Equal Forces
by seamscribe

Summary

SEQUEL TO UGLY PRETTY! AO3 user Jades once commented on that story: "It has been quite the journey for these two!"

You ain't seen nothing yet...

Notes

Thanks for supporting this series!

See the end of the work for more notes
“Brienne, are you even listening to me? Look, I know Jaime Lannister fucked your brains out, but did you have to leave them on Tarth?” Loras huffs.

Brienne turns red with a mix of shame and embarrassment. She hasn’t been listening to anything Loras has said. She’s trying, but it’s almost 8 PM, and she’s been ready to go home for ages. She’s been catching up for hours since she got back, and she hasn’t been able to focus for longer than ten minutes the whole time. She should have just cleared the day, but she already felt guilty about cancelling the meetings in the first place. Now she’s stuck in a sort of emergency meeting with Margaery and Loras—her stylist and her publicist. They each had a lot to say about the godsdamn airport.

“I’m sorry, Loras, what were you saying?”

Loras takes a moment to glare at her before he says, “You and Jaime should try to present, like, a united front, so things don’t seem shady. I don’t know what kind of secrets they think you have. You’re the most boring person I know under the age of, like, fifty. Oh my gods, I guess you could be blackmailing him? Anyway, I don’t think it’ll be hard because the pics of you at the airport definitely look like you fucked on the plane.” Off her dismayed look, he adds, “That’s good.”

“It’s embarrassing,” Brienne grits out, taking a hurried drink of tea.

“You should have worn smudge-proof lipstick!” Margaery huffs.

“I didn’t pack any!”
“Haven’t I taught you anything, Brienne?”

“Did you fuck on the plane?” Loras asks slyly.

“Loras, don’t be silly, they could never fit in an airplane bathroom,” Margaery says.

“Why didn’t you just take his jet?”

Brienne snorts into her tea. Loras gives her a disapproving look and mutters under his breath.

The truth is that she and Loras really don’t care for each other. They simply happen to have several important people in common...but he happens to be one of the best publicists in the business. She also thinks he’s uniquely suited to her because she suspects that he privately thinks every mean thought a stranger on the Internet might and that’s why he can always anticipate their reactions. She’d kill to see Olenna slap him, just once. It’s not a kind thought, but...Loras isn’t particularly kind himself, and he’s definitely not endearing himself to her now.

“Margaery, this tea is lovely,” Sansa says, breaking her thoughts as well as the silence in the room.

“Why thank you, Sansa, it’s green jasmine.”

“I’ll tell you one thing that’ll make you happy,” Loras picks up. “Interest in Tarth has gone way up on social media and people think you’re a good, ethical businesswoman...they also seem to like that you’re taller than him. Margaery, are you gonna be going with a lot of flats, or?...”

“Absolutely not! You just said people like it!”

“Yes, at an inch or two, but they’ll look ridiculous if she wears heels! Let me rephrase,” Loras says, turning to Brienne. “Are you gonna insist on wearing a lot of flats, Brienne?”

“I don’t know,” Brienne says, hating how hesitant she sounds. “Jaime doesn’t really seem to mind?”
“We’ll see,” Loras says with a skeptical look.

“Margaery, I’m gonna go,” Sansa says, pushing her chair back from the table. “Thank you for the tea. I want to go to the sept before dinner. Brienne, do you wanna come with me?”

Ah, sweet, clever Sansa. “Sansa, I’d love to.”

The pair say hurried goodbyes and leave Margaery’s apartment. They walk toward the sept in silence for a block or two until Sansa links their arms together and giggles, “So did you have fun on Tarth?”

Brienne sighs, thinking of that morning, flying down the road in the Jeep trying to make it to the airport and laughing about exactly how they had made themselves late. “It was great,” she replies, unable to keep a smile off her face.

After a moment, Sansa says, “That’s all I’m going to get, isn’t it?”

“Most likely,” Brienne replies, though she still blushes, silly as it may be.

“What made you go? Margaery wouldn’t tell me anything. It was so unlike you.”

“There were just--things we needed to talk about. Uhh, you know, they say, uh, change of scenery can help.” Gods, she will have to get better at lying, quickly. Thankfully, Sansa just nods with a thoughtful look.

Brienne doesn’t consider herself especially religious, but she grew up with the Seven and she loves how the ritual of prayer and the forces you call on are the same all across the world in every sept, just as they say the Seven watches over a person to the ends of the earth.

She lights a candle for the Mother, to watch over the spirits of her dead siblings, wherever they might be. After a moment of thought, she prays for Myrcella and Tommen, too. She lights a candle for the Crone, to guide her father’s judgement on Tarth, and one for the Stranger, not to take him anytime soon.
It only takes a few seconds to think of who to pray to for Jaime. She prays to the Warrior for both of them, for strength in the next few weeks. She has a feeling they’ll need it.

Afterwards, Brienne walks Sansa home, again arm-in-arm. Brienne has changed into something slightly less androgynous, but it still strikes her that some people passing them probably think they’re a beautiful young girl and her odd-looking yet somewhat dashing boyfriend.

At her door, Sansa turns to her and says, “I know Mom sent you a crazy email and she’s upset and stuff, but she’ll come around. I’ll talk to her and tell her Jaime’s okay.” She sighs. “If nothing else, she’ll forget all about it once she finds out about me and Sandor.” She gives Brienne a rueful smile and says, “Maybe you can vouch for him.”

“I would, but now that I’m dating Jaime, I’m pretty sure your mom thinks my judgement is shit.”

“You must really be stressed if you’re saying the ‘s’ word,” Sansa chuckles.

“Your mom’ll still be worried about the rest of them, the Lannisters. Like you said...can’t take just one.”

“Brienne...you’re so mature and adult and stuff that I really believe you’ll make the right decisions. And if you don’t, I’ll be there to tell you to stop it!” she says cheerfully. Of course...Sansa doesn’t have all the facts, so her advice will be kind of useless. Her only confidant will have to be Margaery...gods help her. Then again, she has a unique insight since she’s allegedly in love with Jaime’s brother. She hasn’t had a chance to find out more on that subject.

“Thanks, Sansa,” she says, smiling through the guilt of lying to the sweetest girl she knows, the girl who is like a sister to her. “You’re the best.”

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But then--she’s free to go home! Of course, she should really spend an hour or two going over more things, and she should really go to bed early or she’ll never get back to her morning routine...which she supposes will now involve waking up in Jaime’s arms. How in the hells is it possible that she did it for the first time only this morning?
She chews her lip, sitting back in the cab that takes her home. She has to calm down...but she also has to text Jaime that she’s on her way home and he can meet her there whenever he wants. Well, the sooner the better! She settles for saying ‘ASAP’, taking some strange comfort in the acronym. Acronyms are impersonal. As soon as possible. Mm...actually still rather wanton. Mayhaps she should have prayed to the Maiden for a little chastity.

Her apartment’s been empty for five days. The cleaning staff have come by anyway, so it still smells faintly of the sealant they use on the marble. She feels a strong fondness for the Tarth marble and decides suddenly that she’ll be using the marble hot tub tonight. It seems to take forever for Jaime to reply that he’s on his way.

*Jaime: Do u have?...Did you kcap?*

Did she?... *pack* ! Pack?.......the condoms!

*Brienne: Yes.*

*Jaime: ur goddes*

Brienne snorts. She’s a goddess for having condoms? In that case, the convenience store downstairs is a deity, too. It even has multiple kinds.

She starts the hot tub and searches for food, but it’s been five days, so...no luck there. There’s a place downstairs with steak sandwiches. Gods, she *has* to go to the gym tomorrow, and having nothing but green smoothies and baked chicken for a week.

The sandwich place agrees to come up with the food and get her credit card then, so Brienne plans to leave a good tip for the poor server who has to run around. If nothing else, the elevator ride to the seventh floor is extremely boring.

She takes a quick shower and debates what to change into. If she’s getting in the tub, she might as well wear a robe, but that feels awfully brazen, and as it stupid as it is, she’s starting to feel a bit bashful at the idea of being naked in front of him again. She puts on leggings and a pretty blue camisole that stretches a little tight over her shoulders but also plunges down to show a wide cut of her chest.
Thankfully, Jaime arrives before she can get too antsy. He certainly looks happy to see her, and he doesn’t hesitate to push her against the front door and kiss her, curling his fingers in her damp hair. He leans in and sniffs her. “Mm, you smell good,” he murmurs, dragging his lips over the skin of her neck.

“I took a shower,” she replies, holding onto his jacket.

“What’s that noise?”

She leaves him at the door and hurries back to bathroom, getting there in time to get the water at the right level. “I was filling the tub!” she calls back. He appears in the doorway. She sits on the steps and pushes her hair back from her face. The room is steamy and warm and she can feel herself growing pink. “Uhh, are you hungry?”

Jaime snorts and says, “Yeah, for you.”

“Corny.”

“Honest.”

“I ordered food.”

“Put it in the fridge.”

The delivery arrives right then, and she goes out to pay and, yes, put it in the fridge. When she comes back in, she finds Jaime already naked in the hot tub. He’s grimacing.

“Hot enough for you?” she snickers. She forces herself not to hesitate when she undresses. She dims the lights before he can protest—for the ambiance. She quickly climbs in next to him, yelping at the temperature. “Gods, Jaime, we really could have waited five minutes.”

“Maybe we need some cold champagne.”
“How many times do I have to tell you that you can’t drink in hot tubs?”

“How many times do I have to tell you that you can’t drink in hot tubs?”

“At least once more,” Jaime replies, slipping his arms around her under the water. “Mm, I missed you all day. What did you do?”

“I had make-up meetings for the ones I cancelled. It was rather awkward because...well, thanks to those pictures from the airport, it rather looks like I blew them off to go on vacation. I felt terribly guilty, but everyone was too preoccupied asking about you to grouse about it too much,” she says, making a face. The amount of innuendo and non-productive talk had driven her insane, even though she was the one who put them behind schedule. She finally had to just break in and steer everyone firmly back to the topic with her most serious and directorial expression.

“Oh, really?” he says, raising a brow and running his hands down to her broad, firm waist. “What’d you tell them?”

“Absolutely nothing!”

“Ah, but did you blush while you said it?”

“Perhaps very slightly, but I was also glaring fiercely.”

“I’ve no doubt at all.”

“I had tea with Margie, Loras, and Sansa, then Sansa and I went to the sept.”

“Did you say a little prayer for me? Perhaps praying for my... virility?”

Brienne smirks and moves closer in his arms. “Do you need prayers for your virility?”

“Are you trying to get a rise out of me, wench?” Jaime asks, pressing his lips to her neck. She had felt his gaze on the marks he had already left there as soon as he laid eyes on her.

“Please tell me that pun was intended,” Brienne mutters, her face growing ever warmer.
“Because it’s working.” Ah, there it is. “Gods,” he groans, his hands disappearing under the water to play with her breasts, which he seems enamored with, small as they are. “I really did miss you all day,” he says, brushing his lips against hers. “I can’t believe it was just this morning that I was fucking you.”

The words send an admitted thrill through her...as does the deep, rasping voice he says it in... “And I’m gonna fuck you again tonight.” ...But it’s nothing compared to this one. He moves one hand up and slides his fingers into her hair, pulling her forward into a slow and gentle kiss that nonetheless leaves her trembling against him. “And then...” Jaime continues, tilting her head back with a light tug. “Then...” He closes his mouth over a tender spot by her ear. “I’ll wake up next to you in the morning again. Right?” He pulls back enough to see her reaction.

She mirrors his slightly nervous smile and thinks that of course this is worth a few rumors and rude comments. Rumors and rude comments have always been there, and will always be there. Everyone else...their words are wind. It’s Jaime’s words that matter here.

“Yes, you will. Are you gonna come to the gym with me?”

“Mm, only if I can fuck before I go to work. Watching you work out turns me on too much.”

“I still have no idea how that’s possible, but...yes.”

They linger in the tub for awhile, chatting idly in between long, ardent kisses. When one kiss gets heated enough that water sloshes onto the bathroom floor, she declares that the tub is big but not that big.

Jaime reaches for her in the bed, pressing his hard cock between her legs, his kisses growing more frantic by the minute while his hands roam over her body. It’s a while before her head clears enough to remember the condoms in the nightstand drawer. She was almost afraid it would feel different here than it had in Tarth but the pressure and heat of him inside her causes the same sweet burn in her belly that ignites under his touch.

After honestly wolfing down their dinner, they take a relatively quick shower and get into bed. Brienne stops to get her phone from her bag in the living room. She goes to set an alarm when she notices she has an email. It’s from an unfamiliar address—a throwaway address, from the looks of it. She wouldn’t click except that she sees a screenshot in the preview and she can see herself. Hm. She opens the email with a grimace.
It’s a screencap from an entertainment site showing one of the pictures from the airport that morning. She had taken time to fix her hair and put some make-up on before they landed, but she couldn’t do anything about her mens shirt and mens loafers. The combination of her freckles and her slight sunburn almost makes her look tan. Her eyes are covered by her sunglasses, but she’s smiling faintly. Jaime walks behind her, reaching one arm out to touch her waist while they maneuver their luggage through the door. He’s smiling as well, broadly and beautifully, with his hair all mussed and his skin all perfectly burnished from the sun...Overall, it’s not the worst picture of herself she’s ever seen. They look happy.

But there’s a reason someone sent this to her.

At the bottom, the screencap includes the top comment on the photo.

*sorry but he must have suffered a srs blow to the head if he’s fucking this giant cow*

She closes the image quickly and sets her phone down with a clatter, holding her breath. It’s stupid to be bothered by this. She’s wondered plenty of times why Jaime wants her. She’s likely thought crueler things than ‘giant cow’ about herself. But seeing it in *print*...from a stranger...right under a picture of a happy moment. Would their happy moments always look like a joke to everyone else?

The address may be anonymous, but it’s not difficult to figure out who would want to send her this. She’s only surprised that Cersei bothered to cover her tracks at all. Maybe she even wrote the comment herself. No...Brienne is sure there are plenty of comments just like that, and she doubts Cersei would have been so succinct.

Jaime calls to her from the bedroom. She calls that she’ll be right back and takes a deep breath, trying to steady herself. *Don’t do this, Brienne. Don’t you dare ruin this.* She wipes a hand over her face and walks back to the bedroom with grim determination.

“Everything okay?” he asks when she’s under the covers.

“Yeah, just checking my messages.”

“Your heart is pounding,” he notes mildly. “Worrying news?”
“No…Just…” Brienne ducks her head down to his shoulder and curls up, as if to make herself smaller in his arms. “Jaime…I just hope you’re prepared for…what things will be like.” *I hope you’re prepared to be ridiculed. Interrogated. Judged. Mocked.*

Jaime pulls back and cups her face with dark eyes, saying, “Nothing can make me run away from you, Brienne.” He rubs his thumb over her lip and smiles. “I’m almost as stubborn as you.” He closes his arms around her and kisses the top of her head. “Go to sleep, wench,” he says slyly. “You’ll need energy for the morning.”
Bite Your Tongue

Chapter Summary

"You seem to forget the first half of Margaery’s description: ugly pretty."

Chapter Notes

Thanks for supporting this story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bite Your Tongue

He wonders what Brienne is wearing.

He had to leave for work before she had gotten dressed that morning. In fact, he had left her standing in her lovely silk robe with her nipples thoroughly bitten and her hair sticking straight up from the back of her head. This, after the promised post-workout sex, which was as amazing as he had expected. It’s not surprising in a way, that he likes how strong she is. Her power is in her body...simply in a different way than... other women.

He really does like watching her body work while she lifts weights, or stretches, or bikes, in those tight, tight workout clothes, the pattern of her freckles shifting while her muscles work. He had no idea he had some kind of Amazonian fetish. Then again, perhaps he wasn’t lying when he said he simply has Brienne Tarth fetish. He can’t discount her lips, or her blue eyes, or the sound of her voice when she--

“Brother!” Tyrion exclaims, leaning over to smack Jaime in the back of the head, no easy feat. “Are you listening at all?” He rolls his eyes and leans back. “Of course you’re not, you’re thinking about
fucking your sweet, gigantic heiress.”

“Shut up, Tyrion.”

“Ha! How is she handling the media attention?”

“Fine, I think?”

Tyrion gives him a skeptical look. “Really? I’d think it would be driving her crazy, given how private she seems to be….well, hopefully Loras is keeping the comments away from her.”

“What comments? About her cancelled meetings? Gods, it must be a slow news cycle.”

“Jaime, don’t be dense.” Off Jaime’s still-clueless look, Tyrion curses his brother’s strange moments of naivety and says, “You seem to forget the first half of Margaery’s description: ugly pretty. They’re calling her ugly, you idiot, and speculating as to how you could possibly be dating, right down to wondering if she’s blackmailing you.” Jaime looks infuriated, so Tyrion hurries on before his brother can work himself into a righteous fit of anger. “It might not bother you, but it bothers her.”

Jaime frowns, feeling uneasy. “She did say something last night...something like ‘I hope you’re ready for what it’ll be like.”

“She thinks people will laugh at you.”

“Like I fucking care! She should know me better than that!”

“Jaime,” Tyrion sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “First of all, she’s right. People will laugh at you. Trust me, I know a lot more about being undesirable than you.” Tyrion does an admirable job of keeping the bitterness out of his voice. After all, Jaime can’t help being beautiful and stupid. “And second, as I just said, you may not care— but she does. She’ll be worried about your reputation.”

“So what do I do?” Jaime sighs, throwing his hands up.
“Tread carefully, brother. Just the right slight can undo a hundred compliments. And be patient. She’ll likely push you away and deny your feelings...especially if she’s as stubborn as you say.”

“How can you predict so well, Tyrion? Have you been taking psychology courses again? Gods help us.”

“No,” Tyrion murmurs. “It’s just what I would do.”

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Jaime is grateful for Tyrion’s advice, but there’s one thing he wishes his brother had mentioned. In retrospect, it seems quite obvious...but he could have told him not to read the comments.

He’s immediately reminded of why he doesn’t spend much time on the internet. It’s full of assholes. Then again, perhaps he would once have been as cruel. He hates to think it. Hates himself retroactively. But if someone had told him a few years ago that he’d feel so passionately for a woman taller than him, with bigger muscles and a broken nose and tiny tits, he would have laughed. But then he met her.

He hates the thought that he will have to bite his tongue every time he hears a rude comment. And Tyrion is right, he will. It will be awhile, maybe, before he comes across someone with the guts to say anything to his face, but it will happen. If people say such rude things to Brienne’s face, he can only imagine that vile things that are said behind her back. And Brienne definitely won’t appreciate it if he gets into a fight with half the men in town. Thinking of his sister and Brienne’s evil septa, he suspects he’d be fighting a fair number of women as well.

He’s gripped by an inexorable need to find her and gather her into his arms and protect her from every mean thing anyone might dare to say to her. But he realizes with a somewhat depressed feeling that Brienne is probably used to dealing it, and she probably won’t let him help, even if he was able to think of a way that he could. This is a part of her life he can’t understand.

His secretary Pia is on lunch, so he goes to the kitchen for coffee, still thinking about Brienne, when he runs into Locke. He’s not even sure what Locke does in LannisCorp. He hardly knows the man. Not nearly well enough for Locke to start chuckling when he sees him.

“Lannister,” he grins. “You could’ve just said if you wanted a vacation! Not like anyone’s gonna stop you. But why in the Seven hells did you take that beast of a woman with you? Did you need an
extra bodyguard?"

The man laughs for a few moments before he recognizes that Jaime isn’t sharing his mirth. Jaime’s nails cut deep into his palms with the desire to knock this weasel’s teeth out. He’s Tywin Lannister’s son. He could get away with it. But Brienne won’t be impressed that he punched one of his employees for her.

“Locke,” Jaime says, in a smooth, dangerous voice. “I hope you’re not referring to my girlfriend, Brienne, the heir to Tarth.”

Locke is stupid enough to keep chuckling, and says, “You don’t have to keep up pretenses with me, buddy.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Did you have to say you’d marry her or something? I mean, you’d think a woman like that--”

“A woman like what, precisely?” Jaime asks sharply.

Locke finally seems to sense that he should shut up. “She’s very tall,” he says lamely.

“Well-spotted. You must be excellent at your job. What is it you do here again, Locke?”

“I...Mr. Lannister, I was just--”

“Don’t worry, I’ll find out myself,” Jaime says ominously, leaving Locke no doubt shaking in his loafers. He reminds himself that he can’t fire people for insulting his girlfriend. However, if Locke fucks up at whatever it is he does, even a little, Jaime will be glad to personally escort him out of the building, preferably by the balls.

He goes back to his office and startles Pia by punching the wall a few times. He paces in front of his desk, then he tries to focus on work, then gives up and decides he will go see his beast of a woman at her photoshoot. She’s shooting the Sand Snakes today. Tyene Sand wrote the script for their short film, “The Maiden and the Crone”, and she and her sisters Obara and Nym starred in it. The film is
finally being released at a film festival in King’s Landing next month. He has no idea how Brienne can handle all three of them at once for longer than five minutes, but they had spent a week in Dorne shooting the film before he met her, so they must find some common ground.

He texts her, asking what she’s doing, then what she’s wearing in quick succession.

_**Brienne:** Shooting Snakes at the bay, wearing **VERY conservative slacks and a turtleneck!**_

_**Jaime:** Bra or no bra_

_**Brienne:** You can’t tell either way, pervert_

_**Jaime:** MMM I bet I could tell_

_**Jaime:** Can I come see you_

_**Brienne:** Shouldn’t you be working?_

_**Jaime:** It’s a well-oiled machine._

_**Brienne:** Okay, but beware the snakes, they’re very nosy!_

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Brienne might be dressed conservatively, but the Sand sisters are dressed for combat, in outfits made of swaths of fabric and well-placed leather straps. When he arrives, they’re loitering around the craft services table, and they start to whistle and catcall when they see him.

Tyene smirks and says, “Looking for the big boss? She’s over with the little blonde one,” she says, gesturing towards the other side of the set. Off Jaime’s confused look, she adds, “The one that looks like your sister.”

_**Myrcella?**_

He does indeed find the girl sitting on the curb with Brienne, drinking tea. His niece looks exceptionally lovely today, so much like her mother at that age, but so much sweeter. When she smiles at him, it’s guileless, true, pure. They both stand and Myrcella goes to hug him tightly.

“Myrcella, what are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be in school?”
Myrcella holds her hands up defensively. “It’s a half-day!” She clutches his arm and jumps in place a little. “Uncle Jaime, you have to take me to Tarth next time you go, Brienne is gonna teach me to surf!”

“But you can’t blame me if you break your nose,” Brienne interjects quickly.

“Ahh...well, you know who you have to ask,” Jaime replies awkwardly.

Myrcella deflates a little at that. There’s no way her mother will let her do anything that might endanger her looks, especially if it’s something she learned from Brienne.

“Well,” she shrugs. “Tommen wants to go, too. Maybe we can gang up on Mom and convince her. We make a good team.” She glances at her watch. “I’m supposed to go shopping with Janei, I better go.” She leans over and hugs Brienne. “See you soon. Bye, Uncle Jaime.”

She heads off with her golden hair shimmering in the sun. Brienne says, “It’s obvious, now that I know. They don’t look a lick like Robert.”

“Neither does Joffrey. Lannister genes are just that strong. Although,” he says, taking her hand with a grin. “Hopefully they’ll have your eyes.”

“Who? The children you’re making up in your head right now? Keep dreaming.”

“Of course, of course, I’ll have to convince you to marry me first. All in good time, wench,” he says, tugging her closer. Her lips are red but they taste like honey. It makes her eyes look even bluer, and they are calm and deep in the struggling April sunshine. She doesn’t seem troubled, and her gaze soothes him.

Brienne pulls back, licking her powerfully smudge-proof lips. “Hi,” she says with a soft smile. “What compelled you to visit? You know it’s only been four hours and change since you saw me.”

“But my last look was so good, how could I concentrate on work?”

“I’m pretty convinced that you have adult ADHD.”
“You know there are some things I can focus on for a long... long time,” he smirks, slipping a hand up the back of her sweater. She’s dressed in all black. It is hard to tell if she’s wearing a bra. Chances are no, since she doesn’t need one. The ones that she does wear are either sports bras or flimsy scraps of silk and ribbon that do nothing to disguise her hard nipples. His slides his hand up. No bra.

Brienne slaps his hand away, blushing. “Well, I have to go focus on something for a long time now. Stay away from the Snakes,” she warns.

The rest of the shoot doesn’t take long. It’s obvious that they’ve worked together before and that everyone knows exactly what they want to do. Jaime does actually respond to some work emails while he waits, so it’s not a total loss.

He wanders over while Brienne is saying goodbye to the sisters. They all give him sly looks over Brienne’s shoulder. One of them tells her, “Dad can’t wait to see you.” Dad? Oberyn Martell? Can’t wait to see her? Brienne? His Brienne?

Brienne doesn’t give much of a reaction except to say, “Tell him I’ll pick the wine this time.” This makes them all laugh for some reason.

Finally, when the Sands are away and the equipment is being taken down, Jaime catches her hand and says, “Their Dad?”

“Hmm? Yes, Oberyn Martell, do you know him?”

“I know of him…”

“Yes, he’s a little infamous, isn’t he? He was kind of a mentor to me when I first started. He took those silly animal pictures!”

“Ah…”

“It was his idea that I should try doing a film with Tyene. We all stayed at his estate when we shot ‘The Maiden and the Crone’. I’m supposed to have dinner with him on Monday.”
“I see…” As disturbing as this information is, Oberyn Martell is a matter that will have to wait. “What are you doing later?”

“I’m shooting with Sebastian Kim this afternoon. Well, he’s shooting me.”

“Oh…”

“What?”

“Nothing, just….Sebastian Kim is a man.”

“As far as I know…”

“He won’t ask you to take your clothes off, will he?”

“Oh, goodness,” Brienne says, rolling her eyes. “You’re not serious. It’s a photoshoot!”

“I just never thought about it!”

“There’s nothing to think about it!”

“I’m sure these things happen sometimes.”

“Not to me,” she says in a hard tone. She turns and starts to walk away.

Jaime quickly catches up and grabs her arm, pulling her around to him. “I’m sorry, okay, but I wouldn’t trust Oberyn Martell alone with a ham sandwich.”

“You don’t have to trust Oberyn Martell, you have to trust me.” She shakes her head. Then she
smacks his shoulder and adds, “Besides, models take their clothes off all the time, do you think they’re all cheating on their spouses?”

“You’re not a model, you’re a photographer,” Jaime says smugly.

“Ah...touche.” He comes closer and kisses her for a few long, minutes until he suddenly realizes someone could be taking their picture at that very moment. He’s angry at himself for stopping on that account, but the fewer pictures on the internet for people to talk about, the better.

“So I suppose I have to go back to work.”

“A good work ethic is a very admirable quality in a man,” she shrugs.

“Then work, I shall, wench.”

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Jaime is on his way to the office when he gets a call from Myrcella.

Without preamble, she says, “Don’t mess things up with Brienne, Uncle Jaime.”

“Hey, what did I do to be so suspicious?”

