Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

by NicoleCollard

Summary

After the events at the Dragonpit, Jaime and Brienne reflect on the situation. What will happen now that Jaime’s free of Cersei’s clutches and on his way North?
"Fuck loyalty"

Chapter Notes

Hi, everyone! This is my first fic about 'Game of Thrones' in general and about Jaime/Brienne in particular. I've always been fascinated by these two characters and I've read most of your stories here. You're all wonderful for filling the void in between seasons! Now this is my turn to contribute. ^^

I haven't written anything serious in like two years. I'm quite out of practice.

Here you have my attempt to bring Jaime and Brienne together. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fuck loyalty.

That was what she had said. The Maid of Tarth of all people just told him to fuck loyalty. The woman who always put honour and oaths in the first place telling the master of fucking loyalty to do it one more time.

While walking back towards the Red Keep behind Cersei's entourage, Jaime couldn't silence Brienne's words in his mind. She had used such a harsh tone in her words... And Jaime knew she was right to be worried and anxious, especially after seeing that dead thing himself, but he wasn't sure Brienne understood how tricky his situation was at the moment.

He glanced at the back of Cersei's head. His sister's pace was as arrogant as ever, but her shoulders were rigid. As if noticing his eyes on her, she turned her head slightly to look at him out of the corner of her eye. All of a sudden, that sidelong glance sent shivers down Jaime's spine. That wasn't the first glare he received from Cersei that day. She was mad at him, he could tell. To be honest, she was mad at everyone lately, but especially at him. Jaime knew his passion for her sister had been wearing thin for some time now, but he had never considered leaving her side or being disloyal to his family despite Cersei's attitude or his questioning her decisions. Seven hells, there was a baby on its way!

He had told Brienne back at Riverrun that he was a Lannister. He had told her not to ask him to betray his family. And there she was, asking him to fuck loyalty right in front of Cersei. How very subtle of her. What the hell was that bloody wench thinking? Talk to the queen. He exhaled with frustration. He could still feel her fingers grasping his arm and sending a rush of adrenaline through his body. If she only knew how difficult it was to talk to Her Grace these days, even for him, especially for him. It still amazed Jaime how naïve Brienne could be sometimes. With a pang, he remembered the deep hurt in her features after his curt answer. But what else could he do? The ferocity in Cersei's green orbs had scared Jaime to death, there was a promise for reprisal written on them. He needed to protect Brienne, to keep her away from Cersei to be able to deal with her on his own. There had been a time when Jaime had found the whole world in his sister's eyes, so beautiful, so determined. But, suddenly, he couldn't remember the last time he had sought comfort in them, because those well-known eyes made him feel uneasy now.

And maybe that was the reason why he had searched for Brienne's ones right after setting his foot in the Dragonpit.
The Maid's innocent astonishing blue eyes.

He already knew Brienne was going to be there. As Commander of the Queen's army, he had been informed of her arrival at King's Landing in the first place and that may have saved the wench's life.

Lady Brienne of Tarth had requested an audience with him.

After letting that piece of information sink for a little longer than expected by the soldier who had brought the news, he had thanked the man and had asked for Bronn's help immediately. He couldn't speak to Brienne -neither in broad daylight, nor secretly-, not after that Cersei's warning that had left him speechless and aghast. *Never betray me again.* Betray! Jaime hadn't even known that Tyrion was coming to the city. If Cersei had asked him to punish Bronn after that, when the sellsword was nothing less than Jaime's guardian-angel, what would her sister do to Brienne, who had always been considered to have a bad influence on Jaime? Even knowing barely nothing about the wench, the Queen had looked daggers at her at Joffrey's fatal wedding. Jaime was aware that his twin wouldn't waste a chance to get rid of the lady knight, though he knew Cersei was too proud to see poor ugly Brienne as a threat to her relationship with him. Was she, indeed?

Jaime had entrusted Bronn with the task of keeping Brienne and Podrick alive and far away from the Red Keep. He had to fetch some men and scout the odd pair everywhere until the Targaryen girl retinue's arrival. Bronn's smirk had made Jaime scowl at him. He had no time for little games: he was truly scared for the wench. What was she doing in the capital? Damn thoughtless woman! But deep inside, Jaime had to admit that he really wanted to see Brienne again.

He had spotted her instantly at the Dragonpit. It wasn't difficult, given her height and bright blonde hair. Brienne was already looking at him. Jaime had read the thrill on her face when their eyes had met in the distance, though she was trying to conceal it. There were uneasiness, sadness and courage in that look, as well. And perhaps some shyness and something else Jaime couldn't specify. When he had walked past the wench on his way to the royal canopy, he had wanted to say so many things, to warn her, to force her to run her way back to Winterfell, to shout at her for her irresponsibility, to smile at her. But Jaime couldn't do any of those things, so he had only stared at Brienne, trying to make her understand everything. Until Cersei had caught them at that wordless conversation and Jaime had almost thanked the big dragons' frightening appearance for its perfect timing. He knew it was better not to draw too much of Cersei's attention towards Brienne.

The wench looked healthy, though quite tired. The ride from Winterfell was long and arduous, and the weather was changing fast. Jaime guessed his stubborn friend must be there on Sansa's behalf. In a way, he was so proud of her. She had found Sansa Stark, so she had fulfilled their oath to Catelyn. Brienne was the perfect knight, the one in the songs, the honourable knight everyone wanted to be, even Jaime himself. Except that she wasn't a knight. The wench had earned Sansa's trust due to her actions and that made Jaime happy, because he knew Brienne deserved every praise she might get. But it made him sad as well, for he knew that now they would remain on opposing sides of the conflict for good. And he didn't want to face Brienne on the battlefield at all.

For so many reasons.

The Queen's guards reached the Red Keep and entered loudly in their military pace. Jaime strode and caught up with his sister, who didn't bother to look at him.

“Cersei”, he said trying to get her attention, but she didn't answer. There he was, *talking to the queen.* The Mountain turned his hideous face to Jaime as if he intended to intimidate him.

The Queen seized the fabric of her stunning black dress and lifted up the bottom of it to climb the stony stairs. Jaime followed her in silence and waited until they both had reached her command room
to speak again.

“Cersei”, he repeated with increasing impatience.

“What?” she spat while turning round to face him. Her gesture took him by surprise.

“You know what”.

The Queen held his gaze for a few tense seconds, then turned again and headed to her wooden table. Jaime sighed and stood right there, his eyes narrowed, while she sat down on her carved chair.

“Cersei”, he tried in a calmer voice, “could you just consider the possibility-”

“How can you trust that filthy rat you call your brother?”, Cersei cut him off mid-sentence.

“He's your brother, too”.

“You can be so thick sometimes, Jaime. Tyrion killed our whole family, our parents, our children, and you still want me to join forces with him and that petty little usurper? Even the bastard became allies with them. I bet he's willing to fuck her.”

“Tyrion didn't kill our family, Cersei. I told you-”, Jaime corrected her.

“I know what you said! What do you think they will do when I send our armies North? Don't you see it?”, the Queen leaned forward.

“I trust Tyrion on this. I think we need to stick together to defeat the common enemy! This war is bigger than anything, and it's not about houses anymore.”

Cersei looked at her twin brother with a mixture of disbelief and arrogance, as if something had just dawned on her. Then she shook her head almost imperceptibly and leaned back against the chair, her fingers intertwined in her lap. When she spoke again, she did it in an indecipherable tone.

“You shouldn't grow too fond of your pets.”

Jaime blinked twice, then tilted his head frowning. “Sorry?”

His sister's dangerous eyes fell on him. “Pets die eventually. Make sure you aren't too close when they do. They could drag you down with them.”

Jaime's breath faltered. Was she implying..? “Cersei…”, he warned her.

“Did you think I wouldn't notice the sword that ugly beast was carrying? She was very careful not to show it, but she didn't do a very good job, did she?”, the Queen asked. Jaime's jaw was clenched. His sister was talking about Brienne right out of the blue. “Father gave you that sword. I thought you had lost it, but it turns out you gave it to your little friend.”

Cersei put a mocking stress on the word little.

“She saved my life”, he explained in a very slow voice. He didn't want to make any mistakes. “Do I have to remind you it was her who brought me back to you? I just thanked her for her service.”

“Be careful. I wouldn't want to see that sword driven into your heart someday, sweet brother”, Cersei said with a meaningful look.

“You never know”, Jaime shot back matching her tone, “but I didn't come here to talk about her.”
“But she did come here to talk to you, didn't she?”, Cersei went on. She wasn't likely to drop the subject yet. “To tell you to fuck loyalty.”

“I don't think Lady Brienne meant-”, he started to contradict his sister, but he never finished his sentence.

“Aw, she's Lady Brienne now. Look at you. How cute.”

“Cersei-”

“Get out of here”, her voice was soft and menacing.

Jaime stood rooted to the spot for a while, evaluating the situation, his eyes still fixed on Cersei's, their expressions mirroring each other's. After some seconds of heavy silence, Jaime lifted his chin slowly, then bowed still looking at his sister right in the eye.

“Your Grace”, he said and turned round to leave.

When he got out, his heart beating hard against his ribs, he met Tyrion outside. After a little exchange, his brother entered the room to talk to Cersei himself. Jaime was able to keep his composure until he saw Tyrion disappear behind the door, then he leaned against a pillar and tried to even his rushed breath. Too many emotions for just one day. Cersei's eyes flashed in his distressed mind, but they gradually melted into Brienne's ones. Stupid wench! Why couldn't she keep her big mouth shut? Unconsciously, Jaime lifted his right hand to touch the place where Brienne's fingers had grabbed his elbow, but then he remembered with a pang that he no longer had a right hand, so he lowered his arm again. The man shut his eyes fiercely and sighed, feeling lost, tired and empty.

Jaime couldn't tell how much time had passed when a sudden door creaking brought him back down to earth. Tyrion walked past him without saying anything. His hollow eyes spoke loudly enough for Jaime to understand the suffering his little brother had experienced in Cersei's presence. The older Lannister had thought he might never see Tyrion alive again, but it turned out that he had been able to persuade their sister to side with the Targaryen girl. The little fool had always been more intelligent than Jaime.

As they headed back to the Dragonpit, where all their enemies were still waiting for them, Jaime told himself to be more careful this time. He didn't even dare to look at Brienne when they reached the place. He hoped the meeting could finish as soon as possible. He just wanted to see the wench finally leaving King's Landing, maybe a little disappointed, but safe and sound. If they were really going to be on the same side for the battles to come, there would be time to talk and explain and fight and bicker and joke.

That was what he wanted to believe. But he knew that being able to joke with the wench or with any other human being any time soon would be a fantasy, given the situation.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. As you may have noticed, English isn't my first language, so don't be too harsh on me, but feel free to criticise my work as much as you need.

I tried to keep everyone in character and follow the events in 'The Dragon and the Wolf'. We never got the chance to know what Cersei and Jaime said in that conversation.
before she threw him out.

Let me know what you think.

Winter is coming!
Brienne had never been very talkative. That trait had made Podrick feel odd in her company the first time they had met, because he was too used to Tyrion's never-ending verbosity. It felt strange to ride together in plain silence for hours, with the only sound of forests and rivers reaching their ears. But Pod was a very good lad and wanted desperately to please his lady, so he had learned not to speak too much when Brienne wasn't in the mood for it.

But this was totally different. Pod had never seen her so quiet, so listless. Lady Brienne had barely spoken a word in nearly four days and the squire was starting to worry. After the big meeting and his time out with Bronn, Pod had gone back to his lady and they both had headed to Winterfell. He didn't need Brienne's words to know that something hadn't gone as well as expected at the Dragonpit, and that was the reason why he had respected her silence for so long. But this was too much, even for Lady Brienne.

When they stopped to make camp that evening, both felt incredibly tired. They had been riding at constant speed -without pushing their horses' gait, though- and sleeping on the ground for four days now, so their muscles ached. Pod didn't know Westeros map by heart, but he estimated that they should be near Harrenhal. On the outward journey -and on the very first trip he had taken with his lady knight as well-, Podrick had noticed that Brienne lost heart every time they approached Harrenhal's surroundings. For a couple of hours, she always wore a longing look in her blue eyes. The squire didn't know why, but he felt there wasn't enough familiarity between the two of them to ask the lady such a question. This time was no different, though it was harder to tell, for it was difficult for Brienne's expression to get any gloomier.

Podrick had just started a little fire when they heard a muffled sound of steps. Lady Brienne's back stiffened as her eyes wandered over the trees and the greyish snow searching for any sign of life. She withdrew Oathkeeper from its scabbard as slowly as she could to avoid making any noise. The Valyrian blade shone red, lit up by the growing flames of their bonfire. Pod reached for his sword as well, but before he could grab it, they heard a swearword. Seconds later, the huge figure of Sandor Clegane appeared from behind a tree.
“Brienne of fucking Tarth. Again”, he complained.

“What are you doing here, Ser?”, she asked in a low tone. The lack of use had left a slight roughness in her voice.

Pod knew they had kind of made peace with each other back at King's Landing, but he still remembered the hard fight he had witnessed between those two some time ago near the Eyrie. His jaw was clenched and his brow furrowed.

“I'm on my way to Winterfell, just like you”, the Hound explained.

“I thought you would sail along with King Jon and Queen Daenerys to Dragonstone. Nobody informed me”, Brienne stood suspicious before him, her hand clenched around Oathkeeper's hilt.

“Because nobody cares about you or me, woman. Pawns never count. Get it into your fucking head”, he said putting his sword back in its sheath. Then, the man sat down near the fire without an invitation.

Lady Brienne stared at him with narrowed eyes, but after a few seconds, she shook her head and sheathed Oathkeeper.

“Lad”, the Hound called Podrick. “Go fetch my horse. I left it tied up near the road.”

Pod looked at Brienne, who nodded at him with her lips frowned. It was clear she didn't feel truly comfortable around Sandor Clegane, but she no longer considered him an enemy. Reluctantly, Podrick did as he was told: he didn't want to leave his lady alone with the Hound, despite she was perfectly capable of defending herself against anyone, as she had already proven in the past. When he came back with the horse, Clegane and lady Brienne were exactly in the same place Pod had left them. The lady was polishing Oathkeeper's blade with loving care, as she always did, while the man was staring at the fire with respect and wariness, his eyes wandering over Brienne from time to time.

The squire tied up the horse near his and Brienne's ones, took some food from their saddlebags for the three of them and approached their camp. The lady put aside the sword carefully and the three strange companions started to eat in silence.

“You're better at fighting than talking”, the Hound commented eventually.

Brienne looked at him and shrugged in low spirits. “I don't have much to say.”

Then Podrick addressed Clegane. He could use a little chatter to lighten the mood. “Why aren't you traveling with the soldiers either, Ser?”

“Have you seen them, boy? Cockless cunts and crazy riders are tireless. They can march or ride for days without even sleeping. I'm too old for that shit. I travel North at my own pace.”

The squire nodded in understanding.

“What about you two?”, Clegane asked in return. “You want the lady only for yourself, rascal?” When Podrick blushed and Brienne frowned without setting her eyes on him, the man let out a guffaw and continued. “You better take advantage now. Your lady Brienne seems to be quite popular among the wildlings.”

Brienne stopped eating and looked at the Hound. “That's not.”

“Don't be shy. I just met your friend Tormund. I'm sure he'd seen the way you fight.”
“We met him at Castle Black”. Podrick hurried to say in order to save his lady some more taunting, though he also noticed some respect in the Hound’s words. “I think King Jon Snow did the right thing when he allowed the Free folk to cross the Wall.”

“Pod”, Brienne called while stirring the fire. “Stop talking.”

“Sorry, m’lady.”

They remained silent for a while. However, after a few minutes, Sandor Clegane was back at it, his voice a little less mocking. “Does he know?”

When the woman shot a confused look at him from across the fire, he clarified, “That wildling moron. Does he know he doesn't even have a chance?”

“Really. I don't understand why we're talking about-”, Brienne stood up, her cheeks pink, but the Hound cut her off.

“You made a fool of yourself back at the Dragonpit, you know?”, Clegane's words were hard, but his tone remained soft, as if he felt something close to pity for her.

The air had already been freezing cold before that statement, but now it turned icy. Brienne swallowed hard and averted her eyes. Podrick didn't know what to think, but it saddened him to witness his lady's distress, so he dared to ask. “M'lady. W-what happened?”

Brienne didn't answer his question, nor did the Hound, who adressed the lady again ignoring Pod. “You don't know that bitch. Cersei Lannister would have your head in a pike in the blink of an eye. Don't try to take what's hers, Brienne of fucking Tarth, if you want to live another day. Not that he's going to leave her for you, either.”

“I don't-”, she started to complain, but the Hound didn't let her finish.

“Just remember my words, stupid woman. We ugly people are not meant for the angels”, and there was so much bitterness in his words that Brienne wondered for a second what sad story lay behind them. She remained on her feet for a few more seconds and then sat back near the fire deep in thought, her eyes on her feet.

Ser Jaime, Podrick told himself. It's Ser Jaime all over again. He hadn't wanted to believe Bronn when they had reunited at Riverrun a year ago. The sellsword’s words had been so rude that the poor lad hadn’t been able to assimilate them. In his mind, they didn't fit his lady knight, so upright, so pure for sex. Only average people like him surrendered to carnal desires. For him, lady Brienne was all oaths and honour. How could she be attracted to anyone? Maybe Pod idealized her, or maybe it was just that he had never seen her as a woman -in the sexual sense of it-, but now he felt like an idiot. He had heard Brienne call for Jaime Lannister countless times at night in her dreams during their travels together, but he had always thought she was obsessed with the oath she had sworn to him. Now he could see that Lady Brienne was as human as he was, and she must be suffering a great deal if she had really developed any feelings for the Queen's brother, no matter how weak or strong those feelings were. Pod felt sorry for her, but his admiration for his lady didn't wear thin, though: he realised he respected her even more for her righteousness, her integrity, now that he knew she was a real human being and not some kind of goddess come to earth.

When Sandor Clegane lay on his back, his fur cloak thrown over him, and started snoring, Brienne looked at Pod, who was still awake. The squire was dying for a little sleep, but he didn't want to leave his lady alone with her thoughts. He knew he couldn't do anything to help lady Brienne feel better, but perhaps his sole silent company might calm her a little.
“Go to sleep, Pod”, she told him in a soft voice. “I'll take the first watch.”

“M'lady-”

“It's okay”. She knew him pretty well, so she had worked out that Pod was worried for her.

“Thank you, m'lady”, the boy started to lie down. Suddenly, he lifted his head to look at her, his eyes already sleepy, and said, “Y-you're not a fool, m'lady. Whatever you did, you're not a fool.”

A little smile reached Brienne's lips, but it faded almost instantly. She nodded at Pod, a rush of affection for the compassionate lad filling her heart. The boy turned his back on her and rested his head on his forearm. He fell asleep immediately leaving Brienne alone with her demons.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, guys, let me know what you think. I promise Jaime is on his way and he will catch up with them very soon, but I had the feeling that the Hound had to travel with Brienne and Podrick as well.

Thanks for reading, for leaving your kudos and your comments!
When Brienne, Pod and the Hound finally reach a inn to spend the night, they heard some bad news.

Hi, everyone. Third chapter! I hope you'll enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Warning: there is some cursing. Don't blame me, but the Hound.

Brienne tried hard not to think too much, but it was complicated. Since she didn't feel like talking, there wasn't much else to do but thinking all the time: while riding North, while taking her watches at night, while trying to fall asleep on the harsh ground. She only found some rest when they were setting up camp, sparring or planning the next day ride, because those tasks kept her mind busy.

The rest of the time, her tireless brain kept going back to the Dragonpit, to the exact moment Jaime Lannister had turned his back on her.

Her heart got shattered.

She had trusted him with her life and her soul as a knight. And it had been a long time since she had acknowledged the feelings she had developed for him as a woman, as well. Brienne had never imagined that she would ever feel that way again after Renly. At first, she had denied the signs. He's rude and an arse, and I only admire him because he saved my life. Twice, she kept telling herself. During her first time in King's Landing, she hadn't had too many opportunities to be with Jaime and, besides, she had been focused on planning her departure with Lady Sansa. But, when Queen Cersei herself had accused her of loving Jaime, the foundations of her whole world had been shaken. Then King Joffrey had been killed, Sansa had run away and Brienne had left to search for the girl to fulfil her oath to Catelyn, with the finest of swords at her hip. She couldn't believe how hard it had been to part from Jaime, so hard she hadn't been able to say goodbye, because the lump in her throat had threatened to turn into tears if she dared to articulate any words.

Brienne had had a very long time to think about the man during her trips with Podrick and, at some point, she had realised that she really cared for Jaime Lannister. She was sure she wouldn't see him ever again, but destiny had crossed their paths again at Riverrun. The situation had been complex because they were enemies at the moment, but curiously Jaime had been the only person she could trust to allow her to speak to the Black Fish in Sansa's name. Despite what everyone in Westeros seemed to think, Jaime Lannister had honour, and he hadn't disappointed her then. All along their conversation, Brienne's heart had hammered against her ribs painfully. However, she had tried not to give herself away. She was Brienne of Tarth, honour above everything else, and lady Sansa had entrusted her with a delicate mission, so she had been determined to carry it out. But, once again,
their farewell had left her on the verge of tears. Brienne had spent so many years and efforts building up her high defences that her unexpected weakness around Jaime really irritated her: she saw it as a failure.

Finally, after Cersei's coronation and so many battles, they had met at the Dragonpit, in the most uncomfortable situation Brienne had experienced in her whole life. She was a woman of action, so those political meetings where everyone shot daggers at each other meant uneasiness to Brienne. She knew she couldn't fight that kind of battles and come through them unscathed. In fact, she hadn't at the Dragonpit. How could she not look at Jaime to ensure he still was the same man she trusted so deeply? How could she not try to drag him to the right side?

Then Cersei had stood in her way.

During her first stay at King's Landing, Brienne had only had a glimpse of the Queen's fierceness. They hadn't coincided in their everyday routines back there, only at some banquets or events, like Joffrey's wedding. Brienne hadn't been interested in the court and Cersei had always been plotting behind closed doors. But they had met at the Dragonpit and Brienne had witnessed how frightening the woman was. The Queen was so gorgeous that it was almost painful to look at her. Her high cheekbones, her sensual lips, her womanly figure. Everything in Cersei was flawless; even her short hair lent her an air of dignity and elegance that Brienne would never dream to display. Power had given the Queen the last spark she needed to become the most beautiful woman Brienne had ever seen.

And, at that very moment, the lady knight had realised that Jaime Lannister would never leave his sister to go with her, and that upset her both as a warrior and a woman.

She had hit herself mentally for having allowed her mind to cherish even the slightest and unconscious of hopes. When Jaime had turned his back on her to follow his sister one more time, Brienne's world had fallen to pieces.

Tyrion's return to the Dragonpit, followed by Cersei's promise to send her armies North to help them against the White Walkers, had cheered up Brienne a little, because that meant she would be able to see Jaime again, maybe one last time, before the wights came to take them all. The only thing Brienne could look forward to now was fighting and dying side by side with Jaime Lannister, cause if against all odds they happened to win that war, she'd rather not be present in the next one, the full-frontal crash against Cersei -and Jaime- to put Queen Daenerys on the Iron Throne.

It had been ten days since their depart from King's Landing. As the days went by, the weather grew colder. Besides, they were riding North, so now every town they reached appeared totally covered by a layer of icy snow. Brienne knew Podrick was worried for her, and she tried hard not to look too sad. She was responsible for him, therefore she needed to keep a cool head to be able to protect him. Against all odds, she worried a little less now that the Hound had joined their group. The man was surly and foul-mouthed, but his presence meant she wasn't the only skilled warrior who could take care of Pod.

That evening, when the winds had turned unbearably freezing cold and it was difficult to make out the grounds due to the growing darkness, the three companions decided to look for an inn at Palisade Village, also known as Steamstream -named after the river that flowed through the place-. It was located in the foothills of the Mountains of the Moon. It belonged to the Vale, so, in principle, the place was friendly to the Starks. The village was made up of little houses with smoking chimneys. Everything looked calm. They spurred on their mounts and they finally reached the small inn. There weren't many horses in the stable, so they would likely find vacant rooms for the night. Podrick helped Brienne take off her blue armour, except for Oathkeeper, and the three travelers entered the
While Pod arranged their one-night stay at the inn with the innkeeper, Brienne and Sandor Clegane looked for a table. With their eyes wandering suspiciously around, they sat down near the far end of the common room, cause they didn't want to attract too much attention. There were three men drinking and laughing at a table behind Brienne's back.

When the Hound tried to untie his cloak, he realised his fingers were too clumsy because of the cold, which made him swear aloud.

"Fucking cold."

Brienne didn't respond to that but she sighed in agreement. A few minutes later, Podrick joined them, still carrying Brienne's armour and their saddlebags.

"I paid for two rooms, m'lady. I think they still have one more vacant, but the innkeeper told me the roof fell in on that part of the building two days ago due to a snow storm. I explained him we won't be needing three, so I—"

"Yes, thanks, Pod. We got it."

The lad nodded and disappeared upstairs to prepare the rooms for the night. When Podrick went back downstairs, he wasn't wearing his cloak anymore. He nodded at his lady and took a seat next to Sandor Clegane. Then, a girl approached the table with three plates of stew in her hands and she placed them in front of Brienne, the Hound and Pod. She shot a cheeky glance at the boy and he blushed before grinning at her. The girl returned the smile and then turned around to leave, holding a promise in her hazel eyes. Brienne smiled for the first time in days at the cute exchange. She was sure the lad wouldn't be sleeping neither in her room nor in the Hound's that night, and she couldn't blame him. Let the young ones enjoy while they could.

When they finished their meals, Sandor Clegane ordered some beers for the three of them, but Brienne declined hers and rested her head on her fist to relax a little before going upstairs to her room. The light chatter the Hound and Podrick kept while drinking didn't bother her, quite the contrary, it soothe her.

Suddenly, she caught some words from another conversation. The three men behind her back where talking about dragons. They had spent their time in the inn laughing aloud but now they had lowered their voices a little, maybe to not be overheard.

"... two dragons. That's what people say", the younger was telling the others.

"How can you believe that?", another one asked. "Dragons are dead."

"These ones are very alive. People saw them at King's Landing, I told you."

"Did they see the... usurper as well? They say she's the most beautiful woman in the world."

"I don't know about her, but if she has dragons and dothraki, the realm is fucked. Those bloody foreigners came here to kill us all."

"Aye. Why do you think the Queen allowed them to meet her at King's Landing?"

Brienne was so concentrated on their words that she didn't realise the Hound and Podrick had shut their mouths and were listening as well.
“There is some problem in the North”, the third one explained. He hadn't taken part in the conversation until now. “The Northerners need the Queen's help or so they say.”

“I heard she's sending her army to support them, aye. That must be a hell of a problem, then”, the younger man offered.

“Her army? But she's not!”, the third man laughed and Brienne frowned. “My son serves at Darry castle. His Lord is one of the Lannister's bannermen, and he told me three days ago that his Lord isn't mobilising his men away from King's Landing.”

“Are you sure?”

“Aye, that is a hell of a Queen. She fooled them all.”

And the three men toasted, very careful not to speak the Queen's name aloud. Then they kept on talking about other things, but Brienne couldn't hear anything else. Her throbbing temples were blocking all the sounds. Sandor Clegane cursed in the distance, but she didn't pay any attention. All of a sudden, she felt Pod's hand reaching for her arm from across the table and she lifted her eyes to look at him in awe.

“M'lady”, he spoke in a very low voice. “M'lady, we should send a raven to King Jon or lady Sansa. We need to warn them!”

“A raven?”, the Hound mocked him bitterly. “And where are you going to find it, lad? I don't think your little friend there have one hidden inside her cunt, do you?”

Podrick gaped and blushed.

“We still don't know if that's true. Besides, I think your King Jon will be travelling on a ship by now, so the raven isn't likely to find him”, the man tried to soften his first remark. “We will send a message to lady Sansa as soon as we reach a fucking castle where the lord is sworn to the Starks.”

The lad nodded with a worried expression on his features and looked at Brienne, who also nodded her agreement to Sandor's suggestion. Suddenly, the air inside the common room wasn't enough for the Maid's lungs and she started to feel quite lightheaded. She stood up staggering a little, so Podrick got to his feet immediately and offered her his hand.

“M'lady, are you alright?”

“Yes, P-Pod. I j-just need some cool air.”

“But it's too cold outside, m'lady! Please, don't go out, it's dangerous”, he begged.

“I'll be f-fine. Stay here, enjoy your drink”, she reassured the boy while sending a pleading look at the Hound.

“C'mon, boy. Leave your lady alone”, said the man forcing Pod to sit back down beside him. “I think you have some damsel waiting for you, and you're not tipsy enough for her.”

Brienne left the men without looking back, but she knew the expression in Podrick's eyes as they followed her figure to the door. She opened it and went outside; a slap of cold wind slapped her face without mercy. Her breathing was rushed and she could feel an unpleasant prickle behind her eyes. Brienne needed to get away from the inn, she needed to be alone. She couldn't cry in front of Pod or the Hound.
So that was it. There it ended her bond with Jaime Lannister. He wasn't travelling North anymore, because his sister the Queen had lied to everyone. Brienne had no doubt it was true what they heard at the inn. Cersei was very capable of that, she felt it in her bones. The Queen had broken her oath and so had Jaime.

The Maid walked through the village without really thinking where she was going. The night was dark, but she could still distinguish the world around her. She left the last houses behind and went into the forest. When she was near the Steamstream, Brienne leaned against a tree and wept. Her sobs broke the calmness of the place. How had she been so wrong? How could she have trusted Jaime Lannister knowing who he was? The Kingslayer, the oathbreaker. With bitter tears flowing down her cheeks, she withdrew Oathkeeper and looked at the sword without really seeing it through her tears. She fell on her knees, still gripping Oathkeeper's pommel, and all of a sudden she felt a revolting sensation in her stomach. Using the sword as support, she bent down and vomited on the snow.

Brienne remained in that position for so long that her knees got soaked. She was still trying to catch her breath. Slowly, she got up and went to the river bank to rinse her mouth. The stream hadn't freezed, but the water was so cold that it hurt her tongue, teeth and throat when she gargled. After spitting the icy liquid, the Maid of Tarth sat against a tree in front of the river, silent tears still running down her freckled cheeks. She placed Oathkeeper on her lap and caressed its blade with respect. That sword will always be a reminder of better times, times when she wielded it and felt proud of the man who had given it to her, times when she could feel that man by her side any time she polished it. With a pang in her heart, Brienne hid her face in her hand.

The sound of her sobs and the thick layer of snow muffled the steps of an approaching horse. The rider stopped on the opposite bank of the river, looking at the weeping figure from across the stream. Suddenly, Brienne heard a weak neigh, so she lifted her head with surprise and mistrust on her face, and she automatically wiped her tears and grabbed Oathkeeper's hilt. But when she set eyes on the mounted figure, her breath caught in her throat. That meander of the river was neither wide nor deep, so the rider spurred his horse and crossed it without further problem. Brienne stood up slowly, as if she couldn't believe her eyes. By the time the horse reached her side, she was already standing on her feet, her back straight, her mouth slightly open, her breath quickening, her remaining tears drying out against her skin.

When the rider dismounted, his long black cloak swept the snow around his feet. He removed the furs he covered his mouth and nose with and Brienne gasped. There was no doubt anymore. Standing in front of her, his green eyes full of hurt but a little hopeful at the same time, was Jaime Lannister himself.

They stared at each other for what seemed like ages, so much tension in the air, so many questions standing between them, but they just couldn't speak or move. Brienne's lump was so big in her throat that even her breathing came out trembling throught her mouth. Even now, under those circumstances, she was forcing her mind to stay cool in order to avoid giving herself away.

“Hi, Brienne”, Jaime tried eventually with an insecure and soft voice.

She swallowed and supressed the urge to throw her arms around his neck. Brienne knew she couldn't do that, she wasn't allowed at all, so she just nodded to greet him. After a second of hesitation, Jaime lifted the right corner of his mouth in a sad but honest smile, which she returned.

Suddenly, a deliberate cough from behind startled them and broke the magnetism of the moment.
Chapter End Notes

There you have Jaime! ^^

I know show-Brienne doesn't have freckles, but I like that charming trait of book-Brienne, so I added it to the story.

I wrote in the second chapter that Pod didn't know Westeros map by heart. Well, I'm starting to do. Palisade Village is a real Westerosi town and the Steamstream exists in George R. R. Martin world as well. I also did some research to learn the speed of a horse's gait and trot, I calculated the days the characters would be on their way thanks to a wonderful study someone uploaded to the internet with Westeros distances and the help of a great interactive map someone created online.

Let me know what you think. Thanks so much for reading, commenting and leaving kudos. ^^
Well, here we go again. Fourth chapter! Enjoy.

WARNING: Cursing ahead...

When Bronn felt the pair's eyes on him, he smiled jokingly.

"Lady Brienne. What a fookin' coincidence!", the sellsword exclaimed while crossing the river on his horse.

Jaime tilted his head and looked at his companion with his eyes full of warning, but Bronn seemed to be enjoying the situation. He stopped his horse near Jaime's and jumped down, then he took a step forward and grabbed Brienne's left hand to bring it to his mouth.

"M'lady", Bronn said and brushed his lips against her glove.

The Maid frowned and blinked awkwardly. "Ser Bronn". There were still traces of choked tears in her voice. She broke free from Bronn's grip and looked right at Jaime. "Why did you come?"

"I made a promise", he answered solemnly. His eyes were hollow and he had bags under them, as if he hadn't slept for days. "But I need to warn Daenerys Targaryen or Jon Snow as soon as possible: we are the only Lannister reinforcements the North is going to get."

"I know", Brienne nodded.

"Do you?", asked Jaime narrowing his eyes.

Bronn lifted his eyebrows in surprise. "Your lady is a bright spark, isn't she?"

The Maid of Tarth blushed. "I'm not his lady...", she protested, which made Jaime grin fondly. "We just heard some men talking about Cersei's--", when the name escaped her lips, Brienne bit her tongue and didn't dare to look at Jaime. "--the Queen's decision. I refused to believe it, but I see it's true."

Jaime nodded with such a deep sorrow that Brienne's heart sunk.

"Then why did you come?", the wench asked again.

"I told you, I made a promise", he repeated with a shrug. Then Jaime stared right into her eyes. "Do you trust me?"

Brienne held his gaze for at least five seconds, studying his green orbs full of pain, before replying. "I trust you."

Something changed inside Jaime's pupils. His relief was evident. He hadn't noticed he had been holding his breath while he waited for Brienne's answer. The man sighed, then swallowed.

"Well, if we're all friends again and you're not going to attack us with that sword, m'lady, I'm fookin'
freezing”, Bronn complained rubbing his arms with his hands.

The woman looked at Oathkeeper, whose pommel was still enclosed in her figers, and put it back in its scabbard. “There’s an inn in the town. The food is tasty and I think they still have one vacant room left. But we're not traveling with King Jon, so the warning will have to wait until we reach a castle and we're able to send a raven.”

Walking with difficulty and pulling their mounts' reins, both men followed Brienne out of the woods and into the village. It was so cold that none of them felt like talking. The wind whistled menacingly and accompanied them all along the way to the inn. Brienne and Jaime glanced at each other from time to time, their eyes meeting sometimes. When they finally reached the stables, Bronn tied up the horses and fed them quickly. Then they headed towards the building wooden door. Brienne opened and held it for her companions. Bronn entered the common room rubbing his hands together and gave a nod to the Maid to thank her kind gesture. Jaime followed him, but he stopped by Brienne's side for a second and looked at her with a teasing smile on his lips.

“I know you missed me, wench. But no need to cry anymore.”

He walked past her and had to supress a snort when he saw Brienne's lips tighten in a thin line. Jaime knew that his comment would annoy her, but he couldn't help it. It had been quite long since the last time he had felt like joking. It was easy with the Maid, however. Something in her blue eyes always made him want to tease her, to make her blush awkwardly.

The place was almost deserted. When he spotted Bronn, the sellsword had already found Brienne's companions and was mussing up Podrick's hair with fondness. Young Payne's mouth was wide open. Bronn smiled and sat opposite the Hound. Jaime arrived at the table as well and Pod opened his mouth impossibly wider. The lad's eyes searched for Brienne, who was right behind Jaime, as if he needed his lady's confirmation of Jaime's presence to believe it.

“Kingslayer”, Sandor Clegane greeted, his brow frowned in suspicion.

“Hound”, Jaime shot back calmly.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“It's dinner time. I intend to eat something here. I think this is an inn.”

“Not what I'm fucking-”, the Hound retorted loosing his patience.

“I know what you're asking. We're going North to fight.”

“We heard different, Ser”, Pod took part in the conversation shyly. “We though Q-Queen Cersei wasn't going to send her armies to help.”

“And she isn't.”

A heavy silence fell over them. Podrick and the Hound looked at each other quite confused.

“So we're buggered”, the Hound stated.

Bonn nodded. “Fookin’ Lannisters and their fookin' promises.”

Clegane raised his mug to toast the sellsword's words and drank. Jaime turned around to face Brienne and waved his hand towards the bench to offer her the only remaining seat next to Bronn, but she refused. Brienne knew Jaime was exhausted. Podrick got up right away to leave his place
vacant and addressed the woman.

“Take my seat, m'lady. If it pleases you, Ser Jaime, I can order your dinner and arrange your stay for tonight.”

“That would be great”, Jaime thanked the lad while he sat down at last, his back aching badly.

Pod didn't move, however. He lowered his eyes and gaped. With a little effort, he gathered some courage and spoke. “I-I'm glad you're here, Ser.”

It was Jaime's turn to be taken aback. He had to swallow down his emotions to be able to speak again. “Thank you, young Payne. So am I.”

The knight followed Pod's figure with his eyes until the boy reached the counter. What he had done to deserve such warmth from the lad and the wench, he couldn't tell, but if he was worth their fondness, perhaps there was still some hope for his broken soul. He looked at Brienne, who was sitting right opposite him and was already staring at his face, concern in her eyes. Jaime stretched out his right leg under the table and rubbed Brienne's muscular left calf with his foot to cheer her up. Obviously, she wasn't expecting the contact, because she jumped in her seat, giving him away. Bronn, who was chatting to the Hound and sharing his beer amiably, lifted an eyebrow at the startled wench and glanced at Jaime shaking his head in disbelief. The Lannister shrugged innocently and smiled at Brienne furtively when he saw her blush again.

While the newcomers ate, Clegane and Brienne let them relax a little, but when both were done, they resumed their questions.

“When did you leave King's Landing?” Brienne asked taking off her gloves.

“Seven days ago”, Bronn replied.

“You rode bloody fast”, the Hound marveled.

“Aye, your friend here was very eager to catch up with you.”

“He's not my friend. And how do we know this isn't some damned trap?”, Clegane went on.

“I gave my word”, Jaime answered. He was so tired he could barely maintain his back straight.

“And now we're supposed to believe the Kinglayer's word.”

“I do believe him”, Brienne declared with certainty. Jaime thanked her total trust internally.

“Of course you do”, the Hound snorted, but he calmed down a little. Somehow, he seemed to respect Brienne's opinions. Switching his target, he looked at Bronn now. “Why did you come with him? What business have you in the North?”

The sellsword shrugged and drank from his mug. “He came to tell me he was leaving the capital and wanted to say goodbye. He didn't explain much, but I deduced his situation was serious, so I decided to follow him. He's a cunt, but I think he's the only friend I have left.”

Jaime blinked at the word 'friend'. He wasn't used to such displays of affection towards himself, yet everyone seemed to have chosen that day to show him how much they cared and trusted him. Deep inside, he thanked them, but it made him feel quite embarrassed.

“Well, I think I'll go to bed before you feel the urge to kiss me”, Jaime joked half-heartedly while
Bronn patted him on the shoulder. Then he got up and addressed Brienne. “Aren't you coming, my lady? It's late.”

She nodded and stood up as well. Then she bowed her head courteously towards Bronn and the Hound and followed Jaime.

“Don't be too loud!”, Bronn shouted from behind when they put their feet on the first step of the stairs. Brienne sighed in annoyance and Jaime shook his head, but none of them turned around. They went upstairs without a word. Jaime knew there were so many things he needed to tell the wench, but he couldn't find the strength at the moment.

When they reached the top of the staircase, they ran into Pod, who came in the opposite direction.

“Oh, Ser Jaime. I just stired the fire. A big part of the ceiling of the room you were given was missing, so I took the liberty of moving your things and Bronn's into Clegane's place. I-I'll be sharing with m'lady tonight.”

Brienne shot him a funny glance and the boy had enough decency to lower his eyes.

“It's okay, Pod”, she said allowing the boy to go back downstairs. When Jaime frowned in confusion, the wench explained. “He found another place to stay.”

At that, Jaime mouthed the word ‘oh’ and smiled slightly, then he resumed his pace towards the bedrooms. When they arrived at Brienne's door, she stopped and so did he. He searched for her eyes, those amazing sapphire eyes of hers, deep and immense as the sea, to soothe his suffering mind for a second.

“Are you alright, Ser Jaime?”, the kind wench asked.

“No”. Just one word. What else could he say? He was too tired, too hurt for complex things.

“Rest. You'll feel better tomorrow.”

Jaime took a deep breath and tried to agree with Brienne, but he couldn't. “Are you angry with me?”

She opened her already big eyes even more and shook her head. “No, of course not.”

“But you're disappointed.”

“No, Ser Jaime. How could I? I will never judge you”, Brienne said without averting her eyes from his. There was an awkward silence between the two and then Jaime took her right and calloused hand in his only one. None of them was wearing gloves anymore, so he caressed the skin of her knuckles with his thumb for a few seconds. Brienne's eyes were full of caution and fear. His pure and innocent wench. Jaime brought her fingers to his mouth and pressed his lips against them. Then he planted a soft kiss on the back of Brienne's hand and let go of it.

“Good night, Brienne”, he wished her and bowed his head a little before turning around.

“Good night, Ser Jaime”, she replied, her sweet words going after him to the room where Brienne herself would never follow him.

*****

Brienne stepped into her own bedroom and leaned against the door after closing it slowly. She still
could feel the touch of Jaime's thumb and lips on her fingers. Though she had always dreamt of being a knight -and she still did-, she almost felt like the maidens in the songs when Jaime was around. It was easy for the Lannister to disarm her, to make her feel vulnerable. In a way, Brienne hated him for it, because she refused to be seen as the typical romantic maiden who acted accordingly to her heart. She had fought hard to become the knight who believed in the greater good, in honour and loyalty. But, on the other hand, she also knew that the feelings Jaime aroused inside her chest made her a more humane person. And besides, she was so relieved to see him by her side again that she couldn't really be mad at him, even if he teased her so much.

With a sigh, she walked towards the bed, which was covered in furs. Podrick had laid his bedroll on the floor right next to her pallet. Brienne felt warm inside. What a good and kind boy he was. She might be mean to him sometimes, but it was only because she didn't know how to be affectionate. Poor Pod deserved better.

Brienne undressed. Though it was warm inside the room, it was still too cold to take off her breeches and linen shirt, so she left them on and climbed into the bed. She knew she would find it hard to get to sleep that night. So many images passed before her eyes in the semi-darkness of her room for a while, keeping her mind too active.

But she must have fallen asleep eventually, because when the creaking of the door made her open her eyes, the fire was almost extinguished and the only source of light in the room came from the window, where the first quarter moon shone feebly through the clouds. Brienne heard some silent steps approaching her bed and she thought that maybe Pod's affair hadn't gone as well as expected. But the steps hesitated and Brienne suspected something else was happening there, so she grabbed Oathkeeper and sat up right away, any traces of sleep long gone from her eyes.

What she saw made her tremble: Jaime Lannister, in his breeches and shirt, stood right by her bed with a miserable expression on his face, both his arms -whole and maimed- crossed before his chest to protect himself from the cold.

"I'm not going to kill you, wench", he whispered.

Brienne calmed down a little and placed Oathkeeper back by her side.

"What are you doing here?", she asked while she covered her legs with the furs, it wasn't clear if she did it due to the cold or the shyness. Her words sounded harsher than intended.

"I can't go back to sleep". Though he didn't get any invitation, he sat down on Podrick's bedroll, his back against Brienne's pallet. She remained in a sitting position, cause she didn't know what to do. From above, she could make out the golden hairs of Jaime's crown and nape.

"I can barely sleep lately", he went on, still in a whisper, as if he were afraid of waking up somebody. "And when I do, I dream awful things."

Brienne remained silent. She knew he needed to speak: he wouldn't have come to her bedroom otherwise. She remembered another time when he had talked and she had listened, so long ago, in another life.

"It's Aerys all over again. I'm in the Great Hall, my sword withdrawn, and I hear him scream 'Burn them all' again and again. But when I'm about to drive my blade into his back, he turns around and it's Cersei who's looking at me", Jaime tilted his head back and leaned it on Brienne's bed. The moonlight highlighted the outline of his face and neck as if they were made of silver. "And I always end up running her through with my sword."

“It's just a dream”, Brienne commented to play his fears down.

Jaime remained silent. He closed his eyes for a few seconds and opened them again to stare at the ceiling with a lifeless gaze. After a while, he sighed and spoke trying to keep his tone cool. “She commanded the Mountain to kill me.”

Brienne gasped. “Are you sure?”, she said, but regreted her words right after they left her mouth.

“I was there, of course I'm sure”, the disbelief in Jaime's voice made his tone seem more alive. “She called me a traitor and tried to kill me, so I left her.”

The lady knight held her breath. She could have never imagined that Cersei would threaten her own brother, her lover, the commander of her armies, the only family she had left. But deep inside, she knew the Queen was a manipulative woman who had always been a castrating influence for Jaime's growth as a good man. And, after what Jaime had experienced away from Cersei, and knowing the man as she did, Brienne should have foreseen that it was a matter of time that the good man inside Jaime rebelled against his sister's power over him. Of course, the consequences for him had been terrible. Perhaps Brienne's words at the Dragonpit had produced the last spark inside Jaime's guts. What would have she done if Cersei had succeeded in killing Jaime?

With a shiver, she laid down again, still staring at Jaime's profile.

“I've wasted my life believing her”, he said after a little while, apparently lost in his thoughts. Brienne's heart sunk at his statement, cause she realised how broken he was. “Everything was a lie. I couldn't stay with her anymore. I wanted to be my own man, I needed to break free. But still it hurts.”

