famished*, things now were utterly different. Calmly, biding his time, the old lion was loosening her constraints one by one, removing layer after layer with excruciating patience, gently brushing the fabric with his fingertips and sending shivers down her spine every time a bit of flesh was exposed.

"You're driving me mad," she exhaled as the pad of his thumb slowly travelled from her stomach to the valley between her breast. She felt her nipples harden, almost aching out of arousal; wetness was pooling inside her from the moment he had asked her to lie on her back.

"I was under the impression that you wanted your corset removed," he hummed, "How was I suppose to remove it, without previously start to undress you?" He asked amusedly, guiding her to raise her hips in order to help her out of her dress.

"Good point," she agreed as her corset completely - finally - loosened under his fingers.

"Here. Done." He smirked, apparently pleased with himself. "You can go back to sleep now."

At that, and realizing he was really about to leave, she jerked up.

"What?"

"Well, it's your bedchamber. That's your bed. It's past midnight, and I have work waiting for me in the Tower of the Hand."

"Are you *insane*?"
"Are you insane?" Tywin stopped in his tracks and turned.

"What did you say?"

"I asked you whether you're insane, my lord," she repeated firmly.

"Do you have any idea how the last person who called me insane did end up?"

"I'm quite positive no one ever called you that." Tywin nodded. "But I assume, too, that you've never left alone in her bed a naked woman craving for you, haven't you?"

"No, I have not." The corner of his lips was slightly curled upwards, but Aelinor couldn't see, in the darkness, more than his tall figure, standing against the doorframe. "Are you craving for me, then?"

He asked casually.

"Like you don't know."

In three strides he was back to her again and - without thinking - he scooped her up. "Say it again."

"I-crave-for-you, Tywin Lannister," she declared. "You can put me down, now, you know".

He did as she had asked and his hands circled her naked form as he kissed her deeply, but as soon as her fingers reached for the fastening of his breeches he stopped her. "What are you up to?"

"Well-"

"I'm in no mood for a quick touch-and-go."

"Oh," she murmured sadly. "I'm sorry, I was thinking... I'm sorry, really, of course, I understand, it's-"

"Good grief, woman, be quiet for just a second, won't you?" Aelinor nodded briefly, slightly mortified. "Yesterday's been great, I believe we can agree on that." Another nod, but not a word from Aelinor's part. "Still, as great as it were, it was quite rushed. Wild. Ruffled. And far too quick - even in the multiplicity of its episodes, yes." Aelinor bit her lip, at unease. She had absolutely no idea where he was heading with his talking and that upset her. His hands were warm and open against her chest, though - it couldn't be so bad, could it? "Let me make love to you. I mean, properly."

Aelinor froze on the spot, suddenly out of breath. Surely it was happening because of the darkness in her room - he'd never spoke that way if she'd be able to look him in the face, she was sure of it. Still fully clothed and therefore in sheer contrast with her, Tywin Lannister was standing perfectly still, waiting for her response, yet apparently unwilling to remove his grip on her. So she stood on her tiptoes and put her hands at the sides of his neck, brushing his cheeks with her thumbs. "Make love to me, Tywin. Please," she pleaded against his lips.
I admit it: I was planning to post this tomorrow. Then I thought I'd have been too much of a tease, and here we are ;) Thanks for your kind reviews! Aelinor and Tywin are very glad you're enjoying their little romance (and my silly divertissement)!
His hands gently roaming her sides, Tywin guided her against the bedpost, where her back could easily lean for support. He let his mouth wander all over her shoulders and cleavage, indulging himself with the luxury to spend a long time kissing his way down the valley between her breasts.

"Here," he whispered, guiding her arms upwards until she gripped the wooden bedpost. She felt exposed, yes, and vulnerable: Tywin's lips and tongue having their way with her, though, made her feel unexpectedly cared for. She barely registered he was divesting himself of his emblems - the golden chain had been the first item to be removed and now lied discarded on the floor as if totally worthless - and clothes, too much engaged in the sensations his ministrations were eliciting from her body. As his naked torso brushed against her peaks, though, she couldn't help to let go a moan.

"May I touch you?"

"You don't need my permission." She lowered her arms, then, and tentatively let her hands travel from his wrists to his shoulder, finally landing on his chest; she could recognize his heartbeat under her fingers, the firm muscles tensing under his skin so uncommon in a man of his age. Aelinor couldn't resist the urge to kiss him while her fingers quickly joined his own to unfasten his breeches, from which he was soon freed.

Once again she found herself picked up in his arms, this time skin to skin - her legs wrapped around him on their own accord.
Chapter 23

Aelinor Marbrand could have been not a woman of the world, but she has always been sure of one thing: she preferred to be the one in charge. In matters of sex, that meant her main efforts were oriented to achieve the possibility to be - well - the one on top.

Finding herself under Tywin's muscular body, however, was a sort of revelation: she didn't care about her desire for independence either about her usual strong-minded need of control - the Old Lion covering her was somehow a new experience, in order of both self-awakening and liking, but oddly enough, far from making her feel oppressed, it made her feel protected. *Loved,* she thought, warily and tentatively.

"And is this because of me?" Tywin asked, amused, as his left hand went to tease her opening. Once again, she grunted her sweetest answer:

"Like you don't know."

"What if I just like to tease you?"

"Oh, well, I never..." A kiss cut her protest off as quickly as Tywin's tongue found hers; as that battle went on, hot and wet, his middle finger slid sneakily inside her, rewarded by a soft moan. Aelinor's legs parted, making easier for him to accommodate between her thighs - he reached for his member and their hands met halfway, both absorbed in guiding him towards his target; Aelinor let a soft giggle leave her lips and Tywin snorted his approval.

"Aren't we eager?" he mocked her as he let her take care of his manhood and took the chance to position his arms on both sides of her head in order to hold himself up. Guided by her hand, then, he entered her - easily, swiftly - and stilled, savouring the sensation of their bodies joined.
Tywin's long strokes inside her kept immediately a rhythm which was both steady and erratic - regular in their speed, they were somehow unpredictable as for their intensity and strength, lulling her in a cocoon of pleasure.

Although at the beginning his arms had been pinned on the bed at the sides of her head, soon he had gently lowered himself over her, holding her body as close as possible. It was far, far more intimate: lovemaking he had promised her, lovemaking he was giving to her. This time it was not - not only, she thought as his kisses stole her breath in unison with his thrusts - about pleasure, it was about connection, bonding: it was about worship and caring. Under her fingers, his skin was warm, welcoming, and she found herself thinking that yes, he had been right all along - lovemaking was something entirely different from she had experienced until then.

Tywin's right hand went to the small of her back, encouraging her to lift it from the mattress; as Aelinor did so she recognized the familiar but unexpected thickness of a pillow taking the place of the hand supporting her, then Tywin, who had almost entirely pulled himself out of her, pushed forward, driving himself even deeper than before. The change in the angle - and the possibility to sink deeper it produced - elicited a guttural, satisfied moan from Aelinor, as the combination of the different type of friction and the increased depth he could now reach positively took away her breath.

Her arms circled him, caressing his back, grazing his neck, holding him against herself. Their lips open and just inches apart, their breaths mixed together, their eyes locked: how distant this moment was from the previous afternoon? "You're gorgeous," he panted on her mouth; a moment later, after a quick kiss, he straightened up on his knees, helping her to reposition herself on his thighs without breaking their contact.

It was different, now: his cock buried inside her despite him so far away... Although exciting, although pleasing, Aelinor felt almost cold and held out her hands towards him, trying to bring him back to her. Tywin took her hands, then, and let their fingers intertwine, but he didn't return to his previous position. He drew her closer and closer until he had her sitting between his legs, her legs spread wide open, her breasts against his chest.

"Oh," she exhaled, a new rush of warmth running through her body, and wrapped again her legs around his waist. The sensations of total openness and proximity were so intense it almost hurt. Her head tilted back as soon as Tywin assaulted her throat lavishing kisses on her skin.
"Why?" Aelinor asked softly, her face buried against his neck as they rocked back and forth.

"What?"

"This. Why now? Why me?" Tywin stopped his movement and started caressing her legs and hips.

"I guess I needed it this way. Surely you deserved it this way." Aelinor smiled happily - then, trying to break the tension brought by such a declaration, took his cheek in her hands.

"Who are you? Where's my Tywin Lannister?" They both laughed, their joined hips starting to swap again at unison.

"I'm yours, then?" he asked, amused. She decided to tempt fate - it was a big risk, she was perfectly aware of it, but...

"No more than I am yours, I'd say."

She had feared a change.

And change it was, sudden and abrupt.

Not the kind of change she had dreaded, though.

Her words have barely left her mouth and she found herself pinned under Tywin's broad body, with him pumping strongly inside her, and her vision starting to blur. She reached for her clit, stimulating it at the same pace of his thrusts; her climax was approaching and the spasms through Tywin's body, along with the increasing speed of his loins' work, gave her the distinct impression he was close, too. Again, as the previous day, he suddenly stopped and Aelinor let a frustrated moan escape her lips.

"Tell me one thing, my lady."

"Will you finish, then?"

"I will."

"So, what do you want to know?"

"Would it be such an intolerable thought, bearing a child of mine?"

"You know perfectly well I was only speaking out of concern for you. It's you who can't afford a bastard right now, I'd be just...collateral damage, wouldn't I."

"Do you mean you'd have no objection to give me an heir?"

"Of course not, but I doubt that now is the time to..."

"Yes, it is," he replied, starting to pound again into her with determination as his hand joined hers in massaging her clitoris. "Because we've just begun to try and conceive the future lord of Casterly Rock," he grunted against her sated body - a moment later, he was emptying himself into her with something almost too similar to happiness.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Aelinor Marbrand had her eyes closed, but she wasn't sleeping. Sleepy, she was, yet awake, and trying to determine whether she had imagined it all or not.

Well, not exactly it all. Tywin had actually come inside her, and she had to admit, it had been the perfect epilogue to the sweet lovemaking session they had had. The part about bastards and heirs, though, was a bit confused in her mind. She wasn't able to recall it clearly. She wasn't so sure she had grasped the correct words. She was high on the peak of her orgasm, after all.

A gentle kiss on her shoulder brought her back to reality.

"You're awake."

"I am, yes."

"Is everything alright?"

"I don't know. Did I dream it all?"

"All? I was about to say it had been quite impressive, and now you tell me it was nothing more than an oniric experience? What a shame."

"Oh, Tywin, please, you know what I mean..."

"That you're not so sure to know what I meant when I said what I said. Yes."

"I'm not even sure I remember the words right, to be honest. You were distracting me."

The Old Lion propped himself on his elbow and looked down at her. "It's quite simple. Yesterday you pointed out I can't afford the scandal of a bastard, and you were right. Still, in the light of recent events, it seems I am in need of a suitable heir, and I was under the impression you had no objections to being... Let's say, involved." She furrowed her brows.

"But in order to give you an heir shouldn't I be...?"

"My wife, yes."

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I guess it was not so unexpected! Problem is - I am such a silly, old-fashioned romantic!
To that, Aelinor didn't reply, too overwhelmed even to think. She sat up in the middle of the bed, facing him with her body but not with her eyes.

"I'd thought your reaction would have been a bit better than this," he stated. There was no trace of emotion in his voice - cold, distant, the epitome of the idea of "Tywin Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock".

"No one ever told me I should react enthusiastically to a cruel joke."

"A joke?"

"Playing the affectionate, caring man for one hour is definitely not enough to give you the permission to make fun of me, you know. I've let you have your way with me but it doesn't mean I'm..."

"Aelinor, stop. I wasn't making fun of you, I never intended to. It wasn't a joke: I'll admit you can also call it strategy, if you like, but it was not a joke."

Her eyes widened, she distinctly felt her mouth gaping. "You must be kidding me."

"Actually, I'm not."

"Why me?" she asked faintly, an echo of her own words whispering in her head. She couldn't believe it. Surely it was a dream. A hallucination. Tywin Lannister couldn't possibly show such an interest in her. Not in a thousand years.

"I don't know. Not precisely, at least," he admitted with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Why, then?"

"Does the idea repulse you so much?"

"Of course not!" Aelinor almost cried. "Honestly I can't think of anything else I'd like more than being..." her voice trailed off, incapable as she was to actually say them. "But I want to know why. I need to know why."

Tywin nodded in the dark. After all, it was because of her wit and her fierce spirit that he was thinking about marriage after so many years of solitude, not just because she was pretty. "I believe you'll want to light a candle..."

"Will I?"

"I think so. You'll be able to look at my face as I answer your questions. It could help to persuade you I'm not making fun of you."

Aelinor got out of bed and went to lit the candle over the mantlepiece, saving the one of her nightstand till last. In the yellow light of the candles, Tywin Lannister appeared even more aristocratic, in spite of the fact he was also, undoubtedly, naked in her bed.

"Here we are. I'm listening. Persuade me."
"You're too smart to play naive. You know *perfectly well* what I am talking about, and you
know *perfectly well* I'm serious. It's just you're afraid that-

"Me? Afraid?"

"Precisely. You, afraid. This is rushed and you're afraid it's some sort of manoeuvre that will end
with you in an unstable position. Still, deep down you know this is not how it will end."

Gracefully, as they were not both completely naked, Aelinor sat down on the farther corner of the
mattress, her back stiff, jaw clenched, lips in a tight line. "How am I supposed to know it?"

"Because, as I said, you're too smart," Tywin stated, straightening up to sit and rest against the
headboard. "Your father is the head of house Marbrand, and house Marbrand is an old, important
ally of Casterly Rock. Faithful. Loyal. Ancient. Noble. And rich, yes," he added, reading easily the
word in her expression. "I'm not the one who has to tell you who my mother was, am I?"

"Are you trying to persuade me that you're serious in your proposal, telling me I make you think
of your mother?" She asked sarcastically. Tywin's laugh erupted before he could control it, and filled
the room with its echo.

"That would involve me thinking about my mother in the ways I've seen you these past days, and
believe me, *that is not the case*. No. It's not about my mother. Definitely not. It's about you." Aelinor
raised an eyebrow, determined to look unimpressed. It was becoming increasingly difficult, though.
"In other circumstances, probably I'd have moved heaven and earth to make you marry one of my
sons, you know. You'd have been the perfect candidate. And you still are - whereas neither of them
clearly is."

"So you're...What? Sacrificing yourself?"

"Not exactly, no." He paused, looking slowly at the mess they've done with the sheets, at their
clothes scattered around the room. "The sacrifice would rather have been keeping my hands off my
daughter-in-law if you'd have married one of my sons," he smirked. Despite her determination,
Aelinor smirked back.

"Are you telling me you're the kind of man who'd shag his own son's wife, Lord Tywin?"

"In a scenario where my son's wife is you, yes. Before you know it."

"Mh," she approved, starting to crawl across the bed, towards him. "I'm quite certain I'd be quick to
notice it, to be honest. You're not exactly...*subtle*, in such matters."

"And neither are you, I'd say," came his reply as he reached out to brush her cheek. She sat back on
her heels, taking in the view before her eyes. Tywin was so insanely handsome she felt she was
about to burn.

"Well, shagging your son's wife would be wrong, no doubt," she smiled mischievously as his hand
started to massage her exposed breast, "but I guess there is no restrainer whatsoever when said wife
is yours..."
Chapter 29

Tywin grabbed her by her waist as soon as those words have left her lips and helped her over his lap.

"I take I've finally persuaded you?" he asked amusedly between their kisses. His hands were resting on the small of her back, brushing distractedly at her bottom from time to time. Aelinor nodded without a word, just relishing the sensation of his words against her skin. "Not that I never doubted to succeed." Straddled over him, Aelinor recognized easily his renewed arousal against her lower belly and she smiled triumphantly as her right hand started to caress him.

"I take you're pleased with this outcome?" she mocked him, her fingers encasing his hardening member.

"I'm certain I'm going to be even more pleased with this outcome within a few minutes..." His hands now both wide open over her bottom, Tywin was teasing her, kneading her flesh with deliberation; he had to admit it: he had no idea about how, or why, he had become so physically dependent on her in such a short time. No idea whatsoever. Still, he had. Like the most ordinary of men, he had flopped into the net of a woman outrageously younger than him. Was he getting senile? Was he some sort of old perv?

Those thoughts slid easily out of his mind, though, as soon as Aelinor's lips caught his own - she was such a breath of fresh air. And he had been sincere, of course, the bond between their houses was important, still... Still, he couldn't help to believe that having her as an ally, having her at his side, would have added a big deal of serenity to his life. Was he about to marry Aelinor Marbrand because she was the love of life - or, at least, of his final years? Probably not, he told himself; he had had one love: Joanna. Was he marrying out of strategy, then? Not only. It was far more complicated than that. It was out of curiosity, out of lust; it was because of the sensation of being alive, it was because of the feeling of being desired - not as a source of power but as a man. And it was because he had realized she really was the one who could give him, finally, an heir to his standards.

He lifted her over his member and entered her, his mind focused on that one idea: Aelinor Marbrand was his last chance at redemption.
Tywin's arms were strong around her, holding her tight in the moment of their shared climax - spending himself inside her while digging his fingertips into her flesh, his head buried against her neck and throat, eyes shut and breath broken, would have been great on itself: doing it with her panting his name and coming virtually in the same moment was far more than great. It was divine. In that single moment, if only he had been clear-headed instead of being in the middle of an orgasm, he could have thought that the whole idea of marrying her was purely out of lust and with no trace of common sense.

In that single moment, if only he had been clear-headed enough to be honest with himself, he probably should have admitted he was experimenting something too much similar to affection - again, no common sense at all.

"Promise me you won't mock me," she said, as the peak of her orgasm subsided. He was still inside her and they were almost imperceptibly rocking, joined, holding each other; Aelinor's hands were on his back, lazily drawing circles, and her eyes were full of him - of his freckled skin, of his familiar scent, of his attractiveness which verged on perfection.

"Why should I mock you?" Tywin asked. His lips were caressing her jaw, very slowly.

"Because I'm going to ask you a silly question."

"I spend most of my life listening to silly people asking silly questions, I think I can manage one more..."

"Would you mind if I attend to the trial, tomorrow?"

Once again, Tywin laughed heartily. "My my - is that all?"

"Well, what did you expect? I've just managed to make the most handsome man in the Seven Kingdoms persuade me to marry him, what else should I ask for?"

"Maybe - well - something about when such a marriage will take place?"

"Oh, but I don't care," she replied with a soft, infuriating smile, "I'm confident he had everything planned out, yet..."

"You're giving me too much credit, my lady."

"Am I? You didn't sort out a thing? Really?"

"Well, it's been quite a sudden idea, this I can admit."

"Oh, my - the great Tywin Lannister acting on impulse?" she warmly smiled. "I take we can agree that there are some firm points to be reckoned, though."

"Are there?" he asked, amused. Of course, there were firm points. Of course, he had them perfectly clear which ones they were. He was curious, though: were her firm points the same ones he had in mind?
"Well, yes," Aelinor replied sternly. "For a start, I assume it shouldn't be a fuss at all - and I mean, I am widely of age, so I see no need to involve my father in the process. With Ashemark in the Starks' hands and the war going on, there is no need for him to travel all the way from Lannisport to King's Landing... There is no need for anyone to be here, from my point of view, honestly."

"Neither your brother? Don't you think that being Commander of the City Watch he could...well, let's say, not appreciate being kept in the dark? " inquired Tywin, a grin on his lips.

"You're right. Of course, you're right. But Addam surely would tell ser Jaime, and..."

"And?"

"And if I had to be honest, I dread the moment when the Queen will know that you're marrying someone. And even more when that someone is me," she sighed. "Couldn't we just keep the things extremely low-profile?"

"That's very wise of you, and I agree on the low profile, but unless you have more serious reasons to leave your brother out of our marriage I'm afraid you'll have to tell him... Who else could give you away, otherwise? I'd really like to see the burning tree removed from your shoulders," he added with a soft laughter. "But yes, you're right, it will be better to ask him not to tell Jaime about the wedding, for the moment. It wouldn't surprise me if Cersei would end asking for your head on a pike..."

"AH! Thank you very much!" she exclaimed in - pretended - horror. She found that conversation quite funny, actually.

"Oh, don't worry, don't worry," laughed Tywin, and his fingers went to trace softly the contours of her face. "I won't let her have your head, it's far too pretty to be served in an egg cup..."

"Good grief, given the context don't you think it's a disgusting metaphor-Wait. Wait. Did you just say you find me pretty?"

Tywin, however, didn't match her playful tone. His hands moved softly until they came to rest on her cheek. He looked at her so seriously, so deeply, that for a brief moment she thought he was able to read into her mind. "I'd say, my lady, this is a gross understatement." She knew - on a rational level, she knew, really, she knew - that part of his appeal to him was due to her talent in the use of sarcasm. She was perfectly aware of that. As she was perfectly aware of the fact she should have probably pointed out the ambiguity of his words - was the metaphor or her prettiness, the understatement?

But she couldn't. Those scathing words couldn't find the road to her lips. Instead, she closed her fingers around his wrists, caressing the back of his hands with her thumbs and looking directly into his eyes.

"You know what?" she almost stammered, "I'm quite sure my crush on you won't be over for a long, long time."

Tywin pulled her gently towards him, guiding her with his hands to bend towards him until he could easily reach and kiss her forehead. "What a lucky man I am."
GRRM doesn't say where Lord Damon Marbrand was when Robb Stark took Ashemark - but the fact that he doesn't say that he's dead made me think that he's alive and well, and that probably as head of House Marbrand and bannerman of the Lannisters he could have found shelter elsewhere...Lannisport is a good solution, I think.

Ser Addam Marbrand, Damon's heir (and in our case elder brother of Aelinor), is actually Commander of the City Watch - thanks to his actions during the Battle of Blackwaters - and a great friend of Jaime Lannister.

Of course, the burning tree Tywin refers to is the blazon of House Marbrand.
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aelinor had never suspected that there could be so many hidden passageways in the building where the Throne Room was. Her general idea was that yes, surely there should have been corridors and smaller rooms, but basically, nothing more than a few: what else could have been inside the building of the Throne Room, when the Throne Room itself was so big? There were other parts of the Red Keep where the presence of corridors and dark passageways would have been more logical, weren't they?

As a matter of fact, yes. But no. The Throne Room was no island - difficult as it could have been, being on the second floor - and, on the contrary, it was rather in the middle of a labyrinth of passages and smaller rooms, each with a different purpose and employment.

The one where Aelinor found herself in at that very moment, for instance, was currently employed as the place where the Hand of the King had decided to drag his betrothed.

"And to think that I came here earlier, hoping to see you because I was afraid you could have changed your mind," she panted as they parted after that first, rough kiss that had had her pinned against the door by Tywin Lannister's solid body.

"I could never," he replied with a satisfied smirk. "I was watching you crossing the yard, you know. And in that very moment, I realized how outrageously beautiful our children will be."

"Children?" she asked playfully.

"Well, why one should marry a younger woman if he'd want just one child? Wouldn't it be a waste?"

"Of course," Aelinor smiled, taking the hint, "I was just pointing out...You've said "children", not "heirs". I think it was sweet." Tywin tilted his head, looking at her intently. He was so near that she could easily recognize his prominent arousal against her belly - she wondered whether there would be time enough to...

"Ah! Sweet!" he then laughed, capturing again her lips with his and taking a firm hold of her hips. Her mouth was hot and welcoming, her tongue ready to battle with his own: oh, how very entertaining would have been, making children with her... She was able to match him apparently in everything that mattered - views about politics and religion, issues of military strategy, ideas about duty and family and status: Aelinor was not Joanna, no one could have ever been like her, but still, she was such a perfect partner for this time of his life... "I wish we could have more time," he murmured against her ear. Aelinor's pelvis matched his gentle movement.

"I wish we could," she sighed.

But the arrival of the Queen has just been announced, and the trial would have started in a few minutes.

Chapter End Notes
Just a little Alert ;)
I finally found a reliable timetable of the events (I prefer following the ASOIAF timetable rather the one from GOT) and I now have a clearer idea about how many days went by between Joffrey's death and the trial against Tyrion (and, inevitably, Tywin's murder). I plan therefore to make some slight adjustment in the previous chapters, just to make them fit better into the timeline - as soon as I'll find the time! RL is quite stressful, these days :(
Chapter 33

The Throne room was crowded and Aelinor Marbrand decided it would have been wiser to remain on the edge of the audience. She had no desire to draw attention, and mostly because what she had said to Tywin the night before was utterly true: she dreaded the moment when Cersei would have known of her father's marriage. The last thing she wanted, therefore, was to be seen at the trial - she needed to be just one face in a sea of faces, nothing more.

As Tywin entered the room, though, and sat on the Iron Throne, Aelinor knew he had immediately located her: there had been a look - brief, void of expression, almost bored - and an imperceptible clench of his jaw, and she knew. He had seen her. He had looked for her. She blushed.

Witnesses were interviewed and it was clear from the very beginning that Tyrion's situation was doomed to get worse - Aelinor wasn't exactly sure she share the queen's confidence about the Imp's guilt, but it was also true that ignoring the fact that the every piece of evidence was apparently, and solidly, against him was getting difficult.

"Dear sister, what a surprise." Aelinor turned suddenly around to find her brother the Commander smiling at her side. He was a soldier, he was almost ten years older than she was, yet there he was, smirking at her as if they were attending nothing more than a social engagement like any other... She rolled her eyes. How incorrigible. She smiled back as he continued, "I seem to recall you'd said you weren't interested in the trial... Am I wrong?"

"No, you're right, it's just..." She paused, uncertain. Was that the moment to tell him what was going to happen? "Let's say that things are changed, so I changed my mind." She risked a glance towards the throne. Although apparently focused on ser Boros' witness, Tywin was looking in their direction. "May I ask you to come with me just a moment, brother?"

Ser Addam Marbrand nodded, his brows furrowed, and followed her out of the room. "Is everything alright?" he asked worriedly as soon as they were alone. Aelinor looked down at her hands. There was no easy way.

"I have accepted a proposal, brother."

"Well, what can I say, it was about time!" exclaimed the Commander of the City Watch. His sister's silence made him suddenly suspicious, though. "Does Father know?"

"No."

"It's someone he would disapprove of, isn't it?"

"I haven't the slightest idea about what father could think of it, frankly. What I know is that we need to keep the fact quite... private, at least for the time being."

"Are you pregnant?" he blurted.

"What? No!" she replied outraged. You don't know whether you are, and surely it's not for lack of occasions, said a voice in the back of her head. But there was no need for her brother to know such details. "It's just... With everything that's going on, you know."

"Why marry now, then?"

"I'm positive this is none of your business."
"Oh, I see," he said, unimpressed. "And who's this man, pray?" Aelinor's eyes darted towards the closed door and her brother's brows arched skeptically. "Surely not the king!"

"Of course not!" she replied, but her voice suddenly failed her when she continued, "The Hand."

"Cat got your tongue, sister? I didn't hear a word."

She knew perfectly well how the palace was not the place to say such things out loud, so she reached out to hug her brother. As her mouth was close to his ear, and only then, she whispered. "The Hand."
"The-

"Shut up!" She hissed urgently, pressing her hand on his mouth. Ser Addam nodded.

"Are you crazy? Is he crazy?"

"Oh, well, thank you very much..."

Ser Addam Marbrand held his sisters by her arm, preventing her to put any distance between them. "You have to admit it's quite unbelievable. You, and... Why? How?"

"I suppose it just happened. He believes this would be good for the Lannisters, good for the West - and you must admit, it's a great display of trust towards our house."

"Well... Surely father won't ever dream to object!"

"Will you give me away, then?"

"Yes, yes, of course, but... Why not involve father?" Aelinor sighed.

"I told you. It's...safer this way. Think of all the dreadful things which could happen if my raven should fall in the wrong hands... Only a few people will know, for the moment. You, maybe ser Kevan. And the sept, of course."

"Not even Jaime?"

"Not even ser Jaime, exactly. Be sensible, brother: an event as big as this wedding could be read so easily as a lack of respect towards the Crown, given the circumstances... And yes, yes, I am scared to death by the sole thought of her reaction. If you tell Jaime, she'll know in a blink. And I'll probably be dead a moment later."

"Sister..."

"What, now? Do you really think she'll be happy when she'll realize her father is going to marry again, and a woman younger than her, no less, a woman thereby more than capable to give him a new heir, with both his sons out of the way? Do I really need to explain what she has to lose?"

Ser Addam inhaled. He was aware that his sister has grown, of course he was. She had backed from - how many? Four? Five? - at least four betrothals, she had built for herself a life made of books, knowledge, strategy, and sheer logical behaviour. Now she had just told him she was about to marry the most powerful man Westeros had ever seen. It was unexpected, yes. Still, if he thought of it, it was not completely illogical. It was rather, to some degree, almost foreseeable. Aelinor had rejected every suitor their father had presented to her out of having found them "dull" or "boring", "moronic", "insignificant" or "disheartening"... Surely Tywin Lannister was the right kind of man to challenge her mind. As strange as that arrangement could seem, ser Addam was starting to believe it'd have been a good match. With all the benefits of being again related to the Lannisters, obviously.

"Be careful, Aelinor, please." He bent down to kiss her cheeks. "And let me know when... When my presence will be required."

They soundlessly entered again into the Throne room, where one of the Kettleblack was telling the
court about the threat Tyrion allegedly made against the queen before the Battle of the Blackwater. Once again, Aelinor found the Old Lion looking in her direction; she looked back at him and nodded imperceptibly.

The ghost of a smile danced for the briefest of moments on the Hand's lips.
"Weren't you the one complaining about the age gap?" Aelinor asked, trying to regain at least a bit of her composure by passing her hands through her hair. Thinking of composure was out of the question, though: the bed was a complete mess and she was lying in the wrong direction, prone, with Tywin now unashamedly using her bottom as a pillow.

"So what?"

"So what? So what? You wore me out! You..."

"Oh, did I?"

"Stop playing innocent, Tywin, it doesn't suit you."

"Are you complaining?" Aelinor gently shifted her position and finally sat up, facing him.

"No woman in her right mind could ever dream of complaining about what you just did to me."

The Old Lion stretched lazily, holding out a hand for her to reach him. "I did nothing special, honestly. I simply enjoyed my future wife screaming my name... So loud that probably there will be no need to keep quiet the news of the wedding," he chuckled. "There's a chance that every soul in the Red Keep have heard you, you know."

"You can't just, well, maybe stop gloating, can you."

"Do you know," he began, starting to kiss his way to her cleavage, "Do you know how much time has passed since the last time I made a woman so young scream of pleasure?"

Here it was, Aelinor thought - it always happened: at some point, between sex and sleep, Tywin's control over his emotions slipped for a moment, every time, and as much as she treasured those brief moments she couldn't help to wonder whether he regretted them once he regained his full self-control. She decided not to get the things too emotional, for both their sakes.

"If I recall correctly, I'd say about twenty-two hours..." His laugh came out muffled, his mouth being busy with her breasts.

"You'd have made a great accountant," he pointed out, kissing her white flesh.

"You could put in a good word for me with the Iron Bank, then," she mocked him - her head was abandoned against the pillow, arousal building up again as Tywin indulged himself in gently and intently sucking her left nipple.

"Wouldn't you rather stay here?" he asked, shifting his attention to the right breast.

"Oh, I don't know... Won't you get tired of me?"
Sprawled on the bed with her lower back over the edge of the mattress and Tywin Lannister between her legs, Aelinor Marbrand was, simply put, delighted. She who never before had knelt in front of a man was now the recipient of ministrations from the very one man who rarely had knelt in front of kings and now was kneeling for her. And Aelinor, with her prominent taste for theatrics and symbolism, found it all extremely exciting and flattering.

The Old Lion was rock hard inside her - and judging by his stamina, as she had pointed out earlier, not exactly as old as he claimed to be. Definitely not, she thought vaguely as he improved the pace of his strokes and lowered himself until his mouth came to rest on her stomach. Even in the fog of their coupling, she found the gesture deeply touching, probably even more intimate than their...lower regions' connection. That kiss on the soft, pale skin of her stomach was going to be her undone more than his strong, regular, stimulating hammering: and she caressed his head, gently inviting him to prolong that contact.

Tywin, on his part, saw no reason to complain. Whereas he was never a man to say no to a brief, quite rough shag like the one they got close to before the trial that very morning, he had to admit that he was quite enjoying this new routine... And most of all, he was enjoying her. Maybe he was not a man inclined to admit it, but he was growing quite fond of her, and every time she looked at him - not necessarily during their rather frequent intercourses - he found himself more attracted towards her. She was undeniably beautiful, although not exactly in the conventional way - she was a bit too tall, and her tongue was a bit too sharp, but oh gods, what a wife she was going to be. Clever. Attractive. Willing. Self-confident.

Together, he thought, they would have made the most envied and powerful couple in the Seven Kingdoms. A moment later he was spending himself into her once again, her inner muscles willingly milking him for every last drop.

Spent in Aelinor's warm embrace, now, and gently dozing off, the Old Lion of Lannister realized - not without consternation - that the memory of Joanna, after twenty-seven years of mourning, was finally beginning to fade.
Oddly enough, Aelinor was apparently unable to convince herself to do the right thing. She was sat on the edge of the bed, her feet on the floor, and she knew perfectly well what the right thing was: getting up, getting dressed, going back to her quarters. Still, she seemed unable to. She had been sat in that same position for at least ten minutes, and nevertheless, she hadn't been able to move a single muscle. Perfectly still and naked, she was trying to regain at least a bit of determination - and almost freezing in the process, the night being chill and quite windy.

"What are you doing?" came Tywin's voice from behind her. She didn't turn.

"Trying to do the right thing, apparently in vain."

"What would it be, this right thing you're trying to do?"

"I should be going."

"Mh," he mumbled. She felt him move and she could almost see him - propped up on an elbow, his brows arched, a sardonic smile on his lips. "Why?"

"Oh, please," she snorted. "This is the Tower of the Hand. It would be quite inappropriate if someone should find me still here in the morning."

Another movement behind her back.

Tywin's hands landed gently on her hips, thumbs lightly kneading her back.

"No one said a word when Tyrion brought here his whores. Let them dare to say anything about my wife."

This time, Aelinor couldn't help to turn around and she did it with a soft smile, raising a hand to cup his cheek. "I'm not your wife."

"Not yet. But we can arrange for you to be my wife in no time, you know that, don't you? First thing tomorrow, if you like."

"I hate to remind you that your "first thing tomorrow" is the second hearing of the trial..."

"Well, it certainly won't last the whole day. What about later in the afternoon? Would it suit you?"

Aelinor's eyes widened. "Are you serious?"

"I'm not known for being a man who loves jokes, you know," he smirked. He took her hand and bring it to his lips, leaving a trail of kisses between the palm and the inside of her wrist. "What do you say, then?" She pulled back her hand, and bring it back again to cup his cheek - a kiss like the one he deserved needed to be given the right way - bending towards him to kiss him. Despite the burning, sometimes rough passion which had marked the start of their relationship, and despite the intensity of their encounters, that kiss was slow, sweet, full of intimacy and tenderness. In some respects, it was more...grown up. An adult kiss. A mature kiss.

"I say yes," she smiled against his lips. She found herself extremely surprised, though, as soon as Tywin's arms closed around her. Was it really what it seemed? Was Tywin Lannister hugging her? He was. And it was even clearer when he spoke softly against her ear.
"Stay, then. Sleep with me."

She did.
Not entirely awake, Aelinor opened lazily one eye and cast a glance to the man sleeping next to her. Was it real? That would be the day she’d become the new Lady of Casterly Rock? She couldn’t believe it. Yes, that was the story her sore muscles told; and yes, that was undeniably what Tywin had said the night before; but how on earth could she be reassured it was not just a vivid dream?

She had dreamt about that man for the most part of her adult life. She had always had, as they say, a thing for him - something that made her insides scream of desire, to be more precise. And now she was asked to believe she would have been his wife in a matter of hours? It had to be a dream, a trick of her mind. A long, satisfying, dream.

He grunted softly, on the edge of the awakening, and Aelinor shook her head. It was no dream.

Without really thinking, she pressed a kiss on his bare shoulder, inhaling the scent of his freckled skin. Oh, she liked that freckles so outrageously much.

"Someone's awake, then," he mumbled.

"So it seems."

That said, Aelinor got up, climbing out of bed for no reason at all - no other than showing off a bit, it goes without saying. She went slowly to the jug and basin into the farther corner of the room and poured the water. She had barely dipped her hands in the basin when Tywin’s hands closed possessively on her hips. "You'll catch a cold, standing here naked, you know?"

Aelinor's lips twitched. "Seems to me I've caught a lion," she teased, gently grinding backwards against his awakening arousal.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone!
I'm not dead, neither I've abandoned this story... But thank you for your concern! Just a bit of RL that got in the middle... Too many things, too little time... As usual! I'm very sorry for the delay in the updates, very very very sorry!!!

Enjoy this little moment of passion, and let me know what you think!

Tywin's right hand travelled down, reaching for her folds; his fingers stroked gently the sensitive flesh there, eliciting a soft moan from her - he was not really surprised to find her wet and willing to give in... He was under the strong impression that she'd never made such a show in front of him if it weren't the case. He was so intrigued by her, he had to admit it - his middle finger probed tentatively at her opening.

"I could just have you here and now, you know," he growled against her neck.

"Surely it'd be a pleasant way to start the day," Aelinor agreed, her hand reaching backwards trying to take a hold on him.

"Mh." Tywin's mouth was hot against her neck's skin as he deliberately pushed forward, making her aware of his desire; her hand squeezed him affectionately, then let him go. It was quite clear he had other plans than a quick handjob.

It all happened of a sudden - he had guided her to turn around, and a moment later she found herself pinned against the tapestry, off her feet, ready to be impaled on his waiting cock... She let go a moan. "Should I take it as a hint?" she asked playfully. Tywin paused, eyebrows furrowed, so she nodded at the tapestry. "A lion in front of me, a lion behind me...there is something you're trying to tell me?"

The Hand smiled - an amused, predatory smile. "Definitely not," he chuckled. "I'm not a sharing man."

"Oh, really."

He lowered her on his member, entering her completely in one movement. Aelinor gasped and closed her eyes, enjoying the sensation. "Yes, really," Tywin whispered against her ear, punctuating his words with strokes. "I don't share what's mine," he went on, "I won't share you with anyone."

Riding the wave of pleasure his strong thrusts were giving to her, Aelinor gripped his shoulder to steady herself, then asked with a broken voice: "Are we implying I'm yours, then? I guess..." her voice failed her, due to his increasing speed, but she persisted, "I guess this is your last chance to back out...Oh goodness, Tywin!"

He kept pumping steadily into her, hammering her against the wall and silencing every other mocking objection she could have. As she finally - and again, and this time in the messy peak of the orgasm - cried out his name, he let his self-control loosen, and spent himself inside her with a satisfied grunt.
"I guess this is the answer to your question," he smiled, helping her back to her feet.
Chapter 40

Sat on the Iron Throne, Tywin Lannister was bored.

Upset by the apparently endless line of witnesses, too, yes: but mostly, he was bored. Words were always the same - he strongly suspected that Cersei was behind all of that, but honestly, how blame her? - and after the first three, four witnesses even voices had started to be the same... Whereas he had a beautiful, smart, amusing bride-to-be waiting for him.

He let his gaze wander around the room, lazily looking for her - she wasn't there, predictably, but neither was her brother: the absence of Addam Marbrand gave him the measure of how late it surely was. He suppressed a groan at Lady Taena Merryweather. Insufferable woman. Other faces, other words, new nails to seal his son's fate: Tywin tried to push the thought out of his mind. He was there as Hand of the King. As a judge.

Then other faces came and went, other words, new nails to seal his son's fate: Tywin tried to push the thought out of his mind. He was there as Hand of the King. As a judge.

"Go to him. Bring to him my offer. Guilty, and the black."

"You should talk to him yourself," scoffed ser Kevan as they left the Throne Room.

"I have things to do. Important things. Oh, and by the way - meet me at the Sept in an hour, will you."

Ser Kevan watched his brother walk away, eyebrows furrowed. He had no clue of what was going on and it bothered it more than anything else in the world. He hadn't seen Tywin so indifferent to what surrounded him since...No, he thought. Surely that was not the case.
Chapter 41

Gold.

He had turned his head towards the doors and found himself trying not to gasp for air.

Aelinor was wearing gold.

The low light of the sunset was filtering through the tall windows in soft, bronze-colored blades - and she was wearing gold.

"You always had a good taste, this I must admit," Kevan whispered to his ear. Tywin didn't reply.

Now that she was nearer he could see better - and her dress wasn't exactly gold: an intricate embroidery of golden leaves adorned the ochre fabric, with special care to the area of the - low, almost heart-shaped - neckline. The dark grey cloak hanging from her shoulders seemed the perfect frame for her to shine. The effect was majestic.

Her brother's gold cape was only adding more glow to the chromatic perfection of the scene.

As she and her brother finally reached him, and ser Addam left her at Tywin's side, the Old Lion bent slightly towards Aelinor, a crooked, amused smile on his lips.

"Burning bright, indeed," he complimented her. Quite shocked, ser Kevan's eyes met ser Addam's.
Chapter 42

While it was quite clear that the brothers of both the bride and groom were, to say the least, dumbfounded, it was equally conspicuous that on the other side the couple was finding increasingly difficult not to share even the briefest of amused expressions.

The septon was a stutter.

Or petrified by terror.

Most probably, both.

"You m-m-may now..." It took Aelinor all her strength not to roll her eyes. "You m-may now c-c-cloak the b-b...the b-bride and b-b-bring..."

