The Burnt World (Modern Apocalypse AU)

by TheWolvenStorm

Summary

It's been over two decades since the Mad King burnt the world.

Now Daenerys has finally returned home to right the wrongs of her father. But once again a mad ruler threatens to burn the world anew.

Up North, Jon Snow is racing against time to defeat a swarm of undead that threatens to kill all that remains.

Smut is chapter 19 and 27 and 34
"They will likely blame you, your grace.” Tyrion predicts as he sets down a glass in front of her. “Claim it to be terrorist action by the Mad King’s daughter.”
“Unless this is meant to be a show of force.” Varys interjects. “The few skirmishes we have had with Lannister forces have been victories. She will want to demonstrate that she is capable of winning and that the punishment for sedition will be swift and violent.”

“Are we ready?” she asks the spymaster.

“Yes, your grace, one of my birds is in play as we speak.”

The glass of wine in front of her should look alluring. A sweet tang to ease her impatience, and slow the rage that's been clawing up from inside her since she heard the news early this morning. But the wine was a gift from Olenna, a product of the Vineyard at Highgarden.

There is no more Highgarden, There is no more Vineyard. There is no more Olenna Tyrell.

They were lost in a green, mushrooming cloud of fire and force.

The radio crackles to life with the chime that indicates a broadcast from the Capital. The first four notes of the ‘Rains of Castermere.’

‘And Who Are You…?’ the melody sings to anyone wise enough to know the lyrics behind the bells.

“I am Daenerys Stormborn.” the proud queen said. An unspoken answer to the unspoken question.

“Minister Qyburn from the Red Keep” an announcer says in a clear sharp voice. A flash of static.

“Good Evening.” At 0800 hours this morning, a Wildfire Warhead was detonated at HighGarden with the Authority of Cersei Lannister, First of her name, The Lioness, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, Long may she Reign.”

The Broadcast pauses for a second. A moment for the brainwashed masses to repeat the blessing to their false queen. Daenerys closes her eyes for a moment and inhales sharply through her nose, and drums her fingers on the Painted Table. It seems Cersei has taken a few new titles for herself.

“For the past months, the denizens of Highgarden, led by Olenna Tyrell, have been supplying the Radical Insurgent Daenerys Targaryen with arms, supplies, and men in her campaign of terror across Westeros. This Treason was answered with the full force of the Crown’s justice. I will take questions now…”

The first questions are all from state plants. Puppets to complete the illusion of transparency asking basic questions about the specifics of Olenna’s treason. Centering the focus at the crime instead of the punishment. They fail to ask real questions like: ‘How many are dead?’, ‘Will this affect the food supply in Westeros’, ‘How much more Wildfire does she have?’, “How much does she intend to use?'.

“This is him…” Varys announces.

“Minister Qyburn…” Its a young man’s voice. “This is the second time the Queen has used Wildfire on Westerosi Citizens. First destroying Baelor’s Sept, and now Highgarden. Will the Queen continue to burn Westeros like the Mad King?”

Daenerys hisses through her teeth and pinches the bridge of her nose. Why did he allude to her father?

“Second time…” Qyburn stutters for half a moment. “The incident at Baelor’s Sept was the result of the stores from the Mad King. The official report of the incident says the Wildfire was planted
underneath the city before our good Queen’s late husband ascended the Throne.” his voice picks up speed and volume as he truly begins to rant. “For all we know Daenerys Targaryen is responsible for the incident at the Sept. The only person to be aware of these stores was the traitorous imp Tyrion Lannister.”

She is staring daggers into Tyrion and he isn’t meeting her eyes. Whatever the little bird is going to do, he better do it soon. Missandei is holding her breathe at her side. Jorah stands behind her ever watching. There is a gentle knock at the door as Qyburn continues to rage at this reporter. Varys answers and is handed a slip of paper, which he silently reads before folding his hands behind his back.

“...Our Queen Cersei Lannister was born here in Westeros, she was raised in Westeros and she mothered her children in Westeros. Daenerys Targaryen is a foreign whore who climbed to power on her back, leaving a wake of devastation behind her. She assaults our country with Raiders and Mercenaries from Essos. She spreads dissent and disunity. Her actions have already allowed the Northern Secession from Westeros to go unanswered. Now. Sansa Stark may be murderous whore, whose family is responsible for the devastation of the War of Five Kings but, at least her and her bastard brother are Westerosi“

Lies and Deflection and Misinformation. This smear campaign has gone on long enough. Her hands press down into the table as she rises to her feet.

“What exactly was your little bird supposed to do?” Her violet eyes shoot back and forth between Tyrion and and Varys. Missandei stands and turns the radio off, clearing away the wine glass in front of Daenerys. Good. She wouldn’t want to waste Olenna’s gift in her fury. “Are you sure he was yours after all?”

“Your Grace...”

“Because from my perspective, your little bird...” she spits out the Westerosi idiom. “...Handed him opportunities attack me.” She snaps upright, her hands flexing with anger, her volume increasing. It takes a minute to calm down, a deep breath tamping down the dragon’s breath behind her lips. Forcing her hands to still and fall folded below her waist. “What exactly was supposed to happen?”

They look at each other for a moment and if it would be comical if she wasn’t so angry. It is a series of looks and glances that a decade of partnership offers. Losing the silent argument, Tyrion starts to answer her question.

“The boy did his job. But Qyburn must have been prepared for him...”

The gasp that leaves her body is almost painful. That poor boy will be dead or stuck in a black cell in a few moments.

“That was it?” she asks, hoarse and small compared to the rage a moment ago. Another life lost in her name. “That was all? We could have had him say anything and that was it...”

“We were hoping to catch Qyburn in a lie and discredit him that way.”

“Discredit him... your plan was to discredit him...” The heel of her hand has presses against her forehead. So much loss for such a meager goal. She paces back and forth across the empty length of the Painted Table. “Thousands of people are dead and you plan to DISCREDIT Him?”

Olenna would have laughed in the dwarfs face. “The people of Westeros are sheep.” she had told Daenerys during their last conversation. “Are you a sheep?” the old woman paused, looking her in
“No. You’re a Dragon. Be a Dragon.”

Dragons do not waste time ‘discrediting’ their enemies.

“What news?” She knows its bad, if it was good they would have told her in her rage. He unfolds the message he received.

“A SOS from Theon Greyjoy. Euron surprised them on their way to Dorne. Admiral Yara was captured, most of the Sand Snakes are dead, and what remains of our fleet is on their way back to Dragonstone with no power.”

He says it in a clear calm voice. As if he is giving instruction on how to prepare his dinner instead of crushing news about the death of yet even more allies. All her allies. All except those who sailed with her from Essos and the bay of Dragons.

“So all my allies are gone.”

“Theon will be returning, but they are out of power which means they are at the mercy of the tides until they can recharge their cells.”

Theon… Daenerys doesn’t know him well enough to say whether or not she actually likes him. When he has spoken with her it has been with a slight stutter and rarely meets her eyes, and never without Yara at his side. He is not fit to command the remains of her Navy.

“She was surrounded!” Daenerys grits her teeth as she crosses the length of the table to return to King’s Landing. “Enemies to the East, Enemies to the West” Dragonstone and HighGarden. “Enemies to the South” Dorne “And Enemies to the North…” she gestures up towards the far end of the table.

It's a true piece of art. A topographically accurate scale of Map of Westeros carved out of stone. A sculpture made by her ancestors hundreds of years ago in this brutalist fortress. Built to withstand hurricanes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. She was born here… on Dragonstone. Somewhere in this construction of concrete and steel.

It should have felt like coming home. But instead it feels like a prison. Like Westeros is suffocating her. It might just be the thick woolen jackets she has to wear now. They constrict more than her dresses, or leathers did, and her practiced graceful movements sometimes feel stiff under the bulk of material.

She has never been more formidable, but she has never been so limited. She pauses at the head of the table sliding her fingers across the thin raised line of stone representing the great wall marking the Northern Border of Westeros. Varys shifts uncomfortably in the silence.

“How did this happen?”

It’s a rhetorical question, and no-one dares try to answer it. It happened because she listened to them. Because she didn’t fly over King’s Landing on Drogon. Because she didn’t siege the city right away. Because they’ve spent a year here on Dragonstone, broadcasting out her accomplishment, trying to recruit more Westerosi to rebel against Cersei, skirmishing for the increasingly limited resources, and reversing the image of Targaryen Tyranny.

As if she ever could.

Her family history is long and …complicated and it begins and ends with doom.
The fall of Valyria and the catastrophic climate change that followed, brought her family across the sea hundreds of years ago. The most advanced civilization in the world, reduced to rubble and ash, and with it every accomplishment humanity ever achieved. All their tech, all their knowledge, all their people...gone. Except for the pieces her ancestors hoarded for themselves, here on this small volcanic rock.

Like the jets they used conquer Westeros from the air; their dragons. Like the RAVEN, a handful of satellites from Old Valyria that are still in orbit over the planet, enabling communications over long distances. Like Wildfire… which could either power cities or burn them.

The first Daenerys had tried to power cities when she united Westeros… her father had burned the world when it rose against him.

Such was the way of her family. She had once been told that fate flips a coin whenever a Targaryen is born. One side greatness and the other madness. For hundreds of years they had ruled this country. Governed it. Lead it. Periods of peace and advancement followed by civil war and destruction. A wheel of hope and despair that has rolled over Westeros. A wheel pushed by Westerosi elite for ever diminishing resources as the seasons became more volatile, as the last pieces of old world tech broke down, as the RAVEN began to fail and the satellites fell, as civilization became feudal and desperate.

Her father’s bombs had ended hundreds of thousands of lives and left vast swaths of wasteland across a divided country. The quarter century of political chaos, war, disease, radiation, and starvation killed off millions more. The Mad King has been dead for since before she was born. There can be no justice for the crimes he committed against this world, no trial, no sentence, no punishment.

But Cersei Lannister has just destroyed thousands with the same bombs. Tens of thousands more to come as the radiation seeps into the crops of within the fallout radius surrounding Highgarden.

She should just burn it down.

“We need more Allies...Westerosi allies.” Tyrion suggests.

“We should storm King’s Landing.” Daenerys spits back. “She just destroyed one of my allies. If I do not meet her with the full force of my army. What reason does someone have to follow me if I do not avenger her?”

“If you win, you’ll be seen as an occupying force and the rest of the South will turn against you. Ellaria’s hold on Dorne was… shaky at best. With her and Tyene captured, likely killed, they would either join the remaining territories to oust you or just…”

“Try and out last the Winter… because” Tyrion prompts, eyes darting down to the small wolf figurine.

Her mouth hangs open in disbelief. He’s been drilling her on all these stupid words for weeks. Trying to see how they can incorporate it into recruitment. As if she doesn’t know. “Winter is coming” Viserys would always mock. “Drunk words spoken by Drunk Barbarians. All that matters, sweet sister, is Fire and Blood.”

He was mad.

“We have reached out to every faction and family that has not declared for Cersei. Either with messengers or through the Raven. They’ve either refused or neglected to reply.” Missandei chirps.

“Neglected to reply is polite way of saying ‘Free Men Do Not Kneel’ and disconnecting as rudely as
“Have we heard anything recently from my darling wife, Varys? At her side Missandei makes a face and Daenerys rolls her eyes. Tyrion says it as a joke, but... its not quite as funny as he’d like it to be.

“Nothing Direct. There was a rather grisly incident several months ago at the Twins...” Varys pauses “A massacre. Poisoned Wine by the look of it. The only survivor was Walder Frey’s latest wife who claims that someone held a knife to her throat and said ‘Winter came for the Freys.’ Interestingly Walder Frey’s body was not found, nor was either of his sons.”

“That doesn’t sound like the Jon Snow, I know” Tyrion answered.

“Ten years is a long time” Varys counters. “Commander Jon Snow may not be the man you knew.

“Commander...? Last time I saw him, we were pissing off the edge of the wall”

At her side Missandei makes a face and Daenerys rolls her eyes. Not all soldiers are as well-mannered as her Unsullied. Drogo and and his Bloodriders weren’t. They lived roughly, played roughly...loved roughly.

“There’s been little word out of the North. In addition to what Melisandre told us, all I have to go on are rumors from traders at White Harbor. I don’t have eyes in Winterfell, but the little I do know is not encouraging. Petyr Baelish was executed shortly after they retook the North from Bolton control. Robin Arryn has disappeared. They are militarizing, quickly, quietly, heavily. Recruiting Wildlings from Beyond the Wall. The Wolves of the North are preparing for war and winter is coming.”

Melisandre. The witch had come ashore shortly after they arrived. Seeking safe passage back to Volantis. She had nothing helpful to add, only confirmed what they already knew. That the North had seceded from Westeros and that Martial Law was in effect, with Jon Snow as Commander in Chief.

The only other thing she told them was a half whispered prophecy. “The Old Gods of the North are Awake.”

“They won’t come here,” Jorah spoke for the first time this meeting. “Northerners don’t fare well down south. The last three Commanders of the Northern Front died when they went south.”

“So we go to them. Dragonstone is no longer safe. Especially if there are wildfire is in play.” Tyrion poured himself another glass of wine.

“Surely she wouldn’t detonate a warhead this close to King’s Landing. It would poison the fishing in Blackwater Bay. She’s already destroyed thousands of acres of crops in the Reach, surely she’s smart enough to know she can’t cut off another food supply.” Daenerys prompted. “People will riot.”

“Unfortunately Daenerys...the people of King’s Landing tend to be more interested in the drama of the crown rather than the actions of it.”

She rubs the line of her palm furiously with her opposite thumb. The rough texture of calloused skin where she grips Drogon’s handlebars helps her think. “Be a Dragon.”

A Dragon would rage and burn the Red Keep down in a wrath of fire and blood.

That is not the kind of Dragon she wants to be.

So she gives her order to reach out their last potential ally and if this doesn’t work, she may need to
rethink her campaign. Revolution is hard, conquest is easy. And she wants to break the wheel. She
understands what Tyrion is doing. This approach. Trying to take Westeros as peaceful as possible.
Try and avoid bloodshed. Win people over to her side with the promise of bright future.

Its avoiding the war. Trying to navigate around the inevitable. They had tried that Mereen and it had
all ended with fire and blood anyway. This war will end the same.

It's tempting. To just get on with it so she can finally… do what she truly wants to do. Rebuild and
Revolutionize Westeros so that when her family name dies with her, the good may cancel out the
bad.

She needs to think. She wants to fly.

When they arrived almost a year ago, Dragonstone had been abandoned. The thin strip of land that
connected it to the mainland of Westeros had not been maintained for years and fearing the
hurricanes that frequent the area, people fled. And the stone fortress abandoned by Stannis Baratheon
and the Coming Dawn was open for her to claim. As well as a few sparse antique shreds of her
family's history. Books mostly. Things too valuable to be destroyed.

But the greatest thing about this fortress was how her family had built it for their dragons. There was
a landing strip and hangar waiting for her and Drogon. All the tools and supplies she and her
Bloodriders would ever need to modify their mounts.

Drogon’s original frame had been a wedding gift from the Khal. A tricycle with a ferocious roar in
its engine. What made him fly was the Valyrian Jet Engine, Illyo Mopatis had given her.
Rusted, ancient scrap from the still smouldering ruins of Valyria. She had spent months cleaning it,
repairing them it, restoring it, especially when she was pregnant.

And then Death payed for life. Birthing her dragon in Drogo’s pyre. Roaring to life in her hands.
The mysteries of fire and blood revealed and Life and Fire fueling its flight.

Her hands drift low on her stomach as she moves across the landing strip. Her Bloodriders are racing
the length of it and the smell of burning rubber on old pavement brings a smile to her lips and pulls
the weight away from her heart.

“yer dothrae ven chiori foz” she shouts jeering at the winner. He turns to her and issues a challenge
and she accepts gladly and her riders reset the race as she retrieves Drogon. Its a useless challenge,
on the ground Drogon is too heavy to outrun her riders. But in the air...he is far too fast to even race.
But this is about them seeing her fly.

She used the steel frame of Khal Drogo’s bike to build the wings, after his death...after she killed
him. Her fingers trace the fading tattoo on her wrist, a sun and a line of stars circling her wrist like a
bracelet. He had had all the phases of the moon. A raiders wedding ring.

Jorah had given her the Dragon’s head that sits above her front tire. A flame thrower mounted it it
open mouth. The thrill of flying over the slavers at Yunkai and Meereen, spitting fire, the twin mini
guns mowing down enemies, the memory starts the adrenaline coursing through her veins. The high
of it a welcome change from the frustration she felt because of her advisors, because of the War,
because of Westeros.

Her boot kicks the engine to life beneath her, and she snaps her goggles over her eyes. Drogon’s
massive wings are upright, folded neatly along her sides. At the line, they challenge and jock at each
other, revving engines and swapping insults and she lets out a laugh as Drogon roars beneath her.
And then one of her blood shoots into the air and they are off.

The wind whips past her face and she can feel loose tendrils of her silver hair fluttering behind her. The other riders zip past her, maneuvering for position in a tight cluster. As they pass, she trips her accelerator and watches her speedometer steadily rise, as she shifts between gears. The dial passes a bright line she has marked, her target speed for takeoff. And with the pull of a small lever against her left leg, the wings slide out, locking into place.

The difference is immediate as the tires start to rumble and bounce, as the lift under the wings begins to swell. She trips another lever, this one forcing the small Valyrian engines to spin and suck air under and through.

And just before she overtakes her riders, Daenerys feels it. The bounce that meant she is no longer tethered to the earth. The one that meant she was free.

The wheels stopped seeking traction on the ground and retreated up under the wings as the Jet Engine caught the current and took Drogon to the sky.

Gods it felt good to fly. She switches her footing from the pedals to the stirrups she used to control the blades of the wings. She gave the right one a long press and her dragon slowly turned toward the open sea.

It was a beautiful day, despite all that had happened. The sun warmed her face despite the cold rush of sea salt air as it slowly began to set over the mainland of Westeros. Sunsets are beautiful everywhere. But this view, up here with the lowest clouds softly diffusing the light, this view is all hers. She’s the only person to see the world from this high up in over a century.

She lands before it gets too dark to see the dark brutalist fortress against the dark black of the sea.

“Will you meet with her, Jon…?” Tyrion says as she passes by the C.I.C.

“I’ll think about it.” the voice on the others side is rough, male, with that distinct accent that she’s only ever heard when Jorah gets emotional.

“He’ll think about it?” she sneers.

“Would you like to try and convince him to bring a Dragon to him to his home?” he rolls his eyes.

“I’ll think about it.”

She’s alone when it truly hits. Wildfire. The fall of the Dragons. This weapon that her ancestors unleashed on this world.

Dragons plant no trees.

Even though she’s not the one using it, Her actions have led to another flash of green fire. A light so bright that it extinguishes all others. Thousands dead. Olenna Dead. They were so close. And now she may lose.

Because she didn’t want to burn another city.

It’s late when Tyrion comes for her. A gentle knock low on the large door. The message is one word.

“Alone”

She can hear the protests in her mind before he or her the other members of her council voice them.
Jorah telling her it's not safe. Tyrion listing the multitude of sins her family has committed against the Starks. Varys repeating the grisly details of the Frey’s murder. Grey Worm’s threats of Bravado, and Missandei looking at her with pleading eyes.

Be a Dragon.

A Dragon has nothing to fear from Wolves.
It’s always bad news.

“We lost another Ranger. Last check in was supposed to be at 2100 two days ago. Not a peep. Not a
flare. Nothing.” Edds voice crackles through the radio and Jon lets out a heavy sigh. It's the tenth ranger they’ve lost the past six months.

“Who was it?”

“...It was Satin…”

“Shit”

Satin. Barely a Man. He was in the very last pool of recruits Jon trained when he was in Command of the Night’s Watch. Before…

The pain pools up in his chest, and he has to grind his teeth against it and force air out through his nose. The texture of the half moon scar is rough, even through the fabric of his shirt. He can feel it as he presses his thumb against it, pushing hard against the pain.

“Commander”

“Yeah” He rubs his eyes as he collects his thoughts and exhales out the last of the pain. “When was his last check in and where?” Edd tells him and he notes it down on the pad next to the radio. “How are you on supplies?

“You know what it's like up here, Jon. Nothing’s changed.”

“I’ll see what we can send…”

There’s a large map pinned to the wall in Sansa’s office. He takes it down and spreads it out on her desk and marks the coordinates of Satin’s last check-in with X. Around it he draws a circle, his best estimate of the ground a novice ranger could travel on foot in Winter and notes the date next to it. Either Winter got him or...they did. Edd should have never sent him out alone.

But the Watch wasn’t his command any more.

That ended when a boy’s knife split the muscles of his chest and slid into his heart.

He stares at the map when its been retacked to the wall. Ten more ‘x’s with ten more circles spread out between Fort Black and the Lighthouse at EastWatch. No confirmed sightings. Just dead friends and the looming dread of an undead swarm. There’s no pattern to it. He can draw dozens of lines to connect the dots, but none of them make any sense.

“Another one…?” Sansa asks from the door. He nods. “Did you know him?” She moves through the room behind him.

“Aye. I knew all of them.” he admits turning to face her.

“Did Commander Tollard notify his family?”

“He didn’t have one…” Jon growls. “None of them do. That’s the fucking point of the Night’s Watch.” He snaps and its louder than he expected. She pauses at a filing cabinet across the room from her desk and he hears her take a slow breath before opening it and pulling out a folder.

It’s barely 0500 and her red hair is perfectly braided and sways gently against her woolen skirts as she moves to her desk, stopping at a bookshelf to pull out binders labelled [Death Certificates - 308AL] and [NIGHT’S WATCH - ENLISTMENT]. She asks for his name and he tells her and she raises a perfectly arched eyebrow at the odd sound of it.
“He was an orphan from the Reach. Wyman arrested him ‘in the name of the seven’ because of...his preferred choice of client. He chose to take the black rather than go to prison.”

Understanding and horror fill her ice blue eyes. The same look that filled her eyes a year ago. When she found out about Margaery.

A young man like that would not have survived long in prison. Not that the Black had allowed him to survive much longer. The wooden chair in front of her desk creaks as he sits and watches her work in the early morning silence. Her practiced handwriting copying information from Satin’s enlistment forms. Perfect, crisp, clean lines.

A metal plate presses the image of a Direwolf into the bottom of the sheet. She signs her name in an elegant script before turning the paper around and sliding it to him. He scrawls Cmdr. J Snow on the line next to hers. She blows on the page and calmly slides it into the binder without saying a word.

There’s a knock at the door and he opens it while Sansa returns the records to their place on the shelf.

“Commander... Sansa.” Davos nods to each in turn as he steps into the room before taking his seat. They do this every day. The three of them meeting in the early hours to discuss the day ahead.

They need to move the cattle to a different pasture now that the snows are starting to come in; Gendry has finished some prototype guns that he wants Jon to test; Davos has some new drills for Brienne and Tormund to run with the recruits; One of the structures in the FreeFolk’s camp collapsed under the weight of the new snows last night, no serious injuries but they need to repair it today before the next snow comes through; The squash is ready to harvest in the glass gardens, they need to start canning before they become overripe; There’s a small dispute between Jonelle Cerwyn and one of the homesteaders living on her land; Sansa needs to recruit some of the people to help with felting wool and sewing coats for the next batch of recruits coming in.

Winter is here. And there is work to be done.

The barracks are long simple rectangular buildings on the Eastern edges of the Ranch. The original buildings were built by his great-grandfather over a century ago, when the country was thrown into yet another fucking civil-war. He remembers spending summers building new ones with his father, while Robb was doing lessons with Catelyn. Bastards didn’t need to know the history and law of Westeros. They could know how to build a house though, how to fix things around Winterfell. How to work with the cattle. How to be a good soldier.

The buildings hadn’t been maintained properly in the decade since his father left... nothing had been. He had spent this last summer making repairs after they won back their home. The barracks aren’t much, but its out of the snow and it’s warm and it has bunks and a mess. Far sight better than Fort Black, or anything he had beyond the Wall.

Brienne is running drills with the latest batch of recruits. Standard military, the ones Roderick, his father’s Drill Sergeant, had run him through growing up. The same one’s he had run through in basic when he joined the Watch under Commander Mormont. They are practicing basic takedown and disarm techniques, useless against a swarm of undead raiders, but it’s still early in the day and this the greenest group of young men...and women they’re currently training.

Robb had only allowed a few women to enlist in his short time as the Militia’s commander, But Jon was the first to open it up to anyone over 13. Some of his officers had protested, but they hadn’t seen the enemy. They didn’t know what was out there and they barely believed when he told them. He was coming. The wights were coming. Thousands of them, tens of thousands. Rad sick raiders...
whose minds had rotted to nothing but the urge to eat flesh.

Davos sucks a hiss through his teeth as Brienne slams Podrick to the ground... again, as the large blonde woman demonstrates the move. Again. They run it some more, pairing up, one trying to resist and the other trying to take down. Loser does push-ups.

Some of the younger ones are struggling. They understand the lesson and the technique. They just didn’t have the endurance yet. He looks over to the sidewall of one of barracks. The stack of firewood is looking low.

“Brienne.” he calls her over and leans forward heavily against a fence railing. Pod takes over judging the matches as she strides over to him.

“Commander…” she presses her fist to her sternum in a salute. “XO” a nod to Davos.

“How are they doin’ today?” Davos asks.

“There’s always room for improvement.” The old man chuckles next to him and Jon feels the flicker of a smile cross his face, before he remembers why he called her over.

“I need you to have them cut firewood instead of push-ups. We’re running low out here. Have them switch hands to keep ‘em balanced. Builds just as much muscle.” she stares at him with her usual stony expression as she thinks his order over.

“Commander Snow…” It’s never good when they address you by rank. “I’m concerned that pausing to chop wood will break the flow of the lesson.”

“Keep tally and have them do it after than.”

“The point is to simulate the immediate consequence of failure.”

He pauses and scratches at his beard as he considers her point. It’s a very good one.

“You were given an order from your commanding officer, Sergeant” Davos says with a sharp edge to his Stormlands accent.

The soldier immediately stands up straighter “Yes, Ser” She says loudly. Jon nods his head over to her trainees. Dismissing her.

“Just till the bin is full…” he calls after her as he stands up right, crossing his arms. His teeth bite into his tongue for a tense moment as he turns to his XO. “I had that under control.” The smuggler steps closer to him, not quite leaning in his ear.

“You gave her an order and she questioned it in front of your newest recruits. They need to see discipline and they need see that the chain of command is respected.”

He exhales sharply out his nose, and scratches at his beard again. “She had a point.” he admits. “So did you.” He doesn’t have a response for that. So they watch and wait a few more rounds. They do well... But there’s always room for improvement.

“Best not be staring at my woman with that pretty face of yours Jon Snow” Tormund’s voice From behind. Jon turned to find his axehead pressed into his chest. An ugly thing. A steel baseball bat with a saw blade welded to it with chunks of chain wrapped above and below the blade. “For extra weight on the swing” he had told him years ago.
Brienne had been Sansa’s choice to train new recruits. Tormund had been his. So they compromised. Brienne focuses on the new recruits, while Tormund gets the more experienced. Teach them the fundamentals, then teach them to improvise. The red haired raider replaced the axe on his back and joined them in watching the games.

“Where’s your lads, Tormund?” he asked, not sure if he would he regret hearing the answer. The raider chuckled and it did nothing to alleviate his worry.

“I told them to catch Ghost.” Jon laughed out loud.

“And I suppose there’s supposed to be a lesson at the end of that futile chase.” Davos asked incredulously.

“Of course, there is… Don’t try to catch a fucking direwolf.” the Raider barked out laughing. The Smuggler let out a amused snort, then raised a bushy grey eyebrow as he gestured for an explanation.

“How do you catch a 700 pound wolf?” Jon asked his XO. He shook his head. “You don’t…”

“You make it come to you…” Tormund finished. A broad smile splitting his face. The old man nodding as the lesson became clear.

It’s what he learned beyond the wall. When he fought with the FreeFolk. Raider tactics, guerrilla warfare, bait the enemy, disarm and distract and disrupt. The lessons Tormund taught him, that Mance taught him...that she taught him.

Her crooked smile flashed in his mind's eye. “You know nothin’, Jon Snow.” she laughed at him as he failed to grasp whatever it was that she was teaching him. Jon looks down at his hand. A pair of lips wreathed in flame tattooed above his trigger finger. He had learned how to point and shoot from his father. But Ygritte…

Her red hair catches the firelight and it seems for a moment that she and the flame are one bright thing.

...Ygritte had taught him how to aim.

“D’ya think any of them will figured it out?” he asked.

Tormund shrugged. “They have to find the Wolf first. With all this snow about…” he threw his arm out over wildly at the grey clouds overhead. “Its not very likely, but who knows, a few of them are clever… They might figure out the game, but… actually catching him…”

“He’s in Arya’s bedroom” he answered. The massive beast had pushed her door open as he left his room in the early hours. He’d lingered just long enough to see him circle the floor by her bed and for her hand to lazily pat the empty space in the bed next to her.

She’s alive... And she’s home.

“Don’t say it too loud!” Tormund warned. Davos chuckled. He swallowed the lump that had formed in his throat.

“Lets get to it then…” he says stepping out into the yard.

They join the young troops for a few rounds. Letting them grapple him and practice disarming someone larger than them. Correcting their grip on his shoulders as they push against him, twisting him to the ground. Showing them how to use their thumb to press into his clavicle to control his
movement during the takedown.

The move is useless against an undead swarm. But its still early. They’ll go to the range later for marksmanship and when this group is ready, when Brienne is confident in their coordination and ability to follow orders they’ll start with improvised weapons, and then knives and then explosives.

This group had been in Winterfell for ...two weeks...? Some kids as young as thirteen, some young men and women, one or two his age. War had thinned out the North...Robb’s war had thinned out the North. Six years of Bolton mismanagement and abuse thinned out the North. His war had thinned out the North. Winter thinned out the North. And these were all that was left.

They’ll be here another few weeks, unless some fall too far behind. Then they’ll go back to their settlements and homesteads and it’ll be up to his Lieutenants to maintain his militia.

Sometimes, he’d be able to go with his Father and Robb for surprise inspections at the other Northern Settlements. Always staying a few feet behind Robb as their father loomed large over his men, reminding them that Winter is Coming.

It was coming soon and it would hit hard. Harder than these kids were hitting him as they sparred and grappled.

“They are improving” Davos noted after Brienne dismissed drills so they could split logs and break their fast.

“They’re alright.” He agrees dusting the snow off his blacks.

The FreeFolk’s camp is clear on the other side of the property, deep into the Wolfswood by the train tracks. They hadn’t worked in over 60 years. Nan, the old woman Catelyn hired to help with Bran and Rickon, had told them stories about how the the train would circle the North, from Tohrren’s Square, up to Winterfell, around to Last Hearth, down to White Harbor. Picking up the shaggy cows at each settlement, to be slaughtered at the Dreadfort and shipped south at the port.

It had been his father’s dream to get them up and running again. Maybe he would have succeeded, had he not gone south. Had he stayed here instead of accepting a position as the King’s Executive Officer. Had the fucking Lannister’s not killed him.

The wights would still be coming for them. But he’d be facing them with his father, and his brothers. With Robb. He and Rickon would be alive. Bran wouldn’t be sick. Arya would have never been missing. Sansa wouldn’t have been…

He swallows and focuses on driving.

“You look like shit Jon Snow.” Tormund muses in the passenger seat of his truck.

“Here I thought I was pretty...”

“Aye. But even pretty girls can look like shit, and a wise man would be able to tell” he snorts out a dry laugh. “Joanna and Willa been asking about you...”

“I had to take Ghost up to Deepwood Motte. Ned Umber ran off and Glover couldn’t find him on his own.” Tormund shrugged.

“You should have let him find his own way back.”

“He’s eleven.”
“So...”

“I’m not leavin’ a boy to die in the woods…” He cuts Tormund short. “I’ll spend some time with the girls after we finish here.”

They ran up to him as soon as they pulled into the camp. Karsi’s girls. Willa is four. Joanna is ten. The very last of the Ice River Clans.

“PROMISE ME CROW!” she yelled at him as the stench of rot, and cold, and decay fills the air that fills his lungs. They howled on the other side of the scrap built gate. Climbing it. Climbing over each other to get over it. Shaking it as the press of the swarm bows the too fucking thin sheets of corrugated steel, and the half rotted beams of wood, rusted chain link.

“PROMISE ME CROW!” she stands with her axe raised, ready to strike at they gate gives in, and he is firing into the swarm and her axe hits one body.

“PROMISE ME CROW!” she charges. He retreats. And he is firing behind him as one has her and then he is running because there’s nothing he can do. He has to get them out.

He promised.

Joanna is walking backwards in front of him accusing Willa of knotting her hair, huffing with her fists balled at her sides. Willa is pulling on the edge of his coat defending herself against her sister and sticking her lip out in a pout.

A similar argument had occurred in his father’s office, now Sansa’s office, almost thirteen years ago. Except Sansa was pouting, and Arya was huffing and Catelyn sighed as his father looked to her both mildly confused by the problem and annoyed he was interrupted at work. She leaned down to get to their eye level and said something in a low whisper between them. They both snapped upright and shook their heads violently and she patted their shoulder and they ran off. Sansa with her friend, Jeyne and Arya with him. Arya was always with him.

“You scared them, Cat” his father mused in a low rumble.

He looked back to see Catelyn’s stern face split into a smile as she playfully batted away his father’s hand. Sansa had knotted Arya’s hair and she begged him to help her get the tangles out “before mother cuts it off”

Joanna and Willa’s fight had escalated.

“Girls...” They kept arguing. “Girls...” Willa ducked behind his legs almost tripping him as Joanna reached down to grab a handful of snow. “Girls.” the third time is louder, sharper. They stopped, snowballs in hand. He squatted down, gently pulling Willa around front of him and motioning for Joanna to come closer. “Alright... What’s this about?”

The older girl pulled a tangled tail of hair out her sweater. He winced remembering how his little sister used to cry when Catelyn would tug combs through her wild hair after a day of running and playing in the Wolfswood.

“Willa did it.”

“I didn’t mean too!” the younger shrieked. “I got mixed up when I was counting the twists” she looked the verge of tears. Her voice shaking with guilt.

“Do I have to cut it off?” The girl went stiff as she fought to keep her voice even and her face
brave... She looked like her mom.

“Promise me Crow…”

“Do you want to?” he asked. She shook her head. He nodded. “So how about you two help us fix this roof and then we’ll go see if Miss Gilly can help? Or Sansa?”

The collection of scrap built longhouses and shelters is not the worst place to last out the winter. Every offer for help he’d made, the FreeFolk refused. They would wait out the battle to come at Winterfell, and then focus on building something permanent.

The beam that had collapsed was made of wood too rotted to have been used in the first place. Someone could have been hurt. The girls could have been hurt. He should have caught it when they built it.

They should be with him and Sansa, like they had been in the months of fighting to liberate the North from Bolton control. Fucking Val. Looking for any reason to start shit with him. After they retook Winterfell, and they had re-established their independence from the Crown, Sansa had drawn up adoption papers. Real Ones. They’d be Starks. They’d have a future here.

Val threw a tantrum, split the FreeFolk into two factions. Threatened to start raiding. Threatened to start another war. To break the carefully peace he’d created between the Northerners and the Wildlings.

“After all Crow… It’s your fault their mother’s dead.” she spat in his face.

Her faction wouldn’t have won, but there were so few left. After the wall. After Stannis. After Hardhome. After Ramsay. The army Mance had built. The one he had served with Ygritte and Tormund. The one that was ten thousand fighters strong. The one that was going to win a better life for everyone trapped beyond the wall. This was it. Less than three hundred people. It was all they had left.

His fault.

So they found a compromise. The girls would stay in the FreeFolk camp at Winterfell. Val and her group took the Fort at West Watch on the Wall.

It still doesn’t sit right with him.

He promised he’d take care of them.

“You know nothing, Jon Snow” Ygritte hisses at him through gritted teeth, losing an arrow that sinks into his chest. He deserves it.

He betrayed them.

He betrayed her.

“I know how to fix this…” he points at where the beam broke. They’d risk the structural stability of the longhouse to completely remove and replace it. The best move would be to add supports alongside it. So they climb on to the roof to remove the snow that risks further collapse, run to the workshop behind the house for supplies, and then to the lumber yard where some of the recruits have begun their work detail. Joanna hands him nails as Tormund holds the beam in place.

He can’t deal with the guilt right now. There’s work to do.
The girls rush out of the truck as he pulls up to the main house. Tormund’s back with Davos checking on his lads. No-one’s caught Ghost yet. Through the window, he can see Gilly in the kitchen and Sam doing his best to get little Sam to eat a little bowl of porridge. She doesn’t look like a scared wildling girl who escaped Craster’s cult and fought wights and sailed around westeros and faced down Sam’s father. She looks like a mom. Sam doesn’t look like the scared boy he befriended ten years ago. Gilly is smiling at Sam and her son, as she dices up the latest harvest of squash for canning.

The ache in his chest was different now, as in his mind’s eye he saw a flash of red hair and a crooked smile. No. She would never have wanted this. A raider through and through. Ygritte wouldn’t have been happy here, in his childhood home. Probably not in any home he would have built for them. Even if… even if she had lived.

She wasn’t meant for this kind of life. Perhaps neither of them were.

There’s always a war to fight.

“Have you eaten anything Girls.. Jon?” Gilly asks, the large knife thunking heavily into the board as she splits the orange veg.

He shakes his head, the girls nod vigorously. “We were hoping you could help us with a problem.” Joanna pulls out the tangled mass of hair and Gilly sighs heavily and pulls her to one of the chairs.

“Come on now. We’ll get you sorted.” She sends him to fetch the jars and lids from the cellar and when he’s returned with the last of the crates, Gilly is working through the knots with a comb and Willa is making faces at Little Sam. She’s also put out a small round of bread with beans and beef and barley and tomatoes in the carved hollow of it. It’s past midday and he didn’t realize how hungry he was.

“Thank you Gilly” he sits at the table across from the girls. “Did Sansa already leave?”. Sam nods cleaning off his boy.

“She left with the Hound to the Cerwyns a few hours ago.” his friend pauses “She had a message to pass onto you...about Arya…”

He closed his eyes and exhaled as he leaned into the chair. When had he started to feel tired all the time? When he was a ranger he could go for days. Now every time he began to relax he wanted to fall asleep. Perhaps that's what happens when you should be dead.

He should be asleep. He should be six feet under, sleeping beneath the earth.

“What did she say?” he asks taking a mouthful.

Sam’s eyes dart to the ceiling as he opens and closes his mouth for a moment. “Well I don’t quite remember the exact wording but, the general idea…”

“She said ‘Go tell your little sister to get her ass out of bed and do some fucking work.’” Bran’s wheelchair creaked as his brother turned the corner into the kitchen.

“Yes...that was exactly what she said.” Sam agreed nodding wide eyed and gesturing to the children at the table.

“Apologies for my language, Ladies.” his only brother looked up at him. So fucking thin and gaunt under the thick wool sweaters and blankets in his chair.
“How are you feeling today, Bran” he looked better today. Hopefully it would be a good day, no fits or seizures. Maybe he’d be able to eat something more substantial. Perhaps the medicine Howland Reed had given him was helping.

“How are you feeling today, Bran” he looked better today. Hopefully it would be a good day, no fits or seizures. Maybe he’d be able to eat something more substantial. Perhaps the medicine Howland Reed had given him was helping.

“Today seems different. I can’t decide whether its good or bad. Only time will tell.”

It’s in his brain. That’s what Sam had said when Meera brought him home. There’s nothing that can be done. It’s only a matter of time.

Jon swallows hard and nods. Gilly is having the girls sort through lids and rings, finding matching sets. Catelyn had a system...but she never asked for his help in the kitchen so he doesn’t know.

“Some of them should have numbers.” Bran instructed wheeling closer to the table. Jon pulls a chair out of the way to give him space to pull up directly to it.

“Perfect... you’ll get to practice your numbers.” Gilly tugged the last bit of the knot out while Joanna sneered at the prospect of more lessons as she tests a set.

He eats in silence Sam asks Bran a series of questions checking his mental faculties, his memory, lucidity, ect, taking notes in a small notebook.

Sometimes Jon can’t look at him. He’s so thin and pale and sick. Another failure to save someone he loves. Bran had been beyond the wall for years, and he had never found him. When he told Jon where he was, he knew it by memory. They must’ve walked within a mile of it a half dozen times.

A cave system on the far Northeastern edge of the Haunted Forest. His brother and the Reeds had found shelter in a crashed satellite from old Valyria. A piece of the RAVEN. And the same Wildfire that had kept them warm and alive, had poisoned him.

So close… for so long. He could have saved him.

There’s the pain in his chest again, and he grits his teeth, and flexes his hand and tries to breath through it.

“Two more people came down with the Pox in White Harbor last night. Wylla Manderly radioed this morning to report it.” his brother announced from his chair as soon as Jon had finished eating.

“That's fifteen, Jon.” Sam answered. Gilly looked across the table at him with sad eyes. He has to send him out. They can’t lose more people. Sam needs to go establish a quarantine, try and help the sick, but mostly prevent it from spreading. They can’t lose any more.

“Gather what you need. We’ll leave tomorrow...”

He aims the rifle at the target, exhales and fires. The bottle 100 feet away breaks in an explosion of glass. And the gun hasn’t blown apart in his hands. Jon pulls the slide back and fires again at the next bottle, which shatters as the first one did. He aims at a knot in the tree at the far end of the range. And empties the remaining shots in rapid succession. Each bullet hits the knot, in an explosion of splinters.

“See I told you I could make guns” the boy to his right said. “Try the pistol” Gendry took the rifle and offered the handmade pistol to Jon. It’s a revolver. He’d prefer not to equip his men with revolvers. Too much time to reload, unless they wanted to make a few thousand speedloaders.

If the smith could make guns, why not those too?
Because it would take too much time... They needed the guns more. Beggars can’t be choosers. He
aims and the bullet rips through a wooden board thirty feet out. With a smooth flick of his wrist, Jon
flips the gun to his other hand and put an identical hole next the one he just made. Then he repeats it
transitioning between hands until the cylinder is empty and there are six holes in the board.

The boy next to him was grinning from ear to ear as Jon examined the revolver in his hands. Its aim
was true, he hadn’t felt any pull as he fired. “These are good guns” he resolved.

Davos clapped the young man’s shoulder. “What did I tell you, the boy’s worth all the trouble it took
to smuggle him out of that shit heap of a city.”

“Aye...” Jon agrees, as he spins the cylinder on the revolver listening to the clicks, making sure it
doesn’t skip or jam as it transitions between chambers. “One thing… Can you make pistols that use
magazines instead?” Gendry’s smile disappears and he knows the answer.

“Umm. I can... But I can make these faster and more reliably. There’s less moving parts…”

“Fewer…” Davos corrects. Gendry looks a little stunned.

“Fewer Moving Parts…” he continues “More delicate pieces that need to be fitted perfectly. More
things to go wrong or break.”

Die because he can’t reload fast enough or die because his gun doesn’t fire... Jon knows which one
he’d pick.


“Depends on what kind of slugs you need, and the kind of scrap we’re melting down. Back in Flea
Bottom, I could make about a hundred rounds in an hour, but I had a lot of racks to work with.” Jon
bites his tongue and nods slowly.

“What do you need?” Jon asked and Gendry went through the list. “When Sansa gets back, tell her
what you told me. She’ll probably have more questions.” She has inventory logs of all the scrap
they’ve scavved since coming home. They probably can’t give him the set up he had in King’s
Landing, but at least he is out of that shit heap. “We’ll get you set up as well as we can.”

Davos gives Gendry another hard slap on the shoulder and then they are off to the barracks, and the
training yard to check on the recruits and afternoon drills.

They had some welding equipment. Although there was a man, one of his father’s friends who ran a
workshop about 50 miles out of town. Must’ve been fifteen years since he died. His father hadn’t
scavved it, and they never found someone to replace him. The Boltons probably didn’t know about
it. It would be worth heading out and seeing what they could bring back.

The scrap wasn’t a problem. If anything they had too much scap. It needed to be melted down into
bullets and weapons. Best save the larger pieces though. Barricades won’t stop the enemy for long.
But if they’re working with revolvers and rifles, it’ll buy them time to reload or prepare for melee.

The man power was a problem though. Everyone was already pulling double duty. Everyone was
already working. Everyone was already training.

Gendry said he could do it himself. But he would be able to produce more if he had help. Which
means he would need to thin out the already thin work details among his recruits. They need people.
There just isn’t enough people left up here. The North could prosper, but there just were not enough
people to get all the work done.
More drills, more getting thrown to the ground by a bunch of teenagers until the sun finally begins its
descent.

He sees Ghost out of the corner of his eye. The white wolf followed by a shadow running across the
far end of the barracks and the yard toward the wide expanse of pasture North East of Winterfell.

She’s balancing on the railing watching the massive herd of shaggy cows slowly move from the
open pasture to the fenced enclosure with the simple scrappy shelters. Ghost moves back and forth as
she walks along the beam, so huge, his back almost reaches the top rail. She bends down and
transfers her weight onto her hands and pushes herself upright into a handstand on the post.

Water Dancing, she calls it.

She waves at him as he approaches, shifting her weight onto one hand. He smiles, but Ghost
whimpers betraying the anxiety building in his stomach. With both hands back on the post, she
gracefully flips herself to the ground in an arc that plants her squarely in front of him.

“Jon…” she looks up at him.

“Arya…”

“Are you here to scold me?” He shakes his head and she turns her back to him and climbs back up
onto the railing. Sitting on the second rail with her legs dangling from the height and her chin
pressing into her arms on the third. Jon joins her, leaning heavily against the wood of the rail.

He does need to talk to her. It’s becoming a problem. He needs to explain how its unfair for him to
order the troops to pull double duty, if he isn’t willing to have her do so as well.

They watch the cows instead.

Beric Dondarrion is riding and whooping on horseback chasing the last of them into the enclosure.
He arrived in Winterfell a few months before Arya did. Beric and the Hound and a priest named
Thoros. Saying they saw the Dead in a vision. The priest died of liver poisoning a few weeks later.

“Do you trust him?” she asks, tilting her head to the one eyed man, trotting around grinning like an
idiot.

“Aye.” They believed him about the Wights. He has no reason to not believe them. Besides Sansa
feels safe leaving Winterfell with The Hound. Before she’d only leave if he went with her, even as
close as Winter Town. She has her own muscle now. It’s one less thing to worry about.

“He worships Rads.” She warns.

“We pray to trees.”

“Trees don’t hurt people.”

“I told him to be careful about preaching. Especially ‘round the FreeFolk...He hasn’t started
anything.” If he had been honest with his little sister, he would have said that it felt good to know
that there was someone else like him. Someone else who...came back. That Beric helps him Deal
with it.

Arya lets out a heavy sigh, she won’t tell him what’s bothering her. She’s too much like him that
way.
“What did you do today?” he asks and instantly regrets it. It's not a fucking interrogation.

“Kept Watch.”

“Who are you watching for?”

“No-one.” was the curt reply as she lifts her head from the rail as Beric rides and dismounts in front of them.

“Commander…” he salutes pressing his fist against his chest and dipping his head. “Miss Stark…”

“Just Arya…” she corrects, unblinking. He tips his comically wide brimmed hat.

“I have to thank you, Ser, for indulging the fantasy of an old man who grew up listening to cowboy stories on the radio.” he gathers the reins in his hands.

“As long as you don’t scare them off… I need you to take Sam to White Harbor in the morning.”

“Aye, Ser” The one eyed man lets out a loud laugh as he guides the horse back to the barn, singing to himself. Ghost’s and Arya’s eyes following him.

“Do you have a reason why I shouldn’t trust him” he asks. She changes the subject.

“Have you talked to Gendry yet? He was looking for you.”

“Aye. He makes some good guns. He needs help though…” he prompts. Her hard eyes, dark like his own, weigh his words.

“I’ll keep an eye out for someone.”

“Arya…” Jon sighs. Winter is here. This shouldn’t be a fight.

“Commander” Davos shouts from behind him. “You need to listen to this. Now.”

There are six bodies crammed into the small radio room between Sansa’s office and Bran’s new bedroom on the first floor of the house as his brother plays the recording of the statement released by the crown in King’s Landing.

Davos is hunched over Bran, Arya is sitting on the table. Sam and Gilly stand in the doorway. Sam’s arms hang protectively over his wife’s frame.

They are all looking at him.

They are all looking to him.

He opens his mouth to say something. But there are no words to say.

Wildfire.

Highgarden.

Cersei Lannister.

Daenerys Targaryen.

Thousands of people...
The plan had been to let the two queens fight it out and then, assuming they survived the swarm of undead raiders… Do whatever it took to keep the North Independent. But this… He can protect his family from many things...but a warhead? There’s nothing anyone could do to protect from that.

He’d heard of Daenerys at the Wall with Maester Aemon. Valyrian princesses flying on a Dragon conquering the world. When they received word she’d landed on Dragonstone, they’d been mostly relieved that Cersei would be occupied with a more pressing enemy and ignore them.

When he’d received a message demanding he surrender his command to a very long list of titles. He had given the same response Mance had given Stannis.

He takes a deep breath to fight the tightness starting to pull from the half moon scar next to his heart.

“Bran. Radio the Cerwyn’s. Tell Sansa to get home. Now. Message Deepwood Motte and White Harbor have them send scouts down the coastline. Same for Greywater Watch. I want eyes on the sky. Have them send up flares if they see anything. Then radio the other settlements. Tell them to get emergency rations together…quietly”

“Sam get everything you have on treating Rads. Davos, gather the senior Officer’s in the mess Mess and get our scouts onto the King’s Road.”

The mess is the oldest building in Winterfell. Its a long stone hall with a huge roaring fireplace. Its where his family ate with the troops. Its where they celebrated the solstice. Its where his father would brief his men.

It’s what he’s doing right now.

Telling them what they know. Reviewing their evacuation plans for Winterfell and then for the North as a whole. Sam explains basic treatment for things like Rad Sickness, and Wildfire burns. There are a lot of questions that he doesn’t know the answer to. They send two dozen men to Winter’s town to make sure no-one starts a panic.

Brienne and Davos are reviewing a map of Westeros trying to guess where they most likely launched the missile from. Brienne served as one of the highest ranked officers in Renly Baratheon's Army which marched through the Reach during the last round of wars. Davos knew the Stormlands and East Coast of Westeros better than anyone.

They estimated she had probably launched from Crownlands, which gave the warhead a range of a few hundred miles. If that was true, that meant they were safe...for now. There was over a thousand miles between the crownlands and Winterfell and if they were forced to evacuate to Bear Island there would be another 500 between them and Cersei.

“Jon.” Bran interrupts Davos as he points out places along the coast south of White Harbor where they would be vulnerable to invasion. “It’s urgent.”

“The Bastard of Winterfell.” the imp’s voice crackles through the radio as it whines loudly irritatingly in his ears. They’ll need to replace it soon.

“The Dwarf of Casterly Rock.” Its been ten long years since he’s heard this man’s voice.

“I believe we last saw each other atop the Wall.”

“You were pissing off the edge if I remember right.”

“How is my dear wife Sansa… Does she miss me terribly?” He’s joking, of course, but the retort has
brought him back to the shattering reality that his sister had been forced to marry this man. The day she turned 18. He killed the last man who tried to claim Sansa. Petyr Baelish deserved far worse. “A sham marriage. And unconsummated.”

“I didn't ask.”

“Well, it was...wasn’t” Tyrion quickly corrects himself. “Anyway she's much smarter than she lets on.” As if he didn’t know how smart she is.

“She's starting to let on.”

“Good…” The dwarf sighs. There’s a pause on the conversation.

“What’s this about Tyrion?”

“I can assume you heard about HighGarden?”

“Aye.”

“And Qyburn’s little comment about you.”

“Aye.”

“She’ll come after you next. She’ll come for Sansa. It makes Cersei furious that she slipped through her fingers.”

“Seems to me like you are keeping her busy.”

“You’re right, but have you considered what happens if we lose? She will utterly destroy the North to get to her. If we lose, what stands between my sister and yours?”

“I do”

“I wish I could have that same confidence.”

“Get to the point Tyrion.”

“Surrender your command. Bend the Knee. Join us. Together we would be difficult to defeat.”

“Free men do not Kneel.” Ygritte’s words. A Free man’s words. His voice. “The North has suffered under the crown long enough.”

“The North has suffered under monarchs who enjoyed the privilege of the crown, and ignored the burden of it. Daenerys Stormborn is not Cersei, or my nephews, or Robert, or her Father.”

“Surely you mean… Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, rightful Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, The Last Dragon, the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Unburnt, Breaker of Chains...collector of titles.” he mocks. More fucking propaganda.

“It’s all true.” the man on the other end of the radio answers. And Jon is surprised by the earnest tone. “She has earned every single one of those titles and she deserves a thousand more. The things she’s accomplished… She…” he pauses. “Will you not even consider meeting her?”

“Don’t say another word to him.” Sansa snaps suddenly at the door of small radio room just as he
depresses the button to answer. She’s flushed and out of breath having run from the truck straight into the house. Jon stands and offers her the seat.

“Sansa...my dear.” She takes the receiver from Jon’s hand as she sits.

“Are you not content with destroying HighGarden?” she sneers into the microphone. “You would bring your sisters wrath down on us with your foolish schemes.”

“I am trying to prevent exactly that.”

“You would paint a target on our backs and then run back to Essos once you’ve run out of Allies.”

“Daenerys aims to rule Westeros. She will not run.”

“Says the man with the ships to escape. Says the man allied with the Iron Fleet.” Jon’s nostrils flared. He’d forgotten the Greyjoys. Fucking Theon. There are still scorch marks around the house from his attempt to burn it down. Jon had spent their first month back just rebuilding their home.

“...The portion of the Iron Fleet that was under our control was captured by Euron Greyjoy. Admiral Yara was taken. Theon is sailing back with the survivors.”

“So you have lost your allies…” her voice is dramatic. But her blue eyes lock with his and there is nothing but ice and steel. Her hand goes to the pocket of her woolen skirts and pulls out a small notebook. He passes her a pen that is scattered on the small table, next to Bran’s transcriptions of other communications. She writes in a shorthand.

“No. We’ve many allies...In Essos.” He can’t help but smirk as Sansa raises an eyebrow and continues to provoke her former husband into revealing information.


Stannis left a weapons cache in Dragonstone. They need those weapons.

They could win a war with that. Even against a swarm of undead.

He could have Gendry build other things. Heavy Weapons, Artillery, a new boiler for the barracks, or some more iron stoves for the FreeFolk’s camp so they didn’t have to worry so much about fires.

He flashes the message to Sansa as Tyrion rambles about the difficulties of learning Valyrian in order to communicate with a faction of the Dragon Queen’s army called the Unsullied. She turns to Davos and mouths, “Where?”

“Caves, on the beach.” the old smuggler notes. She nods and waits for Tyrion to finish his complaining.

“Has Winter come for Dragonstone yet? “ she asks with an edge to her voice.

“...Are you threatening me?” She doesn’t answer. “Yes it has… the storms are constantly barraging us.” Davos nods knowingly and signals a thumbs up “According to the locals its one of the worst seasons they’ve seen. The queen finds it poetic being Stormborn and all.” Sansa exchanges a few more barbs with her ex-husband never losing the ice in her voice before passing the receiver to him.

“Will you meet with her, Jon...?”

“I’ll think about it.”
He can finally breathe in Sansa’s office, without the half dozen bodies in it. Talking over each other. Its late and Sansa is rubbing her eyes as she stares at the map of Westeros spread across her desk. With the information she had wrung from Tyrion and the collected military experience of Davos, Beric, Clegane, and Brienne they’ve managed to piece together a general idea of the forces at play.

“Go to sleep Sansa.”

“You haven’t decided what you are going to do yet.”

“Aye, but that’s not going to change by rehashing the same things over and over again.” She sits heavily in her plush chair behind the desk and lets out a sigh.

“I need to message Robin…”

“Gods…” Jon groaned. He’d forgotten all about her cousin, hidden in the Vale out Cersei’s reach. “Royce probably has it under control.” Sansa sighed again.

“…We ignored Cersei for too long.”

“The dead are the more urgent enemy. They’re the only one that matters.”

“We don’t even know where they are Jon...They could have retreated further North. They could be a thousand miles away in Always Winter.” She gestures to the map on the wall, specifically the blank space along the top left hand corner.

“There’s nothing for them to feed on up there.”

“Perhaps they starved then.” He shakes his head. If she had seen what he had seen. “We can’t ignore her any more… she’ll come for us and she will kill us”

“That won’t happen.”

“What exactly can you do stop her?”

“I could do it…” They both turned sharply to see Arya standing in front of the door. It had been closed. She had entered without either of them noticing.

“You could do what?”

“Eliminate Cersei… Take her out and the Targaryen will be too busy dealing with the aftermath, she’ll ignore us… for awhile.”

In the ten years they were separated, Jon had been out at the wall and beyond, Sansa was a prisoner of their enemies. Bran had sat in a crashed satellite for years hiding from the Boltons.

But his little sister had sought revenge. And she had found it.

The bits he understands have to do with a Bravossi cult called the Faceless Men, and that Winter came for the Freys.

He didn’t know the whole story. She was unwilling to tell it. They rarely spoke about anything no other than pleasantries and daily bullshit. There was a wall between them and he had no idea how to overcome it.

Sansa flashes her eyes over to him.
Gods. She’s considering it.

“No.”

Arya scoffs. “Look at you two. Pretending to be mother and father when I’m the only one who has done anything to avenge our family. I don’t know why I bothered coming home.” She turns on her heels and strides away and he can hear the sick wet sound a knife punching into his abdomen.

“For the Watch” Lt. Thorne rasps in his ear.

“Go after her Jon” Sansa urges.

“Arya…” But she’s already up the stairs. He follows as fast as he can and she slams her bedroom door in his face. “Arya.” he knocks on the door. “Arya…Please…”

The bastard stares at him across a field. The field where he was watching cows with her earlier that day. His baby brother looks at him too.

“Run to your brother…” he taunts.

He’s too late. He’s always too late. Too late to save Rickon. Too late to save Sansa. Too late to save Robb. Too late to save Bran.

“You know nothing, Jon Snow.” she whispers as warm blood seeps into his uniform.

Too late to save Arya.

Ghost comes and licks his face. The massive direwolf circling around in front of him as he sits slumped against his little sisters door.

She looks like him. It was the first thing he noticed when she was born. Dark hair. Dark eyes. Like him. He wasn’t sure he was a Stark until he saw her.

Why can’t he talk to her? Why can’t he be her big brother again? Why is this so fucking hard? How can he run the fucking militia and not be able to talk to his little sister? He had died...he thought she had died and now they are both here...alive...and…

He runs a hand through his hair before rubbing the unshed tears away.

“Ghost.” the direwolf snaps to attention. He points to the door as he gives the order “Safe.”

Sansa brushes his arm as they pass each other on the stairs.

“It will get easier.” she promises. He only nods and wishes her a good night.

Bran is wheeling away from the radio room. “Are you going to talk to Father?” he asks.

“Aye.” his brother nods weakly. Then smiles.

“It seems fantastic doesn’t it?”

“What does? “

“A Valyrian Princess riding a Dragon...Goodnight Jon.” He turns and wheels himself to his bedroom.
The Godswood is haunting at night. The thick grove of trees seem to press the air around him, making it thick and dense in his lungs. Its warm air venting from the hotsprings below. Escaping through small holes and pools. The heavy canopy of leaves above him protect the mossy earth beneath from snow and ice. As he moves deeper the sounds of revelry coming from the FreeFolk’s camp die and the lights from the house dim as the white of Weirwood becomes brighter and the silence becomes deafening.

He sits on one of the massive ancient roots, worn from hundreds of men just like him sitting in this exact same spot of his family’s ancestral home. His father had sat here. And he waits and stares up into the red leaves and let the winds whisper dead men’s words in his ear.

“When dead men and worse come hunting for us in the night, you think it matters who sits on the Iron Throne?” Commander Mormont leans over his desk, the old bear’s grey eyes boring into his as he asks the question.

Mance had united every raider left alive North of the Wall to escape the oncoming threat. “I told them we were all going to die if we don’t get south. ’Cause that's the truth.” he had told Jon by the fire, Ygritte’s face was an unreadable mask across from him.

“Every man shall reap what he has sown, from the highest officer to the lowest gutter rat. They have made my country bleed, and I do not forget that.” Stannis Baratheon shouted at him as he marched his army across the yard at Fort Black.

“When the snows fall and the white winds blow, the lone wolf dies but the pack survives.” His father pats his shoulder and turns to say goodbye to the rest of the family before he leaves for King’s Landing.

“The pack survives.”

The house is dark when he returns and the crackle of the radio is almost unbearably loud compared to the creak of settling floorboards.

And a few moments later, Daenerys Stormborn is coming to Winterfell.
As the wind whipped past her cheeks, stinging them red, Daenerys started to worry that she was lost. That she had been somehow blown off course.
According to her map, Winterfell was over a hundred miles west of Highway 1, the King’s Road. For almost two centuries it had been the safest means of travel. The Road system, built by her ancestor, Jaehaerys sparked a period of economic growth and prosperity for Westeros.

It had also been the target her father aimed his missiles at. Raining down green hellfire in a neat line from the Wall to Sunspear. Tearing his country in two. A fitting finale to the end of another long and bloody civil war.

She had seen the exit ramp but had soon lost the road in the the thick of the trees. The coordinates given to her hadn’t matched the base’s location on the painted table.

It's enough to give her pause, and for the briefest moment she wonders if her advisors were right. That it was far too dangerous for her to go alone.

But she was a Dragon.

She sees just a stretch of ruined highway. No buildings, or lights or anything to indicate a settlement. Just Highway and trees. So many trees.

It's the greenest thing she's ever seen her life.

A bright red flare lights up the night sky and Drogon circled the flares origin. Peering down over her shoulder for a look as she saw three or four people, a truck, an ATV and a large white… wolf. There wasn’t a clear line of sight from this high up. She has binoculars but, her focus needs to be on landing safely.

She circled back towards them and let her altitude drop. The two small jet engines slowed to a halt as the trike’s engine took over and the wheels slid out from the undercarriage and began to spin up.

“I am the blood of the Dragon.” she reminded herself as her wheels made contact with the earth and her exhaust burst into flame. Drogon raced towards them gaining speed as his wings retreated upwards folding up alongside her. Faster. Flames licking behind her. It was breathtaking, it was exhilarating. She wanted it to go on forever.

The smell of burnt rubber and ozone filled her nostrils and adrenaline rippled down her spine as Drogon stopped short in front of the small group. It could never last forever.

She pulled her goggles over her head and tugged her silver braid out of her woolen coat before spinning in her seat and sliding off over the folded wing facing away from the small welcoming party. It takes half a second to regain her footing. The muscles of her thighs and ass burn from her long flight North.

As she rounds the back of Drogon, she lets her fingers glide along the red hot shell of one of the engines as it cools. There’s four of them. Five if she counted the wolf.

The first is a tall red haired man. True red. Red like the flames she spits from her dragons mouth. Raider, by his garb and weapons. The handle of a shotgun peeks over his shoulder and a heavy handmade pipe pistol hangs from his waist. His leans on a baseball bat with an ugly looking axe head pressing into the earth.

The older man stands at ease, with his hands folded stiffly at the small of his back. His coat is black wool and it is buttoned high to his throat. An embroidered patch above his left breast pocket reads D. Seaworth and the pips along his collar indicate a high naval rank. At least, that's what they represent in the Iron Fleet.
The third is a girl. She’s young. Dark hair. Dark eyes. She’s sitting on the ATV, the engine is running. Prepared to run back and warn the others in case something happens. Like if a Dragon decides to breathe fire.

The wolf is...monstrous. All white with blood red eyes. Its huge. Tall enough that it stands almost as high her chest. Its stands frozen at the ready. Snowy hair on edge ready to bite her in half. There’s no leash. No harness. No muzzle. Nothing standing between it and her except the will of its master.

He stands next to it. Dark hair pulled back into a loose knot. Dark eyes framed by old scars. Dark whiskers along his jaw and neck. The spitting image of the young girl on the ATV. Except older, taller, and...male.

The black wool and leather coat with brown fur trim around the collar is open revealing a pistol and large knife holstered, but ready. His hands are in hooked into his belt by the thumbs. The display tells her two things. First, he is keeping his hands where she can see them, so he’s not making and sudden movements. Second, that he is confident in his ability to draw quicker than she can.

“That’s close enough.” he holds up a hand. She stops about fifteen feet away from them and folds her hands low on her stomach.

Daenerys’ tongue darts across her lip for a quick second as she appraises her current situation. Usually Missandei or Tyrion makes introductions for her… Its not like they don’t know who each other is. But pleasantries are important.

“Hello. I’m Daenerys Targaryen. Queen of Westros…”

“I’m aware of your titles.” he cuts her off. She glares at him, and she feels her dragon simmer in her belly.

“This is Commander Jon Snow” the Naval officer intercedes, forcing the introduction.

“Thank you for inviting me to your home, Ser.” he shuffles his feet in front of her and looks down for half a second.

“I hope the winds weren’t too rough, your grace.”

“The winds were kind, Jon Snow” The old man brustles.

“Apologies, I have a Flea Bottom accent, I know, but Jon Snow holds the rank of Commander, Your Grace. The Independent North is under his protection.”

“Forgive me…”

“Davos Seaworth, your grace. Executive Officer”

“Forgive me, XO Davos” she feels confident in her use of the Westrosi slang. "I was under the impression that the Independent North was annexed into Westeros when Torrhen Stark signed a treaty yielding the territory to my ancestor, Aegon Targaryen and united the Northern Front with rest of Westeros’s armed forces in perpetuity.” The raider shuffles uncomfortably. “Or do I have my facts wrong?

“I wasn’t there, your grace.” Jon Snow answers.

“No, of course not, but treaties are treaties and an oath is an oath.” she takes a tentative step forward defying his earlier order. “So I assume, Jon Snow, you’ve invited me here to bend the knee and do
“the same.”

“No.”

“Well, that is unfortunate. You've had me travel all this way to only to break faith?”

“Break faith? Your father burned my grandfather alive. He burned my uncle alive. He burned Westeros—”

“My father was an evil man….” she interrupts him this time before he can make a full accounting of the multitude of horrible things her father did. “I ask your forgiveness for the crimes he committed against your family. And I ask you not to judge a daughter by the sins of her father. I am the last Targaryen, and the crimes he committed against this world are too great for one person to bear.”

The wind blew across the highway in a cold shudder. The wolf next to him raised his nose sniffing, as the air flutter her braid behind her, causing the handful of tiny bells carefully pinned into the thick rope of hair to chime quietly. He nods. She inhales and continues.

“The best I can do is try to build a better world. The North was united with Westeros for Centuries, and those were the best centuries Westeros has ever known. Centuries of peace and prosperity. With a Targaryen serving the people of Westeros from the Iron Throne, and a Stark serving from Winterfell. For too long this country has torn itself apart. Together, we will save this country from those who would destroy it.”

“You're right.” she almost sighs in relief. “You're not guilty of your father's crimes. And I am not bound by my ancestors treaty”

Her dragon snaps.

“Why did you invite me to your home, Jon Snow? Why now? What do you want?” she says it quickly, her volume increasing as she spits out the words.

“Guns and Men.” That makes no sense at all.

“If you need guns and men to fight Cersei, why not join us? If we combine our forces…”

“I don’t need guns and men to fight Cersei, I’m asking for guns and men in exchange for helping you fight Cersei.” She looks at him, confused. He looks at her and crinkles his nose and rakes his fingers through the his hair. “You and Cersei, you’re two children fightin’ over a fucking chair. Meanwhile the real enemy is…”

“Tyrion said he liked you, yet all you have had me come here, **alone**, and then after traveling all this way, you’ve refused to surrender your command, and now you’ve called me a child.”

“You had what…5,000 Mercenaries…”

“Unsullied.” She corrects him sharply. And he tilts his head in apology.

“5,000 Unsullied, thousands of bloodriders, the Reach, Dorne, half of the Iron Fleet and a fucking dragon. You could’ve taken King’s Landing a hundred times since you arrived. But you didn’t. Because, I assume…” he makes a low sweeping gesture “…you don’t want to kill thousands of innocent people. Which means at least that part of your propaganda is true and you are better than Cersei.”

“Propaganda…?” she spits.
“Aye. And if one third of what your broadcasts say are true you’d be more concerned with the enemy to the North.”

She pauses. Tyrion and Varys had done their best to piece together the events that took place in Westeros in their absence. They had nowhere near a complete picture, however there was simply no way they had overlooked any enemy so great that the militia couldn’t handle it on their own.

“What enemy to the North, Commander Snow?”

“The Army of the Dead.”

“The dead…” she repeats slowly.

“I know how it sounds. But it’s true. You can talk to the FreeFolk living here, you can radio and talk to the Watch. They’ll tell you what they’ve seen. Our Maester will be back in a few days, he can show you proof…”

“Hmmm... Your allies, Your former command, and the testimony of one of your men. These aren’t exactly reliable sources of information.”

“Why do all you Southerners think we are all stupid!?” he asks suddenly. And she opens her mouth to protest. “Do you think the Northmen would have been chosen me for command if I were a liar or madman?”

“No.”

“The Army of the Dead is real.” he warns. “And if they make it past the wall and we aren’t prepared to meet them, because we’re squabbling over what’s Westeros and who sits on that stupid chair, we’re finished. All of us.”

She folds her hands together and presses the tips of her fingers to her brow for a second in frustration. This is...nonsense. Superstitious nonsense. Like the strung out imbeciles in the house of the undying, taking rad soaked chems to inspire visions. This is a ploy of some kind.

“Cersei calls me a foreign whore.” he winces at the use of the word and his discomfort with it does not go unnoticed. “I was raised in foreign lands, but I was born on Dragonstone, not that I can remember. We fled Robert’s assassins when I was an infant. Robert was your father's best friend, right? Did he know his best friend sent assassins to murder a baby girl in her crib.” her lets her eyes wander as if considering the possibility. “Not that it matters. Both men are dead.” she watches as he stands straighter as if the mere notion of his father brings him to attention. As if he is prepared to salute or march. “Killed by Cersei Lannister and her schemes.”

“So many men have tried to kill me, I don’t remember all their names.” She takes another step forward “I have been sold. I've been chained and betrayed, raped and defiled.” Step. “Do you know what kept me standing through all those years in exile?” Step. “Faith. Not in any gods” step “not in myths and legends.”

As she takes another step his eyes flit to the ground she’s walking on, acknowledging her defiance of his order, then back up to her eyes. “In myself. In Daenerys Targaryen. The world hadn’t seen a dragon in centuries until I built Drogon. Until I birthed him with my sweat and blood and labor. The Bloodriders hadn’t crossed the sea, any sea. They did for me.”

The wolf is closer to her than to him now. The beast could extend its neck out and snap its jaws and crush her head in a single bite.
She plants herself in front of him. Defiance straightening her spine. “I was born to rule the Seven Kingdoms, and I will.”

“You’ll be ruling over a graveyard.” his voice is low and intense, both in tone and volume. The ominous warning meant for her ears alone.

“You don’t believe him.” Seaworth pleads to her. She shifts her gaze from the young man to the old one. “I understand that. It sounds like nonsense. So does Dothraki Bloodriders roaming Westeros. So does wildlings and Northmen living peacefully. He was named Commander of the Night's Watch. He was named Commander of the Northern Front. Not because of his birthright. He has no birthright. He’s a damn bastard. All those hard sons of bitches chose him as their leader because they believe in him. All those things you don’t believe in, he faced those things. He fought those things for the good of his people. He risked his life for his people. He took a knife in the heart for his people. He gave his own--”

Jon turns sharply to his executive officer with harsh look, and the man startles short. It's the first time she’s seen any real reaction from him. This whole time, through her temper, through their tension, he’s been stoic and unmoving. Now his nostrils flare, and a rope of muscle flexes at his neck. Davos offers a silent apology and continues.

“If we don't put aside our enmities and band together, we will die. And then it doesn't matter whose skeleton sits on the Iron Throne.” the old man’s tone has become paternal, and her own intensity seems to soften with his words. Jon Snow’s as well. She watches him inhale heavily. Eye her. Eye Davos. Then look at his wolf.

With no obvious prompt, it lays down next to his feet.

“If it doesn’t matter who wears the crown, or who rules Westeros, then why not surrender your command” she asks earnestly. The cold Northern wind blows through again with another long whistle. Picking up the silver ringlets pulled free from her braid and lifting them gently.

“Why would I do that?” he shrugs noncommittally and she opens her mouth to let her dragon roar again but… he shakes his hand, warding off her wrath “I mean no offense, Your Grace, but I don't know you. As far as I can tell, your claim to the throne rests entirely on your father's name, and my own father fought to overthrow the Mad King. The North placed their trust in me to lead them, to train their sons and daughters, and make sure we all survive the Winter and I will continue to do so as well as I can.”

“That’s fair.” she admits. “But it’s also fair to point out that I am the rightful queen of Westeros and by seceding and declaring the North Independent, you are in open rebellion.”

He nods. “Sounds about right” he turns to the girl on the ATV. “Arya…” he makes a spinning motion with his index finger and she throttles the engine, darting off into the forest.

Arya Stark… Varys’s briefing says she disappeared eight years ago, immediately before their father was killed.

“Forgive my manners, your grace, you must be tired from travelling.” The sudden shift in his tone has her wary.

“Am I your prisoner?” she asks bluntly.

“What?” his face scrunches up. “No.” she lets out a sigh of relief. “Are you armed?” he asks. She
nods and unbuttons the bottom two buttons of her coat, unbucks the holster and hands it to him. A pistol and an Arakh. He eyes the curved blade curiously before passing it back to the red haired raider. “Anything else?”

“Just Drogon.”

“Well I won’t ask for your Dragon.”

“I appreciate it. He’s my baby.” There’s something that’s almost like a smile that flits across Jon Snow’s face.

“We’ll be careful hitching him to the truck”

She nodded and directed the raider on where best to chain Drogon. He’s introduced as Tormund Giantsbane and as an additional good faith gesture she showed them the mini guns and handed over the belts of Ammo she had brought. He offers her the passenger seat of the truck, opening the door for her. Accepting she climbs in, and the Wolf jumps into the truck bed, with the Raider making the whole truck jostle under the weight.

“Just so we are clear” Commander Snow turns to her as he starts the engine. “We believe in guest right up North. We aren’t gonna hurt you or steal from you and we expect the same in return”

“We believe the same things, Jon Snow.”

To her surprise, they turn into the forest instead of the road. Moving through the dense wood. Its dark out, nothing but the headlamps of the truck illuminating their way through the trees.

It makes her nervous about Drogon. What if they crash into tree? Or take a sharp turn and the hitch tilts? Or if his tires can’t gain traction while being dragged because of the snow, so it just drags and wears her them down and the next time she tries to fly she won’t able to gain enough speed so she’ll be grounded…?

Trapped. Alone in a strange place.

Her eyes dart to the rearview mirror, and nervously search around for a glimpse of her Dragon. But its’ dark and Drogon is mostly black and is obscured by the Giant Wolf.

“Ghost, Lie Down” he commands, and flips the tab beneath the mirror changing the angle so and Drogon instantly comes into view as the wolf settles down.

“Better?” he asks.

“Yes, thank you” she answers hastily, pulling a silver strand behind her ear. He’s watching her.

“How do you find Dragonstone, your grace?” Davos asks from the back seat.

“It’s beautiful. Have you been?”

“I served Stannis Baratheon and the Coming Dawn from Dragonstone. I’ve spent many good years there.”

“Ah...are there any secrets you are willing to share with me?” He cringes, and she suppresses a shudder because she knows what he’s thinking. They had found some rather unpleasant things left behind by the Coming Dawn. Specifically, by Queen Selyse. Missandei had screamed when they opened the door to find jars of dead babies suspended in Green Fluid. “Pleasant secrets…?”
There’s a pause, and Jon Snow shifts in his seat.

“Have you watched the Sunrise from the Table yet…”

“The day after we landed,” she confesses. “My whole life the sun has set west into the narrow sea.” She turns back in her seat to look at the officer. “I wanted to see it rise from it.” he nodded, understanding filling his grey eyes.

“When you return, get down to eye level with the table and watch the sunrise again. There are hidden etchings that can only be seen at the first light of day.”

She had expected some poetic nonsense about Sunrises, but now she was frothing with curiosity. There is a secret on Dragonstone.

“Etchings?” she asked, eyes wide. “What sort of etchings” He leaned in so he was in the space between the front two seats. Even Jon Snow turned slightly, dark eyes flashing back and forth between the front window and his XO.

“The best kind…” he whispered, his voice laced with mischief and conspiracy. “...A treasure map” The words hang in the air for moment and then she bursts out laughing, and a broad smile splits Davos’s face. Jon Snow shook his head and let out a sound that could almost be a chuckle. The start of one at least. And as she turns back around the tree line thins and bright lights poke through the dense wood.

“Welcome to Winterfell, your grace.”

Westeros is old. Very old. With a long and complex history, marred by violence and struggle. These buildings tell that story. Long low troop barracks transition from Stone to concrete to wood and scrap. This place has served as a base for centuries of war. This place has been home to centuries of Soldiers.

Several windmills dot the horizon, slowly turning and generating power, copper lines stringing between them and the buildings in long drooping lines. Huge shaggy cows use their broad faces to shovel snow off green/blue winter grass as they graze.

The house they pull up to is unlike anything she’s seen. It’s a huge wooden house backed up against another grove of trees. And like the long low barracks they drove past, it shows the long history of Westeros. Parts of it are stone, parts wood, and bits and pieces of scrap.

Even this place has not been spared from war. There are faded scorch marks from a fire. Theon’s fire. Some are worn with time and weather, and others, like the ones on the stone steps leading up to a covered porch, have been dutifully scrubbed until what remains are dim scratched whisps.

It still looks like a home… defying the violence visited upon

She takes the moment to eye over Drogon as they back into a huge garage near the House.

There doesn’t appear to be anything wrong, but she should consider making some Snow Tires to ensure that that the worst of her anxiety is alleviated.

Missandei promised she only packed essentials to keep the load light on Drogon but, the bag is heavier than it should be. Probably just wobbly from flying all day.

“Here. I’ll trade you.” he extends a hand for the pack and in the opposite he gives her a key. “Only
you, me and Davos have a copy. Your Dragon is safe.”

“Thank you” she tucks it carefully into the pocket of her riding leathers beneath her jacket as they lock the garage behind them and she realizes she never rebuttoned it after handing over her weapons. The leathers beneath, while mostly modest, were made for much warmer climates and her midriff is exposed. He nods and gently guides her towards the house. A

Worn steps and railings. Chipping paint. Lights shining out from the inside betraying the silhouette of a tall young woman opening the door.

Sansa Stark is the most striking woman she’s ever seen. She shocks Daenerys with her beauty, the lines of her cheeks and jaw, the ice of her eyes, the bright red pin straight hair neatly pulled away from her face in a simple elegant tail.

Drogo and her gave each other matching tattoos. His was a sun surrounded by little stars and hers was a moon. He wasn’t a very good artist and its a little more than a simple circle on the inside of her wrist. But to her it was the circle of his arms.

"Yer Jalan Atthirari Anni” he would whisper when she was safely tucked within them.

If she is the Moon, than Sansa is snow. Her pale white skin cuts hard into a long black coat, over a long grey woolen skirt. A delicate chain runs from the high buttoned collar to a pocket at her waist.

“Welcome to Winterfell, your grace. I am honored to have you as a guest in our family’s home.” She extends a gloved hand in greeting and Daenerys takes it.

“Thank you, Ms. Stark, it's an honor to be invited.”

The young woman offers bread, salt, wine. A deep tradition in Westerosi culture. As Tyrion explained it was symbolic for offering assurance that her needs were met while in another persons home.

“I’m sure you’ll want to speak with Tyrion and let him know you’ve arrived.” Sansa says as her brother passes her to hold up on the door for them. “He’s been in contact every hour or so.”

The wolf follows them inside and she is introduced to Brandon Stark. He’s a sickly boy in a wheelchair. The boy was thought dead. He disappeared along with the youngest Stark when Theon burned the home down.


Jon Snow removes his coat and offers to take Daenerys’. The house is warm and she gladly accepts. Sansa Stark, with her high collar and gloved hands, does not.

To her surprise, she is given privacy when speaking with Tyrion.

“And what do you think about this Army of the Dead?” She asks after bringing him up to speed.

“I’d very much like to believe that Jon Snow is wrong.” There’s a low pitch whine running below his voice. It’s an issue with the radio. She peeks around the table looking for a repair kit. “But a wise man once said that you should never believe a thing simply because you want to believe it.”

“Which wise man said this?” It’s in a small set of drawers beneath the table, under an Azhor Ahai
adventure book. Books like these are published by the Rad Temple in Volantis and given out to children on the streets to lure them into the faith. They are a common sight in the Free Cities, but, she never would have suspected to find one here.

“I don’t remember.” She furrows her brow at his answer, as she examines the front cover of the paperback book. There’s pretty cursive initials, S.B, and a lovely sketch of a small doe on the inside cover.

“Are you trying to present your own statements as ancient wisdom?” The connections to the radio have enough slack that she can turn it to make the required adjustment easily.

“I would never do that...To you.” Two simple screws on the back plate. “The reason I believe Jon Snow is because he agreed to meet with you. I would have told him not to. I would have told him to stay up north and let you and Cersei fight it out.” she removes it easily and finds where the speaker wire is exposed. “They can take reasonable precautions against Wildfire and Winter is on their side if anyone chose to invade. But Jon Snow invited you anyway. You don't have to believe him… all you have to do is take steps to a productive relationship with a possible ally.”

“Do we even have enough guns?” The long curved tweezers from the repair kit gently prod the wire back into its socket. And with a pop Tyrion’s voice clears up instantly. She smiles and admires her handy work before screwing the plate back on.

“Perhaps… we should be getting another load of supplies from Mereen within the next week or so. There’s also what we seized from Cersei’s forces during your last encounter. Why...what are you thinking?

“I'm not sure yet, just get me some numbers if you can…”

“Of course.”

“Tyrion…” She wants to ask about the table, and supposedly hidden treasure map. But.

“Your Grace?”

“Sansa is stunning.” It's just a silly story, Davos said it to diffuse the tension.

“And also cunning. Be careful. If you find yourself stuck, appeal to her courtesy.”

The stunning woman shows her to her room. And as they move to the second story, she can see how much damage the fire had caused. Not because of burns or scorch marks. But because of how much of it was new or rebuilt. This room was old though, a boys room by the looks of it. But its clean, warm, and has a window looking out over the trees.”

“I apologize, we haven’t had the opportunity to rebuild the guest house yet.”

“This is more than enough, thank you.” She has slept in much worse places than this. Her eyes venture to her bag on a trunk at the foot of the bed. A tray of food, with a pitcher of water and a small decanter of liquor are on the table. Bread. Salt. Wine.

“Your Grace…” Sansa starts, her striking features pleading. “I ask you to keep in mind that this is not only an active base of operations for the Northern Front, but it also my family's home.”

“I understand.” the young woman offers a tip of her head.

“Meals are in the mess at 0800, Midday, and 1800, but if you need anything at all, please let me
know. My office is downstairs, and my room is down the hall.”

She’s left alone to rest and unpack. It’s late and it was a long journey. But as the moon lifts higher in the night sky, Daenerys finds herself restless and pacing the room.

The dinner tray has been eaten, and there’s been half a dozen plans started and erased in the sketchbook with her designs for Drogon.

She keeps repeating the meeting on the road over and over again in her thoughts. The one detail that keeps rising to the forefront of her mind was Commander Snow’s reaction when Davos mentioned he took a knife to the heart.

Certainly it was an exaggeration, a knife to the chest can be recovered from.

But the heart?...

The technology needed to survive such a thing died with Valyria.

It was his sudden knee jerk reaction that takes her off guard. The quick jolt, and silent command, deep brown eyes going black in a flash of emotion that broke the stoic expression on his handsome face.

Her cheeks feel hot and she decides to test her status as a not-prisoner and wander the grounds. Let the cool winter air blow such thoughts away.

The house is empty… Or at least no-one crosses her path. She can hear a sewing machine running and the sound of a small child crying and a woman’s voice hushing it before humming softly.

She tugs on her coat as she circles the porch. It’s stone with wooden railings and it wraps around the house, allowing generations of Starks to view the entire property from their home.

“Valar Morghulis, Daenerys Targaryen”

The greeting takes her by surprise as she turns to find Arya Stark hanging from straps hung from the rafters of the porch’s roof. Rather, she is pushing down into the straps as she holds herself midair in a plank. The lean muscles shift beneath her skin as she drops down, before pushing herself back up in a slow smooth motion.

“Valar Doharis, Arya Stark” the girl smiles, looking up at her. Red faced from the strain of the endeavour, her short brown hair pulled into two tight buns on either side of her head. Sweat drips down onto short woven rug with a reed mat on top of it. Bravossi. She’d recognize the pattern anywhere. “Gaomagon ao ųzaldrîzes valyrîha?”

“I only know some of the Bravossi dialect, your grace” She answers in Westerosi as she pushes her feet up from the plank into a handstand in the leather straps. And begins to slowly walk on air back down. Holding each muscle taut with every phrase she utters in Valyrian.

“Like… ’Hello’” Step into nothing. “How much is this?” Another. “It’s how much?” ; “There’s no way its worth that?” ; “What do you mean supply and demand?” ;“What do you mean the Dragon Queen seized the means of production and the Iron Bank may collapse?” She walks her way down till her feet touch the floor.

“The Iron Bank did not collapse. We stabilized the region before it came to that… also you do realize that the means of production meant slavery right…?” The girl gives her a cocky smile as she spreads her arms wide with straps and pushes herself back up by pulling them back underneath her.
“It was pretty rough for bit though.”

“Change is always difficult.” Daenerys inhales sharply.

This curious young woman is right. Her disruption of the slave economy had aftershocks felt throughout the free cities. Tens of thousands of people out of work. The Iron Bank and various shipping houses consolidating power and wealth while thousands were left destitute.

Tyrion’s policies helped stabilize things. But the Iron Bank came out with more power in the end.

“I wonder if the suits will back Cersei…” the young woman pulls herself upside down, wrapping her legs around the straps before freeing her hands and shaking arms loose.

“It’s possible…however Tyrion’s last assessment was that they were not willing to continue to loan money to the Crown”

“Then frankly, your grace, Tyrion is an idiot.” Arya folds her body in half, lifting herself by her abdomen, her hand slapping the wooden beam supporting her and the roof as she completes the sit up.

“How so…?” She does it again.

“Well…” Another “Cersei killed off all off all the Tyrells right…” stop. Breathe. Slap. “So where’d all their money go…”

“Some offshoot of their family in the Reach, I suppose.”

“But Margarey…” grunt “…was married to Tommen…” slap “…and if Cersei…” slap. “can take the Throne from him…”

“She gets the money too…” Daenerys’ face falls and she presses her thumbs into the bridge of her nose. Arya relaxes and hangs upside down.

“Sorry, your grace…” The girl scrunches up her face.

“No… you’re right…Thank you for pointing it out.” the girls offers an odd smile and Daenerys exhales. She’ll need to deal with that tomorrow. It’s even later at Dragonstone and there’s no point in speaking with Tyrion again right now. “Who taught you so much about Bravossi Economics.”

“No-one.” the girls flips herself back around in the straps landing on her feet and kicking them to lazily roll up the carpet. “Your Grace, I don’t know how to ask this politely.”

“Well you’ve been so candid thus far.” she hops and pulls the straps from the rafters.

“Did you take a shower? There’s only like twenty minutes of hot water at a time, until Jon can build a better boiler so…” Daenerys shakes her head. The girl smiles as she gathers her things and bids her a good night.

It’s quiet out here, the only sound is wind, and bird noises and slight scrape of her boots on the stone steps transitioning to a gentle crunch on the snow.

The snow is beginning to fall, just a slight sprinkle, flitting to the ground with the breeze. She’s never seen snow before. Yes, she saw it when she was flying, and she saw it when they were driving up, but the snow at the front of the house has been greyed and slushed by boots and tires and activity.

But out back, out here where the forest creeps up to brush its branches against the roof of the house,
there is a soft blanket of white fallen ice. She tries to catch a flake on her tongue as she meanders through the trees.

As she walks further and further from the house the forest becomes dense and thick and wild and the trees loom above her like ancient sentinels, keeping something hidden and sacred. The winter wind blows through, rattling the leaves and needles of the trees, whispering to her. Telling her that she’s here...she’s finally here in Westeros...after dreaming and working and fighting for years…

She’s finally here.

And it’s more beautiful than she imagined.

There’s a small clearing where tree branches haven’t impeded the free fall of frost. And there’s a large heap of the stuff in the center. It looks soft and inviting. Tentatively, she sticks her hand deep into the pile, checking for rocks or branches. Fiddling with her fingers, now stiff from their cold exploration, she looks around, checking to see if she has any visitors.

And seeing no-one she flops backwards into it with a mad giggle, and makes a snow dragon by flapping her arms like wings into it. The cold is exhilarating and she lets out a small squeal of delight as she throws it into the air around her, making her own little snow storm.

As it falls, her eyes drift upward and she gasps as she sees the aurora light up the sky in green and yellow flashes. She lays back in the snow and watches them flicker and dance on a backdrop of Northern stars she’s only seen on starmaps.

“An Amazing thing to see…” There’s a voice from behind her. His voice. Northern drawl pulling on the vowels. She sits up and turns to look at him as he approaches, his boots crunching on the snow. “When I was a boy, they used to come almost every night… Something about the rads and the atmosphere, but they came less and less as I grew up. They’re still common beyond the wall… but not so much down here.”

“They’re beautiful.”

“Aye, that they are” she looked up at him and he was looking at her. She suddenly feels foolish. Sitting, with snow in her hair in front of a man who she is trying to convince to surrender his command. She shivers involuntarily and he frowns and offers a hand to help her to her feet. The snow melted beneath her as she laid looking up, soaking her coat from her shoulders to her seat.

His hand is warm against her frozen skin.

“Do you not have gloves, your grace?” he asks quietly.

“Only the ones for Drogon.”

“We’ll get you some...and a proper coat” He’s pulling off his and offering it to her.

“I’m quite alright” she starts and as if on cue a sharp wind cuts through the trees and pulls a shudder from her as it hits the damp material on her back. “On second thought… she shrugs off her coat and pulls on his.

It smells like gunpowder along the sleeves when she brings her hands to her mouth to warm them. And sawdust caught from bits caught in the fur along the collar. And smoke. He had hung it by the fire when they entered the house.
“Would you like an escort back to the house, your grace?”

“No, I believe I know the way back... ” She points through the trees across the line of her faded boot prints in the snow.

“Goodnight, your grace.” He nods and turns away from her. Without his coat, he has simple black flannel shirt.

“Wait, where are you going?”

“I was heading out to the godswood.”

“Do you have a Were-wood tree?”

“Aye, Weirwood” he corrects. She practices the new pronunciation a few times silently under her breath, appreciating the new musical lilt of the double W.

“Weirwood... I’ve only ever seen bits of it sold at Markets in Essos.”

“Would you like to see it?”

“Another time, I wouldn’t want to disturb you at prayer.” He had given her privacy to consult with Tyrion, the least she could do was return the favor by allowing him his own thoughts. But when he shrugs and indicates its no trouble, she can’t resist the curiosity of something new.

The trees in this part of the woods are dense and he walks alongside her, occasionally directing her to not trip over an obstacle hidden in the snow. But then the snow thins and fades into rich earth and deep moss and the trees seem to swallow them, a low mist gathering around their feet.

There’s something haunting and intense about the white tree, with its blood red leaves. Especially, under the moonlight. Its ashy trunk twisted with knots. The knots almost look like a face, with lines of tree sap for tears. He sits on one of the roots watching her carefully, as she extends a hand to touch it. The treebark isn’t flaky or rough, but smooth like marble, or taut skin.

“How old is it?”

“A couple hundred years at least.”

“Amazing. And It never rots?”

“As far as I know...”

They’re silent for a while. It’s easy to fall into here. She circles the tree, carefully meandering through the roots. Leaving him alone to his thoughts and finding solace in her own as she ponders the trees age.

There’s a scraping sound and she moves back around to find Jon Snow shaving small ribbons off an amorphous piece of wood with a small knife.

“I’m sorry if I was rude to you on the road” he says quietly. The words hang thick in the air for a long minute.

“I should apologize as well... I was being dismissive. You clearly believe there is something out there that threatens your people.”

“It’s hard for me to Fathom. It really is... Eight years ago, if someone would have told me about
Wights and the Army of the Dead. I would have called them mad…” he admits, cutting a sharp edge off the wood.

“To be honest, Jon Snow, I don’t know if I have the guns to give you if I did.” his eyes flit up to the leaves and he sighs heavily.

“Davos’s treasure map.”

“What?”

“Stannis left a cache of weapons on Dragonstone. Davos etched the map on the table to mark the location.” Her mouth drops open. “He’s an old pirate. He’s always hiding sweets, sendin’ the kids on little hunts.”

“That’s adorable.” he nods and gives a hint of a smile as she sits down on the roots across from him and processes this new information. He just gave it to her. She could take it and horde it over him until he’s desperate enough for it.

But that's not right...

“You know, I’m not going to let Cersei continue to rule Westeros”

“Aye. I expected as much.”

“And you know I haven’t changed my mind about what territories belong to Westeros.”

“I haven’t either.”

“Perhaps…” she starts, some of his dark hair has fallen out of the knot. It’s curly. “Perhaps there is some other arrangement we can come to…” he looks up at her, curious. “Regarding the weapons…” she adds hastily.

“What would you have in mind?”

“I’m not sure.” she answers honestly. He looks up into the blood red leaves for a moment before his eyes meet hers.

“I should probably take you back. It’s late...early…” he corrects himself.

The walk back is slow and silent and she can’t help but watch the snowflakes fall.

“I’ve never seen anything like it…”

“Snow?”

“It’s warm in Essos.”

“That explains why you’re throwin’ yourself into Snowdrifts.”

“It looked...cozy. Like how you would imagine clouds to be.” She knows from personal experience that clouds are cold and icy and generally unpleasant. But she’s the probably the only person alive who knows that.

She turns to him and sees it for the first time. It starts at his eyes, the deep brown eyes brightening as his cheeks apple and the corners of his mouth turn upward and his lips part showing a flash of teeth. Jon Snow has a devastating smile. Genuine and warm.
“First time I’ve heard anyone call snow...cozy.”

“There’s a first time for everything.”

The house is mostly dark at the late hour. Despite this Brandon Stark wheels himself into the room as Commander Snow places their coats by the fire.

“Good Evening Your Grace.” he greets her “Jon…?”

“Aye Bran, A minute…” he turns to her. “Have a good night, your grace.”

“You as well, Jon Snow.”
She fixed his radio.
“Are you sure there isn’t like...Like a recorder or something?”

“No.” Bran shakes his head. “She just fixed it. That whining sound is gone.” the boy clicks the speaker on and off demonstrating absence of the noise.

“Is there anything else out of place?”

“Other than the tool kit, no.”

Jon blows air out his nostrils in a low hmmm as he looks between his brother and the fixed radio. Bran’s eyes seem roll back with a heavy sigh. He’s tired. He overexerted himself today. Tomorrow will be hard one, and Sam’s gone off to help at White Harbor. Maybe he should ask Gilly give him a sedative so he sleeps all day instead of risking a seizure while Sam is away.

He helps his brother to the privy and then from his chair, to bed. Bran looks better than he did when he first arrived home, almost six months ago, but he’s still so fucking light and bony as Jon carefully maneuvers him to bed.

“I can take it from here, Jon. Thank you” he grunts as he pulls his useless legs onto the bed after Jon has him seated. “What do you think of her...?”

“I don’t know.” Bran pulls the covers over his legs and lies back, carefully lowering himself into the pillow. “She’s very determined.”

“I think she’s pretty.”

“Aye.” She’s beautiful. A real Valyrian princess, like from the books he’d read as a boy.

He can never sleep.

It's the sound of Ramsay’s skull against his fist. It's the howls of the wights as they chased them through the burning town. It’s the percussive ‘pop’ ‘pop’ ‘pop’ of the firing squad as he executed the mutineers, as he killed a boy he had spent years watching become a man. It’s the screams and explosions as Stannis Baratheon massacred the FreeFolk. It’s the crackle of burning Weirwood as the Rad Witch burned Mance. It’s Lt. Thorne rasping “for the watch” and the dull wet puncture of a knife plunging into his chest. It’s Commander Mormont telling him his father had been killed and that his sisters were most likely dead. It’s Sansa’s sobs as she wept into his shoulder, telling him everything that had happened to her; how she had been so close...and he hadn’t saved her. It’s the bastard mocking “run to your brother”, and his baby brother’s faltering frightened footfalls and the sound of a gunshot, not ten feet in front of him.

It’s a weak broken whisper “You know nothing, Jon Snow.”

And it's the infinite silence of death.

And then in the blackness, there’s a laugh.

Bright and silver and throwing herself into the snow.

He was up before sunrise. Gilly was already awake feeding Little Sam some porridge, and there’s bread baking in the oven, and coffee on the stove.

“Thank you Gilly” she smiles at him sleepily and nods.

Jon unlocks Sansa’s office and pulls out his father’s old contact book from one of the shelves. It’ll
have the location of the scav site he needs to visit. Catelyn had buried their family’s treasures in a trunk in the yard when Robb mustered the militia after their father’s death. They didn’t know about it until Bran had come home. It was full of books, pictures, birth certificates (his noticeably missing), Catelyn’s records and the player, their fathers letters and his dress uniform, some jewelry for Sansa (and Arya if she ever wanted it) from their dead Aunt Lyanna and their mother. Treasures.

There was a picture of him and Arya and Robb. He and Robb were throwing her off the pier at their family cabin at LongLake. It was one of the few things he owned that he cared about. There weren’t many photos of him, but Bran said that his mother loved the way Arya was laughing in this one and she couldn’t bear to let it go. Catelyn hadn’t been overtly cruel or negligent with him, only cold, her icy eyes always flitting over him either ignoring him, or judging him.

It's the way Sansa is looked at him last night after she brought Daenerys to Robb’s room.

“Courtesy, Jon.” she’d snapped. “Courtesy and manners are neither submission nor weakness.” she turned taking out her silver pocket watch with a filigreed mockingbird and checking the time. The chain wavering where it was connected to her collar. “They are armor and they are tools. They protect your reputation...and they allow people to decide whether or not they like you based on your words instead of your behavior. They force people to pause in their judgement of you.”

“First fucking words out of her mouth were bend the damned knee.” That wasn’t actually accurate, but it was around the time he started paying attention to the words she was saying. He’d been examining her before that. Taking in the exaggerated shoulders of her coat. The odd curved knife at her waist. The silver of her hair. The shape of her legs underneath tight leathers.

“Other people’s behavior is not an excuse for your own.” He’d heard those exact fucking words out Catelyn’s mouth when Sansa and Arya would fight. And, ironically, out of their father’s mouth the handful of times he’d have to sit Jon down for a talk about Catelyn treating him unfairly. “You made her…” Her gloved fingers counted each of his offenses in turn. “Come Alone; Fly in the dark; Argue with you on the side of the road; Travel through the woods instead of the damned road”

“I am not allowing a fucking Dragon to land to in Winterfell. I was keeping you and Bran and Arya safe.” She’s right though... He should have ended the conversation on the roadside when he knew she wasn’t going to pull anything. When she acknowledged what her father was.

“You need to make it right, Jon” she said, simultaneously snapping the pocket watch closed. “...And please fix the damn boiler. There are eight people living here now. It’s not just you and I here anymore.”

To fix the fucking boiler, he needs Gendry to make a part; to have Gendry make a part, he needs to build the fucking crucible so they can melt down the scrap; in order to do that, they need to go scavving… which he hasn’t had any fucking time to do.

He explained this to her through gritted teeth and she responded back in kind. Then they stared at each other until they both let out a heavy sigh and she stopped being Catelyn, and he stopped being a Bastard.

They fought about everything the first few months back. She was playing head games, he was being stubborn. She was worried about feeding everyone, he was worried about an army of undead raiders.

But the Pack Survives.

They learned to adapt. She’s learned to stop pushing before he completely shuts down and cuts everyone off, and he has learned to trust that the games she plays protect their family as much as he does.
“I’ll work on it tomorrow...”

“I’ll keep her busy...” She rubs her eyes, and frustrated at finding the gloves, she pulled them off and tucked them into her pocket.

“Go to sleep Sansa.”

“I need to finish some sewing...besides I should remain available for awhile in case our guest needs any assistance.”

The machine is still out on the spare table in the corner and what looks like a stack of wool sleeves are ready to be set into jackets for the next round of recruits coming in month or so.

She fixed his radio.

The smell of gas hung in the air surrounding the garage.

The Dragon.

He unlocked and pulled the door open to vent it and his eyes dart around the machine searching for the waving distortion of escaping gas, listening for where the hiss is loudest.

Of course, it's coming the mouth of the huge steel dragon head above the front tire. His hand touches the cold steel of the snout and he pauses... ‘Don’t be a fucking idiot, Jon. It's not gonna come to life and bite you.’ He sticks his hand into the mouth, feeling gas flutter against his hand from a nozzle, and beneath it a valve of some kind.

He’s either about to get burnt to a crisp in a blaze of dragon fire or...

“Don’t!” she cries behind him and he freezes. “That will ignite it.” She’s wearing the coat from yesterday hastily thrown over a pair of soft leggings. But she doesn’t seem to care, as she crouches down next to the machine, ducking her head under its wing and twisting so she lays flat under it.

He hears the creak of metal on metal, and the hissing of escaping gas subsides.

“We must’ve bumped something when we went off-road.” she explains as she pulls herself to her feet. There’s a flash of moonglow skin below her throat as she bends to dust her knees off. It’s cold out, and when her coat opens, her shift is far too thin.

“How did you know?”

“Mother’s intuition.” she tosses a sly smile at him. “No, your umm... Ghost, was keeping my bed a little too warm, so I opened the window and smelled gas. I feared the worst”

‘My Ghost?’ Seven hells does that mean? It takes him longer than it should have to figure out that she means his direwolf and not...what he was thinking...

“Just kind of shove him if he gets in your way.”

“Not at all. He’s remarkable.”

He stands and gestures over the Dragon. It’s terrifying and breathtaking at the same time. Huge Wings, Huge Engines, Huge Guns. “This is a gorgeous beast.”

A shiver ripples over her as a gust of wind blows through the open door and she closes the coat around herself. “He’s not a beast to me. He’s my child... I made him with fire and blood.” Her violet
eyes cross along one of the raised wings and she looks...sad. But the moment passes, and the ringlets that fall down the side of her head bounce as she shakes herself out of her thoughts. “Be careful around Drogon, Jon Snow… zaldrīzes buzdari iksos daor... A dragon is not a slave. Even I am only his mother.”

The foreign words slip off her tongue and he nods. Because if he opens his mouth, he’s going to ask her to say it again. She yawns and bids him a good day, returning to her bed and his Ghost.

A real Dragon. A real Valyrian Princess.

It took them longer than expected to get to scav site. The easiest route had been blocked by long torn up road and dead trees and they needed to go off road for several miles before finding they found an alternate path. The forest was dense here and crept up next to the highway.

But the haul was worth it. The other scavvers that came through here probably didn’t have the manpower to lift the equipment. They managed it between the four of them, but by the end of it they were drenched. The heaviest thing had been a six foot long, three inch thick, solid steel sheet.

“What the fuck are you going to do with that?” Tormund gasped after they had finally slid it into the Truck Bed.

“Bullets” Gendry replied leaning against the truck “Drill a bunch of little holes, shape ‘em and then pour melted scrap in, then a few minutes later dump cold water on top of it. Bullets. Well slugs, but you can still shoot em. We’ll need to reinforce the gun barrels though”

Jon sat down and rested his head against the side of the tires as sweat dripped down from his hairline. He dug around in his pocket for a tie and stretched it around the hair gathered in his hand. ‘Just fucking close your eyes…’ something begged inside him. ‘Just for a few minutes…’

Winter Roses grew wild here. The bushes grew thick wherever their roots could find earth. Catelyn had grown them. Big thick bushes of them surrounding the house, disguising the stone foundation and porch with the bright blue blooms. There’s a handful still growing wild in the Wolfswood ...but her rose garden was probably one of the first things Theon burned based on the scorch marks.

Fucking Theon.

“If you cunts are done…” Clegane spat as he opened the car door “I got things to do”

Clegane was driving and he must’ve closed his eyes, because when he opened them the sun had risen high and the sun was approaching its zenith.

“You look like shit, Jon Snow” Tormund broke the silence.

“You’re always saying I look like shit. I think you’re just jealous.”

“You’re always saying I look like shit. I think you’re just jealous.”

“Up late with the Dragon Queen, were ya?” he growled and gave Jon a wild eye. “So here I am minding my own business, taking a leak on a tree. When something catches my eye. Its our boy, here, Jon Snow walking with the dragon girl in the moonlight,” he a wide gesture to the roof of the cab “…under the Auroras. And there she was all snug in his coat, with her hair all wild with snow, rosy cheeked and grinning like a madwoman” He slapped Jon’s shoulder. “So, kiss and tell Johnny Snow, how does Dragon pussy taste?” Jon grimaced.

“There’s nothing to tell. I couldn't sleep so I went to the godswood. She was looking at the lights and her coat was wet. I was being polite”
“Bet that's not the only thing that was wet” he punctuated the joke with a loud laugh.

“Shut up” Clegane growled.

They were quiet for a few moments.

“So you can’t sleep and so you look like shit”

Jon exhaled. “Aye” he admits, sagging his shoulders.

“Had a bit of that myself, after the wall” Tormund pulled a flask from his belt.

The Fucking Wall. Fucking Stannis Baratheon and the Fucking Night’s Watch. The FreeFolk had been desperate to escape the undead. And they gunned them down. He had gunned them down. And they gunned him and his brothers down too. And for what…

There was a painful twinge in his chest alongside his heart. He winced and exhaled slowly, trying to breathe through it.

It’ll pass

“For the watch” they stabbed him again.

“Drinking’s good, Fighting’s better, Fucking’s best.” Tormund advised.

“And who am I supposed to Fuck, Tormund.” Jon turned sharply in his seat. “Brienne?”

“If you’re all done clucking like a bunch of hens…” Clegane warned

“Shove off…” Tormund laughed. “You’re just mad that I’m the redhead on this little trip”

“What!” Gendry exclaimed. He had been watching the exchange intently.

“Oh you haven’t seen it yet, have you? Sandor here always jumping to help, always a few steps behind her, and his ‘thank you, little bird’s”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” The huge man sat up straight. Extending to his full height. Making himself bigger. Tormund smiled.

Clegane was Sansa’s bodyguard. Her muscle. It was his job to always be a few steps behind her when she left Winterfell. Arya’s too, though when he told her she’d laughed and tossed a knife in the air, and threw it so it stuck into the wall a few inches from the burned side of the his face.

No-one was going to hurt Catelyn Stark’s girls ever again.

“Oh I forgot. You're not quite Sansa’s...type. Are you?”

“Shut up Tormund” he ordered. Wildlings don’t care about that sort of thing. Its commonplace North of the Wall. But even though they seceded from Westeros, the taint of ‘the Seven’ and all those rules still dominated most people's lives. Even those who follow the old gods.

He didn’t know until… until the Broadcast the crown released about what happened at the Sept. Sansa had collapsed to her knees in the small radio room. Weeping into his shoulder as he did his best to comfort her. He knows what it's like, to lose the woman you love.

Jon knew Tormund was trying to get a rise out of him. It was his way. Provoke him until he lashes
out and then they all have a good laugh at his expense. They had done it a hundred times before. It was Ygritte’s favorite game. She’d tease him and poke at him, and he’d sit there stone faced, ignoring the jibes, until finally he’d snap and they’d fight and then…

Drinking’s good. Fighting’s better...Fucking’s best.

“Well speaking of your sisters.” Tormund said with a wicked gleam and pointed at Gendry “How bout this one and and the little spitfire?”

Gendry’s face hit the back of Clegane’s chair as the huge man slammed on the brakes and Jon had him out of the car and pressed up against the door before he realized what he was doing.

“I didn’t have Davos smuggle you out of King’s Landing so you could mess around with my little sister.” he roared at the boy.

“I didn’t do anything!” Gendry’s eyes were wide.

Tormund was roaring with laughter as he rounded the front of the vehicle.

“Oh you should have seen it Jon, as soon as Davos brought him through the gates, she practically jumped him. I didn’t know if she was gonna kiss him or kill him”

The pain raged, hot and sharp in his chest. He clenched his jaw as he released Gendry.

“Don’t fuck with Arya”

Despite having the shit scared out of him, Gendry was still eager and enthusiastic about getting the stuff set up. The Starks scrap heap was by the barn, everything useful had long been plucked away, and what remains now waits to be melted in a crucible and turned into bullets, and guns and parts. He can get everyone off his ass about the fucking boiler.

Brienne and Davos joined them after a while with Podrick in tow. They were digging a hole where they would bury the fuel tank for the smelter.

“Commander…” she announced “I am happy to report that you have a hundred new troops ready to begin the next phase of their training.

“You know what that means, Jon Snow” Tormund called.

“All bets are on” Davos shouted.

It was a little tradition they started when they introduce them to melee weapons. They would fight and the lads would take bets and a good time would be had by all. Brienne said it was undignified. Davos said it was good for morale. Then Brienne had started betting and started winning and it was Davos’s morale that had suffered.

As shouts rang down with bets and speculation, he heard small voices shouting his name. The girls were running after him. Sansa and Daenerys walking about ten yards behind them. He pulled himself out of the trench and bends to meet the girls at their eye level.

“I met the Dragon Queen…” Joanna announced proudly “But I told her that we weren’t fuckin’ kneelers and that I was Chief of the Ice River Clans” Jon winced. That probably hadn’t gone over well.

“You shouldn’t swear at Queens” he warns her as he shifts onto a knee, “Its impolite.”
“Aunt Sansa told me.”

“She has silver hair. Like an old lady.” Willa exclaims “And purple eyes. And she is very nice. And she talks funny, and her Dragon is red and black.” she hops excitedly in front of him from foot to foot with each detail added. “And when we asked if we could ride it. She said perhaps…if we finish our lessons, and listen to Aunt Sansa and Miss Gilly, and if you said its okay.”

“No riding the Dragon.”

“But why…”

“It's not safe.”

“You said that about the Treefort. And it’s fine.”

The treefort. Where Bran broke his legs. Where he almost died. Where all this bullshit began. He tries to speak as calmly as he can. She had run up to him so happy and now her bottom lip was stuck out in an obnoxious pout. She’s whinging and teasing. But she needs to know he’s serious. It's not safe. He promised he’d keep them safe.

“Willa...Don’t go near the Fort. I will fix it soon. I promise. But until then... Do not go near it.”

“But…”

“That’s an order.” Its what his father used to say and he always listened.

Her face scrunches up and quivers and tears flood her grey eyes. “CROW!” she screams in his face and sprints away as fast as she can.

Joanna looks at him with Karsi’s face as Sansa and Daenerys come up behind where he’s knelt next the girl.

“I need you to go look after your sister, Chief.”

“Aye, Ser.” She answers quietly and runs off after her sister.. He takes a shaky breath as he stands, crossing his arms across his chest, his own sister beside him, looking at him equally unsure.

“They are delightful.” Daenerys chimes with perfectly proper Westerosi. “They were offering some creative ideas for improvements to Drogon.” her teeth flash in a bright smile without a hint of sarcasm. “I rather like, umm... Joanna’s idea to build him some large talons or claws.” She brings her hands up in a claw and snaps it shut to demonstrate how it would function on her Dragon.

“She’s a very bright girl” Sansa relaxes. He does not.

“Well Commander...” Davos claps him on the back taking some notes on small pad of paper. “Looks like most of the lads are feeling lucky, and betting on...” he stops himself mid sentence “Hello your grace, I trust you had a pleasant morning”

“I did, Ser, thank you. It’s absolutely beautiful here. What is this I hear of a wager?”

“Oh, just a little bit of sport for the lads. The Commander and Giantsbane will be putting on a little demonstration. Helps keep the troops enthusiastic.”

“Competition always brings out the best in us.”

“Are you a wagering woman, your grace?” Sansa asks.
“Of course, racing is the backbone of Dothraki culture. And betting on races are its economy.”

“Would you care to make one?”

“What are the rules…?”

“Melee combat. First to get 5 kills.” Davos answers.

She pauses and interlocks her fingers, tapping her thumbs together as she turns to look at Tormund. He is, currently, pretending to help pull Gendry out of the pit only to let go too early so that the young man ends up flat on his back. She draws a small hiss in through her teeth as he lands, and her eyebrows animating and pulling tight to the bridge of her nose.

And then Daenerys turns to look at him, examining him. Appraising him. “From boots to roots” as Mance would sing, whenever he caught Ygritte and him looking at each other. By the time her eyes meet his, he has to turn away and untie and retie the knot holding back his hair. The motion hiding the fact that his ears are hot and, probably, red.

“What do you feel your chances are Commander?”

“Fair.” he scratches at his beard.

“And will it be a fair fight…?”

“First Rule of improvised weapons is there is no such thing as a fair fight. If you are in a situation where you are forced to improvise then the odds are already against you” Commander Mormont's words come out automatically. Awkwardly. Recited over and over again as the old bear stalked up and down the yard. Repeated over and over again as Jon trained his men at the Wall, and now to his soldiers here.

“A practical lesson”

“Aye.”

Her hands break apart, and only to reconnect behind her back as she leans forward, one of her eyebrows cresting towards her silver hair. A long red scarf around her neck. It’s been made to look like a bloody cascade of scales, held in place at her shoulder with a large silver dragon brooch. “Do you fight dirty, Jon Snow?”

“Depends on who I’m fighting.”

Sansa is glaring at him and Davos chuckles softly. She pulls back with a smug look on her face and ever so slightly licks her lips. “I will bet on Giantsbane” Daenerys resolved, her posture returning to normal. “If only to spare you from betting against your blood.” she adds turning to Sansa.

Davos was two steps behind him as he strode over to the yard. “I know what you’re going to say…” his XO said as Jon picked up one of the handmade weapons they had racked up. Testing the grip and weight in his hands.

“Anything can be a weapon” Commander Mormont had told them during basic “but the most important weapon is here” he tapped his head and then he drilled them for weeks. He was a survivor who taught them how to survive.

Jon had picked Tormund because he fought like Commander Mormont. He was fearless. He was relentless. And he would equal parts encourage them and beat the snot of them when he needed to.
“If I ever have to engage her forces, I’d rather them not know what I can do.”

“Or...she sees what she has to gain.” he stalks up to him. “Makes you look like a more valuable ally...”

“I fucking hate these games.” He picks up a large pipe. Tormund likes to dual wield. So Jon would show them how to block. It was heavy and cumbersome, but it would take whatever Tormund threw at him.

“I don’t think she is playing games, at least not not the ones you’re thinking.”

He takes a practice swing with heavy steel pipe. He used a similar one beyond the Wall. Ammo for Longclaw was scarce up there so it was more practical to use something that wouldn’t need to be recharged, repaired, or reloaded.

She fixed his radio.

“She has a good heart.” he admits.

“A good heart? I've noticed you staring at her good heart.”

He taps the blunt end of the steel against the ground, with a series of loud frustrated thuds. Outside the small armory, a crowd has started to gather.

“There’s no time for that.”

Davos shrugs. “If it counts for anything, I noticed her staring at yours too.”

He had an instant to raise the pipe to block.

Tormund is ready for him. As soon as he stepped through the ring of soldiers, the raider had rushed him with an explosive fury of blows. But he was ready for him in return. Tormund always attacks with the right axe first. Jon’s warned him about it. Told him that he’s becoming predictable and that he’s telegraphing his movements.

The first axe hit the down on the pipe with a loud clang. Steel against steel. The second swung at his right. He dodged with a small jump.

“Lesson 1: Never give them a chance to prepare for you” Tormund shouted. “There’s no such thing as a fair fight.” the man repeats what he had told the Dragon Queen.

He took Tormund’s advice and swung at his head while he gloated and stopped it short. Tapping it gently on the back of the man’s skull

“Dead” Davos announced loudly. Sansa and Daenerys are standing next to him, laughing and chatting at the railing. That’s one...

Tormund let out a loud bellowing laugh and raised his weapons. “Lesson 2: Don’t get cocky”

And then he was pinned by the pipe in the mud. Tormund is pushing down on it while Jon has to fight both the weight of the wildling and the heavy downward force he’s applying to the weapon. And the violent grin on Tormund’s face forces Jon to ponder what exactly would happen if he let go and the let pipe and the weight and the force come crashing into his chest above his throat.

It would break his sternum, his clavicles and the maybe a few Vertebrae. His windpipe would be crushed with the forward momentum of Tormund's fall. And he’d be dead
...again.

“You know, Jon Snow…” Tormund says redoubling his efforts to force Jon further into the icy mud. “I hear the Dragon Queen bet on me to win… Wonder if she caught a whiff of my cock while you were out in the woods…”

His knee finds the raider’s groin in swift upward movement, and he shoves his attacker to the side with a heavy push and taps the pipe on Tormund’s chest.

“Dead” Two…

It’s Brienne that announces it this time, as she enters the ring of men and starts to slowly circle them, hands clasped firmly behind her back.

For now.

“That was a dirty trick.” He extends the pipe to help him up.

“You did it to me last time.” Tormund grabs it and yanks Jon down. And then the axe is at his throat, as his friend stops his fall by catching his shirt.

“Dead” She announces again.

And then Tormund laughs and he pulls him to his feet.

They circle and clash until he swings wide around Tormund’s head, catching it behind his neck and pulling him down to almost meet his knee.

“Dead” Three.

But the move leaves him open and the cold press of steel against his stomach is familiar and he knows exactly how it would feel if his friend pushed just a little bit harder.

“Dead”

He sees her out of the corner of his eye. She’s watching him. Sansa is looking at some papers and talking to Podrick and Davos. And she’s watching him. That intense expression back on her face. The one she had while she was giving her speech on the roadside.

They circled and then Tormund charged in with a fury of blows. Jon was struggling to meet them all with the Pipe. It was heavy and every time Tormund hit, a rattle went through his bones. There are a few ways to break a beserker’s rage. All rely on speed and resilience to hold up until that one moment when they gather strength for a power attack… and he rolls, both axes chopping to the dirt and muck where he just was.

He hears the gasp through the troops, and he has a second to register it as Daenerys before Brienne swung her telescoping rod at his head. The air above him whistles as he ducks beneath it.

It’s her preferred weapon. Usually it’s only 10 inches or so long and hangs at her belt. But with a snap of her wrist, it shunts out into a staff taller than she is. Strong enough to break bone. Light as a feather.

“My Woman!” Tormund erupts and she whips it at him. The speed of the movement almost slicing the hairs off his beard.

“DEAD” Davos shouts.
“No! She’s on my team.” the raider protests.

“Friendly-Fire” the old man counters.

She swings it back around at Jon, arcing in a 180 degree arc. Then she zips it back the other way. Slicing it through the air low, then high, then high again to throw him off... And he jumps and ducks and dodges.

Until its suddenly caught. Brienne stares down Arya as she holds the staff in the guards of her knives. The large blonde woman steps forward but his sister keeps a fluid grip. Moving effortlessly with each pull and tug of Brienne struggling to free her weapon.

Water-Dancing.

“Arya...she’s gonna-

Brienne retracts the staff and Arya drops, catching herself on her hands, and springing up as the staffs re-extends and slaps down into the mud where she had just been.

Tormund’s axe swings down at him and he catches it below the blade where the bat begins to taper down the leather wrapped handle. He lunges to hook his foot around Tormund’s.

He hits the ground and Jon moves to strike but he sacrificed footing and balance and he falters when he has to bring up the pipe to block Brienne’s.

Steel on Steel and she grinds the staff down the length of it finishing in a flash of sparks. Tormunds legs swipe around at his feet and he stumbles backwards when he tries to dodge.

Arya drops low, squatting deep on one leg, and spinning with the outstretched one, tripping Brienne.

Tormunds up and brings one axe across at Arya, she dodges, but she misses the second one.

Jon does not.

He catches it with the pipe. Swinging down hard on it as it comes across at his little sister. Hitting with enough force to knock it out of Tormund’s hands. He moves quickly, picking up the axe as Brienne comes across again the staff snapping across his weapons with two hard pings as he crosses them to block.

They come at him at the same time, raising the pipe to meet Tormund on the side, and slashing the axe across at Brienne.

He hears a whistle from behind him, and he drops so Arya can roll across his back to kick out at Brienne. The woman catches her by the calf and she drops to the mud. He brings up the pipe to block the staff whipping down at her.

Jon stands over her as Brienne and Tormund circle.

“Are you all right?” his eyes dart between them as she gets to her feet. She exhales heavily and nods pulling her knives out. “Ready...” He rolls the axe around in his hand, spinning it. She sets herself up to spring.

Arya leaps straight up in the air, kicking out at Tormund, while he darts at Brienne. Tackling her at the thighs. She crashes down and he springs to his feet to tap the axe by her head.

“Dead” Four...
His sister is deftly dodging Tormund’s strikes and he takes her place in front of him delivering blow after blow. One hand then the other against Tormund’s remaining axe.

Arya lurches behind him catching Brienne’s staff once again in the crossguard of her knives. One more fucking kill and they can put an end to this nonsense. He switches up the pattern of blows, feinting an attack to bring up the other axe to the side of Tormund’s head and stops the blade an inch from his ear.

“Dead.” Davos calls. And it’s fucking over.

He sighs as he drops the weapon. And then doubling over bracing himself on his knees. There’s a murmur of noise as Davos gives out orders for the afternoon, work details.

“Excellent match, Commander.” Brienne leans on her staff.

“What the fuck was that?” Her blue eyes briefly flash over to Davos. He chews on his lip. “And what about you?” he turns to Arya.

“I was watching.”

“My Woman! You fight like a GODDESS!” Tormund stands exclaiming loudly and limping over.

“If you’ll excuse me, Ser.” She marches away.

“Ahhh. She loves me.”

“I can tell by the way she’s always hitting you and walking away from you and telling you to fuck off” Arya chimes.

They go back and forth, trading insults. But, his eyes flash up to the railing and her eyes meet his and he can’t quite look away. Her features are somber, and her posture, rigid. But as he catches his breath and stares, she seems to relax under his gaze.

And for a moment he relaxes too.

And there’s that pang. The one he used to get patrolling alone atop the wall. The one he gets when he watches Gilly and Sam. The one he felt after he left Ygritte alone at the lake house.

Alone.

It’s too intense and he breaks through the circle of men, marching off. Arya following at his heels.

“I need a minute.” he leans up against the back wall of the barracks. He looks her over as they catch their breath. She looks just like him. Dressed in all black and covered in mud. Same dark hair pulled into the same knot. Arya nods and stretches her hands above her head and exhales deeply, slowly letting her arms drop, until her head lulls about her neck. He slides his back down the wall so he’s sitting in the snow.

His skin is hot from exertion and the cold snow sends a pleasurable shudder down his spine.

“Do you think the Dragon Queen was impressed?”

“That’s not the point. We were supposed to be teaching...not showing off…”

“Teaching is showing off.”
“Showing off with a point.”

“I think I made an excellent point…”

“Aye…” he admits. She’s an incredible fighter. But there’s a great deal of difference between a fighter and a soldier. And he has no idea how to explain that. “You fought well…”

“But you’re mad that I got involved.”

“I’m not mad. Its just…” he slaps his hands on his knees. Its just he doesn’t want her to be like him. He doesn’t want her to do what he does. He wants to protect her from everything he couldn’t for ten long years… She was always a fighter. Always wild. He should have never doubted her. Never doubted that she would have survived. He should have gone after her instead of believing the worst.

How does he begin to apologize for failing her?

He’s not sure if he got all the muck out of his hair, but if he stays in the shower for too long...he might never get out. Because it's warm, and relaxing and it's been nothing but the cold for ten years except for a few brief hours in a hot spring. Deep in a cave, hidden in the earth.

The scars are ugly things. Even after all this time, they shock him everytime he looks in the mirror. They marr his torso and they are just...fucking ugly.

He’s never been particularly vain. Ygritte would mock him and call him ‘pretty’ but then she’d lick her lips and stare at him like she was the wolf and he was her prey. It had made him feel uncomfortable at first… then confident. Bold.

His father would call it Wolfsblood.

Sansa insisted he needs to go to the Mess and sit for dinner rather than just grab something and get back to work. Diplomacy and all that.

The skunky musty scent of the smoke fills his nostrils as he steps out onto the porch.

“Alright Jon?” Bran asks as a cloud of smoke escapes his lips. He nods and takes a seat next to him on the small bench next to his chair. “Arya said she got to fight with you.” he just nods as Bran takes another drag.

“Are you hungry, Bran? Want me to take you to the mess?”

“Trying to get hungry.” he half laughs, tapping the end of the joint against the wheel of his chair before offering it to Jon.

“That’s your meds.” he declines. Bran shrugs. In truth, there’s nothing more he’d want rather than to just sit and smoke with his brother. But, who knows when he’ll next be able to go down to Greywater Watch and get more from the Reeds. And Sam says its seems to help the seizures, and at least it makes him want to eat.

“You should head over there. Sansa’s probably tormenting whoever is on kitchen duty.” Bran says unlocking his wheels and rolling past him through the doors. “Oh Pardon me, your grace.”

“Oh no. Pardon me” she steps aside, letting his brother pass. Her nostrils flare momentarily as she sniffs the air and then smiles at him knowingly. “Will you escort me to dinner, Jon Snow?”

“Aye, your grace.” Its starting to snow again. She’s still wearing that red dragon scale scarf, and it
brings out color in her cheeks as the wind whips against it.

“Did you get much opportunity to explore Winterfell?” she nods.

“Yes, Ms. Stark took me around. You run an efficient operation.”

“High Praise from the Dragon Queen.” She hmmms a non-response.

“I’d very much like to see the town soon, if that’s all right.”

“It’s a free territory.” she raises her eyebrow and he realizes what he said. Brushing on the heart of the unspoken conflict between them. “I...” he clears his throat. “I mean you’re not a prisoner.”

“Noted, Commander.” she laughs... and it’s a beautiful noise. Bright and Silver. Like her hair.

The mess is the one of the oldest buildings in Winterfell. Its essentially a Stone longhouse, with a massive fire place at each wall, and a steep angled roof to ward off the snow.

He pulls out her chair and she takes a seat.

“Thank you.”

He sits in the chair that was his father’s and now it’s his and that feels...wrong. He’s mildly aware that she’s in Catelyn’s. They’re late to the mess, most of the troops have already eaten and left. There are a few stragglers. Sansa is giving instructions to one of the troops on kitchen duty tonight.

“I’ve been putting some thought into the problem of your weapons, Commander Snow.” she smiles and nods her thanks as she’s served. Its potatoes and elk and some veg from the glass gardens.

“Aye.”

“I believe we can come to an arrangement. My men, while well-supplied...” She emphasizes “are ill equipped for Winter. According to the University at Oldtown, this will be the worst winter in a century.”

“Winter is coming” he recites.

“Indeed...” she swallows a quick bite of food. “I’d like for our people to engage in commerce, Jon Snow. My guns for blankets, coats, wool, fur, lumber.” She takes a few bites of food as he considers it.

It’s not impossible...

“I think we can work something out...I’d need to talk to Sansa...she has a better grasp on that sort of thing.”

“Which brings me to my next point...” she takes a sip of the liquor in the glass in front of her and her eyes light up at the taste. “I love Blackberries...” She licks her lips and folds her hands in front of her. “I also require assistance in order to work out a trade agreement. Economics, as your sister might have told you, are not my strong suit.” His eyes flash over at Sansa. She told him no such thing. “Oh... No...Arya.” She corrects.

There are several confused thoughts that cross Jon’s mind, most prominent of which is...Arya?

He’s pulled out of the thought by a head suddenly resting on his leg. Patiently waiting for his share of Jon’s dinner. Red eyes looking up at him pleadingly.
“What do you want?” he growls at him.

The direwolf snaps his jaw ever so slightly in response.

“Wait for it.” He turns back to Daenerys who’s rolling her eyes at him, a bright smile on her face. “So Tyrion and…?”

“My secretary, Missandei, and Jorah Mormont, my bodyguard.”

“Mormont?”

“Did you know him when you were a boy?” He has his gun. His father’s gun. His little bit of Valyria.

“No. I served as his Father’s aid in the Watch, and his niece Lyanna is my LT.” Her eyes go wide in surprise.

“Do you promote many women to command?”

“Those who earn it…” Ghost lets out a small whine. Head still pushing down on his lap. Jon takes a deliberate bite of food while maintaining eye contact with his wolf.

“Refreshing.”

“Necessary. If I only enlisted the men… I wouldn’t have much of a militia...And if I didn’t promote the women who earned it...I’d have a problem.”

She nods in agreement, taking a bite of food.

“So…” She swallows. “Tyrion and the others have your permission to come to Winterfell?”

He stares at her for a moment. It doesn’t feel like a trick. She takes another drink of the liquor. It doesn’t feel like a trick.

“Allright.” he agrees and a broad smile sweeps over her face. “You can radio them and We’ll get them at White Harbor in a few days.” he takes another bite and Ghost pushes his nose further into Jons lap. “Wait” he orders.

“Thank you. I believe we can come to a mutually beneficial arrangement.” He’s not exactly sure how he’s suppose to respond so he nods and his eyes drift to his sister as she pulls Beric aside, scribbling notes.

“He’s very excited to speak with Sansa.” She says after a minute and he realizes she followed his gaze.

“Yea...well they both like to talk.”