“I don’t know, Uncle Jaime. You never have a girlfriend, so...how do I know you don’t suck at being a boyfriend?” Man, this kid is wise. “Brienne is cool and smart and stuff, and she shouldn’t have anything less than an awesome boyfriend just because she’s crazy tall and, like, doesn’t wanna get a nose job or whatever.”

“I completely agree.”

“Good. Because I don’t wanna choose between you and Brienne,” she says seriously. Then, more like a proper teenage girl, she squeals, “Oh my gods, Uncle Jaime, did you propose?”
Sort of… “No, I didn’t propose. Don’t you think you would have noticed a giant Lannister rock on her finger?”

“I thought she didn’t wanna tell anyone yet. She wouldn’t tell me anything, except about old weapons and surfing. You didn’t spend the whole time in the armory!”

“Myrcella, we’re not engaged, okay? You’ll be the first to know when we are. And thanks for being a good friend to Brienne.”

“Mom knows you’re back.”

“I figured as much.”

“Speak softly and no sudden movements.” She giggles and Jaime can’t help laughing himself. Perhaps they shouldn’t be laughing at her mother like this, but it’s an accurate description of the best way to deal with Cersei.

Jaime goes back to his office and works diligently for a few hours before Pia buzzes him to say he has a call. She hesitates for a moment and then says, “It’s your father.”

Jaime sighs and picks up the phone before he can stress about it. His father never calls to say ‘how are you’. Only to say ‘what did you do, you foolish idiot’.

“Hello, Father.”

“Jaime, who is this woman you’re abruptly leaving work to follow across the Narrow Sea and how have you not presented her to me before you made a fool of yourself in the papers?”

“Yes, I had a wonderful time, thank you. I’m sure you already know everything about her, so what shall I say?”

“You’ve been seeing this woman for six weeks and you’ve already managed to cause a scandal.”
“The scandal occurred because Cersei showed up and insulted Brienne at her own party!”

“And so you accosted your sister?”

“Accosted?”

“You grabbed her and pulled her away. You’re welcome to watch the video that some helpful bystander took if you can’t recall.”

“Gods,” Jaime groans, dropping his head to the desk.

“Indeed. Had you declared your intentions for this woman to me, this would never have happened.”

“Declared my intentions?”

“I assume you intend to marry her. You’ve been to her home. Her island, which happens to be worth quite a bit these days. Very fortunate for Ms. Tarth. I seem to recall that it was rather run-down until about seven years ago. Is she any good with money, Jaime?”

“I’m sure you’ve already looked at her financial records, Dad, you tell me.”

“You will arrange a meeting so I can assess this young woman.”

“Dad…”

“Son.”

“She’s really busy.”
“She’ll find time,” Tywin says with finality.

Jaime puts the phone down with a sigh. He won’t be able to put this off for long. Brienne may be able to deal with his emotional firestorm of a sister, but what about the wall of ice that is his father? Gods, he can imagine the staring contest now.

***

They use the hot tub again that night, more for tired muscles than anything, and get into bed. He doesn’t mention Locke. He has decided that it’ll be better not to bother Brienne with the words of sheep.

She moves close to him, putting one arm over his chest and tangling their legs together. “What a long day,” she murmurs.

“Why’d Myrcella come to see you, anyway?”

“Mmm...no real reason. Wanted to know what happened.” She hesitates and adds, “And what her mom did.”

“That was the first thing she asked me, too,” Jaime admits.

Brienne hesitates again and asks, “Have you heard from her?”

“No. Have you?”

After a pause, Brienne says, “No.” She tenses suddenly when her phone lights up on the nightstand.

“Mm, it’s late, should you check if it’s important?”

“No,” she says quickly. “It’s not important.” She suddenly sits up and grabs the phone, turning it off completely.
“How was your photoshoot?”

Brienne lays back down, but she seems preoccupied. “Uh, fine, I wore this silly gold suit and he shot me from below so I look like a godsdamn giant.”

“Mm, I can’t wait to see.”

She turns and kisses him with sudden intent, moving her hand down between them. “I missed you,” she says breathlessly. She kisses him again, hard, pressing against him.

It’s the last thing that’s said until an hour or so later when Jaime says, “You still haven’t proven that you can put your feet behind your head, wench.”

Chapter End Notes

Please comment if you enjoyed!

Ominous phone notifications!!!

I will endeavor to have a new chapter soon! Seamscribe fighting!
Signal

Chapter Summary

Brienne deals with email and Lannisters.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading! My normal writing times and routines are disrupted right now, but I will try to work quickly! Seamscribe fighting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Signal

“I think I’m in love with him. I know we haven’t known each other that long, but there’s just something about him, you know?”

“Sure, Margie.”

Margaery makes a disgruntled noise and says, “Oh, please, Brie, like you’re not halfway in love with Jaime, inviting him to Tarth and all that. Honestly, I was so proud. You have to tell me everything. Did you talk all about his VC Andrews situation?”

They’re at Margaery’s apartment, having coffee and testing sheet masks. It’s been two weeks since she got back from Tarth, but Margaery’s been so busy prepping for the Council of Fashion Designers Awards that they haven’t had time to get together. Renly is nominated for Best Womenswear, so Margaery is dressing both Sansa and Brienne for the red carpet in Baratheon originals, in addition to another dozen or so other clients.
“We talked about everything,” Brienne admits.

“Wow,” Margaery says, shaking her head. “Has that psycho bitch said anything to you yet?”

For a moment, Brienne considers telling her friend about the emails. There have been at least three and as many as six a day, every day, without fail, for the past two weeks. She can’t simply block the address because it’s a different one every time. She deletes them as quickly as she can, but it’s almost impossible not to catch a few words here and there... hideous ... ugly ... freaky...

Jaime has started to notice that she gets tense every time she gets an email. She thinks about telling him, but he would most likely go storming off to confront his sister, which is exactly what Cersei wants—to keep them apart. Jaime is impetuous, which may make him fun to be with, but it also means he’s not exactly the coolest head in a crisis.

She realizes it’s rather hypocritical to keep anything from Jaime ‘for his own good’...but the less reason he has to see his sister, the better. She decides not to tell Margaery either. She can handle this herself. It’s just a few comments on the internet. Well, over the last two weeks, it’s been more like sixty comments on the internet....

Sansa sends her comments, too, however, of the opposite kind. Apparently, she and Jaime already have a couple nickname: Jienne.

Yesterday’s choice was: Bow to this giant power couple! Haters have thin lips! #jienne

And this morning, it was: he seems like a douchebag but she looks happy so I will stan #jienne

“Myrcella came to see me the other day,” Brienne mentions. Something that won’t make Cersei happy. “She sort of implied again that her mother is…”

“A psycho?”

“...The type who holds grudges.”
“A type-A asshole.”

They spend a while discussing the sheets masks and planning her outfit for the awards. A few years ago, she had been terrified over dressing up and going to her first awards show, but she trusts her friends now. They’ve never made her look like a fool. Although, every negative opinion on the godsdamn internet is probably going to end up in her inbox.

When she’s leaving, Margaery says, “By the way, you know Pod’s coming this afternoon, right?”

Brienne frowns. “What’s a pod?”

Margaery laughs and says, “No, Pod is his name. He’s your new assistant!”

“Excuse me?”

“Loras told Tyrion that you needed a personal assistant, so he said Pod could do it. Pod is his assistant’s assistant.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding! I don’t need an assistant.”

“Mm, Loras begs to differ, and I really agree. Don’t worry, he’ll be great. He should be here at one.”

“It’s not possible for me to cancel this, is it?”

“Brienne, look at it this way: if you get Pod to do your boring errands, that’s just more time to fuck Jaime.”

***

Margaery makes a very valid point, so she lets Pod in when he arrives fifteen minutes early and then stands in her living room, scratching her head and realizing she doesn’t really know what to say. She offers him tea and he blushes heavily and says that he should be getting tea for her.
“But you don’t know where anything is,” she replies dumbly.

“I know. You’ll have to show me everything. I’m sorry, I’ll try to learn fast,” Pod says very earnestly. At least he seems like a hard worker. But what errands can he do? Can she trust him to get her groceries? She’s very particular about her food. She’ll have to write it all out. Surely it’d be easier to do it herself? She can’t let him handle the swords! She can’t have him wash her underwear!

She has Pod organizing her tea collection when she finally has a good idea.

“Hey Pod, are you good with...email?”

“Ms. Tarth?”

“I’m getting these unsolicited emails...um...they’re all, ah, screencaps?”

“Images?”

“Yes.”

“I can set it so all images are blocked by default,” Pod offers.

Brienne sighs with relief. “That would be perfect.”

After a few minutes of fiddling with her phone, he says, “They’re all from anon accounts with the same site. Should I block any address from that site?”

“Yes!” Pod nods eagerly, looking happy to have something useful to do.

“Wait, does it return them to the sender?”
“No, it just sends them straight to the trash folder.”

“Perfect.”

It takes Pod about two minutes to solve her problem. Now she never has to see the emails and Cersei will be none-the-wiser. She’s actually quite pleased with herself.

She decides she definitely likes Pod and should pay him more. He’s shy and sweet and efficient. Given an hour, he’s already planned the next day, right down to the transportation and the best place to order lunch from the set. She sends him on his way with cab fare and dinner money at around six-thirty, when Jaime usually arrives from work.

She chooses not to think of it as ‘coming home from work’, even though Jaime has already hinted that they should move in together. He doesn’t even care which place they stay in. Her apartment is nice, but it’s easily half the size of his, and she harbors a private hope that he’ll be able to see Myrcella and Tommen more often, so they’ll need the space. Not that she’s said ‘yes’. Even though he does spend six out of seven nights a week at her place.

He arrives right on time, although he seems a little grouchy even as he kisses her and says ‘hello’. “Your assistant seems to suit you.”

“Huh?”

“Nevermind,” he says, dropping onto the couch. “I’m starving. What health food will you force on me tonight?”

“It’s parmesan-crusted salmon, I’ll have you know, you can’t claim that that doesn’t sound good.”

“You’re such a good cook. Or should I say, the chef at your grocer is such a good cook,” he grins.

“Hey, you can’t cook either.”

“Well, of course not, I’m fabulously wealthy.”
Her phone goes off on the coffee table and she lets out a heavy breath before she remembers that all those emails should be blocked. She tests Pod’s skills: they’re for real, apparently, because there are no messages from mystery addresses, just a confirmation for a meeting and an ad for cameras.

Jaime steps up behind her and slips his arms around her waist. “You always get tense when your phone goes off.”

“It’s just a really busy time right now,” she says quickly, relieved that she won’t have to make these weak excuses again.

“But...if something were wrong, you would tell me?”

Brienne frowns and takes a moment to answer. “If it was important.”

“Anything that upsets you is important to me, Brienne.”

Brienne presses her lips together, guilt roiling in her stomach. She should tell him, but...the problem is taken care of...

“Everything’s fine. Just...intense.”

Jaime doesn’t look entirely convinced but his look softens and he moves his hands down to her broad hips. He kisses the back of her neck and says, “I know. But...worth it?” he asks quietly.

She turns around in his arms and smiles at him. “I think so,” she replies, feeling a flush spread over her face. Talking about her feelings is almost as uncomfortable as talking about sex. At least Jaime does most of the work with the latter. In fact, he has an incredible way with words.

He kisses her, pressing her against the back of the couch. She’s wearing the same well-tailored and conservative navy blue dress she wore to her morning meetings, but that doesn’t stop Jaime from indelicately pulling it up so he can kneel between her legs, using the other hand to urge them apart until the skirt is hiked up so far that she might as well take it off, but they don’t stop long enough to do that. He makes her come before he’s so much as unbuttoned his shirt.
Later, she asks if he’s staying the night. “I certainly planned on it,” he says, raising an eyebrow. “How am I supposed to sleep without you in my arms, wench?”

Heat prickles on her skin. “You did it before you met me,” she mumbles, looking down at the crumpled sheets.

“And I hope I never have to do it again,” he says, tilting her face up for a kiss.

So she falls asleep in his arms once again, breathing a sigh of relief when she realizes that hours have passed without any emails. She may have only brought herself a little time--Cersei doesn’t quit, even when she’s clearly beaten--the pride of lions or some such nonsense--but that’s just what she needs: a little more time. A little room for this to grow.

***

Jaime only recognizes Podrick Payne because he has seen him trailing Tyrion’s assistant so many times. His gaze is most always turned to the ground and he walks quickly and with tenacious purpose, but not quickly enough to pass Jaime unnoticed.

“Podrick, Pod, how are you? Are you Brienne’s new assistant?”

“Yes, sir,” Pod says nervously, clutching the strap of his messenger bag.

“You don’t really have to call me ‘sir’, Pod. I hope you don’t call Brienne ‘ma’am.”

“No, sir, just Ms. Tarth.”

“What does she have you doing? She always claims that she doesn’t need an assistant.”

“I planned her day tomorrow, organized, changed some of her email settings…”
“Her email settings?” Jaime says sharply. He’s definitely noticed that she tenses up when her phone buzzes, and at all times of the day, not just at night, and she always gives a poor excuse when he asks. She’s a terrible liar. It wouldn’t serve her well as a Lannister, but maybe her honesty will rub off somewhere. “Why’s that?”

“She was just getting some emails from dummy accounts.”

“Did you happen to see the contents?”

Pod hesitates and then straightens up, saying, “Sir, I couldn’t tell you about the contents of Ms. Tarth’s emails even if I had seen them.”

Jaime nods. “Good man. One always appreciates a discrete assistant. Not that Brienne ever does anything scandalous. She says ‘damn’ every now and then.”

“She seems like a very good boss, sir,” Pod says, ducking his head.

“Well, go on then, I suppose she just let you off. I’m sure you’ll be back bright and early.”

She still tenses when her phone buzzes, but it only goes off once and she ultimately ignores it instead of lunging for it and deleting whatever it is. She wouldn’t feel compelled to do that with spam emails or advertisements, so it must be something else...and he somehow gets a sense that his sister is involved. He still hasn’t heard from her, and it’s been two weeks since he returned from Tarth. Moreover, he and Brienne have been pictured on the same entertainment sites he knows Cersei visits. Surely she’s fuming, especially if she has found out that Myrcella is cozying up to the wench.

He comments once more about how she jumps when her phone goes off. She seems to come closer than she ever has to telling him something significant, but ultimately she pins him with those eyes and he decides that if Pod has done something to cause this change, then maybe he shouldn’t push. It’s easy to forget sometimes that they aren’t exactly on the most stable ground, considering it’s only been about sixteen days since he was convinced that she would leave him, and not nicely.

She always manages to be so charmingly shy when he says anything that sounds sincerely affectionate, even more shy than when he spreads her legs and drags his fingers through the wetness that seems to appear as soon as he touches her, just as she shivers at the lightest kisses. He loves the feel of her strong, steady body softening against him when she starts to lose her grip on the control she still hangs on to.
Jaime kneels between her legs and presses his face there, breathing in and squeezing her hips. “Mm, I love the way you smell.”

“Jaime! I haven’t showered all day!” she protests. “You’re crazy.”

“Mm, but that’s the way I like you, wench,” he growls, pulling her closer. “Au natural.”

“You’re crazy,” she says again, running a hand through his hair, which smells like her lemon and coconut shampoo. A shower after their workout is customary now. A workout, a shower, and a frenzied round of sex in between, mostly during the shower. On a good day, they manage three times: the intense morning fuck, after he’s teased her with stares and graphic requests for yoga demonstrations while she flushes and pretends to be very annoyed.

The few times that she has actually obliged (cobra, bridge, and, glaring at him the whole time, cow) he had gotten hard instantly and they had to leave the gym in a hurry with Brienne complaining that they never cooled down until they got to the elevator and he was able to kiss her into silence.

Then there’s this, the hurried ‘I haven’t seen you all day sex’. He loves taking her out of her fancy clothing–or taking her while she’s still in them, as he does now. She’s wearing a dress that’s longer than he’d like, but compliments her skin and her eyes. It’s structured so that it implies a somewhat curvier hip than he knows to be hiding under the crisp fabric, and has little pearl buttons up the front where it cuts across to reveal a wide swath of her chest. On her feet are a pair of low-heeled riding boots that reach her knees only because they’re custom-made. A pair from the store would never fit. He still swears he doesn’t have a foot fetish, but he loves taking her shoes off, which she always claims cannot possibly true. Underneath, she wears perfectly sensible white cotton briefs and a sheer camisole that clings to her hard nipples.

After that, they sometimes settle into a domestic little routine of dinner and TV and talking about work. He likes that the best, but they only manage it a few times a week. Her work doesn’t follow much of a nine-to-five routine: she always has something to attend. She hates networking, of course–she’s terrible at talking herself up. She’s a millionaire photographer with international awards, but to hear Brienne tell it, she takes pictures for the local paper in some backwater town in Riverrun.

Then something slow, tucked away in the softness of her bed. He really prefers her apartment. Compared to his, it’s rather cozy, marble notwithstanding. He worries that he should stop mentioning the idea of spending the rest of their lives together, but it’s already what he pictures in the future. A future that doesn’t involve chasing her around the gym, or eating her sometimes-suspicious Tarth cooking, or talking about historical weapons? Sounds impossibly cold.
The next morning, he finally mentions that his father would like to meet her. Well, more like *demands* to meet her. He’s been hounding Jaime about it since he got back. He has to be there to run interference, while possibly not showing Brienne that he’s doing so in case she decides to give him one of her ‘I can take care of myself’ speeches. Also, against his *father*?

Of course, she shrugs and says, “Okay, when?”

“You really want to meet my father?” he asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Well, he’s going to rather insist, isn’t he? From what you’ve told me, my desire to meet him won’t have anything to do with the outcome,” she says dryly.

“Ah...well, I guess we can set up a time...if we have to…”

“Jaime,” she says, laying her hands over his. “Just answer this question. Are your feelings going to change if your father doesn’t like me?”

“Yeah,” he scoffs. “I’ll like you more.”

She smiles and leans forward to kiss him lightly. “Then what is there to worry about?”

“You don’t know my father.”

“He can’t be worse than your sister, can he?” she says, her tone only half-joking.

“Ugh, I don’t know...if Cersei is a tornado, my father is like an ice age. Cold and relentless.”

“I’m as steady as the hot sun on Tarth,” she says with a smile.

“Mmm, the hot sun on Tarth... *you* in the hot sun on Tarth.”
She kisses him again and says, “Stop it before you’re late for work.”

Jaime arrives at work in a very good mood, but it doesn’t last long, as Pia buzzes him after an hour and reluctantly says, “You have a call, Mr. Lannister…” She only speaks that way when it’s one of two people: his father, or… “It’s your sister,” she finishes apologetically.

Jaime closes his office door and picks up the phone. “Cersei.” He finds he no longer knows what to say to his sister. ‘How are you’ would be absurd. “What can I do for you?” He regrets the phrasing immediately.

“Brother,” Cersei says in a low tone. “There are many things you can do for me.” She laughs a second later and says, “But right now, I’m simply telling you to meet me for lunch.”

Telling...never asking. “I’m busy today,” he lies...not particularly caring if he sounds convincing.

“That’s a pity. Perhaps I’ll have to call on your little pet. We’re overdue for a chat, I think.”

“Cersei, I swear to the--”

“I heard Father wants to meet her. Do you really think he’ll approve?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never had to bring a girl home, have I? You should know better than anyone that I don’t give a damn if he approves.”

“He’ll disown you if you go against him. Don’t think he won’t. Do you really want to slum it for the rest of your life with your ugly girlfriend, Jaime?”

“She’s not exactly a pauper, Cersei.”

Cersei scoffs and says, “She’s certainly not rich enough to justify--”
“I don’t have to justify anything to you,” Jaime says sharply.

“Jaime,” she purrs. “Do you remember when you used to ask me to marry you? And you’d say that you’d be happy living in a shack as long as we were together?”

“Yes, and I also remember you laughing at me.”

“You can’t really think you love her, Jaime. Not like you love me.”

“Not like I loved you. I’m busy. Don’t bother Brienne.” He hangs up the phone with his heart pounding.

***

Having an assistant turns out not to be so bad. Brienne had never realized there were so many little tasks that took up her time and attention. It still felt a little stupid to order a twenty year old boy to...well, to do anything, but Pod is so eager to be good at his job that he seems thrilled with every duty.

A few days after Pod comes to work for her, they’re leaving her building to go to a casting when a man suddenly approaches them. She ducks away, thinking it’s a photographer. She’s had them lurk outside her building before, trying to get a shot of Jaime looking well-fucked. She makes a point of making him look as professional as possible before he leaves...although she can’t do anything about the smug look he tends to wear after sex, which, having seen it in person, is truly worth a thousand words.

But the man--boy, more like--doesn’t produce a camera. “Brienne Tarth?”

Warily, Brienne says, “Yes, can I help you?”

“Mr. Tywin Lannister would like to invite you to lunch.”

“What?” The messenger blinks at her and repeats himself. “Well, tell him to call my assistant,” she says, waving at Pod.
The messenger blinks again and says, “No, I mean, *today, now.*”

“What? I can’t drop everything to have lunch with him. Tell him we’ll have to arrange something later.”

“But...he...you’re saying no? No, you won’t have lunch with him?” The messenger says, looking pale. Brienne doesn’t envy him having to tell Tywin Lannister that she’s not answering his summons.

“Tell Mr. Lannister that I have professional obligations that can’t be cancelled at his whim.” She turns without further word and starts down the sidewalk, Pod rushing to catch up with her.

After half a block, he hesitantly says, “Ms. Tarth…do you think…it might not be a good idea to ignore Tywin Lannister…I met him when I worked for Tyrion and he’s…”

“A very rude man!”

“He holds a grudge.”

“Then he should grow up!”

Honestly, it annoys her all day, to the point that she’s quite ready to call Tywin Lannister himself up and give him an earful when she returns home that afternoon after sending Pod on some errands. However, she finds a different Lannister on her doorstep.

“Hi, Tommen,” she says, watching as Tommen scrambles up, still wearing his school uniform and holding his backpack to his chest. “Is everything okay?”

Tomen chews his lip and says, “I have to show you something, but you can’t tell anyone.”

“Umm…” Tommen looks down into his backpack, cradling it in his arms. “Tomen...what’s in that backpack?”
Tommen’s eyes light up and he leans forward to show her. “Kittens!”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you enjoyed!
Just A Breeze

Chapter Summary

Kitten business and emails.

Chapter Notes

So much has happened! I am sorry to take so long and I will try to show you a more prolific and timely seamscribe in the future. FIGHTING!

Tommen chews his lip and says, “I have to show you something, but you can’t tell anyone.”

“Umm…” Tommen looks down into his backpack, cradling it in his arms. “Tommen...what’s in that backpack?”

Tommen’s eyes light up and he leans forward to show her. “Kittens!”

Brienne breathes a sigh of relief. Tommen frowns and says, “What did you think it was?”

“I don’t know,” she admits. “But probably not kittens.”

“You like cats, right?” Tommen asks hopefully. “I’m not allowed to have one, so…”
“Well, let’s start with getting them out of your backpack, okay?” She lets them into the apartment and gets some bedding for the four kittens that Tommen pulls out of his bag, with big yellow eyes and fluffy black fur.

Tommen tells her about finding the kittens a few blocks away from a bus stop in an empty storefront...but he can’t tell anyone because he wasn’t supposed to be at the bus stop. He always says he’s going to film club, which he did go to a few times, but he really goes on ‘adventures’ with his ‘friends’. He doesn’t sound very excited when he says the words.

Still, she’s certainly not his mother, so she simply makes a skeptical face and says, “Adventures. Okay.”

Tommen asks, very smoothly, for a cup of coffee. She almost bursts out laughing, but she definitely wouldn’t have appreciated that at thirteen. She holds back a smile and says, “The best I can do is a chai latte, Tommen.”

It takes her awhile to think of what to do, especially when Tommen starts talking to her. He’s such a thirteen-year-old that it makes her smile and makes her heart ache for him at the same time. A kid who looks like an angel and stresses out over what to do with lost kittens is probably picked on ruthlessly, even if he is a Lannister. Teen cruelty is a great leveler, and Tommen doesn’t seem like the type to stick up for himself.

She starts to worry that someone’s gonna think she kidnapped him if she doesn’t get him home soon. Gods, how is she gonna get him home? What lie can they come up with? Tommen also doesn’t seem like a good liar. However, Tommen assures her that no one will notice he’s gone, which is...rather disconcerting. She eventually thinks of someone who will definitely want several kittens with no advance warning, but it requires a real trip from her apartment, straight towards Flea Bottom. They’ll have to drive.

“I know where we can take the kittens. What do you say to another adventure?”

***

Tommen is a lot less shy away from his family. He reminds Brienne so much of herself at that age...it’s a little painful. She gets the feeling he doesn’t have a lot of people to talk to. It’s pretty obvious that his mother favors his absolutely vile older brother...so maybe it’s no wonder that Joffrey is a little asshole. She can’t help thinking that Tommen would be a lot different if his mother had ever
let Jaime into their lives...but that’s a pointless line of thinking. Still, she wonders if Jaime ever has the thought.

Tommen alternates between talking her ear off about pretty much everything he’s ever been interested in, from poetry to science fiction to medieval history—she wonders if that was somehow Jaime’s influence. And he talks about cats, a lot, which is extremely endearing until he tells her that he once had a pregnant cat that was found dead in one of the many gardens of Casterly Rock, butchered and with dead kittens laying on the ground next to her.

She’s already pale when he adds, “Joffrey did it, but I wasn’t allowed to say so.” The casual way he says it is ten times more disturbing than if he had started crying. It sounds like violence is considered a rather banal occurrence for him. She wonders who else that might extend to...like his late father. There was definitely no love lost between them when he was alive. Maybe that’s the reason.

“That’s why I’m not allowed to have cats,” he adds.

It takes her a moment to speak. “You must be glad he’s away at school.”

Tommen nods enthusiastically. “I hope he doesn’t get kicked out of this one.”

Her mind is swirling with questions she doesn’t want answered by the time they pull up to Beyond the Wall Books. Tommen carries his box of kittens inside with her. The shop smells like old books and coffee. There’s music playing softly over the speakers, which they definitely hadn’t had when she worked there. The bell over the door rings and Gilly Tarly’s sweet, clear voice calls, “Hello, welcome, be there in one moment, yeah?” It sounds like it’s coming from the stockroom, so Brienne simply calls back, “It’s only me, Gilly!”

Gilly runs out a bare moment later and all but tackles Brienne, crying her name. “We haven’t seen you in such a long time, Brie!”

“I know, I’m sorry, but...I brought you something you might like.”

Gilly notices Tommen then and grins, saying, “This handsome young man? Is he here to work the front desk? He’s welcome to it, eh?”
Tommen blushes and stammers for a moment before blurting out, “I have kittens.”

Gilly peaks into the box and says, “Yes, you do! Here, bring them on over to the counter there, yeah? I’ll call Sam down.”

While Gilly calls her husband down from their apartment above the shop, Brienne explains, “I used to work for Sam and Gilly here at the store.” She smiles ruefully. “Gilly used to make my clothes. Anyway, Sam’s crazy about cats. He’ll take care of them.”

“Are you sure?” he asks anxiously.

“Positive.”

“Where’d you find this one then, Brie?” Gilly asks when she returns.

“He’s, ahh, my boyfriend’s nephew.”