The lump in Brienne's throat grew bigger as Jaime kept talking. Without thinking, she stretched out her left arm and brushed some dishevelled locks out of his forehead. The Lannister closed his eyes and half opened his mouth. Brienne saw his reaction to her touch and froze into place, her fingers still on his forehead. But Jaime didn't protest, so she dared to run her short nails through his blonde hair. The knight sighed calmly and nodded, encouraging her to go on. Brienne combed his hair softly several times. He seemed to relax under her touch.

When she thought that maybe Jaime had fallen asleep, he spoke again in a very quiet tone. “Is it too late for me, Brienne?”

“No. It's never too late”, she said still caressing his scalp with her fingers.

Jaime sighed again at that answer, as if wishing for the truth in her words. Bit by bit, the man's breathing evened and, after a while, he fell asleep. Trying not to wake him up, Brienne got up slowly, picked up her fur cloak from the chair and threw it over Jaime carefully. Then she climbed back into the bed and, with a mixture of melancholy and happiness, she resumed her running her fingers through his locks. Eventually, the Maid surrendered to exhaustion as well.

When Pod entered the room at dawn, he found them exactly that way: Jaime Lannister deeply asleep on the ground with his head on Brienne's bed and the lady's fingers entangled in his hair.

Chapter End Notes
Surely most of you guessed who the coughing guy was. ^^

I like Bronn, Pod and the Hound. I think I'm going to enjoy writing their moments together. I hope I kept them in character, because I had never paid these men too much attention before in the show. Until now.

Jaime and Brienne reunited and talking. Make me happy and tell me what you felt reading the story.

Thanks for your kudos and comments. You're so nice.
Fifth chapter! In this one I wanted to write about something that always gets me thinking when I read books or watch films/series. I hope I'm not the only one!

Warning: a lot of cursing and blood... though maybe not in the way you expect.

When Brienne woke up the next morning, she was alone in the room. The cloak she had used to warm up Jaime last night lied on top of her fur blankets now. She remembered her fingers running through the man's hair, but she couldn't swear it hadn't been all a dream. Brienne closed her eyes to make the sensation last a little longer and then she sat up in the bed with a sigh.

A sudden pain in her lower belly made Brienne bend over herself. Of course, there was time for her moonblood to show up. She checked her breeches and there it was the crimson stain. She growled in frustration, because she knew it wouldn't be easy for her to ride in her state. It was always the same... Why should women bleed? None of her companions would have any additional problems in their trip and that annoyed her, because she didn't like showing any weaknesses in front of people, but that day it was going to be hard to conceal her uneasiness. Brienne didn't usually bleed too much or suffer from acute pain, but there were times when she felt like dying. And she suspected this was going to be one of those times.

Pod's girl knocked on her door and came in, bringing a basin full of hot water for her morning ablutions. Brienne thanked her and, when the girl left the room, the lady knight got out of bed and washed herself and her breeches carefully. After that, she looked for some linen towels in her saddlebag and attached them to her smallclothes. That would have to make it until lunch time. She hoped they could stop near a river at some point to take care of her towels and change.

When Brienne went downstairs fully clothed to break her fast, all the men were already at it. She had decided not to wear her armour that day. It was going to be uncomfortable enough without all that steel on. Jaime was the first to see Brienne and he smiled slightly in her direction to greet her. Podrick, who was sitting next to him on the bench, lifted his eyes from his porridge and, when he realised there was no place left for his lady, he stuffed two more spoonfuls into his mouth and got up to offer her his seat.

"Don't worry, Pod. Finish your porridge."

"It's okay, m'lady. I'm done", he assured her. "I'll go gather up our things and saddle the horses."

Then he wiped his mouth with his sleeve and disappeared upstairs. Brienne took Pod's seat next to Jaime.

"He works his arse off for you, m'lady", Bronn joked winking at her.

"Isn't he a little old for a squire?”, the Hound commented.

"He is. But I can't knight him, even though he deserved it. I'm no knight myself", Brienne responded
lowering her eyes. The innkeeper showed at her side and removed Pod's bowl to place another one in front of her.

“Young Payne is a good man”, Jaime offered. “I hope both of you may be knighted some day.”

“This world would have to change like hell for that to happen”, Bronn shook his head. “Who's going to allow a woman to be knighted?”

“The world is already changing, wanker”, the Hound contradicted him. “This giant of a woman kicked my ass to death.”

Though they were unmistakably bitter, there was a tinge of admiration in his words as well. Brienne blushed and seized her spoon a little bit unnaturally.

When she was eating her first spoonful, a pang in her lower belly made her flinch suddenly. Jaime frowned and looked at her with concern. “What was that?”

“N-Nothing”, she answered waving her hand to play it down. “It's just... the porridge was too hot.”

“Hot?”, Jaime's frown deepened in disbelief, but when Brienne nodded, he didn't push her further.

She finished her breakfast in no time. Soon enough, they were helping Podrick pack everything and saddle their horses for the long ride ahead. Brienne was fastening her horse's reins when Jaime approached her, hiding his golden hand inside a leather glove.

“Is everything alright, wench?”, he asked without raising his voice. Brienne noticed he just called her 'wench' when they were alone, never around the others, as if it were a joke only they shared. It was almost funny how a scornful nickname had changed into an affectionate one.

“Yes, Ser Jaime”, the lady said without looking at him, in an attempt to hide the lie in her words. “You've always been a terrible liar.”

“I-I'm not lying”, Brienne stammered, fixing her beautiful blue eyes on his green ones. Jaime ran his eyes over her face, taking his time, as if he were studying her features to unveil the truth. His gaze intimidated her more than she wanted to admit.

When he saw her redden, the man narrowed his eyes and then lowered them to let her be.

“Alright, I'll pretend I believe you. But let me know if you need anything”, he offered sincerely and she nodded to thank him. Why did he have to be so chivalrous sometimes? It was easier to let him go when he was an arse. After a few seconds, Jaime went on. “Just because you don't need my help to go around kicking asses, it doesn't mean you know how to take care of yourself.”

“I know perfectly how to-”, Brienne started, but then stopped mid-sentence. That was exactly what he wanted, to tease her and to get a response, so she wasn't going to give it to him. Brienne saw Jaime grin out of the corner of her eye, but she kept on fastening the reins.

Before turning around to leave her, Jaime poked her in the ribs with his left hand. “You just get uglier when you are angry.”

And there he was, right back to his annoying self. Brienne clenched her jaw and felt the urge to punch him right in the face, but she managed to keep her rage under control and finished her task without further problem. When everything was packed and ready, the five got on their horses and set out for their new destination.
The morning passed off without incident. The piercing cold froze them to the bone as they kept going North, so the travelers wrapped themselves up in their fur cloaks as tightly as they could. As for Brienne, she was having an excruciating hell of a ride. There was an uncomfortable and persistent heaviness in her lower belly. She didn't know how to sit on the horse to ease her pain. She kept changing her position on her saddle, but it was no use. To avoid her comrades’ questions, she traveled in the rear, but even then she couldn't escape Pod's and Jaime's concerned looks. The Lannister slowed down his horse's gait eventually to ride by her side for a while, trying to find out what was happening to her. He even joked a little to cheer her up, but Brienne wasn't in the mood for it. She was too focused on breathing evenly and controlling the pain to react to his teasing.

At midday, Sandor Clegane suggested to keep going a little further instead of stopping to eat. They could have something on the way, so that they could advance now that it wasn't snowing heavily. But Jaime dismissed the idea before Brienne could even speak her mind. He knew there was something wrong with her and perhaps a little rest would mend her uneasiness.

As soon as they set up camp, Brienne excused herself, took her saddlebag and got away from the men to look for a river or a lake. None of her companions offered to go with her: they knew she was a lady and there were things she needed to do on her own, but Jaime -always Jaime- shot an undecipherable glance in her direction before she turned around. Not far from the place they had chosen to settle down, there was a little stream, perhaps a tributary of the Green Fork river. Without wasting any time, Brienne took off her breeches and washed her private parts with the icy water of the stream. It pierced her delicate skin, but she had no choice. When she finished, the woman removed the stained linen towels from her undergarment and attached some clean ones. Then she put on her clothes again. Brienne was so cold she started shivering, but she still needed to clean the blood-stained pads. She knelt on the snow near the river and did her job as quickly as possible, her insistent belly bothering her. After that, she packed up her things and went a little upstream to refill her skin.

When she went back to the camp, the men had already built a fire and were dividing up their supplies to eat. Brienne knew Jaime had noticed her paleness, because he hurried to sit next to her on a big stump and handed her some bread and cheese with his left hand. The constant sadness in his eyes was still there, but Brienne noticed that his worry for her eclipsed it somehow. Maybe their conversation from last night had helped to reduce his torment. Suddenly, she remembered the way they had fallen asleep and her heart skipped a beat.

They ate in a pleasant silence, while the Hound and Bronn complained about the weather using their rude vocabulary. When she finished her frugal meal, Brienne rested her forearms on her thighs and bent over herself. She felt a comforting hand squeezing her shoulder and looked back at Jaime, who started rubbing her upper back. The contact soothe her pain a little, replacing it with some butterflies in her stomach, but Brienne knew she wasn't allowed to give in to his friendly caresses, because they were just that, friendly ones.

After a while, they decided to resume their journey and Brienne heaved a restrained sigh. The prospect of another five or six long hours on top of her horse gave her goosebumps. Good Podrick helped her get on her horse and she thanked his constant care internally. Trying to gather some strength, she told herself that she would be feeling better the next morning, as her moonblood only bothered her on the first day, but nothing could relieve her current pain.

They spent six hours riding, sometimes faster, sometimes slower. The constant trot of her horse was killing Brienne and, when she thought she couldn't go any further, they spotted the Green Fork and decided to stop for the night. Besides, it was getting more difficult to see in the darkness, so there was no point on traveling any longer. Clegane and Podrick tied up the horses as Bronn collected some wood to build the fire and Brienne and Jaime refilled every skin they had. The two walked to
the fast-flowing river, a little away from the camp, and squatted down to reach the water. Jaime managed very well, keeping in mind that he had only his left hand to uncap, fill and cap the skins again.

“How are you feeling?” he asked Brienne.

“I'm fine.”

“You know the wight your friend Jon Snow brought to King’s Landing? His face had a better colour than yours”, Jaime commented. But the blue of your eyes is even brighter, he nearly added, but he bit his tongue just in time. As always, that fixation he seemed to have with Brienne's eyes caught himself unawares once again.

“I'm tired, that's all”, she said with feigned indifference while she refilled the last skin.

They went back to the others, side by side, and while Jaime delivered the skins full of water among their companions, Brienne gathered her things and disappeared downstream to repeat her noon routine. She was looking forward to laying down for the night. There was snow everywhere, so they had to spend some time removing as much as they could to be able to spread their bedrolls on the cold ground. When she came back to the men, she ate some meat quickly in front of the fire and leaned against a huge tree to relax a little.

“Do you want to hear a story?”, Bronn asked when all of them were done with their dinners.

“Is it about cocks?”, Jaime joked.

“Everything is about cocks, but you'll have to hear it to find out.”

“I could use some fucking story to fall asleep. Get the hell on with it”, the Hound encouraged Bronn as he leaned on his side.

The flames cast hair-raising shadows on the sellsword's pale eyes and face. Pod spread out his sleeping mat on Brienne's left side and lied down on it to listen the story, his fur cloak on top of him. Jaime took his time to unfasten and remove his golden hand from his arm, then he put it away in his saddlebag. After that, he placed his bedroll on Brienne's right, so close to hers that there was no space between them. Without looking at him, the woman bent her knees and hugged them like she had done in the baths of Harrenhal, and she found that position very comfortable. The Lannister leaned against the same tree trunk she was using and closed his eyes to concentrate on Bronn's words.

“Alright, then. Perhaps Pod should cover his ears... A young Dornish man was dreaming of his love at night, he was holding her in his arms, hugging her tight. Then he woke up and saw a lady enter his room, a lady dressed all in white, colder than snow”, Bronn paused for effect and went on, his voice low. “The man called her his love and asked the lady how she had entered, since the windows and door were closed from the inside. She responded that she wasn't his love but the Stranger, who came to take his life because his hour was upon him.”

Podrick shivered and Brienne couldn't suppress a fond smile.

“The young man begged for his life, begged for her to grant him just one more day to be with his love, but the Stranger told him his fate was sealed and he had only one hour left. So the Dornish man left his home and went to see his love, to say his goodbyes to her.”

“He'll need to be pretty fast if he wants to fuck the lady and leave a good memory with her”, the Hound interrupted.
Bronn let loose a noisy guffaw and resumed his tale. “When the man arrived at her house, the lady was at the window. He asked her to open the door, but it was dark and the girl's parents were at home, so she dismissed him. The boy was desperate and said he needed to see her one last time because the next day he would be dead. Then the lady threw a silk cord down the wall for him to climb up.”

“Bad idea”, said Jaime, his eyes still closed.

“Don't spoil the end, you cunt”, Bronn reprimanded him and the Lannister grinned. “When the lad was about to reach her window, the cord broke and he fell down. The Stranger, in the looks of the white lady, appeared, took the Dornish man in her arms and parted with him because his hour had already passed.”

A heavy silence fell over them. Podrick's eyes were fixed on the distant dark sky above and they had an air of reflection which made the lad look older. Bronn lifted his eyebrows as if waiting for his audience's verdict. Then the Hound yawned. “Stupidest story I ever heard.”

“It means our destinies are sealed and it doesn't matter what we do to avoid the Stranger: He always finds us”, Jaime offered with a dark tone.

“Thank you, Kingslayer, we wouldn't have gotten it without your bloody help”, Clegane shook his head and wrapped himself even more in his cloak. “I'll take the last watch.”

He turned his back on them and started snoring a little later. Brienne thought that perhaps the story had affected him more than he wanted to admit. Maybe there was a little heart inside the Hound's chest and behind all his rudeness, after all.

“You're welcome”, Bronn waved his hand at him.

“Okay, I'll take the first watch”, Jaime said as he got up to stretch out his legs and wake himself up.

They decided Brienne would be next, then Pod, then Bronn. The two men fell asleep easily, because they were exhausted from the ride, but Brienne's belly was still giving her problems, so she found it quite difficult to relax. She lied down and covered herself with her cloak, but she wasn't comfortable in any position she tried to sleep in. With a deep breath, the lady tried to calm down: she needed to sleep, because the next day they had another very long ride ahead and she would be needing a good rest to face it.

Jaime hadn't come back to his bedroll. She heard him walking around the camp, looking for something in their saddlebags, but she didn't want to move or speak. At some point, she even thought the Lannister was boiling water in her squire's pot, but what for?

Brienne didn't have to wait too long to know. After a few minutes, Jaime crouched down next to her and pressed something pleasantly warm against her lower belly. That gesture startled Brienne a little, because that part of her body was too private to be touched by anyone, but she didn't move away. When Jaime saw the surprise in her eyes, he spoke.

“Hold the skin against your belly. It will alleviate your pain for a while.”

Slowly, Brienne replaced his hand with hers. Then Jaime put his on top of her fingers to apply more pressure and lingered there. She started to feel better almost instantly.

“Where did you learn this?”, she questioned with curiosity.

“Cersei does it when she's having her blood”, Jaime shrugged.
“And how did you know-”, the woman started to ask, but he didn't let her finish.


*And the way my body reacted this time was exactly the same,* Jaime thought without wanting to brood too much over the idea. Then he removed his hand, sat down next to her with his back against their tree and they remained silent for a while. Then Brienne spoke again.

“Thank you, Ser Jaime.”

“You could drop the Ser, you know. I'm not even sure I'm still a knight”, he told her with a sigh. It was so sad to sense the depth of his sorrow. “Try to sleep. I'll take your watch tonight as well.”

Brienne tried to protest, but Jaime had made up his mind and there was no possible way to dissuade him, so the woman curled up under her furs and tried to sleep, feeling Jaime's presence right by her side. Her belly wasn't so in pain anymore, so she fell asleep in no time.

When she woke up in the middle of the night, Pod had left his place beside her and was keeping watch near the horses. Brienne didn't know what had woken her, but then she heard a weak wail coming from Jaime's bedroll, then another one. He must be having a nightmare, perhaps the same he had told her about last night. Moving slowly not to wake anyone, Brienne slid her right hand under Jaime's furs and took his left in hers. The man clutched her hand in his sleep and intertwined their fingers together. He didn't open his eyes, but suddenly, his tense face relaxed and there were no more sobs. Brienne squeezed his only hand lovingly and went back to sleep.

Little she knew that her contact had woken up Jaime from his bad dream, but he hadn't wanted to let her know just to be able to feel her hand on his for the rest of the night. Being so close to the Maid of Tarth seemed the only way to sleep these days.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, now you know what had me thinking: Brienne's moonblood. How did women manage to live when there were no sanitary pads? Why is it so easy for them to carry on with their lives on TV and books when we all know our periods are quite uncomfortable sometimes? I did a little research and found some interesting things about menstruation in the past. I needed to write about this. Brienne is a woman, she suffers her moonblood and she's still our hero. And nobody talks about it.

And for the story in this chapter, I didn't invent it, I just made Bronn tell it the Westeros way. It's based on a Spanish Medieval ballad: The lover and Death. I always liked it.

Thanks for reading, guys!
It was shortly after dawn when Brienne woke up. The days weren't shiny anymore now that winter had finally come, but it was still possible to tell apart day from night. Her belly wasn't in pain, though the skin against it had already gotten cold during the night, as well as the furs she had wrapped around her body. However, her right hand felt warm. Suddenly, Brienne realised she was still holding Jaime's and she opened her eyes tentatively. The man was asleep on his left side, facing her, with a peaceful expression and his mouth slightly open. She admired his pretty face for a while, his sharp and manly jaw, his long eyelashes, his golden but muddy locks. From this distance, the Maid of Tarth could see some wrinkles around Jaime's eyes and the greying hairs in his temple. He no longer was the beautiful, bright young lion knight all the women in the realm had dreamt about, but now he had an air of elegance and honour that made him even more handsome and attractive in Brienne's eyes. There were some snow flakes melting in his hair. Gently, the Maid freed her fingers from his grip and wiped away the snow from his fringe. If only she could also do those things while he wasn't asleep...

Brienne sat up slowly on her bedroll and the first thing she noticed was that the Hound was looking at her from the fallen trunk he was using as a seat for his watch. She blushed at the thought of Clegane having witnessed her tender gesture towards Jaime. She knew her fears were well founded when the man shook his head and rolled his eyes. Brienne blinked awkwardly and got up without saying anything. She hated it when people found out her weaknesses. Was she being too obvious around Jaime? But how could she help it when he was sleeping so close to her, when she could feel his warm hand in hers?

Moving carefully, the woman took her saddlebag and went to the river to wash herself, her linen towels and to change. When she finished her ablutions, she dressed quickly because the morning was terribly cold and her wet skin hurt too much in contact with the icy air. She had just started to clean her stained clothes when she heard a muffled noise behind her back and then Jaime showed up from behind a tree. His sleepy eyes and dishevelled hair gave him a charming look. Brienne hid her towels fast to prevent him from seeing them, but Jaime only stretched his limbs and approached her to kneel in front of the water.

"Don't worry, wench. Your blood doesn't disgust me."

He unlaced his leather jerkin with his clumsy left hand and took it off, then he spread it out on a plain rock. Brienne stared at him without moving, aware that maybe she should leave him alone to allow him some privacy, but it was Jaime himself who had moved close to her, not the other way round. The Maid blushed when the Lannister took off his shirt as well and started to pour water over his hair, face and torso with one hand. His sleepy eyes and dishevelled hair gave him a charming look. Brienne hid her towels fast to prevent him from seeing them, but Jaime only stretched his limbs and approached her to kneel in front of the water.

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a huge effort to avert her eyes from his perfect body. Jaime's chest and arms were so well shaped and toned that she felt the urge to touch them with her fingers, but she focused on her washing instead. Brienne couldn't understand why she felt so uncomfortable near Jaime's bare skin, when she had held him fully naked in the baths of Harrenhal and had even cleaned him up in his worst times after losing his hand.

Jaime was still washing his face when Podrick appeared from the camp too.

“Good morning, m'lady, Ser Jaime”, he greeted them bowing his head a little.

Both gave him a nod and continued with their duties. The squire approached the river and emptied his skin to refill it again with new water. Suddenly, his eyes caught something inside the stream and got up slowly as if he didn't want to frighten off whatever he had seen. The lad started to get into the Green Fork stepping on a stone. Then, he jumped onto another one.

“Pod, be careful. River stones are always slippery”, Brienne warned the boy.

Putting his shirt back on, Jaime grinned at the wench's concern. “Let him enjoy. A little fishing can't do him any harm.”

But Brienne knew that Podrick wasn't exactly the most agile of people, and what happened next proved her right. Podrick lost his footing and fell flat on his back and inside the river with a splash and a cry.

“You were saying?”, spat Brienne standing up. Jaime growled and both kicked off their boots to go help Pod. The stream wasn't deep, but the boy had hit his back with one of the stones and didn't seem to be able to move on his own. The water was freezing and, when they stepped into it, they flinched: the cold stabbed the skin of their feet and ankles without mercy.

They reached Pod and worked together to pick him up. The squire groaned in pain, completely soaked, and Jaime and Brienne led him out of the river, grabbing one of the boy's arms each. When they were finally out of the water, they saw Bronn running towards them, his sword withdrawn.

“What happened? We heard a scream.”

“The boy fell down”, Jaime informed him while shaking his feet. Stepping on the snow without his boots was an excruciating experience.

“Help him reach the camp to dry and change, Ser Bronn”, Brienne ordered. Then she released Pod and went to her saddlebag to retrieve some dry linen rags for Jaime and herself.

“You could use some of the magic you have in that cock to be a little less clumsy, boy”, Bronn mocked him with a guffaw and disappeared towards the camp, his arm surrounding Pod's back.

Brienne handed Jaime one of the rags for him to dry his feet before putting his boots back on. While they were at it, the Lannister joked, “It's a miracle the lad had survived so long. You're not a very good trainer, are you?”

The woman glared at him. She didn't like when people spoke shit about Pod, though she usually was the hardest one on him. However, she knew Jaime wasn't really mocking the lad, but her.

“Have you never been about to drown, Ser Jaime?”, she asked in a very calm tone. “Not even in a bathtub?”

He opened his eyes so wide that they resembled two ripe melons, but after a while, he smiled.
“That was a blow below the belt, wench”, Jaime complained quite amused, then he sank his left hand stealthily in the river and splashed some water on Brienne's face when she was off-guard. The woman gasped in shock. At the sight of her face, Jaime laughed wholeheartedly, as he didn't remember doing in so long, and was about to spatter her again when Brienne grabbed his hand and stump and knocked him down right on his back. The snow was too cold and he felt how the back of his shirt started to get wet, but he couldn't stop smiling at the situation. The Maid of Tarth straddled his torso and pinned his arms against the ground.

“Alright, alright, I yield”, Jaime said looking at her face, the trace of a little smile still playing on his lips. Brienne's cheeks were pink due to the effort she had just made and her swollen lips were slightly parted while she breathed. Suddenly, something happened inside Jaime's body and his cock hardened. His expression changed from amused to shocked. Since the wench was sitting on his stomach, he hoped that she hadn't felt his arousal. Jaime swallowed and stared into Brienne's amazing eyes. Neither of them moved for a while and the Lannister thought that the wench's weight was even a pleasant sensation. Without warning, Brienne let go of his arms and got up, her heart hammering against her ribs.

“We'd better go back to check on Pod”, she commented quite flustered while she put her things back on her saddlebag. Then she left him and disappeared into the woods.

Jaime remained on the ground for a while, trying to cool himself down, an arm thrown over his eyes. He was incredibly confused at the moment. He was still mourning the end of his relationship with Cersei, actually he still could feel his body react to his memories of his twin sister. But Jaime knew there was something new that was starting to make its way through his foggy feelings. Perhaps it had already been there for some time now, putting down roots but unnoticed, but he was too shocked to understand anything.

Slowly, he stood up and took off his shirt, because it was soaked. He shivered. Then he picked up his jerkin and made his way towards the camp to redress. There, Bronn was helping Pod out of his clothes and the Hound was polishing his sword. For her part, Brienne was fastening the straps of her saddle and didn't bother to look at him. Jaime put on a dry shirt and his leather jerkin. Then he tied the laces of his fur cloak as tight as he could with his remaining fingers. After that, he attached his golden hand to his stump. Though he had never liked the thing, he admitted it was quite useful sometimes. For example, it helped him hold the reins of his horse and he also found it useful to go a little more unnoticed while traveling North.

When all of them were ready, they ate something for breakfast and mounted on their horses. Podrick's back was still aching bad and he sneezed twice before spurring his animal, but they knew there was no time to lose, so they set off.

Brienne rode very silently the whole day. Jaime knew she was worried about Podrick, who was groaning in pain every other minute, but he was sure there was something else. Was it their episode near the river what had her thinking so hard? He couldn't be sure, but he wasn't good at words, so asking her about it was totally out of question. Besides, what was he going to ask, anyway? He didn't even know what was happening to himself. He needed to let his emotions settle down.

Around mid-afternoon, Podrick's sneezes started to happen more often. The boy didn't complain, because he was tough and he didn't want to cause his companions any more troubles, but his face was too pale and his cheeks too red to be healthy. Brienne led her horse near him and brought her hand to his forehead in a motherly gesture.

“Pod! You're burning!”, she exclaimed and stopped both her horse and Podrick's.

“I'm fine, m'lady”, the squire stammered, but he had problems to focus his eyes. He had no more
strength to keep his straight position, so he let go of the reins of his horse and leaned to his left. He would have fallen off his horse if Brienne hadn't been there to catch him.

“We need to stop!” she screamed. Bronn got off his animal quickly and helped her dismount Podrick. Jaime held the reins of the lad's mount, his eyes fixed on the poor boy.

“If I'm right, there's an inn about seven miles away from this place, by the Kingsroad”, the Hound informed.

“We must be near the Twins by now”, Brienne estimated. She dismounted as well to take care of Podrick. “I don't trust the people from these lands.”

“The Freys are all dead. We have nothing to fear”, Jaime assured the lady, then turned to Sandor Clegane. “How do you know about that inn?”

“You should know as well, Kingslayer. We spent one night in it on our way to Winterfell when that cunt of Robert Baratheon bloody insisted on seeing his friend Ned Stark.”

As every time he heard the nickname, Jaime clenched his jaw. He should be used by now, but it still stirred too many memories.

“Alright, we'll head towards that inn. Perhaps someone should ride ahead to look for a maester”, the woman instructed. She had Podrick on her lap and was opening her skin to pour some water in the boy's lips.

“I'll go”, Clegane offered and without losing any time, he spurred on his horse and disappeared.

Bronn crouched next to Brienne and patted Pod fondly on the cheek. “We need to move him, m'lady. I don't think he'll be able to ride on his own, but I can carry him on my horse.”

“No, I'll be the one doing it”, Brienne stated and stood up. She and the sellsword helped Pod on his feet. Slowly and with an enormous effort, they managed to sit the squire on Brienne's horse. Jaime, who was still holding all their reins, used his golden hand to keep Podrick upright until the woman got on the animal behind him. When Bronn was ready, they resumed their ride.

It wasn't easy for Brienne, because Podrick was too weak and he often leaned forward, nearly out of her reach, but she rode that way for an hour without complaining. When they finally reached the promised inn, her back and arms ached. Pod looked very ill and his body emanated a steady heat. They dismounted and while Bronn led the horses to the stables, Brienne and Jaime helped the boy to get in the building. The Hound was already there waiting for them, with an old woman by his side.

“There's a room for him upstairs. You'll have to arrange your own stay”, the man informed Jaime. While Brienne and Clegane drove young Payne upstairs, the Lannister approached the innkeeper to pay for a room for Bronn and himself. He waited for his friend, who had taken all their saddlebags, and shared his load.

Once they had built a nice fire, both left their room and headed to Pod's. There was a crackling fire as well and it cast shadows on the people in the place. The Hound was near the door with his arms crossed in front of his chest and Brienne knelt at Podrick's headboard, holding a wet cloth against the boy's forehead. The old woman was examining his shivering body.

“He caught a cold”, the woman said, “that's all. Make him eat a hot soup and don't let him be cold tonight. I'm going downstairs to speak to the innkeeper. There's a good remedy I could prepare for the boy if I can find some ginger and yarrow.”
That said, the woman hobbled to the door and left them.

“Where did you find that old witch?”, Jaime asked looking at the Hound.

“There's no fucking maester in this place. Everyone knew this crone, so I went fetch her.”

“Do you trust her?”, Brienne swallowed.

“We'll have to. I'd better go get some soup for our patient”, Bronn offered and disappeared after the woman.

“If you don't need me, I'll have some dinner as well. I'm fucking starving”, Clegane told Brienne. Then he opened the door to follow the sellsword.

Jaime approached the lady and sat down on Podrick's bed. The Lannister tied the laces of the boy's shirt with his left hand, taking his time, and then he tucked him in.

“You should go downstairs to eat something. I'll stay here while you have dinner”, Jaime offered.

“I'm not leaving him”, Brienne refused. Stubborn wench. “Don't worry about me, Ser Jaime. Go with the men and relax a little.”

Jaime remained there for a few seconds, but finally he stood up. “I'll bring you something to eat and then I'll relieve you.”

Brienne didn't put up a fight, either because she knew it was no use or because she was sure she would do her will anyway. When the Lannister left her alone with Podrick, she heaved a sigh. As time passed, it was more and more difficult to maintain her mask on. That very morning, with Jaime pinned under her, her body had urged her to lean down and kiss him. Brienne had controlled her impulses in time and had moved away from him to keep her cool head. Their bond was so fragile that she was afraid she might break it at any moment with a wrong gesture. She didn't want to lose Jaime, because his trust and friendship meant the world to her.

The door opened and Bronn appeared with a bowl of hot soup in one hand and a little jar with an amber liquid in the other. Brienne got up and took the bowl in her hands, then she sat down on the bed beside Podrick and woke him up.

“How are you feeling, little man?” Bronn asked the boy, but he only got a groan. After that, he left the jar on Pod's nightstand and explained to the lady, “Make sure he eats his soup and then give him this remedy. The woman said it will help him sweat.”

“Thank you, Ser”, she said and started to feed her squire.

“In a few minutes, Jaime will be up here with a bowl for you, m'lady”, the sellsword walked towards the door, then he stopped and turned around to look at her. “He needs some help, you know?”

They weren't good at putting things into words. Brienne didn't know what to say, because she wasn't sure what Bronn was referring to, but she paused her feeding Podrick and nodded briefly. Bronn also gave a nod to her and before he got out the room, a girl with hollow cheeks and broken teeth bumped into him. She was carrying a basin with hot water for Brienne. The girl placed it on the floor and followed the sellsword outside.

The woman went on feeding Pod until he finished his soup, then she reached for the jar and handed it to the lad. He didn't protest and took a tentative sip, after which he licked his lips.
“I hope it's not too bad”, Brienne wished.

“N-No, it's fine, m'lady. It tastes of honey”, Podrick assured her with a rough voice. His cheeks were bright with the fever. Brienne stroked his hair and helped him lie down.

“Rest now, Pod.”

“But, where are you g-going to s-sleep, m'lady?”

“Right here by your side”, Brienne calmed him down. “Don't worry about me.”

The lad was too weak to rebel, so he lay down and covered himself with the fur duvet. Just five seconds later he was snoring.

Brienne took advantage of the situation and washed herself and her towels before Jaime could return. She had just spread her wet clothes in front of the fire when she heard a light knock and Jaime poked his head round the door.

“How is he?”, the Lannister asked after closing the door.

“Sound asleep”, Brienne informed him. “And he breathes evenly, so I guess he will recover soon enough.”

“Good news, then. I brought you some soup. It isn't the best I have ever eaten, but at least it will liven you up.”

Brienne took the warm bowl from his hand and when her fingers brushed against Jaime's, a jolt of heat shook her body. She turned her back on him and went to the only chair in the room.

“Let me watch him while you rest downstairs, Brienne”, Jaime pronounced her name for the first time since he had caught up with them. It sounded so good in the lady's ears, it tasted so good in the knight's mouth.

“Thank you, Ser Jaime”, Brienne didn't look at him, “but I prefer to stay here with Podrick.”

“Come on, don't be so stubborn.”

“I'm not going anywhere”, she didn't back down. “He's my resposibility and I'm staying.”

The Lannister's jaw tensed and the tone he used next was stricter than before. “If you don't relax a little from time to time that rigid body of yours will explode some day.”

“Then let it explode”, Brienne got up and confronted him, her face mere inches away from his. “What is it to you?”

Jaime's breathing quickened. The wench was a few inches taller than him, so he had to look a little upwards to lock eyes with her. He distinguished a beating vein in her long and thick neck, and he wondered if her skin would still be as soft on that part of her body as he remembered. But before he could surrender to the impulse to check, he turned on his heels and left the room without a word.

Brienne's trembling hands were still holding the bowl. She went back to the chair and left it there untouched. Then she approached the wolf fur that lay on the floor in front of the fire and sat down on it, her back against Podrick's bed, as Jaime had done two nights ago. She hugged her knees to her chest, the position she always used as an unconscious protection, and rested her forehead on her knees.
Taking a deep breath, she tried to calm herself down. Jaime was infuriating. What did he care? But what annoyed her the most was that he was partly right. She needed to relax, because she couldn't keep going for Jaime's jugular all the time. It wasn't his fault that Brienne had developed those feelings for him. He would never reciprocate them, but that didn't entitle her to make his life impossible.

She heard Pod moan in his dream and she lifted her head to look at him. The lad was still sleeping peacefully, so she allowed herself to relax a little on the floor. The fire stretched out its warm fingers to caress her skin. Brienne leaned her head back on the bed and closed her eyes, her knees still to her chest, her arms still around them. After a while, she noticed her muscles were losing strength and, a little later, she drifted off.

When Jaime opened the door an hour later, he found her in an uncomfortable position. She had her head still on the bed, but the angle of her neck seemed painful, and her legs had slipped to the floor and were folded awkwardly. Her arms hung loose at her sides. Walking on tiptoe, Jaime grabbed Brienne's fur cloak, which was folded on the back of the chair, and approached the wench to sat down next to her. When his hip was pressed against hers, the Lannister threw the cloak over them with his left hand. Using his stump to keep it in place, he surrounded Brienne's waist with his good arm to straighten her until the lady's head was resting on his shoulder.

The wench opened her eyes a little to find herself pressed against Jaime's well-known body.

“W-What?”, she started to say in a very sleepy tone.

“Sshh”, Jaime shushed her tenderly. “Just sleep.”

“B-But why d-do you keep c-coming to me at n-night?”, Brienne managed to ask in between yawns.

The knight considered her question and then he answered without raising his voice, “Because lately it seems I can't sleep if you're not around, wench. It's annoying, but it is what it is.”

Without being entirely conscious of her actions or words, Brienne curled against the man's side and went back to sleep. Shortly after, his left arm still surrounding her muscular waist, Jaime rested his head on top of Brienne's and fell asleep instantly.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked this chapter. I reread all of them like five or six times after finishing them to check the grammar, but there are many English structures that I haven't mastered yet. So please, forgive my mistakes if you can. I hope they don't make your reading too uncomfortable at least.

Please, leave a comment and tell me what you think. Feedback always helps.
Morning came and light entered the room through the window. It played with Brienne's eyelids for a few minutes before she opened her eyes. She was alone on the ground and felt quite cold despite her cloak was still covering her. Suddenly, she remembered Jaime's body by her side at the beginning of the night and she felt bereft of his warmth.

Podrick stirred in bed right behind her and she hurried to kneel to check on the boy.

“Pod, how are you feeling today?”, Brienne asked bringing her hand to his forehead.

“Hungry”, the lad said. His answer brought a smile to the Maid's lips. His skin was no longer hot, though his eyes were still hollow and the roughness in his voice was an unmistakable sign of a sore throat.

Brienne helped him on his feet and they got dressed to go downstairs. Jaime was already there, so they joined him at his table. Brienne shot him a shy glance and the Lannister smiled at her, patting the vacant seat next to his for her to sit down. He asked Podrick about his health and they had their breakfast in the calmness of the common room. When Bronn and the Hound showed up and the group was complete, they planned their next steps, keeping in mind Pod's state. The idea was traveling to Greywater Watch, the castle of House Reed. They expected to find Howland Reed -Ned Stark's dear friend- there and, since he was on good terms with the Starks, to send a raven to Winterfell with some news. From her stay at Winterfell, Brienne knew the Reeds didn't have a maester on their castle -she had happened to meet Meera Reed when the girl had arrived with Bran Stark from Castle Black-, but even so they hoped they had some ravens to send.

Jaime's face turned pale. He knew they were approaching North, and that made him nervous. How would Howland Reed react when he saw the Kingslayer at his gates? Whatever Ned Stark's friend will do could foresee how the whole North, including the Starks, would welcome him.

But the group was still like three days away from Greywater Watch, so they'd have to spend the next few nights on the way. Clegane suggested they could stop by an inn that night, in order to keep Podrick from sleeping out in the open. When everything was arranged and clear, they collected their things and left the place.

Days grew colder and the sun didn't even show up that day. They rode slowly but surely, avoiding the most dangerous places. Though no lands were safe lately, some were calmer than others. They always tried to travel near the Kingsroad, because the inns and farms tended to be located by it, but there were too many enemies roaming around the main road.

The tension between Jaime and Brienne was growing bigger too. There was always something in the
air, something in the way they talked to each other, in the way they rode together. The Lannister often sought her company, though they usually ended up bickering about stupid stuff. Brienne couldn't understand his motivations. She knew Jaime liked and respected her most of the time, but since she suspected her feelings were deeper than his, it was truly painful to be near him, having physical contact even, and not being able to act on her desires, desires that scared her. Any time he approached Brienne, she backed away imperceptibly, her heart beating fast, her walls building up quickly to avoid the harm. She was aware of her crooked nose, her broad shoulders, her size, freckles and scars. She was no tiny lady. No man would want to hold her, because that was for fragile maidens, and she was rough and unfeminine. Jaime Lannister was the most handsome man in the Seven Kingdoms and besides he loved his sister, who happened to be the mighty Queen and the most beautiful woman in Westeros.

Little she knew that Jaime, on his part, was more lost and confused than ever. His feelings were a mess. He had never had to court a lady, because he had always been with Cersei. His love for his twin had been genuine all his life, but now he started to suspect that it had never been the same the other way round. He was aware that there were some things about emotions and relationships he should have learnt in his teens but he hadn't, like what it was like to fall in love with someone. That was the reason why he didn't know how he felt about Brienne. Jaime admired and respected her, he liked to tease her and make her smile. His body had been reacting to hers for so long and lately he had found himself seeking her touch, her contact. What the hell was that? Why did he feel the urge to kiss the Maid's lips when they were close? For example, the previous night, without going any further. She wasn't supposed to be attractive! He noticed that, when he approached her in daylight, Brienne always got nervous and felt quite uncomfortable, but she seemed to accept him at night, when her defences were low. What did that mean? Did she loathe him? Was she afraid of men because of her past experiences with them? Was Jaime really making a move on her?

The group stopped by noon to eat something and let Podrick rest. The lad was enduring the ride without complaining, though his face showed his problems to hold his back straight. He still was too weak. Food helped him recover some strength and they could resume their journey. Bronn was very fond of the lad and he proved it by riding next to him and giving him some water when the boy needed it. The sellsword also tried to make him laugh with his jokes. Bronn's humour was annoying sometimes, but they had to admit that his mood was making the trip more bearable.

Some hours later, when the woods started to get really dark, the five companions decided to look for an inn. The one they found that night was far bigger than the last two they had slept in. They could even hear the noisy voices of the patrons coming from the inside. The Hound didn't like that, because the more people there were hanging out in there, the easier it would be to be recognised. But the next shelter could be too far away and it was already late, so they left their horses in the stables and got in the inn.

There were people everywhere. Some of them were drinking, others were dancing and singing. A few fellows were snoring on the counter or the tables. The filthiest ones groped the girls when they went past them to attend the customers and sat them on their laps. Brienne hated that behaviour.

Once they had been shown to their rooms and the fires were crackling upstairs, the five went down to the tavern, then searched for a discreet table in a far corner and sat down. Every day they were more exhausted and found it more difficult to travel. None of them felt like talking, so they let the toasts and noises soothe them while they had dinner.

Jaime didn't use to ask for help while eating, because he had learned to use his left hand pretty well by now, but that night he was struggling hard to cut his meat. Brienne remembered that time with Roose Bolton when she had helped him cut his steak. She didn't want to show him up in front of the others, but all of them were already casting side-glances at him, so the Maid stretched out her right
arm to her side and stuck her fork gently in the meat. Jaime sighed, but gave her a nod and finished cutting his steak. When the innkeeper brought some beers for them, Brienne finally allowed herself to lean back and rest her head against the wall.

Some minutes later, a young man entered the tavern. He was wrapped in furs and carried a lute in a leather bag. When the customers noticed it, they realised he was a singer and cheered him. The stage was set for entertainment. The young bard was given a mug of hot wine. He warmed up his hands and voice with two long sips and took off his fur cloak. Then he jumped onto a table and bowed graciously.

“I hate these guys”, the Hound commented.

“Aye, of course you do. They're fookin' funny”, Bronn mocked him and drank from his mug.

The singer strummed his lute and the patrons clapped furiously.

“The audience is quite enthralled, isn't it?”, Jaime's face showed his amusement.

“Listen, ladies and gentlemen”, the bard raised his determined voice over the noise, then he strummed again. “Today I brought you something new. I'll tell you a story never told before around these lands.”

“I hope it's better than the one you told us the other night”, Pod said looking at Bronn with a mischievous smile. He looked healthier than he did in the morning.

The sellsword shot him a mocking glance. “Admit you nearly shat yourself.”

“Shut your fucking cakeholes”, Clegane told them off. “I'm trying to listen to that cunt.”

The singer cleared his throat and continued. “Ladies and gentlemen, please, enjoy the story of The maid and the lion.”

Jaime lifted his eyebrows. *What a coincidence*, he thought amused and pinched Brienne's hip playfully. She flinched a little, but didn't look at him. She had stiffened.

“Shit, another cheap copy of The bear and the maiden fair”, the Hound grumbled.

Then, the man started to sing. His voice was clear and the melody was catchy, so the audience's faces were of pure delight.

“The maid and the lion

were hunted like hares.

The maid and the lion

unusual pair.

In some frightful castle
the couple was held,
the maid and the lion,
mismatched as hell.

The maid was appalling,
she looked like a man.
The lion was charming,
but lacking a hand.”

Both Jaime and Brienne turned pale. Her blue eyes opened as wide as oceans, her hands clenched into fists. Pod, Bronn and the Hound looked at the pair completely startled. The Lannister felt the tension grow inside Brienne and he knew she was about to leave, but that wouldn't be a clever move. Everyone would turn to look at them if she stood up: even those dumb fellows would put two and two together and would recognise the Hound, the Maid of Tarth and the Kingslayer. When the wench made a move to get up, Jaime grabbed her arm and held her in place discreetly.

“They called for the lion,
he could be set free,
the beautiful lion,
his father was rich.

But they kept the lady,
they made her stay,
the bad-looking lady,
till her ransom were paid.

They wanted her sapphires,
cause that was their prize,
but her only bright sapphires
were those in her eyes.

When her captors found out
that the maid was not rich
they hit her in the mouth,
and threw her into a pit.”

By then, Brienne's eyes were full of tears. She didn't let them spill, because she was too tough for that, but she was living a hell. Jaime hated himself for forcing her to stay, his left hand still tight around her wrist, but it was the only way to keep them safe.

“They gave her a blunt blade,
they made her fight a bear,
but the lady was brave
and she didn't have fear.

The bear was quite hefty,
but it wanted a kiss,
a kiss from the lady
who fell on her knees.

When the lady was lost,
then her saviour arrived,
the lion of gold
with his shiny mane wild.

Though the lion had lost
his dangerous paws,
the woman he loved
he protected with blood.”

Seven hells, Jaime thought. The wench closed her eyes in an attempt to hold back the tears. Her whole body was trembling. Pod cast worried looks at his lady from time to time, as if he could shield her from the painful embarrassment with his sole concern.
“The maid and the lion

got out of the pit.

The maid thanked the lion

his help with a kiss.

When they left the castle,

ey they walked hand in hand.

The maid and the lion,

two bodies, one heart.”

The singer finished his song and bowed his head. The applause was deafening. The customers patted him on the back and carried him on their shoulders for what seemed like an eternity.

After a few minutes, Jaime let go of Brienne's arm. The woman didn't lose any time and rushed towards the stairs. The three men were looking at Jaime, they didn't know what to say. Though none of them were good at showing their feelings, deep inside they were fond of the Maid and the Lannister. They liked to tease them, because they were their friends, but that song had left them speechless. Jaime glanced hesitantly at the stairs Brienne had climbed up and, after taking a deep breath, he followed her.

He found the wench in the upstairs corridor, leaning against a wall, regaining her breath. Jaime approached her and stood by her side in silence. Brienne noticed his presence and shot him a hurt glance, her wonderful blue eyes still bright with unshed tears.

“Brienne...”

“Don’t”, she warned him. She tried to swallow past the lump in her throat. “I didn't want to hear that.”

“I didn't want either. But we couldn't allow ourselves the luxury of drawing attention to us”, Jaime explained. They remained silent for a few seconds, then he spoke again. “That was a shit of a song.”

“It was cruel”, Brienne's voice was so weak that Jaime felt pity for her. “But everything was true: my ugliness, your maiming, the bear...”

“Not everything. You didn't kiss me when I saved you from the bear, wench”, he joked to cheer her up.

“Excuse me, but I think it was me who took you out of the bear pit”, Brienne shot back. “I don't know why I should have kissed you.”

“Because it's what maidens do when knights save them in the songs.”

“Do I have to remind you that I was thrown into that pit because of you?”, the lady faced him at last.
Her tears had almost dried up, but her eyes shone brighter than ever. She held her head up and put her hands on her hips. Brienne could be very frightening.

“Because of me?”, the Lannister pointed at his chest with his remaining hand.