"...And bring her under my protection. Yes," cut short Tywin as Aelinor started to bite her lower lip trying not to laugh. Then he took the one step he needed to place himself behind her and - with inner satisfaction - took off the cloak that she had around her shoulders. The dark cloak with the burning tree of House Marbrand was carelessly handed to the awaiting ser Addam; Tywin extended an arm towards his brother, who promptly handed to him the red cloak where an impressive lion was embroidered in gold. The Old Lion put it around Aelinor's shoulders and in doing so he slightly bent over, just a few inches more than what was necessary: he was indulging in the sensation, she knew it - she knew him.

"My lords, my l-l-l..." The septon cast a quick look around. Ladies? What ladies?

"My l-l-lords, we stand here in the sight of g-g-gods and m-m-men to...to witness the union of m-m-man a-a-and wife. One f-f-flesh, one heart, one s-s-s...one soul, now and f-f-forever."

Aelinor wasn't able to take her eyes off their intertwined hands as the septon started to tie the ribbon. She couldn't believe it. Surely it was a dream. "Let it b-b-be known that Aelinor of House M-Marbrand and... and Tywin of House Lannister" and no one was surprised when the poor man didn't stammer over the groom's name "are one heart, one flesh, one soul. C-c-cursed be he who would s-seek to tear them asunder. In the s-s-sight of the S-seven, I hereby seal these t-t-two souls, b-binding them as one for eternity." No, thought Aelinor. It was no dream. The sensation of the knot unraveling against her skin was so concrete - and concrete was the quick, affectionate squeeze Tywin gave to her fingers.

"L-l-look upon each other and s-s-say the words."

Shivering, Aelinor turned to face Tywin. Possibly for the first time, she couldn't recognize his expression. "Father, Smith, Warrior, Mother, Maiden, Crone, Stranger..." she said, echoing his baritonal voice. And then he smiled. Aelinor found herself barely able to keep speaking, for now, alongside that smile, Tywin's eyes were deeply buried into hers and she was overwhelmed by the intensity of that look. "I am hers and she is mine. From this day, until the end of my days."
Chapter 43

There they were, Tywin thought. They were married.

He had just married again.

And, truth to be told, he didn't feel guilty a bit.

He had felt the light shaking of Aelinor's hand in his as they said the vows and he'd been deeply touched by such an emotional display: for a moment he had even thought of stop and just take her into his arms, soothe her, tell her that she had nothing to worry about, for he...But he had hesitated even in his mind, pushing away the word it was too soon to say. But he cared for her, that he knew for sure. And in recognizing her fingers trembling into his he had also realized how deeply he cared for her.

"With this kiss, I pledge my love," he said finally, and to the surprise of every single living soul in the room, including him, there had been not the slightest hesitation in his voice as the last word had left his mouth. What was that?, he asked to himself, A moment of weakness? A sign? The sign, maybe, that really he was doing the right thing? He drew her near, then, and kissed her - for what was supposed to be the first time. How inaccurate.

No one applauded, though, when they turned to face the audience.

Both ser Kevan and ser Addam were looking at them quizzically.

"Was it such a prolonged kiss you turned into stone out of boredom?" asked Tywin casually. Aelinor smiled to her brother - who was, yes, petrified, but because despite the fact he had suspected that such a marriage would have been a good match he could never have imagined they would have been so...So outrageously well-suited. She had never looked more radiant, of that ser Addam was sure. And that Lord Tywin, too, could seem so genuinely satisfied, well, only added to his astonishment.

"Let me compliment you for my new sister-in-law, brother," said ser Kevan with a sincere, open smile. Aelinor's direct gaze nailed him almost defiantly.

"I'm here, dear brother-in-law. You could just compliment me, you know."

This time, Kevan Lannister chuckled. "Oh, Tywin. Genna will definitely love her."
“You’ll never believe what Uncle Kevan told -” Up in the Hand’s bedchambers the Queen, who had just turned to face the door as soon as she had heard the footsteps approaching, froze on the spot, words dying in her throat. “And what does this suppose to mean?” she asked rudely, seeing his father was not alone.

Aelinor’s hand reached out for Tywin's, fingers closing desperately around his. The Old Lion, on his part, didn’t even blink. He had reassuringly welcomed her panicky gesture, but his eyes were now fixed on his daughter with something too similar to annoyance.

“It means my brother, as disappointed as I am in him in the present moment, was telling the truth, and I find bothersome that you needed to be told when it’s quite evident.”

“The King—my son! Your own grandson!—has been murdered and you waste your time with a wedding? My child is dead and all you can think of is to replace Mother?”

That hurt, Aelinor felt her husband’s whole body tense. And still, he didn’t show the least emotion.

“Were it another day, believe me when I say I wouldn’t hold back so easily from slapping you,” Tywin stated calmly. “But as it happens, it’s been a long day in court, I just married a fine, lovely woman that only in your wildest dreams you could hope to be like to, and as you can imagine your presence is no more required, given the kind of activities newlywed couple usually involve themselves into on their wedding night.”

“You can’t dismiss me with that tone! I am the Queen!” roared Cersei. Once again, her father didn’t even flinch.

“It’s about time you begin to behave like one, then. You can leave us alone, now, thank you very much.”
"Why gold, then? Far be it from me to complain, but... How did it come up?" he asked, pouring two glasses of wine.

"White didn't seem...fitting, given the circumstances," came promptly her reply. There had been no spirit in her tone, though, and Tywin turned to look at her, brows furrowed.

"Is everything alright?"

"Yes... Yes," she repeated, accepting the glass he was extending to her. She took a sip, trying to regain her usual composure.

"You're upset."

"It's nothing, Tywin, really. I just needed a glass of wine, it was a..."

"A long day, yes, yes, I know." He paused and took a step towards her. "What did she said?"

Aelinor was perfectly aware she could have lied. She could have just put up a good, old-fashioned silence. Still, she knew also that he would have never left it alone.

Cersei had stopped in front of her on her way out and had gripped her in a grotesque imitation of a hug. Welcome to our family, dear, she had stated.

"It was not particularly original, I'm afraid. Quite predictable." She took another sip. Yes, Cersei's words had been predictable. And to a certain extent, probably they contained a bit of truth, too. Aelinor knew that, and has always been ok with that, still...

"Tell me anyway."

Not wanting him to see how much the Queen's words had affected her, Aelinor's eyes wandered away for a long moment.

"Something about me being nothing more than a breeding cow, essentially." Tywin's jaw clenched and she went on quickly, "Don't blame her, please. After all, it was part of our deal, wasn't it?"

"Oh, Aelinor." He had put down the glass on the table and now he was in front of her, hands on her shoulders. "Cersei is a bitter, unhappy woman. You can't let her mortify you."

"She's just lost her boy, it's only reasonable that..."

"She's always been a bitter, unhappy woman. I guess to some extent it's my fault, isn't it."

"Tywin..."

"But you're not to blame. Not for the past, and even less for today. Let's focus on the important things."

"Such as?"

"Such this," he said, caressing her arms all the way to her hands. He brings her palms to his lips and kissed them, slowly and affectionately. "You are my wife."
"She's your daughter, though."

"And she's a grown woman. Her own woman. It took me twenty-seven years to marry again, Aelinor. Twenty-seven. Of course she's furious. Of course she'll try again to call you names. But I chose you. You, no-one else. Do you think that not a single House, in all these years, had tried to offer me a daughter?"

"Well, no, but..."

"Still, in less than two weeks, here's where we stand. I'm married to a beautiful, smart woman - who had a juvenile crush on me, no less! - and I'm looking forward to being a father again, and..."

Aelinor was touched by those words. Deeply. She felt she could have thrown her arms around his neck and hugged him so tight it would be too improper, even for a wife. So, she resorted to what she was better at.

"AH! Ah! You see? You're trying and tricking me into becoming a breeding cow!"

Tywin Lannister laughed heartily.

"Don't be silly, my dear. You're a lioness, now. And there is no such thing as a breeding lioness, as far as I know - and believe me: I know a great deal about things like this."
"Should I assume that after all, you care for me a little?" Aelinor mocked him, hands still intertwined. She felt better, definitely more serene, now; it was bizarre how much power to soothe her he had acquired despite the objective shortness of their mutual knowledge.

"What on earth do I have to do to persuade you, girl?" he growled, then suddenly stopped, aghast. Had he just said it for real? Aelinor freed her hands from his and raised them to his face. She cupped his cheek softly, savouring his short beard's grazing against her palms, and smiled.

"Kiss me, my Lord. Please."

Tywin obliged. He needed time, time to think, time to rebuild some wall. So he took that time, his time, and did it by kissing her - passionately, warmly, desperately. He put all of himself in that kiss - those kisses, by now - and oddly enough he wasn't apparently able to go back to being his usual self. His body was starting to react unmistakably to her, drawn by the attraction he had felt for her from the start, only that this time his mind refused to cooperate. She had been affected by Cersei's words and he had told her not to let herself be touched by it; still, here he was, worried sick for her, upset because of what his daughter had said to her. Tywin Lannister had married the daughter of one of his own most reliable allies, had married her mainly out of sheer strategy, and now what? Was he getting soft? Was he getting senile for real? Was that whole idea of his redemption nothing more than a nice fairy-tale he had told himself to have an alibi for such a blatantly embarrassing behaviour?

He finally broke the kiss, finally leaving both her and himself time enough to regain their breath.

"You make me weak, you know."

"Is that a bad thing?"

"Men in my position don't look favourably at the idea of having weak spots, you know."

"I know. But frankly - I can't say I'm sorry."

Tywin's eyes fixed upon her lips, reddened and swollen from the recent kissing; she was so utterly beautiful. Her amused grin did the rest.

And he scooped her up, and she laughed, and when he finally let her down it was on his - their, now - bed but she didn't let him go and they both fell on the mattress, doubling up with laughter.

"I can't recall the last time I laughed so much," he admitted minutes later, laying on his back and staring at the ceiling as he hugged her against his chest.

"Me neither. Definitely not what people usually think of when speaking about wedding night, I'd say."

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder..." he mocked her. Aelinor propped herself up in order to look at him. She was dead serious now.

"Listen to me, for I'm going to say it once." She pressed her lips together for a brief moment, then took a deep breath. "It can't possibly grow fonder."
"Should I assume that after all, you care for me a little?", Tywin mimicked her, but deep down he was grateful for her words.

"You're an incorrigible, unsuffering man, Lord Tywin."

"As it happens I'm your incorrigible, unsuffering husband, Lady Aelinor, and I plan to take advantage of it as soon as humanly possible..." he smirked. Aelinor got out of bed and stretched ostentatiously.

"Help me with the dress?" Tywin sat on the mattress.

"I thought you'd never asked."

It was an impressive dress, that could not have been denied. In addition to the deep, rich colour, the exquisite fabric, and the intricate embroidery, there was something about the cut and the design which caught the attention once one took the time to appreciate it fully: it was closed by what apparently was a maze of ribbons and layers but in facts revealed itself as the epitome of not difficult at all. Being sat, Tywin was at the same height of Aelinor's waist and therefore able to look at the dress' structure properly: he drew her between his parted legs, made her turn around a couple of times just for the sake of it, then with absolute self-confidence inserted two fingers in the right intersection of ribbons and pulled. Aelinor's wedding dress came loose around her.

"How did you know?" she asked, a bit upset.

"Never underestimate the resources of an experienced man on his wedding night..." His hands slid under the fabric and he pushed it away, leaving her in nothing else than the thin, white camisole and corset.

"I'll keep it in mind," she smiled. He was already loosening her corset with apparently no effort at all. "I'm positive you deserve a little something for being so good at undressing your wife, don't you think?"

"I most definitely agree," Tywin nodded as she lowered herself in front of him and started to unfasten his breeches. "Stand before your god, bow before your king, kneel before your man," she quoted.

"And where does this come from?" he asked, amused.

"A woman told me, long time ago."

"Judging by what you told me before, you didn't often put it into practice, though."

"True. But as you can easily see, there's a time for everything," Aelinor pointed out, fingers closing gently around his member.
The words Aelinor's quoting are actually a quote...not from ASOIAF, though, but from Terry Pratchett's Lords and Ladies... I thought it was appropriate, given the circumstances! Cheers!
The complex combination of hand's and wrist's movement made easily Tywin hard under her zealous ministrations. Aelinor, who had known all along how much he would have liked it, grinned in satisfaction when a guttural groan erupted from his throat.

She ducked her head and licked him slowly, achingly slowly, from base to tip; then she looked at his face and - not before mischievous, naughty grin - she finally took him inside her mouth. Tywin's hips seconded her movement. Crawled between his legs, one hand grazing his thigh and the other cupping his balls, Aelinor was taking her time in sucking and licking him, bobbing her head cautiously in order to take it all. Her lips slid up and down his shaft with no rush, patiently building up both his excitement and her own - then she let him go, indulged a few moments around the tip, and looked up at his face. He was puzzled, but not too much: her hand now closed around him and pumping prevented him from despair in a satisfactory outcome.

And Aelinor did what Tywin had secretly hoped since the first time his hands had landed on her breasts. She interrupted briefly their contact, in order to finally remove her thin camisole, and straightened up on her knees; when she reached for him again, she did it bending slightly over, her bosom naked and tempting and ready to accommodate him. Encased between her breasts and slick from both her saliva and his own precum, Tywin pushed and retreat as she massaged him - he did it just once, at first, wanting to savour the sensation in every possible way. A moment later, though, the view in front of his eyes and the whole idea that that was his wife, his wife, took over his self-control and the Old Lion started to thrust with determination, squeezing himself in the tight space provided by her pushing her breasts towards him; Aelinor seconded his movements, matching his thrusts with a gentle, constant swaying.

Tywin slowed down and held her by her shoulders. "As much as I like it, there are certain ways I'd rather not to leave my wife into when I reach my pleasure," he told her softly. She smiled. As far as she would have been willing to go for him, she had to admit that having to clean her face and cleavage from his cum was not her favourite option. She was struck by the fact he shared her opinion - even when she didn't ever mention it to him once.

"I won't complain, I assure you," she agreed. "Not my favourite outcome, either..."

Tywin helped her to her feet and placed his hands on her hips. "You are so utterly beautiful," he whispered, hands travelling on their own accord down her thighs, then back, up, slowly and deliberately, to her folds. He rubbed a finger along the moist opening, a grunt of approval in the back of his throat. Aelinor shivered and reached for his hand, determined to keep it there and guiding it to pleasure her.
"I'd say I should return the favor," Tywin smirked, stroking slowly with his fingers against her wet folds. Aelinor, her legs trembling, nodded absentmindedly and let him maneuver her to sit on the bed. As soon as she reached the mattress, her body slumped on the soft surface, overwhelmed by arousal and tension. Tywin parted her legs and knelt between them, immediately resuming his previous occupation.

Aelinor's eyes closed. She wasn't strong enough to look at his face between her legs, she knew it - she had to not to think of it, or it would have surely been enough to make her come. Like that. The thought was just enough to push her over the edge, she knew it; so she closed her eyes and let him run the game. When his tongue lapped at her folds for the first time, she took a desperate hold on the sheet. And heard him chuckle. Then he inserted a finger into her and kept devouring her, licking and sucking at her clit, and Aelinor's hands went rapidly south, reaching for the back of his head, scraping his scalp in appreciation.

He treasured each moan her lips let escape, each and every one. He was rock hard, yes, but in a way - a bizarre way - pleasuring her was, all of a sudden, the first thing he could think of. She deserved it. Tywin inserted another finger, crooking it a little, and his wife's back arched towards him - a moment later, she was coming, screaming and trembling, her eyes tight shut and full of stars.

"Take me," she exhaled, spreading her legs, even more, to better accommodate him. Tywin obliged, his body readily towering over hers; so, for the first time that night, Tywin Lannister pushed himself inside his newly-wed bride, enjoying their connection - if possible - more than he had done the previous days. She was his, now. Truly his. His, and no-one else's. His hard, pulsing member slid entirely into her, still extremely wet from her orgasm and Tywin started immediately to thrust, so intensely that more than once he recognized the unfamiliar creak of the bed. But how was he supposed to restrain himself?
Chapter 50

Never in her life had Aelinor experienced something like this. It wasn't just the physical side of it - and Tywin was well beyond her previous experiences, in that regard - but it was the **whole** of that, the complete, deep involvement she felt: an involvement so strong and intense it almost scared her.

How had they managed such a transition from *just sex* to *something else* in such a short time, she had no idea. She was holding on his shoulders as he thrust into her, and every time she closed her eyes she didn't see anything else than him, *them*, their future, their shared years to come. Shards of images of a golden, bright, happy future made of intimacy, mutual understanding, challenging arguments, power, and influence - and children, blonde, green-eyed, astonishingly beautiful children... Her nails dig into his flesh as her hips rose to meet his strokes as Tywin lowered himself nearer to her.

"Brace yourself," he whispered into her ear, then he slowed the rhythm and helped her to raise her legs more - her right even landed on his shoulder, leaving her totally exposed and open to him. A swift motion later, he was deeply buried into her again, the change of angle stimulating her so strongly she thought she was about to die out of pleasure.

"Oh, Tywin, please," she exhaled, voice broken, "please, please, fast-oh seven hells yes!"

A few fast, shorter strokes after, she was clenching to his biceps and scratching his skin while crying out his name like a blasphemous prayer. Tywin came with a low, feral groan, and emptied himself into her before sliding to her side in order to not crush her. Aelinor extended her arm and gently stroke his face.

"We're going to be so happy," she told him softly.

For once, he didn't feel any desire to correct the word. *Happy* just seemed fitting.
"Are you coming to the trial?" Tywin asked, clasping the chain of Hand of the King. He was fully dressed and ready to leave and there was a hint of amusement in his voice: Aelinor was still in bed, curled under the covers.

"I don't know."

"You did never miss a hearing, till then. Why this change of heart?"

"I'd rather not to meet the Queen, yes - I know perfectly well it was what you were implying, and yes, that's exactly the reason. Call me childish, but..."

Tywin sat down on the bed, facing her, his right hand pressed against the blankets at the other side of her hips - it gave her an uncommon sensation, both of been trapped in front of a predator and treasured by a powerful guardian. His free hand caressed her bare shoulder.

"You know what I usually say, don't you. A lion doesn't concern..."

"But she's not a sheep, she's a lion, too. Whereas I'm nothing but a tree, and..."

"A burning tree, but now you are also a lion. My young lioness."

Aelinor's eyebrow arched. "Your pet, by the sound of it."

To her disappointment, he laughed. Heartily. "No one in his right mind could call you a pet, wife. No one in his right mind could possibly want such a fierce pet!"

Her frown smoothed to a mischievous smile. A retort was yet on the tip of her tongue, but then she realized, and her smile widened even more. "You just called me wife."

"Isn't it who you are?"

"Yes, but..."

"Second thoughts?" Her hand reached for his, fingers promptly intertwining on their own accord. Aelinor looked at them, then at his face, her eyes buried into his.

"Never."

"I'll see you at the hearing, then?"

"I'm still not comfortable with the prospect of meeting the Queen, you know."

"Her reaction was predictable, you said it yourself. You can't possibly let her have her own way, you're so much better than her..." Aelinor ducked her head to better indulge in the feel of his hand cupping her cheek, then raised her own hand to the nape of his neck in order to guide him nearer. A slow, warm kiss sealed her appreciation.
"You're not supposed to remain so far from the stage, you know."

Aelinor's back stiffened, but she managed to show a radiant smile when she turned towards the voice. "I like this way, your Grace. This is not about me, it wouldn't be right to steal the attention."

"Noble thought, indeed," the Queen nodded, "If only you had thought about it earlier..."

"I did," Aelinor replied curtly. Cersei was the Queen regent, and a dangerous woman, but she kept on hearing Tywin's voice in her head and it gave her strength: if Tywin Lannister was on her side despite it was the side opposite to his daughter's, how could she be afraid of said daughter?

"Did you," hissed the Queen. Aelinor opposed her another wide smile.

"Yes. I could have asked for the bigger, most luxurious wedding the Seven Kingdom had ever seen. I could have had a ceremony fit for a queen. Your father would have given it to me, you know. Instead, we agreed to keep things low-key and understated, in order not to disrespect your mourning. So yes, I did, I voluntarily gave up the flamboyant wedding I could have had, and I did it out of respect towards you and your loss. I did. Yes."

That said, the young Lady Lannister turned on her heels and left the fuming Queen with no more words.

"I didn't give you the permission to leave."

"I am sorry if I have misread the signs, then. I was under the impression that there was nothing more to say..."

"He will get tired of you, mark my words. He always ends up getting tired."

"Does he?" Aelinor asked, dripping pretended innocence. "Then please, your Grace, remind me: how many other women did he actually marry, during these last twenty-seven years?" Another smile accompanied her words, a smile which didn't reach her eyes. Cersei didn't reply.

When Aelinor finally turned around, the feeling of being observed made her look for Tywin - and then she saw him, staring at her while listening to Maester Pycelle and the Spider. He nodded towards her and Aelinor knew he had silently observed every moment of the exchange between his daughter and his wife - and that, judging by his pleased expression, he was also quite happy with the outcome.
"I saw you with Cersei, this morning," Tywin said flatly, looking at his wife while eating grapes. She had played with her food all along, distractedly.

"Yes."

"You seemed satisfied, then, though."

"I still am, it's just... Nothing, truth to be told. Nothing special. Never mind."

"Spare me this ridicule pantomime, please. No one could really believe that nothing special of yours - and you're too clever to even hope I could believe it. You won't hurt me telling me my daughter bullied you, you know, at least for what concerns her. I know her and I know she can be despicable, and a further evidence surely won't affect me. You don't have to protect me from the truth, my lady."

Aelinor nodded and gave him a small smile before standing up and leave the table. She was...no, not upset, no; she was perfectly aware she was not upset. Still, she wasn't able to give that feeling a name, either. She felt, above everything else, weak - and she couldn't stand the idea of letting Tywin see her weakness. She leaned against the windowsill, her gaze lost into the distance. She was so deep in her own thoughts that when Tywin's hands landed on her hips she startled.

"Oh, dear, sorry, I was... Gods, I did forget you were here," she apologized. Tywin made her turn around and cupped her face.

"Tell me what's wrong, Aelinor."

"Just a little sadness, don't worry, just..." She tried to shake her head dismissively, but as soon as Tywin's thumb softly caressed her cheek she couldn't help to sob. A moment later he had his arms around her, holding her against his chest as her tears finally broke out. Where has all her determination gone? she wondered, clinging to him for dear life. The longer he hugged her, the safer she felt - the quicker she melted against him. The deeper her feelings for him dug into her soul.

"I'll talk to her. And after that, believe me, she won't even think of..."

"No, please. Leave it alone. I can manage, Tywin, really. Yes, I am well aware our current positions could make one think otherwise, but I can manage."

"I can't stand to see you like that," he admitted. Aelinor moved slightly, just enough to look at him.

"You're hugging me," she pointed out playfully, despite her eyes still reddened and shiny from the recent tears.

"You were crying," he replied in the same tone. They were amused, if not surprised, by their mutual display of softness.

"I married a master of disguise, apparently..." she said, both her hands now on his chest.

"Did you?"

"He's always so determined to appear as a cold, distant, insensitive man, you know. Even rough, sometimes! And now, out of the blue, I find out he's a kind, caring..."
"Watch your tongue, woman" he warned her with a stern look. "He's not *absolutely* caring, he's *selectively* caring. And he cares for his wife, of whom he's growing fonder every day."

"You care for me," she exhaled, mesmerized.

"I'm afraid I do. Yes. You're a hell of a woman and I am a total irresponsible but I care for you more than I had planned to."

"Is this a bad thing?" Aelinor asked mockingly.

"Nor good or bad. It's just the reason why you'll tell me what Cersei told you."

"She's quite confident you'll eventually get tired of me," she sighed. It sounded so utterly stupid, now. Tywin frowned and leaned forward, capturing her lips with his own. It was such a good kiss that Aelinor found herself on the brink of tears again.

"And what do you think?" Tywin asked, his left eyebrow arched; Aelinor smirked at him.

"I think it's such a pity we don't have enough time for me to show you how silly you'd be to get tired of me."

"Good," he approved, leaning forward again in order to kiss her another time. "I guess it can wait until tonight..."

"Tonight it is, then."
"Is it true? Am I supposed to call Addam uncle?"

Despite the tension that meeting the Queen always brought her, Aelinor smiled warmly to ser Jaime: his friendship with her brother was old and close, and he had always been kind to her. The laughter in his question was promising, too.

"I'm positive he'll be quite happy to exonerate you, ser."

"Come on, child," he laughed, taking her arm in arm and beginning to stroll away from the Throne Room, "Tell me: how is that you ended up marrying my father? My sister is livid, by the way."

"Don't I know that," Aelinor sighed.

"You can't blame her..."

"And I don't. Really," she assured him. "And to answer your question... Well, I'm not so sure, frankly. It happened, I guess?"

"I do hope you're not talking about love, 'cause no one loves my father - and on the other hand my father loves no-one, and this, I'd say, keeps everything extremely efficient."

Still, he cares for me, thought Aelinor, but not a word left her lips about that.

"I'd rather say we realized we had...common interests, truth to be told," she shot him a mischievous smile and Jaime took the bait.

"Ah, sex!" he laughed loudly. "And to think that I could have sworn that he was a stony, cold, sexless son of a bitch!" He seemed to find his remark funny and Aelinor did not object - let him think it's something this trivial. "He's looking for new heirs, then. Well, I can't honestly blame him for wanting someone more useful than a female, a knight sworn to celibacy, and a dwarf... Good luck with that, little one: father is not one easy to please."

"Oh, let me handle this," she replied vaguely, stressing the verb. Jaime has ever been one for innuendos, she knew it quite well, and she soon had the proof it'd been the right choice of words.

"My word, Cersei could be as furious as she likes but I think this will be great fun..."

Aelinor scoffed. How on earth could a man so shallow have Tywin's blood was one of the greatest mystery she ever stumbled upon in her life.
"So, after all, it's been a good day," Tywin stated, lavishing his wife's bare shoulder in kisses while looking at her into the mirror.

"Jaime has a gift for putting people in a good mood...Or at least, me."

"Should I be jealous, woman?" he asked, "For, you know, it would be quite disappointing, after that I've craved for you all day long."

"All day, no less!" Aelinor exclaimed, and her hand rose to caress the nape of his neck, holding him in that position. Looking at themselves in the mirror was quite weird, but undoubtedly exciting: he had arrived behind her as she had started to comb her hair after letting them down, and she had immediately been aware of the turn that things were going to take. He had helped her to unfasten her dress, lowered his lips to the now bare skin of her neck and shoulder, and most of all he hadn't broken a single time the contact of their eyes through the mirror. It was uncommon, it was new: but Aelinor was strangely aroused by the sight of his hand over her bare right breast.

"Thinking of it, I could even punish you," he mocked her, helping her to her feet without averting his eyes from hers. "I could...let's see...I don't know, taking you here, maybe? In front of the mirror? No doubt it would be interesting, you know, looking at your face while fucking you this way..." Aelinor felt moist pooling inside her - the idea was exciting in itself, but listening to his deep voice while he explained it... She couldn't help to grind against him. "Careful, darling, or I'll end up thinking you're a naughty girl..."

"My naughtiness is very like your tenderness, dear husband: extremely selective."

"You mean to tell me that I am a lucky man?" Tywin asked, amused, lazily kissing the side of her neck.

"You mean to tell me that you didn't notice?" came promptly her reply as she smiled at his reflection.

"Oh, Gods, I'm married to the most humble woman in the Seven Kingdoms!"

Aelinor couldn't suppress a laughter - she laughed and laughed, happily, her head thrown back against Tywin's body. He sneaked both his hands around her and embraced her, literally enchanted by how magnificent they looked like, intertwined like that, in the reflection. His body reacted, as it always did when she was near; what started as a mere foreplay or tease always ended like this: with Tywin Lannister, the proud and cold Lord of the West, Hand of the King and most powerful man of the Seven Kingdoms, forced to recognize himself apparently unable to restrain his own lust and desire. He pressed himself against her back and she reacted just as he hoped she would - her hands slid gracefully over his arms, tightening, if possible, his hold on her.

"Oh, Tywin," she sighed, looking at his eyes in the mirror, "If only you'd know how insanely happy I am with you..."

"As long as you keep it on the down low," he chuckled, prouder than he would have liked to admit, "I have a reputation, in case you forgot..."
Chapter 56

As hard as she tried, Aelinor couldn’t avert her eyes - blurry eyes, clouded by pleasure - from their reflection. Heated skin, ragged breath, lips parted... Did she really look like this, when they were together? So undone? So dishevelled? Did he really find her attractive, after seeing her like that?

Proofs pointed in that direction, no doubt about it. And proofs included a quite wide range of gestures, pants, grunts, and vigorous strokes that undoubtedly spoke of nothing else than appreciation. As Aelinor reached backward with her left hand to touch him, to hold him close, to show him how much she was savouring that intercourse, she caught his gaze in the mirror and stopped. He, too, stilled. It was a sudden moment of realization, of unexpected clarity of mind, so deep it didn't need words.

Tywin pulled back, almost entirely out of her, before thrusting deliberately into her again - his hands found hers, pinned against her dressing table for balance, and slid slowly upwards, along her arms, to finally land over her shoulders. Buried inside his wife, Tywin Lannister kept her upper body close to his and looked intently at her, silently waiting for a nod. She nodded. That single, tiny nod ended up in an abrupt series of short, hard strokes, meticulously designed to bring them both to the verge of their pleasure: Tywin knew himself but he was beginning to know quite well Aelinor, too, and that was enough to make him certain that such a development would have brought to its pleasant outcome in no time.

Tywin Lannister was seldom wrong.

Aelinor bent her arms and put all her weight on her forearms for better and steadier position as the Old Lion pounded into her, groaning her name and leaving marks on her hips with his fingers' pressure. She came almost silently, barely managing to keep breathing, in a heated hiss of "Tywin" which had the tone of a prayer. He didn't pull out immediately, as it often happened: how far did seem, now, their first encounters... Now not breaking their connection was apparently what both went looking for and more and more often he didn't pull out of her until completely softened again. Tonight was no exception and they lingered there, spooning over the vanity, regaining breath and vigour enough to head to bed.

"So much for punishment," he chuckled against the bare skin of her back. Aelinor smiled at him into the mirror and gestured for them to stand up. She felt sore in her muscles and sticky between her legs, yes, but she couldn't honestly complain about a thing.

"You can punish me whenever you like, if this is your idea of punishment... As long as you bear in mind a thing or two."

"Let's hear."

"First, I will probably continue to feel bad about what Cersei think of me. So likewise you'll have to continue to cuddle and comfort me afterward."

"This can be arranged..."

"Good. And second... Second, you are my lion. No one else, not even your precious, handsome son. He's handsome and he's funny and he's such a good friend of my brother that I almost consider him a brother myself, but nothing else." She took his hand. "You are the only one, Tywin."

Tywin Lannister stopped in the middle of the room and looked at her, brows furrowed. "Are you
trying to... reassure me?" he asked incredulously.

"I don't give a fig about reassuring your male pride. I'm just telling you where I stand. And if you allow me to borrow and twist a little the Mormonts' words, here I stand."

"Mh," he muttered, "So now we have...A young lioness, who's also a burning tree, but speaking like a bear, trying to reassure a lion? Anything else?"

Aelinor Lannister, née Marbrand, put both her hands on her hips and shot to her husband a challenging gaze. "And to think, there are people out there ready to swear you don't have a speck of humour in your entire body." Tywin Lannister sighed, theatrically.

"What can I say - no-one would ever believe you, so you can spare the effort to tell them they're wrong..."
In the morning sun, the little boy's hair shined like gold and his green eyes were red and puffy out of too much crying. Aelinor felt a sting of sudden interest and picked him up, sincerely sorry for whatever could be the matter.

"What's happened, little one?" she asked quietly, trying to soothe his cries. He could have been three, maybe four, and his features were somehow familiar.

"Dad," he sobbed, raising a trembling finger through a new outburst of tears and indicating a figure nearby. "Dad," he repeated, and Aelinor guessed how he hadn't noticed the man earlier. He sat at a big wooden table - why on earth was there a table here? - but his position was awkwardly unnatural, in particular for that time of the day: was he asleep? Was he drunk? Has he suffered some sort of accident? Aelinor walked towards him, the child still in her arms, holding her desperately. "Dad," he sobbed again as she reached the table.

Aelinor's heart skipped a beat and she faltered. She knew this man. But it couldn't be him. And she knew the boy, but it couldn't possibly... "Mum, please, please!" The boy cried out, clinging to her neck, tears soaking her dress. No, she thought desperately, but she touched the man's hand all the same. It was icy cold. No. There was not even the tiniest trace of a pulse.

The heath was suffocating and she tried to stay focused. She couldn't breathe. The child in her arms was wailing and writhing and calling his father - and his father was dead, undoubtedly dead: no man could have survived such a massive loss of blood. Because there was blood. Too much for a man to survive. There was blood on the floor and on the surface of the table, and there was more blood, when Aelinor gently pushed the body against the back of his chair, all over the man's doublet. The room felt suddenly too small. Aelinor felt dizzy, on the brink of fainting, but she forced herself to look at the man's face. It was true.

She knew him.

She knew him all too well, as she knew who the little boy holding her was.

But it couldn't be right.

She took another step and touched her husband's cheek, trembling at how cold and still it felt under her trembling fingers.

The sound which escaped her lips was deep, guttural, animal. Aelinor collapsed. The child screamed. She couldn't hear it.
Chapter 58

Tywin Lannister proud himself of being a man who needed no more than a split second to awake. This time made no exception: he woke with a start, in the middle of the night, and turned to the figure of his wife, squirming beside him. She was sleeping what obviously was a troubled dream, sobbing, writhing, trembling uncontrollably.

"Aelinor," he murmured, his hand closing gently on her shoulder in order not to scare her. Nothing. He called her again, added a bit of shaking to his hold, and she finally opened her eyes, disorientated; in the pale light of the half moon he could see, now that his eyes had accustomed to the darkness, how tears were still streaming down her cheeks. She held out both her hands, reaching for him with an urgency he found almost alarming.

"You're here," she sobbed. "You're fine."

"Yes, yes," he confirmed, initially perplexed. Aelinor was sitting on the mattress, now, hands feverishly roaming his chest and abdomen. And then, Tywin Lannister understood. "It was a nightmare. Just a nightmare, we are both alive and well, and..."

"Our kid was crying," she whispered, voice broken. "And I wasn't even aware he was our kid, and he was crying and looking at me so desperately and he had your eyes, those green eyes flecked with gold of yours, and oh, Gods, it took me so long to see...

Tywin's hands took firm hold of hers in order to ease, if not stop, her sudden, urgent stammering. "To see...what?" he asked. She was still frightened to the bones, he could easily feel it.

"You," she replied, the tremor in her limbs starting anew. Her skin was cold, still sweaty, and it was pure terror, what he could recognize in her voice. "You were there and there was so much blood and you were... And our little boy..."

"Here." Tywin Lannister spoke softly, his voice full of concern and care. "Here." He helped her to lie down, this time against him, and guided her head to rest on his chest as he hugged her tight. "It was a nightmare, nothing else, nothing more... You're safe, my love. And so am I."

It took her a great time to calm: the dream had been so vivid, so cruelly real, she was still quite in shock. Tywin's lips between her hair were soothing, though, and equally soothing were his arms around her and the rich, deep voice in which he kept on murmuring how they were going to be all right. Nestled against him, Aelinor finally regained her composure, despite the fact she now seemed to have lost even the tiniest ounce of sleep.

"I'm sorry," she said in the silence.

"What for?"

"This. The dream, all...all this mess. I used to have nightmares when I was a girl, but it hasn't happened for years... I'm so sorry. So ashamed."

"No need to apologize," he reassured her, planting a kiss on her forehead. "No need at all."
Chapter 59

Despite her husband's attention, Aelinor's nightmares didn't stop and in truth, after the trial's conclusion and judgment, they actually worsened - aggravated by the fact she was far from persuaded of such an outcome.

"What if he's not guilty?" She asked, pouring him a glass of ruby, sweet Dornish wine.

"He is. Proofs were quite convincing, you know that. You were there the entire time."

"I was, yes, but... Proofs were convincing, that is true, but I can't shake the feeling they were a bit too much detailed. Almost too good to be true. Too ironclad, if you know what I mean."

"I can see your point," Tywin admitted through gritted teeth as he took the glass from her hand. "Still, they remain proof. And in the light of those proofs and witnesses, I couldn't possibly show mercy. Tyrion is a Lannister. If I had shown mercy, people would have thought it was because of that. I can't have people thinking I've gone soft - or, worse, partial."

"I know. But-"

Lord Tywin scoffed, clearly tired of arguing. "Should I ask you - and myself - where does your loyalty lie?"

"Don't you dare," she hissed back. "There’s no need to be unpleasant."

"Well, your defense of Tyrion is quite unnerving, you can't deny it." Aelinor rolled her eyes and tried to maintain her voice reasonable. It was a quite surrealistic quarrel, she knew it - as she knew she was the one who had started it.

"I'm just...trying to be impartial."

"By implying that I'm not, apparently"

"I never said so."

"But you do think so, don't you?" Lord Tywin roared. "You believe that given that I never could bring myself to love him then I've always been eager to get rid of him and this trial provided me the opportunity to finally have what I ever wanted - is it not what you think? Oh, yes, it is, I know it is. But you seem to forget he's a Lannister! If I’d wanted him dead, believe me: he wouldn't have seen his first nameday."

"Why don't you just send him to the Wall, then?"

"You sound like Kevan," he sighed.

"I'll take it as a compliment," Aelinor replied coldly. "Let him take the black - let him go out of your sight for the rest of your lives..."

"Cersei won't ever permit it, even if it would be possible. And it is not, by now." Tywin rose and poured himself another glass of wine. His wife, sensing there was something else to be said, bit her lips in order to remain silent. "He asked for a trial by combat, Aelinor, and who can say, maybe the gods will be merciful to him... But you are too clever not to see that at this point my hands are tied."

Aelinor frowned. She saw it, now. But she had to admit she hadn't seen it earlier. "You're in an
impossible position," she nodded. "I shouldn't have insisted."

"I see why you did it, though, and I thank you." He put the untouched wine on the table and reached for her, his lips gentle on her temple. "You really are the best wife I could have hoped for."

_Don't let him get too emotional_, screamed Aelinor's brain, _he'll regret it in no time, you know him - and you know it better._

"Goodness! Was that a compliment? A _true_ compliment? From my lord husband?" she exclaimed. Tywin chuckled and drew her closer, hands firmly and possessively over her hips.

"Your lord husband apparently can't do more than compliment you all the time," he mocked her. "He's clearly gone soft..."

Aelinor pressed herself against him, inhaling his scent and letting her own body adhere to his. She recognized the familiar feeling pressing against her lower belly and smiled wantonly. "I may be wrong, but I don't see how _soft_ could be the word...I'd say it's _hardly_ the word, in this case..."
Lord Tywin's lips descended on his wife's throat, hot and hungry. Her soft, pale skin was now flushed, marked by his zealous kissing and suckling, and Aelinor instinctively threw back her head with a low moan. Strong arms scooped her up, then, and the force and decisiveness of the act were particularly rugged and unexpected even for Tywin. Lust, she thought; then she recalled the difficult nights of her nightmares, and how he had taken care of her and her nocturnal terrors - how he had remained awake and talked to her, hugged her, held her close, kissed her forehead and made her feel safe. She closed her eyes and corrected her first thought - desire was such a better definition.

In his bedroom - their bedroom - the candles were lit, yet, and a fire was roaring in the fireplace; Tywin put her down and immediately his hands went to the fastenings of her dress, expertly finding their hidden secrets. Aelinor smiled and reached for the revealing bulge in his pants, tracing it with her fingers - a mischievous look in her eyes.

"I'm glad to see that my lord husband is pleased to spend the evening with his wife..." He pressed into her hand.

"No clue what you mean, woman."

"Yes, sure," she giggled, and in a few moments, she had him freed from his breeches. His cock stood proud between them and Aelinor closed her fingers around it with a smile of secret satisfaction. How on earth was she able to arouse him so much, so quickly? Tywin's hands pushed her dress down her shoulders and Aelinor shuddered in anticipation as the fabric pooled at her feet. "May I undress you?" she asked. Tywin stopped her hand's ministrations.

"I'd rather watch you getting ready for me while I undress," he hinted with a crooked smile. Aelinor sat gladly on the mattress and eased herself against the pillows. Without breaking the contact with his eyes, then, she let her hand sneak down her stomach and belly, past down her navel and mound, down, down, to finally reach her lower lips.

"Are you sure you want me to start without you?" she asked softly, her fingers lingering on the very edge of her labia. Tywin was removing his breeches and raised an eyebrow, a knowing look in his eyes.

"I am the one who started first, apparently," he pointed out. It was undoubtedly true: his member was so hard it almost ached. Still, he told himself, the promise of such a show was too tempting.

"As you wish," Aelinor smiled - a delicious, naughty smile that made him twitch - and her forefinger slid slowly inside the wet folds, looking for pleasure. As soon as her fingertip brushed the sensitive nub of her clit, she couldn't suppress a soft whine, her body's responsiveness magnified by the thought that Tywin was looking at her. She cupped her breast with the other hand, massaging, stimulating the nipple, then looked at her husband: Tywin Lannister was standing at the foot of the bed, leaning sideways against the bedpost - naked and magnificent, he was watching her and clearly enjoying the view, at least judging by his appreciative smile and the way his hand slowly moved up and down his cock. Aelinor found the view exciting, and somewhat flattering. Unknowingly, she spread her legs a bit more, to offer him a better angle.

"Naughty, naughty, naughty," he muttered amusedly, as he watched her slid a finger inside herself and moan. He could see her wetness, see how she was almost glistening between her legs - how ready she was for him.
"Not half as naughty as you," Aelinor panted. "Do you plan to join me, or am I bound to do everything by myself?"

