I'll Be Home for Christmas

I update just about every day!

Notes

Based on the prompt: Stuck in an airport at two am because the flights were delayed

If you like this, please comment and I'll develop it into a large story. Thanks!
Didn't edit it much, I apologize if there are any errors!
Chapter 1

"Oh you've got to be kidding me," Genevieve muttered when the man working at the gate announced the flight had been canceled due to the incoming storms.

It was winter and they were heading to Winterfell! Of course there was going to be storms.

Wrapped up in a warn leather jacket Jon sat texting his little sister Arya who was planning on staying up all night until he got home. But now it was 2 am and he didn't know when he'd be home.

Genevieve glanced over to the rows of connected seats in the boarding area trying to scout out a place where she could lay her head for a couple hours. She was ashamed to admit it but she quickly ruled out a few particularly gruff looking people because she feared they'd steal the presents in her bag if she closed her eyes on them. For a second she considered plopping herself down near a woman with a toddler but on closer inspection she noticed the warning signs of an impending meltdown that she'd grown to know when her brother Henryk was still a tot. Of her siblings, he was the most difficult.

Finally when she was just about to call it quits and hunker down in one of the ridiculously overpriced bars she found the perfect spot. In the corner by one of the giant window was a seat. There was even an outlet close by just waiting for her to charge up her depleting battery. And best of all, the guy with a mop of curly hair only a couple seats away didn't look like he'd steal her gifts!

With her head down she rolled her hard shell suitcase over to the seat and sat down before anyone else could claim it. When you're stranded at an airport at two in the morning you've got to do what you've got to do. The suitcase was decorated with stickers from all the places she'd traveled in the past seven months. After graduating from university, she'd been lucky enough to be offered a year long internship with one of her professor studying researching the cultures of Westeros and Essos alike. It proved to be an exhausting journey but she gained valuable contacts along the way that would hopefully score her a job once her internship finished in the spring. For now she was content on returning home to her family.

Arya had been fiercely texting Jon demanding to know why he wouldn't be home in a couple hours like he'd promised. Even though she was fifteen, Jon still saw her as his fiery little sister and it pained him to disappoint him. Currently, she was telling him she was about to run into mother and father's room to make them send their jet down to get him. As if Catelyn would let that happen!

Before Arya could meddle he dialed her number to calm her down.

Genevieve couldn't help but listen to the distinctly northern voice belonging to the mop of curly dark hair as he talked on the phone.

"Arya please don't do that. You know she'll say no. I don't want things to be anymore awkward then they need to be," he said.

Genevieve couldn't help but wonder if Arya was his girlfriend.

"Arya I'll get there when I can. Just go to bed. I'm sure they'll put us on another flight."

She wished she could go to bed. It's too bad these bloody seats are so rigid.

The distinct of a dying phone battery rung out and Jon cursed himself. "Fuck Arya my phone is dying. Let me find somewhere to plug it in and I'll call you right back. Just promise me you won't go
and wake them up," he said.

Ending his call, he cradled his head in his hands and let out a deep sigh. After continuing for a couple minutes what looked like some sort of meditation he shot his head up and Genevieve jerked her head to the window.

Jon knew his time was limited to plug in his phone before Arya did something rash.

"Excuse me miss?" Jon said.

Genevieve whipped her head around pretending like she hadn't just been listening to him the whole time. In her defense, there were only so many things you could do at 2 am when you were stuck in an airport at Christmas time.

"Oh hi," she replied somewhat confused.

He scratched the back of his head and asked, "Do you mind if I sit next to use so I can use the outlet? I need to call my little sister back but my phone died."

Right away she moved her carry-on backpack off the chair beside her so he could sit down.

"Yeah, of course. I can move if you want your privacy," she said.

Already fiddling with the plug and the outlet beside her he replied, "No I wouldn't want to inconvenience you any further. I'm sorry to intrude. I hope you weren't trying to sleep."

She laughed at the idea. "Don't worry about it, I don't think it's even possible to sleep in seats like these. It's like they're design to to keep you alert so you don't miss your plane."

"Let's just hope this storm clears up so we can actually spend the night in real beds," he said.

As soon as his phone powered up it began to ring.

"Hey, sorry about that," he started while pinching in between his eyes, "Yep, it's charging right now. Like I said before, I don't know when I'll be home. They haven't told us anything. Why don't you look up the storm and find out when it's supposed to pass.... Yep I promise. We can go ice skating if that's what you want but we'll have to invite everyone else too.... Arya come on she's your sister! Fine we can do something just the two us, maybe we could see that movie you've been talking about? Okay, yep you can get sour patch kids too. Now please go to bed! You don't want to be half asleep when I get there do you? That wouldn't be any fun. Yep, love you too Arya. Sweet dreams."

With the call concluded he turned to Genevieve and said, "Sorry about that. My little sister was just disappointed I won't be there when I said I would."

"I understand. If my siblings were night owls I'm sure they'd be blowing up my phone with messages," Genevieve said.

"How many siblings do you have?" Jon asked.

She smiled envisioning the black haired clan of kids she called her siblings. "Three. The youngest, Henryk is 12. Then there's my sister Amira who's 16 and my older brother Roland is 24."

"Wow that's quiet a gap between all of you! So hold old does that make you? 20?" he asked.

"No, I'm the exception to the "have a kid every four years" my mom has going on. I just turned 23 last month. I'm Genevieve by the way."
He stuck out his hand with a grin, "Jon, forgive me for not introducing myself sooner." As distant as he and Sansa were he at least shared her beliefs about proper manners. If only Arya did too.

"So what about yourself, do you come from a big family too?" she asked.

Did he ever! "Gods yes. There's Rickon the youngest at 11, Bran who's 14, Arya my lovely sister on the phone is 15, Sansa who's 16, Robb who's 25, and my adoptive brother Theon is 26," he explained.

Genevieve's eyes widened in horror. "And I thought my mother was crazy for having four of us. Your mother must be exhausted," she exclaimed.

His mother? He didn't even know her name. Although Catelyn never seemed tired. She stuck to her house words - Family, Duty, Honor. Even if she was tired she'd always put her duty to her family over herself.

"You could say that," he remarked.

She leaned back against the window and continued, "I wonder if our siblings go to school together. Do they live in Winterfell or do you guys just holiday there?"

Jon thought about his ancestral home and all the magic that he'd felt in the childhood. There were hunts in the Wolfswood with Robb and Theon, expeditions to the broken tower with the youngest three, and walks through glass gardens with Sansa before she got embarrassed of him. And then there was prayers before the wierwood tree with father. The ice of Winterfell ran in his blood no matter how far he traveled from it.

"Born and raised. They probably do go to school together, I could ask Arya. No doubt she's still up praying for a miracle. Are you from Winterfell," Jon joked.

Genevieve laughed at the suggestion she was from Winterfell. She was a Northern girl born and raised, but she didn't call Winterfell her home.

"No, I grew up on Bear Island. When I went off to college my parents moved the family to Winterfell," she said.

Bear Island? Jon remembered his father talking about how one of the Mormonts had been named after his dead aunt.

"I've never been, but I've heard it's beautiful. Do you miss it?"

A starry look came across her face and he swore her eyes were glassy, but then again it was almost 3 in the morning now.

"With all my heart. I haven't been back there since we moved. I haven't been back to Winterfell since I graduated in May actually," she said.

That surprised Jon. He'd only been away from Winterfell because his father wanted him to meet with one of his associates in White Harbor to discuss business. Despite Catelyn's coldness, Winterfell was his home and he hated being away.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

Genevieve glanced down at the stickers on her suitcase and began to rattle them off, "First Pyke, then King's Landing, then Sunspear, Pentos, and Braavos. It's been a busy year."
"My brother Theon was born in Pyke. Is it as wonderful as he claims?" Jon asked.

She scrunched up her nose remember the experience. Between her perpetually soggy clothes and the bawdy men, she wasn't a fan. Professor Lannister just had to get her account of the culture however so she went where she was told.

"It's quite damp, I'll say that. I think I prefer the things I saw in Essos more though," she replied.

It was just like Theon to lie about something. He'd always boasted that his birthplace was more beautiful than the first snow of winter.

"I've heard Sunspear is an enchanting place. Please tell me it lives up to the stories? My family is thinking about taking a holiday there sometime."

Her eyes lit up. "Oh! It really does. They are incredibly open minded people and a lot of fun. I felt like such a Northerner compared to them but it's a beautiful spot to visit," she explained.

A memory of her blushing from one Dornishman's forward compliments at a bar came in her mind.

"I'll be sure to tell my family. Oh, speaking of which what's your last name? I'll ask Arya if she knows your siblings."

"It's Norward. Ask her if she knows Henryk or Amira. Hells maybe Robb and Theon know my brother Roland, he went to college there. God help us if they do know each other. My younger brother is a wild child and Amira can be trying at times," she warned.

Jon thought of Rickon, Bran, and Arya - always up to mischief. It was like you couldn't be a Stark without being mischievous. Even Theon, followed the rule. Sansa liked to pretend she was more Tully than Stark but he'd heard some of the pranks she'd pull on Arya.

"What sibling isn't!" he replied while shooting out a text to Arya.

As he predicted, she replied within minutes. He felt like asking her why she wasn't asleep yet but he knew the answer. He'd always been her favorite, of course she was going to be too excited to sleep. Their bond had always been special. When Sansa was born he'd been excited, but Catelyn was already protective of her daughter. But when Arya was born when he was nine he'd loved her the second he held her in his arms. She was the only one who looked like him with her dark and hair, solemn faces, and grey eyes. They were their father's children. That was one thing Catelyn was never able to deny.

The sound of his phone beeping shook him from his thoughts.

"What's she say? Is it weird to say I hope they do know each other?" she asked.

"No not at all, I know what you mean. Let's see what she said," Jon responded sliding open his lockscreen.

Arya: "Yeah why? Bran and Rickon hang out with Henryk. I think I've heard Sansa mentioned the girl. And knowing Robb he and Theon probably know the oldest one."

"So it looks like Henryk and my youngest brothers know each other! And Sansa's mentioned Amira. Who knows about your oldest brother though," he said.

"Oh that's great news! If your friendliness is any judge of their character, I'm glad they've found such good friends," she chirped.
Jon admired her for a second, not just her striking northern beauty but he ability to be this nice at 3 in the morning. But she was a northern beauty if he'd ever seen one with blue eyes that could rival his Tully favoring siblings and hair as dark as the long night. She had freckles on the bridge of her nose that couldn't have come from anywhere up north and a tiny scar underneath her eyebrow. Maybe someday he'd know why.

"I'm sure if they catch wind that we met they'll be begging us for rides while we're home. Anyways, why were you traveling so much if you don't mind me asking?" Jon asked.

"Not at. After graduation I got a year long research position with a professor. Basically he flies me all over the place to take down notes on the culture, people, and customs of the places for a book he's thinking about writing. I get to be home for a month but then after that I'm off on an expedition beyond the wall to meet some of the free folk," she said.

Jon was shocked. He was sitting next a world traveler when he'd never even left the north.

"You're going beyond the wall all by yourself?" he asked. Old Nan had told them far too many nightmare inducing tales of what roamed beyond the wall to shake the fear from his head.

She however smiled wide at his reaction.

"Yes I am. It's completely safe, my professor has a contact in one of the tribes that he's going to have me meet up with. According to him, this Tormund guy isn't someone anyone will mess with so I'm safe as well," she explained.

Still, the thought of someone a kind as her venturing beyond the wall with a bunch of rough men unnerved him.

"I know what you're thinking," she added, "I can handle my own with them. I picked up a few things over in Braavos."

Jon recalled that Arya's fencing teacher was from Braavos. If he was any indication of the type of skills she might have picked up there, she would be fine.

"I've always wanted to visit the wall. My uncle works up there," Jon said with a yawn.

The time continued to tick on and there was still no word about their flight.

"What's his named? Maybe I'll come meet him when I'm crossing over," she asked.

"Benjen Stark," he said.

A crackling voice on an intercom boomed, "Passengers for the flight to Winterfell, the storm has passed and we are now clear to board. Those in Group A please come to the desk to begin boarding."

Sheer delight spread over both of their faces.

"Thank the Gods! I can't wait to get into those seats and cozy up," Genevieve sighed, gathering her luggage.

Jon rose from his seat too and unplugged his phone. "I'm not going to even text Arya about this. She's going to be so surprised when she wakes up and sees me at the breakfast table," he said. All Starks were mischievous, even him.
"I bet she will! What group are you in?" she asked walked forward to where people were already vying for a spot in line.

For the first time in his life, Jon felt self-conscious of his upper class status. He may have felt like an outsider at times in his family, but in the world he was in a much better position than most.

"Group A I'm afraid. I splurged for the first class seat since it was the only one available when I booked," he lied.

Surprising him she said, "Me too! With all the traveling I've done on my professor's expense I've really wracked up quiet a few frequent flier miles. After tonight I certainty don't regret opting for more leg room."

Jon felt a smile coming when he realized they wouldn't have to part.

In line they had remained together, him shielding her from some grumpy looking businessmen trying to bully their way to the front.

After rolling their suitcases down the corridor to the plane, Jon pulled out his ticket and began looking for his seat. There were only twelve seats in first class so it wouldn't be too hard to figure it out.

"What seat number are you?" Genevieve asked him, pulling her cardigan tight around her with a shiver. Her exhaustion seemed to have hit her at last.

"2D, What about you?" he asked. Silently he hoped she would be next time him.

"Oh darn it! I'm 4C we won't be too far from each other I suppose," she sighed.

He was helping her stow her incredibly heavy bag in the overhead bin when that pushy man from the line huffed impatiently behind her.

"Could you hurry up, you're in my way," the sickly pale man said with a gesture to Genevieve's row.

Jon and Genevieve froze up. Genevieve, for realizing she'd have to spend the next couple hours sitting next to that grump and Jon for realizing he wouldn't be able to act as a buffer.

"Sorry sir," Genevieve said stepping into the row quickly to make room for him.

Unable to help himself Jon intervened, "Excuse me sir, would you mind switching seats with me. I'm seat 2D but I'd really appreciate it if I could sit next to my friend here."

The man scowled for a couple excruciating seconds before pushing past Jon and into his new seat.

Feeling victorious, Jon threw his own bag up next to Genevieve's and sat down beside her.

"Well that went better than I expected," he commented.

Genevieve clipped on her seatbelt and beamed at him. "Thank you so much for that. I don't think I would've been able to sleep next to that jerk."

Here he was, a regular knight in shining armour (or leather jacket in his case), like one of the heroes out of Sansa's childhood stories.
"No problem Genevieve. Now get some sleep," he said.

"Sweet dreams," she added before closing her eyes.

Sometime during the flight her head had fallen to rest on his shoulder and he realized that even though he was wide awake, tonight had been the sweetest dream he didn't even know he'd been wishing for.
"Genevieve wake up, we're here," Jon whispered. Genevieve's head had been laying on his shoulder for the entirety of the two hour flight and not for a second had he minded. He spent those hours looking out the window at the unforgiving icy landscape of the north and plotting out his surprise to Arya. When they'd touched down, he'd had no missed calls of messages from his sister, and even more surprise the woman next to him hadn't waken up from the landing.

She rose with a smile growing on her face and stretched out, as much as she could on an airplane at least.

"Did you sleep at all?" she asked him in a raspy voice.

The fog of sleep still clouded her mind as her memory reminded her where she was, and who he was.

"No, but the flight attendants were amazing! They have decent coffee in first class," he said softly.

A horrified expression crossed her face. "I didn't snore did I?"

"Well..." he joked, "No I'm just kidding. You were practically silent. For a second I was worried you weren't breathing."

"Can you imagine how horrifying that would be! Do you think they'd land at the first airport they could if there was a dead body or just wait?" she whispered.

A shiver ran down his spine just imagining it. "Gods I don't know. Let's just hope it never happens to either of us."

She grinned and pulled her backpack from out under the seat and placed it in her lap.

"When are they letting us off?" She ruffled through her bag for her phone.

"They said just another minute or two. They're connecting the plane to the terminal right now," he said.

A deep sigh escaped her as she read her messages.

Jon's curiosity got the best of him. She seemed upset. "Is something wrong?"

"No," she said pushing her hair back, "Well yes, but it's not important. My brother texted me while we were in the air and said he couldn't pick me up because was quote "drunk out of his mind with the boys" and was going to be passed out."

It reminded Jon of something Theon would do. Jon was always the responsible one as Robb was
usually strongly influenced by Theon's bad behaviors.

"I could give you a ride if you want. I left my car at the airport before I came to Oldtown so you wouldn't have to pay for a taxi or anything so late at night," he offered.

She thought about it for a few seconds. It was a far better option then hoping in a car with a complete stranger at five in the morning. Not that Jon wasn't a stranger, he just didn't feel like one anymore.

"I wouldn't want to inconvenience you Jon, I can get a car it's no big deal," she replied. She was going to at least pretend to be the perfect take no handouts northern lady her parents her raised as.

Jon persisted. "No really, it wouldn't be any trouble at all. We can even stop and pick up some donuts on the way."

The idea of getting a freshly made glazed donut in her stomach won her over. Sugar really had too much power over her.

"Thank you Jon. But I'm paying for the donuts, and don't you dare protest!" she smiled.

Soon, first class was given permission to disembark and Genevieve learned the mad dash out of the plane feels the same in first class as it does in economy. For some reason she thought it'd be more leisurely, especially at this hour but it seemed everyone wanted to get home to their families just like her.

Being a perfect gentleman, Jon grabbed both of their bags and let her walk ahead of him off the plane. She was almost bursting with joy to be off that plane and into a place she could stretch her body without restriction.

"Doing some early morning yoga?" Jon laughed as her saw her twisting her body about.

"Something like that! I can't wait for the day they just cave in and give everyone beds instead of those awful seats on plans," she said.

"And I think flights are already expensive. Can you imagine how much they'd be then?" Jon smiled.

"It'd be worth every penny."

As they walked through the airport they found it strangely quiet. They had taken a red-eye flight but it was eerie to see the place so empty. For a stretch, the only sounds to be heard was the loudspeakers playing "I'll Be Home for Christmas" to the exhausted passengers.

However, when they walked past security they found many tired looking families waiting for their love ones.

After seeing a little boy run up to his father with a huge hug Genevieve laughed, "I wish my family loved my that much."

"On the bright side you'll be able to torment your brother with loud noises when you get home," Jon replied.

Genevieve pictured herself walking into his room and jumping on his bed. On second thought, nothing good ever came out of fighting with her siblings.

"I bet your little sister is staring out at your driveway right now waiting for you to pull in," she replied.
Jon agreed. Arya's room faced the woods but he had no doubt she'd be sitting in the wing back chair in the family room with Nymeria by her side looking out the giant front window.

"They'll be no surprising her," he realized out loud.

The two of them pulled up their hoods and braced themselves to head outside where the winter winds were whipping around.

"My goodness I haven't felt this cold in forever," she shivered as they ran to the parking garage.

Pulling the suitcases behind him Jon replied, "And I thought you said you were a northern girl!"

"Yeah! But one who's been in Essos for the past couple months and Dorne before that," she said. Currently she was jumping up and down to keep warm while Jon tried to remember where he parked.

"It's going to be a tough vacation for you then. I've got a blanket in the car you can wrap yourself in," he said.

They found his black SUV on the second floor and Jon unlocked the doors and turned up the heat as soon as fast as possible. Genevieve had sought out the blanket and was currently wrapped up in what Jon would describe as a "blanket burrito".

"Oh thank the Gods! I thought my teeth would chatter so much they'd fall out," she said.

She wasn't exactly dressed for the winter weather with a pair of cardigan over a long sleeve and a pair of leggings. As she'd been off traveling in such warm climates, she hadn't seen the need to bring along any of her bulky winter clothes. Pyke was the only place she'd regretted it, but even then it'd been the beginning of summer when she'd visited there.

Jon tuned the radio to the Christmas channel and music you would expect to listen to nestled up near a fire began playing.

"Where abouts do you live?" he asked.

"Um let me think! I'm going to have to look up the address, but it's near the woods I know that," she responded.

He laughed and drove down the street, "Well it's a good thing Winterfell is known for it's forests, that really clears it up"

"It's on my phone here somewhere. There's a pond where you can go ice skating nearby. It's a fairly big house, grey stone," she said while scrolling furiously through her phone.

Jon thought of his own memories skating in the winter with his siblings. Father always said they'd learned to skate about as fast as they learned to walk.

"Here it is!" she rattled off, "It's 45 Tohren Street. Do you know where it is?"

He had to restrain himself from bursting out laughing. Did he know where it was? It was the street his family had lived on for generations for crying out loud! It was the only home he'd ever known.

"Afraid so. I live there too. Down the road a ways, but still," he smiled.

They'd be seeing a lot more of each other he hoped.
"That's wonderful news! I'm sure we'll see a lot of each other if our siblings need rides," she said.

Gesturing to his seven seater SUV he said, "Why do you think I have such a big car?"

The ride to the donut shop took only a couple minutes but Genevieve insisted she get out and inspect them herself despite the cold.

"Are you sure? They have a drive through?" Jon asked fisting his hands in his pockets. He felt uncomfortable letting her pay for him.

She strode ahead with so much energy he couldn't believe it was really five in the morning.

"Positive. I want to make sure we get the best ones!"

In line they began discussing the merits of each flavor; Jon fighting for chocolate frosted while Genevieve stuck to her guns with a simple glazed donut. Eventually they both agreed to disagree.

Their order was a long one, with fifteen people to feed.

"I'm going to get two dozen please. For the first two boxes I'll get two glazed, two strawberry frosted with sprinkles, two bear claws, two jelly, two of those holiday ones you've got there, and two of the cider please," she rattled off while the poor kid filled the boxes.

"What does your family like?" she asked.

This was going to take him a while! He'd gone on many donut runs for his family but all nine of them had their favorites.

"Um can I get two powdered, two chocolate frosted, two chocolate glazed, two plain, and four of those holiday ones as well?" Jon said.

The kid packaged up all 24 donuts and slid them forward. Before he could act, Genevieve had already slid her card over and paid.

"At least let me carry them out to that car," Jon joked.

Already munching on her precious glazed donut she said, "I suppose."

"Thanks again for buying these, you really didn't have to."

"And you didn't have to drive me home, now get driving and eat your donut. I miss my bed," she responded.

And he'd miss her company when they went their separate ways.

"As you wish. I feel like a chauffeur!"

She grinned imagining him trying to fit a driver's cap onto his mop of hair.

Before they knew it, he had navigated through the icy roads and pulled into her driveway.

Jon killed the engine and opened her door.

"Thanks again," she yawned as he grabbed her suitcase from the back.
"Don't worry about it. It was nice getting to meet you."

While struggling to find her house keys that'd been buried in the bottom of her bag for months they talked.

"Me too. I'm glad I sat down near you and not that jerk from the plane."

Jon would've called him an ass, but to each their own.

"I wouldn't let that happen to you."

She felt a flutter in her heart at the statement.

At last she found her key and reluctantly opened the door.

Jon handed her the bag not wanting to overstep her boundaries and she placed it inside.

"Give me a second, I'm going to run these donuts to the kitchen and come right back," she promised.

Standing there outside of her house Jon reflected on the past couple of hours. It made him feel confused that there time together had only began that same day. He really needed some sleep.

She came running back like she promised to say goodbye.

"Well I hate to be a bore and say I need to catch my sleep, but I'm still exhausted and I bet you are too. Thank you so much for the ride and I'll hope I'll be seeing you," she said.

Jon spoke without thinking. "Could I have your number?" he started, "You know, so we can coordinate who'll be carting our siblings around."

Nice save she thought trying not to laugh.

She gave it to him and send a text, making him promise not to open it until she was gone.

"I promise," he said.

An silence filled the air as they realized they were about to part ways.

Jon didn't know what to do, but Genevieve did.

Wrapping her arms around him in a gently hug she gave her thanks and her goodbyes.

"Bye Genevieve, sweet dreams," Jon said. He wondered if he'd ever get the chance to say that to her again.

"Bye Jon, you too! Drive safe!" she called out as he walked to his car.

As he pulled away the smile he'd been holding in grew as he watched her wave from her front porch.

It was only when he pulled into his own driveway that he remembered the text waiting to be opened.

"I hope our brothers hang out soon."
Chapter 3

Wow! So it's been a long time since I last updated this! Sorry for the long break, I've been focusing on a lot of projects for school and work. Thank you to the lovely people who commented and gave me inspiration to post a new chapter. I hope I can sort out a regular update schedule. I apologize in advance for any errors.

This chapter is dedicated to Ti for their comment today that inspired me to post. Thanks for putting a smile on my face!

Before he could even unbuckled his seatbelt, Arya came running out the front door.

She threw open his door and practically tugged him outside, surrounding him in a fierce hug.

"It's nice to see you too Arya," he laughed.

When she broke the hug she caught sight of the smile on his face, one that looked bigger than usual.

"What's got you all smiley this morning? Besides seeing me of course?"

He thought back to Genny and the text he'd just received. If he kept thinking about her he'd have to beg Rickon and Bran to make plans with her brother Henryk.

"Oh nothing," he said, "Just glad to be home after sitting in the airport for so long."

Jon grabbed the bags, having to scoop them up before Arya could attempt to check them for presents. She was simply incorrigible.

"Fine, well hurry up and get inside. I have a kettle on for hot chocolate," she smirked, running ahead to prepare their mugs.

Making a glass of hot chocolate was about the only thing you could trust Arya to do in the kitchen. That was usually Sansa's domain. But with Arya's sweet-tooth, she had to learn a couple of tricks over the years.

He ran his bags down to his basement room away from the rest of the family before heading back up for the donuts.

When he checked his passenger seat, they were nowhere to be found.

"Looking for these?" Arya said from the doorway.

Of course it was her.

"They were supposed to be a surprise! Make sure you save some for the rest of them," he said.

She scampered away to the kitchen with him in tow.

"We'll see," she said.
After the two of them had polished off their share of the donuts, although Arya tried to steal Sansa's, she was ready to interrogate him about his trip.

"So how was Oldtown? Did you get to see that giant library Bran always talks about?"

Most of Jon's trip had been spent discussing a contract his father had with Mr. Hightower. Thankfully he did have some freedom at night to explore the oldest city of all of Westeros.

"I did actually. I even managed to talk to a man studying to become a maester there. He told me to come back anytime and he'll give Bran the grand tour," Jon said.

"Can I come too?" she asked bouncing on her feet. How she had so much energy in the wee hours of the morning would never make sense to Jon.

"Of course, but I thought you had your sights set on Braavos?"

She smirked, "It doesn't hurt to be well traveled. I'm pretty sure I could get father to agree."

Arya could get her father to agree to anything. People always whispered that she looked just like Lyanna, and who was Ned to say no to an echo of his sister's memory?

"I'm sure he would Arya," Jon said rising from the breakfast bar, "Now why don't we get some sleep before it turns into a madhouse."

Her eyes shifted in reflection, "You're telling me! Rickon was insane while you were gone. He and that Henryk you were texting me about had the bright idea to build a fort and it was like a construction site in the woods for a few days."

"By the way, why were you asking about the Norwards?"

Jon scooped her up over his shoulder while she half-heartedly fought in protest. He didn't want to share Genevieve with everyone quite yet.

"I'll tell you in the morning, but only if you promise me you'll get some sleep," Jon said.

She huffed but agreed. Arya love a good surprise.

Before she went into her room she swallowed him up in a hug and said, "It's good to have you back Jon. I missed you."

"I missed you too Arya. But I'm back now."

Of all his siblings, his bond with Arya was the strongest. Beyond their similar looks, they shared an understanding of the world that his other siblings didn't. Although all the Starks were connected with nature, he and Arya felt a call to it. And deep down, they both felt like outsiders in their family from time to time. Arya felt like she was always in Sansa's shadow, and for Jon - well he felt like sometimes he wasn't even a member of the family at all.
Even though she was twenty-three years old, when Genevieve woke in the morning she was ready to act like a child. As she crept around the house that barely felt like a home to her, she observed all the things that had changed while she away traveling.

On the fridge Henryk's many full marks exams were on display, something that always amazed Genevieve knowing his wild child ways. There were pictures of Amira at a Halloween dance dressed as a ballerina - a hobby she'd given up when she was five and decided performing in front a room full of people just wasn't for her. Several of the vintage postcards she had sent from around the world were on display. As for Roland, Genevieve was just surprised there wasn't a mug shot hanging up to commemorate one of his wild nights on the town.

And Genevieve intended to give him a little taste of the cost of his latest party night. But, because she was a sensible person she made sure to grab a pink frosted donut. She figured she'd give Roland a fair shot and not prank him on an empty stomach when she was feeling particularly hangry.

She crept down to his basement lair where his snores were loud. It was really a blessing he slept down there and not upstairs with the rest of them. He sounded like a chainsaw.

Surprisingly enough, his room wasn't a total mess. It was actually sparse compared to how his dorm had been. Then again he had too much "studying" to do back then to worry about keeping it clean. His main decor were posters of bands that he (and Genevieve) jammed out too. All of their favorites - Kingslayer, Elder Brother, The Faceless Men, and even the punk singer Khaleesi. If there was one thing Genevieve and her brother could agree on, it was music.

But rules were rules, if you wronged a sibling you faced the consequences. Genevieve had learned that at an early age when she'd broken one of Roland's toys and he'd cut a section of her hair off.

She crept over to his bed where he was flopped down on his stomach and yanked off the covers. He'd always been a light sleeper.

He fell out of bed and rose his fists ready to defend himself, until he saw her of course.

"What the hell Genevieve! I thought someone was coming in here to murder me!" he said.

"You're lucky I didn't for stranding me at the airport!"

He yanked his blanket out of her hands.

"Well you're here now aren't you?" he sighed.

She extended her arms out to him for a hug. "Yeah I guess. Anyways it's good to see you again. There are donuts upstairs if you want anything."

The two of them never held grudges for long. Besides, Genevieve was glad Roland didn't pull
through. She was able to spend more time with Jon because of his irresponsible actions.

He returned the hug and said, "Well I guess so since I'm up now. We can talk about your trip over coffee - well hot chocolate for you."

All was forgiven between the two of them when he took a bite of the apple cider donut she'd gotten him. Before Amira was born it was just the two of them for the first seven years of her life, so she knew all of his likes and dislikes.

"So who'd you go out with last night?" she asked.

He paused to take a big gulp of his coffee. "Just some of my mates from college, no one you'd know. You're supposed to be telling me about your trip. I can't even think right now."

"If you're asking if I bought you any souvenirs over in Essos the answer is yes. You've just got to wait until Christmas morning to find out."

A realization hit him. "Shit I still haven't gone shopping for everyone. Work has been crazy."

After college Roland had started working in the athletics department at Winterfell University. He claimed he didn't want to stay there forever, but Genevieve had a suspicion that he was still clinging onto the fond memories of his college years. Plus, he got free admission into all of the games.

"Yeah sure, work" she smiled, "You do realize there are only two days until Christmas right?"

"Yes. Which is exactly why I need your help! Can you come with me to the mall today?"

Genevieve didn’t have anything better to do with her time. It was the first time in months that she’d been home, but she didn’t exactly have any friends in town that she needed to catch up with. She’d spent more time at school - and abroad than she had at their home in Winterfell.

“Fine, but I want to wait until everyone is up so I can say hi,” she said.

Roland scoffed, “As if my hungover ass would be ready to go right now. I don’t even think they open stores this early.”

“It’s 9 o’clock.”

“Right, whatever.”

An hour later Genevieve was all ready to go, wearing a gray jumper she had bought in Pyke. Professor Lannister had given her a healthy budget for her travels, and the damp weather on the Iron Island felt like a good reason to spend some.

Roland on the other hand, was still down in his cave trying to remember how to be a human. The rest of the family had slowly trickled downstairs in the Saturday haze.

Her father Willem was the first at the breakfast table, his eyes wide at the sight of the donuts, and even wider when he saw his daughter in the living room.

“Genny! It’s so good to have you back. Look at all your new freckles!” he said wrapping her up in a hug.

“It’s good to be back Dad. I missed you,” she sighed.

“We’ve missed you too. The kiddos were always checking the mail hoping from a postcard from
you. You could have called you know.”

“I know, but the phone bill would’ve been insane. Besides, I sort of liked the whole old-fashioned aspect of sending a postcard in the mail.”

“And we loved getting them!” he laughed.

Eventually, the rest of the family came down and sat down around the breakfast table. Her mother had squeezed her tight and her sister had peppered her with questions about the people of Sunspear.

“I’ll have to put together a slide show for you guys! There is just so much to tell you about,” Genevieve said.

Henryk was squirming in his seat. “Did you get a sword for me in Braavos?”

Her mother shot him a fierce look, “After that little stunt you pulled with your friend you think you need a sword?”

“Come on! That was an accident. We were just trying to cut a branch for our fort. I didn’t mean to cut my hand.”

Roland leaned to fill Genevieve in, “Five stitches. You should have seen him. He just walked right in the door and asked me to bring him to the hospital. Didn’t want me to tell anyone.”

“Sounds like things have been just as busy here!” Genevieve said.

“You have no idea,” Amira sighed.

After they had eaten and swapped stories of recent events Roland pushed out his chair.

“Gen and I have some secret errands to run. Text us if you need anything while we’re out.”

His mother said, “Oh! Can you pick up a candle, I don’t care what scent. I need to get a present for the gallery owner.”

Their mother worked as an artist, showcasing her work in local galleries and working part-time at the local recreation center as an instructor.

“Yeah sure, I’ll have Gen pick it out. We’ve really got to get going,” Roland said.

At the mall, Genevieve soon realized she should add “personal shopper” to her resume. Although Roland stuck with her, he just trailed along behind her indifferent to what she picked out until it came time to pay.

“Tell me again why Amira needs the collector’s edition of the stories by Old Nan?” he asked. Old Nan was a local author and legend of the area, and a popular author among almost every age group.

“Didn’t you get the email she and Henryk sent out? Their Christmas lists were pretty high tech this year.”

So far Roland (Genevieve) had picked out a puzzle and a scarf for their father, a new set of paints for their mother, the books for Amira, and this climbing gear Henryk mentioned. Roland knew he’d have to have Henryk keep quiet about the climbing gear. He and his friends were always scaling different things on the property so he figured he might as well have some protection.

“Why don’t we split up so I can buy your gift,” Roland said.
Genevieve could only imagine what he’d pick out on his own. Last year he’d gotten her a bedazzled fanny pack with her name on it claiming it’d be good to hold all her valuables while she traveled. Needless to say, she hadn’t brought it with her. She was supposed to blend in, not stand out like she was heading to a music festival.

“Sounds good, keep it simple okay! I’ll go pick up that candle mom wanted,” she said.

Roland’s eyes sparkled with mischief. It seemed she’d have yet another weird gift to add to her collection.

“Meet up in the food court after? I really want to get some Tyroshi food.”

At the candle store, Genevieve picked up a classic “Winterfell Winters” three-wick and headed to the food court.

Her brother was in line at the Tyroshi place and called her over, “Hey Gen. I ran into some of my friends so they’re going to sit with us if that’s alright.”

Roland’s friends were the boisterous type who knew how to have a good time. Always quick to laugh and lighten a mood. Maybe it could be the cure to the jet lag creeping up on her.

“That’s fine, will you order me a number 6? You know how much I love those pears,” she asked.

“Sure, can you get a table that’ll seat five?”

Genevieve was answering an email from Professor Lannister when her brother and his friends came to the table.

With their trays piled high with food were her brother, a friend with curly red-brown hair, and another with a cocky smile.

“Gen, this is Robb and Theon. We were mates in college,” Roland explained sitting down beside her.

Robb and Theon followed, leaving an empty seat to her left for the other friend.

“Nice to meet you, Genevieve. Roland’s been telling us all about your travels,” Robb said.

Across from her Theon said, “He never told us how pretty you were though!”

Roland reached across to punch him in the shoulder.

“What happened to the bro code?” Genevieve asked.

The guys laughed and the tension eased.

In between bites Gen overheard Roland asking where the third friend was.

“He had to pick up something extra,” Robb began before turning his head, “Speak of the devil!”

Besides Genevieve, the friend pulled out the chair and said, “Sorry I’m late.”

Genevieve put down her fork. She knew that voice.

“Gen, this is their brother Jon. He just came back from a business trip,” Roland introduced.

Jon gave a rare smile and laughed.
Theon and Robb looked at him for an explanation but Genevieve answered.

“We’ve met! Jon, this is my idiot brother Roland that I was telling you about.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in one day after a two year hiatus? Who is she??

“How in the Gods name do you two know each other? You’ve got no friends here Gen,” Roland said producing a laugh from Theon.

She shot him a fierce looked, “How do you think I got home last night while you were off drinking with your bonehead friends.”

“Hey! That’s us,” Robb said.

Jon leaned over and whispered, “I told you our brothers probably knew each other.”

“Oh so these are your brothers? Gods bless you, gotta watch out for that one,” Genevieve said pointing at Theon.

Theon crossed his arms, “Wait till you meet the two youngest boys, they’ll give you a run for your money.”

Roland was still confused. “I still don’t get how he brought you back from the airport Gen.”

This time Jon answered. “She sat down near me at the gate in Oldtown. I needed to use the outlet so we got to talking and ended up sitting next to each other on the flight.”

With a glance at his brothers he added, “You can thank her for the donuts this morning.” Robb and Theon looked at her with heart eyes. Anyone who brought them food after a night of drinking instantly found favor in their books.

“And I can thank you for not making me pay for her cab ride home!” Roland laughed.

“It was no trouble. I wasn’t exactly going to leave her to freeze at the airport,” Jon said.

The trio descended into their own conversation about the previous night’s escapades leaving Jon and Genevieve to talk.

“Well I didn’t think we see each other so soon! Was your little sister waiting at the door for you when you got home?” Genevieve asked.

“Gods, she ran out to my car when I pulled in. Were you able to sleep in?”

“Somewhat, I got up before everyone else just so I could wake my brother up. Then he decided he needed to do some last minute shopping for Christmas.”

Jon eyed his bags beside him. “Me too I’m afraid. It sneaks up on me every year.”

“So what’d you get?” She herself had come out of the stores without spending a single cent beyond the candle her mother needed. After months of traveling abroad and collecting souvenirs, she didn’t feel like buying anything mass produced.
Jon pulled up his bag. “I didn’t get anything today for those two so I can show you,” he said as he opened it up.

He showed her the sewing patterns for his sister Sansa, along with camping gear for the two younger boys.

“My sister Arya is big into water dancing so I had to special order this old-fashioned looking sword for her to practice with,” he said pulling up a picture.

“Looks dangerous! My younger brother was begging me to bring him back a sword from Braavos.” Jon laughed, “I can’t even imagine what it’d be like bringing that through customs.”

“Which is exactly why I didn’t buy it!”

Genevieve noticed Jon didn’t have any food in front of him.

“Do you want some of my brandied pears? I can’t get enough of them,” she asked.

He hesitated but yielded when she slid them in front of him before he could answer.

After one bite he felt transported to Essos and the rich world of flavors.

“Gods it’s been ages since I had these.”

She picked one off the plate, “When I was traveling every meal was like this.”

“Next time I’m coming with you,” he joked.

For a second she imagined leading him around the white stone streets of Pentos. Or lazing in the gardens of Sunspear with him sipping on wine in the middle of the afternoon.

“Haha yeah, I’ll let my boss know! Maybe he’d let you venture beyond the wall with me, if you’re brave enough.”

If she asked, Tyrion would say yes. He was always annoyingly concerned about her safety on the trips alone.

“I think you’re braver than me. But I think you’d be better off with my uncle than myself. He’s been a ranger up there for years.”

“That’s right, you mentioned that! So what are your plans for the next couple of days?”

Arya had groaned about some Christmas pageant the boys were in that Bran and Rickon were in that the whole family would be forced to attend.

“Oh, just a Christmas pageant for my younger brothers tomorrow and then the family festivities begin.”

Genevieve tugged on her brother’s sleeved and pulled him out of his conversation about how the Winterfell Direwolfs were "best” team in all of Westeros.

“Has Henryk mentioned anything about a Christmas pageant tomorrow?”

Theon groaned, “I can’t wait until they’re too old for that fucking thing. It’s so boring.”
“And the seats make your bum numb after five minutes,” Robb added.

Roland checked the family calendar Genevieve had been excluded from on his phone, “Shit, I guess we won’t be going out tomorrow night.”

“We’ll just have to suffer through it together,” said Jon.

Genevieve didn’t think it was so bad last year. Granted, she had shown up thirty minutes late, but the songs had been entertaining. And nothing beat watching Henryk squirm on stage.

The next day she got a text from Jon saying, “I have to get there early to drop the boys off, I'll make sure to save you a seat. I hear it might sell out.”
Let’s hope I can keep up with this newfound momentum. I hope you all have a great week! <3

Jon had been thinking up a reason to text her since they parted ways at the mall.

On the car ride home, Theon and Robb had bombarded him with questions about her — Theon wondering if Jon had called dibs or not yet.

Jon had said, “We’re too old for dibs. Besides, it’s her decision who she wants to go out with.”

When they were younger, the trio (but mostly Robb and Theon) were always trying to “claim” potential girlfriends before the other could. First Theon claimed Ros, then Robb claimed Talisa, and Jon Ygritte for a brief moment in time. But now all three men were single.

Once in his basement room, Jon tried to think up reasons to reach out to her. He enjoyed spending time with her and he tried to explain his attraction as an interest in all her travel stories. But Jon believed their newfound friendship could someday bloom into something more. When he fell, he fell hard. Arya was always punching him in the shoulder and telling him to stop acting like a character in one of Sansa’s books whenever he had a crush on someone.

So when Catelyn told him he needed to bring the boys to the pageant early, he was glad he finally had a real reason to text her. It was still too early for him to feel comfortable enough sending something out of the blue. It had to have a purpose.

When he sent the message he threw his phone down on the bed and started to pace around his room. Suddenly, even all the piles of laundry were more interesting to him than seeing if she’d respond.

But once he heard the chirp of his phone he rushed back over to check it.

“Thank you! I’ll be there early too. Apparently coming home makes me the default chauffeur for Henryk,” she texted.

Jon knew that all too well!

He thought up a message, “Do you want me to pick him up? I don’t mind bringing him so you don’t have to come so early.”

Meanwhile, Genevieve was pacing around her room with what she called her “dumb idiot” smile on her face. It was a smile that her friends from college said she wore whenever she first started talking to a guy. Usually, the smile would fade after the guy showed his true colors — and intentions.

She didn’t want him to have to go alone, “I’ll keep you company, I don’t mind :). Just let me know when you’re on your way.”

Genevieve hoped Jon didn’t think she was being too pushy. Now that she was on break she didn’t really have anything to do with her time. All she had planned for today was a quick video call with Professor Lannister to check in.
Jon was quick to reply with, “Sounds great, I’ll let you know!”

She felt the telltale flutter in her heart and decided to shift her focus to work before she got too jittery with emotions.

Her room in Winterfell lacked the personality that her room in Bear Island, or even her dorm room, had. She really needed to decorate it. Her artist mother was always telling her to put her stamp on it and make it look like someone actually lived there. But Genevieve hadn’t had time for that.

And speaking of which, it was just about time for her call with her boss. She flipped open her trusty old laptop that was covered in stickers from each of her travels and called him.

His sandy blond hair filled the screen and he smiled back at her.

“Hi Professor Lannister, how are you?”

He sighed, “Genevieve, we’ve worked together for how long and you still won’t call me Tyrion? You make me feel like a dragon.”

She laughed, “Sorry, you know it’s just a force of habit.”

“Sure sure. Anyways, I’m fine. How was your flight home? I forgot to ask you in the email yesterday.”

Genevieve felt her cheeks heat up at the memory of meeting Jon. “It was good. There was a bit of a delay but I got home safe and sound.”

“Just in time to spend the holidays with your family,” he commented. Genevieve knew he didn’t get along with his family. He’d mentioned bits and pieces here and there about a cold father and an even colder sister. From what she understood, he and his brother Jaime got along fine.

“You could’ve taken up on my mom’s offer to spend the holiday with us! You know they’d all love to meet you,” she said.

Tyrion rolled his eyes, “I’ll meet them eventually, I just don’t want to do it while you’re all opening up gifts and singing Christmas carols.”

Genevieve was about to protest the singing bit then she remembered she would be attending a Christmas pageant in a few hours.

“Anyways, what’s on the agenda Tyrion?”

He flipped through the pages of his leather notebook. “I just wanted to pass along your flight information for the final leg of your trip.”

“Awesome. Am I still leaving on the 20th of next month?”

“Yep. And I’ll pass along Tormund’s contact information so you can get acquainted with each other before you head up there,” he said.

She received a ping in her email and found a link to his Faceless profile.

“Gods he’s tall! Look at the beard on him,” she said.

Tyrion laughed, “Indeed, he’s a true free folk you can’t deny that.”
“What’s he like?” Genevieve always tried to get a feel for the people she’d be working with. You could never be too careful.

“Loud and bawdy, but he’s got ins with the right people. I’d go up there with him myself but you know…” he started.

“Yeah, yeah. You’re ‘allergic’ to the cold,” she teased, “You know, just because I’m from the North it doesn’t mean I’m immune to it.”

“It’s in your blood, don’t try to deny it.”

They discussed some finer details of the trip and the call came to a close.

“I’ll check with you once it gets closer to your trip. Try and reach out to Tormund, okay?”

“Sounds good Professor Lannister, have a nice night,” she said.

“I swear, the free folk might throw you over the wall if you use that sass with them. Talk to you later,” he said before the two of hung up.

While she’d been talking to Tyrion she’d missed a text from Jon.

“Hey, I’ll be over in about twenty minutes to get you guys. Is that okay?”

It was sent five minutes ago. That meant she had just fifteen minutes to not only corral Henryk, but to also get out of her pjs and looking like a human being.

She fired out a text to Jon and ran downstairs to where Henryk was playing a video game to tell him to get dressed in whatever costume he had to wear this year.

“Thanks! Just honk when you get here.”
Genevieve had barely gotten Henryk into his reindeer costume when they heard a honk from outside.

“I told you to get off the game sooner!” she huffed. Her brother had been protesting that he needed to “get to a save point.”

Henryk grimaced at his reflection in the mirror and said, “Whatever, we’ve got to go. Who’s even picking us up?”

“You’ll see,” she said while pulling on her ankle boots, “Let’s just get out of the door.”

To their surprise, Jon was standing on the other side.

“I know you said to just honk but I felt rude,” he said with a smile.

Henryk looked between his sister and Jon.

“Since when do you know Bran and Rickon’s brother?”

“Since I met him at the airport the other night. Now let’s get moving, you’re going to make us all late,” she urged. Henryk was still struggling to put on his boots. So, instead of lacing them up properly he just ran to the car and caught up with his friends.

Jon walked her over to the car and opened the door for her. Her father always told her, and her siblings, that you should always be courteous and gestures like that went a long way.

“Thank you Jon, and thanks for picking us up. You really didn’t have to do that,” she said as she buckled in.

“It’s no problem,” he said before turning his head backward, “Now what music do you guys want to listen to?”

“They’ve really got you trained as a chauffeur huh? I might have to get you a little cap to complete the look,” she said.

Jon laughed and put on the latest 3 Dragons song that the kids were always playing around the song. It was full of pep and holiday cheer, not the usual genre for Genevieve. It was good for drowning out the chatter of their brothers in the back as they mocked each other’s costumes.

“What kind of music do you listen to?” she asked.

He thought back to the basement shows he used to go to in high school to get away from the house. For a time he was going every weekend listening to music until his head hurt.

“Believe it or not but I actually saw Khalessi at a basement show a couple of years ago.”
If he hadn’t been driving, she would’ve grabbed his arm in shock.

“NO WAY!” she was practically jumping in her seat, “My brother and I listen to them all the time! I’m so jealous.”

Jon thought back to the concert and how the lead singer, Dany sang her manifestos into the mic like each word had the power to change the world. It was electric.

“She was pretty amazing. What about you, what’s the best concert you’ve ever been to?”

Genevieve’s answer was instant.

“You won’t believe me but I actually know the lead guitarist of The Hound.”

The car halted to a stop as Jon turned to whip his head in her direction.

“You mean to tell me that you know Sandor Clegane? Like the Sandor Clegane the rock legend?”

Genevieve flipped her hair ironically, “What? And you don’t”

Jon was awestruck. She knew the Sandor Clegane. The fucking man who’s style pretty much created modern rock. Who’s lyricism could make anyone cry.

“Where’d you even meet him? I’ve heard that he doesn’t talk to anyone,” Jon said.

Genevieve thought back to when her parents decided to uproot the family and move them to Winterfell. Although she was going off to university, she had felt like she no longer had a home. Coming back to Winterfell just didn’t feel right her first year home. So instead of coming home the summer after her first year she went off to a retreat in the Quiet Island where she’d met Sandor.

“It’s a long story, but he’s a nice guy,” Genevieve said. She didn’t feel like bringing up the memories of that summer, that started with dark moods and ended with peace. Maybe someday.

Jon felt the story hiding in what she said and figured now wasn’t the time to probe.

“Well someday maybe you’ll tell me,” he said.

“Maybe,” she replied.

They zoned out to 3 Dragons until they pulled into the parking lot of the school. The boys ran out to join the rehearsal while Jon and Gen found seats to enjoy the show.

It wasn’t easy reserving seats for all twelve of them.

“We should’ve brought some sweatshirts and purses to save all these seats,” Jon said.

Jon laughed, “Let’s hope some of those overeager parents don’t get angry at us for taking all these seats in their front row.”

“If they want the seats they should have come as early as us!”

Genevieve considered laying across the seats until everyone got there, but Jon didn’t look the type to do that sort of thing.

Once they were settled and forty minutes deep into listening to the kids rehearse their songs, Jon was ready for a break.
“I think I heard the popcorn machine startup. Do you want any?” he asked.

After skipping lunch, Genevieve needed a pick me up. “Yes please!” she said giving him some money.

While Jon went off, Gen decided to get a couple of things done on her phone. She sent Tormund a friend request and received a message almost instantly.

“Not that I’m not pleased to see you adding me, but who are you?” he messaged. Tyrion had warned her of his charms.

Gen rolled her eyes and replied, “Hi Tormund, I’m the person Tyrion’s having you guide around next month.”

“Oh! So you’re the woman who’s brave enough to trek around beyond the Wall?”

“After going around the world for Tyrion all by myself, I’m not scared to go up North.”

“Please don’t tell me you’re from the South. I don’t think you’ll survive if you are,” he said.

“Lol. I’m from Bear Island actually.”

“I guess you’ll be fine... “

When Jon returned he felt a strange pang at seeing her smiling at her phone. He knew it was stupid, and too early to be feeling the green-eyed monster.

The smell of the popcorn shook Genevieve from her phone, “Thank you so much Jon! I’m starving.”

“No problem Genevieve. I think we’ll have to eat it before the rest of them arrive and eat it all.”

It turns out he was right. When the auditorium began to fill, the popcorn soon sold out. And with that, the seats became scarce.

A mother came up and tried to sit in one of the seats that they have saved.

“Um sorry these seats are taken,” Genevieve said.

The woman put her hands on her hips, “Well I don’t see them here.”

Genevieve’s face scrunched up unsure what to say. She was normally a very direct person but this wasn’t the place to demonstrate it.

“They’re just sorting out some stuff backstage,” Jon lied.

The woman rolled her eyes and huffed off to find another seat.

“Nice save,” she said.

At last their families showed up, Gen’s flanking her left and Jon’s flanking his right.

“Thanks for bringing Henryk Jon,” her father said.

“Anytime, Mr. Norward. I had Genevieve to help me pass the time,” Jon replied.

Her mother leaned in to add, “Don’t sound so eager, we’ll have you carting him around!”
To Jon’s right Arya was grumbling about how this was “stupid” and that she didn’t want to be there. He tried offering her some popcorn but she was too deep in her mood to notice.

“Join the club Arya,” Sansa whispered.

The lights dimmed and the show began. One long hour of singing, dancing, and embarrassing memories later, it was finally done. Jon was pretty sure he’d seen Theon and Robb sneak out about half-way through.

After the curtains closed, Bran, Rickon, and Henryk ran over to the front row.

Gen’s mom Nadya stepped forward to wrap Henryk in a hug. “You did an amazing job sweetie! I’d say you three were the best reindeer out there.”

Catelyn gave her sons a similar treatment.

When it was time to go the boys lingered by the doors of the school and presented their parents with an idea.

“Can Henryk please sleep over Mom?” Rickon begged. Bran seemed eager too.

Catelyn and Ned looked to Willem and Nadya for an answer.

“Henryk tomorrow’s Christmas Eve, don’t you want to be home with the family?” his dad asked.

“I don’t have to stay late tomorrow, I could be gone before breakfast!” Henryk said.

Catelyn nodded to Ned and said, “Well if it’s alright with you two, I’m fine with it.”

The boys jumped with excitement. Gen was just glad it wasn’t being hosted at their house. Henryk’s room was right down the hall from hers.

On the walk back to the cars Genevieve and Jon kept in step with each other.

“I could really go for a hot chocolate,” she sighed.

Jon had a perfect idea, “There’s a little cafe not too far from here if you want to go.”

“Yes please! Let me just tell my family I won’t be going in their car.”

She came skipping back holding up a silver stag, “Looks like we’ve got the bill sorted! My dad wanted to thank you for all the driving around you seem to be doing for our family.”

In the car Jon joked around and put on a song from The Hound’s earlier album “Not a Ser.” In response, Genny grabbed the aux cord and started playing from Khallesi’s “Stormborn” album.

The cafe was a small shop that was warm with brassy lights and tapestries on the wall. It was full of exotic souvenirs from Essos and seemed so out of place in Winterfell - just like her in a way.

“This is the last place I’d expect to sell hot chocolate!” Gen said as they starred up at the chalk menu board.

Jon ordered two with extra whip cream, “Well, it’s a good one!”

They found two free wingback chairs over by the crackling fireplace. It was a quiet night at the cafe, considering the time of year.
After she’d gotten a first good sip Genevieve asked, “So what’d you think of the pageant?”

“All I can say is that I’m glad Bran and Rickon will be in high school in a few years,” he started, “but it was actually pretty cute. I liked the dance number they had.”

“Yes! They all got so mixed up. I thought some of them were going to fall off the stage with all the confusion.”

As they drank their hot chocolates and enjoyed each other’s company, their conversation grew more personal.

Jon told her about the work he did for his father’s business and she asked “Did you always know you wanted to work for him?”

It made him pause. Growing up, his father’s company was just such a huge part of the Stark’s lives. Business partners were always coming over for dinner, and over the years the eldest Stark sons sort of just realized it was where they’d end up.

“I guess in a way I’d always knew I’d work for the company. Theon and Robb did too.”

“Do you like it?” she asked. He noticed the way the fire danced in her eyes.

“I don’t think anyone’s ever asked me that. It’s stable which I like,” he answered.

“Fair enough. I had no clue what I wanted to do with my life until I started working with my current boss.”

For her first two years at university Genevieve had changed majors like one would change outfits. She started with Education thinking it was a “steady” career choice. Then she realized she needed freedom beyond the walls of the classroom and began exploring other options like environmental science, psychology, and even medicine for a stint. Eventually she signed up for a cultural studies class with Professor Lannister and she was hooked.

“What did you major in?” Jon asked.


Jon was impressed. “I didn’t even know you could major in all of that!”

“Technically you can’t, but I was able to work out a sort of “make your own degree” with Professor Lannister based off of all the courses I’d taken.”

“Now I feel boring with what I studying in.”

“And what’s that?”

“Business with minors in International Relations and Politics,” Jon said.

Genevieve let out a whistle. “Any plans on running for office someday?”

“Gods no, just side interests I guess. What about you, what are your side interests besides the obvious?”

“Well besides befriending gruff rock legends and traveling, I’m a bit of an information nerd. Give me a book, documentary, or whatever and I’ll want to learn from it,” she said.
Jon’s interests were more artistic, “I’m a typical creative type, writing and music sort of deal.”

“Do you do art? My mom is always looking for people to bring into her workshop.”

Nadya’s workshop was in a large old barn on their property. She’s outfitted it with heat and electrical so it was comfortable, while still maintaining the creative environment. Her mother was a surprisingly organized worker, with all of her supplies having a place. But when it came to her art, it was chaotic, raw, and beautiful.

To her disappointment Jon said, “I’m afraid not. I haven’t dabbled much in it. I’ve been focusing on trying to figure out how to play guitar better lately.”

“When’d you learn? I’ve got almost no musical talents. My parents tried to give me piano lessons when I was younger but it never really stuck.”

His Uncle Benjen had bought him his first guitar when he was about eight years old, an acoustic. When he was able to return from his military duty at the wall, he would give Jon lessons. But over the years Jon had been able to pick up things here and there by watching videos.

“I never formally did, but I got my first guitar when I was eight,” he said.

“You’ll have to play for me sometime,” she urged.

“Only if you tell me Sandor someday,” he laughed.

Once their hot chocolates were no longer warm and the fire began to die, Jon and Genevieve headed back to Tohren Road.

As Jon pulled into her driveway Genevieve looked over at him and said, “This was nice.”

“It really was,” he replied.

They spoke to each other in that comfortable way where silences didn’t matter, but only seemed to increase the intimacy of the moment. Neither wanted to part ways, knowing once they left they’d be swept up into the holiday haze with their families.

“Can I text you?” she asked.

Jon felt warmth spread through him, “Of course, I hope I’m not too boring over the phone.”

“Don’t worry about it, I’ll need some connection to the outside world after spending all that time with my family,” she smiled. She loved the way his curly hair hung in his face. Or the way his dark grey eyes seemed to shine.

“I’m your guy then! I know what it’s like having the whole family forced together this time of year,” he said.

She made a move unbuckle her seat belt and said, “Well I hope I see you soon, maybe Henryk will need me to pick him up tomorrow morning.”

“I’m sure he will, I’ll see you.”

Before she closed the door she smiled again, a seriousness in her eyes, “Night Jon.”

“Good night.”

When she entered her house his smile grew, hurting his cheeks the hold ride home.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Genevieve and Jon text each other all day

Chapter Notes

Happy Galentine’s Day! I started my day with a waffle to celebrate in true Leslie Knope fashion.

To stop himself from thinking about Genevieve all day Jon immersed himself in his family’s Christmas Eve celebrations.

The morning had started late when Arya pulled him out of bed to enjoy the Stark “winter waffle wonderland breakfast” as Sansa had named it as a kid. There was a distinct lack of Henryk at the table, and judging by the bags under his younger brother’s eyes he guessed he’d left early.

And after brunch he’d seen a text from Genevieve saying “Sorry I missed you this morning. Henryk called me early to pick him up and I didn’t want to wake you.”

Although he didn’t get to see her, he felt good knowing she’d thought of him.

Genevieve had been awaiting a response all morning while she and her family watching old home videos. Her favorite was one her father had taken Christmas morning when Henryk was still a baby. Amira was only four and in the video Roland and Gen were each holding a sibling, helping them open their gifts. In the video her father panned to her mother as she wiped tears watching her babies. And whenever Genevieve saw that video she felt the ache in her heart for a family of her own.

Jon sent her a text, “Sorry you had to be up so early. Happy Christmas Eve”

After the Starks had gotten their fill of the “waffle wonderland” they’d all settled in the family room to play board games. While all the siblings competed to see who could conquer the world the fastest, Catelyn prepared the laborious dinner meal. Ned sat with his cup of coffee offering strategy to the younger kids, and telling the older ones to go easy on them.
Sansa surprised them all by winning the game, crowning her the Queen of the world.

Genevieve sent him a text, “Hope you’re all enjoying your Christmas Eve. We’re about to go ice skating on the pond, wish me luck!”

With luck from Jon received, she and her family laced up their skates and bundled up with the scarves Amira had made them last Christmas.

Although she had northern blood running in her veins, she hadn’t ice skated since last winter. Roland teased her by doing figure-eights around her and Henryk showed off his skills claiming he’d be playing for the Winterfell Direwolves someday. Her mother and father were disgustingly sweet skating hand and hand around the pond.

By the time she defrosted, Jon received another text.

“Gods I miss Essos. Remind me again why I came back to Winterfell?”

Jon laughed and reminded her that it was because her family missed her. Robb had asked him who was making him smile at his phone and he put it away, until the next text arrived of course.

Most of the Starks had retreated their rooms to finish (or start) wrapping presents so there wouldn’t be a rush before bed. This year Jon had picked out wrapping paper with direwolf pups on it, knowing his family would appreciate it. He was hoping the paper would offset Catelyn’s reaction to him buying Arya a new sword. She’d been quietly, and not so quietly been trying to discourage Arya from it to no avail.

He sent a picture of all the presents laid out on his floor to Genevieve captioning it with “Send help.”

When Genevieve got Jon’s text she was reminded that she too needed to kick her butt into gear and get wrapping. Halfway through Roland had come in sheepishly with arms full of presents looking for some help. In exchange for her assistance, he promised her first dibs on the cookies their mother was baking.

It was a tradition in the Norward family to have an annual Christmas Eve cookie decorating contest.
Last year Henryk had won by creating a fisherman and using shrimp from dinner for as his bounty. It wasn’t the taste that counted, but the innovation.

Jon received the picture of her creation, a gingerbread version of her family that bore a striking resemblance to her actual family. For her own gingerbread woman, she’d even attempted to make a tiny suitcase. According to her text it hadn’t have been enough to win, but she’s sure gotten her fill of cookies.

By the time Catelyn called them to the table for dinner, Jon felt his fingers itching for his phone. The family had a strict “no phone a the table” policy which he respected but now found himself wishing didn’t exist.

Dinner helped ease his anxieties slightly, with course after course of food meant to lull them to an easy sleep. She’d even made his favorite chocolate pie for dessert.

Genevieve’s family was far more relaxed as they sat on the living room floor enjoying a feast of pizza and ice cream. Each year they all decided on a different meal to order, and this year they’d all been craving some warm cheesy goodness. Tomorrow night they’d have a more traditional Christmas feast.

As the night wore on and they were all sent to bed so visions of sugar plums could dance in their heads, both Genevieve and Jon laid awake.

Alone in his basement bedroom, Jon turned on the curtain of string lights by his bed and put on his headphones. He had trouble sleeping most nights and the music seemed to be the only thing that would calm the thoughts in his mind. That and the writing. So he curled up in bed scrawling notes in his tattered notebook about his recent feelings, his recent desires.

Genevieve had every intention of going to be, but the moment her head touched the pillow it was like her brain decided to go into overdrive. After months of sleeping in strange places, her bed felt strange. She tried reading a novel she’d planned on reading on the plane but she couldn’t focus. One thought, or rather one person, kept coming to the forefront of her thoughts.

And afraid they’d sound too eager texting to ask, they both wondered what the other was doing until they fell asleep.
Before Genevieve even got out of bed on Christmas morning she had four very different conversations.

First there was Tyrion:

Gen: Merry Christmas Tyrion! I hope you get everything you asked for

Tyrion: If my sister getting drunk before breakfast was on my list I’d be a very happy man right now.

Gen: You could get on a plane and be in Winterfell by noon…

Tyrion: I’m not crashing Christmas. I’ll just hide away from her and her demon son with a bottle of Arbor Gold.

Gen: Save one for me, I think I’ll need it when my brother realizes I didn’t buy him a sword from Braavos.

And then there was Tormund:

Tormund: Merry Christmas, if you Southerners even celebrate it.

Gen: Merry Christmas to you too. (Bear Island is still in the North you know…) Tormund: Not according to the free folk. My people can’t wait to meet you.

Gen: I feel like I should be scared… don’t tell them anything bad!

Tormund: We’ll see :)

To her surprise, she even got one from her famous friend she’d met on the Quiet Isle.

Sandor: Merry Christmas Genevieve.

Gen: Merry Christmas Sandor! How have things been?

Sandor: Same old I guess, spending the holidays on the Isle. I saw you were over in Essos.

Gen: Tell everyone I say hello! And yes, I was over there for work. I’ll have to fill you in on the details sometime.

Sandor: I’m playing a show in Winterfell in a couple weeks if you want to catch up then.

Gen: Yes please! I’ve missed hearing you live.

Sandor: Sounds good, I’ll have them put your name on the list. Bring whoever you want.
Now she had a reason to text Jon.

Gen: Merry Christmas Jon!

Jon: I was just about to text you, Merry Christmas to you and your family!

Gen: The kids drag you out of bed yet?

Jon: Not yet, I’m sure any minute now.

Gen: I’ve got great news!

Jon: What?!

Gen: Sandor is playing a show here in a few weeks and you’re coming with me (and prob my brother)

Jon: NO WAY

Jon: ARE you serious?

Jon: ***serious

Jon: Genevieve???

Gen: Yes! He said I could bring whoever I wanted.

Jon: I’m in awe right now. You just made my Christmas, maybe even my year.

Gen: I’m glad I could be of service!

Jon: Gods my siblings are going to be so jealous (the ones who know The Hound at least, not those heathens who only listen to 3 Dragons)

Gen: Lol invite them too, the more the merrier!

Jon typed out Love youuuuuu and erased it, thinking better of it

Jon: I think I’ll let them be jealous for a couple of days

Gen: Make them work for it…

Jon: Good idea

Gen: Well enjoy the day with your family, I’ll be away from my phone for the day. Christmas is the one day none of us use our phones.

Jon: Thank you again, truly. I’m so excited. Merry Christmas :)

Gen: Merry Christmas :-)
Chapter 10

Christmas morning was a magical time for the Stark family. It was the one time in the whole year where time seemed to stand still, like nothing existed outside of the moment they were in. And Jon felt that as they opened up presents as a family.

It was always done youngest to oldest, starting with Rickon and ending with their father, each person taking a turn until there were no presents left to open. Arya had jumped up and down when she’d opened the sword from him, and Catelyn even had a small smile.

Jon had received some new books and some records from his family, along with some clothing. Christmas wasn’t his favorite holiday because he got stuff, but because he got to give others things. Besides, nothing beat family time for Jon.

After presents they enjoyed a large breakfast followed by their annual hike in the woods. There was something about the stillness in the air on Christmas that made a walk as a family even more special. Like they were the only people in the world.

By dinner they were all ready to eat and enjoyed a large ham dinner Catelyn prepared with the help of Sansa and Robb. They shared stories of Christmas’s past around the table and toasted for Christmas memories to come.

“Remember when Uncle Benjen gave you coal as a joke and you almost broke the window when you tried to throw it?” Robb reminded Arya.

“I was like five give me a break!”

By the end of the day Jon felt that well-known sadness creep up on him. The kind of sadness that found it’s way in on quiet weekends and holidays to remind Jon that despite all the joy of the day and of his family, something still didn’t feel quite right. And even though he was a self-aware person, he couldn’t quite pinpoint what was wrong.

As the sun went down and the only light in the house were the Christmas lights, the Starks began to drop one by one to head off to bed. Robb and Theon had drank enough to put them right to sleep and the rest of the kids relaxed in blissful contentment.

Down in his room Jon wished he had someone to hold, to help chase away the awful feeling sinking in his chest. He tried putting on one of the new records Bran had gotten him, but even the crooning voice of Elder Brother couldn’t help him relax.

If it wasn’t for a text from Genevieve he would’ve gone up a poured himself a glass just like his brothers to forget how he was feeling.

“Did you enjoy your Christmas?” she’d asked.

He had, really. He’d gotten things he didn’t know he wanted and had a beautiful day with his family. But still he felt like there was something wrong with him. Something he couldn’t shake.

“It was nice, I hope you all enjoyed the day,” he replied.

Back in her room attempting to put away the presents her family had given her, Genevieve was starting to feel strange. Every year Christmas came and went so fast, and with that the magical moments of family time she cherished. She had about a month left in town but after that she wasn’t sure when she’d be back. Hell, she might even have to move down south to work on the book with
Tyrion eventually.

Texting Jon was a welcome distraction.

“Henryk was a little disappointed he didn’t get any sharp objects from Braavos, but I promised him I’d take him to the movies to make up for it,” she said.

Sometimes she felt like the odd-sibling out. Ever since she moved away from school they’d moved on without her, with even Roland staying behind in Winterfell. And although she loved them all she felt like traveling around the world had created a distance she’d never be able to close.

“Did you tell him about your tickets to The Hound?” he asked.

“Lol no. He and Amira have no interest in going with me. But Roland was pumped. He doesn’t exactly know that I know Sandor so I’m going to surprise him. What about you, did you tell your siblings they could come?”

For a long time Genevieve had wanted to keep her trip to the Quiet Isle all to herself. Jon was the only person who knew about Sandor. Telling him wasn’t supposed to mean something, it had just happened.

“I haven’t told any of them. I want to bask in the glory of it by myself for a bit. I’ll probably tell them tomorrow.”

Genevieve took a chance, “You have any plans tomorrow?”

“Besides a half-day at work, nothing. What about you?”

“Looks like I have a fun date with Henryk at the movies. You’re welcome to come with Bran and Rickon if you want.”

She felt stupid for asking. Why would he want to hang out with her and her brother after work?

“I’m down! But I’ll have to ask them tomorrow morning, they passed out early. What movie does he want to see?”

Relief hit her. “Just one of those dragon movies, he wasn’t too clear on the specifics.”

“I think I know the one, just text me what showing you’re thinking of seeing. I get out of work at 1,” he said.

Genevieve decided to give organizing her presents a break and got into bed.

Down the street Jon did the same and felt the tension in his throat ease, feeling better that he now had plans. It was only one movie but anything helped rather than face the holiday season alone.

Genevieve wondered if Jon thought she was too forward for having just met him, too monopolizing of his time. But she decided it didn’t matter. She needed a friend, or whatever he’d let her be, and it seemed he needed one too.
Hi everyone, hope you're having a good week. I'm not sure how frequent my updates will be because I just found out I have carpal tunnel (in both my hands it seems...) so I'm not really supposed to be typing if I can help it. I'll try to post as much as my body allows though!

Jon’s day at work had been trying. His video call with contacts in the Iron Islands hadn’t gone well due to connection issues, and he had to work through lunch. But all the stresses of the day had been forgotten when Genevieve had texted him to say she was in the parking lot with the boys.

When he got in the car Bran asked how his first day back to work was with a smirk.

“It won’t be so funny when Dad has you working there someday!” Jon said.

But Jon knew that Bran had no interest in the Stark family business. He was always reading and researching things. Winterfell wasn’t big enough for all the dreams he had.

“How are you?” he asked Genevieve, regretting his lapse in manners.

She smiled and turned down the song that’d been playing on the radio, “I’m okay. Feeling a little funny today, I think I just didn’t get enough sleep.”

From the back Henryk said, “Too much excitement from Christmas?”

Genevieve felt her stomach rumble, “Maybe Henryk.”

They arrived at the small theatre, one of the few still owned by a family rather than a larger corporation. What it lacked in the latest fancy features like reclining seats, it made up in affordability. Genevieve just couldn’t justify paying an arm and a leg just for a bottle of water and some popcorn drenched in butter.

The movie theatre was about fifty years old and still had the charming details of early architectural styles. Warm lights, red carpets, and velvet seats (that were still in good condition following a renovation).

At the counter, Genevieve paid for all of them before Jon could butt in.

“Five tickets to the dragon movie please,” she said.

Rickon spoke up, “It’s called The Ice Dragon Genevieve.”

Jon shot him a look reminding him to be polite. “I’m grabbing snacks, no objections.”

“Fine with me,” Genevieve said. Her stomach was still feeling nervous, to the point where food wasn’t even on her mind.

The boys, however, were more than willing to spend Jon’s money.
With a small popcorn and flavored ice slushies for each of them, and water for Genevieve, they took their seats. The theatre was relatively empty for a vacation week, most of the families probably at the fancier theatre across town.

The boys ran to the back row to claim the “perfect” seats while Jon and Genevieve trudged up the seats behind them.

Noticing her quiet change Jon asked, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just need to sit down for a bit I think,” she answered.

She and Jon were sitting next to each other, Jon on the outside with Henryk on her left.

The preview for other movies began to play and the lights dimmed. There was a spy movie filmed in Braavos that brought her back to her time there. And a preview for a historical film about the Long Winter that sent shivers down her spine.

Jon leaned over and whispered, “I always hated learning about that in school.”

“Me too, it was like they were just trying to scare us.”

When the movie started they didn’t talk much despite the relatively empty theatre. Jon had offered her popcorn but she still didn’t feel quite right.

It all became much worse when the dragons on screen started spinning around wildly making her nauseous And all of a sudden she had to leave the theatre.

“I’ll be right back, I’m not feeling great,” she said before rushing down the steps and out of the room.

In the white-tiled bathroom covered in mirrors, Genevieve began to feel panicked. She hadn’t felt this way since she’d gotten food poisoning across the Narrow Sea in Pentos. For a second she wondered if she was having a panic attack but that was quickly ruled out when she threw up in the toilet.

After sitting there for a while, Genevieve realized she’d have to go back to the theatre at some point. She couldn’t just sit there staring at her bloodshot eyes in the mirror. So she bought a pack of gum from a dispenser and moved on.

On her way back to the theatre she saw Jon sitting outside the bathroom on a bench.

He rose when he saw her.

“Are you alright? I was worried when you didn’t come back after a while,” he asked.

She considered lying and saying she was just fine, but the sincerity in her voice made her feel like there was no option but the truth. In her sick state, she just melted into his words.

“I got a little sick if I’m being honest,” she said feeling awkward.

She barely knew Jon. Telling someone you barely knew that you’d just throw up in a public bathroom wasn’t exactly getting to know you conversation.

His face washed over with worry, “Do you want to leave? I can go get the boys, they’ll understand.”

She waved him off, “There’s only like twenty minutes left in the movie, I can tough it out.”
Jon didn’t look convinced but let her lead him back into the theatre.

The boys had barely recognized her absence. And for the rest of the movie Gen could feel Jon’s gaze on her checking to see if she was alright.

On the way home Jon had offered to drive, and Genevieve, feeling too dizzy to decline had let him. He must have told the boys to keep the volume at a low because they were uncharacteristically quiet the whole ride home.

Jon dropped his brothers home first, with Henryk promising they’d hang out soon. When they arrived at her home there were no cars in the driveway.

Noticing that no one was home Jon said “Do you want me to stay to make sure you’re alright? I really don’t mind.”

Normally Genevieve would’ve said no. She would’ve soldiered on and taken care of herself. But she was sick and tired, sick and tired of being on her own too.

“If you really don’t mind,” she said.

Once inside Henryk paid no mind to them and ran off to his room saying that he was going to play videogames online with his friends.

Genevieve led Jon to the library and plopped down on one of the couches with a blanket. The room was

Jon stood for a second, unsure of himself. He didn’t know how to help her.

“Do you want me to get you anything? I can run out to the store,” he said shifting on his feet.

She groaned, “I feel bad for asking but can you grab my laptop from my room and a glass of water from the kitchen? My room is the last door on the right upstairs.”

“No worries, I’ve got nowhere to be for the rest of the day,” he said.

“Stop lying, I’m sure spending your night taking care of a sick person isn’t exactly your favorite after work activity.”

“Sure beats the chaos at home. I’ll go grab your stuff.”

Jon felt apprehensive going into her room. It was all too personal of an action. The sounds of Henryk laughing at his video game helped calm him down.

Inside her room he was surprised at how little it reminded him of her. It was practically empty beside her luggage still not unpacked on the floor. The laptop was in plain view on her bed in a tangle of blankets.

He didn’t dally in her room longer, not wanting to seem like he was snooping. After returning with a glass of water he joined Genevieve in the library.

“Thank you so much Jon.”

“No problem, if there’s anything else I can do please let me know.”

He was still standing, unsure if he should sit next to her.
She made the decision for him saying, “Come sit down, I don’t think I’m contagious, or at least I hope. We can watch a movie or something.”

“She made the decision for him saying, “Come sit down, I don’t think I’m contagious, or at least I hope. We can watch a movie or something.”

“Someone in my house is always sick, my immune system is pretty strong.”

“I haven’t felt like this in a while, the airport germs probably got to me,” she said.

She opened up her laptop and they looked through her movie library for a good fit. The two of them decided on a classic from their grandparent’s generation about two shop workers from Budapest. Older movies always made Genevieve feel safe. There was something comforting about the crackle of old audio. As for Jon, he just wanted to make sure she was comfortable.

As the two couples on screen had missed encounters and eventually fell in love, Jon noticed Genevieve struggling to keep her eyes open. Eventually, she was out altogether. He didn’t want to leave her there to wake up around dinner time to an empty house, so he ran off to the grocery store to buy some soup.

When he returned she was still passed out on the couch so instead of waking her he sat in the armchair across from her and try to get a quick nap in himself.

Genevieve eventually woke up feeling parched and was surprised to see Jon still there asleep in the chair, a bag of groceries at his feet. And despite feeling sick she felt in that moment that she was going to be okay as long as Jon was there.
Happy Friday! Would you all rather me stick to an update schedule or just post whenever I finish a new chapter. So far I’ve just been posting whenever I write a new one, but I know that sometimes leaves you all with a drought in the middle of the week when I’m busy with work / school. Let me know if you have a preference!

After Jon made her soup Genevieve insisted he go home to enjoy the rest of his night while he still could. The next couple of days Genevieve was on strict bed rest as ordered by her parents. Her mother would bring her warm meals and the rest of them would provide her with entertainment.

Jon had been texting her periodically to see how she was getting on. Work had been a bore lately for him and he was trying to find something to keep him going through the week.

“I’m still feeling about the same, I think my body just needs rest after all the traveling I’ve been doing.”

“Well let me know if there is anything I can do!”

When she wasn’t off with friends Amira had sat in Genevieve room and read her pages from the book by Old Nan that she’d gotten for Christmas.

“Do you think White Walkers actually existed?” Amira asked sitting at the foot of the bed.

Although she hadn’t been beyond the wall yet, Genevieve had a feeling they had. “The accounts of them seem to consistent to never have existed.”

“Do you think they’d ever come back?” Although Amira was sixteen, she looked like a child again when she asked.

“Who knows. We don’t see any dragons coming back no matter how much Henryk wishes they would, so I doubt White Walkers will suddenly start popping up again.”

Towards the end of her illness, Genevieve found the strength to leave her room and venture to the great beyond — the kitchen. She ran into Roland while grabbing a banana and he was surprised to see her. He’d managed to avoid her the past couple of days, claiming he didn’t want to risk bringing her sickness into work.

“How you feeling Gen?”

She plopped down at the kitchen counter. “Nice of you to ask, haven’t seen you in a while.”

“I didn’t want to start an epidemic at the college!” he said.

Letting out a laugh she said, “Sure, sure. I just missed you.”

“Missed you too sis,” he said putting an arm around her shoulder, “If you’re feeling up for it I’ve got an invite to a New Years Eve party.”
Genevieve couldn’t remember the last time she’d gone out to a party with Roland, it had to be years. She was in, her sick body be damned.

“Whose house?”

“Some girl named Ros that Theon used to have a fling with. They’re on good terms though, so she invited us all to the rager she’s throwing. She’s having a band coming.”

Her achy body was starting to feel lighter at the prospect of letting loose.

“Do you know what band? I need a good house show.”

“No idea about the band, but Gods me too. It’s been ages. I can’t wait to see The Hound,” Roland said.

Genevieve smiled thinking about how shocked he’d be when she introduced him to her old friend Sandor.

“Me too. I’m going to go lay down but I’ll keep you updated on my sickly condition.”

He saluted her, “Very good patient.”

Back in her bed Genevieve decided to text Jon.

“Are you going to Ros’s party? My brother just invited me,” she texted.

When Theon had told him and Robb about the party, Jon wasn’t sure if he’d go. He didn’t want to move through her packed house all alone with a bunch of drunk people.

“I’m not sure yet, I don’t know if it’s really my crowd. What about you, how are you feeling?”

“I think I’ll feel good enough to go. Roland says there’s going to be a band so I’m going to give it a try just to see some live music.”

“Theon didn’t tell me about a band!” he said.

“Yeah! Please come so I have a buddy. I know Roland won’t want to hang around with me all night.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be there. Beats staying home with the kids.”

“Lol good point, I don’t want to babysit this year.”

After they were done texting Genevieve called Amira into her room.

“Can you help me pick out something to wear for New Years?”
On New Year’s Eve Jon stood in front of the bathroom mirror debating if he should change. He was wearing dark jeans, a leather jacket, and an old band tee. His hair was unruly as always and he considered putting it up in a bun like Sansa had recommended a while back. But they were running late and he didn’t have time to experiment.

“Jon hurry up, Ros is asking where we are!” Theon called from the other side of the door.

“Just a second, I’ll be right out.”

In the car to pick up Genevieve and Roland, Robb informed him that they’d need to figure out a designated driver.

“Why can’t we just stay over Ros’s?” Theon asked.

“Last time we slept over I ended up with drawings on my face,” Robb added.

It was true, after Ros’s last rager Robb had woken up with some question body parts on his face. Jon was glad he hadn’t been at that party.

When they pick up Roland and Gen they squeezed into the backseat with Jon.

Genevieve was wrapped up in a coat looking much healthier than she had been days prior.

“Sup lads? You ready to party!” Roland asked clapping his hands.

The car let out a rowdy cheer and Robb turned up the tunes.

“Hi Jon! I’m excited!” Genevieve said.

Jon couldn’t say the same but he could fake it, “Yeah, let’s hope the band is good.”

She turned to her brother, “Make sure you introduce me to everyone, I feel like I don’t know anyone here.”

“Because you don’t loner,” Roland replied.

“Hey!” she said slapping his arm, “It’s not my fault mom and dad decided to move to Winterfell.”

“Okay loner.”

Robb and Theon spoke up saying they’d introduce her to everyone. Jon promised to stay by her side so she wouldn’t get lost in the sea of people.

“By the way, who’s going to suck it up and drive our drunk asses home tonight?” Roland asked.
Having just recovered from her illness Genevieve volunteered, “I don’t mind. I probably shouldn’t be drinking right now anyways.”

“Legendddddddd!” Theon cheered.

“Oh shut up Theon,” she responded feeling comfortable enough with him to joke around.

Ros’s house wasn’t big but that didn’t stop car loads of people from pulling up to party. It was a single story home with a finished basement. Normally, it would’ve been a good size but there was about twenty cars parked outside ready to party.

They all ran up to the door to get out of the cold, Genevieve having ditched her coat to show off the emerald body suit she had tucked into her black jeans.

Theon rang the doorbell in quick succession while they all shivered outside.

“Hurry the fuck up Ros!”

The door flung up and showed a redhead in a tight glittering dress.

“Rang it enough times didn’t you Theon?”

“Oh you love me,” he said.

“Well come on in, before you let in all the cold.”

She stared at Genevieve with curiosity.

“Who’s the bird? You new girl or something?”

Roland did a big laugh, “She’s my sister! Ros, meet Genevieve.”

“It’s a pleasure,” Ros said, “Help yourself to anything you see inside.”

Genevieve looked at Roland trying to communicate her dislike, “Thanks.”

Once inside the boys made quick introductions to some of their friends. So far she’d met a man named Jory and someone named Jeyne.

“What the fuck is Jeyne doing here? Isn’t she like Sansa’s age?” Robb asked once they walked away.

“Yeah, she’s like sixteen,” Jon said.

“Mom and Dad would kill me if I caught Amira at a party and didn’t say anything,” Roland added.

After that the boys left to get drinks, and Genevieve knew she wouldn’t see them again until it was time to go.

But Jon didn’t leave her side. “Do you want to go grab yourself something, I’ll wait here for you.”

“I’m all set. I’m not going to drink tonight.”

“Don’t feel like you have to because I can’t!”

“I really don’t mind. I don’t feel like drinking around all of these people,” he explained.
Genevieve understood what he meant. Sometimes it felt daunting to drink around a bunch of strangers. You never knew who you could trust at a party. When she was overseas she rarely got drunk unless she had a buddy with her.

“Why don’t we go find that band they promised then,” she suggested.

They found it down in the basement surrounded by a small crowd. Genevieve thought the house was going to collapse with all the people on it.

Over the crowd of people Jon tried talking to Genevieve, “I think I’ve seen this band before. The bass player is still in high school I think.”

Genevieve took a look at the guy in question. He was tall with dark hair, and looked like he could grow a full beard if he wanted to.

“That guy’s in high school? Holy shit!”

Jon laughed, “You’re telling me. He looks like he could be my age.”

They listened to a couple songs from the band before the band took a break to get away from the crowd.

“I’ve got to talk to him. I just can’t believe he’s in high school. Even ignoring how he looks, he plays well enough to be a lot older,” Gen said.

Jon was barely about to keep track of her as she wiggled her way through the crowd.

“Hey!” she called out to the bassist, “Yeah, you with the bull on your shirt.”

The kid’s blue eyes flicked around nervously before pointing at himself.

When Jon caught up with her she was practically interviewing the kid.

“Jon, this is Gendry. He does, in fact, go to school with Amira and Sansa,” she explained.

Gendry stuck out his hand, “Nice to meet to meet you Jon, I actually know your sister Arya.”

Jon was taken aback. How did this grown man know his little sister?

“Uh yeah. How exactly do you know her?”

Gendry blushed, “We’re in the same art class together. We have the same friend group sort of.”

Genevieve interviewed, “Nice! Make sure our siblings don’t get into any trouble.”

“Will do,” Gendry said glancing at Gendry, “Well I’ll see you around. Enjoy the party.”

Jon and Gen went upstairs to grab snacks and found a quiet corner of the house in an office.

“So do you think he likes Arya?” Genevieve asked.

“Gods I hope not, even though she’s in high school she’s still in grade school in my mind.”

“You’ll have to interrogate her later to find out.”

They ran into their brothers in a fierce game of pong. Roland was many drinks in and was excited to see his sister.
“Gen!! Come over here and play. I’m getting my ass kicked,” he said.

Her brother was facing off against Robb while Theon made out with a random woman against the wall.

“I’m not drinking though, what if I miss?”

“I’ll drink for you. Come on, I need you,” he pleaded.

Robb was quick to recruit Jon on his side.

Genevieve went first and missed her shot.

“Roland, I’m telling you. You’re going to end up blackout with me on your team.”

“It’s New Year’s Eve, he’ll end up passed out either way,” Robb said.

Jon was able to get the ball in his first try, putting them in the lead. Eventually, the game end when Roland announced he needed to throw up.

“He better not puke in the car later,” Gen said to Robb and Jon.

“Wouldn’t be the first time. We’ve got buckets just in case,” said Robb.

As it came closer to midnight most of the crowd piled down into the basement to listen to the band. Ros had come out to make a drunken speech offering her house for those too drunk to drive home, and toasted with yet another beer.

“It’s amazing she’s still standing,” Gen said.

“I know, I thought she’d be out for the night after that keg stand she did earlier,” Jon replied.

“Part of me is glad I’m the DD for the night. I’d probably have a panic attack if I was drunk around all of these people.”

Jon knew a thing or two about that overwhelming sense of anxiety, “Me too. I swear each year her party gets bigger and bigger.”

Gendry’s band played some cover songs by Kingslayer and The Faceless Men until it was time for the countdown. Around them, everyone seemed to couple off ready to ring in the new year.

Jon could barely make out his brothers’ heads in the crowd and was thankful he hadn’t lost Genevieve in the chaos.

“Ten!”

“Nine!”

“Eight!”

“I think it’s going to be a good year,” Genevieve said hugging herself.

“Five!”

“Four!”

“Three!”
“Two!”

“One!” everyone cheered in an eruption of excitement. They cheered for the new year, for the free booze, and as if hangovers didn’t await them in the morning.

And all of a sudden Jon became very aware that couples were kissing to ring in the new year.

Genevieve looked up at him with a shrug and smile, “I’m down if you are.” Her cheeks were pink and he couldn’t tell if it was because of the million people crammed into the basement or something more.

Jon felt frozen. He knew they’d been growing closer, but to kiss her? To get that close to her without showing how much he was starting to feel for her? His heart pounded and he leaned in.

He smelled like leather and she was a northerner through and through, all peppermint and sharpness. She placed her hand so lightly on his shoulder that he wasn’t sure if she even had. Around them the crowd was still celebrating. It was almost too late to be kissing using the countdown tradition as an excuse. But the two of them didn’t notice anyone around them, just each other.

When Genevieve closed the distance and touched her lips to his Jon felt in his heart that it really was going to be a good year. And when Jon wrapped his arms around her and deepened it, she was certain it would be.
They were too busy herding their drunk brothers to the car to talk about what had just happened between them. But Jon’s glances and Genevieve’s lingering touches on his shoulder said enough.

Roland had been particularly rowdy on the way back, “Gennnnn! Happy new year sis! What’s your resolution.”

“That you won’t be too grumpy with a hangover tomorrow, and yourself?”

“Me too Gen, me too,” he replied. Soon after he was throwing up in the bucket Jon had quickly pulled out for him. Meanwhile, Robb was passed out beside him. Theon had stayed over at Ros’s despite his claims that they were “just friends.”

Even when Jon had dropped her and Roland off she hadn’t had the courage to look him in his eyes and ask him what it all meant. Instead she just wished him a happy new year and said she had to get Roland into bed.

But lying in bed that night Genevieve pieced her feelings together and realized pursuing a relationship with Jon was worth the anxiety it may cause. In college, and abroad, she’d gone on dates here and there but nothing felt solid. But with Jon she already felt comfortable. He knew her family, and because of that and other reasons she couldn’t explain, she felt she could trust him.

So she decided to swallow her fears and give him a call. She knew that if she didn’t she lie awake the whole night wondering if she’d let the window close.

Jon had been pacing around his room when she called.

“Genevieve? Is everything okay?” he asked.

He cursed himself for being too much of a coward to say anything to her before she left.

But she had courage enough for the both of them. “Let me say this before I get too chicken too. I liked our kiss and I like you,” she said in a hurry.

A part of her wanted to throw her phone across the room and hide in the woods as soon as she had said it.

There was a silent pause on the other side of the phone as Jon tried to gather his thoughts into something intelligent or at the very least something coherent.

“Uh if you don’t feel the same that’s totally fine. You can hang up and I’ll pretend like I never said anything, really no worries,” Genevieve added once the silence grew.

“No!” Jon said, “I mean, I liked it too. I like you too.”

“Oh, okay. Okay, great. Awesome.” Her dumb idiot smile spread and her body felt tingly.

“So what does this mean Genevieve?” Jon felt safer asking her, rather deciphering it for himself. He was afraid that if he got too ahead of things he’d end up misinterpreting what she wanted.

“Whatever you want it to mean.”

“So, uh, do you want to get dinner with me tomorrow night? I’ve got plans tonight but I’m free after work tomorrow,” he asked. He had a small restaurant in mind that they could test the waters at,
nothing fancy but comfortable enough.

Genevieve was so giddy she feared if she opened her mouth she’d never stop talking. “I’d like that a lot.”

“Awesome, I’ll text you the details.”

“Night Jon, thanks for not making me feel awkward about this,” she said.

He smiled at the goofiness of her voice, “Thank you for making the first move. Sweet dreams Genevieve.”

“Same to you Jon.”
The two of them woke up feeling like they could tackle anything. For Jon, even a jammed copier and a delayed contract couldn't even kill his mood. She liked him. He liked her. And when Jon went over his friend Sam's house after work his smile was contagious.

“What’s got you in this mood Jon?” Sam asked while pouring them cups of coffee. Sam and Gilly’s rental home was tiny, but cozy. The two of them had dated all throughout college and it was obvious that they'd end up married one day.

Jon thought back to the late-night phone call, to the smile that had seemed like it could split his face.

“I met a girl.”

Sam’s girlfriend Gilly turned her head around from the living room and said, “What was that Jon?”

Her boyfriend was equally shocked.

“I met a girl at the airport the other day. Her name is Genevieve,” he explained.

Gilly walked over to stand beside Sam. “We need more details than that Jon!” she said.

Sam still hadn’t found any words and just nodded in encouragement.

Jon was more than happy to gush over his recent luck, “So I was at the airport in Oldtown and she sat down near me at the gate. We got to talking, and sat next to each other on the plane. Next thing I know it’s New Year's Eve and we’re kissing.”

“That’s quite a big gap of information Jon! But congrats mate, I’m happy for you,” Sam said.

“Can’t wait to meet her, maybe we can go on a double date,” Gilly added.

“Thanks you two. But yeah, turns out Robb and Theon know her older brother. And her younger brother hangs out with the boys,” Jon said.

“What are the chances!” Sam said.

Jon raised the mug to his mouth, “Gods who knows, but I’m just glad those odds worked for me instead of against me.”

Gilly had tried to look her up on Faceless but Sam whispered that they’d do it later. Jon hadn’t even looked her up yet!

Sam had filled Jon in on his recent work at the local library. He’d always enjoyed books, but lately he wasn’t sure if he wanted to stay there for the rest of his life.

“I think Sam could easily go on to get his Doctorate,” Gilly said.
“Oh me too, you’re the smartest guy I know Sam,” Jon added. Sam tried to brush off the compliments but found himself seriously considering going back to school.

“You should look into the program in Oldtown. When I was down there last week I got to see the Citadel’s library. You’d absolutely love it Sam.”

Sam said, “I’ll think about it, now let’s play some games!”

They spent the rest of night playing tabletop games that they had enjoyed in college. Sam had been the first friend Jon made in college that wasn’t friends with him just to party with Robb or Theon. They’d stumbled upon each other in the library and had been fast friends ever since.

While they were playing games, Genevieve was locked up in her room attempting to connect to her friend on video chat.

“Mira? Are you there?” Gen asked.

Mira Forrester, who wasn’t to be confused with her sister Amira, was an old friend from when she lived on Bear Island. Mira and her family were originally from Ironrath, but had moved when they decided to gift their Ironwood trees to a land trust. The two of them had become friends in school and Genevieve could always count on Mira to give her guidance and strength in hard times, which came into play when her family announced they’d be moving to Winterfell after she graduated high school.