“Don't play dumb with me, Ser Jaime! You know they believed your lie about the sapphires. That was the reason why you came back for me, because you felt guil-”

But she couldn't finish the accusation, because suddenly her lips were no longer free to talk. Jaime had captured her mouth with his after cupping the back of her head with his left hand. The kiss was forceful and hungry on Jaime's part, but Brienne didn't move. She was too startled to react, but she felt a rush of warmth running up and down her body. Both their breathings quickened and when Jaime broke the kiss and stepped back, his hand still on her neck, they locked eyes.

A thousand thoughts crossed their minds, a hundred emotions kept them rooted to the spot. It was too much for Brienne. Her walls collapsed and fell into pieces. She wanted to scream at Jaime, to kiss him, to hit him, to hug him, all at the same time. There was still a prickling sensation on her lips where his had touched them. But how did he dare to treat her like that? Why had he kissed her? Why if he didn't love her? Perhaps he felt pity for her because she was upset after hearing the song. Perhaps he felt guilty again. Brienne's blood boiled inside her veins, but she wasn't able to move. She was afraid that her heart could break free from her chest.

Jaime didn't move either. He didn't know what he had done. He, Jaime Lannister, had kissed Brienne the Beauty, the Maid of Tarth, the wench. And the worst part -or the best- was that he had enjoyed it too much. Where did that come from? And why was she so pale and angry?

Finally, Brienne's expression changed from irritated to hurt. Then she swallowed and turned her back on him to get in her room without a word.

Jaime knew he wouldn't be able to sleep that night. He wanted desperately to go after Brienne and talk to her, but he knew it was no use. It would infuriate her even more if possible and could break any little bond that still remained between them. Confused as he was, he went to his own room to retrieve his cloak, he threw it over his shoulders and rushed downstairs. He needed some air to think about his feelings, to find them out. When he ran past his companions, Bronn and Pod called after him, but he didn't look back.

It was time to become his own man, the man he was meant to be.

Chapter End Notes

Well, you don't know how difficult it is to write in another language until you have to compose a song or a poem. This is the hardest thing I've done in my life, so please, be kind and leave a review. I think I deserve it. ^^

Hey, what did you think of that kiss, by the way?! What were you thinking, Jaime?
Dawn

Chapter Notes

Hello, guys. I'm too sad J/B week came to an end. You all did a great job with your art!
You're so talented.

Thanks to everyone who commented and liked my last chapter. ^^

Here we go with number eight. This story keeps growing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It must be near dawn when Brienne heard the door of her room opening, but the sky was still dark outside the window. The night had been long and she hadn't slept at all. She had spent the first part of the night hitting her head against her pillow, then Podrick had entered their room and Brienne had pretended to be asleep, because she didn't feel like talking to her squire.

A recurrent image kept showing up in her mind and she couldn't take it out of her head: Jaime leaning forward and kissing her lips. Why was she so sad? Wasn't it what she had always dreamed of? But deep inside, she knew it wasn't that easy. While her innocent and hopeful heart had enjoyed the contact of his lips on hers, her suspicious brain kept telling her that Jaime Lannister would never love such a beast of a woman and that he had kissed her out of pity, out of mercy.

That was the reason why, when he opened her door so late in the night, the Maid didn't move. She wasn't in the mood for speaking with Jaime or letting him use her as a lullaby once again. She closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep for the second time that night, hoping for the Lannister to leave her alone. But Jaime crouched next to her bed's headboard and rested his left hand on her arm carefully. Then he dared to shake her a little in order to wake her up. Brienne clenched her jaw in anger, but she decided to open her eyes to look at him. She expected to find a hesitant expression across his features, even a regretful one, however, his face was determined, excited. The Maid frowned at the sight. How could he be so cheeky?!

“Come with me”, Jaime said in a whisper and held out his hand for her to take it. “There's something I want to show you.”

Still frowning, Brienne didn't make any move to get up. “I don't want to go.”

“Don't argue, you're going to wake up the boy”, the Lannister scolded her, pointing at Pod's sleeping figure with his chin. “Come on, you won't regret it, I promise.”

“Want to bet?”, she muttered rolling her eyes, but she finally got out of her bed. She didn't take his hand, however. Brienne put on her jerkin and boots, then threw her cloak over her shoulders and tied the laces. Jaime waited patiently, following all her movements with his green eyes. When she was ready, the man turned on his heels and led the way out of the room.

Jaime went downstairs. The tavern was deserted. Even the innkeeper was missing at that ungodly hour. The Lannister headed to the main door and pushed it to go out, then he held the thick wooden board for Brienne. The Maid was quite intrigued, but too cold. Without looking back, Jaime started to walk into the night and Brienne followed him, her arms folded in front of her chest. The icy wind
kept blowing, but at least it wasn't snowing. Even the clouds were mostly gone, which was good. Brienne couldn't remember the last time they had seen the stars in the sky above. The sight of the bright dots soothed her a little.

Neither of them spoke during their walk: they didn't know what to say. It was difficult for them to put their feelings into words and things between them were too delicate at the moment. They both preferred actions rather than words, so they kept making their way through the snow that covered the ground. After a while, they arrived at the foot of a mound and, without thinking twice, Jaime started to climb it, followed closely by Brienne. It wasn't too high, but it took them a little effort to reach the top. By the time Jaime sat down on a huge rock breathing heavily, a dim light had already started to illuminate the lands. The Maid of Tarth hesitated, but when he patted the stone with an inviting gesture, she imitated him and took a seat as well.

Brienne didn't know how she felt. What did he want to show her? And why had she agreed to come? She had promised herself that she would avoid him at all costs from now on... What the hell did that man do to her?

After some minutes of silence, Brienne finally spoke. “What are we doing here?”

“Wait”, Jaime answered without looking at her, his eyes fixed on some point in the distance.

“What for?”

He didn't respond immediately. Then, after a few seconds, he raised his stump and pointed at the horizon. “That.”

Brienne followed his gaze and looked in that direction. The sun was starting to rise. It looked like a little shiny nail at the beginning, but it kept growing bit by bit. The beauty and the calmness of the sight overwhelmed Brienne. She wasn't expecting such a wonderful spectacle. The snow crystals started to reflect the sunlight and broke it up in thousands of tiny rainbows while the shredded clouds became pink and orange.

Unconsciously and without looking at him, Brienne reached for Jaime's fingers. The man smiled slightly and took her hand in his. He knew the wench was overcome with emotion, she wouldn't have lowered her guard so much otherwise. They remained in that position until the sun had showed its whole face, whose brightness was weak and wintry. Then Brienne seemed to realise she was holding hands with Jaime and let go of his fingers, but she still had a touched expression on her sapphire eyes.

“What do you think, my lady?”, Jaime asked her.

“It reminds me of my days in Tarth”, she commented in a dreamy tone. “We used to contemplate sunsets instead of sunrises, though. Our castle's called Evenfall Hall and it faces West.”

“So does Casterly Rock, but I have always preferred sunrises, because they're always the start of something new.”

The Maid lowered her eyes at Jaime's statement. What was he trying to tell her?

“Listen, Brienne, I'm sorry for what happened yesterday”, he apologised after a few seconds of silence. “I shouldn't have done what I did.”

“And why did you do it, then?”, Brienne dared to ask, her voice weak and undecipherable. She felt so bad, because she knew Jaime would have never kissed her willingly if she hadn't been suffering from embarrassment and sorrow. He was her friend and he had only wanted to comfort her, but he
didn't know how meaningful a kiss like that would be for the Maid.

“I don't know, wench. You were shouting at me and everything happened so fast. It seemed like a good way to make you stop your rant.”

Jaime realised that his comment was a mistake when Brienne stood up from the rock and started to climb down the mound without waiting for him. She didn't bother to say anything. Why was she behaving like that? Jaime couldn't understand her. He had kissed her because his body had compelled him to do it. Judging by her face after his impulsive gesture, Jaime had thought that she hadn't liked it at all, that she'd rather they stayed friends, companions, colleagues. He didn't know if Brienne felt something for him. Was he even sure he wanted to change the state of their relationship? Were his feelings for her so strong? He had eventually come to that conclusion during the night, and that was the reason why he had gone to her room to wake her up. Jaime was desperate to make peace with Brienne, but apparently he was awful at it. If she had gotten so angry when he had kissed her, why did she also get angry now that he had apologised for it? The Lannister's head was about to explode. Everything was easier with Cersei: they both used to kiss the anger away from each other's lips. Now Jaime understood that perhaps that wasn't the better or healthier way to put an end to an argument. He still had so much to learn... But what could he do to please the wench now, to make her feel comfortable around him again? He was sure it would be easier to kill a White Walker than to make Brienne happy.

When the golden lion went back to the inn, his companions were all dressed up and ready to depart. None of them mentioned the events of the past night, but it was clear by their side glances that the infamous song was well stuck in their heads. Pod stared at him as if he were seeing him for the first time. The boy had been looking at him with pride since he had joined the group, but his new expression held some admiration as well, and that made the Lannister feel even fonder of the squire. Apparently, knowing that he had saved his lady knight's life lent Jaime some air of heroism in Pod's eyes.

Poor Jaime hadn't slept at all, and he felt too tired to face the journey, but he decided he couldn't complain. At least nobody was making any japes at his cost yet. Bronn questioned him with his eyes, as if asking where he had spent the night, and Jaime shook his head to make the sellsword understand that he didn't feel like talking about that matter. Plus, he realised Brienne was making big efforts not to look at him, because her blue orbs were too concentrated on whatever the innkeeper was doing at the moment.

The next two days were an abject hell for both Jaime and Brienne. The rest of the group noticed there was something wrong going on between the two. They all felt that the bard had ruined something there. The Hound took advantage of the situation and pulled the Kingslayer's leg whenever he could now that Brienne had stopped sticking up for him, but the jokes weren't cruel at all, just a little bothering. Actually, the Maid avoided Jaime all the time. She didn't speak to him if it wasn't extrictly necessary and she tried not to be left alone with him either. Of course, she didn't allow Jaime to place his bedroll near hers at night: Brienne was always very careful to put her sleeping mat between Pod and Clegane or Bronn, so the Lannister's dreams were plagued with nightmares, which had him constantly exhausted due to the lack of rest.

The five companions entered the North one day by noon. The mood hadn't lightened up by the time they did, so they traveled mostly in silence, except for some Bronn's japes or Clegane's grumbles. Besides, they were too tired. Everyone was looking forward to arriving at Greywater Watch. Everyone but Jaime, who felt uneasy and nervous. Now that he needed Brienne's support the most, she had turned her back on him. Sadly for Jaime, his feelings for the wench became clearer and deeper as days went by and that was making him suffer a lot.
Clouds had covered the sky again after the wonderful sunrise the pair had contemplated and they hadn't seen the sun ever since. It was nearly impossible to tell the difference between day and night lately, but mornings were still a little brighter. The Long Night was coming fast.

The southern lands of the North consisted on large swamps whose waters were starting to freeze. There were what seemed to be logs floating here and there, but they breathed too much to be real trunks. From her study days as a kid, Brienne knew the Reed sigil was a lizard-lion, a huge reptile that lived in the Neck, so it wasn't ridiculous to think that they were surrounded by deadly animals. She also recalled her encounter with Meera Reed at Winterfell. She seemed like a nice person, but she must have endured too much beyond the Wall and she wasn't joyful or passionate about anything. They had eaten dinner together one evening and Brienne had asked politely about her home: that was how the Maid had found out about Greywater Watch. It was a strange place: Meera explained that their castle kept moving, since it had been built on a crannog and it never stayed on the same spot, so their enemies had always found it very difficult to reach and attack them. Since they weren't enemies but friends, Brienne hoped they could come across it at some point, as if the castle were magical and somehow knew that they didn't intend any harm. It was their only hope to send a raven to Winterfell reporting Cersei's betrayal before it was too late.

Sleeping on a floating island wasn't the easiest of tasks, but they did their best to make camp and place their bedrolls on the unstable ground. All of them woke up to a dark grey imitation of a day, their bodies aching and their minds filled with uncertainty and uneasiness. No wonder the enemies never made too many efforts to attack Greywater Watch: the surrounding lands themselves were the best defense with such a discouraging air.

The group started to search for the castle as soon as they set off that morning. They were aware that it couldn't be far from the place they had slept in, but it was impossible to know for sure. After a long day of wandering around looking for the building -when their nerves were already high and their patience wearing thin-, they finally caught a glimpse of the tower keep of the castle. It was an odd sight: despite the cold and the snow, a foggy veil welled up from the ground, so the edges of the fortress appeared blurred in the distance.

They rode towards the place after sharing some hesitant looks. Jaime's heart beat too hard in his chest. He even found it difficult to breath, it was as if the air couldn't reach his lungs. The Lannister searched instinctively for Brienne's eyes to calm himself down a little, since her bright sapphires always seemed to act like a balm for his sorrow. The Maid locked eyes with him and gave him a nod: there was something reassuring in the depths of her blue oceans. Then Jaime knew that Brienne could be angry with him, but she would never leave him in the lurch.

They finally halted at Greywater Watch's gates and looked up at the battlements to announce their presence to the knight who was on guard. When Brienne said their names out loud, Jaime held his breath. Then the warrior disappeared from the crenels and they waited for his return. A long time passed and nothing happened. Jaime didn't like it at all. He suspected something bad was going to happen. Were they getting ready to take him prisoner? His horse sensed Jaime's fear and started to kick the ground nervously. Brienne looked at the Lannister and then rubbed his horse's forehead, as if caressing the animal could also sooth its rider.

“I think we should get our asses out of this creepy place”, Bronn voiced what all of them were thinking.

“We're friends, we have nothing to fear”, Brienne said bravely, but not even the Maid was sure about it.

“Not all of us are fucking friends”, the Hound stated. Though he didn't look at Jaime, it was pretty
obvious who he was referring to.

When Brienne was about to speak again to defend Jaime, they heard a deafening sound and the huge wooden gate started to go down. They moved back a few steps to make room for the huge door to settle down on the ground. None of them dared to make a move towards the entrance, however. Then Brienne spotted Meera Reed standing in the courtyard waiting for them, her eyes as sad as always, but her face a little healthier than the last time they had seen each other.

The Maid of Tarth read friendship on Meera's eyes and she decided that the girl was worthy of her trust. She was the first one to spur her mount forward. The rest of the group followed her shortly after. Brienne didn't know who had decided that she was their leader, but all of them seemed to be glad to be under her leadership.

There were few people working in the castle, but every single one of them turned their heads to look at the strange big lady who rode through the gates of Greywater Watch on her horse and her fellow travellers. When her animal reached Meera, Brienne dismounted and held out her hand to the Reed girl with a solemn expression in her eyes. Without hesitating, Meera accepted it and everyone seemed to start breathing again.

Chapter End Notes

They're not very good at talking, are they? Jaime needs to work on his sensitivity. ^^

Well, I don't know why Greywater Watch. It was just on the way to Winterfell, and nobody talks about this castle. Brienne met Meera at Winterfell, so there we go. This story is show compliant, but I like to think my Brienne's and Meera's ages are more book related. Brienne is only three years older than the Reed girl. Keep that in mind when you read their interactions. ;)

Let me know what you think!
“Welcome to Greywater Watch, the home of House Reed, lady Brienne”, Meera greeted her. “I hope you and your companions may enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you, lady Meera. We're just passing through on our way back to Winterfell. We'll spend just one night here at most, if it isn't too much trouble for you”, Brienne explained in her exquisit manners.

“It would be an honour. We don't have much to offer you, but we'll do our best to make you feel comfortable. If you follow me, I will show you to your quarters. You'll be able to wash yourselves and eat something, and then my father and mother will receive you.”

“That's very kind of you and your family”, the Maid bowed her head. Her friends let her do the formal job and didn't say anything. “But before we go to rest, may we send a raven to Winterfell?”

“We don't usually keep ravens at Greywater Watch. It's too difficult for them to locate this place, so we can't train or receive them. We get some sometimes, but they usually get lost on their way here. You're lucky, however. A raven arrived like two hours ago with news for my father. I suppose it is still in the tower. We have no maester here, so you'll have to send it yourself.”

“There'll be no problem. Pod, could you kindly send a raven to lady Sansa?”, Brienne asked.

“Of course, m'lady!”, the lad answered with determination. He was happy to have something to do. He waited for Meera to explain him where he would find the bird and he ran towards the highest tower of the castle.

The rest of the group followed the girl to theinside after leaving their horses in good hands. The stony corridors were so cold that their breaths were visible as foggy clouds in the air every time they exhaled. Meera led them to a deserted wing of the fortress. There were shabby velvet banners hanging from the thick walls. The young woman offered a room to the Hound -he'd be sharing with Pod when the boy returned-, another one to Jaime and Bronn, and the last one to Brienne. She promised them a good fire, some washbasins with hot water and something for dinner, and then her sad and shattered figure disappeared corridor away.

The food was meager and the water wasn't warm enough for the travellers' usual standards, but they thanked the luxury of having a roof over their heads after three days of wandering around and sleeping out in the open. The beds looked comfortable and they were covered with dusty blankets made of furs and wool. That would be enough for them to rest.

Once they had finished their meals, they were summoned to the great hall by a servant. The five
were clean and relaxed, except for Jaime, who had his brow furrowed and looked quite pale. Right after they were announced, the companions entered the large room. Howland Reed and his wife Jyana sat on two humble wooden chairs located at the top of a platform. Meera was there too, but she was standing at the bottom of it. The Lord of Greywater Watch hadn't aged well. His eyes were hollow and his skin had an unhealthy shade of grey. He wasn't so old as to look that worn out and Brienne had been told that he had been a strong and good-looking man in his youth. His wife, on her part, didn't look much better. It was as if they had been constantly ill in that family. The best trait of the crannogwoman was her long curly hair, which resembled her daughter's a lot.

The five bowed their heads when they reached the bottom of the platform. Then Brienne spoke. “Thank you for your kind welcome, Lord and Lady Reed.”

The pair exchanged a glance and then looked at her with commiseration. Brienne was used to that kind of reactions when people were in her presence, but they still got under her skin. The Reeds' daughter Meera wasn't very lady-like herself, so the Maid of Tarth couldn't really understand their pity. She swallowed and bit her tongue. They were the Reeds' hosts after all and they had been treated well.

“Welcome, lady Brienne. We've been told you're on your way to Winterfell. Is that true?”, Howland Reed asked. His strong voice didn't fit his worn body at all.

“Yes, my lord. We intend to arrive there as soon as possible to face the enemies from beyond the Wall”, she explained courtly.

“Meera told us about the wights and the White Walkers. The realm is in danger. We don't have enough men to send them to fight by your side, but we'll do our best to defend the Neck if they happen to get this far”, Jyana Reed promised. She wasn't the typical lady, either. She held some kind of determination in her grey-green eyes, but there was sadness in them as well. Suddenly, Brienne remembered they had lost their son Jojen, and then it was her turn to feel pity for the pair. Perhaps they looked so old due to their sorrow.

“Who is in command of the armies which fight the dead?”, Lord Reed questioned.

“The King in the North, Jon Snow, Ned Stark's son.”

Suddenly, there was a flash of light in Howland Reed's eyes. It lasted just one second, because when Brienne blinked, the light wasn't there anymore. She may have imagined it.

“Jon Snow”, the man repeated absentmindedly. Then he fixed his eyes back on Brienne. “And does he know you're bringing the Hound and a Lannister to Winterfell? That Lannister?”

Howland Reed pointed at Jaime, who stiffened, but didn't back away or flinch. He had to remember himself that he was a proud lion. By what right did the Lizard judge the Lion?

“He pledged his word to fight for the living, my lord”, Brienne stood up for Jaime.

“Can he talk by himself at all?”

“I can”, Jaime responded without averting his eyes from Reed's ones.

“Which are your real motivations, Lannister? You're too far from home. You don't have friends here.”

“I do have four”, the golden lion motioned towards his companions.
“My lord”, Brienne called him to avoid a more violent confrontation. “I think the North needs as many fighters as it could get. There will be time to judge men for their deeds after the war.”

Howland Reed pondered the Maid's words and glanced at his wife. Jyana gave him a nod, as if she approved Brienne's wise statement, and the Lord of Greywater Watch looked at Jaime again.

“Allright, Lannister. I suppose sometimes stabbing a man in the back is the only way to do some good”, the man said with a tired and enigmatic tone that left all of them puzzled. Then he turned to the Maid. “You're a wise woman, lady Brienne. I'm so sorry for you.”

“Why?”, she frowned, showing her lack of understanding.

Howland Reed narrowed his eyes and blinked twice before addressing Brienne again. “How long have you been travelling?”

“We left King's Landing seventeen days ago.”

“Why is that important?”, the Hound asked.

“When was the last time you got any news from your island?”, Jyana Reed said looking at Brienne and ignoring Clegane.

The Maid got pale and her companions frowned. Whatever was what the Reeds were about to tell her, it couldn't be good news to Brienne.

“A-A long time ago, my lord”, she answered. Her broad shoulders had stiffened. “What do you know?”

“We received a raven this very afternoon. Tarth has been attacked, my lady”, the man informed her. Brienne's breath got caught in her throat and her heart started to beat furiously. “Euron Greyjoy razed the island to the ground.”

Jaime clenched his only fist in anger. Euron Greyjoy was a despicable man and surely he had enjoyed to cause so much destruction on his way to Essos -he was absolutely mad-, but somehow Jaime knew who the mastermind after Tarth's sacking was: his beloved sister.

The Maid's eyes filled with tears. Now she understood why the Reeds had looked at her with such pitiful expressions at the beginning of their meeting. Her home had been attacked by the pirates and she hadn't been there to defend it. She felt a void in her stomach. Pod rushed to her side to show her some support, but it didn't help to comfort her. Bronn, the Hound and Meera were completely awestruck as well.

Brienne knew she had to ask one more question, but she wasn't ready for the answer. “A-and my father? W-What happened to my father?”

“I'm sorry. Lord Selwyn is dead.”

It was just as if an invisible hammer had hit her in the chest. The air left Brienne's lungs and she couldn't refill them. She felt Jaime's warm hand on her elbow, but her mind seemed unable to register any more information.

“H-How did he...?”, the Maid managed to ask, barely containing her tears.

“Lady Brienne, I don't think you-”, Jyana Reed started to say, her tone very sad, but the lady knight cut her off in her weak voice.
Howland Reed informed her.

And Brienne couldn't hold back her misery anymore. She wailed, her heart broken, and her tears started to flow freely from her eyes and down her crooked nose. Suddenly, two strong arms surrounded her body. Brienne knew it was Jaime who was hugging her. She was too tired of being strong, so she hid her wet face on his shoulder and cried and cried. She had failed Tarth and her father, her most precious gifts. Soon, her legs faltered and she collapsed, but the Lannister caught her before she could hit the ground. He ended up sitting on the stony floor with Brienne in his lap.

While he caressed the wench's hair with his left hand, Jaime looked up at his companions helplessly. "We need to take her to her room. Now."

The Hound and Bronn hurried to help him immediately. Jaime heard Howland Reed give some orders to his servants, but he was too focused on Brienne to care for anything else. The three men worked together to help the disconsolate Maid on her feet. She was incredibly large. Since poor Brienne couldn't cooperate much, they had to make a big effort to reach her quarters. Meera and Pod trailed them nervously, the last too worried for his lady. The men got in the room and lay Brienne down carefully on her bed after pulling the blankets away. Brienne curled over herself and hid her crying face on the pillow. A servant entered shortly after and handed Podrick a jar of water and a mug for the lady. The lad approached the bed and offered the Maid some water, but she didn't even look at him.

"I think we should let her rest", the Hound suggested. There was some compassion in his words.

"I'm not leaving her alone", Jaime refused and then he sat on the bed by Brienne's waist, his green eyes fixed on the wench's trembling figure.

Bronn and the Hound exchanged a meaningful look. Everyone felt that they were intruding something too intimate, so they started to back away slowly. Soon, all of them left the room and closed the door, leaving Jaime and Brienne on their own.

The Lannister felt guilty, though he didn't know exactly why. Perhaps it was because he was sure of Cersei's involvement in lord Selwyn's death. How could she be so cruel? When she had plotted the Golden Company thing with Euron, she didn't even know that Jaime would leave her. Had she done it to show her brother her infinite power, to demonstrate him what she was capable of when it came to keep him by her side? Jaime would bet anything that Cersei had suggested Euron to attack Tarth because she wanted to chastise him through Brienne. His twin sister had realised what he felt for the wench before he even had a clue. She had always been smarter than him. How could have he been so blind? Why hadn't he been able to see the monster Cersei had become? He should have stopped her! Was there anything left of the golden girl he had loved so much?

Jaime closed his eyes. He wasn't allowed to cry tonight: he was there to comfort Brienne. He didn't want his tears to add more sorrow to her already shattered heart. The Lannister unfastened the straps of his golden hand and put it on the nightstand, because he didn't want to feel its weight while trying to soothe Brienne. Slowly, he got up from the bed and started to work on the woman's boot laces. At least, he could make her feel more comfortable in bed. Using his stump as help, Jaime managed to take off both her boots and then he reached for her jerkin. Brienne's position didn't help much, so Jaime asked for her permission to strip her off her clothes.

"Let me, my lady."

But Brienne didn't allow him to undress her. Still weeping, her chest trembling, the wench brought
her own hands to her jerkin and untied the laces taking her time. Then she took off the leather garment and handed it to Jaime, who placed it on a chair.

Then he sat back down on the bed, put his left hand on her broad shoulder and started to rub it tenderly over her shirt. The Maid still lay with her back to him, so he couldn't see her face, but he kept caressing her muscular arm and upper back patiently. The sobs didn't stop, though, and Brienne was shivering. There was only one thing left he could do to convince her that she wasn't alone, that he was there for her. Jaime swallowed and stood up. Without giving it a second thought, he took off his own footwear and doublet, he pulled away Brienne's blankets and got in the bed behind her. Then he threw the furs back over both of them to keep them warm.

She stiffened a little when she felt the weight of his body on the straw mattress, but she didn't move away or turn her head. Carefully Jaime reached for her face with his left hand and lifted it slightly to place his stump under her ear, so that she could rest her head on his upper arm. Then he threw his good limb over her waist tentatively and placed his hand on her toned stomach to draw her closer to his body with careful movements. Though Jaime wasn't used to lie in bed with a woman taller than him, it felt so right to have Brienne's back against his chest. He held his breath with fear. How was the wench going to react to his closeness? But she just kept crying bitter tears on his maimed arm.

Jaime let her weep. His heart broke every time he heard a sob coming out of Brienne's lips. After a while, he tightened his embrace and leaned forward to place a soft kiss on her hair, right above her left ear. She didn't protest and Jaime took it as a sign of consent on her part, so he kissed her temple again.

The Maid's heart was beating hard. How was that possible? It should be completely lifeless after knowing about her father's death. Brienne could feel Jaime's warm body spooning hers, and that gave her the false impression that her situation wasn't too serious. The Lannister's lips kept leaving a trail of light pecks on her hair and, though the sensation was intoxicating, it was hurting Brienne badly at the same time.

"Stop it, Jaime, please", she begged, her voice broken.

"Brienne...", Jaime sat up a little and stared at the visible side of her face. It was the first time the wench said his name without adding the Ser.

"Don't do this to me."

"What am I doing to you, my lady?", he asked softly.

"I'm a failure", Brienne hid her face in the crook of his elbow. "I don't deserve your pity."

"First of all, you're not a failure, Brienne. You're the bravest person I've ever met. And, on the other hand, you're my friend. Friends are allowed to pity each other."

"I should have been there to protect my father", the Maid's voice broke mid-sentence and the rest of her words came out as sobs.

Jaime's hand left Brienne's waist and rubbed her shoulder soothingly. "No, wench. You could have done nothing to save him or Tarth. If you had been there, now you'll be dead as well. I know what I'm talking about."

"And why is that?", she asked without looking at him. Her tone was sceptical, as if she thought Jaime was saying those things just to comfort her.

"Cause Tarth was attacked because of me", the Lannister confessed. Why? He wasn't supposed to
tell her! How was that comforting?

“What?”, Brienne turned her head slowly, her huge blue eyes flooded with tears. She fixed them on him, she didn't know what to believe. Was he being serious? Jaime lay back down, he threw his left arm over his eyes and rested his head on the pillow. His right elbow was still under Brienne’s neck. The Maid rolled over so that her front was facing him, she rested the weight of her body on her left elbow and grabbed the front of his shirt with violence. “Jaime! What are you talking about?”

He swallowed and removed his arm from his eyes to look at her. “Euron Greyjoy didn't run away back to the Iron Islands. He sailed to Essos under Cersei's orders to fetch the Golden Company.”

“Mercenaries”, Brienne reflected and then frowned in rage. “How could you-”

“I didn't know it. Cersei lied to me as well. She plotted with Euron behind my back, I swear it.”

The Maid let go of his shirt, but she pressed on, her eyes still full of water. “And why is it your fault that Euron killed my...”

“I'm sure Cersei ordered him to do it to punish me”, there was so much honesty in his words that it was difficult not to believe him.

“But why? What did my father mean to you?”, Brienne questioned anxiously.

“Nothing in himself, my lady. But he meant so much because he was your father. And you're... you're... important to me. My sister knew I couldn't bear to see you suffer”, now he was going down a dangerous path. “I'm so sorry.”

Brienne whined and resumed her sobbing. She lowered her head to hide her face from her friend's eyes. Her shoulders started to tremble badly. The sight was excruciating for Jaime. He had never seen Brienne cry so violently, even though they had been through so many horrible things together. She had nearly been raped by their nasty captors and she had shouted, headbutted and kicked them, but didn't allow them to see her cry. She had even fought a bear, Seven hells! And she had never spilled a single tear. Perhaps she had cried after Renly's death, but the Lannister didn't know that. And there she was now, completely broken in a bed next to Jaime, who felt helpless and useless in front of such display of sorrow.

He put his arms around the wench tenderly and forced her to lay back down. Then he drew her closer to his chest while he made soothing sounds. Brienne hid her face in the crook of his neck, too weak to fight, and her tears started to leave a wet stain on his shirt. After what seemed like a lifetime, her sobs finally became less frequent. Her breathing evened a little as well.

“My father was a good man, Jaime”, the Maid whispered eventually, her eyes closed, her tone drowsy.

“I'm sure he was. He raised a wonderful daughter”, the Lannister ran his fingers through her hair several times and noticed that the woman was starting to relax in his arms. “Try to sleep, Brienne. I'll take care of you tonight.”

“I don't need anyone to...”, she said in a cute sleepy voice. She yawned and continued. “... take care of me, Ser.”

Jaime smiled fondly. That was his wench. Broken as she was, the combative woman he knew was still there somewhere, fighting against sorrow to rise again some day. “Of course, my lady. Of course you don't. But I'll be right here just in case.”
Brienne nodded slightly and that was the last thing she did fully conscious. She barely registered the touch of Jaime's lips on her forehead and then she drowned in the swamps of the restless dreams.

Chapter End Notes

They're getting close!

I'm so sorry for Brienne's father... :'(

Tell me what you think, my fellow shippers.
The sword in the darkness

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little shorter than the others, but I will make you up for it in the next ones.

Sorry about Brienne's sorrow.

There we go!

Morning found Brienne still in Jaime's arms. The lady knight had dreamed awful things: she kept seeing her father in front of her, his body covered in blood and his eyes out of his sockets. She had woken up screaming twice during the night and Jaime had tried to lull her back to sleep with sweet words. They were more exhausted than ever. When they woke up in what they felt it was morning, they remained motionless in bed for a while, their bodies entangled. Brienne's eyes were completely lifeless, her piercing blue irises dull and blurred. Jaime wasn't sure she was aware of where she lay.

“Good morning, my lady. How are you?”, the Lannister asked her eventually. She only shrugged, so slowly that she seemed to be carrying the whole world on her shoulders. “Let's go have some breakfast. That will do you good.”

But her answer was the same, so Jaime thought that perhaps it would be better if he asked a servant to take some food to her quarters that morning. He was sure Brienne didn't feel like going to the hall. After disentangling himself carefully from their embrace, Jaime got out of bed and put on his boots and doublet, then he attached his golden hand to his stump. When he turned around to check on Brienne, he realised she had curled over herself again and wasn't even looking at him. He approached the bed and squeezed her arm.

“I'll send a maid with your breakfast. You need to eat, Brienne. I'll be back here soon and then we will go to the courtyard to spar a little. I'm getting a bit rusty”, Jaime commented waving at her with his metal hand. He tried to bring a light tone to his joke, but the Maid shrugged for the third time.

Jaime sighed and left the room, but he didn't feel at ease with the idea of leaving her in her room alone.

When he arrived at the great hall, Bronn and Pod were already there. The squire was stirring the brown liquid in his bowl absent-mindedly and the sellsword was sharing mischievous glances with a serving girl from across the room. Jaime sat down next to Pod and the boy lifted his head from his disgusting breakfast anxiously.

“How's lady Brienne, my lord?”, he asked putting down his spoon. Since Jaime only shook his head in answer, the lad bit his lip in concern. “Do you think I should go to see her?”

“Yes, why not. Perhaps it would cheer her up”, the Lannister doubted it, but it was no use to discourage the boy. “Bring her some food.”

Podrick didn't wait for more to be said. He stood up quickly and disappeared towards the kitchens, leaving Jaime and Bronn alone. The last had his arms folded on the table and his eyes fixed on
Jaime.

The Lannister tilted his head and frowned. “What?”, he asked Bronn after two minutes of enduring his uncomfortable staring.

“Nothing. I was just thinking. Too bad what happened to your lady.”


“Of course she is. But now you'll have to wait a little more to fuck her”, the sellsword said in his cheeky tone.

“Really, Bronn, I'm not in the mood for this.”

The man lifted his hands as if he wanted to make peace and then got up. “If you'll excuse me, I think I'm going to look for that Clegane cunt. I could use a good swordfight this morning. It's the best way to warm you up with this fookin' weather”, Bronn explained and suddenly he locked eyes with the serving girl again. “Well, perhaps the second best way. See you later.”

Bronn squeezed Jaime's shoulder amiably. When his friend disappeared, the Lannister hid his face in his hands, the real and the golden one. After a few seconds of solitude, he used his flesh fingers to rub his eyes. Why did everything have to be so difficult? A servant brought him a bowl with soup and some breath. Jaime wasn't hungry, but he knew he should eat, so he did. Now he needed to be the strongest one, for Brienne.

Without losing time, the Lannister thanked the servant and finished his breakfast. Then he went back to Brienne's room. In a cold stony corridor, he bumped into Podrick, who wore a sad and worried expression on his face. The lad explained that his lady didn't want to eat or get out of bed. Jaime tried to calm him down and promised him to make Brienne have some food.

When he entered her room, the wench was exactly in the same position he had left her more than half an hour ago. Jaime took the bowl Pod had placed on her nightstand in his only hand and sat on her bed. Then he placed the pot in his lap and secured it with his golden hand while he grabbed the spoon with his good fingers.

“Alright, wench, I know this broth looks disgusting. Truly not the best of my life, but if you don't eat it willingly, I will force you”, he threatened Brienne.

The wench turned her head towards him and sighed in surrender. Then she sat up slowly and took the bowl and the spoon from his lap and hand to start sipping her soup meekly. He let her eat in silence, at her own pace, but when she finished and was about to lie back down, Jaime tutted and grabbed her arm.

“No way. Put on your clothes. We're going to train now.”

“I don't feel like it, Jaime”, Brienne's voice held a desperate a plea.

“But I need you to help me improve my skills. Will you say no to this poor old cripple?”, Jaime pouted and blinked several times to melt her hesitation.

Poor Brienne sighed in low spirits, but she got out of bed anyway. Although her body language showed her reluctance plainly, she started to dress up with Jaime's help. After a few minutes, both of them were ready and on their way to the courtyard. They had taken their Valyrian swords with them. Nothing invited to think that this decadent castle had many decent training swords. Besides, Jaime was fed up with using sticks for sparring: what his arm needed was a real blade, with its endless
length and metallic weight, to regain some of his skill back.

When they arrived at the yard, they saw Bronn fighting the Hound. They seemed to be enjoying their little combat, because noisy guffaws and bad words could be heard from time to time coming from their mouths. There were a few people watching them, Pod and Meera among them, while Howland Reed witnessed everything from the balcony. The onlookers cheered up the swordsmen every time their blades crashed. Bronn and the Hound were evenly-matched: they both had a good footwork and used some not very honourable tricks to beat their opponent. After several more minutes of dancing around each other, they put and end to their sparring with no winner and shook hands amiably.

“What a pair”, Jaime commented leaning towards Brienne. “Tough, cynical, foul-mouthed... Don't you think they might be related?”

Jaime was trying hard, but Brienne seemed to be immune to his attempts to erase her misery. All she did was taking a deep breath, then she followed him to the centre of the yard. Every eye was on them. Jaime didn't want to do this in front of everyone in Greywater Watch, because he didn't enjoy making a fool of himself, but he thought that perhaps it would be good for the wench to spar and beat him. Adrenalin had always warmed Jaime's heart and he knew Brienne well enough to believe she felt the same. Besides, she was such a skilled swordswoman: the competition would do her good.

They started walking in circles, staring at each other. Jaime didn't like the lack of tension in Brienne's body, but he was determined to make her sweat. The Lannister flourished Widow's Wail with his left hand and made it spin just to warm up his wrist a little. When people clapped enthusiastically, he smiled at the Maid. At least they were going to entertain the crowd. Suddenly, he attacked her. Brienne parried and blocked his blow easily. The moment their swords kissed for the first time, the sound they made was deafening. A violent quake shook their arms and bodies and drew them apart. It was like nothing Jaime had experienced before. Their blades shone for a second and then went back to their original state. The pair looked at each other with matching startled expressions. What had just happened?

A heavy silence fell over the courtyard, nobody spoke. The Lannister hefted his sword as if it were the first time he wielded it. Then he looked at Brienne with his brow furrowed and decided to attack again. He drove at her without warning, but she jumped back in time and turned the cut with Oathkeeper. Again, they were pushed apart by an invisible force that shocked them. Brienne and Jaime studied their momentarily shining blades.

“I-I think we should stop fighting”, the Maid suggested still staring at Oathkeeper in awe.

“W-What? No!”, Jaime refused. Despite the strange behaviour of their swords, he was determined to train with her. It was the closest he would probably ever be to dancing with Brienne. He approached her, took Oathkeeper from her hand feeling still quite confused and addressed a grey-haired man who seemed to be the master-at-arms of the castle. “Please, Ser, we need two swords to spar.”

Then Jaime walked towards Pod and gave him their two blades. “We'll find out what's happening with these stupid swords later, alright? Hold them while we're training, young Payne.”

When the old man returned with two nicked swords, Jaime lifted his eyebrows in disbelief, but he accepted them. He threw one at Brienne, who didn't catch the flying wooden stick and had to bend down to retrieve it with a resigned sigh. The moment she stood up straight, Jaime stroke and she barely had enough time to step aside. The Lannister moved into the Maid again, as if he didn't want to let her breath, and took Brienne by surprise, so his sword hit her side harder than intended. She let out a groan.
“Are you alright?”, he asked a little concerned. She only nodded and lifted her sword to defend herself, but didn't attack him. “Come on, wench. Fight back a little. This would be a lot funnier if you tried to hit me.”

The woman rolled her eyes and did what he instructed, but it was clear she wasn't putting her heart into it. At first, Jaime thought it was because she didn't want to ridicule him in front of the others, however he soon realised that it was really because Brienne seemed to have lost the taste for fighting. After a few minutes of fake sparring, Jaime was fed up with the situation. He grabbed the hilt of his blunt sword with all his strength and charged against her, whirling the stick above his head. The Lannister pressed the attack as violently as he could until Brienne wasn't able to defend herself anymore in her state and he ended up hitting the back of her leg with his sword, which made the Maid fall down on her knees.

Some of the men clapped, but most of them just left, including Howland Reed, whose grey cloak swirled when he turned on his heels. They had expected a little response from the tall wench, but she had clearly disappointed them. Brienne remained in her kneeling position breathing heavily and didn't move. Suddenly, Jaime knelt in front of her.

“Get up, wench. Now. Fight.”

“I can't, Jaime”, she shook her head. The Lannister had never seen her so defeated and that was killing him.

“Get up. The White Walkers won’t show you any mercy. Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

“Perhaps it would be better-”

With a pang, the knight dropped his sword onto the snow and lifted his left hand to cup Brienne's cheek. “Don't. Ever. Say. That. Again.”

She closed her eyes and leaned briefly into his touch. The Maid liked Jaime's skin on hers, his smell, his only presence. It made her heart sing despite her sad situation. Having Jaime so close lately was melting down all her defences and she was too tired of being strong, so she allowed herself to enjoy the little contact. Brienne really couldn't fight him, not today, at least. Her beloved father had just died, she had suddenly become the only heir of Tarth -which had been razed to the ground too-, and the only other people she had left could die at any moment as well, since they were going out to face the dead, no more no less. What was the point in fighting so hard, in cherishing hopes, when everybody she loved was dead or closer to death than life?

Brienne's thoughts were a complete chaos. She had never felt so confused in her life and Jaime's hand wasn't helping to ease her confusion. With her knees still to the ground, the Maid opened her eyes slowly and fixed them on her friend.

“Brienne. Please”, the Lannister's voice was soft and pleading when he spoke again.

“I can't, Jaime. I'm sorry.”

After placing her wooden sword in the snow right in front of Jaime, Brienne of devastated Tarth got up. Her full height was still impressive despite her stooped back, a sign of her sorrow. Without looking back, the woman crossed the courtyard and headed towards the castle to look for a place where she could think and mourn her father alone and undisturbed.

Jaime picked up both their swords with his left hand and stood up as well, his depressed gaze fixed on Brienne's back. He felt Bronn's hand on his shoulder and he thanked the gesture. Though he
knew it was going to be difficult, the Lannister promised himself he wouldn't lose the wench. She was too valuable, too precious to him, and he was determined to help her get over the death of her father. Jaime was running out of time, true, but he would fight for her.

He owed Brienne that much.

Chapter End Notes

I like Bronn, you like Bronn, everyone likes Bronn. ^^

I wanted to introduce a little mention of their twin blades reaction to fighting each other. I don't know the solution for their problem yet, but I'll try to find out as if I were Samwell Tarly himself.

Jaime is too sweet, isn't he?
After leaving the courtyard, Brienne searched for a quiet place to be alone. She knew her bedroom was out of consideration, because Jaime and Pod would find her there too easily. Though the Maid really appreciated their efforts to make her happy, to help her carry on with her life as if nothing had happened, she needed some time to mourn the deaths of her father and home. She didn't want it any other way. Brienne was too used to pain, it had always played a main role in her life, and she wasn't scared of it. Pain helped her become more conscious of the good things she had. She didn't want to soothe the pain in her heart, she only needed to come to terms with her new situation to go on living. That process was necessary for her. It had been the same when Renly and lady Catelyn had died. She had learned to live with her guilt, but she hadn't wanted to forget the pain their deaths made her feel until time and life themselves had alleviated it.

Without thinking, her steps led her to the tower keep and Brienne decided to climb the stairs to the top. Since Greywater Watch had no ravens -as Meera had explained- it wasn't likely that many people would drop by, so that place could be exactly what she was looking for. The building was in a poor state. A lot of ashlars were missing from the walls, as if a giant had punched the tower in anger several times. The cold slipped through the cracks and made Brienne shiver. She went past the raven cote, where some feathers lay on the floor amongst the straw and dirt, and kept on climbing until she reached the top. Some of the crenels had disappeared there as well, so the Maid was very careful when she leaned over the wall to see the view. The swamps lay away at Brienne's feet as far as the eye could see. Everything in that land seemed to be grey: the trees, the water, the sky, even the snow. Brienne felt an uneasiness that had nothing to do with her sorrow. The Long Night was already upon them.

Brienne stood there for what seemed like an eternity, staring at the horizon. Winterfell was somewhere beyond those bogs, still too far from where they were now, and that made her think. Was she sure about running to the Starks to help them defend the North when her own home had been attacked? Shouldn't she go back to her people now that she was their lady and only hope? Brienne brought her hands to her hair and grabbed some of her blonde locks. Everything was too complicated and sad.

When she felt her feet ache, the Maid sat down slowly, her legs crossed and her elbows on her knees. She rested her forehead on her hands and remained in that position for a very long time. Her thoughts wandered to the image of her father, her lovely and understanding father, the man who had helped her become the woman she was today. He had allowed his only remaining daughter and heir to be taught how to fight, to join Renly's forces, to live her life just the way she wanted. Had there ever been any other man in whole bloody Westeros with such an open mind like lord Selwyn's? Brienne suddenly felt too overwhelmed with gratitude for the father she had been granted. Her eyes started to spill bitter tears against her will, but she could do nothing to stop them from falling. Her
father had died and she hadn't been there to hold him in her arms, to kiss him goodbye, to close his eyes or to help his soul find its way to the Stranger the Tarth way.

All of a sudden, she opened her eyes wide and stood up. She might still do that. It was the only thing she could do for her father right now.

Wiping away her tears, Brienne went downstairs with careful steps to the raven cote and started to look for some fluffy feathers. The search was long, because most of them were too old and ruined, but finally, she managed to collect seven long thick black feathers. Then the Maid climbed the stairs back to the top of the tower because, though the day was dark, she knew it would be brighter outside the walls and she was going to need some light for what she planned to do.

*****

Jaime was desperate.

After his failed sparring session with Brienne, the Lannister had returned the wooden swords to the master-at-arms and had approached Pod to retrieve Widow's Wail and Oathkeeper. The lad had been reluctant to let go of Brienne's blade, but he had finally surrendered to Jaime's warning look. The man had called for Bronn and both had retired to their room. Jaime needed something to occupy his mind with while Brienne took her time to be on her own and he decided that their swords' strange behaviour during the fight might be a good thing to start with.

Both men had spent the rest of the morning trying to get to the bottom of the mystery. They had studied the Valyrian steel carefully, polished the blades, brought them near the fire and even fought against each other in the room, and though the swords had shaken oddly every time they had crossed them, they hadn't shone like before. They would have to find an expert in Valyrian steel to find out what had happened.