“You mean your tall, handsome man?” she asks, punctuating her last three words with a slap on the shoulder. Brienne and Tommen make almost identical faces and turn red. “I saw your picture everywhere! You look so lovely, Brie!”

“Are you from the North?” Tommen blurts out.

“Aye, the far North. I’m as close to a Wilding as you can get these days,” Gilly says, quite proudly.

“You brought kittens?” Sam yells down the stairs. He comes ambling down, carrying a big basket of blankets, his face all flushed with excitement, just as Brienne had expected. Watching the three of them coo over the sleepy kittens, she’s glad she thought of Sam and Gilly. The Gods knew how they had nurtured her, her petrified self having just dropped out of KLU and still struggling to talk to strangers in the city. But the people who made their way into Beyond the Wall Books were nice enough. Strange, but nice.

She’s not at all surprised when Sam steals Tommen away to the sci fi section, his pride and joy.
Gilly watches her with a friendly but sharp eye and says, “You’re quite fond of him, yeah?”

“Of Tommen? He...yes, I am, I suppose…”

Gilly squeals and says, “I always knew you’d make a good mother.”

“Gilly,” she says with a nervous laugh. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

“Nah, those rich types get married right quick. Suppose they want those--what’s it--prenups!” she laughs. “Though I reckon you’re rich enough to want your own now, eh? You know, I saw you on TV wearing earrings that were some four hundred dragons! Reckon you had to give it back though, yeah?”

“Aye.”

“Aye,” Gilly teases. “I bet you don’t say that in front of your fancy fashion friends, then, eh?” Brienne flushes and starts to answer before Gilly waves her off with another laugh. “Nah, I know you’re a good girl, Brie. Always have been, always will be,” she says, placing her dainty little hand over Brienne’s. “Just remember that if anyone tries to tell you otherwise, yeah?”

“Aye,” Brienne says again, feeling rather choked up suddenly. Despite being about a quarter of her size, Gilly is like an older sister to her, or at least what she had imagined having an older sister would be like.

Gilly remembers then that she has a few dresses she’s come across since they last met that she tailored for her, going on about how she’s sure Brienne has proper ‘people’ to dress her now, but Gilly just thought she might like them, even if she never wears them, until Brienne has to stop her and assure her that she’ll still happily wear anything Gilly makes her. Luckily, she doesn’t have to lie, because Gilly has a good eye and a real talent with a sewing machine.

She finally gets back to Tommen, who is settled at the counter with a massive stack of books, feeding the kittens with an eyedropper. He and Sam are discussing quantum physics, one of the many topics on which Sam is randomly an expert, the result of a lonely childhood spent reading books. She and Sam had had that in common when they met, and her own traumatic teen years were still right behind her in those days.
Tommen sheepishly informs her that he doesn’t have any money. She supposes he doesn’t go many places where a quick name-drop isn’t sufficient. The total is hefty, but she certainly won’t begrudge him books, especially from her friends’ shop. They always refuse to take money from her directly, so she always buys the $60 coffee table books. Her photos have even appeared in a few of them.

What she isn’t expecting is for Gilly to make a serious offer of employment to Tommen. Apparently, Sam is trying to finally finish the novel he’s been writing since before Brienne even met him and Gilly is fed up with being the only one in the store. She grins and promises to pay him under the table.

Tommen gets excited and turns to her with a pleading look. She wards it off with the cold, hard truth. “You’ll have to ask your mother.”

She expects him to look disappointed, but he just nods thoughtfully. She sees some kind of Lannister scheme forming in his eyes. But should she really be surprised? However sweet, he is a Lannister. Still, there are certainly worse things to scheme about at thirteen than holding down a job.

She sighs and says, “I still have plausible deniability, so don’t say anymore.” Before they leave, Sam calls, “We can finish naming them next time!”

Tommen declares with authority that the kittens will be happy with Sam and Gilly, then begins a long recounting of his conversation on quantum physics, seeming not to notice that he is essentially speaking in another language. Brienne is certain she was never so chatty as a thirteen-year-old, but maybe that was just because she hadn’t had anyone to talk to...Gilly is right...she is attached. To multiple Lannisters. Gods help her.

She drops off Tommen a few blocks from his apartment, resolutely not asking why he insists on it. She’s finally arrived home for the second time that day when she gets a text from Pod letting her know that he’s scheduled her lunch with Tywin Lannister for the next day. The thought drives an exhausted sigh out of her.

Unfortunately, Jaime lets her know that he’s working late and he hopes he can still come over, which makes her scoff aloud to herself. She’s fairly sure, actually, that his presence is the only thing that will save this day. She’s been in a sulky mood all day after her first encounter-by-proxy with Tywin Lannister. Of course, sulking isn’t the mature way to handle the situation, but she gets the feeling that a strongly-worded email won’t really phase the biggest business magnate in Westeros.

After dinner and a shower, she feels altogether more agreeable. Jaime arrives just after she changes
into a sweater and shorts. She’s barely conscious of her bare face and wet hair when he kisses her hello, tossing his briefcase on the floor, followed by his suit jacket. Brienne takes a moment to lean in and take a breath. He always smells like...leather?...smoke?..clove?...Tom Ford’s Italian Cypress?...whatever it is, she likes it, and she likes how she can still smell it on the sheets on the rare occasion that she doesn’t see him.

She starts to undo his tie and he reaches up to stop her. “I heard a very disturbing story today, wench,” he says, quite seriously.

“Oh?”

“You turned down my father?”

“Well, that’s not exactly how I would describe it!” she protests. “He had his assistant--”

“Which one?”

“Good Gods, Jaime, I don’t know, the one who looked frightened? Though I doubt that narrows it down. Anyway, he had his assistant accost me at my front door and tell me it was time for lunch! I was on my way to a meeting! So I told him he’d have to set it up with Pod,” she shrugs, moving towards the kitchen.

“You told him to call your people?” Jaime asks incredulously.

“Well, isn’t that what Pod’s for?” she cries.

“You should have considered canceling the meetings...”

“That’s what Pod said,” she scoffs. “Well, not to worry, we’re having lunch tomorrow. Confirmed between our assistants.”

“Okay, so that’s my father. What’s this about you getting Tommen a job ?”
“Hey, he got that job on his own merit!”

“Mm...not to sound discouraging, but what exactly are his merits? I mean, he’s never had to help anyone or take orders or...other stuff service people do...”

“Stock, count inventory, ring sales...other duties as needed.”

“What other duties could be needed?”

“Basically whatever they want...but don’t worry, Sam and Gilly are great bosses. I liked working there a lot. Although, they’ve got a little cafe corner now, but it’s not exactly Starbucks-level foot traffic.”

“It’s not in the best neighborhood...”

“Is Tommen only allowed on streets with at least two Rolls-Royces parked on them?”

“I’m just anticipating all the complaints I’ll be hearing at dinner tomorrow.”

“Ah...A dinner called by your father? So he can give his report on my...suitability?” Off his apologetic look, she groans, “Please tell me it’s at least not a family dinner.”

“I wish I could, wench...”

“Gods...”

“It’s not the extended family, if that’s any comfort. Just...the siblings.”

“Just the siblings,” Brienne grumbles, rolling her eyes. “I wonder if Cersei has thought of any new animals to compare me to.”
“I still like ‘piggy’.” She makes a face at him and Jaime laughs despite his tension, saying, “It’s adorably hideous when you wrinkle it up like that, you know.”

“Adorably hideous…”

“Hey, if I don’t wrap my compliments up in insults, you refuse to believe them,” he shrugs.

Brienne pauses and chews her lip for a moment at that before she leans into him and says, “I’m glad you understand that.” They share kisses for a few long minutes, with her perched on the counter and him standing between her legs, dragging her closer until all the space between them is taken up.

She plays with the buttons of his crisp dress shirt and tells him she missed him. “It was a long day,” she sighs, leaning into his shoulder. “Are you hungry?”

“Starving. You know, tomorrow will make the third day in a row that I didn’t have dinner with you. I don’t like it. I realized today that I love watching you eat. I saw a banana and it made me think of you.”

“Jaime!” Brienne cries, smacking his shoulder. “That’s an entirely vulgar statement.”

“Hey! I just saw a banana, any sexual connotation is clearly projecting, wench. Have you got any?”

“Bananas? No, and I wouldn’t eat one for you if I did,” she sniffs.

“Liar.”

She nudges him away and slips off the counter, her face warming as he watches her move around the kitchen, lazily undoing the buttons on his shirt. “No, I haven’t got any bananas, so you’ll have to settle for the kale lasagna that Pod bought.”

“Kale lasagna?”
“Oh, don’t make that face, it’s good, I promise!”

Jaime still makes a face at the plate when she sets it down, but he eats it readily enough. She pours them each a glass of wine and tells him more about Tommen and the kittens.

“Sounds like you’ve gotten to know him better in one afternoon than I have his whole life,” Jaime comments, looking down at his dinner.

Brienne presses her lips together, seeing his face grow dark. “Well, you can visit him at work now,” she says with a weak smile.

Jaime chuckles after a moment and says, “Always the optimist.”

“Me? Mm, that’s one thing I definitely haven’t been called.”

“Perhaps I bring out your hopeful side,” he suggests, nudging her under the table.

Brienne doesn’t reply aside from blushing and directing her gaze to her glass of wine, struggling not to smile. He gives her a soft look before his face changes again.

“Brienne…” She looks up at his serious tone. “Do you know why my sister sent me a text asking if you’d gotten any interesting emails lately?”

She freezes and mumbles, “Uh…Mm…I saw a few from strange addresses. I had Pod block them.”

“Well, what were they? Did you see any of them?”

Brienne presses her lips together, wanting to say no. “I did see a few, but like I said, I had Pod block them.”

“I asked if you would tell me if anything was bothering you, and you said yes.”
“I said, yes, if it was important.”

“You’d never tell me anything if you could get away with it.”

“Jaime, it’s just some rude comments off the internet. I didn’t tell you because there’s nothing you can do.”

“So you did see them?”

“Gods...yes, Jaime, I saw them, some of them, and they were just comments from the internet. It wasn’t anything worse than what I’ve heard before, and it’s not exactly a mystery who sent them, is it?”

“Let me see.”

“Jaime--”

“I can’t stand secrets between us, Brienne.”

“You don’t need to see them. You don’t want to.” She’s pleased that her voice doesn’t break.

But Jaime doesn’t give an inch. Suddenly angry, she push back from the table and stomps into the living room to retrieve her phone. When she turns back, Jaime is right behind her and has to catch her shoulders to keep them from colliding, as fast as she’s going.

“Here,” she says, shoving the phone against his chest. “Trash.” She can easily tell the moment that Jaime finds the emails, and she can’t stand to watch his face while he reads them.

Brienne shakes his hand off and steps around him, heading for the bedroom. She doesn’t bother turning the lights on before she lays on the bed. Staring out the balcony doors at the city lights, she thinks that she might as well call up Cersei Lannister and let her know her scheme worked. She’s humiliated. Jaime’s angry. And at the moment, the space between them feels immeasurable.
She hastily wipes her eyes when she senses Jaime standing into the doorway. He sits on the bed behind her and tentatively touches her waist. When that doesn’t garner any reaction, he sighs and lays on the bed next to her, putting his arms around her despite her decidedly cold shoulder.

“I’m sorry. I should have dropped it.” After a silence, he says, “I just don’t want us to have secrets. I can’t live like that again.”

Brienne states what feels painfully obvious. “I’m not her, Jaime.”

“I know,” he says quietly. “I know. I never want you to be.”

“And you can never stop the things they say, and you can never change the way I feel about it.”

“Mm. Never say never.”

“Jaime.”

“Brienne.”

“I’ve been dealing with this my whole life.”

“That doesn’t mean you have to accept it.”

“Should I break down crying or go on a rampage every time someone says I’m ugly? I’d never have time for anything else.” She turns over to look him in the eye. “You can’t fix me, Jaime.”

Jaime looks like he has something to say about that, but whatever it is, he keeps it to himself for now.

“I don’t wanna fix you. I just want to understand, and I can’t do that if you don’t tell me anything.”
“And will you feel better if you storm over to your sister’s house and tell her off? Will that change anything?”

“My anger levels?”

Brienne sighs and says, “Jaime, if I think I need to stand up for myself, I can do it myself. But something I learned young was to pick my battles, and my weapons. This battle is won with silence. Okay?” She can literally hear him gritting his teeth. “Hey,” she says, slipping her arms around his waist. “Remember Tarth? Remember how still and clear the waters are? Think about that when you get angry. Imagine letting the anger ripple over the top of the water like it’s nothing but a breeze.”

Jaime takes a deep breath and lets it out. “That’s downright poetic, wench. Have you considered becoming a life coach?”

“I’ll stick to my day job, but thank you.”

“It’s the voice. Has anyone ever told you--”

“Oh, shut up,” Brienne laughs. There is the ease in tension she’s been waiting for, the sense of well-being that she’s been craving all day. Ha. Take that, Cersei Lannister. You’re just a breeze! The thought makes her laugh again, which makes Jaime laugh, until they’ve managed to drive each other into fits of giggles. Then the giggles turn into kisses and the night finally begins properly.

The press and pulse of him inside of her is already becoming achingly familiar, but certainly doesn’t get old. How does it feel so different with this man?

She’s never felt this before, this feeling of being heavy and yet impossibly light when she’s in his embrace, as close as they can get.

When he looks at her with heavy green eyes.

When he lays kisses on her neck that feel like a brand that says ‘mine mine mine’ and ‘yours yours yours’ at the same time.
Afterwards, they share idle kisses until their hearts slow. She dreams of still waters.
Jaime speaks in code.

Brienne looks especially striking when the sun rises and touches her skin, making it glow like warm ivory and highlighting her many freckles. Jaime is just thankful that she hasn’t yet caught him in his habit of watching her sleep. It’s almost a shame because her eyes are closed, and they are still the most beautiful part of her strange face.

However, it leaves him free to stare at her lips, which are swollen from so many kisses, and the pale arch of her brow, the sweet curve of her cheek, the milk-white hollow of her throat, dotted with spots of pink from his wandering mouth. Her face is relaxed in sleep this morning, with the slightest suggestion of a smile.

She turns onto her side before long, curling up with a groan and then stretching with a sigh. She glances over her shoulder and smiles shyly when she sees that he’s awake. “Good morning,” she says.

“Good morning. Sleep well?” She makes a vague noise and snuggles back against him. “Dreamt about kittens,” she mumbles.

“Oh, yeah,” Jaime says, slipping his arms around her. “I entirely forgot that Tommen said he has kittens. He wants me to name one.” The request had hit him like a sledgehammer.

Brienne pats his hand. “Any ideas?”
“None.” He’d have to know something about his son for that.

“He likes quantum physics, I think. You could name him...what is it?...Heisenberg?”

“Quantum physics? Gods, he must have gotten Tyrion’s brains.”

“I’m sure he’ll like anything you pick, Jaime.”

“Whiskers?”

“Okay, that’s just lazy.”

“You’re the creative one, not me.”

“Well, you’ll really have to see the kitten before you name it, won’t you? So you’ll just have to go to the shop, right?”

“Clever wench. Ah, maybe that’s the name?”

“Wench? I think not, that’s not a very good example for Tommen.”

“What will you name yours?”

“Mm...there’s a big, striped one, I’ll call it Jupiter.” She sits up, dragging the sheets up with her. “Where’d my clothes get to?”

“Why would I tell you that?” Jaime asks, eyeing her with appreciation as she stretches over the side of the bed to search for her top. It’s actually at the foot of the bed, but he chooses not to tell her that.

Brienne throws the sheets down with a sigh and gets out of the bed, shooting him a heated look when she catches him watching her hurry for her robe. “Shower?”
Once there, it only takes one shared look between them for Jaime to back her into the corner and reach between them, finding her ready for his touch. In fact, she’s already winding her fingers into his hair and pulling him closer. Her custom-made shower has some high railings that he would swear are strategic, no matter how hard she hits him when he suggests it. In any event, those railings plus her impressive flexibility makes it a lot less likely that they’ll fall and break their necks and die naked with the water running. It’s well worth the teasing she gives him when complains about his joints creaking afterwards.

Brienne makes scrambled eggs and laments the total breakdown of her morning workout routine. “Getting out of bed early has just suddenly lost all appeal. I can’t imagine why.”

While she stands at the stove in her pajamas, Jaime toys with his phone, his mind returning again and again to his sister’s message. In truth, he hadn’t told Brienne the full story. Cersei had specifically emailed him about their dreaded family dinner.

Brother, I believe our father is meeting that woman today, after she REFUSED to see. I don’t know how such a creature can be so disrespectful. I do hope that kind of attitude hasn’t rubbed off on you. The idea makes me sick, Jaime. I assume you’ll take Father’s counsel on the matter. The children will be gone tonight but we should leave separately.

-Your sister

He had just settled down for lunch, but the way his stomach dropped had put an end to that idea. The unsubtle insults to Brienne, the presumption that he would do whatever their father commanded, the immediate return to sneaking around and never seeing his children...

I have no plans of any kind to see you.

-Jaime

She had quickly replied:

You’ll see me at our family dinner, silly. It’s far past time for us to reconnect.

By the way, is your sweet, sweet girlfriend still receiving those terrible emails? I hope she doesn’t take those comments to heart, people can be so cruel.

-Your one sister
And they had been cruel, and he wishes he hadn’t pressed Brienne for details. She was right in saying that she was the one who had to deal with; he needs to give her the space to make her own choices on this matter. *You can’t fix me*, she had said. The words had made his heart ache for the wench. He can only hope that he can change her mind on some things. However, she requires a level of delicacy that Jaime worries he’s not capable of, and he wants so badly not to fuck this up.

Which is why, looking back, it was a stupid choice to accuse her of being some kind of dirty secret-keeper. The sense of his questions being evaded—however poorly—had simply been too familiar. He’s fairly certain she had cried a bit while he was out of the room, reading the emails that she had rightly told him he didn’t want to read...if it was possible to kick your own ass, he would have. Or better yet, ask *her* to kick his ass, although she’s far too noble to fight a man who won’t fight back.

That morning, while he was dressing for work, she had asked how tall his father is and whether she should wear heels. “I don’t know,” he admitted sheepishly. “I would guess no. I doubt he’d appreciate being towered over. Just wear something...I don’t know...conservative?” She went to her closet and produced a simple suit of sky blue silk with wide legs. He was mostly interested in how it would look without the suit jacket.

He isn’t actually sure whether he should worry about Brienne and Tywin meeting. There’s the possibility, however remote, that his father will like her. But more importantly, he’s already decided that it doesn’t matter. Tywin can disown him for all he cares. Brienne aside, he’s grown painfully tired of being a dutiful son. It’s a role that’s never fit him anyway.

He wants badly to send a message to his sister. He had been tempted to let her know that all of her mysterious emails were in the trash, but he didn’t think Brienne would appreciate that. *This battle is won with silence.* However, he can remember a method that Cersei herself has used before.

He calls his assistant into his office and says, “How much do you know about flowers, Pia?” Pia doesn’t know much, but she does some quick research and presents him with her final verdict after about an hour.

“Okay, so you wanted a flower that says...uhh...*fuck off, seriously*,” she giggles. “I nominate yellow carnations: they stand for rejection and disappointment.”

“Sounds perfect!”

“Do you want me to order them, sir?”
“Oh, no, no, I’ll do it myself.”

Pia looks rejected and disappointed herself at not finding out who such flowers could be for. “Okay...the other...flowers for someone who’s really shy and really sweet!” She giggles at this one as well. “I submit red daisies! They say…” Pia lays a hand on her heart and sighs, “You’re beautiful and you don’t know it! Isn’t that beautiful?”

“That’s pretty damn on the nose, I must say.”

“I figured you were thinking of your girlfriend, sir. I follow her on Twitter and her name is the ugly swan, so...I thought it might be the right message.”

“Thanks, Pia. I appreciate that.”

“No problem! Let me know how she likes them. Post them on Twitter!”

Twitter is a toxic waste dump. “We’ll see.”

He sends forty-eight flowers total, two dozen of each, with a note stating the meaning of the flower. He arranges for Pod to bring the daisies to Brienne on set after she has had lunch with his father, and a courier to deliver the yellow carnations to Cersei, with express orders not to give them to anyone else. This message is meant for her eyes only.

Pia’s mention of the hated site reminds him that part of Pod’s mission is to take pictures. He checks, and sure enough, there’s a picture of Brienne in her suit, probably not long after he left. She wears a navy blue button-down to complement the lighter tone of the silk. The trousers are perfectly tailored. She usually claims that ballet slippers make her feel stupid because she has ‘ridiculous’ feet, which really seems like an invitation to show her precisely how seriously he take her feet...it’s not a fetish...Anyway, they match the outfit nicely.

She’s not wearing much makeup, but her hair is more carefully arranged than usual, shiny and neat rather than in the usual messy waves. Pearls and sapphires, a reliable choice. And then...her house sigil. Jaime’s not sure if his father will approve or disapprove. He loves family loyalty...but only to their family.

He knows his father views Cersei’s marriage differently--Cersei is a woman, so of course she can’t
truly carry on the family name. He wonders sometimes what Cersei would be like if their father didn’t think about some things like they’re in the godsdamn Dark Ages.

He worries suddenly that the choice of flowers was too harsh...that only lasts for about thirty seconds before he remembers the emails she had undoubtedly sent to Brienne. She had probably even searched for the ‘best’ ones she could find. And he really wishes he could be surprised at her actions, but when he was a stupider man, he would have probably stood by and said nothing while she did it to someone else....Truthfully, Brienne certainly deserves better, he’s just too selfish to remind her. Maybe he’s as bad as the worst of his family? It’s a terribly sobering thought.

He always sinks into these melancholy thoughts when he has family obligations. He’s not sure how he’s changed so much as to drift away from the world that’s been the foundation of his life. It has been accelerated by Brienne. Although she can be surprisingly black-and-white in her thinking, and ridiculously stubborn in her opinions--she doesn’t really have a mean-spirited bone in her body. Even when she has every reason to hate, she resists it.

The thought of seeing her at the end of this very long day cheers him up considerably. Assuming his father hasn’t put her off the Lannister name forever.
You are not nervous. You are not nervous, Brienne. Don’t you dare be nervous, Brienne!

The truth of the matter is that she’s been talking a good game to Jaime, who is so obviously anxious about her meeting his father that she feels the need to reassure him. But the closer it gets, the more apprehensive she finds herself. There aren’t many people who intimidate Jaime—in fact, his father might be the only one. At least she doesn’t have any former girlfriends that Tywin Lannister can compare her to. That he knows of, anyway.

Mr. Lannister is obviously trying to jangle her nerves, as he is ten minutes late now for their lunch. She herself had arrived fifteen minutes early, so she’s already been squirming in her seat for almost a half hour. My time is valuable—yours is not. However, she is used to both waiting and to resisting tedious power plays. At least they have a private room, so there’s no one watching her sit alone and wondering who stood her up.

Brienne barely resists the urge to chew her lip or toy with her hair. She has actually taken some care with her appearance today, although she had been sorely tempted to make herself as plain as possible, so there didn’t seem to be any ‘false advertising’. She had decided on her tried-and-true mascara and Chapstick, plus a few other steps. The suit was easy to choose, as its custom-tailored and blue, her only two requirements of a garment, really.
The last time she had felt this nervous, she had been wearing the most awful pink suit--not a sweet, baby pink but a deeply unflattering Barbie sort of pink. It had been too tight everywhere except across the chest and she had sweated through her nice, white dress shirt. Luckily, she’s gained both more confidence and better deodorant since then.

The most key part, in her opinion, is the Tarth sigil around her neck, made of delicate gold, the rose and azure brilliantly vivid. *I may not be a might Lannister of the Rock, but I’m still proud of my home.* Besides, Casterly Rock doesn’t have the beauty or the bounty of Tarth. It’s a rock, literally, battered on all sides by harsh, gray waters and sitting on top of a massive cache of gold. She wonders if Mr. Lannister ever thinks of the Rock when he feels unsettled, the way she thinks of Tarth. It may explain a lot if he comforts himself by thinking about a big pile of money.

After another five minutes, she is convinced that he is watching her through a hidden camera or a two-way mirror. She tries to subtly eye each mirror without looking too closely at herself. She suddenly wonders if she should have worn lipstick or curled her hair properly...

When Tywin Lannister finally arrives, he barely looks in her direction as he enters the room, giving brisk orders to what must be his assistant, although it’s not the one she saw the day before. She can feel a flush of anger creeping up her face as she waits to be acknowledged. She sets her features in a cool look, one that’s neither friendly or unfriendly.

He finally turns to her, and Brienne is unsurprised to see that he wears the same expression. His eyes are closer to a hazel color than the vivid green of Jaime’s, and though they lack Jaime’s warmth, they also lack Cersei’s cold malice. Standing in her flats, she has a scant few inches on him, and her shoulders are wider, neither of which make her feel as powerful as she’d like at the moment. He gives her a rather frank once-over, pausing over her necklace.

“Miss Tarth.” He doesn’t offer his hand.

“Mr. Lannister. I’m sorry for your troubles.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’m sorry for whatever troubles you must have encountered that kept you from arriving on time.”

Tywin Lannister does not apologize. As they both sit, he says, “I’ve heard much about you, Miss Tarth, but I must warn you that I take the opinions of all my children with a very large grain of salt.” Before she can respond, he continues, “It was very rude of you to refuse me yesterday.”
“I take my professional obligations very seriously.”

“Yes, a quality I admire greatly, in fact, despite the fact that I could have easily cancelled your meetings myself.”

“I’m glad you didn’t. That would not have gained you any favor.”

He raises his brows at her words, then says, “I trust you had a productive day. What is it, precisely, that you do?”

*I work for your magazines!* “I’m a photographer.”

“A fashion photographer.”

“Yes.”

“You have a close relationship with the Baratheons--”

“Not all of them,” she mutters.

“Excuse me?”

She straightens up and says, “I can’t claim a close relationship with all of the Baratheons. Renly is a colleague, and Myrcella is interested in fashion. It’s not very remarkable that we know each other.”

“Myrcella is also a friend to the Stark girl.” Which he clearly disapproves of, probably because his grandson had stalked and terrorized Sansa Stark for months. “Baratheons, Starks, Tyrells...do you make a habit of collecting powerful friends, Ms. Tarth?”

“I collect swords, sir, not people.”
Mr. Lannister merely smirks before asking, “Are you a vegetarian?”

“Do you disapprove of vegetarianism?”

“I simply thought you might be. You seem like the type.”

“Okay...Is there something here you recommend?”

“Oh, I already ordered you the steak tartare.”

_You thought I was a vegetarian...so you ordered raw meat._ “I love steak tartare,” she says with a placid smile.

If he senses the sarcasm in her enthusiasm, he doesn’t show it. He gives her a cool smirk and continues, “And what about Tommen? It makes sense that he would latch on to his uncle--his father barely paid attention to him and my daughter has not remarried.” His disparaging tone frankly makes her feel sorry for Cersei. “But why should he become so attached to you, Ms. Tarth? He _does_ have a mother.”

After a hesitation, Brienne tilts her chin up and says, “Mr. Lannister, I think you’d be best off asking Tommen that. That’s all I do. I listen to him.”

“And he listens to you. For instance, when you suggest a secret outing to an obscure location in an unsafe neighborhood.”