"Oh, definitely not," the Lord Hand replied, crossing the mattress towards her. He knelt between her legs, hands possessively caressing her calves up to the back of her knees. "I was just enjoying the nice view my wife provided me with, tonight..."
Chapter 61

The Old Lion looked at his wife with a grin, taking in the view of her flushed skin and clouded eyes. Her lips were a deep red, too, from too much nibbling, and he found her simply delicious. He took her hand with his left and moved it away from her previous task: then he started to gently rub his member along her opening, slowly, probing her wetness with the tip from time to time.

"You did a good job, I'd say," he approved.

"I had my reasons..."

"Such as?" he mocked her, a crooked grin on his lips. He had grown accustomed to those superficial, inconclusive, playful banter - he had grown accustomed to her. He liked her, respected her, found her amusing and intriguing, and lovely, oh so lovely...

"Such as obliging my uncommonly talkative husband, for example, but I'm starting to fear he's lost his interest..."

In a swift, smooth motion, Tywin entered her before she could actually finish the sentence. On their own accord, Aelinor's legs wrapped around him.

She liked so much having him inside her - despite her never forgotten juvenile crush, despite the memories of their first, frantic intercourses, despite all the terrible things his daughter kept on telling her... Having him buried deep into her made her feel complete, whole, happy: yes, he was significantly older than her, so what? He had never in her life met a man able to make her feel like that. He was, in every respect, her perfect match - so perfect she could even overlook the fact he probably didn't love her and never would. She could even overlook Joanna's ghost. She was ready to overlook everything.

Tywin was keeping a slow, steadfast pace, thrusting into her with a determination which paired the focused expression of his face: jaw clenched and eyes narrowed, he had covered her with his whole body, plainly enjoying the contact of skin on skin. When he slowed his movements, and ducked his head to kiss the soft but firm flesh of her breasts, Aelinor could not suppress a guttural groan and sneaked her arms around his torso, grazing his back with her nails. His toned muscles would never have ceased to amaze her, just like his stamina... "Oh, Tywin, yes, yes, like that," she exhaled.

The Old Lion grinned and took a pert nipple into his mouth, making his wife's back arch towards him, and hummed contentedly, a soft purr which reverberated into Aelinor and brought her on the edge of her pleasure. "Not yet, my lady, not yet," he murmured; a moment later he was rolling them on their side, gently guiding her and helping her until she was on top of him. "I seem to recall you liked to be the one in charge, too..."

A deep breath left Aelinor's lungs, throaty and satisfied, and when he looked up at her, all porcelain skin and auburn hair loose, he found himself thinking he probably was the luckiest man alive. Aelinor bent slightly backward, increasing the friction between his cock, still buried inside her, and her clit, and started to grind gently, supporting herself with her hands on the mattress. Tywin gripped strongly at her hips, seconding her rocking and showing with the pressure of his fingers how much he appreciated her choice. As soon as she changed rhythm again, though, and therefore position, and started riding him mercilessly, his hands reached for her breasts, hungrily kneading and massaging and pinching: until he couldn't stand it anymore and drew her low, fully against him, holding her with his left arm and caressing her bottom with his other hand as his orgasm finally hit him and he emptied himself into her welcoming core.
Aelinor's inner muscles clenched, milking him to the last drop, and not letting him go while he softened; Tywin Lannister insinuated his hand between them and expertly circled her clit with his thumb and forefinger - when Aelinor came, shuddering and muffling the cry of his name against his shoulder, he hugged her close, his lips pressed against her hair. "You're the best thing that could ever happen to me, Aelinor. The best thing indeed."
Save for the last cracklings of the dying fire, the room was now silent and still.

Cocooned under the furs, Tywin Lannister and his young bride were sleeping, still spooning, deeply spent from their lovemaking. It was curious - Aelinor had found herself considering not later than that same afternoon - how a man like Tywin could be partial to sleep in such a position, how...protective he could be towards her. It was almost as he shielded her with his own body, since he was always the one turning his back to the door... An uncommon habit, for a man always so vigilant. She had been tempted to ask him why, or at least whether it depended on her presence or not, but she had thought better, finally. No need to upset him after a bad day like the one he had just had.

In the darkness, Aelinor woke suddenly to find her husband's arm tightly around her stomach and smiled inwardly. "I love you," she whispered. She hadn't had the courage, yet, to speak those words, let alone to him: but they were sweet on her tongue, now, so sweet and silky that her eyes were now filled with tears. She loved him. Her heartbeat accelerated. She loved him.

"Tywin," she called softly, moving between his arms to lay on her back. "Tywin?"

The Old Lion awoke immediately, like the man-at-arms he had been most of his life. "Is everything alright?"

"Yes, yes," she smiled tenderly, placing her right hand on his chest. "Yes, it's just... I needed to tell you something." Now that the thought had taken shape in her mind, she couldn't possibly suppress the joy she was feeling.

"Should I be worried?"

"It's entirely up to you, I'm afraid..." Her hand was warm against his skin and Tywin reveled in the sensation; he began to caress her side absentmindedly.

"Let's hear it, then..." Aelinor inhaled and for the briefest moment, she bit worriedly at her lower lip.

"I have come to a realization."

"What about?"

"Us."

"So I should be worried, after all."

"Yes, you should. For I must say - my crush on you is over." Tywin Lannister didn't speak. Not a muscle flinched on his face. His hand on her side stopped its movement, however. But apart from that, her words hadn't elicited any reaction. "Oh, don't play the statue with me, Tywin Lannister," she said amusedly, caressing his arm from the hand he had on her to his bare, freckled shoulder. "Don't you want to know how have I reached such a conclusion?"

"Not particularly, no."

"I'm sorry to hear it, for I have every intention to explain it." The prolonged caress up and down his arm returned. "I realized that my crush on you is over when I saw the truth - and the truth is, I love you."
"No, you don't. You can't." Aelinor froze, puzzled. "A lord never lets sentiment get in the way of ambition, and neither a lady should..."

"Yes, I agree. And I never did. Now, however, my ambition couldn't possibly bring me higher than where I stand: am I allowed to love, now? Am I allowed to be in love with my husband?"
Chapter 63

"Seven hells. You're serious."

Aelinor felt tears pooling in her eyes, but she was strong enough not to shed them, not even one. Her hand stilled on its way to his elbow, then slowly lost contact. "Yes," she murmured, a big deal of her self-confidence gone.

"Why?" Tywin asked in a flat voice.

"What?" came the reply - brusque, outraged. Aelinor has always been a tough woman, regaining her inner strength was never too difficult.

"Why should you love me, now? For I am your husband? There are plenty of marriages where love is not in the equation. Wives are not required to love their husbands, not in our world."

"And what if they do? What does loving their husbands make of them? Do they become...what? Less than they were? Unworthy? Inconvenient?" Her blood was boiling, she could feel it clearly. She has never been accommodating, never soft - always sharp, sometimes nasty. She left the bed in a heartbeat, tossing away both the furs and the blanket, and she stood there, in the middle of the room, stubbornly naked, shuddering in the cold air.

"You'll freeze to death out there, don't be childish."

"Is it childish, not wanting to share a bed with a man who thinks I'm a liar?"

"It is, when the process involves being completely naked in a cold room. Come back to bed, Aelinor."

"No. Tell me I'm unworthy to be your wife for I fell for you. Have at least this courage."

Tywin Lannister sighed, quite annoyed. That quarrel was completely illogical. "You're not unworthy. But you're not in love, either. You're just being romantic, and... I promise: if I thought you really are in love with me, I'd leave the bed this same moment and I'd take you on that very spot until you beg me to let you breathe. But this is just a romantic notion, a..."

"Yes, you're probably right," she said, shivering, her teeth rattling, her arms crossed. "A woman could never love you. Why should she? How? And why on earth should she have nightmare about losing you? Why should she awake every time in terror, screaming and crying at the simple thought of your death? How could she believe her life over, after seeing you dead in her dreams? Why?"

"But you don't Do you?" Tywin asked, taken aback. Aelinor didn't reply and turned away from him. "Aelinor. Do you?" he asked again, this time to her back, and again she didn't reply. She didn't trust her own voice and she was trembling so much, now, that she didn't even hear the rustle of him leaving their bed and approaching until he draped a fur around her shoulder. "Forgive me," he whispered into her hair, holding her close. "Forgive me."

She moved and turned around, tears streaming down her face. "Why? You don't believe me. How can I forgive you, when you think I'm a liar?"
"Stop saying that. I never called you a liar."

"It was very well implied, though, you can't deny it," she retorted angrily and try to shake off his arms - he didn't let her go. "Get off me."

"No. I am sorry, Aelinor, truly sorry. I didn't mean..."

"Oh, you didn't, really."

"Aelinor." Inflexible, she looked at him with a new, sharper retort on the tip of her tongue, yet, but suddenly she realized - she wasn't trembling anymore. She wasn't even cold anymore. Her hands adjusted the big, warm fur around her form as she weighted her husband's appearance.

"Don't you think it's quite childish, standing in the middle of a cold room with nothing on?"

"Sometimes my wife is such a source of inspiration, you know. You simply can't help to try and mimic her."

"A special lady, your wife..."

"Special, indeed. She even claims she's in love with me. And I'm hardly the most lovable man in the realm, you know. I'm cruel, cold, disliked...obnoxious, to say the least. Yet, she claims she loves me."

"She's clearly out of her mind," Aelinor agreed.

"My point exactly."

"However, word is that there was a woman, once, who did love you. Were you a different man, then?"

"No. Not at all. I was younger, though."

Aelinor opened her arms and welcomed her husband into the warmth of the fur. His skin was as cold as ice but she didn't pull back. "Your present wife doesn't give a fig about youth, let me assure you - again. If you weren't a better man when Joanna loved you, what on earth should stop me from loving you now? I'm calling on your cleverness: I can't see any issue in my argumentation. Can you? A logical issue, I mean. Not some bullshit about age and opportunity and such."

"What a pesterling woman you are," he pointed out, circling her with his arms until her warm, soft breasts grazed his chest.

"I think we can agree this is not an answer."

"You must understand - it's not easy, for a man like me, to accept such...softnesses. It's not that I don't appreciate, just..." Aelinor remained obstinately silent. She was aware he was struggling with words he was not used to, and she was aware of what he was trying to say, too: still, he had to come to terms with them, and he had to do it by himself. "You want the satisfaction of hearing me say it, don't you."

"Well, of course I do..." she replied suavely.
"I'm unused to the idea of someone caring for me, let alone love me. I just need time to get accustomed to it, I guess."

Aelinor finally hugged him back, her head resting on his heart. "Deal. But don't you dare question my feelings again, Tywin. Ever again. You're the cruel, obnoxious Tywin Lannister, but you said it yourself, I'm pestering, and I can easily be the most pestering woman you've ever met."
Chapter 65

The first light of morning was starting to lighten the room when Aelinor opened her eyes and realized her husband was not beside her. She rolled onto her back and looked around, but he was not in the room, either, so she got out of bed, put a dressing gown on, and went looking for him. It was not a long quest: Tywin Lannister was in his solar, fully clothed, his figure shadowy against the circular window. He was looking outside, silent and perfectly still, and she thought it was not surprising at all - it would be quite easy to guess what he was contemplating.

Aelinor walked slowly towards him, quiet as a mouse, and slid her arms around him, hugging him from behind. "Did you get any sleep?" she asked, her cheek resting again his shoulderblade. Tywin put his right hand on hers, crossed on his stomach, and give them a little squeeze.

"Not a bit."

"You should have woken me..."

"To what end?" Tywin sighed. "You're not in need of sleepless nights, these days, are you." He turned towards her, shot her a smile. "Plus, you were so pretty, all curled up under the covers. You almost seemed harmless. Ouch!"

She had punched him in the shoulder, mercilessly, and now they were both laughing, amused by the - predictable - outcome. "I know you're worried. There's no use in not sharing your thoughts with me..." Out of the blue, she had raised the topic again, and the Old Lion shrugged.

"No use in sharing, either... If my son is innocent, then the gods will grant the victory to the Red Viper. Otherwise..."

"Do you really believe that?" Tywin raised his brow. "As I suspected. What do you plan to do, then?"

"And what can I do, possibly? Nothing. This stupid idea of a trial by combat is..."

"Stupid?"

"Stupid. Moving against the Seven is a little too much, even for me. If ser Gregor wins..."

"If ser Gregor wins, Tyrion will die."

"If ser Gregor wins, Tyrion will die," he echoed. Aelinor snuggled quietly between his arms and let him hold her.
"Will you sit amongst the Lannister, then? The Queen knows, Jaime knows..."

Aelinor raised her eyes towards her brother, who was escorting her to the outer yard in his golden uniform, and shrugged almost imperceptibly. "No," she told him plainly. "We discussed it, of course, and he asked me to, but..."

"But you refused, yes, I can see it. What I don't see is why, though." Her hand still on her brother's arm, Aelinor Lannister didn't reply. "Sister? Is anything wrong? Does he..."

"What? Oh, no! No, brother, no, it's not what you think!"

"You didn't let me finish, how can you..."

"You were about to say "mistreat", I know. I read it all over your face. Do you deny it?"

"Well, no, but-"

"Then I repeat you: no, he didn't. He doesn't. He never ever mistreats me, neither when we argue. He's a hard man, this is undeniable, but he's just, as you surely know yet as his bannerman."

"I'm glad to hear it," Addam Marbrand smiled warmly. "But it doesn't explain why you are attending the combat with me." Aelinor stopped.

"Look at me," she asked her brother. "What do you see?"

Ser Addam looked closely at his sister and sighed. "You seem tired," he pointed out.

"That's because I am," she admitted. A tiny smile crooked Addam's lips.

"Eager to get a new heir, eh?"

"Yes. And no. Yes, he is, and so am I. But no, that's not the reason for my being tired. Fact is - I can hardly sleep, lately, and it's starting to afflict me."

"I don't understand. How can the two things not being related?"

"Oh, brother, I hate you when you're so Jaime-ish!" she laughed. "It's not as we spend every waking moment trying to conceive an heir, you know. We spend a good deal of time doing it, this I'll admit," she chuckled, for she loved when her brother frowned that way - he could be as Jaimeish as Jaime Lannister himself, but when his brain kicked in and he remembered it was his little sister he was talking about...well, things usually went different - more embarrassed for him, more amusing for her. "Oh, Addam, please. You were the one raising the subject just two sentences ago! No need to avoid looking at me!"

"What's keeping you awake, then?" he asked, trying to change the direction his mind had taken. He was a brave soldier, he was brave, he was, just... Just not enough to picture his sister and Tywin Lannister together.

"Nightmares," Aelinor replied, quietly. "I lose him every night, and every night is worse. I can't sleep more than an hour without..." She shrugged. "I'm so tired."

Ser Addam stopped and turned to face his sister. Her words were burning inside his mind. "Wait.
You have nightmares again." Aelinor nodded. "And they involve your husband." Another nod. "Are you trying and tell me you love him? You love Tywin Lannister?"

Aelinor rolled her eyes furiously, blushing. Her copper hair, so much like her brother's, made her look like she was on fire. "Is that all you bloody have to say?" she hissed.

"No, but you can't ask me to un-hear what I've heard. Still, I know how dangerous your dreams can be, when they repeat themselves again and again. I'll think of something, I promise. Talk about it later?" he suggested, entering the yard. That was not the place for such conversations. Aelinor smiled at her brother.

"Deal."
Some things, Aelinor would never have been able to forget. Things like the Queen's first, furious wail. Like the cracking sound of prince Oberyn's skull breaking. Like Ellaria Sand's desperate cry.

Like the horror, the *pure horror* suffocating her at the scene before her eyes.

And nevertheless, she had barely flinched.

She was a lion. Tywin Lannister's wife. She would not have embarrassed her husband with a public display of weakness.

Then, she heard it. His voice, hard and stern, loud enough for everyone to hear. Tywin Lannister condemned his own son. His eyes, colder than ever, didn't even turn towards him; the Hand of King Tommen spotted her instead, and spotted her immediately - after all, she thought, it couldn't be difficult to miss two tall copperheads like her and her brother, even in a crowd...

She understood.

"I'd better go," she told Addam.

"Yeah. Definitely. Let me escort you..."

Aelinor kissed her brother on his cheek, quickly as humanly possible. "I'll be quicker by myself. He needs me."

"Don't fool yourself, my darling sister. That man needs no one. That man is solid gold - and gold needs no one."

"Whatever you say," came her brusque reply. A moment later, she was nowhere to be seen and ser Addam sighed. What an insufferable, pigheaded woman she was.
Not a word.

Aelinor had climbed the stairs of the Tower of the Hand almost running, worried sick, and found her husband in his solar, at his desk, shuffling parchments. He had raised his eyes, looked at her, and returned to his readings. Not a word.

She had never seen him like this, before. So distant, so cold. Not that it was unexpected - but she had no idea about what to do. "Tywin?" she tried. He grunted and Aelinor hesitated. She was never skilled in communications, when it came to moments like that, what on earth was she supposed to do? Asking him how he was coping? For the gods' sake, he had just condemned his son to death! "I'm sorry." Another grunt. She sighed and left him.

When she came back, almost a quarter later, he was still in the same position and did not even lift his head. Aelinor drew an armchair in front of his desk and picked up her needlework. Her hands moved rapidly, the sign of both great skill and impatient mind, and she sat there, quietly, pretending it was perfectly normal, for more time she had planned to.

When finally Tywin Lannister looked briefly at his wife, she pretended not to notice - and she kept pretending, when every now and then he cast a glance at her. That way, she missed his tiny, amused smile, though.

For he was amused.

Despite everything, he was - at least in this confined, blessed space from the rest of the world - amused. Here, with her, with her quick embroidering and her pouted lips, with her copper hair and pale skin and sharp tongue, he was...

"It's not your fault." He said. "There are no reasons to be sorry, when something's not your fault."

"Cat didn't get your tongue, then," she smiled. It was not a rebuke, Tywin knew it immediately: her soft tone spoke of affection, of... Well, now she had admitted it why looking for synonyms? Her tone spoke of love, and in that moment he felt deeply touched by that simple, basic thought.

"Not what they call a cheerful company, I know."

"Still, you didn't send me away. You could have, you know."

"And why should I have? Don't tell me nobody ever told you what a soothing feeling is, having by one's side someone to be silent with, without things getting awkward."

"My point exactly..."

Tywin Lannister pushed back his chair and rose, circled his desk and stopped beside her. As soon as she turned her face towards him, he gently cupped her cheek and kissed her, slowly and intensely. "My precious one," he murmured against her lips.
Chapter 69

Food remained untouched on the table for a long time after the servants brought it. The Hand of the King was not hungry - not for food, at least, he thought, looking sideways at his young wife who had resumed her needlework after their brief kissing session had finished - and neither was Aelinor, not with the images of the combat still vivid in her mind.

"You amaze me every time I watch you doing it," Tywin Lannister smirked. She lifted her eyes.

"What?"

"Embroidering. Sewing. All these arts that good girls learn from their septas. They seem...out of place, with you."

"Well, as it happens, I am the daughter of a lord," she smiled back. "And I was a good girl, once. Yes, I was," she assured him.

"Where do you learn so much about war and strategy and military technique, then? And about your other...skills?"

Aelinor dropped her needlework in the basket by her armchair and rose.

"My brother is a knight who loves telling tales, so I suppose I was just an attentive listener. But my other skills..." she said softly, smoothing down her dress without looking at him. "They come from my husband, I guess. I look at him, and all I can think of is how could I give him the pleasure he deserves."

"Oh, really?" he asked, pushing back his chair to have her in front of him and putting his hands on her hips.

"Yes, really," she nodded. "I could have put my skills to good use, yet, truth to be told, but I was under the impression you were not in the mood."

"You were right, I wasn't." He moved on his chair, bending forward to kiss her stomach. Her right hand caressed the back of his head.

"And now you are?" A throaty moan came as his reply. "And this is everything I get for my patient waiting?" she teased him.

"You can have whatever you want, you're a Lannister, now..."

Aelinor ducked her head and spoke in a low voice, barely a whisper in his ear.

"I want my husband inside me," she told him conspiratorially. "I want him to plant his heir in my belly. I want you, here, doing the things you told me I made you want to do to me when we met in this room the first time. I want to make you happy. Even today. Even with everything is going on."

"I still am tense," he confessed, "and crossed. There is the concrete possibility that I will not be gentle, should I lose control." His hands were around her, now, caressing her hips and back.

"Our first encounters were quite rough, if I recall correctly," she whispered, massaging his shoulders. "It doesn't bother me a bit..."

"Mh," Tywin Lannister replied, pondering his wife's words as his hands sneaked up to cover her
breasts. "Are you particularly fond of this dress, my lady?" he asked in a sultry voice, and Aelinor knew she had won.

"No." The sudden sound of ripping fabric filled the silence for a moment, while torn off buttons clicked against the marble floor and the Old Lion's mouth descended hungrily on the porcelain skin of his wife's belly. The damn woman wore no smallclothes at all - the sewing basket had clearly been only part of the reason for her absence, then, he thought. He was not displeased. Not a bit.
Chapter 70

"Impatient, aren't we?" Aelinor Lannister mocked her husband, who was currently freeing her arms from the dress he had just irreparably spoiled.

"What makes you say that?" the Old Lion replied, his hands now busy with the soft flesh of his wife's bottom. He was still sat, and the difference in their height made it possible for him to smell the fragrance of her arousal better than usual - his fingers brushed her intimately and Aelinor sighed contentedly.

"I've hired one of the best seamstresses in King's Landing, but I fear the current state of my dress is beyond even her capability..."

"You can always tell her to come to me to complain," he suggested, as his massaging at her inner parts grew bolder. Aelinor bent forward, putting her hands on his shoulder and, by doing so, distancing herself from his touch.

"Now I am the one who should complain. Look at us: I'm here, naked, and you're still playing the great lord in his seat of power! I claim a bit of naked skin, too, husband..." she chanted. A moment later, her mouth engaged in a battle for predominance with her husband's, she was bending her knees, crouching in front of his chair. "And you know what is said: one has to start somewhere," she smirked, unfastening his breeches and freeing him. He was half hard when she closed her hand down his shaft, encasing it in the soft warmth of her mouth, Tywin Lannister's hips bucked forward, matching her movement halfway. His hand went to her head, half guiding, half caressing her, as she slowly took him entirely and started to bob her head up and down his cock.

"Good grief, Aelinor," he panted. He could already sense the tension building inside him, his peak nearing - he had to stop her. To last so little would have been embarrassing, dishonourable at the very least... "Stop," he urged her. She let him go but had no time to ask what was happening - Tywin had risen and made her rise, too: his hands closed over her hipbones, but this time just for the briefest moment... The brief moment before he scooped her up, commanding her to hold onto him.

And there it was - the round window in the Hand's solar, smooth and cold against her back. "Are you sure no one could see us?" she asked, her voice shaking.

"I couldn't care less, of this I am sure." He cupped and spread her, thrusting smoothly through her inner folds. She was wet and warm, tight around him, and Tywin Lannister found himself starting immediately to pump hard inside her. No time to adjust, no amenities: it was sex, rough, hard, pure sex - and Aelinor was soon in such a great need to touch her husband she finally closed her fingers on the fabric of his shirt and tore its fastenings apart: her grip on his shoulders was so strong she scratched him, over and over again.

When she clenched her inner muscles around him, a guttural, almost desperate groan left his lips: he thrust harder into her, increasing the speed and the friction, bringing her to beg him for her release. He didn't oblige her, though. Instead, he stopped, one of his hands against the glass at one side of her head, his breath hot against her cleavage, and licked her throat, slowly, achingly slowly. She shuddered. "Finish me, please," she begged again.

"Or, I could simply let you enjoy the view..."

"No. I want to look at you," she panted, using her arms to keep him close. Tywin's right hand,
cupped around her bottom, inched along her thigh, slowly reaching for where they were joined. His thumb circled her clit and started to rub it, achingly slowly, while his mouth went again to devour hers - Aelinor could feel her pleasure building up strong again, even stronger than just a few moments before, as his thrusts started to become more erratic. He was close, she could tell by the way his muscles were tensing and his balls hitting against her; his breath hot and short against her skin, his fingers more and more possessive: maybe loving Tywin Lannister was not easy, but surely it was deeply satisfying... He exploded inside her with a feral grunt, a primal sound so low and intense it brought her to her own release: and when she came, his name on his lips, she felt even more complete than she had in her entire life.
"I want you to escort me to the Street of Steel," Aelinor Lannister said, in the tone of someone who wouldn't have accepted any other answer than "Immediately".

"Why?" her brother asked, instead. He had grown more cautious around her since she had married Lord Tywin, and this whole situation - being summoned with such urgency, being commanded in such a tone - was too unusual to shake his determination to be careful. What on earth could his sister want, in the Street of Steel?

"I brought no wedding gift to my husband," she explained, "and now I plan to make full amend..."

"I suppose he'll have plenty of daggers, sister," ser Addam warned her. He was quite surprised she could have thought of nothing better than a blade: it was such a predictable gift...

"I never spoke of a dagger. Nor a common sword. I was talking about this," she said, and rose, and went to the wooden chest lying against the wall behind her. She opened it and took a bundle - the nature of which was quite recognizable, given its shape and dimension.

"Father's sword?" Marbrand exclaimed as soon as she uncovered it. "How do you...?"

"He gave it to me when I left for King's Landing - in what he called "the unlikely event you find yourself a husband to your taste"... And you know what they say, about the Lannisters and their lost Valyrian sword. I know my lord husband had two blades of Valyrian steel forged for the king and ser Jaime, but he kept none for himself, so... Well. With everything that's happened recently, I thought it could...I don't know. Cheering him up a little?"

"So he is a husband to your taste."

Aelinor sighed, wrapping again the fabric around the sword. When she looked back at her brother, she was smiling. "Yes, Addam. Definitely."

"You've always been a strange girl..."

"What does that suppose to mean?"

"Nothing particular. There's plenty of marriages where husbands are older than wives, I know, but I doubt many of them are blessed by the young bride actually in love with her husband..."

"You plan to mock me until the end of time, don't you?"

"I could never mock my liege's wife!" he laughed. "I could escort you to my armorer right now, if you like."

"You read my mind, brother..."
Chapter 72

Chapter Notes

Sorry, sorry, S O R R Y!
It's been a hell of a month, making it very difficult to manage everything... I'm very sorry :(
I hope this chapter is good enough as an apology...

For the night is dark and full of terrors!

Aelinor woke abruptly, covered in cold sweat. Another nightmare. Which had came after another again, and another again, and another again... And she knew perfectly well that if she'd let herself doze off again, there would have been another one. Every time she closed her eyes, horrible dreams came to haunt her sleep: fragments of that awful combat, yes, with all its blood and cruelty, but mostly it was her fears coming alive... That was even worse.

The thundering voice of the red priest echoed once again in her head. "Indeed it is," she had almost mocked him in reply, when the man had thrown himself in front of her and Addam on their way back from the Street of Steel. But it was. Her night was indeed full of terrors. One night after the other.

At her side, Tywin muttered in his sleep and turned towards her, his right arm reaching out to her. She tried to remain still, hoping he would not realize she was awake. He needed to sleep, she knew it, he needed it so much...

"Again?" he asked instead.

"I was trying not to wake you..." Aelinor complained.

"Too still for a sleeping body," he smiled in the dark, drawing her near. "Who was this time?"

"You," she whispered. "It's always you. That's why these nightmares upset me so deeply. I can't stand the idea of..."

"Why don't you just confess you want to be the most coveted widow in the Seven Kingdoms?" Tywin taunted her; Aelinor put a hand on his mouth, silencing him brusquely.

"Don't ever say that," she urged him. "Please, Tywin, don't ever..." There were tears in her voice, and the broken, shaking tone of the deepest fear - the Old Lion encircled his wife with his arms and breathed in the good smell of her hair.

"I was joking, Aelinor, don't get so upset," he soothed her, drawing slow circles on her back, "I have no intention whatsoever to leave you alone, believe me..."

Her lips pressed against her husband's chest, Aelinor Lannister closed her eyes, trying to blink back her tears. She hated it. She hated being so emotional, so frail, so weak. Her right hand sneaked around his shoulder, holding him even closer. "I'm sorry," she whispered, for what could have easily been the millionth time in the last days.
"No, Aelinor. I am. I was rude, talking to you like that, and you didn't deserve it, not in a million years."

"You're never rude to me," she pointed out, kissing her way up his throat. "It's me who's been too messed up lately, it's not your fault... You're the cure, if anything."

Tywin seconded her movement and let her straddle him - his hands slid slowly down her back, finally landing on her soft, round buttocks. "Am I?" he asked amusingly, as he let his fingers explore her. She was wet against his groin, the heat radiating from her in such a welcoming way which made his manhood twitch.

"So it would seem," she murmured in his ear, sliding seductively up his body - grazing his chest with her pert nipples, his shaft with her slick folds. It needed no more than a tiny movement of her hips to take him inside her, and that way she rode him - closely hugged one to the other, kissing away every moan, leaving all the movement job to their hips and never ever breaking contact.
"A fine job indeed," ser Addam nodded approvingly, examining the new hilt of the sword that has been his father's. Despite everything - despite the love he had for his sister, despite the objective gladness he felt seeing her so happy with her marriage - he was a bit upset by the idea she had inherited their father's Valyrian sword instead of him. He was the soldier, the warrior, for the Seven's sake! Why on earth give a sword to a woman?

He weighted the sword and gave a mental shrug to himself. The answer was easy. For Aelinor was never a woman like any other. Where he was a soldier, Aelinor was a strategist. Where he obeyed orders, Aelinor challenged them whenever she thought them perfectible. Where he was a valiant man, his sister was a clever woman, and clearly, their father had realized - before anyone else did - that such a woman would have chosen for herself the finest of husbands: and such a man would have been worthy of that sword, if nothing else for having won his daughter's heart. "It's gold, isn't it?" he asked.

"Of course," the blacksmith replied obligingly. "Lady Lannister was very adamant about that." Brother and sister exchanged a brief look, trying to suppress a mutual grin. Adamant was such a poor word, for the sweet voice she had used to "advise" him that nothing lesser than gold would be tolerated.

"Yes, I seem to recall," ser Addam managed to reply. "What do you think of it, sister?" he asked her, handing her the sword by the hilt. She took it with not a trace of hesitation.

"Always been a wonderful sword," she told almost to herself. When she caressed the lion's head that was now in the place of the pommel, she felt a wave of heath running up her body. It was so beautiful. Addam was right, it was a fine job if she had ever seen one. She could easily picture Tywin's hand strongly closed around the grip - and that caused another wave as she urged her mind to discard the image. "But your work made it perfect. I thank you, master armorer. The Hand will be very pleased."

"I live to serve, my Lady."

"And to be well paid for your services," ser Addam laughed, handing him the bag with the sum they had agreed. Tobho Mott, used to deal with hightborn people, didn't open it. He knew it was there, every single golden dragon he had asked for. He bowed deeply as the Lord Commander of the City Watch and Tywin Lannister's new wife left his shop - then he urged himself not to even think the words "Tywin Lannister's new wife" again. It was part of the deal, after all.
Chapter 74

The big sword was truly impressive on the Hand's table, with the sheer contrast between its dark blade, crimson grip, and the golden pommel and guard. Aelinor gave it an affectionate look. It has been in her family for centuries and now she was giving it to her husband - she hadn't been surprised a little, noticing the shade of slight disappointment in her brother's eyes, still, the way she saw it, Firewind was remaining in the family, after all: Tywin's heir - hers and Tywin's - would inherit it, one day... One day. Years and years and years from that moment.

"What an unexpected surprise," she heard his voice saying, and turned towards him, her gown wrapping her form for the briefest moment.

"To be honest, you just spoiled my surprise," she complained, moving to meet him in the middle of the room and welcoming him with a kiss.

"Oh," he chuckled, "so the surprise you're talking about is not my gracious wife coming to brighten my day? One can never feel- What is this?"

Aelinor started to worry her lower lip. Suddenly her mind had realized - it was a bastard sword. Firewind was just a bastard sword. The Lannisters' lost sword definitely wasn't. What if Tywin would have felt insulted?

"I know it's not a greatsword," she murmured, her heart sunken deep. How could she have not thought about it? How could Addam have not said a thing about it? Tywin was meanwhile circling his desk, looking at the bastard blade with a stone face. Aelinor's hands were tormenting each other, but she was aware she could not stay there silent forever. "And I know it is no match for Brightroar, but I thought... Well, I didn't give you a wedding gift and I thought..."

The Old Lion bent to look closely at the hilt. "This does seem solid gold."

"It is."

He took the sword off the table and weighted it, holding it first with one hand, then with both, very like Addam had done in the armorer's smithy. "Where does this come from, Aelinor? Apart from being your wedding gift, I mean."

"It's... It was my father's. Firewind. He gave it to me when I left Ashemark last year." Tywin Lannister put the sword back on the wooden table and sat solemnly in his armchair.

"And why on earth give a sword like that - the family sword - to his daughter, when he has one of the most skilled soldiers I've ever met as his firstborn?" he asked, his right eyebrow arched.

"Well. As he put it, in the unlikely event that his unruly, stubborn little girl should finally find a husband up to her tastes..."

"I should take I am such husband? You flatter me, woman." There was now a little smile dancing on his lips, too tiny for her to be sure - but something had changed, she could tell.

"Tywin, please. You know you are. You would be such husband even if you were not my husband."

"So," he said, pushing back his chair again and approaching her with what she could only call a predatory smile, "so, you have finally found a husband up to your tastes, and now you are giving
him your family's Valyrian sword, all because your husband's family managed to lose its own in the most stupid way one could-?"

"Ye-No! No, it's... I didn't mean to offend, you, Tywin, I was just..." Tywin's hands closed strongly on her arms.

"Stop apologizing. You did the most generous thing someone has ever done for me," he smiled, finally, lifting an insanely heavy weight off his wife's chest.

"Do you...do you like it? Even if it isn't a greatsword? Really?"

"Bastard swords are infinitely handier," he nodded. "And that hilt...magnificent. Tobho Mott?"

"Tobho Mott. Addam escorted me there."

"Mh. Very wise of you." He drew her nearer, starting to kiss her jaw - which caused a non-negligible increase in her breath's speed. "You know what, wife? I don't know what to do to thank you properly..." His lips moved down her neck, slowly and deliberately. Aelinor cupped him through his breeches, smiling inwardly at the hardening she could easily recognize.

"Oh, I think you do..."

"Brother, I need-Oh Seven Gods!"

Aelinor turned, smiling to an immensely embarrassed Kevan Lannister. "No need to apologize," she told him happily. "It's me who shouldn't be here... I'll leave you to your meeting - and I'll see you later, my Lord," she added with a smirk, looking directly at her husband before leaving the room.

"I know, Tywin. I know. I should definitely make a habit of knocking at your door before I enter your quarters, now. I'll bear that in mind. I promise."

Tywin Lannister just looked at his brother.

"Tywin, really, I'm sorry. You look quite uncomfortable, to be hon-"

"Oh, really? Well I never. Guess why, mh?"

Kevan felt, if possible, even worse. Literally cockblocking his brother was probably the worst thing he had ever done in his entire life. It would have been a long morning, no doubt.
"Another surprise?"

Tywin Lannister was amused, and it was quite easy to perceive it in his voice. He had stopped on the threshold, looking proudly at his wife: her hair loosely pinned on the back of her head, her bare shoulders all he can see of her - obviously naked - body, concealed under the water... She raised her head towards him with a smile, one of her best smile - the one able to seem provocative and naïve at the same time, the one that never failed to make him crazy with desire.

"I'd call it a bath, to be honest. I felt a bit weary, and I thought you might be tired, too... Mind to join me?"

"I don't know... I can't stand when the water is not really hot..."

"Here, have a try," Aelinor said, sitting straight with her back against the metal side of the tub and extending an arm out of the water. Tywin entered the room and took her hand, willingly letting her guide his fingers to dive under the surface. "See?" she asked with a grin, when he retreated his hand from the almost steaming water, "You underestimate me... Me, and my planning skills - which is even worse! Do you really think I could have ever even imagined to trick you in a lukewarm bathtub? I've had the servants finished pouring the water just moments before you entered..."

"Ah, my precious, scheming wife," the Old Lion sighed, bending to kiss her lips. Aelinor's soaked hands came greedily to his cheeks, drenching his whiskers and the collar of his shirt. As he undressed, Aelinor slid forward, making room for him in the tub - and she lent back as soon as he sat in the water with a satisfied grunt.

"I was right, then. You're tired," she told him as he circled her with his arms, locking their hands over her stomach.

"A bit. It's been a long day, and I can't hide from you how deeply Kevan interrupting us this morning have spoiled the rest of the day..."

"Are you telling me you missed me?" she mocked him lazily. Staying like that was so restful - her back against his chest, arms intertwined, cocooned by hot water... No rush, no stress, no concerns at least for a little time...

"I am telling you I missed you, precisely," he whispered in her ear, his baritonal voice sending shivers down every bit of her skin despite the warmth they were immersed into. She drenched the sponge and started to massage his arms, slowly and deliberately.

"Do you reckon this is it?"

"What?" he asked in turn while kissing her bare, damp shoulder.

"Happiness."

"You really are keen on this idea of happiness, aren't you."

"I just want you to be happy, Tywin."

"I am," he breathed against her lips. "I am."
Tywin Lannister opened his eyes and realized he was shivering. It took him no more than a few seconds to remember - the tub, the relaxing bath, the tiredness leaving his limbs... He moved his legs, causing a little wave of cold water which made his wife groan in his arms.

"Aelinor," he whispered in her ear. "We clearly dozed off and now the water's gone cold, we'd better get out..."

"What?" she asked sleepily, but in a moment she was perfectly awake. "I'm freezing."

"That's exactly what I was saying. We dozed off." He moved cautiously, trying to reach a towel without hurting her. It didn't work: the towels remained obstinately out of his reach. "Maybe you should call for your maids," he suggested.

"My maids will never dare to enter the room where my lord husband is taking a bath, don't you know that? You scare them to death! I'm positive some of them would rather be dismissed than take the risk of accidentally see you naked..."

"Oh, really?" he asked, amused, watching her standing up and climb out of the tub. "Am I such a repulsive view?"

"Not-a-bit," she spelled slowly, wrapping herself in a linen and throwing one to him, too. "But you are...well. You. Tell me one person in the Seven Kingdoms who would not be terrified at the prospect of seeing Tywin Lannister naked."

"You."

"I am your wife."

"You weren't terrified at the idea, when you were not my wife...As I recall."

"True. But that was because I had every intention to see you naked before I died," she chuckled.

"You have a point... Gods, that water was ice-cold." he breathed, rubbing his chest and arms with the towel. Aelinor agreed.

"It was indeed... I was wondering - will a resume of what your brother interrupted this morning bring any benefit for our current situation?"

Tywin Lannister looked closely at his wife, her damp and loose hair, her pale skin covered in goose bumps. He found her even more attractive than usual - and, clearly, so did his neither regions. "We just have to try, I'd guess."
Chapter 77

The more slowly and deliberately Tywin Lannister thrust himself inside the warm, welcoming wetness that was his wife, the more she arched her back towards him, overwhelmed by the power of the experience. Was Tywin, literally speaking, a very talented lover? Was she? She had no idea. But about one thing she was sure: in that regard, as in many others, they were perfectly matched. He was deliberate where she was passionate; he was persevering where she was eager; he was implacable, whenever she called for more.

His hands were spread against her shoulder blades, providing the perfect visual counterpart to her legs, locked around his waist - and every time his mouth left her throat to tease her lips with the shadow of a kiss he stole away from her another breath, another moan, another vocal, primal confession about how much she was appreciating what he was doing.

"Come for me, my lady," he muttered through gritted teeth. Aelinor was clawing his back, trying to persuade her body to last more than that, but his words soon broke her. "Come for me, Aelinor, come..." and she came, his name on her lips, her limbs trembling of pleasure - and he came too, spending himself into her, holding her so close one could have said for dear life.

He collapsed on top of her and gently rolled sideways, bringing her with him. "Are you still cold?" he mocked her. Aelinor chuckled.

"Let me think..." She slid the tip of her index finger along the line of her collarbone and brandished it in front of him, showing the thin trace of sweat on her fingertip. "I'd say I'm quite warm," she smiled. "Thank you." A soft peck on his jaw, an arm sneaking around his middle. "You are the best thing that ever happened to me, Tywin."

"I can think of a good fifty people at least who could swear the exact opposite, you know. You're a strange woman."

"Strange? Have I grown a third eye?"

Tywin scoffed. "Let's say uncommon, then," he gave up, propping himself on his left elbow to reach and kiss her forehead.

"Uncommon it is. I like it." Silent and still they stayed, silent and still and content for a long time - until the sun started to go down and make everything golden in its last light. "You should give a name to the sword, you know."

"You suggesting it makes me think you surely have some ideas about it, yet."

"Not one, if I have to be honest."

"Not one? You?"

"It's your sword, not mine. You should do the thinking, not me."
Chapter 78

The cries echoed through the Red Keep, as strong as if they were part of the walls themselves. Aelinor shivered.

"I was under the impression that that debatable pseud-Maester that Her Grace keeps in so high regard intended to heal ser Gregor's wounds, but as it seems he's only able to prolong his sufferings..." There was no pity in her voice, though, just annoyance. The Mountain was no man to feel sorry for - and in his agony, he has become even more a nuisance than he was before.

"So it seems, yes," Tywin Lannister agreed, chewing slowly a piece of spiced meat.

"Someone should do something about it."

"Kill the man, maybe?" he asked. He was often like this, when they indulged themselves in lovemaking before dinner: a man of few words, even fewer than usual, with a dark sense of humour and the appetite of a starving man.

"Why not? He's gonna die anyway, isn't he? I'd call it mercy."

"Cersei would never approve, you know that."

"So what? Are we doomed to wait? What if he's strong enough to survive months? For I'm afraid he could, you know."

