Summary

[On Hiatus] Sent to squire for Barristan Selmy three years before A Game of Thrones, Jon Snow finds friends and grows close to a golden princess before learning a truth which drives him to craft a conspiracy to place himself on the Iron Throne.

Notes

This story will most likely stick to book canon, but since the show screwed with the ages and made Myrcella almost twenty at the end I’m toying with the ages a bit for my own sake so Myrcella isn’t five at the start. Based on Jon being born 283 AC, I’ve moved Joffrey’s birth to 285 and Myrcella’s to 287 so she’s eight and Jon is about twelve when the story starts in 295 AC.

I’m intending to focus largely on what’s going on with Jon and Myrcella and those around them, but I’ll try to key in to other changes every so often. It’s been a bit since I reread the series so I’ve started going through bits of it and have the wiki, but if I get something wrong let me know. Point me to proper information so I can double check and I’ll try to look into it and correct anything necessary.

I may use some theories I don’t necessarily believe for the series for some fun storylines. The only relationship I have set in stone is Jon and Myrcella. I don’t know if I’ll do the
other common ones like Gendry/Arya or the like.

I have no particular idea how long the story will end up as I have no real outline for this yet, but I’ll work on one. Unlike Northern Conqueror I don’t have everything plotted out already so updates might be slower.

I have a Tumblr under CadenceIX so feel free to ask questions there if it’s easier than leaving a comment. I’ll try to answer both as best I can.
“Let me go to the Wall,” Jon pleaded.

“No,” Eddard Stark said sat in his solar, “you’re too young.”

“Then let me go south.”

Ned blinked in surprise. “What?”

“You and Uncle Benjen say I can’t go to the Wall because I don’t know what I’m giving up,” Jon said crossing his arms, “so let me go find out.”

Ned looked at him for a moment before sighing. “I could send you to ward with one of the northern lords.”

“No.” Jon shook his head. “I already know the North, if I can’t go to the Wall then send me south. Let me go to Dorne where it won’t matter that I’m a bastard. Send me to the Reach or the Stormlands.”

Ned shook his head. “No.”

“Why not?” asked Jon.

“I’m not sending you south, Jon.”

“Am I a prisoner?” he asked tilting his head as Ned’s brow rose.

“What?”

“I can’t go south, I can’t go to the Wall. It’s not like I’m an heir or anyone who matters.” He took a breath, letting his arms fall to his sides. “I’m leaving Winterfell. If I have to pack a bag and do whatever jobs I can to make my way I will.”

Ned stared at him, shocked by his declaration. “Why do you want to leave?”

“Because I don’t matter here,” he said louder and quick than he intended. He sighed, letting out his frustration as he shook his head. “Robb, Arya, even Bran and Rickon are like family but Sansa ignores me and Lady Stark hates me.” She hated him more than Theon, who was a hostage that acted like one of them and clearly thought he could marry Sansa and make it official. As though she’d ever want anything to do with him.

“She doesn’t-” Ned quieted when Jon looked to him skeptically. He sighed, pressing a hand to his forehead. “Let me look into it. I’ll try to find someone good. Someone I can trust.”

“Thank you, father.”

Ned frowned, giving the boy a nod as he departed the room.
After much deliberation Ned decided to ask Yohn Royce if he would take his bastard as a ward and give the boy a chance to make a name for himself, assuring him of Jon’s excellent character. While Yohn sent a reply saying he would send word once he had things in order, the next letter he received was from Jon Arryn.

His wife heard of Ned’s interest in warding Jon Snow and happened to mention it to Jon Arryn while King Robert was near. Right away Robert offered to take the boy in as ward himself, ignoring the fact the boy was a bastard. When Jon Arryn reminded him of the impropriety he decided instead to secure the boy a place as squire to Barristan Selmy. He would let the boy make a name for himself and even offered to legitimize him so he could make a cadet branch of House Stark, not unlike the Karstarks.

Worst yet, Robert had already sent someone north to collect the boy, meaning it would be a grievous insult thrice over to have the men sent north do so for naught, deny Barristan his squire and Robert his favor. Ned stared at the letter wondering if he was in a nightmare.

He couldn’t deny them, and yet couldn’t help but think sending the boy to stay with Robert would out the truth. Somehow, Robert would look at Jon and see Lyanna, or even worse, would see Rhaegar. He would find the truth in Jon’s eyes and murder the boy.

But he couldn’t anger Robert, so with a sigh went to the Godswood, prayed to the Old Gods, and told Jon of the impending arrival. It almost hurt how happy Jon was to leave, though that lessened when Robb and Arya learned of it.

“I’m sure you’ll be able to write to me, and I’ll write whenever anything interesting happens,” Jon promised as Arya clung to him.

Ned had hoped they wouldn’t be angry with Jon, but instead found both were colder toward their mother and Sansa, who they saw as driving Jon away. It didn’t help that when Catelyn heard the news she gave a victorious snort in front of them all.

Jon packed all he had, which wasn’t very much, and counted the days until the guards called the gates to open for a white cloaked rider from the south. Arya had run for the yard to tell Jon, interrupting his training with Robb and Theon. All three were dismissed early, rushing behind her to make way for the gate.

They found Ned already standing alongside Lady Stark with Rickon in her arms and Sansa beside her holding Bran’s hand.

Jon had heard stories of Barristan Selmy, expecting to find an old ivory knight with armor and hair of white. Instead he found a man in crimson silks and gilded armor that matched his hair beneath a white cloak. His confusion gave way when he noticed the lion engraved on the armor as the man’s cat-green eyes took them in. He looked as much a king as he did a knight, lacking the stoic visage Jon imagined kingsguard had.

“Ser Jaime,” Ned said with a nod as the knight dismounted.

“Lord Stark,” Jaime said scanning the family gathered until his eyes settled on Jon, a smirk taking his lips. “That your bastard?”

Catelyn shifted as Ned nodded. “I assume you’re the one he sent to escort him?”

Jaime, clearly displeased by the assignment, gave a grunt. “I am.”

Ned waved Jon over, patting the boy’s shoulder once he was beside him. “This is my son, Jon
Snow. Jon, this is Ser Jaime Lannister.”

“It’s an honor to meet you, Ser,” Jon said with a quick nod, holding back his disappointment Ser Barristan hadn’t been the one to get him, but then he was Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. He couldn’t leave his king, let alone for a bastard boy like him, which might explain Jaime’s contained displeasure. The assignment was an insult given to him by Robert.

“Your age, boy?” Jaime asked with an arched brow.

“Twelve, Ser,” Jon said, quietly adding, “nearly.”
Jaime chuckled, shaking his head. “Shall we be off at once?”

“Please, stay the night,” Ned asked. “Give the boy a day to say his farewells.”
Jaime shrugged and sighed, looking to Jon. “A knight of the kingsguard is best at the king’s side. I can spare no more than a night, and when we ride we do so with haste.”

“Aye, Ser,” Jon nodded, standing as tall as he could. “I’ll do my best.”
Jaime snorted. “I’m sure you will.”

Even at his last supper in Winterfell, Jon ate at the low tables. He departed shortly after Eddard stood and toasted to his well being and wished Jon luck.

Jaime found him in the training yard, beating a straw dummy with a training sword. “Your form is awful,” he said standing near the rail with his arms crossed. When Jon stopped mid swing and turned to him, Jaime smirked. “Is that how all men of the North fight?”

“It’s how I fight,” Jon offered with a shrug.

“Then you’ll surely die the moment you face someone with live steel.”
Jon’s jaw shifted, looking from the blunted sword to Jaime. He was spoken of with distaste as the Kingslayer but he was knighted at fifteen and there were stories of Jaime’s skill with a sword. He could overlook his lack of honor if it meant a chance to gain knowledge that could help Jon. “What am I doing wrong?”

“Breathing,” Jaime laughed. Seeing the boy’s sullen face remain unchanged, he sighed and shook his head. “Swing like that and you’ll just exhaust yourself. The sword isn’t just a tool, it’s not a hammer you swing. You don’t need to force all of your strength into it to get what you want.”

Jon frowned. “I know that. I was just…”
Jaime’s brow arched as he realized the boy was venting his frustration on the straw dummy. Maybe he wasn’t the mindless lap dog Jaime thought him. “Oh.” With a nod he glanced back at the Great Hall where the Starks still lingered. “Then it’s fine. Swing away, get it out, but for a real fight it’s important to remember it’s not all strength. It’s easy to feel like it matters when you start off, but once you wield steel with a true edge you find how much strength you use often doesn’t matter as much as where you hit.”

Jon nodded, saying with a smile. “So stick ‘em with the pointy end.”
Jaime chuckled, his hair falling about his face as it fell forward before he nodded and brushed it
back. “The sides work as well, but the pointy end is usually the best to end it quick.”

When morning came the Starks gathered to see Jon off.

He ruffled Bran’s hair and hugged the boy. “You have to go?” he asked when Jon backed away.

“Don’t worry,” Jon said with an assuring smile. “I’ll keep an eye for knights who might want you for a squire, and if I don’t find any then you can be mine.”

Bran’s eyes widened. “Really?”

“I promise,” Jon nodded.

When he moved to Arya she nearly knocked him over with a hug. “I’ll write as much as I can.”

“And I’ll do the same,” he promised.

When he came to Sansa she offered a slight curtsy. “Farewell, Jon.”

“When you cannot write, I’ll write to you.”

“No, I said I’ll write,” he informed her.

“Farewell, Sansa,” he nodded solemnly.

Robb pulled him into a hug the moment he could, the boys patting each other’s backs before separating, holding their shoulders. “I imagine next time we meet I’ll be calling you Ser.”

Jon laughed, but that died as he moved to Catelyn and gave her a quick nod. “Lady Stark.” He flashed Rickon a smile and moved to Ned, who hugged him. “Thank you,” Jon told him before they separated.

Failing to hide his concern completely, Eddard looked him over and nodded. “I’ve no doubt you’ll prove more than worthy.”

Mounting the spare horse gifted to him, Jon looked back to his family a final time before following Jaime Lannister to the kingsroad.

At first the journey had been quiet, but with time Jaime sighed and glanced over at Jon. “So what made him send you away?”

“I asked to leave,” Jon said glancing at the kingsguard.

“That so?” Jaime nodded. Thinking back he arched his brow. “Because of Lady Stark?” Seeing the boy look down and remain quiet, Jaime snickered. “Ah, so she’s a cunt.”

Jon looked at him shocked, but saw Jaime smirk at him. Shaking his head Jon looked ahead. “She made it clear what I am.”

“And what’s that?” asked Jaime.

“The shame of House Stark.”

Jaime glanced at him for a moment and thought of other bastards. Seeing the misery and shame on the boy’s face, he felt something stir inside him, thankful his bastards had a shroud over them thanks to the king’s stupidity. It wouldn’t be hard to sneak much past the drunken lout, but at least his children would never suffer for his love of Cersei. If even a bastard born to the Warden of the North and raised in his home as one of his children was made to feel like this, what would become
of his children if the truth came out?

“Fuck that old trout cunt,” Jaime said with a scoff, flashing Jon a smile when he looked at him. “Make sure you remember her face when you go back a knight while she’s still a miserly crone.”

Jaime couldn’t help but notice Jon smile a bit at that, both from Jaime’s apparent confidence he would become a knight and the idea of proving he was more than the shame of her husband.

When they settled for the knight Jaime took the horses and waved Jon off. “Go find wood for a fire.” Seeing Jon’s surprise, Jaime shrugged. “Consider it preparation for squirely duties.”

“Of course,” Jon nodded, rushing off to gather wood and rocks.

Jaime watched Jon prepare their fire and raise their tents before settling in and taking the preserves Jaime offered him. He found himself not entirely bored by the boy’s presence. Though sullen looking and slow to open up, once he started talking Jaime found him easy to speak with.

“That little one with the brown hair was Arya, right?” he asked after Jon told him of how Catelyn once berated him for letting her hold his training sword.

“Yeah, that’s her,” Jon nodded, looking at the fire for a moment before his smile grew sly. “I think once I can return I’d like to buy a sword for her and offer to train her.”

Jaime grinned. “That’ll really stick it to the trout.”

Jon tilted his head in reluctant agreement. Looking to Jaime he asked. “What is Ser Barristan like? Should I know anything before meeting him?”

“Barristan is a good man,” Jaime said with a nod. “Old enough that most would be brittle and crazed, but the man’s still as sharp as valyrian steel.” He seemed to examine Jon for a moment before deciding to continue. “It’s every man who wishes they could have your place as his squire you’ll need to look out for. And do your best to steer clear of the other white cloaks.”

Jon arched his brow. “I’ll try not to bother you or your brothers.”

“Brothers?” Jaime scoffed. “I have one brother and he wields a sword about as well as the King curtsies.”

When Jon chuckled, Jaime flashed him a questioning look and Jon shook his head. “I won’t say a word.”

“Good man,” Jaime nodded, downing the last of his food.

Jaime told him of King’s Landing and Casterly Rock, even of his brother and the royal family. Jon listened well, seeming thankful for all he said, and yet laughed or shook his head whenever Jaime threw in something ridiculous to test his attention. He wasn’t putting up a front of being polite. His honest interest and sincerity when he spoke surprised Jaime.

It was on their third night that he’d barely tied the horses to a tree when he heard the ruffle of grass and turned to see Jon dodging the dagger of a man in ragged clothes. Three others armed with daggers rushed them, two charging toward Jaime while the third helped the other with Jon.

In a flash of silver and crimson Jaime’s sword was drawn and cut through the arm of one man, dropping his dagger while Jaime stepped forward and slashed through his throat. That same motion let Jaime deflect the strike of the next man before quickly thrusting his sword through the bandit’s
throat and pulling up through his jaw as he withdrew.

Turning his attention to the other two he found one had his arm around Jon with his dagger pointed at the boy’s face while the other turned to aim his dagger at Jaime. Seeing his friends killed seemed to matter little. “Give us yur purse,” he ordered.

Jaime found himself smiling, wishing he wore his white cloak under the travel cloak he wore just to see them piss themselves. Oh well.

“I’d suggest you let the boy go and leave now,” Jaime said aiming his sword toward the one holding Jon.

“Fuck off, pretty boy,” said the one aiming at Jaime.

Jaime’s brow arched before rising as he watched Jon grab the arm of the man aiming his dagger at him and slip beneath his loose arm while pushing it forward, driving the man’s own dagger into his chest.

With a laugh Jaime dashed forward, stabbing the bandit’s wrist and slashing up before tearing the tip of his sword from the man’s bicep and thrusting it through his eye as the other gasped and tore the dagger from his chest. He turned in shock to look at the boy that made him stab himself and found Jon’s fist slamming into his eye, making him stumble back wincing. When he finally opened his eyes he did so just as Jaime thrust his sword through his heart and kicked him off the blade.

Once all the bandits lay dead around them he tore the cleanest sleeve off one and used it to wipe the blood from his blade. Jaime sheathed his cleaned sword before turning to pat Jon’s shoulder. “Good work getting out of that.”

Jon stared at the man who held him before nodding and looking to Jaime. “I’m sorry I got caught.”

Jaime shrugged. “You’re unarmed and outnumbered. Fair enough for a boy who never had a real fight.”

Looking over the men Jaime found the one with the best maintained dagger and removed the man’s belt, thrusting the dagger into it’s scabbard before handing it to Jon. “Take it,” he ordered. “They won’t be much use to these fools, and you’ll need it if this happens again.”

Jon glanced at him before nodding and securing the belt around waist. Though that was the last time they had to fend off bandits, Jon found the dagger useful along their journey south for completing the little tasks Jaime gave him, calling each practice for squirely duties. However the dagger was cheaply made so by the time they reached the Crownlands the blade was chipped and near useless.

Though it stunk and seemed louder than even Winterfell, as Jon rode through the gates of King’s Landing with Jaime Lannister at his side he couldn’t help but smile and feel like this was meant to be. Maybe Winterfell wasn’t the home he thought it had been, maybe he could make a life for himself here. The kind of life he deserved.

**Chapter End Notes**

Things might move a bit quicker in the story to try and keep the pace going, but I’m
hoping to start the next chapter right after this one end. After that I imagine I’ll jump around a bit more. Myrcella will definitely be in the next chapter as well, but the romance will likely be slow since she’s still only around eight here. Gotta build to it.

Originally I considered having Barristan show up at Winterfell or even Tyrion but I like Jon and Jaime’s potential dynamics so went with him. I figure Robert would send Jaime as a kind of petty fuck you to mess with him since surely most would see it as an insult to travel all that way to pick up a bastard boy who is going to be a squire. The other two will have more time with Jon later.

I had some fun writing Jaime as noticing little things he liked about Jon and opening up to him more because of it.
First Day At King's Landing

Chapter Summary

Jon arrives at King's Landing and meets Barristan Selmy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Robert was all smiles as he made his way to the courtyard with Barristan Selmy and Mandon Moore behind him as he came to stand beside Jon Arryn. The old Hand greeted Robert with a nod.

“My king,” Arryn said with a smile.

Robert nodded to him before looking around with a sigh. “Took them long enough to get here.”

“I’m sure they traveled with haste, your grace,” Barristan assured. “Ser Jaime knows a kingsguard’s place is at his king’s side.”

Robert smirked at the thought of Jaime grousing and groaning the whole time. “Hopefully he didn’t take it out on the boy.”

Barristan hoped the same. If he had to take the boy as squire then he would need to be around the other kingsguard, best if he wasn’t wary of them before the boy even reached him.

To their shock when Jaime and Jon Snow made their way into the courtyard they did so wearing smiles, though Jon’s was more reserved than the broad flash of whites across Jaime’s face as he laughed. Once they spotted the welcoming group, Jon’s eyes widened briefly, following Jaime to stand in front of Robert.

Jon made to kneel but Robert grabbed him and laughed as he looked him over. “Look at you!” The king turned to Jon Arryn, squeezing Jon’s shoulder tightly. “He’s Ned anew!”

Jon Arryn looked the boy over with a kind smile before nodding. “That he is.”

Robert turned back to Jon, who looked a bit nervous to be embraced so quickly by the king. “Thank you, your grace.”

“It’s not a compliment boy,” Robert said with a laugh. “Ned was the ugly one of us.”

Jon smiled, saying without thinking. “Then he surely still is.”

The others went wide eyed as Jon fought a wince and Jaime bit back a chuckle until Robert let out a bellowing laugh. “Good lad,” Robert grabbed Jon’s arm and felt his bicep with an approving nod. “You know how to wield a sword?”

“Yes, your grace,” Jon nodded. “I was trained alongside Robb Stark and Theon Greyjoy by Ser Rodrik Cassel.”

“Hm, good I’m sure, but he’s no Barristan the Bold.” Turning to the kingsguard, Robert smacked
Barristan’s shoulder. “Take the day to show the boy around and get him settled.” Robert left no room for argument as he walked off calling out, “Come, Lannister.”

Jaime sighed, giving Jon a nod before following his king, leaving him with Jon Arryn and Barristan Selmy. “There are no spare rooms in the White Sword Tower,” Jon Arryn explained, smiling so Jon suddenly noticed the man was missing some of his teeth, “but I’ve secured spare servants’ quarters for you. Ser Barristan will show you them.”

“Thank you, my lord,” Jon said with a nod.

“If you need anything, ask,” Arryn told him. “I’ll do what I can for my namesake. I hope you do well here, Jon Snow.”

“I’ll do my best, my lord,” Jon assured.

Once Jon Arryn departed, Jon turned to Ser Barristan who motioned to the bag across his torso. “I’ll take you to your room to drop that off, then I’d like to take you to the yard and gauge where you are.”

“Of course, Ser,” Jon nodded.

Spotting the belt on his waist, Barristan motioned to the dagger as he led the boy toward his room. “Your father give you that for the road?”

Jon shook his head. “No. Ser Jaime took it from one of the bandits he killed.”

Barristan looked to Jon. “Bandits?”

“We were on the kingsroad and stopped to camp for the night when four of them came upon us with daggers,” Jon explained. “One grabbed me and held me at point, but Ser Jaime killed two others and while the third asked for his purse I slipped lose and made the bandit stab himself. Ser Jaime then slew them both and gave me the dagger for the road.”

Barristan gave the boy another once over. The boy was twelve from what he understood, barely much older than he was when he joined the tourney at Blackhaven and yet had a hand in the death of a man who threatened his life. He was a few years older and already had a name for himself as a tourney knight when he took his first life.

Though weeks old by now he’d seen others shaken loose by lesser deeds. Men left weak when their lives were threatened or racked with regret over their part in the end of a life. Yet here this boy stood ready to face years at Barristan’s call, coming to them with a smile at Jaime Lannister’s side, something most rarely found. Where others looked down upon the kingsguard the boy had made him open up, earned the man’s smile. Not a biting, smug one, but a true, fond smile the knight wore only while wielding a sword.

Once the boy had left his bag in his quarters Barristan took him to the yard where he disposed of his broken dagger and exchanged it for some spare armor and a blunted training sword. Taking one for himself he asked the boy to come and face him, and he gladly did.

He found that Jon was like a freshly mined gem. There was a shine of true talent, but it was raw and unpolished, waiting to be refined into something unbreakable. Jon told him he’d intended to go to the Wall before asking to come here, and surely the boy would outshine the untrained criminals sent there, but he would likely never be challenged to grow as he could.

The boy was a fighter, unwavering at moments, able to find every opening Barristan gave him and
even two he hadn’t intended. He was still growing and adjusting, but without refinement would lack finesse. Barristan had no doubt Jon may have been the best among those he knew, but left to the North his talent would go untested and never grow, leaving him like a the dragons that withered away because they were bound within the Dragonpit.

It was while they were in the yard he heard the laughter, glancing over to see princess Myrcella chasing the plump little prince Tommen through the Red Keep while Preston Greenfield and Arys Oakheart followed them. Jon only caught a glimpse of golden curls before they were out of sight again and he stumbled back as Barristan’s sword hit his shield.

Myrcella was giggling as she chased Tommen up a staircase and along a platform above before her little brother came to a stop and clung to the railing. Blinking at his sudden stop she followed his gaze to see Barristan slashing at a dark haired boy in gray armor.

“Who’s that?” Tommen asked, looking up to the kingsguard behind them.

They shared a look, stepping to the railing and watching Jon defend against Barristan’s barrage before slashing at the older knight, his sword bouncing off his white shield. They watched him take the momentum of his deflected sword and turn, intending to strike Barristan’s side, but the Lord Commander brought his sword down to parry the strike. When Jon tried to turn back and swing overhead, he found Barristan’s sword aimed at his chest and sighed, backing away to try again.

“That must Barristan’s new squire,” said Arys Oakheart. “A bastard son of your father’s friend from the North.”

Myrcella frowned as she watched the boy swing at Barristan, who blocked or deflected them all. Once Barristan hit him again, she saw the boy grab the sword in his shield hand and brush a hand through his hair and wipe at the sweat on his brow. He was leaner than the old knight, lacking the smile her uncle wore when he wielded a sword, instead seeming sullen and focused.

Tommen blinked watching the boy before looking to Myrcella and asking quietly, “What’s a bastard?”

“It means his parents weren’t married,” she said carefully.

Tommen nodded as though he completely understood, turning back to look at where Jon managed to parry one of Barristan’s strikes, but was knocked aside by a shield before he could riposte. Tommen laughed at how Jon stumbled but stayed on his feet, turning to charge Barristan, slashing at the older man.

“Can we play with him?” asked Tommen.

Myrcella watched them for a moment before squeezing her brother’s shoulder. “They look busy. Maybe tomorrow.”

When Myrcella brought her brother to supper that night she sat across from her mother and Joffrey, who only seemed interested in them when their father entered and made his way to the table.

“Hello father,” Joffrey said, earning a nod from the king.

Cersei saw Jaime leaving to guard the door when she turned to Robert. “Where’s Ser Barristan?”

“Still in the yards with his new squire,” Robert said with a laugh. “Boy’s going to age him a dozen years by the time he knights the lad.”
“We saw him,” Tommen said quietly, looking to his father. “Barstan was-”

“Barristan,” Myrcella corrected, as though she were his mother.

Tommen glanced at her. “Barristan was fighting the bastard.”

Joffrey laughed while Cersei’s brow knit. “His squire’s a bastard?”

“Ned’s bastard,” Robert nodded. “He wanted to ward him in the Vale but I told him he could squire the boy here.”

“That’s what you sent Jaime for?” Cersei asked with a glare. “To fetch some bastard from the North?”

“Ned’s bastard,” he corrected, meeting her glare. “And he’s my guard. I’ll have him wipe my ass if I so please.”

Cersei wanted to say more, but hearing Joffrey laugh turned back to her plate to finish eating.

“Is he our guard too?” Tommen asked looking warily from his mother to his father.

“As good as,” Robert nodded. “Boy’s training to be a knight like the rest. If he’s half the man his father is, half as honorable as Ned, then he’ll be a kingsguard in a few years if he doesn’t want me to legitimize him and let him make his own house.”

“You’d do that for a bastard?” Joffrey asked with a scoff.

“I’d do it for my friend’s son,” he told his son. “The man marched at my side through two wars. Least I can do is let his bastard have a chance to gain some honor.”

“How long will he be here?” Cersei asked.

“As long as I please,” Robert snapped back. “As long as it takes for him to make his father proud.”

While the royal family ate in the Red Keep Barristan took Jon out to Flea Bottom and treated him to a warm meal. He had better manners than most bastards, but it might’ve been expected from one raised within the halls of a lord’s house.

“Have you spent time in the stables? The armory? A forge?”

“Only little,” Jon answered. “But I can maintain a horse and armor well enough.”

“Can you read or write?”

“Both.”

Barristan nodded. “You’re squired to a kingsguard which means you’ll be guarding the king and his family as well. You’ll need to know the city if you’re to watch it’s dark corners and run errands for me in a timely manner. At least once a sennight you’ll roam the city until you know it better than you ever did Winterfell.”

Watching the boy listening intently, Barristan smiled. “You’ll find a sword around your waist when you’ve earned it. Be armored when you’ve earned it. Aye?”

“Aye, Ser,” Jon nodded.
“Do you follow the Seven?” asked Barristan.

Jon frowned. “No, Ser. I keep the Old Gods.”

Barristan sat back, taking a drink. “Did you not have a sept at Winterfell?”

Jon sat up, seeming hesitant to answer. “We did. It… belonged to Lady Stark. I stayed away from it. Do I have to follow them now?

“No,” Barristan said with a laugh. “You’re free to keep your gods, though I’d suggest you look into the Seven. Most here follow them, or at least claim to.”

“I don’t have to convert to be knighted?” Jon asked with relief, having planned to fake it if he had to.

“All that matters is who knights you,” said Barristan. “Of course, you could always not be knighted. Many men squire but never take a knighthood, even when they’ve earned it.”

“Why wouldn’t they?”

“Being a knight means you’re in charge of buying your own equipment, arming yourself for tournaments and the like,” explained Barristan. “Many find it too high a cost, so stay a squire. Being a knight also means committing to a life bound to the sword or lance. Plenty of lords have squired but refuse knighthood to remain a lord if they feel incapable of fulfilling the oaths of a knight.”

“So I can squire and then… stop?” Jon asked, having not thought of that.

“If you don’t feel capable of being a knight,” Barristan nodded. “Though from the little I’ve seen I doubt you’ll have much trouble if you do as I say.”

After letting the boy turn in, Barristan woke early the next day to find the boy at his door, ready to help him into his armor for the day.

“We’ll have to buy you some new clothes,” Barristan said noting the boy’s worn leather jerkin. Most of his clothes were dark grays and browns, simple enough but also clearly old and well worn enough he could imagine the queen making a fuss about him looking poor.

“I-I’m sorry, Ser,” Jon said looking thrown off by the comment, unsure of what was wrong with his clothes.

“You’ll be around the royal family,” Barristan said patting Jon’s shoulder. “It’s fine for now.”

Jon followed Barristan through the castle, eventually coming to corridor where they found another kingsguard outside a door. Boros Blount gave a gruff greeting to the Lord Commander before taking off, nearly shoving Jon while Barristan took his place beside the door.

It was hours before Robert came out of his room and Jon followed Barristan following him to a hall where he joined his family to break fast. It wasn’t until he was sat and drinking that he noticed Jon stood off beside Barristan and a smile took his face.

“Snow,” Robert called out, “come sit and eat.” Jon’s brow rose as Cersei and Joffrey shot the king confused looked. Seeing the boy’s hesitation, Robert waved his hand. “Come, your king demands it.”
With a glance back to Barristan, who gave him a look telling him to go, Jon made his way toward the table. A servant brought him a chair and placed it where Robert pointed next to Tommen. “Thank you, your grace,” Jon said bowing his head as a plate was set before him.

To Robert’s right sat the queen, who might have been the most beautiful women he ever saw with golden hair, emerald eyes and a slender figure, her fair skin wrapped in crimson silks, yet her glowering diminished it some. At her side sat the eldest prince, who looked almost like a girl with long blonde girls and eyes that matched his mother with lips bent in a sneer.

Sat to her father’s left was princess Myrcella, a pretty girl surely destined to become a beauty. She had long golden curls framing her face, and when her emerald eyes met Jon’s and she flashed him a brief welcoming smile he was sure she’d come to surpass her mother in time.

To Jon’s right, sat opposite Joffrey, was the four year old prince who shared their golden curls and emerald eyes with a round, cherubic face. It seemed none of the king’s children inherited anything from him.

“Hello,” Tommen said looking to the dark haired boy.

“Good morning, Prince Tommen,” Jon said with a small smile.

“What’s your name?” asked Tommen.

“Jon Snow.”

“Are you really a bastard?” Tommen asked tilting his head.

Joffrey laughed while Cersei’s examining gaze narrowed and Robert sighed. Jon frowned slightly before nodding. “I am.”

“Not many bastards get to dine with royalty,” Joffrey said raising his chin and smirking.

Jon glanced at him before nodding. “Aye, your grace.”

“How’s he seem, Barristan?” Robert asked, turning to look at the Lord Commander of his kingsguard.

The knight stepped forward. “Ready to be refined, your grace.” The others all looked to Barristan while Myrcella looked from the knight to Jon, who looked down. “He rides well enough, but he’ll need training with the lance. As for the sword, he has talent. It’s raw, but in time, with training and experience I’d say he’ll give Ser Jaime a challenge.”

From the corner Jaime scoffed while Robert laughed. Jon looked down in embarrassment before glancing up and noticing he was being watched by the princess.

“Do as he says,” Robert said looking to Jon, “and it won’t be long before you’re taking winner’s purses from sour knights and have women begging you to crown them Queen of Love and Beauty.”

Joffrey snorted. “Some might not want it from a bastard.”

“If he’s a knight it wouldn’t matter,” Myrcella said shaking her head.

Robert laughed, reaching over to squeeze her shoulder, earning a beaming smile from her. “She has the right of it. Women don’t care about bastards or nobles as much as they care about winners and
“Not all women are whores you can pay to ignore your faults,” Cersei said with a glance to Robert.

Robert shot her a glare. “If only they were.”

Sat in tense silence as he finished his meal, Jon couldn’t help but wonder if maybe bastards were lucky not to eat with royalty if this is what it was like.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like Jon shines so well at the Wall only because he’s surrounded by people who are generally untrained, so even mediocre swordsman do well there. My thinking is if Jon does really well there when he likely trained with the same three or four people for years, none of whom are especially good, then if he is forced to push himself he’ll grow. Pair it with his observational skills and he’s got a lot of potential.

I’m hoping to convey how in the books Myrcella and Tommen basically didn’t exist because they weren’t paid attention. Cersei and Robert all but ignore them, to the point Myrcella is the one correcting Tommen’s speech. And stuff will likely be kind of slow with her and Jon since she’s only around eight here and will only be a year younger than Sansa when things start reaching the books.
Outmatched Observations

Chapter Summary

Jon observes the court as he goes about his duty and feels outmatched in the training yard.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon found that as boring as his duties could be, he enjoyed his time in King’s Landing more than he’d ever have thought. But it wasn’t easy.

Some days they spent following the king or his family around, though it was rare they were assigned to Cersei, who seemed to take his presence as an insult even with the new clothes Barristan bought him. They’d opted to keep to his darker colors, buying mostly black and grays, the opposite of the kingsguard.

“Perhaps it’s best for you to be my shadow,” Barristan said handing the boy a black jerkin as they looked through the tailor’s shop.

Jon found he didn’t like following Joffrey much. Not only did he already have his own sworn sword in Sandor Clegane, who Jon didn’t mind much, but Jon didn’t like the crown prince. He spoke to everyone as though they were the disgusting stains upon existence.

“Don’t speak back to the crown prince,” Barristan told him before their first day guarding him. “Whatever he says, don’t be rude.”

“Was your mother a whore, bastard?” Joffrey asked as they walked him to his lesson with Maester Pyrcelle.

Barristan glanced at his squire, who shrugged. “I couldn’t say, your grace. My father wouldn’t speak of her.”

“Perhaps she was too much of an embarrassment,” Joffrey said with a laugh. “Some ugly wench he took in some hut.”

Jon’s jaw shifted, thinking of the kind, beautiful, highborn lady he imagined as his mother. “Perhaps, your grace.”

Joffrey seemed disappointed by Jon’s passive response, which made him less interested in bothering Jon whenever they were assigned to him. That at least made it bearable.

Tommen was probably the most fun, as guarding him often became playing with him. Barristan was more than pleased to give up his role chasing or lifting the prince to his squire whenever there was no risk of Cersei finding them. He knew better than to let her find the prince laughing manically as Jon swung him about. Though just as often he was helping the boy read a difficult word or describing the North to the prince.

Half the time Myrcella was with Tommen, but guarding her was simple. They often escorted her
for walks about the court and to her garden which she maintained.

Myrcella found herself noticing the kingsguards more often than normal whenever Ser Barristan and Jon were assigned to her. Jon was nothing like what she’d heard of bastards. Though he appeared sullen more often than not, she found she liked seeing him smile as it seemed warmer than she thought possible from a man of the North. She also found herself flustered by how quick he was to help her, lifting heavy sacks and pots to help her keep her garden in order, not hesitating to help her dig or offering to work while she instructed so she wouldn’t be dirtied.

Guarding the king was… interesting. Jon’s face was red for half a day after spending an evening stood beside Barristan and Jaime listening to the king grunt and groan as a maid wailed and cried in pleasure. Jon knew it was common for some lords to have mistresses but it seemed the king had at least a dozen.

It made Jon wonder if Eddard had a mistress. From what he knew his mother was of the south since Eddard returned to Winterfell with Jon after the war, so she couldn’t be there. Jon couldn’t imagine Catelyn making the noises the women made for the king, but maybe that was only because he disliked her and she hated him. Perhaps she was a loving wife. She always seemed to care for her children, even if she was a bit hard on Arya or coddled them a bit, but maybe that was something mother’s did. Cersei certainly coddled Joffrey, but seemed to ignore Myrcella and Tommen. He just couldn’t imagine Catelyn Tully ever enjoying anything, but maybe she wasn’t a cold fish when she was abed with her husband.

Beyond that he found guarding the king an opportunity to do other things. While they stood in silence during petitions Jon did his best to observe as much as possible, training his eyes to gauge every shift in movement within their vision. He took in what the people said and thought on what he might do in the king’s place, sometimes finding the choices too difficult or finding he might have chosen differently.

Jon had never guarded a Small Council meeting as when they tailed Robert he never went and Barristan wasn’t invited to them despite being Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. While Barristan made it clear he didn’t mind avoiding the politics, it meant he had little interaction with most of them, apart form observing them around court of during petitions.

Jon Arryn often checked in on Jon, making sure he was eating right, seeing how he was doing with Barristan. He was certainly the easiest to like of the council, seeming like a grandfather he never had despite having a son barely half Jon’s age. His wife, however, Jon didn’t like much. He rarely saw her, but when he did she was always glaring at him, holding her son as if Jon might snatch the boy away.

Barristan had told Jon to be wary of everyone in King’s Landing, but especially those within the Small Council, and Jon couldn’t help feeling he was right. Though a bit older than Jon Arryn, Pycelle held of none of the Hand’s calm or kindness, seeming more a blustering fool yet watching and calculating during his silences and feigned sleeps. Though he came off as effeminate and soft, Varys seemed little more than a mask the man wore drowned in perfumes.

Petyr Baelish might be the worst to Jon’s mind. The man’s slick smiles seemed like they oozed grease whenever Jon saw them. Ever smiling yet not a single one of them true unless he had spoken some half clever comment, Jon wondered how anyone ever believed a word the man said. Perhaps they thought so little of him because of his low birth, but he seemed to find joy in the chaos of court, which seemed something only a madman might enjoy. A madman, or someone who though themselves smarter than everyone else.

Jon found he liked both the king’s brothers to a degree, but for different reasons. Stannis came off
stubborn as a bulwark at times, paying little mind to courtesies, but seemed fair and just, if a bit unforgiving. The youngest brother, Renly, had all the charm Stannis lacked. He came off friendly, jovial in the way Robert was but kinder and more thoughtful.

“Lord Renly,” Barristan called out one afternoon when they spotted the Master of Laws walking through the courtyard with his squire at his side.

“Ser Barristan,” the young Baratheon said with a smile.

“I hoped I could ask for a match between our squires,” Barristan said looking to Loras Tyrell.

Renly and Loras exchanged a look, half amused. For a moment Jon thought he might deny the knight’s request, but Loras gave Jon a look before nodding, sparking Renly to do the same. “Alright.”

Jon wasn’t sure he ever felt as pathetic as he did opposite Loras Tyrell in the training yard. He’d often get the best of Robb and Theon when it came to swords, but Loras was nothing like them. Robb was all brute strength most of the time where Theon was easy to read. He’d always thought he was better than Robb or Theon, but facing Barristan Selmy and Loras Tyrell Jon just wondered if maybe they were all awful.

Though roughly a year older than Jon, Loras was a much better swordsman than anyone Jon had seen apart from Ser Barristan and Ser Jaime. He’d find he wielded most weapons better than Jon, who rarely used anything but a sword back in Winterfell. Still, he enjoyed their spars, for though he was better than Jon, Loras took him serious from the moment they first took up blunted steel. Barristan had taken it easy on him whenever they trained, but Loras came at him as hard as Jon went after him. Jon just came up short more often than not, and didn’t know how to feel when Loras mentioned one day that his brother Garlan was even better than him.

It didn’t help that as their matches became more frequent they drew the attention of others in the court. Women gathered to see the handsome flower knight batter the poor bastard who could barely hold his own against him. Loras seemed to relish the attention, playing up the role of the dashing knight while Jon tried to take what he could from each match and use it going into the next.

Jon had taken to the yard one night to prepare for the next day’s match when he heard a voice call out, “You’ll never beat him like that.”

Slamming his sword against the straw dummy, Jon heard the clink of armor and turned to find Jaime making his way toward him. “I think I can outmatch this straw knight well enough.”

“I meant Loras,” Jaime said with a smirk. “Tyrell’s been trained by knights since he was a boy. You won’t be able to match him, not so quickly.”

“Should I just accept my losses then?”

“Never,” Jaime said with a laugh. “Just don’t fight his fight. Make him fight yours.”

“What’s my fight?” Jon asked with a sigh. “I feel like I barely know anything.”

Jaime looked Jon over for a moment, his disheartened tone seeming to make Jaime step into the yard. “You’ve come up short against one of the best squires in King’s Landing and against one of the best swordsman in the Seven Kingdoms. Doesn’t mean you’re useless.” Jaime turned and pulled a blunted sword from the barrel beside the wooden fence. “The only way to get better is to keep at it.”
Jon stared at Jaime for a moment, his wide eyes settling as he stepped back and took a breath, raising his sword. Few ever had the chance to spar with Jaime Lannister, Jon wasn’t a fool, he wouldn’t turn this down. Of course he lost, but he found it useful.

“Keep your thumb level with the hilt during that,” Jaime told him. “You could go for a cut here, like this,” he’d say before showing him a quick maneuver.

Jon found himself spending mornings training with Barristan Selmy, many afternoons sparring with Loras Tyrell, and many nights learning from Jaime Lannister. While his mornings and nights were usually private, his matches with Loras quickly became something others found as near daily entertainment.

More than once he found King Robert had come to watch them spar and more often than not Tommen found his way into the crowd, sometimes sitting on the shoulders of a kingsguard to watch them fight. Even Myrcella occasionally watched them alongside many of the other girls of the court.

“Loras is amazing,” one of her handmaidens said watching him parry Jon’s blows before forcing Jon to go defensive.

“He’s as handsome as he is strong,” said another.

Myrcella found herself tilting her head as she observed them fighting. Loras was definitely more skilled, he won more than Jon, but she noticed patterns the more she watched them. When Jon won it was almost always a counter, often after one of Loras’s attempt to counter while on the defensive. She heard others remark that Jon always found an opening.

Loras was undoubtedly more skilled at the moment, but he was quick to anger, and every so often she saw Jon play on that to draw Loras into a loss. He maybe wasn’t as skilled, but Jon was smarter, saw more, used the skill he had better. Where occasionally she saw Loras grouse when he lost, Jon closed into himself and refocused his thoughts.

Myrcella couldn’t help but smile as she watched Jon back away, giving Loras an opening to slash at him which Jon dodged and thrust through his defense to hit Loras’s chest. “Yes, he is amazing.”

Every week Jon would go to Barristan in the morning to help him prepare and then on some random day the Lord Commander would hand him a dagger and tell him, “Wander.”

Jon fastened the dagger around his waist and would spend his day wandering the city, taking in as much as he could. Thankfully he never had to use the dagger. It seemed most people knew who he was and kept their distance, as if he were Barristan himself rather than his squire whose losses grew daily. Barristan finally stopped sending him to wander after Jon had taken to recommending places they could eat during their off time.

It was around then that Jon first met the Imp, Tyrion Lannister, while he and Barristan were escorting Myrcella and Tommen.

“Uncle!” Tommen called out, rushing to the man not much taller than himself.

Tyrion laughed and hugged the boy, releasing him to hug his niece and kiss her cheek. “You grow more beautiful every time I see you, dear niece.”

“Thank you, uncle.” She curtsied as Tyrion’s gaze shifted to the knight behind them.

“Ser Barristan,” he said with a nod before his mismatched eyes found Jon and a grin took his lips.
“You must be Selmy’s bastard squire.”

“I am, my lord,” Jon said with a nod.

Tyrion seemed surprised by Jon’s lack of reaction to being called bastard. Serving months with Joffrey only ever referring to him as bastard helped make the word lose much of the bite it once held for Jon.

Instead Tyrion looked to Barristan and smirked. “Is the boy any good, or did our king stick you with some lost cause for his friend?” Tyrion noticed a flash of indignation cross Myrcella’s face at the insult.

Barristan shook his head. “No, Jon’s a fine squire, my lord. I’ve no doubt you’ll see for yourself soon enough.”

Tyrion nodded, glancing from Myrcella to the sullen squire who flashed a brief smile to Barristan in thanks for the kind words. A smile that seemed to lessen Myrcella’s pout as she grabbed Tommen’s hand. “I’m sure I will…”

In truth he did when he found a crowd gathered around the training yard and squeezed through to stand beside his niece and nephew and their kingsguard to watch the sullen squire face Renly’s squired rose.

He would never be as skilled with a sword as Jaime but Tyrion felt he knew enough to tell exceptional swordsman from others, and he had no doubt that was what he saw watching the squires fight. Loras was skilled and flashy but Jon was patient and observant, attacking nearly every opening he could. Loras was stronger but Jon seemed quicker, or at least quicker to react, his victories coming from what seemed to be accurate predictions of moves. No, half of those were traps he laid for the Tyrell, leaving himself open so Loras would attack but then blocking and countering, twice even accounting for Loras’ reaction from that.

As the squires fought Tyrion made his way over to Barristan. “Your squire, he’s a bastard, yes?”

“Aye,” Barristan said, stood with his arms crossed as he looked upon the squires.

“How long has he been wielding a sword?”

“Since he was old enough to walk he says,” Barristan laughed, glancing at the dark haired squire, “though I doubt he’s had much of a challenge until he got here.”

“No wonder,” Tyrion nodded, looking to the fray.

“When he first came here I’d say he was barely a novice,” Barristan said with a proud smile as he looked at the boy’s back. “He barely landed a single strike his first match with Loras.”

Tyrion glanced at the knight as Jon took another victory, Loras letting out a groan and laughing. “Good riposte, Snow.” Though quick to anger in the battle, Loras was at least gracious enough in defeat to laugh and prepare for the next round.

“I’d imagine the boy’s already better than most soldiers and lordlings,” Tyrion said with a laugh.

“Give him three years,” Barristan said with a smirk as he watched Jon parry strikes and have his riposte deflected, “and that boy will take a victories from Jaime and myself.”

Tyrion found himself grinning as he watched Loras land a trio of strikes on Jon, who chuckled,
rolled his shoulder and took a breath as he circled the ring. He saw the boy going over the round mentally before turning and starting again, feinting and shifting to the left, deflecting a sudden swing from Loras and holding his own blunted sword to the squire’s neck.

Tyrion looked up to the Lord Commander with a smirk. “You sure he’ll need that long?”

Chapter End Notes

There’s a bit of time compression here. It’s not full Ultimacia levels but it’s basically glossing over a few months at least. Since Jon is busy being Barristan’s squire and pseudo guard for the royal family I felt it easiest to play on his observations rather than stretch things out.

Jon feels he kind of sucks here, but as Jaime says it’s because he’s comparing himself to two of the better swordsman in Westeros where before he only really had Robb, Theon and Ser Rodrik to compare himself to. And by the end he’s basically being trained by three of the best so should rise quickly.

Also as far as I know Tyrion isn’t necessarily in King’s Landing long before the trip to Winterfell, so I have it as he was in Casterly Rock and came to KL for a while a few months after Jon got there and is basically traveling around the kingdoms for now.
After spending a day mounted, riding circles and aiming his lance at a dented shield propped up for training, Jon took his and Barristan’s horses back to the stables. When he rushed back to Barristan he found the old knight walking with princess Myrcella on her way to the garden. He noticed her slight pout disappeared when she spotted him, flashing him a quick smile before lowering her eyes as Jon fell into place behind her, beside Barristan.

“Thank you, Ser Jon,” she said when he dug out a place for a new plant she’d been gifted.

“I’m no Ser yet, princess,” he said with a smile.

“And yet it’s you who offers to save his princess from being dirtied,” she said with a playful glare toward Barristan.

The old knight chuckled. “Leave kneeling in dirt and rocks to the young. My knees only have so many years left to them.”

“It’s a beautiful flower,” he said looking to the pale white petals.

“It’s a Moonbloom from Oldtown,” she said placing it into the earth. “It was an early nameday gift from Uncle Tyrion.”

“Your nameday?” Jon asked with a glance to Barristan, who wore a slight frown.

“Mmhmm,” she nodded, looking up to Jon. “It’s in almost a month, but he wasn’t sure he’ll be here then so brought it now.”

Jon nodded, letting her return to replanting the flower.

The weeks leading up to Joffrey’s nameday it was all anyone heard about as entertainers were brought from every kingdom and across the sea, yet Jon hadn’t heard anything about Myrcella’s nameday. Thinking back, he hadn’t heard anything of Tommen’s either, and he’d been in King’s Landing almost a year. Jon suddenly found himself feeling bad for the princess, more so than he did in those little moments where he pitied her having to deal with Joffrey. He could understand his nameday being ignored, he was a bastard, but she was a beautiful princess. She deserved the attention more than her pompous prick brother.

It wouldn’t be much, but Jon decided then that once he was through for the day he would go back to his room and write a letter to Robb asking him to send a Winter Rose from Winterfell’s glass garden. He could say he wanted a reminder of the North, saying he feels like he’s missing home was better than risking Robb teasing him, thinking him fool enough to dream of charming the princess. Robb would ask if he thought himself Theon pining for Sansa, but he simply felt bad for a
girl who seemed abandoned by her family even on the day she should be celebrated.

In his chambers Jon gathered the bundle of letters he had from the Starks, held in a box he hid away in his room. Months ago when he first placed the box he noticed slight shifts in it’s position whenever he went to read his letters so took to burning any that he wanted to keep private, so there were less than there could be. He felt a paranoid fool, but he knew that in a place like King’s Landing someone would surely find some interest even in the details of Arya’s prolonged and failed war of silence against Sansa.

They couldn’t exactly send a potted Winter Rose by raven, but Robb wrote that he found a merchant to carry it with him to King’s Landing on a boat from White Harbor.

Arya wrote the most, though Robb was a close second, each demanding all he could tell of his training. He could have sent them each scrolls of parchment detailing every move in every match and they would still want more. Jon felt a hint of pride in the jealousy he noted in their letters. For once he had something Robb wanted.

Jon had been surprised Sansa wrote at all. While not as much as the others, her desire for information on King’s Landing drove her quill. Jon made sure not to spare any detail, telling her of the beauty of Blackwater Bay, of the abundance of people and hints of foreign cultures he noticed in Flea Bottom, of the constant stench through half the city, of how Joffrey looked down on people, of how he once saw the crown prince chase stray cats, stepping on their tails and laughing as they cried in pain. He might have wrung the prince’s neck if not for Barristan stopping him, frowning and reminding Jon it wasn’t their place to correct the prince. He felt bad for how heartbroken she seemed, but he thought it better than feeding her lies of gallant knights. The only ones close to that he’d seen were Barristan and Loras, Jaime also had his moments, but even the other kingsguard were nothing like the stories they’d heard.

Bran wrote occasionally, sometimes in Arya’s handwriting and with little notes from her added on to his when she checked them over for him. Jon told him of how hard being a squire was, but said he was glad he was chosen to squire to Ser Barristan as he is a true knight, one of the best in Westeros. Part of Jon hoped Bran might take his place as Ser Barristan’s squire, but if not he hoped that when the time came he could ask Loras if he himself wasn’t knighted.

The only other one he received letters from was Eddard, which others noted was more than he ever actually wrote to the king, but even that was less than any of his siblings. Jon found himself looking forward to his letters less than the others as they were often just checking up on him with brief assurances that Winterfell was fine. It made Jon question how close he actually was with his father, how much he truly knew of the man. At times Jon felt like he knew more about King Robert than he did the man who raised him. At least he knew who likely father Robert’s bastards.

Robb sent another letter telling Jon the merchant had made it to White Harbor and would arrive on a boat called the Crimson Crow. The problem was he never said when it would arrive, only that the merchants name was Jorgan.

With no way of knowing how soon they would arrive, and princess Myrcella’s nameday nearing, Jon took to traveling to the River Gate every day and checking which ships had arrived. He did it enough that it was only after three days that a gold cloak grabbed his shoulder.

“What are you doing here boy?” The man asked, his black breastplate ornamented with four golden disks telling Jon he was the gate’s captain. His gaze narrowed slightly as he looked on Jon’s face. “You’re Barristan’s boy, aren’t you?”

“His squire,” Jon corrected as the guard released him.
The man laughed. “Ah, that’s right. Lord Snow.” Jon sighed at the name that others had taken to calling him. He was positive one of the kingsguard had been the first to use it, but couldn’t remember. “What is it has you coming here every day?”

“My family sent me a gift,” Jon explained, “but they only told me the man carrying it would arrive on a ship called the Crimson Crow. They never said when, only the man’s name.”

The guard sighed. “Fine. Tell me his name and when he comes I’ll send an urchin to fetch you.”

“Truly?”

“His name,” the goldcloak said with a nod.

“Jorgan,” said Jon. “And yours?”

“Tobas Maller,” the captain said with a nod.

“Thank you,” Jon gave the man a quick nod before turning and hurrying back to the Red Keep.

Weeks passed as Jon fell back into his routine, pushing himself as hard as he could yet fighting off the urge to go check on the docks. Part of him worried it had already arrived and Tobas, upon finding it was a flower and not something he could pawn, tossed it into the river.

Instead he was training with Barristan one morning when one of the Red Keep’s guard approached. “Lord Snow,” the man called out with a smirk, “some urchin says your ship has come.”

The slight glare Barristan shot the man eased when he looked to Jon with a smile, seeing the boy perk up. He looked ready to run off, but stopped himself. Before he could tell the guard to send the urchin away with a message, Barristan waved a hand. “Go get your gift,” the man said with a laugh.

“Thank you, Ser,” Jon said, giving the man a quick bow before tossing the blunted sword in the barrel and rushing to leave.

Barristan watched the boy depart with a somber smile. Jon had told him of his plan, and though he feared the boy may risk becoming too attached to the princess, he knew Jon would never do anything improper. He also knew the girl would appreciate the gift. She wasn’t ignored by any means, but she and Tommen never got as many gifts as Joffrey, and those they did were clearly meant more as signs of the giver’s wealth or an attempt to gain the royal family’s favor. There was no consideration for the princess in her gifts, no thought of what she would like apart from uncles and some of the guards who got her little flowers, gardening supplies and the like to help grow her solace within the keep.

Jon rushed through the River Gate connecting the Fishmonger’s Square and wharfs of the Blackwater Rush. After a moment he found the gate captain stood with a man leading a cart loaded with goods.

“Lord Snow,” Tobas called out. “Your name’s Jorgan?” He asked as Jon came to stand with them.

“That is is,” the older man nodded. “You’re Jon Snow? Son of Eddard Stark?”

“I am,” Jon nodded. “Brother to Robb.”

“His son gave me this for you,” Jorgan said turning around and digging into his cart before removing a pot holding a small bush with five pale blue winter roses.
Jon took the pot and handed the man a silver piece. “Thank you.”

“Thank you, Lord Snow,” the man said innocently using the name Tobas had earlier before taking his cart away.

Jon sighed as Tobas chuckled. “You came here every day for flowers?”

“They’re not for me,” Jon assured.

“A girl then,” Tobas said with a nod. “Well, good luck, friend.”

Jon gave him a nod and turned to leave, but as he did saw a man rush toward Tobas and thrust a dagger into the goldcloak’s neck. The captain choked on the blade as it was ripped out and thrust at him again, but stopped inches from his face. Tobas stumbled back as the attacker turned and found Jon holding his wrist in his right hand and his potted flowers in his left arm. While Tobas fell to the ground clutching his leaking neck, Jon thrust his boot down on the attacker’s leg, forcing him to take a knee.

It was then the raggedy man tried to hit Jon between the legs, yanking his right hand free from Jon’s grip. In that moment the man swung the dagger down, slashing across Jon’s left thigh as he thrust his right boot into the man’s jaw.

While Jon yelled and stumbled back, turning to press his right hand over the wound on his leg, the raggedy attacker turned and started to scurry away. It was only a moment later three gold cloaks arrived and thrust two swords through the man’s back while another checked on Tobas, who had bled out.

“Shit,” Jon said when he tried to walk but winced in pain the moment he put weight on his left leg.

The guards kept him for a moment, but thankfully others rushed in to say he’d tried to help. However once they realized who he was, the guards sent a man to get Barristan to retrieve him.

Jon wore a frown as he watched Barristan come through the River Gate and lowered his gaze. He couldn’t stand to look at the Lord Commander and see the man’s disappointment when he saw Jon sat on the ground meters from a pair of corpses with blood dripping through the fingers clutched around the slash in his thigh while holding the potted flowers in his right arm.

Hearing the clink of armor as the man took a knee, Jon glanced up to find Barristan in front of him. “Are you okay, Jon?”

Jon nodded. “I’m sorry, Ser Barristan.”


“I almost let him get away,” Jon said shaking his head. “If I’d been paying more attention I might have stopped him from killing Tobas.”

Barristan’s brow furrowed as he shook his head. “This isn’t your fault. You couldn’t know some madman would slay the captain. He was probably some fool who felt wronged. You couldn’t have known.”

“You would have,” Jon said looking to the old knight. “You would have seen him coming, but I was so…” He sighed, looking at the winter roses. “I tried to stop him but I kept holding these. As if they matter. As if sh-” He stopped himself, shaking his head, glancing at the wound on his thigh, taking a shaky breath. “What if it’s too deep?”
A solemn smile took Barristan’s lips, his sapphire eyes taking in the boy before brushing away his left hand. “Let me see.” Once he moved the handkerchief tied over the wound and could look at the cut he saw it surely must have hurt and would require some stitches, but didn’t look too bad. “Have you tried walking on it?”

“It hurts.”

“I’d imagine.” Barristan sighed, sliding his arm under Jon’s to help the boy stand. “We’ll wash it and stitch it once we’re back at the keep. You’ll be hobbled for a fortnight I’d guess.”

“What?” Jon asked as Barristan helped him start toward the gate.

“Be thankful for that,” Barristan said with a smile. “It could have hit the wrong spot and drained you as fast as the captain or left you without the leg.”

Jon didn’t mind the sting as Barristan washed and closed the wound as much as the idea of being unable to move properly for two weeks. Thankfully he wasn’t bedridden, just unable to take to the yard as he had before. That didn’t excuse him from his training though. Instead, Jon found himself focusing more on riding and wielding a lance. Though he didn’t need to, Loras offered to join Jon since they couldn’t spar as they did most days.

His friendship with Loras had been the oddest thing Jon found in King’s Landing. The Tyrell was the opposite of Jon in many ways, though the largest was what Jon suspected but would never reveal. He’d noticed little things about the squire, how he feigned interest in the women who adored him yet would flash certain smiles toward Lord Renly.

Jon had been shocked to find the man was even his opposite in whom he wished to bed, but he’d fought him for months and spoken to him enough to know he was a decent man. He doubted he was the only one to suspect as much, but no one said anything, and Jon knew if they had he would deny it and spare the men any shame that might be cast upon them. Who he bedded didn’t matter half as much as who he was, and Jon found though arrogant, hot blooded and glory hungry at times, Loras was better than most in King’s Landing.

The first night after he returned from the River Gate Jon was sought out by Jon Arryn and King Robert, who brought Pycelle to check his wound.

“It’s nothing, your grace,” Jon assured.

“I’ve seen many a man die from nothing, Snow,” Robert said with a firm nod.

Pycelle had him pull down his breeches and adjust his small clothes to reveal the cut across his thigh. “Stitched well enough. Was it cleaned?”

“Ser Barristan washed it once we got back from the Mud Gate,” Jon nodded.

“Hm,” the old maester nodded. “It should be enough to stand on in a fortnight, maybe less if you heal well. There might be pain for a sennight or so after, but it will fade.”

“Will it scar?” asked Jon Arryn.

“Not if it’s properly cared for,” Pycelle said looking to Jon. “I’ll bring some ointment to coat it in when you wake and before you sleep. If it does scar it will be light enough no one would notice.” He gave the boy a pat on his knee as he stood and turned to leave, stepping past the King and his Hand.
“What were you doing at the Mud Gate, Jon?” asked Jon Arryn.

Jon glanced at the king, worrying he might take the truth the wrong way, but deciding it was better than risking them already knowing or finding out after. He could tell them a version of the truth at least. “I heard princess Myrcella’s nameday was coming up and felt bad that I couldn’t afford a proper gift, so asked Robb to send me winter roses from Winterfell’s glass garden. He sent them with a merchant, so I went to meet him when some man in rags attacked the gate captain. Stabbed him in the throat and when I tried to stop him I still had the pot in my arm so couldn’t fight properly and he cut me.”

“A gift for Myrcella?” Robert said arching his brow.

Jon felt a hint of heat in his neck. “I know it’s late but I only found out a moon before. Ser Barristan said the guards get her gifts so I thought it expected of me.”

Jon Arryn’s eyes narrowed slightly, his lips curving into a knowing smile while Robert laughed. “A true knight in the making,” the king said with a fond smile. “I’ll gather a reward for you.”

“But I failed to stop him, your grace. It was the gold cloaks who caught him.”

“Aye, but they didn’t get cut doing so,” Robert said with a grin. “And maybe you can use the reward to buy your next gift instead of risking another scar.”

While Robert departed to go gather a purse for him, Jon Arryn excused himself from the king and stepped into Jon’s room, closing the door behind him and pulling over the chair from the small desk against the wall opposite his bed.

“You know it can never be,” Lord Arryn said with a frown.

Jon sighed and shook his head. “It’s not like that, my lord. I—” He glanced at the closed door, leaning forward slightly and frowning. “I felt bad. They seem to ignore her nameday yet Joffrey’s was a court affair.”

Lord Arryn was shocked that he could be wrong, sitting back with an understanding, somber nod. “I know. I fear the queen dotes on the crown prince too much at times, leaving the others to themselves. Though… I’m not certain that’s such a tragedy.”

Jon chuckled at the man’s conspiratorial tone. “I wouldn’t know much, my lord. Her grace feels my presence beneath her so requests other kingsguards or has Ser Barristan send me away when he is assigned to her.” The old man smirked at him and Jon sat back, fixing his breeches. “The princess seemed so happy with the flower Lord Tyrion got her, I thought she’d like one of the North as well.”

Eyeing the boy, Jon Arryn wondered if maybe he hadn’t been wrong after all, just had noticed something even the boy hadn’t. Then again maybe it was his age driving him to see things that weren’t there, like the golden children born to the ebony king.

“When will you gift it to her?” Lord Arryn asked.

“I’m already late for her nameday,” Jon frowned. “I can’t decide if I should just give it to her on the morrow or wait until I can stand on my own.”

Lord Arryn glanced to the potted rose bush sat beside Jon’s bed and smiled. “Perhaps it would be best to do so quickly, or else you may have been injured for dead flowers.”
Days later Myrcella had excused her handmaiden before returning to her mirror to adjust her hair and pat her lips to look as full as possible. With a final check she took a breath and left to find Ser Barristan stood outside her door alone. She blinked in surprise, glancing along the corridor for Jon. Many had taken to calling him Selmy’s Shadow for his dark hair and clothes as much as his ever following the guard, yet he was nowhere to be found.

“Ser Barristan,” she asked the older knight as she walked toward her garden. “Where is your squire?”

“He was injured, your grace.”

Myrcella gasped and stopped to turn on Barristan. “What? When?”

“Four days ago, at the River Gate,” he explained. “He tried to stop a murderer and was cut across the leg.” Seeing her eyes widen in concern, Barristan smiled. “He’s fine, your grace. He just won’t be as quick as he normally is for a few days.”

Myrcella frowned, but nodded and turned to continue along her path. Part of her wanted to ask where Jon was and go check on him herself, but she knew she shouldn’t. And yet she could only smile when they came to her garden and she found Jon stood there, leaning slightly to the right to keep weight off his left leg.

“Jon,” she called out, picking up her pace to reach him. “You had me worried.”

“I’m sorry, princess,” he said with a laugh, “but even if it’s late for your nameday hopefully this will make up for it.”

She watched him turn and lift a pot housing a bush of roses the color of frost, looking as though they might freeze her fingers when she carefully brushed them against the petals.

“They’re winter roses,” Jon said with a smile. “Straight from Winterfell’s glass garden. Well, from there to White Harbor and then a boat here.”

Myrcella chuckled along with him as he spoke, but then she pieced together what he said. “Wait, was this why you were on at the River Gate?”