Jaime and Bronn had left the swords well hidden in the room and had headed to the great hall to eat. The Lannister had expected to find Brienne there, but the Maid hadn't shown up. That had worried Jaime a little, but he had sat down with the Hound, Bronn and Pod without making an issue of it. The men had eaten their meager and tasteless stews and had talked about the advisability of leaving the castle as soon as possible to resume their journey. It was clear the Reeds didn't have too much food and they were five more mouths to be fed. They had agreed on packing that evening and setting off the very next morning. Pod, Clegane and Bronn were very careful not to mention Brienne's absence to Jaime during their meal, because they knew he was distressed and worried.

Since the wench hadn't dropped by the great hall during lunch time, Jaime had went to her room to check on her, but it had surprised him that she wasn't there. Then he had started a thorough search. He had opened doors, went to unexplored places... But he hadn't been able to find her. What if she had decided to do something stupid?

After a fruitless afternoon of looking for Brienne, his heart hammering inside his chest, Jaime had headed towards the highest tower of the castle. It was the only place where he hadn't been to yet. He climbed the stairs two at a time. He looked into the raven cote, but the wench wasn't there either, so the Lannister kept going up until he reached the top of the tower.

And there she was.

She stood near the remaining stony crenels with her back to the stairs. Her short blonde hair danced with the wind graciously while her hands held something against her chest. Jaime watched her endless legs and strong shoulders for a second and they took his breath away. She was as tall as the Warrior and as pure as the Maiden. The Lannister's heart skipped a beat. His own goddess was right
there, right in front of him. All he needed to do was kneeling at her feet and saying all his prayers.

When he stepped forward, Brienne turned around to look at him, her eyes full of tears. How did she manage to look strong and fragile at the same time?

“Brienne...”, Jaime pronounced her name reverently.

She didn't say anything right away, but waited until he was by her side to show him the thing she had been holding against her heart. It consisted on seven black feathers tied together by their calamus to form a circle.

“When someone dies, we do this in Tarth”, Brienne explained in a very low voice. “It's called a soulcatcher. We believe it helps the soul of the deceased to find its way to the Seven. You have to make it with seven feathers and tie them with a thread from some of the death person's clothes.”

Jaime nodded to let her know he was listening. Then he asked. “What did you use for that?”

Brienne lifted her left arm and showed him the torn sleeve of her shirt. “I didn't have anything that belonged to my father, but since I'm his daughter and everything I am I owe it to him, I hope this works.”

The pleading look she shot at him melted Jaime's heart, so he gave her another nod to encourage her to carry on with whatever she needed to do with that soulcatcher. Brienne brought it to her chest again and took a deep breath with her eyes closed. Jaime rested his golden hand on her lower back and she leaned slightly against his side, looking for his support. Then she opened her amazing eyes and raised the circle of feathers. She held it up for a few seconds, as if she didn't dare to carry on with her ritual. The Maid's lips said a silent prayer and then she threw the object into the air. The wind carried the soulcatcher away from them and soon they lost sight of it. It was too dark to be able to follow its form through the air.

Brienne sighed and closed her eyes very tightly to prevent her tears from falling, but it was no use. She hated crying in front of people, but she seemed to be unable to stop lately. She turned her head to look at Jaime, whose hand was still on her waist, and put her arms around his neck as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Jaime hugged her back and let her cry her calm tears on his shoulder. Though Brienne was taller than him, the Lannister couldn't help but notice that they fit perfectly in each other's arms. The intimacy of the moment was overwhelming. Jaime had the feeling that this was Brienne's personal 'bath of Harrenhal'. She was trusting him, she was making the first move for the first time. He inhaled her scent and allowed his senses to get intoxicated by her proximity.

At some point, Brienne lifted her head from his shoulder and locked eyes with him, her arms still around his neck. Jaime could feel the tension growing between them. He removed his left hand from her waist and brought it to her cheek to caress it softly. Her full lips were slightly parted and calling for him, there was something in them that made him feel the need to kiss them. The Lannister clenched his teeth. How could he be so selfish? Brienne had just lost her father and there he was, thinking of kissing her lips senselessly. He was truly awful at comforting people. Gathering all his will power, Jaime stepped back reluctantly and took Brienne's hand in his.

“Come on, my lady. It's late. You've been up here the whole day. You need to eat something before going to bed”, he said pulling her towards the trap door that led to the stairs.

They walked hand in hand all the way to Brienne's room. They came across a serving boy in a corridor and asked him for some dinner in her quarters. They reached the door in silence and opened it, tired as hell. Brienne felt drained, emotionally speaking. She let go of Jaime's hand and went to grab two chairs to place them in front of the fire. Someone had already built it for her and she
thanked them internally. Then they sat down and started to take off their boots. It was ridiculous for
them to go on pretending that Jaime wasn't going to sleep in Brienne's room that night, because that
was what he had been doing since they had reunited.

When they were a little more comfortable, their legs stretched out in front of the fire, they allowed
themselves to relax. Jaime's urge to kiss the wench was still there, but he thought that perhaps these
weren't the best times for his advances. He would be patient, and he would respect her will, her pace,
because now he was almost sure that Brienne's heart had already started to walk towards him.

A light knock on the door made them turn their faces. The servant got in the room with two bowls
and two spoons and handed them to the pair. Then he bowed his head respectfully and left. Brienne
and Jaime had just started eating their hot soups when another knock startled them. It was Podrick
who poked his head around the door this time, his face quite relieved when he saw Brienne there
safe and sound.

“M'lady! I didn't know where to find you”, he explained. “Lord and Lady Reed inquired about you
at dinner. I excused you, m'lady, and they understood perfectly that you preferred to-”

“Thank you, Pod”, Brienne said honestly. “I feel better.”

“I'm happy to hear that, m'lady. If you w-want me to pack your things for tomorrow, I'll gladly do it
now”, the lad offered, but he saw Brienne's confused expression and backed off. “B-But if you
prefer-”

“Are we leaving tomorrow?”, she asked Jaime.

“Yes. We talked about it at lunch. I forgot to tell you.”

Brienne looked back at Podrick. “Don't worry, Pod. I'll do it myself. Just bring Oathkeeper, please.”

Pod blushed and glanced at Jaime, who was sipping from his spoon. “It's in my room, right under the
straw mattress. Bring Widow's Wail as well. And tell Bronn you did”, Jaime instructed.

The boy hurried to please his lady and Ser Jaime. He was back in Brienne's room in the blink of an
eye with the two swords in his hands. He leaned them against the wall, wished them good night and
left again. Brienne and Jaime finished their meals and put their bowls on the stony floor. The man
untied the straps of his golden hand and discarded it on the ground as well. He massaged his scarred
wrist with his left fingers. After a while, the lady spoke without looking at him, her eyes fixed on the
dancing flames.

“Do you ever miss Casterly Rock?”

Jaime didn't answer right away. He reflected on her question for some time, still rubbing his stump.
“Well, not the Rock, exactly. I miss my childhood and early teens there. I think I started to lose my
innocence when I left home.”

Brienne nodded, as if she identified too well with his words.

“When I think of Casterly Rock I can almost remember my mother's face. The rest of the time I find
it impossible”, Jaime continued with dreamy but nostalgic eyes.

“I don't remember my mother”, Brienne confessed. “My father never talked about her. Or my
siblings. It was too painful for him. He kind of buried them in his past and carried on the best way he
could.”
“You had siblings? I thought you were an only child.”

The Maid shook her head before answering. “I had an older brother and two younger sisters. They all died when they were kids.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“I loved my brother, Galladon”, Brienne told Jaime. She didn’t know why she was sharing this with him, but she felt like it was the right thing to do. “He was four years older than me. I just wanted to be like him, I followed him everywhere: when he climbed the cliffs, when he threw stones at the sea, when he learned to fight... I was his shadow. When he drowned I was only four, too young to understand death, if we ever come to fully understand it, but my world ended with him. Where there had always been a boy, I could only see a huge void. I wanted them to give me back my brother, but he never returned to me.”

Jaime understood her perfectly. She was describing exactly what he had felt when his mother, Joanna, had died giving birth to Tyrion. Jaime was seven then, and he had suffered so much.

“Death always wins. It takes the rich and the poor equally, Tywin Lannister and a beggar”, the Lannister said softly.

“Then why are we going North?”, the Maid asked. “If death always wins, why don't we let it come for us now? Why don't we let the army of the dead destroy Westeros and its people? Everyone is going to die at some point. Why prolong the wait, the agony?”

“I don’t have an answer for that”, Jaime shook his head. “But I suppose I just don't want to sit down and wait for those wights to take me. I guess I've never been good at obeying orders. I know I'm going to die some day, but I don't want it to be today, wench. There are still so many things I want to do before I kick the bucket.”

Brienne smiled at his optimism and rebelliousness and looked at him. His dishevelled hair and stubble gave him an air of nonchalance that she loved a lot. Jaime glanced at her and smiled back with his perfect lips. Then the Maid lowered her eyes and directed them to the fire again. They remained silent for a while, the only sounds coming from the crackling flames. Jaime felt comfortable in Brienne’s presence. There had been a time when he had needed to talk constantly in her company, but those times were long gone. Now he cherished the silence between them as much as the chatter, because it was another way of telling things to each other. Suddenly, she spoke again.

“I feel responsible for my father's death.”

“You are not.”

Brienne shook her head. “Of course I am. If I hadn't left Tarth to look for adventures, Euron would have never attacked my island... because I would have never met you.”

Jaime’s heart stopped. Brienne’s inference had made his blood run cold. Was she being serious? He swallowed hard and asked in a very slow and sad voice. “Do you wish you had never met me, my lady?”

Then the wench’s eyes filled up with tears. The worst part is that I would let my father die a thousand times if that meant I would meet you again, Brienne thought with a pang of guilt. She didn't say it aloud however, just shook her head. “No.”

Jaime fell silent, his green eyes fixed on the fire. His heart relaxed a little after Brienne’s answer. Without blinking, as if he were watching something very interesting in the flames, he cleared his
throat and spoke again. “I know what I'm going to say won't bring you any comfort and won't compensate your father's death in any way, but...”, Jaime paused because he didn't know how to go on. Then he sighed and the words came to his mouth. “I would be dead if I hadn't met you.”

The Maid took a deep breath and gave him a nod blushing. “I would be dead without you, too.”

Another heavy silence spread its wings over the pair. Talking shouldn't be so difficult, right? They were friends, they knew each other, they'd been through horrible things together. Surely fighting a bear couldn't be easier than talking... But truth was neither of them dared to make the first move, to confess their growing feelings for each other.

“I think it's time to-”, Brienne said and she got up without looking at him.

“Yes”, Jaime agreed and imitated her.

She looked at the bed and then at Jaime, whose eyes held a note of hesitation. Then Brienne took off her leather jerkin and moved towards the pallet to pull away the blankets. With clumsy movements, she got into bed, her back to Jaime, but she didn't throw the furs over her, as if she were waiting for him to climb into bed behind her. The Lannister unlaced his doublet and put it on his chair. Then he approached the bed, his heart beating hard, his mouth dry, and lay next to Brienne.

He didn't know where his courage had gone. Last night he had hugged the Maid and kissed her hair, and now he didn't even dare to relax his back. The difference was that she was barely conscious of her sorroundings last night, she needed comfort. Would she allow him to cuddle up with her now? Jaime closed his eyes and slid his arm over Brienne's waist. The wench didn't hold his hand or touch him in any way, but she didn't move away either. That was a good sign, Jaime thought, and he pressed his chest against her back a little and inhaled the scent of her hair. Smoke, sweat, ice. With a sigh of relief, Jaime let sleep win the battle bit by bit.

Brienne didn't move for some time. Jaime's soft snores had been tickling the spiky hairs of her nape for a while. The sound of his breathing so close to her ear awakened some sensations inside her that Brienne had never felt before. She felt the strange urge to bring Jaime's hand to her mouth and kiss it, to press her body against his. Those thoughts ashamed her. She knew what she looked like. Her face was dull and her body wasn't attractive. But there he was, the Lion of Lannister himself, the man who took her breath away, lying in bed with her. Because he needed her to fall asleep, right, but there he was by her side anyway.

The Maid took Jaime's only hand in hers gently. She didn't want to wake him up. Then she spared a thought for her late father, who she hoped could be proud of her anywhere he was, and closed her eyes to let Jaime's breathing lull her to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I must confess I invented that Tarth tradition. I hope it fits.

J/B talking. Alright, keep trying, guys. You still have a long way ahead of you...

Let me know what you think, my dear readers. It's great to read your opinions.
Jaime woke up with his body pressed against something warm. At first, he didn't know what it was, but the sensation was too good. Unconsciously, he pulled it closer and rubbed his body against it to warm up. With his eyes still closed, his mind barely awake, he moved his left hand over its side and felt soft flesh under his palm. A pleasant feeling filled his belly when he touched it and he felt his cock harden. He heard a muffled gasp and then opened his eyes. Jaime saw a freckled ear and some short blonde hairs right in front of his nose.

The warm thing was Brienne’s body.

Jaime froze, he didn't dare to move. He had been rubbing his hips against her! And the worst part was that Brienne seemed to be awake and aware. The Lannister was too used to sleeping alone, because he had never been allowed to share Cersei's bed until some months ago. He had only woken up in his sister's company two or three times in his whole adult life, so he didn't really know what it felt like to cuddle at night. The feeling was too new and pleasant and he had got carried away by the moment.

Brienne, on her part, couldn't believe how strange it felt to have Jaime's body so close to hers. His arousal was pressed right against her ass. She had been around soldiers all her life, in Tarth, at Renly's and Robb Stark's camps, and she knew that men often had morning erections, and she had even seen cocks before -Jaime's one, without going any further- but she had never had the chance to feel that hardness against her body. That disturbing sensation and the fact that the spot where his hand was touching her flesh was burning hot made Brienne's belly contract with desire, but she felt ashamed and afraid at the same time.

Without thinking twice, she got out of bed to put some distance between her body and Jaime's. The Lannister sat up in the pallet slowly, trying to appear calm and oblivious.

“Good morning, wench. Did you sleep well?”

“Y-Yes, thank you”, she answered, her back to Jaime. She was looking for her jerkin to put it on, because she felt more exposed than ever.

The Lannister stood up and stretched out his limbs. A narrow line of flesh was visible under his lifted shirt and there was still a little bulge in his breeches that made Brienne's heart skip a beat. She had to avert her eyes, her cheeks blushing. Gods, her body reactions were so embarrassing. She needed to control them! As quickly as she could, she approached a clay washbasin that someone had left there for her last night and washed her face to cool down a little. When Brienne finished, Jaime had already tied up his doublet, but was in the middle of putting on his boots. She could have sworn that he had looked away from her body just a second before she turned around.
Could it be possible that Jaime’s arousal wasn't exactly a morning erection but something else? Could he really be enjoying her contact, her tall and manly figure? Brienne shook her head to banish the idea.

When they were already dressed up, Jaime attached the golden hand to his stump, offered her the best of his cheeky smiles and motioned towards the door for her to lead the way to the great hall. Pod, Bronn and Clegane were already there. *Don't these guys sleep?,* Jaime thought.

By then, the three men didn't find it strange any longer to see the Maid and the Lannister show up side by side. They knew perfectly that they were sleeping together, but they respected Brienne's mourning, and that was the reason why neither Bronn nor the Hound made any funny comments on it. Bronn was very fond of Jaime, but he liked to tease him, because there was still some innocence in the Lannister that amused the sellsword a lot. He was sure that even Podrick foockin' Payne had more experience than Jaime in sex and love matters, despite all the power and gold the Lion possessed. He had always suspected that the Lannister liked the wench, but now he was well aware of the true nature of the pair's feelings -though the lovers themselves seemed to remain oblivious to it-. Clegane had told him and Pod just the day before that he was sure that Jaime was fucking the Maid, much to Pod's distress, but the sellsword disagreed. Those two still had a long way to walk: the unsecure ugly lady and the broken-hearted sister-fucker cripple.

Both took a seat at the table trying to look casual. Being natural around each other in front of people wasn't one of their strongest traits. Breakfast was scarce and bland, so they finished it in no time. They waited for the Reeds to arrive at the great hall and when they did, the five companions stood up and approached the platform where their chairs stood.

“Ah, lady Brienne”, Jyana Reed greeted without passion, her grey-green eyes dull. “I hope you're feeling better today.”

“Yes, thank you for your concern. We appreciate so much everything you've done for us, my lady, my lord.”

“Your squire told us you're leaving today”, Howland Reed stated. It wasn't a question, but Brienne felt the need to confirm it.

“That's right. We don't want to abuse your hospitality anymore.”

Lord Reed gave her a weak nod. “It's the only thing we can do for the North now.”

Without warning, Jyana Reed started to raise up from her seat, her eyes suddenly fixed on Jaime, but they were no longer dull: a strange light was coming from them. Lannister held his breath while the woman approached him. When she stretched out her right hand to take his left on hers, Jaime hesitated. What was she doing? Under his companions' startled gazes, he finally allowed lady Reed to touch his hand. He felt an odd sensation when their fingers made contact. It was as if someone were piercing his fingertips with a needle a thousand times. Jyana seemed to be in a trance when she spoke.

“The Three-Eyed-Raven is waiting for you.”

Jaime tilted his head and blinked twice in confusion. He wanted to ask something, but right when his mind started to form the question, lady Reed let go of his hand and returned to her original self, dull eyes included.

“Seven hells”, the Hound cursed impressed.
“Is she a green seer?”, Podrick dared to ask.

Howland Reed nodded. “And she passed it on our son Joen.”

The woman sat back on her wooden chair still looking at Jaime, but her gaze wasn't as intent as before. Then she averted her eyes from the Lannister and stared at Brienne. “Lady Brienne of Tarth, I wish you and your companions a good journey to Winterfell. And be careful, these lands are harsh and full of dangers.”

“Thank you, my lady”, the Maid lowered her head slightly and her companions imitated her.

“May the Old Gods and the New bless you”, Howland Reed bade them farewell. They bowed again and turned on their heels to leave.

When their horses were saddled, the five started to get on them. Brienne was about to do it when Meera Reed appeared behind her. The girl looked as sad as always. When she lifted her eyes to meet Brienne's, there was hesitation in her features as well.

“Lady Brienne, I didn't have the oportunity to give you my condolences. Losing our loved ones is the most awful thing in the world.”

“It is. Thank you, lady Meera”, the Maid showed her gratitude with a resigned voice.

“But you're a true warrior, I know it”, the Reed girl went on. “You're stronger than me. Keep fighting for what you believe.”

“I will. I hope we'll meet again in better circumstances”, Brienne wished.

Meera nodded. Then she brought her fingers up to her chest and searched for something inside her fur clothes. When she extracted it, there was a beautiful object in her hand. It was a circle shaped lizard-lion carved directly in dark wood. Brienne suspected it was some kind of bracelet. Meera made it spin nervously with her fingers and then handed it to the Maid of Tarth, who stretched out her hand to take it.

“Could you please do me a favour?”, the girl asked a little embarrassed, letting go of the object. “Could you please give this to Bran Stark?”

Brienne frowned at the request, but then something dawned in her mind and she felt pity for Meera.

“Of course. It's very beautiful.”

“I carved it myself”, Meera explained. “It symbolises House Reed's sigil. I would like him to have it, to remember... Well...”

“Bran Stark will receive this, lady Meera. I swear it.”

“Thank you”, the Reed girl lowered her eyes. Then she lifted them and looked at some point beyond Brienne's shoulder when she spoke again. “I wish you luck.”

The Maid followed her gaze and she realised that Meera was looking at Jaime, who was already on his horse and talking to Bronn while they waited for Brienne. She blushed, her heart suddenly too alive, and turned back to Meera to give her a little and embarrassed nod. Everyone seemed to know what she felt, but it was too complicated.

The two women shook hands amiably and Brienne went to her horse to get on it. When she was
ready, she spurred the animal and her four companions followed her out of Greywater Watch and into the swamps, leaving Meera behind, her eyes hopeless.

The journey through the bogs was hard. They experienced some critical moments before being able to leave those strange lands. That very day, Pod nearly drowned in a swamp. The lakes were covered by a layer of vegetation that hid the waters below here and there, and the squire's horse stepped on one of the green spots, causing the lad to fall down and the animal over him. All his fellow travelers went on his aid and had him out of the water in seconds, but poor Pod had swallowed so much dirty water that he spent the rest of the day coughing.

The second day, Bronn was attacked by a huge lizard-lion. The animal bit his horse's leg and tore it out of its body. Fortunately, the Hound was quickly at his side and drove his sword into the beast before it could bit Bronn's head. The horse needed to be slaughtered and the sellsword had to share Pod's mount for the rest of the journey.

Since they were forced to sleep out in the open - because there were no towns or forests in that part of the continent - it was difficult for Jaime to get closer to Brienne those days. He never failed to place his bedroll next to hers at night, but he didn't feel like giving away his feelings in front of their companions. And he must admit that the wench kept filling his mind as time went by. Every time their fingers brushed when doing anything, his body got shaken, this situation was killing him. The best part about it, if there really was a best part, was that this problem kept his arrival at Winterfell out of his mind, so he kind of welcomed his worries about Brienne, because he could cling to them anytime he started to think of the Starks.

Finally, on the third day after their depart from Greywater Watch, they rode past Moat Cailin, what meant that they had started to leave the swamps behind. Moat Cailin was as dark and horrifying as always, its high and abandoned towers rising mercilessly to the sky with its crenels covered by a thick layer of snow. When the first trees of the Barrowlands appeared in the horizon, they felt relieved. It would be great to have some shelter for a change at last. The group kept riding until complete darkness fell upon them, then they stopped their mounts and made camp near a stream, which Brienne reckoned must be a Fever river tributary.

While Bronn tied up the four remaining horses, Jaime and the Hound went to collect some dry branches for Pod to build the fire. Brienne took their skins and disappeared into the woods towards the river to refill them. Jaime preferred to go with her rather than with Clegane, but he didn't want to be too evident, so he pretended to look for some wood and, after a while, when he finally lost sight of the Hound, he made his way to the river. Jaime wasn't sure of what he really wanted, what he was going to do when he found Brienne, but he knew he needed some time alone with the wench. They were so close, but so far at the same time. Jaime often missed their days alone on their way to King's Landing, Bloody Mummers, baths and bear included. Not the maiming, though. That had been too cruel, though sometimes he had come to the conclusion that meeting Brienne and having his hand chopped off had made him a better person, the man he was today. It was hard to admit, and Jaime didn't do it often, but there was some truth in that statement.

Soon Jaime started to hear the running waters. He spotted Brienne in the distance, kneeling on the snow right in front of the river. She had taken off her gloves in order not to get them soaked. He took his time to enjoy the view and then he emerged from the woods and approached the woman, who turned her head right away when she heard his steps.

"It's me, don't be afraid."

"Shouldn't you be helping Clegane collect some wood for the fire?", the Maid asked while she refilled one of the skins.
“Yes, but I prefer to hang out with you, wench”, Jaime said and he was delighted to notice her blushing. He knelt next to the Maid, took off his left glove as well and grabbed one of the skins to start helping her. “You would be a good ruler, you know?”, he said suddenly, which made Brienne blush even more. She dismissed Jaime's statement with a shake of her head. “I'm being serious. Everyone respects you.”

“I try to be honest. It's just that”, she explained.

Jaime smiled at the way she put things. He liked her simplicity and her sense of honour.

“Have you thought about our swords lately, wench?”, he changed the subject, because he didn't know how to deal with the one that really mattered.

“Yes, quite a lot, but I haven't reached any conclusion yet. We'll ask maester Wolkan when we arrive at Winterfell. He might have read something about Valyrian steel. Or perhaps King Jon could help us.”

Jaime gave a nod and dropped the issue. There was something else bothering him, and he wanted to voice it in her presence, so he went on talking. “I've been speaking to Bronn about that said Three-Eyed-Raven, by the way, but he doesn't know anything about it. I remember some tales my nursemaid told me when I was a kid. Only tales. I mean, tales aren't true. Though on second thought, we didn't believe in dothraki or wights before we saw them right in front of our noses. Do you think-?”

“Bran Stark is the Three-Eyed-Raven”, Brienne cut off his nervous verbosity.

The Lannister's breath faltered and he stopped doing his job. “What do you mean?”

“He came back from beyond the Wall with Meera Reed”, the Maid explained. “Everyone who knew him when he was a child agrees that he's changed. I've witnessed what he does once or twice. It's quite disturbing, but the boy can see things. It's just like in the old tales.”

Jaime swallowed. So Bran Stark was waiting for him at Winterfell with creepy powers. That couldn't be any good.

“W-Why do you think he wants to see you?”, Brienne asked. The matter had been worrying her as well.

There was a heavy silence between them. The pair could hear the running waters. Jaime wrapped himself in his fur cloak. Suddenly, he was too cold.

“I did something... horrible to him.”

Brienne frowned and stared at the Lannister. “What are you talking about?”

Jaime swallowed and took a deep breath. If there was someone he didn't want to disappoint that was Brienne, but he needed to tell her, to be honest with her. His voice trembled when he finally put his shame into words. “I pushed him off a window.”

The horrified look Brienne shot at him with her tremendous blue eyes made Jaime want to disappear. “It was you.”

Jaime nodded. “It was me. I made him a cripple.”

Brienne couldn't understand. When she spoke again, her voice was scornful and incredulous. “He
was just a little kid. Why, Jaime?"

He didn't want to explain this to her, it was too hard, too shameful, but he needed to be brave. He might lose her, and that will kill him, but Jaime was determined to confess his sins to Brienne. He had always done it and he wasn't going to stop now.

“He saw me with Cersei. If he had told anyone about us, we both would have been executed, and my children as well, because it would have been the confirmation of the rumors everyone was spreading. I did it to protect my family”, his voice faltered. “It doesn't matter now. The kids are all dead anyway and I'm not the same man I was before, thought technically I am. I still am Jaime Lannister, and Jaime Lannister pushed that young man off a window when he was a child. There's nothing I could do in a lifetime that could help me repay that debt. This Lannister doesn't always pay his debts, as you see.”

Brienne looked at Jaime, whose green eyes were full of tears. His face was tired and sad. She was quite torn apart between pity and horror. She stood up, leaving the skins on the ground, and stared at him from above.

“Run away”, she said. “Don't go to Winterfell or they will kill you.”

Jaime lifted his eyes. He couldn't believe what he was hearing from her mouth. “What?”

“Run away, Jaime. You can't show up there if Bran Stark knows what you did.”

Then Jaime got up as well, incredibly moved by the wench's loyalty to him. He didn't deserve her friendship of affection at all. Gently, he took her bare and cold hand in his and rubbed it with his thumb. “I'm too tired to run away, Brienne. I don't have anywhere to go, and besides, I need to be honest with myself. I will kneel in front of Bran Stark, confess my shame and ask for his forgiveness.”

The Maid nodded, proud of Jaime, but she was afraid. “What if he doesn't-?”

“I will die, because that's what's fair. I don't want to, of course. I hope those new powers he has will help him realise I've changed and perhaps he will grant me another chance.”

Brienne swallowed, her eyes bright with unsed tears. “I know you've changed, I'm the living proof of it. I will vouch for you, Jaime. I will defend you.”

The wench was a real gem. Jaime's heart exploded after her statements and he couldn't resist anymore. He let go of her hand, brought his fingers to the back of her neck and cupped it softly. He ran his fingertips through the short locks of her nape and moved his body closer, his face only a few inches away from hers. Jaime's eyes looked at Brienne's mouth with desire, their agitated breaths mingling in the cold air. He was looking forward to closing the distance between them, but he knew he had to allow her a little time to assimilate what would happen next. He was a slow learner, but he learned. From that distance, Jaime could have counted each and every one of her freckles. After a few seconds of silent tension, of adjusting, Brienne hadn't rejected his advances, so the Lannister made the move. It was now or never. Jaime leaned forward and pulled the wench into an honest and true kiss. He was afraid that she reacted just like the first time, but soon, Brienne surrendered to him and started kissing him back, clumsy and hesitant.

The first kisses were mere brushes of lips. The feeling was exhilarating and Jaime felt more alive than ever. They kissed as if something were about to break, as if they were afraid of tearing up something too fragile. At some point, Brienne placed her hands at the sides of his face and kept on following his sweet lead, then Jaime threw his stump around her waist and pulled her closer. After a
few more tentative kisses, Lannister moved away an inch to let the Maid breath, his nose still pressed against her cheek.

“Jaime...”, Brienne breathed against his lips, her eyes closed.

He couldn't resist her voice and captured her lips with his again. This time, the kisses started to grow hotter. They had been holding back for so long... Brienne's warm lips brushed against his with the same fervor she used to fight. Her kisses were no longer clumsy, she was starting to master the art and soon she allowed Jaime to deepen the kiss. She parted her lips tentatively and he bit her lower one slightly, which made her sigh against his mouth. That sent a jolt of desire right to Jaime's groin. It had nothing to do with kissing Cersei, he thought, but he didn't want it any other way, because his body was reacting too pleasantly to Brienne's touches and noises. He pulled the wench's trembling figure closer to his chest and ran his tongue along her lips and teeth. Then he searched for her tongue and they crossed their blades for the first time.

Brienne's brain was about to faint. Jaime Lannister was kissing her with a passion she had never though she would know. This had to be beyond friendship or pity, right? Nobody could kiss a mere friend the way Jaime was kissing her, with such an urge and willingness. She couldn't resist his warmth because she didn't want to anymore. So what if he didn't exactly love her? Was she going to give up on knowing what it felt like kissing the lips of this perfect man who almost made her feel like a beauty?

The next time they pulled apart to breath, Brienne's face was red. Jaime pressed his forehead against hers panting while he caressed her nape, thankful for being able to hold her. They felt a pleasant tickling sensation in their stomachs. Lannister resumed his kissing after a few seconds, unable to stay away from Brienne's lips but trying to soften his passion, because he didn't want to scare her. He took his time to learn the woman's thick lips by heart. He traced them with his tongue and teeth until there was no inch left unexplored. He kissed her commisures, her bow, and got some arousing noises from her throat that he had never heard Brienne make before. How had he been able to live until now without kissing those lips under the sweet gaze of her sapphire eyes?

Suddenly, Brienne and Jaime heard a noise coming from the woods and they broke apart instantly. They knelt by the stream to pretend they were still refilling the skins and, five seconds later, the Hound appeared with his arms full of branches. He looked at them with suspicious eyes. Their faces were red and they could barely hide their panting, but they were sure Clegane hadn't seen them kissing. The Hound addressed Jaime.

“If you wanted to be alone with the woman you could have just fucking told me, Lannister. These branches are heavy.”

“Stop complaining like a bloody maiden. You're strong enough to carry them all. This poor woman needed my help to refill the skins, she doesn't know how to do it properly”, Brienne blushed and shot him a scolding look. “You know the last time she did it alone Bronn found a pebble in his.”

“Shut the fuck up and help me”, the Hound said and Jaime stood up reluctantly, dried his hand in his shirt, put on his glove back and approached the tall man to take some of the sticks from his arms. He didn't want to leave Brienne behind, because there were still so many kisses he wanted to plant on her lips, but it would have to be another time. His eyes searched for his wench's gaze, which still held a lot of ardor and embarrassment, and he thought that it must be the most lovely sight in the world.

When they disappeared behind the trees, Brienne resumed her task, her mind pulled into a storm of emotions. She was afraid but agitated, horrified but aroused. She had to suppress a smile, because she didn't know if she was exactly happy with the whole situation. Jaime was putting himself at a great
risk. Wasn't it too unfair that when she finally had the chance to kiss the man of her dreams, he turned out to be in mortal danger? Had he kissed her just because he had got carried away by his doomed position? Perhaps Brienne didn't want to fully believe that Jaime liked her. Perhaps she just kept building up her walls to protect the little hope she still had left in her heart, specially after her father's death.

She knew they needed to talk, but given their lack of ability to express their feelings, the mere idea sounded almost ridiculous.

Chapter End Notes

There you have it: the kiss. I enjoyed writing it. I hope we get something like that in canon.

Let me know what you think, please! Thanks for reading.
Insecurity

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to everyone who left kudos and comments in the previous chapter.
Your feedback is so important!

WARNING: This chapter is a little explicit.

When Brienne went back to the camp, the men had already built the fire, had the ground clear of snow and had unrolled their bedrolls by it. They were waiting for her to share their food for dinner. The Maid returned the skins to their owners, and tried not to blush when Jaime's gloved fingers brushed against hers. She sat down next to Pod, who handed her a piece of dried meat. Bronn had brought some ale from Greywater Watch, a present from his lovely serving girl, and passed the skin to his companions, who drank thankfully. From time to time, Jaime's eyes searched for Brienne's, but they quickly averted their gazes to avoid giving themselves away.

The Hound and Bronn also exchanged some mocking looks. The sellsword thought he might use some little innocent joking at the two highborn.

"M'lady, Pod told me you two met some wildlings at the Wall. Is that true?", he asked Brienne.

The woman stopped eating and turned her head to look at her squire, whose eyes were wide open, as if Bronn had just betrayed his trust. Brienne might not be too bright, but she was almost sure about the point of the question. What she didn't know was that it wasn't poor Podrick who had told Bronn her whole and true story with the wildlings back at Greywater Watch.

"Yes", she replied without looking at the man, her eyes fixed on her dinner. Didn't this guy have any respect for her mourning? She started eating again, as if she didn't care about the wildlings. The Hound snorted at her plain answer, because he knew what Bronn was doing, and Jaime's expression changed to one of honest interest, totally ignorant.

"Good. I've also met some of them myself in my travels. Wildlings are impulsive and ardent, don't you think so?", the sellsword went on and Brienne frowned, but she didn't say anything. Bronn was enjoying himself too much to drop the subject so soon. "I've heard that they kidnap the women they want to bed. Isn't that beautiful?", the man couldn't suppress a smile when he addressed the Hound.

"Fuckin' charming", Clegane agreed.

"Didn't any wildling try to kidnap you, m'lady?", Bronn continued, making Brienne blush furiously. "I'm sure you didn't go unnoticed. They use to like... healthy women like you.”

Now it was Jaime's brow which got furrowed. First he looked at the sellsword, whose expression was of pure delight, and he didn't understand anything. Then he moved his eyes towards Brienne and saw that the Maid's face was as red as a tomato, and he knew he was missing something there.

"Imagine being beaten and kidnapped by a strong... redbeard wildling, for example”, Bronn's tone was teasing. He put a funny stress on the word redbeard.
“What are you talking about?”, Jaime asked his friend, now too suspicious to remain silent.

“Tell us about your friend, m'lady. Isn't he the leader of the Free Folk no less? Jon Snow's right arm? A true heavyweight. I'm sure the story would entertain Ser Jaime and I.”

“He isn't my friend”, Brienne said looking daggers at Bronn, then she glanced at the Lannister highly embarrassed. Jaime dropped his jaw a little an blinked twice. Wasn't Bronn just joking? Was there a true wildling after Brienne? And why was she so red?

“Oh, I've been told he was pretty insistent, wasn't he, Pod?”

Podrick started to mumble incoherent words, but he didn't dare to say anything with some sense, because Brienne's eyes silenced him.

“I guess he will be delighted and relieved to see you again at Winterfell, m'lady. Will you be too?”, Bronn pressed a little further. It was too easy to tease the innocent woman. He pointed at Jaime and himself alternately and spoke again. “Do you think he would be glad to become friends with us?

Brienne hoped he could leave her alone. “You're unsufferable, Ser.”

The sellsword and the Hound roared with laughter at her reply. How was she able to insult a man without losing her manners?

“I'm looking forward to meeting him”, Jaime commented, his mischievous eyes fixed on the wench. If she wasn't going to be honest with him, he could play Bronn's game as well. Truth be told, he felt a nasty wave of jealousy.

“Could we stop talking about this?”, the woman pleaded. “Tormund isn't my friend and I'm not interested in-”

“Oh, Tormund. Great name”, Bronn said. “Imagine the babies he could make with that name, right, Clegane?”

But Brienne didn't hear the Hound's answer, because she sprang up suddenly and disappeared into the woods, Oathkeeper in hand. Jaime didn't follow her.

“Stop doing that. You make her uncomfortable”, Podrick scolded Bronn when his lady was out of sight.

“C'mon, it was just a light teasing. You two are too honourable and dour. Where's your sense of humour?”, the sellsword said. Then he looked sideways at the Lannister, who was poking the fire with a long branch absent-mindedly. Bronn didn't know about the intimate moment Jaime had just shared with Brienne, but he hoped his comments will trigger some reactions.

Jaime didn't know how he felt. Was Brienne interested in that wildling? Was that the reason why she was always so reluctant to his advances? But she had responded to his kisses just a moment ago! Had he been too insistent? Had Brienne felt forced to kiss him back against her will? Perhaps he should ask Podrick about it, but he didn't want to be too obvious. Besides, the lad could tell Bronn about his concern, and that would be the end of him.

An hour later, the Maid hadn't returned to the camp yet and Pod and Jaime were starting to get nervous. Bronn and Clegane had already laid down to sleep and were snoring loudly. Sick of waiting, the squire had just stood up to start looking for Brienne when she reappeared, her face red, her hair sweaty and stuck to her scalp.
“M'lady, are you alright?”, the lad asked her.

Brienne didn't answer him. She just approached her bedroll, placed Oathkeeper right next to it and laid down. Podrick looked at Jaime, who shrugged. Then the man got up and untied the straps of his golden hand before putting it inside his saddlebag.

“Take first watch, Pod. I'll do second.”

Brienne had curled over herself, her back to where Jaime's bedroll lay. The Lannister was determined to make her a little uncomfortable, so he headed towards Pod's bedroll, which was at Brienne's other side. He sat down on it and contemplated the Maid's face. Her eyes were closed, as if she were asleep, but he knew she was still awake, because her breathing wasn't even. Jaime felt the impulse of kissing her in front of everyone to make clear that he was braver than that wildling, that he was claiming her, but he suspected that wasn't the best way to find out if Brienne really felt something for him. The woman didn't open her eyes, but Jaime knew she was well aware of his presence next to her. He couldn't talk to her, because Podrick was watching and listening, so he finally got up tutting, stepped over the Maid and laid down on his own bedroll.

He would let her make the next move, if there would ever be a next move. When the squire shook Jaime for him to relieve his watch, the Lannister hadn't slept a minute.

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During the next four days of riding, the group went deeper into the Barrowlands. The hilly plains appeared riddled of barrows, the tombs of the First Men. Going North was always a breath-taking experience. All of them had been there before, but neither could help feeling overwhelmed by the silent magnificence of those lands as they rode through them.

Jaime had stayed true to his decision of giving Brienne some space. He had had plenty of opportunities to be alone with her during the last four days while they rode or set camp, but he hadn't searched for her company. What hurt him the most was that the wench hadn't sought his either. From time to time, the Lannister had caught her looking at him longingly, only to lower her eyes just a second later. Brienne's behaviour was highly confusing for him.

That day they stopped in the middle of the evening to make camp. It was so dark these days and the layer of snow was so thick that it was nearly impossible to keep on riding past noon. If their calculations weren't wrong, they were only three or four days away from Winterfell. Jaime's stomach was completely closed to food by then. He knew he was reaching his destination, perhaps his death as well, and that thought made him uneasy and anxious.

When the fire was built, Bronn took Podrick with him and both went to explore the surroundings. The Hound and Brienne started to skin some hares they had hunted on the way. They cooked them in silence while Jaime studied the map. When the explorers came back, they ate the hares, which were hard and stringy. Bronn told them that they had found some thermal waters hidden by some rocks near their camp.

“Winterfell always has hot water as well”, Pod informed. “Legends say there are dragons under the castle, but that isn't true, of course. Hot springs like this one we found pour their waters under the fortress.”

“Shit, I thought it was the dragons. You ruined my life, lad”, Clegane mocked him.

They laughed and Pod blushed. Jaime patted him on the back to show him some support. After a while, Brienne finished her dinner and asked the squire for his help to take off her armour. When she
was done, she took Oathkeeper and went into the woods. She had been doing that for five days now. Jaime didn't know how far she walked, but none of them ever heard her hitting the trees with her blade. Sometimes he had been tempted to follow the wench and offer her a sparring session, but he was determined not to pester her.

When his companions started telling stories to scare Podrick, Jaime stood up and decided to go look for those hot waters. He needed some relaxing time away from all of them: Pod's innocence, Bronn's jokes, Clegane's complaints and Brienne's dourness. He took off his golden hand, grabbed Widow's Wail and disappeared. He was aware that, in his companions eyes, that would look like he was going to search for Brienne to spend some time with her, but he didn't care.

It took him half an hour to find the place. The spring was in a little clearing and flooded through a bunch of pointy rocks covered by snow. Some steam clouds rose from the surface. Jaime unlaced his cloak and discarded it on a rock. It was strange to move and not to make any noise, but the snow muffled every sound. Then he kicked off his boots and took off his doublet, shirt and breeches. It was incredibly cold! Jaime wrapped up his clothes and sword in the furs in order not to get them soaked with the snow and hurried to get in the stream. He was very careful, because it was too dark and he didn't want to stumble. The only source of brightness came from a weak ray of moonlight that went through a crack in the clouds.

When the warm water touched his bare skin, Jaime shivered. The feeling was very pleasant, so he dared to go deeper into the spring until it covered his thighs, hips and stomach.

And then he saw her.

She was sitting against a rock, her naked body almost sunken in the water. Only her broad shoulders and light hair were visible over the surface, the moonlight bathing them. She had her eyes closed and her long fingers were playing with the silvery waters. There was so much peace in that image that Jaime didn't dare to move for a while. He didn't want to disturb her, so he remained still and contemplated the woman before his eyes. The Lannister tried to remember Brienne's body from another bath, the one at Harrenhal. He imagined what laid beneath the water and his cock reacted immediately. While his insides grew hotter, his torso started to freeze in contact with the icy air, so Jaime had no choice but to sink in the spring to get a little warmer.

The splashing sound his body made startled Brienne, who turned her head at once. When she saw him, the wench covered her chest with her arms, as if Jaime could see something under the dark water. Her breath quickened and the Lannister's heartbeat as well. Brienne's parted lips were so enticing for Jaime that he couldn't resist their call: within two seconds he was right in front of her. He stood there, his naked and wet chest moving up and down. The wench looked up at him from her sitting position, taking in his glorious body. Jaime offered her his only hand without speaking. Brienne hesitated, too aware of her nakedness, of her ugliness. What did she have to offer that handsome god? She didn't want to show him her whole unattractive body. But Jaime didn't move, so after a moment of doubt, Brienne finally took his hand and stood up a little embarrassed, letting the water slide down her meager breasts. Her nipples were hard and Jaime had to make a great effort not to look at them. He led the wench deeper into the warm lake, his eyes never leaving hers, until the water reached their chins. Then Jaime let go of her hand and put his left arm around her waist. He pulled her close and made her swirl in the water with him. By her swallow it was clear that she had felt his arousal against her thigh, but she didn't pull away, so he kept dancing with her for a while, their eyes locked.

Brienne put her hands on his slippery chest and let Jaime handle her big body. Every little inch of her skin was burning. After a few minutes of swirling, the Lannister gradually put an end to their little game. Finally, they stood in the water chest to chest, nose to nose, sapphires lost in emeralds, his
Jaime kissed Brienne hungrily, pulling her as close as he could to his body. He needed to feel her bare skin against his forearms and belly. The wench's kisses were passionate and eager, and there was no clumsiness left in them. When she brushed his lower lip with the tip of her teeth, Jaime felt a rush of heat running up and down his body and pinned her against a big stone. She let out a surprised moan, but Jaime captured her lips immediately and they resumed their kissing, while the Lannister rubbed his body against hers.

Brienne was starting to feel dizzy, as if all her blood had left her head to go somewhere else. Then Jaime broke their kiss to search for a less deep place to take a seat. He leaned his back against a rock and dragged her through the water towards him, making Brienne straddle his thighs and sit on his lap. She played with the drops on his perfect torso for a few seconds, wiping them away with her fingertips. The Maid could feel Jaime's hard cock pressed against the folds of her private parts and that seemed to make her heart want to explode. There was a hint of desire in the Lannister's eyes that scared her a little, but attracted her at the same time. Brienne wanted to go further with him, but she didn't know if she was ready to give up her maidenhead yet.

As if Jaime had read the hesitation in her eyes, he raised his left hand to the back of her neck, while his stump encircled her waist. He pulled her towards him and kissed her lips once, twice, very softly. Then the Lannister hugged her trembling body and spoke in her ear.

"Why have you been avoiding me?"

"I-I thought it was you who was avoiding me. I-I thought you were angry", she replied, her warm breath tickling the skin of his neck.

"Of course not", Jaime assured her. Then he used his stump to caress her wet endless back for a few seconds and went on. “So, aren't you interested in that wildling?"

Brienne blushed against his shoulder and shook her head. “No.”

“Imagine what that Tormund guy could do to you, his arms all around your body, making you feel amazing... wild things.”

But the Maid didn't want the memory of the creepy rebeard to ruin this moment, so she broke their embrace and attacked Jaime's lips to make him shut up. After a few minutes, they lost count of the kisses. Suddenly, Brienne pulled a little away to look at Jaime's face again, her blue eyes drunk with lust. It was a sight difficult to resist.

“Gods, Brienne, you're beautiful”, he said with fascination.

The wench's brow furrowed and she swallowed, as if Jaime were joking at her expenses. Suddenly, everything seemed like a big joke to her. “Please, Ser, don't mock me.”

“I'm serious, my lady.”

But she knew she wasn't beautiful. Was this what Jaime was looking for, claming her for his own, as if she were a prize? Now that he knew she didn't want anything with Tormund, he could joke again about her ugly looks. When the Maid got up to leave, sorrow on her features, Jaime tried to hold her into place by pulling her even closer to his chest, but she was too strong. She broke free and got out of the lake in a rush, leaving him in the warm water, completely puzzled and worried.

Jaime remained in the spring for a long time after she left, thinking about their relationship. Brienne
was probably the most amazing woman he had ever met -and the most sensitive one-, and he knew what he was talking about, because he had met a lot of them. After much thinking, Jaime eventually reached the conclusion that the Maid really loved him. He knew her well -she was the best friend he had, his soulmate- and he was sure she would have never surrendered to anyone's physical passion if she wasn't in love with them.

Love.