"In that case, I'll be the one who'll slit his throat, I promise. Far before a month time."

Aelinor pushed sideways her food with her fork, smirking. "We could find someone to do it, you know. And thereafter blame Qyburn. It could work, you know - and we'll be free from two nuisances instead of one."

"Ah, my evil, scheming wife," Tywin scoffed approvingly, "But you forget my children. They owe Qyburn a great deal - Jaime his life, and Cersei..." He stopped. Never before he had been so close to say it aloud. As she always did, she understood.

"Where are you with the choice of the sword's name?"

"I think I have it." He poured wine into both their goblets. "Of course I cannot name it after my family's previous sword, but it is also true I cannot forget where it comes from, and this means I want its name to recall its previous life into your family... Tommen II managed to lose himself and Brightroar - my wife prevented me to lose myself, and brought me Burningroar."

Aelinor Lannister looked speechless at her husband, her mouth agape. There was the concrete possibility that was the closest he had ever get to tell her how much he cared for her. "Burningroar," she repeated, savouring the feeling on her tongue. "I like it. I love it."

"It? Not me?" Aelinor rolled her eyes and laughed, raising her goblet.

"Both. I love you both."

"That's better... Aelinor?"

"Mh?"
"You do know you almost haven't touched your food, don't you?"
Chapter 79

When Aelinor woke in the middle of the night, she realized that for once it was not because of a bad dream - it was because of her husband, spooned against her back, and particularly because of his left hand, which at the present moment was inching along her hips and down her mound. It was because of the unmistakable pressure against her lower back and his breath, hot and comforting on the skin of her shoulder.

"Someone's still hungry," she mumbled, slightly pressing backward to meet his groin.

"Someone's not the only one," he grunted, finding the welcoming moisture between her legs with his fingertips. She couldn't help it: his touch affected her deeply, so deeply her response was immediate, as it happened every single time. She moved, as to lie on her back, but he stopped her. "This way," he stated, and Aelinor obliged gladly, letting him lead. She liked it when he was the one in charge.

"Guilty," she chanted, positioning herself so that he could gain better access. And Tywin Lannister did exactly what his wife had instinctively predicted - with no effort at all he slid all the way inside her, burying himself deeply, zeroing every distance. She gasped.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked, perplexed rather than concerned. Still, he didn't move, waiting for her response.

"No, it's just... Oh," she exhaled, tentatively moving her hips, "It's more... stretching..." She could feel him smile in the darkness.

"Good." Tywin started to move, slowly, but in no time the pace increased: she could find it more stretching that way, but he found it even more stimulating than usual... His cock was demanding, hungry, famished: and the Old Lion gave in to his body's pressing demands - one arm possessively closed around Aelinor's middle, the other hand busy between her legs massaging her pearl, his member pumping in and out her warm, wet folds. It was messy, he knew, and his wife's ragged breath left no doubt about it. It was primitive, feral...

Still, as he spent himself into her, he felt her shiver and come, something he hadn't anticipated - he had figured that after such a basic coupling he should have helped her to reach her peak, maybe stimulating her in other ways... Her orgasm took him by surprise even more than it had taken her: so they remained still, cuddling tight, regaining their breath.

"You really were hungry," Aelinor whispered finally.

"You make me constantly hungry." His thumb and forefinger were now playfully teasing her left nipple, which was now achingly pert despite the fact Aelinor was yet half-asleep.

"That gives me power," she considered with a yawn. "I like it..."

That night, no nightmares nor bad dreams came to trouble her sleep.
"...weariness," the Maester repeated absentmindedly, with a hint of a question in his voice. Aelinor rolled her eyes and tried harder not to scoff at him.

"Weariness, yes. That's what I've said. I'm constantly weary. I scarcely sleep, when I do I do it badly, so I need something to help me sleep. It's quite simple, isn't it?" she couldn't help but ask provocatively. It was the third time she explained it to him and she was quickly losing her patience.

"What I can't understand, my lady, is why coming to me instead of Grand Maester Pycelle... Surely he..."

*He's Cersei's man, you idiot. I can possibly let the Queen know I'm not at my best, don't you see?*

"My husband has complete confidence in you, maester Ballabar: why should I question his judgment?"

"Well," the Maester said tentatively, "it's just that...That I was wondering... Wouldn't be more proper, if it were the Grand Maester to examine you? I am nothing but a simple, humble maester, where you are the Lord Hand's wife: it wouldn't be proper if..."

"Examining me? Why on earth? I told you, I'm having the most disturbing dreams, but that's all: it used to happen a lot when I was a girl, and..."

Maester Ballabar looked at her intently, and sighed. He closed a couple of tomes on his table and lowered his eyes, but a moment later he was looking at her again.

"Can you recall when your last moon's blood was, my Lady?"

"Well, of course, it-" then it dawned on her, sudden and sharp like an arrow. Of course she could.

Of course.

Before king Joffrey's death.

*Way before* king Joffrey's death.
"Sister? Is everything alright?" ser Addam managed to ask, his arms full of his sister hugging him tightly around his neck.

"Alright is a poor word indeed, brother. A poor word indeed..." she couldn't help but smile. She had smiled so much in the last hour her face was starting to ache, truth to be told. So, she hugged him again.

"Aelinor! Aelinor," he laughed, then, holding her by the waist in order not to lose their balance, "You're a little too old for such an enthusiastic display, don't you think?" he tried. Teasing her about her age usually did the trick, for she was quite prone to at least poke him on those occasions, but that time it didn't work.

"I don't give a fig. I'm... I'm just too happy, Addam. Too happy."

The Lord Commander put a little distance between them and studied her intently. "That I see. And if I have to be honest, you're scaring me." It was not like her to behave so openly, that was the problem. She was the silent one, the intense one...not the giggling one, for heavens' sake! Meeting again the wall of her radiant smile, he tried another angle. "What brings you here at this time of the day? You never leave the Keep during the afternoon, as I recall..." That, too, was true: of her - few - weaknesses, the fear of finding herself outside the perimeter of the castle with the night falling on her was probably the strongest. She never liked the shadows.

"I had to come and see you, brother...or should I say...uncle?" Aelinor had whispered the last word an inch from her brother's ear and immediately tried to whirl away from his reach - ser Addam had a soldier's instincts, though, and was quick to catch her.

"No!" he laughed, incredulously, "Really?" Aelinor nodded, biting happily her lower lip. "Gracious Mother, but this is...this is...I can't even find the words! It's wonderful!"

"I know! I'm so outrageously happy..."

"Does he know?" Aelinor shook her head. "Aelinor..."

"Don't you think that telling him was my first instinct? But he was busy, and I thought better not to interrupt him... It was a delicate matter, Addam."

"This, or the one he was busy with?"

"His meeting. I'd have hated to look like the kind of woman who makes a fuss whenever her husband stands not at attention at her calling. I'm a great Lady, you know. To recognize what I can and what I cannot interrupt goes with the job..."

Ser Addam snorted, "You're aware he'll be pissed like hell when he'll know you didn't find the news relevant enough to go immediately to him, aren't you?"

"Yes," she smiled, mischievously, "but by then I'll have shown him my entire plan... Namely, a perfect night of great celebration..."

"You minx!"

"Well, I clearly have to do something to make amends, haven't I."
Ser Addam shook his head, trying very hard to erase the image from his mind. He was sincerely delighted at the idea of being about to be an uncle, and to Tywin Lannister's child, no less, but he preferred not to focus on the process... He kissed his sister on her forehead. "Go to him... But I'll give you two men as your escort, it's getting darker by the moment."
Chapter 82

Aelinor stopped in the middle of their bedchamber and contemplated the results of her - and her maidens’ - efforts. Everything was perfect.

New candles on every holder. Luxuriant flowers on her table. Just a hint of spicy incense caressing her nostrils. And fresh linen, and soft pillows, and the deep crimson dress she was currently wrapped in. Lannister crimson. And gold.

Her hand rose to the neckline, which should have been kept closed by a lion-shaped clasp...which wasn't there. She cursed under her breath. She had forgotten it. "You can finish to light the candles and leave," she said gracefully to the young servant. "I'll be back in a moment."

It was true, it would have been just a moment: her jewellery was stored in the little room beside the bedchamber, and she was quite confident she would be back even before her Lord husband would finally arrive. It took, as expected, no more than a few minutes: still, as soon as she re-entered the room she realized she wasn't alone.

It wasn't the Old Lion, though.

"I'll ask you calmly, for I have no desire to make a scene. What the hell do you think you're doing here?" Aelinor hissed. Taken aback, the young whore who'd had witnessed against Tyrion at the trial tried to cover herself with the bedspread.

"I...I was said... Lord Varys..."

Aelinor closed her eyes and inhaled, then forced herself to remove the woman's clothes from her own stand and throw them to her. "You tell Lord Varys my husband and I have no need for a whore in our chambers," she stated. "Now I'll leave you to re-dress yourself: when I'm back, I don't want to see any trace of your presence here. Is everything clear?"

Fuming, tears prickling in her eyes, Aelinor thundered out, looking for one of her maids. "Find me whoever let the whore called Shae enter the Hand's quarters," she ordered, her hand forcefully closed around the woman's upper arm. "But first, bring a message to Lord Varys."

"Yes, my Lady," the other nodded ceremoniously. "What message would be, my Lady?"

"You'll tell him, This won't be forgotten, nor forgiven."

The servant took her leave and Aelinor leaned heavily against the cold wall. What game was that? What sort of plan could the Spider have in mind? She was so furious, so out for blood, that for a moment she'd even forgotten what the night she had so carefully planned was about. She clenched her fists, angrily. She had to tell Tywin about what had just happened. That was the important bit, being the Spider involved. She heard a muffled voice coming to the bedchamber - so Tywin had come, finally...

As soon as she entered the room, though, it was suddenly clear that the whore had not left as she had been ordered.

She was dead.

Strangled.
On their bed.

On the fresh, fine linen she had personally chosen.

Aelinor tried for a moment to regain at least a bit of clarity of mind, to absorb the idea of having a strangled whore laying naked on her own bed, but it was no use - again she heard muffled voices, this time coming from the privy, this time distinctly two.

And she understood.

And her blood froze.
A dagger, she thought. She needed at least a dagger. There was always a dagger on Tywin's side of the bed, and there she went, fighting the dizziness and trying not to look at the dead, naked body sprawled on her bed.

When her fingers closed around the hilt, she realized, her hand was trembling. She was trembling. But there was no place for fear.

"Tysha," Aelinor heard Tyrion's voice pressing his father as she entered the small room where the privy was. "What did you do with her, after my- oh, father, father, father." The dwarf chanted amused, looking at Aelinor. "Two women? One was not enough, for the mighty Lord Hand?"

"Leave us, Aelinor. Please." Tyrion's voice could have fooled anyone else with its coldness, still, Aelinor knew immediately that coldness was just a trick to conceal his concern for her safety.

"No."

"Aelinor?" Tyrion repeated, as talking to himself. "Surely you didn't look like a whore - see, father? I can also learn words! - but... Aelinor? Is it even possible? Aelinor Marbrand?"

Aelinor took a cautious step towards him and she did it with such a self-confidence that even Tywin, who had opened his mouth to dissuade her from staying, remained silent. "Aelinor Lannister, as it happens. Put down the crossbow, Tyrion, there's no need for that. Go. I won't call the guards. Go. Just leave us be, and go."

"He married you?" Tyrion laughed hard.

"Leave us be. Run." She repeated obstinately. "You won't be followed."

"Put down the dagger, then. Put down the dagger and show me you're good intentions are authentic."

"When a man with a crossbow meets a woman with a dagger, odds are the woman is the one losing the game. Why should I abandon my only weapon?"

"Aelinor, please. Leave us. Let me deal with my son. Please."

"Oh, sweet Mother!" Tyrion exclaimed, laughing again. "You do love her! You're worried that I could hurt her!" The laughter continued, high-pitched, frantic. "Maybe I should, then."

Aelinor watched as Tyrion Lannister pointed the crossbow slowly in her direction. His laughter had subsided.

"Put-down-the-dagger."

"No. You-leave-us-be."

"Can't. Well, father?" he said, his mismatched eyes - and his loaded crossbow - never leaving Aelinor.

"What?"

"Tysha. What did you do with her, after my little lesson?"
"I don’t recall."

"Try harder. Did you have her killed?"

His father pursed his lips. "There was no reason for that, she’d learned her place… and
had been
well paid for her day’s work, I seem to recall. I suppose the steward sent her on her
way. I never
thought to inquire."

"On her way where?"

"Wherever whores go."

Tyrion’s finger clenched. The crossbow whanged just as Lord Tywin started to rise.
The bolt
slammed into him above the groin and he sat back down with a grunt.

"NO!" Aelinor's scream echoed and amplified in the small privy room as she hurried beside her
husband to support him. "You...you bastard!"

"My father's taught you well, as I can see," the Imp considered. Blood was running down Tywin's
wound, weakening him more at every passing moment.

"Run, Aelinor," the Old Lion said, his breath feeble and broken. "My love." He reached for her
cheek with blood-stained fingers, "Go."

But she didn't.

She threw herself against Tyrion, her face wet with both her tears and Tywin's blood, the dagger
clutched in her hand.

The blow didn't miss, she knew as soon as she felt blood on the hand holding the blade - but she
couldn't see where it had ended. The crossbow shot again, this time towards her, and she tried hard
not to collapse under the pain in her left shoulder... She closed her eyes for a moment, trying to
focus, but when she opened them again, Tyrion was nowhere to be seen.

"GUARDS!" she screamed with all her voice, crawling back towards Tywin. "GUARDS!" She half
cut, half tore off a good piece of fabric from her dress and smallclothes and pressed it against Tywin's
wound, holding him tight against her chest. "Stay with me, you insufferable man. You stay with
me."

"I'm...tired..."

"No. I don't care. You won't die on me, Tywin Lannister." The fabric was soaking quickly.
"GUARDS!" she called again. "You won't. I won't let you." Her voice broke, her throat full of tears.
"You won't leave me. You won't make my baby an orphan."

Tywin Lannister's green eyes opened slowly. There was no more than a feeble glint of life in them,
but he opened them, taking in the sight of the wife he had so obstinately denied being in love with.
"Are you...?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes..."

Six Lannister guards finally burst into the room and Aelinor found in herself that there were just two
orders she was able to give in that moment.

"Bring here Maester Ballabar. *Find and kill the Imp.*"
Chapter 84

"My Lady, your shoulder..."

"It can wait," Aelinor dismissed the Maester's worries with a curt gesture of her right hand. She didn't feel pain. She didn't feel the stickiness of the blood starting to dry on her skin. She didn't feel anything - save for pure dread, terror...and the worst thirst for blood she had ever experienced. Shae's corpse had been promptly removed and disposed of - though she had not the slightest idea about where or how - and Tywin was now laying on the bed, where linen had been hastily changed by the few maids bold enough to hasten when she had screamed so loud.

Other Lannister men entered following Maester Ballabar, and Aelinor gave them other orders, yes, but in a hollow voice which made them almost shiver. There was an authority in that voice, though, and no one even dared to think not to obey at once. "You - go and wake ser Kevan. You fetch my brother - the Lord Commander Marbrand. And you - you go and tell ser Jaime. Tell him what happened and that I'm waiting here."

The first two men left in a hurry. The third hesitated. "What should I tell him it happened, my Lady?"

"Tell him his brother shot an arrow against his father and wounded him seriously."

"He shot you, too, my Lady."

"He shot me, too, yes, but that's hardly the point. He will want to know about the Hand, not about me." The man left, and in his going almost run over a trembling Pycelle. Surely one of the first guards had taken the initiative and Aelinor - who was kneeling on her side of the bed, holding his husband's hand while Ballabar kept trying to remove the arrow without him losing any more blood - couldn't stop herself from rolling her eyes.

"Why... Why did nobody call me?" he asked in a whining tone that - Aelinor thought - was not even remotely convincing.

"Maester Ballabar's younger. I judged he would've arrived here faster."

"I understand, still-"

"My lady," Ballabar broke into the exchange, "Maybe the Grand Maester could take care of your wound...?" Both the old man and Aelinor looked at him, outraged, but Ballabar didn't lose a bit of his calm. "As soon as adrenaline starts to subside, that wound will ache like hell and the removal of the arrow will be more difficult. And no, Grand Maester: maybe out of rank we actually should switch our places, still, it's not what we're going to do. I'm in the middle of something extremely tricky, while Lady Lannister's wound here needs to be treated. She can not go through all the pain she would suffer if we wait any longer. In her conditions, it could be..."

"Conditions?" ser Kevan asked dismayed from the threshold. He was starting to believe that night would have never ended.
There were not many possible definitions for that mess. It was a Bloody mess.

Ballabar's hands and arms were now covered in Tywin's blood, but hopefully, he had finally succeeded removing the arrow from his abdomen and was now sewing the damaged parts back together. Grand Maester Pycelle had managed to cut away the fletchings from the arrow still in Aelinor's shoulder, making easier to extract the rest through the exit wound; she, on the other side, wasn't firmly against the idea of Pycelle's weak and trembling hands trying such a manoeuvre.

"My brother can do it."

"My Lady..."

"My brother will do it." And ser Addam did as his sister commanded. No discussions, no buts. Despite everything, she was the one in charge, it was plainly clear to everyone in the room.

Still, as soon as the needle began to penetrate, she was the one forgetting about it. Removing the arrow had made the numbing pain subside, giving her back her full sensitivity - so, she cried. And cried. And clutched Addam's hand so tightly he almost asked her to give him a truce.

It was the shock, they knew. As Ballabar had said, now that the adrenaline was going down everything had kept her standing was beginning to crumble. The realization about what had actually happened dawned abruptly on her, and for a single moment, she screamed, both in physical and psychological pain.

That scream caused a movement in the room, though. A movement no one had even considered possible. It was ser Kevan, who was standing at his brother's bedside, to notice it.

And he hurried at his brother's side. "Tywin!"

The Old Lion's eyes scarcely opened and his first attempt to speak went wasted. Aelinor's voice died in her throat, too frightened to ask what such an exclamation was about. She could feel her heart throbbing in her ears. No, she thought. Don't leave me, don't...

Then came the wheeze. The choked "Aelinor," which had been no more than a gurgle.

In a moment, she was crawled beside him, kissing his hands, trying to conceal from him the blood-stained suture on her naked shoulder. "I'm here."

"Us," he managed, "alone." She understood and nodded.

"Give us the room."

"My Lady..."

"Aelinor-"

"But-"

"The room," she repeated. "Just for a minute. Please."

"We'll be just out of the door," both the Maester and the Grand Maester assured. Both ser Addam and ser Kevan tried to exchange a look with her, but with no success: Aelinor only had eyes for
Tywin, and Tywin alone.

It was only too clear how much he was struggling to stay vigilant - his hold on her hand was quite strong, though, and Aelinor felt quite comforted by it.

"You should rest, my love. We can talk later, we..."

"No." He inhaled slowly. "Tell...me," and there it was again. The wheeze. Again. "The...our...baby?"
"We're fine," she whispered, almost choking with her tears. Tywin tried to lift his hand to her face, failing miserably. He was experimenting the unknown sensation of being totally powerless.

"Can't," he exhaled, exhausted just for trying. Aelinor lowered herself towards him and took his hand, guiding it gently to her cheek.

"See? Together we can do everything," she managed to smile. When Tywin's thumb stroke gently her skin, though, she couldn't hold back her tears - and they run down both his and her fingers, slow and warm, and so salty on her lips.

"You're hurt," he finally realized. Aelinor shook her head.

"Nothing to worry about. You have to focus on you, my love, I can manage, I can-"

"Aelinor."

"Don't fatigue yourself. We have all the time in the world, we..."

"No." His touch on her cheek became even slower, more intense. "Let me..."

"Tywin, please, don't-" He closed his eyes again, paler, weaker - still, he somehow managed to take a deep breath, and when his eyes opened again they looked directly into hers, deep down into the most secluded corner of her soul.

"I love you, Aelinor. Don't ever forget it..." His hand slid weakly out of hers as sobs started to shake her. She took it again, though, and gently placed it on her belly - that loss of consciousness wouldn't be the last, she promised both to him and herself. *I'll bring you back. You'll be the one teaching our child how to be a Lannister.*

"You and no-one else," she murmured, in the still silence of the night.
Jaime Lannister stood rooted on the door, stricken. Addam's little sister had never been little, not in the common way of thinking - tall and elegant, with the strictest posture he'd ever seen even in the noblest women of Westeros, blessed with a mind made of steel and a tongue sharper than a razor... But that was what she was, now: little. Frail. Broken. A bird pushed out of its nest. Pale as death, her hair uncharacteristically down, their copper colour somewhat faded, she looked like a ghost - the ghost of the magnificent, charming young woman his father had married just a few weeks before.

"Is he...?" he asked tentatively. Aelinor turned towards him.

"No - gods forbid it. He's unconscious, though." She sighed. "Did you tell Cersei?"

"Sent a man. Was it Tyrion, then?"

"Yes." Only then she seemed to realize she was still half dressed, her gown hanging from her right shoulder and barely cover her in a decent way. Her left arm was throbbing like hell. "Wait for me in the solar, would you? I need to change. Tell your uncle, too. And Addam."

"Of course. Aelinor?"

"Yes?"

"I'm so sorry."

She kept thinking about that apology for all the time it took her maids to help her wash and dress. As the hot water run over her sensitive skin. As she stood almost frozen looking at the lightly tinged water in the basin where one of her maids wrang out the sponge. As she let them wrap her in a fresh dress, secure her left arm carefully against her torso as the Grand Maester had said. All the time, she kept thinking about Jaime, about that I'm so sorry.

She should have been the one being sorry. It was his father, the one laying in that bed, unconscious and fighting for his life, while she was the one standing unscathed, or almost... Why didn't he seem to think her guilty, or somehow responsible? Why didn't he blame her? She blamed herself so much.

The face looking back at her in the mirror was the face of a stranger: the ghostly pallor made her skin almost shine and stood in sheer contrast with her reddened eyes; her hair, now combed and braided in her usual way, were a bit more acceptable; her left arm, bandaged to her torso, was at the same time painfully aching and totally useless... Aelinor suppressed a groan of frustration.

She couldn't afford to show any weakness. She had to speak with Kevan and Jaime, she had to convince them to follow her lead.

She had a plan.
"Sister." Ser Addam moved immediately, meeting her in the middle of the solar and drawing her into a gentle hug. Aelinor patted his back with her good hand, and nodded imperceptibly.

"I'm fine."

Kevan Lannister stood behind Tywin's desk and she registered the notion with a surge of annoyance - it didn't last long, though, for her brother-in-law motioned for her to sit in Tywin's chair and she suddenly knew what had just happened: the Lannisters recognized her position in the family. *It will make things easier,* she thought, lowering herself onto her husband's chair.

"How's your shoulder, my lady?" ser Kevan asked, worried. Aelinor managed to smile.

"It has seen better times, actually. But thank you for asking."

"Is... everything else... fine?"

"Yes, ser, the baby is fine. We can safely say it's strong and willful as its father is."

"I'm glad to hear it," he said, and it was plainly clear he was sincere. After all, there were no doubts about how deeply he cared for his brother.

"Should we wait for the Queen regent, Jaime?" Aelinor asked carefully, determined to do whatever Jaime had chosen.

"I guess we can start without her," he said. Ser Kevan nodded. Her brother was clearly not persuaded, but he didn't intervene and she was very grateful to him for that.

"I'm confident you all know what happened in the last hours... We have to react."

"Cersei will want Tyrion's head."

"And she'll have it. We'll have it. Fact is - we cannot let our enemies think we're weakened."

"But *we are*, Aelinor. Maester Ballabar said it's too soon to tell whether my father will live..."

"And there's no way to keep the news secret. There's been too much turmoil to-"

*I know, Addam. I know. Keeping the news hidden was not what I had in mind. Quite the contrary, to be honest.*

The three men looked at each other, bewildered. "You want us to spread the news that Tywin's been wounded and it's unclear if he'll survive the attack or not?" Ser Kevan asked. "*That* will surely make us appear weak."

"Indeed. And that's why I think we should tell the realm that Tyrion actually *killed* his father."
"What?"

"You must be kidding."

"Aelinor, you can't possibly suggest..."

Their disbelief, though, didn't touch her - it washed over her like something completely irrelevant. And when she spoke, she did it in a low voice, but firm and stern, almost defiant.

And she did it looking directly at ser Kevan. He was the only one who could see the implications. He was the one who had spent year after year beside his brother. He had to understand.

"I'm not kidding, no. I just have confidence - every confidence - in what I think. And I think that spreading the news of my husband's death - the fake news of my husband's death - will give us more than one advantage in this war."

"Our enemies will think us weakened."

"Even better: they'll think we're broken."

"And how on earth this could be an advantage, pray?"

"For we are not broken, Jaime. That's how. She's right."

"Oh, please, uncle, don't be ridiculous! We're not even sure father will survive, we should go out there and... And..."

"And present ourselves as pathetic cubs blinded by anger and pain? Oh, that's a good plan for sure!"

"Your father will recover, Jaime. I have no doubt about it. And when it happens, think of how disruptive the effect will be!" Aelinor exclaimed, her fist closed on the wooden surface of the Hand's desk. "You weren't at the Blackwaters, Jaime. You weren't here when the Lannisters and the Tyrells arrived, you have no idea of how much of an impact had ser Garlan, dressing Renly's armour... The whole city thought it was Renly's ghost. Think of how much better will it be, when it will be Tywin Lannister himself, and not his ghost, to show up!"

"You can't deny she has a point, Jaime..."

"Of course she has a point, she's your clever sister! She always has a point, hasn't she?"

"Jaime-"

"What, uncle? What now? Do you really expect Cersei will accept this...this..."

"This pretence? Your sister is the least of our worries. We cannot rule out the possibility that Tyrion could decide to try again, once he should know that he'd failed." Ser Kevan's voice was reasonable and firm, but Aelinor's eyes darted to her brother - ser Addam recognized fear in them, and alarm: she had not taken into account that eventuality, and he quickly shook his head, reassuringly. His men were searching and sealing every secret passageway. The surveillance would have been improved. There was no possibility to enter the Tower of the Hand without being seen, from now on.

"Does it mean you agree with my plan, Kevan? Can I rely on you?" she forced herself to ask.
"It's a good plan. Yes." he nodded.
Chapter 90

The Queen regent had arrived as Aelinor was explaining why she did consider essential to move her husband from the Tower of the Hand - and from the Red Keep - as soon as possible, and it was no surprise for anyone that Cersei could think otherwise.

"The Red Keep is the safest place in King's Landing, lady Aelinor. I see no reason why-"

"The reason's your brother broke into this same rooms, on this same night, and shot your father, and if I wasn't here, we would be now crying over his dead body."

"We'll double the guards."

"I don't care, Your Grace. Forgive me. But I don't care. All I care about is my husband's safety, and..."

"And where on earth do you figure the Hand of the King should go and live, pray?"

In the silence that followed, each and every one could almost touch, rather than feel, the building tension between the two women: where Addam Marbrand just stood and looked worriedly at his sister, though, perfectly aware he was not in the position to engage with the queen, the Lannisters exchanged a rather different look.

"There's something else, Cersei," finally spoke ser Kevan. "And before you make a scene, both Jaime and I agreed with Aelinor that this is the better path we can take at the moment." To her credit - and everyone else's surprise - the Queen didn't object. She didn't approve openly the idea, either, but Aelinor felt a hint of gratitude towards her all the same. She was so tired, and her arm was giving her so much pain, she knew all too well that she wouldn't have had strength enough to deal with an argument.

"Then the Crown should... make arrangements for the Hand's funerals?" The Queen asked, probably not so coldly as she had intended. Aelinor nodded. But what a surrealistic conversation it was.

"Yes. And you'll want to appoint a new Hand, too. We can't afford people to ask questions."

"And you'll need black dresses," Cersei suggested, and the other tried unsuccessfully not to shiver. "I'll send my seamstresses to see you in the morning." To that, Aelinor froze, surprised.

"Thank you."

"I'm not doing it for you. Still, I assume we just have to make the best of things, haven't we."

"So it seems."

"And where will you bring my father?" the Queen asked; Aelinor would have preferred she hadn't. She currently had no idea about it.

"My mansion," Addam saved her. "I've bought it as soon as Lord Tywin made me Lord Commander, but I never use it, I spend most of my time at the barracks and..."

"And will make perfect sense if your widowed sister leaves the Red Keep to live in your home," grunted Jaime. "I hate every bit of this, but apparently it could really work."
When her brother, the Queen and ser Jaime finally left, Aelinor found herself in ser Kevan's company - he had deliberately stayed behind, and now he was looking at her, brows furrowed and arms crossed.

"Is there anything else, ser Kevan?" she asked, tiredly. "I was planning to go back to my husband's bedside..."

"You should rest, girl. You need a rest."

She knew, she knew it perfectly well - it was not how he was supposed to talk to her. In any other circumstance, she would probably have rebuked him for calling her girl. Still, in the heart of that horrible night, that simple, improper, little word - girl - produced an equally little miracle. And Aelinor felt tears rolling slowly down her cheeks, and the tension in her muscles slowly easing, and as she stood she find quite comforting the hand he promptly placed on her back.

"I'm so scared," she exhaled, reluctantly. Ser Kevan Lannister took gently his brother's wife's right hand, with the reassuring attitude of a man used to be reasonable with everyone.

"You did well, though. You did very well." He smiled. "Now I can see why Tywin's so taken with you. You truly are his equal."
Chapter 91

Despite ser Kevan's suggestion - and her own better judgment - Aelinor ended up fighting with every bit of strength in order not to fall asleep. She couldn't. Was she tired? Yes. Was she exhausted? Yes. But she couldn't afford the idea of letting herself go, even less risk the eventuality of falling into a nightmare - her reality was horrible enough, at the moment.

Maester Ballabar had sedated Tywin with a massive dose of milk of the poppy and Aelinor, who was sitting wearily on the soft armchair some servant had placed for her beside the bed, stretched out her arm and let her hand rest over her husband's, never averting her eyes from him. He looked so peaceful... She couldn't recall a time when she'd seen him so serene, his forehead so relaxed.

But it wasn't true. He wasn't just sleeping, he wasn't serene. As soon as the effect of the milk of the poppy would have diminished, he'd been in terrible pain: the Maester had warned her.

"I should pray, I guess," she told him, hours later. Her voice went out hoarse. "But I fear there's nothing left in me, good enough to make my prayers worthy to be listened to..." For she was hollow. There was nothing in her - no mercy, no faith, nothing... Just thirst for revenge.

Aelinor's fingers gently caressed her husband's hand and she changed position in her seat, leaning over to lay her head on the blanket. That would have been their last night in the Tower of the Hand, she had been adamant about it: but what was ahead of them, once they would have been relocated, she couldn't say.

And she was scared.
Welcome home, sister.

It had been an innocuous greeting, and Aelinor was more than sure her brother had had the best of intentions, but... She closed her eyes in the dark, determined not to cry. They had moved Tywin with a stretcher, hidden inside a sheeted wagon, as soon as the sun had started to set: all day she had given orders about packing and checked that every single one of the servants followed her dispositions to the letter, all day she had played through the pain her shoulder was giving her.

Men of the City Watch had escorted them - the wagon with the litter, the cart with their possessions - through the streets, but just a few men, not to draw attention from prying eyes. Ser Addam was waiting for her on the threshold and had welcomed her with those three words - but how can she feel at home between those walls, without Tywin to share them with? She was incredibly cold, despite the fire roaring in the hearth.

Tywin had never regained consciousness, not even for a moment - and that was the reason why she had ordered Maester Ballabar to move there with them, too: there had to be someone, in that home, who could take care of him properly... It would have been a risk, having to summon him in case of a deterioration of his conditions, if the Maester would have remained inside the Red Keep...

"How is he?" she asked tentatively. Ballabar shook his head.

"Nothing's changed, my Lady."

"He'll live, won't he?"

The Maester lifted his gaze and looked at her - pale, tired, dark shadows under her eyes. He owed her the truth.

"It's highly unlikely, my Lady. The damages the arrow caused are massive, and..."

"I can't lose him," she said, and both herself and the man were surprised by how firm her voice had been.

"I understand, my Lady."

"No, you don't. You will save him. By any means necessary. Your life depends on it."

"My Lady..."

"No. My husband won't die at the hand of his son."

"I understand, but-"

"My Lady?" the young servant interrupted them, and Aelinor dismissed the Maester's objections with a wave of her hand.

"Yes?"

"The Lord Commander of the King's Guard is asking for you, my Lady."

"Let him in. Maester, you can go."
"You really look impressive in black," Jaime greeted her with a soft smile. "But you look tired, too. Did you get any sleep, Aelinor?"

"No," she shrugged. "Why do you ask?"

"Someone would say my little brother or sister deserves my concern..."

"Oh, Jaime, please. We both know how enthusiastically you and Cersei could have welcomed the news. Spare me, will you?"

"Cersei's upset, I won't deny it," he said plainly. "I'm quite relieved, though. With a new heir on its way, my father won't vex me anymore: believe it or not, I have no desire to have Casterly Rock. I never had. Thereby, I don't see your child as a threat. Thereby, I am free to worry about its well-being."

Aelinor sat back on the edge of Tywin's bed and looked at the man her brother regarded as one of his closest friends. His captivity had changed him, no doubt. The stump at the end of his right arm was heart-wrenching, but - if anything - it had clearly given him a new gravity, which was so comforting at times like that.

"Thank you," she murmured. "The Maester's not confident about your father's recovery, Jaime," she said, tears caught in her throat. "Although I guess that if I ever told Cersei any of this, she'd convince herself I'm secretly planning to put an end to his sufferings."

"You know her," Jaime scoffed.

"I'm ready to welcome any man or woman, servant or Maester, she will want to send here to keep an eye on me. Tell her. Will you tell her, Jaime? Please?"

"Oh sweet Mother," the Kingslayer exhaled, sitting heavily on the armchair. "My uncle Kevan was right, then. You actually do love my father. I mean - nobody in their right mind could ask for my sister to send a spy inside their home. Try and please Cersei in this is totally about loving this man... This, or else you're the maddest woman I've ever met."

"I just don't want to provoke any useless tension. We have to stick together, now more than ever."

"What happens if he dies?" Jaime asked, brows furrowed.

"In the eyes of the realm, he's dead," she softly reminded him. "Personally, I prefer to think of the day he'll be able to hold our child."

"Are you finally getting sentimental, Aelinor?" he mocked her in a gentle tone. "You? The Unrelenting Aelinor Marbrand truly has a heart?"

"Apparently..."

"And it took none other than Tywin Lannister to make you realize it. Good grief. That definitely says something about you!"
"So no one thought to tell me. I travelled for days and now I find my brother's not dead? And no one thought to tell me?" Genna Lannister - for no-one in their right mind would have never dared to call her a Frey - was fuming, pacing the room with the fierce attitude of a wild lioness. "Well?" she pressed, "Why isn't anybody explaining? You, girl," she roared, pointing at Aelinor. And Aelinor, who had been paralyzed with terror just moments before, stood.

"I'm not a girl, as it happens," she smiled, coldly. "By marriage, I am the lady of Casterly Rock. And I could have sworn that my husband being alive would have been a welcomed news for his beloved sister." She caught a glimpse of Kevan's worried look, which she dismissed with an inward shrug. The two women faced for a long moment, both imperious, both defiant, both determined not to be the first to blink.

"Ladies, please," tried ser Kevan.

"Don't fuss, brother," Genna shot back immediately. "The girl is perfectly capable to shield herself, as I can see."

"Oh, is that so? Do I need to shield myself from my husband's sister, now?"

In the palpable tension permeating the room, ser Kevan Lannister looked at his sister and his sister-in-law with resignation: it had always been predictable, after all - two strong-minded women like those two could only love or hate each other, there was no possible middle ground... and apparently they just went for the second option. Jaime had been right.

Genna Lannister stared intently at Aelinor, apparently at loss for words. Then, she opened her mouth.

And laughed.

"I like you, girl," she declared; Aelinor refrained from pointing out again she definitely didn't like being called girl. It was a peace offering, after all. "You look like a real pain in the...neck," she finished with a smirk, sitting down, "Now sit and tell me what are you planning - fear not, I won't tell that fatuous husband I have, that goes without saying... Never trust a Frey, girl. Take it from me."

Aelinor sat with a grin, trying not to think of the stories about Genna's children. A sigh of relief left ser Kevan's body before he could suppress it.
Tywin's fingers were strong and possessive on the back of her thighs, grasping hungrily at the soft flesh - hungrily, but resolutely: there was a deliberate pace in their movements, the steady pace of someone determined to savour every single moment. It had been too long since the last time.

It had been too long and now she's quite heavy with their child and he had helped her straddling him and lowering herself onto him - and she had taken him, all of him, with a shudder of pure pleasure, welcoming him back with every fibre of her being. So he had kneaded her thighs and bum in his hands, he had grabbed her hips and guided her to the stimulating rocking which deeply pleased both of them. He had caressed her breasts, fuller than what he remembers, and brushed reverently her belly, somehow mesmerized by the simple sight of it. Their child. She was carrying their child. She had put herself in harm's way the night Tyrion shot him. She had put herself in harm's way for him.

His right hand raised gently to her left shoulder, to the scar Tyrion's arrow had left her. It didn't diminish a bit her beauty - it accentuated it, speaking openly of her bravery and nerve. She wasn't as confident about her scar as he was, though, so she took him by the wrist and guided his hand where their bodies were joined, signalling him how ready she was to finally give in to her pleasure.

Tywin obliged, stroking her gently while meeting her increasing movements with his own - and her eyes clouded and her breath broke as the orgasm hit her hard, harder than expected: her nipples all too sensitive under Tywin's touch, she rode the wave till what she had thought the last bit of it - then Tywin came, filling her with the warm seed she had missed so much in those months, and there she was again, trembling and moaning and surrendering to the seemingly endless power he had on her.

"Welcome back, my love," she tried to say while catching her breath.

Then she realized.

He wasn't back at all.

He wasn't in their bed.

Once again she had fallen asleep in the armchair by his bed.

And in spite of what she had thought just that morning, she found out she still had tears to shed.

Chapter End Notes

So, so, so TERRIBLY sorry!!!

But I have to thank you, wonderful people, for being so kind to me with kudos and comments, and so patient in waiting for my intermittent updates... LOVE YOU ALL!!!
"Please, tell me it will end," Aelinor managed to say, before bending on herself again and emptying her already empty stomach.

Genna chuckled.

"It will end quite soon - but to you, it will seem an eternity all the same." The older woman handed a towel to the other, smiling as she fixed a strand of hair behind her sister-in-law's ear. The poor thing was a real mess and Genna couldn't blame her, with everything that was going on - third day of morning sickness, second of Tywin's funerals, and not to mention her left arm, still immobilized and aching... Still, she was a brave one. Never complaining. Always fighting. Tywin had been right about her. "You should change, now, girl."

"I don't want to," Aelinor exhaled, avoiding Genna's eyes. Although perfectly aware of being not a widow, having to face a crowd offering condolences the day before had been a terrifying experience and she had no desire at all to endure again.

"I know." Silence floated for a while between them. "You don't have to go through all that again," Genna suggested. Aelinor rolled her eyes and huffed.

"Cersei would ask for my head, no doubt."

"Don't be silly, she's quite busy with Tyrion's, as far as I know." She had followed Aelinor, who was now in the other room, but stopped at the door, looking intently at how different her sister-in-law seemed, now she was in the same room with Tywin. The frail, tired woman weakened by her morning sickness was suddenly strong again, majestic in her posture and attitude. "Stay with him," Genna found herself murmuring.

"People will talk, if I don't show up in the Great Sept."

"People wouldn't even dream to talk if you agreed to break the news of..."

"We've discussed it. No. I won't. It's too soon, but even more, I don't want to. The last thing I need right now is a bunch of enemies trying to get rid of the mother of Tywin's new heir."

"Yes, we've discussed it and I think you're right, but it could actually ease this situation."

"Or worsen it."

"Or worsen it, yes."

"Oh, damn, this bloody-" Aelinor hissed, grasping her left arm with her right in a sudden movement. Her shoulder was on fire and tears of pain and frustration were yet prickling her eyes.

"Listen to me, child," Genna spoke softly, "You stay here, today. You're clearly not well, we both know it. I'll tell everyone your wound is affecting you more than usual, and your Maester ordered you to remain in bed. There is no man nor woman in this city brave enough to confront me, not even my niece - I'll tell everyone you've chosen to grieve over your loss by yourself, and they'll believe me, of course they will. You let me handle it, and rest."

Aelinor smiled at her, thankful. That formidable woman was an unexpected friend and she was deeply grateful for her presence and support. "Thank you," she sighed, sitting down at Tywin's
bedside. Genna didn't share entirely her assurance about the possibility of a real improvement in Tywin's conditions, but she was glad her brother, after twenty-seven years of solitude, had finally married someone so dedicated. She was literally touched by Aelinor's devotion.

"Do you need anything before I left?"

"Should you see my brother... Tell him I need to talk to him, would you?"
"Is everything alright? Are you well?"

"Of course I am, Addam, don't fuss..."

"Lady Genna told me you needed me, so I figured... Oh, well, I'm glad it's no big deal. What happened? Is your husband...?"

"Still alive? Yes," she nodded, fidgeting absentmindedly with her pendant. "Nothing changed. And that's why I need you to do me a favour."

Ser Addam, tall and handsome in his golden cloak, looked abashed at his sister - was that bundle of nerves his sister, though? "Name it," he replied, despite all his questions.

"I want you to bring here the red priest we met the day you escorted me to the Street of Steel."

"A red priest? What for, pray?"

His tone had been somehow defiant, exasperated: he never liked it when she played the vague and given the present circumstances he was quite worried by that new idea. Aelinor arched an eyebrow, not at all impressed by the outburst.