Jon’s brow furrowed, glancing to Barristan, who’s brow rose in surprise at her deduction. “No,” Jon said shaking his head, “I had these before that, but I got along with the captain and…” Jon saw her pout as he lied and sighed. “It was my fault. Please, don’t blame yourself princess.”

Myrcella saw he already blamed himself, and decided she wouldn’t do the same. Instead she took the potted bush and sniffed a rose, smiling as she looked to Jon. “Can you still help me, or should we make Ser Barristan put his old knees to the test?”

Relieved, Jon nodded. “I’ll help.”

“Perhaps they should call you the flower knight,” Myrcella teased as she walked past Jon, who chuckled and shook his head.

“I fear Loras’ wrath if I take his epithet.”

“At least wait until you can stand properly to tell him you’ve claimed his title,” Myrcella said with a laugh as she sank to her knees and watched Jon kneel beside her and start digging where she pointed.
Barristan watched the princess as she looked upon Jon, her eyes holding tenderness he doubted existed within her mother. Once again Barristan found himself feeling sorry a man who put his life on the line giving winter roses to the girl he adored.

Chapter End Notes

This is around the start of 296 in my mind, and Tobas’ murder is what lets Jacelyn Bywater become the Mud Gate’s captain. In my mind it’s even set up by him, or someone who wants him there at least, which is why guards just flat out killed the attacker instead of trying to grab and question him. Jon just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I considered having Jon be stabbed in the leg to get a scar kind of like when Ygritte shot him, but decided a slash was just simpler and still left him hobbled enough to do what I needed.

Winter roses don’t really work for the color themeing I have in mind for the characters, but they’re too important overall to ignore.
The Flayed Knight

Chapter Summary

Ned sends a northern comrade to Jon as he grows his friendship with Loras Tyrell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he first heard Jon had been attacked by bandits on the kingsroad, Ned had been wroth, sending men to examine the bodies and find out who they had been. While that came up short, Ned found himself racked with worry when he received a letter from Jon Arryn telling him Jon had been injured trying to stop a man who murdered a gate captain in King’s Landing.

Ned had been tempted to demand the boy return at once, but he knew he couldn’t. By all reports Jon was doing well in King’s Landing, and no one had found out the truth. Of course, even if he wanted to bring the boy back he knew it would only make things worse in Winterfell.

Catelyn had been furious with the boy, blaming him for the coldness Robb and Arya showed her after he left. Though both had thawed, things had changed. Robb had started to push away from her. His brother was in the capital working to become a knight so he felt he couldn’t be coddled by her mothering. He wanted to prove himself a man worthy of being Ned’s heir.

After weeks of silence and ignoring Sansa completely, to the point where it started to upset Sansa, Arya finally returned to calling her sister names and Ned wasn’t sure which he preferred. Meanwhile Arya doubted everything her mother said and questioned every decision she made, earning herself a missed meal she surely made up for by sneaking into the kitchen. She’d lost faith in her mother’s judgment, making it clear she blamed Catelyn for the loss of her brother. A part of Ned hoped that might make Catelyn rethink things with Jon, but she doubled down and cursed him for turning her children against her.

No, calling Jon back would only make things worse. Instead, Ned thought to send someone to Jon. Other guests surely had retinues, and though Jon was a squire, he was still the son of a lord, surely it would be understandable for him to have a companion. Ned heard from the others Jon had found a friend in Mace Tyrell’s son, but surely a boy of the North would be a good companion to help remind the boy of home, keep him company when he wasn’t squiring, and be there to guard him.

He came to his decision while visiting Torrhen’s Square and considered asking Helman Tallhart to send his son Benfred, but decided against it. As nice as the boy seemed he was a bit too loud for the part he needed to play at Jon’s side.

It wasn’t until they left that Eddard found his answer on the kingsroad.

They were settling for the night when they noticed a camp fire in the distance and Ned found himself thinking of the bandits that attacked Jon. Ready to battle, Ned led Theon and his guards toward the fire where they found a lone man sat before a small fire. He was average sized with a beardless oval face and long dark hair. His eyes, such pale brown they seemed amber, found the men before they’d even made a noise.
“If you’ve come to take my purse I’d suggest you cling to your lives and leave,” the young man said staring at them, unflinching.

Ned’s eyes narrowed as he noticed the boy wearing a pink doublet with with red stripes down the sleeves beneath a black jerkin, his cloak bound by brooch bearing a flayed man.

“You’re with House Bolton?” Ned asked standing straight and stepping into the light.

“I am,” the young man said looking them over before he took a breath and leapt to his feet. “You’re Lord Stark.”

“Aye,” Ned nodded. “And you are?”

“Ser Domeric Bolton, my lord,” he said with a polite smile. “Returning from squiring to Lord Horton Redfort in the Vale.”

“Domeric,” Ned said with a nod, recognizing the name. “Roose’s son.”

“One of them,” Domeric said with a laugh. “I’ve learned I have a bastard brother.”

“You do?”

Domeric nodded. “So I’ve heard. When I wrote to my father he wouldn’t speak of him so I’ve decided to look for him myself once I return.”

Ned stepped forward. “Domeric, do you wish to return to the Dreadfort or could you be asked to travel south again?”

The Bolton heir arched his brow slightly as he moved closer to the men of Winterfell. “For what?”

“My son, my bastard, he’s squiring in King’s Landing, but I fear for him. I know he’s in good hands but all say it is a viper’s pit and I’ve sent the boy there alone.” Ned sighed, feeling a bit of guilt for asking Domeric to give up his task of finding his brother and returning home for his sake, but he needed this. “I’d ask you join him there. I’d like to know he has a man of the North at his side.”

“And you think I’m the one for this?” Domeric asked with a glance to the guards around the lord.

Ned smiled. “As I understand it he’s found a friend but not many more, not his own age at least, so I’d ask you not only watch him but be a companion as well.”

Domeric’s gaze fell for a moment, thinking of his brother. Wherever he was, surely he had his own friends by now. He could always find him later, ask others to look into it for him. Doing this now for Lord Stark could be a boon for him, not only would he get to visit the capital but he would be doing the Lord of Winterfell a favor and likely befriend his son. Surely others would look down on the boy for being a bastard, but how could Domeric do that when he looked forward to meeting his own bastard brother.

With a nod Domeric looked to Lord Stark. “I’ll travel south in the morning.”

Ned let out a sigh of relief. “Thank you, Ser Domeric.”

The boy shook his head. “No, thank you for this chance to see more of the world, my lord.”

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO
“I’m not some lady,” Jon said with an indignant snort as he stood outside the Red Keep with Loras while Ser Barristan guarded Queen Cersei.

“There’s little doubt of that, my friend,” Loras said with a laugh.

“Then why do I need some retinue?” Jon sighed. “What kind of squire has a guard?”

“I thought him a companion to ease your longing for the North?” Loras asked dripping condescension.

Jon shook his head. “You know as well as I do that’s a load of shit.”

“Don’t forget,” Loras said turning to the sullen squire, “manure is key to letting grand gardens bloom.”

Jon eyed him for a moment. “Are you telling me to grow something from the shit?”

Loras nodded. “What harm is there in another knight among us?”

“None, but…” Jon frowned. “The guards already call me Lord Snow. How will anyone ever take me serious if I earn a knighthood? They’ll think me coddled.”

Loras chuckled and shook his head, smacking the dark haired bastard’s shoulder. “Anyone who thinks you coddled or unworthy is a fool who need only see you in the yard.”

Jon shook his head. “I still lost more today.”

“And I yesterday,” Loras shrugged. “At least I know when I go and face Garlan I’ll be able to do so knowing he may no longer be the best I’ve faced.”

Jon smiled at the compliment, lie that it was, looking ahead as he said, “Barristan and Jaime are still better than you.”

Loras guffawed. “Would it be cruel to say I’m glad Lady Stark drove you from Winterfell, otherwise I would miss this?”

“Aye,” Jon said with a reluctant nod, “it hasn’t ended up too bad.”

“Not too bad?” Loras scoffed. “Name me another bastard trained by the best swordsmen in the realm who has the princess fluttering whenever she sees him?”

“She doesn’t flutter,” Jon said with a glance at Loras.

“In her heart she does,” Loras assured. “It shows in her eyes. There’s no chance you of all people haven’t noticed.”

Jon frowned. He had, but then he’d also assumed he imagined it. Of course a bastard like him would want a pretty girl like her to like him. He’d even tell himself why else would she bother with him so much, but he knew she wasn’t like most people. Him being a bastard didn’t stop her from being friendly. She was like Tyrion, smart enough to see beyond things like that, only less crude and much prettier.

“The poor princess,” Loras mourned mockingly, “fallen for a bastard. And not even a fun one but a sullen, honorable one who would never dare steal her away or take her maidenhead in a moment of passion.”
Jon shook his head. “I’m not… I’m fun.”

“No one fun ever says they are, Jon,” Loras said shaking his head pitifully.

“Either way, you’re wrong. The princess is a friend, sure, but she’s like a cousin.”

“She may as well be. King Robert already considers Lord Stark a brother, more so than his own at times.” A teasing smile took Loras’ lips as he looked to Jon. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the king offers to legitimize you or even let you raise your own house and marry her to you just to unify your houses.”

Staring solemnly at the path to Flea Bottom, Jon crossed his arms. “Even he wouldn’t dishonor her by marrying her to me.”

His sincerity stole the humor from Loras, who frowned. “Anyone would be lucky to have you, Jon. Don’t doubt that.” He shook his head. “Besides, I’m sure he’d do it to give her what she wants.”

“He’d have to notice she wants it,” Jon said with a snort.

“Which would mean noticing she exist,” Loras nodded, a smile creeping across his lips, “but at least you admit it’s what she wants.”

Jon gave a relenting laugh. “The queen wouldn’t allow it.”

“Oh, of course,” Loras mocked, “and the king always pays attention to her desires.”

Jon chuckled, though grew somber as he shook his head. “Even if we both wanted that it could never be.” Jon looked to Loras with a smile. “I actually envy you here. At least you have what you want.” Loras let out a slight gasp, his eyes widening as Jon looked ahead and said simply, “I’ll never say a word. I don’t know for sure, so it’s not a lie to say it doesn’t exist. I just want you to know I know so there’s no lies between us.”

Loras found his fear easing when he nodded, a thankful smile taking his lips as he felt tears of relief prick his eyes. He’d thought such awful things about Jon at first, thought him a dullard of the North, an untrained savage given a blessing he didn’t deserve, and yet here he was accepting this awful truth about Loras, something others would hate him for. He didn’t need to tell Loras he knew, he could have even used it against him, but instead wanted to make it known so Loras could be even more open about himself.

“It’s not easy,” Loras said with a quiet, sad laugh.

“No, I can’t imagine it is,” Jon said shaking his head, “but you’re braver than I.”

“I doubt that, Jon,” said Loras. “When the time comes I’ve no doubt you’ll prove yourself more than any suspect.”

When they saw the rider in a pink riding cloak Jon raised his hand, a gesture which the man returned, guiding his horse to them. Loras noticed his pale brown eyes shift, similar to how Jon’s did whenever he scanned a room or person. When he dismounted the young man greeted them with a friendly smile.

“Ser Domic Bolot,” he said holding out his hand.

“Loras Tyrell, squire to Lord Renly Baratheon,” he said shaking the Bolton’s hand before releasing it for Jon.
“Jon Snow, squire to Ser Barristan Selmy.”

“Well you were clearly expecting me,” Domeric said with a nod. “I assume your father told you of me?”

Thinking back on Ned’s letter Jon recalled, “You squired in the Vale, right?”

“Aye.”

Loras observed the man for a moment. He was a year or two older than him, so two or three older than Jon. Though average looking he held himself well, like a man who could defend himself.

“Are you decent with a sword?” Loras asked with a nod to the simple longsword hanging from his waist.

“Decent enough,” Domeric offered with a nod, clearly thinking himself better than decent. “Though I prefer the harp.”

“A musician,” Loras gave an impressed nod. “Should be fun.”

“And you, Lord Tyrell?”

“I prefer to make steel sing,” Loras said with a smirk.

Deomeric nodded, turning to Jon. “What of you, Lord Snow?”

“Jon, please,” he said while Loras chuckled. “I’m… okay, I guess.”

Loras scoffed as his uncertain tone. “Don’t listen to him. Jon is a good judge of everyone but himself.”

Domeric nodded, smiling at the clear camaraderie Loras felt for the sullen looking squire. “I could always see for myself I suppose.”

“It does seem about that time,” Loras said looking to Jon. “I’m sure our fans are waiting.”

“Fans?” asked Domeric.

“Those who come to watch us spar,” Loras explained as Jon led them to the stable to put away his horse before bringing them to the yard. “The king’s even come a few times.”

Domeric wondered if that was because the king had some fondness for the boys, being the squire to his brother and Lord Commander of the kingsguard as well as his friend’s bastard, or if they were good enough to garner the attention. Loras certainly seemed the type women would flock to, but not the king. Then again, it could be both.

He was a bit surprised to find a few people already gathered at the fence around the training yard, turning to wave to the squires as they approached. He noticed even a few guards turned to watch them, placing coins into a purse.

Removing his cloak and securing some of the simple gray plate armor he carried with him from the Vale, Domeric took a blunted steel sword and shield. More people joined the crowd as he heard whispers of Bolton when they noticed the sigil on his cloak. “First to ten?” Jon asked, spinning the training sword in his hand as he looked at Domeric.

“Whatever you normally do,” the Bolton heir said with a smile.
Jon nodded and stepped to the side, forcing Domeric to do the same, circling the ring as Loras stood leaning against the railing, clearly interested in gauging Domeric as much as Domeric was interested in gauging Jon. Domeric closed first, dashing to Jon with a slash he avoided, parrying Jon’s counter. When he went to slash at Jon, he hit only his shield, which knocked the blunted sword aside while his own thrust forward, slipping along Domeric’s arm to find his chest.

Domeric’s brow furrowed as he backed away, the men of the North exchanging a nod before starting again. This time Domeric waited, letting Jon come to him. He was surprised to find Jon swaying slightly, as if unable to determine which way he would go before suddenly dashing toward his shield arm.

It was Domeric who felt a fool for doubting him when Jon bounced his sword off his shield. When he went to slash at the bastard, he found Jon ducking, bringing his shield up to block the blow while he turned and swung his sword into Domeric’s right leg. From there he slashed up, straight into Domeric’s armpit. If it had been live steel and the angle altered, Jon could have driven the sword into his heart or through his collar and into his head.

Domeric let out a laugh as they separated. Jon wasn’t just a good swordsman, he was smart, tricky, thought ahead. He could be vicious most likely, pick away at people if he wanted.

Loras watched Domeric charge in next and his brow rose watching the man slide beneath Jon’s slash to strike at his legs and then swing up, hitting Jon’s side under his arm. He was back on his feet a moment later, turning to swing at Jon, who caught the strike with his sword and slammed his shield into it before bashing his shield into Domeric’s. The moment they made impact, Jon turned his hand, letting his shield loose to grab Doemric’s and pull it up while thrusting his blunted sword into the Bolton’s chest.

Watching the Northmen fight Loras realized just how good Jon was. Jon wasn’t as skilled at Jaime or Barristan yet, likely not even truly of a par with himself or Garlan, but he didn’t limit himself like they did. The bastard squire had conformed to their knightly style and grown, but clearly hadn’t forgotten his northern style. He grappled, struck everywhere anyway he could. Jon wasn’t just a swordsman, he was a fighter. With Domeric he could refine that as well.

It turned out Domeric was decent with a sword, not at their level, but he made up for it with grappling and good strategy. Loras couldn’t wait for their match to be over just so he could try fighting the man himself.

When the match ended it was Jon who took the victory, but both looked as tired as they were pleased. Domeric seemed joyed to find another who fought like him while Jon was glad for another person to challenge him. Though he’d technically won, it was by two points and Jon knew he could have easily lost.

Loras slipped into the ring, taking up his own blunted sword and patting Jon’s shoulder. “Do you mind if I cut in?”

Jon glanced to Domeric, who arched his brow. “Go ahead.”

Stepping aside, Jon spotted a familiar golden haired girl stood beside Mandon Moore. Seeing him take notice of her, Myrcella smiled, waving him over.

Jon stepped out of the ring and around to her, where she smiled. “You did well.”

“Thank you princess, but it was close.”
“Who were you fighting?” She asked looking to the ring where Loras and Domeric clashed.

“Ser Domeric Bolton. Heir to the Dreadfort in the North.” With a hint of embarrassment he explained, “My father sent him to keep me company.” To his relief Myrcella didn’t seem to think less of him, simply nodding as she looked to the man in the pink doublet who laughed when Loras easily parried his blows.

During the match Domeric had noticed Jon speaking with the princess, who smiled up at him as he spoke. His sullen face seemed to soften as well, even cracking a few smiles as he listened to her. Domeric found himself smirking as Loras took another point and he stepped toward the squire.

“Those two?” He asked with a slight glance toward the princess and the bastard squire.

“He thinks it hopeless,” Loras said shaking his head.

Domeric chuckled as he backed away to prepare for another round. He’d been there barely an hour and found his few doubts gone. Things would certainly be interesting here. His father would be angry at him for not returning to the Dreadfort as he wished, but he had little doubt in time Jon could well prove to be a brother in arms, perhaps even more than his own bastard brother could ever hope to be.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone read my authors notes in Northern Conqueror or saw my post on Tumblr, I’m sure it’s no surprise I’m bringing in Domeric. He’s one of my favorite ‘could have been’ character so I definitely want to play with him. I made him a knight here because if memory serves it’s not proven he was knighted, but not proven he wasn’t either, so I’ve gone with he was to make things a bit simpler. If he wasn’t then in this universe he was.

My thinking is Ned’s visit to the Tallharts was shifted slightly, maybe Ned wanted to get away from the frustration of Catelyn’s anger at Jon. I also figure Domeric didn’t find Ramsay right away, so this is still in 296 AC.
Motley Crew

Chapter Summary

With Jon gaining another companion he begins to find new interests which bring to mind a specter of the past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Barristan wasn’t sure what to make of Domeric Bolton when the young knight first arrived at King’s Landing. Though he said Ned had sent him to be a companion for his bastard, it was clear he was intended to guard the boy after his injury at the River Gate. Barristan could understand being concerned about his son, but he was a squire set to become a knight, he would be injured. Ned knew this, so why would Eddard Stark send a guard for his bastard?

Thankfully the Bolton heir was a good hand to have around. He helped Jon come to ride even better than already he did. At times it was as though they were centaurs, both of a par at the lance while Loras wielded it with natural ease. When he’d first arrived Jon had clearly focused on learning the sword but had grown skilled beyond it, wielding lances, daggers, spears, axes all with similar skill.

Soon their number grew again as word began to spread of the Flayed Knight who arrived at King’s Landing to join the Flower and Bastard Squires. Though Mace trusted Loras’ assurances of Eddard Stark’s bastard being a true knight, he couldn’t do the same once he heard the Bolton had arrived. Even in the south there were tales of the Boltons who wore their enemies skins as cloaks, with rumors that they still flayed their enemies despite claiming to abandon it millennia earlier.

They were shocked to find the companion Mace Tyrell sent for his squired son was a pale eyed rotund boy with the collar of his surcoat lost beneath his chins, the scarlet huntsmen embroidered across it marking him a Tarly. Jon maintained an even expression while Domeric observed him carefully and Loras bit back a more biting smile as three other men-at-arms followed the boy in dismounting.

“Welcome,” Loras said he extended a hand which the boy hesitantly shook. “I’m Loras Tyrell, squire to Lord Renly Baratheon.”

“Samwell Tarly,” he said with a quick nod, “son of Lord Randyll Tarly of Horn Hill.”

“My father spoke well of yours,” Loras assured before looking to his companions. “These are my friends, Ser Domeric Bolton, heir to the Dreadfort, and Jon Snow, bastard to Lord Eddard Stark of Winterfell.”

Sam smiled sheepishly to the two beside Loras. “I look forward to knowing you.”

Loras nodded to the huntsman on his surcoat. “Do you enjoy hunting?”

Sam shuddered but looked reluctant before admitting, “I hate it.”

Domeric offered a smile, “And I dislike flaying people.” Seeing Sam’s eyes go wide with fear, Jon
chuckled and elbowed Domeric. “I’m joking, of course, Lord Tarly. I quite enjoy it.”

Loras laughed as Sam’s face paled, Jon noticing the men behind him looking equally concerned. “Don’t mind him,” Jon assured Sam, “Domeric would rather sit and play his harp all day than wield a blade.”

That seemed to wash away Sam’s fear, gaining his interest. “You play the harp?”

Domeric’s brow arched. “Do you as well?”

“Oh no,” Sam said shaking his head. “I enjoy listening and making up songs but I can’t play any more than I can wield a blade. Give me a book though and I’ll tear through it like Arthur Dayne.”

The boys chuckled while Domeric nodded. “Aye, me as well. I’ve found the library of the Red Keep more than adequate. I could show you once you’ve settled in.”

Samwell was to be a companion for Loras since he couldn’t well squire to a squire. Instead Lord Arryn secured him staff quarters near Jon and Domeric. While Domeric found light work in the stables Sam found his maintaining the library. The boy was shy and awkward, making it hard to get to know him at first.

Their first time in the yard had been a disaster when Domeric him him twice in a row and Samwell fell to his knees holding his head. “I yield,” he pleaded, “don’t hit me!”

The knight and squires frowned seeing him shiver in fear. Jon hopped off the rail and hurried over, kneeling down to grab the man’s arm and help him stand again. “It’s fine, we’re not going to hurt you, Sam. We want to help.”

“It’s no use,” Sam said with a sniff as he wiped his eyes. “A dozen have tried and failed. My father he-” Samwell froze suddenly, glancing at Loras before lowing his gaze and shaking his head. “It’s no use.”

Jon and Domeric shared a glance while Loras frowned. “Your father what?” Domeric asked, crossing his arms.

Samwell’s large throat shivered as he gulped and shook his head. “He’s tried before and it never works… I’ve been forced to sleep in chainmail, paraded through the bailey in my mother’s clothes to shame me into valor, bathed in aurochs blood by warlocks from Qarth, none of it worked.”

Jon had known Loras thought poorly of Sam. He imagined it was less to do with his build, which Mace Tyrell supposedly shared, and more to do with his awkwardness and ineptitude. Yet Jon watched as all those things fell away as anger painted Loras’s concerned expression.

“That’s awful,” Loras said shaking his head. He had been lucky that his place in his family meant what he was could be ignored, but Sam had been tortured because he wasn’t what his father wanted. That had been Loras’ nightmare as he came to realize what he was, who he was. To see what it did to someone made Loras thankful for his family and his place as third born son.

After that Loras was more patient with his companion, the three of them doing what they could to train him in the yard, but more often than not he sat aside while they sparred. He would join them for rides, though rarely joined them in practicing with a lance.

Instead it was Domeric and Samwell who managed to make Jon take an interest in reading and history.
They had been sat in the yard one day while Loras was off with Renly and Ser Barristan guarded the queen. Domeric and Samwell were discussing books they’d suggested to each other while Jon listened to them and picked at the remnants of the food Sam had brought them. His interest shifted when he spotted a Mandon Moore trailing the princess and her uncle. Once she spotted them she glanced at Tyrion and diverted her path.

Spotting the princess walking over to them Samwell gasped and sat up, making Domeric glance to Jon, the squire’s smile telling him who it was before he turned. “Good afternoon, Princess Myrcella, Lord Tyrion.”

“Ser Domeric,” she said with a curtsy. “And Ser…”

“Samwell Tarly, your grace,” he said with a bow. “No ser.”

With a polite smile she looked to Jon. “I take it Ser Barristan guards my mother?”

Jon chuckled. “That he does, princess.”

“Tarly,” Tyrion said with a smirk to the fat man. “I’d heard Tyrell sent his son a companion as well, though I’m surprised he didn’t send a knight. Are you sure you’re able to keep up with the bastard and his companions?”

Sam put on a smile as he looked to the little lord. “It was either this or risk an accident on a hunt.”

While Myrcella looked confused, Tyrion’s brow rose as he saw Domeric and Jon’s faces darken. Loras has been furious when Sam told them of his father’s ultimatum, partially because he blamed himself for it.

After receiving a letter from Mace Tyrell asking for have Randyll send his son to King’s Landing and be a companion to his son, the Lord of Horn Hill called his son into his room with two men-at-arms bringing him to his solar. He had a scroll on the desk before him as he stood and looked to his eldest son.

“You’re nearly a man and my heir,” he said carefully. “You’ve given me no reason to disown you, but I will not allow you to take the title and lands that should be Dickon’s. Heartsbane must go to someone able to wield her and you are not worthy to touch her hilt.” His hand pushed the scroll forward. “You’ve decided to make a name for yourself and relinquish your place as heir to Horn Hill. To achieve that I’ve done you a final favor as a father and secured you a place as companion to Loras Tyrell in King’s Landing. If you fail at that and return we shall have a hunt and somewhere in these woods your horse will stumble and you will be thrown from the saddle and die,” he said meeting his son’s terrified eyes, “or so I will tell your mother.”

Sam had spoken it to them calmly but Loras was worked into a rage that left bruises on Jon when they went to the yard that day.

“He’s no knight but he is a scholar,” Domeric offered, reaching over to pat Sam’s shoulder.

“Do you seek to be a maester?” Tyrion asked. The way Sam’s face paled as he shook his head left Tyrion confused and saddened, wondering what the boy had suffered.

“No,” he said with a shaky laugh. “I simply prefer to read. Ser Domeric and I were just discussing a book I’d finished last night. Lost Children, Tales of the First Men by Maester Cregan.”

Myrcella’s brow raised with a smile. “I’ve read that!”
“You have?” asked Domeric.

Myrcella nodded. “I wanted to know about the Old Gods so Maester Pycelle told me of it. It talked of how it’s believed the First Men inherited the Old Gods as a part of their Pact with the Children of the Forest. I’m not sure I believe them about the First Men being from the Essos. That they were basically Dothraki.”

“Perhaps the North changed us,” Domeric said with a smile. “Maybe back then men of the North truly were savages and the pact helped us settle.”

“Then I wonder why the Dothraki haven’t sailed since if the First Men found Westeros,” Myrcella said with a laugh. “Perhaps only the craven stayed behind and that fear of crossing the sea became a part of their culture?”

Samwell smiled. “I’ve also read another theory in Maester Mikal’s Traces of Valyria that the First Men could be from Valyria.”

“I read that last week,” Myrcella began with a nod.

Tyrion found himself feeling pride as he watched his niece hold her own in a discussion with the two older lordlings. Then he found amusement in looking to Jon Snow who seemed a bit lost from not having read the books they discussed. He also found the hint of jealousy he saw interesting as well.

Tyrion thought Myrcella had all her mother’s beauty and none of her nature, and he was never more certain of that than when she spoke of Jon Snow, who kept appearing in more of Myrcella’s stories whenever Tyrion asked how she’d been while he was away. Whenever she mentioned the dark haired squire her eyes softened in a way Cersei’s never did. Her smile held such delicate hope even beneath a solemn veil of knowledge that because of what he was they could never be. It was in those moments a part of him wished Jon Snow the kind of bastard who would do as Rhaegar had years ago and steal his own Lyanna Stark, but he knew the boy enough to know that would never happen.

Worst was Tyrion had an inkling the boy would be good for her. When he’d first looked into Myrcella’s garden and noticed the winter roses he’d been shocked to hear who gave them to her. Then he’d heard the tale of his injury at the River Gate and understood her adoration of the boy. He cared for her enough to go out of his way to get her a gift no one else would and nearly lost his life doing so. No wonder she was smitten.

He’d taken a chance to look into the boy after that, asking around the court and finding that the worst people had nothing good to say of him but nothing bad either. The worst Cersei had said was that he was a bastard, which the boy knew clearly thanks to his time with Joffrey, who considered him a dullard because he never rose to Joffrey’s insults or even seemed to bristle at them anymore. The Small Council considered him a quiet, simple lad, but Renly said Loras spoke of the boy as though he were his own brother. When he asked him of Jon he found the Tyrell answered simply, “Jon is the best person I know.”

Most shocking had been Jaime, who said, “Snow was wasted in the North.”

“Is that so?” Tyrion asked tilting his head.

Jaime thought back to the boy he saw in the yard of Winterfell venting his frustration on a straw soldier. “Before this he intended to go to the Wall,” Jaime told his brother. “They made him think that was the best he could do, go spend the rest of his life sworn to a brotherhood of thieves, rapist
and turncoats. All because Catelyn Tully was terrified he would be the Daemon Blackfyre of the North.”

“And you don’t think him capable of that?” Tyrion asked arching his brow.

“Oh he’s absolutely capable,” Jaime said with a laugh. “I’ve no doubt he could ride to Winterfell now and slay every man there, but he wouldn’t. He loves his siblings, still writes to them from what I understand. When we spar he sometimes mentions things they wrote.”

“You spar with him?” Tyrion sat up, finding that just as telling.

“From time to time.” Jaime shrugged. “No need to be clever or second guess words.”

Tyrion’s jaw shifted as he held back a smirk and took a risk saying, “Perhaps that’s why Myrcella cares for him.”

He watched Jaime’s lips sink slightly. He knew. He’d known for a while, and felt similar to how Tyrion did. “It’s possible. Jon won’t try anything though. He knows better.”

“You know this?”

Jaime seemed to shift uncomfortably before glancing to the door and nodding. “He’s said as much.”

Tyrion’s eyes widened. “He has?”

Jaime chuckled. “I asked him about it. Poor fool looked like he was going to piss himself, expecting me to gut him. Then he told me why he got her the flowers for her garden.”

“Why?”

“He saw how much she liked your nameday gift and realized no one else in court was making a fuss like they had for Joffrey so wanted to cheer her up.” The fondness in Jaime’s somber smile surprised Tyrion. “But he knows his place. He knows the king and queen would never allow her to marry him, even if he rose to be a great knight or founded his own house. Even with Robert showing the boy some favor, being a bastard is a stain he can’t wash away.”

The somber tone when Jaime spoke of Jon’s bastard stain stuck with Tyrion as he saw Jon recognize his jealousy and look down frowning. With a slight shake of his head he seemed to squish what he was feeling listening to Myrcella speak with his friends and looked up with his usual even expression. He flashed a small smile when Myrcella finished and said farewell before leading Tyrion toward the library to pick up a book Samwell had mentioned.

It was after that conversation that Jon had taken to visiting the library and spending his nights reading in his room once he was done with his duties for the day. After that Barristan found that Jon devoted himself nearly as much to studying history as he did training.

“More to learn from,” Jon said when Barristan asked him why he took a sudden interest in reading. “I don’t have experience in battles like you do, but I can read about them and learn from that. I can try to understand things and people more by reading about them. It could help.”

Barristan was glad to see the boy expand his interests. He’d been so focused on training it seemed all he ever did, but he retained that intense, single-minded focus with everything he did. It seemed he was determined to better himself, but never let his duties dwindle. When he was guarding with Barristan he was focused, when he was training he pushed himself, and when he was at the library
it was hard to pull him away once he was deep in a book. Barristan was sure he could give the squire a spoon and tell him to tear down the castle and in a month he would return to find piles of bricks laid before him.

His sudden interest in history was nothing compared to the surprise Barristan felt when he finished a shift guarding the queen and found Jon sat across from Domeric and Sam, his long fingers strumming at a harp set against his shoulder. Barristan felt something flicking at the back of his mind with each string struck. Jon wore a wary expression, looking from his fingers to the kingsguard stood off to the side.

“Ser Barristan,” Domeric said with a tone of relief as he looked from the kingsguard to Jon, “would you tell Jon that playing an instrument wouldn’t make him less of a knight.”

Barristan nodded. “Plenty of knights play an instrument or two.”

Domeric looked to Jon. “Surely you’ve heard of the Tourney of Harrenhal?”

A frown took Barristan’s lips as Jon nodded. “Of course.”

“Ser Barristan,” Domeric said turning to the kingsguard. “You faced Rhaegar that day in the finals, you knew him before King Robert killed him. Surely he was a fine warrior if he beat you that day.”

Barristan nodded, putting together the point the lad was trying to make. “Aye, he was, but even finer at the harp.”

“I’m not some silver haired prince,” Jon said sourly.

“Though I’m sure you’d like to steal a princess,” Domeric teased.

Jon shook his head as Sam snickered. Looking down at the harp Jon strummed an off key melody which somehow made Barristan’s stomach stir as he watched the sullen boy play the strings before looking to Domeric. “Why do you want to teach me?”

“Because it’s more fun playing together,” Domeric answered. Sam offered an almost apologetic look as if his lack of skill was to blame. Seeing Jon still hesitate Domeric tilted his head in thought. “Maybe I should offer to teach Loras.”

“Gods,” Jon sighed, “could you imagine the women if their Flower Knight serenaded them?” The boys shared a laugh before Jon looked at the instrument and nodded. “Fine, I’ll let you try and teach me.”

After that whenever Barristan saw Domeric giving the squire lessons on the harp he felt oddly unsettled. It must have been Domeric’s comment about Rhaegar, but all he could think of was the dragon prince going from reading in the library to training in the yard and then serenading the court with his silver stringed harp, crafting melodies that drove women to tears.

Seeing his squire grow so quickly gave the man a swell of pride, enough to make him doubt not knighting him after seeing how somber Jon was after watching Loras be knighted. The Tyrell had been Jon’s first friend in Kind’s Landing and his rival. Seeing Loras surpass him, leaving Jon as the only squire of their group, might have disheartened him, yet he remained happy for Loras.

It didn’t help that not long after Loras was knighted word spread of a tourney to be held on Joffrey’s thirteenth nameday. Lords and knights gathered to King’s Landing, including Tywin Lannister and even Walder Frey. Loras would have pages to bring him lances, so suggested that Sam act as squire for Domeric during the joust rather than sit in the stands.
“Will you need me for the tourney?” Jon asked Barristan one morning as he helped the knight prepare for his shift.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll ride, won’t you?”

Barristan nodded. “I had considered it.”

“I was hoping you could go without me,” Jon said carefully.

Barristan looked to his sullen squire and smiled solemnly. “There’s no need to be ashamed because you’re behind them, Jon. They’re older.”

The boy looked down as if he’d been caught. “I know.”

“I’ll find another to hand me lances should I decide to tilt,” Barristan assured.

“Thank you, Ser.”

“Now go,” Barristan said with a laugh. “I’ve a queen to guard so I release my shadow upon the world.”

Jon smiled as he followed Barristan out of the room, though that fell as he turned and made his trek to the Street of Steel in Flea Bottom. Jon had been with Loras when the newly knighted Tyrell purchased his armor from the shop of Tobho Mott, so made his way there with the purse King Robert had given him for the cut on his leg. Barely lighter from the toy he bought for Tommen’s nameday, he knew from how much Loras and Domeric’s armor had cost that he could afford a set of his own.

Stepping into the largest house on the Street of Steel, he found the owner walking around examining the works until one of the serving girls spoke to Jon and he made his way toward him. “I’m afraid we’ve not finished the armor yet.”

“I assumed as much, but I’ve come hoping to buy my own set this time,” Jon said with a glance to the door before adding quietly, “without my friends knowing.”

Tobho nodded and said quietly, “Ah. Hope to play the mystery knight? Will you want a full set or shall you piece together my spares?”

Jon looked around before spotting an unfinished bull head helm sat in the corner. “I’d like a helmet like that.”

The apprentice near it looked up and shook his head. “You can’t have it.”

Tobho turned back to his apprentice. “Gendry!”

“He can’t,” he repeated firmly. “It’s mine. I made it for myself.”

“Could you make me one like it?” asked Jon. “Maybe shaped different?”

Tobho turned back with a nod. “He could if that’s what you wish.”

“I’d like the helmet custom, but the rest could be off your racks if it’s easier for you. For the shield, would you paint that as well?”
“We could,” Tobho nodded. “What did you have in mind for the sigil and helm?”

Jon thought about it, trying to think of what he could choose. Domeric had told him of the Knight of the Laughing Tree and he’d considered asking for a sullen tree, but it might have been too obvious. Instead, Jon thought back on what had led him here. He’d wanted to go to the Wall and become a crow yet ended up leaving Winterfell to squire for the Lord Commander of the kingsguard.

“A white crow,” Jon said looking to the smith, smiling as he added, “with green eyes.”

Tobho nodded. “The back?”

“Black. A crow for the helm as well, if you can, though it need not be white. Better to match the armor.”

“We’ll give you a mighty beak, Ser White Crow. Now let’s pick out the rest.”

When Joffrey’s nameday came knights gathered and Barristan found himself disappointed Jon had chosen to take the day to practice the harp and study on his own. He’d hoped the squire would at least come to see his friends ride, but maybe he had underestimated how down on himself he’d been. He still remembered how Jon had apologized for failing to stop the gate captain’s murder, blaming himself for it. Part of him wished the boy could take some of the arrogance from Jaime or Loras, else he may drown in self doubt or end up as skittish as the Tarly boy.

During the procession of knights Barristan noted among them a man in a pieced together set of armor with a crow’s head helm and a black shield housing a white crow with green eyes. The moment the smallfolk saw him the whispers began as they always did when a mystery knight took their ranks.

Barristan found himself smiling, thinking back to when he rode as a mystery knight and Prince Duncan Targaryen dubbed him Bold.

The king chuckled upon spotting him. “Fuckin’ mystery knights.”

“Who do you think it is?” Joffrey asked tilting his head back and forth as if that would help determine the knight’s identity.

“I think that’s the mystery,” Myrcella said looking at the Knight of White Crows.

Joffrey shot her a glare until the king laughed, “It’s probably some noble’s son come to find his glory.”

Loras stood out more than most knights thanks to his resplendent armor littered with gem encrusted flowers and a stallion draped in a blanket of roses. His first went to the queen, and his second to the princess, who took it with a polite smile and nod. He rode down the first of the Frey men, knocking the bulbous knight from his horse with grace that left the women swooning.

That was soon followed by a hush as Domeric Bolton rode onto the field atop a red stallion. He wore dark armor with crimson slits invoking the sinew of bared muscles, as though he were his house’s signature flayed man. Even his helmet had a similar pattern, with red steamers down the back like a horse’s mane.

The quiet of the crowd broke when they saw him speed across the field and break lances with a knight. As they came around for a second tilt, he seemed to push his horse even faster before shattering his lance against the knight, knocking him from his saddle without being hit. The crowd
cheered when Domeric raised his hand and pat his stallion’s neck as they rode back.

Jaime Lannister rode next, garnering smiles from Tywin in the stands, who only grew more smug as he watched his son unhorse a knight of the Vale. Ser Barristan managed to unhorse Gregor Clegane, who glared at him before storming off, knowing better than to challenge the Lord Commander. His brother Sandor broke two lances against a man from Dorne before taking the victory.

When it came time for the mystery knight to tilt he rode atop a gray horse with a bare black caparison. He seemed to ignore the crowd who cheered while he stared down the lane toward the Westerland knight. The knight wore thick armor with a half green and brown shield housing the badger of House Lydden. The Knight of White Crows’ armor was light in comparison, the only color apart from black or dark gray that may as well have been black was the white and green on his shield. He wore no streamers, no flourishes. The only thing that made him stand out were his beak-like helm and the question of who wore it.

Barristan knew on the first tilt it was Jon. He’d seen the boy ride for years now, so recognized how he rose slightly in anticipation of the impact, dug his boots into the stirrups and thrust the lance forward as hard as he could, throwing the Lydden rider back hard enough the man flipped, making his horse turn in a moment of panic. The gasp from Sam when Domeric leaned down to tell him something made it clear Barristan wasn’t the only one to recognize him.

He was tempted to ride out and box his squire’s ears, not for entering the tourney but for playing Barristan. He’d been concerned the boy was going to end up as sullen as most thought him, wallowing in self pity, but instead here he was proving his place among the knights of Westeros.

When the knight returned he moved to the back of the group, away from the others so Barristan guided his horse to him. Knowing none would overhear them, Barristan raised the visor of his helm to reveal a smile. “I don’t know whether to be proud or tell you do laps of the keep.”

The Knight of White Crows chuckled. “I’d hope proud.”

“I am,” Barristan nodded, glancing back at the others. “But why?”

“I didn’t want anyone to know,” Jon shrugged.

Barristan arched his brow. “Even if you win?”

“Especially if I win,” Jon said with a laugh as he gripped his rein. “I can’t let Queen Cersei know a bastard crowned her daughter queen of love and beauty.”

Barristan found himself thinking back to the tourney at Harrenhal. Though he knew nothing could come of it he had still wanted to win and name Ashara Dayne queen of love and beauty. Of course Rhaegar Targaryen would go on to win and crown his own which led to tragedy.


“Thank you, Ser Barristan,” Jon said with a nod as he followed the man back.

“Ser Crow,” Domeric begun as he spotted them returning. “I wonder why your sigil bears green eyes. For the lady who holds your heart perhaps?”

Jon could practically see Domeric’s smile through his helm. “They are green for the wildfire that burns in my heart.” Sam chuckled and Domeric shook his head while Jon quickly added, “Or so I told them when I signed up.”
Domeric snickered. “Good. I’m glad you’ve come, Ser Crow. I hope to meet you in the finals.”

“Assuming you make it that far,” Jon teased.

Loras came next, returning from his second tilt, coming to a stop beside him. “I hope you didn’t pay much for that armor,” he said looking him over. “I plan to claim it for ransom when I unhorse you, and I know squires don’t have heavy purses, much less bastard ones.”

“I’ll have plenty once I ransom your armor,” Jon said with a smirk as he glanced at the Flower Knight. “Of course even if you refuse I’ll have a fortune from the gems alone.”

“Good luck, friend,” Loras said holding out his arm.

“You as well,” Jon said, raising his to tap the back of his forearm against Loras’.

Domeric sat mounted beside Loras as Samwell frowned watching Jon ride out to find himself looking down the lane to Jaime Lannister sat in gilded armor. “Do you think he’ll win?” Sam asked with a concerned frown.

“I hope so,” said Loras. “I want to face him.”

“You face him all the time,” Sam said glancing up at the knights.

Loras shook his head. “It’s not the same. It’s different here. It matters more. The only truer test is on the field with live steel.”

Domeric nodded. “I hope we never have to face that test.” A light laugh came from Loras, ever surprised by how softhearted a flayed man could be.

Staring down the Kingsguard, Jon felt his stomach twisting into itself. He didn’t want the glory of victory, he wanted to know he could win. To know he had a place here, not just in King’s Landing, but in Westeros. He couldn’t just stand among the rest, he needed to be better, to prove that everyone who ever looked down on him for being a bastard was a fool. That someone like him could win and name a princess queen and not have people question it. He didn’t care about the women that he could take to bed, not if it meant fathering another bastard. If being the bastard of the Lord of Winterfell could be such a shroud upon his life, what would it mean to be the bastard of a bastard?

He could win this, name Myrcella queen of love and beauty and then dump the armor somewhere like the Knight of the Laughing Tree. Let the Knight of White Crows remain a mystery while Jon Snow earned his own knighthood. Let them wonder who he could have been, who would dare name the princess queen and leave without a word. He would miss the melee, but it would be worth it. He’d even consider turning down the winner’s purse if claiming it would risk outing his identity. If he did he could hand it to the small folk, build the legend even more and keep enough so he could buy the others a meal and get a sword for Arya so he’d have it whenever he returned to Winterfell.

Gripping the lance and reins, Jon dug his spurs into the horse and leaned forward, his jaw set firm as he rose from his seat and thrust the lance forward with such force his hand numbed as it shattered. So did his shoulder where Jaime’s lance snapped against his pauldron.

Dumping his lance he took another, his knuckles white beneath his gloves as he rode forward again. He tilted his head slightly, keeping his eyes on the gilded kingsguard as the crowd hushed before their lances shattered. He turned again and rode back, his head down, staring at the head of his horse until he took a new lance and turned to face Jaime again.
“Crow!” Sam cheered. “Crow!”

“Crow!” A man in the crowd cheered.

“Crow!” Others repeated, chanting it as he rode forward.

He rose from his saddle slightly as he moved to drive the lance into Jaime’s pauldron, but when he did found the kingsguard tilted his body while thrusting his lance into the overlap of pauldron and chest plate. It felt like Jon was locked in place as his horse rode out from beneath him, leaving him to fall to earth as the crowd gasped.

Jaime tossed his lance aside with a laugh as he turned his horse and rode back to the fallen knight, who groaned and pushed off the ground to stand.

“I’ll claim the helmet first,” Jaime said raising the visor of his lion head helm to reveal a smirk.

The crowd went quiet as as the Knight of White Crows stared at him for a moment before reaching up and removing his helm.

“Fuck my giddy aunt,” Robert said sitting forward, clutching the arms of his chair.

“I knew it,” Jon Arryn said shaking his head despite his smile.

Myrcella gasped, putting her hands to her mouth as she suddenly felt tears prickling her eyes. She’d spent the match cheering for her uncle, but if she’d known…

Tommen bounced his chair, grabbing Myrcella’s arm. “Jon, it’s Jon!”

Joffrey scoffed, crossing his arms while Cersei raised her chin with a haughty smile, glad her brother showed the bastard his place.

Sam peeked out from behind the hand he raised to cover his eyes when he saw Jon fall and frowned as Domeric and Loras sighed. The crowd broke into a murmur with those who recognized him telling others he was Ser Barristan’s squire.

Sat atop his horse Ser Barristan Selmy knew. Maybe it was because Jon was older and had grown into his looks, but he recognized the nose, his chin, even his hair and eyes though they were the wrong colors. In that moment stood upon the field in dark armor it was like all the little things he’d noticed came together to form a melancholic specter stood behind the sullen squire.

Jon Snow was not Eddard Stark’s son. Jon Snow was a dragon.

Chapter End Notes

Quick thanks to Madrigal_in_Training for suggesting a path to get Sam in King’s Landing that I’d overlooked. I definitely read all the comments even if I don’t respond, I just try to leave responding for when I have something to say and avoid anything that would be a spoiler for people who care about that kind of stuff.

I really like how everyone in the quartet has overlapping interest and is a little off in their own ways, but that makes them like each other more.
I figure Loras’ saying Jon is the best person he knows stems mostly from his clear acceptance of Loras’ truth without altering their friendship or treating him different. Then when Jaime talks of Jon’s bastard stain I imagine that sticks with him because of his Kingslayer stain and the stain of regret he has about Rhaegar and his family.

I went with White Crows for the link to the Night’s Watch, the white of the Kingsguard and for the allusion to the White Raven heralding Winter. For anyone wanting an idea of what Domeric’s armor might look like, look up Dracula’s armor from the Bram Stroker’s Dracula movie, but black and with a simpler helmet. I gave him a red horse as a link to House Ryswell and the allusion to the legendary Red Hare.
Chapter Summary

Jon deals with being unmasked as the Knight of White Crows before leaving King’s Landing as squire to Jaime Lannister.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Well I suppose I can’t expect much of a ransom,” Jaime said as he looked to the bastard squire before him, the mystery knight unmasked. “Instead, I’ll return your horse and armor in exchange for your services as a squire for… a month.”

Jon sighed. “It’s not my place agree to that, Ser Jaime.”

“Ser Barristan?” Jaime turned his horse as he looked to the Lord Commander sat mounted with the other knights.

That drew all eyes to the Lord Commander, who was staring at Jon. Once they looked to him Barristan was relieved he wasn’t gaping at the boy, he couldn’t draw attention to him.

“I’ll agree to it,” Barristan nodded, putting on a smile. “Let him suffer as punishment for lying and saying he couldn’t squire for me today.”

That was enough to make the crowd laugh as they turned back to Jaime, who looked to Jon. “You can start tomorrow,” he told the bastard squire as rode away, leaving Jon to mount his horse and ride back to his friends.

Loras and Domeric gave him grim nods while Sam frowned up at Jon. “I’m sorry, Jon. I thought you rode well.”

“Thank you, Sam,” Jon said with a nod. “Let me remove my armor and I’ll help you with the lances.”

“There’s no need,” Sam said, but Jon was already unfastening his armor as he rode to tie off his horse.

Jon took to helping Sam prepare lances for Domeric and squiring for Barristan during their tilts. Barristan rode to a yield against Jaime, who then took a victory from Sandor. Domeric dominated his tilts while Loras gained the love of every woman who watched him.

When it came time for Loras and Domeric to ride against each other it was clear the women of the crowd preferred Loras but the men seemed mixed. Bets changed hands as the riders stood at the ends of their lanes and in a show of friendship raised their fist with a nod before taking their reins and riding.

Lances shattered as both men rode past each other. The crowd cheering when they nodded to each other while returning to their starts. With new lances they rode again, and again they shattered against each other.
It was on the fifth lance that Loras foresaw the shift in Domeric’s and moved, letting his own slam into the Bolton’s side, knocking him off his saddle. The crowd cheered as Loras glanced back and saw Domeric getting to his feet.

“I’ll pay you once we return to the keep,” Domeric assured as he removed his helmet once they moved off the lanes.

“You can keep your armor,” Loras said with a smirk. “I’ve no need of such grim plate. Though I imagine your stallion may come at a prime price.”

Barristan found himself distracted as he returned to stand beside the king while Loras rode against Jaime. He kept staring at the spot where Jon had removed his helmet and he’d put it all together.

Robert had made the realm think Rhaegar some dragon he slew after he stole the love of his life and hid her away in a tower where he raped her until she died, but he knew the prince better than that. It seemed so obvious now that Rhaegar had loved her, taken her away to be with her, and when Eddard Stark rode south for her he returned with her child and claimed him a bastard to spare him the fate of Rhaegar’s other children.

Jon had his mother’s Stark looks but there were hints of his father there, barely enough to be noticed if Barristan’s mind hadn’t been shifting back to Harrenhal all day. Seeing him with a harp, devouring books in the library, pushing himself to be the best at everything he tried, it was as if he’d inherited it all from Rhaegar, yet likely that drive was born from being raised a bastard. Was he even a bastard? For all he knew Rhaegar had married Lyanna once Elia grew frail.

Loras knocked Jaime from his horse and amid cheers claimed his first tourney victory as a knight.

When he took the crown of yellow roses and rode around the field, Loras slowed as he near the royal family. With his visor raised, he shot a quick smirk to Jon before stopping and presenting the crown at the tip of his lance to Queen Cersei. “As a loyal knight in service of the king I find none hold the beauty of his queen.”

Robert laughed as Cersei shot Loras a cold look with a plastered smile and took the crown from him. Jon found himself relieved, as did Myrcella despite her frown.

Once the melee was done they all retreated to the keep for a grand feast, as they usually were for Joffrey’s nameday. Myrcella watched as Loras asked the queen to dance, and she forced a smile and accepted as was expected of her, still wearing the crown of yellow roses picked for their Baratheon colors. Myrcella had always thought her mother beautiful and took it as a compliment when anyone compared her to the queen, but she found herself thankful Loras hadn’t chosen her because the yellow flowers didn’t sit well against their golden hair.

Myrcella had chosen her finest green silks in hopes of bringing out her eyes and spent hours fretting over the soft curls of her golden hair. She knew he never would, but a part of her hoped that something about her would be too much and Jon might cast aside his honor and fear to ask her to dance. Instead the first to ask her to dance was Loras Tyrell, who held out his hand to her with a
“Would you care to dance, Princess Myrcella?”

She rose from her seat with a smile and joined him on the floor. The flower knight’s showy smile softened as he looked to the princess while they danced. “I hope you weren’t insulted by my passing you with the petal crown, princess.”

“I wasn’t,” Myrcella assured. “You chose well. I can only hope to some day share part of my mother’s beauty.”

“I believe you already match it, your grace,” Loras said with a smirk, “but I feared for my life should I crown you before another.”

Myrcella followed his gaze to where Jon sat at a table with Domeric and Samwell, looking more sullen than usual as he stared at his plate, tapping his finger against the rim of his glass.

“I doubt any could claim your life, Ser Loras,” she said looking back to him with a somber smile.

“For you he would,” Loras assured, taking a moment to spin her.

“And yet he will not ask me to dance,” she said knowingly. A frown took her lips as she looked to Loras. “He is a wolf and I a stag. He is a bastard and I am bound to my father’s crown. He is near a man and I still a child. I am a friend, family by friendship, but never anything more.”

She was young, too young to be considered in such a way, especially by someone like Jon, but Loras knew Jon cared for the girl. It wouldn’t be long before the princess blossomed and could no longer be ignored. It had already begun, but it had been so gradual they had missed it’s beginning. Soon men would come for her hand and her betrothal would be set.

“Jon is no wolf.” Seeing her confusion he corrected, “He’s a Snow.”

“It doesn’t change that he has wolf’s blood in him,” said Myrcella.

“Wolves hunt stags,” said Loras, smiling at the flush that took Myrcella’s cheeks. “In time I’m sure not even his honor could withstand your beauty, and you may find him asking for more than a dance.”

Jon watched as Myrcella went from dancing with Loras to Lord Renly. When she glanced at Jon and smiled he returned it, quickly looking back to his plate before anyone saw him. Of course Dom and Sam saw, both smirking as he looked to them.

“Will you ask her to dance?” Sam asked with a glance toward the princess. “I’m sure she’d say yes.”

Jon glanced at her before looking to the high table where Cersei sat sipping at wine, watching Joffrey dance with a maiden from one of the visiting houses. He knew that if he asked Myrcella to dance it would draw attention from enough people, likely even King Robert himself, and turn her attention on them.

Jon had learned early in his stay that most of the kingsguard were far from noble knights of legend. They were just men, some of whom seemed to favor the queen. Even if Jaime hadn’t confronted Jon by asking him about Myrcella, he had no doubt one of the others had told her of Myrcella’s interest in him. It was why often when she was with any but Jaime or Barristan and himself he made sure to make himself a simple, dutiful knight fond of a princess in his care. He had played
Aemon the Dragonknight plenty as a child, so this was no different.

It wasn’t just himself he was keeping out of trouble, but he knew enough of the royal family to know it would cause her problems as well. As awful as it was, he found he agreed with Lord Arryn that Myrcella and Tommen being largely ignored by their family had been a blessing which left them better than the others. Robert was a lush fool half the time and almost pitiful somedays, but even he was better than Cersei and Joffrey, who no doubt would make a mess if they suspected he felt anything for Myrcella. She was a princess, she could have a crush on a knight in her service, but if he made any show in return and let them think something could happen they would do something drastic. They would betroth her to some lord and send her away, decide they had enough of Jon and send him to the Wall, or even take his head.

To think at one time Jon wanted to go to the Wall, but now a part of him hoped he could earn enough favor to gain his own name, one somehow worthy enough of a princess. He hoped the fool king would suddenly decide to legitimize Jon just to unite the Stark and Baratheon houses by marrying him to Myrcella while keeping Joffrey and Robb available for other betrothals. He would be the story other bastards told themselves to lift their spirits, to assure themselves they could achieve anything because for whatever reason the gods had smiled upon him, but it would never happen. Maybe it was being away from the North and the lack of a proper godswood, but Jon had come to feel the Gods never favored anyone. They likely cast their die and observed what came from them or guided them toward some path, never caring what becomes of the people below.

It felt at times as if Jon was meant to be a bastard and no matter what he did he always would be, and there was nothing that could change that. Working hard didn’t matter. Making himself better didn’t matter. He could win every tourney for the rest of time, become the most just and honorable knight through all of history, and it would never change that he was just a bastard.

Jon shook his head, his jaw shifting as he looked to Dom and Sam. “I’m leaving.”

Sam seemed surprised while Domeric furrowed his brow. “Already?”

“I’m going to see if Mott’s still open,” said Jon. “I’ll sell back the armor I bought and put it toward Arya’s sword.”

“You did well today, Jon,” Domeric said as Jon rose from the table. “You unhorsed a man and broke lances with Jaime Lannister. There’s no shame in losing to him.”

Jon, feeling like he was drowning in pitch, shrugged and said morosely, “All I am is shame.”

Barristan watched his squire leave the hall and frowned seeing the boy looking so disheartened. He returned to watching the hall, yet found himself wanting to go find the boy. It would be wrong to tell him what he suspected without being sure. Even if he knew, what would be the point in telling him? What would come of it? He would go from thinking his father was in the North and assuming his mother was dead while hoping she would one day show up and reveal herself, to knowing that both his parents had died, that his life was lie cast upon him to protect him from a man willing to murder infants, a man he’d guarded and followed for years now.

He could try to retake the throne, and then who would Barristan side with? King Robert or the son of the Rhaegar, the king who should have been. His eyes found the door again as he frowned, wondering how he should handle this.

Coming to the Street of Steel he heard the familiar ping of hammer and steel leading him to Tobho Mott’s shop. Entering the shop he found few still working, but recognized the apprentice who made his helmet. Tobho Mott spotted him and smiled as he walked to the squire.
“How’d you do?” he asked.

“I shouldn’t have paid for your silence,” Jon said with a laugh. “I lost and was revealed in my second tilt.” Jon tapped the bag holding all the armor. “The armor was good, but I was hoping I could sell it back and commission something else.”

Tobho thought it over. “I could take them back for a reduced price if they are still in tact.” Once Tobho looked the armor over he gave Jon a nod. “And you wish to commission a custom set?”

“No,” Jon chuckled. “I actually want to gift someone a sword. They’re small though, skinny as a reed from what I remember.”

Tobho nodded, taking a moment to think before motioning for Jon to follow him and bringing him to a rack of different swords. The smith scanned it before removing a slender bravo blade with a gilded basket hilt and jeweled pommel.

“It’s the type of blade used by bravo of the Free Cities,” Tobho explained, handing the boy the blade. “Water dancers.”

Jon took the hilt and wielded the blade, noting how much lighter it was, made purely for thrusting. Jon performed a few swift thrust, using a showy riposte before handing the blade back to Tobho.

“It could work, but they’d prefer a more northern hilt,” Jon said carefully, trying to not insult the man by calling the hilt gawdy.

“And nothing for yourself?” Tobho asked setting the sword back on the rack.

Jon frowned. “Not yet.”

Losing himself in a book on the Second Blackfyre Rebellion Jon woke from another dream of Winterfell’s Crypts. With the morning sun rising he went to begin squiring for Jaime Lannister. Ultimately it wasn’t much different from squiring for Ser Barristan, only Jaime spoke with more bite than the respectful Lord Commander. He even took to Barristan’s habit of sending Jon away whenever he was with Cersei. Most interesting was when he took Jon to the yards to spar, which became a daily occurrence rather than something he did once or twice a sennight.

On the third day of squiring Jon found out they would be leaving. “We’ll be escorting the queen and her children to Casterly Rock,” Jaime told him as they left his room.

“You want me to go with you?” asked Jon.

“You’re my squire,” Jaime said with a smirk. “Don’t worry, I’ll make up for any extra time you have to spend apart from Barristan.” His smile all but said a Lannister always pays his debts, but Jon was more worried about having to deal with Cersei and Joffrey than spending more time with Jaime.

It was on his fourth day squiring to Jaime that he asked, “Could I leave for an hour or so?”

Jaime looked up from where he was sat eating. “You have a date?”

“I need to get something,” Jon said carefully. “I’ll be back within the hour.”

Jaime saw his wariness and smirked, downing the last of his food before waving his hand. “I’ll escort you.”
Jon stared at him for a moment, clearly considering turning him down and doing it later, but he couldn’t be sure Tobho wouldn’t sell Arya’s sword if he waited. With a sigh he led Jaime into the Street of Steel. Thankfully Jaime waited outside the shop, watching the crowd gawk at him until Jon exited with a bundle of cloth that clearly contained a small sword.

“Decided to arm yourself finally?” asked Jaime.

“I’ve a dagger,” Jon said of the dagger Barristan had bought him years ago, though he’d rarely used or even worn. “This isn’t for me.”

“No?”

Jon glanced at him. “I sold all but my helm and shield back and bought a sword for my sister.”

“The little one?” Jaime thought for a second. “Arya?” When Jon nodded Jaime chuckled, remembering their talk on the trip south from Winterfell. “That’ll stick it to the trout.”

He managed to show the blade off to his friends before hiding it away with his letters, not caring that they were still in the room. He knew they wouldn’t take the sword or bother to read the few letters he still kept. One thing that had come quickly even for Sam was a kind of trust. They hadn’t bared all their secrets, not plainly, but they all supported each other enough to where if they wanted to there would be no doubt they could.

On his sixth day Jon left King’s Landing riding beside Jaime outside the wheelhouse carrying the royal family. Jon tried to keep his attention ahead, ignoring the occasional glare from Tywin Lannister, who stared at him as suspiciously as Cersei ever had. It felt like the man thought Jon would suddenly remove his face to reveal he was a faceless man sent to slay him.

They’d barely started along Blackwater Rush when they saw Domeric riding toward them atop his red stallion. Jon and Jaime told the others to stand down as the Bolton heir rushed to them, clearly sent because he was the fastest rider at the Red Keep. Somberly he told them, “Jon Arryn’s died. The king’s called his family to return.”

“What?” Jon asked, his horse taking a step forward as Jon shook his head. “How?”

“A sickness took him,” Domeric said as a guard rushed to inform those within the wheelhouse. “His wife left for the Vale shortly after and the king has said we’re to ride North to find a new Hand.”

Jon shook his head. “He means to make my father Hand?”

Lord Arryn hadn’t been particularly close, but Jon spoke to him at least once a week when the man checked in on him. Though often brief, they sometimes spoke of court, Jon’s squiring, Lord Arryn’s home in the Vale, Eddard’s time as ward for him and even a few stories of Lord Arryn’s youth. He’d helped find Jon a place within King’s Landing and now he was dead.

Even if he might have looked forward to returning to Winterfell it felt wrong to do so when it came at the life of another. Yet Jon couldn’t help the feeling that things would only get more complicated after this. That he would look back on these last few years as oddly peaceful compared to what would come.

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

“These pups may die anyway,” Eddard Stark said looking to the direwolf pups in the arms of Robb and Bran.
“They won’t,” Robb said. “We won’t let them die.”

“Keep them, then. Jory, Desmond, gather up the other pups. It’s time we were back to Winterfell.”

Bran allowed himself to feel victorious and flash Robb a thankful smile once they were mounted, the pup snuggled inside his leathers as they crossed the bridge with five direwolf pups bound for Winterfell.

It wasn’t until after they had gone the silence was broken by the soft steps of a she-wolf who walked with purpose. She stepped past the corpse of the much larger direwolf and found a small white bundle away from the body. Pressing her nose to the runt’s head, the wolf laid down, letting it suckle and drink from its teat now that its mother was dead. As the albino direwolf fed from her, the wolf stared south, waiting patiently as a raven cawed on the tree above.

Chapter End Notes

I softened “Wolves hunt stags” from what I originally had which was “Wolves eat stags” but I think that’s a little bawdy even for Loras to say to a 10 year old.