What a scary and magnificent word at the same time. Was it what Jaime felt for her? It was too soon to say. He had just broken up with Cersei, the supposed love of his life, and still needed some time to forget. His sister's face and body often plagued his dreams, some were awful and some were hot, but as he kept riding away from her, Jaime realised her influence was wearing thin over his decisions and feelings, and now his idea of Cersei always appeared tarnished by all the horrible things she had done to their enemies and the people they loved. Jaime knew he was finally starting to remove the blindfold from his eyes.

On the other hand, what Brienne awoke in him was pure tenderness and affection, but also a strong desire. Jaime admired her a lot. When he was young, he compared his deeds to Arthur Dayne's ones, and when he was about to do something, he always thought if his action would pass the knight's honourable standards. Then he had killed Aerys and had lost all his romanticism and innocence. However, since he had met Brienne, he had recovered some of his idealism, but he had forgotten about Dayne and it was the Maid's opinion on honourability what he considered before acting.

The Lannister tried to picture his life without the wench and a pang of sorrow invaded his heart. Then he knew he couldn't live without her anymore. Perhaps he didn't dare to call love what he felt for her at this very moment, but he knew it must be pretty close to it. He would spend the rest of his life in a huge castle or a small hut with Brienne by his side.

Suddenly, his heart expanded inside his chest and he felt like crying of joy and sadness at the same time. He knew menacing Winterfell was right in front of his nose, but his life would have been worth it if he could make Brienne happy the few days they still had together until they reached the fortress.

Jaime had already won her heart. Now he only needed to keep it. And he was ready for the battle.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, this is getting hot. I'm not sure I will be good at writing smut. It's the first time I'm going to try. Let's see what happens in the next chapters. I might back down on this.

Please, leave a review! ^^
Chapter Notes

This is the neverending story. I just planned four or five chapters, and see where we are now. ^^ Sorry for the delay. It's getting harder for me to write theses days. Too much to do at work.

WARNING: Well... mature content.

The camp was completely silent when Jaime returned. The fire creaked and his companions’ light snores filled the chilly air. Only Bronn was stil awake and on his watch. The man was playing his favourite game: throwing his dagger at a fallen tree. He lifted his eyes when Jaime walked past him towards their saddlebags to put something in Brienne's one, and the sellsword saw something in his former commander's eyes that made him grin mischievously. Jaime shook his head and shot him a warning glance.

“Shut up”, said the Lannister, but he couldn't help blushing a little. Bronn snorted highly amused, but he didn't say anything.

Jaime approached Bronn and sat beside him on the trunk. His golden hair was still wet and the warmth of the fire would dry it faster. He stretched out his hand and stump towards the fire to feel the flames warming his skin.

“We're almost there”, Bronn commented and Jaime didn't know exactly what he was referring to until the sellsword kept talking. “How do you think they will greet you?”

“Well, they're not going put a rug under my feet.”

“Aren't these people supposed to be the good guys?”, Bronn asked with his sarcastic tone.

Jaime smiled bitterly and shook his head. “There are only a few good guys left in this world”, he laid his eyes on Brienne's sleeping figure automatically. “I don't think that Targaryen girl is as mad as her father, but she likes burning people alive, so that leaves her out of the list.”

The sellsword nodded with a shiver. He still remembered the battle against the dragons.

“The Starks were just a bunch of charming kids the last time I saw them. Joffrey ordered the King's Justice to behead Ned Stark in front of whole bloody King's Landing, which forced Arya Stark to leave the capital and manage on her own. My father plotted with the Boltons and Freys to have Robb and Catelyn Stark killed. Then he forced innocent Sansa Stark to marry my brother. I pushed Bran Stark off a window when he was a child. And now my sister has refused to send them the help she had promised.”

With a snort, Bronn let Jaime know that his expectations of a kind welcome had vanished completely. “They're going to kick your ass. And mine, by association. Still I think these ones are better than your sweet sister, no offense.”

“Yes...”, Jaime agreed absent-mindedly. “Jon Snow is quite dolt, but he's honourable and honest. I
hope he'll be able to see beyond my House name and sins.”

“Young brother will be there, too. He could give us a hand”, the sellsword added. Then he realised whom he was talking to, fixed his eyes on Jaime's stump and wrinkled his nose. “No pun intended.”

The Lannister shook his head. “Tyrion would be of great help. He's Hand of the Queen, but I'm not sure Daenerys will be too willing to forgive the Kingslayer. You know I killed her father.”

“Well, if that doesn't work, there's your lady. She will speak in your behalf.”

Lifting his eyes from the flames, he looked at Brienne again. “Sure she will”, he didn't bother correcting Bronn, “but I don't want her to give herself away. It's too risky. She could be punished as well if the Starks found out we're close friends. I don't wish her any more harm. She's the best one of those few good guys left.”

So Jaime fookin' Lannister was truly in love with that girl. For the first time, Bronn didn't feel like joking about it. The Lion's expression was sad and concerned. The sellsword hoped his pity for Jaime was over soon, because he enjoyed teasing him too much.

“We will get out of this’, Bronn encouraged him. “We've been worse.”

Jaime smiled sadly. “Really? Some day our luck will run out.”

“Let's hope that day hasn't come yet.”

“Go to bed, I'll take the next watch”, Jaime offered with a sigh. Bronn didn't protest. He grabbed his knife, patted his friend on the shoulder and headed to his bedroll to rest. The Lannister knew it would be impossible for him to sleep without Brienne's warmth against his body, so he spent the night thinking about the things he would tell the Starks once they arrived at Winterfell -if he ever had the chance to speak- and keeping the fire alive for his companions.

When darkness started to lighten a bit, the first to wake was Clegane. He shook off the snow from his body, just like a dog would do, and sat up on his bedroll. When he saw Jaime on the trunk, he frowned.

“Why the fuck didn't you wake me up?”, the Hound asked, but Jaime was too tired, so he only shrugged. “Not the best way to become a hero, you cunt. Do you want to be the first knight to die from sleeplessness? What a great song that would be.”

Sandor Clegane got up shaking his head, stretched out his limbs and went to his saddlebag to take his breakfast from it. Then he threw some dried meat at Jaime without saying anything. The Kingslayer nodded in gratitude and started to eat in silence with Clegane.

The noises woke up Brienne, Podrick and Bronn, who started to rub their sleepy faces. Their camp came to life in no time. The Maid looked at Jaime right after she opened her eyes and she blushed, surely remembering their intimate moment from the night before. After much thinking, Jaime thought he was starting to understand why the lady had ran away when he had called her beautiful, but he needed a little more information to be sure.

Brienne went to her saddlebag and the Lannister followed her movements out of the corner of his eye. Suddenly, the Maid saw something inside her bag that made her tilt her head. That wasn't there when she had gone to bed. When she extracted the thing, it turned out to be a bunch of wild small blue flowers, a little squashed after being in her bag the whole night. Brienne's heart skipped a beat. Pansies, the winter flowers. She brought them to her nose unconsciously and smelled their faint scent. Then, she turned her head slowly to look at Jaime, who was watching her carefully. He lifted
the right corner of his mouth in a charming half-smile, which made the Maid blush and lower her eyes. She put the flowers back in her saddlebag quickly, because she didn't want the rest of the gang to notice Jaime's gesture, but a pleasant wave of affection spread inside her veins.

When the travellers were ready, they set off on their four remaining horses. Pod shared the Hounds mount this time. Though it had been Bronn's animal the deceased one back at the swamps, the squire was the lighter of the group, so it was him who kept being carried by his companions in turns.

The morning was dark and cold, and they kept riding through the Barrowlands with difficulty. The company stopped at noon to rest a little and eat. It seemed impossible to end the journey once and for all, given the circumstances and their exhaustion. Bronn and Jaime disappeared into the woods to do their business while their companions rested. The Lannister heard the sellsword leave towards the camp when he was done, but he sat down on a tree stump and waited. He knew Brienne would show up at any moment. When she did, Jaime stood up slowly not to startle her, but it was no use, because her sixth sense was too developed and she stiffened before even seeing him. The Lannister approached the wench with his flesh and golden hands up to calm her down and then he brought a finger to his lips to ask for her silence, which had her frowning. Jaime closed the distance between them and stole a kiss from Brienne's lips without warning, a soft but meaningful peck. He pulled away slightly, then cupped the back of her head and captured her mouth again twice, closing his eyes. The last kiss was a long and heart-stopping one. The Lannister looked her in the eye and allowed himself to get lost in her blue oceans for a moment, his hand still caressing the Maid's hair. Brienne swallowed and bit her lip. Then the pair smiled at each other at the same time, half-captivated, half-embarrassed. Jaime kissed her one more time and left her alone in the woods.

The next three days were very similar, with the group riding to Winterfell and Jaime trying to steal kisses from Brienne any time they were alone together. The Lannister thought that he would remember these days in the future as the most crazy ones of his life -well, if he ever came to have a future, of course-. His feelings and desire for the wench kept growing day by day, as well as his anxiety for his arrival at Winterfell. His emotions were so unstable that he often felt like screaming.

The last day, they stopped at an inn in the evening. There weren't a lot of good ones north of the Neck, and that was the reason why they hadn't used them after Greywater Watch, but Jaime remembered this one from the first time he had travelled to Winterfell with Robert Baratheon's retinue. It seemed like another life entirely. When they entered the building, the innkeeper hurried to greet them. They paid for three bedrooms to keep up appearances in front of the man and themselves -some things must be left unspoken despite the familiarity and trust-, but everyone of them knew who was going to sleep with whom.

The members of the soon-to-be dissolved company ate their dinner together and drank some ale before going to bed. They even toasted some times their nearly finished journey. Jaime knew the Hound and Bronn were hard drinkers and would surely keep emptying mugs for a while, but he needed to talk to Podrick alone, so when Brienne excused herself and left the table to go upstairs, the Lannister offered Pod a little walk outside. It was obvious by the look the squire shot at him that it was the last thing he wanted to do right now, but he complied and stood up, a little dizzy. Clegane and Bronn toasted them before they left the inn and laughed out loud.

Both men wrapped up in their cloaks and Jaime led Pod to the stables, where they could sit and be a little warmer than in the snow. The squire was quite confused, but he took a seat on a stool next to Jaime and waited for the knight to speak.

“Well, Pod”, Jaime said. He didn't really know where to start. “Um... What... I mean... Do you plan on to be a squire for much longer?”
What a clumsy beginning. The lad opened his troubled eyes and blushed. “M'lord, I-I... Do you want me to leave m'lady?”

“What? No!”, the Lannister shook his head. “I was just trying to figure out what your plans were. I mean, you're not a kid anymore and I'm sure you would like to become a knight one day.”

“Oh, yes, of course. But I haven't done anything remarkable yet.”

“Well, you helped bring the Stark girls safe and sound to Winterfell. I think that's pretty remarkable.”

“It was m'lady who did it”, the lad explained, “and nobody had knighted her for it.”

Jaime tried not to take his comment as a reproach. “Had your lady being a boy, she would have been knighted when she brought me back to King's Landing the very first time we met. But laws don't allow us to do that, Pod. I could break the rules, of course, you know I'm not for staying true to laws and oaths, but if we want everyone to recognise her as a knight, we will have to break the wheel and change the rules.”

The lad nodded at Jaime's speech and the Lion smiled fondly. Then Podrick spoke. “I won't be knighted before m'lady. It's the only way I have to show her my respect.”

Jaime mussed up the squire's hair affectionately to show him his support and gratitude. “She would appreciate that so much, I'm sure.”

“Yes, I-I... Could you p-promise me something, m'lord?”, Podrick asked suddenly.

“Of course. What is it?”

“T-That you will n-never hurt her”, there was so much honesty in the boy's eyes when he dared to speak that the Lannister almost hugged him.

“I will never hurt her, Pod”, Jaime felt calmer now that Podrick had broken the ice. “I wanted to talk to you because you're her closest friend now. I respect your opinion”, Jaime took a deep breath. “I'm very fond of her and I would like to understand her better, to be able to... well... Does any of this sound strange to you?”

“N-Not really, Ser”, the squire answered. “I've known for a while. A-All of us, actually.”

“Yes, sure”, Jaime frowned and sighed. “Anyway, is there anything in her past that could help me understand the way she acts around people? I mean, did she tell you anything about her life during the time you were travelling together? Did anyone hurt her?”

And Podrick told Jaime about Brienne's ball when she was a girl. The squire told him about the stupid knights that had mocked her and about Renly. Then he went further and added some stories and rumors he had heard from drunkards and servants. Pod told him about the bet over her maidenhead Randyll Tarly had cut off while Brienne was serving at Renly's camp. The Lannister listened to the boy with growing anger and pain. Not so long ago he had also mocked and insulted her on her looks. He regretted it so much. He hadn't been any different from the dicks she had met in her life. No wonder why Brienne had run away from him that night in the hot spring. He'd been a fool.

Jaime thanked Pod's help and both went back to the inn. Though the Lion knew he wouldn't be able to sleep much just one day away from his doom, they needed to relax, at least. The men walked past Clegane and Bronn, who were still drinking from their mugs. Jaime bowed his head to say goodbye and Bronn raised his mug, then the Lion and Pod went upstairs to their rooms.
The Lannister opened Brienne's door slowly. He didn't know if she was already asleep, but he didn't want to wake her up just in case. He found her sitting on a chair in front of the fire, her face sad. She had been thinking about Tarth, about her father... and about Jaime's future. The wooden board creaked when the knight closed the door behind his back, while he unfastened the straps of his golden hand. The Maid turned her head towards him and stood up when he approached her. With a smooth movement, Jaime took Brienne in his arms and hugged her, the golden hand falling to the floor. Would this be the last time they could hold each other? She had just started learning how to enjoy his attentions and physical contact. Would they take Jaime from her so soon, right before she could find out the true nature of their feelings, right before they could speak their minds? Brienne felt like crying, but she held back the tears, because she didn't want to add more sorrow to his already anxious friend.

Jaime pulled a little away to look into his wench's eyes and he immediately relaxed. As long as he could see those astonishing sapphires until his last breath, he would be glad to die tomorrow. Then he leaned forward and kissed her full in the mouth. He needed to feel Brienne's presence. She responded immediately and they stood there in each other's arms for a long time, kissing each other's lips senselessly. When the scene grew hotter, they moved it to the bed. Jaime pushed the Maid a little towards the pallet without stopping kissing her and both landed on the furs, Brienne on her back and Jaime on top of her. The Maid looked at him a little startled, but soon they resumed their smooching.

She ran her hands along his perfect jaw and felt his stubble under her fingertips. Jaime leaned on his stump and started to caress the skin under her shirt with his good hand. That made Brienne gasp. After a while, they were so hot they could barely breath. Both took off their jerkins to be more comfortable in bed. Jaime's erect cock pressed dangerously against his breeches. He could take her right there and now. When Brienne opened her knees to help him settle down between her legs, Jaime exhaled a long breath and swallowed. Was she really asking him for it? He looked into her eyes and he saw no hesitation in them. She was determined to give up her maidenhead to him, he could read it in her blue irises. If this was going to be their last night together, Brienne wanted Jaime to take it from her. The Lannister leaned down and kissed her lips again, then her freckled cheeks and her closed eyelids, touched by her trust. But he couldn't do that to her. He had never made an issue of girl's maidenhead -if a boy could lose it at a young age, why couldn't a girl as well, as long as it was consented?-., but he knew the world, the wench included, gave too much importance to that kind of honourability.

And that would be the greatest proof of his love -yes, love- Jaime would gift Brienne: he wouldn't dishonour her before his trial. If he was found guilty and sentenced to die, how could he leave that amazing woman deflowered and alone in the world, perhaps even carrying his child? She wasn't a defenseless damsel, for sure, but some people already called her the Kingslayer's whore, though they didn't have any reliable proof of their relationship. Brienne was still a maiden, so if Jaime ended up being executed, she would have no problem to find a man to help her rule a rich and wonderful land like Tarth when the war was over. Her honour would be intact and her name wouldn't be even more linked to Jaime's tarnished one. He wouldn't be the one to put an end to the respect everyone felt for Brienne when they met her.

On the other hand, after hearing Pod's painful stories about her past, this wasn't the way Jaime wanted to make love to his wench at all. There were some things that needed to be said between them before crossing that line. He wanted to do it correctly this time. Brienne was his last chance to become a better man in life, knighthood and love, and, if he were granted enough time to try, he was determined to do it.

Jaime captured her mouth once again and rubbed his body against her. Brienne's breathing quickened. She was incredibly tense beneath him. The Lannister kissed her again, but pulled away enough to let her see the honesty in his eyes.
“Not today, my lady”, he said. “If you want me to be the one who takes your maidenhead as much as I do, there will be time after the Starks forgive me, I promise. But I won't dishonour you tonight”, when Brienne started to protest, he shut her up with another kiss and reached out for the laces in her breeches to untie them. The Maid stared at Jaime in confusion. “But that doesn't mean I won't please you, wench. I will teach you a couple of things.”

Working with his left hand, he loosened the knots and slid his fingers in her breeches and smallclothes. Brienne started to pant violently and the colour left her face. Jaime kissed her cheeks to help her relax while he started to separate the moist folds of her private parts to have a better access to her swollen bud. Jaime rubbed it tenderly at first, then he slid his middle finger slowly into her body. The wench moaned against his mouth and that sent an aching jolt of desire to his cock. He didn't want to be too invasive, but she seemed to be adjusting very well.

“Am I hurting you?”, Jaime asked, his voice hoarse.

Brienne shook her head and dared to stretch out her arm to touch Jaime's hard bulge. The Lannister groaned when her fingers made contact with his groin and pulled back immediately. If he allowed the Maid to touch him now, he would come in his breeches like an inexperienced teenager. He didn't know what this woman did to him. Jaime kissed her to wipe away her frustration and mistrust and kept sliding his middle finger in and out of her. Soon he started using his palm to press her bud at the same time and that sent Brienne over the edge very quickly. She started trembling beneath his body while she made some gutural noises that had Jaime panting with desire. The wench's colour had returned to her face and when she looked at the Lion, her cheeks were pink with heat and shyness.

It was the most wonderful thing Brienne had experienced. Though embarrassment and decency threatened to ruin the moment for her, she forced herself to get over it to enjoy the pulsing sensation all over her body.

Jaime smiled and kissed her several times to let her regain her composure a little, then he grabbed her wrist and brought her hand to his own breeches. They both untied his laces and set his cock free. Brienne bit her lower lip and looked at him with hesitation, but Jaime encouraged her with a reassuring smile. The tension was killing him. He ached for her fingers so badly, but he understood it could be a little confusing for her, given that this was the first time she was going to touch a cock. Jaime made her close her fingers around his erect penis and put his hand over hers to guide her movements. The sensation was amazing. He knew it was going to be messy and Brienne would find her hand full of strange fluids when he finished, but he hoped she didn't find it too disgusting. Jaime started to move her hand up and down his cock, slowly at first, but he couldn't wait, he needed to feel that exhilarating sensation in his body under her fingers now, so he quickened the pace of the masturbation and felt how something started to build in his lower belly. After a few more strokes, Jaime knew he wouldn't last much longer and made a startled Brienne remove her fingers from his cock in order not to come in her hand. He would spare her that strange experience that first time. A second later, he reached his climax with a pleased moan.

Jaime remained in his kneeling position between Brienne's legs until he had all his seed in his left hand. Then he lifted his green eyes to see the wench's face and smiled fondly when he caught her looking at his wet fingers.

“Yes, I know it's quite messy”, the Lannister told her with a breathy voice.

Brienne blushed and averted her eyes from his cock, but Jaime understood her curiosity. He hoped he will be able to teach her more things, to enjoy her company in bed more times, to confess her the things he felt.

He stood up clumsily and went to his washbasin to wash his hand. Then the Lannister returned to
bed, where Brienne was waiting for him with her eyes fixed on the ceiling, one arm over her stomach. Jaime got into bed and laid down on his right side to have a good look at her face.

“Are you alright?”, he asked after a few seconds of silence. Brienne turned his sad gaze to him and shook her head. She seemed to be making a great effort not to cry. “My lady, what is it?”

A single tear escaped Brienne's eyelashes before she could speak, all her defenses knocked down to earth. “What if the Starks don't forgive you?”

Jaime closed the distance between them and took her in his arms. “I'm going to ask something from you, Brienne, and I would like you to promise me you will try to stay true to your word, as you have always done”, he told her and the Maid sniffed in his ear, but she didn't nod her agreement. “When we arrive at Winterfell, you will treat me as a mere acquaintance. I'll let you speak in my behalf to Sansa Stark if you want, but don't get too involved in my defence, please.”

“No, Brienne. I would never rest in peace if I knew I dragged you to the grave with me. I need you to stay alive whatever happens to me. You're too good, too pure to die because of me. I'm not worth your sacrifice.”

The Maid grabbed the front of his shirt and faced him, her eyes as determined as always despite the tears. “Let me decide who's worth my death, Ser. All my life I've been fighting to be able to make my own decisions and I've decided that I will vouch for you, because you deserve it. You're a true knight and there's so much goodness and honour in you. I won't let you die if it's in my power to save you. Don't make me promise something I can't keep.”

Really touched by her words, Jaime pulled her closer. He rarely prayed, but he felt the need to thank the Gods for the day they had resolved to put Brienne on his way. What a wonderful and amazing woman.

“Alright, you stubborn wench, but if they decide to execute me, you have to promise me you'll stay alive and spare a thought for me just from time to time.”

That was too much for Brienne. She hugged Jaime tightly and cried in his chest. She let her tears fall freely down her cheeks. She didn't care about strength or dignity anymore, all she wanted was to get rid of the uncomfortable lump she had in her throat. Perhaps she would see things more clearly in the morning, and surely she would appear as strong as the Warrior in front of their companions at breakfast time, but everything was too hard and dark in her heart right now.

Jaime held her and contained his own tears. He should be happy after the big steps they had achieved in their relationship, but all he felt was bitterness. Despite his sorrow, he tried to focus on the fact that he was going to spend the night with Brienne. He didn't want to waste his last night with her crying, so he started whispering beautiful stories and songs in her ear. After a while, the wench stopped weeping and she eventually felt like sharing some tales with him herself.

When the dawn came, it found them in each other's arms, exhausted and sad, but a little hopeful as well. Perhaps they could still write their own future.
Well, this was difficult. Here I am, learning how to write smut. I hope you enjoyed it. Leave a comment, please! :)

Winterfell

Chapter Notes

Chapters keep getting longer! That's the reason why it takes me so long to update now. I hope you enjoy this one. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tension and anxiety filled the air while the five travellers had breakfast that morning. Jaime and Brienne had bags under their eyes. They shot discreet glances at each other from time to time which didn't go unnoticed to Bronn, Clegane or Pod. They found it curious that the lady didn't blush as much as before when Jaime looked at her. Bronn knew it meant the pair was getting closer and more comfortable around each other, maybe even fucking already. It was all cocks in the end, right?

The company set out early in the morning and spent the whole day riding. None of them felt like talking, but they forced themselves to keep a light chatting now and then to make the journey a little easier. They stopped at noon as always, and Brienne sat right next to Jaime to eat, but they didn't dare to touch each other. It was too tantalising, too painful. After a while, they resumed their journey and near early evening -though it was impossible to tell for sure, since the sky was as dark as an abyss- they spotted Winterfell towers with difficulty. Jaime halted his mount for a second and stared at the distant and imposing castle with uncertainty, while his companions rode past him. Only Brienne made her horse stop by his side. She took his left hand in hers gently as a feather and took a deep breath. It was her way to let Jaime know she would back him up no matter what decision he made. He could still leave them and run away and it wouldn't change what she felt for him anymore. They might not see each other again, but Brienne would be content thinking he was alive and well somewhere warmer.

But the Lannister squeezed her hand and gave her a nod, his eyes a bit more determined. Brienne would have done it, he knew. She would have gone right to Winterfell to face her destiny if she were him. Besides, Jaime knew he needed Bran Stark's forgiveness to start a new life and, if he didn't get it, may the Gods be with him.

Suddenly, Jaime started to unbuckle the scabbard from his waist. He did it with clumsy movements, because it was difficult with just one hand. Brienne frowned, but she thought she knew what he was doing. He finally managed to unfasten it and handed it to the Maid.

“Take it”, he said with a sad note in his voice. “I don't want them to have it. If I'm arrested, make sure you keep it, Brienne. There's something important happening to our swords and you have to find out what it is. Don't let them keep our blades apart.”

Brienne swallowed, but she didn't say anything, because the lump in her throat was too big. She took Widow's Wail and fastened it around her hips. Then the pair locked eyes and resumed their riding, their hearts heavy.

When they arrived at the gates it was already near sunset. The surroundings were plagued with Dothraki, Unsullied, wildlings and Stark's bannermen, their war tents spreading everywhere, though the dragons were nowhere to be seen. What surprised them the most was that none of the soldiers tried to stop them when they showed up at the gates, which got opened without anyone even asking who they were. Brienne suspected it might have something to do with Bran's powers. The boy knew
Jaime was coming. He could have foreshadowed the exact moment of their arrival, or perhaps he had just followed their present advances in his mind, she didn't really know how it worked, but truth was they were given free access to the keep.

The activity inside the castle wasn't too frantic due to the hour, but the courtyard was crowded, anyway. The banners showed a great number of sigils, whose colours were brought out by the white snow. Was everyone waiting for them? Then Brienne felt Jaime's eyes on her. She looked at him and the knight shot a meaningful glance towards a point in the balcony: Sansa Stark stood there watching them with undecipherable pale eyes. The girl moved slowly and started to climb down the stairs towards the newcomer group. Brienne dismounted and all her friends did the same. The Maid went to meet her and bowed her head when she reached her lady, her heart pounding hard. Sansa Stark looked at some point beyond Brienne's shoulder, exactly to where Sandor Clegane had just landed, and then she fixed her pupils back on her sworn sword.

“Lady Brienne, welcome back”, Sansa greeted her with her most formal tone. “I thank you for the great service you did to me in King's Landing.”

“My pleasure, my lady”, Brienne bowed her head again.

“I heard about your father's murder. I'm so sorry for your loss. Rest assured that Euron Greyjoy will pay for what he did to your home.”

The Maid of Tarth swallowed and gave her a nod of gratitude. “Thank you, my lady.”

“We received your raven as well”, lady Sansa kept on talking. “That's why Ser Jaime Lannister's arrival took my brother Bran and me by surprise”, she said and shot a glance towards the Lion, who was holding his breath. Hadn't Bran told her about Jaime's crime? Lannister stepped forward hesitantly and bowed his head slightly.

“Lady Sansa, I came to help. I pledged my word.”

“I'm not sure a Lannister's word will be enough for my brother Jon or Daenerys Targaryen after your sister's lies. They're very upset, Ser”, the way she said the young queen's name made Jaime suspect she didn't like her too much, but there wasn't any trace of hatred towards Jaime. He started to think that Bran hadn't shared what he really knew about him with his sister.

“I understand their anger, but I'm not responsible for my sister's decisions.”

“Ser Jaime rode with us all the way North, my lady, just to help us fight the army of the dead”, Brienne interceded for him with nervousness.

The Stark girl studied the Maid's features and then looked at Jaime, who felt a little intimidated by that child turned into a woman. “I don't trust you”, she said with steel in her voice. “But lady Brienne always speaks very highly of you and I do trust her. As the lady of Winterfell, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. But I don't rule here, so if my brother Jon or his queen decide to judge or execute you, I could do nothing to prevent it.”

“Thank you. I understand”, Jaime gave her a nod, still a little startled. When Sansa walked past him to greet the rest of the newcomers, Lannister smiled discreetly at Brienne with relief and confusion at the same time, then he suddenly turned around to ask one last question to the lady of Winterfell. “Lady Sansa, may I speak to your younger brother?”

“I'm afraid that won't be possible.”

“If you don't trust me, lady Brienne could come with me while I talk to him”, Jaime insisted.
Sansa shook her head a little suspicious. Bran had told her particularly about Jaime Lannister's arrival with lady Brienne -he hadn't mentioned the rest of the company- and he had shown some curiosity about the knight, though he hadn't shared why. Since it was a strange thing that the Queen's twin came to Winterfell after all that had happened, Sansa hadn't made an issue of Bran's interest, because she was curious as well, but now that Jaime seemed so eager to see her brother, she started to suspect there was something else there.

“It isn't a matter of trust this time. My brother is studying some ancient books and parchments with Samwell Tarly. He's busy right now.”

Jaime didn't say anything else, but he seemed frustrated and disappointed. Brienne knew the reason: once he had decided to confess his crime, he would rather do it as soon as possible. The longer it took him to speak to Bran Stark, the harder it would be for Jaime to say what must be said. The Maid stepped closer to him while they waited for lady Sansa to say hello to Pod. The boy blushed adorably when the girl addressed him to thank his service as well. Then Bronn approached them, took the lady's hand and kissed it, just like he had done when he and Jaime had found Brienne near the Steamstream. Sansa frowned in disgust, but kept composure. Then she turned to the Hound and there was an awkward silence between them for a few seconds. Brienne would have sworn that Clegane looked at Sansa with fondness, but it was impossible, wasn't it? The pair was too far for the Maid to be able to hear their whole conversation, but she thought she had heard Clegane call the Stark girl “little bird”. What a cute name for the Hound to use.

When Sansa left Clegane's side to look for a servant who could show them to their rooms while they waited for Daenerys and Jon's audience, her cheeks were a light shade of pink. Sansa had barely had time to give a shy young girl some instructions when a disdainful female voice cut the air behind their backs.

“Kingslayer.”

Jaime shivered and turned around. There she stood, her long silver hair braided with the greatest care, her lilac eyes burning his soul, the Dragon Queen herself, the woman whose chest he had tried to pierce with a lance just some months ago. A few steps behind her, Jon Snow looked at the Lannister with accusatory eyes and gloomy face. They didn't seem very nice. A third person had gone out of the castle and joined the group, his usually intelligent face turned into a concerned one: his brother Tyrion. Jaime breathed a little more easily, though he knew Tyrion's presence didn't really change anything. He felt Brienne move closer to him, as if she intended to shield him from any harm, and then he noticed that Tyrion narrowed his eyes at the wench's approach. Jaime smiled to himself: his little brother was too clever.

“Clegane”, Jon Snow greeted the Hound with a courteous nod.

“Snow”, Clegane corresponded.

Then Jon addressed Jaime and asked with disdain. “What are you doing here, Lannister?”

“I'm sure he intends to honour his word, my lord”, Tyrion said to help Jaime.

“Thank you, lord Tyrion, but I was talking to your brother”, Snow hadn't looked away from Jaime. “Why did you come?”

The Lion couldn't prevent a wave of rage from raising to his throat. “It would be wise of you to listen to my brother.”

With a surge of fear, Brienne held her breath. There was so much tension in the air that it could
almost be chewed. Couldn't Jaime think twice before speaking? He was between a rock and a hard place, seven hells!

“No doubt this is a trap”, Daenerys spoke.

“A trap?”, Jaime asked tilting his head.

“How would you call it?”, Jon Snow asked with a hard voice. As he kept speaking, his tone grew louder. “We lost so much to bring you that wight to King’s Landing. Your sister promised to send her army North, but she didn't intend to do so. She lied to us, to everyone. And now she sends her brother to spy on us.”

Brienne stepped forward and bowed her head. “I don't mean to offend you, my lord, but if I'm allowed to speak, I must say that Ser Jaime came of his own accord. This has nothing to do with the queen.”

Jon looked at the Maid of Tarth and shook his head. Then he addressed Jaime again. “I see you fooled lady Brienne easily”, this comment made Brienne blush. “We know Lannisters better.”

Jaime still couldn't believe Jon Snow didn't know anything about him pushing Bran off the window. The young man's accusations couldn't be further from what Jaime had expected at first. But he decided not to stay silent after Jon's arrogant statement.

“There's already one Lannister working for your cause”, Jaime pointed towards Tyrion with his chin. “There's another one offering his help. Are you sure you know what you need to know about Lannisters? What I know about Starks is that they judge too easily. They look at you over their shoulder when they think you're below their honour standards, but they don't bother to ask you to check if their impressions are right.”

A heavy silence fell over the crowd. Jaime held Jon Snow's look defiantly for a while, as if they were fighting a mental battle, until the Dragon Queen's voice broke the moment.

“I'm not a Stark, but a Targaryen. What I know is that my family was killed and my brother and I were forced to flee from our home when you slayed my father. You vowed to protect your king, but you betrayed him. The only thoughts that helped me go on living and fighting were reconquering Westeros and making the Kingslayer pay for what he did to my family.”

“Please, my lady...”, Brienne started to say, but Daenerys corrected her.

“Your Grace.”

The Maid opened her eyes wide and stuttered. “Y-Your Grace. Ser Jaime had a strong motive to-”

But Jaime grabbed her wrist to prevent her from sharing his story in front of everyone. Brienne frowned and looked at him. He only shook his head, then he spoke again fixing his green eyes on Daenerys. “I've done awful things in my life, I won't deny that fact. But I didn't know I was being judged for my deeds today. Every single person here has lots of things to be ashamed of, but here we are, wanting to fight for the living together. That's what you tried to convince us of back at King's Landing, didn't you? So that's what I intend to do if you accept my help. I thought we had a truce.”

“Yes, we had a truce”, Jon Snow took part in the conversation again, this time his voice was calmer, “but your sister broke it when she decided to treat us as if we were stupid. Don't try to use our arguments against us, because we know perfectly what we're fighting for. There's no truce with Cersei anymore. We're at war again, Jaime Lannister, and that makes you our enemy.”
Then lady Sansa, who had been keeping a low profile during the exchange, stepped forward and spoke with a confident tone. “Before you execute him, Jon, I think we should grant him the right to have a trial.”

Jon pondered her suggestion for a few seconds and looked at Daenerys, who shot an angry glance at Sansa. The Dragon Queen took a deep breath, but she finally gave Jon a slight and dignified nod. “Alright, so be it.”

“I will be his champion”, Brienne volunteered instantly, before Jaime could do anything to stop her.

“I'm afraid it won't be a trial by combat, lady Brienne”, lady Sansa warned her with a meaningful look in her pale eyes. “We banished that practice. A jury will judge his deeds and will pronounce sentence.”

Then Jon Snow addressed some of his bannermen, who had been waiting for his orders and eager to chastise the hated Lannister. “Disarm Ser Jaime and his man before taking them to the dungeons. Make sure you lock them away in separate cells. Don't hurt them.”

Two tough Northerners walked towards Jaime and two more headed towards Bronn, their eyes made of steel to match their muscular arms. The sellsword raised his hands in the air to let them know he wasn't going to put up a fight. It was sad to see the man so silent, but Brienne knew he didn't like dragons, so he preferred not to give Daenerys an excuse to roast him. The Maid refused to step back when the men reached Jaime, so one of them pushed her aside. She felt like shouting and punching the bannermen, but Jaime shot her a reassuring glance to calm her down. He knew her too well. Since they didn't find any weapon on Jaime, they stripped him of his golden hand, leaving his bare stump in plain sight. Brienne's heart ached: it was as if they had taken his dignity away from him. Then the four men dragged Jaime and Bronn away. Pod's expression was one of pure despair and Sandor Clegane wasn't happy either. He looked in Sansa's direction, wondering where the sweet child had gone, but the lady didn't look back at him. She was too focused on lord Tyrion.

When Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen started to leave the courtyard, Tyrion stood there without moving, but studying everyone with his clever eyes, surely planning a strategy to help his brother. On her part, Brienne ran to catch Jon on his way to the castle and walked next to him.

“My lord, Ser Jaime is a knight. He can't fight as well as he did before his maiming, but he's still a good strategist.”

“I'm sorry, lady Brienne. I don't trust him”, the young man said without looking at her. “And I can't trust your judgement either: you're too biased.”

“But, my lord, if you could lis-”, she kept trying, but then Jon Snow stopped and cut her off.

“There will be a trial. Feel free to speak then to defend your Lannister if you want and I will listen to you. But now, there are more important things at hand. That's my last word.”

Jon resumed his walking and left Brienne behind. The Maid clenched her jaw and rested one hand on Oathkeeper's pomme and the other on Widow's Wail's unconsciously. She kicked the ground in frustration and turned around to look for lady Sansa. She needed to make her understand, to win her for Jaime's cause, but the girl was nowhere to be seen. Not even lord Tyrion was around anymore. Only Pod, the Hound and the shy servant remained there.

“M'lady”, Pod ventured to say, “we knew this would happen. At least Ser Jaime isn't dead.”

“Lannisters are big pieces of shit”, Clegane offered. “They had hurt too many people. These brats are
not going to forgive him easily.”

Pod groaned. “Could you please just shut up, Ser? I was trying to cheer up m'lady.”

“Your lady isn't stupid, lad. And you're shit at comforting people. Jaime Lannister is fucked up if that clever brother of his doesn't come up with some brilliant defense.”

“Lady Sansa is a good person, m'lady”, Podrick said ignoring the Hound. “Let's go refresh a little and then you could talk to her. She will listen to you and may influence his brother's opinion on Ser Jaime. Perhaps we could look for lady Arya as well. I think she's fond of you.”

With her heart in her throat, Brienne nodded, then the three of them followed the serving girl to their rooms. It was going to be a very long night.

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It was incredibly cold in the dungeons. Jaime had started shivering the very moment he had stepped inside his cell. It was small, much smaller than the ones in the Red Keep. A little window opened on the thick wall, but since it was completely dark outside, no light reached him. There weren't torches in the hallway either, so Jaime couldn't even make out his own body. Moist straw covered the ground and there was a metal bucket in a corner where he could relieve himself. The only luxury inside the cell was a wooden bench, where Jaime was sitting. His door was locked, so he couldn't even speak with Bronn. That would have been a little comfort.

He had been strolling up and down for a while, until Tyrion had come to visit him. Jaime had noticed the irony in the situation: the last time both brothers had been in a cell, Tyrion was the prisoner and Jaime the visitor. Both had sat next to each other on the bench and they had remained in that position in complete silence for a while. Things weren't still clear between them, there was still so much that needed to be said. Then Tyrion had promised him to speak in his behalf in front of Daenerys and Jon, and had asked him for some sense as well. Don't provoke them if you want to go back to your lady, he had told Jaime. The Lion had looked at his brother with surprise, not because Tyrion had found out about Brienne so easily, but because he had used that information at the first opportunity. But Tyrion was too smart, and Jaime had realised the little man was trying to convince him right away using the emotional argument. Jaime hadn't bothered to deny his feelings for the wench and had wondered what Tyrion might be thinking. He hoped there will be time for the two of them to have a proper conversation about their pasts and futures, but just in case that never happened, Jaime had hugged Tyrion before he could leave the cell. Then, still holding his little brother in his arms, the Lion had told him that he no longer bore him malice. When Tyrion had finally left him alone, tears in his eyes, Jaime had hidden his face in his hand and had questioned everything about his life.

He was still in that position when he heard new steps outside his cell. Jaime didn't know how long it had been since the guard had closed the door behind Tyrion's back, but it seemed like an eternity. Someone started to manipulate the lock, making a jangling noise, and then the thick door opened again. The torch light hit Jaime in the face and made him close his unaccustomed eyes. When he opened them again, he saw Brienne in front of him. Her face was pale and scared, but she had had a bath and changed her clothes, so she looked a little calmer than in the courtyard. She placed the torch inside a metal ring on the wall and let some furs fall to the ground while the guard closed the door. Then the wench stepped forward and threw Jaime into a desperate hug.

“Brienne”, he breathed her name and hugged her back. “I thought they would forbid you to come visit me.”

“They did”, she confessed, still in his arms.
“Gods, you shouldn't be here, then”, Jaime grabbed her shoulders with his hand and stump and pushed her a little away to look at her freckled face. “I told you not to put yourself in danger. What were you thinking, wench?”

“I needed to see you”, she shrugged, her blue eyes incredibly sad. Then Jaime leaned forward and kissed her lips. He just couldn't help it.

“You're so stubborn”, Lannister scolded her against her mouth.

“You would have done the same.”

Jaime took her hand and led her towards the bench. “Have you seen Bran Stark?”

Brienne nodded. “He received me. We didn't have much time to speak, though. I gave him Meera's present and told him you were here, but he didn't respond. This is very strange, Jaime. What if he doesn't know anything?

“He knows”, Lannister shook his head. Of course Bran knew. “I don't know why he didn't tell his family. He might have a reason, but I know what happened in the broken tower and so he does. Lady Reed told me Bran was waiting for me. I'm not special, Brienne. I can't fight anymore and, as you said, now young Stark can see Cersei's actions himself in the distance with his powers. He doesn't need me. But he's waiting for me anyway. He knows.”

When Jaime stopped talking, they sat there, their shoulders, hips and knees touching, their fingers intertwined. There were so many other things Jaime wanted to tell Brienne, to do to her, to teach her and learn from her. But he supposed silence might be the least cruel thing he could offer her at the moment, given the circumstances. They couldn't even look in each other's eyes, because they didn't want to have a break down which added more sorrow to the other. Their gazes were fixed on their joined hands. It was Brienne who dared to break the silence.

“Lady Sansa told me your trial will be tomorrow.”

“They don't lose time, do they?”, Jaime whistled. “You spoke to her, then?”

“Of course I spoke to her. I tried my best, but we got interrupted so many times. They've been informed that the army of the dead has crossed the Wall”, Brienne informed with a shiver.

“What?” , then Jaime lifted his astonished eyes to look at her. “The Wall has been knocked down?”

The Maid nodded. Jaime had never seen so much fear in her features. He himself was incredibly taken aback. “Part of our army will ride North in a few days to fight the dead before they reach Winterfell. As you see, they have no time to lose”, she said. Then they remained silent until Brienne squeezed his hand and spoke again. “I will be there, Jaime. I won't leave you alone.”

Lannister let go of her hand to cup the back of her neck with his. Then he gave her a long kiss, a kiss that held so much longing and unsaid truths.

“You must go now”, Jaime ordered Brienne and made her stand up by grabbing her arm. He couldn't have the wench there any longer or he would do something foolish.

The Maid turned around to take the furs she had brought him from the ground. She kindly placed them on the bench and threw her arms around his neck one last time. Jaime hid his face in her broad shoulder. Then he lifted his head and kissed her cheek twice. Brienne swallowed, looked at him with her eyes full of tears and squeezed his hand before leaving him alone.
Jaime heard the guard lock his door again. He walked towards the bench and only when he was sure that Brienne wasn't going to return he allowed himself to break down. Jaime cried bitter tears in the furs to muffle his wails. He knew this was the correct thing to do, but he blamed honour between sobs. They should have run away when they had had the chance.

Now it was too late and he might never hold Brienne again.

Chapter End Notes

Transition chapter. They needed to arrive at Winterfell. I'm quite afraid now, because I know Brienne and Jaime, but I don't know if I'm going to be able to keep Jon, Daenerys, Sansa... in character. Well, you tell me, please.

I play with the idea that Bran speaks more to Sansa than to Jon, and she knows more or less how Bran's powers work, so she uses his knowledge when in doubt, but Jon doesn't. He's... well, he's Jon "knowing-nothing" Snow.

Leave a review, guys! Thank you for your comments and love.
It was still completely dark when a noise in the hallway made Jaime lift his head. He hadn't slept at all, so his head ached and he felt quite dizzy. It had been a long time since he had last eaten, because nobody had brought him any food last night or this morning, so his body was quite weak and useless. Besides, the freezing dampness of the dungeons had cut through to his bones, making him catch a cold.

Jaime's eyes were red and swollen after spending most of his time in the cell crying. At some point, he had been close to come to terms with his terrible fate. But every time he thought he was ready to accept his destiny, then Brienne's face showed up in his mind and ruined everything.

Two rough men dressed in thick furs got in the small cell, torches in hand, and approached Jaime, who was still sitting on the bench.

"Why didn't you bring me some breakfast, ladies?", Lannister asked with a fake smile and then sniffled, his temples throbbing. He didn't know why he kept behaving like that. Perhaps it was his way of coping with anxiety, he wasn't sure.

"You'll die soon, Kingslayer", one of the men explained with loathing. "It would be a crime to waste the little food we have with a corpse."

Jaime swallowed and felt a shiver running down his spine. Of course, the trial was a pantomime, everyone knew the Starks would sentence him to be executed. Even Jaime knew. And if his judges weren't still aware of Bran's story, the Lion was determined to confess it, anyway. In for a penny, in for a dragon, right? Since it was very difficult to chain up his wrists as he was lacking a hand, the Northerners used a thick rope to tie him up. His skin burned and hurt. At least they let him keep the furs Brienne had given him last night. When the soldiers dragged him outside to cross the courtyard towards the Great Keep, Lannister thought the cold was going to freeze his balls. He couldn't tell whether it was day or night, as the sky was as black as a raven's wing. All along the way, Jaime kept changing his mind. He hadn't been so confused in his whole life. One moment he thought there might still be a possibility for him to live if he kept his mouth shut about Bran and the next moment he slapped himself mentally and urged himself to tell the truth. What if this was some kind of proof? Was Bran maybe testing his honour?

When they arrived at the Great Hall, the place was crowded. Jaime remembered the large room, because he had been in it before. They had celebrated some banquets there the first time he had stayed at Winterfell. He had had breakfast there with Cersei, Tyrion and the children right the morning after leaving Bran unconscious, dying and prostrated in a bed. Someone had pushed the long tables against the walls and the Northern lords were sitting right on them as if they were about to witness a joust, but their faces were sour and angry, and some even spat at his feet when Jaime walked past them. The hardest look he received came from a little but determined Northern girl with long dark hair. Lannister caught sight of Sandor Clegane's scarred face in the back of the audience,
and they shared a meaningful look. Instinctively, Jaime searched for Brienne among the hostile crowd and he found her at once on his right. He didn't know if it was because he was starting to feel feverish, but his wench appeared highlighted in his eyes. There was a special light coming from her, from her blonde hair, imponent figure and blue eyes.

The Maid's innocent astonishing blue eyes.