“Hi Gen! I can see you, can you see me?” Mira answered.

“Mira! It’s been too long, I miss you. How’s Highgarden?” Gen asked.

Mira gestured to the lush landscape outside of her window, “Beautiful as always. And Winterfell?”

“Freezing. I thought I’d get used to the cold, but I think my time away turned me into a Southerner.”

“Never!”

“Yes!” The two women had played a game as children where Southerners were evil, and Northerners weren’t. As they got older they started using the term “Southerner” as slang for anything bad.

“Anyways, how are you liking your new job?”

“I love it! The Tyrell’s are super nice, and the CEO Olenna is a hot ticket,” Mira said. She’d recently gotten a job working for the Tyrell’s agricultural empire, using her connections and skills acquired from the Forrester name.

“It’s the perfect fit for you, I can’t wait to visit once I’m done with the work with this book,” Gen said.

“Speaking of travel, how was your flight home? I forgot to ask you. Things got a little hectic with all the holiday travel back to see my family.”

“No worries, it was the same here,” Gen started and her grin grew as she thought about how she’d break the news to Mira.

“What’s that look for? I know that look!” Mira was the one to coin the lovesick smile the “dumb-idiot smile” after the two of them had fallen in and out of love, and often quickly, when they were
growing up.

“I met a guy at the airport, his name is Jon and I kissed him last night,” Genevieve gushed. It felt good to tell someone. She was reluctant to tell anyone in her family until they at least made things official. She didn’t want to jinx it and get too far ahead of herself.

“GENEVIEVE NORWARD! I need more details!”

Genevieve did a little happy dance for her friend and answered, “Roland ditched me at the airport, and I had been talking to Jon before the flight, he was super sweet. And it turns out our siblings know each other so we’ve been running into each other a lot this week.”

“And the kiss? Miss Genevieve, you need to explain. I’m dying in my singlehood over here,” Mira sighed.

“What about that Willas guy you told me about?”

“I’m not going to go after the CEO’s grandson! Back to the kiss.”

“Whatever, I still think you should take the risk. He sounds like a dream.”

“The kiss Genevieve!” Mira reminded. It always amazed Genevieve how easy the two of them could talk, no matter how long it had been since their last conversation.

“Okay so I went to a New Year’s party last night with Roland, Jon, and Jon’s brother’s Robb and Theon. Next thing I know I’m offering to kiss him when the clock struck midnight!”

Genevieve thought back to how soft his lips had been, and how good his arms felt around her.

“Gen? Are you with me?”

“Yeah sorry. Anyways, I was so giddy after the kiss I called him up and told him I liked him. We’re going on a date tomorrow night!”

“Look at you go Genny! My girl making moves,” Mira laughed.

She pretended to look at her nails, “You know me, the men can’t stay away.”

“Girl you’re too much. You have to text me after your date, and send me a picture of him!”

“Look him up on Faceless, his name is Jon Stark.”

Recognition flashed in Mira’s eyes, “The name sounds familiar. I think the Tyrell’s might work with the Starks.”

“I really have no idea what Jon does, I should really ask him. All I know is he works for his Dad’s company.”

“I think it’s some sort of consulting firm, I’m not too sure,” Mira said.

Mira typed away on her computer until she found his Faceless account, “He’s HOT Gen! I love his hair, you could get your hands lost in it.”

“Thank you, thank you! You should really hit up Willas, you sound like you need it.”

“I’m just a little thirsty, I’m not dehydrated yet.”
“Yet,” Gen laughed.

The two girls talked for a while longer, filling each other in on their Christmas’s and their New Year’s resolutions.

“I want to get promoted by the end of the year, and maybe ask Willas on a date,” Mira said.

“And I want to convince Lannister to hire me for a more long-time position.”

“And tangled your hands in Jon’s hair?” Mira suggested.

“Shut up!”

“Love you too, I’ve got to go finish up this report.”

“Love you Mira, bye!” Genevieve said.

She really needed to get down to Highgarden and catch up in person.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Share your worst or (best) first date stories in the comments!

I went on a first date once at the movies, thinking it'd be less awkward to be around other people. But we were the ONLY people in the theatre. It was soooooo uncomfortable for me.

Jon had called her during his lunch break the next day to tell her where they were going to dinner. It was a small bistro with a lit-up courtyard that had been a romantic staple of Winterfell for ages. He just hoped it wasn’t too much.

While Jon worked Genevieve had tried to organize some of her notes from her travels, but all she could focus on was wondering what the date would be like. What would she wear? Would they kiss as the end? Would it be awkward?

Genevieve felt foolish for feeling so nervous. They’d practically already had their first dates, just without realizing. What was it about a first date that had the power to turn the easy beginnings of friendship into something cautious? That feeling was exactly the reason she avoided dating altogether. She wished she could just skip to a few months in when they were already comfortable with each other. At least with Jon they started out as friends.

She’d been on too many dates with people online only to realize immediately afterward that online dating wasn’t for her, only to “forget” that the next time she was feeling lonely.

When Jon came to pick her up she’d already been pacing around the front door in her black dress for fifteen minutes. Thankfully her family hadn’t been nearby to ask her where she was going. Her father had been working late at his office and her mother was holed up in her studio working on her latest masterpiece.

Jon rung the doorbell and shifted nervously. He wasn’t sure if the sportcoat thrown over his white work shirt was too formal.

When she opened the doors he didn’t feel a loss of words, but a stream of them.

“Wow Genevieve, you look great... it’s nice to see you,” he said.

“You too Jon, you’re looking spiffy tonight,” she said as she stepped out the door and followed him to the car.

He opened the door for her and said, “I’m dressing to impress tonight.”

To which she replied, “You don’t need fancy clothes to do that Jon.”

He didn’t even feel like hiding his smile on the way to the restaurant.

“Put on some Hound! We’ve got to get ready for the concert,” she said.
Jon imagined Genevieve introducing him to Sandor and shivered. The guy was huge and looked like he could and would beat him up if he said something wrong.

But the sound of Genevieve belting out the songs calmed him down. She didn’t sound like a pop star but the little cracks in her voice only made it sound even better as she tried to replicate Sandor’s crooning vocals.

He pulled into the restaurant and helped her out of the car.

“This place is so cute Jon! How’d you find it?” she asked.

“Grow up in Winterfell and you learn a thing or two about where to bring a pretty girl on a date.”

“We’ve got to get in there before you charm my socks off!”

The waiter sat them at a table at the front by the window. For a weekday the restaurant was surprisingly busy with couples and families squeezing in a night out.

“Sorry it’s sort of loud in here,” Jon said.

Genevieve put on a snooty face and a posh Kings Landing accent, “Jon I really thought better of you. I thought you’d send a servant to check the noise levels before bringing me to such a place.”

“But of course, it won’t happen again Miss,” Jon smiled. He was glad to see that things were still easy between them now that they’d kiss.

Meanwhile, Genevieve was just trying to keep it cool. Her anxiety was fluttering in her stomach and she felt warm and sweaty but she was determined to enjoy herself.

The waiter came by with water and bread and she felt like stuffing her face so she didn’t say anything stupid.

“Can I get the roast please?” she ordered.

Jon ordered a simple salad, feeling too nervous to try and eat a real meal.

“Now I feel like the weirdo for not ordering a salad.”

Jon grabbed a roll, “Gods please don’t I’m the weirdo for ordering a salad because I thought I’d make a fool of myself eating in front of you.”

“Can I be upfront with you?”

He felt his heart clench with worry, “Of course.”

“I’m super nervous too. And I don’t want to be,” she sighed tearing off a chunk of bread.

Jon put his head in his hands, “I thought I was the only one. Why don’t we just pretend like this isn’t a date and enjoy ourselves.”

“Deal Stark.”

Things got a lot easier after that and they were able to enjoy the time they had to get to know each other better. The food was good, and the conversation even better.

Genevieve was in the middle of telling Jon a story from Braavos, “And I was just minding my own
business walking by the water when this woman comes running out from this big white stone building with a sword in her hand!”

“What’d you do?”

“I got out of her way so fast I almost fell into the water!”

Jon shared a memory from when he was younger, “So my father had this bright idea to let all us kids learn archery. And when it came time for the younger kids to learn I was helping Bran, but the poor kid kept missing shot after shot. And out of nowhere Arya sneaks up and shoots bullseye just as Bran was about to loose his arrow!”

“She’s such a badass! I’d ask you to teach me, but maybe I should ask her instead,” she laughed.

He agreed, “No, totally. If you’re looking for a good instructor your best bet is with Arya or Theon. They were always the best in the family.”

“I can’t believe your mom was okay with you guys learning!” Gen commented.

Jon felt the painful reminder that he didn’t know his mom. “Hah yeah. Catelyn’s actually not my mom, but she wasn’t too happy with all of us learning. Was always saying one of us was going to end up with an arrow in our eye.”

“Sorry Jon, I didn’t know.” She’d already put her foot in her mouth, and it was only their first date.

“It’s fine, I don’t talk about it a lot.” No further explanation was given and Genevieve wasn’t going to pry. They both had their secrets.

Genevieve changed the subject, “Did you tell anyone you were going on a date with me tonight?”

“Just a friend and his girlfriend? Why did you not want me to?” His last girlfriend Ygritte had wanted to keep their relationship “under wraps” for whatever reason and it had made him feel like she was embarrassed to be with him.

“No, not at all. I was just wondering if I needed to prepare myself for teasing from my brother. News seems to travel fast around here.”

“Don’t I know it! Last time I was sick the postman asked me if I was feeling better,” Jon said.

“And I thought Bear Island was bad back in the day!”

“But honestly, I won’t tell anyone until you’re comfortable. But I warn you, once I do they’ll probably want you over for Sunday dinner.”

“Oh I don’t mind. I’ve met half of them anyways,” Gen said.

On the way home she snaked her hand over to his and held on. They didn’t say anything about it, but neither pulled away either.

When he pulled into her driveway and they walked up to the door Genevieve didn’t feel like leaving. She wanted to linger in the moment.

“I really enjoyed tonight,” she said.

“Me too. It just felt easy.”
She felt unsure of herself in the moment. All the boldness she had the other night when she kissed him was gone.

“I know what you mean. Thanks for making me feel comfortable.”

“I think that was your doing,” Jon started scratching his neck, “I’m up for another date if you are.”

She spoke without thinking, “Of course! I mean, I’d like that.”

They didn’t kiss each other goodnight, both feeling like the world around them was too quiet in the moment to do something so intimate. Instead, they hugged and went their separate ways.

“I’ll call you,” Jon said.

“Not if I call you first!”
Happy Friday!

When she entered the house her mother was sitting there on the couch.

Genevieve hoped to avoid questions but her mother was too skilled. She’d stayed up enough nights waiting for Roland to come home to master her technique.

“Hot date tonight? You look nice!” she said.

She knew there was no use in avoiding it so she sat down next to her mom, putting her feet across her lap.

“You could say that. How was the studio today?”

“It was great, I think I’m onto something with this latest piece. I’ve been doing so much collage work! But enough about that, who was he?” Her mom was still in her paint-splattered overalls with her jet black hair up in a bun.

Genevieve sighed. In truth, she loved having those sort of talks with her mom. It’d been so long since she’d gotten to just sit with her and feel like someone’s daughter again.

“His name is Jon.”

Her mom sat up, “Jon? As in the Stark boy who drives Henryk around sometimes?”

“Just the one!”

She gave her daughter a high-five. “Good catch Gen! He’s cute! I love those curls of his, you’d make cute grandkids.”

“Mom! It was one date, I’m not thinking about what my kids would look like with him, at least I wasn’t until you brought it up.”

“They’d be adorable little things!”

She had to steer her mom back on track before she made a baby registry.

“Anyways…”

“Sorry sweetie, you know I get excited. The rest of them never tell me anything,” her mom sighed. Her siblings were a secretive bunch, except for Henryk who currently didn’t show any interest in dating anyone.

“The date was nice though. I was pretty nervous at first and I told him that I was, and everything was easy after that.”

“See! I told you vulnerability was powerful!”
“It just felt natural, like I didn’t have to pretend to be someone else. You know?”

Her mother had a knowing look, “I know. That’s exactly how I felt with your father when we first started dating.”

Genevieve’s mind wandered. She didn’t date just to date, but to hopefully build a future with someone. In the modern world, it was hard to find someone on the same page. Her mom suggesting something more both excited and terrified her.

“I can only hope I find a love like you and dad’s someday.”

“I know honey, but you’ll find him. Who knows, maybe you already have,” she winked.

Genevieve stood up and stretched, “I’m going to bed before you say anything else cheeky. Love you.”

“Love you too. You have to bring him over for dinner sometime.”

“It was one date!”
Happy weekend!

Jon called her the next morning as promised. He had the day off because it was Saturday and his father didn’t subject him to the torture of working on the weekends.

After pleasantries were exchanged, Genevieve said, “The secret’s out, I told my mom.”

“We should just put out a press release,” he joked.

“She’ll probably only tell my dad, but I don’t really care if anyone knows. As long as you don’t mind.”

Genevieve was walking around her kitchen trying to find something to eat. Her siblings were looking at her trying to figure out who she was talking to. But she wasn’t going to tell them unless they asked.

“I’d tell my Dad but I know if I do you’ll definitely be coming over for Sunday dinner tomorrow.”

She grabbed a bagel and sat down at the breakfast bar by the window, “I wouldn’t mind. I don’t have plans tomorrow night anyways — or any day really.”

Jon couldn’t tell if she was serious. Was she ready to meet his family in a new context? Was he ready?

“Jon?” she asked, “I can’t hear you. Are you still there?”

“Yeah sorry, was just thinking,” he said.

From his place at the kitchen table Henryk called out, “You’re talking to Jon? Can you guys bring me Bran, and Rickon somewhere?”

“Not today Henryk, ask Roland,” she said. Henryk groaned and ran down to the basement to ask his brother.

“Sorry about that, we were talking about again?” she asked.

“Oh um just talking about Sunday dinner.”

“Right! So I can be there if you want. Who knows, it might be fun,” she said.

Jon tried to picture her at the family table, a table so old his grandfather had grown up eating at. The Stark family was always full of people and the table could seat all nine of them comfortably. One more person would make it even.

“If you really don't mind, I'll tell Catelyn to expect one more person.”

“I'll be on my best behavior, don't worry. Anyways, what are you up to today?”
Jon had promised his father that he'd help him chop wood to help them get through the winter. It wasn't exactly an easy day off, but it beat being stuck inside the office.

“I'm playing lumberjack for the day. Need to chop some wood. What about you?”

She imagined how he'd look swinging an axe, preferably wearing a tight flannel to show off his arms. “Send pics! I'm actually helping my mom in her studio today.”

“I didn't know your mom was an artist. What are you helping her with?”

“Oh, just sitting for her so she can figure out lighting for something. She's planning a shoot pretty soon and wants to experiment with lighting before she has people in the studio,” she explained.

“Wow! Sounds pretty cool. What does your Dad do?”

“He's a total hippy except he wears suits. He works as an environmental lawyer. You can't really grow up in the North without loving nature.”

Jon agreed. As much as his family needed the wood to heat their home, he felt bad cutting down the trees. His father had always instilled his children with a great respect for the forest and all the creatures in it.

“My dad would probably talk his ear off about the weirwood trees if he knew.”

“God's please don't get him started on them. He'd never stop.”

Eventually, the two of them ran out of things to say and the conversation came to a natural end Jon went off to the woods to play lumberjack while Genevieve played model in her mother's studio.

Jon had sent her a rather exciting picture of him swinging the axe, which she may or may not have set as her background. To return the favor she sent him one of her messing around in the studio with purple light filtered across her face.

That night Jon approached Catelyn to ask if he could have a guest at dinner. It wasn't like it was the first time someone came to dinner, but it was one of the only times Jon had asked.

She'd mentioned to Sansa that they would be an extra guest to cook for, and Sansa’s curiosity brought about questions from the rest of his siblings.

“Who’s coming over Mom?” Rickon asked.

“Just one of Jon’s friends.”

“Is it Sam? I like him,” Bran said.

Catelyn sighed, “I didn’t ask. You’ll just have to ask him tomorrow.”

Jon was glad he was busy for the rest of the night because he wasn’t sure how he’d answer if they asked. They were exactly boyfriend and girlfriend, but they weren’t nothing either. And that wasn’t exactly easy to explain to an eleven-year-old.

Genevieve texted him that night with questions about what to expect.

“What’s the dress code for tomorrow night? Do you guys dress fancy?”

Jon couldn’t imagine his siblings throwing on finery for Sunday dinner. The only day they made an effort to please their parents was on Christmas night, and that was already over with.
“Just whatever you’re wearing during the day. No ball gowns. Those are for Monday nights.”

“I’ll have to go out and buy one just in case!”

“But really, if at any point you feel weird about going just let me know,” Jon texted.

“Jon, I’m not going to bail. Don’t stress about me, I’ll be fine with your family. I’m used to getting grilled by mine.”

“I’ll have to pay them to be on their best behavior.”

“I’ll write you a check,” Genevieve said.
Robb was surprised to see Genevieve at their front door the Sunday night.

“Are you here to pick Henryk up? I haven’t seen him,” he asked.

So Jon hadn’t told his family who was coming?

“No, no. I’m actually here for dinner.”

Robb’s eyebrows rose in surprise, “So you’re Jon’s mystery guest. Come in out of the cold Gen.”

Genevieve stepped inside the Stark home for the first time and took it in. It was rustic while her home was more modern. A tall stone fireplace ran up the wall of a sitting room and a massive dining table peeked out from a room in front of her. It was all earth tones and lush textures — a northern landscape adapted for the home.

Mrs. Stark came out from the kitchen. “Hello Genevieve, are you Jon’s guest tonight?”

“Yes Mrs. Stark. Thank you for having me,” she said. She was feeling antsy, where was Jon?

“He should be up soon, he just ran downstairs,” Robb explained.

Genevieve remembered the bottle of wine in her bag, “This is for you Mrs. Stark. Is there anything I can help with in the kitchen?”

Catelyn graciously accepted the bottle because when you have seven kids sometimes you need a glass to get you through dinner. “Thank you so much, Genevieve. Most of the dinner is ready, but you can help us with the salad if you want.”

“I’d love to.” Although Genevieve sensed that Jon and Catelyn didn’t have the best relationship, she still wanted to make a good impression.

Robb quickly excused himself to avoid having to do any work, leaving Genevieve alone.

Sansa was in the kitchen already checking the temperature on the chicken.

“Hello Sansa. Are you enjoying your break?”

Sansa spun around, “Oh, you’re Henryk’s older sister right?”

“Unfortunately! I’m Genevieve, I don’t think I properly introduced myself to you at the Christmas pageant.”

She got to work peeling the cucumbers for the salad as Sansa expressed her sorrow at having to go back to school in a few days.

And just as Sansa was trying to politely ask Genevieve what she was doing at their Sunday dinner,
Jon walked in.

“Hi Gen, sorry I was downstairs cleaning things up,” he said.

“No worries! I’ve just been hanging out with the girls.”

Jon eyed Sansa who was trying her best not to stare. Catelyn turned around and said, “Speaking of which, has anyone seen Arya? She was supposed to set the table tonight.”

“I thought it was Bran’s turn?” Sansa said.

Catelyn sighed, “No. I thought we established that each of you would take a day of the week.”

“She must’ve forgotten. I’ll go grab her,” Jon said, leaving Genevieve alone again. As long as she had vegetables to chop she could survive.

They’d known he’d found her before they even saw her.

“I don’t get why I have to set the table. I’ve been training all day,” Arya complained as she walked in the kitchen.

“Arya, I’ve told you before each of us has duties to this family. I don’t ask a lot of you,” her mother said.

The brown-haired teen grabbed a handful of forks and said, “Yeah I know. Family, duty, honor. We’ve been over it.”

“Arya! Not in front our guest,” Catelyn said.

It was then that Arya noticed Genevieve, who was trying to blend in amongst the bickering.

“So Henyk’s sister is the girl you went on a date with?” Arya asked.

Jon blushed. He didn’t she was going to tell anyone. He’d just told her very casually before he went out to make sure his outfit was alright. But it came as a surprise to Sansa and Catelyn.

“Uh yeah. She’s the one who went to Braavos recently,” Jon said.

Genevieve felt a sense of pride knowing that he’d talked about her with his family, or at least with Arya.

Arya grinned at Genevieve, “You’ll have to tell me everything during dinner. Or once I set the stupid table.”

“Arya!”

Genevieve thought her family was large, but they couldn’t compare to watching all the Starks fit around their dining room table.

Jon and her filed in early so there wouldn’t be any awkward shuffles to sit next to each other.

When Theon came in he was surprised to see her, as was Bran and Rickon.

“Can you bring Henyk next time?” Rickon asked.

“I’ll try Rickon,” she laughed.
Theon sat down across from her and started grilling her and Jon before the rest of the family arrived.

“So since when are you two a thing,” he asked.

Genevieve answered, “New Year’s Eve if you’re being technical.”

“What! How’d I miss that?”

“You were sort of drunk…” Jon said.

Ned came into the dining room helping his wife carry in the food. “Oh hi Genevieve. I didn’t know you were joining us tonight. How’s your family?”

“They’re well Mr. Stark, thank you for asking,” Genevieve said feeling like a robot with good manners.

He set down the chicken and said, “Please, call me Ned. Is she your guest Jon? I thought Sam was joining us.”

“Noope, just Genevieve,” he said. Jon could tell his father wanted to ask more, but Arya answered the question in the room.

“They went on a date the other night Dad, if that’s what you’re wondering.”

Jon rolled his eyes, “We’re right here you know.” She only stuck her tongue out and sat down across from him as she always had. The rest of the family sat down and once their plates were covered with food the conversation began.

“So how was Braavos? I really want to visit there someday?” Arya asked.

Genevieve remembered Jon telling her about Arya’s passion for sword fighting.

“Oh it was beautiful! It’s really amazing how they built the city around all that water. Plus the history there is just amazing with all the Faceless Men.”

That caught Arya’s attention, “I would’ve joined them back in the day.”

“Didn’t they have to give up their families or something to join?” Bran asked.

Ned changed the topic, “So do you travel often?”

She put down her fork and said, “Quite a bit! After college I started working with a professor who had me go all over the place to compile research on cultures for his next book.”

“Did you go to the Iron Islands?” Theon asked.

Genevieve remembered the damp time she’d spent there. “Yeah, I went there first. Learned all about the Drowned God, even got to see a baptism.”

Theon grinned, “What is dead may never die.”

“But rises again, harder and stronger,” she replied meeting his challenge.

Robb spoke up, “Theon was born there actually.”

“Where are you from Genevieve? I don’t think I’ve ever asked your brother?” Catelyn asked.
Genevieve had expected a lot of questions, but she was starting to feel like she was at a job interview, or therapy.

“We’re from Bear Island. My family lived there for generations before we moved here.”

“Do you miss it? I want to move down South for college but I’m nervous I’ll be homesick” Sansa asked.

It had been rough at first moving from Bear Island. But she’d left for college months after their move so she’d needed to adapt quickly. If it wasn’t for her time on the Quiet Isle that summer she would’ve been directionless in college.

“It was a little hard at first, but I got used to it when college life got busy.”

Jon rescued her by getting Robb off on a tangent about something going on at work so Genevieve could have a break to eat her food.

After dinner Jon invited her downstairs to hang out and listen to music.

“No funny business, I promise,” he said. He was glad it was just the two of them again. It was weird having her around his whole family in this new context. They’d only gone on one date! He was starting to wonder if he’d made a mistake by inviting her over so soon.

Once in his room he said, “Sorry if that was uncomfortable for you. They can get a bit nosy.”

“No worries, the food was really good!”

Jon plugged in his string lights like a little nerd, “Well anyways, this is where I live.”

“Really? I thought this was your dungeon,” Genevieve said. She took in the curtain of lights near his bed and made a mental note to try that out in her room.

“That’s down the hall.”

For a second they both just stood there unsure of what to do next. Jon felt ready to jump out of his skin.

“So do you want to listen to some music?” he asked. That was about the one thing he could entertain her with at the moment.

He was glad she was more outgoing than himself, at least on the outside. “Yeah of course! Show me what you’re working with.”

Jon threw on a well-loved record and sat down on one of the beanbags by his desk. She followed his move and begin moving her head to the music.

“Did you ever tell your siblings they’re invited to come to the concert with us? I don’t want Roland to feel like a third wheel,” Gen said. The concert was on Friday and she really needed to let Sandor know how many of them were coming.

“I keep forgetting! We can go tell them now if you want. They usually hang out upstairs in the family room watching TV after dinner,” he said. As much as he liked her he wasn’t sure what to say when it was just the two of them, at least tonight.

Genevieve jumped up excited, “Yes! I love a good surprise.”
When they went upstairs Robb wiggled his eyebrows at Jon as the two of them sat down on a couch. The Starks sibling were there, with the exception of Bran and Rickon who were too young to drag along to a concert anyways.

Polite as ever Sansa put down her knitting and said, “Did you enjoy dinner Genevieve?”

“Yes, very much. You and your mother are great cooks. What are you knitting?” While she had never learned to knit herself, Genevieve used to watch her Grandmother make scarf after scarf when she was younger.

“Oh, just a headband for Rickon. He keeps complaining about the cold outside,” Sansa said.

“I’ll have to buy Henryk one!”

Once the small talk was done Jon said, “So Genevieve has a surprise for you guys.”

Theon’s eyes went wide as he covertly mouthed “Pregnant?” to Jon. Sometimes Jon wondered if Theon even used his brain. He hadn’t even know Genevieve long enough for that to happen.

“What is it?” Arya asked, putting down her video game controller. She was getting tired of the level anyways.

“The Hound is playing this Friday and I have a bunch of free tickets if you want to come with us,” she said.

Arya stood up, “Are you serious? Jon, please tell me she’s not joking.”

“She’s not. You can come, but you can’t go running off or anything,” Jon smiled.

Sansa looked confused, “Is that the band you guys listen to in the car sometimes?”

Robb said, “Yeah! Is Roland going?”

“He’d kill me if I went without him,” Genevieve joked.

“Well we’ll be there! I’m starting to like you more than your brother,” Theon said.

Sansa still seemed unsure, “I don’t know if I’ll go, I don’t really know the music. And I was thinking of going to Jeyne’s house for a sleepover.”

Jon thought back to New Year’s Eve when they’d seen Jeyne drinking like it was the end of the world. He hoped Sansa hadn’t yet been corrupted by her influence.

“Can I have her ticket? My friend Gendry would die to see them live,” Arya said.

“Of course. Jon and I actually met him at a party the other night. His band was playing,” Genevieve said.

Jon remembered the guy who seemed too old to be his sister’s friend, “How do you know him anyways?”

“He’s my friend,” Arya said.

Sansa laughed, “Seemed like more than a friend with the way you were staring at him at school the other day.”
“Shut up Arya. As if you’re little miss perfect.”

Robb intervened, knowing very well if someone didn’t they would dominate the conversation with their bickering.

“How’d you get all those tickets anyways Genevieve?”

She and Jon looked at each other. She was still keen on it being a surprise, “Just an old friend of my mine.”

“Gods, why don’t I have any friends like that?” Theon said.

“Because you don’t have any,” his brother responded.

When it was time to head home for the night Jon walked Genevieve to her car.

“So what’d you think of Sunday dinner?” he asked.

She leaned against the door, “It was nice. Your bribes must have worked.”

“Haha yeah, thanks for coming though. It means a lot.”

Genevieve understood where he was coming from. It was hard to bring someone home when you had a big family, especially one as big as Jon’s.

“Family is important,” she smiled, “Speaking of which, my mom will want you over some day this week I’m sure.”

“I’ll be there, just tell me when!”

She made a move for her car door but something made her stop. Maybe it was the way Jon was looking at her, or simply the easy energy between them. Jon must have felt it too because when they said their goodbyes he leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek.

That night Genevieve wondered when he’d kiss her on the lips like he had the night at the party and Jon cursed himself for lacking to certainty to do it.
Chapter 20

Just as she predicted, her mom had requested that Jon come over while she was home so she could talk to the young man who was interested in her daughter.

He came over after work and Genevieve greeted him at the door with a hug.

Jon still couldn’t get over how easy everything seemed to her, while he was still too scared to even hold her hand.

“I made us some soup! Come on in,” she said.

“I can’t wait to try it!”

She’d been boasting over text how she was the “soup master” and he’d eventually told her to put her money where her mouth was.

In the kitchen he found out she’d made a beef stew that made him feel right at home after a long day at work.

They ate together at the kitchen table, with Genevieve fluttering around to make sure everything was alright.

“This is amazing Genevieve! Thank you so much,” he said as he took another bite.

She was busying herself with the dishes, “I'm glad you've finally come to realize I am the soup master I claim I was. How was work by the way?”

“Work was work. I'm just glad to be here instead of there,” he sighed.

She dried her hands and sat back down next to him, “That bad?”

“People just keep missing deadlines so I can't move forward with my work.”

“That's frustrating. At least you know you're doing what you're supposed to,” she shrugged, placing a hand on his knee — a gesture that did not go unnoticed by Jon.

She removed her hand and changed the subject. “This is sort of awkward, but I wanted to talk about us.”

A million thoughts raced in Jon’s head, and most of them terrible.

“Uh yeah, what do you want to talk about?”

She squirmed in her seat and looked like she wanted to pace around the kitchen. She had a habit of pacing when she felt anxious.

“Well now that I'm saying it I feel a little crazy because it's still so early but I was wondering what your intentions were,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

She started braiding the ends of her hair to keep herself busy, “Well if you were looking for something casual or more long term. No pressure either way, but I was just thinking about it.”
Jon felt himself relax and he smiled, “Here I was thinking you were going to say you didn't want to go on dates anymore.”

She put her hands on his forearm and gasped, “Oh my Gods! I'm just now realizing I could've phrased that all so much better.”

He was feeling ~smooth~ now, with renewed confidence. “I'm not sure what you're looking for, but I'm past the age of wanting something casual. But like you said, no pressure either way.”

“Oh thank Gods! I'm feeling the same way. I really like you Jon,” she smiled.

Again, Jon was impressed with how sure she seemed of what she said. He almost couldn't believe someone as well traveled and cultured as her would want to be with someone like him.

“So you wouldn't mind if I called you my girlfriend?”

She felt the dumb-idiot smile creep up on her, “Only if you're cool with me calling you my boyfriend, and whatever embarrassing nicknames I come up with… snookums.”

“Okay, maybe not snookums. But we can work on it.”

Genevieve hoped they’d have the time to before she had to go off beyond the wall. She didn’t want to think about what would happen when she went there. She couldn’t expect Jon to wait for her, she didn’t even know if she’d be back to Winterfell after the trip.

Her mother came into the kitchen, surprising them both. They’d been sitting pretty close together and when she walked in they felt like two teenagers again getting caught by their parents.

“Hi Mom,” Gen said standing up.

“Hi sweetie, hi Jon,” she said as she leaned on the counter.

Jon straightened his posture, “How are you today Mrs. Norward? Genevieve tells me you’ve been working on a new project in your studio.”

“Please Jon, call me Nadya,” she said putting their soup bowls in the dishwasher, “And the project is going well. But I could use your help.”

“With what?” her daughter asked.

“Oh, just need a model to sit for me. It’s hard to get people so soon after the holidays.”

Jon laughed, “And you want me to model for you?”

“Of course! Your hair and that pout you’ve always got would be perfect.”

Genevieve groaned, “Mom, don’t pressure him. Jon you don’t have to do it if you don’t want to.”

But he stood up anyways, “I don’t mind. Maybe you could print one of the shots for your wallet.”

“Okay mister, let’s see what you think when you’re under those hot studio lights.”

Genevieve was right. In his thick green sweater Jon was starting to sweat. Mostly from the beaming lights pointing at him, but also from the attention.

And her mom had been asking him some questions, very casually of course, but obvious enough to be getting his attention.
“Gen, why don’t you guys get in the shot together,” she suggested clicking away on her camera.

Genevieve pulled up a seat next to him and put her arm around him, pulling her serious face. It was hard not to laugh but Genevieve had been the subject of her mother’s art enough times to learn what poses worked best.

“So Jon, what do you like to do for fun besides carting Henryk and Genevieve around town?”

He leaned into Genevieve’s arm wishing they were alone. “I’m pretty big into music. I like to write too,” he said.

“Nice! I’ve always told Genevieve to come home with an artsy guy,” Nadya said.

“And my father always told me to find a nice Northern girl.”

“Well I’ve got you covered for the Northern part. Not so sure about the nice part though,” Gen said.

Her mother positioned the purple lights to be behind them, “Yeah, just wait until you see her when she first wakes up. Not so nice then.”

“That was only because you used to come into my room and bug me in the mornings before school.”

“Hey! I wasn’t sure if you were up or not,” her mom bickered.

All Jon could think about was the prospect of waking up next to Genevieve. Was she quiet in the morning? Did she stretch and make noise as she got ready? Was she a cuddler? Did she spread out or make herself small? He wanted to know. But it was too soon. He couldn’t.

“I think I’ve got some good shots of the two of you. You’ll thank me for these someday,” Nadya said.

“Okay mom, you can roll back the enthusiasm.”

“I’m just happy to see you with someone baby!”

Jon was glad Genevieve had a healthy relationship with her mother, something he didn’t have. He didn’t even know who she was. To Catelyn, Jon was just the reminder that her husband wasn’t as perfect as she thought.

“Thanks for letting me take your picture Jon. You make a good model,” she said.

“Oh no problem, you’ve given something interesting to add to my resume.”

“Speaking of which, have you started applying to places around here Gen?” her mother asked.

Genevieve felt her stomach drop. The last thing someone who just graduated wanted to talk about was what they were going to do with their life.

“I’m just going to see if Professor Lannister will keep me on to help with the book once my research is done,” she shrugged.

Jon was reminded that her future wasn’t necessarily in Winterfell like his was. If they were both interested in someone more long term they’d need to figure that out. Eventually.

“Okay Gen, just want to make sure you’re thinking about it. You know how hard it was for me to get Roland motivated after he graduated.”
“But that’s Roland. You don’t have to worry about me,” Gen said.

“Never had to. You were an easy kid, even after the move.” What her mother didn’t know wouldn’t hurt her.

But Jon remembered Genevieve the way Genevieve had talked about missing Bear Island when they’d first met. He sensed the transition hadn’t been as easy as her mom made it sound. How could it be?

After the photo shoot Gen and Jon went for a short drive to firm up plans for Friday’s concert, and to get some alone time.

He parked by the road entrance to the forest and was reminded to show her the heart tree on his family’s property sometime.

“So you excited for Friday?” she asked.

“Gods yeah, I just hope I don’t embarrass you in front of Sandor.”

“I’m sure Roland will embarrass himself enough for the rest of us. He’s really chill, you don’t have to worry about him.”

“I do have to give him a call to make sure the tickets are all set. I keep forgetting to tell him how many people I’m bringing,” she added.

Jon shook his head at her in disbelief, “I still can’t believe you know an actual rock star. I’m still patiently awaiting that story.”

“And you’ll have it someday!”

They’d been listening to a song by Kingslayer about loneliness that changed the air in the car. The song always made Genevieve feel vulnerable.

Jon reached out and held her hand, noticing the glassiness of her eyes.

“I’m fine. This song just makes me so emotional! Like why didn’t anyone believe him, he did what he did to save everyone else,” she said wiping away a tear with one hand and squeezing Jon’s with the other.

He rubbed her hand and said, “I know. This song always makes me feel so upset. Like the odds are stacked against me.”

“Well you’ve got me now, I’ll make sure that doesn’t happen,” she smiled.

In that moment Jon could kiss her. So he did. She was surprised that he’d made the first move, but leaned into it anyways. She’d been waiting for him to show the same passion she’d shown to him.

For a second there she wasn’t sure if he even wanted to kiss her.

But from the way his hands snaked around her waist and pulled her close, or as close as you could in a car, she was proven wrong. He wanted her as much as she wanted him.

When they broke apart her goofy smile spread across her face.

“That was, wow.” she said.

“Yeah. That was something.”
She moved back for more and tangled her hands in his hair just as she had fantasized about doing. His hands played at the hem of her shirt and she guided them higher.

“You sure?” he asked.

“Yeah, of course,” she answered kissing him with greater passion. There was something about the way a man’s hands felt on her. Their ability to make her feel small and strong in her femininity. The way the roughness of his fingertips contrasted against the smoothness of her skin.

As she bit at his lips he felt ready to combust. Between the closeness of her and the feel of her under his hands he felt he could die right then and be content. When his hands grazed her chest she let out a moan, followed by a laugh that broke them apart.

“Sorry, I feel like a weirdo now,” she said. The entire time she hadn’t blushed but now one was spreading up from her neck and onto her face.

“No, don’t. I probably just went too fast.” Jon wanted to kick himself.

But she eased his fears, “No you were great. More than great actually. I’ve just, well I’ve never…”

“Oh, I get what you mean.”

“If that’s a deal breaker for you I understand,” she said with her head down.

Jon grabbed her hand, “No you’re fine. It’s not like I’m an expert either. We don’t have to rush.”

Genevieve had long avoided relationships out of fear that her partner wouldn’t wait until she was ready. That they would end the relationship the moment she said no.

When Jon said he wasn’t an expert he wasn’t exactly lying. He’d done some stuff with his ex-girlfriend but they’d never gone all the way before their breakup. And after that there’d been no one Jon was comfortable enough with to even consider having that experience with.

That night Genevieve dreamed of Jon’s hands.
Chapter 21

She called Sandor the next morning to firm up their plans.

“Good morning Genevieve,” the rock star said.

“Hi Sandor. I hope I didn’t wake you.”

Genevieve checked her phone, it was 9 o’clock. Late for her, but early for people in Sandor’s industry.

“No, I’m up. We just got to Winterfell. Still don’t understand how you live here,” he grunted.

“I don’t know either. I’m barely here as it is with all the traveling I’ve been doing.”

“Anyways, you got the list for me?”

She rummaged through her drawers to find the list she’d written down. With everyone she was bringing she didn’t want to risk forgetting someone.

“Okay, so I’m bringing seven, including myself,” she said counting them in her head.

He whistled, “And just a few summers ago you were complaining you didn’t have any friends!”

“Well I don’t really, at least not in Winterfell. Most of them are friends of my brother.”

“Do they know that you know me?”

Genevieve smiled, “Not exactly. One does, but he doesn’t know how.”

“I’ll be sure to surprise them at the show, give you some much needed street cred.”

“You’re the one who needs me!”

“Whatever you say Gen. I’ll see you tomorrow night,” he said.

“Looking forward to it Ser.”

“Not a Ser!” he said before hanging up.

The next night was busy with preparations. In hindsight, it would have made more sense to get ready at the Starks, but she was the one with the tickets.

Gendry had shown up first, about fifteen minutes before the time she had told everyone.

“Uh hi again. This is the right address right? Arya texted it to me,” he said to Roland who opened the
door.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about mate,” Roland lied.

From the kitchen where she was packing snacks Genevieve yelled, “Roland shut up. Come on in Gendry, you’re the first one here.”

He followed her voice to the kitchen and watched as she filled snack bags with trail mix.

“Never know when you might get hungry,” she said looking up.

“Don’t they check your bag before you go in?” he asked shifting on his feet.

“Nah, not me. And have a seat, you’re making me nervous standing there.”

The Stark family arrived bickering minutes later.

“Hi Roland, sorry we’re late. This one decided his hair was messed up,” Robb said pointing at Jon.

Under her breath Arya murmured, “Wanted to look nice for his girlfriend.”

Roland, Robb, and Theon went off to pregame for the concert while Jon and Arya followed Genevieve’s voice to the kitchen.

When she saw Jon she dropped the baggies of trail mix and pulled him into a hug, “Your hair looks great!”

Arya stifled a laugh and Jon said, “Thank you. Can I help with anything?”

“Um not right now, but pretty soon I’ll need your help.”

Gendry rose from his seat to say hi to Arya. She was wearing a black moto jacket, maroon pants, and leather boots. “You look totally badass Arya. Thank you so much for letting me come along.”

Arya’s face felt hot and she said, “It’s Jon’s girlfriend you should thank. She’s the one with the tickets.”

Turning his attention to her he thanked her once again as she finished packing up her backpack.

“Okay Jon, I need your help upstairs!” Gen said.

Arya whispered to Gendry, “Think that’s code for making out?”

Once upstairs Jon realized what she needed his help with. Her bedroom floor was covered in a tornado of clothes and there was barely a place to sit on her bed.

“Before you judge, I’m fully aware that I’m a disaster right now,” she said as she pushed some shirts on the floor so he could sit.

He held his hands up, “No judgement! So I take it you need help picking something to wear?”

“Exactly! Usually I never have trouble with it but I want to look cool when I see the band again,” she explained.

She held up a grungy band shirt, “Is this trying to hard?”
Jon didn’t know how to answer, “Beats me. I’m the guy who wore a black shirt.” A black shirt that perfectly clung to his arms might she add.

“I’m going to make us all late!” she groaned.

“You’re the one with the tickets, you can do whatever you want,” he joked.

She started digging through her closet, unearthing clothing that she hadn’t seen since before her trip.

“But seriously, how can I help?”

Genevieve’s head poked out from the closet, “Um I’m looking for this bright orange cropped shirt. You literally can’t miss it.”

“Like construction cone orange?” he asked. He was trying his best to look through her clothing without stumbling across something personal. He found it towards the bottom of one of the drawers.

“I’ve got it!”

She emerged from her closet wearing a pair of black cargo pants that looked too hip for Jon to stand next to.

“Thank the Gods! Can you toss me the shirt please?”

He threw it and she disappeared into the closet again to return with her completed look.

Jon watched as she strutted over to her tiny mirror and said, “Wow, you look great!”

“It’s not too much?” On anyone else, yes. But somehow the darkness of her hair helped tone down the brightness of the orange. On the bright side they wouldn’t lose her at the concert.

“No it’s perfect on you,” he said.

She gave him a quick kiss on the corner of his mouth and said, “You’re too good to me. I’ll be right back, I just need Amira’s help with my hair before she leaves for some sleepover.”

“Is it at Jeyne Poole’s house?”

Gathering her hair ties she said, “Yeah why?”

“Sansa will be there too.”

“Great, maybe she can prevent Jeyne from dragging them all along to a party. Don’t need Amira calling us at the end of the night looking for a ride.”

She came back minutes later with two buns on the top of her head.

“Okay, I’m ready to go! I think,” she said looking around her room for anything she may have forgotten.

When the two of them came downstairs Roland eyed them suspiciously. “Quite the outfit you’ve got on Gen.”

“Says the one in a sports jersey,” Gen said sticking her tongue out.
“I think it looks bitchin Gen,” Arya said.

She gave a fake curtsy once she reached the bottom of the stairs, “Why thank you Arya. I’m glad someone has taste. I think I’ll take a page out of your book and wear some black boots to finish off the look.”

“Don’t forget the snack bag,” Gendry reminded.

“That’s right! Thank you.”

“What snack bag?” Robb asked.

Roland smiled, “Gen is such a mother hen that she insists on bringing a backpack full of goodies anytime we go somewhere big.” Jon added the fact to the list of things he liked about her.

“You don’t seem to mind every time we go to the movies together!” she said.

With everyone ready they crammed into Jon’s car ready for a night like no other.

Just before they arrived Sandor texted Genevieve, “That song you like it on the set list! Where are you?”

“Fashion emergency! We’re almost there. Thank you x a million!!!”
Chapter 22

They hit a bit of a snafu when they arrived at the concert. It was being held at a place called the Crypt which was an old stone building with a modern glass roof.

At the door two bouncers, who called in comparison to Sandor, tried to stop them from going in.

“What's your name?” the one with the earring asked her.

“Genevieve. My name should be on the list, plus six people.”

The man crossed his arms, “I don't see you on the list.”

“What the fuck Gen?” Roland asked. The rest of their group stood by awkwardly as other people were let in before them.

She tried to rack her brain for what Sandor might've put on the list.

“Uh can you try Norward?”

“Look, you're not on the list.”

Genevieve was starting to sweat. It was one thing if she let herself down, but another thing entirely if she disappointed the six people with her.

“One second guys, I just need to make a call.”

She walked off to the side where things were quieter, or as quiet as they could be at a show, and called Sandor.

“Dude they're not letting us in!” she said.

She heard Sandor tell someone to fuck off as he moved somewhere quieter, “What do you mean?”

“I gave my name, and they wouldn't let me in. Now my friends are just standing there probably thinking I'm a liar.”

“Give me a sec, I'll call them,” Sandor said.

“Thank you.”

Seconds after she hung up the bouncer's phone rang and she watched him shake his head up and down with wide eyes.

“Sure thing boss, right away.”

He motioned for them to come through, “Looks like you're on the list. Sorry about that.”
“Thank you, come on guys,” Gen said.

The rest of the group let out a little cheer and followed her into the building. The place was packed with people so before entering the floor they turned to each other.

Jon looked at Arya and said, “Now I’ll probably lose you but just stay close to Gendry and make sure your phone doesn’t die.”

“And you guys, just don’t get into trouble,” Gen said to her brother, Robb, and Theon who were already bouncing on their feet with energy from the alcohol in their systems.

Roland who could barely hear over the crowd just nodded his head and walked into the thick of it.

“Seriously though, phones on! We need to meet up after the show,” Gen reminded.

That left her and Jon standing by the outside.

“I don’t know about you, but I always watch from the front,” Jon said looking at the crowd. It was a packed show, sold out according to Sandor.

“We better get moving then before the crowd squishes us!”

Holding each other's hands, they maneuvered their way through the crowd, Jon following behind to make sure people didn’t try to get too close to her.

By the time they got to the front by the stage they were out of breath.

“I'm starting to wish I wore shorts. Who cares if it's winter,” Gen said in his ear.

Jon agreed and shed a layer. He'd have to sacrifice fashion and tie his jacket around his waist.

The lights dimmed and the crowd moved to the front. Even after all the shows they’d been to, they still couldn't help but feel claustrophobic at first. Genevieve was practically jumping when Sandor and his hand came out on stage.

“I'm so fucking excited!”

Jon wrapped his arms around her from behind, “Me too. This is all just so surreal.”

She turned her head to look up at him, “Just wait until after the show!”

Before they started Sandor came up to the mic to welcome the crowd.

“Thanks for having us Winterfell,” he said sending a cheer through the crowd. Genevieve swore she heard her brother scream.

Sandor continued, “Anyways, I'd like to dedicate this first song to a very special woman in the crowd. You know who you are.”

His eyes scanned to find her, but he didn’t stop to linger in her. There was a reason she'd work such a bright top. With it, there was no way he could miss her.

Jon kissed the top of her head, “That's you! Isn't it?”

“Better be! He doesn't know anyone else here,” she replied.
Sandor winked and began playing one of her favorite songs called Toy Soldier. When they were on the Quiet Isle together Sandor had written it up after processing his emotions from a traumatic childhood memory. The first time she’d heard it she’d been a crying mess, and judging from the blurriness from her eyes she was soon to turn into one again.

As Sandor sang out the chorus Jon looked down and noticed the tears on her cheeks.

“Are you okay Gen?”

She smiled up at him, “Yeah, just feeling happy sad. This song really brings me back.” To where it brought her back to, she did not say.

When the song came to an end in the guitar solo, Sandor found her and gave her a quick wink. She responded in kind by blowing him a kiss. She was thankful everyone else was too focused on the song to pay attention to her. The last thing she wanted was to end up in the press blowing kisses to another man while her boyfriend had his arms around her.

They played song after song and Jon and Genevieve found themselves dancing along and screaming out the songs until their voices hurt and their bodies were sweaty. The crowd was electric and Jon wondered what Arya thought of it all. As far as he knew, this was her first major concert. Unless of course she’d been sneaking out to see bands play like he had at her age.

Jon had particularly enjoyed singing Little Bird to Genevieve as they moved with the music. And Genevieve loved rocking out to Fck the King, a particularly angsty song from The Hound’s earlier days.

When the final song came to an end Genevieve could barely stand. She leaned against Jon’s chest and tugged his arms around her for support.

Sandor came back up to the mic and said, “You guys were great tonight! Thank you all for coming out. Drive safe!”

The two of them stayed put to avoid being trampled by the rest of the crowd. The energy of the room still remained and Genevieve was keen to use it. She turned around and slung her arms around his neck and looked up at him.

“Was it all you dreamed it would be?”

He brushed her hair out of her eyes, “Even better.”

Their lips met and they moved to the music still running in their minds. But the vibrations from Jon’s phone put their moment to a halt.

“Shit, I should take this. It’s Arya.”

He picked up his phone and tried to hear her voice over the noise, “Where are you guys? I’ve got the guys with me.”

“We’re at the front left by the stage. Where are you?”

“Doesn’t matter, we’re come to you,” she said hanging up.

Genevieve looked to Jon for answers, “They’re on their way.”

“Awesome. I’ll text Sandor now and ask if he’s ready for us yet,” she said pulling out her own
Sandor hadn’t replied by the time they met up with each other.

“That was fucking AWESOME!” Roland shouted, clearly still used to the level of volume needed to talk at a concert with.

Gendry agreed, “The whole time I just kept asking myself if I was really awake. Clegane can SING.”

“Who do you think his bird in the crowd was? I can’t imagine someone dating someone like him,” Theon said.

“That’s because you’re straight Theon,” Arya laughed. Genevieve had to agree. Her wasn’t her type, but Sandor was definitely someone’s type. Between his height, his voice, and his humor... scars could be damned.

Robb tried to steer them back on topic, “So anyways. You guys ready to head to the car?”

“I’ve just got one last thing to show you guys,” Gen said.

At this point, they were up for anything. The concert high was still with them. Plus, she had been the one to make it all possible.

“She just wants to steal one of the set lists. Says it’s usually posted on the door back here,” Jon explained as she led them towards the backstage.

“I’d follow her across the Narrow Sea right now if she asked me to,” her brother said.

At the door Genevieve made a show of taking down the set list and showing it to her friends.

From a dark corner by the stage a deep voice said, “What do you think you’re doing back here?”

“Holy shit it’s Sandor Clegane!”
“Damn right it is,” he said stepping out of the shadows.

Genevieve ran forward and jumped up into his arms for a hug.

“You killed it up there!” she said.

Sandor set her down, “You like the dedication?”

“Of course! I think everyone was jealous.”

Theon said, “Wait, so you’re his bird in the crowd? What about Jon?”

Everyone, besides Jon, was freaking the fuck out watch them talk.

“How the fuck do you know Sandor Clegane!” her brother asked. Gendry wanted too, but he was too awestruck to formulate a coherent sentence.

Sandor crossed his arms to look at Roland, “And how the fuck do you know Genevieve?”

Roland sputtered and looked at the rest of them to support.

“That’s my older brother Roland,” she said.

Gendry found the words he was looking for, “Wait so you two know each other? Like you actually know the Sandor Clegane?”

“Yeah, what the fuck Gen?” Arya added.

Sandor opened the back door and said, “Why don’t you guys just come hang back here so we can talk?”

To Genevieve he said, "By the way, you stood out like a highlighter in the crowd tonight with that shirt."

"I wanted you to see me!"

Genevieve and Jon followed while the rest of them looked at each other mouthing “What the fuck is going on?”

He led him to the lounge backstage. The walls were covered in autographs and posters from previous bands that had played there. It was pretty grungy, but the couches were comfortable enough. Plus, there were plenty of snacks. Not that any of them, besides Genevieve would go grab any because they were too confused to make a move.

While Genevieve and Sandor loaded up two plates with nachos the rest of them started asking Jon
questions.

“Did you know that they knew each other?” Roland asked.

“Is he the one who got us the tickets?” said Robb.

Arya rolled her eyes, “No shit Robb. You think it was that bouncer who gave them to her?”

When Sandor and Genevieve returned, they sat on the couches wondering why everyone was still standing.

“Well don’t just hover,” Sandor said. He looked comically large sitting on the couch while Genevieve was dwarfed in comparison.

They rest of them sat down quickly like they’d just been scolded by a parent. Genevieve held her plate out to the rest of them but not one ventured to take a bite.

“So are you going to explain?” her brother asked drumming his fingers on his knees.

After another bite she said, “Sorry, I was just really hungry. I forgot the snack bag in the car.”

Jon found himself wishing for some of that trail mix she’d packed and grabbed a chip from her plate.

“Do you want to tell the story or should I?” she asked Sandor.

He shrugged and waved his hands motioning for her to go ahead.

“Okay, so you know the summer after my first year in college?”

“Yeah, you were super weepy when you first came home,” her brother prompted.

Jon put his arm around her shoulders knowing it was still a sore subject.

“So I went away to the Quiet Isle to sort of regroup and Sandor was there doing the same after a long tour and the rest is history,” she said.

Sandor laughed, “You’re leaving a lot out of that story Genevieve.”

“I thought we agreed what happens on the Quiet Isle stays on there?”

The rest of them were still confused out of their minds.

“Wait, so you just stumbled upon him and became friends?” Gendry asked holding his head in his hands.

Sandor looked to Gen with a smirk, “This one got blackout at a barbeque and made me sing a duet with her.”

“So all this time we’ve listened to his band, you never thought to mention that you sung a fucking duet with him?” Roland said in shock. Genevieve was having too much fun watching this unfold.

“I wanted to wait for just the right moment to tell you Roland,” she said.

“Well you sure picked a good one,” he murmured.

Sandor stood up, “Can I get you anything to drink? Any beers?”

“...”
“Gods yes,” said Theon.

Genevieve stood up and offered to help, “Why do you stay here and field their questions, I’m sure they have many. I can go grab the beers.”

“Fine with me, I’m beat after that show. They’re in the room down the hall, can’t miss them,” Sandor said sitting back down.

While Genevieve walked off in search of them, the rest of them jumped up to grab nachos—all of them except Jon too chicken to sit there alone with Sandor.

“So you and Genevieve?” Sandor asked gruffly. Jon’s eyes widened when he realized he was talking to him. It was one thing knowing his girlfriend knew Sandor, but to have him actually talk to him was something else entirely.

“Uh yeah. I met her at the airport,” Jon said trying to sit up taller.

Sandor let the silence hang for a while, “So you two together?”

Jon swallowed, “Yeah. Just made it official recently.”

As if he was talking to Jon about the weather Sandor patted his knee and said, “You break her heart and I’ll kill you.”

“Of course. I would never,” he said. Where was Genevieve?

“Glad to hear that. She deserves happiness, I don’t want to see anything bad happen to her.”

“And neither do I.”

“Then it’s settled,” Sandor nodded. The two of them noticed Genevieve struggling walking forward with a crate of beers and rushed to help. Jon beat him to it and helped it over to the couches.

“You planning on starting a party?” Sandor asked.

“I wasn’t sure what kinds people wanted so I grabbed a variety,” she said.

The rest of them had sat down at this point, and while people got settled Jon whispered to her. “I think he just gave me the shovel talk.”

“Oh Gods. I wish I could’ve heard that!”

Sandor took a sip of his drink and said, “So are you gonna introduce them all to me Gen?”

“Oh shit, I totally forgot.”

“My fame still get to you?”

“Never did, and you know it,” she laughed.

“Anyways,” she continued, “This is my boyfriend Jon, and his siblings Arya, Theon, and Robb.”

“Sick performance tonight,” Arya said.

Robb and Jon seemed more appreciative for the free booze than anything else.

“And that’s my brother Roland, I’ve told you stories about him.”
“Oh, I remember,” Sandor said. Roland was just trying to wrap his mind around the fact that Sandor knew who he was.

“And last but not least, this is Gendry. He goes to high school with Arya and has a band.”

“Jesus, you look as old as I did when I was your age. What’s your band called?”

Gendry scratched the back of his neck under the eye of Sandor, “We’re called Bullseye, we mostly just do house shows when we can find the time.”

“Well keep at it, and send me a demo someday if you think about taking it a step further,” Sandor said.

This was Genevieve loved about Sandor. He could act all big and bad, but he was really just a regular guy, no matter what he said. For his guidance on the Quiet Isle, all the way to indulging her with his time to meet her friends.

They talked for about an hour more, with Jon refilling her nacho plate, until Theon and Robb began to get sleepy from all they’d drank. They were uncharacteristically quiet.

Before they left Sandor scribbled down his contact info for Gendry and said goodbye to the group. Jon and the few that were sober went to pull up the car while Genevieve talked with Sandor.

“Thanks for tonight Sandor, it’d really been too long.”

“Seriously. When was the last time we’ve seen each other? Last year?”

“I couldn’t even tell you,” she said.

“Well when you and Jon get married make sure I get an invite, that’ll force each other to see each other,” he said.

She sputtered, “What? Jon? We haven’t even know each other for a month!”

“Eh, doesn’t matter. He seems nice enough. But I’m always on call if he does anything funny,” Sandor reminded.

“Yes of course, you’re still my bodyguard.”

“Always Gen. Now get going before you run out of gas out there,” Sandor said.

She pulled him in for a goodbye hug as Jon walked back in to say the car was up front. Back on the Isle, it’d taken some effort to get him to feel comfortable with her hugs. But at the time she needed them and who was he to refuse such a sad face.

“She’s all yours Jon,” Sandor said pulling away from the hug when he saw Jon.

After they’d helped Robb and Theon into the car Sandor stopped Jon and said, “Seriously, take care of her.”

“Always.”

Driving off Genevieve felt the complicated emotions of driving away from a friend. She was happy to see him after all the time apart, but something about the origin of their friendship would always make their interactions bittersweet. He reminded her of one of the worst and best times of her life.
So while the rest of the car was either passed out or gushing over the night, Genevieve was staring out the window hoping her memories wouldn’t spoil the night. But then Jon grabbed her hand and she felt as though she could keep the feelings at bay, at least for the night.
Chapter 24

The next day Jon felt too tired to roll out of bed. He’d gotten a text from Genevieve about an hour before he woke up, a picture of the two of them that she’d snapped at the concert.

“New background!” she said.

Jon quickly put it as his and grabbed the notebook besides his bed. The leather-bound notebook was full of old ideas, drawings, and words he tried to make sense of. He hadn’t felt like writing in a while but lately he found he had new inspiration.

Sometimes he wrote poems and songs, and other times he drew pictures of homes he wished he lived in, with memories he hoped to have someday.

There was still so much about Genevieve that he didn’t know, that he wanted to. He wanted her to know him in the same way. Like what was her favorite food, besides soups? What did she do when she was alone? What did she hope for her future?

He could only imagine. But he was careful not to imagine too much and create a vision of her in his mind that didn’t exist. He just hoped that someday she’d reveal the intricacies of herself to him. But he felt a sense of anxiety, that the other foot would soon fall and what he felt would fall apart. That she would run off to never think twice about him, that he was just some holiday fling.

He didn’t want to get his hopes up.

While Jon sat in his room attempting to keep his cool, Genevieve was attempting to catch up on her social life away from Winterfell.

She’d called Mira over breakfast to fill her in on her the recent developments with Jon — the reason for her dumb-idiot smile. Mira was overjoyed with the news and forced Genevieve to do a happy dance to one of their favorite songs from high school.

Over the phone Genevieve asked, “So what about you missy? Have you finally decided you’re thirsty enough to snatch up Willas?”

“Haha, very fun. And no. I’m still hiding my undying love at every company gathering,” she said.

Mira was strong, but she wasn’t very sure of herself. Never had been, even as children. When they were younger Genevieve was the bold one while Mira was just along for the ride.

“What about his sister? Do you think you could just casually ask her about him?”

“Margaery?” Mira laughed, “She’d see right through that.”

“So what! I bet she’d put a good word in for you.”

“I want to build up to it. Him and I actually have a business lunch together on Wednesday,” Mira said.

Genevieve clapped, “Okay girl! I see you! Wear that cute blue shirt and those skinny cigarette pants you got when we went shopping that one time. You butt looks amazing in them.”
“It’s a business lunch, not a date.”

“You never know!”

After their phone call Genevieve looked through Willas’s Faceless profile and sent screenshots to Mira to get her thinking about him. Mira tried to act stern, but the picture of Willas with a bird on his hand on one of their farms made her send heart-eyed emojis.

Genevieve’s phone rang and she hoped it was Jon, “Hey!”

“Hello Genevieve,” Tyrion said.

“Oh it’s you, how’s it going?”

“Ouch I was doing well before that greeting! Were you expecting someone else?”

“No, just didn’t expect a work call on a Saturday,” she said while walking back up to his room.

“New year, new me as the kids say.”

“Gods, hanging out with your sister’s kids really changed you,” she laughed.

“What can I say, I’m the cool uncle. Jaime has nothing on me.”

She sat down on her bed and opened up her laptop, “Oh I’m sure. Anyways, what’s up?”

“I just wanted to check in and make sure Tormund has been in contact with you. I sent an itinerary to your email, there’s been some changes,” Tyrion said, sounding apprehensive.

She pulled up the email and scanned it, “What do you mean? It looks like we discussed?”

“Check the dates,” he said.

The trip had been moved up a week, she’d have to leave next week. She muted her mic and let out a string of curses.

“What happened?” she asked.

Tyrion sighed, “Tormund says there’s some festival or something like that happening so you should come early to see it. If you can’t go that early, I understand, but I think it would really add to the book.”

“I’ll move some stuff around to be there. You knew I wouldn’t say no.”

“Thank you, thank you, thank you! I’ll tell Tormund to make it worth your time.”

They hung up and Genevieve wondered what she was going to do with her last week home. She’d barely felt like she’d rested or talked with her family since she’d been home. And then there was Jon. Would he wait for her while she was away? Could she even ask him to?
On Sunday morning Genevieve’s dad Willem woke her and his sister up early.

“Get up Gen. I want to bring you and Amira to breakfast,” he said.

Genevieve couldn’t comprehend why her father needed to wake them up bright and early to do so, but threw on a sweatshirt and leggings anyways.

Her sister was in a similar mood and couldn’t stop yawning, “Why are we doing this again Dad?”

“I just want to go out with my girls. I’ve been so busy with work since Christmas,” he said as they put on their coats and mittens and headed out the door.

Overnight several inches of snow had coated Winterfell. It was enough to have to clean off the car, but not enough to have to go out and shovel the driveway before they left. Roland could do that.

“So where to?” Gen asked.

“Can we go to that little cafe you brought me to last month?” Amira asked. She’d grabbed a book on her way out and was trying to read it in the car, despite all the potholes that distracted her.

“Sure thing sweetie. Gen, you’ll love it there,” her father said. It always amazed Genevieve that her father could be so nice when his job as a lawyer demanded a harder exterior.

Her father was right. Genevieve had ordered crepes covered in whipped cream and chocolate sauce and she felt like she was in heaven.

“Gods I miss hanging out with you girls. It’s good to have to back with the family Gen,” her father said between bites of his omelet.

“I feel like we haven’t really hung out much as a family though,” Amira said.

Genevieve felt guilty for that. And now, she would have even less time with them with her trip pushed up.

“We should have a movie night tomorrow night, just the six of us,” Gen said.

Amira looked doubtful, “So no Jon?”

She rolled her eyes at her sister, knowing full well a day would come when Amira would have trouble balancing her time with people just like she did.

Her father looked at the two of them, “So who’s this Jon everyone’s been talking about?”

“You probably know him as the guy who drives Henryk places with Bran and Rickon sometimes,” Gen said.

“Or as Genevieve’s boyfriend,” Amira added.

Her Dad whistled and put his hand on her shoulder, “Good for you Gen! When are you bringing him over for dinner?”

“Um, I’m not sure. Sometime this week if he can?” Gen said.
“There’s always next week,” her sister added.

Genevieve was met with the bitter reminder that she no longer had next week to look forward to.

“Actually, there isn’t. My boss moved the trip up so I have to leave Sunday.”

Her father sat down his coffee, “Gods, we just got you home.”

“I know, I know. I’m not too happy about it either, but I really need this job.”

“We understand. Just miss you a lot when you’re gone,” her sister said.

She never realized her sister felt that way. Amira always had her head buried in a book, even when she was younger. She was an independent kid, and Genevieve had assumed it didn’t make a different to her if she was in Winterfell or not.

“I promise to call you when I can. The reception isn’t so good up there,” Gen said.

“No worries baby girl. As long as you bring back some goodies for us,” her dad laughed.

“You wish!”

“Hey! You did send me that bottle of Arbor Gold when you were away!

Her spoke about the banter and said, “So what does Jon think about you going away?”

“Oh we haven’t really talked about it. But it’s my job, I’m not just going to put it on hold,” Genevieve said. She really needed to talk about it with him.

“That’s right Gen! You didn’t work that hard in school to give it up for a boy, no matter how cute he is!” her father said.

“You’re such a weirdo.”

After breakfast Genevieve sent a text to Jon:

“Hey, can we hang out today? I want to talk to you about my trip coming up.”
How’s everyone doing. I was soooo bored at work today. During my shift not a single person needed my help (I work front desk at a library).

Jon suggested they go for a walk in the woods once he got her text. He’d been wanting to take her there, and it never looked more beautiful than after a fresh snowfall.

She’d arrived at his house dressed for the weather, covered from head to toe.

“I can barely see you!”

Taking off the scarf around her face she said, “Hey, I don’t want frostbite."

“You gonna dress up like this when you go beyond the Wall?” Jon gathered two mugs of hot chocolate for them to bring on their walk.

Genevieve didn’t want to jump into that discussion quite yet. She wanted some time with Jon before things got too real and uncomfortable. “We’ll see. I’m sure my guide will laugh at me and call me a southerner if I do.”

They went out the back door of his house and into the woods, “I’m really glad you were free today. I’ve been wanting to show you this place.”

“What is it?” she asked.

How could he explain the beauty without her seeing it? He liked a grand reveal.

“Just a special place for my family. Generations of Starks have come out here to worship the Old Gods,” he said.

“Our old home had a place like that. When the bears weren’t around at least,” she said. She wondered if she would ever get over the loss of their home. It just felt wrong that another family was living in the place where her family had grown.

Jon led her further in the woods, and she grabbed onto his arm for stability. Places along the path were covered in ice.

“Have you been back to Bear Island since you moved?” he asked.

“Not really. I really should… but it’s just too painful right now.”

Jon looked at her face and tried to figure out how to help her, if he could. If he had the money he’d buy her old family home for her. Another fantasy.

“I understand.” They let the silence hang as they reached the clearing.

The heart tree was exactly where it had always been, and always would be. The roots seemed older than time itself and the reflection of the tree in the tiny pond nearby made it feel even more sacred.
Genevieve was speechless. She could sense that it was a place where words didn’t do anything but muddy the environment.

“My father comes here a lot to pray,” Jon said sitting by the tree, “I used to a lot when I was younger.”

“It’s beautiful Jon.” She walked behind him to take in the face on the heart tree. The faces had scared her as a kid but as she’d gotten older she felt a deep reverence for the Children of the Forest.

“It really is. I always feel so small when I’m here,” he said.

She sat down beside him and leaned her head on his shoulder. “I know what you mean.”

Genevieve wanted to tell him what was on her mind, but the moment was to still and pure to be spoiled.

They sat in silence for several minutes, each of them feeling a sense of peace and gladness that they could do so with each other. It was something shared by Northerners Jon felt.

When they started to get cold and even Jon’s embrace couldn’t keep her warm, he helped her up and they walked back.

He handed her the container of hot chocolate. “Thank you for showing me that Jon. I think I needed some calm.”

“What’s been on your mind?” She inwardly cursed him for being too nice all the time. Why did he have to be so thoughtful and herself so ... so complicated. Now she felt mean for what she was about to say.

“My trip got moved up. I have to leave on Sunday,” she said.

Jon didn’t say anything for a second, “Oh, wow. That’s soon.”

They lingered outside his house, “I know and I’m sorry. I thought we’d have more time to get to know each other.”

“Don’t be sorry. I’m not going to hold you back from doing what you want to do.”

She couldn’t accept that he was fine with it, didn’t believe it. “I have to be. I agreed to be your girlfriend knowing full-well that I’d have to leave almost as soon as we got together.”

Jon wasn’t having it, “And I knew that too. I’m not going anywhere. You’ll be back.”

“But what if it’s not for a while? I can’t ask you to wait for me,” she said. She hated this conversation. This is why she preferred being single in the past. Being in a relationship meant letting someone down.

He grabbed her shoulders and made her look at him, “I knew all that when we first met. We don’t need to borrow problems from the future.”

She leaned into his chest, “I just don’t want things to be unfair for you.”

“I’ll be fine, trust me.”

Genevieve felt a lot lighter once she’d gotten that off her chest. She’d been so scared he would reject her, that he was only after one thing. After their talk she felt exhausted from all the emotions she’d
held within herself.

The two of them laid on the couch, with his arm around her body as she nestled in. When she fell asleep Jon sent a text.

“Are you free this weekend?”
On Monday night the Norward family had made a promise to focus on each other before Genevieve went away. It’d taken canceling plans on Roland’s part but he wanted to hang out with his sister while he still could. Henryk had chosen the first movie of the night — an old classic about two cops in a small town investigating murders.

“You kids want ice cream? I’ll go pick some up.” their father asked.

Their mother, who was wrapped up in a blanket like a baby with just her head sticking out said, “Oh my Gods yes please! Can you get me that peanut butter kind I like.”

He walked over and kissed her forehead, “Of course love.”

The rest of them listed off their orders and when their father returned the party began.

Amira was sprawled out on the couch with her legs on Gen’s lap while Roland leaned against her. Henryk prefered the armchair, kicking his dad out of it. She felt so good to be surrounded by the people she loved. As fun as traveling was, nothing compared to being in a room full of people that knew and loved you.

After Henryk’s pick Amira suggested an adaptation of one of Old Nan’s tales. “The book was sooooo good! I’ve been waiting to watch the movie for months.”

“You sound like Bran,” Henryk said throwing a piece of popcorn at his sister.

“Isn’t he your friend?” Roland asked.

“Doesn’t mean he can’t be a nerd.”

Their mother scolded Henryk and made him apologize to his sister.

“I’m sorry I indirectly call you a nerd,” he said in a flat voice.

Roland whispered to Genevieve, “See what you miss when you’re away?”

“Why do you think I left?”

Eventually as the night went on their father ordered a pizza which they quickly demolished.

“Sometimes I wonder why our grocery bill is so high and then I remember we had four kids,” he said to his wife.

While they ate Genevieve broke the no-phone rule and texted Jon.

“Hey bf how you doin?”
“I’m doing swell. Howmst are you my girl?” he texted.

She loved that he picked up on her humor.

“Just eating some pizza with the fam, after our ice cream of course. Finished our second movie and going to start our third.”

“Gods! You’re going to be up late!”

“My parents really don’t seem to care that Henryk and Amira have school tomorrow. Maybe they’ll let them skip.”

“I want to skip work!!!” he said.

“Please do! We could paint the town red.”

An image of them literally painting Winterfell red made her laugh.

“What’s so funny?” her dad asked.

“Are you using your phone over there?” Henryk asked.

She held it up in mock surrender, “You’ve got me! Lock me up!”

“Talking to Jon?” her mother said.

“Maybe…”

Her phone buzzed with another text from him.

“I wish. I really can’t miss anything this week :(. 1 like = 1 cry,” he said.

“100000 likes. :,( Stay strong Jon.”

"I'll survive now thanks to you."

"Such a flirt!" she typed with a smile growing on her face.

Roland snatched her phone away after that so the movie could start in peace.

"Hey! I was using that!"

"It's family night, no excuses," Amira shrugged

"Traitor..."
Jon was having a terrible morning. On his way to work he’d spilt coffee on his pants and he’d forgotten his lunch at home. His father offered to share his, but it didn’t matter. Jon was in a rut.

When Genevieve woke up, two hours after Jon was expected at work, she was in a great mood. She’d treated herself and her mother to a fresh batch of chocolate chip pancakes and had enjoyed a relaxing morning with her. But then she saw the texts from Jon.

“Ahhhh!” he’d texted with a picture of his leg covered in coffee.

And then there was a text about the forgotten lunch, “Rip my lunch :( last seen ???”

For someone who’d been able to spend the majority of her day in her pajamas, Genevieve really felt for him. Which is exactly why she’d gotten to work in the kitchen and devised a plan to help fix his day.

Around his lunch break she texted him.

“Hey can I come up to your office? I’m in the neighborhood and thought I’d say hello.” In truth, she was already in the elevator up to their floor when she texted.

Jon’s reply was quick, “Of course! I’m just going on my lunch(less) break right now.”

She passed by Ned in the lobby attempting to use a copy machine.

“Hi Mr. Stark!”

“Oh! Hello Genevieve. Are you here for Jon?” he asked.

She held up the lunch box in her hand, “Yep! I wanted to surprise him. I heard he’s having a rough day.”

“Just wait until you see the pants he had to put on,” he laughed, his eyes crinkling with his smile.

He directed her to Jon’s office which she wondered if was a perk for being the boss’s son. His head was down looking at paperwork when she knocked.

Through the glass he smiled and walked towards her. His dad wasn’t kidding about the pants.

“Hi Gen that was quick! It’s so good to see you,” he said giving her a quick kiss.

“Nice pants! The 70s are back in style!”

Jon looked down as if remembering his outfit change. “Oh these plaid monstrosities? One of my coworkers had them in his desk from the company costume party last fall.”

“Well I must say, you really work them! Maybe orange is your color,” she said taking a seat across from his desk.

“So what were you doing in the neighborhood?” he asked.

She’d managed to hide the lunchbox in her Mary-Poppins sized purse.
“Well I wasn’t really in the neighborhood. I just wanted to see you.”

Jon was touched, feeling better already.

“You certainly helped brighten my day by coming. It’s been an awful morning, like everything that could possibly go wrong did,” he sighed.

She pulled out the lunch box and set it in front of him, “Which is exactly why I brought you some lunch. If I’d know you needed pants I would’ve stole a pair of Roland’s.”

“Gods if I weren’t at work right now I’d give you a proper kiss for doing this. You’re an angel, thank you,” he said.

“Happy to be of service! Now eat!”

He tried to offer her some of the soup she’d made, or even some of the bread she’d picked up at the store, but she refused

“I may have done a little, or a lot, or taste-testing when I was cooking it.”

“You really are the soup master.”

“I knew you’d realize someday,” she laughed.

“So what’s new with you?” he asked.

She was currently curled up in the armchair, looking at ease.

“Just been emailing back and forth with my boss. I’m supposed to call my guide tomorrow but I hate calling people I’ve never spoken to in person before.”

“The Free Folk guy?”

“Yeah. I’m feeling sort of nervous about the trip. I feel like I’m going to freeze to death out there,” she said. She felt like a fake Northerner for saying so, but the wind chill up there was no joke.

“Maybe he’ll let you borrow some furs.”

The idea grossed her out but when it came down to it she needed to do whatever she could to stay warm.

“I still feel bad that I have to leave so soon,” she sighed.

“I may have found a solution to that. You can totally say no of course though.”

She sat up in her chair, “What is it?”

“My Uncle Benjen has been trying to get me up to the Wall for a while now for a visit. I could fly up with you and stay for the weekend,” he said. He hoped this wasn’t too forward. They were still pretty earlier in their relationship to be following her around the world, not that he would mind.

“That’d be fun! I don’t really have to head out with the guide until Monday afternoon so we could have about a night and a half together,” she said happy at the prospect of spending more time together before she left.

Jon felt relieved that she didn’t think he was a weirdo for offering it. He’d already sort of cleared it
with his uncle who was excited to have him stay with him.

“I don’t know if you already booked a place but my uncle has space at his place if you feel comfortable staying there,” he said. Because of his uncle’s rank as First Ranger he actually had a pretty spacious place, as far as Jon remembered from his visits when he was younger.

Genevieve checked her itinerary on her email, “Looks like my boss just put my accommodations for the night as TBA. I think we’re a go!”

“Awesome, I’ll tell my uncle. I think you’ll really like him.”

“If he’s anything like you I will. Plus, he can help me get a feel for what it’s like to live up there for my notes,” she said.

He admired the way she liked to collect pieces of information and squirrel them away for future use. She was just the type of person meant for a career in research.

When his lunch break ended and it was time to go back to work, Jon did so feeling much lighter. Especially after he saw a text she had sent him.

“Please pack those hot pants with you for this week! Lol <3”
Saturday night Genevieve felt close to tears. She didn’t want to leave her family, no matter how exciting the reason was. And even her siblings who were usually off doing their own thing were hanging around the house to spend time with her while they still could.

“I know this is stupid, but I just don’t want to leave and miss out on everything.” she said to them over dinner.

Roland put his fork down, “All we do is go to work and school. You’re the one doing exciting things off in the world.”

“He’s right sweetie, you’re not missing anything,” her mom said. But she was wrong, she was missing something.

“I’m missing you guys though,” Gen sighed.

As she packed that night she felt unsure of herself. Was it really such a good idea to build a career around traveling the world, never having a place to call home? And was it really worth letting her anxieties overpower her dreams? She didn’t know the answers.

Earlier in the day she’d called Tormund and he’d tried to assure her that everything would be fine, and that he wouldn’t let anything go wrong on the trip. But that wasn’t her worry. Her worry was leaving behind the people in her life again. And she couldn’t figure out if she was chasing or running away from her life.

Jon sent her a video call request.

His smile was the first thing she saw when he picked up, “Sorry for the extreme close-up, was trying to adjust the sound.”

“It was cute. How’s the packing going?” she asked. She was currently struggling.

“Seeing as I’m only packing for a couple nights, it’s pretty easy. How about on your end?” When she left to go beyond the Wall he’d be staying back with his uncle for a couple of days before he had to return to work.

She pointed the camera to the tornado of clothes on her floor. “This about sums it up. I have no idea what I’ll need up there.”

“I’m getting flashbacks to the other night! Just bring a bunch of warm clothes,” he said.

“Easier said than done. Tormund told me to try and bring just a hiking backpack full of stuff.” When he’d told her she thought he’d been joking. She usually packed light, but that was pushing it.

“Do you have one? You can borrow mine.”

“I’m all good. Henryk let me borrow his as long as I bring him back something from my trip. The thing is huge though! I don’t know how he wears it,” she said.

Jon got an image of a backpack with tiny legs.

“As long as you bring lots of socks and sweaters,” he said.
Eventually she finished her packing, feeling proud that she’d managed to pair it all down to just the backpack. It meant she’d only be able to be able to bring the shoes she would travel in — a well-worn pair of hiking boots with electric blue laces. She hoped Tormund wasn’t bringing her anywhere fancy on their trip. Usually she just rouged it on her travels.

Tomorrow the plan was that Roland would drop the two of them off at the airport, which was ironic considering the whole reason she and Jon had gotten to know each other was because he hadn’t picked her up. And from there they’d fly to the Wall to see his uncle.

Before she went to bed her father came in her room to talk to her.

He sat down on the foot of her bed and asked, “How you feeling Genny?”

“Happy and sad.”

“That’s understandable. You’ve been go go go for a while now, this is the first time you’ve really gotten to catch up and think,” he said.

He was right, she’d gone from city to city without a break in between. That sort of life really tired her out easily, but she hadn’t even noticed just how tired until she was home.

She put her head on his shoulder, “I just don’t want to miss out on anything.”

“Gen, we’ve got phones now. And video-chat if your siblings will show me how to use it. You won’t be alone up there.”

“I know. I’m just in a mood.”

“Well it’s a good thing Jon will be flying up with you. That should help,” he said.

“I hope so.”

Part of her feared it would make leaving even harder. She felt it was unfair to leave just as things had started. But life wouldn’t wait for her, and neither would the trip.
Roland had gotten his payback to the way Genevieve had awoken him when she came home from the airport.

“Why the fuck are you jumping on my bed Roland?” she asked. Her mother was right, she was not to be messed with in the mornings.

“You’ve got to get ready! Your prince charming is already here in the living room.”

Genevieve checked her watch, it was well past her alarm. “Shit, okay I’m getting up. Tell him I’ll be right there,” she said.

Roland realized she wasn’t in the mood for playfulness, “Okay Gen. He brought donuts for all of us so you don’t have to worry about breakfast.” Things were coming full circle. But she was never in the mood to eat before she traveled. Her nervous stomach held her back from the sugary goodness that awaited her family downstairs.

He left her to frantically pull on her clothes. Thankfully she’d gotten in the habit of laying out her outfit the night before after too many close calls at the airport. She’d wanted to pick out a more formal airport outfit than usual keeping in mind Jon’s uncle would be picking them up at the airport. Unfortunately there was only so much room in her bag and she wasn’t about to waste any space on an outfit she’d only wear once.

When she was done she threw on her backpack and felt glad that Jon had told her to be ruthless with what she packed. It was big, but she didn’t have any trouble carrying it.

Running down the stairs she said, “I’m here! Sorry I’m late.”

He met her at the bottom of the stairs with a hug, “There’s donuts in your kitchen. I tried to remember what you all liked.”

“I’m not hungry right now but I know the others will love you for that,” she said.

From the kitchen Roland said, “I know I do!”

“So you’ve got everything packed?”

“Yep, just need to put on my boots and my coat and I’m ready to go,” she said.

Roland came back into the living room, “We should probably get going, and not just because I want to go to back to bed.”

“Is anyone else up? I want to say goodbye,” Gen asked.

“Nah, they’re all still asleep.” Maybe it was for the best, sometimes long goodbyes made things even harder.

On the way to the airport Genevieve let Jon ride shotgun so she could lie down in the backseat.

“You okay back there?” he asked.
“Just sleepy still. I need a couple minutes to just remember how to be a person.”

They let her be, Roland even turning down the radio so she could rest. When they pulled up to the gate he helped them unload their bags, not like they really needed the help. Cars were waiting for his spot so their goodbye had to be quick.

He gave Jon a bro hug before discarding him to say goodbye to his sister.

“Bye Gen, make sure to write us!”

“I’ll miss you. Love you,” she said into his shoulder. She felt the all too familiar sensation of tears wanting to come out. But this was an adventure, one she’d always wanted to go on, and there was no place for tears.

When she and Jon waved him goodbye she let out a big sigh.

“Seriously though, are you okay?” Jon asked as they went inside.

“Things are just feeling bittersweet. I hate leaving everyone behind.”

He grabbed hold of her hand, “They’re all happy for you I’m sure. And it’s not forever.”

“It’s not forever,” she repeated feeling stronger.

The line at security wasn’t bad. Apparently no one else in Winterfell had the bright idea of heading to the airport first thing on a Sunday morning. The guard had been surprised when he saw the destination on their tickets.

“Mole’s Town? You two in the army or something?” he asked.

Jon said, “Nope. Visiting my uncle up there.”

“I’m going beyond the Wall for work,” Gen added.

The guard whistled, “Well be careful and stay warm. You two are good to go.”

Their flight to Mole’s Town wasn’t anything like the flight to Winterfell. First, they’d chosen to go without first class and rough it in economy. Neither of them were very tall so it’s wasn’t too bad, but when Genevieve started to doze off she wished her seat was bigger. Jon just missed the extra snacks you got when you sat in first class.

She slept for the duration of the two-hour flight while Jon just hoped the guy sitting to his left didn’t try to make small talk with him.

Thankfully, he didn’t and Jon was able to listen to his music and read in peace. When negotiation some time off at short notice, his father had agreed as long as he kept up on the reports he was supposed to be reading and keep in touch through email. But the reports he had to read were so dry he found himself wishing he was able to sleep as easily as Genevieve could on planes.

When they landed he had one missed call from his uncle who’d left a voicemail saying he was waiting for them by the coffee shop. Both he and Genevieve felt disoriented when they first came off the plane. Jon had been there before, but he’d forgotten just how small the airport was. He was surprised his uncle even needed to tell him where he was with the size of the place.

“There’s only like five gates here,” Genevieve said stretching herself awake.
“It’s not exactly a travel destination,” Jon said. He’d hoisted her backpack and his bag before she could protest and wondered how her clothes could be so heavy.

As promised, Benjen was over by the single coffee shop near the entrance.

The bearded man wrapped Jon up in a hug before greeting Genevieve.

He went for the handshake and she went for the hug, resulting in an awkward fumbling of arms.

“What an impression I’m making!” she said.

“You must be Genevieve. I’m Jon’s uncle Benjen,” he said. The way he smiled reminded her of Jon’s father, and how Jon would one day look when his face crinkled with marks of his happiness.

“It’s nice to meet you, thank you so much for letting us stay at your home for tonight.”

He grabbed the bags from Jon and they headed to his car, “I’m happy to have you guys. I’ve been begging Jon to come up for a visit. I hear I’ve got you to thank for him coming.”

Jon made her take shotgun, “It was all his idea to reach out to you actually.”

“Something tells me he just wanted to follow you up here,” his uncle said glancing at his nephew in the mirror. He had a small smile on his face listen to the two of them talk.

“You’ve got me there,” Jon said.

Driving up to Castle Black was nerve wracking for Genevieve. She’d never been to a place so militarized. Members of the famed Night’s Watch patrolled the Wall like the history books said they always had. But what did they really have to protect against? Were they that concerned about the Free Folk coming over?

The giant gate rose up when they saw Benjen’s car and Genevieve was at the Wall at last.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Anyone else following the Brexit deal votes?

Although Benjen’s house was the perfect size for a man living on his own and even for having two visitors, it didn’t exactly have three bedrooms.

Benjen showed them the guest room but noticed the apprehension on Jon’s face when he noticed that there was only one bed.

“Jon you can take my bed and Genevieve can sleep here. I don’t mind roughing it on the couch. I’m used to sleeping out on the ground when I’m out ranging,” he said.

“I can’t take your bed Uncle Benjen, let me take the couch,” Jon said.

“Or we could just share the room. I really don’t mind,” she said.

Jon was surprised but agreed with her. It didn’t make sense to have someone sleep on the floor. It wasn’t like sharing the bed was going to lead to anything — especially when his uncle was right down the hall.

After they’d settled in, Benjen offered to give them a tour of the Wall. They’d had to take an open- aired elevator that Benjen claimed had been there for hundreds of years. The fact did little to reassure Jon and Gen that they were safe as it climbed up the ice wall.

Atop the wall the soldiers who Benjen walked past moved out of his way due to his rank as First Ranger. And Genevieve couldn’t believe her eyes, couldn’t believe the sheer scale of the wall and the trees beyond. She had trouble believing people had made it. She couldn’t even understand how it would be built in her day and age.

“You see that out there?” he asked them. He’d been pointing at the vast expanse of wilderness that lay beyond the wall.

“The forest?” Jon asked.

“Yes. There’s things out there that we’re lucky haven’t crossed over,” his uncle said.

“You’ve been reading Old Nan’s stories?”

Benjen smiled, “When you grow up hearing them directly from her mouth, you start to believe them.”

Genevieve was glad Amira had made her watch one of her movies the other day. “Who knows, there must have been some basis to the stories with all the historical accounts.”

“But white walkers still walking about today?” Jon asked. There were even rumors of giants. Tyrion would just die if she was able to find evidence. It’d been very hard for him to get in contact with someone beyond the Wall who was willing to take Genevieve on and give her a glimpse into their
culture.

“Who knows, just be glad there’s a Wall between us and whatever lurks in the forest,” Benjen added.

Genevieve wondered if he was one of those people who hated the Free Folk, or wildlings as they called them. She and many others admired the Free Folk for their connection to nature and their long standing traditions, which couldn’t be said for all those living south of the Wall. But others simply saw them as free-range savages.

“It’s a good thing I’ve got a good guide to show me around then,” she said.

“Who’s bringing you around?” Benjen asked. His eyes were dark and serious like the black uniforms his fellow brothers wore.

“A man named Tormund. Do you know him?”

His smile flattened, “Giantsbane? I’ve heard his name. I’ll give you my number if you run into any trouble.”

“I appreciate it, thank you,” she said. She was feeling unsettled by his solemn words. Tyrion had never put her in danger before and she didn’t think he was going to start now. If anything, all the close calls she’d gotten into on her travels were brought on because her own curiosity, not her boss’s urging.

After Jon steered the conversation back to the Wall. “Do you think the Wall really is protected by magic like people say it is?”

“I’m sure Amira and Bran believe it is. They can’t get enough of Old Nan,” Gen said.

“Well as someone who lives here, I’d say it is too. The way things are around here it’s gotta be protected by magic,” Benjen said knocking on the ice so he wouldn’t jinx himself.

He had to go on duty that afternoon which left Gen and Jon at Castle Black with nothing to do. After the observed the brothers of the Night’s Watch out in the yard training old school with bows and swords, they grew cold and sought refuge inside the mess hall.

“I hear the soup the cooks make here isn’t too bad. Want to check it out soup master?” Jon asked.

He’d been wrong.

“Gods I’m sorry I suggested this. I feel bad for my uncle,” Jon said.

Genevieve stared down at the mushy pea soup they’d been given, “I don’t want to be harsh but oof.”

A woman had been eying the two of them the entire time while they ate and Genevieve was getting annoyed. Did she have something on her face?

Eventually the wiry woman approached and turned Genevieve, “You a new recruit?”

“No, I’m here for business actually,” she replied.

“Well if you’d like to stay for pleasure, here’s her number,” the woman said handing her a slip of paper with a wink before leaving the hall.

“Wow! Looks like I’ve got competition,” Jon said as they observed the paper.
Followed by her number she’d written, “Val xx call me.”

“Don’t worry Jon, I’ve only got eyes for you,” she said giving him a kiss.

They decided to watch old movies at Benjen’s house to relax. Traveling had taken a lot out of them, the both of them wishing they hadn’t schedule an early morning flight.

Before she joined Jon in the living room, she explored the place looking around Benjen’s walls. There were plenty of photos of the Stark kids at various ages. And even a particularly cute one of Jon with a puppy as a little kid — all curls and joy. She’d taken a picture and set it as his contact photo.

In the living room she and Jon had talked about their impressions of the place.

“I wanted to join up with the Night’s Watch when I was a kid,” he said.

“Wanted to be like your cool uncle?”

“Sort of. It was a mix of that and feeling like I didn’t fit in with the family. I thought I could find ‘brothers’ up here,” he explained looking down at his feet.

She touched his forearm. “Do you still feel that way with your family?”

“Not always, but I have my days.” Genevieve hoped she could make him feel like he had a place in this world.

The two of them had fallen asleep while watching a Christmas movie about a man who wished he’d never been born. Once in Jon’s arms she’d fallen right asleep.

When Benjen came home he wasn’t at all surprised to see the two of them passed out. The couch was so comfy it always put him right out. He was happy to see that his nephew was growing up and finding love, something he wasn’t sure would ever happen to him. Members of the Night’s watch hadn’t been allowed to marry when he first joined. The rules had changed over the years, allowing women and then marriages, but Benjen felt too old for anything like that. But Jon wasn’t.

Jon woke up minutes after he came in the door.

“You smelled the pizza didn’t you?” Benjen said.

“Guilty. Not sure how I’ll eat it if she’s still sleeping,” Jon said. His was completely numb beneath her.

“I’m up, I’m up. Now what’s this about pizza?” she said. Her hair was a fuzzy mess of static electricity when she sat up.

Genevieve couldn’t believe that they pizza up there could be so good. They weren’t exactly known for their culinary expertise up there.

After dinner Jon and Benjen caught up while Genevieve got in contact with Tormund.

“She’s a nice girl. She makes you happy?” he asked his nephew.

“Totally. I’m just scared I’ll screw it up somehow,” Jon sighed.

“You worry too much. Your father was just like you at his age. Especially after the war. He came home to Catelyn and when all you kids starting coming he never stopped.”
Jon was confused, “He never seems worried.”

“Well he is, trust me. He worries for you kids all the time,” he said taking a sip of his beer, “But like I always tell him, just trust in yourself and the Gods and things will be fine.”

“I just have this fear in the back of my mind that I’ll just end up stuck in Winterfell with no life of my own, just working for my Dad for the rest of my life,” Jon said.

“Then you better make sure you hold tight to her Jon. Be the man you think she deserves.”

Back in the guest room Genevieve called Tormund.

“Can’t get enough of me can you?” he answered.

“You’re too much, really. So we’re still on for tomorrow afternoon?”

“Yep, right by Craster’s. You have a way to get there?”

“I’ll find my way,” Gen said.

“Get some rest and dress warm tomorrow. It’s supposed to be a cold one, even for up here.”

Genevieve was going to look like a little kid bundled all the way up and she didn’t care if Tormund and all his friends laughed at her.

Bedtime rolled around and she and Jon did the awkward dance around each other during their nighttime routines. They’d shared the sink while brushing their teeth and he’d watched as she meditated before getting into bed. Jon usually wrote about his day, but he’d left his journal at home. All of the thoughts in his head about tonight would have to stay there.

“How do you want the outside or the wall?” she asked.

“I’ll take the outside so you don’t fall out of bed.”

She laughed, “You think I need one of those things they put on bed for little kids so they don’t roll out?”

“Never know, I’m happy to be of service if you need it.”

“You’re too much. I love the pjs by the way,” she said. Jon was wearing a shirt with a white wolf howling at the moon and plaid pajama bottoms.

“Thank you. I’m sorry to say I didn’t pack those pants from the other day.”

“How could you! You’ve broken my heart,” she said pretending to faint onto the bed.

“Don’t say that! Sandor will hear and have my head!”

The awkwardness came, at least for Jon, when it was actually time to get under the covers.

“So uh how do you want to do this? I don’t want to make you uncomfortable,” he said.

“It’s not like it’s the first time I’ve fallen asleep on you. By the way, you make a great big spoon,” she said while nestling into him.

Jon’s heart was racing and he hoped she didn’t see the smile on his face.
He put an arm around her and kissed the top of her head, “Sounds good to me. Sweet dreams Gen.”