_Gods, it sounds bad when you put it like that_ ... “I doubt that’s how Tommen characterized it.”

“That’s how _I_ characterize it,” he says coldly.

“With all due respect, sir,” to which he scoffs. “That’s _not_ listening.”
“I’m not interested in what will make my grandson like me, Ms. Tarth, I’m interested in what’s best for him, because he is my grandson and he is a Lannister.”

*How can you know what’s best for someone if you don’t even know them*? She doesn’t have a chance to speak because the waiter arrives with their food. It does nothing to cut the tension in the air, nor does the sound of knives and forks.

After a few silent minutes, Mr. Lannister says, “The Sapphire Isle.” He watches her reach up and touch her necklace without thinking, closing her fingers around the family sigil. *“First to shine, last to fade.* Are you familiar with the Lannister house words, Ms. Tarth?”

“Isn’t everyone?” she scoffs.

He looks pleased at that, and continues, “Tarth is prospering quite well at the moment. Yet you fought the land sale that would be your island’s saving grace. How would you see Tarth progress?”

“I would see it not overrun with tourists who disrespect our people and our culture,” Brienne says sharply. “And if you mean to imply that I don’t care about what’s best for Tarth, I’ll tell you this: the spirit of Tarth isn’t rooted in *money*, and *money* is not always the solution.”

Tywin Lannister laughs! Laughs! At *her*! “You haven’t been rich for very long, Ms. Tarth.”

“The real estate company tried to give us a terrible deal,” she insists. “I wasn’t letting Tarth get swindled by some--some--”

“Rich Westerosi business man?” he asks, raising an eyebrow.

Brienne narrows her eyes and says, “Precisely.”

“So you personally oversaw the very long and involved process of negotiations.”

“And I protected the people of Tarth,” she says, quite proudly, although he probably thinks she’s being naive. In fact, his face is rather impassive and she ends up looking down at her plate, flushed and furious. *Advance, retreat, parry, thrust...Gods, is this what Jaime’s family dinners are like?*
After a few endless minutes, Mr. Lannister says, “The Lannister corporation has quite a few investments in Tarth, through a third party. Were you aware of that?”

“No, I was not,” she grounds out. “What of it?”

“There are quite a few very lucrative properties in our assets.”

“And it would be terrible if anything were to happen to them?”

“I beg your pardon?”

Brienne puts her hands on the table and takes a deep breath. “Mr. Lannister, I understand perfectly well that I’m not the woman you would have chosen for your son, and you want to find out what—I might have, and how you might control it. But if so, speak plainly. I prefer regular threats to veiled ones.”

“I’d hardly call it a threat.”

“That’s how I’d characterize it.”

Mr. Lannister gives her a shrewd look and says. “Ms. Tarth, I have three children, and none of them has been the shining credit to the Lannister name that I hoped they might be. Jaime has potential—he’s always had potential, even if he doesn’t care to do anything with it. Yet he’s had no apparent interest in continuing the family name. I’ve never heard him so much as utter a woman’s name with any intent.”

Not any fraternal intent…

“Now my reckless, impulsive son seems to be fixated on a young girl who, though wealthy and connected, is not known to me. I have little to no idea what kind of influence you might have on him and what kind of impact you may be willing or able to have on the Lannister reputation. So I would not call it a threat. I would call it information gathering.”
Brienne lets out a breath and grudgingly says, “I can understand that. You have a legacy to preserve.”

Is it her imagination or is there almost a hint of warmth in his eyes?

“Precisely. The Lannisters, like the Tarths, have weathered storms that destroyed lesser houses. Robert’s Rebellion, the War of the Five Kings, the Long Night. Both our houses still stand, stronger than ever.” He gives her a shrewd look and adds, “Perhaps they will stand stronger together.”

Brienne’s mouth falls open in shock for a only a moment before she closes it and says, “Perhaps so, Mr. Lannister. Is this an alternate reality? Am I still asleep?”

And, miraculously, the tension eases. She discovers that Mr. Lannister is an excellent conversationalist when he doesn’t have too much of an ulterior motive. He even has a sense of humor—it’s even drier than Jaime or Tyrion’s, but it’s there. Of course, he also lectures and interrogates, but perhaps par for the course when meeting your spouse’s parent.

But all good things must come to an end...

“Do you like children, Ms. Tarth?”

“I don’t know very many.” Although she then realizes that’s not really true.

“You’re an only child.”

Warily, she says, “Yes.”

“Your mother passed away due to complications from childbirth.”

I don’t want to know how he has this information. “That’s right.”

“Jaime’s mother died the same way.”
“I know, Jaime told me.” She softens and adds, “I’m sorry you had to experience that. It’s a hard thing to bear.”

After a moment, he says, “And have you taken steps to ensure your own fertility?”

Flushing, she stammers, “Uh, no, I can’t say, I mean--it’s not something I’ve given much thought to.”

Mr. Lannister gives her a reproachful look and says, “Haven’t given much thought to? Your family history aside, you’re the only heir to Tarth. What will happen if you’re unable or unwilling to produce an heir?”

“I…”

“Haven’t given it much thought?”

She straightens up and says, “If such a thing comes to pass, I’ll name a worthy successor.”

“But he won’t be a Tarth.”

The thought admittedly sends a wave of emotions through her--she supposes she really hasn’t given it much thought. She had never expected to be a mother, but she hadn’t thought about all the implications of that decision. Although, was it really a decision or more of an acceptance of the solitary life that seemed so inevitable at times?

“Well,” Tywin says, standing. “That can be discussed in the future. The near future.”

“Uh, sir, you do realize Jaime and I have only been dating for about three months?”

“I don’t see your point.”
Uh-oh…

They walk out together and Tywin turns to her on the sidewalk and says, “It was a pleasure meeting you, Ms. Tarth, and I don’t say that often with any kind of sincerity.”

His candor startles a laugh out of her and she replies, “I’m glad we could meet, Mr. Lannister.”

“I’m sure we’ll see each other again soon,” he says, managing to make it sound rather ominous. Perhaps he’ll bring an OB-GYN next time.

He turns and walks off down the street, his assistant appearing suddenly and scurrying after him.

And just like that, the ordeal is over. She breathes a sigh relief, almost more for Jaime than for herself. He had said his father’s approval didn’t matter to him, but she’s still glad he doesn’t have to bear the weight of his father’s disappointment…anymore than he already does, anyway.

She collects Pod from the dining area downstairs, where he looks rather out of place in his jeans and hooded jacket and giant messenger bag, but he doesn’t seem to notice as he’s polishing off something with salmon in it.

They head to the set of the photoshoot for Marni and she’s surprised to find two dozen red daisies waiting for her. Several people gather around to coo over them, although Jeyne Poole wrinkles her nose and says, “Aren’t daisies a bit common? I mean, why not red roses?”

“I hate red roses,” she says absently, opening the card.

Brienne--

... A red daisy tells of beauty unknown to the possessor.

--Jaime

“What does the card say?” Jeyne asks. But Brienne finds that she doesn’t want to share this message with anyone else. At her hesitation, someone giggles and says, “Must be dirty, then.”
Brienne holds what is actually the purest message she's ever received and simply smiles.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope the Tywin/Brienne meeting lived up to expectations!

I truthfully could only find a couple of sources that attribute that meaning to red daisies, mostly during Victorian times, but it worked for me, so whatever!!!

It honestly didn't even occur to me to have the flowers mixed up, oop.

Please review if you enjoyed and I will try to write more quickly and show you a prolific seamscribe in the future. FIGHTING!
“Where is she?” Jaime says impatiently, checking the time yet again. Brienne had agreed to meet him for a drink at the Red Keep, but she’s late by five minutes and the wait is agonizing. He’s already been waiting all day for her to confirm that his father hadn’t traumatized her too badly.

“Perhaps meeting Father drove her to jump in the Blackwater Bay and drown herself. That’s what I usually feel like doing when I talk to him,” Tyrion says dryly, knocking back his second double whiskey. Jaime should have known he’d find his brother at the bar, since it is across the street from the restaurant where they always have their awful family dinners. It’s practically a tradition to get mildly drunk before seeing their father, although Tyrion can admittedly hold his alcohol much better than Jaime.

So his date with Brienne has already been crashed when Tyrion adds, “I invited Margaery, by the way.” He waits out Jaime’s dramatic groan and says, “I may marry her, you know. How would Father like that, the both us marrying rich noblewomen? We might just satisfy him yet. Well, I certainly won’t hold my breath.” He signals the bartender for another drink.

“I suppose it depends on whether she’s your better half.”

“She’s only half as wicked as me, but she looks about ten times better doing it.”
“Good gods, does she enjoy those kind of lines?”

“Slick as a baby seal, bro,” Tyrion says smugly. Smug or not, his brother seems happier than he has in a long time.

Margaery arrives, with a drink already in hand, and gives Tyrion a brief kiss on the cheek, but with a smile that promises something much less chaste.

“Did Brienne tell you anything about her day?” Jaime asks.

“No, but she didn’t call me in a fury, so it must not have been so bad,” she says with an encouraging smile.

When Brienne arrives shortly after, she’s full of apologies for being late, saying, “The poodle barked at Penelope and she had a meltdown. Apparently, she had a traumatic poodle incident in her past and it was very triggering for her.”

“Penelope needs to take a Xanax and stop putting shoots overtime,” Margaery says sternly. “Renting that penthouse isn’t cheap and Elisabeth isn’t going to be happy.”

“Elisabeth has her own penthouse, she can shoot there for free if she’s in such a huff about it.”

“Brienne--”

“I’m sorry,” Jaime says loudly. “But can we focus on what’s important right now?” He puts his hands on Brienne’s shoulders and says, “How did it go?”

Brienne gives him a sorrowful look and casts her eyes to the floor. Her shoulders tremble a bit and Jaime’s heart sinks.

Then, the absolute wench looks up with a grin, barely holding in her laughter, not her tears and says, “It went fine!”
“You—you almost gave me a—oh my gods.”

“Sorry I didn’t tell you earlier, but I really wanted to see the look on your face.”

“You’re the cruelest person I’ve ever met,” Jaime pouts, dropping back into his seat. Brienne smiles and sits next to him, putting a hand on his knee.

“It went totally fine. It was tense at first...he kept making all these cryptic statements and thinly-veiled threats, but I told him to just say what he meant. It’s silly to speak in riddles. Oh, and he laughed!”

Tyrion does a literal spit-take and Margaery has to pound on his back, grinning proudly at Brienne. “My father is not capable of laughter!”

“Well, he was laughing at me because I said money wasn’t the answer to everything.” Now Tyrion laughs at her, too. “Then he lectured me on Lannister lore, and then he said--’I’m the important Tywin Lannister, young lady’ voice-- ‘Maybe our houses would be stronger together! That sounds like approval, right?’”

Tyrion shakes his head and says, “First you reject him, then you win him over. Brienne, I believe you have both a death wish and, as I have maintained for some time, psychic powers.”

“Just a death wish and intolerance for bullshit,” Margaery says fondly. “To Brienne!” she cries, raising her glass.

“Yes, to you, Brienne, my future goodsister,” Tyrion agrees.

Brienne flushes and wrinkles her nose, replying, “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

“I can assure you that he’s planning the wedding already,” says Tyrion. Jaime wishes his brother’s legs were long enough for him to kick under the table.
Brienne’s knee touches his and she smiles at him, bright and sweet and unburdened. “I’ll tell you more later, okay?”

“Will you have a drink with us after dinner as well, sister?”

“No way,” Jaime interjects. “I want her all to myself after this dinner!” Brienne flushes further and steps on his foot.

Margaery asks, “What are you doing after this, Brienne?”

“I’m having dinner with Renly,” she sighs heavily. “He says it’s time to start discussing...the dress.”

“A dress for this big awards show?” Tyrion asks. “I’m Margaery’s date, by the way,” he says, giving Margaery a sly look.

Margaery ignores him and says, “BB, you know you can trust Renly.”

“He tried to put me in cap sleeves once, Margie. Cap. Sleeves.”

“Everybody makes mistakes. And cheer up, Brie, I’ll treat you to a nice spa day when it’s all over.” She grins and says, “Maybe I’ll finally convince you to get a Braavosi wax! It can double as Jaime’s birthday present!” She and Tyrion have a good laugh, positively cackling...why would the gods unleash such a pairing on humanity?

Brienne looks like she may literally strangle her friend. Margaery stands up and says, “I’m gonna get you a mojito before you strangle me. Tyrion, come with me.” She saunters off without checking to see if he’s obeyed. He has, smirking over his shoulder at Jaime.

Brienne turns into his arms without asking, sighing and dropping her head to his shoulder. “You really were worried,” she murmurs.

Jaime kisses the top of her head and says, “Not for a minute, wench.” She scoffs. “Well...I was worried...worried that he might scare you off. Maybe it’s not all worth it.”
“Oh, stop. It will take a lot more than your father’s painfully antiquated views on relationships to throw me off.”

They share a long, sweet kiss before Jaime says, “So he really said our houses might be stronger together?”

“Yep,” she says, looking pleased. Then her face darkens and she adds, “Right before he started asking about my fertility!”

“Mm, I’ll have to convince you to marry me first.”

“The more you ask, the less I want to,” she says with a glare. Jaime chuckles and puts a hand on her knee. She jumps at his touch and he can hear her breath catch under the murmur of the bar crowd.

“Did you tell my father how damn stubborn you are?”

“I think he may have picked up on it,” she admits, turning pink.

“You’re absolutely crazy and absolutely amazing,” he says, leaning and kissing her softly, and then a little more firmly, until he remembers that they’re in a crowded bar. He doesn’t remove his hand from her knee, however. “Did you like your flowers?”

Her eyes soften to a sweet, shimmering hue. “They were perfect, Jaime.” She looks down at his hand on her leg and murmurs, “I’ll have to repay you.” Jaime reaches his other hand up and traces his thumb over her burning cheek, turning her gaze up to him.

Jaime slides his hand further up her leg and squeezes, savoring the sweet, low noise she makes. He leans in again and she turns her face for a kiss, her eyes falling closed. Against her lips, Jaime murmurs, “I can’t wait to get you home and fuck you tonight.”

Without opening her eyes, Brienne replies, “You can’t say things like that in public, Jaime.” She shifts in her seat, her legs parting just the tiniest bit.
“Why not?” he asks, reaching up and stroking a tender spot behind her ear that makes her shift in her seat again, biting her lip. Her thighs squeeze around his hand. “There’s a bathroom down that hallway. Mayhaps I should just take you in there and bend you over the--”

“Jaime, stop it right now,” she hisses, pushing his hand away and turning in her seat, her face deep red and her breath coming short. She takes a hurried drink of water and croaks, “You’re terrible.”

“That’s not what you’ll say tonight, wench.”

“You have a family dinner to attend,” Brienne says sternly. “Clean your mind up for a second. Ugg, here come Margie and Tyrion. Look—I don’t know—less smug!”

“That’s not gonna help as long as you stay that color.”

Margaery and Tyrion look entirely too amused, but the Tyrell girl thankfully hands Brienne her drink without comment.

***

By the time the two women leave, Jaime feels drunk on more than his one gin and tonic, and he’s aware of his brother rolling his eyes fondly at him. They make their way across the street for dinner and his jubilation can’t even be dented by seeing his sister entering the private dining room ahead of them. He simply can’t wait to see her expression when their father actually has something good to say.

She looks beautiful, exceptionally and extravagantly so, in a green lace dress with deep red lips and lined eyes. Her smile is hard when she greets him, ignoring Tyrion entirely.

Tywin is already waiting and impatiently waves them all into their seats, informing them that they’re all having the duck.

“Ah, Father, you make life so easy for us,” Tyrion says.

“Father, you must tell Jaime that this ridiculous--” Cersei starts.
“Silence, all of you,” Tywin says calmly. He takes a dramatic drink of his wine and proceeds to give them updates on seemingly every Lannister-related thing under the sun. Aunt Genna until their drinks arrive, Uncle Kevan until the salad, then Lannister stock, until they were halfway through the roast duck without a single mention of his wench. Cersei is equally anxious to get to the point.

Finally, Tywin says, “Jaime, you look impatient yet smug. I’m assuming you spoke with Ms. Tarth this afternoon?”

“Yes, Father, please make my dear, stupid brother see sense about this absurd—farce of a romance!” Cersei cries in relief. She gives Jaime a satisfied look and takes a deep drink of her wine.

“I see no problem with it,” Tywin says, not looking up from his scalloped potatoes.

Cersei takes a moment to register his words. She sets her glass heavily on the table and says, “Father, you can’t be serious! She’s an absolute joke!”

Tywin sets his fork down and fixes his daughter with a stern look. “She’s an independently wealthy heiress from an old and noble family, who is celebrated in her field, and who understands duty and discretion. Please tell me what part of that amuses you.” Cersei’s face has drained of color and she’s trembling with barely controlled emotion. “She will make an excellent strategic addition to the Lannister family. Your approval is not relevant,” Tywin says coldly.

Cersei slams a hand on the table, her face getting red with wine and fury, and cries, “Father--”

“You will not interfere in your brother’s affairs. Do I make myself clear?”

Cersei gapes at him incredulously and turns away without responding.

“All of that said,” Tywin continues, turning an eye on Jaime. “She is a very impertinent young woman. You will need to curb that, Jaime. She will be a representative of the Lannister family.”

“Father, I don’t think it’s going to be so easy to get her to marry me,” Jaime admits. “She’s very...”
“Pig-headed,” Cersei mutters around her wine glass.

“Headstrong,” he grinds out.

“Well, you’d better become very persuasive in the next six to eight months, and I expect grandchildren within a year of the wedding,” Tywin declares with an air of finality, picking up his fork again. He adds, “Tyrion, I won’t even bother hoping that you have any intentions towards the Tyrell girl but to embarrass us all.”

“I’ll update you if there’s a change in plans, Father,” Tyrion says, raising a glass.

“What about my son?” Cersei asks in an icy voice.

“Oh gods, what poor girl has Joffrey traumatized this time?” Tyrion tsks.

Cersei looks as if she may lunge across the table, snarling, “You little--”

Speaking over them, Tywin says, “I might point out that this precisely why Ms. Tarth will be an asset to us. I doubt she’d behave this way at a dinner table,” his father sniffs.

Tyrion is laughing silently at this point with actual tears in his eyes.

“Have you forgotten that that beast of a woman kidnapped my son!”

Tywin says, “After speaking to Tommen myself, I concluded that he placed himself in a foolish situation, and Ms. Tarth attempted to guide him out of it in a nice way.” He frowns. “She’s very nice. I can see it being a problem in the future. She’s not a complete fool at business, but she allows far too much room for sentimentality.”

“And forcing him into child labor at that horrible shop in that disgusting neighborhood?” Cersei demands, crossing her arms over her chest.

Tywin says, “He’s thirteen. He might as well learn the value of an honest day’s work while he’s still
young. It builds character.”

“Father, when have you ever done an honest day’s work?” Tyrion asks curiously.

Tywin glares and replies, “None of you ever did, so perhaps that’s where I went wrong.”

“He’s thirteen! It’s illegal.”

“A Lannister is never too young to start dodging his taxes,” says Tyrion.

“Tommen is a soft boy. Perhaps seeing something of how the other side lives will instill some gratitude in him. Perhaps he wouldn’t be doing these things if you were keeping track of him. I spoke with Myrcella as well, and she informed me that you’ve left them there alone all night while you went out doing I’d prefer not to know what. Do you deny it?”

Cersei is speechless for a moment and then she stands straight up in her seat, knocking it over. “I will not hear this interrogation.” She storms out of the room.

Tywin shakes his head and says grimly, “You two will have to monitor the children. Your sister’s been alone too long.”

Jaime begins counting down the minutes until his father dismisses him. Luckily, Tywin is unusually generous and waves him away just a few minutes later. He is not at all surprised when Cersei appears next to him outside, her fists curled at her sides.

Before she can speak, Jaime holds up a hand and says, “You heard what Father said. Stay away from her. Stay away from both of us.”

Cersei smacks his hand away and hisses, “I do not give up what is mine easily, Jaime.”

“I’m not your belonging anymore, sister. By the way, did you get my flowers?”

She sneers and says, “You think you can walk away from me, brother? No one walks away from
Jaime hails a taxi and turns to her a final time to say, “Just stay away from me, Cersei.”

He gives the driver Brienne’s address and sits back with a heavy breath. The driver gives him a sympathetic look and says, “Woman problems?” He just shakes his head and turns away when Jaime begins to laugh hysterically.

***

As loathe as she is to spend hours breaking down exactly what strategy will be required to make her look halfway decent in a formal gown, Brienne enjoys dinner. Margaery tags along, of course, because she claims to have already found the perfect shoes for the dress Renly has designed. She has to admit that it looks promising, and does not have cap sleeves.

Renly is also skilled at keeping both Tyrell’s in line and steering them away from topics when needed, or else the two of them would probably tease her to actual death. Loras is also much nicer when he’s caught up in the corona of charisma that is Renly Baratheon. He treats her somewhat like a weird little sister, then, and they all feel something like family.

She arrives at her building and is fully prepared to wave awkwardly to the security guard in the lobby on her way to the elevator as she always does, but to her surprise, he calls her over.

He reaches down behind the desk and brings up a vase of yellow flowers. “These came for you about an hour ago.”