Her worried gaze had a soothing effect on him, and Jaime felt a wave of warmth spread through his chest. Brienne gave him a nod, her expression sad and concerned, and Jaime tried to correspond, but his head didn't seem to feel like obeying him. At the far end of the Great Hall there was a big table with some chairs where his judges were sitting. Jaime wasn't sure if he would make it to them. He suddenly felt so weak, feverish and sore that the grey sea of furs made him sick. Some people laughed and others booed at him while he was bent over himself. He caught a glimpse of straw blonde hair running towards him, and then two strong hands helped him up. Brienne was right by his side, watching him with horrified eyes. People would talk, but people always talked. Lannister turned his head to his shoulder and wiped his lips in the furs he found there as if nothing had happened. The wench hesitated, but then she took his arm carefully and walked with him to the high table. Jaime lifted his eyes heavily to look at the jury: Daenerys Targaryen, Jon Snow, Sansa Stark and a brunette young woman who could only be Arya Stark. The last time Jaime had seen her she was a skinny little girl, but now there was something about her that made the Lannister shiver. All the four of them wore similar unreadable expressions. He had expected to find Bran Stark among his judges, but the boy seemed to be avoiding Jaime. A beautiful girl with dark skin and curly hair stood right behind the Dragon Queen's chair and there was a man with a grey beard beside her. Despite his poor state, the Lannister noticed some of his fingers were missing. He thought that he should know the knight and the girl, he had seen them before, at the Dragonpit perhaps, but his mind was too slow to remember anything.

When they reached the front of the table, Sansa looked at Jon out of the corner of her eye and then he stood up.

“Thank you, lady Brienne.”

The Maid clenched her jaw and glanced at Jaime, who was still too weak and was using her as his support. He gave her a little nod and then Brienne let go of his arm reluctantly, but she didn't go too far away from him in case he needed her. She leaned against the wall and didn't take her eyes off Jaime. Tyrion Lannister, who was sitting right beside her, lifted his head to study the Maid of Tarth briefly, then he turned his attention back to his brother.

“Ser Jaime of House Lannister”, called Jon Snow, “you stand accused of kingslaying by Daenerys Targaryen and you stand accused of spying on us. How do you answer these charges?”, said the former King in the North and then he sat down again.

“What difference does it make?”, Jaime asked in return with difficulty. “Yes, I killed good old saint Aerys. And though I'm not here to spy on you, it doesn't really matter. I've done too many bad things, I'm evil, but you haven't heard the worst of all.”

There was a trace of irony and bitterness in Jaime's words. He knew what he should do, but it was the same thing all over again. These people would accuse him of anything and would never listen to his truth. The only thing he truly regretted was what he had done to Bran, and he was ready to confess. If the Starks were going to execute him after all, if they were determined to go on hating him, let them do it for a good reason.

Suddenly, the wooden door that was behind the high table opened and a chubby young man got into the Great Hall pushing a chair like nothing Jaime had ever seem before. It had wheels, and that was
what made the Lannister realise who the teenager in the chair was: the child he had crippled so long ago, Bran Stark. It might have been because Jaime was biased by Brienne's opinion, but when he saw the boy he thought that there was something unhuman in him. A heavy silence fell over the room, as if everyone there respected or feared Bran. Brienne swallowed and looked alternatively at Bran and Jaime. The pusher stopped the teenager's chair next to Arya and the boy thanked him with a nod. Then he fixed his apparently indifferent eyes on the accused right away.

Lannister's breathing quickened. He didn't talk right away, but with slow steps he moved a little closer to the place where Bran was sitting behind the table and then he fell on his knees right in front of him. Brienne closed her eyes.

“My lord”, Jaime said, his voice weak and practically inaudible. “I know you were waiting for me”. Except for Sansa, the rest of the judges showed signs of ignorance and confusion. The witnesses of the trial kept silent. “I was about to confess when you arrived. There’s nothing I could do or say to repay you for what I did.”

Bran kept looking at Jaime with his neutral eyes, but didn't say anything. The one who spoke was Jon Snow, instead. “What are you talking about, Lannister?”

The Lion took a deep breath and finally shared his crime with everyone. “It was me who turned your brother into a cripple.”

Everyone in the room roared in anger. The noise was deafening. Tyrion covered his pained face with his tiny hands, but something in his expression told Brienne that he had always suspected the truth. The Maid looked around, her fear for Jaime growing in her chest as the Northerners started demanding his head. Arya had sprang to her feet and was playing unconsciously with the dagger in her belt, Jon Snow's jaw seemed about to explode and Sansa's face was a horrified one. Only Daenerys wore a satisfied expression: now the Kingslayer would never escape his fate.

Then Jon raised a hand to make everyone shut up and stared at Jaime with his most hateful eyes. “How could you?”, he said with a slow and dangerous voice. “How could you? He was just a kid! My father-”, Jon stopped as if he had just rememberd something and then he went on, “my father always told us that you had no honour. A man who slays his king after swearing an oath is no knight. But this goes beyond everything. How can you call yourself a man? How can you live with that memory?”

Brienne's breath quickened. She couldn't go on listening to their accusations. She knew Jaime was guilty of Bran's fall, but she couldn't stand hearing them humiliate the man she loved for other crimes he hadn't committed. The Maid stepped forward to vouch for Jaime, who was still on his knees, but a raised hand stopped her. This time, it was Bran himself who had made use of his authority. Brienne noticed that the boy was wearing Meera's bracelet and it kind of touched her heart. When he spoke, the Three-Eyed Raven's voice sounded monotonous and ethereal.

“I remember Bran's pain. I remember his frustration when he tried to ride a horse or walk.”

“I think there's nothing else to decide here”, Arya Stark said calmer than expected. “Jaime Lannister deserves to die. Just give the order and you'll have it done.”

But Bran's eyes were still fixed on Jaime. “If you hadn't pushed me, I would have never become what I am today”. Everyone was holding their breaths. The boy looked at Jon Snow briefly and then turned back to the Lannister. “I would have never seen what I've seen. I would have never witnessed the army of the dead going through the Wall. I would have never seen King Aerys's either.”

When Bran mentioned Aerys's name, Jaime lifted his head.
“You have killed a lot of people. But how many of them have you saved?”, the boy asked and the question made Jon Snow frown. “Everyone knows your crimes, Jaime Lannister, but nobody seems to know your feats.”

“Bran, what are you doing?”, Sansa asked. Since she had heard him confess, Jaime knew he had lost her as an ally.

“Why?”, Bran ignored his sister and went on. “Why didn't you tell anyone then? How can a man live with so many secrets and so much pain inside?”

But Jaime couldn't speak, the lump in his throat was too big. He was too focused on trying to hold back his tears. It was difficult, because apart from Brienne, this boy was the first person who had showed a little compassion and understanding towards him, precisely the boy whose life he had ruined.

“My lords, my ladies, Your Grace”, Brienne's strangled voice sounded in Jaime's ears. “Ser Jaime did tell me his story. If you allow me to speak, I will explain it in his stead.”

Jon looked at her suspiciously, but then he nodded: perhaps curiosity was more powerful than distrust. His wench told everyone how Jaime had been a loyal kight, how he had served in Aerys's Kingsguard proudly for some years. Then she told them why the Lion had ended up slitting the Mad King's throat: Aerys had ordered his pyromancer to burn everyone in King's Landing with wildfire just because he was losing the city. Young Jaime had made up his mind in a matter of seconds and he had sacrificed his oath in order to save the whole population of the capital.

“He was a bad man”, Jaime finally found his voice and helped Brienne complete the story. He stared right into Daenerys's lilac eyes from below. “I stood so many times outside his chamber when he raped your mother, his wife and sister. Queen Rhaella was sweet, but always so sad. The other kingsguards always told me it was alright, we couldn't and shouldn't do anything to stop him: he was our king. I saw him burn people to death, innocent and guilty people equally. He enjoyed their screams of pain, he got turned on whenever he burned people, and then he went to Rhaella and abused her. Aerys was an awful king and an awful man, and he deserved to die.”

The silence was deafening. Daenerys's skin was as pale as wax. It was Sansa who spoke in the first place. “If this is true, why didn't you tell our father when he arrived at the Red Keep?”

Jaime gave a bitter and weak snort. “He judged me the moment he set eyes on me. Aerys and his pyromancer laid dead at my feet and I was sitting on the throne. Good Ned didn't bother to ask me what had happened there. Aerys had roasted his brother and father a few months ago after summoning them to the capital, everyone in the Seven Kingdoms knew he was completely mad, the realm was at war, but your father decided that the Lannister brat must be the bad guy of the story because he had dishonoured an oath.”

“How can we know you're telling the truth?”, Jon took part in the conversation, still not convinced of Jaime's arguments. His expression didn't show any sympathy towards him.

“Well, your brother seems to know everything”, Lannister shrugged, He was so tired. “Or you can ask lord Varys as well. He was right there.”

Those present in the Great Hall turned their heads towards the bald man who leaned against the wall in the shadows with his arms crossed in front of his belly. Varys stepped slightly forward and into the light as if he were floating instead of walking.

“Lord Varys”, Daenerys addressed her adviser, “can you confirm this story?”
“I can, Your Grace. I was there, indeed”, Varys stated without passion but firmly and bowed his head.

The woman still didn't look convinced, but then another voice took part in Jaime's defence, a deep one this time.

“My queen, even I didn't know my brother's story”, Tyrion Lannister took a step forward and stood next to Brienne. “I admit I never asked him why he killed Aerys. I was too young when Robert's rebellion happened and I never dared to address the subject: it was painful for my brother, so I respected his silence. Now I understand that he chose not to share his story with anyone: his first great deed granted him the worst nickname ever: Kingslayer”, Tyrion stopped with his voice a little strangled and looked at Jaime, whose tears ran freely down his face now. “Who was he going to trust after that? I know what being the family outcast means, but Jaime was always there for me. He was the only light I had in my childhood. What hurts me the most is that I never comforted him in return. He saved the whole population of King's Landing when he killed a man whom everyone despised and feared”, here Tyrion spoke right to Daenerys, his gaze intent, to make her understand, “and the realm repaid him by convincing him he was an oathbreaker."

Brienne was so touched by Tyrion's intelligent and emotional statements that she could barely move. She would have liked to give such an eloquent speech herself, but words weren't her strongest trait. Thankfully, Tyrion was in their team. The little man took a deep breath and went around the Maid to stand beside Jaime, who was still kneeling. He put his hand on his big brother's shoulder to show him his respect, affection, remorse and apologies. Jaime raised his only hand and put it over Tyrion's small one.

“I'm sure every single man and woman in this room has done something they regret”, Tyrion went on. He knew he had the audience's full attention now. “My brother isn't a saint and, as you said, my lord Jon, he has done enough awful things to be punished. I myself killed my own father and that made me a villain and a hero at the same time, it all depends on how you look at it. Our prejudgement turned an idealistic teenager into a cynical man. Still that man came North, knowing what was waiting for him here, and dared to confess his worst crime! You've already pardoned worst people than my brother, my lords, my ladies, Your Grace. I beg you for his forgiveness.”

Jon Snow had been listening to Tyrion with his hands intertwined before his mouth. He shot a glance at Daenerys, whose expression gave away mixed feelings. She had been determined to go on hating the Kingslayer, her father's killer, but then he had talked about her mother so sweetly that he had melted her heart a little. Everyone had told her that Aerys had been a bad king, after all. Though she knew she would never fully forgive Jaime Lannister for his father's murder, Daenerys couldn't help admitting that perhaps the knight had made the right choice.

“Thank you, lord Tyrion”, she said graciously. The youngest Lannister nodded, squeezed Jaime's shoulder and went back to his original seat, taking reluctant Brienne with him. The Maid was so overwhelmed with emotion and fear that she couldn't find the words to thank Tyrion.

Sansa leaned discreetly towards Arya to whisper something in her ear and the crowd started to murmur. Then an insecure voice raised over the noise and a young man stepped closer to the high table: adorable Podrick Payne.

“Please, m-my lords and m-my ladies and... and D-Dragon Q-”, Pod started, then he corrected himself, “Your Grace.”

“Say your name”, Daenerys commanded and the squire shivered.

“P-Podrick Payne, Your Grace. I'm lady Brienne's squire”, he complied, and this information made
Daenerys look at the Maid of Tarth with curious eyes.

“Say what you must, Podrick Payne”, Jon Snow waved his hand to invite him to speak.

The boy bowed his head and swallowed before starting to talk. “Well, I know m-my opinion might not count at all, because I'm no one, but I-I want to defend Ser Jaime as well.”

Brienne looked at him with a proud and grateful expression and feverish Jaime lifted his eyes to fix them on Pod.

“I had only heard stories about him when I arrived at the capital. Some said he was the b-best knight in the Seven Kingdoms, others said he was a man without honour. And then he saved me. When m-my lord Tyrion was accused of King Joffrey's murder, he got imprisoned, so I was in d-danger in King's Landing. Then Ser Jaime entrusted me to lady Brienne and made me her squire. I owe him my life. He sent us t-to find and protect lady Sansa, and gave my lady a fine armour and his own sword for her to achieve this task.”

“Let me see that sword, lady Brienne”, Jon asked.

Brienne approached the high table and drew the blade from its scabbard with a skilled movement. Then she handed it to the young man for him to appreciate it in its full length. Jon took it from her hands and examined it carefully.

“Valyrian steel... Does it have a name?”

“Oathkeeper”, the Maid whispered. Her mind recalled the day Jaime had given it to her. The audience whispered behind her back.

“It's an interesting name. This is Lannister gold, no doubt.”

Then Jaime looked at Jon from below. “Its blade was reforged from Ned Stark's Ice, as well as Widow's Wail, its sister. It was only fair to use it to defend lord Eddard's daughter. Now these swords should be returned to your House.”

The wolf pondered Jaime's words and looked at the Stark girls and boy. The three of them shook their heads at the same time.

“Keep it, lady Brienne, and go on defending Ned Stark's family with it”, he gave Oathkeeper back to the Maid of Tarth and she nodded her agreement. Then she walked back to her place near Tyrion, a little more hopeful after the exchange.

“Anything else, Podrick Payne?”, Jon turned his attention towards the poor boy, who hadn't moved away and was wringing his hands nervously.

“J-Just one more thing, my lord. Ser Jaime is a good man. I t-think he deserves a second chance.”

“Alright, thank you, boy”, Jon dismissed him with a gesture and Pod went to Brienne. Then he fixed his dark eyes on the accused. “You have many friends, Lannister, even in the North, and they speak very highly of you. But I still can't forget what you just confessed. In my eyes, you will always be the man who ruined Bran's life. Nothing that your defenders said makes me think you've changed enough to deserve our pardon. Yes, you sent lady Brienne to find and protect Sansa, but you could have gone with her yourself. Of course, you didn't, because it was better to stay with your sister and go on plotting against every honourable House in the realm.”

“The bear and the maiden fair”, Bran said suddenly.
“What?”, Jon asked frowning.

“I think lady Brienne might have something else to say on this”, the boy looked at her and the Maid was under the impression that he could see through her flesh and bones.

“I-I think I know what you want me to tell everyone here, my lord, but I need to start from the beginning to reach that episode”, Brienne said shyly and took a deep breath, getting ready to tell their story. “I always wanted to be a knight, since I was a little kid, but I was born a girl, and girls aren't allowed to fight”, Brienne shot a glance at Arya, who nodded slightly. “But my late father was the best of men and he taught me how to wield a sword. Then he allowed me to fight for lord Renly when he claimed the throne for himself. But lord Renly was murdered while only lady Catelyn and I were with him in his tent, and I was accused for it. Lady Catelyn took me to Robb Stark's camp and I swore an oath to protect her in order to show her my gratitude.”

“Then Jaime Lannister got captured by Robb Stark forces”, a bearded Northern lord shouted from behind.

Brienne nodded. “He was a valuable prisoner, but lady Catelyn disobeyed her son and King in the North and sent Ser Jaime back to King's Landing to exchange his life for her daughters' ones. She entrusted me with this task and I felt like dying. I hated the man, he represented everything I despised: kingslayer, oathbreaker, man without honour. Still I did my best to keep him alive and safe on our way to the capital... until we came across the Bloody Mummers. They took us captives and one evening they decided it was a good idea t-to rape me”, Brienne's voice broke a little. Suddenly, she felt the touch of a soft skin on the back of her hand. She looked down and saw Jaime's stump rubbing her fingers.

“Go on”, lady Sansa encouraged her. Rape and abuse got under her skin everytime she heard about them.

“Ser Jaime hated me as much as I hated him then. I still don't know why he did it, but even though he didn't like me, he lied to their leader Locke about my father's wealth to save me from rape. Locke was a sadistic man and needed to give us some exemplary punishment, and since he no longer wanted to hurt me, he took it on Ser Jaime: he cut his right hand off without ceremony.”

Nobody knew that story either. Everyone had heard or seen that the Kingslayer had lost his sword hand on his way back to King's Landing from Robb Stark's camp, but neither Brienne nor Jaime had explained anyone how that had happened. The Maid still felt his skin on hers and she was tempted to caress his arm back, but she needed to keep her cool head to finish the story.

“Then they took us to Harrenhal and lord Bolton set him free, but they kept me. I wasn't as important as the son of Tywin Lannister, of course, and though Ser Jaime insisted on taking me with him to the capital, Roose Bolton gave me to his pet Locke to make of me whatever he liked. They threw me into a bearpit and forced me to fight a bear with a wooden sword. I didn't even stand a chance against it, but then Ser Jaime appeared and saved me from the animal. He came back for me, jumped unarmed into the bearpit and faced the bear with just one hand left. And he still managed to help me get out of there alive. I will never forget it, no matter how long I'll live. How many knights would have done what he did? He didn't have to come back, I was nothing to him, but he did. Then I realised that Ser Jaime truly was the bravest man alive and that I had misjudged him.”

“I heard that song a year ago south of the Neck”, a tall man with broad shoulders said and many others nodded. “The bard called it 'The Maid and the Lion', but I never imagined it was based on a true story.”

“It was, I'm afraid”, Brienne confirmed blushing. She remembered the song too well. “He rescued
me and I have trusted him ever since. When lady Sansa sent me to fetch Brynden Tully to help her
regain Winterfell, Tully forces were under Lannister siege. It was Ser Jaime, their lord Commander,
who allowed me to speak to the Black Fish to call a truce. Ser Jaime was determined to let him live
and take his forces North to help you against the Boltons, but it was your uncle who decided not to
come with me. Then Ser Jaime took Riverrun and gave it back to the Freys, yes, but without
bloodshed, just because he had sworn he wouldn't wound or kill anyone.”

Jon Snow stared at Brienne intently for a few seconds, then he looked at Jaime and turned back to
the Maid. With a slight nod, he dismissed Brienne, and the woman moved away from the Lion with
a little intake of air. Then Jon leaned forward in his seat to address Jaime.

“Why did you come North, Jaime Lannister? And most important, what does your sister think of it?”

With an absent gaze, as if he were remembering something, the accused shook his head. “She isn't
very happy with me”, then he focused his green eyes again to look at Jon. “Actually, she ordered the
Mountain to kill me just before I left. For treason.”

It still hurt so much when he said it aloud. Arya and Sansa Stark turned their heads towards Bran
automatically and the boy nodded without hesitation.

“It looks like you're telling the truth”, Snow said. “So is that why you came, because you had to run
away?”

“No”, Jaime denied, his head aching badly. “I came because I think this is the only war we need to
focus on and, despite everything, I still have some reasons to fight the dead. Honour, life, future...
love. I came to help. As it's been stated here today, I've done too many bad things, but the one I
regret the most is the crime I committed against you, my lord”, Lannister addressed Bran once again.
“It will haunt me for the rest of my life. That's my only truth.”

There was a silence among the judges after Jaime's last words, though a constant whispering raised
from the crowd. Brienne grabbed Oathkeeper's pommel, because that was her way to cope with
nervousness. The hard hilt in her hand always helped her relax.

“I forgive you”, Bran Stark spoke suddenly.

Jaime's eyes filled with tears one more time and so did Brienne's. He stood up at last and fixed his
emerald gaze on the younger Stark. “Thank you, my lord. I know I will never deserve your pardon,
but now I'm able to accept whatever decision this jury makes.”

Then Jon looked at Arya to invite her to speak her mind. The girl's expression was so unreadable that
it was scary. Her beautiful dagger was on the table and she was toying with it. Jaime thought that he
had seen the weapon before, but he didn't remember where exactly. Arya looked at Brienne, then she
fixed her gaze on the back of the room, where Sandor Clegane was, and finally, she opened her
mouth to talk.

“I was at the Twins when you celebrated your victory over the Black Fish in Riverrun. I knew you
perfectly, but you weren't on my list, so I let you live. I wouldn't have done it if I had known what
you did to my brother Bran, though”, she informed with merciless eyes. Then the girl softened her
expression and went on. “And I would have made a mistake. If Bran forgives you, I do as well.
Your time isn't upon you yet.”

Jaime bowed his head, his heart pounding hard. After Arya's pardon, Sansa straightened her back
and leaned forward to take the floor. “You always treated me well when I lived in King's Landing,
but you never bothered to defend me when Joffrey hit me or your sister threatened me. I guess I
wasn't important enough for you to notice my suffering. Then there is what you did to Bran. I still can't get why you would push a kid off a window, but I imagine you had your reasons. You might have been protecting... someone with that terrible action. I would do whatever it takes to protect my family as well”, Sansa said with a meaningful look of her pale eyes, who pierced Jaime's heart. “I don't doubt lady Brienne's words, she's the most honourable knight I've ever met. If you hadn't saved her from rape and that bear, she would have never rescued me from the snow and taken me to Castle Black. I owe her a debt, Ser Jaime, and she wants you to live. I owe you a debt as well and since my brother Bran seems to trust you despite your crimes, I will forgive you too, for the two of them.”

There was such a big lump in Brienne's throat that she was unable to swallow it. Podrick grabbed her wrist discreetly to reassure her. Everyone looked then at Daenerys Targaryen, whose lilac eyes seemed to burn with fire. The woman intertwined her fingers and leaned her elbows on the table. She shot a side glance at Tyrion Lannister and then focused on the accused.

“When you killed my father, we saw ourselves forced to flee Westeros, our home. We were the blood of the dragon and the rightful heirs to the Iron Throne. We were meant to sit there and rule the realm, but have been wandering around Essos for years instead. I've been hating you for longer than I can remember. And now you come here in person, lacking the hand you slit my father's throat with, speaking of how much you liked my sweet mother, whom no one ever talks about, and suddenly I feel compelled to understand what you did to my father. I don't know you, I don't trust you, I don't like you, but you've raised doubt within me. I can't sentence you to die”, Daenerys admitted. She paused to evaluate the accused and then she resumed her speech. “However, if I ever get to be Queen of Westeros, I will strip you of your House name. You will live and will be free to go wherever you want, but you won't be a Lannister anymore and will have no rights over your patrimony under my reign.”

Some members of the audience applauded Daenerys's decision. Brienne gasped and looked alternatively at Tyrion and Jaime, and while the small man let his feelings betray him through his hurt expression, the knight was too relieved to show any concern about his future name right now. Then Jon's turn came, but numbers were already in Jaime's favour. The soon-not-to-be Lannister was trembling like a leaf, waiting for the last judge's sentence to start his new life. Waiting was Brienne as well, now a little disappointed after the Dragon Queen's contribution. The Maid sighed and hoped she will be able to thank the Gods at least for granting Jaime a second chance through the Starks mouths.

“I guess I still can call you Jaime Lannister, since your sister is the one sitting on the Iron Throne right now. I remember our first encounter: it was here in Winterfell, at Mikka's forge. You mocked me about becoming a member of the Night's Watch. I was offended by your disrespect and arrogance then, but after your brother Tyrion told me the truth about what being a crow meant, I started to understand that you had just warned me in your own cynical way. You were a sworn kingsguard, you had taken your vows as I was about to do, so you knew what being in an elite force for life meant. I became a brother of the Night's Watch and I was miserable at first, but at some point I resigned myself and did my best to protect the realms of men. Then I broke my vows too”, a surprised murmur raised from the crowd again, but Jon kept talking and shut it up. “It was the correct thing to do, I was aiming for the greater good. I guess that's what you thought when you killed Aerys. Crippling Bran is a different matter entirely, but since Bran himself has spoken in your favour, I will trust his judgement”, then Jon paused and resumen his sentence shortly after, his eyes fixed on Jaime. “Everyone from your brother to lady Brienne claims you've changed. We need as many men as we can use to fight the White Walkers, who are our true enemies. Show us you've changed, Jaime Lannister. Put your sword and experience at our service and help us defeat Death.”

“You can count on me”, Jaime said, his voice trembling. “You have my sword.”
“Then I absolve you of all the charges. You're free to go.”

“Thank you”, Lannister managed to say before hiding his crying face in his trembling left hand. He knew most of the lords were gosiping behind his back as they left the Great Hall, but he didn't care anymore. He was alive: ill, nearly disinherited and exhausted but alive. Jaime heard Jon order some of his men to free Bronn from the dungeons.

While the Starks started to stand up, he felt a small hand touch his stump and he looked down to find a sad but satisfied Tyrion by his side. Jaime gave him a nod to thank him his help, trust and brilliant words, but he couldn't speak for now. It was so good to be fighting in his brother's team again. Podrick Payne, who was waiting behind Tyrion, walked round the younger Lannister and trapped Jaime's torso in his arms, which made Tyrion laugh. Jaime was so weak that he found the embrace even painful. Then the squire untied the thick rope that was constricting the man's body and threw it away.

Jaime felt like fainting when he finally caught a glimpse of Brienne's eyes. They were full of tears, but he knew she wouldn't allow them to spill until they were alone. Tyrion and Pod shared a knowing glance and moved away to clear the way for the pair. The Maid approached Jaime trying to keep her formality up in front of the Starks and the rest of the lords, though it was clear by her expression that she was struggling hard not to hug him. She gave the Lion a courteous nod and choked back her tears, but Jaime didn't feel like pretending anymore. Feverish as he was, he stepped forward, threw his arms around Brienne's waist softly but without hesitation and hid his nose in her hair to smell her scent. The wench stiffened at first and looked around a little embarrassed, but her reluctance didn't last long, as she was willing to hold Jaime as well. Brienne raised her arms and hugged him warmly. The pair didn't see them, but Sansa and Arya exchanged an indulgent look at their display of affection.

Suddenly, Jaime's legs didn't hold him anymore. He didn't know where his strength had gone. Brienne felt the sudden heaviness of his body in her arms and held him closer.

“Pod, help me! There's something wrong with Ser Jaime”, she said worried and the squire hurried to put his hands under the Lannister's armpits to help him sit on the cold stony floor. Brienne crouched down by his side and put a hand on his forehead. “Gods, he's burning!”

Both Stark sisters and Bran's pusher, who hadn't left the Great Hall yet, approached the group and asked some of the Stark men to help Brienne carry the Lannister to her bedroom, since Jaime didn't have one for him prepared yet. The poor knight was barely conscious when they reached the Maid's quarters and laid him on the bed. He kept mumbling incoherent things under his breath. The chubby man, who turned out to be late Randyll Tarly's eldest son, explained to Brienne that he had been studying at the Citadel for some months to become a maester, so he knew some things about fever. Samwell examined Jaime with professional eyes and, after a little while, he diagnosed him with a heavy cold. The young man calmed down Brienne and promised her that he would prepare a remedy for the patient. Then he took Podrick with him to send the squire later with the medicine and they both left the pair alone in the room.

“Brienne...”, Jaime called for her in his delirium.

“I'm here, you silly man”, she responded while taking off her fur cloak and sat down next to him on the bed to take his hand in hers. Then she brought the fingers of her other hand to his hot forehead to brush his sweaty golden hairs from his eyes. “Don't dare to die, do you hear me? You already did the most difficult part. You can't die now, Jaime. I... I need you.”

But Jaime didn't answer her plea. He was too lost in his ravings to hear her. The day was going to be long and Brienne feared the battle they would have to fight here and now even more than the one
against the White Walkers. She held Jaime's hand tightly and prayed to the Seven.

Chapter End Notes

Well, the trial. I'm not entirely happy with how it went, but I kept changing my mind while I was writing this. I hope it works for you.

Please, tell me your opinions! ^^ Thanks so much for reading.
Rebirth

Chapter Notes

Chapter 17 and this is almost coming to an end. Just a few chapters left to finish this story. Thank you so much for all the comments and support!

Let's go!

As Brienne had foreshadowed, the day was being very long. Jaime couldn't stop shivering despite all the fur layers Brienne had put over his body. His forehead burnt like fire and his cheeks were bright red with fever. She had dampened a cloth in the water of her washbasin and was rubbing the skin of the man's face with it. After a while, Pod came back to the room carrying a hot bowl in one hand and a flask in the other. The lad closed the door with his elbow and hurried to hand both objects to his lady.

“You have to make him eat something, m'lady.”

“He can't eat in his state. Look at him.”

The squire pursed his lips as if he were thinking. “I could hold him up while you feed him. Maester Tarly said he needs some food because he's too weak.”

“He isn't a maester”, Brienne corrected him, but she decided to trust his words. “Alright, help me sit him up in bed.”

Together they managed to straighten Jaime's back. Podrick held his shoulders and head while Brienne tried to convince him to eat the soup, but it was very difficult as Jaime wasn't fully conscious. When they were about to give up on the task, Pod covered Lannister's nose with his fingers, which made him swallow at last. It wasn't the most proper way to feed a sick person, but Brienne congratulated the lad on his idea. Desperate times called for desperate measures.

When Jaime finished his meal, the Maid took the small crystal flask and emptied its green content in the knight's mouth. The smell of the liquid was fresh and strong, as if it contained mint or liquorice. After that, Brienne and her squire helped Jaime lay down again and the woman sat next to his still body. On his part, Podrick took a stool for himself and placed it close to the bed to sit in front of his lady. They kept quiet for some minutes, staring at Jaime's sleeping face. Then Podrick leaned forward and dared to ask.

“How are you, m'lady?”

Brienne turned her head to look at him with tired eyes and sighed. “I'm fine, Pod.”

“I-I don't want to disturb you, so I'll be next door if you need anything. I'll bring you some food when it's lunch time.”

His words touched her heart. She didn't know she could grow even fonder of the lad, but truth was she did. Brienne gave him a nod to thank his help, devotion and concern. Then Podrick dared to pat her shoulder awkwardly and headed to the door, but before the boy could reach it, they heard some
knocks and the wooden board opened to make way for Tyrion Lannister.

“Oh, hello, Pod”, the man said after he almost bumped into his former squire. “I think Bronn was looking for you. He wanted to ‘celebrate my fooking freedom with that pipsqueak’. His words.”

“Thank you for the information, m'lord, but today I will be around just in case m'lady needs me.”

“You're the best squire ever. I hope your lady knows how to appreciate it.”

“I do”, Brienne took part in the conversation from her seat on the bed. “It took me a while to realise, but now I wouldn't want any other person at my service.”

Podrick swallowed with pride and smiled innocently. Then he bowed his head at Tyrion and disappeared from the room before the man could close the door behind him to keep the place a little warmer.

“Lady Brienne”, he walked towards the bed and stopped in front of the woman, his calculating eyes roaming over her face. “How's my brother?”

“I've seen him better”, she answered and averted her eyes from Tyrion's intimidating ones.

“And worse, as well.”

The Maid stiffened, but she didn't deny it. “And worse, as well”, she repeated with her gaze fixed on Jaime's face.

“In the trial you said he saved you when you were travelling to King's Landing together, and I believe your words without hesitation, my lady, but you never mentioned how you saved him in return”, Tyrion said with a soft voice, which made Brienne look back at him.

“I-I did nothing”, the Maid said with her usual humility.

“Of course you did and that's the reason why he's healing now, in more than one way. I thank you for that. I have no doubt that he will recover from this. Tarly told me he caught a cold on his way here or in the dungeons last night. But don't worry: I know him and that won't be enough to finish him off”, Tyrion paused for a few seconds and turned his gaze deliberately to his brother, who had started to breathe more evenly. Then the man spoke again with a dreamy tone. “The things he does for love.”

Brienne gasped at Tyrion's statement and opened her eyes wide. Lannister turned his eyes back to her and smiled with affection when he saw her startled expression and pink cheeks. Then he shook his head still smiling.

“Take care of him, will you?”, Tyrion requested and the Maid only nodded. She was still too taken aback. He patted her knee softly and turned around to leave the room. When he was about to open the door, he looked back at Brienne. “I will drop by before the end of the day if it's all right by you.”

“Of course, lord Tyrion.”

“Just Tyrion”, the man winked at her. “We'd better get used to it.”

Then he disappeared and left Brienne confused and excited at the same time. If Tyrion Lannister, whose intelligence was a legend, said his brother loved her, he had to be right, didn't he? The Maid hoped he was right, at least, because she loved Jaime so much. Once she had opened the door of her feelings for him it was impossible to stop the stream of emotions.
Brienne took Jaime's hand again and caressed his burning cheeks carefully. His bearded face was incredibly handsome even in those difficult moments. With trembling fingers, she combed his hair softly, then she applied the wet cloth to his forehead and nape to help lower his temperature. How long would it take the medicine to start having an effect on him? She prayed again. She begged the Father and her own late father to be just, not to let Jaime die before he could enjoy his second chance after all he had suffered. She asked the Crone for Her guidance, to lead Jaime through darkness and towards his healing. She pleaded the Smith to help him be strong during the hours his illness will make him feel pain. She invoked the Warrior's courage for Jaime to fight the fever and never give in to death. She implored the Mother to be merciful and to keep him safe. She promised the Maiden to love him until her last breath if She allowed him to live. And she prayed for the Stranger to walk past Jaime this time, to let her be the one who took him in her arms.

It must be near noon when Pod came back with some hot stew for her. He spoke a little with his lady about Ser Jaime's state and took the opportunity to stir the fire. Then the boy left the room again. Brienne had long finished her meal when Bronn dropped by to check on her and his ill friend. The sellsword suggested her to give the patient some hot wine to keep him warm, he mentioned something about a castle and a wife under his breath and also took his leave not to catch Jaime's disease. Even lady Sansa was kind enough to come visit the newly-pardoned Lannister. Brienne sprang to her feet instantly when the Stark opened the door, but the girl told her to sit again. She asked the Maid about Jaime's progress and offered her help and family resources to heal him. Brienne thanked her for everything, but Sansa just shook her head to make her understand her gratitude wasn't necessary. Then she took the opportunity to give Brienne Jaime's golden hand, which had been wrapped in some leathers, and she turned on her heels to return to her business.

The Maid left the artificial limb on the nightstand carefully and kept watching Jaime's rest for hours. She didn't know what time it was when the Lannister finally squeezed her hand and opened his eyes, but it must be already close to twilight.

“Jaime! How are you feeling?”, Brienne asked and brought her hand to his cheek to check his temperature. He wasn't burning anymore, though she could still feel the warmth of his skin against her palm.

“Sore”, Jaime answered with a weak voice. He shut his eyes again and tried to make himself more comfortable in bed with a groan and a sneeze.

“Let me help you”, the woman offered. She held him up with one arm and used the other to fluff and straighten his pillow. Then Jaime leaned back on it with some difficulty. “What do you need?”

“I don't know. My head back”, he had some problems to breath due to a stuffy nose.

“Did you ever have a head?”, Brienne teased him.

Her comment made Jaime give her a hint of a smile without opening his eyes, but he started coughing instantly. When his coughing fit ended, the man spoke again. “I think a bath may be a good idea.”

Brienne stood up and went to the door. Then she opened it and called for Podrick, who appeared in the blink of an eye, his expression concerned. The Maid calmed him down and assured him that Ser Jaime was alright and awake. When the squire sighed in relief, she told him to ask Samwell Tarly whether it was good for Jaime to take a bath in his state. As expected, Podrick hurried to obey his lady's orders.

Then Brienne closed the door again and returned to her seat on the bed. Jaime was still leaning against the big pillow, his face skinny and pale. He looked so weak and vulnerable... But when he
opened his green eyes to fix them on hers, the Maid couldn't keep her hands off him anymore. Fighting away her embarrassment, she leaned over Jaime, rested her head on his shoulder and hugged his body as gently as she could. She still didn't feel comfortable showing her feelings so openly in front of him, but it was glorious to have him in her arms again, alive and healing. Lannister used his left hand to caress the back of her neck and hair, which was a little longer than usual, Jaime noticed suddenly. They remained in that position for a long while without talking, just enjoying the moment together, chest to chest, Jaime running his fingers through her hair and Brienne rubbing her nose against his beard and the side of his neck, whose skin was starting to cool down at last. If she made an effort to forget the White Walkers, the Maid could almost say that she felt happy.

Eventually, Brienne pulled back a little to look at Jaime's face again. They locked eyes and stared into each other's depths for long. The knight stroked her cheek absently while he drowned in her oceanic irises, amazed at being so comfortable in silence for so long. He noticed Brienne had bags under her eyes and there were some traces of worried lines in her forehead, brow and the corners of her mouth. Jaime used his hand to force the wench to lie down again until he had her forehead pressed against his chapped lips. He left a trail of light kisses on it and then he moved to her left commisure and planted a soft peck on it too. Brienne's heart started racing and pulled back to a sitting position to be able to see his beautiful features again, her hand on his chest. She still couldn't believe Jaime had been forgiven, because with the whole illness matter she had barely had time to assimilate it.

“Thought I would never see you again”, she confessed in a very low tone.

Jaime placed his left hand over the one she kept on his chest and caressed it with his thumb before speaking, his voice hoarse. “You won't get rid of me so easily, wench.”

“I don't want to get rid of you.”

Her eyes were so honest despite her shyness that her words melted Jaime's heart. He brought her fingers to his mouth and kissed the back of her hand with all the tenderness he was capable of. Then he looked Brienne right in the eye and said, matching her sincerity, “I don't want you to get rid of me either.”

Their breathings quickened at the same time. Both sensed there were some words in the air right between them, those words they needed to say and hear so desperately. Jaime swallowed and took a deep breath with difficulty, then he opened his lips to speak again.

But then someone knocked on the door and startled them, tearing the intimacy into pieces. Brienne let go of Lannister's hand and sprang to her feet instantly to greet the newcomer. The moment had passed. It turned out to be Pod, who returned just to tell his lady that Samwell Tarly had authorised Jaime's bath. Podrick perfect-timing Payne. The knight closed his eyes for a second and sighed, then he sat up in bed carefully and stretched his left arm to reach for a mug of water that was on Brienne's nightstand while the squire and the wench arranged everything. Both approached the bed to help Jaime out of it. They grabbed one patient's arm each and helped him on his feet. Lannister coughed, but he didn't faint, though his head still ached badly. He leaned on his friends and took his first steps towards the door hesitantly. As Pod explained, it was more complicated to bring a heavy bathtub and water to the room than taking Jaime to the baths in Winterfell basement, even in his poor state. Brienne threw the man's fur cloak over his shoulders to keep him warm and the three stepped into the cold corridor.

Brienne and Podrick helped Jaime walk all along their little trip to the basement. Some people passed them on their way, some running, some not, but none of them were very happy. Winterfell inhabitants were under so much pressure and stress that it was difficult to hear a laugh inside its
walls. When they finally reached the baths, Jaime breathing heavily as he couldn't take big amounts of air, the man's eyes wandered all over the place. It was a dark huge room with a low ceiling, heated by a generous fire which was creaking in the fireplace. There were five rectangular tubs dug in the stony floor, but only three of them were filled with warm water. They chose the one that was right next to the fire and started to undress Jaime, who let them do without complaining.

When Podrick finally unlace the knight's breeches to let them fall to the floor, Brienne averted her eyes immediately. Though she loved Jaime's body and despite everything they had already done together, she still felt embarrassed by his nakedness. Besides, she didn't want her squire to think she was an indecent woman. She let Pod help nude Jaime into the water while she collected all his clothes, which had been discarded onto the ground. Then she handed them to the boy and asked him for some clean ones and towels for later before he left.

Brienne checked that Jaime was already in the tub before approaching it because she wanted to keep up appearances. Lannister was sitting in a corner with only his head out of the water, as the tanks were deeper than usual. His eyes were closed and he had an expression of pure bliss in his face that made Brienne smile fondly. She grabbed a brush and some soap from a stony shelf and crouched down to hand them to Jaime, who opened his eyes.

"You know I can't manage very well with just one hand", he said trying to sound helpless, but his cheeky smile betrayed him. "You should jump into this wonderful tub with me and scrub my body until it's beaming clean."

The Maid glared at him with embarrassment and didn't make a move to join him. She just knelt down to dip the brush in the water without averting her defiant eyes from his, then rubbed the soap against the bristles to make it easier for Jaime to clean his body and handed him the brush again with determination. He laughed amused, but a coughing fit just cut off his guffaw. Lannister finally complied and stretched his arm to take the brush, then started rubbing his skin with it. His movements were slow, as if he had been given a beating.

Brienne turned around and sat on the floor with her back to the tub, then hugged her knees against her chest. She was determined to stay, because Jaime was still too weak and she didn't want to leave him alone in the water, but in case someone came to the baths, she preferred not to be caught watching him while he was naked.

"Did I miss something interesting?", Jaime asked her. Brienne could hear the water moving behind her while he scrubbed his body.

"Tyrion, Bronn and lady Sansa came to visit you. They'll be glad to know you're better now."

"Yes, specially lady Sansa will be very happy."

Brienne tutted and made him shut up. "She forgave you. All of them did. You should be grateful."

"Don't misunderstand me: I'm grateful", Lannister must have stopped rubbing his skin for a while because the Maid didn't hear the splashing sound anymore. "It was Bran Stark himself who defended me the most. I don't know what the hell happened to that boy, but he's an angel. That doesn't make the Starks love me, though. That Arya Stark looked at me as if she could kill me at the first opportunity."

"But she won't", the Maid reassured him still without turning back her head. "She pardoned you in front of everyone."

"The Starks are no longer the charming idealistic kids I met in my first trip here", Jaime resumed his
cleaning. “They're older and stronger. And they have a huge army to back them.”

“Does that bother you?”

“Well, they were my enemies until this very morning”, Lannister shrugged. “I'm adjusting. I guess their strength is good for me now.”

They heard some steps on the stairs and they both shut up, but it was only Pod, who brought Jaime's clean clothes and the towels Brienne had asked him for. He didn't stay long, because he realised the knight was managing quite well on his own and his service wasn't needed. When the pair was left alone, Jaime spoke again.

“What do you think about the Dragon Queen?”

“I'm not sure we should talk about this here, Jaime”, she replied while taking off her leather jerkin. It was too hot in the baths with all that steam coming up from the tubs. Besides, Jaime's question made her uncomfortable.

“So you don't like her much”, he worked out. Since Brienne didn't make a sound, he went on. “I think your lady Sansa would agree with you. Did you see her face any time she looked at the Targaryen girl?”

“I-I wasn't paying much attention to them, actually. How can you talk so much being ill? Doesn't you head hurt?”

“I might be raving”, he leaned back in the bathtub with his eyes closed and tried to slow down his reeling mind.

Brienne turned her head to look at him and bit her lower lip with hesitation. Should she help Jaime? She didn't know what to do. “Come on, hurry up and I'll take you back to bed.”

He opened his eyes again with a sigh and the Maid looked away to let him finish. She kept hearing the soothing sound of the water and she allowed herself to relax a little, her chin on her knees. She had always liked how the waves hit the rocks below her window in Evenfall Hall: the constant sound helped her sleep at night. Would she ever see Tarth again? Would they survive the Great War? What would happen to disinherited Jaime if Daenerys ended up on the Iron Throne?

Suddenly, she realised the splashing had stopped. Brienne started to turn around to check on Jaime when an arm and a stump surrounded her torso from behind and dragged her down into the tub. The Maid didn't have time to react and sank in the water with a gasp, which made her swallow a fair amount of liquid. As soon as she could, she freed herself from Jaime's embrace and stack her head out of the water to breath. Brienne stood up coughing. With a murderous look, she stared at the knight's amused face. If he didn't die of his illness, she was going to kill him herself.

“How could you...? Look at me!”, she shook her soaked arms to get rid of some water from her sleeves. Big drops fell from her wet hair and slid down her face. Her shirt was so drenched that it clung to her small breasts, making her erect nipples stand out.

“That's exactly what I'm doing. And I like what I see”, he smiled at her with a charming grin.

“Jaime Lannister, if.”

But Brienne never finished her threat, because Jaime stepped closer and shut her mouth with a passionate kiss, his naked body pressed against hers. He threw his stump around her waist to prevent her from moving away and kept kissing Brienne hungrily. Soon both were completely into it, totally
oblivious to their surroundings. Jaime didn't want to give her his cold, but he just needed to kiss Brienne like there was no tomorrow. He had been holding back those last few days to avoid making her suffer even more in case the Starks had decided to kill him - he hadn't wanted to be selfish - but now that he was free and momentarily alive, he felt like kissing her senselessly. The problem was that Jaime was still ill and his body wasn't as strong as he would have liked.

Brienne noticed something strange and pulled back to look at him narrowing her blue eyes. “Are you okay?”

Lannister rubbed his face with his left hand and shook his head. “I feel a little dizzy.”

“Alright, let's get you out of here. I wouldn't want you to be the first Lannister who drowns in the bath.”

Brienne helped him out of the tub, her breathing and heart still racing. Every contact her hands made with his skin sent butterflies to her lower belly. She took a deep breath to calm herself down while she made Jaime sit down on the floor right in front of the fire. Then she went to fetch the towels Podrick had brought them and started drying her friend's glorious body. That didn't help extinguish her desire, of course, but she was determined to keep her cool head. Jaime needed some rest. After she finished helping him dress in his clean breeches, shirt and doublet, both sat there for a while to give Brienne's clothes time to dry a little, because she refused to take them off in Jaime's presence while in this public place, but she couldn't walk around the castle with wet garments in the middle of winter. Lannister laid down eventually and leaned his head on the Maid's thigh, his handsome face looking up at her. Brienne locked eyes with him. They didn't even blink, the connection between them was incredibly intense. She started running the fingers of her left hand through his hair distractedly and placed her right palm against his heart over his doublet. Jaime raised his only hand to cover hers and pressed it against his chest to feel her warmth. They didn't say anything, their eyes still fixed on each other's features, but for the second time in just one day, both though that happiness must look very much like this.

When Brienne's clothes were a little less damp, the pair got on their feet, collected their things from the floor and walked to the stairs, Jaime leaning on the Maid, who had her arm around his waist. He paused when they reached the stony staircase and gave Brienne a sweet long kiss on her cheek before she could start climbing it. She just smiled and lowered her eyes, then both headed towards her bedroom. Nobody had told them whether another room had been prepared for Jaime, so they imagined they would have to share Brienne's. Not that it was a problem for them, but it amused Jaime how the North had loosen up its standards on honourability. Since when a man and a woman were allowed to sleep under the same roof without being married?