She pulled his arms tighter and curled up making herself small in his arms. “Sweet dreams Jon. Thanks for coming with me. You’re making this whole thing a lot easier for me.”

“Anytime Gen, anytime.”
Genevieve had wormed her way out of Jon’s arms early in the morning to get started with her day. The night before his uncle had told them they had free-range of the house so she took advantage of that in the kitchen.

Benjen was the first to see what she’d made.

“Oh my Gods you’re amazing!” he said as he walked into the dining room table covered in food. She’d made toast, eggs, bacon, coffee, the whole nine yards.

“I just wanted to thank you for letting me stay here before you took off on your shift.”

“The guest room can be yours forever if I can get breakfast like this!” he smiled.

Jon emerged from the room with his hair wild and eyes sleepy. Seeing him made Genevieve feel warm and fuzzy remembering how his arms had felt around her during the night. They made her feel secure, like nothing bad was going to happen to her as long as he was there.

“I smelled bacon?”

“Right on the table, dig in. Genevieve got up early to make it,” Benjen said. He was demolishing a piece of toast.

“Morning Jon,” she said.

“Hey,” he said kissing her cheek and sitting down next to her, “I didn’t even hear you get up.”

“I was in stealth mode.”

“What time do you have to leave today?” Benjen asked Genevieve.

“I’m supposed to meet him at Craster’s around noon.”

“Stay away from Craster. He’s a creep. Jon, why don’t you go with her until Giantsbane gets there,” he said remembering the rumors he heard about him and his kids.

Genevieve’s phone starting ringing.

“Sorry, I’ve got to take this. It’s my boss,” she said.

In the guestroom she picked up the phone, “Hi Tyrion, how’s it going?”

“Things are as well as they could be I suppose. Did you make it to the Wall okay?”

“Yep, I’m at my boyfriend’s uncle’s house right now,” she said.
“Since when do you have a boyfriend?” Tyrion asked.

“I met him at the airport on my way back from Oldtown. Turns out his family knows mine,” she explained.

“Sounds sweet, hope you two kids are having fun, not too much though.”

“Oh shush,” she laughed, “You got any news for me?”

“Nothing big, just remember to get lots of notes about the festival he’s bringing you too. Tormund says their reception is shit up there sometimes so if it comes to it, just send me a raven if you have any questions.”

“They still use them? I thought that stopped like four hundred years ago.”

“I don’t know where you get your news, but they’re still very much in use. Especially up in the middle of nowhere beyond the Wall,” Tyrion said.

“Got it. I’ll send you some bird mail, don’t worry.”

“Awesome! Now I’m off to the beach to find inspiration, but enjoy the rest of your day and give my best to Tormund and your new beau.”

“By beach you mean getting wine drunk during the day?”

“Exactly! You know I hired you because I knew you picked up the little details,” he said.

“Enjoy it while I’m freezing up here!”

“Says the Northerner…”

“Byeee Professor Lannister,” she said with an exaggerated sigh.

“Tyrion, Gen, call me Tyrion.”

“Okay bye for real now!”

She was feeling grateful that she wouldn’t have reliable cell service in that moment.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Are you liking this chapter a day schedule or do you prefer something else? I've been trying to write the next chapter before I post one so I always have one ready to go.

At Craster’s Keep, Genevieve found herself cursing her earlier dismissal of her cell phone reception. She and Jon had gotten there early, but the minutes had ticked by and there was no sign of a certain bearded redhead.

“This place is so creepy,” she said to Jon while looking over her shoulder. Craster’s Keep was a weird place that looked like it’d been built long before her grandparent’s time. Currently the main building functioned as a dirty bar full of people who looked like they’d been there hours earlier.

“I think my friend’s girlfriend is from here,” Jon said.

“Really? I can see why she moved away.”

The two of them had reluctantly went inside the bar and took a seat at a table once they realized waiting outside in the cold wasn’t going to be an option.

“According to the maps I’ve read, this is the closest to the Wall we could get.”

“Still weird,” Jon said.

A bartender came lumbering over and yelled, “Are you ordering something or are you two Southerners just going to sit and take up space?”

Genevieve had dealt with enough surly people in her travels to not let that kind of language intimidate her.

“Two pints, whatever’s on tap,” she said barely sparing the man a glance.

Jon wasn’t sure if he should thank her or yell at the guy for talking to her that way. “Gods I hope everyone you meet isn’t like that.”

“I’ll be fine. I’m only gone for a couple weeks,” she said.

The barkeep came back and slammed their pints on the table, the beer spilling over the sides.

Genevieve took a gulp and said thanks.

“Now that’s a power move. Looks like it’s not you I have to be worried about up here,” Jon said.

“Damn straight. I’m just wondering where Tormund is. He said he’d be like fifteen minutes ago.”

She felt a hand on her shoulder, “I’m right here Gen. Us northerners don’t pay much attention to clocks like you southerners.”

Tormund pulled out a chair and sat backwards on it. His size made it look like a child’s chair. And
his hair was even redder in person.

She stood up and went to shake his hand, “Nice to formally meet you Tormund. I’m looking forward to our trip.”

He ignored her hand and gave her shoulder a heavy pat, “You and your courtesies. And it’s no trip for me, just showing you around.” He eyed Jon.

“Who’s the guy?”

“I’m Jon,” he said. He didn’t want Tormund thinking he couldn’t answer for himself.

Genevieve added, “He’s my boyfriend. He’s just visiting his uncle at the Wall.”

Tormund stared him down. “So he’s a crow?”

“He’s a Ranger if that’s what you’re asking.”

The tension between the two of them made Genevieve uncomfortable.

“Yeah, so anyways I’m looking forward to this festival,” she said.

Tormund was the type to laugh easy despite his fierceness. “And I look forward to showing you,” he said with a wink.

Jon felt his fist clench under the table. Genevieve saw and place a hand on his thigh to calm him down.

Tormund stood up and nodded at others in the bar, “So you ready to get moving? I want to get back before nightfall.”

She knew she and Jon would have to part ways but she hadn’t expected it to be so hard. Tormund said he’d be outside by his car waiting for her which gave her an Jon only a couple minutes to say their goodbyes.

While getting her backpack out of his car Genevieve leaned against his chest.

“I’m really going to miss you Jon,” she said.

He kissed her softly and put his arms on her shoulders, “I know, I’ll miss you too. But when you come back you’ll have so many stories to tell me.”

She wiped away a tear and laughed, “You’ve got me there. I guess I should get going.”

He gave her one last hug, savoring every second before she turned with her giant backpack and walked away.

Jon watched her until she reached Tormund’s old truck and turned to wave.

It was going to be a long couple of weeks for the two of them.
In Tormund’s car Genevieve had to laugh. He was sitting there jamming out to The Hound. She’d have to tell Sandor that his popularity extended to all parts of Westeros, but he probably already knew.

“What’s funny?” Tormund asked.

“Just didn’t expect the radio to work up here,” she said throwing her bag in the back.

“We don’t live like savages you know. They’ve got towers along the Wall for the crows but it works just fine for us free folk too,” Tormund said.

“It wasn’t an insult. I’m just a big fan of the band. Saw them the other week.”

Tormund whipped his head towards her. “You saw The Hound? Now I understand the appeal of the South, not that I’d ever move down there.”

“Wouldn’t hurt to see a show,” she shrugged. She realized telling him that she knew Sandor would probably give the man a heart attack. And that was the last thing she wanted when he was driving.

“I just think these bands should come up here to play for a change. They ignore all their fans beyond the Wall.” Genevieve made a mental note to suggest an extra stop to his next tour.

“So can you tell me about this festival? Tyrion says I can’t miss it,” she said pulling out her notebook.

“If it was so important he shouldn’t miss it either. I suppose it’s easier to send you up here instead of him,” Tormund said.

“And that’s why he’s sent me around the world for free,” she said.

“So basically at this festival we all dress up like the old times, drink mead, and dance by the fire,” he said with a grin.

Genevieve couldn’t believe she had to cut her time at home short for just a party. But she wasn’t so culturally insensitive to voice that.

“What are we celebrating?”

“Another year, another day. That sort of stuff. Basically it’s a way of worshiping the Gods. You’re not one of those seven-pointed star worshipers are you?” he asked with distaste.

“How South do you think Bear Island is? It’s a quick skip to the Frozen Shore,” she said. For goodness sake, her family had done plenty of business with Free Folk when they still lived there.

“So you say. Well it’s a good thing you worship the Gods of the Forest, otherwise you wouldn’t be
allowed to join in on the celebrations,” Tormund explained.

“Well then it’s a good thing Tyrion sent me instead, not that he really believes in anything at all.”

They arrived in Hardhome by nightfall. Genevieve hadn’t really known they were going, so she was surprised to discover it was by the water. She’d always pictured everything beyond the Wall as a frozen tundra, but it made sense considering people actually lived there.

The long ride there Tormund had regaled her with stories of old fights he’d gotten in, and tussles with a bear. He was the type of storyteller that you couldn’t help but listen to, but with a grain of salt.

“Hell of a drive isn’t it?” Tormund said.

“Yeah, I can’t imagine how long it’d take without a car.”

“Some people up here still do it the old way, call the cars iron horses. But me and my clan were happy as all can be when they put in that gas station over there,” he said pointing to a run down two-pump station.

He drove the car up to a sturdy log cabin, “This is home, and your home while you’re here I guess.”

She yanked her bag from the car and followed him to the door.

“I’m home!” he yelled out to the house. She wondered if Tormund had housemates. Tyrion hadn’t really said anything about it. He thought going in blind besides the return date was a good way for her to travel, that way she didn’t have any knowledge clouding her observations.

“Does someone else live here with you?”

Tormund threw himself down on his leather couch, “Not anymore. Not since Ruddy Hall.” There was a sadness in the statement but Genevieve knew pressing wasn’t what she was there for.

“Gotcha. So what do you usually do for dinner? Sorry if I ask a lot of questions, my boss wants me to get a realistic account of modern Free Folk life,” she said.

“Tyrion warned me. But we usually go out and scour the wilderness for the first animal we see and eat it raw,” he deadpanned.

“Um okay?” Genevieve was starting to regret coming up there alone.

Tormund burst out laughing, “It was a joke! I usually just cook up some elk burgers with whatever can be foraged.”

“So you do scour the wilderness?”

He rolled his eyes, “Yes, if you must know us free folk use nature as much as we can. You’ve got to if you want to survive up here.”

“Thanks, I’ll be sure to put it in the notes.”

The elk burgers that he’d made them had been a little too gamey for her tastes, but she was a guest and she’d learned from her travels to eat like you weren’t sure of your next meal.

Lying on the couch that night while Tormund snored in his room, Genevieve checked her phone.

She’d gotten the texts from Tyrion out of the way first, informing him that she’d gotten there safely
and telling him what a character her guide was.

And then there were the texts from her family. Roland, who was making sure she hadn’t joined the Night’s Watch, and her parents asking her how she was doing. They assured her that she wasn’t missing anything back home, but even the reminder was enough for her to long for it.

Lying in a stranger’s house by yourself isn’t really the best way to feel less alone in the world. Especially when you’re in the middle of nowhere so far from home.

Jon’s texts made her feel better.

“I know you’re probably getting settled in and everything so I thought I’d give you space, but I just wanted to let you know that I’m here for you,” he’d text.

She felt weepy all of a sudden. Maybe it was her moonblood, or maybe it was the fact that she wished she was in his arms.

“I miss you. Thanks for texting. Things are good here. Got to try an elk burger!” she texted.

His reply was almost instant. He’d totally been waiting up to hear from her.

“I’m glad you got there safe! Take lots of pictures of the festival. I miss you too,” he said.

She replied, “Turns out the festival is a kind of worship for the Old Gods. I get to dress up like the old days and get drunk during it Tormund says.”

“Now I’m thinking I should’ve come with you, that sounds fun! Plus, I bet you look great in a fur.”

“Lol don’t tease me. It’s you I can see walking around with a cloak,” she sent.

“Next time I’m invited to a costume party (my friend Sam throws them all the time), we’ll have to dress up all old-fashioned together.”

She could picture him in a long black cloak with black leathers underneath. And a tall sword tucked into his belt. In short, she pictured him to be moody, dark, and handsome.

“I’d be torn between dressing like a proper lady and dressing like a spearwife,” she texted.

“Why choose? You can always bring a sword too. Look at Arya.”

“Fair point. I’m getting sleep, but I’ll talk to you tomorrow if I have service.”

“Sweet dreams Gen. I’ll be thinking of you,” he said.

Her heart clenched. “Sweet dreams to you too Jon. Have fun with your uncle tomorrow.”

Although she tossed and turned on the couch that night, knowing that Jon wasn’t too far over at the Wall eased the ache in her chest that told her she was leaving everyone behind.
Chapter 35

Tormund woke her the next morning to give her a lesson on free folk cuisine.

“To make the oatcakes you basically just smash everything together in your hands and press the berries in,” he said.

There was nothing delicate about him, he was all force and action as he combined the ingredients.

The cakes were a bit dry but the berries added much-needed flavor.

While they ate she asked, “So what’s on the agenda today?”

“You’re coming with me to the council meeting. See a little bit of how we run things.”

Free folk famously didn’t kneel to anyone. And from her research, Genevieve also learned that they weren’t fond of structure and people telling them what to do either.

The meeting was held in an old stone building in the center of the village. She’d noticed most of the buildings were made out of wood but there were some made of stone which was an indication of their natural resources. Tormund told her the most of the trade they did was to Eastwatch by the Sea along the Wall, which wasn’t an easy journey in the icy seas.

When she and Tormund walked into the meeting all eyes turned toward them.

An old man bent over in a chair said, “Who’s the girl? Steal her from another village?”

Genevieve remembered reading about the free folk tradition, if you could call it that, of stealing women from other villages to take as your bride. They figured that the stronger of a fight she put up, the stronger their children would be. You were considered weak if you married someone from your own clan.

Tormund laughed big and said, “No, I’m her guide to these big bad parts of up north.”

She noticed several women glaring at her. One spoke up, “So she’s a southerner? What business does she have in our meeting.”

Genevieve considered letting Tormund answering for her, but then she decided to show that it wasn’t just free folk women that could put up a fight.

“I’m from Bear Island, it’s right by the Frozen Shore. I’m here to research your ways so the people down south don’t get to make up your histories for you.”

There were several grumbles about southerners calling them “wildling savages” and saying that they lived in the past.

Tormund backed her up, “She’s good people, you have my word.”

His word must’ve had weight because she was offered a seat in the meeting after that.

As the meeting began Tormund explained that in his village things were decided by everyone, not just one person. Anyone could come to the meetings, and anyone could vote.

They were trying to decide whether or not to continue providing the Wall with the fish they caught.
“For the risk our people take out on the sea, it’s just not worth it,” one man said.

“Aye, remember the ship that went down?”

“That was thirty years ago Styrik. We need the money,” Tormund argued.

The people went back and forth for a while until it was decided by a vote that they continue to trade on the condition that they negotiate with the crows for more money.

Back in Winterfell Jon was keeping busy. Now that his siblings were back at school he was back to being their chauffeur. That meant after work most days he was carting them off from house to house, activity to activity.

When getting Bran and Rickon from school, Genevieve’s mom asked if he could pick up Henryk too. And who was he to say no to his girlfriend’s mother?

“Hi Jon!” he said while climbing into the backseat with a giant diorama in his hands.

“What you got there?”

He held it up so he could see, “It’s a diorama of all the places along the Wall. I was going to show Genevieve, but then she had to leave early.”

“I can send her a picture of it if you want. I’m sure she’ll love it,” Jon said.

Bran was currently inspecting the working elevator Henryk had built using popsicle sticks and string.

“Could you? I haven’t heard from her yet. Has she talked to you?”

Jon snapped a picture and sent it to her. “I talked to her a little bit after her she got in. She’s in Hardhome.”

Rickon was impressed. “Wow! That’s so cool. I wonder what it’s like up there.”

“Cold,” Jon said remembering how his coat didn’t quite cut it up there. And he hadn’t even had to face the wind from the sea like Genevieve was.

Jon received a text from Genevieve while he was helping Henryk out of the car.

“She says she loves it!” Jon smiled, “She’s going to take lots of pictures for you so you can show your classmates.”

“Tell her not to forget a souvenir.”
The following night Tormund decided to show her another piece of his culture. And she wasn’t sure if it was just specific to him or free folk culture when he insisted they go to a bar after inspecting the local fishermen.

The bar was a wood building with the inside covered in pictures of old villagers and the occasional animal head. Genevieve, who wasn’t fond of taxidermy, felt squeamish about the place as she looked in the windows.

“Trust me, this is where everyone gets their news,” he said.

“You mean their gossip?”

Tormund slung a friendly arm around her shoulder and walked her into the bar. It was packed with people like he promised, people who certainly recognized her as the outsider Tormund had been bringing around places.

She was foolish and thought they would walk on over to the bar and just get a pint — simple enough. But with Tormund nothing was simple, or quiet.

When they entered the bar he called out above the crowd to the barkeep, “A pitcher for me and my new southern friend!”

After that she was sure all eyes were on her. And of course they couldn’t sit towards the wall because once Tormund had announced her presence everyone wanted to bother the southern girl.

“Is it true that you guys spend all day on your phones and stuff? I hear that everyone down there is obsessed with tech,” one younger man asked.

Genevieve wished she could go on her phone to help calm her nerves in the busy bar.

“I can only speak for myself, but I only use my phone to keep in touch with people far away and for work.”

The young man continued, “Yeah I’m sure. But do you actually go outside?”

“I just went on a hike the other day, but I don’t see why that matters,” she said taking a sip of her beer.

Tormund patted her back, “Leave her be. She’s not one of those fancy people you read about on your phone.” The irony escaped the young man.

She had to explain to several people that Bear Island wasn’t so far south, what she was actually doing there, and what she thought so far of their village.

“It’s nice. It reminds me of home except with less people, it’s closer knit for sure,” she said.

The bartender spoke up, “Tight knit is all good and nice until everyone knows your business.”

Tormund laughed, “Which is why everyone knows that Myrna dumped you last month.”
“Oh shut it and drink your beer.”

And drink they did. A beer or two later and Genevieve was really talking.

“You wouldn’t believe the things I saw in Sunspeare! There was couples everywhere looking like they were about to jump each other if you know what I mean,” she said.

A darked-haired bearded man said, “Oh I know what you mean. I can demonstrate if you’d like.”

“She’s got a pretty southern boyfriend Kjarn, don’t bother,” Tormund said.

Tormund suggested they place a traditional free folk drinking game and quickly tables were pushed together to seat everyone brave enough to play. Several had backed away when Tormund announced it so Genevieve was weary of what was to come.

“You’re going to love Bear Paw,” he said rubbing his hands together.

“But you’ll hate it in the morning,” a woman laughed, sitting down anyways.

People sat down and soon there were about ten people in the small bar involved, with the rest spectating.

“How do you play?” she asked.

The bartender came over with a pitcher of beer and a bottle of vodka and explained the rules. “So everyone takes a gulp of beer, and after you drink you top it off with vodka.”

“Holy shit, so won’t the whole thing be vodka by the end? What’s the point?” she asked.

Tormund smiled big, “The point is to get hammered, but last one standing wins. There isn’t much else to do for fun around here, unless you like playing out in the snow until you get numb.”

“Okay, I’ll play for the sake of learning the culture,” she laughed, “But I call going first!”

Going first did little to save her from the effects of the vodka. By the time it was her turn the pitcher was almost all vodka. And for someone her size who didn’t drink much, she was way out of her league.

Several rounds later she found herself saying, “I can’t do itttttt! No no no, I’m out.”

Tormund pushed her seat away from the table and ordered her a tall glass of water. He knelt down to her height and said, “I’m going to win first, but after we’ll go home. Just sit tight and try not to puke on the floor. Ask for a bucket if you need one.”

She didn’t sit tight but instead started dancing behind his back to the music inside her head.

And then came the singing.

“The north is colddddd! I’ll be living here until I’m grey and olddddd! I can’t rhyme anymoreeeeee,” she sang to herself.

Tormund was too focused on the game to try and rein her in.

The water didn’t do anything but expedite her trip to the bathroom. After she’d finished her business she found herself mesmerized by her reflection in the mirror.
“Who is she? Helloooo?” she said to her reflection. She began to dance in front of the mirror, fully enjoying how the strange person looking back at her in the glass looked. Her arms moved wildly and her vision was blurring it all together.

She got so confused she decided to call the one person she thought could help.

“Genevieve? How’s it going?” Jon asked.

“I’m confusion! This girl in the glass looks like me, but isn’t me? Help.”

Jon laughed into the phone, “Are you drunk Gen?”

“We played Paw Bear? Or Bear Paw?”

“Are you safe? Do you need me to call Tormund? I can track down his number,” Jon asked.

Genevieve continued her dancing, “Noo he’s in the other room. He says we’ll leave once he beats the game.”

“You two aren’t driving right?”

“We are skipping home on our feets! I miss youuuu.”

“Miss you too Gen. Please try and drink some water,” he said feeling like a mother hen.

“I gulped some down! I miss you and your pretty hair. And your pretty arms. And your pretty lips. I just want to kiss you!”

Jon was flattered but wanted to make sure she didn’t say anything she’d regret. “Okay love, I miss you too. Why don’t you go find Tormund, get some rest, and we can talk about how pretty my lips are tomorrow.”

“Fineee but I’ll still be thinking about them. Kisses! Bye bye!” she said before hanging up before he could reply.

The last thing she remembered was creeping up behind Tormund and blindly trying to navigate the cold walk home with him.

Chapter End Notes

Reminder to drink responsibly and to never drink and drive, or leave a friend behind!
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

I have a lot of fun doing research for these chapters. I’ve been drawing a lot of inspiration from places like Russia and countries in Scandinavia. That Bear Paw game from last chapter is actually a Russian drinking game! Hope everyone is having a good day :) 

The next morning Genevieve woke up with her face pressed to a carpet. On the floor. In Tormund’s bathroom. The floor of a bathroom that looked like it hadn’t been disinfected ever.

The harsh light was still on and the sight of the offensive thing made Genevieve rush to the toilet.

Tormund knocked on the door, “You alright in there?”

“I’m fucking dying! I’m never drinking again,” she vowed, like the millions of people before her recovering from a long night.

“I’ll get you some water.”

She had to roll her body to the door to let him in. He leaned against the doorway as she sat on the floor.

“I never get hangovers,” she said burying her head in her hands. She wanted to crawl out of her body and come back when it was all better. Or be held like a baby and taken care of, not that she wanted Tormund helping her with that.

“Well you’ve never played Bear Paw before.”

“Please tell me the festival isn’t today. I don’t think I could drink even if someone paid me,” she said. He helped her up to her feet and she got a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She was a hot mess of wild hair and bloodshot eyes.

“You’re in luck, isn’t until tomorrow. I’ve lined up something else for you to do while I go into work,” he explained as they walked over to the couch.

She surrounded herself in blankets, “It’s not anything social is it? I don’t want to puke on anyone.”

“No, but it is an old hangover cure up here,” he said.

And that is how Genevieve found herself butt-naked in a sauna full of old women.

Tormund had driven her over to the local gym and signed her in as a guest of his. From there, he just instructed the lady at the front desk to take her to the sauna.

“It’ll help you sweat out all the booze, but make sure to stay hydrated,” he explained. What he didn’t explain was that she’d have to be naked.

It was the attendant who explained it to her, “You can put your clothes in the locker here. The mats
“Where are the towels?” Gen asked as they walked down the wood-paneled corridor lined with pictures of athletic teams from their gym. She’d heard hockey was big with free folk, yet it made her wonder why they didn’t have a team in the league.

“Towels are in the shower room for your use after the sauna,” the woman said.

“So… um okay.” The woman left her to disrobe and she soon found that she was expected to truly go in their with nothing on, if the other women walking in were any indication.

And because it was in the middle of the day when people had to work, she was in a room full of older women.

Her first step into the room was like walking into battle. There was nothing except her hair to hide the blush growing across her chest and face.

“Uh hello, it’s my first time,” she said sitting in the corner further from everyone. Her words were met with strange looks, like she was the crazy one.

And worst of all, no one said anything. They just sat there in silence probably contemplating just how awkward the situation was.

She found it easiest to stare at the wall and try to take her mind elsewhere. It was about as hot as Sun spear during the summer in room, and Genevieve was surprised just how much she could sweat. She tried to imagine Winterfell’s icy cold winds but that only made her think of Jon. And thinking about Jon in a room full of naked old woman didn’t exactly help Genevieve’s mind conjure up the best images.

Eventually she felt so warm that she couldn’t take it anymore and jumped in the shower. The cold water was another shock to her system. While she didn’t feel much better, she certainly felt more alert. And that was all she needed to prepare herself for the festival the next night.

Tormund had given her free reign to walk around the village on her own after that. She decided to look into their mail system, seeing as she was supposed to keep in touch with Tyrion and her phone decided not to work that morning.

When Tyrion had suggested she send a raven he hadn’t be joking. They had a special building just for it and the teenaged kid working at the desk explained to her it’d reach him within the day.

In her message to Tyrion she wrote, “Seeing lots of their culture from Tormund. Got a cooking lesson, went to a village meeting, played traditional drinking game (awful awful don’t even put it in the book unless you want your readers to suffer), and tried a traditional hangover cure in a (naked!) sauna today. Festival tomorrow, I hope my phone is working.”

And just for the novelty of receiving a raven in the mail, something Genevieve hadn’t seen done since she was a kid with her grandparents, she sent one to Jon.

“Hope you enjoy this bird giving you a message. I woke up with the worst hangover and Tormund brought me to a sauna. But he didn’t tell me I’d be in a room full of naked women. My phone isn’t working great today but I saw I called you last night. I’m praying I didn’t say anything weird. Miss you!”

That day when Jon was waiting around for Benjen to come home from work, he was surprised to hear a cawing outside that wouldn’t go away.
“Jon, you know there’s a raven outside with a message for you,” his uncle said when he walked through the door.

“What the fuck?”

“Like with a message tied to his foot, not a talking bird if that’s what you were thinking.” His uncle knew him too well. This wasn’t a talking animal from a childhood cartoon.

Jon stuck his head outside the front door, and sure enough there was the raven cawing away and waiting to be sent away.

He was confused until he saw that it was from Genevieve once he broke the wax seal.

“She really keeps things interesting, huh?” his uncle called from inside once Jon had said it was from her.

Jon shook his head and said, “She sure does.”
Preparations for the festival started early the next day. And by early, for Genevieve that meant Tormund announcing that they had to get over to the water for the first tradition of the day at the crack of dawn.

Bundled up in her coat in the early morning weather Genevieve soon realized that the villagers gathered up weren’t there for a nice warm cup of hot cocoa like she’d hoped.

Instead, they all began to shed their clothes and talk about how the water would cleanse them for the festivities of the day.

“Surprise!” Tormund said.

Genevieve swore like the fishermen she’d met days prior under her breath.

“I don’t have a towel with me!” Genevieve said, also noting she didn’t exactly have a swimsuit on.

“I’ve got a couple in the car, and I promise to cook you a warm breakfast after,” he said while stripping down to his underwear like it was no big deal to do in front of your whole village. No one seemed to be having a problem with it except Genevieve. Southerners and their propriety!

“I’m sorry, could you explain this whole thing to me? Why are we going in the water?” she asked. There was ice floating in it yet no one seemed to care. If anyone below the wall suggested doing it, they’d be told they’d get hypothermia!

Tormund jumped up and down to keep warm, “The cold water sends a shock to your system, and sort of resets things. Legend is the First Men did it to show the Old Gods they were tough enough for winter, that they could take what came their way.”

“And why do it today?” Genevieve asked.

“Tradition of course. Without tradition what do we have?” he said.

It made her think. What traditions did she have? Did the annual cookie decorating contest her family did count? It made her want to create more with her family, something to pass down someday to all her imaginary children.

“Okay, I’ll do it.”

Tormund laughed, “I was going to throw you in if you didn’t.”

She rolled her eyes and gave him a shove, “So we just jump in and get out?”

“Yep, unless you want to show off an swim around for a bit. I don’t recommend that unless you’ve secretly been doing some cold water training on the side.” She most definitely hadn’t been.

Genevieve had gathered they weren’t a self-conscious people with the way they so easily striped down to their underwear, without so much as a covering hand. Between that and her experience in the sauna, she was starting to wonder if they just liked showing what the Gods gave them.
When she took off her heavy clothes she was just glad that she’d put on underwear that covered her bum.

The villagers linked hands and yelled, “Colder than cold!”

Together they jumped off the dock and into the water. As she plunged to the water Genevieve found herself wondering what had brought her to that moment in life.

The impact of the water hit her hard and the frigid temperature had her gasping for air when she resurfaced. It wasn’t as cold as she expected, but maybe her body had just become numb from standing there. Her body was stiff as used her numb arms to hoist herself back on the dock with the rest of the villages.

But once she was wrapped in a towel with her coat on with the rest of the villagers she was glad she’d done it. There was a certain comradery that came out of doing something incredibly reckless with a group of people, a certain bond. Plus, it’d be a cool story to tell people. Not everyone could say they jumped in the Shivering Sea with a bunch of free folk.

After that moment those who had been weary of her were now patting her on the back and bringing her in for a hug.

Tormund shook out his hair and said, “What’d you think?” Icicles were forming in his beard and Genevieve wondered how he wasn’t freezing to death.

“Definitely something I never thought I’d do. But I’m glad you made me,” she said. It was one of those things that seemed rosy when you were removed from it.

“That’s what I like to hear, we might make a northern of you yet Genevieve,” he smiled.

“So can we go do that warm meal you promised?” she asked.

After Tormund had treated her to a warm breakfast of oatmeal and berries, and she’d treated herself to a cozy nap, it was time to prepare for the night ahead.

But first there was the matter of trying to get her phone to work.

“Tormund, do you have service?”

He scoffed, “Maybe on a good day, not with these storm clouds we’ve had since yesterday.”

“Is there any way I can get in contact with people besides using a raven? I sent one yesterday but still haven’t heard back,” she said.

“Have you gone back to the office? They don’t deliver messages, you’ve got to go to them.”

Genevieve hadn’t, “Will they even be open right now?”

“Eh, not likely. But they leave it unlock and the messages out in the open.”

They really didn’t have any privacy in their village!

Sure enough, the office was unlocked and the tiny sealed scrolls were in a basket with no security other than a sheet you had to sign to say you’d picked up your message.

And right there on top was a message addressed to her.
“Thanks for the update, feel free to just report back when you get service again. Make sure you take lots of notes at the festival! - Tyrion”

She was disappointed that it hadn’t been from Jon so she kept digging in the basket.

“Are you looking for something?”

A thin greying man had appeared from the back room, “Oh sorry, yeah. I’m expecting a message.”

“Your name?”

“Genevieve Norward?”

He nodded his head in recognition, “The girl staying with Tormund.”

“That’s me!”

He checked some shelves behind the counter, “Looks like this one’s for you. From the Wall it says.” She could hear the suspicion in his voice.

“Just my boyfriend, he’s visiting up there.”

After that Genevieve decided to just head back to Tormund’s place so she could read in peace without some old man thinking she was conspiring against the free folk.

The note read “I loved the bird message, I was a bit confused when it showed it up at his door. By the time you read this I’ll probably be back in Winterfell, so be sure to direct any future birds there! The sauna sounds like an experience to say the least. And sorry to break it to you, but you did call me when you were having fun at the bar. Nothing too embarrassing (although you did say I have pretty arms and lips). I’m back to work tomorrow so I hope you’re having enough fun for the both of us. Miss you (and your pretty lips).”

Genevieve didn’t even have a second to gush over how sweet he was before Tormund appeared behind her.

“Your man send you a raven?”

She rolled up the paper so he couldn’t peep. “Yeah, he’s heading back to Winterfell today,” she explained.

“I’ve been thinking about taking a visit there someday.”

Him? The “south sucks” guy wanted to visit below the Wall?

“For a concert I’m sure. I’ll let you know the next time someone good is playing.”

“Still wish I could’ve seen The Hound,” he groaned.

It was starting to get dark outside. Tormund looked out the window and said, “We should probably get dressed in the furs. Don’t want to be late to the party.”

Chapter End Notes
Have any of you ever jumped in frozen water?
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

Song lyrics come from "Let No Man Steal Your Thyme" by Pentangle. I love that song!
Also, another reminder to drink responsibly!

The furs were heavier than they looked. And quite musty too.

“I borrowed them from a friend,” Tormund said as he helped her attach her cape to her ensemble.

Genevieve felt like she was on her way to some convention, while Tormund looked like he’d stepped out of time. It all just look so natural on him.

“Where’d you get the sword?” she asked.

He pulled it from his scabbard to show her, “Been in my family for ages. Pretty badass, right?”

The metal was sharp to the touch and clearly well taken care of. “Got one lying around for me?”

“I think it’s best you don’t have a sword on you tonight based off how you handled your liquor the other night,” he laughed.

The celebrations were being held outside in a clearing in the woods, with fairy lights strung on the trees to light up the area. The whole village was there, even the children who were running around with ribbons trailing behind them. In the middle of the cleaning a large fire was burning, illuminating the face of the people sitting near it. And most important, there was a heart tree just off to the side.

“Wow! This is beautiful,” Genevieve gasped.

“Aren’t you glad you came up early for it?”

As hard as it was to leave her family, Genevieve was glad she wasn’t missing out on this.

“Yeah. So you’ll have to walk me through all of this.”

Once everyone seemed to be there they began their first ritual of the night.

Children passed out sheets of paper and pencils to write with.

“You’re supposed to write down stuff weighing you down and throw it in the fire. It’s symbolic of putting your faith in the Gods,” he explained.

Genevieve liked this side of him. He was a lot more serious than she originally thought. When it came to his people and their traditions, he didn’t joke around. Some of the other places she visited explained their traditions as “old-fashioned” or “silly”, but not the free folk. They believe and valued what they did.

She thought of what she could write on her paper. There’d been a lot on her mind lately, a lot of worries. But maybe Tormund and his people were right, maybe she needed to put her trust in something bigger than herself and let go of her worries.
So on her paper she decided to let go and wrote down everything on her mind. Missing family, missing Jon, worries about her future, ghosts of her past. She wrote them all down on the paper and tossed it into the fire.

“You feel lighter?” Tormund asked.

“In a weird way, yeah.” It was true, she felt a comfort in knowing that she didn’t have to shoulder the burden alone, having a renewed faith that the world would take care of things.

The kids began to leave and Tormund rubbed his hands together with excitement, “Now’s the fun part.”

“I’m guessing that means it’s time to get drunk?”

He smiled, “And feast!”

Tormund wasn’t kidding. Platters of food were brought out from a house nearby and they covered the entirety of a stretch of picnic tables.

The two of them sat down on a log by the fire with their plates full of food and their cups full of the traditional sour goat’s milk he insisted she try.

Tormund bit into a large drum-stick and groaned. “Gods I missed this. Best night of the year,” he said.

Genevieve wasn’t convinced that it was better than her New Year’s Eve night had been yet, but it was certainly enjoyable. She thought the cold would’ve spoiled the night but the furs and the booze running through her helped her stay warm.

After a couple of drinks all the adults there were breaking out in folk songs and dancing around the fire.

“I wish I knew the words,” Genevieve said as she and Tormund circled the fire in step with everyone.

“It’s a warning to women telling them to be tough and not let men steal their time. To be tough against people trying to steal them as their brides,” he said.

Eventually they’d sung it enough times for her to get a hang of it, and Genevieve had drank enough to want to sing along.

With them she sung, “Come all you fair and tender girls that flourish in your prime. Beware, beware, keep your garden fair. Let no man steal your thyme, Let no man steal your thyme.”

She couldn’t tell if it was just the mead playing tricks on her, but she thought they all sounded pretty darn good.

As the night progressed people, and the villagers got drunker, they were invited to pray aloud for everyone in front of the Heart Tree.

One man had prayed for luck in the bedroom. Another had prayed for a daughter, with his very pregnant wife praying for a son. One by one everyone took a turn praying and thanking the Gods.

When it was Tormund’s turn he lumbered up to the tree and said, “I thank the Gods for warm clothes, warm women, and cold beer!” which resulted in laughs and cheers from his neighbors.
He then drunkenly prayed that the crows pay them more for their labor and stay out of their business. When he came back to Genevieve he squeezed her with a big hug, lifting her off the ground.

“It’s your turn now,” he said.

She hadn’t prayed aloud since she was a child with her parents in the woods. And back then she’d always thanked the Gods for the same thing — her family. Her requests of the Gods were a lot simpler back then too, wishing for a pony or a good grade on her spelling test.

But things were a lot more complicated now and she wasn’t sure what to say.

Tormund noticed her apprehension and handed her a beer, “Drink up, have some liquid courage.”

It worked a little but she still felt like an outsider standing before the villagers and trying to worship the Gods.

“Thank you for my family,” she began as she always had, “And for Jon, for Mira, for Sandor, even Tormund. Basically for everyone in my life.”

Tormund gave her a thumbs up and she continued, “And I pray that my love lasts and that I can find a home again.”

When she finished Tormund shouted, “To love and home!”

“To love and home!” the drunken villagers followed.

After her prayer Genevieve had to step away for a little bit to collect herself. Maybe it was the drinks, or just the atmosphere of overwhelming faith and togetherness, but she was feeling anxious.

She was feeling like her worries were catching up to her. That the things she was supposed to put in the hands of the Gods were falling straight in her lap again. She needed to get out of there.

Back at the clearing she asked Tormund if there was anything left to the festival he said no, unless she was planning on finding someone to make out with against a tree. And seeing as she had a boyfriend, she told him she’d see him at home later.

When she got home the drinks had worn off leaving her feeling empty and aching. With the costume gone she was left with her normal self, a reminder of the world she lived in and had to face everyday. It was too late to try and call Jon so she was left with her thoughts, a dangerous lot to be with.

As she lay awake worrying, Jon was fast asleep dreaming of her.
When Jon was on his lunch break days several days later he got a video call from Genevieve.

Since the festival she’d been able to text him periodically when she had service. He often pictured her climbing a tree to try and get a signal.

While she was off learning about the free folk, Jon had been doing a whole lot of nothing. He went to work each day and did what he needed to get a paycheck, and came home and basically just watched movies and listened to music until he passed out. The highlight of his days were always when he and Genevieve were able to get in contact with each other.

And that was why he was so glad to see her name pop up on his screen after a slow morning at work.

“Hey cutie, how’s it going?” she asked when he picked up. She had her dark done up in braids on the crown of her head and a big sweatshirt on.

Jon smiled, “Hi Gen. It’s going okay. Work is work, but I’m halfway done with the day.”

“Got any exciting plans after you get off?”

“Nah, just going to try and read that book you told me about.”

She clapped her hands, “Oh yes! Please do, you know I need someone to talk about it with.”

“I’m not usually one for fantasy but I’ll give it a try.” He usually stuck to historical books and science fiction. Fantasy overwhelmed him with all the books that usually followed them in a series and how you had to wrap your head around entirely new worlds with rules so different from his own. He could never keep track of all the characters.

Genevieve was happy that he was giving it a shot. She’d finished her copy on the plane up to the Wall and handed it off to him desperate to see what he thought.

“I forgot to tell you! I made ice cream in the snow today,” she said.

Jon’s stomach rumbled. He’d only had a sandwich for lunch. “How’d you do that?”

“So you take some fresh snow, add a little bit of milk and vanilla, and then pour syrup on it! It was delicious.”

“We’ll have to make it together when you come home.”

She laid down on the couch, “Of course! I’m sure the kids would like it too. Speaking of, has Henryk been over much?”

“Not too much. The boys went over to your place yesterday. I think they were just playing video games,” he said. He hadn’t even had to drive them over because Theon and Robb were meeting up with Roland.

“Bunch of nerds. Guess it beats when they were making that a deathtrap of a fort out in the woods,” she said.

“Bran was climbing things like crazy. I thought Catelyn was going to have a heart attack.”
The conversation turned towards the future, “So what’s on the agenda for tomorrow?”

“Tormund’s bringing me to the school. Apparently they do things very differently than us ‘southerners’.”

Jon rolled his eyes at the southern remark. “That sounds interesting. I bet they have a lot more freedom up there.”

“Yeah, that’s what I’m guessing. Tormund doesn’t like giving me details before I get to a place.”

“No spoilers!”

“Exactly!”

Eventually it was time for him to get back to work, and for her to get back to exploring. She seemed in better spirits than before, but he wasn’t sure if she was just putting on a brave face for him. He knew she was homesick, but her trip would be over before she knew it.

“Only a week left! I can’t wait to see you,” she sighed.

“I know Gen, me either. I’ll be there waiting for you at the airport with plenty of hugs and kisses.”

“With your pretty lips?” she asked with a wink.

He put his camera up close to them and kissed the screen, “Of course. Talk to you later Gen.”

“Happy reading!”
The school in Tormund’s village was nothing like Genevieve remembered from her public school
days. It wasn’t a brick and mortar building where children were required to sit and listen to a teacher
all day while they were bored out of their minds. Instead, it was as free folk as could be.

“So they can just walk around the place?” she asked as students passed them by unchaperoned.

Tormund and her walked around the corridors, “Yeah. Haven’t got enough teachers so it’s more of a
collaborative community effort.”

Students were free to walk around from room to room, learning what they pleased. Tormund
explained it didn’t matter to many of the students what they learned, so long as it was interesting.
And many of the parents didn’t mind considering they didn’t expect their children to move past the
Wall for college or a fancy job. It was just expected that everyone would stay in the village after they
finished their studies.

Tormund told her that most of the older students picked something they were interested in and made
projects on it which they presented to the village when finished. They were all so focused on their
projects that Tormund didn’t interrupt them. But Genevieve could see that they were passionate
about what they were doing, and curious to solve their tasks.

One student was busy at a sewing machine, running a garment through it before taking breaks to
adjust it on a dress form. And in another room, a young man was typing away at code on a
computer, not even noticing their presence as they walked by.

“Wait till you see the younger kids. They’re the ones who’ve got the power around here,” he
explained.

He led her outside and into the woods following the squeals of children.

“Is it recess?”

Tormund laughed and pointed his arm out to a group of younger children playing a game of tag.

“Nope, this is their classroom. We believe the younger children learn best through play. None of that
sitting at desks reading from books when they’re too young to even tie their shoes,” he said.

Genevieve wasn’t too sure what the children could be learning from each other as they hit each other
with sticks and climbed high in the trees.

“But isn’t it dangerous?”

Tormund shrugged, “They learn what the boundaries are very quickly. This sort of play teaches them
how to stay safe and still have fun. Gives them a lot of confidence in themselves too.”

“Makes them tough as nails too I’m sure.”

The teacher watching them, and that term was used lightly, let them talk to the students to hear what
they thought.
“My mum says it burns off all my bad energy,” one kid with a red hat told them.

“I just like getting to climb,” another added.

Genevieve was reminded of Henryk, “My brother loves climbing! What else do you like to do out here?”

“We build forts in the snow.”

Tormund leaned in, “See, they learn a lot of motor skills.”

“I like it. Lets them just be kids. I remember hating school when I was younger. I was always looking out the window wishing we could go out and play.”

In the old school cafeteria Genevieve warmed up to a cup of hot chocolate while Tormund talked about his school days.

“Gods it was a good thing they had me running around outside when I was younger. Probably would’ve gotten kicked out if I was locked indoors. Gods know I came close when I had to start my lessons,” he said.

“Do you feel like you got a thorough education?”

He leaned back in his chair, “I know how to pay my bills, build my own home, and talk with people. What more do I really need beyond that?”

“What about the rest? You haven’t been in a situation where you felt like you were missing something?”

He shrugged, “I can read up on whatever I need or ask someone in the village. Do you even remember half the stuff they made you learn in school?”

The comment made her laugh as she tried to recall the equations they’d made her learn, or the ancient battles she’d been forced to memorize the dates of.

“You’ve got me there. I remember a lot of big picture things. Anything else was just because I was interested in it,” she said.

“Exactly! And that’s why we believe in letting the students choose how and what they want to learn. If we force it on them they’ll just reject it.”

He had a point. “I think I might just have to send my kids up here for school someday,” she smiled.

“You and your pretty Southern boyfriend can bring your brood up here, build a house right next door to me,” he said while wiggling his eyebrows.

“Oh shush! We’ve only been dating for a couple of weeks.”

“If you could see the way he looks at you, you’d think it too.”

His comment made her blush. She promised herself she wouldn’t borrow from the future, even good things that could come to her.

“Anyways, I should probably give him a call. I want to catch him while he’s on break.”

“Have fun you love birds!”
She walked through the halls until she came to a quiet nook by a window where she could sit.

Jon picked up after a couple of rings, “Hi Gen. Are you at the school right now?”

“Just finished up my tour! I think I’ve got to send my kids to their schools someday, they were all so curious and happy,” she said.

She couldn’t help but think of what Tormund had said. Would their children have his curls and her eyes? Would they be reserved like him?

Jon’s response kept her on track, “I can’t wait to read this book about your travels. I feel like there is so much I don’t know about the world, you keep showing me how different things are outside of Winterfell.”

“I’ll make Tyrion send you a copy when he writes it. Speaking of books, what do you think of that book I’m forcing you to read?”

“It’s good, but I don’t like all the deaths! I can’t believe they killed off the father and the king so soon,” Jon said sounding passionate.

“You’re going to hate the rest of the book then! As painful as it is, keep reading. The story is just so good.”

They talked for a while longer about their days until Tormund told her it was time to go.

“I’ve got to go Jon but text me, okay?”

“Of course. Miss you Gen.”

“Miss you too Jon, sending hugs your way.”

When she hung up she found herself wondering when it’d be a good time to say the three little words she had on her mind. Three little words that came to her mind whenever he called her before bed to make sure she was okay. Or when he sent her bashful pictures of him smiling as he went about his day knowing it’d make her smile. Three little words that she’d never said to anyone outside her family before. But was it too soon?

Chapter End Notes

Primary school based off of the Forest Kindergartens in Denmark, and the older grades based of of the Sudbury school model! Highly recommend looking into those if you're at all interested in alternative educational methods.
While Genevieve was busy learning from Tormund, and Jon with contracts and meetings they kept up with each other over text.

It was mainly funny pictures of themselves accompanied by a silly caption. Like when Tormund brought her to Hardhome’s tiny art gallery and let her try on some masks students had made. Or when Jon had played karaoke with his siblings and sent her a video serenading her.

The texts went back and forth until they finally had time to sit down and call each other over video. For Genevieve, that time had come when Tormund announced he had to go out for the night with a wink, leaving her home alone with nothing to do. Tormund didn’t have a TV or anything so all she could do was sit around his place and hope she didn’t get cabin fever.

A call from Jon was the remedy she needed. They’d both decided to make themselves a nice dinner and pretend they were out to eat with one another. For Genevieve, this meant another Elk burger because Tormund hadn’t left much in the fridge. As for Jon, he’d indulged and made himself a big bowl of pasta and snuck down to his room to eat.

“Jon! We should’ve done this sooner. It’s so cute,” Genevieve said when he answered the call.

He raised his glass, “Yes! I missed your face. Are you enjoying your time alone?”

“It’s pretty quiet without him, but it’s nice. Just makes me feel sort of lonely.”

“Only a couple more days until you don’t have to worry about that,” he said.

She smiled at the screen, looking at the way the strings of light on his wall reflected in his eyes, lighting up his face. He was adorable.

“I can’t wait. I should get a countdown going on my phone. We’ll need to stop at that donut place on the way back from the airport.”

“Yes! Except this time I’m not sharing with my siblings. We can hoard them all for ourselves,” he laughed.

“Totally, it can be our little secret. Ugh I just miss you. I’m hug-deficient up here!” She wished she could just reach through the screen and wrap his arms around her.

“Only a couple more days Gen, then you’ll be missing your travels.”

She scoffed, “I’m sure it won’t be my last. Tyrion will probably tell me I have to go into the sky or
something next.”

“As long as we can still keep in touch, sounds cool to me!”

The next day Genevieve caught up with her boss to find out what he did expect from her next.

“Well once you get all your notes typed up and organized I thought you’d come down here and work on the book with me,” Tyrion said over the phone.

Genevieve had so much more to consider before making those sort of plans. She had Jon now and she didn’t want to postpone their relationship yet again.

“Okay, well let me get back to you about all of that. Might need to do some telecommuting depending on what’s going on back home,” she said.

“Come on, you’re young! What do you have to lose by leaving home to work on it with me? You’ve already been around the world to work on it. I need you to help make sense of all the notes,” he said.

For a change, Genevieve found she had a reason to stick around in Winterfell rather than run away from it all.

Back in Winterfell Jon and his father had carpooled to work and were on their way home for the day.

“We should drive together more often Jon. I feel like we barely see each other when we’re at work,” Ned sighed.

Jon looked at his Dad who was already loosening his tie and undoing his cuffs. He was the type that liked to get out of his work clothes and into his lounge clothes the moment he got home.

“It’s fine Dad. We’ve all been busy at work lately,” Jon said. Both he and his brothers had been swamped with new contracts, marketing strategies, and general day-to-day communications. And as the boss, his father was just as busy.

“Still, I miss my boy. It seems like only yesterday you were learning to walk in the backyard, and then strumming away at your guitar with Uncle Benjen. Lately I’ve been wondering where all the time went with you kids.”

Jon felt the warmth of his father’s voice and the love it carried. “I know what you mean. I can’t believe Rickon is already eleven. And the girls are in high school.”

His father groaned, “Gods don’t remind me. Before I know it, they’ll be bringing home people for dinner just like you. How is Genevieve by the way?”

Jon blushed as he turned onto their street, “She’s great. We got to video call last night around dinner. It seems like she’s learning a lot up there.”

Ned put his hand on his son’s shoulder and squeezed, “You’ve got yourself a good one Jon, I’m proud of you. I know you have a lot of nerves about this sort of thing, but I can tell you’re doing right by her.”

“Thanks Dad. That means a lot. I’ve never been able to woo girls like Theon, but now that I’m with Gen none of that matters,” Jon said.

It was true. When he was younger he used to wonder why he couldn’t seem to find the courage to approach girls like his brothers. Robb had no problem with his winning smile and skills on the
hockey team. And Theon, was Theon, all charm and good humor. But Jon? He’d never quite figured out what to do. Ygritte had approached him, and even Gen now that he thought about it. But with Genevieve he didn’t feel like he had to be someone or act a certain way. He could just be, and somehow she wanted that.

When they pulled into the driveway his father said, “You don’t have to be like Theon or Robb, just yourself Jon. That’s all you can do and if people aren’t happy with my son, they can shove it.”

Outside their front door a raven jumping around with a note tied to its foot. Ned walked forward trying not to scare it away from their door.

“Gods, what is this doing here? I haven’t seen anyone send a raven since I was a boy,” his father said with a confused face.

Jon laughed, “It’s probably from Genevieve. She’s been sending me some when she can’t reach me over the phone. I think she just likes the novelty of it.”

His father stopped and put his hands on his hips with a smile. “You’ve got a good one Jon, hold onto her.”
The morning before the day Genevieve was supposed to return to the Wall and fly home, Tormund and his villagers had received some bad news. The village council had sent their proposal to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea to negotiate for higher prices for their fish, but it had been rejected.

Tormund was upset and swearing up and down about how the bloody crows always did this to them. Genevieve had observed enough to know that the majority of their economy was fueled by trading with the Wall. But if the Wall short-changed them, how could they live comfortably?

At an impromptu meeting they’d all been yelling at each other trying to come up with a solution. Some suggested cutting off trade and others suggested climbing the Wall like the old days and giving them a piece of their mind.

Tormund tried to calm them down.

“I’ve got to go down to Castle Black tomorrow to drop her off, so I’ll see what I can do,” he said.

“What good is that going to do? You going to just march up to someone and ask for more money?” a man complained.

Tormund rolled his eyes, “No, but I’m not going to just sit here and watch our people lose money with each passing year.”

After the meeting Genevieve and Tormund had went out to a final lunch at a small restaurant that was dark in the afternoon, despite the sun shining outside. They’d both ordered soup to keep warm, and over their meal they discussed the meeting.

“What do you know anyone at Castle Black?”

“Not anyone who’d be happy to see me again,” he said.

Genevieve wondered if Benjen could help. But he was a ranger, not exactly someone who could negotiate trade. You had to go to the top for decisions like that.

And that is exactly how Genevieve and Tormund found themselves in the office of the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, face to face with Jeor Mormont.

On the ride back from Hardhome, Genevieve had coached Tormund on what not to say to the Lord Commander if he wanted things to go smoothly. There was to be no wise comments about southerners, or threats to cut off trade. It was a negotiation, not a fight she reminded him.

Mormont’s office was an imposing room within the stone walls of Castle Black. When they’d driven through the gates at the Wall, Genevieve had to lean over Tormund to tell the guard they needed to speak with someone inside.

“Is Benjen Stark around?”

The guard’s face remained stony, “What business do you have with him?”

“He’s a friend of mine, my boyfriend’s uncle,” she explained. She hated using her connections to do things, but if she had privilege she might as well use it to help the free folk who didn’t have anyone on their side.
Tormund shot her a look but whispered for him to keep quiet as the guard radioed someone on his walkie talkie.

“You’re good to go, Benjen’s in the mess hall waiting for you,” the guard said.

Tormund was amazed as they drove ahead, “If that were me asking they’d probably have me locked up by now.”

“I’m sure you would if you gave them some tongue.”

“You’ve got a point there,” he laughed.

Benjen was waiting in the mess hall as promised and looked confused to see her.

He rose to his feet and greeted Genevieve first before inspecting Tormund.

“Giantsbane.”

“Stark,” Tormund replied standing tall.

Genevieve sat down at the table and the men followed suit. There was little love between the two of them, but they both made an effort for her sake.

“So what brings you back here Genevieve? Jon told me you were flying back later today,” Benjen said.

She clasped her hands in front of her and fidgeted, “Well, yes. I’ll be home by nightfall. I’ve just promised Tormund here that I’d help him with something.”

“And what’s that?”

Tormund spoke up, “I’ve got to negotiate a trade deal with the Lord Commander. Genevieve is coming with me to make sure I remain civil enough.”

Benjen raised his drink, “Probably for the best. Good luck getting an audience with him though, he’s a busy man.”

“That’s where I was hoping you could help,” she said.

He scratched the back of his head, just like Jon did when he was uncomfortable. But like his nephew, he couldn’t disappoint Genevieve once he saw her earnest smile.

“Well he does have a bit of a break before his next meeting, he could probably squeeze you in then,” he said.

Tormund clapped her shoulder. “You might just save us Gen.”

Then she and Tormund found themselves outside the Lord Commander’s door, waiting as Benjen made their case.

“He says you can come in,” Benjen said.

Genevieve hugged him, “Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

She said her goodbyes to Benjen, promising him that she’d make Jon come up for another visit sometime.
The Lord Commander was an imposing man. His was wizened with age and the whiteness of his hair seemed to only add to this effect.

“You must be Genevieve, and Tormund I assume,” he said when they entered the room.

Genevieve spoke first, moving to stand in front of his desk where he was standing.

“Yes, thank you for taking the time to speak with us,” she said.

“Please, have a seat,” Jeor said sitting down. Tormund was hesitant to do so but Genevieve gave him a look that made him obey.

“So what brings you here today? Benjen didn’t explain much to me,” Jeor said.

Genevieve looked to Tormund. It was his people, his fight, and she trusted him to explain it.

“I’m from Hardhome. And as you know, we provide a lot of food to East-Watch-by-the-Sea,” he began.

“Yes, I’ve seen the reports.”

“Then you know how much our fishermen get in exchange isn’t enough to support themselves on. They rejected a recent proposal to increase the prices,” Tormund said.

Genevieve leaned forward, “I’ve spoken with many of them Lord Commander, they work hard but with each year their hard work doesn’t yield as much as much of a return as the last.”

“And are you from Hardhome as well?”

She straightened up, “No, I’m from Bear Island.”

Jeor smiled, “Really? I’m from there myself.”

“It’s a beautiful place,” she smiled back. Tormund was glad he had a southerner with him for a change.

“Well, in this case what sort of deal is your village looking for Tormund?” Jeor asked.

“For the payments to increase annually at the same rate of the cost of living, everything adjusted for inflation,” he said.

Jeor nodded and thought for a moment, “Sounds fair. Have your council draft up some documents and send them our way. I’ll see that a deal is made.”

He rose from his seat to shake their hands.

“Thank you very much Lord Commander,” Genevieve said.

Tormund simply nodded but it was respect enough coming from someone with beef with those dressed in black.

When they left his office Tormund picked her up and spun her around.

“Fucking hell I’ve got to keep you around for these sorts of things!” he said.

She laughed, “Just call me up next time you need to negotiate.”
“The villagers are going to be so happy. Next time you visit they’ll all be fighting over you.”

But Hardhome was miles away and she didn’t have any plans to come back, at least not yet. She had Winterfell on her mind. And Jon of course.

At the airport in Mole’s Town, she found it harder than she expected to say goodbye. In all of the other travels Tyrion had sent her on, she’d acted as her own guide, blindly leading her way around. But this trip she actually had someone to miss when she left.

Before she wheeled away with her luggage she gave him a big hug and promised to stay in touch.

“Seriously, don’t be a stranger. You need to come down South so you can actually see a decent concert,” she said.

“You’ve got me there. You’re better than I thought you’d be, the house is going to be quiet without you around.”

“Don’t go getting soft on me, you’ll make me emotional,” she said feeling the urge to let out a tear, “But really, thanks for showing me your culture. I know how vulnerable it can be to share things with an outsider.”

“It was my pleasure. Just make sure you don’t go writing that we’re all a bunch of crazy redheads and you’ll be fine in my book. Now get going before you miss your flight!”

On the plane ride home Genevieve tried to collect some of her notes but found herself more focused on who would be waiting for her at the airport.
Jon could barely contain his excitement as he waited at the airport for her. Knowing she was coming home had got him through work and the hellish traffic near the airport.

So he stood there with a sign bearing her name and an excitement running through his body.

Meanwhile, Genevieve was anxiously waiting for the people in front of her to get off the airplane so she could sprint down the halls to find him. But there was a family with a couple of kids in front of her taking their sweet time grabbing their luggage from the overhead bins. As soon as the plane had touched down and they’d been given the okay to leave, Genevieve had slung her backpack on her shoulders as fast as she could and had been waiting in the line ever since.

But once she’d gotten off the plane her legs ran to reach him. She didn’t care who saw her, or what they thought of a woman running as fast as she could in an airport. Airports were places for dramatic reunions, and she was in need of one.

When she’d rounded the corner by security she saw Jon standing there holding a sign reading “Miss Genevieve Norward” and looking just as she remembered. His eyes met hers and a smile grew on his face. He’d even worn the leather jacket she loved so much on him.

She closed the distance and leaped into his arms, hoping he’d catch her. He dropped the sign just in time to pick her up and wrapped his arms around her.

“Fuck I’ve missed you,” she said kissing him deeply. His arms felt perfect around her, and their connection making her feel like they’d never been apart at all. Jon felt it too as he looked down at his girl, loving that he could be with her again.

He let her down and kissed her forehead, “I’ve missed you too Gen.”

She laughed and leaning against him, “Now let’s go get those donuts you promised!”

He grabbed her bag and they held hands on the way to the car, filling the air with little details about how much they’d missed each other.

In the car she stopped him from turning on the music, “Let’s just talk. I don’t want anything distracting me.”

Jon felt warmth spread through his body and squeezed her hand. He didn’t know how to explain to her how much he missed seeing her and talking to her everyday. How he missed getting a hug from her after a bad day, and a kiss from her on a good one.

So instead, he asked her how she was, “How does it feel to be back?”

“I’m definitely glad to be away from the cold up there! We’ve got it easy compared to up there,” she said.
“How would you compare it to the other places you’ve been for the book?”

She thought about this for a second. It was no secret that Pyke hadn’t been her favorite, but Sunspear and her travels to Essos had been unlike anything she’d ever experienced.

“Tormund definitely made me feel more connected than my other trips, but I think Sunspear might be my favorite. It was just so warm and beautiful there.”

“I’ll have to take a visit sometime,” Jon said.

“Oh yes! We could go together and I could show you around the Water Gardens. We’d probably get burnt through,” she said grabbing his arm. He loved how easily she included herself in the plans.

He laughed, “Don’t worry, I’ll bring one of those sun umbrellas for us.”

At the donut shop the employees were getting ready to close for the day, spoiling their plans of pigging out there.

“We can just order some and then head back to your place,” he suggested.

“Fineeeeee, I suppose my family is anxious to see me.”

With a dozen donuts under her arm they headed back to the car and towards 45 Torhen Street.

“Gods it’s good to be back,” she said, for the first time really feeling that way about Winterfell.

At her house her mom had answered the door.

“Oh my God baby! It’s so good to see you,” Nadya said wrapping her arms around her daughter and shaking her side to side.

“Hi mom!”

Her mom broke her attention from her daughter long enough to greet Jon, “Thank you for bringing my baby home.”

She greeted him with a hug as well, ushering them inside.

Her siblings were in the kitchen picking up from dinner.

“Your father is in the library, I’ll go get him,” Nadya said.

Her siblings rushed over to greet her. Roland reached her first giving her a big hug and messing up her hair. Henryk and Amira followed close behind.

“Were the wildlings scary like everyone says?” Henryk asked.

She and Jon sat down, “No, they were very nice to me. They’re just wary of outsiders. And they prefer the term free folk.”

“I’ve heard stories about their drinking, did you get to experience some of that?” Roland asked.

Jon laughed remembering the phone call from her that night after the bar.

“Let’s just say I learned a lot about their bar culture,” she said with a grimace remembering just how bad her hangover had been.
Amira had been quiet, “Are you done with traveling now?”

Genevieve didn’t know how to respond. Everyone, including Jon, wanted to know the answer.

But just before she had to explain her future plans her father walked in.

“Sweetie! You’re home,” he said kissing her forehead.

“Hi Dad, I missed you guys.”

“We missed you too honey,” he said before gazing around the room, “And you brought donuts! Gosh I love you.”

“You can thank Jon for that, he paid,” she said wrapping an arm around her boyfriend.

Roland bit into one and groaned, “You’re the best mate. If anyone else was dating Gen I’d probably hate him, but we like you.”

“Glad to hear it,” Jon said.

Once they’d gotten their fill of donuts and Genevieve, her family let her and Jon be. Her parents knew what it was like to be young and in, well you know.

In her room she collapsed into his arms. “Can you stay with me tonight? I just really want you near me,” she said.

Jon couldn’t think of any other place in the world that he’d rather be than with her in that moment.

“Of course, might have to borrow some pajamas though.”

She dug through her drawers until she found a pair of pink sweats and a baggy t-shirt with a sheep on it.

“These should fit you. I bought the wrong size for the sweats,” she said.

And although they were too big on her, she thought they looked perfect on him. Her man had a body sculpted by the Gods with a heart even more beautiful.

“Looking like a snack Jon!”

He posed in front of her mirror, “What does that even mean?”

“It means you’re very handsome, now come cuddle with me!”

“You’re so needy!” he said, lying down next her to her anyways. He loved that they’d gotten to the stage where they could do this without it being awkward. Since he’d held her that night at Benjen’s, he’d been longing to do it again. His previous girlfriend had never wanted to cuddle with him.

“But you like it, don’t act like you don’t.”

He kissed the top of her head and squeezed her close, “You’re right, I love it.”

And as he said it he wished he told her that he loved something else instead.
Chapter 45

Jon had to leave early the next morning for work. When he tried to untangle himself from her she stirred and said, “No, don’t go!”

“I’d love to stay, but I’ve really got to go before I’m late. We can hang out after work,” he said smoothing her hair back. It was covering her face and the blankets were twisted around her legs.

She tried to stand up but she the blankets tripped her up. His arms caught her.

“Promise you’ll be back?”

“I’ve got nowhere I’d rather be,” he said giving her a kiss goodbye.

When he left, Genevieve found herself unable to go back to bed. She’d been having the most wonderful dream when he’d woken her up. One of those dreams where you find yourself pregnant and can just feel the love for a child who doesn’t even exist. With the dream far away and Jon off at work, she felt lonely.

She laid there for a while hoping she’d be able to slip back into sleep, but it evaded her. So she crept downstairs to grab a donut before Henryk and Amira could grab snatch up the rest on their way to school.

Her father found her on the couch wrapped up in a blanket eating donuts.

“Hi sweetie, got any big plans today?” he asked. He was dressed up in a suit and had his briefcase ready to go, off to fight for the environment.

She sighed, “I need to call my boss, and I really should do some laundry.”

“I’d get in there before Roland stinks up the laundry room with his!” Her brother had a nasty habit of waiting until the last possible day to do his laundry. He’d wear everything several times until he had no option but to wash it all or face going to work naked.

“Good idea. What’s on your agenda today?”

He flipped open his briefcase to show her a proposal. “Just working on a proposal to get the forests around here protected, especially the Godswood at your boyfriend’s house.”

“Does it need protection if they own the land? They care about the woods as much as you do,” she said.

“Yes, but in the event something happens and they sell it someday, it would protect it from future owners.”

“They’ve owned the land for hundreds of years. I think it’s safe,” she laughed.

“Well either way, I’m going to protect the Wolfswood!”

“Love you Dad, have a good day at work and keep fighting the good fight!”
He kissed her forehead and said, “You know it Gen. Have fun with your laundry.”

After that she forced herself to get dressed so she wouldn’t spend the whole day in her pajamas. She had a bad habit of doing so on her days off. It was as if self-care flew out the window and she couldn’t be bothered to brush her hair, much less get changed.

With her laundry in the wash and herself dressed, she brought her laptop down to the breakfast table to call Tyrion. Unfortunately for her, the rest of her family was up and preparing for the day ahead.

“Henryk! Don’t forget your lunch,” her mother yelled from the kitchen, “And Amira, you’ve got your drama auditions today!”

Amira was sitting on the couch where Genevieve had been previously.

“I didn’t know you were doing drama?”

Her sister didn’t look up from her texting and shrugged, “You weren’t around.”

The comment stung Genevieve but it was morning so she gave the teenager a pass. “What play is it?”

“You wouldn’t know it. It’s about a tabletop board game and a sister trying to learn more about her nerdy dead sister by playing it.”

Knowing how much her sister loved all things nerdy, it sounded like the perfect fit — minus the dead part. “Well good luck Amira. It sounds like a good one.”

“Thanks Gen. By the way, could you pick me up after the auditions?”

Her sister never asked anything of her. It was the least she could do. “Of course, just text me when you get out and I’ll zoom over.”

Once they left for school and her mom left to go run errands she was free to call Tyrion in peace. He answered the call on a beach, his face blinded by the sun. Meanwhile, she was bundled up with a blanket trying to stay warm in her house.

“Hi Tyrion. Enjoying your morning I see?”

“I wanted to get here and read before everyone else showed up and ruined the atmosphere,” he explained holding up a thick biography on a former king of Westeros.

“I’ve been meaning to read that. It’s the one about Aerys II, right?”

Tyrion nodded, “Yep, the mad king. I’ll send it to you when I’m done.”

“Anyways, I thought we should talk about what the plans are for after I get the notes all typed up and organized,” she said.

“Well I remember us discussing you coming down here after, and I also remember you awkwardly trying not to commit.”

She sighed and leaned back, “I just don’t want to leave home so soon. I feel like I just got back.”

Tyrion’s face turned stern and he moved to get under his beach umbrella. “Your new boyfriend isn’t holding you back is he?”
Genevieve couldn’t even imagine Jon doing that. He wasn’t the manipulative type like some people her friends had dated. She once had a friend whose boyfriend made her quit her job because of the way her boss looked at her. She had a zero tolerance for people like that in her life.

“Gods no, I’m just thinking for myself.”

“Well why don’t you take some time at home, do what you need to do while you work on the notes and then we talk when you’re done about the next step.”

“Works with me. The more you show me the beach there, the more you’re convincing me to go down south,” she said.

“In that case I’ll keep sending you pictures!”

At work, Jon was being bullied by his brothers.

“So, we didn’t see your car in the driveway when we woke up,” Robb said leaning against the door frame of Jon’s office.

Theon strolled in and took a seat, “Sleeping over Gen’s parents house? Bold move Jon. Then again, with all the excitement you had about her coming home it’s not really a surprise.”

Jon rolled his eyes. Sure, he’d slept over, but that’s all they’d done. “Yeah, I stayed the night. She didn’t want me to leave and I didn’t feel like driving home so late,” he said.

Robb smiled, “Well either way, good on you. At least one of us is happy.”

Their father walked by the office and poked his head in, “What are you boys talking about in here? Having a secret meeting without me?”

Robb laughed, “No dad, we’re just teasing Jon for spending the night with Genevieve.”

Ned raised his eyebrows and looked at Jon, “Do we need to have the talk?”

Theon burst out laughing and patted Jon on the shoulder, “Don’t worry Jon, we can give you some tips.”

The last thing Jon wanted was to hear their tips on how to seduce his girlfriend.

Meanwhile, his girlfriend was playing chauffeur. Amira had texted her around four saying that she and her friend needed a ride home.

“Be right there. Can’t wait to hear how it went!” she texted her sister.

Gen was surprised to see that the friend that needed a ride home was none other than Jon’s sister Sansa.

“Oh hi Sansa, it’s good to see you,” she said.

The redhead smiled politely and climbed in her back seat, “Thanks for picking me up. I would’ve asked Jon but he’s still at work.”

“Don’t I know it! He hasn’t answered my text yet,” Gen said before turning to her sister in the passenger seat.

“So how were the auditions?”
Amira sighed, “I don’t know. A couple other girls tried out for my part too so I’m not sure I’ll get it. But Sansa was fabulous, totally convincing.”

“Oh please! You did great too Amira. I’m sure we’ll be starring alongside each other,” Sansa said.

“So you two are going for the leads?” Gen asked. She couldn’t believe her shy little sister was trying out for something that required so much confidence.

“Yeah. I’m trying out for the role of the dead sister and Sansa is trying out for the sister who is still alive,” Amira explained.

“Well I hope you two get the parts! It’d sure make carpooling a lot easier for our families.”

By the time she’d dropped Sansa off and she was back on her couch feeling like a lazy lump, she’d gotten a text from Jon.

“Sorry for the late reply! Want to order a pizza at my house?”

“Yes!!! Cheese for me please,” she texted.

“Awesome, I’ll place the order now. I’ll be home in like 15 minutes if you want to head over then.”

Genevieve was so ready to see him that she left long before the fifteen minutes were up. She was circling the block when she saw him pull in. She parked soon after and gave him a hug.

“I didn’t see you on the street? Were you right behind me or something?” he asked.

“Something like that. I can’t wait for this pizza!”

While they ate in his room listening to music he invited her to dance. A Kingslayer song about fighting for the ones you love was playing, and Jon felt the need to connect with her in someway if he couldn’t explain how he felt in words.

“Gods I’m not very good,” she said trying to dismiss his attempts.

He grabbed her hand and pulled her to her feet, “Come on, you were a great dancer at the concert!”

“Fine, just because it’s you,” she said.

He guided her hands to his shoulders and placed his on her waist. “See, you’re great at this.”

“I prefer my wild dancing, but I think I could get used to this kind if it’s like this,” she smiled up at him. She couldn’t get over the way he made her feel when his hands were on her waist.

“So could I,” he said as he leaned his chin onto the top of her head.

When the song ended she felt a shift between them, like the world had gone quiet and they were the only ones alive.

She tried to speak but found herself feeling like the same scared girl she’d been when she’d went to the Quiet Isle summers ago. But if there was one thing she learned there, it was to take fear and turn it into courage. So she took a leap of faith and hoped he’d catch her.

“I think I’m falling in love with you.”

He pulled away from her and put his hands on her shoulders. His eyes were as wild as his hair but
she saw a hint of a smile.

“I think I am too Gen.”

She tangled her hands into his beautiful hair, just as she’d dreamed of doing while she was away and pulled him in for a kiss.

Jon felt his shoulders relax and all the tension he’d been carrying float away. He felt so blessed to have someone like Gen in his life who could have the courage to admit their feelings, to open up the doorways for them in their relationship.

“You’re amazing, you know that?” he said.

Genevieve wished he could see that the statement applied to him too. She often felt like he didn’t quite understand what a catch he was. He was kind beyond belief, strong, and creative. His handsome looks were just the icing on a perfect cake.

“Right back at you babe.”

That night as they laid in bed they both found themselves wishing it wasn’t so late, and that they weren’t in his father’s home so they could show just how fond they were of each other. But they each wanted those milestones to be more special for the other than just a blind fumbling in the dark. As they saw it, they had all the time in the world to figure out how to make it memorable.

Chapter End Notes

Does anyone know what the play is I'm referencing?
The next couple of days Genevieve was busy trying to make sense of all her notes that she’d taken on her travels. She’d filled notebook upon notebook with notes and observations and didn’t feel even remotely close to figuring out how to make sense of it for Tyrion.

Jon found her sitting on kitchen table with all her notes spread out around her when he arrived after work to see her.

“I brought hot chocolate,” he said giving her a kiss hello.

She looked up at him like he’d brought her a bar of gold, “Thank you so much babe!”

“You look like you’re about to pounce, crouched up there. Don’t your knees hurt?” he asked. He wasn’t even surprised to see her up there on the table, she was a creative spirit just like her mom.

“I’ll be real, I tried sitting in the chair but I’ve really got to be immersed in it to understand it all.”

Jon flipped through one of the journals full of her swirling quasi-cursive script. It was full of diagrams, lists, drawings, and long paragraphs about her travels.

He sat down in front of her and asked, “So what are you working on? Anything I can help with?”

She tied up her hair that kept falling in her face, “Gods I can’t focus with my hair down! I’m just trying to figure out a system in which I can organize the notes. Any suggestions?”

“Well what about if you break it up by place, and then by the element of culture. Like a section on religion, another for food.”

She leaped off the table and grabbed a notepad, stopping to kiss his head before scribbling down her ideas, “You’re the best Jon! I’ve been overthinking it and was thinking about it more chronologically.”

“I’m sure whatever you do, it’ll be great.”

“Oh shush you! Give yourself some credit,” she smiled.

He helped her get through part of her notes on Pyke by typing up the sections she read to him.

“Under religion put down Drowned Gods, and the stuff I said about their baptism,” she said.

He nodded his head, “Yep, ‘What is dead may never die,’ Theon’s told me all about it.”

“You’re my favorite research assistant. Maybe I could convince Tyrion to let you come with me when I go down there to work on the book.”

Genevieve hadn’t even realized what she said was so important. She was so focused on getting
through her dreary notes from Pyke that she didn’t pick up on the way Jon paused from his typing duties.

And Jon, who was just enjoying her company and the time they had together, didn’t want to spoil it all by talking about their uncertain future.

“That’d be fun. Where is he again?”

“Just down in Casterly Rock. He keeps sending picture of the beaches to make me hurry up with my notes. But I’m in no rush, I just want to spend time with you and my family,” she said putting down the journal.

Jon couldn’t help himself. The part in him that believed things wouldn’t work out for him made him ask. “When are you going down there?” He tried his hardest to be nonchalant in his question, but his anxiety was evident in the way he drummed his fingers on the keyboard.

His question snapped her back to reality. Back to the reality she’d have to face with him now that they were a couple.

“Oh, once the notes are done he wants me to go down to help write it. But I’m not sure if I’m going to go down,” she shrugged.

Jon didn’t want to be the arsehole who got in his girlfriend’s way of following her dreams. He wasn’t that guy nor would he ever be. His father had taught him enough about honor to never do such a thing.

“Gen, if you’re hesitant to go because of me, don’t be. You’ve been working your ass off doing this research for almost a year now and I don’t want to be the one to cut it short,” he said.

She rolled off the table and paced around the room. “Thanks for saying that Jon. But I don’t know, I still have this nagging voice in my head that tells me it’s unfair to expect you to wait for me while I’m away.”

“But you’re not forcing me to do anything. I’m a grown man, I’ve made that decision for myself.”

“I know, but I just feel like it’s not right for me to leave just while our relationship is still so new,” she said.

Jon walked over to her and hugged her from behind, “Why don’t we just talk more when you’re actually done with the notes. No need to borrow trouble.”

As much as she wished she could, she couldn’t put it off forever. If she did go to Casterly Rock she’d have to start planning now. There was the whole matter of renting a place and moving down there. Her anxiety was creeping up on her and threatening to swallow her whole.

She broke away from his arms and walked over to the window, “I’ve got to figure it out soon though. Figuring out my notes will take me about a month tops, and that’s if I’m being lazy. So that means I’d have to move down there around the beginning of March. And then what? I just leave for a couple months and hope you don’t move on without me?”

Jon felt stunned, “Gen do you really think I’d just drop you like that? That I’d just move on because you were off pursuing your dreams?”

“You know that’s not what I meant.”
“Then what did you mean Gen?”

Her pacing continued as she wrapped her arms around herself, “I don’t even fucking know anymore. I just don’t want to get my heart broken, or break yours just because I need to go away to help write someone else’s book.”

Jon took a deep breath and tried to see things from her point of view. She was scared of things not working out, and that fear was trying to sabotage any possibility of things actually working. But he was scared too — scared that by leaving she’d never want to come back, and if she did come back that she’d resent being with him and feeling trapped in a place she didn’t even feel at home at.

But he had to try. He walked over to her and held her hand. “Let’s just sit down and talk this through. I don’t want to fight when we’re both trying to make things work.”

She sat down at the table and leaned her elbows on her pile of notebooks. Jon was cautious as he sat beside her.

“So why don’t we try and talk through our anxieties,” he suggested.

Gen raised and eyebrow, “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. We could write it out maybe.”

She sighed, “I’m sorry I’m being such a butt. I’m being stupid and stubborn about all of this.”

“No you’re not. You’re just worried, and those worries are freaking you out,” he said.

She could understand what she did to deserve someone so understanding. To make up for her attitude she leaned her head on his chest and hoped it’d be enough to center the both of them.

“Okay, let’s make this list,” she said.

By the end of their discussion they’d debated their way through it. Gen, pointing out the flaws with going, and Jon showing the benefits.

“It’ll give me a place to visit,” Jon said.

“But think of all the time off of work you’d have to take.”

“We do business down there. I can just work on some contracts when I visit, or just go on the weekends to see you.”

“Your father is going to hate me for keeping you away from work so much,” she said with a groan.

Jon laughed, “He loves anyone who makes his kids happy, so you’re good in his book.”

She blushed. It was strange to think that she made him happy. For so long she couldn’t even make herself feel that way, and couldn’t imagine she helped others feel it.

“Do I really make you happy?”

He answered without hesitation. “Of course you do. Everytime I see your name pop up on my screen it helps get me through the day. And your hugs always make me feel like I can conquer anything.”

“And I feel the same way. There is just something about you that makes me feel safe. You just respect my boundaries and put up with me despite all my anxieties,” she said.
“I don’t put up with you, I enjoy you,” he said kissing her head. There is was again, that feeling when he touched her that made her feel like she was someone important, someone worthy.

“Thanks for being your sickly sweet self and talking us through all of this. I’ve been wanting to bring it up with you but I was too chicken.”

He rubbed her shoulder, “It’s what I’m here for. You don’t have to carry the stress alone.”

She looked him in his stone grey eyes and felt in her heart that he was a gift from the Gods. Whether he was sent for her, she wasn’t sure, but she knew that he was too kind, too good, and too understanding for someone like her. With each day he just showed her that a healthy relationship was possible and that she didn’t have to live a life worrying that things would fall apart around her.

As she stared at him thinking about all the ways in which she was convinced he was a gift from the Gods, a goofy smile grew on his face.

“Checking me out Gen?” he asked with an exaggerated wink.

His little attempt at being saucy was just the push she needed to take a leap of faith and say those three little words that’d been running in her mind for days.

“Gods I love you.”
Jon was stunned. Speechless. Frozen. And lost in the way she’d said those three little words to him. Just three syllables made him glad he was sitting down, made him feel like she had made a mistake.

His silence made her blush. “You don’t have to say it back. I’ve just really grown fond of you, I know it’s soon but it’s how I feel.”

Both of their insecurities met each other and convinced themselves that what she’d said was a mistake.

“Are you serious?”

She blinked wildly and played with her hair — a nervous tick he’d noticed in her. But she tried to be brave, tried to find the courage she’d had just seconds before to confess it to him.

And he deserved to be loved without uncertainty. He deserved a confident declaration that he was cared for.

“Completely. And not just because you help me feel sane or the things you do for me, but for the way you just are. You’re just good,” she said.

He wrapped her up in a hug, burying his head in her neck. He may not have had the ability to express it as she had, but he could in his own little way.

“Love you too Gen. You have no idea how special you make me feel,” he said.

She captured his lips in a kiss, deepening it until she remembered they were in her dining room where her family could walk in at any moment. It all felt very surreal to her like any moment now she’d wake up from a dream.

Pulling away with a laugh she said, “Why don’t we go out for dinner and celebrate tonight. Screw work, the notes can wait.”

“I couldn’t agree more. I’ve got to show the world what it looks like to be in love with a beautiful woman,” he smiled.

“You’re such a ham!” she said while picking up her notebooks, “Why don’t you go get changed for dinner while I turn myself into that beautiful woman you’re talking about.”

“Don’t need any time to do that Gen. You could go in your pajamas if you wanted and still be stunning.”

She rolled her eyes and gave him a kiss, shooing him out the door so she could get ready.

He came to her door twenty minutes later just as she was trying to decide what coat of Amira’s to
steal from the closet to complete her outfit. Gen’s college wardrobe just wasn’t cutting it these days.

She whistled when she saw Jon come through the door. He’d ditched his khaki work pants and company polo for black slacks and a crisp blue shirt.

“Gods you look hot,” she sighed wrapping her arms around his neck. And he smelled even better, like he’d splashed on some aftershave just for her.

“Have you looking in a mirror Gen? You look beautiful,” he said taking in her emerald green floral dress that looked like it’d been made just for her. Her hair was loose and he wanted nothing more than to lose his hands in it.

She bowed and grabbed Amira’s jacket, “Thank you, thank you.”

Before they could leave her brother came upstairs from his cave.

“Look at you two! Going somewhere special?” Roland asked while snacking on a bag of popcorn. It always amazed Genevieve that he always seemed to have food on him. It was like it materialized out of nowhere.

“Off to dinner,” she answered with a goofy smile.

He nodded at Jon, “Well make sure she’s back before midnight, don’t want her turning into a pumpkin on you.”

“Will do!”

Genevieve handed her phone to her brother, “Will you take a picture of us?” She wanted to have a record of the day they’d confessed their love for each other. Maybe someday she’d learn to scrapbook and put it in there, or a the very least, tuck it away into her journal.

“Yeah, yeah. Smile you two,” he said.

The picture he’d taken quickly became her phone background.

They ended up in a corner booth cozied up to each other at restaurant so nice it had cloth napkins. It was the type of restaurant that had soft string music playing and candles on the table.

“Gods I feel like an imposter. I don’t even know what half the stuff on the menu is,” Jon laughed.

He had half a mind to order soup and just be done with it.

“Well you certainly look like you belong here handsome. I’ll help you decipher the menu,” she said looking down at it.

Eventually he decided to go with the Merenesse Lamb and Genevieve tucked into a dish of Honeyed Chicken. Their older waiter had even given them a complimentary bottle of wine to go their meal.

“For such a lovely couple,” he’d said.

They spent their dinner enjoying the food and the company of one another. Genevieve realized that she could get very used to the ease she felt with Jon, and he couldn’t imagine a better way to end his day.

On the car ride home he’d held her hand as they sung along to the song playing through the radio.
“Turn it up Jon! It’s Toy Soldier!” she said jumping in her seat. He shook his head and laughed as she belted out The Hound song.

“But I’m not your toy soldier anymoreeee! Not something you can toss aside on the floor,” she sang. He wished he wasn’t driving so he could send a video of it to Sandor.

He loved her goofiness. Loved that she felt like she could sing in front of him. Loved that she loved him. Loved that he’d finally told her.

When he pulled into her driveway neither of them wanted to part.

“Can we drive over to that hiking spot you brought me to and just park for a bit?” she asked.

Jon’s face heated up remembering the feel of her body against his. The way she’d pressed against him and the sounds she’d made.

“Is this just your way of saying you want to make out without being in your parent’s driveway?”

“You’ve got me!” she said rubbing his hand in hers.

The snow crunched under the tires when they pulled into the shadowed spot by the woods. If she was with anyone else, she’d feel the urge to lock the doors and hide. But she was with Jon, someone who she trusted. Someone whose presence felt like a warm hug after a long day.

They crawled over the seats to situate themselves in the back where there weren’t any barriers in their way. And back there Genevieve felt sheepish and unsure. Jon didn’t admit to it, but he felt that way too. Both of them thought so highly of the other that they were scared to have an ill-placed kiss or touch.

But the music was right, no longer playing the crooning voice or her friend, and they soon found themselves tangled up in each other. His hands were back where they belonged running up and down her torso, lingering on her waist like she loved. And her hands squeezed his shoulders relishing in the solidness of the man she loved.

His kissed up her neck and along her jaw sending shivers down her spine. “Jon, fuck,” she sighed into him.

Their lips met and next thing they knew she had him lying down underneath her in the backseat of his car.

He panted for air when they broke apart, “Gods you don’t know what you do to me.”

She laid her head on his chest and laughed. It shook her body, sending vibrations through his, “Oh I think I do babe. We really need to go away for a weekend just the two of us or something.”

“Find a place and I’ll be there,” he said rubbing her back.

“And here I was thinking the move down south was going to suck. At least I’ll have my own place to kiss you whenever I want in.”
Chapter 48

Genevieve called Mira later that week to give her a life update.

“So we said the “L” word to each other,” Gen said while scooping into her ice cream. She and Mira had decided that if they couldn’t have a girls night in person, they could at least try one out over video. And since Jon was off at hockey game with his brothers, she had all the time in the world.

Mira removed her spoon from her mouth and said, “Shut up! You didn’t! I call bullshit.”

“Nooo! It’s true, I swear.”

“Who said it first?”

“I did. I was really stressed out and he talked me through it, then next thing I know I’m drooling over his cute face and saying I loved him,” Gen said. She smiled remembering the joy she’d felt when he’d said it back.

Her friend pretending to wipe away a tear, “You’re growing up so fast. I’m so proud.”

“You are too missy! I saw that Willas tagged you in a post on his Faceless profile.”

Mira threw her hands up, “Are you stalking me or something? How’d you even see it?”

“Oh, I have my ways. I have to keep tabs with you somehow when we’re so far away from each other,” Gen said.

She wasn’t going to tell Mira, but she’d done quite a bit of digging through his social media to see if he was suitable for her best friend. She’d been able to discover that he had a bunch of degrees attached to his name and quite the library if his pictures were actually his. And he seemed to have a fondness for birds that she couldn’t wrap her head around.

“Well, now that you’ve stalked him, do you have any questions about the date we went on?”

“Oh my Gods it was a date? I’m so mad my reception was bad up in Hardhome. Where do you two go?”

Gen pulled up the picture again to take in her friend’s unsure smile. She was such a cutie.

“He took me to his family’s vineyard and we had a picnic,” Mira said.

“You say that like it’s something casual! That sounds beautiful!”

Mira rolled her eyes but softened her stern face, “It really was. He’s just so kind and smart.”

“Just like you! Do you have any dates planned in the future?”

“Yes actually, he’s taking me to a family lunch.”

Genevieve picked up on the nervousness in her friend’s voice. She wasn’t even touching her ice cream!

“You’re going to be fine Mira. You already know them anyways from work, and from what you tell me it sounds like Margaery likes you!”
Mira buried her head in her pillow for a second, “I know. It’s just going to be weird seeing them outside of work with Willas on my arm.”

“Well if he’s as kind as you say, he’ll make ease any awkwardness for you!”

“I hope so. Now what exciting things do you and Jon have planned?”

Genevieve blushed thinking of their weekend plans. “We’re actually going away for the weekend, just the two of us, to Bear Island,” she said.

Mira whistled, “Just the two of you? Going to get up to any funny business?”

She scratched her arms and fidgeted. As open as she was, she didn’t really like talking about her affections with partners. But this was Mira, her best friend who would never judge her in a million years. If anything, she’d just stand on the sidelines cheering her on.

“Well let’s just say when I come back I might not be the same as when I left,” she winked. Despite her show of confidence, she was nervous as all hell inside.

“Genny! You minx, what are you going to wear?”

She hadn’t thought of that. “Um I’ve got this cute set from Sunspear when I was down there.”

“Wear that! I wish you’d told me sooner, I would’ve sent you some cute stuff from Highgarden,” Mira said.

Gen groaned, “Fuck I’m nervous now.” Her palms were getting sweaty and she felt like opening a window despite the winter chill outside.

“That’s perfectly natural. Just don’t feel pressured into doing anything you’re not ready for.”

“It’s not that, Jon wouldn’t do that. I just don’t want to look like a fool,” she said feeling the blush heat her face.

“Jon loves you Gen. He’s not going to laugh at you. Hells, even when I lost it to Daemon in college he was kind about my inexperience. And it certainly wasn’t his first time with someone as beautiful as him.”

“Gods Daemon was hot! What ever happened to him?”

Mira shrugged, “Think he joined the army or something. I really don’t know. But seriously, what ever you decide to do this weekend, you’re going to be fine. You’re hot too, Jon won’t care what you do.”

“Oh shut up. I’ll probably chicken out and just end up showing him around the old neighborhood instead.”

“Yeah, sure. Just make sure you wear protection!”

Gen stuck out her tongue and said “And make sure you make a good impression at lunch with Willas’s family.”

When they ended their call Gen riffled through her drawers to make sure she packed the little blue number she’d bought in Sunspear. She never found a reason to wear it considering she preferred comfort over style, especially when no one would see her underwear anyways. But the seller at the market had convinced her it would enchant anyone who saw it, and she needed those odds on her
side for the weekend to come.

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Jon was bricking it. Even a beer with Sam couldn’t calm him down.

“Jon, you look like someone just told you to do your taxes. Why are you so tense?” Sam asked.

They were sitting in Sam’s living room that was covered wall-to-wall in bookshelves with books Jon wished he had the time to read. Gilly was off at work at the cafe and the two guys were having a movie night to catch up.

“Gen and I are going away this weekend,” he sighed.

Sam smiled, “That sounds awesome! Where are you guys going?”

“Up to Bear Island where she grew up.”

“So why are you tense about it?”

Jon tensed up further, embarrassed to admit his fears to his friend. “It’s just going to be the two of us and I think we’re going to take the next step.”

“Oh,” Sam said raising his brows and taking a sip of his beer, “You and Ygritte never got to that point did you?”

“Not all the way. Now I’m just scared I’m going to fuck it up for Gen,” he sighed.

Sam leaned forward, “Well I didn’t have any experience at all when Gilly and I got together, and it worked out fine. Just think of it as an opportunity to learn together.”

“I hope you’re right. I don’t want to ruin the whole weekend.”

“Have some faith in yourself Jon. It’ll be fine.”

While they watched their movie about dragonriders Jon couldn’t stay focused. Thinking about the weekend ahead made him think about Genevieve. And thinking about her made him so preoccupied that all he could think about was the warmth of her hugs and the joy of her smiles.

He wanted so badly to make it a good weekend for the two of them.
Chapter 49

The drive to Deepwood Motte from Winterfell had taken about four hours during which the two of them talked about everything but their plans for the weekend. It was like all the advice about communicating their anxieties had gone out the window.

Instead, they talked about recent tidbits Gen had rediscovered from her notes and Jon’s recent songwriting attempts. The road there cut through the forest her father was trying so hard to protect and the trees felt eerie in the looming closeness.

“I’d totally forgotten about going down the Street of Steel in King’s Landing,” she said as she read from her journal.

“Surprised you didn’t pick up something for Henryk.”

“Oh trust me, he begged!”

Jon tried to remember what his father had told him about his visits to the capital. He’d never been himself, but then again he didn’t really have any desire to. From what he heard it was a congested city with bad air. He’d been spoiled by the Northern climate for too long to ever enjoy a place like that.

“Did you go down the Street of Flour? I think I remember hearing about it.”

She gasped, “Oh my Gods! How could I forget. I thought I was going to die from all the bread I ate, and the lemon cakes!”

Jon laughed, “Sansa is obsessed with lemon cakes. Maybe she should take a trip down there to look at schools.”

“Oh she should!”

Then the conversation switched to Jon’s music.

“I’ve been writing a lot more lately.”

“Oh really? I’d love to hear what you’ve been cooking up,” she said holding his hand.

“It’s nothing special. Just messing around on the guitar. I was going to bring it, but I figured it’d be a pain to lug around on the ferry.”

Jon should’ve brought it with him. The ferry from Deepwood Motte to Bear Island was practically empty on a winter Friday night and the two of them retreated down below deck to stay warm. The lights were dim as they leaned against each other during the trip.

“I can’t believe I’m going home,” she sighed.

When she’d suggested they’d go there for the weekend, he’d been surprised. He knew she hadn’t been back since they moved and wasn’t sure how she’d handle being back after all that time.

“You excited?”

“To show you where I grew up, yes. But I’m not sure how I’ll feel.”
When the ferry docked and Genevieve felt a wave of emotion pass over her when the captain announced their arrival. She was home.

Jon grabbed their bags and noticed her emotional state. Her eyes were glassy and she stared straight ahead at the rocky forests of her home.

“Are you okay Gen?”

She turned around and put her arm around his waist. “Yeah, just taking it all in.”

Despite the island not being very large, they still had to rent a car to get to the place they were going to be staying. She drove so she could show Jon all the places she’d grown up by.

“I know it doesn’t look like we’ve got much, but I had a wonderful childhood here. We were always playing outside and making forts in the woods,” she explained as they passed by a couple shops that’d seen better days.