“We all like what we’re good at.”

“I don’t” Daenerys had been reaching for something. But she stops and tilts her head to look at him, and folds her hands in her lap. She’s doing it again. That long stare like she’s trying to see through his head.

“No. I suppose you wouldn’t.”

He takes a long drink of ale. Letting the hoppy, yeasty drink calm his nerves. She’s eating calmly,
but she has that sad expression on her face.

“I hope you didn’t bet anything too—” he stops mid-sentence because he can’t think of the end of it and he shovels some more food in his mouth to disguise it.

“She refused to follow through. Though I clearly lost.” She chews silently for a moment, and then suddenly put her fork down. “Do you do fight often...In that fashion?”

“No. It’s supposed to be a lesson.”

“I have no taste for Bloodsport either. It’s caused me nothing but problems.”

“In Essos...?” he asks. He’s never been out of the North, and she’s been all over the world. Her, Arya and Sansa have seen places and things he could only dream about. And he’s seen...Ice.

A lot of fucking Ice.

And Dead people. Lot of dead people.

“The ‘Wise Masters’ of Mereen” she rolls her eyes as she addresses them. “Used matches to suppress the enslaved population. When we occupied the city it was the first thing they petitioned for. Not food. Not work. Murder for Sport. Murder so they could feel something other than the misery of their everyday life.”

His thumb traces the burn scars on his hand as she speaks.

“What happened?”

“I resisted and compromised and finally relented. And then they tried to kill me.”

“At least they didn’t succeed.” he jokes morbidly. His enemies succeeded. She’s looking at him with one of her eyebrows raised and her tongue held tightly between her teeth. “...Sorry. You’re here… I can assume they’re not.”

“I gave the Wise Masters a choice: they can live in my new world, or die in their old one. They chose poorly.” He drums his fingers along the outside of the mug of ale. “You’re not sure how you feel about that?”

“No. I’m not.” he admits.

“You’ve made men pay the slaver’s price. You executed Petyr Baelish for selling your sister.”

“I killed Littlefinger for a lot of reasons. None of them were because he rejected my authority.”

“And I killed the Masters because they were slavers. I killed them because they treated human beings like they were worth less than one of the cows you raise. I killed them because they profited on human suffering.”

“And how much suffering did you cause because people didn’t want to live in your world.”

“How many people died in the fight to recapture your home?”

“Thousands” he answers. “Thousands of men.”

“From what I’ve seen, you’ve made people lives better. You want to help people. We can only help people from a position of strength. And Strength is sometimes terrible.”
Am I to be given the same choice as the Wise Master’s of Mereen?”

“I dont believe it will come to that. I believe you will join me, Jon Snow.” she says matter of factly. “Because we believe the same things. You want your family safe. You want your people to thrive. You want them to live their lives without fear of raiders, or wildfire or even these undead. You don’t want them to send their sons and daughters off to fight and die over petty wars fought because of centuries-old insults.” She neatly sets her fork across her now nearly empty plate. “You will join me, sooner or later, because Justice demands it. And we will rebuild this world.”

There’s this earnest quality to her speech. When he heard it in her broadcasts, he assumed it was acting. But hearing her speech, he can feel the fire and the passion in it. He can feel it lighting fires inside him. As if her words skip his brain and shoot straight to his heart.

Igniting an anger that feels… righteous.

He wants to rebuild. It's what his father always talked about.

But they have to win first.

She’s looking at him, expectantly. Challengingly. Daring him to say something snarky. Baiting him for a response.

And that sets something else on fire entirely.

There’s no time for that.

“So you say.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

*Brienne’s Weapon is Captain Phasma’s melee weapon in Battlefront II. Its' great. I’m desperately in love with Phasma. My deepest regret is that they didn’t get Gwendoline Christie to narrate the Phasma book.
The bustling of the homestead wakes her in the early hours as it has every day she has been here. Her early life as a Streetrat in the Free Cities had made her a light sleeper. It had started small, with sound of a hungry baby crying and for a few moments she was almost able to lull herself to sleep as
the child was soothed and quieted. But then the full force of the morning assaulted her senses the smell of coffee and bread baking, males voices calling each other lazy, engines turning over, the incessant clucking of chickens and roosters, the sound of a typewriter below her clicking away, and the youngest Stark girl, her hallmate starting her exercises.

She can hear the rhythmic - clap thud grunt coming from the room down the hall.

It was nothing like the vast silence of Dragonstone or the comfortable intimate quiet of her Penthouse atop the Great Glass Pyramid in Mereen. So despite her best efforts to sink deeper into Robb Stark’s bed and fall back asleep, she remains awake.

‘A Complete history of Westeros and her Territories’ lays open next to her. Part of her royal reading list from Tyrion. Can’t be queen if she doesn’t know every minute detail about her country.

Her conquest.

They’ll be travelling to White Harbor to get Tyrion soon and he will no doubt spend the entire journey back drilling her on the details of… She rolls in her bed to look at the page she fell asleep on. ‘Daenerys the First and the Dornish Acquisition.’ She knows all about her namesake and her dream to bring cheap energy to Westeros. But the actual details of her life are tragic. Another princess pawned off in search of power and riches.

Like she had been.

Restless, she dresses and grabs her sketchbook instead of the history book. Joanna, the young wildling girl had made a clever suggestion for Drogon. It’s a challenge that she thinks she can manage. They have the capacity to manufacture such parts on Dragonstone. But she needs to think on it first. Sketch it out.. Plan how such a device would interact with the existing parts.

How would she control it? The obvious solutions would be to make another set of squeeze bars on the handle that directly control the grip. However, she already has triggers for both the flame thrower and the mini guns on the handle bar.

Also, where would she place them. Again, the obvious place would be reaching out along the front tire, but that would cause serious drag problems in flight. Perhaps she could have them operate like a pincer tucked up under the wings that snaps shut beneath Drogon.

She’s found a place she likes to sit and sketch or read. Like her balcony in Mereen. There’s a bench on the stone porch outside, facing out across all the Stark’s property. It has a cushion and there’s a fireplace on the other side of the wall in the sitting room and the stones are warm against her back as she curls her feet under her.

In her head, she knows she should be working, studying her history, gathering information, or tracking down Jon and badgering him until he surrenders. But this has been the first time she’s been alone since Drogon crashed in the Dothraki sea almost three years ago.

And with the prospect of her...handlers coming soon, she wants to relish the solitude.

She sees the wolf first. Breaking through the tree line in a run up to the house. He clears the steps up to the porch in a single leap and sniffs after her. Sniffing around at her feet.

It had surprised her in her room the first day. She had gone to the privy only to come back and find a large wolf laying on her bed. It was good she had just emptied her bladder or else she would have pissed herself in terror.
But the beast only quirked his head to the side and then laid it down on the quilts covering the bed, and then it showed its belly. Then after a sniff of her wrist and a few scratches behind the ear, the great beast was hers.

“He likes you” Commander Snow does not clear the stairs in a single leap. In fact, he’s limping slightly, and his lean muscular form is covered in dirt and sweat, as usual. Only today the skin beneath his dark eyes are shaded purple from a lack of sleep. Even so, his not-quite smile brings one to her face.

“I think Valyrians just smell different.”

“Aye. I suppose they would.” He leans against one the wooden railings that surround the porch and with a heavy sigh, he closes his eyes. “You’re up early.” he observes.

“And you’re out late.” And he actually smiles, a flash of teeth and a nod of the head and he opens his eyes to look at her.

“Running night drills. Took a few of the more...independent lads on a ranging. Seeing how well-suited they’d be for it.”

“Ah...send the troublemakers out into the wild on their own.”

“Troublemakers tend to do their best work on their own…” Ghost circles and lays down at his feet. “Ya like sketching?” he asks.

“Blueprints for Drogon” She turns the book around so he can see. “I like to tinker…”

“Is that why you fixed my radio…?”

“It was an easy fix.” She taps her pencil against the pad on her lap and her lips pull tight across her teeth, as she feels her cheeks flush. “Does Wintertown have a scrap yard?”

“Aye.”

“And May I borrow your tools?”

“Whatever you need.”

“Then, if I am not your prisoner, I would very much like to browse for parts.”

“You can go wherever you like…” he nods but then a somber expression crosses his face. “Wait a moment.” and he disappears inside the house, returning a moment later. “Here’ he hands her back her gun belt. “Market’s quiet, and I don’t suspect you’ll run into any trouble but, just in case.”

She feels her face fall as she stands and buckles the belt around her waist. Trouble hadn’t really crossed her mind. She was busy relishing in the possibility of solitary exploration that she had forgotten that meant she would be vulnerable. His brow furrows. “I'll find you someone to go with you.”

Tyrion would tell her she’s being reckless. Jorah would plead with her for her safety. Grey Worm would make idle threats about how no-one would dare come near Daenerys Stormborn. Varys would tell her all the worst rumors he’s heard about Northern Markets. Missandei would ask to accompany her, using their friendship as pretense for guarding her.

Olenna would tell her to be a Dragon.
“No.” She reaches out and grabs his arm. “Please. I will be perfectly fine. I am eager for the opportunity to explore a new place on my own. It has been a long time since I was free to do so.” she smiles sheepishly and he nods, understanding. “And as for trouble...I am quite capable of getting myself out of trouble” She leans in near him “And into trouble…” She winks at him… Oh Gods...she winked at him.

She quickly removes her hand from where it lingers on his… extraordinarily firm arm and smooths her hair.

He’s looking slightly stunned and then he’s looking down at his feet. A hand runs through his own hair and she can see that the tips of his ears have turned ever so slightly pink. She wants to cringe and…? Fall into a hole and die? Fly back to Essos on Drogon? Sit in the center of bonfire for a few hours to re-establish that she is the Dragon Queen?

Then Commander Jon Snow looks up with a wolfish grin on his face and leans in ever so slightly to her. “I know…”

Her mouth is suddenly very dry and she doesn’t know what she’s supposed to do with her hands. So they clap together in front of her as she stares down at the stonework.

“Ghost.” he commands and the wolf’s ears shift forward at the sound of his name, standing almost at attention. “Safe.” Jon points at Daenerys as he issues the second command. She almost laughs at how silly it sounds, but then as ordered...the wolf moves to stand beside her, ears up, tail down, on alert.

“Amazing.” she observes.

“Would you believe he was the runt?” she shakes her head. No. This massive wolf is by no means a runt.

His hand is on her shoulder, gently turning her and he’s pointing down a dirt road that begins near the barracks at the eastern end of the property. “Past the barracks, through that gate, and then town is less than a mile straight down that road. No way to get lost.”

“Thank you, Commander. I hope you actually get some rest.”

“Aye. I doubt it, but, it's always nice to hope.”

She hadn’t been to a market since arriving in Westeros. It had been a favorite pastime since she was in Vaes Dothrak, where she would spend her days haggling with the Scrap Dealers for parts for her Silver. And even long before that when Viserys and her had to survive the streets of Free Cities. Markets were full of people and life and color and she had seen them from Braavos to Qarth. But never one in Westeros. The place she was to govern. The place she was to call home.

Dragonstone had been utterly deserted. People were too scared of the rad storms and hurricanes to resettle there. Her few engagements with the Lannister forces didn’t offer her much opportunity to explore this country and her interactions with Civilians had been limited. Tyrion said it would be best to isolate her forces from civilians, as it would make her seem to be more of a threat than a savior.

“We can focus on integrating them in Westeros, once the war is won.” he advised pouring himself a glass of wine. “When people see them as liberators, instead of invaders. Until that time, we should limit their contact with the Unsullied and the Bloodriders…” he took another drink “Especially the Bloodriders.”

She had accepted his advice at face value. It seemed reasonable enough at the time. But now…
Daenerys had her doubts. If they used her Unsullied as nothing but soldiers, and have them do nothing but ride out and fight and die and ignore the rest of life...are they not still slaves. If they kept the Bloodriders moving, charging in and stealing supplies from Lannisters, are they not still just raiders? She promised them a different life here. One where her Unsullied could live as free men. One where her Blood could create a permanent home for themselves.

A home like this one, with a large fireplace surrounded by chairs, and a kitchen that smelled like food, and full of voices talking and laughing and singing and crying. A home.

The wolf is very good company, it turns out. He’s quiet. Almost uncannily so. He’ll disappear into the drifts of snow that line the road and she’s made a little game of trying to guess where he’ll pop out of next.

Winter’s Town is much smaller than the many other markets she’s been to. And she is reminded how sparsely populated the North is compared the cities she’s lived in. Less than ten thousand people in a cold forested wilderness as large as the whole of the Great Grass Sea.

The town is small, a few dozen buildings. A few of them are even old world houses. Restored with scrap and the care of someone who making themselves a home. There are several guard towers, each made taller still by a mounted windmill generating just enough electricity to power strings of exposed bulbs. The dim yellow lights criss-cross the market on copper wire creating a warm glow to counter the bite of the winter wind.

It’s so beautiful... and she can’t help but smile so bright that people start to stare but then again...People always stare at Daenerys Targaryen.

She hopes maybe they are staring at her snowy companion, but that’s not the truth. It is a sensation she has grown familiar with over the years. Eyes always on her. Sometimes with hate, sometimes with reverence, sometimes with wonder. But they always stare, and they rarely see.

Daenerys thanks her lucky dragon that these people are just looking at her like a curiosity more than anything.

With Ghost following at her heels, she makes her way to what appears to be the town’s scrapyard. It’s everything a good yard should be. There are stacks of old tires creating a makeshift wall around the perimeter, old tractors, and trucks and vehicles, rusted out appliances and chipped up furniture and stacks of old electronics no-one can spare the power to use.

She could spend hours in a place like this. Digging through everything, looking for the one part that will make Drogon fly ever more minutely faster. There’s an old snowmobile and she plants herself in front of it, the wolf circling and lying down behind her as she sits to examine its engine in the center of the yard.

Let people stare at her. Let them see her work. Let them see what she does best. Let them see she’s not a threat and she’s not mad and she’s not a whore. Let them see her for what she is.

She’s able to recover some insulated rubber tubing from the underside of the machine. Hopefully they will keep her fuel lines from freezing while she is here. A frustrated sigh escapes her lips as she rights herself, brushing some dirt off the seat of her coat. And she begins to browse along the walls of tires that surround the yard. Snow Tires and repairing whatever damage caused Drogon’s flamer lines to leak.

There’s a problem she foresees in her negotiations. She is allied with people who betrayed this place. Moreso… she relies on the people who betrayed this place. Food and supplies from the Bay of
Dragons are transported to Westeros by the Iron Fleet. She needs them. And with the loss of her Westerosi armies from Dorne and and Reach...she needs the Northern Front. With the Majority of her navy gone, she would need to rely on what’s left of the Greyjoy’s for trade.

“I can’t go back North.” the broken man had whimpered. “I can’t go back North. He’ll kill me.” Daenerys couldn’t imagine growing up in place like this and in the short time she’s been here...it turns her stomach to imagine burning it down.

She can imagine doing the other things Theon did. She can imagine killing her brother, because she had watched her husband kill Viserys. In a way, she had killed him, because she did not raise a finger to stop it. But he had sold her and abused her...and the man who was her brother, had died long before Drogo crowned him.

And from Theon’s confessions… he had been treated like another son to Eddard Stark and he had betrayed that out of ambition and jealousy.

And people died for it...Children died for it.

Revenge would be justice.

But she needs the Iron Fleet and if they don’t follow the Greyjoy she has, they’ll follow Euron. Which means Cersei wins the game. It’d be over and the only option left would be Fire and Blood.

And that may not be enough.

There’s a pair of narrow tires, perfect for Drogon. The tread is worn, but the rubber is still thick and relatively undamaged. She’ll be able to carve broad new treads which hopefully will allow her to ride in the snow.

The Vendor is cheating her. She knows that the easiest way to win people over is to be generous when haggling. But this is excessive. It puts her in a delicate place. If she starts to haggle too aggressively, the rumors will start that the Last Dragon is just as mad as her father. If she does nothing, she’ll be seen as a pushover and that’s the exact opposite of what she needs to be. She’s about to walk away entirely when...

“What exactly do you think you are doing?” A girls voice, hard with rage. Daenerys turns from the stall to find Arya Stark standing next to her, the girls finger pointed in the vendors face.

“Just plying my trade, Ms. Stark.” the man’s ruddy face squinched up uncomfortably.


“Trade is Trade and Winter’s Comin.” the man spat back. The girl laughed then. A vicious cackling sound that left the man looking nervous.

“Shall I remind you who allows you to trade in Winter Town?” She pointed up into the stall where a piece of paper was tacked in plain sight. Daenerys briefly scanned it. A simple permit stating that the man had permission to sell here, and that his weights and scales had been verified. Sansa Stark’s elegant signature next to a Wolf’s head stamp.

“Shall I fetch Administrator Stark so we can test your scales?” The girl cocks her head to side and leans into the man’s face as she makes her threat. “Or should my brother arrest you outright? I’m sure he’ll be more than happy to stop training troops to deal with the likes of you. Then you can ply ya
trade at the Wall. Earn your honor back fightin’ Wights.”

She wants to tell the girl to please not wake Jon up, but the threat works and the man shoves half her trade back towards Daenerys without saying a word. With a pleasant smile, she scoops it into her bag along with the insulation she pulled. But, as she goes to lift the tires, Arya stops her.

“We’ll get them on the way out. No-one—” she emphasizes, shouting back over her shoulder at the still stunned vendor “—will steal them.”

“Thank you.” Daenerys waves back to him and quickly follows the young Stark, Ghost brushing past her as she struggles to keep up with the girl’s long strides.

“He’s always an asshole.” Arya admits. People aren’t usually crass with her so easily. It leaves her joyfully off balance. “No-one else will give you any problems.”

“So what do you do at Winterfell, Arya Stark, other than fight people three times your size?”

The girl shrugs and smiles and does a short slide through some mud. “Keep Watch.”

“Did Commander Snow change his mind about me needing a guard?” she asks.

“No.” the girl shakes her head as she approaches another stall. Short. Blunt. Answers. Seems it’s a family trait. She browses the various wares while Arya engages with the vendor. It’s an older woman, with jars of honey, candles, and some kind of bun with meat and cheese all wrapped in buttery pastry.

“Here” she passed one to her. The smell instantly made Daenerys’ mouth water. It must be near midday and she hasn’t broken her fast yet.

“Thank you.”

Arya scrunches up her face for a moment and offers a low ‘hmmm’ as she attacks it. The market is small and soon she finds them meandering through the small buildings surrounding the central plaza.

Ghost whimpers at her side, his huge red eyes staring that the last few bites of meat pie. She moves to give it to him but Arya snatches it as soon as it leaves her hand. Fast. Insanely, precisely fast.

“Don’t feed him your scraps.” she warns.

“Will it make him sick?” Arya shakes her head.

“Jon is his Alpha, the leader of his pack. Ghost has to beg for his scraps.”

“Oh. My apologies”

“It’s part of training them. You need to train them to only listen to you, so you have to be the only one to feed them.”

“You sound like you know from experience.”

“We all had one. Jon saved them. Father was going to let Theon kill them. But Jon said we were meant to have them.”

“All of you?”

The girl nods eagerly. “Jon’s is Ghost. Robb had Grey Wind. Sansa, Lady. Summer was Bran’s and
Rickon named his ShaggyDog.”
“Shaggy Dog?”

“He was just a tot when we got them.”

“And your’s?”

“Nymeria.” Of course she named her wolf Nymeria. What else would the fiercest young woman in Westeros name her Direwolf.

“Where is she? If I may ask…” The little wolf pauses for a moment looking into the woods.

“She deserved to be free.”

A woman with a pair of the largest breasts she’s ever seen hangs out a second story window, propositioning some young men with patches on their coats bearing the white wolf of the Northern Front. She laughs quietly, because that will be the same everywhere. Satisfied with her exploration, she and Arya collect the tires from the scrap yard and begin lugging them back to Winterfell. Daenerys manages to coax a few more bits of information out of her.

She’s eight and ten. She’s a formally trained Water Dancer. Despite her skill, she doesn’t have a real rank in the militia.

...She’s bored.

The little wolf doesn’t say it aloud. But potential energy crackles around the edges her movements.

And she doesn’t know what to do with it.

It’s exactly how Daenerys felt for years. Stuck in place. Until it all went to shit, and she ended up alone in the plains. With nothing but her dragon and her wits.

Just like now.

“Gendry!” Arya shouts. The young man walking towards them on the road breaks into a run.

“Seven hells, here… let me carry those.” he lifts the tires out of their hands and moves to walk next to the girl. They weren’t heavy. Just cumbersome.

“Stormborn… Gendry Waters. Fabricator extraordinaire. Davos smuggled him out of King’s Landing.” She’s speaking with an excited tone that she hasn’t heard out of the young woman yet. He nods.

“Really?” recognizing the surname. A Bastard’s name. Like Jon’s. “And how are you faring in the cold?” she asks with bright smile to the young man. Arya instantly frowns deeper. And Daenerys learns something else about Arya Stark as she raises an eyebrow and cautiously slides her lips back over her teeth to dim the smile.

“Cold’s fine.” he answered, oblivious to the terse silent exchange happening next to him. “It’s the company that could use some improvement…” he teased smiling down at the young woman and the frown shifts to a playful snarl as she kicks out at his shin. He dodges swiftly with a slight jump out of the way. The two starting kicking at each other as they walk and watching their game forces a sigh from Daenerys.

She never could play such games with any of her lovers. Drogo would’ve felt emasculated by it.
And while Daario and her had their fair share of flirting, it was never as casual or as playful as this. An ache blooms in her chest and she looks to the direwolf still padding along next to her. He cocks his head to the side, red eyes meeting her violet for a moment before she turns to make idle conversation with her companions.

The young man is one and twenty. He was born in Flea Bottom. He’s a journeyman fabricator. Could have been a master, but he couldn’t afford to pay the union dues on the Street of Steel. He wants to be a soldier. But right now, they need his skill more than his strength. The thought brings out a different sort of ache in her chest. Cersei’s propaganda was all targeted at recruiting young boys like this into fighting and dying for her war machine.

Brave boys.

The smith lets out a low whistle as they bring the tires to the garage. “That’s a fine machine.” he exclaims squatting down to examine the dragon’s head flamethrower.

“Thank you. His name is Drogon.”

And then they are baraging her with questions. How fast can she go? What are the wings made of? When did she get the engines? Why is it a tricycle instead of a motorcycle? Can she do flips like Visenya did in her jet during the conquest?

She answers their eager questions, but they begin to slow as the kicking game between them starts again.

“Will you be needing any special tools? There’s more in the workshop.” Gendry asks.

She glances around the garage. “I will be fine with what’s here” As if her words were permission, Arya grabs Gendry’s arm and pulls him out the door.

“Don’t be afraid to bother someone, if you need anything.” She yells back dragging her boy behind her, a she-wolf and her prey. Daenerys snorts a laugh as she digs in her bags for a pencil to start tracing the outline of new treads on her tires.

She’s getting frustrated with tire jack when she’s called on again. Her bloodriders have specialized ones for their bikes. This one is fairly standard, for trucks and cars and other four wheeled vehicles. Her front tire keeps shifting when she tried lifting one of her back tires, which in turn causes the whole thing to shift off of the jack.

“Good Afternoon, your grace.” Sansa enters the garage with large burned man behind her standing quietly by the door. He’s Sandor Clegane, The Hound by reputation. From what she knows of him, he used to be the personal bodyguard of of Cersei’s wicked son.

And now he’s Sansa’s.

That raises more questions than it answers.

“Good Afternoon Miss Stark.” The woman eyes her work cautiously. Her red hair is pinned up in a neat roll and comb.

“Do need any assistance?”

“No. I think I’ve got it.” She pushes herself to her feet.

“I’ve come to offer my sincerest apologies for the Market today.”
“It’s no trouble really… merchants will be merchants no matter what part of the world you’re in.”

“Not in the North.” Daenerys’s head turns sharply to the side as there is coldness in Sansa’s tone that she hasn’t heard yet. The red haired woman taps her gloved thumbs together. “...Cersei calls us lawless. Puts out her broadcasts, telling anyone who will listen that we are a rural backwater, an uneducated impoverished territory in a perpetual state of Anarchy.”

It’s true. While the majority of Cersei’s propaganda focused on Daenerys, the North was always spoken of in the same way the people of the Free Cities, and the Wise Masters’ spoke of the Dothraki.

Scorn for people they thought were less than them.

“But we have stronger laws than any other territory in Westeros.” She holds up a finger and states proudly “Winter is coming. It is not a motto for us to embroider on our coats, or to threaten our enemies, or to drink to.. It's the law of Winter.”

“Winter is coming.” She says it with the booming cadence of someone who grew up listening to men of war bark those words. “And a man who would cheat a guest when we have plenty is a man who would gouge prices and allow people to starve when we have nothing. Winter is the law here.”

“Will he be going to the wall then?”

Sansa’s ice blue eyes widen in shock. “No. The wall is barbaric. I’ll investigate and probably fine him.. Heavily. Mind you. But the wall… No. Jon banned sending people to the wall.”

“Sansa...We don’t want to drive in the dark.” The man says making eyes out the door.

“Please start the Engine, Sandor. I’ll be a moment.” She offers the man a small smile and he leaves. “I’m afraid, I’ll be occupied this afternoon and the majority of the evening with some of the homesteaders living on our land. If you need anything, Gilly is looking after Bran and Little Sam in the house, and Arya is around here...somewhere.”

“She ran off with Gendry.”

“Oh.” Sansa smiles awkwardly. Knowingly. “Don’t tell Jon. We need that young man in one piece.” She wraps a scarf around her throat and covers part of her hair like a hood. “Did they tell you he’s Robert Baratheon’s Bastard?” She says it casually as she adjusts the fabric. Daenerys shakes her head. Stunned. “Not the only one of course. Mya Stone watches over my cousin in the Vale. There are many things to be said about Robert Baratheon, but his…” she casts a side-eye along, looking like she has a naughty secret “potency is one thing that could never be doubted”

It’s a subtle game. But Daenerys recognizes a play when she sees it. Why else would Sansa reveal that the man who took her father’s thrones has two children under her protection? Rather than acknowledge it, she smiles and wishes her safe travels.

She’s mostly done replacing the tubes that carry flamer fuel from the tank, deep in Drogon’s belly, to the Dragon’s head flamethrower. It could use a few more tweaks but as she’s not planning on raining down fire on her enemies any time soon it will hold for now.

The wolf’s ears perk up and he paces and paws at the door to the garage. And Daenerys pulls herself out from underneath Drogon to open the door so he can relieve himself. But as she opens it he’s pushing her out the door with his massive head.

Running a head of her, stopping, circling back, pushing her.
Something is wrong. And it wants her to follow.

She can’t keep up with him as he runs. But as if he knows, he keeps himself visible above the snow so she can follow him deeper into the forest.

He’s circling a tree with an old playhouse tucked up into the branches. Surrounding the base is a broken board, bowed with rot. She peers up into the hole that was once the floor of the treefort and bites down a curse.

“Are you hurt sweetling?” The little girl shakes her head, tears streaming down her face in long shimmering lines. She’s standing on a thin board, fingers in a white knuckle grip in the wide space between the planks of the ramshackle wall. “Does what you’re standing on feel wobbly or broken?”

“No” she cries.

“Okay. Stay there… Umm” her eyes dart around looking for a way up. She could climb the tree but her weight would cause more the derelict to fall, she’s not confident in her ability to catch the girl herself, and she doesn’t want to leave to find someone.

“Ghost!” she snaps, looking down at the wolf as his ears perk up, waiting for a command. She taps her fingers together. “Jon. Find Jon.”

It sniffs the air and for a second she feels very stupid. But then it bolts off at a speed unnatural for a creature that size.

“Help is coming, just hold on.”

“No! I don’t want to see the Crow!” It’s an insult she’s heard before but it is not one she understands.

“Well you can’t just stay up there, can you?” The girls face twists and contorts with frustration and Daenerys scolds herself because reason isn’t going to comfort a frightened trapped girl. She switches tactics. “What were you playing that broke the board? It must have been terribly fun”

“I was hiding from wight walkers…”


“Shit…” she hears him running behind her, Ghost leaping and circling the tree again. The girls sister in tow. The two girls start shouting at each other in a language she’s never heard before. “Willa, I told you not to…”

“You’re not the boss of me CROW!” He curses taking off his coat. She takes it from him and drapes it over her arm as he jumps up to grab one of the sturdier branches and begins to climb.

“Well I am the boss of you! And I told you not to” The older girl, Joanna yells.

“Girls please…” he stretches across to a higher branch.

“You are not”

“I am Chief of the Ice River Clans.” she grits her teeth. Jon is on a branch about 15 feet in air.

“THERE ARE NO MORE ICE RIVER CLANS!” the younger stamps her foot. “We’re the last ones!” She stamps her foot again “You’re chief of nothing.” she does it a third time and the board
groans and creaks and lets out a sickening cracking noise and she screams.

“Willa. Come here…please” Jon reaching his arm out for her to grab on to. His hand extends almost to her but he’s too short to actually get a hand on her. “Please…”

“NO!” she shrieks back against the wall.

“I’m the last one too” Daenerys says. The girl looks down at her from her perch, red faced with tears and snot running down her face. “I know how it feels…”

The Last Targaryen. The Last Valyrian. The Last Dragon.

“…So you must be brave, so that when people remember the Ice River Clans, they remember you. Please go with Jon, sweetling” The girl stares at her for a long minute.

“Willa…” he pleads. “…Please”

Its unnaturally quiet, only the sound of Jon’s boots scraping against the tree bark as she reaches for him. Letting go of the wall and grabbing onto his outstretched arm. “Hold on Tight” she nods as he curls his arm about her waist bringing her down to the center of his mass and she transfers her grip around his neck as he climbs down. Jumping down from the last branch, to land in a squat.

She’s whimpering as he sets her down and takes a knee in front of her. Staring down into the snow and not meeting his eyes. His face is a conflict of worry and fear and relief.

“Why did you go up there Willa? I told you it wasn’t safe. I told you not to go up there.”

“You’re not my mom.” She spits back. Grey Eyes hard as stone and brimming with tears. Her sister makes a step towards her and Daenerys lightly restrains her by the shoulder.

The young woman looks up at her, a question in her eyes and she shakes her head.

“I promised her I’d keep you safe.” The tears break through again.

“I can’t remember what she looked like…and so all I can imagine is…” the small girl makes a monster face and then starts sobbing, collapsing against him, throwing her arms around his neck and Daenerys has to blink back her own tears.

Jon grips her tightly, rubbing her back. Quiet for a moment as he obviously struggles to come up with some kind of response. “Sometimes I don’t remember my Da…And then when I try to remember, I feel like the picture I remember is wrong. But I remember what he taught me, and that’s more important. And your mother was strong and kind and brave. And so are you… Look at how high you climbed.” he points up to the treefort. The girls eyes follow as she sniffs, and slowly retreats back into his arms. “Do you want to go to the heart tree?” She shakes her head. “Alright. Let’s head inside. Miss Gilly will make some hot cider.”

He lifts her carefully, letting her cling onto his neck. As he stands, Daenerys spreads his coat over the girls back and he adjusts, wrapping the child up in it.

“Can we stay in the house tonight? I won’t let anyone tell Val.” Joanna pleads. He casts a glance over his shoulder at her.

“Aye. If you like.”

“Where do you usually stay?” Daenerys asks.
“We live in the FreeFolk camp. Tormund says we have to so we don’t become kneelers.” Joanna answers proudly as they begin to walk.

Jon shakes his head and lets out soft chuckle that she hasn’t heard before. He’s walking in front of them, behind Ghost who is carving them a path through the snow. The sobbing has turned to sniffling, the young girl settling her head on his shoulder.

“Where is the Ice River?”

“North.” Joanna says bluntly. “Beyond the Wall.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know much about beyond the wall. I’ve always been curious...In Mereen there was this huge mural map of the world painted and everything was so detailed, all the cities, and landmarks labelled, except for this huge white blank space at the Northern border of Westeros. Uncharted territory…” he laughs out loud at that.

“Of course it’s charted…” she stops and looks at him almost too afraid to ask. But she doesn’t have to. “I’ll show you once we get the girls settled.”

During the slow walk back and their conversation slips into an easy silence. And she watches as the easy rock of Jon’s gait lulls the girl to sleep.

It’s in Sansa’s office, and he unlocks the door and allows her in. The girls are upstairs in Little Sam’s nursery, Willa tucked into a burrow of pillows and blankets, and Joanna sipping cider and happily playing.

Sansa’s office is full of bookshelves and filing cabinets, and there is a large map of the North tacked up on the wall. It's been marked up with dozens of flags, symbols, small notes. Her first look of what that last blank space is filled by. An expanse of forest and a huge mountain range that crosses the wall itself and trails deep into Westeros. A huge forest, and more white space.

“This one’s better…” he unfolds another map he’s pulled out of a cabinet.

This one wasn’t printed. It was drawn by hand on a pulpy handmade paper so worn and so soft it felt like thin leather. Time has dyed the paper a mustard yellow. It's a ranger’s map, with shaded in territory of different raider clans, lines indicating migration patterns of various animals all simply sketched, the edges of rivers and lakes marked with best fishing spots and the best locations to cross, seasonal passes through mountain ranges, the margins littered with constellations indicating direction, which homesteads and comms were hostile and which were friendly.

Drogo had one just like this for the Dothraki Sea….The animals were different, and there was only one mountain in the plains. But some of the southernmost stars were the same. She remembers him towering over her, pointing at things on the map and describing them to her as she learned Dothraki. The khals huge hands on her slight shoulders as he promised to take her wherever she wanted. A million questions that she couldn’t put into words yet. Her imagination filling in the gaps the language barrier created.

The mountains she saw are called the Frostfangs and they stretch as far North as North can go. And her imagination is spinning a thousand miles an hour as her fingers trace a delicate line of a river labelled “Milkwater” up to another pass of mountains called “Thenn.” and a million questions are bubbling to her lips as she takes in all the details carefully written on the map.

Is Hornfoot the name of Raider clan or is it a landmark? A Clan, the few he’s met all had black feet from Frostbite; What does the Fist of the First Men look like? A plateau in the middle of sea of trees, forest stretched endlessly in each direction; Who lives on the Frozen Shore? A small nomadic group
that use sled dogs and hunt walrus; Were there towns or cities or homesteads like Winterfell? No cities, very small communities, smaller homesteads; Has he ever seen a snowbear? Yes, but only at a distance. They are huge and very dangerous.

“May I copy this?” Daenerys asks after barraging him with questions. She wants to put in her sketchbook, and she makes herself a promise to fly over it one day. To land Drogon on the Fist of the First Men and find out what Walrus tastes like. But he hesitates and she can’t pin down why. It could be some kind of strategy. There might be resources up beyond the wall that he doesn’t want her finding. But his eyes aren’t calculating, they’re cautious. His hand moves to scratch his beard and she understands…

Because there’s a tattoo on his hand, above his first finger. And the same hand that drew that tattoo is the same hand that drew this map. She has marks just like that, a sun and stars on the inside of her wrist. Drogo had a moon on his. Riders don’t get rings. And neither apparently do raiders.

And migration patterns and fishing spots aren’t the treasures he is protecting. She opens her mouth to apologize and withdraw her request.

“Just…uh…Don’t take it out of the house. It's…” a pause as he searches for a word. “Its one of a kind.” He offers a small sad smile.

“Of course.” She promises slowly folding it along its deep creases. “You were married?” He cocks his head to the side in surprise at the deeply personal question. She flashes him the markings on her wrist to put him at ease. “I noticed yours.”

“Oh…” he looks at his hand and shakes his head. “Uh…It’s actually my unit from when I was running ops with the FreeFolk.” he makes a mock gun with his thumb and forefinger then pulls the trigger. “…Trigger Finger”

“Oh,” she feels foolish and her hands suddenly become more interesting as she ducks her head to hide her face.

“You’re not far off though…” he admits, almost reluctantly “We…uh…we never stood in front of a heart tree…” his tongue slides over his teeth, under his lips. “But I was hers and she was mine.”

It’s a lovely image that begins to form in her head. His dark features a sharp contrasting against the ashy white Weirwood and she wants to finish the picture. This is deeply personal, and she shouldn’t be asking… why does she care about his dead wife?

Because sometimes at night she still cries for Drogo. The sound of his raspy cries as the witch turned him into a husk haunt her. Not feeling him struggle at all as she suffocated him. The smell of him burning, the wails of the other women. Because grief feels lighter when someone else grieves too.

So she dares to ask, and… he answers.

“It was me, her and Tormund…” he makes a gesture mimicking the wildlings hair. She smiles and nods to indicate that she recognizes the man by name. “Couple others…”

“He was your commander…”

“No…She was ours.” an audible gasp leaves her mouth. Other than Yara, she had never known another woman in command before. A huge smile splits her face and… his mirrors it. He must’ve guessed why the comment left her excited. “She joined the FreeFolk when she was 12, started by running missives, and then she became a ranger, and then she became a very very good ranger, and she captured me when I running a mission for the Watch and then…”
“And then she stole you.”

“Aye.” he nods his head, slowly. A few of his loose dark curls gently bouncing with movement.

“What was her name?”

“Ygritte.” he’s not looking at anything in particular. “She had red hair. Kissed by fire” he taps the tattoo on his hand. Years had turned the black ink a greyish-blue, but what once had been an amorphous shape becomes clearer with the explanation. A pair of lips, wreathed in flame.

He looks sad, and she regrets that her curiosity had made him so.

“The Khal had a braid down to his knees.” she says it to break the tension and to even the playing field. He is not the kind to ask intimate questions. So she has to offer the information and prod him to ask follow up questions. “His hair was black and he had more curls than you.” she gestures towards his head. “He loved to put...bells in it, so that everyone around would know he was coming.”

“You had bells in your hair when you first arrived.” His observation takes her by surprise and she tilts her head as she feels her brow quirk. “It’s not good for sneaking up on people.” He adds hastily crossing his arms across his chest. The action draws the fabric of his shirt tight around the muscular curves of his arm...and his chest.

“There is nothing discreet about a Dragon or a horde of screaming Bloodriders on thousands of motorcycles.” she answers and he bobs his head slightly, as if following the thought to its conclusion.

“Can I get you a drink?” Jon asks suddenly. “Sansa has the good stuff somewhere around here” He circles the desk and opens some drawers, and the cabinet behind the table, pulling out a glass decanter and two glasses. “Don’t know how she gets it, but she does.” Daenerys nods and sits at one of the two chairs in front of the massive desk. “Sounds exciting, runnin’ round like that. A right sight easier than walking cross half a continent in the ice and snow.”

“Well its not easy but...its exhilarating.” There’s a slight brush of his fingers against hers as he hands her the glass. “Thank you.”

“And flying?” The chair next to her spins around and he straddles it, sitting backwards, laying his arm across the back, and leaning heavily against it.

“Flying is…” How on earth do you describe it. She struggles to put words to it and it comes out clips and half sentences. It’s a rush of wind to the face. Its feeling air stream and whip and whirl and swaying with it. It’s feeling her consciousness fall into Drogon and feeling his wings and engines and fire become her own. She’s not making sense and her fingers taps against the glass, as the doubt and foolishness creep in.

It’s watching the earth fall away and become small, and all the petty problems become small with it.

“The wall feels like that… You’re so high up that on a clear day...you feel like you can see the end of the world.”

They’ve had more than a few drinks, and Gilly came in with some dinner, which sits half eaten on Sansa’s desk when the owner of said desk knocks on the door.

“...Jon…” the red haired woman starts. “Davos was looking for you. He wants to talk about White Harbor” Sansa wasn’t supposed to come back until late and she turns to look out the window to find... night, and the moon high in the sky.
“Shit” he stands suddenly but has to grip the chair as Sansa eyes the half empty bottle and Daenerys has to fight the laugh that the drink would surely erupt from her throat.

“How about... I’ll go get him and you stay put.” She puts her hands on her brother’s shoulders and pushes him back down. “Your grace…” she acknowledges as she departs.

Daenerys stands cautiously, it seems she’s better at holding her drink than he is. They had been comparing their respective times raiding. He with the FreeFolk and She with the Bloodriders. He had asked what kind of rackets they ran. Gambling, Protection and...Slaving, but she had stopped the slaving when she became Khaleesi. She asked in kind. Smuggling, and Protection, as they prepared to attack the wall, but his job was ops so he wasn’t directly involved with much raiding

...until the end. He didn’t clarify, and she didn’t ask.

“I should find my bed. I don’t know if I can handle Tyrion with a hangover.”

“Gods…” he laughs and it turns into a sigh as he runs his hand through his hair. At some point in their conversation, the knot of hair had come loose and his dark curls hang around his face and...gods is the right word for it. “I couldn’t keep up with him when I was sixteen and stone sober. I don’t want to think about listening to him with a pounding headache.”

“I’ve kept you away from your work for too long. I’ll get out of your way.” She passes him to leave.

“It was worth it…” he starts and she turns to face him and he’s looking at her with his dark eyes and a mischievous smile playing on his lips “…to enjoy some of Sansa’s secret stash.” She smiles brightly and parts her lips to bid him a good night. But there’s a question that tugs at her and it tumbles out of her mouth before she can stop it.

“Willa and Joanna...What happened to their mother?” He had been slightly swaying leaning forward with his hands firmly planted on the back of the chair. But now he is frozen and his devastating smile disappears.

“Karsi was the one who convinced the FreeFolk to trust me after Stannis…” he stops and licks his lips and he doesn’t finish the thought. “After the fighting at the wall. She convinced the survivors to evacuate Hardhome with me… But they were there. Thousands of them. We never stood a chance…” he’s looking up at the ceiling “But she planted herself like a tree… She didn’t last long… You can’t put up much of a fight against them... But we got to the boats… and I brought them through the wall…” he looks down then. “Like I should of done the first time.”

A desperately honest admission. It’s the drink talking and the look that crosses his faces is just… guilt and anger and sorrow and her own eyes brim with tears because she knows exactly how that feels…

Thats how Rhaego died. That’s how Drogo died. And Barristan… And Highgarden… And her Dornish Allies… And Yara and the Iron Fleet.

Her choices cost their lives.

The drink makes the weight of it feel heavier.

She wants to say something. Something inspiring. Or just...something comforting. But she knows as well as he that there’s nothing to say.

“You weren’t the last, you know…” he says after a long moment.
“What…”

“The last Targaryen… Our Maester at the Wall was your great great granduncle Aemon… he’s dead now… but… He asked about you. All the time. We only ever got bits and pieces of news. But he kept every report we got. He wept when he found out you built a Dragon. He was proud of you”

“Was?” she asks.

“He died shortly after I became Commander. He was a good man. It was peaceful, in his sleep. Sam was with him. We burned him. When he died… I know thats how Targaryen’s... yea.” he doesn’t finish the sentence and makes a gesture.

She sniffs. He wasn’t alone. He didn’t die violently like everyone else in her family. He died at his post, doing his duty.

“It will be very awkward when I die then” she says desperately trying to overcome the waiver in her voice. Desperate for him not to see her cry.

“Why is that?” he asks.

“Fire cannot hurt a dragon.” she teases, “Perhaps I will show you sometime.”

“Ah there you are Ser, Been lookin’ all over for you.” Davos strides in to the room. “Your Grace.” he nods.

“I’ll let you get to work, Jon Snow.”

She gets to work herself, taking the yellowing map and tracing it in her sketchbook. Enlarging it across multiple pages so it can be used. She doesn’t need or want all the details. Just the parts she needs to fly. Mountain Ranges, Landmarks, Constellations.

And when she’s done, she makes another copy as well. So that the original can stay safe. There’s heavy drunken snores coming from his bedroom, so she leaves it folded neatly by the door, with a note.

*Thank you for new adventures*
“Are you seriously going to eat that?” Sansa asks as he taps the flat of his knife against the Oyster’s shell.
“I’m fucking starving.” the knife prys into the shell. “Didn’t you eat them in Kingslanding?”

“Of course. Cleaned and plated…”

“You’ve never had one fresh out of the water?” She shakes her head.

“The water in Blackwater bay is irradiated, not to mention toxic from all garbage and a three centuries old sewage system.” Davos tells him. “They bring them in from farms off the coast of the Stormlands.”

“Huh…” He counts himself lucky that White Harbor isn’t big enough to have that problem...yet. Jon digs the knife around to free it from the shell and offers it to her. She takes it hesitantly and somehow makes swallowing it look graceful.

“Why aren’t we farming these?”

“It’s alot of work for not a whole lot of food.” She hmms at Davos’ answer and takes out the small notebook she carries and makes a note. It makes him smile. She’s always thinking about the future of the North. How to make it prosperous.

It’s what they spent most of the drive talking about. Well that and thanking her for the new copy of the Map of Beyond the wall. Dany’s supply lines from the Bay of Dragons connect her to massive trade networks hitting the Free Cities, Volantis, Ashai, Quarth and a million other places he’s never seen, but used to dream of. White Harbor tends to mostly get traders stopping over from Braavos, and the brave few Southern Westerosi willing to break Cersei’s trade embargo.

White Harbor is the largest settlement under his protection and the small, well-lit streets are a testament to the Manderly’s hard-work. It’s also because they had the privilege of remaining neutral in the fight against the Bolton’s. The North needs this small city. And Wyman Manderly knows it. It’s made him a pain in the ass.

The Black Wind, Admiral Yara Greyjoy’s ship, looms too big for this Harbor. But somehow...Wyman’s ass is larger still as he trudges down the the small pier accompanied by his eldest granddaughter Wynafryd, and Sam and Beric. Jon winces. He shouldn’t think like that but, its just so fucking hard not to resent the man. If they can actually set up some kind of trade agreement, he’s going to be fucking rich.

Jon’s eyes drift to the Black Wind

Theon’s on that boat.

Longclaw’s weight on the strap across his chest feels heavy, and his hand traces a scar across his knuckles. It’s from one of the bastard’s teeth as he pounded his face into the mud and he vaguely hears Sansa screaming for him to stop.

He snaps to look at her, but she is standing calmly, jotting down notes as Davos tells her about Oyster Farming at Storm’s End, the chain of her pocket watch glinting in the light. Her ice eyes look up and she closes the notebook as the party joins them.

“Commander” Wyman says as way of greeting. There’s something in his tone that tells Jon he has a problem. “This man…” he points to Beric. “Has been preaching the word of the Rad god in White Harbor.”

Jon sighs heavily and his eyes flit to the ocean. No sign of their guests. “No laws against preachin’,
Wyman. People can believe what they want.”

“Worshipers of the Rad god believe that rads are the cure-all. And he was preaching in the sick house.” he looks to Sam and Beric. Sam has his mouth open as if he is about to say something and Beric is standing there all smiles as fucking usual.

“I wouldn’t call it preaching… Lt. Manderly…” Sam starts. “More like comforting with strong religious overtones. You know…praying with sick people, reading Princess Shireen’s adventure books to the children.”

“Rads make people sick. They don’t cure anything. If people listened to him, the bloody Pox could have spread and we would have an epidemic in White Harbor.”

“That’s why I sent Sam…” Jon counters.

“And Mr. Tarly brought Mr. Dondarrion.”

“Sergeant.” he corrects. “and I ordered him to accompany Tarly.”

“Sgt. Dondarrion.” Sansa intervenes. “Did you, at any time, assert that rads cure disease while assisting Chief Medical Officer Samwell Tarly?”

“No.”

“Did you, at any time, advise any person, to use any form of radiation in lieu of medical treatment?”

“No.”

“Did you, at any time while in White Harbor, expose any person to rads of any kind?”

“No.”

“Chief Medical Officer Tarly, Can you confirm Beric’s testimony?”

“Oh Yes” Sam nods his head enthusiastically.

“I see no problem here, Wyman.” Jon observes. “If this trade deal works, there’ll be more foreigners coming here, and you’ll need to learn to deal with people offending the Seven’s sensibilities.”

“How are you today, Miss Manderly?” Davos interrupts Wyman’s huffing by addressing his eldest granddaughter. Her long chestnut hair dipped green and the ends. She wears long wool skirts, like Sansa does. However, unlike his sister’s severe blacks and greys, her skirts are a sea green and she has a blue coat. Bright blue. Like Glacial Ice up by Always Winter. It’s rich and impractical, and so very colorful.

It’s hard not to look at it, especially when his entire wardrobe is a canvas pack with the black pants, black shirt, and black flannels of the Watch.

“I am excited to see the Dragon Queen, it is not everyday Royalty comes to White Harbor.” Wynafryd answers politely. Then a mischievous looks passes across her round face as she steps closer to him. “Perhaps after she returns to Dragonstone, I might call on you at Winterfell, Commander.” her voice goes higher and she addresses his rank with dulcet tones.

He pulls a lungful of sea air through his nose. “Perhaps.”

“We would love to have you as our guest, Winnie.” Sansa adds hastily. He scrunches his face at her
and she bulges her eyes at him. The gestures conveying the complete conversation. ‘Why?’ and ‘Why Not?’.

It’s not the first time she’s tried it. After they’d finished mostly rebuilding the house, he’d come home to find Elena Glover as their guest for a few days, while she and Sansa discussed setting up a school at Deepwood Motte. They had over fifty kids running around the settlement and the lumber mills surrounding it were far too dangerous for children.

She was kind and sweet, They had grown up seeing each other every few months when their fathers would meet to discuss militia matters. Elena was quiet like he was and would sit on the couch in the sitting room reading to herself while her mother, Catelyn, Sansa, the Pooles, and Nan sewed and knitted and gossiped. She had this deep dark brown hair, like his, and these forest green/brown eyes.

And one year during the summer solstice she, Sansa, Jeyne, and some of the other girls all made flower crowns but she had made hers out of evergreen needles instead. Woven in a basket braid around her head. The other girls were pretending to be Princess’s like...well the first Daenerys. But when Robb asked who Elena was...she smiled meekly and mumbled “I’m one of the children of the forest.”

It was something he thought about often his first year on the wall. Elena Glover with a crown of pine needles in her hair. She’d grown up, and so had he. And he told Sansa he’d call on her. “When the war’s over.”

He’d meant it then.

Jon doesn’t mean it when he repeats it now.

Their guests arrive in a small boat. Dany is standing at the bough, with her queen face on. The one she wears when she’s trying to convince him to surrender his command. But she smiles when she sees him and he smiles back and steps out onto the pier to help Wylis bring in their boat.

“Stormborn”

“Commander Snow.” She reaches for his hand and he pulls her out of the boat. There’s a moment when he pulls her up and she is incredibly close to him and they pause and she looks up at him and it is as if their breath had sucked all the air in the small space between them.

Jon hastily takes a step back and she moves around him to allow Davos assist the other woman in the boat. Dark skin and dark hair. Tight Curls like a halo around her head.

“This is my secretary, and dear friend Missandei of Naath.” he nods a greeting and the woman smiles even brighter.

The other man he knows by looks and by reputation. He has his gun. It’s on his back right now.

“I served in the Watch under your father” he extended his hand out to Jorah Mormont. “He was a good man” the man stood to accept his handshake. “I assure you, those who mutinied against him were dealt with”

“Thank you. The Watch was his life.” he released Jorah’s hand. “And how is my niece and Bear Island?”

“The island is probably the most secure place in North. Lyanna is...formidable.”

“I haven’t seen her since she was a baby. She had a fierce cry then.” The man laughed. “Thank you,
for permitting me back. It is good to be home.” He follows Daenerys and her secretary down the pier to be introduced to the Manderly’s by Sansa.

The imp does not accept his help and neither does the bald man accompanying him. Davos tenses.

“Snow!” Tyrion shout joyfully. “Glad to see you in one piece.” the clever man eyes his scars “Mostly…” he corrects. “Picked up some scars along the road.”

“It’s been a long road. We’re both still here.”

“I’m Tyrion Lannister.” he introduces himself to Davos.

“This is executive officer Davos Seaworth of the Coming Dawn”

“Stannis and the Dawn are long gone, and the world is better for it. I serve Commander Snow and the Northern Front”

“Ah, the Onion Knight. We fought on opposite sides at the Battle of Blackwater Bay.”

“Unluckily for me.”

The dwarf closes his mouth and there’s nothing to say. Davos lost two sons in the fighting and now he stands across the man who engineered their demise. All for a rad-sick king that died in the snow. Executed by Brienne in the name of yet another dead king.

War never changes.

“So what do you think of our fearless leader?” the dwarf asked a few steps ahead of him, moving toward the shore.

“I think she’s fearless and I think she’s a leader” Jon said. Davos snorted behind him. The bald man did not speak, only eyed him curiously. He hadn’t introduced himself.

“Well put. I see your skills at conversation have not improved since we last spoke.” Tyrion rolled his eyes. “My Darling Wife.” he exclaimed loudly instantly becoming the center of attention for the small group gathered at the shore.

The Red Wolf examines her prey with a trained eye. “My least despised husband.”

“I told you, Varys, my dear wife wouldn’t kill me on sight” he takes Sansa’s outstretched hand, and presses it against his forehead in a relieved gesture, before letting it drop.

“I prefer to have Jon kill my husbands for me.” Not entirely true, but he’s not going to correct it.

“What are my chances for survival, Snow?”

“Decreasing every time you call my sister your wife.” to his left Dany laughs quietly.

“Samwell Tarly!” Jorah extends his hand out to his best friend.

“Jorah” Sam smiles. “I am glad to see you well.”

“Khaleesi, this is the man I have to thank for my life and my continued service to you. He’s a genius”

“Oh...Well… That may be a bit of an exaggeration.” Sam stutters.
“Nonsense. How many men can say they cured a man of Greyscale?” Sam mutters something about just following the instructions.

“Well met, Sam. I have heard a great many things about you.” she extends her hand elegantly and he takes it awkwardly. “I absolutely adore your wife. She has been exceedingly kind”

“Oh Gilly.” he says excitedly, he apples of his cheeks swelling at her name. “I cannot wait for you to meet her, Ser.” he turns back to Jorah, intimidated by Daenerys. “Oh and Little Sam.”

“Well let’s get you back to her.” Jorah claps him on the back and picks up some of...what he’s assuming is Dany’s additional luggage.

“Do you still remember how to drive in the snow, Ser?” Jon asks Jorah.

“Oh yes. There’s somethings you never forget.” He tosses him the keys to the second truck. The one Sam and Beric came in. But before the party begins to migrate towards the Trucks, Sansa stops them.

“Minister Varys… I don’t recall you being among those invited to participate in these discussions.”

“Miss Stark…”

“Administrator Stark.” She corrects coldly. The man bows his head in apology.

“That’s an interesting pocket watch you have there. May ask where you got it?”

“Bequeathed to me as part of an inheritance”

“Who died?”

“My good uncle.”

“Tragic.”

“Varys and I are a package. Together we make a whole man.” Tyrion jokes as Sansa’s ice eyes freeze over her former husband cutting off the nervous laughter. He turns Daenerys for an answer.

“He has some new information regarding Cersei that I think would be valuable for both of us to hear.” He turns back to Sansa.

“I like Spiders where I can see them.” but as soon as their car door closes behind her “Keep my office and the radio room under lock and key at all times.”

“He’ll spy?” Sam gasps.

“Not directly, but he will be listening...carefully. and I don’t want him learning all our secrets. Be careful speaking too freely around children, or around the vendors at Wintertown, or any hired help.”

“We have nothing to hide.” Jon grumbles.

“We have everything to protect. There’s no telling where his true loyalty lies.”

It’s a long ride back, Jorah drives the queens company, giving her the privacy of her own council, and he drove the rest. Sam briefs them on what’s happened at White Harbor. Sansa tells updates them about Gilly and Little Sam and curses quietly every time he hits a bump and she drops a stitch in her knitting. But after awhile it gets quiet. Only the sound of Sansa’s needles, and Davos gentle coughing.
“How are you doing, Jon?” Beric asks in that way. That way that can only mean he’s talking about that one thing. He meets Sansa’s eyes in the rearview mirror. She sighs sadly and turns those blue eyes away to look back at her knitting.


Or Arya. Or Bran.

He doesn’t want them to see.

“Fine.” he answer curtly. He hears the one eyed man chuckle in the seat behind him and sees Sam casts a worried glance his direction. Not now.

“Good.” the preacher leans back in his seat. “I was worried that the stress might be trigger an episode”

“I’m good.” his jaw hardens and he bits into his tongue.

“You know with Cersei having wildfire and the Dragon Queen barking at you to surrender.”

“I’m good” he repeats himself.

“No knives in the dark? No lying in the snow?” His eyes flash up the rearview mirror and Beric smiles. And he sees himself in the mirror. His face twisted up and hard. Something Dead and Dangerous in his eyes. And then he sees Sansa. Worry marring her features.

And he lets out a breath.

It’s nightfall when they finally get back to Winterfell.

And as expected, Sansa stops him before he exits the truck. Hopping into the front seat, as Sam runs to introduce Jorah to his wife.

“You know you can talk to me about it.”

He sighs because what the fuck is he supposed to say. What is he supposed to tell her? He fucking died. And now he’s back and he’s constantly fucking reliving the moment he died. How’s that supposed to fucking help anything. What happens when he needs take a fucking minute and she’s fussing about him trying to fix him. No. It’ll make her worry more. Worse it’ll make him look weak.

She already doesn’t think he can protect her. “No-one can protect me.” she’d chided after he promised her that Ramsay would never hurt her again. “No-one can protect anyone”

He doesn’t need to give her another reason to believe that.

“I know.”

“You know he’s only doing it because we love you. Davos, Sam and I. You can talk to us. We’re here for you.”

“You know nothing, Jon Snow…” Ygritte whispers.

“What do you want from me Sansa?”

She sighs heavily and looks out the window and shakes her head.
“Bran says Arya’s having nightmares too. That she’s showing signs of shell shock. She does the same thing you do. Only she just trains instead of works.”

How many times will he fail to protect them? How many more times does he have to fail them?

He buries his face in his hands, pressing into his eyes and pushing up, till his fingers rake through his hair. “I’ve tried talking to her. She won’t—”

Sansa shakes her head and lets out the saddest smallest laugh. “—I wonder where she learned it from, Jon”

Missandei is polite and extraordinarily patient as Joanna and Willa ask her a million questions. She has her septum pierced with an ornate silver ring. And dark skin. Both of which the girls find fascinating, much to his chagrin when they very bluntly ask why her skin was different.

He cringes. They’ve never met anyone who lived farther south than Brienne. There were a handful of Dornishmen in the Watch. But he made a point to make sure they were kept well away from any of his men at the wall.

“It’s quite alright Commander” she smiles brightly as he apologizes. “They are only curious.” she bends to their eye level. “Have you ever turned pink when the sun is hot?” Joanna nods “I am from Naath, little ones, and there the sun is so hot that if we did not have dark skin, we would burn from the sun’s light alone.”

They accept the explanation and drag her off to meet Gilly and Little Sam.

“Commander Snow.” Daenerys pulls him to the side, her hand sliding from his shoulder to hook around his elbow as she pulls him away. “I wanted to apologize for springing Varys on you. When I boarded the ship to collect the others, he said he had important intelligence to share. I thought it best we learn of whatever new threats Cersei presents together at tomorrow’s council.”

“What do you trust him?” She pauses, considering the question thoughtfully. Her animated eyebrows knitting together as she answers him.

“I trust his motives. I trust his abilities. I trust that he will tell us what we need to know.”

“That’s not a yes.”

“He’s a intelligence officer. Its best to always be wary of spies.”

They hammer out the trade deal first, and the tedious topic reminds him exactly how unprepared he is for this job. His life has been military. And while much of that included things like protecting supply lines, making sure everyone had enough to eat, and organizing people. Manufacturing goods, like the winter coats Daenerys wanted in exchange for Stannis’s cache of weapons was just beyond his skill level.

Sansa on the other hand…. She had already recruited many of the older women from homesteads surrounding Winterfell, Deepwood Motte, and Barrowhall to felti the thick fiber from their shaggy cattle, received some estimates from Alys Karstark regarding availability of sealskin from the Bay, projected timetables on how quickly they would be able to begin shipping things down to Dragonstone, based on how often they could shear fiber from the cattle.

After this initial exchange, they worked on a more general trade agreement. Greyjoy ships are only allowed to dock at White Harbor. Daenerys can dock there as well as Deepwood Motte and Eastwatch. No ships are allowed in the Bay of Seals or Bear Island.
Not that Lyanna would let them. She turned that Island into a fortress. Artillery included.

Then Sam starts to educate them on the wights. He spreads out a map of the world on the table. Windstreams.

“Now after the bombs dropped, clouds of radiation were spread all over the globe. But the winds kept moving them around. They eventually settled here” he pointed to a region on the map above the arctic circle. “The wall traps air currents behind it. Keeps the rads cycling around and around.”

He opens up a muddy journal. “We were up there with the Night’s Watch and I noticed my rad counter clicking. Which was odd because no bombs were ever dropped North of the Wall. I started keeping track.” he found the page he was looking for. It was a chart with his coordinates marked one axis and the rads on another. As he moved North, the rads went up.

“You see, at sites where the bombs hit along the Kingsroad, the rad count is off the charts. You can’t measure it with a handheld counter. That's why it kills people so fast. But up there it’s like their brains are being eaten slowly until their only instinct is to well… eat.”

Sam pulls out a Textbook he had stolen from the University at Oldtown.

“So this is what a normal human brain should look like.” and then he showed her a sketch that was part of an official looking document. It was a coroner's report from the Night's watch. “And this is what their brains look like.” The brain looked… eaten, deflated, rotten.

Daenerys looks at the report but her eyes aren’t on the disgusting image of rotted corpse. It's on the signature that lines the bottom of the page. Her violet eyes go deep as she smiles as her fingers trace the old man’s wobbly hand…

There’s this tender ache in his chest as he watches her pass the report to Tyrion and blot her eye attempting to disguise it as brushing her hair out of her face. And he decides that he’ll tell her more about Aemon at dinner tonight. Sam has some good stories about him. But he wants to be the one tell her, to see her eyes go wide as she tells him about how he would shame Lt. Thorne with his quick wit, and leave the asshole dumbfounded and gaping like a fish.

“For the watch…” a ghost rasps and that tender ache that felt so good and sweet, twists to frozen steel sliding past his heart. He winces.

“How many do you believe to be beyond the wall?” Tyrion asks. Sam turns to Jon and Tormund.

“At least fifty thousand.” Jorah whistles.

“That many…” Daenerys gasps.

“Aye. And that's not the worst of it.”

“Whatever is causing this… it behaves like a virus. Its spreads with any contact with blood or mucous membranes.” Sam adds. “So as your men fall…”

“More are added to their numbers…” she finishes the thought to its logical conclusion.

“They’re fast fuckers too. ” Tormund adds. Not quite helpful. But its true. They’re fast as shit.

“Do you believe them to be intelligent?” Varys asks. It's the first time he’s spoken and the questions
feels... pointed.

“They hunt. They swarm and overpower their prey. Like insects.”

“An interesting an analogy.” the bald man says with his curiously...effeminate voice. “Most types of swarm insects… bees, ants… are highly organized units operating around a central queen.”

Tormund freezes and he feels himself do the same.

“Do these undead have a central leader, Commander Snow?”

This is the part where they lose people. This is the part where everyone assumes he’s crazy. The rest makes sense. The rest they can prove, kind of, but this part… He’s fucking real and he’s fucking coming.

“Yes.”

“Who is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“Is he undead as well?”

“I don’t know.”

“How does he control his forces?”

“I don’t know.”

“You know nothing, Jon Snow.” Ygritte answers him numbly as they wander through the destroyed homestead. It was little more than a cabin, a chicken coop, and small patch of veg. She leans down and picks up a small doll in a corner. A trail of blood leading out the broken down door. Stained with dirt, and blood, and the desperate claw marks of once human hands scratching the door to shreds.

Davos puts a stop to it. “Why don’t we let Commander Snow and Tormund Giantsbane tell you about what happened at Hardhome?”

They tell them. Do their best to describe it. Try to not choke on their words as they tell them how all that was left of the FreeFolk were swallowed up by a horde of undead in a matter of minutes and all they could do was try and get away with the people they had.

How a man with blue glowing eyes strode through the horde untouched and suddenly, the dead stopped feasting… and the people they were feasting stood up. How Karsi stood up, half her face chewed off.

“And they are still Beyond the Wall?” Tyrion asks.

“Yes.”

“Are you tracking their movements, Do we have a current location?”

“What remains of the Night’s Watch is on high alert and sending rangers out scouting constantly. Ten men have disappeared this year.” He points out the locations where they disappeared on the map.

“Couldn’t these men have been taken by the wilderness?”
“Yes. But my men are experienced rangers.” He bites his tongue as he thinks of Satin. Dammit Ed.

“Are they your men, Jon Snow...I was under the impression that...Commander Tollet was new Commander of the Night’s Watch.” Varys interjects, drawing his attention away from the dwarf.

“I trained every man on the wall myself, when it was my command.”

“So to review, you are claiming there is an army of... fifty thousand undead wildlings at unknown location beyond the wall, led by an unknown person with unknown abilities. And for evidence you have provided... A sketch from a 90 year old man who reportedly went blind years before he died. Radiation counts noted in a handwritten journal that cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the realm” he paused. “...And the word of a commander who broke his oaths to the Night’s Watch.”

“Jon’s no oathbreaker” Davos growls.

“No-one here would hold such a thing against you of course, of course. Many people tried to rescue Sansa Stark over the years, people in this very room.” the bald man gestured to Tyrion. “Not to mention the Late Olenna Tyrell, her graces former ally.” He turns a very pointed look to Sansa “and the former Queen herself.”

Ice is cold and unforgiving. It will kill you as surely as a bullet or a blast… or a stab of cold steel to the heart. The cold steel of Sansa’s spine straightens as she extends to her full height.

“Say her name.”

“Forgive me, I had forgotten how close you and Margaery Tyrell were. Her death is a true loss to Westeros. But, I digress” the bald man turns back to him “You broke your oaths to The Night’s Watch to save your half-sister.”

“I would be careful about insulting the honor of one Eddard Stark's sons on my land, Minister Varys.” Sansa hisses.

“I wouldn’t dare, Administrator Stark, I am merely remarking on the facts as they have been presented.”

“My watch had ended.” Jon’s voice was gravel in his throat.

“Forgive me if I’m mistaken. But, I thought that The Night’s Watch was for life.”

The knife punctured his chest. “For the watch” Lt. Thorne rasped.

“Enough!” Daenerys stands abruptly, her voice low and dangerous and laced with dragonfire. The room went silent and still. “We are here as friends, if not allies, against very dangerous enemies that threaten our very survival.” She closes her eyes and takes a few deep breaths out her nose. Nostrils flaring as she exhales her flame. “If you have completed this unnecessarily aggressive line of questioning, and have finished antagonizing our host, Varys, please update us on Cersei’s movements.

“At once, Stormborn.” there’s some maneuvering of maps, and charts as he brings his own out. “During your father’s time there were five facilities that were used in the production of Wildfire. Four are in the crownlands, and were reported to be destroyed by Robert Baratheon after he was crowned. But like everything Robert Baratheon ever did after the rebellion, he did a poor job.”

“Cersei began quietly excavating the ones in the Crownlands shortly after Joffery’s death. But back then she was doing it quietly. It took years to excavate the first one. Now that she has the power and
resources to do it she can clear the others in months.”

“Where is the last facility?” Sansa asks. Varys is silent and only places a small rocket figurine on the map.

Casterly fucking Rock.

“She has diverted huge labor forces to the mines outside The Rock. Wildfire production takes a great deal of energy… and with the power in short supply throughout much of the crownlands, it would be impossible for her to…” The man continues talking but… he can’t focus.

He’s staring at the clean easy line of ocean between Casterly Rock and the Iron Islands and then the line between the Iron Islands and Deepwood Motte and the clean line of land between Deepwood and Winterfell.

It’s the weak point in their defenses. The waste of ruined riverlands and the thick swamp of the neck would make any Land invasion impossible and the dangerous waters along the coast of the Vale combined with the Arryn’s artillery make their Eastern Shore a less likely target.

Davos tells him the cold water of the Frozen Shore with keep Euron Greyjoy’s submarines away from their Western Coast.

For now.

Winterfell wouldn’t be worth the resources it would take for Cersei to physically march her army up North. That part of her propaganda was true. The south didn’t need them… But with Winter coming and a huge swaths of the Reach’s crops destroyed with Wildfire, a few hundred heads or so of cattle are going to seem like a prize.

He’s walking the edge of the ranch, watching the shaggy highland cows meander as a few of the ranch hands try and get the first batch into the Barn. Sansa re-did the schedule that they were going to slaughter them for winter stores so they can shear them a few more times to better fulfill their part of the trade. This batch was going in out of the snow to make it easier for the ladies Sansa hired to work.

He sees Arya’s dark shape run past the barn with Ghost following her heels. No doubt going to the smelter to see Gendry. He lets out a half snort of a laugh.

Then as he turns and sees Dany walking towards him. She looks beautiful, wearing a dark grey coat with those exaggerated shoulders and thick wool leggings. She looks like a queen, and not a scrappy raider in leathers and denim and linen.

Jorah is with her, watching her approach from a respectable distance. He doesn’t like the way Mormont looks at her. He noticed it on the shoreline, he noticed it in the mess during the meeting.

Jorah watches her the same way he watches her. Too closely.

Whatever time he had alone with her is over.

“Commander Snow.”

“Stormborn.” he addresses her formally but she gives him an easy smile and he returns it. But then her face falls. Her violet eyes filled with a doubt.

Everyone always doubts him. Because he’s a bastard, because he’s not Robb, because he’s not a
Stark. He thought she’d be different.

“You don’t believe me.” he can hear the pathetic panic in his voice. A frail line waivering through the words.

“I haven’t said anything.”

“You don’t need to, I can see it.” he paces back and forth. And takes two long steps into her space. “It’s real. The enemy is real. He’s always been real. I’m not mad. Tormund is not mad. You have to believe us.” That panic is louder now.

“Jon. Stop” she says it quietly and holds up her hand to the side. And he sees that Jorah has moved closer. And he realizes how close he is to her, how he’s invaded her space. How he’s trapped her between his body and the railing.

“I never suggested you were mad. It’s just all a little fantastical. But that even that doesn’t matter, even the most fantastic stories have seeds of truth to them. I’d like to find out the truth behind this one”

Jon turns away from her and presses his hands into his eyes, desperately trying to get control of his emotions as Karsi’s last words ring in his head, as her undead corpse shuffled toward the shore, as he hears Willa scream behind him while Tormund tries to pull her away from the edge of the boat. Pull her away so she doesn’t have to see her mom like that.

He is telling the truth. He knows its the truth.

“The Wildling’s called him the Night King. After the old story about the Children of the Forest and the First Men. They fought together against their common enemy. Despite their differences, despite their suspicions. Together.” he turns back to her. “We need to do the same if we’re going to survive. There’s your seed of truth.” Her moonglow face scrutinizes him for a long moment.

“And you don’t think you can defeat them without my armies and my dragon?”

“No, I don’t think I can.” It’s the first time he’s admitted it outloud and its...thick in his mouth and heavy on his tongue and the weight of his inadequacy sits heavy on his shoulders.

She glances down and taps her knuckles against the palm of her opposite hand. Measuring his words in her mind.

“I will fight for you. I will fight for the North.” and the weight lifts for a half instant before… “When you bend the knee.” and the full force of it crashes back down on him and it's his turn to punch his fist into his opposite hand as he bite his tongue and shakes his head. Her eyes are hard and her mouth drawn tight over her teeth. Every muscle of her face frozen.

“The North won’t accept a southern governance. Not anymore. Not after all they suffered.” He spits and she sighs and shakes her head.

“They will if you do.” she answers cooly. “They made you their leader. They chose you.” Then she inhales and her eyes shine up at him, and her tone becomes quiet and pleading. “Isn’t their survival more important than your pride?”

Those are his words. The same words he said to Mance. He’d begged him... And if Mance had listened…

His feet begin to carry him away from her. He’s not Mance. Mance used him. Mance took his anger
and used it and turned him into his little crow soldier. Mance manipulated people with hopes of a future that could never be. Mance led ten thousand people to their deaths.

He’s not fucking Mance.

The slurry of half melted ice and tough grass crunches beneath his boots as he marches away from her. “Jon. don’t...” she calls softly.

Drinking’s good. Fighting’s better. Fucking’s best.

So he fights. After Dinner Drills with his troops and after hours of running them, his blood is still up and he wants to fucking go harder.

So he grabs Beric and Clegane and they do what soldiers do.

Beric watches while he fights Clegane. It’s simple hand to hand. He wants to feel it, to get hit and hit back. There’s a truth behind Tormund’s wisdom, the act of using his body pulling him out of his head.

He can’t yield. He betrayed them once already. What was the life of one innocent man against Thousands of lives, lost to Stannis and the Undead.

Hindsight.

One of Ygritte’s arrows sinks into his chest. Traitor. Twice Turncloak.

“It’s always going to hurt, Jon Snow.” Beric advises as he fails to weave away from a simple punch. “You can’t avoid it.” The one eyed soldier scratches at the scars around his neck. Ygritte loses another arrow, this one hitting between the muscle below his clavicle. She could have killed him at any moment. Her eyes are full of tears... Because his choice caused the deaths of thousands of people.

Had he stayed with her?... Had they stayed in that cave?

“We are both servants of the Rad God, Jon Snow. The Rad Temple in Volantis say she is the princess that was promised. Accept it.”

“I serve the North, I serve the FreeFolk. Stannis massacred the Free Folk in the name of the Rad God.”

“You don’t owe them anything. They didn’t raise you from the dead after your own men killed you. R’llhor did.”

“Why?” It’s not the first time he’s asked this question. Some days it's the first thought in his head.

“I don't know.” Beric shakes his head. “I don't think it's our purpose to understand. Except that we’re soldiers. And we fight for life. Death is the enemy. And Death is coming for us all. With an army of our fallen. That's all I know.”

Jon stands upright and turns to face Clegane.

“Bend the fucking Knee, Snow.” he says lighting a cigarette. “Kill that cunt on that fucking chair, and let the Dragon Queen roast your dead.”

“Oh its that simple isn’t it.”
“I’ve fought six fucking wars and put down more rebellious little twits than I care to fucking think about. Your little fucking wildling Mantra, is gonna get alot of fucking people killed. Bend the Damned Knee.”

“For once, I agree with Clegane.” He quiets as Brienne walks into the yard. Arms folded behind her back.

“How goes it?”

“All Quiet, Commander.” She eyes them carefully. “Would you care to spar against a different opponent?”

“No.” Brienne would kick his ass and leave him on the floor in his current state.

“Permission to speak freely, Ser.”

He licks his lips and looks away. “Go ahead.”

“There is no shame in service. We all enlisted to serve Westeros in one way or another. We all swore oaths.” She motions to Clegane and Beric. “How did yours start, Ser?”

“My Oath to the Night’s Watch ended when men whose lives I saved stabbed me seven fucking times.”

“Bullshit.” Her gun hangs from a strap across her back. Oathkeeper. “Your Oath, Jon.” she demands. It’s made from pieces of his father’s…

He stares at her. Trying to light her on fucking fire with his mind.

It doesn’t work and she sighs.

“I am the Sword of the Storm” she salutes and recites her oath to the Stormlands, to Renley Baratheon. “I will rage against those who attack us, and shelter those who seek the safety of my Eye. I will protect and serve the Storm, the Crown and Westeros from this day until my last day.”

He runs his tongue along his teeth. She thinks she can pull duty on him.

“I am a Brother with no Banner.” Beric announces. “I will take no coin nor claim no title. I will fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. I will fight those who only fight for themselves. I will protect and serve the small folk of Westeros. From this day until my last day.”

The one eyed man turned to Clegane and hit him.

“Fuck you, I’m not doing it.”

“Just fucking say it.”

“No.” he scoffs.

“Fucking do it Clegane.” Brienne barks.

Clegane grumbles and lets out an annoyed huff. “I am the line between kings and men. Between Order and Chaos. I protect those who protect all. I will serve those who serve all. From this day until my last day.” He spits on the ground as he finishes. Brienne rolls her eyes before turning back to him.
“Your Oath, Jon.” she demands again. He sighs heavily, leaning against a the rail.

“I am the shield that guards the realms of men.” he relents.

The night sky lights up red orange as a massive fireball spits up into the sky. Its in the direction of barn and the pasture...and the smelter.

Arya.

“PODRICK!” Brienne screams

He’s calling her name again as he sees the flame spread cross the roof of the building, the snow on the ground and the cold in the air doing nothing against the spread. There’s the sound of panicked cattle making a terrible sound as they are burned alive inside, trapped inside the barn.

“She’s in the house Commander” Gendry calls running up to him.

There’s the stench of burnt hair and the smell off cooked meat, and the reality of it hit. Fuck. Jon catches the boy by the shoulder. “Get your hammer. We need to break down the door and get them out…”

“Yes Ser.”

Another Fireball erupts as the Barn doors swing open.

And she stands there...flames licking across her newly exposed skin as the sheds of her coat burn around her as the sudden rush of air into forces another erupting bellow of fire. The orange lights catching the silver in her hair and the moonglow of her skin.

Kissed by fire, but never burning.
As soon as the words leave her mouth...she regrets them. She wishes she could suck the soundwaves back past her lips, pull the air back through her vocal cords and into her lungs. Swallow them whole, so she would never have to see that...look ever again.
But she can’t.

That’s not the gift the rads gave her.

There’s a huge grin on Jorah’s face that won’t go away as he walks alongside her. It had been over twenty years since he had seen snow, since he had been home. His joy brings a small smile to her face. One promise that she was able to keep. If only Barristan could have come home as well. He was the finest man she ever knew.

Until she met a man who would freely kneel before children, but never before a queen.

“What do you think of the North, Khaleesi?

“It is cold and beautiful. I like how open the sky feels. It reminds me of the Grass Sea.” He stops and looks up at the stars.

“I suppose it does… Clear skies without the smog of from the factories.” He sucks in a lungful, eyes peeled on the skies. “The Ice Dragon.” he points up at a constellation. “It’s good to see it again. Coldest Star in the Sky points the way North.”

Her violet eyes find the line of stars he demonstrates. Like all constellations, it's fairly amorphous. There’s no dragon. But there’s no missing a the bright blue white twinkle due true North. It must be fairly close to the planet’s pole.

“And its people…?” he asks.

There’s a question laced behind the question. Of course he’s noticed. He’s always watching her. Especially when she’s in the company of men he finds… threatening.

Daenerys sighs. “Hardy, Hardworking, Friendly if a bit...cold. Stubborn…” She hadn’t meant to say the last bit aloud but it tumbles past her lips anyway.

Jorah laughs. “Somethings don’t change.” he shakes his head. “Don’t worry, Khaleesi… Give them time. “Practicality is the law of the North.”

“Winter is coming.” she mumbles.

“Always. The North will accept your rule before the worst of it.”

Daenerys nods. Hearing the words. Even listening to them. But… she can’t shake the look on Jon’s face.

Anguish, despair, disgust, and… hurt.

She’d hurt him…

“And you think I made the right choice?” and she hates how small her voice sounds.

Jorah stops walking and turns to face her. His steel eyes looking over her.

“You were born to rule Westeros. You were born to save Westeros. Never Doubt that.”

“But…what if… this is not the way to save Westeros.”

“A United Westeros is a Westeros at Peace. To leave the North Independent would invite war in the future. Commander Snow may be reasonable… and the South may be able to coexist with him in
command. But Martial Law means leadership can change...Easily. The next Commander of the Northern Front may not be. For centuries, its been Starks...but with their family so...” he pauses trying to be delicate when discussing the diminished state of the once great family. “Who knows who will come next?”

Who will come next? It’s the same question Tyrion has been pestering her about. Pestering her to name a second or come up with a means of succession...“if you truly believe you are barren.” He says it as if he doesn’t believe her. As if she doesn’t know her own body. As if she is not the product of hundreds of years of inbreeding. As if she is simply human and not a dragon.

Her hands drift low on her belly as her mind drifts to little Willa... her small round face peering over Jon’s shoulder before drifting to sleep. Safe and Warm.

“By my understanding of their rankings, the next Commander of the Northern Front is your niece. Lt. Commander Lyanna Mormont”

He beams with pride.

“I can’t wait to see her. To meet the woman she has become. I’ve been told she is fearsome by some of the greenboys. She seems well-respected. They will learn to respect you as well. And love you.”

They walk in silence for a time. It’s not an easy one. He’s watching her too closely. Perhaps he always has...and the pleasant solitude and privacy of the past week has made her realize it.

“Khaleesi... seeing you here...in the North. In my home. It makes me-”

She knows what comes next. He’s done it before...and her heart can’t take it right now.

“-Stop Jorah”

“Daenerys. My feelings for you have not changed.”

“And what of my feelings...” she hisses. “Do you not see how much damage you do with these proclamations? You are my oldest friend, my protector, my confidant. But I do not love you the way you wish me to and that will not change. How many times must I say no? How many times before you respect my wishes? You damage the bond between us with this foolishness. Did you travel across two continents and conquer Greyscale only to break my trust?”

“Khaleesi...” he pleads.

“I need some space.” she orders. “Maintain your distance.”

“As you command, your grace.” His eyes dart to the earth and he trudges away from her, boots crunching in the snow. She rests her hands on the railings and decides to put another barrier between them. Bending awkwardly, she slides between the rails, slipping inside the pasture.

There were many farms in Slaver’s bay, and all across the Great Grass Sea, but Daenerys never spent significant time on any of them. Her experience had been limited to robbing them when she was with Drogo, and desperately trying to get the people who were once slaves to return to them to work as Free Men for wages.

The great shaggy cows shoveling their heads through the snow to graze and are entirely unmoved by her presence among them. They have large horns, and great thick coats hang off them in mops of long black hair.
She brushes her fingers through it. The outer layer is coarse and rough, the thick coarse fibers insulating the animal against the cold... but underneath... its soft and warm. Jon’s coat had been warm and heavy on her shoulders that first night. A comforting weight as she found herself feeling lost in a strange place. A weight pushing her down, grounding her to the earth.

“I don’t suppose you have any advice.” She asks the creature, brushing a tuft of fluffy black hair away from its eyes. It looks at her, large black eye unblinking. Then returns to graze. “I thought not” The sky lights up with and roars with a fiery blaze as the barn is suddenly ablaze. It spreads... unnaturally. Spreading across the roof and walls more quickly than it should.

A Dragon knows how fire moves... and this is wrong... This is intentional.

And then she hears the terrible noise of the cows locked inside. A young man, she can’t remember his name... is attempting to open a small door on the side. The Brave boy reaches for the lock.

“MOVE”

The bolt is red with heat but she only feels warmth beneath her fingers. As the door flings open flames lick out around her, blowing the young man back.

“Is anyone inside?” he shakes his head. The cows are trapped in small pens inside. Making horrific noises as the shaggy coats that keep them warm in the blizzard catch and burn. “Go get help.” she orders and runs in.

Its hot...Too Hot. She doesn’t know it by the touch of skin but by the taste of it on her tongue. Too hot. Too Fast. It...tastes wrong. Its not woodfire. It’s acidic and noxious.

A beam has already collapsed, killing the animals beneath it. The small side door isn’t big enough for them to go through. They will stampede and crush each other and crush her. The main doors are large and swing out from the inside. The smoke that fills her lungs abrades the soft tissues as she pushes against it with what strength she has. It is old heavy wood and she can feel it splinter against her bare skin. Her coat is all but gone and the layers beneath are starting to catch.

She has to jump out of the way as the first batch of cows bolt free from their pen. Bursting through the barely open door, and the fresh burst of oxygen causes the fire to burn brighter and hotter. The stench of burnt hair and burnt meat and burnt wood fills her nostrils. She gasps for breath as the smoke fills her lungs and she attempts to cover her mouth with her sleeve...but there’s nothing left to it.

The second pen is all she can muster. She can’t breathe anymore and the rest... is all to waste.

Jorah has her as soon as she staggers outside. His coat around her as she coughs and gasps. Cows and people run around them. Trying to catch them and push them down into the snow to extinguish the flames.

“You need to stop running into flaming buildings” Jorah began patting out the flames lingering on the remains of her clothes.

“I’m the only one who can.” She offered weakly, shivering as the cold air touched her naked skin. A wave of dizziness crashed over her. She’d inhaled too much smoke and she leaned heavily against Jorah coughing.

“PODERICK!” Brienne shouts bursting through the treeline. The young soldier who she’d thrown aside early waves in response.
“Let it burn…” his voice breaks over the roar of the fire and the cries of the shrieking animals. “There’s nothin’ we can do.

“Aye, Ser.” someone responds.

She lets out a breath, she didn’t realize she was holding as he walks over. That looks of disgust and betrayal and hurt gone and replaced with…

Her eyes hit the floor and she pulls the coat tightly around her, aware of her near-nakedness beneath Jorah’s coat.

“Are you alright?”

“Commander. This fire was intentional.” She coughs it out. He opens his mouth to say something, then closes it changing his mind.

“How do you know?”

“It...tastes wrong.” she hesitates and he looks confused as she searches for another descriptor. “Artificial.”

“Smells like Chems.” Gendry observes.

There’s another roar, as a spark hits something. A propane tank or some other fuel source. And Jorah pulls her down crouching over her protectively.

“Get the cows out to the North pasture.” he orders the men gathering. “Bury the dead ones in the snow.” he turns back to them.

“Are you alright, Daenerys?” he repeats his earlier question.

“I’m fine. Fire cannot hurt a dragon” She says it with a small smile, but even as she says it her lung betray her and she begins coughing again. He makes a movement towards her, then seeing Jorah, stops.

“Sam has an oxygen tank, it’ll help with the… “ he makes a circular hand motion in front of his chest to indicate breathing.

“Let’s get you inside, your grace.”

It’s a small room on the first floor of the Stark’s home. All the best to keep the meds safe. Most valuable things on the ranch most likely. Jorah leans up against the doorway and Missandei is fussing about brushing the tangles from her hair as she sits taking deliberate huffs through an oxygen mask.

Brandon Stark eyes her curiously from the corner, in his chair.

“So its true…” the young man eyes her curiously as she nods. “Amazing. I’ve never met anyone else with gifts...” Her eyes brighten as she turns to him pulling the mask from off her face.

“What can you do Bran?”

“Bran can hear the RAVEN” Sam says pulling a depressor out and an small flashlight. “Open up, your grace”

“Radios?” she asks then sticks out her tongue.
“Its complicated.” the sickly young man dismisses the inquiry as politely as he can manage.

“Seems like there’s no permanent damage. You might have a bit of sore throat for a few days. But I think you will be alright, your grace.”

“Thank you, Sam”

“May I ask something” he sputters. She nods. “Is it a Targaryen thing? Or is it just you? Because we burned Aemon, but he didn’t” he waggles his fingers as if casting a spell.

“I believe it’s some combination of the two. I was born after my father dropped the bombs, the Scientists at the House of the Unknown in Qarth, believed the rads may have interfered with something in my genetics, however, all the Lore and history of Valyria is full of Fire imagery.”

“Well perhaps when you conquer the South, you’ll go to the University at Oldtown and they can look into it.” Missandei finishes the long rope of braid and sighs. Daenerys stands and straightens the fresh clothes Missandei brought her.

“Perhaps.”

If she learned anything from Qarth, its to never let people’s awe of her gifts pass beyond a curiosity. They had tried to imprison her, experiment on her. Her friends betrayed her. Never Again.

Raised voices echo through the hallway.

“You can’t lead a raid beyond the Wall. You're not in the Night's Watch anymore. You’re the fucking Commander of the Northern Front.” Davos snaps.

“People will starve this winter if we don’t.” Jon answers him.

“That doesn’t mean you have to go yourself.” Davos again. There’s the jangle of keys and the toe-heel sound of ladies boots. Sansa.

“I’m the only one here who's fought them. I'm the only one here who knows... “ The doorway to Sansa’s office closes, cutting off the conversation.

She tries to hear through the wall, but its muffled and hushed. Sam has gone very quiet, as has Bran. The young man has his eyes closed, and is pressing his forehead into a steeple of his fingers.

“If you’ll excuse me” she slips out of the room dismissing herself as Missandei slips back up the stairs and Jorah plants himself by the front door to the house. Maintaining his distance...as ordered.

“Reckless” Tyrion mutters from a couch in the sitting room, mulling over a large cup of wine.

“Necessary.” she replies.

“Fire may not hurt you… but there are still many things that can. What if you had been crushed by stampede, or a falling beam, or suffocated?”

“I will not play a game of hypotheticals with you Tyrion.” She takes a seat near the fire. “What is the damage?”

“56 dead and dying cows. Nearly 20,000 kilos of beef. Thousands of yards of wool, hundreds of pounds of cheese and butter over the course of the winter… The animal’s shelter is gone, so when Winter comes in force they’ll need to either build a new one or slaughter them all.”
“Speak with Administrator Stark about allowing some of our men to come ashore from the Black Wind and provide assistance rebuilding the barn”

“Daenerys…” Tyrion warns.

“I will not have my men sit idle, while the people I intend to serve need aid. Draw up a work detail, preferably Unsullied who speak either Westerosi or the Bravossi dialect of Valyrian.”

“At once, Stormborn.” he shuffles off his seat and departs. The door to the office opens and a flash of red hair catches her eye.

“Bran could you connect with Commander Tollet at Fort Black and ask for a Status report at EastWatch.” Sansa asks her brother.

She remembers Eastwatch from when she copied the map. Northeastern corner of the Wall. An old Lighthouse tucked far North. That portion of the map was one of the sparsest. Only a handful of details compared to the dense forest on the Western portion of the Map. The only real details had been the Shivering Sea, a river, A doodle of a pirate ship and a small settlement.

Hardhome…

A gasp sucks into her lungs as Sansa approaches her, Davos at her heels.

“Your Grace. There are no words. Thank you. That was…” her ice eyes shine with unshed tears. “There are no words…” she repeats choking slightly. “Excuse me…” Sansa moves out the door brushing her hand to her eyes.

“That was a brave thing you did, lass, running into a burning building like that.”

She nods and offers a small smile. “Not as brave as you would think” Fire cannot harm a dragon and Bravery requires risk.

He flips open a lighter. “May I?”

She extended her hand and the ran her fingers through the flames.

Arya snorts loudly from the top of stairs. “It’s a parlor trick.” she jumps down from the second story and runs her fingers through the flame.

Daenerys quirks her eyebrow and kept her hand extended over the flame. The flame licked across her skin, flickering and looking for something to catch on.

“This is Daenerys Stormborn. The Unburnt. The Last Dragon. It is no trick.” Jorah answers.

Davos snapped the lighter shut. “Well, now I’ve seen everything and we can go on your suicide mission in peace” he jerked his head to the left. “Isn’t that so Jon?”

She hadn’t seen him re-enter the room, now holding a large sheet of paper. It's the map she made for him. The copy of his dead wife’s. He was staring at her. His eyes were full of something. Regret.

He set his jaw and ignored Davos as he went to the table and laid out the map and stared at it intently. She found herself staring at him, her eyes drifting down the hard plane of his back. His blacks were always a little too tight. Around his arms, across his chest, and back. Lower.

Not appropriate.
Sansa returns, her face was a mask of stone and Daenerys wills herself to look away, tapping her thumbs together and letting out her frustration and growing anxiety in a slow breath, careful not to disrupt the uneasy tension that permeates the room.

It was shattered by Tormund slamming open the door and pointing at Davos.

“Isn’t it your job to talk him out of stupid fucking ideas like this?” he strode in followed by two men. Clegane and Beric.

“I’ve been failing at that job as of late.” the older man grumbled. Jon looked over his shoulder at the men.

“Where’s Gendry?” he asks roughly returning to his position leaning over the table.

“He’s a Green Boy, Jon.” Davos replied quietly. She watched him roll his shoulders back and stand tall with his hands on either side of his belt before turning around.

“He’s a fighter. Go get him” it was an order. One that didn’t invite protest.

“Aye Commander” the old man marched out the door.

“If someone doesn’t tell me what is going on, I’m going to start killing people.” Arya shouted angrily. Daenerys regarded the girl. No, not anger… Fear.

Jon turned then to face his youngest sister. “Come here” the line of his jaw loosened as he said it. He stood upright as she came to him and he wrapped his arm around her shoulders and pulled her into an embrace. She slung her arms around his waist and he held her for a moment. The girl is small, compact and her head barely reached his chest.

Tormund moved to speak but Daenerys held up her hand, silencing him. The wildling eyed her warily, but he obeyed her silent command. Seeing Arya and Jon like this made her heart ache and Daenerys would not have it interrupted for a witty quip.

If her own brother had cared for her…

The last time she saw Viserys, he had threatened to kill her and her baby. Then Drogo had killed him. Taking the scrap the Horde had melted for parts and dumping it over his head.

She could still smell it. Burnt hair. Burnt Flesh. Molten Metal.

A few moments later, Davos returns with Gendry.

Jon whispered something into his sister’s hair and released her. She walked away quietly to stand next to Sansa.

The soldiers gather around the map and Daenerys stands and joins them. He eyes her for a moment, and then exhales and assumes the posture of command.

“Right.” he began “We need Salt. A lot of it. We could spend a month getting every bit of it from the coast for a hundred miles and we wouldn’t have enough. We are going to Eastwatch and then beyond the wall”

“What’s out there?” Gendry asked.

“There’s an old factory along the Shivering Sea. Pulls salt brine in from the ocean and process it. I know it from my smuggling days. Not much regulation beyond the Wall back then.” Davos pointed
to the location on the map. “Bravossi used to Smuggle goods through the wall at Eastwatch. They’d land at Hardhome, pack goods in Bags of Salt from the Shivering Sea. Drive down, Bribe the Night’s Watch and take it south. I used to run it with Salladhor Saan twenty years ago.”

“Twenty years is a long time…” Beric says.

“Smugglers were still making the run before the wights overran it, Free Folk used to steal the contraband” Jon answers. “We’re taking three trucks. We go in. We take what we can. We get out. We should be back by weeks end. Gear up for a heavy fight. We don’t know what out there. Clegane get Heartsbane from Sam.”

Daenerys opened her mouth to say something. “Don’t go” or perhaps “I’ll go with you” But she was interrupted by Jorah.

“Stormborn, with your permission, I’d like to accompany Commander Snow and his men” he stood tall, towering above everyone except Clegane. “My kins wellbeing is a stake.”

How could she let him go? How could she let any of them go? She sighed. These weren’t her men. They didn’t need her permission to run off and die.

“If Commander Snow will have you, it would honor me to have you represent me on this mission.” She turned to Jon. “Jorah has been my protector since I was a child. He will be a valuable asset to you.”

Jon was looking at her, then turned toward Jorah. “You can take whatever you need from our armory.”

“I’m well equipped, Commander.” Jorah smiled.

There was a tense pause. Tormund came forward and his eyes bored into Jon’s.

“You really want to go back out there?” he asked. Jon slowly nodded, and his mouth formed a wordless yes but no sound came out.

She did not sleep that night. Restless as always. She made herself busy. The others were awake as well making preparations. She busied herself with helping Arya load ammo into clips.

The truck beds were left empty for their haul, but extra fuel cans, tire chains, and equipment hung over the sides. They would be travelling for a full day before they arrived at the wall. The North was vast and the checkpoint they would cross at Eastwatch was over 400 miles away.

The men took turns gathering their individual gear and sleeping. Jorah left first as his equipment was back at their camp. “No exposed skin.” Jon warned. He went last.

Tyrion stands with her as Jorah loads the last bit of his gear in the Truck.

“Here” her executive officer says extending his hand to the old Bear “ This is the coin the slaver gave me when I suggested he free us and pay us, remember? It was supposed to last us the rest of our lives. Take it with you. But bring it back. Our queen needs you.” Jorah shakes his hand and with an nod he departs.

“We should be better at saying farewell by now.” She admits. Despite everything. He is her advisor, her protector, her friend. It would break her heart if he died...

“I plan to see you sit upon the Iron Throne, Khaleesi.” He presses a kiss into her hand and circles
one of the trucks, finding his place.

“Ghost. Safe” she hears the order behind her as Jon approaches the vehicle.

He had changed into his combat armor. A tight thermal shirt hugged his chest and arms and black bandana tied around his throat. Handmade black leather shoulder and arm guards that were reinforced with steel plates. Tactical boots and pants, strapped with several knives, extra ammo. His gun belt carried additional pistols and he had a rifle across his back. A Valyrian rifle.

And cross his chest he wore a ballistic vest with the white wolf painted.

“Well if we die out there, you won’t have to deal with Commander Snow anymore.” He offers that almost smile, indicating the dark humor, she exhales a small laugh and... His vest is strapped tightly to him, but one of the ties is twisted. Without thinking she reaches out and adjusts it.

“I’ve grown used to him.” he met her eyes and her hand lingered at his side. He doesn’t move away. There was something she wanted to say but it remains lodged in her throat. A warning. An order. A plea.

Instead he turns slightly to look back at the house. Sansa stands on the porch, her hands resting on Arya’s shoulders, while Bran sits next to them in his chair.

“…I just got them back.” he admits quietly, his dark brown eyes flicking back to hers. And the vulnerability of it takes her by surprise. She licks her lips and folds her hands, drumming her fingers across the knuckles of the other.

A queen should know how to encourage her soldiers. In the slave cities, she would give speeches about Breaking the Wheel, Throwing off the Slaver’s Chains, About bringing in a new world.

This fight isn’t about that… It’s about survival. A literal fight of Life and Death.

And she has no speeches to offer, No words of comfort or encouragement, There is nothing to say… if he goes up there… he may die.. If he doesn’t… people **will** die.

And he is not her soldier.

But he is her friend.

“They just got you back too…”

He gives a small sad smile. “I wish you good fortune in the wars to come.” his voice is low and his accent thick like it was last night."You have to believe us” he had said crowding her space. He was crowding her space now. Rather she had moved to be crowded by him.

And with one last look at his family… They’re gone.

She had grown used to him. His absence is a cut across her skin, sharp at first, then dulling to a throb, and a keen awareness of it every time her eyes flit to the gate. Or Ghost runs towards something. Or when the door opens and its not him.

By the second morning...the wound has begun to fester. And Daenerys struggles to ignore it, and she is running out of things to distract her.

Sansa permitted a crew of fifty Unsullied and a couple dozen Bloodriders to assist with rebuilding the Barn, expanding their smoker, and slaughterhouse. The Northerners were wary at first, but help
is help. And Winter is coming. Missandei once again proves how invaluable she is. Serving as both Liaison and interpreter for the crews. Creating Trust. Building Bridges.

She has tasked Varys with investigating the explosion after the preliminary investigation reveals nothing. He found a chemical compound at the ignition site, and is running tests aboard the BlackWind and listening around White Harbor for any news from Cersei.

Daenerys has taken to spending mornings in the yard with Brienne, watching from the railings as the large woman barks instruction. Tyrion has explained that it will help her be perceived as more martial. Military duties instead of civilian duties. It may help earn the Northerners respect. Brienne has found a like-spirit in Grey Worm. They both have similar military experience, and were trained in more traditional styles of combat. Street warfare, occupation and suppression. Not the guerilla fighting, ranging, and ops that Jon and the others are familiar with.

Missandei is happy to have him here as well. Watching their relationship evolve has been so satisfying. This is why she brought her people across the sea. This is the life she wants for them. For them to be free of the master’s chains, to be free to create a home, a life.

Love.

She has to look away from them. Even though they are only standing next to each other as Brienne explains her training regime to her General, its still so intimate. The way her dark eyes brighten when ever he struggles with Westerosi word, and she steps up to assist. The way he gets excited when he has the opportunity to explain tactics to her.

Love.

A truck pulls through the gates, and for a moment her heart stops. But it is not one of the vehicles that left Winterfell, and she recognizes the Green Bear painted on the outside of the Truck. Bear Island.

“Your Grace…” Sansa says a few moments later approaching with two young woman, and Tyrion.

The first is tall and thin, younger than Daenerys...probably around two and twenty. She has a rich honey blonde hair. It’s been shaved short from the neck to just above the ear, and the remaining hair is pulled up into a long tight braid that starts at the peak of her hair line and flows back. She’s dressed practically for time in the wilderness, for ranging. Tight but comfortable pants, boots. Her coat a light grey, with dark grey splotches… seal skin.

The other is… too young with long dark hair pulled into a simple low tail, wearing the Uniform Jacket of the Northern Front. Except it’s too big for her and it is worn and old, unlike the others. On the shoulder, is embroidered the White Wolf and beneath it, the silhouette of a Green Bear on his hind legs. But above the breast pocket is sewn M. Mormont. Across her chest is a harness, that straps two sawed off shotguns at her ready.

But the girl’s most striking feature is the long hard scar across her right eye. An eyepatch sits in the socket, thin black leather keeping it in place. A jagged, ugly thing she carries with pride. Holding her head high, and always tilting her face just so to force people to look at it.

She can’t be older than six and ten...

“May I introduce, Lt. Commander Lyanna Mormont, and First Ranger Alys Karstark.”

“This is Daenerys Stormborn, Queen of…” she holds up her hand to stop Tyrion from listing the rest.
“A pleasure to meet more officers of the Northern Front”

Alys greets her with a firm handshake and a smile. Lyanna keeps her hands clasped firmly behind her back.

“Rumor has it you returned my uncle from his long exile in Essos.”

“Yes, he is most anxious to-”

“And you and Commander Snow permitted this…” the young woman turns sharply to Sansa, interrupting her.

Sansa hasn’t been sleeping since her brother left. Her pale skin has gone slightly purple beneath her eyes, and under the sharp line of her cheekbone. It has Tyrion fussing about her like a nursemaid.

Daenerys had fallen asleep to sound of her sewing machine running, and woken to the same noise. She said she was sewing Daenerys a coat to replace the one that was burned in the fire. But Sansa is just keeping herself busy. Trying to keep her mind away from the worst.

“My brother permitted him. In fact, your uncle bravely volunteered to accompany him on mission beyond the wall.”

“And should he return? What then? Will he face Justice for his crimes?” Sansa raises an eyebrow, and Lyanna draws an aged yellow sheet of paper out of her pocket and hands it over. Alys peers over Sansa’s shoulder and gasps.

Sansa raises a hand to silence the girl and stares down at the officer before her. Ice spreading across her features.

“It is signed by your own father’s hand.”

“I can see that.” she passes it to Tyrion, who frowns, reading it quickly and hands it to Daenerys. It is a writ of execution for Jorah, declaring him guilty of slaving, disinheriting him from Bear Island, and sentencing him to death for his crimes.

“You can’t enforce this.” Tyrion claims.

“It is Northern Justice, and it applies to everyone equally under the law… Does it not… MISS Stark.” the girls missing eye whipped to Tyrion, Sansa’s former husband.

“Administrator Stark” Sansa corrects.

“Do slavers not pay the slavers price in the North? Or only when it is convenient?”

“Lyanna…” Alys hisses in a low shocked voice.

“Quiet Alys” the short woman snaps. “You weren’t there. You ignored the call.”

“I am not responsible for my brother’s treason. And I have fought back my family’s honor with blood and sweat and duty.”

The dark haired woman draws her lips back in a sneer. “See to your duty then, Ranger.”

Neither Lyanna or Alys moves.

“Your commanding officer gave you an order, Alys.” Sansa says calmly never taking her eyes off
Lyanna. Stone faced, stone hearted and stoic.

“Aye.” the young woman replies meekly, moving past them toward where Brienne is standing with Missandei and Grey Worm, acknowledging them before vaulting over the railings and shouting at some of the troops to form up for a run.

Sansa opens a pocket watch connected to her high collar by a delicate chain, takes a deep breath, then snaps the lid shut meaningfully.

“Neither I nor Commander Snow, nor any officer or citizen of the North can enforce this. If you will read paragraph 3 of section 5 of the document, you will no doubt find a declaration stating that the bearer of this writ may not pursue execution beyond the borders of Westeros, which the Independent North seceded from. Furthermore, in paragraph 6 of the same section, it states that no non Westerosi citizen may pursue it either.” Daenerys eyes skim the page in her hand and there it is exactly where Sansa describes. “If I recall correctly, you were the first to propose secession, and then proceeded to sign the declaration with a hand so large, that I needed to add another length of paper so that the other landholders could fit their signatures.”

Tyrion beams up at Sansa with nothing but unabashed pride. And the young woman’s good eye flashes dangerously as she wheels on Daenerys.

“And what say you…Breaker of Chains? How do you permit a slaver into your service?”

She folds the paper back on its creases and returns it to Lyanna. “Jorah Mormont, sold two poachers into slavery to earn his exile, And while in my service he freed thousands.”

The young woman opens her mouth to speak. But it is interrupted by a sound that chills Daenerys’s heart.

A long low howl.

Ghost.

Jon…

Sansa freezes and pinches her eyes shut as Ghost continues to howl.

“SANSAAA…” Arya shouts running towards them from the direction of the house. The eldest Stark’s shoulders shake as she draws in a shuddering breath. “SANSAAA!!!” her sister screams again. The woman’s mask slips into place.

“If you’ll excuse me.” She turns and it’s only a few steps before she starts to run.

“You may get your wish sooner than you hoped. Lt Commander.” Tyrion hisses.

It’s a report from the Night's Watch stating that one of their rangers has spotted at least 500 wights moving towards Hardhome.

And Lt. Commander Lyanna Mormont assumes command of the Northern Front. She barks orders to the Night’s Watch regarding defensive formations at the wall, Order Alys to rally troops in the yard, and promptly throws Tyrion and Daenerys out of Sansa’s office citing security reasons.

She can’t even process the insult because… there’s a numbness and a shock that has frozen her. Tyrion is huffing about something, but she can’t focus. The world has gone grey and dull and her senses are blurred by this… ache.
Daenerys waves him away as she stumbles mindlessly into the trees. Her feet carrying her further away from the reality until the crunch of snow becomes the squish of moss, and the crisp winter air becomes heavy and ancient and the trees grow thick and dense and sacred.

“Hello Daenerys.” Brandon Stark sits in his chair in front of the Weirwood tree his eyes rolled up into his head, so nothing but white can be seen.

“Bran...there’s been news from the wall… you should go inside…” she rushes over to him and starts to turn his chair to push him through the spongy ground.

“I’m searching for my brother…” he says quietly. “Its easiest to do it here.” She stops trying to jostle the chair from where its stuck in the thick undergrowth and lets her hands rest at her sides. Not sure of what to do...she sits at the roots where she sat on the first night she was here and waits.

Waits for...what? What? Waits for the inevitable news that they’re all dead… that the people will starve… that their peaceful not-quite an alliance will collapse… that world will lose the bravest, stubbornest, honest man alive… that she’ll lose him… before she even had a chance to...

“What gods do you pray to Daenerys...?” he asks quietly, his eyes still rolled up in his head.

“None…” she answers with a hollow tone.

“Ah yes… Daenerys Stormborn, who has conquered cities, collapsed the slave trade and built a dragon all with faith in only herself…” he laughs quietly and it breaks into a small cough and she pulls the blanket that has slipped to his knees higher to his chest. “Thank you” he says, his pupils never returning. He’s quiet for a moment, and seems to listen to the quiet.

“Have you been here before? The Godswood?”

“Yes... Jon took me here the first night.”

The young man hmms thoughtfully. “He likes to listen for our father. I don’t know if he can actually hear him or if the godsdrome just creates a quiet place where he can remember.” He pauses again his head snapping quickly up and to the right as if something has caught his attention. “I think the gods speak to us through memory. Trees have no voice but the wind and the leaves so they have to use the voices we know… and will listen to.”

He closes his eyes as his head rolls back to lean against the wooden frame of his chair, and when he pulls himself up right, his irises and pupils have returned. Dark eyes. Stark Eyes. Jon’s eyes.

“There’s still time.” he declares. “But not much…”

Bran turns away from her to look at the direction of the house. Sam is huffing through the trees towards them. He waves at Bran, and the young man nods an acknowledgement.

“I wonder whose voice you will listen to... Daenerys Stormborn who only believes in herself…” Bran says quietly.

It is her own voice that whispers through the wind and the blood red leaves of the weirwood tree.

“I will take what is mine... with Fire and Blood.”

And she’s moving. Running. Almost pushing past Sam in her rush. Her feet hit the moss carpeting the floor of the godswood, the crunch of snow, the stone steps of the house, to the wooden stairs to her room.
“But you can’t leave!” Tyrion protests.

The decision is made. Alys Karstark is loading belts of Ammo into Drogon’s mini guns. Missandei is helping her strap into the harness around her waist and legs while Sansa laces closed the fur coat she’s made for her. Its grey and white… Stark colors… and absolutely beautiful. Its a shame she’s to wear it to battle.

“The most important person in the world can't fly to the most dangerous place in the world.” he begs.

“Who else can?” she says snapping her goggles around her eyes.

Arya revs the engine of the ATV in front of her. She’s to follow her out to the road where she’ll be able to take off most quickly.

“No one. They knew the risk when they left.” Alys gives her a thumbs up and backs away from the guns.

“So what would you have me do?”

“Nothing. Sometimes nothing is the hardest thing to do. If you die we're all lost. Everyone, everything. Cersei will kill us all. And the world will burn again.”

“I won’t let that happen.” she shouts flipping on Drogon’s engine. The roar of it is deafening in the garage and with jolt of speed she bursts out. Arya pushes ahead of her on the ATV. Down the dirt road past the barracks, past Wintertown, until her tires hit the broken asphalt that was once the Highway.

Faster and faster her tires roll, the new tires cutting through ice effortlessly, and Drogon’s wings spreads and her jets catch the wind and spin up until she is free of the earth and the ice and she becomes air and fire.

A Dragon.
Undead

Chapter Summary

Beyond the Wall.

Chapter Notes

https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Claim Your Weapons (Feat. Atrel) - Christian Reindl, Atrel
It takes almost a full day and half of straight driving to reach the wall. Once they pass Queenscrown nearly every road was blocked and requires either a detour, or for them to literally move rusted out cars out of the way. Or shovel enough snow to get on top of it. They sleep and drive in shifts. Their party split between the three vehicles. Jorah and Jon taking point with Tormund, Clegane and Beric, followed by Davos and Gendry.

But only Gendry was in a good mood. Tormund’s had soured as soon as he figured out who Jorah was.

“You’re a fucking Mormont? Like the last Commander of the Watch?”

“He was my father.”

“He hunted us like animals.”

“You returned the favor, as I recall.”

The Fucking Night’s Watch and the fucking Wildings. Fighting over a border for no reason for hundreds of years. Thousands dead… for what. For a derelict wall of ice and cement and steel. For a border to a country that’s been tearing itself apart from the inside.

Wildings never killed him though… Not for lack of trying. She could have killed him if she wanted to. Instead she left it to the gods whether he’d live or die.

The wall can be seen from over a hundred miles away. It’s still breathtaking. A massive feat of engineering the likes of which the world has never seen. Daenerys had reminded him that people all over the world marvel at it. “A wonder of the First Men” she had called it while looking over Ygritte’s map. Her violet eyes went wide when he described it, her pupils dilating to black moons ringed with a thin line of purple, her expressive eyebrows pulling her eyes open, her cheeks up and her smile wide.

There’s no time for that...

He swallows hard against the knot of regret rising in his throat.

He should have made time for that… made more time with Bran. Should have told Val to fuck herself about Joanna and Willa. Should have listened to Sansa more instead of fighting with her. Should have been training with Arya, fighting alongside her. Instead of letting his own hang ups damage their relationship.

Edd greets them at the gate as they pull up, and strap on tire chains for the mostly snowed out road ahead.

“Hey Commander.”

“Not your Commander anymore Edd.”

“Right.”

“Any movement?”
“Sent a five rangers up ahead. Not a peep, Not a rustle.”

“That’s good right?” Gendry says lifting his head out from where he’s ducked down under the tires.

“We’ll see” Jon answers before turning back to his friend.

“Rumor has it the Dragon Queen’s at Winterfell.”

“Yep.”

“She uhh...?” he waggles his eyebrows at Jon suggestively and Jorah shoots a warning glare at Edd as he climbs back into the vehicle.

“She’s a queen.”

“Is that a yes?”

Jon licks his lips and looks down at the floor. “Can’t wait to take off the blacks can ya?”

“Soon as this wars over...I’m going down to Molestown and finding the prettiest whore I can and marrying her.” He chuckles at that. Edd never was the sharpest knife. But humor fades as the last car door closes. “Open the gates and lets get on with it.”

Moving through the wall always feels like going back in time. Like the cavernous tunnel of glacial ice transported them back to a time of myth and magic. To time when the Children of the forest carved runes into stone, and the first men hunted snow bears with spears and arrows.

Mance had explained that that was the point of the Night’s Watch. To keep the people beyond the wall living in poverty barely above basic survival, to keep them from developing their communities into cities, to keep them from uniting and organizing into something that could challenge Westeros.

Jon grew up listening to his father and his officers complain about wildling raiders terrorizing the most northern settlements. Each raid resulting in a few deaths and stolen supplies and equipment. It was part of the reason he joined the Watch. Eddard Stark had raised his children to serve their country, and if Jon wasn’t allowed to serve beside his brother, he would do so beside his uncle Benjen. He would do his duty. He would serve his country.

“Why do you think we raid, Jon Snow?” Mance asked him as he sat on his knees, hands cuffed behind his back. The King beyond the Wall had seen right through his lie that he was leaving the watch. “What forces a man to climb an 800 foot tall wall of Ice?” He squatted down very close to Jon then. “Need. Starvation. Death. We raid because we need to. Because we’ll starve if we don’t. Because we’ll die if we don’t. You and the Watch and the rest of those Elitist assholes down in Westeros make it so we have no choice but to raid.”

He stood then expanding to his full height and pulled out the handcuff keys and released him. “You know the truth of it Jon Snow. You haven’t turned your cloak, Not yet. But you will...”

At the time, all Jon could think was that there had never been a man who liked the sound of his own voice more than Mance Rayder. But the truth wormed its way into his mind, and as he spend more time with Ygritte, as he worked and fought beside them... as he gained rank and respect he would have never had a chance at down south. As his resentment towards his bastard name, and his grief over over the loss of his father and Arya grew and became a bile in his stomach he couldn’t swallow.

He turned his cloak.
And then he did it again… On the shore of a lake, near his family’s hunting cabin.

Eddard Stark raised his children to serve their country. It was ingrained in him. It was apart of him.

And because of that choice… there’s less than three hundred of the FreeFolk left.

There was no fucking point to any of it. They didn’t deserve to be cut off from the world by Westerosi elite. They didn’t deserve to be starved out after the bombs. They didn’t deserve to be slowly devoured by the wights. They didn’t deserve to be gunned down by the Watch, by Stannis and the Coming Dawn. By him.

He had tried to make up for it. He had died trying to make up for it.

“You know nothing Jon Snow” she spat as the third arrow sunk into his chest.

“I’m sorry, Ygritte.”

He can never make up for it.

“I don’t understand how it works…” Tormund asks suddenly breaking Ygritte’s image from his mind.

“What?”

“The Dragon. I’ve seen some crazy fucking shit. Never fuckin’ seen something fly.”

He turns to Jorah, and the old bear hmm’d a moment as he searched for the words. “If I knew the answer to that question… I’d be the richest man on three continents.” he laughs and Jon cracks an almost smile at him. “Here’s what I know… The engine was given to Daenerys as a wedding gift by a scrapper in Pentos. It was this rusted thing. In fact, the Khal almost killed him because he thought it was an insult. But Daenerys babied it. Cleaned it. Took it apart. Put it back together. But no matter what she did, they wouldn’t start. And the Bloodriders are some of the most best mechanics in the world. If they couldn’t get it started… no-one could. Then the Khal died and…” Jorah pauses, eyes averting away from them. “-and everything goes to shit. And they built this big pyre and Daenerys takes her engine and walks into the fucking fire.”

“I’ve never been more scared in my life…” the man confesses. “The fire was so hot and the smoke was so thick that we couldn’t see anything. But then… there was this… sound… somewhere between a whoosh and a roar. And all the fire and all the smoke was suddenly sucked down and there was Daenerys… With an engine in her arms… red and humming…”

There’s more to the story than Jorah’s telling him.

He pulls out a pair of binocs, hunting for the landmark that meant they were close. An old bridge that he remembered all too well.

“We need the bridge intact.” Ygritte snapped at Wun-Wun as she passed the binocs to Jon. “No blowin’ it up.” The monster of man snarled down at her, and she snarled back up at him. Through the binocs he saw the pirates shoveling piles of salt into bags, then tucking pistols, chems, ammo, and powercells into the bag, before tossing them onto the truck.

Wun-Wun leered down over her and growled “Rozbice podpokra. Zaczać się Korsarz”*

“If we take out the bridge, they find a new way to smuggle past the wall. Perhaps closer to Eastwatch. Then we’d be fightin’ crows and pirates.” She reached up and tapped her knuckles on his
head. “Besides its the fastest way in or out of Hardhome. We need the supply line free.”

“Mała przerwa. Naprawimy”  

Her face fell. “There’s no time for that. We need to get this back to base by Weeks end.”

“They don’t grow them that big without losing some smarts.” Tormund laughed snatching the binocs from Jon. He was lying flat on his belly looking out over the ridge at the smugglers landing site, surveying the landscape. Jon grunted as weight landed on his back and Ygritte stretched out over him folding her hands atop his head and resting her chin on them.

“Whatcha think, Snow?” He shifted and she adjusted her body weight on top of him as he stretched out his arm to point.

“If we aren’t going to blow the bridge, We need to disable the vehicle, Slash the tires.”

“We need to keep it intact. Mance would be happy to get another truck…”

“That's not the mission.”

“You gonna let your Crow question your orders Ygritte” Val mocked behind them, loading her revolver, and spinning the barrel. SixSkins laughing next to her petting that damned eagle. Ygritte rolled her eyes.

“There’s almost twenty of them, if we don’t slash the tires, or disable the bridge, they can escape.” he argues.

“Best not let them.” She moved to a squat and smacked his ass as she stood. “Follow me down the Ridge. Wun-Wun and Tormund go around and clear the loading bay. Val. SixSkins. Watch their retreat.”

Beneath the weight of the trucks, the old wooden bridge sways and creaks. Too long since it was maintained. Its almost a quarter mile long, and year after year of snows have not been kind.

They move slow, in single file and he can hear the river below over the rumble of their tires. The most dangerous kind of frozen. The water still rushing underneath a thin layer of ice twenty feet below.

“20 minutes out” he chirps into a walkie talkie.

“So what are they like?” Jorah asked.

“Who?”

“The wights”

“They have blue eyes. Glowing blue. You can see their veins through their skin. On some of the their veins glow too. But mostly they just look dead.”

“If it looks at you weird and growls, shoot it in the head. Or cut off their head. Or bash in their head” Tormund adds.

“Target the head, understood”

The decrepit factory is overgrown with frozen vegetation. The old cement cracking, the walls sagging under the weight of the snows bowing the roof. Jon pulls off his rifle and passes it to Jorah.
Commander Mormont gave it to him and he had intended to give it to Lyanna when he died, and she assumed command… or if he ever had the opportunity to retire.

Unlikely.


“It's not right for me to have it.”

“He gave it to you.”

“I'm not his son.”

“I brought shame onto my house. I broke my father's heart. I forfeited the right to claim this. It's yours.” He returns the rifle. “Besides… I’m not in the habit of taking a man’s gun before a fight.”

There wasn’t really anything to say to that. So Jon licks his lip and pulls his bandana up over his hair.

“Let's move out.” he orders, sticking the butt of the rifle into his shoulder. Taking point as the others move to flank. Davos stays with the trucks. Keeping the engine running in case they needed to make a quick getaway. They need to sweep the building first.

“Gendry. Stay with Beric.” the boy had skill but still too green for Jon’s liking. But he had what it took, if they survived, he’d train him himself.

They breach the first door. Gendry bashing off the lock with his hammer. Jon enters first flanked by Jorah. Flashlights click on. Guns Up.

The factory is nothing more than a large warehouse that went out into the open ocean. Long troughs of fetid brine occupying most of the space.

Jon flashes three fingers at Gendry, Clegane and Beric. Flagging them to the right. He, Tormund and Jorah taking the left. It stinks like mold. Mold. Rot. Decay.

He hears it before he sees it. Crawling at them from under the trough, dragging itself with its hands. Blue eyes, mottled skin, dark veins, and the growl of starving predator.

She couldn’t be older than Arya.

“Tormund” Jon orders. The man swings his axe. If there are others he doesn't want to alert them with a gunshot.

“Gods” Jorah whispers a curse.

He bends down to scan below the troughs with his flashlight. A flash indicating Beric was doing the same on the other side of the room.

“Clear” the walkie clipped to his shoulder chirps quietly.

“Clear” he answers.

They meet around the other side. Two metal roll up doors outlined by worn yellow paint designating the area as a loading zone. If their prize was any where, it was here.

He signals to Tormund and Gendry who take their position on either side of the garage door. The rest flanking Jon and pulling guns. Ready for whatever was on the other side.
The gate rolls up and the flashlights illuminated the darkness. And Jon exhales a long sigh of relief. There it is. Fucking Mountain of the stuff right where those Bravossi Bastards left it.

“There’s never just one, Jon.” Tormund reminds him.

“I know.” He reaches up for the walkie. “Davos brings the trucks around. Beric, Jorah” he points at each man individually. “Help him, then walk the perimeter. Signal for back-up if you see any of the fuckers. Rest of you... Let’s bag it up.”

They mov quickly. But bagging and loading hundreds of pounds of salt still takes time. Too much time.

“Do you really have to smack my ass in front of them” he complained as Ygritte and him slid quietly into cover behind one of the trucks, taking deep huffing breathes from their run. A Bravossi smuggler whistled while working on shovelling salt into a bag.

“Aye.” she peered over him around the corner of the vehicle and flashed him two fingers, and pointed him down the opposite direction. He took his position and then with a nod from Ygritte, they spun the corner. She fired two arrows in quick succession into one of the pirates throat, and he tackling the other and easily pinning him to the ground. She strode over and handed him a knife. “Do your job.”

He looked up at her for a moment and…

He did his job. They dragged the two bodies away, ducking them behind a crate. Voices. Bravossi coming their way. Ygritte starts to nock her bow, but he taps her shoulder and points up. A Window.

He boosts her up to it and then ducks behind the other side of the crate.

An exclamation in the Bravossi dialect of Valyrian and three sets of footsteps running toward their position. Towards the dead men. The whistle of an arrow. A thud on the ground and a groan. He spun out of cover grabbed one and used him as a shield as the third draws a gun. The smuggler doesn’t get the opportunity to fire. An arrow head suddenly popped through his throat.

He does his job.

Ygritte whistled for him. A small jump had him pulling himself up to the walkways above the warehouse. The pump that sucks up seawater for evaporation disguising the small noise of him not so gracefully regaining his footing.

“What?”

“When you boosted me up?”

“No. We’re working.”

“Liar.”

He was lying. He could never lie to her. Up until the very end, when he betrayed her.

There were at least six men in the warehouse, three carrying boxes of contraband into the warehouse to be parsed up and loaded into the bags of salt. One trying to get a machine working. The other two
patrolling around the perimeter.

“What do you think?”

“Guards first. Then crates. Then Mechanic.”

“You know nothing, Jon Snow” she chided, leaning into him, giving him a quick peck on the lips before creeping along ahead of him, above the guards. “Be ready.”

And before he has a chance to react, she draws her bow and puts an arrow through the Window behind him. The glass shattered and the guards eyes went straight to him. He pulled out Long Claw and started running across the upper level as they shoot behind him.

He blindfired down and one drops, Arrow through the neck. Another, perforated by automatic fire. He landed on the machine the mechanic is working on and fired down as the man tries to worm his way out from underneath it.

Ygritte hit the second guard, and then they heard a roar and Tormund’s laughter as he and Wun Wun burst into the bay doors. Firing chaotically into the mess.

It was over in a moment.

“What did I say about wasting bullets!” Ygritte snapped.

“Używaj tylko tego, czego potrzebujesz” Wun-Wun mumbled

“Only use what you need” She repeated in Westerosi. “Tormund go sink their boat.” she extended her hand up to pat Wun-Wun’s shoulder and peered up at a cut on his eye. “Can ya see…?” she asked and the huge man nodded and grumbled as he went to search through a crate of contraband. Lifting up a bag of chems as SixSkins runs up to investigate.

“Crowfucker.” Val accused following behind her partner.

“Cunt.” She smacked his ass as if emphasize the insult.

“We’re on a job.” he whispered as Val examines some of the chems.

Ygritte smacked her lips “ The more I smack your ass, the more these fucks are reminded we’re fucking. The more they know we’re fucking… the more they believe you when you say you’re not a crow.” She raised her eyebrows at him as he averted his eyes away from the intoxicatingly lewd way she licked her lips. “Let’s finish the job alright… sooner we get back to camp, the sooner you can smack mine.”

This had been too easy. He banishes the thought from his mind. Never say something is easy, that's only a prelude to it getting hard.

“I think that's all we can carry.” Davos yells. “If we weigh the truck down too much, We won't have enough fuel to get back.”

Jon nods. “Load up, let's move out.”

It sneaks up on him as they moved out to the vehicles. He wasn’t aware they could sneak. His back slams against the ground before he could brace for it. It's huge, a man easily Clegane’s size. How the fuck had it snuck up on him? It writhes on top of him, pinning him down. He struggles to lift it with one hand as his other reached for his pistol.
It’s head explodes in a rain of gore. Jorah pulling him to his feet. His ears ring from the volume of the shot, but he can hear another noise through it. The lulling roar and growl of creatures that no longer use their lungs to make noise.

Eight or so racing towards him. A few shots take out the first wave. The second meet his machete. The low rumbling growls get louder. They’re coming out of the trees now. Dozens of them.

“Let’s go” he yells, counting his men, coming up short. “Gendry!” he shouts running toward the man. Get in the fucking truck and drive.”

He launches into one of the truck beds and wedges himself as well as he can between the bags. The truck speeding off. He curses as he bounces. This is not a good position to be in. But it lets him actually shoot.

They run after them. Howling their inhuman screams. He picks off one, then two. Pulling out and past the ridge where he and Ygritte had stood years ago.

Three. Four. He stops counting as a he’s ostled forward. He grabbing side edge. And a body tumbles out from under the trucks wheels.

Fuck… They’re in front of them too. He looks to his right. Clegane had shattered the back window of the Truck and was shooting out it. Beric stands through the sunroof of the one on his left taking shots at the ones in front of them. Tormund hangs half his torso out the window, shooting forward.

They’re fucking everywhere. Hundreds of them, thousands. Spilling onto the broken icy highway and racing after them. Like a cresting wave tumbling over each other.

He regains his balance and keeps firing. They need to create some distance between them. They need to go faster. But the combination of dirt roads, tire chains and heavy loads make it impossible.

He unclicks the fully automatic and sprays along the first line of ferals. Some stumble. Some fall. Most keep charging.

Another line. Reload.

Tormund shouts something about cunts. A body falling away from the window.

Reload

One reaches the bed of the truck and grabs hold. He slams the hand with LongClaw’s barrel.

Reload

The vehicle to his right waivers. Clegane screaming in frustration as Heartsbane misses the shot.

Reload

The walkie chirps in his ear. Davos. “Keep it steady Gendry. You’re doing great lad.”

Reload

Another bump, another body tumbling beneath the tires. He shifts his weight to keep his balance.

Reload

His gun is hot in his hand and he can feel his blood rush in his ears.
He reaches down to grab another magazine from where they are strapped across his thigh. Last One.

After he was out, it would be pistols. Then knives. Then whatever he could grab... Then dead. Again. He exhales, unclicked the automatic and picked his targets.

He thinks of Robb and Rickon and his father. He would see his them soon. He hadn’t seen him them the last time he died. Or maybe he had, but couldn’t remember because those memories belong with the dead.

The feral that had pulled itself on Beric’s truck falls off in a bloody burst as he pulls the trigger.

Would Catelyn accept him this time? He tried to save Sansa. Tried to rebuild what her and his father had built. Was it enough for her acceptance in whatever afterlife there was? Would Karsi forgive him? He got the girls beyond the wall, he got them to Winterfell.

A woman lunges at the gate of the cab. She had no jaw. Then no head.

He thinks of Bran. They couldn’t move him easily. They wouldn’t be able to run with him if need be. He’d be dead by Winter’s end. Fuck.

He misses his first shot. But not the second.

He thinks of Sansa and Arya. They would survive. They would endure. They’d protect each other. He’d failed them but they never failed themselves. Yes. They’d survive.

Last shot before the last stand.

He thinks of a bright smile and silver hair. “It looked cozy” Cozy. Warm. Like her laugh and like the touch of her hand as she fiddled with the straps on his waist. When it rested on his arm. Or her violet eyes when she spoke with sincerely...when they spoke alone. Or those few moments, when he was so very close to her, and she very close to him and he could feel the heat radiating off of her. “You better get to work, Jon Snow”

He had better get to work. He intends to go down fighting. He looks down the barrel at the wight running up at him and lets out a long slow breath.

And before he squeezes the trigger, it burst into hellfire.

The column of fire cuts a line through the swarm and he follows that line up and up and above him and behind and there she is...

On the amazing machine she built with her own two hands, silver hair streaming behind her in a long tail, raining down fire and hell upon their enemies.

And she dives down for him, and a long curved swoop and a wall of fire gives them a moment to pull ahead. And as she tilts her dragon skyward for another pass...

Her arm reaches for him..

And he reaches back.

And then that wall of fire disappears in a vacuous suck.
And there he is... Standing calmly among them in the middle of the highway. Blue glowing veins running from his eyes down his face, down his arms and hands. And in his hands he holds a rifle unlike any Jon had ever seen.

“Smok jest mój” He shouts in the tongue of the first men and swarm charges them and he takes aim for Daenerys.

“Dany!” Jon screams, firing his last bullet at the Night King and...

A wight jumps in front of it at the last moment.

And a blue bolt of energy whizzes past Dany, but she dives at the last second, the bolt slicing the air above her.