They were just about to turn the last corner of the corridor when they bumped into Tyrion, who had gone visit Jaime and had found the room empty.

“Oh, there you are. I'm glad to see you're feeling better, brother.”

“Indeed”, Jaime replied. Brienne's arm was still around his body to support him.

Tyrion smiled at the two of them. “Well, I guess we'll have time to catch up tomorrow. Just... rest, you're in good hands”, the man said and winked at Brienne, who blinked awkwardly several times.

“Oh, by the way, lady Sansa won't be needing you today, my lady. She asked me to tell you you could take the rest of the evening and night off to attend to your... business.”

“T-Thank you”, Brienne muttered. She didn't know how Jaime's brother managed to make her feel uncomfortable all the time.
Then Tyrion waved his hand and walked past them with a smile on his lips. The pair turned their heads to see him disappear round the corner.

“He likes you”, Jaime told Brienne when Tyrion couldn't hear him. “And you'll come to like him as well. He's too intelligent for his own good, but he's a great man.”

“Have you forgiven him, then?”

“Yes”, the Lion nodded. “He's my little brother and the only family I have left.”

Brienne rubbed his back to provide him some comfort and to show him her support. Then they resumed their walking and got in the bedroom. A greenish flask and two bowls of potage were waiting for them on the nightstand -Pod's doing, no doubt-, and though the food wasn't hot anymore, the pair polished it off in no time. Then Jaime took his miraculous medicine while Brienne changed into dry clothes. He had to admit that the ‘Tarly boy knew what he was doing. He had managed to lower his fever in just one day and Jaime was feeling better by the hour. He would need to praise his talent.

When they felt like it, the pair got into bed together. There was no room for that kind of hesitation anymore. Jaime waited until Brienne had taken off her boots to pull her closer to him with his stump. He propped on his elbow to see her face from above. The Maid's eyes still seemed quite shy in bed, but he could understand it, as there were still some barriers he needed to knock down. Jaime thought in the truth he had been about to confess a few hours ago.

“I'm not good at this, wench, but I want to thank you for taking care of me”, Jaime said and raised his stump to caress her cheek, but when he realised she might find it disgusting, he stopped halfway.

Brienne hurried to grab his arm and pressed his scarred wrist against her face. “You don't have to thank me for anything, you know it.”

“But I want to”, he insisted. The light from the fireplace bathed Brienne's pale skin in crimson shades and danced in her extraordinary eyes like golden fishes in the water. Jaime leaned down to kiss her lips slowly. Then he pulled back and stared at her. “You're truly beautiful, my lady.”

The Maid shifted uncomfortably and averted her eyes from his. Lannister noticed that her walls were suddenly building up again. “Please, Jaime, why would you say that? I just don't-”

“Stop it.”

“No! You stop it. I am a lot of things, but beautiful isn't one of them. Why do you punish me?”

“It isn't my intention to make you feel bad, quite the opposite”, he explained and put his stump under her chin to force her to look back at him. “I swear to you I'm being honest.”

Then Jaime leaned down to kiss her lips again, but Brienne turned her face away one more time. “I-I think you should listen to the wise people and get some rest. You're still recovering.”

The Lion shook his head in frustration and a little hurt as well. How could she still think that he was calling her beautiful to make her suffer? Didn't she know him at all? What was there in her mind that made her react the way she did anytime he complimented her body? What startled Jaime was that she seemed more comfortable when he kissed or even touched her -and not necessary in the most honourable ways- than when he tried to talk about their relationship or their feelings. But Brienne was clearly a woman of action: she understood acts better than words.

With a resigned tut, Jaime laid down next to the Maid, who had turned her back on him. Lannister
surrounded her waist with his stump and pulled her closer to his body. “Come here, you silly wench.”

Brienne didn't need much to surrender, actually. She didn't turn around, but she allowed him to cuddle. Jaime hugged her tightly against his chest and let her relax until she fell asleep. Trying to make Brienne happy must be one of the most difficult goals he had intended to achieve in his life. There were so many doubts she still had to push away until her heart healed completely. She had been holding back for too long with nobody to trust. But Brienne had helped him get over his sorrows and he was determined to do the same for her.

With this thought in his mind, Jaime also let sleep win the battle and he drifted off eventually with his wench's body pressed against his, and he knew that this was the most amazing sensation in the world.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if there's a basement full of bathtubs at Winterfell. I just invented it for fic purposes. ^^

I'm always afraid when I write Tyrion. This guy is too intelligent for me.

Thanks for reading. :) Leave a comment, please!
Hi, dear readers. Chapter update! :)

Thank you so much for all your support, comments and kudos. You're incredibly kind!

When Brienne woke up in Jaime's arms, the first thing she did was turning around to check his temperature. There was no trace of fever: his skin was warm, but not hot anymore. The knight breathed evenly, though he made a strange noise any time he inhaled, like a wounded animal. Obviously his stuffy nose was still giving him some trouble.

Bit by bit she regained full consciousness and then she remembered last night with a pang of bitterness. Every time she started to think that happiness beside Jaime was possible, he brought up the beauty matter. Brienne knew her body perfectly and she knew what she looked like. It was impossible that he truly thought she was beautiful, then why did he keep calling her that? She didn't need his lies to love him. Why couldn't Jaime understand such a simple truth? Perhaps he needed to lie to himself, to make himself think she was beautiful to justify why he was around her all the time. Or perhaps he was just trying to prove to himself that he was moving on and needed to believe Brienne was beautiful to be able to kiss her. Had he chosen her as his consolation prize after leaving Cersei?

Lannister sniffled twice beside her, breathing with difficulty, and opened one eye with a yawn. Then he stretched his limbs to loosen up. When he looked at Brienne, he saw her troubled expression and it worried him.

“What is it?”, Jaime asked her, but Brienne only shook her head. She got out of bed without ceremony and headed to her washbasin to perform her morning ablutions.

Jaime sighed and leaned against the pillow. Stubborn woman, he thought. Slowly, he pushed away the fur covers and stood up as well, his head still a little dizzy. He paused for a few seconds to regain his balance before approaching Brienne, whose back was turned to him while she washed her face. Her endless legs almost disappeared under her loose shirt, but she was bent over the washbasin to prevent the water from splashing too much, so her butt was the most visible part of her at the moment. Jaime felt his cock hardening and stepped closer to his wench. He threw his arms around her torso gently from behind and pressed his hips against her arse. Brienne straightened her back with her heart pounding hard and the man hugged her more tightly, until there was no space left between them.

“What are you-?”

But he started rubbing his cock against her body slowly and she gasped, so the words died in her throat. His hand and stump caressed her belly over her shirt at first, but then Jaime held the clothing up and ran his fingers over her warm skin. Brienne let her head fall backwards, right on Jaime's shoulder, and he turned his face to suck the skin of her neck, which made her breath loudly. His hand started to go south while his right arm held her in place against him. The Maid grabbed his stump to have something to cling to while Jaime kept torturing her. Lannister stroked her navel and
let his fingers run down her lower belly until they reached the forbidden land. He searched for her
clit over her breeches and started to caress it carefully. Brienne moaned and her chest started to move
up and down quickly against his with anticipation.

But Winterfell was a truly crowded place these days and they both knew too many people there to be
able to make intimacy last too long. A knock on Brienne's door made them jump away from each
other with a curse, their breathings rushed. Jaime hurried to sit on the bed to hide the bulge in the
front of his breeches.

When Brienne allowed the visitor to enter the room, their faces were still flushed. It was Sam, who
came to check on Jaime's health. The young man apologised just in case it wasn't a good moment -
Jaime and Brienne glanced at each other and averted their eyes immediately-, but he told them there
was so much to do that he had taken advantage of the calmness of the early hour to visit Jaime, who
sneezed all of a sudden.

“I see you're recovering, Ser Jaime. Well, more or less”, Sam stated after checking his pulse and his
eyes. Brienne smiled at Jaime's efforts to conceal his cock. “Your pulse is a little bit rushed and your
pupils are more dilated than usual, but I don't think we’ll have to worry too much about it. Your
temperature is completely normal. I brought you another dose of your medicine: just drink it and
you'll feel better by the end of the day.”

“Right”, Jaime tried to sound serious, but he caught a glimpse of Brienne's face and couldn't help
smiling. “I thank you for your help and remedies. They're miraculous. Most of my strength is back,
actually.”

“I'm glad to hear that.”

“Why isn't maester Wolkan treating Ser Jaime?”, Brienne asked.

“Oh, it's just because I happened to be in the trial when he fainted. Maester Wolkan is a very nice
and open-minded man who's letting me help him and carry out some experiments.”

“That's very nice of him. I thought it was because he didn't want to be near the Kingslayer.”

“Nothing to do with that, I assure you. You might never get rid of that nickname, Ser, but you made
us change our minds yesterday with your story. We all have light and darkness within.”

“Thank you...”, Lannister sighed and then spoke again, using a more honest tone this time. “By the
way, I'm sorry for your father and brother. They fought bravely.”

Sam only nodded with a sudden sadness on his features. Truth was that he hadn't felt anything when
he had heard about his father's death, but he had mourned Dickon's one: he had always loved his
little brother. Jaime lowered his eyes and drank the green liquid Sam had brought him. When the boy
was about to go out, Brienne called him.

“Lord Tarly-”

“Oh, please, just Sam. I'm not a lord.”

“Sam”, she corrected herself, feeling a sudden wave of affection for this Tarly man. “There's
something we would like to ask you.”

“Of course”, Sam replied with a sparkle of curiosity in his eyes.

The Maid exchanged a glance with Jaime and the knight nodded his agreement. Then Brienne took
both their swords and approached the scholar.

“You were at the trial, so you already know our swords, Oathkeeper and Widow’s Wail, are twins. They were reforged after melting the same Valyrian steel blade, Ice”, the woman explained. “The thing is they’re doing strange things.”

“What do you mean?”

“We can't make them fight each other, for example”, Jaime took part in the conversation. “Whenever we try to cross them, they get repelled.”

“Could you show me, please?”, Sam requested.

Brienne stepped closer to Jaime and handed him Widow’s Wail, then she drew Oathkeeper from its sheath. The blades were reddish and both kind of glowed when the warriors wielded them. Sam frowned in awe: it was the first time he saw something like that. The Maid used her height to attack Jaime from above, but he was ready and blocked her blow. Then the swords shone as if they were incandescent, made a strong metallic noise and the fighters were pushed apart by an invisible force. Samwell Tarly opened his eyes wide and stretched his fingers for Brienne to hand him Oathkeeper. He touched the blade carefully, but the steel wasn't hot at all, which startled Sam even more.

“May I try?”, he asked. When Brienne gave him permission to use it, Sam turned to Jaime and waited for the knight to nod. It was strange, because the blades weren't shining anymore. Then the young man stroke without any skill, but strongly, and Lannister parried. Again there was an uncomfortable noise when the blades hit each other and both Jaime and Sam flew off backwards. The scholar landed on his back and Brienne helped him on his feet. Samwell studied the steel one more time, his intelligent eyes roaming over it without rest, and ran his fingers along it with curiosity. Then he handed the sword back to Brienne to test something and the very moment her fingers enclosed the pommel to wield it, both blades started to shine again. This surprised Brienne and Jaime as well and they stared at each other intently, as if the connection between them had just appeared in front of their noses for the first time.

“Alright”, Jaime agreed and nodded towards Brienne. Then both put their swords back in their scabbards and handed them to Sam, the Maid reluctantly, and the young man bowed his head before going out of the room with his funny way of walking. When they were alone again, Jaime shrugged and spoke. “We should go eat something, my lady.”

Brienne agreed and they got dressed while shooting constant glances at each other. Every little touch set them on fire. When the Maid helped him attach the golden hand to his stump, Jaime clenched his jaw to hold back his desire, because her fingers were doing things to his sanity. They went out of the room more aroused than ever and Jaime thanked the length of his doublet internally.

The pair went to the Great Hall and found Bronn sitting there with the Hound. Those two really got on well. Both looked at Jaime and Brienne with amused but satisfied faces and stood up to greet them. When they walked past the other tables, men and women turned their heads to look at them with distrust, but nobody dared to insult Jaime. Bronn hugged his friend and patted his back with genuine happiness, then the Hound shook his hand nodding.
“You're a lucky bastard”, Clegane said and Jaime smirked at him with a shrug.

Then he and Brienne sat down with them and had some breakfast. Podrick showed up eventually as well, and the five of them shared a quiet time together. They exchanged memories, japes and information equally. That's how Jaime and Brienne learned that Littlefinger had been executed by the Starks for treason, or that Beric Dondarrion and Tormund had been at Eastwatch when the Wall fell down, but they had survived the disaster. Clegane told them that Beric, the wildling and some other men had made it to Winterfell the same day they had arrived, their bodies wounded and their souls shattered.

Jaime looked at Brienne out of the corner of his eye when the Hound mentioned Tormund and saw the Maid stiffen uncomfortably. It sent a wave of jealousy through his body, but he tried not to give himself away.

“Have you seen my brother?”, he asked Bronn just to change the subject.

The sellsword nodded. “Yes, he was in a hurry to give some advice to his Dragon Queen. I find him less funny now that he's serving that blonde bitch.”

As if they had sensed Bronn's insult, a deafening growl came from outside. Some Northerners covered their heads and others ran to the corridor to look out of the windows. The dragons had chosen that very moment to have breakfast as well, so they were flying over Winterfell and its surroundings to look for some preys. They had been too quiet the last days, or at least Brienne and Jaime hadn't been aware of their presence. Perhaps they didn't like the cold. The five friends kept talking quietly while the rest of the people returned to the Great Hall until calm got restored.

“M'lady, m'lord”, Podrick addressed Brienne and Jaime, “now that I think of it, there will be a council this evening. You've been invited to attend.”

“You rose fast, you bloody cunt”, Bronn whistled looking at Jaime. “From the dungeons to the council in just one day. That name of yours keeps opening a lot of gates.”

“Not the gates of the castle you've been wishing for, I'm afraid”, the knight informed him with a mixture of bitterness and relief. “When this war ends I won't be a Lannister anymore, so start sticking to my brother's tail again: he's the only Lannister who will make your dream come true.”

Bronn frowned because he didn't understand a thing. “What do you mean? I thought it was the woman who took the man's name when they got married, not the other way around. Are you planning on taking the Tarth name just to evade your foockin' responsibility towards me?”

Neither Jaime nor Brienne were expecting something like that. They opened their eyes and mouths wide, which made the Hound burst into laughter. “That was fucking funny! But you're wrong. The blonde bitch, as you call her, is even bitchier: she's going to strip your golden friend of his name when she's crowned.”

“What?”, the sellsword exclaimed quite outraged. “Then we'll have to make sure that she never makes it onto the Throne.”

“Ser!”, Brienne scolded him, her cheeks still as pink as rubies. “Not here, please.”

“Oh, so you had already given that a thought. Your wench is smart”, Bronn poked Jaime in the ribs with his elbow.

“She isn't my wench, and her name is Brienne, man”, Lannister said with exhaustion.
“Alright, don't get mad at me”, Bronn raised his hands in the air. “Who's feeling like parrying? What do you say, Pod? Would you let me kick your ass to give free rein to my anger?”

The squire shrugged. It really wasn't the most appealing plan.

“I'll go with you”, Clegane offered, “but you won't stand a chance of coming even near me.”

“Well, a little swordfight may decongest my nose”, Jaime agreed, but Brienne frowned.

“You shouldn't make any physical efforts yet. Besides, it's too cold outside.”

“Don't spoil the fun, my lady”, Lannister said poking her with his index finger and winked. “I might let you win this time.”

The Maid shook her head, but finally, the five stood up and left the place together to head for the courtyard. It was incredibly cold outside, not even their thick furs could reduce the chill that freeze their bones. There were other fighters already training, mostly men, but there were some women as well. Arya Stark and lord Royce had sorted out the beginners into two groups and were teaching them how to wield a sword, each one sticking to their totally different fighting styles. Brienne saw the Hound smile proudly when he spotted Arya skilfully performing her water dance. And he wasn't the only one: a young man with short black hair didn't lose sight of her either. Clegane seemed to recognise the guy, so he let his companions go ahead to go speak to him. Besides, he hadn't still had time to talk to Arya, and that was something he had to deal with at some point.

Pod, Bronn, Jaime and Brienne looked for the master-at-arms and asked him for some blunt swords. They claimed an empty part of the vast courtyard for themselves and they paired off: Brienne would fight against Pod and Jaime would get his ass kicked by Bronn until the Hound joined them.

As the wench had said, Lannister didn't feel completely well yet, but inaction killed him, so he did his best while parrying with Bronn. The sellsword hadn't changed a bit: he still didn't have mercy. He kept blocking Jaime's attacks, more easily at first because the beginning was always the worst part, then the knight started to grow more confident and his movements got more skilful. Jaime realised that trying to concentrate on Bronn's blows wasn't easy, as Brienne's figure kept appearing in his field of vision from time to time. Whenever Jaime dared to shoot a glance at her, Bronn ended up hitting him with his sword.

When the Hound joined them at last to take Jaime's place opposite the sellsword, Lannister was a mess. His arms and legs had been severely bruised, so he left the field and leaned on the wooden fence to lick his wounds and watch Brienne without regret. Watching her fight had always turned him on. She was good; very good, indeed. She had improved her style since the last time she had wielded a sword against him. Of course, he didn't count Greywater Watch, as the wench hadn't been at her best there. Jaime would have loved to parry with her in full performance, with his right hand, but now they would never know who would have defeated whom. Now he could only wish he were a decent opponent and not to make a fool of himself when they trained. This thought made him a little sad, though he knew his wench didn't mind that at all.

He was deep in thought when he felt a presence by his side. Another man had just leaned on the fence and was watching Brienne and Pod with an enthralled look in his eyes. There was a big wound in his forehead and Jaime noticed that the man kept avoiding to stand on his right foot, as if he had broken or sprained it. He wore some thick uneven furs, so he wasn't a lord, but some kind of wildling. His hair and long beard were red, as if kissed by fire. Then Jaime put two and two together: this man must be famous Tormund, Brienne's wildling friend. Lannister didn't like much the looks the man was shooting at the Maid, but he didn't say anything: he could understand the fascination his wench awakened in everyone, after all.
“What an amazing woman”, the wildling said eventually with delight.

Jaime turned his head to look at him carefully, as if weighing him up. “She is, indeed”, he conceded.

“She's meant to be the mother of my children”, the man sighed.

Jaime raised his eyebrows. *Gods, this stranger is really serious.* “Does she know yet?”, he asked trying to keep a light tone.

“I have never told her, but I guess she feels the connection between us as well as I do.”

At that very moment, Brienne shot a glance their way, as if she had just felt someone was talking about her. Her expression changed from concentrated to surprised when she discovered the two men together, but soon she turned back to Podrick, who was on the ground rubbing his aching back to ease his pain.

“I think you should tell her”, Jaime smiled innocently, but he was secretly enjoying himself, his mischievous eyes on Brienne. “Women always want to know that kind of things. It makes them feel desirable.”

“I might tell her. But she's a woman of action. If I tried to kidnap her, she would understand the idea better.”

“Oh course”, Jaime couldn't believe what he was hearing, and he felt like laughing and bitchslapping the guy at the same time. “That would be even more flattering.”

“You lords don't know how to deal with women like her”, Tormund shook his head.

“There are no women like her”, Lannister corrected him with an involuntarily proud tone, his green eyes still fixed on the Maid. “Only her.”

For the first time, the wildling looked at Jaime, a surprised light in his eyes. Even Tormund had noticed the admiration behind his words. The redhead frowned and studied the knight as if he had just realised that this fine lord could be a potential adversary. Jaime stared back at him calmly before speaking again.

“But don't let my words discourage you. Go talk to your lady.”

The wildling shot him a suspicious glance, but eventually he decided the knight wasn't a true threat for him, so he limped around the fence and approached Brienne and her squire. Suddenly, the Hound saw Tormund out of the corner of his eye and raised a hand towards Bronn to make him stop. The redhead walked with difficulty, but he straightened up when he felt Brienne's gaze on him. The Maid rolled her eyes and sighed uncomfortably, then looked at Jaime out of the corner of her eye to check on his expression. Lannister didn't want to miss a thing. Tormund walked towards Brienne pretending his leg wasn't killing him and stood right between her and Pod, who lowered his sword with annoyance. Then Tormund kept a little conversation with Brienne, but Jaime couldn't hear their words. Though at first she replied politely, she didn't seem very eager to keep talking to him. And when the wench turned her back on the wildling to resume her fighting with Podrick, he sprang at her and threw his arms around her body without warning. Jaime stiffened and got ready to intervene, but his wench proved she was very capable of taking care of herself: Brienne elbowed the wildling in the ribs without ceremony and then turned around to face him. Without allowing Tormund any time to recover, she kicked his chest and the man landed heavily on his back groaning. Some guffaws came from the other end of the field: Bronn and the Hound were laughing hard at the situation. Then Clegane approached the bruised man and helped him on his feet while patting his
back. The most incredible thing was that he didn't seem angry at Brienne; on the contrary, his awe and admiration for her seemed to have grown and while the Hound took him away from the courtyard, Tormund couldn't take his eyes off Brienne.

When the two men disappeared into the castle, Jaime walked around the fence and joined Brienne and Podrick. Then Bronn collected both the Hound's and his swords and did the same. The four stood there for a few seconds until Bronn spoke with his usual sarcasm.

“That is what true love looks like. I think you should give that poor man an opportunity, m'lady.”

Brienne shot him an annoyed glance, but Jaime smiled at the sellsword's teasing words.

“Not interested”, the Maid stated, not even blushing this time.

“Alright, then. No big wildling babies for you. Then you'll still marry your Ser Jaime of Tarth and I will never have my castle.”

“They already told you-”, started to say Pod.

“I know what they told me. Come, boy. Let's look for lord Tyrion. I need a drink and some whores to cope with my sorrow.”

Then he made a cheeky face to Jaime and Brienne and threw an arm over Podrick's shoulders. The boy looked at his lady to ask for permission, as he always did, and she nodded to let him go. The lad let go of his sword, which fell to the ground and he left for the keep with the sellsword.

“What did you tell him?”, Brienne asked suddenly when she and Jaime were alone.

“Me? Nothing”, he replied innocently as he took Pod's blade from the floor.

“I know you, Jaime Lannister. Don't play dumb with me.”

“Well, I might have encouraged him to let you know how much he wanted you”, the knight blinked charmingly at her several times.

“You're impossible.”

“But you like me”, Jaime stated and the Maid's cheeks turned pink. Then he bowed at her with his most courteous smile and said, “May I have this dance, my lady?”

And so she did. Brienne showed him to a more isolated place she knew, the same corner she had first fought Arya a couple of months ago. At first, the Maid's attacks were soft and slow to allow Jaime to adjust, but after a while she showed him no mercy. Jaime lost count of all the times he ended up in the snow. But as they kept fencing, his blows grew more confident and well-aimed. Actually, he managed to disarm Brienne twice. He liked parrying with his wench very much. They moved very well around each other and every little touch made his body tremble.

Jaime didn't know how long they had been training when he started to feel exhausted. His nose still didn't let him breath well and his head ached in the temples, but Brienne didn't seem to have noticed his troubles. When she attacked him the next time, Jaime dodged the blow by squatting. Then he stood up instantly, let go of his sword and threw his arms around her torso by surprise. He hugged her tightly to keep her arms against her body.

“Jaime, what are you doing?”, she asked startled.
“Resting”, Lannister replied a little out of breath, his face against hers.

“I can't move.”

“Yes, that's the point, wench”, Jaime laughed in her ear, but he didn't let go of her. It was so warm there against her body that the man didn't really want to step back. When he felt her relax in his arms, he rested his chin on her shoulder and remained in that position for a while. Brienne looked around carefully to see if there was someone watching them, but there was nobody to be seen, so she allowed herself to press her cheek against his, both breathing heavily due to the effort. Then Jaime loosened his grip on her a bit, just to let her drop her sword and place her hands on his back to tighten their embrace.

It started snowing again. The first snowflakes were light as feathers and landed on their hairs and shoulders. Still holding each other with so much tenderness, the pair could hear steps and voices from afar as some people started to leave the courtyard to look for shelter inside the fortress, but the moment was so intimate for both Brienne and Jaime that none of them wanted to move. The knight pulled away just a little to be able to look at her face and she did the same. They locked eyes and kept staring at each other for a lifetime. Then Jaime glanced at Brienne's lips casually and leaned forward to capture them with his in a soft kiss. The contact lasted forever, time stopped suddenly, just the two of them in the middle of the white courtyard, their mouths locked, their eyes closed, their minds completely blank. Snow kept pouring down over them, more heavily now, as if the sky wanted to hide Jaime and Brienne from the rest of the world behind an immaculate curtain. Their lips began to move slowly to enjoy every little touch and the couple went on exploring each other's lips endlessly. Jaime raised his hand and cupped the Maid's cheek softly to stroke it with his thumb while he kissed her. She licked his lower lip, he sucked her upper one. They deepened the kiss eventually, never losing gentleness, never rushing, moving at slow speed on purpose. Their bodies reacted with delight every time their tongues brushed against each other, their mouths swallowing moans and sighs.

When they finally pulled apart to breath, they did it with their eyes closed, exhaling warm steam clouds against each other's red lips. Both sensed that something had just changed there: they had kissed in public, in a place where anyone could have seen them, without even bothering. Besides, that tenderness meant something deeper was happening between them. Neither Jaime nor Brienne had ever dared to confess the true nature of their feelings for each other, none of them had dared to put it into words, and though they had started to suspect some time ago what laid behind every gesture, every kiss, every touch, it was only now, after that tenderness, that Brienne and Jaime finally realised that not only they loved, but they were loved in return with matching passion.

Brienne shivered in Jaime's arms at the realisation and she let him hug her tightly. She felt just as nervous as the first time he had kissed her in that dark corridor to cut off her accusations towards him. She couldn't believe it, after all they had seen together, after all they had done to each other, how could she still feel so shy while Jaime held her against his chest? But this awareness threw a new light over their relationship, and Brienne started to understand a few things at last, and others just fell into place.

Then he spoke, his nearly frozen lips near her ear, his voice low and soft as a snowflake in her skin.

“We should go inside, my lady. You're trembling.”

It was true, but her shivering had nothing to do with the cold. Even so, she nodded against his shoulder and they broke the embrace, a sudden shyness taking over both of them. First, they took the blunt swords to the armery, then both went to the castle. Suddenly, Jaime took Brienne's hand in his and led the way, walking hand in hand with his wench in silence, which made her heart beat even
faster than before. When they finally reached the gates, he stopped and brought her fingers to his mouth to kiss them. Then Lannister let go of her hand in order not to embarrass her in front of everyone inside the fortress and they resumed their way to the Great Hall to have some food for lunch.

Jaime had never looked forward to nighttime so much. He needed to hold Brienne again, to have her in his arms, to show his wench how much he loved her both emotionally and physically. He was ready to cross the line with her tonight.

He just hoped she was as well.

Chapter End Notes

Yeees, Jaime, cross the line! ^^

Thanks for reading! Let me know what you think, please. Your opinions always help.
The Great Hall was crowded when Brienne and Jaime arrived. After a quick look, they realised none of their friends were there. Bronn and Pod must be still looking for Tyrion or already having a drink with him, and Clegane was surely spending some time with the battered wildling. Brienne looked at Jaime with hesitant eyes. Was it the wisest thing for him to venture inside the Great Hall without his friends? Actually, some of the lords and ladies shot them harsh glances when they discovered the pair at the doors. Perhaps it would be smarter to wait until the place emptied a little. But a better idea came suddenly to the Lion's mind.

“Come with me”, he said enigmatically and took a surprised Brienne by the arm.

“Where are we going?” the Maid asked when Jaime led her back to the courtyard. It was snowing heavily now, but the knight didn't stop. He just wrapped himself tightly in his cloak after sneezing and started to walk towards the main gates.

“I'm taking you out for lunch”, Jaime smiled at her while they strode across the courtyard.

Brienne frowned, but then she remembered Winter Town, the little village outside Winterfell. Given the situation, she imagined the alehouse would be equally crowded, but hopefully they could go a little more unnoticed.

Both started to run when they noticed their hairs were getting wet. Jaime didn't want to resist the temptation to hold Brienne's hand all along the way, so he reached for it when they ran past the last soldiers' tents and intertwined his fingers with hers. Any little contact, even though both were wearing gloves, felt great. Being able to hold her hand without fear made him incredibly happy and at peace.

Fortunately, the town wasn't too far away from the castle, so they reached it before their furs got soaked. It was dark and the snow fell down without mercy, which made it quite difficult for them to see anything. Eventually, Brienne and Jaime slowed down the pace and started to search for the only inn, the Smoking Log, still hand in hand. Finally, they spotted its smoking chimney and hurried towards the building. As Brienne had guessed, the place was full of people -wildlings and Stark men mostly, but some Dothraki were singing over their ales as well-, however there were still two empty tables. Rubbing her hands together, Brienne headed towards the furthest one and Jaime followed her, gesturing to the innkeeper for him to attend them. The man offered the pair two mugs of hot wine and some stew, then he called a girl and ordered her to clean their table.

Before Brienne could sit down, Jaime hurried to change the position of the bench. He pushed it against the wall of a darker corner and then asked the Maid to help him move the table as well. This way they would be a little more out of sight. It was pleasantly warm inside the inn, so they took off their furs and gloves and finally sat down together in the same bench. Suddenly, Jaime shook his head to get rid of the remaining snowflakes and he ended up splashing Brienne, who tutted annoyed.
She looked at the knight and then snorted at the sight of his dishevelled hair. The Maid raised a hand to comb his locks, which made Jaime close his eyes with pleasure. It amused him how natural the gesture had come to her. When she was satisfied with his looks, Brienne removed her hand from his hair and nodded appreciatively. Jaime smiled at her fondly and she smiled back, her expression a little less shy than usual.

Soon afterwards, the serving girl showed up carrying their dishes and the pair started eating, keeping a light chat while they polished off their meals. Jaime couldn't help teasing Brienne, he enjoyed it too much, but she always knew how to reply now that she was more confident around him.

“You have never told me what you think of the Targaryen queen”, Jaime pushed her once they had finished their stews and were enjoying a little more hot wine. He sat now astride the bench, his front to Brienne's side.

She shrugged with a lovely shade of pink in her cheeks. Due to the food and her constitution, she couldn't possibly be drunk after having just two mugs of wine, but she wasn't used to drinking alcohol, so she felt a little tipsy.

“I guess she suffered a lot and that made her a tough woman. She knows what she wants and fights for it. I admire and respect that”, the Maid summed up. Then she looked around to check if anybody was paying them any attention, but everyone was focused on their own businesses. “However, I can't find her as appealing as I should after what she said at your trial.”

Jaime nodded and took her hand in his to thank her loyalty. “But at least she decided against killing me. I'm alive and that's the only thing that matters to me right now. We know nothing about the future, we could all perish at the White Walkers' hands. And if we win, she might never reach that throne anyway.”

“So you think Cers... your sister could win?”

“You can say her name”, Lannister told her. It was painful, but he wanted Brienne to feel free to speak about whatever she needed in front of him. “She's very clever. Besides, she's gathering a big army. The Golden Company is made up of professional killers, Lannister army is very well trained and Euron Greyjoy has the greatest fleet in whole Westeros. Cersei will know how to convince them to fight for her cause, no doubt.”

The bitterness in his words made Brienne want to hug him, but she felt like it might not be the best moment: she didn't want to force her image into Jaime's mind while he was thinking of his sister.

“H-How are you doing?”, the Maid dared to ask. Both understood what she meant.

The man sighed and looked at the ceiling. “I'm fine. Bit by bit I'm coming to terms with everything. I loved Cersei so much”, he confessed. He wanted to share it with Brienne, he didn't want Cersei to come between them anymore. His wench tried to remove her hand from his, but Jaime didn't let her do it. He lowered his gaze and fixed his eyes on hers. “I don't regret anything I've done in my love life, Brienne. I loved Cersei, and she will always be an important part of me. She's my sister, my twin, and is also the mother of my children. She was everything I knew and wanted. I devoted my life to her... Now I know it was just a dream, a ghost.”

Brienne's blue eyes filled with tears when she sensed the pain in Jaime's features. She swallowed, but didn't say anything. What could she say? How could she ever come to be near as important to Jaime as Cersei was?

“And then you... appeared out of nowhere and made me want to be a better person. A tall child with
warrior dreams, a sweet maiden in the body of a soldier. I want to believe I always was a good man, but you brought out the idealistic teenager I had been once. I didn't know why then, but I would have given my life to save you from that bear so long ago. I would give my life for you, Brienne.”

She swallowed again, for a very different reason this time, and lowered her face to hide it from Jaime. Two pearls spilled from her eyes and ran down her cheeks. She didn't cry like the damsels he was used to, with studied grimaces and extravagant wails. Her tears were silent and stoic, honest, and they didn't make her look weak. The Lion used his stump to make her turn her head towards him, since his hand was still holding hers. Then he forced her to straddle the bench as well to have her face to face.

“Please, look at me. I want to see your astonishing eyes when I tell you my most important truth”, he pleaded and then she obliged. She fixed her blue irises on his green ones and waited for him to speak, her heart about to explode. “You are the most wonderful woman in the world. You are unique, Brienne.”

Jaime stopped to take a deep breath. He hadn't planned to tell her here, but somehow he knew this was the moment. He needed to let her know about his feelings right now. Then, without looking away from her, he squeezed her hand and brought it to his heart. “And I love you.”

The Maid closed her eyes and gave free rein to her tears. Jaime moved closer to her until his knees bumped against Brienne’s. He let go of her hand and put his arms around her body, though the position they were in was too uncomfortable. With quick and skilled movements, he made her place her long legs on top of his thighs until the fronts of their bodies were pressed together. Then the Lion hugged her tightly and she hugged him back, her face hid in the crook of his neck, the noises of the tavern long forgotten. Jaime thanked the Gods internally for this dark corner.

“Don't cry, my lady”, he begged while he caressed her trembling back.

“T-They're happy t-tears, Jaime”, Brienne whispered against his skin. “I-I just can't... I don't know...”

“Sshh, it's alright.”

“T-Thank you”, she managed to say, which made Jaime pull away a little with a surprised but amused smile on his face.

“This must be the dumbest answer to a declaration of love ever, wench”, the knight cupped her cheek to force Brienne to look at him.

“I-I'm so sorry. I just didn't expect it. And I d-don't understand how a man like you can-”, she paused, as if she didn't dare to say the next word, “... can I love someone like me.”

Jaime shook his head and crashed his mouth against hers without warning. If she didn't know how to accept his words, she would have to accept his actions. Brienne’s lips tasted salty because of her tears, but that didn’t make Jaime stop kissing them. She responded hungrily and vanished inside his kiss. Pulling her even closer with his stump, Jaime pushed against her lips with the tip of his tongue and Brienne parted them to allow him to search for her tongue. Their wet blades fought violently inside each other’s mouths, which provoked their owners to moan with delight. Because of their intimate position, Brienne’s pelvis was pressed right against Jaime’s crotch and soon she started to feel his cock harden. Lannister ran his stump down her back until he reached her ass. Then he pulled the Maid closer and both groaned when their genitals crashed. Brienne’s breathing quickened and she raised her hands to place them at both sides of Jaime’s face to hold him still while they kissed. Their full body contact was making her belly throb painfully.
Suddenly, Jaime pulled away and held her shoulders with both his hand and stump to keep her at bay. If they kept making out with such passion Jaime would have to take Brienne right there in front of everyone. She looked at him with lust and ran her fingers through his beard several times, while Jaime traced her lips and jawline with his thumb. They needed to cool down, but there was so much desire in the air that they found it quite difficult to keep their hands off each other. Brienne leaned forward and rested her forehead against his, still trying to steady her breathing. They remained in that position for a few minutes until their hearts started to beat less violently, then Jaime kissed the Maid's lips softly and hugged her with tenderness.

“I think there's a meeting we have to attend”, Brienne said in his ear.

Lannister was reluctant to let her go, but he knew she was right. In his current position, it wouldn't be advisable to show up late at the council. Jaime let his arms fall on her legs, which were still on top of his own, and ran the fingers of his left hand along her right thigh several times, from hip to knee and vice versa, tracing her muscles over her breeches. How could this woman be so amazing? Suddenly, he pinched Brienne's inner thigh to tease her a little and the Maid let out a surprised moan that threatened his sanity. With a mischievous smile, Jaime kissed her one last time before getting up. While the wench threw her cloak over her shoulders, Jaime searched for some coins inside his bag and put them on the table to pay for their meals and then he added some more for the inkeeper. He was already running out of money, but he wanted to invite Brienne today.

“That's too much, Jaime”, she said after counting the coins with a quick glance. She knew that he was no longer a wealthy man.

“I'm feeling generous today.”

“Jaime...”

“Shut up”, the Lion cut her off and started to lace his own cloak, but it was Brienne who did it for him in the end.

It was extremely cold when they got out. The chilly wind dishevelled their hairs and froze them to the bone. It was still snowing hard, but some of the snow had frozen and the ground was slippery. They had just taken a few careful steps, their hands clasped together, when Brienne lost her footing and fell gracelessly, dragging Jaime down with her. He landed on top of her body and she groaned in pain but, after a few seconds, Lannister started to laugh, which made Brienne smile as well. He got up and offered her his hand to help her on her feet, then threw an arm around her waist. Jaime knew he was as likely to slip as she, but he just wanted to have her body pressed against his.

Brienne’s fur cloak was soaked and her ass hurt. Walking slowly, they went back to Winterfell, snow falling on their shoulders. The courtyard was almost deserted when the pair arrived, only a few guards were patrolling the battlements and right behind the gates. A small figure was waiting for them at the keep's entrance: Tyrion Lannister.

“Where the hell were you two?”, he asked the pair when they reached him.

“Eating”, Jaime responded frowning. “Did something happen?”

“Nothing, but the meeting's about to start. You shouldn't be late, sweet brother.”

“Pod told us it would be celebrated in the evening”, Brienne excused them while they went through the doors of the castle.

“Right, but they had to bring it forward. The army of the dead is too close now and it seems we need
to discuss many things”, Tyrion informed. They walked fast and Brienne and Jaime almost left the small man behind as he barely could follow their pace. When they were about to get in the Great Hall, Tyrion grabbed his brother's arm without ceremony and stopped him dead. “Jaime, at some point... a detachment will be formed. These men will be sent to fight the White Walkers in the first place, to hold their army back. It will give us some time to gather more men and train them, but as you may have guessed, they're doomed. They won't come out alive.”

“What do you mean?”, Jaime asked starting to suspect where his brother was going.

“Some lords intended to send you in that squad, but I begged Daenerys and Jon not to do it. I made them see what a skilled strategist you were and I think I managed to convince them. So just... don't do or say anything stupid in there, alright? Keep a low profile, try to go unnoticed.”

“Tyrion, I'm a knight”, Jaime reminded his little brother. “I'll do what I must.”

“Of course, of course. But try to be a little less... knightly today. Don't volunteer, don't attract their attention. You're way more valuable here, you need to be planning the battles, not fighting them at the vanguard. You're no longer a warrior, Jaime, but a commander”, the youngest Lannister pointed out. Then his voice changed a little and showed his fondness. “I just got my big brother back. Don't let me lose him again.”

Jaime pursed his lips and glanced at Brienne, who was following their exchange with a concerned expression. Then he looked back at his little brother and put his hand on his shoulder.

“Alright, don't worry about me, I'll behave.”

Tyrion nodded a bit more reassured and led the way to the Great Hall, which was already crowded. A fair amount of lords and ladies bunched together inside the not so big room, chatting noisily. Tyrion hurried to approach the front table, where the Starks and Daenerys Targaryen would sit when they arrived, while Brienne and Jaime searched for a discreet corner to stay as much out of sight as possible. As always, comments and whispers followed the Lion. It was clear the North hadn't accepted him yet if they had suggested the idea of sending Jaime at the vanguard. Again, the small girl with the sour face shot him a disapproving glance, which made him frown.

“Why does that little brat hate me so much?”, Jaime whispered in Brienne's ear.

“She's honest and judgemental”, the Maid answered and then she recalled how much she had despised Jaime herself when they had met for the first time. She had just described what she was like in her youth. “Lady Mormont's just too young. If we get to live after the war, time will teach her that life isn't only black and white.”

Lannister knew Brienne was also talking about herself, and he smiled with affection. He would have liked to hold her hand, but they weren't in the right place to do it, so he just crossed his arms in front of his chest and waited right by his wench's side. Jaime let his gaze wander over the crowd while they waited and he discovered the Hound sitting right next to a man with an eye patch. Jaime was sure he knew the guy, but he found it difficult to recognise him. When he finally did it, it struck him how changed he was: Beric Dondarrion, no less. He was talking to the red-haired man: Tormund. The wildling spotted Jaime almost at the same time and they stared at each other briefly. Then Tormund looked to Jaime's left, to where Brienne was standing, and his expression changed: suddenly he looked like a little puppy. Jaime saw how the Maid rolled her eyes and sighed.

A few minutes later, Jon Snow, Arya Stark, Sansa Stark and Daenerys Targaryen entered the Great Hall followed by the man without fingers, a huge Dothraki, a muscular boy who seemed the leader of the Unsullied, a man with a bear as his sigil who could only be Ser Jorah Mormont, lord Varys,
the ebony girl and Sam Tarly. To Brienne and Jaime's surprise, he was carrying their swords. The pair wondered why the young man had decided to bring their blades to the meeting. They followed him with their eyes until he slipped into a corner and sat down there to go unnoticed. They shared a questioning frown and turned their attention back to the main table. Brienne told Jaime that the bearded man behind Jon was Ser Davos Seaworth, who had been Stannis's first man. Actually, Jaime knew now that he truly remembered his face from the Dragonpit, and some of the others as well.

It was Jon who spoke all the time. Jaime realised that Daenerys might have crowned herself queen, but it was Jon who still ruled the North. Sometimes, the young man shared meaningful glances with the Dragon Queen and the Lion started to suspect there was something more than friendship and an alliance between them.

Jon asked the smith about the armours they were making at the forge and he let Sansa inform the crowd about their running out of supplies. He also told the attendees everything they knew about the wights and White Walkers, then he gave Tormund the floor for him to explain how the Wall had fallen down. When people learned about the Ice dragon, they started to panic and protest. Jaime opened his eyes wide and he remembered Cersei's words about them bringing only two dragons at the Dragonpit meeting. His sister was too smart. Brienne was very pale, but she didn't raise her voice. Jaime knew that if she needed to fight, she would do it no matter what their enemies had within their army. Jon Snow explained that they still didn't know how a dead Ice dragon could be defeated, but he had his best people trying to work it out. Then he gave instructions to some lords about the way they had to proceed amongst their men regarding training sessions or recruitment. Finally, they chose some men to lead the way and fight at vanguard, and Jaime wasn't one of them. Tyrion looked at him with relieved eyes and turned his head back to the main table immediately.

Some lords asked questions and made some requests as well. Then Jon made a sign to Sam for him to get up and the scholar went to stand beside the table with the swords still in his hand, while the former King in the North dismissed everyone, except for a few close people. When the crowd started to leave, Jon called for Jaime and Brienne and asked them to stay as well. The pair approached the small group who still remained in the room. The Hound, Beric, Tormund, Varys and Tyrion were the ones Jaime knew. Then there were the Starks and the Dragon Queen with their counselors, the young man the Hound had been talking to at the courtyard, a few Northern lords, a man from the Vale and the girl with the resentful face, who didn't take her judgemental eyes from Jaime.

“Hello. I'm Samwell Tarly”, the scholar started to say a little embarrassed and everyone paid him full attention. “As you all might know, I help Jon and Bran study the ways we have to defeat the White Walkers. We already know that dragonglass kills wights and White Walkers. Regular fire burns the wights, but doesn't harm the White Walkers. We still don't know if dragonfire could kill them, we'll need to test it next time if possible”, here Sam looked at Daenerys with caution, who pretended to appear emotionless, and she nodded. “Then we have Valyrian steel, which can kill both White Walkers and wights. Lady Arya owns a fine dagger, I brought Heartsbane North from Horn Hill, Jon still has Longclaw and now we've been joined by lady Brienne's and Ser Jaime's blades as well, Oathkeeper and Widow's Wail. There's something I want to try, but I need your help.”

First, Sam asked Jon to wield Widow's Wail against him while he was holding Oathkeeper. Jon got up a little confused and did what he was requested, but nothing special happened, only the deafening sound when the blades met each other.

“What do you want to prove”, Tyrion asked with a curious light in his eyes.

“There's something strange happening with these swords. I'm studying them and I have a fair amount of guesses, but I need to discard some theories to start focusing on the right ones.”
“What do you make of what you saw?”, Jon inquired this time.

“It’s not about friendship”, Sam answered enigmatically. Brienne and Jaime exchanged a confused glance. Then Tarly addressed Jorah Mormont, who stood behind Daenerys. “Ser, would you mind sparring with Jon a little?”

The man gave him a classy nod and took Brienne’s sword from Sam's hand. The little girl who hated Jaime seemed to despise Jorah as well, judging by the look she shot at him. When the knight attacked Jon, it was the same. The swords didn't want to fight each other, but none of them shone.

“All right. It's not about being a great warrior either”, the scholar muttered. Everyone seemed very puzzled by his experiment. This time Sam turned to Daenerys Targaryen. “Y-Your Grace, could you please hold Oathkeeper?”

Mormont handed the sword to the Dragon Queen with tenderness. She got up with all her dignity and took it. It was a heavy weapon and the girl frowned when she tried to hold it up. Jorah Mormont stepped forward to help her, but she dismissed him with a slight gesture. Then she wielded the sword with difficulty against Jon, who blocked the strike with only a movement of his arm and a smile. The collision hurt everyone's ears, but nothing remarkable happened. This time, Sam didn't say what he was thinking aloud, but Jaime was able to read his lips while he muttered something about not being the reason either. So Tarly too had suspected the kind of relationship there was between him and Brienne, and it confirmed what he had just deduced about Jon and Daenerys.

“All right. Lady Brienne, grab your sword, please”, Samwell Tarly took Widow’s Wail from Jon hand's and leaned on it. Then he asked Jon to draw Longclaw from its scabbard just to check if Oathkeeper reacted opposite other Valyrian blades, but when Jon swung his sword and Brienne parried, nothing happened, not even the uncomfortable sound.