Jon was amazed by the way the water crashed against the shores. He understood why the people from Bear Island were known for their hardiness. You’d have to be tough to withstand the winters here.

“I believe you. I can’t wait to see it in the daylight.”

She smiled at him, “Did you know the ironborn used to control the island long ago?”

“Is that why you hated Pyke so much?”

“Maybe… I can’t exactly use the dampness as an excuse now that you’ve seen what it’ll like here when it’s stormy out,” she laughed.

“So how’d they lose control of the island?”

She drove up a hill lined with cottages, “Well rumor has it, this guy named Rodrik Stark, probably one of your ancestors, won the island in a wrestling match against some ironborn and granted it to the Mormont family.”

“Wow! My Dad doesn’t really talk much about our family history, but I know it goes back quite a bit,” he said.

“Oh please, your family is so old that you probably would’ve grown up to be King of the North had you lived back then.”

Jon couldn’t even imagine himself as King. He thought he was much too unsure of himself to be able to rule.

“Maybe you could help me research it some time with your skills.”

“I’m sure it’d be easy based off how many times your last name popped up in my history books in college.”

She slowed the car and pulled into a cottage covered in black slate tiles. When they’d been figuring out which place to book he’d been drawn to it instantly thinking it looked like just the place for a cozy winter getaway.

“Home sweet home, at least for this weekend,” she said getting out of the car.
“Wow, I can’t wait to see the views this place has.”

She unlocked the front door using the code the owner gave her and they walked into the warmth. The inside had dark wood floors and the walls were painted in shades of dark green, black, and deep blues. In any other home, it would seem claustrophobic but it only made it feel cozier.

“I love the velvet couch! It’s gorgeous,” she said flopping down onto it.

Jon was enjoying the feel of the thick fur rug under his feet. “This place is great. Let’s go explore the rest of it,” he said pulling her to her feet.

The discovered the owner had a large record collection for them to use, a pale wood kitchen, and a large shower with river rock tiling. It was everything a Northern house should be — a perfect balance of comfort and nature.

“Let’s just buy this place and run away,” she said when she walked into the bedroom.

It wasn’t a very large room, but she couldn’t get over the view from the window behind the king-sized bed.

“Sounds like a good idea to me. I could get used to waking up and seeing that every morning,” Jon said.

Their window overlooked the cliffside below them and where the land met the lake. And just beyond across the chilly waters, they could hear the distant roar of waterfalls pouring into it.

They sat on the bed together, leaning their faces against the window like two kids driving past a toyshop.

“I’ll never understand how my parents could move away from this place. It’s just so beautiful,” she sighed leaning her weight against him.

He wrapped her in his arms, “I see what you mean. It’s got a wild beauty, even more so than Winterfell.”

They sat there enjoying the feeling of closeness until their stomach protested.

“Guess we should get some food,” she laughed when she heard their stomachs growl so loud it sounded like they were having their own conversation.

“Know of any good places for take-out? I’m feeling lazy after all the driving today,” he said.

“Me too. I used to order from this one place, they had the best gravy fries and I think they’re still open.”

“You had me at gravy fries!”

As they ate cuddled up on the couch listening to a record as old as their parents, they got to talking after several glasses of wine. It began innocently enough, with him asking about her childhood on Bear Island and then morphing into her longing for the life she used to have.

“When we moved I felt like my parents had betrayed me, like by doing so they cut my childhood short and ripped away my memories of it,” she sighed into him.

His hand rubbed her shoulder and pulled her closer into him. He knew this was a time for listening and comfort. She needed this.
“Why’d they even move to Winterfell?”

“Fuck if I know. My Dad wanted to go and save the environment and my Mom wanted a better gallery space. But I just couldn’t process leaving everything behind for something only the two of them wanted. It was like they didn’t even consider how it’d feel for us to leave everything behind.”

Jon tried his best to help her, but found himself unable to do anything to ease her pain except ask her questions to help her work through it. “How’d your siblings take it?”

She scoffed, “Roland was too busy getting drunk at school to care, Amira retreated to her room with her books, and Henryk just became even more aggressive.”

She started laughing and shaking her head, “Even after all this time I’m still pissed off that it happened. But now it feels too far away to bring it up, especially with all the time that’s passed.”

“How’d your parents take it?”

Gen wrapped her arm around his waist so she was practically sitting in his lap. “I just know if I bring it up with them they won’t really understand. They’ll tell me I was moving back to college anyways so what did it matter. And then I’ll feel as trapped as I always do.”

“Even if they say that, it doesn’t mean your feelings are any less valid Gen. I can imagine moving from home and off to college was a lot all at once,” he said.

“Yeah. It’s like no matter where I am, I don’t feel like I’m at home. College wasn’t home, and Winterfell isn’t really. But even if I bought the old house here and lived in it, it wouldn’t be home either because time has passed and I’ll never be able to get that back,” she said. As she talked she began to hiccup from tears she’d tried to hide from him.

He held her close and kissed her head, “Gen, if I could get that time back for you, I would in a heartbeat. As for not feeling at home anywhere, I hope you find your home. I really do. Because you deserve that.”

She wiped away her tears and leaned into him, allowing him to take the stress of her body away. As Jon held her, she found herself wondering if home was really a place, or if it could be a person.

“I love you, you’re the sweetest man ever.”

“I wouldn’t say that, but I’ll keep it up as long as you believe that,” he said.

She moved out of his lap and laid down on the couch so that her legs were resting on his.

“I guess this is a good time to tell you about how I know Sandor.”
Chapter 50

Jon sat up and rubbed his hands up and down her shins. She was too rigid, even despite lying down on the couch. It was like the conflict she was feeling in her mind had spread to her limbs, tightening her like a rubber band about to snap.

“Gen, before you say anything just know I’ll still love you when you finish talking,” he said.

Her body relaxed slightly, her shoulders drooping and her arms falling to her sides instead of crossed in front of her.

“Thanks Jon. It’s nothing weird or bad, just something I’ve never really talked about before,” she said dropping her head.

“Well, either way, I’m here to listen to whatever you have to say.”

She began telling him about that first summer after college when she’d come “home” to Winterfell. How the entire first month she felt like a stranger in her own home, in her own skin and how no one seemed to notice. It got bad enough she stopped sleeping, stopped brushing her hair even. And then one night she’d been scrolling through her phone feeling too sad to sleep and too sad to stay awake with just her thoughts to keep her company. And she saw the ad and went to the Quiet Isle the next day, just told her parents she was visiting Mira.

“It got really bad Jon. I don’t even know what happened. One minute I was fine at school and when I came home it was like all the shit I hadn’t processed or dealt with hit me all at once and left me unable to cope. So I saw an ad for a retreat on the Quiet Isle and it changed my life,” she said.

“I remember you mentioning you went there. What was it like? Are you really not allowed to talk on the island?”

A sound that resembled a laugh came out of her mouth, “If that was the case they would’ve thrown Sandor and I off the Isle as soon as we got there.”

“He doesn’t strike me as the talkative type,” Jon smiled. He noticed her body relaxing the more she talked about it.

“Oh, he’s not. But you’ve really got no other option on the Isle unless you want to just chop wood for hours, which both of us did until we got over ourselves and started talking.”

She remembered the way her arms ached after her first day. Elder Brother had met her and told her she could either talk about what was bothering her or go chop wood. And she’d chopped wood so hard that the next day she would have talked all day if they asked her to.

She continued her story, “So I was sitting around in a circle with all the other sorry souls there looking for some peace and I just listened to their stories. One woman had been assaulted after a riot in King’s Landing, another man had been recovering from drug abuse. Listening to their stories...
made me feel like such an asshole, like what I was there for couldn’t even compare to what they’d gone through.”

Jon stopped her, “Pain isn’t a competition. Someone else’s pain doesn’t make yours hurt any less.”

Her eyes blinked quickly, suddenly tearing up at the weight of what he’d said. She’d never thought of that way. She’d gone so long trying to tell herself to suck it up because her hurt was small in comparison to others.


“All the brooding I do gives me time to think,” he smiled.

She moved closer to him, so their thighs were touching and leaned her head against his shoulder.

“You can’t repeat this to anyone because Sandor would have my head, but he said I could tell you.”

“Of course, what you tell me doesn’t leave this room Gen,” he promised.

“Okay, so it was Sandor’s turn to talk a couple of days later. I was still pretty angry at the world and got piss drunk from some booze I found. So we were all sitting around the fire and Sandor starts to share his story. Meanwhile, I’m just trying not to make a fool of myself. You know how I handle my booze,” she started.

She still remembered buying a bottle before the boat ride to the Quiet Isle, “just in case”. And that night she’d been so pissed about her life and felt so trapped in all the decisions that she hadn’t even been made for herself. So she drank a bunch, wrapped herself in a blanket, and watched a man wary of the fire explain his story.

“So he starts to explain how when he was child his older brother, a nasty nasty horrible fucker, caught him playing with one of his toys. Just a little toy soldier you’d get in a gumball machine.”

Jon tensed up sensing what was to come.

“And the monster grabbed Sandor, who wasn’t even in primary school, and he just put his face to the fire until it burned. And his father did absolutely nothing about it. Nothing,” she said feeling hot tears spill down her face as she retold the horrors.

The scars on Sandor’s face made sense to Jon now. He’d heard rumors over the years, but nothing was as horrible as the truth.

“So I was sitting there listening to him recall how the burnt flesh smelled. And how he’d been on his own since he was a kid, trying to find his place in his world when he didn’t feel like ever had a home. When he said that, I just started bawling in front of everyone. I didn’t even care who saw,” she said shaking her head.

“I’m so sorry Sandor had to go through that. I’d give both you and a him a hug right now if I could,” Jon said.

She let out a strangled laugh, “As if he’d let you. I’m the only one he lets hug him.”

“While I was crying and making a scene he just stood up, sat down next to me and grabbed my hand. He told me he wouldn’t have anyone like me crying over him or feeling pain on his account. And from that moment we were friends. I followed him around the Isle for the rest of the trip, and he just let me,” she said.
“You’re amazing Genevieve. Truly,” Jon said.

“He’s the amazing one Jon. If it wasn’t for him I would’ve just stayed on the Isle and became a hermit. He made me confront the world I had waiting for me and realize that I’d survive.”

“I guess I’ll have to thank him for that then.”

She wiped her eyes, “He’s really a sweetheart, just like you. You know his song Toy Soldier?”

Jon remembered the way she’d sang it at the concert like each word was a prayer. And how sad her eyes had looked afterward.

“Yeah?”

“Well, he wrote it when we were on the Isle. It’s about his brother. The two of us sat at the fire until dawn the next day once just riffing back and forth and putting it together. Watching him create was like magic,” she said.

Jon’s eyes widened in awe, “That’s amazing Gen. I can’t believe you were there for that. It’s one of my favorite songs.”

“Well next time you hear it, just remember how much of a fucking badass Sandor is to survive what he has and still come out a good man,” she said.

That night as they got ready for bed, she texted Sandor.

“I told Jon the truth about the Quiet Isle. He’s sworn to secrecy, but I think he loves you even more now. Especially for how you helped me.” she sent.

“You helped me more Gen. But I’m proud of you for being open with him. He must really mean something to you,” he replied.

Gen looked over at Jon who was tugging on his flannel pajama bottoms and stretched before the moonlit window. There was a certain sureness to him, a solidness that made her feel calm inside.

“He really does.”
Chapter 51

The next morning the two of them got up early to take advantage of the day. They’d watched the sun rise through the picture window, admiring the way that the morning light highlighted their faces. And for breakfast they’d made pancakes together, ending up covered in flour by the time they were done.

“I can’t wait to show you around!” she said as they pulled on their boots and coats and headed out the door. It was supposed to rain but neither of them cared. Because what was a little rain when you were with someone you loved?

“Where are we going first?”

Gen drove down the street and on a tree-lined path. “Thought we could go to my old hiking spot before the rain started.”

The trail was covered in snow and animal tracks, some of them large. Jon grabbed onto her hand, mentally telling himself it was for her safety instead of his.

“So are there any bears in these woods?”

She laughed, “We’re not called Bear Island for nothing. We probably won’t run into any if we stay on the path. They usually leave us alone as long as we do the same for them.”

The path led them to the top of a waterfall so tall that Jon was scared to walk near it. Gen sat on a rock by the edge and took in the sight.

“This is one of the falls we could see from the house,” she explained.

He found the courage and took a seat next to her. The view was amazing, but in a violent way. It was violent in the way the water crashed down at the rocks below without relenting.

“It must be amazing in the summer.”

Gen turned and smiled, “It really is. I used to come up here a lot with my friend Mira after school and just lie back and think of how lucky I was to be born in such a beautiful place.”

“I used to do that sort of thing in high school. Just went over to the Godswood in my backyard, but I know the feeling.”

She stood up and wiped her hands on her hiking pants, “Want to take a visit to my old school? My teachers are always telling me to come back and visit on my Faceless profile.”

“Yeah, of course. Whatever you want to show me I’m down.”

Bear Island High School was nestled in a valley. It wasn’t big compared to Winterfell High, but it had a certain charm in it’s old age. It was a grey stone building that looked more like a historical museum than a school.

But the inside had been modernized and fitted with bright lights and study spaces to help the students feel comfortable.

At the front desk, Gen walked in like she’d never left with Jon trailing behind her with his hands in his pockets.
“Hello Miss. Lori! Is it alright if I walk around and say hi to a couple of old teachers?”

The greying woman put on her glasses and gasped, “Oh Miss Norward! How are you? I haven’t seen you in ages!”

Gen laughed in the way that had the ability to brighten a room. “I’m doing great, just visiting and I thought I’d stop by and say hello,” she said.

“And who’s this handsome guy? It can’t be little Henryk, can it? He was so tiny the last time I saw him.”

Jon had to stifle a laugh at the suggestion. Gen flipped him off under the counter where Lori couldn’t see.

“Oh Gods no. Henryk is growing up though, almost as tall as me. This is my boyfriend Jon,” she said.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Miss Lori,” he said stepping forward.

The woman smirked at Gen. “Well why don’t you two sign in and take a walk around. I’m sure Genevieve has lots of stories to tell you from her time here.”

With their visitor passes on, Gen led him down a long hallway.

“See this mural? My class and I worked on it when we graduated,” she explained pointing to a painting of a bear wearing the school colors.

“It’s quite the mural! Who came up with the idea?”

“Oh, just one of the class clowns. They wanted to have something lighter up on the wall instead of the usual serious quotes other classes do.”

At the end of the hall she knocked on a door.

“I really hope he doesn’t have a class. I don’t want to be that person who comes back after graduation and disturbs everyone. That’s so cringy,” she said.

A man came to the door and pulled her into a hug.

“Genevieve Norward! What are you doing here? I thought your family moved to Winterfell,” he said.

He was a thin man with a great grey beard. Jon wondered if he’d ever be able to grow a beard like that.

“Hi Mr. Falcin! We did move to Winterfell, I’m just up for a weekend away.”

Mr. Falcin took notice of Jon and stuck his hand out, “I don’t believe we’ve met. I’m Mr. Falcin, but you can call me Barret. I was this one’s history teacher for four years.”

Jon smiled, “I’m Jon, it’s a pleasure to meet you. You must’ve had a big influence on her career path!”

Gen said, “Oh he did. He’s the reason I wanted to study anthropology and history in the first place.”

“Which you have to tell me about! I’m horrible about keeping up with people on Faceless, so you’ll
have to fill me in. Come on in and take a seat,” he said.

The walls of his classroom were covered in maps of Westeros and Essos. And there were even artist renderings of famous warriors like Visenya Targaryen and Ser Duncan the Tall. It looked like a place you could really drop in and learn, rather than a room where knowledge was spouted at you from behind a desk.

When they sat down he asked, “So what have you been up to? I knew what you were studying in college, but you must be graduated by now.”

“Yep, I am. I ended up getting a job with my Professor, Tyrion Lannister, and I’ve been traveling around ever since graduation collecting notes for his next book,” she said.

Her teacher ran over to his bookshelf, “I LOVE his books! I wish I’d known you were working with him, that’s really amazing.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll send you a copy of the book when it’s done.”

“Please do! I’d love to brag about it to the students, use you as inspiration,” he said.

Jon spoke up, “She was actually just beyond the Wall doing research.”

“Really? How’d you like it? There is such a gap of information with their cultures.”

“Oh, it was great! Everyone was nice to me once they realized I wasn’t there to take advantage of them. Their culture is very much community based,” she explained.

Her teacher nodded and asked, “So when will the book come out?”

“Should be out by the end of the summer I hope. It depends on how long it takes to turn all of my notes into coherent thoughts,” she laughed.

The bell rang, signaling that a class would soon be there.

“Well as much as I’d love to stay and chat all day, my class will be here any minute. But please keep in touch on Faceless, I’d love to hear more about your adventures,” Barret said.

“I will! It was so great to see you again,” she said.

As they were walking out, Jon went to grab a quick drink of water from the fountain while she talked to her teacher one on one.

“So how do you know Jon? Does he work with Professor Lannister too?”

“Oh, no. He’s my boyfriend. I’m just showing him around all of my old haunts for the weekend before we got back to Winterfell.”

“Well it looks like you’re really happy. I’m glad to see it Genevieve,” he said.

“Thank you. Your classes meant so much to me when I was in high school, keep doing what you’re doing!”

In the car Genevieve explained how she’d been somewhat of a teacher’s pet. “I didn’t care much for my other classes, but I always loved his. My classmates probably hated me for the amount of times I raised my hand in his classes,” she said.
He could just picture teenaged Gen raising her hand high in the air without any embarrassment, just pure curiosity and passion.

“What’s your favorite time period?”

She thought long and hard for a second. “Oh gosh. They’re all so interesting! But I really liked learning about Aegon the Conqueror and how he united the realm.”

“Plus there was dragons,” Jon added.

“Yes of course! That always made the lessons more fun,” she smiled.

They went to her favorite deli for lunch and the woman at the counter still remembered her name and order. Jon began to realize just how much she had lost by leaving Bear Island behind for Winterfell. She had such a sense of community there, but now in Winterfell she just had her family, and Jon’s now too.

After lunch he noticed how Gen’s hands gripped the steering wheel. Her shoulders were tense again, just like they’d been the night before.

“So where to next?” he asked.

She fidgeting in her seat, “I thought we could drive by my old house and see if anyone’s home.”

Genevieve wasn’t sure if she was ready, or if she’d ever be, but she wanted to see her home. She wanted to share that piece of herself with Jon. He couldn’t truly know her until he’d seen where so much of her life had taken place. And her home had been calling her for a while, she couldn’t ignore it’s absence from her life any longer. She had to face the loss head on.
Chapter 52

Nestled in the woods along the coast, her childhood home was paradise to her. The front yard was the ocean, not that it was ever truly warm enough to swim in it. And the backyard was a wild expanse of woods with a Heart Tree her family used to pray at.

When she drove up the street toward it, Genevieve felt her hands grow stiff.

“I’ll be real, I’m freaking the fuck out right now,” she said with a nervous laugh.

Jon’s heart hurt for her, knowing what she must be feeling. “Do you want me to drive? You can relax in the passenger seat,” he said.

“No, no. It’s right around the corner. I’m just scared that it’ll all be different.”

“I get that. I’ll be here for you hon.”

She grabbed his hand and squeezed it for strength. “Thanks babe. I don’t know if I’m more afraid of the house looking totally different, or it looking the same as we left it.”

He didn’t have any words of comfort to offer her as they parked along a curved road with some beautiful houses.

“Which one is it?” Jon asked walked over to her.

“It’s the one with the swing on the tree,” she said. She and her father had built it together, staining the wood one weekend when she was a girl. And she’d spent so many afternoons in the sun standing on that swing, gliding back and forth through the air loving the thrill of not knowing if she’d fall. Already the memories hit her.

Her steps towards the house were shaky and unsure, and she felt like just turning back and hiding under the covers at the rental house.

“So do you want to knock on the door?”

“I guess so,” she said grabbing his hand to stop him, “Will you do it for me though? I don’t think I’ll be able to find the words right away.”

“Of course Gen, whatever you need,” he said before knocking on the double door.

An old woman with her white hair in a bun opened the door, “Can I help you?”

Jon moved forward to speak but Gen found her courage. “Sorry to bother you, but could we take a look around the property? I grew up in this house and wanted to show my boyfriend where I used to live.”

The woman checked her watch, “Well I have to leave for an appointment in thirty minutes, but I suppose you could take a look around the place. Do you want to come inside?”

Gen looked at Jon with wild eyes. She wasn’t sure if she was ready to face the reality of her home moving on without her. But there was something reassuring in the way that Jon looked at her that
made her feel brave.

“Uh sure. If you don’t mind,” she said.

The woman stepped aside and said, “Well I’m Berna. Feel free to walk around, I just ask that you take your shoes off.”

“Of course ma’am. Thank you so much,” Jon said as he unlaced his boots.

Genevieve was speechless. It was just as she remembered, yet so alien at the same time. It was like someone had snuck in the middle of the night and changed minor details and the pictures on the walls with another family’s life.

The woman walked into the kitchen to give them some privacy.

“Gods Jon this is really fucking weird. I hate it but I don’t want to leave either,” she sighed.

Jon grabbed her hand and kissed her head, “I know Gen. Don’t feel like you have to push through it because of me.”

The house was only one story but had an attic space that was reached by a slim flight of stairs. She led him up there and tugged down the hatch like she’d done a million times before.

She stood in the middle of the empty attic for a while, before sitting on the floor with a heavy sigh.

Jon sat down beside her and put an arm around her shoulder “What was this room?”

“It was my bedroom for as long as I could remember. Once Amira was born I moved up here so that my old room could be used as a nursery. It looks so weird without my stuff in it.”

It wasn’t a big room, but the wide planked wood floors gave the room a sturdy feeling, like it’d always been there and always would be. It was flooded with purple and blue light from two stained glass windows which colored Gen’s face. Jon had never seen anyone look more beautiful. Even when she was curled up into a ball leaning into his chest, she was the bravest person he knew for coming into the room.

“I can picture you living here. How’d you decorate it?”

His question made her sit up, “Nothing like my room in Winterfell. I really need to make that place more personal. I used to have a collage of pictures on this wall with anything I came across that I liked. So many pictures of family and nature. And if we knew each other back then, I’d have put you up too.”

“Was your bed over by that window?”

She stood up and walked over to explain. “I had it right in front so I could wake up to the light. And over on that wall I had my desk where I used to write until the early hours of the morning. It was just the best room to escape from the craziness of family life.”

“That’s why I’m down in the basement,” Jon laughed.

Gen lingered by the window for a moment and turned to face him. “You know, it’s almost funny being here. I used to look out this window every day and wonder if I’d ever get off of Bear Island, and now that I have I wish I was right back here.”

He hugged her behind and looked out through the glass at the ocean outside.
“It’s quite the view.”

“It really is,” she sighed.

Their hug broke apart and she wiped a tear from her cheek. “Thanks for coming with me Jon. Berna would probably have to drag me out sobbing if you weren’t here,” she said.

He rubbed her back and said, “You don’t have to face it alone.”

“Why don’t we head outside so we don’t take up the poor woman’s time,” she suggested, taking one last look at the room that’d been her sanctuary for so many years.

She didn’t have the energy to show him the rest of the house. Couldn’t show him the kitchen where she’d learned to cook with her parents. Or the garage her mother had used as an art studio, where she and her siblings used to play while she worked. Each of the rooms contained so many memories that Genevieve knew if she even opened a door they’d burst out and overwhelm her. It was easier to just show him the Heart Tree.

The woods behind her house weren’t anything like Jon’s. Where the paths behind Jon’s house were well-worn and the trees spaced out, Genevieve’s was not. The woods were dense and left wild. And from the looks of the one trail her family had forged by walking to the Heart Tree, the new owner didn’t spend much time out there. She wondered if they worshiped the Seven instead.

She led Jon to her Heart Tree in the quiet way he’d led her to his.

“This is it,” she said sitting down beside it.

Jon found something beautiful in watching her make herself at home in a place for the Gods. Her comfort there told him that she’d been there thousands of times before.

“It’s so serene with the sound of the waves,” he said.

“We used to come out here at least once a week to pray. I remember being scared of it when I was little, because you can’t see the house at all in the woods. I imagined I’d been transported in time,” she explained.

Jon sat down next to her, “The woods really are thick around here.”

Gen leaned against him and closed her eyes. “I’m going to pray for a bit, you don’t have to sit with me while I do it, but you’re welcome to.”

He wasn’t about to leave her side. Instead of closing his eyes and praying, he watched her scrunch her eyes closed and wipe back the tears that slipped out.

What she prayed for as they sat there, he didn’t know. What he did know is that he couldn’t thank the Gods enough for bringing her into his life.

As he watched her he prayed that he could find the words to alleviate the hurt she was feeling as she tried to figure out where home was.

Her eyes opened and shined at him, “All done. Let’s go back to the rental and veg out.”

He knew she needed it more than anything and just held her hand as they drove back in silence.

In the rental, he wrapped his arms around her as they both pretended she wasn’t crying. He tried to say something, but she just wanted him to hold her until she fell asleep. And who was he to argue?
Don't worry, she'll be fine!
When the two of them woke up wrapped around each other, they knew things would be okay. Jon couldn’t get enough of the way her arms always snaked their way around him. And Genevieve knew as she listened to the steady rise and fall of his chest that he’d never hurt her like she had been in the past.

And it was that trust in him, in their relationship, that gave her the courage to take the next step.

She sat up and kissed his cheek, “Did you get a good nap in?”

Jon stretched with a loud groaned and laughed, “It think I even dreamed. I’m started to think you’re my good luck charm. I never have trouble sleeping when I’m with you.”

His comment made her heart beat faster, “Happy to be of service cutie.”

He stood up, “I’m going to get a glass of water, you want anything?”

“Oh sure, a glass of water would be great,” she said. His shirt had ridden up in his sleep and he made no move to adjust it. Genevieve found herself wishing she’d asked for him instead.

When he came back with the drinks he looked so earnest and sweet she wanted to put down her glass and just take him into her arms instead.

“Are you okay Gen? You seemed far-off right now?” Jon asked.

She blinked and smiled at him, “Just feeling a little foggy from the nap.”

He nodded and left the room, saying he’d be back in just a second. The couch felt so much colder without him next her.

Suddenly music filled the room with lofty sounds and melodic voices. It was one of the songs that they’d listened to the first time she hung out in his room.

Jon came back into the room with a shy smile and extended his hand, “I thought this would energize you. Want to dance?”

Again, she was amazed at his ability to lift her spirits. He was always saying she was the one to make things happen, but she realized it was only possible because he gave her the courage to do so.

“I’d love nothing more,” she said.

She grabbed his hands and they swayed around the room, not caring if they kept in step with the music.

“I always forget how much I love this album,” she said.
He spun her and said, “I know. It sort of puts into words a lot of how it feels to fall in love.”

“Oh does it now? I guess we should rename this song ‘The Night Genevieve Norward Came to Town’ then,” she laughed.

She didn’t really see how the lyrics reminded him of falling in love. To her, it was more of a song about all the people you meet before the one you love, the people you don’t end up with.

“I mean more of the album as a whole, especially the next song,” he said.

She noticed a blush creep up his neck as the song came on and they listened to the breathy intro, holding each other tight while moving about the room.

“Oh, this song,” Gen said, feeling her face heat up as well.

He surprised her and began singing, his steady timbre flowing through the airspace and into her heart.

“I can hardly believe I’ve found you and I’m terrified by that,” he sang.

After the first verse, she was entranced. She was done dancing, she wanted to be with the man who loved her enough to hold her as she cried and sing with her when she was happy.

She looked up at him and said what’d been on her mind for days, infecting her dreams and thoughts.

“Let’s do it Jon, I’m ready if you are.”

He pulled apart with his hands on her shoulders and stared at her with dark eyes. To her, his touch was a way to stay connected with her. But to Jon, he held on so he wouldn’t fall over from what she’d said.

“Are you sure?”

“Completely. I’ve been thinking about it a lot, and you’re the only one I’ve ever felt comfortable enough with to consider it. You make me feel like a woman reborn Jon, like someone loved. And I’d love to share this with you too,” she said.

His mouth felt dry as he tried to speak, “Well you’ve already got my heart. I’m yours Gen, for whatever you’ll have me for.”

She smiled and he pulled her into his arms, their lips meeting in a flurry of passion. It was messy and not at all gentle like their other kisses. This was much more raw and true to the passions they had kept locked up inside of themselves, fearing rejection from the other. But there was nothing to fear.

They broke for air and Gen said, “Give me a second. I just need to do something. I’ll be right back.”

Jon would’ve waited for her for an eternity if she’d asked him.

In the bedroom, Gen riffling through her bags feeling her hands shake. But she didn’t feel a bad nervous energy flowing through her, but rather an excitement. Excitement for taking this step with Jon, for finding someone she trusted enough to love in that way.

And when she stared at her reflection in the bathroom mirror she felt like the most beautiful woman in the world, and all because of the way Jon’s love made her feel.

When she entered the living room she found Jon pacing around with his hands in his pockets.
He turned around and his jaw dropped. The seller in Sunspear was right, the outfit did entrance anyone who looked at it. But she only had plans to entrance one man.

“Gods you’re beautiful,” he said.

She felt shy all of a sudden when he stepped closer and brushed her hair out of her eyes. His hands hovered above her skin, shaky as hers had been. He wasn’t sure if her skin or the lacy blue silk she wore would be softer.

“May I?”

“Please do,” she sighed into his chest.

When his hands touched her body she was lost to him. And when she ran hers down his chest on the bed he made her pinch him to prove he wasn’t dreaming. Their kisses found new paths on each other’s bodies and their hearts found new ways of loving.

As he hovered above her and asked if she was sure, Genevieve found herself feeling surer than she’d felt about something in years. There was no one else she could imagine that moment with. And Jon was glad he’d waited to experience it with someone who didn’t play with his heart or love him for the wrong reason. They felt seen with each other.

And although the sun was setting outside in the window behind them creating a natural wonder, both of them found themselves focused on each other, feeling like the Gods had never shown them something more beautiful.

“I love you Gen, so much,” he sighed.

She rose her hips to get closer to him, wishing she could always be this close to him, feel the grounding comfort of his body on hers. He kissed at her neck and up to her lips. They mapped out every last freckle and made stories out of scars, an ecstasy of fumbling.

“I love you too Jon, always.”

There was a brief snap of pain, and with it a sanguine pleasure that flowed out her fingertips. The ache told her that she was alive, that pain didn’t last forever. And she found herself consumed by the way his weight felt against her. The dumb-idiot smile found a new reason to spread across her face.

Jon was focused on doing right by her. But the newness of it all, and the feel of her overrode his senses. He felt blinded by the feel of her. He found himself entranced by the way her black hair spread out across the pillows and the trust in her eyes. With each movement, they seemed to brighten, until they rolled back and she sung for him.

After that, he was a goner.

When it was done they didn’t feel a loss like they’d been told they would, but rather something gained.

Saying “I love you” wasn’t enough for either of them to explain how they felt.
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

Poem snippets are from Queen Elizabeth I's "On Monsieur's Departure" and Margaret Atwood's "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing". The poem Jon describes is Emily Dickinson's "Some keep the Sabbath going to church". They're all lovely poems that I highly recommend reading!

Also, did anyone catch Kit's SNL episode?

She wasn’t there when he woke up.

His heart hammered in his chest and for a brief terrifying second he thought she’d left.

But then she came through the door wearing a pair of his sweatpants and her wolf tee and he felt his body relax. He thought the pants looked better on her than they ever did on him. Maybe she’d give him her pink ones in exchange for them.

“Morning love, what are you doing out of bed so early?” he asked.

Her heart leaped at the new pet name. She climbed up on the bed and cuddled into him, burrowing under the blankets. He thought to ask if she was feeling alright after last night, but her affections told him she was just fine.

“I was starting breakfast for us. Thought I’d surprise you.”

He kissed her head, “Everyday you do something that makes me wonder what I did in a past life to deserve you.”

“Nothing in a past life, current you is worthy enough. Besides, I like to think I’m the lucky one,” she said.

“Either way, I’m blessed.”

They lingered in the new intimacy of each other, in the warmth of the moment. An alarm from the kitchen beep and Gen moved to get up.

“I’ll do it Gen, just stay cozy,” Jon said. He threw the blankets back over her and tucked her in.

“This is why I love you,” she laughed as she peeked her head out from the blankets.

He came back with cinnamon buns on a tray that filled the air with a sweetness that made his mouth water.

“These are so good, did you make them from scratch?”

“Gods no, I didn’t wake up that early!”

After they ate it was well past noon and they knew they couldn’t laze around in bed much longer. It was a long drive back to Winterfell and he had work the next day.
“We should’ve flown,” Jon sighed as he drummed his fingers against the steering wheel on their way home.

Gen put her book down and grabbed his hand. “On the bright side, it means we’re spending more time together.”

“You’ve got me there,” he smiled, “My butt keeps falling asleep though!”

“Not your precious bum! You need to protect that at all costs. I should take out an insurance policy on it.”

Jon laughed, “You’re a goof, you know that?”

She struck a pose and said, “I know, but I’m your goof. Now, how about I read to you so you don’t go bored out of your mind?”

“As long as it’s not that sad book you made me read. I can’t deal with all those deaths,” he said.

“But you’ve still got to read the rest of the series!”

“Someday, just not today.”

He’d barely made it through the first book with all the tears he’d shed. He couldn’t understand why the author would kill off so many beloved characters, just as things started to get good for them.

She leaned against the window and began reading him snippets of poetry from different authors.

“For I am soft and made of melting snow,” she sighed, “Isn’t that just the most beautiful thing you’ve ever heard?”

Jon thought her voice was, but to each their own. She then read a racier one from her phone that had long been a favorite of hers.

“They’d like to see through me, but nothing is more opaque than absolute transparency,” she quoted.

“Gods, those poems make me feel like my writing is shit,” he laughed.

“You’ve got to show some of them to me sometime, I’m sure they’re beautiful!”

Now that he’d found his muse he’d been writing a lot more, but he still didn’t feel like they could compare to the power of the poems she’d read to him.

He took the attention off of him by telling her about one of his favorite poems.

“I don’t have it memorized, but I like this one poem that’s about worshipping the Gods outside in nature, instead of feeling like have to be in a building for them to listen to you,” he said.

“So it’s basically a call-out poem for the Seven?”

He laughed, “Honestly, yeah.”

Eventually, they swapped seats so he could take a nap and much-needed break for his bum. Gen entertained herself by pretending she was talking to a talk show host in her head about her life. It was strange, she knew it, but incredibly fun to imagine her life in a different context.

By the time she’d dramatically explained meeting Jon at an airport to her imaginary audience, she
was in Winterfell.

“Jon, wake up hon,” she said.

He shot up and looked around wildly, rubbing his eyes. “What’s wrong, where are we?”

“Everything’s okay, we just got into Winterfell. I was just waking you up to tell you incase you had anywhere you wanted stop before I drove home,” she said.

Jon relaxed and yawned deeply, “Um no, I’m all set. Thanks for driving this stretch, I didn’t expect to be asleep so long.”

“No worries sleepy-head. You looked so peaceful I didn’t want to wake you.”

In his sleep-addled haze, he leaned his head against the window and dreamed of home. “You’re the best Gen.”

When they got to her house he woke up enough to help her get her bag out of the car and into the house.

Her house was mostly quiet, with everyone still getting back from work or after school activities. It felt strange to be back in the new home after visiting the one she’d grown up in. Although it didn’t have the same memories of her own home, it had something else. Like her Dad’s shiny shoes by the door, or her mom’s paintings on the wall. It was the little details, things from her family, that made it feel like home. The place she’d grown up in was now just a mausoleum for dead memories.

Jon ran her bag upstairs for her and met her at the bottom of the stairs. “As much as I’d like to stay and hang out, I’m just feeling super wiped right now,” he said.

“Did I tire you out last night?”

He wrapped his arms around her, “You’re too much.”

When he left to go home and off to sleep, Gen wondered what this change in their relationship would mean for them. She’d waited for so long to find the right person, and now that she had, she found herself wondering what was next? She didn’t know how to navigate a relationship on these new terms. But she knew someone who did.

She pulled out her phone and sent a text.

“Mira, call me when you’re free. I’ve got tea.”
At the dinner table that night Jon could feel Robb and Theon’s eyes on him. Hells, even his Dad was giving him a knowing smile.

“How was your trip Jon?” Sansa asked.

Jon wished he could just keep eating the roast to avoid any questions about what’d they done of the weekend. He didn’t trust himself to stay composed through their interrogation.

“It was nice. She got to show me the house she grew up in and her old hiking spots.”

Arya pushed her food around on her plate, “See any bears?”

Rickon perked up, “Henryk tells us they’re everywhere on the Island!”

“Thankfully we didn’t run into any. We mostly just relaxed and listened to music,” Jon explained.

Theon laughed, “Oh I bet you did a lot of relaxing together.”

Catelyn shot him a sharp glare and changed steered the topic away from anything that could scandalize her babies.

“Well it sounds like it was a nice weekend Jon. I’m sure Genevieve appreciated you coming with her,” she said.

Robb and Theon couldn’t hold in their laughter, clearly finding another interpretation to what she’d said.

“Boys, calm down,” Ned sighed. It was tough work raising seven children, let alone having a dinner without it erupting into chaos.

“Anyways, how’d your auditions go Sansa? Genevieve was telling me you and Mira were trying out for a play,” Jon said.

Sansa sat up straight and smiled, light filling her eyes, “Yes! We both got the parts we wanted. I’m going to playing the older sister.”

Arya scoffed, “As if you don’t play that role enough already.”

“Well we can’t wait to see the performance Sansa. I’m sure you two will be lovely up there,” Jon said.

After dinner Genevieve had called him really quick to ask if she’d mixed her wolf shirt in with his bags. He knew how much she loved the shirt, always saying it was her way of assimilating to Winterfell’s culture.
“Yep, I found it underneath my shoes in my bag when I was unpacking earlier and forgot to tell you. I can bring it over tomorrow Gen.”

“Thank you! I was worried I’d left it behind at the rental. Love you!”

“Love you too Gen, have a nice night,” he said hanging up.

Suddenly Robb and Theon were behind the couch making their presence known.

“Gods were you two there the entire time?”

Robb shrugged and threw himself down on the couch next to Jon, “Maybe.”

“So you guys told each other you loved each other? Big moves,” Theon smiled while bouncing his knee up and down. He never stayed still.

Jon threw his head back and sighed. Between the two of them, there were no secrets. In general, once one person in the family knew something, the rest of them did too. Robb naturally told Theon. And Theon would let it slip to Arya over one of their gossip sessions. And then Arya would tell Sansa, because as much as she liked to pretend they had nothing in common, she still loved sharing secrets with her sister. Eventually Sansa would tell Catelyn, who’d tell Ned, who’d accidentally repeat it in front of Bran and Rickon. And then everyone would be knee-deep in Jon’s business.

“Yep, we did,” Jon said.

He wasn’t ashamed to admit it, but he did wish he would've kept it to himself for just a while longer.

Robby patted him on the back, “Good on you Jon. I’m happy for you guys.”

Sansa walked into the room with her sewing and sat in the armchair. “What’s this about being happy?”

“Jon told Gen he loved her,” Robb said.

Their sister gasped, “Really Jon? Did she say it back?”

“She actually said it to me first, but don’t go spreading this around,” Jon said.

His siblings collectively rolled their eyes, “Who do you think I’m going tell, Roland?” Robb asked.

Jon sat up in his seat and leaned towards Robb, “Gods please don’t. I know he likes me, but I don’t want to risk anything.”

“So I take it this means did have fun this weekend,” Theon asked, stressing the word fun with a lilt in his voice.

“Oh shut it Theon, that’s private,” Sansa said.

Jon had an even better line in mind, “A lady never kisses and tells.”

His brothers erupted in laughter and patted him on the back with messages of congratulations.

And little did he know, that’s exactly what Genevieve was doing.
“Girl you have tea?” Mira asked when Gen picked up the phone.

Gen put her headphones in, “Just give me a second to run upstairs. I don’t want any of these weirdos eavesdropping on me.”

“It must be some good goss then! Remember that time Asher walked in when I was telling you about that guy in our math class that asked for my number?”

With her bedroom door shut behind her, Gen nestled into bed and said, “Oh my Gods I forgot about that. You were so red! How is that brother of yours anyway? I’m still mad at him for not meeting up with me when I was in Essos.”

“Wellllllll,” Gen started.

“Well what? You’re killing me over here.”

“We may have hooked up this weekend when we were in Bear Island.”

Mira clapped, “Oh my fucking Gods! Gen! How was it? Did it hurt?”

“It was very sweet! It hurt at first, but once we got in the swing of things I was doing just fine.”
“Oh I bet you were Gen! Was it awkward?”

Gen thought back to the fumbling the two of them had experienced when they first laid down. Initially she felt very unsure of herself and in her body, but then Jon had kissed her up and down and any trace of awkwardness had flown out the window.

“Not really. I trust him completely, so it felt sort of natural,” she explained.

Mira groaned, “Gods I need to get back in the game.”

“You’ve got Willas! Go get him girl.”

“Lunch at my boss’s place with him and his family wasn’t that bad actually,” Mira said.

“Yay! Did you feel comfortable or was it weird being with them outside of work?”

Mira thought back to the her dinner at Olenna’s mansion. The place was huge, and beautiful too. It was a large villa that overlooked one of their wineries. They’d eaten outside on a deck covered with vines under the sun. It had been beautiful and a meal full of laughter. Mira knew her boss was a sharp woman, but it really shined through when she was with her family.

“Willas kept checking in with me to make sure I was okay, which was really sweet. But I held my own during their questionings,” she explained.

“Couldn’t have been any worse than your interview for the company!”

“True! I think they were all just glad he’d brought someone home. Olenna, his grandma and my boss, kept saying it was a miracle.”

Gen couldn’t believe it, “But he’s a total catch? He must really be into you if he never brings anyone home.”

“That’s what I’m saying!” Mira smiled, “But then again, I suppose it was easier for him to bring me home since I already sort of knew everyone.”

“I don’t know Mira, I wouldn’t sell yourself short.”

Mira glanced down at the watch on her wrist, “I should really get to bed. But it was so great hearing your news! I’m so jealous!”

“I’m sure you’ll have a similar call for me in a month or so. Love you Mira!”

“Love you too Gen, use protection!”
Chapter 57

Gen was getting sick of Jon. He’d been showing her up their entire date, and looking impossibly good while doing it. It was like he’d been born with a sword, or whatever he called it, in his hands.

“Next time I see Arya, I’m cursing her for giving you his idea,” she said.

Jon took off his mask, “What can I say, I’m light on my feet!”

“Which doesn’t make any sense considering the muscles you’ve go on you!”

He smiled and threw a sweaty arm around her shoulder, “Don’t worry, we can stop sparring and get some food.”

“Thank the Gods. I’m so warm in this get up!”

Arya’s water dancing instructor, a Braavosi man named Syrio Forel, had given them a crash course which led to Jon dominating each match. Where Gen had the element of surprise on her side, Jon had speed and accuracy. She’d been no match for his skills.

On their way out Syrio called out to them, “And what do we say to the God of Death?”

“Not today!” they answered in return, shaking their heads at the eccentricities of the man.

“I can see why Arya likes him. The Braavosi culture is just so interesting,” Gen smiled. Her mood was much improved now that she was out of the getup that made her look like a snowman.

Jon laughed, “I think she’s just partial to an accent.”

They ended up at an arcade bar that claimed to serve the best wings in the North. It was an old-style wood paneled bar that looked like it’d been there for ages, updated with the inclusion of arcade games and pop-culture references.

The two of them sat down at corner table right next to the games so they could really immerse themselves in the experience.

“Can order my drink please Jon? I want to get warmed up,” she asked walking over to one of the games.

“I’ll let you get a head start. You want the usual?”

“Yes please, just the cherry one I like!”

He came back with the drinks and even some popcorn, amused by the way Gen was intensely staring at the screen and bouncing on her feet when the game got stressful.
Like he was her trainer, he put the drink under her mouth so she could take a sip without losing her concentration. He thought about running out to the store to buy her some sweatbands to really complete the look.

“Thanks Jon. Go jump on the machine next to me. You may have bested me with your water dancing skills, but I think I can do this.”

He did as she commanded and put coins into the machine, “I think you’re forgetting that for a good chunk of my childhood it was just Robb, Theon, and I messing around on video games before the younger kids came along.”

“And I think you’re forgetting that Roland was my only playmate until Amira was old enough to realize that eating her hands didn’t exactly count as fun.”

The two of them battled for a high score. She shot down monsters left and right, and Jon was especially good at knowing where to find power ups.

But even all the power ups in the world wouldn’t have been enough for Jon to win. She had an impressive ability to make the split second knee-jerk reactions required to rack up point in the game. And because of that, she’d won.

At the table Jon raised his drink in a toast, “I’ve got to hand it to you, you’ve got some skill.”

“What can I say, when Henryk was old enough to play, Roland was off at college so we got to improve our skills together,” she smiled.

While they ate the popcorn and listened to the old music playing through the speakers, the conversation turned to work.

“The notes are progressing okay. I finally finished with Pyke, thank Gods. And the rest of the Westeros sections are done, except the Wall.”

“I’m proud that you’ve gotten so much done, even if it means you’ll be leaving sooner,” he said.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be forcing you to come visit me as much as you can.”

Jon grabbed her hand from across the table, “You better start begging my dad for time off now.”

From behind him, Jon thought he heard his name. Gen leaned forward and whispered, “Don’t look now, but I think someone’s watching you?”

And Jon, ignoring her instruction whipped his head around anyways. Over by the bar Sam and Gilly were trying their best to look like they hadn’t been staring. Once they were caught, they walked over.

“Hi Jon, I didn’t know you’d be here,” Sam said.

Jon looked up at his friend and raised an eyebrow. “You tracking my location or something?”

“He wishes. We were just at the library and decided to stop by for a drink,” Gilly said.

Sam turned his attention to Gen who’d been sitting there enjoying the scene, “I’m Sam by the way, Jon’s friend.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Genevieve, Jon’s girlfriend,” she answered in a similar fashion.
Gilly and Sam shot each other a look and hummed, “Oh, so she’s the one you can’t stop talking about Jon? I’m Gilly, Sam’s girlfriend.”

Gen laughed and winked at Jon, “All good things I hope! Why don’t you guys take a seat and join us.”

Jon broke his silence, “So now that you’ve met her, you can interrogate her with all those questions you’ve been asking me.”

Across for Gen, Sam said, “So Jon tells me you’re working on a book?”

If putting notes together counted as working on a book, she supposed she was. Tyrion would be doing most of the writing, but she knew he’d let her put her mark on it. She just hoped he’d give her glowing praise in the acknowledgements at the end.

“Yeah. I just got back from Hardhome up beyond the Wall where I was doing research. It’s not my book, but I’ve been having a lot of fun collaborating on it with my boss.”

Gilly sat up, “Jon! You didn’t tell me she was going beyond the Wall?”

“Oh yeah, we actually were in your hometown for a bit. She spent a lot of time with the free folk up there,” Jon said.

Gen thought back to the villagers she’d met and found herself missing it. She needed to check in with Tormund at some point, and try to convince Sandor to do a show up there. It’d be a tough sell. He hated the “fucking” cold as he called it.

“What’d you do up there?” Sam asked.

“I had a contact in Hardhome and he showed me around to different aspects of their culture. I got the worst hangover of my life up there too playing a drinking game!”

Gilly nodded with a shudder, “Bear Paw?”

“Yeah, I’m never playing that again.”

Jon and Sam looked at each other, enjoying their girls bonding over their shared experiences.

Gen wracked her mind for details about Sam. She knew Jon had mentioned him, but she couldn’t quite remember when. While Jon relayed to Sam and Gilly the fur outfit she’d worn to the festival, she remembered.

“Jon tells me you host costume parties?”

Sam perked up with wide eyes, “Oh yes! We’ve got one planned for the end of the month if you’d like to come.”

“I’d love to. Ever since Jon mentioned it I’ve been dying to see him all dressed up.”

Gilly laughed, “Well you’re in for a treat. The theme this time is ‘Winter Is Coming,’ gotta dress like old Northerners.”

Jon would have to ask Sansa if he could help them make their costumes. She was always holed up in her sewing room working on something new.

“Oh my Gods that sounds fun! I’ll finally get to see Jon in a cape. Saw him with a sword earlier
when he kicked my ass water dancing,” she said.

“You weren’t that bad! I’ve just had more practice from sparring with Arya,” Jon said.

Sam smiled and held Gilly’s hand, “Well we’d love to have you both there, swords or not.”

When they left the bar Gen and Jon went wild with ideas for their outfits. She imagined a warrior queen outfit for herself while Jon was set on anything as long as it was black. He knew his color and was sticking with it.

Later, when Jon got home for the night he commissioned Sansa’s help.

“This is going to be fun,” she’d said as she fluttered about sketching out ideas on her whiteboard, “Tomorrow after drama maybe she could come over so I can take measurements!”

"Sounds like a plan Sans!"
Genevieve had been in many uncomfortable situations in her life, but having her boyfriend’s sister measure her bust in front of his family had to be pretty high up there. On the plus side, there’d been no need for her to measure the inseam.

“You’re all set Gen!” Sansa said.

Jon met her eyes and she started laughing. “Thanks Sansa. Just let me know what kind of fabric to pick up and I’ll get it,” she said once she’d caught her composure.

They were all in the living room hanging out after dinner. Catelyn had made another delicious meal, spaghetti and homemade meatballs. And Gen had managed to get through the dinner without spilling sauce all over herself. Rickon hadn’t been as lucky.

Arya had wanted to play cards, and her father wanted to oblige but he kept nodding off in his recliner. Her brothers were more than happy to play with her, slapping down the cards on the coffee table while Sansa took Gen’s measurements.

“If you want I can just come with you to pick them out,” Sansa said.

Gen was surprised the teenager wanted to hang out with her. It wasn’t like Amira was jumping to. But Gen liked Sansa, she was a sweet girl. She’d been nothing but polite since Jon had brought her into their family life.

“Sure Sansa. Maybe we can go next time I pick you and Amira up from school, I’m sure she’d like to come along too,” Gen said.

Jon smiled over at the two of them from where he was playing cards. He liked seeing his family interact with her. It made him feel at ease to see them receive her so well. That was a big reason he’d never brought Ygritte around, he was never sure if she’d say something too bold in front of them. Gen was bold, but not in a way that made people wince.

“Jon, you want to come shopping with us for your fabric?” she asked.

He put down his cards so his brothers wouldn’t peak. He didn’t have to worry about Arya, she could read his poker face either way. There was no use in hiding them from her.

“Sure! I don’t want to end up with some bright red leather,” he joked.

Gen pictured a fire-engine red doublet on him and laughed. It’d certainly be a look. If he could pull off those pink sweatpants, he could pull off anything.

Arya pushed his shoulder, “Jon it’s your turn.”

They dealt Gen and Sansa into their game. It was one of those games where you put a card down with a category, and you had to put down whatever card you thought fit it best.

Theon was the judge this time so she knew she’d have to put down something funny. The category one the table was “Pathetic.” Gen had the perfect card in mind and slid it into the pile.

“Looks like we’ve got some throwaways here,” Theon said as he read them.

“Who said ‘my love life’? Was it you Robb?” he asked.
Gen raised her hand sheepishly, “Guilty! Sorry Jon, I gotta do what I can to win the round.”

“She just called you out!” Bran said.

Jon rolled his eyes and kissed her to show them that their love life was anything but pathetic.

Rickon made a puking sound, and even Catelyn laughed.

With each round, they grew louder as they argued for their cards. Everyone thought that their card was the funniest, or the most clever. Eventually Ned stirred from his armchair and sat up quickly.

“What’s going on?” he asked confused. Gen knew where Jon got it from now.

“They’re just playing a card game Ned,” his wife explained. She was curled up on the couch doing a crossword while stealing glances at the kids having fun. Life was good.

Ned rubbed his eyes, “I thought for a second someone had broken in with all the chatter.”

“Just fighting over who’s going to win this next round dad,” Arya said.

Eventually, the game went to Bran. He was a very crafty player, never showy or loud. His strategy seemed to be quietly squirreling the most cards before any of his siblings could notice how many he had.

Once they finished the game Gen and Jon went down to his room to hang out. She noticed he had a new desktop background, a picture of the two of them at the top of the waterfall on Bear Island. She’d forgotten they’d even taken it. Their hair was wild in the picture, and their smiles wide.

“Aww Jon, I love this picture of us. Can you send it to me?”

He sat down on his bed, “Of course hon.”

“Now I don’t know about you, but I don’t feel like playing cards,” she smiled.

“Put on the music and get over here then.”

He loved having the basement to himself. And he loved his girl even more.
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

I am so hyped for the new episode tomorrow! I’m just a ball of excitement and nerves. I don’t want to see all the sad stuff that’s sure to come :,(

On her way to pick up Sansa and Amira from school, Gen called Sandor. It’d been weeks since they talked and she had so much to tell him. Between her time with Tormund and her life with Jon, she wanted to fill him in on all the good news. Before the left the Quiet Isle they promised each other, him more reluctantly, that they’d share good news with each other when it came to remind each other that nothing bad ever lasted forever.

“Genevieve, how’ve you been,” he said. His voice was gravely, like he’d just woke up or played a long show the night before.

“Hi Sandor, I’m doing well. Just picking my sister up from school. What are you up to?”

“Fun times. I’m just holed up in a shit motel in Storm’s End waiting for the next show.”

Gen could just picture him sprawled out on a bed too small for his body, feeting hanging off the end. He wasn’t exactly the type of person who could just kick back and relax. The man had a work ethic like no one she knew. If he wasn’t touring, he was building something. On the Isle he learned that he had a natural talent for woodworking and liked to do it to keep his mind off of things. He’d even made her a tiny puzzle of interlocking bears last year for her birthday.

“Did you play last night? Your voice sounds hoarse.”

He laughed, “Probably because I was barking at our manager. He wants to schedule another show but none of the guys want to fuck on over to Essos again.”

She saw her chance. “Oh, does it have to be in Essos? I know of an area in use of a visit from your beautiful voice.”

“What’s that, your house? I told you, I’ll do a house show for you someday when I’m done with the business,” he said.

He’d first promised her sometime after the Isle when she’d mentioned just how good his voice would sound at a more intimate concert. Hells, maybe he could perform at her kid’s first birthday party someday. That’d be one hell of a party.

“No, not this time,” she smiled, “I’m talking about north of the Wall.”

He scoffed, “What? So I can freeze my balls off?”

She laughed as she pulled into the parking lot at the school. She was early and they wouldn’t be outside for a couple minutes. Having been out of high school for so long Genevieve felt sorry for the poor souls who had to endure it. She couldn’t understand how she’d ever gotten up so early and stayed so late.
“No Sandor, so you can make some fans dreams come true. When I was up there my host, a guy about as tall as you, was wishing you’d play up there.”

“Did you tell him you know me?”

“What? And ruin all the fun?” Gen laughed.

He sighed, “Fine, I’ll suggest it. But you better come up for it if I have to go up there and freeze to death for a bunch of wildlings.”

“Sandorrre they’re called free folk! But if you perform I’ll be there front row.”

She filled him in on the recent happenings with the book, and briefly mentioned that things with Jon were doing great.

“They better be. I told him I’ll kill him if he hurts you. I mean it,” he grunted.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m sure you’d have to wait in line with the rest of my family.”

“Anyways, I should probably head to practice. I can’t sit in this fucking motel for a second longer.”

“Okay, good luck at your show tonight. Miss you!” she said.

“Miss you too, stay out of trouble.”

When they hung up Mira and Sansa came running up to the car and pulled on the handles, scaring the life out of her. Kids these days…

She unlocked the door and glared at her sister. Amira knew better than to sneak up on her like that. Gen was the type to jump when she opened the front door, even if she knew that someone was on the other side.

“Hello to you too,” she said rolling her eyes.

Sansa buckled her seatbelt and asked, “I thought Jon was coming with us?”

“He’s leaving work now but he’ll meet us at the fabric store.”

Sure enough, when they pulled into the parking lot his SUV was there and he was sitting in the car looking at his phone.

Gen’s phone began to ring with a call from none other than the curly-haired cutie in the car.

“Hi Gen, I’m here. How far out are you?”

She decided it was her time to have some fun. “Almost there, Sansa says five minutes.”

“Tell the girls I say hi!”

“Will do babe, see you soon.”

Sansa and Amira had already seen Jon’s car and started approaching it. “Let’s sneak up on him like you guys did to me. But nothing too scary,” she suggested.

Jon had told Gen all about the prank wars between the Stark siblings. Apparently Sansa was quite good at in her quiet way.
The girls crouched down and walked over to the car, earning some curious stares from customers passing by. And just as he was focused on his phone, they popped up and knocked on the window.

His reaction sent them into a fit of giggles. He fumbled with his phone, losing control over his hands and dropping it into his lap. His hands tightened into fists and he rose them protectively over his face until he realized who they were.

Sansa opened the car door and laughed at her brother. “Gods Jon! What were you going to do, punch us through the glass?”

He took a second to catch his breath and stuck his tongue out at them. “Almost made me piss myself you jerks.”

“Sorry babe, we couldn’t resist,” Gen said as he stepped out of the car.

Jon played hard to get for a second before taking her hand. She reached up and gave him a kiss for his troubles.

Amira and Sansa coughed, “PDA.”

They laughed and broke apart. “Fine, fine. Let’s go pick out this fabric,” Jon said.

Sansa was in heaven. The fabric store was like her home away from home. Most of the employees knew her by name, and some even told her they’d set products away just with her in mind.

She brought them to the back of the store where the quirkier fabrics were. There was bolt after bolt of fake fur and leather for Jon’s choosing. Luckily for Gen, she could get away with just a simply woven fabric and use the offcuts of Jon’s leather for her costume’s belt.

“Now I recommend this type Jon because I don’t think my machine can handle anything thicker. Unless you want me to hand sew for historical accuracy,” Sansa said pointing to a dark leather.

“Sansa, whatever you recommend I’ll get. You’re the expert,” he said.

Amira ran her hands over some of the fake fur and said, “She really is. I think the costume department is thinking about stealing her for the next play.”

Gen looked over at the section Amira had pointed out to her. She and Sansa had been talking over the designs and both felt that a darker color was more historically accurate. But Gen didn’t really care much what she wore, as long as she looked badass.

“What do you guys think of this one?” Gen asked pointing at a grey-blue fabric.

Sansa ran her hands over it, “Oh this is a lovely weave. I think it’d look great with your coloring.”

Amira agreed, saying that blue was her color. All the Norward siblings had dark hair and grey-blue eyes. Despite their paleness brought about the northern climate, cool tones really worked on all of them.

When the were all rung up Gen wished Jon wasn’t in another car. Sansa had gone with him leaving her with Amira. It wasn’t a bad thing, but she missed his company.

“How have things been at school?” she asked her sister.

Amira looked up from the book she’d been reading and said, “Same old same old. Rehearsals have been stressing me out.”
“How much longer until the show?”

She sighed, “About a month and a half. Will you be able to come with all your book stuff?”

Gen heard the little sister she remembered in the way she asked her question. Growing up, Gen had been like a tiny mother to her sister, always letting her follow her around while her parents were busy with work. But then as they both got older they’d lost a bit of that.

“Oh, course, I wouldn’t miss it. I’ll fly back up so I can you kick ass up there,” Gen smiled.

Her sister perked up, “Just wait until you see the play. I actually do have some fighting scenes!”

When they got home Gen saw a text from Sandor saying his boss loved the idea of a concert at the Wall. Apparently he thought it could be a good morale boost for the soldiers up there, and an even better PR stunt. Sandor wasn’t a fan of PR, but he told her he was good for his word and she could pass it along to her little free folk friend.

Gen texted Tormund feeling giddy with the news.

“Rumor is The Hound is coming up to the Wall for a show. Not sure when, but tickets are on me. You better bring your ass down there for it.”

His response came later in the day once he got out of work. And it’d been well worth the wait.

“Holy FUCK!!!!!! I don’t even care if I have to sing along with some bloody crows, I’ll fucking be THERE. You’re the best.”
Both Gen and Jon went into Valentine’s day with the intention of making it perfect. They both wanted to show just how much they cared about the other, and had plans to do so. But as the old saying goes, when you make plans, the Gods laugh.

Gen stayed up late the night before making the chocolate cupcakes that Jon had been craving for days. She picked up some pasta from the store and headed to the office hoping they could enjoy a nice lunch together.

She saw Ned pouring himself a cup of coffee when she walked into the office. He was wearing a red tie and heart shaped pin that must’ve came from Catelyn. He didn’t strike her as someone who picked out his own outfits.

“Hi Mr. Stark. Happy Valentine’s day,” she smiled.

“Hello Genevieve, I’m guessing you heading up to see Jon?”

“Well, that’s what I was thinking. Well go enjoy lunch with Jon, I know he’s excited to see you.”

In Jon’s office he presented her with a bouquet of daisies. They were gorgeous but there was just one little problem.

He pulled her in for a kiss and thanked her for the cupcakes, “I wasn’t sure what kind of flowers you liked, but I thought these were pretty.”

She loved the gesture but found herself unable to hold in her sneezes, “They’re great Jon, but you might want to pass them off to someone else in the office. I’m afraid I’m allergic.”

“Oh shit, I’m so sorry. I’ll go give them to my Dad, he’s always saying he needs to brighten up his office,” Jon said rushing out the door.

When he came back they squeezed onto the tiny loveseat in his office and ate their pasta. It was perfectly cooked and Gen found herself wondering why she even bothered cooking if she could buy stuff that tasted that good.

The two of them had decided earlier in the week that they didn’t want to do anything fancy to
celebrate. Instead, they were content with spending the night at Jon’s places and enjoying each other’s company. Neither of them felt like being stuck in a busy restaurant when they could be wrapped up in each other’s arms in bed instead.

Jon tried a cupcake and paused a second before chewing. She noticed his eyes seemed to be watering a bit as he ate.

“Are you okay Jon?”

He swallowed hard, “Yep, I’m great!”

She saw through his lies and decided to try one of the cupcakes herself. They were awful. She spit out her first bite into the trash can.

“Gods Jon how are you eating these!”

“I didn’t want to offend you,” he said with a small smile.

“I must’ve put salt instead of sugar. I made them at like two in the morning after I finished up the Sunspear section of my notes,” she sighed.

He wrapped his arm around her and laughed, “Well on the plus side, the frosting is still really good!”

She shook her head and found herself wondering how she’d managed to find someone so sweet. That cupcake was disgusting, if he was willing to stomach his way through that, he really was a keeper.

After he got out of work Gen threw on her best pair of pajamas and headed over to his house. In line with their no stress Valentine’s Day, they both agreed that it was a pjs only event.

She found Jon in the kitchen busy at the stove. He was sitting down looking through the oven door wearing his flannel pajamas and a pink t-shirt.

“Whatcha doing down there babe?” she said putting her bags on the counter. She’d picked up more chocolate cupcakes, this time from a bakery, along with with some rice that she’d made for dinner.

“Oh, just making sure the chicken is cooking alright,” he said standing up to give her a hug hello.

“I should get you a chef’s hat.”

“I think I need a chauffeur hat first,” he laughed.

When the chicken was done, and at the perfect temperature Jon might add, they sat down at the kitchen counter and dug in. They didn’t have cloth napkins or fancy wine. But they had each other’s company and that was all they wanted.

“To us,” Gen toasted with a glass of $10 wine they’d picked out together the other day.

“To us love.”

They didn’t even make it ten minutes into their meal before his siblings trickled in, looking for something to eat. They’d made plenty for everyone so they didn’t mind, but eating with his siblings didn’t exactly set the mood. Robb and Theon had gone out for the night to some club, explaining that it was the perfect night to pick up girls.

“Why aren’t you guys out on the town?” Arya asked as she cut into her chicken.
“We wanted a quiet night in. It’s too busy out tonight,” Gen explained.

Sansa broke into a story about how a girl at school had received a giant bouquet of flowers and have been lording it over everyone at school.

“Knowing her, she probably bought them for herself,” she scoffed.

Arya said, “I’m sure she’ll be bragging tomorrow about how this secret admirer took her out to dinner.”

Rickon bemoaned the loss of Valentine’s day cards and treats now that he was a middle schooler. “I miss the candy, why does getting older mean less candy?”

“Beats me, it should be illegal,” Jon laughed.

This time, they all enjoyed the cupcakes. Bran ended up with chocolate all over his face and Rickon kept trying to sneak another. She’d bought enough for the whole family, so there was plenty to go around. But she knew Catelyn wouldn’t be too pleased if she came home and found her boys too hyped up on sugar to go to sleep.

She and Jon retreated to the basement and threw on a movie. He’d gotten a tiny projector for Christmas and now he was able to project things on the wall opposite from his bed. It was just like the movies but better because they could be in their jammies.

Cuddled up against him Gen let out a sigh, “I’m so content right now.”

Jon felt the same. They’d both been working hard lately and it felt good to just do nothing and let their brains rest. Doing it together was just another added bonus.

“I love my little cuddle-bug,” he said pulling her closer.

They watched their silly rom-com until they decided to make some romance of their own. Gen climbed on top of him and kissed him silly. His hands played at the hem of her shirt and reached higher with blissful smiles on both of their faces. They were half undressed when a knock came on his door.

She rolled off him and threw a blanket over herself. Thankfully, Jon only had to put his shirt on.

Gen started laughing, “Fuck that was close.”

Jon opened the door and Bran was there panting, “Uh sorry but Rickon and I were trying to cook some bacon and now the stove is smoking and we don’t know what to do.”

They ran up the stairs, and sure enough the bacon had caught on fire.

Arya and Sansa were nowhere to be found, the boys probably scared they’d snitch.

Jon didn’t even stop to think before he opened the over door, grabbed the flaming tray with gloved hands and ran out the back door.

Gen was too stunned to know what to do. The boys just sat there with frowns, mourning the loss of their bacon.

Their brother threw the tray into the snow and came back in breathing heavy. He wasn’t pleased.

“Your mother told you not to use the oven! What were you two thinking?” he asked with his hands
on his hips.

Rickon was cheeky, “We were thinking that’d we’d eat some bacon.”

Gen had to muffle her laugh into Jon’s blanket.

Jon wasn’t amused, “Well don’t do that again unless one of us knows and is supervising. We don’t need anyone getting hurt or the house burning down.”

Bran and Rickon sobered up and apologized, “Sorry Jon.”

“Just don’t let it happen again.”

Jon grabbed her hand and brought her back to his room.

“They’re going to be the death of me someday,” he sighed.

“You’re good with them.”

He looked up at her and she wrapped him up with the rest of the blanket, “I mean it. You handled that well. I just froze up when I saw the fire.”

“Well I hope it didn’t put out our fire,” he said kissing her neck.

Despite all the mishaps of the day and screwed up plans, their passion for each other was stronger.
Jon woke the next morning to Genevieve nestled to his chest, just where she belonged. She had curled up small in the night and tucked the blanket around her head so only her face was peaking out. Jon never wanted the moment of bliss to end, didn’t want to disturb her peace by getting up for work.

But his clock kept ticking and if he didn’t get up now he’d have to rush to get ready. He decided to forgo a shower, figuring his curls were going to be wild no matter what he did. He didn’t regret staying up so late with Gen, but his body did.

He snuck upstairs and put the kettle on. He was going to need something to get him through the day. The rest of the house was blanketed in a peaceful silence. He must have just missed the kids heading off to school, those poor souls.

While he waited for the kettle to come to a boil he walked over to the screen door and stretched. The sun was rising high in the sky and it looked like the spring might actually come. Although he’d always felt at home in the snow, he wanted to show Genevieve all that Winterfell summers had to offer.

The kettle whistled and he poured himself a mug of hot chocolate.

“Can you pour me one too?” Gen asked from behind him.

She was still wrapped up in the blanket, letting it trail behind her like a cape.

“I didn’t wake you, did I?”

He poured her a mug and she sipped it quickly, not even caring if she’d burn her tongue. That was her in a nutshell, diving head first into things without fear, or at least it seemed that way to him.

She sat down with him over by the sliders and sighed, “Nope. I think I just missed your warmth though. You’re like a little heater.”

“It was pretty hard leaving you when I got out of bed. I just wanted to stay there forever.”

They leaned against each other and watched the sun climb higher in the sky. The birds were chirping and the world was waking up around them. But for that moment, they were the only two people on earth.

That is, until Robb came downstairs holding his head.

“Hot water in the kettle if you want it,” Jon said.

“Thanks Jon. I’m so hungover, I think Theon might even call out. I had to drag him out of the taxi last night.”

Gen was so glad she and Jon hadn’t gone out. She felt like a grandma to think it, but she was getting too old for nights out on the town. Or maybe it was just the winter blues saying that.

He sat down with them at the table and rested his head against a placemat. Gen liked that his family
had accepted her so easily into their home, like they didn’t have any reason to be cautious of her. There was practically no stress.

“Did Dad leave yet?” Robb asked.

Jon checked his watch, “I’m not sure. But probably.”

“Fuck I was going to ask him if he could drive me. My head is killing me.”

“I can bring you, don’t worry. I’ll go get dressed,” Jon said.

Robb thanked him and dropped his head back down on the table.

“Do you want me to get you a glass of water?” Gen asked.

He lifted his head and she got a glimpse of his bloodshot blue eyes, “That’d be amazing. Thank you Gen.”

When she came back, he downed the water and seemed to be more alert. “How was your Valentine’s Day with Jon?” he asked.

“It was nice. We cooked dinner together and then watched a movie,” she smiled.

Jon came running up the stairs ready for work as Robb was asking them what they ate.

“Just some chicken and rice. They’re probably leftovers if you want any for lunch,” she said.

Robb pulled himself up from the table and paused to look outside, “What the hell is that oven tray doing out there?”

Gen and Jon shared a look.

“Let’s just say Bran and Rickon tried cooking,” Jon said.

Robb was glad he hadn’t been there to witness it. His mom was going to freak out when she found out, if she did.

Before they left for work Jon kissed Gen on the cheek with a hug and said, “Stay as long as you like. Love you.”

“Love you too, hope work isn’t too bad.”

Gen felt weird being in the house without him. It was just so big to walk around alone in. She decided instead of just sitting there waiting for time to pass, she’d clean up a bit. She started in his room by making the bed and finished by doing the dishes.

And that’s how Catelyn found her trying to scrub the burn bits of bacon off the tray they’d flung outside.

“Good morning Genevieve. Did the boys leave for work yet?”

Gen stepped away from the sink quickly, “Good morning Mrs. Stark. They just headed out. I thought I’d clean up a little bit before I left.”

Catelyn was graceful even in the morning. She was all poise and posture while Genevieve felt like a slug in yesterday’s outfit.
“You don’t have to do that. I can manage,” she said.

Gen deferred to Catelyn’s wishes and wiped her hands on a towel. “Did you enjoy your Valentines?”

Catelyn poured herself a cup of coffee and smiled, “I did. Ned bought me a beautiful necklace.”

“Oh how thoughtful. Jon and I had a quiet night in. It was nice.”

The silence hung in the air for a second, like Catelyn was processing something only she could understand.

Eventually she said, “So he makes you happy?”

“Yeah, totally. He’s a very sweet person. You and Mr. Stark did a good job raising him,” Gen said. She hoped she hadn’t overstepped her bounds.

Catelyn only paused for a second biting her tongue, “I’m glad to hear it. It wasn’t easy raising them all, especially in those first couple of years.”

Gen wanted to hear more, but it wasn’t her place to ask. Jon would tell her when she was ready. But she did feel something else hiding behind her story.

“I can’t even imagine. I still don’t know how my parents did it with the four of us,” Gen laughed.

Her coldness broke into a smile, “It’s not easy being a mother.”

Gen wondered what more was meant by that as she went about her day. She knew Jon wasn’t Catelyn’s, nor was Theon. But there seemed to be something different between the way Catelyn and Jon interacted. It was stilted. But why?

It hurt her inside to think that Jon had been treated differently. Theon was adopted, so it wasn’t like Jon was the only kid who wasn’t hers. Unless it had to do more with the fact that he was Ned’s. She didn’t know, but it hurt her heart thinking that Jon was ever treated with less love than he deserved.

She spent the rest of her day working through her journals until it was dark out. She’d finished up with Westeros and was half way done with Essos. She needed to let Tyrion know. And Jon.

Chapter End Notes

Soooooo what’d you all think about the new episode? At this point I feel like being pro-white walker will cause the least amount of pain. So much drama already!
Chapter 62

Chapter Notes

Hope everyone is having a beautiful day! I'm on my lunch break after class (and before work) and I'm having a good time!

Jon was sitting with her working on a writing a song when she finished up her notes.

“I’m done!” she said. She closed her laptop shut and stood up to dance around the dining room. Her hands had been aching from all the typing she’d been doing.

Jon stopped writing and pulled her into a hug. “Congrats Gen. You’ve been working so hard.”

She smiled up at him and said, “Thanks hon. I should ask Tyrion for a raise.”

“I’d say you deserve it!”

She opened her laptop again and showed him how many pages her notes turned out to be. Jon couldn’t believe all the work she’d put into the book. She was brilliant.

“So it’s about a hundred pages of notes so far! I think he’s aiming for the book to be around three hundred,” she explained.

Jon couldn’t wait to get his hands on a copy and brag about how amazing she was to everyone he knew. He was going to buy everyone a copy for Christmas.

“That’s amazing Gen. You’re going to be famous!”

Gen laughed, “It’s his name going on the book, not mine. Although I fully expect a glowing thank you in the acknowledgements section.”

“Well either way, it’ll still be yours in my mind.”

Jon went to go pour her a celebratory glass of wine while she emailed Tyrion. She was more than relieved to finish up with the notes, but with that door closing, another one had opening with a bunch of things she’d been trying to avoid.

“Notes are done!”

Tyrion’s reply came fast. He was always checking his phone, for Gods know what. Genevieve remembered him even taking a call during the middle of a lecture.

Jon came back with the wine as she opened up his email. He tried not to pry, but he couldn’t help read it over her shoulder.

“Awesome! Now get down here ASAP, I just squared away where you’ll be staying. It’s right down the street from my office,” he sent.

Gen was too focused on the pictures of the apartment to toast with Jon. She took a deep sip and turned to him.
“Look at this place! It must cost a fortune,” she said.

It was so beautiful it almost made Jon forget that she’d be leaving Winterfell. It was just a one bedroom flat, but the view was breathtaking. The walls were white and the furniture fresh. Genevieve had always been fond of minimal design, especially on her travels. It helped her think better.

She couldn't decide if the best feature was the large shower or the balcony that overlooked the clear blue waters of Casterly Rock. It looked more like a vacation rental than a place to work. But she knew Tyrion, he liked the finer things in life. He’d let her choose her accommodations while she traveled, which usually meant the cheapest hostel she could find, but if he had it his way she’d stay in only the finest hotels. But she didn’t believe that was any way to get a feel for the culture of places.

Jon was ecstatic for her, truly. “Gen you’re going to be living it up down there!”

She jumped around in her chair, “I know! I can’t wait for you to visit so we can experience it together.”

“Just imagine watching the sunset on that balcony.”

She grabbed his arm and smiled wide, “Or swimming in the sea!”

“I’ve never done it before,” Jon said.

“Well we’ll change that, don’t worry!”

Jon could just picture her dragging him into the water like a siren. He’d follow her to the bottom of the ocean if she asked.

“I’m sure you’ll be the Queen of Casterly Rock before you know it. When does he want to head down?”

Gen winced and took a sip of the wine. She didn’t want to think about it, no matter how exciting the opportunity was.

“Well he says as soon as possible, but I’ve got some wiggle room. I’m not missing Sam’s party so probably a couple days after that so I have time to pack.”

Jon put on a brave face, “Sounds like a plan! And again, don’t worry about leaving. We’ll be able to stay in touch. Thank the Gods for technology.”

“I should send a robot with a screen of my face to keep you company,” she laughed.

He shuddered. “Gods no. Only you, no substitutes.”

As much as he appreciated technology’s role in making his life easy, he was extremely cautious of it. He didn’t want some robot tricking him into thinking it was his girlfriend. That plot was straight out of a sci-fi horror movie.

Their conversation turned to all the things she’d have to pack for her trip, and all the fun things she could do while she was there. Jon tried his best to get her excited to go. He knew it would make it easier for her to leave. He didn’t want to see her sad and weepy at the airport. He wanted to see her smile.
Jon’s attempts worked. He’d reminded her that she’d only be a short flight to Mira and have access to one of the more beautiful coastlines in the world. For someone who grew up on an island, that was a big selling point. She hadn’t been able to swim since she was in Essos. And no, she didn’t count that horrible ice plunge Tormund had made her do. That wasn’t swimming, it was torture.

Later that night she got a jump start on her packing. She wouldn’t need to bring any of the clothes she wore in Winterfell so it made the process easier. It was a change from her previous trips because before she’d only allowed herself one backpack to avoid having to lug around heavy luggage. But now she would be able to stay someplace for a change.

She packed sundresses and plenty of bathing suits, also remembering to throw in a couple of sun hats to protect her skin. She hadn’t been blessed with Tyrion’s ability to get golden in the sun.

While she packed Jon sat at his desk trying to put his feelings onto paper. He was happy for her, truly, but he couldn’t ignore the sense of loss he was feeling. And she hadn’t even left yet. How would he feel when she actually did? He was supposed to stay strong for her while she forged new paths in the world. He didn’t want her to have to worry about how he was coping back in Winterfell.

So instead of burdening her with his own fears, he wrote. He poured out every anxiety into his journal and tried his best to turn it into something beautiful. Eventually he came up with a poem that captured the bittersweet emotions he was dealing with. But he wouldn’t ever show it to her.

His worries could wait. He was a firm believer in communication, but sometimes things were better left unsaid. Besides, why borrow troubles that weren’t even sure to come?
Amira was yanking a hairbrush through Gen’s hair when Jon came into their house dressed for the party.

Gen winced until she saw her brave lord approach, “Oh Jon! Sansa did an amazing job with the costume. You look like you were born to wear that.”

He knelt beside her chair and rested his borrowed sword on the ground, “I offer my services Lady Genevieve. I will shield your back and keep your counsel and give my life for yours if need be. I swear it by the Old Gods and the New.”

Behind her, Amira started giggling as she tugged her sister’s hair into a complicated braid.

“Oh Gods, this really squash my plans to be your sworn shield,” Gen smiled.

She fumbled for a second and pulled up the response on her phone, reading, “And I vow that you shall always have a place by my hearth, and meat and mead at my table. And I pledge to ask no service of you that might bring dishonor. I swear it by the Old Gods and the New. Arise.”

He stood up with a goofy smile and a bow. Amira secured her braid so she was free to stand. And stand she did, as she pulled him into a kiss, grabbing hold of his cloak.

“You’re such a goofball,” she said.

He replied putting on a thick Northern accent, “Aye, but I’m your goofball Lady Norward.”

Genevieve’s mother walked in to take pictures before they went off to the party.

“Oh my Gods! You two look amazing! I swear Gen you look like a Northern Queen. And Jon, what can I say!” she gushed.

Gen curtsied, “And he just laid down his sword and vowed to be my sworn shield.”

Her mother raised an eyebrow, “Oh really. Thank you Lord Stark for taking care of my daughter.”

With the pictures taken, and her mother promising to show her father over dinner (along with all her Faceless friends...), Gen and Jon left for the party.

The two of them arrived at Sam and Gilly’s ready to have fun and ready to stay in character.

Sam answered the door wearing maester’s chains and the traditional robes, “Good evening Lady Genevieve, Lord Stark.”

“Thank you for accepting us into your home Maester Tarly,” Jon said.

Sam cracked a smile and invited them in to have salt and bread — as guest right required. Sam and Gilly had really outdone themselves with the decorations. All the lights had been switched off and replaced with candles placed around the room. And although technology seemed to be absent, music fitting to the time period played through the speakers.

And it wasn’t just salt and bread that was offered, but a feast for the stomach (and the senses). On a large table covered in rich green fabrics, there were platters of food fit for a king. And Jon and Gen were more than happy to contribute their bottles of wine to the spread.
It was a packed house, full of Sam and Gilly’s many friends they’d collected over the years. Jon recognized many people he’d have to introduce Genny too, and several he’d not met himself. Once they nibbled on a bit of food, they found their hostess in the living room.

“Lady Gilly, this feast is a credit to you,” Gen said with a curtsy.

Gilly smiled and raised a goblet, “Why thank you Lady Genevieve. I do hope you enjoy the games we have planned for the night.”

And they had. Together with Jon, she’d played a strategy board game that’d taken quite some time. Of course, she’d sent her sworn sword off to find food periodically. Together, they managed to conquer the seven kingdoms, although they didn’t have much interest in conquering Essos.

After their victory, Jon introduced her to a friend with shoulder-length hair and a reddish beard. He was dressed in a similar fashion as Jon, but was a wiry man.

“Gen, this is my old buddy Edd,” Jon said.

“It’s nice to meet you Edd. Nice cloak.”

The man knelt down and kissed her hand, keeping in fashion with the party’s theme. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. Not so much a pleasure to see this oaf again.”

Jon put his hand on the pummel of his sword and laughed, “Don’t try to steal my girl Tollett.”

Edd put his hand to his heart, “My condolences Lady Gen. It hadn’t realized you had befallen such a fate with this man.”

“I warn you. My sword isn’t just for decoration Lord Tollet,” she said putting her arm around her boyfriend with a smile winning a friendly laugh from Edd.

The two of the went off to the snack table to forage for more food and ran into Sam again.

“Thank you for a such a lovely party Maester Tarly,” Gen said after she’d loaded her plate up again.

Jon contented himself with more wine and clapped his friend’s back, “It truly is.”

“Well, we had cause for celebrating,” Sam smiled with a pink blush covering his cheeks.

Both of them wondered what the celebration could be, Jon knew there hadn’t been any promotions for Sam or Gilly. But then again, sometimes just having your friends around you was celebration enough.

Gilly yelled out to the party, “Lords, Ladies, Maesters, Knights, and whatever else showed up at our doorstep, please join us in the living room for a special announcement.”

Sam downed the rest of his wine and looked to Jon, “Well here goes nothing!”

They filed into the living room, where most of them had plopped to the floor when there was no seating. It made Gen giggle to see all these seriously dressed people sitting on the floor like children.

Sam swung his arm around Gilly and smiled at their friends, “Well I’m sure all of you expected this to be just another one of our costume parties but we’ve got a surprise. Gilly?”

Gilly raised her glass higher and said, “We’re getting married!”
“Tonight!” Sam added.

All of their friends cheered and crowded the couple with their congratulations. Jon was stunned.

“Did you see that coming?” Gen asked.

“Well I always knew they’d get married someday, but I didn’t expect it like this.”

Sam made his way through the crowd to find Jon. Jon didn’t even let him say anything before pulling him into a hug.

“Congrats mate! I’m so happy for you two.”

“Thanks Jon. Do you mind being my best man tonight? Gilly’s got one of her sisters so I don’t want to look like a weirdo up there alone,” Sam asked.

Gen had to hold in her a squeal of delight at the display of friendship.

“Of course Sam, I’d be honored.”

And that’s how Jon found himself next to his best friend, staring out at his girlfriend, while the make-do officiant pronounced Sam and Gilly husband and wife.

“I am hers and she is mine, from this day until the end of my days,” Sam recited with Gilly. And while they made their sacred bond, Gen found herself tearing up. Jon’s gaze at her through the ceremony had made her heart thump with an ache she’d never felt before. His stare felt like home.

And when the ceremony was over and they all celebrated in excess, she wondered if she and Jon would ever have a happy ending like that. Jon celebrated with his friend, drinking until his cheeks turned pink and Gen had to drive them home.

On the car ride back Jon was all smiles and declarations of love. But one in his drunken haze made her pause.

“Gen? Do you think we could ever have something like that?”

And although she knew he wouldn’t remember in the morning she replied, “I hope so Jon, I really do.”
Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

Hoping I’ll be able to post the next couple of days. Not sure how much time I’ll have with Easter.

A day after Gilly and Sam had pledged themselves to each other for life, Gen and Jon took a walk in the Godswood. The persistent blades of grass were starting to poke through the thin covering of snow, making way for a more colorful world. Spring was in the air and already Jon’s family motto was fading into the background.

Genevieve was set to leave the next day, but the two of them were determined to make use of every last second they had together. Jon wanted to make sure she knew just how much he loved and cared for her before she left on her trip.

As they walked to the Heart Tree, Jon held her hand and pointed out old spots from his childhood.

“Robb, Theon, and I used to climb that tree when we were kids to spy on my Dad when he would sit out by the Heart Tree,” he said.

Gen looked up at the towering tree and wondered how in the world the boys ever survived their childhood.

“Could you even hear him?”

“Not in the slightest. But now that I look back on it, I’m not sure I’d want to. He always looked so sad about something.”

She wondered what the man with smile lines around his eyes could have been sad about.

They sat by the Heart Tree and leaned against each other. The pool of water had defrosted and was still, save for the gentle whispers of wind disturbing it.

“I love coming out here with you,” she sighed.

“I do too. It’s like I can forget about everything else and just enjoy the peace with my favorite person by my side.”

She was someone’s favorite person and she couldn’t believe it. But she felt the same about him, her steady reminder that things were true and beautiful in the world.

“Do you think we’ll lose this when I go away? This closeness?” she asked.

Jon sat up straighter and got a good look of her, sitting there with gloom overtaking her face.

“I pray we don’t. And I’ll try my best to prove that to you.”

“I hope you’re right. They do say absence makes the heart grow fonder, so we’ll just have to hold onto that,” she sighed.
“And lots of video chats and visits!”

The two of them sat there until their bums went numb from the frosted ground, praying silents for all the things they hoped from life. Jon prayed for peace, for Genevieve, for his family — thanking the Gods for all the wonderful things they’d given him in life. And Genevieve thanked the Gods for all the opportunities and people she’d been blessed with, praying to the Gods that they wouldn’t take them away from her.

She stayed the night at Jon’s so she could be away from the luggage waiting for her in her bedroom. She didn’t need another reminder that everything was about to change once again.

During his family dinner, they tried their best not to probe her with questions, sensing that she was feeling a little funny about leaving once again. Jon had made them promise before she came up the stairs to be on their best behavior.

Catelyn had made homemade macaroni and cheese, a favorite of Gen’s, but she barely touched her food. She had no appetite for it, which wasn’t uncommon right before a trip. Her nerves usually forced her to eat small portions.

“So Gen, what’s the name of your professor you’re working with?” Ned asked.

Catelyn hurried to say, “He’s been forgetting to ask you.”

But Gen didn’t mind the questions like Jon thought she would. If anything, they helped her get used to what was about to come.

“His name is Tyrion Lannister. You may know him from his book on the politics of King’s Landing. It was pretty popular a couple of years ago,” she said.

Ned dropped his fork and looked at Catelyn. There was something unspoken in the glance that the rest of them weren’t privy to.

Even Arya was curious, “Do you know him Dad?”

He cleared his throat, “Not exactly. I knew his family many years ago, long before any of you were born.”

Gen would have to ask Jon about it later.

“Well we hope you have a great time working with him Genevieve. This will be a great experience for you,” Catelyn said with a rare hint of a smile.

“Thank you Mrs. Stark. He’s a wonderful person to work with, I have no doubt it’ll be a fun time.”

“Not to mention all the things you can do at the Rock to goof off,” Theon said.

She laughed, “Don’t worry, I have every intention of exploring the city and going for swims in the water when I’m not working.”

“You should write a little blog while you’re there so everyone can keep up with you,” Bran said.

Jon intervened, “Don’t want to stress her out with another thing to do bud.”

“No, no. That sounds like a great idea Bran. It’d be a lot easier to do that than trying to call everyone and tell them what I’ve been up to,” she smiled.
“And you can post pictures!” Sansa said.

Gen was getting excited by the idea. She could picture a sleek blog full of travel photos and memories. Someday she’d look back on the blog and be very grateful she’d documented the trip.

Before dinner ended, Robb rushed off to the kitchen to grab something. He came back with a beautiful vanilla cake with blue roses on it. On it, the words “Good luck Gen!” were written on it.

She turned to Jon, “Was this your idea?”

“Nope, it was all them.”

“Aw thanks everyone. It was very sweet of you to do this, you really didn’t have to,” she said.

Robb laughed, “We wanted to. Besides, it gave us an excuse to eat cake.”

“Just think of it as a little thank you for making Jon so happy,” Ned added.

She noticed how Catelyn’s smile didn’t quite meet her eyes. What was her deal?

Later that night when their bellies were full of cake, Jon and Genevieve laid in his bed looking up at the glow in the dark stars on his ceiling.

“I’ve really got to get me some of these for my room,” she said.

“I’ve had them up there since I moved into this room.”

She pulled the blanket over them, “And when was that?”

“Sometime after Bran was born. I figured Catelyn could use my room as a nursery,” he said.

Gen wanted to ask him more about her, but was it the right time? The voice in her mind told her not to pry, to wait for him to bring it up. But when was the last time she really listened to that voice?

“Uh Jon, you don’t have to answer if it’s too personal, but what’s the deal with you and Catelyn?”

She felt him stiffen besides her and regretted asking instantly.

“In all honesty, I don’t know. She’s probably just pissed that my Dad had a kid with someone who wasn’t her,” he sighed.

“But that’s not your fault. It’s not fair.”

“Don’t I know it Gen. She’s gotten better over the years, but I remember her just being overly cross with me when I was a kid. Robb was always the golden boy, and Theon, well all his scoldings were deserved. But I just felt like I couldn’t do anything right,” he said.

Her heart broke for him. How could anyone be mean to someone as sweet as Jon, especially when he was so young. Why didn’t Ned do anything?

“I’m sorry you had to deal with that Jon. You deserve better.”

He was silent for a while, trying to convince himself that truly was worthy of something better.

“It is what it is. I just wish my Dad would tell me who my mom is.”

“You mean he hasn’t told you? I didn’t want to pry so I never asked you,” she said.
He tucked an arm around her, “Not like I’d have been able to answer. He just doesn’t bring it up around me.”

“Maybe you should try and ask him now that you’ll older.”

Jon didn’t see a point in asking. Nothing could erase the years of feeling like he was an outsider in his own family. Or the mother’s days spent in numb pain. The rest of his family was good enough, that’s what he told himself. He could get on without knowing who the woman who hadn’t even bothered to raise him was.

But maybe Gen was right, maybe his dad would tell him. And maybe knowing would change something for him. But he wasn’t so sure he wanted things to change.

“Yeah, maybe Gen.”
Chapter 65

Jon wanted to make the most of his last day with her. And he felt lucky enough that he family let him share it with them. She was a precious commodity in those parts.

They’d woken up early and drove to the donut shop, which had become symbolic of comings and goings, and ordered up whatever their hearts desired. Jon only truly desired one or two things, which he couldn’t have. He couldn’t ask Gen to stay nor could he ask the truth of his dad. So a donut would have to do.

After some errands, they hung out in her home library, letting everyone know she was there if they wanted to hang out. And somehow, her family squeezed into the tiny carpeted room to bask in her presence.

“Guys, I’m not going be gone too long. A couple months tops depending on how much mischief Tyrion and I get into,” she said.

Her father frowned, “He’s not one of those writers with a little too much passion for drinking is he? I don’t want him getting you into trouble so far away from home.”

She rolled her eyes, “I go away to Essos on his orders and now you ask questions about his morality?”

“Well yeah,” her mother Nadya smiled.

“He was my professor for Gods sake. He’s perfectly capable of keeping me safe, not that I need any help.”

Henryk squirmed from his seat on the floor, “You’d be even safer if you’d picked up a sword for you and I in Braavos.”

“Nice try,” Roland said.

Jon was glad to just be in the room watching her family interact. They were very similar to his own family, but they didn’t care as much about the “rules” Catelyn came up with. It was always family, duty, and honor with her. But with the Norwards, it was all about teasing one another and at the end of the day, a lot of love. He was happy she had that.

“I think the biggest worry is her skipping work to swim everyday,” Amira said.

“Okay, true. You don’t grow up on an island, no matter how cold the water, without learning to love to swim.”

They migrated to the living room for lunch, Gen glad to have some breathing room. The library was a great place for reading, but the coziness, a synonym for small, didn’t exactly work well when you had seven people crammed inside.

For lunch they’d spread out blankets on the floor of the living room and made a picnic out of it. It wasn’t quite warm enough outside to have one, so it would have to do. They’d let Genevieve pick the meal, and that’s how they ended up with Tyroshi takeout.

“You really like those brandied pears, don’t you?” Jon asked taking a bite of some rice.
“Essos got me hooked, I can’t help myself.”

While they ate her mother tried to fill her in on the art scene down there. Apparently once you got past all of the commonplace art about the water, there was a thriving graffiti scene. Genevieve had no idea how her mother would know that as she’d never been there, but she took her word. She promised to pose in front of a couple walls just for her.

Her dad on the other hand, had been much more interested in telling her about the ecological efforts to keep the water clean.

“Apparently they had a bad sewage problem back in the day but some guy figured it all out. I just want to make sure it’s being properly handled and not just dumped into the ocean,” he said.

Gen suppressed the urge to gag on her food, “Dad, it’s Casterly Rock not King’s Landing. I’m sure the water isn’t bad like it is there.”

“Well make sure you ask before you go swimming in it. Never know what’s in it,” he said.

When they finished eating Gen leaned into Jon on the couch, tugging his arms around her. She didn’t care if he siblings rolled their eyes at them, she wanted to feel safe. They all sat there for a while just talking about what was going on in their lives.