It could be inferred that Jon is a bit in his cups here, kind of like he was during the feast at Winterfell in AGOT, which is why he’s a bit moody. Plus he’s still 14.

Jon and Myrcella both realize they are interested in each other, but aren’t really willing to try for more yet. I definitely want to delve into their reasons and thinking with more depth later, but for now hopefully these glimpses give an idea of where they’re at.

No doubt, unlike Barristan, Jaime sends Jon away when he’s with Cersei cause she’s probably giving him gobbies or something. But as observant as Jon is he just figures any perceived closeness is from them being twins.
The Long Road

Chapter Summary

The royal court travels north and arrives at Winterfell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The wheelhouse returned to King’s Landing to let the royal family prepare clothes for the north before departing while Tywin continued to Casterly Rock, though Tyrion had opted to join them north. The king told them Barristan would be joining Jaime, Meryn Trant and Boros Blount who had been escorting the wheelhouse. His smile to Jon as he said it made it clear it had been for the squire’s sake, likely to make sure Ned could meet the man who had looked after his son for near three years. Thankfully Domic and Sam would be joining him, though Loras had decided to stay behind with Renly.

While packing warmer clothes, Jon made sure to tuck Arya’s sword into his bag as well. He wasn’t a knight and didn’t even have one of his own yet, but he could gift her one.

It wasn’t long after they left that Samwell turned fifteen, but they’d given him his gifts early since Jon’s quiver of arrows went with the bow Loras gifted him, while Domic got him a fine dagger with an arrowhead pommel.

When they gave it to Sam in King’s Landing the boy blinked at the bow Loras presented him. “This is for me?”

“I know you hate hunting,” Loras said with a smile, “but we thought you should at least have a way to defend yourself if the need arises.”

“We’ll help you train. We considered a longbow like the Tarly sigil but decided on a recurve,” Jon explained, “the kind they use in Dorne.”

“Doesn’t it make sense that you should learn to wield a bow?” Domic asked with a smirk. “The weapon of your family sigil, but one of your own.”

Sam blinked at him before noticing all three shared similar smirks. They’d done this to help him get back at his father. Make Sam learn to use a bow like the Tarly huntsman and prove his father wrong about him. His father had failed because he never considered Sam, but they had and found a way to include him even in their martial progress.

Samwell blinked back tears as he looked over the bow. “Thank you.”

Once they began traveling north whenever the procession stopped for a long time Sam found himself using the bow. Most often it was just Domic teaching him, though Jon occasionally joined when Jaime had no use of him or he wasn’t sparring with the kingsguard.

Sam was surprised by how hard it was to use. It took more strength than he expected to draw the string properly and how he held the string or arrow seemed to alter everything about the arrow’s trajectory. Domic explained it was a proper warbow rather than a lighter hunting or target one.
and was meant to fire heavier arrows so required more strength. To help his ability to draw easier Sam found himself training his arms and hands as much as he could while they rode.

They were past the twins when some of the men saw him shooting and the next day called for him to join in a hunt. Sam had frozen until Domeric smacked his shoulder and agreed to it.

“I’m sorry Sam,” Domeric told him as they rode behind the others, “but this will help us stand out less.”

Sam looked at Domeric and nodded, understanding his thinking. They weren’t guards or part of the royal retinue. They were out of place and stood out enough without him giving the men more reason to treat them differently.

Sam had been terrified of the Bolton when he first arrived, having heard stories of them being heartless people who flayed others living. He’d even heard people say they likely ate human flesh and drank or bathed in their blood. Even knowing it was the men-at-arms teasing him he wondered what kind of people could make them think such lies believable. Of course Domeric would teasingly say he did all of those things, but it was clear he was mild-mannered and thoughtful, too level headed and kindhearted to do such awful things. Though there were moments where Sam wondered if that were the case.

“Go here and slit his throat,” he’d say as he showed Sam a move with the dagger after they finished with the bow outside an inn. “They’ll bleed out from here, or here even.” He pointed out the arteries of a person on himself. “Stick them once and leave, they’ll die by the time anyone finds them.”

“Won’t they suffer?” Sam had asked.

Domeric shrugged. “If they try to hurt you then they deserve it.”

Still, Domeric was kind as well. While they went hunting Domeric borrowed one of the men’s bows and stayed near Sam. When they spotted a pair of hares he said quietly, “Close your eyes, Sam,” before loosing his arrow, giving Sam time to snap them shut as he heard the hare screech.

While they road they spoke of books they read. When Sam mentioned a third book Myrcella had recommended to him, Doemric arched his brow. “Don’t tell me you’ve taken a liking to her as well.”

“I’m fat and craven,” Sam said with a laugh, “not a fool.” They looked to Jon riding next to Jaime and Tyrion, who was speaking as his brother chuckled and Jon smiled, shaking his head at the likely crude story. “If he knows, why doesn’t he do anything?”

Domeric looked to Sam. “He has his reasons, I’m sure.”

Sam frowned. “Perhaps he thinks himself Aemon the Dragonknight.”

“He’s sullen,” Domeric chuckled, “not weepy.”

Sam snickered. “I could lend him some tears.”

Their trip north took long enough that Jon’s service to Jaime came to an end well before they reached Winterfell.

“Lord Commander,” Jaime said as he walked to Barristan with Jon at his side one morning, “I return your squire to your service. Though I may call upon him again should I find myself bored.”
Barristan offered a smile to Jon. “Has he been treating you fairly?”

“As fairly as can be expected.”

Jaime scoffed, elbowing the boy’s side before he gave Barristan a nod and went to mount his horse. Jon glanced back at the Lannister before turning to Barristan. “Is there anything you need done, Ser Barristan?”

The kingsguard shook his head. “Just another day’s trek north.”

“Do you dislike it?” Jon asked as they mounted their horses.

“The travel perhaps,” Barristan admitted, “but not the lands.”

Jon wore a smile as he looked to the hints of snow around them. “It’s hard to think it’s been years since I’ve seen snow. It felt like something that was almost always around when I was growing up and now it feels odd.”

Barristan looked to his squire solemnly. “Do you miss it?”

“Winterfell?” Jon asked while they started to ride, giving a nod to Domeric and Sam as they took a place behind them. “At times. It’s all balanced to where I’m not sure which I prefer anymore. I miss the snow but not the cold, I miss a nice heavy cloak and warm clothes but not the burden that would come with wearing them. I miss my family, but it’s not as if I’m alone here either.”

Barristan had spent the past month thinking and watching. Part of him had always hated the politics of court, it was why Robert barring him from the Small Council hadn’t bothered him much. Now he’d spent a month going over it all as he pondered what might come from Jon knowing the truth he suspected.

Robert had taken the throne for his own, but being a Baratheon meant he also had Targaryen blood tying them to the Iron Throne. However if Jon was Rhaegar’s son than his claim could surpass Robert’s. Even ignoring that, Jon could still muster allies to his side and attempt to retake the throne. There were some loyal to the Targaryen name, those like the Dornish who felt wronged by events during Robert Rebellion.

The Reach and Tyrells had ties to the Targaryens as well, and with Loras as Jon’s friend there was little doubt they would aide him. The North was the same, the Starks no doubt willing to back the boy raised as their son and brother. With the Starks would come the Tullys and the Riverlands, possibly even the Vale now that Lysa Arryn was in charge with her son.

The Crownlands would be a mess of those loyal to the Targaryens and those loyal to whoever sat on the Iron Throne. The Iron Islands were hard to gauge, though Barristan imagined they would more likely use the fighting to try raiding their shores than choose a side. The Stormlands would surely go for Robert, as would the Westerlands to defend their queen and her children.

But then there was Myrcella. Born to Baratheon and Lannister, she could be used to assure alliances within the Westerlands and Stormlands. Jon could take her as a wife as he likely wished and find not only happiness but that he had nearly every kingdom on his side. There were surely houses unhappy with the state of things or would be happy to settle for her at Jon’s side.

Jon could win. He could try to stay close to the king and send letters to have those he knows would be loyal or work against Robert gather their forces before he makes a move. He could leave Barristan’s service and ride through the kingdoms gathering banners before conquering the Westerlands, Stormlands and Crownlands. But if they dismissed him as a Blackfyre or Daemon
come again, how could he convince them? His lack of evident Targaryen traits would leave most
to think him a mummer at best, and more likely a fool given to avarice after seeing those better
than himself.

If he had proof of some kind, then it could be done. He could convince them that the throne should
have been his but was stolen by Robert, stolen by a lie forced upon, a veil to save his life. Jon could
gather an army and wear a crown as rightful king.

If it was possible, if Jon should have been king the moment he was born, then was Barristan’s
place at his side? Jon wasn’t king, not yet. Even if he was Rhaegar’s son, Jon may well deny it or
reject it, he might not want the crown. He could flee to Essos and take up the life of a sellsword or
a pirate.

So much could go wrong as well. Anyone could kill him out of some grudge against Targaryens,
the Stark, even bastards. They could deny him and tell Robert, one Robert’s spies or someone loyal
could find out and warn him. If it came to war many could still die, including some of the royal
family. Would Myrcella still care for Jon then? He would never marry her against her will. Even if
others would tell him to, as king it would be his right to do as he thought best.

The only thing Barristan knew for certain was that he would find the truth in Winterfell.

Seeing it break the horizon Jon found himself smiling in anticipation, wanting to ride ahead on his
own but stayed with the procession.

“Will he be with them?” Arya asked as she took her place with the others to await their visitors.

“I don’t know,” Ned offered with a solemn smile. “If Ser Barristan rides with the king then I
imagine his squire would be at his side.” Seeing his youngest daughter’s hopeful smile Ned found
himself hoping the same.

“If he is,” Catelyn said looking to her children, “you must all remember not to do anything
improper. You can greet him after we’ve had our introductions.” The others nodded while Arya
frowned. “I mean it, Arya.”

The girl glanced at her mother and looked down with a quiet huff, digging her fingers into her skirt.

The visitors poured through the castle fates and Ned found himself knowing many of the riders.
Jaime was easily spotted by his golden hair, Sandor Clegane by his burnt face trailing a tall boy
who could only be the crown prince while the stunted man behind them was no doubt the Imp,
Tyrion Lannister. It was Robert himself who Ned barely recognized, flanked by two knights in
snow-white cloaks before he vaulted off his warhorse and wrapped Ned in a bone-crushing hug.

Arya looked around, doing her best to keep herself from bouncing in place too much as she tried to
find Jon while the King said her father he hadn’t changed. Their wheelhouse too large to fit
through the gate, the queen and her children came through on foot and with them an older white
cloaked knight.

She gasped, her eyes widening as behind them, keeping their distance from the queen, was a boy
she knew to be Jon. He was taller than she remembered, near a man, but retained his lean build. He
still had the Stark long face and dark grey eyes that looked almost black framed by wavy dark
brown hair that didn’t go past his neck. He wore almost entirely black, or grays dark enough they
seemed to be black, as if he had truly gone north and joined the Night’s Watch.

Trailing him was an average looking man with pale brown eyes wearing a pink and red doublet
beneath a black jerkin and a pink woolen cloak with crimson lines throughout held by a brooch bearing a flayed man. Beside the Bolton was a rotund man wearing a black doublet, dark green surcoat and dark crimson cloak fastened by a brooch with a Tarly huntsmen. She recognized them right away from Jon’s letters.

Holding the reins for his horse as well as Barristan’s, Jon looked to his family lined up before the king and queen, exchanging introductions.

Robb had always been stocky compared to Jon and that hadn’t changed with age, his red-brown hair freshly trimmed for the royal visitors. Sansa had grown into her Tully looks, seeming a true lady in the making. Arya had grown some but was still small and skinny, making Jon sure he’d picked out the right kind of sword. Bran had changed from the toddler he had been when Jon last saw him, wearing a sweet smile as he examined all the knights. Rickon had even grown from a babe in his mother’s arms to a boy stood beside her clutching her skirts.

Ned had somehow remained as Jon pictured him, long haired and bearded, though perhaps with a few more grays than he had before. At his side stood Catelyn Stark, beautiful surely, but that lessened when her gaze briefly met Jon’s and a flicker of anger painted her face. Jon quickly shifted his own, finding Ned flashing him a small smile and nod before the king called for him to take him to the crypts.

While their mother showed the royal family to their quarters the Stark children lingered in the yard. Arya grinned as she watched Jon and his friends hand their horses off to a stable hand before turning back and smiling. The moment he did Arya took off running, squealing as she leapt up and wrapped her arms around him.

Once she released him and sank back to the ground. “I missed you brother,” she said with a sniff. “And I you,” he assured, patting her cheek and smiling.

“Seems I was wrong,” Robb said as he came up behind her. “Here I thought you’d come back looking a pompous southron, yet you return looking as if you’ve joined the Night’s Watch.”

“Black is my color,” Jon said with a laugh, stepping forward to exchange a quick hug and pat Robb’s back.

When Robb stepped back he did so into Rickon, who tried to peek around his legs at Jon. Laughing and picking their youngest brother up, Robb pointed to Jon. “That’s our brother Jon. You were still little when he left to go train to be a knight.” The boy nodded, smiling as Jon reached over to ruffle his hair.

Bran looked up at Jon from beside Robb. “You’re not a knight yet?”

“Not yet,” Jon nodded, “but there’s still time before you’re old enough to be a page or squire. If I’m not knighted by then I’m sure I could convince Ser Loras or even Ser Domeric here to take you in my stead.” Jon motioned to Dom as he mentioned him, who bowed his head.

“You’ve been missed,” Sansa offered sweetly.

Arya scoffed. “You haven’t missed him.”

Sansa glared at her sister. “I have.”

“And I’ve missed you too, Sansa,” Jon said before they could say more. “I’ve appreciated your letters.”
“I as well,” she said turning to him with a nod. “King’s Landing sounds so interesting.”

“It has it’s moments,” Jon said with a shrug before stepping back and motioning to his companions. “These are my friends, Ser Domeric Bolton, heir to the Dreadfort, and Samwell Tarly.” Jon nearly said of Horn Hill, but he’s been all but disowned. He still had the Tarly name but that was all.

They all exchanged greetings before Arya grabbed Jon’s hand. “Come, we can show you the direwolves.”

“Direwolves?” Jon asked as he was dragged along.

“We found them when we went with father to execute a Night’s Watch deserter,” Robb explained.

“Three boys and two girls,” Bran said with a grin. “Robb said they matched us so must have been meant for Stark children.” Suddenly Bran saw Arya, Robb and even Sansa shoot him quick glares as he winced, realizing what he’d said.

With a frown he looked to Jon, who wore a solemn smile and seeing Bran’s concern shook his head. “I’m no Stark.”

Though only weeks old the direwolf pups were already a third the size of some dogs. Sam and even Domeric looked a bit wary of them, but Jon happily knelt and rubbed Nymeria’s head before joining Rickon in rubbing Shaggydog’s belly, chuckling when the pup nipped at his hand. Still, a part of him felt oddly hollow, but what did he expect, he was a bastard. In time he may well follow Barristan and end up wearing a cloak and sigil to match his name. Surely that was the best he could hope for.

In the crypts King Robert looked to Ned after offering to make him Hand of the King. “If Lyanna had lived, we should have been brothers, bound by blood as well as affection. Well, it’s not too late. I have a son. You have a daughter. My Joff and your Sansa shall join our houses, as Lyanna and I might once have done.”

The offer surprised Ned. “Sansa is only eleven.”

Robert waved a hand impatiently. “Old enough for betrothal. The marriage can wait. Now stand and say yes, curse you.”

“Nothing would give me greater pleasure, You Grace,” Ned answered, then hesitated. “These honors are all so unexpected. May I have some time to consider? I need to tell my wife…”

“Yes, yes, of course, tell Catelyn. Sleep on it if you must,” Robert said pulling Ned to his feet, “just don’t keep me waiting too long. I am not the most patient of men.” They started to leave when Robert looked to Ned with a laugh. “If not for her mother I’d considered raising your bastard and having him marry Myrcella as she no doubt wants.”

Eddard turned to the king. “What?”

“She fancies the lad,” he explained with a shrug. “Don’t worry. The boy’s as honorable as your ever were. He cares for her no doubt, but if he thinks more of her than he doesn’t act on it.”

Ned nodded. “Do you know how he’s been coming along?”

“Gods, Ned,” Robert laughed. “I was ready to knight the boy before Old Jon died.”

That surprised Ned. “What for?”
“On Joff’s nameday I held a tourney and the boy entered as the Knight of White Crows,” Robert snickered. “Rode down some bumbling knight, but then rode against Jaime Lannister.”

Ned’s eyes widened, his shock seeming to grow the more Robert spoke.

“Boy broke two lances against him, but the third unhorsed him and he took off his helm. I just about pissed myself when I saw it was him. I was ready to knight the lad, but Barristan asked me to wait, Others’ know why.” Robert shook his head. “He said the boy still has things to learn but hells, I’ve seen him in the yard with the Tyrell boy. Watching them makes me want to grab a hammer and join them, but I’ve settled for earning coin whatever your boy wins.”

“He’s doing well then?”

“Jon seemed proud of him,” Robert nodded. “Said the boy was as smart as he was honorable, his mind as sharp as a sword. Every time I see him he’s either in the yard, walking around with some book from the keep’s library, or sat with his friends playing his harp.”

All the pride that had started to swell in Ned vanished with the air in his lungs as his chest seized and he looked to Robert. “Harp?”

“The other one,” Robert said with a wave of his hand, “the Bolton boy, he’s teaching your bastard. They usually keep it to their rooms but have played a time or two in the yard.”

Seeing Robert’s smirk as he spoke eased some of Ned’s fears. As far as he could tell no one knew. He’d told himself that it would be impossible for anyone to find out, but this felt like Jon was unknowingly tempting fate.

He also wondered why he was just finding out about this now. Jon’s letters had mirrored his own, with little detail beyond what seemed necessary, but he’d always had others sources on news about Jon thanks to his letters to the children. It was one thing to not know of the tournament and Jon’s brief stint as a mystery knight since it had only just happened, but it seemed he’d been playing the harp for some time. Perhaps the boy was simply embarrassed and didn’t want to tell the others, but it made Ned question how much Jon had changed if he’d suddenly become studious and taken up an instrument.

His concerns only grew after he showed the king to his chamber and turned to find Ser Barristan Selmy stood at the end of the corridor with his arms crossed, eyeing Ned cautiously before he said. “Lord Stark.”

“Ser Barristan,” Ned nodded.

“If possible I’d like to speak with you,” he said meeting Ned’s gaze. “In private.”

With a nod, Ned led him toward his solar, yet couldn’t help feel a sense of foreboding, as if a specter were reaching for his neck.

Chapter End Notes

Sam’s dark clothing I imagine as a thing where big dudes typically where darker colors but also it’s his Tarly colors fading. Their sigil went from embroidered on his surcoat to just on his brooch. He’s basically distancing himself from the family that disowned
him. I’d actually considered having Randyll Tarly draw up documents to make him Samwell Flowers, but don’t know if that’s possible and figured on the off chance Samwell doesn’t fuck up or die Randyll wants the chance to claim him and any glory Sam might stumble upon.

I considered sticking in a scene of Jon, Jaime and Tyrion talking but couldn’t find anything that I liked. At least not that wasn’t clearly filler, and I want to try and cut down on that to keep the story from swelling more than it already has.

I think next chapter should include some theory stuff I want to play with. Not R+L=J but other theories. I have a bunch I want to play with actually. Just be thankful I’m not going R+L=J&M, because I considered it for a moment or two!


**Chapter Summary**

Barristan speaks with Ned before Jon attends the welcoming feast.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Entering the Lord’s solar of Winterfell, Ned took a seat and motioned for Barristan to take a seat.

“I prefer to stand.”

Barristan couldn’t be sure. Ned could be desperate to keep this secret and try something foolish. It was why he approached him after their arrival so no one would question him wearing his armor.

“What did you wish to speak of, Ser Barristan?”

“Your nephew.”

Ned’s brow sank as he stared at Barristan. “What?”

“Rhaegar’s son.”

Ned stared at the old knight for a moment, silent and afraid. Had Robert sent him? Had he ordered Barristan here to keep Ned away from his family? His family could be having their heads smashed against walls while Barristan held him here. He couldn’t beat Barristan, but that hadn’t stopped him fighting Arthur Dayne either.

“If he harms my family-”

“I serve the king,” said Barristan, his somber blue eyes meeting Ned’s as he said, “even if he is my squire.”

Ned’s fear began to give way to confusion. His fingers dug into the arms of his chair. “What do you know?”

“I know Rhaegar would never have taken Lyanna against her will,” Barristan stepped forward. “I know that when I look upon Jon I see a pieces of another man I watched grow. A man who should have been king.”

“Then you know nothing.”

“Yet I suspect you didn’t find her dead when you arrived. You found her with a babe in her arms, one she could not raise herself so you did it for her, calling him your bastard to spare him what his true siblings faced.”

“My children are his true siblings!” Ned said in a shouted whisper as he rose from his chair.

“They are his cousins,” Barristan said, maintaining his calm.
Ned’s eyes darkened as he said firmly with emotion shaking his voice, “Jon Snow is my son.”

Shaking his head, Barristan answered simply, “Jon is a dragon.”

Ned felt shaken. Jon wasn’t his son, he never had been, but he had cared for the boy. Part of him wished he had been his, things might have been easier if he were. “You can’t tell anyone.”

“I will.”

“If Robert finds out-”

“Jon must know.”

Ned stopped his step forward, having not expected that. “No.”

“He will know,” said Barristan, his gaze making it clear it was not a choice of if he would, only how.

Ned found himself sinking back into his chair shaking his head. “What good would come of it?”

Barristan looked at Eddard Stark in that moment and found himself disappointed. “I thought you honorable.” The comment made Ned sit up, a flash of anger flickering in his eyes. “You would let this boy you claim to love as your own live a lie? To be bound and stained by a fiction you made for him? A fiction that drove him from this very place he thought his home because he believed himself nothing more than your bastard, when he may well be a bastard prince.”

Ned’s jaw shifted, clearly angered, but looked down, unable to deny it. “He’s not a bastard.”

Barristan frowned, surprised he could dislike Ned more than he had a moment earlier. “He is chained to choices he had no part in. If you cared for him you would make sure he knows the truth. Or are you terrified of the choice he may force you to make if he decides to take what Robert stole from him? A choice you would never question if you truly cared for him as a son.”

Ned wanted to strike the man, but it wasn’t his sword or armor that kept Ned in his chair. Could he truly let Jon go his entire life without knowing as he’d intended? If he’d gone to the Wall he considered telling him after he’d taken his oaths, but now that he had a life in the south he’d considered letting him build his own house. Ned would damn his entire line to a lie, for what? Did he think Jon would run around telling everyone the truth, or come at Robert with a dagger?

Defeated, Ned said only, “I’ll tell him.”

There were times in King’s Landing where Jon felt like he wasn’t a bastard, just some spare son to a lord. His friends were sons of lords, he was squired to one of the best knights in the realm, he even felt a friend to the princess and the youngest prince. Yet there he sat at the low table, finding himself in his cups as as he watched the Starks escort the Baratheons to the high table. He even found himself once again feeling a flicker of jealousy when he watched Robb walk with Myrcella. If he chose to court her he could. If it had been him with Barristan she would smile at Robb instead of looking to Jon with a solemn smile on her lips as she took her seat.

Half a knight and forever a bastard, Jon thought with a morose laugh as he finished off his cup. He looked to Dom and Sam sat opposite him and pressed his hand to his cheek. “When I’m knighted, what will become of us?”

Both men looked up, surprised by the sudden question. They looked to each other before Domeric asked, “What do you mean?”
“If I’m knighted… Do you think I should stay in King’s Landing?”

Domeric thought for a moment before shaking his head. “No.”

Sam frowned. “What of Loras?”

Jon smiled sadly. “He’ll stay with his lord, surely.”

“Would you return to the Dreadfort?” Sam asked Domeric.

Domeric glanced down at his mug before nodding. “Perhaps. If there was nothing else for me.”

Sam chuckled. “We could travel.”

“See the world as brothers in arms?” asked Jon.

Domeric smiled at that. “We could take to the road righting wrongs as knights of justice, or sail to Essos and find wives to soothe our souls.”

“A bit young for a wife yet aren’t you?” A familiar voice asked.

They turned to find Benjen Stark stood beside them with a smile, Jon quickly rising to hug the man. Jon introduced his friends, finding amusement in Benjen’s surprise as Domeric’s presence. The Boltons were old rivals of the Starks. Others might have found it an insult to be sat with servants and surrounded by mutts, but Dom preferred to be sat with his friends than given a false seat near the high table.

“Ned’s told me you’ve been in King’s Landing,” Benjen said looking to Jon with a smile. “I still remember the first time I saw you, and now here you are squire to Barristan the Bold, spending half your days guarding the king and his family so I hear. Though I wonder if you’ve given up on the Night’s Watch to become a knight.”

“For now at least,” Jon offered.

“Was it just the knighthood, or is there a girl that’s caught your eye?” Seeing Jon’s companions share a smirk while Jon frowned, Benjen chuckled. “A girl then. Who is she? A serving girl? Some handmaiden?”

Jon glanced at the high table before his eyes darkened and he looked down. Arching his brow, Benjen glanced at Dom and Sam and saw them glance there as well, so looked and found Robb smiling as Myrcella held her hand over her mouth and laughed.

Benjen’s face sank as he looked to Jon, squeezing the boy’s shoulder. “I’m sorry, Jon.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Jon shrugged.

“Well whatever you choose, know the Night’s Watch will always be there if you decide to join us, but for now try to find happiness.” Benjen offered a light laugh of encouragement. “Honor and sacrifice can come in time. For now live, enjoy yourself, father a bastard or two!”

“I will never father a bastard,” Jon said, trembling as his venom soured his words. “Never!”

It seemed as if the table had fallen silent, and he even noticed a few eyes on him from the high table.

“I must be excused,” he said rising to his feet and pushing past Benjen. He dodged a serving girl as
he left, feeling tears sting his eyes but holding them back as he stormed toward the yard.

He found himself heading directly toward one of the straw men which he knocked over with a fist to the side of his head. Looking upon his fallen prey he felt more pathetic than he ever had.

Myrcella had been nice enough to him early on, but as he learned more of how things worked in the Red Keep he found himself thinking on her more and becoming friendly despite being expected to be another guard, Barristan’s shadow. He’d felt sorry for her at first, but soon found most of her tragedies had been blessings. Perhaps if she wasn’t ignored by her parents they would have twisted her into a hideous thing like Joffrey. She hadn’t faced much of the pressure which seemed to drive Sansa into her obsessive need to be a lady, but found it naturally instead. Without Cersei keeping Tyrion away he often found his way to Myrcella, sharing his love for books. Jon wondered if she may be the brightest of the royal family, certainly more so than the drunkard king, the cruel prince or even her rotten mother.

Early on Jon had spoken to a serving girl who met him once while bringing food to the king. She would spot him sometimes in the yard and flash him small smiles. It was during Joffrey’s nameday feast during Jon’s first year in King’s Landing that the girl asked him to dance and when they were finished had kissed him on the cheek and run off giggling. Jon had been shocked, but was left smiling through the night.

The next day when he saw her and waved, the girl’s eyes widened in panic and she lowered her head, rushing off as if afraid of him. He had been confused, but that grew when he noticed most of the staff began doing the same. The few who had been friendly with him before then had taken to ignoring him while the rest were brisk at best. Whenever he saw that serving girl she would look away from him, even ignoring the one time he dared to try calling her name.

It wasn’t until months later he told Jaime of her. “I thought she liked me,” Jon said with a morose laugh, “but I suppose bastards are too low even for serving girls.”

Jaime had frowned as Jon shook his head, putting their swords away. Behind him Jaime had sighed and whispered, “Damn it, Cersei.”

It hadn’t taken Jon long to realize she had poisoned them against him. Her small smiles whenever she noticed a server ignore Jon’s requests suddenly making sense. Part of him wondered if that was what spawned his interest in Myrcella. What better way to get revenge for her making sure he wouldn’t find companionship in the keep than to find it with her daughter? But it had started before that, sparked by the time he gave her the winter roses, maybe earlier.

At first it had been simple. Jon just liked being around her, finding she was willing to discuss anything, even asking after the gods he kept. She had been the one to give him the little he knew of the Seven, but she’d also asked after Winterfell, the North, his family, even his swordplay so she might have a better understanding of what she saw in the yard. He’d always enjoyed hearing her describe a book she’d read, a story she’d heard, her knowledge of flora and her visits to other keeps with her family.

However one day he found himself imagining kissing her, and realized her lips looked fuller than they had been. That had lead him to notice her face didn’t seem as round as it had before, yet still looked soft, just more refined. Even the curls of her hair had softened some as it grew, hanging past her shoulders. She’d grown taller as well, going from near his chest to his shoulder. Maybe Jon’s dislike of Cersei painted it, but it felt at times as if she was leeching the beauty of her mother.

Those changes had continued and it felt as if she would soon leave Cersei a hideous crone to match her heart. Her emerald eyes seemed to glow in the light of the Great Hall as her smile touched
them, the curve of her lips playful and warm. It hurt seeing her sit beside Robb who seemed to
easily make her laugh in a way that seemed so rare for Jon, yet every one had always left him
proud when he’d earned it.

In that moment Jon wanted to be the bastard they all feared. To grab the princess and take her for
himself, to run and find a new life in Essos. Let him find them a place in the Basilisk Isles. Jon was
already used to living among venomous beasts after three years in King’s Landing.

But he couldn’t. Not because of what others might think, but because Myrcella didn’t deserve that.
He could love her and he felt sure he could make her love him, there was no doubt both had felt the
same stir in their hearts when their eyes met. No, it was the kind of life they’d find that she didn’t
deserve.

Love didn’t grant happiness. More often it was the opposite in tales he heard. Love wouldn’t feed
them, that would come from a life of hard work, and though he would gladly spend his days
working a field or even as a sellsword, Myrcella deserved to be a princess. Hells, she deserved to be
queen. She deserved to have fine clothing, scented baths and jewelry worth more than anything
he’d ever owned. She deserved better than Jon could ever give her, and that was what stopped him
more often than not.

With a bitter laugh he shook his head, deciding then he would stop. Jon would stop fooling
himself. He would return to King’s Landing and finish squiring for Barristan and then he would
leave. Let him think back fondly on his friendship with the princess and forget he was ever fool
enough to want for more.

Domeric would return to the Dreadfort and find his own bastard brother and embrace him with
open arms. When their father passed Domeric would find his brother a place within the keep and
make sure he was respected. People would look upon Domeric and see beyond the stories told to
frighten others and see the kind lord he was.

Loras would gain fame with every tourney he won, being renown as a true knight that all women
desired but was too chivalrous to dishonor them. Instead he would find his happiness in secret with
his liege lord. Loras would even help Samwell find his footing and as he was no longer bound by
his father’s will or his family, he would look to earn his chains in Oldtown or explore and study the
world. If his father had a heart he would be shamed by what his son would become, but more likely
the man would claim some part of whatever glory he found yet still ignore him.

Myrcella would be sent to live with some lord worthy of her. She would meet him and find him
more handsome that the bastard squire she’d been close with in her youth. She would come to love
her betrothed and happily take to bed with him and give him children. Whenever she attended a
tourney with them she would see Loras, Domeric or Jon and laugh at her stupidity for every
thinking herself interested in him. She would laugh at her naivety and hold her husband’s hand and
think of her happiness with him.

Robb would inherit Winterfell and marry some beautiful lady who would bear him strong children.
Sansa would go off to marry some lord and become the lady she always dreamed of and make
herself think it something out of a song. Arya would find someone who appreciated her wild spirit
and the beauty she held despite her sister’s denial of it’s existence. Bran would be a knight of
renown after squiring to some of the best in the realm, while Rickon would find himself adored by
the North as he grew into a warrior.

Jon would be left alone to wander. He would ride in tourneys and do well enough to find a decent
brothel and buy company to help him forget. Once he found he could no longer live off tourney
gold he would sail to Essos and sell his sword for a time, making his way across the country and
finding whatever joy he could in the moment, whether it be in seeing something he never could in Westeros, in the arms of a woman or with a blade in his hand. He would ride and fight and fuck until he stopped caring and then he would go to the Wall and say it was honor that guided him there in the end.

He’d always striven to be as honorable as possible, the opposite of what was suspected of him. When he was younger he’d think he wanted to be as honorable as his father, but time and distance had made him doubt any of it true. For all he knew it was the naivety of a child that made him think the man honorable. He’d fathered Jon after all, and never spoke of his mother. What honor was there in not telling Jon if she was alive or dead? No, Ned was clearly afraid of the shadow of his mother, and all he ever did was run from her and ignore her. Jon was more like to call Ned craven.

At least he could understand why Sam held so much fear after the things his father did to him, but even if his mother was awful Jon should know.

Gods, near every day in King’s Landing he hoped word would find her. He dreamed of walking through Flea Bottom when a voice called to him and a woman would smile at him the way only a mother could, and she would tell him that she’d missed him every day as much as he’d missed her. If she was high born he could swear to her house and be near her, but if she was a peasant then he could help her, he could win tourneys and have her live on land he would earn. He could introduce her to his friends, to his half-siblings, he could make sure she was safe and happy. And every day he thought of that and went to sleep without finding him he was never certain if it would be worse to find she was dead or that she hated him as well. That he was just as much her shame as he was Lord Stark’s. That he was something she would rather forget, or had given him up because she’d rather he died than suffer him.

“Jon!”

He stumbled back as Domeric pulled him off the straw dummy, it’s head collapsed into a hole in the ground, Jon’s knuckles red from where they had beaten the earth. His cheeks burned and his chest stung as he wondered when he’d started hitting it. His breaths were heavy, suddenly finding himself awash with fading anger.

“How you okay?” Samwell asked, frowning as he looked to Jon’s hand.

Taking a breath Jon nodded, sniffing and wiping at his cheek, angered anew that they had seen that, that he’d done that.

Domeric stood the dummy back up and turned to Jon with a sigh. “I shouldn’t have let you drink so much.”

“I’m not your squire,” Jon snapped. He sighed then. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Domeric said shaking his head.

“I’m sure it’s just a lot to take in coming back here after so long,” Sam offered with a smile.

Jon shook his head, looking between the two. “When this ends I’m going to end up alone in the world.”

“Jon!” They all turned to find Theon called out to him from meters away. “Lord Stark wishes to see you in his solar.”

Jon sighed, looking to his friends. “I’m sorry.”
“There may be times where you are on your own,” Domeric said firmly as he met Jon’s eyes, “but you will never be without friends. Without brothers.”

Sam nodded. “I’ll never be as brave or strong as any of you but I would gladly give all I had for either of you or Loras. You need only ask and I would follow you as best I can.” Sam let out a sheepish laugh as he looked to them both. “I thought I would be alone, mocked and insulted, yet found instead men I consider brothers.”

Jon nodded. They all shared a smile before Jon turned and made his way to his father’s solar. Whatever came, at least he might face it with brothers of choice at his side.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bit long so I’ve cut the end to be the start of the next, so that’ll be when the first large shift based on a theory will happen. It’s not one I necessarily believe for the books, but I think it’s interesting to play with so I’ve incorporated it here. Most theories I want to include in the story are pretty much in the same realm.

It was fun writing Jon’s pit as he fell and sank deeper until he was in an unconscious rage. There are moments in the books where Jon seems to act unconsciously and become kind of unstoppable or show moments of great strength, as if he’s ‘waking the dragon’ or going berserk, so it’s a play on those I suppose.

Upon rereading I realized I have Jon at his lowest settling for what Robert desires as an escape in riding around fighting and fucking.
Chapter Summary

Jon learns the truth and makes a decision.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

Making his way through the corridors of Winterfell he entered the Lord’s solar and found it occupied by Eddard, Benjen and Barristan. For a moment he was concerned they’d suddenly decided to send him to the Wall, but squashed it as he closed the door.

“You called for me?” asked Jon. He noted that Ned seemed grim where Barristan wore solemn resolution. Benjen seemed concerned, almost wary as he looked from his brother to Jon and Barristan.

“Jon,” Ned said motioning to the chair opposite him while Barristan and Benjen stood to either side behind him.

“Is something wrong?” Jon asked as he took the offered seat and looked to each man.

“I’m going to tell you about your mother.” Jon’s eyes widened as he took a breath that swiftly escaped him as Ned continued, “But I also have to tell you about your father.”

Benjen frowned seeing the boy’s brow sink as she shook his head. “What?”

Ned nodded somberly. “I’m not your father, not by blood.”

Jon stared at him, anger mixing into his confusion. He looked to the floor trying to speak, but only letting out brief, shaky breaths before he looked to Ned. “Who?”

Meeting his gaze Ned answered, “Rhaegar Targaryen.” Ben’s jaw shifted hearing it finally confirmed, though having assumed as much. Ned had never told him, but he knew enough to know.

Jon’s brow shifted as he sat back in his chair, his eyes sinking to the floor as he said quietly, “You’re my uncle.”

“I was there when your mother died,” Ned said quietly. “I brought her back here and had a statue built for her. I think some part of me wanted you to be able to look upon her face.”

“Then you should have told me,” Jon looked to Ned, his eyes darkened. “You should have-” He turned his head and shook it, blinking back tears. “I suppose I understand. Who would want to know they were born because their father raped their mother and left her for dead?”

“She was never raped,” said Benjen. When Jon turned to him he frowned. “I saw them wed on the Isle of Faces.”

Jon stared at him for a moment before looking to Ned and seeing he knew as well. “I was never a
“Jon,” Ned said carefully, “when I led the party to the Tower of Joy there were three Kingsguard waiting for us. Ser Arthur Dayne, Ser Oswell Whent and Lord Commander Gerold Hightower. They weren’t there to guard some hostage… they were there to guard their queen regent and their rightful king, Aegon Targaryen.”

“What? Aegon died.”

“The Aegon born to Elia died,” said Ned. “All I know is Lyanna called you Aegon Targaryen, but I couldn’t well call you that so named you Jon.”

“Even my name is a lie?” Jon asked, his elbow digging into the arm of his chair as he pressed his fingers into his forehead with a bitter laugh. After a moment he sighed and lowered his hand. “So I’m the last dragon?”

“Not quite,” said Barristan. “Near a year after the war ended Rhaegar’s brother Viserys and newborn sister Daenerys escaped to Essos, their mother dying in birth I believe.”

“There’s Aemon as well,” said Benjen. “The Maester for Castle Black.”

“He left with Brynden Rivers,” Jon remembered from one of his books. “He must be ancient.”

“He is,” Benjen assured with a laugh. “Though as kind as he is blind.”

Jon’s head sank forward in thought before looking to Ned. “How do I know any of this is even true?”


“Is that it?” Jon shrugged. “The word of men who lied for near fifteen years?”

Ned frowned at the bitter question. “There is more, but…”

“Show me.” When Ned hesitated Jon rose from his chair, his eyes shining black as he glared down at Ned in his chair and demanded, “Show me.”

Ned led them through a path that would leave them unseen as they entered the crypts of Winterfell. Jon followed silently through the path, remembering his dreams of the Winter Kings and wanting to laugh that in the end it turned out he never belonged there.

They came to the statue of his mother, Lyanna Stark, the only female he knew of to have a statue. The only one without a sword.

Jon stared at her stony face, wondering how many times he’d look upon it before without ever knowing. If he had, would he have come down here every day to see her, to speak to her? He could have found solace here. He could have found a mother that didn’t despise him for something he never had a part of, something he’d never wanted, a lie cast upon him.

“It’s here?” Jon asked looking to Ned.

“In here,” Ned said raising his oil lantern toward the sepulcher. Jon stepped toward the tomb and saw within her bones beneath a pale shroud that faded with age. With a glance to Jon, Ned said, “When I found her she made me promise something. Not to save you, I would have that without
question and she surely knew as much.”

“What did she ask of you?” Jon asked.

“To protect your heritage,” Eddard said as he knelt down and moved a slab set in the back of the statue of his sister. One he’d set himself years ago after having the statue commissioned and brought down here.

Jon watched him pull a long chest from the cavity and unlock it before turning it to Jon and picking up the lantern. Ned moved to his side while Ben and Barristan watched. Unlatching the chest he found a black cloak with long dead petals spread across it. Jon found small rolled parchments atop it and unraveled one.

“My winter rose, I look upon the sky and fear each day may be my last, yet greet each dawn with a smile for it is another day until the Long Night comes,” Jon read, looking through the letter. This was his father’s handwriting. His true father.

Setting it back beside the others atop the cloak he realized there was more beneath the cloak. Or rather, wrapped within it. He carefully began moving them, his brow furrowing as he noticed the odd weights and shifts in shape. When he finally removed the cloak he saw not only was the inside of the cloak red, but what it covered made Barristan, Benjen and Jon all gasped.

Laying across the bottom of the chest was a slender blade housed within a black scabbard with gold meeting the cross guard which had a ruby set on either side. The gold of the waving horizontal guard seemed to leak into the black hilt, which had gilded lines through it leading to the golden fire shaped pommel.

“Is that Dark Sister?” Barristan asked, earning a nod from Ned.

Yet Jon found himself reaching not for the sword, but the dragon’s egg beside it.

It was much larger than any hen’s egg with fine red scales covering it’s surface, shining bright as jewels in the lamp light. It was heavier than expected, with smooth scales of deep, rich red which seemed to shimmer as he turned the egg in his hands. “Blood and fire,” he whispered, noting the fleck of gold in it as well as whorls of midnight black.

“That’s-”

“A dragon egg,” Ned nodded. “Lyanna said it was a gift from Rhaegar before he left.”

“And Dark Sister?” asked Barristan.

“She said he’d gotten it from Maester Aemon,” Ned said with a look to Benjen.

“Who likely got it from Bloodraven,” said Jon, setting down the egg. He picked up Dark Sister and unsheathed it partially to examine the rippled steel of the longsword. He’d imagined it much like the sword he’d bought Arya, but was only just slimmer than other longswords he’d seen and the same length as most others.

Ned nodded. “Rhaegar left it with her. He thought her a warrior, but she was too weak. A fever had taken her.”

Sliding Dark Sister back into her scabbard, Jon put it all back into the chest and slid it back in to the cavity, closing it with the flush slab. Rising to his feet, Jon stared at the floor for a moment. “I’ll need time to think.”
“Take as much as you need, son,” said Ned. He saw Jon bite back a comment, likely ready to tell him he wasn’t his son, but he only frowned and made his way from the crypt.

Benjen watched Jon’s back before looking to Ned and Barristan. “What do you think he’ll do?” With a glance toward the statue he asked, “Would it be enough?”

“Maybe,” Ned sighed. “The letters will be of more use than the sword or an unhatched egg we could well have found, but they’ll bolster the rest, the letters and accounts of others.”

“Do you think he’ll try?” asked Benjen.

Ned glanced to Barristan as he frowned. “Whatever his choice, the Starks stand together.”

Jon had been roomed with Dom and Sam, his old room, the one he’d had before leaving, had been changed and given away. The moment he returned it was clear he had no place in Winterfell, but he’d been glad at least to be paired with his friends.

When he didn’t join them hours after leaving for his father’s solar flickers of concern had grown in them. “Perhaps he’s finally given in,” Domeric said with a smile. “Decided it time to give up and rode to a brothel to find his solace.”

With that they found sleep, but that was broken early, before the sun had risen when they heard the door open. Waking they found Jon sat beside his bed packing the few things he’d removed back into his bags.

“Jon?” Sam asked sitting up in his bed. “What’s going on?”

“I’m leaving,” Jon said, stopping to look back at them. “Will you two join me?”

Domeric sat up, his brow furrowed when he saw Jon’s frown. “What’s happened?”

He turned to them. “Will you come?”

Dom and Sam exchanged looks before throwing aside their furs. “Where are we going?” asked Domeric.

Jon had spent the night thinking on much, as well as this. He’d considered riding to White Harbor and sailing to Essos, to find the aunt and uncle Barristan had mentioned, but they weren’t alone. They had one another. He could find a way to contact them, to let them know he was alive, that he wanted to know them. But Aemon was alone.

“Castle Black,” he answered.

“Are you taking the black?” Sam frowned.

“I’d follow you many places,” Domeric said teasingly, “but I fear I’m not ready to give up the Dreadfort just yet.”

“No,” Jon said shaking his head, standing as he tucked a cloak into a large satchel that hid Arya’s sword, sliding it over his shoulder. “I have something I need to do there. Things I need to see. We’ll tell them we’ve come to see the Wall at least once in our life and check in so I could properly ask the king to help them.”

Domeric arched his brow, clearly curious what had caused this but trusting Jon. “We could leave before they break fast.”
“I have things I need to handle,” Jon said adjusting the satchel across his back. “Could you two prepare the horses?”

“We can handle it,” Domeric nodded.

“I’ll meet you by the stables,” Jon said holding the bag on his left hip as he left the room.

In the dark of the early morning Jon Snow crept into the crypts of Winterfell. One of the few things which was likely unique to squiring with Barristan, was the kingsguard’s lessons on stealth. He’d sneaked into a city to save the mad king and knew much of going unseen and moving quietly despite spending his time donning heavy snow white armor.

He left the lantern near the entrance as he made his way within, his stride sure and unstopping as he went to the statue of his mother. For a moment he stopped before her, his eyes having shifted to the dark enough for him to see her, placing his hand in her stony grasp.

Moving the slab he opened the chest Ned had shown him and took the cloak from his bag, wrapping it around Dark Sister and his egg which he placed back in the bag. Setting the chest back he hid it away, with no clear sign the slab existed once it was set.

Arya sat up in her bed before the sun had risen over the horizon, rubbing sleep from her eyes as she dressed and answered the door. She blinked in confusion at Jon, who offered a smile. “May I come in for a moment?”

With a nod Arya stepped aside, waving Nymeria away as she sat on her bed. When Jon closed the door she noticed the bag on Jon’s torso. She stood with a gasp. “Are you going already?”

“I’m sorry, Arya,” he said walking to her. “I need to do something while we’re in the North, but I’ll be back, I promise.”

“Why?” She pouted, sinking to her bed. “You just got back.”

Jon took a knee, holding her shoulders. “Arya, it doesn’t matter where I am or what happens. No matter what, you’re my sister and I love you, do understand?”

Arya nodded, blinking back tears brought on by his sudden sincere declaration. “I love you too, big brother.”

“I’ll always do what I can to protect or help you, but I can’t be there always, so I’ve brought you something,” said Jon. “Something you’ll have to keep secret.”

“A present?”

“You could call it that.” He opened his satchel and pulled a thin small sword from beneath the cloak he’d packed. Sheathed in a gray scabbard with a blade slimmer than Dark Sister. The hilt was black with a rounded gray pommel and straight gray cross guard.

“A sword,” she said in a hushed breath.

“This is no toy,” he said drawing it from the scabbard to show her the pale steel, which though narrow retained a cutting edge. “Be careful you don’t cut yourself. The edges are sharp enough to shave with.”

“Girls don’t shave,” said Arya.
“Maybe they should,” Jon said with a smirk. “I’ve seen a few with legs hairy as my head.”

Arya giggled at him. “It’s so skinny.”

“So are you,” Jon said handing her the sheathed sword. “I had this made special for you by the best blacksmiths in King’s Landing, Tobho Mott. It’s the kind of sword bravos use in the Free Cities. It won’t take a man’s head, but if you’re quick enough it’ll poke him full of holes.”

“I can be quick,” Arya nodded.

“If you end up coming to King’s Landing, I promise I’ll try to help give you lessons, though I’m not sure how much use I’ll be with such a different sword.”

“Really? You’ll teach me?”

“As much as I can,” he assured. “First lesson, stick them with the point end.”

She smacked him with the flat of the sword. “I know which end to use.”

Jon chuckled. “Good. Make sure you watch how they fight in the yard, even if you can’t use the same things they do you can learn how they fight and think on how to counter it. Run, ride, do whatever you can to make yourself strong.”

“I’ll find someone to practice with until you’re back,” she nodded, sheathing the blade. “Do you really have to leave? What if we leave before you’re back?”

“Different roads sometimes lead to the same castle,” he told her. When she nodded he motioned to the sword. “All the best swords have names.”

“Like Ice,” she said looking over the blade. “Does this one have a name?”

“I’d considered one. Can you guess it?” He teased, “It’s your favorite thing.”

After a puzzled moment she smiled, looking to him. “Needle.”

Hiding the sword away she followed Jon to the stables where they found Domeric and Samwell had prepared their horses with enough provisions for the Wall and back.

“All set?” Domeric asked before nodding to Arya. “Is she coming with?”

“No,” Jon said shaking his head. “Just here to see us off.”

Arya smiled to his friends, who gave her nods as Jon turned to her, who took a knee, letting her wrap her arms around him. “Take care.”

“And you, sister.” Jon held her shoulders as they separated. “I’ll need you to tell Ser Barristan that I’ve gone, as well as Father. Tell them I’ve gone to the Wall to see it once before I go back south. If you can find them alone and when you’re sure no one else is around then tell them I’ve taken what’s mine and will decide if I’ll take the rest when I return. Okay?”

Arya nodded. “Okay.”

Seeing her confusion he chuckled. “I can’t explain right now but I will later, I promise. They’ll know what I mean, but remember, no one can hear or know. And tell Robb I’m sorry I left early and didn’t tell him, but I need to hurry so I can get back sooner.”
“Can I tell him about Needle?”

Jon chuckled. “Just don’t tell Sansa. She may tell your mother or the septa and no good can come of that. You’re smart enough to know who else can know, who else can keep a secret.”

“I’ll wait to tell them,” Arya said looking toward the gate. “Give you time.”

“Thank you,” Jon said rising and mounting his horse. Securing the satchel at his hip he took the reins and gave Arya a nod before leading them toward the gate as Dom and Sam fell into place at his sides.

He would have gone alone if he had to, but it was a relief to know he rode with men he could speak to of the truth, who could help him decide what to do. As of now all he knew was he didn’t want to be in Winterfell, and wanted to let his uncle know that he wasn’t alone, and maybe neither was Jon.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve gone with Aegon for a few different reasons, but that’s about the only ‘theory’ here I think might work into the books. Everything in the crypt is stuff I don’t think will come into play in the series, but I think is fun to play with as theories and in fanfics, which is true for most of the 'theories' I'm planning to incorporate into the fic. Lyanna’s statue is the only one without a sword because the sword is inside it, her statue exist to hide something, the rumors of dragons in the crypts are made vaguely true by Ned hiding Jon’s egg in there, Ned’s promise was to protect Jon’s heritage since him protecting his nephew was already assumed, etc.

It's easy enough to bullshit some way for Ned to get the hollow spot in the statue with a flush slab only he knows of until now, but as for why it's not just with her bones? Who knows who might one day decide to go crypt crawling, so better to hide it in a statue. Or really just because I want 'em in there.

The petals on the cloak are supposed to allude to or maybe be the petals I remember in Ned’s thoughts of Lyanna. Which egg Jon has will be revealed soon, but I’m sure some will already know or look it up. Dark Sister is meant to look pretty similar to how it does in The World of Ice and Fire.
“You sure about this?” Sam asked with a glance back to Winterfell on the horizon behind them.

“I have to do this,” Jon said facing ahead.

Domeric saw his dark eyes had hardened like steel quenched in determination. “Why the Wall?”

Jon looked to them both before answering simply, “My great uncle is there and I plan to meet the man.”

“Your great uncle?” Sam asked tilting his head.

Jon nodded. “Aemon Targaryen.”

Both of their eyes widened as Domeric sat forward slightly. “Your mother was a-”

“Lyanna Stark,” Jon answered.

Domeric, having thought perhaps some forgotten Targaryen cousin or bastard, found himself gasping. “Then would your father be Rhaegar?” Seeing Jon nod, he thought back on all the awful stories he’d heard of her abduction and frowned. “Jon, I’m so sorry.”

Glancing at him, Jon shook his head. “He didn’t take her. They were married on the Isle of Faces.”

“But he already had a wife,” Sam pointed out.

“Not like they never took multiple wives,” Domeric offered with a laugh. “Though I imagine your uncle may have some answers.”

“How’d you find this out?” asked Sam.

“My-” Jon paused before continuing, “Lord Stark told me. My uncle Benjen was witness to their wedding, and Lord Stark brought me back from the Tower of Joy in Dorne. Me… and these,” Jon said bringing his bag forward and opening it.

They moved their horses closer as Jon pulled the scarlet dragon egg from it just enough for them to see. Sam gasped. “Is that-”

“A dragon egg?” asked Dom. “How?”

“It was left for me by Rhaegar.”

“They used to place eggs in the cradles of their newborns,” Domeric remarked. “I bet that was
meant to go in yours.”

“Instead it sat in the dark for years.” Jon frowned, setting it back inside. “Alongside Dark Sister.”

Their eyes widened again as he pulled the longsword from the bag. Sam gawked at the sword while Dom’s eyes darkened. “Jon you can’t let people see that.” He looked from the sheathed sword to Jon. “They’ll wonder how you got a valyrian steel sword. It will cause too many questions.”

“I know,” Jon nodded, setting it back beneath the cloak. “I brought these to prove to Aemon who I am. The sword should’ve been with Bloodraven, and apparently Rhaegar got it from Aemon before leaving it for my mother.”

“How keep it quiet?” asked Sam. “Surely they would have told everyone.”

“Why bother?” asked Domeric. “What good would come from telling others, of telling his maddened father? They weren’t at war before so he had no reason to use it, assuming he even had it then. All we know is he had it at the end and gave it to his wife.”

“She was a fighter,” Jon said looking to Dom. “She had wolf blood, like Arya. He thought her capable, but then a fever took her.”

“Do you think he knew?” Sam asked somberly. “That he would die.”

“Targaryens have been known to have dreams of prophecy,” noted Domeric. “Maybe he had his own, or simply wanted to know his wife had it in case he did die.” Watching Jon close the satchel he asked, “If that’s what you took, does that make the rest you mentioned the Iron Throne?”

Sam looked panicked as Jon nodded. “You’ve been there long enough. You’ve see what they’re like. Myrcella and Tommen are fine, but they’re not in control. Robert’s decent enough most of the time, but do either of you truly think him a good king? And what of Joffrey when he follows his father?”

“Jon, what you’re talking about…” Sam frowned.

Jon thought of the times he’d seen Joffrey torturing Tommen while Barristan kept him from doing anything. It was their place to guard the royal family from others, not from each other. He’d hated Barristan in those moment, but knew he was right. As much as he wanted to run Joffrey through he had to find other ways. When Joffrey held the boy’s arms around his neck so he could barely breath Jon made himself stumble, slamming his head into the floor and groaning in pain, drawing the prince’s laughter while he released Tommen to gasp for breath. Watching Joffrey walk off after that, holding Tommen as he cried, hearing him tell the tale of his pet fawn Joffrey had skinned, Jon wanted nothing more than to make Joffrey suffer. After that he did what he could to find other ways to distract the prince to spare his siblings from torment.

He couldn’t let someone like that rule the realm. It was doubtless he would be Aerys II or Maegor the Cruel come again.

Domeric thought as he asked, “Are you certain you want this?”

“No,” Jon shook his head. “I wouldn’t risk lives for that. I don’t want to rule. I’d be happy with lands of my own, just enough to live in peace and maybe make a house of my own. It’s not as if I want the responsibility of the throne, but I can’t sit by and let the Baratheons ruin the realm. If I took it at least I could try to make things better, make a better council to guide me and the realm. If I can do this to stop them from sinking us all but don’t then it would be just as much my fault when
we go to ruin.”

Sam looked to Jon and saw he was being honest. He wasn’t contemplating this because he coveted the crown. He looked almost mournful as spoke of himself upon the throne and his need to try for it. “It won’t be easy.”

“I know,” said Jon. “We’d have to do it slowly. Carefully. We’d have to work in the shadow of vipers. We’d have to drift through poison to find a path. But if we must, I’ve no doubt we will find it.”

“What of Loras?” asked Sam, who frowned. “He is… close to Lord Renly.”

Domeric nodded somberly. “Though I’d consider him one of us, love has driven plenty of brothers to take up arms against one another. It might be best to keep this from him until we have a better idea of what we’ll do, how we can spare Renly.”

Jon sighed. “I know. I don’t like it, but we can’t risk him telling Renly. Surely his loyalty to his brother outweighs any for Loras’ friends.”

By the time they stopped for the night Jon was waiting to hear riders approaching to come retrieve them. Instead it was the soft patter of a wolf that drew their attention. The pale eyed gray wolf stood a few feet away from the trio of men, Domeric’s hand on the hilt of his sword while Jon and Sam reached for their daggers.

Jon’s eyes shifted from the pale amber eyes of the wolf to another set behind it. Deep crimson eyes caught the flicker of firelight, seeming to glow as another approached silently, it’s fur pure white, nearly a third the size of the she wolf.

Releasing his dagger, Jon held a hand out toward the others as his gaze lingered on the white wolf. “Wait.”

They looked to Jon as a raven cawed and he tore a piece of mutton he’d been eating and held the chunks out. The wolves approached and took the meat from his hands. Jon watched them, noticing the white wolf kept looking at him as it ate. To their surprise the she wolf finished her meat and turned to lay by the fire. The white wolf glanced at her before turning and laying near her.

Sam stared at the creatures in fear while Domeric looked curious. “Are they planning to lay in wait and devour us in our sleep?” Domeric asked with a laugh.

The wolves remained there as they settled in for the night. They contemplated taking watches, but took what rest they could to ride hard the next day. When they heard the shift of grass and snow all three found themselves roused from their slumber, but none moved. Instead they watched as the she wolf rose and walked into the woods. Jon furrowed his brow, looking from the wolf to the sleeping white wolf which had silently moved to lay beside him and was deep asleep.

When morning came Jon found the white wolf looking out into the woods silently before turning and making his way to him, pressing his snout to Jon’s hand. Reaching up he rubbed the wolf’s head.

“Your mother left you as well, hm?” Jon asked with a somber smile. “You can come with us, but you’ll need a name.” The wolf rolled in the snow, staring as Jon, reminding him of the time he’d covered himself in flower and hid in the crypts. “How about Ghost?” The pup tugged Jon’s hand back and forth playfully, making him chuckle. “Ghost it is.”

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO
Few seemed to notice their departure until Arya asked to speak with her father after he broke fast. For a moment he’d considered sending men to fetch Jon, but no good would come of it. Jon clearly wasn’t willing to sit and obey, not any longer.

When Barristan found out he was ready to ride out himself and bring the boy back, but knew that would only bring questions, so he covered for him. When anyone asked after him he’d say he let the boy visit the Wall since Jon intended to go there before he ever came to King’s Landing.

“He’s left?” Myrcella asked with a frown.

“I’m sorry, princess,” said Barristan. “I’m sure he’ll return in time and meet us on the road.”

She’d looked forward to seeing his home but it seemed less interesting without him there to show her it all. Still, she tried enjoyed her time there as much as she could.

“It’s beautiful,” she said walking through the glass garden filled with fruits, vegetables and flowers. Her garden was partially enclosed, but the structure was small, built only to house her flowers where the glass garden was meant to house food enough for the castle.

Walking alongside the princess, Sansa saw her eyes brighten and her smile grow when she spotted the winter roses. Putting on a smile she walked to them. “These are winter roses, your grace.”

“Oh, I know,” Myrcella said looking to Sansa as she brushed her fingers across the petals of one. “I have a bush in my garden at the Red Keep.”

“You do?” Sansa asked blinking. “I thought they only grew in the North.”

“I was gifted a bush by your brother.”

Sansa tilted her head. “Robb?”

“Jon,” Myrcella said turning to Sansa. “He gave me a potted bush for my nameday.”

Sansa blinked at that. Thinking back she remembered Robb and Theon laughing that Jon had asked for roses to remember Winterfell. Had he lied to them? Why would he-Oh. She bit at her lip to keep her smile from growing too large. Oh, poor Jon.

Seeing Robb escort Myrcella to another dinner, Sansa found him the next day and took him aside. “Brother,” she called to him, making him turn and excuse himself to come closer. “Do you remember when Jon asked you for the winter roses?”

Robb furrowed his brow. “Aye, I do. That was years back now.”

“Did he tell you what they were for?”

“He said he missed home.” Robb shrugged.

“I think that a lie,” said Sansa.

“Why?”

“Because it seems once he received them he gifted them to Princess Myrcella.”

Robb laughed. “What?”

“She told me in the glass gardens,” she explained. “It was when he was injured. He was at the
docks to get them when a man killed a gate captain and he tried to stop the murderer. Afterward he gave her the roses. He’s even taken to helping her in her garden.”

“Jon?” Robb laughed. “Jon Snow? Our brother?”

Sansa giggled. “Robb, she says not only does he spend his nights reading, but is learning to play the harp!”

Robb scoffed. “You can’t be serious.”

“I swear, it’s what she said.”

“Does he sing as well?”

“She couldn’t say,” Sansa snickered. “She said she only knows he plays the harp because she’s seen Ser Domeric giving him lessons.”

Robb’s smirk fell slightly as he thought on it. “Gods, what else don’t we know?”

“I think he fancies the princess,” Sansa said with a laugh. “Why else would he give her the roses?”

Robb glanced toward the keep. “You’ve seen them. Maybe he felt bad for her.”

“Bad for what?” Sansa scoffed. “She’s a princess.”

Robb frowned. “And Joffrey’s a prince, but if half of what Jon’s told us is true then he’s still a sadistic prick.” He wore a sneer as he scoffed. “And now father’s sold you to the blonde shit.”

“Robb,” Sansa hissed. “He’s just rough… Mother says boys grow out of things like that.”

“None of us did things like Jon told us,” said Robb. “Theon never did, I never did, Jon never did, Bran doesn’t, Rickon never will. Even his own brother isn’t like that.”

Sansa groaned quietly, clutching the front of her skirt. “For all we know Jon’s lied.”

“Jon wouldn’t lie,” snapped Robb.

“He’s already lied about the roses and his harp.”

“That’s different, you know that.” Robb sighed. “He may have feared we would tease him and hoped to avoid it. Or perhaps he wanted to surprise us with his harp one day.”

“Still,” Sansa said indignantly, “Joffrey’s been so kind. A perfect prince. Maybe Jon’s just jealous of him like he was you.”

Robb frowned, disappointed in his sister’s doubt of their brother. He could almost see their mother whispering in her ear, telling her Jon wrote to Sansa with a bastard’s jealousy guiding his quill.

“Just be careful, Sansa. If he does anything, tell us. Jon will be there with you, he can protect you.”

It didn’t take long for Arya to overhear Sansa gossiping with Jeyne Poole. Afterward she rushed off to meet with Robb and ask if he knew of Jon’s crush. When he said he’d sent the flowers, Arya found herself watching Myrcella. If Jon was interested in her, then she must be interesting, yet Arya thought she seemed much like Sansa, though not as bad. She was nice at least.