"This isn't about you, brother, so I'd say I don't have to explain myself to you. I'd be happier if you were the one fetching that man and bringing him here, but if you're not up to the task, just say it, I'll find someone else..."

"Don't overreact, Aelinor... I'm just concerned, don't you see that?"

"I do. And I'm grateful you care for me. But I need you to trust me in this, Addam... Find the red priest. Bring him to me."

Ser Addam Marbrand shook his head, defeated. "Just promise me you know what you're doing."

"I can't, for I don't know for certain. But I can't stand the idea of just sitting idly by. I must do something, I..." her voice faded and her brother knew she was trying to suppress a sob.

"You, what?" he pressed, gently as he could.

"I can't even think my life without Tywin, Addam. Please. Help me."
"What you're asking for is impossible, my lady," the man insisted for the third time. Aelinor, sat behind the impressive table in the parlour, didn't even blink.

"Rumor is Thoros of Myr is more than capable to bring back people from death. Beric Dondarrion has benefited from this ability more than once, as far as I know. Is Thoros of Myr a...wizard? A sorcerer, maybe?" She asked innocently - at least, that was what the priest thought; ser Addam felt a shiver of worry running down his back. That tone, in his sister's voice, didn't sound good at all.

"No, my lady, he's what you Westerosi call a red priest. He serves the Lord of Light, R'hllor."

"And which god is the one you serve?"

"The one and true god, my lady. R'hllor."

*Good grief*, thought ser Addam at unease. *The man is digging his own grave.*

"So what you're telling me is that Thoros is a better servant than you are? He never struck me as a saint, truth to be told... Yet he has to be, hasn't he?" The red priest moved slightly on the spot, his eyes fixed on the pavement. "He has to be a saint, if he can bring someone back to life and you cannot. I don't see how could he have so much power, otherwise," Aelinor dropped with a smile. A dangerous smile, her brother thought.

"The Lord of Light gives him-" The man stopped abruptly. Aelinor's smile widened.

"And why him, and not you? Are you such a disappointment to your god that a well-known drunkard is better than you?"

"My lady..."

"Show me where I'm wrong, then. *Prove me wrong.*"

"But-"

"Yes?"

"Your... Your lord husband's still alive and..."

"It will be easier, then," that smile was there again, cold and sharp and deadly. Even ser Addam shivered. "After all, everything I'm asking is for you to try. It seems reasonable to me, isn't it reasonable?"

The man bowed his head, defeated and clearly terrified. "Of course, it is, my lady. I'll do whatever you ask for."

"Good," Aelinor exclaimed happily, standing up. "Tell me: is there anything you need?"

"No, not really," he shook his head. "Just to be left alone with him for as long as my try will take."

"Very well. I'll escort you to my husband's bedchamber, please follow me," she encouraged him. At the door, though, she stopped. "It goes without saying... Not a single word about this will ever leave these walls," she warned him in a sweet voice.
"Of course, my lady."

"Oh. And you better try very hard. It's not just about my husband's life, you know, it's about yours, too."

"My...My lady?" The man stuttered, his eyes wide with panic. Aelinor put her good hand on his arm, gently and reassuringly.

"Oh, but I'm certain there'll be no need to worry about it. Come, my lord husband's waiting."

Frozen on the spot, ser Addam watched his sister and the red priest leaving the parlour. That story was incredible, completely incredible. It could work, of course, having seen what Thoros was able to do Addam couldn't possibly rule out the possibility, but even so... Did Aelinor just threaten to kill the man if he failed? *Yes,* he realized, definitely worried.
"It's not good for you, having the Lannisters so close..."

"They're family. You can't possibly expect me to keep them from coming to see Tywin. Besides, it's mostly Kevan who comes here often... And I can't see how Kevan's presence shouldn't be good for me."

"It's Kevan who comes here, but lady Genna lives here, doesn't she?"

"Yes, she lives here, and she's helping me a lot with all this mess - pregnancy included. I still don't see what problem do you have with this, brother." Addam Marbrand shook his head, his copper hair catching glimpses of light with that simple movement.

"You're becoming one of them, Aelinor, don't you see it?"

Her eyebrows furrowed, the young woman leant against the table and shot a glance at her brother. The pain in her shoulder was back but she resisted the urge to rub it. "I'd say it's safe to assume I am one of them, Addam. It's called marriage."

"You just threatened a man! You threatened to kill him!"

"Oh, please! Don't play innocent, Addam, it doesn't suit you. The man just needed a little encouragement..."

"It was a little encouragement, then? Nothing more?"

"Well..."

"And what if he fails?" Aelinor's right hand gripped hard at the edge of the table.

"He won't," she replied coldly.

"But what if?"

"In that case, the Sevens forbid it, he won't get away with it. It's just prudence, brother. I can't let the news break free, can I?"

"You'd be ready to kill a man for not being able to give you the outcome you want, then? What the hell is happening with you?"

"You do me wrong, Addam. Of course, I won't have him killed, don't be stupid. But I'll have him imprisoned, you can bet on it. He'll be secluded in the depths of Maegor's, with no contacts with anyone, and thank you very much. I can't permit such a voice to spread, you understand this, don't you?"

"I do, but you do scare me anyway. This is not who you are."

"Indeed it is, brother. I am a woman wanting her husband back, a woman trying to defend her child and family. I am a woman who won't stop until she'll have tried anything to achieve her goals. I can't live without Tywin, Addam. I know you think it sounds extreme, but these past days have proven it beyond any doubt... I can't, Addam. I simply can't. I've tried to reconcile myself with the notion he could never regain consciousness, believe me, I've tried... But I can't. Not until I'll have tried in every possible way. When I'll run out of options, maybe, I'll be able to let him go, but not before then."
Addam Marbrand nodded solemnly - he *did* understand. His sister has always been *extremely* secretive about her feelings, and that now she could actually speak about them so openly could only mean she was telling the truth... His heart ached for her even more. "I'm so sorry, Aelinor..."

She accepted his outstretched hand with a smile, a distant smile that made her look sad, and wise, and almost *ancient*. She never managed to thank him, though, for the door suddenly opened.

"My lady, I've done everything I could."

Aelinor stormed out of the door - her brother's hand closed in an iron-like grip around the red priest's arm. "What have you done?"
Closed shutters and darkness.
Silence.
Stillness.

Aelinor broke into her husband's chamber and stopped abruptly, shaking uncontrollably.

Not a sound, not a movement - not a breath, she registered, reluctantly, and felt her heart drop. It was over.

Her happiness, her dreams. Her life. Everything was over. She could almost perceive the smell of death.

It couldn't be, it couldn't have happened... Her eyes filled with tears and her throat closed so tightly, so suddenly, she needed all her willpower and strength not to faint.

"No," she exhaled, inching towards the bed. Soon the Lannisters could be back from the fake funerals, how was she supposed to tell them...? She collapsed by Tywin's side, crumbling under the weight of her deep, breathtaking sobs. Her chest was aching like hell, her lungs on fire - Aelinor's hand went to Tywin's cheek, to the still warm skin of his neck, to the bare chest emerging from the bandages constricting his torso. Her fingers indulged over his heart, almost numb in their compulsive, desperate trembling.

She wasn't ready. She couldn't let him go, it was too soon, too...

"Cold..."

Aelinor froze on the spot.

Tywin's eyes opened weakly as he took a deep, slow breath - a sound so primal it could have come from the center of the Earth. But it was a breath.

"Your hands. Cold."

And Aelinor started to laugh, hysterically, as tears began to fall again.
Hi everyone! Thanks for being still with us... Let's celebrate ch. 100 properly! ;)

Chapter 101

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

For the first time since Aelinor had set foot in there, her brother's house was full of relaxed, happy people. Even the Queen, who had come as soon as ser Addam had brought the news inside Maegor's, had been seen smiling - and when she had hugged her, Aelinor had noticed, it was truly out of relief and joy.

Without anyone noticing Aelinor had dismissed the red priest, with a heavy bag full of gold, the promise of undying gratitude, and a parchment, allowing him to preach and proselytize freely in Lannisport - a permit signed with Tywin's own seal, a permit even the Faith could ever question.

The relative turmoil of Lannisters discreetly coming and going subsided quite early, not just due to the small number of the people involved but mainly because of Maester Ballabar's strict instructions: his patient was still far from healed and needed rest, so even the most important members of the most powerful family in the Seven Kingdoms found themselves pushed unceremoniously out Tywin's door. No one complained, though. Tywin Lannister was alive and his wife had been right the whole time: they were not broken nor bent, and they would have risen again, stronger than before.

"Should I keep sleeping on that damned cot, or may I share my husband's bed, Maester?" Aelinor asked, as soon as they were the only people in the room. There was something light in her voice, the man realized, and he found himself smiling at her.

"As long as he remains on his back, and sleep is what you have in mind," he warned her playfully.

Aelinor laughed and turned towards Tywin, now propped against the cushions in a slightly reclined position.

"Did you hear that? Your Maester's afraid I could try and seduce you."

Tywin Lannister laughed softly, painfully. "Clearly he's aware I can't deny you anything."

"Maybe some other time, mh?" She smiled. His joking was a good thing.

"If you say so," he exhaled. The Maester nodded towards them and took his leave. Silence fell.

Aelinor didn't really know where to start. Everything was coming back to her, and it was overwhelming. She tried to keep her breath steady, but it was of no use.

"Come here?" Tywin asked in a raspy voice, and Aelinor winced. Yes, she thought. There was just the better place where to start. She moved towards the bed, slowly, for the first time worried about her look. She sat on her side of the bed, unable to avert her eyes from Tywin's face. "Does it hurt?" he inquired, nodding to her shoulder and arm. She shrugged. There was no need to worry him.

"It will leave a scar, though," she murmured, mortified.

"It will make you even lovelier," Tywin's hand had inched heavily to her good one and was now gently squeezing her fingers. "You look like you need a good night sleep," he smiled.

Aelinor smiled, too, and snuggled against him, peaceful and serene.
I DO LOVE YOU ALL, GUYS!

You're too kind: to me, to Aelinor, even to my flawed English... You really are THE BEST and I thank you very, very, very much indeed!!!
Chapter 102

Aelinor opened her eyes in the dim light of the dawn, then closed them again, happily.

It hadn't been one of her cruel dreams. It was true. At her side, Tywin's breath was the regular, steady breath of a sleeping man, not the feeble one of a man whose survival was anything but certain. He was still weak, yes, and Maester Ballabar had been clear about the fact it would have taken long before he could have been considered as recovered, but even so... Even so, her heart was so full of joy she barely believed it. She pressed her lips to his collarbone, softly, not wanting to awake him.

"I'm not sleeping," he murmured, and Aelinor felt a sudden surge of relief: his voice was firmer than the day before, and surely that was a good sign, too.

"And I'm not being sick, so I'd say it's a win-win situation," she joked. Tywin's hand sneaked discretely around her form, finally landing on her waist.

"How bad it is?"

"Quite bad, but it's worth it... And your sister's been very helpful, you know."

"Mh." It was a slow, lazy, relaxed conversation. A sort of reconnecting, on some level. A man like Tywin Lannister was inevitably one to fill in about the most recent facts - starting with minor details. "What place is this?" he asked as his fingertips traced little circles over her hip.

"Addam's. I couldn't stand the Tower, after everything that..."

"And this is safer, for a **self-proclaimed widow**..."

"You'll never forgive me, will you."

"Well, I won't deny you had a great idea..."

"...thank you..."

"...but the fact remains: currently you're the most desirable young widow of the realm, and I'm jealous," he mocked her.

"Will you marry me, then?" Aelinor asked softly, her fingers intertwining with his.

"A thousand times, may the gods have mercy of my weakness."

"Oh, sweet Mother, look at these two lovebirds!"

"*Genna!* I'm not nine anymore, in case you hadn't noticed," Tywin snorted, "You can't storm into my bedchamber as you please. Besides, my lady wife here could complain about that, don't you think?"

"But I would never!" Aelinor laughed.

"See, brother? Your young bride is wiser than you."

"Yes, that's exactly the reason I married her for. Didn't she tell you?"
Chapter 103

Genna was talking - she had been talking for hours, or at least that was the impression he had: his sister could be extremely talkative, everybody knew that, and particularly she was when judgement was involved. At the present time, she was judging her own niece - his daughter - the Queen regent.

"She's collecting dwarves' head, thanks to her brilliant idea. Your wife was definitely more subtle, but I guess that shouldn't surprise me. She's a wise girl, with a good head on her shoulders."

Tywin smirked. "You like her, don't you."

"Cersei? Not at all. I never did."

"Not Cersei. Aelinor. You like her." Genna, who was fixing fresh flowers in a pot, turned abruptly, with a swirl of her gown. Then she smiled. There was something predatory in her smile.

"And you don't?"

"I married her: that I like her is part of the deal, isn't it?"

Genna Lannister put her fists on her hips and shot a deadly look at her older brother. "I am under the impression you like her more than the average man usually likes his wife, truth to be told."

"You're not supposed to take advantage of an ill man," the Old Lion scoffed, uncomfortable. His wound hurt, his back hurt, but he was all too aware of his current state of physical debilitation - as his hand dropped on the covers in frustration, his sister went help him.

"You should have seen her, these past weeks," she lectured him while changing the angle of his pillows. "Devastated. A shadow. And still, she ruled your brother and children with an iron hand."

"But not you."

"I'm unruly by birth, you know that - but Kevan? Jaime? She bent them to her will so easily... I have to confess, I was impressed - I am, in fact, impressed." To his sister's surprise, something softened on Tywin's face.

"She's brilliant. She's strong-willed and well educated..."

"...And she has good hips. She'll give you plenty of children, brother: are you prepared to be a father again? And again?"

"Being a father again was never an option, after Joanna, you know that all too well. But things change, Genna, and have actually changed, and if you want me to tell the truth, well, I can't deny now I sort of look forward to it... Does it sound pathetic, mh?"

Genna sat merrily at his side, facing him, and smiled. "It sounds lovely, brother," she replied. "And of course I won't tell anyone!" She mocked him. Tywin rolled his eyes.

"I am perfectly aware it's quite out of character, coming from me, but... She's my second chance, Genna. My second chance to be a better husband. A better father. And with everything that's going on, and everything that happened after Robert's death... I don't know. It's like I need it."

"No, you don't," the formidable woman said, her hand firmly closed on her brother's wrist. "You don't need a second chance, Tywin, you need her. Yes, there's also all the second chances you like
to think, but the truth is you need her. She's the one who brought you back from the dead. She's the one you refused to give in to death for. You didn't die from that wound, and you should have, but you didn't, and you didn't because you didn't loosen your grip on your life - because of her. Let's call things by their name, brother: you love her, and you need her by your side - not just a wife, not just a mother for your heir: her."

For some minutes, not a muscle flinched in Tywin's face. He looked at his sister betraying no emotion, no thought, nothing. But finally, his lips pressed together so hard they whitened. She could hear his teeth gritting. "How can you possibly be so sure of it, sister? I've been awake for less than two days, you can't."

"You keep forgetting I'm the most clever in our family..."
Aelinor was tense and upset and it was quite clear from the way she fusssed relentlessly around the room. She kept fidgeting, picking up things and putting them down with no purpose - but what gave her up the most was her jaw, clenched so hard one could actually distinguish the muscles under her skin, and her lips, pressed in the thinnest of lines. Maybe upset wasn't exactly the word, Tywin considered, looking at her in silence. Furious was a better definition.

"You're avoiding me," he said plainly: it has been a difficult night due to his not-so-fast healing wound and he was still tired, not just aching. He would have rather not know what was going on, truth to be told, but his wife's current state of mind was alarming, to say the least. So was the fact she hadn't told him about it yet.

"No." And the fact she just snapped at him.

"Yes, you are. What's happened?"

Aelinor shrugged, "Nothing relevant," she lied.

"Enough is enough, Aelinor." The change in Tywin's tone couldn't have been missed but Aelinor welcomed it all the same, as a sign of his returning strength - still, she had reservations to tell him what actually was worrying her. She hesitated. "I may be presently confined to this bed, but this doesn't make me an invalid," the Old Lion went on, the coldness in his voice rapidly assuming an intimidating inclination.

"Of course not!" she reacted, outraged.

"I'm glad we see eye to eye on this matter," he replied icily. His right hand was closed in a fist, so tight his veins were neatly visible. "So? What's going on?"

Aelinor sighed. "The High Septon's dead."

"Dead?" Tywin repeated, his brows furrowed. "How?"

"Peacefully, in his sleep - or at least that's what they say."

"But you're not eating it up."

"No."

"And you may be right," he agreed. Aelinor sighed again.

"Still, I'd rather not. For if I am right, the alternatives are few, and they are upsetting, all of them."

"You're thinking my children could be involved, aren't you." Once again, Aelinor's lips tightened. "He was a man of Tyrion's, after all. This leaves us with very little options." She nodded silently, still avoiding his eyes. "It is not your fault, Aelinor, you know that, don't you?"

"Yes, but."

"No buts. It was Tyrion's doing, or Cersei's. We both know that all too well. In either case, it is not your fault. Why are you so upset, then?"

"Can't you see it? If it's been Tyrion, it means he's still in the city - and I don't like it a bit. On the
other hand, if it's been Cersei I could have prevented it, if only I'd realized sooner the man was in danger. Or a danger. I could have had him questioned. I should have. But I didn't. And now he's dead, and I have no way to know whether he was in contact with Tyrion or not. I failed. I failed you."

"You did not. You did so much more than you were supposed to. The High Septon's safety was not up to you."

"But-"

"Enough. You cannot change what happened, right? All we can do now is to hope that the Most Devout will choose wisely."

"And will they?" Aelinor asked in a sarcastic tone. Tywin grinned.

"It's highly unlikely."
Her eyes fixed upon the embroidery work in her lap, Aelinor was only half-listening her sister-in-law's chatters. She suspected Genna was perfectly aware of that, given the light tone of her apparently unstoppable stream of words, and for that, she was even more grateful to her: the formidable woman seemed always able to offer the right word, the right distraction, the right suggestion... And Aelinor felt she needed that kind of support, now more than ever. Now that the streets around them were in such a turmoil.

Now that the Crown's grip on its people seemed weaker than ever.

Now that her brother's men were apparently unable to placate the mobs.

Now that she lacked the courage to tell Tywin what was actually going on.

He was... grumpy enough, even without telling him everything. Not that he hadn't good reasons - more and more often he complained about the apparent lack of improvement in his conditions, despite Maester Ballabar's continue efforts, and consequently, well, dealing with him was not exactly the easier activity in the world: now that his mind had regained its full strength, being constrained by the limits of a human, still healing body was something he had no intention to accept. As the loud exchange of opinions, she and Genna had easily picked up just that morning, between Tywin and the Maester.

Ballabar had returned in the afternoon and Aelinor was quite positive that Genna's talkative attitude had more than something to do with that unusual behaviour. A sweet, well-intentioned thought for sure, but - Aelinor realized - totally useless. She was worried, and she would probably continue to be worried...

"Lady Aelinor, Lady Genna," as if he would be summoned, Maester Ballabar appeared on the door, his head bowed. Aelinor's eyes darted towards him but he didn't give her the time to react. "I'm sorry to interrupt you, but..." He took a step sideways. In the doorframe, supported by crutches but awfully dignified all the same, Tywin Lannister appeared, a satisfied grin on his lips.

"You're up!" cried Aelinor, her smile so broad her muscles started to ache.

"Praise the gods," Genna exhaled with unusual gravity. Aelinor rose to cross the room towards him, but Tywin stopped her.

"Let the tough part to me." So, Aelinor stood where she was, her hands elegantly crossed over her stomach, waiting for him to reach her. There was, at the same time, something extremely determined and infinitely sweet, in that scene, and Genna Lannister left her seat and the room - with an encouraging glance at her sister-in-law, a supportive one to her brother, not a word, and a particularly strong grip around Maester Ballabar's arm as she dragged him with her.

Tywin had finally reached his smiling wife, by then.

"You did it," she whispered.

"I had good reasons..."
Chapter 106

Aelinor felt her eyes filling with tears and she couldn't help but gently slide her free arm around him, holding him in a soft hug. She had missed it so much - being able to hug him, to feel the muscles of his back under her fingertips - she thought, for a moment, that surely that was another of her cruel dreams. There he was, though, solid and concrete, maybe not at his best, yes, but up and about and more than determined to get back to his former glory... She indulged with her head against his chest, inhaling his scent, giving in to the overwhelming sensation of not being in that bloody sickroom.

Tywin, too, breathed in slowly, filling his nostrils with the good, lemony scent of her hair. He kissed her lightly on the forehead. "Can't manage without these, yet, I'm afraid..." He said apologetically, gestured at the crutches. At first, Aelinor didn't understand. Then, realization dawned on her: he wanted to hug her back... Had she been a different woman, namely a more impulsive one, she would have probably ended throwing herself at him, neglectful of wounds and healing processes and crutches and ladylike behaviour.

Being the woman she was, though, she put a mischievous smile on her lips and slowly, very slowly backed away from him.

"Come with me," she encouraged him, and he did, one step after the other until he reached her. She had nestled with her back against a corner, and just looking at her Tywin understood: in a space narrower and more constricted than the middle of the room, he could have been able to find a stable position without the crutches...meaning his hands would have been free to finally hold her - something both of them had missed so much that their bodies almost ached in anticipation.

"You clever..." He didn't finish the sentence. It didn't matter. He left both the crutches against the wall and let his hands wander lightly, barely touching his wife's form, savouring every moment of that newly-conquered intimacy. Aelinor ducked her head towards her damaged shoulder, offering him the white, soft skin of her throat, and smiled. She smiled that smile of her, that mischievous smile of her, and Tywin grinned and couldn't help but indulge her.

"I missed you terribly," she exhaled, barely audible, as he started kissing her jaw. His lips were still chapped, but delicate, as delicate was the touch of his hand on the back of her neck - she raised her own hand to his face, caressing him almost in awe.

"You're chuckling," he pointed out, whispering against her throat.

"It's your beard... I'm not used to it."

"Neither am I," he was chuckling, too, now, and interrupted briefly his activity. "I suppose now I am regaining a bit of independence I really should give myself a proper shave..."

"No," she hurriedly objected. "I like it. I like you. Like this, I mean. I like you like this. And it's...funny," she grinned,"Tickling."

"As my lady wife wishes," he nodded, amused. Then he gently brushed her still restrained left upper arm, and frowned. "Does it hurt?" he asked. He asked so often.

"Not much, not anymore. It just...stings. Sometimes."

"Will you ever allow me to look at it?" He asked seriously. She always averted her eyes whenever he tried to raise the subject, he was aware of that - and every time it broke his heart. "It's nothing you should be ashamed for, Aelinor. All the contrary."

"I know," she murmured, her eyes still avoiding him. "Can't you just...hold me, please?"

He did. He was starting to feel weary, but he did. He held her close to him, squeezing her as gently as he was able, his bearded cheek against her temple. "Do you know what I'd like?" he asked her. Aelinor automatically took a berating tone.

"Dear me, you naughty...

"Easy, easy," he laughed. "I am perfectly aware I'm still not in good enough conditions to...be involved in what you, naughty girl are thinking of. I'd just settle for being able to lay on one side and hold you near. Shield you from everything else. Cuddle you, long and properly."

Aelinor's fingers caressed his cheek again. "Was it true, then? What you told me that night?" Tywin's hands cupped her face, solemnly, as he looked her in the eyes.

"I love you," he told in a whisper, and bent his head to catch her lips. "I love you," he repeated, and kissed her and welcomed her kissing him back. "I-

"Sorry to interrupt, brother, but the Maester here says you shouldn't overdo yourself unless you plan on never healing properly. And from what I'm looking at, I'd say that would be a real shame."

Aelinor rushed to give Tywin back his crutches, trying everything she could think of not to look at Genna. As she could see, Ballabar's face was as red as her own - the man was so embarrassed she almost felt a bit of mercy towards him. Almost. "Thank you for your help, Maester," she said icily as he stepped towards Tywin. The Old Lion scoffed. Maester Ballabar reddened even more.

"No need to blush like that, child," Genna merrily scolded her. Aelinor thought of the long afternoon still ahead of her, and shivered.
I'm so, so, SO TERRIBLY SORRY! I had two exhausting weeks and things got a bit out of hand...

Hope you'll like this little bit of fierce! Aelinor ;)

"I honestly hate it, you know." Aelinor was checking the perfect waves in her hair and shot him a perplexed glance via the mirror. "You wearing black. I hate it. You look both stunning and - well - a widow. My widow. It's quite disconcerting, to be honest."

"I know," she sighed, "and I understand it. But it makes situations like the present one undoubtedly easier..."

Yes, she thought, putting on her face her best expression of prostration, a lot easier. She was almost glad that just a couple hours before her morning sickness hit her so hard. Playing the role of the broken, desperate widow in front of a man as skilled as the Spider would have required every bit of her ability: a touch of unhealthy pallor was a welcomed help.

"Be careful."

"I will. I always am."

"You've never been careful, with me," he teased her. Aelinor theatrically arched an eyebrow.

"But I never wanted to kill you, either."

"Oh. And you want to kill Varys because...?"

"There's something I didn't tell you, yes, but I will, I promise - as soon as I get rid of him. Let me go and meet him, now, the mere thought of him under this very roof gives me the creeps."

"Come here," Tywin said softly, and as Aelinor stood at his bedside he took her hand, turned it gently, put a reverent kiss on her palm. "Crush him like the insect he is, my lady."

"That was precisely what I had in mind, my lord."

"The voices are true, then. You do mourn your late husband's death... Let me say I am impressed, my lady of Lannister."

"And why shouldn't I mourn my late husband killing, Lord Varys? Oh, yes, I almost forgot," Aelinor smiled, radiantly, innocently, so full of venom she could have outdone a viper. "You weren't so sure about the reasons behind my marriage to the late Hand of the King, were you. Otherwise, you would have never sent a whore to our chambers, the night Tyrion escaped."
"I know you believe I am the responsible for that unfortunate situation," the eunuch bowed his head without even flinching, "your servant was quite adamant about that, but I can assure you..."

"Spare me, the whore told me herself," Aelinor retorted. "So I take we can play it straight, can't we?" She sat, her right hand elegantly abandoned on the armrest, her face a mask of pure coldness: a statue - pale, majestic, copper-haired - in a black brocade dress, a young woman who could apparently present herself as centuries old.

"May I sit, my lady?"

"I don't recall having you invited to do so, my lord," she smiled again, suavely. "What I do recall, however, is my request, and that's why from now on we play it straight. Therefore, I'm asking you: what did you hope to accomplish, sending Tyrion's whore to my late husband that night? And most of all - what do you hope to accomplish, now, paying me this visit?"

"That was out of misjudgement, my lady, and I have every intention to make amend. While this is... well. This is respect, of course."

"Ah, respect." She repeated, distractedly tapping the armrest with her fingers. "My husband's been dead for thirty-four days, lord Vays. I'd say your respect did take its time. What do you want?"

"My lady, believe me when I -" Aelinor laughed. Cruelly.

"Believing you, Varys? What do you take me for?"

"I take you for a girl who's playing with fire, my lady," came his reply, calm as if they were discussing the weather. "And who's forgetting that in this game, I am far more experienced than her."

"It's a good portrait, I'll give you that. But you keep forgetting something, too..." She poured herself a cup of wine, took a sip. "First, that you plotted with Tyrion in order for him to escape, and this I know for sure; second, that you plotted against both Tyrion and his father, sending the whore Shae to the Tower of the Hand, something you knew all too well would have made the things between them escalate out of control - this, I know for sure, too; and third... Well. That I am no girl, and I never liked spiders."

"Oh, but this is a good thing, my lady," Varys smiled.

"For me, yes, it is. For I never liked spiders, but I never feared them, either." She stood, stretching every bit of her impressive height and imperious figure. "That's why - tomorrow, in a month, in the end - I'll crush you, Lord Varys. I will never forget what you did, you know, and when I say "never", please note that I mean "never", with the capital N. Never as in not in a thousand years. Never as in should it take decades or centuries, I will have my revenge. I'll see you squashed on the ground like a fat, bald, smelling insect. My face will be the last thing you'll see, take my word on this."

"You certainly put a lot of faith in your family's strength and power," the eunuch said softly, fiddling with his ample sleeves, "but it seems to me the Lannisters have seen better days..."

"We'll see, my lord. Trust me - we'll see."
Chapter 108

In the confused mess of her still sleepy mind, Aelinor didn't realize what was happening. There was something definitely familiar - that she knew for certain, even at a non-conscious level - but she was too drowsy to be able to put her finger on it... She struggled a little with the blanket. Yes, she lazily thought, it was too deep in the night to put her... Her eyes shot open. It was not about a finger, more about a hand, and most of all...

"Maester's said I can lay on the side, now, 'cause the wound at this point should no longer risk reopening." There was a laughter in Tywin's voice, a sardonic, satisfied tone she could have found irritating - under different circumstances, of course. Surely not now. Not with his arm around her waist.

"Your wish has been granted, then," she sighed, leaning back against him. "Yours and mine, truth to be told."

"Just a little part of it, but yes. I won't say I'm not relieved to finally be able to change position freely." He drew her nearer, until the point her back and his chest couldn't be any closer. The thin fabric of her camisole tickled his skin and sent a shiver to places that Maester Ballabar had recommended himself not to...put into use yet. He exhaled in frustration. "I still can't do much, though. Ballabar's been very adamant about it..."

"You're in bed with your wife, spooning her, and this is the second time you talk about the Maester: should I worry?"

Tywin chuckled. "Oh, no," he stated, starting to kiss her at the nape of her neck. "No, no, no, definitely not..." His lips trailed to her shoulder - her disfigured shoulder, as she thought of it - and kissed it slowly, religiously, taking all the time in the world.

"Tywin," she protested, grasping his forearm with her free hand.

"Am I hurting you?"

"No, no, it's just... You know."

"What I do know is that I want to relish every inch of my brave spouse's perfect body - yes, perfect. You have nothing to fear, Aelinor," he soothed her, continuing his kissing and letting his hand wander to her belly. It didn't seem so different, and yet it was - their baby - their little cub. "You are so precious."

She didn't reply - she didn't trust her own voice, so full of tears of joy was her throat. Instead, she placed her own hand above his, caressing it lovingly - and gently suggesting him to move it a little downward.

"Ah, this is unforeseen," he whispered in her ear as soon as his hand landed between her legs. He could feel her heat even through the fabric.

"Not at all," Aelinor teased him, pushing slightly against him. Tywin was never a man to be told twice and his hand travelled south, to the hem of her camisole - which he lifted, of course, but excruciatingly slowly.
"I missed you," Aelinor exhaled, fighting with herself in order not to urge Tywin to speed up his movements. Her thin nightdress had been finally lifted up at her hips and his hand over her was possessive, yes, but gentle - and she liked it, of course, but she was quite craving, too, and a huff of frustration left her lips before she could stop it.

"We're eager, aren't we?" Tywin mocked her, trailing her labia with his fingertips. Aelinor snorted. "Oh, don't get upset with an old man... Come," he said amusedly, guiding her to lay on her back, "Let me look at you."

His middle finger slid sensually between her folds, finding exactly the same wet velvet he had had on his mind since their brief kissing in the solar a few days before. It was like going back home, he realized - a home he'd been far off from, and for a long time; a welcoming home he was all too glad to return to. He probed at her entrance almost distractedly, bringing his palm over the sensitive bud of her clitoris. She shivered, her breath suddenly troubled.

"Please, don't tease me," she panted. "Don't-" but she stopped, she had to. Tywin had moved slightly beside her - slightly, yes, but more than enough for him to circle her left nipple with his lips. After more than a month without him, just the simplest contact - namely, at that moment, a quick licking with the tip of his tongue, and through the fabric of the nightgown, which to be honest was very good for friction - made her tremble with shock.

"Do you want me to interrupt this?" He asked, covering her breast with brief kisses as his finger finally entered her. "Should I...?"

"Don't you dare," Aelinor threatened him, grabbing his hand with hers and guiding it to a more satisfactory angle. Tywin chuckled against her soft skin and started to pump inside her with his finger, from time to time brushing not-so-casually her clit... She was so wet that a second finger entered her almost by itself.

"I missed you too, you know," he admitted, sensing his member hardening against any better judgement. "I'd give anything, to being allowed to..." He paused, for his wife was wriggling under his ministrations in a way that was all too familiar - the rhythm of his pushing and retreating fingers increased, as did the pressure he put on her most sensitive bundle of nerves: and Aelinor came, calling his name, burying her sweaty forehead against his chest.

"...being allowed to...?" she asked, when finally she regained her breath. Tywin spoke in a hot whisper against her ear.

"To turn you over this mattress and fuck you until you beg me to stop." Aelinor realized how hard he was and caressed him playfully.

"I would never do such a thing," she whispered back, in a perfect replica of the mischievous tone he had used.
Chapter 110

"He did- what?" Tywin's voice thundered, his fist hitting the wood of the table. He had instinctively made a sudden movement, too, as to get up from his chair - and both his wife and brother hurried at his side when he doubled, almost collapsing because of the pain. "I'm good," he panted, easing himself back in the armchair, "I'm good."

"That's precisely the reason I asked you to tell him carefully," Aelinor hissed in a reproachful tone, looking furiously at Kevan.

"I understand, but the circumstances are such that..."

"I know," she said through gritted teeth. She was mad - at him, at Cersei, at the High Septon: she could have set the city on fire, on the entity of her rage.

"Who the hell does he think he is?" Tywin asked, in his usual cool voice. He had regained his breath, but his fingers were still clawed around the armrests.

"Cersei put him where he is," Kevan pointed out, as a peace offer to his sister-in-law. Obviously, they shared similar ideas on the matter at hand, but he was prone to believe it would be less infuriating if he was the one telling Tywin the worst part of those ideas. "And I fear she could be the one behind this arrest, too. Rumour is, one of the Kettleblack is involved. And they're Cersei's men, that we know for sure."

"So, you're hinting at the possibility that the Queen's arrest was my daughter's doing?" Tywin asked icily. Ser Kevan clenched his jaw.

"You know what she thinks of the Tyrell girl," Aelinor pointed out in a soft voice. "And you surely reckon it looks like her doing..."

"Yes," the Old Lion reluctantly admitted, "but you're asking me to accept that my own flesh and blood could have been so utterly stupid to-"

"She had reinstated the Faith Militant," Aelinor blurted out. For days she had carefully avoided to even mention those facts, but now things were escalating too quickly.

"What?"

"Apparently she was under the impression that such a concession could have eased the High Sparrow's decision about acknowledging Tommen as king - and forgive the Crown's debts with the Faith, too."

Even under his new beard, Tywin's jaw and neck's muscles were so tense they were perfectly recognizable. He didn't reply. He didn't react. For a long time, he just sat still, breathing slowly, his eyes fixed on a point neither his brother or his wife could see. Kevan felt the need to try and put an end to that uncomfortable silence. "I suggested that she went here to discuss it with you, but..."

"But?"

"She's driven by the desire to make you proud of her, Tywin. Two things she wants the most: her son on the throne, and to show you she's your worthy heir despite being a woman. Clearly this solution should have seemed..."
"I don't give a fig to her being a woman. These are the reasons why she's unworthy to be my heir, not her sex! Nevertheless - what did she do?"

"She offered me to be Hand."

"You did refuse, as I can see." Silence fell again.

"I did," Kevan said, finally.

"You shouldn't have," Aelinor sighed. Kevan smiled gratefully at her.

"I asked to be named Regent as well. She refused. So I took my leave. I'm not your daughter's puppet, Tywin." There had been no animosity in those words - just a bitter sadness, which hit his sister-in-law deeply: Kevan was a good man, loyal to his family, but even his loyalty was not enough to make him take decisions against his judgement. That made him a great man, despite his customary remaining a step behind his brother.

"Even in my darkest moment, I could never ask you something like that. I'm sorry she treated you so poorly."

"Thank you," Kevan nodded. "But I'm leaving, brother. I'm going back to Casterly Rock."

"Kevan-"

"No."

Aelinor moved in front to him and took his hands in hers. "I'm sorry to hear this. With everything going on, with Addam at Riverrun... I will be short of two brothers, instead of just one," she smiled. "You've been such a good friend, and seeing you leave saddens me: but I understand your reasons, we understand..."

Kevan Lannister bowed his head and give a gentle squeeze to Aelinor's fingers. "Thank you. Keep my brother safe, uh? Help him get better and better. We need him, now more than ever: our family's survival is at stake..."

Aelinor's hands left his, and landed almost unknowingly over her belly. She nodded, solemnly.
"You knew."

The two words hanged in the silence as soon as ser Kevan left the room - blunt, cold, distant. Aelinor forced herself to look at her husband.

"I knew, yes."

"Yet, you didn't tell."

"No."

She should have been scared by that demeanour, she was perfectly aware of that. Tywin Lannister's cold ire was something any human being with a brain inside their skull should have been scared by. Curiously enough, she was perfectly calm - and able to face him on an equal footing. He could be terrible, everyone knew that, but he was also the one who had chosen her: and the mere thought was everything she needed in order to be the woman she had to be in that moment.

"Why, pray?"

"You were in the middle of a difficult recovery - you still are, by the way, in case you didn't notice - and I decided not to worry you with the affairs of the Realm. It was my right as your wife. I did what I deemed necessary."

"It was not your place."

"It was. Mine, and no one else's."

"You betrayed my trust!"

"I was protecting you!"

"I have no need to be protected."

Aelinor arched an eyebrow, sarcastically. "No?" She hissed, "Are you seriously telling me you don't need to be protected from yourself? Are you trying to tell me you wouldn't blow our cover, in order to stop the madness your daughter has set in motion?"

"Aelinor-"

"And don't Aelinor me!" For the first time in their fight, Aelinor had actually yelled - the peak of her anger was decreasing, now, and her voice took a deeper, sadder tone. "I'll admit we failed, Kevan and me. We tried to bring her to reason, and we tried hard, but we failed. I know. But we did everything we could. And in my case, 'everything I could' meant also doing whatever necessary to help you not to distract your energies from what really mattered - namely, your healing. I know it's a damn mess, I know. But it was my right - and it was my duty - to have you back. So, yes, I kept you in the dark about your daughter and the Faith, and I would again. If you'll excuse me."

And with that, she retreated, leaving him at his desk, denying him any chance to reply. She had left the parlour in indignation, and it wasn't until she reached the security of their bedchambers that she let her frustration going loose - and she sat on the edge of the mattress and tried to calm herself and stop the warm, heavy tears pooling in her eyes.
"You didn't even let me answer." Tywin was on the threshold, leaning heavily against the one crutch Maester Ballabar still insisted he walked with. He was fatigued, it was clear - a bit short of breath and flushed, he was struggling (she could tell) not to shift his weight and lean against the wall.

"There was no need. You said just enough."

"So you're telling me you don't want my apologies?"

"I'm telling you, you never apologize."

"Mh. True." He crossed the room to the bed and sat down heavily at her side. "I'm sorry."

"No, you're not," she fired back. Tywin chuckled.

"No, you're right, I'm not. But I see your point."

Aelinor turned abruptly to face him. *Gods*, he was so handsome. "And?" she asked bluntly.

"And," the Old Lion mumbled, cupping her cheeks between his hands and drawing her nearer, "I happen to think I should make amend for the way I spoke to you."
Aelinor, her eyes shut and her heart drumming in her ears, was simply feeling lost. Lost inside her mind, lost in her own lust - lost in her husband's embrace, lost in their kiss. Still, it was not just the embrace, it was not just the kiss - it was the hand playing with her hair and holding her head at the right angle, it was that other hand, spreading warmth on her back with its mere presence.

Truth to be told, she didn't even realize when, or how, she had ended up straddling him, with his lips travelling hungrily all over her neck and cleavage.

"I dare to say your precious Maester could have objections to your present conduct..." she panted, trying to regain at least a bit of her composure.

Tywin stopped and looked at her, a mischievous smile tickling the corners of his lips. "Oh, I don't think so," he teased her, kneading her bum in a not-so-subtle way.

"Of course he wouldn't object to something he doesn't know, but what I meant was-"

"Well, what I meant was that he would not object, even if he'd be in this very room." He let the realization dawn on her. Aelinor's eyes widened.

"You're telling me we're finally allowed to-"

"Surprise, surprise" he grinned, and a deep sigh left Aelinor's throat.

"The Gods be blessed," she exhaled, "And are you sure, Tywin? We really can-"

"With care and without overworking each other, but..." The kiss cut off any other word - eager tongues started to explore and battle, avid hands touching and massaging and awakening secret spots all over the other's body. "Good grief, woman: and here I was, so sure I was the excited one..."

Aelinor giggled against his shoulder. "According to your sister, pregnancy does have this sort of side effects..."

"Oh, well, in that case, I won't complain, I promise." His hands slipped boldly under her gown and up her thighs, adjusting her in his lap - she could easily feel his arousal against her lower abdomen, now, and sighed contently.

"Maybe we should...you know...This way... Just to be on the safe side, and not to fatigue you too much..."

The Old Lion left a hot trail of open-mouthed kisses over his wife's throat and collarbone. "I'd say, let's start from here, and see where it takes us."
Leaning with this back against the headboard, Tywin Lannister was observing his wife loosening the ties in her garments with quick, pragmatic gestures: if he’d be the one undressing her, it would probably be infinitely slower or outrageously ruder, no doubt... Still, there definitely was something hot in her efficiency, something solid and reassuring, yes, but also exciting - his member twitched in anticipation, beginning to make his breeches an extremely uncomfortable place.

"No need for that," he mocked her, pointing out at how she had covered her scarred shoulder with her hair. Reluctantly, Aelinor pushed them away - long, thick, copper waves covered her back as she sighed. "Let me look at you," he smirked. Aelinor twirled around, slowly - the soft curve of her abdomen now perfectly recognizable under the thin fabric of her shift, her breasts fuller, and that smile on her lips... The Old Lion extended a hand towards her and she took it, triumphantly. "You're so beautiful," he exhaled, looking at her climbing onto the bed.