He screams in rage and pulls both pistols from his belt and rhythm of gunfire began again to a different beat. She’s flying a serpentine pattern above them. Her Mini guns shooting line after line of bullets. Holding back the swarm and while he picks off the stragglers that dared to defy her Dragon’s wrath.

On her next pass, she circles above them and clears the path ahead.

He can’t see the Night King. With the fire and roaring and swarming and the bullets, he can’t find him.

“Hold on” Davos shouts and he feels them increase speed. He ducks down tightly as they finally put some distance between them and the swarm. They’re still coming. Not free yet. She throws an explosive off the side of the road. Thinning the herd that was spilling over onto the highway

They're getting close to the bridge. He recognizes this land...

The truck to his right accelerates as the vehicles fall into a single file. If she could blow the bridge they can escape.

He stands, waving his arms to get her attention. The truck jostles and he graby onto the bungee cord strapped across the bags of salt. Not really recovering his balance before waving again.

She passes overhead and he screams it. “The Bridge Dany! Blow the Bridge!” As he yells it, he hears it...the unholy laughter erupting from a dead man’s chest. His chest seemed to collapse and expand with each booming breath, and the noise stops.

He fires again as the Night King takes aim at Dany. Unloading his last shots at him. He feels it beneath him. The rickety wooden slats rumbling below the tires. She pulls up and the bombs drop. And a blue Bolt of Energy ripping across Drogon.

A white light blinds him as the bombs impact against the bridge. And he feels himself separate from gravity, and twisting in the air. he saw the dragon above him leaving a trail of smoke as she spun out of control in the air.

Dany...

Gravity reclaims him swift and hard as he hit the ice of the river below and plunges down into darkness.

Chapter End Notes
You are all soo nice with your feedback. Thank you!

*Break Bridge. Ambush Pirates

**Small Break. We fix.

*** The Dragon is mine

Update 7/12/18 - Fixed some Verb tense issues.
Orphan

Chapter Notes

https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

The Wolven Storm - Malukah

At first she thought she was caught in the explosion. That the wave of force had simply knocked her off course.
But as the world twisted and veered out of her control and she struggles against the straps around her thighs and waist and kicks the ignition a cold dread spreads through her as the engine doesn’t restart.

“*Sovez*” She begs… Another kick to the ignition… “*SOVEZ!*”

Her boot hits hard against it triggering nothing but a sputter and flare and the force of her impact knocks them sideways and the world spins and tumbles around her as she struggles to remain aloft and...Daenerys knows what happens next.

She’s going to hit… hard.

The only way to soften the impact is to glide down. Desperately she shifts her feet onto the stirrups that control the wings and pushes down in her heels pull the wings up…

It’s not enough.

She barely has time to start her tires spinning before she impacts. With the pull of a lever, the safety bolt on the wings breaks off and the wings snap, closing around her loosely as the the back tires hit at the precisely the wrong angle, enough for her head to slam against the retracted wing.

When her eyes open again, Jorah’s voice rings softly in her ears. .

“Daenerys.” he’s repeating her name and snapping his fingers in front of her eyes. “Focus for me. Focus for me. Khaleesi.”

With a few blinks his face comes becomes clear. Gods her head hurts. At his side is the broken remains of her helmet.

“What happened?” she asks, blinking around and finding Gendry squatting above Jorah looking down at her… someone else is supposed to be here…

Jorah licks his lips and looks to his left and she follows his eyes.

And there’s Drogon… One of the wings has nearly been torn off. The frame of it bent up with huge scratch marks from where it skidded across the highway. The anchor that connects to the front wheel has been has warped sharply. Across the highway are various pieces of wreckage…

Jorah helps her to her feet as she stares dumbfounded at her baby… her Dragon, crumpled and bruised.

And then she sees the worst of it… Her engine… the jet engine that makes her fly… the ones that make her a Dragon… the one she brought to life on Drogo’s pyre.

A large black scorch line shreds across it in a bolt…

He killed her Dragon…

That monster killed her Dragon.

Her breathing becomes heavy and labored.

How the fuck did he kill her Dragon?

“Khaleesi” Jorah comes behind to steady her as her breath comes in hissing gasps.

“Drogon…” she whimpers…
What if she can’t fly?

Oh Gods.. what if she can’t fly?

“Khaleesi.. We need to get Drogon hitched to the Truck and get to Eastwatch before nightfall. The others will join us soon.” he says it calmly. Enunciating each word slowly as she processes the shock of seeing her baby broken and battered on the road.

There’s something about the way he said it. A careful avoidance. She peers up at him, then past him to look at her surroundings.

There’s one truck, and Gendry and Beric.

“Where are the others?” she asks. He doesn’t answer. Daenerys repeats her question, slower this time.

“They’re looking for Commander Snow, your grace.” Gendry answers for him.

The earth tilts suddenly and Jorah reaches out to stabilize her and she grabs his arm.

“WHERE IS JON” She snaps. Dragonfire roiling in her belly. He killed him. He killed her Dragon and he killed her…

“We don’t know, your grace” the boy answered taking a step back and holding his hands up defensively. “One minute he was there and then the bombs exploded and then he was gone…”

Gone…

Gone as soon as he walked into her life. Gone before she had a chance to…

She clasps her hand over her mouth as a sudden nausea wells up and Jorah catches her fall as she lands on her hands and knees and empties the sparse contents of her stomach onto the road.

“Heart Injury…” Beric says taking a long drag from a cigarette. “You should lie down in the snow, your grace. Ice your head. Reduce the swelling.”

She’s numb as Jorah tugs off his coat and sets her down in small mound of snow at the base of a tree. The soft powdered ice feels cool against her throbbing temple. But the relief from the physical pain only heightens the anguish ripping apart her chest.

“Gone” she whispers as the men work and haul her dragon… her baby up onto its rear wheels so that the front wheel won’t touch the ground and warp it more. And then pick up whatever remnants can be pulled from the road and shove it in the truck alongside bags of salt.

Commander Edd Tollet greets them at Eastwatch…

“Where’s Jon?” he asks. Panic creeping into the man’s voice.

“Do you have a medic?” Jorah asks, nodding at Daenerys in the passenger seat. The man eyes her quickly.

“Yes of course this way.”

“I want to go to the top of the wall.” she orders.

“Khaleesi… you’ve hit your head. You need some rest.”
“I need... to go to the top of the wall.” She turns the Commander Tollet. “Please” he looks back and forth between her and Jorah and deciding guides her towards a dubious looking lift.. Jorah follows.

“I'll send the medic up after you.” he says shutting the door behind them.

Jon was right… from up here it’s like she can see the edges of the world. If her body didn’t feel like lead she might have been able to appreciate how it feels like flying, but with both feet on the ground. But she doesn’t want to see the edges of the world. And flight has been ripped away from her. No. Not now. All she wants to see is him. Safe where he belongs.

He was right… He was right all along. The undead are gathering in the North and they will kill everything in their path.

They were terrifying. The stuff nightmares were made of. No matter how much she had shot at them. They just kept coming. When she flew among the horde enemies would cower or run for cover. But not these. They kept rushing onward, fearlessly, endlessly. Faster than anything that ever was human could possibly move. Not even acknowledging the dragon flying over them.

Drogon. She hadn’t spent the time to look thoroughly examine the damage. Between her and her Bloodriders, they should be able to fix most of it. Except… her Engine… The one that Mopatis had given her. The one that made her special. The one that made her fly.

What is a Dragon that can’t fly?

She froze that fear deep inside her, but instead of sinking into her, it chilled her from the inside out. She was trembling… She heard Jorah exhale and she knew what was coming.

“Daenerys…”

“A bit longer…” she begged.

Her hand went to the fragile frozen railing at the edge of the wall. The ice was so thick it it had created a pane like a window under it. Jon had disappeared at the bridge… which was over the frozen river. It must be thin enough to fall through or else…

Or else they would have found him already, Broken and Bloody on the surface.

But could he break out from under it?

In a flash of anger she kicks the ice pane with her boot and when it doesn’t break…

She does.

Daenerys buries her head in her hands. The throbbing in her skull increasing as her tears well up and spill over and she chokes on her sobs.

She felt Jorah behind her. Preparing for her to collapse as he had when she lost Drogo. When she lost her baby. It was hopeless. Her Dragon was broken. Jon was gone. She couldn’t fly. She couldn’t save him.

She couldn’t save him…

She sunk to her knees atop the wall, sobs wracking her body. The snow beneath her melting and soaking into her pants.

“I’m so sorry, Khaleesi”
Her rage and her grief wrestle inside her and both lose to the numbness of the frost. It penetrates her anguish and she feels something dying inside her. Like her hearts gone cold and turned to stone… and she’s never felt more lost…

Not when she lost Drogo.

Or Rhaego.

Or in Qarth as their scientists tried to steal her dragon and experiment on her.

Or when she found out Jorah betrayed her.

Or when Barristan died.

Or Drogon crashed into the Dothraki sea.

What kind of Queen can’t save her people.

She’s no queen at all.

“Alright.” she whispers and slowly rises to her feet with Jorah’s assistance.

And as the thing inside her breaths its last… it flares to life again as Vehicles emerge from the forest hundreds of feet below them and Jorah’s walkie chirps.

“We got him.”

Three little words to spark life back into her. She runs to the lift and watches them drag him from the vehicle inside the fortress built into the wall of ice as it descends. Its cold. Everything is cold here.

When the lift hits bottom, she runs. Because she needs to see. And she bolts through the door to the officers quarters, but she is stopped dead in her tracks at the sight of him.

Davos takes a knife and rips through the straps of his ballistic vest and the thermal shirt beneath. Its practically frozen to him. It makes a ripping sound across his skin as Davos and Tormund pull off the layers.

His chest…

She stares at it, rage building inside of her at sight of seven ugly red scars littering his torso in jagged lines.

“My watch had ended.” he hissed at Varys.

Commander Tollet is barking orders to his subordinates, demanding hot water bottles and the medic. There a bloody gash on Jons hip that Tormund is working around as Davos slumps back into a chair breathing heavily and looking every bit his age.

Her hand finds his shoulder, and his covers it with his own.

“Thank you, your grace” the old man murmurs, and they watch and wait.

Watch as the Tormund and Gendry finish pulling off the rest of Jon’s armor and clothing. Wait as the medic pulls a chunk of wood from his hip and packs and bandages the wound. Watch as the they line the bed with rubber bottles of hot water. And wait for him to wake up.
Jorah demands she sleep.

“I’m not leaving.”

Gendry looks around quizzically then walks out.

“I promise to get you if there’s any change” Davos says patting her hand. “Rest yer head, your grace.”

“I’m not leaving.” she repeats.

“Khaleesi… your head.”

“Is fine.”

“He wouldn’t want you to work yourself sick, Daenerys.” Davos counters and she waivers.

But before she relents, Gendry walks back in with one the steel cots from the barracks and drops it in front of the fireplace without saying a word, one of the men of the watch following behind him with a thin mattress and bedding. Davos lets out a small chuckle.

“Smart lad.”

“Will this do, your grace?” the smart lad asks. Daenerys nods, tears of relief welling up at his compassion and quick thinking “Right then… Let me know if you need anything.”

The sun is streaming in through the small window of the officers quarters when Daenerys wakes. The ache in her head, while reduced, still throbs to the tempo of her pulse.

Davos is leaning back in the chair, eyes closed. There’s a mug with some tea on the floor by the small cot and she recognizes the pulpy mass in it as Willow Bark.

“Trade you spots.” she tells Davos, gently rousing him. He nods and offers her the seat before landing hard in the small bed by the fire.

The fireplace had done little to keep the bitter tea warm as she dutifully downs it in a few gulps, chomping down hard when ever she feels a bit of the Willow Bark.

It leaves her mouth feeling numb, but that just means the herb is working.

Jon’s chest rises and falls steadily beneath heavy fur lined blankets. Her hand reaches out to trace the fresh cut lining the the side of his face. A new scar to add to his many others. He feels warm, thank the gods. His alabaster skin has returned to its normal coloring, no longer tinted blue with cold.

His hair is damp, with sweat… or more likely melted ice and she gently tugs the tie out so that his curls can hang free about his face.

He looks like the young man of six and twenty he is then. Not the battle hardened commander, or the world weary soldier.

“Your Grace.” Gendry’s voice. “I brought you some breakfast…” she nods appreciatively at the young man and takes the bowl of bland oats from him.

“Did Jorah get some rest?” she asks taking a mouthful.

“Yes. He’s in the barracks.” But then he hesitates clearly ready to ask something.
“Tell me…” she coaxes.

“I need to remove the front axle of your dragon, so we can haul it back to Winterfell. Its warped and it’ll be hard enough to tow as is without it wobbling all over the place.”

Drogon…

The grief wells up again inside her and she almost chokes on her porridge.

“Disconnect the flamer line leading from the tank to the Dragon’s head before you do” She answers monotonously. “Its temperamental and I don’t want you getting hurt.”

“I’ll be careful not to touch anything I don’t need to, your grace.”

She should go out and help him. But she can’t… if she has to look at it… the ruins of her child, she’ll scream.

And if she starts, she doesn’t know if she’ll be able to stop.

They had dumped his clothing and equipment at the foot of the bed and she busies herself spreading the clothes over the fire grate to dry. The snow and ice had frozen into the fibers and cracks of his gear and weapons. And when all his equipment has been disassembled and laid out in front to dry… she works on repairing the long slice through the strapping of his vest from where Davos sliced through it to remove it.

Its nylon and can be melted back together, so she pulls all the straps and settles by the fire, using the one gift she still has to do what little good she can.

And when its all done… there’s nothing left to do but sit at his side and wait and desperately try not to think.

Wait and not think about how… she’s not a dragon… she’s not a queen… she’s just the product of a dozen generations of inbreeding and a rad-warped mutation.

Wait for his breath to shallow and quicken and for his dark eyes to slowly flutter open into focus. The noise that passes through her lips is half gasp of surprise, and sob of relief.

“I’m sorry….” his voice is hoarse and rough but its still his. And his hand reaches for hers and it slides around it as if it’s the easiest thing in the world. “I’m so sorry.” She sniffs and shakes her head tears filling her eyes. “We should never have gone… “

“No…” she answers hoarsely.

“I saw you get hit. I saw your Dragon smoking. I saw you falling.” he sputters and grips her hand tighter. “I wish I could take it back. I wish I could take it all back.” he chokes as he says it and she lets go of his hand to reach below and grab the water cup by the remnants of her breakfast.

More than a little spills down into his beard as she brings it to his lips. Jon leans back as he finishes, closing his eyes and taking deep breaths, as if the simple task of taking a few sips of water was exhausting. The movement forces the blankets down his chest… showing the half-moon scar just right of his sternum.

He should be dead after a blow like that.

She opens her mouth to say something and… there are no words. He rolls his head to look at her and
gives her a sad smile.

“I don’t.” she finds herself saying quietly and as she lifts her eyes to meet his, her anguish at the loss of Drogon becomes a solid thing inside her. “If we hadn’t gone… I would not have seen. And you have to see to know.” It’s resolute and sturdy and demands justice for the loss of her child. The only child she’ll ever have.

And if she can’t have justice...she will have vengeance.

“We are going to destroy the Night King and his army. Together.”

A single tear escapes and she feels it run down the side of her face and she violently wipes it away before taking his hand again.

“Dany…” the name rolls of his tongue with such tenderness and empathy and the wall of anger she just built for herself waivers.

“Dany…?” she half snorts and shakes her head, more tears threatening to fall. Viserys used to call her Dany. Her brother that sold her when she was four and ten for the hope of a throne that he was too mad to ever take for himself. The memory gives her enough anger to keep the walls up and to keep her emotions at bay for a minute longer. “My brother was the last person to call me that… he wasn’t the kind of man... he wasn’t the kind of company you’d like to keep.” Its so unnecessarily defensive, but its all she has to keep this ache from spreading through her and to keep some shred of dignity.

“Alright… not Dany.” he gives her a half smile and she lets out a breath of relief. And then he breaks her… “How about my queen?”

“I don’t deserve it” He shakes his head at her.

“Bullshit. Daenerys…”

“What about the Independent North, and the FreeFolk and… and… Free Men do not kneel”

“They’ll see you for what you are…” he answers reassuringly. “And if not, I’ll make them see. You deserve it, Dan... Daenerys. You’re the only one who does.” When she doesn’t say anything he adds. “I’d bend the knee but…” and makes eyes down at where his clothes hang by the fireplace, a pair of grey shorts hanging on the corner of the grate and smiles at her. That bright devastating wolfish smile that pulls her own out and despite everything...

She laughs, its small and quiet, but for a moment her heart is light enough to bear the grief.

He’s the one whose bedridden after nearly dying under the ice. She’s supposed to be comforting him and helping him and trying to cheer him...Not… Him giving her all the things she wanted, pledging his loyalty to her and telling her she’s worthy and making her laugh.

At the sound of her laugh, the cot in the corner creaks. Davos has rolled to sit awake. She turns back to look at Jon. “The others will want to head back to Winterfell, now that you’ve woken,” she stands squeezing his hand gently before letting it rest on the mattress “You should try to get some rest before we depart.”

He mouths an “aye” as she brushes some hair out his eyes before turning sharply and walking out the door, Davos nodding at her as she departs.

“Commander Tollet.”
“Aye. Your Grace.” she takes firm long strides to reach the man across the small yard of the small fortress. Each step making her feel more and more like the queen she needs to be.

“Have you been briefed on the Wight’s movements.”

“Yes Ma’am.” he moves to walk alongside her. “Got rangers out there scouting now. It’s like they up and vanished after attacking you. My men got a few stragglers… but the swarm… Its fucking gone.”

“How is that possible? There were hundreds of them. A force that size must leave some sort of trail.” He looks down at his wrist to check the time.

“Next check in from the Rangers is in an hour. They may have found something…”

“How is the Watch on supplies?” They stop at the lift as he nods to two of his men riding up. They leer at her lewdly. One leans to the other and says something in his ear. The other starts to laugh and the first smacks him.

“Oy! I heard that!” Ed shouts. “Keep your mouths shut if you can’t keep your mind out of the gutter” As the lift clears the ground they keep moving towards the small garage. “Apologies, your grace. Women are a rare sight at the wall.”

She looks up at the lift crawling up towards the impossible wall of Ice, and cement and steel. “I understand, Commander.” and the she repeats her earlier question.


“When I we return to Winterfell, I’ll have my hand send what we can. Administrator Stark has accurate counts of your men, I presume?”

“We keep her updated. Thank you, your grace.” he opens the door to the garage and beckons her to step through.

Daenerys takes a long slow breath to steel herself for to look at her baby. The air pushes past her lips in a wavering exhale and she walks through.

Gendry has taken off the bent wing and slid it into the truck bed along the side the bags of salt they collected. And the front wheel and tires are on the ground alongside it. Clegane and Tormund are holding the front end up while Gendry preps the chains to lift it.

“Can you move any fucking slower?” the burned man huffs.

“Getting tired already?” the raider laughs.

“Shut it” the boy counters. “I need to find…”

“The Crossbar beneath the handlebars is the most stable point to hitch it.” she says behind them. Gendry nods and wraps it where instructed and a few moments later the they lower her baby down. The whole Dragon balancing on its two back wheels behind the Truck.

“Commander Snow has woken” She continues. “I’d like to leave as soon as we receive word from the Rangers tracking the wights.”

They nod and busy themselves, Gendry pulling the front end of Drogon to load into the back of another truck.
And she surveys the damage for the first time with a clear head.

It could have been so much worse. The frame of the trike is still intact and unbent and a quick peek reveals no… horrible damage to the the trikes engine. Its nothing that can’t be fixed between her and her bloodriders.

But her jet, the jet engine, the one that makes her fly… the one that she felt hum to life in Drogo’s pyre. The ones she labored in fire and blood for.

It’s even worse in the daylight. The jagged line of Valyrian steel torn like paper across the long hollow cylinder.

What kind of weapon can do this?

The medic from the Watch suggests sedating Jon for travel back, and he reluctantly agrees as they load him into the back seat of the truck Drogon’s hitched to. And without a word, she slides into the seat and shifted his head onto her lap.

He smiles up at her, as her fingers drift through his hair, sighing contentedly as his breathing shifts and slows and the sedative pulls him back down into oblivion.

The Kings Road was different here, compared to the few other parts of Westeros she’s seen. The bombs had come here. You could see it from the way the buildings of the small towns were burnt and broken. It patches where young trees stood apart from the rest. In the rusted vehicles that littered the roads.

But… People had actually begun to rebuild here. Down south, the buildings were grander and where there was wealth and power, you could just convince yourself you weren’t living in a burnt world. But where power ended the slums began. Thousands of people huddled in shacks pressed up and over each other barely scratching out a living selling scraps and scavenged goods for the chance of being kept out of indenture to the Crown’s war machine.

But here, there were towns and people. Homes. As they drove, she saw exit signs for the town of Last Hearth and on each one they passed was spray painted a white wolf. It was a warning to raiders. This town was protected by the White Wolf of the North.

There were huge Orange markers as well. Indicating detours around the most heavily irradiated parts of the highway. A few rads wouldn’t hurt much… but any more than a few you end up rad-sick.

What had her father seen here? To make him so afraid and so paranoid that it drove him to destroy. She looked down at Jon. His head resting in her lap, his chest slowly rising and falling in slow even breaths. Strength and Courage and Honor. Her father had seen enough of it to defy him.

For a moment her mind drifts to her brother. Not Viserys… Rhaegar. The one she never met. She’s been told the story from a couple of different perspectives. One from Jorah, another from Barristan, another from Tyrion and Varys. Each adding pieces to a puzzle that she can’t quite put together yet.

But the truth is she’ll never have the whole story.

The North had been content to keep to themselves and stay out of Southern Politics. And the Southern territories were itching for a reason to rebel against the crown. And Rhaegar gave it to them a reason… kidnapping a pretty Stark girl and uniting the everyone against the Crown.

The rebels painted the incident as a symbol of the Crown’s madness and abuse of power. Then as it became more clear that the Crown wouldn’t win… her father ordered his entire arsenal to be fired...
along the line of King’s road. Hundreds of thousands dead in an instant.

Because of her brother’s choices...

Varys said it would have happened anyway….That her father was a tyrant who used secret police and encouraged neighbor to spy on neighbor. That his policies were destructive. That he was cruel. That the elites of Westeros would have used anything to start a war. That anytime someone accrues that much wildfire… they alway use it. That the environment was ripe for revolt and any spark could have lit the flame.

Tyrion disagrees. Probably because he sees the same things in his vile sister and he’s still hoping against hope that she can be redeemed. Or because he likes to believe that one person’s actions can create or destroy nations.

There’s a certain poetic truth of a small man dreaming of casting a large shadow.

“I am continually astonished by how brave you are, Stormborn” Davos meets her eyes in the rearview mirror. “And I am forever in your debt.”

She shook her head. “My father burned this world. It is I who owes this world something.”

He stared at her through the rear-view mirror for a long moment then chuckled to himself. As if he knew a secret.

They stop to remove tire chains, refuel and relieve themselves at the outskirts of the Dreadfort. It’s a small rocky industrial wasteland. Nothing but the rusted remains of an old railyard, and tin warehouses. Everything else is rubble. Davos explains that is used to be a slaughterhouse and that the rail lines that used to run around the North stopped here to slaughter the cows and process the leather and wool before the rail line looped back to White Harbor and Winterfell.

He also tells her that this was where the last fight battle of their war to liberate the North from Bolton control. The last ugly struggle after months of fighting and never fucking stopping. A thousand men had died here. The rusted out railcars show scorch marks, bullet holes and blood stains.

War never changes.

She uses the break to check the bandage at Jon’s hip. Nimble fingers quickly and carefully repacking and rewrapping the wound per the medics instructions. Desperately trying to only look at bandage and not stare at the deep grooves that lined his torso. Not just the scars… but the clean cuts of muscle clearly defined on his hips, his abdomen, up his chest…

Stop. She tells herself. They need to get him home so Sam can sew him up.

He suddenly gasps awake pushing himself onto his elbows. “Why the fuck are we back here?” panic creeping up in his voice.

“Jon?” he’s looking around wide-eyed until she repeats his name and he stops and focuses on her.

“Why are we here?”

“We’re refueling and taking a break.” he takes a few deep breaths and seems to settle. “I need to finish this. Lie still.”

She quickly tears off some med-tape and seals the ends of the bandaging before reclaiming her seat, letting his head rest on her thigh. His hand slides around hers and she shifts her fingers to interlock
“I hate this place.” he grumbles. “He raped my sister here...He killed my baby brother here...I want to rip it apart and burn it till its nothing left.” There are no words she can give him. So she raises their hands and presses a kiss into his knuckles.

“I’ll help you.” she whispers against his skin and he stares up at her with those deep brown eyes, suddenly flecked gold in the sunlight. His hand untangles from hers and she sighs as it traces the line of her jaw.

“My Queen…”

Davos slips back into the driver seat and starts the truck without saying a word, flipping the tab beneath the rearview mirror in a feeble attempt of privacy.

The remaining drive back is uneventful, Jon drifting in and out under the lull of the moving car and she joins him, resting her tender head against the back of the seat, lulled by the feeling of his thumb gliding across her knuckles where their hands rejoined.

As soon as they’re close to Winterfell, Arya bursts from the tree line forcing Davos to stop short as she scrambles through the front passenger window frantic to see her brother.

“Jon…” she gasps as he rolls his head to look at her and smiles bright. And she dives forward, crawling over the seat to bury her head against his chest. He ‘ooofs’ as she lands, but wraps his arm around her with more effort than it should have taken.

“Mind his hip, Little Wolf.” Davos warns as starts driving again.

“I thought I lost you again.” she cries, tears streaming down her face.

“M’ here… I’m here” he smooths her hair and clutches her against him.

Sansa is less outwardly emotional but Daenerys watches the stress and worry melt off her face as soon as she sees her brother and her shoulders slump as relief comes with gasp.

“Sam’s ready for him in the med” she orders moving things out of the way to make space for the men to carry him inside.

Tyrion wanders over clutching his hair as he sees Drogon hitched behind the Trucks.

“Gods be good!” he exclaims surveying the damage. “How close was it?”

“Too Close.” Jorah tosses him her destroyed helmet and the half man catches it and stares gobsmacked at the portion that was sheered off in the crash. He lifts it pointing it at her.

“This could have been your head!” he scolds. “What happened?”

“Death himself shot her out of the sky.” Beric steps to her defense, as he slams one of the truck doors closed. “Took a rifle taller than you, fired it right at her.” he turns to look at her as he approaches “I’m sorry I missed your grace.”

“You didn’t miss” Clegane grumbled. “We were all shooting at him. Fuckin’ bullets bounced right off him.” Tyrion swears loudly.

“I’ve never seen anything like it.” Jorah adds. “You should rest your grace. I’ll send Sam up to look at your head when he’s done sewing up the Commander.”
“Her head...” Tyrion gasps “This is is exactly what I was afraid of. This was Reckless Daenerys”

“Hush Tyrion!” Sansa snaps re-emerging from the house, silencing him as only an ex-wife can. She glides through the dusting of snow on the ground to Daenerys, taking her hands in her own and looks her with those bright blue eyes. “Thank you, your grace. Thank you for saving my brother.”

She threads her arm through Daenerys’s elbow and leads her to the house.

“Need anything, Little Bird” Clegane calls after her.

“Please get some rest, Sandor, you as well Beric. I'll handle everything” She gently guides her through the house away from Tyrion’s scolding. “Jon bent the knee?” she asks quietly.

Daenerys only nods in response. She’s too numb to deal with it. She doesn’t want to deal with this right now.

“He told me as Sam was sedating him.”

“I didn’t…”

“Don’t worry about Lyanna and Jorah. I will take care of it.” The thought forces her to stop at the top of the stairs. She hadn’t thought of that. With Jon uniting the North with the rest of Westeros... Lyanna’s warrant…

“I will take care of it, your grace. No harm will come to him. I swear it by the old gods and the new. ”

Missandei hugs her with such ferocity that its almost painful. She wants to wash… and sleep. Her braids are in tatters and Missy takes so much care to be gentle with her head as she attempts to brush out the tangles. Sam knocks on the door by the time they’ve gotten to the ends. He does a series of quick tests to check the severity of the concussion. A flashlight in her eyes to check pupil dilation and a few cognitive questions.

He offers her pain meds. Opiates. Daenerys declines in favor of more tea.

And he confirms that Jon is alright.

“Don’t worry… your grace. I’ve stitched him up more times that I can count.” he tells her with wide smile as she slowly relaxes into oblivion.

The hardest part is starting. And as she stares at Drogon, she can’t even begin to think where to start. Its this overwhelming… weight pressing down on her. Several of her bloodriders have offered to help. Gendry as well. Sansa insisted on paying for any scrap she’ll need.

Daenerys turns them all down, closing the doors to the garage. Prefering to be alone and wallow in her misery.

Her baby. Its scrap.

The greatest machine ever built.

Scrap.

The hardest part is starting.

She has a vague awareness that time is passing. Voices moving alongside the building. The sun
moving across the sky. She’s decided to start with the wing. It’s already separated from the rest of her Dragon and its something that she knows she can fix.

The blades of Drogon’s wings hinge on series of tracks that connect to a stirrup mechanism she uses to control how air moves around her as she flies. Its easiest place to start. While the whole system is complex, the repairs to this portion will be relatively easy. Many of the small supporting beams were bent in the crash. It’s a simple matter of the taking it all apart, heating and straightening the bent ones and putting it back together.

She has her plans… so its doesn’t feel quite as…

Impossible.

“Daenerys…” Missy finds her beneath the wing. She doesn’t come out from under it. Missy kneels down and peeks underneath. Sympathy and worry shining in her gold-brown eyes. “I brought you some lunch… its past midday.”

“Thank you” She answers dryly, her hand reach up using a small wrench to loosen one of the lugs that connects the blade of the wing to the support structures beneath it. There are eight on each wing and she’s gotten four done so far. After she finishes with them, she’ll be able to access the frames beneath easier.

Missy eyes follow the bolt that gets added to a small tin can she found to store the bolts. It rings sharply as it hits the others inside it.

“Did Tyrion want something?” The next bolt doesn’t budge as she pulls on it.

“You are my friend Daenerys. And I am worried for you”

“Why!?” she lashed out. “Because I recklessly flew off to save a man I barely know” she strained against the bolt. She must’ve had access to a drill when she did this before.

“Because I crashed and now everyone is doubting whether whether or not I can fly” the bolt began to shift.

“And they are debating whether or not I can beat Cersei without a Dragon.” the bolt gave way with a squeak and she began to unspool it.

“And if I can’t beat Cersei, the maybe I should be turned over to Cersei.” she pulled the bolt out and tossed it into the can and moved to the next one.

“Surely you don’t believe that” Missy gasped. Daenerys didn’t answer, just began pushing against the tight grip of the next bolt. “I do not follow you because of Drogon. I serve you because if I wanted to go home, I know you would do anything in your power to get me there. I serve you because I believe in you. We all do.”

The bolt gave way and she unscrewed it and moved onto the next.

“I can see you are busy Stormborn.” Missy sounded hurt. “Let us know if you would like some company” she turned and walked out.

The bolt wouldn’t budge and she let out a desperate frustrated scream.

The food Missy brought her had long gone cold. She should feel bad about that. About wasting it. The blades of the wings were stacked, somewhat haphazardly against the side of the garage as she
worked through the structure of the frame. A pile on each side of her, one of pieces that were bent and needed repair, and the other of pieces that were okay.

“Are you here to scold me some more?” she said without lifting her head to the intruder. “Tell me I’m acting like a whinging child or a silly girl”

“Well actually I came to bring you this…” Tyrion placed her sketchbook down at her side. All her sketches and calculations were in it. Ideas and plans for future modifications. “Missandei says it helps you think.”

She scoots back away from Drogon to lean her back against a set of cabinets at the back of the garage. Supply storage for the Starks small fleet of vehicles.

Surprisingly he takes a seat next to her. Usually she tries to meet him at his eye level.

“When I was a child, my uncle asked what I wanted for my name day… I begged him for a dragon of my own. My tutor had just gone over the history of the Aegon and Balerion. How he flew over the whole of Westeros in this...machine. ‘It wouldn't even have to be a big dragon,’ I told him. ‘It could be little like me,’” he chuckled softly. “Everyone laughed like it was the funniest thing they had ever heard. Then my father told me that there were no more dragons. That the Tech was lost forever... I cried myself to sleep that night.”

Lost.

“...But here you are.” He turns to look at her then. “You built him. You built a Dragon. With No Help. With No instruction. With only your instinct and your smarts.

“You are the Dragon.”

Gods she doesn’t want to cry in front of him. So she presses her fingers into her eyeballs as far as they’ll go until there is a throb that shoots up to where she hit her head. The sharp clear bolt of pain dries her eyes with a wince.

It hurts, but she can keep her composure. With a heavy sigh she nods, she can listen to him. They can talk. She can do her job… for a little while.

“Before we begin...” he started. “I need you to understand something,” he stood in front of her now and for once she was the one below his eye-level. “I will never, ever sell you to my sister. We follow you because we believe that you will make this world a better place.”

“Now... you are acting like a whinging child and a silly girl. What you did was incredibly reckless, and you scared us all to death.” he smirked and she let out a small dry laugh. “To business then” he said and began pacing careful to not disturb the piles she had laid out.

“What kind of threat are we facing up North? What do they look like? How do they move?”

“Jorah was the one that saw them up close”

“I’ve already spoken with Jorah and every other member of the party, save Commander Snow. But you saw them from the air”

She looked out the window into the distance. It was snowing. “They were so fast. Inhumanly so. They were able to almost keep pace with the trucks. They would climb over each other to try and attack the team.”
“Did they seem organized at all? Intelligent?”

“No. Just...desperate. Like their existence depended on catching up.” she looked at Tyrion. “My guns didn't phase them. The fire didn't phase them. The fire hurt them, but it didn’t scare them. I saw them burning and they still kept running until there was nothing left. I was barely able to slow them down.” she felt her anxiety building.

“But you were. Everyone escaped. Everyone made it home.” he places a hand on her knee, to calm her. “And their leader... “

“I didn’t really see him... I just heard this...horrible noise and then I couldn’t control Drogon and then Jorah was waking me up”

He nods and then surveys the work around her.

“Daenerys, I must insist you stop working on this today. You’ve suffered a great trauma. Your well-being takes priority.”

As she heaves her way to her bedroom, she hears a guitar strumming. The chord’s off key.

“That’s great but... you need to put this finger... here... Can you reach?” It's a door at the far end of hall opposite hers.

“Yes.”

“Good now try.”

The chord comes out bright and loud and sweet as she presses her ear against the door.

“Was that right?”

“Perfect... Now try all three together”

The three cords blend together clumsily, with several seconds pause between each one. She knocks and Arya opens it.

“Your Grace” She slips inside the room after her. A small spartan room with way too many bodies currently in it. Willa and Ghost, Gilly and Little Sam, Arya, and Joanna is sitting with a far too big guitar in her hands, while Jon adjusts her fingers.

“It looks like there’s a party in here?” She says

“Well it is now”
As he falls… he twists and sees it. Dany spinning out of control, and smoke pouring from the dragon as the bridge splinters and blows around him.
Then the ice cracks as his shoulder slams against it, before the current drags him under.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

He pulls out his knife and begins stabbing up into the blue ice glowing with sunlight above him.

It’s dark below him. Deep and Dark.

And so fucking cold.

‘Don’t open your mouth’ he begs punching up with the knife into the ice. But his body doesn’t listen. And the pressure on his lungs becomes too great and his mouth is open and water comes rushing in.

He’s drowning. His vision tunnelling and going dark as his knife finally cracks through and he’s able to fucking push his head up through the small hole in the ice.

Jon coughs and spits struggling to haul himself out of the water.

There’s something embedded in his side, just above his hip. His fingers come back bloody when he touches it and it pushes deeper into him as he lays sprawled out on his belly on the ice.

So fucking cold.

He needs to move. He needs to get off this ice. But his muscles are heavy and sore from the impact and…

It’s so fucking cold.

“Are you staring at me’ ass, Jon Snow?”

She looks back over her shoulder at him. Her mane of red hair escaping from the white/grey camouflage.

“Ygritte…”

“Maybe you’ll climb faster, If I let you.”

No. He’s dead.

Again…

But he didn’t feel the world turn black like it did before. Or the heavy weight of existence crashing down before falling away.

“C’mon Jon” she urges. “Climb”

His hand extends out to grab where her foot was a moment ago, and he pulls himself forward, the thing in his side sharp and present,

“Climb Jon.”

The wind pushes him flat against the wall of ice and he peers through his hair at her, and he extends to reach the next hand hold her boots carved out for him.

“Climb.”
He spreads his legs out to distribute his weight. The last thing he needs is to fall in again.

He won’t make it back out.

“Climb”

He’s not sure if its her saying it now… or if its him

“Climb”

The thing in his side throbs. He didn’t dare risk removing it. Not yet. Not while he was on the ice. If he pulled it out he might bleed out faster. Night was falling, the temperature would drop soon and it was already so cold. If he lost anymore blood his body temperature would drop faster and he would die faster.

And he was determined not to die.

“Climb”

He was soaking wet and he could feel his clothes beginning to freeze around him. His movements were starting to slow.

Keep going.

Keep climbing.

“Almost there, Jon.”

She looks back over her shoulder again to make sure he’s keeping up. White and Grey and Red and Strong and Unbroken. Weirwood.

And she disappears over the top of the wall.

Then his knee finds a rock. If there were rocks, maybe this was the shallows. Carefully he forced himself to his feet. The ice slowly cracking under his weight. When he falls through his foot found the river bed and a few moments later, He’s ashore lying up against the roots of a massive tree.

“Cozy” something silver whispered.

No, that's not her. That’s the hypothermia talking.

His frozen fingers touched the spot on his side where it hurts. There’s a shank of old rotted wood sticking out of him. Shrapnel from the bridge blowing up. At least the bombs had worked. The Wights wouldn’t cross the gorge or the river. But it only delayed the inevitable. They were coming and they were close.

He braced himself and grabbed at it. Only for a bolt of pain to run through him and he lets out a low scream and a string of curses as he let go.

Davos wouldn’t have left. He didn’t force the Rad-Witch to restart his heart at gunpoint only to abandon him in the snow. He needs to get the others attention.

Pistols. They would be able to hear the shots. He had been holding them when he told her to blow the bridge. Long gone most likely. The sun had set and he couldn't see anything around him. Which meant the others wouldn't be able to see him either.
He could try shouting. But His shirt was frozen to his chest and it was becoming difficult to breathe. He tried anyway but barely any sound came out. There were flares in the truck. Like the one he’d used to signal Daenerys. The one he used to let her crash into his life.

Fuck his side hurt. Fuck...everything hurt. Keep your eyes open. Stay alert.

He could feel the rifle strap around his shoulder cutting into his neck. At least he didn't lose that.

The rifle.

His Flashlight.

He grabbed at his rifle and there it was. Where it should be mounted on the barrel. He whispered a thanks to any gods that were listening and clicked it on and flashed it up where he believed the highway to be.

And he waited. Everytime he felt himself drifting he’d push on the stake going through his side and let the pain and the adrenaline run through him. And he waited.

And then he heard voices. Human ones.

“You know nothing, Jon Snow” she whispers into the wind.

“Ygritte...“ he calls after her.

“DON'T FOLLOW HER YOU CROW BASTARD” Tormund yells and he surrenders to the oblivion.

He doesn’t dream...but when he wakes, it feels like a dream. Her silver shape slowly comes into focus and Her lips part and she makes a small noise.

Dany...

Emotion crackles under her violet eyes as she looks over him.

And he remembers her Dragon spinning and smoking and… her eyes tell the rest. “My baby” she called it… of course it's her baby. She built it with her own two hands.

And there’s nothing he can do but grab her hand and apologize. It’s his fault.

It’s his fault.

Like so many things. It's his fault. It’s his fault his queen lost her dragon.

But as he chokes on his confession, she nurses him and... vows to help him. To fight beside him. Together.

“Dany...“

“Dany?” she hmmm’d. Foolish. That was supposed to be his secret name for her and he let it slip out of his mouth so easily. But, she doesn’t want him using it, because someone else used that name before. Someone who hurt her.

“My Queen…”

He has moments of lucidity. Sam has all the good stuff from the University at home and the medic at
the wall are making do with what they have. He remembers his head in Dany’s...Daenerys’s lap. The way her fingers feel in his hair. Her quiet humming.

He remembers smelling the Dreadfort. Its smells of rust... metallic and coppery.

Like Blood.

His baby brother’s blood.

“Run to your brother”

He remembers her lips pressing into his skin, pulling him away from that horrific moment.

Arya buries her head against him. His little sister. His little sister back from the dead and here next to him.

Then Sam has him in the med, and Sansa is leaning over him as the good stuff floods into his veins... She grabs his hand, urging him to count backwards.

“I bent the knee...” he gasps. She nods and kisses his forehead.

“I’ll take care of it. Rest Jon... Rest”

Other than that...

He knows nothing.

The first things he hears is Arya’s voice, and the quiet clacking of Sansa’s knitting. As he blinks awake and the world comes into focus again, he feels Arya’s weight beside him on the bed, her legs tented over his knees as she leans up against the wall.

She’s reading horror stories to him. Like he used to do for her. When they were young, she would laugh and make fun of the characters as they inevitably walked into the monster or murders trap. But always... always she would creep into his bed at night. She would never admit she was scared at first. She would make up a million and one excuses. But sometimes as he started to drift off to sleep, she would whisper... “I’m scared” and she would curl herself around his arm.

She’s reading one of the stories right now. One of the few things that weren’t necessities he’d taken with him to the wall.

“Gods Arya...” Sansa gasps as Arya reads through a particularly grisly scene.

“What...?”

The familiar slide and click of her metal knitting needles resumes. “Can you at least skip past all the gore and just get to the action? I hate waiting.” Sansa sighs.

“The gore is the action” she scoffs in return.

“Mother saved a few of father’s favorites” Bran suggests from somewhere out of his line of sight.

“They’re down in my room...”

“Ew. Old Man Militia Fiction.”

“It’s not that bad.”
“It is that bad.” Sansa agrees resting her needles for a second, flexing her hand and unravelling some more yarn. Its a dark navy blue and there is a blue mass of the same color in her lap.

“What do you think, Jon?” Bran asks. He’s been caught.

He doesn’t answer. Just smiles as Arya throws the book down and crawls up the bed alongside him so that she is under his arm. His little sister.

The monsters aren’t in the stories anymore. And he’s the one that scared her this time.

Sansa presses her hand to his forehead. “Fever’s broken…” she sighs. “How are you feeling?”

“Thirsty… Sore…” he answers quietly. “…Happy to be home.” Sansa smiles down at him and stands and leaves the room as Bran wheels into his line of sight. “What time is it?”

“It’s around 0200 You arrived about midday. Sam stitched you up and you’ve been down ever since.” His little brother answers him. He looks… tired. Like he does after he’s had a seizure.

“You shouldn’t be awake Bran.”

“You shouldn’t be alive, Jon.” he answers pointedly.

Jon swallows hard. He doesn’t like talking about that. Not with his family… not with Arya… He looks down at her looking up at him under his arm.

“I know” she says quietly. “The men talk…”

“I didn’t want you to know.”

They are quiet for a time as she settles back against him. There’s nothing really that they can say.

He died… but now he’s back.

Sansa returns with some water and some broth and bread. Arya crawls to her knees and uses her surprising strength to help him sit up right, as every muscle in his body protests the movement. He can feel huge bruises down on his side and down his arm and leg where he impacted against the ice.

“So what’s happened?” he asks Sansa after a few sips of water.

“We can talk about it in the morning, Jon. You should rest after you get some food in you.” She sits back down and resumes her knitting.

“Aye. I promise I will. But…”

“Everyone made it home safe. The men are working a double shift getting the beef salted and stored for winter. We only lost a few hundred pounds to rot, thank the gods. You don’t have any broken bones, but we need to watch for an infection on your hip. You’ve been placed on leave. Lyanna and Alys are here taking over some of your responsibilities…” She pauses debating something in her head. “There’s an issue with Lyanna, but we can talk about that in the morning.”

He takes a bite of bread, but its… too much for the cotton in his mouth. Best stick with broth. His body will revolt if he tries too much too fast.

“And Dany?”

Fuck.
The needles stop for a moment and Bran raises an eyebrow at him and Arya suppresses a wry smile. “Her grace is resting. Sam’s checked her head for injuries. It appears to be only a minor concussion. She’ll be fine.”

She got hurt. He killed her dragon. And he hurt her. “She’ll be fine, Jon…” Sansa repeats, reassuringly. There are dark purple circles under her eyes. “You should get some rest Sansa.”

“After I finish this row. If I stop in the middle, I’ll drop stitches. Arya… I believe some teenagers were in the middle of being murdered.”

Arya picks up the book while he eats and Sansa knits and Bran leans his head back in his wheelchair. And he falls asleep to his little sisters voice.

“Mornin’ Ser” Davos bustles into the room accompanied by Sansa. “Yer lookin’ a right sight better than I last saw.” Arya is perched on his desk cross legged. He hasn’t left her sight for more than a few minutes for the privy.

“To business then…“ he says after they get through the increasingly annoying questions regarding his health. “You bent the knee.”

“Aye.”

“Right then…”

“I don’t think she’s told anyone.” Sansa says. “Tyrion would be making a scene. But he’s been quiet.”

“What does that mean for us?” Davos asks.

Sansa shrugs. “We carry on as usual. You’ve made your decision, the rest is up to her grace.”

“We should make plans for housing her men. We have empty settlements at the Dreadfort and Moat Cailin, and Last Hearth could uses some more people…” Davos adds.

The whole North could use more people.

“What’s the issue with Lyanna?”

Sansa sighs heavily. “She’s wants Jorah executed for Slaving.” Davos looks at her gobsmacked, and Jon feels the same expression on his own face. “She’s testing us… because of what happened with Petyr.”

It was the only crime they were able to prove. The only one they had evidence for. Him selling Sansa to the Boltons. He was guilty of so much more. Guilty for starting a war that killed Robb and some thirty thousand Northern alone, not to mention the other hundred thousand from the other territories. Guilty for the Murder of Sansa’s aunt, Lysa. Guilty of extortion, bribery, corruption, embezzlement and a million other crimes.

But the only one they could prove. The one he’d executed him for was selling his sister to be raped and torted.
“I was able to hold her off for a bit, but once it become public that you’ve surrendered to Queen Daenerys, and the North will be reuniting with the rest of Westeros, it will be a problem.”

“Do you know why she wants him dead?”

“Northern Justice…” Sansa speculates.

“He’d be the rightful inheritor of Bear Island, and their property. Perhaps she’s worried he’ll try and get it.” Davos suggests.

“Commander Mormont disowned him”

“There are some who oppose having a girl who’s barely five and ten as second in command of all our forces.”

“I stand by my choice.”

“I agree whole heartedly. Should you fall, she’s the best defensive mind we have.”

“I’ll talk with her, send her up when she’s done running drills. Any leads on what happened with the Barn?”

“No, Daenerys sent her spider to the task after you left and he hasn’t returned. Brienne wants to talk to you about increasing security.”

Lyanna Mormont has a way of intimidating people. Even before she lost her eye. This tiny fierce little warrior who silence grown men with a glance.

She’s a soldier now. And a damn good one. When her time comes… she’ll be the best General Westeros has ever seen.

There is absolutely nothing that could stand in her way.

She strides into his bedroom, nodding at Arya sitting guard on his desk and pushes her hand onto his forehead.

“Lyanna…”

“Shhh… I’m counting.”

He stops and waits a few seconds before she moves her hand away.

“You seem well, Ser.”

“Gettin’ there. How goes it?”

“You are getting soft in your training.”

“Am I?”

“We did a few rounds of Queen and the Castle and not a single troop was able to breach my line.”

Ooof. That is not good.

“You fightin’ fair?”

“War is not fair, Commander”
“Aye.. but they’re learning from you. Not fighting you.”

“I would have had Alys on their side teaching offense, but she ran off with your rangers in the middle of the night and they haven’t been seen since.”

“I wouldn’t be worried.”

“I’m not. I just wish she told me.”

“You two need to stop competing and work together…”

“Competition brings out the best in us… her at least... I don’t need the validation as I’ve already won…”

They discuss reports from the other settlements. Tohrren’s Square is concerned about raiders coming up through the Swamps. They haven’t been attacked yet, but supplies and winter stores have gone missing.

“What’s this I hear ‘bout you wantin’ to kill your uncle.”

She stops and licks her teeth beneath her lips. “That is a perspective that lacks context.”

“Seems pretty straight-forward to me.”

“Your father signed his order of execution. He’s a slaver. He’s been tried and found guilty.”

“He risked his life… for you. He didn’t have to come on my foolhardy mission. He volunteered.”

“And that should wipe away his crimes? That should over-rule your father’s judgement?”

Arya looks at him from her spot on the desk. Shifting uncomfortably to perch on the balls of her feet.

“That is a perspective that lacks context.” he says, quoting her own words back at her.

She taps her heavy boots on the ground and begins to pace, her good eye roaming the room, as if examining the invisible threads that bind them to each other.

And then she wheels on him, shock and disgust on her face.

“You bent the knee.” she accuses.

He swallows hard and holds contact with her eye. He’s never lied to her.

And he never will.

“Aye.” She snarls at his short reply and resumes her pacing, her face twisting more viciously with each pass.

“Why?”

“Its’ the right call” She lets out a long low grunt through her nose. “Winter is coming, and the dead come with it. We need her. We won’t survive without help.” She casts her good eye at him as she paces past him.

“And she offers help in exchange for the North”

“No. She vowed to help and then I surrendered.” She glares at him for a long moment, her dark eye
waiting for words to weigh him by. “She saved my life... She didn’t have to... She could have let us die up there. Then you’d have t’ deal with her.” he tries to joke. Lyanna shakes her head.

“I would have given her a war unlike anything she’s ever seen...” And then she relaxes. Her shoulders round and she exhales, her cheek puffing as she blows out the breath. “What’s done is done. What happens now?”

He shrugs. “There hasn’t opportunity to discuss the details.”

“The Manderly’s won’t be pleased... Most everyone else will fall in line... Unhappily” she adds as an afterthought.

“And you?”

She pauses, then smiles, a delighted malice shining out of her dark eye.

“We’re facing anything other than total annihilation, I would return to Bear Island and dare you and your queen to take it from me.”

He laughs aloud and gods it hurts to laugh. But he can’t help it. Because gods know how that fight would turn out.

Bear Island is a fucking fortress, surrounding by the coldest water you can imagine, and if by chance you did brave the water, you’d find a minefield. If you did make it ashore, you’d find the densest darkest forest you’ve ever seen, crawling with BEARS that shrug off bullets until you hit them a few dozen times. And if you make it to the settlement, you’ll find yourself facing people who’ve managed to live alongside those bears, behind a stone wall that’s never been breached since it was built almost a thousand years ago lined with Artillery that would make Daenerys and her Dragon pause.

He could win.

Maybe.

Maybe not.

“The troops are asking for a rematch, Miss Stark” Brienne says to Arya as she strides into the room. It’s odd having so many people in his bedroom. But... he’s stuck here for the time being. And its not like he anything to hide.

In fact, he thinks Sansa or Gilly must’ve cleaned in here while he was gone. His pack from the Night’s Watch where he usually kept all his clothes has been emptied, and all the clothes hung up in the small closet.

They even took Mance’s guitar out and put it in the corner. He hasn’t touched it in months.

He liked playing when he was a boy. Catelyn had bought a guitar from some scavvers for Robb but, Robb wasn’t interested so he gave it to Jon. And Jon taught himself as much as he could until Catelyn gave the guitar away to one of his father’s Lieutenants son’s.

Mance passed it to him one night at camp and told him to “Play something soft and pretty so I can sweep this soft and pretty maid off her feet” and then in rush picked up Dalla spinning he and dipping her and crooning love songs at her.

Jon saved it after he killed him. Rescued it from being burned. It was too precious a thing to be
destroyed.

“Just Arya”

She places the back of her hand against his forehead for a moment. And across the room Arya cocks her head to the side.

“You seem well.”

“Aye. Every muscle’s screaming at me though.” She nods curtly and briefs him on her plan to heighten security. It mostly involves increasing patrols, and restricting access to certain areas.

“Whatever ya think is best.”

As she closes the door, Arya licks her lips and asks “Do you think they are actually checking your temperature? Or are they just going through the motions?”

“I was going to ask you.” She laughs and does a free fall on to the floor, landing in a plank “So... Gendry seems nice.”

“Is that the best you can do?” Arya cackles obnoxiously.

“He fought well.” she shrugs. “Are you two...?”

“What’s going on with you and the Queen, Jon?” she asks pointedly.

“Fair Enough” he answers.

Her elbows square and she drops down lower before rolling her weight to one hand, and spreading her torso upward to stretch the other hand toward the ceiling.

“If you’re bored…”

“I’m not.” she controls her fall back down to the plank before rolling up onto the other side. “This is exactly what I’d be doing if I was alone.”

“They taught you this in Braavos.” Gods he’s sore. Every muscle in his body is screaming at him. Even watching her exercise is painful and exhausting.

“More or less. Some of it I made up because the basic move was too easy.” she lands in the plank again, but this time transitions into a handstand. “Water Dancing is about controlling your opponents movement.” She bends back in the handstand and he can hear her spine pop as her feet touch the floor in a bridge with her belly toward the ceiling. “The water moves around the obstacle, not through it.” Arya slowly moves to a standing position, squaring her shoulders. “And time and erosion wears it down” She bends back again, to the bridge, to the handstand then down to the plank. “Just like men get tired from swinging at you too much.”

“And then?” he asks.

She pounces up almost faster than he can see and her fist is an inch away from his face. His sister beams at him, as two fingers and a thumb uncurl from the fist into the shape of mock gun.

“Bang...”

“Jon…” Gilly gently knocks on the door, her voice waking him from the light doze he’d fallen into listening the rhythmic creak of the floorboards beneath Arya’s pushups. Her head peeks through the
door as he opens his eyes and smiles at her. “Its past midday, Are you up for some lunch?”

“Gods yes…” he’s starving. That oppressive weakness has been fading since he had some porridge this morning. Gilly presses her palm to his head for a moment and he catches Arya pressing her mouth tightly against her hand stifling a laugh. She pats him on the cheek affectionately before turning to tend to the tray of food, dividing out a portion for Arya.

“Where’s Sam?” he asks.

“Oh… Rangers came back an hour or so ago. One of the poor lads ended up with a slash across his arm this long.” she holds out her hands, the space between them about 8 inches long. “Sam’s stitchin’ him up downstairs. Says he accidentally sprung his own critter trap”

He cringes. He’s done it himself. Never bad enough to get stitches. But the snap of taut green wood hurts like hell. Especially when you’ve got it drawn tight enough to break a rabbits neck. She puts a plate on the table next to bed. Juicy looking strips of beef and fried potato and he can’t stop staring at it.

“What? Is it too much? D’ya want somethin’ else?”

“No, Gilly. it’s perfect. I could fuckin’ kiss you”

“Don’t you dare, Jon Snow. My husband sewed you up, and he’ll unstitch ya just as easily.” She smiles. “Speakin’ of which… Lets see ‘em” He lifts the corner of his shirt and Gilly leans over him pulling the bandage up to examine the stitches. “Looks clean.” she hmms in approval. “Do you feel well enough for the girls to come visit?”

The girls. Yes. He nods. Yes he would love to see them.

“They’ve been cryin’ for days.” her skirts ruffle as she exits hurriedly “Eat that. I’ll go get them.”

As soon as she leaves, the laugh Arya has been suppressing erupts from her mouth. “It’s like they can’t help it.” she exclaims, giggling madly as he takes a bite of food.

Its so fucking good. It feels like its been a week since he’s had real food. On mission, he tends to stick to jerky, nuts, dried apple rings. Easy tasteless calories to fuel the fight. But this...Fuck, Gilly knows how to cook. She cooks like Catelyn used to cook for their father

Usually their family would eat in the Mess with the men. But at week’s end, she demanded they have a family dinner. More often than not, he would go to the mess instead and do his best not to attract her ire. But every few weeks or so, his father, or Robb would catch him and insist he join. And Catelyn would make a show of having to make another place setting and then pointedly ignore him for the whole meal. Never looking where he was.

But fuck if its not the best food he’s ever had.

He scarfs down the food voraciously clearing it in a few minutes. Arya laughing at him as Ghost whines pitifully.

“Mine.” he growls at the wolf.

The sound of mad running footsteps reaches his ears and Gilly yelling a reprimand and the running stops in front of the door. Gilly opens it, restraining Willa gently by shoulders. “Alright. You see him?” She points at Jon “You see that he’s home?” Willa nods up at her. “You see that he’s alright?”
another nod. “You see there’s no reason to cry anymore?”

She sticks out her bottom lip in apologetic pout.

“Alright go get him.” and Gilly turns her loose.

And she jumps up onto his bed in a single leap landing not so gracefully across his legs. He grunts on the impact but hauls her up to sit properly next to him.

“I missed you.” her arms wrap around his neck in a hug.

“I missed you too.”

“Shoes off the bed” Gilly barks pulling the chair away and taking a seat by the desk, pulling a book out of her apron. It’s a romance novel she took from Sam’s mother. More than once she’s asked him what a word was and he’s come away feeling embarrassed because of the context. “And mind his side.”

“Were you helpful to Miss Gilly, while I was gone?” he asks helping her with the shoes.

“Yes! We helped in the garden and we..uh...we made jam and did our lessons and Miss Alys took us scouting through the woods and showed us---showed us how to do bird calls.”

“What kind of bird calls?

“Like umm… Like this…” she folds her hands carefully together, interlacing her small fingers just so and blows through them. It makes a noise that is absolutely nothing like any bird calls he taught Alys. The ones Ygritte had taught him.

“Robisz to źle”* another voice answers from the doorway. He turns to look at Joanna, leaning defiantly against the doorframe. He smiles at his chief, but it fades when she glares at him with harsh grey eyes, her lips tight and twisted with anger. But before he can say something...

“NO! I did it right.” Willa counters frowning at her older sister. He watches Joanna as she carefully meanders into the room.

Purposefully hugging the edge of it, averting her eyes, keeping her hands buried in her pockets. Taking a seat on the floor in the corner, next to where Mance’s guitar case rests against the wall.

Staying away from him.

Isolating herself.

“and Miss...ummm... “ Willa grabs his face and turns him it to look at her. Demanding his full attention.

“Missandei” Gilly helps her.

“Miss Missy braided my hair all fancy like the Dragon Queen’s, but it got messed up when we went with Alys so she had to redo it, but she doesn’t know how to do the fancy ones and--and we went to the Godswood and prayed everyday that you and Tormund would come home safe....”

It hits him unexpectedly. Every time someone has ever told him they were praying for him it’s been sarcastic, or pointed. Meant to shame him somehow.

But the way she says it… with bright grey eyes and a bright smile. It...
It opens up this tear in his heart, like he’s never felt before. And he stares at her small smiling face, so excited to see...him. Happy to see him. His mouth hangs open dumbly, overwhelmed with this nameless emotion that’s filling his chest, poured in through that small tear.

“OH And look!” She stick out her lower jaw at him and wiggles a tooth with her tongue.

“You have a loose tooth!” he exclaims and she bounces her head up and down in an enthusiastic nod.

“I can yank it out” Arya waggles her eyebrows at the girl.

“NO!!!” she shrieks and recoils against him.

“We’ll let it fall out on its own... Unless it starts to hurt...Then Sam will pull it out.” he reassures her, rubbing her back.

“The sooner it’s out the sooner you can put it under your pillow and the Children of the Forest will trade it for sweets while you’re sleeping” his little sister explains.

Willa looks to him, her mouth open with shock and amazement. “Really?”

Catelyn had done it for all her children, maintaining the illusion even when Sansa spoiled it for Arya when she started losing her teeth. His father was too busy for that sort of thing. It ruined that bit of childhood magic for Robb, when they both started losing their teeth and Robb would get candy and Jon wouldn’t. It didn’t take much for them to figure it out.

“Yes.” he answers. “You put your tooth under your pillow and then when you’re fast asleep, they come in and take your teeth t’ use for their magic spells” he tickles her stomach and she squinches her face up giggling “and give you some candy to say thank you for the present.”

“Po prostu kłamie” Joanna says dryly from the corner.

“No He’s not!” Willa turns sharply at her sister. “Jon wouldn’t lie!”

“He’s lied about everything else.” she growls, finally speaking in Westerosi.

“What’s goin’ on Chief?” he asks her directly.

“What do you care?” the words spill from her lips, dripping with venom.

Fuck...

Fuck.

He looks to Gilly, locking eyes with her and tipping his head to Willa slightly.

“Willa...sugarlump...Why don’tcha come and help me get Little Sam up from his nap.”

“But…”

“And we’ll get some toast and jam and be back in a little bit.”

“Listen to Gilly, Willa.” he says gently, lifting her out of his lap to stand on the floor.

“Yes Ser…” she murmurs as she’s guided by Gilly out the door.
Arya meets his eyes a with a silent question. He nods and she shuffles off the desk, silently following the others. Closing the door behind her.

Of course it stings that she’s not happy to see him. And it upsets him that she’s angry with him. And that she thinks he doesn’t care about her…Fuck…he feels lower than dirt for that...

But that’s not the worrisome part. She called him a liar. And its not the insult to his honor, he’s been called far worse. Its…

She’s his responsibility. And if he gives her an order, and she disobeys it because she doesn’t trust him. She and Willa could end up hurt or dead.

He looks at his hands for a moment and flexes his right one. The burn scarred skin shifting as the muscles beneath contract and he takes a deep stabilizing breath against the old injury as he desperately tries to remember every serious conversation he ever had with his father.

“Promise Me Crow…”

Joanna is glaring at him from underneath unruly tendrils of black hair falling into her grey eyes.

“If you’re going to call someone a liar, do it standing on your feet and looking them in the eye.”

She freezes, and then she sets her jaw, stands up and stomps to the foot of the bed.

“You. Are. A Liar.”

As she hisses it out through gritted teeth, he realizes that trying to be rational with a child is foolish. That she’s emotional and angry and doesn’t have the tools to describe what she’s really feeling.

But she’s not the little girl that would sit and pet Ghost off to the side whenever Mance called a moot and Karsi came down from the Ice River to meet with him. A little bird that flitted around her mother, Karsi’s belly swollen with Willa. Not anymore. It’s nearly her eleventh name-day.

And this is wartime.

“I don’t know what I did to make you angry. I’d like it if you told me. But, if you don’t want to...that’s fine. You can be angry with me.” He pauses for a second, giving her the opportunity to say something. “But I’ve never lied to you…”

“All Crows are the same…Kneelers”

He should have known. She grew up surrounded by the Free Folk. Her entire life has been the Free Folk.

“My duty is to keep you and Willa safe. My Job is to keep us all safe… And I’ll do whatever I have to do and right now… that means surrendering…”

“Kneeler.”

“Aye.”

“Crow!”

“Aye.”

“Traitor!”
“For the watch…” Lt Thorne rasps and a knife plunges into his chest.

“Aye…”

“ITS YOUR FAULT MAMA’S DEAD” she spits Val’s words at him. And immediately she gasps and claps her hands over her mouth and tears flood her grey eyes.

The world stops for a moment.

“M’Sorry” she whimper.

“No..” he shakes his head.

“M’sorry.M’sorry.M’sorry.” she repeats it over and over again. Shaking like a leaf.

“NoNoNoNo” he reaches out for her but, she recoils away from him.

“I didn’t mean it…” she sobs and he pulls himself out of the bed, the stitches screaming. But he’s only up for a moment before he collapses to his knees in front of her.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.” It is his fault... and he can’t even explain it to her. He thought he was doing the right thing. He was trying to do the right thing. He opens his mouth to say something, to tell her she’s right, to tell her it was his fault, to apologize again and again and again and again and never stop.

And she sobs. The heaves wracking her small body. Karsi’s brave girl. His brave girl.

“I didn’t mean it…” Joanna cries as he wraps both his arms around her frame.

They were there the night he died. Not in the room. Thank the gods. But at Fort Black. When they returned from Hardhome, he’d locked them in the commander’s quarters at night with Ghost keeping watch at the door. Keeping them safe from his men. He knew what the Night’s Watch was...

They were so scared.

And as his mind reeled from the devastation of dying and coming back. The first solid thing he could cling onto… the first thing that made any sense at all…

“Promise me, Crow”

“You didn’t say good bye to us…” she says against his chest, the words coming out shaky and thick as she struggles to stop sobbing. “You were just gone...Gone like mama.”

“I’m so sorry. I never meant to hurt you.”

What’s that emotion?

The one that turns rage into tears, and hurt into comfort

Love.

Harsh and fierce and proud and Paternal. And he understand why his father took Arya and Sansa with him down south. He could never stay away from them. He could never not be there to protect them.

“You n’ Willa are goin’ to stay with us now. Okay?”
“Val will kill you.” she cries.

“Val’s always threatening to kill me. Fuck Val.”

She nods against him and he lifts her chin and wipes her tears with his thumbs, Karsi’s grey eyes peeking up through her wet eyelashes.

“Fuck Val” she repeats dragging her sleeve across her nose. And there she is. His brave girl.

Thankfully, none of his stitches tugged out but that doesn’t stop Gilly from cursing him as Arya tucks herself under his shoulder to help haul him back to bed.

The chord Joanna plays on Mance’s guitar strikes sour.

“That’s great but… you need to put this finger” He taps one of her small fingers “here…” he taps the space on more fret over on the guitar. “Can you reach?”

“Yes.” and she stretches her pinky out as far as she can and presses down on the string.

“Good now try.” She strums again and the chord comes out melodic and pretty, if a bit stuttered.

“Was that right?”

“Perfect… Now try all three together” The three cords blend together clumsily, with several seconds pause between each one. But she got it. She’s so fucking smart. Smart like Sansa, or Sam or…

There’s a knock at the door and Arya opens it. “Your Grace” she tips her head before retreating back to her spot on his desk.

Smart Like Dany.

Her long silver hair is down, no braids. Just gathered in a loose tail off to one side. Gods she’s beautiful. But there’s a pang of guilt at the thought. Her hair wouldn’t be in her normal intricacies...she hurt her head saving him.

“It looks like there’s a party in here?” She says

He chuckles. His room is crowded. Willa is on the floor with Ghost in the corner, coloring contently. A small human lying against a pool of white fluff. Arya’s on his desk reading the horror novel. Gilly and little Sam are on the floor in the middle of the room, rolling a ball back and forth, and Joanna’s on the chair next to the bed with the guitar.

“Well it is now” he answers, and Arya rolls her eyes.

She comes in an closes the door behind her, greeting everyone as her amethyst eyes search for a seat. Then she sits on the edge of the bed. Along the narrow strip where between the edge and his body. So very close to him.

He just smiles dumbly at her for a long moment as she reaches up across his torso, her elegant fingers resting against his forehead for a moment, before brushing some hair out of his eyes.

“How’s your head?” she sighs heavily at that and chuckles quietly.

“Ask me that later.” That worries him but...she’s smiling shyly at him, before turning to Joanna. “Are you learning?”
“Jon’s teaching me how to play ‘The Last of Giants’”

Gilly suddenly cups her hand over mouth with an awful noise. “Watch him” she points to Little Sam and darts out of the room and a few moments later lurching sounds come from the privy down the hall.

“How wonderful” A sad look crosses Daenerys’s face, but it's instantly replaced with a cringing grin as Gilly lurches again.

Joanna hands him the guitar and joins Arya on the floor with Little Sam with a wary glance at Daenerys. But she stays on the bed beside him even though the chair is now open.

“Leader of the Free Folk” She drags her nails across the strings letting it thrum, delight dancing on her lips as she draws the noise from the instrument. “Can you play, your grace?”

“May I?” she holds out her hands and Mance guitar just looks dirty in them, an impure and broken thing against moonglow skin. She traces where Mance carved his name into the neck. “Who was he?”

The innuendo isn’t lost on him. “I’ve been beaten, raped and sold.” she told him when they first met. And that night in Sansa’s office, swapping adventures, she told him about her wedding to the Khal.

How many other men had her brother tried to sell her to? His own little sister sits on the floor near him, and he can’t even fucking stomach the thought. It makes him sick with wrongness of it. Arranged marriages are one thing, a fairly common thing. But what happened to Daenerys...what happened to Sansa was different. Wrong.

He extends his arm to take back the guitar, and extends it again once the instrument is in the case. She took his hand before and... she takes it again now.

Gilly comes back looking sweaty and exhausted.

“This is what you get for having a baby”

“Pssssh” she hisses. “It’s not hard to get knocked up. Congratulate me when the bugger starts kicking and we know he’s healthy” The drag of Daenerys thumb across his knuckles pauses as she averts her eyes from Gilly,

“Please feel free to ask Missandei for any assistance.” her voice is dry and tight...

“Thank you, your grace.” she says awkwardly scooping up Little Sam and eyeing their joined hands “Alright. We’ve kept Jon up for too long. Let’s go start makin’ supper and gettin’ your stuff from camp an’ let him rest.”

With more than a few groans from Willa, his room clears. Arya awkwardly excusing herself from her
guard duty to go find Gendry.

And then he’s alone in his bed…with his queen. Her hand warm in his, Soft but calloused. In different ways than his own, along the ridge of her palm, and the swell of flesh between her thumb and her wrist. Calloused from thousands of hours gripping the handle bars, and tinkering with her Dragon.

Drogon.

Her baby.

“How bad is it?” he asks quietly.

“Bad…” she answers. “Very bad.” And then the tears start to fall. “He killed my baby, Jon. I-I don’t know if I can fix him…I-I…” He moves up, pulling his legs underneath him so he can sit up next to her at the edge of the bed, arms around her shoulders. “He killed my baby. He killed my baby.”

She babbles as her words descend into gentle sobs and her head presses against his shoulder.

“We’ll find a way t’ fix him…” his hand smoothing her hair. “We’ll find a way… Gendry--Gendry’s clever an’…You’ll find a way.”

“He tore my jet. He tore it apart like it was nothing…It’s the only one left.…The only one left. The last one… Just like me…And now its gone.”

“That’s not true…You’re still here. You’re not the last…” And then the sobs return. “Drogon is the only baby I’ll ever have… and he killed him!” He can feel her teeth grit and her jaw set as she cries. “You were right... You were right from the beginning.”

“We’re going to beat him. Together.”

She shakes her head. “How? Without Drogon… I’m just another terrible Targaryen thing hells bent on conquering Westeros.”

“You’re not like everyone else…If that were true. You wouldn’t be here right now…If that were true, I wouldn’t have surrendered.” She scoffs quietly at that.

“Maybe you shouldn’t have…You were injured and delirious…I’d...understand if you wanted to…”

“No”

She looks up at him then, her cheek still pressed against his shoulder.

“No?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because…” he pauses, because its the truth. What he told Lyanna was true. It made strategic sense. They will all die without help. Everyone. Everywhere.

But there’s a difference between a true thing and the truth.

“I’m not Mance.” he confesses. Daenerys lifts her head to look at him square in the face. “What you said… about my pride. It's what I told him. The exact same fucking words.”
“And he made his choice… and now all that's left of the free folk can live in a camp on the corner of my sister's land…”

“What happened?”

“They charged the wall with an army of over ten thousand people…and the Watch lost. We lost. We were down to less than a hundred men. And fucking Stannis came out of nowhere with his tanks and artillery and…”

Her face falls. Because it's not hard to gather what happened next.

“I begged him to surrender to Stannis… And he didn’t… and then.. ” he couldn’t finish the thought.

Because he can still hear the screaming. Smell Weirwood Burning. Feel the chants of the Rad Witch and her followers reverberating through his skull.

“How many?” she asks gently.

“Thousands…They marched on the wall with an army of ten thousand men and women… Good people...who just wanted a chance at a life… I begged him and in the end… I killed him.”

She’s quiet for a long time, and that's fine...because her head’s on his shoulder, and her hair smells so good, a scent he can’t identify, a subtle floral smell. Eventually they shuffle back on the bed so their backs lean against the wall, and she wraps her arm around his, intertwining their fingers as their hands rest in the groove where their thighs touch.

“This is a small bed… small room for the Commander of the militias of the North.”

“I’m not the biggest man.” She laughs aloud, a small snort in the middle of the noise.

“It’s not well suited for company…”

“Ah well…I suppose not.” There’s a question behind her words and after a moment chewing on his tongue, he decides to answer. “No company either...so…”

The hand that's not laced with his traces the burn scars up his arm, light touches examining the texture of the marred skin.

“T’s not a pretty sight.” he comments.

“Does it hurt?”

“Just gets a bit stiff sometimes…Not all of us can just waltz through flames.”

“I like this one…” she lifts her hand to trace the line above his brow down his cheek. “Makes you look...roguish and daring.”

“Is that so…” Daenerys nods “I s’pose I’ll keep it then.” she lets out a quiet laugh and Gods her laugh is...fuckin’ music, and he wants to do whatever he can to keep earning the sound. “Would you believe me if I told you it was an eagle?”

“Really?” He nods and her hand cautiously drifts from his face to plant above his heart, the rigid puckered skin of the half moon scar beneath his shirt. Beneath her palm. “And this…?”

“For the Watch…” A voice rings in his head and fuck why can he feel it? Why can he still feel cold steel punching through his chest. He swallows hard and tries to remember all the things Beric taught.
him about reliving it. Breathe. It’s always going to hurt. But remember that it’s not real. It’s just his body reminding him that he should be dead.

“Is this what you meant when you said your watch ended?”

He just nods, bites his lip and focuses on where their hands are joined.

“You died…” her voice is small and quiet, and he turns to look at her then and her eyes are wide and violet and gentle.

“Yea.” he whispers. “Then I woke up naked on a table with a giant needle in my chest and the Rad Witch pinning me down and a strap between my teeth. Sam says she used irradiated adrenaline to restart my heart but…”

“Melisandre…” she says her name as she drops her hand and adjusts herself next to him. How does she know her name? “She came to Dragonstone after we landed… Gave us some cryptic messages from the beyond and was on a ship back to Essos.”

“She’s out of Westeros then…” She nods. “Good.”

He rubs his hand against the pain that’s risen in his chest, wincing. And concern fills her eyes.

“Does it hurt?

“All the time…”

She slowly rests her head back against his shoulder, settling in, and resumes tracing the scars on his forearm. Falling back into that easy silence and the pain slowly subsides as the anger fades and he lets himself relax under the small gentle touch.

“I’m glad you are still here” she confesses.

“I’m glad you’re here now…”
“Thousands of men coming through White Harbor, and you expect me to stand idle while this Queen invades the North.”
She recognizes the voice from downstairs. Wyman Manderly. An obscenely obese blustering fool of a man.

“Tis not an invasion if they were invited.” Sansa counters.

“Oh my apologies Administrator Stark.” the fat man spits sarcastically “I didn’t realize we were to surrender the North so politely.”

“I certainly hope you will do so politely” Sansa says, maintaining that calm even professional tone. “It would be most unfortunate if there were any incidents so early in our alliance with Queen Daenerys Stormborn”

“Alliance?” A gruff man’s voice. She doesn’t recognize it. But she knows it to be Robert Glover. Distinctly old and Northern “Is that what this is? Because it seems like total surrender. Without a fuckin’ fight!”

“Father…” a young woman hisses.

“Yes… That’s exactly what we want. Let’s fight a war on three fronts. Good Job, Robert. I can see now why Commander Snow relies on you so heavily for tactical advice” Lyanna Mormont answers him.

“We aren’t even fighting the War down south. Hells we aren’t even fighting the war up North yet.”

“War is just as much in the preparation as it is the actual battles. Is this the sort of advice you gave Robb Stark?”

“Had Robb Stark listened to me…”

“Enough.” Sansa interrupts and the room goes quiet. “You can discuss my brother’s mistakes another time and not in this house or on my land.”

“Do landrights even mean anythin’?” Wyman Manderly again. “Since we are once again under the crown’s thumb”

Missandei sits next to her, both of them tucked away out of sight on the top step.

“I should go down there.”

“This is what Sansa and Tyrion are best at.” she whispers back to her.

“Under the crown’s thumb!?!” a thick Northern accent. Alys Karstark. The R’s and Th’s burring together. “That’s a wee bit dramatic, Dontcha think Wyman?”

“We are bein’ asked to quarter foreign mercenaries.”

“Here I was thinkin’ you’d appreciate the additional men protectin’ your settlements” Davos.

“More men to fish the harbor, build up stores for Winter.” Sansa adds.

“Stores they’ll eat through.” A nasally female voice… Wyman Manderly’s eldest granddaughter Wynafryd.

“We have arranged for shipments to be brought in from Essos as well as from our territories to south.”
“The Imp speaks.”

“Indeed.”

Jorah glances up at her from the bottom of the steps, probably wondering why she hasn’t decided to make an appearance.

“And what Territories would those be?”

“The Dornish…”

“And supposin’ Euron GreyJoy decides to blockade the Harbor.”

“Then it is good thing we are allies, because without us you wouldn’t have a naval force to speak of.”

“If yer thinkin’ Theon has either the wits or the will to defend against the Iron Born, yer dead wrong.” The gruff male voice.

“Good thing that his forces have been fortified with the remaining fleets from Highgarden and Dorne.”

“The cold will keep Euron at bay. His men are used to raiding in the South.”

“Winter won’t hold the Ironborn for long, especially now that we’ve painted a target on our backs.” Robert Glover counters.

She takes a deep breath, he’s right. Yara is the only one with even a hope of defeating Euron. Just then a door behind her closes and she turns to find Jon standing above her, a sad sympathetic smile on his face. His hand reaches down, tracing her braid in a reassuring swirl.

“It’ll take months for them to outfit his subs for Cold Water. That gives us plenty of time to strengthen the Harbor’s defenses.” Lyanna Mormont.

“Pardon me, your grace… Missandei.” and steps over them, his perfect shapely ass at her eye level for a fleeting instant. The end of the braid slipping through his fingers as he moves past them, the bells softly chiming as it drops.

“Oh and you’ll be donatin’ your minefield, Lt. Commander?” Wyman counters “...For the good of the North.”

He turns and winks at her from the bottom of the stairs, before nodding to Jorah, rolling his head about his shoulders and extending to his full height and striding towards Sansa’s office, the weight of command in his heavy footfalls.

“If it were possible to move it without blowing us all to pieces. Yes, I would.”

Next to her Missandei suppresses a light giggle and Daenerys gently elbows her.

“I like him better than the other one.”

“Hush. Nothing’s happened.”

“Nothing except spending hours at his bedside, and afternoons walking the grounds, and sitting together at dinners ignoring everyone else for the past week? Not to mention all the time you spent yesterday in the cellar.”
“We were fixing the Boiler.” she explains far too defensively. They were fixing the boiler, and the amount of time it took to fix had nothing to do with being in a small tight space in a quiet room with him.

“Of course, your grace.”

She shoots Missandei a glare that tells her she’s overstepped, but she can’t hold it as a smile breaks across her face. Gods… she can feel the flush creeping up her neck. It's so embarrassing how obvious it is. Almost every moment she hasn't been working on repairing Drogon has been spent in his company, in one form or another.

“Good Mornin’ Commander Snow.” Wynafryd’s squeal of voice. Ugh… she can hear her twirling her hair.

She can’t hear exactly what he says, so she assumes he’s speaking in that quiet way he does. The way that forces those around him to really listen to what he’s saying.

She should really go down there.

And do what?

*Be a Dragon.*

With what…

No Dragon.

These aren’t even half the Northerners. They are just some key figures. According to Sansa, Alys is Loyal to Jon. Fiercely Loyal. However, her word doesn’t mean much to the others because her brother fought for the Boltons.

The Glovers are the old blood. Northmen pure and true. Blood of the First Men. The North Remembers and “Winter is coming.” Every Glover has served the Northern Front since before Torrhen Stark surrendered the territory to her ancestors. Back when this was the frontier of a New World.

She leans back, peeking out the window at the end of the hall. Green trees with a dusting of white snow clinging to their needles brushing up against the glass. Scratching it with the wind.

It still is.

The Manderly’s are the money. He owns huge chunks of the Eastern Coastline, as well as the port. The port all her supply lines will go through. His land holds the only true city of the North. And he owns most of the buildings in that city. And his land will be the biggest target if Cersei wanted to attack them… Which in turn means that is where the majority of her forces will be quartered.

But Lyanna…

Lyanna is the key on which all the politics of the North turns. The first support the Starks return to power. The one who had the most to lose and gambled it all for honor. Barely a woman and already irrevocably marred by the horrors of war. The first to declare the North Independent of the Crown and Westeros, and the first to name Jon, Commander in Chief. A woman with unquestionable honor, whose loyalty is to the North and the North alone.

It should give her hope that she can break through to them. The North accepts Lyanna’s word, The
North accepts Jon’s leadership because they... supposedly… value the content of a man’s character above anything else.

She has always fought her own battles. She will not have others fight hers now.

So with a deep breath, she stands up. Missandei fusses delicately with the bells in her hair and lines of her coat. It’s the fur one that Sansa gifted her. White and Grey. Stark colors that match the silver of her hair.

It’s beautiful. Sansa knows how create the most beautiful things. Significant things. Treasures draped with meaning. Her art is… inspiring.

It’s predatory like the snow cat pelt cascading down her back. Precise in the geometries of the lines fitting down her form.

Jon told her that before they started their War against the Bolton’s she made him his coat. One that looked exactly like his fathers.

...He loves it.

Sandor Clegane stands at the door to Sansa’s office and Jorah takes a place on the other side of it as she enters.

“Speak of the Stranger…”

“...And she shall appear.” She completes the colloquialism. She folds her hands neatly, letting them hang low on her belly. “Hello, I am Daenerys Stormborn.”

Her eyes drift around the room meeting each of the occupants in turn.

Jon stands behind Sansa seated at her desk, his arms folded across his chest, with Davos flanking him on the other side. Wyman Manderly sits heavily on one of the wooden chairs in front of Sansa’s desk dabbing his head. Wynafryd she recognizes, standing behind her grandfather. Bright woolen seafoam skirts, big bouncy brown curls dipped green, pinned back with a sparkling beaded hair clip.

Alys Karstark leans lazily in a near diagonal, stretching out her athletic form against one of the several cabinets in the corner. Her partially shorn hair hangs long, brushed over to one side, showing off an intricate Knotted design she’s sculpted into the undercut.

The other girl, who Daenerys knows to be Elena Glover, is the very image of demurity. A simple sweater, faded olive skirts, and an apron. The kind Gilly wears, messy and stained, with large pockets that hold all the hidden tools of domestic work. Dark hair neatly drawn back in a tight bun, with a pencil holding it in place.

Next to her a boy sits, his eyes glancing up nervously to look at her before darting back down to study the grain of the wooden floorboards. He can’t be older than ten and one.

In the center of the room, pillars of strength and Northern pride stand Robert Glover and Lyanna Mormont. The gruff man with a greying beard staring daggers into her. The young woman peering over her shoulder through her good eye. No daggers. But caution. Both of them in same posture, with their hands folded martially behind their back. Puffed out chests, Straight backs. At Attention.

After a moment, Tyrion shuffles over to her from the other chair in front of Sansa’s desk. “Stormborn, may I introduce Lt. Robert Glover, his daughter Elena, and their ward Ned Umber. I believe you already know the others.”
Daenerys tips her head graciously, and in the corner Elena does a small dip of a curtsy. Her father does not move.

“It is good to meet you.” she flashed a bright smile. “I'm sure we have a great deal to discuss in regards to the threat beyond the wall. I look forward to working with you to rid the North of this danger.”

“I’m looking at the only danger to the North. Daenerys Targaryen.” Glover said. Behind her, she hears the floorboards creak as Jorah shifts into the doorway, making his presence known.

Alys pushes herself off the cabinet. “What’s that Robert?” She bounces into a low squat, cupping her hands over her eyes as if looking through a pair of binoculars. “You see some undead lurkin’ ‘bout here that we don’?”

The gruff man doesn’t flinch, doesn’t even turn to look at the young woman mocking him. “Yer not old enough t’ know what Targaryen’s are capable of.”

“Aye.” Wyman agrees from the chair. “None of you were even alive when the Mad King burned the world. Save Davos, an’ the imp.” He gestures at them before point at Jon. “You don’t know what your doin’ boy”

Jon furrows his brow and Lyanna cocks the eyebrow that has been split by the scar across her eye.

“Would you care to re-word that? Lieutenant.” A quiet threat in her voice. She must be only a quarter of his mass, but with him seated, she is at his eye level. Yet she seems to glower over him twisting her face so that when their eyes meet, he is facing the ragged line across her face, and into the black void of the patch fitted into the socket.

“Enough, Lyanna.” He says the command without raising his voice and his second returns to her stance.

Tyrion rolls his eyes. “Among the queens of Westeros, only one has used Wildfire. And that is not Daenerys.”

“I’ll not fight fer a Targaryen.” He spits her surname like its poison.

“You’ll disobey direct orders?” his voice comes out like a low rumble.

And no-one breathes for a long minute.

“...DA!” Elena gasps.

“No Ser.” her father answers.

Jon nods and with the permission everyone relaxes. The young woman sighing heavily with relief.

“An what of my father’s earlier question…?” Wynafryd breaks the melting tension. “What of landrights?”

“Of course that’s all you care about Winnie.” Alys scoffs. The brunette’s volumes of hair whips about as she shoots a glare back over her shoulder.

“Don’t provoke, Alys.” Jon orders.

“Aye, Jon”
“Commander.” Sansa corrects her and Alys’s pale skin burns red. And the rich girl looks between them with hawkish sea blue eyes and a twisting wry smile crosses her face.

“Our priority is the undead.” Daenerys states flatly. “Things will continue the same as they have until the war is won or we are all dead and it doesn’t matter anyway.”

“Daenerys has seen what we’re fightin’, what I’ve been telling you since I was commandin’ the Watch. We don’t stand a chance without help.” Jon adds. “Or have you forgotten… ‘When the Snow falls and the White Winds Blow. The Lone Wolf dies. But the pack survives’.” Words that aren’t his roll easily off his tongue. “Winter is coming and we will not survive without help”

A still silence falls over the room and she meets his eyes as the others share wary glances. They don’t understand… they haven’t seen it. They can’t wrap their heads around this impossible claim. They don’t understand the urgency. They believe they can ignore it.

It’ll be too late before they see their folly.

Despair weighs heavily on her as the others clear Sansa’s office. Each offering a polite nod to her and Jon. The men and Lyanna depart to watch the youngest recruits complete their morning drills. While Alys grabs Elena by the wrist and drags her outside loudly proclaiming that there’s something important for her to see. Wynafryd follows Sansa complimenting her on the lace tatting about on the cuffs of her sleeves and along her high collar.

“Ned, Joanna is outside playing with Ghost, if you’d like to join her” he tells the boy who looks confused about what to do with himself. The boy nods and runs off.

“That went about as well as expected.” Tyrion announces to no-one in particular.

“Robert’ll come ‘round… He won’t sit idle when the fightin’ starts.” Jon leans heavily on Sansa’s desk, wincing slightly, his hand pressing into his side where he was wounded.

“But will he come around soon enough?” Daenerys asks them.

“Perhaps you should talk to ‘Lena, Ser.” Davos answers as Jon straightens and his dark eyes slide over to her a moment. He doesn’t answer, just absently nods before returning to look at Sansa’s notes on the desk. Her plan to quarter men along various settlements throughout the North.

“How many people are coming tomorrow?”

“Less than fifty. We are only requesting Landholders with more than twenty five hundred acres to quarter soldiers.” Tyrion shuffles about pulling the large decanter from the back of a cabinet behind some papers. “For now”

“You know she hid that from you.” Jon states looking up at him.

“She’s not married to me anymore. She can’t forbid me to drink.”

Davos chuckles quietly, a mischievous smile playing on his lips. “The man needs to unwind.”

“Well then I…” Daenerys starts and Davos shakes his head at her, a finger to his lips as Tyrion pours himself a glass of amber liquid. Jon furrowing his brow in confusion.

“Besides… Sansa should know better than to horde the....” He takes a sip.

And sprays it out in a fine mist.
Davos erupts in laughter, and Daenerys feels her eyes widen in shock.

“What swill did I just drink?”

Tyrion stares and sniffs at the decanter, wrinkling his nose and pulling out a nearly invisible thread attached to which are several tea bags stained a nasty shade of brown.

Gagging, he waddles out the room shouting for Sansa.

“Was that you?” Jon asks his XO through quiet rumbling laugh.

“No… Mine’s the one in the desk.” Davos walks over to small table Sansa’s sewing machine is built into and reaches beneath to the basket that sits beneath and pulls out another bottle. “I’d also avoid the one in the kitchen. The little princesses did that one an’…” the sentence fades into a chuckle as the old pirate pours two glasses, before stowing the bottle back in its hiding spot. “Children are cruel an’ creative.” he laughs pushing a glass into Daenerys’ hand and leaving the other on the table for Jon.

And then they are alone.

In that easy silence, where the only sound is the bells in her hair chiming as she walks to clink the glass against his still resting on the table.

“Its bad luck to share a drink without a toast.”

“It’s a bit early…” he nods out the window where grey daylight spills in. It’s not midday yet.

“It’s your last day on leave. You should enjoy it.” She lifts it and extends his glass to him and he takes it and his fingers brush hers in that lingering way.

“If my queen commands…” A smile creeps across his face and she rolls her eyes at him.

“Are you going to return to brooding when you return to duty?” He pauses for a second, refolding his arms across his chest and rocking his torso back and forth in exaggerated mock consideration. The laugh threatening to spill from her lips is dammed as he grunts and pushes his hand against his side. And she’s there a moment later, tracing the wrist connected to that hand.

“You could have tore your stitches”

“Just a twinge. I’m fine.”

“I didn’t rescue you so that you can reopen your stitches, get your wound infected and die of something stupid and preventable.”

He laughs, but then his pupils dilate suddenly and he lets out a few deep breaths before swallowing. And when he speaks, his voice is low and cautious.

“Maybe you should make sure…”

The invitation forces a soft sharp inhale and her eyes quickly dart down, before glancing to the left, where the doorway to Sansa’s office is open. Not seeing anyone, her eyes slowly trail back to meet his, nervously awaiting her response.

A half step into his space and a tentative slide of her hand down from his wrist to lift the corner of his shirt.
The wound is fine of course. It’s been nearly a week.

But her eyes stray from the vicious red line of the recent injury, to the cut groove at joining of his abdomen to his hip and a dusting of coarse black hair beginning to trail beneath his naval. And she feels her mouth go dry as her teeth gently tug on her lips.

Gods…

“Will I live?” he asks. That thick burr of an accent vibrating in his chest, as he loops the tail of her braid loosely around his hand, the small silver bells ringing softly.

Gods…

Its her turn to swallow hard, as the gentle gathering of her braid around his hand draws him a half step closer to her.

“Yes.” She sputters, her tongue swollen and unable to form a more complex noise. And he’s so close to her she can feel his breath on her face. The deep pools of his eyes pulls hers away from their shameless ogling, and then pull her closer as she leans further into his space.

“Daenerys…” A voice from outside the room.

It’s Missy.

And its over.

He pulls away, letting the small coil of hair slip from his hand, and the corner of his shirt falls from hers.

She quickly steps back, snatching her drink from the table and turning toward the window.

“I was thinking, perhaps it would be best if you took a break from working on Drogon and we could spend some time this afternoon reviewing some basics of Westerosi with…” Missandei’s voice trails off as she enters the room.

“Commander.” she nods to him as Daenerys turns to face her friend.

“Missandei.” he greets her and turns to Daenerys “Your Grace…”

Missy’s golden brown eyes sparkle as he closes the door behind him. “My apologies your grace…”

“It’s alright” comes out as a heavy sigh and Daenerys downs the drink. Missy only smiles and takes the cup from her hand.

“Where’s the other one?” she asks opening the cabinet to return it to its place. Daenerys’ eyes drift back to the desk where Jon’s drink was.

Its gone.

Sansa is knitting in the sitting room with Wynafryd Manderly. More specifically, Sansa is knitting, a massive blue lump in her lap, while Wynafryd lazily spools yarn from a skein into a ball.

“Does Alys often speak so casually with Commander Snow?”

“They are Rangers, Winnie. Everything is casual…”
“Everythin’…?”

“Your Grace” Sansa tucks her needles to the side and stands.

“Sansa, I fully support any and all actions you take to curb Tyrion’s drinking.”

“You didn’t…”

“Oh No, Davos saved me.” Sansa sighs in relief.

“Would you both care to join us?” She gestures to Wynafryd who sits quietly, waiting to be acknowledged. “I’ll prepare some proper tea.”

“No, thank you, We are going to spend some time providing some lessons in Westerosi”

“Nonsense” Wynafryd scoffs. “Have your girl make some tea an’ join us for a sit.”

Daenerys opens her mouth in shock and disgust. Her girl…?

“Missandei is our guest. Shame on you Winnie.” Sansa interrupts before Daenerys temper flares.

“It’s quite alright.” Missandei holds up a hand.

“We’ll just be off to work then.” Daenerys spits hastily, grabbing Missandei’s hands and pulling her out the door.

She’s agitated by the encounter. Its... She didn’t expect those kinds of attitudes in Westeros. This as far away from slaver’s bay as she can possibly get.

“Don’t worry about it Daenerys.” Missandei clucks as they walk along the property. Most of her Dothraki have been gathering around Gendry’s forge. Arya has been translating Westerosi into Valyrian and Red Flea, one of her unsullied translates that rough Valyrian into Dothraki.

It’s inelegant, but it shows they can find a way to make some of it work. Merchants in White Harbor will be able to speak the traders tongue.

“No. I am worried about it. We are going out of our way to save that whinging child and she…” she rips at the air in frustration.

“These Northerners have been isolated for too long. They are fearful.”

She’s right. The North isn’t even properly integrated with the rest of Westeros. Marriages tend to stay between Northern families. Trade is limited. People tend to live and die on the same patch of land for generations.

How on earth is she going to integrate her people into this culture? Into this land? Her people are freed slaves whose homes are spread across the known world. From Vaes Dothrak to Sothoros. They speak hundreds of languages, worship dozens of gods. They are foreigners who followed Daenerys because she promised them freedom and a better life.

How in seven hells is she going to give it to them?

A pair of girlish giggles interrupt her thoughts.

Alys and Elena are leaning over the railing, surrounding the pasture where her Unsullied are helping rebuild the Barn. Alys has a pair binoculars in her hands, fervently looking the direction of the
workmen.

“Thought you were goin’ steady with Talen Tallheart?”

“I had t’ give him up when I made First Ranger. Commander says there t’ be no relations between an officer and their subordinates.”

“A wise policy” She interjects herself into their conversation.

The first ranger gasps and spins. “Your Grace!” Surprised she hops to the ground, dropping the binoculars and pressing her fist into her sternum in a hasty salute. Unwavering Loyalty indeed. Her enthusiasm brings a smile to her face.

“At Ease, Ranger.” she says gently. Elena offers a small curtsy, a furious blush creeping across her cheeks and down her neck. “May I?” she gestures to the binoculars on the ground.

“Of course, your grace.” Alys picks them up, shaking them rid of snow and hands them over. She smiles and peers through them in the direction of the barn and the workmen.

Two of her bloodriders are strutting around like peacocks, shirts off despite the snow. Slapping at their chests in aggressive displays of dominance as they circle each other preparing to fight.

She sighs heavily.

Men.

“I fancy the one with the Tattoos.” Alys grins. Daenerys returns the smile and searches for the one she’s talking about and finds him. A Young Bloodrider with a rushing stallion tattoo’d along his shoulder, racing across his back.

“His name is Qhono.” she answers after a minute and passes the binoculars back to Alys. “He is one of my Kos, my captains”

The young woman’s lips form the shape of the name, rolling it around in her mouth and quirks her eyebrow up when she decides she likes the taste. For a long minute, the women all lean against the railing in a neat line, all staring at the sparring match. The Unsullied and the Northmen gather to watch and Alys hisses as her view is blocked.

“Have you had much opportunity to spend time with any of them?”

“Aye, your grace. I met Grey Worm, an’ Red Flea, an’ Storm Son. I invited Storm Son on me last Rangin’ but he was drilling with Brienne.”

“Do they not have family names?” Elena asks, there is a genuine curiosity in her question. Daenerys looks to Missandei to answer.

“No. Birth names are the first thing the Wise Masters erase when they become Unsullied.”

The girl gasps. “I can’t even imagine…” she pauses mid sentence. No… there’s no way she can imagine. She can probably trace her family history back 500 years or more.

“The names they have now are the names they chose.” Daenerys adds.

“Where are you from Missandei?” Elena asks.

“I am from Naath. Its an island, North of Sothoros.”
“What’s it like? Warm?”

“Course its warm ‘Lena. Everywhere’s warm ‘cept here.” Elena frowns at her friend.

“I was very young when I was taken. I don’t remember much, But I remember the sun, white sand beaches, and clear blue water, Coral, and butterflies in every color.”

“Ooh that sounds lovely.” The demure girls eyes shift warily around as she answers. “I want to apologize. Your grace. My father was very rude. I know its no excuse, but... We’ve had a rough go of it. Everyone has…”

“Thank you Elena. I’m interested to know your opinion on this whole ordeal?”

“Oh.” the woman blushes and looks at her feet. “Well..My father is concerned about-”

“Your father made his opinion very clear. I’m interested in yours.”

The question freezes the girl like a startled animal, a small gasp and her forest green eyes dart around anxiously. Feet shuffling. Searching for a way to neither offend her or her father. “Well… um… No matter what else. I am very glad you a bringing people North. I hope that after Cersei, maybe some of your people will like it here enough to come back and live here. There’s lots of land and Winter’s always comin’ but... “ her eyes get sad. “The North is dying, even with the Stark’s back in charge. There’s just not enough of us left. We need people. We need babies… An’ with all the brave girls enlistin’…” She doesn’t finish the thought. Not when one of those brave enlisted girls is standing next to her.

Alys makes an excited noise and she holds up the binoculars again. “Looks like my lad won. I wanna go over there. ‘Lena, what should I say?”

“You’re just going to walk up to him!?!” The shy girl squeaks. “Aren’t you scared?”

“Perhaps he should be scared of me.” The girl flashes a predatory smile and waggles her eyebrows. “Is it true they don’t have cocks?” the ranger asks looking over from where she is practically folded over the railing at her waist. Daenerys nods solemnly.

“Only the Unsullied…”

“That’s alright. In my experience… the cock’s only the second best part.”

“ALYS!” Elena gasps something between between a hiss and giggle. And Daenerys lets out a small chirp of a laugh glancing over at Missandei, whose quiet tight lipped smile is slowly spreading across her face.

‘Many things…’ she had told her after Daenerys asked what they actually do in bed. She hadn’t explained further. And it was rude enough to ask in the first place, without pressing the issue.

“Where did you even learn such things?” Elena asks wryly.

“FreeFolk.” Alys slides one leg over the railing so that she is straddling the wood. “You should come visit camp with me tonight ‘Lena. Wildlin’ lads know how to have fun.”

“I could never.” the brunette smiles shyly biting her lower lip.

“C’mon it’ll be a great time. I’ll bring my fiddle, an there’s always a bonfire...”
“My father…”

“Your Da is goin’ t’be up all night drinkin’ ale, bitching with Wyman ‘bout Commander bendin’ the knee. Unless you want to spend some quality time wit’ Winnie and Wylla?”

Daenerys cringes at her own prospects for the evening. Gods… Hostile company.

Elena’s shy forest green eyes focus on her hands for a moment. “Wylla’s not so bad… an surely you wouldn’t leave her Grace and Missandei alone with ‘em.”

Like Daenerys would willingly spend another moment with that girl.

Alys draws her other leg over the railing so that she is facing opposite them, holding onto the railing tightly as she leans forward between the three of them. “Course I wouldn’t leave our new friends Queen Daenerys and Missandei of Naath to a borin’ night sewin’ with the witless wonders.”

“How one’s Wylla?” Daenerys asks.

“Ya can’t miss her.”

“She’s the only one with Green Hair, your grace” Elena explains. “She’s enlisted, so she was training instead of joining us this morning.”

Alys grins up between the three of them and the young woman’s infectious smiles spreads to her. Yes… She will join them. She’s a queen and she can spend the evening however she damn well please. “Absolutely” She answers and Alys’ blue eyes twinkle with mischief as she peers to Missandei next who takes a deep breath and nods nervously.

“Come on ‘Lena...Come on” Alys urges.

“Oh Fine” the brunette caves. “I’ll go. But don’t leave me alone. And I’ll not be stolen t’nigh.”

Alys squeals cheerfully, clapping maddly, letting go of the railing, then her eyes go wide and she catches herself before she falls off. “I promise you will have so much fun!” she looks back toward where the Bloodriders are working before spinning back to Missandei, her long blonde braid whipping across her face at the speed of it. “Now how do I say ‘Can I touch your tattoos?’ in Dothraki?”

He’s disrupting her lesson. Another Selection from ‘A Complete History of Westeros and her Territories.’ Lessons assigned to her by Tyrion. She’s nearly five and twenty, why on earth is she being assigned lessons.

Because she’s to be queen, and a queen must know her country.

But she can’t focus on the intrigues of the Blackfyre Rebellions, yet another series of civil wars resulting in hundreds of thousands dead and a further regression of Westerosi society back into the Dark Ages, when he’s outside her window, chopping firewood.

She pulls aside the curtain and peers down at him. Watching and imagining the hard muscles of his back stretching and shifting under the skin with each divisive thud of the axe. Dozens of tree rounds split into Halves, then quarters, then eighths..

And her fingers drift up to her lips.

It would have been so easy. So easy…
He pauses, wiping sweat off his brow. Untying and Retying the knot that holds his raven hair back. And then he looks up at her, planting the axe on the ground, one foot on its head, both hands resting on the end of its handle.

And just smiles at her, that devastating wolfish smile.

Her breath hitches. How long did he know she was watching? Embarrassed she offers a small wave and he smiles all the brighter.

“Jon.” She hears someone call him from outside. Its muffled, but she’s almost certain its Sansa. And its confirmed a minute later when a flash of red hair appears.

They speak quietly for a moment and then she disappears again and he tucks the axe against the woodpile and looks up at her, returning that small wave before jogging after Sansa.

And he’s outside her room that evening as she opens the door to meet Alys and Elena.

“Headed to the mess, your grace?” he asks.

“Oh Gods no. I fear I may exacerbate tensions if I go there.” he nods, and smiles that quiet smile. The one that asks questions without asking them. “Alys said she would play for us if we joined her at the FreeFolk camp.” His mouth stretches taught into small cringe, but the smile is still in his dark eyes.


“You’ll find out.”

“Jon.” she looks at him, and then forces her eyes wide, and pouts. He stares at her for a long second, and she sees his teeth dig into his bottom lip.

“Alys may be exaggeratin’ her skill level.”

The victory of convincing him to tell her is short lived as she grasps his meaning.

“Oh.” He nods. “Ohhh.. Well then you must join us”

“Must I?” the corner of his eyebrow lifts ever so slightly with the corners of his mouth.

“Yes, with your guitar.”

“Well…” he sticks his hands in his pockets. “If the queen commands.”

“The queen requests.” she says quietly and his eyes get soft and intense, and he looks down the hall to the nursery.

“I need to put the girls to bed, can you wait a...”

“Yes.” she answers before he finishes his sentence.

She fusses with her hair, after sending Missandei off without her. Grey Worm was wary, but Missandei was able to convince him that it was alright, that she could be without a bodyguard for a short while.

The silver bells chime gently as she tucks them into the long thick braid hanging simply down the side. There’s no time to take it out and do something more… more what? She had left the bells out,
thinking it best to not appear so exceedingly foreign… but that was before.

Pacing the room is too much, so she paces the stone porch of the Stark’s home. From here she can see the lights glowing from inside the Mess, lights from the barracks, lights from the worksite at the barn. Lights of homesteads off in the distance.

The whole of Winterfell brimming with life.

“Shall we” he says and offers her his arm, guitar case slung over his shoulder and she takes it, sliding it through the loop.

The alcohol runs down the bare skin of her arm.

“I’ll only do this once.” she proclaims. Alys crawls off Qhono’s lap to sit pointedly in front of her. Elena leans forward. Even Missandei, who had been distracted by an increasingly tipsy Grey, turns to watch the trick. With a nod to Jon, he flicks open the lighter and her arm bursts into flame and she flicks her fingers out creating small shower of fire and sparks.

Alys claps madly. “Gods! That’s amazing” she swats off a flicker of fire from the sealskin coat.

“The Khaleesi is stronger than flame.” Qhono explains as Alys plops herself back onto his lap.

“Cause of Rads?”

Daenerys shrugs. “I think so. There’s no way to know for sure.”

“Did the rads give you anythin’ else?” Elena asks, scooting away

The inability to reproduce, she thinks miserably.

“I’ve never gotten sick. Though I’m not sure how much of that is luck.” she shivers. Where did her coat go? She took it off for the trick. She searches and realizes she’s sitting on it. But, Jon drapes his over her shoulders before she has a chance to wiggle off it.

It smells like sawdust and woodsmoke and the warm weight of it settles on her.

“Won’t you be cold?” he shakes his head.

“After my little dip in the river, I don’t think I’ll ever be cold again.” he laughs and she scoots closer to him so she can wrap her arm around his again. And that’s when she notices it.

“Oh.” she fingers the yarn of the sweater. “It’s not black.”

“Sansa made it for me.” he beams. “She went a little mad and re-organized my room because it wasn’t ‘lived in’ enough… and decided she didn’t like that the only clothes I had were from the Watch.”

“That’s sweet… and a little mad.”

“He says he likes your braid.” Missandei translates for Alys. “And that you must be a great warrior.”

“Oh I don’t know about that…”

“Don’t be shy. First Ranger Alys Karstark” Elena chides gently.

His fingers gently tug on the end of her braid, the small bells chiming and he smiles at the noise.
“My mum would lose her shit.” There’s something in the young woman’s tone that shakes her out of the dark depths of his eyes and the hypnotic chime of the bells. It’s a sad noise, a sharp contrast to the jovial, spunky, attitude that has brightened her day. The young woman’s mother must be dead.

Jon hears it too and turns and mouths something she doesn’t catch at Elena, who holds up three fingers in response and he curses under his breath.

“Hey Alys” he coughs. “Why don’t you play us a song?” He reaches behind them to grab at the guitar case and the young woman immediately perks up, the spunky bright smile splitting across her face.

He’s a talented musician, not faltering at all when Alys misses notes, helping keep her on track as the song rolls on by playing deliberately until the ranger finds her rhythm again. Too much of the music in her life has been the stiff noise of musicians plucking soft notes during boring functions.

Barristan once told her that her brother Rhaegar was a musician. That he was as skilled with an instrument, as he was on the battlefield. That he’d sometimes go around Kings Landing and play for people and try to see how much coin he could earn. That he loved to move people with his music. Make women cry, make children laugh, make men feel brave and daring.

Jon’s music is like what she imagines Rhaegar’s was. Warm and Genuine. Campfire songs of the FreeFolk, and a prattling song that doubles as a drinking game, And there’s a jaunty jig and Grey Worm actually taps his foot and pulls Missandei into his lap and he bounces her to the beat as she shrieks in delight. Elena gets pulled up to Dance with one of the FreeFolk boys.

And Jon looks at her like he would do the same, pull her up and spin her around the crackling fire. And Oh gods she wants him to throw down the guitar and do it.

Alys plops down on the ground at her feet having fiddled in circles dizzingly.

“Hold this Qhono” She shouts her words thick and slurred with ale, and holds the instrument to be rescued from the snow.

“How you’ doin’ ranger” he reaches behind to tuck the guitar back into the case, but it lingers at her back. Tentative.

And she leans back into it tucking herself under his arm.

“Permission t’ stay down, Ser.” the blonde grumbles pressing a half-hearted salute into her sternum. He looks to Daenerys.

“What?”

“I can’t grant her request. I’m still on leave for…” he checks his watch “Forty more minutes.”

“Are you serious?” he smiles and shrugs and she rolls her eyes at him. “Granted. Stay Down Alys.”

“Thank you, Your Grace.” the girl slurs.

He takes her the long way back to Winterfell, along the railroad tracks in the wolfswood. She’s balancing on them, a feat made more difficult by the ice on the beam, and her elevated blood alcohol content.

But she’s not worried about slipping, not with his hand stabilizing her, not with his quick movements to catch her the one time she did.
"They’re getting used to it all… Proper beds an’ rules, an’ chores, and real lessons. With books and paper an' sums an' all that…"

"That doesn’t necessarily mean a better education."

"Aye. But it helps. I think they’re happy."

"I’m probably talking out my own resentment. I want to choke Tyrion sometimes. I know it’s necessary, but gods Westerosi history is boring."

"Boring?"

"Not boring… its just not a narrative. And the names… Gods. Do you have any idea how many Aegons there were?"

He looks up as if thinking. "Five?"

"Those are just the ones that actually took the crown.” She hops down from the track."
Peripherally… there are dozens. Princes and Ministers and Generals and…ugh…”

He laughs and his thumb trails across her knuckles. “You think they would get tired of the name.”

"Who knows."

"Well, you’re the queen. You can ban anyone from ever using it again.” She snorts.

"Oh I can hear it now.” she presses two fingers against one nostril to make her voice nasally and clipped like Cersei’s radio announcer. “Tyrant Daenerys Targaryen, bans the use of ancestral name in another attempt to destroy Westerosi culture.”

He chuckles at her impression and starts leading her away from the tracks. Walking backwards in front of her, carving her a path through the snow. The silence is easy fall into as the snow crunches beneath their boots.

"How’s your head.” he murmurs quietly.

“What?”

"You told me to ask you later.”

"Oh.” she feels the hot flush rising to her cheeks. Its’ a lewd joke Daario once told her. “Ask me again.” He cocks his head and looks confused, but compiles. “Never had any complaints.”

Jon freezes dead in his tracks and she holds her breath as he stares at her. And for a moment she’s worried that he doesn’t get it and then she’ll be forced to explain it to him…and oh Gods this was a terrible idea.

But then that wolfish smile splits his face, and his accent gets thick and heavy.

"Neither have I.” he growls.

Gods.

She straightens out his coat, and fiddles with her hands. She can’t tell what answer she was expecting…but it wasn’t that.
Gilly and Sam. Expecting a new baby. Growing their family. She can’t give any one that. She can’t give him that.

“You seem far away.” he asks quietly. ‘What’s goin’ through yer head.’

“Gilly and Sam.” she nods to the windows and he follows her gaze.

“He asked me if it was okay to name the babe ‘Jon’ if it’s a boy.”

“Really?”

“Aye.”

“You don’t want to…” she has to look away before she asks “…save it for your own son?”

He shrugs. “Winter’s comin. No point saving a name for something that might never happen.” he smiles over at her. “Besides…his da’s an arse, and his brother… “ he starts laughing

“His brother…” she prompts, turning back to face him.

“His name is Dickon”

Her hands clasp over her mouth to prevent the laugh from boiling over. “Are you serious” he nods, eyes watering. “That’s the worse name I’ve ever heard. That’s so cruel. Who would do that to a boy?” he shakes his head the remnants of the laugh die down. “Maybe I’ll outlaw that name instead of Aegon.”

“Merciful Queen Daenerys Targaryen protects generations of children from world’s worst name.”

“Merciful?” She rolls her eyes and moves away but he has her by the hand, and doesn’t let go.

“Wonderous” he tugs her arm and the bells in her braid sparkle their soft sound as the pull spins her not quite gracefully into his arms.

“Keep going.”

“Beautiful” His smile is small and shy as he looks down at her in his arms. His body is this solid mass. And she’s so grateful for it, because otherwise she might fall down. Because he thinks she’s beautiful, and that sweet ache blooms in her chest as she lets out a small sound.

Jon’s waiting for her to move first. Waiting for permission. Waiting for a sign from her. He’s warm against her and its so quiet, and the wind and the snow flakes start to dust into his hair.

And the sound of her heartbeat thudding, and her blood rushing. And its so loud and the ache seizes around her heart and rips it open and its so exposed. And she feels dizzy and out of control, and vulnerable and this terror she can’t name tears through her, demanding that she hide.

His smile fades as the moment passes, replaced with concern. Oh no.

“I’m sorry, that was inapprop…”
“You didn’t the do the voice” she cuts him off, her own voice is hoarse and far too quiet for her own liking. She clears her throat. “You didn’t do the voice...” she manages to smile and make her voice sound somewhat playful, and he cracks a smile.

“Aye. I can’t do a southorn accent.” he lays his own on as thick as he can, rich and rough.

“Oh is that so, Jon Snow!” she teases.

“Aye. ‘Tis.”

“Oh Come on! Try?...Please!”

Oh Gods.

She sags against the bedroom door as soon as it closes behind her.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

She buries her face in her hands, taking a few deep breaths.

“Did you have fun?” Tyrion asks and she realizes she’s not alone.

“Yes, thank you. How was your evening?”

“Oh full of idle chatter and empty threats, some Cyvasse, listening to petty concerns…” he swirls a glass of wine. “So...Jon Snow…”

“Is that a question?”

“An observation that begs an explanation.”

“I don’t see how its your concern.”

“It is very much my concern. In fact, one would say it's my job.”

She begins to pull out the bells, carefully dropping each into the small box, Missandei had gifted her. An Iridescent butterfly, preserved, pressed and laquered to a wooden container.

“Speak plainly.”

He takes a deep breath.

“You are the greatest hope we have for a stable future. For your sake, for Westeros’ sake, I don’t want you to piss it away on some reckless…” he pauses and takes a deep breath, bringing himself back under control. He exhales and makes a backpedaling motion with his hands. “Your goals and intentions are unclear, and that puts us in a vulnerable position.”

“How exactly...?”

“The whole point of our excursion to this frozen wasteland was to gain allies and bring the North back into the fold of Westeros. Now that Commander Snow has bent the knee, surrendered his command to your authority, you seem hesitant to act on that.”

“What would you have me do? Hold Court? Spend months negotiating with petty men regarding land rights? We have a war to fight. A war I may not survive”
“And there’s the other point…”

“I’ve told you this before we will discuss succession after I win the throne.”

“And if you die in this war... what then?”

“I don’t know!” She snaps, and he’s taken aback. Suddenly exhausted, she slumps down on the bed, burying her face in her hands. He waits to speak, starting several times before truly beginning.

“You are our leader. You are our hope for a better future for Westeros… for the world. I don’t know if you’ve been shaken up by what happened with Drogon, or if it’s just your time here in the North, but your intentions are not clear.” she looks up at him and she knows he’s right. “And that puts us in a vulnerable position, especially for tomorrow, if the Northerners think that Jon Snow bent the knee because he’s in love with you…”

“Jon Snow is not in love with me.”

“Oh, my mistake. I suppose he stares at you longingly because he's hopeful for a successful military alliance.” She narrows her eyes at him, and then sighs.

“I will take your words to heart Tyrion…” she stands “You should find your bed.”

He nods. “That I should.” he takes his cup from the small table in the sitting area and opens the door to depart, but closes it just as quickly. “One more thing... “ he holds up a finger. “I don’t want you to think I disapprove. I just want to caution against… recklessness.”
https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Will I find my home - Through Juniper Vale, Vian Izak

“I don’t know, Jon” Sansa sighs, looking down at Joanna next to him. “I don’t know if its wise.”

“You said I need to learn.” The little Wildling girl looks up at her, dark eyes narrowing “If I’m t’ be a
good Chief”

“She’s the same age you and Robb were when father started…”

“This is a little different than discussing Winter Stores, and Raider attacks.”

“No time like now, besides its my decision.”

“As you say…” Sansa sighs and kneels in front of Joanna, gently smoothing her dark hair, and brushing it from her eyes and securing it with a pin she pulls out of her own bun “Now I’ll tell you what my mother told me when I first started… listen carefully, don’t interrupt and if you have any questions, write them down and we’ll go over them later.” She straightens the edges of her sweater “And if you have something to say, wait two minutes, and if it's still important, put your hand on Jon’s or my arm. Can you do that, sweetling?”

She looks up at him, dark grey eyes pleading, questioning the boundaries his sister laid out for her. He’s silent, tilting his head toward Sansa.

There’s only one answer when a superior officer ask if you can do something.

“Aye, Sansa.”

“Thatta girl.” Sansa stands up right. She’s wearing her nicest, a long black coat with wide sleeves flaring out her elbows and lace around the edges, red hair smoothly rolled into elegant bun, that looks simple but is probably witchcraft judging by the exasperated swears coming from her room this morning.

She has all her facts, he has all his points. They’ve drilled it over and over again. She made him practice saying it over again. Even so… Before they go into the mess, Sansa takes his elbow and stops him. “One more time.”

“You’re makin’ me nervous.”

She looks apologetic, but doesn’t withdraw the request. He sighs, shuffles his feet so they are shoulder width apart and stands as tall as he can.

He says the thing they practiced. “We are facing an enemy that means to destroy us. An enemy that threatens not our land or our freedom, but our existence. We have no hope of defeating this enemy alone. Luckily, Queen Daenerys Stormborn has promised us her support in the fight for our lives. With her help we have a chance. That said, if we survive, the Northern Front and her territories will reunite with the rest of Westeros under her rule.”

Sansa nods approvingly “Good.” She leans towards him straightening the collar of his uniform jacket “One note though?”

“Aye.” He grunts. Always one fucking note.

She brushes some non-existent lint away from his uniform. “Don’t say her name like that.”

“Like what?”

“You know like what.” she scoffs.

He does know like what. He can’t say her name without thinking of her face. Silver hair sprinkled with snowflakes, eyes wide and reflecting all the stars as she looks up at him. Smiling up at him.
At him.

The mess is packed with people, his troops, the landholders, the handful of the Dothraki, the captains of the Unsullied. A few of the Free Folk. He takes his father’s chair, and Sansa the one next to it. Ghost appearing out of nowhere, and sitting back on his haunches next to him.

“Hey buddy” he scratches between his ears and under his snout. Ghost tilts his nose to the ceiling and Jon follows his gaze and begins to laugh.

Sansa looks up from her task and rolls her eyes.

“Get down.” she hisses. Arya jumps and lands behind them, startling Davos. “What were you doing?”

“Keeping watch.”

“And?”

“Hornwoods look anxious, Manderly’s are fuming, Lyanna’s been arguing with Robert for a half-hour, Bran is sick of people asking about his health. Talen Tallhart is staring daggers at one of the Bloodriders. Tormund is provoking Brienne. Elena can’t find Ned anywhere. Jonelle Cerwyn has made more than one tasteless remark about the Unsullied...and the Free Folk. They’ve kept their cool, but…” she makes a noncommittal shrug “Everyone’s wondering where the fuck the Reeds are? Everyone wants to see the Dragon Queen.”

Sansa and him share a look before turning back to Arya and mumbling shocked thanks.

“No problem” She folds her hands behind her back and stands behind them.

“The Reed’s aren’t coming.” Davos announces.

“What?”

“Howland radioed this morning, said you have his support, but his health prevents him from travelling and Meera won’t come.”

“I’m sorry…” Bran says as Sam tucked him into the space next to Sansa before rushing down to sit next to Gilly, pulling a wiggly Little Sam out of her arms. She’s talking to the girl Larence Hornwood married after they retook the North. Beth…or Brit… He forgets. So pregnant she might pop at any fucking second. Sansa insisted that they make a huge deal out of it. They had the ceremony in Winterfell’s godswood. The first wedding he actually performed as Commander of the Front.

Nothing like a wedding after a war.

“Did you tell her that?” Sansa asks shuffling through some papers she’s spread out on the table, passing a copy behind her to Davos. “Can you put this where Tyrion is going to sit, sweetling?” she whispers to Joanna who nods taking the small stack of papers and running over to the empty seats to his right.

“I’ve tried to apologize to her. She won’t speak with me.”

“Hmm…” she clucks her tongue and looks up as Clegane comes over from watching the door and takes his place directly behind Sansa’s chair.
“Me too…” he sighs and the direwolf gives him a side eye that would make Sansa proud.

And the front doors open and he wonders if he’ll ever not be shocked by how beautiful she is.

Even now, her coat, cut with dramatic uplifted shoulders, riding leathers, and a large silver dragon brooch pinning a cascade of scarf of red scales around her neck and flowing down her back. The elaborate web of braids, the only crown she’ll ever need.

It's meant to convey her strength, her authority, her ferocity, and he sees that. He knows that.

But gods she’s beautiful.

Dany smiles and nods and does the thing where she looks everyone in the room in the eye at once and introduces herself, speaking in that crystal clear clipped Westerosi. “Hello, I’m Daenerys Stormborn.” and takes Catelyn’s seat. He tries to look ahead, to not look over and smile at her. To not recall how she looks with wind whipped cheeks and starfields in her eyes. He manages to do it as he makes the announcement. Manages to keep his voice even throughout it.

The last time he made a decision like this, he died for it.

They killed him for it.

The room divides. The Unsullied remain stoic, the handful of bloodriders laugh at how the pink men’s faces turn red, his troops fall in line behind Lyanna as she stares across the room at Robert. She’s challenging him, reminding him that to the youngest generation, the ones that makes up the bulk of their forces, she is the war hero and he is the one who failed to rise up against the Boltons.

There’s arguing, first devolving into a chattering chaos. Sansa taps her pen anxiously as they wait for chaos to die and the questions and anger to find a direction.

“My father and uncle died fighting to remove Targaryen’s from power, now you’d have us fight for one?”

“You are underestimating an Enemy who has us outmanned almost three to one. And that’s with Queen Daenerys’ forces fighting with us. Without allies we are hopelessly outmatched.” Lyanna counters.

“You’ll be fighting alongside me, and I alongside you. Against our common enemies.” she answers.

“You mean to bring us into the war down South?”

“You would allow Cersei to remain on the Throne? Armed with Wildfire? Capable of murdering thousands in seconds?” And when no-one answers, she adds “Has the North Forgotten?”

He wants to smile so he bites his tongue.

“And where are the undead, then?”

“They were seen North of Eastwatch not Ten Days ago. We were attacked by a horde of approximately a thousand weights, when we were recovering Salt.” he answers.

“A thousand…The Wall has stood for over five thousand years. Yer’ actin like its gonna come tumblin’ down at any moment.” Wyman Manderly huffs.
“How convenient is it that everytime you make a decision you can justify it by sayin’ that the Undead are comin’?” Wynafryd tacks onto her grandfather’s statement.

“Show some fuckin’ respect Winnie” Alys swears. “Half the watch has seen the wights, All the FreeFolk, Jeor Mormont reported it years ago, all the good it did him. The Dragon Queen saw them. And Commander Snow has fought them. They’re comin’ for us all.”

“Of course you believe that Alys…” her voice is a saccharine song. The same voice Nan would use when she called him ‘a sweet summer child’. And then her face twists into a vicious smile.“...You’re fucking him.”

And the roar of anger that bursts into the room is like...It’s like first time he fired artillery. The initial bang followed by whine that dominates the senses, forcing all other sounds to dull.

Sansa’s hand grabs his arm and he can focus again, blinking back the noise in his head. “Don’t say a thing, except to deny it.”

“I didn’t”

“I know. Jon”

He scans the room. Lyanna is up arguing that relationships between officers and subordinates are not permitted, and that applies to everyone from him, all the way down to recruits scrubbing pots and pans. Sansa proclaims that its a baseless accusation. They turn to him and he denies it. Alys denies it.

“Is that so… how is it then that you got the lowest scores comin’ out of basic, an’ yet you were jumped up to First Ranger?”

“I earned it.”

“...On yer back.”

The room erupts in another wave of chatter and he can’t even fucking process this. And he buries his hands in his hair because he just needs to fucking think. Sansa told him this would be a concern when he allowed women to join the militia. So he was careful. So fucking careful from day one.

Always tell them exactly what he’s doing when they train and spar. Don’t ever be alone with one of them. If there’s an issue always bring Brienne or Lyanna, or Sansa along to discuss it. Set a no relationships policy in the chain of command and strictly enforce it. Make sure they know that they can go to Brienne or Lyanna if they have concerns about their personal safety, and he would take care of it on his end, no questions asked.

His eyes meet Daenerys’ briefly and she exhales giving him a sympathetic look, but then her eyes drift across the room, and his follow.

And Alys is just standing there, looking so utterly defeated.

They’re insulting one of his soldiers. One who he trained and challenged and watched overcome her circumstances and fucking succeed.

Jon starts to push himself out of the chair. To say something… to fucking defend her. But Sansa’s hand digs into his arm.

“But Alys…”
“There’s nothing you can do. Anything you say will make it worse for her. It will fuel more rumors and do more damage.”

“She’s right Jon.” Daenerys agrees quietly, her eyes not moving from Alys. An empathetic sigh escaping her lips.

Davos claps his shoulder. “Stay down, lad.”

This is wrong. This is fucking wrong.

“Scores do not make a soldier.” Brienne marches forward, striding through the tables. “Scores are merely tools. Goals for enlistees to strive for. One of many methods command uses to identify where we might be failing. To Identify recruits who may be better suited to serve in more specialized capacities.”

There’s more arguing. Some of his troops stand up to defend him. Wynafryd leading the dwindling group of resisters as they bounce back to his decision to pardon Alys and Ned for her Brother’s and his Father’s choice to fight for the Boltons.

Alys enlisted the day after he pardoned her.

“Sansa…” Bran warns.

“Not. Yet.”

There’s something about the way she says it. He turns to look at his sister and fucking sees it. It’s cold calculus of Cyvasse… yet another fucking game he’s not clever enough to play. She pulls out the pocket watch, opens it and stares at the small hands ticking slowly around the face.

Another back and forth, this time Lyanna stepping up to Wynafryd reminding her of the Manderly’s neutrality during the war.

And as Wyman hauls himself to his feet to defend his granddaughter, Sansa beats him to it, snapping the watch closed and standing quickly.

“Enough. This discussion is pointless. Unless you are formally accusing either Commander Snow, or First Ranger Karstark of misconduct, we have other business to attend to. I’ll remind you, that all the evidence you have presented thus far, has been hearsay and speculation.”

The room goes quiet.

“No. Administrator Stark.” Wyman huffs taking Wynafryd by the arm and pulling her back to her seat

“Executive Officer…” Sansa steps aside letting Davos come forward.

“Right, we need to house Queen Daenerys troops for the winter. Moat Cailin and the Dreadfort and the Wall will be holdin’ more than half but the rest will need to be quartered in our Settlements. Last Hearth will needing to house 500 men, Queenscrown: 750… “

Alys storms out, her arm dragging across her eyes.

Daenerys is tapping her fingers against the arm of the chair quietly, and her recognizes the rhythm as the song they played for her last night. He glances over and she’s already looking at him.

“Can you go see if she’s okay?” he asks quietly. “Please…I…” She nods, the movement barely
perceptible and rises, scratching gently from Ghost’s ear to his neck in a gesture that makes him want to shiver.

The rest is logistics and its dull and he’s grateful its dull. All the anger in the room seems to have fizzled out. As if there was only so much of it and they used it all up with the bullshit from earlier. They answer questions. Introduce Daenerys’s captains. Tyrion details supply line routes coming from White Harbor and Eastwatch.

Joanna puts her hand on his arm while Tyrion is talking about shipment schedules from The Bay of Dragons.

“What’s up Chief” he asks lowly.

“I thought you were stealin’ the queen?” she whispers.

Davos coughs loudly.

“Joanna, sweetling” Sansa pulls her keys out of her coat pocket. “Can you go to my office and get me-get me the binder that says—” she sticks her tongue into her cheek. “...Land Grants through 308AL, its on the bottom shelf next to the door.”

The girl takes the keys and looks between the two of them. He winks down at her and points her the direction of the door.

“You’re so fucking lucky” Arya hisses quietly. And as his sister moves back out of his line of sight, he sees her re-emerge through the side door, offering a small soft reassuring smile before the lines of her face harden as she takes her seat.

Yes, he is.

And they get through it. Everyone knows their part. If they don’t have their tacit approval of their plan, they at least have their consent. For now.

She closes, standing tall and upright and silver and…

“I want to thank you all for your cooperation, and your courage. And I look forward to working with you all in combating this threat. The enemy we fight, does not care for our faiths, our blood, our sins, our wealth. He only seeks to destroy us. All of us. And so it will take us, all of us, rising up together to meet him. And when we prevail, it will be us, all of us, to rebuild this world.”

A Queen

Lyanna is the last to pull him aside.

“Why didn’t you stand up for Alys?”

“I wanted to. But I didn’t want to make anything worse for her.”

She stares up at him in the way she always does. As if her eyes are scales, the good one weighing his honor against the marred counterweight lining the other side of her face.

And she makes her judgement.

“Because Sansa told you to?”

“Watch it.” he warns and she narrows her eyes holding up a finger.
“How convenient is it that any time someone questions your authority, the person doing so gets discredited, shamed, or… executed.” she hisses.

“You’re questioning my authority now.”

“Its my job.”

“Wynafryd should be ashamed of herself. And I’m not going to discuss Baelish anymore. He was a murderer and a slaver, he was tried and found guilty and I executed him.”

“Around the same time he started whispering to everyone about the circumstances of your departure from the Night’s Watch.”

“You know why I left the Watch.” he growls. “Get to the point.”

“Who is whispering in your ear, Jon?” she turns and he follows her gaze, pleading with the gods that its not Daenerys.

It’s Sansa.

“A man with honor does not need to stack the odds in his favor.”

He’s going to wear a ditch into the hardwood floor of her office if he keeps pacing. So he fucking sits, and pops his knuckles, and bounces his knee until, she finally walks in sighing in relief as she pulls out some pins from her red hair.