“Princess,” Arya said one day when she found the girl heading toward the library. When the blonde princess stopped and turned to her she said, “I’d heard you were friends with my brother
Jon. Is that true?”

“It is. I call him friend. Him and his companions.” Myrcella smiled, suddenly moving closer. “Jon spoke of you often.”

“He did?” Arya blinked.

Myrcella nodded. “He spoke of your wild heart. That you were as brave as you were clever.” She chuckled. “He even said he-” She gasped and winced.

Arya arched her brow, thinking on it before looking to her in shock. “He told you about the sword?”

Myrcella smiled in relief. “He gave it to you already? Thank the Seven. I feared I ruined the surprise.” Seeing Arya’s surprise she chuckled and said conspiratorially, “Fear not, I won’t speak a word of it.”

After that Myrcella found herself enjoying things a bit more as Arya took to showing her around, telling her stories of Jon before he came to King’s Landing. She shared her own tales of Jon. Arya was shocked to hear that not only had he taken to reading half the books at the Red Keep but he had been learning to play the harp. She was glad to hear he was as skilled as she’d hoped in the yard if Myrcella’s praise was true.

Myrcella found her time with Jon of interest to Robb and even Bran, who asked of Ser Loras as well, admitting Jon said he might ask the Knight of Flowers to take him as squire. She found herself having budding friendships with all the Stark children, enjoying her time at Winterfell more with every day. At least until Bran fell.

Even with the bitter winds growing colder every day, seeing the Wall break the horizon was a relief. Approaching Castle Black Jon couldn’t help but compare the place he’d once hoped to spend the rest of his days to the Red Keep. Though the Wall was the grandest thing he’d ever seen, the castle wasn’t. It felt run down, near abandoned but for the people calling out to raise the gates.

A glance down showed that the wolf, Ghost, was still following them as it had since his mother left him with Jon. Every night the wolf had taken to sleeping beside Jon, who made sure it was fed. Jon found himself wondering if it might be a direwolf as he rubbed it’s head at night sometimes. It still had a pup’s look despite being a third the size of it’s mother, and he could scarcely imagine a poor wolf mating with a massive direwolf to make some half breed. With no way he could think to know, he decided instead to wait and see if it grew as big as the Starks’ wolves.

Making their way through the gate they were met by brothers of the Night’s Watch and after introducing themselves were taken to meet with the Lord Commander, Jeor Mormont. Jon took the reins for their introduction.

“This is Samwell Tarly and Ser Domeric Bolton, heir to the Dreadfort,” Jon said before motioning to himself. “I am Jon Snow, son of Eddard Stark, Lord of Winterfell. We rode north with the king’s procession and thought to come see the Wall for ourselves and perhaps speak to the king of it.”

“And the king will listen to a bastard?” said the broad older man, motioning for them to take seats.

“He’s shown me favor in the past,” Jon nodded, having prepared for this with Dom and Sam since they took to the road. “I think I have a better chance of getting word to him than any letters. I could speak to him or at least those I know at court such as Ser Barristan Selmy, to whom I squire, or Ser
Loras Tyrell who could speak to Lord Renly Baratheon. If nothing else I could speak to my father, ask him to speak to the king as well. Perhaps then he could help make the Night’s Watch the order I spent much of my childhood wanting to join.”

Jeor looked at the squire before him. “Benjen’s mentioned you wanting to join us.”

That surprised Jon. “He has?”

Jeor chuckled gruffly. “Said it was our loss the moment your father sent you south. He claimed you would have been the best of us if you’d come.”

“I’m sure he was in his cups,” Jon said humbly, “but I’m glad he thinks so much of me.”

Jeor nodded, rubbing his beard. “You truly think you could get word to the king on our behalf?”

“I’d like to spend some time here and look around as much as I can.” Jon hoped it seemed natural he would say, “I’d like to meet your Maester and learn about Castle Black and the Wall, to have as much information as I can before I ride back south.”

Jeor nodded. “I’ll have a steward bring you to him and prepare rooms for you.”

They left and Domerice and Sam excused themselves to bring their things to their rooms, leaving Jon to meet the master on his own. He flashed them a quick, thankful smile before following the steward with Ghost following behind him. Clutching the satchel on his hip, Jon felt the weight of the egg and sword and hoped Aemon would be as glad to meet him as he was to find another uncle.

Chapter End Notes

It’s pretty much supposed to be inferred Ghost is being guided to Jon, as if he is supposed to have him, or so someone or something thinks. It could be the gods or maybe Bloodraven, or at least he and his ravens maybe know of Ghost and followed him to see what came of it. Not sure if I’ll ever give a more solid answer on it, but hopefully there’s enough for the inference.

It’s always surprising when people become pissbabies about Jon’s name being Aegon. It makes me go from not caring about his name or hoping it’s something unique instead of just another Targ or Stark name, to really hoping it is Aegon just to see people whine about it. I mean, it’s not as if I might have considered others but chose Aegon for some thematic or narrative reason, right? It’s not as if I put any thought into what I write. Jon has Dark Sister cause it’s just a cool sword, and his egg is red cause red is pretty, yeah?

You can not like something, but why would I care? Especially when it’s not a criticism, just a complaint, and complaints are useless. It just comes across as “I didn’t get what I want” instead of “here’s a way this could be improved”. Even if I don’t agree with it I’d consider criticism, but complaints waste my time as much as yours. Our time is worth more than that.

Questions are fine and welcome, I answer a bunch in the comments and even say what I have planned occasionally or explain choices.
Next chapter is all Jon and Aemon.
Entering the maester’s quarters, the steward called for Aemon, who rose from his chair and looked toward them with clouded eyes. “Maester Aemon?” Jon asked softly, smiling somberly as he looked upon the bald elderly man.

“IT seems you know of me,” the man said as he came before Jon, “to whom do I speak?”

He’d thought on this but decided to take it slow. “Jon Snow, bastard to Eddard Stark.”

Aemon nodded. “Mm. Have you come to take the black?”

“I’m afraid not, Maester.”

“And your friend?” Aemon asked looking down toward Ghost, the pup stood behind him.

“I’ve called him Ghost,” Jon said turning to lift the wolf, who obediently went still as Jon adjusted his grip and raised him. “He came to me in the woods, abandoned to us by his mother it would seem.”

When Aemon raised his hand, Jon carefully took it and guided his fingers to the wolf’s soft white fur, letting the maester scratch his head. The wrinkled man chuckled as the pup licked at his hand. “Obedient for a direwolf.”

The steward gasped while Jon smiled. “So it is one after all?”

“You didn’t know?” Aemon asked with surprise.

“The one who left it was a wolf. Her eyes seemed pale, so I thought perhaps she was blind and left him to us or was abandoning him for his odd look.”

Aemon nodded. “Have you cared for it?”

“It’s slept at my side every night since our first and has eaten from my hand more than a few times.”

Aemon nodded, looking toward the steward but staring past the man’s left shoulder. “That will be all, you can leave us.” The steward seemed wary but shrugged and left the room while Jon set the wolf back on the floor. “Ghost, you said? How does he look?”

“He’s white furred and red eyed.”

“An albino,” Aemon said turning to make his way toward a table as Jon followed. “Like my great uncle.”

“Brynden Rivers,” said Jon.
Aemon smiled as he took a seat. “So you know who I am, Jon Snow?”

Jon glanced back at the door before he sat to Aemon’s right. “You are my great uncle.”

Aemon’s smile faded, his face darkening as his brow sank. There were hints of anger coloring his gentle face. “I will not stand for foolish japes, boy.”

“I speak the truth,” Jon said setting his satchel on the table. “Who else would come to you with a dragon egg and Dark Sister at his side?”

Aemon gasped. “What?”

Jon motioned to the door, “Ghost, guard.” Obediently the wolf went to stand by the door and act guard as he had a few times during their trip. Jon opened the satchel and removed the egg, making sure his body blocked it from the doorway as he set it on the table.

Aemon reached out, running his fingers across it as he let out a trembling breath. “It’s colors?”

“Red, with golden flecks and black whorls.”

Aemon’s lips stretched into a somber smile. “The Butterwell egg.”

“Butterwell?” asked Jon, looking to the egg. “From the second Blackfyre rebellion?”

“There was a saying of my uncle. How many eyes does Lord Bloodraven have? A thousand eyes, and one.” Turning his clouded gaze onto the egg he explained, “It would seem those eyes knew of what was to come and had a hand in secreting the egg away. Though I thought it lost to Summerhall or time.”

“So the sword and egg are both from him,” Jon said with a laugh.

“Are you certain it’s her?” Aemon held the egg out for Jon to take, letting him put it back into his bag before taking out Dark Sister. He felt the hilt and snickered, handing it back. “How did you come across these? Why do you think yourself my kin? Has Eddard Stark laid with some forgotten cousin?”

“It was his sister laid with a dragon,” Jon said after he set the sword away and looked to Aemon. The old maester gasped, looking toward Jon. “You’re Rhaegar’s son?”

“So I’m told,” said Jon. “I was told my uncle claimed me as his bastard to spare my murder at the hands of Robert. I was told Rhaegar wed Lyanna Stark before taking her south where I was born and was given the name Jon Snow to hide my true name.”

“And what is that?” Aemon asked quietly, his face full of tender emotion.

“Aegon Targaryen.”

Aemon’s smile grew. “Another Egg.”

“So it would seem,” Jon snickered. “I imagine that might have been different if not for the death of my siblings.”

Aemon chuckled softly. “Perhaps, though I fear Rhaegar had his obsessive moments. We wrote to one another by raven. He seemed to believe his child would be the prince that was promised. He thought the boy needed to be named Aegon, his sisters named for the conqueror’s sister wives.”
Perhaps he hoped to make certain his belief came true and begged your mother, or you were named in honor of you stolen brother or one of the many great Aegons before you."

“Did he ever speak to you of my mother?”

“Not specifically,” Aemon said with a frown. “He once mentioned he had fallen for a girl despite being married. He spoke of his wife being frail, unable to give him a third child. He was afraid the dragon wouldn’t have three heads. Perhaps he took your mother as bride to give the dragon three heads twice over, with him and his wives as well as their children.”

“And now I’m all that’s left of them,” Jon said somberly.

Aemon raised his hands. “May I?”

“Of course.” Jon took the man’s hands and guided them to his face.

“Your coloring?”

“Dark hair and eyes, like my mother. Enough to keep me alive despite squiring to the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard in King’s Landing.”

Aemon nodded. “Is that so? Why not Winterfell?”

“I was raised in Winterfell, and though I loved Lord Stark’s children as siblings, his wife saw me as a stain on their family, so I left to find my own way in hopes of gaining some honor back for them.”

Aemon brushed his fingers across Jon’s nose, smiling sadly. “You’ve his nose, his chin as I remember it. Even his hair hung similar. It may be a blessing you’ve taken your mother’s coloring if you can learn from Ser Barristan while beneath the usurper’s nose.”

“It’s kept me alive,” Jon said with a hollow laugh, “but… I grew up thinking myself a bastard. Fearing I was a stain upon my family, and now I’ve learned my father’s family is dead. All but you and my aunt and uncle somewhere in Essos.”

Aemon smiled. “You’ve heard of them? They live?”

“I was only told they live in Essos,” said Jon. “Viserys and Daenerys.”

“And you came to see me instead of them?” asked Aemon, taking his hands from Jon.

“They have each other,” said Jon, “but you were alone.”

Aemon smiled to the boy. “And now I am not. Thank you, Egg.”

Jon smiled. “Please, in front of others—”

“Jon.” Aemon nodded. “If you have the sword and egg, then do you plan to reveal yourself?”

Jon frowned, Aemon looking concerned hearing his sigh. “I fear in time I must.”

“Why?” asked Aemon, “Is your hair turning blond with age?”

“No, but there is a blond prince waiting to take the throne upon his father’s death,” said Jon. “A blond prince who is cruel and petulant, who tortures animals and torments his own siblings.”
Aemon frowned. “Perhaps it is not the Targaryens who sow the seed of madness, but the throne.”

“More like his parents,” Jon said with a scoff. “He has his mother’s vanity and greed with his father’s recklessness. If anyone but him gains attention he takes it as some covetous infraction, if anyone questions him he takes it as defiance, he makes threats and uses his place as prince as a shield.”

“To usurp a usurper is no easy task,” noted Aemon.

“But one that can be done in time.”

Maester Aemon thought for a moment. “A dragon might help.”

Jon blinked, sitting back in his chair. “You think it possible to hatch the egg? I thought it nothing more than a stone now.”

“Have you ever held a dragon’s egg you knew to hatch?” Aemon asked, unable to see Jon shake his head but assuming as much. “Who is to say such a feat impossible if done properly?”

“How is it done?” asked Jon.

Aemon frowned. “Who knows? The last dragon lived and died before my time. The last in Westeros, at least.”

“You think there are others elsewhere?”

“We know so little,” said Aemon. “Though my chained brothers may think themselves knowing, to assume so is a fool’s folly. The world is grand and cast in shadow yet.”

“How can I go about hatching it then?”

“I cannot say, as I have not hatched one. I know only the tales of babes in their cribs waking to find dragons beside them. What lay within the egg may be long dead, or it could be stirring still, waiting for it’s rider to rouse it from its slumber. Perhaps it is simply waiting for you to stop being an egg.”

“Me?”

“You are a boy still, aren’t you?”

“Near fifteen,” he admitted.

“Yet an Egg,” said Aemon. “If you seek the challenge the realm that cast us aside then whether as Jon Snow or Aegon Targaryen you cannot be an Egg. You are much younger than my brother when he took the throne, but I will share the counsel I gave him before we parted for the last time. He was a man grown with sons of his own yet in some ways still a boy. Egg had an innocence to him, a sweetness we all loved. Kill the boy within you, I told him the day I took ship for the Wall. It takes a man to rule. An Aegon, not an Egg. Kill the boy and let the man be born.

“You are less than half the age that Egg was, and your burden will be even crueler, born from war and strife. Reclaiming what has been stolen from you will be no easy task when so many have bloated in peace and have been turned against us. They remember only Aerys the Mad, Aegon the Unworthy and Maegor the Cruel while forgetting Jaehaerys the Wise, Daeron the Good and even my brother Aegon the Unlikely. You will find little joy in your rise, but I sense you have the strength in you to do the things that must be done. Kill the boy, Jon Snow. Winter is almost upon
us. Kill the boy and let the man be born.”

Jon thought on his words, sat in silence for a moment as he looked to the bag housing his egg and sword. “If I hatch the egg, I can’t keep it in King’s Landing.”

Aemon frowned. “Not once it begins to grow. Not if you mean to keep it secret.”

“Could I ask you to care for it?”

At that Aemon smiled. “You mean to leave the egg with me?”

“No,” said Jon. “The dragon. Once it hatches I could send it to you on the Wall. If I can’t keep it with me, why not let it foster with another dragon?”

It was odd how despite being blind, Aemon looked at him for a moment. “I will tell them I’ve grown fond of Eddard Stark’s bastard,” he said suddenly, “that your interest in the Wall and our history has endeared you to me. The boy they think you, Jon Snow, is he the type kind enough to placate an old man at the edge of the world?”

Jon smiled. “I think he could be. I’ve taken to reading on history, so who better to speak of it than one who lived in the time of the old kings. Though Robert may damn you as dragon blood you are still a man who lived a long life. We could speak through history, through details of the order I’d always wanted to join before heading south, or other mundane tales.”

“So it’s as your uncle said. You sought to join us before you went to be a knight?”

“I did,” said Jon. “I thought it the best I could hope for.”

“Could you not be master-of-arms at Winterfell?”

“Lady Stark saw me a stain upon their house, upon her honor. I would not stay there even if I did not know the truth. I would have come here to spare them the slight of my birth since I’ve little doubt she would want me gone now that Eddard Stark likely rides for King’s Landing to act as Hand to the King.”

A hint of anger came to Aemon’s face again as he shook his head. “I am sorry I did not know. To speak true I have had my vows tested three times, the hardest was hearing of our house’s fall during the usurper’s war. If I had known of you, I fear I may have failed the test.”

Jon reached to hold the man’s hand in hopes that it would convey his smile. “Then I am glad. I fear our talk wouldn’t be as interesting if you lacked a head.”

Aemon laughed at that, squeezing Jon’s hand and patting the back of it. “I shall look into your aunt and uncle, and I will find a way to speak to you and share anything I find of the egg, I promise this to you.”

“Thank you, uncle.” He noted Aemon’s smile grow as his clouded eyes glistened. “Are you the only maester here?”

“I’m afraid so,” the old man nodded, blinking the tears from his eyes.

“I’ll speak to the king himself if I must to have him write to the Citadel and send another here to aide you.”

“You have his ear?”
“He thinks my squiring to Ser Barristan Selmy a favor done to Lord Stark,” said Jon. “His wife, Cersei, has made the staff of the Red Keep ignore me while his eldest son, Joffrey finds amusement in belittling me, but the king shows me favor every so often. He’s asked after me a time or two, and I’ve earned him coin from bets placed on my matches in the yard.”

Aemon smiled at that. “A warrior, hm?”

Jon thought for a moment and nodded. “I’ve spent years learning and sparring with Ser Barristan Selmy, Ser Jaime Lannister and Ser Loras Tyrell, even Ser Domeric Bolton.”

Aemon’s brow furrowed. “Barristan the Bold, The Kingslayer, a Tyrell and a Bolton?”

Jon nodded before remembering he couldn’t see. “Yes, I know many look down on Jaime but I’ve found him not entirely unhonorable, though perhaps only because I thought my bastardry stained me much like his slaying of Aerys. And his skill had helped me grow near as sharp, or so I hope.”

After a moment of thought Aemon asked, “What of the others?”

“Loras and Dom? They are friends. I know many tell tales of the Boltons, but Dom is a true knight. He and my friend Samwell Tarly who joined me on the ride here are the only ones who know what I’ve told you and seen the egg and sword apart from Ser Barristan, Lord Stark and Benjen.”

“Ser Barristan knows?” Aemon laughed. “Then it seems you already have your first kingsguard, and likely two others if the Tarly you speak of is a knight as well.”

“He isn’t,” said Jon. “He’s more like to be a maester. Though a Tarly, he prefers to read and hunt books rather than beasts.”

“I see,” Aemon nodded, “though when I said others I meant the others in the royal family. You spoke of the usurper king, his queen and his crown prince, but not the others.”

“Oh, they are nothing like their parents,” said Jon. “Or at least if they are they have only the best of their qualities. Tommen is a tenderhearted but tries his best, especially when it comes to reading, which he shares with his sister and their uncle Tyrion. Myrcella has her mother’s beauty but given to a true lady in the making. She’s one of the few to stand up to Joffrey, even his parents don’t question him or ignore him but she doesn’t hesitate to answer him. She’s intelligent too, not like some ladies who are all courtesy and beauty, she has those but has a sharp mind which she seems more like to have inherited from her uncles since the king and queen lack it.”

Aemon smiled as he listened to the boy, hearing how his tone revealed the fondness he surely showed on his face. “You care for the princess, I see.”

Jon glanced at him for a moment, thinking of denying it, but then sat up. “In a way. She was… She’s nice to me. She has been since I first met her, and while most of the other servants at the Red Keep have turned away from me her kindness grew. I think she is fond of me, I am near sure of it and my friends tease me about it near constantly, but I thought myself a bastard. I fear I may have wanted what I thought I could not have. Part of me surely saw her as an achievement to grasp, something to earn in an effort to prove myself. It was why I entered a tourney months ago as a mystery knight.”

“Did you?”

“I unhorsed my first opponent but was unhorsed in my second by Jaime Lannister and made to squire him for a month as ransom after removing my helmet for all to see.”
“And if you had won?”

“I planned to crown the princess, toss most of the coin to the peasants and use the rest to buy my friends a meal and drinks.”

“You wouldn’t have revealed yourself?”

“To what end?” Jon shrugged. “It would only draw the ire of the queen and prince if they knew I had crowned Myrcella. Of my companions I am the only one still a squire, and not much younger than them. I wanted to ride and win to know that I was as good as they are.”

“And when you take the throne?” asked Aemon. “What happens to the once prince and princess?”

Jon frowned. “I don’t know. If it all happens without bloodshed I thought I could send the king and crown prince here and let Tommen take Storm’s End, or give that to Stannis or Renly and have Tommen fostered before taking another keep. As for Myrcella I… don’t know.”

Aemon chuckled. “I am glad you’ve been so honest with me, Egg. You are a poor liar.”

“I’ve gotten better,” he said with a laugh.

“King’s Landing has a way of teaching you.”

“In truth I don’t know, but only because I don’t know what will happen. If it comes to war Robert will likely die and I will make sure I kill Joffrey, but she may hate me for that. Even if it were a bloodless exchange I fear she may hate me, but if she didn’t I’d prefer to keep her close, if only because of whatever loyalty she may bring from the Stormlands and Westerlands.”

“If only for that,” Aemon said with a knowing smile. “It seems at least your hope for the throne is no thoughtless desire.”

“There is little desire,” said Jon. “I’ve stood in the Great Hall and watched the king for hours. I’ve followed him for entire days. I’ve seen what it does to him and fear I may fail as well, but I hope that even if I did I would choose better people than the council he has. Half of them are mummers and charlatans playing at some grand game.”

“They play the game of thrones,” Aemon spoke grimly. “Now you’ve joined them in it.”

Jon sighed, sitting back in his chair. “I plan to be here for a few days and hope we could speak more.”

“Have you figured out a way to do so without drawing suspicion?” asked Aemon.

“I’ve told the Lord Commander I’ve come in hopes of asking for aid from the king on behalf of the Night’s Watch. I mentioned specifically I want to know as much as I could, and surely the maester could help me learn the history of the watch.”

“I could send books as well,” said Aemon. “To pair with our letters should the need arise. One you could return with someone you trust to guide your dragon back North. Though I beg you be careful going forward. Your life may rely on your patience. Hopefully the ice of your mother’s family will quell any fire that may push you to act too soon.”

Jon nodded, looking from the white wolf stood at the door. “Ghost, to me.” The pup rose and walked over to him, Jon reaching out to rub his head. “I’ll do what I can, but I imagine a dragon woken is difficult to put to sleep again.”
First Pledge

Chapter Summary

Jon leaves Castle Black and rides south.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon enjoyed his time at Castle Black for the most part. Occasionally he’d take to the yard and help some of the men, though found no one of a par with any of his companions, bar Sam who used that time to train with his bow. The rest of their time was spent eating, sleeping, in the library, touring the castle or meeting with Aemon or Jeor or both.

It was short, but when they made to leave Jon exchanged a firm hug with Aemon in his quarters before leaving for the yard. Aemon came to watch Jon and his companions mount their horses, giving the boy a nod before Jon turned and left Castle Black.

They were on the road heading south when they came across Benjen and Tyrion with other recruits bound for the Wall. The smile Jon wore upon seeing them fell away when he saw not only was Benjen clearly uneased, but so was Tyrion. His confusion broke when he heard that Bran had fallen and been left in a coma.

“How?” Jon asked, shaken as he looked between the men.

“As far as anyone knows,” Tyrion said carefully, “he fell.”

Jon looked to him and saw the doubt in his eyes. He suspected someone had pushed Bran. Why? Who? His mind quickly settled on Joffrey.

They watched his jaw set and his hands snap into a fist, his eyes darkening as they looked do the ground. “I should have been there.”

Tyrion frowned. “And what would that have changed? You wouldn’t have been guarding the boy every moment of every day. You can’t know or assume your presence would have changed anything.” Seeing the boy shake his head, unable to say Tyrion was wrong, the dwarf put on a smile. “Hopefully your journey was successful? I heard you went to the Wall.”

Jon nodded. “It was. I told them I’d try to speak to my father and the king about sending men to the Wall.”

“Ah, yes, surely many a man will be willing to give up their lives for a chance to live amongst rapers and thieves.”

“If their king commanded it they might,” Jon said full of doubt.

“The Wall has served its purpose keeping out wildings for thousands of years. Would more men change that?”

“And they slip through all the time,” Jon noted. “What if wildlings aren’t the only thing the Wall
“Keep out?”

Tyrion laughed. “You fear grumpkins and snarks sneaking past the Wall and swarming Winterfell?”

“The world is grand and cast in shadow,” said Jon, “for all we know there are Others and ice dragons and giants beyond the Wall waiting to bring it down and claim us all. Unless we go beyond it who can say?” At that Jon looked to Benjen, sparking Tyrion and the others to do the same.

“Don’t look at me. I tend to worry about wildlings more than Old Nan’s tales.”

“I’m sure people worried more about bandits than dragons,” Jon said crossing his arms, “but when Aegon came they felt a fool.”

Tyrion furrowed his brow and snickered. “You expect us to be facing dragons soon?”

“We know they lived, yet because there are none here people assume they’ve all died, but can anyone say for certain that’s true? That there aren’t dragons in the west waiting to fly here?” Jon looked to Tyrion. “We can’t know what we don’t know of the world, so who is to say there aren’t giants roaming the deep north or a pack of ice dragons waiting for a long winter to fly south?”

Tyrion laughed. “The Wall really got to you, hasn’t it.”

“I spent much time with the maester reading in his library,” Jon said, laying seeds for later. “He’s even spoken of writing to me.”

When they made to leave, Jon said farewell to Tyrion before Benjen took him aside to a private goodbye that became a brief talk. “I heard you took a piece of two,” he said carefully, “have you decided if you’ll take the rest?”

“In time. I can’t let Joffrey take the throne. I’d rather die running him through and let Tommen take it if not for Cersei.”

After a moment he nodded. “You’d be good, I know it.”

“I’ve talked to Aemon, he knows.”

“I figured.”

Jon glanced to where Tyrion was speaking with Sam before looking to Benjen. “I may be sending a dragon your way soon.”

Benjen’s eyes widened. “You can’t be serious.”

“I’m going to try, but if I do I can’t keep it in the Red Keep, so I’ll try to send it North to let Aemon care for it.”

Benjen frowned. “Write to me. Let me know what you can.”

“I already planned to write to Aemon,” Jon said with a smile, “he’ll tell you the code we’ve worked out for anything important. Otherwise I’ll write when I can.” Meeting the man’s eyes Jon near pleaded, “Be safe, uncle.”

Benjen smiled in relief. “I feared you’d hate me and Ned.”
Jon shook his head. “It seemed you didn’t know, and he did what he could I suppose.”

“He tried.”

“As will I.”

Jon gave his uncle a hug before mounting and departing, giving a wave to Benjen and Tyrion before moving quickly south.

It was still days before they reached Winterfell.

“Open the gate!” Men called out as Robb made his way to the yard with Rickon, Theon, Grey Wind, Shaggydog and Bran’s pup behind him.

His somber smile grew to confusion when he saw Jon, Dom and Sam ride through the gates of Winterfell with a white direwolf pup at their side. The moment they saw each other the direwolves ran to the white wolf, who sank down before meeting them and sniffing wildly at one another.

Jon dismounted and Robb nodded to the wolf. “Where did you find that one?”

“On our way to the Wall,” Jon said walking up to wrap his brother in a quick embrace. “I’m so sorry I wasn’t here.”

“You’ve heard?” Robb asked stepping back with a hint of surprise.

“We ran into Benjen and Tyrion on the way here.” Jon noted Robb’s face darken when he said Tyrion’s name. “They said Bran fell and even if he woke he would never walk.”

Robb frowned. “Aye, but there’s more.”

“Someone sent a catspaw after Bran,” Theon revealed. “Would have cut his throat with a valyrian steel dagger if not for his lady mother and the direwolf that tore out the assassin’s throat.”

Sam gasped while Domeric’s brow furrowed in a flicker of anger and Jon stepped back shaking his head. Had Joffrey sent an assassin to finish the job?

After taking a breath to calm himself, Jon looked to Robb. “Is there any sign he was pushed?”

That made Robb and Theon exchange glances, though Robb smirked. “Luwin says it’s conjecture, but the day he fell everyone had gone hunting except for Jaime Lannister.”

Jon’s brow rose, shaking his head. “Why would he push Bran?”

“Why would he be in the First Keep?” asked Robb. “Bran might have overheard something he wasn’t meant to and so he pushed him.”

Jon shook his head. “What of Joffrey?”

Robb’s brow knit before tilting his head in thought. “No, he was on the hunt, I think.”

Jon wanted to say it couldn’t be Jaime, but remembered Aemon’s words of the world being cast in shadow. It would be folly to deny something he couldn’t know, to assume that because Jaime was someone he looked up to as a swordsman that he would not have reason to do something so cruel. After all, who would think that Jon was a trueborn Targaryen preparing to go to war for the throne?

To Jon’s relief Catelyn had left, apparently traveling to King’s Landing with Rodrik Cassel to
inform Ned of the attempt on Bran’s life. However Jon couldn’t stay in Winterfell long, he had to travel south.

“Are you sure you won’t stay?” Robb asked when Jon found him in the lord’s solar that night, his now that Ned was bound for King’s Landing.

“I have things I need to do,” Jon said walking to sit in a chair across from Robb. “Things I may need your help with, brother.”

Robb arched his brow. “What things are those?”

Jon sighed, glancing at the satchel he’d brought with him.”Robb I need you to make me a promise first.”

“What kind of promise?”

“What I tell you can’t be shared, not for a long time. You can’t tell anyone, not Theon, not your mother, no one.”

Robb saw Jon needed this from him so nodded. “Okay. I promise.”

“Do you swear?”

“To the old gods and the new,” Robb assured.

Sitting up Jon asked, “You know I went to visit the Wall, right?”

“I’d heard,” Robb said with a smirk. “Also heard you bought Arya a sword.”

“She told you? Good.”

“I gave her a few tips but it’s not like I could take her out to the yard and train her with mother around.” Robb chuckled, “Though I guess she’s lucky you’ll be in King’s Landing once mother returns.”

“She is lucky,” Jon said deciding to just dive into it. “She’ll be able to use her sword while mine will have to be hidden away.”

Robb looked confused. “What are you talking about? Why would you have to hide a sword?”

Jon reached over to open his bag and remove the valyrian steel sword as he said, “Because they might wonder why I have Dark Sister.”

Robb’s eyes grew as big as saucers as he leapt from his seat. “How did you get that? Is that why you went to the Wall?”

Jon shrugged. “In a sense.”

“What does that mean?”

“I went to meet Aemon Targaryen. My uncle.”

Robb stared at him for a moment before sinking back into his chair. “What?”

“Before I left father told me of my mother,” he said carefully, “and of my true father.”
Robb gaped at him before shaking his head. “No.”

“You’re still my brother, Robb,” Jon said quickly, “and we share Stark blood, only mine is from my mother’s side.”

Robb’s brow furrowed. “Aunt Lyanna. That means… Rhaegar?”

“Benjen saw them wed on the Isle of Faces,” said Jon. “He never stole her. Father brought me back and claimed me a bastard to save me from the fate as my half-siblings.”

Robb sat forward, his head in his hands. “Are you sure of this?”

“They told me themselves. I can show you the letters Rhaegar wrote to her if I must. I hoped to read them all before leaving.”

After a minute he sat up. “Jon, if you’re his son and they were married…”

“I’m going to make a claim,” Jon said to Robb’s shock. “I can’t let Joffrey take the throne. It’s why I need your help.” He glanced at Dark Sister laid across his lap and smirked. “I can’t well charge into King’s Landing with this and try to kill him and the king. I need to work slowly and gather allies where I can. With Father in King’s Landing you’re the Lord of Winterfell now, so I’d ask you to be the first to pledge for Aegon Targaryen, sixth of his name, and work at my side when I ride to war.”

Robb stared at Jon for a moment, his smile seeming so odd on the face of a man who just declared intent to commit treason. After a moment Robb scoffed and shook his head. “You have to ask? I’m always on your side, brother.”

Jon let out a relieved breath. “Good. Maybe you can help me keep another secret in time.”

“Another?” Robb asked watching him put the sword away and remove a large scarlet egg. “Is that a dragon’s egg?”

“It is.” Jon nodded, setting it on his lap. “Aemon has offered to look into everything he can of dragons in hopes of me hatching it. But when I do I can’t well keep it in King’s Landing without being found out, so if I can I’ll send it to the Wall so Aemon can try raising it until I can claim it. But that’s assuming I can figure out what to do with it. Until then it’ll be hidden away with Dark Sister.”

“What should I do then?”

“For now? Nothing.” Jon put the egg away. “We can’t rush this. We need to make sure we can win before doing anything. It’s why you can’t tell anyone. Dom and Sam know because I felt it wrong to lie when they came with me to the Wall, but other than them and Aemon you’re the first I’ve come to with this. I may not even tell Loras since Renly is his lord and could tell Robert. You’re the first I’ve asked for help, but it isn’t help now. It’s help in the future.

“I need you to act as if I’m still your bastard brother rather than your cousin. No one can know I’m not just Jon Snow, nor can they suspect a dragon lay among them. I’m going to work to be knighted and garner a name, try to gather what allies I can and see who may be willing to go against the crown. It will be slow, but it’s the only chance we have of doing this clean and smart.” Jon hoped it wasn’t to obvious he was repeating Domeric’s words there.

Robb nodded. “We need to be careful.”
“We can do this,” Jon said leaning forward. “Winter is coming, and when the snow falls and the white winds blow…”

Robb smirked finishing, “The lone wolf dies but the pack survives.”

They spent most of the evening discussing what to do going forward and what they intended to do. Robb wanted to tell Theon but respected Jon’s distrust of him and wariness to share such a secret with him, so agreed to keep it. Robb had expected the main reason for his mother’s exclusion would be her dislike of Jon, so was surprised to find it was due to her likely willingness to share the secret if it came between Robb’s life and giving up Jon as much as it was for her ties to Lysa Arryn.

“She’s unstable,” Jon told him. “She clung to her child near constantly in paranoia. I understand the boy is sickly and weak, but it was different, Robb. He is near six and still at his mother’s teat.”

“That’s near Bran’s age,” said Robb. “Twice Rickon.”

Jon nodded. “There is also her closeness to Littlefinger, the Master of Coin in the small council. I wouldn’t trust the man to clean my chamber pot without digging through it for something he could use against me.”

Rather than head to the room Robb gave him, Jon sneaked into the crypt once again and spent most of the night going through Rhaegar’s letters to his mother. It felt so invasive, but he wanted to have a chance to know the man, however little he could. From them he found his father was poetical at times and blunt at others, speaking of prophecy and yet speaking of their will. He seemed to adore Lyanna, and even spoke well of Elia, saying he feared for the life of her and his children imprisoned by his father.

There were also hints of what his mother had written him through his responses. Twice he spoke of Elia in response to Lyanna asking after her well being. Rhaegar promised he wore her favor every day, and Jon was shocked when Rhaegar referred to her as the Knight of the Laughing Tree, follow shortly thereafter by a bawdy comment about Lyanna that made Jon decide he would never let others read that particular letter.

By the time he finally went to bed he found himself wishing he could meet them, if only once. He would give up near everything he could think of for a chance to embrace his mother and hear her voice or to spar with his father and show him the man he would be. Jon had never hated Robert more than he had in that moment.

As far as he could tell Lyanna never loved him, yet he spewed such filth about his father and told the world Lyanna had been the love of his life, but never that he wasn’t the love of hers. Maybe Joffrey’s cruelty and vanity wasn’t all from Cersei after all.

They spent an extra day there to gather supplies for the trip south as well as to give Ghost a chance to play with his siblings. Though they considered them siblings much like Jon still considered the Stark children siblings, it was hard to imagine they would take so quickly to a direwolf if it weren’t their kin. Robb thought he might have overlooked him since Ghost was so quiet, saying he’d had a dream or two that they’d forgotten something there but thought it guilt over not finding another direwolf for Jon.

Jon sat at Bran’s bedside for a time, telling him of the Wall, even telling him that if he could he’d try to make sure Bran rode his dragon. He wouldn’t need legs to fly.

Gathering at the gate of Winterfell Jon hugged his brother one last time. Looking to Jon’s eyes
Robb wore a somber smile. “Take your time. I swear we will wait for you, brother, and so long as I live House Stark and the North stands with you.”

Jon nodded, patting his shoulder before they separated and he left Winterfell for King’s Landing once again as a new man with a house pledged to his secret cause. He passed through the Ruby Ford as his fifteenth nameday came and went, assuming it was even his true nameday and not another lie. They’d rode to Brindlewood before they saw the king’s procession and Jon felt a mix of relief and fear at what lay ahead.

Chapter End Notes

As far as I know Benjen wouldn’t know about the Others existing, at least not enough to consider them seriously. Even the Night’s Watch likely didn’t, likely just assuming Craster was letting his boys die to weed out rivals to his harem. So Benjen doesn’t care about the Others yet.

With Robb’s pledge I thought it interesting to see a large conspiracy starting at a ground level with Jon’s plot. There are so many others that are theorized but we’re only seeing what is potentially the middle and end of them, while here we see the beginning.
Returning Procession

Chapter Summary

Jon’s group rejoins the procession and return to King’s Landing. Benjen goes ranging beyond the Wall.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The bitter chill of the royal procession felt harsher than the cold of the Wall when Jon and his friends rejoined them. At first he’d assumed it was simply the shadow of Bran’s fall, but soon he found out that had simply been the start. Since then Joffrey had been bitten and Lady slain as punishment for Nymeria’s attack, Arya’s wolf having been released into the wild by Arya in secret.

“Did you stop in Winterfell?” Ned asked him once they were alone.

“I have. I saw Bran, but father there’s…” He sighed. “There was a catspaw who came for him after you left. He injured Lady Stark and nearly Bran before his wolf killed the man.”

Ned’s face fell and he asked for details so Jon gave what he could, telling him that Lady Stark had left to tell him with the dagger. He hadn’t met them along the way, but they had sped south, not stopping at inns in their rush to meet the procession.

“How is he?” Ned asked with a frown.

“He looked as if he were sleeping,” Jon said sat across from him. “He may as well been dreaming as I spoke to him.”

“And Robb and Rickon?”

“They were well,” said Jon. “Rickon is unsettled by all the changes, but I imagine once Lady Stark returns he will settle again. Robb seems a lord and was concerned for us all.”

Ned nodded, then a moment later looked to Jon. “How was your journey?”

“Enlightening,” Jon said carefully. “I’ve decided to go slowly, but in time I have to try.”

Ned frowned, sitting back in his chair. “Must you?”

“Would you rather Joffrey given the power of the Iron Throne?”

Ned looked down and thought on all that had happened and all he’d learned. Sansa had been bereft when he executed Lady and sent her North to spare her becoming a pelt for the queen.

Most disturbing was it had been a sign that Jon was right about the prince’s character being so tainted. Catelyn had told him of Sansa’s concerns whenever Jon wrote to her with the harsh truths of King’s Landing. She told him of the things she said to ease Sansa’s worry, and found himself hoping Jon was wrong. He didn’t like to think Robert’s son could be so cruel, and yet he had no doubt the boy had lied, seeming to inherit the cruelty of his mother which drove her to want an
innocent death. If Arya was right then how bad could things have gotten if Nymeria had not been there? What else of Jon’s warnings was true? Ned felt himself shiver at the thought of such a boy growing to a man with the power of the crown.

Worst of all had been the moment he overheard Sansa in her tent sniffling after an argument with Arya, telling herself, “If it’s true then I can change him.” In that moment he wished Catelyn had never assured Sansa as she had, let her be safe away from him. He wanted to go and break the betrothal in that moment, but knew he couldn’t without it being a grave insult, one the queen and her cruel prince would use again him no doubt.

“I ask you let your northern blood prevail,” Ned said meeting his eyes. “Be ice and let it cool you. If we must go about this then let it be done slowly and carefully. I do not want to fight another war, so let us find another way than taking it to the field.”

“I agree,” Jon nodded. “We have time and King’s Landing has many a shadow to hide us if we try to weave our way.”

“Who all knows?”

“I told Dom and Sam once we left, before I found Ghost.”

Ned nodded, having expected that. He’d been relieved to see Jon had a direwolf, and though he feared the queens wroth upon seeing it, Robert had helped him keep it.

“The matter was settled,” Robert said firmly. “The boy and his wolf were in the north.”

“So we must suffer another beast in our midst?” Cersei asked looking to the direwolf at Jon’s side as she clutched Joffrey’s shoulder.

“If it please your grace,” Jon said carefully, “I promise Ghost will stay at someone’s side while in the city and will be kept in quarters at night or let beyond the walls of the city to hunt hares and the like.”

Robert wore a relieved smile, thankful to have some obedience for once. “Good lad.”

“You said wolves are no pets-”

“If the beast goes mad and attacks someone then slit its throat,” Robert cut in, his teeth grit, annoyed with the queen’s whinging, “but if I see a drop of blood red upon the wolf’s fur before then you’ll be going against your king and I’ll have the boy flog whoever does it until their back is raw!”

Sansa had wept upon seeing the direwolf, but while Jon spoke with Ned he had Sam with the direwolf and Sansa, who had taken to her tent to pet and groom him.

“I doubt you’ve met anyone else on your way North,” said Ned. “But at the Wall?”

“The Maester and I spoke,” Jon said with a nod. “He was friendly and even said he’d write to me in King’s Landing to feed a young mind with such an interest in history.”

“You sure that’s smart?”

“Aemon is an old man who lived a long life,” said Jon. “Who better than an old maester to give another view on history? Plus he’s offered to look into the egg.”
Ned sat up. “Does he think it more than a rock?”

“He told me we can’t know what we don’t know, and I don’t know.” Jon shrugged lightly. “I also told Robb.”


“Because he’s Lord of Winterfell while you’re away and I want Winterfell to be my first ally. He’s my brother, he deserves to know and had reason to. Though he’s promised and sworn to keep it to himself, sharing it not even with Lady Stark or Theon.”

Ned sighed, rubbing his brow. “What have you told him to do?”

“Nothing,” Jon said to Ned’s relief. “I just wanted him to know what will come. Let me be Jon Snow, let me earn some recognition and find who I can trust as allies. Find who else sees the kingdom crumbling beneath a stag as a poisoned lion waits in its shadow.”

Seeing his desire for patience loosened the knot in Ned’s stomach. “Good. Will you tell Ser Loras as well?”

“I don’t think I should,” Jon said, his regret apparent, “Dom and Sam agreed. He is too close to Renly, the risk too great.”

“You would lie to your friend?” Ned asked with a flicker of surprise.

“If I must,” said Jon, “only until we know for certain what will become of Renly and the Tyrells.”

“How long do you plan to wait?”

“However long I must to make sure it’s a fight I can win. Let the people bloat under Robert while I gather and when the crown comes to pass I will take it.” Jon leaned forward. “But for now I start by asking the Hand of the King and preferably King Robert himself to help the realm.”

In Robert’s tent he scoffed as Jon told him of his journey to the Wall with Ned at his side. “That old dragon still lives?”

“If you call it living, your grace,” Jon said pitifully. “He is frail and alone and blind, needing a steward to write and read to him. I even read for him while I was there since I was imposing upon his time and intruding his library and maester chambers.”

Robert shook his head. “You’re too kind.”

“And it is that kindness that asks your grace to send word to the Citadel and have them send another to take his place when age finally claims him. Let them come now so the castle isn’t left without a maester, else I fear we risk losing contact with them should all the men capable of reading and writing and handling a rookery die.”

“And what’s to kill them up there? A chill? Shall we send them more furs?”

“Wildings, your grace,” said Ned. “They sneak past the wall frequently enough. Most take to raiding and either escape back beyond the wall or die against northern warriors, but if they should take to raiding the keeps from the south, with enough men then they could open the gates and let their kind through, let them reave until the North is red with blood.”

Robert groaned, downing the rest of his wine and holding it out for a refill. “And what should I do?
Damn good men to freeze their balls off alongside men from our cells?” He sighed, taking a drink. “Write to the Citadel, Ned, have them send someone to get rid of the dying dragon.”

Jon was glad for even that much, bowing his head to Robert in thanks before leaving the tent. His nervousness left him feeling foolish, as if he’d feared Robert somehow being able to know the truth now that Jon did.

The rest of their ride passed without incident. Jon hoped to introduce Myrcella to Ghost but knew better than to try with Cersei and Joffrey around. Even Jaime kept his distance from Jon, sticking to the wheelhouse.

Jon, Dom and Sam rode into the city with the Starks and while Ned was called to a small council meeting they escorted Arya and Sansa to their chambers. Once they’d seen the Starks off and made their way toward their own quarters they found Loras waiting for them.

The men exchanged brief hugs before Loras looked them over with a smirk. “Seems the North wasn’t too bad on you.” Looking to Sam he asked, “Was it as dreary as I imagine?”

Sam chuckled and shook his head. “No, it had it’s own beauty separate from the Reach.”

“And here I thought you’d all be so bored and cold you’d return with smiles,” Loras said with a laugh.

“I hope you weren’t too bored without us,” Jon teased, hoping to deflect or end the discussion before letting his guilt build. “Though I’m sure you were busy serving your lord.”

Loras shot Jon a playful glare. “At least I have one to serve.”

Jon chuckled. “I simply have higher standards.”

Loras laughed, nodding as he looked them over. “I missed you all.”

“And we missed you,” Jon said with a nod, “but I’m afraid we traveled further north than the others.” He answered Loras’s questioning gaze saying, “I talked these two into a trip to the Wall to see the Night’s Watch and Castle Black at least once.”

Loras shook his head, looking pitifully upon Domeric and Sam. “You poor fools.”

“It wasn’t too bad,” Domeric assured.

“It was incredible,” said Sam. “It stretched across the horizon and glittered in the sunlight.”

That made Loras arch his brow. “Perhaps I’ll need to see it someday.”

“If you do I pray you don’t need to ride your horse ragged to catch up with a royal procession,” said Jon. “It’s left me aching for bed if only to lay there and be still.”

“I pity the girl who takes you to bed if all you do is lay there,” Loras said with a grin, patting Jon’s shoulder.

They departed for their rooms and Jon made his way to his. It wasn’t long after that Domeric knocked on his door and entered, setting aside his bag and harp to help Jon lift his mattress.

Cersei forcing the staff to ignore Jon would be a boon now that Jon was the only one who handled his bed, the sheets left for him to change himself. It left him little worry someone would stumble upon the spot where they cut open his mattress and stuck Dark Sister and his egg within. After
filling it with extra innards Domeric had pilfered to keep a soft shape, they carefully stitched it closed so there was little hint of the tear’s existence. He’d never once hidden anything beneath it, keeping his letters elsewhere, places others surely knew he used well enough to not bother checking the mattress year on.

He knew how and where he laid, so that night he found the bed no less comfortable, though when he woke nearly every day after he found his hand resting atop the same spot over the egg that lay beside him every night.

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

When he set out to range beyond the Wall, Benjen stopped to pray before a weirwood, asking the Gods to look over Jon and help him and his friends where he could not.

He’d trekked through the Haunted Forest countless times, but looking for lost brothers was never easy. Most of the time they never found them, their corpses surely dragged away by the beasts of the forest. Still, they had to look.

This search quickly became one he disliked as they found themselves hounded near constantly by an unkindness of ravens once they entered the forest. Thankfully their squawking quieted enough for them to sleep when needed. Othor complained of the shit down his cloak he noticed while taking a piss one night, but any complaints Benjen had ended when he first heard the raven squawk, “Fire.”

His brow furrowed as he sat against a trunk and looked up to the ravens sat on the branches above them. “Fire. Fire. Fire.”

Benjen rose to his feet and looked around them expecting to see smoke, but all he saw was the black trees against the night barely lit by the small fire they’d built. Then he saw the blue star between the trees, glowing as it grew and he soon realized it wasn’t a star. It was an eye.

“Make a torch,” he told the men, who looked to him oddly but did as he ordered.

Before Jafer Flowers even handed it to him, Benjen’s brow furrowed, raising the torch in hopes the light would weave through the trees, reflecting off the snow enough to give him a better view of the young man he recognized. “Waymar?”

The others all rose to join Benjen in looking to their lost brother, but soon found themselves staring at eight more sets of bright blue eyes. Benjen felt his heart skip a beat as he thought back on the stories he’d heard. “Wights.”

At once the men drew their swords while Benjen stared at a shard of steel sticking through Waymar’s non glowing eye. A raven landed on his shoulder briefly, startling him as he looked to it and it squawked. “Fire. Fire. Fire.”

Benjen looked from the raven which flew off his shoulder to join the dozens suddenly settling upon the trees around them. “Make more torches!” He called out, the men snapping off branches to ignite them.

The wights drew closer and the rangers found themselves facing shambling men with rotting, blackened flesh. Benjen led the charge forward, slashing at Waymar’s hand, cleaving two fingers yet the undead man grabbed his arm with the remaining eight. With a grunt Benjen turned and knocked Waymar aside, thrusting his sword through the brother’s stomach when he approached again, yet found Waymar simply stepped forward to try and grab Benjen’s throat.
Ripping the sword free, Benjen slammed the torch in his left hand into the wight’s arm, letting the flames catch and ignite his clothes as Benjen backed away. A glance to the others revealed them battling off their own wights, more seeming to have come from the sides now being attacked by the unkindness of ravens pecking at their rotted flesh.

“Brother!” The shout cut through the mix of grunts, yells and squawks, drawing Benjen’s gaze to a figure behind them, muffled head to heels in mottled blacks and greys and sat atop an elk. He extended a hand to Benjen, seeming to ignore the others being overwhelmed by the blue eyed men. “Even the brave retreat.”

Benjen turned back, wanting to help his brothers but saw Othor being strangled by a wight while another drove an axe into Jafer’s neck. All around him his brothers were dying, so Benjen turned and took the rider’s hand, noting it was cold and black.

As the elk sped away, Benjen turned back and saw his brothers laying in the snow rise with blue eyes as all turned to watch Benjen and his savior flee toward the Wall.

Chapter End Notes

I’m sure there’s a few things here that will make people bristle and screech but oh well. Some will surely whine that hiding the sword and egg in the mattress is unrealistic or whatever. Likely the same will be said of Jon keeping Ghost, but I’m keeping them more as setup for potential later stuff and having Ghost as a bonding point with Sansa.

For Ben I’m keeping him around to have him hold a pseudo Jon-like role at the Wall for now, but I’ll probably throw in glimpses there to show what’s going on every so often.
Arms and Armor

Chapter Summary

After their return to King’s Landing, Jon meets with Barristan, Ned and Myrcella.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Morning came and Jon made his way to White Sword Tower to help Barristan prepare for his duties now they were back in King’s Landing. When he found the squire ready to help him, Barristan laughed.

“It feels odd,” Barristan said watching Jon secure Barristan’s cuirass over his enameled scale shirt.

“The last Egg was a squire for his Lord Commander before he took the throne,” Jon noted with a smile. Aemon had told him a tale or two of Aegon the Unlikely, along with tales of near every other Aegon, whether they took the throne or might have.

“That he was,” Barristan nodded. “Does that mean you intend to try?”

“I do,” said Jon, walking over to get more of his armor. Once he returned he met Barristan’s eyes. “Joffrey would ruin the realm. I have to try, else it is as much my fault as every man who doesn’t run him through.”

Barristan tilted his head at that. “Even I?”

Jon had secured one pauldron when he stepped back in thought. After a moment he nodded, moving to the other side. “Yes. Even you. I know it’s your duty to protect the king, but you are still a man, are you not? No matter what you tell yourself, your vows don’t make you a sword and shield made flesh, you are still a man living, and a knight. Even if it is against your duty, surely your honor demands you protect others. It may be one thing to ignore the suffering of one or few, but to ignore the suffering of hundreds or thousands or millions is too great. I can’t do that.”

Barristan stared at Jon, surprised. “You think me dishonorable?”

Jon smiled sadly. “I think you a devoted kingsguard. You’ve served many a king, but how many have been of your choice? How many have been good? How many have been worthy of you?”

Watching Jon carefully secure his armor, Barristan answered, “Two.”

“You were made kingsguard by Jaehaerys the second, weren’t you?”

“I was,” Barristan nodded. “Though his reign short he was a capable man who did what others had failed to due by ending the Blackfyre threat.”

“But two?” Jon laughed. “Was Aerys truly good before he went mad?”

“He showed promise at first, claimed he wanted to be the greatest king in the history of the Seven Kingdoms,” said Barristan, rising once his armor was set. Watching Jon go to retrieve his sword
and buckler, he continued, “but I spoke of Aegon the sixth.”

Jon turned back to him with a solemn smile, giving him a thankful nod before walking back with the sword belt. “He’s not king yet, and not for some time most likely.”

“How will it come to pass?”

“I don’t know,” Jon admitted. “Slowly is the only thing I’m certain of. My only ally is the Starks, who may bring others but I’m not certain. Domeric might bring the Boltons, but he’s only the heir to the Dreadfort still and his father already dislikes his being here with me. I’ll need to find more, convince them I’m worthy without them suspecting beforehand.”

Tightening the belt around his waist, Barristan looked to Jon. “Then I think you should ride in the Hand’s tourney.”

Jon’s brow rose. “There’s another tourney already?”

“The king spoke of it. I don’t know the details, but it will happen soon. If you want to garner some recognition, then you should ride again.”

Jon thought on it for a moment. “Is that smart?”

“Show them your skill,” said Barristan. “If you fall then show them you can get back up. Let them see you are a warrior, and if you gain some glory let those who come to seek it find out you are a good man as well.”

Later that day he was called the Tower of the Hand to sup with the Starks, but found himself being led to the private audience chamber where Ned waited at a desk. He’d been here a time or two before to meet with Jon Arryn, though often the old Hand would speak with him in the yard or in his quarters.

“How was your first day at King’s Landing?” Jon asked as he sat across from Ned once the steward left.

“It went as well as could be expected,” Ned offered. “Last night Arya and Sansa had an argument.”

“At least that’s normal,” Jon said with a laugh.

Ned frowned. “When I went to speak with Arya she seemed ready to sneak out holding a sword I didn’t know she had. A sword I imagine you gifted her.” Since he seemed to not know for sure, meaning Arya hadn’t said as much, Jon shook his head. Ned sighed, sitting back. “It had a maker’s mark I was unfamiliar with. I’d know Mikken’s mark, and it’s a sword fine enough that it was surely expensive. How much did it cost?”

Jon’s jaw shifted slightly before answering, “Less than Arya’s happiness is worth.”

Ned nodded solemnly. “I agree. That’s why I’ve looked into hiring her an instructor.” He snickered at Jon’s surprise. “That’s a bravos blade, right? It seems the former First Sword of Braavos is in King’s Landing. Hopefully I can get him to agree to meeting her.”

Jon was relieved as he sat up nodding. “If he does he’ll definitely want to train her. With how much she wants to learn no doubt she would be his favorite student.”

Ned chuckled, sitting forward as he met Jon’s gaze. “No more secrets, Jon. If we’re going to make it through this then we need to work together. We need to share our plans.”
Jon tilted his head slightly. “Do you think I have some kind of plan for Arya?”

“I don’t know.” Ned frowned at the brief shock on Jon’s face, hurt by his father’s doubt. “You’re not as you were when I last knew you. You’re a man now, or near enough that you’re making difficult decisions no boy should make. I can’t know if you have some plan for her. For all I know you planned to include her as you have Robb.”

Jon looked down, nodding when he raised his head to look at Ned. “I do want to tell her.”

“She’s a child, Jon.”

“Just because I want to do something doesn’t mean I do it,” Jon said pointedly. “I want to tell her but I won’t.” He wanted to though. While Sansa might find the distance a relief, if only for his no longer being a stain upon their family, Arya may well be angry at him for lying and push him away. At least that was the image his fear concocted.

“Good.”

“I’m riding in your tourney.”

Ned sat up. “What?”

“I’m going to ride as myself,” said Jon.

Ned shook his head. “Why?”

“To win,” Jon laughed. His smile faded as he explained, “To garner some favor and hopefully earn an ally or two. Or at least get a sense of people.”

Ned nodded, holding his chin as he asked with a smirk. “You truly think you’ll win?”

Jon shrugged. “I plan to try.”

The next day Barristan was assigned to Myrcella in the afternoon, which meant Jon would be there as well. When they arrived at the library to take over for Ser Boros, Myrcella heard them and looked up to wave at Jon. Once she finished whatever she was reading, Jon noticed she placed it back in the section dedicated to books around the Dance of the Dragons.

Once she made her way to them she gave the kingsguard and squire a curtsy. “Ser Barristan, Ser Jon.”

Jon sighed, but smiled. “Good afternoon, Princess.”

“I heard you have a direwolf,” Myrcella said solemnly. “Is it true father let you keep it?”

“His grace was gracious,” Jon said, pride swelling within him as Myrcella giggled.

“Can I meet it?” asked Myrcella.

Jon glanced to Barristan, who seemed wary. “Are you certain princess?”

“I know Joffrey lied,” Myrcella said with a frown. “I played with all of them at Winterfell and they were all gentle. Well, Shaggy was a bit rough but not enough to hurt.”

Jon looked to her and nodded. “He is in my quarters. I don’t think it would be proper to be seen there.”
“Then I’ll meet him tonight,” she said firmly, “I will dress discreetly and make my way to the godswood. Ser Barristan can escort me himself, while you happen to be visiting with your direwolf.”

“Ghost.”

Myrcella blinked. “What?” For a moment she wondered if he was saying he was afraid of ghost, or that she should be.

“His name is Ghost.”

That night she dressed in a simple, darker red dress and riding cloak with a hood she used to hide her golden locks. Ser Barristan had taken watch at the corner in case there was need of him, waiting for her door to open and follow her form a distance so as not to draw too much attention to her, yet still act as her guard.

Within the godswood Myrcella found the great oaken heart tree where Jon stood with a white wolf at his side. He was letting the wolf playfully tug his hand back and forth. She stood still for a moment, just watching him play with the wolf, smiling until suddenly he bared his teeth and growled at the wolf, drawing a playful growl from Ghost and a giggle from Myrcella. At that his head snapped toward her, his eyes widening slightly in embarrassment.

“Princess,” he said taking his hand from Ghost’s maw, causing the wolf to silently sit beside him. As she approached he motioned to the wolf. “This is Ghost.”

She smiled at the wolf who stared at her with crimson eyes. “He’s beautiful.”

“Quiet too.”

She held her hand out, letting Ghost sniff it before he licked her fingers and let her run them through his fur. Myrcella sat to rub his head and laugh as Ghost looked content. After a moment she looked to Jon and found him staring at her with a grim expression that made her pout. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” he assured with a shake of his head. “Just thinking.”

“What will be your epithet this time?” Myrcella asked taking her hand from Ghost.

“Bastard of Winterfell most likely,” Jon said with a shrug. “I’ll ride as myself.”

“Good,” she beamed.

“I can’t well do this before the court, but I would ask a favor from the one I intend to crown as queen of love and beauty.”

Myrcella’s eyes widened, placing a hand over her heart. “Truly?”

Jon nodded. “It’s what I intended last time, though this time I imagine I’ll claim the reward rather than throw it all to the crowd as I planned to hide my identity.”

Myrcella felt her chest tighten even more at the revelation. Her lips curved as she thought on what
she could give him. “If I were to give you my favor, I’d want more than it’s return.”

“Such as?”

“A song.”

Jon shook his head. “I can’t reward your favor by torturing you.”

Myrcella raised her chin. “Then let your arm be bare.”

His brow furrowed, shaking his head at her impetuous tone. “Fine. If I win and crown you queen of love and beauty and can return your favor to you, I will play a song on the harp.”

“And sing?” she asked, her arched brow and hopeful tone breaking her indignant facade.

“I’ve only just begun to learn the harp,” he said pitifully. “Don’t make me embarrass myself even more.”

With a relenting sigh she nodded. “I can find you a favor.”

“My arm thanks you for it’s protection.”

He watched her leave after petting Ghost again and made his way to his room laughing, wondering why exactly he’d done that. Yet as he sat in bed that night with his hand over the spot where his egg laid, it felt right. He could win and crown her and figure out a way to make it seem born from gratitude rather than adoration.

While Arya began her training a day later it would be another before Loras was free to join them in the yard again. It wasn’t long before crowds began to gather again whenever the young knights gathered to spar. Arya had taken to doing her odd practices given to her by Syrio while watching them, doing as Jon told her and observing their matches to try and imagine herself fighting them. She would need to know how to battle them since bravos swords weren’t common in Westeros. More than once Syrio had even taken to joining her following a session to observe them after she’d mentioned it to him, wanting to see what other influences his student had.

Eventually Ned stopped by one afternoon to observe them, and Jon pushed himself even harder, feeling the aches and sweat worth it when he saw a hint of pride in Ned’s smile before he left. Another afternoon Sansa came to join them with Jeyne Poole, both looking shocked as they watched Domeric, Jon and Loras all fighting one another, either in pairs against one or all three against each other. Seeing their confusion Sam explained to them, “They do it to try and be ready for the chaos of a true battle. It was Ser Domeric’s idea.”

Sansa frowned as she watched Domeric parry Jon’s sword so it blocked Loras’s strike, leaving both open for him to duck and slash across both their armored stomachs with his blunted blade. Though he wore a cold expression as he did so, she was surprised to see them all back away laughing. They’d all worn such focus she’d wondered if they weren’t trying to truly harm one another. Instead they often went over moves or strategies they’d attempted, pointing out faults with each other as well as where they excelled.

They were a month out from the tourney when Barristan looked to Jon one afternoon after their shift with Tommen ended. “Have you ordered your armor yet?”

“No,” said Jon. “I still have my helmet from last time and enough to get another set of spare armor from Mott’s shop.”
Barristan came to a stop briefly before waving Jon along. “Come. I can’t have my squire being ill prepared again.”

Jon furrowed his brow, following the kingsguard along their new course toward Flea Bottom. “What?”

“I think you’ve more than earned your sword and armor by now.” Making sure they couldn’t be overheard, Barristan added with a smile, “If I can’t act as your guard yet, let me at least arm and armor my king.”

Chapter End Notes

Jon calling out Barry is something I went back and worth on but kept as it shows a difference in mindset that I think interesting. He doesn’t think badly of Barristan or any of the kingsguard really, understanding why they don’t act, he just thinks they should. Being around Jaime and plotting a betrayal had taken away some of the onus he feels required of a kingsguard.

The only two results that came up in A Search of Ice and Fire for buckler were the lord, but I think it a more realistic option than the kingsguard carrying around shields all day. To war and the like sure, but carrying a shield around is a hassle where a buckler is simple and easy and near as good while still being better than an empty hand or even a dagger most times. I’m even reluctant to have them wear full plate sets, but I figure they’d still wear the cuirass and some arm pieces.

I contemplated having Ned ask Jon about the council but I think at this point he’s sure in his own gauging of them and wouldn’t feel the need to ask him much about the capital. That will change once he begins looking into Jon Arryn’s death.
Preparing To Ride

Chapter Summary

Weeks pass leading to the Hand’s tourney.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon spent what felt like hours with Tobho Mott measuring him and taking the details of all Jon wanted. It wasn’t an especially elaborate harness, just blackened plate with dark buckles and straps as well as a dark gray haubrek. Even his shield would be black iron with the reversed Stark heraldry leaving him with a white wolf. It was his sword that required specifics, Barristan realizing he wanted it to be akin to the slender bladed Dark Sister only with a simpler hilt, claiming he wanted it to be quick and able to slip through gaps others might not.