"That's the abstinence talking..." Aelinor teased him, immediately straddling him.

"Maybe, maybe not, maybe both," he teased her back. "And maybe there's something we could do about it."

It was Aelinor's turn to smirk, now - and she did it as she reached for the strings in his breeches, and loosened them, and freed him from his constraints. Her hand closed gently around the shaft, hard and pulsing under her fingers as she started caressing and slowly pumping it. Not that he needed to get ready, though. "Tell me what would you like the most," she whispered sultrily. They had all the time in the world - including that for quickly finishing him this way, now, and then waiting for him to regain his stamina in order to...

"What do you think?" the Old Lion asked, his voice dripping sarcasm. Aelinor let him go and removed her chemise - the fabric didn't even touched the floor, yet, that her husband's hands were kneading her breasts. She laughed in satisfaction, knelt for a moment and got a grip on his hard member: then she lowered herself onto him, guiding him inside of her inch by inch, taking him all the way in her.

She stilled. Tywin's hands travelled south, to her waist, her hips, her thighs - the back of her knees, and then back again to her thighs, on and on.

"I missed you," she almost choked on her own arousal. He chuckled.

"Yes, I can feel it." Of course he could, Aelinor realized. She was so dripping wet not even a eunuch could have missed it.

"So my lord husband likes to play the know-it-all, doesn't it?" she asked, rocking her hips forward for a moment.

"Not a play, that's what I am."

"Oh, are you, now." Another movement. Tywin's hips pushed immediately towards hers.

"Always been." His fingers closed on her hips, guiding her to move again - she raised her hands and grasped at the headboard, showing him she was all too happy to comply and essentially providing them with a more comfortable position: she was well supported, he was well supported, all they had to do was to enjoy - and as soon as Tywin Lannister's lips closed hungrily over his wife's left nipple she started to rock, back and forward, speed increasing - somehow recalling their rushed, famished
first encounters.

Flesh and wetness, sweat and panting - strong desire and blind lust - fingertips leaving marks - ragged breath - pure bliss.

The sensation to be complete again - the fullness - the heath - once again being one.

"I'm going to ride you, Tywin Lannister" she whispered in his ear, wantonly.

And she did. She rode him hard, desperately - she savoured the sensation of him being buried so deep in her - she burned with her own pleasure - she closed her eyes and let her senses guide her: his groans, her moans; his hands, her oversensitive skin; his drawing her nearer and kiss her, their mixed tastes.

His climax.

Hers.

Their mutual trembling in each other's arms.

"I'm glad you're back to me."
Chapter 114

His lips buried in her hair and his eyes closed, Tywin Lannister traced soft circles on his wife's naked shoulder with the mere movement of his index, inhaling her scent at his every breath. He was sated, satisfied - and not without a shiver he realized something else: he was feeling happy, for the first time in decades.

"Thank you," he whispered, quite confident she was sleeping.

She wasn't, though.

"What for?" she mumbled against his chest, adjusting the arm she had draped around his middle.

"Nothing," Tywin retreated. His wife poked him with a finger. "And everything," he yielded. In the dim light of the dying fire, Aelinor propped herself up on her free elbow and looked at him, seriously, her other hand warm and possessive on the skin just above his heart. She had planned to talk love, truth to be told. She had planned to be reassuring and kind and affectionate - he was so handsome, though, so magnificent in the slightly lightened shadows of their bedroom, she almost couldn't suppress a moan. Her fingers travelled higher, to his newly bearded jaw.

"I like it so terribly much," she declared, her voice deep and burdened by desire. "It suits you, you know. Makes you... distinguished. Authoritative."

"Ah, that's interesting," he smirked. "It makes me think you didn't find me authoritative enough, before all this mess..."

"But I did, and you were, and I seem to recall you never missed a chance to show your wife how much authoritative you could be," she mumbled against his skin - her breath was light and warm and had a definite sensual quality that was starting to influence Tywin's body's reaction.

"You were a naughty girl, back then," he teased her, his fingers inching meaningfully down her back.

"I see," Aelinor considered. Mirroring his movements, she let her hand slide downwards, quite wantonly, truth to be told. "And what on earth would I be, now?"

"A respectable, naughty widow..." Tywin drew her up against his chest to meet her lips and kissed her deeply, devouring her mouth with such a vigor one could have doubted he'd been on the brink of death for days and days. The sensation of her hand caressing his hardening member was so invigorating he thought for a moment it wouldn't be long at all, until they could have regained their intimate life as before. He groaned in her mouth.

"Are you sure we can...?"

"It's you the one... handling the situation, aren't you? What do you reckon?"

Aelinor's fist closed a little tighter around him and gave a tentative pumping twist at her wrist. Oh, he was hard...
In the room, the air was heavy and charged with tension. Aelinor listened attentively to the man's report, daring from time to time to cast a sideways look to her husband and sister-in-law: it was then and there, in the middle of such a terrific event, that she first had been able to realize - and to realize fully - how many traits Tywin and his sister shared. It was not just about their colors, as everyone used to think; there was something in the way their jaws clamped, something in their eyes... They were able to suddenly freeze, to become all too similar to statues - golden statues maybe, but that only added coldness to their posture.

It was quite strange, though, how both could have listened to the account without even flinching. She, on her part, was confident she had literally dug her fingernails in the wooden armrest at least three times...

"It can't be," Genna finally spoke, but she did it only after the soldier had left.

"Spare me the stupid nonsense," came Tywin's immediate and chastising retort, "Of course it can be. It is. It's what happened."

"No need to be unpleasant to me, brother. It's all your daughter's doing. Of that stupid cow of a daughter of yours."

"Genna!" Aelinor cried.

"Oh, now tell me you disagree, come on, tell me."

"She doesn't. And I don't, either. Nevertheless, Cersei is my daughter. A Lannister. And the Queen Regent. And her arrest is simply outrageous, and I won't tolerate it." Tywin's voice had been cold, calm, but Aelinor knew quite well how furious he was. She shared his concerns - everyone with an ounce of common sense would have shared it - but she was all too aware of the risks. She was worried. So worried she could almost feel the pain.

"May I remind you, you're still dead, brother? You will tolerate it - maybe it could even bring some good, all things considered."

Tywin looked at his sister, then at his wife. "Do you agree with her?"

Aelinor sighed. "I don't know. She could have a point... But I see your point, too. And they're both embraceable, and..."

The Old Lion's brows furrowed, his jaw clenched. "Maybe you could just spit it out, you know."

"What?"

"The truth. That you don't believe I'm ready to return from the dead. That I am still too weak to be...let's say, persuasive enough. That I'm not my old me, yet, and probably I will never be that man again."

Horrified, Aelinor's gaze fixed on him. "Could you give us the room, Genna, please?" she managed to say, trying to leave the trembling out of her voice.

Genna rose. "You're a bloody idiot, Tywin," she stated, and left.
"How dare you," Aelinor hissed, facing her husband. Her eyes were prickling, her hands tightly clenched, her knuckles white in the effort not to let her fury escape its boundaries - Tywin Lannister, on the other hand, was now showing an extremely irritating calm, very different from the one shown before.

"That's what you actually think, though, isn't it."

"No!" Aelinor cried, frustrated. "No. But you have to understand -"

"Have to, no less."

"Tywin, stop. I know how you feel about this. I know that the Faith arresting your daughter is something-"

"It's not about her." He pushed back his seat and rose, fists on the table. "It's about you, and what you think about me. She deserves what she's got - she practically asked for it, with every single, stupid decision she took, and-"

"We can't let her be judged, though."

"Of course, we can't. But this leads to the same issue: you doubt my real conditions. You think I'm still too weak, too-"

"I just want to keep you for myself a little more!" Aelinor shouted. The Old Lion raised his eyes on her, taken aback. "I am the one who's not ready, not you," she was almost whispering now, "I'm not ready to watch you go, I'm not ready to share you with the others again - I am the one who's not strong enough yet to let you go..." She stopped suddenly, doubling over, hands covering her belly.

Tywin Lannister circled the table in no time - his movements had incredibly improved since the Maester had given him permission to give up the crutches and he caught her, supporting her in his arms. "What's happened? Are you in pain?" Ghosts from his past lingered between his thoughts as he held her, desperately.

"No, no, it was..." her eyes brightened up as she started to regain her breath. She was smiling. "Unexpected. It was just unexpected..." His concerned look was not going to relax, she knew it, she saw it in the lines crossing his forehead, in the tense muscles of his neck - so she took his hand and put it lightly on her stomach.

"Is it...?" he finally managed to ask, amazed. Of course, it was: he still remembered how the twins used to move inside Joanna, he remembered the time he had spent with his hand in that exact position, waiting for his babies - yes, he thought, annoyed, Tyrion, too - to kick. He did remember, and he closed his eyes, overwhelmed.

"It is," Aelinor smiled, intertwining her fingers with his.

She was not at all surprised, when her husband kissed her tenderly, their argument forgotten.
"And you reckon this is a good idea."

In many ways, Genna Lannister was all too similar to her brother Tywin, and Aelinor knew it - speaking a question without asking a question, though, was probably the most characteristic trait they shared, and Aelinor couldn't suppress a smile.

"Yes, I reckon this is."

"Will it work?"

"This I can only hope for," she sighed, as the litter proceeded through the crowded street of King's Landing towards the Palace. Genna nodded.

"Do you know the boy well?"

"King."

"What?"

"He's the king. Calling him "boy" could be not the best idea we -"

"Oh, nonsense. He is a boy. And very different from his brother, as far as I understand, so he won't mind... I'm his great-aunt, after all! With age come prerogatives..." Aelinor rolled her eyes and laughed, heartily.
Yes, King Tommen was another person, entirely, compared to his dead predecessor. And he was, undoubtedly, *a boy*.

A beautiful, kind, smiling boy - a beautiful, kind, smiling boy imprisoned in something bigger than himself. Aelinor cast a glance to the two Warrior's Sons looming in the corner of the room as she curtseyed and quickly averted her eyes. Genna, on her part, seemed about to start and roar at any moment.

"Should I call you "grandmother", my lady?" King Tommen asked, sincerely concerned about doing the right thing. Aelinor smiled.

"It's not for me to decide... But I'd rather not, I have to admit."

"Thank you, my Lady," the King smiled back, and his grandfather's wife looked at him flabbergasted. How could such a lovely boy be Cersei's son? She nodded gratefully at him, then crouched down, reaching for the bold kitten pawing the hem of her dress. Genna Lannister was watching the scene in silence, both keeping an eye on the armed men and approving her sister-in-law's conduct. "How are you? If you don't mind me asking, of course."

"I don't mind, your Grace... And I am well," her hand landed lightly on her belly as she spoke, "We are both well, all things considered."

"Do you miss him, lady Aelinor? My grandfather - do you miss him?"

Aelinor lowered her eyes as she grazed the kitten's head. She hated the idea of lying to him, but she couldn't possibly tell him the truth, not with the High Sparrow's men in the same room. She sighed and shook her head. "Last months have been quite difficult," she considered sadly. That, at least, was not a lie.

"I miss him, you know," the boy king said, offering her his arm to assist her to get back to her feet. "I know what they say about him, I know he wasn't... *good*, in the way the gods want us to be," his eyes darted to the silent men, "but even so..." He shook his head and shrugged. "I miss him. Is it childish, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't. And you should come to visit us, Your Grace. There are so many things I could tell you about your grandfather when he was your age... And I'm afraid this is not the place - nor the company, truth to be told." Genna had spoken in the authoritative voice she always relied upon, but there had been a softness, something... *gentle*, and *caring*, and-

"I'd like it very much indeed," the King exclaimed happily. "I'm not sure I'll be able to, though..."

Aelinor's hand closed softly over the boy's arm and she bent towards him to *grandmotherly* kissing him on the forehead. "Just remember: *you are the king*. You can do whatever you like - and that includes coming to see your grumpy great-aunt and your devoted grandmother every time you want."
"We did everything we could," exhaled Genna once they were back in the litter, heading for home. "Now it's up to him."

"Yes."

"He's a Lannister, after all. He does have it in himself."

"I know."

"You seem worried."

"I am. He's practically a hostage, Genna, and this is worse than we anticipated..."

"Yes, but he is the king. And what's important, now he knows you're by his side." Aelinor gave the thought a brief consideration and sighed. She was right.

"So are you..."

"Oh, but I am just the grumpy great-aunt!"
Chapter 119

It had taken him four entire days, but in the end, the boy king had finally managed to visit. It had been unexpected, and he had arrived in an anonymous litter with almost no escort, but he had come. As the Warrior's Sons had tried to enter the gate to the yard, though, Lannister guards had made blatantly clear that that was definitely not about to happen.

A brief altercation had followed, but even the well-protected emissaries of the Faith Militant hadn't been able to force their way in, when finally Lady Aelinor Lannister had gone and confronted them.

"We have orders, my Lady. We must attend the King, and protect him in case of-

"You won't set foot in my house. His Grace is in no danger, for he is with his family."

"My Lady..."

"I won't tolerate any further arguing. This is my home, and it's protected by my family's men, and I do really hope you won't urge me to make them intervene." She didn't wait for a reply. "You will wait here, out of the gate. I'll have some stool brought out for you to sit down."

She stopped abruptly on the door to the parlor, not wanting to interrupt the moment - King Tommen was crying softly, hugging his grandfather around his middle, his blonde head pressed against the taller man's chest. Tywin - who always seemed able to feel her entering a room - raised his head and looked at her with an unusual smile, half amused, half taken aback. He never expected the boy to actually love him, it was clear: Aelinor had quite a familiarity with Tywin's attitude about being cared for, and smiled back to him, affectionately.

"Now, now, Your Grace," the Old Lion said quietly, "I'll admit this must come as a shock to you, but we can't let the women see you like that, don't you think? Your grandmother is a kind soul, no doubt, but my sister would probably end up saying something rude," he chuckled. King Tommen nodded against his doublet and finally let him go.

"What should I be hurt by, more, Your Grace? By the grandmother, or by your grandfather thinking of me as a kind soul?" Aelinor had gracefully entered the room, radiant despite the black dress she had worn due to the presence of the High Sparrow's men. There was a fine embroidery in the black fabric, though; a flower motif in gold thread, which seemed to add fire to her copper hair and made her magnificent.

The boy king cracked a little smile. He liked this woman. "The grandmother part, my Lady. Definitely. You're too young to be called that way, but surely you are a kind soul... You persuaded me to come here, didn't you?"

"Are you boys set on outsmarting me, then? Dearie me..."

King Tommen laughed - a crystal laugh which resonated in the room like the sound of a hundred silver bells. He really liked this woman. And his grandfather. And the idea of this woman and his grandfather together. Despite his own mother tirades about their union, he realized - part of him, at least, realized - that he could have been very happy with them.
Aelinor woke and stretched lazily, trying to determine at what point the night presently was - in the hearth the fire was dying, feeble flames gradually turning into embers and ashes, and she estimated it should be somewhere near the first lights of the morning: it was pitch dark, save for the small halo of dim light around the fireplace, and the air was cold...

The air was.

Aelinor was not. She was, in fact, hot. *Definitely* hot.

Genna was right about the sudden desires - she could almost hear her: "And if even *I* did find attractive and desirable *my* husband, in those distant occasions, you take my word: it's going to be an actual challenge for my brother..."

Aelinor rolled her eyes and scoffed, trying to ignore the heat rising inside her and to control her breath. It was useless. A knot was tightening inside her, a frustration which was made even worse by the way the thin nightgown grazed her hard nipples, making her shiver infuriatingly.

"Tywin," she hissed, defeated, in the end. A moment later he was perfectly awake.

"Are you alright? Do you feel...?" His voice was worried, urgent, and Aelinor replied in a petulant tone which told every bit of her frustration.

"*Horny*, thank you very much," she groaned. To her amazement, her husband started to chuckle. "It's not funny," she scolded him.

"Why not?" The Old Lion asked, his hand covering her left breast and starting to massage it. Aelinor writhed under his touch and moaned softly.

"*Cause it's bad...*

"How bad?" It was right breast's turn, now, and Tywin's words were so enthralling they sounded almost obscene.

"Bad as in *fuck, me, Tywin, I am in no state for gentle foreplay*. That bad."

Tywin Lannister sighed as his free hand came in aid of his stiffening member. "Oh, gods. How do I *hate* being considered a sex object..."

Aelinor snorted impatiently. "You'd better be a sex *subject* at the earliest opportunity, darling, or my patience could run dry..."
Truth was - he loved the way the pregnancy made her breasts heavier. And, of course, he loved even more what she was doing - or, better, was letting him do - with them.

His member thrust between them with deliberation, building its own readiness, and Tywin felt almost overwhelmed by the blissful sensation. He looked down at her - she was sitting on the mattress, legs spread and feet on the carpet, and he was standing in front of her, having...well. Having the time of his life, or at least of his most recent life. When she released the sides of her breasts, therefore reducing the tightness he was thrusting into, he almost groaned in complaint. Almost.

For she had ducked her head and reached for him with her mouth, so suddenly, so unexpectedly that as soon as her tongue touched his shaft's head he nearly came.

"Easy, easy," he scolded her, amused. But her hand cupped him eagerly and her lips opened, and when he found himself cased into her hot mouth his hips started to move on their own accord, following the rhythm she was setting with her sucking. "Won't you be disappointed, if I come before taking care of your desires?" he asked, his finger gently intertwined in her hair. She let him slide out and inhaled deeply.

"I was just apologizing for the wake-up call," she winked seductively.

"Oh, but there is plenty of ways for you to apologize... And to both of us to achieve satisfaction - which, as I recall, was the plan."

"Ah, darling, you know me so well..."

"Do I?" he chuckled, and knelt between her legs, and kissed her stomach with slow deliberation. "Right now I'd say I worship you," he stated - and his voice was so steady and serious she almost crumbled against his welcoming arms.

"Oh, don't be silly," she moaned, "I'm becoming bigger and heavier by the day, and..."

"You're magnificent," the Old Lion claimed her mouth, sucking hard at her lower lip while cupping her cheeks. "And I am lucky, for I've come back to the dead to find a very hungry wife by my side, waking me up in the middle of the night to..."

"Stop, please," she laughed. "I got your point. Now-"

"Now, you could be a good girl and turn around."
"Now, you could be a good girl and turn around."

"Mh... I like the suggestion," Aelinor smiled wantonly as she rose and turned - she was facing the bed, now, and shivered in anticipation when her husband's mouth landed in the middle of her back. "And I definitely like the beard," she added approvingly, enjoying the sensation of Tywin's prickly chin gently grazing her skin. Tywin grasped a cushion and put it in front of her, guiding her to bend over it - supported by her arms on the mattress, Aelinor felt her belly just barely touching the cushion.

"In order to support the baby without making things uncomfortable," Tywin explained, and it was clear it wasn't the first time he did something of the sort. Had Joanna been so perpetually lustful, too?, Aelinor wondered, still, she didn't ask: fussing about his first, dead wife is a foolproof way to kill any man's appetite...

And given that Tywin's appetite was quite in good health, at the moment, Aelinor had every intention to make the best of it. She moved slightly backward, meeting with his unquestionable erection - not for the first time she found herself almost amazed by the kind of response she was able to elicit from him. He had lived the life of a hermit - at least with regard to his sexual life - for many years, but with her... With her, everything had been different. Everything had been different starting with that very first encounter on the gravel path, months before. "Please," she murmured, as he started to rub her slit with the head.

"You're so wet, my lady."

"Can you guess why, my lord?"

"Too much foreplay, maybe?"

"You know me, I'm usually the one claiming that there's no such thing as too much foreplay, but..."

Tywin Lannister interrupted their brief connection and backed off a bit - her groan was still echoing in her throat when he entered her in one motion, burying himself all the way inside her. "Finally",

"You're so wet I'm almost worried," Tywin mocked her, starting to move.

"I know," came her reply, through gritted teeth. She was trying to match his movements halfway, in the desperate hope to make the friction more fulfilling. "I know," she panted, once again.

"Sometimes I am so wet, and I feel so... lascivious... I almost think the only way to cope with it would be to..."

"To?"

"Nothing. You wouldn't like it."

Tywin bent over her and took one of her breasts in his hand while the other hand came down to massage her between her legs. "Try me," he commanded in her ear.

"But it's embarrassing."

"I won't embarrass you, I promise. So the only way to cope with it would be... What?"
Aelinor carefully lowered herself on her right elbow, bringing her left hand to the one Tywin was teasing her with. "To have two of you," she exhaled. "But on the grounds that there is only one Tywin Lannister..."

Both his hands left their current job and he straightened up without a word. His fingers closed like iron on her hips and the Old Lion started to thrust hard inside his wife, his eyes full of her copper hair and his ears of the fulfilling sound of his flesh slamming against hers. Aelinor's hands fisted between the sheets, her breath shorter and a fire in her loins. Was he punishing her?, she wondered.

It was not a bad punishment, all things considered - she felt whole, complete, she felt filled: and her own moans echoed his grunts and thrusts as her elbows absorbed every surplus of strength he was putting into his frantic mating.

"You're mine," she heard him hiss, and she cried, overwhelmed by the intensity of their present coupling.

"Yes," she screamed, "YES! Good grief, Tywin, YES! More, more, yes!"

His movements became quicker, shorter - he emptied himself into her in a few hot spurts and a mighty roar, leaving her sated and sensitive in every bit of her body. He slid out of her, then, and lowered himself at her side, holding her in a spooning position and waiting for them both to regain their breath.

"About that thing about having two..."

"Don't mind me, darling. It's just some rambling thought that sometimes occurs in my mind, but..."

Tywin made her turn to face him and looked deeply into her eyes. "I know I told you I'm not one for sharing what's mine. And I am not, truth to be told. But why don't you...tell me what does cross your mind - I mean, actually - when those thoughts creep into that lovely head of yours?"
"I dare to say it's not exactly ladylike, on my part," she protested, trying to avoid his gaze. Tywin's right hand went to her face, then, and cupped her cheek with unexpected sweetness.

"I can't care less about what's ladylike or not," he declared, "I'm curious. And of course, you can't really expect to tell your husband you fantasize about having two men at once without him being quite...well, aroused by the thought. It's an interesting picture, you know..."

"Even if you're not a sharing man?"

The Old Lion kissed his wife's shoulder lazily, leaving a wet path all the way down to her throat. "Why don't you describe what's on your mind on those occasions, and maybe then we talk about my attitude about sharing what's mine?"

"Oh, such a naughty husband you are..." Aelinor snuggled against his chest, her arm draped around his middle as her fingernails gently scraped the skin on his back. "It's not as I actually started to fantasize about it, let me be clear. It's more... Well, when these side effects hit me harder, sometimes I find myself guessing how it would be to..." She hesitated.

"Name it."

"...to be taken by two of you at the same time. Because it's always you, Tywin, no one else. Apparently, I can't persuade myself to think of another man even in my wildest fantasies," she smirked.

"Such a shame there's only one of me, then," he mocked her.

"You can say it..."

"And what do you - we - do in those...what did you call them? Wildest fantasies?"

Aelinor sighed, defeated. "The usual things I guess everyone does in such situations... I don't know how does it start - usually, I find myself right in the middle of it - so I am..." she paused. Surely he didn't want to hear the details.

Only, he did. And it was made quite clear by the way his member was starting to react against her thigh.

"Go on."

"Busy with you in my mouth," she gave up. "In our bed, and on all fours, and you're caressing my hair - but it's not just my hair, 'cause you're behind me, too, and you lap and suck between my legs and..."

"Such an interesting picture indeed," he said approvingly, as his hand inched gently between her thighs. He was hardening again, this time even more quickly than before - despite his over-grown sense of property (and propriety), he found those fantasies quite entertaining, and very, very titillating. "And you're happy just like that?" he probed.

"No," came the reply, not stronger than a whisper. Aelinor was desperately trying to focus: the combo between Tywin's hand tickling her folds and her own voice outlining some of her hottest dreams, though, made every attempt to focus dramatically vain.
"No? What do I do to... _pleasure_ you, my lady?"

"You help me... _straddle_ you..."

"Mh. Do I enter you, then?"

"Yes."

He rolled onto his back and helped her on top of him. "Like this?" He asked, palming her butt and guided her to impale herself on his hard member.

"Yes," she exhaled, starting to move slowly back and forward.

"What happens next? With me - the other me, I mean. What...?"

"Well, you are behind me, and..."

"Mh, I see," he whispered, kissing her deeply. Emboldened, his right hand slid down her bum and he prodded at her opening with his middle finger. She writhed in arousal, her breath heavy and labored and her skin covered in goosebumps. Tywin bit her lips, her chin - everything was _so damn exciting_ he was starting to fear he was about to cum. "And you dream about _me_ taking you this way, then? Both ways? At the same time?"

"Yessssss..."

"Mh. Do you remember when Kevan interrupted us?"

"Which time?"

Tywin chuckled and the strength in his thrusts improved, at the same rate as her rhythm. "The one when you practically had me in your hand... Are you telling me that if he'd been just a few minutes late you'd be prone to..."

She stopped abruptly. "With _your brother_?"

"Well, definitely he's the only one I'd trust enough to-"

"Good grief, Tywin!"

The Old Lion laughed, and drew his wife down against his chest. "I'm glad you feel this way, I won't deny it." He kissed her hungrily, devouring her mouth with all the fervor of the lion restoring his rights. "I'd be careful in dismissing the suggestion, though, if I'd be you... You could regret it - notably during those _nocturnal cravings_ of yours..."

"Stop mocking me, Tywin Lannister," Aelinor hissed, her index finger pointed in the middle of his chest. "And finish what you started."

"Namely?"

Aelinor snorted and removed herself from on top of him - she laid on her back, then, propping herself up on her elbows and spreading her legs in front of him. "Namely, _fucking me_, hard and properly."

"I thought you'd never asked..."
Crimson.

Aelinor's face was, simply, crimson - something her sister-in-law was finding extremely amusing. "Goodness, child, there is no need to be so embarrassed! I knew you and my brother were enjoying each other's company even far before last night, you know?"

"Genna, please..." Aelinor pleaded.

"Oh, don't be silly! I'm more than happy that you both are so well recovered that-"

"Please..."

"I'll never understand this youth, I swear. When I was your age, young married women were more than able to appreciate a bit of sauciness when conversation's topic was their sex life, but now..."

"My wife prefers to confine her bluntness about our sex life to our chambers, Genna. Please, respect that."

Aelinor ducked her head even lower. Wonderful. Tywin's arrival was exactly what was missing to worsen her breakfast.

"Ah, brother! I'm glad to see you're still able to stand! I was quite worried, you know, after..."

"Genna!"

"Yes, Genna, stop it," the Old Lion chuckled, sitting down in his chair. "I'm very well, though, so thank you for your concern but I can assure you it was misplaced."

"You two are awful. Yes, yes, both of you," Aelinor complained, looking from a Lannister to the other.

Brother and sister smirked as one. Oh, shit, Aelinor thought, feeling definitely outnumbered.
Chapter 125

"It's too risky." Aelinor's voice had interrupted her husband's monologue with just the fragment of truth he would have preferred not to hear.

"Maybe so, but given the circumstances, it is hardly relevant. It's what has to be done."

"I see your point - really, I see it! - but this plan is still too risky. There are too many details which could go wrong - and we have not what I'd say enough men to grant our success. Let's call some units back from the siege: Jaime can surely spare some dozens of men, and here they could make all the difference in-

"There's no time for that!" He reacted. "The walk of atonement will be in three days, and that's all the time we have left. We must act. We must act now."

"Tywin..."

"Enough!" Aelinor froze on the spot, lips pressed together and jaws clenched, her hands on the table. She inhaled slowly but said no more. "You can't possibly think I'd let my daughter endure that barbaric punishment."

Genna Lannister looked her brother but didn't dare to speak. There was some sort of shared thought above their heads, a shared thought that no-one had the slighted intention to voice. Even if she deserves it.

"At least let me talk the king out of this idea of being there," Aelinor said softly. "He's just a boy. He doesn't deserve such a display of..."

"There will be no display, because there will be no walk. And the king has to be there."

"But if things should go south..."

"Things won't go south. They're not waiting for us. They think us broken, useless, and we'll show to them what a wounded lion can still do. Wasn't it your clever plan, wife?"

Aelinor sighed uneasily. "My plan was a longer play, my lord."

"Well, at the time circumstances were different," suggested Genna Lannister in a careful tone.

"I know. Still, I can't help worrying for Tommen. It will be quite the shock, and he's-"

"He's the king. He must learn."

"At least tell me he knows you're planning something. Tell me you've warned him."

The concern in her voice was so deep, so urgent that even in his icy mode Tywin found himself taken aback - he reached for her hand and covered it with his own. "He knows. I promise you, he knows. And he'll be perfectly safe."

"Promise me?"

"Absolutely."
"Will you be at my side, my lady? Please?" Aelinor nodded with a smile.

"As you wish, your Grace," she reassured the boy. He smiled back at her.

"I don't want you to find yourself in any danger..."

"I'll be safe - and so will you. And everything will be perfectly well again in no time, I promise."

Silence fell - a silence filled with unspoken words, with the name which dominated their thoughts and could not be spoken out loud, not yet... Soon, Aelinor thought. Soon her life wouldn't be her life anymore. Soon the Realm would have had back the only actual ruler it had had in centuries. Tywin Lannister is coming, she smiled inwardly to herself.

Lannister men were now silently taking their positions at the crucial points inside the city. Weapons were now ready, polished and sharpened and waiting to act. The boy king pushed back his chair.

"Will you give my regards to..." A meaningful pause, a meaningful nod, "my great-aunt, lady Genna?"

"I will." Aelinor curtsied - for as much as her pregnancy let her. "Take care of yourself, your Grace. 'til tomorrow, then."

On her way back from the Red Keep, Aelinor had shut the curtains of the litter, not wanting to see - she dreaded the sensation of not seeing what was actually happening, even when not seeing it was the key to their success. Not seeing would have led her to doubt, but she was married to Tywin Lannister and doubt was not an option. She let her back rest against the cushions and closed her eyes, trying not to think of the risks, of the pile of things which could actually go wrong in their plan.

Most of all, she was trying not to think of what was going to happen next. The Lannisters restored to full power in the Seven Kingdoms could only mean Tywin in his full power over the Realm - and more ruling-Tywin was just another way to say "less family-Tywin". Which, with their baby definitely on its way, was not the best of the scenery she could picture in her mind.

"You did marry the most prominent and powerful man in Westeros, dear: you knew what you were signing for," Genna had told her just the night before. And she had been right, of course, and still... Still, the temporary setback caused by Tyrion's wicked actions had somehow crept under her skin, and she had started to wonder how would it be, being just some noble couple with a perfectly normal life instead of an immense amount of responsibilities on their shoulders.

But to that specific question, she knows even too well, there was no answer.
"You're worried."

In the dim light of the fire, Tywin's hand had stopped just above his wife's belly but his thumb was keeping on gently caressing her skin in circles. It had become quite usual, that laziness after lovemaking, and once again she sighed heavily.

"No, I'm not. I'm a bit...sad, that's all," she admitted, her hand reaching for his, their fingers intertwining.

"Sad?"

"It's our last night - I mean, the last we can truly call ours. Tomorrow will change everything."

"Not everything," he said quietly, kissing her shoulder, "After all, it'll be just as nothing had happened..."

"I know, I know," Aelinor sighed again, and moved slightly in order to better fit against her husband's chest. "But despite how this reclusive life of ours had begun, well, I've grown quite attached to it. To being just you and me..."

"...and Genna," he chuckled.

"Oh, please, Tywin, I was trying to be serious and profound!"

"And I was trying to make you laugh. You're far more pretty when you smile."

"It's too dark, you can't see whether I'm pretty or not," she mocked him. Tywin snorted and raised his hand towards her face.

"I can touch, though," his fingers found easily her cheekbones, her lips, tracing them with tenderness. "And you keep forgetting I can sense whenever you smile."

"Oh, can you?"

"Don't use sarcasm with me, woman..." He kissed her reverently, her cheek cupped in his hand, his nostrils filled by the good scent of her skin. "I won't put the Realm above you or our child. I won't. I promise."

Aelinor held him against her, closing her eyes in the desperate attempt to keep her tears at bay. "I'd really like to believe you, Tywin," she whispered. "But we both know-"

"No. What I know is that I won't do the same mistake again. I've spoiled my children before - that won't happen to our little one. Did you hear, me, Aelinor?" he asked urgently, propping himself on one elbow to better look at her. "It won't happen again. I promise. She'll be happy, and loved, and-"

"She, Tywin? Won't you be disappointed, if our firstborn should be a girl?" It was a completely new notion, Aelinor realized in awe. She had always been so confident, so sure all he would have wanted was an heir...

"I couldn't possibly be disappointed with something - someone - you and I have made. I thought you knew."
Aelinor smiled, nuzzling against his short beard. "I didn't," she confessed. "But I do now..." she kissed his jaw. "Promise me our family will always be your first thought, Tywin, would you mind? Once more?"

"I promise. No realm, no responsibilities, no strategy... You'll always come first. I promise. Always."
The sun was high in the sky and not particularly warm - *a winter sun, indeed*, thought Aelinor adjusting distraughtly the golden clasps keeping her cloak in place. She was wearing black - black velvet was the dress, black finest wool was the cloak, black were the pearls in her jewels and hairnet, and everything concurred to one, single purpose: to let the lions forming her clasps shine in shameless pride on her chest.

When she had taken her place next to the king, the High Sparrow had looked at her and furrowed his brows, but in the end, he had had to just go and pay his respects to her, too: Aelinor had graciously extended her hand for him to kiss - something he *definitely* did not - and as much graciously failed to notice how he had been expecting some gesture of submission from her. She had smiled, though, and it had been a soft smile, full of tenderness and meekness. She was beginning to find it amusing, after all.

"I was very sorry when I heard of your loss, my lady," the man had said, and Aelinor had nodded, solemnly, and lowered her eyes.

"I suppose I can consider me lucky, though: at least my lord husband will live through his child..."

"The Mother is merciful," the priest had stated, but Aelinor was under the impression that his reply had come some seconds later than what expected. *You didn't know until the moment you saw me, then*, she thought happily. Up to that point, her plan had worked more than well.

Then the man left, with not even a bow of the head towards the king - Tommen did not seem afflicted by the loss of respect, while Aelinor... Well. Aelinor tried very hard to keep herself focused on the matter at hand.

"This truly was unexpected," said a fluted voice by her left side, but she had no need to turn her head in order to see who'd just approached: soft voice, a rustle of silk, a cloud of perfume...

"I'm glad to provide you with an additional entertainment, Lord Varys," she nodded, without even the barest flinch of a muscle in her person. She hadn't anticipated the Spider's presence, but truth to be told, it could have its interesting implications... Mostly in the department of her private vendetta. Her lips curved imperceptibly.

Suddenly the doors of the Great Sept slammed open and the septas escorted Cersei out in the light - Aelinor heard the gasp which had escaped Tommen's lips seeing his mother like this and her heart ached deeply for the sweet boy by her side. She almost reached out to him, but she stopped: he was the king. It would be *extremely* improper.

The Faith had covered Cersei with a tunic of rough, poor fabric which made Aelinor shiver. The Queen was barefoot, too, but even so, Aelinor could recognize, her gaze was not the one of a broken woman: she was submitting herself to something *dreadful*, but she was doing it out of nothing else than disdain towards her gaoler... And Aelinor, despite everything she had ever thought - and still thought - of her, had to admit she admired her courage. As the septas started to strip her naked, though, and to announce her crimes, silence fell.

And was suddenly pierced by the sound of a solitary, perfect cry. "*LANNISTER!*"
For a split second, no one understood except for Aelinor and the king.

Cersei's head turned abruptly towards the point where the voice had come from, then towards her son and her father's wife. People looked around, bewildered.

"LANNISTER!" Hundred of voices responded as one, like a thunder. Then everyone heard - the clang of armored steps on cobbles, the echo of the hooves of the warhorses pouring out in the streets around the Sept.

Someone screamed.

Aelinor smiled broadly, extended her right arm to the king and the two walked the few steps which separated them from Cersei. Aelinor unclasped her cloak and draped it against her daughter-in-law's shoulders - but only after having turned it upside down: what had been black a moment before was now crimson red, Lannister red.

"This ends now," she stated in a calm voice. The High Septon turned towards his men - someone took a step - a moment later he was contorting himself on the steps, an arrow with red and gold fletching protruding from his thigh. "Oh, I must advise you against it," Aelinor said, looking directly at the Sparrow.

"You won't get away with it," he shot back.

"Maybe you want to look better what's going on around us?" Lannister men were everywhere to be seen. And the crowd opened in two wings around a big horse with a man in crimson steel armor on its back. Aelinor could hear the collective gasp at the sight - crimson steel, golden lions, the impressive great cloak...

"We've seen this trick before, Lady Aelinor - Renly's ghost worked once, but you cannot expect that-"

"Let me tell you a secret," she said conspiratorially, bending slightly towards the High Sparrow as the man in Tywin Lannister's battle armor was climbing the stairs of the Great Sept with his horse. She winked. "This is not a trick."

Chapter End Notes

Being this story slightly (lol) AU, King Tommen is present to his mother's punishment: it's quite a cruel thing, I know, but it's necessary to the ends of the story... or at least, it's what I keep telling myself ;)
"Leave this place, neatly and immediately, and no harm will be done," Tywin's voice thundered. He had removed his helm, revealing how his wife's words had been true: that was not a trick, he was not a ghost. The High Sparrow cowered. "No, not you," the Old Lion told him almost softly.

"You cannot..."

"I can. I will. I'm doing it, truth to be told."

"Father," Cersei finally exhaled. Tywin looked down from his armored warhorse and nodded to her. The message had been clear: no quick death for the man. Not that Tywin Lannister had ever thought about showing mercy, after all.

"You will suffer, man," he stated, "for your destiny is now out of my hands."

"The Gods-"

"We'll see, we'll see," Tywin dismissed his protest with a curt movement of the hand. Another gesture and four Lannister men arrested the High Sparrow - a third, and a litter was quickly brought for the Queen to be carried to the Red Keep.

The show was over.

Aelinor had to admit, her husband had been right from the beginning: the element of surprise had been the key.

An element of surprise was, too, when she realized Lord Varys was standing at her side, though, holding a dagger and heading for...

"Tommen!" She pushed the boy away and the blow failed, but the eunuch didn't seem affected by his failure.

"Ah, very well played, my Lady," he smiled, grasping her left wrist and twisting it. Aelinor winced. Her right hand made what seemed a desperate movement, insinuating between the folds of her dress.

Tywin was immediately on them both - one moment he was towering over them from his horse, a moment later he was standing on the marble stone, cloak abandoned and sword in hand. "Let her go."

Aelinor smiled at him. "No need for that, darling, I got this," she chirped.

Varys looked quizzically at her - the bit of uncertainty she just had hoped for. Aelinor Lannister, née Marbrand, sister of one of the finest swordsmen and soldiers in the Seven Kingdoms, shifted her weight towards the eunuch, who lost his balance - and as soon as the stiletto appeared in her right hand, she thrust it deep into the Spider's stomach. Ah, she thought, what they say it's correct: a blow does it best when inflicted bottom-up.

The eunuch staggered, his hands freeing hers and pressing frantically over the wound. Aelinor extracted the blade, then sank it once again.

"I did warn you, didn't I?" she said softly. "Lannisters always pay their debts."
The litter had brought her back to his brother's mansion - she was quite tired but still overexcited about the perfect outcome of their plan. When she climbed down, though, Genna's scream startled her to the bones.

"What happened?" she asked urgently.

"What happened?" repeated the older woman, "What happened? You tell me what happened! You're covered in blood!" Aelinor lowered her gaze on her hands, and started to laugh. "Aelinor! What-

"It's Lord Varys'," she reassured her sister-in-law. "I'll take a hot bath, now," she ordered to her maids. Genna followed her inside, fussing about scares and horrible jokes, and continued all the way to Tywin and Aelinor's bedchambers.

"Varys?" she asked, "What does the Spider have to do with...?"

"He's dead," Aelinor replied, quickly unfastening her dress, "Be a darling and help me with these buttons, would you?"

"Dead? How-

"Have a guess," her sister-in-law smiled, nodding towards her dress and showing her hands. Genna's expression froze.

"You?"

"It wasn't planned - at least, not in this way, not so soon... But he attacked Tommen, and... Oh, nevermind. Tommen is safe and sound, the Spider is dead, all hail to the Lannisters."

"You did kill a man?" Genna insisted, flabbergasted, "You mean you-

"My lady, your bath is ready..."

"Thank you, Mawrys," Aelinor nodded towards her maid and headed for the bathtub, Genna heeling her. "Oh, Genna, please. He was the responsible of my husband nearly being killed - he sent Tyrion's whore to our quarters in the Tower of the Hand, he set Tyrion free, he...

Genna raised her hands. "I yield, I yield," she declared. "I was just finding...curious that you're the one who has killed him, instead of my notoriously merciful brother... Oh, speaking of my brother: where the hell is he?"

Aelinor lowered herself carefully into the tub, letting the hot water progressively cocoon her. She closed her eyes and sighed.

"Back to the Red Keep, I guess..."

"Guess again," a deep, definitely masculine voice said. Aelinor's eyes shot open.

"What are you doing here? Why on earth aren't you with your daughter, with the king, with-"

Tywin Lannister looked sideways at his sister, who patted him comradely on his shoulder and left the room. "Technically speaking, I am - not with the king, this I'll admit; but with my one true queen, I am..." He bent over to kiss her softly on her lips, on her forehead. Aelinor caressed his arm with her
wet hand, soaking the sleeve.

"Are you getting soft, Tywin Lannister?"