Henryk had been busy with Bran and Rickon trying to convince their parents to let them take ice hockey lessons. This was news to Jon and he made a mental note to ask his brothers about it. As for Amira, the play she was in with Sansa had been eating up her time. She said there was still lots of rehearsing to do before she would even feel comfortable letting her family come and see it.

“Seriously Amira, let me know when opening night is so I can book a ticket home. I don’t want to miss you and Sansa’s big night,” Gen said.

Jon smiled at the way she so easily included Sansa.

Roland shared his life update next, which wasn’t much. The athletics department had been taking player headshots recently and Roland was sick of having to getting the teams organized enough to be there at the time they were supposed to. In other news, he announced that he’d recently downloaded a dating app.

“I can’t let you have all the fun Gen,” he’d explained.

Gen slowed him down, “Wait a second. You’re on a dating app? Have you actually met anyone from it?”

“Well not in person, but fingers crossed,” he said.

Her mother groaned, “Gods help us. Roland you better not sneak any of these women in our home without introducing us to her.”

Genevieve knew damn well he’d sneak one in down to his basement room just as he’d done when they were in high school. Her parents were so oblivious sometimes.

As for her mother, she’d just been working on editing those photos she’d taken of Jon and Genevieve, promising to send them to them as soon as they were done. Beyond protecting the forests, her father’s latest news was that he just bought another puzzle to work on in his study. He was a strange man.
Eventually they ran out of time to talk and it was time to bring her to the airport. They tried to keep her spirits up, playing her favorite songs on the car ride there. Jon was squished in between Gen and Henryk in the back row of the car, reminding him of family car trips before Bran and Rickon were born. After that, they’d had no choice but to take two cars.

He held her hand all the way to security until it was time to part. She said her goodbyes to her family first, full of laughter and smiles and body shaking hugs. She seemed to have everything covered until it was time to say goodbye to him.

His heart ached when he looked into her eyes and saw the same hurt he’d seen the night she told him about the Quiet Isle. All he could do is wrap his arms around him as she engulfed him in a hug and whispered in his ear.

“I want to cry so bad right now, but I’m trying to be brave,” she said.

“You can do this Gen. I believe in you. I’ll just be a call or a plane ride away.”

They pulled apart and she gave him a kiss goodbye for good measure.

She turned to face the rest of her family, “Love you all. I’ll send lots of pictures, don’t forget to check my blog!”

As she walked away Jon felt that he was in a dream that he’d wake up from. But he wasn’t, as much as he wished it to be. He wanted her to be happy and he wasn’t going to hold her back. The world needed her as much as he needed her. So he was content to share. But it didn’t stop him from tracking her flight online to make sure she was okay.
Genevieve stood at the baggage claim hoping Tyrion would know where to find her. Her phone had died on the plane after about an hour of just scrolling through pictures and videos she’d taken of Jon and her family. The person sitting next to her on the plane probably thought she was stalking people.

Her luggage was taking its sweet time to come out. She turned to a young blond man about her age and asked, “Is this the baggage claim from the flight from Winterfell?”

The punk rolled his eyes and said, “No. It’s from Highgarden.”

Genevieve bit her tongue and walked on to the next area, where she began to recognize people from her flight. She’d been so focused on just stretching her body after the flight to really pay attention to where she was.

Eventually she spotted her stickered luggage and hauled it into her arms. Now came the challenge of finding Tyrion.

But before she even had to riffle through her bag to charge her phone, there he was coming through the doors. He was a picture of relaxation, wearing sunglasses atop his sun bleached hair. Gen couldn’t wait to change out of her Winterfell clothes. She was already feeling the evening heat coming in through the doors.

Her smile grew wide when she saw him, “Tyrion! It’s so good to see you.”

“Good to see you too Gen. Did you lose your phone or something?” he asked with a raised eyebrow. There was the wit she’d grown to love in university.

“No, it just died. I didn’t even have enough battery to tell everyone back home I landed. Now enough about that, show me your city!”

Tyrion walked her over to his car, a blue convertible of course. He liked to do things in style. She had no idea a professor’s salary paid so much.

“I wish I brought a scarf to tie up my hair!” she said as they drove down winding streets. Her hair was whipping around her face causing quite the distraction.

“We’re almost there don’t worry. You’re going to love the apartment!”

Tyrion was right. The apartment was on a very modern street full of modern buildings that instead of conflicting with the ocean views, highlighted them. They were all glass and clean lines. And along the street were plenty of fruit trees that Tyrion explained were part of the city’s initiative to end hunger.

“I don’t see how placing them on one of the nicest street is going to help, but hey, free breakfast for you,” he said.

When they entered the apartment Genevieve was in love. She found herself wishing she’d taken up on his suggestions of accommodations during her travels instead of using hostels. The pictures on the website couldn’t even do it justice. Between the lush white furnishing and picturesque views, it was a dream.

“I’m not even going to ask you how much this place costs,” Genevieve said as she put her bags
Tyrion laughed, “Don’t even worry about it, my father owns the building.”

So he did come from money? Genevieve should have expected, but she’d just assumed his taste for the finer things in life had come from his book sales or something.

“Well give him my thanks!”

“Like I’d give him the satisfaction.”

He helped her unpack the best he could, with her tackling the clothes and him working on establishing some system of organization for all her journals she’d brought with her.

“I thought you finished up with the notes, why’d you bring all of these?” he asked.

She unpacked what seemed like her million sundress and said, “I’ve got lots of drawings and stuff that didn’t transfer well. You’ll thank me for them later.”

“Fine fine, I’ll just put them in this box so you can bring them to the office tomorrow.”

It hadn’t taken her long to unpack which made her realize just how minimal she’d become. Sure, she had plenty of clothes. But beyond those and her toiletries, all she’d really brought was her phone and her computer. She needed to personalize the place a bit, but she was too overwhelmed with all the change to think of it. Tyrion just kept showing her new things to look at.

For dinner Tyrion had taken her to a hole-in-the-wall place that served appetizers. He explained that the Rock had borrowed a lot of Dornish culture in the way that they ate.

“Most of us don’t eat dinner until eight or nine o’clock,” he said.

Genevieve couldn’t live like that. Well maybe she could if she’d been given enough snacks.

They shared plenty of appetizers and Tyrion was generous with the wine. It was a beautiful place to eat, especially at nighttime. Most of the seating was outdoors under a pergola strung with lights that bounced on the water. Genevieve snapped a couple pictures and reminded herself to upload it to her blog later.

Over their food they discussed some of their hopes for the upcoming months and their ideas for the project.

“I was thinking we’d get right into it and work on establishing a tone for the book,” he said.

“Have you gotten a chance to look over the notes I put together?”

“Oh yes, they’re very thorough. I’d love to see your travel journals though. I think it’d be interesting if we incorporated some of your entries as a first person account of the culture.”

Gen buzzed with energy at idea. Maybe she would get to put her name on the book? Her journals were full of tiny details that reached far beyond observations of the culture. She was a people-watcher by nature, so she’d filled pages with drawings of locals, descriptions of meals she’d eaten, and random things she’d overheard.

When she traveled she tried her best to blend in and just take it all in. And by Tyrion’s comment, it seemed like she’d done a pretty good job of it.
“I’m all for that idea. Just don’t judge me for all the weird stuff I wrote down in those notebooks when you see them,” she laughed.

Tyrion scoffed, “Genevieve, you should know me well enough by now to know that nothing phases me.”

On the way back to her apartment he pointed out the office where they’d be working together so she didn’t have any trouble finding it the next day. And how could she? It was right down the street from where she was staying, so close that she could go home for lunch if she wanted to.

Alone in her apartment she took a deep breath and took it all in on the balcony. It was hard to believe that just that morning she’d been bundled up in her winter coat in Winterfell. While enjoying the breeze and the stars, she wrote up a quick blog post attaching pictures of dinner and her current view.

Hello friends and family! It’s my first night in Casterly Rock and I’m already in love. The water is beautiful (not that I’ve gone in it yet… soon though!) and my apartment is perfect. Tyrion and I went to dinner at this place by the water and as you can see from the pictures, I’ll be spending a lot of time there! My flight was okay, I mostly just kicked butt on the trivia game they offered on the screen on the back of the seats and looked at pictures of all of you guys. Sorry if this is all disjointed sounding, I’m just full of ideas and energy from being in a new place. I’m taking some time right now to slow down and just enjoy my view for the next couple of months as the day comes to a close. Miss you all!

Before she went to bed she sent a text to Jon, “Hi cutie! I’m safe and sound in my apartment. Super wiped right now, but I’ll call you in the morning. Love you!!!”
On her way to work past the shining buildings and clean sidewalks, Gen called Jon. It was a beautiful morning and the sun was high in the sky. Casterly Rock couldn’t have been any more different than the climate of the North.

“Hi Jon, I didn’t wake you did I?”

“Not at all! I’m just driving to work. How are you Gen? I’ve been thinking of you,” Jon said.

Gen was happy to hear his voice, the true northern steadiness of it. She was positive it was going to be a good day as long as she got to say hello to him.

“I’m doing great! Just walking to work right now. I can’t wait for you to see it, it’s beautiful here!”

She had been able to forgo a coat and strut out onto the street in a blue linen dress that she hadn’t worn since she was over in Essos. Her skin had lost its tan but she was determined to get it back. She just hoped she didn’t blind anyone with her paleness.

“How far is the office for you?”

“Oh it’s just down the street. I’m almost there honestly. What do you have planned for today?”

He laughed, “Besides living through the sunny photos on your blog, not much. It’s rainy here.”

“Beats the snow! Let Bran know the blog is up, he’s the one who gave me the idea.”

“Oh don’t worry, he has email notifications turned out. What are you doing after work” he asked.

She entered the sleek building Tyrion had pointed out to her and walked over to the directory. He was on the top floor, of course he was. She was beginning to realize just how wealthy her boss was. It was no wonder he could afford to send her around the world for months.

“Oh, I might go for a swim. I’ll probably spend a long day here at the office outlining the plan for this book. Shit, and I need to send Sam and Gilly a wedding present,” she said as she hopped onto the elevator.

The elevator was mirrored and she wondered if there was a camera hiding somewhere. She’d have to postpone her silly faces in the mirrors until she knew for sure.

Jon sighed, “That’s true. I can send you some money so we can split the costs.”

“Whatever works, I’ll probably end up picking up some board games for them.”

“Sounds perfect, well I hope you have a great first day Gen. You’re going to kill it!”

She got off at her floor, “If he doesn’t kill me first. Love you Jon, I’ll talk to you later.”

“Love you too, bye.”

Once off the phone, Gen adjusted her dress and walked into the office. There was no receptionist or anything waiting, not that she expected one. Tyrion was the type that preferred to do things for himself if he could help it.
She called out hoping to find him, “Tyrion! I’m here.”

“I’m back here, come on through!” he called back.

His voice led her past a row of empty offices with the best views in Casterly Rock. It was a shame they sat empty. But the views were no match for Tyrion’s. His office was glass on three walls with a view of the water. She didn’t see how he got anything done with that view, but he did have a desk at least.

“Morning Genevieve. How’d you find the apartment last night?” he asked.

“Oh it was wonderful, no complaints. Your office is insane Tyrion.”

He laughed and offered her a seat next to his desk, “Well it’s your office too now for the next couple of months. You better get used to the view.”

She couldn’t believe it. Who would’ve thought taking a class with him, and then a post-grad internship would have ever lead to all of this? She was one lucky person.

“I’m going to be spoiled once I’m done here.”

“Well that’s the hope. I like to spoil all of the people who work with me so they never want to find another job,” he said.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get a gig as good as this one,” she smiled.

He took a sip of his coffee, “I’m the best in the business, what can I say? Not very hard when other companies treat their interns like slaves.”

“Very true, now how do you want go about all of this?”

Tyrion loved Genevieve for her work ethic, among other things. When she was his student he noticed her drive and ability to consistently perform at the highest level, time after time, with all of her papers. And now here she was, trying to steer him on track. On a Monday morning too.

“Well, since you want to jump right into things I thought we could go over the notes together and talk structure. You brought your computer I hope?”

She nodded and pulled it out, “I was going to bring my journals but I thought I’d wait to hear what you wanted.”

“Bring those tomorrow. Now I was looking over the way you structured the notes last night, and I think what you did really works for our purposes. I think diving them by region, and then by city would work best,” he said.

“And then by element of culture?”

“Exactly.” Gen would have to tell Jon that his idea for structure had really paid off.

“So what do you want me to do, as far as writing goes?”

He leaned forward and scrolled through the notes on his computer, “Well I’ll flesh out the elements some more based off of what I know from my other studies. And you know how we talked last night about incorporating your travel journals into it?”

She thought of all her silly doodles, “Yeah?”
“Well if possible could you expand upon those and develop them into a concise picture of each place? Maybe select a couple of the drawings you liked best.”

Gen had to smile at his confidence in her, he hadn’t even seen her journals or her drawings. For all he knew she could’ve been drawing stick figures. People tended to assume she was a great artist because of her mother’s talent. While she wasn’t the worst, she certainly wasn’t a prodigy of anything.

“Sounds good with me. I’ll run back to my place and grab them now if that’s alright with me,” she said.

“Gen, you can leave whenever you want. We’re working together, I’m only your boss in the sense that I’m paying you.”

She walked back to her apartment enjoying the feel of the sun on her face. Any other job and she’d be running to get her journals as fast as she could. But Tyrion was right, this job wasn’t traditional. She could pretty much do what she wanted as long as her journals were completed in time.

When she strolled back into the office Tyrion was busy writing away at his computer. “Hi Gen, pull up a chair and have at it. I’ll tell one of the maintenance people to drag a desk in here for you.”

She sat down at the conference table by the window, “No, this is fine. I like getting to spread out.”

“Whatever works for you. By the way, can you also copy-edit each chapter once it’s done?”

She mimicked his words, “Whatever works for you, I’ll get started on Pyke.”

“Ha! Your favorite!”

Gen found it easier than she thought putting her lyrical journals onto the page. The Pyke one was pretty straightforward. She’d been negative in her descriptions so all she had to do was change the tone a bit and insert some more of the positive aspects of the place. She couldn’t deny they had some good seafood, if you were into that sort of thing. And their religious practices were fascinating.

Her favorite journal entry from that leg of the trip had been when she’d observed a man being baptized into the faith of the Drowned God. From her place on the beach, she’d thought the man was going to die. The priest had held him underwater for so long he didn’t stir when they pulled him back up. But then, just went she thought about calling the police, he spit out water and his lungs drew in a breath of air. It wasn’t like anything she’d ever seen.

After work that day she felt confident in her ability to get her sections of the book done. She’d had some anxieties surrounding the division of labor for the project, but Tyrion had assured her. During their lunch break over sandwiches he’d shown her a schedule he’d hoped to stick by. He’d budgeted two months for the book, for edits, and layout and he was confident they could stick to it.

Genevieve was glad the project wouldn’t stretch on any longer than that. She knew she’d have a blast down in Casterly Rock, but she also had a whole other life back home with her family and Jon that she wasn’t trying to leave behind.

On her blog for the night she posted a picture from the office conference table and wondered what everyone back in Winterfell was doing.

Jon was the first to comment on the post saying, “Wow! I think I need to show this to my Dad. Seems like it’s time to relocate the offices somewhere warmer.”
To make up for it she sent him a picture from her bed, with a smile just for him captioned, “Love you Jon.”

He texted back relieved that she was settling into things with a brave face, an a cute one at that. He sent a selfie back holding up his guitar, “Next time you see me I’ll have learned a song just for you. Love you Gen, sweet dreams.”

She went to bed wondering how she’d gotten so lucky.
Chapter 68

While Genevieve spent her day writing about the damp bridges of Pyke, Jon had to take a sick day. He’d woken up with a wicked sore throat and a chill that spread through his body. And as he laid there in bed bemoaning the betrayal of his body, he wished he had someone there to look after him.

When he was a child Catelyn would give him a warm bowl of soup and a cold washcloth for his forehead, letting him put on whatever cartoon he wanted. He remembered one time his fever had been so high, his coughs and breathes so ragged, that he had delusions. The doctor wasn’t sure if he’d make it through the night and the fear alone almost took him. But Catelyn stayed with him through the night, murmuring prayers. But when his fever broke he’d felt the same distance he always felt from her.

With no one to take care of him, he struggled his way up the stairs to make himself a cup of tea. By the time he made it to the kitchen his brow was soaked with sweat. He hadn’t been that sick in ages. The house was quiet, almost too quiet.

Cuddled up on the couch he sent Gen a text. She’d know what to do.

“Hi love. I’m sick as a dog today. Hope things are better for you.”

Her reply came quick, “Oh no Jon! What hurts? I wish I could be there to help you out. Sending hugs and kisses your way!”

“Just a sore throat and feeling chilly.”

Back in her office her face turned to a frown. She hated to be so far away from him when he wasn’t feeling well.

Tyrion noticed and asked, “What’s wrong Gen? Your face isn’t looking cheerful as always.”

“Ugh, Jon’s sick and I wish I was there to help.”

“Why don’t you send him some soup or something to his house?”

Gen took the idea and ran with it. Tyrion always knew what to do.

About thirty minutes later Jon had a ring at the door. Before he could even get up off the couch Catelyn came running down the stairs.

“Oh Jon! I didn’t know you were home,” she said.

He gave a weak smile, “Just not feeling good today.”

A delivery man handed over a large bag, “It’s all paid for.”

“Did you order something Jon?”

Catelyn pulled out a bottle of ginger ale, some crackers, and soup.

“Uh no. But whoever did seems to know I’m sick,” he said.

Catelyn laughed, “Wait, there’s a note. Looks like your girlfriend was worried for you.”
Jon smiled despite the pain. To his surprise, Catelyn poured him a bowl and walked over with the rest of the treats.

“I’ll be home today if you need anything. Gods know there isn’t much else to do around here when the house is empty,” she said.

As she walked away he wondered if he was just imagining her kindness, or if she was really trying to be nice to him, the best she knew how.

After work Genevieve skipped out the door and over to a stationary shop around the corner, hoping to find postcards to send off to her friends and family back in the North. The shop was fit into a narrow building, full of cards, journals, and more types of writing utensils than she knew existed. Everything she touched, she wanted. And everything she saw was beautiful.

There was a display of postcards on a wall near the register.

The shopkeep saw the awe on her face as Gen looked up at all of them. “Can I help you find anything?”

“Nope, I’m just admiring the selection. You’ve got quite the shop here!”

The sandy-haired man smiled wide, “Been in my family for generations. Finest stationery shop in the area if you ask me, but I’m biased of course.”

Gen selected some postcards with sketches of the lovely blue waters that she looked out at every day.

“Well I believe you. I’ll take these please.”

Over a humble dinner of pasta on her balcony, she wrote postcard after postcard full of descriptions of the warmth of Casterly Rock. She even sent one off to Tormund, figuring he could use something to brighten up his chilly life beyond the wall.

She called Jon on video, the screen showing the man she loved looking paler than ever with curls damp with sweat.

“Oh Jon! You look terrible. Did the soup help at all,” she asked.

He shrugged and she realized he couldn’t do much talking with his sore throat. Arya popped into the frame and answered for him.

“Hi Gen. He can’t talk much, but he ate all of your soup. He’s just been on the couch all day napping and watching old movies,” she explained.

“Aww. Well I hope he’s feeling more comfortable. Thanks for looking after him.”

Arya shrugged, “My mom’s been doing most of the work. I’ve just been sitting with him since I got out of school and making sure the rest of them keep it down.”

Gen was surprised to hear that Catelyn had been looking after him. If anything, she expected Jon to fend for himself.

He gave her a weak smile and tried his best to talk, keeping his voice soft. “I’ll be better tomorrow I’m sure. Thanks for the goodies Gen.”

“Anything for you Jon. I hated the idea of you sitting here alone not feeling well. You’re not going to work tomorrow are you?”
Jon looked over his shoulder off frame and smiled. He moved the camera to show her and there was Ned looking sheepish.

“Hi Gen. I was just eavesdropping a bit, hope you don’t mind,” he said.

“Not at all. Here, I’ll show you the view.” The sun was setting over the water creating a picture any artist would love to recreate.

“Oh wow, just for that I’ll give him another day off,” Ned laughed rubbing his son’s head.

Arya looked to her dad, “Can I skip school so he has someone to watch after him.”

“What, your mom’s not capable? Good try kiddo.”

After their goodbyes she climbed into bed and tried her best to go over her agenda for the week. Tyrion wanted her done with her Pyke section by the end of the week so she could start editing what he’d written. She had reached a block in her writing that she’d need to get past if she ever hoped to stay on schedule.

And beyond going to work, she hadn’t done much to explore Casterly Rock. There hadn’t been any time. But Tyrion had invited her to join him and some friends at the beach. She was excited to finally test out the waters and see if they were really as nice as they looked, plus she could use some human interaction beyond those back home.

She just hoped she didn’t burn.
Genevieve was determined not to get a sunburn. It was the weekend and Tyrion had picked her up in his fancy car, leaving the stress of the book behind. Gone were the anxious read-throughs of her work hoping she didn’t miss a mistake. And back in Winterfell, gone was Jon’s illness, one less thing to worry about. It was the weekend and although she felt like living in Casterly Rock was vacation enough, she was determined to enjoy it.

Before they arrived Genevieve had some questions for Tyrion. “So the water’s safe to swim in? My Dad seems to have this idea in his head that it’s contaminated with sewage like in King’s Landing.” Tyrion scoffed, “Gods no. Our sewage system is one of the most sophisticated in the world, and our water the cleanest. Whoever designed it was a genius.”

He drove them through the winding roads to what he claimed was the best beach in the area. She figured it was just one of the other perks he had access to with all the money his family had.

“So fill me on these friends of yours? I don’t want to make a fool of myself in front of them,” she said to Tyrion.

He pulled into the parking lot at the beach and laughed, “They’re the ones I’ve got to worry about. A bunch of scoundrels, the usual type you’d expect me to hang around I’m sure.”

“Well if I can handle myself around you I think I’ll be just fine.”

His friends were already set up on the beach sitting under the beating sun without an umbrella. Genevieve had thought ahead and begged Tyrion to bring his, saying she’d have sun poisoning and need to skip work if she wasn’t careful.

She was the only woman present but it wasn’t the first time she’d had to hold her own with men. That was pretty much all she’d done overseas in Essos.

Tyrion’s two friends, one bald and one not, were sitting staring up at her with raised eyebrows. “Hello, I’m Genevieve. I work for Tyrion,” she said sitting down on her towel.

The muscular man gave her a wolfish grin and said, “He has you do his dirty work does too does he? The names Bronn.”

“Do you work for him too?”

The bald man next to him laughed, “Let’s just say he helps keep Tyrion’s family’s reputation intact. I’m Varys but you won’t catch me working for them.”

Tyrion laughed, “Oh please Varys, we do business all the time.”

He shrugged, “Maybe so, but go telling people that and we won’t.”
Sitting there on her beach towel soaking in the sun, Gen was enjoying the banter between Tyrion and his friends. They were as quick-witted as she expected of a friend of Tyrion and could take it as much as they dished it.

Genevieve stood up and stretched, “Well I’m going to go test out the water if any of you would like to join me.”

Varys waved off her explaining that the world didn’t need to see his body playing around in the sand. And Tyrion complained that he needed to talk over some stuff with Varys. But Bronn jumped to his feet and joined her readily. At least someone was ready for a day at the beach.

The raced each other into the water, not pausing to test the temperature. And she had no regrets. The water was perfect, clear and clean just as Tyrion had promised. It was just the sort of refreshment she needed after sitting in the hot car.

“Gods this is beautiful,” she sighed.

B orn swam next to her, riding out each wave with a smile. “It sure is. So how’d you meet Tyrion?”

“He was my professor and next thing I know I’m helping him work on his book, going all over the world doing research. What about you?”

“Sounds a whole lot better than my work. He got into some trouble up in the Vale and I helped him out,” he explained before dipping his head back under the water and smoothing out his hair.

“I can only imagine that situation. Are you from there?”

He let out a big laugh, “Gods no, I’m from the hells of Flea Bottom. Lived there all my life until Tyrion and his family found some use for me keeping their name out of the dirt. And what about you? A northerner I’m guessing from your accent.”

She hadn’t realized her accent was so obvious. Then again, after spending so much time with Jon’s Northern drawl it was hard not to lean into it.

“I’m from Bear Island. Live in Winterfell now,” she explained.

Bronn shivered in the warm water, “Gods I don’t miss the North. I did some work up beyond the Wall and nearly froze my ass off.”

She thought of her time up in Hardhome and jumping in the ice cold water, “I know what you mean. Tyrion had me up in Hardhome doing research. I thought I knew cold until I went up there.”

“I’ll put in a good word for you, make sure he sends you to Sunspear or somewhere nice next time,” he said.

Once they’d cooled off they walked back up to the where Varys and Tyrion were in the heat of a conversation.

“But Varys, the only way they came into power was toppling someone out of it. It really made them no better than the last ruler,” Tyrion argued, presumably about something he’d read in one of his history books.

“Are we really going to spend the entire afternoon talking about the futility of everything when we’ve got these two beautiful people here?” Varys said with a glance at Bronn and Gen.
“Fair enough, what’d you think of the water Gen? Is it up to your pure Northern standards?” Tyrion asked.

She sat down on her towel and threw on her sun hat, “It was perfect!”

“Sure you’re not talking about me love?” Bronn asked.

Tyrion laughed, “Careful, she’s in love with someone back in Winterfell.”

“Well he’s a lucky guy.”

Varys rolled his eyes noticing the blush spreading like wildfire on Gen’s body, “Enough of that Bronn. You’re too much of a flirt.”

“So that’s why you and Tyrion get along so well?” Gen added earning a laugh from the men.

They laid out in the sun talking about life for several hours, staying there until the tide came in. Tyrion talked of life and its beauty and Bronn balanced it out by talking about death and all the shitty things of life. Varys and Gen had sat back enjoying the two men go back and forth as they argued over what the point to everything was, as if there even was one. To Gen, she just figured the meaning of life was to love and be loved, and to do good. Their talks of power and money didn’t mean anything to her.

When the conversation became too heavy for a day at the beach, Gen hid away under the beach umbrella and texted Jon. His day couldn’t have been any more different from her own at the moment. Winterfell had gotten a spring snowstorm and he’d spent the day sledding on what little snow was left out in the woods with his siblings.

And when he returned home he’d found her postcard in the mailbox in which she talked about how much fun she was missing, but also how much she was thinking of him.

He sent her a picture of him holding it up with a big smile with the rest of his siblings in the background giving thumbs up, “They’re all loving your blog! Can’t wait to see pictures from the beach up later. Love you!”

That night when Genevieve got out of her cold shower to heal her sunburnt skin she got under her cool covers and took a deep breath. She was tired, more tired than she’d felt in a while, but it was a good tired. She’d been working hard and her exhaustion was evidence of it. And although she’d spent the day at the beach, she couldn’t deny the pace she’d set for herself on the book was intense.

She blogged about the beach that night posting pictures of her jumping over waves that Bronn had took and of her setup under her umbrella writing:

“Beach day! Today Tyrion and I took a much needed break from writing and went down to the beach. The waters by Casterly Rock are crystal clear and just the right temperature to cool you from the hot sun. Certainly warmer than the water I jumped into back in Hardhome! Tyrion friends Varys and Bronn were both there and we all had a great deal of fun talking and swimming (well at least some of us… others cough cough Tyrion and Varys couldn’t be bothered to go in the water). This week I’m going to work on writing about King’s Landing and I’ll probably need to mention how the water there can’t compare to Casterly Rock. In my opinion, which isn’t worth much, King’s Landing is just the off-brand version of Casterly Rock. I don’t mean to offend any of my friends that I’ve made back in KL, but I assure you, come visit Casterly Rock and see what I mean! I’m loving all of your sweet comments and texts, and I hope you all received your postcards! Thanks!”
How’s everyone doing? I sometime wonder if anyone even reads these lol! Things are super busy between my jobs and school right now, so I'm not sure how regular the chapters will be. Although, writing new ones seems to be a good way to procrastinate!

While Genevieve was busy in her sky rise office writing about the hidden brothels of King’s Landing and the poverty of Flea Bottom, Jon was having a day like no other.

His father had given everyone a half-day off work due to recent good news that they’d finally settled a contract they’d been working on with the Umbers. It wasn’t a huge deal, but it would bring in steady income to their company for several years.

Jon and his brothers were eating burritos at a popular chain restaurant when their Dad called them from home.

“Boys, come to the house after you’re eating. I was out in the woods and you’ll never guess what I found!” Ned said.

The brothers looked at each other, surprised by the excitement in his voice.

“Dad, what are you talking about?” Robb asked.

“It’s a surprise! Just get here and you’ll find out. It’s nothing bad.”

They were too curious to find out that they ended up just eating the rest of their burritos in the car, not caring how much of a mess they made.

Their Dad met them at the door with hugs, “Come on out back, I can’t wait to show you.”

Jon wondered what it was their Dad did when no one was home. Catelyn was out grocery shopping and he just couldn’t picture his Dad roaming around the house without everyone there.

“What were you doing out in the woods?” Theon asked.

“Praying for you kiddos, you keep me busy!”

Whatever his father had been praying for, it’d been working. His kids were healthy and happy for the most part. And they wanted for nothing. They’d truly been blessed.

Ned led them out into the woods to the Heart Tree and told them to close their eyes. The brothers shifted on their feet and tried to picture what he could have possibly found.

“Okay, open your eyes boys!”

Jon couldn’t believe what he saw. His father was holding a bunch of puppies in his arms looking like a goofball, his smile wide enough to crinkle his eyes.

“Gods where’d they come from?” Robb asked walking forward to pet them.
“I was out walking and I found their mother, dead unfortunately. Looks like these pups will need a home.”

Theon looked at them from afar, “They’re cute but I don’t have anytime to be taking care of an animal. I can barely take care of myself.”

“Well there’s six of them, so whoever wants one can have one,” Ned said putting them down on the ground.

The white one ran to Jon’s feet and licked at his legs. He couldn’t quite grasp what type of dog it was.

Robb smiled, “Looks like that one’s claimed you. I’m quite fond of the grey one myself.”

“What kind of dog are they Dad?” Jon asked.

That’s when Ned got excited, “I think they’re direwolves! Their mother was big enough to be one, that’s for sure.”

“Aren’t they really rare?” Theon asked.

“Extremely. Which makes it even more important that these pups get taken care off. I’m sure I’ll have a hell of an argument with Cat later, but I’m not abandoning these babies.”

Jon was sure that once his younger siblings saw them, they’d be lost. There was no way Catelyn would be able to veto them once they held them in their arms. All of his siblings were animal lovers, save for Theon. It wasn’t that he hated them, he just preferred not having the responsibility. The most he’d ever wanted when he was younger was a couple of fish.

“What are you going to name yours?” Robb asked.

He looked down at the beautiful white fur and striking red eyes of the pup squirming in his arms.

“I’m not sure yet, I want to get to know him a bit more first.”

The rest of the pups yipped as they brought them inside, waiting to meet their family. Robb had quickly named his Grey Wind after watching him run around his siblings in a blur of grey fur.

Catelyn was not at all pleased when she came home and saw six puppies in the living room. She dropped her groceries in the kitchen and walked over to her husband, “For the love of all that is holy, please tell me you’re not seriously expecting us to keep them.”

Her husband sighed and held one up, hoping the cuteness would confuse her. “Their mom died Cat, I couldn’t just leave them outside to fend of themselves.”

“Oh so now it’s our responsibility? Why does this always happen?”

Jon felt stung by her words. He himself had been a stray just like the direwolves. And although he didn’t know if his mother was alive or not, he would be alone in the world if his father hadn’t taken him in. He wondered if Theon was stung by her words, not that he ever seemed to read between the lines of Catelyn’s spite.

“Cat, you won’t have to take care of them if you don’t want to. I’m sure the kids will be more than happy to feed them and take them on walks,” Ned said.
She shook her head and walked away, “Fine. But I’m not cleaning up after any messes they leave behind.”

Ned was right, when the kids came home from school they’d felt an instant attachment to the tiny fur balls.

“Oh my goodness, you’re a pretty lady aren’t you? I think I’ll have to call you that!” Sansa mused as she nuzzled her pup into her.

Jon and his pup stood by quietly as the rest of them named their dogs.

“I’m going to call her Nymeria, after the warrior queen,” Arya said proudly.

“Gen would like that name. What about you Bran and Rickon?”

Bran laughed, “Summer. I’m getting tired of all this snow.”

Rickon was busy rolling on the floor with his dog, “Shaggydog!”

That night Jon and his pup retreated to his bedroom to settle in. He soon found his spot at the foot of his bed, content to be safe and fed at last.

He called Genevieve over video, hoping to surprise her.

She answered with her towel on her head, “Hi Jon. I just got out of the shower so you’ll have to ignore my getup.”

“You look great, I don’t know what you’re saying,” he laughed.

He laid back and bed and was sure to hide his pup from the frame.

“So what’s up? You had a half day today?”

“Yeah, and my Dad gave me a little bit of a surprise.”

She winced, “Nothing bad I hope. I can’t take anymore bad news. Tyrion is making me edit through the Pyke chapter yet again. I just want to wash my hands of it and be done.”

“No, nothing bad. I think it’ll make you smile actually.”

She perked up, wondering what he had in store, “Okay, spill it.”

Without saying anything he turned his camera onto his pup and she squealed.

“OH MY GODS JON! WHO IS THAT LITTLE CUTIE?” she said. She could practically feel her heart thawing just by looking at the little furball.

“My dad found six direwolf pups out in the woods without a mother, so he’s mine now.”

He scooped him up into his arms and showed her.

“Oh my goodness you two are just the cutest things I’ve ever seen. My new background. What’s his name?”

Jon still hadn’t figured that out. His dog was a lot like him, staying off to the sidelines and just taking it all in as he watched his more extroverted siblings.
“I don’t have one yet, but I think he’s the runt of his litter. Only white one too, the rest of his siblings are all dark, grey or black.”

“Hmm maybe you could name him something related to the snow or something, just an idea. Or anything that’s white really,” she said.

That gave Jon an idea. “What do you think of Ghost? He’s hasn’t made a sound so far and he’s white.”

“I love it! I can’t wait to meet him.”

They talked for a while longer about what Jon’s life would look like now that he was a proud dog-dad. The conversation then turned to when they’d be able to see each other next.

“Well I could come up in a couple weeks, celebrate my birthday with you,” Jon suggested.

Genevieve’s mouth hung open, “Jon! You didn’t tell me your birthday was so soon. I can’t believe I didn’t know that.”

“It must’ve slipped my mind. Did you ever tell me when yours is?”

“Oh, I guess not. But it’s November 2nd if you’d like to put it in your date book,” she smiled.

“Okay, well pencil me down on March 20th. I think it falls on a weekend this year so I can fly down and hang with you.”

“Please do! We can go swimming and I can show you around the city. You can even bring Ghost!”

Jon thought about how he’d manage to get Ghost on a plane. If his father was right, he’d be growing steadily in no time, and he wouldn’t want to keep him cooped up on a flight.

“I’ll leave Ghost behind, don’t think he’d do well in the heat anyways. But I’ll book my flight now. Can’t wait to see you love.”

“Right back at you Jon. Give him a cuddle for me!”

That night Jon dreamt of Ghost running through the Godswood with his siblings and could feel the rush of air pushing past him. Old Nan always said Northerners sometimes felt a deep connection to their animals, and Jon could already feel the bond between him and Ghost strengthening.
“Wait so where are we going to lunch tomorrow?” Gen asked.

Tyrion leaned forward on his desk and closed his laptop, “My father’s house. He’s insisting we meet up for a family lunch and I’m not going into the lion’s den alone.”

“So I’m there to make sure everyone plays nice?”

He laughed, “If my sister is there we’ll need you.”

The next day Genevieve felt her nerves starting to creep up on her. From what Tyrion had told her of his family, they weren’t an easy bunch to get along with. And although Tyrion had a habit of using his biting wit against people, Genevieve thought he was easy enough to get along with.

She made sure to wear an outfit that made her feel powerful. Tyrion had told her the emerald wrap dress she wore was sure to make his sister jealous.

Tyrion tried prepping her in the car, “Make sure you make eye contact when you speak to my sister and my father. They can sense fear.”

Genevieve wasn’t going to let them scare her. She’d traveled around the world alone and had seen some truly frightening stuff. She wasn’t going to let some bored housewife get the best of her.

“And what about your brother?”

He smiled, “You don’t have to worry about Jaime, he’s not cruel.”

“And your sister is?”

“Just wait, you’ll see.”

And see she did. His father’s mansion on the Rock was insane to say the least. The imposing white stone walls were a smooth contrast to the ocean waters it overlooked. Genevieve had thought she knew wealth coming from a very comfortable upbringing, but this was just ridiculous.

“Holy shit Tyrion. You grew up here?”

“Unfortunately. Don’t let how it looks fool you. My childhood was rough to say the least.”

She took Tyrion’s advice in mind when she was introduced to his family. They were the last to arrive, and the others were already sitting at the table waiting for them.

His family was seated in a grand formal dining room that overlooked the sea, a resplendent room full of ornate furniture. Despite the obvious cash dropped on the furniture, Genevieve felt like there wasn’t any air in the room. But that might have also been because of the way his family was staring at them.

“ Took you long enough Uncle,” a blond guy around her age said with a sneer.

The man at the head of the table, presumably Tyrion’s infamous father silenced him, “That’s enough
Joffrey. Your uncle has a guest with him.”

Tyrion led the way to the table and they sat down. But unfortunately for her, he hadn’t enough foresight to leave a buffer between him and the beautiful blonde woman she assumed was his sister. But he had given her a seat across from a stunning man with the same golden hair as her. The chatter at the table resumed among the young crowd, with the adults sitting there in silence.

His sister a deep sip of her wine, despite it only being noon and said, “Brother, did you pay this woman to come?”

“Cersei,” their father warned.

Genevieve wasn’t scared of women like her. She had no tolerance for bullies and she wasn’t about to bow down to someone trying to insult her.

“Well he’s my boss, so sort of,” she said.

A bearded man who didn’t have the golden hair of Lannisters put his hand on his stomach and let out a big laugh. Tyrion followed, giving Gen a please glanced with the way she had dealt with his sister’s attempt to scare her.

“I like this one Tyrion. Where’d you find her?” he said.

“I’m sure this one has a name Robert. I’m Tywin, these are my children Jaime, Cersei, and of course Tyrion.”

Genevieve could sense Tywin had the power to make people wither under his gaze. But she wasn’t a flower, if anything she was as steady as the trees her father worked so hard to protect.

“Thank you for having me Tywin. I’m Genevieve,” she said with her back straight.

The younger blond twat turned his attention from his food, “How old are you?”

“Joffrey, it’s impolite to ask a woman her age. I’m sure your mother taught you that,” Jaime smiled.

“I’m twenty-three. Graduated from college last year. I had your uncle as a professor and the rest is history,” she said.

College felt so far from where her life was. It was hard for her to realize that just a year ago she was just a college student who hadn’t done anything truly exciting with her life. Now here she was, a world traveler with a great job and an even better boyfriend.

Tyrion said, “She was the best student I’ve had in ages. Not many can keep up with the banter like she can.”

“You must be from the North, aren’t you?” Robert asked.

“Oh yes. Born and raised in Bear Island. But my family lives in Winterfell now.”

Thinking of home made her heart ache. She had to keep reminding herself it would only be a week or so until she could see Jon again. And then before she knew it she’d be back home with her family watching Amira’s play.

“Robert and I went up to Winterfell many years ago. Can’t say I cared for it much,” Cersei said.

Genevieve steeled herself again and wondered what she’d done to provoke her anger. Was she really
that intimidated by someone so much younger than her?

Tyrion covered for her saying, “Genevieve gets on just great up there. She even found winter romance up there!”

She felt her face heat up and sent Tyrion a glare. Sometimes he really acted like an annoying older brother. He only smiled back, glad that the attention was on someone else for a change. He quite liked bringing guests to eat with his family for that exact reason.

Robert leaned forward not even bothering to finish chewing before speaking, “What’s his name? I know people up there.”

Genevieve couldn’t see how he’d possible know anyone in Winterfell, considering he hadn’t been there in years.

“I doubt you’ll know him, but his name is Jon Stark.”

The adults at the table stopped eating. Tywin looked stern, Cersei looked pissed, and Robert looked like she just pissed in his drink. Tyrion looked apologetic, his eyes widened looking like he wanted to make a swift getaway with her before anymore damage could be done.

“Do you know him?” Gen asked.

Robert cleared his throat while the others avoided eye contact, “What’s his father’s name?”

“Ned. His family is very nice.”

Cersei finished her glass of wine and set it down heavy on the table.

“We used to be friends. A long long time ago. Don’t speak anymore though,” Robert explained looking out the window.

Genevieve felt like she’d just committed an awful party foul. But how was she supposed to know? Tyrion should’ve warned her!

The rest of the lunch was quiet, saved only by Tyrion’s niece and nephew Myrcella and Tommen chattering away about their school days. Genevieve was so thankful for them that she wanted to hug them. And there she was thinking she’d be there to lighten up the mood.

Most of the adults just fought through the lunch with the aid of the steady wine Cersei kept pouring.

On the car ride home Tyrion was shocked.

“Holy fuck Gen. I didn’t know you were dating a Stark!”

She couldn’t understand what was so shocking about it. Sure, they were a great family with an old business, but it wasn’t like they were celebrities.

“I thought I told you. What’s it matter anyways?”

“I don’t know the full story, but apparently Cersei’s oaf of a husband Robert had the hots for Ned’s sister and it didn’t turn out well,” he said.

“I didn’t even know he had a sister.”

“Well I wouldn’t bring it up to Jon’s father. I’m sure it’s still a sore subject for them after her
Her passing? Genevieve had no fucking clue what Tyrion was talking about. And from what Jon had told her, neither did he. She’d have to try and figure it out.

Chapter End Notes

A lot of this dialogue came to me about a month before I wrote it. I had a lot of fun with this chapter. Also, finals are killing me. Send good vibes please <3
Chapter 72

Jon was back to feeling like the busiest man in Winterfell. Ghost, although he was a quiet fellow, had nudged him awake early in the morning looking to be set free outside. He seemed to enjoy the comforts of home which was a relief to Jon and his family, but his brothers and sisters still loved a good run in the backyard through the woods.

At work he’d been inundated with emails from the public relations team (aka Theon) who were asking for all sort of information on a new deal from Deepwood Motte that Jon just didn’t have the answers to.

Robb had even swung my his office to probe, “So Theon’s been bugging me left and right to get the information from you. Could you just throw him a bone and tell him a little a bit about the deal so he can put it up on the stupid social media page?”

Since joining up with the company, Theon had found a natural fit within the PR department. He was always sweet talking someone in his social life, so it was an easy transition for him. But with that came a big headache for Jon. Theon was always asking him to send over information that he couldn’t possibly see how he would integrate into their social media. And then there was the whole mess with the employee bios.

“Fine, I’ll send him what little I’ve got. Do you have any idea when his team will be around for the staff bios?”

Robb groaned, “Fuck I forgot about those. I don’t even know what to say. My life is so boring.”

“Beats me. Just talk about Grey Wind and say you’re enjoying working with Dad or something.”

Theon had been up just before his lunch break to bug him with more questions.

“Hi Jon. Just gotta get this bio out of the way, freshen up our website a bit,” he said waving his little notebook around.

“Okay Theon, ask away.”

He began drilling him on his interests outside of work, as if he wasn’t his brother who already knew all of it.

“So you’ve got a new girlfriend, a new dog, you like music and writing, anything else?”

Jon laughed, “Um you can put down working with my family is an interesting challenge each day.”

“Hey! It’s not so bad. You’re just lucky Robb and the legal team never bother you for shit.”

Jon worked very closely with Robb’s team in fact. “Bro, I literally do all of the contracts with them. The only time you have to deal with them is when you post something you shouldn’t have.”

“Okay fair. They just don’t understand us creatives,” Theon laughed.

Once Theon left he decided to take a much needed break and give Genevieve a call. She usually took her lunch break around then too.

“Hi babe! How’s it going, you on a break too?” she asked.
“Yeah, just got grilled by Theon for a bio he’s writing. Should be up on the website by the end of the day he say.”

“You’ll be famous. I’ll have to print it out and stick it up on the wall in my bedroom so it looks like someone actually lives there.”

“You still haven’t hung anything up?” Jon asked.

“No! I didn’t bring anything with me and I haven’t had anytime to really shop for something.”

While Jon was holed up in his office eating a sad sandwich, Gen was sitting by the waterfront eating ice cream. She was truly living the good life down at the Rock.

“Well maybe we could go art shopping when I’m down there. I’m sure they’ve got lots of shops,” he suggested.

“Oh they do! Trouble is my wallet isn’t very fond of them. Just hurry up and get down here already so I can get free hugs!”

He laughed, “You’ve been paying for them?”

“No! But I’m in a drought. I might die if I don’t get some soon.”

Jon mentioned how he’d be playing driver again after work for the boys, “Yeah, so I’ll be bringing them to the ice rink later.”

“Is Henryk coming too?”

Her brother was awfully fond of the ice. He loved to skate circles around her whenever he could.

“Probably. I guess I’ll see what Bran and Rickon command of me later.”

“You’re such a good sport! Take pictures for me!”

Later at the ice rink Jon was sure to send her lots of pictures. The boys were bundled up as requested by their mothers with hats and mittens.

“Jon! Come out on the ice! Show us your skills,” Bran called to him.

The rink wasn’t busy that day. They’d come during the public skate hour but everyone seemed too busy with life to make an appearance. It worked out for the boys because they got pretty much free rein to goof off out there.

“Give me a second! I’ll go lace up,” Jon said.

When he skated onto the ice it all came back to him. It hadn’t been ages since he last skated, but it always amazed him how his body seemed to remember just what to do. It was like riding a bike.

He stopped short in front of the boys, “So are you guys going to try out for the youth hockey league? Robb would be thrilled.”

Henryk smiled, “Roland would be too. He says he’d try to make it to every game if we did.”

“Yeah. I think we’d be a good team out there on the ice,” Rickon said. His shaggy hair kept falling in front of his eyes and Jon had to resist the urge to help his brother out. It was weird watching them grow up. It seemed like just yesterday he was helping them tie their shoes.
“Well you guys better get practicing!” Jon said putting an arm around Bran to keep him stable.

Bran looked up at him, “Can we race?”

Jon surveyed the mostly empty rink. It wouldn’t be too dangerous as long as they didn’t get cocky.

“Fine, but you’ve got to promise to slow down the second you feel like you’re losing control, okay boys?”

“Okay, ready set go!” Henryk said, sending the boys off in a rush of speed.

Jon didn’t even bother to compete with them. He had years of experience on the ice and he knew if he tried to show it off to them, they’d end up falling on their faces to catch up with him.

Rickon ended up coming in first, raising his arms in the air triumphantly.

“Jon! I beat you!” he cried out.

Jon smiled as the boys panted towards the side, “Great job you three, I think you’ll be just great on the team.”

When he dropped Henryk off at his house Nadya answered the door. He had an idea for his visit to her daughter that he’d need to square away before his trip. And she’d been more than happy to help.
Genevieve couldn't focus. She'd tried her best to finish up her doodles of King's Landing but she couldn't stop thinking about who would be waiting for her after she got out of work.

Jon was due to arrive just twenty minutes after Tyrion set her free out to the streets of Casterly Rock. But he was considering letting her go earlier seeing as she couldn't get any work done anyways.

"Gen. Why don't you head back home and get ready for him. I'm sure you've got presents to wrap and all that nonsense," Tyrion said.

He figured she'd worked hard enough earlier in the week. She deserved a half day. Hells, he had half a mind to take one too and get a jump start on his weekend.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I can't focus with all your staring out the window," he laughed.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you! I promise I'll finish up with this section so we can get started on Sunspear first thing Monday."

She was already packing up her bag when he said, "Don't make any promises you can't keep Gen. I doubt you'll even think about work when he's around."

And he'd been right. As soon as she spotted him at the airport every other thought flew out of her mind.

She ran up to him and wrapped him up in her arms with a flurry of kisses.

"Gods I've missed this," he said, smiling into her neck.

Someone could have stolen her wallet at the moment and she wouldn't have cared. She had Jon, and that was all that mattered.

"I've missed you so much! I can't wait to show you around."

Jon held her tight as they walked to a taxi. The whole ride there he kept smiling over at her, taking in the newness of her. The sun had given her new freckles to marvel over. And he couldn't wait to figure out what was making her shine so much.

The pictures hadn't done her apartment justice. Jon had half a mind to forsake Winterfell and move in.

"Gods Gen, this place is stunning. It's like you're living in a movie or something," he said.

And then there was the balcony. The view and the breeze made it feel like every day was vacation
"Wait until you see the shower! It's huge!" she laughed.

They made their way out to the balcony after her tour and sat there enjoying having the other near.

"Oh I almost forgot, I've got something for you!" Jon said jumping up from his seat.

He opened up his suitcase and had her close her eyes.

"Jon," she complained, "It's your birthday weekend. I'm the one who's supposed to be giving you stuff!"

When she opened her eyes she was no longer frustrated. He'd gotten her just the right thing.

"Oh my Gods! Did my Mom print this for you?" she asked.

He was holding up a picture of the two of them, one that her mother had taken in her studio many weeks ago. His arms were around her shoulders and they both wore goofy smiles, while purple light diffused over them.

"Yep! When I dropped off Henryk the other day I asked if she could help me pick one out. You mentioned you needed some personality to your room so I thought you'd like it."

She sighed and hugged the picture to her chest, "You are so thoughtful sometimes it makes me heart hurt. Thank you so much Jon, I'll put it right by my bed."

For dinner she threw on a little black dress and helped style him so he didn't sweat to death. He had packed like a Northerner, with clothes far too heavy for the climate.

She had him borrow an over-sized jean jacket of hers and had him put it over a black t-shirt.

"Gods you are a cutie! Very stylish, work it Jon," she said.

He spun around the room with a laugh, showing off what the Gods gave him.

The two of them set out on the town, walking hand in hand under the streetlights as the sun set. It couldn’t have been a better night for the two of them.

After getting pizza, they walked by the water and stopped to talk. A man was playing his guitar softly filling the air with a quiet ambiance.

"I've really missed getting to see you. I talk about you all the time at work, Tyrion is always making fun of me," she said.

Jon thought of all the times he'd mentioned something she'd done in front of his family, only to have Theon poke fun at him or Robb raise his eyebrows. They were on each other's minds all the time.

"I know what you mean Gen. I'm starting to think I should ask my Dad to open up an office down here."

"Oh don't do that! I won't be here that long Jon."

A woman wearing a tie-dyed dress came walking up to them with a flyer, "We've got a paint and sip down right around the corner tonight. Two for one special, and live music too."
Gen looked up at him with hopeful eyes, "Can we do it?"

How could he say no to her? "Of course. It'll give you more art for your walls."

"Oh you think that photo of us is art? We are pretty cute," she laughed.

Armed with paintbrushes and smocks to protect them, they were ready to make some art.

The instructor was generous her instructions on how to paint an ocean sunset and even more generous in pouring the wine.

Jon soon realized her didn't have the talent Genevieve did for the arts. She must've gotten it from her mother. He on the other hand had only seemed to inherit his Dad's business sense and brooding looks.

She noticed him struggling to pick colors. "Do you need help Jon?"

He set down his paintbrush in defeat, "Please."

Together she helped him blend out the harsher spots until she it somewhat resembles what the instructor showed.

Back at her place he helped her hang it up on the wall somewhat lopsided from all the wine they'd been given, "Let's call it abstract? Okay?"

"I think it's beautiful. It's like what someone without their glasses would see," she said looking at it from afar, "That sounded mean, I actually really like it."

He laughed, "I'll be sure to remember this someday when I'm a famous artist. You'll be able to say you got my first art piece, apart from the little drawings we used to do in school."

"I'm honored. Don't forget about me when you're rich and famous."

Jon looked at her and kissed her deep, pulling apart to say, "As if I could."

Chapter End Notes

Sad day for Bear Island! On the plus side, we have Bear Island native Gen and her family still!
He and Ghost were running through the woods. Nothing was chasing them but the drive to escape was still there beating in his heart. To run away from home, to get as far away as he possibly could. They didn’t look back as they ran past the trees and away from what they knew. Ghost urged him forward with a glance of his red eyes when he faltered.

And then a stranger grabbed his shoulder, rooting him in place.

“Jon love. Wake up, I think you’re having a nightmare.”

Genevieve?

He opened his eyes and looked around wildly prepared to protect himself.

“It’s just me Jon. Are you okay? You looked like you were having a rough dream,” Gen said.

Her hair was blocking most of her face and the blankets tangled around her waist. But as he saw her, he grounded himself in his reality. He was with Genevieve, not running around in the woods terrified. He was safe.

He pulled her close, “Sorry if I woke you up. Just had the strangest dream I was running through the woods with Ghost getting as far away from home as I possibly could.”

“Hmm I wonder what is was all about. You should keep a dream journal. It’s good inspiration for creative projects,” she said before reaching over to her nightstand and pulling out a journal.

“See, here’s the entries from when we first met. I kept wandering around airports looking for something, or someone it seems,” she said.

It was comforting to hear he wasn’t the only one who’d become quickly besotted with the other. Sometimes he still couldn’t believe she loved him, especially when he held her in his arms.

His kissed the top of her head, “Maybe I will. Thanks for waking me love.”

She rolled on top of him and began kissing him silly, “Anything for the birthday boy.”

After he’d gotten his first birthday present they threw on their bathing suits and got ready to face the day. Before he’d gotten up she made sure to run to the little bakery around the corner and pick up some fresh chocolate chip muffins that she knew he’d love.

While he got dressed she stuck a candle in it and walked it over to him singing, “Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Jon! Happy birthday to you! Love you babe.”

“Aww thanks Gen. It’s perfect so far. But I should’ve expected it to be since I get to spend time with you,” he said.
She laughed and bit into a muffin of her own, “Oh let’s get moving before you make my teeth rot with all your sweetness!”

While they walked to the beach in the quiet morning air Jon received a phone call from his family. His entire family was singing into the phone, quite off-key, wishing him well.

“Love you Jon! Happy birthday!” Arya shouted above the rest.

Gen watched the smile take over his face listening to them all, “Thanks everyone! Gen and I are headed to the beach now to do some swimming.”

“Make sure you wear sunscreen! Don’t need to get a sunburn on your birthday,” Ned reminded.

“Of course, thanks for calling. We’ll send you pictures. Love you all!”

He hung up the phone and shook his head at Gen. “They’re such goofballs. I swear my family’s singing gets worse each year. Not even Sansa can save the lot.”

“They’re so cute!”

After applying sunscreen they laid their stuff on the empty beach and ran for the sea.

“Come on Jon! Gotta welcome in the next year of your life with a good swim,” she yelled from the water.

He was eyeing it with apprehension. In truth, he’d never swam in the sea before. It’d always been lakes and rivers for him. No one wanted to risk the cold of the northern seas if they could help it.

“Is it warm?” he asked.

“Just come in! You’ll love it, it’s refreshing!”

He trusted her with all else, so he took a leap of faith and ran in. She was right, it wasn’t as big and bad as he made it out to be in his mind. Old Nan had filled his mind with too many stories of sea creatures and pirates when he was younger.

She swam over to him and grabbed his hand, “Isn’t this beautiful?”

“You look like a mermaid,” he laughed.

Gen looked down at her green bathing suit and smiled, “Oh sure. Well you better hope I didn’t lure you out here to keep you all to myself.”

He shrugged, “I wouldn't mind.”

They rode out the waves on their back for a while, taking in the ocean breeze and the sun shining down on them.

After they dried off they didn’t stop to sit, she had plans for them. Of course, this was after they treated themselves to an ice cream cone.

She led him to narrow streets with explanation, dragging him along.

“You’re not going to jump me are you?”
“No! Just bringing you somewhere my mom told me to check out. Should be right around the corner,” she explained.

And for a change, her directional skills were right. Once they turned the corner the alleyways were covered in graffiti from artists. It was the underground scene according to her mother, and it was clearly thriving.

“Wow! This place is amazing. Who would’ve known this was tucked away over here,” Jon said.

One wall was covered in coins, creating a picture of a woman somehow out of their varying shades. Most were traditional spray paint art, depicting different people and places around the city. Another was an interactive display with the words “Write what you love” written in bold at the top. The artist had painted over the wall in what looked like white board paint and left behind markers for people to use.

Gen smiled at Jon and went to work.

He jotted down “family, friends, and you” where she could see it before reading over her shoulder.

From the looks of it, she had a lot to be thankful for.

When she noticed him staring she just said them out loud as she wrote, “Okay, so there’s you, my family, Mira, Sandor, Tyrion, and pretty much everyone I’ve ever met.”

He hugged her from behind, “You’re just a loving person aren’t you?”

She shrugged, “What can I say, I’ve got great people in my life.”

The two of them posed for several pictures against the backdrops and forwarded them along to her mom.

Her reply was fast, “Oh my Gods how cute! I’m going to print those out and hang them on the fridge ASAP.”

“Send me copies lol. Love you! Thanks for telling me about the place,” she texted back.

Once their art excursion was over he decided he wanted to spend the rest of the day roaming the streets with her until dinner came. She showed him around to all her favorite shops including the stationary store, a story that only sold chocolate, and even a funky wig shop just for fun.

“Can we try one on?” she asked the shop keep.

They smiled at her enthusiasm, “Go ahead. As long a you’ve got clean hair.”

She threw a blond wig on Jon and laughed, “Oh my Gods Jon can you imagine?”

He turned around in the mirror, “I think I could pull it off. Although I do look just a bit pale with it.”

“Oh just a bit babe, no worries.”

Jon had her try on a pink wig that fell to her chin.

“I feel Arya could pull this look off,” she said.

“Don’t give her any ideas. She and Catelyn are already at odds enough as it is.”
When dinner came she had tried to suggest all these places that they could go to, her treat she emphasized.

“Would you be disappointed if I said I wanted to just hang at your place and have someplace deliver?”

She’d found another reason why she loved him. He loved a good night in as much as she did.

“Not at all, let’s go home and get in our jammies!” she laughed.

When the seafood takeaway that he requested arrived, they snuggled up on the cloud of a couch and relaxed.

“Life is good,” she sighed.

“It really is. I’ve got food in my belly and you right next to me. Today has been perfect.”

“Sure beats the cloudy northern spring weather, doesn’t it?”

He thought of all the mud back home and realized just how lucky he was to be spending his birthday somewhere so beautiful, with someone so beautiful.

“It really does.”

She left the couch and came back with two bags behind her back.

“Present time!”

He’d never been good at accepting gifts from people and felt the blush on his cheeks, “Gen you shouldn’t have.”

“I wanted to! You deserve to be spoiled!”

As he opened the bags he noticed how nervous she looked and put his hand on her leg. “Gen I can see you stressing. I’m sure whatever you got me is perfect. Just spending time with you this weekend is more than enough.”

She cracked a smile as he reached in the bag and pulled out a hat. Jon was confused. It looked like something a police officer would wear.

“Is this you trying to explain a kink to me Gen?” he asked putting it on his mop of hair.

She burst out laughed, “Oh Gods no! It’s a chauffeur hat. Just a little gag gift considering all the driving you do around for the kids.”

“I’ll be sure to wear it next time I escort you somewhere Miss Norward,” he bowed.

“That’d be most agreeable Mr. Stark. Now open up the rest of the stuff!”

He pulled out a black leather journal and flipped through it. On the first page she’d written a letter to him, explaining how much she loved him.

“I figured you could use it to write your songs in,” she smiled shyly.

He leaned forward and gave her a hug, “It’s a great idea Gen. I love it.”
She bought him a new hockey jersey to wear to the next Winterfell Direwolves game with his brothers and a couple books she thought he’d like.

“Do you like everything? I can return stuff if you want,” she hurried to say.

“Gen. They’re great. You were really thoughtful in doing all of this,” he said.

She sighed into him, “Just wanted to make today special for you.”

He kissed her deep, “Well you did. Stop worrying about me.”

Gen stood up and started walking towards her room, “Still got one last present waiting for you in bed if you’re interested.”

He got off the couch in record speed and picked her up in his arms. Her laugh sent waves of happiness through his body and her kisses made him feel like a new person.

“Happy name day love.”

He was blessed.
Chapter 75

The next morning before his flight the two of them sat on the balcony discussing recent events over tea. The sun had just began to rise and they’d decided to get up early to spend every last minute together before his flight.

“Did I ever tell you about my lunch with Tyrion’s family?”

“No, I don’t think so. But who knows, my memory isn’t the best,” he said.

She tried to think of how to explain to him how she’d met an old friend of his aunt, an aunt he’d never even mentioned to her before. An aunt who was very much dead for reasons no one would explain to her.

“Well his brother in law, Robert Baratheon was there. Apparently he used to be friends with your Dad,” she explain.

Jon raised his eyebrows, “Really? I don’t think I’ve heard his name in years and years. Maybe as a little boy, but nothing in ages.”

She hesitated to continue speaking.

He noticed and said, “Do you know something more?”

“Uh well according to Tyrion he used to have a thing for your aunt but it didn’t work out,” she said.

Gen watched as Jon’s face twist from confusion to solemnity. “My aunt Lyanna?”

“He didn’t tell me a name but I’m assuming so.”

Ned never mentioned Lyanna around them. If he did, it was only on the anniversary of his death when he’d walk off into the woods for the day without a word. A day when Catelyn forbade them from walking after him.

“Hmm. My dad never talks about her, even after all this time,” he sighed.

She leaned forward and grabbed his hand, “I’m sorry if bringing her up was painful. I just thought the connection was interesting.”

He forced a smile to his face, “No it’s okay. I didn’t know her anyways.”

After that she helped him pack, savoring in their last moments together before he’d have to head back to Winterfell. Both felt like their caresses and kisses hadn’t lasted long enough and were already planning for another trip together.

“Well I have to come back to Winterfell for Amira and Sansa’s play in half a month,” she said.

“Good point, I keep forgetting about that. So that’s one weekend.”

She curled up into him and sighed, “I know it’s not a ton of time together but we have video chat at least. The more hours I work the sooner we get this book done and I can come home.”

Tyrion was a genius. He could write his chapters in a week without requiring major edits. But she felt a block in her writing recently. Even though she had her journals to go off of, she kept feeling
like her words weren’t good enough to be published. But with the speed that they were working at, she didn’t have much time to think about her inadequacies. She just had to keep writing and get over herself.

“Gen, don’t worry about coming home in a hurry for our sakes. I’m happy as long as you’re happy. And if that means taking your time on this book and really enjoying the process, I’m cool with it. Just don’t feel like you have to rush back for me.”

“I know! My motives are a little selfish. I want to finish up so we can get back to cuddling again. It gets lonely in this bed by myself. I never thought I’d like sharing one with someone until we started,” she said pointing to the expanse of mattress around them.

He laughed, “How about I get you one of those body pillows? You can tape a picture of me to it.”

“You’re such a weirdo! I’d feel like such a creep doing that,” she laughed, “Besides, there’s no substitute for the real you.”

On their way to the airport he showed her all the recent pictures of Ghost. Most were taken as he guarded the bedroom door from the foot of Jon’s bed. But there was also a great group shot of all the Stark kids holding their direwolves in the living room.

“Oh my Gods Jon! You guys are so cute. You need to edit Theon into this and make it your Christmas card,” she said zooming in on his face.

“Maybe Bran can figure out how to put his face onto one of the pups,” he laughed.

“Oh Gods that’d be something!”

They lingered at security, neither one wanting to part. Jon kept thinking of how hard it’d been at home not being able to drive over to her house whenever he wanted to see her. And she thought of how cold she’d felt at night without him.

“Do you really have to go?”

He kissed her head, “I’m afraid so Gen. But this goodbye isn’t forever. We’ll still be in touch.”

She looked up at him with glassy eyes and smiled, “You better Jon. I’ll send you lots of life updates.”

“I’ll look forward to them Gen. Love you,” he said. He buried his head into her neck and hugged her tight. He wanted to remember how it felt for the weeks without her to come.

“Love you too Jon. Thanks for keeping me company this weekend.”

When he arrived back in Winterfell his dad was there to pick him up. Jon felt weird to be back away from the sun. Being back almost made him feel like the trip had all been a dream. But then he looked down at his phone, saw a picture of Gen sitting alone in her bed, and felt grounded.

“How was your trip Jon? It was weird not having you around on your birthday. We all missed you,” Ned said.

Jon wondered if everyone included Catelyn too. “I missed you all too. The trip was amazing though. Genevieve is really living the dream down there.”

Ned turned to look at him, “You’re not thinking of moving down South are you? Your grandpa
always said it wasn’t natural for Northerners.”

Jon smiled, “No Dad, I’m still very much fond of the North. But I wouldn’t mind a business trip down there from time to time.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

The morning’s conversation came to Jon’s mind and he wanted to ask his Dad so badly about his aunt Lyanna.

But then he saw the happy look on his father’s face and he realized he couldn’t be the reason it went away.
Chapter 76

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’d been a hard week for Gen after Jon left. Her dinners alone felt quieter than usual, and her the silence was getting to her. Sure, they could chat on the phone from time to time but it wasn’t enough. He was always busy with work and his family and by the time she got out of work she was too drained to talk most days. And it didn’t help that her family kept “forgetting” to call her.

She’d tried updating her blog at night to keep her busy, but what could she really say? She woke up, went to work, and went home. Sometimes she went for a walk with Tyrion to get lunch but that wasn’t exactly something to write home about.

Sitting at home listening to the muffled drum of the city, Gen had to get outside before she lost her mind. She threw on her bathing suit and ran out the door toward the sea.

The beach was empty under the cover of night and she found herself wishing she could scream without waking people up. Lights from the sky rise building behind her polluted the water with light as she walked into the water.

It was cold, so cold without the sun, that she felt goosebumps spread across her skin. She didn’t mind though. The shock to her system helped snap her out of the fog she’d been in for the past couple of days, at least for a minute.

When she worked she had a nasty habit of getting into routines she couldn’t break. And more often than not those routines prioritized work over her happiness.

She began to feel stupid for heading out there in the dark without a reason. But did there have to be a reason for everything she did? She was tired of having to have all of the answers.

So she got out of the water and shook herself off. As she walked back to the apartment things seemed to catch up with her and her vision blurred with tears.

Her doorman didn’t even know what to say.

Shut away in her room she texted her emotional support dog, or hound rather.

“Sandor? Can we talk. I’m feeling emo.”

He called her right away, “Gen what’s wrong? Do I need to kill your boyfriend?”

She laughed out a sob, “No, it’s not him. I’m just feeling really lonely here and I don’t know how to keep myself sane. It’s really fucking hard.”

“I know Gen, I feel you. Every time I go on tour I feel like I’m going to lose my fucking mind. But I just keep on going, got no other choice,” he said.

The assurance in his words helped dry her tears, “Don’t you ever wish your brain could just fuck off and do what it was supposed to naturally?”

“Of course I do. But as I’ve gotten older I’ve realize I can’t control everything, and sometimes you’ve just got to let your body feel the emotions it wants to, ride out the wave.”
Gen felt like some days her body was trying to make her ride out a hurricane, not a wave.

“Elder Brother isn’t with you telling what to say is he?”

His gravedeled laugh flooded her ear, one of her favorite sounds in the world, “No. He’s safe and sound on the Isle I’m sure.”

There was a pause in conversation as Genevieve tried to keep herself calm. Sandor’s words helped, but only to an extent. There was only so much a person could tell you before you had to believe it for yourself. But when she got in these moods it was hard to.

“Did you talk to Jon about your mood this week?” he asked.

Gen paused. Why hadn’t she? “Uh no. I didn’t want to bother him when there’s nothing he can do to help.”

“Gen, didn’t you learn anything on the Isle? The whole point to having people in your life is so you don’t have to go through bad days alone. Call him.”

“Yeah maybe, thanks Sandor. I’ll talk to you later,” she said.

“Alright Gen. Take care of yourself. Just text me and I’ll jump on a plane and come hang out with you. Fuck knows I could use a break from this tour.”

After her phone call with Sandor she wandered around her apartment, fruitlessly searching for something to distract her. The bottle of wine in her kitchen gave her pause but she wouldn’t. Hearing Sandor’s sobriety journey on the Isle had been evidence enough not to drink when she was sad.

So instead she climbed into the shower and let the water wash over her until her fingers pruned. And after, as she laid in bed with her phone inches away from her hand she couldn’t bring herself to text Jon. Not even a simply goodnight.

The next morning at work she’d tried to stay hopeful. Because she really did believe in treating each new day like a blank canvas. She didn’t like carrying old emotions over. But it was hard.

And it was made harder by the fact that Tyrion hadn’t shown up until two hours after she arrived. For a while as she tried to bang out paragraphs on her computer she wondered if she should just walk around the city seeing as he wasn’t even there.

He noticed her mood almost instantly when he walked in the door, “Seven hells were you up all night or something?”

“Do I really look that bad?”

Tyrion backpedaled, “Uh no. Just a bit tired that’s all. But really, are you okay?”

She shrugged feeling like a little kid. “Not really. I’ve been feeling off since Jon went back. It’s hard being away from home.”

He felt guilty, realizing that he was partially to blame for her feelings. He was the one who insisted she move down there to work on the project when she’d expressed hesitation.

“I’m sorry Gen. Why don’t we got out for dinner tonight to help keep your mind off of it all. The city can be a lonely place if you’re on your own.”

“I’d like that. Thanks Tyrion,” she said.
He looked at her, taking in her reluctant posture and messy hair. He wasn’t very good at consoling people, never had been.

“Great. Well let me know if you have any problems with what I’ve written for Sunspear.”

Over dinner that night he allowed her to mope, as long as she promised him she’d tried to find things to enjoy over the weekend, even if it was just calling friends.

She felt slightly better after taking sometime to talk and reflect. Nothing bad ever lasted forever, and no emotional state was permanent. She had to keep reminding herself that. And she had to be brave enough to admit that sometimes weren’t okay.

She picked up her phone and called Jon, “Hey, I’ve been having a hard week. Can we just chat?”

“Of course Gen. I’m here for you,” Jon replied.

And with those words she knew she’d be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the chapter drought! Between work, school, family visiting, and a family emergency, I've been BUSY! I think from here on out updates should be back to once a day (hopefully!!)
Chapter 77

Over the weekend Gen took Tyrion’s advice and tried to have fun. She swam first thing in the morning, and even went to a yoga class on the beach. His advice was good, but Jon’s was even better.

He told her that every time she was feeling sad, to text him and he’d send her a picture to make her smile.

So that’s how she ended up with several pictures of Ghost licking his face, a video of Jon scaring Theon from behind, and a simple mirror selfie with a goofy smile.

And with each picture he sent, she felt energized to pick herself up and keep going. She didn’t have time to spend these beautiful years of her life with a frown on her face. Especially when her boyfriend kept sending her selfies with a puppy. What could be better than that?

She decided to keep busy by calling Mira. It’d been some time since they’d last spoken and she wanted to hear all about her time in Highgarden.

“Mira! How’ve you been?”

Over the video her friend waved and said, “I’ve been really good actually. How’s life in Casterly Rock?”

Gen looked out her window and sighed. Anyone else in the world would kill for that view. What was wrong with her?

“Eh, just feeling a bit homesick. But I want to hear about you!”

But Mira knew her better than to just let her change the topic so easily. Concern filled her eyes as she asked, “Gen, what’s wrong? Are things not okay at the Rock?”

Gen felt her eyes start to well. She hated crying in front of Mira. She didn’t know why but it felt taboo to cry in front of Mira, someone whose friendship was based around laughter and light-heartedness.

She couldn’t speak for a second, scared her voice would shake.

“I don’t know. I think I’m just a little lonely up here by myself. I get to talk with Tyrion at work, but the rest of the day I’m just by myself. And I call home and stuff but it’s just so fucking quiet in my apartment,” she explained.

Mira sighed, “I was going to offer anyways but this just confirms it. Why don’t you come visit me one weekend so you’re not just sitting alone in your apartment talking to walls.”

Gen laughed, “That’d be a lot of fun. How far am I exactly from you?”

“Uh let me check,” Mira said typing away on her keyboard, “This website says it’s only a three hour train ride. So you’ve got no excuse!”

“Fine, fine. I’ll book a ticket for a couple weekends out. Will I get to meet Willas?”

Mira blushed and put her hands to get neck, “I suppose so. I do mention you enough to him.”
“So you’re a thing now? When’d this happen!”

“When we made out in the break room last week,” she smiled.

Gen rose out of her bed and started dancing around on the camera, “Oh my fucking Gods Mira! You’re a legend. I can’t wait to congratulate you in person.”

“Oh trust me, we’ll have a good girls night. Don’t you worry.”

For them, girls nights often involved sharing a bottle of wine, dancing around the room in their pajamas, and making pasta in the middle of the night to fuel them. With Mira, Gen could be her true self. There was no drama clouding their friendship like with other people she’d met. She felt very blessed to have Mira and all the people in her life without any tension.

“I can’t wait! But seriously, how have things been with Willas so far?”

Mira leaned over and rummaged through her purse and held up a ticket, “He’s taking me to a concert tomorrow night actually.”

“Ooooo a musical manz! Who are you seeing?”

“Don’t get too excited, it’s classical. Not exactly your type of music,” Mira said.

“Hey! I listen to every genre!”

“But you’re not jumping to hear an orchestra are you?”

Genevieve tried to picture her and Jon all dressed up heading to a fancy concert at a musical hall. While she occasionally listened to classical to help her focus, she couldn’t exactly see them sitting through an entire performance. She liked to dance to music, feel it flow through her body, and you couldn’t exactly dance in the aisles at the orchestra.

“Okay, you’ve got me there. So what are you wearing to it? I’m sure Willas looks amazing in a tux,” Gen said.

Mira’s eyes looked like they were seeing stars, “Oh he does. I almost asked him out at the Christmas party solely based on the way he was rocking it. But to answer your question, I think I’m going to wear that midnight blue dress I got a couple years ago”

“Send me lots of pictures! You could put your mom and I in a group chat, I’m sure we’re both dying for updates.”

“I actually haven’t told her yet, thanks for reminding me,” Mira said.

Gen was surprised she hadn’t told her mother yet. When they were in high school, she told her EVERYTHING, well mostly everything. There were somethings she had to leave out or risk being grounded.

“Have you guys been in touch lately?”

“Eh, not too much. We text in the family group chat most days but they’ve been super busy with Talia, Ethan, and Ryon.”

“I miss hanging out with your family. Next time you’re home invite me so I can hang out with all of you,” Gen pouted.
“Fine, fine. But I’m warning you, Ethan still has a crush.”

Gen laughed, “Maybe I’ll bring Jon too.”

“You can’t break his little heart. He’s been reading your blog I think. Next thing you know he’ll have a song written about you.”

“He and Jon can battle it out,” she said.

After their phone call Gen booked her train ticket and started receiving links from Mira of all the trouble they could up to in Highgarden. After talking with Mira and finding something to look forward to, she felt the lightness return to her body. And besides, she only had a week full of work before she’d be back in Winterfell with everyone for Amira and Sansa’s play. She could get through it.
“Hi everyone! Tyrion and I have been writing so much lately. My hands hurt from all the typing! I can’t spill too much about the book, but it’s shaping up quite nicely. I can’t wait to see my family and friends back in Winterfell this weekend for Amira and Sansa’s play! (And no, I didn’t just friendzone Jon… lol) Thinking of all of you and hope you have a fun and stress free week. Love, Gen”

Jon was just about to comment on her blog post when his Dad walked in his office.

Ned smiled at his son and asked, “Do you have a minute? Your Uncle’s on my computer doing that video thing if you want to come say hello.”

As if he was going to just sit there and work on the proposal he was supposed to be finalizing!

In his Dad’s office, sure enough, Benjen was sitting there on the computer screen. Robb and Theon were nowhere to be found, probably too busy with deadlines to step away. In their defense, they’d never been really close with Benjen.

“How’ve you been?” Jon asked.

His uncle grinned, “I’ve been great. I was off duty last night and got to play a mean game of cyvasse at a bar in Mole’s Town.”

“I didn’t even know people knew how to play that up there.”

“You’d be surprised with the people that pass through up here. Not all Northerners that’s for sure,” Benjen shrugged.

Ned leaned his face into the frame, “Do you have this weekend off? Sansa is starring in a play at school.”

Jon tried not to laugh at the way his father tried to figure out how to use the technology. He kept putting his face too close to the screen, making it impossible to see.

“What day is it on?”

Jon looked through the calendar on his phone, “Opening night is Friday, but there’s also shows on Saturday and Sunday.”

“I’m on duty all weekend unfortunately. It’s been too long since I’ve seen all the kids,” Benjen said.

Ned clapped his hands together, “Well you know our home’s always open to you Benj. Bran has loads of questions for you about the Watch, I’ll have you email him.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t try and convince him to join up,” his brother laughed.

“You better no! Cat will behead me if you do!”

Down south, Gen was reading over the recent comments on her latest post. Her mother had commented telling her to call her, and etreelover (Mira’s brother) had commented a bunch of happy emojis. Dear Gods…
She called her mom who was busy cleaning up her studio.

“Hi sweetie! Are you on your lunch break?”

Gen eyed her pitiful sandwich, “I guess so. Tyrion went out so I’m just enjoying the view here.”

“How nice! Be sure to send me lots of pictures, I want to paint something. I’m just trying to get my studio in order.”

Knowing her mom, that wasn’t an easy task. She hoarded art supplies like they’d never be sold again. She never knew what she’d need in the future.

“How’s that going for you?”

Her mom laughed, “About as well as you’d imagine. Your father has been trying to teach me that if I let things go, it’ll end up in the hands of someone who needs it more. So that’s sort of been working.”

“Just think, some little kid might be able to use it,” Gen said.

“Okay fair. I’m trying sweetie! How are you today?”

“I’m good actually. Knowing I’ll be home this weekend is making this week a lot easier for me.”

“Oh that’s right! Amira is really happy you’re able to come for her play. She’s been practicing 24/7 with her lines. Jon’s sister, the redhead, uh what’s her name?”

Her mother never had the memory for remembering people’s names.

“Sansa.”

“Yep, that’s the one. She’s been over too a bunch rehearsing.”

“That’s nice. Maybe they’ll be friends after this.”

Her mom laughed, “As if our family’s aren’t connected enough. Between you, Henryk, and Roland we might as well combine our family holidays and call it a day.”

“It’d sure make things easier!”

“Anyways, how are you and Jon? Did you have a nice time when he came up to visit? I like all the pictures of you two at the graffiti! I’m jealous.”

Gen scrolled through the pictures on her computer of the two of them posing with the art. Her smile had been so wide that day. Jon just had that effect on her.

“We had a lot of fun! I was feeling pretty lonely last week after he left, but I think I’m better now. Having plans to look forward to is helping me out of my slump.”

“Oh sweetie. You can always call me when you’re feeling down. It’s no bother at all.”

Gen sighed, “I know, but you’ve got enough to worry about with everyone at home.”

“You’re still my baby Gen. I’ve got your back. Anyways, what plans did you make?”

“Well I coming home this weekend for the play. And the weekend after that I’m going down to
Highgarden to see Mira!”

“Ooooh! How is Mira? I miss seeing you two together,” her mom asked.

“She’s great! Don’t say anything to her mom, but she’s actually dating someone right now.”

She could feel the excitement in her mom’s voice when she asked, “What’s their name? I promise not to mention it to Elissa. She’s doing great by the way. They’ve all been reading your blog.”

“His name is Willas and he’s very handsome. I’ll collect as much intel as I can for you when I’m down there.”

“You better! Your siblings never tell me anything!”

Gen laughed and they ended their phone call soon after. She had writing to do if she wanted to head back to Winterfell without any work to catch up on. And that meant she better figure out how to draw the ice plunge she’d done with Tormund as soon as possible.

Chapter End Notes

Between the chapters I'm writing now and the recent episodes of the show, I am feeling EMO about these characters. I need some fluff!
Chapter 79

The day before Gen came home was incredibly stressful for both the Starks and the Norwards. Sansa was running around like crazy trying to finish up the costumes the drama department had asked her to help with. And Amira was a ball of anxiety wondering if she’d have the confidence to even get up on stage in front of everyone to perform.

“Hey Jon?” his father poked his head into his office, “Can you pick up Sansa and Gen’s sister from school today?”

“Yeah sure. Did Sans say how the rehearsals are going?”

Ned sighed and sat on the couch in his son’s office, “Poor girl is beyond stressed out. But I know they’ll get it all done, they always do.”

Jon began packing up his bag to go home, “Very true. I’ll try to cheer her up when I see her.”

In the school parking lot Jon tried to do this by first putting on some of Sansa’s favorite music. While the pop voices of Florian and Jonquil weren’t exactly Jon’s type of music, he’d suck it up to see his sister smile.

When Sansa and Amira got into his car he could feel the stress coming off of them. Their shoulders were tensed up close to their necks and their brows were furrowed.

“Hi Jon, thanks for picking us up,” Amira sighed.

Sansa rested her head against the car window, “Yeah, thanks.”

He tried turning up the music louder so they could hear it. Sansa’s hands began tapping to the music, though her worried brow remained.

“I take it rehearsals didn’t go well?”

Sansa and Amira shared a look, “As well as you’d expect for a bunch of high schoolers.”

“Are you having trouble remembering your lines?”

“Not really. It’s more of all the movements we have to remember for the fight sequences,” Amira said.

Jon tried to picture his dainty sister Sansa fighting on stage. He just couldn’t. Arya, yes. But Sansa? She didn’t even like killing bugs.

“Maybe Arya could help you two?” Jon suggested.

Sansa rolled her eyes, “Like I get that she does her water dancing and everything, but she can’t possibly learn all the steps in time to help us.”

“Well if there’s anything I can do, just ask and I’ll try my best to help out.”

“Thanks Jon. I’m sure I’ll think of something,” Sansa said.

Instead of going straight home Jon pulled into their local bakery to take their minds off of all the drama of drama club.
The bakery was an explosion of pink, on the walls and on the food. Sansa always loved going there when she was a little kid. Especially when the owner would sneak her an extra cookie when she saw her smile.

“Come on you two, let’s get you something sweet. My treat,” Jon said.

“Gods I can see why my sister loves you,” Amira said.

Sansa laughed and Jon’s face felt heated.

“You’re probably right Amira. Your sister does love her snacks!”

And Amira wasn’t unlike her sister. Both she and Sansa had decided to get the biggest cupcakes they saw, piled high with pink frosting. Jon had encouraged them to go all out and get milkshakes too.

When they sat down at the tables enjoying their sugar feast Jon sent a picture of the three of them smiling to Gen.

“Oh my Gods! My little babies. I love that picture. What are you three up to?” Gen texted.

“The girls were stressed after rehearsals so I thought I’d take them out for a treat.”

“You are so sweet Jon! Love you!!! Thanks for looking out for Amira. You’re the best!”

The girls caught him smiling at his phone and started teasing him.

“Oooo how is she Jon?” Sansa asked.

“She’s fine. Just finishing up with work so she can get things squared away for tomorrow.”

Amira said, “Are you coming with my mom pick her up?”

She was supposed to fly in around lunch time while everyone was at work or school.

“I wish I could, but I’ve got to stick around at work to get some last minute things done.”

“Is Dad really that much of a hardass at work?” Sansa asked. Although she had little interest in joining the family business someday, she still wanted to know the ins and outs of what the men in her family did everyday.

Jon thought about her question. He wasn’t really tough on any of them, but then again Jon always did what was expected of him without slacking off. Mostly, his dad just wanted to make sure their customers were satisfied.

“Not really. He’s pretty laid back actually. I just don’t want to take advantage of being the boss’s son and taking all this time off.”

“Theon doesn’t seem to care. He’s always taking days off when he’s hungover,” Sansa smiled.

“It’s Theon. Do you really expected anything different?”

The girls ended up taking Jon’s advice and recruited Arya to make sure their movements were as clean as possible. Between going back and forth rehearsing dialogue and helping Sansa finish up with the costumes, the girls were beat.

Over dinner the two girls ate fast and squirmed in their seats wanting to be excused.
Sansa turned to her mom and asked, “Is it alright if Amira sleeps over? We won’t be up too late, but we just want to go over some scenes a couple more times before bed.”

Cat smiled at her daughter, “I’m fine with that as long as her parents are.”

“Thank you mom! We’ll call them after dinner.”

Nadya and Willem were more than happy to let Amira spend the night. Although her siblings were outgoing, Amira didn’t spend a lot of time with friends. When they moved it had been a hard transition for not just Genevieve, but her sister too. They were happy to see her off spending time with someone. The fact that it was a family they already knew and trusted was just an added bonus.

Jon watched them practice their fights scenes for a bit after dinner, but they kicked him out when it came time to rehearse their lines.

“I don’t want to spoil anything for you,” Sansa explained.

“Yeah, we want you all to be surprised tomorrow,” Mira said.

So Jon walked down to his room and flopped on the bed. It’d been a long day and he was feeling drained from all the running around. He pulled out his guitar and began strumming away on a song he’d been working on.

The day he’d met Gen at the airport the lyrics had come to him on the plane as she slept next to him. It didn’t mean much then, but as he got to know her the song had become to represent all that she meant to him.

In the lyrics he talked about the way her smile hit his heart with joy and how her touches made him feel whole. He’d been working on it and perfecting the sound since the day she’d first kissed him. And he felt just about ready to show it to her.
Nadya and Roland were waiting at the airport. Roland had decided to take the day off to see his sister come home, not that minded having an excuse to skip work. As for her mom, she kept looking around the corner hoping to get a glimpse of her daughter.

"What's taking her so long? I thought they landed twenty minutes ago?" Roland asked.

She leaned her head against her son's shoulder, "I don't know Ro. Maybe she's in the bathroom."

But then Gen came bounding through the security with a smile on her face.

Nadya ran forward and hugged her daughter close to her, "My sweetie! It's so good to see you."

"It's good to be back Mom. I can't wait to see Amira up on stage, who would've thought?"

Roland coughed and held his arms out to her for a hug.

"Hi Gen. You look like you got some sun," he said.

She laughed, "Don't flatter me. I know I'm just as pale as when I left. No tans in this family."

Back at the house their mother was happy to spoil her two oldest babies. It'd been ages since they'd gotten to spend time without the younger kids around. Being home just the three of them reminded her of when they were little and still needed her, the days she stayed home taking care of them while she tried to find time to paint. Now she felt like she had all the time in the world for her art and so little time with her oldest kids.

"I made that soup you two like. Thought I'd have it ready for lunch considering the younger two don't care for it," their mom said.

"I'm still convinced they're adopted. How can they not like Nana's soup?" Roland said as he took a spoonful into his mouth.

"Well they didn't get to know the grandparents much before they passed. Poor Henryk didn't even get to meet them. You two were very lucky," Nadya said.

Gen thought back to memories with her Nana, her mother's mom, and how special she was. Every time they visited her she'd always be ready at the door to give big hugs and even bigger meals. And she wasn't what'd you'd expect for an old lady. She was a firecracker, full of humor that she claimed helped her stay hip with the grandkids.

Their father's parents had died before they were born, so their Nana and Papa were their only grandparents they knew. And soon around when their mother was pregnant with Henryk, they passed away within six months of each other.

They didn't talk about them much in sadness. Instead, they tried to keep them alive through recipes and pictures.

Gen pushed the thoughts out her mind and tried to stay positive, "So what time is the show tonight?"
Her mother walked over to the color-coded family calendar, "Um it says five-thirty but I think Amira has to be there earlier. She says she's going to be too nervous to eat so I figured we'll just go out to eat afterwards."

Gen hoped that dinner would include the Starks.

Roland seemed to have the same idea, "Are we going to eat with the Starks? I want to talk with Robb and Theon about how our fantasy league is doing?"

"I mean we could eat with them, I don't see why not. I'll call up Catelyn and see if they have plans already."

Catelyn confirmed the plans and the three of them spent the rest of the afternoon watching TV. Their guilty pleasure was throwing on house-buying shows and critiquing the couples wishlists.

"No one needs that much closet space. They need to just learn how to throw out some shit," Roland said rolling his eyes.

Nadya couldn't believe the expectations of the younger couples,"And who needs those fancy countertops in a starter home? I wouldn't have even dreamed of that back in my day."

After several episodes, Henryk came home from school and Willem arrived home from work ready with flowers for his daughter. Amira didn't have the same allergies as her sister thankfully.

And speaking of her, she called with nerves clear in her voice.

Nadya put her on speaker, "Hi Mom. Did Gen come in?"

"Yep, she's right next to me. We're all excited to see you tonight."

"Well don't get too excited. I'm scared I'll mess up," Amira sighed.

Her dad took over the phone, "Sweetie, don't be nervous. You're going to be amazing and we're all be there rooting for you."

"Yeah Amira. Just think, you'll get to order whatever you want afterwards at dinner too," Roland called out.

Henryk raised his head from his video game at the mention of dinner, hoping to get in on the action.

Soon it came time to file into the car and head over to the school to see her stage debut. And when they pulled into the parking lot Gen spotted Jon's car already there. She still hadn't gotten a chance to give him a call.

But none of that mattered when they entered the auditorium and found the Starks sitting there, with five seats saved.

Jon was on the very end, and kept looking around hoping no one would try and take the seat next to him. So when Genevieve approach he almost tried to tell her off without even noticing.

"Hi sorry, I'm saving this seat for someone," he said.

"My bad. I'll go sit somewhere else," Gen responded with a smile.

He stood up quick and pulled her into his arms, "Gods it's good to see you."
She kissed her cheek and squeezed her arms around him, "Thanks for saving me a seat Jon. You're the best."

Sitting next to each other, the two of them seemed to forget that they were in a room full of people. It was only them when they talked.

"Did you talk to Sansa today at all? Amira is pretty nervous."

"Not directly, but my Dad said she was stressed out. I bet they’re going to do amazing though. I can’t wait," he said.

Gen noticed the way his eyes seemed to shine with pride talking about the girls. She could just picture him as a father someday, with so much love and joy for his children that it would shine through in all that he did.

He noticed her dumb-idiot smile and said, "I love you, you know that?"

"Always. Love you too Jon, so much."

The lights dimmed and the show began. First, Sansa came onto stage and opened with a monologue about a high school graduation. It seemed a typical coming-of-age story until she announced that her family had died in a horrible car accident the same day.

And then Amira walked on stage as the dead sister, ready to show a side of herself to Sansa that she’d never gotten a chance to know. A side that was nerdy and witted, loved and fierce. But her sister had been too busy with her own life to ever notice.

Sitting in the crowd Gen began to reflect on her own relationship with Amira and her siblings. There never seemed to be enough time to get to know them fully, and the realization made her start to cry. It didn’t help that the girl her sister played was dead either.

Jon held her hand through it all, massaging it when he noticed the hot tears trickle out her face.

Sansa and Amira’s characters got to know each other through a role-playing tabletop game, and Sansa’s character had a breakdown that made Gen have to stifle some sobs. She prayed that she’d never know a world without her siblings and vowed to take more time to know her nerdy little sister.

When the play was over they met their girls at the stage with flowers and praise.

Gen pulled Amira into her arms and said, “You were brilliant Amira. I cried so much.”

Amira smiled up at her with the same smile Gen had loved on her as a child, “Thanks Gen. It means a lot that you came up to see it.”

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world Amira, and I promise not to ignore you like Sansa’s character.”

Her sister shrugged and looked down, “I get it if you do, you’re busy with life.”

“But never too busy to spend time with you and the rest of our crazy family. Now let’s go eat!”

Dinner was full of laughter and lots of overlapping voices. It’d been hard for Jon and her to hear each other over the madness of their siblings.

“It’s so cool that they’re all friends now,” Jon said as he looked at them all interacting.

“I know! It makes it a lot less scary for us dating. No scary meeting the family moments for us.”
Jon laughed, “I think you’re forgetting how Sandor threatened me.”

“Speaking of which, he agreed to do a concert at the Wall in a couple months. Let Benjen know if he wants to go. I promised Sandor I’d come up for it,” Gen said.

Jon’s smile lit up. One thing he loved about her was how thoughtful she could be of everyone in her life, even people who were practically strangers like his uncle.

“I’m sure he’d love to have us back up there. I’ll let him know.”

When he texted Benjen that night while Gen laid asleep next to him he’d been surprised by the response.

“That’s awesome Jon! I can’t wait to see you two again. Can you have her reserve two tickets for me? I’ve met someone in Mole’s Town. I’ll tell you about her later.”

Chapter End Notes

# operation get Benjen a gf has begun!
Chapter 81

The next morning she woke up before him and smiled at the weight on his arm on her waist. There was no where in the world she'd rather be. Cuddling up next to him always made her feel as though she was untouchable, like no one could ever hurt her as long as he was there.

And she loved the way he looked when he slept. He was just so peaceful. With wild hair and a calm face, she thought he was most beautiful first thing in the morning.

Ghost was lying at the foot of his bed looking at her curiously. When she'd met him last night, along with all his brothers and sisters, she'd fallen in love. Her parents had never let her and her siblings have a pet so this was as close as she'd ever get. And Ghost was a perfect little heater just like his friend Jon.

When he woke up his arms instinctively squeezed her tighter to make sure he wasn't dreaming.

"Morning Jon," she smiled.

His voice was rough in a way that sent a happy shiver down her spine, "Morning love. How'd you sleep?"

"Better than I have all week. You have any good dreams?"

He yawned, "All I remember is you, Ghost, and I walking through the woods. I don't know where we were going but it was snowing."

"I bet Ghost misses the snow, poor baby," she cooed.

Jon laughed sending a rumble through his body, "What about you Gen? Any crazy dreams?"