It seemed those among the Stark guard who learned of Jon’s patronage through Arya’s Needle had taken to visiting Tobho Mott, as did Samwell, who had a mail shirt, gorget and helm made to fit him.

Over the weeks leading to the tourney Jon spent most of his time training. His days were spent waking early to help Barristan prepare for the day and don his armor, often being dismissed to train on his own or with Domeric and Loras, Sam acting as a squire of sorts to Dom and Jon since he wouldn’t be riding. Some days he spent astride a horse until dusk came. Jaime didn’t come across him in the yard at night, leaving Jon on his own. Other nights, after a day that left him sore, he opted to relax with a book or take another lesson from Domeric.

Ghost spent most of his days at the side of Jon or in the Tower of the Hand where his sisters were free to play with him as they liked. Things had eased somewhat as news arrived that Bran had woken and named his direwolf Summer.

The first time Jon returned to claim Ghost, sore from riding and holding a lance all day, he found Arya shaking her head while Sansa greeted him with a bright smile, her hand resting on Ghost’s head. The direwolf looked guilty at the scarf wrapped around his neck and tied in a perfect bow.

“Oh you poor thing,” Jon said shaking his head as Ghost stared at him silently.

“He loved it,” Sansa said with a snort, turning to rub his head. “He was a perfect gentleman the entire time.”

“Are you sure we can’t take him out sometimes?” Arya asked with a pout.

“You can come with me when I take him to the Godswood or out of the city sometimes, but otherwise we need to stay with him.” Jon reached down to rub Ghost’s chin. “I can’t risk them trying something if he’s alone.”

Of course, that didn’t mean it never happened. Though he often spent his nights in Jon’s room laying beside the bed, there were nights where Ghost never met Jon at the gate after letting him out to hunt. Twice he’d been gone for multiple days, then in the middle of the night Jon woke to
scratching at his door and opened it to have Ghost stride past him and lay in his normal spot as if he hadn’t been gone.

Yet Jon found himself worrying less about where he was during his missed nights. It seemed at times as if his normal dreams were replaced by ones where he wandered the woods as Ghost. During his longer stays from Jon he found the dreams of Ghost’s return tense as he silently weaved through the shadows of buildings to go unnoticed by guards.

A few times Jon had left Ghost at the Tower of the Hand for the night, though the first was after Jon arrived early and made his way to Sansa’s chamber. Inside he found Sansa sat beside Ghost, brushing his fur as tears trickled from her eyes.

“Sansa?” He asked in a whisper, making her gasp and look up, wiping her eyes.

“Jon,” she shook her head. “It’s impolite to barge into a lady’s room!”

“Your door was open,” he noted.

“Was it?” She blinked, sniffing and shaking her head.

Jon took a knee in front of Sansa. “What’s happened?”

“It’s nothing.”

“Sansa,” Jon sighed. “Please, let me be your brother for once.”

Sansa stared at him, frowning at the pledging edge to his voice. “I miss Lady.”

Jon nodded, sitting cross legged in front of her with Ghost between them. “I’m sorry you had to suffer that, Sansa. I know Ghost is no replacement.”

“He’s nice though,” she assured, smiling at the direwolf as she rubbed behind his ear.

“You can have him as much as you want,” Jon said leaning his head slightly to meet her eyes.

“I can?” She asked with a hesitant smile.

“I trust no one else to keep better care of him,” Jon said with a smile, “and at least with you I know he’ll be as clean as he is safe.”

Sansa giggled. Her smile fell as she looked from Ghost to Jon. “You weren’t lying, were you?”

“About what?”

With a frown she seemed to hesitate before saying, “The city smells.”

Her brokenhearted expression made Jon put on a solemn smile. “Have you been to Myrcella’s garden? It smells good there, and there are some other places as well. I can show you some of the better ones if you want.”

Sansa looked to him with a nod. “I’d like that.”

After that he’d escorted Sansa and Jeyne Poole around the court every so often, showing them little spots he’d found during his time there. The first time they ran into Loras he noticed Sansa perk up slightly while Jeyne looked nervous seeing him approach and greet Jon as a friend.
“Ser Loras, this is my sister, Sansa Stark and Jeyne Poole, whose father serves as steward to the Hand.”

“It is an honor, ladies,” Loras said bowing to the curtsying girls. “I would offer to escort you but you already have such a capable guardian.”

Sansa looked to Jon and he held back a laugh as he turned to Loras. “Please, another hand could never hurt. I doubt I know every spot of the keep’s beauty.”

“You’ve already found two of it’s greatest,” Loras said with a nod to the girl, who giggled as he looked to Jon. “If I’m not imposing?” When Jon shook his head Lorad held his arm out for Sansa to take. “Lady Sansa?”

Knowing the truth of Loras made it sting less seeing the hint of jealousy in Jeyne’s eye as she took Jon’s arm while Sansa walked with Loras. He considered finding a way to tell her it was a fruitless endeavor, but decided to leave it be. Though he hoped to find a way to free Sansa from her betrothal before it was consummated he didn’t think it necessary to take away her dream of a knight as decent as Loras.

A time or two Jon had come upon Arya during her lessons with Syrio, though more often he came across her doing some odd task given to her by him as some kind of indirect lesson. She tried to have Jon spar with her, but since he didn’t want to disturb her learning he turned her down. Of course the next day when he went to drop off Ghost with them she threw him one of her training swords and attacked him, forcing a quick match. He arrived late to meet the others, leaving Arya grinning at having fought him.

It was after another sudden sparring match with her that Jon handed the swords back and ruffled her hair. “We’ll need to get you something to hide this.”


“I thought you might like to help Sam squire for me and Dom while we ride in the tourney.”

Her eyes widened with a gasp. “I can?”

“If you can lift the lances and we can find you some cloths to wear so you don’t draw too much attention, why not?” She hugged him for near a minute before releasing him.

It was days before the tourney was to start that Jon made his way to Tobho Mott’s shop with Sam and found Ned leaving to mount his horse. Spotting Jon, Ned greeted him with a nod toward the shop. “This is smith you’ve been giving your patronage?” When Jon nodded, he glanced to the shop before turning back with a smile. “I’ll see you tonight at supper.”

With a nod Jon watched them leave before he dismounted and left Sam to watch their horses. After trying everything on with some help from one of the shop’s staff, Jon carried it all to his horse and secured it to the saddle to bring the bag back to his room.

When he made his way to the Tower of the Hand that night he was once again brought to meet with Ned before they ate. Ned welcomed him with a smile as Jon took a seat across from him. “Jon, how often did you speak to Lord Arryn?”

“Not too often,” Jon said surprised by the question. “He would check on how I was doing and we would talk sometimes but he was often busy with other things.”

“Did he ever speak to you about anything that seemed odd?” Ned asked carefully.
Jon furrowed his brow and shook his head. “Not that I can think of. We mostly talked about my stay here, you and your time in the Vale, he even told me a few stories about himself.”

“Nothing about Robert or his bastards?”

Jon frowned and shook his head. “No. The most he said about Robert was during stories about you and bits of the war.”

“Did he ever say anything like ‘the seed is strong’?” When Jon shook his head Ned sighed and sat back in his chair. “What of Stannis? Do you have any idea why he would leave before our arrival?”

Jon felt a fool for shaking his head so much. “I spoke to him even less. I tend to stay away from the council if I have a choice.”

Ned arched his brow. “Why?”

“If you had a choice would you want to speak with any of them?” Jon asked with a laugh. “A mummer, a charlatan, a procurer, who wouldn’t want to befriend them?”

“What do you mean a procurer, charlatan and mummer?”

“You surely know Littlefinger owns brothels. I’ve seen him enough at court to know he views everyone as a woman to make spread her legs for him. There’s no doubt he’s one of the few having his people look through my letters.”

“You think he reads your letters?”

“Him, Varys, Cersei and others as well.”

Ned shook his head. “Why do you think that?”

“I’ve hidden letters I received over the last few years and left little things as test. Placed them in certain positions that changed when I checked them again, strands of hair left taught that were broken, things like that. I don’t think they sneak in themselves, but I’ve little doubt they have their creatures poking through my floorboards.”

Ned frowned, sitting back in thought. “If he’s the procurer then who are the others? I take it Varys is the mummer? That makes Pycelle the Charlatan?”

Jon nodded. “He acts a bumbling, tired fool but I’ve seen him pretend to sleep yet clearly listening to what was being said.”

“What of the others? Stannis and Renly?”

“They’re surely better than the others, but I don’t know either much. Stannis always seemed to himself in a way, set in his ways, focused on what he saw as justice even at the expense of others. You’ve heard the story of Ser Davos?”

“Who passed the siege of Storm’s End?”

“He survived because of Davos smuggling him food, yet felt he still had to take Davos’ fingers for it. I can understand the mentality, but Dom pointed out that it just as much speaks to his sense of justice as it tells others the next time Stannis needs help it’s better to keep your fingers and let him die.”

Ned arched his brow, surprised at the view, though not too surprised it came from a Bolton. “And
Renly? I know you’re friends with his knight.”

“I’m friends with Loras, not Renly,” said Jon. “He’s been around and seems nice enough, but we don’t talk much. He’s funny in a way Stannis never was, like Robert can be sometimes. Loras says he doesn’t care much for books, and always has a quip about someone in court. I’ve started to get the sense he looks down on most people, but I couldn’t say for sure.”

“Are there none on the council you view favorably?” asked Ned.

Jon thought for a moment. “Ser Barristan isn’t allowed in the small council meetings and you’re Hand, so no.”

Ned smiled at his inclusion, relieved to hear his fears being dispelled again. “So I should be wary of them all it seems.”

“You should be wary of everyone. The city watch, the kingsguard, they are all in someone’s pocket, whether it’s Littlefinger’s, Varys’ or the queen’s.” Jon looked grim as he sat up. “It’s easier to assume everyone knows what you do and anything you say that can be overheard has been.”

“It seems I can’t trust anyone.”

“You can trust me,” Jon offered, earning a smile from Ned. “Other than that I can’t say. The longer you stay the more I’d be wary of your guard.” Seeing Ned’s incredulous look he chuckled. “They’re men, father.” He watched Ned sink back and run fingers through his hair, his brow knit in thought. “Why are asking about this anyway?”

Ned looked to him and after a moment sat up. “I’m looking into Jon Arryn’s death. In Winterfell we received a letter from his wife saying the Lannisters had killed him.”

Tilting his head Jon said, “They weren’t here near a sennight before he died.”

“What?” Ned asked wide eyed.

“After losing to him in the last tourney I was squired to Jaime, so I joined them as they left the city to visit Casterly Rock with Lord Tywin. We were gone days before Dom rode to tell us of Lord Arryn’s death.”

Ned sank back in his chair, shocked and shaken. “Why would she lie?”

“Because she’s mad,” Jon said simply. He answered Ned’s curious look, “She is paranoid and clung to her child as though everyone were trying to steal him from her. He suckled at her teat still last I saw him, and she did little to hide her distaste for everyone but her son and Littlefinger.”

Ned’s brow sank as he asked, “Littlefinger?”

Jon nodded. “He was her only friend. She was already speaking to him during feasts and gatherings, more so than her own husband at times. It was clear she felt some affection to him. Half the time she looked like the ladies who look upon Loras whenever she saw Littlefinger.”

Ned’s jaw shifted at the thought of that worm cuckolding the man who raised him. “Did he seem to return her affection?”

“Not that I saw, at least not as much as her. He was friendly and kind, whispering with her, but I saw no stolen kisses or the like. Though he may well be too clever for such an obvious display, I doubt she is.”
Ned tapped his desk in thought before whispering to himself, “It was him who suggested Tyrion, wasn’t it?”

“What of Tyrion?” Jon asked overhearing the name.

Looking to him, Ned decided best to be open. “On the day we returned Lord Baelish brought me to one of his brothels where he’d hidden away Catelyn. She showed me the dagger and told us how he’d lost it in a bet with Tyrion during the tourney you participated in.”

Jon shook his head. “That’s a lie. He lost it to Robert.”

Ned tilted his head. “How do you know?”

“Loras told us Renly wished he’d taken the bet since Robert won a valyrian steel dagger from him. Renly always bets on Loras, much as Tyrion’s said he always bets on Jaime.”

Ned’s face darkened with a mix of anger and confusion. “What is he playing at with all these lies?”

“I couldn’t say.” Jon sighed. “I only know that it’s clear he looks at this as a game. Aemon told me they play the game of thrones, no doubt he sees himself as a player. His lies may be how he plays.”

Ned nodded, rising to walk around the table as Jon took the cue to stand. “Thank you, Jon. You’ve given me much to think on.”

“Of course, father. If you need help you need only ask. Even Dom and Sam would likely help if asked.”

Ned squeezed his shoulder. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

The day before the tourney Jon gave himself a break from training and joined Barristan on his shifts again. They found Jaime speaking with Myrcella outside of her garden when she perked up and waved to them, making her uncle turn to them, his smile fading when he saw Jon.

“Lord Commander. Snow.” He motioned to his the princess with a smirk. “The princess is yours.”

Jon found the flicker of humor in his eyes as he said that and looked to Jon a relief. He’d yet to find Jon and spar with him since he left Winterfell, so Jon worried it was guilt that kept him away. Part of him also worried he’d grown tired of Jon’s company during their time on the kingsroad. Either way he didn’t like that Jaime had seemed to keep his distance.

Once he departed, Myrcella went around watering her plants and checking them all before making her way back to her chambers. She invited them inside and hurried over to her wardrobe where she revealed a crimson kerchief with emerald embroidery and flecks of yellow. Holding it out for Jon she smiled as Barristan looked away in an attempt to give them some semblance of privacy.

“Would my knight wear my favor?” She looked it over when he nodded. “I decided to avoid Baratheon colors so they wouldn’t know it is mine.”

Jon watched her wrap it around his right bicep to make sure it was long enough. Seeing only the red and green, Jon chuckled. “If nothing else I could say it’s a favor from Sam and House Tarly.”

Myrcella giggled. “Only if you must.” Looking it over she stepped back and smiled. “Are you prepared?”

“As prepared as I can be. Ser Barristan helped me purchase a fine set of armor and arms and Ser
Domeric helped me find a well bred courser to replace the aging horse gifted to me when I left Winterfell.

“Do you think you’ll do well?” Myrcella asked, concern evident in her voice.

“I’ve no doubt Jon will surprise us all,” Barristan said with a proud smile. “I’m sure your favor will be well worn.”

“Good,” Myrcella said with a smirk as she looked to Jon, “I expect a song to bring tears to the eyes of all who hear it.”

Barristan arched his brow as Jon sighed. “The only one to hear it would be you, princess.”

“And if I demanded otherwise?” she asked playfully.

“Then you would be breaking out deal,” Jon challenged.

“Nothing of our deal spoke to who would hear it, only that you would play a song for me on your harp.”

“If all that’s required is for me to play it, then perhaps you need not hear it either.”

Myrcella gasped. “No!”

Jon chuckled. “I’ll play where I can, but not before a gathered crowd.”

Looking to her favor she said, “I hope you win.”

Jon saw her smile and nodded. “So do I.”

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I have Jon going for black armor cause it's Targaryen, but also so he can say if he ever decides to go to the Night's Watch he’ll at least have the armor to bring with him.

I actually hadn’t intended for Jon to go so hard against Littlefinger, but realized he could call bullshit on a lot of his lies. I know Jon being with Lannisters doesn't negate them since Arryn was poisoned, it'll be brought up later.

I had a small scene of Benjen returning to Castle Black but it was literally just him coming back and saying wights killed them while the others were kind of doubtful, so I cut it and figure I’ll just go over things there later whenever the story goes that way.
Tourney Beginnings

Chapter Summary

The Hand’s tourney begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The day of the tourney arrived with all the splendor expected as the city gathered to watch the participants make their way to the tourney grounds. Sansa was sat with Jeyne Poole and Septa Mordane watching the knights pass. Jeyne declared her willingness to wed Lord Beric Dondarrion the moment she saw him before they spotted Jon riding with Ser Domeric and Ser Loras.

Loras looked no less resplendent than her had during the last tourney, the flowers adorning his horse and cloak exchanged for fresh cut sapphire forget-me-nots. Domeric still wore his imposing armor slit like human muscles with a blood red mane of streams along the ridge of his helmet, laying atop the pink cloak spotted with droplets of blood.

Jon wore a plate set not unlike the others, a full harness covering his arms and legs while sat atop his black courser. The steed wore a gray caparison edged in white with white, red eyed wolves on either side of it. He’d forgone his crow helm for a close helmet with a visor that seemed to come to a point, leaving a narrow slit for his eyes. On his waist was a black belt holding a small dagger with a white hilt and a slender sword with a gray hilt, straight cross guard and circular pommel.

Though the plate, mail, cloak and even bits of leather, buckles and straps were all blackened he wore a gray gambeson beneath it and had streamers of gray, white and red silk coming off his helm. The only other strike of color was the band of red wrapped around his right bicep which made the girls giggle as they tried to guess who would give him a favor from houses with red and green colors, assuming it was even someone of note and not some maid.

Sansa found herself feeling a hint of pride as she saw him riding beside Domeric and Loras without seeming out of place. He’d been so kind to her since their return to King’s Landing, taking her for walks, introducing her to his friends, letting her play with Ghost as much as she needed. He could have teased her for crying but he never did, consoling her or doing something to take her mind off her sorrows. She’d feared leaving Robb at Winterfell would leave her alone, yet she’d found another brother here.

Arriving at the ground, they were soon joined by Loras’ pages while Sam looked over Arya who had hair hidden beneath an arming cap while wearing breeches and a tunic with an unmarked surcoat. Jon removed his sword and handed it to her, letting her place it with his lance along with his cloak.

While they all began their preparations, Jon noted another squire looking his way as Arya helped him make sure his armor was still secure after stretching and jumping in it. He’d removed his helm, leaving little doubt of who he was. Once he’d seen to his own lord’s needs, the boy seemed to gather his nerves and approach him.

“Pardon, my lord,” the boy said quietly, making Arya turn to look at him skeptically while Sam
and Dom looked on from the side. The boy was younger than Jon, near Myrcella’s age he guessed. His hair was pale blond and his eyes such dark blue they seemed purple as he smiled shyly at Jon. “You’re Jon Snow? The baseborn son of Eddard Stark?”

Arya bristled at that while Jon nodded. “I am. You are?”

The boy’s smile grew as he stood straighter. “I’m Edric Dayne… Lord of Starfall and squire to Lord Beric Dondarrrian. We share a bond as well, Ser Jon.”

“I’m no knight, Lord Dayne,” Jon said with a smile, Edric seeming uncomfortable when Jon called him Lord. “Though what do you mean we share a bond?”

“We are milk brothers.”

“Brothers?” Arya asked glancing between the two. “You’re from Dorne, how could you and Jon be blood?”

“Milk brothers,” Edric clarified. “Not blood. My lady mother had no milk when I was little, so Wylla had to nurse me.”

“Wylla?” Jon recognized the name from when he’d asked Eddard to speak more on what happened at the Tower of Joy. He was reluctant to say much, but told Jon that afterward he’d gone to Starfall to return Arthur Dayne’s sword Dawn and found a wet nurse there to help feed Jon. A wet nurse named Wylla.

“Your mother,” Edric said with a smile. “She’s served us for years and years. Since before I was born. Likely before you were born, I’d imagine.”

Arya gasped, looking to Jon, who as far as she knew had never heard of his mother. To her shock he shook his head and offered a kind smile. “Though I agree we are milk brothers, I’m afraid you have it wrong there. As I know it, Wylla was only my wet nurse for a time.”

Edric blinked in confusion. “Is that true? I’d heard she nursed you before Lord Stark took you to Winterfell.”

“Lord Stark told me much of the same, but said she wasn’t my mother.”

“Did he tell you who she is?” Arya asked with a smile, as if Edric weren’t there.

Jon frowned. “He told me she died.”

“Oh,” Arya deflated. “I’m sorry.”

Jon shook his head, “It’s fine.”

“I beg forgiveness as well, Ser-Uh, Lord Snow,” Edric frowned.

Jon shook his head. “It’s fine. Though I’m glad to meet another brother.”

Edric smiled at that. “I as well. I wish you luck in the tilt.”

“And you and your lord as well, Lord Dayne.”

“Ned,” Edric said after a moment of hesitation. “Most call me Ned.”

“Like my father,” Jon noted with a laugh.
Edric nodded. “I suppose so.”

“Then please, call me Jon as my brothers do, whether by blood or arms,” he said with a motion to Dom and Sam. “Perhaps we could take to the yard some day if your lord agrees to it.”

Edric had turned to give the others a nod when he turned to smile at Jon. “I’ll ask once the tourney is concluded.”

Once Edric returned to Lord Beric, Jon put on his helmet and mounted his horse while the tourney began. Jory Cassel was in the first round, defeating Horas of House Redwyne. Jon was disappointed he couldn’t ride against him after having noticed him making squealing noises at Sam earlier. To his relief he was instead paired against Ser Hobber Redwyne, his twin.

Taking his lance from Arya, he turned it slightly and kicked his heels into his courser, smiling beneath his helm both for the impending hit and the feel of the young steed’s speed compared to what he’d ridden before. He kept his eyes on Hobber as he drove his lance forward, straight for his heart, knocking him clear off his horse while the Redwyne’s lance splintered against the visage of Ghost upon Jon’s shield.

Jon considered rejecting Hobber’s horse and armor, saying it was as unworthy of ransom as he was unworthy of knighthood for his taunting of Sam, but instead he decided he would use the Redwyne knight’s ransom to buy Sam a sword.

He also found joy in seeing Loras defeat Meryn Trant of the kingsguard, who years on still sneered at Jon as if he were an insult. Domeric unhorsed one of the many Freys while Ser Jaime and the Clegane brothers won their opening matches. Even Lord Beric won his match, though by forfeit when the hedge knight he faced slew the horse beneath him, forcing him to switch saddles to his new mount, which he was knocked from by Thoros of Myr in his next tilt.

Ser Gregor’s second joust ended in death as his lance pierced the neck of Ser Hugh of the Vale, killing him. Domeric’s eyes narrowed as he watched Ser Gregor ride off while Sam gasped and snapped his eyes closed. Jon had leapt off his horse and wrapped an arm around Arya, turning her away from where the knight lay drowning in blood. She didn’t cry, but Jon felt her shiver slightly before meeting his eyes through his helmet and giving him a nod to say she was fine. In the stands he saw Jeyne weeping while Sansa kept her composure, much like Myrcella did frowning and looking away to console Tommen.

Once Ser Hugh’s body was taken away the lanes were cleared and Domeric went out to ride against Ser Barristan Selmy. The Flayed Knight matched the Lord Commander for a time before Domeric admitted defeat. Returning to the sides he told the others, “I’d rather forfeit the match than my arm if he hit it again.”

Loras defeated another kingsguard while Domeric tied off his horse and took to helping Sam and Arya prepare Jon for his next match. While Loras returned he glanced back to where Lord Renly Baratheon rode onto the field while the crowd cheered for him. Passing Jon he gave the squire a nod, turning his horse to watch his friend face his lord and lover.

Jon’s armor seemed drab compared to the brilliant forest green of Renly’s armor with a helm topped by magnificent golden antlers. Though not as tall or muscular as his brothers Renly had height on Jon, yet after their first exchange ended with both lances splintering, it was Renly who flew from his horse. He head hit the ground with a crack that made the crowd gasp, though he rose with a laugh holding the broken golden antler.

Loras let out a sigh of relief as he watched Renly toss the antler to Jon, likely as ransom for his
armor and horse, yet Jon looked it over and tossed it into the crowd. It was Renly who walked out into them to restore the peace as they took to fighting over the bit of gold. When Jon returned Loras gave him a nod, letting out a relieved sigh.

Barristan would ride against Jaime and lost again on the king’s decision, though Jon wondered if perhaps the queen had a hand in their exchanges always seeming to go to Jaime. He felt himself growing frustrated at the idea of her sat in her chair with her smug smile as she decided who won or loss.

That anger boiled his blood as he took up his lance and rode against Sandor Clegane, splintering lances against the larger man’s armor. He felt his arm ache as he took his third lance and made his way back to Arya and the others. Sam gasped when Jon snatched the lance from his hands and turned his horse in one movement, breaking into another charge as he leaned forward, his eyes piercing the narrow slit of his helm as he sat up slightly, thrusting his lance into Sandor’s chest at an angle which forced him to tumble to the side.

He forcefully threw the broken lance aside as he turned his horse, ready to ride back and get another before he spotted the Lannisters’ sworn shield laying in the mud and realized what he’d done. He glanced toward the royal booth where he saw Joffrey and Cersei shared sneers aimed at him while Robert wore a grin across his face while laughing. Tommen smiled and clapped while Myrcella gave her own polite clap, a sly smile taking her lips when she saw Jon glance her way.

Arya rushed out to pick up the broken bit of lance Jon left behind, clearing the lane for the next match while he noticed a few of the knights remaining giving him nods.

Loras rode out and gave a red rose to Sansa, claiming no victory half a beautiful as her, mesmerizing the girl before he claimed a victory from Robar Royce. Jon’s last match of the day was against Thoros of Myr, nearly unhorsing the man twice before Jon took his victory over the red priest rolling through the dirt.

Robert announced the last three jousts would happen the next day, with only Gregor, Jaime, Jon and Loras remaining.

Switching out his armor for a black doublet and gray jerkin Jon made his way to the feast where he found Samwell sat with Loras. The Knight of Flowers nodded to Jon as he made his way toward where Domeric sat with the men of the North. His good mood soured when he noticed Joffrey sat next to Sansa while taking his seat across from Dom.

“Ser Loras has a keen eye for beauty,” Joffrey told her after kissing her hand.

“He was too kind,” she demurred, keeping modest and calm. “Ser Loras is a true knight. Do you think he will win tomorrow, my lord?”

“No,” Joffrey said. “My uncle Jaime will take it, surely. And in a few years, when I am old enough to enter the list I shall do for them all.” Sansa bit back from saying Jon could win, watching Joffrey wave over a servant with a flagon of wine.

At his table Domeric looked to Jon with a sigh. “You rode well today.”

“Would you believe me if I said I’m jealous of you?” Jon asked with a smirk. When Dom gave him a questioning look he explained, “Part of me hoped to ride against Ser Barristan. Even if I lost against him, I hoped to measure myself against him.”

“And you may well measure yourself against the man who bested him,” Dom said with a nod
toward Jaime stood near the king and queen.

Jon nodded, glancing at Jaime, then to Ser Loras sat laughing with Sam before turning his gaze upon Ser Gregor. The massive man seemed a true mountain. Jon saw little hope of unhorsing the knight himself. He wondered if even Ser Loras or Jaime could. He’d seen Ser Barristan do it, but he was Barristan the Bold. He could take a lance to the Wall and it would buckle.

In that moment the Mountain’s eyes rose and met Jon’s, a sneer crossing the massive man’s face as he glared at Jon. Jon kept his gaze for a moment. He had heard tales of Gregor’s deeds during Robert’s Rebellion. Of his supposedly raping the woman who might have been a second mother to him and killing her along with his older half-brother, crushing his head while another murdered his half-sister. He had robbed Jon of family as much as Robert, Aerys or any other person responsible for their deaths. In that moment he decided that if he rode against the Mountain the next day he would put a lance through his throat and watch the man choke and drown in his own blood.

He had calmed by the time the next course arrived, though the quiet was interrupted when Dom sat up and motioned behind him. Jon turned and found Lord Beric Dondarrion with his red-gold hair brushed back and black satin cloak decorated with stars. Beside him was Edric Dayne and the tall, fat, smooth faced Thoros of Myr.

“I thought it easier for me to have Lord Beric pay you from what he owes me,” Thoros said with a smile.

“Whatever you think is fair… Ser Thoros?” Jon said uncertainly.

“I’m a red priest, Snow,” Thoros said with a laugh. “I don’t follow the knight or the other six.”

“And I follow the old gods,” Dom said with a shrug. “A knighthood still has its uses, doesn’t it?”

“You follow your gods, that is different from being one whose life is dedicated to them,” Thoros answered, moving to sit at the table while Beric and Edric followed suit.

“How old are you, Jon?” Beric asked with a smile.

“Fifteen.”

Thoros and Beric shared a look and a laugh while Edric smiled. Not only had someone so young bested his lord and a veteran like Thoros, giving Edric hope he may do the same in time, but it was his milk brother. The men shook their heads and went about negotiating their prices, ending with Jon getting a few coins from Beric while Thoros took the rest since Beric’s armor and horse were deemed of more value.

“I’d have given you the entire purse,” Thoros said looking to Jon as he tucked his own away, “but I still need to pay for wine every so often, though thankfully our king graciously provides swords for my melee.”

“It seems a waste of a blade,” Dom noted, thinking back on Thoros’ defeat by Yohn Royce at the tourney on Joffrey’s nameday after the wildfire on his sword went out, leaving the blade twisted and unusable.

“Seems a waste of wine,” Thoros said picking up their pitcher and pouring himself a cup.

“You rode well,” Beric said with a nod to Jon, “though I imagine it’s to be expected of one squired to Ser Barristan. I’d have liked to have ridden against you myself. If not for that damn fool slaying my steed I’m sure I could have taken it.”
Jon chuckled. “There is always the melee, my lord.”

“I fear another trick will claim that,” Beric said with a look to Thoros.

“It shall if the lord of light determines it must.”

Jon’s brow furrowed for a moment before looking to Thoros. “That’s a lord of fire, isn’t it?”

Thoros arched his brow, as did Dom, Beric and Edric. “R’hllor is the Lord of Light, the God of Flame and Shadow. Is he of interest to you?”

“As interesting as the seven, the drowned god and any others,” Jon offered with a shrug. “If I were interested in learning of him, but not necessarily following him, do you think I could speak to you?”

Dom looked confused while Thoros nodded with a smirk. “Fill my flask with wine and I will talk as much as asked.”

“I thought you men of the North followed the Old Gods?” Beric asked with a laugh.

“I do,” Jon nodded, “but what harm is there in learning of other people’s beliefs?”

Once the others left, Dom looked to Jon. “What was that about?”

Looking around to make sure no one would overhear, Jon turned to Dom with a smile. “A god of flames is fairly interesting. Perhaps in time I may seek to change my hilt to one of a golden flame.”

At that Dom chuckled, shaking his head. “I guess that could work in time, but they would know it’s steel.”

“At least if I decide to try I’ll have the option,” Jon said with a shrug. “Besides, why not learn of it? Perhaps my uncle and aunt are followers.”

Dom nodded. “Have you heard from them?”

“No,” Jon shook his head. “Even if I knew where they were I can’t exactly write to them here. Hopefully Aemon can find them and write something. Otherwise I’ll just have to wait.”

Jon glanced at the table where Myrcella helped her brother cut his meat, ignoring where her father was speaking loudly with his mother. Turning back to his plate Jon reached for the wine pitcher but Dom put a hand over it to stop him.

“Not this time,” he said with a laugh. “Not when you have a tourney to win.”

Jon groaned. “Fine. Then I’m going to rest and prepare.”

Dom watched Jon leave the hall giving Loras and Sam a nod. Glancing back over his shoulder he saw Gregor Clegane staring at a maid with a hungry grin while tearing into a chunk of meat that dribbled down his chin. Part of him wanted to go over and stick a dagger through the man’s eye, but decided to put his faith in Jon and Loras to survive no matter who faced him. They wouldn’t die as the knight of the Vale had. They would win, and in time it would be Jon sat at the high table with his blonde wife.
Why tell Edric Wylla isn’t his mom? Because it’s better to have her a mystery than have Edric telling people Wylla is his mom and letting them believe a lie. Right now Edric and Myrcella are the main reason I’m considering a time skip at some point in the future if I can figure out a decent point for it.

I originally had Jon shit on the Redwynes, but realized he wouldn’t put them down and risk turning away an important family when he’s looking for support. It'd be different if he was a mystery knight, but he might need them in the future. Plus I like the idea of the twins who bullied Sam paying for his weapon.

Jon versus Sandor is supposed to be another moment of his berserker strength showing as he’s pissed so takes Sandor’s hits and unhorses him without even noticing. I figure Sandor gave him his ransom off screen by just tossing him a purse and grumbling.
Champion Crowned

Chapter Summary

The Hand’s tourney ends and a champion crowned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The second morning of the Hand’s tourney came and Jon awoke and started preparing before Arya arrived to help him finish putting on his armor. “Are you nervous?” she asked helping him strap in his arm harness.

“Probably not as much as I should be,” Jon admitted with a nod.

“You’re going to win, I know it,” Arya said with a grin.

“I’m glad at least one of us does,” Jon said with a laugh.

Taking the red favor from Jon to tie it around his bicep she asked, “Who is this from?”

“You’ll find out if I name the owner queen of love and beauty.” He wore a teasing smile as he asked, “Hopefully you won’t be too jealous?”

Arya scoffed. “If you gave it to me I’d throw it in your face.”

“At least now I know,” he chuckled, watching her go to get his sword belt as he got to his feet.

“Who do you think you’ll go against?”

“I don’t know.”

Arya handed the belt over. “Who would you want to go against?”

Jon had spent a part of the previous night thinking on it and decided, “It doesn’t matter. I’ll ride against whoever I must.”

Dom and Sam met them at the stables, Dom wearing a pink doublet with slashes of red satin beneath his crimson jerkin not unlike Sam’s over his green doublet. Since neither planned to join the melee or the archery contest, they both agreed to serve as Jon’s squires for the day.

The stands were packed with people come to see the finals of the joust as well as the other events. Ned was sat with Sansa when the moment Jaime Lannister entered, riding an elegant blood bay destrier draped in gilded mail while it’s rider glittered from head to heel and Littlefinger announced, “A hundred gold dragons on the Kingslayer!”

“Done,” Lord Renly shot back. “The White Wolf is more than enough to down a lion.”

“Maybe the boy’s pet,” Littlefinger said dryly, “but we’ve seen this play before.”

“You should be more careful with your bets, Lord Baelish,” Ned said looking to them. He
managed to keep himself from berating the man, saying simply, “You’ve just forfeited Lord Renly your gold.”

“Would you like to bet as well, Lord Hand?” Littlefinger offered with a grin.

“I never bet against my family,” Ned told him, turning back to watch Jon’s courser stride up to the lane as Dom handed him a lance.

“You’re different now,” Dom told him. “Take this victory and you’re one step closer.”

With a nod, Jon lowered his visor and turned to look down the lane to Jaime Lannister sat in his gilded armor with a lion roaring defiantly upon his chest.

Jon thought of all the time they’d spent together before he left Winterfell for the Wall, before he knew the truth of who he was. He’d looked up to Jaime in a way. He was stained like Jon, yet never seemed to care that people spoke ill of his honor. He proved his worth with his sword, and had helped Jon in his own way. Even suspecting Jon’s adoration of Myrcella hadn’t turned him away from Jon, instead only seeming to amuse him as most things did.

Yet he hadn’t joined Jon to spar in the weeks since their return to King’s Landing. When they spoke it was only brief exchanges when Jon joined Barristan for his shifts as kingsguard. He avoided Jon otherwise, leaving Jon to question his doubts of Robb’s suspicion. He wanted Robb to be wrong, to find out it was Joffrey who pushed Bran, but Robb was smart, he wouldn’t forget Joffrey’s presence in the hunting party. It could have been someone else, Jon had even told himself it must have been Cersei, but he couldn’t help wondering if Robb could be right.

His mind was a mess as Jaime’s golden lance glanced off his shield while Jon’s shattered around the lion of his golden shield. Jon rode back to Arya and the others already preparing his lance when he glanced to the crowd and saw Sansa sat with their father, who wore a proud smile as he caught Jon’s eye and gave him a nod. Taking up the lance he looked to the royal box and saw Myrcella wore a concerned frown, torn between cheering for the squire with her favor and her uncle. Jon found himself again hoping she would forgive him when he rode out and both lances splintered against shields as the riders passed each other.

“Third again,” Domeric said watching Jon turn his horse to come back.

“Again?” Arya asked. “You mean like the last tourney?”

“He got to the third set before Ser Jaime unhorsed him last time,” Sam said with a frown.

Arya stared at Jon, carefully holding up the lance as she rushed forward to give it to him. “You can do it, brother!” She saw his smile in his eyes as he took the lance and nodded, letting her back away before he turned and rode down the lane again.

Myrcella felt her breath stop as she watched them speed toward one another, her eyes widening when she suddenly heard a yell come from Jon as he pulled his arm back and thrust the lance forward so hard it exploded against the lion on Jaime’s chest, throwing him off his horse.

Robert let out a bellowing laugh as he rose from his chair and clapped while Cersei clutched the arm of hers and sneered. Myrcella looked down, feeling her eyes sting with relief as she found herself able to breath again. Sansa had gasped and started clapping, cheering for her brother while Ned let out a sigh of relief and joined her, keeping himself from looking at Littlefinger to rub it in his face.

Arya dropped the lance she held to grab Sam’s hands and bounce up and down with him while
Domeric smirked and shook his head. Standing while his pages brought him another horse, Loras grinned seeing Jaime Lannister laying in the mud while Jon sat atop his black steed, assuring in his mind that they would face one another in the finals.

Jon rode toward where Jaime was getting back to his feet and raised his visor to smirk down at the man. “I imagine I’ll take in near as much as either purse with your ransom.”

Jaime grunted as he removed his dented helm, having slammed into the ground near as hard as he did. “Don’t you worry,” Jaime assured, “a Lannister always pays his debts.”

“So I’ve heard,” Jon said with a nod, “I’ll trust you’ll pay in time.” With that Jon rode off toward the others, letting Jaime leave the field while Gregor Clegane took his position. Passing Loras Jon gave him a nod. “I’ll meet you in the finals, Ser Loras.”

Lowering his visor, Loras returned the nod. “Just give me a moment to down a mountain and we can finally have our match.”

Though the crowd had settled some they cheered for Loras, Sansa asking her father to ensure Gregor didn’t harm him. It seemed as if the moment Loras and his mare came to the field Ser Gregor had trouble controlling his stallion. He barely had time to take his lance before Gregor’s mount broke into a gallop while Loras’ charged with grace.

Sam frowned and shook his head. “A cruel trick using a mare in heat against a stallion.”

“Better a trick than a lance in his neck,” said Dom.

The Mountain was still struggling with his mount, shield and lance when he met Loras, who landed a perfect strike, knocking him over with his mount, not even breaking his lance. Raising his visor with a grin Loras looked upon the crowd cheering his victory.

That was when they saw Gregor disentangle himself and rise to his feet, throwing off his helm and shouting to his squire, “My sword!”

Jon leapt of his horse, “Arya get mine.”

Dom’s hand reached for his hilt as Arya hesitated before turning and grabbing Jon’s sword, handing him the scabbard.

They watched with relief as Gregor swung the sword at his horse, severing half its neck in a single blow as the crowd shrieked as the stallion screamed and fell to its knees. Then Gregor turned and strode toward Loras as the crowd broke into yells and Sansa cried as Ned shouted, “Stop him!”

Jon drew his sword, throwing the scabbard aside as Dom’s sword rang and the men charged the field. Loras’ mare reared from Gregor’s grasping at its reins. Loras barely kept in his seat until Gregor swung, his sword slamming into his chest and knocking him from the saddle as the courser dashed away in a panic while Loras lay stunned in the dirt.

Before they could reach him Sandor had leapt over the barricade and called out, “Leave him be!” His hand grabbed Gregor’s shoulder, pulling him away from the young knight.

Jon and Dom moved around the fighting brothers swinging at one another, making their way toward Loras and helping him to his feet as Robert boomed, “STOP THIS MADNESS IN THE NAME OF YOUR KING!”

The Hound took a knee while Dom held Loras with one arm while the other held his sword and
Jon stood before them both holding his sword in a defensive position ready to face the Mountain. Thankfully he came to his senses and dropped his sword with a glare at Robert as the Kingsguard and a dozen other knights and guardsmen surrounded him. Jon noticed Barristan was not far from him, Gregor shoving past the Lord Commander as Robert told them, “Let him go.”

Once his daze left him and Loras was standing on his own, he moved to the Hound. “I owe you my life, ser.”

“I’m no ser,” the hound replied, walking back to the barrier.

Loras nodded, exhaling as he looked to Dom sheathing his sword while Jon turned to him with a smile. “You good to ride?”

“Give me a moment and I will be,” Loras said with a nod.

“Good,” Jon nodded. “I’ll have you at your best or not at all.”

Loras laughed, waving him off. “Go and ready yourself to lose, Jon.”

With a playful bow Jon turned and made his way toward Arya and Sam, flashing Dom a quick look he answered with a slight nod as he stayed with Loras while his pages rushed to the other side of the field. Arya slammed into Jon, hugging him as he returned. Jon laughed, handing Sam his sword, letting him set it back in its scabbard while Jon patted Arya’s back to make her release him.

“I’m fine,” he assured.

Once she backed away she nodded, rushing off to bring his horse. The crowd had settled and both riders moved to their starting positions, Loras making a point to bow to Jon from atop his horse, a gesture which Jon returned before either man took a lance.

Looking at the young Knight of Flowers, Jon took a breath to steady himself. He needed this. In every he needed this. He needed the acclaim and glory to find allies and friends. He needed the purse to fund his plans. He needed to know he was as good as Loras.

Jon thought of his dream the night before, of sitting in the courtyard and bringing the egg to his chest as it hatched, releasing a gargantuan dragon. He’d felt invincible in that moment, the way only possible in a dream. It was that sensation Jon clung to, releasing a dragon in his mind as he rode and gripped his lance, feeling like Ghost rushing in for a kill.

Their first pass ended with both men shattering lance against shield without budging from their saddles. Their second ended when Jon’s lance splintered against Loras’s shield while Loras’s slammed into his chest, yet Jon sat unmoving.

Across the field Sam noticed that as Loras returned to take another lance Dom spoke with him, giving Loras advice. It felt near cruel, and yet in their third tilt Jon ignored the lance cracking against his right shoulder as he drove his lance into Loras’s shield. A strike that might have left others dazed yet Jon barely budged.

Jon returned and threw aside his broken lance, taking another from Arya which swiftly shattered against Loras’s shield while he took another to his own. Their fifth lances seemed to glance off one another before slamming into shields and snapping. On their sixth pass Jon missed Loras’ shield as the knight seemed to shift in his saddle and slam his lance into Jon’s collar, making many gasp as splinters flew at his neck, glancing off his helm and gorget.

They heard Jon exhale as he came around and told Arya, “Put the lance down. This is my last.”
She blinked up at him, quickly handing it off to Sam who set it aside. “Are you sure?”

Jon didn’t answer, tugging the reins and taking a breath as he watched Loras take up a new lance swirled in green and gold. Kicking his heels the courser broke into a charge as Jon stood tall. Across the field Dom noticed Arya and Sam didn’t have another lance ready and furrowed his brow, taking a step forward, wondering what Jon planned.

Loras met Jon’s eyes through their visors, each man staring the other down while pulling their lanced back before they came within reach of one another. It was when both thrust forward that Jon shifted forward, the crowd gasping as they watched the blunted end of Loras’ lance graze Jon’s helm while he yelled and his black lance slammed into Loras, exploding against his chest. Though he stayed in his saddle, Loras slumped back gasping for the breath the hit seemed to steal from him, his lance falling from his hand as he laid back, reaching up to remove his helm.

Jon rose and shook his head, his silk streamers shaking and settling as he turned his horse and saw Loras removing his helmet. Tossing his broken lance away Jon rushed to his side. “Are you okay?” Jon asked, reaching over to help Loras sit up.

Loras nodded as his heavy breaths became laughs and he grabbed Jon’s hand to raise it. That was when Jon realized the crowd had been silent until then, rising to their feet and cheering wildly for his victory.

Loras made a round with him, motioning to Jon who kept bowing his head in thanks to the crowd. With a pat on his shoulder Loras left Jon to take one on his own, “Wave to them.” Jon took his advice, waving as he made his lone pass before riding to the king’s booth where he was presented with a crown of red roses set upon a pillow.

Taking it he made another pass around the lanes, noting Arya’s warning look and Sansa’s somber smile as well as Ned’s pride. Returning to the royal booth Jon said, “Though I am a bastard and no knight, you’ve often called me Ser while I acted as guard with Ser Barristan. While I have little to of worth to show my thanks, I offer this crown to a queen of love and beauty so kind to make even a bastard feel a ser.” With that he present the crown to Myrcella.

“I thank you, Ser Jon,” Myrcella said, beaming as she took the crown and carefully placed it upon her head. She’d done her hair specifically to accommodate it when he won, so it sat near perfect upon her head.

The crowd cheered as he bowed to the princess, who curtsied and returned to her seat while Jon turned and raised his hand to the crowd before returning to the others waiting for him in the sidelines. The moment he was off his horse Arya and Sam wrapped him in a hug, making him laugh as he pleaded, “I’ve just won. Don’t kill me now.”

Soon after Loras and Dom arrived to congratulate him, as did nearly every other person he passed on his way to the archery field, where Sam seemed to be carefully observing everyone while Anguy won the event. The melee lasted three hours before Thoros and his flaming sword claimed the day.

Jon had forgotten how much the winner’s purse was until they wheeled it out for him along with the others. Forty thousand gold dragons had been piled into a small cart and sack, weighing more than Sam or the King himself. He could have sold his egg and bought an army, or even sold Dark Sister and named his price, but now he didn’t need to. He’d pictured it as less, but opening the sack to run his fingers through the gold coins he realized just how much it was. It was enough to buy some land and live at ease most of his life. Maybe enough to fund the beginnings of a coup.
He’d bought a heavy chest with a lock to hold his armor and sword, but found himself loading it with coin for now. While they could perhaps break the lock and steal some coins, there was little chance of anyone moving the chest without the bottom collapsing.

“You’ll need a chest with better locks,” Arya said with a laugh watching Jon lock it.

“We could look for places to invest it and still keep more than we’ll need for now,” said Sam. Jon turned to him nodding as Arya helped him remove his armor. “I’ll leave it to you Sam. Think on it and find a use for all this. I might buy a few things, but this much gold surely has better uses. Other things we could fund and gain from.”

Sam glanced at him over Arya’s head and nodded while Dom looked himself over. There were a few spots of dirt from running out in the tilts and standing near Loras’ horse. “Well I’m going to get cleaned up before the feast.”

Once Dom and Sam left Arya smiled up at Jon. “I knew you could do it.”

“And I’m sure the Knight of Dancing Water will unhorse a knight or two in her time” Jon said with a smirk, “leaving everyone wondering who she was.”

Arya chuckled. “You think so?”

Jon nodded. “Have you ever heard of the Knight of the Laughing Tree?” When Arya shook her head he explained, “They rode at Harrenhal. A mystery knight who defeated three men from noble houses for the cruelty of their squires, shaming them before the realm in the grandest tourney ever. The next day they disappeared and no one ever found them, only their shield with a laughing weirwood sigil hanging from a tree.”

Arya had removed the armor of his arms but stayed in place as he spoke. “Who do you think it was?”

Jon glanced at the door and smiled as he leaned forward conspiratorially. “Lyanna Stark.”

Arya nearly dropped the armor, bringing a hand to her mouth as she gasped. “Really? How do you know?”

“I could be wrong but I heard it from a pretty reliable source,” Jon offered with a shrug.

Arya beamed. “You think I could do that?”

“Only if you get bigger and train,” said Jon, “but if you do? Then I’ve no doubt men will beg for mercy as much as they do your hand.”

Chapter End Notes

I’d considered just having Jon lose cause why not, but went with him winning as another show of his berserker-like mentality. He’s pissed when riding against Jaime so hits hard enough to unhorse him. Then he’s so determined to win against Loras he takes all the hits and then just throws caution to the wind and risks his head to win. He’s setting a dangerous precedent.
I went with Jon and Jaime as I felt it had more in this moment than Jon and Gregor, which is sure to happen in time. Plus it gave a chance to have Jon and Dom rush out to help Loras in front of everyone.

Ultimately Jon didn’t unhorse Loras, but he hit him hard enough any one else would have likely been unhorsed. I thought it a way to show Jon having a badass moment but also Loras for staying saddled. And I figure Jon’s little speech will be enough to leave room for doubt of his having any romantic intentions for Myrcella.

Also holy shit, 40k gold is a ton of money. Multiple discussions brought up the weight of it, often around 400 pounds, which I think is 120 more than Sam is supposed to weigh when he showed up at Castle Black. It’s also a ton of money in that you can do a lot with it, so Jon has a lot of options if he actually manages to keep it all.

The fun really starts next chapter, where certain things will be skipped or given summaries if they're close to what they are in canon in an effort to save words and avoid long stretches of dialogue from the books.
Chapter Summary

Jon attends the feast as champion and gets a surprise before he, Dom and Sam are given new jobs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Arya was all smiles as she left, letting him change before he escorted her to the Tower of the Hand to change for the feast. He wore a black doublet with streaks of silver through it beneath a gray jerkin Sansa had embroidered as a thank you for lending her Ghost. It had white wolves with crimson eyes near the collar with lines of white done as trails of snow. Around his waist he wore his sword belt but had removed his sword, leaving only the dagger and a small pouch which held Myrcella's favor. When Arya came out wearing a light blue dress he held out his arm with a smirk. “Lady Stark.”

Though she rolled her eyes she took his arm and let him escort her to the feast, bringing her to the high table where Sansa rose and gave him a quick hug. “You were amazing, Jon!”

“Thank you, Sansa,” he said with a laugh, patting her back before she backed away.

“She speaks true, son,” Ned said rising to embrace the boy. While patting his back, he whispered to him. “They would be proud.”

Jon nodded against his shoulder before backing away with a solemn smile. “Thank you, father.”

“You should have been there, Arya,” Sansa said looking to her sister sat beside her. “I would have thought you’d want to watch Jon.”

Arya glanced to Jon, who shrugged. “I was there,” Arya said with a smile. “I just had better seats.”

Sansa glanced at her and chuckled. “Sure.”

Ned seemed pleased it didn’t lead to a fight while Jon gave them a nod and turned to leave. That was when he heard a voice call out, “Snow!” They turned to find Robert leaning forward in his chair to look at Jon with a grin, motioning for him to join them. The only ones at the table seemed to be Robert, Tommen and Myrcella who wore a red and gold gown to match the crown of roses sat atop falling golden curls that framed her face. Cersei and Joffrey were thankfully missing, though Jaime was also nowhere to be seen.

Making his way over Jon bowed to Robert. “Your grace.”

“You did well today, son,” Robert said with a grin. “Bet more than a few of those knights looked down on you even though you’re a lord’s bastard. Hells, probably because of it. But you put ’em in their place today, didn’t you?”

Jon offered a smile. “I look forward to spending their gold.”
Robert laughed at that, then glanced back at Barristan who gave him a small, relenting nod. With
that he rose to his feet and looked to Jon. “Jon Snow of House Stark,” he boomed, quieting the
room as all eyes turned upon him, “kneel.”

Jon wasn’t the only one to go wide eyed as Robert was handed a sheathed sword he drew, turning
to Jon who sank to his knees while Robert walked around the table. Placing his sword upon Jon’s
right shoulder he asked, “Jon Snow, do you swear before the eyes of gods and men to defend those
who cannot defend themselves, to protect all women and children, to obey your captains, your liege
lord, and your king, to fight bravely when needed and do such other tasks as are laid upon you,
however hard or humble or dangerous they may be?”

Meeting the man’s bright blue eyes he answered, “I will do all I can to help others, the realm and
those in need of protection, your grace.”

Robert nodded, moving his sword to Jon’s left shoulder. “Arise, Ser Jon.”

Bowing his head, Jon rose while the room broke into applause as the king handed off his sword.
“Thank you, your grace.”

Robert turned to him with a laugh, clapping his shoulder. “You earned it. You’ve more than
proved yourself capable.”

Robert turned to make his way back to the table as Jon glanced to Myrcella and saw her beaming
with pride while Tommen grinned. He then walked toward Ned, who rose and shook his hand,
looking relieved as he met the boy’s eyes. Sansa was wiping her eyes of proud tears while Arya
kept hers in.

At the end of the table Ser Barristan met him and shook his head. “You did well, Jon. I couldn’t be
prouder of a squire.”

Jon smiled, glancing at the king. “Did I truly earn it?” He asked quietly. “Does it even count?”

Barristan met his eyes and nodded. “It will when I knight Aegon tomorrow morning.” Jon’s
surprise pleased Barristan as he squeezed the boy’s shoulder, “Go celebrate.”

Making his way to the lower tables he found himself stopped by near every man he passed who
shook his hand and congratulated him. Eventually he arrived where Dom, Loras and Sam stood to
greet them with clasping hugs, calling him Ser Jon. They all sat and started on their first course
while downing wine.

It was on his second cup that Loras leaned over and elbowed Jon sat to his side. “I want to dance.”

Jon looked at him with a laugh. “Then go find a partner.”

“You’re the champion,” Loras said turning to him. “go ask the queen of love and beauty so I can
cut in.”

Jon glanced toward the table where Myrcella and tommen had moved to sit with Sansa and Arya
while Ned spoke with Robert. He had to admit she looked pretty with the curls of her hair seeming
more pronounced as it flowed from the crimson crown, her emerald eyes shining in the light as she
smiled and laughed.

Downing the rest of his cup he rose and made his way to the table. Even that took some time as he
was stopped by Andar, Robar and Yohn Royce, Patrek Mallister, and plenty of others, even Aron
Santagar, the master-at-arms of the Red Keep who had ignored him near his entire stay. Perhaps
without Cersei there they felt more at ease speaking to him, though surely they knew as much as he
did that Meryn Trant’s presence meant she would know whatever he saw.

By the time he reached the table his smile faded in embarrassment as he stood before the
Baratheon and Stark siblings. “I was told the champion should start the dancing with the queen of
love and beauty,” he said hoping she understood his put upon words were spoken for others.

His tone seemed forced, but Myrcella saw the flicker of a smile on his lips when he met her eyes
and was sure it was false. A show he put on for the court, much like his speech when he gave her
the crown.

“If we were going by old traditions then you should have taken me to your saddle and ridden me
around the grounds after crowning me,” Myrcella said teasingly. She laughed when she saw Jon
swiftly turn to shoot a look to Loras, who reeled back with laughter along with Dom and Sam.
Rising from her chair and drawing his attention back she said, “Though I would love to claim the
first dance of the newly knighted man who considered my beauty beyond others which surpass it.”

Thankfully the moment Jon guided Myrcella to the floor others soon joined them. Loras made his
way to the table and asked to dance with Sansa while Dom asked Arya, who reluctantly agreed.
She ended up enjoying her dance with Dom, as he spent most of it telling her what he knew of
Harrenhal after Jon had mentioned telling her of it, and she talked of her water dancing lessons.

“You look pretty,” Jon said as he held Myrcella’s hand, turning with her.

“As do you,” she said before wincing slightly, “look handsome I mean.”

Jon chuckled. “And I put so much effort into looking pretty tonight.”

Myrcella giggled as he turned her, catching her and letting out a breath of relief when he caught her
hand and avoided stepping on her toes. “Thank you, Ser Jon.”

“Now I can’t tell you I’m no ser.”

“You were always better than many a knight,” she said meeting his gaze. “The only difference is
now they must recognize you for what you are.”

Staring into emerald pools he nodded solemnly. “In time they will.”

Loras soon switched out with Jon, who danced with Sansa before handing her off to Dom. Once
their dance was done, Dom waved over Sam, who looked nervous as he approached and Dom
switched out with him. Though clearly nervous, once Sam started it turned out he was a good
dancer despite his size, claiming he often danced with his sisters so had plenty to learn from.

Jon found himself dancing with a few other ladies as well, his new knight status seeming to lessen
the insult of his bastardry. Myrcella didn’t feel much in the way of jealousy seeing others dancing
with him, but she did feel a flicker of anger when she noticed a handmaiden from one of the other
houses dancing with him slide her hand to his rear while speaking to him. To her relief he swiftly
guided her hand back up, much to the girl’s disappointment.

There was much to enjoy that night before Jon finally made his way to his room and fed Ghost a
few scraps before turning in for the night. When he woke the next day he made his way to
Barristan’s apartment in the White Sword Tower where Barristan reminded him it was no longer
necessary as he was no longer a squire.

“Go get Ser Domeric and Samwell,” Barristan told him. “Meet me and your father in the Tower of
the Hand.”

When they arrived Ned greeted them in his audience room while Jon left Ghost with Sansa. Returning to the others Jon asked, “Where’s Arya?”

“Off chasing cats,” Ned answered with a shrug. “It seems you were right again.”

Jon arched his brow as the others looked to Ned. “About what?”

“Varys the mummer,” Ned said rising from his chair. “He came here last night in disguise to tell me the Lannisters had planned to slay the king during the melee, which Ser Barristan and I convinced him to sit out. I can’t speak to that truth of that, but he also spoke of Grand Maester Pycelle loving his office and the suspect loyalties of the kingsguard. He told me it was the Tears of Lys which killed Jon Arryn, which he believes given to him by his squire, Ser Hugh.”

“Who lays dead,” Dom noted with a scoff. “Unable to admit to any of this.”

“Why would they kill Lord Arryn?” Sam said with a frown. He’d been so kind to Sam though he had no reason to be.

“Varys said it was for asking questions,” Ned noted, looking to Jon. “If it was Ser Hugh who gave the poison we can’t be sure the Lannisters weren’t involved.”

Jon sighed and nodded. “True. I still wouldn’t trust anyone outside this room.”

“Speaking of,” Ned said with a nod to Ser Barristan, who drew his sword.

“Aegon of House Targaryen,” said Barristan. Jon knelt and the others watched as he took the same vow the king had given him. Switching his sword to his left shoulder, Barristan declared, “Arise, Ser Aegon.”

Ned exchanged a brief hug with Jon before backing away. “Now that you no longer serve Barristan as squire, I’ve decided to hire all three of you as members of the Stark guard during our stay here. That way we can meet easily, bar Ser Barristan, though I imagine it not too difficult to believe Jon would still speak with you.”

“Thank you, Lord Stark,” Sam said with a nod.

“For now it is us and Robb who waits to play his part,” said Ned. “We need to work together to survive this.”

Jon, Dom and Sam were sent to meet with Jory Cassel before leaving to acquire Stark surcoats, gray wool cloaks with white satin borders, silver mail shirts and steel caps shared by all the guards. The next morning while still waiting for their equipment to be finished they were left to train with some of the guard. Jon and Dom helped Sam train with a sword, the Tarly feeling it necessary since he was hired as a guard and Jon had bought him a sword with gold taken from Hobber Redwyne.

“It’s a shame,” Loras said when they told him of their being hired to the Stark guard in an effort to keep them in King’s Landing. Looking to Sam he asked, “You’ve joined as well?”

“I have,” Sam nodded. “Lord Stark was gracious to offer me the position, and it pays more than I had before in the library.”

Loras frowned, but nodded. He’d tried to have Renly hire him as a guard, but the Baratheon had chuckled and dismissed him without much consideration, making remarks of his weight. While in
his first days meeting Sam such biting jokes had amused Loras, he grew to despise them. It had caused Loras to ignore him for days, but when they made up he still wouldn’t hire Sam. “I’m glad,” he offered. “I’m sure you’ll do well.”

It was barely a day later they were showing Sam a parry when Fat Tom came to tell them Lord Stark wanted to see Jon. Dom stayed to help Sam while Jon put his equipment away and made his way to the Tower of the Hand. He found Ned stood beside his desk looking agitated and concerned.

“I’ve quit as Hand and sent Vayon Poole to look into ships to take us from here.”

Jon blinked in surprise. “Okay,” he said uncertainly.

“I know it would be easier to work from here but we can still manage on our own if we take our time.” Ned glanced at the door and sighed. “Jon, you should know… The council has Jorah Mormont working as a spy with Daenerys. He’s told us that she’s pregnant with her Khal’s child so Robert wants her dead. That’s why I quit.”

With a frown Jon crossed his arms. “Do you know where she is? I could try writing to Aemon and he could write to her.”

“Only that they’re heading to Vaes Dothrak, but the information is delayed.”

Nodding, Jon asked, “When do we leave?”

“I’ve asked Vayon to look for a ship ready to leave tomorrow.” He seemed to hesitate before adding, “This evening I’ll ride with Littlefinger who says he’ll take me to a place I’ve had the guards looking into.”

“You can’t go alone,” Jon said stepping forward.

His concern made Ned smile. “I won’t be. I’ll take Jory and some guards with me. You three stay, try to get your equipment and prepare your gold to leave.” After a moment he stepped forward. “There is more though. A brother of the Night’s Watch came here last night to tell me he saw Catelyn take Tyrion Lannister as prisoner.”

“What?” Jon shook his head. “Why would she do that?”

“It was at an inn in the crossroads.” Ned sighed. “She never received the letter I sent to Winterfell, so still thinks him to blame for Bran.”

“They won’t let that stand,” Jon said holding back his anger. “Even if they don’t care for him he’s still one of them. Why would she be so stupid?”


Jon ignored his warning. “She’s damned us all with her ignorance.”

Ned stood straight. “Jon.”

“Don’t make excuses for her,” Jon snapped. “Because she’s too vain to consider anything but herself she’s put us all at risk. I won’t let us die for her idiocy.”

Before Ned could speak Jon turned and left, slamming the door behind him and striding out of the tower to meet Dom and Sam.
Once they were in private he told them what he’d learned, ending with a scoff. “And he thinks to get angry because I speak the truth.”

“She is his wife,” Sam noted.

“And his wife has put a Lannister knife to our throats,” said Dom.

“We’ll need to be even more careful,” Jon sighed. “For now just prepare your things to leave as soon as we can.”

Making his way to his own room Jon loaded his gold back into the sack and small cart he’d been given with it. Then he loaded his armor and clothes into the chest he bought. For now he left his sword and egg in the bed, deciding he would take them out in the morning.

That never came to pass as that night a guard came to call on him to return to the Tower of the Hand at once as something had happened to Lord Stark. Throwing out a haubrek and sword belt he called on Dom and Sam to join him, each securing their own mail and belts as they followed him. At the tower they found Sansa and Arya in tears beside a bedridden Eddard Stark having his broken leg treated by Pycelle.

Jon shot the old man a glare as he wrapped his arms around Arya and Sansa, consoling them as he asked, “What happened?”

Alyn, now acting as captain of the guard, told him, “Jaime Lannister attacked Lord Stark on the road and fled the city.”

Jon’s brow rose as he looked to the man and knew exactly why. He wanted to leave and chase after him, to find Jaime and make him come beg forgiveness, to make him reveal if it was him that pushed Bran. Instead he closed his arms around Sansa and Arya, his face darkening as he pushed his anger down and embraced them.