Chapter End Notes

~~~Hang on to that cliff
Brienne answers the door in the wine-colored tunic she had worn earlier, the one he had liked on sight. It makes her eyes look even bluer and her freckles a quite funny shade of orange. It seems that her face just has endless variations, even as it grows so familiar.

With narrowed eyes, she says, “Jaime, did you send two sets of flowers today, by chance?”

“I did,” Jaime says cautiously, following her inside with a growing sense of dread.

“Did you intend for both of them to end up here? Awfully mixed messages, Jaime!” she says, crossing her arms over her chest, her face flushed. Her eyes glow vivid and hot. She practically looks like an angry Amazon, and Jaime has to remind himself that this seems like a bad time to get an erection.

“You don’t think I sent them, do you?” he demands.

“Of course not,” she huffs. “I’m insecure, not blind. Here,” she says, handing him two cards from the florist. “All she did was cut her name off the top!” Indeed, the card he sent to his sister is noticeably short on its’ top side. “She must think I’m truly stupid,” Brienne says, walking over to the coffee table, where both sets of flowers are in vases. Red and gold. Huh. The irony had been lost on him.
“So you know who they were meant for,” he says, reaching for her. She backs away and sits on the
couch, crossing her arms over her chest again with a huff.

“You said you wouldn’t respond to her, Jaime,” Brienne says, looking straight ahead at the skyline of
the city.

“Well…” Shit. “Yes, but...I didn’t really respond, I just...wanted to send a message.”

“Yes, and I told you not to do that!”

Which Jaime has personal opinions about, but he can’t deny it. “I didn’t actually say anything. I
mean, I did want the message to be subtle.”

She takes the florist’s card and throws it at him, saying, “What in the hells is subtle about rejection
and disappointment? You realize that subtext is supposed to be not in the text, right?”

“I just wanted her to know--”

Brienne leaps from the couch and says, “She doesn’t need to know anything about us, Jaime. Okay?
I’m not something for you and Cersei to bicker over.”

Jaime sighs and runs his hands through his hair. “Okay. You’re right, I’m sorry.” She lets him close
enough to touch her arm, though she’s still glaring at him. “I didn’t think the rules would be so
strict!”

“Next time I want you to do something, I’m extracting an actual promise,” she grumbles, leaning
back against the armrest of the couch. “You’re a godsdamn cheater. I’ve always said so.”

“Brienne.” He decides one hand can successfully go to her waist. She doesn’t yield against him, nor
does she push him away, her crossed arms still keeping him back. “It’s been a very long day. Can’t
we fight in the morning?”
She moves her arms, but only to plant a finger in his chest, growling, “Promise me. That You Won’t. Contact her. And yes, subtle messages count. Although,” she snorts, “I’m not sure you’re capable of subtlety.”

“I promise this time. But, I don’t think it’ll be much of a problem. Father forbade her from meddling.”

Brienne gives him a skeptical look and says, “You really think that’ll stop her?”

I do not give up what is mine easily, Jaime. He feels a chill, but he covers it with a grin and says, “We’re all cowards when it comes to Tywin. It is known.”

“Ahh, so if he hadn’t given you a green light, it would have been bye, wench, nice knowing you? ” She has a thankfully playful expression.

“Of course not! I can be recklessly brave when the occasion demands it.”

“Jaime, those things don’t have to go together,” she sighs.

He puts his arms around her waist and whispers, “Does this mean we can just fight tomorrow? Or perhaps even never?”

She finally uncrosses her arms and he’s free to hold her properly. She returns his embrace, but even so, maintains that he was in the wrong.

“I just want everyone to know how great I think you are,” he murmurs against her neck.

She scoffs and says, “You think being extra sweet will distract me?”

“I do, actually,” he replies, moving his hands to the top of her black jeans, which are tight enough to show the length and power of her legs. They’re a godsawful pain to get off, actually, but well worth it when he sees the contrast between the deep color of the tunic and the ivory-pale skin of her thighs.
Brienne jumps and looks as scandalized as she always does when he presses his face between her legs and breathes in. He drags her wonderfully skimpy underwear down, while she hastily explains that you have to wear skimpy underwear in such tight jeans, as if he might disapprove.

“Mm, I think you wore them for me,” he says, biting her hip and moving one hand up her thigh. He isn’t sure how long he can really kneel on the floor, but it’s infinitely worth the view. He thinks again that he really needs to spend more time kneeling at her feet.

She grumbles under her breath even as she makes room for him. Unfortunately, Jaime gets a little overzealous and she tips over the armrest, her legs waving in the air. She pops back up a moment later and scowls at him, doubled over with laughter.

“Yes, do keep waving your legs around like that, wench,” he says, catching her hands. He’s not really surprised when she kicks him. He pulls her up and back over the armrest in one, frankly, smooth move. Her hair is messy and her cheeks pink with a mix of embarrassment and amusement and he has to stop to kiss her, over and over, until he feels halfway satisfied, at least enough to move to the bedroom.

He hurriedly unties the laces of her shirt, then pauses, rubbing the material between his fingers.

“Gods, what is this thing made of?”

“Authentic Northern wool. Gilly made it for me. She makes Sam’s LARP costumes.”

“What’s a LARP?”

“Talk to Tommen and you’ll soon find out,” she grins.

“I like it. Still, off it comes,” he declares, pulling it over her head.

He can still see the slightest hesitation, the instinct to cover her small chest. He feels a strange surge of pride (and blood) when she sets her shoulders back and leans in for a kiss, her lush mouth parted, her lips the same sweet pink as her nipples. He’s discovered that she likes it when he scrapes a fingernail over them, and that this in conjunction with his lips brushing behind her ear is enough to make her arch against him without thought.
“Bedroom or hot tub?”

“I don’t care,” she moans against his neck.

They end up in the bedroom to fuck and the hot tub to relax afterwards, where he has to hold onto her when she falls asleep, running his fingers softly through her damp, fine hair.

Just when he thinks he might have to carry her out of the tub--a rather daunting task, considering they’re both still wet and soapy--she speaks, her low, resonant voice humming against his chest.

“You should get an STD test.”

“...Excuse me? What? Why? It’s not like you don’t know where I’ve been,” he says, and immediately wants to smack himself.

“Sorry, but Margaery has really drilled it into my head. Besides...you know they say when you sleep with someone, you’re sleeping with all *their* partners, too.” Jaime winces, thinking of his sister’s unnamed and uncounted betrayals. “I’ll get one as well, to be all fair. I just meant then we can stop using condoms.”

“Uh...darling, call me old-fashioned, but I really think we should get married before we think about having kids.”

“Kids?!” she says in alarm, sitting up enough to look at him. “No, I’m on birth control. I just thought…” She turns red and ducks back down to his chest. “I mean, they say it’s nicer that way, don’t they? Without one?”

“You’ve never done it that way?”

“No…”

“So I’d be...”
“The first, yes, don’t gloat.”

“I’m not gloating.”

“I can hear the gloat in your voice.”

“Well, why shouldn’t I gloat? I get something first. I wish I could have had all of them. I was still a young man six years ago.”

“Mm, you were thirty-two, and I would have said you were too old for me.”

“You would have turned me down?”

“No, scratch that, I just wouldn’t have believed you, and I would have avoided you forever.” She says it in the same matter-of-fact tone that she says most sad things and rises from the tub suddenly, water streaming over her hard abs and into the curls between her legs. She declares them both prunes and climbs out of the tub.

In her bed, he kisses her neck and says, “Since we’re taking bold steps forward and all, I ask again that you move in with me, wench.”

“And I say no again, ser.” At Jaime’s grumble, she sighs and continues, “Where would we live, anyway? I don’t believe you would want to live at your place, since you already never want to go there.”

“That’s because it’s very empty. A situation you could remedy,” he muses, although she truthfully has him pegged. He can’t imagine the ease he feels with her here would translate to his spartan cavern. “Anyway, why not here?”

“It’s too small for…”

“Our future kids?”
“Tommen and Myrcella,” she says, punching him not-lightly in the ribs. “In case they ever want to come stay with you.”

Her head must be in the clouds if she believes Cersei would let that happen. She may not be able to meddle, but she can certainly do every petty thing she can manage, and she’s certainly never minded holding them away from him to control him better. Still, his heart is warmed by the fact that she sees something so lovely in their future.

“Sure, that’s a good idea.”

“Fat chance, I know, but better safe than sorry. Anyway, that means we’d need probably four bedrooms. Do you know how dreadful it will be trying to find something at a reasonable price in a good location? And selling this place—”

“Have a Lannister lawyer do it all!” Jaime says dismissively. “A billion lawyers, one of the many huge perks of being a Lannister,” he says pointedly.

Brienne makes a noise that is somehow both non-committal and disgusted. “What if we have totally different tastes? I mean, what kind of moldings do you like? What if you have awful taste in backsplashes, or like non-traditional chandeliers made out of quirky materials?”

“Are you being serious?”

She shrugs and says, “I have heard all of these given as excuses for breakups. It could be very important.”

“I’ll live wherever you want, Brienne…..as long as wherever you want is by your side.”

“Gods, you’re cheesy. You learned all your lines from movies.”

“Oh, leave me alone. I’m old and grouchy, remember?”
“Are you pouting because I said you would have been too old for me, six years ago?”

“You won’t think thirty-two is old when you’re thirty-two.”

“Yeah, and you’ll be in your mid-forties.”

“Promise me you’ll take care of me when I’m old and decrepit, wench.”

“No way, it’s not like we’re married or something,” she says, twisting in his arms to grin at him and getting a thorough attempt at tickling for her jape.

***

It’s a Saturday morning, so they don’t rush out of bed quite as they do most days. There’s time enough to wrap his legs around hers and kiss her until he can hardly breathe. Time enough for Brienne to slip down his body and take him in her mouth. It has only happened once before and the sight is as arresting as it was the first time, the sight of her sweet lips opening for him, her pale lashes brushing her flushed cheeks, her radiant eyes darting to his every-so-often and making his heart feel like stopping.

After a shower, they’re sitting down for coffee when Brienne checks her phone and lets out a horrified noise. “We’re in the news again,” she sighs. At Jaime’s silent request, she hands her phone to him. Someone had seen them at the bar the previous night and taken at least half a dozen photos and posted them online. He glances at the top comments before he can stop himself:

-Can anyone ID that top?

-Does this bitch time travel Outlander-style for her wardrobe or what?

- She has said she has her clothes custom-made but she never said in which century…

-Her legs are goals even though I’m short af lol

-Omg I’ve like never seen her smile that’s so sweet

- she has such a cute smile too
- Man she has horsey teeth
- Good thing for dim lighting cause this chick will not see rhino reason
- Nice wordplay but fuck off
- He’s hot as HELL and I hope she sits on his face

His expression must be somewhere between amusement and disgust because Brienne snatches her phone back, asking, “Did you read the comments, Jaime?” She glances at the phone herself and snorts, saying, “Rhino reason, okay, that’s kind of clever.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Rhino, like, rhinoplasty?”

“...Okay, so we are talking about rhinos as in animal rhinos, right?”

Brienne needs several minutes to stop laughing before she explains that a rhinoplasty is a nose job—something someone so absurdly handsome wouldn’t know about. He refuses to concede that an insult against her could be funny.

Scoffing, she replies, “Okay, Mr. Uglier In Daylight. Though yes, the sun does make my eyebrows disappear, and people really need eyebrows.”

“I love your non-existent eyebrows.”

Brienne frowns and says, “They also mention here that I got flowers on set. There are spies everywhere.”

“So does this mean you’ll never kiss me in public again?”

Smiling, she says, “Depends how the mood strikes me.” She pauses and adds, “And how dim the lighting is.”
I intended for this chapter to have more content, but I keep going back and forth on the timeline of the story. Bear with me and enjoy sweetness while it lasts...
A Heated Discussion

Chapter Summary

Spotted! Cersei Lannister and Brienne Tarth were spotted today at Joe’s Joe--cute name--in a heated discussion.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Heated Discussion

Brienne arrives on set about a week later feeling like her head is lodged firmly in the clouds, a feeling that has become familiar ever since that first blind date, the one she had expected to go so disastrously.

She has to admit that she had perhaps never realized quite how judgmental she can be until it occurs to her that she would have never expected to like any Lannister...let alone most of them.

Myrcella and Tommen, she’s not surprised by. They’ve always been sweet kids, although she’s not sure how. But the sharp-tongued Tyrion makes her laugh, and sometimes shows her glimpses of the pain that his wit covers up.

Tywin’s not so frightening to her, just a rich old man used to getting his way who’s suppressed his empathy into non-existence for the sake of a family that’s grown to fear and despise him. She believes he does loves his children, in a cold and unreasonably demanding way.

And she certainly wouldn’t have expected any of them to take to her, but she gets the feeling she’s being ushered into the family, subtly by some, very un subtly by others.

She forces herself to push the dizzy feeling away, no matter how exciting it is.
The shoot should be easy, just motion shots through the streets without extras or props, the locations pre-prepped, everyone on-time. It’s entirely too simple and she realizes with a sinking feeling that she has really been waiting all along for something to challenge her.

So it’s not surprise so much as resignation that she feels when the model’s eyes look over her shoulder and grow wide and terrified.

Brienne gets out of her seat and turns around. Cersei Lannister is dressed in white, with dark red lips and waves of shining gold for hair.

“Hello, Cersei.”

Cersei comes forward with a smile and places a tiny, elegant hand on her arm, saying, “Brienne, how are you?”

“I’m very well, Cersei, how are you?” Brienne replies, slipping her arm away. She finds her voice seems to tremble in her mouth and she has to remind herself that this is her set, her domain. She can’t cower in front of the model, Roslin, who is all but frozen now. “What do you need? We’re in the middle of shooting.”

“Oh, I thought I’d come and observe. Just supervise a bit.”

Supervise. Supervise? SUPERVISE?

Of course this magazine happens to be owned by Lannisters.

Brienne smiles and says, “Make yourself at home.” Someone instantly produces a chair for Cersei and she sits, of course, right next to Brienne, eyes boring a hole through poor Roslin, who is still as wooden as a puppet, no matter what direction Brienne calls out to her. Her eyes dart to Cersei approximately every ten seconds.

Picking her words carefully, Brienne comments, “Your father must be pleased that you take such an interest in the creative side of the family business.”
Didn’t your dad tell you to leave me alone?

“Mm...my father’s approval is important to me, but I also like to be proactive with my involvement.”

You won’t get away from me that easily.

Brienne finally has to take a break from trying to ignore the woman at her side to talk to Roslin.

“Roslin,” she starts.

“I’m sorry,” the model blurts out. “She just makes me so nervous,” she whispers, tears building in her eyes.

“Roslin, don’t worry, okay? I have it under control.”

“But what if she thinks I’m awful and she tells everyone not to hire me?”

“Then I’ll stick up for you. She’s not omnipotent, no matter how it may seem.”

Roslin gives her a look that’s half-awe and half-incredulity. “Okay,” she says, taking a breath. “I’ll try for you, Brienne.”

Brienne gives her a proud smile, remembering the quaking slip of a girl Roslin had been when they first met. “You’ve shot this designer for this magazine before. They love you. You’ve got this, Roslin.”

The shoot goes slightly better, but Brienne is still relieved when they break for lunch. As much as she’s not looking forward to a showdown with Cersei, she can’t have the woman scaring everyone stiff.

She forces a smile and says, “There’s a cafe across the street. Let’s have a drink.”
Cersei raises an eyebrow, but does follow her across the street to the cafe. Pod stays behind, looking anxious. The cafe has a back patio that’s empty, which allows them some privacy.

When the waitress has left them their drinks, Brienne says, “I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t bring this conflict to my place of work.”

“What conflict, sweetling?”

“The lunch break is only twenty minutes. Whatever you came to say, kindly spit it out.”

“Alright, you insolent little bitch,” Cersei says, folding her arms on the table and leaning in, dropping her voice to a low roar. “You think you’re a Lannister now? Because you’ve amused the imp and convinced my father that those revolting hips of yours can bear plenty of children? I don’t care how much of your island you sell off or how many people you flash those big, dumb cow eyes at, you will never be a Lannister.

“That’s what you’re aiming for, isn’t it? You think my poor, misguided brother is going to make an honest woman out of you? You think he hasn’t done this before, thrown himself off the deep end with some woman to make himself feel a little less lonely? The only difference is you’re by far the ugliest.” She sits back with an expectant look.

“Is that all?”

An indelicate flush spreads across Cersei’s cheeks. “Excuse me?”

“Is that everything? I’d like to get back before the kombucha’s all gone.”

Cersei glowers at her for a moment before saying, “You’re a stupid girl, Brienne. Do you really wanna make an enemy out of me?”

“I made an enemy out of you the moment you laid eyes on me. Why stop now?”

“You really think he loves you?” Brienne keeps a straight-enough face, but it doesn’t prevent the sneer from Cersei’s lips. “You do, don’t you?” At Brienne’s silence, she asks, “Do you think you
know Jaime? Do you think you could ever know him like I know him? Do you know what kind of secrets he’s keeping from you?”

“I know the important ones.”

“Oh, yes?”

“Yes. I know how deep your bond is. I know how deep it’s been since you were thirteen.”

Now she can see the other woman clench her jaw, her eyes widening the slightest bit. She hadn’t expected Jaime to share their secret. Damn. She should have held that back and let her think she had something devastating up her sleeve.

“And yet you stay. Don’t you think that’s rather pathetic?”

“Let me worry about that.”

“It all makes sense now though, doesn’t it? Why he’d stay with you. Not many women would be willing to accept such a thing. But I suppose beggars can’t be choosers, can they?” Cersei says, tilting her head. “It’s sad, really, but quite clever of my brother.”

And it does send pain streaking through her heart as she remembers how deeply that very fear had settled on her when she first found out. She thinks she keeps it off her face, but she finds herself at a loss for what to say. Jaime’s not like that would sound so weak and grasping. Cersei would laugh in her face.

She thinks back on her words to Jaime-- she doesn’t need to know anything about us.

“I appreciate your concern, Cersei, but it’s not really any of your--”

Cersei slams her hands on the table and leans in, hissing, “Everything to do with Jaime is my business, you--” She seems to suddenly realize they’re in public. She sits back and folds her hands in front of her, taking a deep breath. “I beg to differ.”
“I don’t believe Jaime wants your input on the matter.”

“Jaime doesn’t know what’s good for him.”

“I beg to differ.”

Her eyes burning with hatred, Cersei murmurs, “Enjoy it while you can, you ugly slut. There’s only room for one woman in Jaime’s heart.”

“And I’m not sure he’s holding that spot for you anymore.”

Several moments pass in which Cersei seems to consider committing an act of extreme violence. “Like I said. Enjoy it while you can. And while you do,” she says, leaning in again. “Just remember where he learned all his tricks. Remember that every time he makes you come, you should be thanking me.”

“Wouldn’t you get tired of hearing it so often?” Brienne snaps, her cheeks burning at her own audacity.

Cersei looks half-impressed and then she sits back again with a chilling laugh. “You’re gonna regret this, Brienne Tarth. Mark my words. No one plays with me and wins.”

“Cersei, this isn’t a game, this is Jaime’s life.”

“I am Jaime’s life,” the other woman replies coldly.

Brienne presses her lips together and shakes her head once with a sigh. “Are we finished?”

“For now,” Cersei smirks.

Brienne stands and tosses a few bills on the table. Over her shoulder, she adds, “Tell your father I said hello.”
She makes her away back to set with her heart pounding fiercely, wondering if she said too much or went too far. Her strategy with Cersei has always been to be as inoffensive as possible, until pushed to the edge, but she’s never been trapped in verbal combat with the other woman without an exit or an ally. It’s exhausting.

Is this what it will always be like? Will she be getting cornered by Cersei at her fifteenth wedding anniversary? After all...she can’t just have Jaime…

But Cersei is only one Lannister. The scary one, yes, but she’s still outnumbered. Whatever reasons Tywin has for approving of her, it should give her some measure of protection, right? We’re all cowards when it comes to Tywin. But she can’t imagine Cersei backing down, especially now, after everything Brienne had said.

You’re gonna regret this, Brienne Tarth. Mark my words…

What can Cersei do to her? Margaery’s voice pops into her head, helpfully providing, she could burn your house down.

Brienne, she tells herself sternly. You knew it would be like this, and you decided it was worth it, so don’t be a coward. Cersei Lannister is nothing more than an exceptionally beautiful bitch, and she already hated you, now she just has a proper reason.

“That’s what I’m worried about!” she mumbles to herself.

Everyone on set is considerably more relaxed and more focused than they were with Cersei watching everything like a hawk, so the rest of the shoot passes quickly and without incident.

She turns her thoughts to something more positive: specifically, the negative results of all her tests from the doctor. Jaime had gotten his done the very next day after she mentioned it, and insisted that he could get her in immediately, but she had stubbornly refused in favor of waiting a week to see her own doctor, for no reason other than that she’s slightly terrified of what it will mean.

She had been very stupidly brave in bringing it up...but now she’ll have to follow through on it. She had never thought she cared one way or the other about condoms, and she had always somewhat suspected that the whole bit about it being better without them was a myth created by lazy men who didn’t care about fathering children all over town.
But the idea had stuck in her head somehow. She’s not even sure where it came from. Had she randomly smelled latex somewhere? She had not thought to bring it up, but curled in his arms, relaxed and sleepy and frighteningly content, the words had popped out.

*It’ll be almost like another first time*, she muses. The thought sends an odd pang through her. She certainly wouldn’t mind improving on the real thing, but this is twice as scary. But she must be brave. She takes her phone out and types.

*Brienne: I got the results from my tests today.*

*Jaime: gods finally!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

*Jaime: well get ready wench bc im gonna make you so wet tonight that you have to replace your mattress*

Good Gods …she has to look around for a moment, as if someone will be able to see the message on her face.

*Brienne: Mattresses are very expensive…*

*Jaime: oh for fucks sake I’LL BUY YOU A NEW ONE*

*Jaime: ur so fucking mean…cruelst wench in Westeros*

She smirks to herself a little in satisfaction.

***

“…and then I said, Tell your father I said hello.”

“You did fucking not!” Margaery squeals, dropping her make-up brush.

“I really did,” Brienne says with a slight smile.

“Wow, BB, you really are my idol right now,” she says, shaking her head. “You’re one brave
woman.”

“I’m one fed-up woman. Anyway, it totally exhausted my reserve of sharp comebacks for, like, a month.”

“Hey, you used to have no sharp comebacks! And have no idea what silhouettes were flattering, or how to do a proper smoky eye, or how to use a diffuser. My baby’s come so far,” Margaery simpers, brushing away a fake tear.

“Shut up, Margie. See, that’s the sharpest I’ve got right now.”

“I’m your best friend,” Margaery dismisses. “Are you gonna tell Jaime?”

“I don’t know…” Brienne sighs. “I know it makes me an awful hypocrite, but all it’ll do is make him angry. I already worry that he’ll end up punching someone every time we go out to dinner. It seems so much easier not to say anything.”

Margaery tsks and says, “You know what my grandmother says, little white lies are ripe for a stain.”

“Oh, you made that up just now.”

“I didn’t, Grandmother is the only person in the world more clever than me, don’t you know? She’ll be here for the awards, by the way, so prepare yourself for--well, Grandmother.”

“The only Tyrell nosier than you.” Her phone rings on the table and she glances at it, saying, “Speak of a devil, it’s your brother.” She picks up, but Loras starts to speak before she can greet him.

“Brienne, what the fuck?”

“What’d I do?”

“You met with Cersei Lannister and didn’t tell me?”
“I...didn’t think it was important? How did you know?”

“Brienne, how many times do I have to explain that you’re a public figure and everything you do in public is important! You’re in the news! Again! Gods, I never thought having you as a client would actually become stressful.”

“In the news?”

“Yes, listen. From Varys himself: Spotted! Cersei Lannister and Brienne Tarth were spotted today at Joe’s Joe--cute name--in a heated discussion. Though the two didn’t speak long, they sat in a secluded outdoor section and appeared to have a tense meeting, with Tarth leaving first.

“There appears to be no love lost between the Baratheon beauty and the photographer, who is also the heiress of popular tourist spot Tarth. Tarth began dating Baratheon’s twin brother Jaime Lannister in early March and the three appeared to have a confrontation in early April that ended with all three leaving the event separately, and none of them looking too pleased.

“What could be causing so much drama between the sister, the lion, and his lover? Share your theories in the comments below!”

“Oh, Gods…”

“Cersei’ll be pissed that he called her a Baratheon instead of a Lannister,” Margaery comments.

Brienne is too busy worrying over whether anyone heard them. She had given Margaery a clean and condensed version of the story, i.e., one that left out any mention of thanking Cersei for orgasms. There really are spies everywhere.

“So?” Loras demands.

“So what?”

“So what’s the godsdamn drama?”
“Uhh…”

“Uhh, spit it out!”

“I don’t know, she just showed up to set and I wanted to get her away! She just doesn’t like me! She’s never liked me, and she likes me even less now.”

“Argh...I’ll have to spend all night running interference between you at the awards, and no, you can’t skip them .”

They hang up with a grudging agreement that she and Jaime will go to dinner in public to quell anymore gossip. She really, vastly, greatly prefers eating in. They really do get odd looks, and it really does make Jaime angry every time. They can go to Maegor’s. The mead is good...and the lighting is quite dim.

Margaery asks what she’s laughing about, but Brienne can’t explain.

Chapter End Notes

I've been waiting to write that 'wouldn't you get tired of hearing it so often' line for SO LONG.

I kind of wish I hadn't made Pia Jaime's assistant so I could instead have her be Pia P, the model with the charming snaggletooth.

So Cersei now sees it won't be as easy to shake Brienne as she thought...what's the next tactic?

Though the chapter count changes constantly, we're a little less than half way through my plans for this story.

Please comment, I read them all, seamscribe fighting!
Tell Me, Tell Me, Tell Me

Chapter Summary

Will she tell him?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tell Me, Tell Me, Tell Me

“Uncle Jaime, are you listening?”

Truthfully, he hasn’t heard a word Tommen’s been saying since he received Brienne’s text a few minutes earlier, the one that held such straightforward words, but so much promise. He quickly sets the phone down, not needing Tommen to start asking why he and Brienne are discussing the price of mattresses.

He gives Tommen a sheepish look and says, “Sorry, what were you saying?”

“Are you talking to Brienne?” Tommen asks wistfully.

He’s already confessed to Jaime that he has a massive crush on his boss, Gilly, and that all his friends are either trying to secure girlfriends for the following school year or hoping for summer flings on their vacations. They are all mystified by Tommen’s decision to stay in King’s Landing and work all summer, not even doing a proper rich kid job, like lifeguarding at the country club pool, where he could at least check out girls all day.

It’s only day one of the summer, but Tommen seems quite happy with the prospect of spending all his time in the dark interior of Beyond the Wall Books, pining guiltily for his rather rough supervisor, who had given Jaime stern looks during their brief meeting. Tommen tells him that Gilly doesn’t trust rich people, as a rule, and that he suspects that she gets a kick out of bossing him around, though he
certainly doesn’t look like he minds.

“Nope, I’m talking to my favorite nephew. Now, you were saying? About...physics?”

“Yeah, Sam and I are reading this book together that’s, like, all about the metaphysics of--” And Jaimes immediately lost, so he contents himself with seeing Tommen happy about something.

Eventually, he asks, “So is that what you think you wanna be someday? A physicist?”

Tommen gives him an extremely long-suffering look and says, “Uncle Jaime, regular physics and metaphysics are sooo different.” He perks up and says, “I’ll loan you a book!”

Jaime doesn’t have the heart, or, frankly, the courage, to tell his son that he’s not much of a reader. Not because he doesn’t have the time or the interest or even the intellect, in theory, but because he can hardly make sense of the words. They swim and flip and turn around while he looks at him.

He knows it’s probably dyslexia and it’s not that uncommon. But it had taken a year of long, harsh lessons, overseen by his father, to get to what Tywin considered a satisfactory place, and he had never shaken the feeling that he must be stupid somehow for not being able to read a book as quickly as his younger brother.

In truth, it was Tyrion’s secret help that gotten him through. Cersei had found it amusing at first, then very tedious, then embarrassing. Finally, she became low-key resentful, as the news that young Jaime was taking a curiously long time to move on from his reading lessons spread through Casterly Rock. He was supposed to be her mirror, she complained, how could be possibly be too dense to grasp something their freakish brother could master.

And he would mumble a defense of his brother, Cersei would very sharply ask him to repeat himself, and Jaime would make a joke and push down his guilt and shame and take her hand.

After all that, reading and writing makes him downright anxious at times.

With an admin like Pia, it’s easily to get away with fumbling on emails because she proofs them, but it still sometimes takes him ten minutes to manage a brief message. Tyrion had once again saved his dignity by teaching how to dictate into the phone.
Brienne has become very adept at reading his more jumbled messages.

When he asked, very casually and while averting his eyes, if she thought it was awfully embarrassing that a thirty-eight year挣扎 to read a two-page article on finance. And he’s a businessman. But her words had been kind, her embrace compassionate, like a balm on a scratch that had been stinging since childhood.