"Umm I think I was in Braavos or somewhere in Essos. I was running through narrow streets running away from something."

"Probably best if we don't analyze that one too much."

The two of them loved that they could share the mundane tiny details of their life together. Gen had always been told to never share her dreams because most people don't give a fuck. But with Jon, she knew he was truly listening. Some mornings when she was away from him they'd text each other what they could remember, just as a way to share another piece of themselves.

She rolled out of his arms and out of the bed and stood up with a yawn to stretch. Jon protested the loss of her in the bed but Ghost was happy to run around her feet.

"I need to shower. I feel so gross," she said. The last time she'd showered she'd been in Casterly Rock for Gods sake.

"But I'm cold," he whined, "Come back."

It was like he knew how his sleepy morning look pulled at her heart, "Just come with me. We can keep warm under the water."

The suggestion won him over and his eyes darkened. In the shower they sat on the floor, leaning against each other and letting the water wash over them.
"This is heaven," he sighed kissing at her neck.

Her hands wrapped around his waist, moving lower to one of her favorite parts of him. The Gods had made him perfect.

"Heaven is being in your arms and having your kisses," she smiled.

He kissed lower down her body until he made her sing with love for him.

"How are you so perfect?"

He smiled up at her and winked, "Guess I'm just born with it."

After she showed him just how perfect she thought he was they took turns washing each other's hair. This act of closeness was somehow more intimate than their other explorations of their bodies. The tender touches, without lust, showed each other just how much care they had.

After the shower Gen had the dumb-idiot smile plastered on her face. And Jon couldn't stop looking at it and feeling his heart beat fast.

They skipped out on a Stark family breakfast that would be full of questions and noise and instead drove over to the donut shop.

The woman behind the counter gave them a knowing smile as they ordered holding hands.

And as they sat by the window wolfing down their donuts they began to think about how far they'd come since they'd first came there together months ago.

It seemed like ages since that earlier morning after their flight. They'd both been bleary-eyed and ready to get home as soon as possible. But yet when the plane landed they'd felt the need to linger just for a bit at the shop.

"I was just thinking about how crazy our relationship is. I mean, what are the odds?" Gen said after a bite of her glazed donut that left her fingers sticky.

Jon had thought this over himself. If she hadn't sat down next to him at the gate, she'd probably just be a stranger. Just a faceless sister of his brothers' friends.

"We're just very lucky I guess. But I think I owe a lot to you making the first moves. You chatted me up at the airport, kissed me at the party, and even said I love you first," Jon said.

She smiled, "What can I say, I make moves! I know a good thing when I see it."

"You're such a goof."

"But I'm your goof and you know it!"

After donuts they headed to her house for the day. Jon knew he had to share her with them, as much as he wanted to throw her over his shoulder and just dive back into bed with her.

At her house her family was in the middle of eating breakfast still in their pajamas. Gen had explained to him that most Saturdays they didn't even bother to get dressed. They loved a lazy day in.

Meanwhile, his family was probably already up and dressed, ready to head out for one of their many activities.
"Hi you two! Did you just wake up?" her father asked when they joined them at the table.

"Nah, we got up a bit ago and went over to the donut shop. I was craving some," she explained.

Roland groaned, "Gods Gen you’re a cruel cruel woman for not grabbing some for your poor brother."

Jon looked at the spread of pancakes piled high on the table, "Looks like you’ve got quite the set up here."

Her mother laughed, "Thank you Jon. At least someone appreciates the efforts of Henryk and I."

Henryk sat up straighter in his chair and smiled.

"You helped mom cook?" Gen asked.

"Yeah, she’s been helping me learn so I can fend for myself," he said.

"Wow Henryk! Good for you. I’ll give you my soup recipes."

The conversation turned to Amira and how she was feeling after her first stage debut.

"I was super nervous right before, but when I got on stage it went away. Seeing you all in the crowd made it easier. Besides, getting to act with Sansa made it less scary."

"You two were really great up there. You had me and your sister all choked up. And those fight scenes! All your practice paid off," Jon said.

Her sister blushed, "Aw thanks Jon. You’ll have to give my thanks to Arya for helping us."

After breakfast they spent a lazy day in the living room, just vegging out on the couch and watching old movies. It was Gen’s idea of a perfect Saturday, cuddled up with the people she loved and eating snacks her doctor wouldn’t recommend.

Before Amira had to leave for the next showing of the play, her mother ran up from the basement carrying a box.

"I’ve got home movies! Just finished transferring them to DVD," she said.

Normally, Gen would’ve been embarrassed but she knew Jon wouldn’t judge her for her questionable haircuts of her childhood. She’d gotten ahold of the scissors a couple times and got a little too enthusiastic playing hairdresser.

Jon squeezed her arm and said, "I can’t wait to see this!"

Her father leaned forward in his chair and put his glasses on, "They were just the cutest kids, don’t know what happened to them."

"Hey!" Roland laughed.

They saw videos of Roland meeting Gen for the first time, looking like he was going to push her off the hospital bed. And then with time, the two of them running around hand in hand up to no good around the woods of their old house.

There was footage of tiny Gen with pigtails in her hair and missing teeth holding her baby sister with so much pride that she refused to give her back to her parents.
“She’s mine!” she’d said.

Amira laughed and said, “Was she really like that with me?”

“Oh yeah,” her mother nodded, “You were her little baby doll.”

When Henryk came around babies were old news in their house, but Roland was beyond excited to have a baby brother. One of the videos showed him trying to teach him how to walk, thinking the sooner he did, the sooner they could play together.

Watching the videos made a big smile grow on Gen’s face, and put a longing in Jon’s heart. Their family was full of so much love that it was almost tangible. And he wanted that for his future, for their future.

It was just another thing he’d have to add to the list of things to talk to her about someday.
That night as they squeezed into her bed they talked about the future. Gen was slowly realizing that her room at home was just a place to lay her head, and not a place she felt belonged to her. She asked Jon for advice considering how cozy his room was.

“You think I should get some string lights like you have?”

He looked around the blank walls of her room. It couldn't be a further representation of the vibrant woman he knew and loved. There wasn't even color, just boxes she hadn't gotten around to unpacking when they moved.

"That'd be nice. Do you plan on staying long here after your work with Tyrion," he asked.

She turned to face him with a pout on her face, "Well I'm not going to jet off to somewhere else if that's what you're wondering."

He smoothed the hair out of her face, "No, that's not what I meant. I was just wondering if you were going to live at home or what."

"What? Like get my own place?" she asked.

His heart-thumped in his chest as he said, "Yeah. I mean if you're interested maybe we could look at a place together."

She whistled and laughed into his chest, "I see you making moves. Is this your way of asking if I'll move in with you?"

"Uh if it's working, yes."

Her heart wanted so badly to say yes to him right then and there and watch his smile spread across his face. But she couldn't just make decisions with her heart. She had to think things through, especially decisions as big as that.

So instead of saying yes she said maybe.

"Maybeee. Depends on the details."

He pulled her closer, "Well I can't promise you a view like you have down at the Rock, but I can promise you it'd be close to family."

"What's got this on your mind all of a sudden?"

Jon noticed her apprehension and loosened his arm around her, "I mean it's no big deal if you're not feeling it. I've just been thinking of getting my own place for a while, seemed like a good time to go for it so we could have our own space."

"I get where you're coming from, I just don't want to rush to move out if I don't have a job lined up right after my work with Tyrion to help pay the bills," she said.

Jon sometimes forgot she'd only been out of college for about a year. Meanwhile he'd been working steady for his dad for a couple of years, saving up as much as he could.

"Oh, that's true. I wouldn't mind paying for the rent either way."
She sighed into his shoulder, "I can't ask you to do that Jon. I'd feel so guilty. Why don't we table it for later, when I'm closer to the end of my work?"

As much as he wanted the freedom to walk around a place that only the two of them owned, she had a point. The discussions of how they'd decorate their first place or whose bed they'd bring could wait. But that didn't mean he stopped picturing himself coming home to her after work.

He swallowed hard, "I understand Gen, no worries. Just think about it. I'll probably end up looking for a place either way. You're more than welcome to just hang out there if you'd rather live at home."

"It's not that I don't want to live with you, I just feel like we should take it slow. Why rush the future when we've got all the time in the world? Plus, I really want to have an income secured before I make any decisions."

He kissed her forehead and told her that there was no pressure.

Jon fell asleep soon after leaving Genevieve awake wondering what the hell to do.

She felt like she'd lived on her own for so long now that she was scared what'd it'd be like to have someone waiting for her to come home.

In college and during her travels she'd been able to come and go as she pleased. And home was never more than a place to sleep. And although she knew Jon would never try to make her feel caged in, she wasn't so ready to give up that freedom.

On the other hand, she could picture a life with him in a place of their own. There wouldn't be any need to lock the bedroom door and hope their family didn't hear. Hell, she could walk around naked if she wanted. There would always be someone to talk to, someone to hold her close at night. And she wanted that.

But she didn't want to plan so far in the future. She didn't want to jinx herself.

The next morning at the breakfast table Jon made no mention of the conversation they'd had, and neither did she.

Instead they sat around eating the scrambled eggs her dad had cooked up and tried to cheer up Genevieve before she had to get back on an airplane to Casterly Rock.

Her sister looked exhausted from the play the night before.

"Gen, Arya's friend Gendry came up after the show and told me to tell you that he talked to your friend Sandor," Amira yawned.

Jon and Gen shared a smile, "Really? That's pretty cool."

"How do you even know Gendry? He's like super cool."

Roland laughed at Gen's expense.

"What? And I'm not? He came with us when I went to that concert with Roland and everyone," she explained.

"You mean the concert I wasn't allowed to go to?" Henryk said under his breath.

Their mother intervened, "I'm sure it wasn't even your type of music anyways. Be nice to your sister."
Roland filled them in on the latest in the athletics department at Winterfell University.

"So we're redoing our website right now, it's going to be really fancy looking. I've got to meet with all the teams and make sure they use our new marketing materials so it's all unified," he explained.

Jon was impressed and wondered if he'd talked with Robb about his work. "That sounds cool Roland. I'll keep an eye out for it on the hockey team's Faceless page."

Before Gen knew, it breakfast was over and her bags were packed. It was like the weekend had ended just as soon as it'd begun. Time always had a funny habit of moving to fast just when things started to feel right for her.

At the airport the goodbyes felt too short, the hugs not long enough and Jon's kisses too public. Her parents had hugged her close, recruiting the rest of her siblings into a public display of care towards their sister, but that'd just reminded Gen of all that she was leaving behind at the Rock. Why did goodbyes have to be so hard?

Before she walked through security Jon rubbed his hands up and down her arms and tried to calm her.

"I'll be just a call away Gen. Go and play in the ocean for me love," he said. Behind his smile she could see that he too was trying his best to stay positive.

She gave him one last kiss and said, "You better keep your phone on. Same goes for you, if you have even the hint of a bad day I'm here for you. Love you so much."

"Love you too Gen, now go write your butt off so we can see each other again."

"Will do. Give Ghost a hug goodbye for me. And the rest of your family too."

She left with a smile but soon found the feelings of loss coming back to her. Why'd Tyrion have to live so far away?

As she walked onto the plane she tried to remind herself that she'd be okay. She just had to get through one week of work. And it was with Tyrion, someone who could make her smile just with a couple words. And then, before she knew it, the weekend would be there and she'd get to see Mira down in Highgarden. She just had to force a smile on her face and hope it stuck.
Chapter 83

The next day, after a sleepless night alone in her bed, Gen was trying to stay sane on her lunch break. She had planned to eat with Tyrion but he'd told her last minute that he was going to meet his Dad for lunch and she didn't have any interest in joining him. She didn't need Tywin's icy stare to make her feel even more alone at the Rock.

So instead she walked to her apartment for lunch and ate a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich she'd defrosted from her fridge. She was a fairly utilitarian eater, preferring to eat just to sustain her body when she was eating alone. With others she could pig out, but when it was just her all she cared about was getting enough energy. Which is why she kept a loaf's full of sandwiches in her fridge at all times.

She sat in her quiet living room eating and staring out the window until the silence became to much for her. Jon wasn't answering his phone and she didn't want to bother anyone else. She could handle being by herself. Hells, she’d done it for months abroad so it wasn't anything new. But now she was spoiled by the contact with her family and all the late night convos with Jon. Now silence felt strange.

So she turned her music on loud to drown out any thoughts that scared her, focusing on the mindless lyrics instead.

And then her laptop began to ring, Sandor's face filling the screen.

She accepted the call and he looked in much better spirits than she felt. It was usually the other way around. She really had to snap out of it and appreciate just how good her life was. There were people starving in Essos for Gods’ sake.

"Yo. What's up Sandor?" she asked.

He smiled in the way he only allowed for her and said, "Just checking in. Need some contact outside this shit hole tour bus."

He panned around to show her his cramped bunk. She had no fucking clue how he managed to lay on it, let alone sleep, with his height. The motel beds must feel like a cloud compared to it.

"Gods Sandor, you've got to get yourself your own bus."

"Don't I fucking know it. What I really need is to just say fuck it and retire," he sighed running his hands through his hair, exposing his scars.

"As much as I'd miss seeing you guys play, I don't blame you. You've been on tour for your whole adult life practically."

"I just want to buy a house in the middle of fucking nowhere and become a hermit."

She frowned, "Hey! I'd miss you."

"Fine, I guess I'd allow a visitor or two," he grunted.

On the Isle he'd told her the story of how his band even came to be. He'd run away from home at an early age, taking nothing but a picture of his deceased mom and sister. And for a while he'd lived not knowing where he'd sleep that night or when his next meal would be. Eventually he saved up
enough money to buy a second-hand out of tune bass guitar and learned some songs. He'd played for his meals in order to survive.

And then eventually he got good, so good that people booked him for gigs as seedy clubs most people wouldn't want to show their face at. He met his bandmates, wrote a few songs, and the rest was history. They'd gotten signed after their demo had gotten into just the right hands, some white-haired young man with money and a passion for music.

Now he was the face of one of the most celebrated rock bands in Westeros. Sandor found the fact very ironic considering the fact he'd tried to hide what he called his "ugly mug" for years.

But Sandor didn't care about the money or the fame. For him, music had always been about survival. He played to forget the pain of his past and then the loneliness of his future. But with the stresses of fame he'd took to the drink too much, sending him straight to the Isle for a reality check where he'd met Gen. And since getting sober his heart just hadn't been with the band like it used to be. He'd found that there was so much more to life than simply getting by day-to-day.

Realizing this Gen said, "Well whatever you decide to do, I'll support you. Who knows, maybe if you retire you could just do your woodworking instead."

"Gods I'd love that. At this point I wouldn't mind just being back on the Isle chopping wood with you again," he laughed.

She remembered how her arms ached. "I'll pass on that, but I'd watch. By the way, where even are you?"

He stuck his head out his cubby and yelled to his mates.

"They say we're going through Felwood right now."

She scrunched up her face, "Where the fuck is that?"

"Fuck if I know Gen. Our show is at Storm's End tonight."

"Nothing like a Monday night concert Sandor! Good luck," she said.

She'd never been to Storm's End herself, but she'd heard it was a place where the sea sprayed the air. It was that detail that always made her want to visit and see if it was anything like Bear Island during a storm.

"Thanks, but I'm mad at you. You totally owe me for forcing me up to the Wall for a show," he sighed.

"Hey! It'll be your last stop and then you can be a hermit in the woods. It beats Essos," she reminded.

He rolled his eyes as if he was a dramatic teenager and not a grown man, "Fine I guess so. By the way, that kid you brought to my show reached out."

She felt nervous for Gendry. He'd been great at the house show at the New Year's Eve party, but reaching out to a certified legend? That was risky. She didn't know the kid had it in him. He’d seemed pretty reserved when she’d talked to him. Looking back, she really didn’t understand how he was friends with Arya.

"Oh yeah? What'd he say? I don't really know him. He's Jon's sister's friend," she said.
"I thought he was going to send me a demo or something like the rest of the kids looking for fame. But he was actually pretty earnest."

"What'd he say?"

He shrugged, "Just wanted to thank me for meeting him. Asked if I had any pointers. I gave him a couple. Told him to build on what he knows, write from pain, and avoid the whole asshole musician thing."

"Aww look at you being a mentor!"

Sandor gave her a look and rolled his eyes again. "I do enough of that with you."

"Oh please, we mentor each other I'd say."

"Whatever you think Gen. Anyways, he sent me a video of him playing at a show. The kid's not bad, neither is his band, Bullseye or whatever it's called."

She'd certainly enjoyed hearing them play at the party. They'd even been playing when she and Jon kissed for the first time, so they'd always have a special place in her heart.

"Maybe he can take over for you when you decide to call it quits," she suggested.

"Oh shut it. I'm not retiring just yet. But seriously, after this tour is over I'm really going to consider it."

She smiled and started packing up her bag to head back the office. Talking to Sandor had totally made her lose track of time.

"On the bright side, you did promise me you'd do house shows when you retired."

He groaned, "In that case maybe I won't retire."

"Hey! I've got my sights at your playing at my wedding and my kid's first birthday party. You better be there," she laughed.

"Oh Gods. You tell Jon this yet?"

She blushed, "Don't want him thinking I'm a psycho planning this far in advance."

"But you are Gen. Don't deny it!"

"Whatever Sandor, I've got to get back to work and you've got whatever it is you do on the bus to do," she smiled.

"Fine fine, go get that paycheck. It was nice talking to you Genevieve."

"You too Sandor, you made my day. Kick ass in Storm's End."

"I'll try. But I'm thinking about jumping in the ocean too if I have to spend another night in this bus."
"You know Jon, it's nice getting taken out for lunch. Usually I'm the one doing the paying!" Ned said.

He and Jon were just around the corner from the office at a modern sandwich place that Ned had never been to. His father had been walking by his office all day to say hello, so Jon wanted to spend sometime while they could.

"You raised me, it's the least I can do," Jon said.

"Tell that to your siblings!"

They ordered from the tiny older woman behind the counter and took a seat in the corner. Having been in the war, Ned always like to be able to have a good view of the places he went. And that meant covering his back so he didn't have to worry about it.

Jon started catching him up on the latest news on the contract down in Oldtown with Mr. Hightower.

"How is Leyton? Did he say anything about the increase in fees?" Ned asked.

"They seem a little standoffish but I think if we took another trip down there it could help clear things up. We've just got to explain the breakdown of the costs better, and they seem the type who need to be talked to in person."

Ned looked at his son in pride as he talked about the family business. When he was younger he watched his own father, Rickard, build the place from the ground up. After Brandon died he'd had no choice but to take over the family business and make sure it wasn't run into the ground. He never imagined he'd have his own blood working for him too. They all made him proud.

He smiled and said, "Sounds good Jon. It'll be a good way for the two of us to hang out away from the craziness of the rest of the family."

Jon thought of the mysteries to be uncovered in the Citadel and all the books he'd never be able to read in his lifetime. Every time he thought of the place he became even more convinced that Sam should move down there with Gilly so he could become a Maester. But there was much more to the old city that he could share with his dad.

"We could go to the Starry Sept. I'm sure Cat would like pictures of it," Jon suggested.

"That's a great idea, Jon. What did you do when you were down there last time?"

"I pretty much just hung out at the hotel. But I did get to walk around the Citadel and bit all slack-jawed. It's really amazing there, nothing like I've ever seen."

"And you've seen the bloody Wall!" Ned laughed.

"That was pretty cool too. I'm actually going to be going back up there in about a month or so. Gen's friend is having a concert up there and wants us to come."

"Oh, is that the rock star the boys were talking about? You know I haven't had much time to listen to music the past couple of years."

Jon had to laugh. His dad's music taste was the same as it'd been for twenty years. Whatever he'd
listened to in high school was his favorite songs. He and his siblings always made fun of him for listening to the same songs on repeat in the car, begging him to mix it up a little.

"Yep, that's him."

"Well, be sure you two go and see your Uncle. He misses you a lot up there," Ned said.

"Don't worry Dad, I already invited him to come to the concert with us. I don't know if I'm supposed to be telling you this, but apparently he's got himself a girlfriend now."

Ned's eyes grew large and his mouth fell open, "Really? And he didn't tell his big brother?"

"He probably just didn't want to draw attention to it all. He didn't tell me much beyond that. When I'm there visiting I'll gather some intel for you."

"You better! I need to know if I'm going to get some nieces and nephews out of him," Ned said.

With as many siblings as Jon had, he'd never really wanted for some cousins. But when he thought of it, his family was pretty small outside of their house. It was just Benjen. He didn't count Catelyn's weird sister Lysa or her brother Edmure that never came around. Besides, they weren't his family.

"Dad you're too much. I won't be asking him about any potential cousins for me," Jon smiled.

His Dad put his hands on the table, "Fine, fine. I'll gather my intel in other ways. I've got my ways."

"Oh I'm sure."

Ned asked him about what Genevieve was up to now that she was back in Casterly Rock. They hadn't video chatted all week but he had been able to stay in touch with her through silly selfies sent back and forth. His phone background was currently one of her trying to stick her leg up in the air in her bathroom mirror. Apparently, she'd almost fell down trying to take it.

"She's doing pretty good. I forgot to tell you but she actually met one of your old friends. I think it's someone you were in the army with," Jon said.

His dad sat up straight and his face turned serious. He never talked much about those days with the kids.

He took a sip of his water and said, "Oh yeah? Who was it?"

"It was Tyrion's brother-in-law, Baratheon something."

Jon noticed the way his father's face seemed to still itself even further, as if he was trying to keep something hidden.

"I haven't talked to him in ages," was all he said.

"That's what I thought. I feel like I remember someone with his name visiting when I was really little, but I'm probably just imagining things."

"Yeah, I don't know. The last time we saw each other you were probably four or five, I can't even remember."

Jon remembered what Gen had said about his aunt Lyanna and his father's old friend. Maybe there was something to that story that his father would finally reveal to him.
"Uh yeah so you were in the army together though?"

His father nodded, "Yep. We trained under my brother-in-law, Jon Arryn. We joined up when we couldn't even grow beards, so we bonded a lot in those years together."

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to, but why'd you stop talking?"

Jon immediately felt like he'd misstepped. It wasn't exactly light conversation for a lunch break.

But his dad answered anyway with his jaw set tight.

"He fell in love with my sister and then she died. Didn't want anything to do with us after that," Ned said looking off into the distance.

Jon knew better than to ask anything more. He'd gotten more than he'd hoped for and he'd have to be content with that.

"Oh, okay. Sorry to bring it up. We should probably head back to the office," Jon said.

His father pulled him in for a hug and said, "Don't worry about it Jon. It's good to remember those we've lost. She wouldn't want us to forget her."
Chapter 85

Chapter Notes

Spoilers for the new episode in the end notes. I'm posting this one early because I think we could all use a little fluff right now. I'm absolutely gutted by that episode, I cried like a little baby. So seriously, if you don't want spoilers and a rant for episode 5, STAY AWAY from the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Gen, how are the edits going on the Westeros section?"

She looked up from her mountain of journals at her boss. He was leaning back in his chair looking like he didn't have the care in the world. She was sure if she gave him a couple minutes he'd be spinning around in his chair.

"I'm still working on it. Need to clarify some things you wrote in the section about the Wall," she said.

"Like what? I thought it was good to go."

She sighed and scrolled through the section, "It is for the most part. I'm just making some notes where you could talk about their education system and all that fun stuff a little more. I think we've really got to emphasize that this is just one village, so it's not entirely representative of the free folk as a whole."

Tyrion paused for a second and nodded, "Good point. I know I have some notes somewhere about some other villages up there I could write about."

"I think that'll be good. I just don't want this to be another instance of the free folk having their histories written by people who didn't have the care to make sure they were right."

He smiled, thinking of how far she'd come since she first walked into his classroom. She'd been fairly quiet at the beginning, and then overtime she came to be a passionate leader in classroom discussion. She was always standing up for the little guy and making sure all views were represented.

"Totally Gen. Now let's get to it before we lose all the ideas in our head!"

Tyrion wrote and Gen edited. It was fun getting to use her red pen and make notes on the things he had written. It really made her feel like she had some ownership over the book, that she was integral in making it happen. She realized that without her, the book would have no primary sources, just things that Tyrion had read elsewhere. And that was no way to write about foreign cultures.

When Tyrion closed his laptop for the day, Gen didn't feel like leaving. She was on a roll with the edits and believed if she stopped then, she'd forget all the ideas for the manuscript that were buzzing in her head.

"I'm heading out Gen, you ready to go?" Tyrion asked with a yawn.
She looked up from her copies and grinned, "Um I think I'll hang here for a while longer. I've found my groove."

He laughed and shook his head, "Okay, whatever floats your boat. Just make sure you lock the door on your way out. We don't need anyone stealing our precious work."

"Don't worry, I'll guard them with my life if anyone tries to break in and steal them."

With Tyrion gone she through on some music and began dancing in her seat. She found a steady rhythm that allowed her to type away, her fingers dancing across the keyboard. And the paper edits she made were full of color and suggestions by the end of the night.

Eventually she took a break and the intercom system in the office began talking to her.

"Hello, delivery for a Ms. Genevieve Norward?" it said.

Gen just about jumped out of her skin when she heard the voice. As she walked to the lobby of the office, she had a sinking suspicion that Tyrion was right in his paranoia. Maybe someone did want to steal their work.

She grabbed a heavy stapler from the front desk and crept forward to the door. Gen had the bright idea in her mind that if it came down to it in a fight, the stapler would save her.

But she felt like an idiot when she realized it was just an order of her favorite pasta dish with a note saying "Thanks for the hard work! - Tyrion."

She tipped the worker and felt like cursing Tyrion on the phone. He knew how jumpy she was!

After an angry bite of her pasta she texted him saying, "Ughhhhh! You're the best and the worst at the same time. Warn me next time you try to surprise me."

"That'd defeat the purpose of a surprise Gen."

"Okay true... thanks for the good eats but PLEASE don't scare me like that again," she sent.

Once her pasta was done she found that the edits went by even faster. And before she knew it the sun was gone from the sky and she felt herself yawn.

With the Westeros sections given another once over, she packed up and headed out of the office. Although Tyrion promised it was a safe street she wanted to be careful.

So she pulled out her phone and called Jon.

"Hi cutie. How's my favorite person?" Gen asked.

"Give me a second, I'll add Mira to the call and you can ask her yourself."

"You're such a goof. You know I love you!"

He laughed into the phone, sending a smile to her face, "I know Gen. I'm just messing with you. But to answer your question, I'm doing well."

"Yay! Anything new at work?"

Jon thought back to the conversation with his dad at lunch and felt an uneasy sensation in his stomach. "Um nothing much. My dad and I are going back down to Oldtown for business next
week."

Gen entered the safety of her building and waved to the doorman. "Wow Jon. That's exciting. Have you ever gone somewhere just the two of you?"

Jon had to think on it, "Not really. I went with him the Wall once to visit Benjen, but that's because the rest of them didn't feel like going."

"I can't even imagine how hard it was for our parents to make time for each kid," she said thinking back to her own childhood. She'd just been lucky that she was the second kid. They'd had more time for her back then.

"True! Wouldn't trade my family for anything in the world though. Anyways, what are you up to tonight?"

She flopped down on her couch and said, "Just got home from work. I stayed late to wrap some stuff up before my trip to Highgarden this weekend."

"Look at you working hard. Proud of you Gen!"

"Thanks Jon!"

"Anyways, I expect to see lots of pictures this weekend! I hear it's absolutely beautiful there."

Mira was always making her jealous with her pictures of the vineyards and sprawling fields of lush greenery. Then again, she had ocean views so they were about tied.

"Don't worry, I'll update the hell out of my blog just for you! I'm so excited to see her. It's been way too long."

The last time she'd seen Mira was at her college graduation last year. And even then, the two of them had been such a flurry of excitement and joy that they hadn't had anytime to really sit down and hang out. Besides, their families' had gotten first dibs. She needed her girl time in person, not just over video!

"Good! I miss seeing your face," he sighed.

She could picture him curled up in bed with Ghost looking up at the stars on his ceiling. She wanted to be there with him.

"I miss your face too. Maybe you could stop by on your way back from Oldtown if you have time."

"Maybe! I'm not sure what our schedule is going to look like yet."

She began to yawn and he noticed. "Well I should probably let you get some sleep Gen."

"Yeah, you're probably right. Thanks for chatting Jon, it's great to hear your voice. Though it's no replacement for having you here with me."

"You'll be back home before you know it. Love you Gen."

"Love you too, night."

After they hung up she found her mind thinking that moving in together might not necessarily be a bad idea. But on the other hand, they had all the time in the world, so why rush things?
"I just don't want this to be another instance of the free folk having their histories written by people who didn't have the care to make sure they were right."

I'd written that sentence weeks ago but I think it fits D&D very well right now! I am so incredibly disappointed with this season and how rushed things were. I understand that people need to move onto other projects but... DAMN! Sandor's death was absolutely awful and broke my SanSan dreams. I hate how the message with Sandor and Sansa in the show has been "your trauma defines you". Like fuckkkk off. They all deserved so much better. I'm not mad about the Dany stuff because that's probably canon, but so much went wrong with this season. Everything was way too rushed. Also fuck Euron's fight with Jaime. So pointless. Bunch of flat characters and destroyed arcs. I didn't expect a happy ending from the show but I did hope they'd stay true to the narratives instead of just doing stuff for shock value. This has turned into a huge rant but DAMN! I'm so so so disappointed. So many fanfics have dealt with the characters with far more care than D&D. I guess I just have to hope Martin (and the lovely writers on this site) pull through and give me something better.

Even though mine is a modern AU, I promise to give you all the fluff the characters deserved!

TLDR: Wasn't expecting a happy ending, but holy fuck they did all the character arcs DIRTY and rushed it
Chapter 86

After work on Friday Gen made the journey to see Mira. The train ride to Highgarden was longer than Mira had promised. And although Gen enjoyed the free time to stare out the window or catch up on some readings, her butt was hurting.

The further south the train went, the lusher the lands became. Everywhere she looked there was another field that made her want to get off the train and run around.

When she met Mira in the old-fashioned train station, she promised her they’re be plenty of time to explore the natural beauty of the Reach.

She first spotted her friend leaning against the information booth by the door.

"Mira!" Gen said.

Mira's mouth spread into a smile as the two of them speed-walked over to each other to get a hug hello.

"Girl! I've missed you so much," Mira said.

Gen looked at her friend's newly tanned skin from days out in the sun, "You look amazing, you're glowing! Does this have anything to do with Willas?"

"It might," Mira winked, "And look at you, you look amazing in that sundress. A northern beauty making a statement down south!"

The two of them burst into laughter when Gen spun around to model her blue and white striped dress. Their interactions were always like this — full of laughter and compliments to boost the other up. The two of them had so much love and respect for each other that they couldn’t help but gush whenever they came in contact. And for the two of them, it’d been awhile since they’d been able to hug the person they considered an extension of their family.

They loaded up into Mira’s rusty old car, the same one she’d been driving since high school, and headed off to her apartment.

Looking over at her friend, Gen noticed all the new freckles on Mira’s face. She was positively radiant. The climate really suited her.

“Ugh I’m just so happy to be back together. What’s on our agenda this weekend?”

“Well I thought tonight we could have a true girl’s night. I’ve already picked up your favorite wine and ice cream. And tomorrow after brunch, I thought we could meet up with Willas and his siblings so you could meet the people I’ve been spending time with.”

Gen rubbed her hands together, “Yes yes yes, to all of that! You’ll have to warn Willas to be ready with plenty of questions.”

Mira laughed, “I’m sure he’s got plenty about me for you Gen. He’s excited to meet you though, I’m always talking about you.”

“I’m flattered. Promise me you’ll visit Winterfell this summer so you can meet Jon too!”

“I suppose I could swing by on my way up to see my family.”
Gen slapped her arm, “I’m just now realizing I haven't congratulated you for snagging Willas yet!”

“I think he’s the one you should be congratulation. I’m the total package,” Mira giggled.

“Oh totally. I’ve always said if I wasn’t into guys, I’d be on you like Dothraki on horses!”

Mira pulled her car into a spot on the side of the road and pointed out to a stone building with ivy trailing down the side. It was clearly old, but very much Mira’s style.

“Here’s home. I don’t have an extra bed though, so you can sleep on the couch or with me,” Mira said.

Her apartment was a collection of quirky art she’d picked up over the years, some she’d created in college. Everything was second hand, because as a true environmentalist, Mira didn’t see the point in buying new if there was something perfectly good already floating out there at a charity shop.

“I'll share the bed. I promise not to hog the covers either,” Gen said.

“As long as you don’t snore, not that I ever remember you doing that in the past.”

The two of them settled on the couch ready to unwind after a long week at work. While they sat watching TV, they ate buttered noodles. With anyone else they’d feel embarrassed eating such a plain meal, but with each other there was no shame. They were just free to be their authentic selves with each other.

"Gods I'm living for this. Work was so annoying this week," Mira sighed taking a sip of wine.

"Dating the boss's grandson doesn't give you any perks?"

"If anything, Olenna just gives me more responsibility because she trusts me more now."

Gen raised her glass, "You've said that's she's a tough cookie. I'd take that as a compliment."

"I don't care about compliments, I just want my work load to go down. How's your stuff been?"

"Eh about average," Gen shrugged, "We're a little over halfway done. It's not too bad."

"What do you even do up there in your free time?"

Gen laughed, picturing all the nights she'd spent curled up alone in her bed in her sweats. She'd been a bit of hermit as of late.

"Honestly, not much. By the time I get out of work for the day I'm just too tired to do anything," Gen said.

"I feel you on that. If it wasn't for Willas dragging me out for date nights I'd lock myself in here."

"Date nights don’t seem like such a bad way to spend your nights."

Mira laughed, "Oh they're not. Doesn't hurt that the sex is good either."

"Girl, you never told me you hooked up!" Gen said putting her hand on Mira's arm.

"I thought I told you! Anyways, all you've got to know is he's way better than anyone I've ever been with."
"Cheers to that Mira," Gen said raising her glass for a toast, "Must have learned a thing or two from all the books he reads."

"Oh for sure."

Their attention turned to the mindless movie for a bit until their attention spans were dwindled by the bottle of wine they’d consumed. Neither had any interest in watching a movie when they could get plenty of entertainment just from talking to each other.

They changed into their pajamas, grabbed their tubs of ice cream, and jumped into bed.

Covered in blankets Gen sighed with a wide smile, "I'm so content right now. I'm never leaving."

"Good with me. Though I have a feeling our men will have something to say about it."

Gen laughed, the giggles coming easy with the wine flowing through her body, "Screw them. We loved each other first."

"True! How's is your lover-boy anyways?"

Gen turned to look at her friend, her eyes wild and happy, "Oh he's good. I honestly can't remember what he's been up to this week. But he got a dog! I don't know if I told you."

She pulled out her phone and showed Mira her background picture of Jon and Ghost together.

"Oh my goodness! Look at that cutie!"

"I know right! Ghost's cute too I guess," Gen said.

"So you guys have been dating for a couple months now, how's it feel?"

Gen reflected on all the memories she and Jon had created together. Their chance meeting at the airport in Oldtown, their first kiss at the party, their concert meeting Sandor, the Wall, and that special night on Bear Island. So much had happened in the last few months that Gen could hardly believe it. She went from wondering if she'd ever fall in love, to being so in love she couldn't remember a time before it.

"It's weird, but a good weird. Like he's my first real boyfriend and I just feel so lucky. Everyday with him really makes up for all the shitty first dates I've ever gone on."

"You two are so cute! I'm happy for you Gen," Mira said.

"Thanks girl, I'm so proud of us. We're kicking ass in our careers and still getting that good dick. We're thriving."

Mira burst out in laughter at her friend's colorful language, "Gods that wine hit us. We should really get to bed before we hate ourselves in the morning."

"Ugh fine, but I call being little spoon!"

"Fine you big baby, whatever it takes to get you to sleep."

Genevieve tugged the blanket close to her chin and felt the blissful smile of drunkenness spread over her face, creating a numbness she loved.

"You love me, don't deny it."
"You're right. Night Genny."
They woke the next morning in a tangle of limbs and blankets. Somehow in the night, Mira had turned sideways on the bed and was cuddled up to Gen's legs. And Gen herself was barely on the bed.

"Oh my Gods what time is it?" Gen groaned when she noticed Mira was awake at last.

Normally during their sleepovers, Gen would get up much earlier than Mira and just sit there on her phone hoping she didn't need to get up to pee. But her phone was nowhere to be found and Mira was too close to be moved.

Mira scooted her way up to the headboard and stretched with a groan, "Gods I was OUT. I know drinking messes up your REM cycles but it really knocked me out."

"Totally, I had all these weird dreams too. Usually apple juice gives me weird dreams," Gen said.

"Well maybe grape juice can do the same. What'd you dream about?"

"It was so weird. I was down South in Sunspear or somewhere warm, and I just heard screaming. But as much as I walked around trying to find the source, I couldn't."

Mira said yikes under her breath before saying, "Sounds spooky. You make me glad I don't remember mine from last night."

"It's not like I wake up feeling scared, or that I'm ever scared during the dream. I always feel sort of detached from it as it happens."

"Well that's good then! Let's go get some food before we perish."

Gen's stomach rumbled on cue and she found herself thanking the Gods that she hadn't woken up with a hangover. Mira had been right to make them go to bed so early.

Their strength was renewed after Mira popped some cinnamon buns in the oven that filled her apartment with a sweetness that made their mouths water.

"Little fun fact, I made these for Jon the morning after our first night together," Gen said after a bite.

"Oooh girl. Double sweetness for Jon."

After they ate they took their sweet time trying to find the perfect outfit for the day. Mira was still in the stage of her relationship where she wanted Willas to see her looking good when they went out. As for Gen, she just wanted to make a good impression.

"I feel like I'm meeting my in-laws," Gen laughed pulling on another blue sundress she'd packed.

Mira opted for a black jumpsuit and said, "Like I said before, they're the ones who have to impress
you. You're my fricken rock for Gods sake. They can't afford to mess things up with you."

"Fair. I'll make it as painless as possible."

At the vineyard they'd agreed to meet for lunch, Gen's thoughts of her impressing them flew out the
window. How could she ever compete when they had a fricken vineyard at their disposal to have
fancy lunches that looked like they were made to be posted about on social media?

If Mira wasn't there dragging her along, Gen would have felt out of place. She led her to an empty
table that overlooked it all. From their view, they could see the rows of grapes ripe for the picking.

"I just got a text from Willas, he says they're like five minutes away. Apparently he had to pick up
his siblings because they didn't want to drive," Mira explained.

"I'm nervous!"

Mira poured her a glass of water and put it in front of her, "Don't be. His family is pretty outgoing.
They'll charm you before you even know what hit you."

And she'd been right.

When the man she recognized as Willas from all her internet searching (stalking) walked in with
three beautiful people in tow, it was easy to see what Mira was talking about. Their easy smiles were
just magnetic.

Gen and Mira stood up to greet them, Willas pulling in his girlfriend for a hug.

Gen couldn't help but coo at the sight of her best friend happy.

The brown-haired woman that'd walked in with Willas came beside her and smirked, "Aren't they
just sickly cute? I'm Margaery, Willas's sister."

Margaery pulled her in for a hug, crushing any reservations Gen had felt.

"They're adorable. I'm Genevieve. Mira's mentioned you a lot to me. She really enjoys working with
you all," Gen said.

Willas pulled away and introduced himself with a kind hand-shake, his other hand resting his weight
on his cane.

"You must be Genevieve. Mira has been filling me on all your travels, I can't wait to hear more."

"Oh, I've got plenty to share. It's great to finally meet you Willas."

Beside Margaery a man with golden curls smiled and stuck out his hand, "I'm Loras and this is my
husband Renly."

"It's nice to meet you both. Your vineyard is just beautiful," Gen said as they all sat down.

"Thank you. My grandmother will be happy to hear that. She's been worrying about the aesthetics of
it all lately," Margaery said.

Gen couldn't see why, it looked like something out of a painting.

"Really? It looks amazing to me."
"Just wait until you try to wine," Renly added.

With wine in their cups and bread on the table, the inquisition began.

"So Genevieve, how long have you known Mira?" Willas asked.

Gen thought back to the first time she’d laid eyes on Mira so many years ago as a child. She’d been a wild child back then, wearing overalls and pigtails and dead set on making a new friend. Her big brothers had walked her up to Genevieve to introduce her and the rest was history.

“Oh Gods, since I was about seven I think? When her family moved to Bear Island she was in my class and over the years we’ve just been inseparable.”

Mira smiled, “Yep. I still remember that first day when Rodrik and Asher marched me up to you at the playground and asked if I’d hang out with you.”

“Not like it was a burden on me. I was just happy that I’d have a playmate that wasn’t my baby sister or my older brother.”

The Tyrells (plus Renly) were enjoying the obvious love between the two of them. It was clear that their friendship was built on deep trust and kindness.

“What about you Willas? Any interesting stories about yourself that I can’t find out through your Faceless profile?”

Margaery laughed, “And I thought I was the only one who checked up on friend’s boyfriends.”

“I’ve got to make sure my girl is in good hands!”

Willas blushed and said, “Well I don’t know if Mira’s told you, but I’m quite fond of animals. Mostly birds now, but I used to ride horses when I was younger.”

“Well you’ve certainly got the land for it!”

Mira texted her under the table to tell her to move away from the topic. Apparently his limp had something to do with an accident years ago on his horse.

“Why don’t you tell everyone about your travels lately? None of us have gotten out of Highgarden in quite a bit,” Mira suggested.

“This is a place I wouldn’t mind sticking around!” Gen said gesturing to the landscape, “Anyways, I just finished up visiting a bunch of cities in Westeros and Essos for a book I’m helping put together for an old professor of mine.”

Willas was intrigued, “Really? Mira mentioned you were traveling but she’s been withholding why you were.”

“Yeah, so pretty much my boss just sent me to all these places to gather information about their cultures and we’re going to turn it into a book.”

Ever the business-woman Margaery asked, “Who’s your boss?”

“His name is Tyrion Lannister. I’m not sure if you’ve heard of him. He’s published a couple of books in the past, mostly historical and anthropological.”

Renly and Loras shared a look and began laughing.
“My brother is married to his sister actually.”

Gen perked up, “Robert? I actually got meet him. Tyrion forced me along to a family lunch.”

Loras grimaced, “My apologies. His wife is a wicked bitch.”

She almost choked on her wine when he said that, “You’re not wrong with that one. She tried to suggest I was a sex worker that Tyrion paid to come with him.”

“I swear, the more I hear about this woman, the more I want to claw her eyes out,” Margaery said.

“Which is exactly why I didn’t invite her to our wedding. No bad vibes,” Renly said.

Mira stole a glance at Gen, the two of them smiling at watching them interact. Gen still couldn’t get over how small a world it was. I mean really, what were the chances the people she’d met lately all knew each other, even indirectly?

Willas laughed, “Anyways, how’s the book coming along? I’ve read a couple of his books and always enjoyed them. He’s got such a sharp wit.”

“He really does. It’s one of the main reasons I took his classes in college. The book is going okay, I think it’ll be out sometime this fall.”

“You’ll have to sign some copies and send them to me,” Mira said.

“Don’t worry. If he let’s me, I’ll even mention you in the acknowledgements.”

“I’m honored!”

Their food came as a beautiful spread of fresh salads and meat artfully placed on wooden trays. It was truly one of those restaurants that had an air of refined ruggedness, if that contradiction wasn’t too much to be understood.

Eventually Mira left to go to the bathroom and all the Tyrells leaned forward at the table.

“Quick, before she comes back give us some embarrassing stories,” Margaery begged.

Willas rolled his eyes with a laugh, “Or maybe just some cute child photos.”

Gen pulled out her phone, “Don’t worry I’ve got plenty of both.”

As she scrolled through the Faceless album of pictures of them as children, she explained to them a story about a time Mrs. Forrester let them walk down the street to get ice cream.

“So her mom gives her a five dollar bill to get ice cream. And as we’re walking down to the ice cream truck Mira rips it in half and just smiles at me with the purest little grin and says ‘Now we can both have five dollars!’”

They burst out laughing and Willas said, “Oh my goodness that is just hilarious. What was she thinking?”

“I have no clue! But I always use that example to explain what type of friend she is. Throughout our entire friendship she’s always just supported me, even if I was being stupid,” Gen said.

Mira returned and raised an eyebrow at the silence at the table, “Were you all just talking about me?”
“Come on! I had to give them some dirt about your childhood.”

“It wasn’t that story about the time we were all in the mud was it?”

Willas laughed, “No! But I’d love to hear it now.”

After their lunch, Gen found herself with new numbers in her phone, and a sense of peace that her best friend was in such good hands. Mira deserved the world and it seemed like she’d met someone who could give it to her. Besides, they’d gotten to talk about his recent reads so that alone was enough to put him in her good books. And also, anyone that didn’t like Tyrion’s sister was a friend of hers. She couldn’t wait to tell Tyrion she’d met Renly.

And of course, there was so much to tell Jon over the phone before she and Mira went exploring for the night.

After she talked to Jon and gushed to him about how happy she was for Mira she opened up her computer and wrote out a blog post.

“First full day in Highgarden and I’m in LOVE! It is just so beautiful and sunny here. Casterly Rock is stunning too, but the landscape here is just so different. Instead of beautiful ocean views, I have views of vineyards and fields of crops that make me want to quit my job and buy a farm (Don’t worry Tyrion, I’m not quitting!) Also, I never realized how much I missed seeing Mira in person until I got to get a hug from her (I miss the rest of the Forrester fam too! Hi!) We went to lunch at a lovely vineyard with some of her friends and had lots of laughs. I’m not sure where we’re going tonight, but Mira promises we’ll have fun. See you later, Gen”
“Mira, where are we going?” Gen asked as Mira led her through the streets of Highgarden. The sun was beginning to set, creating a glow over the city.

“Since when are you so impatient?”

“Since you’ve been leading me through these beautiful streets without an indication of where we’ll end up. I’m a curious person, you know that,” Gen laughed.

They entered a courtyard surrounded by old trees and flowering plants, with a brightly lit fountain in the middle.

“Well we’re here, so you can stop pestering me.”

Gen felt like she was in a movie. The courtyard that people were milling about looked like it’d been built for a movie set, not an actual city. Nowhere in Bear Island or Winterfell had the style to create such a beautiful scene. Besides, it was too cold up there for a water fountain.

“People usually come here around dinner time because vendors set up with food and musicians create just the best vibe,” Mira explained.

Already they could smell the sweet scent of roasted almonds and the savory meats being cooked. Gen wanted it all.

When they had their food they claimed a bench by the fountain and waited for the music to wash over them.

Mira laid her legs out across Gen and asked, “So what’d you think of Willas?”

Gen grinned, she knew that Mira was trying very hard to sound casual. But she cared, she really did.

“I thought he was great. Very charming and respectful, and intelligent too!”

“You really think so? Don’t lie to me,” Mira blushed.

“I wouldn’t lie about this Mira. I really do think he’s a good fit for you. And he reads, so that automatically makes him good in my book.”

Mira started laughing, “Gods, am I just dating the male version of you?”

“Like that isn’t what you’ve been praying the Gods for since high school!”

Musicians strolled into the courtyard and began claiming different corners for themselves. Over by Gen and Mira a young girl was playing a saxophone so well they wondered how her lungs were strong enough to do it.
“Gods, makes me wish I’d kept up with the piano,” Gen said.

She sent a video to Jon knowing he’d love to see the live music she was enjoying. He still owed her a song.

“I’m so jealous! I love all the lights. Meanwhile, it’s pouring rain in Winterfell and the dogs are all wet,” Jon texted.

“Ooof! Nothing like that wet dog smell. Good luck!”

Mira noticed the smile Gen couldn’t help but have on her face whenever she texted Jon.

“So you’re saying?” Mira asked.

“Oh, he’s just saying how the dogs are wet. Apparently it’s raining pretty bad up north right now.”

“Beats the snow!”

The music played on and Gen found herself unable to sit still on the bench with it playing.

“Just get up there and dance Gen. I know you want to,” Mira said.

That was all the encouragement she needed to stand up and sway to the music, closing her eyes to forget anyone else was even there. She found that if she didn’t think of all the people watching her silly moves, she could really forget herself to the music and enjoy it.

Eventually Mira finished the ice cream sundae she’d been savoring and tapped on her shoulder.

“Can I have this dance cutie?”

Gen dipped low, “Of course my love.”

The two of them spun in circles, twirling each other until they were dizzy. Eventually the girl who’d been playing saxophone took a break and walked up to them.

“Do you want me to take a picture of you two? I couldn't help but watch the two of you dance when I was playing,” the girl said.

“Oh we’d love that! Thank you so much,” Gen said as the two of them posed with wide smiles.

The girl handed back Gen’s phone and Mira said, “And we loved your music! You’ve got a lot of talent in you.”

She stood up straighter with pride and said, “I’m trying. The more I practice, the better I’ll get. Or at least that’s the hope.”

“I’m sure you’ll reach those dreams someday!”

Once their feet were aching and their bellies were full, the walked back to her car arm-in-arm. In the car they both let out a deep sigh that descended into laughter.

“It’s been a good day Mira. I really needed this.”

“It’s just been good to be back together with you. I’ve really missed my boo,” Mira said.

Gen smiled, “Don’t worry, I’ll still annoy you with all my texts when I’m back in Casterly Rock.”
“You better! I want exclusive Gen news, not just whatever you put up on the blog for everyone to see!”

“Then you better send me updates of your life, and anything with Willas so I don’t have to see it on your Faceless profile.”

Mira stuck out her pinky finger. “Promise?”

“Promise.”
"Gen? When are you getting back from Highgarden? I just got an email and I need you back at the Rock," Tyrion said over voicemail.

By the time she'd gotten up and checked her phone, the message was already hours old. She and Mira were sitting in her breakfast nook eating waffles and Gen didn't know what to do.

"Fuck my boss wants me back."

Mira stopped squirting out the whipped cream onto her waffles and said, "On a Sunday?"

"Apparently. I wasn't planning on leaving until tonight. Fuck," Gen said.

"Give him a call back, see what's up."

Gen walked into Mira's bedroom and found herself growing angry that she was spending her Sunday morning thinking about work instead of eating waffles with her best friend. Why couldn't things just be easy for a change?

Her phone clicked and she said, "Tyrion, what's up. What's that message about?"

"Oh thank the Gods you called Gen. I got an email from the publisher late last night and they want to see a draft by this week."

"So why do you want me back today?"

He sighed, "Because they want to see the whole thing, not just the Westeros section. So that means we've got to work our asses off the next couple of days before our meeting on Friday."

“Fuck. We’ve barely outlined the sections."

“Exactly. Which is why I need you back so we can pull a couple of all nighters and get this shit done before we’ve got to find a new publisher.”

Gen was seriously annoyed. As much as she loved her job, she was really looking forward to the rest of her day with Mira. They were supposed to go rock climbing! The last thing she wanted to do was head into work on a Sunday.

But she wasn't at a point in her career where she could afford to say no to her boss, just when he needed her most. That was on the of the reasons Tyrion hired her. He knew she was loyal and dependable, a fact that was now coming back to bite her in her ass.

"Fine. When do you need me back?"

"As soon as you can get here. I'll pay you time and a half all week, don't worry. And I'll get us food."

The money would be nice, she might be able to afford to fly back to Winterfell one more time to visit them. And free food...

"Okay. I've just got to pack and say goodbye, but I'll get on the next train."

When Gen walked out of the bedroom and her head down and shoulders slumped, Mira knew what
"No rock climbing?"

Gen shook her head, "Not today. Sorry Mira, I know you were really looking forward to going climbing with me."

"I'll ask Willas. He can't exactly climb with his leg, but I'm sure he'd be happy to tag along," Mira said.

Gen washed their plates in the sink and said, "Again, I'm really sorry I have to leave so soon. This summer we need to meet up again."

"Don't worry about it, I know how work can be."

On the train ride back Gen tried her best to outline what she could about the Braavos and Pentos sections. However, without her journals or a reliable internet connection, her memory was proving to be a fickle thing. But she did have cell service.

":( had to leave Highgarden early because Tyrion needs me back to work." she texted Jon.

His reply was fast, "Nooooo! I was really looking forward to seeing videos of you rock climbing. What does he need you back for?"

"Apparently the publishers want to see a complete draft by the end of this week for a meeting. We're fuckedddd if we don't get to work now."

"Ugh sorry Gen! If anyone can do it, it's you two!"

Gen smiled and leaned against the window. He always knew what to say to uplift her.

"Thanks Jon, love you so much! What are you up to today?"

He sent a picture of Arya at the water dancing studio. Her hair was pulled into a tiny bun and her face was fierce with determination. The same guy who'd helped them learn on their date was sparing her.

"Arya invited me to watch her practice today. I can't get over how quick she is on her feet. She just did this crazy move where she switched sword hands like it was nothing." he texted.

"She is such a badass! Cheer her on for me."

"Will do!"

By the time she arrived at the Rock she was starving. In her rush to get back she hadn't even thought to pack something for the ride, and she'd learned quickly that a waffle wasn't exactly a high protein meal.

Tyrion met her at the station with a box of chicken nuggets and a milkshake.

"How'd you know?" she asked.

"I figured you be hungry. Plus, it's my way of bribing / thanking you for coming in on a Sunday," he laughed.

She wolfed it down and by the time they got to the office she was energized (full of sugar) and ready
They sat down at the conference table and began outlining what they needed to do.

"Okay so we have to do Braavos and Pentos," he said.

Gen stood up and began writing the plan on one of the windows with a dry-erase marker, "Okay, what else?"

"Within those we need your journal sections too. And all the edits that come along with them."

"Yep. I'm going to hate myself when I write them, but they'll get done."

Tyrion opened up his laptop and began looking through their notes, "Fuck and I've still got to write the Essos section header."

"So how do you want to divide it up? Same as we've been doing, or is that anything more I can do besides edits and the journals?"

"If it isn't too much, could you make a brief outline for me to go off of for the Braavos section while I write the Pentos one?"

"Of course, I liked Braavos better anyways."

While Tyrion typed away trying to organize his brilliant mind into coherent thoughts, Gen flipped through her notes she'd made and tried to make sense of Braavos.

There was the obvious connection to the water, the fighters, and the foreigners. But it seemed like no matter what Gen wrote, she came further away from the truth of the place. It was shrouded in mystery and intrigue. In faceless fighters and the God of Death watching over them all, promising to visit them one day.

But what was it about that city that made them a people? What had made Gen feel both alive with electricity and at the same time like she had to watch her back? Or the claustrophobia of the twisting streets? Or how even when you walked by the water you could feel the danger of falling in, no matter how good the seafood was. How could she explain that to Tyrion in a way that would translate the same feeling to the readers?

She didn't know. So instead, she pulled what she could from her notes and threw it into outline format, adding helpful hits of expansion where she could. But it'd taken her hours. It wasn't easy summing up an entire culture in bullet points, especially in just one night.

By the time they called it quits for the night Gen felt she wasn’t any closer to their goal. Tyrion had busted out the intro to Essos, but they were still so far off.

“I can’t do this anymore. I’m going home,” Tyrion said closing his computer.

“Same here. The Braavos outline is a little shaky, but I can clarify more later on.”

“I’m sure it’s great. Again, thanks for coming in. You’re really saving my ass on this one.”

That night she had nightmares of losing her journals or deleting her files by accident. The fear was still there when she woke up in a sweat the next morning, her hands aching with anxiety as another day of work awaited her.
"Jon can we talk for a second?" Ned asked.

He poked his head into the doorway, letting his hair fall in front of him. Jon still couldn't quite understand how his big business father would let his hair grow long like he was a teenager. Maybe it was just a leftover reminder of his youth gone by. In the old family pictures of his father, he and his siblings all wore their hair long. It was like they were all trying to look like his aunt Lyanna.

"Yeah, come on in. I'm just finishing up with an email and then we can chat," Jon said.

Jon sent off the lengthy email he'd been writing to Robb and the legal team and closed out the tab.

"Sorry about that Dad, what's up?"

His father smiled and sat down at the chair in front of him. He loved seeing his sons at work. Seeing them grown up in suits and ties always reminded them when they were barely at his hip, three wild little boys, asking him how to tie their ties.

"Nothing much Jon. Just finalized some of the details for our trip down to Oldtown this weekend."

With the busyness of his day, Jon almost forgot they had a business trip planned. He still had so much to do to prepare. He still had to talk to the accounting team to get a complete rundown of the associated costs with the project so they could justify the increase in fees to Mr. Hightower. Just the thought of all he had to do was making him anxious.

"Great. After we talk I'll talk to a couple of people to make sure we're all set to go for our meeting."

"Thanks Jon. I really appreciate all the hard work you do here. You kids make me so proud," Ned said.

If there was one thing Jon and his siblings could count on, it was the love of their father. He was always just so ready to give praise when it was due, and his moral compass was something Jon particularly admired about him. Sometimes Jon wondered if his father had ever done an unjust thing in his life. It just wasn’t in his nature. And that was something Jon tried to remember in all his decisions in life. Honor above all.

"Thanks Dad. Do we leave Friday?"

Ned pulled up an email and showed Jon, "Yep. Hope you don't mind that I just booked one room. I thought we could order room service and watch a movie or something."

"That'd be great. It's been a while since we've really just gotten to do anything just the two of us."

Ned laughed, "Tell me about it. Our house is insane, even more so with the dogs running around now."

"Hey, you're the one who found them."

"Don't remind Cat about that! She'll throw it back in my face," Ned smiled.

Jon would never let Ghost be in the line of Cat's anger.

"Yeah, anyways I should probably head over to accounting to get the numbers squared away," Jon said.
Ned stood up and gave his son a quick hug goodbye, "Alright Jon, let me know if you run into any problems. I saw that you sent out that email to Robb and the legal team, let me know what they say."

"Will do, see you later Dad."

Later that day he sat with Arya and Robb in the living trying to pass the time before dinner. They tried flipping through the channels on the tv to find something mindless to watch, but it was pointless.

But their pups were more than happy to provide entertainment by running around the living room together.

"Looks like Nymeria will be the boss of them before we know it," Robb said watching Arya's dog trick her siblings.

"That's my girl! Grey Wind seems pretty fierce too," Arya said.

Grey Wind would playfully bare his teeth at his siblings when they got annoying, not that it made them back off. Ghost usually just strolled around and observed the action.

Jon asked "You ever wonder what they'd be like if Dad had never found them out in the woods?"

"Dead probably. There was no way they would've survived on their own," Robb said.

Arya nodded, "Yeah. Like Dad says, the lone wolf dies but the pack survives."

After dinner when Ghost and Jon slunk off to the basement alone he called Gen. He'd tried not to bother her all day because he knew she'd been insanely busy with all the writing she and Tyrion had to get done. But it was nighttime now and he was really hoping she was giving herself a break.

She answered the video call with her hair up in a messy bun and a face mask on.

"Sup Jon. Like my new look?"

"Oh it's my new favorite I think. The green really suits you," he said.

"Thanks, I totally agree," she laughed, "Anyways what's new with you and my sweet boy Ghost today?"

"What? I'm not your sweet boy too?"

Gen rolled her eyes, "You're my sweet man. It's different."

"I'll take it. All I really did today was get things ready for the business trip with my dad," Jon said.

"Oh yeah! That's right. Oldtown right?"

"Yep. Should be pretty easy. Nothing complicated, just going over some figures with the guy."

She walked him and the camera over to her bathroom and peeled off her face mask, taking a second to wash the rest off.

"Well knowing you, it's going to go great. I can't say the same for me and Tyrion right now."
"That bad?"

Gen grimaced at the screen and pointed her phone at her laptop.

"So we've got to turn all of these bullet points into actual pages. And my journals are kicking me in the ass. It's like all I wrote down in Braavos was how spooky everything was. Like that only gets you so far when you're supposed to write a couple pages."

Jon felt for her. She was clearly stressed out judging by the earlier face mask. She'd told him earlier that she only ever had little spa nights when she was really freaking out about something. He was sure that if her hair was down, the baby hairs would be all over the place.

"They just want to see a first draft right?"

"Yeah. But we've got so much to write still!"

He wish he had the magic words to help her, or to convince the publishing company to give them more time, "I guess all you can do is try your best. Try to remember it's just a first draft, it doesn't need to be perfect."

"I guess you're right. I'm just such a perfectionist that it feels weird to submit anything but the best."

"Submit your current best, and then later on with the different drafts you can get even better."

She cracked a tiny smile, "Alright. Thanks for listening to me rant. I know you've been stressed out lately too."

“Gen, don’t worry about it. Sharing your worries with you is just another way I get to love you. You don’t have to face any of it alone.”

“And neither do you Jon. I love you so much.”
"You're capable and you know your stuff. You can do this. You're going to be articulate and brilliant," Gen murmured to herself.

"I swear it by the Old Gods and the New," Tyrion laughed.

Gen was pacing around the office straightening up stacks of paper they'd left out, waiting for the publisher to show up. Tyrion didn’t seem to care and just kept scrolling through emails on his laptop.

"I swear Tyrion, if you make me laugh during this meeting I'm going back to Winterfell."

Tyrion rolled his eyes and sat down at the head of the table, with his back to the ocean views. She forced herself into the seat next to him. But as soon as she sat down she wished she was still pacing around the room. All the nervous energy was begging to be released. Part of her wanted to run around the hallway to get it all out. She’d read somewhere that exercise was good when you were anxious.

"Genevieve calm down. I know the guy, it's pretty much a done deal already. This is just a formality."

"If it was just a formality then why'd we have to rush to put the whole manuscript together?" Gen asked crossing her arms.

He leaned forward in the chair and smiled at her, "Let's just say my publisher is a bit of a hardass."

When they heard the someone walking through the office Genevieve stood up quick.

"Should I go great them? I feel so weird right now," she asked.

Tyrion remained sitting, "They know their way around the place. But I'm sure they'll get a kick out of you standing."

Gen felt her hands getting sweaty and the footsteps came closer and the door handle twisted. And then came confusion.

"Hello father."

Tywin walked over and nodded his head at his son, sticking his hand out to greet Genevieve.

“Genevieve. Good morning,” he said.

His back was so straight, his posture so proud. Gen felt like withering under his gaze. But then she reminder herself of the weirdness of the situation. This was Tyrion’s father for Gods’ sake. He was a scary man, sure, but if he was the publisher what did it matter?

“Mr. Lannister. Thank you for coming.”

Tyrion laughed at her formality. “Please sit you two. You’re making me nervous.”

“You wouldn’t feel so nervous if you were standing up with us,” his father said with an icy stare.
Nevertheless, the pair sat down across from each other. Genevieve sensed that Tywin was annoyed that he hadn’t been seated at the head of the table like he was clearly used to. From what she could gather from just his property holdings alone, he had some serious money. And anyone with that much money didn’t get there without knowing how to dominate a business meeting.

“So shall we begin?” Tyrion asked.

“Well that’s why I’m here, isn’t it?” his father said

Genevieve opened up the binder she’d made late the night before. She’d had to stay late at the office to make sure everything was printed out and hole-punched so it’d be ready for the meeting. Tyrion had told her usually they ordered a mockup from their printer, but with the deadline so close they hadn’t been able to.

“So what do you want from me this time Tyrion?”

Tyrion spared a look at Gen and she saw the sparkle in his eyes. It seemed that despite the tension with his father, he truly enjoyed the verbal sparring they could get into with each other.

“Same as last time. You agree to front the printing costs and let me use your connections to promote the book and I’ll give you a cut of the profits,” Tyrion said.

His father crossed his arms across his chest and leaned back in his chair, “What percentage?”

“10 percent.”

“Thirty,” Tywin said closing the binder Gen had set in front of him.

Gen felt like stepping out of the room to let them figure this out. She had no interest in sitting in the thick air any longer.

“20, but that’s the highest I can go. I’ve got to pay this one,” Tyrion said winking at Gen.

Tywin was silent for a beat. Gen watched the hand of the clock tick by, each second feeling like another closer to a panic attack. She didn’t even know why she was so nervous. She felt stupid for feeling so much in that moment. But she could help it that her body had the cute habit of freaking out just when she needed it to be reliable.

“Fine. But only if I can retain exclusive publishing rights. No reprints down the line with a publisher if it’s not under the Lannister brand,” Tywin said.

"Deal. Works with me, your name is my name. I'd be an idiot to use another publisher and lose that branding," Tyrion nodded.

Gen felt her body relax once the deal was reach, but quickly straightened when Tywin looked at her. That was one way to fix her posture, just have him follow her around with those judging green eyes.

"Now that that's settled, show me the book, won't you?" Tywin said.

"Of course. Gen, would you like you to explain how we set it up?"

She felt her hands flutter and shake as she tried to flip her way to the front of the binder.

"Sure. Well in terms of structure it's divided between Westeros and Essos. And then from there by city,” she explained.
She thanked the Gods for not making her trip over any of her words.

Tywin flipped through and nodded. “What about under each section. Tyrion says it’s about culture, what makes that marketable?”

Gen hadn’t thought to prepare for an answer like that. She didn’t have any practiced careful words that came to mind. She just had her passion.

Tyrion nudged her foot under the table, urging her to speak.

“Well under each section we described the traditional aspects of culture like politics, religion, economics, and so on,” she started.

Tywin cut her off, “There’s already hundreds, if not thousands of books that’ve done that. What makes this one worth it?”

Gen felt a heat rise in her, the same heat she’d felt when Tyrion’s sister Cersei had tried to make her feel small. She wasn’t an idiot and she didn’t like when people assumed she was.

“Well for one, it’s written by your son who’s a brilliant and respected writer in the community this book will target,” she said.

Tyrion smiled, “Thanks Gen.”

“And second, it’s not just a dry cultural overview like many of the current books on the market, believe me, I’ve read them. We have first-person accounts, illustrations, and have paid careful attention to each culture to avoid generalizations.”

“Such as?”

Gen flipped through to the section about her visit to Hardhome as an example, “Many of the current books on the market still contain inaccuracies and harmful stereotypes. This one doesn’t. In our section about the Free Folk, we were accurate and actually have sources, which I can’t say for many on the market.”

“She’s right. This will be one of the first published with research actually conducted up there. My contact up there told me the only books people had ever written about their histories we lies by Southerners. This book gives voice to marginalized populations while still remaining marketable with overviews of more popular places like Kingslanding,” Tyrion said.

Tywin nodded his head and read through the journal Gen had written about Hardhome, raising his brows when he read about Bear Paw, the drinking game she’d played.

“Do they really do this?” Tywin asked, ignoring Tyrion’s comment.

“Yes. Experienced it first hand unfortunately.”

Tywin cracked a hint of a smile and looked at his son, “We should send Cersei up there. She’d be a champion.”

“She’s better acquainted with wine,” Tyrion laughed.

“Well this looks like it’ll be a suitable venture for the company. If your research is as careful as you say, I’m sure it’ll sell well with the Free Folk and all the other people who get ignored in the history books,” Tywin said.
“Don’t worry Mr. Lannister, I took very careful notes in each of the cities. It’s all been checked for accuracy.”

Tywin raised a brow at her, “I’m not worried, my wallet is.”

With the deal settled and Tywin off to go scare children, Tyrion’s words, not Gen’s, they could relax.

“Gen you’re brilliant around him. I think you really surprised him when you said why the book was marketable,” Tyrion said.

She smiled and looked out at the sea, “Oh please. You saved my ass by highlighting the importance of the book to marginalized populations. Also, I hate you for not telling me it was your dad!”

“Trust me, he’s worse to do business with than other publishers. Telling you would have only let your guard down too much,” Tyrion said.

“Whatever you say. I’m just pumped it’s actually getting printed.”

Tyrion pouted, “You doubted me?”

“Not for a second. I’ve just never done any of this before.”

“Well you better get used to it. I plan on hiring you full time, and don’t freak out, I’ll let you work from home.”

Gen felt like all the pieces had finally come together. She could have it all. She didn’t have to choose between love for Jon and her family and love for her career.

“Holy fuck. Are you serious?”

“Deadly. We’ve got a lot to celebrate tonight!”

Chapter End Notes

Thing are looking up for Gen!
Chapter 92

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Leyton Hightower had been an easy sell. Once Ned shook his hand and smiled Jon knew the deal was back on. Sometimes the older clients just wanted a wise face like his father's, a signal that they could respect them. Not many wanted to listen to someone young like Jon try to convince them that their prices had gone up for good reason.

On their way back to the hotel Jon was in high spirits, "It feels so good to get that done and over with. I can't believe it's been months since I was last down here negotiating."

"Just think, last time you were here you hadn't even met Genevieve yet," Ned said.

Jon sighed, looking down at the picture of them on their phone, "Very true! Can't believe all that's happened already this year."

"Between you and your siblings, I can't keep up. You are all growing up way too fast."

The hotel was in an older building in the heart of Oldtown. But the inside was fully renovated, full of bright lights and simple colors. The company always put Jon up in it when he visited the city for business.

In their room they plopped down on the beds and shared a knowing look.

"Pajamas and room service?" Ned smiled.

"You know it!"

Jon and his father both loved a quiet night in. Unlike Robb and Theon, when he went on business he didn't have much interest in exploring the nightlife of the cities they visited. Like his father, he was content to eat food that was bad for him and flip through the weird channels on the TV.

Room service came, and they ate their burgers and fries from bed, sipping on overpriced beers. It was moments like this that reminded Jon of how comfortable his family was. Anyone who could afford room service was in a whole other income bracket from the rest of the world.

Ned indulged himself and soon he was laughing along to the cheesy jokes on the nighttime comedy special and being very talkative with Jon.

"You know, when I first took over the business from my father I used to look forward to all the business trips so I could pretend I was just like any other young man on earth, without a care in the world," Ned said.

"How old were you when you took over the business?"

His father finished his beer and looked upward in recollection, "Gods, Cat was still pregnant with Robb. And I had everything else going on, you know."

Jon felt the weight of his meal in his stomach. He knew he fell into the everything else of his father's statement. Robb and him were practically the same age. Why did he have to constantly be reminded of the fact that he was a burden on everyone’s lives?
Ned paused realizing the error of what he'd said. "Jon, I didn't mean it like that. You were a blessing in my life. It was just stressful having two kids on the way and the business."

Jon didn't know what to say. He knew his Dad loved him, and he thanked the Gods that he hadn't grown up without his father, but still. There was still that part of him that was angry at his father for making him the reminder of his infidelity to Catelyn. Ned didn't carry the burden of that shame, Jon did.

"I'm sure it was hard," Jon said. He kept his eyes focused down on his beer trying not to show his Dad how he felt.

His father leaned forward on the edge of the bed, "Seriously Jon, I mean it. You kids sure helped give me some grey hairs, but I've loved every second of it."

Jon felt the unspoken question linger on his tongue. Would there ever be the right moment to ask all the things he'd wondered his entire life? The mysteries of his identity that he'd been too scared to ask?

All Jon could say was, "Yep. I know. Just wish I knew more."

He couldn't help himself from saying it. And the moment he did he felt the words leave his mouth he regretted them. Ned looked up at him and put his hand on his knee.

"Jon. I think it's time that we had that talk. Watching you and Gen together has shown me you can understand what you'd do for the people you love."

"What are you talking about dad? Are those beers finally getting to you?" Now that he thought about it, his cheeks did look a little pinker than usual.

Ned sighed, "No. And before I start talking, just know that I did everything I did because I loved you. It was my never my intention to hurt you."

"Dad, you're freaking me out. What's going on? Did something happen?"

The silence that followed took the breath out of Jon, leaving nothing behind but prickly nerves. His father's face was contorted with a pain he never saw on his face unless he was alone in the Godswood praying, an emotion they'd agreed to never discuss.

And when Ned finally spoke, Jon realized why some things were best left unsaid. There were some things that once spoken would forever change the world you lived in.

"Jon, I'm not your father."

Chapter End Notes

Ahhhh I apologize for the timing of this angst! I didn't mean for this to come out the same day as the series finale, but here we are! Let's hope the finale doesn't hurt so much.
Chapter 93

Chapter Notes

Soooo the show is over now :-( let's discuss in the comments.

Avoid the end notes if you don't want spoilers!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

How could what his father said possibly be true? He was Ned Stark’s boy, the only one besides Arya that had the Stark look. He had his father's solemn face and crinkled eyes when he smiled. He had the dark hair and strict adherence to honor that his father instilled in him. Jon couldn't comprehend a world where he was anyone but Ned Stark’s son.

And when Ned said those five words, Jon felt his identity shatter. And along with that, the illusion that his father was an honorable man went away too. Although Jon knew that he was a secret Ned kept, this was beyond what he ever imagined.

If Ned wasn’t his father, then he’d let Catelyn’s hate hurt him all those years for nothing. Jon wasn’t a bastard. He wasn’t proof that Ned was human. He was no one now.

And he didn’t know what to say. He felt his eyes well up with tears and his heart clench with an ache no words could fix.

Ned stayed silent unsure of what to say next. What could he possibly say to Jon? There was nothing he could do to undo the mistakes of his past.

Jon felt frozen. His pulse quickened and he felt like he was floating away from reality.

“What are you talking about? I don’t understand,” Jon said.

When he looked up he found that his father’s, or whoever he was, eyes were filled with tears. He’d never seen him look so sad.

“I’m so sorry Jon. I should have told you sooner. But things were complicated back then, and as you got older I wasn’t sure how to undo the mess I’d made,” he rushed out.

Jon took a deep breath and set his jaw, “You’re saying that you’ve lied to me all my life?”

Ned tried to put his hand on Jon but he jerked away. He didn’t want anything to do with him. He couldn’t even look at him in the eyes without wondering what else had been a lie. Who the fuck was he?

“I had to Jon. If I hadn’t the courts would’ve taken you away to live with your father’s parents. And that was no home to raise a child in,” Ned said.

A home with blood was better than a home built on lies.

“Then who the fuck am I? Who are you? I don’t understand any of this.”
“I’m your uncle, Jon. My sister Lyanna was your mother.”

His mother was Lyanna? The woman Ned prayed for every year on her death? The woman they’d been forbidden to mention in the house growing up by Catelyn? Why the fuck did Ned let his wife hate him for so many years then? What had a motherless child done to be so deserving of such treatment?

Ned wasn’t honorable, he was a coward. A coward who let Jon’s life be built on lies and feeling like an outsider in the very place he was supposed to feel at home. Even Theon had found a place in their family easier than Jon once he’d been adopted. All Jon had gotten was lies. And he was mad. So mad that he couldn’t see straight.

“Some job you did of that. I can’t believe you let me believe I was just some bastard son of yours all these years. I fucking hated myself for ruining the perfect little family you and Catelyn had. You know that?”

Ned was stunned into silence. He’d never imagined or intended for this conversation to go this way. Hells, he never thought that weekend he’d be telling Jon the truth at last. But Jon was growing up and he couldn’t let it go on any longer.

“I’m so sorry Jon. I never thought,” Ned started.

Jon cut him off standing up, “That’s right. You never thought. You never thought what it felt like to be me all these years. You never thought what it felt like not knowing who my mother was. You never even gave me the chance to even grieve for her. And what about my father, my other family? You robbed me of a chance of feeling like I belonged.”

“You always had a place in our house and you know it.”

“Try telling that to your fucking wife then!”

Ned stood up and tried to get Jon to look at him, tried to get through to him. He felt like the quiet boy he’d known was gone and replaced with the fiery side he was always scared would surface. But deep down he knew he deserved the hatred Jon was spewing at him. He deserved every hurtful word and betrayed look. He’d broken the promise he’d made to his sister so many years ago.

“You have to protect him. Promise me Ned, promise me.”

But Jon couldn’t remember his own birth. He didn’t know the loneliness his mother felt or the fear his Uncle had as he sat beside her clutching her hand. He didn’t know the sounds of her screams or the way her blood had soaked through the sheets. He didn’t know the tears she’d shed those months before Jon’s birth, wondering what would happen to her and her son. He didn’t know all of the things that haunted the man he’d known as his father for all those years. There was so much Jon didn’t yet understand, but Ned acknowledged it was his fault he never knew.

Jon stormed out of the hotel room grabbing nothing but his phone and his wallet. He didn’t want to fucking see his uncle for a second longer. He needed to get out of there.

The tears were hot and heavy on his face as he ran down the stairs of the hotel and fetched a car. He needed to get anywhere but there.

Chapter End Notes
I don't know how to feel about the ending, I just feel sad and numb about it being over. So glad we've got a community of writers on here to give all the beloved characters new adventures and epilogues with all the details we imagined. What you all think of it?
Chapter 94

Chapter Notes

My lifetime of family drama has prepared me for this chapter lolol

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Gen was sitting in bed writing in her journal. She’d let her entries become too spaced out as of late and she didn’t want to forget anything that the Gods had given her. Documenting the highs and lows was a way for her to see that things did get better.

So she wrote about all the stress of being away from those she loved, followed by the reminder that she was so blessed to be working with Tyrion. She and him had secured the book deal, and she considered that a win in her book, even if the publisher was only Tyrion’s father.

She was just about to brush her teeth and head off to dream land when there was a knock on her door. It was close to eleven o’clock and when she heard the noise she jumped from the bed and ran to her closet.

There was no one in the city that would come to her door at that hour. Tyrion would have had the sense to call her first.

In her closet she’d hidden away a dagger she’d purchased in Braavos. A dagger she’d made sure to keep hidden from her brother Henryk, but one she’d brought with her to keep her protected. When you were a young woman living on your own in an unfamiliar city you couldn’t be too careful.

As her heart rate sped up, she hid in her closet for a beat hoping whoever was at her door would just go away.

But the knock continued and she had no choice but to investigate. As she crept forward to the door light on her feet, she felt like all those stupid girls in horror movies. The girls that could easily escape but instead go towards the noise instead and get murdered.

It wasn’t in her nature to run away. She faced her fears head on, always had.

She dropped down to her hands and knees and tried to look under the door. If there was only one person she could take them. But two? That was above her paygrade.

But she only saw one pair of feet. She prayed they didn’t see her shadow.

She stood to her feet unsure what to do next. Her stupid fucking door didn’t have a peephole for her to see if it was just a surprise delivery or someone there to murder her.

“Please, come to the door Gen,” a broken voice said.

It was a voice she knew, a voice she loved.

She put the knife out of the way on the kitchen counter and flew open the door.

“Jon? What are you doing here?”
Before she could even get a good look at him, he collapsed against her with a sob. Gen was in shock. Between the previous fear that someone was there to kill her and the sudden realization that the man she loved was in pain, she was unsure of herself.

She put her arms around him as he wet her shoulder with her tears and his chest shook with the unknown grief he was experiencing.

“Jon? What’s wrong love? What happened?”

He broke away only to walk into her apartment and on through to her bedroom. She watched as he collapsed into her bed and curled up into himself. His sobs shook his body and filled the room with an ache that sent pain right to Gen’s heart. She couldn’t bear to see him that way and felt her eyes well with tears.

She sat down behind him and stroked his hair like her father used to do when she was younger and had an ocean of tears just like Jon. He was crying so hard that he was hiccuping, forgetting to breathe.

A million thoughts swarm through her mind. Why was he crying? Was someone hurt, or worse dead? Her heart had sunk when she first saw him at the door, but the realization that it was a possibility made her freeze. A lump grew in her throat and she struggled to find the words.

“Is everyone okay? Please tell me no one is hurt,” she begged.

Jon turned over and stared at her with a pain in his eyes that could have killed her. He shook his head and moved closer toward her until he was enveloped in her arms.

“I’m not a Stark. Everything’s a lie,” he said with a sob.

Although she didn’t know the pain behind his words yet, his hurt was her hurt.

“Sweetie, try and sit up with me. We’ve got to get you breathing,” she said.

He shook in her arms as she tried to wipe the tears from his cheeks. He’d already soaked her shoulder through with them. The left an angry flush on his skin that made him look like he’d been slapped.

The hiccups and wracking sobs slowed and became less frequent as she had him listen to the steady beat of her heart and follow along with her breaths.

“In… and out.”

He started to talk, “Gen I...” but soon dissolved into tears again.

“Jon, look at me. I’ve got you. You’re safe with me. What happened?”

Finally he had composed himself enough to get words out. The pain was still written on his face but Gen prayed she’d be able to help ease it before the sun rose.

“I’m not my father’s son. He’s my Uncle,” he sighed into her chest.

Gen was stunned. That was not at all what she’d been expecting him to say.

“Wait what do you mean? How is that possible?”

Jon laughed a mean laugh, a laugh without joy, “Fuck if I know. I’m my aunt Lyanna’s son
apparently.”

“What the fuck?”

“That’s what I’m saying.”

Gen didn’t understand. If Jon was Lyanna’s son then why Ned raise him to believe he wasn’t? Why the secrecy? Why let Jon feel like a bastard his entire life?

She felt her fists curled up into balls as she held him and had half a mind to head up to wherever Ned was and scream at him until he undid all the hurt he’d caused.

“So who’s your father then?”

Jon blinked, “Fuck, I don’t even know. I stormed out of there before I could find out more.”

“I’m so sorry Jon,” she said smoothing back his hair, “How’d he even tell you?”

“I don’t even remember. One minute I’m Jon Stark and then he’s telling him I never was. I’m so fucking mad at him for making me live this lie, and for what?”

“Jon I can’t even wrap my mind around any of this. He better have an explanation next time you see him.”

He sat up straighter and pulled away, “I’m not fucking going back to him. I can’t be in that house anymore after this.”

“Wait so you’re moving out?”

“How could I live in a house with him and Cat? I’ve been treating less than by her my entire life for no reason, and he let her,” he spat.

She wished she could have helped the lost boy he’d been growing up. He hadn’t deserved any of that, no one did.

“I support you. And I’m so sorry this has happened to you Jon. I’m speechless, really,” she said with downcast eyes.

“Do you think I could stay here for a couple days, just to figure things out?”

As if she could say no to him? She couldn’t abandon him to the world just when he needed to feel safe the most. Right now he felt like he had no home. And he had help her realize that wherever her heart was, she was home. She had a duty to him to help him realize that he was loved and deeply cared for, by so many people.

“Of course Jon. As long as you need. I’m here for you.”

While Jon’s exhaustion overtook him that night, Gen was too wired to fall asleep. She couldn’t believe what Jon had told her. Who the fuck did Ned think he was to keep something like that from him all his life? What about his other family?

Her anger bubbled and reached its highest point when she received a text from a number her phone didn’t recognize.

“Gen, it’s Jon’s Dad, Ned. Please tell me if he’s with you. We had a difficult conversation and he left. I’m really worried about him.”
Gen scoffed. Ned may have been Jon’s Dad, but he wasn’t his father. A father wouldn’t hurt his kid like he’d done to Jon.

But deep down she knew the worry Ned was feeling. It was the same worry she felt as she looked down at the hurt man asleep next to her.

“He’s with me. I’m praying you have a better explanation than what he’s told me,” she sent.

Chapter End Notes

Anyone have any requests for this story? I'm always looking for fun little transition chapters that you'd enjoy! If there's something you'd like to see happen, just let me know.
Chapter 95

“Jon, it’s been a couple days. You’ve got to get out of bed and get some sun at least,” Gen said.

Her boyfriend had stayed curled up in the dark of her bedroom while she’d been off at work each day. According to Ned, he hadn’t contacted him or any of his siblings. Gen didn’t blame him. Jon needed time. Finding out the identity you believed to be yours your entire life wasn’t true was a lot to process. Patience was the best thing she could give him.

But after watching him float around her apartment like a ghost of the man she loved was getting to her. There were only so many times she could watch him break in front of her before she broke too.

“I can’t Gen. I’ve got nowhere to go,” he said burrowing under the covers even more.

She took a deep breath and prayed for peace. She knew she didn’t have the words to help ease his pain but maybe the Gods could help him.

“I know Jon. It’s hard. But I can’t let you lay here and believe that you’ve got nothing left. I’m worried for you.”

He was silent for a beat. “You should be.”

Jon didn’t make it out of bed that day, or the next even. He wasn’t showering and he barely ate. Not even homemade treats could entice him.

Tyrion had noticed her funk at work. He knew Jon was staying with her but Gen hadn’t betrayed his trust by spilling the beans. He’d been let down by enough people lately.

“How are things at your apartment?” Tyrion asked.

Gen looked up from her sketches for the book and sighed. She’d been having trouble concentrating all week knowing Jon was back at her place feeling so lost. All she wanted to do was hug the hurt out of him.

“About the same. It’s been a tough week for the both of us. But I’m hoping things will improve. I’ve just got to get him out of bed.”

Tyrion grimaced. He himself had had many of those days when he was young and struggling to find his place in the world. But he couldn’t exactly recommend wine and women to help Jon through it like he’d done.

“I’m sorry Gen. I’m thinking of you. Though I wish you could tell me what was wrong so I could help better.”

“I know. If I didn’t think I’d be betraying his trust, I would.”

When Gen got home from work that day with an armful of groceries Jon surprised her by meeting her at the door. His hair was wet, from the shower not tears, and he’d changed into her pink pair of sweatpants. When he’d left Ned in Oldtown he’d been so upset he hadn’t even grabbed his luggage meaning he didn’t exactly have anything of his own to wear.

If it was any other week Gen would have smiled and told him how good he looked in her pants. But despite the progress, there was still no sign of the man she knew in his expression.
She didn’t stop to put away her groceries before pulling him into a tight hug, breathing in the clean scent of him.

He returned it in kind, clinging to her with all the unspoken thanks he wanted to say.

“How are you today?”

“Still raw. But I’ve been thinking a lot.”

Gen waited for him to expand on what he meant. She didn’t want to put words in his mouth or make him say anything he wasn’t ready to.

He took her bait and sighed, “I keep getting calls from my Dad.”

She took him calling him Dad as a good sign. At least he wasn’t swearing anymore, not that she blamed him. If she was in his shoes she would have run home to her parents and give them a mouthful. She never was very good at keeping her calm when she received bad news.

“Have you answered?”

Jon looked down at the floor, “Not yet. But I’m thinking about it.”

“I’ll support you either way. Now let’s get some food in you before you waste away,” Gen said.

He humored her and ate a couple bites of chicken. It wasn’t nearly enough, but it was a start.

“So what’s the plan? You want to stay the weekend here?”

Jon looked up at her with wild eyes, an uncertainty lying beneath his expression. “Uh I hadn’t really thought that far ahead. I guess that’d be good, just so I can sort out finding a place to stay back in Winterfell.”

“Don’t worry Jon, I’m not kicking you out.”

She wanted to ask him what he planned to do about work considering he worked for the very person he was trying avoid. But bringing that up would only add another thing for Jon to feel overwhelmed by.

“Thanks Gen. I know I haven’t been easy to deal with the past few days,” he sighed.

Gen grabbed his hand and looked him in the eyes, “Jon, that’s what I’m here for. We look after each other, it’s our job. Don’t feel like you have to thank me for that.”

“Well either way, thanks for answering the door. I don’t know where I would’ve gone.”

The rest of the night she helped him look at apartments online. On such short notice many of the places available were not exactly what Jon had imagined when he proposed moving out with Genevieve weeks earlier.

The best he could find was a one bedroom that was still in Winterfell. He told himself that he liked it because it was close to Genevieve’s house, but he knew that he wasn’t quite ready to cut ties with his family despite his hurt.

“Sure you don’t want to move in with me when you’re done here?” he tried to joke.

Visions of waking up next to him everyday made her heart clench. If they lived together she could
always hear that sleepy morning voice he got, and shower him with kisses at all hours. She wouldn’t need to video call him for the late night conversations she loved or hug a pillow to feel like she wasn’t alone. But despite the temptation, the voice in her head told her it was too soon. Too soon to be moving on with her life without taking a moment to just reflect.

“Sorry babe, someday for sure. But for now I just need to sort out my finances first.”

He leaned his head on her shoulder, “I’m holding you to it.”

Gen remembered the conversation she and Tyrion had had earlier in the week, “Oh Gods! Speaking of finances I forgot to tell you!”

“What’s that?” Jon asked.

“Tyrion said he plans on hiring me full time after the work here is finished.”

She watched as Jon’s face fell again, before he forced a smile on his face. It hurt her to think Jon thought she was leaving him.

“That’s awesome Gen. You deserve it, so proud of you.”

“I see that frown! Don’t worry, he’s going to let me work from home. So I’m not going anywhere. You’re stuck with me.”

Jon let out a deep breath, “Thank fuck! For a second there I thought you were giving me more bad news to close out this shit week.”

“I wouldn’t think of it! I’m team support Jon and don’t you forget it!”

“I’ll have t-shirts made up.”
“Jon?? Where are you? Dad won’t tell us and I’m starting to FREAK out,” Arya texted.

He was walking up and down the beach trying to collect his thoughts while Genevieve was swimming lithe as a dolphin. All weekend long he’d been trying to see from his Dad’s point of view. But then he remembered the hurt he’d felt as a child, and still felt as an adult, and stopped caring about walking a mile in the shoes of someone who’d allowed hurt to come to him.

While he was lost in his thoughts he hadn’t even thought of how his siblings, or cousins now, were taking the news. He hadn’t even considered if Ned would have told them or not. Clearly Arya didn’t know, but she would eventually. How would they take the news?

He decided to be blunt. Arya wasn’t someone he needed to skirt around the truth with. “Some shit went down and I’m hiding out for a while at Gen’s place.”

As soon as he sent it he regretted it. He didn’t want Arya’s relationship with her parents to be fractured just because his was. He didn’t want that for her or any of his siblings.

Her reply was instant, “Wtf?? Call me right now. Dad seriously refuses to say anything. He and my mom had a huge fight the other night but I couldn’t hear anything through the door.”

Jon felt goosebumps cover his arms despite the heat of the sun above. He wasn’t sure what to do. Call her and change her perception of her father forever? Or take some time to sit on all the feelings he was experiencing. He’d learned early on in life that acting without thinking never got him anywhere.

“I’ll be home in a couple days and I’ll explain then. It’s too much shit to be talked about over the phone.”

Gen came out of the water, a picture of health in a black one-piece swimsuit and wet braids.

“What’s up? Did he try calling you again?”

He put his phone back into his pockets. Arya could wait.

“No, Arya was just wondering where I was. Apparently he hasn’t spilled the news to them yet.”

She nodded with a grimace, “That’s some shit Jon, I swear I really don’t know what I’d do in your shoes. I still want to call him up and give him a piece of my mind.”

He loved the fierceness in his voice but recognized that she couldn’t fight his battles for him. He had to navigate it himself.

“I’ll call you if I need backup. But getting the text from Arya made me realize I’ve really just got to put on a brave face and head back up there to try to salvage what I can. I don’t want to lose my siblings.”

“You won’t Jon. They love you so much, this news won’t change that. You’ll always be family to them, no matter what.”

Jon hoped she was right.

When she brought him to the airport Sunday night he couldn’t stop his mind from catastrophizing.
Already he felt like he’d received the worst possible news and he was terrified going home to talk about it would only make things worst.

“Jon, I’ll just be a phone call away. I already talked with Tyrion and he said I can jump on a plane to meet you the second you need me,” Gen promised before he went through security.

He couldn’t find the words but collapsed into the strength of her hug, in the feeling of safety only she could give him.

“Love you Gen. Pray for me.”

“I will. Keep me updated if you can. Love you so much!”

By the time he got back into Winterfell the streets were empty and there was a quiet stillness to them that made Jon feel like turning the car back around. And when he pulled into the driveway of the house that held the truths he was too scared to confront, he found himself unable to get out of the car.

He didn’t want to go inside. He didn’t want his home to be tainted by the news he’d received. Going inside would only make it real. He wasn’t ready to see their faces fall or the silence that would suck the air out of the room when he walked in. He wasn’t ready for any of that.

So instead he go out of the car as quiet as he could and walked through the backyard into the Godswood. It was the one place beside Gen’s arms where he could feel like he was safe, like he was heard. And there was no better place for that than surrounded by the Gods.

As he walked into the Godswood and looked up at the Heart Tree he felt a calm rush over removing all the weight he’d felt since he’d found out the news. He collapsed to his knees on the wet grass in front of the tree and started crying. For relief or sadness, he couldn’t tell. But it poured out of him until he found the strength to stand.

He couldn’t run from his problems. But he couldn’t deny the fear he felt in facing them either. He wasn’t sure if he was strong enough to face them alone. But he wasn’t alone, no one ever truly is.

As he walked towards the house he saw the porch light flick on and the outline of his father standing in the window. It was time.
Chapter 97

He’d fought in a war and watched six of his children being born, but nothing had prepared him for this. As Ned watched Jon walk towards the back door of the house he felt like his legs would fail him and he’d collapse to the ground. But it wasn’t the time for anxiety, it was time to make things right.

Jon slid the door open and kept his eyes on the floor. Neither of them wanted to speak first.

“Why don’t we sit down,” Jon said with a stillness in his voice that made his father nervous.

He considered sitting at the dining room table but he was too tired for the formality. Jon didn’t have it in him to pretend like everything was okay and that he was tough.

“Jon, I just want to say how sorry I am for this and how I explained things to you.”

Jon took a deep breath and tried to give his brain time to process his thoughts before his mouth exploded with them.

“And I apologize for missing work this week. I’ll be back tomorrow.”

Ned reached forward to put his hand on his shoulder but thought better of it, letting it drop to the couch. “

“Don’t even worry about it Jon. I know you needed time, and still do probably. If there is anyway I can help you through this, just tell me.”

“Well you can start by telling me about my parents,” Jon said.

Ned always knew this day would come but now that it was actually there he felt tongue tied. He couldn’t remember the last time he talked about his sister’s wild spirit and her fierce passion. And he’d spent so long being angry at Jon’s father for what had happened to Lyanna that he’d didn’t know what to say.

He sighed. “Where do you want me to start?”

“How’d they meet?”