Over the next six days Jon spent most of his time in the tower with his sisters before Ned woke and spoke with Robert and Cersei, who left the tower with a bruise across her cheek. When Robert left Ned was somehow Hand again.

“Take them and leave,” Ned told Jon.

“We’re not going to leave you,” Jon said shaking his head.

“Jon,” Ned groaned, sitting up, “take your gold and go to Robb.”

“And leave you here to die?” Jon shook his head. “How could I do that?”

“What of Sansa and Arya? Will you have them stay here as well?”

Jon shook his head. “No, we can send them north but I’ll stay here with you.”

“And who should I trust to take them through the kingsroad?” He sighed. “What of a boat?”

“Vayon didn’t say if he found one yet. It may take time to find one we can trust.” Seeing Ned’s frustration, Jon frowned. “I’m sorry I won’t go. I asked Dom and Sam to take them, but both said they wouldn’t leave without us as well.”

Ned laughed grimly. “At least they’re loyal.”

“They are,” Jon nodded proudly. “Sam’s been looking into shops to invest in so I have less to carry
and more play within the city.”

“Has he found any?” Ned asked with a laugh.

“I don’t know. I’ve… I just told them to split it up into smaller bags we can all split and carry if we have to leave in a rush. I’m not even sure how much is still in my room anymore.”

Ned’s brow rose, surprised at such blind trust. “Well we can always store if in Winterfell’s vault.”

“Assuming we get there,” Jon said with a bitter laugh. “It feels like everything on fire.”

Ned saw his gaze fall in distress and quieted anger. “Whatever your name you are a Stark, Jon.” When he looked to Ned, he found his father smiling at him. “The Starks will endure. We always have.”

That was put to the test when Robert went hunting the day after Ned woke, leaving the Hand to sit upon the Iron Throne. Jon and Sam stood among the Stark guards in the room while Dom stayed at the tower to watch over Ghost and the girls.

It was on Robert’s second day of hunting that Sers Raymun Darry, Karyl Vance and Marq Piper came before Ned with a group of kneeling smallfolk. They explained how their lands were destroyed, their families murdered and raped, all by the Mountain’s men. Jon wanted to run Pycelle through when the old maester only roused once the Mountain was mentioned, making his allegiance clear. Jon could see the value in questioning the people, they needed to be sure, but the old fool ignored their plights until the moment his master’s name came up. He was a worthless old dog that should be put down.

Jon felt sorry for Loras when Ned excluded him from the group sent to bring justice to Gregor Clegane, though he understood his reasoning in a way. However he didn’t understand why Ned called for him after and told Jon privately, “You’ll ride with the guard sent after Gregor Clegane.”

Jon tilted his head in shock. “Why would you send me to face him?”

“Because it takes you further north,” Ned admitted. “I’ll tell Alyn that once this is done he’s to take you to Winterfell.”

“I’m not leaving you all here,” Jon argued.

“You’re a guard in my command,” Ned said simply.

“Then I quiet.”

“And you are still a knight and I Hand of the King.”

“Not my king,” Jon said with a frustrated glare.

“Jon.” Ned sighed, shifting in his seat. “I know you want to help us, but having you here is too great a risk for what we have planned. However little it is so far. Go and let this be your first act of justice, both for these people and for his crimes against your family. Find allies. House Darry was loyal to the Targaryens during the rebellion, sneaking Viserys and Daenerys from Dragonstone, perhaps they could be your first now.”

“How it less a risk to send me after the Mountain?”

“I’m not sending you alone,” Ned noted. “It’s Gregor and a brigand company against a company of
king’s men lead by multiple knights. I’ve faith you’ll persevere.”

When he left Jon quickly found Dom and Sam, both shocked when Jon told them he would be leaving to face the mountain with the others.

It was after a moment to take it in that Dom asked, “When do we leave?”

“You don’t,” Jon said to their shock.

Dom’s brow furrowed. “What?”

“I need people I trust here to watch them,” Jon said nodding toward the Tower of the Hand.

Dom and Sam exchanged a look, and it was Sam who stepped forward. “I’ll go with you.”

Jon smiled at his courage and shook his head. “You don’t need to.”

“I want to,” said Sam. “I may not be of much use in battle, but surely you’ll need a squire.”

“Are you certain, Sam?” Dom asked crossing his arms. “Men will die. You may be one of them, else you may need to take a life to survive.”

“I know,” Sam said before looking to Jon. “I’ll do whatever needed to help you survive.”

“I’d rather us both return alive,” Jon said with a smirk. “But I’ll be glad to have a friend at my side for whatever comes.”

Chapter End Notes

The feast after the tourney was one the Lannisters missed out, but I figure Tommen and Myrcella would come to celebrate Jon’s victory, and because Myrcella was crowned Cersei would basically have to let her go.

I figure winning a tourney would be enough to make Robert want to knight Jon since he has such a focus on martial prowess. Barristan has that as well as all he knows of Jon, plus with Jon knighted by Robert I imagine he’d want to make sure Jon is properly knighted so he could knight others if he had to even before he becomes king.

While Loras came around to Sam, I don’t think Renly would, at least not so quickly. Even ignoring the talk with Stannis he calls Shireen ugly, puts down Brienne and comes off kind of catty to me. Sam would be a prime target for that, especially due to Loras spending time with him. I could easily see him teasingly asking Loras if he kisses his pig and super mean shit that would piss him off as he became friendly with Sam, so Renly would just avoid it over time.

Next chapter was a tough one to figure out and has some big choices.
Departures

Chapter Summary

Jon leaves King's Landing before everything falls apart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon’s evening was spent packing for the journey to follow, and while going through his things he found his pouch holding Myrcella’s favor. Running it through his fingers he sighed and left his room, knocking on Dom’s door. When it opened Dom motioned for him to step inside, closing the door as Jon turned to him and held out the favor.

“I thought it usually the one leaving who gets the favor?” Dom asked with a smile.

“I need you to return this for me. With Jaime gone and Ser Barristan on the hunt I can’t approach her without one of the other kinsguard finding out.”

“You’d have them think she gave me a favor?”

“I doubt you’d be so obvious.”

Dom nodded, taking the favor with a sigh. “As you command.”

“It’s a favor not a command,” Jon clarified.

“I know what it is,” Dom said waving the kerchief while Jon rolled his eyes.

Sleep didn’t come easy that night as Jon lay in bed thinking over what could happen, both while he was gone and where he was going. Dom would watch out for the Starks, Loras might also if only for Jon’s sake.

The little sleep he got was broken before the sun had risen as Jon dreamt of the Mountain striding into the Tower of the Hand and smashing Stark skulls against walls. His skin felt taut and his hand hot where it laid upon the egg in his bed. Sitting up he looked at the small cart holding his gold. With Jon gone, even those who didn’t frequent his room might come looking for it, and when they didn’t find enough they would look through all they could.

Opening the mattress again he removed the dragon egg and sword, keeping them wrapped in cloaks as he packed them with his armor. Better to take them with him than leave them for Dom to bring North in time. He couldn’t carry the gold, but they all knew where it was so could find it before they left, leaving Jon and Sam to take more than they’d likely need but less than they could.

By the time he finished closing the mattress again he heard a knock at the door as Ghost rose. “Ser Jon,” Edric called through the door. “Lord Beric told me to make sure you were getting ready.”

Jon opened the door, revealing he was already dressed in riding clothes. “Lord Beric asked you?” He’d expected Alyn or one of the guards.
“Lord Stark spoke with him yesterday,” Edric offered, “I believe he asked him to care for you.”

Jon nodded, imagining Eddard had told Beric of his intent to send Jon north after they handled Gregor. “Thank you, Ned.”

Edric nodded, turning and hurrying back to his lord while Jon went to wake Sam and help him prepare. Dom was also there to see them off, helping Sam prepare his horse while Jon handled his own.

“You might not be able to fight like them, but you can fight in your own way,” Dom told Sam, who smiled at his clear concern. “You can be as brave as any of them, and you can be smarter than many of them. Use that and keep him safe as well as yourself.”

“I will,” Sam nodded. “Thank you.”

It was midday when Dom made his way toward Myrcella’s garden and found Mandon Moore stood guard. Dom ignored his suspicious glare to call out, “Princess!” A moment later he saw her rise from behind a bush, brushing off her skirt. “May I join you?”

“Of course, Ser Domeric,” she said with a nod.

Dom stepped past Moore, who turned to watch them but seemed to only barely be paying attention. “What are you doing?” He asked looking to the bush she’d been sat beside.

“My dragon’s breath flowers seem to have wilted so I was replanting them.”

“May I help?”

Myrcella tilted her head but nodded when she noticed him nudge his head just slightly toward where the kingsguard stood. “Of course.”

When Dom knelt and watched her do the same before he said quietly, “I’d imagine you’ve heard of the band gone to deal justice to Ser Gregor Clegane?”

“I have,” Myrcella nodded. “My handmaids worried Lord Stark sent the men to their deaths.”

“He hasn’t,” said Dom, “else he wouldn’t have sent his son with them.”

Myrcella’s face paled as she turned to Dom. “Jon rides with them?”

“He left this morning with Ghost and Sam.”

“But he’s…” Myrcella frowned, turning back to the flowers. He was a knight and it was his duty to obey his liege lord and the king, and his father had spoken on behalf of the king.

“Lord Stark hired us to his guard so it is his duty to obey his father thrice over now,” Dom said with a snort. “Sadly he lacked my will to disobey his father.”

Myrcella looked to him with a somber smile. “How have you disobeyed yours?”

“By being here. When Lord Stark sent me to be a companion to Jon my father soon wrote demanding my return.” Dom gave a hollow laugh. “I fear he forgot I am a man grown. Though even if I had returned I would have disobeyed him by looking for my bastard brother who he kept hidden.”

“You hoped to find him?”
“I hoped to have a brother of my own,” Dom sighed, smiling as he looked to Myrcella. “Luckily I’ve found others here that may as well be blood to me.”

With a nod Myrcella said, “I have my own bastard brothers I don’t know. The only I know of for certain is at Storms End, but I’ve heard others claimed as my fathers in whispers, though most try to avoid my hearing.”

“Have you ever wanted to meet them?”

“At times,” she admitted with a sheepish smile. “I wonder sometimes if I have a brother who is as kind and caring as Jon rather than how they often speak of bastards.”

Dom smiled, reaching into his sleeve to remove the favor. “Speaking of our kind bastard knight, he asked me to return this to you in his stead.” Seeing her disappointment as she took the kerchief he continued, “He hoped to return it himself, but with everything as is and Ser Barristan gone he couldn’t find time before leaving. He begs forgiveness and hopes you understand.”

Myrcella looked to Dom and shook her head. “I wish he’d taken it with him.”

“He’ll return, princess,” Dom said with a solemn smile. “I’ve no doubt Jon will make his way back to King’s Landing in time.”

It was that evening that Ned called on Sansa and Arya, telling them of their impending departure from King’s Landing and return to Winterfell.

After both girls erupted with questions, Ned settled them with a wave and Sansa asked with a pout, “Why?”

“For your protection,” Ned answered.

Sansa thought of her time and King’s Landing and found more she enjoyed than disliked. Arya had been busy so didn't seem too bad, she’d spoken to Myrcella who may become another friend, and even walked through the keep with a gallant knight like Ser Loras and found Jon wasn’t like her mother worried, he was as any knight should be. Even after everything that happened, Joffrey had been nice to her lately.

“What of my betrothal?” Sansa asked looking to her father. “I’m supposed to marry Joffrey and be queen and have his babies, as brave as wolves and proud as lions.”

“He’s not a lion,” Arya pouted out with a scoff, “he's a stag like his father. And a craven, and a liar.”

“He’s not!” Sansa said with a huff, remembering the bruise across Cersei’s cheek after she visited their father with the king. “He’s not the least bit like that old drunken king.”

Ned’s face twisted in realization. “Gods. Out of the mouth of babes.” He called for Septa Mordane to take them, assuring Arya Syrio Forel would be among their guard if he agreed to enter his service.

He sank into his chair later with a bitter laugh as he saw what Jon Arryn had before his death. One or two with Cersei’s looks may have been poor chance, but for all three of his children to lack Roberts looks while every bastard he saw shared them seemed improbable. Robert had no trueborn children, only baseborn. Those he thought true were base as well, though even then for all to retain her looks would still be unlikely, unless her lover shared her looks.
Ned sighed at the thought, his leg seeming to throb at the thought of the man who attacked him. He spent the next few days thinking much on it, considering his options and what he could and should do. Honor would dictate he go to Robert once he returned, let him know the truth and dispose of Cersei and her bastard children.

The day Pycelle told him of Tywin’s anger at Beric’s mission, the day Joffrey returned with the bulk of the hunting part and he learned Robert was after a boar, Ned decided to warn Cersei. It wasn’t for her sake, but for Jon’s. He had seen clear enough the boy cared for the princess and the youngest prince seemed to like Jon more than most guards. Cersei and Joffrey could rot, but he wanted to spare the younger two for Jon’s sake.

Though it was clear she wouldn’t leave, naming Ned a fool and even making an advance on him that earned him a slap, it had at least confirmed Jaime was their father.

Ned’s solace that the girls at least would leave before things turned was lost when the day before they were set to board the Wind Witch, Robert was brought back to the keep to die after being gored by the boar he slew. They tried to close the rip from groin to nipple but it wasn’t enough. It smelled of death as Robert demanded the boar be served at his funeral before ordering everyone but Ned to leave.

Once they were gone Robert admitted Ned was right about Daenerys Targaryen, thankful that Ned was willing to tell him he was wrong. In his final testament, he named Ned Lord Regent and Protector of the Realm until his son came of age, but Ned worded it as his heir. When he signed it and asked Ned to rescind the death warrant on Daenerys as well as help his son be a better king than he had been. Others returned to watch him seal the letter before taking milk of the poppy and drifting to sleep.

He wasn’t surprised that Varys arrived while he spoke to Ser Barristan to intimate that Robert had been made drunk by his Lannister squire or that Renly arrived after to offer him a hundred swords. He’d considered it, but didn’t trust him not to move around him and harm the children. He had too much to gain from their deaths. The same was true of Stannis so, though he considered writing to him so he could claim and distract the Lannisters, his quill remained untouched. He also couldn’t risk Stannis seeking justice against those loyal to the Targaryens when Jon needed them and whatever power they had. But he had to make use of Stannis’ name as he called on Littlefinger.

Though he doubted Littlefinger’s loyalty to him he hoped his love for Catelyn would go to her children and have him aid them as he promised Catelyn. While he made clear he knew of Ned’s position as Protector of the Realm upon entering, he also revealed he knew the truth of Cersei’s children and promised to turn the city watch to their side by bribing the commander Janos Slynt. Ned disliked the subterfuge, but thought if he could take hold of the throne he could give it to Jon.

Everything seemed to slip through Ned’s fingers after that as Robert died, Renly left with Ser Loras and fifty retainers, and he had Ser Barristan read the writ naming him Protect of the Realm before they were called to the throne room. Before long Joffrey ordered Ser Barristan to seize Ned as traitor, but the old knight hesitated and in the mayhem the gold cloaks slew the Stark guards while Littlefinger took the dagger from Ned’s sheath and held it to his throat as he thought of Jon on the road and his daughters in the Tower of the Hand.

“Did father really allow this?” Sansa asked with a frown as she watched Arya training with Syrio before they were due to board the ship to Winterfell.

Stood with his arms crossed, Dom nodded. “He set it up for her.”

“Mother would be furious.” Dom kept quiet on his thoughts of her mother while she glanced at
Jeyne sat beside her, holding back a smirk as she watched Arya get hit in the breast by Syrio’s sword. Looking to Dom she saw he wasn’t dressed as a guard but in his own clothes with faded pink and blacks. “Will you be joining us on the ship to Winterfell?”

“If your father commands it,” Dom said with a nod. “Otherwise I’ll stay and await Jon’s return.”

Sansa nodded, going back to stitching the wolf on her kerchief. Part of her had wanted to go run to Cersei and beg her help to keep her there, but she found herself torn on what she wanted. Joffrey had been nice to her, but he had also lied about what happened with Arya. She also couldn’t forget the things Jon had written of him and remembering how callous he could be with those beneath him. He never abused them anywhere or anything front of her, but she couldn’t say he didn’t when she wasn’t there, and everything else Jon had told her of King’s Landing was right. She’d seen what a true knight should be like in her time with Ser Loras and Dom and Jon, and even Sam was gentle and kind, but it seemed different with Joffrey the more she thought on it. Like some mask a mummer wore.

Her thoughts were broken when the great wooden doors of the Small Hall flew open to reveal five Lannister guards and Ser Meryn Trant of the Kingsguard, each in full armor. She noticed Dom shift at her side, maintaining a slate expression as he observed them.


Arya chewed her lips. “What do you want?”

“Your father wants to see you.”

Sansa had started to rise until Dom’s hand on her shoulder stopped her. Syrio grabbed Arya’s arm to stop her as well. “And why is it that Lord Eddard is sending Lannister men in place of his own? I am wondering.”

“Mind your place, dancing master,” said Ser Meryn. “This is no concern of yours.”

“My father wouldn’t send you,” Arya said pointedly, snatching up her training sword to the Lannisters’ amusement.

“Put down the stick, girl,” Ser Meryn told her. “I am a sworn brother of the Kingsguard, the White Swords.”

“So was the Kingslayer when he killed the old king,” said Arya. “We don’t have to go with you if I don’t want.”

Sansa let out small worried whimper as Jeyne shifted closer to her. With a glance to Dom, Ser Meryn lowered his visor. “Take them.”

“Don’t move,” Dom told them as he drew his sword. “Arya, stand aside and let us handle this!”

Arya glanced at Dom, nodding as she backed away from Syrio who handled the Lannister guards. Sansa watched as Ser Meryn Trant, cloaked in white armor, approached Ser Domeric Bolton with only his sword and sheathed dagger.

Jeyne yelped, dropping her needles to grasp Sansa’s arm as they slid back, watching as Domeric blocked a strike from Meryn. When he parried, Domeric slashed down, the edge of his sword catching the side of Meryn’s leg before swinging back up to deflect another strike as the kingsguard yelled in pain. The tip of the sword aimed at the ground, Dom met Meryn’s eyes as he parried the strike and turned the blade, slashing beneath Meryn’s chin and backing away to avoid
the spray of blood released.

Sansa gasped and Jeyne screamed as they watched Dom draw his dagger and stick it through Meryn’s eyes while he clutched his throat. He pushed Meryn away from the girls and threw him to the ground, yanking his dagger free and turning to help Syrio with the guards, two of them already laying on the ground.

Syrio backed away as Dom pushed his sword through the back of a Lannister guard’s throat, then turned, yanking the blade free and slashing through the face of another. When the last turned to strike Dom, Syrio thrust his wooden sword into the man’s throat, making him choke and gag until Dom turned and thrust his dagger through the man’s nose. With all of the guards on the ground Dom went and stabbed his sword through each, making sure all would die.

Taking out a kerchief to wipe the blood from his blades before sheathing them, Dom looked to the girls. “We’re leaving.” Dom looked to Syrio, his eyes ice as he asked, “Are you coming or are you going to run?”

“The First Sword of Braavos does not run.”

Arya looked from the corpses to Syrio with a smile as Dom nodded. “Come on,” he said waving for Sansa and Jeyne to come to him. She pulled Jeyne to her feet, the girls holding their skirts as they ran to him and he lead the way down to the stables. “We’re going to change and once things have settled I’ll get you out of the city and we can head north.”

“Change?” Jeyne asked with a frown.

“Get out of your dresses, cover Sansa’s hair,” Dom said holding up a hand to stop them as he looked out a door before waving them forward. “They’ll know her easily, but not as a boy or a girl in rags with her hair covered. Arya, get your squire clothes.”

“Squire?” Sansa asked with a blink.

Arya nodded. “I squired for Jon at the tourney.”

They arrived at the stables where some of the men were downed and found the chests in their wagon turned over. Arya dug through her clothes for Needle and her squire clothes, quickly slipping on her arming cap.

“There they are,” a voice hissed behind them. They turned to find a stable boy wielding a pitchfork. His brow sank as they turned to him. “Dom? I guess we can split the reward.”

“What reward?” Arya scoffed.

“What are you-” Arya never got the chance to finish before Dom lashed out with his sword, knocking the pitchfork into the ground before slashing into the boy’s neck.

Sansa put a hand over her mouth to keep from screaming while Jeyne turned away from the boy gurgling on blood bubbling from his throat. Dom tossed them both plain wool dressed before wiping his sword with one what Sansa recognized as one of her summer dresses. “Change.”

Sansa held back tears while Jeyne quietly wept in the stall with her while they changed into the dirtied clothes. Arya had changed into her clothes from when she squired to Jon, including the arming cap while Dom handed Sansa a scarf to hide her hair. Syrio had taken his own bravos blade
from his chest and changed into a thicker leather jerkin and cloak with a hood to hide his bald head.

“The gates will be closed, won’t they?” Arya said looking to the men.

Syrio nodded. “If they have half a brain.”

“They have enough to be annoying,” said Dom. “Where the hell can we hide?”

“The dungeons,” Arya said, drawing their attention. “There’s a way from the sept. From there we can get to Flea Bottom.”

“Could you make it there by tonight?”

Arya nodded. “I know the way.”

Turning to Syrio he asked. “Master Syrio, I ask you guard the girls until then.”

The bald braavosi nodded. “I shall do what I can.”

“If I’m not there by the time the moon peaks, find a way to leave the city,” he told them as they left the stables.

“What about father?” Sansa asked with a sniff, barely holding back her tears.

“I’ll find out where he is,” Dom told her, “I promise.”

Sansa and Jeyne clutched each other’s hands when it was their turn to cross the yard, walking so they didn’t draw too much attention. In the sept it took Arya half an hour to find the opening, Sansa holding the candle as Syrio helped Jeyne in after Arya.

“Will you not come with us?” Sansa asked Dom.

“We’ll need horses,” Dom said shaking his head.

“But the gates—”

“Don’t worry, Lady Sansa,” Dom said squeezing her shoulder. “You’re a Stark. You’ll endure this and make it back to Winterfell.”

“Girl,” Syrio called for her. She frowned, giving Dom a quick curtsy before turning to be helped through the low narrow window that slanted into the dungeons.

“Be quiet,” Arya whispered to her. “Don’t be scared.”

“You sure you won’t come?” Syrio asked of the knight.

Dom shook his head. “I’m going to make sure we can survive the journey, and I have some things I need to handle.”

Syrio nodded, giving the knight a swift bow. “I await our meeting, Ser Domeric.”

Jeyne gasped, clutching her mouth to keep from yelling when she saw the first dragon skull. Sansa bit her lip, Arya holding her hand much as she held Jeyne’s to guide her through the dark. When she noticed the small glowing eyes, Sansa couldn’t help but whimper.

“It’s just rats,” Arya said dismissively. That made Jeyne squirm, and Sansa saw Arya’s face shift in
the dark. “There are worse things than rats and spiders.”

“Lions,” Sansa whispered with a frown.

Arya glanced back at her sister, torn between pride for her sense and empathy for her clear sadness and distress. Turning back ahead and guiding them through the shadows, Arya was determined to make sure that nothing happened to her. She would stick Needle through every man in the keep before she let them touch either of them.

The sun had set by the time they made it to the street of steal where Dom had told them to meet him. They hide themselves in shops whenever guards passed, Syrio finding it easy to keep the owners busy with questions. The longer they waited the more tense they grew until suddenly bells rang from the sept in the Red Keep.

“Fire!” They heard the yells and looked to the keep where a pillar of smoke rose from the keep.

Sansa clutched her chest and gasped. “Dom.”

She wasn’t far off the mark, as not long after Dom arrived with three horses, each saddled and bagged, including his crimson steed. He had changed into a mail shirt, surcoat and red cloak stolen from a Lannister guard. Sliding from his saddle he waved them forward. “Come, we need to be quick.”

Syrio helped Arya onto the brown courser before leaping into the saddle himself. Dom helped Sansa and Jeyne onto the gray palfrey, making sure they were settled before mounting his own horse.

“Ser Domeric,” Sansa said with a frown, “our father?”

“Arrested,” Dom said grimly. “The Lannisters call him traitor to the crown and have slain all loyal to the Starks.”

Jeyne gasped. “Even-”

“Yes,” Dom said with a nod. “I’m sorry, Jeyne.” He led them forward slowly as the steward’s daughter clung to Sansa, crying quietly into her back. They were heading toward the Iron Gate when Dom motioned for them to stop. “Count to one hundred and then come to the gate,” he told them, giving Syrio a nod as he put on the Lannister steel cap.

Sansa squeezed her reins, frowning as she watched Dom gallop toward the gate, out of view of them. Behind them she heard Jeyne whispering, “Three… four… five…”

Syrio moved while Jeyne was only at ninety four, but Sansa followed, watching the dancing master hold the hilt of his thin blade. However at the gate they found the trio of guards laying across the ground in pools of blood as Dom tossed a torch to their bodies and turned to wave them forward, leaving through the Iron Gate.

It wasn’t long before he took them off the road, but kept them moving. Sansa fought to keep her composure as she rode to Domeric’s side. “Will we ride north to Winterfell?”

Dom glanced at her as Syrio guided his and Arya’s horse closer. “It is best we are not where they think.”

“I agree,” Dom nodded. “I thought we could go around the God’s eye, head to Raventree or Riverrun before heading north. They’ll give us help for your mother’s sake as well as to keep us
from the Lannisters whom they war with.”

“Maybe we can find Jon,” said Arya.

“They’ll be heading west,” Dom said regretfully. “Before he left he told me if something happened to take you to Winterfell, so that is where we’ll go. We just need to do it carefully.”

Chapter End Notes

Sansa’s change isn’t so large she wouldn’t still ask about her betrothal, but is large enough she would find more than Joffrey to make her want to stay. I also just wanted that scene to lead into the revelation for Ned.

Again a lot of the similar scenes are skipped over to compress multiple chapters and pick up the pace.

I considered having Ned accept Renly’s help, but he’s still a guy who was gung ho about killing Dany, so Ned couldn’t be sure he wouldn’t try it with Myrcella and Tommen. Instead he hopes Littlefinger’s feelings for his wife and her sister will make him keep his promise.

Barristan’s hesitance is more about “what the fuck is going on” than reluctance to switch sides to Ned. By the time he could do anything everything went to shit so he just went with it to be there if Jon returns to King’s Landing. Assuming he makes it back.

When I thought on what I could do going forward I decided to have Sansa and Jeyne there with Arya as well as Dom, joining in their escape. Originally I was considering having Dom stay behind after helping Syrio survive with Arya, or those three leave with Dom going to Jon, but realized he wouldn’t leave Starks behind like that, but he would leave to protect them. I’m not sure when we’ll see them again (I’m only solid on planning for a few chapters ahead right now) but I definitely look forward to it if I’m able to do some of the stuff I want with their storyline.

Next chapter have a few big moments as we see how Beric’s group is doing.
Ambushed at the Mummer’s Ford, Lord Beric’s party make a fighting retreat.

After a night camped in a hollow hill filled with weirwood roots, the band sent after Gregor Clegane headed to the Mummer’s Ford. Sam rode with Jon near the center of the group with Ghost at his side. Rather than spend the day riding in full plate, Jon kept in his Stark guard mail shirt, surcoat, steel cap and gray wool cloak with white satin borders. He kept his sword secure around his waist while Dark Sister sat hidden in his bags beside his egg. Sam wore his guard gear as well, his bow and quiver hanging from his saddle while his new sword hung from his waist.

“Have you ever seen it?” Sam asked Edric as the squire rode beside them.

“Once,” Edric nodded. “I sneaked into the armory and got caught, but then Aunt Allyria showed me Dawn anyway. She wouldn’t let me touch it though.”

“I’m sure she wants you to earn it,” said Jon.

Edric laughed. “Maybe in a dozen years if I practice every day.”

“Ser Barristan said I wasn’t half as good as I am now when I first came to King’s Landing,” Jon said looking to the young squire. “I was your age then. If you want it, by the time you’re my age you’ll be twice as good.”

Edric’s shy smile faded as he arched his brow. “But didn’t you train every day with Ser Barristan and Ser Loras?”

“Ser Jaime as well,” Sam added.

Jon’s face darkened a bit as he nodded. “Aye, Ser Domeric helped as well. Even Sam would give me advice from time to time. I watched others fight, read history books to study strategies they used. All of it adds to your experience, lets you handle things better, but what determines your skill is you. Maybe you won’t have Dawn by the time you’re my age, but if you want it and work for it, you’ll wield it.”

“Do you still think we’ll be okay?” Sam asked Jon, looking around at their company now nearly forty men fewer since Ser Marq Piper and Karyl Vance took their men after hearing of the battle in the hills below Golden Tooth.

Jon had been tempted to leave as well when Jaime Lannister was mentioned, but remembered Lord Stark’s words. Looking to Sam he answered, “This is my first act. It will end with us standing tall above a river run red with blood.”

Watching Jon move his horse ahead, Edric moved his closer to Sam. “He isn’t as I expected. I know they treat baseborn differently than they do in Dorne, yet he shows little of it.”
“It was there before we left to bring the Starks from Winterfell,” Sam revealed. “But since then he has been more a knight than a bastard.”

They were nearing the river when Jon neared Raymun Darry. “Ser Raymun,” he called, making the knight turn his head.

The knight greeted Jon with a nod. “Ser Jon.”

“I understand Darry isn’t too far from here, just east to the Trident?”

“That is correct,” Raymun nodded, adding grimly. “Not far from the Ruby Ford.”

“I read you lost three brothers in the battle,” said Jon.

“That was only the start of our loss,” Raymun sighed. “Next came our land, our wealth, our power… Our house has been left little more than most landed knights.”

“A shame,” Jon said to Raymun’s surprise. “Loyalties don’t lesson the value of one’s life or diminish their courage. Surely that is what it takes to ride to war, or sneak away with the remnants of those you support as Ser Willem Darry did.”

Raymun arched his brow. “What would you know of it?”

“My father is Lord Hand,” Jon said holding his reins. “He knows more of the Targaryens than most.”

“How to slay them perhaps.”

Jon laughed. “Less than you might imagine, Ser Raymun. He isn’t Robert Baratheon.”

When they reached the Mummer’s Ford Sam had been speaking with Anguy, who had taken to giving him advice after seeing Sam practicing with his own bow. A quiet came upon the company as they passed through the silent streets. Sam had thought them empty until he saw the bodies. Men cut across the back, woman laying with their throats opened and blood pooled between their legs, pieces of babes laying where there were cut through while nursing. The stench of death caked the town masked in terror as all inhabits lay dead.

They had barely made it through the town when Ghost began to growl, making Jon glance down and look around. Sam gasped. “Ambush!”

The men all drew their arms as a moment later they heard the clink of armored men rushing toward them and soon saw the Lannister forces closing in on them. “Fall back!” Beric called out, tugging on his horse’s reins.

He started the charging retreat when he suddenly saw the massive figure of the Mountain the Rides charging toward him with a lance in hand. With only his sword in hand, Beric prepared to try and deflect the lance until a streak of white flew past him and Ghost bit into the horse’s leg, causing it to scream in pain and flip forward, throwing the Mountain from his saddle, snapping the lance against the ground.

With Gregor down the company clashed with his men as Ghost went around tearing throats from horses, leaving the men trapped under them while Beric lead the others back to the river.

Though ten men died the rest managed to reach the river, Jon staying at Sam’s side as he took panicked breaths watching the men clashing around them. When Jon parried the strike of a man in
a surcoat showing the Myatt sigil, another from house Hamell swung at him. With a gasp Sam swung his sword up, letting the soldier’s sword bounce off his while Jon swung his sword back, slashing into the man’s chest plate and knocking him from his horse before he and Sam sped away.

The Lannister forces rushed out to meet them in the riverbed, the water barely past their horses ankles. It was Alyn who called out to the others, “Make south!”

They began moving south along the river, fighting off mounted Lannister men while others on foot chased after them. Jon saw Lothar Mallory knocked off his horse by a blow from a man in Lefford colors. Just as his face landed in the water, Ghost arrived to yank him free, letting him choke and cough, spitting up water while Raymun Darry rode to his side, stopping his horse from running.

“Ghost!” Jon called as he saw Ser Gregor Clegane riding toward them. His massive size let him wield his greatsword one handed, holding it on his shoulder ready to slash at them until Ghost dashed forward and ducked into the water. Gregor’s sword brushed past his fut before Ghost rose and bit into the horse’s stomach. It bucked, again throwing Gregor clear of the saddle, tumbling through the water.

His white fur spotted red, Ghost turned and rushed back toward Jon as Raymun Darry helped Lothar Mallery onto his horse.

“Make for the pass,” Alyn said pointing to a closed off path just off the edge of the river.

Men tried to strike at Gregor while he was down, but their lances snapped against his heavy armor. That left them open for his men to rush in and skewer them on pikes while Gregor slammed his fist into the rocky riverbed and stood. His gaze hardened as he found Jon parrying blows from a man of House Brax before Thoros came up from behind and stuck his sword through the man’s neck. “I’m going to kill that fucking wolf.”

Ghost deftly dodged crossbow bolt, downing their wielders while Anguy turned at the pass and loosed arrows on the Lannisters to cover their retreat. Alyn joined him, parrying the blow of a Lannister man who slashed at Beric, letting the lightning Lord turn and stab the man through the throat.

“Come,” Alyn called out as the soldier fell from his horse, which ran off into the woods while the guard waved the man toward the pass, “hurry!”

When Jon joined them Sam was confused to see Jon turn his horse around. “I’ll guard the rear,” he told Beric and Alyn.

“Jon,” Alyn shook his head, “Lord Stark-”

“Isn’t here,” he told them. “Lead the men. I’ll guard the rear with a few others. We can hold them off, give you time before we turn and run. It’ll be easy enough for a few of us to lose them.”

“I’ll join you,” Gladden Wylde said as he approached, his sword red with blood.

“Jon-”

“Go with them,” Jon cut Sam off before he could say more.

Sam shook his head. “I won’t leave you.”

Jon met his eyes, grabbing Sam by his collar. “That is an order.” The others look on confused as Sam frowned and nodded, accepting Jon’s command as tears stung his eyes.
“Don’t die, Jon.”

Jon thought of riding in the tourney, remembering that invincible feeling he had when he faced Loras, Jaime and Sandor. “I won’t,” Jon assured, adjusting the wooden Stark shield on his left arm.

Edric frowned as he watched Beric ride to Jon’s side. “Your father asked me to guard you and bring you to Winterfell once we were done.” Jon looked to him with a look that told him he wouldn’t be talked down, so Beric sighed. “Fine. Then I’ll stay with you.”

“They’re your men,” Jon told him. “Lead them.”

Thoros rode to Jon’s side. “Go, I’ll stay with the boy.”

Alyn turned to Beric. “Make for Sherrer, then head for Hollow Hill.”

“Ser Alyn-”

“I’m no Ser,” he said turning to join Ser Jon Snow, Ser Gladden Wylde, Anguy, Thoros of Myr and a dozen men to guard the path as Beric led the others.

Ghost rushed to join them, growling at the line of men charging toward them. Jon’s blade was still clean as he parried strikes until killed the rider’s horse, letting him fall over and be crushed under hood by his comrades rushing to attack them. With only his normal slender blade he had little hope of slicing through their armor or even their mail shirts, and by the time he’d prepared a riposte to strike their gaps Ghost had ripped open their horses. When they tried to attack from the ground Ghost was there to push them over and rip at their throats or bite into their arms deep enough it wasn’t long before they bled out.

A roar drew their eyes to the river where Gregor Clegane rode atop a stolen stallion. Ghost looked ready to attack again, but Jon spotted a man aiming a crossbow from behind another rider. “Ghost, back!”

Instead of going behind him as he intended, Ghost dashed to the side, taking a curving path to leap up and slam into the man with the crossbow. The landed in the river and Ghost tore out his throat while the man fired a bolt into the back of another horse, causing it to rear and throw the rider back.

Jon raised his shield to take a swing from Gregor’s greatsword. His arm felt numb as the strike dug into the wooden Stark guard shield, nearly reaching his arm. Jon released it, letting the greatsword take it as Gregor swung it back up, throwing the cleaved shield behind him.

Alyn tried to strike at Gregor’s hip, but found his sword glanced off Gregor’s armor. When he went to bring his greatsword down on the guard captain, Gladden Wylde threw his dagger at the Mountain, distracting him as Alyn pulled his horse back, avoiding the slash.

Jon turned his blade and struck for the eye slit of the Mountain’s helm, but Gregor shifted his head, letting his slice across the side, leaving barely a scrape. Taking his greatsword in both hands, Gregor turned in his saddle, slashing down at an angle as a series of harsh pops heralded the searing pain stretching across Jon’s torso as Gregor’s greatsword cut through his silver mail.

With a yell, Jon pulled on his reins, leaning back and turning the horse. He swung his sword at the Mountain, weakly glancing off his pauldron as blood poured down his torso and legs. Anguy quickly fired two arrows at Gregor, drawing his attention when one glanced off his eye slit only because Gregor turned his head slightly.
“Jon!” Thoros cried, reaching for a bottle to pour its contents across his sword before striking it against a piece of flint. The sword ignited in brilliant green flame, startling the horses of the men who came for him. He began to slash wildly, startling the horses he passed as he moved to Jon and grabbed his reins, “Hold on, boy!”

“G-Ghost,” Jon called out shakily, barely holding on to his sword. He tossed it back into its scabbard hanging from his saddle, trying to take the reins from Thoros, but too weak to pull them from his grasp.

“Retreat!” Alyn called out, leading the remaining men to turn their horses and gallop down the pass.

Gregor started to follow, but found himself falling again as Ghost ripped through the back leg of his horse, stopping to shoot him a glare, his fur caked in blood to match his eyes before turning to run after Jon, avoiding a crossbow bolt.

The longer they followed the more their horses died to Ghost and Anguy. They tried targeting the wolf but he hid behind trees, used other horses and riders to block their aim, and seemed to slip into shadows while Anguy fired arrows at them. By the time they reached Sherrer the only soldiers following them were far enough they never saw the men bypass the town completely, heading toward the Hollow Hill.

Beneath the weirwood roots Sam went around helping the injured men as best he could when a guard called out, “Riders!”

That caused all the men to take up arms and prepare for an attack. Even Sam drew his sword, fighting back a shiver that broke when another called out, “It’s Thoros!”

People started to gather around the entrance before one of the Stark guards, Harwin, called back, “Get water and clean cloth!”

Sam heard people dismounting and hurrying inside while others tended to the horses. Then he felt his fear give way to tears upon seeing Thoros of Myr carrying Jon in his arms, blood dripping from what seemed to be the entire lower half of his body. His skin was pale, looking half dead already as he struggled to stay awake.

Ghost, also stained red, whimpered as he followed Thoros inside. Beric’s eyes widened while Edric fought off his panic to motion Thoros toward a tangle of roots they could lay Jon in.

“What happened?” Beric asked Alyn as he followed Thoros with the other men.

“The Mountain,” Alyn answered, his fist clenched tightly. “He cut clear through the boy’s mail, right across his chest.”

“S-Sam,” Jon called out.

Sam wiped at his eyes, his sword falling to the ground as he rushed to Jon’s side. “I’m here,” he said looking down with a put on smile.

Jon smiled up at him. “I’m c-cold… but i-it burns…” Tears trickled from his eyes as he looked to where Edric was helping Thoros remove everything from his torso, leaving him bare chested, revealing a cut that stretched from the collar, across his left pectoral, ending near his waist.

“Y-You’ll be fine,” Sam assured, taking a cloth to help them wipe away the blood. “You’re strong.”
Thoros quickly said, “This’ll sting,” before pouring boiled wine one of the men handed him across the wound. “Now we can try closing it.”

Jon winced, but barely made a noise as he looked to Edric. “Sorry, we couldn’t…”

Edric shook his head, glancing to where Thoros was using a needle to force the wound closed. “We will when you’re healed.”

“My horse?”

Edric motioned behind them, “Right there.”

“Sam?”

“Yes Jon?”

Jon’s smile faded as he looked to the men gathered around him. “Give me… my egg.”

While the others looked on confused, fearing his mind was slipping, Sam’s eyes widened. “Jon, are you-”

“Now,” Jon ordered weakly.

Sam frowned, but nodded, setting the stained red cloth aside to rush past the others. They watched him dig through Jon’s saddle bags before removing a large scarlet egg that made the men all gasp.

“Is that-”

“A dragon egg?”

Sam rushed past them to Jon’s side, holding it out for him. “Here.”

Thoros and Edric stared as Jon took the egg from Sam, groaning slightly as he slid up enough to sit slightly. Jon wrapped his arms around the egg, holding it to his chest, blood trickling across it and smearing the bottom as he whispered, “I’m sorry.” He pressed his head against the egg and chuckled weakly before laying back. “It’s warm.”

At his side he heard a whimper and turned his head, letting his hand down to Ghost’s blood stained head. “Ghost,” he whispered before he closed his eyes and fell still.

“How does he have a dragon egg?” asked Thoros.

“It’s his,” Sam said firmly, “given to him by his father.”

“Lord Stark?” asked Alyn.

“Rhaegar Targaryen,” said Sam, looking to Jon’s cold body, “left with his mother, Lyanna Stark.”

The men around them gasped in shock as they turned to Jon, who lay in a tangle of weirwood roots.

Thoros stared at the boy for a moment before shaking his head and reaching for a piece of root, tearing it from the walls. Laying it on the ground he struck his flint against a dagger, igniting the end and raising a big enough flame for him to hold as he stood. The others looked as he began to pray to the Lord of Light before taking the flames into his mouth and turning to Jon, pressing his lips to the boy’s and breathing flames into him.
“What did you do?” Alyn demanded when Thoros pulled back.

“I gave the boy the good god’s own kiss to send him on his way.”

“Fire and blood,” Ser Raymun Darry gasped, staring at the boy he’d thought ill of when he mentioned the Targaryens. Others seemed to repeat the words, but soon silence filled the hollow hill.

That silence was broken by soft cracks followed by a whimper from Ghost. They followed his crimson eyes to where the sealed shell began to crack and shatter, gasping as a chunk fell away and they saw a small scaled snout push through it. More of the egg broke away as the scarlet dragon pushed at the shell, letting it fall around him to reveal it’s body before raising it’s head and letting out a screeching cry.

The men stared in awe of the first dragon on Westeros in well over a century. They watched it blink it’s golden eyes up at the pale man it sat upon, sniffing at the stitched wound across his torso. Ghost whimpered and the dragon turned its gilded gaze on him, gold meeting red before the dragon turned and crawled up Jon’s chest. After a moment it pressed its snout to Jon’s chin, then to his cheek and forehead before moving back to his chest and pressing his snout to the dead man’s lips.

Once the dragon moved away, Jon gasped and sat up, wincing as he felt tiny claws dig into his chest. His eyes widened seeing a scarlet dragon clinging to him, staring at him with eyes of molten gold.

Looking to the others and seeing their shock he knew they would have few answers for him at the moment, so instead looked to the dragon which crawled up to his shoulder, it’s tail sliding across his neck while it flapped it’s wings and pressed it’s forehead to his. Jon closed his eyes for a moment, feeling the warm spot against his chilled skin.

Had he died? It felt like he did, and there had been nothing. An empty void waiting for him as he drifted from the light.

Gregor Clegane had killed him, same as he had killed Elia Martell and his elder brother Aegon. Tywin’s mad dog, a Lannister pawn. All because of Robert’s Rebellion which spread lies of his parents and played Robert as some champion of stolen love when he was a lecherous brute obsessed with what he couldn’t have. It had been the Stark who were wronged worse, but people seemed to forget that the moment Robert killed Rhaegar.

Jon had lived a life in ice and snow because of them, because they couldn’t settle for removing a mad king but had to slaughter children and take power for themselves. Even when he was given an escape he found only those who had slaughtered his family, forced his uncle and aunt to flee. He found an undeserving king, a vile queen and a cruel prince waiting to be crowned. Though they flew Baratheon banners there were no stags there, only lions and snakes.

It was then Jon decided the Lannisters would pay the debt they owed him. They would pay with fire and blood.

Opening his eyes, the dragon pulled it’s head back as Jon raised his right hand and called to it. “Bloodwing.”

The dragon flapped it’s wings and crawled to his open palm, sitting in it and wrapping it’s tail around Jon’s arm as the others watched it rear back and unleashing a roar, letting the world hear their song as the men in the hollow hill all fell to their knees around Jon.
I hadn’t planned for Ghost to cause so much mayhem apart from his saving Beric, but after that it just felt really fun and I’ve no doubt he has the biggest death count, which will more than double if we include horses.

Jon and Sam not killing anyone came about because despite what shows tell us armor is tough, and with them focused on retreating it left Ghost to down people before they could land any killing blows. It’s also a bit of a juxtaposition to the previous chapter where Dom kills a bunch of guards and a stable boy.

Jon’s death and revival is meant to be vague and uncertain. Most people will just go with what they saw with him dying and then being revived, either by R’hllor or his dragon or both. It won’t particularly matter and should fit whatever you want to take it for.

I don’t take the whole “pieces get chipped away” aspect of revival as literal as some do. Beric is a dude at war who took a mace to the head and Stoneheart is Catelyn after a brutal betrayal. I think without dying and being revived both would be about the same as they are, bar the rot and scars. That’s how I’m handling death and revivals when or if they happen in this story. It’s less about some magical loss and more about what the character goes through because of their death.

I have my own ideas about what happened with Jon that I like, but it should fit most interpretations.

Bloodwing is named for a few different things. Daemon Targaryen, who also wielded Dark Sister, rode a red dragon called Caraxes, known as the Blood Wyrm. There’s also Silverwing, who visited the Wall so keeps a connection to there for Jon. Plus there’s the fire and blood connection, and the fact Jon was covered in blood which got over the egg before it hatched, so lots of blood connections to it as well as it’s coloring.
Chapter Summary

Jon recovers beneath the hollow hill and gives orders to his new found fellowship.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It felt odd to have so many know the truth Jon had struggled to keep secret, yet he had no choice. There was little he could do to hide the dragon that had been born before them all.

The first time someone called him your grace it was Raymun Darry asking, “What should we do, your grace?”

“I’m not a king,” Jon said to the men gathered before him. “Not yet.”

Thoros frowned. “You plan to be?”

“Surely you have heard tale of the prince? The prince who cut open a kitchen cat to see the kittens inside. The prince who slew his brother’s pet fawn and wore it’s skin as a cloak while tormenting him. How many of you would prefer to let Joffrey take the crown when Robert dies?” That seemed to wipe the doubt from the few that had it. “I can’t let the crown go to another mad king. I’ll die making sure Tywin, Cersei and Joffrey don’t ruin the realm just so they can have power.”

“How long have you known?” asked Alyn.

“My father-” Jon sighed, “Lord Stark, he told me when I went to Winterfell with the Baratheons to name him Hand. It was why I left the day after. I went to visit my uncle Aemon at the Wall.”

He explained what he could to them, telling them of how his father had stored his heritage, yet lied of where it had been. They all asked to see Dark Sister, staring in awe of the rippled steel when he drew it, many laughing when they admitted they’d thought him odd for choosing a slender longsword, yet understood now why he might want it. It wouldn’t be too hard to slip past sight with a change of the hilt if he swung quickly and kept it sheathed most of the time.

“That’s why you asked of R’hhlor,” Thoros said with a laugh. “Flames for your hilt.”

“Also there are my aunt and uncle in Essos,” Jon told them. “I don’t know if they follow the Seven or if they’d taken to the gods there. I already know so little of them, I thought knowing of the Lord of Light might help if I met them and they followed him.”

“We should sail to them,” said Ser Raymun. “Let us go and bring an army back to take your throne from the Lannisters.”

Beric shook his head. “And leave the realm like this? You all saw what the Lannisters did to these people.”

“We can help them by ending the Lannisters,” said Raymun. “Kill Tywin and those on the throne and they have no one to lead them, no power to use against us.”
“And while we’re gone thousands will be raped and murdered.”

“My lords,” Jon called out, though he imagined it was more Bloodwing’s shrill roar as he sat perched on Jon’s shoulder that silenced them. “We can’t sail to them because I don’t know where they are. The little news I have is delayed. They may be Vaes Dothrak, surrounded by an army of Dothraki, or they may be on the move again. I can’t say. I won’t waste us on a mission so like to fail.” Jon sighed, looking up to rub Bloodwing’s head with his right hand while his left scratched Ghost’s scalp. “That’s why I have others I’d ask you to take.”

The men all straightened. “What is that?”

Looking to Alyn and Beric he said, “I know Lord Stark told you to take me to Winterfell when this is done, but it isn’t. As Lord Beric reminds us, these lands are tormented by Lannister men. We all saw the horrors of Mummer’s Ford. We cannot let such injustice remain. Though I am not yet king I’d ask some of you to stay here and give the people justice, support the Tullys and Riverlands while I return to King’s Landing.”

They looked confused as Edric asked, “Why would you go back? You heard what they said of your father.” The men who left to get supplies had returned with tales from King’s Landing of Eddard Stark’s arrest as traitor to the crown.

“That’s exactly why I have to go back,” Jon said. “I can’t let him rot in a cell.”

"You could head north," Alyn suggested. "We could have your brother-Robb, we could have him call the banners and support you."

Raymun Darry nodded. "You could have an army on your side."

"I already do." They looked confused until he continued. "Robb has known the truth since I returned to Winterfell. He was the first to pledge to me. The Stark army is mine if I call upon them, though I’ve told him to act as though I was just his bastard brother until I make my claim and call upon them. Any allies he gathers should be allies to our cause. Doubtless the Tully will come with him now, but let him handle any others who would openly go against the Lannisters. I’ll find others who do so from the shadows they cast upon King’s Landing."

“Ser Jon, you would be a hostage,” said Lothar Mallery.

“No, I would be a turncoat.” He answered their surprise with a somber smile as he said, “To them I am as I always will be, a bastard. Even if I spoke the truth to them they wouldn’t believe it. They would dismiss me as a mummer or a bastard thinking himself trueborn. So let them think me a Stark bastard willing to serve them, loyal to the man who knighted me while my father sent me to my death.”

“Surely they would know the truth once Bloodwing grows,” said Gladden Wylde.

“Aye, which is why I can’t bring him.” Jon glanced at the dragon, who pressed his small head to Jon’s temple. ‘I’d ask some of you to carry him to the Wall.”

“You would trust others to carry him?” Ser Raymun asked.

“You are all men who sought justice for people wronged. I ask you not to support me because I am owed a crown or even desire it, but because I believe I can do better that a prince who tortures his sibling near as much as he does animals.

“Ser Alyn.” Alyn, who always dreamed of being a knight, had it granted after Raymun Darry heard
from Thoros how Alyn had ridden beside Jon. He returned to the hollow hill with a shield covered in bolts he stopped from hitting the hidden dragon prince. The guard’s smile still lingered days later as Jon called to him. “I’d ask you to lead the party north and bring Bloodwing to Maester Aemon at the Wall. Help him however you can before returning to aide Beric and the others.”

It took time for Jon to regain some of his color and vigor, but it gave him time to know Bloodwing. He found the dragon fairly quiet and thoughtful, often tilting his head as he examined things. Jon wasn’t even sure it was a he, but had a sense it was. It seemed at times as if the dragon understood not only his words but even his thoughts. When he lay with Jon in the root next where Bloodwing had been born, Jon sometimes found his mind drifting south, and the dragon would then trill mournfully and press his head to Jon’s cheek and chin to cheer him up.

He hated that he had to leave the dragon, yet whenever he spoke or thought of it the creature seemed to look at him solemnly. He wanted to believe that it knew he didn’t want to abandon it. That Bloodwing knew it was a duty they had to do so they could be together later. A duty he told himself the dragon seemed to accept.

Where Ghost held colors worthy of a Stark bastard Bloodwing held those of a trueborn Targaryen. It looked as though he’d absorbed the blood Jon shed, leaving him with scarlet scales and flesh dark like pooled blood in the membrane of his wings while his eyes shined like liquid gold.

Much as Ghost had, Bloodwing took to Sam. He’d been scared whenever the dragon crawled toward him, but once he realized he could only breath small puffs of smoke and was coming to beg for scraps of food, Sam warmed to him. Bloodwing took to others as well, though Jon wondered if that was simply because they all took the chance to feed him scrapes whenever they could.

They took two weeks to regain their strength, though that had been delayed when Beric led a party to slaughter a band of Lannister men who stayed in Sherrer to torment them. They returned with a mound of goods stolen from the dead soldiers and food offered by the villagers.

“They asked our name,” Beric told Jon, who waved off one of the rewarded cakes. It wasn’t unnoticed that he always let others eat before himself whenever they returned with treats.

“How should we be known?” asked Thoros.


Gladden chuckled. “Shall we tell them we follow a Targaryen as well?”

“Then perhaps Brotherhood of the Scarlet King?” Lothar suggested with a nod to Bloodwing, who was taking a scrap of meet from Edric’s fingers.

“The Fellowship of Fire,” Sam suggested. When they looked to him, Sam nodded toward Thoros. “Let them think you all converted by Thoros. Let ‘and Blood’ follow it silently.”

Beric grinned at that, smacking Sam’s shoulder, who smiled thankfully. Thoros glanced at Jon, sat on a log beside Ghost and shaking his head with a slight smile.

It was later that night as Jon stood outside, letting Bloodwing flap his wings from his shoulder while men stood in the distance keeping watch, that Thoros approached him. “Jon,” he called quietly.

Jon turned, looking to him and chuckling. “You know you look better with a beard.”

“I say the same of you,” Thoros said with a nod to the dark stubble growing around the boy’s jaw.
Watching Jon reach up to stroke the scaled head of his dragon, Thoros glanced to the cave before telling Jon, “I intend to go with you.”

“Are you certain?” Jon asked. “You would do better here. If your lord let you revive me then perhaps you can do the same for others?”

Thoros shook his head. “When I asked his guidance he showed me the Red Keep cast in shadow. Besides, I was Robert’s friend, that may still hold sway with some of them.”

“Even with your help I would be a hostage. They may let me walk through the keep but I'll have daggers at my throat in some form or another. Here at least you could help protect people.”

Thoros laughed. “There are near one hundred of us, most of whom are still here because of you and Ghost. If not for that warning we would have been taken by their trap and slaughtered. We lost twenty four men instead of one hundred. There are sellsword companies with less men than our fellowship.”

“And we’ll need every one of them if we’re to help the realm.”

“You’ve been given a second chance at life, Jon. The Lord of Light doesn’t give such a thing to let it go to waste,” Thoros said with renewed confidence in his lord. “If he brought you back then he did so for a purpose.”

“Are we sure it was him?” Jon asked quietly. When Thoros looked at him questioningly he explained, “I didn’t see light when I died. There was nothing. No flames, no trees, no heavens or hells, just nothing.”

“Nothing that you remember,” Thoros reminded. “Who knows where you were when the light left your body.”

Bloodwing pressed his head against Jon while Ghost pressed his face into Jon’s side and whined. “Wherever I was doesn’t matter. I’m here now, and I know what I have to do. No matter how hard.”

While Beric was left in charge of those remaining within the hollow hill, which would act as their base, Alyn and Jon prepared their parties to head north and south respectively.

“Ser Jon.”

He turned and found Lord Beric walking to him while he secured his saddlebags to his courser. “Yes, my lord?”

“I feel torn,” the man admitted quietly to Jon. “I want to aid you in your efforts, but I feel it my duty to do as you and your father asked and bring justice for these people.”

“I will be fine, Lord Beric. I’ll have Thoros and Sam with me.”

“And the hero of Mummer’s Ford,” Beric said with a laugh, looking to the large wolf which seemed much larger than he had when they set out.

“Not for long,” said Jon.

That surprised the Lightning Lord. “What do you mean?”

“I considered leaving him here with you,” Jon said looking to Ghost, who stared at him sullenly.
“But I’ve decided to send him north with the others, let him be with Robb where I cannot.” He reached down to rub Ghost’s head. “Without Robert there I fear Cersei would skin him as she’s wanted since she first saw him.”

Beric frowned. He’d seen how close the boy was with his direwolf and dragon. “I’m sorry you have to be separated from them.”

“It’s only for now,” Jon said for himself. Shaking his head he looked to Beric. “Either way, you need not feel concerned, my lord. I trust you’ll lead the men well.”

Beric sighed. “I failed at the ambush.”

“You were startled.” Jon shrugged. “But you aren’t alone. You have others here to aide you.”

“I await Ser Alyn’s return,” Beric said with a laugh, “he led better than I that day.”

“And you may lead better tomorrow,” Jon assured, clasping Beric’s shoulder. “Ser Barristan told me when I started squiring for him that doubt eats at skill. Don’t doubt yourself, Lord Beric. Let others do that for you so you may prove them wrong. You are the Lord of Blackhaven. A house born of divine luck. Who better for this than you?”

Beric wore a soft smile as he nodded. He couldn’t help wondering what kind of king the boy could be if he was like this at fifteen. “Thank you, Ser Jon.”

“Be a lord,” Jon told him as he took his hand from his shoulder. “Command your men. Help your squire become the lord he needs to be.”

At that Beric nodded. “I’ve released him from my service.”

“Why?”

“To serve the man who may be king,” Beric answered with a somber smile.

Jon shook his head. “Lord Beric-”

“In truth I am no different from Lord Stark,” Beric admitted quietly. “I fear the boy’s safety here, and think he could be of use to you. I saw you on the field, I’d ask you train him as you were, let him earn his birthright. If you must, let him serve as his uncle did your father.”

Jon shook his head. “I won’t name him some shadow guard.”

“Then name him squire and teach him what I cannot.”

When he told Sam of what Lord Beric had done he crossed his arms and thought on it before nodding. “It could still work. He was a squire much as I. Many saw him speak with you in King’s Landing. We need only add him to our story rather than change it.”

“So now it is what? Thoros rode back with me while you and Edric left to join us?”

Sam nodded. “We met you and rode ahead with Thoros while the others stayed behind to hold off the Lannister pursuers. But we became separated from them, finding refuge in a desolate town before making our return once you were healed.”

Jon never felt as awful as he did when he rode south while Ghost and Bloodwing traveled north with Alyn, Ser Raymun Darry, Ser Gladden Wylde and a guard squad sure they could move silently, even with an infant dragon. It felt like Jon was being split across Westeros, but he knew he
needed to do this. Aemon would take care of Bloodwing. He could name him his own, claim he
found some lost egg of Silverwing or Vermithor from their visit to the Wall and raised it in secret
to be a guardian of the Wall in his place. Robb would care for Ghost and keep him safe while Jon
rode into the Lion’s den.

He told himself Domeric and his sisters were alive, but he didn’t know since there was no news of
them, only Ned’s arrest. There was little news from Winterfell either, but Jon imagined that once
Robb heard of Ned’s arrest he would call the banners.

Jon rode hard, moving quickly with only three others, each willing to skip a meal or ride into the
night to close the distance. Whenever they stopped at night Jon had taken to doing his best to teach
Edric what he could. He felt he owed it to the boy for taking him from Beric.

Though Edric had been hesitant to leave Beric, the lord had told him privately, “Watch him. I
cannot leave these lands unguarded, but neither do I want to do so for him. I ask you to be his
shield and aide in my place. Be his eyes and ears where you can, and let him train you as I can
not.”

That had eased Edric’s concerns he had failed Lord Beric somehow, and once they took to sparring
he found himself pleased with the chance to push himself against someone more skilled than Lord
Beric or most master-at-arms he’d trained with. By the time they neared King’s Landing Edric felt
confident that if he kept to this he was destined to wield Dawn as his uncle had. It helped that Jon
did all he could to mimic Barristan’s training, with bits of Jaime’s levity. He spoke more of Edric’s
potential than his failures, pointing out his mistakes but equally making his successes apparent.

Sam had improved his archery thanks to tips from Anguy. His clusters had shrunk, drawing closer
to his targets despite picking up his pace. He had lingered on each shot, but Anguy told him the
foolly of that as it may be allowed in competition but he wielded a warbow meant to see battle and
his targets wouldn’t wait. The largest help seemed to come with the realization that there was
maths involved with near every aspect, from the angles to the strength needed to vary distances. It
gave Sam a way to study and practice in his mind even when he wasn’t wielding his bow.

They were near the city when they found a secluded spot and took to digging with a spade they
stole on their way south. By the time they started toward the city again, Dark Sister lay buried near
a tree far from the walls, waiting for Jon to come claim it again.

Though he had abandoned his razor to let his hair grow again, Thoros did his best to keep his robes
clean. He did his best to look as respectable as he could when they arrived at the city gates and the
guards recognized them, drawing their swords and halting the group.

“What is this?” Thoros asked, taking the lead as he was the elder of the group. “We return from
seeking the king’s justice.”

“With a traitor’s bastard,” the men spat while glaring at Jon.

“And you think he gave me traitor’s blood?” Jon laughed. “Take me to the king and I’ll tell him
myself of your idiocy.”

The men sneered, aiming their spears at his horse. “We’ll do that.”

Sam glanced to Jon, who seemed unafraid as they were lead toward the Red Keep surrounded by a
group of guards. Somehow, his confidence eased Sam’s doubts of their plans. Maybe Thoros was
right and the gods were on their side for once.
Myrcella likely told Jon the kitchen cat story of Joffrey at some point, much like Tommen told him of his fawn.

I imagine people thinking Jon a fool but he isn’t Sansa, so would seem to have less value as a hostage. Starks like to be on the front lines, and this is Jon’s front line. Plus it’ll lead to more cool story stuff that I’m looking forward to writing.

The bit with Jon rubbing Ghost and Bloodwing when Thoros talks about where he was when the light left his body is more for the sake of anyone who wants to think he went into them than saying that he did. I wrote it more as them being sad at the idea of him dying or the memory of it, but it could work either way.

I can’t imagine Thoros not following Jon after everything unless R’hhlor gave him some specific vision that made him stay with Beric. Because they have larger numbers, Beric shouldn’t be so quick to die, if he dies at all, so Thoros shouldn’t be needed as desperately.

Edric is mostly because I have some stuff planned for him, and he’ll be of more use at King’s Landing with Jon than fighting with Beric and the Fellowship. It won’t hurt that he’ll be training with Jon, who is about to have much less people at his level to practice with. Plus it might be helpful to have someone from Dorne on his side if Jon found some Dornish lords at court he might try to make allies.

Next chapter starts with a bit of backtracking before picking up with Jon speaking in the throne room.
She didn’t hate the boy at first. No, it was more Robert she hated for sending Jaime to retrieve him. But then it was clear Robert liked the boy, and Cersei couldn’t help but dislike him.