After the exchange, Brienne looked at Jaime with questioning eyes, while Tarly handed Widow's Wail to the red-haired wildling this time. The Maid turned around and found Tormund with Jaime's sword in his hand. Both her blood and the Lion's boiled. The wildling showed her his best smile and didn't wait for her to get ready, he just sprang forward and raised the sword to strike. Brienne was a well-trained warrior, so she reacted quickly and blocked Tormund's attack by taking a step backwards. Her foot slipped a little and she almost fell to the ground, but the wildling stretched his arm in time and caught her. Jaime clenched his jaw when he saw Brienne pressed against the redhead's chest, who wore a satisfied smile on his lips. With a gentle shove, the Maid pushed him away and blushed awkwardly.

“All right, nothing happened this time either”, Sansa stated the obvious. She might be trying to divert the audience's attention from Brienne.

“Exactly. That means the swords react only when held by the right people. I just need to show you one last thing”, Sam agreed and turned to Jaime, who was still keeping a low profile. “Ser Jaime, come here, please. Take your sword.”

Lannister approached Tormund with a slow pace and stopped right in front of him, his expression intense and confident. With a graceful movement, he stretched out his left hand to ask for Widow’s Wail without words. The wildling studied his face and everyone in the room could feel the tension growing between the two of them. Eventually, Tormund raised the sword, never looking away from Jaime's face and the Lion took it with determination and without averting his eyes from his opponent's ones until he turned his back on him to face Brienne. The moment he fixed his gaze on the Maid and wielded Widow's Wail, both their blades started glowing. Every member of the small group gasped. They were so surprised that none of them said anything right away. The Valyrian steel was shining crimson once again in the pair's hands. Daenerys exchanged an amazed look with Ser
Jorah, Sansa leaned forward in her seat to have a closer look and Arya and some of the lords stood up, their eyes wide open. The funnier face was Tormund's, however, because realisation seemed to have just stricken him. On his part, Jon Snow stepped closer to Brienne and reached out to touch the edge of the blade. When he noticed the metal was cold, he shook his head in disbelief. People started whispering. Nobody knew what this could possibly mean.

“Yes, it's incredible”, Samwell raised his voice over the crowd's noise. “It only happens when Lady Brienne and Ser Jaime wield their swords at the same time.”

“There's a legend-”, Tyrion began to say with a dreamy voice, but then the Hound cut him off.

“We all know that fucking story.”

The young leader of the Unsullied looked at Tyrion with confusion. “I don't know the story.”

Then Beric Dondarrion got up, his only eye fixed on Brienne's blade. “Azor Ahai's. But the legend is about just one sword and one man.”

“These blades were reforged from a single one, as Ser Jaime explained during his trial. Ned Stark's sword might have been the legendary Lightbringer and when they melted it, its magic could have gotten split in these two”, Sam ventured.

Brienne and Jaime shared a baffled look. Everyone was looking at them intently. Tyrion stood up and approached his brother to take a closer inspection at his sword. In the meantime, Ser Davos leaned forward and rested his maimed hand on the main table.

“If I rememeber the story correctly, Lightbringer caught fire, but these blades only glow. How would you explain that?”

Sam sighed and shook his head helplessly. “I'm still studying them. I think it's too soon to come to any conclusion.”

“Your sword fucking burns, Dondarrion. Explain them how to do it and let's finish this stupid nonsense”, Clegane blurted out and sat down again.

“It doesn't work that way”, Beric explained. “My sword burns because Thoros knew how to make normal steel react to some substances. It's just artificial fire, which is very useful, but it's not what Lightbringer offered in the legend.”

“I don't know whether I understand this or not”, a childish but fiery voice interrupted. It belonged to Lyanna Mormont, “but I think you're suggesting this man could be the reincarnation of Azor Ahai, the legendary hero who defeated the Others. I wonder why the old Gods would choose the Kingslayer for this task.”

“Ser Jaime is an honourable man, my lady”, Brienne defended the Lion and Tormund grimaced. “He came North to fight for the greater good. I accept the Gods choosing him with no problem at all. Actually, I think he's the best choice they could have ever made.”

“I wasn't suggesting that Jaime is Azor Ahai when I mentioned the legend, though, my ladies”, Tyrion Lannister corrected Brienne and Lyanna. “In my opinion, if the reincarnation of Azor Ahai is truly in this room today, not only my brother holds the title, lady Brienne, but you as well. Two bodies, one soul.”

Suddenly, Brienne remembered the song they had heard about their incident with the bear. She had been too focused on holding back tears then, but she couldn't help listening to the lyrics. The words
Tyrion had used were the same ones the bard had sung at the end of his poem. The Maid's breathing quickened and she raised her frightened blue eyes to search for Jaime's, who was equally taken aback.

Every single person fixed their eyes on the pair, as if they were seeing them for the first time in their lives. Anywhere she looked at, Brienne only saw eyes: hopeful, jealous, scared, surprised or unsure eyes, but eyes everywhere, and all of them on her. Her heart beat painfully, which made her temples throb. She couldn't hear anything anymore. Azor Ahai? What if they were right? But what if they were wrong? Brienne had heard the story a lot of times as well and she knew how it ended. No-one had talked about the tempering matter. What if Jaime was truly Azor Ahai and her role was really Nissa Nissa's one? Would Jaime have to drive his sword through her chest to make it burn, like the legendary hero had done to his wife? And what if Brienne was Azor Ahai instead? Would she have to kill Jaime for the greater good? She'd rather die!

With a gasp, Brienne let go of Oathkeeper. The sword fell on the floor with a metallic noise that broke the spell and it stopped glowing, as well as Jaime's. The Maid felt so overwhelmed that her head started to spin. Her violent panting wasn't helping her fill her lungs with air, so she began to have an attack of dizziness. Jaime noticed the sudden paleness of her skin and stepped forward to reach for her, but Brienne backed up, refusing to look at him. Shaking her head, she turned her back on everyone and headed to the door slowly. When she had almost gotten out of the room, she heard whispers behind her back, but it wasn't until she was out of the Great Hall that she started to run.

Confused, concerned and equally overwhelmed, Jaime saw his wench leave the place, lifeless Widow's Wail still in his hand. Suddenly, he made up his mind and handed the sword to Samwell Tarly, who seemed very sorry for both of them. Then Jaime shot the attendees a quick glance and ran after Brienne without waiting for anyone's permission.

Chapter End Notes

I had to do a little research. There's just one inn at Winter Town and its name is The Smoking Log. ^^

Well, please, tell me what you think. :) Thanks for reading!
Sword tempering

Chapter Notes

Number 20. First time in my life I've written a story this long.

Thank you so much for reading this far, guys. Your support and encouragement mean the world to me. :)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Brienne didn’t know where to go. Winterfell corridors and rooms were absolutely crowded with hard-working people, so it wasn’t easy to find a peaceful place whatsoever. As she needed to be alone to think, the Maid kept running until her steps led her towards her bedroom. She pushed the door open and then closed it behind her back. Panting violently, Brienne leaned against the thick wooden board to regain her composure. Since she was in shape, she knew her rushed breathing had nothing to do with her physical activity, but with the uneasiness in her heart. After a little while, she still found it difficult to get her lungs filled with air, so she decided it might be a good idea to walk a little around the room to calm herself down.

Brienne took off her fur cloak and discarded it onto the bed absent-mindedly. The logs were crakling in the fireplace, so it was too hot in the room despite the cold outside temperature. The Maid started pacing up and down with her arms around her own torso, as if she were trying to shield herself from troubles. She had never been a coward, no one could accuse her of that, but the way things were going had started to scare the hell out of her. How could life be so unfair? Now that she had just learned that Jaime Lannister, the man she loved above everything, loved her in return, then suddenly one of them might need to kill the other to fulfill a stupid legend. A stupid legend Brienne had always enjoyed listening as a kid, to be completely honest.

Could Tyrion and Sam be wrong? What if the blades were reacting right when Brienne and Jaime grabbed them only by chance? Alright, let's admit the swords had some kind of magic in them. Couldn't it just be that they sensed when their right owners wielded them? That wouldn't be so awful. Indeed, that would allow Brienne to fight beside Jaime, as she had always dreamed. She would be happy to die if she could save the Lion's life with her sacrifice. Or perhaps Tyrion and Sam were right and then both Brienne and Jaime were the chosen ones, so none of them would need to drive their sword through the other's chest. This way they could still fight against the White Walkers together.

When she finally managed to start breathing a bit more steadily, Brienne sat down on the bed and hid her face in her hands. This was the position Jaime found her in when he opened the door a few minutes later and got in the room. The Maid lifted her head to look at him, a pained expression on her face, and then she lowered her gaze again and stared at the floor blindly. Jaime took some hesitant steps towards her and, since Brienne didn’t make any move to reject him, he dared to kneel down right in front of her.

“Brienne...”, he said taking her right hand in his softly. She sighed and then looked down at his handsome face. “What are you afraid of exactly, my lady?”
The Maid of Tarth shook her head and averted her eyes before speaking. She couldn't bear the sight of Jaime's beautiful features, she still felt absurdly shy in his presence. “I-It's the first time s-someone loves me, Jaime”, she stuttered and swallowed hard. Then she searched for his eyes again. “I don't want to lose you.”

Lannister let go of her hand to cup her cheek with all the tenderness he was capable of. Then he caressed her skin with his thumb. “You're not going to lose me”, he promised, a fiery note in his voice. Then he settled between her knees, threw his stump around her and pressed his chest against hers in a comforting embrace. “I swear it.”

“You can't swear something like that”, Brienne hugged him tightly and started to feel Jaime's fingers running through her blonde hair soothingly.

“Difficult times are coming”, Jaime predicted still holding her. “I need to stick to the only hope this cruel world is letting me keep. You brought me back to life every time my soul was dying. You are my everything, my sweet Brienne”, then he pulled a little back to fix his pupils on hers. His fingers grabbed some of her locks as if he wanted to cling to her desperately. “I will fight for this. I will fight for us.”

With a smooth but passionate movement, Jaime captured Brienne's lips in an ardent kiss. When he pulled back again, his eyes were full of energy, full of life. The Maid panted against his mouth and whispered his name with desire, breathing every single sound of it. They locked eyes for a couple of seconds, their hearts already beating fast, and then they fell in each other's arms again. When their lips crashed, Brienne cupped Jaime's neck to keep his face fully pressed against hers. It felt so good to have the Lion's arms all over herself.

At some point, Jaime's knee started to ache, as the stony floor was too hard, so he got up and forced Brienne to do so. Once they both were on their feet, he threw his arm and stump around her waist and pulled her closer to go on kissing her lips hungrily. Jaime found kissing Brienne very easy, as they were more or less the same height. Their lips met without making any effort, it always felt incredibly natural and comfortable.

Soon, Lannister's cock started to show signs of arousal, so he pressed his body against Brienne's to make full contact with it. The Maid didn't back up; quite the contrary, she had totally surrendered to lust by then. Brienne rubbed her hips against the bulge in Jaime's breeches with slow and tantalising movements while she kept running her tongue along his lower lip. He groaned as he felt his whole body react with ardor to the wench's teasing rubs. She was just killing him. Jaime guessed they both knew what might happen next, but he still needed to check, he wanted to ask her before venturing into the dangerously sweet land of first times.

“Brienne...”, he pulled back to look into the blue depths of her amazing eyes.

“Do it”, she urged him with a swallow. He could tell she was willing to give in to him, any possible reluctance long forgotten, but there was still some fear in her voice, as if she felt that crossing that line would change her life for good.

Jaime used the back of his fingers to stroke her cheek gently and he smiled at her reassuringly. “Lock the door.”

Brienne took a deep breath and nodded, a nervous look in her eyes. With a promising kiss, Jaime's stump let go of her waist to allow her to do the task, then he grabbed the Maid's cloak and some other fur linens from the bed and spread them out on the ground right beside the pallet and in front of the fire. When Brienne turned around to face him again, Jaime had also taken off his doublet and was waiting for her by the bed wearing only his shirt and breeches. Brienne's breathing grew incredibly
uneven and she got a little paler than usual. She approached Jaime very slowly, gazing at him in awe. How could he be so gorgeous? She felt incredibly lucky to have him right there in front of her, willing to love her, to be the one who took her maidenhead.

When Brienne reached Jaime, he received her with his arms open and pulled her into a warm embrace one more time. Desire was consuming both of them, so their bodies were already radiating pulsating heat. With his arms still around her torso, the Lion tilted his head and rubbed Brienne's earlobe with his nose, then he started brushing his parted lips against her pale neck softly, as if he were just breathing in her scent. Brienne felt a delightful shiver ran through her body and moaned, which made Jaime want to take her right then. However, he held back his lust to go on planting feathery kisses all along her jawline. He needed to take his time to do this, to allow Brienne to grow more confident with the situation. When he reached her wobbly chin, he sucked it tenderly and Brienne opened her mouth to gasp, but Jaime captured her lips with his and swallowed her panting. They kissed with passion, their arms roaming all over each other's backs.

Pulling back to breathe eventually, his cock throbbing inside his breeches, Jaime cupped the back of the Maid's head and stared into her eyes intently. “Are you sure of this?”, he asked still a little out of breath.

Brienne didn't hesitate this time: she shot him a determined look that almost made Lannister lose all his temper and raised her arms to surround his neck with them. She hoped this gesture was enough for him to understand her intentions, because she seemed to have forgotten how to speak. It was, indeed. Jaime brought his hand to her cheek and pressed his palm against it.

“Alright, my dear Brienne”, he agreed. “I'll be the one if that's what you wish. But... on one condition.”

The Maid frowned at this sudden twist. “What is it?”, she inquired with a hoarse voice.

Then Lannister forced her to remove her right arm from his shoulder and took her hand in his before answering her question. Without looking away from her oceanic irises, he dropped his demand with a flirtatious grin but serious eyes. “You'll have to marry me.”

At first, Brienne thought she must have heard him wrong. But when he didn't move and kept staring at her with that honest and hopeful expression that made her pure soul fly, she knew she wasn't imagining things. Brienne opened her beautiful eyes impossibly wide, a mixture of longing and disbelief shining inside her pupils. “A-Are y-you... serious?”, she stuttered.

Jaime lowered his gaze to look at their holding hands. “Well, yes. I know I can't offer you anything anymore, Brienne. You deserve far better than me, a broken old man, I'm fully aware of it. But if you accepted me I would try to make you happy for the rest of my life”, he confessed and finally looked back at her face. “That's all I want.”

The wench was so quiet that Jaime didn't know what to do. She looked just like a pillar of salt. After a few seconds of worried staring, the Lion saw her blink at last. He squeezed her hand softly to bring her back to earth and Brienne was finally able to focus on him.

“Say something, please”, he begged in the weakest voice Brienne had ever heard him speak.

She shook her head slightly, her eyes still fixed on Jaime's ones. “Y-You want to marry me?”

“Yes.”

“B-But... why?”
“Why?”, Jaime repeated and stepped a little closer to her to make sure she could hear his voice though it was only a whisper. “I told you a long time ago: we don't get to choose who we love, remember? And I fell in love with you, Brienne. I was bound to love you, though I didn't realise it at first. I was a fool, a stupid cunt. I hurt you, I know, and I regret it so much, but you're the most amazing woman I've had the luck to meet and I want to spend the rest of my miserable life by your side if you just honour me with being my wife.”

Brienne gaped at the overwhelming honesty of his words. “But... I'm not... I mean... I l-love you with all my heart, Jaime. I've b-been loving you for longer than I can remember. B-But not even in my most optimistic fantasies I would have dreamed of... of this. I'm not... I'm not.”

“Just stop”, he commanded to make her shut up. She was so amazed that she obeyed. “What do you think you are not? What do you think I need? I love you for who you are, as you love me the same way, I guess. I lost my sword hand and can't have it regrown. Do you love me less for it?”

“No!”, Brienne answered immediately and brought her hands to his stump. She started working on the leather straps until she got them unfastened, then she discarded the golden limb onto the ground and grabbed Jaime's maimed arm with her fingers as if making a statement. “I-I wouldn't want you any other way. Y-You're so handsome and chivalrous... You're just perfect, Jaime. But look at me. I'm-”


Brienne shook her head, tears starting to form in her eyes. This time, she averted her gaze from his and spoke in a very low tone. “... ugly.”

“No, you are not”, Lannister refuted fiercely and held up her chin to force her to look back at him. “I truly think you're beautiful, my lady.”

When Brienne opened her mouth to complain, Jaime pressed his thumb against her lips to make her swallow her protests. “Listen to me! Just once, stop being so stubborn”, Jaime sighed to regain some calmness and then he went on lowering his voice until it became a soft whisper. “There's beauty in the muscles of your arms, because they held me when I was weak and about to drown in Harrenhal. There's beauty in your full lips, because they're ready for me to kiss them and they always speak true and honest words. There's beauty in your tits, because they guard the heart that makes me want to be a better person. There's beauty in you eyes. You have the most astonishing eyes I've seen in my whole life.”

Those eyes Jaime was talking about were full of tears by now and poor Brienne let them spill. There was so much pain in her features, but also happiness at the same time, that Jaime felt the urge to hold her in his arms, and so he did.

“Please, my lady, believe me. I don't care whether you're the most gorgeous woman in Westeros. I'm tired of smooth skin, long eyelashes and high cheekbones, I swear it. You're real and I admire and love you so much. And it turns out that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. That's me, by the way, and I see in your body the magnificent beauty that comes from within.”

Brienne wailed and hid her face in Jaime's shoulder. The man hugged her even tighter and rocked her a little. After a while, Jaime made her look at him. Her face was lined with tears, which were leaving wet traces on her cheeks on their way to her chin. Raising his hand from her waist, the Lion used his thumb to wipe them away.
“Come on, my lady. Stop crying or you will go down in history as the Weeping Warrior.”

In the middle of her sobbing, the Maid let out a weak guffaw. It was such a refreshing sound for Jaime's ears that he grinned in awe. At that very moment, he knew he had just finally managed to knock down his wench's defenses. A little startled by her own laughter, Brienne smiled back at him and chuckled again through her tears. The Lion loved how her eyes wrinkled when she laughed. He kept holding her with devotion until her nervous giggles faded, then he released her from their embrace to take her hand in his one more time and waited for her to lock eyes with him before asking the next question. With a tone that was half teasing, half serious, he finally made the proposal.

“So, Lady Brienne of House Tarth, will you marry me?”

The Maid stared at Jaime intently, so many emotions running through her veins. Then, she took a deep breath and nodded just once with a smile on her lips. Jaime couldn't wait any longer, so he pulled her closer and sealed their engagement with a hungry kiss that lasted several minutes. It was just as if they had never paused their foreplay to cry and talk: their bodies reacted amazingly to the contact. Soon their hands started to roam all over each other's backs, caressing them over the clothes.

Jaime pulled back suddenly and started unlacing Brienne's jerkin with clumsy movements of his left hand, and she ended up helping him to have it done faster. Now he could read the determination in her blue eyes, which sparkled just like real sapphires in the firelight. Once she had discarded her jerkin onto the floor, Jaime made her raise her arms to get rid of her blouse as well, which he found easier. Brienne gasped when her shoulders, belly and tits were exposed, but she didn't try to hide them this time. It was Jaime who stood in front of her, she felt completely safe in his presence at last. Lannister stepped a little closer and brought his hand to her neck. He ran his fingers down her cleavage, from collarbone to navel, so softly that Brienne's whole body shivered. That caused her nipples to harden and Jaime's cock welcomed the sight with a throb. Then he started caressing one of her breasts with his thumb without looking away from her eyes. When he finally cupped it, Brienne moaned and she felt a pulsating sensation in her lower belly. With her eyes closed, she focused on the marvelous sensation and let Jaime keep stroking her nipples alternatively. She grabbed his shoulders to have something stable to cling to, while Jaime pressed his hips against hers and both started to rub their bodies together, panting heavily.

With a confident light in her pupils, the wench grabbed the hem of his shirt and started rolling it up his torso. When her fingers made contact with his skin, they almost got burned with his heat. The shirt got stuck in Jaime's head, which made them both laugh and help them relax a little. Brienne placed her big hands on his toned chest and was astonished by the beautiful contrast between her pale fingers and his tanned skin. Jaime pulled her closer with his stump and kissed her again, first on the mouth and then he pressed his lips against the side of her neck several times. He kept going south until his tongue found one of Brienne's nipples. The noise she made when he sucked on it drove Jaime completely crazy with desire. With a skilled movement this time, the Lion untied his wench's breeches and squatted to push them down to the ground. When he finally had her towering over him fully naked, he started to get up slowly while he ran his eyes, left hand and stump along her bare long legs.

Brienne swallowed when his fingers reached her private parts and stopped there to rub them. Lust was already consuming her. Her whole body needed Jaime's skin on hers. He stroked her wet folds teasingly while he captured her lips with his for the umpteenth time. The wench reached for Lannister's crotch and he sighed against her mouth. He let her undo his laces and soon they were both naked as the day they were born.

Jaime's throbbing cock ached for Brienne's touch, so she hurried to close her fingers around it, just like he had taught her to do back in the inn some days ago. When she started stroking him back and
forth with clumsy movements, his heart rate increased and he reached for her clit. After a little foreplay, Jaime pushed his middle finger inside her tight hole and he realised she was completely ready for the next step. The wench supressed a groan of pleasure and squeezed his dick in surprise, which made him bit his lower lip. Jaime dared to push another finger inside her to help her dilate a little more. Brienne's legs trembled at the overwhelming sensation and she felt completely empty when Jaime suddenly removed his fingers from inside her.

The Lion grabbed her hand and led her to the furs he had spread on the ground. Without hurrying, he sat down with his back against the pallet and dragged Brienne down with him, making her straddle his thighs. He put his stump on her waist, cupped her cheek with his left hand and stared into her eyes to check her determination again. Her chest heaved rhythmically, but she didn't recoil. She just leaned forward and attacked his lips with a wild look in her eyes. Jaime recognised in them the same passion she always displayed when she wielded her sword, so he smiled proudly.

“Are you ready?”, he asked her, placing his hand on her bare hip.

“Yes”, Brienne whispered a little confused. The position they were in was completely new for her.

“Alright. I'll let you set the pace”, Jaime explained.

“I-I don't know what to do”, she stated.

But Jaime smiled reassuringly and helped her understand. He pulled her closer and used his hand and stump to make her lift her firm ass from his thighs. Then he aligned her body with his crotch and suggested her to place her hands on his shoulders for support. Brienne looked down at him, her heart about to explode, and saw how Jaime held his cock up for her to sit on it. She took a deep breath and started lowering her body, her eyes on his, until she felt the tip of his member against her pulsating entrance.

“Relax”, she heard Jaime say. He felt nervous as well, because this was like a first time for him too, but he knew one of them needed to keep their cool head to make things move forward.

Brienne threw her arms around his shoulders and let the tip of Jaime's cock slip inside her. The piercing sensation was a bit painful, but also sweetly pleasant. She kept lowering her body slowly until she was fully sitting on his thighs again. When her body finally swallowed Jaime's length completely, she winced and he moaned. His hand was back on her hip and he started stroking her skin to help her relax. It really didn't hurt as much as she had expected. She just experienced a little prick when he entered her, but the general sensation was of pure delight. Now she could feel him inside her body for the first time. His pulsations matched her heartbeats perfectly. Jaime waited patiently until Brienne adjusted and then he began to move under her, his eyes on hers. Soon she understood and imitated him, her whole body on fire, her soul flying of pure bliss. The wench lifted her hips slightly using Jaime's shoulders as support and felt his cock slid amazingly inside her. They both groaned when she lowered her body again and fully engulfed his member.

Brienne realised this has a resemblance to riding, so she tried to reproduce the movements she used to do on a horse. She pressed her knees against Jaime's hips and started to move up and down with a slow rhythm. Bit by bit, she stopped thinking and just let her body do the job. Jaime noted she was feeling more and more comfortable as her riding pace sped up and only then he allowed himself to get carried away by the heat of the moment. He surrounded her waist with his arms to pull her even closer and started moving with her to match her rhythm. Soon both were panting and sweating in each other's arms, Jaime's cock sliding in and out of Brienne without regret. They moved in pretty good sync, keeping in mind that this was the first time they made love to one another.

When Jaime started to feel his release was close, he knew he wouldn't last much longer. He didn't
know how far Brienne was from her climax, and he wanted her first time to be as much satisfying as possible, so he decided to trigger her orgasm by stimulating her while she was still riding him. He struggled to bring his hand near her private parts, as their bodies were incredibly close to each other. Then he reached for her clit and rubbed it in circles with his fingers. His wench’s breathing quickened and grew louder until it turned into a true enticing moaning, but she didn't stop moving. Something started to build inside her lower belly as Jaime kept stroking her bud and penetrating her without a break. She knew she was almost there, her tense body screaming for release.

“Jaime...”, she whispered in a very low voice and then she was done. Brienne threw her head back and closed her eyes while she let out a restrained groan that sent real fire to the Lion's dick.

Jaime's sanity jumped out the window and in just two more thrusts he reached his orgasm as well. He would have wanted to ejaculate out of Brienne, but the woman was too heavy to lift her up on time, and besides, Jaime couldn't think of anything at the moment. The sensation of finishing inside his wench was so overwhelming and wonderful that he got carried away by the situation. He moaned his satisfaction and rested his forehead against Brienne's collarbone as both their bodies kept throbbing in pleasure.

Bit by bit, their breathings and heart rates slowed down, but Jaime and his lady remained locked in a tight embrace for a few more minutes. He caressed her back as she ran her fingers through his locks. He had to struggle to find his voice after the wonderful experience they had just lived together.

“Are you alright?”, Lannister asked her. Brienne just nodded against his hair and tightened the embrace. It felt too good to have Jaime in her arms. Besides, she was kind of afraid of letting him go, as if clinging to his body were her only way of staying alive right now.

When the Lion finally felt his cock going soft again, he made Brienne lift her hips to slip out of her. She got up first and stretched her hand to help Jaime on his feet. When their gazes met, he could tell the no-longer-Maid of Tarth looked slightly anxious, so he pulled her into a tender kiss to let her know that he loved her more than anything. After a few seconds, she shivered against his chest, and Jaime realised how cold he was all of a sudden. He pulled away and smiled at the wench while stroking her cheek, then he picked some of the furs from the floor and threw them back over the bed. Brienne lay down and shot an involuntary last glance at Jaime's cock. With a frown, she realised there were no traces of blood in it. Wasn't she supposed to bleed on her first time? What would Jaime think of her? Lannister followed her worried gaze and found out her concerns at first sight.

“I-I swear t-to you-”, the wench started to say, but he cut her off.

“I know. Don't worry. I don't care about it.”

Then he lay down next to Brienne and pulled her into a hug. Jaime knew that the absence of blood didn't mean anything. Most septas and septons kept defending that maidens had to bleed when they were deflowered, but that was bullshit. Using that stupid fact as a proof of untouched maidenhead had never convinced Jaime. Brienne, for instance, had spent most of her time riding horses, which meant she could have bled at any time during her life. And years had taught him to trust his judgement rather than septons' believings. Anyway, he really didn't care about whether Brienne was a maid or not before their love making. It hadn't been his first time, actually, and Brienne hadn't made a think of it.

Jaime kissed Brienne's forehead. “Well, was it what you expected?”

“No”, she shook her head against his shoulder. “It was much better.”

The comment made the Lion laugh wholeheartedly and he ended up infecting Brienne. She giggled
as well and let all her remaining tensions slip away while they shared these blissful moments in each other's arms. She had just made love to Jaime Lannister, the man she loved, and he had even asked her to marry him. She didn't know how long happiness would last, but she was determined to make the most of it while she still had the chance.

“Glad to hear it”, he said and kissed her cheek this time.

Suddenly, Jaime felt really tired, so he made himself a little more comfortable in bed and pulled her closer. Brienne threw an arm over his stomach and cuddled against him for warmth. There was something still bothering her in the back of her head, of course, -swords, legend, wights, war, future, marriage-, but she didn't want to focus on it right now. She felt so relaxed that she could fall asleep right now. They didn't know what time it was, but judging by the time they had spent at the alehouse, at the meeting and together, it must already be late evening, so they didn't even bother to go search for some dinner and let sleep claim them instead.

With a last yawn, Brienne kissed Jaime's shoulder and muttered: “I love you, my Lion of Lannister.”

He smiled against her short blonde hair and kissed her back, his eyes already closed. “I love you too, my Beauty of Tarth”, he replied and relaxed at last.

When night finally came, it found the couple asleep, their limbs entangled and their faces as calm as the surface of a quiet lake.

Chapter End Notes

There.

;)}
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Last chapter. I can't believe it... Let's finish this, my friends, and enjoy it! ^^

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A weak ray of light entered through the window and played with Brienne's eyelids, which fluttered open with a yawn. She felt a warm body pressed against hers and turned her head to the side to look at Jaime, who was already staring at her. When their eyes met -Brienne's ones still a little sleepy-, the knight smiled softly and leaned in to plant a sweet peck on her forehead.

"Good morning", he greeted her with his voice hoarse after sleep.

Brienne stretched out her limbs and suddenly realised they were naked. All the memories from the past evening struck her at the same time, making her blush furiously. Jaime laughed at her endearing shyness and pulled her into a hug under the fur covers. Hiding her face in his chest, Brienne sighed and then kissed his skin tentatively. She didn't know whether she was thanking him for his love or teasing him to start another round: truth was she felt completely safe in his arms.

With a kiss on the top of her head, Jaime pulled away to look at her blue eyes and whatever he saw in them made his heart expand. He cupped his wench's cheek with his left hand and moved his lips closer to hers until they were inhaling each other's breaths. Then Jaime captured her bottom lip with his teeth and pulled her into a passionate kiss. One thing led to the next and soon their hands were roaming all over backs, legs, stomachs. Their lovemaking was a little more confident this morning. It was Jaime who set the pace from above this time, controlling the rhythm and making Brienne reach her release with a bunch of satisfied moans that were music to his ears.

They kept seducing each other while getting dressed for the day. When Jaime helped Brienne slip into her breeches, he ran his fingers all along her endless left leg from behind, and she kissed the side of his neck every time she tied one of the laces of his doublet. They were already dressed when someone knocked on the door and Brienne turned to open it, but Jaime grabbed her arm and pulled her into a last lustful kiss before letting her go to the door. She unlocked it, a beautiful smile playing on her swollen lips, to find Pod on the threshold.

"Good morning, my lady", the lad said with a little bow. "I hope you slept well..."

"She slept very well indeed", Jaime answered approaching them from behind Brienne, who blushed awkwardly and scowled at him.

It seemed Podrick got the real meaning behind his words, because he looked at his feet a little embarrassed and went on speaking without daring to raise his eyes. "M-Maester Tarly sent f-for you, my lady, my lord, if you're so k-kind as to follow me."

"Of course, Pod", Brienne placed a hand on his shoulder to ease his dicomfort. "Lead the way."

The squire took them to Sam's quarters. Brienne's worries returned to her mind all of a sudden while they walked along the cold long corridors of Winterfell. She could feel Jaime's arm brushing against hers all the way. At some point, his fingers even closed around her hand to provide some comfort.
When they arrived at Sam's door, Podrick knocked on it and stepped aside to clear the way for Brienne and Jaime. The scholar gave them access from the inside, so the woman pushed it open while Jaime whispered something to the squire and sent him about his business.

Sam was sitting behind a big wooden table whose surface was covered in parchments and books. There was a little blonde boy on the floor right next to Sam's feet. He was playing with some feathers and raised his vivacious eyes only to check who the newcomers were, then he resumed his game. Standing next to Sam, two well-known swords in her hands, was a girl with intelligent eyes and long front teeth. She gave Brienne and Jaime a shy smile and they bowed their greeting towards her. Finally, they spotted a fourth person perched on a chair in a corner, his short legs hanging in mid air: Tyrion Lannister had a big and heavy book on his lap and was trying to read it.

“Ah, Ser Jaime, lady Brienne”, Sam greeted them and stood up, “I see you're feeling better, my lady. Your face is a little happier this morning.”

Brienne blushed again and cursed herself internally for it. It seemed everyone was incredibly able to read in a face when a girl lost her maidenhead, or perhaps she was just biased to believe it.

“Y-Yes, thank you”, she replied making a huge effort not to glance at Jaime's amused expression.

“I've summoned you because lord Tyrion, Gilly and I have spent the whole night looking for answers in books, but we're still quite lost. We came to the conclusion that you might help us throw some light over the mystery of your swords”, Sam gestured towards two vacant chairs for them to sit, and so they did.

Tyrion closed his book and left it on his chair after jumping to the floor. He started pacing the room with his hands clasped behind his back. He had bags under his eyes due to the lack of sleep.

“Alright, brother”, he said stopping and looking at Jaime, “according to Pod, you gave lady Brienne your blade because you wanted her to protect Ned Stark's daughters with his own sword. Is that correct?”

“It is”, Jaime answered.

“I'm going further with this question, but take no offence. It was you who should have wielded it, but you had just lost your sword hand when you arrived at King's Landing, so is there any chance that you might have already considered lady Brienne your right hand back then?”

Jaime narrowed his eyes, as if it were the first time he was giving the matter a thought. He fixed his gaze on Brienne and his heart melted once again at the sight of her innocent blue irises.

“It's possible... But she's much more than my right hand”, the knight stated without looking away from Brienne.

Tyrion shot Sam a quick glance and couldn't help smiling. He never thought he would live to see his brother move on from his love to Cersei, but here he was, looking at Brienne of Tarth with adoring eyes. The youngest Lannister sibling resumed his pacing trying to hide his smile -there were more important things at hand- and he addressed the woman this time.

“Who is Oathkeeper: you or my brother?”

Brienne shrugged. “I-I guess both. The two of us vowed to return the Stark girls to their family, so the sword was kind of a symbol of our shared oath.”

Tyrion nodded and stroked his beard, deep in thought. The little boy left his feathers on the floor and
started to crawl towards Tyrion, who mussed up his hair absent-mindedly. They heard him mutter something like “He chose her” under his breath before looking at the girl called Gilly.

“Please, Gilly, could you return the swords to our friends?”

Brienne and Jaime got up at the same time and stretched their right and left arms respectively to take Oathkeeper and Widow's Wail. Tyrion was astonished by the perfect sync they moved in.

They wielded their swords and, as always, the red Valyrian steel started to glow, but this time the brightness was blinding. It was as if both weapons had just been forged a few seconds ago, they were red-hot. Jaime and Brienne held the blades up, their breathings rushed. They felt the hilts start to vibrate and instantly knew something was going to happen. Tyrion swallowed, Sam stopped blinking, Gilly squatted down to move the kid out of the way.

And everyone gasped when the swords finally caught fire.

Standing there in full height with the flaming blades casting lights and shadows over their faces, Brienne and Jaime looked just like two knights come from some song or legend. Their four companions stared at them in awe, unable to speak. Swallowing, both the Lion and the former Maid of Tarth looked at each other with surprised eyes. Jaime swung Widow's Wail hesitantly and its flames seemed to roar with the movement. Sam laughed and placed a hand on Tyrion's shoulder.

They were so enthralled by the phenomenon that they didn't realise the little kid had started to cry against Gilly's chest. Suddenly, Jaime and Brienne heard his sobs and put their swords down at the same time again. The flames disappeared when the pointy ends of the blades touched the ground. The Lion turned his head again to look at his lady and smiled at her. She didn't know whether she was relieved or scared, but it seemed clear that neither Jaime nor she would need to kill the other to set their swords aflame anymore.

Slowly, Sam regained his temper and walked towards both warriors to touch the steel of their weapons, and one more time, he checked that the metal remained cold. After nodding towards Tyrion, a new hopeful light in their eyes, the scholar turned to Jaime and Brienne with a smile. He invited them to take a sit again.

“D-Did anything change since you last wielded your swords yesterday?”, he asked eagerly.

Jaime glanced at his wench discreetly and saw her blush out of the corner of his eye. Brienne dropped her gaze to the floor as if her boots were the most interesting thing in the room. She had always been a very bad liar. Their awkwardness was enough for Tyrion to guess what was really going on there, and most importantly, what had happened last night in Brienne's bedroom. The man chuckled in realisation and patted Jaime's knee, while Sam looked at him with his brow furrowed. The next giggle came from Gilly's mouth almost immediately, which left Tarly even more confused.

“I-I don't... What-?”, Tarly asked shaking his head. Then suddenly, his eyes and mouth opened wide. He looked at the couple with a mixture of amusement and wonder.

“So this means you no longer hold the title of Maid of Tarth, lady Brienne”, Tyrion teased her, which made her blush ever more. Her face seemed forged in Valyrian steel. “Was it any good?”

“Tyrion”, Jaime warned him with a little smile on his lips, “of course it was good. And stop making my future wife uncomfortable.”

The little man placed his hands on his hips and laughed wholeheartedly. Then he stepped forward and hugged Jaime while Sam and Gilly gave their congratulations with happy voices. Tyrion let go
of his big brother and moved towards Brienne to hug her as well, and he whispered something in her ear, something she would never forget in her whole life: “Thank you for saving him”. She nodded at Tyrion and smiled softly without blushing this time.

“This could explain it”, Sam said suddenly. He walked around the table and started to search among the books and parchments that covered the wooden surface. When he found the volume he was looking for, Tarly approached them again and began to turn the pages until he reached the one where Azor Ahai’s legend was written. “It's said that Azor Ahai drove his blade through his wife's chest to temper it and then she let out a pleasure moan while he pierced her body. Could this be a metaphor for...?” he stopped talking and turned towards the girl. “Ah, please, Gilly, cover little Sam's ears. Could this be a metaphor for sex? I mean, the blade is... is the...”

“The cock”, Tyrion helped him.

“Y-Yes, and the whole tempering thing could be just the lovemaking. Azor Ahai's sword and soul were connected in the legend. So when lady Brienne and Ser Jaime joined their bodies and bonded their souls, it was just as if they had tempered the swords like Azor Ahai's did: in the chest of his most beloved person, his wife...”, Sam's eyes were impossibly brighter. He chuckled happily. “They're the chosen ones, lord Tyrion! Ice, Ned Stark's blade, could be Lightbringer reborn, and when your lord father had it reforged into two new swords, Oathkeeper and Widow's Wail, they needed to be wielded by two knights then, two knights who shared one soul.”

Tyrion, Sam and Gilly looked at Jaime and Brienne, who were amazed by Sam's explanation. With a slow movement, the girl put the kid on the floor again. She narrowed her eyes as if she were trying to remember something important.

“I don't know the legend by heart, because we don't tell these stories north of the wall. I just read it yesterday when you told me about it, but I think that hero, Azor Ahai, tried to temper his sword twice before deciding to drive it through his wife's body. How can you explain that, Sam?”

“Oh, Gilly, it's just a metaphor. Don't be so literal.”

“Water and lion, you're right, my lady”, Tyrion told her appreciatively and turned to look at Jaime and Brienne. “Azor Ahai tried to temper his first blade in water and it broke. Water... Do you recall any important waters in your relationship? Did any river or sea help you forge your bond?”

The pair locked eyes with their mouths open. They were both thinking of the same waters, the bath where everything started. Tyrion knew instantly that they were discovering something very important. “What? What is it?”, he asked gripping Jaime's knee.

“Harrenhal”, the knight replied, his voice very low. “Brienne and I shared a tub at Harrenhal. I intended to mock her, you know me, but everything turned upside down and I ended up spilling my secrets into her ear. I told her what I had never told anyone. I started trusting her that day.”

Tyrion looked at Brienne, who nodded with her eyes full of tears. “And then you went back to save her from that bear... Everything started in those waters for you two”, the little man agreed.

With a satisfied look on her face, Gilly crossed her arms in front of her chest and shot Sam a proud glance. The scholar rolled his eyes at her and focused on Brienne and Jaime again. The pair remained apparently calm, the connection between them more obvious than ever.

“Well, Gilly was right about the waters, but we still have the lion. Azor Ahai drove his next attempt of sword into a lion's heart to temper it the second time”, Tarly told them. “Have you ever killed a lion, Ser, my lady?”
Both Jaime and Brienne shook their heads a little puzzled. This question seemed to be more complicated to answer than the first one. It was Tyrion who replied this time, his mind working at full speed, his gaze lost somewhere behind Sam's ear.

“Lannister.”

Jaime tensed when he heard their House name. “What do you mean? Father? I remind you it was you who killed him.”

Tyrion nodded absentmindedly. “I didn't mean Father, but Cersei.”

Brienne swallowed hard and frowned at Jaime, whose jaw was clenched. “She's still alive. I didn’t kill her before riding North.”

With a thoughtful expression, Tarly studied Tyrion's face. “I think your brother is going further with the metaphor. You... I mean... It's said that you l-laid with her.”

“I did”, Lannister confirmed tilting his head and looking alternatively at Tyrion and Sam with suspicious eyes. “But obviously Brienne didn’t. Cersei can’t be your lion.”

Rubbing his temples with slow moves, Tyrion opened his mouth to keep on explaining his theory. “She’s a Lannister, so she's a lion. And when you left her to be with lady Brienne, her heart broke into pieces.”

“We broke her heart?”, Jaime asked in disbelief.

“Yes. Cersei never thought you would abandon her. But, if I have heard correctly, she ordered Euron Greyjoy to destroy Tarth, right?”, Tyrion fixed his gaze on Brienne then, and when the wench confirmed his words with a pained nod, he turned towards his big brother again. “She did it even before you confronted her and came North. She already knew you loved lady Brienne, Jaime.”

With a frustrated sigh, Jaime rubbed his eyes with his left hand. “It was Cersei who failed to fulfil her promise. I just did what I felt it was right and honourable. How am I the one who broke her heart?”

“I'm not judging you, brother. You did the correct thing”, Tyrion comforted him by placing a hand on his shoulder. Then he brought his other hand to Brienne's thigh, because her distress was visible. “Cersei was always manipulating you, it was always her will you had to make. I'm just glad you finally broke free from her, but it's a fact that your leaving after lady Brienne's harsh words at the Dragonpit turned her whole world upside down. You two pierced the lion's heart and it strengthened your relationship: it was the last step in your way towards one another.”

Jaime nodded and let his sword rest against his inner thigh to stretch his left hand towards Brienne. When she closed her fingers around his, the Lion squeezed them in a reassuring gesture.

“So you were right, lord Tyrion”, Samwell said with admiration.

“Could this mean Ser Jaime and lady Brienne are the key to defeat the White Walkers?”, Gilly took part in the conversation. Her question made both aforesaid hold their breaths.

“Well, legends and prophecies are just that”, Tyrion shrugged. “That's a heavy weight to place on their shoulders alone, don’t you think so, dear Gilly?”

The girl nodded her agreement a little embarrassed. It was difficult not to let oneself get carried away by the amazing news. When Brienne was about to ask Sam if they could keep their swords now that the mystery was solved, someone knocked on the door and pushed it open. Podrick Payne was back
in Tarly's quarters, his face very excited, though it was clear he was trying to hide his happiness behind a mask of composure. Brienne caught him bowing slightly at Jaime, who nodded back and smiled. Their exchange made her frown, but then Pod informed them that the first squad was about to leave Winterfell to face the White Walkers and they all were required at the gates to bid them farewell.

Brienne and Jaime got up, took their scabbards from Sam's hands and fastened them around their hips. Apparently, he wouldn't be needing the swords anymore. Though there was still a heavy burden in her heart, Brienne let Gilly chat amicably with her down the stairs and erase part of her worries for a while. They hurried to reach the courtyard, but Brienne was too focused on her companion's opinions about Westeros to realise Pod wasn't really leading them to the North gate, but to the Godswood, where a small representation of the population of Winterfell was waiting for them.

Gilly stopped talking all of a sudden, her mouth wide open, but she understood very soon what was happening there. She looked up at a puzzled Brienne with bright eyes and stepped aside to let her be the centre of the celebration. The heir of Tarth looked around without knowing what was going on, her gaze searching eagerly for Jaime, who had been walking right in front of her just a moment ago. She had started to panic when she felt two warm hands on her forearm and looked down to find Pod's smiling and excited face staring up at her. With a slight movement of his chin, the lad gestured towards the huge weirwood, where lady Sansa was standing, her auburn hair cascading down her back with style and majesty, both Arya and Bran flanking her all dressed in furs.

When Brienne finally spotted Jaime, she understood everything and blushed. He was standing next to Jon Snow, who didn't seem very happy -truth be told, he never looked really glad, Brienne thought absurdly in her confusion-. The Lion gave Pod a sign with his eyebrows in the distance and the squire started to walk her through the Godswood towards Jaime, who was waiting for her with the most beautiful expression she had ever seen in his eyes. Now she knew they had been plotting everything behind her back, but she couldn't be mad at them. Brienne swallowed, her arm entangled in Pod's one. She couldn't take her eyes off Jaime, so she didn't see Tormund's resigned face, Daenerys shooting glances at Jon from time to time or Bronn, Clegane and Tyrion's satisfied grins. Sparing a thought for her late father, Brienne finally reached Jaime, who brought his left fingers to her cheek to caress it briefly before taking her hand in his. Pod let go of her other arm with a nod and stepped aside discreetly. The ceremony would be officiated by Jon Snow as lord of the castle before the Old Gods. Facing each other, words were said and vows were made. Brienne and Jaime knew that not everyone in Winterfell was fond of them -the Kingslayer and his whore-, but when Jon allowed them to kiss at the end, all the attendees cheered them and clapped fiercely. They clearly needed some fun and good news in the middle of the hell they were living.

Jaime didn't lose time and cupped his wife's nape to pull her into a tender kiss. Now their compromise was truly sealed, the oath finally spoken by their keepers. Oblivious to the momentary rejoicing around them and looking into each other's eyes, emeralds drowning in sapphire pools, Jaime and Brienne were under the impression that they were invincible, that they would live forever. With a final kiss, the Lion promised his wife he would always fight by her side in war and in peace. And come what may.
Well, there it is. What a beautiful adventure writing this story has been! I hope it worked for you, with its mistakes and crazy theories. ^^

I want to thank you all for sticking with me until the very end. It's been a pleasure reading your feedback. You're amazing! <3 I will miss you all and these two wonderful characters. Brienne and Jaime are something very special. Fingers crossed for them to live happily ever after. Thanks again, guys.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!