“You don’t look happy.” she observes sitting down and pulling more pins and foam tube. “It certainly could have gone better…” and she shakes out the long red hair with her fingers. Its wavy from being wrapped around the roll and kinked where the pins tucked it tight to the back of her skull “But we hit all our marks. Everyone knows what they have to do. Most seem wary of Daenerys, but that will take time. But the positive thing is we have moved from open distrust to vocal apprehension.”

“Did you set up Alys?” he asks and the smile on her face falls and he knows the answer. “Gods Dammit.” he stands and buries his face in his hands.

“Are you going to let me tell you why? Or does honorable son of Eddard Stark not care?”

“What did you fucking tell Wynafryd to say all that shit? To fucking rip her apart in front of everyone? Is this because I went against you on pardoning her a year ago?”

“No!” She exclaims reaching for him. “I’m not a monster.” he shakes his head.

“Then fucking explain.” He watches the ice in her eyes frost over as she taps her fingers on the desk.

“We had three goals today. What were they?”

“I’m not playing these fucking games.”

“One - Establish the nature of our alliance with Queen Daenerys and her future rule while keeping the peace. Have the leadership of our peoples meet in a controlled environment. Two - Logistics.” Then she stands leaning heavily over her desk. “Three - make sure no one thinks you surrendered the North BECAUSE YOU’RE FUCKING THE DRAGON QUEEN”

“I’m not”
“I KNOWWW.” she draws it out dramatically before inhaling sharply, blowing it out in a long stream and repeats “I know, Jon. But they don’t” she points out the window. “And do you know what they’ll say if they suspect, They’ll say we are making the same mistakes Robb did. They’ll turn on us and we’ll be so busy fighting each other that we won’t have anything to fight the wights”

“And that justifies setting up Alys to be humiliated in front of everyone.” She snorts.

“You make it sound like I took Winnie aside and we plotted together.” he shrugs. He doesn’t know how the game is played. “Wynafryd is petty...pretty...and privileged. Which makes her predictable. She doesn’t like being denied what she wants and what she wants is power, which means what she wants is...” She points “you. And when she doesn’t get you, that must be some other girl’s fault. She chose to target Alys, all I did was fail to correct her suspicions. If she gossiped about it, it would distract from you and Daenerys. If she accused you of misconduct, it would be easily disproven and it would also distract from you and Daenerys with the added benefit of making her grandfather shut up.” He just stares at her. “So our army remains in tact, the Landholders will comply with our deal, a potential rival won’t be causing any problems we can’t handle, and all it cost was passing blur on your honor, and the reputation of girl whose reputation was already worth shit anyway. A reputation that you will no doubt allow her to repair, by providing her opportunities for Valor in the war to come. That is a bargain.”

“So this is my fault. I spend some time with a girl and that means...”

“A girl? Oh please Jon spend as much time with a girl as you want. But you are courting the queen. You had to know there would be consequences, you had to know there would be a cost.”

“This is wrong.”

“This does the greatest good for the greatest number. This is what keeps us alive. All of us.”

“Don’t do this kind of shit again. We aren’t them.” He wheels on her, pivoting to point. “You aren’t him.”

“No...” She takes the pocketwatch and flicks it open on the table. Engraved in the lid are four little words. *Fight every Battle. Always.* “...He would have given Wynafryd some actual evidence so that the seed of doubt remains in everyone’s mind. Just in case, he ever wanted to get rid of you...”

He recoils at how casually she says it. “Sansa...”

“There are real monsters in this world. I am not one of them. You protect our family your way. And I will protect us my way.”

They stared down each other for a long minute, before they both let out a sigh.

“Are we going to have to worry about the Manderly’s?”

“No.” she answers, relaxing and pulling at the back of her dress. “Wyman is probably furious at Winnie. Wylla is too worried about the fact that she didn’t make rank. Wyllis is useless.” She struggles to find the zipper.

“Here” He stands and circles back to her, pulling aside her hair and tugging it down. And he sees the tops of her scars above her corset, between her shoulder blades. A pair of pink lash lines, raised and puckered like the ones on his chest.

Sansa’s already paid enough a price.
“Can you undo the knot too?” she asks quietly, as if she knows what he’s looking at. He undoes it and tugs a few of the laces loose and she takes several deep breaths. Filling her lungs, before relaxing back in the chair.

“I don’t know why you bother.”

“Appearances matter. I need to remind them that despite my husbands, I am a Stark of Winterfell.”

And he’s the Bastard of Winterfell.

They could have found some other way. And he runs the scenarios through his head as he leaves and he can’t fucking think of anything.

“So the Unsullied’s ranks are broken down by factors of 10.” her voice

“What does that mean?”

“So the smallest command is over ten men, then the next is over a hundred, then over a thousand, and then the top rank. Grey Worm, commands everyone.” She’s there as soon as he opens the door, sitting on the top step of the porch. Sitting neat and upright with Joanna.

“You couldn’t wait for me?” he asks taking a seat leaning against the railing opposite them.

“You an’ Sansa were busy.”

“Aye Sorry.”

“T’s alright. How many languages do your people speak?”

“Oh… hundreds.”

“Does anyone else speak the tongue of the first men?”

“No, I’m afraid not.”

“Oh…”

And as if on cue, her sister comes running shouting at her, with several other children, Ned Umber, and Teddy, the youngest of the four Tallheart boys holding stick and paper kite. “Chodź pograć z nami”

And Joanna turns to look up at him.

“Go play.” and she smiles and runs off, leaving him with the piece of paper. He folds it up and tucks it in his pocket and stands, offering her his hand to pull her up.

“Should we go after them?” She asks.

“Na’h they’re fine. Lots of snow on the ground in case they fall.” She looks up at him with that pout she used on him last night. “Oh Fine.” and he whistles low and loud, so much so that she covers her ears. Her arm slips back through the loop of his as they start to walk, no destination in mind. The weight of it, light and heavy all at the same time.“I’m sorry about today.”

“There’s nothing for you to be sorry about.”

Ghost answers his summons and he pulls out the paper for his nose. “Safe” he orders and points in
the direction of the kite. She shakes her head at him, as they circle around the back of the house towards the Godswood.

“Jon.” Gilly shouts from the kitchen window.

“Aye.” he turns to look at her.

“Somethin’s wrong with the Glass Gardens. The plants are starting to freeze.”

“Glass Gardens?” Daenerys asked.

“A greenhouse” he answered “My Da’ and I built them when I was boy. I can’t believe you haven’t seen it yet.”

“I’d love to.” she squeezed his arm around his bicep excitedly. He wasn’t going to deny her.

He knew what was wrong as soon as they entered the greenhouse. But she gasped and let go of his arm as she darted off to examine the blackberry bushes.

“Its warm in here” she observed.

“Aye, but not warm enough”

He followed where his father and him had dug the pipe that ran water from the hot spring under the gardens to keep them from freezing. Brushing his foot along where the pipe was buried. Kicking up the dirt with the inside of his boot. It was cold when he touched it. He kept following, every few yards kicking up the dirt and checking the temperature.

“What are you doing?” she asked returning to his side.

“This pipe comes from the hot springs. Keeps the greenhouse warm. It's gone cold. I’m trying to find where its leaking.”

“You have hot springs!” she looked about to burst with excitement. He nods.

“Nan used to always say that there was a Dragon under Winterfell. Heating the springs. Keepin' us Warm.”

“Perhaps there is” adventure glinting in her smile.

They followed the pipe back to its source. The snow outside covered the track. It meant the problem was at the springs source. Normally there was a trail of mud over it as snow melted once it hit the ground.

The springs source was sheltered by a loose structure that covered the entrance to the small underground cavern where the pool was.

He lit a lantern and grabbed the tool belt from the wall and descended the ladder first before helping her down after him. His hands lingering on her waist longer than they should have. She didn’t need his help but she smiled as she stepped off.

“You built this with your father? She asked, her hands drifting across the pipes that lined the walls.

“Not this part. It's much older. But we fixed it enough times, we might as well have.”

He could see the problem. The main return which fed cold water back down into the spring to get
reheated had no pressure. If the system wasn't closed it wouldn't work. He hung the lantern and stopped in front of it but she kept moving ahead.

“Mind the spring. Its boiling water” he warned. She laughed. He couldn’t see her in the dark. He tapped along the pipes. Listening for the echo that indicated a blockage.

“So just you and your father? Not your brothers?” she asked.

“Sometimes” he hit one that sounded different. “Catelyn kept them busy with lessons though.” he tapped it again. Found it.

“Did she not give you lessons?” he heard her shuffling around by the spring.

“She gave me better than most but She always gave the best to her own children” he sealed off the water flow behind it. “I’m not dull, but...I can’t do the kind of maths you can.”

“Did you follow your father around and go to Councils and all that?”

He offers a quiet laugh. “Yes and no. For things with the militia yes. I did Drills everyday since… Since I was like five or six. An’ he brought me along with him and Robb when he’d go do inspections or War Games. But for comm meetings an’ festivals...if it involved both my Da and Catelyn, it was best to stay away.”

“At least you got to spend more time with your father when you were working together.” she said. Her voice was farther away than he would have liked. He took the wrench from the tool belt and began to loosen the blocked pipe.

“I suppose”

“Is this a drinking water source?”

“No. It has heavy metals in it. It’ll make you sick if you drink it. We use it for heat mostly.” he pried it free. Speaking of heavy metal. The length of pipe had been almost capped over with mineral build up.

She hmmm’d then he heard a soft splash.

“Daenerys!” he rushed over with the lantern and her head broke through from under the water and she was smiling up at him, silver hair slicked back against her head. “Are you alright? That water is…”

“Fire cannot hurt a dragon.” she cut him off. Her eyes rolled back into her head as she ran her fingers through her hair. She’d undone the braids. “It feels amazing” she smiled this luxurious smile. Her eyes were closed.

Beautiful.

He let out a dry laugh. And with the immediate fear of her being scalded alive past, he realized she was naked. The rolling boil of the water just barely distorting her features.

“I’ll have to take your word for it.” he said, his tongue thick in his mouth as he willed himself to look away. He picked up the pipe and slowly eased himself down with his back against the wall of the cavern. Settled, he began carving away at the mineral build up on the inside the pipe.

“Where did you get your lessons?”
“When I was little I had a septa. We lived in a house in Braavos. With a Red Door…and a lemon tree. I learned whatever I could from the merchants we lived with, but it was never… structured. I learned how to build things from the Dothraki, and all the engineering and maths in Qarth, when I was really building Drogon.”

“They just let you build a Dragon.”

“So.. in Qarth there’s a University, like the University in Oldtown. And I was staying with a Merchant by the name of Xaro. He pulled some strings and I was able to study at the University and work on Drogon in exchange for the university taking some of my blood to experiment with.

“What?”

“They wanted to see what made me fireproof. But it doesn’t matter, Xaro was trying to get me to marry him. When I refused, they stole my jet and the people who were experimenting on me became violent.”

“How did you get out?”

“Fire and Blood.” she answers sadly.

He heard a small splash and she was close to him. Her arms folded up on the edge of the spring, her head resting on them and her eyes closed. They were quiet for a long time. The only sound was the gentle scraping of his knife. Peace and quiet.

There was another time like this. In another cave. At another hot spring. With another girl with fire coursing through her veins. She was in his arms, only she wasn't dying this time. Not yet. She wasn’t spitting in his face or cursing him, she was whispering his name against the hollow of his throat as she came apart around him.

“Jon?” she asked quietly from the springs. He looked down at her and she smiled up at him. “I asked how you felt… about the meeting?”

“I couldn’t protect one of my soldiers. One of my best soldiers. I know that we did everything we’re supposed to do…but…” He blew out some the debris he had managed to scrape away as he stands. It was as good as it would get until he could find a replacement. “I couldn’t protect her, just like I couldn’t protect my sisters.” He sets the pipe back in its place and sets the wrench around the fastening.

“Or Bran” he pulls the handle back.

“Or Rickon” Again.

“Or the FreeFolk.” It squeaks.

“Or-”

Another girl in another cave… So very much like this one.

“-Its not your fault, Jon.” she says quietly.

“Aye… I know…”

“You know nothing Jon Snow.” an echo somewhere deep in his mind.

He turned the flow of water back on and a moment later Daenerys yelped.
“It’s cold!”

“That means it’s working,” he returned to the spring and did his best to stare directly at the back wall of cave and not down at the beautiful silver naked woman relaxing in the water. “All fixed”

Her eyes were bright with mischief. He shouldn’t have noticed that. He was staring at the wall.

“With this new development” she nodded to the pipes that carried cold water back into the spring to be reheated. “I dare say you could jump in and join me. Jon Snow.”

Ygritte fell backwards on the cave floor as she choked out his name and buried her hands in his hair. Her thighs clamped around his head. And when he surfaced for air, the bright silver of her hair blinded him and her violet eyes were dark with lust.

“Another time.” she pouted ever so slightly, but smiled all the same.

“Is that a promise?”

“You’ll need to find a braver man than I to jump into a endless pit of boiling water.”

“Oh its fine.” She flicks water on him, the droplets landing haphazardly on his shirt. He swallows hard as she dives down once more her perfect ass bobbing out of the water for a split second, before she emerges at his feet. A bright body against the pitch black water, her moonglow against the dark. “Help me out.” and he squats down and extends his arms. “Close your eyes.” she breathes and he obeys. She grabbed onto his wrists and he grabbed onto hers. Then she was in standing front of him. Naked in the dark. Not moving away.

“A braver man than you?”

“Aye.” his voice is hoarse and the sound burns as it escapes.

She was so close and so warm. He didn’t open his eyes. He could feel steam coming off her. Her hands slips from his wrists, and feels her move away, but he’s not opening his eyes. Even though its dark. Even though the only light is the lantern.

“I must be a horrible queen then…” he can hear the rustling of the fabric. Woolen layers, that cover up what he now knows is underneath. Perfect expanses of moon glow skin, and soft curves. A Valyrian fucking princess stepping out of story book. “…to not be able to inspire such courage.”

He laughs and its this awkward noise that he can’t recover from and he can hear her smile in the silence that follows.

And then her hand finds his in the dark and slips down to intertwine their fingers.

“Thats not true...You make everyone around you feel brave.” it was barely a whisper. Like the distance between them. He kept his eyes closed but gods, he wanted to see her face. In his mind’s eye she was biting her lip, and her eyes were dark, those big black moons rimmed in violet.

“Do you feel brave, Jon Snow?” she asked breathlessly. There was a shade to her voice. A challenge and an invitation. He felt her shift her weight closer. Her feet stepping between his, forcing him to either grab her or be off balance.

“Yes”

He opened his eyes and they met hers and she was smiling with eyes dark with mischief. She was
beautiful. She was leaning into him and tilting her head just so.

“Yes” he said again. And his hand was in her wet hair and the other wrapped around her waist. Her arm was around his neck, across his shoulders and her mouth, her perfect fucking mouth was against his, moving with his.

Meeting again and again and again in small soft sucks before slanting, widening, and opening.

His tongue begged entrance to her mouth and she granted it with a noise he decided was his favorite sound in the world. And she tasted so fucking good. Her hands moved into his hair as she deepened the kiss and began exploring his mouth. His hand tightened around her waist and pulled her torso against his.

And with a gasp she breaks away and presses her forehead against his.

“You make me feel brave too.” she confesses.

And gods be good, he never wants to stop kissing her.
Mad

Chapter Notes

https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

The Calling - The Rigs

FYI - Fairly Mild Smut.
This needs to stop.

But oh gods she doesn’t want it to. Not when his whiskers tickle and scratch as he plants feather light kisses along the side of her neck, before claiming her mouth again.

Its another small stolen moment, like the many they’ve shared over the past weeks. A peck on her forehead when Tyrion and Sansa were too busy arguing about some problem with the Iron Bank, to pay attention to them. A vase of Winter Roses left on her dresser, waiting for her when she returned from overseeing encamping her Unsullied at Moat Cailin. A casual smack on her ass, as she passed him on the stairs. An arm draped across her shoulders as they drove to pick up rolls of felted wool from some Homesteaders living on Stark Land. A hand untangling her braids while she complained about the difficulties of explaining Westerosi Syntax to Dothraki. A tongue sliding against hers in the dark of the wolfswood. A heated kiss while inspecting the rebuilt barn. And another before the meeting yesterday morning. And another last night, up against her door.

And another right now as a palm glides up her ribs and around her back and then down to shape her hips, and following the line of her thighs in a methodical exploration that makes her squeak in delight, and she can feel the light rumble of his laugh against her.

She’d been in the garage swearing loudly at all the gods she doesn’t believe in. Frustrated by Drogon and the pieces of wings that don’t quite fit together just right. Some her most skilled mechanics among her bloodriders were working with Gendry to build weapons, modifications, supplies and parts she requested for Drogon.

Its not enough to make him fly.

The Stark’s don’t have a proper machine shop. In one of their talks, she’d casually mentioned the idea of turning the Dreadfort into an industrial settlement. The old train yards and butcheries have huge open spaces for her Dothraki to camp, huge piles of scrap, and coal deposits in the coastal mountains. Close enough to the coast, that snow isn’t as thick, close enough to the port for them to move quickly.

Jon was supportive of the idea but their priorities have been mostly on bringing in the Unsullied and food. With their limited fleet, transporting the Khalasar and all their vehicles and equipment wasn’t practical yet.

And for not the first time, she feels like she’s failed them. They are her people. Her first people, and she’s left them on an island, surrounded by the water they fear, and near an enemy that may be able to obliterate them for spite.

She had thrown a wrench across the garage in frustration, a loud series of swears in three languages pouring out of her mouth as she laboriously lifted herself out from under Drogon to retrieve it.

It probably wasn’t the best time for him to slip in behind her and slide his hands around her hips.

“Am I interrupting you, my queen?” he asked with surprised sarcastic smirk in his eyes, the wrench firmly caught in his hand, inches from his face.

He was being cute, and kind and flirty.

But she was bloated and angry and moody. The cramping pain in her abdomen had started a few days ago, and the mess and unpleasantness had followed swiftly behind.
His hand let go of the wrench and she tapped it lightly against his sternum.

“I almost hit you! Don’t sneak up on people!” It came out angrier than she intended. The tumult within her lacing her words. His lips stopped smiling but his eyes didn’t as his arm curled around her waist.

“Aye. I’m sorry for startlin you. Can I make it up to you?”

There’s this part of her that wants to melt into the embrace, and allow herself to ignore the stress that had been building inside her. Allow herself to forget her failure to fix Drogon. Her failure to provide a better life for her Khalasar. Allow herself to forget the nagging cramping in her abdomen, and the unpleasantness that accompanied her moonblood. Her reminder of her failure to create life.

The fundamental failure of her genetics.

“No…Yes. I don’t know” The corners of his mouth quirked at her grumbling indecision. “Maybe?”

“Why don’t you tell me what you’re doing and you can decide later.” he compromised, untangling her from his arms.

“I’m trying to fix the steering mechanism for the wings” she points down to the parts in question as she mounts Drogon and puts her feet in the stirrups. “You see where my feet are?” he nods squatting down to examine “That controls the blades along the wings, which redirect air so I can turn, descend, ascend…” he draws half a figure eight in the air with his finger. “…yes, loopy loops.” she sighs and he supressess a smile “What?”

“Nothin’.” he answers, lying. She narrows her eyes at him but continues.

“Anyway, I control them by shifting my weight on these, and…” she pushes her weight down on one.

“That’s no good.” Jon cringes up at the terrible grinding sound. “Let me take a peek…”

At first, there’s a flash of anger, charging through her like a lightning bolt. This is her Dragon. Her Baby. The greatest machine built in 300 years. How could anyone… anyone presume to know it better than her. But he rolls onto his back and his shirt trails up at his waist, revealing that trail of black hair before he adjusts it to cover the red line of scar tissue next to it.

And that anger shifts inside her to entirely different feeling altogether. One much better than frustration or indignation or self pity.

“Daenerys…” he prompts “Can you…” She snaps out of the hypnosis induced by the sight of his form sprawled out on the garage floor and pushes down on the petal, that horrible noise shrieking in her ear drums.

Missandei has scolded her for how shameless she is when she oggles him. Daenerys had countered that Jon seemed to enjoy the attention. Missy replied that it makes ‘certain parties’ a little uncomfortable. And she had said that she is the queen and she’s only looking, unlike SOME former monarchs

“Well everything seems to be moving…” his head and neck obscured from her vision by the length of the wing. “One more time…” And she obeys. “This one's moving slower than the others and its jamming all the ones past it up” he announces tapping the third blade along the wing.

An aggravated grunt steams out her nose at the revelation. It means the pieces aren’t to her
specifications. They’re either too rough and creating too much friction or were made incorrectly and she didn’t catch it when she was putting it together.

“Thanks. That gives me a place start.” she sighs.

“Just an extra set of eyes…” he half explains pushing himself to his feet. And then he eyes her and she’s keenly aware of her position.

When she’s flying she needs to stay low. Keep her head down to maintain an Aerodynamic shape. And keeping her feet on the controls forces her ass up in the air. The result is a position that may be somewhat… provocative.

“Have you decided yet…?” he asks nonchalantly. A predatory gleam in his eyes as he plants himself in the space where she would dismount.

“Have I decided what, Jon Snow?”

“If I’m interrupting you…”

She takes what is hers with fire and blood.

He catches her off Drogon, and lifting and spinning her to land on the tool cabinet and his hands begin that tortuous circling of her sides.

And she’s sucking his lip and running her hands up his triceps to tangle in his hair. And her legs frame his as they dangle over the edge.

And in this position she can feel how much he wants her.

And she’s the one that pulls their bodies flush, lips colliding again and again and again. And she’s the one who wraps her legs around his waist, and she’s the one to begins the urgent press against him.

He groans and flutterbys rush down to the cage of her pelvis, and the heat follows.

Jon plants his hands on either side of her hips and deliberately rolls against her, and hers go to his jaw to pull him to her mouth. And he does it again and again and again, the thick fabric of his blacks against the soft knit of her leggings, a sweet pressure against her core, aching with want and with… the unpleasantness.

It comes and goes so sporadically that Missandei had needed to ask Gilly for the necessities. Sansa didn’t have any, curiously, and Arya was no-where to be found. She’d come to her room later, with the supplies, a hot water bottle, and a book.

It’s probably the filthiest thing she’s ever read.

“She insists it helps with the pain.” Missy shrugged with an easy smile and small wink. “She was quite forward.”

And oh it does help.

There’s a small noise that passes through his nose. A question and a plea all wrapped in a low rumble as they pause their kisses to breathe. Foreheads pressed together as her hands do their own torturous slide from his neck down the planes of his torso to unhook his belt and inch the black denim down to hang around his thighs.
And oh it does help.

Her lungs sigh his name and in response he locks one arm like an iron bar around her back and the other under her hips, and pulling her hard against him. Caging her tightly. The hard edge of the cabinet cutting into her ass cheeks. His erection straining through the cotton of his smalls to press between them. Dull Blunt pressure exactly where she needs it.

She’s delightfully off-balance, standing on her tip-toes and clinging onto him as he lifts and grinds her against him.

He’s so fucking strong.

Her face collapses against his shoulder, mouth hanging slack in a silent sob to all those gods she doesn’t believe in.

“Daenerys…” He chokes out her name and oh the way it sounds. Those thick r’s and the long, drawn out vowels and that hard D.

And she opens her eyes and pulls back and...it’s the way he’s looking at her, big brown eyes all tender and intense. And it’s too vulnerable, too exposed.

It’s too much.

And it’s not enough.

He buries his mouth back on her neck and collarbone, beard chafing the skin around the wide open mouth kisses and quiet encouraging yeses.

She’s going to come. She can feel it cresting and rising with each rock against him. That grind driving her insane as his mouth finds hers again in an open, messy collision.

And her hands start to claw desperately at his back as a frantic madness overtakes her. The wave of pleasure breaking and crashing through her body. And he crushes her tight against him, pinning her to him, containing her storm in the circle of his arms.

A “Fuck Yea Daenerys” escapes in whisper against her ear as it quiets and she shifts back to sit properly on the cabinet, face buried against his chest, breath coming in hard pants.

And she watches as his hand dips under his smalls to fist himself, before the other draws her face up, palm cupping her cheek with a tenderness that makes her chest ache.

“Gods you’re beautiful.”

It makes her go weak, nuzzling against his hand like his wolf does. Big Brown Eyes nearly black with emotion and...

So Vulnerable. So Exposed.

She isn’t a wolf.

She’s a dragon.

And as his thumb slides over her lips, her tongue darts out to meet it, capturing it and lewdly drawing into her mouth.

“Fuck”
His foul mouth crashes against hers, her hands grabbing at his free one to bring it to her breast. Demanding he feel her. Breaking away from the tide of his kisses to nip and suck at his throat, hands sliding around his back to claw into his ass as he ruts against his hand, against her.

And she catches him when he breaks, freezing and faltering forwards to slump against her with a groan.

“Fuck” he swears into the hollow of her shoulder.

“Yea” she answers, lazily tracing soothing shapes on his back, as her heart rate slows and a contented quiet settles over them

And for several long quiet minutes

Its enough.

He straightens himself up with small grunt, as she releases him from her hold. And he traces the line of her jaw, caution in his eyes. “Are you alright?”

Daenerys snorts a laugh, before nodding and cocking her eyebrow up as high as she can..”Are you alright, Jon?”

“Well I got to squeeze the queen’s tits...so…” he says shrugging. And her mouth hangs open in mock outrage, and he teases her by mimicking her face.

“You’re horrible.”

“You’re amazing.”

“I ought to scream”

“Is that an order, my queen?” he shifts back between her legs, invading her space again, silencing whatever quip she was about to spit with an urgent kiss that shifts into something long and languid and lovely.

And he thinks he’s not clever.

“Your Grace” There’s a half knock and the door opens, and her eyes lock with Davos’s over Jon’s shoulder before he makes a startled sound and turns his back to them, shielding his eyes. “My apologies, Ser...Your Grace.”

Jon hangs his head in defeat, making a noise that is something between a laugh and a sigh as she untangles herself from him. Looking up with a smile in his eyes, he mouths the word “Caught” as he pulls his pants back up and rebuckles the belt.

Davos doesn’t care. He’s been discreet about how much a wreck she was after Eastwatch. Discreet about catching them in the armory after she brought Jon lunch a few days ago. Discreet about a great many things.

So she kisses his cheek before sliding off the chest “What is it, Executive Officer?”

Davos turns back to face them after brief glance over his shoulder.

“Minister Varys just radioed from White Harbor. He’s returned. With News.”

“What news.”
“He wouldn’t say over the radio.”

“That’s not good.” Daenerys sighs.

“Aye.” Jon agrees behind her.

It’s not good. If Varys needed to deliver information in person, That meant it was serious. Usually he was content to work independently.


“Turn around Davos” he orders and she scoffs. But as ordered, the XO pivots, with a quiet chuckle. Her noise is silenced with a less than chaste press of his lips against her. The whiskers tickling beneath her nose. “See you later.” he whispers tucking a lock of her hair behind her ear and she nods and he’s gone.

Davos lingers, laughing to himself, “I must say your grace. I’ve known that lad for four years now. An’ I have never seen him smile as much as I have this past month.” and she feels that embarrassed flush creep back up her cheeks. “And I think that might be true of you too…”

“It’s been a long time.” And never like this.

Her life with Drogo is a mix of the most painful memories in her life and her most joyous. And Daario was about sex and power and control and autonomy. They shared a bed… not a life.

This is… different.

“I’d be remiss, if I didn’t say…” he pauses, cautious, preparing to test the formal line between them “…that there’s nothing like a wedding after a war.” And the old man smiles so bright at the girlish giggle escaping her lips.

It would be a lie to say it hasn’t crossed her mind.

“And there’s nothing like babies to bring people together.”

The brief elation deflates inside her.

“Begging your pardon, your grace. I overstepped”

But she’s already spiraling. Back down into that abyss she was in before Jon gave her brief respite. She was so happy a moment ago...

But cuddles don’t change the fact that she can’t fix Drogon. That she’s failing her people. That she can’t have babies.

And the North needs babies. Westeros needs babies. There’s so little left, and the wars aren’t over yet.

They’ve barely begun.

And the tears begin to fall as she confesses it.

“Oh lass…” he sighs and he puts his arms around her and rubs her back and just tries to comfort her as she starts to sob. Its an uncontrollable tide.
She’s not usually a crier. Perhaps it’s the intimacy she just shared with Jon that’s left her so vulnerable. Perhaps it’s the hormonal shifts from her moonblood. Perhaps its that Davos is safe and paternal. The way Barristan was…

She never knew her father. And from what she knows of him… he was a cold man. Viserys never hugged her, except for warmth the few dozen times they ended up on the street. Jorah was her protector, and he comforted her many times, but always lurking behind that comfort was his desire for her.

“I’m not a Maester, so I don’t presume to know anything about that sort of thing.” he says breaking away as she regains her composure “But I served Stannis Baratheon for nearly two decades. And he and the Queen Selyse struggled to have a child for many years. They brought people from all over the world, and then came the Princess Shireen just when all hope was lost. Beautiful Girl, with Kindest Heart in all of Westeros.”

She shakes her head.

“It’s a genetic condition. I’m the last Valyrian. My family was inbreeding for almost five hundred years. It’s just not possible”

‘You’re not even human’ the witch whispered.

There’s something about his tone when he discusses the princess. “The Princess Shireen… Where is she?”

“The witch Melisandre burned her alive.” She gasps. The witch was on Dragonstone and she let her go. She let her escape. “Sometimes… I can still see her when I look at Jon.” And she understands. Only Death can pay for life. It is the mystery of fire and blood. It is a lesson she knows well. As Rhaego died for Drogo. As Drogo died for Drogon. “My princess must’ve died for something.” his eyes fill with tears and he brushes them away, steeling himself “Don’t give up hope, your grace. I’ve watched a man be raised from the dead and a woman walk through fire and not a single hair be burnt. I’ve seen a Wolf read a man’s mind and I’ve seen a Dragon soarin’ above my head. I’m not sure I could put a limit on what’s possible. Jus’ something to think on, your grace.”

And she does think on it.

“You said it would take six months.”

“Refugees from The Reach have been moving into the Westerlands and into the Crownlands. Cersei put them to work.” Varys answers.

She has another warhead. Months ahead of schedule.

“We should begin to prepare a siege of the Rock.” Tyrion notes.

“A siege…?” Jon scoffs.

“We cannot allow her to launch that bomb. Where do you think her next target will be Snow?”

He plants his hands on the table and leans into his words.“We don’t have the time or the resources for a fucking siege.”

“The most immediate threat is the warhead itself, and the production facility” Lyanna Mormont snaps at Tyrion “The rock is insignificant, your bias has inflated its importance.”
The dwarf’s mouth hangs open for a moment at the young woman’s answer.

“What do you think we should do, Commander Snow?” she asks.

“Take it” Jon answers bluntly.

“I’m sorry… What?” Tyrion asks.

“Take the weapon from her.” Lyanna clarifies, her exasperation at the dwarf hissing through her teeth.

“There’s no way she’s building it behind the city walls. She wouldn’t risk it.”

“Sansa is correct.” Varys pulls out another map. “The most likely location is somewhere within the mines surrounding the city.”

The maps displays a network of mines and canyons covering a fifty mile radius of the city. And there are curses and groans from all parties surrounding the table. It looks like a insect’s nest. Branches stretching and webbing across the land. There must be hundreds of miles of tunnels.

“Most Likely…?” The anger seeps into her voice. They were supposed to have time. “Two days ago the Cersei was most likely six months away from constructing another warhead.

“It would be difficult to pinpoint the exact location, but it’s the only place she could build it. While the city has its fair share of slums and refugee camps, Casterly Rock and Lannisport are places where support for the Lannister name has not waned. The mines employed thousands and Cersei has promised to restore that.”

“You told me the mines closed years ago.” She snaps to Tyrion, braid whipping around to land heavily against her. “That the land is unusable. That there’s nothing left.”

“My Father…” Tyrion clucks “He stripped the west bare of anything valuable that might be hiding under ground.” There’s a sarcastic sort of pride in his voice. “And that’s the truth, he admitted it himself, But people will believe what they want to believe if that means they can dream of the life they had before. They would rather have comforting lies than face hard truths.”

It’s the fundamental core of Cersei’s propaganda. That she will restore everything to balance like it was in the years following the Rebellion, before the War of Five Kings (which she blames the Starks for) Despite the fact that historically… things were far worse than during her father's rule. The Crown was in debt, which led which led to trade suffering, which created massive slums throughout most major cities in the south, which led to crime, disease, and extreme poverty. But with all the devastation of a Civil War of that scale, people can’t remember what life was like before.

There’s been too much terror. Too much horror. Too much death.

And that’s what Cersei relies on.

“Are we just going to overlook the fact that Commander Snow is suggesting we just take the warhead? How do you propose we do that if without capturing the city? Just supposed to waltz up and ask for it?”

Lyanna’s good eye rolls. “Do you ask for something you’re going to take?”

Tyrion’s face scrunches up and his nostrils flare with irritation and Daenerys places a hand on his shoulder and he takes a deep breath before starting.
“As we can all see, there are miles of mines and tunnels surrounding the Rock. How can we take it if we don’t know where it is?”

“Producing Wildfire takes a great deal of power.” She starts reasoning and Jon nods along with her logic, staring at the map, his eyes following the intricate lines of tunnels.

“It would also need to be in a deeper mine.” Sansa adds. “In case there was an accident.”

“I’m not sure Cersei is too concerned about safety” Davos shifts his stance, rolling his shoulders back before his hands take their usual place behind his back.

“No but she is concerned about deniability.” the red head corrects.

Jon taps his finger urgently on the map “What’s this formation right here?”.

“Part of the Golden Tooth Canyon, it was one of the more profitable mines about…15 years ago.”

“Lyanna…?” The girl’s eye darts around his finger. Searching. Strategizing. Nodding in agreement with the unspoken question.

“I see it.”

“What’s the main way people get power down in the Westerlands?” he asks Tyrion.

“See wh...” Daenerys starts before Tyrion interrupts with the answer to his question.

“Wind...hydroelectric dams.”

His eyes meet hers across the table as he explains.

“The Canyon, its isolated, only a few ways in and out. It's mostly cut off from the rest of the mines.”

“...It was well known. If Cersei is trying to convince people that the mines are reopening…” Sansa adds, following his reasoning “Seeing people working around the area would support her claims.”

“You think that this is where she would be constructing it?” Daenerys asks.

“I think that if I wanted to hide something in plain sight that’s where I’d do it. Its easily defensible. Boxes your opponents in”

“Exactly.” Tyrion snaps his fingers. “...Exactly...If the warhead is where you think it is. This is Cersei’s secret weapon. She’ll have it heavily defended. So how do you propose we just go in and “take it”?”

“Draw her forces out, OPs go in and take it.” Both Sansa and Davos exhale heavily.

“We don’t have OPs.” and even as she says it… she knows.

“Yes, you do.” her shoulders stiffen. “If we can pull most of the workers and security away from the site, my team and I can go in, take out whoever’s left and secure the warhead.”

“And disable the facility.” Lyanna adds.

“And disable the facility.” He agrees twisting his torso to nod at his second. Daenerys swallows hard. Forcing herself to focus on the situation at hand. Not on him agreeing to run off...Again… to be the fucking hero... again… To go off and fight a fight that’s not his for no other reason than...
Tyrion turns his face to her, a smug suppressed smile threatening to break the trained muscles.

She won’t give him the satisfaction. “So we need a diversion.”

“Khaleesi…” Jorah said. Jon wrinkled his nose at the title. “Remember the Slave Riots we started in Yunkai” She only nodded in response. She hadn’t expected jealousy. Jealousy at what?

...The pet name.

She told him not to call her Dany.

The truth is she had only said to keep some shred of herself together. A desperate attempt to throw up a wall between them. To have something left protecting her heart from inevitably breaking all over again.

But... she’s desperate to hear it again. But the only way to tear down that wall is to admit why she put it there in the first place.

“Unfortunately, that won’t work here.” Varys sighed “In Yunkai, the slaves outnumbered the masters almost 5 to 1. This is a military operation. Anyone working the site will be heavily guarded by a well armed, well trained security force. The workforce will likely be Lannister Loyalists or Refugees from the Reach. Any inkling of a riot will be quickly and violently suppressed.” Daenerys frowned.

“We have explosives” Grey Worm suggested in faltering Westerosi “We could cause a…” he slipped into Valyrian, looking to Missy for help.

“An earthquake or a landslide.” she translated then turned to Tyrion. “You said your father strip mined the region. Is it possible its geologically unstable?”

“I wouldn’t even know how to find out that information” the dwarf shrugged.

“Those mines have been inoperative for at least a decade. Even these maps are out of date. There are too many variables to account for. Who knows if they would even stop work to evacuate?” Varys finished.

“Cersei considers them expendable. We do not” Daenerys stated. “Any explosion large enough to force an evacuation would put hundreds of innocents at risk”

“Who’s in command of their forces?” Davos asked.

“Probably my brother” Tyrion answered.


“So we are back at Sieging the Rock…” Tyrion said exasperated.

“We won’t be sieging the Rock” Daenerys folds her hands. “We won’t win that way. We need to draw them away from the site.”

“Bait them” Varys prompts.

“Exactly”
“Bait them with a prize that Cersei desperately wants” Varys was leading them somewhere and she nods as it clicks in her head.

“No” Jorah and Tyrion say it at the same time. Jon’s shoulders stiffen as he straightens and crosses his arms on his chest, but his tongue remains firmly held in his teeth.

“Stormborn” Tyrion continues “If I may offer a reminder, you don’t have Drogon. If something were to go wrong you won’t be able fly away.”

“I am keenly aware of that” she replied through gritted teeth.

“Daenerys Stormborn will be well protected.” Grey Worm states “We will sail south to Casterly Rock.”

“That would take too long.” Varys says. “Most of the Unsullied have already made camp. It would take days to muster everyone, and days for our fleet to pick up the Unsullied at Deepwood Motte.”

She gasps because there’s the answer she’s been looking for. But Qhono beats her to saying it.

Qhono steps forward. “We will ride with Daenerys. This…” his hand circles the area surrounding Casterly Rock. “It is an open field. It is where we fight best. We need to be quick, yes?” he snaps his fingers “We ride circles around them” he motioned to Jon “They secure bomb. We leave.”

“The problem is Jaime knows he wouldn’t be able to defeat a Dothraki Horde on an open field. He would have to be very stupid to try it.” Varys said. “The Unsullied would be preferable. Jaime is familiar with their style of combat and we can bait him into a fight.”

“If the whole point is to secure the missile, it doesn’t matter if we fight.” He looks to her directly. “Bring your Bloodriders. Have them swarm the countryside. Most people…guards…workers will run to the city for shelter. Whether or not they come out to fight, the countryside will be more or less evacuated. We can get in, do what we have to do and pull out.”

Qhono nodded along and smiles. “They are afraid of what your Blood can do Khaleesi.”

“If that’s the case, Daenerys doesn’t need to come out at all.” Tyrion answers.

“I will ride alongside my blood. A khal who cannot ride is no khal.”

“It’s reckless.” he countered.

“It is decided.” the edge in her voice was final. “We sail back to Dragonstone, and the Khalsar will move with all haste to converge on the Rock. Commander Snow, how soon can your team be ready to go?”

“We can’t sail with you.” he answers flatly and her heart falls. “They see a single one of us riding alongside. Game’s over. We move quiet. Go south, Reeds’ll take us through the swamp.”

“Gendry and I will take them through the Riverlands” Arya finishes his statement to everyone’s surprise.

This was supposed to be a secure meeting. By the way every muscle in his body tensed, the little wolf had startled Jon too. Sansa rolled her eyes. Tyrion looked confused.

Varys shrugged.

“With their attention diverted to the Bloodriders we should be able to sneak through unseen.”
“Be careful of that Swamp, Jon Snow. Its an irradiated wasteland and there have been rumors of crocodiles bigger than your wolf.” Varys warned with a raised eyebrow.

“We’ll rendezvous here” He pointed to a location east of the missile site. “And then locate any resistance as you sweep through the region. Confirm the site’s location.”

“Assuming we get the warhead.” Tyrion starts. “What do we do with it? I don’t think its a smart plan to have everyone in Westeros know that a Targaryen has one. It will unite people against you.”

“Force Cersei into a Truce” Varys suggests.

“Use it on the Undead.” Jon

They say it at the same time.

“You will not bring one of those things onto my land.” Sansa states flatly.

“Bring it to mine” Lyanna smirks, “No-one can get in or out of Bear Island without my knowing.”

“We’ll take it to the Wall. One of the empty fortresses.” She concludes looking to Jon for approval. He nods agreeing. They can decide what exactly they are going to do with it later. If they use it on the Undead, it’ll be ready. If they are using it to create a truce, it’ll be a in a place where she can’t easily steal it back. “Well, I do believe we have a plan.” she concluded the meeting.

A handful of hours to gather gear, collect her captains and leave. Missandei and Varys are staying behind to continue assisting with the Unsullied. Lyanna Mormont is left in charge of the Militias, with the goal of continuing to build fortifications and prepare the troops.

Willa won’t let go of Jon’s leg as he leaves orders for Lyanna and Davos. Gilly, Sansa and Missandei have all tried to get her off him, bribing her with everything from candy and coin to pets and privileges. But she wouldn’t budge, clutching tightly onto his belt as he preps his gear. Her sister passing him magazines to load with ammo, while he explains to her how to take care of the weapon. Using every minute he can teach them how to survive.

It breaks her heart watching him say good-bye to the girls and Bran and Sansa.

And it breaks her heart even more when they say good-bye. They had travelled together to Moat Cailin. Where they split, she to continue following the White Knife to White Harbor and Theon and her ship. He to start South, moving through a swamp and the devastated RiverLands.

They stop for a moment on the side of the road. The Riders that accompany her speed by, hooting madly, glad to rejoin the khalasar, to be on the open the road. He laughs.

“Perhaps, you’ll show me how to ride one of those?”

“Perhaps Jon Snow.” she says quietly. Too quiet. Her bravado hushed by the weight of good-bye. She’ll see him in less than a week. But he has become apart of her life. A fixture of it. A centerpiece of it.

He pulls her towards him quietly, as the others finish gassing up the vehicle. His combat armor is bulky and when she wraps her arms around him, she can’t feel the heat of him through it. But he looks dangerous and handsome with his hair tied back in a knot, and the white wolf painted on his chest. Telling her things he had already told her. Warnings about the black ice that may be on the road. Reminders about the minor details of the plan. His rough northern accent smearing syllables together as he stalled for time. Waiting for a moment when they weren’t surrounded by bustling
bodies and roaring engines.

Terrible at hiding his intentions.

When it became clear they wouldn't be alone, She’d tugged him down to kiss her anyway and he complied with a sheepish smile.

“Don’t let anyone see you coming” she whispered, hands sliding around his neck, keeping his forehead pressed against hers.

“Make lots of noise.” he replied, bringing his own hand up to entangle with her fingers.

His eyes shut as he nuzzles against her hand, and when he opens them, the dark orbs make her chest feel so empty she’s hollow, yet so full she’s about to burst. And for that instant of eternity, she can bear it. She can hold her soul open for him.

Because they are going off to war, and she’ll regret it forever if she doesn’t.

“After this…” he starts before pausing. “…I think we need to have a talk about... this” he bites his lip before clarifying “…us.” And she nods. Because she knows.

“Ser.” Davos interrupts gently and he acknowledges before turning back to face her.

He brushed a loose hair from the side of her face and tucked it behind her ear before pressing a kiss to her forehead.

“I’ll see you in a few days” his chest rumbled as he said it against her forehead.

And then she was on her borrowed motorcycle speeding off towards the White Knife and he was climbing into a vehicle.

A piece of her soul missing.

They're called Iron Born because their ships are made of Iron. Steel actually. Derelict War Machines from a time before her ancestor’s doom. Maintaining them is almost a religion. The inorganic metal of the ship lending credence to their philosophy of “what is dead, may never die.”

Theon Greyjoy is dead.

Since she left Dragonstone weeks ago, Daenerys has met many dead men who walk the earth. Jon. Sgt. Dondarrion. A swarm of undead brought to life by an unknown means.

But Theon is dead in a different way.

He stands before her. Speaking with that shaky toneless mumble, hands wringing endlessly. Eyes never staying in one place. Searching for a monster that exists only inside him.

“We will..” he swallows hard before starting again “We will be at Dragonstone by tomorrow evening, your grace.”

“Clear Skies and calm seas?”

“Y-Yes.” then he hastily adds “Your Grace.” There is a plea in his eyes that she doesn’t quite understand. A question she can’t decipher.

And it's there in his eyes again when he knocks on her cabin door that evening.
“Yes, Theon, how can I help you?”

His eyes flit around her doorframe in an erratic pattern that leaves her uneasy.

“I was-I was hoping you’d tell me about…” He looks so small and so scared. A little lost boy. “I was hoping you’d tell me about Winterfell.” he finds his courage.

A little lost boy who misses home.

The only place she’s ever considered home was a house she can hardly remember, in a place she doesn’t know, from a time she can’t measure. The streets of the Free Cities, a guest house in Pentos, her tent with the Khal, her suite atop the Great Glass Pyramid of Meereen, all just places to sleep.

But thinking of Winterfell now, she’s just as much a little lost girl as she was when they left the house with the red door.

And to comfort her own soul she invites him inside.

“...So he rebuilt it…” he mumbles as tears flood his eyes. The coffee on the small table in her cabin has long gone cold. She nods. “And Arya is home.” he wipes the wet streak away from his eyes with his sleeve a small smile forming across his thin ashen lips. “That’s good. She always…” he starts then the smile fades. “She was always his favorite. He does-He does better when she’s around.”

“In what way?”

“When we were boys, and she was watching us run drills, he would always beat us because he was showing her how to do it. We could never beat him when Arya was watching...”

“You and Robb?” he nods quietly. “Apparently I’ve been staying in his bedroom.”

“He would’ve had a laugh at that.” A hollow half laugh turns into a cough before any joy could reach it. And he stares at the floor past her elbow for a long minute. “...Bran?”

She hold her tongue. The boy is sick. He had a seizure last week. She wasn’t there. But Missandei and Gilly were in the kitchen and they were able to take care of him. Missy later told her that the only reason they knew was because Ghost ran through the house and started pawing at the boys door.

But that’s not her place to say. He had tried to kill the boy.

So she does not answer. And the dead man gives a tight lipped nod in return.

“Thank you, for your time, your grace.” he stands awkwardly and does a half bow/half salute as he walks like a wobbly automaton to the door. “When you turn me over to them, please convince Jon to do it at Winterfell. I-I want to die at home.”
“Jon, me boy” Howland Reed extends his thin arm out to shake. “Glad to see you finally comin’ down this way.

“Aye. Wish it could be under better circumstances.” he answers peering around the Greywater Watch. It’s not quite a settlement. More a flotilla of barges all interconnected with rafts, lines, ladders, chains, tires, beams. All slowly moving with the thick current of the swamp.

The Reed’s had vanished when the Bolton’s took the North. Dropping out of sight, sinking into the irradiated muck.

He’d had to shove the rad counter into his pack because the clicking was driving him crazy. Meera said it would take a day to move through the swamp by boat. It shouldn’t be long enough for anyone to get too RadSick.

There’s always a risk though.

He can tolerate Rads. He assumes Arya can because he can, they are alike in most ways. Gendry was in King’s Landing when Cersei used Wildfire to seize the Throne, and he says he didn’t get sick then. Beric, Clegane and Tormund can, he’s seen them do it. Jorah said he spent time in the ruins of Valyria with Tyrion, which is just about as irradiated as it gets.

“So do I...Meera’s finishin’ preppin the boat. Why dontcha come with me to the Godswood for a minute?”

“Sorry, Howland, I should really make sure…”

“Nonsense. Yer about to run off to War. Have you paused a minute to talk to Ned?”

Jon flicks his finger against the meat of his opposite hand in a series of quick snaps that give rhythm to his hesitation.

No. He didn’t talk to his father.

Beric and Clegane are transferring gear from the truck to the boat. Davos and Jorah speak with some of the Crannogmen updating them with the latest news from Winterfell and the rest of the North. Tormund is harassing Gendry, teasing him by knocking him off balance on the rickety planks of the barge while Meera and Arya share a girlish giggle that’s too rare for either of them.

“Alright”

Their weirwood is amazing. It sits atop a barge, massive ashy roots curling around a half-rotted boat, partially sunk in the murky water.
“We sink it whenever we make camp, so the roots can make contact with the earth” Howland explains, stepping onto one of the white-grey tendrils. “Did you know I used to run ops with Ned?”

“My father ran ops…?” He shook his head disbelieving as he followed Howland’s footsteps from root to root as they make their way out over the murky water. “He never told us.”

“He wouldn’t have. He was never one to brag about War Stories. Especially about the Rebellion. It was an ugly time. War never changes, but it changes men.”

“The Rebellion?” he starts, and Howland nods. “I suppose you have thoughts about me bending the knee to a Targaryen then.”

The man gives a smile, a flash of gold tooth. “I think your father would have supported it.”

They maneuver around to where the knots of the weirwood forms its ugly face. Howland squats low and Jon sits, letting his legs dangle out over the water, while perched on the root.

“Everybody’s been tellin’ me the opposite…” He looks at Howland and a thought occurs to him that he hasn’t thought in a long time. “Were you with my da’ when he picked me up?”

The old man’s smile fades and his head wobbles slightly, looking between the face on the tree and Jon. “No. I wasn’t with your father.” he answers cautiously before settling into silence, and hanging his head in prayer.

And in the quiet of the godswood, Ygritte mocks him.

“You know nothing, Jon Snow.” whistles through the leaves.

It was too good to be true. To think that someone maybe knew about his mother. A flicker of hope crushed in an instant by an old heavy weight.

He tries to ignore her voice. Tries to push her away and think on his father. To focus on everything he ever taught him.

But the only memories that are dredged up are the bad ones. A hundred slights from Catelyn ignored. Not standing up for him when she kicked him out. A broken promise from the last time he saw him.

“Promise me Crow.” Karsi reminds him gently.

His father wasn’t able to keep his promise.

He’ll keep his.

But Ygritte doesn’t leave him alone.

Her bow is strapped to Meera’s back as she starts up the massive fan on their boat. Ygritte had built it out of scrap. Spent years honing it. Perfecting it.

It was the only thing he could think to give Meera when she brought Bran home. It was the only thing he had that had any real value, a piece of the small handful of treasures he’d accumulated. Sansa had offered her coin, land. He’d offered her a job, a command. But Meera refused all of it.

Except the bow.

She gave him his brother back.
“I don’t like not having my hammer” Gendry complained.

“We’ll move faster without it. And it risks sinking the boat.” he countered. “You’ll get it back when we meetup with the Riders.”

“Besides…” Arya teased “It’s not a very effective weapon”

“It’s plenty effective.”

“Takes too long to hit, takes too much power to swing, requires both your hands to use…” she continued poking at him.

Davos pulled him aside as the two banter. “Keep an eye on Gendry” he pleaded, looking very much like the old man he was. “He’s smart, but he’s young.”

“I will.”

“I’ve buried too many sons, Jon. Don’t make me bury more.”

He nodded “We’ll come home Davos”.

The old men stares at him for a moment. “Alright then. I’m off. I’ll hold the North for you. Can’t promise Lyanna won’t take your job while you’re away.”

“Let her” Davos laughs opening the car door. “Make sure Bran get those meds.”

“Will do, Commander” he saluted, pressing a fist to his sternum.

The boggy waters teem with extraordinary life. Giant rainbow fish with two heads swim in small schools under the green-black water darting away if they come to close to the surface.

“Wouldn’t want to eat somethin’ with two heads” Jorah grumbled.

“They’re not bad. Better’n frog.” Meera answers, turning the fan up to increase their speed. “Hold on.” she commands, skidding them across some muddy shallows before making contact with the water again.

“You sure no-one’s going to spot us.” he asks.

“No-one comes through the swamp.”

“Scared of the crocodiles…?” Gendry asks.

“Snakes” she corrects “You can see Crocs in quiet water. Snakes’ll get under you.” and Gendry’s eyes go wide, and as if on cue something thumps the side of the boat, and the boy scrambles away from it.

They make camp on a small patch of terra firma long after the sun went down. It’s the last fire they’ll get before they have to start travelling through the Riverlands, Meera took first watch but, he can’t sleep.

“Commander.” she acknowledges, twisting some wire around her hand. Prepping it. Making it warm and flexible and malleable so it can be used for arrows. Ygritte used to do that.

“Meera. How are you?”
“Fine. I suppose.”

“How’s the bow working out for you?” and she actually gives him a shy smile at that.

“Good. I hit a kingfisher from 50 meters last week.”

“That’s an impressive shot.” He offers her the smile back as he takes a seat on the low flat floor of the boat. He’d love to have her enlist. She’d make a good sniper. A good soldier. Quiet. Patient. Adaptive.

Angry.

She wants to say something, she’s wanted to say something all day. He caught her looking at him multiple times, before her eyes dart away. At first he was concerned… but then he realized she was biting her tongue. Holding something inside herself. And the gravity of whatever it is holds him there, waiting for her to make up her mind.

“Did you know we saw you? Did he tell you that?” she finally spits. The thing inside her welling out with her anger. “Jojen and Bran convinced me not to go get you.”

“When?”

“Near Queenscrown. You were fighting Wildlin’s”

One of the worst days of his life. When he became a traitor twice over. Betraying Ygritte. Betraying the FreeFolk. The day he really became a Crow. His eyes flit to the bow on the girl’s back.

She put three holes in his chest.

His thumb runs over the scars through his shirt. Pushing back against them. It was wrong… It was all so wrong.

He can’t bring himself to believe that it was wrong to love her. But he can’t bring himself to believe that he wrong to leave her. Its is a paradox of wrongness that ended as badly as anything could end.

“...I wish I hadn’t listened…” she starts again. “My Brother’s dead. Osha’s dead. Rickon’s dead. Summer and Shaggy are dead. Hodor is dead. Because I listened to them.”

“You can’t blame yourself, Meera.”

“I don’t. I blame him. He wanted to go hear the RAVEN. To hear the gods. And Everyone’s dead because of it. I even tried to get him to go to Hardhome when he said he saw you there. Saying that you were coming to take everyone past the Wall. But he wouldn’t listen. He made us stay.”

That’s…alot to digest. So he sits, looking up at her, legs dangling over the massive fan. And they are quiet for a long time.

“...If you had come to find me that day. You would have died. If you had come to Hardhome. You would have died…” he answers slowly.

It’s the truth. It doesn’t mean it’s right. But that’s the truth. They would have made him kill her to prove his loyalty, and since he wouldn’t’ve, they would have killed them all. And Hardhome… Hardhome was a massacre. There’s no way he would have been able to get them out.

“What the fuck am I supposed to do?” she asks exasperated. “My father says the gods are moving. That they have a plan. That the trees woke up an’ That the wights an’ Bran, an’ you an’ me are all
part of it.”

He can feel the cold mud of Fort Black soaking into the fabric around his knees, and warm blood trickling down his arms to gather at his elbow.

“You know nothing, Jon Snow”

“I don’t have the answer you’re looking for Meera.” he sighs. “I’m sorry. I wish I did.” The girl nods from her perch and wraps the wire around her hand in the opposite direction, slowly unkinking the thin metal.

The water begins to move faster as the boat struggles up on of the dying tributaries that feed the swamp. The current threatening them as Meera finally breaks through the tree lines and across a marsh to as the land shifts.

He’s never been this far South before.

“Here. My da wanted me to give you these.” she hands him some rolls of hash. “For your victory.”

“Thank you, Meera.” Behind him Jorah and Beric wrestle with inflating the rafts, while the others work on gathering plant growth to camouflage them. “I could really use your help,” he admits. “You know the wights. You know what’s really out there. The others… They don’t take it seriously.”

Her lips go tight as she leans on the bow.

“You want me to enlist…” she asks. “After everything I did…?”

“Yes.”

“Is this a joke?” Meera sneers.

“It’s your duty.” he pauses a moment, letting the words sink in. “I need people who’ve seen the wights. I need people who know how to fight them. I need you there when fight comes. I need people I can count on.”

She stares at him, eyes hard, features sharp. Before cringing in defeat, tapping the bow against the hard bottom of the boat in a series of quick rhythmic beats.

“I can’t leave the Crannog to go through Basic. My Da’ needs me. Ever since he found out about Jojen…” she stops and shakes her head.

“We can work something out.”

“We can work something out.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“I need an answer now.” He tightens LongClaw’s Strap. Securing the Rifle hard against his back. “I need your word that you’ll fight the wights, I need to know you’ll be there.” He turns to look behind him at the others working, and her eyes follows. “In case…”

She nods her understanding and takes a long slow breath. Straightening her spine. Shifting her weight. Pressing her fist into her sternum in a formal salute. “I’ll be there, Ser”

Brave Girl.

They split up with Jon, Arya, Jorah and Tormund in one raft. Beric, Clegane and Gendry in the other. Arya had scowled at him for separating her from Gendry, But he couldn’t have them
bickering. Voices carried over water, and the motor was already too fucking loud.

“I fucking hate boats” Tormund grumbles.

They stick to the boggy waters of the creeks and tributaries that feed into the main rivers. Avoiding the settlements, homesteads and small towns clustered by sticking to dirty water.

Arya serves as his lookout while he steers the raft, peering along the shorelines through a pair of binoculars. She stiffens suddenly and waving at him to kill the motor. He signals the others and Jorah and Clegane each jump to push the boat into the shallows on the far side of the creek. Shallows where the plants grew thick, and they can disappear into the overgrowth.

He lays on his stomach in the boat with his rifle drawn along the inflated edge. The barrel dividing reeds in front of him. To his right in the other boat, Beric did the same, as they both looked to Arya silently directing them where to aim.

Two men appear along the horizon. Armed, but not armored. Not like a soldier would be. Wearing Lannister colors, but they didn’t seem to be actively patrolling. They were talking and laughing

“Beric has a shot” Arya whispers in his ear. Leaning over him. He does too.

They didn’t have time wait for them to get out of an earshot of the motors. Were these soldiers or workmen? Scavvers out searching for scrap, or lazy guards on a patrol. He could feel Arya tense next to him as their window for a clean kill began to close.

In the end it didn’t matter, He couldn’t risk them warning anyone they were here. It had to be done.

He nods to Beric and flashes three fingers at him. A long slow exhale.

Two shots ring out simultaneously, and both men dropped.

They restart the motors and Clegane and Tormund recover the men’s weapons and drag their bodies into the river.

The rest of the day passed without incident. They travelled until the sun faded entirely, and the sky was black, not purple. They didn’t make a fire. Too easy to be spotted. He took first watch, leaning up against the stump of a tree with Arya curled up under his arm, sleeping softly with her head on his shoulder.

The moon was a thin sliver. If they could have waited a few days, they could be travelling under moonlight. Sleeping in shifts. But they couldn’t even wait for that. The undead wouldn’t wait and neither would Cersei.

There was a long howl of a wolf in the distance and Arya stirred.

“Maybe it's Nymeria.”

“Maybe.”

“I dream about her sometimes. In my wolf dreams, I dream I am her.” she says sleepily. “That I’m running in a pack. We hunt Lannisters soldiers”

He smiled “Do you catch them?”

“Always.” she yawns and settles back against him. “Do you still have them?”

“Not in a long time.”
“Since you died…?”

“Before… Since the fight at the Wall…” Since Ygritte Died, and the FreeFolk slaughtered, and the Weirwoods burned. “Go back to sleep.” he orders gently and she obeys, pulling the coat around her more.

She more or less told him she was coming with them on the mission, stating flatly “Either I’m going with you or I’m going without you. You can’t stop me and I don’t need your permission”

The pack survives, so here she is.

She’d do well in OPs. Even without her skills and training, she’s dedicated, determined, ferociously fast.

Angry.

After a few hours he kicked Gendry with the leg that wasn’t next to Arya. Not hard. Just enough to get him awake.

“Your watch” he orders. Gendry stretching awake. With the handful of Dothraki, more or less taking over his equipment, he’s been joining the others running drills, training with Beric and Clegane. Sparring with Podrick.

The lad wants to be a soldier. Wants to prove himself. Wants to show the world he can be a better man than his father was. Wants honor and glory and all the things he was denied growing up a bastard.

Jon gets it. It’s why he joined the watch.

He eyes the young man now. Eager. Strong. Loyal.

Angry.

Tomorrow he’ll have to travel a full day on two hours and stay alert. He’ll ride with him. He’ll ask the same questions Commander Mormont used to ask while training in the yard.

“If you are pinned down, what is the best place to strike to get your attacker off of you?” he’d ask as he’d walk down a row of recruits doing push-ups. “How hard do you have to Strike a man in order to break a rib?; What are the most common tells for an opponent's previous injuries?”

Or maybe he’ll teach him what Ygritte and Tormund taught him about survival beyond the wall. How to regulate your breathing so you don’t die at high altitudes. How to build a map of a region in your mind based a few geographic features. How to hide in plain sight, how to camouflage yourself.

How old is he? Two and Twenty? Younger? When Jon was his age, he was running Ops with Ygritte and Tormund. Val. Wun-Wun. SixSkins.

What was it Mance had seen in them? In him?

Angry.

Angry at the World. Angry at the Watch. Angry at his Father. Angry for being a bastard. Angry for losing Arya. Angry because he wanted Ygritte. Angry because he was lied to. Angry because he couldn’t protect the people he loved.

“I’m not Mance” his heart whispers, but he already knows the answer.
“Oh...You know nothing, Jon Snow.”

“Let me sleep, Ygritte”

He wakes to Arya moving his arm off her shoulder. It’s before Sunrise. The sky just beginning to purple. The rivers were quiet and the sound of the motor shattered the serenity. They were moving quickly. Making good time.

There was no-one on these waterways. He let Tormund take over for Gendry as look out and he began to run through all the questions he had picked out of his memory the night before. He did alright. Next time they’ll run them while sparring.

“Maybe you should ask him to catch a fish.” Tormund suggested wiggling his eyebrows.

Jon laughs quietly. It was trick Ygritte and Tormund had played on him. They told him to catch a fish barehanded to “make him faster” and when he was deep in concentration, she tackled him into the freezing water. “Always keep your wits about you” Tormund said as he roared with laughter.

“Later” he said. They kept moving until the last light of day. They were close to the Whispering Wood, along a boggy tributary of the Red Fork.

Robb could have won a war here.

He was always a better strategist when it came to formal armies. Legions and Battalions. Rank and File. Throw men at each other until the cost is too high or everyone is wiped out. It was different at the wall. The Free Folk fought for survival against the elements and the wights, the Watch fought for survival against the Wildlings.

“I’ll take first watch” Jorah volunteered. Jon nodded his thanks. Arya curled up under his arm again and fell asleep quickly. The others dropped off, but sleep did not take him right away. Instead he stared up at the moon. Admiring the silver of it.

Dany...

She should have already landed at Dragonstone, about two days ago, which means she’s probably roaring up the Gold Road right now. Thousands of Bloodriders on thousands of Engines. Scaring the hells out of anyone who gets in her way.

There’s sharp Dany. With the dramatic cut of her coats, hard line of her jaw, silver hair braided tightly to her head. Full of righteous fury, unmatched bravery and fire, raging hot and fast. Demanding. Then there’s soft Dany, big violet eyes, plump lips, smooth skin. Gently sliding her hand around his. Full of dreams for a better world, unending compassion, and fire, burning warm and bright. Giving.

“Daenerys seems quite taken with you…” the old bear said quietly. He nods slowly. He didn’t have much experience with women. But Daenerys wasn’t exactly being subtle. Mischievous eyes flashed up at him from the rolling boil of the hot spring. Smiles and Laughs that seem to come easier and easier each day. Powerful Legs that control dragons wrapped around his waist. Walks with no destination. Hands unbuckling his belt. Long kisses in hidden places. Quiet barely-there cries against his chest as her whole body quivers and flutters in his arms.

“I assume the feeling is mutual.” he nodded again not trusting the sound of his own voice. Jorah nodded and hmmd. “She’s a good girl.” he let out a sigh “who’s seen too much, who’s been through too much. She deserves to be happy” He stood then. “Get some sleep, Jon” he left to scout around the campsite.
The last leg of their trek was on foot, unless they could steal a vehicle. If all went as planned they would disembark before midday, near Wendish Town and then travel due west till they reached the Golden Tooth Canyon. They would scout the area, then wait for the Bloodriders to race through.

They were ahead of schedule. Arya and Gendry knew these waterways better than he had hoped. He shouldn’t have doubted. The pack took a minute to relax as the boats deflated. They had a ways to go.. And the closer they got, the more likely there would be a confrontation.

Tormund flashes him a wild grin and eyed Gendry. He knows that look. Suppressing a chuckle he put on the most serious face he could and began barking orders.

“Gendry. Go catch a fish”

“What!”?

“You heard your Commander.” Tormund said, sounding just a serious.

“You’re too used to your hammer. You need to be faster with your hands.” he explains as if it's the most obvious thing thing in the world.

“I’m a smith. I’m plenty good with my hands.”

“Then this should be easy. Take your knife. Go catch a fish.”

Gendry grumbled as he stripped off his boots.

“Don’t take off all your gear.” he gestured to the handmade combat armor he wore. Mostly leather reinforced with steel. Like his own. “We need move soon”

“What are you doing, Jon?” Arya whispered as Gendry waded to the water.

“Teaching”

“This isn’t how you improve dexterity” she flipped a knife in the air and caught it.

“There are lots of lessons to be learned by catching a fish.”

She looked unimpressed but was silent.

“What’s going on?” Beric came over, zipping up his pants and buckling his belt.

“Lad’s catching a fish.” Tormund answered. The one eyed man laughed.

“Thoros pulled this on me once. Our first mission out. I didn’t speak to him for two days after.”

Arya raised her eyebrow at him.

“When I was a boy and my father took me hunting, my father would suddenly pull me down and get real quiet and point out on the Horizon and say ‘Do you see the bear Jorah?’” the man pointed at nothing, mimicking his father “And I’d look for it and he’d say ‘it's camouflaged, you need concentrate.’ and then he’d knock me into the mud. He did it three times before I caught on.” he smiled and the men laughed. Arya did not.

“That’s a good one.” Tormund chuckled. “I’ll need to save that for the greenboys at Winterfell”

Arya was scowling down at him where he sat in the grass.
“Would you like to do the Honors?” he asked her. And like flipping a switch, her scowl spread into a bright smile. It was the best thing he’d seen all day. He gestured down to Gendry. “Go for it”

Gendry let out a yelp and there was a splash. They looked to the Riverbank and he was just... gone.

“I don’t see him” Arya screamed, running preparing to jump in. He barely caught her before she did. Grabbing her shoulder and pulling her back to be snatched by Clegane.

“Guns up” he ordered and drew his machete and waded into the water. The current wasn’t moving fast enough for riptides. Could Gendry swim? Stupid. He hadn’t even asked. Stupid. He hadn’t thought this through. He could smell blood. Fuck.

Jon waded till he was waist deep in the water then stopped. Any deeper risked getting swept away.

“Jon…” Arya gasped. He held up a hand, a gesture to silence and comfort her. His eyes searched the murky, green black water.

Movement.

His hand shot down, finding his target and he pulled Gendry up by the strap of his chest plate.

“There’s something in the water” he sputtered, gasping for air.

Jon pushed Gendry behind him where Jorah pulled him out. He began to slowly retreat backwards. Moving slowly, precisely..

It lurched at him, breaking through the water with an explosive force. A blur of white water and green scales. He heard the gunshots behind him. He fell backwards into the water, holding it by the neck. The snapping maw inches from his face as the claws raked across the leather guards on his shoulder.

More weight landed on top of him and he felt warm and smelled blood as he heard the sick sound of a knife puncturing flesh over and over again. It writhed ontop of him, thrashing madly, scratching up the guards.

And he’s so grateful he’s not in the watch anymore. The equipment he had then… he would be more than a little tore up right now.

The crocodile finally slowed as the blood leeched out of it and with a hard shove he rolled it off him into the mud, where Tormund slammed both axes down on its head.

“Binoculars. Scout now!” he ordered coughing up water. “Someone might of heard those gunshots.” Beric ran to the gear and followed orders. Arya helped him to his feet. He leaned heavily onto her has he regained his balance and checked himself for injuries. Couple of bruises and a long cut on a patch of exposed skin on his arm. Nothing bad.

Soaking wet and covered in gator blood.

But no real injuries.

“How’s Gendry?”

Jorah nodded “Not as bad as it could be. The bite didn’t puncture his guards. They’ll need to be repaired.”

“Can you walk?”
“Yeah” Gendry said catching his breath “I’m fine”

“Clear” Beric returned with the binoculars.

They all stood panting. Arya retrieved her knives from out of the gators sides. Gendry had also got it once with the knife he was “fishing” with. Close to its neck. If the knife had been a few inches longer, he would have killed it. He clapped his shoulder as he returned it to Gendry.

“Good Job”

It was huge. At least fifteen feet long and a head the size of a chainsaw. Tormund began to laugh.

“Look at the fish you caught my boy!”
A thousand engines roared in her ears, yet all she could hear was her own heartbeat and the shallow
gasps of her own breath. The rumble of the earth moves beneath her from her tires, up the frame,
spreading between the handlebars, through the leather of her gloves and hum deep into her bones.
It’s been too long since she rode alongside them.

She was fourteen the first time she felt this. The first time she stood up to Viserys. The first time she felt powerful and capable. A rush of defiance that rode the line between terror and bliss.

This was what had turned her from a quiet scared little girl to Daenerys Stormborn. She was the eye of this storm. This stampede of steel. An unbreakable tide of sound and speed. Mighty and terrible.

And they washed over this land.

Three days hard riding from Dragonstone to Harrenhall, then South to the Gold Road only to sweep North through the Westerlands, encountering little resistance. Those who fought fell under their wheels. But most ran. Tucked themselves away behind city walls, or into the slums that housed the thousands of impoverished Westerosi.

Qhono had been right. They were afraid of what her blood could do.

They were afraid of what she could do.

“They’ll come to know you for who you are” Jon had reassured her about his officers, about the Northmen. Whether the same would apply to these poor souls…

She can only hope, and give the slums a wide berth when the terrain allows it.

And move quickly when it doesn’t.

The dust was brutal as the winds picked up. She adjusted her goggles with one hand, tightening the strap that sat under the root of her braid.

The Lannisters had strip mined most everything in this region, leaving nothing behind but barren landscape, empty quarries, huge sunken holes in the earth, and derelict equipment slowly rusting.

Leaving the Earth here fallow, dry, and toxic. She can smell the heavy metals in the soil. Particles that would permeate anything that future settlers would even try to grow here.

Little changed as the Gold Road twisted North, past Lannisport and toward Casterly Rock.

She understands now, why it’s colloquially referred to as “the Rock”

It’s started as a grey blur on the horizon, that grew too large, too fast. The wall surrounding the city was huge, a jigsaw of concrete and stone and steel.

The city was the major population center, and she could see the steady stream of people and vehicles moving towards it. She accelerated in front of the other riders and led them East before they made contact with the refugees.

The outskirts of the city was a tangle of scrap yards and open air foundries. Indentureds or free scavs would bring in scrap from the countryside or from other cities to either be taken apart and used or melted down into new metal.

New metal to reinforce the Lannister War Machine, which would roll over Westeros if she did not end it.

Tyrion chirped in her earpiece as they hit the next yard. He was already at the Rendezvous, having diverted the supply trucks to make camp, and set up communications. “Commander Snow has located what seems to be a large work site the canyon. Patching you through.”
“Daenerys…” His low voice crackled with static and she let out the breath she had been holding for days. “They’re held up in gorge about three miles east by southeast from your location.” she looked down at the small map of the region she had drawn and Missy had sewn onto her wrist guard. “It looks like they’ve already sealed the underground, You’ve got a few pocket of resistance. Largest group numbers about four hundred. Doesn’t look like they intend to go anywhere. His voice sounded heavy. “Looks like they’re going to try and wait you out.”

There’s questions she wants to ask but he wouldn't be able to hear her over the roar of all the engines. She could only double tap “yes” or single tap “no”

“There’s a pass into the canyon coming from your angle. But it's Narrow. You’ll only be able to fit maybe five riders at a time through. I’ll signal at you when you get close.”

She swore in Valyrian. A narrow passage means slowing down. Speed was her blood’s weapon. Speed and maneuverability.

“There’s a larger opening if you go around but it’ll take you time to get there.” she tapped the earpiece once. There was no time.

“Right then. We’ll cover you.”

She swung the bike in the direction Jon had specified and flagged Qhono down. She flashed him three fingers. Three riders. And then thrust her arm forward in a fist. One column. Then Pointed at her nose. My signal. He nodded and fell back to pass on the info.

There was a flash from a mirror along the canyon wall. A bright spot flaring in the sunlight. It flashed at her then flashed over to a dark gap in the rock. She shifted weight forward on the bike and bounced her back tire left. Then right. Marking in the dirt the lines of the column she wants.

She heard the roar behind her focus and sharpen as the sprawling wave falls in line. Qhono pulls up beside her and another of her kos on her left.

So They ride. Accelerating. Hitting the Throttle Hard. Setting the pace for those behind.

The sun darkens for a moment and time slows as they push into the passage. At the end of it there are silhouettes of men. Men in red armor with gold trim with guns up.

She shifts her grip on the handlebars so that her thumb sits on the trigger to the mounted gun. It's not Drogon’s guns that can move and rotate. It can only aim straight from its mount next to her left knee and into a target's center mass. She lets out a quick volley. A burst of bullets spray catching the men in their armor.

But the man directly ahead of her is still standing and his gun is trained on her. She shifts slightly right trying to line him up with the gun but Qhono is riding too close to her and if they fall here, in this narrow passage the entire Horde will crash behind them. She reaches for the pistol at her belt, but it's too late to aim. She braces for the impact of the bullet, trying to focus on keeping the bike steady once she’s hit.

“Duck” he whispers in her ear.

A bullet whizzes past.

And the man’s head erupts in a spray of gore and she blows past his falling corpse as the canyon opens up into a wide channel that splits. The rider on her left lets out a war cry and takes her bike up the wall with her arakh drawn high.
“The pass on the right is where the majority of hostiles are making their stand.” he’s breathless and it sounds like he’s running.

She points her other Kos to keep going straight down the pass to the left while she and Qhono bank right. The canyon is wider here and the bikers fan out behind her.

“They’re in the basin ahead of you about 50 yards away. There’s a bit of drop.” She signaled to Qhono to get ready to jump. He passes it back. Above her two Lannister guards suddenly fall off the sides of the canyon wall to be crushed by the riders behind her. For a moment, she lets herself search along the walls for him. She doesn’t find him, but she knows her wolf is prowling up there, watching her.

The first wave of guards were kneeling prepared to shoot up at them. She shifted her weight on the bike and at the next patch of upturned earth she launched herself over them.

She lands in the center of the basin. One boot plants into the ground and she burns rubber in tight circles kicking up dust and smoke. Her riders circle her, filling up the space in a rolling spinning mass of wheels and steel. Those who had enough speed, spun up the sides of the wall.

A Wheel, The Khal’s Wheel. And she is the axle on which it pivots.

The last time she had been here, at the center of this mass, she was 14 and clinging to the khal’s back. Trying to hold on as he spun and trying not breathe in the fumes or the exhaust, or… the blood.

She got pregnant shortly after and Drogo wouldn’t take her raiding anymore.

It’s been a long time.

The Bloodriders were true to their name. The spikes and guns they had welded to their bike frames tore through the Lannister forces. Their tire tracks would leave bloody trails on the canyon floor.

She practiced the tight spin several times. But never around people. Never in a tight space. Never with the screams. Her head was spinning. There was too much chaos. Her heartbeat was so overwhelming loud in her head. The fumes were slowly depriving her brain of enough oxygen, and the mania of the violence, and the dizziness of her spin crashed together and her dragon roared in her chest.

“Daenerys!” his command snaps her back to herself.

She vaguely heard the sound of automatic fire and the tight coil of riders around her loosened, and sped off through the canyon chasing the noise. She shook off the terror as she broke the spin and followed the riders, weaving through them, heading toward the head of the column.

“Alright?” She taps twice. Yes.

“Good. They’re scrambling to set up an ambush at the worksite. Get your sidearm out. 500 yards. We’re almost there.”

She pulled her pistol out as she reached the head of the column. The dry riverbed of the canyon narrowed again before opening up to a large open area.

Scaffolding had been mounted along the sides of the canyon walls and mining and survey equipment was scattered about. Then there were the men. Only a few were armored, most wore lannister colors. All were armed, if not with guns, then with pick axes and sledgehammers, lengths of pipe.
She skidded to a stop in front of the man who was clearly in command and held up her fist. Behind her, the Horde stopped short. Burnt Rubber and exhaust filled the air of the gorge. Their engines kept humming. Ready to ride.

He was an older man, but large and authoritative.

“Surrender” she said, kicking the stand down and letting it support the bikes weight so she could move freely.

“Daenerys Targaryen...” he spat out her name like so many others had. Spreading each syllable out to fill it with as much hate as it could absorb. She holstered her pistol.

“And whose surrender am I accepting?”

“Randyll Tarly” he stood firmly and stared down his nose at her. There was a hiss and a curse in her ear. “But you won't be getting my surrender.” the man in front of her continues.

“You are surrounded. There is no reason you all have to die today.”

“If we all die today, then we die defending our country against a woman who killed our Queen.”

“I have not touched Cersei.”

“Not CERSEI.” he hisses. “Margarey. Margarey Tyrell. The true queen of Westeros. You murdered her. Only the imp knew about the caches of Wildfire under the city. Your father’s caches.”

Misinformation and Lies.

“I did not kill Margaery. Why would Olenna ally herself with me if I had?”

“You lied to her. Tricked her with your Dornish whores and your Essosi witchcraft.”

Xenophobia. Lies. Misinformation. There’s no way she’ll break through to him.

So she addresses the workmen and soldiers.

“I know what Cersei has told you about me” she dismounted her bike. “That I've come to destroy your cities, murder your families, rain down wildfire and the burn the world, just like my father.” she took a step towards him. “That's Cersei Lannister, not me.” she breathed deep, rolling her shoulders back and folding her hands in front of her, letting them rest low on her belly.

“I'm not here to murder, and all I want to destroy is the wheel that has rolled over rich and poor to the benefit of no one but the Cersei Lannister's of the world.”

“I offer you a choice-- surrender and join me. Together, we will leave the world a better place than we found it....Or refuse and be ripped out like a weed by the root.” she looked through them. Making eye contact with as many as possible.

They whispered at each other. And the whispers became louder and one man bolted for the Bloodriders line.

The gunshot rang in her ear and he fell before he reached the line. She turned and saw a young man beside Randyll Tarly holding a smoking pistol.
“Good Job, Dick” he stepped into her space. “We already have a queen. Daenerys Targaryen. One who was born in Westeros. Who has lived here all her life. You are a foreign invader. One with no ties to this land with an army of savages at her back.”

The army of savages at her back revved their engines. And in response the young man’s gun turned to her.

“Don’t move” she froze, trusting Jon’s command.

“Last Chance” she said.

One Beat.

Two.

A muscle in the young man’s face twisted.

And the bullet whizzes past her ear and the gun fell out of the boy’s grip as he collapsed to the ground. Blood blooming out of his head. Randyll screamed and reached for his weapon but she drew her pistol and shot him three times in a quick succession.

Her shots hit his stomach and he doubles over to his knees. The workman raise their weapons and shots are fired and her bloodriders rush forward into the pool of men. It's over in a few minutes.

They never stood a chance.

Her campsite is little more than the supply truck with her bedroll laid out in the back. Her borrowed bike leaned against the side of the truck, water dripping off the sides. She had splashed a few buckets of water on it to prevent the dust and the gore from building up and affecting her ride for tomorrow.

Tyrion had already scolded her for killing the Tarlys when she could have captured them.

“I gave them a choice. They made it.” she countered, kneeling and taking a cloth to the joint where the frame connected to the wheel. He left looking uneasy as the red water drained from the bike. He had no stomach for the reality of war. “There are no easy choices in War.” she called after him.

The day had left her shaken. It had been so long since she rode alongside her riders. She had always flown into battle. Tearing into enemies from above. The fight on the ground was much more...visceral than she remembered from her time clinging to Drogo’s back.

She reaches for another bucket only to find none and scowls. But before she could get up to fetch more, one was placed on the ground by her side. And another off close to the truck's door. She looked up at him, shading her eyes from the setting sun behind him. She offers him a sad smile and he returns it as he knelt down next to her. They were silent as he helped her wash the worst of the gore off the bike and then dumped the remaining water over it as the red faded to pink.

“Have you screamed yet?”

“I lost my head out there, Jon.” she snaps at him. He nods, unflinching. “I almost let it get me. The fumes and the chaos...I felt myself being swallowed by it” she tosses the rag in the bucket. “And then that stupid boy put a gun in my face and...” she stands up, frustrated and ran her fingers through her hair until they became tangled in the grimey wind-whipped braid. “They left me no choice. I didn’t want to do that.”
“That was Randyll Tarly and his youngest son, Dickon.” he says quietly, standing. “Sam’s father and brother.” she gasped as she realized it. And the guilt overwhelms her… They made fun of him… And they killed him. He looks down at his boots. “…I killed my best friend’s brother today.” he was quiet for a minute, the weight of the decision bearing down on his shoulders. “There are no easy choices in war.” he repeats what she shouted at Tyrion. He tilts up at her then, looking her in the eye, something like resolve settling inside the deep brown, flecked gold in the sunlight. “They made theirs, We made ours. The mission was to clear the worksite so we can secure the weapon. In that, you were successful.”

“It doesn’t feel like a success.” she says, pathetically whimpering.

“Command never does.” he gently places a hand on her shoulder, and pulls her in closer, not quite an embrace and tapped the other bucket he had brought her with the toe of his boot. It had a little steam coming off it. “‘You’ll feel better after you wash up’”

She flashed him a wicked grin. “Are you suggesting I’m dirty?” she teased, slinking close to him. He looked down, an embarrassed smile creeping across his face.

“I know you are” he teased back, tugging at her braid gently.

“You smell terrible.” she says and he laughs briefly.

“ Took a messy swim in a bog this morning.”

“You’ll tell me about it later?” he nods and smiles.

But it fades as she leans against him, pressing her forehead against the white wolf painted on his vest. After a minute, she gripped the firm edges of the ballistic vest of it with both hands and pressed her face deeper against it and screamed. His arms go around her shoulders, encasing her head to muffle the noise as she roared against him.

It wasn’t enough to be successful, she wanted to be righteous.

“They blamed me for what happened to Margarey Tyrell.”

“You didn’t do that.”

“But my father did. He left those caches in the city to blow it up. I let Olenna die because I didn’t go after Cersei soon enough.” He grabs her head as she starts sink into the mire of her raging thoughts. Forcing her to look into his dark eyes.

“Listen to me. You are not your father. And listen. Sansa… Sansa loved Margarey. And Olenna. They saved her. We’re going to Avenge them. We are going to bring them justice. And we are going to capture this warhead tomorrow so it never happens again. Okay?”

She nods and listens sinking into her hold on him. Letting the truth of his words sink into her bones. She believes him. She believes him with every fiber of her being.

“Do you know how to disarm someone whose holding a pistol to your head?” he asks in a low voice as she quieted, unwrapping her from his arms. She shook her head against his chest as she pulled away, wiping her eyes.

From his belt, he pulls one of his pistols from its holster and removes the magazine and hands the gun to her as he tucks the clip into the back pocket of his pants. His hands are on her shoulder and he positions her arms length from him.
“Right...Hold the gun to my head” he says after adjusting his stance. It takes a moment before she realizes what's going on. He's going to show her. She inhales sharply, regaining her composure and draws herself up and focuses his face between the small marker of the sights. He doesn’t flinch at the barrel in face.

“Like this?” she asks. He nods.

“Now your going to take your opposite hand, and grab the arm here...” He places his hand on her arm a few inches below her wrist. “and push your attacker’s arm away from you..” His hand gently pushes her arm to the side. “And at the same time your going to bring your other hand around, and knock the gun the opposite way.” Daenerys watches his hands intently as he does it slowly twice more. “I’m gonna do it for real now.” he warns. “Ready...?”

“Are you?” she smirks and the scar across his eye lines up with sights and the gun is out of her hands and on the ground in a flash and his hand has her wrist in a secure grip.

“Then, of course I could just...” he hooks a leg behind hers and she’s off balance and gripping onto him as she starts to tumble. But he has broad smile on his face as he catches her and returns her to her feet. She can’t stop the same smile from splitting her face.

“That was an awful trick Jon Snow.” she mocks playfully.

“Aye. I’m disarming an opponent...” he bends to retrieve the gun from where it flew from her hand, giving her the opportunity to stare at the way his pants frame his ass. If he had intended the words to have a double meaning, he didn’t act like it. “Want to give it a try?” he asks. She nods and he waits for her ready her stance.

Then the gun is in her face and she swipes across at him and the gun falls.

“Good. You’ve got speed to do it and that's the most important part.” he encourages, picking it up “This time though...” He moves their hands back to the point where she had grabbed him to begin the disarm. “Don’t put your hand so close to my wrist and don’t wrap your thumb around... Cause see than I can...” His wrist rolls beneath her hand and the movement puts an uncomfortable pressure at the juncture of her thumb. “...Break your thumb.” He corrects her grip on his arm and then returns to the start. “Try again.”

The gun is in her face again, and she’s more careful about about where and how her hand lands on his arm. But she sacrificed speed for accuracy. He bends to grab the gun once more and they do it again. And again. And again. And Again.

Why hadn’t Jorah taught her how to fight? Or Drogo or Daario? Instead they pined over her, begged her not to be reckless, not to put herself in danger. Jorah taught her basic gun safety, and point and shoot marksmanship. Drogo taught her how to ride, but never how to actually use an arakh. Daario... was too busy with himself to teach her much of anything. But nothing like this. Precise demonstrations and explanations, gentle corrections and encouragement, and practice.

At some point, as he pushes her to put more power into the disarm, she realizes what this is and what lies unspoken in the lesson. She didn’t have an option today. Tomorrow she will. He’s giving her a choice.

The gun is in her face and then Jon’s arm is in her grip and the gun is on the ground... and he is just beaming at her with pride. “Aye. You got it.” She’s staring in his eyes and Daenerys doesn’t let go of his arm, so he uses her grip to pull her closer to him.
Her breath catches as her weight shifts to keep her balanced with the movement. And for a moment, it feels like she’s in high towers in Mereen again. The opulence of the city below her as she stands at the very edge of the balcony in her suites. Wondering if she’ll fall.

Jon leans into her and presses a kiss to her forehead. “Wash up, put on some clean clothes.” he pointed off to the right “Our camp’s over there. We have better food than rations” he smirked as if he has a secret. “Tormund has some strong drink. And…” he pulls out some rolls of hash out out a pocket, and she laughs “I got these. You’ll feel normal in a bit. I promise.”

She nods and exhales. He brushed his hand across the side of her face, letting it linger for a moment, before walking away.

And…

She fell.

She fell desperately, hopelessly, completely in love with him

It came to her in a rush of understanding. A sudden knowledge. Slowly then all at once. She could feel it in her chest like her heart was breaking and swelling at the same time. Like every moment before she had skidded to a stop in front of him at Winterfell was ever so slightly out of focus, and every moment after was clear and sharp. Like every touch they ever shared was marked into her skin.

She wanted to pull him to her and kiss him till he couldn’t breath. She loved him and he’s... walking away from her.

“Wait…” she called. He turned back and she couldn’t think of anything clever to say and the words she desperately wanted to say were caught in her swollen heart. “What's for dinner?” she asked.

He chuckled.

“Something Gendry caught.”
“So... “ Tormund starts, lewdly licking gator grease off his lips “Have you stolen the Dragon Queen yet, Jon Snow?”
The fire crackled between them. It felt so good after travelling the Riverlands without one. Armor and equipment all laid out in circle around the pit, attempting to burn out any rust that may be building after more than one swim and the adventure with the gator.

Its tail was skewered with a spit and hung above the fire, sizzling and crackling as fat dripped down off of it.

Tormund demanded they take it.

He said no, citing how they needed to travel on foot and that they still had things to do today and they didn't need to carry an extra 50 pounds of weight while scouting.

Beric casually mentioned that the meat tastes amazing.

Arya and Jorah agreed.

Gendry shrugged and said something along the lines of ‘what’s the point of catching a fish if you aren’t going to eat it.’

He relented.

Clegane called them all “a bunch of cunts” and chopped its tail off and slung it over his shoulder.

And that was the end of that.

Luckily, they made it to the Rendezvous before it started to rot, and they left Gendry to make camp while they scouted. He had been injured, and had tried to hide it. It wasn’t serious. But around mile three of their hike to the Rendezvous he started limping. So he sat out the scrambling through rocks part of the mission.

“What in the seven hells is that?” Tyrion exclaimed as he handed him the earpiece.

“Dinner.” he explained as it was the easiest thing in the world.

“Don’t take offense if I decline to join you”

“Who said you were invited?” Arya chimed from behind him as she hopped up onto the Truck that they would take for the last leg of their mission.

He runs his hands through his wet hair as he settles back against a large boulder. Gendry had picked a good spot and he felt… good. Relaxed. He had taken his own advice for once and did all the things he told Dany to do to feel normal again. Washed up. Changed clothes. He hoped she didn’t take it as patronizing.

She was shaking, her movements edgy. The adrenaline wearing off and forcing her to crash internally.

Jon knows that feeling. He knows it all too well. He’d had it after the Wall, alone in his bunk as puked his guts out and sobbed endlessly; after Hardhome, sitting on floor of the boat, Willa and Joanna tucked between him and Tormund as they stared at each other in dumb horror; After he almost killed Ramsay, mud and blood and dirt and gore dripping off him, circling the drain of the shower.

It fucks with a person. The guilt. The failure. The helplessness.

The oppressive realization that all this death meant absolutely nothing, and that there is nothing to be
“You steal alot of girls up North.” Clegane snarled. Fuck he’s in a bad mood. He’s always in a bad mood. But usually he just grunts.

“It doesn’t mean that.” Jon intervened. “It basically means getting married among the FreeFolk”

“It also means the other thing too…” Tormund interjected “Fucking.” Jon groaned. “So now I’ll repeat my question. Jon Snow, Did ya fuck the Dragon Girl or not?” He doesn’t answer, only takes out the small block of wood from his pack and starts carving along the underside.

Tormund shakes his head at his deliberate avoidance of the question and turns to Arya. “What do you think little wolf?”

His sister crosses her legs and leans forward, hands under her chin, elbows on her knees. Scrutinizing him.

“No.” she concludes flatly.

“Are you sure, Little Wolf?” Tormund asks again.

She sits up right, linking her fingers together and stretching them towards the sky, palms up. “Most definitely.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he asks in mock offense.

“How do you know” Gendry asks. Leaning in.

“Well… “ She twists left and he can hear her spine pop. “Some tells are universal and regarding this specific…” she jerks the opposite direction sharply and there’s another line of pops along her spine. “topic… all men are the same.”

“There’s no way that’s true.” the young man shakes his head. She shrugs and stretches one arm back over her shoulder and one arm under and around her back, hands meeting and clasping, and she juts her chest forward to pull and loosen the muscles in her shoulder.

“Tormund have you fucked Brienne?” she asks, reversing the stretch. A look crosses the wildlings face before fading quickly in a burst a laughter.

“See.”

“Holy fucking shit.” Gendry exclaims.

Beric drops a bundle of firewood in the space between Clegane and where all their packs are stacked. “What’s going on?”

“They’re trying to find out if Jon has gone all the way with the Daenerys.” Gendry answers.

“Oh…” the one eyed man tossed a new log on the fire. “Well try and hold off a few more days Commander. I have a bet with Davos that I would very much like to win.”

“What?” his neck twinges at how fast he whipped his head up to Beric.

“Wait? What did he bet you?” Tormund asked.

“A half pound of Tobacco.”
“Fuck. Thats a good one.” he took a nip of his flask.

“Brienne got him to stake five overnight guard shifts.” Beric continued. “A solid week of sleep, can you imagine?”

“I only bet one” Gendry complains.

“No risk, No reward.” Arya tsk’d, putting the soles of her feet together and pressing down on her knees.

“Is everybody in on this?” he hates the almost squeak in his voice.

“It got so bad Davos couldn’t keep it all together and Sansa had to make a chart.” Clegane growls.

“Sansa…” he mouthed silently. The hound nodded seriously.

“He even got some of her people. The curly haired girl…”

“Missandei.” Arya corrects.

“Missandei” he stumbles through the name “bet 10 yards of silk.” he points at Jon violently “I’m only telling you this because Sansa fucking wants it, and she won’t shut the fuck about it. I don’t give a shit about your fucking love life.”

“I’m not going to…” he gestured, desperately trying not to say it. “so Sansa can get some fucking silk”

“So you haven’t yet.” Beric teased.

“Told you.” Arya lilted.

“Fuck me. I’m out” Tormund threw his hands up in the air.

“Me too” Gendry groaned.

“I can’t believe this.” he could feel heat creeping up his neck.

“So…is it like winner take all then… Like who ever wins gets six nights off, and the tobacco, and the silk?” Gendry asked.

“More like three weeks off.” Clegane answered. “And a bunch of coin, guns, A bear pelt.”

Tormund was roaring with laughter. “Remember Jon Snow. Wet as a baby seal”

“Gross.” Arya cringed.

“That may be the worst metaphor for it, I’ve heard in my life.” Beric exclaimed.

“Least my Pecker’s not small.”

“Gross” his sister repeats.

“That smells amazing.” she sighs behind them, and he turns to see her stepping into the circle, escorted by Jorah. She nods a greeting to everyone.

“Allow me to get you some Khaleesi.”
She looked down to him. Her violet eyes were deeper tonight. “May I join you?” she smiled. He couldn't help but smile back. All the earlier embarrassment forgotten. He began to move but she toed his leg with her boot so he spread them wide and she sat in the center, her back leaning against his chest.

Jorah passed her the skewer with a hearty cut on it. She tore into it. “Gods. I’m so hungry.” she exclaimed. “What is it?” The others laughed.

“Alligator” he answered her, slipping an arm across her hip. She looked at him in shock then turned to Gendry.

“You caught this?” she asked. The boy laughed.

“No ma’am, I was just bait.”

“I killed it” Arya announced proudly.

“You slowed it down… I killed it” Tormund countered.

“The Little Wolf killed it you dumb cunt.” Clegane growled.

“Well I would have killed it. But Jon was squirmin ‘round under it. Didn’t want to knock his pretty little head off.”

She giggled and took another huge bite of the beast, shifting in his lap to see him more easily as she chewed.

“And what were you doing under it?

“Trying t’ keep my pretty little head from getting bit off”

“I’m grateful” she teased flicking a stringy bit of tendon into the fire.

“Oh come on, Jon. You have to make it sound better than that.” Beric began rolling a cigarette. “You were wrestling the alligator. For sport. Glory and Honor and all that.”

“No hedging your bets” Arya snapped.

Daenerys turned to look at his sister then back up to him, one of her eyebrows arching in confusion. He shrugged. She returned the gesture and smiled and took another vicious bite out of the meat. He relaxed a bit and enjoyed the feel of her against him. Warm and perfect.

“I once ate a stallion heart you know…” he craned his neck around to see adventure sparkling in her violet eyes “…Raw and still beating…”

“Gross.” Arya echoes.

“Beating is a bit of an exaggeration, Khaleesi.”

“Fine... Raw and gushing” She gestures with both hands, making semi-circle in front of her torso indicating an overflow.

“And why in seven hells would you do somethin like that?”

“Its part of being the Khaleesi…” she took another bite than covered her mouth apologetically as she quickly chewed and swallowed “In Vaes Dothrak, I had to eat it in front of the Dosh Khaleen”.
foreign words rolled off her tongue in a rough melody. “to prove that I would be a good strong wife and bear good strong sons…” she sighed and paused.

But not a moment later her eyes brightened up. “...And so they killed a Stallion and cut out its heart and handed it to me and… I ate it while they chanted at me. It's something to do with Horsepower and blood” she licked some of the gator grease off her thumb.

He shifted slightly behind her giving himself an inch or so between his zipper and the small of her back.

“That’s mad.” Beric remarked.

“It’s true. I saw her do it.” Jorah replied.

“How old were you?” he asked.

She hmm’d and looked up at the stars as she chewed and seemingly searched for the answer. “...six and ten…?” she looked to Jorah.

“It was just before your name day.” he confirmed for her.

“So what does a Khaleesi do?”

“While the Khal is alive…Not much.” she said it far too casually. “But after he dies, you join the *Dosh Khaleen* and make other girls eat stallion hearts.”

“Did you make some poor girl eat one of those?” he teased. She shook her head, silver hair sliding against his skin.

“No…” she smiled with fire behind her eyes “I am the Khal now.” she said it slowly. With resolve and confidence and satisfaction. Like she savored saying it.

“What did it taste like?” Gendry asked.

“Have you ever eaten horse?”

Gendry shook his head. “Maybe, No-one really knows what goes into the hotpots in Fleabottom”

“Rat” Arya murmurs “Pigeon…” Then she wiggles her fingers spider-like in the boy’s face “...People”

“There’s no people in the HotPots in FleaBottom” Beric answered. “That’s just a rumor.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that.” Clegane replied. “We arrested an awful lot of sick fucks.”

“Is it truely so bad” Daenerys asked sadly, throwing her empty skewer into the fire and settling deeper into his hold. His other arm slid through hers to meet the other around her waist. She shifted, tucking her head against his shoulder, one of her hands absently drifting up to scratch at his beard.

“Yes.”

“No.” Beric countered.

“See Jon.. At least the fuckin’ Thenns were open about their Cannibalism. They didn’t hide it. You knew not to eat with them.” Tormund said.
“The Thenns did not eat people. It was just The Lord of Bones and his little band of assholes.” he explained to Daenerys who was looking up at him wide eyed. “Who are now dead.”

“He’s dead?” Jorah cocked his head to the side. “My father was after him for years.”

“Dead and burned.” Tormund announced. “Took care of it ourselves. Didn’t need crows to solve our problems for us.”

“If I’m rememberin’ correctly, I was the one that killed him. So I think you needed at least one.”

“Oh you cocky fuck, of course you think you were the one who killed him”

Daenerys started laughing, and he reluctantly takes his hands off her waist to count out his points. “Val was fighting the Thenns. Sixskins was doing his Eagle thing. Wun-Wun was down. We rushed him. Ygritte dashed right, Ghost came up behind her and broke left. And when he was distracted, I killed him. I don’t remember where the fuck you were”

“Takin a piss” The wildling laughed pulling a flask out of his pocket and tossed it to Gendry.

“Six people on one man.” Beric chided.

“Six people and a wolf.” Daenerys chirped, her hands pulling his back down to her waist drawing them them tightly around herself. The flash of anger that had welled up dying instantly, as she tilted her head and smiled up at him.

“Still... not very sporting Commander”

“The Lord of Bones was no joke.” Jorah answered. “He was responsible for some devastating raids. Slaughtered a whole town once. What made Mance want to go after him?”

“Attacked one of our comms.” Tormund answered. “We had a treaty. We’d leave each other alone until it was time to make our run at the Wall. Winter came. Resources went short. The other Thenns wanted someone else in charge... He broke the treaty. And so we broke him.”

That was part of it. The truth is… a lot more complicated.

Gendry passed the flask to Arya.

“Nope” he tried to use his commander’s voice. But it's hard to sound stern with a stupid fucking grin on his face. But he couldn't push it down, he was holding the most beautiful woman in the world.

“Oh let her drink, Jon” Tormund bellowed.

“Let me...” she said incredulously. “I’m eighteen. He doesn’t let me do anything.”

“We have a fight tomorrow. I can’t focus if I’m worried you're hungover.”

“You let Tormund drink and fight.”

“I prefer him to drink and fight.” he felt Daenerys’ bright laughter vibrate through her back into his chest. It was perfect. Her hair smelled...amazing under his chin. Her fingers gently tracing the bones of his hand against her waist.

Arya defiantly took a drink and then went for another before Clegane snatched it from her.

“Your brother’s right little wolf.” Arya snarled at him and snapped her teeth at his hand.
The drink circled to Beric who passed it Daenerys. She took a drink before handing it over her shoulder to him. He took a long drink and then tossed it over the fire to Tormund.

It was the stuff the Free Folk made from the wild blackberries beyond the wall. He had been Nineteen? Twenty? When he got his first taste with Tormund and Ygritte when he was their prisoner. Well, prisoner in name only.

He planted as many bushes as he could back at Winterfell, but they took up too much space in the glass gardens so he could only put in a few before they started to take up space that needed to go to food. When summer comes, if they make it to summer… he’ll plant more and at least this part of the Free Folk will live on.

Maybe when all this is over he and Dany could…he stopped himself and let out an exhale.

What kind of future could he even give her? She’s the future of Westeros and he was an honorable man’s bastard. It was foolish to ask for anything more than this… to want anything more than this.

Her head drops back against his shoulder and her forehead into the hollow of his throat. Giving a contented sigh.

The lull of warm fire, and full bellies, and a few nips of strong drink settles over them and her hand returns up to scratch at his beard again.

This is enough.

“How far South are we?” Tormund asks.

“Compared to What?”

“Tarth?”

“Tarth is on the other side of the Continent. And farther south. And an island”

“Brienne hates you.” Arya shook her head at him.

“I see the way she looks at me.”

“Like she wants to carve you up and eat your liver?” Clegane added.

“I want to make babies with her. Think of them. Great big monsters.” He spread his arms wide and puffed out his chest “They’ll conquer the world.”

There was a roar of laughter around the fire. Her head was thrown back into him as she clamped both hands over her mouth to stifle how hard she was laughing.

“I can’t wait to meet these monsters Tormund.” she said.

He waved her away, embarrassed. “Ah it's all good fun. It’ll never happen.” he looked into the fire, and his face became somber. “The little wolf's right. She hates me. But I owe her a great debt”

“And what’s that?” Beric asked.

“She killed Stannis Baratheon.”

The Free Folk Army had beaten them. They had broken through the wall. And suddenly he was kneeling in the mud holding Ygritte’s lifeless body in his arms. He was ready to die. Ready to join
her. Her and his brother and his father and the rest of his family. He had believed they were all dead.

But when death came. It didn’t come for him. It came in fucking tanks, painted with the fiery heart of the Coming Dawn. It came with thousands of men. It came with guns and bulletproof vests. It came with a righteous fury. It came as a solemn man dressed in dark grey, and a Rad-Witch in deep red.

He can still hear the FreeFolk screaming as The Coming Dawn massacred them. The pain started in his chest again as his heartbeat sped up.

“Fuck Stannis” Gendry said. “Asshole wanted to burn me alive.”

“Quit whinging” Clegane rumbled

“Sorry about that lad” Beric replied, as he finished rolling his cigarette and lighting it. “We backed the wrong man.”

“Did you serve the Coming Dawn?” Daenerys asked the one eyed man. He shook his head.

“No. I serve R'hllor. The Red Woman said she needed him, Stannis seemed to be the only one fighting for something more than a fucking throne. He was fighting for life.”

Tormund grumbled. “Life. That man didn’t give two shits about life.”

How many had escaped to Hardhome after Stannis massacred their army? Two thousand… Less… maybe? How many had he been able to save from Hardhome? Seven hundred…ish… How many were left after they reclaimed the North?…Not enough.

They were good people, there were a few exceptions, but… they just wanted to be safe. To escape and survive. He had let their people slip through his fingers. He had lived among them. He had a life with them. A love. A bedroll next to hers to call home. Meals around a fire so very much like this one.

He had to close his eyes and lean back against the rock as the pain became sharp and focused in his chest. A knife, sliding past his heart. He was trying to breathe through it. His jaw clenched and he exhaled as slowly as he could manage. Desperately trying to push out the pain.

Her hand slipped around his and her thumb began to rhythmically glide across his knuckles. Scarred knuckles. Scarred from nearly beating a man to death with his bare hands.

But her thumb was there, softly blurring the hard edges of the pain so at the very least he could breathe again.

He opened his eyes and she was looking at him. Concern and sympathy filling her lavender eyes. She smiled sadly, but he couldn’t return it. He had broken out in a cold sweat and it was getting harder to disguise how hard he was breathing.

Beric’s good eye examining him cautiously. “Breathe.” he mouthed as he stoked the flames and a rush of air threw bright orange embers into the air, glittering around them. And for a moment her silver hair was kissed by fire.

She died in the mud.

She died in the fucking mud.

He let go of her hand, and tapped his leg. Understanding the request, but not the cause, she shifted
out his lap. He stood slowly, his hand rubbing his chest.

“He even burned the trees” Tormund continued. “Called them unholy abominations. Those trees mean somethin’. I don’t care what faith you follow. Whether you believe they’re the gods or not. Those trees mean something.” Jon moved around the rock and began pacing in small tight circles. Energy and Rage crackling off him. Beric’s eye following him.

He tries.

He really tries.

But his heart’s pounding. The pain had spread in a jagged bolt through his chest and was creeping down his abdomen to each of the other angry red scars that refused to fade.

The night was still and dark. They were in the Westerlands, in a rocky outcrop along the buttes that wall off Casterly Rock from the rest of Westeros.

But he can feel snow in his hair, warm blood running down his arm, cold mud around his knees. Hear gunfire, and explosions and screams and the crackle of ancient wood that could have been older than the Targaryen dynasty.

“Commander?” Beric asks knowingly.

“There was nothing I could do!” he roared at the fire. He didn’t realize how loud he was or how low and deadly he sounded. But he felt the wolf in his voice.

He felt the eyes on him. Her’s. Jorah’s. Gendry’s. Arya’s. The others stared straight ahead into the fire. They knew… They knew what this felt like.

“She knows, Jon” Tormund said quietly, not looking up.

“I’m walking the perimeter” he announced. Blinking back tears.

He picked up his rifle and slung it over his shoulder. Her sad eyes followed him as he walked away.
It was the same expression as that night before the Barn caught fire. Hurt and Horror and Guilt and just… pain.
Dany doesn’t need to ask who ‘she’ is. His wildling wife. The one who died.

There’s a flash of jealousy, but the pain on in his face smothers that spark of green before it can light anything.

And then he’s walking away.

Arya moves to follow, but Clegane grabs her wrist.

“Let him be.”

“But.”

“Trust us, Little Wolf.” Tormund adds.

“He’s my brother…”

“Aye. We know. Give him some time to screw his head back on straight. If he doesn’t come back in an hour, we’ll got get him.”

There’s silence around the fire for a long moment as the girls eyes dart to Daenerys. There are questions she recognizes in her dark eyes, eyes that are so very much like Jons.

Will he be alright? What should I do? How do I help him?

A little girl who’s afraid to lose her brother again. If only she knew how afraid he was to lose her.

So she clears her throat and smiles as warm as she can, doing her best to reassure the most dangerous young woman in the world.

“Tormund is right, Arya. Don’t…” she pauses and sighs because she can’t tell her not to worry. Not when her own stomach is in so many knots, she’ll never be able to untwist them all. “Patience is the wisest course”

Across the fire, Beric nods approvingly. Gods if only she believed her own words. But the Little Wolf seems to, and hesitantly sits back down with cautious looks around at the others.

Shell Shock.

Her only experience with it is second hand stories from Daario. A far too casual remark about a suicide in his ranks. A number buried in a report on the status of her troops. Complaints about the older mercenaries slowly going mad.

“Sometimes a man has seen too much war, Daenerys.” her captain shrugged “There’s nothing to be done about it.”

Too much war.

Too much horror.

Too much loss.

Too much death.

“Too bad all this Gator’s gonna go to waste” Clegane grumbles.
There must be something that can be done.

“With you permission, I’ll take the remainder to my Kos.” She stands carefully, not betray the wobble that three days hard riding has left in her legs. They nod their approval. “Sgt. Dondarrion, will you accompany Jorah and I?”

“Your wish is my command, your grace.” He and Jorah cut and skewer the remaining portions of the meat and begin walking with her toward the other campsites as she bids the others a good night. “I take it, you didn’t request my company because you enjoy it, your grace.”

“I enjoy your company a great deal, however, you are correct. You died and were resurrected six times, am I remembering correctly?”

“You have a sharp mind, your grace”

“If I may ask, What are the side effects you have experienced?”

He pauses, and looks up at the sky with his good eye.

“If I overstep…”

“Not at all, your grace. It just takes a moment.”

She waits, Jorah standing alongside her.

“There are times, when my body reminds me that it died.” he unbuttons the top few buttons of his jacket and tugs down a scarf so that she can see his throat. There’s a vicious red/purple scar all around it. “I can feel my neck snapping. My lungs burning. The noose getting tighter and tighter the more I struggled.” he touches the back of his head. “I can hear my skull breaking.” He taps various places on his chest. “Bullets punching through me. Like its happening… Like its happening right now.”

“And your mind” Jorah asks.

“I forget things. Though…I’m not sure if that’s the…uh.” he taps the back of his head. “Or if it’s just part of coming back.” He smiles despite the gravity of the topic.

“How do you cope, Ser?”

“I have my faith, my friends… and my purpose. I am soldier, your grace, and I fight for life. Death is the enemy. The first enemy. And the last.”

“Valar Morghulis.” she answers, understanding.

“And all men must serve. While Death threatens us, I will fight him, and I will serve those who fight him”

“And if we defeat him…”

“If I survive… “ he looks thoughtfully back at the camp, eyes settling on Arya. “I once served Westeros. Special Forces. My last orders were from that young woman’s father. I was to bring Gregor Clegane to Justice for his war crimes. If R’hillor lets me, I will complete the mission Eddard Stark set out for me.”

She nods and lets her hands hang low on her belly, thumbs tapping together. Justice. Now there’s a thought. There is something she can do.
“I thank you for your service, Sergeant and your wisdom.”

“My Queen,” he presses his fist to his sternum in a salute, and tips his head. She returns the gesture, and the one eyed man returns to his compatriots.

“We should get this to your captains, Khaleesi.” Jorah urges, holding up one of skewers, after she spent a long moment lost in thought. “Before the bugs come for it.”

They find Qhono celebrating with her Kos. There isn’t a great deal of meat left, but what is left is far better fare than trail rations. They greet her with cheers and more drink. Two riders jump on bikes and begin to race, the screech of tires splitting the night air. Qhono and her place bets as they watch.

“I like this place, Khaleesi.” he admits, a huge boyish smile splitting his face.

“This place? Or Westeros?”

“Both, but I speak of this place. When we destroy our enemies, It will be a good place to live, the Khalasar will thrive. You saw all the scrap, wasting away… We can build great machines here.” Then his face falls. “But… I do not think Alys will leave her home with the Wolves.

That surprises her. They’ve known each other… A few weeks? A month. Less than she has known, Jon. Her eyes travel back to the campsite, and she counts five bodies.

There should be six.

“Are you considering taking a wife?” he laughs.

“I remember when the Khal said we would come across the Poison Water. After the hrazef zhor. I thought, ‘I will take myself a pink wife too…’ Though I did not think one would hunt me.”

“If she accepts we will have a great celebration. It will be a wonderful thing for our people.” he smiles.

“The Wolves are like us. Their women are strong. Their young ones fierce. But their old men…” he clicks his tongue disapprovingly.

The riders zip back around, completing their circuit and Qhono lets out whooping cry and holds out his hand for his winnings. She sighs and flicks a coin at him. He playfully bites it, testing its value by taste.

*The Dosh Khaleen have said we will build a new Vaes Dothrak here.* he announces tossing it up in the air and catching it. *It is known.*

*It is known* she agrees.

“You’re grace…” Tyrion looks surprised to see her. In all honesty, she’s surprised to be here. “I figured you would be enjoying your victory.”

“It is not a victory yet.”

“Well we should celebrate every accomplishment.” The Command Tent is not much more than a handful of poles arranged in a cube connected by Zip-Ties and Tarp. The communication equipment takes up two of the ‘walls.’ while a flimsy table with flimsier chairs occupy the remaining space. He offers her a seat, and a drink. She takes one, but not the other. “I had hoped to apologize for my earlier actions. I was hasty, in disapproving of your actions with the Tarly’s.”
“It is your job to question my decisions Tyrion. If we saw eye to eye on everything, you would be useless to me.”

“And you to me, your grace.” He takes a long drink. “How may I serve?”

She lets a deep breath out her nose in slow stream as she slides the offered drink over to Jorah.

“I seek your counsel.” her hands fold on her lap. “I wish to find the Red-Witch, Melisandre, and bring her to Justice for the murder of Shireen Baratheon, and for war crimes committed against the FreeFolk.”

Tyrion tilts his head. “You never fail to surprise me, my queen.”

“You agree then.”

“Well…” he hisses through his teeth and stands and begins to pace with hands behind his back, thinking. The wheels visibly turning in his clever mind. She can already see it. He disagrees. He already has a bullet pointed list of all the reasons why he disagrees, why she’s wrong.

“…Justice is a funny thing, your grace… its definition shifts based on the person administering it.. Lt. Commander Mormont seeks justice for Jorah’s past crimes. My sister, in her twisted way, believes that she performed Justice when she destroyed Highgarden because of Olenna’s part in my nephew’s murder, because she supported you, because she was a traitor.”

“I don’t know what happened at the Wall.” he continues. “And I don’t believe any of us will. The Watch was in chaos, The Wildlings are dead. And the only person who has perspective... the only person who was in command… Fought for both sides. Not only that…But need I remind you that they did attack the Wall, and are responsible for the deaths of thousands of Northerners over the past few decades.”

The Night’s Watch and The FreeFolk.. Two groups of raiders, each convinced their cause was righteous. And somewhere in the middle of it all was Jon. He had fought on both sides. Lost people on both sides...died trying to unite both sides.

“You have a heart for the oppressed. It is one of the things, I admire about you. But as you well know, even those who are downtrodden must face justice as well.”

She does know.

There was a young man in Mereen, Mossador, a freed slave. Her justice wasn’t good enough for him… And he sought his own.

He cried her name, even as the axe fell, even as his head separated from his body. She could even hear it after. Whispering up at her from where his head lay on the stone.

She does know.

“They were at War, Stannis won.” Tyrion continues. “Winning a battle is not a crime, no matter how… terrible the cost. Otherwise… You would be criminal for what you did today.”

“What about the murder of Shireen Baratheon?”

“That is even more complicated…” he takes another drink. “According to Sansa’s records, Commander Snow passed summary judgement, exiling her from the Independent North, with the threat of execution if she ever returns.”
“You reviewed Sansa’s records?”

“All the one’s she’s not hiding.” he sits in his chair. “You cannot make a person stand trial for the same crime twice. To reopen this matter, is to invite a dozen more matters to be reopened, not mention make it look like you doubt Commander Snow’s and Ms. Stark’s judgement, as they are our allies, and friends and...” he casts he a side-along glance. “...more.”

That angers her.

“I am not here to play the game, I am here to end it.” she snarls

He lets out a long exhale through his nose. “If we find her... What will you do?”

“I will meet injustice with justice.”

His jaw twitches, and he pulls his lips tight, carefully considering her words. Carefully considering his next words. How will he get her this time? A long winded history lesson? A meticulously structured series of call and response rhetorical questions and answers?

She wanted Jon. Jon who spoke plainly. Who said what he meant. Who couldn’t lie by will or by skill. When they spoke, she didn’t feel manipulated or led. The natural pauses in their conversation were not chess matches spent planning your next move. She could just talk...

He drums his fingers on the flimsy table before starting.

“Ellaria Sand killed my niece, Myrcella. She was a good girl. A sweet thing, gentle hearted, brave, dutiful. A true princess. Will that injustice be met with justice?” he asks, without expecting an answer. “The Greyjoys. Both of them. Theon murdered two boys. Yara is a reaver who, before joining your cause, was one of the most notorious pirates on the Narrow Sea. Will they face justice?”

“Ellaria Sand and Yara Greyjoy are captives of our enemies.” her tone is flat, hopefully he’ll forget about Theon.

The side of the Dwarf’s mouth quirks because of course he didn’t forget.

“I murdered my father and my former lover before escaping to Essos, Will I face Justice? Someone...probably Sansa... arranged for the murder of every male member of the Frey family. Who knows how many were innocent of the Red Wedding? Will they face justice?” he pauses...caution flickering in his eyes for a moment before dropping his final point.

“Jon Snow... left the Night’s Watch and fought for the FreeFolk for nearly four years before returning to the watch. In the Watch, as in any Westerosi military organization, desertion is punishable by death. Will he be required to face justice?”

She feels the muscles of her jaw harden and set. Her molars locking together in her mouth. Her shoulders tightening and pulling her head fully upright. The chair creaks as he shuffles off of it to begin to pace

“It’s in his service record.” he explains. “Of course, I am not suggesting we pursue any of these courses of actions. I am merely suggesting, that perhaps...” he pivots in his pacing. “These injustices are of a rather small scale. Cersei keeps hundreds of thousands of people living in destitution to fulfill her own goals. Euron Greyjoy will rape and reave along the coasts with the full support of the Crown. The Iron Bank will do anything to dispose of you in order to return Essos’ Economy to one based on the Slave Trade. Qyburn will continue to experiment on living humans, mostly poor, mostly children.”
She draws a sharp inhale through her nose. Remembering the needles and machines in the House of the Undying. Her hand absently rubs the crook of her elbow, rubbing the blue vein they pulled her blood from.

“Not to mention of course the Undead…”

“Freedom and Justice are two sides of the same coin… One cannot exist without the other.” She repeats the words she spoke that day in the Great Glass Pyramid of Meereen.

Tyrion nods along.

“High Minded Ideals, that sound good, but are only that... ideas. Your father believed he was administering justice with every person he burned. From the cooks he believed were poisoning him to the Stark’s grandfather and uncle. What makes justice… justice is…” He pauses. “I actually don’t know. But I know it when I see it.”

It’s a lot to think on and she lets’ out a sigh.

“I still want you find the Red Witch. Whatever I decide, I want her watched.”

“I agree wholeheartedly, your grace. When we return to Winterfell, I will have Varys look into her.” he takes another drink. “He’s probably already tracking her. He likes to keep track of all the... interesting people.”

Some equipment squeals high pitched and annoying.

“You have a loose wire.” she comments.

“I’ve undone and redone the whole thing twice and I can’t seem to find it.”

She hmmms.

“Is there any possibility that I can be mic’d tomorrow? I didn’t like being limited to only Yes/No questions”

“If you can find a way to make a thousand motorcycle engines more quiet then yes…”

“Will we be able to communicate with the Strike team?”

“Unlikely. They’ll be under ground. We’ll be able to communicate once they resurface. Speaking of which…” he ducks down and pulled a small tangle of wires. “Please remind him to come get these tomorrow, if you see him of course… I wouldn’t want to presume.” he said the last part like it was a question.

She doesn't respond to that.

“Thank you for your counsel Tyrion. You’ve given me much to think on.”

“Always, your grace.”

Jorah escorted her back to her camp. A supply truck with a bedroll across the back seat.

She had intended for different company to walk her back to the truck. She had imagined feigning a yawn, and asking him to escort her, breaking off from their companions and taking his hand as they walked. Then not letting go when she opened the door and...if he was willing...pulling him inside and spending the night watching him come undone beneath her.
But the disappointment she feels is overwhelmed by heartbreak and rage. He had been smiling and laughing with their friends. With her. Holding her, and whispering in her ear. Looking at her with deep dark eyes until….

She had felt him change against her. It started with a wince and the sound of air getting sucked through his teeth.

“Does it hurt?” she had asked back at Winterfell at his bedside. After he told her about how he died.

“All the time…”

She loves him, and she helpless to help him.

“Khaleesi…” Jorah starts.

“Yes, Jorah.”

“I see what you are trying to do, and I think it is admirable.”

“But?”

“I don’t think closure exists for a tragedy of such magnitude.”

There were so few of the Free Folk left, The group at Winterfell, the group at the Wall, Gilly and Little Sam. A fierce, smart little girl who was born to lead, and another with a gentle heart full of an infectious sort of love that can break even the hardest of men.

“Justice for the FreeFolk is the only thing I can offer. It is the only thing I can do that could help him.”

“You can’t help, Khaleesi…” Jorah shakes his head sadly. “I know that you may… mistrust my motives in regards to Jon Snow. And I have earned it, but I speak honestly.” She brings her feet together and he stops beside her. “You can support, you can listen, you can comfort, but you cannot fix him. And it is going to get worse, before it gets better.” Her shoulders drop under the weight of his words as she looks out into the night. “War haunts men, You don’t just fight it once… you fight it your whole life.”

“And our war is just beginning…” she completes the thought, biting her lip to fight back the tears threatening to spill. The horizon seems empty and void as she searches it for sign from gods she doesn’t believe in. Or perhaps she’s just looking for him. “I cannot sit here and do nothing, while the man I love is in pain.”

The confession spills out of her lips unbidden. And she gasps, because it's real now. She’s said it out loud and put them into the world. Jorah only smiles that sad smile again.

“You are not doing nothing, Daenerys. You are following the advice you gave young Miss Stark, You are being patient. Grief is… Grief takes time.” He gently places a hand on her shoulder and begins to walk, a small tug to start them back towards her camp. “Does he know?” she shakes her head. “He deserves to. The love of a good woman is a good motivator when you are fighting for your life.”

A cold breeze blew down from the North, and she shivered. She needed more Winter Clothes. Especially since they will be more or less stationed at Winterfell for the coming months. Oh how she missed her flimsy silks.
She would be able to distract Jon from his pain with those. Especially... that one. It’s a terrible thought, A selfish thought and she bites her tongue to chastise herself for it as she opens the door with the Red Three Headed Dragon spray painted on the side, and pulls herself up into the truck. Its one of the Unsullied’s, polished, black, and bulletproof. Unlike the rusty, pickups up of North, decades old and half scrap. Once her Dothraki join them up there, she’ll have them repair all the Northern Front’s vehicles. She can tell the Northerners do their best. But there are no greater mechanics in the world than The Dothraki.

Tyrion had insisted she not sleep out in the open with the rest of Khalasar. Every one of his ideas had been rejected, so on this small thing she relented. But she is glad as she strips down to her small clothes, a thin tank top and some shorts. She can be comfortable, instead of bundled up in a tent fighting the cold breeze. Her jeans, sweater and boots join her Riding Leathers in the Front Seat of the cab.

Pulling the blanket about her waist, and relaxing back against the seat, she thinks about it all, as she gently tugs out her braid and brushes her hair with her fingers.

Qhono is right, the Westerlands are perfect for the Dothraki, much more so than The Dreadfort could ever be. The Canyon’s and mountain passes give way to wide open spaces. While the land has been strip mined, there are vast scrapyards full of derelict equipment. Most of the settlements they passed through had long warehouses and factories for smelting ore and making usable metal.

It is perfect..

It’s just under Lannister Control and will be for some time. Their objective is to secure the warhead, not take Casterly Rock.

All she has to do is distract their forces. The rest is up to Jon and the others.

Brave Soldiers doing their duty against all odds.

She peers out the window to look at the campsite beyond the ridge. Three Bodies lounging around the fire less than a hundred yards away.

The sight of it shoots a pang of loneliness through her chest.

It had been wonderful. Relaxing in his arms, laughing with his men, sharing his meal, listening to him get protective of his sister.

Perhaps she should join Arya. She’s more mature than his young sister. Better equipped to handle complex emotions, better able to partition her mind to shut down her own feelings and focus on empathizing. More experienced with the larger picture of war.

No.

It’s not her place.

She pulled the blanket up further around her shoulders. It was selfish to want him when he was hurting. Wanting him to ease her own loneliness.

Selfish.

Besides, as Theon said no-one could ever beat him, when Arya’s watching. She can only hope that applies to himself as much as any external foe. So she takes her own advice, tucking her knees up to her chest on the bench. And she waits...
Waits for the sound of heavy footsteps circling behind her truck, then a long pause as a shadow of someone that looked so very much like him slid in front of the tinted glass. Waits for the sound of three sharp knocks against the door. And waits for her heart to start hammering in her chest as she realized she wasn’t dreaming.

Waits a half second before opening the door. And waits as his dark eyes stared deep into hers and for his breath to hitch slightly as he looked at her. Waits another moment before scooting back to give him room to enter. And waits as he pulled himself into the cab and shut the door behind him.

Then she waits no more.
One of the first things his father taught him when they began training was how to disassemble a gun. It's muscle memory now.
It’s a nervous habit.

Click the safety.

Remove the magazine.

He has his recruits compete to see who can get the best time to disassemble and reassemble their sidearms. It’s a game for them.

It’ll be life and death soon.

Remove the slide after confirming the chamber is empty.

Push the String forward to Separate it from the barrel.

Lift out the Barrel

A handful of riders whiz past a few dozen yards from the rock he’s sitting on. The Red dust spirals up in a small cloud and he grunts because what was just a nervous expense of energy is now a chore because he’ll need to clean the parts… again.

He’s taken it apart and put it back together… a half dozen times, since he stopped walking and sat down. He can do it in less than a minute.

A heavy sigh escapes, and he closes his eyes and puts the weapon back together again blind.

As the magazine clicks into place there’s a footstep behind him and he whips around weapon drawn to find his little sister at the other end of his gun.

And he has to swallow hard because… that’s… the most terrifying thing Jon Snow can imagine. The Weapon slides into place in his holster and he checks to make sure Longclaw is still where he left it at his side.

“Don’t sneak up on people.”

She circles around to stand in front of him, silent as always. But there are heavy footfalls coming from behind him and the thought strangles him. He knows why Tormund is here.

“You didn’t have to come. I wouldn’t...”

“We’ve both known men who wouldn’t… Jon.”

He nods, running his fingers through his hair. It feels like he’s been punched in the stomach. “Aye…” the acknowledgement is a whisper. They’ve seen good men snap and hurt themselves. Good Men snap and hurt people.

He’s snapped before. In the end, it had been Tormund who pulled him off Ramsay. Only then did he hear Sansa screaming.

It takes everything he has to meet Arya’s eyes. Deep Brown eyes… so very much like his own. They are darting between him and Tormund as she puts the pieces together. She hadn’t realized that Tormund wasn’t here to be a supportive friend.

That Tormund is here to protect her. In case... he’s the monster he’s afraid he is. In case he’s that thing that nearly beat a man to death with his bare hands.
“You look like father…” she says quietly.

And he scoffs and shakes his head, pushing his fingers into his eyes before sliding them up, over his forehead, through his hair to dig into the flesh at the back of his neck. No… he’s nothing like his father.

She looks very similar to how she had as a young girl. Dark hair, dark eyes so very much like his own. Shoulder length tendrils of hair pulled into a loose knot. But the skinny arms had been replaced by lean ropes of muscle and the constant fidget with the disquieting stillness of a predator. She watched him where he sat. Unmoving.

“You look like him too…”

His little sister blows some air out her nose in a single quiet snort of a laugh, before looking up at the stars, straightening her spine, moving her feet shoulder width apart, clasping her arms behind her back. Steeling herself.

“How is it…that you can be both the most selfish person in the world and the most selfless person in the world at the same time?”

He opens his mouth to say something but… no words come out. There’s nothing to say.

“How can you put yourself at risk again and again and again” She stamps her foot slightly each time she repeats the word “for everyone else and then at the same time be so wrapped up in your own bullshit that you can’t even see what's going on around you?”

“How can you stand in front of everyone and talk about nothing but the War that’s coming, how we all have to drop everything to fight our ‘True Enemy’, When you are still fighting the war in your head?”

“How can you fight for the living if you’re preoccupied with being dead?”

“I’m tryin’ Arya…” he shakes his head as the tears start to fall “I’m tryin’ but…” He hates how thick his voice sounds.

“Everything before the word but is bullshit.” she snaps.

Their father used to say that. All the time. At least once a day to one of his children, or his officers, or his troops. It’s almost funny coming out her mouth. Their father’s words, her voice. He’d laugh if his heart didn’t feel like lead. If the phantom pain of the wounds covering his torso wasn’t mixing with the grief in his stomach to create heavy choking nausea that he can barely keep down. His mouth is salivating… preparing him to retch.

He swallows more of the bile down again.

“It’s complicated Arya. You… You wouldn’t understand.”

She gets angry then. That stiff predatory posture breaking as she begins to huff and pace and shake her head. “I wouldn’t understand.” she mocks. Biting her lip, then bearing her teeth. Taking two long strides one direction before pivoting hard. “I wouldn’t understand” she repeats. Then she squares off with him and she’s in his face before he has the time to prepare for it. “You know NOTHING!” she spits. The familiar words causing something inside him to break. “About what I understand. About the shit I’ve seen. About the shit I’ve done.”

He has to look away and she does too. He looks down at his hands, hands that have been covered in
blood so many times. Ygritte’s Blood. Ramsay’s Blood. She looks to the stars, searching for some unknown thing.

He wouldn’t know what she’s been through. He’s had to pick up pieces from Clegane, and Beric and Brienne. But they only had bits of it. She wouldn’t tell him.

But then again...he didn’t tell her.

“I saw them execute him, Jon!” she yells “I was there. I watched it happen.” she points to Casterly Rock indicating who ‘they’ are. “I watched them murder our father. I watched them drag him out, and force him to his knees and hack his fucking head off. I heard it Jon!”

He knows that sound. He’s executed men. He’s cut off their heads. He can hear it now too. The wet spatter, the breaking bone, the gush of gore. His pinches his eyes shut as he swallows back another wave of bile as the sound connects to the image of his father. It's not just the sound… it's the smell and the sight of it. A body stiffening for a second, then going slack in a dead puddle of flesh contained by skin.

Arya’s pacing becomes less even and more frantic as more words spill out of her.

“At least they had the decency to keep mother’s head where it belongs.” she says it fast and sarcastic but there’s no hiding the panic creeping into her voice. “Not for a lack of trying. Not that it made it any easier to identify her body when I found it in the water a few days after the Red Wedding… Have you ever seen a body that’s been sitting in water for days?”