Though he rarely went to interact with the boy, too busy drinking wine and fucking every ignorant whore he could, Robert always found time to ask Jon Arryn how Jon Snow was progressing. It didn’t help that while she was set to dislike the northern bastard even Jaime took a liking to him. What had settled it for her was the day she heard Robert tell Jon Arryn, “Gods, I’d be proud if Joff was even half Ned’s bastard.”

How could he think favorably of a bastard over her son? His words made her seethe for months, each compliment she heard making the bile boil within her until Joffrey’s nameday feast where she saw one of the maids dancing with the bastard. She saw the girl kiss his cheek and rush away, and found herself smiling as she thought of what to do.

It wasn’t hard. “Are you some worthless whore?” She asked with a scoff. “I won’t suffer a staff that associated with baseborn filth. I won’t have it their black hearts spread to my children.” A few words to key people and suddenly it spread until no one would even serve the boy wine. She could still remember the joy she felt watching him be passed over for supper the first time, having to stop a maid and demand it, only to be served cold food sometime later.

Months later Jaime had come to her and when she tried to kiss him he’d pushed her away. “How could you?”

“How could I what?” She asked with a huff.

Jaime’s eyes seemed so cold as he shook his head. “You turned the servants against the boy.”

A smile took her lips as she snickered. “The bastard?”

“I know you don’t like him, but he’s not like Robert,” Jaime said sharply. “He doesn’t deserve this, Cersei. He’s-” He winced as she pressed her lips to his without warning to shut him up. Grabbing her shoulders he pushed her away. “Cersei, you can’t-“ He gasped when she slipped a hand into his breeches and took hold of his cock, pressing her lips to his again.

She couldn’t believe it when he had grabbed her arm, stopping her stroking to pull her head back. “Stop making them stay away from him,” he told her.

In that moment she hated Jon Snow, but nodded. She had stopped long ago, now they did it out of habit or fear. The damage had been done and every one brought on after was quickly told to ignore the bastard squire. She never had to say a word to them again.
It wasn’t long after Jaime came to her that night that she first heard of the bastard speaking with her daughter. Those who told her of it said that they seemed friendly, but that was all they could say for certain, though each warned of a bastard’s lust.

Cersei had even dared to ask Barristan of it while he guarded her and the knight answered, “Jon has taken to helping her in the garden in my place. They tease me about my age, but I believe Jon does it to be useful and as thanks for the princess’ kindness while I am able to continue my duties as her guard.”

“Her kindness?” Cersei asked with doubt.

“The princess frequently slips and called him Ser Jon,” Barristan revealed. “I think it helps boost his confidence some.”

She had known the boy played with Tommen while they guarded him. Tommen had mentioned it to Jaim and the other kingsguard, often disappointed they ‘aren’t as fun as Jon and Barry’. However the idea that her child could be taken by a bastard had left her distraught. At least until the day she saw Myrcella walking through the yard with Ser Meryn Trant where she stopped to go speak with Jon.

From above Cersei watched them speak for a time and saw that Myrcella’s affection for the boy was apparent. Cersei could understand it in a sense. He was growing into a decent enough looking boy, and Myrcella interacted with him more than others. However when the conversation ended she saw no hint of the boy sensing or returning her affection. If anything it left her thinking Jon was truly a northern dullard too dense to see Myrcella’s beauty. Or perhaps he shared Loras’ taste in men.

“Is he truly so dim?” She asked Jaime the next time they met in private.

Her twin laughed, shaking his head. “Jon simply knows his place. He knows it’s not worth thinking on since he’ll never try anything.” She saw her brother’s brilliant face lose some of it’s luster as he sighed, keeping from blaming her as he said, “He thinks himself too low for even the servants.”

Cersei’s joy at that faded when Jaime continued with a smirk, “I think I’ll speak with Tyrion about getting him to bed a woman. Show the boy he’s worth more than most and deserves to have his pick of the ladies in court.”

With a scoff Cersei shook her head. “He’s a bastard.”

“Lord’s bastard,” Jaime corrected, “and a knight.”

“A squire,” Cersei corrected in return.

Jaime shook his head. “For now. But I’ve known the boy long enough to see the kind of man he is. He could be a true knight, one worthy of the respect due, unlike most the fools knighted these days.”

When Jaime stepped toward her she brushed his hand away and turned from him. “You speak so highly of this bastard. Let him take you in hand tonight. If even our daughter cannot tempt him then surely his taste match Renly’s.”

With a grin Jaime had come up behind her whispering, “I don’t want your hand.” His had suddenly dug between her legs, making her squirm before he took her that night.

Most days Cersei didn’t see the bastard. Even when Barristan was assigned to her she’d made her
distaste clear enough for the kingsguard to send him away. Perhaps that was why it felt so sudden that he was being unmasked as the Knight of White Crows and made to squire to Jaime.

“Why?” She demanded that night.

“I want someone to match me eventually,” Jaime said with a laugh. “Apart from Barristan who else is there? Loras might get there, but I’d prefer it was Snow.”

Even her father had been suspicious of the bastard, but he seemed to accept Jaime’s assurances enough to let the boy join them. Thankfully Jaime took Barristan’s habit of sending him away whenever he was assigned to her, giving them time to sneak away together before their journey. Once it started he also was kept at a distance as the suggestion of Tyrion, though Tommen and Myrcella seemed to speak with him through their deformed uncle, who told them of all Jon was doing while they were in the wheelhouse.

Cersei had always doubted Jaime’s stories of Jon’s dislike of the Starks, and that doubt grew when they arrived at Winterfell and he seemed to spend the day with them. But then he left without telling anyone but his youngest sister, and Jaime suddenly grew more dismissive of the Starks, especially Catelyn. He almost never referred to her by name, calling her the cold trout and even an undeserving cunt who should have been rotting in a river.

“Is it her alone he dislikes?” She asked quietly when he followed her toward the sept.

“It’s more complicated than that,” Jaime admitted. “He speaks on it sometimes while we spar.”

“He does?” Cersei arched her brow.

Jaime nodded. “When he was young he felt jealous of Robb at times, but again knew his place. He’s not very close to Sansa, the girl keeps her distance to appease her mother. He fears her mother will warp her into a vapid lady of little depth. He’d even spoken of his doubts about Ned, who he knows so little about. The man won’t even speak of his mother, leaving the boy to suffer his sneering wife. It’s almost as if he avoids the thought of being another Daemon Blackfyre simply to spite Catelyn worries that he will.”

That amused Cersei, who wondered if she could use that since it was strong enough to drive the boy to the Wall.

When Jaime pushed Bran her concern was not only that others would find out but that Jaime’s guilt would grow after Jon returned to the procession. She could sense it bubbling within him, making him withdraw from her, which she wouldn’t allow.

“Ignore him,” she told her twin. “Keep your distance.”

“I can’t,” Jaime said somberly. Seeing the worry in her eyes he laughed. “It’s not as if I’m going to confess to the boy. Even if they suspect it I’m not so stupid as to admit to it.”

His decision changed after she took him to bed and spent the night pleasing him until he agreed with her. After that he kept his distance from the bastard squire, abandoning their night spars.

When the boy unhorsed Jaime she felt a flood of anger, but wondered if her twin had let the boy win as some kind of foolish penance. Though he denied it sullenly later that night, she doubted his words, telling herself Jaime was too kind.

Even worse Jon had crowned Myrcella queen of love and beauty. Cersei was displeased a bastard had been the one to crown her, tainting it for her daughter. If anything he should have given it to
her, but it seems much as Jaime had helped prop him up by letting him win, Jon had taken Myrcella’s affection as support for his becoming a knight and used this chance to thank her. The boy was so blind to her adoration he needed to be tricked into dancing with her by his friends, Ser Meryn telling her he’d been sullen as ever by the time the dance ended.

Sat in the throne room she watched as Jon Snow stood beside Thoros of Myr, Samwell Tarly and Edric Dayne. Each had told their part of the story, of how they rode with Beric, how Jon had been forced to go by his father. How when the ambush happened Jon stayed behind to help them escape, but the squires returned to help him and found Thoros holding him half dead. How they were separated from everyone, Jon even looking somewhat distraught when Samwell mentioned they couldn’t find his direwolf.

Nearly all in the room gasped when Jon removed his jerkin and doublet to reveal the scar stretching across his chest. They remarked it was a miracle he hadn’t died from the amount of blood that must have escaped him.

Stood off to the side Myrcella wiped her eyes, turning her head and biting her lips to keep quiet. Cersei glanced to her daughter as Joffrey laughed. “That’s some scar.”

“Few men could have survived such a wound, your grace,” Thoros said with a nod to the young king. “I saw men die from lesser wounds when I fought beside your father.”

Joffrey nodded. “So you knew nothing of your father’s plan to betray the crown? You weren’t party to his betrayal?”

Jon stared up at Joffrey as he put his doublet back on. It hung loose as he looked to the blonde boy. “Your grace. Your father gave me all I have, not Eddard Stark. The only reason I don’t serve at Castle Black right now is because when I wanted to leave he thought me too young and your father graciously offered to let me squire for Ser Barristan. If not for King Robert I would be freezing alongside murderers, rapist, thieves and traitors instead of having a chance to prove my worth. He would have damned me to serve the rest of my life at the Wall, but your father gave me a chance at a better life. I would never betray him.”

Cersei noticed Myrcella looking from Jon to Joffrey, clutching her skirts and fighting off more tears, surely praying that her brother would be merciful.

“So you admit you have no loyalty to your own father?” The room turned to Cersei as she spoke.

Jon looked to her, nodding solemnly. “I believe loyalty is something that must be earned, and putting his seed in some woman he doesn’t even care to tell me of isn’t enough to earn loyalty. Nor is giving me a home when it is one where I spent my days reminded of how little I was worth.”

“Then who are you loyal to?” asked Varys. “If not your father, House Stark?”

“The house of the woman who cursed my life for being a bastard, which I never asked for?” Jon scoffed. “My brothers and sisters are fine enough, they only do as their parents tell them and have no hand in House Stark. If Lady Catelyn did as you say than why should I follow any who support her, a woman who would claim her own justice? She is just as like to claim me trying to kill Robb if I were to hug him.”

Joffrey chuckled and leaned forward. “Would you fight for us?”

Jon frowned. “I would ask to be spared fighting my own siblings who will be made to fight her war, and instead act as a guard for yours, as I have since I began squiring for Ser Barristan.”
“You wish to be named to the kingsguard?” Littlefinger scoffed.

Jon shook his head. “No, only a guard. I haven’t earned the honor of being named a kingsguard.”

Looking to Joffrey again he continued, “Your father knighted me because I earned it by besting others. I wouldn’t ask to be given this, but I would ask to be allowed the chance to earn it, as well as the honor and trust my father has cast aside.”

Joffrey arched his brow. “Would you swear your sword to my family?”

“I would,” Jon said with a nod, keeping his eyes on Joffrey, praying he would be made to swear to Myrcella. It would be so easy if he was.

Instead Joffrey sat back and smiled. “Good. When the fighting ends you can swear your sword to my uncle. The Imp.”

Cersei glanced at her son, thinking on it quickly. It kept the boy close, but at distance enough that if he turned on them he would likely kill Tyrion first. Once he did they would know his true colors and kill him before he tried anything. If he didn’t then he would still be loyal to them since Tyrion at least did what he could to help them when he wasn’t whoring. Either way it should work out for them.

“You can help finish building the new stable. The last burned down, so you can work there until my uncle comes to claim you.” With that Joffrey rose and made his way down the throne after waving a hand to dismiss Jon.

“Thank you your grace,” Jon had called out with a bow before turning to leave with his companions.

When they returned to their rooms Jon found his a mess, the lock of his chest broken open and the cart of gold long gone. He was told later that it had been claimed by the crown to be held until they could be sure of his innocence.

“You also received a letter from your uncle,” Pycelle said, Jon thankfully keeping his confusion internal before realizing they only knew of the one.

Taking the letter he thanked the grand maester, watching the man leave as he opened the letter. Sam came to his room and sighed. “They got you as well? They took the gold I’d imagine?”

“They did,” Jon nodded. “How much was there?”

“More than I’d like,” Sam sighed. “There should still be some stashed around though. If they haven’t found it, you should have a few thousand still. The batch from Domeric’s room was missing though, so he likely escaped.”

“Hopefully with my sisters,” Jon said, none of them missing the lack of anyone mentioning Sansa or Arya since their return. Jon also avoided asking to help play into his lack of concern for them.

“What’s that?” he asked nodding to the letter.

“From my uncle,” he said looking over the letter. “It’s coded but I don’t understand it.”

“Have you forgotten it already?”

“No,” Jon shook his head. “It’s what it says that’s confusing. He says the Others are coming. The dead walk in the north and travel south.” Looking to Sam he noted, “He wouldn’t just make it up,
would he?"

“If he’s not then…”

Jon looked to the letter with a frown. “Then the death comes for us all.”

Approaching the ancient fortress of the First Men which guarded the Neck, Catelyn Stark felt relief and pride in what her son must be now he was leading a host to war. She made for the Gatehouse Tower flying Stark banners with her uncle Brynden Tully, Wylis and Wendel Manderly, and near fifteen hundred Manderly men.

She found her son in a hall speaking so intently with his father’s bannermen it was his direwolf, Grey Wind who noticed her enter. It was the silence of the other lords that made him look up, his face and voice full of emotion as he said, “Mother?”

She kept herself at bay, speaking of his beard and letting the other lords pay their respects before leaving them alone.

Filling a horn with ale she studied her son. “Edmure was sixteen when he grew his first whiskers.”

Robb ignored her eased tone as he stood looking to her. “You know of father?”

“Yes. Lord Manderly told me when I landed in White Harbor. Have you heard word of your sisters?”

“No,” Robb’s jaw shifted as he pressed his palms into the table. “They could be hostages or dead. We can’t know.” His gaze rose toward her. He looked like he was overcome by a flood of questions, finally settling on, “Why?” She didn’t answer, so he stood and revealed, “It was never Tyrion’s dagger.”

Catelyn’s eyes widened, sitting up in her chair. “What?”

“Father wrote to us at Winterfell, where he expected you to be, telling us that he learned the truth. Your friend,” Robb said with some bite, “Littlefinger, lied to you. It was Robert Baratheon won it from him. Father also worried he had been cuckolding Lord Arryn by sleeping with aunt Lysa.”

Catelyn shook her head in disbelief. “R-Robert?”

“Littlefinger,” Robb answered.

Catelyn gaped as she stared at the table. “Littlefinger would never-”

“We know he lied,” said Robb. “Once Jon told father he asked Ser Loras and Lord Renly, both of whom shared the same story. He lied to us.” Robb’s eyes darkened as he said with contained anger to maintain a relatively calm voice, “You’ve started a war over a lie.”

Catelyn shook her head. “You can’t know that. Tyrion could have gotten the dagger-”

“Gods!” Robb scoffed. “Should I fear for myself as well? Does madness run in Tully blood as it did Targaryen?”

“Robb,” Catelyn warned.

Robb shook his head. “How many have died because you couldn’t let him pass? I did. I was barely
fifteen but I let him pass through Winterfell while Bran sat beside me. I knew it wasn’t worth it. How could you not know better?”

“I couldn’t-”

“You’re supposed to!” He boomed, making her wince. “Father left you to guide me, but all you’ve done is force me to war.” Robb sighed, reaching down to rub Grey Wind’s head as the wolf rubbed his head against Robb’s leg. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this.”

“I know, Robb, but we must endure this.”

Robb glanced at her, wanting so desperately to tell her the truth of Jon, but wasn’t even sure if he could trust her anymore. How could she doubt father? Was it to make herself feel better and assure herself Tyrion was guilty, or was it to avoid admitting her friend had lied?

Because of her the Lannisters attacked. Because of her they slaughtered the people of Mummer’s Ford. Because of her father had sent out a band of men to bring justice to Gregor Clegane. Because of her Jon rode with them.

Catelyn gasped when Robb suddenly turned, throwing his goblet against the wall and yelling. “Robb!” She gasped, rushing to his side as tears fell from his eyes. “What is it?”

Robb stepped back. “Tywin ambushed a party father sent out to bring justice to Gregor Clegane. They almost succeeded, but the band managed to make a fighting retreat thanks to a white wolf. Jon’s wolf.”

Catelyn’s brow furrowed, remembering Ned mentioning Jon had found a white direwolf. “What happened?”

“They say Jon stayed behind to block a pass and hold off the Lannister men. That he was cut down by the Mountain.”

Catelyn felt unsteady, turning to hold the table. “He’s dead?”

“So they say,” Robb said bitterly, looking to her as he added, “we don’t know, so don’t celebrate just yet.”

Catelyn turned and smacked Robb across the cheek.

Robb turned his head and closed his eyes at the strike. After a moment he opened them and looked to her. “I’m sending you back to Winterfell.”

Catelyn eyes widened. His eyes left little doubt he didn’t want her there, feeling like a knife in her heart. “Robb,” she said pleadingly, “your grandfather is dying and my brother is surrounded by enemies. My place is with them at Riverrun.”

“And not with your own sons?” Robb nodded, walking past her. “Do you as please.”

She watched him leave, tears falling from her eyes as she sank into a chair and wept into her hands. It felt as if everything was slipping through her fingers. Her eldest son thought ill of her, they had no idea what happened to her daughters and her youngest sons were left to rule a keep. Her husband was a prisoner under arrest for treason, and because of the war she’d started his bastard had likely died.

All because of her. All for a lie.
I had a lot of fun going back through the story from Cersei’s perspective and bringing Jaime back through that. Every pick up on how dumb Cersei is? Jaime says even if they suspect he pushed Bran he wouldn’t admit to what he did, meanwhile Cersei told Ned about her and Jaime despite not being a captive or anything. Also the bit of jealousy Cersei has toward Myrcella being crowned felt petty enough I had to include it.

Joffrey having Jon swear himself to Tyrion and work in the stables is meant to be an insult to the knight, much like Jaime getting him was meant to be an insult from Robert.

Originally I had a scene in the last chapter with Benjen, but it was just a few paragraphs, so I removed it to leave what’s going on at the Wall for an overview much like Cersei got here. Hopefully this is enough to know that he got back safely.

Who knows what at different points is a big ol’ mess right now, so Robb is going off the stories his scouts have heard. The Lannister forces just assume Jon has died, they haven’t had word yet from King’s Landing.
Chapter Summary

Varys visits Ned in his cell to tell him of Jon’s return. Barristan is released from the kingsguard and returns to his true king. Robb leads his host to the Twins and must negotiate their passage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the dark of his cell, Eddard Stark found himself wishing he could stop thinking. His thoughts became a plague he couldn’t escape as he replayed all that had happened to him.

It didn’t help when Varys arrived in disguise bringing him wine instead of water.

“My daughters…”

“Have escaped the city with your Flayed Knight and their dancing master,” Varys told him. “But your bastard has returned to the city.”

“Jon?” Eddard sat up.

“Are there others?” Varys asked.

“How is he?”

“Alive, but the rumors he’d been cut down by the Mountain seem to have been true. The scar across his chest leaves little doubt of that.” He explained the version of events he’d heard along with the rest of the court, leaving Ned shocked.

“Why would he return?”

“It seems he thinks it his duty,” Varys revealed. “Not to you, but to the man who knighted him. Even as he begged for mercy on Joffrey’s first day of court he did so while admitting he held no loyalty for you or your family’s slights against him.

“He is being watched, escorted by an honor guard ready to slit his throat if he tries anything before he is sworn to Lord Tyrion.” Varys wore a smile as he said, “If he weren’t a bastard I would say he has damned you by giving them another hostage, but it is clear your wife wouldn’t put much value in him. You may prove valuable even though she has let the Imp slip through her fingers.”

Catelyn. In his darker moments he agreed with Jon. She had put the noose around his neck as much as Littlefinger and his lies.

If only she’d let Tyrion leave that inn Jaime never would have attacked him and Robert might not have left for his hunt to avoid the chaos. They could have worked together with Robert to handle the Lannisters and if they were strong enough just taken the throne at the end or waited and built up their strength to claim it from Stannis, who people scarcely seemed to care for. He may have even married Myrcella to Jon to make a point and insult Tywin by marrying his grandchild to a
bastard, allowing them to use her to rally the Westerlands.

Instead Tywin started a war with the Riverlands, Jon was injured and lost Ghost, and their daughters were somewhere in the wild hopefully avoiding the war while his eldest son rode into it.

His only hope now was that as a hostage he would prove too valuable. Varys thought even the Wall too much for him, saying Cersei would be better off having a tame wolf they could use than one halfway across the world.

“She was fool enough to dismiss Barristan Selmy,” Varys revealed, “I doubt she will be fool enough to throw away an asset like you. Still, I would suggest you confess to the crimes they charged you with, else they may come to convince you with your bastard’s head.”

Ned had hoped that Barristan would serve his duty as Jon’s mentor and hidden kingsguard, ready to protect him when the time came, but Ned doubted they would let the man stay to help his former squire. Of course, he couldn’t know that after Barristan left the throne room he returned to White Sword Tower to edit his White Book entry and record his own dismissal. Ned couldn’t know that despite not having a sword he killed the gold cloaks sent for him and fled, only to return in disguise.

Rather than go to his kin at Harvest Hill and risk inflicting Joffrey’s displeased upon them he sold his horse and dressed as a commoner. Cloaked in the persona of an elderly man among the smallfolk fleeing the war, the guards paid him no mind.

It was when Jon went to the half built stables early one morning with Edric that a voice called to him, “Jon.”

They turned, hands on their swords when they found an old man with a slight beard beneath a hood he pulled back to reveal himself. Jon smiled. “Ser Barristan.” He glanced to his squire, “Edric, stand watch.” The boy quickly moved, ready to warn them if the guards went to check on them while Jon turned back to Barristan. “Why are you here?”

“A kingsguard’s place is at his king’s side,” he said simply.

“Not now it isn’t,” Jon said.

“Jon,” Barristan glanced to Edric. “Let us all flee and find a way north.”

“I can’t.”

“Then what shall I do?” Barristan asked. “Should I wait in Flea Bottom until you are done?”

Jon thought for a moment before shaking his head. “No. I’d have you act as my kingsguard and guard my family.”

“You want me to go to Robb?”

“To Essos,” Jon answered. “Find my aunt and uncle and seek their aid in the war to come. Protect them so I can meet them. Let them know I want to welcome them home. Let them know I have a dragon named Bloodwing who travels north with Ghost.”

Barristan’s eyes widened. “It hatched?”

Jon nodded, telling him of all that happened at the Mummer’s Ford and Hollow Hill, of his supposed death and revival. Of Bloodwing’s birth and the Fellowship of Fire. They discussed how
Barristan should handle thing some before Jon removed a small coin purse from his belt and tossed it to Barristan.

The kingsguard shook his head, opening it to remove a few pieces before tossing the rest back. “This is more than enough for a ship.”

“While he was still hand, my father told me Ser Jorah Mormont acted as a spy for the crown. I’d suggest watching him, see if it is still true, learn what you can from him and guard them from him and any others.”

“Please stay safe, my king.” Barristan said bowing his head.

“You as well, Ser Barristan.”

Barristan wore a smile as he raised his hood and left through the back of the stables. Edric returned as Jon turned back to his saddle. “Are you certain we couldn’t use him?”

“Of course we could,” said Jon. “But for now I need to play hostage, and I can’t do that if we slaughter everyone in the keep with just us five.”

Edric laughed, pleased to be included in Jon’s count.

**XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO**

Catelyn was a world away from her youngest sons and had no idea where her daughters were. Though she rode beside her eldest there was a chasm between them that seemed too large to cross, though she would try forever if she had to. If she couldn’t be of solace for her child she would be his strength, make herself of use.

That had been why when Ser Stevron came to them she spoke up among the arguing lords. “I will go!”

“You, my lady?” The Greatjon furrowed his brow.

“No,” Robb said crisply. Catelyn frowned as she watched her son turn. “Uncle Brynden, would you go?”

The gray haired Tully arched his bushy eyebrows before nodding. “If that is what you wish.”

“I am certain my lord father would be pleased to to speak to the Lord Brynden,” Ser Stevron said. “To vouchsafe for our good intentions, my brother Ser Perwyn will remain here until she is safely returned.”

“He shall be our honored guest,” said Robb as the youngest of the Freys dismounted. “I require my uncle’s return by evenfall, Ser Stevron. It is not my intent to linger here.”

Robb had helped Brynden to his horse to see him off, speaking quietly with him the entire time before he stood watching them ride to the Twins. Catelyn walked up beside him. “This is too great a risk. He could still hold your uncle hostage in your place You should have let me go.”

“Let them think me sentimental,” Robb said icily, “or that I think you incapable.”

Catelyn frowned. “You know I would never let them mistreat you.”

“And Uncle Brynden will?”
“He is a man set in his ways,” Catelyn argued. “He is stubborn, proven by the years of silence between him and my father as well as his lack of wife. He won’t accept an insult from Walder with a smile, he will return it.”

“And you would accept an insult?”

“If it helps us,” Catelyn said stepping forward, placing a hand over his heart, “if it helps you, I would gladly take a knife to the heart.”

Robb glanced at her, thinking back to his words with Brynden.

“I can not be wed,” Robb told him as they walked to his horse.

“Think to model yourself after me?” Brynden asked with a laugh. “You’re a lord, no second son. They’ll demand it of you soon enough.”

“And I’ll choose mine when it comes. I’m worth more than the Twins.”

“Is that so?”

“In the war to come we’ll have grander needs than a bridge,” Robb told him as he watched the man rise to his saddle. “Needs my marriage may buy.”

He had worked that much out with Jon that night they spoke of their plans. When Jon told him of Loras and the Tyrells, Robb realized he could wed Margaery to assure their allegiance for Jon beyond his friendship with Loras.

“Have you seen her?” Robb had asked.

“Only a portrait he had made to give to Lord Renly for some reason,” Jon said with a shrug. “She seems pretty. And Loras says she is as clever as their grandmother. More than enough for you, I’m sure.”

They had laughed, but they had others to consider as well. If not for Dornish customs making her heiress to Sunspear he might have married Arianne Nymeros Martell, but someone would lose if two heirs married. There was also the option of going for a lesser Dornish house and finding a way to overthrow the Martells, but Jon seemed reluctant. Robb had smiled seeing his brother’s empathy for the family of siblings he would never know.

“We could marry Sansa to Quentyn,” Robb said with a teasing smile as he continued, “let him become prince of Dorne while you wed Arianne and I can marry Myrcella to secure the Stormlands.”

Jon shot him a playful glare. “There’s no need to start our coup with Targaryens and Starks warring again, brother.” Robb had laughed at that, cracking Jon’s mask. Once they settled Jon sighed.

“There is Shireen Baratheon.”

“Isn’t she Arya’s age?” Robb asked shaking his head.

“Aye,” Jon nodded. “She is also marked from a bout of Greyscale that nearly killed her as an infant. It’s left her cheek and neck cracked and flaking, black and grey like stone here.”

Robb watched him move his hand from his left cheek to his neck. “And you think I should marry her?”
"You could," Jon corrected. "If not for that she might be pretty in a way and grow into her looks, but the little I interacted with her was sweet and kind. Though whenever they came they did so with their mad jester who seemed to entertain her, so he may come with the deal."

Robb snickered, shaking his head. "It could help us secure the Stormlands, but wouldn’t we get that with Myrcella?"

"Maybe," Jon said with a shrug. "But Stannis and Renly ignored her much like her parents. I doubt they’d support the Lannisters. They never seemed friendly with them."

"So I could wed her to secure their support."

"Some of the Stormlands maybe, but not Stannis and those loyal to him." Jon shook his head. "I can’t imagine Stannis putting aside what he feels is his because you’re wed to his daughter."

"Because she is scarred?" Robb asked with a frown.

"Because he thinks it is right," said Jon. "If we stood in his way I don’t think his daughter would be enough to stop him from attacking. If he decides it’s his duty to help Joffrey or Tommen or himself rise to the throne then he’ll likely do it. If he thought it his duty to slit his throat he just may."

Robb arched his brow. "Then perhaps it best we do that for him."

He had enjoyed so much of that night with Jon, staying up speaking of such grim, grand things. They had discussed Jon’s rule, even joked of who he would name his council and place as wardens and lords paramount. They shifted from joking to grimly discussing which houses they might need to destroy to secure his position once he claimed the throne.

Hours passed before they saw Brynden Tully returning with a column of Frey men, and Robb rode out to meet with him. Catelyn watched them speak as they made their way back, Robb’s relief souring as he nodded. She saw him glance back briefly toward the Frey men following them before looking ahead and swiftly freezing his anger.

As they prepared the host to cross the Twins, Catelyn found her uncle and asked him what terms they had come to.

"Walder will give us all but four hundred of his men,” the Blackfish told her. “In exchange two of his grandsons will be fostered at Winterfell. Olyvar Frey will ride with us as Robb’s squire, and Robb will broker betrothals for three of Walder’s daughters and granddaughters to lords of the North and Riverlands, or is free to take his pick of them for himself or your other sons, with the promise of a dowry matching the girl’s weight in gold.”

"That’s it?" Catelyn asked, surprised it wasn’t even more demanding.

"At first he demanded a betrothal to House Stark through Robb and Arya, but I refused them."

"Why?" Catelyn asked.

Brynden remembered Robb asking him to not speak of his intent to use his marriage later and answered instead, ‘I’ve seen what happens to those forced to wed for war.’

Catelyn frowned at the thought of her sister, but shook her head. “Not all are so hopeless. Ned and I–"
“Not all men are Ned Stark,” Brynden cut her off, “nor are all women like you. Besides, your own family isn’t without strife.” At that he nodded toward Robb who was meeting with Olyvar Frey, his squire two years his senior. “This is for the best. It has shown us Frey’s true colors.”

Catelyn returned her gaze to Brynden. “How so?”

“When he continued to insist on wedding one of his daughters to Robb, I told him I would bring it to Robb so long as he agreed to do so immediately. Bring his daughters out, let Robb choose one and they could wed tonight.” Brynden glanced toward the Twins as he revealed, “That was enough to change his tone, making him ask for Robb’s aid brokering future betrothals instead. The man has no desire to truly tie himself to our cause until he is sure we will win. He only does so to avoid a siege since he knows not of our need to move quickly.”

“Then he may betray us.”

“Which is why Robb vowed not to give them the chance,” said Brynden.

“How?” asked Catelyn.

“Only a fool would switch to the losing side,” her uncle said looking to Robb, “so he intends to win.”

Riding through the Twins she felt as if they were stepping over coals or spikes, waiting for the stones to fall away and drop them to their deaths. Yet they crossed while Roose Bolton took his forces along the Green Fork to draw Tywin’s army.

It was near a sennight later she watched her son be replaced by a knight before his army and ride down the line. “They say my brother rode against the Mountain himself! He and his white wolf, Ghost! Today, let the lions quake in fear before the Grey Wind of Winterfell!”

Cheers of Winterfell took the men as they rode off, leaving Catelyn with her thirty guards to wait and pray for her son’s return.

Though he could not show it and never would, Robb Stark felt fear fill him as he rode to battle for the first time. He wondered if Jon felt the same when he rode against the Mountain. Either way he had stayed to face him, willing to give his life so others could survive.

When he heard the rumors of his death, Robb had hated Jon. He knew how important he was, yet put himself at risk. He questioned why Jon would do such a thing, but the more he thought on it the more answers he found. Jon would want to help others, and like Robb now he would want to be the first to enter the fray and the last to leave it. There was also Jon’s goals in King’s Landing to make him stay. He needed to build a name strong enough to earn him allies, what better way to do so then to be the man who slew the Mountain? To be the one who held off a Lannister ambush and let a company of men escape? Not only would every man he helped live be loyal to him, but others would flock to him.

His anger had turned to Catelyn, but had quelled some since seeing her. He couldn’t put his trust in her, not yet, but she was still his mother. It hurt to see her so sullen at times, so before he rode to battle he had pulled her aside.

“I’m sorry for what I said at Moat Cailin,” Robb told her.

Catelyn shook her head. “I’m sorry I struck you.”

Robb sighed. “I just… Jon never deserved it.”
Catelyn frowned. She had been thinking on that as well. “He didn’t.”

For a moment Robb thought to tell her the truth, but he was still holding on to his hope that Jon was alive, which meant he couldn’t break his promise. “He never wanted anything but to help us. If… if he returns, I won’t allow him to be mistreated. Father may have let it pass, but I will not. No matter what you or anyone else think of him, he is my brother.”

Wiping her eyes, Catelyn nodded.

“I want us to make it through this together,” Robb told her. “This isn’t the last battle we’ll fight. We need to work together.”

“I know,” she said with a solemn smile.

Robb stepped forward, pulling her into a hug. “We’ll get father back, find the girls and figure out what to do.” Catelyn had nodded into his shoulder, sniffing in relief as she squeezed her son until he had to pat her back. “Mother, I need to ride with my men.”

Catelyn had laughed, reaching up to brush back his hair. “Return to me as your father always did.”

“I will,” Robb assured as he left.

Oddly, his sense of fear faded when he waited in the Whispering Woods with the personal guard his mother had convinced him to craft. Not only did he have Grey Wind at his side, but he was surrounded by his squire Olyvar Frey, Theon Greyjoy, Ser Perwyn Frey, Ser Wendel Manderly, Dacey Mormont, Daryn Hornwood, Torrhen and Eddard Karstark, Robin Flint, Patrek Mallister and the massive Smalljon Umber.

There was a moment of relief when the warhorns sounded, telling them Jaime had fallen for their plan and followed the Blackfish and his company along the stream. Grey Wind howled, the Karstarks blew their warhorns, and arrows rained on Lannister men and horses.

The Lannister lines opened as the men panicked and Robb called out, “WINTERFELL!”

The cavalry charged, surrounding the Lannisters from all sides. Cries of Lannister, Winterfell, Riverrun and Tully came over the screams of horses and men, the scrape of steel on steel and clunk of wood, the hiss of arrows and splashes of water.

It was hopeless. Jaime recognized this quick enough, so turned his horse and charged toward the mounted soldier commanding the massive grey direwolf. However as he did a streak of white slammed into him, throwing Jaime from his horse as eight riders joined the Stark forces.

Ghost wrapped his teeth around Jaime’s throat, holding the Lannister in place, his teeth trembling against the man’s neck as the direwolf growled. Around them the battle slowed and the Lannister forces were taken captive, many on both sides staring in awe of the white wolf holding Jaime at bay.

“Ghost?” Robb asked, looking from the wolf to the men who had joined the fighting, most of them dressed in equipment marking them as Stark guards. They seemed to be led by one he recognized. “Alyn?”

“Lord Stark,” he said with a nod. He glanced to Ghost, who finally released Jaime to let two men take Jaime captive. “We should speak privately.”

Robb nodded, looking to where Grey Wind was licking Ghost’s face before turning to Theon.
“Lead them back. I’ll join you in a moment.”

Theon Greyjoy furrowed his brow, shooting Alyn a wary glance. “Are you sure?”

“I am.” Robb spoke firm enough they didn’t question him, his personal guards leaving to lead their prisoners away with the soldiers.

“Ser Alyn,” one of the guards said, turning his head to look at the captain, “shall we retrieve it?”

“Aye.”

“Ser Alyn?” Robb asked with a smile.

“I knighted him myself,” said the man who then introduced himself with a bow, “Ser Raymun Darry, my lord.”

“I’m glad for you, Alyn.” He chuckled and corrected himself, “Ser Alyn.”

The guard nodded sheepishly. “Thank you, my lord.”

“He earned it,” Raymun said with a nod. “He guarded your brother.”

“Does he live?” Robb asked quickly.

“He did, he didn’t and then he did,” Raymun said with a laugh. “The boy was given a scar across his front, but we had a red priest among our party. We thought him gone, but then he gave the boy his lord’s kiss of life.”

“And he returned?” Robb asked in disbelief.

“After his dragon was born,” said Ser Gladden Wylde.

Robb’s eyes widened, looking to where the men who had left on Alyn’s command returned with two others, one of whom held a large chest. They opened it and Robb watched as a scarlet dragon climbed over the edge, it’s golden eyes finding his before shifting to meet Grey Wind’s.

“You know?” Robb asked looking to Alyn.

“Aegon told us all we needed to know,” said Raymun, hoping that made it clear enough.

Robb shook his head, overcome with emotions as the guard tossed a piece of meat into the chest, making the dragon go back within so he could close it. Alyn looked to him explaining, “Ser Jon sent us north to bring Bloodwing to Aemon at the Wall and leave Ghost with you before we return to join the Fellowship of Fire in aiding the Riverlands.”

“And what of Jon?”

“He returned to King’s Landing to play traitor,” said Gladden Wylde. “He plans to let the Lannisters think him the Daemon Blackfyre of the North, bitter of his treatment in Winterfell with no loyalty to House Stark, only those who have seen his worth, like King Robert who knighted him.”

Robb nodded. Though he disliked the idea of Jon being there, they wouldn’t know the value he held as a hostage. If he played up his mistreatment and resentment then they could even let him close. Once news came of his apparent betrayal he would need to play into it, less they risk one of their men revealing the truth.
“Have any of you heard of my sisters?”

“Nothing,” Alyn admitted. “At least nothing solid. We’ve heard everything from they are held prisoner in the Tower of the Hand, they are chased after fleeing, they were sent to wed lords, and much grimmer things. There is no way to know the truth.”

With a frown Robb looked to Ghost, who stared up at him, then nodded. “Come, we’ll let you rest before you continue your trek North.”

If nothing else he was glad to know Jon was alive, now he just wished he knew the fates of his sisters.

Chapter End Notes

This should make clear Varys has no idea Jon’s truth, else he wouldn’t think him of little value as a hostage.

Hopefully the linked flashbacks aren’t too much, I thought it fun going back, then going back again before going forward. I know they haven’t mentioned Asha, but Robb assumes they have the Greyjoys because of Theon. Also they are maybe a bit tipsy.

Next chapter is Sansa and Arya’s journey away from King’s Landing.
Chapter Summary

Arya, Dom, Jeyne, Sansa and Syrio make their trek from King’s Landing in hope of finding safety.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Riding north was nothing like it had been traveling south for Sansa. Not only was she sharing a horse with Jeyne, but they weren’t anywhere near the kingsroad and often ate while riding. Rather than stopping in the small towns and villages they stayed outside of them while Dom went in alone to gather supplies. Syrio had gone once, but found the owner of the tavern had charged him a bit more to refill their flasks, so Dom was left going, keeping his Lannister garb to hide his identity as much as he could.

It felt like they were going so fast, far faster than they had coming south. They had traveled west a ways, taking a long route around the God’s Eye rather than head straight north as would likely be expected. They traveled along the Blackwater Rush to arrive at the town of Tumbler’s Falls.

Dom had entered the town garbed in his pilfered Lannister garb when he was spotted by a group of them exiting an inn. Thinking him one of their own, the men called out to him, so Dom steeled himself and made his way toward them. He didn’t recognize any of them, which told him they at least weren’t guards of the Red Keep come to hunt them.

“I thought us the only ones out here,” a short, round faced guard said with a laugh.

“Why are you all out here?” Dom asked with a chuckle.

“Come to resupply before heading toward Stony Sept,” said a man with sandy hair.

“And to find women the Mountain’s Men haven’t already taken,” the tallest of them added with a snicker.

“Youself?” asked the eldest.

“I’m to check in on a few towns nearby,” Dom offered with a shrug. “It’s busy work after I bumped into the maid bringing the king his supper, making her spill it. He had to take another’s portions, and I must waste my days riding.”

They laughed at his plight while he excused himself and departed, fighting his urge to look back at them.

He would come to wish he had so he might have known they were suspicious before they rode into the field where he had met with Syrio and the girls. Sansa gasped, rising to her feet with Jeyne as the men dismounted.

“What’s this?” Asked the eldest of the group.
“Happened upon them camping,” Dom offered.

“So you’ve offered them one of your waterskins?” The sandy haired one asked nodding to where Jeyne held one of the skins Dom had carried out of the inn.

“No need to let such pretty girls go thirsty,” Dom said keeping his eyes on the guards moving toward them. They were spaced out enough they could wrap around them all. There were eight of them, each armed and armored for war, likely scouts for a raiding party. Two held spears over their shoulders along with their mail, chest plates, swords and shields.

“Truer words are rarely spoken,” said the round faced man, who stared at Sansa, who had removed her scarf whenever they weren’t riding.

Dom saw the hunger in his eyes and put on a smile. “Perhaps we should all be on our ways then? No need to waste more time. Best get our duty done, right?”

“That can wait,” said the tallest man, taking a step toward the girls.

“Gentlemen,” Syrio said stepping in front of the girls. “We must be on our way.”

The tall soldier saw Syrio’s hand resting on the guarded hilt of his sword. “Step aside.”

Syrio shook his head, brushing back his hood back. “No.”

The tall man drew his sword, seeming to cause the others to do the same as the men with spears took them off their shoulders. Dom turned toward Syrio, drawing his dagger. “Ser!” He yelled at Syrio, before turning and throwing it at one of the spearmen, the blade of the thrown dagger burying into his nose.

The guard stumbled back as Dom dashed forward and yanked the spear from his hand while the guards all looked to him. Holding just past the head, Dom swung the spear so the blunt end slammed into the face of another guard, then flipped the spear and thrust it into the man’s face.

Syrio used his left hand resting on the hilt of his sword to push it forward, into his right as he drew it and avoided the tall soldier’s slash. His first thrust pushed through the man’s jaw, making him choke on blood. When he went to slash as Syrio, he found the braavosi dashing back, tearing the blade from his throat.

Jeyne yelled as Sansa stepped back toward her seeing the round faced man turn toward them. He took two steps before coming to a stop and laughing as Arya, dressed in her black surcoat and arming cap, drew Needle and held it forward, aiming it at the man while she stepped in front of Sansa.

“Stand aside little bo-” The guard was knocked aside as Dom threw his spear across the field. It pierced the soldiers arm but didn’t make it through to his chest. With a yell he tore the spear free and turned to watch the eldest man joined by another as he fought Dom while the sandy haired and bearded soldiers tried to hit Syrio, who dodged their strikes, waiting for an opening.

Turning back to the girls, the round faced man swung his sword at Arya, who tried to deflect it but found his strike strong enough to knock her sword aside.

“Arya!” Sansa yelled, tears flooding her eyes when the soldier lifted her by her arm, making Arya yell in pain. Because it was her left, and he grabbed her with his left, the man had turned his back enough that Sansa knelt down and picked up a rock which she threw at the side of the guard’s helmet.
It rang, making the round faced man turn to look at her. “What the hell are you-"

Arya had released her grip on Needle, letting it fall to her waiting right hand before slashing up, through the man’s jaw.

He released her and stumbled back clutching the wound. Arya hit the ground with a thud, groaning slightly as she got back to her feet. Seeing the man clutching his jaw with his left hand to keep his sword in his right hand, Arya swiftly tossed Needle into her left and dashed forward, thrusting it through the man’s hand and jaw. He was short enough that her sword surely dug into the top of his skull before she withdrew it, her eyes wide and mouth gaping as she stumbled back, watching the man fall limp to the ground with blood pouring from his wound and mouth.

Syrio frowned seeing Arya staring at a corpse she had created, dodging a strike and stepping past the sandy haired soldier’s right arm, thrusting his sword into his neck and withdrawing it as he turned, avoiding a slash from the bearded man which cut through the soldier’s right shoulder. His shock left him open for Syrio to thrust his bravos sword into the man’s eye, turning and slashing down, throwing off loose blood and brain matter.

Turning to see how Dom was doing, he found he had taken the other soldier’s shield when he killed him, leaving only the eldest one. When the man struck at Dom, he found the pilfered shield thrust forward, slammed into his own. Dom turned his hand and grabbed the soldier’s shield, raising them both while his sword slipped under them, thrusting into the man’s neck.

Once the last of them fell, Dom grabbed his stolen surcoat and wiped their blood from his blade while walking to the others. “Is anyone hurt?” Sansa and Jeyne were staring at Arya, who looked to Syrio and Dom. With a glance to the man she had killed, Dom nodded. “You did well, Arya. He would have killed you.”

“He speaks true,” Syrio said with a nod. “By taking his life you protect your sister and yourself. You must remember, you cannot help if you do not protect yourself as well.”

Arya slowly nodded, but to her surprise Sansa had stepped forward and wrapped her in a hug. Her tears had finally broken through, the older sister holding her sister and crying. If Arya wouldn’t then Sansa would.

Once their swords were clean, Dom removed his Lannister garb and was joined by Syrio in moving the bodies, going through them taking what they wanted before dumping the bodies in the Blackwater Rush.

“Thank you,” Sansa said wiping her eyes when she stepped back from Arya.

The girl smiled slightly, her eyes glistening as she shook her head. “I had to.”

“I know,” Sansa nodded. “I’m sorry you did.”

“I’m sorry you saw it.” Arya frowned, looking down. “You must think me a monster.”

Sansa smiled softly, reaching for her sister’s shoulder. “I think you strong enough to do what I never could.”

Arya looked up to her sister, smiling as she shook her head. “You could if you had to. You threw that rock at him. If he wasn’t wearing a helmet and it was heavy enough it could have killed him if hit the right spot.”

Sansa chuckle. “Maybe. But I could never wield a blade like you.”
“You may need to,” Dom said as he came back toward them. “Here.”

He handed Arya the mail shirt of the man she killed while Jeyne and Sansa got those of the other shortest of the group. Though each was large for the girls, it was better than nothing. He also held sword belts he gave each, having removed the scabbards for swords they wouldn’t know how to use to leave only the daggers. He even held padded arming and steel caps stolen from the dead while Syrio pulled on his own stolen armor.

“Are we to wear these?” Jeyne asked skeptically looking from the helmets to the mail and belt.

“You could ride unarmored into warring lands,” Dom offered. “I held them all under water and scrubbed any blood as best I could, though most remained on their surcoats. Or passed through the mail.”

“But they—”

“Better to wear a dead man’s clothes than join him in the grave,” Dom cut Jeyne off. “Put them on and we can be gone before more come looking for their comrades.”

They did as he said, Arya wearing her mail under her surcoat while the girls simply put theirs on over their dresses. Thankfully the weight of the mail shirts hanging off them was lessened once they put the belts around their waist. The girls carefully tied the padded cloth arming caps over their heads, hiding Sansa’s hair before securing the steel cap over them.

Not only did they take their armor, but their horses as well, Syrio and Arya taking the stolen Lannister coursers while Jeyne moved to the palfrey. Dom had switched out his Lannister surcoat to replace it with a black jerkin, not wanting to risk wearing red as they traveled further north. He kept his clothes away from even his own house colors, preferring to be a nobody as they made their way.

After their run in with the Lannister guard they kept further east.

They had settled west of the God’s Eye, able to see Harrenhal across the lake while they rested for the night. As was usual Dom left briefly to try and scrounge for food, hoping to put off another visit to town anytime soon. When he returned he had a small hare in hand, tucking the bow he’d stolen from the Lannister horses back onto his saddle.

Sansa sat beside Jeyne, who was looking over a few flowers she had picked, and watched Arya using branches to spar with Syrio, who stopped every so often to speak to her. She’d seen the strength of her sister the more they traveled. Not just in killing that soldier, but with how little it all rattled her. Dom and Syrio helped her come to terms with the need to kill the man, but thinking on it still made Sansa’s stomach turn. It wasn’t particularly disgusting, but unnerving to see the life leave a man before all his blood had, yet still he’d twitched for a moment before going still.

It seemed Syrio was constantly giving lessons as they rode. “Size matters not,” he told the girls when they questioned if the daggers would be any good if more soldier came upon them. “A humming bird can escape a lion. It need only stick a beak through the eye. For a wolf? No problem, she has not only claw, but fang to bite. If need be, use yours. Just do not bite armor.”

Dom also gave his own kind of lessons. “This is all you need to kill cut through skin,” he told them, showing them the pressure needed to push their daggers through skin. “Little more than that in the right place and they’ll die. Stab them, slash them, do whatever you can. Open their neck here and they’ll bleed out while they can chase you.”
Watching Dom wield his flaying knife to swiftly skin the hare, she wondered if he enjoyed it. All the blood and killing. Syrio seemed to almost ignore it, as if it beneath him to worry. “They think little of you, think little of them,” he had told Arya.

Yet Dom spoke so coldly of death and even prolonged suffering. He had told the girls, “Stick them in the groin. They mean to make you suffer pain, so let them suffer it where they fear most. Make their pain last the rest of their lives if they manage to survive.”

She had heard stories of the Boltons, tales of their flaying people, even wearing the skins of Starks. Dom seemed so separate from those when they were in King’s Landing. He seemed near as gallant a knight as Ser Loras, though more grim than even Jon and his constantly wearing black. Yet he hadn’t hesitated to kill the stable boy likely near Sansa’s age if not Arya’s. He spoke so callously, but it was always at those who meant to harm them. Then his tone was so different when Arya had asked of Jon, wondering where he might be. “Likely back in King’s Landing,” Dom said with a laugh. His smile made his pale brown eyes seem gentler, less cold.

Arya had gasped. “He wouldn’t know about father.”

“I’m sure he would,” said Dom. “They’d have to stop by a town or two on their way back and news has surely spread by now.”

“Then why would he return?” asked Jeyne. “Wouldn’t he just be thrown in the cells?”

“No. If he does as we planned, then they’ll think him a traitor.”

Arya blinked at that. “As you planned?”

“We’ve suspected things might go wrong eventually, but we realized it’s salvageable for him.” Dom sighed, seeming disappointed as he said, “I was supposed to be there with him, but he would want me to get you all to safety rather than be there for him.”

Sansa found it odd how referential Dom was to Jon. She understood they were friends, but he spoke as though Jon had given him orders, as if Dom weren’t the eldest of their group. “How can this still be salvageable?”

“They see him as most do,” said Dom. “A bastard. His being forced to go will help things. He can use it to support his displeasure with your father. Say he sent him away to achieve some harsh goal while all Jon wanted was to be a guard.”

“You think they’d believe that?” asked Arya.

“They already think him a black heart waiting to take what he desires,” Dom said somberly. “King Robert knighting him was a boon if only for it giving him something to pin his loyalty to. Why wouldn’t a bastard show more loyal to the man who gave him a chance at a knight’s life? It will be easy enough to play into their beliefs and act as though he feels wronged by your family. It’s not as if he was welcomed to your home as a trueborn child. Why else would he leave?”

Sansa had felt awful at that, realizing that however small she had played a part in Jon’s departure. She had followed her mother’s example and taken to shunning him as much as she could without being outright rude. At least most of the time.

She had been awful to him, and yet Jon had been so kind to her. He had given her Ghost, even held her once when he found her crying after an argument with Arya before her sister ran off to train. He’d told her the truth of Joffrey, hoping she would see it, yet she had chosen to believe her mother, who had never once met the prince. She only wanted Sansa to marry him and be queen,
thinking it would make her happy even if she had to try and change a cruel man. As though being queen would make up for being married to a man she didn’t care for. In truth she might have become like Cersei if she wed Joffrey.

Sat staring at the God’s Eye, Sansa wondered if maybe she wasn’t a Stark. People had said she shared her mother’s looks and she was the only one who followed her example. Maybe Sansa was a Tully, more fish than wolf.

It was when that somber thought passed her mind that she heard the howls. Dom was on his feet, still holding the leg of the cooked hare until the horses started to panic. He dropped the meat and drew his sword. “Sansa, Jeyne get behind me!”

The girls swiftly stood and rushed behind him as Syrio and Arya rose, all turning to see sets of eyes staring at them. A pack of four wolves came to a stop, spread out among the trees as they growled. They seemed to all go silent as a low, rumbling growl came from another which moved around a tree to approach them, it’s golden eyes slightly higher than the others.

Arya, having drawn her sword like the men, gasped and sheathed Needle as she stepped forward. “Nymeria?” Sansa stared, tears burning her eyes as Arya took a step toward her. “It’s me, Arya.”

The direwolf stopped baring it’s teeth, her eyes seeming to take Arya in.

“We’re going back home. You can come with me,” she said holding out her hand. “We can go home together.”

They watched the direwolf take a step forward, sniffing at the raised hand before pressing her snout against it.

“Yes, it’s me,” Arya said shakily. “You remember?”

Nymeria gave a soft whine as the wolves around them went silent, watching their leader sit and lick Arya’s hand. The wolf with matted brown and gray fur growled and started to run forward. Dom had stepped forward and turned his arm to slash at the beast, but Nymeria had turned and slammed into the wolf, pressing her paw into it’s side as she bit into the wolf’s neck and pulled her head up, ripping through it as the mangy wolf cried and died.

The others stared and backed away, whimpering and sitting as Nymeria turned to them and growled. After a moment they all sank to the ground, lowering their eyes while Nymeria returned to Arya’s side and rubbed her head against her master. With a breath Arya wrapped her arms around the direwolf, tears escaping her eyes while squeezing her.

With Nymeria and her small wolf pack joining them, Sansa found her fear had lessened. The wolves seemed to take after Nymeria, following her example of submitting to the humans. They kept a distance while they rode, but when they settled for the night the wolves appeared, bringing with them whatever game they caught. They took enough to feed themselves and gave the rest to the wolves, letting them have their fill.

Arya was the first to risk petting them when the trio joined Nymeria in sitting around her one night. Nymeria had stared at them, waiting to strike if they tried anything, but they never did. Her display, and their making sure to feed the beasts, seemed to make them loyal enough that soon Sansa and Jeyne found themselves petting the wolves. Syrio had even taken to throwing sticks for them, more than once having Arya race them to find it, though she never did before the wolves.

Dom remained wary of the wild wolves, but trusted Nymeria to keep them in line. He knew enough
from his time with Ghost to know her loyalty to Arya. Instead he focused on guiding them, taking them west toward Acorn Hall, where they found the gates of the keep barred as few remained to hold it. Unwilling to reveal who they were, Dom took them to Blackwater Bend to camp for the day before heading toward Riverrun.

Instead they made their way toward Castle Lychester, a small, square keep that had been showing signs of disrepair by the time they arrived. It was there, while Dom was gathering water skins that he heard of the siege of Riverrun.

“So where will we go?” Sansa asked when he told them upon his return.

“Didn’t you say we could go to Raventree Hall?” asked Jeyne.

Dom shook his head. “Two of the men mentioned hearing it had been taken by Lannisters. Even Stone Hedge was apparently burned by the Mountain.” After a moment of thought, Dom decided. “We’ll go to the Inn of the Kneeling Man. They might have more information.”

They couldn’t argue against it so mounted and began their ride to the riverland inn, said to be near the spot where Torrhen Stark had bent the knee to Aegon the Conqueror. They arrived the next day and found the main building along the shore of the Red Fork with long low wings stretching out from it.

Watching Dom enter from afar, Sansa found herself growing tense as she always did when they stopped. Even with the wolves at their side she still waited for more Lannisters to find them, to finally force her to use her dagger. She feared that Lannister men may have taken the Inn or be staying there and recognize Dom.

Instead he returned shortly after wearing a smile as he told them. “It seems our luck has turned.”

“What makes you say that?” Syrio asked from his saddle.

Looking to Arya and Sansa he revealed, “Your brother Robb has led a host south to war with the Lannisters at Riverrun. We could ride to Winterfell, but if they’re this close I think it might be worth trying to find them.”

“Then we will,” Arya said looking to Sansa. “Who better to protect us than Robb and his army?”

“Let’s find Robb,” Sansa said nodding in agreement. “It will home enough for now.”

With that they began making their way, heading west again in hopes of finding Robb near Riverrun. Instead they would find the siege broken and an army waiting to welcome them.

Chapter End Notes

It wasn’t until I started this that I realized I’m again writing of Sansa’s difficult journey north. Though there’s less dog killing here than in Northern Conqueror.

For those who missed it, Dom basically used the move Jon used in their first sparring match by grabbing the other guy’s shield and stabbing under them.

Since Arya isn’t going the Faceless Man route I decided to give her Nymeria for a few reasons, but mostly because it should be fun seeing them later on. For anyone
wondering, Syrio isn’t Jaqen. They’re separate people.

Next Chapter: Ned confesses and Robb calls a council.
Chapter Summary

Ned confesses before the Sept of Baelor. In Riverrun Robb calls a council and welcomes the return of his sisters as well as another ally.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The city gathered as Lord Eddard stood on the High Septon’s pulpit outside the doors of the Sept of Baelor, supported between two gold cloaks. He was thinner than Jon had ever seen him, his long face drawn in pain, the cast over his leg gray and rotten.

The squat, fat High Septon stood behind him wearing long white robes and a crown of spun gold and crystal wreathing his head with rainbows whenever he moved.

Jon stood off to the side with Sam watching the knot of knights and high lords clustered before the marble pulpit. Their escorts stood behind them, Sam having joined Jon in his honor of having a personal guard ready to kill him. Though Varys and Littlefinger surely knew of Sam’s all but being disowned by his father, it seemed they wanted to be ready to use him if they had to.

Joffrey stood prominent among the lords, clothed in crimson silk and satin with a golden crown across his curls. The queen mother stood beside him in mournful black with a slash of crimson and a veil of black diamonds in her hair. Jon felt anger stir in him seeing her wear the colors that should have been his.

The Hound now wore a snow white cloak over his dark gray armor, joined by three other kingsguard. Varys stood near Littlefinger, and Jon wondered which of them had told his father of his presence in the city. Pycelle might have, but he doubted the man would bother visiting the cells, where he wasn’t certain with Varys and had little doubt Littlefinger would be petty enough to go down and boast to his father after the betrayal Ser Barristan told him of. He knew they’d told him when Ned was brought out and there was little shock on his face when he saw Jon, only sorrow as a long line of gold cloaked spearmen held the crowd at bay.

When the bell ceased quiet settled upon the crowd and Ned raise his head to speak. His voice was so weak few could make him out, causing others to yell for him to speak up. Jon wanted to get him a proper drink of water or speak on his behalf, but he’d already done his part. He just hoped he’d done enough.

“I am Eddard Stark,” he began again in a raised voice. “Lord of Winterfell and Hand of the King, and I come before you to confess my treason in the sight of the gods and men.”

Jon kept his face slate as the crowd cursed and shouted obscenities at Ned. Jon found himself looking to them, hoping he could remember them and find them in the future. King’s Landing could use a few less people crowding its streets.

“I betrayed the faith of my king and the trust of my friend, Robert,” he shouted. “I swore to defend and protect his children, yet before his blood was cold, I plotted to depose and murder his son and
seize the throne for myself. Let the High Septon and Baelor the Beloved and the Seven bear witness to the truth of what I say: Joffrey Baratheon is the one true heir to the Iron Throne, and by the grace of all the gods, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm.”

A stone sailed through the crowd, hitting Ned’s forehead hard enough the gold cloaks had to keep him from falling. Blood trickled from the gash as more stones followed, one hitting a knight while Kingsguard stepped in front of Joffrey and Cersei to protect them.

The High Septon knelt before Joffrey and Cersei. “As we sin, so do we suffer,” he spoke so all could hear. “This man has confessed his crimes in sight of gods and men, here in this holy place.” Rainbows stretched across his head as he raised his hands. “The gods are just, yet Blessed Baelor taught us that they are also merciful. What shall be done with this traitor, your grace?”

Thousands screamed suggestions as Joffrey stepped past the kingsguard. “I have heard that time in a cell changes a man’s heart. Others have said not even my father would let such treachery go unpunished!” Some of them shouted in support while Cersei and Varys looked tense before Joffrey smiled. “I believe the punishment should fit the man as much as the crime. Lord Eddard,” Joffrey turned to the Hand, “you will take the black.”

Ned looked as relieved as some of the other lords as he nodded. “If that is your command, your grace.”

Joffrey’s magnanimous smile twisted into a cruel grin, his emerald eyes dancing as he nodded. “Then you shall be sent to the Wall to take the black,” he said turning and pointing, “after you have been scourged by Ser Jon Snow.” He ignored the confusion and whispers from Varys and his mother. “Let this show that disloyalty can turn even your own blood against you.” Joffrey walked toward Jon, smirking as he asked quietly, “Unless you can’t do as your king commands?”

Jon met his eyes and shook his head. “No, though I would need a whip.”

Joffrey snickered, turning to call out, “Ser Ilyn, bring a whip and bind Lord Stark.”

Jon felt his stomach twist in anger, not only at Joffrey’s cruelty, but at the looks of disappointment he noticed on the faces of Ilyn Payne and Littlefinger. Had they wanted more? Ilyn had looked ready to draw his greatsword. Maybe they had tried to suggest Joffrey to do as they desired, much as Jon had.

“They would have damned me to the wall,” Jon had told them during court. “He doesn’t know what it is like. The only times he wasn’t safe within the walls of some keep were when he was at war alongside your father, but I’ve visited the Wall. I’ve been to Castle Black, spoken with the men and trained with them. Though the older ones have it broken, the young are cruel, still criminals. He would have cast me into that life, much as he sent his youngest brother to suffer it.”

Even whenever they spoke briefly in passing after that, Jon tried to bring up the Wall if he could. He’d done all he could to make the poetic justice of sending Ned to suffer at the Wall seem too enticing to pass up. If this is what it took to keep Ned alive, then Jon would do it. He wouldn’t have to bear the scarred back, only the knowledge that each one was given by him.

The crowd watched as Ned was bound to the marble pulpit, Joffrey ignoring the High Septon’s pleas as Ilyn returned with a scourge which he handed to Jon. Taking a breath, Jon watched them cut open the back of Ned’s doublet, revealing his bare back.

Joffrey’s face darkened as he smiled in anticipation of the first strike. But after a moment passed where Jon simply looked the whip over he started to call out, “Let-”
Jon turned and struck hard enough the crack was heard across the plaza, making the crowd gasp.

Blood trickled from the marks across Ned’s back as Jon threw his arm back and swung again. Ned screamed while the lashes peeled his back, leaving cuts in varying patterns with every strike.

Joffrey had been startled by the sudden start, but it gave way to sadistic joy watching Jon apparently give in to his anger and yell with every strike, which seemed to be as hard as he could muster. Sam frowned watching Jon, but when he glanced at Joffrey and saw the boy smiling, he wondered if Jon had a reason behind acting so aggressive. He seemed more angered than sorrowful of each strike, as if he truly didn’t care for his father, or perhaps was using this to vent his anger at those watching.

Sam’s brow furrowed slightly as he wondered if Jon was using this to get close to the king. Joffrey’s sadism was well known to them, yet for all the court knew Jon shared the same trait but hid it because he had to. Was this another way to earn the king’s trust? Or perhaps even a way to get close enough to have some influence on him?

Let him think Jon like him in a way. He was near enough Jon’s age and would surely want to find his own advisers. Did Jon plan to be one? Or was he simply doing this to support their view of him as an angry bastard willing to support the Baratheons because they gave him a chance at a better life while the Stark kept him from achieving what he could?