“Anyway,” Tommen says with an eye roll, letting Jaime he know he had slipped into a melancholy reverie. “I’m going to go to law school and become a public defense lawyer,” he replies confidently.

“Since when are you interested in law school?”

“Uncle Jaime, lots of people can’t afford good lawyers and bad stuff ends up happening because there’s no one to, like, advocate for them or whatever. And I don’t think very many people go to law school planning to be a public defender, so I wouldn’t be taking a job from someone who needed it. Does that make sense?”

“Yes, it does, and that’s a really mature way to say it, Tommen. I’m proud of you.” Too good to be a Lannister, really.

Tommen sighs in relief and says, “Good, because I don’t think Grandfather is gonna like it too much...but at least he’ll know I’ve thought about it. Oh! Do you know Grandfather tried to talk to me the other day? I mean, talk to me, not talk at me. He asked me questions. Like, nicely, kind of. It was so weird, Uncle Jaime, so weird.”

“What did you talk about?”

“Well, he asked me what I do outside of school and what the bookstore is like and what...role I want to play in the company someday or whatever.” He sighs. “But I don’t wanna be a businessman.”

“You know, you’re only thirteen. You don’t have to decide right this second.”

“I’ll be fourteen next week,” Tommen shrugs, as if that says everything, and to a thirteen year old, he supposes it does.
“Well, I can’t say I was the most impressive student, so I probably won’t be helping you study for law school. Tyrion would be much better on that front. He knows quite a bit about law.”

“Yeah, tax law, to get Grandfather out of paying any.” He gives Jaime a guilty look and adds, “No offense.”

“To me?”

“Uncle Jaime, you are the COO of the company. You’re kind of…Grandfather’s…right hand man…aren’t you?”

“I suppose you could say that,” Jaime says reluctantly.

“So you know Grandfather’s not…all that fixated on…you know…ethics.”

“That’s one way to put it.”

“Well,” Tommen says, sitting up straight. “I’m going to change things even if I have to see Grandfather in court.” Then he slumps and adds, “Oh Gods, don’t tell him I said that.”

They both laugh for a solid minute before Tommen continues, “He’ll listen to Brienne, though, because he thinks she’s a good at business.” Jaime is nodding in agreement when Tommen adds, “He says you’re getting married at Septmas-time.”

When Jaime’s recovered from choking on his water, he coughs, “That’s only a plan in your grandfather’s mind.”

“Aw, that’s too bad. I like Brienne.”

“Me too, but I don’t think she’ll marry me by then.”
“You never know,” Tommen says cheerfully.

“I like your optimism,” Jaime grins.

***

He’s in a very good mood at the end of the day when Tyrion sends him a link to an article on VarysScoop about Brienne having a *heated discussion* with Cersei and he groans, running a hand over his face, suddenly feeling exhausted. His father’s overbearing nature was supposed to pay off for once by keeping Cersei away from them. Brienne won’t like it, but his father *will* hear about this, one way or the other.

He actually hadn’t stayed at her apartment the night before, a rare occurrence since they returned from Tarth. She looks tired and tense in the pictures accompanying the article, taken covertly outside the cafe, and he can’t help wondering if it’s because he hadn’t been there. He hadn’t slept well himself.

No...it’s probably due more to the fact that his sister is strolling along beside her with a smirk, looking resplendent and excessive in a pristine white dress with blood-red lips and heels.

Will she tell him? Brienne values trust, but she’s withheld information before, when *she* decided that it wasn’t important, that he couldn’t do anything about it. She always wants to handle everything herself, as if he’ll forget how strong she can be.

Jaime lets out a heavy sigh and allows himself a moment to just imagine Brienne’s astonishing blue eyes and her sweet, plush lips. He’ll just have to have faith.

***

Brienne edgily tells him that Loras Tyrell wants them to go out to dinner, not mentioning why. She doesn’t look very enthused. She likes staying home, and he can’t disagree, but he proposes the obvious solution—a hole-in-the-wall Dornish place that’s completely empty, save the cook and the elderly waitress.

“Very clever,” she admires, raising her eyebrows. “You know I love Dornish food, too.”
“Perhaps I’m trying to seduce you,” he smirks.

She mumbles something under her breath with a blush starting to bloom on her face. She looks different than she did this morning, her skin shimmery and her lashes darkened and spread so they form a perfect halo around her striking eyes. Her lids shimmer too, and her lips are smooth and polished and watermelon-pink. He always knows when she’s been with Margaery Tyrell.

She’s also changed out of her favored working wardrobe: well-cut black slacks with boots, a crisp white shirt, and either a blazer or a jacket, denim or leather, depending on the weather. This, along with her honey lip balm and Tarth necklace, are ever-present.

But tonight, she’s wearing a big blue cable-knit sweater that falls between her thighs and her knees—closer to her thighs, thankfully, so that he can imagine her shapely legs underneath, clad in black leggings and tennis shoes. She looks young and sweet and too innocent for the things he wants to do to her...but he’s a selfish man, after all.

“What was that, darling?”

“Oh, nevermind,” she smiles slightly. “How was your day?”

“Very nice. I had lunch with Tommen.”

“Jaime, that’s great!”

“Did you know he wants to be a lawyer now?”

“A lawyer? Last I heard, he wanted to be a poet.”

“A poet? Well, I suppose Father will be pleased that he’s off that idea. Though I’m not sure being a public defender will be much better, in his eyes.”

“Ohhh,” Brienne says, nodding. “That makes sense. He’s probably been talking to Gilly...Gilly’s...been through a lot, and the system that was supposed to help her never really did.”
“Well, she’ll certainly have a champion in Tommen if she ever needs one.”

“I’m glad the job is working out so well. Has anyone else had anything to say about it?”

“Tyrion dropped in the other day and said he could barely understand anything the woman was saying, but that they have a fairly impressive selection of out-of-print science fiction novels. The sex section was a bit small for him, though.”

“To which you made a horrible joke, I’m sure. Or Tyrion did it himself. One never knows.”

“True enough. Tommen told me that my father tried to talk to him the other day.”

Brienne perks up at that and says, “That’s what I suggested!”

“My father listened to advice? Gods, wonders truly never cease.”

Brienne smiles and says, “It’s nice if they become closer, isn’t it?”

Jaime has a skeptical thought, remembering Tommen’s own words about Tywin’s cavalier attitude towards integrity. “Sure,” he says, mirroring her smile. “How was your day?”

She looks down at her lap and mumbles for a moment, tugs at her hair, bites her lip, takes a deep breath—an entire catalogue of her nervous habits.

“It was...interesting...Cersei...came to visit.”

Jaime lets out a relieved sigh, saying, “Thank Gods you told me, wench, or we would have had a big fight.”

She scowls at him and says, “So you were laying a trap for me, then?”
“Ah, you’d never fall for a trap like that because you’re so honest,” he says, satisfied.

Brienne makes a face and says, “Did Loras call you?”

“No. Why, is he the one who’s making us go out to dinner?”

“Yeah...so we don’t look...suspicious?...Anyway, how’d you know then? Oh! You saw...the article…”

“Tyrion sent it to me,” he shrugs. “I didn’t read the comments,” he assures her.

Brienne sighs in frustration, poking at her roasted peppers and rice. “Why are people so interested in everything?”

“It’s called being a public figure, wench.”

“Ugh, you sound like Loras.”

“Gods forbid. Are you sure you need him? Seems like he only ever tells you things you don’t wanna hear.”

“I’m not good at most public things, let alone public relations,” she scoffs.

“So, what did she have to say?”

“Nothing new. But...I let it slip that I knew about things. Not everything, but...you know…” She bites down on her lip with a groan and says, “I should have kept quiet and let her think she had the upper hand. But she just makes me so...so mad!”

“It’s okay. She would have found out eventually, somehow. However...you made me promise not to say anything to her, but my father told her to stay out of it, so I am talking to him about this.”
Brienne sighs again, but agrees with little resistance. “Now,” Jaime says, clapping his hands. “No more talk about any of my family members, okay?”

She gives him a brief smile. “Okay.” She hesitates, licking her lips, then says, “Ready to go home?”

She doesn’t seem to notice the significance of her word choice, but Jaime certainly does. He takes her hand from across the table and says, “Let’s go.”

***

They don’t bother turning on the lights when they arrive at her apartment, having both sensed a rapid building in anticipation as soon as they left the restaurant. They walked back instead of catching a cab, holding hands and exchanging shy but heated looks. He wonders for a moment if this is what thirteen-year-old Tommen feels when he looks at his almost-a-Wildling boss.

So they don’t speak much when they arrive except to take a quick shower, which Brienne insists on even though he protests that she doesn’t have to. The three minutes of distraction make her shy all over again, holding her arms over her chest and her hips before she settles them at her side with a deep breath.

“I’m nervous,” she admits in a tremulous voice, standing a few feet away from him.

Jaime reaches for her and she lets him pull her closer, then closer still, until they’re pressed together, warm and shifting with each hitched breath. He kisses her as reassurance, as she always values action over words.

“I think I really could kiss you for hours,” he sighs after a while.

“But not tonight,” she says quickly.

Grinning, he replies, “But not tonight.”

He lays her on the bed and settles between her legs, pausing to appreciate the sublime scent of her arousal, already grown steady enough to drive an impatient noise out of her when he takes too long.
She shifts her hips towards him, just a bit, not enough to make him go any faster, so he spends a bit just biting and sucking her thighs until they tremble and squeeze around him.

Finally, she groans at him to stop teasing.

Without pause, he says, “You love when I tease you.”

She groans again--but makes no denial.

It’s not until she lets out a hoarse plea that he tastes her, her wetness pooling on his tongue and slipping under his fingers where he spreads her open. He makes her come twice like that, then once with his fingers, and he fully intends to keep going, but she begs him to stop at three, after she’s pulled out at least a few strands of hair and left scratches across his shoulders.

The feeling when he presses inside her with nothing between them for the first time makes them both pause for one long, still moment until she shivers around him, so wet and scorchingly hot that it takes all measure of self-control not to come before they’ve even gotten started. They will definitely have to do it again.

He makes an effort to go slowly because whether this is not really her first time or not, he can’t forget her earlier anxiety. But after less than a minute, Brienne closes her legs around his waist and pulls him closer, hard, huffing, “You know I won’t break, Jaime.”

He does go a bit faster, but only a bit, in a ploy to get her to beg him--but he doesn’t have the patience for that just now, so he only resists the urge for a minute. He sits up and grasps her hips, moving with more force, and more still, until they’ve started inching across the bed.

They come together, Brienne blinking her shining eyes at him with an astonished look, having never felt this moment in quite the same way. Jaime feels a rather caveman-like satisfaction at the thought of his seed filling her, where no one else had been before. It makes him think dreamily of the children they might have someday.

All is quiet for a minute or two until Brienne says, “It’s quite messy like this, isn’t it?”

Which makes him laugh and laugh until Brienne punches his shoulder and complains, “If you were any other man laughing less than five minutes after sex, I’d be beating you over the head right now.”
He kisses her cheek and says, “Let’s take a shower.”

“Another one?” she groans, getting out of the bed. She yelps at the sensation and hurries to the bathroom and is in the shower before he even crosses the threshold. "Gods, this is very wasteful. We’ll have to plan better for next time.”

After he’s stepped in to join her, he prompts, “But it was worth it.”

The flush that had settled across her cheeks since they began hasn’t abated, but he can see the mix of embarrassment and happiness in her eyes, which look especially dazzling when filled with unfettered elation.

“Yes,” she says softly, her words still warm and full under the sound of the shower spray. “It was.” She looks at him with her deep blue eyes for a long moment, such a long time that he carries a sudden hope that she's about to say ‘I love you’, as he’s wanted to say it for some time.

Ultimately, she just gives him a sweet smile. But it’s more than enough to thoroughly warm his heart.

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In the morning, over breakfast, he hesitantly reminds her of his plan to talk to his father. As the night before, she doesn’t give much push-back. She must really be fed up. What will he have to do to protect her from Cersei? And moreover, what can he do, anyway? Like a child, all he can see to do is tattle on her to their father.

He kisses her goodbye, with her hair still wet and spiky from a post-gym shower, her cheeks bright, her eyes so soft, and the words crowd in his mouth, wanting so much to come out. But she’s still not ready, so he keeps his mouth otherwise occupied.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys so much for commenting and sticking with this story!
Negotiations

Chapter Summary

Jaime pleads, Tywin dictates, and Brienne gets surprised.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Negotiations

As a rule, Jaime hates to ask his father for anything, favors least of all, as favors usually carry a personal price. However, for once, they have a common interest: keeping his sister the hells away from Brienne.

His father must have been in the same thought, for his first words are, “If you’ve come to see me about your sister, I already plan to speak with her.”

Jaime, slightly baffled, asks, “How did you know already?”

Tywin gives him a disdainful scoff and says, “It’s called a Google alert, Jaime. What do you pay your assistant for? Unlike your brother, I know it’s not because you’re sleeping with her.”

“I don’t care to keep tabs on internet gossip, Father. Aren’t you the one who always says lions shouldn’t bother with opinions of sheep?”

“Enough sheep can still be a problem. I’m prepared to sue Varys if need be. Or blackmail him. Or bribe him. Whichever seems more fitting to the situation.”

Jaime is strongly reminded of his conversation with Tommen, and hopes his son has the courage to back up his words.
“Anyway, regarding your sister, I really must find her a new husband.”

Jaime snorts at that, saying, “I don’t know, the last one didn’t work out so well.”

With a hard expression, Tywin replies, “Leaving her to her own devices doesn’t seem to be working out so well either. Although, frankly, it’s likely for the best if she’s not smothering Tommen like she did Joffrey. Do you know he was arrested only two months ago? Your sister could found her own company with as much as she throws away on that idiot boy’s legal fees. Robert’s money is hardly infinite, and she doesn’t handle it nearly as well as she believes.”

“But you’ll never leave her out in the cold. Can’t have a Lannister embarrassment, right?” His voice holds some measure of bitterness.

After a cold silence, his father’s ominous reply is simply: “Your sister tests my patience.”

“Doesn’t everyone?”

“Yes,” his father says crisply. “In that vein, what of your brother and the Tyrell girl?”

“All goes well as far as I know,” Jaime shrugs. “But Margaery is a bit of an odd girl.”

“My standards are no longer discriminating with your brother.”

“And she’s rich.”

“That, too.” At the shaking of Jaime’s head, he glares and says, “At least I know she’s not after his money. It’s certainly happened before.” And Jaime remembers every time, as he had been the one left to comfort his brother.

“Anyway,” Tywin continues. “I’ll speak with your sister and make sure she understands the seriousness of the situation. But know that I expect a certain outcome.” Over Jaime’s heavy sigh, “You will marry that girl, and you will give me an heir, preferably male, and preferably two or
“Father, really, you sound like you’re in a skit at Medieval Times.”

“It’s my empire, I’ll decide who it should go to. I assume you’ve discussed these plans.”

“Father, what will you do if we decide not to have any? What if it’s not even possible?”

“Oh, we’ll have all the necessary tests done before it becomes an issue.” Meaning, *I’ll never let you walk down the aisle if I’m not getting what I want out of it.*

“Oh? How do you intend to get her to agree to that?”

“The same way I will convince her of anything else—by appealing to her emotions. She knows you want children, and she will not likely tie you to her if she knows she can’t give them to you.”

“Well, I don’t care.”

“Yes, you do,” his father scoffs. “If you’re overly concerned about the matter, do it now. Send her to one of our doctors, they can do it all in one visit, very discreetly.”

“You mean, without telling her?”

“Tell her or don’t tell her,” his father shrugs. “What will it matter when you’re watching him take his first steps?”

For someone who shows so little emotion, Tywin is remarkably good at manipulating them, and by the satisfied look on his face, he knows he’s just succeeded in manipulating Jaime’s.

After a pause, Tywin continues, “You realize her mother died in childbirth?”
“Yes, I know,” Jaime murmurs.

“I simply want to ensure that something like that doesn’t happen again,” he says, with surprising tenderness.

Or perhaps it shouldn’t be very surprising. Jaime knows better than most how devastated his father had been by the loss of their mother, how it had changed him so drastically, from a fairly demanding and somewhat distant parent into the cold patriarch he has become. He wonders suddenly, for the first time, if he would react the same way. He knows Brienne wouldn’t want that—but would he be able to honor that if he lost her? Would he look at his children and be so reminded of her that his heart would harden? Maybe his father is trying to protect him in his own harsh way.

“I understand,” Jaime replies. “But with how much Brienne values honesty, that would be the worst way to go about it.”

“It’s entirely possible to be too stubborn for your own good, and that girl is a case study. She told me she hasn’t given it much thought, presumably because she never thought to marry and have children. It might be something she hasn’t considered. It’s a frightening thought, but running from frightening thoughts is utterly foolish, especially for such a practical girl.”

“You’re right,” Jaime concedes. “But for anything like that to happen, we need space. So please...speak to Cersei.”

“Yes, yes.” Give my regards to Miss Tarth.” And she had better end up Mrs. Lannister.

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When Jaime has left his office, Tywin takes his reading glasses off and pinches the bridge of his nose. Is there anything more exhausting than dealing with his stubborn, prideful children? And now he will have to deal with the most stubborn and prideful of them all.

Cersei is already in the building, likely terrifying the lowliest employees, something she seems to enjoy entirely too much. Cruelty should be reserved for one’s enemies, not one’s underlings.

Without preamble and without looking up from his work, he says, “You will stay away from your brother, Cersei.”
He can picture her innocent look when she says, “I haven’t—”

“And I include Miss Tarth in that directive.”

She sits with a huff, crossing her arms over her chest. “I’m not even to speak to the girl who may be my—my goodsister?”

“You have no intention to merely speak to the girl and we both know it. Your intention is to harass, intimidate, and confuse her.”

“Has she said something like that to you? Already tattling to daddy?”

“No, because she is too courteous to say so. Do you take me for a fool, daughter? I know you entirely too well to believe you want to welcome her into the family.”

“Why should I?” Cersei spits. “As if she belongs in a family like ours! She’s from some backwards, stupid nowhere island that was practically in the third-world until someone thought to get rich people onto its’ beaches. She’s a dense, boring, ugly girl and it baffles me completely why Jaime would even look twice at her. You should be sitting him down for a lecture on embarrassing us!”

“She is not dense, and she might not be well-versed in quick banter, but she’s not especially boring, either. I much prefer someone who keeps their mouth shut when they have nothing of value to say. Abstaining from pointless small talk about pointless topics is hardly a flaw. As for her looks, I don’t care if she looks like the Crone herself, as long as she stays in line.”

“And you think you can rely on that? Did I tell you she refused an incredibly lucrative job just because she made some stupid vow not to work with Ramsay Bolton?”

Tywin scoffs and says, “The Boltons are low-class and that boy is a menace who can’t even keep his indiscretions off-camera. Besides, people with morals are very predictable, and that makes them easy to manipulate.”

“It makes them foolish.”
“That, too, but once they marry, that can all be mitigated.”

“How can you support this?” she exclaims, slamming a hand on his desk.

He sends her a quelling look and says, “Because I’m capable of looking at the big picture.” He sits back and says, “Honestly, you claim to love your brother so much, one would think you’d be happy he’s no longer alone.”

“He was never alone!” she protests fiercely.

“Your obsession with your brother’s love life is entirely inappropriate and it will stop now. You should be concentrating your efforts on finding a new husband before your children end up being raised by the brother you hate. By the way, if you plan to neglect them entirely, at least hire a nanny to get them to school on time next year, before the teachers begin to comment. They haven’t forgotten Joffrey, you know.”

She clenches her teeth and says, “Joffrey and the school had several misunderstandings —”

“Do you know how much Lannister money has been wasted covering up his idiocy?”

“*My son* —”

“Is an idiot.”

She clenches her teeth again, but doesn’t dare talk back, sensing that he is not in the mood to discuss Joffrey’s havoc for the umpteenth time.

He continues, “Your brother has been a romantic fool his entire life, and now he will finally settle down of his own volition.”

“You certainly never cared for my happiness so much.”
“Cersei, as I’ve told you many times, I believed we wanted the same things for you. I still believe that. It’s hardly my fault that your dragon ran off with the Stark girl and got himself killed and left you with you with the lesser man. I didn’t force you into that marriage.”

“If you had given me the position I wanted in the company, I wouldn’t have had to marry Robert.”

“And I would refuse you all over again. You don’t have a head for business, Cersei, and what business sense you might have is drowned out by your petty grudges.”

“So you think I’m too emotional for business because I’m a woman?”

“I think you’re too emotional for business because you’re too emotional. Now let us drop the subject once again, and I do not intend to revisit it. Stay away from your brother, and stay away from Miss Tarth.”

Cersei has no reply, crossing her arms again and looking out the window with a bitter stare.

Tywin sighs internally, watching his daughter. He does believe that she loves her brother, twisted and sick as that love may be. He had tried to put a stop to it when he sent them both away, but it hadn’t worked. Jaime had come right back to his twin and wasted years hovering around her even as she had her own family.

But her gaze holds more spite than pain. Tywin has often thought that she looks quite a bit like her mother, but he had never seen Joanna’s face hold such scorn.

Joanna...had she lived, things would be much different, he’s sure. But she hadn’t. She had died giving life...to Tyrion.

He understands, logically, that it makes no sense to blame his son, that it’s cruel, that it’s driven a wedge between his children, that it’s not what his wife would have wanted. He can even recognize that all of Tyrion’s disgraceful behavior is likely a result of their hateful relationship, and not some inborn evil. But he’s never been able to feel anything besides grief and disappointment when he looks at his youngest son.

Had Joanna lived to bear more children, perhaps he could have accepted it. If he wasn’t the last thing he had of her.
Still, he can’t deny that his little black sheep has turned out to be far more shrewd than his golden twins, and has become more sensible as he’s gotten older, so they have managed to build a civil working relationship. That might be the best they’ll ever manage.

Things will be different with the next generation of Lannisters. Cersei and Robert had been so fixated on Joffrey, the heir to two great legacies, that they had left Myrcella and Tommen more or less to their own devices, more like a fawning aunt and uncle that they saw once a month than parents. Now that Joffrey is an adult--legally, anyway--she doesn’t seem to have any interest in more active parenting.

So it will fall to the rest of the family to shape her children, and they will grow up clever and level-headed and respectful of their duty to the family legacy.

Ultimately, he suspects she’s more bothered by the fact that Jaime has left her than she is about him being gone. And he had gone to a woman that is perhaps as far from Cersei as he could get. That must feel like a slight.

And he’s happy, something Tywin doesn’t believe his daughter has ever been. It’s his fault, perhaps. He had never been an especially tender father, to any of them, and she’s inherited his always-striving nature, never satisfied with what’s been achieved or what power has been gained, forever wary of the moment is starts to slip away. The difference is that she has a core of entitlement.

Tywin had taken it upon himself at a young age to save the Lannister family from the ridicule his own father had brought on, and he has thought of little and stopped at nearly nothing to restore the legacy. None of his children have carried such a burden.

“What is it that makes you think she’ll be such a great asset to us?”

Though it feels an awful lot like justifying himself, Tywin indulges her. “She’s discreet, dutiful, and tactful. She’s humble, almost to a fault. She’s an heiress, of course, so I know she’s not looking to get at our money. She’s also independently wealthy, because she’s not frivolous with her finances.”

“So if she wasn’t so rich…”

“I still doubt she’d be trying to get at our money. She’s simply not the type.”
“And if she wasn’t so discreet?”

“Enough. The subject is closed.” Cersei nods, as if she’s somehow satisfied. He narrows his eyes. “I mean it. Do not cross me, Cersei.”

With a slight smile, she replies, “I have no such intentions, Father.”

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Shockingly, Cersei sticks to her promise.

A few weeks pass for Brienne and Jaime without much incident, aside from gearing up for the Costume and Fashion Designers Awards in mid-summer. Tommen continues with work, with Jaime visiting him often, and Myrcella starts an internship that has she and Brienne crossing paths on a regular basis. Brienne starts to notice decorations that Myrcella might like for the room she’ll have in their new home, as she’s decided that she and Jaime will move in together at the end of the summer, after the September issues come out.

There is an issue on Tarth, when one of the resorts there is forced to shut down due to health code violations. They don’t have a plan in place for such an event because she had naively assumed that everyone would follow the rules. She feels an agony of guilt over not being there to oversee things, and decides to fly back for a day to argue with the economic council, which has become full of too many outside business people.

The closure of the resort leaves several hundred people without work until it reopens, and leaves local businesses with a sudden drop in customers. Ultimately, she and her father persuade the council to start an emergency fund that will give displaced workers a stipend to cover the loss of wages and the cost of temporary housing for those that lived on-site. Part of it will be funded by the considerable fines the hotel will pay, part from government funds, and part straight out of the Tarth’s pockets. Tywin lectures her on the concept of laissez-faire economics while she insists that they have an obligation to protect Tarth from predatory business practices. It’s not a very pleasant lunch.

One day in late May, she has lunch with the girls. Sansa seems strangely distracted and nervous, but Margaery doesn’t give her much chance to speak, as she’s caught up in a turmoil over Tyrion.

“I have to admit that when we first went out, I was just curious about...well, you know, I mean...it
was kind of a...damn, how do I say this?...a novelty?”

Brienne cringes slightly and says, “I’m not sure novelty is the best word choice.”

“Well, technically, novelty doesn’t have any inherent negative meaning,” Sansa says, looking up from her phone. “But it is a synonym for trinket, which means...goodness...a small ornament or item of jewelry that is of little value, and I swear to you that the dictionary says small, not me.”

Margaery makes a face and says, “Can you two focus on the important thing, which is that I feel sad over a man. That is not supposed to happen! I’m supposed to be Margaery, the cool person!”

“You don’t call yourself that in your head, right?” Sansa says dubiously.

“So what are you sad about?” Brienne asks.

“I can just feel him always holding himself away from me, if that makes sense. He can talk for an hour about practically anything, but whenever I bring up anything even a little personal, he suddenly doesn’t wanna talk. Then he runs away to look at his godsdamn papers. Always with the important papers!”

“Would you wanna talk about being a Lannister?” Sansa scoffs.

“You know how complicated his family is,” Brienne agrees. Margaery, in fact, knows much better than Sansa.

“I know, I know, but he won’t even let me talk about my feelings! And half the time, he seems like he doesn’t even believe I really like him, no matter what I do or say.”

Brienne feels a pang of guilt as she wonders whether that’s how Jaime feels sometimes.

“I have an idea,” Sansa says. “What’s a memory that makes him happy?”

Margaery thinks for a moment and replies, “Probably playing at the beach at Casterly Rock with
Jaime.”

“Hm...was there ever a beach you went to in Highgarden? Like, something on the Sunset Sea?”

“Yeah, there was, actually.”

“Give him some seashells from that beach. It says ‘here’s something about me’, ‘I remember something about you’, and ‘I’m trying to make you happy’.”

Margaery places a hand over her heart and says, “Sansa, you are so smart.” She gasps. “You should be a marriage counselor!”

“Let’s not go that far,” Brienne interjects.

Margaery leaves, but Sansa holds Brienne back, her voice shaking when she asks her to wait.

“You’ve been acting a little strange all day, Sansa. What’s up?”

Sansa takes a deep breath and says, “Sandor asked me to marry him and I said yes,” she blurts out quickly.

“Sansa, that’s great! I’m so happy for you!”

“You’re not mad?”

“Of course not! I’m a little surprised, but I’m not mad at all. I didn’t think Sandor would ever wanna get married, so that really says something about how much he loves you, and I can tell he does.”

Sansa gives a dreamy sigh and says, “He does, and Brienne, I love him so much, it drives me crazy sometimes. Can you believe it? I mean, it’s unbelievable, right? Like, impossible.”
Brienne smiles, thinking of Jaime, and says, “I don’t think anything’s impossible, Sansa.”

***

She breaks the news to Jaime that night, saying, “She says they’ll have it at Winterfell, and there’ll be two ceremonies, one in the Godswood and one in the sept. Have you ever been to a Godswood?”

“Only the one at the Red Keep. Fucking creepy, if I’m being honest.”

Brienne snickers and says, “Yes, they’re definitely a little jarring at first, but I rather like the Northern-style weddings. It’s kind of romantic, how it can be just the two of you because you’re in the presence of the Old Gods themselves. With the snow falling...well, at Winterfell, not in King’s Landing.”