Bloated, Rotten, Translucent.

She saw her mother like that.

Catelyn could be cold. But that coldness was only reserved for him or their father when she was angry with him.

But never her children. Never her babies.

The love she had for her children burned with a warmth that pierced through even her hatred towards him. When Arya started growing attached to him, He had expected her wrath. He had expected to be forced to move to the barracks with the enlisted men.

But she didn’t separate them. She didn’t want her wild little girl, who was so different than the others, to feel alone. The unspoken permission for them to bond was the greatest thing she ever gave him.

He failed her.

Catelyn didn’t deserve that. Arya deserved to have her mother. So did Sansa and Bran…

Rickon…

“Run to your Brother…” the Bastard laughed.

Catelyn deserved better.

“Oh and you remember Robb? OUR Brother” she spits. “Did Clegane tell you what they did to him? Did anyone?”

No.
He’d been beyond the Wall when it happened. He didn’t find out until later. Not until after he rejoined the Watch. Robb’s death. Sansa’s sham marriage. Janos Slynt mocked him with it, baiting him. Trying to get him to abandon his post and seek revenge. Trying to get him to strike a superior officer.

He didn’t stick around for the details.

Only grieved alone in his bunk. His brother… He’d wanted to be him so badly. Wanted to be loved like him, Wanted to make his father proud like him. Wanted the opportunities Robb had.

And now he does, and its not right...

It’s not right.

“I watched them strap his headless body to a horse. Then staple Grey Wind's head to his neck.” she snarled it in his face. The words slid out from between her teeth with spit and rage. “I sat there and watched… and I begged the gods it wasn’t you…”

“Arya…”

Her name is this desperate sob that escapes his lips. His little sister… his favorite. The one he was supposed to protect.

He wants to reach for her. To pull her against him and make her forget. But every muscle in his body is busy fighting the against the sobs threatening to overtake him. And he can’t fucking move.

His little sister...

“You think I don’t understand?” she roars at him. Her arms stiff, fists clenched. “You think I don’t know what it's like to be stuck in a moment… to see it happen again and again and again…” slapping her hand at each repeated word. “Until you feel like you’re going mad.”

The knife was slides past his heart. Cold steel splitting open muscle and warm blood spilling out his chest. A boy he trained and watched grow up, with nothing but hatred on his face. “For the watch” Thorne rasped.

“...To have it be the first thing you see when you wake up...”

They were running to the boats. There wasn’t enough room. The Ferals were swarming around them and he could hear the visceral noise of them tearing through flesh. He jumped onto the fishing boat barely catching the edge. Tormund pulled him over the side. When he looked back, the people who had been behind him were being dragged back to the swarm. Being eaten alive

“...And the last thing you see at night...”

There were gunshots, soldiers marching in step around him, tanks spitting shells. Stannis stood in front of a blazing fire of bodies. The Rad Witch praising R’hllor. The brothers of Night’s Watch cheered. The FreeFolk were screaming. He was screaming.

“...And every time you begin to feel something good…”

His knees land in the cold mud next to her. She reaches for him and he picks her up. Her body was limp and he could feel her blood seeping through her clothes and down his arms. She smiled at him. A crooked, toothy, lopsided smile he had seen a thousand times, across from him as they ate, beside him as they fought ... beneath him as they loved.
“...It rips you away.”

She touches his face with a bloody hand, drawing his attention away from her wounds to meet her green eyes.

“You know nothing, Jon Snow” she wept for him.

It’s Arya’s hand that’s on his face now, thumb dragging under his eye to wipe away the line of tears. The other coming up do the same on the opposite side.

And he’s back. Back here in this moment with this little sister, standing in front of him, all steel and rage and grief and wildness and ferocity, holding his face to meet her eyes. Eyes so very much like his own brimming with tears she might never let fall. His hands wrap around hers, almost pushing them deeper into his skin. Willing her to further tether him to reality. To Ground him into the Earth beneath them.

“I couldn’t protect you. I didn’t protect you…” he confesses. She looks at him for a long hard moment and then reaches down and pulls something out of her boot. The Switchblade popping open with a sharp noise. Needle. The knife he gave her before he left.

“You always protected me.” She still has it. Ten years and thousands of miles and she still has it. “You’re the only reason I came home, Jon.” She says quietly. There’s still that hard angry edge to her voice, but its quieter now. “I was so close… I was less than a hundred miles away from King’s Landing. I was ready. I was going to kill Cersei and probably die trying to kill the Mountain. And I was ready. But then… someone told me you were in Command, that you were home. And I had to come home. Not for Sansa or Bran or Winterfell. You. Only for you.” her face squinches up tight “I love you.”

He grabs her then, pulling her tight against him. His little sister, back from the dead as much as he is. Here with him.

“I love you too”

“I fucking need you, Jon!” she yells into his chest. Her cheek pressed against the half moon scar under the black flannel shirt. “I need you to help me. I need you to show me how to do this. If you can’t… then there’s no hope for me.”

He nods and kisses her hair, clutching her tighter still.

“You died.” she groans.

“I’m here.” he whispered, tears falling freely into the dark locks. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“You can’t stay there. It’ll poison you.” she paused “It'll turn you into something father wouldn’t be proud of.”

“I’m proud of you.” he answers.

And she starts to cry. And he holds her like he would when she was little and begs the world to be quiet for. And when it’s not enough, he begs his soul to be quiet for her. He searches it, desperate to find a peaceful place inside him so he can give it to her.

His father beams at him and tells him that he’s a Stark. “You may not have my name, but you have my blood”; The sound of a wolf pup, buried in the snow, and Ghost running through the gates after going missing for months and months; Tormund and Ygritte roar with laughter around a fire; A little
girl wraps her arms around his neck and tells him she missed him, “I prayed that you and Tormund would come home safe”; Sansa throws her arms around his neck and for the first time in so long, he has a family; Lyanna stands up on her bench in front of the entire North, everyone who shunned him as a boy and says that he’s the one who should lead, that he’s worthy of his father’s command; A moment in a cave when he first fell in love.

And another moment, so very much like the first, when he fell in love again.

And there’s that peaceful place he was looking for. A Dream of Planting Blackberries in the Summertime. A hope of a future for the North, for his people, for his family, for him and Dany. Of Sansa smiling and sighing finally… finally safe and free to do as she pleases. Of Arya running wild through Winterfell and the Wolfswood. Of Bran happy and healthy. Of Joanna and Willa growing up and becoming women that would make Karsi proud. Of holding a son of his own in his arms. Of Dany standing by the heart tree… smiling up at him.

“Do you feel Brave, Jon Snow?”

“Yes” he answered.

Brave enough to hope for it. Brave enough to fight for it.

His breath becomes slow and loud and steady, as the grief and the anxiety and the pain shrink and condense into something he can manage and control. And he feels Arya change against him, her own breath adapting to match his as the peace he’s found seems to permeate the earth and air around them. The world finally obeying his demand for quiet and stillness.

This is what Beric was talking about. This is what he’s been trying to get him to do for months. It’s got nothing to do with R’hllor or the new Gods or the old Gods.

Just hope… and love.

Another set of riders zip past kicking up more dust and dirt in rocky plains. And Arya laughs as she slowly breaks out of his arms.

“You think Daenerys would tell them to shut up.” she says rubbing the puffy redness out of her eyes. He can’t stop the huge grin that splits his face at her name. He loves her. Arya shook her head giving him a small smile. “You’re so transparent it’s disgusting. You can’t even hide how you feel.”

He shrugs and she yawns. “I’m going to find my bed. You following?”

“Not yet.”

She laughs as she walks away. That bright girlish laugh she had when she was a little girl he was chasing around Winterfell. “Sooo Transparent.”

Tormund came up and gave him a firm clap on the shoulder. Followed by a swift punch in the stomach.

“That’s for makin’ me cry.”

“Fuckin’ hells” he gasps, doubling over for a second, before grunting and righting himself. It wasn’t a hard enough hit to actually hurt. Just shake him up a bit and knock some wind out of him.

“D’ya need me to remind you how to do it?”
“Shut up. I know how to fucking do it.”

“Well you better, cause she’s gonna be disappointed in the size of your pecker.”

“I was fucking dead.”

“Keep tellin’ yourself that..” The Wildling draws a deep breath. “You’re a good man, Jon Snow.” he claps him on the shoulder one last time. “Good Luck”

Alone again, he unties and reties the knot holding back his hair. Before picking up Longclaw where it was resting against the rocks. The ends of the Nylon strap are fraying, probably from the encounter in the water earlier. They had a fight tomorrow. He couldn't risk it slipping off. He pulls out his lighter and flipped open the lid and the end caught and softened and pooled into the threading and cooled.

Her hand lingers over the flame at Winterfell. The small flame licking her skin in a small bobbing dance.

“What do you feel Brave, Jon Snow?”

“Yes” he answered again.

He loved her.

She was brave, and smart, and fierce and compassionate, and funny, and beautiful. She trusted him and he trusted her. She was the sun and all the stars in the sky. A warm bright light that banished the darkness.

She made him dream of summer.

“What do you feel brave, Jon Snow?”

“Yes” he answered as her fingers adjusted the strap of his ballistic vest. He doesn’t want to say goodbye. He wants to kiss her till he has to hold her up. She flirts and lifts the corner of his shirt. He wants to see her look at him like that for the rest of his life. She clutches to him tightly as her body quakes and shudders, and her hips rock against him, and gods he can feel her heat through their smalls.

He walks towards her camp now. Long even determined steps

“What do you feel Brave, Jon Snow?” she asks him in perfect proper Westerosi.

“Yes” he grabs her hand and tells her things he hadn’t told anyone, and she listens and waits for him to finish talking and runs her thumb across his knuckles. She tells him about her adventures in places he had only ever heard about, each one as fascinating as the last. Each teaching him something new and wonderful about her. Foreign tongues slide off hers in a jumble of sounds. She says things like “Loopy Loops” and “Flutterby” and “WereWood” And gods be good he’ll never correct her.

He loves her.

A column of fire erupts above him. Skidding into his life at the exact moment when he had lost all hope. Saving him with her courage, her ingenuity, her ferocity. Saving his body, Saving his soul, Saving his heart. Her body pins him against the cavern wall and their mouths crash together in waves and she makes the most perfect noise out her nose. She walks out of a burning building like a flaming goddess sent from some ethereal world. Her eyes roll back into her head as boiling water
drips down her chin to her throat.

“Do you feel Brave, Jon Snow?”

“Yes” he slides his arm over her hip and she attacks her food and he wants her to eat her with the same ferocity. She is spinning on her bike in a tight circle and she is fearsome and beautiful and terrible. “We want the same things” she tells him with confidence and authority and a conviction. A gun is being held to her head and he begs her not to move, and she trusts him not to miss. And he doesn’t.

He loves her.

A real Valyrian Princess sits with his brave girl on the porch, taking time to teach her. She looks up at his gentle girl, and says just the right thing at just the right time. She laughs like music. A sweeter song than Mance ever played for Dalla. Her long fingers trace along Ygritte’s map and her curiosity is overwhelming and exciting and makes him to appreciate the wonders of the world he had taken for granted. She slaps the gun out of his hand with a force that surprises herself and she smiles with delight and accomplishment.

“Do you feel Brave, Jon Snow?”

“Yes” Starfields reflect in her violet eyes, and quiet gasp escapes her lips. She sobs against him with grief. She screams against him with rage. She pulls herself tighter against him as her pleasure builds. Her lips press against his hand in a promise. Her head leans against his shoulder in a lazy languid roll. Her hand presses against his heart.

Asking if she can have it.

“Yes.”

He stands in front of the door of the Transport. A three-headed Dragon stencilled in red spray paint staring at him with six small black eyes. He stares back at it and exhales. And hesitates for a moment.

“Do you feel brave, Jon Snow?”

He raises his hand, and gives three sharp knocks.

“Yes.” he nods and holds his breath. Only for it to be stolen away as the door swings open.

“You make me feel brave too”
Jon and Dany

Chapter Summary

So this is all smut.

Chapter Notes

https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Can You Hold Me - NF, Britt Nicole
It takes a second. A long shaky exhale. An instant for their minds to reconcile with reality. A moment to realize...

He knocked because he loves her.

She opened because she loves him.

He pulls himself up into the cab as she scoots back to make room for him. The rifle and gun belt joining her scattered belongings in the front seat, and he closes the door firmly behind. And as the lock clicks into place, she’s on top of him. Sliding across his lap to plant an knee on either side of his thighs.

His hands are on her hips pulling her body close to his.

Her hands are cupping his face pulling his up to meet hers.

Her forehead presses against his, and his nose gently bumps against hers. And long swirling silver locks of hair hang loose around them. Breath mingling, and lips brushing once, and twice.

And she kisses him, and he kisses her.

It isn’t like the other kisses they’ve shared. Desperate crashes and challenges. Clicking Teeth and dueling tongues. Secrets stolen in hidden places. Cautious carresess and Forbidden Feels. Embracing a reckless youthful courtship that neither ever had a chance to experience.

This time, the seal of their lips is a seal on their souls. A mark renewed and restamped and resealed with each gentle breaking and rejoining.

He is her winter, unflinching in the face of her rage. And she is his summer, shining into his darkness.

Her hands slide up from his neck and weave into his hair as their small kisses grow deeper and longer and...urgent. As the flow of mouths and tongues and gasps becomes fuel for the most human engine.

His hands roam her torso. From her hips, along her ribs, around her back, down her thighs, up her belly… beneath her shirt. A small mischievous grin against her lips before she breaks away with a small laugh that turns into a sigh as he cups her breasts. That mischief turning into wonder as he relishes the feel of the soft, warm, beautiful curves.

He wants to see them. To kiss them, lick them, suck them... bite them. And he will.

She wants him to see her too. To be the subject of his awe and attention. And she will.

Her hands leave his hair, leave the soft, dark curls. Lips planting a long languid kiss that leaves him breathless as she shifts back in his lap. And his eyes follow her hands as she grabs the corners of her shirt that’s been slowly inching up her belly. And his wait at her waist as she pulls the garment over her head.

He looks at her as if she is a holy thing.
He looks at her as if he wants to defile her.
Her fingers tangle into his curls again. Grabbing when she finds a grip. Not pulling. Not hard.

Not yet.

Just enough to lock his head against her as buries himself in the expanse of her chest. His mouth, oh gods his mouth, is everywhere. Sharp little bites soothed by soft little licks. Hands cupping her and holding her up for him to feast on her skin. Long loud sucks as he draws one pink nipple into his mouth to lave at the hardening peak. Swiping a calloused thumb across the other before switching.

Her skin tastes like the faint salt of dried sweat, and she smells like exhaust overwhelmed by campfire smoke. And her hips begin to rock as the arousal builds at the apex of her thighs. The small movement spurs him on as he grabs one tightly and worries the hard tip between his teeth before kissing it better.

And he earns the moaning whimper that spills from her lips, he can feel it reverberating in her chest. And that sound makes him shift in his seat, his jeans quickly becoming uncomfortable. He’s so hard and she is so close to him. He’d just have to pull her down and he could be inside her, and she could be around him.

Except she is nearly naked, down to a small pair of shorts, and he is wearing too many clothes.

Her hands trace a line from his hair to his chest, and back up to the first button of the flannel shirt. He sighs as her finger tips brush down his throat. And it’s her smile that’s mischievous now as she pushes him back, and pulls his head to the side to expose the stretch of skin.

Her teeth sink into it and in turn, his hands travel down to sink into the flesh of her fucking perfect ass. An ass she earned with hours in flying a fucking dragon, and thundering across open plains at the head of a horde.

His strong hands knead and squeeze her as she latches on at the hollow of his throat. This patch of his skin has become her obsession as small swears and groans travel the small distance between his mouth and her ear as he nuzzles against her, the silver tresses like silk against his cheeks.

Her fingers, so clever in other contexts slowly work the buttons of the shirt, as she licks and sucks and nips and bites and marks him as her own. And she will do so for as long as he lets her.

And he will always let her. When his men tease him, when his officers sneer, when his sisters roll their eyes, he will smile and shrug to indicate that he simply doesn’t give a fuck. He lets her because he belongs to her. And she marks her territory like the predator she is.

And it feels so fucking good….

His hands on her ass pull her flush against him and she smiles against his throat as she feels how much he wants her. And the roll of her against him lets him know she wants him too. Her fingers finally finish with the last button of the flannel and she groans in frustration that there is still another shirt beneath it.

But before her hands can snatch the ends of the undershirt, he stills them, taking them in his own and planting small prayerful kisses on them. He looks up at her, big brown eyes full of lust and love and wonder, now shaded with something anxious and vulnerable.

He knows she has seen them, seen the vicious red marks that marr his torso. And she knows he hates them. And she decides that she will not allow his grief catch him.

So her hands roll around his, capturing them and she kisses his in answer to that small prayer. And
then she pulls him closer, sliding past his teeth and tongue to explore him, to empower him.

He traces her sides and begs her to breathe courage into him. Her fucking perfect mouth moves against his and her breasts rise and fall with her heavy breathing, brushing against his torso with every inhale. Wet muscle sliding, swirling and sucking around his.

And he wants to feel her naked chest against his. To feel all of her skin press into all of his. To be as close as two bodies can be. Her hands find his and their fingers mingle and together they go to the hem of his shirt.

She captures his tongue in her mouth and lewdly sucks to distract him until the shirt passes over his head and they need to break apart. And she lets him hide against her for a long moment after as she recaptures his mouth. Breasts pressed tight against his chest. Her soft and giving flesh against his hard and textured.

He feels so fucking good.

Her hands rake up his sides, along his ribs, around his back, over his shoulders running down his biceps until her fingers intertwine with his again. Smoothing and pressing and feeling the muscles beneath his skin. Reminding him of the power in his body. Reminding him that she wants him as he is by opening and deepening the kiss until his head tilts back against the seat, and he’s left breathless.

His eyes flutter open as she pulls away.

She looks at him like she’ll rip him apart.
She looks at him like she’ll put him back together.

Her fingers trace down his chest. Neither lingering on the scars nor ignoring them. Instead her trajectory is calculated as her fingers brush along the hard planes of his torso. Exploring the deep groove between his pectorals and along the V of his hips. The hard lines of his abdomen. The landmarks of his body that he earned with years of ranging and training and fighting and working and never fucking stopping. Relentless.

Thats how she wants him to fuck her. Relentlessly.

She feels that want sink low, below her belly, behind her clit, beneath her remaining clothing. And the gentle rock of her hips against his is no longer enough.

He lifts his hips as she unbuckles his belt, and she tugs all his remaining layers down at once. And He… laughs against her lips as they do an awkward seated dance to push the bunching bundle of jeans and smalls past his knees. He manages to kick them off along with his boots. The jerking movement causing him to bob in the small gap between them.

And that laugh turns into a gasp at the contact. His cock rubbing against the soft skin of her stomach and the fabric of her remaining small clothes. She bites into her lips and glances down at him. And her expressive eyebrow arches high toward her hairline as her pretty pink tongue darts out to wet her lips, before giving him a sinful smile.

His breath becomes harsh on her face as she reaches between them and firmly grasps him. Little jolts of pleasure causing small spasms in his shoulders as her thumb swirls the the few drops of milky fluid around the head. Kissing him again and again as she pumps his slowly in her grip.

Swallowing every groan, every swear, every gasp she pulls out of him.

It feels so fucking good. Her hand tight around him. Her soft little “yeahs” at every noise, and every
jerk, every rock of his hips up into her hand. The callouses along her palm from days of riding and gripping her handlebars rub against the underside of his cock. And he whimpers and pinches his eyes shut when she discovers it and changes her grip to give him more.

His cock is hard and hot and positively pulsing in her hands and she loves the feel of it. Soft skin stretched taut. Like steel and silk. It makes her feel powerful and she loves every little noise that passes past his lips. He jerks up, thrusting into the circle of her fist. A crude mummerly of what’s to come. The thought drives her need, and she rocks her hips, feeling how wet she has become.

It’s almost a blessing when her hand moves away for a moment, and he can open his eyes in time to see hers go wide in pleasure and her hand returns to his cock, slick with her. He can smell it. Smell her. The feel of it on his cock, making her glide up and down his skin all the more glorious.

“Dany…” he chokes out her name. His name for her. The one he can’t help but call her in his mind. And she gasps and pulls away…

The name she asked him not to say.

“Sor…” his apology is shushed by her fingers on his lips. Fingers that were on the hand that was just pumping him. Fingers that smell like her.

No-one has ever said her name like that before. Not a ‘Dany’ to belittle her, to make her feel small. A ‘Dany’ that is a plea, and a prayer and a praise all in one. Full of love and admiration and desire and desperation.

“I like it when you say it”

Mine.

The thought snaps in him and he almost growls as he attacks her mouth. Tilting forward. Claiming it. Possessing it. Pulling her hand away from him, so he can slide his thumbs into her shorts and pull them down.

And she laughs against him at her own awkward kneeling dance. Stretching the material around one leg, so that it can slip off the other. And her laugh turns into a gasp, as one hand slides around her waist to support her, and the other glides between her legs.

And it’s his turn to whisper breathless encouragement against her lips as he starts to explore her folds. Fingers dividing her lips to capture her clit between two, rubbing as he spreads her slickness around.

And it feels so fucking good as she grinds down against his hand. She watches his eyes search hers as he changes tactics searching what feels best for her and she nods and sobs and whimpers as he finds it. Flat and cupping her, three fingers circling her nub, divots and calluses creating texture to rub against.

Her arms wrap around his shoulders to support her grind, and her fingers play with the ends of his curls while he buries his head back against her chest. Searching it with his mouth and tongue for a spot to mark her. For a spot that will make her moan louder in his ear. It’s above her clavicle, low on her throat. And he licks and sucks and nips and bites and marks her as his own. And he will do so for as long as she lets him.

And she will always let him. When Tyrion lectures her on propriety, When Missandei complains about the futility of trying to hide it, when young pretty things bat their eyelashes and twirl their hair at him, she will smile with the most casual menace and undo another button of her jacket, proudly
displaying what he has done to her skin. She lets him because she is his. And he marks her as his mate, his partner in his pack.

And it feels so fucking good.

His fingers break away from their task every few seconds. Breaking away to drag more of her arousal to her clit, smearing it around her vulva to keep the friction glorious and slick. Toying at her entrance. Her hands weave back into his hair and grab, his whiskers scratching at her cheek as she tries and shift herself onto his hand.

“Jon…” keening in his ear.

It enough to get him to stop playing, cupping her fully and pressing the heel of his hand up against her nub and curling two fingers inside.

Thick fingers breaching her but only spurring her on as she falls forward onto his shoulder and drops her hips onto his hand. Relaxing to receive what he’ll give her. It’s been so long. She and Daario hadn’t coupled since she fled the riots on Drogon, before the first time she crashed in the Dothraki sea. It’s been years of nothing but her own fingers, and even this stretches her as he pushes up and forward.

Her heat swallows his fingers and he growls at how tight she is around them. And he groans at the thought of his cock enveloped in that small hot space. It’s low and loud and she nips at his neck in response and spreads her knees, shifting on the seat to bring just that much more inside her. He needs her to come, It’s been years since Ygritte died, longer even since they last fucked. Years of narrow bunks and his own fist. And he slowly prys his fingers apart, gently opening and scissoring to make way for one more.

She’s shaking as he adds it, her breath coming in small hisses and gasps and pants as she rocks and he slides his free hand into her hair to bring her to his mouth so he can feel her moans vibrate against his lips.

“Jon…” she shudders and he can feel it everywhere, in the breath escaping her mouth, in the tremble of her torso, in a flex around his fingers. And her hands cup his face and she loses herself in the glassy black pools.

“She’s so fucking good and he can’t wait to eat from the source. Except she tackles him down onto the bench. Feverishly kissing him, desperate to taste herself on his lips.

Her head sinks into his shoulder as she sobs, the roll of her hips and the thrust of his fingers slowing. He brushes his cheek against her as he gently slides out, fingers coated with her. The ripe scent entering his nostrils and surging straight down to his cock. Her eyes open as he brings the shining digit to his lips and sucks it into his mouth, cleaning it off.

And it feels so fucking good.

Her head sinks into his shoulder as she sobs, the roll of her hips and the thrust of his fingers slowing. He brushes his cheek against here as he gently slides out, fingers coated with her. The ripe scent entering his nostrils and surging straight down to his cock. Her eyes open as he brings the shining digit to his lips and sucks it into his mouth, cleaning it off.

She tastes so fucking good and he can’t wait to eat from the source. Except she tackles him down onto the bench. Feverishly kissing him, desperate to taste herself on his lips.

His hands cup her head, pulling her lips to meet his and her hands grip his sides, pulling him closer to her. Her legs straddling one of his thighs, her wet heat smearing into it. His cock hard and ready,
pressing up into her belly.

And he loves her
And she loves him.

They pause the tide of their kisses and their breath fans out over each others faces. The second before Drogon’s Wings catch the wind, letting her fly, letting her soar. The second before a fight begins and his wolf comes out and his instinct takes over.

Dangerous.

Necessary.

In a swift movement, she is rolled under him and he parts her thighs with his legs, wedging himself between them. And he licks her, from her chin to her cheek as he drags himself onto his elbows, hard cock pushing up and into her.

She’ll laugh every time she thinks about it. How silly it seems in retrospect, but how erotic and territorial and possessive and loving it was in the moment. She’ll give him a look and stick her tongue out to let him know exactly what she’s thinking about. He’ll smile and shrug, and kiss her hand or her forehead or maybe whisper something dirty in her ear.

And if they’re alone, He’ll lick her again.

Two quick thrusts seat him fully. And he is inside her and she is around him. And he presses deeper and she spreads wider. And he captures her lips, and she reaches for his. And he is looking at her and she is looking at him.

She looks up at him. One hand rests on his bicep and the other lingers on his ribs. Memorizing his face, his scars, his eyes, the shading in his beard. Her heart is panging in her chest as if it wants her to rip it out of her and hand it to him. She loves him.

He’s looking downs at her. One arm is supporting his weight underneath her. The other is framing her face. Tracing the line of it. Awestruck by it. His heart tears open anew, and its not death that follows but life. He loves her.

So he needs to kiss her. So she does.
She needs to fuck him. So he does.

Each of his thrusts is received with her kiss, until the momentum builds and the thrusts are coming quicker than their mouths can meet. She is so tight around him. Squeezing him, crushing him, sucking him. He’s spearing into her, filling her, stretching her. So hard inside her.

He’s so strong, the powerful snaps of his hips push him deeper, butting up against her womb, making her keen and moan and cry out from the friction of it. She’s so clever, wrapping one arm under his and around to grab and claw at his shoulder and back. Using his own muscle as leverage to undulate beneath him, rolling against him, receiving everything he can give until he falters and groans and chokes on her name.

“Dany…”

He shifts onto his knees and pulls a leg over his hip. And the change of angle drags his cock against something inside her, and a whimper turns into a loud open mouth moan as he begins to rock into her again.
“Jon. There” she begs and he stills for a moment, the mask of pleasure slipping as he focuses. Gripping her hips to hold her in place as he slowly rolls inside her. The blunt head striking and dragging across it.

“There?” that husky quiet Northern voice that she loves so much. And all she can do is sob and nod at the overwhelming pressure building inside her as he does it again. She sees him smile before his fingers dig into the flesh of her hips and he starts pounding away at this sweet spot. Her eyes pinch shut, and her mouth hangs open in wordless cries.

She’s squirming and moaning, nails clawing into her neck and breasts and it’s the most erotic thing he’s ever seen. His queen losing herself under him. Her controlled veneer long gone as she surrenders to sensation She’s so fucking tight and so fucking wet and so fucking hot around his cock. Sucking him up further up into her as he bottoms out.

“Jon” and “Yes” and “Dany” and “Gods” and “Fuck” fill the air, joining the pants and gasps and moans and the lewd sound of wet skin slapping as they couple. She’s going to come again if they keep this up and she wants him to come with her. He’s been in control for too long, and she will not go unchallenged. He catches her sinful smile a moment before she grits her teeth and her walls flex tight around him.

“FUCK!” he spits and thrusts hard until he has to pull out, sucking in air in deep ragged breaths, willing himself to calm down. “Fuck Dany.” She whimpers and pouts at the sudden emptiness, before bringing her own hand down to rub between her legs, teasing him with the sight.

He can’t look away those delicate fingers, perfect moonglow skin against pretty pink petals, flushed red. Swollen and sopping and salivating for more. A small sigh snaps his focus up to her face where she flashes him a wicked wolfish grin.

And then he flashes her his.

And his is so much better than hers.

She yelps as he yanks her hips up to his chest. The swiftness of the move surprising and delighting her as her knees fold over his shoulders. And his dark eyes lock with hers as he runs the flat of his tongue in a long lick up the the length of her slit, much in the same way he did when he entered her for the first time.

When she thinks of it, she’ll laugh and give him a look and stick her tongue out to let him know exactly what she’s thinking about. He’ll smile and shrug, and kiss her hand or her forehead or maybe whisper something dirty in her ear.

And if they’re alone, He’ll lick her again.

He closes his eyes as he savors her. This is what he wanted since he first smelled it. Licking along each of her labia to taste her arousal, along the crease of her thigh to taste her sweat, circling her clit to feel her throb beneath, down to lap directly at the source.

Her abdomen starts to shake, from the effort of holding herself up, and the concentrated effort of him signing his name across her vulva with his tongue. Gods. Oh gods he’s everywhere. Sliding his lips over his teeth and nipping at her, sucking her nub into mouth, pressing his nose against her as he penetrates her. She pushes his head away when it’s too much, and he cools the fire by gently blowing before turning to bite at her thighs, until she greedily grabs his hair and pulls him back to center.

She can feel him smiling against her every time she moans, every time she gasps, every time she
swears, every “Jon...” that seems to come in higher pitches with each swipe.

He’s circling his hips, desperate for some relief on the pressure that’s building behind his balls. She tries to reach for him but the contact is brief and fleeting. If he had a free hand, if he hadn’t decided to hold her up like this, he could do this for hours. Fist himself while making her melt into a puddle and go catatonic under his tongue.

But there’s no time for that now, she reminds him, grabbing his hair urgently and sliding her legs off his shoulders to pull him forward and back atop her, back inside her.

She can’t stop looking at him, looking at her, practically dripping off his beard. She locks her legs around his waist, so he can’t escape again when she bears down tight as he glides in and out of her with sharp shallow thrusts. She captures his mouth again as he groans and thrusts deeper into her, harsher into her.

One hand is locked around his shoulder and the other grabs the edge of the seat so she can roll up to meet him as their flesh collides over and over again. His pelvis rubbing against her clit as his thrusts become more frantic, more urgent. Become less like a a thrust and more of a grind as he burrows his cock deeper inside her.

Sweat and Skin and Slick and Saliva sealing them together as one person. The end of him butting up against the end of her. His fingers finding the hand that’s not in his hair, and intertwining them.

The coil inside her tightening and twisting and his panting in her ear almost as loud as the thundering of her heart. And he lets out this sound, this deep anguished groan that sounds something like her name. And it snaps, and she shudders and spasms and cries his name as wave after wave crashes through her, and her insides pulsing and fluttering around the solid mass of him.

Her fingers grip his hand first, then her pussy smothers his cock, and he can stroke through the first bit. But then she says his name like...that. And he’s done for, jerking violently, and burying his cock inside her. Every muscle of his body locked up tight as he floods her with his seed. Coming apart at her cry.

And it feels so fucking good.

He collapses on top of her with a sob and she’s grateful for his weight. A solid thing on top of her to keep her from floating away. And he is so grateful that she’s there to catch him, reminding him that this is real.

They lay like that, two broken things shattered and splayed out over the back seat. And as the moments stretch out, and their sweat dries, and their breath evens, they put themselves back together, each adding pieces of the other to their own souls.

He moves first, up onto his forearms because he’s crushing her. She shifts beneath him and slides him out of her with a small wince.

And he opens his eyes and she opens hers.

She frames his face gingerly with her hands, tugging gently on one of the raven curls. Watching it bounce as she releases it. Working up the courage to say with her words what she’s told him with her body. And he licks his lips because he needs to tell her too. Needing to say the words aloud. To make them real.

And she laughs because… there’s no reason to be afraid.
“I love you, Jon Snow.”

And he chuckles lightly, the sheer joy of it spreading through him.

“Aye. An’ I love you. Dany.”

And she’s kissing him and he’s kissing her. Breathing life and love and hope into each other, until the small kisses once again, become deeper and longer and more urgent. And the most human engine starts up again.

Because he loves her.

And she loves him.
“The North Remembers” he is reminded.
Constantly.

During his time North, he’s met with many officers of the Northern Front. Old families, Northern families. Proud Men. Hard Men.

And Fierce Women.

It’s one of these Fierce Women that is currently reminding them how “The North Remembers.”

Wylla Manderly arrived this morning with messages from her grandfather. She’s here to discuss logistical information regarding this first shipment of food and supplies from Essos. How much there is, distribution schedules given the limited number of transports available. But logistics like these are generally handled through the RAVEN.

So there is another reason why Wylla Manderly is here.

She is young. Barely one and twenty. With bright green eyes and bright green hair to match. It’s tied up into two loose, puffy buns atop her head. Pretty.

She is enlisted, and as such does not wear the long woolen skirts many Northern girls favor. Instead she wears combat leathers and the black coat of the Northern Front that both Sansa and Davos wear, the White Wolf on one shoulder and the Green Mermaid of White Harbor on the other.

But unlike Sansa’s which is high collared and cut to intimidate, Wylla prefers hers to be more… exposed. The top buttons are open to below her breasts, and the rest of the garment is...well fitted. Pretty.

“The North Remembers how trade in White Harbor thrived under Ned Stark, and how it suffered under my grandfather’s choices with the Bolton’s.” She announces boldly to her small audience of Sansa, Davos, Missandei and himself.

“Is Commander Snow not here?” she asks, looking around, as if he’ll pop out of a closet. He sees Sansa take a long stabilizing breath. He doesn’t know if it’s because of the girl’s obvious antics; or if she is preparing herself to have her authority undermined by yet another of her brother’s officers.

“He is away on Mission to Casterly Rock with Daenerys Stormborn and her forces.” Davos answered for Sansa.

“Oh well no matter” the girl said with a far too casual smile. “Before we get down to business, I have a gift for you”

She pulls a paper envelope out of her coat and hands it Sansa. It had been bulging beneath the too tight fit of the jacket at her waist.

Sansa opens it and gasps, pulling out a handful of photographs.

“I know the Boltons must have destroyed most of your family’s. One of the maid’s found these while clearing Uncle Wendell’s room for one of the Unsullied Captains. I think my grandfather took them when our parents were our age.”

Smart. But not graceful. Pitying the Starks. Hinting at her family’s wealth. Name Dropping a dear old Uncle who died at the Red Wedding. And mentioning that the Unsullied will be housed in her own family’s home all in the span of breath.
“These are true treasures.” Sansa says flipping through the photos. She sees through the charade, of course. He didn’t have much interaction with Young Woman seated at her father’s desk when she was hostage to the Queen.

But there is one thing he does know, courtesy is Sansa’s armor, and if Cersei did not break it, this girl stands no chance. But he can see her muscles tense, almost imperceptibly. The slightest adjustment of her jawline, making it all the more sharp. She has grown a spine of steel since he last saw her. A waif of a pretty girl, a pawn for Joffrey, Tywin and Cersei to play with as they saw fit.

But she was the player now.

Not just a player. A wolf.

The Red Wolf to be exact. For the bright flame of her hair.

But there’s another story behind the name. He’s only heard rumors. Nothing verifiable. Probably embellished. A tall tale to re-establish the Stark’s control over the region.

Ramsay Bolton had dogs. He liked to starve them and have them hunt his prey. So while everyone was cleaning up after the Battle of the Bastards, after her brother nearly beat the man to death with his bare hands, Sansa Stark went and put on her wedding dress. The one he forced her to wear.

And then she went to the Barn, where Ramsay was being held. Where his dogs were kennelled.

And then she locked the door behind her.

And when she came out...the dress was stained red with blood and there was nothing left of Ramsay Bolton.

Unverifiable.

Pure Speculation.

“Thank you Wylla.” she says placing the photos down at her desk and giving the green girl a smile that shows her teeth.

Likely True.

And then it’s down to business, Davos asks her questions about martial matters. Fortifications, New Enlistees, training with the new Batch of guns come up from Stannis Baratheon’s cache on Dragonstone. Sansa reviews some supply lists and the shipment information, and Missandei takes notes. He steps into speak on Daenerys’ behalf when necessary. But mostly he just listens and glances at the stack of photographs sitting on the corner of Sansa’s desk.

There’s a long pause where Missandei and Sansa are updating White Harbor’s roster with new Enlistees while Davos and Wylla discuss possible fortifications of port.

“May I?” he taps the table next to the pictures. Sansa’s ice blue eyes slide over to him and she gives a small nod.

He skims through the old photographs. Candid shots of the various Starks in the years before the world burned. Pictures of a Young Ned Stark, his brothers, and Lyanna. Their grandfather Rickard and his wife. Other people, some he can vaguely recognize, others he cannot. They were taken at some kind of celebration from before the world burned. Then he paused.
It’s almost a portrait, except for the glare captured from a window in the corner of the shot. Lyanna Stark stood in a fighting stance, looking directly into the lense of the camera. All lean muscle and ferocity. Wearing her boxing gloves and taking a mock swing at the camera with a wolfish smile on her face.

He remembers that smile. The referee announcing a draw and her pulling off her safety gear and the long dark hair spilling out of the cushioned helmet and the gasp of the crowd. She shook Rhaegar’s hand. Then threw her arms up in victory flashing this very same smile.


Tragic.

But, as he stares at that smile, he realizes he’s seen it recently. Very recently. And a very dangerous question occurred to Varys. A question he can’t believe he hasn’t asked before.

How exactly does a girl who can go ten rounds with the crown prince of Westeros get abducted?

Unverifiable.

Pure Speculation.

He looked back down at the photograph. Commander Jon Snow’s smile splitting the young woman’s face.

Likely True.

As the business discussion comes to a conclusion, Wylla asks if she could talk to Sansa alone. Not Graceful indeed. The dumbest thing this young woman could have done is try to make a closed door deal with Sansa alone.

The Red Wolf smiles and politely asks for the room.

He nods graciously, gingerly shuffling the portrait back into the stack of photos before departing.

Missandei joins him on a walk around the ranch. The North has never been a place that much interested him, mostly because nothing interesting ever happened in the North. His job was to collect valuable intel. And up until five minutes ago he believed that there were no valuable secrets to be found up North. Only snow, small shaggy cows, folksy people with irritating drawling accents and an inflexible idea of Honor, and a Giant Wall that someone thought it would be a good idea to build.

They walk to the training yard, because that’s where Grey Worm is, which means that is where Missandei wants to be. The young General has developed a friendship with Brienne of Tarth and most of his days are spent in the huge woman’s company.

Brienne is interesting, and her journey north would be one of those valuable secrets he’d like to learn. By his understanding, her father begged Renly Baratheon to in turn beg Robert to grant her admission to the Officer’s Academy. The first woman ever accepted. And there she both excelled and languished. Her scores were perfect, her commendations exceptional, her skill unquestioned but, she was never given a rank, never given a command, never put on duty. Until the War broke out and Renly needed a General. An ambitious boy who wanted to change the world...For all the good it did him.

Rumor has it he gave her a set of combat armor made out polished chrome. He’d very much like to see the armor, if it exists.
“Miss Missandei.” a young woman runs over. One of the Stark’s wards. A Wildling girl with those dark features that are so common among the blood of the first men.

“Miss Joanna.” Missandei answers, a bright smile splitting her face, genuine joy. “How are you today? Do you need any help with your lessons?”

“I already finished my lessons. What’s my word of the day?”

Missandei taps her lips thoughtfully. “What do you think Varys?”

“Oh I haven’t the slightest idea. What were you learning last, sweetling?”

“Mother and Father”

“Which are...” Missandei prompts

“The same word because Valyrian doesn’t have genders.” the girl answers smartly.

“Let’s stick with family members, How about brother and sister” She squats down to the girls eye level. “So remember in Valyrian the modifiers blend into the word. So little brother/little sister is Val-on-Quar”

“Valonquar”

“Valonquar” she repeats again.

They shoot back and forth Missandei correcting her pronunciation. But the young girl is clever and soon she even has Missandei’s accent right.

“Very good. Let’s try a couple of sentences.”

I have a little sibling.
My little sibling plays.
My little sibling runs.
I love my little sibling.
My little sibling is a wolf.
My little sibling fights.

Simple sentences of basic words to teach and practice the words she already knows.

“Your turn ” the girl announces. “Młodsza siostra”

“Młodszy brat” and they do it again until the little girl is satisfied, and runs off with a wave to join in the next round of drills. Brienne raising an eyebrow and smiling.

“I didn’t know you were learning the tongue of the First Men.”

“It’s fascinating. It bears similar linguistic traits to Old Ghiscari, but the tonal...” she starts to drone on about voiced and voiceless sounds and nasal vowels, and while its is...truly fascinating, his eyes focus on the young girl struggling to keep up with the soldiers doing push ups as Brienne paces up
and down the line.

Sansa is giving her a formal education. The same kind that Catelyn Stark gave her. Rare for Women, even among the elite. A most generous gift.

And Catelyn Stark raised Sansa to be Queen of Westeros.

Curious.

The girl stands as Brienne blows a whistle and she pulls that Dark Hair that’s so common among the blood of the first men up into a tail before running to follow the soldiers to the firing range.

Podrick Payne tends to disappear if one doesn’t keep track of him. Until, of course, he ends up inadvertently at the center of a disaster. Like the Barn fire that forced the Heroes of Westeros to run off to their deaths over a pile of salt. The one that cost them a Dragon.

It was intentional, that much he knows. The accelerant was kerosene. A week of listening around White Harbor revealed nothing. It was the only reasonable place for the assailant to flee. They could have gone overland through the Vale, but the mountains in Winter are… treacherous at best. And Yohn Royce watches the bloody gates through the mountains with Eagle eyes. They could have also escaped south through the swamps… but no-one has been able to make it through there safely without aid from the Crannogmen.

They could have also gone West to Deepwood Motte and the small fishing port there. But no crafts were reported missing. And the Glover’s are isolationists, a new face would have sent up alerts through the settlement.

Whoever started it is hiding in plain sight. A skill that very few truly have.

Podrick’s knack for disappearing is not the same. It’s because people tend to overlook him, rather than any sincere effort on his part. He’s fumbling through a schedule of security rotations for the ranch, from a small table in the corner of the officer’s barracks.

“Still working for Brienne, Podrick? Surely by now you’ve earned rank?”

“Well…” he starts sputtering “Brienne needs help, and the Wildling doesn’t do any paperwork and Davos is busy. Someone’s gotta do it.”

“Indeed. I will be sure to remind our Queen that aides and secretaries deserve accolades as well.”

“Just doing my duty…” he answers cautiously.

“Your duty? Have you and Brienne sworn oath’s to the Northern Front?”

“I mean… It’s all the same thing right?”

“What is?”

“Sansa, the Stark’s, the Northern Front. It’s all the same thing? Right?”

Curious.

“Indeed it is”

What was it that Pycelle had said once. “She is a sweet thing now, but in ten years, who can say what treasons she may hatch?”
Those ten years have come and gone.

Ten years...


It must stop.

It needs to stop.

His age seems to catch him as the snow crunching under his feet shifts and becomes spongy and mossy earth. The air seems to grow ancient as he walks further. The godswood of Winterfell. He hasn’t avoided the place, but nor has he gone out of his way to seek it.

It is as if his feet took him there. Or perhaps it grew up around him when he wasn’t paying attention.

“...And please keep Jon and Tormund, and Miss Arya, and Queen Daenerys” there’s a pause between each name as she counts them on her fingers. “And Mr. Beric and Mr. Clegane and Mr. Tyrion and Mr. Jorah safe.”

The enormous White Wolf curls around her. His ears perk up and forward and his head twists ever so slightly to the side in order to look at him. The red eyes judge him silently, weighing him carefully before tucking his head back down between his front paws.

“Did I forget anyone…?” she asks, small angelic face peering up from where its resting on her knees.

“Gendry, Sweetling.” he answers and she opens her mouth. Scandalized by her forgetfulness.

“Oh and Gendry” She rolls forward and runs the three steps to the tree and whispers “Love you Mama” to the face before kissing it quickly and returning the Wolf and snuggling into the mass of white fur.

“That looks extraordinarily comfortable” he smiles.

“He’s so fluffy.”

“He seems rather attached to you.” She nods vigorously.

“Jon says its because I’m the littlest in the pack. And the big wolves always protect the little ones.”

“Aren’t you afraid? He’s much bigger than you?”

“Everything is bigger than me!” she shrieks lifting her arms as if measuring the world.

“Not for long. Soon you will grow tall like the Weirwood.” The small girl beams and giggles. “I must ask a rather silly question, Miss Willa. I hope you won’t think me foolish.”

“Sansa says there are no silly questions.”

“Sansa is very smart.” he pauses and taps his lips considering. “Is Commander Snow your father?”

She bursts into a fit a laughter.

“No! Papa died fighting crows when I was in mama.”
“I told you it was a silly question.”

“Joanna said he had long hair and was very tall. And that he was a Ranger. But I didn’t know him.”

“Well thank you, Miss Willa. You’ve saved me from looking very foolish.”

The small girl smiles and shrugs. Before her eyes go wide. “BRAN!” she jumps up and runs to where the young man is being pushed towards the large tree by Samwell Tarly.

Another one of those curious stories he would very much like to know. How the xenophobic Randyll Tarly’s eldest son ended up married to a wildling girl in the North.

The wolf follows the girl, towering above her. The top of her head barely reaching its chest.

“Hello Willa.” he smiles. “Did you pray for everyone?” she nods enthusiastically. “Good. I am sure the gods heard. Minister Varys. I am surprised to see you here. What brings you to the Godswood of Winterfell?”

The wolf’s head slides under the crippled boys hand in his chair.

“Holy places of all faiths do wonders for meditation and introspection. Forgive me if I have overstepped.”

The crippled boy pets the Wolf’s head before blinking slowly and sighing.

“The Godswood is open to all.” he answers fingers gently plucking out some dark burrs from the white wolf’s fur. “I hope you found the answers you were looking for.” he motions to Sam to push him closer to the tree. “Although I am concerned your worldview will prevent you from drawing the correct conclusion.”

Curious.

The girl runs ahead of him and the wolf runs ahead of her, carving her an easy path through the snow.

“Sansa!” she shrieks as the woman comes into sight. She’s sitting on the porch with Sam’s wildling wife and son. Gilly holds a pair brush paddles and is working through tufts of fiber. Preparing it to be spun into Yarn. Sansa flipping through a bound notebook. But as the girl springs up the steps. The red haired woman puts her work to the side and the young girl crawls up into her lap.

“Have you had lunch sugarlump?” she asks bopping her on the nose. The girl shakes her head.

“No. I was in the godswood.” Sansa smiles with her lips but her ice eyes move over to him.

“Was Ghost with you?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Jon and I feel better when he’s with you.” She stands shifting the small girl onto her hip. “Lets get you some lunch. Minister Varys, will you accompany us?”

“I only intended to escort the young lady home. I should return to my duties.”

“Nonsense.” the ice of her eyes spreading into her voice. “I insist”

It’s not a request.
Sansa prepares the girl a small meal. Apples and Cheese, Bread, and some cold chicken. All the things a little princess needs to grow strong. She smiles kindly at her and kisses her forehead. Before gesturing him to follow her to her office.

And as the door clicks shut, the room seems to grow cold.

“It’s quite the colorful menagerie of characters you’ve assembled here at Winterfell. Administrator Stark.”

Her hand glides across her desk as in a sweeping gesture as she takes a her seat.

“Quite.”

“Beric Dondarrion for one. The Lightning Lord. Hero to the smallfolk. There are so many different accounts of his death, I had presumed he died years ago. How on earth did he end up here?”

“Beric goes where his god wills him.”

“And Brienne of—” he’s cut off with a hard look, and a menacing, knowing smile and a question that is not a question at all.

“Would you like to know what happened to the last man who whispered around Winterfell?

A Girl

The world is still and silent.

And so is Arya Stark.

The bloodriders had given up their racing a half hour ago. No more tires squealing. No more engines roaring.

Only the crackle of the fire and the hearty snores of Men.

Drunk Men.

Drunk Tormund.

She slides Gendry’s arm off her shoulder cautiously. He’d slipped it around after she returned and he saw her red eyes in the firelight. He didn’t say anything. Just sort of did it. He’s been doing things like that alot.

He’s Good. Good like Jon. Good like Father.

Good in a way she is not.

“Where you going, Little Wolf?” Clegane grumbles without opening his eyes.

“Latrine. Care to join?” she replies curtly.

“Fuck off.”

She doesn’t go to the latrine. Instead she wanders through the bloodrider’s camps. Hiding in the shadows of steel and wheels. Listening to the conversations in Dothraki. Rolling the rough tongue
around in her mouth. The meaning of the words don’t matter. What matters is the voice, matching its pitch and cadence. The shapes their mouths make. Variations in volume and inflection.

It doesn’t matter what you say, but to draw prey in closer, you need to sound like a friend.

They aren’t her prey, of course. But she’s gotten out of practice with it. The accent she worked so hard to suppress returning almost as soon as she got home. As soon as she heard her brother’s voice.

No-one notices her.

Not the riders.

Nor the handful of Unsullied Technicians stationed at the Comm Tent.

Nor Tyrion Lannister as he stomps back to it, muttering the word “reckless” over and over again. She melts into the shadows as he opens the flap of the tent and light spills out. Light always makes the dark places darker.

“Well. That’s it. I fear we’ve lost her.”

“Have some faith Tyrion.” Jorah grumbles.

“Faith!?” he snaps, as she circles the perimeter of the tent. It’s surrounded by Trucks with antennae mounted. Mobile connection to the RAVEN “Faith.” he huffs again. “If the gods of any sect gave half a shit about Westeros, we would be drinking and whoring across Essos instead of camping out in a Wasteland hunting a weapon that could kill us all in a blink of an eye.”

“I meant faith in her.”

“Oh” the dwarf says after a long moment. “Well she’s making it extraordinarily difficult.”

“You have no idea.”

She drops to her belly and rolls beneath one of the trucks. Next to a spot in the tent, where the wind has pulled on the zip ties enough to create gaps in the flimsy walls. Not enough to see them, but enough to hear clearly.

“What happens if something goes foul between them. We risk the whole of humanity on the desires of two people in the roar of their twenties.”

How old was Jon now…? Five and Twenty? No. Six and twenty. In her mind, he was still sixteen. Which meant in his mind, she was still eight. She scrunched her nose in the silence and shifted uneasily.

If he was overprotective tomorrow, he could get himself killed. He had pulled her out of the way, when Gendry was pulled under at the riverbank. If he did it tomorrow, with soldiers, with guns…

Fighting men is different than fighting monsters.

“It’s difficult enough to pitch a Targaryen Restoration, but now add a Bastard into the mix.” Gods she hates that word. “The old families would never support it.” Tyrion continued. “If she can’t get control them this War will devolve into factional chaos.”

“I wouldn’t think you’d care about things like that Tyrion.”

“I don’t. They will. I understand his plight. All dwarves are bastards in their father’s eyes.” He takes
a long drink.

“The only thing I care about is her.” Jorah admitted. “I’ve dedicated the last decade of my life to being her guardian. She needs someone to protect her…”

“Then protect her. She’s being reckless. Just like when she flew off save you fools.”

“And if she hadn’t none of us would be here…the Northern Front would blame us and we would be fighting a guerilla war the middle of winter in addition to fighting Cersei. You think this…” Jorah gestures widely, indicating their current terrain. “…is difficult? If Commander Snow hadn’t surrendered, we’d be fighting Lyanna to her last man for the Independent North, and the cost of winning that War is too high.”

The men paused for several long moments. She imagined them standing. One huge. One small. Staring each other down. There was the sound of shuffling and a drink being poured.

“Well…?” the dwarf asked.

“Well what?”

“What do you think of him?”

She heard the sound of a heavy sigh, and footsteps coming towards her. And she pushes herself onto one hand, her back pressing up against the underside of the truck. Making her self small and invisible under it.

“He’s the most effective field commander I’ve ever served under.”

“Truely?”

“I’ve served in the army when I was young, like my father. After I was exiled, I worked for a handful of mercenary groups before swearing myself to Daenerys. I’ve worked for every type of Commander you can think of. None even come close. He’s even better than my father was.”

“How so?”

There was a long pause.

“He’s an extraordinary tactician. An excellent marksman. A vicious fighter. He’s the first one into danger and the last one out of it. He acknowledges the risk, the danger, and then does what needs to be done anyway. He trusts his men to do their job. And in turn they...we... trust him to do his. ”

Tyrion came into view in the small gap between the panels. He was holding a drink, and was rubbing his chin as he slowly paced.

“She could legitimize him. Make him Jon Stark…That could put this…” he pauses as he searches for a word. “alliance on firmer ground…”

Jorah made a noise she couldn’t identify, but the sound moves away from her, so she sinks back down.

“Won’t that cause problems…? Especially among the Northerners?”

“They’ll say we are attempting supplant Ned’s Stark’s trueborn children. That we are dissolving their rights to their own land. That we are cheating Sansa out of her inheritance. Not that she even needs it. Gods be good.”
“You said you think she’s hiding records from you, what do you think they are?”

“Money. Littlefinger was one of the Wealthiest men in Westeros. When the Bolton’s took Winterfell, the Stark’s were ruined, yet they could somehow afford to rebuild Winterfell and maintain the militia without borrowing money from the Manderly’s.”

“You think she stole Baelish’s money.”

“Oh no… my dear wife is much too clever for that. She’d need it to be legitimate.”

“ Wouldn’t her inheritance from the Boltons..?”

“You’ve seen the Dreadfort. The land is useless. Nothing but scrap and rocks. Not unlike here. No.. Whatever meager inheritance she acquired from the Boltons wouldn’t be enough to be able to maintain the entire Northern Front. She could be borrowing the money from her Cousin in the Vale, wherever she’s stashed him. But I doubt it. In order for the Starks to have maintain the control they do, they must be self-sufficient.”

“So what do you think happened?”

“The simple explanation is Petyr left her everything. He had grown up with Sansa’s mother, she was his ward for a number of years after Joffrey died. He had no children of his own. She is technically his niece through his marriage to her Aunt Lysa. However I doubt it.”

“Why?”

“Because I knew the man, he was as low a creature as any. He thrived on chaos, and was meticulous about setting it in motion.”

She could tell he was pacing by the way his voice carried up and down. She steeled her mind to remember every word.

“So…”

“So imagine I am a young twice married woman.”

“I’d prefer not to”

Tyrion scoffs. “Imagine I am a young twice married woman. I’ve spent the last eight and half years of my life being passed around like a Cyvasse piece in game that has killed my father, my mother and two brothers. I am young, attractive and currently unmarried. What do I want? And How do I get it?”

She wants to snort out a laugh. To play the game of faces, you must start much simpler than that. The old man chuckled for her and she heard the sound of another drink being poured. “No more for me. I have actually have to fight tomorrow.” she heard the shuffling of chairs and papers. She circled back near the entrance and slipped under one of the trucks as Jorah appeared at the entrance of the tent. He breathed in deep. Enjoying the night air and the cold Northern breeze. He turned back for a moment.

“I think you’ve been playing this game for too long Tyrion. Try and keep the goal in mind.”

“And what goal is that?”

“The one Daenerys dreams of. A better world.”

The old bear wished him a good night and walked off.
Arya waited for a minute. Waited for the sound of his footsteps to fade into the night. Waited for the sound of another drink to be poured. And then she rolled out from beneath the truck and began to meander back to camp.

So this was the Game. The game that Sansa was always talking about. The game that got her father, her mother, and two of her brothers killed. And now she stood, shadowing the players. She doesn’t know what schemes the dwarf was trying to cook up for her family.

Jon always wanted to be a Stark...at least he did when he was 16, and Sansa...Sansa wouldn’t be a pawn for anyone anymore. That much Arya knew. For the first time in her life, she wished for her sister. She would know what to do. She would know how to protect their family.

“In winter we must protect each other...” her father's words. Jon’s voice. She doesn’t remember what her father sounded like. She blinks at the realization and let out a long breath as their camp came into view.

And the night is silent and still.

And so is a girl.

And so is a man.

A man is fast, but a girl is faster. She whips around. A knife to his throat. A knife to her stomach.

“A girl has improved.”

“A girl is Arya Stark.” he snorts at the statement and drops the weapon. She does not. “And a girl is a Wolf. Is a man here to kill me?”

“A man was listening to the night and heard a silence, louder than thunder.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

“A man is here because a man must be here. A man has no wish to be back in this country.”

“Does a man’s work interfere with Arya Stark’s?”

“A name has not yet been given. Only a place. But a man doubts it is a name that is on Arya Stark’s petty list.” He begins to circle. Like he always would. Relaxed. Shoulders back. Fluid.

“Is it a name in a wolf’s pack?”

The Iceberg has deep roots and plants itself in the ocean and will not be moved. And like it, she breathes and pushes her body’s energy down. Down into the earth. And she roots herself in the ocean. Moving slowly in his circle taking one step for every three he takes.

“If a man had been given a name, he would not waste time talking to a girl. A man would rather be in Braavos, but a man serves the many faced god.”

“A man serves the Iron Bank” she spits. It’s how they fund the school of black and white. Their holy patronage pays for everything. “Daenerys Stormborn is part of a wolf’s pack. And if the name is given, Arya Stark will send a man to meet his god.”

“Why does a girl hesitate? Chances are good that the name given will be a name Arya Stark knows. A girl did not hesitate with the Freys.”
“A man still has a chance. A man still has a choice.”

“A man is a tool. An instrument.”

“A man is a fool and a slave.”

“And a girl lacks faith. It is why even her gods turn away from her.”

“There is only one thing Arya Stark says to the god of death.”

The wave always hits harder than expected. It comes faster than expected. It batters those who stand up to it. When it swells and breaks it leaves those trapped in its wake confused and disoriented. The heels of both her hands impact on his torso and he is forced back. Absorbing the hit, rolling with it. Using the backwards momentum to reach behind, planting both hands on the ground, and like the wave curling in on itself, springing himself out at her, feet first. She ducks low and pivots. Ducking and turning in a low lunge. Passing beneath the Titan’s shield. Catching the fist coming at her with both hands as she extends back up. Twisting. He spins with it, and rushes her.

The cold Northern current collides with the warmer waters of the south and a hurricane of blows and blocks threaten to overwhelm her. But she withstands it. Meeting each one, blow for blow, block for block.

And then he smiles and stops a fist an inch away from her face.

“Good.” he says “A man is relieved that a girl remembers her training.”

“Why?”

“A girl is to fight tomorrow, yes? To capture an instrument of death.” She nods. “A man is a girls teacher. A man would grieve if his student were to fall.”

“That you Little Wolf…?” Clegane growls, and she blinks as the flashlight hits her eyes. A man is gone. “What the fuck you doin’? You’re out of breath. The fuck is wrong with you.”

“Ran over here.” she huffs. “Walked by Daenerys’s camp and heard things I should not have.”

“Creepy Girl.”

“I got turned around. All these tents look the same. I didn’t want to be over there.”

“I don’t want to know why you were over there. Keep all your creepy fucking shit to yourself.”

She follows him back to camp and pulls some jerky out of Jon’s bag and chews on it slowly while shifting herself back under Gendry’s arm.

“Your brother coming back?” he asks without really waking up.

“Not today.” she answers.
https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Lover. Fighter. - Svrcina

One to Dread.

And One to Bed.
And One to love.

That was what the fortune teller told her, all those years ago.

He looks so peaceful. The worry lines relaxed and smooth. Even his scars seem to disappear as he sleeps.

“All I want to do is sleep” he had told her, that first night. When he found her playing in the snow.

So she doesn’t move from her place. Nested between his legs, with his arms loosely holding her. Head resting in the crook of his throat. She can hear his heartbeat. It’s a little arrhythmic, probably due to the halfmoon scar under her palm. But steady and constant all the same.

She carefully moves her hand away, so that she can see it up close. It still looks so raw. Raised red skin dotted with small holes from stitches or staples left in too long. She remembers what Melisandre told her. That one little piece of information Varys wringed out of her.

“The Old Gods are awake.”


A witch told her she couldn’t have children. And she believes her because she knows its not possible. She’s not human. Not really. The last scion of what was once the Valyrian Freehold.

And she rests in a dead man’s arms.

Her freehand drifts down to her belly, where an ache reminds her that she’s been thoroughly ravaged. She told him...vaguely. He said he loved her. But, she needs to confirm he understands what that means. That she won’t be able to give him a baby. Their baby. With dark curly hair and a wolfish smile and big pouty lips and a quiet voice. Instinctively, she crosses her legs and squeezes her thighs together.

The early morning sun, pierces through the window, glaring harshly into Daenerys’ eyes. Forcing her to squint and tuck her head away. And it hit him a moment later, his jaw brushing across her head, whiskers catching in her hair as he turns from the sun.

The hand around her waist starts to drift up and down her sides, feather light touches on her skin, and lips pressing a kiss to her forehead. A contented hum from her draws out a similar one from him and she relaxes into his grip as he adjusts it.

And then those feather-light touches transform and he brushes his fingers up and down her sides in rough rapid swipes. Tickling her. And she screeches and tries to wiggle her way out of his grasp. But one arm has her firmly locked in place. He continues his assault through her thrashing, until she’s awkwardly pinned between him in the back seat of the Truck. He laughs and stops his attack, leaving her trapped and breathless.

“Are you ticklish Dany?”

“Jon Snow.” She warns. “Don’t you dare.”

“Is that an order, my queen.” he teases, a huge grin splitting his face.

“Jon...” she cautions.

The last person to tickle her was Mr. Derry. She was five… running through the house with a red
door. He’d pretend he was a monster and chase her around the garden. She’d try to hide behind the lemon tree. He’d stop and start to make large exaggerated animal stomping noises. And when she’d peek around to see him, he’d swoop her up in his arms and tickle her until she was screaming with laughter.

He called her “little princess.”

She can’t stop laughing now either, even as she tries to free herself from him. Jumping at then leaning into the caresses. Wanting him to stop but at the same never wanting him to. Letting her catch her breath every few seconds, letting her relax and settle back into his embrace before renewing the assault.

And as she lets out a shaky laugh, she feels him against her lower back. A delightfully wicked thought springs into her mind as she rolls her head back, looking at his brown eyes flash with flecked gold in the sunlight. Mischief dancing in the dark pupils.

“Want to go ag-?”

He captures her mouth before she finishes, tearing the blanket tangled in her legs away. She rolls in his lap to straddle him as he shoves himself up right. Hard and ready underneath her and she drops, seating him inside her fully.

“Oh Fuck Dany.” he groans as she grabs his shoulder for leverage as she rides him. She wasn’t quite ready and she’s sore inside. But that dull ache makes her feel fuller. Makes his sharp jabs up into her defined and clear. Makes the pleasure that much sweeter as he licks his thumb and rubs her clit in small circles. His other hand slides around her ass to squeeze and support as she bounces. “Soo Good” he whispers against her lips. “Soo Good Dany.”

His eyes are darting up and down between her eyes and their thighs. And she sighs as she imagines what he sees down there. where they are joined. Him disappearing into her over and over again.

“That’s it, love, ride me.”

She fills his filthy mouth with one of her breasts, by grabbing him by the hair and dragging him to it. He swipes his tongue around the nipple before doing the same to the other. She has to grab behind him to the back of the seat to hold herself up against the lashing he’s giving her. She sinks down, spreading her knees wider. It’s overwhelming, this press of him inside her.

As she falters, both arms wrap securely around her midsection and holds her there. Thrusting up into her in short rapid strokes. His balls smacking up against her with noisy slaps. Giving a loud rhythm to what’s being done to her.

Its too much.

Being restrained to endure the onslaught. The noise filling her ears. His vulgar murmurs of encouragement. That fucking stretch inside her. It hits her out of nowhere, this bolt of pleasure charging through her. Sweet wet release making that slapping sound lewd and messy. The clench of her muscles wrenching and milking him until he freezes, the ropes of muscle in his neck drawing taut beneath his skin as he pulses inside her. Hands grabbing and clawing at her as she gently rocks into his release.

“Good Morning Jon.”

“Aye. It is.” He laughs heartily as she shifts from straddling him to curling her knees over his thighs. Her own pressed tight together, attempting to trap what he left inside her. His arm slips around her
shoulder and she nuzzles into his neck. And a moment to bask in each other’s glow.

But the glow through window grows brighter with every passing minute, until…

The sun is up… and he has to go.

Go put on his armor. Go prepare his men. Go underground out of radio contact to face who knows how many men and secure the most dangerous weapon to ever exist so they all don’t die in flash of green. She swallowed hard and turned up into his eyes.

He shakes his head slowly.

“None of that.” he cups her face. “ We have a job to do. We can’t do it if we’re more focused on worrying about each other than on the job. It’ll get us both killed. Self-fulfilling prophecy and all that.”

He’s right. But it still takes a moment for her to find her fire. To find her bravado.

“Who says I’m worried about you?” she cocks her head to the side. “Maybe I’m worried about Gendry.”

“Oh don’t let Arya hear that. Not even as a joke. Nothin’ I could do to save you then.” He says it with a gentle chuckle, But his face falls all the same.

“You’re scared for her.”

“Aye.” he answers quietly. “I know” a heavy sigh “I know… that any of us could get hit at any time. And that she probably has a better shot than the rest of us. She’s small, and quiet, and she can fuckin’ disappear when she wants to.”

“But you’re her big brother” she explains, as if it isn’t the most obvious things in the world. As if they aren’t mirror images of each other. “There’s absolutely nothing you could do to stop yourself from worrying…”

“I know.” he sighs hanging his head

“Besides… She brings out the best in you. And you bring out the best in her. What chance does anyone stand against the two of you?”

His mouth is open, and his eyes search hers for a long minute. And she doesn’t expect it when he rolls her onto her back. She doesn’t expect him to fling her legs open, and wedge himself between them and kiss her until she can’t breathe.

“I fucking love you Daenerys Targaryen.” he says grabbing her wrists and pinning them above her.

“Why?”

“You always know exactly what to say.” He kisses her again. Hard. And he starts to grind his pelvis against hers. Thick cock rubbing across her vulva sending jolts of pleasure through her. The remnants of all their earlier couplings making his press easy and slick. “One more time?”

She nods and he thrusts himself inside her.

It’s a challenge to find all their gear in the wreck of the truck. Awkwardly maneuvering about as they try to tug on clothes in a tangle of limbs and fabric. And when they’re decent she shivers in the morning air. It’s so much colder today than yesterday.
“Here.” he passes her his black flannel shirt.

“How...you need it?”

“It’s warm underground. And I’ll be carrying a ton of gear. Anything I can take off helps.”

It smells like him. Like campfire smoke. Like gunpowder. She tugs it on, and then pulls the red and black leather jacket of the Bloodriders. “When we get back home, we’ll see about getting you some proper winter clothes.”

Home.

“And when we get to Lannisport, we’ll see about getting you some that aren’t black.” She wiggles excessively, buckling her boots.

He laughs and pats himself down, as if he’s looking for something. Then he turns to her and smiles that wolfish grin as his hand goes into the breast pocket of his flannel. The one she currently has on. And pulls out a tie from the pocket.

“You’re an awful tease Jon Snow.”

He laughed as he worked that gorgeous mop of dark curls into a knot and winks at her.

“I’ll make it up to you tonight.” he pulls her close.

Tonight. As if it was guaranteed. She slips her arms around his waist and kisses him. Not a deep kiss or a long kiss, like the one she wanted to give him. Just a quick soft kiss. One she might give him a thousand times. One she might give him everyday. As if today might not be the last.

When she pulls away, he traces the line of her face.

“Give them hell.” he says.

I love you.

“You too” she answers.

He began to walk off.

“Wait.”

“Dany…”

She rolled her eyes. He smiled.

“Tyrion wanted me to tell you to get your earpieces from the comm tent.”

He nodded and kept going. She wanted to wait for him to look back. But no. They had job to do. They were responsible for thousands of lives. She began to braid her hair into the fierce plait as she toed the tires of her motorcycle.

She looks up to get a last glimpse of him… And he looks back.

Tyrion is cross with her, as usual.

He won’t tell her why he is cross with her. But she can guess. It has something to do with the ache within her. The ache deep inside, between her legs and up into her core. And he hands her a small device. Its an odometer attached to a watch, with a meter that read fractions of a mile. She smiles at the dwarf.
But he doesn’t say anything about it. Yet…

“T’s been radio silence on their end for a few hours now. My brother is planning something.” he says as he passes out similar devices to her a Kos, her lieutenants among the Bloodriders.

It’s a solution to the communication problem she’s been having. Not being mic’d made command difficult, and they couldn’t execute the kind of precision maneuvers she wanted without having something synchronizing them.

“That’s helpful.” Arya spat sarcastically next to her. Daenerys cocked her head to the side, she hadn’t seen the girl enter the tent. She hadn’t seen her come up beside her, even though she was less than two feet away. She opens her mouth to say something, but closes it. It wasn’t worth her time.

Tyrion had the same shocked expression on his face. One of her Kos, a woman by the name Rahkishi, whispers something about shadow magic in Dothraki. Qhono shushes her.

“How can I help you, Arya Stark?” Tyrion asks. The exasperated annoyed tone more her fault than the Little Wolf’s. She taps her ear in response. “Ah” he pulled out the tangle of wires and began pulling them apart into individual sets. “Are you sure it’s a good idea for you to go on this mission?”

Arya raises an eyebrow. “Its very dangerous. You can’t be more than six and ten”

“Eight and Ten” she corrects taking ahold of the untangled wires.

“You could get hurt.”

“Valar Morghulis…” she rolls the words off her tongue with a shrug.

“Ah…” Daenerys stopped her with the noise “But we are not men” she finished.

“Thank the gods for that. Can I talk to you? Alone. It’ll take thirty seconds.”

She nods and exits the tent with Arya. The girl bites her lip.

“Don’t trust anyone you haven’t seen in 12 hours.”

She wasn’t exactly sure what she should have expected, but that was vague and...specific.

“Why?” Arya blows some frustration out her nose. The crisp morning air making it steam.

“The house of Black and White may be hunting you.”

“Faceless Men?” She nods. “How do you know?”

“I know.” The little wolf says it with a certainty that makes her blood go cold. “You’re probably in the clear for a while. The Iron Bank is probably waiting to see how things will play out. Why get their hands dirty if we all die anyway..”

Daenerys lets out a huff of air then nods in agreement. “Have you told Jon?” She shakes her head. “Please don’t tell him yet. He needs to focus.” Arya quirks her eyebrow up, but nods. “Why twelve hours?”

“Thats how long it takes to…” she draws her hand across her throat and then makes a gesture of pulling off a mask.

“Well that’s thoroughly unpleasant.”
The little wolf nods and pivots and strides back towards her camp.

Tyrion is in the middle of detailed description of the terrain directly surrounding Casterly Rock. The Khalasar can operate mostly independently in a battle. Light Cavalry. Hit and Run. Smash and Grab. Overwhelm and Outpace an enemy.

Scouts reported movement around the Rock. But the outlying areas are deserted. If they are to be a good distraction, they need to hit them where there’s people. Which means they have to hit The Rock itself.

It’s not ideal. But enough people saw her yesterday, it should be enough to bait Jaime Lannister into a fight. Tyrion says his brother wants to end this war. That he hates Wildfire as much as anyone. That reason he killed her father was because he was going to use the last of it to destroy King’s Landing. That he’s a good man with a problem. A good man who’s love affair has torn apart this kingdom.

She doesn’t know if that’s true. Or if Tyrion just has a soft spot for him. The man’s morality doesn’t matter. He doesn’t need to be a good man. He just needs to want to end the war enough that he brings their forces out.

He starts to review his brothers old tactics and she does her best to keep up with translation, for not the first time she misses Missy. If she’s too focused on translating, perhaps she’ll overlook some detail, some key thing.

Jaime’s last major military defeat came when Robb Stark ambushed him. The way the men around Winterfell talk about him Robb Stark was either a prodigy or an idiot. The truth is probably somewhere in between.

Robb Stark ambushed Jaime by baiting him to attack an army that wasn’t there. Her goal is practically the opposite. She wants him to attack the army that is there, so he doesn’t look for the army that isn’t.

His last victory was storming Riverrun, and he did it by tricking them into opening the gates for a friend.

She won’t know till she’s out there.

“I must once again beg you not to go.” Tyrion tells her as she mounts up on her motorcycle.

“A khal who cannot ride-”

“-is no khal. I’ve heard it before.”

“Tyrion. The Dothraki follow me because I am the strongest. I was made Khal and I can be unmade Khal. Not going would invite challengers. And if I were to lose control, we would have Bloodriders going unchecked across Westeros.”

He stops and considers.

“You’re right. Good Luck. Do not get shot.” She snaps the goggles on over her eyes and revs her engine.

“I don’t intend to die today.”

“The last man who said that to me died… that day.”
That doesn’t bode well.

“Have faith in me Tyrion.”

“I do. Your Grace.”

“Have faith in Jon.”

He doesn’t answer. Only nods and tips his head in respect.

And her engine roars, and the dust spits behind her, and she rides toward Casterly Rock at the head of the horde.
Beric let out a long wolf whistles as he enters camp. Jon ignored him.

“Arya. Go to the Comm tent and get our comms.” hopefully that will get her away while Tormund
makes his jokes.

She was doing a handstand, her ankles tight together, straight up in the air. She swung her legs backward to gain momentum, then flipped onto her feet and sprinted off.

“So Jon Snow…” the wildling claps him on his shoulder. “How does Dragon Pussy taste?”

Fucking Amazing. He can fucking smell it. In his beard, in his skin.

He smiles and shakes his head but doesn’t answer. Focusing on changing and strapping into his gear. Throwing the other set into his pack. Jeans exchanged for the tactical pants he received when he joined the Night's watch. A compression shirt to help with the bleeding if he get hit.

Then the welded saw blade of Tormunds axe head planted in front of him as he tightened the laces of his boots. He looked up to see him leering over him.

“Come On…”

“She bites.”

Tormund burst out laughing.

“The best ones always do.”

He finished lacing his boots, slipping a small knife sheath into his left one. He strapped on the leather and steel guards, around his shoulders, and over his forearms and pulled his ballistic vest over it.

Her hand lingered as she adjusted the strap.

Stop. Do your job.

He shook his head and repeated it.

Stop. Do your job.

Gun belt buckled around his waist, double checking the pistols, double checking the clips of ammo. Around his thigh he clipped the machete.

“Beric, You’re carry Charges?”

“Yes, Ser.”

“Rope?”

Clegane grunted.


Gloves. They’re not his winter gloves. These are fingerless and leather. They are for keeping a grip on his gun, and protecting his hands when he demonstrates just how hard he can hit someone.

He learned his lesson last time.

Arya returned with Jorah and the earpieces. “All geared up?” he asked the old bear. Jorah nodded
and distributed the walkies.

He pulled Arya away from the others and helped her put in her earpiece. She didn’t wear any combat armor because she relied on stealth and speed. Instead she wore a fitted black jumpsuit, with knee pads and elbow pads for crawling and sliding. Gloves with lots of grip. Her boots were made for climbing and the toes had small blades embedded that would only puncture if she kicked you hard enough. On a strap on the outside of her thigh was a set small steel canisters. Chems for Smoke Bombs.

Around her waist was a belt with eight knives attached to it. The hilt of each was wrapped in grip tape and had a name written and rewritten and rewritten in different colors of permanent ink.


“Where’s your gun?” she points to her pack.

“It throws off my balance” he gave her a hard look and retrieved the small pistol.

“Turn around” she obeyed. He attached the holster to her belt horizontally, centered at the small of her back using zip ties, so its weight was evenly distributed and it wouldn’t move as she leapt around. “Better?”

She jumps onto one of the rocks and does a backflip. Landing in front of him and nodding. Jon clipped the ends of the ties and turned her to him.

“Okay.” He bent his knees till he was eye level with her and exhaled “When we are out there, I am not your brother. I am your commander. Do you understand?”

“Yes”

“Yes what?”

“Yes, Ser.”

“Alright. That means you do what I tell you to do, when I tell you, without question.”

“Jon...you can trust me. I can do this.” she looked slighted.

I know. I do. Now I need you to trust me” she nodded. “If I tell you to fight, you fight. If I tell you to fall back, you fall back. If I tell you to hide, you hide,” he paused. “And if I tell you to run, you run. You run and you follow Sandor and you listen to him and you don’t fucking stop until you hear from me or you get to Sansa. Do you understand?”

She looked down at her feet. Then back up at him.

“Understood, Commander.” he turned his head to the right.

“Understood?” he asked the person standing behind him.

“Yes, Commander” The Hound answered.

“Alright.” he stood and patted Arya on her shoulder and checked his watch. “Transport in Five lads. Let’s pack it up”

Their packs went with Tyrion and the Unsullied who were manning logistics and communications.
The plan was to make a quick exit once they secured the weapon. The breeze picked up and he shrugged off a small shiver. He’d be underground soon.

He looked to the North, there was a storm brewing in the Mountains. He could see the clouds beginning to gather and darken around the peaks.

It’s too far away for him to tell where it’s moving. If it moves south, they’ll have to deal with rain. It’s too warm and too early for snow this far south. If it moves North, Sansa will have to deal with a blizzard on top of everything else.


Stop. Do your job.

He catches a glimpse of her while climbing up into it the transport. She was on her motorcycle flanked by her kos. She was shouting in Dothraki and flashing signals with her left hand. Rough and Melodic. Her silver braid whipping in the wind behind her. Fearsome and Beautiful.

She moaned in his ear.

Stop. Do your job.

Her tongue dragged across his throat.

Stop. Do your job.

“You’re not going to do that creepy thing your cult does when we’re in there right?” Gendry asks Arya.

“They aren’t a cult and they aren’t mine” Gendry rolled his eyes at her. She mock punched him. “Which creepy thing?” she smiled and flashed all her teeth. He made a motion like he was pulling something over his face. She grew somber and looked at him with that eerie stillness.

“I will kill Lannisters as Arya Stark”

Jon leaned his head back and closed his eyes and desperately tried not to smell Daenerys.

He smells smoke.

“Put it out Beric.” he ordered without opening his eyes. “The smell will give us away in a closed space.”

He heard a snap of fingers as Beric flicked the cigarette out the back of the truck.

It’s a fucking hole in the ground. An air shaft bored into the ground so the work crews can breathe as they clear rubble and debris from the underground facility. Fifty feet down, the bottom was resealed with fresh concrete, but they hadn’t bothered to fill in the hole yet.

He had almost fallen in it when he was chasing Daenerys through the canyon.

“Setting a five second fuse.” Beric drew out the fuse and lighted it as they took cover. He crouches over Arya and she tucked herself under him as he counted down the explosion.

The earth shook beneath them for a moment and cloud of dust erupted from the hole. A low rattle that lasted only a moment. He looked down at his little sister.
“Ready?”

She nods.

They tied off the rope to a nearby boulder and he held it, sliding it across his back and through his hands as she half rappelled, half climbed down the shaft.

She finished her descent and tugged the rope twice to indicate she was in. Now they waited for her to scout and see if anyone was coming.

“Two…” she whispered into the com. It was staticy and barely audible through the layers of rock between them.

“Take one alive.”

One beat.

Two.

Five.

“Clear”

He nodded to Gendry who dropped down. Followed by Clegane. Beric. Jorah.

“Tormund. Get the body out of sight.” The wildling nodded as he slid down the rope. The rope went taut then relaxed. He untied it from the rock and let it fall.

He wedged himself in preparing for his somewhat...controlled slide down.

He held a finger to his ear. “Strike Team, Going out of Range.”

“Good Luck” Tyrion.

There were three quick taps. He couldn’t help the smile that split his face.

One for yes. Two for no.

Three for “I love you.”

“Same to you.”

He pulls his black bandana back over his face and covered his hair. The motion eerily similar to pulling off a mask.

He dropped down the hole.

It was dark and cramped as he slid. His boots dragging across the dirt walls causing rubble to shift and move beneath him.

Landing on his feet with a hard thud.

The Lannister guard was on his knees. He had been gagged and his hands were tied to behind his back. Gendry was behind him with the long handle of his hammer tight beneath the man’s chin.

Jon squatted down to get eye level with the man.
“Are you going to tell me what I need to know?”

The guard nodded and Jon looked to Gendry who loosened the hammer against the man’s throat and he pulled the gag out.

“How many people are here?”

“...a little over a hundred”

“How many are security?”

“At least half...”

“Where’s the weapon?”

The Guard’s WalkieTalkie chirped.

“Status Update? What was that noise?” came a voice from the other end.

He grabbed the device from the guard's belt and pointed into the man’s chest. Stabbing it in hard.

“You tell them it was a cave-in. You say it's all-clear. Or my friend here breaks your neck.”

The guard nodded. He held the walkie to his mouth and depressed the button.

“Intrud...”

Gendry pulled the hammer’s handle up and to the right in swift violent motion and the man slumped against him after a bone crunching crack.

They held their breath waiting for an alarm. Waiting for a response.

“You got cut off. Please Repeat.” Jon exhaled.

It had almost been over before it started. Arya extends her hand for the Walkie and he depresses the button.

“All Clear. Must be a Cave-In”

It’s an eerily perfect mimicry of the man’s voice.

The voice at the other end sighed. “Third one this week. Try and find it will ya”

“Yes Ser”

He took the Lannister Walkie back and clipped it to his belt. They could use it to monitor their communications. Tormund dragged the body to where he stashed the other. Taking their guns and ammo along the way.

He took a moment to look around. It was a dark rounded passageway with cement floors, walls and ceilings. New cement. Through the center of the passage there was a wide channel with water flowing away from them.

He pulled out the small handheld Rad-counter and his compass. There was a faint clicking but it didn’t seem to be stronger or weaker in any particular direction.

The water was flowing west, he knelt next to it and dipping his finger in to taste it. It was metallic,
and heavy, Like the water they used at the wall. Melting ancient Ice for freshwater.

The guards hadn’t taken long to get here after the small explosion. That either meant there were more close by or the two they had come across just happened to be patrolling this area.

“Arya...where’d they come from?”

She pointed west, the same direction the water was flowing.

“Right… Jorah, on me.” Jorah flanked him as he took point. It was dark. He pulled his rifle round front and clicked the mounted flashlight on. He kept it pointed down. No direct beams, just ambient light.

They followed the long passage until they heard the sound of falling water. It grew louder and soon it was roaring as the passage opened up into a large circular room.

The channel of water mingled with three others as they stepped out onto a steel walkway that followed the round perimeter of the room. And all the channels tumbled into a man made waterfall. In the center was a concrete ring that blocked any water going in. Above them the ceiling was a massive set of round steel doors.

Doors that were last opened almost a quarter century ago, when Dany’s father decided he would rather rule over ashes then let anyone take his throne.

Doors that will open again if they fail.

“I think they are using the energy of the falling water as a power source.” Gendry said, shining his flashlight down into the water. “It’ll hit turbines somewhere below and generate electricity. That’s what they do with the blackwater rush in King's Landing.”

That would explain why the water tasted metallic. If they could cut their power...

He needs to see what’s at the bottom of that ring of concrete. If there are more people working or if its deserted. If the weapon is down there. Ready to launch. Ready to destroy his home, his family.

It was almost 20 feet from where they were standing. And there was a waterfall between them. Nothing on the ceiling or walls but the metal doors above them.

He looked at Arya. She was small, but he wasn’t confident he could throw her that far. At least not by himself. He turned to the Hound.

“I can make it…” She looks up at him. He nodded and handed her his flashlight. It was the best chance they had.

They tied the rope around her waist and beneath her chest. The way he and Tormund and Ygritte lashed themselves to each other as they climbed the ice and concrete and steel of the wall. She looped the rope in long folds that hung down to her knees. The pattern making it easy for it to roll off her as she moves and twists in the air.

Gendry tied the end of the rope around his waist and planted his hammer on the ground, both hands gripping the handle as hard as he could. Jon squatted low across from the Hound they and held out their hands for a basket toss.

They held their breath, and Arya exhales slowly.
She ran back to the wall, bounced off it and then sprinted at them. Her foot hit his hands and he and Clegane launched her as hard as they could across the tumbling water 10 feet below.

She flew and twisted and caught the edge of the cement with two hands on the edge. He blew out a breath as she climbed up onto the ring and clicked on the flashlight. He couldn’t hear her over the roar of the water. She was peering down the hole and then suddenly she dropped to hang over the side. His stomach lurched.

“I don’t see the warhead, but there’s people.” in his ear.

“How far down?” She pulled herself back over the lip, shining the flashlight.

“200 feet.” They didn’t have that much rope.

Not that it mattered, as lights fell on them and someone shouted “Intruders” over the Lannister Walkie. A bullet whizzed by his shoulder and another pinged off the steel walkway over the torrent of rushing water.

He pulled his rifle around and aimed at the light sources shining on them. Arya dropped over the edge and hung in the darkness out of sight. He saw five lights flashing up at him. Jorah raised his rifle and they fired together. Two dropped and then a third as he fired again.

Another light flashed from across the room. Beric fired and the light dropped only to replaced by more. He flagged Jorah and Beric to take care of the wave coming from that direction.

He clicked on the fully automatic. Only to curse loudly as Tormund rushed across the line of bullets he was about to fire. The red of Tormunds hair and the red of the Lannister helmets looked the same in the dark.

“Get Arya…” he ordered to Clegane and Gendry. She was vulnerable in the center of the room like that. More lights. More men. He sprinted towards Tormund.

Tormund brought his axe down across of the Lannister guards. He pulled out his machete and stabbed through the first man he saw, and fired into the mass of bodies. He felt another bullet graze across his thigh. There was an audible crunch of a man’s knee as Tormund rolled low to avoid the gunfire.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Gendry hanging over the water by the handle of his hammer, his arm outstretched for Arya. Clegane was kneeling on the heavy end to counterweight.

Jon slashed at the guard in front of him, and the wave of soldiers broke off enough for him to grab Tormund and pull him back.

Arya drew herself tight against the cement, water roaring at her, Gendry’s hand outstretched.

He swung his rifle back around and let out a spray of automatic fire. Tormund getting the hint and pulling out his gun and firing into the mass.

“We’re pinned down.” Jorah in his ear.

Arya leapt.

He spun in his stance and fired at the second group of guards that were firing on Beric and Jorah. Gendry caught her.
Lights dropped along with the men holding them across the room and his men were able to start firing again.

Reload.

He turned back to Tormund and the guards coming at them and sprayed the full clip at the wave. Some fell. He let the rifle drop. The strap across his torso keeping it at his side. He drew his pistols and began picking off targets.

One rushed him and tackled him to the ground. He wrestled the man up before cracking his forehead against his nose. Then a knee to the groin.

And Arya’s boot to the head had him free. Jon pushed the body off as she rushed past him. Throwing two of her knives while twisting in the air and two more guards dropped.

He fired up from the ground up at the guards. There was a loud thud as the hammer made contact with its victim. Tormund rushed in alongside Arya.

“Clear” Beric in his ear.

He stood and pulled his machete and joined the others in the melee. He, Tormund, Arya and Gendry sliced and smashed through the Lannisters until then there was one.

They surrounded him. Clegane and Jorah holding his arms behind his back.

“Where’s the warhead…?”

The man didn’t answer.

He punched him. Hard. Blood poured out his nose in a long gooey trail.


He grabbed the man by the throat and dragged him over to the roaring water, hanging him over the edge.

He repeated his question. Again no answer.

He threw the man to the ground. Clegane pinned him and Jon tossed him his handcuffs.

“Beric I need a charge.”

If he wasn't going to get an answer, he would at least knock out power to the facility.

“How far down do you think those Turbines are Gendry?” he asked circling the man as Clegane secured his hands behind his back.

“Based on the sound, probably really deep. Like two or three hundred feet.”

“Make it a long fuse”

With a nod to his team they moved ahead to find cover.

Jon grabbed the man by his armor and shoved the explosive under it and lit the fuse. Then he held a gun to his head.
“One last time. Answer the question and you die easy. Where is the fucking warhead?”

“Fuck you.”

He threw the man over the edge. And then sprinted for his team. He tucked and rolled as the explosion erupted behind him.

There was a cry of chatter over the Lannister Walkie.

“Power failures in sections eleven through fifteen.”; “What level are they on?”; “Explosion heard at the launch bay”; “Lock it down and Move Out”

...Move out. They’re moving the weapon.

“Find what hole these men crawled out of.” he ordered. His team spread out searching. But he stopped Tormund before he moved ahead and looked him dead in the eye.

“We’re not raiding... These aren’t Thenns.” He paused “And I almost shot you. Don’t rush in until my signal.”

Tormund stared him down for a long moment. Defiance and anger flitting across his face. Then he took a breath and licked his teeth under his lips.

“Aye Jon.”

“Found it.” Beric in his ear.

It was a ladder going straight down into darkness. He clapped Gendry on his shoulder.

“Good Job.” He looked to Arya. “You too.”

She beamed at him.

He slid down the ladder first with Arya close behind.

It was a long slide into darkness and they landed with a small splash. The ground was flooded with about 6 inches of water.

“Ew.” Arya groaned aloud. He put a finger to his lips and she nodded.

Jon could hear the waterfall crashing onto the turbines above them. The ceiling was leaking and walls had cement and plaster stripped away. The result of the explosion. He flashed the light up the ladder and signalled the rest of his team to come down.

“Careful of the splash” he advised into the earpiece.

They moved as quietly as possible through the flooded corridor. Following the movement of the water. “Always follow water”, Ygritte had taught him, so long ago. It was moving slowly which meant the ground wasn’t level, or a drop was pulling it down.

Like stairs…

“Let’s move... Clegane bring up the back.”

The stairwell was five stories and there were lights at the bottom of it. Moving lights.
The Lannister Soldiers started firing up at them. He grabbed Arya by the collar and pulled her against the wall as bullets pinged off the steel railings and embedded into the cement wall behind them.

The Lannisters reloaded and he took his shots. Their enemies dodged out of the way and they made it down to the second landing before the Lannisters recovered their position. Arya hit the floor and covered her head as they rang another burst of fire back up at them. A level above them Jorah fired off two shots with his rifle.

A thud meant one of the soldiers at the bottom had dropped. He moved down another level as they focused their fire above him at the old bear. The steel railing became a low cement wall and they were able to move more freely. When they were a level above them he turned to Arya.

“Stay here.” He whispered at Arya. “I’m going to turn that corner and pop up and fire at them. When they reload, jump em.”

She nodded and drew two knives and sat back on her haunches preparing to spring up.

He crept along the wall down as the rest of the team exchanged fire with the Lannisters at the bottom.

He reloaded and exhaled.

“Hold your fire” he whispered into the comm. He didn’t want them firing down on Arya.

He popped up and unloaded on them in three bursts at where he estimated their location to be. They broke off from firing up and fired at him. He felt one hit his vest. It knocked him back, and it hurt like hell, but he was fine. He’d have a nasty bruise tomorrow.

The firing stopped and he heard Arya land. He pulled himself and jumped down to them pulling his pistols out and firing on the ones she hadn't taken care of.

He took position against the door frame at the base of the stairs and reloaded his rifle as the rest of the team moved into position. Clegane stood on the opposite side of the door.

He peered around the corner only to duck back as they opened fire. It was enough to get an idea of what was on the other side. It was a huge room. He could hear the waterfall hundreds of feet above them. They were at the base of the huge concrete ring. The LaunchPad. There was a lit passage across from the circle. The room was filled with excavation equipment and piles of materials. Steel beams, Pallets with bags of concrete, Large coils of wire, and bundles of rebar, piles of gravel.

And a large flatbed truck with a massive steel crate loaded on it.

And at least thirty soldiers between them and their target.

He covered his mouth and whispered into the ear piece. “There’s 30 men between us and our goal. Target is about 50 yards ahead on a truck. Clegane and I will lay down suppressing fire. Get to Cover and try and take out the tires. Do not hit the crate.”

The Hound pulled out a large combat shotgun and plugged in an eight shot clip. Arya pulled out her pistol from the small of her back. Gendry slung his hammer around his shoulder and pulled a gun from one of the fallen Lannister soldiers. The others reloaded.

Clegane burst out ahead of him firing shots. He counted each boom of the shotgun as he followed laying down a line of fire across the first grouping.
Three.

Arya had fired three times and sprinted into the blade of bulldozer. She hit one of the three shots. Blood bursting from the security officer.

Four

Gendry dove flat on his stomach behind a small pile of I-beams and started blind firing above it. He felt blood running down his leg and he didn’t know where it was coming from.

Five.

Reload.

Six.

Jorah and Beric made it to a pallet of concrete bags. A small group of advanced their position and he hit each with a gut shot in quick succession. A bullet pinged off something metal.

Seven.

Tormund’s red hair flash behind him and he tapped Clegane to follow him. They slid into cover.

Eight.

Jon rolled back to Arya’s position in shell of the of bulldozer. A quick scan revealed she wasn’t hit. He exhaled.”Everyone alive?” he asked into his earpiece. Various affirmatives came through. He looked down at Arya.

“On my signal, Disable that fucking truck.” he ordered his sister.

She nodded and set herself in a deep lunge, ready to sprint. He reloaded his rifle and held a finger to his ear. “We’re covering our shadow.” Arya began bouncing on her back leg. “Weapons free in 3...2...”

He spun out from his position and fired at a Lannister soldier. Drop. He saw Arya sprint past the pallet of concrete Jorah and Beric were shooting from. The other side was in cover too but there were more of them with less space.

A small group of Lannister advanced forward and he picked them off one at a time before rolling and sliding to the I-beams Gendry was pinned behind.

Reload.

Arya was halfway to the truck. He popped up with Gendry, and covered him as they moved across the line of fire to the next covered position. A stack of crates full of scrapped steel. The were soldiers taking cover on the other side.

Between the bursts of fire being exchanged by the other members of this team, he heard the slide of Arya’s knee pads against gravel. He squatted low, pressing his back against the materials he was taking cover with and slipped around the corner with his machete in one hand and a pistol in the other.

Sam’s rad counter was clicking loudly and quickly from where it was clipped to his belt, giving away his position. The guard burst from around the corner and he slashed up across the guards leg and up across his throat. The spray of blood splattered across him. He spat and rounded the corner
gunning the other men down.

Beric and Jorah had advanced as well. He heard Tormund roar and he heard the shotgun boom. Gendry was behind him. They slowly gained ground moving from cover to cover.

“ Arya?”

“Almost…”


There weren’t many Lannisters left to hit.

“Done.” Arya confirmed and Jon dropped back into cover and exhaled loudly.

“Well…now see now you’ve gone and made my life difficult.” The voice came through a speaker of some kind. It was distorted and he couldn't peg the accent. “And now I’ve gotta kill you.”

He heard something begin to spin up. He knows that sound. It's the sound he heard as Daenerys flew over them beyond the wall. A mini-gun. Only it wasn’t Dany coming to save them.

“Take Heavy Cover!” he ordered over the comm. He shoved Gendry down low onto their stomachs as the crates behind them were perforated with bullets. As the shots rang above them and wood splintered around them he heard heavy metallic thudding footsteps.

The only other time he’s seen power armor was beyond the wall. The Lord of Bones. He didn't even have a whole set. Just the frame. Plated thousands of Bones.

That fight had almost killed him. Almost killed all of them.

The gun overheated and stopped and he pulled Gendry up and they sprinted back as the man in power armor reloaded the belt. The handful of remaining Lannisters opened fire behind them. He looked back as they broke cover. The power armor was black steel and across the chest is painted a green flaming chain. He doesn’t recognize the markings.

“Secure the weapon!” the suit ordered. They were moving towards Arya’s position. Another belt of bullets whizzed around them.

“The truck won’t start” a Lannister shouted.

“Orders, Commander” The mini-gun spun down to reload.

“Drop that gun!” Jon ordered. He popped out from cover and emptied a clip at the armored hand holding the Mini-Gun. Arya slid into cover between him and Gendry. The gun was still firmly in the armored grip. He crouched back into cover as the next wave of fire began. He eyed Gendry’s hammer. “Alright… Arya, you and I are going to run out and distract him. Gendry. Bring that hammer down.” Gendry nodded. he tapped his comm. “Get rid of those soldiers and cover us”

They held until the next break in fire and he bolted at the armor skidding across the gravel and dirt kicking up as much dust as he could. Arya leapt up on the crates and launched herself into a large arcing flip landing in front of the suit. She then sprung up 6 feet into the air and bounced off the chest plate of the power armor, grabbing the shoulder guards of the suit and landing hanging off the suit like a backpack.

The hammer came down with a loud crash. Arya flipped off and joined him in cover.
“What the Fu…” The hammer came down again and the gun dropped. The barrel bent. “Open fire,” the armored person urged the remaining Lannisters. Gendry scrambled to cover narrowly dodging a rain of fire.

He heard the armored footsteps moving away from them and the creaking of steel on steel and an engine roaring to life. He reloaded and huffed a few quick breaths before springing back up and laying down suppressing fire to see what was happening.

The armored man had picked up the steel crate and was taking it over to the bulldozer. Lannister soldiers were advancing on the rest of his team, and one of the Lannisters had climbed into the bulldozer and started the engine and raised its bucket.

“I need a shot. Cover me”

He clicked off the automatic and aimed at the driver. Jon let out a long slow breath to steady his hands and his vision tunneled at the man. He fired, but the bullet hit the steel plate of the power armor as he dropped steel crate into the bucket.

He swore and fired again. The soldier dropped but was shoved out of the way by another one. He fired again but the vehicle lurched backwards towards the tunnel at the other end of the room. The Armored man sounded a retreat for his forces.

“Don’t let them retreat. Keep up the pressure”

They fired round after round and Lannister after Lannister dropped. But the vehicle kept crawling into the tunnel. They were retreating. The man in armor following it. Arya looked up at him after he ducked down.

He nodded as he reloaded and she bolted and sprinted towards the bulldozer when he sprung back up.

He fired twice, but his eyes went wide as he saw the Soldier carrying the RPG. “Get Down!” he ordered and ran after her. She dove and he jumped on top of her as the blast caved in the tunnel.

Gravel and rock blew over him and he felt blood drip down over his eye. But he stayed put, keeping his little sister pinned under him until the debris settled. Jon lifted himself up off her and stared at the caved in passage.

They had been so fucking close.

“Is anyone hurt?” he asked. There was a chorus of negatives. “Alright then. Beric blow this fucking rubble out of our way. Gendry, find some armor that fits and put it on. The rest of you pick up any ammo you see.”

He was bleeding. On his thigh and on his forehead. A bullet had grazed him at some point. Jon wiped the blood away and tied the bandana that was covering his hair around his thigh.

The bulldozer would be slow. But it’ll take time for them to blow through this rubble, then they have to catch up and then… they would be fighting a small army and that armored fuck on exposed tunnel.

Beric told them to take cover as the first round of explosives went off. Sandor tossed Arya water bottle from his pack and she chugged it. She was covered in grey cement dust, dirt, blood. So was he. Tormund leaned heavily on his axe. Jorah was testing some dropped guns. Gendry was poking through dead soldiers looking for armor.
The second round of blasts got them a hole.
He crawled through it first and stared down the tunnel. And it was long. Miles long.

“There’s only one place they’re going, Jon…” Jorah told him quietly.

“I know.” he admits.

They stared down out at it. A tunnel miles long, with no way out and no way back. Only one way to go. He’d once again led his team to certain death. He’d led his little sister to certain death.

She looked up at him with a quiet expectation. She needed him. Sansa needed him. Bran needed him. His team. Winterfell. The North. Dany...

Dany whose confidence and conviction and unwavering faith in herself had brought armies across an irradiated ocean. Dany who could fly on a dragon she built with her own two hands. Dany who made men, who made him... believe they could do impossible things.

Dany needed him.

“I love you Jon…”

And he told her he would see her tonight.
And Jon Snow is a man of his word.

He took a deep breath through his nose and he could smell her and it set him on fire. Her fire. Dragon fire that burned deep in his stomach.

“Jobs not done. Lets go hunt some Lions.”
Be a Dragon.

Daenerys Stormborn knows the Mysteries of Fire and Blood. Knows heat between her thighs.
Knows how to ride beasts of steel. Knows the thrum of power. Knows heart gnashing in her teeth. Knows the burn of smoke down her throat. Knows the smell of burnt flesh, and burnt wood, and burnt enemies, and burnt loves.

Knows what it feels like to go faster and faster. To see the earth fall before her. To mock its gravity. To dare it to defy her.

Dragons plants no trees.

Its like the Dothraki sea. A vast stretch of nothing but dead grass and open road for thousands of miles. The bluffs and outcrops and plateaus fade giving way to sparse scattered open-air foundries and scrap yards. Pools of half molten scrap wafting orange flexs into the air, and occasionally belching a black cloud of smoke. The heat radiates off them, Clear wavering lines of it distorting the surrounding piles of rusted out scrap.

None would grow in this wasteland anyway.

“Strike team going out of range.” he says in her ear. And an ache inside grounds her to the earth.

“Good Luck”

She taps her ear quickly three times, hoping her meaning gets through.

“Same to you.”

Surrounding the city, approximately a half mile away, in large half moon are three rows of Lannister tanks.

Tanks.

She wipes the dust off her goggles and pulls out a pair of binoculars from the bandolier across her chest and peers through.

Tanks.

She can begin to make out the formation of the vehicles. Closest to the city wall are monstrous machinations. Huge, derelict, skeletal cranes rolling on massive treads with large platforms mounted at the base of its long neck. Lightly armored. Steel plating focusing on key areas of the machine’s build.

The other lines are tanks in small pyramid formations. One in front, two behind. She can’t get a good count of the groupings with all the dust. More than ten. Less than fifteen.

It's similar to the Blockade formations the Wise Masters made around Meereen. Trying to trap her. Trying to Trick her. Trying to cage her in.

One cannot cage a Dragon.

And silly ships of wood and scrap are nothing to a Dragon.

She snarls to psych herself up and cries out a command in Dothraki and holds her left fist high into the air. And behind her and around her the same cry goes up and the horde falls into their lines. Long unbroken stretches of wheels and steel. Fastest in the front. Heavies to the back.

Daenerys stares at the small odometer on her wrist and slowly counts down with the hand she holds tightly in the air as the device tracks each fraction of the remaining space between their forces.
500 meters

In her rearview mirror, the second riders on the backs of the heavies are standing in the stirrups they have mounted on their bikes and have drawn whatever weapons they are outfitted with. Guns, chains, arakh, makeshift projectiles... explosives.

The very front line, the one made up of the very fastest bikes begin to draw short zig zagging lines in dirt. A moment later the next line follows. She does it as well. Kicking up dust and dirt and ...hopefully obscuring the heavy bikes with clouds of detritus.

200 meters

The very first shot from the very first tank fires. It lands and booms somewhere to her left. The war cry that follows is just as loud thunderous as the explosion.

50 meters

To her right is Qhono. He draws an Arakh from his belt and pulls up alongside her. The weapon is designed to slice tires, cut fuel lines, gouge out flesh while passing parallel. She doesn't know how they will work against the tank's treads. They look like they are made of rubber, but that doesn't make them like tires, which can blow out.

10...

She holds her breath.

The Wise Masters tried to use fire against her. Launched explosives behind the walls of Mereen. Starting Fires, Collapsing Building, Killing Civilians. Killing her people.

Her people. Their property.

And to the wise masters, if a slave does not obey, if property has no use, then it must be destroyed.

Be a Dragon.

Dragons plant no Trees.

The steel of Qhono’s Arakh and the steel frame of the treaded wheels create fireworks of sparks as they grind across each other. The thinnest line of rubber peeling off the edge of it.

But then they are through the line of tanks. Riding towards the monstrosities ahead of them. There are snipers perched in those derelicts.

And her suspicions are confirmed as a rider drops to her left. Bike waivering out of control, before tumbling and spinning, leaving scrap and steel scattered in the dirt.

She whistles loud and shouts a command in Dothraki, while drawing circles in the air with her hand.

In the space between lines of Lannister Tanks, they spin. Tight circles, tight wheels kicking up another cloud of dirt and dust. The riders coming behind and along the line do the same and with each zip and wave through the formations of tanks they spin.

Trying to obscure the snipers line of sights.
Gun fire from the Lannister machines. Metal tearing against metal as a bold young man weaves too carelessly, and collides with a tank, and the crunch of steel and blood. Shouts in Dothraki. An explosion as a rider leaps from the back of motorcycle onto a tank prying open the lid and dropping a grenade, spinning and dropping onto a new bike.

Break a hard right before flames burst from the hatch and the plating creaks and groans and shudders to a halt.

She signals Qhono with a diagonal slicing motion, mimicking the grip on his arakh. Silently directing him to drag his arakh across the exposed tread instead of along it. He nods and she can only hope he understands.

Regain momentum, gripping the throttle hard, accelerating through back through the line.

The arakh slices across the exposed tread in a long diagonal as they breeze past.

And it works.

As the machine crawls forward, the pull of it along the ground causes the rubber tread to snap. It drags behind the tank and without the friction of the rubber to pull it along the earth that side of the vehicle grinds slowly to a stop.

But the other row of tread, on the other side, is still moving. Full speed ahead. And by the time she has completed her turn and faces her foe once more, it has spun into the tank next to it with the shriek of metal on metal.

The Wise Masters believed they could march on her cities and go unpunished. They believed they could threaten her Dragon, threaten her Unsullied, threaten Missandei. They believed they could make demands of her.

They believed they won.

She offered them a chance.

She hears the whistle before the impact. Smoke and Rock and Dirt darken the sky in front of her. She can feel the dirt skid across her skin and into her hair, and the earth shudder under her wheels.

Another whistle, this one impacting to her left. Belching out fire and shrapnel. Tangling bodies and machines. Riders pulling bikes off their blood. Pulling them up onto the bikes.

Dragons plant no trees.

She skids to a stop beyond the turmoil.

“Khaleesi” Qhono pulls up next to her.

“I need to see” she shushes him.

The Lannisters are shelling them past their own line of tanks. She hears another whistle and the shell crashes off to her right. They are attempting to cut off any potential retreat. Box her riders in between the line of tanks and the walls of the city. Snipers will be high above them on top of the city walls and nesting in the large necks of the cranes.

They need to be able to retreat at a moment's notice. That's the plan. That’s the mission.

She needs to break their trap.
Through her binoculars she can see them loading another shell into the one on the far right. And she counts the seconds as they finish loading it. As men pull and crank massive winch. As long cords strung through the neck of the crane become taut. As it launches and whistles through the air, and hits the ground in an explosion of dirt and shrapnel.

They are more than just snipers nests. Scrap built Ballista firing into her riders

A wicked smile splits her face and she lets out warcry as her hand twists the throttle. Several cries coming behind her. She throws her hand in the air and brings it down in a long slicing motion, her fingers pointing at the crane. And they burst forward charging the line. A quick glance in her rearview mirror shows about twenty riders behind her.

A bullet whizzes past her, and she’s only aware of it because it ricochets off the tank she is passing with a loud ping. They don't stop when they clear the formation of tanks into the cloud of dust her riders have been kicking up with each pass through the line.

Daenerys waves her hand left and right in a deliberate even motion and they serpentine, kicking up dust behind them and dodging the bullets raining down from the gunners along the walls and high in the skeletons of the cranes.

She hears a cry and the sound of metal scraping against packed earth as one of her followers is hit and they fall from their mount and the motorcycle slides out from under them. Far behind them, in her rearview mirror, one of the tanks has burst into flames and a Lannister soldier escapes only to be shot down by her Blood.

A bullet hits the ground at her feet as she dismounts at the base of this rolling scrapheap. And riders follow her lead. And they climb. Grabbing onto exposed machine parts, crawling their way up the side, until it suddenly jostles to life.

The operator trying to shake them off.

Other riders have reached the top and she can hear combat on the platform. The platform with the winch, the winch with cable she needs cut to disable this monster and open up a path to retreat when she gets her signal from Jon.

The flap of her coat gets caught and she feels the slow moving machine begin to pull at her.

"Arakh!" she screams.

The rider ahead of her drops his to her open hand and she slices the excess leather in a long swift cut, freeing her with a jerk. She almost loses her footing with violence of the recoil.

They thought they could insult her to her face. Call her a whore. Call her a slave. Didn’t they know she was the Last Dragon? The last blood of Valyria. Did they think she didn’t know the tongue of her blood?

Weren’t they afraid to wake the Dragon?

She slides the arakh into her belt and tucks her braid into her jacket. Keeping it away from the rotating parts. To lose one’s hair was a sign of defeat among her blood

Besides, She liked it. Jon liked it. At least, she assumed by the way he was constantly touching it.

A small leap and she grabs the end of the platform, with both hands, pulling herself up as much as she can. A bullet hits the platform by her head and she drops down to hang off the edge. The sun is
behind him, and she can’t quite see him despite the tint of her goggles.

She’s exposed dangling off the edge of this machine.

That’s how they always wanted her. Exposed and Vulnerable. Drogo with her ass up in the air, where he could shove her face down into the dirt. Confined by the Khals to Vaes Dothrak. “Sweet Sister.” Chained.

But Dragons are meant to be exposed. Dragons are meant to be seen.

How else would anyone believe it?

There’s moving tread rumbling below her and she isn’t exactly sure how long she can hold on by her fingers. The operator drives them over a bump and the turbulence almost causes her to lose her grip.

Fumes and Exhaust fill her lungs and are exhaled as Dragonfire.

A Lannister soldier is fighting one of her riders a few yards from where she hangs. And she stretches and shimmies her way over to them. With a quick motion she slices the arakh across the back of her enemies heels. The man toppling and falling backwards to be crushed beneath the tread.

"Shoot Him" she orders, pointing with the Arakh in the general direction of the Sniper. He turns and fires as she scrambles to her feet.

She needs to disable that Ballista. The winch is ten feet away from her position. She sees the sniper fall from his nest as another of her blood open fire.

It’s almost a crude how simple this machine is. Compared to Drogon, compared to any motorcycle in the Horde. The winch and cables pull on torsion rods which in turn compress a huge tightly wound spring, which launch the shells.

She slices the Arakh across the cables making sure to cut each one. And then she brings it down again. She feels the blood drip down her cheek before the sting as the wires snap, suddenly released of tension.

And then there’s a hand around her throat.

The soldier has her by the neck, and she kicks out hard as she can aiming for the knees. She makes contact but it's not hard enough to for him to let go.

Be a Dragon

The arakh in her hands slices out and she’s ill prepared for the splatter of blood erupting from the mans throat.

Blood in her mouth. Chanting in her ear. Muscle between her teeth.

“Khaleesi!” one of her riders scream. She inhales deeply as that painful pressure on her throat has disappeared.

“Kill the driver and ride this monster” Her blood follows her command and the machine is rolling towards the line of Lannister tanks ahead. Dead man at her feet.

Dragons plant no trees.

Dusting off her goggles she peers through the binoculars, to examine the landscape from her now
elevated position. Three pyramid formations of tanks have circled in unison and are moving full speed ahead towards them. The heavy gun atop one fires and booms and the projectile slams into the side of the crane.

She has to fight to regain her balance.

She sees the small twisted shapes of bikes on the ground and the deaths twist in her stomach. They are her blood, and their lives are her responsibility. And she sees what she’s bought with their blood. A dozen or so of the tanks have been destroyed.

One is on its side. From where she stands it looks like they used several grappling hooks and chains attached to their bikes and pulled it over. The others are in flames, grenades most likely.

Or...

Daenerys nods and licks the side of her mouth as her next plan comes together. Another projectile launches and it misses them and slams into the side of the city wall and there is a great sound of cracking cement and the crash of rubble.

It's not a big enough hole to be of any use to her. But it gives her a smug sense of satisfaction to see that perfect wall damaged.

She orders her rider to keep the massive crane moving forward, straight into path of the tanks coming at them. Her objective is either at the back of this monstrosity or under it. Peering over the back edge she smiles at her luck.

The Bloodriders nod as she relays short simple orders. She wants grenades, scraps of the cable from the winch, and for the driver to set them on a collision course with their oncoming enemy and bail.

The Lannister tanks charging them have begun to veer their left and right, moving to flank them, preparing to surround them on three sides. She flags the heavy riders that have been circling the crane to her position.

The next step is the part that has her heart pounding in her chest. They lower her down to where the fuel tank sits, exposed and vulnerable at the crane’s rear.

One arm is released from the safety of their grip to find the steel frame that keeps fuel tank tucked securely to machine. With a quick breath, she lets go of the other.

And she doesn’t fall to her death, crushed under the treads of this monstrosity. Her riders follow her down. Most jump directly from the back of the platform down onto the back seat of the heavies chasing behind the runaway crane.

It’s a delicate thing she must do next, taking one of the grenades she’s been given and securing it to the frame of the fuel tank and arming it.

The vehicle jostles as the Lannister tanks fire another shell at them. And she almost drops it. But her hands are practiced and stable as she winds the thin cable around it and the steel. The heavy beneath her is crying out for her to jump.

Be a Dragon.

And her breath escapes in a loud huff as she lands on the heavy bike and the engine roars and they accelerate and her Dragon fire erupts behind them. The explosion occurs in two blasts. The grenade
first. The fuel tank second. And it is a flaming wreck of steel.

She spins backwards behind her rider. Taking in the chaos she caused.

The dragonfire she’s rained down.

Four more tanks grind to a halt. But one bursts through the wreckage and the smoke. Firing at her with a heavy mounted gun. She cries out in warning to the rider and they bank hard to the right as the shell crashes next to them. Dirt and rock spraying out at them.

The tank’s hatch opens, and soldier pops out to fire at her. It pings of the edge of the bike’s frame. They are hunting her. Tracking her relentlessly through the swarm of riders whipping past them. She grips the back of the seat, holding on above the exhaust. Hot air streaming past her fingers.

They fire another shell at her and she’s able to hang on for the first. She goes flying with the second.

One of the first things Drogo taught her about riding was how to survive a fall. Try and stay with the bike. Slide. Protect your neck. Tuck and Roll.

She tries.

The slide through the dirt has torn through her leathers. And the road rash is dirty, and the cuts and abrasions sting along her hip and thigh. It is going to hurt a lot tomorrow.

The next blast shocks her to her feet and the dizziness is overwhelming. But she needs to run. Because that tank is still coming after her.

She’s searching a bike. But each one she sees is crushed or warped or damaged or out of fuel. She shouts for a rider and taps her earpiece quickly as she runs.

“Da…. Rys...ca...me…?” the radio is mostly static. Tyrion’s voice cutting in and out of the electric crinkle.

The gunner is playing with her as she runs. He’ll fire at her heels or past her hair. Toying with her.

Don’t wake the Dragon.

She’s at the perimeter of one of the open air scrap foundries that surround the city. Piles of scrap surrounding a massive smelting pool with red hot metal.

Fire cannot hurt a Dragon.

And she sprints for her position. Planting herself on the low cement wall surrounding the molten pool of scrap. Raising her hands high in the air.

Alone, No Comms, An arakh and a revolver and her wits.

It bursts over a pile of scrap and grinds to stop in front of her. The gunner in the hatch has been shot and the body hangs limply over the side. The heavy gun, creaks and moans as its huge barrel aims at her.

“Daenerys Targaryen.” a voice says through a staticy speaker system. She nods.

There’s a pause and the sound of someone moving within the steel belly of the tank. The dead gunner's body is pushed out of machine and lands with a nauseating thud on the ground. Then a man appears with gun drawn and trained on her.
“You don’t have to shoot me”

“You don’t have to shoot me.” he orders. She waves her hands ever so slightly, forcing him to acknowledge that her hands are already up. He grunts and mumbles something under his breath. “Throw down your gun. And that stupid fucking knife.”

She raises an eyebrow but complies. Slowly moving her hand to the gun belt and pulling the buckle free with one hand. As it falls, it scrapes against the road rash on her hip and Daenerys winces.

The man seems to stare at her for a minute. He doesn’t know what to do next.

She toes her weapons towards him and he seems to snap out of whatever hesitancy he was experiencing. He keeps the gun on her as he climbs down the tank and kicks her gun behind him.

And then he has one of her wrists and there’s metal around it and then her other wrist is cuffed too. Handcuffs. She growsl internally.

Don’t wake the Dragon.

“Don’t make it so tight.” she complains sarcastically. “I’m sure Jaime Lannister wouldn’t want his captive injured.

The man looks like he might hit her and she braces for it. But he doesn’t. Instead he grabs her by the small chain between connecting her wrists and yanks her to him.

And she falls into. Overbalancing herself so that her dead weight collapses against him and pushes him back. He lands against the wall of the smelting pit and lets go of his gun in surprise. She scrambles to find the Arakh on the ground and then scrambles to her feet. Both her cuffed hands gripping the handle.

He fails to aim when he fires at her.

Don’t wake the Dragon.

She swings at him. Slicing in wide uncontrolled arcs. His eyes go wide and he steps backwards. And she does it again hurling curses in Dothraki. He tumbles backwards and the molten pool of scrap claims him.

The smell of molten metal on human flesh isn’t new to her. The sound of Viserys screams. Drogo’s laugh.

He was no Dragon.

Neither is this man.

She locates her pistol and stands over the pit where he screams and flails.

Dragons plant no trees.

She could not grant Viserys mercy. And the screaming stops after she pulls the trigger. Its quiet again. Except for the somewhat distant gunfire and shelling and shouting and the long frustrated roar that rips through her chest.

One problem at a time.

First, Her hands are handcuffed. She carefully climbs the low wall of the smelting pit. The body is
burning and slowly sinking into the molten metal. There’s no way to get the keys off it. At least she was handcuffed around front.

Second, her radio isn’t working. She tries tapping again. No response.

Third, she needs transportation. She looks to the tank. She built a Dragon. What is a tank to a Dragon?

With a frustrated sigh, she works on climbing up into it. It's made difficult by the handcuffs, but after one hard fall right onto her injured hip, she manages to drop herself down the hatch.

The only light is the light from the open hatch and a clip on flashlight tied haphazardly to a pipe. Daenerys plants herself in the driver seat and examines the controls.

There’s five levers, some kind of periscope, and a radio. Exactly what she was looking for. She hunts for the frequency shared by her, Tyrion and Jon. She needs to communicate where she is, to get an update on the rest of the fight. But its no good.

But when she talks through the set, it only goes to the speaker outside.

Deep Breath.

Be a Dragon.

She has a puzzle to solve. There are five levers in front of her. Two to her right, two to her left and one in the center.

The one in the center has a trigger. Probably the big gun. She grabs it with both hands, as if the cuffs gave her a choice, and wiggles it around. It can move in small clicks along both axis and she hears grinding and creaking metal as the gun obeys her orders.

“Now let's try and figure out how to drive this thing.” she says it aloud to herself and is ever so slightly startled by the shake in her own voice.

There are two sets of levers on either side of her. All are currently upright. Its clearly how the operator controls the tank. She doesn't want to experiment. If the tank goes moves forward too much they will end up in the smelter, and while she's pretty sure she would survive the heat, she doesn’t know the upper limits of her gift.

And if it's up to her, she’d rather not find out here.

With no immediate danger so she can take a moment to think it through. Her motorcycle is controlled by her hands on the handlebars and the engine pushing forward from the back tires. The front tire directs, the back tire pushes. Same with the trucks with the added step of a steering wheel.

This tank doesn't have back tires. This tank has rows of tread--Which means they dont have an axel----Which means that these levers are forward/backward - left tread and forward/backward - right tread. She snaps her fingers, congratulating herself on how clever she is.

And grabs the outer lever on her right with both hands and pulls. And she does the same on her left. Its jolty, jarring violent movements, but through the periscope she can see that she is backing up.

She can't see behind her though and she can hear the metallic clang as she’s backed into a pile of scrap. She quickly grabs the left forward lever and pulls it back and the machine stalls.
Daenerys groans and pushes the left backward lever upright and the tank makes a hard jerk as it turns. The handcuffs are making this difficult. A normal operator would be manipulating multiple levers at a time.

It’s slow at first. Navigating through the scarp yard she sprinted through earlier. The Periscope is dirty and she can’t clearly see out of it.

A rider comes into view and she screams into the radio.

“Khaleesi!”

“Yes, my Blood.”

Qhono climbs up into the tank, sliding into hatch, and closing it behind him. “Are you alright?” She shakes her wrists demonstrating the handcuffs “This is slow” he complains after taking the seat next to her.

“Sometimes we must crawl before we can run” The battle coming hazily into view. Smoke and charred machines lining the field. Another of the ballista has been taken down.

She can’t see the barrel of the gun through the dirt on the periscope. But she can see her target, two small tanks barrelling after a group of retreating riders. And she can hear the gun rotating above her as she clicks the control along the axis.

She fires.

It misses widely.

There’s only one way to see. But sticking her head out of here will make her an obvious stationary target on a slow moving vehicle. She takes deep breath, pulling her goggles back over her eyes and wiping them off.

There’s only one way to see.

“Take over”

She rolls back to the gunners hatch as Qhono scurries into the seat. Handcuffed hands struggling to unlock the small round door. It pops free with a hard yank that causes her to lose her footing as they rumble over uneven terrain.

“Keep following them” she orders, tense after a bullet pings off the side of the tank.

There’s only one way to see.

She pops her head up. Trying to remain shielded on one side by the steel door.

“Three Degrees Right” she shouts down to Qhono and gun creaks and groans. The gun moves the wrong way she shouts down an obscenity at him that is rudely interrupted by a ping and a spark near her. She drops down panting.

“Khaleesi!”

“Higher. That means Up.” she snarls returning to her feet as he makes excuses about inverted controls.

Her cheeks puff out as she lets out a long sputtering breath before popping back up again. The gun
rotating as requested. she orders as they crawl closer to their prey.

“Dracarys.”

A mechanism within the gun clicks and the whole vehicle shudders with the force of the projectile. It hits directly into the side front of one of the tanks. Halting its momentum.

“Again”

Another click. Another shudder. Another explosion.

Dragons plant no trees.

The second tank’s gun rotates and fires. “REVERSE” she screams as it impacts into the dirt not ten feet away from her. Flashing brightly and dizzingly and kicking up dirt and rocks at her. The force of the blast slamming the hatch down. Knocking her down into the belly of the tank. Landing hard on her injured hip.

Qhono is doing his best to try and dodge. Doing Shaky half moons in an attempt to serpentine that sounds clunky and will likely result in a Jam. And they will be trapped in this tank, a stationary target. Better than retreating in a straight line.

Fire cannot hurt a Dragon.

But Shrapnel can. Another blast near the tank jostles them. They need to get out. She tries to turn the door but it won’t budge. It wasn’t closed properly so it won’t open.

“It’s stuck!”

Qhono bolts out of the seat and she tucks into it grabbing at the Radio, shouting urgently in Dothraki to any nearby riders to take out the tank charging them. Her blood pounding in her ears, peering out the periscope.

Two more tanks have turned on them. She’s going to die, handcuffed in a box. Like the Wise Masters wanted.

A shaky breath escapes as she brings up the radio to her lips. “Jon...” she whimpers. A bullet dings into the side of tank, leaving a dent in the metal plating near her head. “Please...”

The radio presses against her forehead as she tries not cry. Tries not to be scared. Tries to die like a dragon.

“This is Commander Jaime Lannister of The United Armed Forces of Westeros.” The radio crackles “We surrender. All Units Stand Down. I repeat All Units Stand Down. Authorization Code B5843-F”
He tracks his prey through eerie blackness of the bedrock. Old Mineshafts and cave systems that wind and wend beneath the Westerlands and the territory surrounding Casterly Rock. Tracking the
residue from the exhaust, an invisible drip of machine oil, and a slight variance in the pattern of clicks from the Rad Counter.

His pack follows behind. Taking up positions at every intersection as he searches for where their prey is running to. They know they are being hunted.

The passageways are inclining at a steady slow uphill grade. Moving them closer to the surface, closer to the high walls of Casterly Rock. There’s only one place for them to run. They find the earthmover sitting abandoned, out of fuel.

“Bettin’ you wish you brought Ghost?” Gendry half laughs the question, fumbling with the single flashlight they are using.

“Aye” But he can see the trail just fine.

The occasional footprint as the tunnels transition from bedrock to hard packed earth. A white scrape against the wall by combat armor. Taste sweat and blood and that ionized buzz in the air that powercells give off when they are being overtaxed.

Overtaxed by carrying a giant weapon.

They need to hunt quiet. Their prey is wounded and carrying heavy load. But Dangerous all the same.

A noise echoes through the long confined corridors of the mines. He drops to a crouch, rifle out, searching for a movement. A Gunshot? No. Its louder, deeper. It happens again and then the earth rattles above him.

He knows that sound. Its one of the many that haunt him. One of the ghosts that keep him awake, when she isn’t there to keep them away.

Explosions.

Another explosion. Then another and another. All around them on the surface...who knows how far above them. The Lannisters were shelling her. They were shelling the Bloodriders and she rode at the head of the Horde. He swallowed the fear building in his chest and took a deep breath.

“A Khal who cannot ride is no Khal” she had said. With the all confidence and authority and resolve and fire she could breathe.

She knows what she’s doing. She’s strong and smart and she knows what she’s doing. She’s doing her job. He can do his. He can do his and he can get her out of here. He can take her home. Jorah crawls up next to him and even in the dark he knows the expression on the man’s face.

It’s the one he has too.

He swallowed the fear. Then, for good measure, he did it again.

“She’s alright” he reassured the man.

“She’s alright.” the man repeated nodding slightly.

Through the din ahead them, there are voices. Young. Southern.

Probably two hundred feet away.
Maintaining his crouch, he inches ahead in slow low steps. Jorah begins to move next to him and he puts his hand on a shoulder, telling him to stay down.

The earth changes beneath his boots as he creeps ahead. Brushing his hand along it to feel the texture. Its new cement. The small bumps and ridges haven’t been worn down yet. The walls have changed too. The carved out tunnel of earth becomes cement as well with Steel Girders every 10 yards or so.

Four soldiers. Left behind as a rear guard.

He looks back to Arya and signals her forward with him. “We need one alive.” To the others the instruction not to fire unless they have to.

The Lone wolf dies.

She jumps one. Fucking appearing in front of the Soldier, and slicing his throat in a quick slash that drops him before he has a chance to react. He takes one from behind, clamping a hand around his mouth and shanking twice into the chest and jugular. Before tackling number three and wrestling him, cracking his head against the cement hard enough to hear it.

The pack survives.

Arya has number four gagged and tied. For good measure, he punches the man in the stomach. The shriek muffled by a wad of fabric sliced off the young man’s uniform.

“Are you gonna tell me what I need to know?” The Soldier whimpers and nods going wide eyed as his pack circles, looming dangerously around them. He pulls out the gag.

“They are taking it to Jaime Lannister” the man huffs, not waiting to catch his breath. He punches his prisoner again, this time into flesh above his knee.

“I know that. Give me something useful. Who’s in the suit?”

The man grits his teeth against the new flash of pain. “Bronn… Bronn of the Blackwater.”

“Thought that fuck worked for the imp.” Clegane barks.

The prisoner shakes his head. “I don’t know”

“He was with Jaime at the Frey’s” Arya confirms. Jorah’s eyes flash to her curiously.

“Where’s Lannister?”

“Probably C.I.C.” Fucking useless. Another punch, Opposite knee. “Straight up.”

Up…

He takes his flashlight, shaking it quickly before shining it up into the darkness.

They are in the city wall.

Its hollow. Like all fucking things Lannister. Empty Words. Empty Walls. He stands nodding to the others and they bring their lights up, as he walks around the space.

“Who are you? Are you with the Dragon Queen? You don’t look Foreign.”
He doesn’t answer

Winches and cabling along the walls of the corridor. A Steel Elevator cage above them and the faint hint of daylight at the very top. If they bring it down, they’ll know they are coming. They’ll be walking into gunfire.

No retreat. Job’s gotta get done. He drops his lights and the others do the same.

He grabs the cabling and shakes it. Checking the tension and the weight. “...Arya.”

Gendry takes her spot over their prisoner, and she jumps onto the line, and climbs. She slips about twenty feet into the air and while she recovers, the tug on the taut cable jostles the cage above.

They are still for a moment as the noise echoes through the shaft.

“Careful little wolf.” Tormund whispers.

A sharp inhale and then she resumes her climb.

“Wolves.” the prisoner gasps, understanding.

“Shut him up.” He hears the crack of a gun butt and Clegane looks at him with that question. A nod. A twist. A crunch. And a gentle thud.

The prey doesn’t need to know what’s hunting it. Only that it is being hunted.

He can’t see Arya anymore in the dark, but he can feel her movements in the gentle vibrations on the cable. Until he doesn’t. Another metallic noise as she transitions onto the steel cage. Quieter than the first. As controlled as she could make it.

A shadow flicks across that weak glow of daylight. “Takes us about halfway up the wall. Someone blew a hole in the wall up here. Looks like the Dothraki are giving them hell.”

“Inside?” he chides, irritated by impatience and a brief wave of anxiety. The urge to ask is strong. Ask if she can see her. But he doesn’t.

“Hallway.” He can hear her shuffling. “Looks like its equipment storage. Mining Equipment. Fuck. Hold On.” There are voices on the other end of the line. There’s a click letting her know she’s opened her line, as he hears the idle chatter of soldiers patrolling. Gendry grabs the body and pulls it away from the shaft. Another shadow across the small glow.

Then voices where he can hear them.

“How’s it going down there? Any sign of them?”

He taps Beric. Beric’s from the stormlands, so at least he’ll have a southern accent. “No Ser.” he calls up from out of their line of sight.

“Right. They want to transport out soon.” Another voice says.

“Commander says Battle’s heating up. We got to get it out of here before they sack the city...AHH” the first man shrieks as he falls, hitting the ground in an overripe splatter.