He threw back his head and laughed heartily. "You can't possibly tell me it comes as a surprise, woman."

Aelinor sat up straight and extended her hand, caressing his bearded cheek. "Truth to be told, it's just I enjoy too much when you admit it..."

"It makes you feel...what, exactly? Powerful? Magnificent?" he mocked her.

"...Lucky. And happy, of course." She arched her back and groaned in satisfaction - tiredness was starting to kick in and the hot bath was exactly was she needed the most. "Join me?"

Tywin Lannister loosened his breaches and shirt with an amused smirk on his lips. "You can bet."
Eyes closed and body completely relaxed, Aelinor was enjoying the warming and pleasant sensation of her husband slowly kissing her neck. She had expected something entirely different, she had to admit: she knew - well, everyone knew - that both soldiers and lords were usually famished, and not for food, when returning from a battle, whichever form and type the battle was. It was just what happened. It was the excitement of the fight, which needed to subside. It was the need for celebration. It was about reaffirming once again their strength and superiority.

Therefore, Aelinor had half expected - well, totally expected - something different from the sweet, almost lazy cuddling Tywin was giving her. There had been no roughness, no urgency, and she was enjoying the discovery of this unexpected angle of him - she was enjoying a lot.

"What now?" she asked, gently grazing his forearm.

"The Crown will appoint a new Hand, and a new Regent..." he replied, without interrupting his ministrations. Aelinor stiffened.

"You?" her voice trembled.

"No."

"No?"

She felt him smile against her skin. "No. I promised you, didn't I? I won't put this realm before our family."

"But... What if it needs you?"

"It will set for someone who's not me."

Aelinor sighed and turned in his arms, propping herself on her right elbow in order to better face him. "Setting for someone who wasn't you is exactly what brought us where we currently are, Tywin."

"Are you complaining, Aelinor? I was under the impression that you were the first one wishing for me not to resume my former duties."

"I know, I know, and I'm sorry for being so inconsistent, but... I mean, I'm worried: this whole situation is complex and the realm is far from pacified, and we've seen what your daughter's choices had caused. Tommen needs a guiding hand which cannot be his mother's... What he needs is a mentor, a man whose skills and reliability could-"

"I do agree. But I won't be that man. Kevan will."

Aelinor froze. It was almost too good to be true and a tentative smile appeared on her lips. "Does he know?"

"He should have left the West two days ago."

"And you didn't think to tell me?" She exclaimed, theatrically. Tywin closed his fingers on her soft thigh and kissed her jaw with deliberation.

"And being such a spoilsport? Ah!"
"Something's on your mind," Tywin mocked her, looking intently at her while her maid finished styling her hair.

"Mh?"

"I said, something's on your mind... And I'd say this distraction of yours proves I'm right..." Aelinor rolled her eyes and dismissed the girl with a quick gesture.

"The Spider," she admitted, once they were finally alone in the room.

"What about him?"

She looked at his reflection in the mirror, not daring to turn and face him. Surely he would have considered it such a silliness... "Shouldn't I... I mean, I-"

"Are you feeling guilty?"

Aelinor sighed. "That's exactly the point."

"Well, darling. From my point of view, you did what you did because of what he had done to our family, so I can't see why you should feel guilty in any-"

"No, the point is - I don't. But at the same time, something inside me keeps telling that I should, at least on some measure. But I don't. I do try, and I keep failing."

"Ah, an ethical conundrum," she saw him smile - of course, he was finding her dilemma quite amusing. He crossed the room and made her turn around on her stool in order to properly look into her eyes. So properly, he even knelt in front of her and took her hands. "I guess it's a bit of religion kicking in, or resurfacing..."

"Probably, yes, but it could at least do me the favor to work properly!"

"You grew up as a proper lady, well educated and obedient and-"

"I was never obedient, Tywin, let's face the truth - and as for the proper part..."

Tywin Lannister chuckled. "Just because you were too brilliant not to become an independent thinker. That doesn't mean you've been bred with high expectations on the proper, well educated and obedient department, though." His hands left hers and started to caress her thighs, affectionately. "And now that you've acted just like any man would have done, you don't know how to feel about it. It's only to be expected."

"Is it that simple, then?" She had instinctively spread her legs, making more space for him - who had just lowered his head at her belly's level and put his mouth over it in a reassuring kiss.

"Yes, it's that simple," he smiled against the brocade, then whispered conspiratorially, "We'll make a great soldier of your mother in no time, little one, believe me..."

"Are you talking to the baby, Tywin Lannister?" she asked, nearly shocked.

"Since its mother doesn't trust me..."
"You've just managed to unlace half of my dress while pretending to give me ethical advice, Tywin: how on earth could I trust you?"
Despite her better resolutions, she had to admit that meeting Kevan Lannister after the...speculations about him which had taken place nights before between Tywin and herself was causing her a bit of embarrassment. Nothing too worrying, just... Embarrassing. Not because of something he was doing or saying, of course - he was the perfect, kind gentleman he always was.

Problem was - Tywin was not. Not perfect, nor a gentleman. And he had that kind of contorted sense of humour that just rejoiced in casting her long and knowing glances across the table. Aelinor looked intently at the food on her plate, desperately trying not to blush like a girl.

"And you'd be willing to... Are you sure, Tywin? I can understand not wanting to be Hand, after what happened there, but surely you'd be a far better Regent than me, we both know that."

"We all know that - no offense intended," cut in Genna, brandishing a fork, "As we all know you, Tywin, have always thought you'd be a better king than-"

"Anyone," Kevan stated. "And the boy adores you. You could shape him into a fine king, Tywin, probably the finest this realm has ever seen."

"Probably you're right, I could. But it's you who will. We'll leave for Casterly Rock just after the baby's birth - I'd rather he or she could be born in there, but I'm afraid it's too late and I won't put Aelinor at risk forcing her to travel in her conditions."

Aelinor smiled softly, her hand coming to rest on her belly. "Maester Ballabar says the last weeks are almost as important as the firsts," she acknowledged. "He forbade me to leave the city..."

"Everything's good, then," Kevan smiled, but the grateful Yes that Aelinor was about to pronounce was still on the tip of her tongue when Tywin's voice casually stated:

"Everything's good, yes - with just the right amount of...side effects."

And it happened. It happened all at once.

Genna started coughing, almost choking on her food - Aelinor, a ferocious gaze in her eyes, kicked her husband hard under the table - Kevan rose, in order to pat her sister's back - and in the middle of that, Tywin Lannister, simply, laughed.
"Now that you're officially alive again, though, you should come back and live inside the Keep," Kevan suggested cautiously, as soon as he and his brother were left alone. "As protected as this house can be, remaining here it's too risky..."

"I agree. I wish it would be that simple, though. Aelinor seems to love this place..."

"Yes, but she's too smart to simply set on what she loves - she'll agree the Red Keep is the best option."

Tywin sipped slowly his wine and put his cup down with a soft clink. "You do like her, don't you."

"Yes, I do, and I admire her," His brother admitted. "You should have seen her when..." Words trailed off. They both knew the all-too-near-to-death time Tywin had experimented would have never been a topic for conversation. "No one in his right mind could possibly not like her, after seeing how she ruled over this family."

"She's tough," Tywin nodded. "Tougher than she looks." He let his head rest against the high back of his chair, and closed his eyes. "Sometimes I find myself wondering whether she's ruling me, too."

"Were it the case... Where would the problem be? If I recall correctly - and I do - they say something very similar about Joanna."

"The problem, brother, is that now I am not a young man anymore." Kevan Lannister looked at his brother in horror. He knew, now, what was happening, and he didn't like it a bit.

"You can't possibly consider your situation and think of Father, Tywin. Be serious."

"I am. And that's why I know this kind of thing is exactly what people will think of. Don't misunderstand me: I can't care less about what others could think. It's just - she doesn't deserve it."

Kevan stretched out his legs and sighed. "You said it yourself: she's tougher than she looks. And the two of you make an astonishing couple, that's there for all to see." He sipped slowly from his cup, his mind troubled. "What do you plan to do, Tywin? About Cersei, namely."

The Old Lion exhaled. "She'll have to go."

"I agree. But where?"

"As far away as possible. She won't like it, but there is no alternative."

"See? That's why I keep saying you should stay in King's Landing. With Cersei out of Tommen's life, he'll need..."

"A guidance. That's what a Regent is for."

"He'll need a mother. And that's what your wife could-"

"Once before I've sacrificed my family to the Crown, Kevan. You can't possibly ask me for..."

"I'm not asking," the younger man considered. "I'm merely pointing things out, waiting for the moment they'll finally sink in inside you."
Chapter 135

Aelinor opened her eyes and realized that her husband was not in bed. Her brows furrowed - it was the middle of the night, and it was starting to get definitely cold, what reason could have been for him to leave her side? She waited for a little while, silent and still. He didn't come back. Quite worried, by now, Aelinor slid out of the furs and wrapped herself in a thick blanket before going in search of him - and as soon as the male voices hit her senses from behind the parlour's door, Aelinor knew something was wrong.

She pushed the door open without announcing her presence. Silence fell, immediately.

For the briefest moment, seeing Jaime between the men at the table filled her heart - then she realized.

"Where's Addam?" she asked in a soft, reasonable voice.

Jaime looked at his father, who had his eyes buried in his wife's.

"I reckon you should go back to bed, Aelinor. I'll be with you as soon as..."

"Where-is-my-brother." she repeated in a hiss.

"At least take a seat, Aelinor, don't-"

"Stop this immediately," she ordered. Her heart thundered in her ears. "And tell me what's happened. Now."

Tywin Lannister rose and crossed the room with long strides. Aelinor's head started to spin - when he reached her, it was just in time to catch her and hold her trembling figure against his chest. "No," she sobbed.

"He's missing," he whispered in her hair while stroking her back. "He went after the Blackfish when the siege broke, and... There's no news. They found his horse, but..."

Aelinor straightened up grasping her husband's arm and turned to Jaime. "Why on earth are you here, then? You should be looking for him," she stated, forcing herself to use a calm voice when her one and only desire would have been screaming.

"I sent my best men, believe me. We'll find him."

But she felt what his voice hadn't said, the words none of the men in the room would have ever dared to speak: alive, or most probably dead. She nodded.

"Thank you." She took a step, as to leave the room, but suddenly something ached inside her - her knees gave up and everything that kept her from collapsing was Tywin's grasp. She tried to regain her breath but it was as if her body was tearing itself apart. "Tywin!" she cried, terrified. Something watery was pooling at her feet. "It's too soon! It's- it's-"

Tywin Lannister didn't waste a moment in thinking - despite every recommendation about not exerting himself, he lifted his wife in his arms and headed for their room.

"Fetch the Maester! NOW!"
"Father..."

"Shut up."

"At least try and-"

"Shut up!"

The Old Lion was pacing furiously, the solar plainly all too small for his rage. Under the scars left by Maester Ballabar's minute sutures, his bowels and muscles were burning in pain - but he didn't care. He barely sensed it: his head was full of Aelinor's screams, full of dark memories and...

_Fear._

He was never familiar with the idea but he knew what it meant, how it presented itself. And his chest was now burdened with _fear._

He couldn't even stand the mere thought of: _Sweet Mother above, look after her._

Maester Ballabar had banished him from his own bedchamber and he honestly couldn't care less about the idea that, at least, Genna was there; Aelinor was in pain and screaming his name and he wasn't even allowed to...

"I'm going inside. I can't stand to-"

"No, you won't. Let the Maester do his job, you'd be a nuisance."

Tywin turned to face his brother and his voice fell down a few tones. "It's my wife we're talking about," he said icily.

In his chair by the window, Jaime Lannister bowed his head. Cersei had spent months claiming that their father had married Addam's sister out of the need for a new heir, but this... _Gods._ He _did_ love her, then.

"Yes, and Genna's there, and she's more than capable to be of assistance. More capable than you."

"It's _my_ name she's calling out for," Tywin stated, simply, but his brother saw every bit of the world full of terror and pain hidden behind his eyes. _Good Mother, keep her safe._ "And it's been hours. She'll be exhausted, and scared, and-" his voice died away.

There had been a high pitched shriek, coming from behind his bedchamber's door.

A shriek, and a sudden silence.
It lasted just for a moment - a dilated moment, during which both Kevan and Jaime looked at Tywin with the concrete fear he could collapse at any moment, pale and still as he was. It lasted just for a moment, yes, but a dreadful moment, made terrible by the sudden silence.

Then the Old Lion moved, and it wasn't just a movement - he *stormed* into the room where his wife was, with a strength that he almost knocked down his sister, who was just then coming out.

He stormed into the room and he didn't pay attention to a thing: just to Aelinor, nothing else, she was his final and only focus...

Meanwhile, out of the door, Genna Lannister cracked a tired, tentative smile towards her brother and nephew, while wiping her hands in a towel.
"Are you...?"

"Alive, I dare to say," Aelinor smiled with a heavy sigh. It was a lame try on the humorous front, yes, but she knew it was something he was in need to hear. She reached out for him, her hand instinctively landing on his neck's side and drawing him towards her. Tywin gave in gladly, crushing against her and closing his arms around her frame; he inhaled deeply - neither the unmistakable smell of blood and sweat permeating the room was enough to prevent his nostrils to recognize her good scent, and she was there, and she was alive and almost joking and...

The sound had been an undertone to the rumbling of his blood pressure in his ears, but now he was getting calmer he recognized it - and raised his head from its rest against her shoulder, and looked expectantly into her eyes.

Aelinor cupped his face with the greatest affection she had ever felt for a man in her whole life. "Go and look for yourself," she prompted him softly.

On the other side of the bed, in the small cradle Maester Ballabar had just laid it in, the baby was gurgling - still reddened from the washing and wiping and from the new effort of breathing and living without its mother, yes, but alive, moving, and perfect.

Ballabar smiled proudly and ducked his head. "A strong, healthy boy, my Lord."

Tywin's chest almost ached in joy. He turned to Aelinor. "You've made the most perfect little thing I've ever laid my eyes upon, my Lady," he smirked, then sat back on the mattress, facing her and caressing the soft line of her jaw. "Copper haired, yes, but..." Aelinor's eyes clouded with tears for a moment and Tywin took her hands in his. "I was kidding, my love." He shot a quick glance to the Maester, who left immediately.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"What for?"

"This. All of this. I've put everything at risk, I-"

"Hush." Tywin moved slightly in order to be closer to her and held her tight against his chest.

"I was so scared," she sobbed.

"I know. I'm sorry, I should've been here, I..." He kissed the line of her hair, her temple. Aelinor sighed.

"You're here, now. And our little boy is here, too, and..."

"About that, Aelinor."

"Yes?"

"He needs a name." Tywin let the notion sink in, patiently waiting for her to adjust to the idea. It had been a difficult night, the last thing he wanted was to put her under more pressure.

"I know, but... I wasn't expecting it to happen so soon, and honestly, I didn't..."
"I did. I have a name I'll treasure your opinions about."

Aelinor nodded against his shoulder, struggling with herself in order not to fall asleep. She had never been so tired in her entire life. "I'm listening."

"I think his name should be Addam."
Chapter 139

Aelinor nodded against his shoulder, struggling with herself in order not to fall asleep. She had never been so tired in her entire life. "I'm listening."

"I think his name should be Addam."

Her head shot up to look at him. "But..." she tried not to look eager, "But it's not a Lannister name. You know, that thing with the y-s and..."

Tywin snorted and shook his head. "Good point, but who cares? It's a good name - the name of my beloved wife's beloved brother, the name of one of my best men. And the boy has Marbrans' copper hair, too!" His voice had been playful but once again, Aelinor's eyes filled with tears. "I know, Aelinor. I know. But we'll find him. And we'll bring him home. And he'll be over the moon when you'll tell him that the heir of House Lannister bears his name."

Aelinor weighed the idea - and he was right. Of course, he was right.

"Would you please bring the baby here with us?" she asked softly. Tywin froze for a moment - it had been too long, how was he supposed to...? "Oh, don't be sheepish. You'll have to pick him up, sooner or later, so you might as well start from now..."

"Oh, I hate you," he complained, bending over the cradle to pick up his son. Aelinor smiled.

"No, you don't... And - see? - you're still very good at it."

They were a picture, father and son: one so imposing, the other so tiny; one so golden, the other with all the colors of his mother's family; one staring so lovingly to the other, fast asleep in his arms. "He's so beautiful, Aelinor," Tywin sighed, mesmerized. "But you're exhausted, you need to rest. Let me call your maids to..."

Aelinor's hand landed gently on her husband's arm as soon as he had sat at her side with the baby. "No, he stays here. And you, too. Together."

"As my lady commands." Tywin Lannister leaned against the headboard and drew her close with his free arm, actually enclosing in his embrace all his reasons for living.

And he laid there, relaxed and serene, until he dozed off, enjoying the sensation of both his wife and son soundly asleep against him.
Days came and went, and became a week, then two, and finally three, but still bearing no news about Addam's fate; had it not been for the baby - whom everyone had just started to refer to as "young Addam", something his mother was particularly grateful for - Aelinor would have been in a miserable state indeed. And in a sense, she was, despite everything.

Despite her child's perfect health.

Despite Genna's efforts to make her smile.

Despite the extra care everyone seemed to put in their manners when approaching her.

Despite her husband holding and soothing her to sleep every night.

She missed her brother, but most of all, she didn't miss him like one's supposed to miss someone dead. He wasn't dead, she was so sure of it. He just wasn't.

He couldn't.

"Aelinor?"

Aelinor lifted her gaze and looked at Tywin, standing on the threshold of her parlour. He rarely went to the trouble to announce himself in such a tentative way, and she shivered.

"Yes?" Her hands, until then gently crossed in her lap, parted, the right reaching for the baby's cradle. She needed something to rely on, something - someone - to stay strong for.

"A raven's arrived."

Aelinor nodded. "Dark wings, dark words?" she asked hollowly.

"I don't know yet. I didn't open the scroll, I thought it would be better if we open it together."

She smiled sadly and reached out for him with her free hand, which he took immediately. "I won't say it to a living soul, I promise, but... You're a good man, Tywin Lannister."
Tywin Lannister wasn't exactly sure about how it had happened, but now that his wife was sobbing uncontrollably against his doublet he could do anything but wrap his arms around her shaking form and hold her against his chest.

She cried, then. She cried, and sobbed, and cried again.

When finally she stopped, and sighed, and snuggled between her husband's arms, he smiled - and knew she was smiling, too.

"Do you feel better, now?"

"Definitely better, yes."

"Sayings aren't always right, then, mh?"

"Can't say a thing about others, but *Dark wings, dark words* apparently is not..." Aelinor nuzzled his neck, inhaling his good, reassuring smell. Nothing in her life, ever, had made her feel at home like his scent did... She gave his throat a playful peck. "How long do you reckon it will take for them to arrive in King's Landing?"

"Two days, three, maybe. But I'm quite confident they'll be prone to travel fast - your brother is surely looking forward to coming back to life and civilization..."

Aelinor's hands slid slowly along his doublet, landing on the back of his neck. "I can't believe it, you know... He'll be here. I'll see him again, and...and... Oh, Tywin. I'm so happy I could almost..."

"Almost what?" he asked, sincerely amused.

"I could almost be persuaded to kiss you," she smirked.

"Oh. Then I guess I'm just gonna have to sacrifice myself..."
"I...was...mmm...I was...thinking..." Aelinor finally managed to say, with a great effort to keep her mind focused.

"Thinking?" Tywin asked, interrupting what he had been doing for the last minutes and looking sternly at her. "Was I doing such a poor job?"

Aelinor scoffed. "Oh, no. I can assure you, definitely not!"

"Still, you were thinking." He stretched himself up and sat on his heels. She felt exposed - she was, legs spread and now without a sapient mouth taking care of her sex. The air of the evening was almost tickling on her oversensitive skin.

"I know you want to return to Casterly Rock, and I think we should, but..."

"But?"

"Maybe, not on a regular basis. Kevan's right, Tywin. Tommen needs you."

"Oh, and how's that my brother's name pops up so often, in our bedroom, lately?" Aelinor's lips curved in a mischievous smile as she propped herself up on her elbows.

"As long as it's just his name, what pops up..."

"Aelinor!"

"Oh, don't make the scene of the horrified husband, Tywin, please. It was you who spoke his name in the first place, remember? And no, darling, I'm sorry, your death glare does not impress me." Tywin Lannister smacked his lips in delight as he slowly started to unfasten his breeches. Seven gods, they do really start to get uncomfortable. "Ah, but that, on the other side..." Aelinor grinned, nodding openly at his groin.

"You're a wicked woman, my lady. Kinky, I'd dare to say," he complimented her with a grin that mirrored her own. His hand was fisted around his member, vigorously pumping it with steadfast deliberation. She was laying there in front of him, naked and gorgeous, and after the forced abstinence which had followed their son's birth the Old Lion's appetite was getting more famished by the day - ah, yes, he thought, watching her with the kind of feline gaze a big predator could reserve for its most appetizing prey, how delightful.

He grabbed her by her ankles and dragged her towards him - towering over her from between her legs, he took a moment to savour the scene before his eyes. "Now that we established this, may I have my prize?" She pouted. "Please?"

A moment later, Tywin Lannister drove himself all the way inside his wife, overwhelmed by the sensation of how good was, once again, being buried between her welcoming folds.
Little Addam Lannister was fast asleep in his crib, softly mumbling from time to time while his mother was busy in needlework. Oh, it was not something she particularly liked, everyone knew that, but it had proved quite useful whenever she was in need to empty her mind from dark thoughts. And at the moment, she was worried.

The raven announcing her brother's rescuing had arrived almost a week before, but after that, no other news had reached King's Landing... And she - as the professional worrier that she was - was starting to feel that particular kind of true concern that was the reason behind her sudden urge to resume her embroidering.

"May I interrupt you, my Lady?" Asked the gentle voice of King Tommen. Aelinor smiled at him warmly and put down her work. "Oh, please, there is no need for you to interrupt what you were doing..."

"You're always very kind, your Grace, but I think I will," she winked, conspiratorially. "Please, come, sit..."

"And how's my little...uncle?"

"Quite well, truth to be told. Eating and sleeping and being adorable for most of the time." The boy king bent to watch the baby, smiling absentmindedly while fidgeting and nodding to himself. There was something on his mind, she could clearly see it, but it was not her place to ask him. He was the king - she would have waited for him to be ready.

"My grandfather is truly fond of you, my lady," he murmured. "You know, I never... I never saw him smile, before you. And surely I would have never dreamed to hug him as I did at ser Addam's mansion, before you entered his life... He'd had probably scolded me harshly just for trying it!" His laughter was gentle, authentically amused.

"He's a stern man, yes, but he loves you dearly - this I know for sure."

"And you. He loves you, that's quite undeniable... Otherwise, I doubt my mother would be so livid about it." Aelinor had the good grace to avert her eyes. A kind boy, but a clever one, too. "That's why I'm here, my lady. I needed your..." He hesitated for a moment, and Aelinor wondered what could he possibly need from her. Expertise? About what? Advise? Why should a king need something from her? "...Help," he finally gave in. Aelinor's eyebrows arched.

"From me?"

"You can talk to my grandfather." Dumbfounded, Tywin Lannister's young wife put every care in not making a single movement. The king rose and started pacing the room. "There's something I've been thinking about, lately. Something I want - well, no, maybe it's something I do not want - it's just... I'm not making any sense, am I?"

Aelinor ducked her head with an encouraging smirk. "No problem here, your Grace. Take your time. You're the king - you can do as you please..."

"That's the fact, my lady." He looked at her expectantly, but it was quite clear she wasn't following him. His hands clenched into fists, king Tommen took a deep breath. "I am the king. And I don't want to."
Ser Kevan Lannister raised his head, interrupting his reading.

His sister-in-law had just stormed in his solar, unannounced and clearly upset. "My lady?"

"I know, I shouldn't have come here. I mean - yes, being you Hand of the King and Regent it's the right thing to do, coming to you, but..." She sighed, and sat heavily into one of the chairs in front of the table. "But Tywin won't like it."

Kevan pushed back his chair and reached for the wine jug. "You've got my attention," he stated cautiously, pouring wine for both of them and handing out a cup to Aelinor. For a moment he misinterpreted her hesitation in accepting it, and stopped. "You're not pregnant again, are you?"

"What? Oh, no, no!" She took the cup from his extended hand and after a couple sips, she started to feel cold-blooded enough to speak again. "No, Kevan, I'm not pregnant. It's something neither Tywin nor you will like. I am quite shocked, too, truth to be told."

"I need you to be clearer, Aelinor. You're getting me quite anxious."

She took another gulp of wine. "The king went and see me. He wanted me to speak with his Hand and with his grandfather," she lied. Kevan had never been the boy's first concern, but there was nothing wrong in kindness.

"What about?" he pressed. He didn't like her tone, he didn't like her agitation. She was never agitated.

"About his kingship. He doesn't want it."

Kevan turned slowly towards her. "What?"

"Precisely. He doesn't want to marry the Tyrell girl - and that would be the easy part, with everything that's happened... But he doesn't want to be king, either. He claims he... He wants to be a septon," she exhaled.

"Oh." Ser Kevan sat down slowly, grasping both armrests with uncommon force. "And what else does he have in mind? Who on earth should have the Iron Throne in his place, pray?" Aelinor looked directly into his eyes, uncomfortably. "Sweet Mother," he hissed, and Aelinor - who had half expected some well-earned profanity - nodded.

"You see I couldn't just go to Tywin and tell him Your grandson wants to abdicate and to make you king, don't you? I had to speak with you first."

"Any idea about where does this foolishness of being a septon come from?" Aelinor shook her head.

"Apparently it's always been in his mind," she shrugged. "I tried to dissuade him, believe me, but... I've even brought up Baelor the Blessed, for heavens' sake!"

"No results, though, I assume?"

"No. It's been when he told me he wanted to leave the throne to Tywin."

Ser Kevan's fingers tapped nervously the table as the man let the words sink in. "Surely it could be a good thing for the Realm," he considered.
"You can't *possibly* like the idea!" Aelinor retorted, shocked, and her brother-in-law raised his hands.

"I don't *like* the idea. Still, I couldn't help to see it could have its positive outcomes..."

"Kevan..."

"What? Wouldn't you like the thought of your son on the Iron Throne?"

"That damned throne," she hissed, "sometimes I think it's cursed. It had brought nothing but pain and sufferings - you'll forgive me if I'd rather spare my son that kind of future..."

The Hand took another sip of wine, then sighed heavily. "You cannot, apparently - unless you manage to persuade Tywin to talk the boy out of this foolishness."

"I came here looking for help, you know," Aelinor stated in a reproachful tone. "I never thought you might actually agree with the King!"

"I do *not* agree. I merely say I can see the pros of such an outcome... And you know you see them, too."

Aelinor sighed and pressed two fingers at the base of her nose. "I wish I could unsee them."

"You'll be queen, though."

"Ah, *how wonderful,*" she retorted, dripping sarcasm.
Aelinor climbed slowly the stairs, one step after the other, too worried even to think clearly. Whatever Kevan in his blind optimism could think of it, an abdication - and even more in a turmoil like the present - was bound to mean troubles... Yes, he was right in thinking that a reigning Tywin Lannister would have been a good thing for the realm, but what about... Well, what about a lot of things. What about our family?, for instance. Our life? Oh, yes, she would be queen - so? The only queen she had ever had direct experience of was Cersei, and she was abundantly far from every idea of a role model Aelinor could have had in her whole life. Was that what being queen did to a woman? No, thank you.

"Lord Tywin is taking a bath, my lady," told ceremoniously his attendant as soon as she entered their quarters, and she almost jumped, startled, for she had been so deep in her thoughts she hadn't realized the man was there.

"Yes," she hissed, "Yes, thank you."

Oh, gods, she mentally exhaled, heading for the big room they usually reserved for the ceremony of the bath. She had no idea how to tell him. She didn't want to. Maybe the bath would have proved itself a blessing, for the relaxing atmosphere could perhaps... She stopped on the threshold, taken aback by the sight, and she couldn't help but smile affectionately. Gods in heavens, how could he be so elegant and...perfect, even while asleep? His right hand was resting on the tub's side, long and aristocratic; his head just slightly turned, eyes closed, and yet, with that noble demeanor that most men could only hope for, even in the full of their consciousness... And he was hers. Oh, the pride she felt. He loved her. He had given her the most beautiful child she had ever seen. And he would probably have made her a queen - a pang of pain shot through her chest at the thought and she shook her head, closing the door again and taking a couple of steps inside the room.

She sighed. Her hand cupped lightly the side of his face - and his hand shot up and caught her by her wrist. "I was awake as soon as you clicked the door open, you know," he pointed out amusedly, welcoming her sudden and horrified shriek at the unforeseen contact.

"You monster!" she protested, starting to squeeze the water out of her sleeve's fabric. "It's silk! Do you know what water does to silk? What if it's ruined?"

"We'll pay for another... And this reminds me - you might want to take it off, for I have every intention to do things, in the immediate future, that will probably end in damaging it even worse..."

"Such as?" she asked with pretended innocence; Tywin's hand raised to the back of her neck, drawing her to him with the sheer force of an appetite she knew all too well. Their lips crashed, hot and famished, in the eternal battle of their mutual cravings. "You convinced me," she panted against his mouth, and shot him a playful wink as she straightened up and started to undress.

As the Pratchett lover that I am, I have to point out that Aelinor's scandalized question
(Do you know what water does to silk?) is from Carpe Jugulum ;)

Chapter 146

Holding the reassuring hand her husband had outreached for her, Aelinor finally stepped into the tub - the water was still hot, not just warm, a clear sign that he hasn't been there long. Despite her husband's enthusiastic proclamation about his plans for their immediate future, though, Aelinor crouched down slowly, letting her body the time to gradually accustom to the warmth, and nested against his chest, eyes closed and cheek grazing his damp skin. Promptly, Tywin's arms closed around her form while his lips found the line of her hair.

"I know you were expecting something more...dinamic," she apologized. "I need just a moment, though, just..."

"Don't be silly. There's no fun in it, if you're not in the mood: and if you're not in the mood, this only means we'll do it some other time. Surely I'm not going to force you into something you-

"Don't you be silly, Tywin Lannister," she interrupted him, suddenly covering his mouth with two fingers. "There is absolutely no way you could force me into..." Her words faded away as - with as little movement as the confined space of the tub made necessary - her lips replaced her fingers. It was a light kiss, still, at the same time, curiously dreamy: it was like her mind had every intention to cope with the day's events by actually not coping with them at all, easing every tension in her muscles and shutting down her conscious thinking, for the benefit of her senses and relief... Almost without noticing what was happening, Aelinor found herself astride him, his hands open on her cheeks under the water and something quite unmistakable stirring under her. "And as it happens, I do need you to take me," she whispered against his ear, kissing him on the precise point where his jugular surfaced. "Actually I need you to...fuck me." Her voice had become deep, sultry, and that had given a velvety, provoking tone which made him harden even more quickly. He took her hand and guided it to palm his member - she promptly understood, closing her fingers around the shaft and starting to manipulate it with sheer dedication.

"Don't go overzealous..." he mocked her, sneaking his left hand between her legs. There he was welcomed by a wetness which had little to do with the water they were immersed in, and moaned in satisfaction when - tentatively inserted one finger in her opening - she playfully clenched her muscles around him. So he stopped her hand's movements and helped her to properly straddle him and take him inside for good.

"Ah," she groaned at the filling sensation, and started to move in order to improve it.

"So it seems it was you, the famished one..." he smirked, eagerly kissing her left breast and kneading the right. Making love in the tub was something they both appeared to enjoy a great deal - that was why he had given order for the tub to be filled as soon as he had entered their quarter: for a good half of the day he had had no other thought in his mind than his wife, and he had every plan to take the better from that thought... "Slow down. Wait. Let's try to..." He helped her to change position, guiding her to face - and grasp - the edge of the tub while he carefully moved behind her.

"Gods in heavens," Aelinor hissed between her teeth as soon as he entered her that way, and Tywin nodded proudly to himself: surely it had to be stimulating, being pressed against the tub with him knelt beside her, between her legs... He thrust with deliberation and drew back and she shivered. "Don't play with me - and most of all, don't make me ask again."

"You liked, then?" he chuckled, still not giving her what she had openly asked for.

"TYWIN!"
"Oh, well, if that's what you want..." He took hold of the edge, too, towering over her as he entered her again. And again. And again. What had started as a slow and playful pace became soon something completely different - something hot, and steamy, something which broke their breaths and marked their skin with the force of their mutual grasping.

"I'll have bruises, tomorrow..."

"I'm sorry," he muttered, kissing her at her nape. "I don't know what it-"

"You just did what I asked you for," she said reassuringly, turning in the water - the considerably less water than it was when they had started. She placed her hand over her cheek, drawing him nearer for a kiss. "And I love you for that."
The dim, feeble light of the sunrise was starting to glow in the distance. It was the hour when people all over the city would start to move, but there was no way to hear their lively sounds from up inside the Red Keep - still, Aelinor had just to close her eyes and inhale deeply, and flashes of memories of their time in Addam's mansion would have come back to her. She missed it, despite it all. Despite the initial desperation, despite the worries, despite the difficulties... She missed something she didn't ever truly had before, and surely she wouldn't ever have had again: she missed being ordinary people.

And now...

She shivered in the morning air, shaking her head and adjusting the warm fur around her shoulders. She didn't tell him the evening before, but she had to. And she dreaded that moment, as she probably had never dreaded anything else in her life.

"Something's troubling you."

Not a question - *how peculiar*, she thought sarcastically. "Mh?"

"You were sleeping, yes, but not resting. And now you're up far before sunrise and I find you staring sadly outside the window... It's about your brother?"

"No," she sighed.

"Nightmares, again?" he prodded cautiously, his right hand resting lightly on her shoulder.

"No..." Her fists closed hard around the blanket’s brims, in the effort to give herself courage. "It's too cold to stand there almost naked, Tywin. Come and share, there's plenty of room in here."

The Old Lion accepted his wife's offer with no objections; as soon as he took hold of the fur, though, and she snuggled against him, a heavy sigh left her throat, so deep it almost sounded like a strangled cry. "You're worrying me, Aelinor," his voice rumbled in her ear, softly reverberating through the contact of skin with skin.

"There's something I must tell you, it's just... It's just I don't know how." He held her against his chest, arms crossed over her stomach.

"Are you alright?" he asked. In his suddenly hollow voice she recognized the deepness of his concern.

"I am."

"Nothing else matters."

Aelinor closed her eyes, trying to keep her tears under control. "The king went to see me, this afternoon."

"And?"

And she told him. Every word, every thought she had had. She told him about her concerns, about Kevan's opinions, about her *fear*. And when she fell silent, he just nodded and for some minutes didn't speak either. "I should have told you sooner, I know, and I am so sorry..."

"What do you want me to do?" he asked plainly. She had expected something entirely different - his
mind springing in motion, tracing plans and strategies, something like that... His tone, though, had been free from any inflection of irritation or excitement. He had asked what to do, and he had done it with the same tone he could have used to ask her opinion about a doublet.

"I can't see how what I want could be of any importance," she smiled sadly, turning around in his arms to face him. Her right hand landed to rest affectionately on his chest, just over his heart. "What you have to do is what is right, Tywin. And as I said, Kevan was quite adamant about what's right in this case."

"I don't give a fuck about Kevan, Aelinor. I'm not endorsing Tommen's plan just because my brother thinks it's the right thing to do. It's not my brother I do sleep with. It's not my brother I chose to share my life with, it's not my brother who gave me the most beautiful son I could desire for. What do you want, Aelinor?"
"I don't know." Aelinor slipped away from his embrace, out of the warm protection provided both by the fur and Tywin's arms. The cold air of the dawn hit her hard, made her shiver. "I really don't know, Tywin." He didn't speak - he knew that sometimes she needed space to better express what was inside her head. "Kevan's right, you see - you, getting along with Tommen's plan, being crowned and everything... You'd be this troubled kingdom's savior, not just its protector, and I can't help to think about how desperately we need a savior. At the same time, though..." She shrugged, shook her head. "At the same time, and on the other hand, there's just a bunch of silly dreams which could never become true, because I lost every right to dream for a quiet, normal life when I agreed to marry the Lion of Lannister," she tried an affectionate smile. "You asked me what I want," she went on, trying not to shiver. "I want you to do the right thing, Tywin. And all things considered, for you to be king and father of a king is the right thing to do."

Tywin Lannister welcomed his wife's words with a solemn nod, his mind full of memories. That brave abnegation brought him back to another brave abnegation, years before, a life before - she was so much like Joanna, at that moment, he felt he could have even burst into tears. He clenched his jaw and let the fur slide down from his shoulders when he reached for her. "I will talk to Tommen, though. I won't accept until I'll have done everything in my power to talk him out of this idea." His hands on her hips were warm, reassuring: Aelinor smiled and brought her own right to his bearded cheek.

"Is it actually true, then?" she asked, a hint of playfulness in her trembling voice. He arched an eyebrow, perplexed, and she explained, "I mean - you do love me, then? So much?"

Tywin shook his head and smiled, genuinely amused. "Of course not," he replied, catching her lips in a kiss. A kiss that soon became eager, and moved down her jaw and neck, finally landing on her throat, sucking and lapping gently and hungrily at one time.

"You're right, me neither," exhaled Aelinor, as her shivers started to have very little to do with the cold air of the room.
"I could almost get used to begin the day this way, you know," Aelinor considered, between the lazy kisses she was peppering her husband's torso with. Tywin's hand was gently tickling her side, his eyes closed in the bliss of the aftermath of their lovemaking. "But of course, it could prove itself difficult, should some important matters require the king's undivided attention..."

"Are you threatening me, wife?" he chuckled. "Trying to trick me into refusing the crown, using our incredible, outstanding and extremely satisfactory sex life as a counterbalance?"

"Mmh, maybe..." Her fingers grazed gently his chest, his side. "You know I hold my personal pleasure in great esteem..."

"Oh, really. I never noticed." He eased her on her back, his lips suddenly busy worshipping her cleavage and breasts. She moaned, softly, arching towards him. "Never on earth," he reiterated, and in a brief moment, his mouth closed on her left, pert nipple.

"Oh, go on," Aelinor playfully rebuked him, guiding his head by the hand she was keeping at his nape. "Stop tantalizing..."

By the time he positioned himself between her legs, she was so flushed he could have easily counted each one of the freckles flecking her skin. He aligned himself with her opening and entered her slowly, keeping a hand over her lower belly - she was so damn beautiful, in the golden light of the morning, that he was tempted to consider just like nothing every single thing and problem their current life was made of. Ah, how good would it have been, he thought, just love her, give pleasure to her and taking pleasure in return, and to hell with the Seven Kingdoms, and war, and family and obligations...

He lowered himself into her, zeroing the distance, holding her to him while moving with the long, considerate thrusts he knew she loved so much. Her ragged breath was hot against his skin, her hips ready to meet his thrusts with equal enthusiasm - her soft mouth, welcoming and loving in kissing him, and still, daring and audacious in sucking his skin at the base of his neck, marking him as hers... The mere idea pushed him over the edge, forcing him to come inside her far before he had planned: but he kept his pace for as long as possible, bringing a hand between them and skillfully massaging her clitoris in order to bring her to her orgasm, too. It didn't take long; and Aelinor stopped him from both slid out of her and moving from his current position by circling his shoulders and back.

"Crushing you would be against my better interest," he warned her as he regained his usual grasp on the reality.

"You're not crushing me... And most of all, I like you where you are," she smiled, caressing his forehead as her inner muscles gave a gentle squeeze to his softening member.

"I like it, too."
Chapter 150

Tywin Lannister was absentmindedly looking outside the window, waiting for the king. One thing, at least, Tommen had been ready to learn about royalty: a monarch always makes the others wait for him. And that was good, because it was giving him – Tywin – the occasion to indulge in observing his lady wife, quickly crossing the yard towards the gates – something he hadn’t doubted for one moment.

He grinned.

Addam’s return was due for that very morning, and despite he had warned her against the many risks of waiting in the icy sleet of that unforgiving winter it has been more than clear in her eyes that her determination was not in the least weakened: she would have waited for her brother, she would have been the first to welcome him home, and nor sleet nor snow would have been enough to stop her, thank you very much. She was wrapped in what he could easily recognize as a warm, soft cloak, lined in fur – it was evident in her tense attitude, though, how difficult it was staying outside in that weather. There was something irritating, in that obstinate determination, still – the Old Lion couldn’t help to acknowledge – something admirable, too… And, if he was lucky, the promise of a heated afternoon, or night, spent in trying to ban the ice from her body. Not bad, when you thought of it…

“Grandfather.”

“Your Grace.” He bowed his head the fraction of an inch.

“I assume lady Aelinor spoke to you about my decision?” Tommen inquired, in what he could only hope it was a steady voice. There had been a little trembling in it, truth to be told, but his grandfather did appreciate the effort.

“She did.”

“And?”

“And we have a lot to discuss, to say the least.
Chapter 151

He spotted her from afar, with the worrying thought that she could actually run and welcome him. So, he dismounted, quickly as he could, and lowered his hood and loosened the scarf around his face, and shook his head almost imperceptibly. She would have understood, he was sure of it. His sister always understood.

And she did, although it was clear how much effort it was costing her: she waited for him to be nearer and she waited as still as a rock, hands regally clasped on her stomach… And she waited, until he was suddenly near enough to bend the knee in front of her.

“My lady of Lannister,” he whispered, and bowed his head.

“Raise, ser,” she smiled, lips trembling and voice barely audible, then extended her right hand towards him: “And welcome back.”

Ser Addam Marbrand rose and gave a quick brush to his breeches’ knee, in order to ease the damp fabric which was troubling his skin. Then he smiled – openly, happily, in that irritating and carefree way sometimes he and Jaime Lannister shared. “May I kiss my little sister, my lady?”