“Mm...a Northern wedding...how is Catelyn taking it?”

“Sansa went kind of pale when I asked, so I didn’t push too much.”

“Is she still calling you every week to tell you to dump me?”

“Not every week. I think she’s thrown in the towel. I’m too stubborn.”

“Good thing for me,” he smiles.

***

Her mind wanders the next day while she’s on a break from set. It’s too nice a day to sit in the tent with the scent of makeup and leather and hairspray, so she meanders away, her mind stuck, as usual, on Jaime.

She muses that every bit of happiness she’s had has been hard-won. It required some form of work or drudgery or discomfort, whether it was toiling at low-wage jobs, working as a lowly production assistant on early shoots, or even just accepting overtures of friendship. It feels, at times, like Jaime
has come too easily to her. For all that they’ve been through and all that she knows, she’s shocked herself with how quickly she’s accepted it. Well, relatively quickly.

When he says she’s beautiful, she half-believes him. When he says she’s funny, she doesn’t assume he’s laughing at her. When he makes his ridiculous comments about where to have their wedding or what to name their future children, she knows he’s not kidding, she can believe he really wants that, that every moment of this is as real to him as it is to her.

It feels too good to be true.

It is.

Because while she’s sitting in the park, twirling a red daisy in her fingers and smiling to herself, she hears a chilling voice behind her.

“Brienne the Beauty...what a coincidence.”

Chapter End Notes

You knew this drama had to come sometime.

Hope no one was bothered by the new POV! Tywin interests me.
A Requiem For A Rose

Chapter Summary

“Brienne the Beauty...what a coincidence.”

Chapter Notes

Offensive language here because jerks are jerks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Requiem For A Rose

Ronnet Connington has the same shock of red hair, the same bulky frame, and the exact cruel same sneer of a smile. As he walks around the side of the park bench, the daisy falls from her fingers as she wonders whether this is a dream...no, she tells herself frantically--this must be a dream, please, it must be …

“Long time, no see, Tarth,” Connington says, sitting on the other end of the bench. “Can’t say hello?”

But as in her dreams, she can’t speak.

Connington doesn’t seem too concerned, as he just sits back and rakes his eyes over her with a grimace. “Can’t say you look any worse than you did in college, but that’s not saying much. I hear you’re rich now, so I guess some poor bitch gets paid to try to make you look good. Hope you pay her a lot!” He cracks himself up.

The sound of his laugh takes her back in time with a terrible quickness, to Hyle Hunt’s bed with her jeans unzipped and her face burning with humiliation when she had fled his room to that awful
sound. Her stomach lurches and her lips stay stuck together.

“Gods,” Connington snorts. “Can you even talk? I’d think you were retarded if I didn’t know better. You’re not quite that stupid. Does your boyfriend—” He says the word with complete incredulity. “—like it best when you’re quiet? I mean, you’re fucking boring enough. I saw a picture of him—I don’t know what the hells you blackmailed him with, but it must have been good!

“Or are you his beard? That’s what I’m betting on,” he smirks. “Although, you’d think if he wanted to get a beard, he’d get someone who actually looks like a woman. You already look like a godsdamn man, I don’t get why you go to the gym and try to finish the job. It’s bizarre. Are you a dyke? Because I always thought so, and I still do, even though you were definitely about to give that pussy up to Hunt.

“Then again, we never found out for sure if you even have one!” he cackles. “Guess if I could have waited a few more minutes, I could have seen for myself, but I couldn’t hold back, it was just too fucking funny.” He chuckles and adds, “The pot got pretty big, too. Impossible task, and all.”

Brienne stands up abruptly, feeling an unconquerable need to flee. Connington jumps up as well, saying, “Fucking finally! I thought you might have gone deaf since I last saw you running out of Hunt’s room.” He follows her down the sidewalk, even though he has to scurry rather quickly to keep up. “Well, I guess the last time I saw you was when you were running out of KLU.”

That terrible afternoon when she had gone to her advisor’s office to officially withdraw from all her major courses. She had already been dreading it because the advisor in question had obviously decided it was her own fault, both for believing a man could want her and for going into a man’s field.

She had thought she had planned it very carefully, but she still somehow managed to cross paths with them. Connington’s face had lit up with cruel delight, while Hyle Hunt just looked very slightly guilty and somewhat panicked, as if Brienne might want to tell everyone about the fifteen minutes he had spent in between her thighs, sticky with the last remnants of her innocence.

She had indeed fled, literally running out of the science building. She had ducked into an empty classroom with her heart pounding, cursing herself for hiding from them, these petty boys, but painfully unable to face them. By the time she made it to her advisor’s office, the dignified meeting she had envisioned was utterly beyond her, and she handed him her withdrawal form with a trembling hand and barely-suppressed tears.

They had won. They had driven her out. Even if it was a blessing in disguise, they won.
She forces herself to slow down and turns on him abruptly. She’s briefly satisfied to see him jump—he obviously remembers the time she broke his nose. Unfortunately, it was set well enough that you could hardly tell. How unfair.

“This doesn’t feel like a coincidence. How did you find me?” she demands, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Ahh, one could say we have a mutual friend. Though I’m not sure she thinks too highly of you,” he snickers.

Cersei. Gods. How in the world did she even manage to orchestrate such a thing? A mutual friend? From the tone of his voice and the disgusting leer he gives her, he clearly thinks they might be more than friends. Would Cersei really touch Connington just to get to her? The thought makes her want to be sick for multiple reasons.

Before she can reply, Connington is back on his game, saying, “So really, are you his beard? Is he blind? How does he do it? Does he only fuck you from behind? I mean, that’s still not great, but you know what Hunt used to say, all women look beautiful in the dark.”

Her stomach turns and her ears buzz and she thinks she really will be sick. She closes her eyes—but that’s not what happens.

What happens instead is that her fist, which has been clenched since she heard his voice, hits his jaw with a very audible crack.

Then, she runs. Again.

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Brienne didn’t realize how far she had wandered from the set until she’s sprinting back, her face red with a mix of exertion and unshakable humiliation. She tries to cast off the patina of mortification that seems to have settled over her, but she must not succeed given Pod’s anxious look and the strange tension that pervades the set.
She finds herself thinking shockingly uncharitable thoughts about the models, who she thought she had learned a long time ago not to envy, not to resent, not to hate for their willowy frames and tiny noses and unspotted skin. Connington’s words echo in her head relentlessly.

She rushes through the last shots with a disturbing sloppiness that she knows she will regret later. If there’s one thing she’s always been able to pride herself on, it’s how seriously she takes her work and how carefully she applies herself to any task she undertakes. The calm that she’s learned to maintain under pressure, no matter how great. At times, it’s been her only defense. And now, even it has failed her.

Pod attempts to intercept her when they’re done, but she runs away again, not stopping to thank anyone for their hard work as she usually does, but the dull ache of her guilt feels almost imperceptible on top of everything else.

She doesn’t sprint this time, merely hurries down sidewalks and across streets with a mindless determination to outrun her thoughts. But they don’t stop, as every look from every stranger seems full of disgust, every low voice seems to say gods, look at that poor, hideous woman, until her skin crawls and her eyes swim and her breath comes too fast, until she has to pause in a patch of sunlight and listen to her heart race.

Why is it like this? It’s not supposed to be like this anymore. She feels caught between a frightening turmoil of emotions and a blankness that’s almost more frightening, the kind of empty and unreal feeling she had when she laid under Hyle Hunt, silently crying and wondering, who did I think I was, leaving my only home to live among these liars? Lying with a man she despised who thought her a joke felt more honest than any of his sweet words and gifts had. Those had been a mere illusion that sparkled in the lights of this mirage of a city.

When she wipes her tears away, she sees a welcome sight up ahead: a sept. The Seven aside, it will be quiet and dim inside.

It’s also blessedly empty and she takes a moment to collapse in one of the pews until her head stops spinning. Then she goes forward to the altars only to realize she doesn’t know which to choose.

The Father, for her own, who deserved better than to be left with her, a gawky, unloveable daughter who may never even carry on the Tarth name? She starts to move forward, but then she thinks of all the justice the Father has failed to execute.

The Mother, then, for her own, whose face she can’t even remember? Her mother hadn’t been an especially beautiful woman--and how cruel it would be if she had been--but Brienne wonders if even
she would have looked at her daughter with distaste. Maybe her sisters, had they lived, would have been pretty and proper and embarrassed by their revolting sister. It’s been a secret fear of hers for a long while, but the thought has never gripped her so tightly.

The strength of the Warrior has abandoned her.

She settles on the ugly, old Crone.

She lights a candle and holds her fingers over the fire for a moment, letting the sting of a burn send a wave of cleansing pain through her.

She prays for understanding, for the ability to reconcile her life with her expectations, her desires with what she deserves, what she’s been told with what she feels. Ms. Roelle had told her every compliment she received would be a lie and she would only ever need to look in the mirror to see it so. Does she know so many liars? Has she felt so many false touches? Can lies become truth if you believe in them enough?

By the time she’s finished, her knees ache and her cheeks are tacky with dried tears, yet she has a renewed sense of purpose. She had moved to the Warrior and prayed for strength. The strength to look in the mirror.

She catches a taxi and goes home. She had turned her phone off the first time it rang in the sept, and now she finds a dozen messages awaiting her. She ignores them all and sends one straight-away to Jaime, telling him to come over as soon as he can.

She catches a glimpse of her reflection in the elevator and thinks, It’s not possible that someone could look at me and find me beautiful. It’s not possible. This must be the ugliest she has ever looked, all puffy and red and drained, with swollen lips and muddy freckles. Still, it suits her purposes. She rubs her sore knuckles and gives herself a grim smile.

It’s not possible.

Chapter End Notes

You know this had to happen!
Sorry this chapter is so short! Having a hard time choosing how to structure the remaining sections.

Next chapter is challenging me, but I will try to show you an eloquent and more prolific image in the future! Seamscribe fighting!
Jaime receives two very alarming phone calls in short succession.

First, Podrick Payne calls in a near panic, saying that Brienne had been acting strangely and had subsequently disappeared.

“What do you mean by acting strangely, and what do you mean by disappeared?”

“She seemed upset. More upset than I’ve ever seen her. But I didn’t get a chance to ask why because she left as soon as the shoot was over. She always stays and thanks everyone and helps pack up and stuff, but she didn’t say bye to anyone—not even me! She didn’t even stop to ask what the rest of her schedule was, and she left her camera behind. She never leaves her camera with me!”

Jaime takes a deep breath and says, “I’m assuming you tried calling her?”

“Her phone’s not on. I went to her apartment and she’s not there. I didn’t know what to do, so I came back to the park, but she’s not here,” Pod says helplessly.

“Okay...okay, Pod, why don’t you just go on home?”
“But I have to help you find her! I should have run after her,” he frets.

“She’s much faster than you, Pod.”

“You’re right,” Pod says miserably.

“I’m sure she’s fine,” Jaime says, though he knows no such thing and his dread is growing by the minute. “You know Brienne can take care of herself.”

“You didn’t see how upset she was...”

“Pod, go home. You wandering the city isn’t going to do any good. I’ll call you when I see her, all right?”

Jaime tries calling her himself a few times and gets no better results than Pod. He checks with Sansa Stark. Pod has already called her, so she’s growing concerned, as well. They both agree that it’s not like Brienne to disappear without telling anyone, but Sansa doesn’t want to tell the melodramatic Margaery or the over-protective Renly. Instead, they make nervous assurances to each other that she’s fine and they’re worrying over nothing.

Jaime is debating leaving work and going to her apartment, in case Pod missed her, when he gets the second call.

Loras Tyrell asks him if he happens to know anything about Brienne punching a man in a public park.

“Punching a…? Who?”

“That’s precisely what I’d like to know, Jaime!”

“What did he do to her?” Jaime growls, trying to imagine what someone could have done to earn a punch from Brienne.
“I have no idea! And I can’t get ahold of her, either. Like, what do we even pay her assistant for? We’re just lucky Varys was willing to hold off on the story. Apparently, he likes you two as a couple.”

“Do you know where she could be?”

“No. The last time she disappeared, it had something to do with you, Lannister, so if there’s something you’re not telling me, you better spit it out.”

“I have no idea, Loras.”

Loras sighs and says, “Well...I can’t imagine Brienne punching someone for no reason. Whatever happened must have really upset her, so...just be careful with her when you find her.”

“Why, Loras, I had no idea you cared.”

“Of course I care, you asshole,” Loras snaps. “I give Brienne a lot of shit, but she’s like a sister to me. I mean, a really weird, obviously adopted sister, but a sister, nonetheless.”

“I’ll just go to her apartment and wait for her. She has to come home sometime, right?”

“If she hasn’t fled the continent again, yes.”

Jaime is packing his things to go when he gets a short, plain message from Brienne telling him to come over as soon as he can. It’s not a heartening tone, but at least he knows that she’s safe.

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He can see that something is wrong as soon as she opens the door. Her hair is a mess, her face is drawn, and her eyes are red and somehow manic and blank at the same time.

“Sweetheart, what’s wrong? You don’t look so good.”
She flinches, minutely, and then seems to school her features, something he hasn’t seen her do in some time, not with him. She gives him a slight smile.

“I know,” she replies.

She steps back to let him in and wraps her arms around herself. She doesn’t seem in any rush to explain, so he says, “Where have you been all day? I called you, Loras called you, Sansa called you…Pod called in an absolute panic.”

“Sorry,” she says, with a bizarre lack of concern. Normally, she’d be spilling over with apologies for worrying anyone.

“He said you even left your camera behind.”

“Huh.”

“Okay...did it have anything to do with the man you punched in the park?”

She blinks and starts to speak before her mouth snaps shut. “I’d rather not talk about it.”

“Okay...well, can I have a hug or something? I was really worried about you.”

“You don’t need to worry about me,” she says, making no moves towards him.

“Really? Because you’re acting really weird.” She doesn’t reply, merely giving him an unreadable look. Jaime sighs and tries awkwardly to put his arms around her. “Are you upset with me?” He reaches up and tucks a ragged strand of hair behind her ear. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

She starts to speak, stops herself again. Suddenly, she lets her arms down and leans into his embrace, pressing her face against his chest. She takes a deep breath and exhales, but her body remains tense, even after several more breaths while Jaime rubs her back and pleads again for her to tell him what’s wrong.
Finally, she leans back and says, “Do you want to have sex with me?”

She asks in an odd, flat voice, and something about the wording seems very strange. Before he can reply, she leans in and kisses him hard and without finesse, almost like she’s angry about it.

Jaime pulls away and says, “Are you sure you wouldn’t rather work out or something?” It’s not unusual for her to work out when she’s stressed or unhappy, but for some reason, the suggestion makes her laugh, sharply. “Or we could box. Perhaps you’ll feel better if you punch me,” he tries to joke.

“I’m not upset with you,” she says, annoyed. “It’s...not about you.”

“So what is it about?”

She pulls away altogether and crosses her arms over her chest again, snapping, “Look, do you or don’t you?”

Truthfully, he’s not sure, and it seems like a trick question, so he hesitantly replies, “If that’s what you want…”

“It is,” she says, taking his hand and pulling him towards the bedroom.

Once there, she leaves the lights off and begins to briskly undress him, completely ignoring his suggestion that they stop and talk a bit first. “I don’t wanna talk,” she replies, not looking at him. She tugs his shirt off and sets to work on his pants.

“Okay,” he says, catching her hands. “But slow down. What’s the rush?” He kisses her as he backs her up towards the bed and urges her to sit down, which she does, after a hesitation. He kneels in front of her and kisses her until her lips finally yield against his. He settles into a slow rhythm that she doesn’t challenge, but doesn’t meet either. She simply allows him to lead her.

She’s strangely passive, too, while he undresses her. Once her clothes hit the floor, however, she sits up suddenly and says, “Wait. Don’t.” She meets his eyes for a brief moment before she looks away, hugging herself again. “Don’t...touch me.”
“You want me to fuck you but not touch you? That’ll be a neat trick, how’s it done?” Jaime scoffs.

“Just trade places with me, okay?” she huffs, shoving him back.

He finishes undressing and sits on the bed with an equal huff. “Brienne, I’ll ask you again what’s the--oh…”

She takes him into her mouth almost roughly, totally unlike the gentle touch she usually has. As much as she’d laugh at being called sensual--she’d blush just hearing the word--it’s the best term he can think of for the unhurried, exploratory way she touches him when she’s too focused to be self-conscious.

This is not that touch, and no amount of stroking her hair can gentle her. But...she’s determined, so it works well enough.

Still, he feels compelled to say, “Are you sure you--”

“Don’t ask me again,” she says tersely, already climbing on top of him.

It’s not the easy slide it usually is and she makes a face of some discomfort that makes him almost ask again anyway, but the tension in her body finally releases somewhat when she settles on top of him, her breath calming. She tips her head back with a sigh and Jaime finally feels like she’s really here with him.

She whispers to him to close his eyes.

He sits up and wraps his arms around her, kissing across the expanse of her collarbone. “Look at me first,” he says. Her eyes meet his and soften to the sweetest azure. He starts to speak, but she puts a finger to his lips. She kisses him briefly, and then repeats her command to close his eyes.

They fall into an easy tempo. He kisses her, tangles his fingers in her already-tangled hair. It’s nice. It’s good.
Until she suddenly sits up, her eyes back to a pretty blue void, and says, “Tell me I’m ugly.”

Jaime is so shocked that he drops his arms and leans back on the bed. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me,” she says coldly.

“I’m certain I didn’t hear you right, darling.”

“Tell me I’m ugly,” she says, with careful diction.

“Why would I do that?” he asks, baffled.

“You can’t even say, can you?” she sneers.

“I don’t want to say it!”

“You know it’s the truth, Jaime.”

“I know no such thing.” He puts his hands on her shoulders and urges her up. “And we’re not having this talk in the middle of fucking.” She scowls and climbs off of him with a grimace, grabbing the sheet from the bed and yanking it up to cover herself. “You’re being crazy right now, Brienne,” Jaime says, shaking his head.

“Oh, no,” she says softly. “Oh, no.” Then, louder, “No, Jaime, I’ve been fucking crazy, now I’m finally being sane.”

“Wench, just say what you mean, I’m not interested in fucking riddles right now.”

“Say it, Jaime,” she all but shouts.

“No!” he yells back. “No! I’m not saying it, and I never will! Why would you ask something like
that from me?” He puts his head in his hands. “I don’t understand why you’re being like this.”

Her only response is to say, again, “You know it’s the truth, Jaime.”

“Stop saying that! I’ve never said anything like that!”

“But you thought it when you first saw me. Admit it.”

“The first thing I thought when I saw you was that you were really tall, okay? Did I think, wow, that’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen? No. But Brienne,” he says, trying to take her hand. She steps away from him, clutching the sheet tighter to her chest. “I do think you’re beautiful.”

“You’re a liar,” she says bitterly.

“Look me in the eyes and tell me I’m lying, wench.” When she doesn’t, Jaime sighs and says, “Do I think you’re beautiful the way Sansa Stark is, or the way Margaery is, or the way my sick sister is? No.” He pushes past the way they both flinch when he mentions his sister. “But don’t tell me I’m a liar just because you don’t want to hear it.”

“You don’t have to lie,” she insists, rubbing her cheeks roughly. “You can just admit that you’re only with me because—because—”

“Because what? Because what, Brienne? Because you’re easy?” She looks away. “I’m with you because I like you. I think you’re kind and smart, and yes, beautiful. How many fucking times do I have to tell you that before you believe me?”

“I’ll never believe you,” she screams. “I’ll never believe you, because it’s not true!”

“You wanna know the truth?” Jaime yells. He comes closer and grabs her by the shoulders, shaking her roughly. “I love you, you crazy wench!” He lets out a breath and shakes her again. “I love you. Is that a truth you’re willing to hear?”

“You’re a liar,” she says again with a hoarse sob, not looking at him.
“I love you, and don’t call me a liar again,” he snaps.

But she does and then she pushes him and he grabs her arms and she fights against him, dropping the sheet from her chest, and then they’re wrestling, naked, and it’s so absurd that he could laugh, but so disturbing that he can’t.

“Stop saying it,” she sobs, giving him a weak push. “Just tell me the truth.” He lets her go and she scrambles back to the bed, pulling the blanket up to cover herself once more.

Jaime gives a tired sigh and runs his hands through his hair, saying, “What do you wanna hear, Brienne? What? That you have too many freckles? That your nose is crooked? What’s the fucking point? You can look in the mirror.”

Which, for whatever reason, is the entirely wrong thing to say.

The noise she makes when she cries now is frightening, unrestrained and sharp and full of despair. Her sobs are rough, brutal things that make her whole body shake.

But whatever insanity has taken her finally seems to break at the same time she does, as she finally lets him close enough to put his arms around her.

As long as he can hold her, he can fix this.

Finally, she pulls away enough to look at him, exhaustion writ across her face like bold print. “Jaime,” she whispers, her lips trembling. “Jaime.”

“What is it, sweetheart?” he asks, reaching up to wipe away the last of her tears.

“I need you,” she says, so miserably that it makes his heart ache.

“You have me,” he replies softly. “I’ll tell you as many times as I have to.”
“What if it’s never enough?”

He doesn’t have an answer for that.

“Then I’ll have to show you,” he says after a moment.

“You’ll give up,” she challenges weakly. “You’ll decide I’m not worth it.”

“Never,” Jaime answers, with a confidence that is stunning even to himself.

She simply looks at him for long, long moments before sighing and closing her eyes, laying her head on his lap. “I’m so tired, Jaime.”

“Go to sleep, wench. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

He half expects her to call him a liar again, but she nods and lays down and lets him arrange the sheets and blanket over her without comment, falling asleep almost immediately.

Jaime sighs and texts everyone to let them know he found her and she’s having a nap, ignoring all other inquiries, including Loras’ ‘BUT WHO TF DID SHE PUNCH JAIME WHO WHO WHO’. He realizes he still doesn’t know. He doesn’t know anything, actually, except that he won’t be getting any sleep anytime soon.

Still, he gets into the bed with her. She stirs only enough to turn into his arms.

As long as I can hold her...

Chapter End Notes

So I decided to restructure things again, so please note the change in chapter numbers. I endeavor to have it all wrapped up before the new year.

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!
Look Back, Look Ahead

Chapter Summary

“So does that mean you believe me now?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Look Back, Look Ahead

Brienne wakes in the bed, alone.

She can tell by the slant of the light through the blinds that she’s been asleep for a couple of hours. Her head pounds like she has a hangover, except that there was no fun part to justify it. She faintly remembers Jaime laying next to her, but the spot beside her in the bed is cool.

Still, she’s no longer unglued enough to think he’s abandoned her, and a brief moment of listening is enough to hear the TV on in the living room. She stares up at the ceiling and reluctantly recalls the events of the day.

It seems like it was a long time ago that she was twirling daisies in the park like a silly girl. She had woken up in Jaime’s arms, worked out with him, eaten breakfast with him, gone to work, and had her world broken apart in very short order. Fucking Ron Connington. Ron fucking Connington. That fuck, Ron Connington.

But Ron Connington wasn’t the one that ran away from her friends like a crazy person and screamed at her boyfriend that he was liar when he said he loved her.

Gods. Her stomach twists with guilt. She can’t imagine how much courage it took for him to say
it, probably to only the second person in his life, and she had called him a liar, instantly, without a thought. In a more rational state, she could have believed him. But she hadn’t even tried. It was like she regressed back to a sad teenager with just a few cruel words. She’s supposed to be smarter than that. Stronger than that.

She shakes her head at herself. She let him win.

_No...no...whether he wins depends on what she does now._

She gets out of the bed and gets dressed before going to the living room. There’s an unfamiliar discomfort between her legs and she remembers the way she had practically bullied him into sex. She feels another wave of guilt. Something else to apologize for.

She hovers in the doorway to gather her thoughts as well as she can, until Jaime suddenly mutes the TV and says, “I know you’re there, sweetheart.”

Blushing, she walks to the couch and sits next to him. He looks tired.

“Did you think I’d be gone?” he asks, somewhat coolly.

Looking down, Brienne presses her lips together and says, “No, I didn’t think you’d be gone.” She meets his eyes after a moment. “I’m sorry,” she blurts out.

“For what, in particular?” he asks dryly.

“For making you worry...and for...calling you a liar...so many times...and for...asking you for...something like that...at a time like that...I feel...ashamed.” She’s horrified to find tears springing to her eyes.

“Oh, just come here already,” Jaime says, holding his arms out. She moves gratefully into them, pressing her cheek to his chest. “You really scared me,” he says, tightening his hold.

“It was scary to me, too,” she admits quietly. “I don’t know...well...I do know what happened…”
“Finally ready to enlighten me?”

“I...saw someone. Someone I knew from college.”

He knows instantly. “Which one?”

“The worst one. Not that one, but the worst one.”

“Did you break his nose?”

“For the second time.”

“That’s my girl,” he says with a small smile.

“There’s something else, though. It seemed like he knew I’d be there. I asked him how and he said we had a mutual acquaintance.” Jaime takes a sharp breath. “So it must be Cersei, but she’s awfully clever because she didn’t technically do anything. She just fed the right words to the right ears. I don’t know how she found him…”

Her stomach turns at the thought of Connington and Cersei reveling in her humiliation, six years after the fact.

“So...I left it to your father last time, but hiding behind him isn’t going to make a difference. She’ll just...slither her way around him somehow. I don’t know what I’ll do, but I have to show her that she can’t break me.”

“I should be able to handle this,” Jaime says angrily. “I should be able to protect you, and I haven’t done shit.”

“I think this is going to have to be between me and her, Jaime. Just...be there when I need you, like you were tonight.” Because I might not always win.
He takes her hand and kisses her bruised knuckles. “I’ll always be there, Brienne. I love you.”

It’s as strange to hear as it was the first time! She presses her face to his chest again and says, “I’m sorry I called you a liar.”

“So does that mean you believe me now?”

Brienne chews her lip for a moment before replying, “I believe that you meant it.”

“Because I’ll say it again if you need me to.”

Hesitantly, she asks, “Shouldn’t I be the one to say it this time?” His reply is to tilt her chin up and look at her deeply enough that she feels warmth bloom in her chest. It fights with the ice that settles in her gut when she says, “Jaime, I love you.”

“Say it again.”

“Jaime, I love you.”

“I love you, too.” He kisses her softly, then deeply, until she’s far past dizzy and feels impossibly light, with only his fingers tracing the freckles on her cheeks to ground her.

“But Jaime…” she says eventually.

“But?”

“Can I tell you something honestly?”

“I hope you will.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way…”
“Spit it out, wench.”

“The way you make me feel...well...no...the way I... need you...I don’t know...if I like it. It scares me.” This is easier said with her face tucked against his shoulder. “I’ve never needed anyone...except maybe my brother, I suppose, when I was little. Then I got through his death by myself. I mean, in a totally unhealthy way where I shut everyone out, but I got through it. I got through everything by myself. Even my friends, I love them, but I wouldn’t say that I need them. I didn’t go to them today...I mean, I’ve never even told them about Hunt and his bet.”

“But Brienne, you wouldn’t let me comfort you at all.”

“I didn’t believe...that I deserved it? Or...that I could trust it? I don’t know,” she sighs.

“Ahh, sweetheart...I wish I could undo all that pain.”

She shakes her head quickly, saying, “I wouldn’t be who I am if all those things hadn’t happened. I mean...I have to wonder sometimes what’s so damn great about being me that I’m so attached to it, but...you know, I never thought therapy was something I could use, because I knew exactly what my problems were, I was ugly and most of my family was dead, and talking about it couldn’t fix any of that. But I thought the same thing when Galladon died, that talking about it couldn’t help, and I think I might have been wrong. What do you think?”

“Gods, I’m the last person to ask. If you need therapy, I probably need it twice as much.”

“Well, maybe I should think about it. In the meantime, I’ll just try to hold onto the deeply therapeutic memory of breaking Connington’s nose. But how did Loras know? Oh no, someone took a picture, didn’t they?”

“Well, wench, it’s not everyday you see a six foot tall woman punch a man and run away. Not even In King’s Landing. Apparently, Varys is keeping it under wraps.”

“Oh gosh, just what I always wanted, being in debt to the Spider. Loras is gonna kill me.”

“Nah, he values his cute little nose too much.” That makes her laugh, for the first time all day. He
kisses the top of her head and says, “You know, I’ve been waiting to tell you I love you for awhile.”