“Fuck Me!” Clegane grumbles.

“Sorry.” Arya murmurs. “He leaned forward.”
He was strong enough not to ask when Arya was looking out the cracked hole in the wall. He can’t resist looking out himself. Eyes darting everywhere, searching for her silver shape somewhere in the massive clouds of dust and dirt. Hoping not to see it the wreckage of at least a dozen tanks and motorcycles.

He doesn’t see her.

“You said this guy was the Imp’s man.”

Clegane nods.

“A merc. Tyrion’s enforcer while Joff was alive. Don’t rightly know what happened after the Blackwater.” He grabs the radio at his back and clicks it to the command frequency between him, Tyrion and Daenerys. They’re above ground again. They should be able to get through.

“Tyrion. A merc named Bronn is guarding the target.” He presses into his ear.

“Oh.” The static crinkled through. “Tell him my offer still stands. Whatever anyone else is paying him. I’ll double it.”

“Right.”

There’s no response from Dany And a ball anxiety begins to build in his chest. She should do something. Tap Yes to Agree with Tyrion. Let them both know she’s alive. But the radio is silent.

“There’s no way it’ll be that easy.” Tormund scoffs as he relays the info.

“When I worked for the Golden Company, we once switched sides mid-battle because we got a better offer.” Jorah adds.

“Thought the Golden Company never breaks a contract.” Beric asks.

“And the crows called us Raiders.” the wildling laughs. “If I had known all we needed was a fuckin’ piece of paper... I would have learned to write.”

“You were raiders.”

“Freedom Fighters.”


Wolves stalk their prey. Run them ragged until they are exhausted and have no place to hide. Corner them.

A trail of bodies, of half answered questions leads them through this hollow shell of wall. It serves as the base of operations for the security force here. Barracks. A mess. Storage. Creeping through the facility. A handful of encounters with guards or passing soldiers ending with muffled bloodshed.

Why isn’t Dany responding?

Do your Job.

The mantra isn’t enough anymore, tension thrumming through him. The predator inside him snarling as they close in on their prey.
A shout of “barricade the door.” through the modulated speaker box, gives the targets location away. They turn sharp and sprint as two heavy metal doors close and a locking mechanism jams clicks shut behind it.

“Break it down.”

Gendry kneels and presses his ear up against the doors. Tapping gently to hear the echo. The sound changes from high to low as he finds his mark. Bringing his hammer out behind his shoulder and across, slamming against it. The force of the first blow denting and shuddering the door.

Wolves howl when they are close. When there’s no where left for prey to run. When their fate is sealed.

“When this door opens, I want everyone inside dead.” He pulls Longclaw around, discharging and replacing the clip. “No more quiet.”

Gendry brings it down again, a narrow gap opening between the two doors as the bolt bends. He shoots through it. Two Quick shots inside men through the door sprint for cover.

Arya pulls a canister out of her small pack and shakes it. Small puffs of smoke escaping from the where the lid isn’t quite sealed.

“Do you want me just to blow the door?” Beric asks as Jon fires once again through the gap aiming at the flash of red armor.

“Hit it again!” he barks. He wants them to hear. To see this last wall getting torn down with their claws and their teeth.

This time Gendry brings the Hammer overhead and slams it down on the bolt. And Arya tosses the smokescreen at the same time.

The door bursting open and smoke pouring through as they rush through the cloud. Longclaw’s recoil punching into his shoulder over and over again as the handful of soldiers in the room drop in a burst of gunfire. Greenboys feeling foolish and brave, popping up from cover only to be knocked down by the fist of the first men.

And after a few moments, its quiet.

“Bronn of the Blackwater!” he shouts, reloading, and stepping over the bodies of Lannister soldiers. “The dwarf says his offer stands. Surrender.”

No response.

This is a secure room. Weapons Storage. The bent and broken doors locking all this treasure away. Guns, and explosives. A perfect place to hide the most dangerous weapon in the world.

No way out.

A heavy thud.

And another and another.

Wolves circle their prey. The flashiest hold its gaze while the strongest circle for the kill.

“Well now.” that staticy electronic voice mocks as he steps out. Easily ten feet tall in the power armor. Carrying another fucking minigun. No Cover now. “Seems you boys…”
“and Girl.” Arya interrupts as they spread out. The helmet turns slightly, the metal squeaking as it turns to face his little sister. Wild and Fearless against something three times her size. “I mean if you have a big speech about how you’re going to kill us all, the least you could do is…”

The mini gun whirls up. Metal grinding and spinning hotly, as his men coil to jump him.

Except.

“Ah shit.” the man groans, dropping the gun. “We can’t do this here boys… girl.” a rough metallic gesture at Arya. “Too much wildfire and I’d rather not die.”

“Secure the weapon” he orders at Beric.

“Nope.” Bronn says pulling a pistol on Beric. “All of you over there until I speak to Tyrion.”

There’s no time for this. They need to make it to an extraction point. He needs to tell Dany she can retreat. He needs to get her out.

Arya whips past, sliding between the massive steel legs and to the massive metal crate.

“Heyheyhey… Be very fucking careful with that, girl.”

“Holy shit.” she opens the box. A small green glow emerging under the lid. The rad counter clicking madly.

“Okay. Okay. You’ve seen it. Tyrion’s frequency. I know you’ve got him on comms.” He gives him the frequency as Beric and Gendry move over to the warhead “Double.” Bronn’s voice echoes in both his ear and in the room. A small high pitched whine.

“Double.” Tyrion confirms.

“I want a better girl too.” Jon scoffs as he circles.

“Fine. I’ve recently made the acquaintance of several lovely ladies. Essosi ladies.”

“Oh no. I want your girl.”

“Mine?”

“Rumor has it Sansa Stark’s available again.”

Protect your pack. Its more than reflex. More than instinct. Its automatically bringing Longclaw up and emptying an entire clip at that fucking helmet.

“Fucking hell!”

And Clegane does it as he discharges and reloads.

And he does it once more good measure. A huge dent in the side of the tin can.

“NO MORE FIRING!” Beric shouts.

“Did he kill you?” Tyrion asks.

“My fucking head…”

“Good. You deserve it. Double, and I will introduce you to Sansa Stark. Whether or not she kills you
He shifts his weight from foot to foot as Beric and Gendry take the Weapon out of its case. And carefully pry it open. Two metal rings with dozens of small cylinders of green liquid. The radiation counter clicking madly at his belt.

“That’s it?” Gendry asks. Beric nods.

“You don’t need a lot of wildfire to make a warhead. These bits…” he motions to the metal rings “are magnets that excite it and make the bang...Bigger.”

“Have you disarmed one of these before?” Bronn asks.

“I have disarmed hundreds of bombs” Beric answers, taking out his kit. “I’m the best in all of Westeros.”

“That wasn’t my question.”

“Shut up.” Clegane grumbles.

“Arya, Find us an extraction. Clegane, go with her. Kill anyone you encounter.”

Beric pulls out the scarf covering up the marks on his neck and folds it a few times. “Watch me Gendry. I’ll need help to get this done with any reasonable speed.” The boy leans and watches as Beric carefully unscrew the cylinders from the mechanism locking them into place and places it on the scarf. “These are safe, But if they crack, any spark will ignite it and we won’t be able to put it out.”

“Understood.”

They work disarming it as quickly as care will allow. Tormund and Jorah circling Bronn while Gendry and Beric work. But his patience is wearing thin.

And he hasn’t heard from Dany.

“We got a fucking tank.” Arya laughs. “They’re rolling them out from a loading bay at the base of the wall to join the fight, two levels down. Path’s marked.”

“Daenerys, start prepping for retreat.”

No response.

“Daenerys, come in.”

No. No. No.

“Tyrion…?” Jorah’s eyes go wide at him as he stands frozen in place.

“I can’t raise her.” the imp answers.

That thing snaps in him. Wolfsblood.

“Where’s Lannister?” he shouts at Bronn. The Merc laughs.

“You’re fucking funeral mate. Upstairs. Top the Wall.”
This isn’t a fucking wall.

He snatches a handful of the green glass cylinders.

“Commander!?”

“Finish the job and Get out!” he barks. “Kill anyone that gets in your way!”

Dying’s fucking easy.

The doors are open and lights pool through open Windows as the handful of officers in the C.I.C hug the sides of the room as he enters holding the cylinders in one hand and a pistol in the other. Jaime Lannister standing unmoved in the center. That smug fuck. His hair’s shorter. He’s not wearing that stupid fucking gold armor.

But his arm. It’s mechanical. Gold. Brienne had told him before they left. But seeing it…

“Jon Snow. My gods, its been ten years.”

“Glad to know you recognize me.” he snarls. The wolf snapping its teeth inside him.

“Yes, last time I believe you were running off to the wall to escape your wicked stepmother.” he mocks. “I can’t say I’m glad that your tendency to make stupid decisions remains.”

Dying’s easy.

“Well how about you make a smart one? Surrender.” The smug golden fuck scoffs. “I suggest you all do the same.” he announces to the room. They freeze, eyes darting between the two of them.

“Go ahead.” Jaime makes a motion with the gold arm and the handful of officers flee. Abandoning their posts at radio controls scattered throughout the room. “You know Cersei doesn’t take you seriously. I told her… I warned her. ‘That bastard’s dangerous.’ But she didn’t want to listen. She’s obsessed with the Targaryen. And with Sansa. Afraid that one of these young and beautiful queens will replace her. I don’t rightly understand it. War-” A half snort “-War’s a Woman’s game now.”

“Yer’ wasting my time.” And he can hear the growl in his own voice.

“Let’s settle it like men then.”

Dying’s easy.

The golden hand twists and transforms. A fucking gun appearing where the wrist was, metal hand bent up inhumanly. Shot blasting in his direction. He rolls forward, tossing the pistol and tucking the cylinders into the holster. Catching the gleaming, golden limb as the barrel aims down at him. Pushing it up. Pushing up against Jaime’s weight, moving from a kneel to a crouch to his feet. Shot firing past his shoulder. The energy of the discharge vibrating through the leather of his gloves. And he forces it up again as another burst erupts from the wrist.

His fist against that perfect chiseled jaw feels so fucking good. He’s wanted to do it since he was six and ten.

The third shot fires right next to his ear. The hit threw off Lannister’s aim, but he’s disoriented. The world sounds muffled and quiet as he regains his bearing in time learn what its like to get punched in the stomach by a metal fist.

The Kingslayer tackles him and he feels the cylinders crunch under his weight. An acidic smell
filling his nostrils as something wet seeps into the thick fabric of his pants. Jaimie has him pinned with his weight on top of him, one hand around his throat, and the other transforming back into a gun.

Dying’s easy.

And it jams. Inches from his face. It fucking jams.

The swear escaping from Jaime is interrupted by Jon’s forehead cracking into his nose. Breaking the pin and sitting up rapidly. Knocking his target back.

His hand goes to the holster. One vial still intact.

Jaimie tries to fire again as he scrambles back, trying to recapture his footing, blood pouring out of his nose. He must be out. Must be difficult to reload, when the gun is encased in gold.

“Surrender.” he stalks toward him as the Kingslayer makes it to his feet. The gold hand transforms and strikes out at him.

He catches it, the fist jarring his bones all the way up his shoulder. The impact of it on his palm reverberating down his arm and to his shoulder. Pain in his elbow and in his shoulder.

Dying’s easy.

These fuckers killed Robb.

Took Arya away from him.

Sold Sansa like she was a piece of meat.

Murdered his father.

This man. This man and his fucking golden cock is the reason all this misery happened in the first place. Nearly a million people are dead because of this man. Westeros is dying because of this man. Dany may be dead because of this man.

He boxes the side of this man’s head with his free hand. Using the blow as a distraction to get around him. Twisting that golden arm behind his back and up, slamming him facedown onto one of the radio consoles.

“Surrender!”

Jaime struggles beneath him and he grabs him by the greying hair and smacks his head against it again.

“Surrender!” he pulls the radio receiver over and switches it to all frequencies. But the brief release on his hold is costly. The Kingslayer snapping his head back. Cracking the back of it into Jon’s nose, and he can feel his own blood gushing. Soaking into his beard.

“Jon…” she whispers. “...Please.”

Dying’s easy.

He slams that last vial into that golden arm. The glass breaking and shattering against his gloves. And he can taste the burn of it in the air as the viscous green liquid seeps into mechanisms inside. Pulling out his lighter, flicking open the lid. That small tiny flame ready to burn them both.
Burn them all.

“SURRENDER!” he roars.

Jamie’s human hand depresses the receiver.

“This is Commander Jaime Lannister of The United Armed Forces of Westeros. We surrender. All Units Stand Down. I repeat All Units Stand Down. Authorization Code B5843-F”

A quiet sob of relief in his ear.

Wolves protect their pack.

“Snow you crazy fucking Crow Bastard.” Tormund shakes his head as now compliant Lannister troops open the gates under the wall. Arya is glaring at him.

“I’m sorry.”

“No you’re not.” she sneers as she fills another bucket of water to dump on Jaime whose currently sitting handcuffed to Clegane.

“No. I’m not.”

She throws the bucket carelessly. Not targeting the arm. Just drenching both him and the hound.

“Watch it. Little Wolf.”

“Is that where you disappeared off to, Clegane, babysitting wolf pups?” the former Commander of Casterly Rock snarks, sputtering with water. She punches him in the face. A blur and a loud slap of skin on skin. “I think she hits harder than you do. Snow.” he spits out a glob of blood.

“Probably.”

“Wall’s secured Commander.” Beric marches over.

“The weapon?”

“Disassembled and Ready for Transport” He nods and watches the first of the Dothraki begin to filter into the wall. Motorcycles whipping between the neat rows of tanks.

He doesn’t see her.

Tyrion rolls up in one of the Unsullied’s Transports, climbing out the truck awkwardly on short legs.

“Tyrion…” his brother says sheepishly.

“Jaime…” the brother responds. “My Gods, Snow. What did you do to him?”

“What needed to be done.” he answers curtly, rolling to his feet and walking away. He’s fucking done and he’s not talking to another fucking person until he sees Dany.

Outside the gates he watches as riders gather and filter slowly. One of Daenerys’ Kos rides up and asks him in faltering Westerosi what the plan is. Capturing the city wasn’t the objective.

He shouldn’t be the one giving orders. He’s not the one who’s captured cities. What the fuck is he supposed to do with a city.? But he knows what to do after a fight.
“Get the wounded inside. Disarm the Lannister security. Salvage what you can…” He doesn’t know what Dothraki do with their dead. “ID the fallen.”

“The Khaleesi…?”

“Would give the same orders.”

The rider nods and wheels off.

Jorah is doing his best to liaison between the Dothraki and the Lannister security. But every few seconds he looks up into the horizon. Worry deepening his age lines.

He heard her. He heard her in his ear. She was alive. She has to be alive. But she sounded so scared.

Excitement. Yips and Hollers and a storm of Dust rolling towards him as riders breeze past surrounding a Lannister Tank that’s looks like it’s been blasted through the seven hells. Wobbling to the Rock on Broken Treads.

The Dothraki can fuck up a battlefield, that’s one thing he’s learned. A flicker of hope, that with them they stand a chance against what’s coming.

But not if he can’t find her.

The tank stops along side him, the massive gun rotating with a whine and a creak until he’s staring down its barrel.

Dying’s easy.

“BANG!”

And she laughs. Bright and Silver even through the modulated speaker of the tank. Oh Gods. Oh thank gods... She’s alright.

“Can you help me out of here? The hatch is jammed.”

It takes a few shots against the bolt to release the hatch. Qhono scrambling out first. Breathing heavily and sweating and sicking off the side of the tank.

“He doesn’t like enclosed spaces.” she laughs, looking up at him from the hole.

“I want to die seeing the sky. Not in a metal box.” her Kospants, sliding off the tank to be caught by one of the other riders.

He can’t stop looking at her. Alive. Safe. Her hands stretch up towards him. Handcuffed together tightly. And she’s the lightest thing he’s ever lifted. Despite the injury from catching Jaime’s punch. She’s weightless to him.

Her side is injured, the riding leathers shredded along the outside of her leg. Dirt and blood and bruising along the length of it. A small cut on her cheek. Shades of bruises around her throat. Handcuffs biting into her wrists. Wild hair. Dirt everywhere except the hard line where her goggles protected her eyes. She’s fucking beautiful.

“Jon Snow…” she laughs his name handcuffed hands gesturing towards the wall looming large above them. “You captured Casterly Rock!”
“Aye.” His hands go to her hair, a tangled wind whipped mess of braids. “But, you did all the work.” He presses his forehead against hers and… he can breathe. He feels her lashes flutter, and her breath on his skin, and her heat under his fingers. “I just beat up some asshole who was picking on my girl.”

Alive. Safe.

Her restrained hands go to his beard and pull him down to her lips. So soft. So sweet. So Alive.

Till she gives a frustrated groan at her inability to grab him more.

“Let me get you out of those, Love” He pulls back, letting go of her for a second to retrieve leather pouch on his belt. His handcuffs are lost in the wreckage of the power generators deep underground. But he still has the key. The metal slides off her wrists and he takes them, rubbing the bites gently. Planting small kisses as if he could will the hurt away.

“If you two are finished…” Tyrion huffs and they reluctantly peel apart, her violet eyes narrowing down at her Hand. “We have things to discuss. A formal surrender to accept. Terms to give. A City to Secure.”

“Yes… Tyrion.” she snaps, shaking out her arms. “So Commander Snow… What are we going to do with Casterly Rock?”

Chapter End Notes

Wow. So that was a nice little 6 mos. Break.

Here's what happened. My Mom died around this time last year and its been... rough. I've moved, Gotten a Promotion, my husband has switched Jobs, my niece is a toddler and less prone to easy naps where I can sit and write.

I started writing again because it was something she was always proud of, and I challenged myself to write everyday (Which I have only missed 3 days of 2018! huzzah). But grief is fucking crazy and in one of those downs, I decided I hated my Daenerys and wanted to fix her. After a million edits, nothing seemed to work so I took some advice that said, "Don't edit. Rewrite"

And I re-wrote this whole fucking story, and I like it now. I wanted to challenge myself to see if I can actually write something I'm proud of, and I think I am.

We'll see.

Although I'll always see the mistakes, I think live with them now. As my husband told me everytime I got frustrated. "Don't be Led Zeppelin. Don't keep trying to redo the same thing over and over again. You nailed it the second time."

For some perspective. We went from 67,606 words to 142,204.

I hope you like it. If you don't, don't be an asshole. If you do, let me know.
Her leathers scrape against the road rash along her hip with every step she takes. The material rubbing all that dirt and gravel against long lines of partially dried cuts that seem to rip open every minute or so eliciting a hiss from her as they make their way into the Wall. Into the partially underground bay
where at least 30 more tanks wait in neat little rows to be deployed. 30 more tanks that could have crushed her forces.

But they didn’t.

Because of him.

Every time she hisses, he looks down at her. Concern and a question in his eyes. Then she’ll narrow her eyes and squint at the the bullet lodged in his ballistic vest, or the dried blood from along his hairline, or the yellow bruising around his nose.

Then he smiles and shakes his head.

Her Dothraki are already working. Bringing in Discarded bikes. Calling for the Non-Combatant members of the Khalasar to come into the oversized bunker. Disarming Lannister troops.

And they haven’t entered the city, yet. They are waiting for her to give them the order to Sack it.

There are some who will be disappointed when she never gives it. There are others who will loot anyway and she will need to make a show of disobeying direct orders. This wasn’t part of plan. The Unsullied would have been much more preferable for an occupation.

They haven’t discussed this. And they have no plan for this and she isn’t quite sure what to do.

But first she needs to meet a man that has haunted her whole life.

Viserys used to talk about Jaime Lannister as if he was monster. He was the one that was out to kill them. That he was the one who was coming for her at night. The Usurper’s traitorous protector. The Kingslayer.

She doesn’t see a monster.

She sees a man. A broken shell of a man.

“Your Grace.” He nods. There’s a metal port in his right shoulder where the golden arm attaches to him. The arm that goes in that socket sits on the ground in front of Gendry, rivulets of water streaming away from it, as he slowly tries to pry it open. Trying to disarm the firing mechanism inside, so it doesn’t spark and burn them all up.

Oh Jon.

Jaime is handcuffed to Clegane by his human hand, and he draws both men’s hands forward as he moves to shake hers. She does not accept. Jon loudly reloads his pistol behind her. The new magazine shunting into place as she weighs the man before her.

He withdraws it, slowly, with a glance down at Tyrion. The dwarf takes a long slow breath and nods.

“Allow me to formally offer the Unconditional Surrender of Casterly Rock and her lands. My men, my people and my city are at your mercy.”

“And you?” he draws a tight breath. “Are you at my mercy?”

“I am your prisoner, your grace.”

“And what is a prisoner, but someone at the Mercy of those who guard them?”
Understanding crosses his face and he looks to his feet. “I killed your father.”

“Yes.” she answers flatly. “You killed my father.”

He squares his shoulders as much as he can with one hand cuffed, and the other hand not attached. But he does not lift his head to meet her eyes. “There are many things I regret about that day. Killing your father is not one of them. He would have destroyed the city, rather than let them take it.”

Tyrion’s eyes dart frantically between the two of them.

“And do you regret not killing your sister before she ordered the killing of thousands at the Sept, or thousands more at HighGarden, or the tens of thousands more to come when Winter Comes and there isn't enough food.”

He does not answer.

“My father was a sick wicked man who was too dangerous to be left alive. Are you?”

The question hangs in the air, and she can almost hear the wheels in Tyrion’s head turning.

“I believe that is your judgement to make, your grace.” he says quietly.

She’s already made her decision.

“Commander Snow” she turns to Jon. “May I have use of your men?”

“Of course, your grace.”

“Please secure the brig and escort this man to a cell.” She turns to Clegane. The huge man nods and pushes Jaime forward. Gendry sits up and accompanies him with the arm. Slinging his hammer across his shoulder.

“I thank you for your restraint, your grace.” Tyrion hangs his head.

“I will meet injustice with justice, Tyrion. Or have you already forgotten?”

The field nurse has to cut off her leathers in order to get access to her side. She’s a plump woman with coppery brown hair and thick spectacles. Even so, the woman still needs to squint and bring her face very close to where she is cleaning her injury. Arya paces the small private med bay and Gods why hadn’t she thought of bringing on a woman as a guard before.

It would have fixed so many problems.

“Are you from Casterly Rock?” she asks the woman.

“Yes, your grace.” is the gentle but stiff reply.

“Were you born here?”

“Yes, your grace.” she repeats

“Do you have family in the city?”

A small gasp and a slower answer. “Yes, your grace.” She’s afraid. The nurse carefully removes the fabric from her thigh. “This will sting. It’s a warm saline wash to flush out all the debris.” And Daenerys has to squeeze Arya’s hand to keep from crying out as the nurse gently washes off her
side. The little wolf cringing, and hissing sympathetically as the dozens of small cuts and gashes and scrapes are cleaned. The nurse then takes an oily salve and scoops out two fingers worth.

“What’s that?” Arya barks and the woman nearly jumps out of her seat.

“A...um... balm, it will protect the raw skin from getting too irritated, and keep it clean.”

The Little Wolf extends her hand for it and the woman cautiously turns it over. She sniffs the jar and rubs some between two fingers before handing it back. It feels nice on her skin, the thick gelatinous mixture soothing the stings.

“Can you put some here too, please?” She extends her wrists and the bites from the handcuffs are instantly relieved. “You must think I’m a weakling” she laughs at Arya, as the nurse returns to her leg.

Arya shakes her head. “Water-Dancing is about avoiding getting hit. Or when you get hit, it’s fairly concentrated. We don’t tend to get dragged across the dirt. That looks like it fucking hurts.”

“Is that where you leaned Water-Dancing? The House of Black and White?” She asks in Valyrian.

“I learned a great many things in a great many places.” Arya answers, eyeing the nurse. “But yes, I was trained at the house of Black and White.”

“Can you do it?”

“Do what?”

“You know what.” The little wolf smiles menacingly and the nurse looks between them, confusion and caution in her eyes.

“Boo.” Arya pops her lips and the nurse jumps clutching at her heart before making the sign of the seven, before taking a deep breath and rising.

“You’ll be wanting to keep it to dresses for a few days, your grace. Air it out. Confining it will irritate it and risk an infection”

“Thank you for your assistance. Miss..?”

“Hill.”

Hill. Another Bastard name.

“Thank you, Miss Hill. That will be all.” The Little Wolf’s eyes follow her as she departs

“Do you need me to go steal a dress for you?”

“Maybe, though I’m fairly certain Missandei always puts one in my pack. In case, I need to look like a queen” Arya shrugs and rummages through the pack while she wipes down her exposed skin on her face and neck and arms with a wet cloth. The rough fabric coming back brown and dirty from all the dust. She wants to take a bath. A few more hours and they’ll be in the Lannister’s mansion and she and Jon can do whatever they want. At least for a few hours.

“Besides… We took the city. It wouldn’t quite be stealing now would it? It would be… requisitioning supplies.”

Arya cackles as she finds the dress and a hairbrush. It’s the black draping linen one. Loose fabric that
won’t hurt her side. Modest enough to not offend the Seven’s sensibilities. Not too foreign looking. Thank the gods for Missandei.

“Daenerys…” Jon knocks on the door, letting himself in after she hmms an acknowledgement starting to work through the tattered ends of her braids. He grabs a chair and drags it next to her on the exam table. “How bad was it?”

“I’ve had worse.” she pulls the bullet casing out of his vest and flicks it across the room. “The first time I crashed in the Dothraki sea. I must’ve skidded…fifty feet.” He smiles but the concern doesn’t leave his eyes as he looks over her.

“I’m a little out my depth.” he admits, hanging his head. “I have no idea what to do. I know how to clean up a battlefield, but…” he shrugs.

“Well…” she grunts, working through a large tangle. “Hindsight makes me wish we had planned on taking the city, but we will make do. We need to establish a curfew. Keep the civilians in their homes for now. We need to make sure that none of my riders start looting. The Dosh Khaleen will be here soon to escort the dead into the Nightlands. We need to interrogate Jaime.-”

“-I can handle that.” Arya interrupts.

“I’m sure you can.” Daenerys laughs. “But I think we should just let him rot in a cell for a few days first.

“Days…” Jon murmurs, disheartened. She nods.

“Tyrion seems to think we can leverage the warhead and the city to force Cersei into a truce so we can handle the Night King without interference.”

“Do you think that’ll work?”

“I don’t know, but I think it’s worth a shot.”

“If we are going to meet Cersei-” Arya starts flipping a knife in the air. The false queen’s name written in red ink on the handle.

“-No.” Jon cuts her off.

“Why not?”

“No.” Daenerys echoes, handing her the brush before working the, marginally, tidier hair into a simple long braid down one side.

“I can do it. No-one will know it was us. I can make it look natural. Be in and out before we head back North.”

“Cersei needs to be deposed, and served Justice to build a lasting peace. If our purpose is peace and limiting the loss of civilian life: Cersei is better than anarchy while we deal with the Night King. Assassinating her will cause chaos and violence and King’s Landing will tear itself apart.”

“She’s trying to assassinate you.” Arya counters and Daenerys groans as Jon’s eyes flash over to her.

“Were you going to tell me?”

“Yes.” she exhales, glaring at Arya, before her turning to Jon, taking his hand and planting a kiss on it “After the fight. And she won’t succeed, because you’re here and Arya is here keeping watch.”
His eyes are hard so she tries to make hers bigger as she rubs her fingers across his scarred knuckles and places another kiss on them. After a long minute his dark eyes soften and he lets out stream of air out his nose and he returns the gesture on her knuckles.

“Should I leave? Arya asks, a sarcastic sort of disgust in her voice. Jon’s chuckle vibrates against her hand and he stands before helping her slide off the bed.

The Captain of the city watch is already meeting with Tyrion in a conference room near the CIC, which is currently being cleaned to avoid any accidental fires from Jon’s fight with Jaime.

“May I introduce Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, The Last Dragon, the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Unburnt, and the Breaker of Chains.”

He missed a few.

“And Commander Jon Snow of the Northern Front.” Tyrion introduces the man as Captain Darvin Archyr.

Arya extends her hand as if it shake his hand but grabs his wrist at the last second.

“I’d like to ask a few questions first.”

“Commander Snow-” Tyion starts, looking scandalized. But Daenerys holds up her hand. Jon folds his arms across his chest. Looking handsome and menacing.

“Please comply, Ser. It’ll take only a moment.”

The man nods cautiously and Arya adjusts her grip on his wrist so that four fingers pinch at his pulse.

“What’s your name?”

“Darvin Archyr” he states flatly.

“How long have you worked with the city guard?”

“Six Years”

“What’s the name of the first girl you ever kissed?” The guard shuffles awkwardly. But the little wolf holds his gaze.

“Elise”

Arya lets go and nods to her.

“Thank you for meeting with us, Ser. I appreciate your cooperation and dedication to avoiding unnecessary bloodshed.”

“I appreciate you not immediately sacking the city, your grace.” he says watching Arya as she circles around behind them

“The Dosh Khaleen believe this land is where we will build a new Vaes Dothrak. That makes this land sacred, and blood is not to be spilled on sacred ground.” Tyrion’s jaw drops, and Jon glares at him until he shuts it again.

Darvin looks confused but nods along. “Does that mean this is to be a lengthy occupation, your grace?”
“That depends entirely on Cersei.” The man looks crestfallen, and she searches his face for an explanation. It could be that he believes Cersei won’t come to retake the Rock. It could be that he believes Cersei would rather destroy it than leave it in enemy hands. “While we wait for her response to our terms, we require your cooperation in enforcing a curfew, as well as disarming the civilian population. Do you believe we will encounter any resistance?”

The watchman’s eyes ricochet around the room and he leans forward as if he is afraid someone else will hear. “Have you seen the city yet, your grace?”

It’s worse than she imagined. It makes sense, of course, when she reflects on the statistics, Varys’ estimates of the city’s population, combined with what she knows to be the city’s size.

But seeing it…

The slums are stacked up high against the city wall. Dangerously high. Ramshackle scrap huts piled one atop the other. A creaking unstable network of chains and planks holding them together. Thousands of homes, with only the city wall for structural support.

“Collapses are common. As are fires, we had one last week that decimated the Southwest Corridor.” The watchman points to a blackened smear along the wall. “300 dead. More injured. Over a thousand without shelter.”

“Winter’s coming” Jon says sadly. And she nods agreeing.

“Most don’t have power, access to clean water is a problem, sewage is a problem, looting, violence, disease. All problems.”

“It’s worse than the slave cities…” she gasps. It is. The wise masters treated their people like property. But that meant they also treated them like an investment. Most slaves, despite being chattel were given food, clean water, and a bed. A sick slave cannot work. A weak slave cannot work. Treated like well oiled machines, stripped of humanity and thought and identity and reduced to the task they perform.

This is different.

This is squalor. Slavery without Chains. Intangible bonds of poverty and despair and hopelessness. Viserys would have brought true chains to Westeros. His time in the Slave cities combined with his hatred towards those who rebelled led him to the mad conclusion that the practice should be restored here.

It came anyway.

As her eyes search along the mass of slums, she sees it, the walls within the wall. The hard line dividing the rich from the poor. Tidy white washed houses built atop coastal bluffs that look out over the ocean.

They have to turn their back on the city to get that view.

There’s no mistaking the Lannister’s mansion. The biggest one, the grandest one. The one with an additional wall around it. The one with green grass despite people in the slums not having clean water.

“Its just like this in King’s Landing.” Arya murmurs. “Except there’s a hundred times more people there.” She turns to Tyrion who nods solemnly.
“I’d like to speak to the city’s Administrator as soon as possible. Please arrange it. Lock it down for the night. I want everyone in their homes before sundown. If we can keep the peace tonight, we’ll see what we can do in the morning.”

The Dothraki believe that a body must be whole to rise as smoke and ride into the Nightlands. And so the Dosh Khaleen wail for those whose souls have died with their bodies. Burying them in the earth so that someday a piece of them may be born anew to join the Great Stallion’s Khalasar.

Qhono gives her a brief count of their losses as the others prepare a large Pyre. Drenching the wood in fuel. They lost more bikes than men and the wreckage is sprawled across the battlefield. Smoking Tanks, Burning Tires, Blood.

Blood of her Blood.

“Khaleesi” Omela greets her with her arms extended.

“Khaleesi” she embraces the woman, returning the title. The youngest member the Dosh Khaleen. Her conspirator in burning down the temple. She introduces Jon and he reaches to shake her hand. She stops him, gently bracing his forearm.

“It is forbidden for a man to touch the Dosh Khaleen.”

“Sorry.” he murmurs withdrawing it. Omela tips her head in understanding.

“Qhono tells me you have proclaimed this place a new Vaes Dothrak.”

“It is known. The Great Stallion rode above us as we rode over this land. When can we enter the city?”

“Soon, my blood. Let us send our riders to the Nightlands.”

“May they ride forever.”

Viserys used to call them Barbarians. Unwilling to learn Dothraki. Unwilling to adapt to their lifestyle. Unwilling to treat them with respect. They would have turned on him. He was not strong enough to lead them. Not even strong enough to use them as the Mercenary force he sold her for.

“I like these scrappy fucks. Look at all this…” Tormund shouts brandishing his axe, surveying all the wreckage. “You burn yours?” he plants himself in front of them, motioning to the dead. She nods.

“Brave lads”

“Brave lads” Jon agrees.

Tormund pulls a small metal tin out of his pocket. Its filled with a waxy red substance that he rubs onto his finger, before dragging a line of it under each eye, and tosses it to Jon who does the same.

“Weirwood Tears” Arya whispers, explaining as she draws the lines down her own face, and passes it to Jorah who eyes it for a long minute, a slow homesick smile spreading across his face.

“You honor us.”

“These men died so we could do our job. Let’s send ‘em off right.” He tells her, draping an arm over her shoulders, as she slings an arm around his waist.

And as the sun begins its descent into the sea, and over the chants of the Dosh Khaleen, and the through the yips and hollers and engines of riders circling the pyre, her blood rises as smoke into the
darkening sky.

May they ride forever.

There’s a man next to Tyrion. He has dark greasy hair and a thin beard around his jaw. Standing with both hands on his belt as the city gates open and the Dothraki filter in.

“So… this the little girl with bigger stones than me?” He looks down at Arya. “Bronn.” The Little Wolf does not respond and the man smiles with only one side of his mouth. “That was some crazy shit you lot pulled. Especially you…” he points at Jon shaking his finger and chuckling “…you crazy bastard” He turns to her. “Maybe he’s the mad one, eh?”

“Not nearly mad enough to carry it for almost seven clicks” Jon takes a small protective step closer to her. But his tone is easy.

“You almost burned out my fucking cells.”

“Should’ve just dropped it.”

“Jobs a Job. Speaking of, when am I getting paid?”

“Paid?” she scoffs and Bronn turns to Tyrion with an incredulous look on his face. The dwarf open his mouth and chooses his words carefully.

“How much was Jaime paying you?”

“Double what you were paying me.”

A pause.

“…Which Time?”

“-Commander.” Beric calls to Jon as the Mercenary and the Dwarf banter. He eyes Arya, tilting his head toward Daenerys. And she watches, Beric whispering in his ear, the lines of his face hardening with every word spoken. She sees him mouth a command that looks like ‘Get the Gear’ and claps Beric on the shoulder before walking back.

“What’s happened?” she asks as he turns her to face him.

“Edmure Tully and Roslin Frey have fled the city with their son.”

“And you’re going to get them.” She tries to hide the disappointment in her voice.

“Aye.” The short response disguising the disappointment in his.

“And once you have them?” He lets out a long slow breath.

“That depends on if they’re traitors or prisoners.” She licks her lips and nods.

“I look to you to handle the crown’s justice, Commander” He gives her a small smile, before the weight of command furrows his brow and he turns to Arya.

“You stay with the Queen.” Then pointing at Bronn. “You come with us.”

“I haven’t been paid yet.”
“You aren’t getting paid until you do some fuckin’ work!” he barks. “Get your gear. Smash and grab. We’re out in ten.” Bronn looks down at Tyrion.

“I would just do it.” The merc swears loudly as he strides away.

“What an investment” She spits at Tyrion sarcastically.

“He’s worth it.”

“You’re leaving me behind?” Arya starts. “I can do this. You saw what I did today. I did everything you ordered me to.”

“An’ now I’m ordering you to stay with Daenerys.”

“But…”

He wheels hard on her. “I gave you an order.” His sister digs her heels into the ground and locks her jaw. Defiance and hurt flitting across her face. His face softens instantly. “I need you here. If what you say is true about Cersei trying to assassinate Daenerys then you are our best chance against it. Do your duty.” He claps his sister on the shoulder and presses a kiss to Daenerys’ forehead. “Take care of each other” she nods.

“Cersei is trying to assassinate you?” Tyrion asks as Jon strides away tightening the straps of his ballistic vest.

“The Iron Bank.” she corrects. “But they are most likely working with Cersei. Anything they can do to consolidate power. The dwarf draws a long tight breath and opens his mouth to say something, but she cuts him off. “Let us focus on maintaining the peace. We have taken what precautions we can. The rest is up to chance.”

“Welcome home, Mr. Lannister.” an elderly housekeeper greets them as they enter the Lannister’s Mansion. Its enormous. Lavishly decorated in a way that even she is unfamiliar with.

“Thank. Please Bread, Salt, and Wine for Her Grace, Queen Daenerys Stormborn and our guests ”

“Of course, Ser, Will you be wanting your father’s rooms?”

“No thank you, please prepare it for her Grace.”

“Of course, Dinner will be ready shortly.”

Arya interrogates every member of the staff they come across as they wander through the estate. Doing the same maneuver she did with the Captain of the City Watch. Grabbing their wrists and measuring their heart beat. Asking two simple baseline questions and a random deeply personal one. Doing her duty.

The Great Glass Pyramid of Meereen was sleek. Glass and Steel and concrete. A feat of craftsmanship and engineering designed to gleam in the sun. A beacon of the wealth and power of the city. A sign of what they could make their slaves do.

Xaro’s estate was green and colorful. The vast gardens and exotic plants showing off all the water he could waste in the desert. The imported silks and goods and spices displaying the vastness of his trade network.

The Lannister’s Mansion is full of antiquities, rich wood, oil paintings of the most notable members
of the Lannister family. It smells old and stale. There’s a huge painting of Tywin Lannister, his wife, and a young Cersei and Jaime looming above them in the dining room. A stoic man with a hard, long face dressed in an officer’s uniform. A beautiful woman with an easy smile and rich attire. Two nearly identical children matching their parents.

The young Cersei’s green eyes follow her as she moves around the room. Judging her. Hating her. Demanding to know what she is doing in her childhood home.

“He doesn’t look like I remember him” Arya comments as they are served. Despite it only being the three of them, the vastness of the dining room makes what should be an intimate meal feel empty. This place should be full of people.

“When did you meet my father, Miss Stark?”

“Just Arya” she corrects as she has multiple times. “Gendry and I were trying to get to Robb but we were captured at Harrenhal. They took him on as a fabricator. I was working in the kitchens pretending to be a boy, he saw through my disguise. Said I was smart and had me work as an aide. I think he knew who I was. Or at least had suspicions.”

“I don’t doubt it. You’re the spitting image of your aunt Lyanna.”

“Did you see the fight?” Arya asks with genuine curiosity. “Father never talked about it.”

“No, I was very young. My father and the King had a falling out over Jaime joining the Guard and we left. I saw her though, at the opening ceremony. She had a kind smile. Your father and your uncles, were crowding around her, looking intimidating to keep us silly soft southerners away from her.”

A slow smile spread across Arya’s face “Well she showed them. Didn’t she?” Tyrion’s eyebrow quirked as he took a long sip of wine.

“Well that is a perspective I’ve never heard before.” His eyes soften. “Would you like to hear it? My father kept copies of all the crown’s broad—”

“Yes.”

The archives of their Radio Room are down a spiral staircase into a massive library. The only other time she’s seen this many books was in Qarth. Books. Records. Film. Photographs. Art. Curious artifacts in display cases.

“I think we are going to be requisitioning some supplies…” Arya whispers.

“I agree.”

There’s several wooden cabinets with long narrow drawers. Organized by year. Tyrion hums to himself as he opens one labelled 281AL and flips through the recordings before cheering to himself and pulling out a small cassette.

When she first heard the story from Viserys. She’d asked about what happened to the girl their brother took. He’d struck her and said “A Dragon takes what he wants.” When she heard it from Barristan it was shaded with regret and guilt.

The thing that she is hearing is the truth as it broadcast out to all of Westeros as the military elites of the Country participated in War Games celebrating the country’s “Unity” under the crown. A boxing match against the crown prince to mark the closing of the games. A unknown challenger in ill fitting
equipment with a hand-painted weirwood tree. Heartstopping bout after heartstopping bout. The smile on the little wolf’s face spreading wider and wider as the referee calls it a draw and Lyanna pulls off the safety helmet and the crowd gasps. Then there’s static for a few seconds until the commentator cuts dramatically cuts in citing technical difficulties and spewing state propaganda about how ”unifying” the games were.

“Aerys had the referee executed for sedition.” Tyrion finishes seriously. Stopping the tape and pulling it out. “Lyanna was labelled a political dissident and shortly thereafter she disappeared. A year later we were in the midst of the most catastrophic war in Westeros’ history.”

He hands it Arya who holds it like it is a holy thing. “Why? It was just a match.” she asks quietly.

Tyrion pauses and carefully considers the question. “There were many reasons for the rebellion. The country was on the brink of imploding.” he turns to Daenerys, sympathy shining in his eyes. “Your father was slipping deeper and deeper into madness. People were disappearing. Corruption and Terror were widespread. Dissent was violently suppressed. Even these games, were meant to be a...display of the crown’s might. I was young, but the world felt… dark in a way it hadn't before. Like we all knew the world was going to end, and we were just waiting for it to happen.” He offers Arya a small smile. “Then a young woman stood up and proved that the Crown was weak.”

Tywin Lannister’s suite is… obscene. She’s escorted to a private sitting room with even more books. One wing of the suite is an office with huge desk desk made out of rich dark wood. The other wing is the bedroom with massive four poster bed made out of that same rich dark wood and privy that more bathhouse than privy with golden fixtures. Lion’s pelts on the floor, Even more tacked up on the wall. Floor to ceiling windows along one wall with a balcony looking out to the Sunset sea.

A small smile spreads across her face because she is going to fuck Jon on every surface in this suite. But the smile fades quickly as a small ball of anxiety sinks into her stomach.

He’s not back yet.

Arya secures the room. Setting a line wire across the balcony door, and snare traps along the windows. Some of the housekeeping staff brings her up food and drink, extra clothes, take whats in her pack for laundering, provide some more feminine toiletries, showing her how to use the intercom. They eye the little wolf cautiously as she prowl through the room. Knives still strapped to her waist.

“You can take off your weapons. I think we are safe.”

“Not till Jon’s relieves me of duty.”

She gets pruny waiting in the large marble tub. Hoping that he would come in halfway through and join her. But he doesn’t and that small ball of anxiety grows with each moment that passes until she eventually gives up and gets out, wrapping herself in the white silk robe the staff brought for her use. Reapplying the balm to the road rash along her leg. Brushing out all the half-worked through tangles from earlier until her silver hair shines. Keeping herself busy, trying to keep the anxiety at bay.

It doesn’t help that Arya is perched on the balcony sharpening her knives. Each slide of the blade along the whet stone grating against her fraying nerves. She seems lost in thought. Staring out at the ocean, looking at everything and nothing.

“Oh? Who are they? The names you have on your knives” she asks cautiously stepping over the tripline. “All the people who hurt my family... my friends.” she pauses. “All the people I’m going to kill.”

“Going to?” She picks up the one that reads Beric Dondarrion and raises an eyebrow. Arya snorts a
small laugh out her nose.

“Sometimes it doesn’t take.”

“I suppose not.”

The knife she sharpens right now has the name Walder Frey. And Daenerys swallows hard recalling the grisly details Varys revealed of the incident.

“Be careful with your vengeance, Arya Stark. It is one thing to orchestrate and savor the downfall of an enemy. It is another to obsess over it. I watched it poison my brother, Viserys, until he became as mad as my father.”

“You should get some rest, your grace.” she says quietly after a long minute.

Daenerys sighs.

“A bit longer…”. 
https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Nothing But The Water (I) - Grace Potter & The Nocturnals

FYI - Very Scary Jon at the Beginning. If that's something that you aren't into, just scroll about 1/3rd of the way down.
“They have a headstart on us” Beric tells him pulling out a map as Jon straps additional ammo to his belt “The guard I spoke with said that they were taken out through the mines”

“We probably just missed them as we came through.”

The one eyed man nods. “They’re to meet a caravan on the Gold Road which would transport them to King’s Landing.”

A steady stream of air blows out his nose as he looks at the map. “They were on foot, with a woman and a small child.”

“We got three potential points of egress. Here… here… and here.” Beric circles each spot.

“The guard didn’t know?”

“I didn’t interrogate him.”

“So this whole fucking thing could be a wild goose chase…” The merc scoffs as he strides up.

Jon takes a heavy breath. “Or it could lead us to capturing a traitor. Either way… Cersei wants them or she wouldn’t go through the effort of getting them.”

“They have a three hour head start. You won’t catch them.” Bronn mocks.

“Lucky for us, we have very fast friends.” he turns and motions to the Dothraki racing behind them.

“Oh fuck no.” Bronn sags his shoulders. “OH FUCK NOOOOOOO!” he screams as the young woman he’s riding behind pops up her front tire and holds in the air for a few seconds before slamming it down and roaring her engine up to full speed.

“I don’t think my cock has ever been so hard!” Tormund shouts over the din. Qhono gives him a thumbs up.

It’s exactly like Dany described it. Earth disappearing behind him and under him as if it hadn’t existed in the first place. Qhono tilting the bike left and right as they whip through the canyons to meet up the Gold Road. Movement and Machine and Man all melded together as they chase their quarry through the red rock.

The first stop doesn’t lead anywhere. No footprints, no tire tracks. No sign that anyone else has been there in ages.

The second… is littered with signs of people running. Tire Tracks, Heavy soldiers bootprints, smeared mud, a handful of discharged shells and a small footprint, no bigger than the length along his forefinger to his thumb.

Only a little bigger than Willa’s footprints in the snow.

Brienne had been sent to recruit Sansa’s great Uncle, Brynden Tully, to help them retake Winterfell. The Blackfish. A fucking legend. Catelyn would always tell his war stories to her boys. Robb used to study his tactics, and use them to utterly destroy him when they’d play with tin soldiers. They were asking him to abandon his home, and leave it in enemy hands, for a niece he’s met only once for a place that’s not his, to fight alongside a cobbled together militia of Wildings and Northmen, against a foe they had little chance of defeating.
Sansa was furious when he refused.

It wasn’t a reasonable request.

But Edmure fucking Tully… walked up and surrendered it. Another barrier between Cersei and Sansa gone in a puff of smoke for a girl. Not just a girl. Bait in the trap that killed Robb, his wife, their child, Catelyn, most of the Northern Front’s leadership and their men. A trap that Edmure survived.

Prisoner?

Or Traitor?

The girl is another story, Roslin Frey. Its possible she hadn’t had a choice. Sansa hadn’t had a choice. Daenerys hadn’t had a choice. But… She was also promised Robb. And got Edmure fucking Tully instead. She was the bait. The crux of their treason. The Distraction.

The kid… What the fuck are they going to do with the kid? Not his fault all this shit happened. But if he has to execute his parents what are they going to do with him? Bring him in as a hostage like Theon? Someone who his family took care of, who his father taught alongside him and Robb. Who Catelyn cared for. Who betrayed their family and burnt down their home. Bring him on to work like he had with Olly? Olly whose life he saved. Olly who he trained. Olly who carved a half moon in his chest. Olly who he executed.

He pulls out the Binocs to look for them as Qhono weaves them between the other riders on this torn out highway. The tire tracks in the eroded become fresher and less windblown and suddenly they swerve hard. A Dust Cloud South by South East. They’ve gone off road.

And he swallows his rage down and lets it become a pulsing weight in his stomach as he flags the riders to follow.

Three Targets. Three trucks with that fucking Lion.

“I need one of those vehicles in tact.” he shouts above the roar of the engine and Qhono give him a thumbs up and gestures the other riders who all flash at each other with a free hand. A chain of unspoken dialogue between the ten riders he’d brought along.

When Jon had asked Qhono for a few riders to do a smash and grab, he’d given the cockiest smile he’d ever seen. “You need Speed?” then clucked his tongue and snapped both thumbs back to himself. “I got speed.”

He was not lying.

They catch up in...seconds.

One rider darts between the second and third trucks, forcing them to momentarily tap the brakes. Slowing it down and separating it from the others. And in that instant another swoops behind slicing both back tires with the Arakh. The truck swerves and wobbles as the driver loses control and skids to a stop.

Then the soldiers start coming out.

Qhono whistles at him and reaches behind to a leather strap built into the seat the bike and then makes a finger gun at him.
Stand up and shoot.

“‘Right.’” he says, more to himself than to the Dothraki, clipping the loop around his belt and pulling out one of his pistols, and planting his feet on the bar above the exhaust. “Right.” Then Qhono holds up a hand and spins two fingers in the air. The rider with Bronn pulls up behind them.

And the bike whip hard into a circle around the disabled truck.

He misses his first three shots, but as they loop around the back of the Lannister vehicle the doors open and he has a clean line of fire. One down, then another as Bronn and the other rider pass.

“Hold” Qhono instructs, tapping the seat of the bike. And he digs his fingers into the lip, as the rider spins them in a tight circle. Reversing their direction as they loop back around the truck, the other two soldiers going down, and Bronn throws a grenade as they zip back towards the caravan.

It explodes behind them in a rain of fire.

The other riders have pulled a similar maneuver with the lead truck. Diverting it from the remaining vehicle in the caravan and disabling it. Beric and Tormund cleaning up the soldiers.

“Get me the driver.” He shouts, pointing to the remaining vehicle, and they accelerate. More riders flanking the vehicle. Surrounding it on all sides

One shot breaks the glass. A woman screams.

“Stop the truck!”

The soldier in the passenger seat takes a few shots at him, but Qhono breaks hard and they fall back. Letting him fire out into the nothingness of this open plain.

With a roar, they zip forward again.

He doesn’t give them a second chance.

The riders break away as the vehicle wobbles and waivers and slows and finally stops.

“Kids are extra, by the way.” Bronn announces as he dismounts, bouncing on his legs a bit, trying to resteady them.

“We aren’t killing the kid. Beric, secure him.” he hops off the bike. “Tormund, Bronn with me. Qhono get some scouts out, make sure no-one else is comin’. I want to get out of here as soon as this is over.”

“Yes, Ser.” Beric affirms. Qhono shouts an order in Dothraki.

“How we doing this? Big and Scary?” Tormund asks pulling out an axe and swiping it across dramatically.

Robb.

His brother.

Dead.

“Yea.” he answers, untying and retying his hair as they approach the vehicle. Flashlights and Pistols out. He takes position next to the door and Tormund flanks him. Bronn circles around to the other
side so they don’t try and run. He can hear the woman whimpering inside. The man trying to quiet her. He flashes two fingers at Tormund and they take a long slow breath.

And Tormund pulls open the door.

“HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM!” he shouts, shining his flashlight at his hostages. The man instantly complies. The woman screams and turns her back clutching the kid against her. “I SAID HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM!” She shakes her head defiantly, back to him, keeping herself between her child and the band of raiders surrounding them.

“Roslin” Edmure whispers harshly.

“Get out of the Truck!” he shouts. Edmure mouths a shaky O-K and slowly steps down.

Spineless.

Tormund grabs him and puts him on his knees in the facing the headlights. Forcing him to look into them. Dazing and Disorienting him with the brightness.

“I said GET OUT OF THE FUCKING TRUCK!” He roars, smashing the window of the truck’s door.

“YOU WON’T TAKE MY BABY!” she shrieks. It’s a blood curdling noise.

“Grab her.” Jon orders and Bronn opens the other door and pulls her out roughly. The girl has more fight. Shrieking, spitting and swiping at Bronn. Tiny waif of a woman with thin mousy black hair. Kicking out with all her might as the kid starts screaming as Beric wrestles him away from her.

Bronn drags her next to her husband. “KNEES. HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD.” She spits in his face. The Merc spins her arm behind her back, pinning her wrist up between her shoulders blades and knocks his knee to the back of hers to force her down.

Behind him, he hears Beric ordering the kid to lay down on the seat, with his head down and eyes closed.

“DON’T HURT MY BABY!” She screams.

“Think she’ll run?” Bronn says.

“Seems like a runner to me.” Tormund jibes.

“Should we break her legs?”

“Don’t see the harm in it” The wildling plants his axe on the ground with a heavy thud. Jon fires three times in the air.

It’s a scare tactic. Interrogating women is always tricky. Threaten their kid, they fight. Hard. Threaten their husband, chances are decent they didn’t like them in the first place. Threaten them with violence, Women tend to have a higher pain tolerance than men.

“Every ounce of Freedom a girl has…she fought for.” Ygritte once advised him. “Always go for that.”

“Enough” he orders, pacing in front of them, deciding which one to start with. Squatting in front of Tully. The man blinking as his eyesight adjusts to not having the headlights blinding him. “Where were you going, Edmure?”
The man takes three shaky breaths "Cersei ordered us moved to King’s Landing."

"Cersei… Ordered you moved to King’s Landing…” he repeats slowly. “Now why on earth would she give two shits about a useless fuck like you. You already gave her RiverRun.” He turns to Roslin “And there’s more than enough fucking Freys running around. Even with most of them dead.”

The girl sucks in a tight gasp through her nose.

“Real Nasty Job that was.” Bronn paces behind her. “Real nasty. Somethin’ like fifty people dead all in one swoop. No sign of a struggle, just Dead.”

“Winter came for the Freys.” He reloads his pistol. Loudly, Deliberately. Edmure actually looks at him then. Eyes examining the wolf on his vest and shaking his head.

“We had nothing to do with what happened to Robb.”

“Where were you then?”

“It was after the bedding.”

He punches him.

“Must’ve been one hell of a fuck” The Merc comments. “Not to hear hundreds of people getting murdered.”

“She doesn’t look like much” Tormund notes.

“It’s always the fragile looking ones that scream.”

“There’s no way this-” the wilding shoves Tully. “-Little git knows how to make ‘em scream”

Bronn shrugs and nods down to the girl. “So she faked it as a distraction”

“They made me! I had no choice!” Roslin wails.

“Mama…” small voice from behind him. And he looks back to see the kid sticking his head out the smashed window. Small head full of Coppery Tully Curls. Looking at him with big scared blue eyes.

“Run to your Brother” the bastard mocks. And his baby brother sprints towards him. He’s begging him to serpentine. To zig zag. To not make it so easy fucking for Ramsay. Father never got a chance to teach him. He never got a chance to teach him.

His chest to burst open not ten feet away from him. His baby brother’s blood splattering on his face.

He never had a chance.

The boy looks just like Rickon.

His baby brother.

“Go back in the Truck, Hos. Mama’s fine” she cries.

He blows out a long breath.

“Cuff ‘em. Get ‘em in the truck.” he orders, pulling out the cuffs he had taken off of Dany and whistling for Qhono.
It’s a long tense drive back to Casterly Rock. They handcuffed Roslin around front so she can cradle her son against her. She quietly shushes him everytime he starts crying.

“What will you do?” Edmure asks finally.

He sighs.

“You’re going to Winterfell. You’ll stand trial.”

“And Hoster…?”

The boy that’s not Rickon.

“We aren’t Freys,” he spits “We don’t murder children. If you’re guilty, we’ll hide him with his cousin Robin till the War’s over. Sansa has him stashed out of Cersei’s reach.”

Edmure nods slowly. “…Thank you.”

Gendry is guarding the Brig with their lone prisoner.

“Ah… I was wondering where you lot ran off too. I was looking forward to your company Edmure” Jaime mocks from his cell. Lying face up on the narrow bunk. Staring at the ceiling.

Their prison is actually a small suite. Designed to hold them comfortably for a long time. Windows, Beds, a Privy. Small Library with books. The boy who isn’t Rickon runs to his bed and crawls under it. Running and hiding from the big scary raiders that captured his family.

“Jon…” Edmure swallows a lump in his throat, stopping him from locking them in after he uncuffs them. “Commander Snow,” he corrects “Wait. I-I have something… for Sansa.” He walks over to chest, and pulls out a flimsy paper file. “It’s just… some of Cat’s things. Letters and the like.”

It practically falls apart in Edmure’s hands and the man scrambles to pick everything up. Jaime laughs. Jon sighs and squats down helping put it all back into a neat stack.

And then he freezes as he sees his name on a document. Its typewritten. Official looking. Robb’s blocky signature down at the bottom and that Direwolf embossing.

He stands as he skims the section with his name. And then he reads it again.

And then he has to read it again.

“You alright, Ser?” Gendry calls.

“Yea.” he answers taking the stack from Edmure and putting it back into the busted box, before locking the cell behind him. “M’ Fine.” Gendry is sitting at the guards post still fiddling with mechanical arm. “Did you get any sleep?”

“Not yet. I took first shift. Clegane said he’d switch off before zero hour. I’m alright though. They gotta shitload of Caf here.”

“Help yourself” Jaime snorts.

“Feel free to hit him.”

“I’ve just been breaking off a piece of the arm every time he does it.” Gendry laughs. That brings a smile to his face. Smart Lad. He claps his shoulder.
“Good Job today.”

“Thank you, Ser.”

Bronn is waiting for him outside the Brig.

“So…”

“So.”

“When am I getting paid?”

“If Tyrion doesn’t take care of it, talk to Sansa when we get back to Winterfell. Speaking of…” He grabs him by his throat and slams him against the cement wall, Pinning him and pulling out his pistol and pressing it against the merc’s cheek.

“Is this the part where you threaten me?”

“This is the part where I remind you that there is a reason only one of the men who tried have to claim Sansa is still alive.”

“Relax. I know all about Sansa’s…” he slides his tongue across his teeth. “Preferences. I was Tyrion’s enforcer. Back when they were married, back when she and Margaery Tyrell…” he clucks his tongue “Oh... to be a fly on that wall.” He pistol whips him and the Merc lands hard as he lets go of his hold on his throat.

“Like I said. A reminder.”

“Good Workin’ with you, Mate.” Bronn laughs, picking himself off the floor.

He hears the hiss of a spraypaint can as he re-enters the loading bay with all the tanks to collect Tormund and Beric.

“Now that...is how you do it.” Tormund states proudly.

“Too small.” One of the Dothraki says.

They are clustered around the Truck they picked up the Tully’s in. Tormund, Qhono, Beric, some of the other Dothraki. Some still straddling their bikes. The Golden Lion on the side has recently been adorned with a Giant Cock. White paint dripping in a crude line from the tip.

“If you make it much bigger, I think the lady lions are going to have a problem.” Beric laughs.

“You need…” Qhono gestures to his testicles and grabs the spray can from Tormund and proceeds to add the additional anatomy.

“Balls” he translates, rubbing his shoulder. Its starting to hurt. A lot.

“Balls” Qhono repeats excitedly. Jon pulls out the rolls of hash Meera gave him and hands most of them over. Saving one for him and Dany.

“Thanks for the lift.” The rider takes them and sniffs, a bright smile lighting up his face as he announces the gift to the others. They burst into laughter and chatter in the rough tongue as one lights up. The thick musky scent filling the air. The woman that Bronn was riding behind taps Qhono and says something low in Dothraki.

“She says you ride well.”
She hits him again, this time more aggressively and they mumble back and forth. Qhono going wide eyed and shaking his head violently. He’s picked up a few words, but the only one he catches here is “Khaleesi.” The young woman gasps and looks down. If her skin wasn’t so dark, he’d think she was blushing.

“What’d she say?”

Qhono smiles that bright cocky smile. “She ask if you want to ride.” he adds a small pelvic thrust and Jon shakes his head.

“I don’t think the Khaleesi would like that.”

“Holy fucking shit” Tormund says as they pull up to the Lannister’s property. Jon nods echoing the sentiment. “Is this Normal for these Southern fucks?”

“I don’t know” he admits.

“No. This is big.” Beric explains. “This is bigger than the Crown’s.”

“No fuckin’ way.”

“Richest family in the country.” the one eyed man observes.

This house is the biggest house he’s ever seen. He thought Manderly’s were obnoxious. A tired looking woman shows them through a Dining room that could easily fit a hundred people. Tormund points at a painting that looms over the table.

“Are their eyes followin’ you too?”

“Yea.” he observes. The young boy, obviously Jaimie, mocking Jon’s discomfort in a being some place he clearly doesn’t belong.

“Snow!” Tyrion says chipperly as they are led into a kitchen“ You’re just in time.” The Dining room was big. The Kitchen is no different. Pantries of full of food. The smell of baking bread, cooking meat. Spices. Liquor. Gods he’s hungry. A pleasantly plump woman hums to herself, greeting the new arrivals as she lays out another tray of food on the much smaller table where Tyrion and Clegane are seated.

“In time for What?” He folds some meat into some bread and the woman brings them over a pitcher of water and some glasses. “Thanks.” he acknowledges taking a bite, and she nods and smiles.

“I am about to watch this man-” the dwarf motions to Clegane using a glass of amber liquor. “-Finish Eating his third chicken.”

“So?”

“Soo…?” Tyrion slurs drunkenly brandishing a glass. “Soo?” he holds up three fingers and starts to laugh.

“I’m fuckin’ hungry.” Clegane grumbles.

“Some of us actually worked today.” Beric lands heavily in a chair and starts picking off parts of the chicken.

“I worked.” Tyrion hisses. “I was manning the radios.”
“I dismantled a Warhead.”

The imp finishes his drink and bows dramatically. “You win.”

“Tyrion, I need you to not be drunk for two minutes and read this!” he drops his pack and pulls out Robb’s Will and hands it to him.

The dwarf sobers almost instantly upon reading the Document’s header.

“Where did you get this?”

“Edmure Tully had it.” he begins to flip through the other papers as Tyrion reads. There’s a photograph among the letters.

“Look at this…” he pulls it out. It’s Robb. Older than he ever knew him. Sitting under a tree in his Uniform. The rank of Commander pinned to his collar. Next to him, an olive skinned woman with straight dark hair has her head tucked beneath his chin. They’re both smiling, laughing.

He looks so happy.

“…It’s my brother.” emotion thickening his tongue as he says it. He flashes the picture at the others. “And his wife.”

“She’s a pretty one.” Tormund says offering a sympathetic smile. Beric wipes the chicken grease off on his scarf and extends a hand for the picture. Carefully holding it by the edges.

“Field Medic.” he points out a patch on the jacket she’s wearing. “From Volantis, by the look of it.” he passes it back. “The Red Temple trains them and sends ’em off to WarZones to do good works in the name R’hhlor.”

A field medic. A brave girl.

“I don’t even know her name…”

“According to this…Talisa Maegyr” Tyrion folds the paper over to the second page “Although I suppose it was Talisa Stark.” he shakes his head in disbelief “My Gods…this is incredible.”

Clegane looks up at him warily from the burned side of his face and nods to the paper. “What is it?”

“The solution to many of our problems.” Tyrion announces excitedly flipping back to the first page. “Its Robb Stark’s will” he passes the papers back to Jon. “In the event of his death: he legitimizes you…names you a Stark. He releases you from your Enlistment oath to the Night’s Watch. He declares you the inheritor to Winterfell, successor to his command. All of it…”

He’s shaking. He feels the paper waiver in his hand as he takes a long slow breath.

“What does that mean?”

“You know what it means. Jon Stark” He draws in a tight breath at the name. His name. The dwarf lifts his glass, and starts to pour him one. “No-one would ever question why you left the Watch again.” Tyrion smiles brightly “You could marry Daenerys and no-one would have damn thing to say about it.”

The hound’s eye is heavy on him.

“What does that mean…for Sansa, an’ Arya, and Bran?”
Tyrion shrugs. “Legally, it would be the same as if you were your father.” He hands him the drink. “Congratulations.”

For a minute... He lets himself have it. Let’s himself be Jon Stark. Commander of the Northern Front. Let’s himself have Winterfell. Let’s himself be his father’s son, instead of his father’s bastard. Let’s himself be worthy of the woman he loves.

“Thanks Robb.”

And then he pours the drink on it, pulls out his lighter and lets it catch.

Tyrion’s mouth hangs open in mute horror as Beric chuckles quietly taking another piece of the chicken. And... it’s gone. Black wisps and shreds scattered on the table.

“What are you doing!? You stupid-”

Clegane stands abruptly. The huge man who just ate nearly three whole chickens towering over the dwarf. “No-one is putting the Little Bird back in a cage.” Low and deadly.

“You of all people...” Jon snarls at his little sister’s first husband.

“You should’ve at least talked to Sansa, before throwing it away! See what she thought! Let her decide!”

“I am what I am!” he shouts. “I’m the Bastard of Winterfell. I will always be the Bastard of Winterfell. And there is nothing a piece of paper will do to change that. Winterfell is Sansa’s. She will never be sold again. She will never be put in a position TO BE sold again! Arya will never not have a place to go again! It’s theirs. I won’t take it from them”

“You are making your own life difficult. You are making Daenerys’ life difficult.”

“She’ll forgive me.”

“I can’t believe this. I cannot believe this. I could fucking... ARGGGHH!” Tyrion makes a strangling gesture at him.

“Fucking kneelers...” Tormund sighs, sliding a tray of food over to his seat. “Gettin’ all worked up over fuckin’ names and fuckin’ paper.”

“What’s done is done, Tyrion.” Beric crumbles some of the ashes between two fingers. “Lad’s made his choice. Not up to us to decide whether it was right or wrong.”

Tyrion slumps into the chair burying his face in his hands. And for a long few minutes, the only sound is Tormund smacking his lips as he tears into the food.

“Did you kill the Tullys?” he finally asks, not removing his hands from where they are buried into his eyes.

“No. They’re back in their cells.”

The dwarf growls absently, taking a long drink. As if he didn’t care one way or the other.

There’s a note on the double doors in Arya’s handwriting that threatens “Knock or Else!” The “Or Else” is a snare trap that catches his wrist in a tight loop.

“Told you...” she whispers sing-songy as he untangles himself from it. The suite is dark, but he can
see her. The outline of her sitting with her legs dangling over a balcony. He moves to his sister, briefly pausing to catch a glimpse of a body in white silk reclining on a chaise in the bedroom.

Dany sleeping softly. Her chest steadily rising and falling.

Gods she’s beautiful.

“Watch the line.” Arya warns, and following her instruction, he carefully steps over the trap.

“All quiet?” he asks and she nods as he ruffles her hair and presses a kiss into it. His little sister. “Thank you…”

“...You’re welcome.”

The noise of the ocean crashing into the cliffs below fills his ears. And he lets out a long breath as he can finally start to relax. He pulls out the tie and shakes out his hair in the sea salt breeze. Small bits of gravel falling out as he loosens the straps of vest. The bulky material puffing out as the tension is released. Groaning as he rolls his injured shoulder around.

He’s going to hurt so much tomorrow.

She’s slowly turning a cassette in her hands.

“What’s that?”

“Aunt Lyanna’s fight” she smiles wide.

“Really?” She nods. “Did you listen to it?”

“It’s amazing. She was... amazing.” she shakes her head in disbelief. “I can’t believe- I can’t believe father never told us. All we ever heard about was that she died. He never told us how she lived.” Looking back down at the tape and inhaling sharply. “I’m so angry at him… I’m so angry he kept this from me.”

“I understand.” he takes the tape when she offers it. Looking at the white label: **Unity Games: Closing - 281AL**. “Sometimes I...I get so angry at him, it just overwhelms all my other memories of him. When he left, he said he’d tell me who my mother was next time I saw him.”

“And then he never came back.”

“And then he never came back…” he repeats, and they look out at the sea. “I have something for you too.” he drops his pack and pulls out the picture. “Your uncle Edmure had some of your mother’s things. This was in it.” Arya stares at the image of her big brother for a long time.

“That’s his wife...Talisa. Beric said these patches mean she was a medic.”

She rolls the name around in her mouth before letting out a long shaky breath. “He has that stupid grin on his face.” she sniffs, rubbing at her eye and passing it back. “The same one you have when you look at Daenerys...”

He snorts out a small laugh. “I’ll have to take your word for it. Do you want the rest of your mum’s stuff now?”

“No…” she shakes her head. Loose Dark hair. So very much like his. “I think I’ll wait for when we’re home. We should do it together, with Sansa and Bran. I think it’ll be good… For us.” her
voice gets tight and breaks toward the end, and he slings an arm around her shoulder as she wipes her eyes again, two or three small sniffs betraying the emotions inside her. Then she draws a deep breath through her nose and finds some bravado. “I was thinking we should ransack Cersei’s bedroom tomorrow.”

“Sounds fun.”

She gently headbutts him, knocking the side of her head against his, before shrugging his arm off. “Good night Jon.”

“Night Arya.”

He takes off his gear in the opposite wing, in the office, so he doesn’t wake her up. Taking off the gloves and his gun belt. Removing knives and all his guards, and the Ballistic Vest. Unlacing boots. Hissing sharply as he unties the bandana around his thigh from where he was grazed earlier. All the blood thick and clotted, glueing the fabric to his skin and the wound.

It’ll be a new one.

And finally takes off the compression shirt, grunting against the bolt of pain running down from his shoulder.

Shouldn’t’ve caught that punch.

He quickly tucks a pistol on the bedside table and hides Longclaw within reach under the massive bed before going to her.

There’s a book open on the floor by her face. As if it just fell out of her hands. He quietly closes it as he kneels next to her. The silver of her hair and white silk of the robe catching the moonlight pouring in the window and reflected in the Sunset Sea. She shifts softly with a small noise and the robe parts at the apex of her thighs.

And if that isn’t a sign from the gods, he does not know what is.

He starts low on her belly. Lips trailing along the soft swell before tracing down the inside of the thigh that’s exposed to him. Then reversing and going back up again, gently grazing on that perfect skin.

Another small movement and he pauses till she settles. And he glides his hands up and down her legs. Soft Skin transitioning to Soft Silk under his fingertips as traces the lines of her sides. Carefully avoiding the myriad of injuries along her outer hip and thigh. Planting open mouth kisses over her mons. Silently willing her to turn and open up for him.

She does with a soft sigh and he’s rewarded with the light fragrance of her budding arousal and pink petals just beginning to blossom. Slow, he wills himself. Each long languid kiss against her lips begging her forgiveness.

Begging her to forgive him for taking so long. For taking so long to get her out of there. For taking so long to get back here. Begging her to forgive him for being a bastard. For doing what he had to do. For making her life harder than it has to be.

Her hand weaves into his hair in response, nails running along his scalp and he shivers and rests his head against the pillow of her thigh as relief and peace wash over him with each gentle caress.

And when he feels whole again, he lifts his head to see her softly smile. Sleepy eyes just barely open,
the barest hint of violet in the pale light.

“I love you.” she mouths silently. He pulls her hand out of his hair. Perfect clean hand in his dirty one. A thin red line of handcuff bites. Delicate moonglow skin now marred like his. A kiss against her wrist, then against her palm.

“I love you too” he whispers, then dips his head back down to show her. Wrapping his arm around her uninjured hip, parting her with his tongue in long languid licks along her seam. Gods. He’ll never get over how she tastes.

A contented hmm, and she interlocks her fingers with the hand that’s wrapped around her. The other hand going back into his hair. Tracing invisible lines through the tangled mess. Small movement in her hips, seeking more from him.

He gives it gladly. Spreading her wider and focusing on her clit. Flat Tongue smothering it in his saliva, before drawing his lips tight and sucking it. A shudder and sigh letting him know he guessed correctly. More of that sweet scent drifting into his nostrils.

That smell. He could drown happily in her cunt.

His free hand goes to his zipper and rubs against it. Not unzipping. He doesn’t want her to hear it and distract him. Just enough to shift his cock around in his smalls. Adjusting to get comfortable for the task ahead.

A lazy, greedy, gentle roll of her hips and he switches tactics, burrowing into her and sweeping across and around her well in broad strokes. The hand in his hair tightens and the nails drag in a jolt down his spine.

She pulls their entangled hands up to her breast, still covered in the silk. He lets her guide him, gliding his fingers over her nipple in the pattern she wants. Warm flesh hardening, and poking through the fabric. Warm weight in his hands as he cups and rolls the peak between two fingers. Sweet folds pulled gently between his lips, drawn into his mouth with soft sucks.

The second hand tilting his head up so he meets her eyes. Pupils so big he can see the white of her robe reflected in them. He holds her gaze as he swipes with a stiff tongue around her bundle of nerves. Circling it. Pushing back the small hood to laave on the pearl beneath. Her mouth opens and...

“Jon…”

“Shh Love… I got you” he breathes, gently breaking away from the button before he overstimulates it and planting a kiss on her lower stomach. Gently biting at flesh there while his fingers brush the robe aside and pinches her nipple. Slowly increasing the pressure till her hips tilt up, seeking his attention.

The hand in his hair becomes a hand on his head and she pushes him down, nose brushing back and forth on her clit as his devours her sweet nectar. His beard absorbing what remains. Gods he’s hard. His cock pushing against his pants almost painfully as he widens his knees to drop lower and create more room in the fabric for himself.

She gasps as his tongue trails further down to tentatively swipe back there. But she doesn’t push him away, so he does it again and then again and again. Each brush against the forbidden zone drawing a different breathy reaction from her as she relaxes into the new sensation.

Long flat tongue from the new low to her mons, tasting all of her at once in a wolfish lick up. Filling
his hands with her breasts and swiping his thumbs across them as he dives back to her clit. Her breath coming in shaky fits as he dances his tongue around it. Flicking it back and forth from a dozen different directions in a fluttering hurricane of licks.

Her nails digging into his scalp now. Holding him there as her back begins to bow, and the muscles of her abdomen begin to tremble. Each hitch of her breath narrowing his target until he sucks her nub into his mouth and smothers the button with his teeth and tongue.

Gods she’s beautiful when she comes.

Loose silver hair shining in the moonlight, cheeks flushed, lips slightly parted, muscles lightly spasming. Her center pulsing beneath his tongue as she draws tight and contracts and floods his beard, before sagging back down in to that sleepy pool of white silk.

Long lazy licks cleaning up her core as she settles and sighs. The hand in his hair gently tugging to get his attention and directing him to come closer. Guiding him to her sweet mouth as he shifts to kneel by her head. Gently rolling his tongue against hers. Possessing him.

“I fell asleep.” she pouts, cupping his face as they slowly break apart.

“Aye.” he smiles.

“I had all sorts of plans for what I was going to do to you.”

“I’d love to hear them.”

“They mostly involve that bed.” her animated eyebrow arching high as she nods toward the beast. “But also the bathtub, and the desk, and that lion skin rug over there, and those windows…”

He chuckles lightly. “I’ve never fucked in a proper bed before.”

“Really?” She gasps.

“Yep.” he nods. “Just bedrolls...not a bed.”

“Well, Jon Snow...” his name. His name on her lips. His name in her voice. In that perfect proper accent. “That is quite an interesting development.” she brushes hair out of his eyes. “I’ll need to revise my schemes.” a mischievous smile splitting her face.

“Let me clean up first, love. Then you can have your wicked way with me.”

She nods and he nuzzles against her palm, kissing before pushing himself to his feet. A grunt as his shoulder protests his weight.

“You’re hurt?” she sits up in the chaise, eyes following him as he moves to privy.


“You’re bleeding.”

“It’s not deep.” starting the water. The heat will feel good on his shoulder.

She sighs heavily and gets up and he can no longer see her through the mirror as he strips off the trousers and smalls and steps under the stream and leans heavily against the wall.
Watching the dirt and the blood and the grime and the gore start to melt off of him. The wound stings sharp at first but it eases to a dull burn.

“Did you eat anything?” she asks.

“I had a bite.”

He vaguely hears her speaking, and another voice responding. Staticy. Like through a radio. Then she ducks back into his line of sight, her face reflected in the mirror.

“Where’s your pack?”

“The office”

She bends and collects his trousers, like she’s a washer woman, not his queen. And she watches him soap up. He can see her in the mirror, eyes raking across his body. Her heated gaze both predatory and innocent. And he can feel his ears burning in a way that has nothing to do with the hot water.

“Turn around.” she whispers in a low hoarse voice. Dany smiles a wicked smile as he does, teeth barely digging into her lower lip as she watches him through the glass wall of the shower. And her eyes flick down to his cock in a silent demand.

He does as she asks, leaning back against the wall of the shower as he fists himself for her. His cock heavy and aching and while its definitely not her sweet cunt, its sweet relief. Her face is a mixture of curiosity and lust and shame and delight as she leans against the doorframe. Her hand slowly gliding up and down the silk of her robe near her neck. Along that patch of skin, that he knows makes her feel good. A groan echoing in the enclosed space as he pinches his eyes shut, the sight of her watching him like this too much.

A knock on the door breaks the spell. His eyes snapping open, hand stopping abruptly. She startling out of the hypnosis. And she’s gone in a flash of silver, taking his trousers with her.

He can hear her gently speaking with someone. Something heavy being set down. Bodies shuffling around the bedroom. The sound of a record starting, the scratch of a needle before the music catches.

It hurts to lift his arm above his head to wash his hair. Shouldn’t’ve caught that punch. Should’ve dodged or rolled with it. Had to be a tough guy and get into a punching contest with Jaime fucking Lannister and his fucking golden arm. His hair is so fucking dirty. Caked in sweat and grime and dried blood and it takes more than one wash to feel clean. And by the time he done he has bite his tongue to fight through the pain.

A “Thank you for your assistance” and a “Of course, your grace” and the closing and locking of a door. He needs to reset Arya’s trap. Bar the Door. Lock everyone out of their space.

She rejoins him in the privy, setting down a med kit on the counter, and taking out gauze and tape.

“It’s fine.” he repeats, and she smiles at him. Then she pulls off the robe and gods…

Gods she’s beautiful

“You are not a very good liar Jon.” she explains stepping into the shower with him, wrapping her arms around his waist, and ducking under the water to kiss him. Planting one on his chest, on the bruises spreading up from where his vest caught a bullet, before reaching up for his mouth. “Now let me take care of you”
https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Making Love on the Mountain (Sexy Mix) - The Woodlands

So this is all smut and fluff. There is a choke kink scene. I marked the start and end of it with an asterisk so if that's not your thing hit that CTRL+F, put in that asterisk, hit enter twice and boom... you breezed right past it.

Hope you like lovelies.
The record warbles on the player, as one song ends and another begins. A scratch of dead air, before the first familiar chords are crooned. The Myrish ballad barely audible under the curtain of water.

*I loved a maid as white as winter, with moonglow in her hair*

She clings to her winter. Arms tight around his waist and head tucked under his chin. And he clings to her as well. Holding her against him, Enjoying a moment of serenity. Warm water pooling in sparse cracks between their bodies and falling away as she lifts her head to meet his lips. Soft and Sweet. Timid and Tender.

*I would have done all that she asked..*

She glides her fingers up and down his spine. Feather light touches he can barely feel drawing out a long shiver despite the heat. Despite the steam rising to spread across the glass walls and the large mirrors. He shapes her hips with his palms, sliding them easily over her ribs, to cup her face and pull her mouth to his.

...so quick I was to please...

The previous night they were confined. Their movements limited by the small space. Their exploration of each other regulated by practicality.

*We were all we ever had but... we were wild...*

Tywin’s suite is huge and isolated. Their companions occupied with the mansion’s luxuries or their own beds. Space. Solitude. Enough of each that they are boundless. Enough of each that even time has ceased to exist. There is only him. And only her.

...free

The water moving through his whiskers tickles her nose and she breaks away, giggling at the sensation. Sputtering at the water cascading around their faces. He keeps her close though. His forehead pressed against hers, fingers sliding through her silver hair. Trying to steady himself because it feels like he’s falling.

*Two hearts that beat as one we were...*

He is.

...*our song was meant to be...*

It’s that smile that gets him. The one that tells him he’s done for. That reminds him that she is a Dragon.

And that Dragons are greedy.

And that Dragons always get what they want.

She knows what she wants. The thing she couldn’t really get her hands on last night. The thing he’s always teasing her with. Always strutting around in pants that are just a little too tight. Always bending over. Always leaning forward against things.

She smacks his ass before she digs her fingers into his cheeks. Appreciating the satisfying sound echoing off the glass walls before groping him shamelessly. Silencing the deep chuckle by ducking
her head and worrying a nipple between her teeth.

His cock sandwiched between their bodies. Heavy and Hard and begging for attention against her belly. The urgent prod of it forcing her to reluctantly let go of the firm muscle to reach for the soap. Smearing suds all over her stomach, and he groans as she soaps him up.

Her hands were on him for a moment. Sliding up and down his cock with a tight, soapy grip. But it's gone too soon. Her hands returning to knead at his backside. But oh this feels good too. She squeezes and pulls and urges him to thrust against the slippery surface of her abdomen. He wraps his arms around her shoulders pulling her closer. Making the space between their bodies smaller. Tighter.

Teeth drag across his neck and a “Daaannnyyy” fills her ears, fills the shower, fills the room. The whine of her name an unexpected treat.

She looks up at him, flashing that smile again.

She has him.

She always did.

He finds his back unexpectedly pressed up against the glass as she smears more soap around. Around her stomach, across her mons, between her thighs. And she clings around his neck, standing up on her tip-toes, trapping his cock in a tiny triangle of space between her legs.

And it's his turn to claw into her, rocking her back and forth. The length parting her so he can grind against her vulva, against her nub. Small sighs and squeals of pleasure as she struggles to maintain her balance. The blunt head nearing her opening, but the angle preventing him from entering.

Not that she would allow it.

Not now.

Not yet.

She has plans for him.

So she constantly shifts in his grip, tilting her hips away. Teasing him with the sweet relief of her cunt. With the prospect of taking her. Of letting him fuck her right here in this shower.

He will.

Not there though.

She has other plans for him.

He’s panting when she breaks away. The sudden absence of the warm soft flesh surrounding his cock leaving him shuddering and swearing.

“Where are you going?” the desperate whinging question spilling out of his mouth as she opens the shower door. She laughs as she grabs a towel. Her violet eyes flash with mischief as she folds the thick cotton several times, and tosses it at his feet. A hand on his chest.

“I said…” her hand slides down his torso as she sinks to her knees. “Let me take care of you.”

Gods.
She teases him, planting kisses along the dusty trail of black hair below his navel. Biting at the
groove of his hip. Running her nails along the corded muscle his thigh. Then finally dragging the flat
of her tongue along the underside of his cock in a long lick from root to tip.

“Oh Fuck.”

The swear is repeated as she takes the head between her lips and swirls her tongue around in
deliberate slow circles. Violet eyes locking with his. Watching as realization and awe and lust mix on
his face as she grips him by the base and slurps down to meet her fist.

He has no idea what to do with hands as she does it over and over again. Her mouth is warm and
wet and so fucking good. Inside, her clever tongue flutters along him, occasionally letting her teeth
catch the taut skin. She brings one of his hands to her face, so that he can feel the swell of himself
inside her cheek.

Her free hand goes to his stones. Cupping and supporting the hefty weight of them. Full. She ignores
the pang in the back of her mind. A faint sound of a witch’s cackle. And focuses on rolling them in
her hand. On lightly scratching them with her nails. On gently, carefully, tugging on the loose skin

It deliciously wicked. Watching the greatest hero in Westeros falter under her tongue.

His cock slips from her lips. A thin trail of saliva quickly falling away, as she nips around the base.
Nosing her way through the coarse black hair, letting his length slide against her face. Each small nip
causing a small jolt of movement above her. The barest hint of a thrust, tightly leashed. Fists tight to
his sides.

It’s not enough to make him falter. She wants him undone.

He can’t remember the last time he was this hard. So much pressure. The heat of the shower and the
blood rushing away making him feel dizzy. The obscene sight of his queen on her knees lifting up
his cock and sucking one his balls into her mouth...

It’s impossible...There’s simply no way its real.

But it is real, she reminds him.

She reminds him by mirroring the act on the other. She reminds him by dragging her lips along him
in a long open kiss. She reminds him by sucking and tonguing a strip of skin under his head. She
reminds him by reaching around and sinking her claws into his cheeks and engulfing him whole.

And the sound he makes vibrates the glass walls surrounding them.

She hollows her cheeks. Creating a vacuum in her mouth as she bobs up and down. Nails digging
into him. Pulling his hips forward till her reflex protests the invasion. The Tuneless hum of her
breathing through her nose vibrating around him. Making his thighs bunch and quiver. She releases him for a second, sucking in deep lungfuls of air. He tries to grab her. Grab her and
stand her up and slam her against the wall and fuck her till she screams for him.

But she has other plans.

The hands that were reaching to pull her up to him are snatched and trapped and tangled into her
hair. And she dives back down on him. Slapping his ass. Demanding fuck her. Relaxing her neck.
Relaxing her jaw.

Opening her eyes to watch his jaw go slack. Watch as he tightens his grip in her hair. Watch his eyes
alternate from wide eyed disbelief to pinched tightly shut. Watch his muscles flex with each roll of his hips as he takes her.


“Dany… M’ gonna”

Lips sliding back and sealing tight and sucking hard.

Dragons always get what they want.

She wanted him undone.

He comes apart. Bending nearly double over her. Hands locking her head into place around his cock. Low rumbling moan tearing from his throat. Throbbing and Pulsing as he erupts.

Oh gods

She draws him back. Letting him spill on her tongue. Keeping her lips tight around his shaft as he floods her. Every muscle in his body flexing with the force of his pleasure.

An almost whimper, as he slumps back against the shower wall. Boneless, Dizzy. The calm of an empty vessel. And he opens his eyes to see her slowly slide his softening cock out of her mouth. Delicate tendrils of white clinging to her pink lips. Her hand making a tight ring around the base and pulling very last few drops out.

A long swear as he slides down to sit in front of her. A deliberate show of swiping her tongue around her lips and a deliberate audible swallow. A knowing smile.

His thumb trails along her jaw and her lips. Gazing into bright violet eyes shining with accomplishment. And he drags her to him, crashing her mouth against his in a violent kiss. His beard spongy in the water. There’s a taste in her mouth that he can only assume is himself. He kisses her until the water cascading onto them forces them to break apart, sputtering and laughing as she reaches up to turn off the water.

“I think you broke me.”

“Not yet.” she promises, bopping him on his nose. He laughs. But then a somber look crossing his face. Reluctance. Hesitation.

“What’s wrong?”

“I need to tell you something, and I’d rather you hear it from me than from Tyrion.” She blinks at the sudden shift.

“Is it important?”

“Kind of.”

“Does it involve anyone we know being in danger? Or anything that requires immediate action?”

“No.”

“Then it can wait till tomorrow” she smiles and he nods and returns it as she eyes his the gash on his
thigh. “Let’s wrap that up, have something to eat, and then... take me to bed, Commander.”

“Aye, My Queen.”

The cool sea salt breeze coming through the open window is a sharp contrast to confined heat of the shower. It makes her skin ripple with gooseflesh as he lays her on the bed. Climbing her with kisses along her belly, her breasts. Whiskers on her neck.

The balm he reapplied for her eases the sting of stretching skin along her injured leg as she wraps them around his waist. And he puts all of his weight on his good arm, bringing the other one around to cradle her head, like she’s cradling his hips. Hard muscle of his back under her palms as she pulls him closer to her.

“I was so scared.” she confesses

“Me too…”

Alive.

So very alive.

They prove it to each other. With deep open kisses. With soft sighs. With lips traveling down the sensitive skin of their throats. With gentle rocks testing their readiness. With a sharp inhale as they join. With whispers of their names. With a slow love that builds in urgency. With a need to feel their hearts beating. With a need to live.

Space.

Solitude.

Enough of each that they are the only ones that exist.


“Jon... I need...”

He pushes himself upright, pulling her injured leg up atop his injured shoulder. Twisting her hips to open her up for the new angle. Tighter. Deeper. Fuller.

“Need You...” he whispers planting open kisses against her calf.


It's the beat his hips snap to as he drives into her. The length pushing apart her walls. Dragging against them. Striking inside her. Rending her. Overwhelming her.

Her mouth hangs open and a long moan rips out. Her hands reach up to lock around his neck and pull him back down on top of her. The motion bending her knee back to press against her chest.

Closer. Tighter. Deeper.

“Harder.”

They prove it to each other. With fingers clawing into the his back. With forceful thrusts butting up against her womb. With a craning neck reaching to taste his skin. With whiskers abrading the soft skin of her calf. With heavy pants and long groans. With her body inching up the bed with the force of his thrusts. With lewd wet noises from where they are joined. With tunneling muscles gripping him. With lashes fluttering as her eyes roll back into her head. With her back arching as much as she can under his weight. With breath coming in ragged sobs as she tries to suck down air. With a husky voice whispering “Yea Dany.” With electricity rippling up her spine. With legs spasming. With increasingly high pitched cries of “ Jon JON. JOOONNN!” that devolves into wordless babbling as he fucks her through it.


His queen collapsing and contracting. Seizing him. Making him shudder and falter, as her pleasure ebbs and flows. Then she looks up at him. Violet eyes dark with lust. Teeth sinking into her bottom lip as her hands trace down her chest to cup her breasts.

Pinching, tugging and clawing at them. Sliding a hand down her belly down to where they are joined. Circling herself briefly, before offering him her fingers. He draws them into his mouth greedily. Licking them as she licked him. Tonguing them as she tongued him. Sucking them as she sucked him. Before withdrawing them so they can slide back to rub between her legs


His teeth bared above her. The muscles of his neck rigid with strain. Droplets of sweat and water from the shower shaking out of his hair to sprinkle atop of her as he throws his head back and tries to bury more of himself inside of her. His cock striking her womb with each devastating blow. Her fingers sliding across her clit. Greedily trying to push herself over the edge one more time. Words that she didn’t know she was capable of saying pouring out of her mouth.

He sinks his teeth into her calf as her muscles seize tight around him again. Sweet pain making her keen and mewl. Twisting and Sobbing and Shaking under him as her release washes over her. Dropping the leg on his shoulder to twine it around his waist, and dig her heels into his ass. To lock him against her as he chases his own end.


It’s too much. Her tits jiggling and bouncing. The taste of her on his tongue. The sound of her anguished cries. Her essence coating his groin. The incredible pressure surrounding him, overpowered by the pressure building inside of him. The filth she spouts at him.

Telling him to take her. Telling him to use her. Telling him to hurt her. Telling him to fuck her. Telling him to fill her with his seed. Telling him to let go. Telling him to come.

Alive.

Alive.

Alive...

Dragons always get what they want.

She catches him. Arms wrapping around his head and shoulders. His head lolling into the crook of her neck, a long moan rumbling against her throat as he collapses. His cock throbbing as he floods her. She tilts her hips up, Tilting up to receive everything he’ll give her as he twitches and pulses inside. Filling her. His weight settled pleasantly atop of her.
Alive.

He doesn’t want to move. Doesn’t ever want to leave this place. This place with her arms and legs snaked around him. Cock sunk into her. Locked inside her. Her fingers running through his hair. Her lips pressing against his forehead between sweet loving murmurs. Cool breeze rippling across his back. Peace. Quiet.

Space. Solitude.

Enough of each that they are the only ones that exist.

She lifts his head, tilting it to meet her lips as their tight embrace eases and he slips out of her with a grunt and wince. Her thighs squeezing together as he rolls onto his uninjured side. And He notices her careful movements as she tucks herself against him. She sees the thought in his dark eyes. The question. The hope.

“Tomorrow” she says quietly. “We’ll talk tomorrow.”

“Aye. Tomorrow” He wraps his arm around her as she nuzzles and burrows into her place on his chest. In his heart.

Space. Solitude.

Enough of each that even time ceases to exist.

They exist in a time that is only for lovers. Where sleep and love seem to blend together and the night stretches on eternally. Where each collapse after each completion could be a few minutes or a few hours. Where they rouse each other with long kisses that swell with an urgent need. Where her youthful dreams of a comely lover merge transition to reality. Where his nightmares can’t reach him. Where there is only him. And there is only her.

Even the sun struggles to find them here. The floor to ceiling windows of Tywin Lannister's suite face west over the Sunset Sea. So the sun must climb high to reach them. And even then its harsh light is diffused. Sparkling and glittering off the endless stretch of ocean.

It's what she sees as her lashes flutter open at the feel of soft kisses along her neck and back. An arm wrapping tighter around her. Pulling her against him to feel his readiness for her. A rumbling chuckle as she wiggles against it. The kisses along her neck becoming feverish until he sinks his teeth into the sensitive flesh.

She gasps as he releases and soothes it with little kisses and licks, before doing it again. And then again. The arm around her waist dragging up to paw at her breasts. Clever calloused fingers seizing both nipples and rolling them around.

“Jon…?”

“Yes, Dany.” The coarse hair of his beard tickling behind her ear.

She doesn’t remember what she was going to say as he pinches them. Jolts of pleasure coursing through her in a long wave that makes her elongate. Stretching her stiff limbs in his grasp. He runs his hand over her leg as she does, drawing it back over his. Opening up her chest, opening up her hips, Opening up her lips. Exposing his Dragon’s soft underbelly.

That hand drifts down to circle her, while his lips and teeth and tongue work her neck.
“How are you still so wet for me, Dany?” shifting his hips behind her to free his cock from where it was wedged against her cleft.

“How are you still so hard for me, Jon?” her voice hoarse from their night together. From screaming his name so loud, he had clamped a hand over her mouth. He chuckles at the quip and responds by bringing some of their mingled fluids up for her to see. His fingers webbed and sticky with long tendrils of their cum.

“How are you still so wet for me, my Queen.”

“Look at how messy you are, my Queen.”

“What did you do to me, Commander?” his tongue runs in a long possessive swipe up her neck and nuzzles against her ear.

“I think the better question, love-” he growls “-is what am I going to do to you”

She isn’t given a chance to respond as he sinks his cock into her abruptly. The sharp jab of it pushing forward against her walls. Perfectly rubbing against that perfect place inside as he begins to harshly thrust into her.

He drags his hand back down to her clit. The angle leaving it exposed and erect. Sticking out for him to easily toy with while he pounds into her. He’ll never get over how good she feels. The clasp of her cunt around him the sweetest torture. Her anguished cries at his invasion the sweetest music.

The other hand that had been plucking at her nipple draws up to her throat, pulling her head back so he can take her mouth as well. Her spine bending and tilting her hips out to give him more access to her.

It's so good. The brief wave of anxiety she felt at not facing her lover crumbling under the rush of pleasure. She hasn’t taken a lover in that fashion since Drogo. Painful memories of him dragging her onto her knees plundering her. Remote. Far Away. His only noise small grunt to indicate his completion. Pinning her head down to indicate that she was his thing. His possession. His slave. Nothing like this. Jon panting in her ear. Groans and whispers telling her how pleased he is with her. His body pressed close behind her. His hands all over her. She is safe. She is free. She is loved.

“Can I try somethin’, Dany. Do you trust me?” Strong hand on her throat demonstrating what he’s asking her to trust him with. It’s not something she’s ever done. But… Jon always has the best ideas. Ideas that make her feel so good. She nods and he kisses her. Deep, wide kisses that make her moan and squirm around on his cock.

Ygritte had asked him to do this. The request scared him. Such a violent thing had no place between lovers. And he was so much stronger than her. But she’d mocked and teased and eventually begged until he did it. She came so hard she’d screamed. She screamed so loud, Val had burst into their camp, pistol out. Ready to shoot first and ask questions later. But the sight of it. Of the fiercest woman he’d ever met, surrendering entirely, coming completely apart. Losing herself in him...

He wants her undone. This woman that drives him to near madness. His Dany who always gives as good as she gets. His love that has conquered him so completely. He wants her unspooled and writhing. He wants his undefeated queen to lose to what he can make her feel.

Kissing her neck, behind her ear, her shoulder. Silently bidding her to relax against him as his cock slips from her and she reaches up to adjusts his grip on her throat so it feels comfortable. Fear and anticipation arousing her as she nods and closes her eyes and takes deep lungfuls of air. His hand on
her clit never stopping the steady circling.

“I love you.” he promises.

“I love you too.”

“Tell me if it hurts, or if you start to feel faint or if you don’t like it or-”

“-I will, Jon.”

His lips on her forehead as the strong muscles of his hand bear down slowly around her throat. The stream of breath becoming narrower and thinner. Her chest starting to heave as the pectorals beneath her breasts try and pull her lungs open. Blood thrumming as her brain realizes its not getting enough oxygen. The fight or flight response drenching her nerves with adrenaline. Her body tightening, fighting to pull in more air. Muscles going rigid. Lips tingling with a strange numbness.

He slowly, silently counts back from five. His mouth gently moving against her ear as the seconds tick by until… he lets go.

And she spasms. Shuddering with relief. Her body undulating with each gasping breath. His lips capturing hers as sensation returns. So sensitive now. She can feel every part of his lips, his beard. His tongue. The smallest brush sending tingles down her spine. Muscles twitching as her blood is reoxygenated. Her pussy gushing with a rush of wet.

A long shaky “ooohhhhh” escaping as she lolls against him, unable to open her eyes..

“…Jon…”

“Yes, Love.” anxiety in his voice.

She remembers what she wanted to say when they woke up.

“More.”

He’ll always give her what she wants. From Bedsport to the Throne of fucking Westeros. He’ll always give her what she wants.

Hands traveling along her ribs as she stretches. He captures her in a sloppy kiss. Open, wide, deep. Running his tongue along her sensitive lips. Slanting his mouth against hers as he invades her mouth. Leaving her breathless and sighing as his hand finds her neck again. Breaking apart for a moment to let her pull in air before cutting off her access to it.

He draws his knee up between her legs. Giving her his thigh to push down as she starts thrash. Feeling the another surge of her arousal coat it as he releases her.

“You’re so wet Dany…” murmuring in her ear as she sucks down air and he can feel her body trembling against him. His hand dipping back down between her legs. Toying with her. Playing with her. “Who knew you liked such things?”

“You did” she whispers hoarsely, sucking in air, not opening her eyes.

“Aye…” He seizes her again, tasting the sweat on the back of her neck. Rubbing her harder. “What would people think if they knew their queen was so wanton? That she liked getting fucked in all manner of ways?” his grip loosens and her chest expands with a harsh sob. His hand is fucking drenched as she twitches and wriggles.
Each deep breath is so good. Like sinking into a hot bath. Or having a long stretch after sleeping too late. Only concentrated and exponentially better. The simple act of breathing becoming a visceral bodily pleasure that she feels everywhere. Pushing down on his leg. Desperate for friction. Her cunt is so empty. Each time he legs go of her, her body contracts and she can feel how hollow she is.

“Do you like that Dany?” he growls in her ear as he slowly increases the pressure around her throat. She nods as much as his hand around her will allow. “I know… I know you like it. Do you want to know how I know?” she mouths ‘yes’, but no noise comes out.

He start to deliver small slaps with four fingers against her vulva. Fleeting, jarring contact on her sensitive nub. Her body tight and tense. Oh gods.

He releases her throat and a stuttering moan tears out of her as she quivers. A flood of her arousal bursting out of her and those small slaps become loud and wet. Her essence splattering with each small impact.

“That's how I know Dany…” his cock is grinding against her backside. Friction made easier by her juices. Hard and Thick and not inside her. “You’re so fuckin’ wet. You’re soaking the bed. Can you feel it?” she nods, lost in the sensation, in his filthy words. “You’re leaking like your cunt’s on fire. Is it, Dany?” she nods again, whimpering, as he removes his leg from between them and adjusting himself behind her. “Is there something I can do to help you?”

Her mouth forms the shape of a ‘yes’

“What is it, love, what can I do?”

“Fuck meee…” she whines.

He’ll always give her what she wants.

He enters her in a swift motion. Hard. So impossibly hard. A solid thing suddenly inside her. The intrusion making her gasp. But its cut off almost instantly with a squeeze of his hand. Full. So full. Her lithe form drawing taut around him as the air leaves her. Sharp thrusts into her strained sheath. So good. So fucking good.

“I want you to come, Dany.” his cock battering her. “You’re so beautiful when you come. You know that? You look like a fuckin’ goddess. I wanna see… Can you do that for me, Love? I want you to let go. I want to feel it.” His fingers return to that steady circle on her clit. It’s the longest he’s ever held her and she fights the urge to panic as one of her hands goes to his wrist. As she opens her mouth to try and pull in air. A flash of fear sending spiking adrenaline through her as he holds her just a second too long. “Will you come for me, my queen?” She nods urgently, the hand on his wrist starting to claw.

He lets go.

And so does she.

The rush of air into her lungs immediately rips out as a scream as her body convulses. Every nerve ending firing. Tremors and twitches. Her cunt shuddering and bearing down around him. He groans in her ear. The noise thick and heavy. “That’s it. Dany. Come for me.” he kisses her neck and behind her ear and all over where he choked her. “So good Love. So good. You have the sweetest cunt in the whole world.”

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He pulls her tight against him. Her limbs loose and limp. Soft sounds escaping as he fucks her. His cock pushing against that spot he knows she likes. One arm wrapped around her waist. Gripping her. Bracing her. Supporting her as he pounds into her. She sobs as it begins to ebb. Hand roughly rubbing her rubbery nub another breaks through her. Gushing and squirting with the force of her pleasure. Triumph surging through him, making him drive into her harder

Oh gods.

She’s lost. So lost. She can’t form a coherent thought. It just flashes of sensation. The sound of Jon moaning. The feel of whiskers on her face. Lips on hers. The room is spinning. Sweat dripping down her neck. Sharp pulls on her nipples, sweet pain sending shivers down her spine. Trembling. Shaking. She can’t stop shaking.

“Can you give me one more, Dany?”

Dragons are greedy.

“One more. Just one more. Please. I need it. I know you can. Don’t fight it…Please don’t fight it.”

So very greedy.

“Oh please, love. I want it. Its mine. Give it to me.”

And Dragons always get what they want.

“Come for me, Dany.”

It feels endless. Wave after wave washing over her. Her body heavy. Gravity pulling her down until she’s drowning in her own cum. Floundering in a sea of it. Melting into a puddle of it. The sound of the waves crashing in the cliffs outside seem to match the endless tide that rolls over her.

He roars against her as her body clamps down around him. She can feel his mouth open against her shoulder. The teeth sinking in. A half dozen short thrusts are all it takes to send him after her. His body tensing and releasing in fits as his cock pulses inside of her. Heavy shuddering pants behind her as his own wave crests and breaks.

Space. Solitude.

Enough of each that they are the only ones to exist.

She’s drifting. Her mind fuzzy around the edges. Like waking up from a sleep she doesn’t remember falling into. He rolls her over, holding her to him. Kissing her hair. Whispering love and praise and gratitude. Running his hand through her hair and down her spine. Gently bringing her down. His heart thundering under her ear. The arrhythmic beat anchoring her as she regains her lucidity.

“Dany...” worry painting his rough voice.

“I think you broke me…” she teases hoarsely.

He laughs quietly, a ball of anxiety unspooling at her light words. He gently lifts her head up, so he can make sure he didn’t hurt her. Her violet eyes slide open, brightly shining for him. A shaky hand lazily reaching to scratch his beard.

“How do you feel?”

“So Good…” A shaky calm has settled over her. And she vaguely wonders this is what it feels like
for men. A release that permeates her being. Her ejaculate soaking the bed beneath them. “Thirsty… I'm all dried up.”

“Aye. Love. You drenched the bed.” The enormous wet spot starting to dry around the edges in the sunlight. Leaving a white flaky mess on the Lannister red sheet.

“I feel bad for the Staff…” she smiles against his chest. Still loose and soft and limp “We definitely cannot do this when we get back to Winterfell.”

“Gilly would murder us.”

“Might be worth it through…”

He kisses her forehead and gently slides her off of him. Leaving her in a Dany puddle while he fetches the pitcher and a glass the staff had brought up along with the medkit and dinner and clothes. She finishes it in three long gulps and he refills it for her. The second one going down much slower. A sudden wave of dizziness overtakes her as she sits upright.

“Easy.” Grabbing her hand to stabilize her.

She blows out a breath and nods. Taking a few deep breaths before bracing against his hand and pulling herself out of bed. Finding her feet and Stretching up her arms above her head and arching her back to pull apart her vertebrae. He licks his lips and smiles wide.

“Jon Snow!” she folds her arms across her chest in mock outrage.

“Oh like yer not going to stare at my arse as soon as I turn ‘round.” She laughs and wraps her arm around his waist. Jolting him as she pinches the aforementioned arse.

“Of course I am.”

They break their fast on the balcony. The household bringing them a tray loaded with Eggs, toast, bacon, fruit and Coffee. Juice from Oranges, which Jon’s never had because citrus is hard to get up North and when its got, its not wasted on juice. Her sitting in his lap with her head tucked against his shoulder on the oversized cushioned chair on the balcony. Her in the robe, him in some simple cotton pants. His hand trailing up and down her thigh between bites of food

She’d asked them to bring him up some clothes with dinner and the med kit last night. So the dirty ones in his pack could be laundered. But she’d hidden the shirt. Snatching it away from him and sprinting off naked with a mad giggle on her lips.

It’s tucked under one of the cushions in the sitting room

He knows.

But she’s so delighted with herself, and she looks at him like she wants eat him. And that makes him want to fucking devour her. So he lets the shirt sit. A grey wad of cotton shoved indelicately into the upholstery.

“So what did you do?” she asks popping a piece of fruit in her mouth.

“What?”

“You said last night you needed to tell me something and that you’d rather I didn’t hear it from Tyrion. Which leads me to believe you did something and you don’t want Tyrion to Tattle” she
teases, tapping a finger against his nose.

He laughs quietly, and then his face gets somber. And he tells her. About Robb. About his will. About what he did. Why he did it. And she listens. Letting him talk. Giving him time to find the right words. Holding his hand through it. Letting him know it's okay.

“I respect what you did. I wish you hadn't done it. But I respect it."

“You aren't worried about... me being what I am...”

“I've never cared that you were a bastard, Jon. I think the whole concept is an atrocious piece of Westerosi legalism that allows Landholders to do as they please without facing the consequences of their actions. It allows rich men to take advantage of women, and often leave them without means to support themselves or their child. I know your father was a good man. But you deserved better. Your mother, whoever she was, deserved better.”

There are so many different emotions sparking in his dark eyes. He doesn’t say anything though, Just takes a shaky breath and leans forward, wrapping his arms around her knees. Chin resting atop them. A quiet relieved noise rattling through him.

“I just wish you had talked to someone first, Jon.” she rubs his back in slow circles. “Davos or Tyrion or Sansa. Even Jorah and Beric. That’s why they’re here. They’re here to advise us... to support us. I understand your reasons. And they are good reasons. Viserys sold me. I can’t imagine a world where he would have even given up a night’s sleep for me. Much less...” Winterfell. He gave up Winterfell so his sister would never be in a position where she even could be sold again. Removing even the remotest possibility that it could happen again.

“I’m mostly worried about Robb releasing you from your enlistment oath. You are uncomfortable discussing... the mutiny.” Jon nods slowly. “I’m scared that...someone might try and...” she has to pause because the fear sinks deep inside her rattling her voice “…that someone will take your head and call it justice. I couldn’t bear it Jon. I couldn’t...If someone took you from me like that. I couldn’t bear it.” Her voice cracks and he sits upright, wrapping his arm around her shoulder. Pulling her against his chest.

“That won’t happen.”

“You can’t promise that.”

“I can promise I won’t go down like that. I won’t die on my knees. If I die... I die. But I intend to die fighting. Or...If the gods are good, an’ we survive everything that’s comin’...an old man...” he pauses and looks at her “…in your arms.”

She draws in a tight breath. Because it's the first time they've brought up the possibility of a future...together. And there’s apart of her that’s elated. That imagines him with grey hairs in his curls, and watching age lines join the scars around his eyes and the hard cuts of muscle beneath her becoming soft. But there’s that thing. That thing’s broken about her. Three hundred years of inbreeding. Radiation mutating her into something that’s not quite human. A witch’s hateful curse. She blurts it out indelicately. He frowns.

“Who told you that?”

“The witch who murdered my first husband...”

“Huh.” he sticks his tongue to the inside of his cheek. He doesn’t know much about that sort of thing.
Ygritte couldn’t get pregnant because… she chose to get herself cut when she was promoted to command. But the little he does know doesn’t support that conclusion. His lips draw tight, before he licks them carefully considering his next words.

“Have you considered… that she may not have been the most reliable source of information?”

“I was with my other lover for several years… we did nothing to prevent it. I never conceived.”

“Maybe the problem was with him?”

“I’m not human, Jon. I’m Valyrian. Different. It’s like…” she struggles to come up with an example. How does she explain genetics and evolution and speciation to him? She barely understood the book she read in Qarth, but she’d understood enough to verify what the witch taunted her with. “Like a…A snow bear and brown bear.”

“Snow bears and Brown bears fuck and have cubs all the time. Freefolk called ‘em silverbacks because their fur tends to be white but the undercoat is dark. They’re fucking terrifying.” She blinks. “...And of course you’re human Dany. How could you say such a thing? You’re the most human person I’ve ever met.”

She swallows hard as he kisses her hands.

“I don’t want you to hope for something I may not be able to give you. I don’t want you to grow to resent me for it.”

He nods quietly and stares out over the Sunset sea for a long minute.

“I resigned myself to never being a father when I joined the Watch... Then I died. And so many things… So many things I’d never thought I’d have again... Never thought I’d have a home again. Never thought I’d see Arya or Sansa or Bran again... Have my family back. Never thought I’d be named Commander.” his fingers trace over her knuckles “Never thought I’d fall in love again... If it's just us for however long our lives are... That’s...that’s more than I could ever have wanted. But…” he pauses and looks at her. “But you’re hoping, Dany. I see it in your eyes. Everytime I…” he makes a crude gesture and she laughs and leans into him. “I want to give you everything you want... You deserve it.”

“You do too…”

The sun is warm on their skin. The sea-salt breeze easing the heat. Full bellies. A drowsy contented lull settles over them.

“What are we going to do?

“I believe you mentioned the bathtub, and the desk, and the windows and… I forget the other one.”

“The lion skin rug.” she giggles batting his arm playfully. “I meant with us.”

“Aye. I know…” kissing her forehead and taking a deep breath. “If we die. We die. But first we’ll live.”

“And if we live…” he licks his lips. Heart racing. Because he can’t believe he’s going to say it.

“Then I’ll be yours… if you’ll be mine…”

She feels her heart rip open. Love’s sweet ache. It’s not quite a proposal. But with the future so
uncertain…

“I’d like that very much.” She tilts her head up and meets his mouth. Drawing him to her. She’s already his, and he’s already hers. And she spells silent vows with her tongue as she widens the kiss. Pulling him down on top of her. Lips meeting and sucking as she claims what is hers.

The sudden movement jostles the tray on the little table and they startle at the noise.

“Bathtub?” he raises an eyebrow. She nods and laughs.

“You smell terrible.”

“Oh my queen, whose fault is that?”

“Yours… All yours..”
Interlude - The Bull and the Butterfly

Chapter Notes

https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Falling Slowly - Glen Hansard, Marketa Irglova

Gendry

“Have you thought about it yet?” Tyrion asks with a gleam in his eye. This place is just… insane.
More food than he could ever eat spread out across the enormous dining room table.

“Bout’ what?” he pulls some flapjacks onto a plate.

“Storm’s End…? The Baratheon name? OURS IS THE FURY!” the dwarf bellows lifting a mug of coffee like its a mug of ale. Beric winces with his one good eye at the sudden shift in volume.

“I don’t know the first thing about bein’ a Baratheon or running a settlement.”

“And the fury…?” Beric laughs.

“You could learn about House Baratheon and about running a settlement. You’re young and clever. You’ll have help. It’s not that difficult.”

The slums of Flea Bottom and the slums stacked along the city walls tell him differently. Watching Administrator Stark tells him differently. Before they left he and Arya had been sitting on the railing laughing hysterically as she recounted how her sister had screamed after find a grey hair that morning.

“Storm’s End’s more of a port than a proper settlement” the one eyed man corrects. “Most of the people come in for work from surrounding areas. It’s less daunting than say…” he motions around him.

“What happened to your land, Beric?” the dwarf asks.

“Who knows? Probably forfeited to the Crown.”

Clegane storms into the Dining room with a menacing scowl on his face, landing heavily in a chair.

“Good Morning.”

“Fuck off, Tyrion.”

“You let him get to you?” Beric smirks.

“Fucking Sister-Fucking Lannister Fuck!”

“Ah there it is… And who is guarding the sister fucking Lannister fuck?”

“Mormont.” The Hounds answers Tyrion flatly pulling a fucking mountain of bacon onto his plate.

“Poor Man…” the dwarf sighs. “First deciding to camp with the Dothraki and now not even sharing a meal with us.”

“This house is huge. I’m sure he could have found a place where he wouldn’t hear it. I did.”

“I didn’t hear anything” he chimes eagerly.

“You both slept in the guest wing.” the dwarf wipes his mouth on a napkin.

“How bad was it?” the one eyed man laughs.

“I have never been more grateful that my father wanted me as far away from him as possible.”

There’s a clatter coming from the stairs as Tormund and Arya shout at each other. And he learns exactly how much more menacing Clegane can look.
“You breathe a word about what happened last night to the Little Wolf…” he hisses at Tyrion, pulling out his pistol and slamming it on the table. Beric, likewise, opens up his coat to display the weapon strapped under his arm.

What happened last night? What are they keeping from Arya? Is he supposed to be armed? He left his hammer upstairs.

“I am not a dullard, Clegane. You can put that away.”

“I win!” Arya shouts triumphantly bursting through the double doors to the dining room as Clegane’s gun slides back into his holster.

“Did you really expect not to?” Beric adds.

“She’s so fucking fast…” Tormund huffs against the doorway.

“You’re just old and fat.” She laughs. Plopping ungracefully into the seat next to him and tossing him a bright smile.

“You cheated.” The wildling complains.

She shrugs and forks one of his flapjacks and drags it onto her own plate.

“There’s a stack over there” he mock whinges at her.

“You already buttered this one for me.” she smiles. That half predatory, half innocent smile.

“Now Miss Stark…”

“Just Arya.” she corrects the dwarf stuffing it into her mouth.

“Arya, I must insist you stop menacing the staff. Interrogating is one thing. Writing threatening notes is another.”

“It was one note and it was for their own good.”

“I assure you, they know to knock.”

She rolls her eyes and relents selecting some more food.

“No.” Clegane snaps as she reaches for another flapjack.

“Why not!?”

“You said want more power in your hits? The means more mass. More mass. More muscle. Eggs. Meat. Protein.” he tosses a boiled egg at her and she catches it and snarls and starts peeling off the shell.

“Thoros used to make me eat ‘em Raw.” Beric adds.

“Disgusting.” Tyrion proclaims. “Also, don’t tell girls what they can and can’t eat. It gives them a complex.”

Three start to argue. Clegane saying that the imp knows nothing about building muscle. Tyrion saying shit like that is how you end up with women like Cersei. Beric provoking both of them for his own amusement.
“Arya…” he whispers. “Here…” He slides half of one on to her plate. She smiles and mouths ‘thanks’ before indelicately shoving the whole thing into her mouth before any of the others notice.

A nice woman, the one who brought him to his room last night, brings Tyrion a piece of paper which he reads. “Well we’ve found the city’s administrator. Hiding in Brothel in Lannisport. They are bringing him here as we speak.”

“Do we need to rough him up?” Beric asks.

“I don’t think that will be necessary. Although I would appreciate if Miss Stark will go and alert our fearless leaders.”

“Just Arya.” she corrects yet again, rolling her eyes “And I am not going up there.”

“I’ll do it” Tormund proclaims standing up, half a strip of bacon hanging out of his mouth. “I taught the lad everything he knows about pussy. Nothin’ I ain’t seen or heard.”

Both he and Arya cringe. “Gross.” she mutters, before giving him a side eye. Tormund looks directly at him and winks as he leaves. He swallows hard. Clegane glares at him. He swallows again.

She asked him to time her climbing the cliffs. He’d held the rope as she rapelled down and now she was free climbing back up. She was making good time. Although he’s not exactly sure what good time would be. Faster than he could. He looks down at her, as he dangles his legs over the edge of the cliff.

It’s nice here. Real nice. From the house, there’s an expanse of garden full of all sorts plants and flowers. Pretty ones. It creeps up to where the dirt becomes rock at the edge of the cliff that suddenly drops down into the ocean. Its nothing like the ocean around Blackwater Bay. Toxic. Brown. Slimy. Full of garbage and sewage. Around Dragonstone it was Grey, reflecting the stormclouds constantly above it. At White Harbor it was Icey and briney. Salty. But here… The ocean is so blue and so endless.

There’s a part of him that just wants to dive off and jump in.

Arya’d do it with him.

What would the ocean be like at Storm’s End? It’s the stormlands so it probably be Grey like Dragonstone. Port means lots of boats, which means gross water like around Blackwater Bay.

“How goes it?” Commander asks. Suddenly standing over him. He shrugs.

“Fine, I guess. This place is crazy.”

“Aye. How the fuck do people live like this?” he takes a deep breath of the sea salt air. “Have you seen Arya?”

He tilts his head over the edge of the cliff. Jon leans over, and as his neck cranes out, Gendry has to look away. The red and purple splotches on his Commander’s neck making him flush with second-hand embarrassment.

Commander pulls his hair up into knot and takes a seat next to him while waiting. A huge smile splitting his face as he looks down at his sister. He and Arya have the same smile.

“Out with it.” he says after a long minute.
“What?”

“Whatever it is that bothering you. Let’s hear it.”

He licks his lips and looks at his hands. Fidgeting with a piece of dry coastal grass. Ripping it apart in his hands as he think of how to put words to the thoughts.

“I guess…” he takes a long breath “I guess I just don’t know what my place is… in all this… what my duty is.” He pauses. “Tyrion’s been talking…” Jon snorts, but doesn’t say anything. “Tyrion’s been talking to me about Storm’s End… and me being…ya know… what with who my father is… was…” he corrects quickly. And he feels it. The anger. The Fury. “Do I owe him any duty? Do I owe him anything? At all? He probably didn’t even know I existed, and if he did… well he’s just that much more an asshole right? Stannis was gonna let the Red Woman burn me. Brienne says my other uncle was a good man, but… who the fuck knows? An’ then Davos is like: ‘We need people to build things. Can’t rebuild the world world without people like you. You’re good at making things’ and he’s right. I can make things. I’m good at making things... Is that what I’m supposed to do? Is that my duty? That’s what Arya’s father... Your father wanted me to do. Paid my union dues so I could be a journeyman on the Street of Steel. So I wouldn’t starve. So I could do something with my life. I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know.” He rambles repeatedly and throws the grass of a cliff.

Commander sighs and leans back and stares at the ocean for a long time.

“Duty isn’t something you owe someone else.” he says quietly. “It’s when something needs to be done, and yer capable of doing it, and you step up.” He turns to him then. “You don’t owe your father a damn thing. You don’t owe Davos a damn thing. And you certainly don’t owe my father a damn thing.”

“But Davos pulled me out so I’d-”

“Davos pulled you out of King’s Landing because he loves you. Like he loved the Princess Shireen. That doesn’t mean he gets to dictate your life.”

“What about Storm’s End?”

Jon sucks in a disgusted hiss through his teeth.

“Tyrion just likes to fuckin’ talk. Likes to feel powerful... Like he has the fuckin’ ability t’ just give you Storm’s End.”

“Doesn’t he?” Jon shrugs. “Doesn’t matter… not like I could run it anyway.”

A frown crosses his commander’s face. A disappointed, somber look. He runs his tongue over his teeth and takes a deep breath.

“We got two long wars to fight before we even get there. Who knows what you’ll be capable of when we come out the other end of ‘em.”

“Jon…” The queen calls walking towards them through the garden. He turns to look at her, that frown melting away and replaced with a huge grin. He flashes two fingers at her and she smiles at him.

“Tell you what.” he stands. “I need someone else to look big an’ scary when we meet with the City’s administrator. Go get your hammer and come with.”
“I’m timing Arya.”

Jon smiles and squats down at the edge of the cliff extending his arm. After a moment, a hand clamps around his wrist and he lifts as he stands upright. A sweaty red-faced Arya landing in the grass.

“How did I do…?” she huffs, her chest heaving as she takes deep breaths.

He chews on his tongue for a moment as he looks at his watch.

“I forgot what time you started…”

She flips to her feet and slaps him on the chest. “ASS!” Jon laughs as he walks away from them, wrapping his arm around the queen’s shoulders, as she slings hers around his waist.

**Missandei**

“Uncle Edmure…?” Sansa says incredulously into the radio.

“Yea.” Commander Snow’s voice crackles through the other end. Her tongue pokes through her cheek as her ice eyes consider.

“His wife? the boy?” Varys asks.

“Same.”

“Commander Snow felt it best that they face trial at Winterfell.” Tyrion adds. “That it might provide the North some closure for the events of the Red Wedding.” Sansa pinches the bridge of her nose.

“I doubt that very much.” Varys gives voice to what lies unspoken in Sansa’s face. “At best, it will re-open the wound, at worst we will be facing a mob demanding Roslin’s head.”

“I’ll take care of it.” Sansa snaps, the frustration disappearing as she has worked out a solution. “Send them here as soon as you can. With as little noise as possible.”

“We’re to meet with the Fisherman’s union and Miner’s guild within the next few days. We’ll see if one of them can take them North, while we wait for Cersei to respond to our terms.”

“Whatever terms Cersei agrees to-” Varys starts.

“It’s a trap.” Davos interrupts.

“Of course it is…” Tyrion answers. “But we need to at least attempt a truce.”

Doubt spreads across the red-head’s features.

“Don’t let her bait you Jon…She’ll view you as the easiest target.” Sansa warns. There’s a long pause on the other side of the radio. And Missandei stifles a laugh because she can HEAR him brooding, just as she can hear the smile in Daenerys’ voice as she pokes him out of it.

“…Jon…”

“Right.” he growls.

Davos waggles his eyebrows at her.

“Is that Jon?” Willa bursts into the room.
“Aye, Dove.” he answers the small girl as she crawls up on Sansa’s lap as Varys and the others take the hint and filter out.

“When are you coming home?” the sweet girl pouts as Missandei follows behind. Closing the door as tears start to roll down the child’s cheeks as he tells her he doesn’t know and that he’s so...so sorry.

“Well, at least we learned one thing…” Varys says tucking his hands into his sleeves as they move into the sitting room. “It seems our leaders have solidified their alliance.”

“That’s one way of putting it.” Davos chuckles.

“I much prefer Commander Snow to Daario.” Missandei says. “He is respectable.”

“Quite” Varys agrees. “A much more suitable consort for a queen.” Davos frowns at the word ‘consort’ but, quickly shrugs it off in favor of a more mischievous smile as he pulls out a small notebook.

“At the very least we can start eliminating people from our wager.”

She claps her hands excitedly as Davos scratches out all the names from the current date going forward. Which eliminates Beric Dondarrion, Lyanna Mormont, Sansa, Red Flea and Podrick Payne.

“I can assure you, they had not consummated their relationship before they departed.” Varys suggests. Which eliminates Tormund Giantsbane, Gendry Waters and Alys Karstark.

“And this time would have spent travelling...” scratching out his own name, Sam Tarly, Gilly and Qhono. “Which leaves us down to two contestants…” Davos announces and a wide smile splits her face as he turns to look at her. “Brienne of Tarth and Missandei of Naath.”

“What will you be doing with your winnings?” Varys asks.

“Should I win…” she starts. The most valuable thing for her is the overnight guardshifts, which she would give to Grey so that they could have more time together. But that’s not something she will announce. “I am going to take Lt. Commander Mormont’s Bear Pelt and fashion Grey a proper coat”

“There’s a fair bit of coin put up, perhaps you should look into a homestead. There are several empty plots on Stark land. And since it seems we are to be staying here for quite some time...” Varys sighs heavily at the prospect “At any rate...It would be far more comfortable than the barracks.”

“Perhaps yer’ the one that needs to find himself a Cabin” Davos laughs.

“Don’t I know it.” the bald man grumbles.

“Grey would not appreciate being separated from his men, but I thank you for the suggestion.”

It’s something she dreams of, but dare not put into words. A home. A place for just her and Grey. It’s impossible. After the wars, if they survive... they have a duty to the Unsullied, and the other former slaves that followed Daenerys across the Narrow Sea.

Unsullied are trained from childhood to suppress their emotions. It is for that reason, she knows he loves her. Because he smiles when he sees her crossing the yard to him. He does not smile for anyone else but her.
It’s become a small daily ritual for them. She bringing him lunch when the soldiers break to go to the mess and begin their work details around Winterfell. He’s marching through mixed lines of the Unsullied and the Northern Front. Barking corrections while Brienne blows a whistle. Having their troops transition from a squat to a plank back to a squat then jumping as high as they can. Endurance training. Getting them used to each other, getting them to trust each other.

She waits patiently under the small covered pavilion in front of the armory. Setting the picnic basket down and resting her hands on the railing as the two generals work. He does not look at her. Does not convey any weakness to his men. But she know he sees her. She can tell by the almost unnatural avoidance of her direction.

“Secretary Missandei” Brienne greets her after breaking the men out. “How do you fare?”

“Excellent, I bring exciting news.” she tells the woman everything. All the news from Casterly Rock. Her face grows solemn, the opposite of what she expected. But before she can tell her about the wager...

“Was there any word of Jaime?”

“Lannister?” Brienne nods. “He is a prisoner of Daenerys Stormborn and Commander Snow”

“Will he be accompanying the Tully’s North?”

“I am not sure, but I can make inquiries. My understanding of the situation is limited. But it seems they are attempting to force Cersei into a truce, so it stands to reason that he would be part of it.”

“I must speak with Administrator Stark immediately. Please excuse me.”

Brienne stalks off. Long determined strides toward the house. Her confusion at the reaction is short lived as enough soldiers have broken away from the yard for Grey Worm to feel comfortable approaching her.

She takes his arm as they disappear into the wolfswood. She found this spot on her first day here as she explored this strange place. A small grove of trees with ancient broken boulders arranged just so. As if the earth wanted her to have a cozy table and bench for them.

“The Unsullied should have gone.” he scowls after she relays the information yet again. “I do not trust the Dothraki to maintain order”

Most former slaves have trouble trusting Dothraki. They were one of many groups that supplied slaves to the Masters. It has been...difficult to bring these forces together.

“They want a new life, just as much as we do. They were just as much slaves to the Masters as we were. Only they were slaves to the Master’s coin. Their choice was to be slavers or slaves.”

“It is not the same.”

“No. It is not.” she agrees.

He stops for a moment taking a bite of the food she prepared. Naath and the Summer Isles have similar diets, but the Northerners have a much heavier fare than they are used to. A great deal of beef and dairy and bread.. She’s managed to make something that he’s familiar with, something that reminds them of home, by skewering cubes of the meat onto a stake interspersed with various veg. The meat is wrong and veg is different, but she hopes the form will bring a smile to his face.
It does. The smile that is only ever shared with her.

Its cut short by laughter in the distance.

The greenboys are trying to stay quiet. To observe what they must believe to be a freakish display. A Eunuch and a slave girl trying to have a picnic. “Cockless” and “What do they even think they are doing?” and “I’ll show her what she’s missing.”

They are young and ignorant. They do not understand.

“Ignore them.” she urges as she calmly starts packing their meal so that they may move somewhere even more secluded. Trying her best to suppress her own unease for his benefit.

It does not work.

“What are you lot doin’! Get back to work” A northern voice. Rough. Female. Alys Karstark. The boys scamper off to their work details, but as Alys breaks through the treeline, her face falls as she sees them. Emotions dance over the young woman’s features. Realization. Disgust. Disappointment. Confusion. Failure. A young officer who does not have the maturity or tools to unravel the complexities of the situation she finds herself in.

“M’sorry.” she calls quietly. “They should know better. I’ll make sure XO is made aware of what happened.”

A young officer who is trying her best.

It’s not enough to soothe Grey. His room is in the officer’s barracks. It’s small. But it is his. As the most Senior of the Unsullied he gets his own space. It’s a bed, a trunk, an iron stove for heat, and a small privy enclosed by four walls. She’s asked if he would like to join her in her room in the house. But he declined for the same reason she won’t ask about getting one of the small cabins available. He is Unsullied and must stay with his men.

His work doesn’t give him as much opportunity for growth as hers does. Slave or Free. He is Unsullied. A soldier. One of the best in the world. Her work with Daenerys has allowed her to become so much more than a translator. She is secretary to the Queen of Westeros and as such has done everything from serving as a handmaid to serving as a liaison and representative for all those who followed from Essos. It has given her an identity distinctly separate from Kraznys mo Nakloz’s slave girl.

Grey still struggles with his.

“This one is sorry.” he grumbles, turning his back to her as she sets the basket down and bolts the door.

This one.

This one.

It’s what the master’s made them refer to themselves as. Ones. Without Identity. It is not uncommon for former slaves to fall into these old habits. A toxic combination of shell shock and brainwashing dragging them back into the old ways when faced with intense emotion or stress.

She crosses the room in three strides and wraps her arms under his and presses her face against the back of his neck.
We are not ones, we were never ones. You are Grey Worm and I am Missandei. Commander of the Unsullied’s Legions. And Secretary to Daenerys Stormborn. We serve the Breaker of Chains of our own free will, so that all chains may be broken. We are not ones.

He shakes his head.

“They would lay hands on you and this one said nothing.”

“What would you have done? Fight them? That would undo the work you and Brienne do to unite our forces. They are stupid boys. They wish to make themselves feel like men. They do not know what it means to truly be a man.” Grey shakes his head again and she knows the words that he would say next. Say that he is not a man. That he is Unsullied. She silences it. “They are stupid boys, who lack creativity and who will only ever know one kind of love. We know many.”