“I won’t object, ser,” she smiled back. The blink of an eye, and brother and sister were holding each other, hoods down and a cloud of copper hair to brighten the grey atmosphere; sleet had become snow, finally, but with no effects over their reunion. “I never doubted,” she sobbed against his cheek. “I knew you couldn’t be dead…”

“And I knew you would have known… So I had to survive – for you’re never wrong, aren’t you?”

Aelinor laughed, heartily. “You bloody idiot!”

“Such a lovely welcome… Could I have my liege’s wife back, please? She was far more ladylike, you know”

“Yes, you could,” she chuckled, letting him go, “but I was hoping you would have preferred to meet your sister’s, rather than your liege’s, ba-”

“Seven hells, the baby!” ser Addam thundered, happily. “You must tell me everything! How is… wait. He? She?”

“You don’t know?” she asked, flabbergasted. “Are you telling me nobody told you?”

“It’s precisely what I’m saying, Aelinor, and frankly, the suspense is killing me!”

She put her hand on his arm and entered the huge building where the Lannisters’ quarters are located inside the Red Keep. “A boy,” she smiled as they started to climb the stairs.

“An heir,” her brother pointed out, not without a reason, and she conceded it.

“Yes, that, too: a beautiful, healthy, strong heir for the powerful House of Lannister.”

“The Old Lion must be prouder than usual – I mean, insofar it could be actually possible…”

“It is, it is,” she nodded.

“Well, it’s inevitable. If my nephew is beautiful, healthy and strong as his mother is saying, why
shouldn’t his lord father proud himself with a brand new golden cub in his…”

“Well…” Aelinor interrupted him, earning a perplexed look in return. “The golden part was… imprecise,” she explained. Her brother’s brows furrowed even more and she arched an eyebrow, challenging him to realize the evidence.

Which he did, not without a gasp. He stopped, too. “A redhead? You managed to give House Lannister a redhead?” At his sister’s nod, Addam Marbrand laughed hard. “You must be the first woman in centuries, able to do such a thing! Ah! A Lannister with Marbrands’ hair, who’d have thought it!”

Aelinor’s smile suddenly filled with tenderness. “Not just hair,” she hinted.

“What?” she shrugged.

“He has your name, too.” With that, Addam took a firm hold on his sister’s arms and look straightforwardly at her.

“What the hell did you do to Tywin Lannister, girl? How did you persuade him to…”

“It was Tywin who named him,” she pointed out, leaving him speechless. He could have asked more explanations, maybe, but in the meantime, they had reached Aelinor’s quarters.

And found the door open.

And as soon as his sister had quickly examined each room, there was another – far more terrifying – problem.

The baby was nowhere to be found.
As the Old Lion entered his solar, his mere presence dragged the attention on his person - he seemed completely calm, but no one in the room had any intention to believe it: each and every one knew him, maybe on different levels but they knew him, and if Aelinor could recognize the flame of angry fear behind his eyes, Kevan looked with concern at how often his brother's muscles tensed under the skin of his neck and jaw.

Genna, still keeping a wet towel against the swelling where she had hit her head, sighed impatiently. "You'll give yourself a heart attack, brother. Stop it."

He nodded, but he was completely unimpressed. He moved towards his wife, who was staring into the void as her brother kept an arm around her waist. Both the men knew instantly what they were supposed to do - and as ser Addam loosened his grip on Aelinor, Tywin drew her to his chest, holding her, letting her feel how his entire person was trembling with concern and rage. He held her as if no one else was in the room, without speaking, his lips against her temple, his eyes closed - he hugged her until she finally hugged him back, fingers scratching against the fabric.

"Tell me what happened," he ordered his sister. Lady Genna was no woman to get lost in periphrasis.

"That crazy bitch of a daughter of yours, that's what happened," she replied in a hiss. "She picked young Addam up, and... I don't know, really. She started babbling about how you two were trying to steal her boy away, basically, and a moment later she pushed me - and I'm not the woman I was, anymore, and I lost my footing, and, well, you can see it." she complained, not without a reason. A dark shadow was widening on the side of her face - under other circumstances, both her brothers would have probably pointed out what fortune it was, be able to rely on such a thick head.

"I want her gone." Aelinor's voice pierced the following silence and the eyes of everyone looked at her. She hadn't let go of Tywin, yet, but she repeated, in a stern voice, "I want my baby back, and Cersei gone. Once and for all."

Tywin's hands closed over her shoulders, gripping her flesh and bones as if his life depended on it. She understood.

"I instructed the guards to not let anybody leave the keep," offered Kevan. "I'll go and double the surveillance."

"I'll come with you," stated ser Addam. He was in a dark mood and in an even darker place - he knew it was no knight's thinking, but he was prepared, in case of actual need, to do everything in his power to free his sister from the Queen Mother's shadow. This time, for good.

When they remained alone in the room - save for Genna, yes, but Genna had shared such an amount of events of their recent lives that she was almost to be considered part of their familiar life - Tywin finally spoke, and he did it softly, brushing his wife's cheek with his lips. "I'll send her away, I promise. I'll exile her as far away as you can name. I will."
Chapter 153

There was no time, and he knew it. He knew it and - as embarrassing as it could be for a trained soldier - it scared the hell out of him. If his father's men would have reached her first... And not to mention Addam.

He had spotted Addam's fury in his eyes as they had crossed paths in the courtyard - not that his fellow soldier and friend didn't have his reasons, of course, but... Jaime took Maegor's steps two at a time. He couldn't let anyone else put their hands on his sister. She was clearly out of her, of course, she had had to be: attacking their aunt? Kidnapping their newborn half-brother?

"I know you're in here," he said in what he hoped to be an audible whisper. "It's just me, no one else. I haven't told anyone I suspected you to be here."

"Not even father?"

"Especially not father." He followed his twin's voice to the secret room, hidden behind a false pillar on the right of the fireplace. "What have you done, Cersei?" he asked softly.

"What should be done! They're stealing Tommen from me, they... Did you know that father was scheming to be appointed king in Tommen's place?"

"No, and that's because he definitely was not," Jaime said calmly, in sheer contrast with her outraged question, and sat on the corner of the table. "It was Tommen's idea, Cersei. I see why you cannot like it, but..."

"What!"

"...but you surely cannot blame our father for that. On the contrary - I know for certain he's working day and night to try and talk him out of it."

"Oh, yes, as if our father wouldn't like to be king!"

"You'll end up drowning into your own sarcasm, sister, watch out... And I can assure you: he wouldn't." Jaime's gaze was searching the room trying to locate the point where the baby was, but with no results. He had to get on talking, he needed more time. "I could have made him king, instead of Robert... But he never wanted the kingdom. Never. And even less he would want it now, with..."

The Queen Mother took a long gulp of wine before speaking again, and when she did it, her voice was pure venom. "With this new, cute little family of his, uh? He betrayed us, Jaime. He betrayed our mother! How can you be on his side?"

"She's dead, Cersei. Dead. He didn't betray her..." A gurgle drew his attention. There. Too close to the window, yes, but... "And he does love Aelinor. He truly loves her. And I know you cannot stand the idea, but she loves him, too. You weren't there, Cersei. When Tyrion escaped, you..."

"I don't care!" Her shouting reaction made the baby start to cry - instinctively, Jaime jumped down the table and moved a few steps towards him. Cersei picked him up first, though. "Our father is practically making bastards of us, and you have the nerve to stand here and..."

"He's not doing anything of the sort, Cersei, be reasonable. You can't blame him for loving his wife and child."
"Is he angry, Jaime?" she asked, apparently out of the blue. He shrugged.

"I didn't see him. I've been avoiding him since I heard about this mess... But I've met Addam and uncle Kevan, and if they're angry even a fraction of what he is..."

Cersei held the crying baby against her chest, pacing the room and talking to nobody in particular. "He'll lock me up. Or he'll send me away - do you think he's going to send me away? How far..."

"Cersei," tried Jaime, his heart aching for his unfortunate, unhappy sister.

"How far do you reckon he will send me? I'd rather die than being locked up again, I'd rather die..."

She neared the windowsill, still holding the baby. "I'd rather die!" she screamed out of the window. People in the courtyard raised their eyes and pointed their fingers. Lannister men ran to the entrance to Maegor's Holdfast.

"I'll come with you," Jaime said hurriedly. "I'll talk to father. He won't have you locked up, I promise. I'll talk him into exiling you to the Free Cities, and I'll come with you." He took a step towards her, then another. "We'll finally be able to be together," he offered, taking other two steps. "We'll be together, Cersei... Just give me the baby. You know he's scared, don't you? He needs his mother, Cersei, please..." He held out his good hand to her, "Please, give him to me. I'll fix this, I promise, just... Just give me the baby."

She did.
Chapter 154

Tywin walked quietly to his wife, who was sitting at the side of their child's crib and watching him sleep, and brushed her shoulder with his fingertips.

"Come to bed, Aelinor; please."

She shook her head, eyes once again filled with tears. "I can't," she mouthed. Tywin's hand rested against the nape of her neck, warm and reassuring.

"He's safe - we're safe..." But she didn't move. Neither she did look at him, which, he realized, was even worse. He knelt at her side. "I know I failed you," he forced his own voice to admit that unbearable truth.

"You could never fail me, Tywin," Aelinor whispered, her left hand quick to reach for his cheek. "Never."

"I didn't see how delusional she was, I didn't realize..." He shook his head, overwhelmed by the unfamiliar feeling.

"She's your daughter. You can tell yourself stories for as long as you like, but it's only natural that you're somehow biased, when it comes to your children."

"It could have costed our son's life," he whispered, and laid his head on her lap as his arms circled her waist. "Could you ever forgive me?"

Aelinor bent over him, fingers grabbing his shirt and lips grazing his head. She had nothing to forgive him for, that she knew for sure - but those words wouldn't have been of any help to him, in his present state. She knew perfectly well how upset - scared - he had to be, facing his weakness for the first time in years: he had come to her to be of assistance, and out of sudden he had found himself kneeling in front of her and begging for her forgiveness... Not what people surely would have imagined, talking of the Great Lion of Lannister. "I forgive you," she murmured in his ear as her thumb kept massaging the back of his neck.

"Will you come to bed, now? He could sleep in our bed if it could help you to-"

"No...No. I'll call Nalyssa, it's her place..." She rang a bell, then kissed her sleeping son's soft forehead, shivering. "I cannot give in to my fears, and more so when they're irrational - Cersei knows she made a mistake, and there are guards outside the door and she swore she won't try anything of the sort ever again..."

"Jaime swore it."

"I know. But I trust Jaime. I'd trust him with my life."

The young woman who served as Addam Lannister's wet nurse appeared and signaled her presence with a curtsy; a long gaze of mutual understanding passed between the two women as the lady and her lord husband left the room.

"He asked me to let him go with her," he exhaled, sitting heavily on their bed.
"He asked me to let him go with her," he exhaled, sitting heavily on their bed. Aelinor waited patiently for something else, but he just remained still, elbows on his thighs, fists closed, gaze fixed on the floor. She walked to him and put her left hand softly at the base of his neck, very much like he had done not even an hour earlier.

"And you?"

He shrugged. "I agreed. What else was I supposed to...?"

"I'm sorry," she murmured, caressing his neck and shoulders, "Gods, I'm so sorry..." Both her hands were holding him, now, and he gladly sank his face against her stomach.

Aelinor knew what such state was about, she knew it despite him telling or not - Jaime's request had just made the voices about his children true, and how on earth was he supposed to live with that truth?

"Three abominations, not just one," he sighed. "I brought up three abominations." He held her by her waist, so desperately she could feel her heart breaking; his fingers clawed at the fabric on the back of her dress with the sheer force a castaway would have used to keep himself clinging to his last chance of surviving. The mighty Lion of Lannister was crumbling in front of her, laying his weakness naked at her feet for her to soothe: and Aelinor knelt in front of him and drew him fully against herself, enveloping him in a cocoon of pure affection.

"Don't be so harsh with yourself," she murmured, slowly drawing circles on his back. "You're a good man, Tywin. A good, upright man. My man..."

"I am not. Not good, even less upright. You know that. You shouldn't even be here, for the gods' sake."

Her heart aching for him, Aelinor closed her hands on his shoulder and pushed him at arm's length in order to better look squarely into his face. "No? Where do you reckon should I be, then?" she asked, in such a gentle voice she almost didn't recognize. She had always been good in a crisis, yes, but in that practical, no-nonsense way that was entirely and undoubtedly her: being nice, on the other hand, being warm and consoling was something completely new, unexplored - but there was something ironical and at the same time highly symbolical, in the idea of them both being out of their depths.

"Far away from me," he replied, in a stern voice. She took his face into her hands, de facto forcing him to look her into her eyes.

"Do you want me to go?"

"You should."

"Do you want me to be unhappy for the rest of my life, then?"

Tywin's strong hands closed around her wrists, in the vain effort to interrupt the feeling and the overwhelming sensation of her palms on his cheek. He had never been so weak before. "I am the one who'll make you unhappy, Aelinor. It will happen, sooner or later. You know it - everything I touch turns into ashes, you know it. Everybody knows it."

She closed her eyes but resisted his movement: her hands remained where they were, with a
deliberation that surprised even herself.

"We're a match made in heavens, then - I burn bright, in case you forgot."

That was enough. With a strangled cry and the abandonment that only desperation can produce, Tywin crashed against her, holding her, keeping her closer than humanly possible. How on earth had happened? Why had the gods sent him such a blessing? To him - so cold, so cruel, so cynical: how could have he been worthy to receive the gift of a woman like her? He kept her near, he inhaled her - silently and almost madly he was worshipping her with the zeal of the most inspired believer.

She was his. She was his savior and salvation.
Chapter 156

He had made love to her, that night - gentle, heartbreaking love which had left her physically sated and emotionally shaken - and when he had finally fallen asleep, Aelinor had struggled to stay awake, for she needed to think, she needed to absorb what had happened. All of it, every single bit of that infinite day with all its mixed up emotions.

Strangely enough, now that everyone had agreed on sending Cersei away once and for all she was not satisfied as she would have thought. For that decision had brought Tywin to face the truth about the twins, and it had been devastating for him.

Of course, she wasn't so naive to believe he never heard the rumors; and on the other side, surely he wasn't so naive not to have heard those rumors, and perhaps even wondered whether or not they were true. Today's events, though, had sent him to pieces.

Surely, it was just a matter of time - at least, on the outside. In a bunch of hours, the sun would have risen, and Tywin was undoubtedly going to act as usual, like his usual, untouchable self: solid like a rock, that was what everyone expected from him and that was exactly what they would have got in return. But she had seen him, and she knew: something inside him was broken, and he was suffering, and the healing process was about to be long and difficult.

_How do you face something like that about your children?_

She snuggled against him, her closed lips grazing the expanse of his chest that his tunic left uncovered. She would have done _anything_ to make him feel better. Anything. His broken heart was breaking her heart, too. He moved to rest on his right side and his free arm instinctively reached out to hold her.

"I'm not sleeping," she murmured cautiously, unsure whether he was awake or not. He rolled her onto her back, then, slow kisses landing one after the other on the soft skin of her throat. Aelinor smiled in the darkness. "Talk to me, Tywin, please," she begged, caressing the back of his neck.

He shrugged. "Don't know how." Despite the lame light coming from the consuming fire, he found her eyes, burying his green, sad ones into hers. Aelinor's hands came to his cheeks, affectionately.

"Let me feel it, then. Share your grief with me. Please." His lips descended between her breasts. "Please."
Chapter 157

She let go of a sigh as soon as Tywin, towering over her with his mute presence, entered her, and her arms run to his shoulder, eager to make him feel how good it felt. His silence was uncommon - not that he was a talkative man, nor a vocal one, but to take her like that, without the tiniest grunt of desire or humming of satisfaction, was something entirely new. Just a few hours before he had been - well - *vibrant*, the low rumble resonating from inside his throat and chest like the one of a big, wounded but still mighty feline, but now...

His hands at the sides of her head for support, he mechanically pulled out and entered once again, his gaze fixed on nothing, his thoughts miles away - she moved her hands down his back, then, and sank her fingernails in his loins, painfully. He stopped without a word, distant despite their still joined bodies.

"Where are you, Tywin?" she asked softly, and her husband flinched. His eyes focused on her, full of sorrow.

"I was...lost," he admitted.

She gently rocked her hips once or twice, without breaking their eye contact; a slow, warm caress grazed his tensed arms from shoulder to wrist and back, then went to his face with the more affectionate of touches. "Look at me," she whispered. "Stay with me," she said, drawing him down for a slow, emotional kiss.

His arms enveloped her and hold her near as Tywin started to move again, seconding his wife's tentative rocking. "Save me," he breathed on her lips, then. And she did.
His hand closed furiously on the scroll, that a moment later fell crumpled atop the other documents on the desk. *Damn.* It was too damn soon.

*Damn!*

Tywin's fist hit the surface, hard enough to make the ink bottle tremble. "Guard!" he shouted.

The Lannister man usually stationing outside his solar's door entered in a rush.

"Yes, m'Lord"

"Fetch my lady wife."


Never before, Aelinor reflected as she hurriedly followed the man Tywin had sent to her, did her husband summon her like that. Never.

And given that, she was worried. Undoubtedly worried.

So worried she hadn't even brought little Addam with her, preferring to leave him in the capable hands of one of her maids and under the supervision of his eponym uncle. Not that there could be any real danger in the palace gardens, now, but... But she was grateful for Addam's presence. Even if she had had to decline his offering to accompany her back to the Tower of the Hand. Such a hurry, from Tywin's part, could only mean something serious had happened - and if he had summoned *her*, instead of one of his commanders, well, she would have followed his directions.

She opened the door and Tywin Lannister found himself holding his breath - she was so beautiful, so glowing...

"You and young Addam are going to leave for Casterly Rock tomorrow at first light."

He could recognize the muscles tensing in her neck, the way she had instinctively clenched her teeth. It was clear she was trying to stay calm and cool while her deeper nature was kicking to surface.

"Are you punishing me?"

"What? No!"

"Are you mad at me?"

"No," he replied, quite annoyed. He was not used to people *discussing* his decisions.

"Are you *tired of me?"

"Of course not!"

"That settles the question, then. I'm not going anywhere and neither does our son. Thank you for this
funny interlude," she bowed, and moved to leave the room.

"Aelinor!" he boomed. She turned slowly, her face still as a mask.

"Yes?"

"You're going to do what you're told."

"No. In case you didn't notice, I am not one of your soldiers. My brother, yes, surely he would obey without a flinch - without an explanation - but as it happens, I am your wife. And I have no intention to leave King's Landing unless you come with me and our son. And before you could think I'll change my mind as soon as you explain to me what's happened, or what that crumpled letter is, forget it: I will not go anywhere without my husband. I simply won't."

"You don't understand."

"And I don't want to. There's nothing to discuss, Tywin: I stay where I am, and Addam stays where I am, and that incidentally means we're both staying where you are. Cleare and simple. Now, if you'll excuse me..."

"She's got dragons!" he hissed. Aelinor's feet rooted on the spot. "She's got dragons, and she's coming."

Unable to turn around towards him, Aelinor bent her head, fingers still closed on the doorknob. As Tywin's hands landed on her hips, she frowned.

"Casterly Rock will not be safer than here," she exhaled.

"But at least I would have tried to save you."

His words sank deep in her, and part of her would have liked to be able to accept them - but she wasn't. "I am no damsel in distress," she stated, finally turning to face him.

"I know perfectly well you are not, but this time you have to do what I ask. This is not a game, Aelinor."

Trapped between his body and the door, Aelinor Lannister, née Marbrand, smirked.

"Yes, it is."
"Yes, it is," she repeated, cocking her eyebrow in her unique fashion. "And you're better at it than anyone else."

"It's not so simple."

"I know it's not, but do you really think it would be easier if we're apart? For she won't spare Casterly Rock, if that's what you're thinking. She simply won't. So - should things go south, they'll actually go south, but we'll be separated and afar, and I will spend days waiting for news from the capital and..."

"Do it for our son," he pleaded. Aelinor sighed.

"No. I stay. For our son, and for our children to be. I won't miss a single opportunity to give you another little lion, Tywin. I am your wife and I will be by your side." Her solemn expression suddenly changed in a saucy one. "As well as under you, and on top of you, and in front of you... Oh," she chuckled approvingly, as soon as her right hand, in order to corroborate her words, had palmed the front of his trousers. "I take you like what you've heard?"

The Old Lion groaned - that was not an outcome he could have anticipated! Not an hour before he had been worried and angry and resolved to send his wife away from him in order to protect her life, and now? Was he really falling for a few stubborn words and the prospect of... taking her wife in the inner sanctum that was the Hand's solar? He felt her tugging at his breeches' fastenings - there was no rush in her movements, no urgency: just the steady, resolute actions of a woman in perfect control of herself and the situation. He thought he could almost hate her, for showing such control.

By the time he had reached the thought, though, she had finally freed him and circled his manhood in her cold but gentle hand, caressing him with the lightest touch. "This is hardly the place," he scolded her, but Aelinor chuckled again.

"I'd say 'hardly' is just where we're headed..." she stated. "Hardly and quickly, as it seems." She guided his hands to lean against the wall - the result being her trapped in an even more narrow space - and after a quick, all-but-chaste peck on his lips, she slowly lowered herself until she found herself definitely knelt in front of him. He was so tense, so nervous, so in pain for the events of the last few days and that morning's news, that he almost came on the spot the same moment her tongue traced the length of his member from root to tip.

"Please, give me a moment," he sighed. Aelinor looked intently at the drop of precum forming on the head, but for nothing more than a moment - by then she was too hungry, too lustful to stop: and she licked him once again, this time not with the tip but with the entire dorsum of her tongue. Tywin's muscles twitched as he tried not to indulge too much in the sudden desire to just fuck her senseless. "Aelinor," he warned her, and she looked up at him with such a smirk... Oh, gods, spare me from my wife's pretended innocence!

But it was too late for any divine intervention.

Lady Lannister's lips closed eagerly around her husband's cock, enveloping it in a warm, wet and welcoming space while her hand reached for the base and started to pump. Tywin's right hand descended to the back of her head, accompanying her rhythm and caressing her copper hair at every bobbing. When her free hand went for his balls, though, and her cheeks started the familiar procedure of sucking in, he couldn't help but lose every bit of his troubled control - he came,
suddenly and hard, and despite that his wife didn't waste a single drop of him: wouldn't he be *so deeply spent*, he would have probably taken her up and slammed her against the first profitable surface... "You should have been more sensible, wife," he murmured, "Now I won't be able to return the favour..."

Aelinor's naughty smile hadn't faded from her lips, though, and remained where it was as she stretched and crossed the room to his desk.

Where she sat, legs spread and gown conveniently rolled up to her knees. "I'm sure there's something you can do," she smiled wantonly as her dress' hem continued the journey along her thighs.
Standing in front of her with his hands on her spread legs, Tywin conceded a smile. "You truly are a wanton woman, Lady Lannister..."

"Like you didn't know," she sighed pointedly. The warmth caused by his hands on her skin was spreading all over her - and it was quite bizarre, she thought, given the not-so-immediately-sexual nature of what he was doing. Still, it was out of the question: he did have that effect on her body. Every single time.

"Surely it has its upsides..." the Old Lion murmured, descending on her like the predator he was. His mouth left wet trails on her neck and throat, mementos of hungry kisses and passionate worship. Good heavens, the things she made him desire to do to her... His fingers went to her bodice, to the ribbons that kept it perfectly shaped over her curves. And he pulled them, a bit too impatiently.

"Are you planning to ruin another dress, dear husband? My seamstresses have barely been able to mend the blue one..."

"Do they know it's their mistress' fault? That she's the one provoking her husband?"

"Oh, no," she chirped in pretended innocence as he managed to finally free her breasts, "They probably just think my husband's a famished beast..."

"And that, he is indeed," Tywin growled, capturing a pert nipple between his lips. His left hand trailed down, slowly but deliberately, until it reached the warm, welcoming refuge between her thighs - it traced the wet opening once or twice, rejoicing in the amount of wetness he was greeted by.

"Enough with beating about the bush," Aelinor warned him - all too happily, he obliged her and thrust a finger inside her. She inhaled deeply. The combination of both his finger inside her and his tongue torturing her nipples in turn made her shiver from pleasure. "More", she hissed. Tywin let finally go of the breast he was currently busy with and guided her to lay back on her elbows as he spread her legs even more before kneeling in front of her.

By the time he started to tickle and lick her, she was feeling on the edge of screaming and losing herself for good.
"You know what?" Tywin asked, looking intently at her as she fastened back her dress.

"What?"

"Every time I lay my hands on you in this solar I wonder..." Aelinor stopped, then raised her head and shot him a deathful glance.

"Don't you dare," she hissed.

"...Well, you can't possibly expect from me I don't wonder, what if my brother should walk into us?"

"TYWIN!"

"What! You started it!"

"No, I didn't!"

The Old Lion chuckled and rose, but his wife turned away from him. "Oh, Aelinor," he whispered naughtily against her neck, "of course, you did. It was you, the one bringing up the subject of sharing. You, the one daydreaming about two lions at one time..." She tried to put some distance between them but his arms enveloped her languidly, bringing his mouth even nearer to her ear. "And I cannot believe that you, of all women, would be so naive just to hope such an image to leave my mind - a man's mind, Aelinor! - so easily..."

"So, let me understand," she said, trying not to choke to her own saliva, "Just one hour ago you were eager to send me miles and miles away, and now you're trying to trick me into a threesome? Aren't you the wicked one, Tywin Lannister?"

Tywin smiled against the skin of her neck, peppering her with kisses. "Not a doubt about it in the whole kingdom," he mocked her as his hands moved to cup her breasts, "But what I'm doing is not trying to trick you into something, wife. I'm just saying, I've come to terms with the thought, and I won't complain whether should it happen..."

"Tywin!" Aelinor's sudden intake of breath sounded like the perfect background music to the feeling of her hardening nipples under his fingers and the Great Lion of Lannister sighed contently.

"And as for the miles between King's Landing and the Rock... Well, I have to admit you've been quite persuasive..."
Two knocks at the door were enough to startle them to the bones - a moment later, a hurried "Wait!" stopped the visitor from entering as Aelinor's hands were at work to make herself presentable again.

"Good thing that the First, knock policy is now a habit," she giggled. Tywin's right eyebrow arched as he replied with a knowing cough. "Would you really be ready to risk to share your privileges with anyone who enters that door? What if this time it's not Kevan?"

With an amused snort, Tywin went to open the door. "Ah, sister," he welcomed Lady Genna as she entered.

"Mh. I see," the woman said in the most knowing tone she could use. Aelinor blushed so hard she had to turn around and pretend to fidget with something on the mantelpiece.

"To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit, Genna?" The Old Lion asked with a half smile as he sat lazily behind his table.

'I'd hardly say your pleasure has something to do with me," she mocked him. Aelinor sincerely wished to die on the spot. "Oh, don't be silly, girl: keeping up your man's appetites is definitely the best way to..."

"GENNA!"

"What, Tywin? Are you denying the obvious? Because it is obvious, you know," she added with a formidable laugh, her right hand taking in the entire room in a slow, circular motion.

"Obvious may it be, but you really should stop embarrassing my wife..."

"Ah, yes, this shy and delicate flower of a wife... Are you shy and delicate, Aelinor? Since when?"

Aelinor finally turned to face her sister-in-law and she did it with a smile. "Well, I'll admit maybe I am not exactly..."

"See? She's a grown woman, she can manage a little bit of dark and matronly humour!"

"Of which, as it happens, you are an undisputed champion?"

"Precisely. I'm glad to see you're learning, brother."

Tywin Lannister shook his head and sighed. "Still, you haven't told me why are you here."

A shadow passed over the older woman's face as she regained her gravity. "All the arrangements are done. The twins are leaving in two hours."

Aelinor watched her husband's face becoming stone and her heart ached terribly for him.

"So?" He asked. Not another word, not a muscle flinching in his person - whereas his wife looked worriedly at him, though, his sister almost roared her disapproval.

"So you should go and... And..."

"No. Cersei's banished, and for good reasons, and..."
"I'm not talking about your damn daughter and her follies, Tywin, I can't possibly care less of her. Jaime, on the other hand..."

"He could have told her no. He could have refused to leave with her."

"Stop being an asshole, Tywin: he did it for you!"
Chapter 163

Whether it was because of his sister's massive lack of diplomacy or because of the notion itself, Tywin's expression froze even worse. Aelinor realized with horror she was actually hearing him gritting his teeth.

"Genna..." she tried, but her sister-in-law was in no state for kindness.

"No. Do not Genna me, both of you. You know perfectly well this is the truth. Cersei had to go, but she would have never accepted to go quietly unless some sacrifice was made. And Jaime, as foolish and incredible as it would seem, is the one whose sacrifice was necessary. He knew. He knows. And he knows he's hurting you, Tywin, but this was the only way."

Silence filled the room. It was a thick, heavy silence - a Tywin Lannister kind of silence. One in which you were tempted to scream and make huge noises just to avoid listening to your own mind. Genna looked sideways to Aelinor, who shrugged at unease.

"Genna's right," she admitted in a soft voice.

"I won't call upon me the burden to look again in their faces. I will not. They're dead to me. Both of them."

"I can understand, brother, but..."

"No buts."

"But," she insisted, nevertheless, "you know it's probably been all Cersei's fault. She's the wicked one, Tywin, and Jaime... Jaime is a good man. He's truly grown to become a good man. And the least you can do for him is to acknowledge his motives in leaving the city with his sister."

"No."

"He's your son!"

"I have no children left, save from Addam. Enough," he stated, coldly, raising his right hand to stop both his sister and his wife from speaking again. "Not another word, or I'll have you both sent to Casterly Rock for real."
"What was that about the Rock?" Genna Lannister asked with a cocked brow while her index finger was definitely trapped in Addam's little fist.

"Tywin received a raven, this morning. Apparently, the Targaryen girl is on the march and..."

"Is it true, then? What they say about... dragons?"

Aelinor sighed and poured two goblets of watered wine. "So it seems."

"So he thought to send you away." Aelinor nodded. "An idea you clearly... managed to talk him out of," Genna concluded, a knowing smirk on her lips.

"For the time being, yes. But I have no idea about how long will it be before he takes it up again. He's worried."

"He wants to protect you - you, and this adorable, funny little cub," she chirped, tickling the baby's bell with her free hand.

"I know, but Casterly Rock is not the solution. Should she attack, Lannisters' cities will be as much her priority as the capital... There's nowhere safe, Genna: this is the truth."

"Still, you want to stay here."

"No. I want to stay wherever Tywin is. It's different. I won't leave his side - not now, not ever."

Genna rose and started to walk around the room, little Addam in her arms and a pensive look on her face.

"You never cease to amaze me, girl..."

"Well, you can hardly be surprised by the fact I actually love your brother, can't you."

"Of course, but even so... Such loyalty, such dedication... It warms the hearth, believe me. Twenty-seven years I watched him mourn, suffering every day like the first. Twenty-seven years I watched him retreat from any form of proximity, of human coexistence. I watched him become a statue, a lump of rock, day after day, year after year. Then, you."

"Genna..."

"No. You let me finish. For you gave me back my brother, you know? And more than once, and in more than just one way. And I am so mad about this damn Targaryen girl threatening to ruin everything, that I could... I could wring her neck, I swear!"

Aelinor laughed, and laughed, and laughed - and hugged her sister-in-law so tight, that even Addam complained finding himself squeezed between his enthusiastic mother and his extravagant aunt.
"Definitely, this does not make things better."

"No, it doesn't. Although, I suppose it has some sort of... Closure? A hint of fatal sarcasm? The ultimate mock from the gods?"

"Tywin..."

"What, isn't it so? Tyrion as the Hand of his half-

"TYWIN!" Kevan Lannister was looking at his brother in shock. On the other side of the big wooden table, said brother just shrugged.

"It's hardly the best-kept secret in the Seven Kingdoms."

Kevan sat heavily, without any clue on what to say. Tywin was right, plenty of words have been whispered in the past about that horrible story, but since Tyrion was, in the eye of gods and men, a Lannister, voices had quickly subdued... So, this is the reason for Tywin's undying hate towards his youngest son. He knew from the beginning what others just suspected.

"I don't understand, Tywin. Why did you..."

"Tell the world he was mine? What other options did I have? I would have been a laughing stock in front of the whole realm in any case, so I just did what I would have done if Joanna..." his voice trailed off for the briefest moment. "Whatever. We are here and now, and here and now is quite a bad place. If only the damn woman accepted to leave..."

"Aelinor?"

"Who else..."

"You're a fool if you think she'd accept to leave you here and go West, brother. And don't look at me like that, you know perfectly well I am right."

"You all seem to forget I could order her."

"You seem to forget she would never obey. Really, Tywin, you underestimate her. You didn't see her when you were...unwell, but if you would have seen her then, believe me - you could never even conceive the idea of sending her away."

The brothers faced one another - the younger, with the serene confidence of a man who had eye-witnessed his sister-in-law's unbreakable determination to let her husband go; the other, with entirely another kind of concern written all over his face.

"I have to protect them, Kevan. I have to make everything possible to secure Addam's life, and his mother's. I can't stand the thought of..." The Old Lion hesitated, upset with himself and the world. "The mere hint of the idea of losing them, losing her... I can't, Kevan. Not again."

Kevan Lannister raised his gaze on his brother and felt a new wave of love towards him: this unexpected - and surely, from Tywin's part, unrequited, too - display of weakness made him so
human, Kevan almost thought of hugging him. "It won't be necessary," he said, instead. "We will defend ourselves, we will defend the city - and we'll strike back, and in the end, we'll win. We're lions, Tywin. Who the hells care about some *lizard*?"

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if Kev's right... But I wish he is ;) Surely we'll sell our lives dearly!
Chapter 166

Aelinor was - unsuccessfully - trying to focus on her embroidery, but once again - the fourth, by now - she stung herself with the needle. Her works ended thrown away in a shot of rage as she hissed in pain.

"Such a ladylike outburst," she heard Tywin's amused voice observe from behind her chair. She shot him a glance of pure fire and started rummaging inside her basket, looking for a spare piece of cloth to wrap around her injured fingertip. "Are you hurt?" he asked then, quite worriedly.

"Only in pride. But I won't risk staining my work, so I need..."

Tywin was in front of her, now, towering over her cowering figure. He took her hand, looking intently at the oblong red mark the needle had left along her middle finger. "Are you sure you were sewing? Carving would seem a more fitting word, given the results..."

"My mind was somewhere else," she admitted reluctantly. Tywin chuckled and guided her to stand up.

"You should be more careful," he warned her in a low voice, while bringing her hand to his mouth and kissing her fingertip. His tongue darted to lick the blood away and she shivered. "A fine lady like you..." He caught her middle finger between his lips, giving to it just the slightest suction, "cannot afford..." he cast a wicked glance to her, sucking harder, "...clumsiness..."

Suddenly, Aelinor felt as her dress was too tight, especially at her breasts. Her breath was heavier, quicker - he could see it in the way her bosom moved up and down in front of his eyes. "Tywin..." she warned him. He shrugged.

"You're not the only one able to play this game, dearest wife..." There it was!, Aelinor mentally screamed. Was he mimicking her actions from that morning? How...exciting, she couldn't help but admit.

"Yes, but at least I was actually bringing you pleasure... While all you're giving me its frustration."

"No," he disagreed, letting go of her fingertip and kissing his way through her palm and to her wrist. "I'm teaching you patience."
"Patience, ah!" Aelinor laughs. "You, teaching patience? You of all people?"

"Why not? Would you prefer if I'd... Let me see... Grab you," which he actually did, "slam you against the wall," which he did, too, "and have my way with you before you have enough time to complain?"

Strangely enough, the situation was hilarious more than sensual. When he had such intentions, rarely he took the time to describe his actions. Therefore, Aelinor could not stop giggling. "I doubt I would ever complain, you know," she said while massaging his biceps and shoulders, "But I doubt it's what you want - I mean, presently."

Tywin's green eyes nailed her, deep and suddenly severe as they were. "Never doubt me. Never."

"I wasn't doubting you," she matched the threatening shadow in his voice, "But I know what you were doing, as you know what you were doing. And I won't indulge your urge to bury your cock somewhere just in order to avoid thinking." Tywin let her go - annoyed and vexed with both her and himself.

"One could object that's what husbands usually do," he said sternly, his eyes never abandoning hers.

"Not my husband. He's a man who takes his thinking very much into account. A man who ponders, a man who considers. Maybe he's not so good with feelings, but if you take his thinking from him, he's lost."

And she saw him - the great, wounded lion. She saw him in his sudden sternness, in his tensed jaw. She saw him in his eyes, now fixed and cold as if they were shards of green ice. She wished to be able to help him, to remove that particularly painful thorn from his paw, but she couldn't - it was not mercy, what he needed. It was not kindness. He was a man made out of Valyrian steel: he needed fire, and strength, and hammering and tempering in cold water. And mastery. A great deal of mastery.

"That said," she nodded as to herself, collecting her embroidery work and threads and putting them back into their basket, "I will refuse you your marital privileges until you'll start to behave like the man I married. Enough with any nonsense about me and our son leaving, enough with degrading our sexual life into something the only purpose of which is to keep your mind occupied anywhere else. Enough."

"Well, that for sure comes quite unexpected."

"Indeed." Stern eyes met stern eyes as Tywin's fingers sank into her hips.

"Strictly speaking, though, you cannot...."

"Try me."

"I don't know what do you want from me, woman."

Neither do I, Aelinor silently admitted to herself, but she was unusually angry - at him, at Cersei, at
the Targaryen girl, at the whole situation - and determined to bring her husband back from whatever pit of desolation he found himself at the moment. She couldn't allow herself any weakness. "You're the smartest man I know - I'm sure you'll figure it out."

Chapter End Notes

...I'm afraid I'm teaching you *frustration*, not just patience... :) Please, don't hate me!!!
Aelinor's gaze traveled slowly from one man to the other, and back. They have both been there for minutes, with almost no word save for some compliments about her son's good health and spirit. More like two overgrown children than two soldiers and commanders, they just stood there, looking at her sheepishly and at unease.

"Well?" she teased, her mood not at its best.

It's Addam who capitulated first. "You have to put an end to this, Aelinor," he stated, conveying all his life as her older brother into those words. Aelinor just cocked an eyebrow, unimpressed.

"I don't have to do a thing, for should you have sadly forgotten, I am your liege's wife, brother. And what happens - or not - in our chambers is not of your concern."

"I didn't mean to overstep, my lady," he replied plainly.

"Well, then." She outstretched her hand towards her son, who grasped her fingers trying to draw himself into a standing position. He was probably too little for that, yet it didn't seem to discourage him a bit.

"My mother used to say Tywin was able to stand up by himself at scarcely eight months," Kevan offered, crouching next to little Addam to better appreciate his nephew's stubborn attempts. "I'd say this little one is on his father's path..."

Aelinor smiled softly. "He's an obstinate little cub, yes." She raised her eyes to her brother, then brought her gaze back to Kevan. "He's making your life difficult, then?"

"He's... determined to resist. At all costs."

"It's not necessarily a bad thing," she points out. Addam shook his head.

"Under normal circumstances, probably it wouldn't. But it's a Targaryen we're talking of. She will not show mercy towards the West - towards any of us - but she has got dragons, and an impressive army, and we..." he hesitated. Kevan Lannister stood back to his feet and nodded. There were things only a Lannister could say out loud.

"We revised our forces. There are strong probabilities we cannot withstand a frontal attack."
Chapter 169

Aelinor froze, her heart thumping loudly in her ears. "Are you sure?"

"Not sure, no. There's no way to be sure, with dragons involved, we lack the first-hand experience to at least try to predict how..."

"So you're here to..." She watched her brother and brother-in-law look at each other and for the first time that day she was not annoyed by their reticence. She couldn't even start to imagine how difficult could it be, for seasoned commanders as they were, to say the word *yield*. "You want me to talk Tywin into surrendering, don't you."

Addam Marbrand ducked his head. "Not exactly."

"I'm trying to be reasonable, brother, but you really start getting on my nerves," Aelinor snapped. But as soon as Kevan started talking, she realized why her brother had been so reluctant - there were things only a Lannister was allowed to say.

"The Targaryen girl is out for blood, when it comes to our family, and we all know it. But whatever Tommen's parentage could be, she will crave to destroy him before anyone else - save for my brother, maybe - because of both Robert's name and Lannister blood. You can see why now, more than ever before, the boy cannot remain on the throne..."

Lady Aelinor Lannister reached out for the little bell laying on the polished surface of the side table. Her mind was racing, getting through ideas after ideas and trying not to give in to the sudden panic threatening to grip her throat.

Nalyssa came to fetch little Addam and vanished in a hurry. Aelinor rose, started pacing the room under both her brother's and brother-in-law's worried looks.

"So basically it's all about... What? What do you suggest? Wait - remove Tommen from the throne, for, after all, it's what he wants? Put Tywin on the Iron Throne just to make him lay down his crown at the Targaryen girl's feet?"

Kevan inhaled heavily and nodded. "Something of the sort, yes."

"And you think he'll accept to yield? Tywin Lannister?"

"That's why this plan needs you, sister. He treasures your advice, everyone knows..."

"He will never yield. And even less, whether would he be the anointed king. You've seen him, sitting on the throne - he's the only one appearing like he was born for that damn chair."

"He is," Kevan agreed. "But it's my brother we're talking about. There's nothing he considers higher, in his whole life, than his family's wellbeing. Talk to him, Aelinor. Please."

"Persuade him." Addam Marbrand averted his eyes from his sister's face - for the first time in years, he was at unease with the words he was about to speak. "With any means necessary."

Aelinor nodded thoughtfully, biting lightly into her lower lip. It wasn't the best plan. It probably was neither a plan with many good chances of success.

But it was the only plan they had.
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