Brienne looks up at him and whispers, “So say it again.”

Later, after they’ve gotten into bed for the second time, she says, “Since when do you call me ‘sweetheart’, anyway?”

“Since today. I suppose you like it better than ‘wench’?”

“I don’t know. ‘Wench’ is quite special, isn’t it?”

“So you finally admit that you love it,” he says smugly.

“I’ll never admit that.”

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The next morning over breakfast, she says, “Hey, I have a great idea. Let’s move in together.”

“You have a great idea?” Jaime says in disbelief. “I had that idea ages ago, wench. I suppose you’ll be saying marriage was your great idea at our wedding, too,” he scoffs.

“I might let you have that one,” she says loftily.

“Well, I already have some options lined up.”

“Because of course you already started looking.”

“Well, I knew it was only a matter of time, wench.”
“Don’t be smug.”

“Why the hells not?”

“I’m not sure I enjoy proving you right.”

“What’s right for me is right for you, isn’t it?”

Brienne blushes and agrees on that point, but still adds, “And don’t call me ‘darling’.”

“Alright, sweetheart, but when we’re married, I get unlimited pet name privileges.”

“\textit{You} will remain pest into our golden years.”

“Mm, you know, I think you’ll actually say yes when I propose in approximately four months. Unless you’re ready to forget about that stupid six month rule.”

Brienne decides it might be best not to mention that she had already decided to move in with him, and that she has just significantly advanced that timeline.

“We need four bedrooms,” she says. “And gym access.”

“And a hot tub,” he says suggestively.

“And a hot tub.”

Chapter End Notes

I rushed. Perhaps it shows. I wanted to provide a happy chapter for the holiday. Yet more rearranging means there will be a final chapter and an epilogue, after Christmas.

I know readers are frustrated that Jaime’s not doing anything to protect Brienne from
Cersei, but I'm not sure what he could do that isn't violent. She deserves a slap, but I wouldn't feel right. Canonically, he protects Brienne by sending her away...which may be a factor in the next installment (yes, I plan on another installment!)

So if anyone will beat up Cersei, it will be Brienne! Will she?! Her ~~~retaliation will be revealed soon.

Hope this chapter isn't too boring or rambling. Feelings, nothing more than feelings.
“Ready to go home, darling?”

“Yes, Jaime, I am ready to go home, and I told you not to call me that.”

It had taken them only twelve days to settle on an apartment. It might have been foolish to rush into such a costly decision, but Brienne was more concerned with getting it done before something else went wrong. With Lannister money at his fingertips, Jaime had been able to have someone else do all the leg work of finding the right place, and had been able to put a stop to any potential haggling over the price by paying sticker price.

Tywin was pissed, of course, that they were moving in together before getting married. Brienne had sighed and explained for the dozenth time that they don’t live in the 1850s.

“ Couples live together before they get married all the time. It just makes sense. What if you got married and then realized you hated living together?”
“Then you buy a second house.” Saying *duh* was beneath Tywin Lannister, but it was heavily implied.

They had done a tour once, but today, the paperwork is done and they’re using their new keys for the first time. Going *home*.

They have the same car and the same driver as they did on their first date. The driver, Bronn, is rather lecherous, as if can sense everything going on in the backseat, behind the partition.

By some unspoken agreement, they’ve spent the past few nights apart, like some kind of absurd courtship ritual. It struck her again, powerfully, how strange it feels not to fall asleep next to him and wake up next to him every night and day even though they’ve only been doing it for two-odd months. What’s so short on paper feels much longer in practice. There’s no furniture in the apartment yet, but they will definitely be sleeping together tonight, even if it’s on a pile of blankets.

He had also become annoyingly careful with her, as chivalrous as a knight, as if she were a piece of glass that could break and cut him under too much pressure. She had been absurdly pleased when, on one of the only two times they’ve had sex since the day she saw Connington, he had complained that they should turn the lights on, claiming he wanted to see his ‘ugly girlfriend with the loveliest cunt in Westeros’. She hadn’t *let* him turn the lights on, but some pressure inside her had eased with the realization that her meltdown hadn’t changed their relationship permanently.

“I slept horribly without you, you know,” Jaime says when they’ve settled in the backseat.

“I didn’t sleep very well, either,” she admits.

Jaime puts a hand on her knee. “I had to take extreme measures,” he murmurs, leaning in to her.

Her face warming, she says, “Extreme measures...”

“Yes, sweetheart, extreme measures...in the shower...every night.” He takes a breath and says, “You smell like lemons. Did you know that?” He presses a kiss behind her ear and bites. “You left your green sweater at my house. It smells like lemons. I slept with it. Is that creepy?”
“I don’t know. Maybe a little. But you left your green t-shirt at my house and it smells like… *mmm* ...I don’t know what, something expensive, I don’t know, it just smells like you.”

He uses his grip on her knee to turn her legs towards him and moves his hand up to squeeze her thigh, making her close her eyes for a moment.

“And did it make you think of me?” he murmurs.

“Everything made me think of you,” she says, before she can stop herself.

“Ahh…I’m glad the feeling’s mutual.” He breathes into her ear in a way that always makes her shudder. “I thought about calling you. Would you have liked that? It was fun that time we had phone sex while you were on Tarth. Not as much fun as the real thing, but gods, you have a sexy voice. I love those breathless little noises you make when you’re about to come especially hard.”

Brienne bites her lip and says, “We shouldn’t do this here, Jaime.”

“Do what, darling? We’re just talking. Just last week, you let me play with your nipples back here.”

“Yeah, and you’ll obviously never let me forget it.”

“Like you want to! If we had gone one more mile, I’m ninety percent sure I could have made you come.”

“Jaime!”

“Mm, yes, that’s exactly what you would have said.”

She punches his arm. “Watch yourself, pest. I burned off all *my* frustration in the gym.”

“*Just* in the gym? No *extreme measures* ?”
flushing, she’s about to confess that even two hours in the gym hadn’t always prevented the ache of missing him once she got into bed, the extra time spent trying to recreate the smooth, sweet burn of him inside her, the half-remembered meetings, the one somewhat shameful trip to the bathroom. But she’s saved—or thwarted—by their arrival.

“You can tell me inside,” Jaime whispers into her ear.

She must be bright red because Bronn smirks. Of course he does. She glares at him and walks determinedly to the door of the building. Thankfully, they leave him at the curb.

In the elevator on the way to the twelfth floor, Jaime leans back against the wall. “Did you wear those shoes just for me, wench?” he asks, eyeing her espadrilles, blue suede and a cork wedge with a matching blue ribbon that ties around her ankles. She had worn them for him, in fact. She may not understand his obsession with her feet, but she’s perfectly willing to indulge it.

Still, all she will give him is a maybe.

“Maybe,” he scoffs. “You only wear heels on two occasions, when you don’t think you can get out of it, and when you’re trying to turn me on. Don’t deny it,” he says, holding a hand up to cut off her cursory protest. “And with a skirt, no less? You must have really missed me,” he smirks. He scrutinizes her gray pencil skirt and adds, “But that particular skirt’s not long for this world, wench, unless you can get out of it quickly. Couldn’t you have worn something a bit looser?” he asks, reaching forward and playing with the hem, which is a few inches higher than it would be on someone with average height.

Brienne slaps his hand away and says, “I never said I wore it for you.”

“Liar. You know it makes your ass look amazing.” He gives a low chuckle from behind her, trailing his fingers under the hem. “I bet you’re wearing silk panties, too, aren’t you?”

She shifts her weight, very aware of the ten or so inches between his fingers and her, yes, silk panties, as well as the way it makes her legs and her ass move under the snug skirt.

She’s rewarded with a groan as Jaime pushes off the wall and steps up close behind her.

“You are,” he murmurs over her shoulder, sounding pleased. “And I bet if I slid my hands under this
lovely skirt, they’d be all wet, wouldn’t they?”

He takes a deep breath at her violent shiver and the feel of it breezing across the back of her neck when he exhales is almost enough to make her moan.

“But regrettably, I won’t,” he sighs. “Because there are cameras in here and I know that you’d have a panic attack when you remembered that later. Left corner, no audio,” he says. With that information, he takes her right hand and pulls it back against his cock, closing her fingers around it with a rough noise.

“Thank you,” she murmurs vaguely, carefully keeping her eyes off the cameras and wondering how she will ever ride this elevator again without a full-body flush.

“Don’t thank me yet, sweetheart.”

Twelfth floor.

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The apartment is very, very nice and they’re both extremely impatient for the real estate agent to leave. She’s so happy to have made such a big sale with so little hassle that she insists that they share a glass of expensive champagne that might as well be lemonade for as much as either of them taste of it. Jaime stands strategically behind the kitchen counter.

Finally, she leaves them alone in their empty new home. They make a slightly exaggerated show of putting their new keys on their rings, and although the ceremony is somewhat camp, the emotion behind it as real as the antique wood under their feet.

Then, they toss them aside and Jaime offers his hand and says, “Shall we take a tour? I have a few surprises for you.”

“Oh? That worries me.”

“You’ll like them very much,” he assures her, leading her past the three guest bedrooms to the
exterior door of the master bath. The bathroom is already lavish, so she’s not sure what he could have done to make it better. “Okay, close your eyes.” He guides her over to the hot tub and sits her on the top step. “Okay, now look down.”

“Oh!” She now knows the one thing that could have made it better—a deeper hot tub, deep enough that she’ll be able to get up to her ears without having to bend her knees up to her chin. She swallows against a wave of affection that makes her throat tight and says, “I hope this thing was installed properly. Twelve days sounds like kind of a rush job.”

Jaime rolls his eyes fondly. “Have an inspector look at it before you get in, if you like. Now,” he continues, unceremoniously pulling her forward on the step and attempting to shove her skirt up to her waist. To save another garment from him, Brienne quickly reaches back and undoes the button and zipper and lets him pull it down off her legs and throw it over his shoulder.

She’s left perching somewhat awkwardly on the step, still in her crisp, white blouse, silk underwear, and heels. Jaime deliberates for a moment before choosing the sight of her still in them with her legs parted to show a strip of pretty, blue silk over the pleasure of taking them off. He kneels between her legs on the next step, noting that they would have to get cushions on these steps or something.

“No,” he continues, reaching up to run his fingers through her hair. “I believe you were about to tell me about what you did with yourself when you missed me.” He moves his other to the top of her thigh, that soft spot he loves so much and thinks he will suck later until it leaves a mark, and squeezes, feeling her hips tilt towards him.

She blushes and stammers for a moment, still managing to be so sweetly shy even while he can watch her grow wetter by the second. Jaime tightens his fingers in her hair and uses his grip to tilt her head back enough for him to kiss her neck, knowing it will be easier for her to talk if she’s both slightly distracted and not looking at him.

“That night in the car…” Brienne had been wearing a lovely blouse that he had slipped his fingers underneath to find her nipples, and then they had gotten caught in a very convenient traffic jam. “You teased me.”

“We could have finished up…”

“And have Bronn smirk at me until the end of time? No.”
“So I would really say you teased me. Now, tell me what you did after I left.”

Brienne swallows and finds her mouth very dry. “Well…” she begins hesitantly. “The first time, right when I came in, I...didn’t feel like going all the way to the bedroom--” Couldn’t make it all the way to the bedroom. “--So I did it on the couch.”

“...The first time?” Jaime asks, pulling her closer by the hips, pressing between her thighs.

Gasping, she continues, “I took a shower and tried to go to sleep, but...I kept thinking about...how much I wished you were there...”

“So I could do what, darling?”

“Jaime…”

“What?” he asks innocently. “Tell me.”

“Don’t make me say it,” Brienne says, biting her lip.

“Just say you wished I was there so I could fuck you.”

“Jaime, shut up! Ohh…” Her protest turns into a moan when he runs his knuckles over her through the wet silk.

“Is this how wet you get just from thinking about me, wench?” he says, kissing her before she has a chance to answer. After a few minutes, he pulls back enough to say, “Did you use your fingers?”

She hadn’t thought she could get any redder, but she feels a fresh bloom of heat through her cheeks.

“Yes.”
Jaime takes in a sharp breath and pulls the fabric of her panties aside to rub his thumb over her in a broad stroke that makes her legs tremble.

“How many?”

“Two...at first...”

“Oh, I’m loving these little details, wench,” he groans. He slides two fingers inside her, curving them just the right way. “Was two not enough for you, sweetheart? I’m flattered.” He adds a third and pumps them in and out for a few minutes with a slow, deliberate pace until her thighs twitch and he has to hold her to keep her from falling into the bath.

Brienne grabs the front of his suit jacket-- he is still fully-dressed--and pulls him closer, until there’s only as much space between them as he needs to keep moving his fingers inside her, deeper and deeper when she rocks her hips to find the perfect angle. She finds it.

“Don’t worry, wench, I’ll leave you plenty satisfied tonight,” Jaime says, feeling her wetness slide over his palm. Straining his arm, he adds, “But first, I want you to anoint our lovely new tub.”

“Gods, Jaime, shut up,” she moans. Then he tilts his hand at the perfect angle to rub his palm against her and she comes with a sharp cry.

“I think I sprained my wrist,” he says idly, with zero concern. Brienne reaches for his belt but he stops her, saying, “Hold on. I haven’t shown you the second surprise.” He tells her to close her eyes and leads her to the bedroom.

“Okay,” he says, opening the door. “Open your eyes.”

In the middle of the room is their new bed, which she had thought would be delivered the next day.

And, on the pillows...lays a bouquet of red daisies.

Jaime’s arms close around her from behind and he says, “Did I do good?” Brienne turns around with tears in her eyes. “I’ll assume those are happy tears until you start yelling at me,” he says, reaching
up to wipe them away.

“Very happy tears,” she confirms.

“I wanted our first night here to be special.”

“You didn’t have to get flowers to make it special, Jaime.” Brienne takes his hands and softly says, “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” he replies, squeezing her hands. “Now,” Jaime grin, pulling her along. “Let’s christen this big, beautiful bed!”

***

It’s hours later when she turns to him and says, “I’m having coffee with your sister tomorrow.”

Jaime tenses instantly and says, “Oh, sweetheart, why?”

“I told you before, I have to show her I’m undefeated. Then I let you distract me and I never got around to it. She must have been awfully disappointed when Varys didn’t publish the story. Probably scheming right now,” she scoffs.

“So why do you want to antagonize her?”

“I don’t want to antagonize her, I just wanna let her know that I’m not afraid.”

“So what do you have planned?”

“Well,” Brienne says thoughtfully. “I thought about it and I realized that I just need to do the one thing that always drives her crazy. Besides existing, of course,” she snorts.
“And what’s that?”

She grins and replies, “I just have to be nice.”

“No,” Jaime groans. “You’re already too nice.”

“We have a saying on Tarth. The tree that does not bend will surely break. If I bend and bend and never break, she’ll get bored.” At his skeptical noise, she runs a hand through his hair and says, “Trust me, Jaime. She’s already tried to use our worst secrets against us, and it didn’t work. Together, we’re stronger than her.”

“And you say you’re no good with words,” Jaime replies dryly.

Brienne slaps his arm with a tsk and settles against him. “By the way, are you all out of surprises?”

“Oh, yes, Ronnet Connington’s nose was tragically broken again.”

“Oh, dear,” she says, turning her face against Jaime’s chest to hide her grin. “Will they be able to fix it?”

“I don’t know. Could be tricky.”

“That’s so awful,” she snickers.

“Yes, his septum might be deviated forever. Does that turn you on, baby?”

“Jaime.”

“Yes, my most cherished darling?”

“Shut up.”
Well, by the New Year was a fool's goal. This is your reward, for the wait and all that angst--2800 words of pure fluff and smut.

Just an epilogue left--one that might surprise you.
“Ms. Lannister?”

Her assistant is nervous, but she’s always nervous. She’s been nervous since the first time she accidentally called Cersei ‘Mrs. Baratheon’, still her official title with the company, which drives her insane and is just one item on a long list of complaints she’s made to her father, to no end. She had been harsh with the girl, B something, something stupid from the Riverlands like Betha, but how would she learn without a firm hand?

“What is it?”

“Your appointment at one has been canceled, and Brienne Tarth has inquired if you would like to meet for a drink at that time.”

Had she been less of an elegant woman, Cersei might have spat her sparkling water--with just a touch of vodka--onto her desk. If she didn’t know the girl to be utterly lacking in cunning, she might suspect that she had manufactured this convenient cancellation.

She makes a show of debating, but there is no debate. As loathe as she is to grant a last-minute meeting, to anyone, as it implies that she is not an incredibly busy and important woman, she’s too curious to know what could bring that foolish girl into her path when her father and brother have been so adamant that she leave the little lamb alone.
Perhaps she can get some information on why the breaking of Ron Connington’s nose hadn’t become front-page news, after all her hard work. Gods, she had let that vile man touch her hand! And he hadn’t been gracious when she had left, obviously thinking his purchase of two cheap vodka tonics had entitled him to liberties that he would have hardly deserved from the aging barmaid.

She could have sent Taena to do her bidding, but she had wanted to hear the entire, humiliating story for herself, and the man had been more than willing to oblige, rapturously describing the girl’s tears, and crowing proudly about her subsequent withdrawal from KLU. He had speculated aloud that she had eventually lost her virginity to ‘that big ugly fuck from the record store’, and that it had probably been bloody and painful.

He seemed so gleeful at the idea that Cersei had wondered if the girl had actually done something to make him angry--besides being ugly where he could see. Despite being a 6 at best, he obviously despised ugly women, probably despised all women and thought the ones who wouldn’t sleep with him were frigid and the ones who would were classless whores.

The man himself had bothered her so much that she had almost re-thought her plan, but not only was the girl taking her brother away from her, something that should have been impossible, from any woman, but it would do her good to remind her of her place.

Of course, she had been a poor awkward nobody when Cersei had first laid eyes on her, with chapped, puffy lips and hair as dry as straw, in massive, ugly t-shirts borrowed from her massive, ugly boyfriend, hunched and shy and stilted. Cersei can’t deny that she’s gained a certain amount of poise with time, and a confidence borne of success. Margaery Tyrell had managed to improve her attention to her appearance. And of course, she had become a godsdamn heiress, on top of her considerable fees as a photographer. Such a turn in fortunes should be criminal, in Cersei’s opinion.

“She said she could meet you at a cafe called Joe’s Joe.”

Cersei lets out a disbelieving laugh. The same cafe where she had attempted what should have been the easy task of bullying the wretched girl into slinking away. Is she actually trying to play games with her?

The idea makes her smile. The most gratifying victory would be forcing the self-righteous bitch off her high horse, make her get her hands dirty and be cruel and petty, make her question that moral superiority that radiates off of her like a cloying perfume. It’s infuriating that her uppity brand of innocence has lasted this long. She certainly doesn’t have the advantage of looks or charm, so she should be more corrupt than anyone, should have to do things that are positively depraved to get ahead, should be opening her mouth and her legs for power like every other woman with ambitions.
And yet, there she sits, at the top of her field, with money and powerful friends, and still somehow with that naive, artless air and that benevolent kindness. How can Jaime stand it? Jaime, who used to revel in cuckolding one of the most powerful men in the realm, in fucking her in closets at Robert’s own business dinners, in seeing the weak fall, in sticking his nose up at anyone who wasn’t a Lannister?

The children make more sense. They’ve always been soft, especially Tommen, not enough time with his father, well, with Robert, to toughen him up. She had found his sweetness charming for a time, but now he’s becoming a man, and all he cares about is books and charity. She’s tried to explain that lions don’t shepherd helpless lambs, that the idea of a Lannister championing for sorry wretches straight out of the gutter is embarrassing, but he actually seemed offended by these statements. And his obsession with having a job! He never needs to work a day in his life, but he doesn’t like to hear that, either. She blames Brienne Tarth entirely.

Myrcella is pulling away from her as well, not as obviously, but Cersei can feel it. She can’t track her daughter’s movements because she no longer takes the car service, always ditching her unknown security by jumping into cabs, probably to meet that Stark whore who wants to ruin their family, and probably using money she gets from Cersei’s monster of a little brother.

Getting rid of Brienne Tarth has been harder than she had anticipated. Cruel words hadn’t worked, either from her, or from the abhorrent Ron Connington. Makes sense, as she she’s probably heard every cruel word in the book by now. Manufacturing a minor economic crisis on Tarth had yielded disappointing results. Publicly humiliating her hadn’t panned out.

She’s close to getting her father to agree to let her handle company affairs in Dorne, and she’s sorely tempted to take the children and stay there. Let her idiot brother have his ugly girlfriend. She doesn’t want him anymore, anyway. The game is becoming tedious. But the principal of the matter…

Brienne is waiting in the cafe, staring into the distance as if she’s meditating. She’ll have that serene calm, like the slippery surface of a frozen lake, impossible to pierce with any delicacy.

They greet with the customary air kisses and study their menus. Cersei will order a Bloody Mary, so she uses the time to take stock of the girl’s face. It’s broad and square, overly-freckled, with strong cheekbones and a sharp jaw. The bridge of her nose is wide and crooked, with a snub tip that might be cute on someone else but which makes her look like a pig. Obscene lips. Hair as fair and fine as cornsilk, consistently glossy and well-maintained these days. Her eyes are stunning, there’s no denying that.

Brienne orders a mimosa. The champagne flute looks absurd in her giant hands.
Cersei says, “I’m surprised you wanted to meet. I thought my father forbade it.”

Brienne’s big lips turn up in one of her mild smiles, not cold and not warm. “I think he’ll let it slide this once.”

*My father has never let something slide ever in his entire life.* “Perhaps we just won’t tell him.”

“If you like,” Brienne shrugs. “How have you been? How are the kids?”

*Bitch.* “My children are just fine, as I’m sure you know since you refuse to stay away from them.”

Brienne shrugs again and says, “I see Tommen at the bookstore, and I run into Myrcella sometimes because of her internship.”

“Yes, I’m sure that’s all.”

“They’re old enough to make some decisions for themselves, don’t you think?”

“They’re old enough to disobey their mother.”

“I can promise that’s not an idea they got from me.”

Gods, how she *longs* to slap her across those pale, spotted cheeks. Brienne tilts her head, blinking at her with her big, stupid cow eyes.

“And my brother?”

“Jaime?”
“Yes, Jaime, you complete idiot. I certainly don’t care how Tyrion’s doing. I can only assume he’s still whoring it up with Margaery Tyrell.”

“I don’t think she’s paying him.”

“Is that supposed to be funny?”

“Just clarifying.”

Cersei leans back and crosses her arms over her chest, saying, “You seem exceptionally smug today. I take it Jaime is still madly, inexplicably taken with you.”

A flush starts to make its’ way across Brienne’s face, the only sign of any discomfort, but she smiles. “We just bought an apartment together.”

Damn. How had that happened without her knowing? Jaime must have gone through a real estate agent the family’s never used before. The thought of them playing house makes her want to be sick. She and Jaime had certainly never gotten to live together. She can count on one hand the number of times they’ve even woken up in the same bed.


“Sage advice, thank you,” she smiles.

“I always have your best interests at heart, dear.”

“I think sometimes our ideas about my best interests don’t line up, but I thank you, sincerely. I have to admit,” Brienne says, leaning in. “We did have some conflict beforehand.”

“Oh? Do tell,” Cersei says in a droll voice, taking a large drink of her cocktail.

“I ran into an old classmate of mine from KLU.”
“An old friend? How sweet.”

“Not a friend, not at all. He did say we had a mutual friend, but I can’t think of any friend who would think I’d want to reunite with him.”

“What a mystery.”

“Indeed. Anyway, we got into a bit of an altercation. I was very fortunate that it didn’t end up on VarysScoop.”

“Yes, very fortunate,” Cersei replies, gritting her teeth.

“Apparently, he held the story back because he likes us. Anyway, I was admittedly upset and I rather took it out on Jaime. He was very understanding, thankfully.”

Jaime? Understanding? “That surprises me.”

“Tyrion told me he’s changed quite a bit in the past few years.”

*And become a useless sap. “How lovely.”*

“We decided to move in together that very night. So as unpleasant as it was, it worked out quite well. Whoever this mutual friend was, I should really thank them, shouldn’t I?” She gives Cersei a startlingly shrewd smile and says, “I think we’ll be very happy there.

Cersei drains her glass and stands up. “It was so nice catching up with you, Brienne.”

Brienne stands and embraces her, saying, "And you, as well." Before she pulls away, she whispers, "And Cersei...thank you.”

Oh, she will destroy this girl. She will let her get comfortable and when she’s the happiest she’s ever
been, Cersei will find a way to tear it all down.

*Enjoy it while it lasts, sweet girl.*

*Enjoy it while it lasts.*

Chapter End Notes

Brienne had the right idea, but she may have overplayed her hand...

Hope this chapter was okay and the POV was interesting!

I've been planning another installment in this series, but I'm not sure what my motivation will be like with the show not coming back until 2019...

Ch 17 is hot gossip from Varys!

Thanks for sticking with this story and thanks for all your thoughtful comments!
Spotted! Brienne Tarth receiving a gorgeous bouquet of flowers on-set! The bouquet is reported to have been red daisies. In the language of flowers, these mean ‘beauty unknown to the possessor’. Swoon!

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Spotted! Brienne Tarth and her gorgeous beau Jaime Lannister going incognito for a dinner date. The part-time model and in-demand photographer went casual in an over-sized blue sweater, leggings, and tennis shoes. This, only a few hours after being spotted having a tense-looking meeting with Lannister’s twin sister, Cersei Baratheon. Flying under the radar? Don’t hurt my little birds!

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Blind Item: Wealthy Socialite is famous for having a nasty temperament. Turns out she may just be a mean drunk! Sources report that she’s got a buzz on before noon at least a few days a week. Someone should tell her too much vodka is aging!

-I never get these
-Possibly Cersei L. That’s sad for her kids
-LYSA ARRYN

- She has crazy eyes, not drunk eyes
-Cersei L...drunk bitch lol
-Olenna Tyrell lmao

- lol, imagining her in one of her crazy hats, screaming at maids
-Cersei L?
-One of the crazy ass Sand Snakes
-Cersei Lannister

-All these rich bitches are drunk lbr

-Gotta be Cersei Lannister, the 'mean' part gives it away tbh

-Agree with everyone that it's CL, can't confirm if she’s a drunk, but can def confirm that she’s a raging bitch, and an unprofessional one. She came to a set I was working on one day and just made rude comments like 'why does she look so trashy' and 'gods, she looks fat', the model was in TEARS

-Was CL drunk when she organized a smear campaign against Sansa Stark?...

Spotted! Brienne Tarth and hunky boyfriend working out together. My sources report that they regularly hit the gym together and enjoy boxing, swimming, and wrestling. Whether the wrestling is amorous or not is up for debate!

-Not boxing!!!!! Her nose can’t take anymore lol

-I feel personally offended that she won’t get a nose job

-Her nose is cute

-Stop

-No, you

-Her nose is charming

-Maybe if she breaks it again it’ll go straight lol

-I could never work out with my SO, I get so red

-Getting red is the least of her worries looks-wise let’s be real

-That’s hot

-I would watch her do squats

-I live in her building and see them at the gym a lot...he def watches her do squats lol

-Her body is goals

-Too muscley

-She should do less weight-training, her shoulders are huge

-I want her leg routine
Spotted! Brienne Tarth and hottie boyfriend Jaime Lannister having drinks with his brother and her stylist, Margaery Tyrell. The two got very cozy in a moment alone, exchanging kisses and whispers. The part-time model has also been seen having lunch with her boyfriend’s father, the famously snobby Tywin Lannister. Joining the family? Sources report a little romance between Tyrell and the other Lannister brother as well. Could get complicated!

-A LITTLE romance, I see what you did there Varys and I DON’T like it lol
-Okay, ‘a little romance’ made me lol
-Can anyone ID that top?

Blind Item: Part-Time Model and Wealthy Socialite do NOT get along. Why? Who knows. PTM has a reputation for being sweet as pie. WS is going so far now as to try to dig up embarrassing secrets on PTM. Unfortunately, PTM is pretty boring by all accounts. 404: Dirt not found!

-I’m so bad at these
-The least blind blind item ever
-Brienne T is PTM, Cersei L is WS. Why is she so obsessed with her bro’s gf?
-They’re fucking
-Her and her brother?!!!
-Two groups of people love incest, hillbillies and the very wealthy lol
-I’d watch the sex tape lbr
-Maybe Brienne T broke them up lol
-...Her?
-Brienne Tarth and Cersei Lannister. She should get away from this family!!! The d isn’t worth the crazy

Spotted! Brienne Tarth and Cersei Baratheon having drinks. The exotic island beauty, popular with her photographer friends for her unique looks, has been dating Baratheon’s twin brother Jaime since March and relations between the two have been tense. Patching things up?

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Spotted! Jaime Lannister and his photographer girlfriend Brienne Tarth closing the deal on a 1 million dragon apartment. It’s a gorgeous place--with FOUR bedrooms. Though they’ve only been dating since March...Can we expect a shotgun wedding announcement soon?

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End Notes

Please comment if you enjoyed!

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