She slips her hands under the flap of his uniform jacket to find the concealed buttons and begins to undo them as she starts humming. It is a lullaby from the Summer Isles she learned from one of the others slaves. He does not remember his mother, and it is possible she never sung it. But she hums it anyway, because it soothes him.

“Missandei”

“Shh…”

Removing the jacket and the undershirt beneath, she urges him to lay on the bed on his stomach. The skin of his back marred with scar tissue. War Injuries. The Master’s lashes. Straddling him, settling her weight on his backside, she starts with his head. Running her nails in a long run from his hairline, behind his ears, down his back, framing either side of his spine till her fingers meet her thighs.

“This is your body. Only yours.” she repeats the movement again “It belongs to you, not to the masters, nor our queen, nor I.” Her thumbs press into the small groove at the base of his skull, and she digs around until he groans. “It is yours. And everything you experience is yours. They are your feelings, your emotions, your thoughts.” she massages down his neck and into his shoulders before planting her palms between his shoulder blades.

“Breathe Deep and feel your lungs expand and contract. They are your lungs and they serve only you.” He does as she says and after a few quiet moments, she slides her hands up and over his arms, feeling the muscle beneath his skin. Your strength is your own. Your skill is your own. You earned it with the work of your body. You wield it for your own purpose”

She stretches over him, running her hand to meet his. Interlocking their fingers. “Your hands are your own. To Build and Destroy. To touch and to hold.” She plants small kisses on his scalp, the back of his neck, behind his ear. Until he turns under her and brings her down to kiss him.

They are their own. They belong to no-one.

Except for times like these.

In times like these, they belong each other.

After, she straightens her coat, and he re-laces his boots. And then he takes her hand and plants a kiss on the palm.

“Thank you, my butterfly.” And he smiles. That smile that is only for her. “May I see you tonight?”

“Yes, my heart”
She has learned much of Westerosi history and culture in her service to Daenerys. In the slave cities, a man’s wealth was his slaves. Not his things or his coins. The number of human lives he controlled. In Westeros, it is land. It is what separates the free... from the truly free. And she dares to hope.

And so she asks, as she takes a seat in front of Sansa Stark’s large desk. Joanna sitting at the corner of it, struggling through maths. And the woman listens to her concerns, to her dream, to her hope.

And at the end of it she pulls out a map of Westeros and spreads it out on the table, and then takes a transparent sheet and spreads it along the top of it. “You are Secretary to the queen, when this over, I’m sure you and Grey will granted whatever it is you wish…”

“What will your sigil be?” She starts circling various parts of the map on the transparent sheet. Starting far North along the entire stretch of land directly south of the wall. “All landholders have one.” The Dreadfort, Moat Cailin.

“I don’t know...I’ve only just thought of it…” Several locations in the Vale.

“I think it should be a butterfly... like your home.” Joanna chirps as she draws a hard diagonal line, separating the North and the Vale from the rest of Westeros.

“Shouldn’t it be something more fearsome?” Marking RiverRun and the Twins and drawing little stars next to them. Joanna shrugs.

“Margaery once told me something about Butterflies…” Sansa starts as she circles and stars at sites labelled Harrenhal and the Fingers “After it forms its chrysalis…” Highgarden. “The caterpillar completely dissolves...into goop.” she bugs her eyes out and looks at Joanna making the girl giggle, before turning back to the map and circles a handful of places in the Westerlands and Crownlands and Stormlands. “And from that... comes butterflies” Sunspear and several locations in Dorne. “I cannot think of a more beautiful symbol.” she sighs and turns the map around so Missandei can look.

“Now everything above this line is what we currently control, and if you are feeling...impatient... we can make arrangements. Everything that I’ve starred south of this line is land we ‘have’ in one form or another through myself or Tyrion but we don’t yet have access to as its under Cersei’s control. Everything else is land that I know to be turned over to the crown and will be available once we depose Cersei.”

And she goes on describing things like local exports and industries for the various locations. Temperature, Climate. It is only an idea. It is only a thought. It is only a possibility. One of many possibilities. Many opportunities. So many futures for a slave girl and a soldier.
“You best not be shaving that beard Jon Snow.” He meets her eyes in the mirror and he snorts out a small laugh. Hands defiantly flicking open the gold plated straight razor he’d found.
“Is that an order, my queen?”

“It could be.” she stretches in the bathtub, raising her arms above her head to distract him. It works...for a minute... as he stares at her chest in the mirror. Tongue darting out to wet his lips.

Then, rebelliously, lathering the soap cake. She growls a warning from the tub and amusement dances in his eyes as he smears it on his neck. She sneers and crosses her arms. If he’s going to do it, then he doesn’t get to look at her tits while he’s doing it.

“All yer doing is pushin’ ‘em up” he teases running the blade across the leather and canvas strop.

“Good. Maybe you’ll be distracted and cut yourself.” she pouts and his eyes soften a bit.

“I promise, M’ not gonna shave it off, love. I’m just gonna tidy it up. It gettin’ a bit...much.” he ties back his hair and leans into the mirror. “Besides...” he runs the razor along his throat, clearing foam and the admittedly scraggly hairs sprouting unevenly beneath his jugular “…If Im goin’ steady with the queen... escortin’ her around an’ what not... Might as well try and look presentable.” Wiping the excess onto a cloth and throwing her a lopsided grin before returning to his task.

It takes a moment for her to train her face to something haughty and aloof. A girlish, lovestruck smile fighting her every effort.

“I suppose you are right” She sighs and brings her arms up to rest on the curved edge of the tub and arching her back against it. “It would be unseemly for me to be seen with someone so utterly...unkempt.” He pauses, squinting at her.

“Unkempt...?”

“Barbaric”

He mouths the word back at her in the mirror. The hard “B”s popping his plush lips in a way that makes her bite her own.

“Uncivilized”

“Almost a week at Casterly Rock and the Khaleesi is talkin’ like a Lannister...”

Her jaw falls open in shock. He mimics her expression in the mirror before chuckling and clearing another track of hair. She can’t think up a good response and he’s so...smug about it. So she seethes and sinks into the tub up to her neck while he focuses on the hair that has started to creep up his cheeks from his jaw.

And she must admit that he cleans up nice. Not that she doesn’t enjoy the ragged, rough, raider look. But the new clean lines along his throat and cheeks make him look all the more striking. A hard contrast between milky skin and dark hair. She bites her lower lip and beneath the bubbly surface, her hands follow a heat that has nothing to do with the water. Subtly slinking along her body beneath the surface while he trims the length with a pair of small scissors.

Satisfied with his work, he rinses it off with a clean towel before turning to face her. A grin splitting his face as he estimates the position of her hands beneath the water.

“What’re you doin’?”

“Nothing...” she lies, a small gasp giving away the truth.
“Nothin’…?” he repeats, tugging down the loose cotton pants and letting them fall. Hissing against the bath’s heat as he joins her. His pretty skin flushing pink. “So it wouldn’t bother you… If I did nothing…”

“No at all.” she smirks, raising an eyebrow, watching his hand dipping below the water.

It’s either a few long minutes or a few short seconds. She isn’t quite sure. Each struggling to keep a straight face while they pleasure themselves to the thought of the other. And triumph surges through her when he relents first.

“Fuck this.” He lunges at her, water sloshing onto the floor. A mad giggle breaking past her lips as he spins her around. Dragging her halfway out, and bending her over the edge. Her breasts squishing into cool marble surrounding the tub. One hand snaking around her waist, sliding down between her legs to circle her clit.

She cranes her head around to meet his in urgent kisses that devolve into something much sloppier. The fresh shaved, smooth skin of his cheek, and the newly trimmed abrasive whiskers of his jaw nuzzling against the side of her face. A perfect concert of opposing sensations.

Until a horrible thought occurs to her.

“Wait...Wait.” he freezes behind her, cock seated at her entrance. “Is the door barred? I don’t want a repeat of what happened last time.”

Tormund had interrupted the last time they tried to make love in the bath. Kicking down the door, hollering something intelligible about “Cunts and Cocks”. Then made several… unkind remarks about Jon’s “Pecker” and performance. Then commented on the bedsheets and the...odor.

That was when Jon punched him.

The black eye is fading. But her cheeks still flush every time she sees him. Even though it's unlikely he saw any of her bits as Jon had thrown her back into the tub. Obscuring her under a tide of bubbles.

“Aye. I took care of it.”

Her relieved sigh is abruptly broken as he sheathes himself to the hilt in a single stroke. A gasp tumbling out of her. The force of it lunges her forward against the slick marble. Her thighs pressing against the lip of the tub.

“Oh Fuck Dany.”

Water sloshing back and forth with his harsh thrusts, licking their legs. Spilling over to wet the ends of her hair. The rough edges of the scars on his chest pressing into her back. His hips snapping against her backside and his delicious groans in her ear.

So full. So suddenly and completely and overwhelmingly full. And still she wants more.

She reaches for his hands. Pulling one away from between her legs. Dragging the other away from the edge. Interlocking their fingers as she pushes herself up off the tile and onto her elbows. Leveraging his own strength for balance so that she can resist the force of his blows. So she can feel him that much deeper. So he can fuck her that much harder. So she can offer up more that more herself and in turn receive that much more of him.

A knot of tension slowly tightens inside her and she squeezes his fingers and bites into her lip to hold
back against it. His forehead pressed between her shoulder blades as he drives into her. Each stroke striking a place that is almost painful. The repetitive blows bruising something deep inside.

A chant of “Yes. Jon. Fuck. Me. Right. There.” punctuates her squeals and whines as he gives her exactly what she wants. Her hips bouncing back to meet his thrusts in urgent, uneven movements.

Her back arching, spine and neck bowing almost painfully. Reaching behind to meet his mouth in a messy kiss. He pulls her up so he can reach beneath and grab her breasts. Playing and squeezing with one hand. The other digging into her hips to guide her frantic movements.

Loud swearing behind her. His teeth bared against her skin. His cock plunging in with hard rapid strokes. His loud ragged pants telling her that he's right there with her...teetering on the edge of oblivion. Her voice echoing off the walls of privy as that tension coils unbearably inside.

And all that it takes to release it a strangled whine of…

“...Dany…”

It overpowers her. Crashing through her in a violent blur of pleasure. Her mouth hanging open in a silent scream that descends into heaving sobs. Walls contracting and collapsing around the solid mass of him. Pulling him after her into the abyss. Urging him to follow her. His fingers digging into her hips when he does. A sudden heat and a kicking throb as he spills inside her.

Jon groans in her ear, wrapping his arms around her waist and sinking them down into the water. There’s much less in the bath now then it was before. Barely reaching their chests as she melts in his arms. Resting her head on his shoulder, in the crook of his neck as the sound of their heavy breathing fills the small room.

As it evens, she begins to laugh.

“That was much more fun without interruptions”

“Aye. Love”

They’re to go to Lannisport today to meet with the Fishermen’s union. They need to arrange transportation North for the Bloodriders and address concerns of the food supply in the city.

But before they go, they need to make a stop.

“Her grace, Queen Daenerys Stormborn, would like to know if Hoster would care to join us on a daytrip to Lannisport.” Arya announces to her uncle. She’s dressed in a simple non-threatening top and denim shorts she requisitioned from the princess Myrcella’s old room. Looking very much like Jon’s little sister, and not at all like the most dangerous young woman in Westeros. A single knife, with no-name, buckled into a sheath at the small of her back.

The boy looks to his mother with wide eyes and she in turn looks to Edmure with the same look.

“There is a small tide pool North of the City-” Tyrion starts, flashing a reassuring smile. “-I was quite fond of it as a boy.”

“We’ll be going to the beach and having a picnic while her grace and Commander Snow conduct their business.” Arya adds.

Edmure nods and offers a meek smile before squatting down in front of his son. “What do you think, would you like to go to the beach with your cousin…”
“He can’t swim!” Roslin protests, holding him tighter.

“He’ll be accompanied by Miss Stark and Gendry Waters. Both of whom are more than capable.” She explains to the woman.

“He needs to go outside, Ros…”

“A day of Fresh Air and Sunshine will do the boy a world of good” Tyrion chirps pleasantly.

“No harm will come to him. Your son will be safe in our care.”

Roslin anxious eyes flit between Daenerys, her son and her husband. Then, sighing give small nod and begins to ready him a small pack.

Edmure takes his son’s shoulders. “Stay with your cousin. Remember to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. Be sure to call the queen ‘your grace’ and Commander Snow ‘Ser’ and do exactly as they or your cousin Arya says at all times. Do you understand?” the boy nods. “Be good. Have fun.” Watery Blue eyes looking up to her. “Thank you, your grace.”

Hoster clutches onto Arya’s hand as she guides him out of the cell. He had grown somewhat attached to her during her time guarding Jaimie a couple days ago. Spending the majority of her shift playing a card game with him. The boy has not experienced much in his sheltered… imprisoned life. But he understands that she is his family and that she will keep him safe.

Jaime eyes them curiously as their party departs. His face falling in dismay as Beric sits cross legged atop the guards post and pulls out a small red book. A bright smile splitting the one-eyed man’s face as he begins to preach.


“Fuck me…” Jaime groans.

“-But be warned, for the weak will be blinded and the prideful led astray. And the wicked shall be consumed by R’hllor’s eternal flame…”

It’s a pretty drive along the coast. Calm skies. Calm seas. Arya and Gendry pointing out different parts of the boats in the harbor for her cousin. Sails and Rigging and the like. Clegane silently driving them. Tyrion flipping through figures and murmuring to himself, preparing for the meeting ahead. Jon’s arm stretched across her shoulders.

A dark impulse, one she can’t quite control, moves her hand to her pack and takes the notebook out. They found it in Cersei’s bedroom. Rather Arya had found it and brought it to her. A small, white leather book. A diary… Most of it is garbage. Murderous designs on Tyrion. Rude comments about a girl named Melara. Gossip. Pining over Jaimie, and her brother Rhaegar and Robert and half dozen other men who are all long dead. But among the useless scribbles is the same word written over and over again.

Valonqar.

Pages and pages and pages of the single word. Starting in pretty cursive penmanship and descending into jagged blocky text that consumes the rest of the diary.

“Stop readin’ it.” Jon whispers in her ear.
“I just can’t figure it out.”

“There’s nothin’ to figure out, love. She’s mad. She went mad a long time ago. That’s all that diary proves.” She sighs. There’s more to it than that.

“This word is Valyrian. It means younger sibling, but because of the context, I can assume it means little brother. We can also assume she’s referring to Tyrion and not Jaimie.”

“Because she hates me” Tyrion states from the front seat.

“Cersei doesn’t speak Valyrian, much less write it. And she talks about Tyrion dozens of times in other passages and never once does she refer to him as Valonqar. ‘The imp’, ‘the dwarf’, ‘mother’s murderer’, ‘little monster’, ‘abomination’—”

“I think we get the point—” Tyrion clucks his tongue.

“But never Valonqar. Why is this different? What does she believe it means? What’s the connection?”

“A madman sees what a madman sees,” her love answers. A gentle solemn shade in his voice. “The fourteen year old girl that’s in this book isn’t the woman sitting on your throne. An’ she’s not the woman we’re going to war with.”

“How much are you the boy you were at fourteen? How much am I the girl Viserys sold? Some part of us is always fourteen… Even Cersei.”

Jon looks at her for a long minute. His dark eyes infinite pools she could fall into forever. Then he smiles and presses a quick peck on her forehead. But before she can bring him down to her lips, Hoster gasps and scrambles over Gendry. Pressing his face up against the window and they all turn to follow the boys excited gaze.

Out in the ocean, a massive whale spears out of the water, slamming down with a mighty splash. The forked tail sticking out of the waves as it dives. Gendry lifts Hoster over the seats to land next to Daenerys and she rolls down the window so he can see clearly. Two more breach the surface. Water erupting out of their blowholes before diving with almost a wave of their tail fins.

“They’re migratin’ south for the winter…” Jon explains. “They’ll breed and calve in warm waters, then head back to the Frozen Shore during spring t’ feed”.

There must be a dozen of them. A whole pod of huge majestic grey creatures with white underbellies. All calling to each other in their beautiful whiney songs.

“I wonder what they’re saying”

“Aye.” he agrees.

“Probably ‘Where’s the fish’ and ‘That way’” Tyrion remarks chuckling to himself.

“Those things are 15 times the size of us. Got brains just as big. M’ sure they’re saying much more than that…” Tyrion eyes Jon curiously before hmming to himself and returning to his figures.

“What do you think they’re saying, Hoster?” she asks the boy.

He turns to look at her and licks his lips. “I think maybe…they’re wondering about us.” then his eyes go wide as he hastily adds “…your grace.”
The little beach is perfect and every fiber of her being wants to cancel their meeting so they can spend the day here instead. Large rocks break the incoming waves about fifty meters out. So all that reaches the shore are gentle rolling swells that creep up the wet sand before retreating.

Arya immediately runs off with Hoster. Ripping off their shoes to go to splash in the water and collect shells. Leaving Gendry with their picnic basket, fishing rods, and a large blanket.

“Gendry...” Jon pulls him aside to meet with him and Clegane.

“Are you sure this is wise, your grace?” Tyrion asks.

“They will be fine. We will only be gone a few hours.” she answers. Gendry clips a walkie talkie to his belt as Jon points to a rock formation further down the coast, indicating that it would be a good place to hide should the need arise. “Both of them are well trained and capable. Besides no-one knows they are here.” She vaguely hears Clegane give instructions on how to carry someone and swim at the same time, while Jon pulls one of the holsters off his belt to hand to Gendry.

“Stay Alert.” he commands and the young man presses his fist into his sternum in a salute, before buckling the additional gun around his belt and darting off after the others.

There is a certain degree of danger. Despite Jaime’s surrender, Cersei likely has agents active in the city. They have taken what precautions they can. Travelling in an unmarked vehicle. But in Westeros, vehicles are exclusively for military use, and there is only so much they can do to hide, even in a city as large as this.

Without the high walls of Casterly Rock to contain them, the slums of Lannisport spread out along the coastline. Miles and miles of small scrappy piers with small scrappy boats full of small scrappy equipment for fishing and salvage work. Huge derelict desalinators mark the edge of the continental shelf. Some close to the coast, some far out at sea. Dotting a jagged line between the deep water and the shallow.

A deep water harbor full of huge fishing trawlers, and trade vessels marks the main port of the City. Large cranes, similar to the ones that had been converted into Ballistae for the battle, line long docks that reach out into the deepwater. Most are falling apart. The wood rotting and bowing beneath the machine’s weight. Large corrugated steel warehouses lean against each other, all surrounded by crowds of civilians. Slum rats and refugees looking for work, where there is simply none to be had.

The Union hall is especially crowded. It sets Jon on edge immediately as they approach, pulling his arm off her and checking each of his pistols in turn.

“We should’ve had them come to us.” Clegane states flatly as he kills the engine and does the same.

“Then they could lie. Here we can see exactly how things are.” Tyrion points out to the harbor. “We can see exactly how many ships they have available, and we can see exactly how eager their men are. This puts us at an advantage.”

“An’ if this mob decides to rush us...”

“That is why you are armed, Commander. And they won't. They know why we are here. It is why they are here. A chance for work.”

“Don’t worry, my love.” she scratches at his beard, and he takes a deep breath and he relaxes against her hand, before leaning down for a kiss.

“Let’s put a limit on the displays of affection, shall we? We are in a strong negotiating position. It
would be a shame to compromise it with… bad behavior.” She rolls her eyes at Tyrion as they break apart and Jon flashes a rude gesture.

“Ready?” she asks him.

“Aye. Let’s get it done.”

Clegane clears a path and she stays under Jon’s arm as they make their way through the throng. There are cries in the crowd. People shouting at her. Shouting for her. Begging her. Telling her what she already knows. That there’s no work. That food prices are climbing. That power and clean water are in short supply.

One of the first things they did after securing the city was tell people what Cersei had done. How the mines were not reopening. How she’d used most of the cities power to manufacture Wildfire. And when that wasn’t enough, she’d diverted the cities fresh water supply to generate even more power. How she’d redirected materials from the city to be used to build both the production facility and the launchsite.

Crews were working from within Casterly Rock to bring all the construction material back into the city to stabilize the towering slums. Power was…slowly… being restored. They’d opened up larger passages of the mines to create shelters to at least reduce the pressure on the population within the city walls. Water was still a problem. Cersei’s actions had introduced the freshwater to the toxic heavy metals from the mines and it was making people sick. They don’t have a good solution.

It’s unlikely any of these projects will be completed by the time they leave. But they are working on setting things to right as much as they can with the little they have. The Dothraki are working with the citizens, doing their best to foster trust despite the language barrier. There have been a few incidents, but they were limited to some fist fights, the cause of which seem to be strong drink and pretty girls.

In front of her, Tyrion turns his head, indicating a young girl atop her father’s shoulders in the crowd. She follows his gaze and smiles bright and waves at her. The small politicking gesture earning her a priceless reaction. The girl’s mouth drops open and she smacks her father’s head shouting “Did you see that papa!? She waved at me!”

The child’s smiling face is a harsh contrast to the solemn ones that greet them inside the Union Hall. The representatives of the various enterprises lining one side of a long table. All staring across at them with dour doubtful expressions.

Men that own the ships that would sail North. Men that own the plants where the hauls would be salted and packed. Men that own the warehouses where they would be stored and distributed. Men that own the markets where they would be sold. Wealthy men from all branches of the supply chain. All Pasty, soft and eerily identical.

“As you all know...” Tyrion starts, standing on his chair so that he can easily lean over the large map of Westeros’s Western coast. “Radiation from Highgarden is being carried out to sea by the Mander, poisoning your usual fishing grounds off the coast of the Reach and the Summer Sea. We have reports from several company ships of dead-zones in this area…” he gestures over a large of region where the Mander drains into the ocean. “As well as toxic counts of rads from the most recent shipments...”

“All our shipments meet the Crown’s safety standards.”

“The Crown’s standards aren’t good enough.” she hisses. After Cersei had bombed Baelor’s Sept,
she’d quietly removed many of the regulations Margarey had implemented regarding food safety. It makes her gag to think of what is being served in the Hot Pots of King’s Landing.

“Will you be establishing new ones...your grace?” One of the men raises an eyebrow and steeple his fingers. Tyrion widens his eyes at her in a silent plea to keep quiet. They can’t enforce any new regulations she would propose.

“When the time comes…” she answers. Tyrion cringes.

“What her grace means-”

“Why would you go fishin’ in poisoned water when there’s plenty of healthy fish up North?” Jon interrupts before Tyrion can further undermine her. Beneath the table she gives his hand a short squeeze, and he gives her one back.

“Up North…?”

“Aye.”

“Commander Snow and the Independent North are willing to allow ships from the Westerlands to fish their waters in exchange for a percentage of the catch and safe transport of the Dothraki to Deepwood Motte.” There is a great deal of murmuring among the men as they lean into each other and whisper. She spares a glance at Jon, and he gives her a not-so-sly wink.

“How much of the catch?”

“Twenty Percent. But we are open to negotiation”

It’s a win-win. The North does not have the people or ships to fish their coast on an industrial scale. These men would be rich; another food supply made available in a time of scarcity; they provide jobs where Cersei cannot; the Bloodriders transported North for the fight against the undead. They would be insane not to take their deal.

“No.”

Even Tyrion looks shocked.

They had expected bargaining. Expected to spend hours negotiating the exact percentage. Or working through minute details and logistics. But a flat ‘No’?

“Are you serious?”

“I’m afraid so, your grace.”

“What possible reason could you have for refusing this offer?”

“The Northern coasts are notoriously dangerous… and as Commander Snow well knows… Winter is coming.”

Jon stiffens in his seat next to her. His anger at these men using his words turning him cold and deadly. She can feel it through their connected hands. His muscles freezing and becoming an anchor which controls the Dragonfire surging through her.

“Aye. Winter’s comin’.” He nods, the movement small and slow. Like the steady crawl of a glacier. “An’ what are yer’ people gonna eat?”
“Your reports of dead-zones and radiation have been blown widely out of proportion. There is no reason for us to abandon calm seas for treacherous waters riddled with Icebergs.”

“Are Icebergs more dangerous than rads?” She spits at them. “You risk losing as many men to sickness as you would to winter.”

“If that were the case, your grace, at least our ships would remain intact.”

“You would poison the people of Lannisport to save your ships!”

“Historically, It has never been the Crown’s place to meddle in commercial affairs. Perhaps, your tutors in Westerosi governance…” the man looks down his nose at Tyrion “…have failed to explain the Crown’s relationship with Industry”

She feels the fury course through her as they storm out to the Truck. Clegane once again clearing a path as she stumps behind him, swearing in three languages.

“Daenerys…” Tyrion warns, eyeing the crowd.

“They would poison people rather than…Rghhh” She lets out a frustrated noise through her teeth, hands choking the air in front of her. Jon opens the door for her, but before she can climb in...

“In their defense…”

She slams the truck door closed.

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence.” she hisses, glaring at him. There is no defense for such greed.

“They are playing us. They know we cannot stay here. They are trying to strong arm you into playing by their rules.”

“So what do we do?” Jon asks Tyrion, placing a hand at the small of her back, the gesture helping her get her rage under control.

“They are not the only ones with Transports. We can still leverage the coal deposits in the Lonely Hills and the Dreadfort with the Miners guild.” It was the less favorable option. It meant slow overland transportation, which made them vulnerable to attack by Cersei. It provided jobs, but no food. More mouths to feed up North, where their resources were already stretched thin.

“That’s not good enough.” She wrings her hands, pacing the length of the truck, no solutions coming to mind. But she isn’t alone anymore, and the burden is not only on her shoulders. “What do you think we should do?” she turns to Jon.

He pauses and lets out a long breath. Dark eyes searching over the piers and docked ships. Ships they need. Ships that are laying idle for no better reason than old men’s greed and fear.

“I don’t know much about trade.” Jon bites his lip as looking down at his hands, tapping his thumbs together. Hesitant to give advice in an area where he has little experience. But the his eyes meet hers, now burning with intensity and authority. The weight of command giving gravity to his words “But I know this… If we cow to them now, We’ll be cowin’ when you take the throne. If someone’s trying t’ strong arm you, You strong arm ‘em back.”

“You can’t be serious.” Tyrion huffs.

“Jon is right. We can’t allow them to go unchecked.” Behind Tyrion, Clegane pulls out a shotgun
from the truck. “No. Not that. Not yet.” hastily gesturing for him to put it away before any civilians see him drawing a weapon.

“So what do we do?” Tyrion asks.

“I am open to suggestions.”

“Maybe the little bird’ll buy the ships out from under them” Clegane offers.

“They won’t sell to us. Besides, Sansa’s liquid assets that I KNOW of-” Tyrion shoots a pointed look at Jon who raises an eyebrow and frowns. “-won’t be enough.”

“Even if we did, it would just be playing into their game. They would still control the ports, and the rest of the supply chain and would end up even wealthier. They’re like the Wise Masters” She huffs, slumping back against the truck. “It was naive of me to think things would be different in Westeros.”

“Greed is Universal, your grace. It is the same everywhere. Whether dressed in Tokars or suits”

“It appears Masters are as well.” a sigh escapes her lips. Defeat creeps in on her. Extinguishing that righteous raging flame inside her. Despair filling up space in her chest with each exhale, as ideas fail to materialize. She’s already fought one long exhausting war against slavers. A war she nearly lost. A war she only won because she had Drogon. A war she isn’t prepared to fight again. A war she fears will be never ending.

Jon toes her boot with his, getting her attention.

“Good thing then...since yer’ the Breaker of Chains…” he lifts her chin with two fingers, forcing her to meet his gaze. “They don’t stand a chance.” Repeating her own words to her. She snorts a small laugh and nods, sliding the hand up to her cheek. Kissing his scarred palm and nuzzling against it as she takes short breaths to build her fire back up. Looking out over the crowds along the docks, and the piers and the boats.

“I need to speak with the ship’s Captains.” She says suddenly, snapping upright. “Directly.” Jon’s eyes crinkle, smiling as he understands her meaning.

“Alright. That will take some time to arrange…” Tyrion starts snapping his fingers as he thinks aloud. “The Union will control all that information. I’ll speak to some of the dock-”

“No. I’ll speak to them now.” She circles around to the truck bed, and drops the end.

“Clegane start the engine.” Jon orders, climbing up into the truck bed before extending a hand to help her up “..Might need to make a quick get-away”

“This is reckless, Daenerys.” Tyrion warns climbing up with more than a little help from Jon.


Tyrion rattles off each of the titles. Each one stroking that flame inside her. Reminding her of who she is, as much as it reminds the onlookers. Jon planting his feet wide, and clasping his hands behind his back. At-Ease. The martial stance lending credence to her authority. Her eyes darting over to union hall as the crowd starts to gather.
They don’t stand a chance.

“Nine Weeks ago,” she begins “Cersei Lannister used Wildfire to destroy Highgarden. She justified this course of action by claiming Olenna Tyrell to be a traitor.”

“She was a traitor” someone shouts. Tyrion eyes her warily and she hears a small click from one of Jon’s pistols behind his back.

“Regardless, for one woman’s actions, thousands of people were murdered. For one woman’s crime, thousands have perished, and tens of thousands more to come. First, from the blasts. Now from sickness and starvation as radiation poisons the Mander, the coast, and the Summer sea.”

There’s a great deal of murmuring and chatter. She hears a great deal of things. Some harsh like “A Targaryen is one to talk” or “War wouldn’t have come in the first place if she had just stayed in Essos.” Others panicking about the food supply and the fishing.

“I am seeking the captains of these vessels” she motions behind her to the ships docked. “To discuss alternatives to fishing the southern waters.”

Two young men look at each other. One tall, and wearing a dirty, patched dark blue coat. A Sailor. Ex-Navy by the looks of it. The pips along his collar indicating the rank of first mate. He taps the smaller boy on the shoulder, who darts off. Another older man striding forward, Long grey beard and a coat to match.

“Where would we go, M’um?”

“North.” she answers flatly.

“Lots of Ice up North, your grace. Lots of Storms.”

“Lots of fish, too” Jon answers.

“What’s your name, sailor?”

“Larris Coldwater, Captain of the Black Bessa. M’um”

“Well met Captain Coldwater.” she addresses the man. “Yes. The Northern Waters are significantly more dangerous than the southern coasts.” The boy who ran off returns with an older gentleman in tow. He wears the same blue coat as the young man, who is now whispering in his ear. An eyebrow arching as his first mate summarizes the proposal. “But consider the alternatives. Bringing poisoned fish back to port to sell to your families. Surely the men of the West are willing to risk the Frozen Shore to make sure their wives and children can eat”

“The suits turned you down…” the newcomer states. “And now you want us to take their ships anyway.”

“The suits care only for their capital and their coin. The suits are not the ones whose families face starvation and sickness. And the suits are not the ones who would be risking their lives to feed thousands. That honor belongs to the Men of the West.”

Captain Coldwater and the newcomer look at each other. The two captains present for the exchange. If they go, others will follow. The newcomer turns to his first mate. Letting the decision fall to a new generation. “What do you think lad?”

The young man spits. Then looks up at her, then out to sea, then back to his captain.
“I intend to die at sea. Fuck the suits.”

Jon won’t stop laughing. Every minute or so, she feels his chest rumble with a deep chuckle. His arms wrapped around her waist, her head resting in the crook of his neck, leaning back into his embrace. Gendry built a small fire, and a half dozen clams sit in it, slowly cooking on rocks in the low flame. He, Arya and Hoster decorating a sand castle with dozens of little shells.

“How did we do, Tyrion…?” she asks as he pours over his notes. Pages scattered and held down with rocks as he organizes his chicken scratch. He’d been furiously noting down things as word spread and more ships joined their cause. Personally, she lost track of the names after two dozen.

Her hand looks up at her with disbelieving shake of the head. “Fifty-Four ships. Over two thousand sailors. We have transportation North for the Dothraki. A new food source for the Winter… The groundwork for a lasting peace in Westeros.” The dwarf looks out over the sea. A broad smile she has not seen in some time splitting his face. “You did it, Your grace.”

“Not yet…”

Jon squeezes her and kisses her hair “Aye. But its a start. My Queen”

For years, she dreamed of coming to Westeros. Endlessly toiling towards as goal that was so... so far away. And when she finally...finally arrived here. When she was so close she could taste it, the goal kept moving further and further away. But, today… Today they made progress. Real progress. Its not much… But its a start. A real start toward the world she wants to build. A real blow to wheel she wants to break.

“Did you have fun, Hoster?”

The boy is more than a little pink from the sun, but he smiles bright all the same.

“Go get your seashells to show the Queen.” Arya tells him taking a seat next to the fire and snatching one of the clams. He gasps excitedly and darts off to one of the many half destroyed sand sculptures that now litter the small beach.

“This was a kind thing you did for him, your grace.” Tyrion remarks

“It is a small thing.” It makes her deeply uncomfortable, having a small child as a prisoner. It seems cruel and unnecessary.

“No. It was a great thing. When we return to Winterfell, ask Sansa how many time she was allowed out of the Red Keep when she was my sister’s prisoner.” He replies. Daenerys already knows the answer. “She was only allowed out as a piece of performative propaganda at Royal events. Always accompanied by a dozen fully armed guards, that were there to threaten her as much as to protect her.” Shame darkens Clegane’s features as Tyrion says it. “No matter what happens with the boys parents… he won’t have that.”

He falls asleep on the drive back, exhausted from the day at play. Gendry carries him to the cell. Roslin fussing a bit over his sunburn. Edmure chiding her as he takes the basket of sea-shells he collected. Beric still sitting at the desk, still preaching. His voice just as strong and steady as it was when they left.

“...For life is warmth, and warmth is fire, and fire is R’hllor’s and R’hllor’s alone”

She holds her tongue, biting back a laugh. Both at Jaime Lannister attempting to block out the words a threadbare pillow and the silly sentiment. Fire belongs to no-one. And Dragons are fire made flesh.
“I need to take a shift with Lannister” Jon says quietly, pulling her aside. “Everyone else has taken a turn. Tormund’s done three to make up for-”

“-Surprising us.”

“Aye.” he smiles, his eyes crinkling at the edges. She sighs heavily, wrapping her arms around his waist.

“You better get to work, Jon Snow.”

“Aye my Queen.” He presses a kiss to her forehead and she hears him smell her deeply, before leaning in for a proper kiss. A long languid one to make up for all the kisses he won’t be able to give her tonight. “I’ll wake you tomorrow.”

As soon as they are out Jon’s line of sight, Gendry reaches for Arya’s hand and she takes it. It’s almost funny. As if they think they are being subtle. As if they think he doesn’t know. They keep her company through the evening, though. Arya utterly destroying her at Cyvasse several times before she gives up and retires. Leaving the two to guard her in the sitting room.

The massive boat of a bed swallows her up without Jon to make it seem smaller. An unreasonable pang of loneliness in her chest keeping her awake. He’s not in danger. He’s doing his job. And he will be here with her when she wakes. If she can fall asleep first.

Her thoughts turn to Jamie in his cell. And Cersei in the Red Keep. How many nights has she lain awake like this? How many nights spent with her love so close, yet so far away? Years? Decades? How long did it take for that pang to become emptiness? How long did it take for the loneliness to become something hard and unyielding?

And for a moment, in the drowsy spell between sleep and wake, she can understand the madness.

Chapter End Notes

Does anyone want to do a Gendry/Arya Beach & Babysitting adventure? LOL.
He’d forgotten how boring guard duty was.
Right sight better than duty at the wall though. No ice. No wind. No cold. Better than duty at camp too. Inside. At a desk. With a chair and caf. Compliant prisoners locked in cells, with no-chance they could break out. Not tied together with whatever threadbare rope they had beyond the wall. Waiting for the opportunity to break out and attack.

An easy job.

But seven hells, he’s bored.

It almost makes him wish Lannister would taunt him. Just so he could do something other than sit here and whittle away this small block of wood.

He’s not good at it. His father was good at it. Always making little wolves for Arya, Bran and Rickon. Davos is good at it too. Carving up all sorts of toys for Joanna, Willa and Little Sam. Says it keeps his hands busy, so his mind doesn’t wander too far. He’d told Jon to try it, told him it would help. That using his hands to make a gift for a child helps heal the soul in the way nothing else can.

This started as a wolf. But he’d lopped off one of the legs on accident, so he’s been trying to re-shape it into a seal. For Joanna, to remind her of the Ice River’s delta, where her com would hunt. He needs to let Alys take her up to Karhold for a week. So she can see the Bay of Seals. It’ll remind her of home. Willa doesn’t remember it. She was too small when Karsi fled with the clans.

“The fuck is that supposed t’ be?” Tormund shuffles into the prison, dirty from working with Bronn and the teams scavving Cersei’s wildfire facility. The merc following right behind him.

“A Seal.”

“A fat fuckin’ seal.”

“A Walrus then”

“Good Eatin’ Walrus…” Bronn interjects plopping down in the chair opposite him. “Like Duck and Dog all in one.”

“Aye.”’ he eyes the man curiously. Most people… even in the North don’t eat Walrus. They’re aggressive and run in large defensive huddles* that make hunting difficult. Tormund points at Bronn and shakes his head.

“This fuck’s been beyond the wall.”

“What were you doin’?”

“Work”

“What were you smugglin’?” he asks.

“Wasn’t smuggling” Bronn picks his teeth.

Tormund bolts upright, kicking the chair out from behind him and drawing a knife. Lannister sits up in his bed and watches intently.

“Where did y’ sell them!?” Tormund shouts.

“Easy Friend” Bronn holds up his hands.

There’s only two kinds of work beyond the wall for a Westerosi Merc. Smuggling… and Slaving.
Snatching Wildings as they tried to make their way south. Or tricking them into thinking they were smugglers that would take them to Westeros. Only to sell them across the narrow sea. It was one of the things Mance and the FreeFolk offered. Protection from the Slavers. Retribution against them once they took the Wall.

“Do you know what the Slaver’s price is in Westeros?” Jon stands slowly, hand on his belt next to his holster.

“I’ve done a lot of shit... But I’m not slaver.”

“Then I suggest you start telling us exactly what you were doing Beyond the Wall…”

“Alright.” Bronn cautiously lowers his hands and he sits back down. Tormund following with a small nod from Jon. Once all the weapons are holstered, he starts. “There was this guy. Some Rich Scavver. Called himself an Artifact Hunter. He was looking for Valyrian tech beyond the Wall.”

“There’s no tech beyond the wall.” Tormund states flatly. “You southerners made sure of that.”

“That’s what I said. But the coin was good, and all we had to do was protect some rich ponce and scope around a bunch of caves.”

Caves. Like the ones Bran was hiding in.

“What was he looking for?”

“He never told us. Said we would know it if we saw it.”

“Did y’ find anything?” The merc shakes his head.

“Fucker went mad. Sayin’ he had visions. That he was hearin’ things.” he taps his skull “Radios in his head. Started murmurin’ about the Blood Raven”

“The fuck is a Blood Raven?” Tormund growls.


Their prisoner stands and moves to the bars. “Fuckin’ Legendary…”

Jon knows the story. He’d heard it from Maester Aemon himself. The Blood Raven had killed one the Blackfyre princes under a peace banner. “Sacrificing his honor for the good the Country.” the old man had whispered. For that, he was sent to the Wall with Aemon when he took his vows.

“He commanded the watch sixty years ago” Jon adds. “Disappeared beyond the wall, on a ranging a few years later…Finish your story…” He commands Bronn.

“Not much to tell. He fuckin’ died. Think one of the other Mercs got him. We were all thinkin’ about doing it. Only a matter of time before someone showed some initiative.”

“And then…”

“We left.” The merc shrugs “Took the gold. Took the gear. Headed South.” He points at Jon. “...Your step-mother hired me at the Crossroads. Rest is history…”

“What happened to the man, the one who hired you to go beyond the wall?”

“What the fuck do you mean? He died… not like he’s gonna get back up..”
He and Tormund share a look, a look they’ve shared a hundred times. It’s the look they share everytime they have to tell someone.

“He might’ve…”

Bran’s face remains inscrutable. Listening carefully with one eye-brow arched toward his thinning hairline. An impassive, unimpressed expression on his face.

Jaime, on the other hand…

The Kingslayer’s face shifts from a mocking disbelief, to a frozen horror as he realizes they are telling the truth.

“Well Fuck me.” Bronn leans back in the chair. “How many fucking times does the world got to end?”

“Least once more.” he answers. “Still wanting to come North?”

“Administrator Stark still gonna pay me?”

“Aye.”

“That Wildling cunny any good?” he flashes a grin at Tormund.

“If they don’t kill you first…” the raider laughs. “Me… I got myself a Southern Girl. Tall as a Giant and Blonde like the sun”

“Stop Harrassin’ Brienne…” Jon orders, shaking his head. “You make her job hard enough as is, without bitin’ at her heels.”

“What do you mean!?” Tormund snarls.

“Brienne…” Bronn looks at Tormund incredulously. “…Brienne of Fuckin’ Tarth…” the Merc bellows out a laugh before turning over to Jamie. “Looks like you’ve got some competition.”

“Fuck off” Jamie’s hand had been pressed into his eyes as he processed the news of the White Walkers. But now those tired green eyes shoot daggers at Bronn. Spitting the insult a bit too defensively.

Tormund appraises Jamie, looking him up and down.

“Here I thought you were the one fuckin’ his sister…”

Their prisoner rolls his eyes and lays back down on his cot with a heavy sigh, disengaging. Satisfied with silencing his opponent, Tormund turns back to Jon. “Speakin’ of fuckin’ queens. Yers get sick of you, yet? Or did you wear her out?”

He drums his fingers along the desk, before staring intently at Tormund’s face. Leaning forward, making a show of examining him.

“You got somethin’…” extending his hand “Right…Here” Flicking the yellowing bruise around his eye from when he punched him. The Wildling bats Jon’s hand away before he does it again. Bronn laughs and stands, clapping Tormund on his shoulder.

“Leave the Queen-Fucking to these cunts. World’s Ending. That means drinking and whores.”
“I prefer a woman that mine. But I’ve never turned down a drink and I won’t start now”

They lope off, discussing the various pros and cons of whoring, while he gets himself a cup of caf. The bitter drink more a distraction from the boredom than anything.

It’s quiet. Only the soft sound of the knife scraping along the wood as he tries to smooth out the curve of the tail. The gentle ticking of a clock. The occasional small noise from Edmure and Roslin’s room.

Jaime shifting.
Then standing.
Then pacing

“You can’t beat the Wights and Cersei…” he says, abruptly breaking the peace.

“Then convince her to meet with us…”

The first day they sent her a message, letting her know that Jaime was alive and treated well. Asking to meet with her to discuss a truce. Offering her brother back in exchange for peaceful parley.

The ominous static of dead air was the only response they received back.

Jamie frowns and paces the stretch of cell twice more, before planting himself in front of the bars.

“What’s your plan?”

“What d’ya mean?”

“To fight them? What’s your battle plan?”

He sticks his tongue into his cheek as he debates answering. This could be a trick. He could be gathering information on his forces, on Dany’s forces. Gathering info to pass onto to Cersei to make up for his failure to hold the Rock.

But there’s fear in his eyes.

And soldiers serve their country.

“We’ve got all sorts of plans… but there’s too many things left up to chance to have anything solid.”

Jamie’s green eyes narrow, appraising him. An inadequacy slowly creeping through him. The one he used to feel when he’d lose to Robb when their father was watching. The one he’d felt when Stannis would tell him that he was the reason any of the watch was left alive. The one he’d felt when Littlefinger...reminded him, that he was the reason they won against the Boltons.

The reminder that he’s nothing but a Bastard, a Crow, and a Raider. That he’s just a soldier. And that running ops is not the same thing as leading an army.

But then Jamie starts asking questions. How do they fight? What’s their organizational structure? What kinds of Terrain does he think they’ll be fighting on? Tactical questions. And an hour later, they are standing the CIC, where a week ago he had forced this man to surrender by threatening to burn them both alive. A crude map covered in a dozen sketches of various formations.

“...Now the most important thing” Jamie lectures “Is to keep them from swarming. You need to
break them up as much as possible. The Bloodriders are going to be best for that… have them try and keep tight fast formations, and slice through the swarm. Their goal isn’t to kill them as much as it is to prevent the wights from gaining momentum. If they crash, skid or fall, all that does is add another barrier they have to crawl over to get to you. Slowing them down so that your infantry isn’t overpowered.”

Jon nods, as he looks over the shaky diagram Jaime drew with his left hand.

“You want your rangers sniping into the mass, any artillery you have should be fired in to the mass. Your infantry should entirely focused on grinding away at the wights directly in front of them. Everyone else focused on breaking them up or thinning them out…” Jamie looks at Jon pointedly, licking his lips before asking. “The Dragon…?”

He bites his tongue. All the other information he’s given Jamie thus far has been stuff that he probably already knew from Cersei’s intelligence on them. Rough numbers of the Northern Front, Rough numbers for the Unsullied and the Bloodriders.

“Is it real…?” Jamie asks when Jon doesn’t respond right away.

“Yea…It’s real.” An almost boyish grin splits the man’s face.

“What’s it like?”

He remembers Dany soaring above his head. How terrifyingly beautiful it was. Remembers feeling heat on his face. Remembers staring down at the sculpted face. Feeling the machine thrum with a heat and energy that something so inorganic should not have.

“Like everything the stories say…” he sighs and flicks his finger against the meat of his opposite hand. “He took this gun… It was huge. I’ve never seen anything like it. And it fired… Energy… at her. Like a bolt of light. He shot her out of the sky with a single hit.” Jamie bites back a curse. “…Dany’s got it mostly fixed up. But… We don’t know if we’ll have it for the fight…”

It’s quiet for awhile. Jon leaning heavily over the table staring at the formations and sketches. Trying to memorize the tactics he’s learned. Jamie slowly walking back and forth across the length of the room, stretching his legs after a week in a small cell. Disappointment, frustration, and guilt crossing the man’s face in waves.

“Did you give Brienne the rank she deserves?”

He shakes his head. “I wish I had an proper army to give her… She’s training the greenboys” he stops and corrects himself, adding “and girls… and the officers that make rank.”

“Girls…”

“Aye…”

Another wave of dismay washes across the Jamie’s face and he can’t read it. He could be judging him for the choice to include women or anguished that their need for soldiers is so great.

“Do you have trouble with it?”

“Some. Not as much as I expected. Most are eager to prove themselves. Takes about a week for them to get used to it. But after that they do just as good as the boys. Brienne being there helps. They look up to her.”
“She probably loves that…” The Kingslayer looks out the wide windows of the CIC that survey the field surrounding Casterly Rock. There’s still some wreckage from the ruined tanks and motorcycles from the battle.

“Aye…” An idea flashes through his head. The synapse firing his brain before he thinks it over again. “Come with us”

“What?” Jamie turns sharply to face him.

“If Cersei doesn’t respond. Come North with us. I need more veterans. I need more officers. Half my army is green, All of Dany’s… Daenerys’ is from Essos, and’ll be fighting in a climate they aren’t experienced with. If Cersei doesn’t respond, take your men with us.”

For a moment, it looks like he’s considering it. The more he thinks about it, better of a plan it becomes. If Jamie turns, others will follow.

“I… can’t…”

He can’t convince him… But he knows who can. He rights himself, going over to the radio. The radio he’d slammed Jamie’s face into repeatedly as they fought for him to surrender.

“…Winterfell…” Joanna’s voice chirps through the radio.

“Hey Chief…” He hears her gasp.

“Are you coming home!” she demands, cutting him off before he can say anything else.

“Not yet…”

“Oh…” a sad note shading her voice. “…Willa will be upset.”

“M’ Sorry.” The apology hangs in the air for a moment. Willa had sobbed into the radio when he last spoke to her. Begging him to come home. It’s not fair. They’d had their home taken from them, their people, their mother. Then as soon as they had started to get settled with him and Sansa, Val threw her fit and they had to move them again. And then he had to leave just as they were getting settled again. It’s not fair.

“What are you doin’ on duty?”

“Oh.. uh… Bran wasn’t feelin’ well so Aunt Sansa said I could do it.” Jamie flashes him a queer look. “D’ya want me to wake her up?”

“No. No. Let her sleep. I need to speak to Brienne.”

“Okay. I’ll go find her.” Static on the other end.

“It would seem… I’m not the only one who broke some oaths.” Jamie offers a dry laugh and it takes him a minute to figure out what he’s talking about.

“Not the important ones.” he answers vaguely. He’s not sure how to answer that. He did break his oaths. Not the one that Jamie is thinking of.

“Commander…” Brienne’s voice, crisp and sharp. Jamie’s breath comes out in a shaky exhale.

“Brienne, I got Jamie Lannister here. You should talk to him.” He hands the receiver to him. “I’m going to get some caf.”
It’s a gamble. That Jamie won’t try something in the three minutes it’ll take him to get the cup. That Brienne will succeed where he’s failed. He’d look a fool if some how their most valuable pawn with Cersei escaped under his guard.

But the potential payoff... If Jamie turns, others will follow. If Jamie prioritizes Westeros over Cersei, it could force the truce.

It could win them two wars.

“...FUCK LOYALTY!” Brienne spits through the radio as he re-enters the CIC. It’s tone he has never heard from the woman. “This goes beyond the Crown, or houses, or oaths. This war is for the survival of Westeros. This is a war for Life itself. You told me once that you wanted a chance to reclaim your honor. THIS IS YOUR CHANCE. This moment. Right now. This is your choice”

Jamie presses his head against the receiver, thudding it against his forehead. Eyes pinched shut as he shakes his head.

“It’s been good to speak to you, Brienne…” he chokes out. “I suppose if I ever see you again, it will be across a battlefield.”

“Don’t do this.” She begs. “Don’t let her destroy you.”

The kingslayer freezes for a second, seeing that Jon has re-entered the room. “She already has…” and he tosses the receiver at Jon. Brienne calling at him through it. “I’ll be in my cell.”

“Thanks for tryin’…” he sighs.

“I appreciate the chance, Ser.” her voice is thick. There’s a shuffling noise on the other end. “… Miss Joanna would like me to tell you that she had a perfect score at the 15 meter range yesterday”

“That so, Chief?”

“Yes!”

He takes a few minutes with her, asking about her lessons, and her week. She tells him everything she can fit into the time. She’s teaching Missandei the tongue of the First Men, and in turn she’s learning Valyrian. Willa is annoying her, but Sansa says its because there are no other children her age around and she’s lonely.

“I got to get back to work…” he says quietly, and the disappointment in the empty static is tangible and heavy.

“…Okay…”

“I’m proud of you. Thank you, for bein’ brave.”

“Tęsknię za tobą…”

“I miss you too…”

“Bran says we shouldn’t pray for you to come home. Instead we should pray that you stay safe…” a lump he can’t swallow forms in his throat.

“I will. Give your sister a hug for me…”

“I will, Bye Jon…”
The rest of the shift is silent. Jamie sitting on his cot. Staring at the floor. An utterly broken shell of the man who once taunted him. But his tired green eyes perk up, as he sees Clegane come in.

“Ah. I missed your handsome face Sandor. I was beginning to think you were avoiding me.” Clegane grunts in response, landing heavily in the chair. Setting Heartsbane on the desk and starting to take it apart with a set of tools. Deep Cleaning the Valyrian rifle.

Arya is perched atop four stacks of books. Doing deep push-ups into the gap between them. Her shoulder blades folding up like wings behind her with each repetition.

“Bored…?”

“Never.” She dips down. “I’ve been thinking... when all this is over, I’ll make a good Queensguard.”

“Maybe.”

“It’ll be all women…It could be me and Brienne and anyone else we can find that’s as good as us. Westeros’ first elite female fighting force.” She flips up as she says it landing in a fighting stance.

“Sounds good.”

Dany’s body stretches out over the bed. Taking up an impossible amount of space for someone so small. The covers tossed and crumpled. A thin cotton nightdress creeping up her thighs. The sight makes him laugh quietly as he strips off his clothes.

He slides in next to her, snaking his arm around her waist and drawing her close to him. She makes a small noise.

“Go back to sleep, love” he whispers, kissing her softly and settling behind her. Pressing his nose into her hair, letting her scent relax him, her heat sink into him, her presence calm him.

But as the veil of sleeps starts to fall over him, its ripped away. And he finds himself flipped onto his back. His queen hovering over him.

“But, I am not sleepy, Jon” Her thighs straddling his hips, her hands firmly planted on his chest as she leans in closer. “In fact, I am wide awake.” her lips capture his, her tongue slipping into his mouth. Her hands moving to pin him down by the shoulders. And her teeth snapping into his bottom lip. Dragging it through her teeth as she moves to sit upright above him.

“I don’t like being kept waiting, Jon Snow.”

“Is there any way I can make it up to you, my queen…?”

“Perhaps…” she shifts her knees further up his torso, her heat smearing across his abdomen with every inch she crawls up him. Discarding the thin nightdress in a smooth motion.

A real Valyrian princess floating above him. Long lithe limbs, and moonglow skin. Dusky pink nipples pebbling in the cool early morning air. Her silver hair wild and fluffy from restless sleep. Her pupils wide and her teeth worrying into her lower lip. Conveying a desire she doesn’t need to say aloud.

“I live to serve, my queen.” her hands grip the headboard, and he slides down, wedging his shoulders through the gap in her thighs. Her pretty pink petals hovering over him.

He grabs her hips and pulls her down. His hands kneading into her perfect ass, grabbing hold and
dragging her around in small circles. His lips meeting her folds in sloppy open kisses. Penetrating
with a stiff tongue, urging her to drop her weight. To smash herself onto him. To drown him.

She tastes so good. Her essence thick, and clinging to his lips, his beard, his nose, his cheeks. Strands
of it stretching out, connecting him to her when he breaks for air. He cranes his neck to focus on her
pearl, his hand traveling down the expanse of her backside to drift between her legs. Entering her
with two fingers. Finding the spongy patch of tissue inside her, the one directly behind her clit, and
pressing forward.

At her gasp, he opens his eyes to see her. Her eyes pinched shut as she bobs up and down on his

One hand releasing the headboard to thread into his hair. Roughly manipulating his head till its
exactly where she wants him. Sharp pain shooting from the roots straight down his spine to his cock.
Hard. So fucking hard it hurts. If he wasn't already on his back, he’d be dizzy from the blood rushing
away. Dany violently bats his hand away when he reaches for it.

His queen demands his full attention.

He gives it. Sucking hard on her button for a few seconds. Releasing. Then chafing it with beard
before returning to lick the abrasion away.

She lets out a deep moan, tossing her head back. The ends of her silver hair brushing across his
chest. Both hands tangled in his hair now. Gripping and Clawing. Her thighs beginning to bunch and
quiver as she begins to draw tight around his fingers.

All he can do is hold on and keep his tongue flat for her while she bucks and thrashes and grinds
down onto him. Taking everything she wants from him in desperate uneven movements.

And when he’s sure he’s going to drown, she freezes tight, clutching him hard against her. Holding
him there as her body hums. He can’t see her, but he can feel her pulsing around his fingers, and
beneath his tongue. Taste renewed wetness, and hear her strangled cry. And her smell, oh gods the
smell of her makes his cock throb.

Their fingers intertwine as her body relaxes. Her nails biting into his hands as she shimmies her way
back, sitting on his abdomen. Leaning down to run her tongue across his lips, before stealing a soul
searing kiss. Her weight settled pleasantly atop him. A wicked smile on her face as she slowly opens
her eyes to survey him beneath her. Taking in what she’s done to him in her heat. Lust flaring her
nostrils and greed enlarging her eyes.

He can see the glint in those violet orbs. The one she has when she’s been scheming. And by the
dark circles under her eyes, the wild mass of her hair, and rumpled state of the bed, she’s been
scheming for sometime.

“Hands above your head, Jon Snow.” she orders, reaching for the nightdress, Finding the seam and
tearing. The rip of fabric as loud as her dragon’s roar.

“Is this okay?” she whispers, winding a long torn strip of the dress around his offered wrists. Sharp
Dany slipping away for a moment. Soft Dany peeking out from behind the fluffy curtain of silver
hair.

He could over power her at any time. Flip her over, and take her. She’d feign resistance or fight
back. Wrestle him. All the while exposing the line of her throat for him to bite and suck. He’s been
held captive before. But never like this.
“Have your way with me, love.” he answers.

Sharp Dany was only gone a moment, returning with a vicious snarl, and sharp tug, securing his bindings.

“You’re mine, Jon Snow.” Wickedly torturing him with long rolls of her hips. Trapping his cock between her folds as she rubs along the length of him. Her hard nub pressing prominently against him. “Do you know that?”

“Aye.” he swallows. Fuck. He aches for her. Knowing that she’s withholding her cunt on purpose making the want that much deeper. He arches his hips up to her. Trying to slip inside. She smacks his thigh in response and freezes. Scolding him with a wave of her finger.

“Do you know how long you kept me waiting?” she tsks. Slowly, deliberately sliding across him.

“Too long...”

“Too long.” she repeats. “Hours and Hours in an empty...” she lifts herself up for a moment. Threatening to sink down onto him. Tempting him with prospect of filling that emptiness. “-bed”

And then... not. Returning to the agonizing rock back and forth. Gods she’s trying to drive him mad. Her want seeping over him. The smell of her still in his beard overpowering. Fighting the urge to thrust up into her.

“Dany...” She quirks an eyebrow at his whine and shakes her head. He pinches his eyes shut. He can’t watch her torture him. Can’t watch her moon glow skin flush pink. Can’t watch her chest heave and jiggle. Can’t watch her stomach stretch and bunch as she rolls over him. She can’t expect him to watch and stay still beneath her.

Her hands roam across his torso, dragging up his chest, smoothing over his biceps. Heat in her palms. He flexes for her as much as the bindings will allow. Wiggling and testing them for her amusement.

“Are you wanting to escape already?” she laughs.

“Am I your prisoner?”

“Would you like to be?”

There’s only one answer to that question.

“Aye.”

She imprisons him. Capturing him in her cunt. Holding him hostage inside her. The tight walls securing him and locking them together. The air leaving his body as she drops her weight. Her breath hitching from the sudden joining.

The fabric binding his wrists amplifies the bliss of her body engulfing his cock. The surge of ecstasy making him struggle against his bonds. Bright sparks of pleasure sending jolts through his nerves. Her hands plant on his chest, fighting to pin him down, bracing herself to grind down onto him. Working him deeper inside her.

There’s a punishment for his outburst. The cant of her hips slowly milking anguish from him. A teasing smile testing the limits of his patience and self control. The steady rhythm intentionally too slow. Leaving him craving more friction. The want buzzing through him.
His body screams for him to throw himself back. Throw himself back and buck up into her. Grab her however he can and fuck her. But he doesn’t. Fighting the urge by grinding his teeth, and punching his hands up to the headboard. The sharp burst of pain cutting through the twisting torment she wrings with each drop onto him.

“Dany…” a desperate plea. She bites her lips and shakes her head. The violet pools of her eyes darting down to where they are joined.

“Look at us, Jon…”

The sight erases every half-formed thought from his mind. His cock being swallowed and spit out over and over again. The length of him disappearing into her. Tacky tendrils of her lust glueing them together. Threads of it mingling her silvery curls and his dark ones.

His nostrils flare as the need for her twists darkly in him. He needs to be fucked harder. Faster. Needs to feel his cock battering the mouth of her womb.

A deep moan above him as she plunges down, rocking her body to take him deeper. She looks absolutely feral above him. The mess of her hair now menacing and wild. Her teasing smile, predatory.

“Mine” she growls.

Gone is the steady rhythm and the tortuous pace. Replaced with an mad animal sort of a love. The Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea riding him for all he’s worth. Finally giving him what he needs. He thrashes beneath her, bucking madly and she rolls with every movement. Never letting him go. Keeping him inside her.

Bound hands disobediently reach for her and she seizes them. Using them for balance as she shifts to plant her feet on either side of him. Her hips slamming down to take him with quick snapping squats. Fucking him how he needed to be fucked. Fast and Hard and Deep.

Her sweat dripping down onto him. Running in rivulets down from her hairline, between her bouncing breasts, falling from her belly to mingle with her cum.


She grabs his wrists and pins them above his head as he cums. The movement making him elongate and undulate beneath her.

“Yess... Jon” she hisses. But he doesn’t hear it. Not really. Not with blood rushing around his ears and thrumming through his body. Not with his mind flashing blank, and black spots dotting his vision. Not with his cock erupting into her, blinding pulses consuming his being.

He captures her as soon as he’s free. Pulling her next to him. Kissing her until she pushes him away to breathe. Reaching down to finish her with his fingers. Her fatigued, over-sensitized body surrendering and crying out in short order.

“I fucking love you”

“I love you too” she yawns, curling up next to him, resting her head on his shoulder, tangling her legs with his, stretching her arm possessively around him. “I’m so tired…”

“Aye, Love. Go back to sleep.” he repeats his earlier request, wrapping his arm around her, kissing
her forehead. Listening for her breath to even and slow. And letting her peace carry him off as well.

It’s past midday when the knock comes. Tyrion looking up at them with cautious eyes.

Cersei has responded.

Chapter End Notes

* A Group of Walruses are called a Huddle. THE MORE YOU KNOW!

This is the last smut for a few chapters. Sorry. We have plot and we can't have them fucking in front of Cersei in the Dragonpit can we? I mean we could... WHAT A TWIST! I'll leave that for someone more adventurous.

There's five more chapters and then that will close out ACT 1.
Dany
*SPECIAL*
Jon
Jon & Dany
Close Out Act 1

I'm thinking It would be prudent to start act 2 as a new fic. We'll be a little over 200K words at that point and that's... Daunting. Interested in advice for that.
She’s dreamed of coming here. To King’s Landing. The city her ancestors founded. The city they built to rule Westeros. Once the greatest city in the country. Full of Architectural feats that spoke of Targaryen Power.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
They built skyscrapers out of glittering steel. Housing for the millions of civilians. Webbed those towers together with broad walkways and pavilions. A man could live his whole life in King’s Landing and never step foot on the ground.

They built railways and trains that wove through the towers. Providing easy transportation through the crowded thoroughfares. Ferrying those millions of people through their daily lives. Keeping the city streets free of vehicles and smog.

They built a sewer system to keep the city clean. Floodgates extended into Blackwater Bay to maintain a calm harbor. Turbines along the Blackwater Rush to provide power. Walls to protect the city. Paved Roads branching out across the whole of Westeros.

They had used the technology and knowledge of Valyria to make people’s lives better. To make a feudal collection of ever-warring territories into a Nation.

But what made this city great died decades, if not centuries ago.

The once towering skyscrapers lean under their own weight. The glittering steel replaced with dingy scrap. Rusted panels, and exposed beams. Derelict giants now home to squatters and slum rats. The walkways and pavilions gritty and graffitied. The rich clustered into the few remaining districts near Aegon’s Hill. Their wealth sheltering them from the city below. The trains clunk and screech and spark along dying rails.

The Harbor’s water tinted grey with pollution. The waves scummy with filth. Lights flicker on and off. Exposed copper lines carrying a thin stream of power to those who can afford it. Or those who can steal it.

And the sewers…

Olenna was right.

She could smell the shit a mile away.

The foul odor exacerbates the tension in the air.

They are surrounded by enemies. A small group of soldiers and raiders in a city locked down for their parley. Most of her Bloodriders are sailing for Deepwood Motte. The token handful with her will not be enough to fight their way out, should the need arise. This Parley is most assuredly a trap. But they need to try.

Life depends on it.

But what grates her nerves now is Jon’s pacing along the shore of the Blackwater Rush. Waiting for the small craft to reach the shore. The closer it gets the more he snarls. Fighting to keep his anger under control. Tyrion shoots a warning glare at her.

He promised he wouldn’t kill Theon.

“Jon…”

“I know.” he growls. Not at her.

She can’t blame him. If she was in his situation… There’s no point to speculating.

The BlackWind and the Silence are the only ships in the Harbor. Yara’s Flagship and Euron’s
Submarine. Cersei’s armies locked behind the city walls. A false shroud of quiet over the metropolis.

“Do I have to worry about you killing him?” Tyrion regards Arya. She stands at-ease with arms folded behind her back, her legs in a wide stance. The Little Wolf casts a glance his way, but does not answer. She will follow Jon’s lead.

And He’s still making up his mind.

Theon disembarks and he and Jon stare each other down for a long minute. Or rather Jon stares at him, while Theon’s cowers. His gaze focused, his lip twitching with anger.

She can’t stop him…

He crosses the space between them in a few strides. Covering the ten or so yards in a few heartbeats. Grabbing Theon by the collar and punching him.

“KILL HIM JON!” Arya shouts.

The second punch drops the Theon to his knees. The Ironborn around him look on indifferently. Some even laughing.

“Daenerys!” Tyrion snaps as Jon picks Theon up by the fabric of his uniform. Bringing the man close.

“THE ONLY REASON YOU ARE STILL ALIVE IS BECAUSE SANSA IS!” He roars. Loud and terrifying. It rattles her, how fearsome her love can be. “DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME!?”

“Yes. Jon.” Theon answers, not meeting his eyes.

“YES WHAT!?”

“Yes-” The broken man’s chest heaves as he chokes out the words “-Commander Snow.” His voice shaky.

Jon tosses the man who was once his brother onto the ground and strides back to their party. Leaving Theon to pick himself up and follow.

Gendry goes with the Iron Born to board the Blackwind. Tyrion suggested his presence would set Cersei off. There are some in Kingslanding that would suggest that he has a better claim to the Throne than Cersei does. Such a threat to her control over the city would utterly ruin any chance that this talk would succeed.

The young man is troubled by what lies unspoken in the action. If this is a trap, and they all die today, someone else needs to challenge Cersei. There needs to be someone else for Westeros to rally behind. And he is the Usurper’s Son. There are some that would suggest that he has a better claim to the Throne than she does.

She lets the thought drift away with the speeding craft.

The road to the Dragonpit is empty. The city’s lockdown clearing the roads to the ancient airfield. Once home to greatest machines in the world. And now it’s a scrapyard. Her ancestors flew dragons of all shapes and sizes. All mighty and terrifying. Legendary machines sparked to life with the secrets of fire and blood. Secrets that blurred the line between technology and magic.

She’s only tasted those secrets once, as blood dripped from the apex of her thighs into the flames of
Drogo’s pyres. The rage of the flames inside and around her. Mira Maz Duur’s hoarse anguished screams sending her into a trance. Drogon’s heart roaring to life. The child she lost, the one she never held, breathing anew in her hands.

“We should keep an eye out for some scrap to repair Drogon, your grace.” Jorah says offhandedly as he drives. “Assuming, we all don’t die. We can come in after dark and scav it.”

That’s not how it works. But she can’t tell them that. Even Jorah doesn’t understand. They couldn’t understand. They think he’s just a machine. An infinitely complex machine, but a machine nonetheless. No, he was alive. He was fire and life. He was her baby. Her And now he is dead. Now he is scrap. Just like all the others.

“Thank you, I will” she answers, leaning back into her seat. She wishes Jon were here to calm her nerves. To hold her hand and distract her from her melancholy thoughts. He’s escorting Lannister with his men. Jorah and Arya serve as her guards. Her few bloodriders surround their vehicle on their bikes.

“They don’t keep any of the good stuff here” Arya replies. “It all under the Red Keep”

“That’s only rumors.” Jorah answers. The Little Wolf’s head tilts.

“Miss Stark is correct.” Tyrion notes, looking up from his work.

“I used practice water-dancing in Balerion’s frame.”

“How do you know it was Balerion?” she asks the girl.

“He’s the biggest one. The only one big enough to hold all the bombs Aegon dropped. They have Vhagar and Meraxes there too. But they’re smaller. Vhagar kind of looks like Drogon.”

“How so?”

“Vhagar doesn’t have a cockpit like Balerion and Meraxes do. It has seat between the wings. Which means Visenya flew mounted, like you do.”

Like she did.

“You certainly know a great deal about it…” Arya nods absently, wrapping her wrists in white tape. A boxer’s wrap. Starting around her wrist.

“People always talk about Aegon. They forget he couldn't have done all he did without Visenya and Rhaenys.” The wrap circles her knuckles. “Visenya had a Valyrian Rifle. Not like Jon’s. A Real Valyrian Energy rifle from before the doom. She called it Dark Sister.” anchoring it around her thumb “There’s still scorch marks from it at Harrenhal.” She moves to wrap her other hand, following the exact same pattern. “The old ladies there said it ate power from the sun. She’d fly straight into it, so high up she couldn’t be seen, and then dive. Straight down and rain hellsfire down on her enemies.”

She’s familiar with the tactic. It was one she used against the Wise Masters. The sun blinding them as she swooped down upon them.

“What happened to it?”
Arya shrugs. Another precious piece of Valyrian tech lost to time and endless war.

“Pull over up here” she instructs Jorah.

The Little Wolf gets out of the transport and stretches up. Pulling off her coat and passing it to Daenerys. The Jumpsuit beneath folded over at her waist. The young woman’s training has been a constant in the weeks she’s known her. Always pushing herself harder. Never quitting. And all that training is on display now as she pulls the jumpsuit up over her shoulders. Lean ropes of muscle in her arms, hard cuts and deep grooves in her torso. Strength disguised by her small size. Two vicious looking stab wounds in her lower abdomen.

The knife belt clips around her waist. Cersei slipping prominently into place at her side. Lastly, dragging two red lines of weirwood tears under her dark eyes. War Paint.

“Sagon kostōba, Valonqar”

Be strong, Little Sister.

She presses a salute into her sternum and nods. And then simply... disappears.

It’s desolate. This place her ancestors built. This airfield turned scrapyard. A fitting metaphor for her family. The last scions of the greatest civilization the world ever saw reduced to nothing. Reduced to only her.

Her Dothraki take positions around her small tented pavilion. Jon’s men doing the same around his.

He snaps Jamie’s golden arm back into its socket. The Kingslayer grunting as the clockwork mechanisms within recalibrate. There’s a whirring sound as it locks into place, and he flexes the fingers, twists his wrist, and rolls his shoulder.

“I’m sincerely grateful you didn’t destroy it, your grace.”

“It’s not too late, Jamie.” Tyrion pleads. “You know what we’re facing. Your oath is to Westeros, not to Cersei. Please reconsider Commander Snow’s offer.”

Jamie lets out a small sad snort.

“It was too late a long time ago.”

At his belt, Jon’s rad counter starts clicking. Slowly at first, a light crackle. Then loudly. His eyes dart around furiously, searching for the source.

“The Mountain...” Jamie explains, something almost frightened shading his voice.

She looks up at Jon, her eyes wide. Searching the depths of his for something to anchor onto. He extends his hand for hers and she takes it, intertwining their fingers for a brief moment. Squeezing tight. Holding on for their lives. He mouths those three words, and she mouths them back. And then her hand slips away, and he turns to grab Jamie and bring him over to his pavilion.

They called Dragons monsters. During Aegon’s conquest. All through the first century and half of her family’s dynasty. The Masters called Drogon a monster. But Dragons were art and engineering, magic and maths, tech and fire.

And thing that was once Gregor Clegane is a monster.

He lumbers ahead of Cersei’s party, flanked by Lannister guards in black and silver combat armor.
Nearly 10 feet tall. A breathing apparatus strapped across the bridge of his nose and around his jawline. Covering the lower half of his face. It’s been fused into him. Pink puckered lines along the edges against grey mottled skin. In the center of his chest, embedded in a heavy leaden ballistic vest is a small reactor. The singular glow of wildfire burning inside. Conduits of green run in long lines. Spreading out along his torso, around his arms, beneath his armor, up his neck. The skin around the conduits, pink and puckered like the ones around his head.

The monster walks straight through them and Sandor walks out to intercept him in the center. Tension thrums through her as Jorah and Beric pull their rifles around front. Tormund planting his axe on the ground. Theon taking the cue a second later.

“Remember me?” the thing that was once his brother lets out a noise through mechanism adhered to his face. Clegane nods. “Yeah, you do...You're even fucking uglier than I am now. What the fuck did they do to you?” Another noise like a whirring growl. “Doesn’t matter. This isn’t how it ends for you, brother. You know who's coming for you. You've always known.”

“If you are quite finished…”

Cersei’s propagandists depict her as a Lioness. Vicious and Maternal. Red and Gold posters line the streets of cities under her control. Images of a mother lion protecting cubs from a black dragon flying above them. Or Snarling at a pack of wolves surrounding them. Or her claws swiping at a den of vipers.

The tragedy of it is that the Lioness could not protect her own cubs.

She strides through yard behind her monster. Her head held high, a somber black dress reaching her feet. A thin elegant crown twisting about her head. She disregards both her and Jon, only casting a fleeting glance to Jamie, and then a murderous one to Tyrion.

Three men follow her. She recognizes Euron Greyjoy by the unmistakable swagger of a pirate, and by the taunting smile he flashes at Theon. Minister Qyburn by the silver hand pinned to his lapel. The third is a mystery to her. He wears a rich suit and he regards her with a slippery smile.

Tyrion shakes his head when she looks to him for an answer. Then a cold dread sinks in her stomach as realization dawns on her.

The Iron Bank.

Her eyes dart around the yard. What had Arya told her? She looks to her Dothraki. “Don’t trust anyone you haven’t seen in 12 hours.” When had she last seen these men? On the road? Overnight? She looks to Cersei’s guards, anyone of them could be an assassin.

“I have your sister Theon…” Greyjoy mocks. His voice lilting and sing-songy, holding up a small device in his hands. “If you don’t surrender the rest of my fleet to me. I’ll kill her. Right here. Right now.”

So many things all happen at once.

Cersei glares at Euron. Her green eyes flashing like Wildfire. Jorah pulls her behind him. Jon whips out a pistol and presses it to Jamie’s head. The Mountain slams a fist into his chest, green surging through his veins. Jon’s men and her bloodriders bring weapons up

Tyrion steps out into the middle of it all. Hands up in the air.

“Let’s all calm down”
Greyjoy laughs at the dwarf. Sniggering like adolescent. “We don't even let your kind live in the Iron Islands, you know. It’s a mercy.”

“Perhaps you should sit down so we can address larger concerns.”

“You're the smallest concern here.” He brings up his thumb and forefinger, indicating the slight space between them. Explaining his ‘joke.’

“Sit down, or Leave” Cersei hisses. When he doesn’t obey automatically, The Mountain snatches the device from his hand. Crushing it. Euron snarls and the Monster snarls back. And his is infinitely more frightening.

Jon lowers his pistol from Jamie’s head and weapons are holstered with a nod to his men. She breathes a loud sigh of relief and watches Tyrion’s shoulders sag as he does the same.

“We are a group of people who do not like one another, as this recent demonstration has shown. We have suffered at each other's hands. We have lost people we love at each other's hands.”

She dares to glance over Jon. Neither of them have done anything to her Cersei or her family. Jamie stands next to him. Unharmed. Unhurt. But in Westeros… that doesn’t matter. Individuals don’t matter. Families do. And her Father wreaked havoc across this country.

But so has Cersei.

“Get to your point, Tyrion. Should we settle our differences and live together in harmony for the rest of our days?

“We all know that will never happen and there is no point in pretending otherwise.”

“Then why are we here?” the queen spits.

Jon steps up, moving behind Tyrion. His uniform dark and Northern. The White Wolf embroidered on the shoulder, his rank pinned to his collar. “This isn’t about living in Harmony.” He nods at Jamie, who lets out a relieved breath and traverses the space over to Cersei. “It’s just about living.”

The gesture is meant as a peace offering. Returning her brother… her lover in hopes that she will listen to what they have to say. It’s not their only bargaining chip. They also have the warhead.

Jon, technically, has the warhead. Seized in the name of the Northern Front. Reluctantly. But, it was the best call. Distancing herself from her father’s weapon of terror as much as possible. And if she was being honest, it scared her. What if the madness comes from wielding something so powerful? What if the high concentration of Rads are what triggers the madness?

Jamie takes a seat next to Cersei and she regards him thoughtfully. Their identical eyes speaking a language that only twins… that only lovers can speak. Jamie wins whatever silent argument they have and the queen leans back into her chair.

“I’m listening… Commander Snow”

Her nostrils flare and her jaw clicks as it sets. How dare she? This woman who had three bastard children of her own. This woman who put two of them on the throne of Westeros. This woman dares insult her love for his name.

A name he chose to keep.
Jon takes the insult in stride. Breezing past it as if it never happened.

“The same thing is coming for all of us.” A general you can’t negotiate with. An army that doesn’t leave corpses behind on the battlefield. There’s a million people living in this city. They’ll soon be a million more soldiers in the Army of the Dead.”

“I imagine that will be an improvement for most.”

Her casual disregard for the civilians under her protection is jarring. She has to train her face to keep her jaw from falling opening.

“This is serious.” Jon growls, the weight of command making his accent thick and heavy. “I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t.”

“You should have received—” Tyrion starts before he’s interrupted by Qyburn.

“...We received the data sent to us through the RAVEN by Brandon Stark...” Cersei’s eyes narrow at Jamie for a moment and he offers the smallest shake of his head. “...and we have compared your findings with the artifact and witness brought to the Crown by Lt. Commander Alliser Thorne six years ago. “My own tests on the sample have yielded disturbing results.”

“So you know what these things are capable of.” Jon does not take his eyes of Cersei. Searching her for answer he will not find. “You know these things will destroy us all.”

“We have been able replicate the virus and have successfully re-animated over one hundred test subjects.” Horror pools in her chest. Test Subjects. Phantom pain in the crook of her elbow from needles at the House of the Undying. “However, we have been unable to exert the same control as described in your accounts of this ‘Night King.’”

“A children’s story” Cersei scoffs.

“He’s real. I’ve seen him.” Her voice waivers. “He killed my Dragon... He murdered my son.”

For a second, she can see it in her rivals eyes. The Lioness protecting her cubs. The mother who knows the pain of losing a child.

“If I understand your terms correctly, you're asking me for a truce.”


“That’s all?” Cersei mocks, a vicious smile twisting her face. Wheeling away from her to glare at Jon “Pull back my armies and stand down while you go on your monster hunt.” Turning back to face her “Or while you solidify and expand your position... Hard for me to know which it is with my armies pulled back until you return and march on my capital with four times the men.”

“Your capital will be safe until the northern threat is dealt with. You have my word.”

“The word of a would-be usurper.” she spits.

“There is no conversation that will erase the past. We are seeking to ensure a future.” Tyrion pleads.

Cersei stares at her hated brother for a long minute. Long fingers drumming on the wooden chair.

“I know what these things are, I know what they mean. I watched a hundred corpses tear each other limb from limb with fury that I could not fathom. If those things come for us, there will be no kingdoms to rule. Everything we suffered will have been for nothing. Everything we lost will have
been for nothing.”

She stands, folding her hands in front of her. “The crown accepts your truce. Until the dead are defeated, they are the true enemy.” Relief escapes in heavy exhale from her lungs, but the Cersei holds up a finger. “In return…” she turns to Jon. “The North will remain independent of Westeros. And the Northern Front will remain in the North and not take up arms against the crown.”

“And me? Am I lay down my arms against the Crown as well?”

“I would never ask it of you. You would never agree to it. And if you did, I would trust you even less than I do now. I ask it only of Ned Stark's son.” She proclaims loudly. “I know Ned Stark's son will be true to his word.”

Her eyes lock with Jon’s across the yard and her shoulders fall. Because Cersei is right. Eddard Stark’s son will be true to his word. And it fills her with terrible mix of joy and anguish. Joy because he loves her. Because he’ll be true to her. Anguish because it means this was all for nothing. They put themselves at risk for nothing. They gave up Jamie for nothing.

“I am true to my word.” he answers slowly. “Or I try to be. So I cannot give you what you ask… should we survive the dead, the North will rejoin Westeros, under the rule of Daenerys Stormborn.”

Tyrion hangs his head and the air become thick and tense as Cersei examines Jon. Then she turns to her, then back to Jon. And a sound that is almost like a giggle erupts from her throat.

“Oh Gods…” she laughs turning to her brother. “They’re in Love.” Jaime hangs his head in defeat and shame while Euron joins her cackling. She regains her composure. The lines of her face hardening into something menacing. “I’ve heard all I need to hear.” she turns back towards her seat. The Queen’s crown tilting towards the representative of the Iron Bank for just a fraction of a second.

A terrified gasp escapes her, and she is tackled to the ground. A bullet whizzing above her head. Arya’s weight atop her.

There’s movement as Jon’s men draw weapons on Cersei’s guards, moving with haste to reinforce her Dothraki. The mountain once again slamming that device on his chest. An inhuman roar tearing from his throat. Cersei’s guards pulling their own weapons. Jon pulling her up and to him. Jorah grabbing Tyrion and pulling him back to the safety. Jaime calling for Cersei. Euron cackling madly.

Tension thrumming through the air. Each party waiting for orders to open fire.

And in this chaos a voice rings out. Bright and Resilient and Strong as the weirwood tree.

“IS A MAN STILL THE IRON BANK’S BITCH!”?

And a young woman stands up and proves the crown is weak.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is not from Jon's perspective. Get Hype?
The She-Wolves of Winterfell

Chapter Notes

Try n' Hold me Back - Rob Bailey + The Hustle Standard
https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

Look at yourself in the mirror and tell me what a man is without pride
“STOP HOLDING BACK, BRANDON!” she shouts.

He always goes easy on her. Everyone always goes easy on her. Her brothers. The other boys in the lists. How is she supposed to get better if they don’t go harder.

“He isn’t holding back Lyanna” Ned answers, in that quiet way of his. The one that almost makes her believe him. Leaning on his elbows along the side of the practice ring.

“I’m not going to hit you harder” her oldest brother counters. “Father would be furious if…”

“Fuck what father says! Hit me!” she raises her gloves to guard her face. “Show me what you got!”

Brandon sighs heavily. Then his eyes flash in that way particular way and he comes at her.

Right Hook.

Left Cross.

Jab

Jab

Fucking Predictable.

His assault wains for just a moment, and her lips curl into a vicious smile. He doesn’t see the uppercut. Or the hook that follows. Or the one coming from the opposite direction. And his footwork isn’t enough to keep him balanced as her blows drive him into the corner.

“LYANNA!”

Shit…

She pulls off her safety helmet as quickly as she can. The knot of her hair coming loose. Her father marches through the small crowd of spectators gathering to watch the Heir to Winterfell get his ass kicked by his little sister.

“Get out of there now!” He turns to her brothers. “All of you!”

“Da!”

“NOW LYANNA!”

The corners of Ned’s mouth quirk up in a small apologetic smile, before he quickly moves to join their father. Brandon gives her that look as he ducks between the ropes. The one that tells her it’s all her fault.

Father glares down at her. Disapproval and frustration and disappointment crossing his face. For a moment her defiance waivers. There was once a time when he would have been pleased to see her win against Brandon. When he would have boasted to his men that his Wolf-Maid could best any of their sons in a fight.
But that time is gone and he is selling his Wolf-Maid to Robert Baratheon.

Her lip trembles. But its not fear. It is a slow seething anger. A glacier grinding through her. A cold rage strengthening her resolve as she meets his glare with her own. And she takes her sweet time. Pulling out her hair tie and twisting the long dark strands up into a knot, before she vaults over the top rope. Boldly striding to her father.

“Miss Stark.” Someone interrupts, a man stepping between her and her father. She recognizes him from the weapon at his hip.

Dawn.

“Captain Dayne!” She gasps and presses a salute into her sternum as quickly as possible. He smiles and she feels her ears flushing red.

“Commander Stark… Your daughter is most impressive.” extending his hand to shake her father’s “If she were a man, I’d demand her immediate enlistment.”

“Thank you, Captain.” her father folds his hands behind back, his anger tempered by the need for propriety. “What brings a Kingsguard down this way?”

“I actually came to find you, Ser.” he casts a long gaze at Ned, inspecting him before winking. “My sweet sister has begged our mother to invite you to dine with us at the party this evening.”

Ned’s face remains passive and inscrutable. But she can tell how excited he is. By the way he shifts on his heels, and how he brings his hands behind his back to stand taller. Father frowns. He never was good with small talk, and since mother died…

It will be an awkward evening.

“We’d be glad to” his voice thin and brittle. It’s courtesy. He wouldn’t dare insult them by refusing, and Ashara would be a good match for Ned. And father is determined to sell them all off. One by One. First Brandon to the Tully girl. Then her. Now Ned.

“What do you think yer doin’? Makin’ yer brother look like a fool.” he snaps as soon as the doors to their suite in Harrenhal’s officers barracks.

“If he paid attention and kept his guard up, he wouldn’t’ve looked a fool.”

Brandon’s lip twitches but he ducks his head down. Her father blinks in rage.

“Go get yerself cleaned up, and get ready for tonight.” he growls at struggling to control his anger. “Robert’ll be there. Try an’ look like a lady.”

“I don’t care about Robert fucking Baratheon!”

“Watch your tongue!”

“I WON’T MARRY HIM! He’s a drunk and brute and-”

“You’ll do your duty!” he hisses at her. “Starks serve their country. And this is how you’ll serve yours…”

She slams her door shut. Rage rippling through her. Eating her from the inside out. Burning through her till there’s nothing left but a husk of herself.
Starks serve their country…

Had she been born a man she could truly serve her country. Like her father, and Brandon and Ned. Even like Benjen, preparing to join the Night’s Watch. She peeks through the keyhole, watching as her father and Brandon head out. No doubt on some terribly important business. The politics of it all. Father never cared about politics before.

Starks serve their country.

A country that's falling apart. War’s comin’. Everyone can feel it. Even at one and twenty, she knows it. It’s a tension that hangs over everything. It's in the way people are starting to ration more food away. It's in the way the men whisper “Winter’s comin.” It's in the increase of weapons being carried openly. It's in the tone of the nightly broadcasts from the Crown.

She should be be serving alongside her brothers. Fighting the war to come with them. She can do so much more than be Robert’s prized princess. Locked up in a manse at Storm’s End.

Benjen’s at the small table in his room, pouring over that godsforsaken map and journal. She crashes onto his bed with a heavy sigh.

“I heard…” he says quietly. “I’m sorry.”

“I hate this.” This feeling of being small and weak and helpless. All the the things she knows she’s not. “It’s not fair…” He spins the chair around and gives her a small sympathetic smile. “I should go with you… to the wall. I’ll cut my hair and pretend to be a boy. We could go on your treasure hunt. Find Dark Sister and the BloodRaven. Fight Wildings. Have adventures. See things that no-one else in Westeros has ever seen.”

“I’d like that,” he chuckles quietly. “… I found a place I want to visit.” he pulls the map over onto the bed and spreads it out in front of her. Circling a place far North, a small stretch of river along the Eastern Coast. “Ranger called this the Ice River. He says the river is frozen, but all the salt brine in it keeps it from freezing solid, so it still flows.” He picks up the field journal he’s been reading from. Its crusty and all the pages are yellowed. Yoren gave it to him the last time he stopped at Winterfell on his way South. “And that you can see the Ice Dragon directly above you and that there are aurora all the time. The top of the world.”

“That sounds lovely. I wish I could see it with you…” he nods and a sadness permeates the room. Settling over them like a heavy blanket. Till the chimes of the clock rip it away.

“We should get ready… Got to look impressive for these Southorners..”

“Aye…”

It’s one of her mother’s dresses. A subdued blue and grey, with little winter roses along her neckline. Father gives her a small smile, nodding his approval. She straightens the partial pelt draped authoritatively over his shoulders. Indicating that while the issue remains, her anger has burned out. At least for now. Her brothers look handsome in their dress uniforms. The Stark Grey Wolf on their shoulders. Ranks pinned to Brandon and Ned’s collars. Mother would have loved to see it.

She misses her.

Her absence is an ache in her heart through the whole affair. Her arm draped through her father’s as they enter the banquet hall. It should be mother’s. He should be pulling out mother’s chair for her. Mother should be correcting her when she grabs the wrong fork at dinner. Instead of Mrs. Dayne kindly nodding down to the smaller one she holds. When father stumbles through smalltalk, mother
should be coming to his rescue.

Instead, Father excuses himself as soon as it is polite to do so. Making his way across the massive room to speak with Jon Arryn and other officers from the Vale. It should be mother kicking Ned under the table. Provoking him to actually talk to Ashara instead of staring dumbly at her.

She’s so pretty.

Ned is dumbstruck and choking on half his words. But Ashara laughs and it glitters just like she does. Her dark hair peeks out from under a purple veil. The olive skin of her hands and wrists delicately marked with a reddish brown ink in ornate Dornish patterns. Elaborate strings of beads hang from her throat, and across her forehead. Her gown, layers of flowing purple silk patterned so subtly that it was barely visible. And her eyes… the brightest shade of violet.

She feels a frumpy mess in comparison. keenly aware of how tight her mother’s dress is around the muscles in her shoulders and arms. How her breasts don’t quite fill out the front. How it hangs just a bit too long. How bare her face is compared to the made up women of the court.

A roar of drunken laughter interrupts her brooding. And she sees him before he sees her.

“If you’ll excuse me…” she whispers to Mrs. Dayne, standing quickly and attempting to dart away to the privy. She can hide there for awhile, until he drinks himself distracted.

“THERE SHE IS!” he hollers slurring. “MY BRIDE-TO-BE!”

He drapes his arm over her shoulders and gods he smells. His uniform stained with grease drippings and whatever ale hasn’t been caught in his mouth or beard. A soldier should take pride in the uniform they wear. She would, were she permitted one.

His overbearing arm pulls her against him and she cringes so hard, she mights as well turn inside out. A mug of ale sloshes around in his other hand.

“Ned, How on earth does an ugly fuck like you have such a pretty sister?” She can feel his lusty gaze on her and her skin crawls under his palm. Mercifully he loosens his grip to clap Ned’s arm, and she’s able to slip free. But the movement jostles him and the ale sloshes over the front of her dress.

Her mother’s dress.

“Robert!” she screeches and before she can restrain herself, her fist rears back, and lands square on his nose.

The room falls very quiet. As if the whole party has paused to gawk at her. Ashara’s henna’d hands clap over her mouth. Benjen’s eyes wide. Ned holds his breath. Father glares at her from across the banquet hall. Fury burning his features red. Beer drips down her mother’s dress and blood pours freely from her betrothed’s nose.

And from the grand table at the head of the banquet hall, even the Prince and Princess pause. Rhaegar Targaryen and Elia Martell. The princess Elia leans over to her husband whispering, and he nods, a small almost mocking smile crossing his face. Her ears grow hot, and her cheeks flush under the intense scrutiny. Tears pricking at her eyes.

Robert wipes the blood away, using his uniform sleeve as rag. And bursts into a furious roar of laughter.
“That’s my WIFE!” he laughs, roughly squeezing her against him. Before plopping down in her father’s empty chair.

“I’m goin’ t’ clean up…” she excuses herself. And she doesn’t recognize her own voice. It’s shaky and small. All the things she knows she’s not.

“Come back soon, love.”

Love.

No.

Never.

Her father’s heated gaze follows her as she makes her escape. Darting out of the banquet hall with all speed. For a second she turns back and sees purple eyes following too.

The gardens surrounding the banquet hall are pretty and quiet and full of Winter Roses. But light scent isn’t strong enough to overpower the reek of ale from the front of her mother’s dress. Tears run hot down her face, as she fans the material with her hand.

“M’ sorry, Lyanna…” a meek voice interrupts her tears. And Howland offers her a wet napkin.

“Thanks Reed.” she wipes it across her the bare skin below her throat. The warm water sluicing away the sticky ale on her chest. He sits on the bench next to her, folding his feet up beneath him.

“How goes the Resistance…?”

He raises his eyebrow and lets out a quiet chuckle.

“Slow and Steady.” he answers. “We grow strong like the Weirwood. Everyday we move closer to setting things to right. Everyday more people join the cause. ”

“But not me…” she scoffs.

“You’re too high profile, Lyanna.”


Howland laughs at that. His dull gold hair hanging around his face.

“Are you sure...?” he asks as he regains his composure.

“Yes. I’m ready. I’m ready to serve”

“And to die…? Are you ready to do that?” When she opens her mouth to answer, he holds up a hand. “Think about it, Lyanna. Take a minute. Think about your brothers… your father. Winterfell. Home...”

Her brothers are all leaving her. Benjen running off to the wall. Brandon caring only about politics and impressing Father. Father selling her to Robert. Ned too blinded by their friendship to realize what he is.

“I’d rather die than marry him.” she whispers. “Give me the opportunity to do something, Howland. Let me serve my country. Let me serve the North.”
Howland examines her for a long moment and takes a deep breath. “Alright, I’ll talk to the general. We’ve grown a lot since the last time we spoke. We were fragile before… but we are stronger now.” he smiles, a single gold tooth flashing “I will ask him”

She waits by the Weirwood for her answer. Harrenhal’s godswood is small, overgrown. Until the games this week, no-one must’ve come here in a long time. She’s done her best to look like a proper soldier. Tying her hair into a tight knot at the base of her skull. Binding her breasts. Stealing Benjen’s nondescript uniform. His training blacks.

She’s just as good as any man. She can serve just as good as any man.

The wind whispers through the leaves and for a moment she swears she hears her mother’s laughter. Chasing her through the barracks. Singing her to sleep. Telling her to be brave when she was scared of the Dragon that lived under Winterfell’s hot springs.

“I’m not afraid of the Dragon” she whispers.

But she is.

Everyone is.

She’d be stupid to not be.

“M’ not afraid” she whispers again.

“Oh Lyanna… that’s the only time you can be brave” her mother’s whisper whistles through the Weirwood’s leaves.

Leaves crunch behind her, and she turns to see Howland stepping up to the tree.

“M’ sorry if I interrupted your prayer.”

“I was just listenin’…for my mother…”

He nods his understanding. “Our gods aren’t like theirs…” his hand brushes against the trunk. “They do not speak t’ us through texts or hymns. They speak to us only in the voices we know. An’ they only whisper it in our own hearts. Only we know our true sins. An’ only we can figure out how to absolve them. Our prayers are our own words. Our oaths are our own. Our vows, our own…” his too tired green-grey eyes stare into the empty eyes of the tree “Are ya’ ready?”

“Aye.”

They sneak through the barracks. Slipping past the great banquet hall. The revelry loud and overwhelming, distracting patrols, disguising their movements. This place is both a marvel and a monstrosity. The site of Aegon’s first conquest. The first to try and stand against him. The first to fall. The land still shows signs of it, three hundred years later. The land rocky and full of small hills and valleys. Eroded craters, the remains of the bombs that fell from Balerion’s belly. The damage confined to the ten mile circle of the city. Meraxes and Rhaenys herding fleeing soldiers and civilians back into the city with ten thousand bullets.

But its the towers that are the most foreboding. Vacant and watchful. Steel and stone that once climbed to the heavens droop, spilling and melting like candlewax down the structures. Dark Sister’s doing. They say Visenya could unleash the sun with it.

It’s to one of these haunting towers that Howland leads her.
“Keep a look-out.”

He ducks into an alcove that she couldn't see in the dark. It’s a long tense few minutes as he whispers to someone. She struggles to keep focused on their surroundings and not on trying to interpret the muffled voices. And then a hand taps her arm and she turns.

“Captai…” Captain Dayne puts a finger to his lips and motions her to follow him into the tower. She does as he commands.

Of course it's him. A man such as him wouldn’t serve a monster like Aerys. The greatest soldier in all of Westeros also working to restore things to right from within. He leads them up winding stairways, the stone burnt black under Visenya’s fury. Short ladders of chain and pipe taking them through the portions that are too broken to climb or jump across. Until they stop at a heavy door. But he pauses, reaching for the handle.

“Ms. Stark…” he turns to her. “Once you pass through this door, there is no going back…”

“I understand, Ser.”

He nods and motions for her to wait while he quickly ducks in, speaking something in a language she doesn’t know. And a woman’s voice answers. It doesn’t sound like Valyrian… Rhyonish maybe? Captain Dayne is from Dorne…

The Captain motions her forward. But Howland does not follow. She reaches for his hand, and he takes it.

“I can’t go with you, Lyanna…” Giving her hand a small squeeze. “Whatever it is the general wants with you… I best only know my part…” He lets go, and offers Captain Dayne a salute as he steps back into the stairwell.

It’s quiet, small and secluded. Captain Dayne bolts the door behind her, and gives her a small smile and nods toward a blown out chunk of wall. A woman stands there, overseeing the encampment below. Dressed in all black like she is. A long tunic over black pants. Dark Skin and Dark hair tucked under a veil. That red-brown dornish ink marking her hands as she motions Lyanna to join her at the edge.

Far Below is the Great Banquet hall, aglow with lights, and music. Robert’s no doubt drunk himself into a stupor and roaring about, Ned joining in the revelry. Father’s probably down there too, introducing Brandon to the other officers. There’s also the brick building of the barracks, where Benjen is probably wondering why she locked herself in her room so early, and why she won’t respond to his knocks. And hundreds and hundreds of tents. People not important enough to warrant housing. People like Howland.

“Do you know why we are here, Ms. Stark? At Harrenhal?”

“Aye. Ma’am” She swallows hard, because she’s not exactly sure how to address the princess in this context. Elia turns to her, clasping her hands low on her belly. Cradling a small swell barely visible beneath the loose fabric.

“Tell me.”

“Harrenhal is the site of Aegon’s first and most brutal-” she holds up a hand.

“I’m glad you know your history. I meant: ‘why are we here now?’ Why are we here at these games?” Elia’s bright eyes search hers as she considers her answer.
“The king wants t’ scare everyone into submission…”

The princess nods solemnly.

“Yes. We have been summoned here, for the sole purpose of oppressing and intimidating our small folk. To make the country listen to the prowess of Westeros’ Military. To warn them what will happen if they dissent. If they disobey. If they assert their gods-given rights as Free men.”

“An’ Women…”

Elia actually smiles at her interruption. “Yes… And women too.” The princess turns back out into the open. A heavy sorrowful sigh passing through her lips. “We are here among the bones of those who first defied the Dragon so that we may once again prove its might.”

The wind blows past them. Stronger than usual due to the great height. Delicately lifting the edges of the black veil around the princess’ head. It whistles through the torn out portions of wall. Haunting gusts like the ancient screams of those who burned in dragonfire.

“M’ not afraid.” her heart whispers.

“Oh. Lyanna.” mother cries.

“And why am I here, Ma’am?” She folds her hands behind her back. Shifting her feet shoulder length apart. At-Ease. A proper soldier.

“An excellent question, Ms. Stark. Why are you here?” The princess turns her delicate frame square with hers.

“Are you here because of your friend, Howland Reed? A wise young man who speaks so highly of the daughter of winterfell. A gentle man who calls you his hero because you fought his bullies for him when you were young.”

Her ears turn hot from the memory. It was at the Summer Solstice festival, just after her nameday. The Umbers were beating him up and calling him frog eater and swamp rat. She punched great Jon so hard he broke his nose.

“Are you here because ‘Starks serve their country?’ Because you have been denied that opportunity... despite your skill and talent. Denied the opportunity to have Honor and Glory of your own.”

It sounds selfish when its said like that. Petty. Stupid. No… She swallows hard. Men are allowed to seek Honor and Glory. Why can’t she? Why should she be denied her own ambition? No. It’s not petty.

“Are you here because you are running away from your brute of a betrothed? Because you can’t stomach the thought of being forced to be his wife? Because you want to retch when you think of him rutting into you? Using you until he’s bored and then proceeding to destroy what’s left of your honor with his exploits? With... ‘making the eight’ as he calls it?”

Behind them Captain Dayne shuffles uncomfortably.

“...Aye Ma’am,” she answers. “All of it an’ more”

Elia stares at her for a long moment. Tapping her thumbs together as she examines her. Examining the training uniform she stole from her brother. Her hands. Her arms. She flexes under the scrutiny
and the princess smiles. But it quickly fades.

“Captain Dayne tells me you are quite the fighter.”

“I do alright, Ma’am.”

“Seems to be an understatement. You’ve beaten every man in the lists who’s willing to fight you.”

“They’re holding back…”

“No. They aren’t.” Captain Dayne speaks for the first time. “It starts that way… but by the end of it they are throwing all they have at you…”

Pride swells in her chest. Buoying her heart and lifting the corners of her mouth. But all too quickly its deflated. Fear digging its claws into her as she realizes why she’s been brought here.

They want her to fight.

“Why am I here, Ma’am?” she repeats her question.

Elia and Captain Dayne share a long look. A silent conversation in their eyes. Elia sighs and her hands drift down to rub along the slight roundness of her belly.

“Three Days from now will be the closing Ceremonies of these games. At that time my…” she blows out a long hot breath through her nose, gritting her teeth angrily “…husband will be fighting Barristan the Bold to prove that not even the mightiest heroes can stand against the crown.”

“I thought he was to fight the tournament champion…“

“You are not a summer child.” The retort sharp and pointed. “The last few rounds are staged. Rhaegar is not as capable as he is made out to be. Captain Dayne…” she nods to him “…will be taking a dive in the Semi-Finals” The princess pauses taking a deep breath. “-I seek a champion to replace Barristan, and defeat my husband, and prove to all of Westeros that the crown is not a strong as it seems…”

She feels herself gasp. Her heart thuds in her chest and in her ears. The winds howl around them. Fluttering Elia’s scarf. Pulling strands of hair loose from the knot at the base of her neck. Her mother’s fingers run through it. So soft and gentle.

“...We cannot allow for these games... For this… intimidation to go unanswered. For the sake of our people. For the sake of our country, We must not yield. We must stand strong against Tyranny.” Elia continues, but she doesn’t quite hear it. Not over the sound of the wind and her heart beat. The moon nearly full, White and Grey like the trunk of the Weirwood. Painting the room in beams of light.

“M’ afraid.”

“Oh... Lyanna.”

...She knows the rest.

The words come in a voice that is not her own. A voice that is deep, and strong and...old.

“Winters’ Comin…”

She’s grew up with those words. Spoken by her father. His men. Her brothers.
Her brother stands behind her. Pulling Daenerys up and behind him as she traverses the space between these lines of guns. His anxiety something she can taste in the air.

This is the only way. If she does not call a man out, a man will try again.

And a man does not miss twice.

“I asked a man question!?” Confusion on the faces of Cersei’s men. On Cersei herself.. A murderous glare sculpted onto her face. The queen looks different. Her hair short now. The rich gowns long gone and replaced something martial and severe. Her hand goes to the blade at her side.

It’d be so easy. She could get Cersei before the Mountain reaches her. A flick of her wrist and it’d all be over. And then Jon would be forced to watch as a monster crushes her skull. Or rips her in half. Or stomps her into paste.

There’s no time for that.

She can’t let a man try again. Even now, Daenerys isn’t safe. Even tucked up against Jon. Even blockaded by her Dothraki and the Pack.

A name has been given.

“Does a man need his master to summon him!?” she points accusingly at Tycho Nestoris. She knows his name. Knows his face from the house of Black and White. His weasley features drawn tight in surprise at being put in the spotlight. His nostrils flare for a moment and then he begins to laugh. It’s a dry mirthless sound and he shakes his head.

“...A girl should know better... “

His voice is raspy and quiet. Dripping with mystery. He’s throwing his voice. The sound coming from everywhere and nowhere. Filling the open space.

“A Girl is Arya Stark” she announces and watches with satisfaction as rage twists Cersei’s face. “And who is a man?”

“A Girl is Arya Stark. A girl is a Wolf. A girl is a Cat. A girl is a boy. A girl is a Ghost.” Each name comes from a different direction. He’s trying to confuse her. Trying to disorient her. It won’t work. Not this time. “A girl seems to be many things...”

She sees him for a half a second. A flash of movement along the raised wall surrounding them

There’s no way out of this. Assuming Cersei doesn’t just give the order to kill them all.

“...a man is simply no-one.”

Her boots scuff along the dusty earth. Grit beneath her feet. Her fist slams into the meat of her opposite hand. The sound loud and satisfying. Echoing in her ear. An audible reaffirmation of the power she holds in her body. Strong as a bear.

“A man chooses to be a slave… to his god… to the Iron Bank. But Arya Stark serves the Breaker of Chains...” She paces down the line of drawn weapons and pivots. “So Arya Stark offers a man a final chance. A man’s god has demanded a Queen’s name. A man has been given one. But Arya Stark has been given a queen’s name as well...”

She pulls Cersei out of it sheath and throws it into the dirt. Sticking it into the Earth at it’s namesakes
feet. The queen glares at it. Hatred glinting in her green eyes.

“Perhaps we should see which of these names will be offered to a Man’s god.”

Two metal canisters slide through the dirt. White whisps of smoke spilling leaking out. Then breaking open. Clouds of white filling the space. Obscuring her vision. Obsuring everyone’s vision. Guns click all around her. Two dozen barrels locked along this narrow strip of dirt dividing the two groups.

“HOLD YOUR FIRE!” Jon orders. The Mountain roars and Jaime shouts for his men to stand down. Daenerys yelling in Dothraki as her riders begin to posture and spin their arakhs.

“Cersei we need to leave… now!” Jaime hisses.

“I will not be intimidated by a child.”

“…A girl should know better…” a man repeats. His shape appears in the mist. A shadow in the smoke.

They are still for a moment. Calm as still water.

It happens so fast.

Captain Dayne knocks out Barristan in the small tent adjacent to the arena and brings her inside. Her heart pounds in her ears and her breath is coming in short panicked pants. Howland seals the flap behind them.

“He’s going to wake up soon… I’ll be here to ‘discover’ him but by that time you should already be in the arena…”

“What if the King kills me before I get a chance…?”

“His ego won’t let him.” he reassures her, clasping onto her shoulder. “And if he does… you’ll never see it coming and it’ll be over before you know it.” She wants to laugh but the panic won’t let her. “Breathe. It’s just a fight.”

“What if I don’t win?”

“All that matters is that you stood up.” His eyes steady, as he places a hand on her other shoulder. The weight of command pressing heavily down on them. “It is not fair that we have to ask this of you. It is not fair that this is the country we’ve given you. It’s not fair that it's up to you to make it right. That you have to pay for the mistakes we made… But here we are... and your country needs you, Lyanna Stark.”

His words bring a shaky calm over her. Her breath becoming slow and stable. She swallows the lump in her throat and it becomes a hard thing in her belly. Something strong and unbending. Like a Weirwood.

“Well if I’m goin’ t’ die… May I see it?”

He smiles and pulls his arms off her shoulders. Removing the small weapon from his hip. It’s only a cylinder. Barely a foot long. He holds it out at arms length and she takes a step backward.

And it ignites in a beam of pure starlight. The blade buzzing and purring as he playfully swings it around her head.
Dawn.

“Beautiful.”

The light disappears, retreating back into the hilt with a hum. It returns to his belt and then he squares his feet and gives her salute and a sad smile.

“May your gods protect you.”

Howland helps her gear up. Awkwardly helping her bind her breasts down beneath the trainer top. Strapping her taped hands into the gloves.

“D’ I look like a girl?”

“Y’ look like a soldier.” He takes out a small tin from his pockets. Smearing the waxy red substance down the sides of her face. Then pulling the foamy safety helmet over her head. “Our gods are quiet...” helping her put in the mouth-guard “…But when they move, they uproot everything.”

She strides out with all the boldness she can muster. The ill-fitting equipment disguising her shape. The open air stadium full of people. She climbs through the ropes to face her opponent who eyes her up and down. She can’t see his face. And he can’t see hers. His posture is confused though. She glances through the crowd and she sees her father.

Brandon. Ned. Benjen...

And Robert.

And then she looks up at Elia, dressed like the princess she is. Hurriedly fluttering about the King. Playing her role perfectly. His ashen white face stoic. Long mangy hair. And for a moment the world stops as he decides whether or not to kill her right there.

But he starts to laugh. A terrible mad cackle. Gesturing to one of his attendants. And a second later the ref puts a finger to his ear and nods.

Cold. Despite the lights. Despite the heat. Despite her heart pounding. And the sweat dripping down her sides from under her arms. And the wind blows and time slows… A single red leaf drifts through the air. The gods granting her prayer as the whistle rings in her ears.


A man is there. A knife blade flashing above her head. Another sweeping low across her abdomen. Slashing through the fabric of her jumpsuit. The slightest sting across her skin.

“ARYA!” Theon yells sprinting out towards her.

“Trust yer sister.” Jon snarls, catching him by the collar and dragging him back. "Keep your guns up!"

Dodge a knife point past her shoulder. Bobbing as he stabs out again and then again. Weaving fluidly between each lunge. The current taking the path of least resistance between the rocks.

Melisandre parries his knife. Drawing a tight circle and throwing it away. But his opposite hand
slaps up. The Witch slipping from her hand like water running through her fingers.

Disarmed. They circle each other. Two ships in a whirlpool waiting to collide.

Her hands up. Guarding her face against the onslaught to come.

He rushes her. His gloves slamming into her forearms again and again. The first round he was hesitant. Confused by the stranger he found himself battling. But now he is angry and he attacks with the ferocity she should’ve expected from a dragon.

Right Hook swinging around her guards and making contact to her face. The blow disorienting her. Two jabs to her midsection. Then two more to her head. Blood trickling down her nose.

Blood in her mouth. Rage she can taste. He has her backed into the corner. But a caged wolf is at its most violent.

Her fists drive hard into his sides. Striking his ribs in pairs of blows. Left. Left. Right. Right. It leaves her open to for him attack. But she is relentless. Keeping up the assault until he lowers his guard to protect his ribs. Then throwing her fist into his face.

Blood drips down from his nose. A smear of red marring his features. He pauses. Wiping away the blood before roaring and coming after her. She slips between his jabs. Swaying back out of his reach. Ducking and striking low. Evading and taking whatever opportunities he gives her in his frantic attempt to regain his advantage.

The dripping blood does not slow, and the ref blows the whistle when it dribbles onto the mat. Ending the round. Because he is the crown prince.

And there’s no such thing as a fair fight.

It’s one of the first thing’s Syrio taught her. Take advantage of her left-handedness. Her opponents are used to fighting against right-handed attackers. It throws off their defense.

But she and a man have fought too many times.

A hurricane of blows between them. Dodge and Strike. Bob and Weave. Over and Over again. She kicks up up at him and he traps her. Capturing her leg against his torso.

But she is smaller than he is. Lighter. And she knows how to fall.

So she jumps. Bringing her boot up and over to make contact with his head. Landing hard with him into the dusty earth. It billows up and around them as they scuffle to their feet. The light glinting off his weapon catches her eye. He’s not used to fighting in the light. He’s not used to an audience. He’s not used to being seen. He’s used to being quiet as a shadow.

And there’s no such thing as a fair fight.

She leaps and spins between them. Passing between the thrown knives. Removing Illyn Payne and Meryn Trant in a smooth motion. And throwing them at him with the momentum of her spin.

Meryn Trant whistles past his head. Illyn Payne slices his cheek. Blood dripping down his face.

She throws one more. And he catches Tywin Lannister. Dancing the blade along his fingers

A smirk smearing across his face.
A stupid princely smirk that does nothing but make her more angry. He had her for a moment. A clever sequence of throws that threw her off balance. Making her falter like Brandon with his faulty footwork. A jab comes at her and she weaves away. Regaining her position and momentum. Finding her reach and rhythm once again. Driving him back away from her.

He clinches her before she can get him on the ropes. Locking his arms tight around her elbows. And leans. Putting his weight onto her. Pressing his helmet against hers. He spits out his mouth guard. Letting it hang from his lips. Panting as he leans further into her. Forcing her to expend her own energy to try and shove him off.

“Why are you doing this?” he dares to ask.

Because it needs to be done. Because she’s capable of doing it. Because she stepped up. Because it’s her duty.

As a Queensguard. As a soldier. As a Stark. As her brother’s sister…

It’s her duty to protect Daenerys.

Their blades whistle in the wind. Walder Frey meeting Tywin Lannister in slashes of sparks. She lunges. Passing beneath the Titan’s shield. Passing under his outstretched arm. An elbow to to his ribs. And when he doubles, her foot slams into the back of his head. A man falls forward, landing on his hands and kicking back into her knee. Losing her balance. Crumbling down.

“A man saves a girls life…” His foot hits her chin. Knocking her teeth as she fights to get up. Walder Frey slipping through her fingers. Her knee hurts. Burgeoning bruises throb in time with her pulse. All over her torso. Her thighs. Her arms.

“A girl saved a man first.” swift as a deer she rolls backwards. Dodging away from his next kick. Springing out to her feet.

“A girl comes to a man with nothing…” he staggers up and her eyes see true. He’s hurt. They’re both hurt.

“A man took away a girls eyes and left her to beg on the streets of Braavos.” Charging at him. Vaulting. Crashing her knee into his sternum. He slashes at her as she dances away. Tywin Lannister skimming across her chest.

“A girl steals secrets!” he yells. Clutching his center as they circle each other.

“A man knew what a girl would do!” she shouts, unsheathing Beric Dondarrion.

“And a girl knows what a man must do” she lurches out at her. And fierce as a Wolverine she dives in.

She’s not fast enough. Tywin Lannister punctures deep into her side. Blinding pain blocking out Daenerys’ scream. White hot pain tearing through her as he rips the knife out.

She can’t breathe.

Too many hits to her ribs. The binding around her breasts too tight against the swelling. She can’t breathe. He hits her in the face. She can’t focus enough to block.

Staggering backwards and struggling to stay upright as he rains blow after blow onto her. Hooking
around to hit her midsection again and again.

It's a mercy when the ref calls the round.

“Can you continue?” he asks. This stranger with a kind somber face. “You can forfeit…” then he leans in close and whispers “If you forfeit… you might be able to get away with it. Throw yourself on the mercy of the crown...”

She nods wearily and looks through the stands. Robert laughing with a mug of ale in his hand. Ned sitting next to Ashara. Her henna’d hands gripped in his. Brandon and Father talking quietly.

But Benjen’s staring at her. A horrified expression on his face.

He knows.

Her hands plant on her knees as she takes deep breaths. “I can’t breathe” the words choke out of her mouth with a glob of blood. Leaning heavily against the ropes. Its too tight, it's all too tight.

She’s going to lose. She’s going to die. This was stupid. So stupid. How could they think she could do this? She’s going to die. Oh Gods. She's going to lose They’re going to take her to a black cell and she's going to die.

“M’ Afraid”

And her mother does not answer. Tears burn hot and spill over. Blood on her skin as she wipes her mouth.

Fear cuts deeper than swords. Blood trickling through her fingers as she grips her wound.

“GET UP!” Benjen roars. His voice drifting over the crowd. He’s at the edge of the railing. Standing and leaning over as far as he can. “GET UP LYANNA!” her breath shaking as a pushes herself to her feet. “GET UP!”

“GET UP!” her brother orders. His voice loud and strong and so very afraid. “ARYA! GET UP!”

“FINISH IT!” Tycho Nestoris shouts.

The ref blows the whistle and she charges. Stomping into the center of the ring to meet him once again. A righteous fury filling her tired limbs. The leaden weight of them adding power to her hits as she strikes again and again. Not bothering to evade his hits.

Not bothering to avoid the pain. It’s always going to hurt.

Rolling with it. Letting go of the wound. Blood trickling down her side. *The Mountain* and *The Hound* firmly in her hands. Charging at him like a storm. One blade over the other in spinning raging hurricane of slashes. He rolls away. But she plants one in his leg.

He pivots hard away from her. Trying to escape. But wolves hunt their prey. And she is a wolf.

Her fists crack against him to a rhythm she knows. It's the lullaby of her grief for her mother. It's the pulsing rage at her engagement. It’s the twanging ache at her abandonment. It’s the beating of her own heart.

“Get him!” her brother shouts.

She disarms his knife and he slaps the *The Mountain* away from her. But she snatches his wrist.
Twisting back hard. Forcing him to bend double. Slamming his face into her knee. He snatches her leg and falls forward. His weight taking her with him to the dirt. Wrestling *The Hound* from her hands.

Sweat mixes with the lines of Weirwood tears down her face. Red dripping from her in long rivulets.

Faster now. Harder. There are gasps and cries in the crowd as Benjen screams at her to keep it up. Her father panicking. Pacing back and forth along the railing. Robert has joined in with Benjen. Telling her to “Pound that Fucker into Jelly.” The smell of blood and sweat. Howland’s words echoing in her ear.

“Our Gods are quiet, but when they move-”

She wraps her legs around him and rolls. Twisting him beneath her. Punching him over and over again until her taped knuckles are bloody. He bolts upright. Knocking his face into hers. Cracking his forehead into her nose as he overtakes her again. But it takes him a second too long to regain his bearing. And she has one last knife.

“-They uproot everything”

Needle shunts out with a small noise. And slashes up...

Her jab slams into Rhaegar and he stumbles. Disoriented by the blow.

He collapses on top of her. And she rolls him under her. There’s shouting and screaming. Cersei and her party are running. Her ears ringing. Pain searing through her. Streaking out like a bolt from her side. She pushes her hand into the gash across his throat. Blood seeping into the tape on her hands.

The whistle is so loud. So loud in her ear as the Ref physically separates them. Pushing them apart. She’s panting. The crowd is blazing with chatter. And everything is so slow. She can’t focus. Her body heavy. Weary. It’s so hot. An unreal haze clouding her mind as the ref grabs her hand.

He lifts his hand to her face. And traces the line of her nose. And smiles…

The ref lifts hers and Rheagar’s hands in the air. And he calls it a draw…

And reality comes crashing down.

Rhaegar removes his helmet. A terse thin smile on his face as he pulls off his gear and extends his hand to shake. She licks her lips and tastes blood. And pulls off her own gloves, and finally the helmet.

The knot of her hair falling loose

As she screams for him. Tearing from her throat as his hand falls. Tears burning behind her eyes. A familiar grief opening a chasm in her heart. The weight of her duty crumpling her. The pain coursing through her with each deafening sob. The guilt staining her body. The anger welling up as she spies Cersei retreating.


“Ms. Stark…” he breathes in perfect proper Westerosi.
“Excellent Match, Your Grace.” She won. By all rights she won. But this ref won’t risk his life to say the Crown Prince lost. He leans in close.

“Did my wife put you up to this?”

“No yer’ grace. I jus’ had somethin’ t’ prove.”

She ducks through the ropes and Benjen catches her. Supporting all her weight as she practically collapses. Throwing his arms around her. Carrying her home. Her baby brother. Her brother.

He snatches her before she bolts after them. Jon’s arm circling around her waist as she roars at Cersei. His hand pressing into the wound on her side to control the bleeding.

“Arya…”

“I’M GOING TO KILL YOU CERSEI!” she screams at their retreating forms. “I’M GOING TO KILL YOU!” Daenerys kneels in front of her, ripping some fabric off her dress and handing it to Jon. “I SWEAR IT BY THE OLD GODS AND THE NEW. THE LAST THING YOU EVER SEE WILL BE MY FACE!”

“Stay with me Little Wolf…” Clegane says coming into her eye line as her vision blurs and darkens.

“I swear it by the old gods…”
THANK YOU JUSTWANDERING NEVER LOST FOR MY BEAUTIFUL BOARD! YOU ARE AN ARTIST AND I'M SO HAPPY!

Hey! I'm doing the Jonerys Charity Fic Auction!
Do you want smut? Dedicated to you! YES YOU! You with all your shameful kinks!

Shame. *bell* Shame. *bell* Shame. *bell*
Anyway, you should bid on me!


See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was a day like this the first time he lost her.

The grey skies out the window of the medical wing at Dragonstone, eerily familiar. Like the ones out the window of Commander Mormont’s office as he read the report from Kings Landing. His father’s trial. His guilty plea.

His execution.

The same blurring numbness. The same heavy weight as he read it over and over and over again while Commander Mormont watched him. Authoritative eyes searching him. Watching for any hint that he might break his enlistment oath.

“It doesn’t say anything about Arya…”

It describes the trial. Every person present. Details the evidence against his father. His acceptance of guilt. Transcribes Sansa’s plea for their father’s life. Begging her betrothed to spare his life and send him to the wall.

If only...

“Where’s Arya…” he pleads his commander. The old bear sighs and his tired eyes softened with sympathy. “Where’s Arya…?” he repeats. A question he already knows the answer to. An answer that tears him apart. His voice cracking and growing thick with desperation. “Why doesn’t it say anything about Arya…?”

Commander Mormont leans over his desk and grips his arm. The words calm and even. “If she was alive, they would have made a point to mention her. To show how merciful they are…” A knife punches into his heart. “They probably used her to force your father to confess…” Cold steel splitting open warm muscle. “...I’m sorry lad” Blood trickling down his chest.

It was the first time something inside him died.

But she’s not dead.

His little sister… Alive.

Her face pale from blood loss. Dark shading under her left eye. The right one swollen shut. A cut across her ashen lips that trails down to her chin. Bruising along her temple and jaw. But alive. His elbows sink into the thin mattress of the hospital bed. Intermittently squeezing and releasing his fist in steady pulses. Willing more of his blood to pass from the needle in his arm along the thin transparent tube to the needle in hers. A lifeline connecting them.

Gendry paces the room. His anxiety palatable in the air. Making the aged Essosi medic nervous.

“Will this even work!?” the young man shouts. Giving voice to Jon’s own unspoken fear. That his blood is not enough… “When will she wake up…?” The medic doesn’t speak much Westerosi. But
the tone of Gendry’s voice is universal. Fear.

The medic smiles and pulls another chair up to the bedside for the young man, before circling back around to Jon. Pointing between Arya and his hair. “Same” Their eyes “Same.” Their noses “Same.” He extends a hand to touch his bicep “Strong.” Then touches Arya’s arm. “Same.”

Simple words that swell his chest with a tender ache. Yes. She’s strong. She’s stronger than he is. She’ll survive. She’ll pull through. She always has… Gendry slumps into the chair across from him. His imposing stature deflating with impatience as they sit in silence.

The grey sky and grey sea of Dragonstone grow dark and thunder rattles in the distance as they wait. Eventually, the medic pulls the line from his arm. The dizziness and nausea that accompanies losing a few pints of blood threatening to overwhelm him.

“You should get some rest, Commander…”

“So should you…” swallowing some bile.

“I’m not leaving her again.” Gendry shakes his head. Leaning with his elbows on Arya’s bed. “I left her once... worst mistake of my life” The young man swallows. “… I’m not leaving her again…”

He nods slowly, understanding. So very heavy. So very numb. Leaning back in the chair, the weight of his limbs dragging him down. The stress and blood loss taking its toll.

When the nightmare comes this time, it's different. The landscape still muddy. The sky still grey. The smell of fresh rain and grass. The sound of not-enough men behind him. Davos and Sansa beside him. “He’s trying to bait you,” she says solemnly, keeping her voice even. “There’s nothing you can do… she’s already dead.”

And this time, when he looks across the field, Arya looks back. Her dark eyes, eyes that are so very much like his, blown open wide in fear. The bastard puts his hands on her shoulder… The. bastard. puts. his. hands. on. his. little. sister.

“Run to your brother…”

She starts to sprint. Calling his name in a voice that’s not quite hers.

“Jon…”

He runs toward her.

“Jon…”

She’s so close. He almost has her. A little bit closer. A little bit faster. He can stop it. He can tackle her and take the shot. He’s been shot before. He’s died before. Dying for her…

“Jon…”

...That’s easy.

“Jon…”

The gunshot echoes in his ear and he bolts awake.

Dany’s hand runs down the side of his face and he grabs it and presses it into his skin. His deep ragged breathes quickly becoming heavy heaving sobs. She sits on the edge of his seat, wrapping her other arm around him. Lips gently brushing against his forehead as she quietly shushes him.
“This is my fault. This is my fault. This is my fault…” he repeats the confession over and over again. Whispering it against her wrist, into her skin, as if she could absolve him of it.

“No.”

“I almost lost her. Almost lost you… For my stupid honor. Because I couldn’t…” he chokes and collapses forward into her. The words coming thick and wet. She holds him tight, crushing him against her. As if she’s proving she’s still here. “I almost lost both of you…”

She shakes her head above him.

“Listen to me, Jon… None of this is your fault.” Her voice low and deadly and laced with Dragonfire. “The only people to blame are Cersei and the Iron Bank.” A bright fire that drags him out of his darkness. Burning through him through their joined hands. “And we are going to make them pay.”

Lightning flashes. And a second later the thunder follows. The loud rumbling booms echoing her threat.

“Aye.”

They will regret the day they tried to take away what’s his.

She smiles and nods. Pressing a kiss into his hands. Then a small chaste one on his lips as she stands upright.

“I brought you something to eat.”

It’s an Essosi meal. It’s all they have at Dragonstone. A flatbread with spiced meat and veg all wrapped up inside of it. She leaves another next to Gendry where he’s curled himself up on the other bed in the Medical Bay. His oversized body hanging off the edge of it. Tormund’s flask on the floor next to him. Signs of another chair pulled up to the bed while he was sleeping. Clegane’s coat hanging off it.

“Thank you, Dany”

She nods and takes a seat at the edge of the bed, pressing the back of her hand to Arya’s forehead.

“No fever…” gently running her fingers through her hair as he takes a few bites. Her color has improved in the time he slept. She’s not quite as pale. Relief washing over him with the rain pouring in sheets outside.

“How goes it?”

“Slow…” she answers nodding her head to the storm outside. “It’s taking time to get all the equipment loaded onto our ships. Tyrion has reports of an explosion at the Red Keep, but he can’t verify it.”

His face crinkles up as he takes another bite. “An explosion?”

She shrugs. “All we have is chatter through the RAVEN. A good deal of Speculation. The keep is still intact though, that much we have confirmed. It appears to be isolated, although what was destroyed is another question altogether.”

“Suppose its too much to hope that it took care of Cersei for us.” That earns him a small smile, but it
quickly fades. Something anxious shading her face as her eyes flit toward the door. She licks her lips and takes a deep breath.

“Theon would like to see Arya…”

He doesn’t answer and she does not press. Only extends her hand for his and takes it. Tracing lines in his palm. A thousand words spoken in gentle caresses. Running her thumb across the scars of his knuckles.

Scars from the bastard’s teeth as he punched him into the blood-soaked dirt. He hurt Theon too. He raped Sansa, killed Rickon, and tortured Theon.

“I don’t want t’ forgive him”

“You don’t have to”

“I want to hate him. I should hate him” He looks up at her and she nods slowly. “Why don’t I hate him?”

“Because he’s your brother…” her quiet voice full of empathy. She knows how this feels. To be betrayed by a brother. To be hurt by someone who was supposed to stand at her side. By someone she was supposed to trust. She knows all too well.

He leans forward. Letting his head rest between the valley of her breasts. Her hand threading through his hair. Their comfortable familiar silence settling over them as he grapples with the truth. It's easy to hate him from a distance. Up close though...

Up close, all he can see is the man he grew up with. Who trained with him and Robb and their father for hours every day. Who was there when Rickon was born. Who helped him work on the ranch with his father. Who would get them in so much trouble… and then do his best to get he and Robb out of trouble. Namedays. Solstice Festivals. Feasts and Family Dinners.

“Alright…”

Pink lips curl into a soft smile and she leans in. Gracing him with a warm caress of those lips on his. Gently scratching through the coarse hair along his jaw. And the magnetic pull of her brings his arms around her waist. Allowing himself a quiet moment to absorb her peace and warmth. And she holds him too, clutching his head against her in a possessive embrace. Taking what she needs from him before she has to return to her duties. Taking one last kiss before she has to put her mask back on to face the world.

Arya’s chest rises and falls steadily. The medic comes and takes her vitals. Listen to her heartbeat. Opening her good eye and shining a light into it. A half dozen other things that he has never seen Sam do to his patients. Some Essosi practice or another.

“Where are you from?” The man smiles up at him as he cuts the wrap off Arya. The wound sealed with neat stitches.

“Meereen. Before Daenerys Free, I heal for Rizlaq zo Aan. After heal for Unsullied. Soldiers more work. But good work. More…” he taps his chest three times before bending back over Arya, cleaning up her wound with something that smells like chems.

“How do you like it here?”

The man bobs his head back and forth, never taking his eyes off his task as he re-wraps Arya.
Weaving an intricate pattern of bandages around her torso. “Cold. But...” he lifts his head up to the window. “Rain… No Rain in Meereen.”

His eyes flit to the doorway. Theon’s lanky form in lurking in the frame. Teeth bite into his tongue. Sharp pain against the flash of rage as the man who was once his brother shuffles into the room. The medic taking a final look over Arya before nodding his head and leaving.

Theon won’t look at him. Instead, his eyes linger over their little sister. Hesitantly, pulling out the chair and sitting at the edge.

“You grew up…” he chokes out “Stupid. Of course, you gr-grew up.”

Ten years…

“Its just whenever I thought of you, you were always still s-small. And now you’re a soldier. Like you always wanted t-to be...”

Ten fucking years.

“W-We thought you were dead. We thought they killed you with-with… We all thought you were dead.”

And for the first time in ten years, he really looks at the man who was once his brother.

“Our Father was more of a father t’ you than yours ever was.”

“He was.”

“And you betrayed him. Betrayed his memory. BETRAYED ROBB!” The last part comes out angrier than he wanted, and he realizes he’s standing. Towering over a cowering Theon. He takes a few short breaths and lands back in the chair. “How could you betray Robb?”

Theon pulls his hands down his face. Shame and despair hollowing his features. Gaunt splashes of purple and grey on his skin. Signs of starvation that will never fade. Scars that will never heal. He feels his own twinge, a cold and sharp pain in his chest that he presses his thumb against. Rubbing hard to push it away.

“You’ve always known what was right...Even when we were all young and stupid, you always knew. You always know the right thing to do…”

“I’ve done plenty wrong.” He growls out, and he can hear that dead thing inside him. Theon can too. But… the man who was once his brother has seen more monstrous things than a dead man.

“Not compared to me…”

“No…” the words slow and drawn out. “Not compared to you.” Theon flinches hearing the truth repeated back to him. But swallows hard and nods.