When Jon asked the question his voice was so small, reminding Ned of the child he’d watched grow up since the day he first held him in his arms and promised his sister he’d protect him. To see the caution in his voice made him feel like he’d broken that promise a million times over.

“It’s a very complicated story so you’ll have to bear with me,” Ned started shaking his head remembering the moment they’d laid eyes on each other, “It was at a military ball right after I joined up. I brought Cat as my date and my old friend Robert, the Mr. Baratheon Gen met, brought your mom Lyanna.”

“Is he my father? Gen said he was weird when she brought me up in front of him,” Jon asked.

Ned’s fists clenched remembering just how awful his “friend” had treated his sister, and how he’d acted after her death.

“No, but if he had it his way you would be. He wanted nothing more in life to marry your mother but he wasn’t right for her. They were both too wild to ever truly be happy with each other.”
Jon had spent so many years dreaming up a mother for himself in his mind but he never considered that she would be wild and fierce, just like his sister Arya. And he’d never considered that she might be dead. No child ever prepared for that.

“After she passed away Robert was inconsolable. They weren’t dating for a while at that point but he still clung to the hope she’d come back to him, even after you were in her belly. He started drinking even more and she made me promise me to keep you away from him.”

Jon was confused, “But why? It’s not like he had a legitimate custody claim? Why the secrecy about me?”

“Your father’s dad, your grandfather, was still alive at the time and your mother was terrified that you’d end up under his care.”

Just a snippet of the other side of him made him want to know more. What was his grandfather like? Did he look like them? Did he have their personality? Were any of them alive? Did he have any half siblings?

“What was wrong with him? Why couldn’t my father have taken care of me?” Jon asked. He felt the anger of abandonment rise up in him. Why had the Gods cursed him with two parents who couldn’t be there for him? It wasn’t fair.

Jon knew something was wrong when his Dad put his hand on his knee, “I’m sorry Jon but he passed away in a car accident a couple months before you were born.”

His stomach dropped to the floor. His father had never even got to see him. And his mother died bringing him into the world. Where were the Gods then? Why was he being punished by them?

Jon couldn’t focus on the death of both his parents in that moment. He needed to move on or he’d crumble.

“Oh. So my Grandfather, what was wrong with him?”

“He was abusive but very good at hiding it. Mad as all hell too. Your mother made me promise on her deathbed that you never end up in his hands. She knew the pain your father had been caused by him and wanted you to grow up in a happy house.”

It was getting to be too much to process for Jon but he didn’t want the conversation to end. He wanted to keep talking until he knew exactly who he was, and why his life had been the way it was.

“So that’s the reason for the secrecy?”

He watched his Dad’s face fall, “At first, yes. And then once he died I had no choice but keep it up for legal purposes.”

“But in the house with the family? Was it really necessary?”

“I made the decision to raise you as my son, because you are Jon. I’ve always thought of you as that since the day I held you in my arms. I never wanted you to feel different.”

But the explanation wasn’t enough for Jon. Intentions didn’t equal actions.

“But I did feel different. If it was really the truth then Theon would’ve have felt just as different than I did. But he doesn’t. He was always accepted into the house by everyone. You just let my siblings think I was your bastard kid.”
Tears came to Ned’s eyes and he quickly wiped them away. This wasn’t about his pain, it was about Jon’s.

“And I’m so sorry for that Jon. I won’t make excuses but I will tell you I was a young idiot who only ever wanted to do right by you kids. I didn’t know what I was doing and you paid the price because of that. It was wrong and I apologize from the bottom of my heart.”

Jon didn’t know what to do with that. He wanted to snap and ask for his wife’s apology too.

“I need to table that before I lose my cool,” Jon sighed, “Just tell me more about how my parents met I guess.”

The resignation in his voice hurt Ned. He’d been fighting with Cat about the situation all week and he felt stuck. Until she explained her side of things to Jon they’d never get better. And Ned was having trouble rationalizing the immense love he felt for his wife with the way she’d treated Jon differently over the years. Why hadn’t he spoken up more?

“Well at the military ball, your father was there. I only ever saw him on the battlefield but the moment your parents met eyes they were hooked. I’d never see her smile so much until after that night.”

Ned remembered how her eyes had shone when Rhaegar introduced himself to her, and how they’d talked a good bit of the night, ignoring the partners they’d brought with them.

“But she was dating your friend at the time?”

“Yep. Caused a bit of a scandal when they got together. Made things really awkward between Robert and I.”

Jon couldn’t get enough of all the details, “What was his name?”

“Rhaegar, Rhaegar Targaryen. I never got a chance to really get to know him, but just know you were made in love. If your parents were still alive today you’d be suffocated with it.”

Hearing that broke Jon’s heart even more. He’d grown up in a house full of love yet he still longed to know what things would have been like. But there was no use in wishing for something he could never have.

Jon rose up and looked at his uncle, “Thank you for telling me this. I need some time to think.”
Chapter 98

Chapter Notes

Might not be able to post every day this weekend! Hoping I'll be able to, but not sure yet. Depends on how much I can write today...
Also sorry these past couple have been shorter than usual, it just made sense for me in terms of pacing!

“Jon I’m so sorry. I wish I was there to give you a big hug,” Gen said into camera of her phone.

He’d just broken the news to her that both his parents were dead. He thought that by telling her it’d feel more real, but he still felt the same numbness as before.

“Not your fault. Just wish I had some family left. I always imagined once I knew I’d be able to meet them, and learn all about my Mom.”

“I’m sorry Jon. Is there anyone still alive in your father’s family?”

Jon had thought about looking him up online but he couldn’t bring himself to. He didn’t want to see grisly news articles about the car accident that had taken his father’s life. He didn’t want that to be the only thing he knew about his father.

“Um I’m not sure. I know I’m all out of grandparents, but we really didn’t get into it. I sort of just shut down on him,” Jon shrugged.

She stared back at him with a sad look, “Ugh I don’t blame you. Did you tell him you’re moving out?”

“No yet. I sort of got a little muddled while we were talking. But I really can’t fucking be here anymore, at least not now.”

“You’re always welcome to stay in my room at home if you want,” she said.

Jon couldn’t picture himself squeezing onto her tiny bed and living in a house with her family. They were lovely people, but it wasn’t home. But his house wasn’t feeling like home lately either.

“Thanks Gen, but I’ll just get my own place. I don’t want to bother anyone.”

She had to roll her eyes at that. “You know you wouldn’t be bothering them! They love having guests.”

“Either way, I just want a place of my own to try and figure things out. And you and Ghost of course.”

The next morning Jon left for work before the rest of the family was up to avoid the questions he was sure to get from his siblings. He’d snuck into the office before even the assistants had arrived, needing to use the special key his dad had given him for emergencies to open the place up. He told himself that as long as he kept his head down and hid away in his office he’d be fine.
But leaving early did nothing to stop Robb and Theon from sneaking into his office to check in.

Their dad had made no mention of his conversation with Jon but Robb had spotted Jon’s bag by the front door and had known in an instant he was back.

“Hey Jon? Can we talk?” Robb asked.

His head shot up from his computer and he felt like running away. He wasn’t ready to tell them, he knew if he did he’d end up crying at work.

Theon sensed the discomfort and said, “Please? We’re just worried about you and want to make sure you’re alright.”

“Alright. Come on in.”

His two brothers were uncharacteristically quiet as they shut the door and plopped on the couch. The silence hung heavy in the air until Theon clapped his hands together.

“So… What’s up? Arya told us you with Gen,” Theon said.

Robb leaned forward, “Yeah, are you two alright?”

Jon tensed up. He and Gen were stronger than ever. Crying in front of someone created a special type of bond that tended to stick.

“No, we’re good. Dad just told me some shit news and I’m not taking it well.”

“Wait, like what? What’s going on?” Robb asked.

The angry part of Jon wanted to bad mouth their dad until they were on his side. But he didn’t have it in him. He knew he’d made a difficult decision, and although Jon didn’t agree with the choices he’d made, there was nothing he could do to change them. Adding more drama into things wouldn’t fix it.

“I think it’d be better if we all sat down as a family tonight and talked it over. It’s got to do with my mom.”

Robb and Theon glanced at each other fast then back at Jon, ready with a flurry of questions.

“Holy fuck Jon. What’d he say?” Robb asked.

“Are you okay Jon?” said Theon.

He held up his hand to stop them, “I really can’t talk about it right now. I just want to get through one work day without a break down.”

They stood up after that, patting Jon on the back and telling him they were there for him. Jon wondered if they would be after they heard the news.

Ned had enough sense to stay away from Jon at work. Although when he walked past his office he had to will himself to keep walking. He wanted nothing more than to barge into the office, pull his son into his arms, and tell Jon he was sorry until he believed it.

As the work day came to a close Jon felt the nerves rise up in his chest. He knew if he didn’t force the family to have the conversation that night he’d lose his nerve and let it eat him alive. They had to know. He didn’t want to keep things from his siblings like they’d been keep from him. They needed
the truth just as much as he did.

But that didn’t stop him from considering Gen’s offer on his drive home. Driving past the Norward house, he had an urge to just walk into their house and hide from all his problems until Genevieve was back in Winterfell.

When he pulled into the driveway he saw Arya waiting on the front steps for him and he knew then he couldn’t turn around and hide, no matter how much he wanted to.

The only way he’d have any hope of healing from this was if he talked about it.
When Jon got out of the car with his head hung low, Arya sprinted over and gathered him in a hug. It helped, but only slightly.

“I missed you,” he said with a sad smile.

She punched his arm, “You didn’t tell me you were back! You need to tell me everything so I can help you.”

“Is everyone home? We can talk about it now.”

Arya grew quiet, “Yeah, you’re the last one home. You’re really starting to freak me out, you know that right?”

Jon couldn’t fake a smile, even for her.

The house was full of hushed chatter when he walked in. It was like everyone was talking about him but too scared to do it in front of him. Of course, Ned and Cat were silent standing feet apart in the kitchen.

As he walked past his siblings who wore worried looks and to Ned, Jon felt the all too familiar urge to run away.

Ned met his eyes and nodded, heading to the living room to sit down.

“I’m sure by now the family rumor mill has caused quite the stir today,” Ned said looking at Theon and Robb in particular.

“And I think it’s time you all know what’s going on,” Jon added.

Catelyn’s fists were gathered in her lap and she sent a pleading look towards her husband. Jon wanted to scoff. She didn’t have anything to worry about. Her kids weren’t as hateful as she was. They had the ability to forgive.

“Would you like to tell them or should I?” Ned asked.

Rickon broke the uneasy silence and said, “What the heck is going on right now? One second I’m about to play my game with Bran and then you’re all in here creeping us out.”

Sansa reached forward to quiet him but Jon held up his hand, “You’ll be able to play your game in a little bit. Don’t worry.”

“So what’s going on? Why were you with Gen all week? Did you get engaged?” Sansa asked.

Jon’s face lit up red and he sputtered for an answer. He much rather preferred Sansa’s prediction to the actual truth.

“Nope. Dad told me who my mother was, and my father too.”

The room erupted into chaos among the younger siblings who hadn’t an inkling of the news. Although they never broached the subject with Jon, they’d all been curious over the years about how
he came to live with them.

Ned took a deep breath and held onto Cat’s hand for support, “I should have told him ages ago but I’m not his father, I’m his uncle. My sister Lyanna was his mother.”

The chatter of the room died down in an instant. As they all tried to process the news they’d just heard, Jon sat there wishing he could bury his face in his hands and forget all about it. Sometimes knowing was a lot more painful than not knowing. And to think he’d spent so many years of his life waiting for this exact moment.

Arya was the first to speak, “What the fuck? I don’t get it.”

“Both my parents were dead and Dad made a promise to my mother to take me in,” Jon sighed.

Bran echoed the same questions Jon himself had been asking, “I don’t get it. Why didn’t you just tell us he was our cousin then Dad?”

Yeah, why Ned?

Cat looked ready to storm out of the room with the way her face was set into a frown. She still hadn’t said a word to Jon about what had happened, about the way he was treated differently from everyone else.

“There were some complications that would’ve come up with custody. My sister didn’t want me risking things. But I’ve always meant what you’ve believed, Jon’s my son and your brother no matter what. Me not being his biological father doesn’t change that.”

Jon wished he could believe that.

Robb’s head had been down the entire time trying to process it all. He looked up at Jon and said, “I’m here for you always Jon. I’m your brother until the end of time.”

“Same here Jon. I know what you’re feeling. If you ever need to talk about it, I’m your guy. I know what it’s like,” Theon said with a faraway look.

His younger brothers were silent, until Arya and Sansa forced them to say they loved him just the same.

Jon felt numb hearing from all of them. He knew deep down they all loved him, and that the news didn’t change much, but he still felt out of place. He wanted to know what his life would have been like. He wanted to know the other side of him that he’d been denied by Ned’s “honorable” decision.

“I’ve got one more thing to announce,” Jon said with a deep breath, “I’m moving out this week. I just need some space for a bit to figure things out.”


But Ned understood. He understood better than anyone the pull to leave things behind to get some peace of mind. That was the reason why he spent so much time in the Godswood. If Jon needed that to heal, who was he to stop him.

“Arya, leave him be,” Ned warned, “But Jon, just know you’re always welcome back here. We love you and you’re still family. Still my son and their brother.”

Unspoken in what he said was Catelyn’s reluctance to accept him as one of her sons too.
And that little fact erased all the rest that Ned had said. After the conversation Jon walked down to his room and began to pack. He had to keep moving or he’d crumble.
Chapter 100

Chapter Notes

100 chapters! Wow! I think this is longer than the non-fanfic books I've written at this point! Found an old fic I wrote year and years ago as a kid and this one has the same amount of views as that one! Little writer me would be happy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Genevieve? Let me get to another room, I can’t hear a thing right now.”

“No worries Sandor, I’m just walking to work right now. If you want to talk later that works fine,” Gen said.

She was passing under the shade of the fruit trees on her street, wondering if anyone ever really stopped to eat from them. She’d never seen anyone take from the trees from all the people watching from the sidewalk.

“No, you’re good. I’m away from the guys right now. I’ll never understand how they can be so loud first thing in the morning,” he said.

Gen laughed “First thing? It’s almost 9 o’clock.”

“You call me to bully me or to talk Gen? What’s up?”

She hadn’t really had a reason in mind when she called Sandor. Sometimes she just missed hearing from him, and wanted to talk to him and be reminded of their crazy friendship.

"Just saying hi! How'd that show down in the Stormlands go?"

He grunted into the phone, "The usual."

"So you killed it?"

His deep rumble of a laugh filled her ears and put a much needed smile on her face. Ever since Jon left her place she’d been full of worry knowing there wasn't much she could do to help him.

"At least you believe in me."

"And Elder Brother, and the rest of your adoring fans!"

"Sure sure. What's been on your mind lately? I didn't see anything on your blog last week, been meaning to ask why."

Gen was unsure if it was her place to tell. Then again, it wasn't like he and Jon talked. She decided she could say a little without betraying his confidence.

"Jon's been having some trouble with his family. He fled to my place and I was busy with that, still am really," she sighed.

"Poor guy. I won't ask why, because I doubt you'll tell me, but I'll be think of you two. Fuck knows I
know a thing or two about family drama."

"Thanks San. Well, I'm heading up in the elevator right now. I'll have to let you go, but please keep me updated on all your happenings! You still have to let me know when the show up at the Wall will be."

"Don't worry, I won't let you forget it."

Gen laughed. The only reason Sandor was going up to face the bloody cold was because she asked him too. She wasn't going to miss that.

"I'm sure you won't. Bye!"

When she walked into the office Tyrion was glad to see the smile on her face, even if it was a small one. She’d been too quiet the past couple of days and it was starting to get to him. He just wanted her back to her usual self — bubbly and full of ambitious ideas.

“Ready to get down to business?”

"Of course. I'm ready to kick ass and finish this thing already," Gen said.

He crossed his arms and pouted, "Ready to get rid of me so soon?"

"Oh please, you know I just want to get home. And we'll still be video calling all the time for work."

Tyrion nodded, "That's right. I've got to talk to you about all the details of what's to come."

As much as she wanted to hear about her new job and it's expectations, she cared more about finishing up the one at hand.

"How about we get this book done first before we worry about the next one."

Having finished up with a rough draft of the manuscript already when they showed it to Tywin, they were in good shape to finish the rest. Gen had been trying her best to refine her sketches for her sections which was all she'd seemed to be able to handle with Jon on her mind.

Tyrion was happy with their progress but feeling a little down that it meant she'd be jumping back on a plane to Winterfell soon enough.

But then again, he had known from the beginning that she'd never make Casterly Rock her home. She was a Northerner, inside and out, and people like her weren't built to withstand the southern climates.

Several hours later after they'd put their heads down and tried to focus in on the copy editing, they were ready for a distraction.

Tyrion closed his laptop with a groan and said, "Let's go get an ice cream before I lose my mind looking at all these words."

"Gods you always know just what to say."

He sent a wink at her, “And that’s why I get paid the big bucks.”

They walked down the street to the water, stopping at a stand that sold homemade ice cream, complete with novelty cups. Gen decided on what Tyrion called “boring chocolate” while he got a fruit explosion of tropical flavors.
As they sat on a stone wall by the beach, they reflected on their weeks spent together as they people watched. Gen could always count on Tyrion for witty commentary.

“Gods we needed this,” she said taking a big lick of her ice cream.

He held his own cup up in cheers, “Yes we did. My guess is we’ll be done with all the work we can do on the book by the end of this week.”

She whipped her head at him. Despite all the work they’d been putting in, she still felt like there was still so much more to go. She hadn’t wanted to get her hopes up so soon.

“Do you really think so?”

He shrugged, “Well most of the big edits are done. And you said your drawings are just about there. Once that’s all done there’s really no need for you to hang around waiting for the marketing stuff to start.”

“And when it does?”

“Well I figured you could help do press for the book, write up blurbs and come up with all that social media stuff.”

Tyrion liked to act like he didn’t have a clue how to use Faceless and the like, but Gen knew better than anyone that he was adept at navigating the sites. It was the reason he knew half the things he did about her.

“I can do that. Are you sure you’re fine with me working from Winterfell? I want you to be honest with me.”

“Well in that case,” he started before smiling, “No seriously, I wouldn’t have offered if I wasn’t okay with it. But you better fly down for the launch party!”

Back in college Tyrion was notorious for hosting dinner parties for his students at the end of each semester. He’d book a cool restaurant and keep the booze flowing, all on his bill. The last one that Gen had gone to he’d booked a Dornish place that had the biggest spread of food she’d ever seen. He’d even hired a band and a photobooth! And the best part of the night had been his witty speeches where he basically dragged each student, before lifting them up with compliments. With all the money he had, he really knew how to use it.

“I’ll be there and ready to party. I’m not missing that!” she promised.

“Good, because I’ll need you there to schmooze with my Dad so he keeps the money flowing on the book.”

Gen shuddered remembering how nervous she felt under his gaze, “In that case, I’m bring Jon as my support animal.”

“Well you’ll be mine, so that’s fair.”

After their ice creams were long gone and she’d forced them back to the office before she burnt, they were incredibly productive. For Gen, knowing it was potentially her last week had filled her with energy to keep pushing through. The faster she worked, the sooner she could get back to help Jon through his difficult time.

And she was dead set on making sure he wouldn’t be alone through it.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the encouragement to get me to this 100th chapter ♥ ♥ ! You all rock!
Although he had planned on moving out eventually, Jon never imagined actually doing so would hurt so much. He'd signed the lease on the place right around the corner from work and then next thing he knew he was taking a half-day to move in.

It was easier that way, rather than waiting until the weekend when the whole family would be there to watch him. He didn't want the pitying looks from Sansa or the arguments with the rest of them. He just wanted some Godsdamn peace and quiet to figure out what his life would look like now.

"Jon? I just loaded up your books into the car. What do you want me to grab next," Theon asked.

Robb had offered to take off work early that day too but Jon had said no. Jon knew that Robb would never understand what he was going through like Theon could. Robb was the golden child, his mother's favorite since the day she'd held him in her arms.

But Theon had taken off early without even asking Jon. He just insisted that he be there to help him through it, especially since Gen couldn't.

"Thanks Theon. I was thinking we could load up the records and my clothes next," Jon said.

They'd already taken one trip with the bulkier stuff to his apartment, and were close to finishing up at the house. It was weird for Jon to look at the room he'd spent his entire life in and know that once he left it, he was unlikely to ever move back in again.

The thought of that chapter of his life ending made his throat constrict with a pain he didn't have time to think about. There wasn't any time for him to process each and every change that had been thrust upon him.

But Theon had been an enormous help the entire afternoon. He didn't try to poke fun at the weird things he found in Jon's room, not even at the old school pictures of Jon before he'd learned how to manage his curls. Instead, he was quiet and reflective, acting as just the big brother Jon needed in the moment.

When the car was loaded up with the last of it Jon looked to Theon and said, "I'll be up in just a second. Go on up without me."

With Theon gone he sunk down to his knees and prayed to the Gods. He didn't want to leave the space full of negative energy. Through hard times his bedroom had been a refuge for him, the place where he could escape into his words and music, forgetting the world outside. But now that it was time to part, he had to thank it in some way.

He thanked the Gods for the peace they'd given him there before standing up without a look backwards. There was no room for looking backwards anymore, only forwards.

In the car Theon drove and tried to keep the air light with chatter.

"You know, I think Ros and I might actually go on a real date."

Jon had to focus his thoughts to be there for Theon. He knew he was trying hard to keep the move as painless as possible. The least he could do was play along with him and pretend everything was okay.
"Oh really? Who came around first? You or her?"

Theon tapped the steering wheel, "I'm not sure really. One day we're hanging out at one of the parties at her house, and the next thing we know we're texting all the time."

"Well you two were pretty close in high school. Who knows Theon," Jon said.

"I just hope I don't fuck things up."

Jon looked over and saw the wildness of Theon's eyes, the nervous energy they had despite the smile on his face.

"You'll be fine Theon. Just be yourself."

Theon laughed, "I think if I do that I'll scare her off."

"She knows you. If she wasn't into you, she wouldn't have pursued anything. She wants you, not some fake version that you think she wants."

"Well either way, I'm really trying not to sabotage things for myself like I usually do with women."

Theon had a history of meeting women, falling hard, and then ending up with a broken heart. Whether it was him or the woman who was left with a broken heart, most of his relationships were short lived. For a while the family had wrote it off to Theon's rebellious nature, and his dislike for being tied down. But now it seemed like Theon was so caught up in his old ways that he was worried he wouldn't know how to have a normal relationship.

"Seriously Theon, just take it slow. Don't rush into things cause you'll just get cagey," Jon said.

"I know, I know. I'm really trying to stay calm about things with Ros and not fuck it up like before."

They pulled into the parking garage at his new building and hopped out of the car. With their arms full of boxes and their backs aching, the headed up to his apartment to begin unpacking.

With all the boxes stuffed into the apartment, Jon realized just how little he had in his life. Beyond his clothes, there wasn't much for him to furnish his apartment. He'd have to buy a ton of things he'd never even thought about.

For instance, the kitchen was empty beside his reusable water bottle and a case of beers Theon had picked up at the store to drink while they unpacked.


Theon cracked open a beer and took a deep gulp, "Well you could always leave it for later. Your bed is all set up so you don't really need more than that."

"True. But I know if I don't get started now I'll never do it. I don't need to make this place anymore depressing than it'll already feel."

Theon opened up a box of his clothes and began hanging them up pausing for a second in thought.

"Jon, you know we all still love you right? You're not alone here," Theon said.

Jon paused. Although he knew there was love between him and his brothers, they were never really vocal about it. It was a mixture of toxic masculinity and the things that were often left unsaid with Northerners.
"I guess so."

"Seriously Jon. We all talked, without Ned and Cat, and we're all on your side. What happened is really fucked up and we're here for you. Always," Theon said.

Jon tried to busy himself with putting away his books on his shelf to push past his emotions.

"Thanks Theon. It means a lot. I don't really know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything."

They worked without talking after that, the only noise coming from Jon's speakers that Theon had quickly set up. He knew how much Jon loved his music.

When everything was unpacked Jon felt like a kid playing house. His stuff looked so small in the space and he wondered if he'd made a mistake.

"Theon, you don't have to answer. But did you ever feel like an outsider growing up in our house?"

Jon asked.

Theon paused for a second and sat on the bed, "Well in some ways yeah. But at least I knew from the start I wasn't a true Stark. And I've had a much better life here than I ever would have back in Pyke."

"But do you ever think about your family back there, wonder what they're doing?"

His brother sighed, "After my brothers died my father went crazy. It was no place for me to grow up. I got out when I needed to and I'm grateful for that. But I do wonder about my sister, if she's okay. Or if she remembers me."

When the courts took Theon away from his father when he was a kid, and let the Stark's adopt him, his sister had stayed behind. She'd been old enough to decide for herself and had refused to leave her home. But that was all Jon had ever been told about it.

"I'm sorry to bring it up. But I'm sure she remembers you, have you ever thought about contacting her?"

"Some days I think about it. But I'm scared she won't want anything to do with me. I was the one who ran away, what if she thinks I abandoned her?" Theon sighed.

Jon felt bad for rehashing the painful memories. But in some sick way, he needed to hear from Theon that he wasn't the only one with doubts and hurt. He needed to know that things got better with time.

"You were a kid Theon. You had to think of your safety. I'm sure she'd understand that."

Theon stood up and finished his beer, "Well either way, I'm not sorry for joining the family. I have a good life here, much better than I ever would have."

The silence hung in the room for a beat until Jon came up with a way for them to try and heal their mutual hurt.

"How about you try reaching out to her. I'll try and find who's left of my father's side too. We could do it together so we're not alone," Jon said in a quiet voice.

Theon knew that Jon needed the support more than him in that moment. He slung his arm over his
shoulder and squeezed him tight.

"Deal. But I'm forcing you along with me to see her if she answers," Theon smiled.

"I'll be there making sure you don’t embarrass yourself."

His brother shoved him, “And I’ll make sure you don’t lose yourself up here in this apartment. Seriously, remember we’ve all got your back. I expect to be invited over all the time for lunch during the work week.”

“I’ll stock up on the beer that you and Robb like,” Jon laughed.

“Gods Dad will sack us if we show up to work after a couple beers.”

Jon had to find the humor in the situation, “As if he’d say anything to me right now.”
"Cheers to us!" Gen said with a smile that would make her face hurt if she kept it up.

She and Tyrion were back at his bookish penthouse apartment right on the water celebrating the end of her work in Casterly Rock. Earlier in the day they worked their asses off finishing up with the last of the majors edits so she could get home over the weekend.

"I'm so glad that part is done and over with. It's been a long time coming." Tyrion said.

Gen thought back to when Tyrion had first approached her with the offer to travel around the world and collect research for him. She'd had him in many classes in undergrad, and then during her senior year she was the teaching assistant for one of his intro level anthropology classes. And then the next thing she knew they were cracking up in his office about the students and he'd asked her to work for him.

She raised her glass with him, "Totally. Can't believe last year at this time I was just getting to Pyke and hoping I didn't screw it up."

Tyrion's laughter filled his apartment and he said, "Believe me, I wouldn't have hired you if I thought there was a possibility of that happening. I was more than familiar with your writing at that point."

He was right. Tyrion was infamous for assigning lots of readings that were accompanied by dense research papers. While most of her classmates were more than happy to skip the readings and bullshit their papers, Gen was researcher through and through. She got a thrill out of piecing together all of her sources until she had a complex web of information that she could weave into a narrative in her essays.

"I'm still proud of the one about the Old Gods I wrote for the final of the World Religions class," Gen said.

"Gods that was a long one! Very well done, but long. I think that was one of the ones that proved to me that you could handle a longer form project like this. You were always pushing the word limits."

She gestured to all the books around them that Tyrion had scattered around his apartment. “What can I say, we love a good research project.”

“You’ve got me there. I was probably just as eager back when I was a student. Although I think I got in far more trouble than you ever did,” Tyrion laughed.

She could only imagine the escapades he’d gotten into. He could drink just about anyone under the table. But although she hadn’t been particularly wild in college, she’d let loose on her travels.

“You didn’t see me in Sunspear. It didn’t make it to the journal but I went to this crazy rave and danced on a stage.”

Tyrion tried to picture his northern friend letting loose down South like she was a spring breaker. He just couldn’t.

“I think I’d have to see it to believe it!”

A bottle of champagne and a pizza later, she and Tyrion were all giggles enjoying the feeling of accomplishment.
“Fuck I feel like this is the first time in years I can really breathe,” Gen said as they lounged on his couch zoning out, letting the buzz fill her with lightness.

“Gen, you were in high school years ago. Enjoy your youth for Gods sake.”

She laughed, “I know! I’ve been getting better at going with the flow. It just feels good knowing I’ve got a real job with you for the near future and not with some soulless company.”

“Well we’re controlled by a soulless company with my Dad.”

“But I don’t have to answer to him!”

Tyrion rolled his eyes but laughed nonetheless. He was going to miss having her around. She was a nice addition to his usually quiet days at work. It got pretty lonely up in that office alone.

Before she left for the night, he ran off to his room and grabbed a little something he’d picked up for her at the store.

“What’s this Tyrion?” she asked, feeling a bit bad she hadn’t gotten him something too.

“Just open it!”

Inside the bag was t-shirt with the words “I love Pyke” written across the chest.

She erupted into laughter and tried it on, “Oh my Gods Tyrion! You’re the worst.”

“Thought I’d give you a little parting gift so you remember just how awesome those travels were.”

Gen struck a pose and pretended to strut down the hall near the couch. “I’m still 100% more fashionable than anything I saw there,” she said.

“I wouldn’t tell them that. They’ll throw you in the ocean if you ever try to go there again.”

“And I’d let them if it meant I didn’t have to gag on the smell of the fish again!”

They parted with little fanfare after the bottles of wine were empty and there was nothing left to laugh over. Tyrion wanted to make sure she had time to pack before her flight back to Winterfell because he knew she’d been procrastinating packing. All week she’d groaned to him how she just didn’t have the motivation for it. But with her flight fast approaching, she’d have no choice but to find it.

When he walked her down to the entrance of the building she felt a little teary-eyed. She wasn’t sad exactly, but as usual she was finding it difficult to leave one person behind and replace them with others. She often found herself wishing all the people she cared about would just move to Winterfell so she wouldn’t have to feel like she wasn’t leaving someone behind.

“Bye Tyrion. Thanks for trusting me with this project. You really helped me out and made post-grad life less scary,” she said with a quick hug.

Tyrion waved her off, “Gods Gen, you act like we’re never going to see each other again. I’ll be annoying you on my computer soon enough and you’ll be glad you’re not down here.”

She rolled her eyes at him. He never could accept a compliment from her.

“Seriously though, thanks.”
“Yeah, yeah. Go pack before you start crying on me!”
Jon was sitting on the edge of his bed with his head in his hands. He felt like he’d made a mistake in moving out but there was no turning back now. The ink was already dry.

Ned had kept his distance at work, giving Jon the space to think things over just as he promised. And it wasn’t like he could have got close to him if he tried. Robb and Theon had been keeping a careful watch of him to make sure nothing set him off at work. They both knew just how much Jon was hurting, even if he didn’t tell him about it.

His brothers had suggested they got out to a club for the night, hear some music and just lose themselves to the noise. But for Jon, he barely had the strength to get out of bed and face the office everyday, let alone a loud room full of strangers.

And then there was the group chat Sansa and Arya had made for just the three of them, where they sent memes every day to Jon, never asking directly how things were for him. Jon appreciated their efforts but he was having trouble finding the energy to crack a smile these days, no matter how silly his sisters’ edits of their brothers were.

Alone in his apartment on a Saturday night, Jon felt like he was losing his mind. Scratch that, he felt like he was losing his heart. The love for those in his life was still there, but there was a piece of him that felt like it’d been snuffed out. The part of him that had held onto the childish hope that his mother was still off in the world somewhere.

He looked over to the fridge and threw caution to the wind. Inside was the case of beers that Theon had left behind for whenever he wanted to stop by after work to unwind.

“Fuck it,” he said grabbing a couple and retreating back to his bed.

He threw back two in quick succession and tried to drown out the noise in his head with his music. But even the harsh sounds didn’t quiet his mind. The hurt was still there underneath it all.

The differences between home and here were glaring. He missed the sounds of his siblings, a sound he’d always shook his head at when they woke him up too early in the morning. He missed the stars on his ceiling that reminded him that the universe was much bigger than his life. The nightly family dinners, the scrambled for the TV remote, the car pooling, he missed all of it. Life was too quiet on his own.

Beyond his family and Genevieve, no one knew what he was going through. Not even Sam. He’d thought about picking up his phone and telling Sam about it a million times but each time he went to dial he stopped. His hurt was his to carry and he didn’t want to burden someone else with it.

So he laid there sipping on beer until his body felt fuzzy and his eyes glassy. As he looked up at his starless ceiling, he wondered how he’d ever come back from the mess his Dad had created. How could he ever look him in the eye again without feeling the empty ache in his chest?

And then his phone began to ring. If it was anyone else, he would have thrown it across his bed and continued to bury his head into his pillow.

“Gen?”

She’d been busy all week and had tried her best to send him words of encouragement throughout it. While his head was stuck in his own troubles, he’d neglected hers. The realization made him want to
go into the shower and scream.

“Hey babe. I know you don’t want any more surprises right now, so I’ll spare you that and tell you I’m in your building right now,” Genevieve said fast..

Jon shot up from his bed and looked around his apartment wildly. Although he’d only been there for a few days, he hadn’t had the energy to maintain the cleanliness he’d had the day he moved it. Takeout boxes were piled up on the counter and Ghost’s toys were strewn about the place.

He hadn’t even known she was coming home. He knew she was close with the book, but to be done so soon? He hoped that she hadn’t come home just for his sake.

“Oh Gods, are you serious? Like right this second?”

She paused, “Uh yeah? Is that okay? I can go home if you want. I just wanted you to be the first person I saw.”

“No, no. There’s no one else I’d rather see right now,” he said.

When he opened the door and saw her there with a brilliant smile on her face and crazy hair, he felt like the tension in him deflated.

And when she pulled him into a deep kiss wrapping her arms around his shoulders, he thought he would crumble.

“Gods it’s good to be back,” she laughed.

Jon’s spirits were lifted by her, but he still found himself forcing a smile.

“Wait so are you back for good now?”

She did a mini dance and said, “Yeah! Tyrion’s letting me work from home on the rest of the stuff for the book. And I’m getting paid full time!”

The Gods had done him a favor at long last. Things weren’t always bad and Gen was proof of that.

“Thank the Gods. I’m so proud of you Gen. That’s amazing news.”

She winked at him, “Thanks Jon. I’m sure some of your happiness has to do with the fact I’ll be home with you now. Speaking of which, give me the grand tour!”

There wasn’t much to show to his place yet. All the things that made his room at home feel like home were still packed away in a box in his closet. He didn’t have it in him to string up his curtain of lights or put up posters.

“Well I didn’t buy anything new yet,” Jon said scratching the back of his head, “I guess I should head to the store and get a couch or something.”

Gen nodded towards the empty area just off the kitchen. Her hands were itching to flip through interior design books with him and make the place feel like a home to him, a place he could go to feel safe.

“Don’t worry. I’ve got ideas. But enough about that, how are you? Really.”

Jon sighed as they sat down on his bed. He couldn’t lie to her, she’d see right through him.
“Honestly, I had a couple of beers before you got here. It’s been an exhausting week but I’m trying to keep going. No matter how hard it is.”

She leaned against him and wrapped an arm around his waist, pulling him into her.

“I’m sorry you’re going through this Jon. Please don’t ever feel like you have to hide how you’re feeling from me.”

He laughed, “It’s pretty hard to when you can read me like a book.”

“I just don’t want you to feel alone Jon.”

Jon turned to face her and cupped her cheeks in his hands. Her stormy eyes stared back at him, so open and honest that he knew he was with someone who’d never betray him like he’d been. Her face showed all that was on her mind.

“Kiss me already,” she laughed, feeling odd under his gaze.

He pulled her closer and lost himself to her. She smiled into the kiss and ran her hands down his chest. Both of them sighed with relief, knowing that they were back together, and this time for good.

There would be no more video calls or plane rides to see each other. They had the real deal again and they felt whole again. It wasn’t that without the other they weren’t complete, but neither could deny the calming grounding presence they had on the other.

And as they reacquainted themselves with the curves and edges of their bodies they couldn’t help but smile. It’d been a while since they’d been able to lose themselves to each other.

Gen kissed his neck and down his chest, her hands ghosting over his skin.

Jon looked at her with dark eyes and wondered how he’d gotten so lucky to have a love so pure.

And when they chased out their highs together Gen felt a tear slip out of her eye and hit the pillow beneath her.

He slowed and brushed a piece of her dark hair out of her face, “Are you okay Gen?”

She nodded and pulled him closer, wrapping her legs around him to urge him on.

“More than okay. I’m just so happy to be back with you.”

As he looked down at her, so pure and unafraid to show how she felt, he was lost. She was everything he’d ever hoped for.

And as they laid there afterwards, enjoying the closeness and the steady sound of the other’s heartbeat, they realized things would be okay.

Gen knew that she’d finally felt rooted to a place that wasn’t Bear Island and that for her home was people, not a place. And although Jon still felt the light that’d gone out in his heart, he knew with time it would flicker again and things wouldn’t be so dark.

They had each other and that was all they needed to know they’d get through as many bad days the Gods decided to throw at them. They’d be fine.
She snuck in her house the next morning and unloaded her bags without bothering to unpack. Her whole family was still asleep and none of them knew she had come in the night before. The way she saw it, she and Jon had deserved at least one night together before she got back to the craziness of family life.

But to make it up to them she went down to the kitchen and got to work making breakfast. Her family always devoured her chocolate muffins and she wasn’t going to disappoint them with a sad cereal breakfast.

She was sitting on the couch texting Mira when her little brother came down the stairs rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

“Hi Henryk.”

Her brother jumped and rose his hands in defense, “Gods Gen! Since when are you home?”

“Just got back. There’s muffins on the counter. Go grab one and spend some time with your big sister,” she smiled.

It was weird being home again knowing it was for good this time. She felt like she had another trip to pack for, another place to jet off to leaving her home behind. She wondered when the edginess of impermanence would leave her.

Henryk plopped down on the couch next to her and leaned his head against her shoulder. It warmed her heart to know that the little brother she remembered was still in there somewhere. In between bites he couldn’t stop yawning.

“You okay bug? You sound like you’re going to fall asleep any second.”

He pulled a blanket over him and said, “Don’t tell Mom but I stayed up super late last night on my game with Bran and Rickon.”

“My lips are sealed. If we’re being honest I actually got into town last night but I saw Jon first.”

Henryk made a tsking sound and pretended to be offended. “Bran says he moved out. Are you going to move in with him?”

“Um not right now. I want to take some time to just live at home and save money,” Gen said.

They threw on stupid cartoons and wasted time until the rest of the family came down. They were all equally surprised, but Roland most of all. Apparently he hadn’t been reading her blog close enough to realize she’d been wrapping things up down at the Rock.

While the rest of the family squeezed onto the couches in the living room in their pajamas, Roland kept gaping at her.

“Gods Roland. It’s not like I’ve been gone that long,” Gen said.

“I know, it’s just good to have the whole gang back together.”
Their dad laughed, “So we’re a gang now. What happened to that whole squad business you kids were talking about a while back?”

“Guess we’ll never understand their lingo Will,” their mother sighed with a wink at her kids.

His next statement earned a groan from all his kids, “And here I was thinking we were those young and hip parents.”

“I’ll give you young… but hip might be a bit of a stretch,” Amira said.

Their parents were fairly young for having kids in their twenties. They’d been in their early twenties when they married, and their mother just twenty-three when Roland was born. In the back of Gen’s mind, she couldn’t help compare her own life to her parents. By the time they were Gen’s age they already had a kid. She couldn’t keep up with that!

Now that Gen was home, the shininess of having her back was quickly fading away. Once they knew that she was home for good the need to spend every second with her while they could had gone away, leaving her to entertain herself for the day.

She called up Jon hoping he’d be up to a day out, “Hi Jon. Do you want to go shopping today? I could use some stuff to make my room here more homey, and I know you were saying you need some kitchen stuff.”

“Yeah, I’ll come with you. I just need to get myself out of bed and into the shower.”

“Ooof don’t put that imagery in my mind. You’ll ruin my brain for the rest of the day,” Gen smiled.

On the other side of the phone Jon decided to have some fun, “Just imagine the water dripping off me and the towel slung low on my hips.”

Her cheeks turned red and she hoped her phone hadn’t been loud enough for Amira to hear from her room, “Gods you’ll be the death of me. Just text me when you’re ready and I’ll meet you there.”

When they met at the mall Gen couldn’t look at him without picturing him as he’d described. And his wet curls pulled back into a bun sure didn’t help.

He was sitting outside the pretzel place snacking away when she approached.

“Hi love. Want some pretzel? I saved some for you,” he said with those big eyes that made her heart melt every time.

“I’m all set, you eat up. You’re going to need some fuel for this shopping haul.”

And she wasn’t kidding. They spent several hours picking out everything from lamps to dishes for their respective spaces. Gen was trying to be cautious with how she spent her money, even denying herself a cute pair of sandals that reminded her of the ones she’d lost in the water in Braavos.

But Jon’s credit card spent more time out of his wallet than in. He didn’t mind furnishing his new place, upon reminders from just about everyone to make it feel like a home the best he could. Part of him felt that if it felt like a home he wouldn’t miss his real one as much.

Their arms were heavy with all the bags but Gen saw something that she knew they needed to buy. It was one of those DNA tests that’d recently become popular so you could find out your ancestral background, and people you were related to.
“Jon you’ve got to get this. Maybe you could find people on your Dad’s side,” she said holding up the box with a hopeful smile.

Jon wasn’t so sure he was ready to open that door. But what did he have to lose?

“Fine. Throw it in the cart. But you’ve got to be there with me when I get the results. I don’t know if I’ll be able to handle it.”

Chapter End Notes

I live for comments, pls fuel me <3
Chapter 105

Chapter Notes

A short but very important transitional chapter!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After a week or two of avoiding Sam’s questions about what he’d been up to, Jon finally bit the bullet and headed over to visit his friend.

They met at the library during Sam’s lunch break and sat in between stacks of books. Winterfell’s library was practically ancient, an old stone building like many in the area, and full of dusty books that hadn’t been opened in decades. To Jon, it was an sneeze fit waiting to happen. But to Sam, it was heaven.

Sam pulled Jon into a hug when he saw him, “Jon you’ve been such a stranger lately! Where have you been?”

“Well I didn’t elope like you and Gilly if that’s what you’ve been wondering,” Jon said.

Just the other day Gilly had changed her profile picture on Faceless to a group shot from the wedding. With Sam and her smiling wide and Jon standing off to the side as the best man with his eyes looking far off into the crowd. At her.

“So what is it then? Gilly’s got all sort of theories and we’re dying to know. You never go off the grid like that.”

Jon wasn’t sure if Sam’s lunch break was the best time to break the news, but it seemed as good a time as any. There was never really a perfect time for bad news.

“So I finally found out who my mom is. Turns out my Dad is actually my uncle and my real parents are dead.”

Sam dropped the sandwich he’d been eating and stared at Jon like he’d grown wings.

“Are you serious?”

Jon groaned into his hands and put his head down on the table. “I wish I wasn’t. It’s just been a shit show ever since then.”

“I can imagine. How have things been at home? Bad?”

“So bad that I moved out. No one’s been mean to me or anything but I just couldn’t be there knowing I’d been lied to all those years,” Jon sighed.

Sam could understand what Jon was feeling. Both he and Gilly knew what it felt like to feel unwelcome and unsafe in their own home. And they both knew how much improved their lives had been once they gained a new perspective of things from the outside.

“Gods Jon. I’m so sorry. If I’d known I would’ve been over in a heartbeat to help you out.”
Jon shrugged. He knew it was no one's fault but his own that he had isolated himself. “It's alright, you didn't know. I stayed for a bit at Gen's place when I first got the news.”

“So what's next? Are you going to try and talk with your Dad or…” Sam trailed off.

He wasn't sure what was next. There wasn't a rule book for what to do when you find out the person you thought was your dad is actually your uncle and both of your real parents are dead. It was like something out of one of Sansa's crazy dramatic books she read.

“Honestly I'm not sure. I'm so tired from it all that I'm over it.”

Over the weekend Jon got an email while he was on the couch with Gen that told him what his next step was — meeting the one person on the planet who might be able to give him some answers.

And when he opened the results from the DNA test and found out he wasn't completely alone in the world, a new door opened up for him. He'd finally have a chance to ask the questions his childhood self had been dying to know. Sure, they'd be about his father instead of his mother, but it was better than he could hope for.

Gen was scrolling through her own inbox answering a note from Tyrion when Jon turned down the TV.

“Gen. The results are in.”

It took only a second to realize what he was talking about and stare at him with wide eyes, reaching out to hold his hand. The squeeze he gave her as he read it made Gen nervous. What could it possibly say?

“It says I have an aunt. Her name is Dany and she wants to meet me.”

“Hi Jon. I know you’re probably as shocked as I am (or maybe not), but I guess I’m your aunt! Just when I was starting to think I was the last Targaryen left in this big world, I was proved wrong. And I couldn’t be happier by that. I’ve got so many family pictures and stories to tell you if you want to meet up. No pressure, but I’d love to meet you. Love, (your aunt lol) Dany.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry this story is getting super long, I've written about 20 more chapters already beyond this one and I'm still not done! Hope you don't mind the long haul! I just love having little fluff chapters, I don't really know how to skip large periods of time in my stories without feeling like I'm betraying the characters and their growth. If you'd prefer me to time jump some stuff, just let me know and I'll try and shift the way I've been writing this. Ideally, I'd like to finish this part of Gen & Jon's story before August. I'll probably end up writing a sequel, but I can't discuss much yet without spoiling my ideas!
Chapter 106

Jon broke the news to Theon that he’d have to hold up his end of the deal and contact his sister now that he’d gotten the result of his DNA test back. Theon had just about picked him up with a hug when he’d found out the news, and promised he wouldn’t spill it to the rest of their siblings until Jon was ready.

And without telling their families where they were going, Gen and Jon took a weekend trip down to Dragonstone to meet his aunt. Neither knew what to expect, they didn’t even have a picture of her.

These anxieties crept up on Jon as they got off the plane and headed to their hotel, “I can’t believe we’re doing this right now. What if she doesn’t want a relationship with me?”

Gen took a long look at Jon and wondered how someone so great could have such little confidence in himself. “Jon, she’s your aunt. She’s going to love you like the rest of us do. Trust me.”

And he tried to remind himself of the love people had for him if his aunt didn’t. His friends and siblings loved him, and as much as he didn’t want to admit it, his dad did too.

They got to the seaside park that Dany had mentioned as a meeting point and the pacing began. There was no sign of anyone who even remotely looked like they could be his aunt. And with each minute that went by Jon felt panicked.

What if she’d bailed? What if she didn’t want to meet him anymore? What if she wasn’t ready to have someone new in her life?

“Gen should we just leave? I feel like this was a mistake. I don’t feel good,” Jon said.

She saw the fear in his eyes and made him take a deep breath, “Why don’t you sit down for a second and I’ll take a walk and ask around. Who knows, maybe she’s just late.”

“Okay. Be safe Gen.”

With that Gen started walking up and down the cliffside looking for the answer to Jon’s questions. She passed by a two kids skipping school avoiding her gaze, and an old woman sitting alone on a bench.

“I’m sorry to bother you, but your name isn’t Dany is it?”

The woman stared up at her with a snarl, “The fuck it isn’t.”

Gen moved on quick after that. She walked for about a half mile longer before she eventually gave up and plopped down on a bench next to someone.

“Tough day?” the woman next to her asked.

“You could say that. I’m looking for someone right now but I can’t find them for the life of me. Sorry to intrude, I’m Genevieve.”

The white-blonde woman with purple eyes stared at her with a hint of a smile. “I’m in the same boat. I’m Dany.”

Gen almost leapt up from the bench. “Oh my Gods. You’re who I’m looking for, Jon is just up over there. I’m his girlfriend.”
Dany looked at her with worried eyebrows and let out a sad laugh. “It’s stupid. I’ve been sitting here for an hour just working up the courage to go and talk to him. I’m just so scared I’ll let him down.”

There resemblance between the two of them was already apparent.

“He’s thinking the same thing right about now. As long as you’re not secretly a mass murdered or anything like that he’s going to love you. Seriously,” Gen said.

Her words gave Dany the strength to walk with her back up the hill to Jon. Dany didn’t say a word the entire time and Gen wondered if she’d always have to be the one to get her and Jon talking.

She had Dany hang back for a second so she could talk to Jon first.

“Jon, I found her. She’s right around the corner but she’s just as nervous as you are right now. But you’ll be fine, both of you.”

Jon gulped and nodded, “Here goes nothing.”

When he walked forward and saw the young woman who was his aunt, both their jaws fell open with shock.

And after a moment of them staring at each other and Gen secretly recording from her phone, they burst out into a mixture of laughter and tears.

“Look at you. I can’t believe this,” Dany said pulling him into a hug.

She was tiny next to him and the sight of them hugging sent a tear down Gen’s cheek. She felt incredibly blessed to be there in that moment witnessing the beauty of a family reunion.

Jon glanced at Gen with a dumb-idiot smile and pulled away from the hug. A quick look at her made him realize she was pretty young to be his aunt.

Dany answered the question on their minds, “I know I’m young. Your father was my big brother. My mother, your grandmother, was still pregnant with me when he died.”

The three of them sat down to process it all better.

Jon couldn’t stop searching Dany’s face for hidden secrets of his own father. She was right in front of him. She was family. She was blood.

“Do I have any other aunts and uncles?”

She looked away at the ocean with a faraway look, “Just me I’m afraid. You had an Uncle Viserys but he sort of lost his way a couple years ago. Died of an overdose when I was just eighteen.”

Jon grabbed her hands, “I’m so sorry Dany. I wish I could’ve met him. And the rest of them too.”

“Me too Jon. But Viserys was a bit of an asshole if we’re being honest here. As bad as this sounds, it was a breath of relief for me when he passed away. For a while he was all I had growing up after my parents both died,” Dany said with a sad smile that didn’t reach her eyes.

Gen sat back analyzing just how similar their lives had been. Both felt alone in the world, yet Dany seemed to truly experienced life without the love of family. Her heart broke for her. At least Jon had grown up in a house full of mostly love.

Jon’s voice went low, “Did he raise you?”
“For the most part, but I wouldn’t really consider what he did raising. We mostly just bounced around from family friend to family friend in Essos until Viserys came of age and got his money. After that he went off the rails.”

Jon never considered that the other life he’d always dreamed of having could be worse than he had. It was a testament to being grateful for what you had.

“Gods Dany. I’m so sorry. I wish we could have known each other before that.”

She patted his hand, “We’ve got the future to make up for lost time. So did you just find out you were part of our crazy family?”

Gen winced at the question. Then again, with family nothing was held back. And Dany and Jon seemed to take that in mind.

“My dad, who’s actually my uncle just told me. I had absolutely no idea.”

“Wait wait wait. Rewind for a second. Maybe being an aunt now is making me old and confused, but I don’t get it.”

“I didn’t either,” Gen laughed.

Jon went into his story of betrayal and pain from the past few weeks, careful to explain that although he was incredibly grateful for the life he’d had, the pain had still been too much.

There wasn’t a dry eye when he finished talking, not even Gen who’d heard it and analyzed it countless times by then.

Dany pulled him into a hug and wiped her eyes. “Well let me just tell you right now that I don’t do secrets. You won’t have to worry about that with me.”

The three of them burst into laughter and took a collective deep breath.

“Gods this is a lot for one day,” Jon said.

Dany smiled, “I know. I think I need a good nap after this, or maybe a good cry. I can’t tell yet.”

“Same here. Why don’t we take a little break now to process all of this and then meet up for dinner later,” Jon suggested.

“I’d love that. It’s been so great to meet you two, truly,” Dany said with her eyes focused on her nephew and his girlfriend, “I really thought I had no family left in this world before you popped up my DNA profile.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not going anyways Aunt Dany.”

The heavy mood lightened and Dany’s full laughter filled the air around them, “I think we’ve got to stick to just Dany. I’m too young and cool to be an aunt yet.”
Chapter Notes

Long chapter to make up for not posting yesterday! I was feeling weirdly emotional and sad yesterday for no reason and couldn't bring myself to write!

Back at the hotel it was like Gen was with a totally different man than the one she’d been with for the past couple of weeks. He was animated and the frown she’d gotten used to had lifted from his face. Her Jon was back and she hoped he was there to stay.

Jon flopped down on the bed and said, "I just can't get over this. This is crazy!"

Gen joined him, curled up to his side. "I know! It was so sweet watching the two of you."

A smile grew across his face as he looked at her, "I just feel like a whole other door just opened up for me."

"Well it did. You'll get to know a whole other side to your family that you never knew."

Jon thought about the potential behind Gen's statement. Not only would he be adding a new family member to his life with Dany, he'd get to learn about the ones no longer living from her as well. He'd finally have answers instead of hushed secrets he had to carry alone.

A nap later, Dany texted them with the address of where she was staying so they could have dinner together.

They drove up to a dark stone house on the coast that'd looked like it'd been there for ages. Neither could imagine it was a rental.

"Gods I wonder if this is her home," Gen said.

"Who knows. Looks a little spooky from the outside."

Dany greeted at them door having changed into a pair of sweats, looking comfortable.

"Hi again! Come on in, I'll give you the grand tour of the family home," Dany said.

Jon looked around the traditional stone house with red decor and felt goosebumps rise on his skin. This was a family home, his family.

"Oh wow. How long has it been in the family?" Gen asked taking in an ornate tapestry with a dragon flying over the sea.

Dany paused leading them into a grand living room that overlooked the ocean waves, "Honestly, I couldn't tell you. I know my grandparents had the place but I'm sure even before that."

Jon couldn't get over the fact that he was walking in the place where his father had once stood, where generations of Targaryens had lived.

"I'm just speechless right now," he sighed.
The women laughed and they sat down in the living room. Dany had prepared snacks for them to munch, paying careful attention to make sure everything went well. It was very sweet for Gen to observe the two of them trying their hardest to make a good impression.

“Don’t worry. I’m sure I’ll fill the air with a bunch of stories about our family anyways,” Dany said.

The words our family made Jon’s heart flutter.

“Speaking of which, you said you had some photos you could show us?” Gen said.

Dany stood up and ran off to a cabinet in the corner, her arms full of photo albums.

“I’ve been waiting to show you these since I got the email saying we matched!” Dany said flipping it open.

She started by showing him pictures of his grandparents, Rhaella and Aerys. It was a picture of the two of them on their wedding day. Both of their faces were stern but they had the same bright beauty that their daughter shared.

“Wow. I can’t believe I’m looking at a photo of my grandparents right now,” Jon said.

Dany laughed, “Just wait until you see your dad. I think you look a bit like him, although you’ve got the Northern coloring instead of the Valyrian look of the rest of us Targaryens.”

“I’ve always thought I looked just like my Uncle. I’ve got the same grumpy face as him.”

Gen smiled, she couldn’t deny the family resemblance. Especially when their hair was both down.

She showed them a couple pictures of herself and a thin man with the same coloring as her. “This is your uncle Viserys. He would’ve been around seven when you were born.”

“I know you two didn’t get along great, but what was he like?” Jon asked.

Dany took a deep breath and traced the lines of Viserys’ face on the picture. “He loved our family. But once it was just the two of us he became obsessed with making things how they were before. He wanted to live a life as comfortable as the one our parents had but got blinded by it.”

“I’m sorry you had to deal with that Dany,” Gen said looking at the purple eyed man with an emptiness in his eyes.

She forced a smile to her face and said, “Don’t worry about it. I’m in a great place now.”

She moved on to a page with older pictures, all of them featuring a beautiful man with a bright smile and happy eyes. He looked a lot like Viserys but with a distinct joy to his character where Viserys had sorrow.

“This is your father, my big brother Rhaegar,” she said.

Jon was speechless. He was looking at the missing half of him, the half he’d never known existed in the first place.

“You see? I think you two have the same sort of look to your eyes,” Dany said.

Gen nodded, “Yeah I get what you mean. They’ve got the same softness to them. And that hair! Both of you were blessed with such nice hair it’s unfair!”
There was a picture of his father sitting on the beach strumming away at a guitar, and another of him smiling big with his mom. Absent from most of the photos was his own father Aerys. Maybe Ned had been telling the truth about it.

Jon looked up at his aunt with hope in his eyes, “What was he like?”

“I didn’t get to know him, but by all accounts, he was magnificent. Viserys always told me he was brave and kind, which was a lot coming from someone like him.”

It stung Jon to know that he’d never get to know him.

“What’s the story with the guitar? Did he like to play music?” Gen asked.

Dany smiled big and said, “He was absolutely obsessed. He never performed professionally but he used his inheritance to start a record company. It’s still around today, even signed some big names like *The Hound* before they were famous.”

Gen had to laugh, how could she not? The world she knew just kept getting smaller and smaller.

Dany looked at Jon with confusion, “Was it something I said?”

Jon grinned at his girlfriend and gestured for her to tell the story.

“Not at all. The lead singer, Sandor, is just a good friend of mine,” Gen said.

She couldn’t wait to tell Sandor that she’d met the sister of the guy who’d signed him and got him off the streets all those years ago. He’d curse and grumble at the weird tricks the Gods liked to play on him. But deep down, she knew he’d be just enchanted as she’d been to hear about it. Hells, this meant that Gendry had an in now if he was realize serious about pursuing music.

“No way! I haven’t seen him a while but I can’t believe that. What are the chances?” Dany said.

“What are the chances of any of this happening?” Jon added.

They all laughed and Dany asked Jon if he had any interest in music like his father.

He scratched the back of his head and thought back to the songs he had hidden away in the journal beside his bed. And the old guitar that’d become a familiar friend to him over the years.

“Nothing professional, but I do like to play from time to time just for myself,” he said.

Dany clapped her hands together, “I’m already seeing the similarities between you two.”

“What about you Dany, do you play any instruments?” Gen asked.

She blushed and fiddled with her hands, “Well this is going to come off as a weird humble brag but I’m actually the lead singer in a punk band.”

“No way! That’s so awesome Dany! What’s is called?”

She looked up with a bashful smile and said, “*Khaleesi*.”

Jon and Gen looked at each other stunned. When would the surprises end?

“Are you kidding me? I saw you perform in a basement show a couple of years ago,” Jon said.
He couldn’t believe that he’d been in the same room as his family and he’d never even known it.

“And my brother and I have like all of your albums. I can’t believe we didn’t recognize you,” Gen added. She was having a hard time processing all of this.

Dany let out a big laugh, “Holy shit this is too crazy! I can’t believe it either. Then again, I’m usually all done up in the crazy outfits and makeup for my shows.”

Jon tried to remember how’d she looked at the show he’d seen. But he’d been so far back in the crowd of sweaty people that he’d only been able to focus on the music, not what the powerful singer looked like.

“You’re like a certified legend Dany. Your album Stormborn is one of my go to girl power albums,” Gen gushed.

Jon could practically see the hearts in Gen’s eyes. She was beaming with excitement. And so was he. Not only had he met a new member of his family, but she was one of the coolest artists in the punk scene.

A light blush covered Dany’s cheeks, “Well I’m glad to hear it. I put a lot of myself into that album.”

“Well it paid off. It’s absolutely electric Dany,” Jon smiled.

Gen nodded, “Really. I swear with each song I hear I want to go out into the streets and dismantle corruption.”

“Well that was the goal! Power to the people!” she giggled.

Gen couldn’t believe the sweet woman she was talking to was the same woman that could scream her manifestos into the mic like she was born to. It was amazing.

After their astonishment subsided, Dany pulled food out of the oven and directed them to the large table so they could eat. She’d cooked a meal with a distinct Essoian flair to it.

Jon noticed and compliment Dany, “This is really good Dany. Do you do a lot of Essos-inspired cooking?”

There was a sadness to Dany’s answer, “Not much anymore. But I used to be very close to someone from Essos, so whenever I cook the food it makes me feel closer to them.”

Gen and Jon weren’t sure what to say to that. There was clearly something hidden in plain sight in her statement.

Dany cleared her throat and took a sip of water, “Anyways, have either of you been over to Essos?”

“I haven’t but Gen’s done a bit of traveling over there, and in Westeros too.”

“Oh really? Where abouts in Essos?”

Gen’s face lit up as she talked about her travels that already seemed so far away from her life, “After I graduated last year, I got a job with my boss researching different cultures around the world. In Essos I got to go to Braavos and Pentos.”

Dany’s hand tightened around her fork, “Viserys and I lived in Pentos for a little bit. That was one weird year.”
“When’d you come to Westeros?” Jon asked.

“As soon as Viserys was old enough to take over the family businesses, but we did go back to Essos from time to time,” she explained.

Jon couldn’t imagine what her childhood had been like, without any stability or guiding presence besides her brother. He was beginning to realize just how lucky he was.

Gen was trying to get a grasp on the Targaryen family. Dany had mentioned that Viserys was in search of power, but what kind?

“If you don’t mind me asking, what sort of business did he run?” Gen asked.

“Um well I manage most of them now with the help of board members, but besides Rhaegar’s record company, there’s also some real estate in Valyria and some hedge funds that have been privately managed since my father was alive.”

Gen let out a whistle, “Wow Dany you’re one busy woman.”

She rose her eyebrows and took a dramatic sip of her water, “Don’t I know it. Why do you think I was so thrilled to hear I had a new family member who could help me out?”

Jon didn’t know what to say but Dany continued talking, “Just kidding Jon, unless you want to join the old family businesses. Either way, I’m writing you into the will. You’re owed your Dad’s inheritance at least.”

“I can’t take it Dany, I’ve got a job that pays the bills and then some.”

“Oh really? Where’s that? I can’t believe I didn’t ask you that yet,” Dany said with a face palm.

“It’s my Dad’s consulting firm, or my Uncle rather. I basically just make sure the deals go smoothly and the contracts don’t get messed up.”

“We could use that sort of work at the record company. I can’t tell you how many fights I had to break up over contracts,” Dany laughed.

Gen tried to picture the short woman standing in between Sandor and his band mates. It was just laughable. But she was a fierce force and that was all that mattered.

“Maybe someday I’ll come on over if I ever get tired of Winterfell.”

“Please do! Seriously, either way I want to see you. I don’t care if you work for the companies or not. Although it would be pretty cool to have you on the board of your father’s old company!”

Jon had to smile. He felt pretty awkward when Dany had mentioned the inheritance. Although he’d always been well taken care of by his family and knew that he’d someday received a share of the company, Dany’s wealth went well beyond that. He didn’t want her thinking the only way she could maintain a relationship with him was through money.

“That’d be pretty fun! But really though Dany, I don’t care about the money. I just want to get to know you,” he said.

Dany pursed her lips but nodded, “Fine. But I’ll have them put in a separate account so I can sneakily gift it to you over the years.”

“Does this mean I’ve got one of those trust fund boyfriends now?” Gen laughed.
Dany laughed, “Gods no, they’re the worst. I wouldn’t do that to you Gen.”

When the meal was over and the sun had disappeared from the sky, it was time for Jon and Gen to head back to the hotel. The only return flight they’d been able to book on such short notice for the trip would be leaving the next morning.

As they said their goodbyes, with plenty of hugs and hopeful messages, Gen’s heart felt full.

She watched Dany and Jon hug goodbye and said, “Can I please get a picture of you two? You’re just so stinking adorable and I want to document the moment.”

Jon’s goofy grin spread across his face and Dany’s was brilliant, “Of course Genevieve. You can send it to me and I’ll print it out to start a new family photo album.”

Their new family picture quickly became Dany’s new phone background. Dany stuck her arm out for a group shot of the three of them and said “Oh my Gods do you mind if I post this on my Faceless so I can show you and Gen off to the world?”

And Jon, in his happiness said yes without ever thinking who might see it.
Chapter 108

Gen got a flurry of texts from her brother Roland the next morning before she even had time to remember where she was.

Jon rolled over as she read them and saw the confusion on her face.

“Morning love. You don’t look happy, what’s up?” he asked.

She tried to relax her furrowed brow and said, “Not mad, just confused. Roland sent me a bunch of question marks and a link to a post.”

“Let me see.”

She handed over the phone and Jon followed the link to a Faceless post from Dany, posted from her Khaleesi handle which had over almost a million followers. Right there on her profile was the picture of the three of them that they’d taken last night, drunk off happiness.

“Oh my Gods what did Roland say?” Jon asked.

“Uh he wants to know how in the fuck we know Khaleesi, his words not mine,” Gen said.

Her mind began to panic for Jon. What if he didn’t want his family, or the world to know yet? What if people started stalking him? Okay, maybe she was catastrophizing, but still… you never know.

“Don’t answer yet. I haven’t even told my family I took the test yet, let alone flew down to meet my long lost aunt.”

“Gods this is just such a weird life. Who would’ve thought that when we met at the airport we’d be lying in bed together in a hotel in Dragonstone, talking about your famous aunt you never knew existed,” she sighed.

Jon put his arm around her and kissed her head, “It’s a crazy life, but it’s the one we’ve got.”

She smiled up at him and nestled closer. “What’d she use for a caption?”

“Um it just says ‘fam <3’,” he explained.

“Okay, that’s vague enough. It doesn’t directly out you as her nephew so you don’t have to worry about people coming after you.”

“I didn’t even think about it. It’s a good thing she didn’t tag us in it,” Jon said.

Gen took the phone back and began scrolling through the comments, “Damn it looks like people want to know our names though. This one girl says she ‘loves your curls and supports Dany if she wants to hit it’ oh my fucking Gods.”

“Ewwww that’s so weird. I almost wish she had said I was actually related to her. I’m creeped out now.”

“Just wait, that’s not even the worst. Someone asked if we were a throuple.”

Jon sat up confused, “What the hell is a throuple?”
Did she have to explain everything to him? He was so innocent sometimes…

“A threesome Jon. People are asking if we fucked your aunt.”

They burst out laughing at the absurdity of the sentence and shook their heads.

“Gods this is just so weird. I can’t wait to explain this all to my siblings when I get home.”

“Please do, I want to rub it into Roland’s face about how cool she is. But I’ll wait until you’ve given me the okay,” Gen said.

Jon didn’t really care who knew. As long as he got to tell his family first. He wanted to keep everything on the table so they didn’t feel the same hurt of being left in the dark.

He couldn’t believe he’d been kept from that side of his family for so long. Surely his dad knew that there were still relatives floating around. If he’d known from the start he could’ve met Viserys, but now that would never be an option. Just him and Dany holding up the family tree.

“You alright? You got all spacey for a second,” Gen asked.

Jon got out of bed and stretched, “Yeah, just thinking about things for a second. Still trying to figure out how I’ll tell them back home.”

“Walk in the door, start playing one of her songs and wait for someone to tell you to turn it down. And then refuse and say ‘sorry I’m trying to listen to my AUNT right now’,,” Gen laughed.

“I’ll get right on that Gen. You big goofball.”

When they arrived back in Winterfell, Jon decided against heading straight to his family’s house to break the news to them. He was riding the high from meeting Dany and he didn’t want to spoil it by a difficult conversation. Besides, he still wasn’t sure how to navigate the boundaries with Ned and Cat. He didn’t quite know how he felt lately about it all. So space was the only thing he could be certain of.

As for Gen, she ran up to her room when she got back, avoiding any contact with her family that may make her spill the news. She knew as soon as she saw one of them she’d want to explode with the details of her recent weekend adventure.

But there was one person Jon had said she could talk to it about. One person he knew wouldn’t yap his mouth and spread the news — Sandor.

She texted him knowing he was probably having a quiet afternoon stuck on the tour bus. Usually on Sunday afternoons his bandmates were too hungover to be disturbed by noises and could only tolerate the steady humming of the bus. But unfortunately for sober Sandor, that meant he had to sit there in silence until they got their asses out of bed.

“Sandor you’ll never guess who I just met.”

“It wasn’t the Stranger was it?”

“Please, you know I’m an Old Gods girl. Guess again,” she sent.

“Gennnnnnn I don’t know. Just tell me.”

“The head of your record company, Dany.”
“As in Daenerys Targaryen? The lead of Khaleesi?”

“Yeah!!!”

Her phone began to ring, Sandor not giving a single shit if his bandmates were trying to sleep. It was well past noon and he wasn’t about to keep quiet when his friend had news like this.

“How the fuck did you meet her?” he asked.

“Nice to hear from you too San!” Gen laughed, rolling her eyes at his straightforward manner.

“Fine, good afternoon Ms. Norward, how do you do today?”

She put on her best impression of a “proper” westerosi accent and said “I’m well thank you, and yourself?”

“I’d be a lot better if you just told me what was going on.”

“Oh, so you know how I said Jon was having some family drama?” She was enjoying listening Sandor beg for the goss. She never knew he was so into that sort of information.

“Yeah?”

“Well he finally gave me permission to tell you, I’ve been keeping it to myself for WEEKS. So anyways, he grew up thinking he was the kid from one of his father’s affairs. But it turns out his father is actually his uncle, and his real mother and father are dead.”

“Holy shit. And I thought my family life was complicated,” Sandor said with a low-whistle.

“Totally! So he buys one of those DNA tests and it matches him with Dany. Apparently she’s his aunt. So we went and met her this weekend and she was just the sweetest person ever.”

Sandor had to stop her. He was having trouble processing all that she just threw at him. “Wait so that would make Rhaegar his dad? No way it could be Viserys.”

“Yes, you’ve got it. So now we’ve got another connection because he was the one who fricken signed you guys. I can’t get over all of this.”

“Holy shit. This is so weird,” Sandor said with a pause followed by a laugh, “You know, my ego’s a little hurt. Now I’m not your only famous friend.”

“But you’re the only famous friend I have who listens to all my emo shit!”

“Fair. I guess I’ve got a monopoly on that. At least she’s good people. Never tries to screw us out of what’s ours like some other people do. Helps that she’s a musician herself.”

Gen was all smiles realizing that she now had two people she could bother to get the inside scoop about what the lyrics in their songs met. Although she’d only just met Dany, she knew through Jon they’d become close enough to indulge her music-loving self with the tiny details she craved.

“She’s so badass. It was sort of weird talking to her in person, she’s just so normal and nice.”

Sandor scoffed, “What and I’m not? Not all musicians are assholes you know.”

“Oh please, you knew what I meant. I’m just saying that she’s very approachable for someone so, well so cool. And you can’t deny you’re a little bit gruff to strangers.”
“I don’t need them bothering me. If I smile at them all next thing I’ll know they’ll be hanging off of me asking for favors.”

Gen rolled her eyes, “Oh by the way, can I have a million gold dragons?”

“Oh shut up Gen. Don’t you have work to be doing, or better yet, naps to be taking?”

She eyeballed the laundry she still needed to put away and then her cozy nest of blankets on her bed. It wasn’t even a question of what she’d be doing next.

“Okay you’ve got me. Thanks for chatting Sandor! I still can’t believe how small this world is.”

“Meet either, give my best to Jon.”

“Will do, love you!”

She could almost feel his eye roll but he lowered the volume of his voice and said it back anyways.

It always made her want to do a little dance knowing that she was the only person that could make the gruff man be a big softie. Not that she’d ever admit it to anyone.
Back at the office Theon and Robb were dying to know about how Jon knew Dany. They snuck in his office without an invitation and refused to leave the couch until he spilled the beans.

“How’d you even see it? I know neither of you listen to punk music,” Jon asked.

He tried to ignore their presence and stay focused on the memo he was sending out to his team about unused vacation days but Robb wouldn’t stop touching things on his desk.

“Gods okay, what do you two want to know?”

Theon smiled, “Well I’m team Ros now, but Robb and Roland seem to be ready to battle it out for blondie’s number.”

“I’m your brother Jon, I get first dibs,” Robb added holding his phone out, ready for a new contact.

Jon shuddered. That was his aunt they were talking about.

“Dude I’m not just going to hand her number out to people she’s never met,” Jon said shaking his head.

Robb stood up and frowned, “Please? I’m not a stranger technically, I know you and Gen.”

“But that doesn't give me the right to hand out her number to every guy who asks.”

Theon hung back enjoying Robb’s groveling. He’d been ignoring the dating scene for so long that he wasn’t even sure he’d be ready to get back into it. Where would he even bring her on a date? A Direwolves game? She didn’t strike Theon as the type to be into that.

“How’d you even meet her? Roland says Gen has been ignoring his texts about it,” Theon asked.

Jon didn’t want to break the news in the middle of the office. It would be easier for everyone involved if he just came over after work and told everyone in one swoop.

And that’s how he found himself the center of attention yet again, crammed in between Robb and Arya who were eager to find out what was going on. Arya had never mentioned it to Jon before, but apparently she’d been listening to Dany for quite sometime.

“She’s like the only person I listen to when I train,” Arya explained, pulling up her water dancing playlist to prove it to him.

Cat and Ned just looked confused as to why they were involved in the conversation. Neither of them had seen the picture nor had the slightest clue about the latest music, especially female punk singers.

“So what’s this all about?” Ned asked.

Arya thrust her phone out to her father and showed him the picture of the three of them smiling like they didn't have worries waiting for them back in Winterfell.

“Jon and Gen met this badass punk singer I listen to,” she explained.

Ned put on his glasses and he and Cat zoomed in on the picture to get a better look. Ned almost dropped the phone when he saw the white blond hair and purple eyes.
“And he said he’d tell us who she was tonight,” Robb added.

Ned had a very good guess of who she was.

Jon scratched his head and tried to think of how to explain it all. “Well so I got a DNA test, because Gen and I thought I might be able to find some of my father’s side that way,” he started.

Theon cut him off with a groan, “Does this mean I have to try and find my sister now?”

"A promise is a promise!"

Ned felt like all his kids were trying to get away from him. He’d done his best with them all but he couldn’t help but feel that way between Jon moving out and Theon suddenly mentioning he was going to seek out his sister.

“Really Theon? I didn’t know you were thinking about doing that,” Robb said.

The rest of the siblings had been too young to remember a time before Theon became a part of their family, let alone had a family of his own before them.

“Yeah, I promised Jon I would reach back out to her if he tried and find his own family.”

Jon sighed, “So anyways, my results came back and matched me with Daenerys. She’s my aunt apparently, my father’s sister.”

Arya was shocked, “Holy shit. Your Dad is that Targaryen?”

“Arya! Language!” her mother scolded.

Despite the rest of his siblings lack of interest in the music community, Arya’s emphasis had got them curious.

“Who is he Jon? I don’t know who your aunt is,” Rickon said looking up from his handheld gaming device he’d been glued to.

“She’s a punk singer. But my Dad started the record company she runs now,” Jon explained.

Theon started laughing at Robb’s expense, “Damn Robb. You’ve got the hots for Jon’s aunt.”

“Shut up! I didn’t know.”

Sansa rolled her eyes, “It’s not like she’s blood related to you.”

“Can we get back to the fact that you’re related to some of the biggest names in music? Gendry is going to flip when I tell him,” Arya said already pulling up his number.

“Go ahead and tell him. Just try to keep it on the down-low, okay?”

Ned couldn’t believe how well Jon seemed to be handling the news. Maybe he had made a mistake all those years ago in depriving him of his family? It sounded like Daenerys hadn’t given Jon any reason to come home upset.

That night Jon stayed for dinner, but in the back of his mind he kept his guards up around Ned. He kept looking at him with questioning eyes but didn’t say anything. It was driving him crazy. Why didn’t he just say what was on his mind already and squash Jon’s anxiety?
After dinner Robb continued to ask for her number, and Jon continued to deny it.

“Just follow her on Faceless or something. She’ll see that we have mutual followers.”

“Fine, but if she accepts can you just casually mention her to me?” Robb asked.

“Sure. I’ll be sure to mention how much my brother is obsessed with her. I’ll get right on that.”

He was hanging by the couch getting ready to head back to his place texting Dany.

“So I told my family about you! They’re all jealous that I’ve got such a cool family,” he sent.

She sent back a smiling emoji and said, “I’d love to come up and meet them sometime! I’m still so happy from meeting you and Gen. This weekend was like something out of one of my childhood dreams!”

“I totally get what you mean. I always dreamed of meeting my other side of the family someday, just never imagined it’d be my father’s side and not my mother’s!”

Ned caught Jon smiling at his phone and sat down on his armchair near him.

“Texting Gen?”

Jon looked up and put away his phone. He felt tense all of a sudden. “Nope, just Dany. Told her I told you guys about her. Trying to be as open as possible with her about things.”

Ned felt the barb in Jon’s words. He deserved it.

“I know I’ve said it a million times already, but I really am sorry for everything. I messed up bad, and hearing you and Dany so excited about each other is making me realize that even more. I shouldn’t have let my fears keep you away from them,” Ned sighed.

What could Jon say to that? He didn’t want to tell him everything was fine and that it didn’t matter anymore. Because it did. He’d never be able to get that time back with his family. He’d never get to meet Viserys or his grandparents. In depriving him of his family, Ned had hurt Dany just as much as he’d hurt Jon.

“Yeah, you shouldn’t have.”

On the car ride home through the quiet streets of Winterfell, Jon wasn’t sure what could be done to repair their relationship other than time.
Gen was creating some promotional materials for the book when her inboxed pinged. She didn’t want to tear herself from the fancy publishing software Tyrion had let her buy on his credit card, but her curiosity got the best of her. It was from Sandor, Gods only knew how he had her email.

The email said “How many tix you need?” accompanied by a link to their tour website.

The headline made her laugh, “First ever concert at the Wall. Half of proceeds go to the troops.”

So not only did she scam her friend into moving a show up there just for her, it’d be helping a lot more people than just her.

“Let me check with my peeps! I’m so excited. Two weeks!”

She tore herself away from the distractions and called up Tormund. It’d been over a month since she’d last spoken to him.

“If it isn’t the cub of Bear Island? Where’ve you been,” Tormund answered.

Gen could just picture the shit-eating grin on his face. “I’ve been working down South with Tyrion. I’m home now though. What are you up to?”

“Just chopping some wood right now. Just because it’d spring for you southerners doesn’t mean it’s nice up here,” he huffed with a chuckle.

She couldn’t wait to see him again. He was such a riot and she just knew having Sandor and him in the room would produce some great conversations. They’re either end up fighting or laughing. Either way, Gen couldn’t wait to bear witness to it all.

“Oh, I get it. You’re a true northern. But anyways, I called to ask how many tickets you want to the concert. It’s only two weeks away,” Gen asked.

“Just one. You bringing that boy of yours?”

She had to roll her eyes, “Yes, he’ll be there. And his crow uncle too so prepare yourself.”

“I already promised you. I’m not letting any crow ruin that concert for me. Besides, he did right by me and my village with that whole trade deal.”

“I’m glad! I’ll text you closer to the weekend, alright?”

“Sounds good. You better get ready to scream those lyrics in the front row!”

Gen thought back to how bad her throat had hurt the day after the last concert she’d gone to for Sandor. She’d yelled out every song like she was part of the band.
“You’ll be wishing you hadn’t said that!”

She thought about giving Jon a call to ask him what his uncle wanted to do but she thought better of it. He’d been telling her that since he’d taken a whole week off earlier in the month when he ran away, he had plenty of work to catch up on. Instead she sent him the most formal email she could manage.

“Dear Mr. Stark,

My records indicate that you have expressed interest in attending a concert performed by The Hound at Castle Black. If you could please reply with an indication of how many tickets you would like, that would be most agreeable.

Sincerely,
Your lowly servant and cherished girlfriend,
Ms. Genevieve Norward”

Gen hadn’t even had time to change around the background on the social media post she’d been making on the book before Jon sent a reply.

“You’re such a goof Ms. Norward. Besides me, Benjen has asked for an extra ticket for his lady friend (he hasn’t spilled any goss about her yet!). I’m going to ask Dany if she wants to come up too but she won’t need a ticket since she can just show her business card and get in.

Btw wyd big head???? Miss you and love you. I’m bored out of my mind right now looking at all these contract changes Robb sent my way ahhhh.”

Gen could just picture him hidden away in his office spinning around in his chair to avoid looking at them. She didn’t see how he got any work done with a couch in there. She had a hard enough time avoiding her own when she did work at home. Thankfully, the dining room table had so far proved itself to be a good area to work.

But knowing he was feeling antsy made her feel antsy. “Meet me at your place for lunch? We can goof off together,” she texted.

“Sign me UP! See you then love!”

When the time came she changed out of her pajamas (a blessing and curse of working from home) and headed on over to his place.

Before she got out the door her mom came in from her art studio and saw Gen loitering by the door. She had her hair up in a messy bun and was wearing the big glasses she only wore when she was inspecting negatives of her photos.

“Hi lovebug! Where you off to? I’m just taking a break from the darkroom right now,” Nadya asked.

“Oh, I’m heading to Jon’s for lunch. Not sure how long I’ll be there.”

Her mom frowned but gave her hug, “Okay honey. Maybe tomorrow if you have a break in your work were could do something together? I miss my baby!”

Gen felt bad. She hadn’t spent much time with her family since she’d been back. She’d been too focused on the mess with Jon’s family to equally split her time. It was hard to share herself with everyone. Between friends, Jon, and her family, somedays it felt like there wasn’t a minute left to
herself.

“I’ll be around! Even if I’m busy with work, I can bring my computer into your studio so we can at least hang out.”

“Yay! Now go enjoy your lunch. Tell Jon I say hi!”

She still hadn’t filled in her family on the stuff with Jon. But she wasn’t sure if they even needed to know. She figured Robb and Theon would eventually let it slip to Roland, and Henyk would find out to.

Jon wasn’t there when she got to his apartment so she leaned against his door feeling like a gangster in an old movie. All she needed was to snap her fingers and smoke a cig and she’d fit right in.

When Jon walked up to her he did a silly sashay down the hall and pulled her into a hug.

“I’m soooo bored! Can we just fuck around the entire lunch break.” he asked.

And fuck around they did, just not the type Jon had in mind. Forgetting to feed themselves, they savored each others kisses, and later on the lushness of their bodies.

When they resurfaced from their noonday tussle Gen laughed at the state of his hair.

“Oh my Gods Jon. You’ve got to brush that out. Everyone at the office will no what you’ve been up to if you don’t.”

He smoothed it with his hands, “I don’t mind. Let them be jealous.”

With a roll of her eyes Gen pulled a blanket around her and walked off to his kitchen to find something to eat. She laughed at the contents of his fridge. What did one guy need so many different types of beer for.

“You opening a bar or something honey?” she called out.

“That’s Theon and Robb’s stash! I let them have a shelf so they stopped complaining.”

She should have figured as much. “Want a pb&j? I’m in the mood after all that exercise we just got up to.”

“I wouldn’t exactly call that exercise, but yes please!”

Back in his room she sat in front him, leaning her back against his chest as they ate and listened to music. There was no more comfortable place than in his arms.

“Do you really have to go back to work? I want to nap with you.”

Jon pulled his arms around her, nestling his head into her neck, “I wish I could. But how about you stay here until I get out. You can use Ghost as your heat.”

Where was that fluff ball anyways? “Gods I honestly forgot he was even here. He’s so quiet!”

Jon laughed, he was always forgetting the pup himself. If Ghost didn’t whine around meal times he wouldn’t even know he was there most of the time.

“I think he’s taking a nap in the living room. He likes being by the window in the afternoon.”
Ghost was a boy after her own heart. Made if Jon ever got around to picking out a couch she’d join him someday. So far he’d been getting by with some outdoor sports chairs Robb and Theon had taken from their house.

Jon went back to work, leaving a sleepy Gen in his wake. When he came back he found her and Ghost cuddled up in the bed, giving him the perfect photo for his next phone background.

Having a place to himself wasn’t so bad.
Chapter 111

Nadya snuck into her daughter’s room early the next morning while the rest of the family was getting ready for the day. She tried to scooch Gen over, but the bed was only so big. She sighed and laid at her feet like Ghost had yesterday.

“What’s up lovebug?” her mom asked.

Gen’s eyes were still blurry from sleep and she could only manage a sorry excuse for a greeting.

“I’m hiding out from the rest of the family right now. I’m scared they’ll ask me to make breakfast.”

That made Gen crack a smile, “I swear you could put out anything and they’d devour it. They’re a bunch of monsters.”

“Which is exactly why I’m hiding in here with you until they leave. Then I’ll make us something to eat and we can have our art time.”

Gen still hadn’t checked in with Tyrion for the day. There was no telling if he had a laundry list of things for her to get done. She checked her email and found the inbox empty. Hopefully it stayed that way.

When the house was quiet, her mother leapt from the bed and gave Gen the all-clear signal. She’d always been goofy with her children, and them being grown didn’t stop that.

After a simple breakfast of oatmeal with cinnamon, Gen threw on her old paint covered overalls and joined her mother in the studio.

It was dim in the studio, the rain clouds covering up most of the sunlight. While Gen had changed, her mother had gotten out two canvases and an array of cool toned paints.

“Doesn’t seem nice enough out yet to break out the bright colors,” her mom explained.

Gen figured she could return the favor to Jon and paint him something for his place. With her mom’s instruction maybe it wouldn’t turn out half bad.

She texted Dany and hoped she could help her out, “Hi Dany! Could you send me a picture of the view from your place in Dragonstone? I want to paint something for Jon.”

“You guys are so cute!!!! Here you go!”

Gen smiled, feeling a fullness in her heart that Jon had another person in his life that cared for his happiness. She don’t know what he would have done if Dany had turned out to be a disappointment.

She tried her best to capture the stormy ocean waters, the same waters his family had once swam in and watched over. It was important to her that Jon have a piece of them with him.

“Gen? Want me to mix you some colors for the sky? I think you need something a little moodier,” her mother asked.

“Yes please! You’re the talent, not me.”

Her mother rolled her eyes and gestured to her cork board wall full of art by Gen and her siblings. She proudly displayed anything they gave to her when they were little, rotating the pieces out as the
“What do you call all of those then? Not a single one of my babies isn’t an artist!”

Gen had to laugh. She didn’t exactly consider her childhood drawings of the warrior women of Bear Island to be high quality. But seen through a mother’s eyes, they were worth their weight in gold.

“Well thanks Mom. We must get it from you.”

“Well I don’t know about that. Your father was a bit of a hippy when I first met him,” her mother smiled, remembering the days gone by when his hair was kept long.

“He still is!”

While they painted away the morning hours, her father was hard at work protecting the natural beauty of the North. If he had it his way, he’d call up the Children of the Forest himself and ask what could be done. But since they hadn’t been seen outside of folk stories for hundred of years, environmental lawyers like him would have to do.

Gen pulled out her phone and sent a picture of the finished product to Dany.

“It looks sooooo good! I might have to commission a copy! Btw, Jon asked me if I wanted to go to Sandor’s concert! I’ll be there!”

“Yaaaay! You’ll get to meet one of his uncle’s from his mom’s side. It’ll be so much fun!”

Her mother put down her brush and looked away from the painting of a mythical three-eyed raven she’d been doing in the abstract. To Gen’s untrained eye, the sharp and sure lines created an ominous tone to the raven’s stare.

“Who you texting?” she asked.

“Um well did Roland tell you guys about Jon’s weird family situation?”

Her mother wrung her hands together and didn’t meet her eye, “He may have mentioned it at dinner the other night.”

“Fine with me. As long as I wasn’t the one to spill the news I’m in the clear. Well you know how I went away last weekend with Jon?”

“Yeah? You didn’t text me all weekend!”

The family group chat would never die down if her parents had a say. They were always sending weird gifs and emojis to draw their kids into conversation. Gods forbid if Gen put in on mute for one weekend.

“Well we went and met his aunt. She’s the same age as him, but we found her through one of those DNA tests. She’s super nice. I’m texting her right now.”

Her mother gasped in recognition, “Oh! Is she that blond woman your brother was talking about?”

“I’m sure it was. Roland better watch out, Jon’s brother Robb has his eyes on her too. But I don’t think she’d be interested in either of them,” Gen smiled, thinking of just how busy Dany was.

Nadya washed her brushes in the paint-stained sink, “I mean, I know I don’t know the woman but it’d sure make holidays a lot easier if Jon and her married into the same family.”
“You’re just obsessed with getting grand kids! I’m not ready!” Gen laughed.

Her mother shrugged and winked at her baby girl, “You know this, but I already had Ro by your age. Probably was about to find out you were in my tummy too right around this time.”

“Gods you know how to make me feel old. I just graduated college!”

“I know, I know. But I can dream! I miss having babies around the house. Henryk is so old now, doesn’t even have his fat baby cheeks anymore,” her mom sighed.

Henryk used to be the fattest little baby. And Gen had loved hugging him in his arms on cold winter nights as his giggles filled the living room. But as he grew older, he’d shaped into a wiry thing, probably from all the running around in the woods he did with Bran and Rickon. But if Roland was any indication, he’d be a stocky northerner in no time.

“Maybe you should get a dog or something then mom!”

Her mom let out a dramatic sigh, “I suppose I can wait a couple more years!”

Yeah.. a couple more years. Gen could work with that.
“Where did you say we were meeting them tonight?” Gen asked.

She was sitting on his bed brushing through her hair while Jon was struggling to find a shirt he liked in his closet. He came out wearing a light blue one, grabbing a black jean jacket to throw over it.

“Sam said some bar over by their place. Apparently they make homemade pretzels.”

“Oooo! I can’t wait. I feel like we haven’t seen them in forever,” Gen said.

“Well you were down at the Rock. I just saw Sam the other day though while he was at work.”

She watched mesmerized as he gathered a section of his wet curls into a bun, letting the rest fall down.

“Gods you’ve got beautiful hair,” she sighed.

Jon laughed and walked over to kiss the top of her head, grabbing the hairbrush from her hands to help her. The tangles in her hair were persistent after the post-work nap they’d taken.

Gen had been spending a lot of time at Jon’s place when he wasn’t there. There was something about his distraction free space that made it easier for her to focus on the design requests that Tyrion had been sending her way. Her room back home didn’t even have a desk anymore!

And Jon didn’t mind at all coming home from work and seeing her tucked up in his bed wearing one of his shirts or perched at the kitchen counter typing away. It was the closest he could get to feeling like he was home.

“You’ve got pretty nice hair yourself,” he smiled.

“Yeah, for the whole three seconds everyday that it isn’t tangled!”

Jon laughed as an image of a potential solution came to his head, “You could always shave it off.”

“Oh totally. That’d be a real good look for me. If you think my normal skin is pale, wait until you see my scalp. It’s probably blinding.”

They loaded up into his car, playing their music loud. With a cheeky smile, Gen threw on Dany’s song *Breaker of Chains* to see if Jon would notice.

And his golden laughter filled the car, giving her just the reaction she’d hoped for. “It’s so weird listening to her songs now.”

Gen was used to it with Sandor’s music. But it did make the lyrics a lot more interesting to guess the meanings.

“I wonder what she was going through when she wrote this album. It feels so much more personal now,” Gen said.

Jon tried to imagine Dany’s life in Essos, long before she’d ever met him. But his mind came up blank, just a black screen in his mind that reflected back at him, reminding him of all the years with his family that he’d missed out on.
“I’m sure she’d tell us if we asked.”

“We should let her keep some secrets to herself,” Gen said with a stare out the window.

The bar was unlike any building Gen had ever been in. It was housed in an old bank, with black carpets and rich red leather seating. There was antique mirror glass behind the bar and the low lighting reflected off of it, making Jon and Gen feel like they’d stepped back in time. And most special of all, was the old vault that now housed leather-bound books and a single table for guests lucky enough to get it.

“This place is sick! Have you been here before?” Gen asked.

Jon looked around in awe, “Never, but we’ve definitely got to come back sometime. Sam says they’re near the back.”

Unspoken was the thought that his father would love the place. Jon could just picture him sitting with his back against the back wall, his eyes crinkled from smiling as he drank a beer with his sons.

“Oh I see them! They’re over by the vault,” Gen said.

Jon forced a smile to his face as they approached, Sam and Gilly standing to say hi.

“It’s great to see you Sam, I’ve missed you,” Jon said with a hug.

Sam grinned, “I could say the same. Guess we’ve both been busy lately.”

Gen and Gilly walked over to the bar to grab drinks while their men sat and caught up.

Gilly was quiet for a second while they leaned against the bar waiting to be noticed. It was pretty busy for a weeknight and Gen was surprised to see the people of Winterfell out and about.

“So,” Gilly said averting her eyes, “Sam says Jon’s been dealing with some family stuff lately. How’s he been, really?”

Gen let out a sigh, “Honestly, I’m not sure. The first couple of weeks he was very vocal about it all with me but now he’s gone sort of quiet. I’m trying not to push things.”

Gilly nodded, “Probably for the best. When Sam’s Dad cut off contact with him, Sam barely talked to me about it at all. Drove me half crazy.”

“What’s with it with those two thinking we can’t handle their emotions?”

Gilly took a deep sip of the beer she’d just ordered and said, “Beats me. But we’ll get through to them.”

Back at the table the women sat down and the men stopped talking. Gen looked to Jon with a raised eyebrow but all he did was blush and look down.

“What’s with the two of you?” Gilly asked.

Sam stuttered, “Um we were just uh.”

“We were just talking about the stuff with my dad,” Jon sighed.

Gen grimaced and took a sip of her root beer. Her hand slid across the table and found his with a squeeze, something to remind him that things would be okay.

“Don’t worry about it Gilly. I don’t mind that Sam told you,” Jon said, “Anyways what’s new with you two?”

Sam smiled big and Gilly pulled something out of her purse. It was a grey and white envelope addressed to Sam.