“I wanted t-to be good. To be like you and-and Robb. Do the right thing… Be the right kind of person. But it always felt like I was betraying something else inside me. Like I had to make this impossible choice. Stark or Greyjoy. And when I couldn’t be... When I couldn’t be a Stark… I…”

Tears fall freely from Theon’s face, his shoulders gently rolling with quiet sobs. Regret thick in the air.

“Please, Jon… Just let me die at home. I want to go home…” His sobs choking the plea. “Please let
me die at home…”

They can’t go back to that home. Theon burnt it down. Despite his best efforts to repair and rebuild, That home doesn’t exist anymore. That home with Catelyn singing to herself in the kitchen while she and Nan cooked. With Bran climbing out his window and jumping into the trees that push up against the house. With Rickon totting about with Shaggy. With Sansa and Jeyne giggling in a corner. With the three of them, Robb, Theon and him running drills while Father watched, and Arya did her best to keep up.

That home is gone.

“M’ not gonna kill you, Theon” he admits. To himself more than anyone.

“Its all my fault…” Theon whimpers. “I deserve it”

“We don’t always get what we deserve.” he leans back in the chair and searches his brother for a long minute. “You don’t need to choose. Father’s still with you. You didn’t lose him. ‘Else you wouldn’t be here. He’s apart of you. Just like he’s apart of me.”

“And everything I’ve done…”

Theon’s crimes make his guts twist. No matter how much of it was Ramsay manipulating him. He still did it.

“You let two boys die, Theon… I can’t-I can’t forgive you for all of it. It’s not my place. Not my right. But, for the things I can… I do.”

Theon lets out a shaky breath. Something heavy and formless becoming strong and solid inside him. An uneasy silence settles over them. Both of them warring with thousands of unspoken words. Biting their tongues against all the things that could be said.

“What happens now?”

“We go back home… And we figure out how to protect it…” Theon nods solemnly and stands. Brushing a small strand of hair out of Arya’s swollen eye.

“Yes, Ser.” he presses a fist into his sternum in a salute as he walks out the door.

“...I would’ve just killed him…” his little sister whispers in a hoarse voice.

He thought he was dreaming when she came home. Thought he’d slipped into one of his nightmares. One moment he was working with Tormund, repairing one of the structures in the FreeFolk camp. Someone called his name and he looked up.

And then his heart just… stopped.

Because she was there. There in front of him. His little sister who he thought was long dead. That very first part of him that died, given back to him. Her dark eyes that were so very much like his own staring back at him. And he ran to her. Fell to his knees in front of her as she crashed into him. Holding onto him tightly, and he held her back. His little sister, back from the dead as much as he was.

His heart almost stops again as a tremendous joy bursts in his chest.

“Still not sure if it was the right call” he answers back, half-laughing, half-crying in relief.
“It was the right call. You know it's the right call,” she reassures him, a weak smile flitting across her face. An annoyed groan following as she tries to shuffle herself into a more comfortable position. “Stupid bull…” she whispers eyeing Gendry as he helps her sit upright. Letting out another groan as she grips her side.

“I'll get the doc, he’ll have stuff for the pain…” She shakes her head, huffing a few deep breaths before settling into the pillows.

“Where are we?” She asks after he gets her something to drink.

“Dragonstone. We’re picking up the last bit of Dany’s supplies and re-grouping before we head back North.”

“Cersei…?” he shrugs.

“We left in a bit of hurry. They did too. There hasn’t been anything really out of the city.”

“And Jaquen…” The man. The faceless man who nearly took his girl and his sister from him. The Iron Bank tried to kill Dany. Cersei tried to kill Dany. And his little sister stopped them. “He’s dead?”

“Aye. He’s dead.” Tormund confirmed the kill, triple tapping the assassin while he and Clegane fought to stabilize her and get them out.

To his surprise, she gasps. And blinks. And sniffs. And rubs a tear from her eye before it can fall. Wincing at the pain of crying out of her black eye.

“I gave him a choice.” she chokes.

“You did”

“...I gave him a choice...” she repeats pinching her good eye shut against the tears and failing as they start to fall anyway. He shuffles onto the small bed, wrapping an arm around her shoulders as she twists to cry into his shoulder. Dark hair so very much like his trailing through his fingers as he does his best to comfort her.

“He was your teacher…” she nods against him, muscles tight as she fights through the pain her sobs cause. And he holds her tighter still. She did it for Dany. For him.

“When you were beyond the wall… You fought with the Wildlings”

“Aye,” he answers.

“And then you left them, and went back to the watch… because it was your duty.”

“Aye…” softer now.

“And when they attacked the wall, you fought them… because they left you no choice. Because it was your duty…” There are no words to give. So he only nods and presses a kiss into her hair.

“What did it feel like?”

It doesn’t hit until after the fight is done. Then it all comes down at once. A guilt that sits like a sickness in his stomach. A sickness he’s tried to retch out of him. A grief like a weight that he could only learn to carry.

“Like this... It feels like this” He rocks her against him as her tears soak into his shirt. Like he used to
when she was small. Like she’s just a little girl again, and not the most dangerous young woman in Westeros. Like he did on the day she was born. When he was only eight years old and he first understood what love was. Like he did when she came home, and he understood he could love again.

The room brightens up with a flash of lighting and a roll of thunder. Rain drumming heavy onto the roof. Streaming down the window pane in a flat sheet of water.

“I’m ready to go home now…” she whispers as she lets go of him.

“Me too”

It’s been almost two months. Time traveling down to fight. Time at Casterly Rock waiting for Cersei to respond. Time negotiating the Parley, which the mad queen dragged out for weeks. Time getting the Dothraki moved North. Time traveling discreetly through Lannister controlled territory to avoid a trap. It’s been amazing, seeing the country with Dany and Arya. But gods’ he’s ready to go home. Ready to see Sansa and the girls. Ghost. Davos. Ready to get back to preparing for the real war.

“Commander…” Beric knocks on the door. A smile splitting his face as he sees Arya “Glad to see you up, Little Wolf.” the smile fading as he turns back. “Sorry Ser, You’re needed. It's important.”

“Right” he stands and straightens himself. Pulling on his uniform jacket. “You gonna be alright?”

“Yes.” she reaches with a wince for a water cup and tosses it at Gendry. The splash of water waking him with a sputter and a start.

“Arya…”

“Stupid bull, you were supposed to be here when I woke up.” And as he closes the door he hears it. “...Just be glad I love your stupid face or else I’d thump you.” But Beric passes him Longclaw before he has a chance to think on it.

“What’s happened?” strapping the rifle across his back.

“A Lannister force is gathered on the mainland. They’ve sent a messenger.”

“How many?”

“Hard to say.” he gestures to the rain. “My guess, less than five hundred.”

The corridors of Dragonstone are large and cold and ancient. The massive fortress serving as first an airbase for the first Targaryens to arrive in Westeros. After the Doom destroyed the world for the first time. Where Aegon built Balerion. Where he planned the most successful military campaign in the history of the known world. And over three hundred years later, its back with its rightful owner.

These walls once held her armies, and now they are empty. Only a few hundred remain to hold the island against any incursion and keep an eye on the situation in the south. While all her remaining forces gather in the North.

That emptiness is amplified as he enters the grand-hall. Banners bearing the Three-headed Dragon of House Targaryen. A handful of Unsullied guard the walls. Tyrion and Theon stand at the base of some stairs. His men and Jorah flank the Deus, guns out and ready. And in the center of it all, Daenerys sits on a throne built into a massive block of stone fleck in obsidian. Looking very much like the queen he knows she is. She wears no crown, save her own silver hair.
Still, it shocks him. First, with how impressive and intimidating the whole display is. Second, by how easy it is for him to cross the length of the room, climb the small handful of steps and stand at her side.

“How is she?”

“Awake.” Dany smiles and brushes some lint off his uniform “Any word on what they want?”

“We will all find out together.” The massive doors open and Clegane marches in with the messenger.

Jaime Lannister. Dripping wet from the downpour outside.

“Commander Lannister, this is certainly a surprise…” Daenerys states dryly. Folding her hands in her lap.

“I imagine so, your grace,” he answers, walking to stand at the base of the stairs. Clegane remaining close behind.

“I believe your sister effectively ended negotiations when she ordered her lapdog to have me assassinated.”

“You are correct, your grace” Daenerys taps her fingertips together in a steady rhythm as she weighs the man in front of her.

“Why are you here?”

Jamie smirks and pulls off his coat with a flourish. The uniform jacket is old. Very old. The black woolen fabric washed out and faded to a dark grey. It was made for a much younger man. Only the middle two buttons are buttoned and even they are strained. The sleeves too short. The shoulders bunching awkwardly. The three-headed dragon on House Targaryen emblazoned above his breast pocket.

Jaime presses a salute into his sternum and then sinks to one knee, laying his gun on the floor.

“Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen. I, Commander Jaime Lannister of the United Armed forces of Westeros, pledge my allegiance to you. I offer myself, and whatever men will follow me to your cause. I vow to shield your back, keep your counsel, and give my life for yours if need be. I swear it by the old gods and the new.”

Tyrion looks up at the Throne, with a large grin on his face. But it fades as he realizes he’s the only one smiling. Daenerys raises an eyebrow but remains silent. He folds his arms behind his back and with a nod, his men all bring their guns round front. At the noise, Jamie raises his head, apprehension in his eyes.

“Your grace…” Tyrion protests and Daenerys holds up a hand to silence him.

“You’ve sworn such oaths before…” Jamie winces, but recovers.

“Yes… I have your grace.”

“To how many kings?”

“Four, your grace.” comes the hesitant answer.

“And how many of those kings remain alive?” Jaime swallows, the prominent swell in his throat bobbing.
“None.”

“None,” Daenerys repeats. “One killed by your hand, another by your sister’s machinations. A third by your incompetence. A fourth by your apathy. My father, the Usurper, and your sons…” she stands then, slowly walking down the steps. He shoots a look down to Clegane, who puts a hand on his gun’s grip. “And now you forsake another one of your kin. Your sister. Your twin. Your…” she doesn’t finish the thought. Letting the unspoken ‘lover’ permeate the room. “What good is your oath, Jamie Lannister?”

She stands in front of the kneeling man. Her silver hair hanging to her waist in a woven tail of braids. Her long coat with its upturned shoulders making her slight frame terrifying and regal. Her fingers intertwined and hanging low on her stomach.

From his vantage point next to Dany’s throne, he can’t see the Kingslayer. But Tyrion stiffens, not daring to breathe as he waits for his brother’s answer. Jorah shifts. Theon tosses him a nervous look. He ignores it. Keeping his eyes on Clegane, watching for any sudden movements.

“I was a green boy when I killed your father.” Jaime starts, his voice thin. “I hadn’t yet reached twentieth name day... He had destroyed most of Westeros, and he was going to destroy the City as well. So I killed him, for the city, for my country. It made every other oath I swore worthless. But, I’d do it again… A hundred times over. And that’s why I’m here, breaking another oath, for the good of my country.”

She doesn’t answer. Only stares for a long moment, before looking over her shoulder at him. Her violet eyes somber with an unspoken question. If Arya were here… she’d be able to tell if he was lying. He draws a small breath and licks his lips. There’s no trusting a Lannister. Even Tyrion with his plans and designs and schemes. A Lannister always has an angle to play.

And yet…

Dany finds the answer in his eyes and turns back to Lannister.

“I accept your allegiance, Jaime Lannister. I vow to uphold the rights of you and your men as free men of Westeros and to ask no service that would bring they or you dishonor. I swear it by the old gods and the new. Arise.” As he stands, she holds up a finger, forcing him to pause in an awkward half-crouch. “Betray me… and I will burn you alive.”

Davos told him about the Painted Table. This exact scale model of Westeros. But seeing it is another story. A map of the world as seen from the air. What did those old Westeros think when they first saw Dragons flying overhead? Were they terrified? Awed? Did they believe their own eyes when they saw a machine defy gravity?

His hands roll around a small wolf figurine. The fresh coat of white paint threatening a smile from him while they listen to Jamie detail everything he knows of their enemy’s position. Small lions scattered across the southern end of Westeros. The majority of Cersei’s forces focused on blockading and imprisoning Dorne and the Reach. Squeezing the territories as punishment for their treason. The remaining armies locking down the Crownlands. Only a few sparse contingents throughout the Westerlands and the Riverlands.

“It’s not sustainable strategy…” he muses.

“Cersei’s viciousness more than makes up for any tactical weakness. I was able to destroy Qyburn’s lab to prevent them from Weaponizing the Undead. But I fear-”

The room freezes, horror frozen on the faces of everyone in the room.

“When I left, they were considering spreading the plague through the Riverlands so that when you begin your advance South—”

“Are they mad!!?” Tormund shouts.

“There’s no way they could contain it.” offers Jorah “It would kill just as many of their men as ours.”

“You destroyed his lab?” Tyrion asks his brother.

“That won’t stop him. You saw what that man can do.” Clegane barks “You saw he did to my brother. We need to kill him.”

“Well, the ideal person to do that is recovering from being stabbed in her spleen,” Beric adds, unhelpfully.

“Could it even spread like that…?” the dwarf turns to him and he shrugs.

“Get enough dead anywhere and it’ll spread,” he answers. “At this point, Qyburn probably understands how they work more than we do.” Dany plants her hands on the table and stares at King’s Landing.

“How long do you think it will take for him to rebuild and replicate his previous experiments?”

Jaime lets out a heavy breath and sighs. “I blew up his laboratory which had all his equipment. He’ll need to have it either remade or requisitioned from the University at Oldtown, which will take time. Whether or not he has enough material left to recreate it is another question.”

Daenerys clucks her tongue. “We’re entrenched up North. That’s where the fight is. If we can’t defeat the dead there… we won’t be able to defeat them anywhere. Tyrion get Varys to work with his birds in Oldtown and Kings Landing. I want to know if they get anywhere close to succeeding.” she sighs and dismisses the room “Tyrion, please assist your brother in preparing a statement for broadcast. We need as many men as we can get. Everyone else should resume preparations for the Journey North. Now that Miss Stark has stabilized I’d like to leave before the storm escalates”

He circles the table to her as the others leave. Rubbing her shoulders and kissing her forehead.

“Will you take care of getting Jaime’s men in order?” she pouts bringing his hands down to intertwine their fingers. “I think they will respond better to another soldier rather than another queen”

“Aye, love. I’ll take care of it.” Leaning in close to her.

“Your Grace…” Tyrion interrupts before he can give her a proper kiss. “My brother would like a word in private.” She lets out a groan and thumps her forehead against his sternum.

“Fine” she sighs, slowly lifting her head. A slow playful smile. “You better get to work, Jon Snow” Popping up onto her tiptoes to steal one before spinning and following Tyrion. Leaving him stunned and grinning like an idiot.

He doesn’t see her for the rest of the day. But with the addition of the troops that defected, the work moves quicker. Clearing out the last bits of munitions and supplies left over from Stannis. Listening to the broadcast Jamie and Tyrion prepared to recruit additional troops for the fight. Radioing Sansa to let them know they are finally returning home. Leaving instructions for the Unsullied remaining behind to maintain this position. Making sure Arya is alright in the Blackwinds medical bay.
Only catches a glimpse of her boarding the ship before he’s swept away. Needing to break up a fight between the IronBorn and some Lannister soldiers from the Redwyne. Stupid cunts. But when he does finally find her, that playful smile is gone. Replaced something sad and despondent as she sits on the bed in the Captain’s Cabin. Absently brushing her hair, and staring out the small porthole window at Dragonstone.

“I’m sorry, we didn’t get to stay longer.” he drops his pack on the floor and strips off his uniform jacket. She shrugs as he sits and starts to unlace his boots.

“We’ll see it again soon.”

It’s not fair that they are returning to his home, but they barely spent two days at hers. He looks out over the massive fortress. A sight to behold. No doubt strong enough to withstand a blast of Wildfire. A true base in all the ways Winterfell has never been.

“Aye. You need to show me that Bathhouse you were braggin’ about’ he answers, hoping she’ll crack a smile at him. But she doesn’t. Only turns to him, violet eyes brimming with tears and an expression that breaks his heart. “What’s wrong love…?” She sniffs, shaking her head and biting her lip. He kicks off the boot and crawls onto the bed. Pulling her to him “Please tell me, Dany.” Her tears hot on his neck as they fall in thick drops. Hand circling her back in slow circles, trying to coax her into telling him.

“Cersei is pregnant.” the words shake with small hiccups as she burrows her head further into his shoulder. “That bitch can have babies and I can’t…”

“No, Dany. You don’t know that…” threading his fingers into her hair and squeezing her against him. “That witch was lying. She was trying to hurt you…” The waves beneath gently rocking them back and forth and as he tries to soothe her. “For all we know you could already be… you haven’t had your…” he swallows hard. “All I’m sayin’ is we’ve been goin’ at it for a bit and I don’t know much, but I know that and… I can keep time…”

She snorts out a small laugh as he stumbles over the intricacies of ladies cycles. Lifting her head and wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. He cups her face and drags his thumb across to wipe away the stray ones. Pupils slowing going wide as the thumb trails down to brush along her lips.

“Prove her wrong…” she whispers. Her voice low and husky. "Prove her wrong, Jon."

Chapter End Notes

What's that? On the Horizon!? Is it...? Could it be?

BOATSEX

Sweet Sweet Boatsex.
Hold Me - The Sweeplings
https://goo.gl/wvpBJD

So this is all smut. But like super specifically Baby-Making Smut. Just a heads up, if that
makes you like uncomfortable.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Prove her wrong…” she whispers. Her voice low and husky. "Prove her wrong, Jon."

She whispers the words as though they are a prayer. Desperate words spoken from a desolate place inside her. From a wound in her womb that has never quite healed. From the scars from a son she never held. From a long acceptance that her body was broken. Barren.

Yet she whispers it. A prayer to all those gods she doesn’t believe in.

All those gods, save one.

He stares at her. Those deep dark eyes full of a million emotions she couldn’t begin to name. The calloused hand cupping her face pauses and she nuzzles against it. An ache for intimacy, as urgent and essential as breathing, tearing open her soul for him to see.

And he does see. He always sees.

He sees his Dany. Her heart fractured by false facts. By a vicious lie spat when she was at her most vulnerable. When she should’ve been protected. Sheltered. Loved. And instead was left alone.

Never again.

Strong arms draw her tighter against him in a wordless promise. And she presses that silent prayer against his lips until they answer with his own.

Her kisses widen as the ache spreads through her. The craving for connection, a tangible burning in her palms. A slow stinging fire that can only be sated by sliding them across his skin. Under his shirt, along his ribs, and across his back. His circling arms tug at her in response, bringing her to sit on his lap. Her legs tangling around his waist. Her mouth capturing his over and over again as that prayerful plea becomes a demand.

He’ll always give her what she wants.

The small straps of her nightgown slip down her slender shoulders. Silk pooling at her elbows. Dusky pink poking above the loose neckline. Inviting him to break away from her soft lips to give each one a soft nip.

The little love bites jolting all those nerves to life in time to feel his mouth enclose around one. Tongue laaving roughly, swirling around and around. Hand kneading, pinching and swiping a calloused thumb across the opposite. Sucking deeply before releasing with a loud wet pop and turning his focus to the other.

She has to lean back to absorb his attentions, gathering his shirt in her fist for balance. The long pulls making her dig her teeth into her bottom lip. Holding back a delighted squeal that breaks through regardless of her efforts.

At the sound, he smiles against her skin and opens his eyes. Something boyish and playful flashing as he takes each breast in a hand. Testing and squeezing one then the other. Soft flesh molding around the shape of him. Warm weight in his palms. That pink flushed to a deep rose. His brow furrowed in concentration as he studies them.
“Is something wrong?”

“Just deciding which one’s my favorite.”

“Oh Gods…” giggling and grabbing his left wrist, jostling the breast it’s holding. “This one, obviously.”

“Obviously?” he brings it back to his mouth, wetting it with a quick lash of his tongue before blowing out a thin stream of cool air. Watching the peak pucker and tighten.

“Yes,” she shivers as he does the same to the other “It’s the bigger one.”

“That so, love?” He takes it between two fingers and pinches down slowly.

“Yes…” The pressure easing into something sharp. Eliciting a narrow gasp from her. Pain twisting into pleasure as it courses down to her core.

“Aye. Perhaps…” Stroking softly with the pad of his thumb as he releases it.

The rough fabric of his pants scrapes against her bare ass as she shuffles atop him. Pulling the neck of his shirt down to nip and suck at the base of his throat. Her own nightdress a puddle of silk around her waist. His growl vibrating beneath her lips as her hands seek the buckle of his belt.

Her fumbling hands brush against his cock, straining in the confined space. And his find the globes of her ass as he pulls her closer to him. The musical tinkling of his buckle harmonizing with her silvery squeaks when he pinches them.

Crashing into her lips. Rocking from side to side to inch the clothing over his hips without letting go of her. Peeling the shirt over his head, catching briefly on the knot of hair at the base of his skull. Tugging both free while his fingers slide between her folds. Circling her with a practiced familiarity. Melting into the miasma of his manipulation. Head resting against his shoulder as her arousal blooms and spreads.

Whiskers rasping her face with his whispers of encouragement as she lets out her soft cries.

“Yea, Dany. That’s it, love…”

Her fingers sink into the hardened muscle of his back. Nails biting into his skin, as he slides his into her. Those small half-moon marks of her pleasure cutting into his heart more deeply than the half-moon on his chest. The warm haven eagerly accepting his invasion. Massaging her with the pad of his thumb. That beautiful distressed whine resonating in the hollow of his throat as he explores the textures of her. Her lashes fluttering against his cheeks. Hips rocking forward onto his hand with quick jerks when he finds that spongey patch of tissue and crooks to rub against it.

“That’s it…”

Teeth grazing across his skin as her mouth ‘O’s and her body quakes and trembles. Locking down around his fingers before going slack and limp.

They’re so close. So overwhelmingly, overpoweringly close. The light scent of her hair. The taste of his sweat. The quiet sound of their breath. All of her skin pressing into all of his. The weight of his cock insistent against her. The heat of her cunt radiating in the space between them.

Their kisses a constant tide, flowing back and forth, from him to her and back again. His hands sliding around her hips to scoop her backside, bringing her onto him. Joining them together as one.
Kneading her cheeks as they sway together, falling into each other.


And their whispers and groans join in the chorus. Arms and legs tangled around each other in a slow, close grind. In a steady rise and fall. In a patient push and pull. In a gentle swelling, cresting, and breaking with the waves that carry them home.

Her eyes open and he’s staring at her. A soft smile on his soft lips. The small shallow rocks into her core, nestling him intimately within her. Dark pools, nearly black with an infinity she could fall into forever and always. Infinitely full of a promise and hope that she has never dared to believe could come true.

And as soon as she dares to believe, a witch laughs in her mind.

Suddenly the infinity of his eyes is too much to bear. The loving gaze stripping her away. Leaving her vulnerable and bare. Succumbing to the urge to hide from him. Tucking herself into his shoulder so he doesn’t see. Doubt and grief crippling her.

All those years she laid with Daario. All those weak moments alone in her bed when she would beg all those gods she doesn’t believe in. As if they would listen now. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid

As if they could just will a curse to be broken. As if they could will her erratic moonblood to become predictable and regular. As if they could just will away three hundred years of inbreeding. As if they could will a child into the world. A baby with his dark curls, and pouty lips.

“Stop that,” he whispers. “Don’t listen to her” Stilling and lifting her head. “Stay here with me…” Kissing her softly, then urgently. “It’s just you and me.” Rolling onto his back. Keeping her seated atop him, keeping him seated within her. “Just you and me.” bringing her hands to plant on the flat of his chest. The rough texture of the scars beneath her palms a clear reminder that he has already done the impossible. “Just you and me”

“Just you and me.” She repeats. Reclaiming the power she took all those years ago. When she stopped being a slave. Mounting him. Riding him. His fingers clutching her as she begins to cant over him. Each dip of her hips, each swallowing sink, strengthens her resolve. “Just you and me.” That vicious lie that she had allowed to define her, to become apart of her identity collapsing as her pleasure builds. Tears pricking her eyes as the carefully constructed walls crumble. Something new building in its place.

“You and me” Rocking back and forth as he rises to meet her. His thumb circling her clit as she grinds down onto him. Hands bracing against his impossible chest. Needing him to anchor her as the tender ache in her soul becomes a tender ache in her body.

Heat blooming out from where they are joined. Ecstasy expanding to reinforce and strengthen her. Sparking through her muscles, making them twitch and spasm. Need, voracious and hungry, driving her forward. Her body humming. Like Drogon sits between her legs ready to take flight. Blood roaring with a thousand engines stampeding behind her. Mountains quaking and blowing as she convulses. Contracting around the hard solid mass of him. Becoming more than she ever has been. Sated and powerful.
Bending over him, wrapping her arms under and around his shoulders, hooking her legs beneath his, using the purchase to ride and conquer and claim what is hers.

What is theirs.

His Dany. All sharp and soft wrapped up in one. Determined and fierce. Her nostrils flaring as she rides through her own release. Taking him over and over again.

Bucking up into her. Hands bruising her hips with his grip as he lifts and scoots and rocks her on his cock. Her tight walls milking him, ratcheting him higher. Rising to meet her. Her gasping moans becoming short and stilted as her pace flickers and waivers. Her body sprawling and spreading. Chasing after her. Following her to the brink and then yielding.

His eyes rolling up into his head. Pouty lips parting to heave out a low loud wail. Silencing it by taking his mouth. Arms seizing around her waist. Dragging her down onto him. Shuddering and shaking as warmth floods her. She rocks into his release. Wrangling every drop from him until his hold on her slackens. An easy smile stretching across his face.

“Oh fuck, Dany”

She laughs, sliding off of him carefully. Crossing her legs tightly in a somewhat futile effort as he untangles their clothes from the bed linens. Seed dripping down her thighs. Watching him as he pads across the small room. Properly folding his uniform so it doesn’t get any more wrinkled. The corners of her mouth lift as he winks at her before ducking into the compact privy.

The narrow space is made smaller by the stack of her trunks from Dragonstone in the corner. Personal effects that she’s bringing North. His pack leaned up against them. The small smile spreading wider at the thought of their belongings mingling together. Not his things or her things. Their things. Their family.

Her hands drift low on her belly. Tracing the contours of its shape. Acquainting herself with her new body. No. Not new. The same body she’s always had. The same body that was never broken. Never cursed. Just hurt. Just healing.

Grief takes time.

She owes Missandei an apology. For all the times she didn’t listen when her friend offered advice or wisdom, herbal concoctions, or sought out discrete healers on her behalf. All of which she had refused, lest she have to face that unbearable grief once again.

“Dany…?” the privy door opens and he leans in the small doorway. The muscles of his body shifting to maintain balance as the Blackwind rocks gently beneath his feet. A queer expression on his face and an arm tucked behind his back.

“Hmmm”

“Is this yours?” Revealing a large purple… phallus. A false rubber cock. Her eyes go wide in shock before she bursts into a peal of laughter. He grins. “I won’t judge if it is… Although it does make me feel a bit-” giving the obscene length a lewd wiggle. “-inadequate.”

“It’s Yara’s.” wheezing the words as she shakes her head and struggles to catch her breath. Laughing so hard, tears run down her face. His grin immediately turns into a cringe as he tosses it back into the tiny shower in the closet-sized privy. It’s weight crashing heavily in the door.

She’s still giggling as he crawls back into bed beside her.
“I miss her company. She’s so funny. You would like her.”

“We’ll get her back,” he reassures her.

“Did you know she offered to marry me when we first met?” He raises an eyebrow. “What?...”

tongue darting out and shaking his head. “What?”

“I mean… did y’ consider it?”

“For a moment” she shrugs. Eyes flicking down along his body. “But she didn’t quite have what I was looking for…”

The kisses start slow. Her lips pressing chastely against his before opening to slip her tongue inside. Stroking it against his before widening the kiss to let him take her. That noise. His favorite noise humming out of her nose as he pulls her head back to claim her. Palming her breast. Pinching and playing until she squeals and squirms in his grip.

“Jon…”

“Roll over for me, love,” he whispers. His voice husky and thick as he breaks from the kiss. Cock renewed against her hip. She takes it in hand. The soft skin sliding against her palm as she pumps the length in slow even strokes.

“Are you sure you’re up to it?” her teasing smile a welcome relief from the earlier sorrow. The playful tone easing the burden of her grief on his heart. “You could go get Yara’s friend…”

“Aye, Dany.” a faint laugh in his voice, masked through a veil of pleasure. “M’sure” rocking his hips up into her fist to demonstrate. Her firm grip tight around the base. Making the tip throb red as her lips.

“Hmmm…” pouting “I’m not convinced.” giving him a long kiss before pulling away to nip at his neck. His hisses of pleasure matching the tempo of her hand. Pressing her lips against his heart, repeating that whispered prayer against the half-moon in his chest. Then slithering down in a long lick through the planes of his abdomen. Kissing along that trail of coarse dark hair that leads to her ultimate goal.

“Oh gods…” as she takes him lazily in her mouth. Lounging on her side. Draped over him. Gentle suction and loving licks fluttering along the flared head. “Oh fuck. Oh, Dany. Oh, fuck.” as she bobs up and down. Lips meeting her fist. Saliva saturating his skin, making her short movements slippery and smooth. Wetting the already wet thatch of hair dusting his groin. The smell of her own cum filling her nostrils. The faint taste of herself on his cock. “Oh Fuck.” his hand gathering her hair as she increases the pace and depth.

Spit slick hand reaching down to cup and caress his stones. Already full of more seed to fill her with. Heavy with potential. Lips capturing swaths of loose skin. Sucking and releasing with loud wet pops.

Opening her mouth wide and letting him press against the back of her throat. Fighting the urge to gag as his back bows off the bed and that hand in her hair tightens and holds her there. Tears pricking her eyes as she forces herself further before backing off with a gasp.

“Oh please, Dany. Please.” A long loud groan echoes through the room as she does it again. His cock sliding into her throat. Triumph surging through her even as an unwilling tear streaks down her face. Breath coming in heavy streams through her nose as he rolls his hips up. Curses and praises and unintelligible noises all mixed up with her name spilling from his lips.
Oh, it feels so good. Her throat holding him in a tight wet embrace. Ecstasy shuddering through him
with each plunge. His stones rolling around in her hand. Gently squeezing as if churning the seed
inside. Fuck. He’ll fuck a dozen babies into her if she just keeps…

“Fuck. Fuck! Dany. Stop. Stop!”

He pulls her off him in time. Barely. His fist gripping in a tight ring, holding back his release. His
lungs pulling in gulps of air as sweat drips down the back of his neck. Dany resting her head on his
stomach. A barely contained, self-satisfied smirk lurking behind the tear tracks staining her cheeks.
Lips swollen from stretching around him. Glossy with saliva and red as sin.

The hand in her hair grips and drags her up to meet him. His tongue invading her mouth the same
way his cock had not moments earlier. Insistent, devouring kisses that leave her just as a breathless.
Hair tangling around his hand as he pulls her head back to expose the line of her throat. Dragging his
tongue in a long wolfish lick up to her ear.

“Roll over, love,” he growls into the shell of it. A soft kiss followed by a sharp nip.

This time it's not a request.

Hesitantly, she shifts onto her hands and knees. Her violet eyes wide and watching him. Watching
him like he’s a predator. Smoothing calloused hands over her body as he crawls behind her. Up the
backs of her thighs. Circling the globes of her ass. Along the sides of her ribs. Stretching over her,
kissing up her backbone to her neck. Whispering his love into her ear, and proving it for the
thousandth time by reaching for one of the pillows haphazardly tossed at the head of the bed.

She wedges it beneath her breasts as his hands slide under her. Lingering there for a long moment as
his palm draws a smooth spiral along the flat her stomach. Her own reaching beneath her to connect
with his. Intimately brushing their fingers along the expanse of skin where their child would grow.

Imagining. Hoping.

Praying to all the gods she doesn’t believe in as he slides inside her. Filling her slowly till his hips
press into the flesh of her backside. Then shuffling behind her to inch even deeper. The familiar
shape of him stretching her walls. The familiar rhythm building inside. The familiar warmth and heat
pooling in her groin as his hands slides from hers to circle her clit.

She clings to him with every thrust. Taut flushed petals hug his cock, pulling him back into her with
each withdrawal. Her body claiming him as hers, urging him back inside in a primal display of
ownership.

Her cheeks bouncing back onto him with the momentum of his hips. Using the plump curves to
bring her back down on him harder. Hands grabbing and clawing into them. Thumbs pulling apart
the dark crevice to glimpse the puckered skin and a better view of himself disappearing into her cunt.

Holding herself up for his inspection. Folding herself deeper and spreading her legs wider. His cock
burrowing into her. Stones full and heavy, slapping against her vulva. Spikes of contact against her
clit, counterpointing the blunt strikes inside her.

“Oh, That’s it, love. Keep it up for me. Let me in. Let me in deep.”

She does. Vulnerable and open and raw. Reaching back for his hand. Offering all of herself to him.
All her trust. All her hopes for their future. And he takes it, strong hands clasping hers as she
stretches the other back as well. Adjusting their grips so they lock around each other's wrists. A firm
bond that won’t be easily broken. He has her. Stable and strong and steady.
And pulling her back on to him with a sharp tug. Making her keen and peal with a sudden deep penetration. Feeling weightless in this suspended hold, bouncing with each tug and pull onto him. Giddy, shaky moans spilling from her lips. His own cries resonating with hers. Echoing throughout the cabin. Perhaps, throughout the ship.

But her world has shrunk down. Shrunken down to the man behind her, the bed around her, the life she hopes will bloom within her. The deep bruising strikes against the mouth of her womb. The bed linens rubbing her nipples raw as her breasts swing with each joining. Not yet heavy, but soon. Soon gods-willing.

“Fuck me, Jon.” She urges. Her voice hoarse and breathless. Pulling up onto one knee. Bringing it over her hip.

“Harder” Lunging into her with short bursting strokes.


“Dany…” his grip on her wrists becomes tighter. Her cunt straining under the assault. His pace quickening. Quickening like she wills her womb would. Relishing the relentless rending. Spearing her with sharp stuttering thrusts splitting her open. The sweet agony coiling impossibly tight until she’s shrieking and begging. Until he snarls and howls. Babbling nonsense and filth in three languages until they come apart.

Collapsing forward. Crashing down into the bed together. Fracturing and filling her. Cock thick and throbbing. Planting himself deep inside her.

Absorbing him. His seed. His sounds. His sweat. His weight on top of her. His heavy male scent and heaving pants. Feeling him melt over her, into her. Wanting nothing more than to stay here. With his nose nuzzling into her neck. Buried beneath him, buried inside her.

But he does move. Eventually…

Slipping out of her as he softens. Pushing himself off her only to clumsily fall next to her. Dany snorting with laughter at his fumbling. The musical noise splitting a smile across his face as he rights himself and drapes an arm around her.

“Do you need anything, love?”

“Just you…” tucking herself against him. Easing into his hold, into her place on his chest. That crook below his shoulder that has been her pillow since that very first night. The spot where she can hear his heartbeat and watch his chest rise and fall. The lazy shapes he traces on her back lulling her to sleep.

Sleep doesn’t come easy for him. And when it comes it doesn’t stay long. After a few hours, the constant sound of the water rushing past the thin metal hull of the ship sees him awake and already on edge. That and the million thoughts racing through his head. It is one thing to leave things up to chance. To throw caution the wind and say ‘if the gods will it. It’ll happen.’ It is another thing to actively pursue a child.

Winter is Coming. And this is wartime. Selfish and Stupid. His own promises haunt him. Not just his enlistment oath. But the one he made himself. That he wouldn’t father another bastard named Snow.
The moon breaks through from some clouds and fills the small porthole window with light. They have two long wars to fight. Wars she’ll fight by his side. Not just leading alongside him. But riding at the head of a Dothraki Horde. He swallows a lump in his throat as the worst possible scenarios flash through his mind.

“I can feel you brooding in my dreams....”

He glances down to find her violet eyes staring up at him. A soft smile banishing his doubts. Brave and strong and fiercer than any foe he can imagine. Even if he falls before they can marry, their child would never a bastard. She wouldn’t allow such a thing.

“Go back to sleep, love.” he brushes her hair out of her eyes. Silver locks tangled from sweat and sleep.

“You first” She shakes her head and stretches under his arm. One perfect tit popping out from under the covers. A bright smile flashing wickedly as she catches him looking. “HA! I knew this one was your favorite.”

He can’t help but laugh. The chuckle rumbling through his chest. “Aye. But not cause its bigger than the other…” she raises an eyebrow and licks her lips, waiting for an answer to her unasked question. “Its the easiest one for me to grab, when you’re all snuggled up like this.” her eyes soften. “I like you like this…” he admits quietly. All those worst possible outcomes rising back up. Visions of her in a pool of red. In the snow. In the dragon pit. In the mud. In his arms. Small and slender or swollen with child.

Her fingers trace the veins of his arm. The light touches easing the grief of imagined things.

“I was thinking-“ she starts, her voice tender and cautious. “-About Gilly and Sam, and their baby.”

“Aye…” not sure where she’s going. Her breath hitching anxiously.

“I know its probably bad luck to talk about it. All things considering… But if… if everything works out and… and-” blowing out a stabilizing breath. “If we are blessed, and everything works out... and if its a boy. I was thinking we could name him Robb.”

His muscles freeze beneath her. Locking up. She tilts up to look at him. His mouth barely open. Those deep dark eyes, unreadable depths, welling with emotion.

“I just thought, that there’d be another Robb and Jon running around Winterf.”

She doesn’t get to finish the thought as he pulls her to him with a crushing force. Kissing her hard. With such ferocity and intensity that it leaves no room for doubt. Rolling her beneath him in a whirlwind of movement. His knees pushing her thighs apart. Hovering above her.

“I love you.” Kissing her again. “Oh, I fucking love you.” and again and again. Not giving her a second to respond or catch her breath or even properly kiss him back. Laying back to receive what he’ll give her. Grinding against her. Testing her readiness before burying himself in her.

Her sore sheath stretched full of him. His dark eyes shine down at her, full of a love that is constant and confident and complete. Their bodies fitted together. The broken parts of themselves lining up to create something whole. Luminous warmth, bright and glowing, radiating through her. From her core, from her heart.

Fuck, he loves her. This woman whose stormed into his life demanding everything. This woman has given it all back a thousand times over. Hope. No. Not just hope, a fighting chance that they’ll
survive the wars to come. Not just survive, but thrive. That they’ll live lives worth living. All those things he’d never thought he’d have. All those things he didn’t believe he deserved. He wants them. Wants them with her and no-one else. This Valyrian princess with sharp edges and soft curves. A girl and a goddess all wrapped up in one. Full of contradictions he wants to spend his life unraveling. He fucking loves her.

He says it over and over again into her mouth, against her lips, her jaw. Her neck. Whatever stretch of skin he can reach. Burying it into her with each thrust. Her arms and legs snaked around him. Grabbing the back of her knees and pushing back so she opens even wider for him. Burrowing inside her warm depths.

*What's honor compared to a woman's love?*

She loves him. This impossible man. So stubborn that not even death could defy him. Unyielding in his honesty. Brave beyond belief. Arms strong enough to fight their enemies, or comfort a crying child. This man who has given her a love she never knew she needed. Who has given her the home she’s longed for. Who lets her be both a woman and a queen. Whose stoic exterior hides hidden depths that she’ll spend her life exploring. She loves him.

She tells him. Over and over again, holding his gaze. Holding him in her arms. Holding him inside her. Bearing down around him. Curling her back to raise her hips up to him. Reaching around to his backside and pulling him deeper. Taking everything he’ll give her. Opening herself for him. Letting him fill whatever hollow space remains within her.

*Or the feel of a newborn son in your arms?*

His body grinding against her core. Against her clit. Climbing towards rapture with each rush of his hips. With each brush of his lips. With each lush noise coming from where they are joined. And his eyes, black as ink and full of promise. Velvet walls drawing tight around him. Her hands clawing into him. Urging him. Encouraging him. Her eyes open, pupils wide, violet rings sparkling. Lips parting with a soft sound. Erupting and flooding her with a violent wail. Cleaving to her as he empties inside her. Rocking together, as he pulses into her.

Her body clenching in response. Contracting hard. Womb seizing and shuddering as the waves of pleasure roll through her. Drinking his seed as he groans and shudders and softens. His movements heavy and imprecise as he begins to lift off of her.

“Stay…”

“M’ not goin’ anywhere.” settling back down into her embrace.

*Or the memory of a brother’s smile?*

The cool early morning air is a welcome respite from the sticky warmth of the cabin. Sex and sweat hanging in the air. Suffocating them in the small room. But out here, the fog is so thick, she can hardly make out the shapes of the black cliffs off the Vale’s coast. It’s cold, but she can barely feel it. The fur lining of his coat blocking out the worst of it as they lean against the railing at the prow. Watching the Blackwind cut through the waves. The sea foaming and frothing beneath them.

“I used to want to be a sailor…” she admits.

“That so?” Nodding and giving a slight hmmm.

“I love the sea. I love the way it smells.”
“Aye. I could get used t’ it…” he smiles and draws her closer.

But his smile fades as he gently brushes something off her face. And it starts, a first flake catching the fur of his coat. And then another catching in his dark tangled curls. And then another falling between them. And soon snow covers the deck, flecking the dark metal in white.


But through it all, a bright light glints in the east. A diamond white gleam peeking through the fog. Cutting through the darkness. He presses a kiss into her hair.

And they wait for the dawn.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks you to JustWanderingNeverlost for the Moodboard! Its sooo pretty.
Interlude: Relay and Repeat

Chapter Summary

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the Fire - Willyecho
https://goo.gl/wvpBJD
“This is Commander Jaime Lannister of the United Armed forces of Westeros… and this message is sedition.”

He listens and waits.

Waiting for what the gods would have him hear. Perhaps they will show him something. Perhaps it will be another day listening to empty air. Perhaps the gods have little to do with it.

But yet he listens and waits beneath the Weirwood tree. His eyes rolled up in his heads, opening his mind. The mass in his brain, the thing that’s slowly killing him, hums with the empty static of the RAVEN.

A signal is never truly lost. It’s waveform bouncing endlessly through the layers of atmosphere, and off the ancient Valyrian tech hobbling in orbit around the planet.

Thousands of messages, spanning thousands of years. A blend of noise. Some decayed and weak and old. Others fresh and new and crisp. Some spoken across vast distances. Others only series of dots and dashes that he needs to jot down in order to understand.

If he focuses, he can pull at a thread and follow it through the fog. Hear something that happened 10 years ago. Or something that happened 10 minutes ago. Or… a thousand years ago.

A signal is never lost.

And if he pushes himself… If he reaches through the RAVEN, he can make himself heard too.

Bran reaches now, reaching through the transmissions sent at Fort Black. Riding the waves of nightly status reports from the few occupied bunkers of the Night’s Watch. Spreading at lightspeed in concentric circles beaming out beyond the wall. Through the Haunted Forest to the Fist of the First Men.

And then the wave breaks and crashes into a sea of static. The Night King and his army. It feels like drowning. Only it's his mind that disappears into the dark waters of Death’s influence. Fighting against a current of lost souls flowing into a tide of nothing.

Before he’s suddenly seized by the throat and dragged out of the noise and into the silence. Into a black space between worlds.

His legs failing beneath him. Collapsing at Death’s feet. Gasping for breath as the monster stares at him. Peering down at him, inspecting him. The ice blue veins glowing with that ominous light. The familiar taste of rads on his tongue as his presence seems to ionize the air. Growing colder as he bends in to meet Bran at his eye level. Fear cutting to him. Paralyzing him beyond his legs. Panic seizing him.

Only…

The Weirwood exists here. It’s white trunk illuminating the blackness around him. Its blood and bone empty and dead. The red leaves still and silent. There is no wind for the gods to whisper through here.

He’s not breathing. His heart's not beating. This is not life. And it is not death.

He used to dream of being soldier. Like his brothers. Like his father was. Standing up to triumph
over oppression and evil. But those dreams died with his legs.

But this black space… is not a dream. Nor is it reality. A phantasmal aether that exists only for signals and spirits. For shades of spectral things.

Here his body is not broken. Here he can fly.

And here he can stand.

His legs twist in a way that they have not in years. Finding purchase in the smoky feathered edges of this unreality. Pushing himself to his feet. His brother didn’t flinch… Jon didn’t flinch. He won’t either when he meets this monster’s eyes.

A faint expression crosses the Night King’s frozen features. Something vaguely human… Curiosity? Surprise?

“Why?” he asks. Reaching out through the RAVEN. Through this black space. “Why are you doing this?”

Contempt.

“Ty to zrobiłeś” His voice grating like a cracking glacier. “Mężczyźni są niegodni tego świata… Nie zasługujesz na to”

[You did this. - Men are unworthy of this world… You do not deserve it]

The tongue of the first men. Bran doesn’t speak it. But there is no mistaking the meaning. There is no negotiating with this enemy.

“Oczyszczę ten świat twojego rodzaju”

[I will cleanse this world of your kind]

“You will lose.”

“Twoja ściana nie ochroni cię, mały Kruk” he mocks. “Żyjący nie mogą zatrzymać umarłych”

[Your wall will not protect you, little Raven - The living cannot stop the dead]

“BRAN!” The hand shaking him snaps him back to reality. The Night King’s voice fading as his he falls back into his chair. “BRAN!”

“Hello, Gilly.”

“You scared me!” She huffs out a long breath, her hand moving to brace the small swell of her stomach. Smoothing over the barely visible pouch under her skirts. “Are you alright?”

“I need a few moments. But I am fine,” he answers calmly as she adjusts the wheels of his chair. Unlocking them as he scrambles to remember everything. Keep the memory fresh in his mind.

“They need you inside. Message coming in from Dragonstone…”

He smiles because he can hear it. In fact, he can practically see it. Crisp and clean and new and radiating throughout the world. Relaying between the radio towers at settlements up and down the whole of Westeros. A call to arms heard in bunkers and barracks and family homes. Bouncing through the layers of atmosphere and off those ancient satellites. Across the Narrow sea from
Braavos to Volantis to the Bay of Dragons to Qarth and beyond the wall.

He reaches once more. Barely skimming the surface of it. Whispering quiet words. Adding them to the wave so the Night King can hear.

“You will lose.”

"By the time you hear this, I will have been disavowed, my rank and authority will have been stripped and I will have been labeled a deserter, a traitor, and an enemy of the state by Crown at King’s Landing."

It starts as it always does. With a sudden spike in her heart rate, followed by a twisting tightness in her chest. Bile building in her mouth as her throat flutters closed. Her muscles cramping. Arms and legs drawing so tight she fears the cords may snap. Straining against the bonds that keep her lashed upright against the Operating Table. Heat searing up from the needle in her arm. Flooding and burning through her veins.

“I’m here, baby…” her mama whispers. Her voice hoarse “I’m here. You’re not alone. I’m here... I love you, Tyene. Don’t be afraid... Don’t be afraid. I’m here.” The mantra she has repeated over and over again every time she succumbs to these fits.

“Gods take me” she prays. “Let it be over. Just let me die.”

She doesn’t.

Which means she’ll have to endure it again and again and again until the Stranger finally takes her. Or until the mad Queen has had her fill of suffering…

“Mama…” she cries weakly, before retching out the sparse contents of her stomach onto the sterile white tile floor. The little bit of broth they forced down her throat with a tube and funnel. The bile stings the sores on the inside of her throat. Her head is pounding and everything is so blindingly bright.

“I’m here. I’m here Tyene.” Finally able to look up to see her mother. Arms chained above her head as she strains against them. Tear tracks lining her face. The same tear tracks that have stained her face for weeks. Months.

Since she was first hooked up to this… machine. This machine that’s been slowly poisoning her. She looks up at that glass vial full of yellow green liquid. Dripping slow drop after slow drop. Trickling the diluted venom into her. Killing her as slowly as Qyburn can manage.

Forcing her mother to watch her deteriorate. Watch her wither away until she is a husk of herself. She can feel it. How far she’s gone. Muscles built up from years of training with her father and sisters reduced to loose skin and tissue. She should have died with Obara and Nymeria…

At least she could have died strong.

Not in this cell in the corner of a madman’s laboratory, as an experiment on the limits of human suffering.

Mama starts to cry again. Big ugly tears rolling down the well-worn tracks. And for not the first time she curses her father. Why had papa been so blind? He did this. His revenge has destroyed their family. They could have been happy if they just stayed in Dorne… None of this would have
happened if he had just stayed home…

But even as what’s left of her heart fills with hatred she can hear him singing to her. Spinning her in a circle and dancing with her. Lifting her above his head in the water gardens before throwing her into the pool. Calling her his sunshine…

That glass vial rumbles against the metal rim holding it up. A small rattle and tinkling glass. Nothing. The mountain walking by perhaps. But then it happens again. Louder. And she sits as far upright as she can as she hears more rumbling. Booming. Explosions.

“Mama…”

“I hear it” Her mother looks around, pulling at her bonds to look as far out as she can before screaming.

A sudden heat washes past them as the room outside their cell is suddenly engulfed in flame and another explosion tears through the complex. Blasting through the wall behind them. The table rolling with the force of it. Slamming down into the ground with her beneath it. Trapping her.

“Tyene!” her mother screams. She can’t answer. The weight of the table crushing her into a pile of debris. Leather cuffs cutting into her skin as she struggles. The needle in the crook of her arm pulling and pinching at an unnatural angle.

Another explosion rattles the building and her mother screams again.

“MAMA!” she chokes out. Pulling against her restraints.

The chain connecting her cuffs behind the table snaps. Shrapnel or strain or heat breaking the links. Her weak body crawling out from beneath. Chunks of concrete, ceramic, and glass scraping into her torso as she shuffles out.

“MAMA!”

Mama’s holding her stomach as the room burns around them. Blood pooling beneath her onto the destroyed tile floor.

She crawls to her. And her mama cups her face. Finally free of the bonds that have separated them for all these months.

“Run…” her mother’s voice shakes as she says it.

“Not without you. We can make it.” She tries to lift her up, but she’s so weak. She can barely make it to her feet before collapsing into the rapidly spreading puddle of blood. Flames licking along the insulation that lines the walls. The smoke growing thick and black.

“I’m going to see your papa… It’s not your time. Go. Run. Live.”

“Mama…” Her mother’s lips press against her forehead.

“You are the daughter of Oberyn Martell. The Last Sun of Dorne. Live.” Her mother’s hand pushes her off and away. “GO!” shouting and pushing her away with what strength she has left. “GO!”

Tears run down her face hotter than the flames licking past her as she starts to run. Running barefoot and nearly naked through the crumbling hallways. Embers burning the soles of her feet as she searches for a way out. Any way out.
“DEAR GODS!” Someone screams and she recognizes the voice. Qyburn. The monster who has been poisoning her all this time. Who stood as her mother wept and asked questions about the nature of her suffering. Asking about the pain. About her fear of death. Making her viscerally describe how her body was reacting to his toxins. Stabbing her with needles. Taking samples of skin, of her flesh. Inspecting her in front of her mother. Then asking mama a million questions about how watching her daughter die made her feel.

And a rage she cannot contain strengthens her. Her father’s rage and thirst for vengeance. For her sisters. For her mother. Filling her weak muscles as she bolts toward his voice. Following his noise of distress out of the laboratory. Out onto the wall overlooking Blackwater bay.

She finds him there. Gripping his hair and shouting for the guards to go to his now destroyed laboratory. Demanding helplessly that they put out the fire.

And He doesn’t see her fast enough. Only gulps in surprise as she gets him by his chain. That sacred chain he dares to wear. That chain that should mark him as a healer instead of a murderer. Pulling with a force she does not have. Hanging onto it. The old man flailing. Gagging as his false chain digs into his throat. Choking and sputtering.

A guard makes a noise and starts running toward her. A bullet hitting the ground next to her. She wrestles them back against the wall. The concrete edge scraping along the raw skin of her back. Using the monster as a shield as another round of gunfire rings out. Impacting the wall next to her. She peers over her shoulder into the filth of Blackwater Bay.

It’s a long way down.

“Live.”

She takes him with her. Falling. Diving into the putrid murky water. Blackness taking her a swiftly as the current.

And then she’s suddenly awake. Opening her eyes to a blinding light that dims with each passing moment until the world sharpens into focus. An old man with the bluest eyes she’s ever seen looking down at her. Warm. She’s in a bed. And she’s moving… rocking… A boat?

“Take it easy, Miss,” he says.

“What happened? Where am I? Who are you?” She snaps off the questions. one after the other.

“We found you clinging to a bloated corpse outside Blackwater Bay” He studies her carefully. “A bloated corpse wearing this…” holding it up for her to see. A circle surrounding a gold hand with a long sharp point. The man eyes her curiously, a smile playing on his lips. As if he knows something she doesn’t.

The man is Westerosi. Southern, Coastal. Not Dornish. Proper. Wealthy. She glances around the room searching for a hint to where the man’s loyalty lies. The only clue is a large trunk with green and gold stag of Renly Baratheon. Stormlands… or the Reach? Both regions are under Cersei’s control. But control and loyalty are two different things.

“My name is Tyene Sand. I am the daughter of Oberyn Martell and the Last Sun of Dorne. I demand to be taken to Dragonstone. The Dragon Queen, Daenerys Targaryen, will reward you handsomely for my safe passage.”

“You’re not in a position to making demands, Ms. Sand…”.
She snatches that golden hand out his. Stabbing out with the pointy end. Using all the speed and force she can muster in her weakened state. He dodges. Quick for a man his age. Grabbing her wrist and twisting till she drops the only weapon she has.

“A fighter. Just like my girl.” he laughs releasing her hand. “You can rest easy, Ms. Sand. You’re in luck. We’re heading North now to meet up with the Dragon Queen and the Northern Front. Joining in the fight.” he extends a hand to shake hers. “Selywn Tarth. Welcome aboard The EvenStar.” she takes it cautiously.

“North?”

“I suppose you wouldn’t’ve heard yet…” he stands. “It’s been repeating non-stop for days. Rest up. I’ll get you something to eat” Clicking on the small dial radio as he departs. Jaime Lannister’s voice coming through loud and clear.

”... We are at War. And you deserve to know the truth. This is not a war for the Crown. Or between Kings... Queens. Its is not a war between houses for Land, or Power or Coin. It’s not a war for the Old Gods or the New Gods or some notion of right and wrong. It is a war for life itself.”

“Leaving already, Captain Naharis?”

The prismatic glass of the Great Pyramid of Meereen casts rainbows throughout the room. Splashing onto the walls, across the floor, creeping up the bed and along the long legs and wide hips of the beauty lounging in his bed. The spectrum of color stretching along her coffee skin. A slow smile spreading across her face as he pulls on the far-too stiff shirt.

“Duty calls,” he answers, letting his eyes drift over the swell of her ass. “I’m a very important man.”

“Ah…” Full lips curling to flash her teeth. “I was under the impression that important men get to go where they want-” rolling onto her side. “-When they want-” rubbing her thighs together in a way that’s meant to remind him what’s between them. “-and do what they want…”

It’s meant to be a tease. But it hits too close to the truth.

Stinging like a slap in the face. Acid welling up at the back his throat. A twitch in his eye. The familiar lance of rejection, sharp and biting. Time has not eased the wound.

A knock interrupts him before he can lash out.

“Priority One message from Westeros, Ser,” the officer tells him handing him the transcription.

He reads it quickly. The sting and the burn and the bite dulling with each word. Ambition and Anticipation growing. His queen calls for aid, and he will remind her of his value.

"An Undead Army of overwhelming numbers is gathering beyond the great wall of Westeros. It was first reported by Commander Jeor Mormont of the Night’s Watch nearly seven years ago. And was later verified by members of the Coming Dawn, the Night’s Watch, The Northern Front, Commander Jon Snow, and Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen."

She growls impatiently at the lift waiting at the bottom of the blue-white ice. Of course, they’re late. The next watch shift probably lazing about in their bunks. Comfortable and warm inside the ruins of Westwatch. Snug inside this Crow’s nest. Forgetting about all the blood that stains this wall.

This fuckin’ wall.

Val hasn’t forgotten.
She will never forget.

A heated rush of air steams out her nose as she grunts and pushes down on the nearly frozen lever. Summoning the lift back up. The generator humming to life in the small shack. The mechanisms of the winch clicking and grinding. Scraping off the thin lining of ice that built up since she started her watch.

The next watch being late means the cage moves empty. It should never be empty. Wastes fuel. Which means they’ll need to ask the Crows for more.

Beg. Like a dog. Like a fuckin’ kneeler.

Cold stings her cheeks as the brisk rapid wind whips past. Using her hand to shield a small matchstick as she lights a cigarette. The smoke harsh and thick. The Tobacco old and brittle and stale. Burning her throat and lungs more than it dulls the sharp edge of her nerves. Mance knew how to roll them proper. How many times had he offered to teach her? How many times had her pride forced her to refuse?

She looks out over the black green trees of the haunted forest. Spreading out for miles in every direction. Her world. Her home. The memory of her sister’s laugh ripping open a pang in her heart. Dalla. A single tear freezes in its duct. Blinking and turning away.

It’s not her world anymore… The dead have taken it. The crows took her kin and the dead took her home.

She will never forget.

The lift creaks and sways, hanging in its frame by a heavy chain. Thudding to a stop as the small ramp drops, anchoring it into the ice. No matter how many times she’s ridden it, it always looks ready to fall. The wind doesn’t help.

It stutters the embers at the end of her cigarette. The thin roll waiving between her lips as she drags the smoke into her lungs, before taking the remaining nub and flicking it. The small orange light tumbling against the blue white ice of the wall as she climbs aboard and pulls back the lever.

A familiar screech catches her attention as the cage rattles down in its frame. She digs along the pouch at her belt to pull out a piece of dried jerky. Extending her arm and the treat out for him.

The Raptor wings past. Diving down with a shrill cry before flapping up to her and landing on her arm. Thick sharp talons leaving scratch marks on the worn leather brace. Poking her slightly as it snaps the scrap out of her hand.

“What did ya’ see, Six?” she asks. As if he could still see through the bird’s eyes. As if he could answer her. As if he was still alive… somewhere in there.

He’s not. The Crow killed him.

The lift lands heavily and the bird screeches again, flying away. Startled by the jarring noise. She watches for a moment before turning to the young woman waiting on the lift’s platform. Her bright red hair so achingly familiar. But her rage hardens the loss.

Ygritte paid the price for trusting crows.

Traitor Killed Six. Killed Mance. Killed hundreds of ‘em. Watched them be murdered by a madman and his witch. The wind whistles and for a minute she hears Dalla scolding her. Telling her to let go
of her anger and focus on her people.

“Where were you!” she barks at her subordinate.


Traitors.

Her boots grind into the ice as she marches through the snowy yard. Following the younger woman through Westwatch. Past the rows of beds and bedrolls stretched in the main hall between the ever roaring fires. Through the decaying fortress heaped with frozen rusted scrap. Up the long spiral flight of stairs. The steel steps clattering with each heavy stomp up. Her snow bear coat quickly becoming far too hot as they climb up the dozen or so flights to the small radio room.

She takes it off and leans against the wall of the small chamber as she listens to the message. Her tattoos itch from sweating. The black dead bird and the tally beneath are fading to blue. It’ll need to be redone. After all, she doesn’t hunt bluebirds.

“What d’ we do, Val?”

Tapping her fingers against the hilt of her gun. The Crow’s makin’ moves, building an army to fight the Others.

Never trust a Crow.

“What we’ve always done… We fight for what's ours…”

"This threat is real. Our Enemy is real. And our enemy is powerful. And our enemy seeks to annihilate us. All of us."

The flames burn bright. The great pyre roaring with power and life. The chants of the faithful thrumming in time with the heavy Ruby around her throat. The soldiers of the Fiery Hand, a thousand men armed with R'hllor’s holy flame, stand silent and stiff to receive blessing alongside the other servants of the Holy Light. Medics and Mechanics. Priestesses and Prostitutes. All gathered to serve in the great war.

The Red Temple burns with R'hllor’s might tonight.

The High Priest, the First Servant of the Lord of Light raises his arms and brings the chanting to a halt.

“You have heard the stories that our wise sister Melisandre has brought from the West.” he booms. “Many doubted her… but now there can be none. The Great Other moves in the Frozen Wastelands in the North. The Long Night is here!” he proclaims, red robes flourishing with his wild movements. The great flame twisting following the path of his arms.

“Lead us from the darkness, O my Lord.” Praying loudly. Stretching his arms out over the masses. “Fill our hearts with fire, so we may walk your shining path . . . R'hllor, you are the light in our eyes, the fire in our hearts, the heat in our loins. Yours is the sun that warms our days, yours the stars that guard us in the dark of night.”

“Lord of Light, defend us. Lord of Light, protect us.” The whole of the temple echoes in response.
“We walk the righteous path to face war and death. We fight the dark in your name. Send us Lighbringer, O my Lord, Send us Azor Ahai! Send us the Prince that was Promised, Born admist smoke and salt to keep the savage dark at bay!” He recites the prayers as the flame grows ever larger and ever brighter. Sweat dripping from the Priest’s face as he cries out.

“Lord of Light, shine your face upon us!”

She does not join in the chant. Her mouth forms the shape of the words, but no sound emerges. Only stares into the flame as the vision unfolds.


A Dragon clawing up from a grave...

...and a princess dragging her back down into it.

She blinks away the vision as the flame erupts. Shooting up and over the crowd of the faithful as they repeat the final refrain.

“For the night is dark and full of terrors.”

"And so we must all rise up to meet him. The Northern Front and the forces of Daenerys Stormborn have already gathered for the fight and we must join them. Only together do we have a chance to defeat this foe. Only together can life prevail."

“You’re taking everything from us” Edmure whinges, tossing the document down on his niece’s large desk. The red headed woman stares at the paper for a long moment, tapping her thumbs together. The ice in her eyes spreading throughout the room. Varys shuffles in the seat next to his, inching to the edge as if he was about to watch a fight. At the door Podrick shivers, looking every bit the boy he remembers from King’s Landing. Older. A bit scruffier, more muscular, but very much the same.

“I wasn’t aware that prisoners of war had anything in the first place,” Sansa replies coolly.

She, on the other hand, is much different. All the pretty colors she used to wear in King’s Landing replaced with severe shades of black and grey. Good. That’s the kind of person that’ll get a man paid.

Fucking finally.

“We were told by Commander Snow and Her Grace that we would face trial…” Roslin adds, placing her paper that, down on the desk. Her squeaky voice adding to her mousey features.

“And how do you think that will go… Roslin Frey?” the severe woman answers. Edmure snorts.

“We are innocent of the Red Wedding. We did nothing-”

“-Exactly.” Sansa interrupts. “You. Did. Nothing.” her eyes boring into her uncle’s. “And that is how anyone who judges you will see it…”

“I’m willing to take that chance.”

“Are you?”
“Eddy…” Roslin whimpers quietly. Bronn tries to suppress his chuckle at the pet name but it doesn’t work. It’s too fucking funny.

“Not now, Ros.” He snaps, before turning back to face his niece. “We’ll face trial. We did nothing wrong.”

“Fine” Sansa shrugs, leaving the paper where Edmure threw it. “Varys…With my brother and her grace away, who would be the next in line to oversee the Trial?”

“Lt. Commander Mormont, Administrator Stark.”

“Ah…” As if she didn’t already know. “She’ll have already left to oversee fortifications at Queenscrown. Although I’m sure she’ll more than willing to return given the circumstances. Podrick, please go fetch Bran from the godswood. We’ll want to radio before she reaches the Hornwood’s.”

Pod nods and leaves, while Sansa pulls out another sheet of paper and begins writing something. Edmure settles back into his seat as the pen scratches into the paper. Fake notes. He’s been around Tyrion long enough to know these games.

“While you were serving under Robb’s command, did you have much opportunity to spend time with the Mormonts?” Sansa asks, her tone calm and even, not looking up from the page. “Maege and Dacey?”

He can hear Edmure swallow.

“No. I did not.”

“Shame… I remember Dacey from when I was a young. Arya always looked up to her. She’d come down for Comm meetings and run drills with the boys while Maege barked at them. Called them all ‘soft and green.’ Mother thought it was distasteful. Though…” Sansa blinks and her voice grows tight. “I’m sure, in the end, she wished she knew how to fight like Maege and Dacey…”

The flash of emotion that catches everyone off guard. Ice briefly melting. The hard line of Edmure’s jaw softening. Roslin deflating. Even he feels sort of bad for the girl.

“Of course-” Sansa continues, the ice returning as quickly as it left. “Knowing how to fight didn’t save Dacey.” She looks up at her uncle for a moment before resuming her notes. “My second husband would often entertain me with stories about the Red Wedding. Invite his father’s men to dinner so they could give first-person accounts. His favorite was how they forced Maege to watch while they raped Dacey to death.” She places the pen down on the table. Next to the parchment in front of Roslin. “I’ll spare you the details…Though I am not sure Lyanna was…”

Roslin snatches the pen and scrawls her name across the bottom of the paper.

“Ros!”

“Just sign it, Edmure. Take the deal. Give your niece RiverRun so we can go to the Vale where no-one will bother us again. Right!” she looks to Sansa with pleading eyes.

“I am certain Young Robin would benefit from the company and care of his Uncle,” Varys adds, sitting upright. Bronn can’t suppress the laugh this time. Robin Arryn. Little tyrant. Edmure would be better off letting the Mormont girl take his head.

“Did you take his land too?” Edmure sneers at his niece. Sansa does not answer, but the lines of her high cheekbones and sharp lines of her jaw harden with disdain. Her cold glare freezing over her
uncle.

“Your wife has already signed over The Twins. Make your choice.”

He scoffs and takes the pen. “Family. Duty. Honor.” Gritting his teeth as he signs his name. “But you would know that if you weren’t a fucking Lannister.”

She stares at him for a long moment before pulling out a small pocket watch attached to a long chain at her throat.

“And who are you?” she recites watching the hands circle the clock. “that I must bow so low…” snapping the lid shut and snatching the deed from him. “That will be all, dear Uncle. I’ll have Gilly prepare you a room for tonight. I’m sure Hoster would enjoy spending some more time with children his own age before you leave.”

Edmure makes a low noise to protest but Roslin quickly shushes him and grabs him by his elbow to lead him out of the small office. Sansa blowing on the ink before folding it up and sliding into a drawer. The elegant red braid shifting as she turns to look out the large window.

“Well, you know what they say. ‘A Lannister always his debts.’” he laughs standing up and takes Edmure’s seat in front of her. A small smile spreading across her face. He follows her eyes out the window. Sure enough, Hoster is running around out there with a little dark haired girl. Building a snow fort to fence in a large white wolf. “Speaking of-”

“-What did Tyrion promise you this time, Bronn?” she asks not taking her eyes off the children playing.

“Same as always. Land. Coin. A Girl.” she rolls her eyes with her whole body as she turns to face him.

“This isn’t the south. We don’t trade girls anymore.”

“So I’ve heard… But surely you know a pretty girl who's interested in coin and land. Maybe one with a rich daddy who’ll die soon enough.” Sansa snorts before sighing and standing from her chair.

“Wait here.”


“Have you ever been this far North, Bronn?”

“Farther…” he answers. Wishing desperately that this conversation will end. No fucking point to small talk. Especially with the likes of Varys. That’s how a man makes problems for himself.

Luckily Sansa returns, with both Pod and a small leather pouch. Dropping it on the desk before returning to her seat. It clinks metallically. The beautiful tinkling of coin.

He reaches for it, but the look in the ginger’s eyes wards him away as she heaves a typewriter out of a cabinet. Rolling a sheet into it before typing.

“How you liking these Northern Girls’ Pod…?”

“They’re good fighters,” he answers awkwardly. “Brienne’s really showin’ em what’s what.”

“I bet she is.” He can’t help the smile spreading on his face. “…I bet she is”
“Podrick has been recently making the acquaintance of a young officer from Barrowtown.” Varys leans in conspiratorially. “What was her name? Grayce-Graycie?”

“I’d rather not talk about it” mumbling from the door and examining the worn wood floor.

“You may want to consider telling her that—” Sansa growls in annoyance, pushing the slide back across to start another row of text. “—Before Bryeana or Delylah find out...”

He howls in laughter as Podrick’s face turns bright red.

The rhythmic tatting of the keys fills the silence for several long minutes as Pod shuffles around, embarrassed and as Varys watches too closely. Before she stops, practically ripping the paper from the typewriter and passing it to Varys. The spymaster giving it a quick read and nodding before returning it. Opening the deed to The Twins and securing the Amendment inside.

The Twins. Not a shitty patch of land in the Crownlands. Or a small sliver of the waste around Casterly Rock. Not something he has to wait for someone to die to claim. A fortress. Two Fortresses and Bridge on one of the major roads in Westeros.

“What am I buying, Bronn?” She leans back in her chair and toys with the pen. He looks down at the blank space at the bottom of the page. Waiting for her signature.

There is only one right answer to this question.

“Silence. Loyalty. And a job well done.”

She taps her fingers on the desk. Weighing his words. And deciding signs her name in large elegant handwriting.

“You will discreetly escort my uncle and his family to the Fingers,” Folding it up properly and sliding it across the desk to him. “After assuring their’s and Robin’s safety, you will collect a woman by the name of Mya Stone from Yohn Royce and bring her back to Winterfell. She’ll have several trunks for transport as well.”

He nods staring at the deed in his hand.

“After you will take a boat from the Fingers to White Harbor. In the Harbor, you can make the acquaintance of a Wynafryd Manderly. Whether she is interested in your land and coin is up to her. Although I would consider it a personal favor if you would drag her down to the Twins and keep her there.”

“Yes Ma’am” he stands and reaches his hand across the table to shake hers. “Pleasure doing business with you Administrator Stark.” snatching the leather bag of coin as he leaves.

Ten minutes… Ten minutes and she’s giving him what it’s taken Tyrion ten years to deliver on. Fucking Finally.

“So I call upon you now, not as your commanding officer, but as a soldier whose first duty has always been the protection and service of Westeros, to come north and face it with us.”

He’s been tracking this group for months, as they made their way down from Always Winter. Across the mountains of Thenn and down the Milkwater. Adding to their numbers at each small camp of Wildlings they came across. He’s tried to warn them, but he’s always too late. Not that they would trust him anyway…
Why would they trust a dead crow?

The undead are smarter than they look. Moving in single file to disguise their numbers. Covering their tracks in the snow. They make no camp. Leave no scraps. Set no fires. Take no rest. Only move with a relentless determination toward their goal.

When was the last time he rested? When was the last time he slept? When was the last time he felt warm?

Dead men don’t need those things.

He can see it now. Their goal. Their destination. He should have known.

Their army gathers at the Fist of the First Men. A dark plateau rising above the sea of trees. He hears them now. A low hum of growls and creaks. Sometimes they make sounds that almost seem human.

Almost.

His cold hands fumble with the focus of his binoculars, causing them to slip, and he hears a small sickening crack. The glass breaking against the ice. He blows out a short stabilizing breath, a breath he does not need, and picks them up. Nerve damage. His body finally catching up with his death. How long will it be before his limbs fail him? How long before he won’t be able to lift his gun? Or his limbs? How long until he is as putrid and decayed as some of these?

How long before he ceases to be Benjen Stark?

Only one of the lenses broke. He focuses the remaining one, surveying their gathering. How many are they now? Fifty thousand? A Hundred? No fires to count. No vehicles. No tents. Just an endless sea of bodies.

The ocean of dead parts to make way as the monster and his kind move through the horde. Striding through the walking corpses, inspecting the incoming group as they join the undead masses. Gathering his forces. A massive gun strapped to his back. Large and Ancient. Valyrian.

A breath he does not need catches in his throat as he recognizes it for what it is. And it takes longer than it should for him to steel himself, to swallow the oppressive truth that history lays bare, to gather his nerves and confirm...

The Night King has Dark Sister.

Visenya’s Fury.

A gun that can swallow the sun and spit it back out. The weapon that won Westeros. Over and over again throughout each and every civil war that ripped this country apart over the past 300 years.

He confirms the worst of it and watches his enemy move, flanked by his unholy kin through the crowd of dead. Searching for the patterns that lay beneath all things.

But then he sees her…

Her lovely face half torn off, her dark grey eyes a shocking shade of blue. And his heart, his heart that has not beat in years, breaks. The pang shattering through him, tearing him open. Anguish eating through him as he stares at her through the binocs.

He promised he’d get her and their girl through the wall. He promised. He promised he’d make sure
they were safe.

“Promise me, Crow…” she whispered the last time he left. “Promise me, you’ll come back.” Leaving her warm bed of furs. Leaving her camp on the shores of the Ice River. Years ago, when his little girl was barely old enough to understand that he was leaving. Much less why… Why he was gone all the time. Why they had to hide from the others when he was there. Why there were so many secrets…

He promised her so many things.

Would she stick by her mother if...? He can’t finish the thought as he searches through the crowds. Despair closing around him as the cold envelopes him, something harsher than the cold of his undeath. Something black and hard and truly dead. Dead in a way he does not know yet.

His heart, that has not beat in years, sinks to his stomach like a stone as he forces himself to his feet. He was too late to save this family. But he can still save the family he has left. Jon. He needs to find Jon. Needs to warn him.

The Dead are coming.

"I call on every soldier from the Twins to Sunspear, from Tarth to Casterly Rock. On every veteran of Robert’s Rebellion, and the War of Five Kings. On every greenboy who dreams of fighting for something more than a crown. On every man who has something to protect and every man who has nothing to lose."

“But Da!’” Meera screeches at him as he shuffles away from the dinner table. “I already told Commander Snow.”

“I know whatcha told him…” he answers, quickly washing off their plates. “That doesn’t mean you’re goin’” One’s chipped and the sharp edge catches the dish cloth as he dries it. Hands shaking as he tries to untangle the snag. The tremors are coming more often now.

“You haven’t seen them.” she snatches it from his hands and finishes the job. “I have!” Placing it in the cupboard. The worn old ceramic clinking against the small stack of plates. “I’ve fought them. I’ve killed them!”

The small stack of plates for just the two of them. Just the two of them...

“Aye, you’ve killed them. Don’t mean you need t’ be goin’ t’ war to fight more of ‘em.”

“They need me!”

“They’ll do without!” He raises his voice. And hates himself for it. He leaves her standing in the kitchen. His brave girl. His Meera. Hanging her head in grief and confusion. Hearing her sniff before grabbing her new bow from the wall, that new bow Jon gave her and slamming the door as she storms out.

It’s what he used to do when he was angry. Angry at the world for taking his parents. Angry at the world because he wasn’t strong enough. Angry at the world because it was unjust and there was nothing he could do to correct it. Go out and hunt some little critters in the swamp. Practice sniping. It’s what he was best at in the Rebellion. It’s why Ned wanted him on his team.

It’s not why he joined though.

He pulls the small box out from where it has been hidden in his closet. Tucked under extra quilts for the winter. And all those boxes full of clothes he was saving for Jojen when he grew into them.
Jojen will never grow into them.

It's too heavy. So he does what he has always done and seeks the solace of the gods. A few of the other crannogmen offer him a small salute as he climbs the roots of the great tree. Stepping over the water letting the barge dip and sway under his weight. Taking a seat and letting his feet dangle over the murky swamp as the tree groans and settles.

A clear night with a full moon. A beautiful night. Light trickles through the blood red leaves and reflects off the white trunk. Illuminating it and making it almost glow. Perhaps the gods will give him answers tonight.

The box is small. A regulation kit from back during the Rebellion. They didn’t have the capabilities to make nice sturdy ones like the Mad Kings forces had. A simple tin box, meant to be kept at the bottom of a pack, to hold all the survival essentials.

“Easy to melt them down for emergency bullets” Ned used to say. Always practical. Always dutiful.

Inside are the shards of a long hidden life. Pamphlets about the high-minded ideals of the Resistance. Patches and pins of his rank during the Rebellion. A letter from his princess that came too late. And a weapon that does not belong to him.

He takes Dawn in his hands. Setting aside the tin and examining it for the thousandth time over these past…

Twenty-six years, nine months, eleven days.

He was always a good sniper.

It’s heavy in his hands. It was heavy when he first recovered it from his Captain’s body. It’s just as heavy now. Heavier, with the shakes and the tremors and the oppressive persistent weakness. The smooth metal of the hilt disguising the tremendous power within. His thumb glides along the gentle slope of the trigger.

Does it still work…? After all this time…?

It’s not his place. And even if it was, he wouldn’t be strong enough to wield it. That honor belongs to someone stronger. Someone with a faith stronger than his...

In the distance, there’s the soft whistle of an arrow cutting over the water. And suddenly, one of the many chirps and croaks that fills the swamp falls silent. She got it the dark. By the sound of it, at least thirty meters away.

Good girl.

Brave girl.

His girl...

He’s already lost one child to this war. He doesn’t even know what Jojen looked like in the end. He grew into his manhood away from home. In his mind, his son was just like him. Lanky and scrawny.

Jojen. His boy. His smart, brave, special boy...

The wind picks up and he can hear her through the leaves. Only this time, she’s not screaming…

Her screams still keep him up at night. As crisp and clear as when he heard them through his walkie
as Ned shouted orders and ran through the fortress. As he sat against a rock, baking under the hot Dornish sun. Guilt and anguish washing over him as he stared down from the outcrop at Arthur Dayne’s lifeless body. His gun in his hands and Lyanna’s screams in his ear.

Her screams of pain twisting year after year into screams of rage. Her fury something he could taste on the wind. Demanding to know why they allowed her son to languish and suffer. His imagination driving him to hear words she never said.

Cowards. Liars.
Traitors.

That one had jolted him awake, on a black moonless night nearly two years ago. She screamed so loud the Weirwood creaked and groaned through the night in her rage and agony. He only found out later what had happened. What the Watch had done to her boy.

But tonight her screams are quiet as he rolls Dawn around in his hand.

“I’m sorry, Lyanna,” he whispers for the thousandth time.

“I’m sorry, Da’” Meera comes and sits next to him. Her dark hair falling into her face in a way that all too familiar. “I shouldn’t’ve gotten so angry…” Quiet as a mouse. “It’s just…” she takes a deep breath. “For years, I hid from them… They took Jojen. Hodor. Summer. All of ’em. Everyone but me an’ Bran.” she steels her resolve. “Commander Snow says he needs me. An’ so I’m goin’. I won’t hide from them again. I’m goin’ t’ serve my country. I’m goin’ to fight for life.”

So achingly familiar. His brave girl staring at him waiting for a response.

“Do I look like a girl?” the leaves bristle in the wind. And for the first time in twenty-six years, she doesn’t scream at him. For the first time in twenty-six years, he can see her as something other than the bloody corpse they bagged up to take home. He can see her as she wanted to be seen.

He pulls out a small metal pin from the box at his side and sniffs as he affixes it to the flap of Meera’s jacket. “There…” he adjusts it slightly and straightens the fabric so it sits just right. “Now you look like a soldier.”

"The Others do not care for your loyalty. They don’t care which king or queen you serve. They don’t care about what banner you fly, or the coin in your pocket, or your gods, or your sins. They only seek to destroy you, and your family. And everything we all hold dear.”

“For hands of gold are always cold…”

“Shut it!” He orders, holding his ear up to the small handheld receiver. The other soldier flashes a mischievous grin but obeys. His hand quieting the guitar’s strings and the singing coming to a rapid halt. But with the music gone, the others can hear the message coming through just as clear. He listens again as it repeats.

“There’s no way it true…” Harrolyd says after a long moment. His heavy cheeks jostling as he sputters out the words. “The Others. The Undead. There’s no way.”

“Why else would the Front and the Dragon Queen retreat North?” Ryon pokes at their dinner. A few rabbits cooking slowly over the fire. It’s the best they’ve eaten in a while... There will be even less food up North. “They took the Rock. They could have pressed their advantage.”

“Maybe its a test-” Myles takes apart his gun. Cleaning the mud out of the barrel with a thin brush.
The mud gets everywhere. The Riverlands are fucking miserable. “-Seein’ who’ll desert. We’ll get up to the Neck and then get gunned down.” the young man looks around anxiously. “I heard the Mountain tore a deserter in half, in front of the whole court. Blood and guts everywhere.”

“That’s just a story. Just like the Others. More rich ponces trying to get us to fight and die…” Conwy tosses a rock into the fire, sending sparks up into their dinner.

Across the fire, Ed eyes him queerly, flashing a glance at his comrade.

“Watch your tone, soldier… you’re not a deserter yet.” he corrects.

“Sorry, Ser.”

The reprimand seems to silence them as they all drift in thought. Each taking their miserable share of Rabbit before wrapping the remains for later. He misses his wife’s cooking. Hells... He just misses his wife. How pregnant is she by now? How round is her belly? He ticks off the weeks in his head. Thirty-Two weeks. Eight or so more to go. She’s probably making her mum miserable.

Gods he hopes its a girl. A little girl who’ll take care of him when he’s old and grey.

But she has to live first…

They pack up camp and turn back out onto the Road. Ed pulls his guitar back around and strums a cord.

“Which way, Ser? South?” he gestures with the guitar. “Or North?”

Gods, he hopes its a girl.

“North,” he answers. “We go North.”

"Together we will send these monsters back to whatever grave they crawled out of."

He watches as Arya balances on one leg on the ship’s deck. Slowly maneuvering her arms into a defensive position while planting her foot far behind her. Across from her, Dany mirrors the action. Dressed in a loose shirt and leggings for training with the Little Wolf.

“Like this?” she asks while his little sister nods. In her infinite cleverness, his queen even found a way to get Arya to slow down. Asking Arya to teach her so she doesn’t train so hard so she can heal properly. Teaching her the basic forms of Water Dancing. Not the fighting necessarily, just the forms. Poses with names like “Beneath the Titan’s shield” and “The Delta” and “Riding the Wake.”

He smiles as he watches his sister scold his girl. Leaning over the railing at the tier above them. Looking down as she barks orders. Telling Dany to square up her hips and lunge deeper.

“She seems to be recovering well…” Tyrion interrupts the smile.

“Aye,” he answers, not turning to look at him. “She’s strong.”

“Seems you Starks are hard to kill…”

“Not hard enough…” The imp pauses at the remark and nods before joining him next to the railing. His head barely poking over the top of it.

“I suppose not.”
They are quiet for a long minute. Arya kicking out at Daenerys’ back leg to get it in the right position.

“What’s this about Tyrion?” he asks. He knows when he wants something by now. Gods, he ready to have Davos back. He’s tired of these fucking games. Why can’t Tyrion just tell him what’s on his fucking mind? Why does everything have to be a fucking riddle wrapped in small talk?

“Cersei and Jaime.” he eyes the dwarf curiously. “Lysa Arryn... Fools in love who have torn this country apart…”

At that, he stands up right. A sudden rush of anger extending him to his full height.

“If yer’ gonna call me a fool. Look me in the eye an’ say it.” Tyrion licks his lips.

“I have moved past trying to explain the dangers of emotional entanglements to our Queen. And I am not dumb enough to try with you… However, I am asking you to be aware of the lessons recent history has laid out for us…”

He flicks the flesh between his thumb and forefinger with his opposite hand. The noise giving voice to his silence, and rhythm to his thoughts as he looks down at his sister and his love. Both of them breaking out into a fit of giggles as Dany loses her balance in the twisted pose. Flashing her smile up at him as she recovers and rights herself before resuming the position.

“You’re not as smart as you think you are,” he states. “If you think all this country’s problems come from people caring for one another.”

“That is a gross oversimplification of my point.”

“I don’t think so…” Tyrion sighs heavily and rolls his eyes, opening his mouth to talk even more. He holds up a hand and amazingly…. “I don’t have your education. Or your experience. But it seems to me- “ he pauses, licking his lips as he puts the words together in his mind. “-That all those people who tore the world apart were liars above anything else.”

The faded scar across the dwarf’s face crinkles.

“Your devotion to honesty is admirable. Honorable.”

“But?”

“Honor is what got your father killed. Another lesson in recent history.” His eye twitches.

“Talk about my father if you want, tell me that's the attitude that got him killed. But when enough people spread falsehoods, words stop meaning anything. Then there are no more answers, only better and better lies. And lies won't help us in this fight.”

“And when your inability to lie gets people killed? What then?” Tyrion pivots and looks down at Daenerys and Arya. “What happens when Cersei tries again and your sister isn’t there to save the day? Or perhaps worse… what happens when-?”

“You think I haven’t thought about that!?” his fingers forming a gun and tapping it against his skull. “You think yer gonna come up with some scenario that I haven’t already got running through my head. Some new nightmare that ends with Daenerys an’ Arya an’ everybody all dead. I think about it all the time. Don’t come at me with ‘What ifs’ thinkin’ yer gonna scare me into doing whatever it is you want me to do.”
The dwarf recoils and withdraws, making a back peddling motion with his hands. “I only meant to bring your attention to where other leaders have failed, in hopes that you might avoid the same mistakes.”

“Bullshit” he exclaims, probably too loudly. “If you think that Daenerys or I are slacking in our duties, that’s a talk we should all have. But that’s not what” pointing between himself and the dwarf “-this is. Play your head games with someone else.”

At that, he strides away moving towards the stairs that lead him to the lower deck. Passing by a plethora of soldiers. Westerosi. Ironborn. Unsullied. Dothraki. Different Uniforms. Different sigils. All offering him a salute or a nod or a polite ‘Commander’ as he moves past them towards the girls.

“That’s enough training today, you’ll strain your side,” he orders his little sister.

“M’ fine” she groans, but her hand rubs across her injury.

“Stop while yer’ ahead. Get some rest. I’ll come and get you before we go to the galley” She starts to protest but a harsh hiss passes through her teeth instead. Relenting, she nods and rolls up the Bravossi mat before saluting and disappearing below deck.

“I tried to slow her down,” Daenerys says quietly, slinging her arm around his waist.

“I know… she’s stubborn.” Draping his over her shoulders.

“Oh, I hadn’t noticed” Dany teases, flashing him a bright smile as they follow after Arya. The limited daylight fading into the flickering lights of the Blackwind. Rust lining the rivets of the bulkheads as they pass beneath them. A random drop of water splashing onto his nose. “What happened with Tyrion?”

“He likes to talk....” he grunts. It’s not the answer she wants, but there’s no point to getting her needlessly upset. A passing soldier offers him a salute and her slight bow. “I made him stop…”

“Ah. You’ll have to share your secret.” He opens the door to their cabin and steps aside to let her pass through. And to his delight, she lets out a playful shriek when he swats her arse to get her inside quicker. “Jon!” turning and planting a defiant finger in his chest as he closes the door behind her. “What if someone saw you manhandle your queen like that?”

“Oh, they haven’t seen me manhandle my queen…” grabbing her and tossing her on the bed as she squawks in surprise. Laughter erupting from her as he rips off his uniform jacket and shirt before jumping to begin unwrapping her. But she pauses him, her soft hands sliding over his as he hooks his thumbs into her leggings.

“I love you,” she says easily. Giving his hands a squeeze. Violet eyes soft and warm. The tenderness of her voice tearing open his chest so she can reach in for his heart. Gods, this woman. How in seven hells did he ever get this woman?

“I love you too, Dany.”

She smirks and releases his hands from her grip. Leaning back into the mess of pillows she insists inhabit their bed. Playful eyes flicking down to his belt as she says those seven little words that always drive him mad.

“You better get to work, Jon Snow…”

Perhaps they are fools in love. Perhaps he’s wrong, and Tyrion’s right. Perhaps they are just like
Cersei and Jaime, and this is a selfish love that will end just the same. With a broken country, and millions dead. Perhaps not.

But as his hands peel the tight-knit fabric over her thighs to reveal smooth expanses of creamy skin. As her smile passes over him and another giggle erupts as he struggles to untangle her foot from the narrow hole in her leggings. As her hands drag him to meet her lips, there is one certainty.

There is absolutely nothing that could take him away from her.

“This message will repeat in 30 seconds. Record and Relay to all available frequencies. Priority One.”

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if I've said this... but I've been using Polish for the Tongue of the First Men. I have my reasons. This is from google. If you actually speak it, please let me know. Google is lying to me.
It's always so cold.

The steel can she finds herself in does little to temper the frigid, iceberg-laden waters of the North. If anything, the metal walls make it all the colder, the Blackwind’s poorly insulated hull leeching then
losing every hint of warmth to the wrathful winter seas. The blazing furnaces in the bowels of the ship do little and less but drive them ever forward, crawling against the current.

What was an easy quick passage south less than two months ago is now dangerous and slow. So very slow. All hands are needed to stoke the furnace and feed the boilers. Dothraki, Ironborn, Unsullied, and Westerosi all take shifts. Working side by side in torturous tedium to bring them North.

“At least it’s warm down there, Your Grace,” the men tell her, their breath fogging in the cold air, a black cough plaguing their words.

Even Jon has taken a few shifts, much to her dismay when he returned to their cabin covered in ash and soot. Spreading coal dust all over her trunks and their belongings in the few short minutes it took her to disrobe him and throw him into the privy to wash up.

She’d finally had a chance to see them in action after demanding Theon give her a tour of the Blackwind’s inner workings. He stumbled through his explanations, but she did not need them in the first place. It does not take long for her to understand this machine. How all its parts fit together to crank the three huge propellers at the stern of the ship.

This is a powerful machine. Engines larger than she had imagined. Simple compared to Drogon, but massive in scale. Occupying the length of the ship from stem to stern. Rooms of furnaces, all burning fuel to boil water to generate steam to crank enormous pistons and feed the turbines which work in tandem to propel them through the water. Fire and water mixing and churning, creating energy and momentum.

It’s impressive.

“Only fire and blood can create true power.” Viserys reminds her, whispering in the back of her mind. “Fire and Blood.”

But it is no Dragon.

Her brief excursion down to the engine rooms left her smudged with coarse coal dust, and she dreaded returning to their cabin. Lest Jon tease and rush her into the tiny privy as she had him. Mercifully, he wasn’t in their cabin. He was likely off training with Arya. Working with her to build her strength and speed back up after her injury.
She’ll never forget the look on his face as his little sister collapsed into his arms, blood dripping through his fingers as he tried to put pressure on the wound.

Her own fingers are stained and sticky with machine grease, smearing black onto her smalls as she peels them off in order to wash. The stain of her curiosity, earned by her exploration. A stain that’s hard to remove in the few minutes of hot water she’s allotted aboard the Blackwind.

There’s never enough hot water. She should be used to it by now. The sudden splash of cold signalling the end of whatever comfort she could find in the cramped space. Bone-chilling water stinging her skin, leaving her numb and shivering as she rushes to wash off the filth. It lingers in her pores, leaving her feeling spotted and dirty, no-matter how much she soaps and scrapes. Shaking under the frigid stream, scrubbing herself raw and red, until she can bear it no longer.

Perhaps she’s not a dragon after all. Dragons don’t whimper and pine for warmth. Their teeth do not chatter and clack. They don’t shiver in their bed, wrapped in a pile of blankets, listening to the rhythmic pinging of the rain against the hull.

They are fire made flesh. Fire and Blood.

She’d even fished out Drogo’s Hrakar pelt from the bottom of her trunks. It’s not a thing she’s seen in years. Since before she came across the sea, before Meereen and Slaver’s Bay. Back when there was nothing but the endless waste, and the scorching sun. The cold makes her long for that red, dead place. Her lips would still be dry and chapped. Her cheeks would still sting from the elements. She would still be lethargic and exhausted and drained of her will to move.

But at least she’d be warm.

The thought sends a stone of guilt sinking in her belly. She’s far better off her than most of her men. Taking turns sharing cots and cramped quarters of the aft cargo hold. The Blackwind wasn’t meant to house so many. And she should be grateful for the small comforts she’s allotted.

But its still so cold.

“Oh Dany, my poor love.” Jon laughs when he returns, closing the door to their cabin behind him. Her suspicions about his whereabouts confirmed by the red flush to his cheeks and the trail of sweat down his shirt. Immediately -mercifully- stripping down to his small clothes, and tossing his training blacks atop one of her trunks. Blotchy bruises from sparring with his sister starting to shade his skin.
“You’re just used to this misery,” she cries, hating the pathetic whine in her voice. The wavering shivering mewl of a small and pathetic creature.

“Perhaps, love,” he chuckles as he untangles and straightens the layers of unsatisfactory blankets. “Here, the best way to get warm is body heat.” Wrapping her up in his arms, creating a cocoon for them out of the blankets. Draping the Hrakkar pelt around as the outermost layer. Trapping all their heat inside the little nest he built for them. “Better?”

She nods, burying her face into his chest. Warmth already seeping into her pores. Jon hisses as she slides her cold hands under his armpits and tangles her frozen feet between his legs. Squirming and hooking her toes behind his knees. He doesn’t flinch or withdraw at the frigid contact. Instead, he draws her closer, wedging her limbs into the scarce nooks of his body. Letting her take what she needs from him, doting on her with soft kisses.

“Will it be like this all winter?”

“It’s the ship, the Ironborn usually keep to Southern waters during Winter,” he explains quietly. “Only day or so more, love. It will be easier when we're ashore.” Kissing her forehead, sealing his promise to her skin.

“Of course it will.” Lifting her head and rolling her eyes. “We’ll be back at Winterfell and the fireplace will be going, and the house will smell like Gilly’s cooking. And we’ll be naked in your bed under all those quilts.” A sad smile curls his lips, and his dark eyes seem to grow heavy.

It’s a dream, a nice dream in a world where they can snuggle in that cozy corner. Spending the long winter nights in an endless cycle of fucking and falling asleep. His fingers slip along her back and trace patterns over her skin, spelling out his own longing for those imagined days. A world where they aren’t marching towards war and death in the frozen wasteland beyond the wall. Where they could plan their future without caveat. Where all their hopes aren’t supposed on a multitude of ifs.

*If they survive the dead,*

*If they last the Winter,*

*If they defeat Cersei,*
They won’t even be returning to Winterfell when they finally dock. Brienne musters the rebelling southern troops at Moat Cailin while Lyanna Mormont and Grey Worm encamp their existing forces throughout The Gift and The Wall. There are so many unknowns and so much of what lies before them is unclear.

But what is clear is Jon’s erection poking into her stomach. She snorts out a laugh and wiggles in his arms, pressing herself flush with him. A different kind of warmth flooding her as Jon sighs and tightens his hold. Rocking against her with easy, lazy movements.

“Yer’ soft,” he mumbles into her hair.

She snorts a small laugh, raising her eyebrow and rolling him onto his back. “And you’re hard.”

“Aye.” His jaw falls slack and eyes slide closed as she slips her hand under his smalls and wraps it around his cock.

A deep relieved groan reverberates through him as he stretches under her attentions. Several loud pops cracking up his spine. She nuzzles into his side as he settles, keeping herself tucked under his arm, under the layers of blankets. Listening to the small noises he makes with each stroke.

He’s beautiful, though he’d laugh if she told him so. Looking like both a god and a greenboy as the worries of the world melt off his face and his rapture begins to build. The lump in his throat bobbing as he swallows and pants. His hips flex and twist under the thin weight of her arm. Muscles shift beneath his skin, urgently seeking more friction, and she tightens her grip to give him what he asks.

A breathy “Fuck, Dany” escapes when she swirls her thumb around his cockhead. Coaxing out a few small sticky droplets and smearing them into his skin. His coarse, untamed whiskers catch in her hair as he noses through the silver strands. Sniffing her and planting small kisses on her crown, while a firm hand slips under her shirt and travels up her spine, holding her against him. Urging her closer as he writhes from her touch. His cock hot and hard in hand. His pleasure filling her chest with pride.

Something soft inside her wanting to nurture and nourish. To dote on him and spoil him. To calm his mind, and ease his distress. To curl around him and listen to him purr. Something sharp relishes the power she wields. His rigid ropes of muscle twitching and trembling. The great hero of Westeros writhing in her bed, whispering his devotion in her ear between quiet groans.
His hand tangles in her hair, tilting her head up to meet his gaze. Liquid heavy-lidded eyes looking down at her. The hand behind her head tightening and bringing her up to meet his lips. Her shoulders peeking out from the covers as she cranes her neck to reach him.

The cold doesn’t have a chance to touch her. His kisses are kindling, starting a fire inside her. Heat swelling in her heart and between her hips. Flame sparking in her palms, spreading through her, devouring her from within. Each press of his lips, each lash of his tongue making her burn brighter. Hotter. Making her ache with need as he twists her under him, wedging himself between her thighs. Tugging one leg out from her thick knitted leggings. Gasping as a rush of cold air pierces the burrow of blankets.

“Wait. Wait.” She stills him as his cock nuzzles between her folds. Reaching up to pull the covers over his shoulders, locking the warmth inside. “Okay.”

He smiles and chuckles quietly, his weight shifting above her. His arms hooking under her shoulders, his hands holding her head. Distracting her with his smile before burying himself inside her.

She wasn’t quite ready for him. Her molten heat just beginning to spill out. But it is such delicious agony. To be filled so abruptly. To have her flesh stretched and rent apart. To feel him make room for himself inside her. To be overwhelmed by him. By his weight pressing her down into the bed. By his mouth slowly consuming her. By his cock stirring her insides with small movements.

His hand slips under her knee and pushes her open. Spreading her beneath him. Hips rocking and rotating. Opening her up with an agonizing churn. With a deep, round rut circling the mouth of her womb. That whispered wish stirring in her heart. A long-suppressed desire blooming in her chest. An if that has become a hope and a prayer.

*If the witch was wrong,*

*If she falls pregnant,*

*If their orphaned and lonely souls can start a family of their own,*

She threads her fingers through his hair. Losing it from its knot. Letting the midnight locks spill around his head. The ends of it ghosting over her skin as his mouth roots and latches, nipping and sucking at her neck. At a spot high on her jaw just beneath her ear. On the fleshly space where her throat meets her shoulder. In a line from her chin to her chest. Sending shivers down her spine as the
cold air hits the wet marks of his saliva. Fueling her need for more of him.

She takes more, smoothing her hands down the long lean lines of his back. Reaching to find the swell of his arse. Bringing him closer. Pulling him deeper. Feeling his muscles bunch and relax, feeling him press and shift within her, in the slow grind of their languid, lazy love.

Each heavy exhale filling the air with warmth. Each deep lunge filling her with him. Spreading and stretching and stealing small sips from his lips between strong, sure strokes sawing her in two. Leaving her whimpering in quiet surrender. Pinching her eyes shut as the wave swells and crests and breaks.

Not the violent waves of the Narrow Sea crashing outside the frosted porthole window. But the easy waves of the small lake at the foot of the Mother of Mountains. Gently lapping at the shore while the sun bakes into her skin. A tender tide ebbing and flowing. Heat seeping into her flesh, into her bones, banishing the chill. Leaving her glowing and complete.

Jon buries his face in her neck, a small shuddering tremor traveling through him and dying with a strangled cry. Her love going slack, and sinking into her arms, melting into their intimate embrace.

She loves the peace that permeates these quiet moments. The raw edges of their souls fusing together. His weight settled on top of her. Solid and satisfying. Her fingers scratching absently at his shoulders and scalp. Listening to him happily hum and shift and groan when she reaches a good spot until he rewards her with kisses. The deep possessive kind. The ones that leave her breathless and heady… and needy.

“I need a minute, love,” he barks, the skin around his eyes crinkling with his laugh.

“I’m sure you can figure out how to make yourself useful while you... recover,” she teases. Toying with an errant curl. Tugging it straight before releasing it. Only to watch it spring back into place.

“I live to serve, my queen.” He dips his head down for another kiss. But before his lips can brush hers, he startles stiff. The muscles of his body tightening in her embrace. Pulling away from her, eyes darting around as if searching.

“Jon?”
“Something’s wrong,” he answers absently.

“What?”

He doesn’t respond, only grabs her and rolls off the bed. Crashing them to the floor and covering her with his body as the loudest noise she has ever heard tears through the ship. The explosion echoing through the bulkheads, vibrating along the metal walls. Crashing. Shouting. Confusion. Chaos.

Jon is up in an instant. Pulling her to her feet, before scrambling for his gear. As he dresses, she hustles to the speaker box in the captain’s cabin. Opening the comm line to the bridge. “Theon, Status report.”

Static.

“Theon! Report.”

Panic builds as no response comes through the small metal box set into the wall. She casts a glance at Jon as he straps on his ballistic vest.

“We got to move, love.” He tosses her Dothraki leathers at her, before pulling on his boots. Tugging at the laces with practiced haste. She hurries, fumbling with her own gear as the ship rattles and shakes again.

They should have been safe at sea. The cold Northern waters were supposed to keep Euron at bay. The Blackwind was struggling at the surface. For the Silence to reach them from deep below the waves…

It must be so cold.

A panicked shout rings through the heavy steel door, followed by a loud pounding knock. The frantic noises of a little sister calling for her big brother.

“Arya.” He leaps to his feet, the hatch door opening with a thunk. The little wolf practically falling into his arms as the ship lurches hard. Gendry catches himself in the doorway behind her, his large
hammer planting on the ground with a heavy thunk.

“Status,” she demands, lacing her boots, as Jon checks over his sister, eyes narrowing on a bloody slice across her head.

“No idea, Your Grace. We ran right here,” Gendry answers. “There’s water in the hallways, not much yet, but…”

Satisfied with his inspection of Arya, Jon extends to his full height, the god and the greenboy gone, and Commander Snow taking their place as another explosion shudders along the steel walls of the ship.

“We need to get to the bridge.” Extending his hand for her and strapping Longclaw to his back. “We need to know what’s going on.”

There are a dozen reasons Theon wouldn’t answer. The explosion might’ve damaged the comm systems. He could be in communication with the engine room. He might be hurt or dead. As the thoughts cross her mind, another explosion hits the ship. Jon grabs her, pulling her down against the bulkhead, crouching over her and Arya as the ship rattles.

The corridors are filled with soldiers hustling to their stations, alerted by klaxons screeching their shrill songs, deafening those who weren’t already deafened by the explosion. Ironborn race to find and seal the breaches.

But the Dothraki panic. The deep ingrained fear of the poisoned water becoming a reality. She shouts her commands to them as they fight their way to the bridge. *Stay calm. Account for everyone. Secure the supplies.*

“Commander!” Beric shouts above the din. The one-eyed soldier shoving up to their side through the chaos.

“Status?” Jon demands.

“We have an impact on the port side. Reported breaches on levels three and five.”
“Dead?” she asks.

“Unknown, Your Grace.”

“Theon?”

“Unknown, Your Grace,” he repeats. “I haven’t been able to raise the bridge. Could be they knew where to hit us.”

“We need to get to topside, see if we can find where they’re hitting us from.” But even as she gives her orders, the hull shrieks from impact. A large pointed chunk of metal, almost like a spearhead, pierces the hull of the ship in front of her.

Jon spins her around, slamming her against the wall and shielding her. Shouting for Beric to disarm it.

“It’s not a bomb,” the soldier declares after a moment.

“What is it then?” Jon asks as she shoves her way out from under his arm so she can investigate. Water streams through the torn metal shards. Saltwater spilling into the corridor from around the edges of the breach.

At the question, it begins to whir with a grinding mechanical noise. The point splitting open like a horrific steel flower. Each bladed petal bending backward and clamping down into the hull. Understanding dawns on her as another pierces the ship 10 yards away. The same horrible flower blooming and clawing. And another and another.

It’s not a bomb, or a spear.

“It’s a harpoon,” she answers, her voice sounding hollow in her throat. “They’re trying to drag us down.”

Horror paints the lines of Jon’s face, and the whole ship jerks violently, the clamps indenting the steel hull as whatever is on the other side begins to pull. The metal groaning beneath the strain. The force
throwing her off balance, and tumbling into the few inches of water pooling in the corridor.

“We need to get it off!” Splashing as she struggles to her feet, Jon’s firm hand pulling her back up. Gripping her tight as the ship lurches again. Soldiers shout orders at each other in the hall as they try and pry the devices off. Using knives, crowbars, cabling, scrap. But its grip into the hull is too tight. The force of the pull molds the steel of the hull around the clamp. Folding it over the edges.

“Move!” Arya shouts from behind them, pulling her back against the wall. Jon ducking to the side as Gendry brings his hammer up and overhead. Then down with a furious force. The blunt head of the hammer striking loud and true. Smashing, again and again, warping and twisting the horrific bloom until the mechanisms break apart and the tension snaps.

The ship pitches with another pull on the line. The fisherman reeling in his catch. The Kraken dragging his prey down to the depths. She looks down the corridor, a dozen clamps blasted into the sides of the ship. Gendry rushes to the next one. Already swinging, The Fury running hot despite the frigid cold pooling at their feet.

It's not enough.

How many of these harpoons lance the Blackwind? How many more tentacles does the Kraken have to leash them by?

“We got to go.” Jon’s hand wraps around hers. “Beric stay with Gendry. Get those things off this ship.”

“Aye, Ser.” The soldier offers a quick salute before he turns on his heel, chasing the thundering of Gendry’s hammer behind him.

The chaos below deck is contained by the narrow bulkheads and small passages, but above deck, there is nothing to hold it back. Rain and seawater slosh across the deck, sending cargo and crates careening. Desperate soldiers fire into the nothing, hoping in vain that their bullets find a mark in the pitch black of the sea.

Metal whines and warps as the ship tilts with the pull, throwing her against the railing. Arya catches her, the girl’s unnatural speed saving her from falling overboard into the frozen water below. Icy waves roar and lash below. The cold salt spray stinging her face.
But against the black, she sees them. Thin metallic lines pulled taut. Fanned out from their source. Straining, then slacking as their enemy tries to pull them down after them.

Even in the bay of Dragons, there were whispers of the Kraken.

A silent hunter, lurking in the depths, stalking its prey. Taking ships at night, tangling them in its snares, gorging itself on gold and gore before dragging vessels to a watery grave.

But the Blackwind is not one of the small cargo ships hopping from port to port between the Free Cities and Qarth. It is many thousand tons of steel. It is a Warship. The legacy of the IronBorn maintained for centuries to serve a singular purpose. To reave and rob. To outrun and outlast.

Lightning cracks above and for the smallest fraction of a second, the shadow of the Silence is outlined beneath the waves. Its engines frothing and churning the water. Fighting to drag them down. It’s smaller than the Blackwind. Much smaller. And though Euron has caught them off guard, the Blackwind is no easy prey. The warship will not go down quickly or quietly. Not unless they don’t put up a fight.

Water flows freely down the stairs leading to the Bridge and she has kept a firm latch on Jon’s arm to keep from losing her footing as they climb through the torrent. The rain hits hard, adding a heavy harmony to the chaos. Soaking her to the core, and leaving her more a drowned rat than a queen.

But even rats fight back.

“Pull yourself together, Greyjoy!” Clegane roars at Theon. The thin ghost of a man standing frozen in the middle of the Bridge. Shock and confusion streaming steadily from his eyes as the Hound glowers over him.

“We need Yara,” he blubbers.

“Well, what we have is you,” Jaime adds with a snarl, before his green-gold eyes meet hers in the doorway. “Your Grace!” The veteran bolting upright and pressing his fist to his sternum in salute.

“Move,” she orders.
“Your G-G-Grace…” Theon stammers at her, looking like a beaten animal. Eyes glassy and darting everywhere, yet still empty and gazing into the middle distance.

“I will deal with you later,” venom drips down her throat as she shoves past him. Seizing the wheel and throwing it hard to starboard.

The broad windows that surround the Bridge rattle with the thunder rolling overhead and the ship reels at her command. Slanting and sending anything not anchored crashing to the floor. She can barely make out the shape of the Blackwind below her. The rain blurring the lines between shadowed steel and dark depths.

“Your Grace.” Jaime staggers and catches himself on the edge of the rusting command console. His mechanical grip bending the edges.

“Euron has us by tethers along the portside. We need to fight back.”

Her eyes narrow out the window, finding the faint outline of the mounted artillery at the Blackwind’s bow. “Theon, what’s the range on those guns?”

Theon swallows and chokes on his answer. His mouth opening and closing as he seems to gasp for words that refuse to form. Rage balloons inside her. Hot air streaming out her nostrils, venting the toxic anger boiling in her belly. Like the smoke that billows up from the engine room only to spew out the towering stacks high above.

Yet even as the heat of her wrath washes over her, she feels a coolness at her side, and glances up to meet Jon’s eyes. He doesn’t say anything. But then he does not need to. His gaze breaks from hers and his arm reaches toward Theon. Grasping his brother’s shoulder even as Theon withdraws from the touch.

“Theon,” his voice low and steady. An island of calm surrounded by raging seas. The eye of the storm. His other arm stretches out to Theon’s other shoulder, turning him, forcing him to meet his gaze. “Theon. You are the acting captain of this ship. You are our best hope of coming out of this alive. I need you with us.”

Theon’s wheezing breath fills the air for a long desperate moment. But finally, it slows and evens. His thin, waifish form seems to fill and become solid. The distant far away look in his eyes becomes focused. And after the silence, he nods. “We-we can’t hit from here, not with the big g-guns…” He
takes a deep whistling breath. “We use them t-to disable shi-ships at a distance an-an’ then we overtake them. They wo-wo-won’t work this close. Not when-when he’s got us.”

A frustrated grunt tears out her throat as she begins to pace the bridge. The Silence is so much smaller than them, he should not be able to tow them along.

“So what should—” Her words catch in her throat as the ship stalls. It’s forward momentum shuddering to a halt as the Silence pulls against them. Jon seizes her about the waist, keeping her from tumbling headfirst into the console. Firm grip pinning her to his chest, bracing her against him as the floor beneath them tilts and sways with the pull.

Out the window, the faint landmarks of the horizon begin to list to the left. The rain slanting diagonal as the Blackwind is dragged over the water.

Clegane bolts for the wheel as it begins to spin on its own, his huge hands grasping the bronzed spokes and tugging hard against the pull as the rudder tries to give in against the monster’s force. Straining, pulling and fighting the complex machinery, as a horrific grinding noise whirs through the ship.

It dies after a minute, the Blackwind’s engines roaring in protest and lurching forward once again. Her stomach somersaults with the momentum, bile splashing up into her mouth as she regains her composure.

“We need options.” She swallows the bitterness back down as she untangles from Jon’s grip. “We cannot let him continue unchecked.”

“Bash him,” Clegane mutters, catching his fist with his opposite hand.

“Are you insane!” Lannister screeches.

“I don’t see you comin’ up with any bright ideas,” the huge man growls, leering over Jaime with menace.

“Not every problem can be solved by hitting it hard enough, Clegane.” His mechanical arm clicks as he jabs a finger into the Hounds face.
“Enough,” Jon interjects, stepping between them before the palatable frustration in the room escalates.

“Could that work?” She turns to Theon. “Could the Blackwind take it?”

“It’s…” Greyjoy licks his lips, his chin bobbing with his thoughts as he reasons through the idea. “It’s not the worst idea. We could take it. Buh-buh-but it depends on how damaged we are. An-And he could just dive.”

She taps a finger to her lip. “Not indefinitely. Those lines have a limit.”

“Well what else are we going to do,” Arya states, regaining her perch on one of the consoles. “It’s not like we can go over there and put him down.”

“Unless…” Jon low voice rumbles above her.

“Unless…” her voice joins a chorus of confusion from the others in the room. He opens his mouth to speak but it’s cut short by the whine and peal of static.

“-R Gra-? Yo- -Ce,” Tyrion cuts in and out of the speakerbox. His voice chopped by interference.

“Tyrion,” she calls outs, rushing to comm array. Finding the mic and bringing it to her mouth. “Tyrion can you hear me?” She twists the random dials on the comm system, his voice wavering and popping as she crouches beneath the console, searching through a nest of copper wiring, thick with years of dust. Exposed and frayed metal threads stinging her skin with small jolts of electricity as she hunts for the line that will connect her to her Hand.

Her fingers find and follow a line from the deep within the console, leading from a pipe in the floor to the inside the machine, and with a twist and loud pop, Tyrion’s voice rings clear.

“Daenerys?”
With a relieved sigh, she depresses the button of mic. “Status report, Tyrion.”

“We have two impacts on the portside. Unfortunately it seems he’s struck our aft cargo hold. We’ve sealed the bulkheads but—”

”Daenerys, we have men trapped down there,” Jorah interrupts, his tone urgent and desperate.

For a moment she is robbed of words. Horror growing as a cancerous mass in her stomach. Heavy and solid. Her bloodriders, drowning in the poisoned water that they fear so much. Her Unsullied, robbed of the futures she promised them. The Westerosi soldiers who rebelled to serve life, and not a country.

She looks up at Jon, his dark eyes staring back. And answering her wordless plea, he rolls his shoulders and exhales deeply.

“Clegane, Lannister, with me. Arya do your duty.”

“Yes, Ser,” Arya answers, pressing a salute to her chest.

“I should stay with—” Jaime protests.

“Do as Commander Snow says,” she barks, rage boiling beneath in her skin. Glaring before turning to Jon. “And bring him back alive.” Jon looks her over for a long second. A weighty moment, heavy with longing. But it fades as he tightens the strap of Longclaw across his shoulder, and with nod turns toward the door. Her eyes follow their backs, as she speaks into the mic. “Jorah, Jon is coming, get as many men to safety as you can.”

“Understood,” Jorah cuts out.

“Your Grace,” Tyrion interrupts. “The safety of the ship, its best we cut our los—”

The volcano of her wrath spills out. “We are not your sister, Tyrion. We do not cut our losses! We do not give up on our men! Keep me updated.” She inhales sharply and releases the mic. Arya holds out her hand and helps her find her feet.
Brushing the dust off her leathers, she takes a deep breath, pinching her eyes shut. Letting her hands fold low on her belly as she shuts everything away. A moment to think. To regroup. To find that thing within herself.

Shoving down her fear for Jon’s safety, her fear for their men’s safety. Focusing her anger, away from Tyrion and his short sightedness, away from herself at being taken by surprise. Stoking the flame of her rage. Each breath making it burn hotter and a brighter. Drawing it inward. Letting it forge something stable and strong in the midst of the chaos. Drawing it upward, letting it spread and fill her limbs. Fire and Blood mingling, churning and flowing. Becoming powerful and unstoppable.

Her eyes open as thunder roars above them. The cracks echoing over the open sea, resonating through the steel walls of the Blackwind, humming in her bones, humming in her soul.

“I need a heading for the Silence,” she says something predatory and venomous slipping along the words. Something dangerous and inhuman. Something as monstrous as the Kraken lurking beneath the waves. “See if it’s changed position”

Boots thud against the floor, the wet squish of waterlogged leather betraying Arya’s normally silent footfalls as she runs out the door. Her own steps are solid as she strides to the wheel staring out into the dark ocean surrounding her. Fire does not fear the blackness. For it is only in the dark, that its true might can be seen.

“Thirty degrees off the Port side.” Arya runs back inside, breathlessly running up to the wheel beside her. “Around a hundred meters out.”

“That’s too tight, your-your grace,” Theon stammers.

Her eyes flash down to the console, laden with knobs, and toggles and switches and finds the large brass lever gleaming in the dim light. “Is he keeping pace with us or is he being dragged behind?”

“Keeping pace,” the little wolf answers, a cautious curiosity painting the lines of her face.

“Good.”
And with that she grabs the throttle and yanks it back. The engines whirring in protest. The mechanisms within clicking and groaning as the gears switch. Losing the forward thrust, stalling, and turning over. Momentum transferring to retrograde propulsion with a jarring rattle through the ship.

“He’s gonna dive!” Theon exclaims, a panic filling his voice.

She shakes her head. He doesn’t understand. He doesn’t see it. He could never see. There is a reason the Silence is the only one left of its kind. And there is a reason only Dragons have ever touched the sky.

“He won’t have enough time,” she grunts. “Arya. I need you to let me know when he’s in front of us.” With a small nod, Arya darts off once more. “Theon, notify all decks to prepare for impact, evacuate the stern.”

“Yara’s gonna k-k-kill me,” Theon groans.

“If she hasn’t killed you before, she won’t kill you now. The sea is still making up its mind.” She turns to him, a quick reckless smile spreading across her face. “Besides… what is dead may never die.”

Theon regards her solemnly for a moment. The apple of his throat bobbing with a hard swallow. Pressing his fist to his sternum in salute. “But rises again, stronger and harder.”

The flickering light on the ceiling changes from the flickering faded yellow to an eerie strobing red. The same red light flashes throughout the ship. A pulsing warning for all to prepare for the worse.

“Hang on Jon…” she whispers beneath her breath. Praying that his gods will hear her.

“Thirty seconds.” Arya runs back, planting herself next to the wheel.

She squints out the wide glass pane, searching for a sign and finding nothing but black sea and black skies. Nothing to do but wait it out second by second.

The sky splits again, cracking with a bolt of white hot light. Flashing and painting the world in stark
greys for but a moment before thunder roars behind it. And on the horizon she sees another monster lurking in the distance.

It’s bigger than it looks, she knows. Its roots sink deep beneath the waves. Its jagged jaws of ancient ice ready to shred across steel. The great threat of winter seas. An icy doom that has sent sailors to their grave since time immemorial. A floating mountain of ice crawling south from some forgotten sea beyond The Wall. Drifting to its eventual doom in the warm equatorial waters.

“There’s always a bigger fish” the fish mongers of the free cities told her when she was but a young girl. Staring wide-eyed at some terrible sea beast hanging off the side of a too small fishing vessel. “There’s always somethin’ else that can swallow you whole.”

“Fear cuts deeper than swords,” a breath of a whisper escapes from the young woman next to her. She feels a hand at her side, and looks to see Arya’s reaching for her. Her fingers lock around the Little Wolf’s. The cloth wrapped around her knuckles and wrists making the grip all the tighter.

“I know you’d rather be with your brother. But I’m glad you’re here.”

“My place is here, Your Grace,” The Little Wolf answers.

She mirrors the exhale, slowly extending her free hand to the brass throttle. Gripping it tightly as she counts down the last seconds. “Five… Four…”

“Fear cuts deeper than swords,” the mantra repeats. The ghostly prayer tightening her grip around the young woman’s hand.

“Three…two…” And throwing it forward.

The ship lurches. The intricate mechanisms stalling and starting once more before charging headlong into darkness. The engines beneath them climbing and churning. She can feel it through her waterlogged boots. The pulsing rhythm of the propellers frothing the sea, thrusting forward. She grips Arya’s hand, pinching her eyes shut as she braces for impact.

For a moment, her stomach drops as there’s no grinding of metal on metal. No stuttering scrape of steel on steel. The horrible sinking fear that she miscalculated. That Arya miscounted. That Euron was able to evade their maneuver.
And then a sickening crunch is followed by a deafening screech. The ship rattles, quaking from blow. Metal tears and shrieks in a cacophony of chaos. A terrible whine cutting the air, humming in her bones, in her teeth.

The bow lifts, the long barrels of the Blackwind’s artillery tilt towards the stars. Tilting up to where only dragons have ever flown. The floor beneath them shifts and angles, sending Theon tumbling to the floor. Arya tugging her down into a kneel, keeping them low and balanced until the roar slows to a rumble.

Her nostrils flare with deep heaving inhales as the chaos dies. A thick quiet overtaking the ship, for a moment the only sounds she hears is the gentle pings of a dying storm, Theon’s weak groan, and the decaying hum of the Blackwind’s engines.

“We got him,” Arya breaks the silence, an almost giddy quality to her voice as she releases Daenerys’s hand and rushes to the window.

“I think so,” she agrees, letting out a puff of air, before turning to help Theon to his feet. “We need to asses the damage,” she turns toward the comm array, “The engines don’t sound right.”

Theon rubs his temple for a moment, closing his eyes and listening to the ship. “Sounds like the central turbine.”

“So much for making it to White Harbor by tomorrow,” she sighs, bringing the mic to her lips. “Status report, all decks.”

Reports trickle in, the engine room confirming Theon’s suspicions and worse, several of the boiler rooms were badly damaged. Her stomach twists as they account for the dead. A dozen killed in the initial explosion. Another handful lost to the storm. A med bay full of dead and dying from the careening cargo shifting throughout the ship. Men burnt alive when the boilers ruptured and split. There’s no accounting for those who were trapped at the stern of the ship when she rammed the Silence. They won’t know until they take a full tally.

And she still hasn’t heard from Jon.

She swallows hard, that twisting ache in her belly tightening as she finds the courage to ask.
“Tyrion,” her voice waivers. “Was Commander Snow able to pull our men out of the hold?”

“Yes, Your Grace,” her hand pauses warily. “He’s gone to the Silence to capture Euron.”

The air evacuates her lungs.

“He’s what?” she hears herself screeching the words, the sound hollow and far away, as if she was listening to herself through a glass bell. He wouldn’t. He wouldn’t risk everything for such a trivial prize. He wouldn’t go down there, to the crushed hull of The Silence, to fetch a man who is likely dead. Not without backup. Not without her.

But even as the whirlpool of denial sends her spinning, she can recognize the truth. Of course he did. That’s what he does. Rushes off into danger. Takes the hit. Pays the price. Does the stupid heroic thing that everyone else is to afraid to do.

“Your Grace!” Theon’s shouts snatch her attention as he points out the window. What was a small blip on the horizon a few minutes ago, now looms large directly ahead. The first beams of dawn glint off the blue white ice, blinding her with sunlit sparkles.

“We must be drifting off course!” Theon explains, striding to the wheel, reaching to the bronzed spokes and tugging hard to starboard. It squeals in reply, barely moving as the thin man pulls against it. A stuttering swear tearing from his lips as he struggles to move.

Arya bolts to him, shoving him out the way, rolling up her sleeves and pulling with all her might. The muscles she’s earned with constant training bunching beneath her blacks as she strains.

“Its jammed!” the little wolf shouts.

“How long do we have?”

“Not long enough…”
“Gods,” a ghastly whisper slipping out, as she stares wide eyed in shock as the ship crawls ever closer to the mountain of ice. “Is there any other way to divert us?”

Theon licks his lips, as he swallows and starts, unable to force the words out of his throat. “We-We-We-”

With an exasperated hiss she turns on her heel toward the comm array and grabs the mic. “Drop anchor. Now!”

“Daenerys, what’s happening?” Tyrion replies, his voice masked through the static.

“Do it!” she orders.

“We’re too-too-too far from the shore, Your Grace.” Theons’ eyes dart around as he chokes on the words. “It wo-wo-won’t do anything.”

She tears at her hair in frustration. Her mind scrambling through what it remembers of the engine room, searching for a way to manipulate the rudder. Breath coming in short gasps as she stomps and paces along an invisible line, bisecting the ship from stem to stern. Her eyes follow it, out the window across the deck, to the heavy artillery mounted at the fore.

“Arya…” she breathes, turning to the girl. “I need you to fire a very large gun.”

The little wolf stares at her, then glances to the guns before turning back again. A feral grin painted across her face. “It would be my pleasure, Your Grace,” she answers before darting out the door at top speed.

Theon murmurs a command into the radio. Pleading for men get down to the gunnery bay immediately. “She wo-won’t get many shots.”

“I know.”

Each second that ticks by tightens the knot in her belly. Each passing moment giving her more opportunity to reflect on the consequences. Jon in the Silence, wedged under their stern. The crash
slowing them, but not enough to stop them from careening into death. He’ll be the first to be crushed by the ice.

Stupid Hero, running off to die. Leaving her to a world without him. For however long she lasts afterward. The bitter thought floods her mouth with bile and without warning she’s overcome with a wave of dizziness. Leaning up against the window and lurching as she coughs out a sudden rush of sick.

“My Grace…” Theon rushes to her as she heaves and gags. “Daenerys…”

“M’ fine.” She gags, wiping her mouth the back of her hand. “Update all decks on our status,” she wheezes as she sucks down air. Sweat beads on her brow as her deep heaving breaths slow. She presses her forehead against the window pane, letting the cold glass ease the heat in her face.

Stupid Heroes.

She opens her eyes as the long barrel at the stern of the ship begins to move. A heavy mechanical clicking accompanying every inch. A green light flashes on the comm array.

“Locked an-and loaded your grace,” Theon interprets.

“Is there a radio in the gun bay?”

“Yes.” Theon hands her the mic, the cord stretched taut as she presses against the window.

“Arya. You may fire when ready.”

“Almost,” Arya answers. The barrell nudging up and down as she lines up her shot. “Firing.”

It’s loud. So loud. Her head rings with the blast and it takes a moment for her to blink away the low whine lingering in her ear. Peering out the window she watches as ice cracks and falls away.

It’s not enough.
“Hit it again,” she demands.

Another thirty seconds. Another wait. Another long string of moments to reflect on all that’s at stake. Another shot.

“Again,” she orders. And again.

It’s too big. The iceberg’s roots sink deep below the waves. And every chunk they blow off, only forces more to rise up from below.

“Again,” she orders into the mic. “Arya? Again!”

“It won’t fire!”

She turns to Theon, who glances down at the comms. The once green light flashing orange instead.

“That’s all we got,” Theon exhales in a rush of regret. “We have nothing left.”


She can’t answer her. The little wolf calls in her ear, asking for guidance she cannot give. A brave girl willing to fight and die at her orders. To protect people. To protect her brother. Jon… trapped in the ruins of the Silence. There’s no way out for him.

She can’t save him this time. There’s no Dragon for her to fly. No wrath left for her to rain down. Just an empty bitter life alone.

*Stupid heroes*.

“Come back, Arya.” She tosses the mic to Theon as numbness washes over her. “Sound the call. Abandon ship. Load what lifeboats we have.”
“Ironborn don’t have lifeboats, Your Grace.”

“No.” Her teeth grind and the muscles in her face twitch as she fights back tears. “No. That’s not true. You have to have lifeboats. It makes no sense for you not to have lifeboats. Yara’s not stupid. You’re not stupid.”

Theon offers her an empty smile as he fidgets with the mic in his hand. “What is dead may never die…”

“A Dragon is not a fish,” Viserys mocks. “We belong in the sky, not the sea.” The waves crash in her ear, despair threatening to drown her. The shocking cold of the water already sinking into her bones. Her watery grave closing in before she has to endure an empty lonely life.


Theon stares at the mic in his hands. The voice coming through clipped and male. Tinged with age and salt.

“Evenstar to Blackwind, this is Selwyn Tarth. Do you need assistance?”

She snatches the radio out of Theon’s grasp. “Evenstar, this Daenerys Stormborn, our engines are damaged and we are unable to change course.”

“Understood, Your Grace. Hang tight. Launching torpedoes.” A breath she had been holding releases in a rush as a cacophonous explosion splits the mountain of ice. A burst cracking into frozen shards. “Train guns on the biggest pieces,” the voice orders through the radio. “I don’t want anything sneaking up on us while we tow her to White Harbor.”

The guns blaze behind her, shell after shell launching, breaking up the remaining hunks into harmless floating shreds.

“Your grace!” Arya calls, her boots bounding up the stairs with heavy thuds. “Daenerys, you need to see this!” The little wolf grabs her hand and hauls her out of the room.
The early dawn air is crisp and cool on her flushed skin. The storm fading to a light sprinkling mist. And through it another warship pulls up along their port side. It’s dark blue hull adorned with reflective white stars. Along the bow, bold lettering spells out “Evenstar”, and beneath it and an elegant scroll reads, “Through the Storm.”

Guns flank the sides of the ship, heavy artillery, smaller than the Blackwinds. But newer, much newer. And on the deck hundreds of soldiers stand at ease in a sea of deep blue uniforms.

As the ship draws close enough to board, a man steps out onto the deck. His frame tall and blonde and broad. His uniform decorated with medals that glint in the early morning light. The soldiers around him snap to attention as he cuts through their ranks, shouting as he spies her near the bridge.

“Permission to come aboard, Your Grace.”

“Granted,” she shouts back, before rushing down to meet him, Arya following close behind. The metal steps clattering in their haste. Even so, their savior already waits for them at deck. A long plank connecting their ships. Slowing her pace, she attempts to pull herself together, and appear somewhat regal after so much chaos. “I do not have the words to thank you, Ser. We owe you our lives.”

“It seems will we need all our lives in the days to come, Daenerys Stormborn.” The old man extends his hand out to hers. “Selwyn Tarth,” he says taking her hand and offering a small bow.

“You’re Brienne’s father,” Arya interrupts. Selwyn looks over to her, bluer than blue eyes darting to the daggers around her waist, her martial stance, the ropes of muscle in her arms.

“That I am, Miss Stark,” he muses, a faint smile touching the corners of his lips.

“I am afraid, there is little time for pleasantries, Ser. Our ship has been greatly damaged, and Commander Snow is currently aboard the Silence capturing Euron. I fear that the danger has not—”

“Ser!” a voice shouts from the Evenstar, an officer running across the plank to Selwyn’s side and whispering something in his ear. The captain’s face growing grim.

“She did what!?” he roars a storm flashing in his calm blue eyes. The officer nods in acknowledgement. “Prepare the rafts, and the divers. It seems we will have to pull her out of the ocean yet again.”
“What has happened?”

Selwyn sighs in response. “It seems your Commander Snow isn’t the only one who has designs on Euron. We rescued one of your allies from Blackwater Bay, a Miss Tyene Sand.”

“She’s alive…” The news fluttering joy in her heart. She hadn’t lost them all.

“Not for long,” Selwyn scoffs. “She dove aboard as we pulled up, raving about how she was going to kill Euron.”

She looks over the side of the railing, shards of ice bobbing in the water. Recalling Jon in his sickbed at the wall. His clothes frozen to his skin. His features tinged blue with cold. She would not lose him again. Either of them.

“Do what you must, Ser.”

“At once, Your Grace.”

Chapter End Notes

It's been 84 years...

Super huge thanks to JustwanderingNeverlost for betaing this chapter and giving me my new moodboard.
She's been working on a lovely new Modern fic called Torniquet. You should go read it.
And to all my lovely friends for being so kind and encouraging through the very real struggle.
Frost, and Ash and Sharon and Meisie and Alice and Mel and Meg and Jenna. You're the bees-knees.
And hearty high-fives to all those who politely inquired about my wellbeing.
What do we say to the god of death? Not today.
Take care of yourselves.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!