Jon looked at his friend who was moving it about in his hands, “What’s this Sam? You’ve got news?”

Gen wondered to herself if it had anything to do with Gilly. You never knew with a young married couple.

“I applied to the Citadel and I got accepted!” Sam let out with a big grin.

Jon rushed to hug his friend and Gen started clapping.

“Oh my Gods Sam! That’s amazing news, congratulations,” Gen said.

Sam blushed and opened up the envelope so they could read the details.

Jon scanned the letter, imagining his friend walking around the old libraries that looked like something out of a dream, “You’re going to be perfect for it Sam. They’ll never want you to leave.”

Gilly laughed, “It took him forever to convince him to apply. But after we got married I sort of forced his hand to do it. I want him to follow him dreams before we have kids.”

Gen thought about her own dreams with her work with Tyrion that Jon was making her pursue. He’d never once made her feel like she should stay behind in Winterfell. He was always encouraging her to reach further, no matter the cost to him.

“When do you leave?” Gen asked.

“This summer actually. They’ve got family housing so it all worked out very nicely,” Sam said.

Jon was speechless for a second and Gen noticed the almost imperceptible falling of his smile.

“Wow Sam. I can’t believe it! You’re going to be a maester!”

But later in the car, after pretzels had been eaten and their drinks finished, Jon was quiet once again. Gen figured what was bothering him, he couldn’t hide it from her.

“Are you sad he’s moving away?”

Jon looked at her quick, his eyes wide at her ability to know what was running through his head. “In a selfish way, yes. But he was born to be a maester. I can spare him for a few years while he makes that happen.”

“You’ll still be able to see each other and talk. Maybe not at much as you’d like, but it’s clear he sees you as a brother. And brothers make time for each other,” Gen said grabbing hold of his hand.

“I hope so Gen. He’s the best friend I’ve ever had. No one really understood what it was like growing up better than him. He’s just the kindest person.”

Gen smiled, happy that Sam had been able to bring Jon so much joy and peace in his life. And
although Sam was moving away, she knew Jon would be okay. It wasn’t the first time he’d dealt with someone he loved moving. But maybe it could be the last.
Chapter 113

Chapter Notes

I've love some good family fluff!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey Jon could you pick me up from school please? I asked my mom but she’s volunteering with Rickon’s class and can’t get me,” Sansa texted.

Jon sighed deep at his desk. He had lots to do for an upcoming contract, and Robb had just dumped a bunch on his desk for him to read over. What was it with his Tully-favoring siblings asking for help?

But he couldn’t say no to his little sister. That was another thing he had in common with Ned, they both couldn’t say no to the sweet little girl they remembered with her bright blue eyes. Lately, the comparisons with the man who’d raised him had been hitting Jon.

As much as it confused him, Jon couldn’t deny that Ned was his Dad, and had imparted many of his values onto him. But he couldn’t help but wonder the person he would have been if his father Rhaegar had been in his life to mold him. But there was no use in dwelling on impossible things, or at least that’s what Jon told himself.

“Sure Sans. I’ll see you later. Just text me whenever,” he replied.

Picking up Sansa gave him the perfect excuse to ignore all of the papers Robb had left on his desk.

At the high school Sansa was wearing a light wash pair of overalls that reminded Jon of the days she and Arya used to tramp around the backyard together rolling in the dirt with the rest of their brothers. Cat had always complained, but they’d insisted on wearing their brother’s hand-me-down overalls back in those days. Seeing Sansa in a pair brought Jon back to those days.

She got in the car and gave a grateful smile with a sigh, “Hi Jon.”

“Hi Sans. Long day?”

Sansa shook her head with a laugh, “You have no idea. I had to stay after to get some extra help with my math work. I still feel like I’m going to fail the next test.”

“When’s the test?”

“Monday. He really just wants to make that day as bad as possible.”

Jon had always been good at math. He didn’t have much interest in science, but he liked the constant nature of the numbers. It was nice knowing that no matter who did the problem, the answer would always stay the same.

“I can help you out if you want. You’re in pre-calc right?”

She looked up at him with shining eyes, “Would you really Jon?”
“Of course! Gen’s busy with her brother tonight so I’ve got no plans.”

Gen had texted him screenshots from her brother earlier where he’d been begging for her help setting up his dating profile. Apparently his current pictures of him partying from college just weren’t cutting it anymore. In one of the texts he’d said, “Seeing as you’re never to give me Khaleesi’s number, pls help your poor single brother.”

At the family home, Jon and Sansa settled in at the kitchen counter. Sansa was busy getting dinner ready for the family seeing as her mother would be arriving later with Rickon.

While Jon sat and looked over her notes to refamiliarize himself all the equations and symbols he hadn’t seen in years, Arya walked in looking for a snack.

“Oh my Gods Jon! Why didn’t you tell me you were coming over?” she asked, pulling him in for a hug with a punch to his shoulder.

“I just got here! Picked Sansa up from school.”

Arya plopped down beside him and munched away on an apple, “So are you staying for dinner?”

Jon wasn’t sure if he was ready for that yet, “Um maybe. I’m just helping Sans study for her test, haven’t figured out the rest of my night yet.”

“Well you should Jon. We all miss having you around. Dinner isn’t the same without everyone there,” Sansa said as she peeled a potato.

Jon found it hard to believe that everyone missed him. He was sure there was at least one person glad to see an empty seat at the table.

Arya leaned against him, “Please Jon! I want to show you the new move I learned from Syrio.”

Jon rose an eyebrow at his baby sister. She never begged, but like Sansa, she knew how to get Stark men to say yes.

“Fine Arya. Just for you two,” he sighed.

Sansa cheered and put the potatoes on the stove. Jon shook his head with a smile he couldn’t help but have on his face. It was moments like that with his siblings that reminded him that his life in the house hadn’t been all bad. But then again, they weren’t the ones he was upset with.

Once Sansa was done helping out, and Arya was done staring at her do it, it was time to help her with her math. The mere mention of it was enough for Arya to leave the room. Although she didn’t have any trouble with it, it was the last thing she wanted to think about when she was home from school.

“Okay so I looked at your homework and it seems like you keep using the wrong equation for these ones,” Jon said.

Sansa scanned over her neat handwriting and gasped, “I’m such an idiot!”

“No, you’re just learning. Doesn’t help that your teacher is a bore. Robb and I had the same guy when we went there, I was always having to wake Robb up.”

They worked out several problems together, until Jon noticed she was able to select the right equations herself. It made Jon happy to see her anxiety decreased and her pencil speed up as she
found the confidence in ability.

“See Sans? You’ve got it down. Just got a little confused with the equations, your math after that is perfect,” Jon smiled.

Sansa leaned back and did a mini cheer with her arms, “Thank Gods. Because I don’t want my GPA to go down just for this stupid class that will have no influence on my career.”

“I know you probably get this question all the time from your parents, but what are you thinking for a career?”

For the longest time Sansa had told her family that she was going to open up a bakery and be a dancer. But it’d been years since she’d quit dance lessons, much to Cat’s dismay. She still baked a mean cookie though!

Sansa pulled her sleeves over her hands and said, “I’m not really sure. I love sewing, but I also think I should work for the family business like the rest of you.”

“Don’t feel like you have to just because we are. Dad’s got enough help between Robb, Theon, and I,” Jon said.

“I know. I just think I could balance out Theon’s crazy and help with marketing. He still doesn’t know how to use color schemes,” she laughed.

Jon had noticed some strange ads out of Theon’s department lately. But he wasn’t going to march down to his office to ask why Robb and the rest of the legal team have been the face of a recent ad.

Sansa was finishing up the rest of her problem sets when Cat came in with Rickon in tow. Her arms were full of grocery bags and Jon stood up to offer his help.

Cat’s eyes widened when she saw him, “Oh hi Jon. I didn’t know you were coming over.”

Jon put the bags on the counter and had to fight the urge to roll his eyes.

“Yep, I picked Sans up from school. Helping her with her math homework now.”

Rickon ignored his mom and showed Jon something on his game, “Can you help me beat this boss? Bran won’t help me.”

Sansa watched her mom’s eyes softened. Maybe she was finally realizing just how important Jon was to the function of their family? She and Arya had been having some late night conversations about why Jon was still staying away, and it always came back to their mom. Sansa hadn’t wanted to admit it, but she did treat Jon differently.

“Yeah sure Rickon. Maybe after dinner?”

Dinner was weird, at least for Jon. Ned had been surprised to see him in his usual seat, and it felt like everyone was trying too hard to make Jon feel welcome. Robb wouldn’t stop asking him about Gen, and the usually quiet Bran even asked how work was going. Jon wished they would just stop being weird for one second so he wasn’t reminded of all the changes in his life.

“So Jon. How’s the your apartment? Do you think I could stop over sometime to see it after work?” Ned asked.

Jon put down his fork, “Uh sure. Any day this week works. Not like like I’ve really got plans.”
After they’d eaten, his siblings had claimed his attention. Arya had showed him a cool knife trick where she was able to switch hands faster than her opponent could comprehend. If she wasn’t so against people telling her what to do Jon thought she’d make a brilliant soldier.

Once Rickon’s bosses were defeated, Ned pulled Jon into his study.

“Uh about earlier, would it be alright if Cat came by too?”

Jon felt himself stiffen and was unable to hide it from his dad.

“Why?”

Ned took a deep breath and clutched the edge of his desk, “We’ve been talking a lot and she’d like to speak to you about her behavior over all these years.”

Jon wasn’t sure he’d heard him right. He’d never once imagined Cat apologizing to him. And in many ways, Jon still felt like he’d been deserving of the treatment. He had been a burden on the young couple’s life, no matter how he looked at it.

He tried to look like he didn’t care to hear what she had to say, like he wasn’t itching to know what excuses she’d come up with.

“Yeah, whatever works.”

Chapter End Notes

Also thanks so much for encouraging me with this story, I think it's the longest thing I've ever written and keeping up with a daily writing schedule has been really good for getting me in the habit for other creative projects I'm doing. So thank you!
Chapter 114

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Gen was running around Jon’s place with Ghost following behind her. Jon had called her during his lunch break all panicked because Ned and Cat were coming over with little notice and he’d have no time to prepare his apartment. And the last thing he wanted was for them to think he couldn’t get on just fine on his own.

So he’d called up Gen feeling like his hair was going to fall out and she assured him that she’d drive over right away and straighten up. She even brought over the painting she’d made him to surprise him with a little character to the place.

Ghost wouldn’t stop following her and eventually she just gave up and sat on the floor with him.

“You stressed out too cute boy?” she asked Ghost, burying her head on his back and giving him a good pet.

Ghost nuzzled at her arms with a lick.

“Okay boy, we should get back to work.”

Gen looked around the place. Jon and her still hadn’t made it to the store to pick out a couch, so the camping chairs would have to do. But it was almost too sterile. And it wasn’t like Ned and Cat would bring them into his bedroom to chat.

She patted Ghost on the head and walked out the door, “Hold down the fort, okay Ghost? I need to do some shopping.”

An hour and a couple silver stags later, Gen arrived back at his apartment and let herself in using the rainbow key Jon had made for her. Ghost was just where she’d left him, and came forward with kisses as she struggled with her bags. Just like his owner.

“All right, now I’ve got lots to do Ghost boy! Why don’t you take a nap?” she said after she’d poured more food in his bowl.

Gen was always astonished by just how much food he could eat. She didn’t know how the Starks could afford all the food the direwolves needed.

She unloaded the bags and let out a deep sigh at the work ahead of her. It was time to flex her decorating muscles if Jon had any hope of looking like he actually lived there.

And that was how Jon found her when he walked into his apartment after work. She was unrolling a grey rug in the living room, fiddling with the position of the camp chairs on top of it. And there was a painting on the wall he was sure hadn’t been there when he left.

She turned around and gave him a sheepish smile, “We can return anything you don’t like. I just thought it would liven up the area a little bit.”

Jon walked over without a word and pull her into his arms, “Gods I love you.”

Her giggles filled the room waking Ghost up, “Love you too! Now help me pick out some photos to
print out for these frames.”

Jon walked over to the seascape painting on the wall that looked awfully familiar, “Gen? Where’d you get this?”

Her smile was big and she pulled up a photo on her phone and showed him the photo from Dany.

“Oh my Gods! Did you make this?”

“I might have…. Thinking about turning this place into my personal art gallery,” she said with a wink.

He couldn’t get over how she’d captured the stormy beauty of his family home. Just a look at it brought him right back to that night with her and Dany, the night he’d felt a piece of his heart light back up.

“You’re amazing, truly. I can’t thank you enough for all of this,” he sighed.

She hooked her arms around him and looked up at those dark grey eyes that she could fall into and smiled. “I’ve got your back, always Jon.”

The last minute preparations busied them. Jon was flipping through his photos so Gen could fill the picture frames. And after they were filled with pictures of Jon and his siblings, one with Gen, and the one they’d taken with Dany on Dragonstone, there was little time left.

“Go make sure the bathroom is clean! I’ll wipe down the kitchen counters,” Gen said, as her eyes darted about the room looking for anything out of place.

And before they knew it Ghost was barking at the knocking on the door. Jon rushed forward to get it before Gen could even get up from the floor where she was straightening out Jon’s shoes.

But neither Cat nor Ned noticed her when Jon opened the door.

Cat was gripping her husband’s hand tight, nervous for the first time in a while about the conversation to come. And Ned was no better, leaning against her scared to meet his son’s eyes.

“Come in,” Jon said stiffly.

Gen wanted to rush forward and lighten the mood with the cookies she’d picked up at the store but she hung back with Ghost. Her white-haired friend was looking skittish and Gen was feeling it too.

“Oh hello Genevieve, I didn’t see you there,” Catelyn said.

Gen rose up from the floor and waved her hand, “Hi Mrs. Stark! How are you doing today?”

“I’m well. Have a long night ahead of me with the boys hockey practice, but what can you do,” Cat said with a hint of a smile.

Gen hoped she aged as gracefully as Cat someday. She looked amazing for someone who’d ran after seven kids for the past twenty-something years.

“Oh I forgot about that! Make sure Henryk doesn’t get into trouble there.”

Her brother had been keeping quiet about the practices, only a few whispers here and there to Roland. Roland had confessed to her that Henryk had been begging to let him come to work with him at the university so he could get some tips from the players.
“I’ll try. I think your father will be there,” Cat nodded.

A silence followed as they looked to Jon’s apartment. Ned peeked his head into the bathroom before leaning back on his heels. His hands were stuffed into his pockets, clearly nervous.

Jon scratched the back of his head and said, “So do you want to take a look around the place? I haven’t found a couch I like yet but we’re still looking.”

Ned walked forward and held up the picture of his smiling children, an old Christmas card from a couple years ago. They’d all been so happy then.

“How do you live here too Gen?” Ned asked when he noticed the decidedly feminine touches around the room.

“Oh no. I just come over from time to time. I’m still living at home for the time being while I save money,” she said.

Cat walked over to the window and looked out at the view, the Stark family business just right around the corner. Jon could only imagine what she was thinking.

“Smart plan Gen. My top advice to you young kids is to save as much money as you can until you have to go out in the world. It’s tough out there,” Ned lingering above the camp chair.

Jon grounded himself by staring at the stormy sea of Dragonstone, taking a deep breath trying to remind himself that whatever Cat had to say to him, he’d be okay. He didn’t need her approval. He wasn’t even sure if he wanted it anymore.

Cat turned around and gave her husband a look, her blue eyes shining in a way Jon hadn’t seen in years. Like Sansa always did when she was nervous, she was pulling her sleeves over her hands.

Ned met her eyes and nodded, standing up from the chair with a clap of his hands.

“Um Gen will you walk to the store around the corner with me? I’m sure you know the best ones,” Ned said.

Gen looked at Jon, both of them knowing that Ned knew the neighborhood better than she did. Jon’s eyes looked stricken and Ghost stood up to stand by his feet.

“Uh sure. I guess we’ll be right back?” she said looking at Jon and Cat.

Cat was refusing to meet her eyes, looking like she wanted to walk out the door with them.

Before Gen left she hugged Jon goodbye and whispered into his ear, “Just give me a signal and I’ll be right back. Seriously.”

But he didn’t say anything to acknowledge what she’d said.

And when Ned and her walked out leaving the people they loved most behind, they weren’t sure what to do.

“Is it bad that I want to put my ear to the door and make sure everything is alright?” Ned sighed.

Gen had to laugh. She was just as nervous for what Catelyn had to say to Jon. She swore that if she even so much as made him feel little again, she’d burst back in there and give her a taste of her own medicine.
“I’m feeling the same way. Let’s hope we don’t need to drag them apart later.”

And when she said that Ned wondered where he’d gone wrong to be in a situation where the boy he promised to protect was at odds with the woman he loved more than words could describe.

Chapter End Notes

Little cliffhanger!
Chapter 115

Chapter Notes

Let me know what you think! I'm nervous about the reception of this one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Catelyn’s hair obscured her face. It was loose instead of its usual tight braid. And there were bags under her eyes that Jon knew didn’t come from just the regular exhaustion of her family. She had the same bags under his eyes that he’d had for almost two weeks after the news.

Jon wasn’t sure what to do with himself. Sit down and face it or run out the door and never look back? Either option felt like a loss.

The silence hung heavy in the room and neither of them knew where to look. Both were too stubborn for their own goods. Maybe Cat had rubbed off on him.

Jon shielded himself with Ghost and took a deep breath, “So what did you want to talk to me about.”

The woman who’d been running through his thoughts lately, the subject of one-sided fights in his mind, was right in front of him. She was the reason for so much pain in his heart, yet he couldn’t find it in him to hate her. That wasn’t him.

She stilled herself and took a seat, “I’m here to apologize to you. I owe you that much.”

He felt hands tighten unconsciously around the arms of his chair and found himself wishing Gen was still there. He didn’t know what to do anymore. There was no map for anything that’d been happening in his life.

Jon didn’t know what to say to that. A simply sorry couldn’t erase what had happened. Things had still been shitty, no matter how he looked it, or tried to justify her behavior. Sure, she’d gotten better over the years but who was to say that wasn’t because of the sheer exhaustion of running the family? Maybe there wasn’t much room for spite when you were that worn down.

“Oh. So where do we go from here?” Jon asked.

Cat kept her eyes trained on her hands, unable to look up at him and be reminded of her failure as a mother, as a person. She’d thrown family, duty, and honor to the wind when she’d found out about Jon. And for that, she hated herself.

And she hated her damned pride for letting her misplaced anger spiral into her current situation. She’d been a fool all those years ago when she couldn’t love that little parentless child as her own. And she was certain the fights with her husband over it were not near enough the punishment she deserved from the Gods.

“I don’t know Jon. But I need you to understand some things, even if you don’t accept my apology. I’m not asking you to. But I need you to know you never did anything wrong, and I realize that now. I was so blinded.”

Jon would have comforted her had she been anyone else. The lump in his throat had begun to grow.
and even Ghost sensed his discomfort, looking up at him with curious red eyes.

She took his silence and filled the gap. It all poured out of her. Every complicated feeling she’d ever had. Every thought that made her sick with the realization of how horrible she could act. She’d betrayed her family, shirked her duty, and kissed her honor goodbye many years ago.

“When I was pregnant with Robb your mother came to Ned and begged him for his help. She’d run off with your father, brought you into the world, and for so long I was angry that I had to pay the price,” Cat started.

She remembered when Ned had first told her. She’d just found out about Robb and she felt like nothing in the world could ever touch their new family. Things would be good again, and even the hole Brandon’s death had left in her heart was patched over with a new kind of love.

But then Lyanna pulled Ned away from her just when she needed him most. While Cat struggled through morning sickness, Lyanna was calling her brother south. She didn’t once stop to consider Cat’s lonely feelings up in a cold place that didn’t yet feel like home. All she could think about was her own grief, the loss of Jon’s own father and the uncertainty of her future.

And just when Catelyn thought the family she always dreamed of would be knitted together, Lyanna’s was more important. Ned’s damned honor and sense of obligation to his wild sister had torn him away from her when she was barely stable. Where was his honor when she was left alone in Winterfell pregnant with her first child? Where was his honor when he let his damned moral compass blind him?

“So I’m the price to pay?” Jon murmured.

With the fierceness of a mother her protected her pups, she shook her head, “I won’t lie to you and say I never thought that way. For the longest time I was just so angry that I was starting off my family with something that would never be mine. I was an idiot.”

Jon was having trouble believing it. Actions spoke louder than words in his book. And he wasn’t going to let some sweet words change that.

“I could have been yours, just like Theon is. All you had to do was try,” he said.

She blew her nose and looked away, “I know that. I’m sorry Jon. I’ve been blinded all these years. And by the time I realized what I’d done I was so rooted in shame that I let my pain become yours. I can’t ever undo that.”

“You’re right. You can’t.”

Her hands dropped to her side and she looked up at him with those Tully-blue eyes. The same pair of eyes he saw in Sansa’s bright stories or Robb’s worried stares.

“I don’t know how to fix things, or if I ever can. These past couple of weeks have really made me realize how awful I’ve been and how much I’ve hurt you. I don’t want to live with this shame anymore, I don’t want to be this person,” she begged.

She hated herself for putting Jon in the position of her absolution. He didn’t need that burden. And it was unfair of her to ask for his forgiveness. Jon wasn’t sure if he was a big enough man to give it.

The silence between them lingered for a moment, prickling Jon’s skin.

“Then change Catelyn. Saying sorry won’t matter until I don’t feel the unspoken words behind your
eyes when I come to the house unannounced. I’m as much a Stark as you are.”

Catelyn nodded with a shame that crept down her cheeks, “I know Jon. You’re as much Ned’s son as any of the kids, and even I couldn’t deny that. You’ve got his smile and that annoying habit of always being dependable. I promised him years ago that we’d raise you thinking you were his son, but in doing so I failed to treat you like one.”

Jon thought back to all the times he’d picked up his siblings from school without a complaint or the nights spent around the kitchen table doing homework with them. He’d always thought if he devoted himself to his family, in an outward way that she could see, that maybe she’d grow to love him. Why hadn’t that been enough? Why couldn’t she have loved him, even in the silly way she loved Theon?

“Whatever you’re feeling, just know that my anger has been misplaced. I should have been upset at your mom and Ned, never you. And I hope the Gods will punish me for that, I deserve it,” she said.

As much as Jon’s younger self would have called for that punishment, he’d learned that hate never did any good. His childhood was evidence of that. He could prove himself a bigger man than that, prove her wrong for all those years.

“No need for the judgement of the Gods. I’ll forgive you,” Jon said, reflecting on how much he wanted to take the words back, “As long as you don’t blame me for things I had no control over anymore.”

The breath that Cat’d been holding dissolved into shaky laughter, tears running down her face. “I promise Jon.”

And somewhere, wherever she was, Lyanna was laughing.

Chapter End Notes

Hope this was satisfying for you all! I know people have different opinions of Cat, but this is how I see her in my story. I’m all about fluff and establishing healthy relationships, not the drama and pain of canon to be honest! In my version she knew all along that Jon wasn’t Ned’s son, but had never let it slip to Jon. In this way, I think it makes her a more sympathetic character because she could have easily gone "You’re not even his kid!" in a moment of frustration. But still, in my version of the story, Jon was left feeling like an outsider / like he could never be as good as her own kids. Hopefully I’ll be able to heal them as a family!
With Cat and Ned gone, Jon sat there in the living room unsure of what to do next. It was almost too calm. His whole life he’d waited for the other shoe to drop and now that it had he was scared he’d get stomped on again.

And Catelyn had been so changed after that he wasn’t sure who she was. It was almost like someone had replaced the high-strung fierce woman with someone contented to watch from the sidelines with a lame smile. It was maddening to Jon.

Gen walked over to him and sat down, munching on one of the decadent peanut-butter chocolate chip cookies that no one touched. She thought the Starks crazy for not even trying one.

“How’d it go? Things seemed a little fraught when we came back in,” Gen said.

When they’d been summoned back to the apartment Gen and Ned had taken deep breaths and prayed for the best. On their walk together he confessed to her about how stupid he felt for lying to Jon. He said that he and Cat had been arguing since it happened, and she’d only just seen the error of her ways. She’d been sickened with shame. Ned and Genevieve both hoped the conversation hadn’t ended in tears.

Jon thought back to the talk they’d had. It’d gone as well as he could have hoped for, “It was weird, really weird. Like everything I always wanted to hear.”

“Good. Ghost and I were going to scare her away if she hurt you again. How do you feel now that she’s talked to you?”

He smiled at the mental image of Gen and Ghost barring their teeth to protect him. He couldn’t have asked the Gods for better best friends.

“I don’t even know. Unless I actually see her treat me the same as the rest and show some interest in my life, I’m not letting my guard down.”

Gen didn’t blame him. She didn’t want to see his heart hurt over a broken promise, “Well I hope for your sake she makes an effort. Either way, Ghost and I are in your corner.”

Jon’s eyes went soft as he imagined a life where Catelyn treated him like Robb, her golden boy. Would she pull him into hugs, a maternal grasp he never understood? Would she cook his favorite meals without Sansa’s urgings? Would she send him sweet reminders that he knew his siblings got? He’d gone so long without those little things that he didn’t even know what a mother’s love could give.

Gen noticed the look in his eyes and put her hand on his knee. “You know, I was just thinking about something she said to me a while back.”

He leaned forward instinctively, curling his fists with worry, “What’d she say? It wasn’t anything bad was it?”

“No. It was that morning after Valentine’s day. I was still at your place scrubbing that tray Bran and Rickon had burnt the bacon on. And then we were just talking, she asked me how our Valentine’s Day was and if you made me happy.”

Jon had to fight the urge to scoff. Of course she hadn’t believed in his ability to give the woman he
loved a good first Valentine’s Day. Why did he even give her the benefit of the doubt? He’d do anything for Genevieve, anything.

“And what’d you say?”

She rolled her eyes and a brilliant smile lit up her face, “I told her you did, of course. And each day you prove me right.”

Now it was his turn to roll his eyes, “You’re too much, but I love you. So what did she say after?”

“Well I told her that she and Ned did a great job raising you. And she said it wasn’t easy being a mother to all you kids,” Gen said, watching his face for a reaction.

Jon saw the meaning behind her words. In some strange way, no matter how she’d done the job, she’d been the only mother he’d ever known. And for a second he felt a flash of anger at her claim of the title, but it washed away quickly replaced by realization.

She may not have been the mom he’d always dreamed of having, but she was all he had. And if she was willing to change, begging to even, why not give her a chance? There was nothing to lose.

He nodded and looked down at the floor, “Never thought she’d admit to being the mother in my life. It’s strange.”

The feelings of confusion followed him in the coming days. He didn’t know how to feel when she invited him over for dinner, ready to hear about his day. And he didn’t know what to say when she greeted him with a smile when he dropped his siblings off at home. The radical shift in their relationship made Jon feel unsteady, like the past twenty years of his life were a bad dream.

And in the following week when he and Genevieve were on the plane headed up north to the Wall, his feelings of anxiety came back up. Cat had sent him a text telling them to “have fun!” and Jon just kept looking at it wondering if he was hallucinating.

“I know it’s probably super weird right now seeing her all friendly but I hope it stays that way. Just try and open your heart up to the possibility of a relationship with her,” she tried.

Jon laughed, “She’s got me fucked up if she thinks a couple texts will undo it.”

Gen couldn’t hold back her smile at his slang, “Oh Gods is it too late to turn this plane around? Your lingo is too much for me.”

He pulled a frown and threw his arm over her shoulder, pulling her close. “You’d really go without me? Go and visit my poor uncle and new aunt on your own?”

“I have it on a good knowledge that Benjen and Dany adore me.”

“Oh do they?”

“Oh totally. Dany and I text about you all the time. I’m her source of funny nephew stories,” she said scrolling through the many texts with his aunt.

Jon shook his head at her ability to make him smile. She always knew how to lighten the mood.

“And Benjen?”

“Well how couldn’t he adore me, just look at me?”
She was going to be a handful up there, wasn’t she? But at least she kept his mind off of all the thoughts of home.
Chapter 117

Gen was outlining their weekend like a soldier preparing for war. Jon thought it fitting that there were at an airport lounge just outside of the army base at the Wall.

“Okay so Dany is coming in tonight, Sandor’s already here, and Tormund won’t get here until tomorrow. So I thought maybe I could go say hi to Sandor for a bit while you check in with Benjen? And then we can all get Dany together and get dinner? But if you want to come with me that works too,” she said in a flurry of words that Jon could barely keep up with.

All he cared about for the weekend was watching Genevieve sing and dance to the music with stars in her eyes and seeing his family. Gen could decide the rest.

“That sounds good to me. Be sure Sandor knows I’m not just ignoring him,” Jon smiled.

“Oh please, neither of you are drama queens!”

The dropped off their bags at the hotel Dany had graciously forced them to put on the company tab and headed off in search for their friends. From Sandor’s annoyed texts, it sounded like he was just getting out of rehearsal and in need of some cheering up. Meanwhile, Benjen was just about ready to hang his hat up for the day and greet his nephew.

Gen found Sandor in the hotel restaurant as promised, scarfing down some chicken wings. He paused with a wink for a greeting but went right back to it.

“Gods Sandor aren’t you a sight!” she laughed, swinging into the seat across from him.

“Those fucks in my band kept the practice extra long as if we haven’t been driving all day just to get here,” he groaned.

Gen and Sandor had a strict policy of no whining, unless of course things were legitimately wrong. He’d been the one to instate it on the Isle after she’d griped about missing her phone too much.

“Enough whining! It’s supposed to be a fun weekend. Just keep eating your chicken and pep up.”

He put down the chicken wing with a raised eyebrow, “When have you ever seen me peppy? Have you been taking drugs?”

She snuck a sip of his water and smiled that cheeky smile that always came out when she was messing with him, “Wishful thinking I guess. But anyways! It’s so good to see you.”

“Same to you. Then again, if it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t be playing in this cold shit hole.”

“No, if it wasn’t for me you’d be playing in Essos. Far away.”

That made him shut up and smile. After he finished his disgusting act he called eating, they took a walk around Mole’s Town.

They passed many short buildings that looked like they hadn’t been renovated since before her grandparents were born. In a strange way, she liked the disrepair of it. It made her feel a lot calmer than when she walked grand streets in the big cities. Like there was nobody who would look down on her.

“So where’s Jon?” Sandor asked as her riffled through some records at a tiny music shop.
She picked up an old jazz one and thought about buying it to sing with Jon, “He’s with his uncle right now, or should be. We’re planning on getting dinner tonight with him and his aunt. I’ve already told him you’ll come.”

“Oh did you? And by aunt you mean the woman in charge of all my music?” Sandor laughed.

“Don’t worry, it’s a family dinner for all of us. Not a business one.”

Sandor’s scoffed, “I’m not family though.”

“And neither am I. But I still you consider you mine. You’re so stubborn, you know that?”

While Sandor reflected on the charm of the young woman who’d come into his life at just the right time, Benjen and Jon were deep in conversation.

“I swear I didn’t know Jon. Ned just told me the other week and I had half a mind to abandon my post and fly down to Winterfell to give him a piece of my mind,” Benjen said.

There was a truth to his uncle’s voice that made him believe it. The only time Benjen had ever let him down was when he’d had to leave Winterfell after his visits to go back North. Other than that small betrayal he’d felt as a kid, he’d never done anything unkind to Jon. He was beacon in the North that Jon could look to whenever he felt like escaping.

“So you didn’t even have a feeling I wasn’t his? Not even a little?”

Benjen sighed and took a sip of his second coffee, “Well I did think it was out of character for him to come home with a baby so soon after his marriage. But I didn’t think it was my place to pry.”

“Gods this is just a big mess isn’t it?” Jon said.

His uncle thought back to the day he’d first found out about Jon. He’d just gotten up to the Wall to start serving when Ned had called with the news. At the time, he’d been so used to the crazy fate of the Gods taking half his family away in a couple years, he felt they were due some births. Jon had been a blessing in his eyes.

“You, no. Your dad, yes. I swear if I’d known he would’ve had a custody battle on his hands,” Benjen smiled.

“You would’ve made a wonderful dad.” And Jon thought he still would. Who knew, maybe that mysterious girlfriend he’d yet to meet would pan out.

“Wouldn’t have been much fun up here for you all by yourself just the two of us. I’m just glad you grew up with all those kids, no matter how crazy they got.”

Jon filled him in on Dany, who he had only mentioned in passing in their sparse phone calls before the trip. He regretted it, but he’d felt a reluctance to pick up the phone and call his uncle lately. Maybe it was out of fear that Benjen had knew all along, or trying to spare his feelings.

But Benjen had accepted the news with a great big hug for his nephew, “Oh my Gods that’s amazing Jon. I’m so glad to hear it. I never got to meet your father so this is the closest I’ll get to it!”

“Thanks Benjen. She has lots of stories for us all for dinner tonight.”

And in line with all the strange coincidences that’d been happening to Jon lately, he received a text from Dany in the group-chat with Gen soon after.
“Helloooo you two cuties! My plane just landed.”
“Dany! It’s so great to see you!” Gen said as she rushed forward leaving the men behind to pull her into a hug. Sometimes it got a little old being surrounded by men all the time.

Dany took off her sunglasses that she’d been using to hide her identity and said, “Wow, we’ve got quite the posse here to pick me up.”

Jon walked forward and gave her a quick hug before introducing her to the rest of the group.

“Well you know Sandor of course,” he started.

He gave an awkward wave and Dany laughed, “Don’t worry. I’m not going to be asking you when your next album is coming out.”

“I told you so Sandor,” Gen said.

“And this is my uncle Benjen. Benjen, this is my aunt Daenerys, or Dany,” Jon said.

Benjen walked forward with a shy smile and a hand extended that was soon dismissed when Dany held out her arms for a hug. “It’s so great to meet you! Jon adores you,” she said.

Gen grabbed hold of Sandor’s arm as they looked on at the cute interaction. Her heart was soaring watching both sides of his family behave. Sandor whispered to her asking when their reservation was earning him a huff from her.

Benjen smiled, “When Jon told me about you I couldn’t believe it. I’m so glad he’s got you to teach him about his father. You’ll have to share stories with us over dinner tonight.”

At dinner Dany was sure to provide. They went to a small steakhouse that Benjen said he’d never found a nice enough occasion to bring himself to celebrate there yet. But with everyone getting together, it was as good as he’d ever get that far North.

The restaurant had dark wide plank wood floors and the leafy-green walls were covered in photos of old commanders of the Night’s Watch. Jon wondered if Benjen’s face would ever be up there. Then again, he seemed content as First Ranger, having the freedom to explore beyond the Wall while Commander Mormont dealt with all the paperwork. For a time before he’d gone to college he himself had considered a life on the Wall just to get away from home. Who knew, maybe his face would have been up on the wall if he’d kept his boyhood plans.

They crammed into a rounded booth, all five of them, and ordered their food. While they waited for their appetizers to come out Dany filled them with stories.

“So Sandor already knows this because he actually got to meet Rhaegar, but my brother was absolutely obsessed with music. My brother Viserys always told me that if Rhaegar wasn’t busy writing it, he was busy playing it.”

Sandor thought back to the lithe man who’d changed his life forever. If it wasn’t for him he’d probably still be on the streets, drinking his life away.
“He was a nice man. Never tried to screw us over like some of the other record companies wanted to,” Sandor added.

Jon smiled and Gen squeezed his hand. Maybe Rhaegar was looking down at them right then, mystified by the way the group at the table had been brought together. Surely it would have inspired at least one song.

“What sort of music did he play?” Benjen asked. Like his older brother, he didn’t have much time for keeping up with the latest trends. But he did enjoy a good oldie from his youth.

Dany smiled in a sad way that didn’t reach her eyes, remembering the tapes Viserys used to play for them at night to help her fall asleep as a child.

“Folk music mostly. He loved the stories behind them, and the deep tradition and sense of history to the music. But he never wanted to perform to big crowds, so instead of pursuing his own music full time he decided to pursue other people’s.”

“Like Sandor’s,” Jon said with a slight smile.

“Exactly!”

When their food came and Gen and Sandor were stealing bites of each other’s steaks, the conversation switched to the Stark side of the family.

“So Benjen, how’s life up here? I’ve got to say, this is the farthest North I’ve ever been,” Dany said.

“Oh it’s not so bad. I’m used to the cold and all, and I like the quiet up here. It’s a pretty calm life,” he shrugged.

Gen had to wonder how things were with the Free Folk. Most of his job was interacting and keeping the peace with them. From her studies she knew that relationship between the free folk and the rangers had always been tense, and for a long time nonexistent beyond bloody battles fought for territorial gains. For the free folk it was about survival, but the history books didn’t always show that.

“Any trouble lately up north? Tormund has been off the grid for the most part,” Gen asked.

Benjen shifted in his seat, something hidden behind his eyes, “Uh not really. His village is still trading well with Eastwatch by the Sea if that’s what you’re wondering.”

Dany looked at Gen, “I didn’t know you were such an activist Genevieve?”

Jon laughed, “Oh believe me, she is. She may not go out protesting like you do but she does it in her own quiet way.”

“I wouldn’t call it quiet. The girl knows how to get things done. Always bossing me around that’s for sure,” Sandor added.

It was Gen’s turn to blush, “Hey! I just don’t like wasting time when I see a solution! Anyways, enough about me, what’s new in your life Benjen?”

He scratched the back of his head, “Well I met someone actually.”

Jon leaned forward. His uncle still hadn’t filled him in on the news about this mystery woman. “And?”

“Well her name is Inaya and she makes me laugh. She’ll be at the concert tomorrow,” he said
quietly. The shy way he said it reminded Genevieve of Jon when she first met him.

“Where’s she from?” Gen asked. If Jon wasn’t going to ask, she’d have to get the details herself. She knew Ned was back home in Winterfell dying to know what was going on with his little brother. She could get the gossip for him.

“Dorne.”

Dany whistled, “Wow! She’s quite a ways from home!”

“Tell me about it. Don’t know why a southern woman would want to be up in the cold,” Sandor said with a shake of his head.

“I wonder it myself,” Benjen said, “But she says she came up here looking for adventure and says she’s found it.”

Gen raised her glass in celebration, “To adventure!”

The rest followed suit and rolled their eyes at her silly habit of formality.

After dinner that night, once they’d made sure everyone got back to their hotel rooms alright, Genevieve and Jon laid in bed cuddled up in each others arms.

He was holding her while her arm laid across his chest, feeling the steady beating of his heart.

“Was it weird having them meet?” she asked.

“No, not really. At this point it’s more exciting than anxiety inducing. I know neither of them would do anything to upset me.”

She felt a piece of her relax knowing that Jon was starting to see the silver lining in all of this. He’d been opened up to a whole other family member he would have otherwise never known.

“And how crazy is that about him having a Dornish girlfriend! I would have never expected that from him. He seems so reserved,” she said.

He kissed her forehead with a laugh, “And so am I, but I’ve got you! The Dornish part did throw me off. When he told me he met someone I was expecting someone from beyond the Wall, not someone from down South.”

“I can’t wait to meet her! I’ve been dying to talk to someone about my trip to Dorne who’d be able to understand the places I referenced.”

“Hey, maybe Inaya can even tell you about stores to buy more of those beautiful blue silk things you wore that night in Bear Island,” he joked.

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

He laughed and showed her just how much he would.

Chapter End Notes

Hope no one is disappointing by Benjen's girlfriend being an oc! She'll only have a
minor role in this story so I didn't feel like writing in one of the Dornish characters already established in the canon.
“I swear, he takes longer on his hair than I do,” Gen said while she adjusted her top just one more time.

She and Dany were holed up in Dany’s spacious hotel room, Gen seeking refuge from her boredom while Jon took his sweet time in the shower. Dany had been more than happy for the company. She was so used to doing things alone that having Gen around meant a break from the quiet.

“He probably gets that from my side,” Dany said, inspecting her own intricate braids in the mirror, “My bandmates are always teasing me about how long it takes to do my hair before shows.”

“If it’s any consolation, I think they look badass. How do you even do them?” Gen asked.

In each album Dany produced with her band *Khalessi*, it seemed her braids multiplied. They most recently album had them snaked down her back, twisting on each other in a knot Gen could barely understand.

Dany pulled up a photo of her band and showed Gen a woman with an afro and the kindest face Gen had seen in awhile. It was just a face that screamed trust to her.

“So one of my singers, Missandei, helps me do my braids. My arms usually give out when I try,” Dany explained.

Gen examined the rest of the picture. Although she’d recently done a Faceless stalk with Jon of his aunt’s entire collection of public photos, they hadn’t paused for long at the group shots of her band. Gen had never really noticed the people in the background, Dany’s hair and roaring voice always commanded attention.

“I totally feel you! I can only do simple braids. Maybe I should teach Jon how to do them,” she laughed.

Dany scrolled through her photos and showed another picture of her and Missandei, the two of them cheek to cheek with smiles so big that Gen would have never guessed they were in a punk band. Off to the side doing a peace sign was a straight faced man wearing a utilitarian jumpsuit.

Gen couldn’t help but be nosy, “Who’s this?”

“Oh! That’s Grey. He’s actually Missandei’s husband. They’re insufferably cute together, love them both to death,” Dany said with a silly smile and a sigh.

It warmed Gen’s heart knowing how loving a person Dany was. She’d been nothing but friendly and kind to her since she and Jon had been thrust into her life.

“Adorable! Do you get to see them often?”

Dany’s eyes didn’t reflect her smile anymore, “Not as much as I’d like. When we’re touring I get to see them 24/7, but when I’m dealing with the other aspects of the business I don’t have much time to visit them over in Essos.”

“Whereabouts do they live?”

“The Isle of Naath? Not many people have heard of it. It’s over off the west coast of Sothoryos,”
Dany explained.

She herself had never been to Missandei’s homeland, they mostly met in more populated places when Dany was in town.

“I’m afraid I’m one of the ones who’ve never heard of it. I’ll have to tell my boss to add it to a list of places to visit for the next book,” Gen said making a mental note to tell Tyrion.

“You really should! Missandei speaks so highly of the place. Says there’s butterflies everywhere.”

Jon knocked on the door and came in with a spin. “Hello! Getting into trouble without me.”

Gen laughed, “You know, just the usual gossip about you. We’re thinking about making t-shirts for it.”

“Whatever happened to the Team Support Jon shirts you were going to wear?” he asked.

Dany smiled at the jokes between the two of them. Although it reminded her of all she’d lost by not having a family for so many years, it made her happy to think she now had a new one made up of her friends and now Jon.

When they arrived at the show it was crazy packed with people from all over. It was the first concert in years that had happened that far north, and the people of the area weren’t about to miss the live entertainment. And it didn’t hurt that Dany had so graciously kicked some of the company profits to the concert so that the soldiers could see it for free.

After they’d gotten into the venue, which was just outside in a field barely defrosted from the winter snows, Gen started to get nervous. There were people everywhere and she felt like she would get swallowed up by the crowd.

Jon grabbed her hand and grounded her, “You okay Gen? Your eyes are getting wild.”

“Just a little overwhelmed by everything around us. I still need to find Tormund, and you’ve got to get ahold of Benjen.”

He rubbed her shoulders hoping it’d calm her down, “I’ll give him a text now. Do you want us to go try and find Tormund?”

Gen looked around at all the people swarming to get to the front. She thanked the Gods Sandor had some of his bulky friends portioning a section off for her so she could get right up there and sing.

“Um I think it’d be easier if I just went alone. That way I can just weave in and out without worrying about losing you guys. I’ll have my phone on, but just in case it dies, just meet me over by the front near the guys wearing the yellow vests.”

“Got it. See you soon love.”

Gen heard Tormund before she saw him. His red hair and ferocious voice within the crowd was a dead giveaway.

“It’s free folk not wildlings you jackass. This is why our people don’t like you guys. Always spewing hate!”

She hurried her way through the crowd before Tormund got kicked out of the show before it even began.
And there he was, wearing a black long-sleeved shirt looking impossibly tall, and ginger, as he glared at a brown-haired man with long hair and a scraggly beard. Men around them were standing with their arms crossed, looking for trouble.

When Gen thrust herself in front of Tormund, they went silent.

She took a glance at the other man and furrowed her eyebrows, “You alright here Tormund?”

The other man spit on the ground, “What’s it to you bitch? It’s none of your business.”

“You tell her Umber!” one of his goonies said.

That’s when Tormund really got mad. It was one thing to insult him, but to insult his friends was a death sentence. Gen couldn’t careless, so used to the rude comments from men on her travels. Some people just liked to belittle others. But she was so done with letting people like that think it was okay to turn their inner hate on the world.

She turned around the face the man, “It is my business when you’re talking shit about my friend in front of me.”

Tormund put his hand on her shoulder, wanting to move in front of her. But she waved him off.

The man moved forward, getting in front of her, “What’s a northern girl like you doing with wildling scum like him.”

“Any true northerner knows that the free folk are just as northern as us, even more so. So shut the fuck up and get your head out of your ass. It’s not cute.”

She thanked her gruff banter with Sandor for giving her the confidence to talk to angry men.

The man looked back at his friends with a laugh and Tormund’s fists clenched.

“Don’t Tormund. He’s not worth it,” she whispered.

His eyes were fierce and he almost didn’t hear what she said with all the blood rushing to his head in anger. When he wasn't angry he didn't open his mouth and spit out words, he simmered in a quiet rage.

“What? He’s too chickenshit to fight me?”

Tormund stepped forward with clenched fists but Gen spoke, “Not at all. I’m just don’t want to see any blood at this concert, especially since the Hound is a friend of mine who would be more than happy to throw your ass out of here for calling me a bitch.”

“Yeah right. You’re probably just some washed up groupie at most.”

Gen didn’t even give him the satisfaction of letting him see her face, turning around only to say, “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Tormund’s face was stern as she walked him to their section in the front.

“You should have let me punch that prick. Nobody talks to a woman that way,” he said with gritted teeth.

“Assholes like him do, women are used to it. And don’t worry, I’m going to get security on it.”
Tormund shook out his body, “Nice save with saying you know the Hound. He’s scary as hell, and I think the fucker would piss himself if he had to fight him.”

“Well the thing is, I do know him. Sandor I have been good friends for a couple of years now.”

She never got tired of breaking that news for people. It was like payback for having dealt with Sandor’s gruff demeanor in those earlier years.

“Yeah, and I’m the king of the fucking north!”

“No seriously, you’ll see.”

“Okay Gen. But I’m not betting on it.”

They regrouped with Jon and Dany, who were now standing talking to Benjen and a tan dark-haired woman Gen assumed was his girlfriend.

“I found him! Everyone, this is Tormund,” she said, “And Tormund, this is Jon, Benjen who you’ve met, Jon’s aunt Dany, and, I’m afraid I don’t know your name.”

“Inaya,” the woman answered with a coy smile and a Dornish accent.

Tormund nodded at all of them and turned to Jon, “You must be her boyfriend. I had half a mind a couple minutes ago to kill a guy for her.”

Jon looked at Gen with a confused face, as did the rest of them, “What happened Gen.”

She waved it off, “Just this asshole talking shit about the free folk. And when I moved in to speak up he didn’t really care for what I had to say.”

Jon wrapped his arm around her, pulling her closer.

“What’d you say?” Jon asked.

“I told him to take his head out of his ass, thought it was fair considering he called me a bitch.”

Dany shook her head, “Point him out and I’ll have him kicked out.”

“Yeah, who is this guy? I’d like to talk to him,” Jon said. Gen knew “talking” meant something entirely different to them. She didn’t want them to soil their knuckles with their tainted blood.

“Not worth it. I told security, and if they hear another peep out of them they’re kicking them out.”

Benjen pulled out his work phone, “Want me to call it in to the guys we have working this detail?”

“No, it’s all right. I just want to relax and enjoy the show.”

Before the show began Benjen’s girlfriend slunk over to Gen to introduce herself properly.

“Are Genevieve right? Jon’s girlfriend?”

“Yep! That’s my proud title now. It’s great to meet you. Sorry you had to listen to all that drama!” Gen laughed.

Inaya smiled, “No worries. It’s nice to see Northern woman have the same fierceness as the Dornish do.”
“I love Dorne. It’s absolutely gorgeous, I was just there last September in Sunspear.”

Her eyes lit up, glad to hear someone knew the beauty of her homeland, “Really? What were you doing down there?”

“Uh it’s a long story, but basically my boss is writing about cultures of the world and I was down there to collect research,” Gen explained.

“I hope you mentioned the sand snakes! They’re so badass.”

The sand snakes were an elite squad of female fighters who fought for sport, because in Dorne, the people loved nothing more than displays of strength and passion. And the sand snakes were experts at harnessing their feminine wiles, before snapping with grace into a flurry of strength. They were fascinating examples of the seductive and dangerous feelings that people associated with the region.

“Yes! I want to be one of them when I grow up! Think I’ll need to hit the gym more!”

“Oh I know what you mean! They always bring out the inner warrior queen in me,” Inaya laughed.

And when their conversation faded out and the stage lights turned on, Gen found her spot in Jon’s arms.

He talked in her ear, brushing back her hair that hung wild around her, “Weird to think we were just at a concert for him a couple months ago.”

She brought his hand up to her mouth and kissed it, “I know! Seems like so long ago now.”

Sandor and the rest of the band walked on stage and Gen couldn’t help but jump up and down.

“Excited?” Tormund laughed.

“Oh shut up. You’re probably pissing yourself right now with the excitement,” she replied.

Sandor walked up to the mic and nodded at the crowd. He usually didn’t speak much to them, but he always pushed himself to at least thank them for coming. It was something he’d wanted to improve on when he went to the Quiet Isle. He was tired of scaring the audience away. So on the Isle EB had helped him channel this whole other persona for talking on the stage, someone who cared about the ticket sales rather than just the music. And so far, it’d worked. But it was always strange for Genevieve to hear the departure from his usual manner of speaking.

“Hello everyone. This is our first show this far north and we thank you all for coming. Not only is it a special night to support our troops, but to also say hi to some of our friends beyond the wall!”

Tormund cheered so loud beside her that she feared he wouldn’t be able to talk the next day.

“And it’s a special night for me because I’ve got a few friends in the crowd, and my boss,” Sandor laughed.

“Well I hope we can give you a good show tonight. We’re going to start by playing ‘Toy Soldier,’ this one’s for you Gen!”

Tormund whipped his head around to stare at her.

“I told you I wasn’t making it up.”

His barking laugh filled the air as Sandor played the first few cords, “Guess this makes me King of
the fucking North!”
After the concert they were a mash of sweaty bodies, with people pushing them all over to get out of there. Jon, Tormund, and Benjen had formed a protective barrier around the women just in case the Umber punk tried to try and be an asshole one more time as a parting gift.

They found Sandor backstage in one of the rooms the Night’s Watch had given to them to set up. And between Gen, Benjen, and Dany, they had all the clearance they needed to get inside. Claiming they weren’t as young as they used to be, Benjen and Inaya went back to his house for what Gen assumed wouldn’t involve any rest. She knew the looks they were giving each other!

Sandor was covered in sweat and chugging down an entire bottle of water before he threw it aside and nodded at his guests.

“Happy Gen?” he grunted.

She laughed and walked towards him to sit down, “100%. I’m starting to think your concerts are necessary for my survival.”

He shook his head, “You better take notes then Jon.”

Jon and the rest joined them on the couch. Dany smirked at Sandor and he rolled his eyes, “Please for f**ks sake don’t make me do another Essos tour.”

“You’re the one who insisted the last time!” she said.

Gen couldn’t hold back her laughter, “You’re a workaholic Sandor and you know it. Just retire already.”

Tormund grunted, “Hey! Don’t be convincing one of my favorite bands to go into the shadows!”

“I’m not! Just looking out for him, someone’s got to. He’s a self-sabotaging prick sometimes,” she said.

Sandor looked up and down at the ginger who was mostly at fault for Gen forcing the concert up at the Wall, “You’re a big fucker aren’t you?”

Jon almost spit out his drink at the comment. Gen had been wondering how the two would interact.

“Aye, same as you. You’ve probably got some giant’s blood in you too,” Tormund responded with his crazy smile.

“So you’re the reason I had to give a concert in the fucking cold?”

Gen rolled her eyes and whispered to Jon and Dany, “Gods he’s so dramatic sometimes!”

“We’ll make a northerner of you, just you wait,” Tormund laughed.

And he wasn’t wrong. That night once everyone had washed the sweat from the concert off, they met in Dany’s huge hotel room for some fun. Benjen and Inaya rejoined the group coming up with some explanation that they’d taken a good nap and were ready to stay up past their bedtime.

Tormund suggested a game of Bear Paw and Gen shuddered.
“Fuck no. I’m not dealing with a hangover like that ever again,” she said.

Jon laughed, “I probably shouldn’t either. I don’t want to be puking on our flight tomorrow.”

Meanwhile, the rest of them had no clue was Tormund was talking about.

“What’s Bear Paw?” Inaya asked.

“Yeah, I’ve never heard of it,” Dany said.

Tormund cracked his knuckles and pulled out several bottles of the Sour Goat’s Milk brand Vodka from his backpack and put it on the table. “It’s a true free folk drinking game. I showed Gen when she came up to my village.”

Sandor shook his head, “I’m out. I’ve got to drive the bus tomorrow morning.”

Gen was proud of him for sticking strong to his promise to Elder Brother to avoid alcohol at all costs. Since she’d met him, his relationship with it had improved dramatically. He went from craving it every night just to fall asleep to not have even the slightest desire to risk ruining his moods with it. He’d come a long way.

“She’s out. I’ll watch and make sure you don’t trash Dany’s hotel room.”

Benjen, Inaya, and Dany agreed to play with him. Gen had tried her best to warn them, but they all claimed they didn’t have anything the next day to stop them from welcoming an unholy hangover. It was like they were gluttons for pain or something.

While the four of them began the game, Jon, Gen, and Sandor hung out on the couch playing a mean game of cards.

“I swear if you cheat Sandor I’m deleting your number!” Gen warned.

Jon laughed, “Yeah right. You’re always telling me how much you love his calls.”

“Aww,” Sandor joked, “Is that right Genny? You love your big brother Sandor?”

“You know it! Now let’s get playing so I can win already.”

Gen ended up eating her words when Jon came out of nowhere and had just the right hand to win. Because it was him, she’d allow it. Sandor was going to have to fight her for that win had it been him.

They turned their attentions to the sorry souls who were already sounding silly.

“Jon! Get over here and cheer for your poor uncle!” Benjen said.

Dany laughed, “Then I claim Gen. I need your girl power. I’m feeling dizzy already.”

Sandor whispered down at them, “It’s no wonder. Your aunt is fucking tiny Jon.”

For someone so tiny, that didn’t stop her from beating Benjen, who waved his hands from taking another drink several rounds later.

“I can’t do it. Hangovers get worse as you age, I’m not young anymore.”
Tormund slapped his hand on the table with a grin, “So much for northerner’s handling their drinks.”

Eventually even Dany dropped out, curling into Gen’s side and asking her to take out her braids for her, “Please Gen? I’m so sleepy!”

Jon helped Gen carry her to her bed in the other room and left her to help Dany get ready for bed.

“Do you want me to grab your jammies?”

Dany skipped over to her drawer, “Right here!”

She was able to get them without any trouble, some stumblings, but nothing that required Gen to see Jon’s aunt naked. Her life was weird enough without that. When she was all comfy in bed, Gen began unbraiding her hair while Dany talked nonsense to her.

“It’s soooo nice having a nephew,” she sighed with a smile.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah! Now I get to have someone to hang with on holidays so I’m not all sad and alone in the big house on Dragonstone.”

Gen stopped her unbraiding and thought. Dany was just as lonely as Jon had felt. But she truly didn’t have any family besides Jon. Just him. And the thought broke her heart.

She pulled Dany into a half hug without thinking and said, “Don’t worry Dany. You’ll always have us. We’ve got you.”

Outside the bedroom, Jon was trying with Sandor to balance Inaya and Benjen so they could get them into a taxi and back to his home. Tormund was leaning back in his chair looking like he was going to fall asleep any second.

While Jon and Sandor walked them downstairs Benjen wouldn’t stop talking. It made Jon laugh at first to see his usually quiet uncle so talkative, but then he said something that made him pause.

“Jon, Jon Targaryen Stark. I think I know your one of them,” he smiled.

Inaya slurred out an explanation, “The maester at the Wall, Jon.”

Jon was too tired to even process what they were talking about.

When he met Genevieve back at their room, they were so worn out from the day that they collapsed into bed together without even bothering to keep the lights on.

“Who even won?” Gen asked.

Jon laughed, “Honestly, I don’t even know.”
In a miraculous turn of events, Benjen had sobered up enough the next morning to tell Jon more about what he’d said the night before.

“Yeah. I’m not sure if Daenerys has left yet, but Maester Aemon should be working right now if you want to swing by and meet him.”

Jon had totally forgot about it. Despite not drinking a single drop the night before, the night felt like a blur to him.

Gen was trying to pack up her suitcase and dry her hair when Jon turned to her and mouthed, “Text Dany and ask if she’s up.”

“Are you sure he’s even related to us? I just don’t want to get her hopes up,” Jon asked.

“I’m not positive, but it doesn’t hurt to check it out.”

Gen ran down to say goodbye to Sandor while Jon hurried to get ready and make sure Dany didn’t leave for the airport so soon.

When he was ready he went down to her room so they could go together. She opened the door with a hand on her head and a cup full of water. The bags under her eyes were made more prominent by her pale skin.

“I take it you’re not feeling so well today?”

“Not at all,” she sighed, welcoming inside, “If I see Tormund I’m going to puke on him to get back at him for this pain.”

“That’s exactly why I didn’t join in. Gen was warning enough last time she played.”

Dany plopped down on her couch and tried to brush through her tangled hair, “So what’s up Jon? Gen said you wanted to meet up with me before my flight. I’ve got a couple hours if you want to get breakfast, not that I’ve got much of an appetite.”

“Um it’s not that actually. My uncle seems to think some uncle of ours works up here,” Jon said.

Daenerys had tried her best to make herself presentable, but she couldn’t bring herself to put on a nice outfit. Instead she settled for a pair of old leggings and crew-neck sweatshirt she’d gotten from Missandei a few years ago when they were on tour.

Both Targaryens were nervous as they met up with Benjen outside of Aemon’s office. It was deep in the halls of Castle Black and Jon felt like the walls were closing in on him.

“I feel so nervous right now, I don’t even know why,” he said to Dany.

“Me too. But I’m more excited than nervous I think. I just don’t want to get my hopes up.”
Benjen pulled Jon into a hug and said good morning to Dany, “How’s your headache this morning? Inaya had to drag me out of bed so I wouldn’t forget to tell you two about this.”

“I may or may not have thrown up a bunch,” Dany cringed.

“Me too. I’m never playing another free folk drinking game ever again.”

“Does that mean you’re still open to northern ones?” Jon asked.

Benjen shivered, “Ask me again in a month.”

His uncle knocked on the door and a bent over old man answered it.

“How are you? No injuries I hope?” he asked.

His eyes were milky but Jon saw right away the similar coloring the Dany’s own.

Dany and Jon walked forward and gave shy waves and Benjen said, “Just brought two people for you to meet Maester Aemon.”

His hands shook when he saw Daenerys.

“Oh my Gods, is she?” Aemon gasped.

Benjen nodded, “She is.”

“Come in, come in!” he said moving aside for Jon and Dany.

Benjen put his hand on Jon’s back and nodded, “I have to go to work now, but love you Jon. Keep in touch okay?”

Jon pulled his uncle into a hug and breathed in the scent of trees and smoke, a smell that would always be the north for him, “Thank you so much for this uncle. I love you too.”

Inside his office, Dany and Jon bunched together, sitting together for support. She had to fight the urge to grab his hand to calm her nerves.

“I’m Daenerys and this is my nephew Jon,” she explained.

Aemon’s face had a contented grin that looked like it’d freeze on his face, “I always wondered if there was more of us in this world. A Targaryen alone in this world is a terrible thing.”

Jon turned to Dany and a nervous laugh escaped him, “So it’s true then? We’re related?”

Dany grabbed Jon’s hand and gave it a squeeze as Aemon laughed along with him, “It would seem so if Daenerys’ color is anything to go off of. And that name, not many have a name like hers besides our ancestors.”

A tear leaked out Dany’s eye and trailed down her cheek, “Did you know about us?”

“Not at all. I would’ve had you up here to visit if I did. Haven’t had much contact with the family since I came up here to serve the realm. Now whose children are you?”

“I’m Aerys and Rhaella’s daughter. And Jon’s my brother Rhaegar’s son,” she explained.

Neither of them could believe they were looking at another piece of their family. They thought it was
just the two of them, but how wrong they were. They couldn’t believe the chances of finding one of their own so far north.

Aemon nodded, “So that’s makes you my great-niece and you my boy, my great-great nephew.”

“What a strange world we live in,” Jon said thinking about all the strange coincidences that had led them to that room together.

“It is, but how wonderful is it to bring us three together after all these years,” Aemon smiled.

Dany squeezed Jon’s hand again and said, “Yes. I never dreamed I’d meet another Targaryen until I met Jon, and now you.”

“Did you meet recently?”

It was Jon’s turn to fill in the blanks, “About a month ago. I didn’t even know I was a Targaryen until this year. My uncle who raised me never told me.”

Beside him, Daenerys looked at him with kind eyes, “He didn’t want my father Aerys to get custody after Rhaegar died. He wasn’t the best man.”

Aemon nodded solemnly, “A touch of the famed Targaryen madness. Back in my day they used to tell us that when a Targaryen was born the Gods flipped a coin — landing on either madness or greatness.”

A shiver went through Jon and Dany as they both reflected on their struggles to remain calm through adversity. For Jon, thoughts of his breakdown at Gen’s apartment came to mind. As for Dany, the empty ache of her past knocked at her consciousness. But who could blame them with all they had gone through in their lives?

“But don’t be afraid. We’re not our fathers and I’ve never had much faith in silly sayings,” Aemon said.

Jon and Dany relaxed and laughed, Dany saying, “I hope you’re right. I’ve spent so many years of my life praying I didn’t turn out like my father or my brother Viserys.”

“And you won’t. You’ve got the two of us now to keep you balanced,” Aemon smiled.
Chapter 122

“Do you have to go back to your house?” Jon asked.

Gen sat up from his bed and threw her hair into a bun. He’d been playing with it since they’d woken up from their nap. Their mid-afternoon flight from the Wall had left them feel antsy, yet still so tired.

“I mean, not right away. But eventually yes,” she smiled.

“Boo. Maybe I should buy a desk for you so you can work here.”

She looked over at his own desk in the corner of the bedroom, that was bare except for a picture of them cheesing big at the hiking spot in Bear Island. She wondered how she ever got so lucky to have a sweetie like him in her life.

“No need for that Jon. The kitchen counter works fine. But you should get yourself a couch. Poor Ghost needs someone to perch and look out the window.”

He groaned and buried his head in her shoulder, “I knew I was forgetting something! Where do I even buy a couch around here? All the furniture back home is as old as me.”

“Jon you’re kidding right?”

The man in question sat up with a sheepish grin, “Uh would you hate me if I said I wasn’t?”

“Never. Just can’t believe you don’t know you’ve got a Vinter’s a short drive from here.”

Jon’s eyes got a far away look as he tried to figure out what in the hells she was talking about, “Wait is it that place that sells those meatballs?”

“Yeah, and couches too.”

He let out a laugh and kissed her head, “You’ve got to give me a pass. I do most of my shopping online.”

“Not like I’m exactly a champion of interior decorating judging by the state of my room,” she said.

They rolled out of bed and showed Ghost their love before jumping in his car and heading in search of the mythical store that sold everything from lamps to chocolate.

“You’re going to love it Jon. It’s like an adult amusement park,” she said as they pulled into the blue and yellow warehouse building.

“Oh yeah? Are there any rides inside?”

“Well they’ve got an escalator. It’s all very thrilling.”

Jon took her word for it as she equipped herself with a map in one hand and his hand in the other. The store was pretty crowded for a Sunday afternoon, which he was surprised to see.

“I can’t believe I’ve never been here,” he said.

“Me either. It was always my first stop for dorm shopping in my college days.”
He laughed at her choice of words, “You talk about college as if it was years and years ago!”

“I’m an old washed-up graduate now, what can I say.”

“Then I must be practically ancient.”

She winked as she inspected a closet system built into a fake house, “Well you said it. I’ve got myself an older man.”

“You’re so annoying,” he laughed, “I only just turned 26.”

“And I’m just a spring chicken at 23!”

He rolled his eyes and pulled her into a hug, her laughter filling the showroom bedroom they were tucked away in.

“Vinter’s should hire us as store models. I think we could make these little rooms look more convincing.”

They walked over to a kitchen with navy blue cabinets and marbled grey counters. Gen pulled open the the cabinets and groaned over the pretty containers that made her heart sing, “Gods I wouldn’t mind pretending in this kitchen. Let’s just move in here.”

“Oh now you want to move in together?” Jon joked.

“If you can find a place with a kitchen this nice I’m down. I’ll contribute my measly salary to the rent,” she laughed.

Genevieve wasn’t exactly being truthful. Tyrion paid her a lot better than she had expected to earn as a recent college grad. But then again, he was one of the few that believed in actually paying people her age a living wage. But until the rest of her school debt was paid off she wasn’t going to rush to move out of the safety of her parent’s house.

“I can be your sugar daddy.”

“Oh my Gods if you ever say that again I’ll puke,” Gen said with an exaggerated gag.

He pulled her into another hug and laughed.

“Let’s go find you a couch weirdo.”

Through the maze of the store they eventually walked their way to the big room with all the couches and got to work.

“Well I don’t know about your process, but I think the only way to go about this is if we sit on every single one,” Gen said.

Jon looked out at the selection of love seats, sectionals, and weird modular pieces, “Sounds like a plan. Need to make sure there’s enough room to fit the both of us.”

“And Ghost! Can’t forget that sweet baby.”

Eventually their butts found their way over to a l-shaped black couch that they could sink into.

“Well it’s definitely comfortable,” Gen said.
Jon stretched out his legs to make sure they wouldn’t hang over during their movies nights, “Seems wide enough for afternoon naps together too.”

She smiled wide and leaned her head against his shoulder. He loved those moments, especially the way the sunlight landed across her face from the window he still hadn’t gotten curtains for yet.

“What about the color? Don’t forget Ghost is going to shed.”

“Oh shit that’s a good point. Maybe I shouldn’t get black then.”

“I mean it’s up to you. But his white fur will really stand out against it.”

Jon leaned back and grabbed the little tag with the color options, “What do you think of this grey? Is it too boring.”

“No, I don’t think so. You can always pick up some colorful pillows and nice blanket to make it feel more personal.”

He stood up and clapped his hands, pulling her up to her feet. “Well I think it’s settled then. What’s next? Do I just pay for it and it gets delivered?”

“Oh Gods you have no idea do you!”

Jon soon found out what she meant after they unloaded the large boxes from his SUV and into the elevator of his building. A poor old man had been squished in the corner on the ride up and Jon’s cheeks were blushed red.

“I’m so sorry sir. Thought we’d make one trip of it.”

“Oh don’t worry. I remember what is was like moving in to my place. Can’t say I’ve shopped at Vinter’s in years though!”

“I’d actually never been before. It was my first trip today,” Jon said.

The old man gave him a smirk and said, “Well good luck to you putting your stuff together.”

Back in the apartment Ghost sniffed the boxes and bags with curiosity and circled around their legs.

“Hi boy! Your dad’s got you something special so you can be cozy and look out the window,” Gen cooed, giving him a good pat.

“Next thing you know he’ll take up the whole thing and we’ll have to get another,” Jon laughed.

Gen took out a box cutter from his kitchen and cut away at the box, “This is my favorite part. Most people hate the assembly, but I love it. It’s like the adult version of building block sets.”

Looking at the instructions Jon wondered what was wrong in that pretty head of hers, “Gods this looks like sadism to me. You can be the project manager.”

“As long as you help me with the lifting and hand me the tools it’ll be done in no time.”

She was wrong. Two hours later she and Jon were on their hands and knees in search for a missing screw, “Gods I swear I put them all together. Do you think Ghost ate it?”

“How could he have? He’s been over in that corner looking at us the entire time,” Jon said.
She sighed heavy and plopped down on the carpet, “Well it looks like we need to take a break then.”

Jon poured her a glass of water and threw on some music to help energize them. And weirdly enough, right there on the kitchen counter was the missing screw.

“Well don’t fire me as your building assistant, but I just found it. It must have slipped out of my hand when I was opening the bags.”

She stood up and planted a big kiss on his lips, “I think you’ve just earned yourself a promotion!”

The rest of the couch came together quickly and before they knew it, Jon, Gen, and Ghost were cuddled up enjoying the fruits of their labor.

“Wasn’t it sort of satisfying?” she asked.

“It’s not exactly my idea of a fun time, but it beat you going home early.”

Ghost barked from the l-part of the couch over by the window, staring at them with big eyes.

“Oh you like it baby boy?” Gen asked.

“I think he likes you more.”

“What can I say. You two are my boys!”
“Wait. So you just slid into her messages on Faceless and said hello? Didn’t even say who you were?” Jon asked.

His brother Theon was reclined on his couch eating away at a burrito. On the other end of the couch, Robb was showing his love to Ghost and rolling his eyes at Theon’s actions.

“Uh yeah. I thought I’d get a reply faster if she didn’t know who I was right away,” Theon said.

Robb snorted, “Yeah. Because women love receiving messages from random guys on Faceless. Perfect way to gain her trust Theon.”

“What! How was I supposed to know she’d tell me to fuck off? It’s not like I’ve spoken to her since I was a kid!”

Jon shook his head. He was proud of Theon for trying to reach out to his sister, but Gods did he go about it the wrong way.

“Maybe you should try sending her an old-fashioned letter. It’s a lot more credible than messaging her out of the blue,” he suggested.

Theon took a sip of his beer and shrugged, “Who knows. Seems like she’s not very fond of men in her inbox from her reaction though.”

“Did you ever tell her you were her brother?” Robb asked.

“No! She blocked me almost instantly.”

“Well fuck.”

“Fuck is right, Robb,” Theon sighed, “Maybe I will write that letter. Should give her more time to think it over I guess.”

Theon found her address through combing through a phone book at the library, which he had found through the help of Jon and Gen who’d joined him. With Sam in Oldtown, he’d had to rely on their research skills to find it.

He sent off his letter, full of apologies and curiosity to the sister he wasn’t even sure would find him fit to call him brother. The thought of her abandonment terrified him to the bone. Worse than he’d felt when he had to leave Pyke in the first place away from her.

But Jon had stayed true to his end of the bargain when Theon received a short missive weeks later from Yara. In her letter she’d remained unsentimental and curt, not yet convinced that the man writing her was actually Theon.

In the letter she had offered up a location in Pyke, just a small seaside bar, that they could meet at if he was truly serious about proving his identity. And for a couple days Theon thought about hiding the letter away and letting his fear of rejection win.

“What if she hates me? The Ironborn don’t like outsiders much,” Theon sighed.
Jon thought back to Genevieve’s own experience with the Iron Islanders, and her inability to feel comfortable there.

“She’s your blood. She won’t have much choice when she sees that you’re actually who you say you are. I’m sure she’s just as nervous to meet you as you are.”

From what Theon could remember, Ironborn didn’t get nervous. They just steeled themselves with emotionless facades of strength. Although he’d left as a child, he could still remember the coldness of his father and the faraway eyes of his mother. There had been no room for sentimentality in their household, especially after his brothers had died. And he feared Yara would be of the same mind.

Because Jon had promised Theon he’d go down to Pyke along with him to make sure he didn’t turn around as soon as he got there, he found yet another reason to get out of Winterfell.

As he packed, Gen sat on his bed with Ghost flipping through one of her old journals from her trip there. Just reading about the seafood made her feel nauseous. Bear Island would always be the superior island in her mind, no matter how times Theon insisted it wasn’t as bad as she thought.

“Are you sure I can’t convince you to come with me? We could walk the beach together,” Jon smiled.

He knew that there was more of a chance of the dragons returning than his girlfriend going back down to Pyke.

“Afraid not love. But I do have a little something you can bring with you to make friends with the locals.”

She rummaged through her overnight bag that she had taken to bringing with her every time she went over Jon’s and pulled out a white t-shirt she’d gotten from Tyrion.

“I love Pyke?” Jon read.

“Yes! It’s big on me so it’ll fit you perfect. You can strut around the island in it,” she laughed.

Jon pulled it on and flexed his muscles underneath the tightness of the shirt, “Oh I’m sure they’ll eat me right up in this. I’d make the perfect Northern ambassador.”

“Oh totally. Just be careful no one tries to steal you as their salt husband. I’d be devastated.”

“What the hell is a salt husband?”

Gen smiled as she described to him the saucy old Ironborn tradition of taking a mistress, someone for pleasure in addition to your traditional life partner.

“Gods no thanks. I’m too Northern for any nonsense like that,” he scoffed.

“Well either way, don’t let them steal you away. Ghost and I would miss you too much.”

Theon and Jon left early the next morning and hopped on a plane to Pyke. Ned had been more than happy to give them the time off, realizing that at that point it was best to let his son’s explore the other aspects of their identity before it was too late. He’d learned enough mistakes from how he’d handled Jon.

As they got closer to the rocky waters of Theon’s home, his grip tightened on the arm rest. He’d fidgeted the whole flight and not even the free snacks had been enough to help ease his nerves. Jon
knew exactly what he was feeling. He’d felt the same as he’d flown down to meet Dany for the first time.

“Theon, you’ve got to loosen up. I know it’s scary as all hell but you’ll be fine. I’ve got your back,” Jon said.

“I know,” he laughed nervously, “I just wish you could guarantee that Yara would too.”

“I’ll try my best. I’ll even swear it on your Drowned Gods.”

Chapter End Notes

I love Theon :( Anyone know of any good Theon fics where he gets a happy ending, or is working towards one?
“Theon! Get back here!” Jon yelled from across the beach.

His wiry brother was speed walking away from the bar that they’d promised to meet Yara at. As they neared it, Theon had become jumpy and his words sped up. Jon was going to have to wrangle him inside.

Jon ran down the street, careful not to bump into one of the grim-faced islanders that Gen had warned him about. Apparently they were known for their fighting.

“Theon slow down! She’s probably inside waiting for you!”

Feet ahead of him, Theon panted and rested his hands on his knees, “Exactly. I can’t fucking do it.”

“Yes you can. You’ve got to. What’s the worst that could happen?”

Theon looked at Jon like he was an idiot. But Jon knew a thing or two about the brain’s ability to storm up worst case scenarios.

“Um she could spit in my face and tell me I’m not her family. That sounds pretty real to me,” Theon said.

Jon scoffed. Someone had to keep Theon in check. “Oh I bet. Someone’s going to look at you and say that, your own blood.”

“You don’t know my family.”

With an arm around his older brother, Jon pulled him forward down the street. Theon’s steps were reluctant and slow, but only one thing mattered to Jon. He was moving forward.

They paused outside of the seaside bar with big glass windows and took deep breaths.

“Shake out your nerves Theon. You’re going to be just fine. I’ll be right at a table if you need me,” Jon promised.

Theon shrugged off his words and squared his shoulders, before walking inside. He was going to try and make himself the person he thought his sister wanted to see.

“Here goes nothing.”

From the seat Jon grabbed at the far end of the bar, he watched Theon order a drink. Once he had his beer, he took a worried sip and held it up to Jon. So much for pretending he didn’t know him.

Theon walked over and collapsed next to Jon, “Do you see her?”

“No,” Theon sighed, “But then again, I haven’t seen her since I was a kid.”

“Wait so you didn’t see a picture of her or anything?”

“Not like I was trading pictures with my sister Jon. We’re not some southern freaks,” he scoffed.

“Fine. But just sit down somewhere away from me so she doesn’t think you’re not here for her.”
Theon laid his head against the bar and groaned, “Do I have to? Let’s just go back to Winterfell and forget about this.”

Jon stared at him, “Theon. It all worked out fine, actually more than fine, with my aunt and I. You’ve got to give it a chance.”

Before Theon had a chance to pick himself up off the bar and stop feeling sorry for himself, a woman with hair just the same color as his walked in.

“Theon, look alive. I think that’s her,” Jon said.

He spun around and met her eyes. Eyes that were the same dark stormy shade as his own. He stumbled out of the chair and stuck out his hand, the action causing Jon to bury his face in his hands.

With hope of child who’d been forced from his home he asked, “Yara?”

She ignored his hand and sat down, “And you’re the one who claims to be my baby brother Theon?”

“Yes. I can’t believe it’s really you Yara. It’s been over ten years, hasn’t it?” Theon smiled.

Yara turned to Jon, “And who are you? His mainland boyfriend?”

Jon sputtered and wished he’d been sitting away from them like it was supposed to happen, “I’m his adoptive brother. My name’s Jon, it’s nice to meet you.”

She nodded without a smile and said, “Sure.”

Theon stole a glance at his brother and searched for what to do next. It was weird for Jon to see him so unsure of himself. He was usually so confident and bold, always had been when they were children.

Yara called to the barkeep and said, “My regular Roryn?”

“Got it Esgred.”

“Esgred?” Theon asked.

She rolled her eyes and gulped down her beer, “Told him to use an alias for me in case you were some prick. But now I know I could take you if I needed to.”

Theon felt his heart drop. What happened to the sister he remembered? They’d never been a loving, touchy-feely family like the Starks, but she had cared for him. Or at least he thought.

“So how’s your life been?”

Yara stared at him like he was crazy and said, “As well as you’d think. Mom is still locked up in that crazy home and Dad’s still an asshole. Did give me the fishing boat though.”

Knowing his mother was still ruined by her grief made him feel like an arrow had gone through his heart. Jon wanted to just reach over and give his big brother a hug. He could see how his hopeful smile fell and his eyes glazed over with that faraway look.

“Does she remember us?”

Yara shrugged, “Not much. Still thinks you’re a babe in her lap. And that Rodrik and Maron are still alive.”
“Gods I’m sorry Yara. Do you think she’d be okay if I visited her?”

“Fuck no. You’re not the boy she remembers. It’ll only upset her,” Yara said with a firm snap, “Besides, what are you even doing here?”

Theon’s grip on his seat tightened, “I just wanted to reconnect. What do you mean?”

“If it’s money you want, I’ve got none. It’s all tied up in the boat and mom’s care.”

He wondered how he could prove to the woman who was now a stranger to him that all he wanted was to know his family again. There was no love or hope in his heart for his father, but he still had a chance with Yara, with his mother.

“Yara I’m not here for money. I’m here because we share blood. I’ve got the same salt and iron running through it same as you.”

She turned to Jon, “If he’s lying to me I’ll skin the both of you.”

Jon put his hand to his heart and fought past his sheer fear of the woman, “He’s sincere. I’m the one who convinced him to come.”

“Seriously Yara. I just want to connect to my roots.”

“Ironborn do not sow. We have no roots,” she said stiffly.

“You know what I mean Yara. Stop hiding behind all the Ironborn sayings and tell me why you even agreed to meet me in the first place.”

“You got out and I didn’t. I had to see what my life would have been like.”

Theon moved to stand up from his seat. He wasn’t going to sit there and feel bad for escaping their house. He’d done what he had to do to survive. If he’d stayed… well he didn’t know where he’d be.

“You could’ve left, same as me.”

She let out a bitter laugh, “Yeah, and leave our mother with dad? I’d rather died.”

“And I would have if I’d stayed. I’d sooner have drowned than stay in that house with him.”

“True Ironborn can’t drown.”

Theon had enough and his voice began to rise, “Then I guess I’m not a true Ironborn. Is that what you want me to say? That I’m just some green mainland who isn’t hardy enough to be called a Greyjoy?”

She took a deep breath, “You know that’s not what I meant. You just don’t know how hard it was in that house after you left.”

“And I know that. There wasn’t a day I didn’t pray to the Drowned Gods for your safety, or wondered how you were. And that’s why I’m here Yara. So you can tell me what I missed.”

“Fine. Meet me tonight on the docks at sunset. I’ve got to go out on the water now and make a living,” she said.

She rose with a nod to Jon, sparing a last glance as Theon.
“Fine. See you then.”

When she was gone from the bar, Jon and Theon settled up their tab and walked outside away from ears that would probably report directly back to Yara with whatever they had to say.

Jon waited for Theon to speak. And he didn’t for a while as they walked under the cloudy sky, looking for a bench.

But then he turned to Jon with a look a shake of his head and said, “Holy fuck. That went about as well as I expected it to.”

“She agreed to see you again though. That’s got to count for something,” Jon said.

“Fuck I hope so. Otherwise this is just one depressing trip for us.”
“How’d it go this morning?” Gen asked.

Jon sighed. Theon was currently off at the docks alone and vulnerable. He’d offered to come with him but he hadn’t wanted his support. He’d told him he needed to try and talk through things with her alone. She wasn’t fond of outsiders and he didn’t want to seem like he needed Jon as a safety net.

“Not great. She’s a tough cookie, I’ll say that.”

“And how’d Theon handle it?”

“Okay. I think he’s set his expectations so low that he’s fine with whatever happens. But deep down everyone just wants their family, of course.”

“Totally. Keep me updated! I’m thinking of you two. You wearing that shirt?”

Jon looked down at the trusty black shirt he’d chosen for the day. He’d decided to leave the “I Love Pyke” shirt back at his apartment. It wouldn’t have exactly let him blend in with the locals. But with his dark hair, he stood out like a sore thumb compared to their sandy hair and sun soaked skin.

“Afraid not. Maybe we should wrap it up and give it to Theon for his birthday next year,” Jon said.

Gen laughed, “Oh that’s an idea! When was his birthday?”

“Just passed. Surprised you didn’t hear about it from Roland. He probably came home with a raging hangover.”

She thought back to several weeks ago when Roland had demanded silence at the breakfast table, and she was more than happy to give it to him. Usually, he was the one who annoyed her in the mornings. A peaceful breakfast was all she asked for.

“I think I remember that! How do you keep track of everyone’s birthdays?”

“I’ve only got eight people in that house to remember birthdays for,” Jon laughed.

“And here I was thinking it was hard to remember just five. You must be broke with all those gifts!”

Jon thought back to the pain his wallet had felt after Christmas time. If he hadn’t saved money from his paycheck for his special gifts fund, he would have been in big trouble.

“Oh trust me, it’s rough. Even harder when we all have the same ideas and end up buying two of the same gift.”

“Really? When’s that happened?” Gen asked.

“Last year Bran got the same book from three of us! We’ve gotten better about coordinating but my Dad and Robb insist on letting things be a surprise so it’s hard to know for sure if your gift is original.”

“That’s why I like getting handmade stuff for people. A nice hand-knit sweater is always a safe bet.”

Jon thought back to all the gifts he’d ever gotten from Sansa, “That’s why Sansa’s are my favorites!”
“I still think that chauffeur hat I got you is iconic.”

“Oh it is. I need to start wearing that to embarrass Sansa when I pick her up from school. I’d wear it to grab Bran and Rickon but they’d probably think it was cool.”

Gen smiled remembering how goofy the hat looked squished on his mop of hair, “She’d probably feel like a celebrity.”

Before Jon could answer his phone screen lit up with another call, “Oh shit Theon’s calling. I’ll talk to you later, okay love?”

“No worries! Go and make sure he’s alright. Love you!”

Theon didn’t even give Jon a second to ask him how it went before he started speaking at him. Jon was sitting by the water, watching the tide come in after pacing around for quite a bit on the phone with Gen.

“Hey Jon I don’t know when I’ll be in at the hotel tonight. Yara seems to not hate me now so she invited me to eat dinner with her at some place. She said you can come too if you want,” he rushed out.

And all of that, was said in one breath. The family was used to Theon’s bursts of energy whenever he was excited. But sometimes, even being used to it, Jon needed a second to process all that he said.

“Gods Theon slow down a second. Where are you?”

“I’m still by the docks. She went back to her house to do something, I’m not sure what. I forgot to ask.”

Jon looked down the beach at the docks about a ten minute walk away, “Alright stay put. I’ll be there in a little bit so we can talk in person.”

Minutes later he found Theon pacing up and down the pier with what Gen called a “dumb idiot” smile. His hands were shoved in his pockets, and from the looks of it, Jon assumed it was so he wouldn’t wave them around in excitement.

“It go that well?”

Theon laughed, “For my family, yes. Just getting her to have dinner with me is a big win in itself.”

“You have to bribe her?”

He looked down at his feet, not meeting Jon’s eyes. But his smirk said it all.

“You did didn’t you?”

“Okay, I may have promised to buy her dinner tonight. But I figure I owe her for all those years apart living the good life while she was stuck here with my shithead dad.”

Jon wished he had the right words to try and make his brother believe that he didn’t owe Yara anything for choosing the life he did. He was a child, and a child who needed a loving home if he was ever going to get past the abuse from his father. How could anyone ever fault him for choosing the safest path?

“Did she say anything more about when you can see you mom?”
Theon scratched his head and looked out at the sea, “Uh yeah. Says that she’s not stable enough to have me back in her life right now. I thought it’d help for her to know I’m okay, but I guess most days she still asks about my brothers.”

“I’m sorry Theon. That’s not easy.”

“I know,” he shrugged, “But it’s what I’ve got.”

Yara was in much better spirits at dinner once Theon agreed to buy a pitcher of beer for the table. She sat back in the chair and nodded at passersby, apparently very familiar with the locals of her home. Meanwhile, Theon sat up straight in a way Jon had never seen, looking like a kid on his first day of school.

“What do you think of Pyke?” she asked Jon with a big bite of a chicken leg still in her mouth.

“Oh it’s nice. My girlfriend was actually up here for about a month this time last year.”

“Yeah? Doing what? Don’t get many foreigners up here.”

Theon chimed in, “She’s a researcher.”

Yara let out a barking laugh, “What was she researching? The fucking fish?”

“She was researching the culture actually. Went all over Westeros and Essos for her boss doing it,” Jon said.

She nodded in appreciation. Any traveling woman brave enough to cross oceans was someone worth hearing about.

“And her verdict?”

“Let’s just say she prefers her hometown on Bear Island to the Iron Islands,” Jon laughed.

The rest of the dinner went as Jon expected it to. Yara was self-assertive and Theon struggled to rein in his usual personality to try and make him like her. But as they talked, he loosened up and started being the person Jon knew.

“So I’m in the meeting, trying to get through the fucking presentation and I just throw up all over the conference table!” Theon says.

Jon had the fight the urge to bury his head in his hands. He hadn’t been at the company yet when the infamous event happened, but he remembered his father yelling at Theon and Robb for staying out so late drinking the night before to cause the embarrassment to happen.

“Holy shit. Did you get fired?” Yara asked.

“Thank fuck no. My adopted Dad is sort of my boss.”

“Sort of? He owns the place Theon,” Jon laughed.

Yara crossed her arms, “Never thought I’d see a Greyjoy working for the man.”

“Well he’s not the man, he’s my Dad.”

Yara had a small smirk after that, and Jon wondered if she’d been trying to get him to admit that he had no loyalties to his blood father. And if she was, Jon wasn’t sure if she was worth Theon. There
was no room for a relationship with that asshole who’d hurt his whole family.

That night at the hotel Theon was barely drunk, but just enough to gush to Jon about his day like he was a kid again. They laid on their beds of the beach-side motel with water stains on the ceilings and talked like they had as boys.

“I don’t even know if she’ll want to have a relationship with me, but I’m just so glad I got to see her after all these years. She looks so different, yet just as I remember,” Theon sighed.

“I’m happy for you Theon. I hope she reaches out to you in the future, you’re a good egg.”

His laugh filled the room, “Can’t say I’ve ever been described that way, but thanks Jon. And thanks for forcing my ass to do this.”

“Did you guys make plans to meet up in the future?”

“Uh we exchanged numbers, and she unblocked me on Faceless. I don’t see her ever wanting to come up to Winterfell, but I’m willing to come back down here if she wants to meet up. And I want to see my mom,” Theon said.

Jon’s heart constricted. He wished he could do the same. But if Theon had a chance, even the smallest, to have a relationship with his mom… well he needed to go for it.

“Keep asking Yara, Theon. If you’ve got a chance of seeing your mom. Go for it,” Jon sighed.

“I’m scared shitless that if I see her she’ll freak out and think of Rodrik or Maron. I don’t know if I could handle that.”

“I know. But who knows, maybe knowing you’re okay would bring her some peace?”

And that night, as Jon struggled to fall asleep, he wondered if his own mother was at peace knowing he was loved.
Chapter 126

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As the weeks went by and the spring flowers were replaced with the summer sun, Theon's progress with Yara was slow, but progress nonetheless. She had yet to agree to him flying down to see his mother Alannys, but it seemed to him that she was starting to trust him enough to consider it.

Meanwhile, Jon had been getting on just fine with her new family connections of his father's. He and Dany were always texting each other about their weeks, and he had started sending letters to Uncle Aemon to find out about how life was at the Wall. Benjen, who had made it a habit to visit the old man, had noted that a smile lit up on his face every time he mentioned Jon or Dany to anyone willing to listen.

And although Jon didn't expect his relationship with his dad and Catelyn to improve overnight, things had been improved. Catelyn was making an effort to not look like he gave her a dead puppy whenever he stopped by to see his siblings, and his father had been profuse with his apologies. To be honest, Jon was starting to get sick with the amount of times he'd said sorry at this point. He just wanted things to go back to normal, and they were on the way there.

The one thing Jon could count on, the one thing that he knew would still be there for him besides Ghost after a long week, was Gen. The more time he spent with her, the more he felt like he was looking at his future. He didn't know how to put it into words but every smile and sweet laugh from her was what played on repeat when he closed his eyes at night.

And on a sunny afternoon under the protection of the panes of the glass garden of his family home, he felt an ache in his heart whenever she talked.

"Jon? You're so quiet! What's on your mind?" Gen asked, tucking back her hair.

They'd prepared a picnic lunch choosing to avoid the bugs by hiding inside the greenhouse. The blue winter roses were beautiful, thanks to Sansa and Catelyn's dedicated care to the gardens. His dad had told him they were his mother's favorite flowers when she was still alive. And how at her quiet funeral, with just family present, they'd covered her casket with them.

"Just the flowers I guess. And you," he said.

She blushed, "Nothing dirty I hope. I wouldn't want to have to desecrate this place."

The shy smile she loved grew on his face, "Just thinking about how much I love you."

Gen abandoned her sandwich and wrapped her arms around him with a hug that showed how much those words meant. Her touches on his skin, until they cradled his cheeks, mapped out the history of their love. She had fallen just as deeply as he had.

"I love you too Jon. We really got lucky that day at the airport, and every day since."
He kissed the top of her head and eased himself in her arms. It was impossible to be tense around her. They melted into each other.

"We really did. And I pray to the Gods everyday that we'll always know this love."

She pulled back with a smile, "Forever?"

"With you, if you're willing, I would," he said.

His eyes didn't leave her as he said that, nor did his voice shake with uncertainty. He knew that she was the person the Gods had destined for him to love. And with that he knew there could never be another like her.

"I would too, if you're the one asking."

He let out a happy laugh he didn't know he'd been holding in, "I'll keep that in mind for the future. I've still got a lot of wooing to do before I'll be worthy enough to ask you to love me forever."

She reached her hand up to her cheek and looked at him with the fondness of familiarity. "You'd be worthy if you asked me in rags without a cent to your name. I just want you."

"Either way, I want to do all in my power to prove it to you."

"But you're serious though? You see a real future with me?" she asked in a quiet voice he almost didn't recognize.

"What? Like it's so hard to believe? You're all I ever wanted."

Gen laughed, "Oh I'm sure they're got to be somethings about me that are less than ideal."

Jon couldn't tell if she was serious, how could she possibly think there was anything about her that would make him second guess his love? He loved it all, not just the happy times with her where she came home and jumped into his arms and told him stories about her day. He wasn't just in it for the sunny days, but also the days she was too tired to talk or frustrated by work to the point of tears. Just being by her side for it was privilege enough. Besides, the way he saw it, if she could see him through that week after his dad's big reveal, there was nothing she could do to that would make him think less of her.

"I haven't found any, but even if I did I wouldn't care. All I know is if every day with you is like this, I want it forever."

"I know this is sappy, but I really don't know how I got so lucky. I can't believe it's almost been six months with you. And after six months we already know we want forever."

Jon smiled and squeezed her with a hug, "I know. It's crazy to think today is six months since that kiss in the basement. I feel like we should go somewhere more to celebrate, as part of my wooing efforts."

Unfortunately for them, their anniversary fell on a Monday and the only reason Jon was able to celebrate with her so early because his Dad had agreed to give him a long lunch. But Gen’s night was already booked up with seeing Henryk’s big hockey game, a game Jon was also forced to attend to see his little brothers play. But the glass gardens had been kind to them, and he was glad to have brought up a future with her. He wanted forever.

An idea came to Gen’s head. If Jon was really that serious about her, there was someone she wanted
him to meet.

"Would you be interested in taking a little weekend trip to celebrate?"

"Of course, I wouldn't even need to take time off from work. Where would you want to go?"

"Let me get it all coordinated, I think I know a place where we can stay for free and still enjoy ourselves."

The boys won their hockey game that night, with both the Norward and Stark families in the crowd to cheer them on. Gen had held Jon’s hand the entire game, surrounded by her family, and the family that she hoped would one day become hers as well.

And on the ride back next to Jon in the passenger seat, she received confirmation for their trip.

*EB: Long time no talk Gen! But sure, I'd love to meet him (and see for myself how you're doing!)*

Chapter End Notes

I can’t wait until I’ve finished writing this story so I can just post like four chapters a day for all of you! I’m *hoping* I’ll be able to write the ending by mid July. But then again I thought I’d be done with this back in May so my estimate is probably way off lololol.

Thanks for reading :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!