Ned hung limp from the pulpit as blood ran down his back, dripping down the steps while Jon stood staring at the shredded flesh across Ned’s back while taking heavy breaths. The crowd stood in silence until applause drew their eyes to their king, who walked toward Jon and placed a hand on his shoulder. “A true knight who deals the king’s justice even against his own uncaring father.” Joffrey laughed, looking to Ned. “Take Lord Stark to be treated, then have him brought to the Wall.”

In the crowd Yoren quickly made his way toward the gold cloaks to tell them of his impending departure while Jon was pulled aside by Joffrey. “You did well, Snow. I never expected that.”

“I apologize if it was too much, your grace.” Jon bowed his head, handing the scourge to Ilyn. “I fear I let myself lose control for a moment.”

Joffrey shook his head. “No harm done,” he said as the gold cloaked lifted the unconscious Ned and dragged him to the maester. “I’ll make sure you have a chance to speak with your father before he leaves.”

“Thank you, you grace,” Jon said with a put on smile, remembering what Robert had said before knighting him. “I admit to finding a certain joy in putting those who look down on me in their place, even if they are my kin.”

Joffrey chuckled, patting his shoulder as he departed, leaving Jon to return to Sam’s side. Walking back to their chambers they were silent before Sam finally asked, “Are you okay?”

Jon nodded, keeping his eyes forward as he whispered, “I’m going kill them all.” Joffrey, Cersei, Littlefinger, Ilyn Payne, Varys, the High Septon, hells he’d slaughter everyone in that crowd who cursed or threw rocks at his father if he could. He’d bring the sept down if he could, build a Godswood in honor of Ned or let Thoros build a temple for R’hllor to spite them all.

The nightmares that night didn’t surprise him. They only made his blood burn even more than it already did.

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO
After finally seeing her brother and father Catelyn found Robb in the godswood with others who kept the old gods. It was there she learned that Renly had made claim for the Iron Throne rather than support Joffrey. Once the others left to form a council to meet that evening, she looked to Robb.

“Are you certain about this?”

“I am,” Robb nodded, looking to where Grey Wind and Ghost stood off to the side watching them. “It’s as they said it would be.”

While they had spent the night resting with them, Alyn told him what Jon had told his Fellowship. “He intend to entice them into making your father take the black. Him and his friend seemed confident they could.”

“And if they let him?”

“They’ll likely send a group to escort him and make sure you don’t try to break him free.” Ser Raymun said with a smirk. “You’ll never get the chance before a fellowship from the Riverlands holds him ransom and has you pay for his freedom. Or so they’ll hear.”

Robb hoped it was a freedom he accepted. His father may still have him stand down, become neutral against the warring south. He could even think to take the black as some way to assure them of his intent to keep true to whatever promises they made him make after Jon had lashed him before the city.

“Word will have reached them by now,” Robb told his mother. “Jon’s fellowship will find and free father.”

Catelyn frowned. “How can we be certain this isn’t all some act? That his sending the men North isn’t some act in itself, a way to have them take Winterfell for him?”

Robb frowned at her. “Mother…”

Catelyn sighed. “I worry, Robb. They follow him because he nearly died saving them? Doesn’t it seem odd they would be so loyal simply because he was brave?”

“And because he survived what few others could,” Robb added. He’d told her only a version of what the Fellowship had told him, keeping Jon’s death and his dragon a secret, saying he miraculously survived a wound instead. That their loyalty was born from Jon’s bravery and a common goal of justice. If it hadn’t involved father he might not have even told her that much. “You worry for no reason, mother. Let the others worry of Jon’s betrayal. Once I know I can trust them I’ll tell them the truth of him, but until we’re secure I can’t risk it. So let us at least put our faith in Jon.”

That faith was rewarded when before their council meeting stewards rushed to get Robb and Catelyn, telling them, “Riders approach. Riders with wolves.”

Their confusion gave way to joyful relief as they saw Ser Domeric Bolton leading in a group with Arya and Sansa followed by Jeyne and an unfamiliar face as well as three wolves led by Nymeria, who had grown near as much as her brothers who rushed to her side.

Catelyn was in tears watching her daughters dismount, taking a shaky breath, waving them to her. Sansa lifted her skirts, nearly knocking her mother with her steel cap as she went to hug her. Arya quickly followed, Catelyn bending slightly to hold them both.
“Look at you,” Robb said with a laugh as Arya turned to him. “You look half a knight.”

“She is near enough one,” Sansa said as she stepped away from their mother and the sisters moved to hug their brother. “She saved me and Jeyne from Lannister bandits alongside Dom and Syrio.”

“What?” Catelyn asked with a gasp, watching Arya chew her lips as she backed away.

“We were attacked by Lannister men,” Domeric explained as he approached. “Syrio and I slew the bulk of them, but Lady Arya was forced to defend herself, Sansa and Jeyne from another.” Looking to her he wore a slight smile. “She did what she had to, and she did it well.”

Arya flashed him a thankful smile while Robb frowned, pulling off her caps to run a hand through her hair and make her look at him. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Arya assured. “He deserved it. He wanted to…” She didn’t need to finish for them to understand.

“Good,” Robb told her.

“Robb!” Catelyn said with a click of her tongue, though she didn’t disagree.

“I killed my first recently as well,” he told her. “If you need to you can come to me, you understand?” Arya nodded and his gaze rose, stepping forward to shake the hands of the men who returned his sisters. “I am more grateful than I can ever say, my lords.”

“It was nothing, Lord Robb,” Dom said with a smile. “I know your father had hoped Master Syrio would remain as Lady Arya’s sword instructor, which is why I made sure to bring him.”

“My father truly let you train Arya?” Robb asked with a smirk while Catelyn frowned.

“He did, my lord,” Syrio nodded. “Give her time and she will be your First Sword.”

Robb glanced at Arya, who turned her gaze sheepishly at Robb’s smile. “Okay,” he said nodding, making her look up in shock as he turned to Syrio. “If these four trust you then so will I. We’ll find a place for you and you may continue to instruct her.”

Syrio gave a bow. “I thank you, my lord.”

Robb looked to Dom. “Ser Domeric, if we could, I’d like to speak in private.” At that he glanced toward Ghost, making Dom nod and follow him to his chambers. “Have you heard of what’s happened in King’s Landing?”

“It depends what you mean, Lord Robb.”

“Please,” Robb shook his head, closing the door. “You’re Jon’s friend and one of the few who know the truth. Well,” Robb laughed, “one of the hundred now, I suppose.”

“What do you mean?” Dom asked tilting his head. “The last I knew of Jon he’d ridden to bring justice to Gregor. I’d heard a few stories, but nothing solid, and they were all so different I couldn’t tell what was true.”

Robb told him what he had been told by Alyn’s group. Dom’s eyes darkened when he heard of Gregor cutting down Jon, but then flooded with confusion and disbelief when he spoke of Jon’s apparent rebirth following his own dragon’s birth.

“It can’t be-”
“I saw it myself,” Robb said with a laugh. “They held a chest which they kept it in and showed me the dragon. Bloodwing he called it. They sent it north, to his uncles at the Wall.”

Dom sank into a chair shaking his head. “I should have been there.”

Robb moved to sit across from him. “I wish I had been as well, but he’s alive. He returned to King’s Landing and word’s come of his betrayal. It seems they believed him, though they had him scourge my father himself outside the Sept of Baelor before making him take the black. The fellowship apparently plan to kidnap him once he gets close enough.”

“Good,” Dom said with a solemn smile. “He’s thinking. Using them. At least he’ll have Sam and Loras.”

“Not Loras,” said Robb. When Dom looked to him he explained how the Tyrells were supporting Renly Baratheon’s claim for the throne, Loras having fled with Renly the day Dom did.

Anger seemed odd on Dom’s face as he squeezed the arm of his chair. It wasn’t just anger, but the hurt of betrayal as he realized not only had Loras not told him of his intent to leave, but they may end up fighting against him. Dom knew early on Loras was the one Jon saw more as a rival, more of a par martially, yet he was as much a friend to Jon as Dom or Sam had been, and similarly a friend to Dom as Jon or Sam. If it came to the field, if they had to test themselves with true steel, Jon would be distraught at being forced to kill Loras. His only hope was that Jon would be kept in the city, far from the fighting.

Dom sighed, letting his anger freeze and fall away. “Renly’s a fool. He’d be near as bad as Robert in some ways.”

“But he is a fool with a large army backing him,” Robb said with a frown. “That matters more than if he’s ill suited for the crown.”

Dom nodded in agreement before looking to Robb. “Jon isn’t. He could be a good one.”

“I imagine he will, but we need to help him get there. For now that means letting him play the part of traitor. My mother knows some of the truth, but the only others who I know as much or more are his Fellowship of Fire, and the pair that joined him and Samwell.” Seeing Dom’s questioning gaze he answered, “Thoros of Myr and Edric Dayne.”

Dom laughed. “The fool, he asked Thoros of his fire god so he might use Dark Sister and claim her hilt a sign for the Lord of Light. And Edric thinks himself Jon’s milk brother.”

“Alyn thought them loyal.”

“Doubtless every man there is after seeing him be brought back from death while having a dragon born upon his chest.” Dom sat back shaking his head. With a sigh he wondered aloud, “What am I supposed to do now? I can’t return to King’s Landing and be at his side.”

“You could help me,” Robb suggested.

Dom arched his brow. After a moment of thought he asked. “What of my father?”

“He is distracting Tywin along the Green Fork,” Robb answered. For a moment he hesitated before saying, “He doubted you would live but if you did said he intended to have you return to the Dreadfort. Now that you’re here, I intend to have you council me as it seems you did Jon.”

Going against his father had never been too tough for Dom, but others often seemed too
intimidated to do so. The fact Robb would do so just to keep Dom there made the knight nod respectfully. “I will do what I can to see Jon sat safely upon the Iron Throne.”

“I as well,” Robb nodded. “Whatever it takes. We’ll find a way.”

Dom looked forward to aiding Robb, who Jon saw as a brother despite being his cousin by blood. He’d been surprised to find the Stark heir greeting him so readily, but they were united in their goal. A goal which suddenly became more complex as that night the council gathered. With Ned not there, without knowing of his impending kidnapping and freedom, and thinking Ned as likely to make it to them as he was to die of some Lannister treachery, the lords of the North named Robb their King in the North.

Robb looked to Dom as they knelt around him and shouted, “King in the North!”

He hadn’t wanted this, but he couldn’t tell them of Jon yet. So, much as Jon was forced to play the traitor, Robb would play the king. And when the time came Robb would accept his place as another King Who Knelt once Jon came to claim the North.

Chapter End Notes

Ned’s confession struck me as odd when I read it back. He asked the Septon, the Seven and Baelor to bear witness to his lies, so a dead man and those of a faith he doesn’t follow. It would’ve been more believable if he swore to the Old Gods at least. Shows how little anyone there knows him or cares if it’s true.

The whipping idea is one planted by Robert back when he spared Ghost. I like the idea of Joffrey trying to emulate a man who isn’t even his truly his father, so thought it a fun thing to play on. I still consider having him die even after I put the flogging mention, but wanted the out just in case. Thinking on it, I have some things I want to do with Ned, so spared him.

Arya and Sansa will know the lie version of Jon’s treachery like their mother, though even people like Theon and the Tullys will be left with the lie of his betrayal.

I really liked going a bit into Dom’s thoughts here and the last chapter. I want to go into his disappointment at not being there with Jon during his death and rebirth later, but even his anger at the situation with Loras was fun to think on. I really like playing Dom’s confidence in Jon and his brotherly concern for him. Where Robb is of age with him and more like a twin in a way, Dom is more like an older brother, caring for Jon and worrying after him beyond even as someone who would his king. Long gone is the idea of earning the favor of the Lord of Winterfell.

Roose is still on the Green Fork. It’ll be a while before we see Dom reunited with his father.

I’m sure some are disappointed by Robb not just telling everyone about Jon, but no way could he trust them yet. I really like the idea of him playing king and knowing he’ll kneel when Jon makes his claim. It adds to the conspiracy and I have some stuff I want to play with having him as king.

If the chapter title made you think Ned was dying then it worked as intended,
otherwise it's literally the last days of Summer as ACOK is Autumn, but also it's referring to Jon and Robb ending their days as knights of summer and the like.

This is essentially the end of the AGOT section. After this begins the A Clash of Kings storylines, which I’m thinking might go quicker than the AGOT section.

Next Chapter: Jon is the last Stark in King’s Landing. Alyn’s party arrives at the Wall.
Jon glanced to where Yoren was supposed to come with the recruits he’d managed to scrounge up. A trio of Lannister guards stood off to the side watching them as Ned frowned at Jon asking, “You certain they’ll come?”

“Thoros has told him the area they await,” Jon nodded. “If they aren’t there, then just head north and Robb will free you.”

Ned frowned. “Perhaps I should take the black just to let them think we are obeying them.”

“No, the North and I have need of you yet. Though…” Jon sighed, seeming to steel himself against ridicule. “Uncle Benjen wrote to me. He said the Others come, that the dead walk and travel south. You should send someone to see what he means.”

“Jon…”

“I hatched a dragon and came back from death,” Jon told him. “Is it so impossible that Benjen tells the truth? Why else would he send it in code? Something has happened. If he tells the truth then… I don’t know what to do.”

Ned saw his sincere concern and was surprised by the pride he felt, as if it made him seem more a man. “We’ll figure something out, and when you’re ready you’ll find an army waiting for you in the North.”

“Assuming they don’t try to kill me for what I’ve done,” Jon said grimly.

“They’ll understand,” Ned assured. “I’ll make sure they do.”

When Yoren arrived with a group bound for the Wall, both Jon and Ned recognized Gendry among them. Both also seemed to realize he wouldn’t have gone on his own, which meant someone was getting him out of the city.

Ned looked to Jon and held back a smile. “Be safe, Jon.”

“You as well,” Jon nodded, hating that he couldn’t shake the man’s hand or show any affection else it could break the masquerade. Instead he turned and coldly walked off, his honor guard soon following at a distance while the three escorting Ned followed him to Yoren.

In the weeks that followed Jon found a schedule for himself. His mornings were spent training with Edric. At first he’d felt so unsure if he could teach him, but the more they worked together the less it felt like teaching. It carried less of a burden, seeming more easy as Edric took to most lessons
quickly. He seemed willing to try anything, trusting Jon to make him better than he was.

His afternoons were spent working with the builders to finish the new stables whenever he wasn’t tending to the horses. Oddly that was when he most missed Dom, whose Ryswell side must have been why he was such a good hand with horses, yet Jon found himself struggling to understand them with even a quarter the ease Dom had. Still, he knew enough to clean after them and groom them, just not enough to know their moods and which was the best for a task with little more than a look.

His nights were spent with Sam, Edric and Thoros, the four taking to meeting and chatting, ignoring their guards and enjoying themselves as best they could. Sam, who had returned to working in the library, often gave Jon books to read in his room at night when he wasn’t strumming at the harp Dom had left behind. Though Dom wasn’t there to teach him, he intended to give Myrcella her song. He just didn’t know when he would have the chance.

Jon was kept at a distance from the royal family, though Joffrey sometimes flashed him smug smirks whenever he spotted Jon in the distance. Those ended when word arrived of Robb being named King in the North.

He’d been brought before him and Jon decided he had only one option. “He was always the spoiled child,” Jon offered with a scoff. “I bet his mother gifted him the crown when she met him. Polished it well for him before she set it upon his head and took to clutching his mouth and speaking through him.”

Jon had spent well over a year acting as Joffrey’s guard with Barristan. Not only did he carefully observe the cruel prince, but some days he took to distracting him to spare his siblings his torment. He’d come to know what did and didn’t work for the Joffrey, so wasn’t surprised to see the king laugh and glance toward Cersei at the mention of an overbearing mother.

“Ser Jon. You said before your siblings were well enough, but surely you understand that they may die. Robb will surely have to now his mother has named him king.”

Jon let out a sigh and nodded. “I understand, your grace. War is filled with tragedy, and though I pray the gods will find a way to spare them by the time this is over, I fear it unheard.”

“If all your brothers should die, there would be no Stark to claim Winterfell, would there?”

Jon arched his brow. “The girls perhaps.”

“My betrothed and her wild sister?” Joffrey scoffed. “Neither will see light once they are captured, assuming they live as well. No. There wouldn’t be a Stark, though there would be one with Stark blood who could be of use to us. Who may prove his loyalty and be named Lord of Winterfell.”

Jon stared at Joffrey, much like his council did. “Your grace…” Jon decided to use this, though hated sharing a memory that still stung even now. “As a child I dared to play at being Lord of Winterfell once, but my brother told me I never could because I was a bastard.”

“And should we win, I would want a Stark in Winterfell, not a bastard. But a king’s decree could change such things for one loyal to him,” Joffrey offered.

Joffrey’s council had advised against having his kingsguard beat a knight as he’d wanted. The smallfolk would know Jon couldn’t fight back, and think it as his loyalty shown in public being punished. His victory had given him recognition enough among the small folk, but his obeying on the steps of the sept had spread it even further. To beat a knight who wouldn’t defend himself
might turn them, especially those loyal to the faith, and the High Septon was already upset for such a grim display happening before the sept. Instead Joffrey found his joy in turning Jon against his family.

Jon raised his head. “I can only thank you for the offer, your grace, but pray still peace will be found before the need arises. I would stay a bastard if it meant peace for the realm.” Of course there would never be peace, and thus he could never remain a bastard.

The comet came, a streak of red across the sky which spawned a dozen names. Sat in the yard one morning, Sam had looked up to it with a smirk. “Bloodwing,” he said, earning looks from Jon and Edric. “It is red like blood, and stretches across the sky.”

Jon shook his head and waved for Edric to continue his attack, leaving Sam to finish with his bow. They would act as Jon’s squire the day Joffrey’s nameday tourney arrived and he was all but forced to enter. There would be little to gain from such a pitiful win, but he would take it if he must.

However before he could ride, Ser Dontos Hollard arrived drunk and Joffrey called for him to be drowned in a cask from the cellars. Stood off to the side, Jon glanced at the man being raised by guards as others rushed to bring a cask. He saw Myrcella shift nervously, holding Tommen’s hand as both resolved themselves to look rather than risk Joffrey forcing them to.

“Your grace,” Jon said moving toward their box. He was stopped by Boros Blount and his own honor guard pointing their swords at him. “This man is a shame to himself and his house, but isn’t it better to let this fool dry out in your dungeons than have the smallfolk think you cursed for slaying a man on your nameday?”

“Cursed?” Joffrey asked with a scoff, looking disappointed in Jon.

Sandor glanced at him before looking to the king. “What a man sows on his name day, he reaps throughout the year.”

Joffrey looked from Jon to Sandor. “Fine;” he sighed, looking to the men holding the drunk knight. “Take this fool to the dungeons! Let him dry out there, until he is a prune of a man.”

Myrcella met Jon’s eyes briefly, flashing him a thankful smile.

When Joffrey called off the tourney, Tommen protested, and Myrcella answered Joffrey’s dismissal of their childish behavior by reminding him they were children. That earned a laugh from the Hound and a smile from Jon, who backed away with his guard. He watched them prepare Tommen’s opponent, a quintain which once struck swung around and unhorsed him.

Joffrey broke into riotous laughter while Myrcella stood to go help Tommen but saw Jon leap over the railing and rush to the young prince’s side. He helped the prince up onto his feet as the kingsguard stood at attention, ready to strike, but stopping as Joffrey held his hand raised.

“You okay?” Jon asked.

“It hurts,” Tommen whined, sniffing as he looked around at the laughing people.

“I know,” Jon offered with a nod. “It does sometimes, but getting up and trying again proves to them we’re stronger than they think. So long as you get up, their laughs will never matter. Not against your courage.”

Tommen smiled at him. “I can try again?”
“If that is what you wish,” Jon nodded.

The crowd watched with interest as Jon helped Tommen back onto his horse, clearly giving him tips as he pointed toward the quintain.

Myrcella found herself unsure if she should frown or smile watching him advise her younger brother. Much of him confused her lately. Everything had gone wrong when her uncle attacked his father and Jon stayed at his bedside. After that he was sent to slay Gregor and everything got even worse.

She had spent those days afraid, not only for herself, but for Jon as well. She knew enough that he would be considered a threat due to his father’s actions. Yet he returned to King’s Landing, and did so after nearly dying because he wanted to help others escape an ambush. After she saw the scar she’d had nightmares of him laying in the river run red with the blood pouring from his chest.

Maybe that had been what changed him. Or perhaps like many men who rode to war he came back a bit different. Either way she had been sure something had changed. Not only was Jon more outspoken now, but he spoke what she was sure were lies. Whenever he spoke of his family he had avoided speaking of Catelyn, but the rest he spoke well of, even Sansa before they had grown closer during her stay in King’s Landing. He’d told her once he hoped Sansa would marry a man half as good as their father, yet Jon had been quick to speak against him.

She could understand why he did either way she thought on it. Maybe it was more complex than she thought and he had both those good things to say of his family and the disregard for them he expressed recently. Or more likely he knew as she did he was walking a tight rope with a noose around his neck, so did all he could to appear loyal.

The only thing she couldn’t figure out was why. They wouldn’t have killed his father if he wasn’t there, he was too valuable. He could have been traded for her uncle Jaime. Their mother had been wroth with Joffrey for releasing Eddard once they learned of Jaime’s capture. Though he reminded her she’d been the one to suggest he take the black, she didn’t care. Myrcella felt sure that her mother or brother would send out men to get Lord Eddard back if they hadn’t already sent men to kill him.

A petty part of her wanted to think Jon had returned for her, but she knew better. Jon and her were barely anything yet, not enough for him to risk his life for. There would be other women, ones older or prettier than her surely. No, it was more likely he’d spoken the truth and acted out of loyalty than his coming to be at her side. And she completely doubted that, though would never say as much to anyone.

Her thoughts were broken by the sudden rise of the portcullis and the entry of Tyrion leading a column of freeriders, sellswords and savages with a few Lannister men-at-arms. She noticed Jon kept his distance as Tommen and her rushed to greet Tyrion.

“A day later and you’d be taller than me,” Tyrion told Tommen with a laugh.

Making his way to Joffrey they spoke for a time before Joffrey called for Jon to join them. The knight made his way over, earning suspicious looks from the black-haired sellsword and one eyed savage who shadowed Tyrion.

“It seems much has happened since we last met, Snow. I hear you have quite a scar to show for it.”

“It’s what happens when you face men men too weak to kill you,” said Jon.
Joffrey snickered at that while the Sandor scoffed and Tyrion smirked. “Is that so?”

“If he weren’t, then how am I here?” Jon asked arching his brow. “If you prefer a more fantastic tale, go ask Thoros his thoughts on it. He’ll spin one of his god’s will letting me live.”

Tyrion nodded. “I suppose I’ve as little choice in this as you.”

“I would honored to serve a lord,” Jon said simply.

“You can swear yourself to me later, Snow,” Tyrion said waving his hand. “I’ll call for you when I’m ready to have a pet wolf.”

Jon watched him and his shadows leave while Joffrey left with the Hound. Walking back toward Edric and Sam he began to remove his armor, Edric quickly moving to help him.

They were making their way to their quarters after bringing Jon’s horse to the stable when Thoros found them. “We need to speak,” he said urgently, Jon quickly leading them to his room. Once within his chambers Thoros told them, “Viserys is dead.”

“What?” Jon’s face fell. “Did someone claim the lordship?”

Thoros shook his head. “No. The tales say it was his sister’s husband who did it. Poured melted gold across his head to give him the crown he begged for.” Thoros gave Jon a sympathetic look. “They say he was called the Beggar King and was cruel to his sister and others.”

Jon frowned, looking down. “Then perhaps it’s best he died.” Looking back to Thoros he asked, “What of Daenerys?”

“She lives as far as I know. No news of her.”

Jon nodded. “Barristan will find her. I’m sure of it.”

“And if she is as her brother or father?” asked Sam.

Jon crossed his arms. If she was mad then it may be best if she simply died like her brother, but Jon would need her help in the war to come. A Dothraki horde would help them win whatever lands they rode through, but it would also be a horrible thing to unleash a wild horde of raping reavers upon Westeros. Could he truly unleash them upon the lands he sought to rule? If she was older he’d consider standing aside and letting his aunt rule, but she was younger than him and had never spent a day in Westeros. He’d hoped even the threat of her bringing the Dothraki horde might bring people to their side, but if she was like Aerys what was to stop her from unleashing them on every kingdom?

Could he use them and then kill them? Daenerys likely wouldn’t sit for that, nor her husband. If he did use them he might have to slay them all, which would make him a kinslayer. Was it worth it to win the throne and avoid the Dothraki destroying their lands. IF she was mad maybe he could play as he has, seem her friend but then once the throne is theirs kill her and take it to free the realm, much as his father Rhaegar should have. He could be a kinslayer if it kept people alive.

XO

Few believed him at first, but it was hard to argue after they found Othor and Jader’s bodies and both rose once night came. Thankfully Benjen was trusted enough that Jeor took his advice and posted guards. It was their screams that roused the castle after the wights got free and attacked them. They were trying to make their way toward the Lord Commander when Benjen arrived with
a torch to ignite them both.

After that it seemed all could see the truth of it, though none knew who Coldhands had been. Not even Aemon recognized the description Benjen gave of him, making him wonder if perhaps he was some long dead brother from before their time. Riding with him there was little doubt the man was reanimated, yet still had his mind, the rot stopped by the cold or some magic he didn’t care to share with Benjen. All he told him was he wouldn’t pass the Wall due to spells crafted into it.

He’d also told Benjen there would be a day when children would come to the Wall. Children known to Benjen, and he should make sure they are seen through it whether he is there or not. Benjen didn’t know what to make of it, but knew he had little choice but to trust the brother who saved him from death.

If not for the wights Benjen might have ridden south after hearing news of Ned’s imprisonment. Jeor assured Benjen he would use his contacts to ensure Ned took the black, but Benjen had feared it wouldn’t matter. Thankfully it wasn’t long before word came of Ned’s sentencing, and though he felt bad for both he and Jon, he knew it better than them taking his head.

He’d also assumed it meant none knew the truth of Jon, at least until the men came from the south with a dragon. Alyn arrived with Ser Raymun Darry and Gladden Wylde, asking to speak with Benjen on behalf of his nephew. Most assumed it was Robb, so they accepted the answer that it was him asking Benjen to try and seek his aid in helping Ned to take the black, only to find out that he had already been sentenced by the time they arrived.

It was only after he took them to their rooms that they opened the chest and revealed the blood red dragon which hopped out and stared at him.

“It’s real,” Benjen remarked in quiet shock.

“It is,” Raymun nodded. “Which is why we need Maester Aemon’s help to care for it while Ser Jon is within King’s Landing.”

Telling the others they sought treatment for a wound that looked infected, Benjen made his way to the maester’s quarters. Inside he found not only maester Aemon and his new steward after Chett was killed by Jafer’s wight, but their new maester Cayle Hill.

The blond maester had arrived just before the wights were found, and when they were slain had stared at them as they burned, as though his entire view of the world had been shaken. Everything they had told him of magic had been a lie. Many had told him to focus on things beyond earning another valyrian steel link, but even those who had them spoke of the higher mysteries as if they were legends which could never exist again.

Though young he had many a link, with plenty of iron, silver and even black iron. Not only was he a skilled animal handler, but when Benjen came asking Maester Aemon to check on their guest, Cayle had looked up from his book. “I would be happy to help, Ser Benjen,” he said, lifting one of his many silver links.

“It is of little concern, brother,” Benjen told him. “And please, Benjen is more than enough if Ben is too little.”

Cayle chuckled sheepishly. “Of course.”

“Would you mind checking on the ravens once you are done, Cayle?”

“Of course.” He bowed his head at that, watching the men leave.
Once outside Benjen asked, “How is he?”

“Shaken,” Aemon said with a frown. “He is one of the few who holds a Valyrian steel link, and yet all he knows has been shaken by what he saw.”

“I meant how do you like him?” Benjen clarified with a smile.

“Ah, he is well enough,” Aemon assured. “Intelligent. More learned than most we see here.”

“Is he trust worthy?” Benjen asked thinking on the blond bastard born a Hill of the Westerlands.

“As much as any brother,” Aemon offered.

Entering the guest quarters they swiftly closed the door and Raymun Darry was quick to shake Aemon’s hand, guiding the elderly man. “We’ve something you need to see, Maester Aemon. Pardon the phrase.”

He furrowed his brow in confusion as Benjen took his hand and guided it forward until he heard an odd trill a split second before he felt warm scales across his fingers. With a gasp he faced to the dragon. “He did it?”

“He did,” said Raymun.

Aemon’s eyes glistened as he shakily put out his left hand to find the bed and sit on the edge, petting the small dragon. “How?”

He turned his head to listen to them explain all that had happened. Benjen clearly hadn’t been told everything either, else he might not have gasped at hearing of Jon being cut down by Gregor Clegane and brought back by flames from a red priest and his dragon’s kiss. They spoke of their trip north, of Robb’s war and Jon’s plans in returning to King’s Landing.

“Now that Lord Stark comes north to be kidnapped, does Jon intend to stay there?” Aemon asked with a frown.

“As far as we know he does,” said Alyn. “He told us he intends to gather allies among their enemies, and thought no better place to do so than among their ranks since Robb would already gather those who do so openly.”

Aemon nodded, turning to the dragon which had laid beside him. “And this one’s name?”

“Bloodwing,” Gladden said, the dragon’s golden eyes shifting to him briefly.

Aemon smiled. “It works for our plan.”

“Your plan?” asked Raymun.

“Did you not hear of the dragon at the Wall?” Aemon said with a conspiratorial smile. “Born from a lost egg likely left by Queen Alyssanne and her dragon Silverwing, kept in secret by the forgotten Targaryen at the Wall until it hatched and became the terror of the north?”

Benjen found their shocked looks amusing, though he had mimicked it when Aemon first shared the tale he and Jon had crafted. “Aemon has taken to walks outside of Castle Black. Unlike the others who run to Mole’s Town to bed a woman, he finds his solace in the wild where none know what he does.”

“Return with Bloodwing,” Aemon told them. “Meet me outside the castle walls and I shall come
claim him, saying the egg has hatched suddenly, perhaps due to the comet the men speak of. I hear they are of a color?"

“Both are red, yes,” Benjen said.

That night, after the men left, Aemon departed for his walk and remained late. Some of the men laughed as they always did, joking of his going to see a whore, but those died away when Aemon returned with a bundle of crimson set upon his shoulder. The guards had run off in fear, going to get Jeor and waking the castle who came out to see the dragon.

“Aemon, what is that?” Jeor demanded as stood in the yard surrounded by their brothers.

“I believe it is a dragon, Lord Commander.” Aemon said with a smile. “I thought if the king will not help us then perhaps we might find another strength to bolster the Wall. One I would imagine Queen Alysanne left behind.”

Cayle gaped at the dragon, yet was the first to step forward. “It is magnificent.”

“His coloring?” Aemon asked the maester.

“Scarlet,” Cayle said looking at the dragon, which eyed them all warily. “Golden eyed with dark skin across its wings.”

Aemon nodded. “I shall care for it, Lord Commander.”

Jeor gawked at the beast like every other man, but shook his head, looking to Benjen. “Ben, come with me to speak with Maester Aemon in private. I trust you to be my dragon should it try to harm our maester.”

The others parted while Benjen followed them to the Lord Commander’s chambers. Once inside with the door latched Jeor poured himself a drink before turning to them.

“Is this what you two have been up to?” Jeor asked, making Aemon chuckle while Benjen sighed. “You can’t think I haven’t noticed you two suddenly becoming friendly. I thought it might just be because of his fondness of your bastard nephew as you said, but I doubt that now.”

“In a way, though it is our nephew that unites us,” Aemon admitted. Knowing that had made Benjen turn to him Aemon said, “Who better than him to know?”

Jeor tilted his head in confusion. “To know what?”

Benjen glanced at the door before moving forward and telling Jeor. “Jon Snow is the son of Rhaegar Targaryen and my sister, Lyanna Stark, who I saw wed before the war started.”

“The dragon is his,” Aemon added quickly.

Jeor stared at the men and saw neither was lying. “Do you expect him to end your oaths?”

Each shook their heads. “No,” said Aemon. “We simply seek to aide one who would help us. One who wished to be one of us before learning the truth of who he is.”

Jeor frowned. “You think he would help us?”

“More than Robert ever did and Joffrey likely will,” said Benjen. “I’ve already sent him word of the wights and he’s sent us his dragon. He’ll believe us, or at least consider it where others won’t.”
After looking between the two, Jeor chugged the rest of his mug. “What will you need to care for the dragon?”

“Bloodwing,” Aemon told him with a smile. “And I would only need food. I prefer to let him live freely in the land beyond the Wall once he is too big to stay within the castle.”

“So long as you can be sure he won’t kill anyone, you can keep him here and I’ll back your story.”

“Thank you, Lord Commander,” Aemon said with a slight bow of his head while Bloodwing kept his golden eyes on Jeor.

Back in the mester’s quarters Aemon found Cayle waiting to speak with him. “Have you named it?” The young maester asked Aemon.

“Bloodwing,” Aemon answered.

Cayle nodded, smiling at the creature resting on the old man’s hunched shoulder. “I never thought we’d see another.”

“And none thought we would see wights either,” Aemon said with a frown. “It seems the world is changing.”

“If the Citadel is to be believed than neither should be possible,” Cayle noted with a scoff.

Aemon arched his brow at that, wondering if maybe Cayle had been sent here for his doubts in their order. With Alyn and the others returning south and Benjen set to join the great ranging, Aemon would need another willing to help him care for the dragon. Perhaps Cayle’s change had already come with the wights, leaving Aemon with an ally instead of just a replacement.

Chapter End Notes

It’s kind of shaky how Thoros would learn of Viserys, but I figure he has some friends at the docks who would’ve heard some stories. I kind of just wanted Jon to contemplate really grim things.

I typically don’t like adding original characters to fics, but I couldn't think of a maester to fit the spot who wasn't already somewhere else. So I made up a minor maester. I considered hinting that he might be loyal to the Lannisters kind of like Theomore Lannister, but that character already exist so I went with him being more open minded due to his interest in magic. I always found Qyburn interesting in that aspect of him going against the order, so Cayle could be seen as a version of that kind of character. He’s not going to dissect Bloodwing, but he might look through his shit and give him little tests.

The links I mentioned (iron, black iron and silver) are, according to the wiki, for warcraft, ravenry and medicine. Cayle is a Hill, and I’ve toyed with him being bastard to a few different people, mostly side characters and no one of import but fun to mention. It likely won't come up at all, so feel free to think it whoever you want for now.

Next Chapter: Jon swears his sword to Tyrion, and Ned travels to his kidnapping.
Sworn Wolf

Chapter Summary

Jon is sworn to Tyrion. Ned travels from King’s Landing with Yoren and his recruits.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After meeting with the small council and speaking with Cersei, Tyrion found Shae sitting with a group of Black Ears clansmen and Varys, who left with a riddle for Tyrion. It was the next day he arrived at the throne room to act as Hand and found Jon Snow brought before them.

“Lord Tyrion,” Jon said as he knelt before the dwarf and placed his slender sword at his feet. “I am your liege man. I will shield your back and keep your counsel and give my life for yours, if need be. I swear it by the old gods and the new.”

Looking at the young knight, Tyrion felt pity at the boy’s forced sworn servitude, but knew denying it would only put Jon at risk. “And I vow that you shall always have a place by my hearth and meat and meat at my table, and pledge to ask no service of you that might bring you into dishonor. I swear it by the old gods and the new. Arise.”

Jon rose and sheathed his sword, giving Tyrion a thankful nod before following him to his seat and standing behind him during court. He found he had little to do otherwise as Tyrion seemed to keep Jon at bay, treating him more like a maid than a sworn shield.

“Ser Jon, this is Bronn,” he told him when the dark haired sellsword came to find him.

“You’re a ser?” Bronn asked with a laugh.

“Knighted by the king himself for winning the tourney before his death, so I’m told,” Tyrion said sipping at his wine.

“That is correct, my lord,” Jon nodded, stood beside Tyrion as Bronn sat across from him.

“Jon would you spare us a moment?” Tyrion said sitting up, waving the knight away, to go stand outside.

He watched the boy leave and found himself chuckling as he turned back to Bronn. He had a squire of his own in Podrick Payne, who he suspected had been inflicted with serving Tyrion as a joke much as Jon was made to swear himself to Tyrion as an insult. Ever the joke to his family, it seemed he became their dumping ground, given their spare whelps to curb or risk his neck. Now he had a squire, a sworn shield with his own squire, a sellsword in his service and the clans of the Vale supporting him. Once Bronn gathered worthy sellswords he could well end up with the strongest position in the Red Keep if things played out right.

Tyrion had always been one to enjoy the company of his niece and nephew as he was one of the few to pay attention to them. Both took to seeking him out more than usual after his return, yet both often turned their attention to Jon.
“Could you teach me to ride like you do?” Tommen asked him during his first visit.

“I don’t think the king would allow it,” Jon said solemnly.

“The King’s Hand might,” Tyrion offered with a smile. Jon’s curious glance was expected, so he answered it. “I saw you helping him when I returned. And who better to teach him then a young knight who won his second tourney?”

“Wouldn’t it be an insult to Ser Aron?” Jon asked, concerned the master-at-arms would cause some trouble.

“He’ll have little say against my teaching him, and should my sworn shield share his own thoughts no one would say a word,” Tyrion retorted.

Myrcella was the more interesting one, as she made her interest in Jon’s company less obvious. When she came she did so to see Tyrion, speaking with Jon only briefly when the topic called upon it. Though it seemed she often found a reason to ask him of their discussions.

One day after she left, Tyrion had Jon join him at his table, pouring the boy wine. “What has come of you and my niece?” he asked, sliding the cup across the table.

“Nothing, my lord,” he told Tyrion. Years ago he might have been worried or been embarrassed, but he had larger worries now. “I called her friend but I fear my father’s betrayal has ended any hope of keeping her as one.”

“It’s for the best,” Tyrion offered.

“It is,” Jon said somberly.

Tyrion sighed. “It isn’t as fun if you agree with me. Shouldn’t you mourn the loss of your forbidden love?”

Jon chuckled. “I fear I may bore you then, my lord. I know better than to covet what I cannot have.”

“And yet you seek the trust of my family.”

Jon shrugged. “I will leave no doubt of my loyalty for the king or his family.”

“There is always room for doubt,” said Tyrion. “Don’t worry though. I’ll find you another girl. Best to turn your attention elsewhere.”

Tyrion tried to observe the boy, to see what the truth of him was. He was friendly with the Tarly boy, seemed a good mentor for his squire, and even had a friendship with Thoros of Myr, who likely spent his days converting them as much as drinking and exchanging stories. Their unity seemed to come from their time riding together, yet it wasn’t hard to tell that even Thoros looked to Jon at times. Though twice his age he looked to the boy knight he claimed was given a second chance at life by the Lord of Light.

There was little doubt of his martial prowess, but Tyrion doubted his reasons for returning. He wondered if perhaps he had some hand in Joffrey choosing to release Ned Stark rather than let him rot in a cell and be used in exchange for Jaime, but as far as any knew he never spoke with the king except for at court or in brief passing. Instead he spoke only to assure him of his allegiance, or the lack of one to the Starks.
It wasn’t until Varys told him Jon had told the king of Lord Starks’ intent to send Jon to the Wall and damn him to a life he would never know that Tyrion began to suspect he was right. The more he thought on what he’d been told, and what he heard from others, he realized Jon had influenced the king, though much more subtly than he ever expected the boy capable of. So subtle, he wasn’t particularly sure it was intentional.

He had made the irony of Ned Stark serving at the Wall too enticing for one as cruel as Joffrey to pass up. The lashing was surely more than he’d anticipated, yet he’d done what was demanded of him. He even managed to shift the king’s view of him, leading to him offering the boy legitimacy and Winterfell if he remained loyal. Tyrion’s doubts grew, but he was sure Jon could have left if he wanted. His friend had cut through their guards to leave, no doubt Jon could do the same if he truly desired.

At first Tyrion had thought to keep the boy at bay for his own sake. Even if Joffrey found him interesting or amusing, Cersei and his father would be wary of him. There was no need for Tyrion to add to the boy’s plight, so he thought to spare the boy Cersei’s ire if they grew close.

It would be too much of a risk to simply bring the boy close as he did Bronn. He may be so desperate to prove himself he would reveal his plans. Instead, Tyrion would use his friendship with Myrcella and Tommen to draw the boy closer. No doubt Joffrey or Cersei thought Jon would reveal himself a traitor by attacking Tyrion, but the boy was too smart for that. He would know he had only one shot and wouldn’t waste it on Tyrion, or the two children he seemed to enjoy.

There was more to his sworn shield than a simple bastard knight born of the north, and Tyrion intended to find out the truth of him.

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Early on in their journey Gendry took to helping Lord Stark as much as he could. The man had trouble enough moving as the cast became more a problem than the pain. The day of its removal finally came when they reached an ivy-covered inn and Gendry helped Ned cut through it. It felt like watching a ghost as he saw the tall, muscled boy pull apart his cast, freeing his leg. It still stung walking on it unaided, but with his crutches or even just a walking stick the ache faded into near nothing.

“Did you want this?” Ned asked quietly.

“No thanks,” Gendry said shaking his head, “I’ve no need of an old rotted cast.”

Ned chuckled. “I meant this life. To be a brother of the Night’s Watch.”

“It wasn’t my choice.”

“What would be your choice?”

“To stay at the forge.”

Ned nodded, but his smile quickly faded when gold cloaks came riding toward them seeking Gendry. Thankfully not even the guards with Ned had cared enough to learn his name, and the others had taken to calling him Bull for his helm. The Lannister guards seemed ready to jump in and help the gold cloaks, but as more and more of the recruits heading north took up arms they soon dropped their hands from their hilts, leaving the gold cloaks on their own.

That, and Yoren holding his sword to the officer’s throat when he spotted Gendry, was enough to
drive the gold cloaks away. The Lannister guards looked displeased with it, but seemed ready to accept it. It was their duty to take Ned to the Wall, not help the gold cloaks.

Picking up the sword the officer abandoned, Yoren looked it over. With a glance to Ned, he tossed the sword to the lord, who caught it and dug his stick into the ground as he turned and slashed at the throat of a Lannister guard. The man gasped and choked on his own blood, stumbling back. The others started to draw their steel but Yoren dashed forward and killed one with a thrust through his neck. Ned managed to block the strike from the third, but Gendry had pulled the hammer from Cutjack’s hand and slammed it into the guard’s knee. When the man fell forward, Ned pulled his sword up and drove it down into the man’s neck and torso.

Yanking the blade free and letting the corpse fall over, Ned stumbled before pressing his stick into the ground to keep on his feet. “Take the mail, caps and arms,” he told Gendry.

The boy looked up at him as the others stared in shock. “Best hurry,” said Yoren. “We’ll leave the kingsroad to avoid more gold cloaks.”

Eddard, Gendry and Yoren took the mail and caps from the Lannister guards, though as Yoren already had a sword he gave the guard’s to one of the willing recruits while Ned gave his officer’s sword to Hot Pie, who earlier had only managed to wield a big rock when confronting the gold cloaks.

Now free of his guards, Ned found Gendry one night and told him of his plan to escape with the Fellowship of Fire. “I’d like you to come with me.”

“Why me?”

Ned considered telling him of his father, but decided it might be best to wait and learn the boy’s character before telling him. For all he knew the boy could try to make his own claim as it seemed Renly was. Instead he said, “Because I’ve seen your work. You have true skill and I’d like to see you help my son.”

Things might have been better if he let the boy take the black, but with how things had turned out for Jon it felt wrong to let him do so unknowingly. He also felt he owed it to Robert to make sure at least one of his sons survived and lived a decent life. He couldn’t go find Edric Storm or any of the others, but he could at least care for Gendry.

Gendry seemed to accept Ned’s reason and agreed to join him and avoid taking the black. While they abandoned the kingsroad Gendry continued to act as Ned’s squire since he still had trouble with his leg. Ned had tried to console the crying girl whenever she cried, but she still hadn’t spoken. Hearing her wails made him think of his own daughters, praying for their safety whenever he heard her crying.

It was near a month before they found a town on the southern shore of the Gods Eye which was abandoned. Or so they thought until thirty riders arrived to surround them. The riders all had weapons ready until one of them called out, “Lord Stark?”

Ned’s eyes found the source and laughed upon see the stocky man dismounting and sheathing his sword. “Harwin.”

A slim man bearing a brooch with his sigil of six white mullets on violet stepped forward after the Stark guard. “Lord Stark, I assume you know why we come.”

“I do,” Ned nodded, looking to Gendry, who was riding one of the horses they’d stolen from his
former guard. “I come willingly.”

“Good,” Harwin smiled, looking to Yoren. “Is there any objection?”

Yoren looked to the men and shook his head. “No.” He knew of their plan since Thoros had spoken to him, but needed to seem neutral. If it were any but Benjen’s brother by blood he might have turned them down as he had the gold cloaks.

Ned glanced at Yoren before looking to Harwin and Lothar Mallery. “I ask you help Yoren and these men to pass north. Gold cloaks seek them along the kingsroad, to not aid them would be damming them to death.”

“You need only let us cross the bridge to the south,” Yoren noted, speaking of the wooden bridge Woth had found.

“You’re lucky it still stands,” said Harwin. “We found Amory Lorch going about burning towns to seek us out. He was set to burn the bridge when we ran his band down and took him prisoner.”

“You have him?” Ned asked leaning forward.

Lothar nodded. “He is guarded by three of our men.”

“You know the truth of your leader, don’t you?” Ned asked them quietly.

The men shared looks before nodding. “We do, Lord Stark.”

“Then you’ll know he’ll want him to be brought to justice. Let me take him with me as a prisoner.”

Lothar glanced to Harwin before shrugging. “It could be done. And we’ll help the black brothers make it north.”

There was little surprise that some of Yoren’s recruits tried to join the Fellowship, but they denied them all.

It was on their second day of travel that they heard the yells and found a band of the men charging toward them. The Fellowship and recruits all drew steel, ready to fend them off. Ned was never sure who they were, if they were the Mountain’s men or Amory Lorch’s come to check on his disappearance. They may have just been bandits or deserters for all they knew, the only thing certain was they sought to kill.

The crying girl wailed as chaos engulfed them. Men fired on them with crossbows, thrust spears at them and steel clashed. The wagon holding the caged men nearly shattered as the horses driving it ran to a field where a large rock waited. It caught the underside of the wagon, snapping the wood and causing the horses to choke until the cage fell from the wagon and the wagon bucked, letting the horses pull it over the rock.

It hit the ground and the lock snapped, so when the men inside flipped the cage they threw it open the two largest ones fought to escape first. While they rushed into the fray hoping to kill the men who kept the caged, the third with white and red hair left the cage and waited for one of the startled horses to pass. Grabbing it’s reins, he pulled himself up and rode off alone.

The Fellowship men met their attackers. With the recruits of the Night’s Watch supporting them they lost only two of their men and five of the recruits before the last of them died. Yoren had killed the two caged men who came for him with some help from Harwin and Ned, but noticed the third was nowhere to be seen.
One they stripped the dead of anything valuable, the band continued on their path. With the Night’s Watch recruits among them, they wouldn’t lead them to the hollow hill, but instead a village that they’d helped previously. Still, Ned knew he had to be patient. Even free, it would still be some time before he saw his family again, but at least now he had hope that the image of him with them in Wintefell may come true after all.

Chapter End Notes

Thinking on it, Jon kind of has some of Sansa’s arc in King’s Landing here. They are called before Joffrey to answer for their brother’s crimes and tied to Tyrion. He has another similar to one of her ACOK moments later on.

I know people are looking forward to Jon and Tyrion being buddies, but for now Tyrion is still in his manipulating mode and is suspicious of Jon. For the most part Tyrion’s storyline will be the same as ACOK without much involvement from Jon early on as he’s kept from his plans.

The gold cloaks come for Gendry shortly after Ned leaves, but because Ned’s bit ends later than Jon’s, I saved it until now. Originally Ned’s story was pretty different, and his section gave be a bit of trouble.

At various points I had him follow Arya’s story until the attack by Amory Lorch, or just completely avoid Amory, but this was the path that made the most sense to me for what I want. They couldn’t cross the bridge on the God’s Eye river if Amory burnt it, and the only way he wouldn’t would be if the Fellowship caught him, which they did while waiting for Ned.

Having Ned fight was interesting since we never really see him do it, and even here he’s doing it with a busted leg. I don’t think he’s especially good, but he is a war vet and is getting the jump on the guards who think him a cripple. I think he’s definitely capable of killing them, especially because he feels he has to at that moment.

I knew pretty early on I wanted Gendry to go to Robb, but that was also when I imagined a different group heading north. I don’t know if I’ll do Gendry/Arya, probably not if I’m honest, but it should still be interesting having him with the Starks.

Next Chapter: Myrcella gets a new handmaiden and hears a rumor as her nameday approaches.
False Identity

Chapter Summary

Myrcella plays a prank by switching places with her new handmaiden, and as her nameday approaches hears a rumor that leaves her shaken.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though she had some companions from other houses, Myrcella found herself looking forward to the arrival of her cousin, who was to be her handmaiden at her uncle Tyrion’s request. She had realized early on her handmaids had been made to entertain her by their families, feeling it their duty to befriend her so they had a hope of raising their family’s status. Once she realized that it had made their friendship seem false, something she hoped would be overcome by familial ties, even if it was a branch of the Lannisters from Lannisport.

It turned out Rosamund looked much like her, though her hair was straight compared to Myrcella’s golden curls.

“If one of you changed your hair you could be twins,” Tyrion had said when he introduced them.

Two days later Rosamund spent the morning curling her hair while Myrcella straightened hers. They even changed outfits, letting Rosamund dress in her elaborate crimson gown while she wore Rosamund’s blue dress. They spent the day exchanged, and found themselves holding back giggles as Ser Preston Greenfield arrived to guard her and didn’t notice that he was stood behind her cousin while seeming to ignore her.

They arrived at Tommen’s room where Ser Mandon Moore barely cast a look their way before they entered. Inside Tommen looked up from his book and his brow knit in confusion as they walked to him.

“Myrcella?” He said uncertainly, knowing something was wrong.

“Yes?” Rosamund said, matching Myrcella’s voice.

Tommens looked at them both oddly before pulling back slightly, causing Myrcella to break into giggles. “Don’t worry, Tom, it’s me. We’re just playing tricks on people.”

“You are?”

“You want to come with us and see how many we fool?” Myrcella asked. When he nodded she held his shoulder. “You can’t tell anyone though, okay? You have to pretend like cousin Rosamund is me and I’m her.”

“I will, I promise.”

He followed them to the kitchens where Rosamund called for her meal, the servants quickly bowing their heads and telling her, “One moment, Princess Myrcella.”
Rosamund glanced back at her with smirk while Tommen put his hands to his mouth to hide his held in laugh. Even her other handmaidens couldn’t spot the differences, showing reverence to Rosamund while shooting Myrcella odd looks, as if warning her to keep her distance. It made her feel bad for her cousin, wondering how badly things would go if she simply dismissed all the other girls. Maybe she could find some of her bastard sisters and take them as handmaidens.

Even the king himself barely noticed the difference as found them sat on a bench and called out. “Myrcella,” he came to a stop before them, ignoring Myrcella while looking to Rosamund, “you were friendly with the traitor’s bastard before, weren’t you?”

Rosamund blinked in confusion, spotting Myrcella subtly wave her hand so she nodded. “I was.”

Standing before her he looked agitated. “Do you think him true? Mother says I need to be careful of him, but he’s been at the Imp’s side since his arrival and hasn’t tried anything. I think he may be honest about father’s knighting him making him loyal to us, even more than your taking pity on him and acting a friend.”

Myrcella frowned at the comment that she was only friends with him out of pity. If she was herself she’d have said much more, but just subtly waved her fingers, making Rosamund nod. “I think him true.”

Joffrey stared at her for a moment before pushing his head forward. “Is that all?!”

Rosamund backed away slightly. “Um…” Myrcella gave her a slight shrug, so Rosamund did her best. “He seems a true knight. I wouldn’t act his friend if I didn’t believe him worthy.”

Joffrey scoffed, standing straight. “You would know better than Mother. She seems to stare at him whenever he passes.” He laughed, “I’d worry she intends to wed him just to spite father, but even she wouldn’t sink so low.”

Myrcella frowned watching Joffrey walk away while Balon Swann followed. He had been taken as kingsguard to replace Ser Meryn Trant after his death during the escape of the Stark girls.

Rosamund turned to her. “Who was he talking about?”

“Ser Jon,” Myrcella answered.

“Lord Stark’s bastard?” Rosamund asked with surprise. “You were his friend?”

“I still am,” Myrcella said, meekly adding, “I think.”

Rosamund offered a smile before thinking back. “He’s cute.”

Myrcella smiled sheepishly at that. As it was, she felt a child at times despite being only a few years younger and noticing that her body was surely beginning to take shape. She found herself thinking of him differently since his return. At first she’d thought it the beard he’d grown as she found herself wanting to feel it despite having thought nearly every other she saw odd. His wasn’t very long, but while he’d been squired to Ser Barristan he left no trace of it much like the Lord Commander did with his own.

She had sensed something different in him, and wondered at times if it was imagined, that perhaps the beard made him seem older or more determined. It seemed as if he’d seen more than she could know, but she was sure there was more to it than some scruff and having seen battle. She wanted to go and ask him what it was, to speak with him, but even with Tyrion she didn’t want to risk making her mother angry with Jon if she saw them together. For all she knew, if Cersei saw them speaking
she would lock Jon in a cell, saying it was to keep her safe.

“What’s he like?” Rosamund asked. She listened as Myrcella spoke of him, telling her stories of their time together as examples of him being not just strong but keen minded, direct but smart enough to be subtle. She told him of how clever he could be at times, of how thoughtful he was of others, how gentle and kind he could be. By the time she finished Rosamund was smirking. “Wow, you really like him.”

“Shush,” Myrcella warned. She looked down, then after a moment revealed, “I’m thinking of asking Joffrey to have him betrothed to me and legitimized so he can take Winterfell when the war is over. That way we’ll have claim to it and know him loyal.”

“Do you think he will?”

“No,” Myrcella frowned. “Not now. I’d need to convince him, but I fear this war may last long, so I’ll have time.”

Later that afternoon Myrcella and Rosamund were walking toward her garden when they spotted her mother walking with Ser Boros Blount. They had been changed so long Myrcella had forgotten until Cersei walked straight to Rosamund. “I’ll be holding dinner in my solar tonight, bring your brother.”

“Yes, my-mother,” Rosamund stuttered, giving Cersei a curtsy.

All the fun drained from their prank as Myrcella watched her mother nearly bump into her, forcing her to back away and make room for her and Ser Boros to pass between the girls. As much as she thought it would be fun to trick even her mother, it just made her chest hurt and her eyes burn, cementing how little she considered her. However, even if she was playing a handmaiden, she was still a princess and wouldn’t be seen crying.

“We should return to my room and change so I can attend,” Myrcella told her cousin.

Rosamund nodded, walking beside her through the keep. The sun was low in the sky when they heard the clang of steel and a voice call out with a laugh, “You’ll need to do better than that if you want to wield Dawn!”

“It’s so heavy,” Edric groaned. “How am I supposed to use it?”

They made their way toward the training ring where they saw Edric Dayne wielding a blunt two handed sword he tried to swing at Jon, who deflected each strike. “It’s not too different. You still have a lot of the same options, with a bit of extra weight and a greater reach.”

“If it’s so great why don’t you use one?”

“Preference,” Jon shrugged. “They’re more meant for groups or cavalry and I’d prefer to face a man on foot with a longsword. You’ll get the hang of it though. Ser Barristan wielded one near as quick as he did his longsword.”

Edric nodded, swinging at Jon but stopping when he saw the Lannister girls walk up to the rail around them. “Princess,” he said bowing his head.

Jon turned to them and arched his brow before looking straight to the straight haired Myrcella. “You two switched?”

Myrcella smiled, biting the inside of her lip as she nodded. She wanted desperately to hug him and
thank him for seeing through it. “I thought it fun.”

Edric blinked in confusion before on his second pass of looking between them he nodded, spotting the differences while Jon asked, “People fell for it?”

“Of course they did,” said Myrcella. “We even changed our hair.”

“It looks nice, but everything else is still different.”

Rosamund blinked, glancing at Myrcella before asking, “What do you mean?”

“Your eyes are paler than hers,” he told Rosamund. “Your face shape a bit different. Your nose and lips too.”

Edric arched his brow and listened, noting that he was right, but the differences were slight. Myrcella had slightly fuller lips and though their noses were straight and slightly retroussé Rosamund’s was more pointed. The Lannister girl also had a more oval face compared to Myrcella’s heart shaped one.

“At a distance it might work, but did it truly trick that many people?”

Myrcella nodded. “Near everyone we’ve met so far.”

“Than I fear their minds may be gone,” Jon offered with a laugh.

Rosamund snickered at his unknowing insult of the king and queen mother while Myrcella simply smiled. “At least we know yours remains sharp.”

“Like valyrian steel,” he assured.

Though his ability to see clearly through their act left her smiling the rest of the day, it was only the next that she began to notice odd looks from near everyone she passed. It was almost her nameday before she finally came to know what had caused them.

She and Rosamund had changed again to let Myrcella walk about as she liked without a guard. It was while stood looking out to the Blackwater that she heard the discussion of a passing group.

“You think it true?” One of the women asked.

“The princes and princess do all look like their mother,” said another. Myrcella kept her eyes away from them.

“And their father,” the first said with a laugh. “I assume it’s to be expected if the parents are twins.”

Myrcella fought back her confusion, keeping her eyes forward and breathing even.

“That is only if Lord Stannis speaks true. It is easy enough to lie. He surely hopes to discredit the king so he can take his place.”

“Rohn said he heard that the Lord was cuckolded by his fool,” said the first lady. “That Lady Selyse would sneak away to bed him because Lord Stannis proved incapable in bed.”

“A fool?” The lady laughed. “I suppose it’s better than a man as firm as a leaf.”

They all giggled as they passed and Myrcella turned to see the group walk into the distance. Taking
a breath, Myrcella made her way back to her room to take in all she’d heard.

Lord Stannis was saying her father wasn’t her father? That she wasn’t just a bastard, but one born of incest between her mother and her uncle Jaime? It had to be a lie like the one lady said. Spread to discredit her brother so Stannis could take the throne from him, much like Renly hoped to do.

But then the other spoke true as well. None of them looked like their father, while all his brothers shared their Baratheon looks. Whenever she heard of his bastards, people always spoke as if their looks were confirmation enough, yet she and her brothers all shared her mother’s looks.

She found herself questioning everything she knew over those next days. Every time her uncle guarded her mother, every glance or smile they shared, every time her uncle had placed a hand on Cersei’s shoulder to calm her ire. Had they been cuckolding her father the entire time? If so then that would mean he wasn’t even her father. Her father would be her uncle.

If it were true, then she wasn’t a Baratheon. She wasn’t even a Lannister. She would be a Waters. She would be a bastard.

How much of her life was a lie? It felt like all of it was, from herself to those around her. She had always heard people speak of King’s Landing as a nest of vipers but had never felt it as firmly as she did then. It suddenly felt like she was drowning in lies. Her mother was her mother, but her father was a man her mother not only disliked but cuckolded, making her father her uncle. The servants all lied to her as they kept calling her princess while looking at her as if they thought Stannis’ words true. Even her handmaidens soon shared their looks and spoke their lies on top of those used to gain her friendship.

As her nameday came and Myrcella entered her twelfth year she felt as though she were drifting through a pit blindly. She accepted the small gifts given to her by the staff and the larger ones from lords seeking to endear themselves to her family, but barely managed to make her put on smile convincing.

“Are you okay, dear niece?” Tyrion asked after giving her a potted flower from the Neck.

“I’m fine, uncle,” she said quietly, brushing her finger against the small goldencup.

Tyrion frowned at her, knowing she would have heard the rumors by now. He’d suspected it was the cause of her ill mood lately. Sliding off his chair, he walked to her and held her hand to draw her gaze. “Do not listen to their lies, sweet girl. Whatever they think does not change who you are. No matter their words, you are a princess.”

Myrcella’s eyes glistened as she nodded.

Tyrion sighed, brushing a hand across her cheek and kissing her hand. “I heard you took my hint and tricked some of the guards.”

“You heard? How?”

“My sworn shield spoke of it,” Tyrion offered.

He held back at laugh at how her sorrow faded, a small smile taking her lips as she asked, “Ser Jon told you?”

“He did. He said it a decent enough trick for those who don’t know you, but not enough for those who do or with half a mind.” Tyrion patted her hand before stepping back. “Surely that is enough to show you how ignorant most are. If such a simple trick can fool them even when they spend
their days serving you, why would trust them to do anything but accept such a simple lie from a greedy man?”

“But…” She sighed. “There are things they say which make sense.”

“Like what?”

“None of us have father’s looks, only mother’s… and uncle Jaime’s.”

Tyrion wished he could find everyone who spoke a word of it and have them rot in the dungeons, but it would do little to console her, and only make it seem more true. “All that means is Lannister blood is stronger than Baratheon blood.”

“But I always heard even father’s bastards shared his look. All of them.”

Tyrion’s face sank at the thought of the bastards slaughtered after Robert’s death. “They are born to weak women. For all her faults, your mother is gifted with Lannister blood and beauty which she luckily passed on to you and your brothers.”

Myrcella looked at the goldencup flower. “Did uncle Stannis and Renly ever care for us? Or have they always hated us?”

Tyrion frowned at the hurt in her voice. “I doubt that, but greed grows large in them and they will do anything to feed it. Even cast aside those they care for. Children have slain their own parents and siblings to try and claim lesser things than the Iron Throne.”

“It isn’t worth this,” Myrcella said with a sniff, reaching up to wipe her eyes.

Tyrion stepped forward and raised his arms to pull her into a hug, gently patting her back as she trembled and quietly cried into his shoulder. “I know. It isn’t, but greed makes men fools.”

“All of them?” she asked pulling back and sitting up.

“There are some good ones,” he said somberly. Seeing her frown, he wondered if his plan might work out for the best. Though he could do something sooner to ease her heart.

Myrcella kept to her room most of the day, but left for the feast in honor of her nameday which was barely a third of what Joffrey’s was even after his canceled tourney. She wondered how many thought ill of her now they suspected Stannis’ words true. They must think her an abomination, yet she would remain a princess, dressed in one of her finest green silk gowns with traces of gold.

While she ate she saw Jon sat with his usual group near the end of the low tables. His squire, who always seemed shy around people, showed no hint of it as he spoke with Sam and Thoros, laughing at the old priest’s reply. Jon simply smiled at them briefly, tapping the rim of his mug before turning his head slightly to glare at the table across from them where Ser Jacor Hogg and a group of men laughed.

His soured expression remained as he downed his mug and looked to Sam. His face brightened some as Sam spoke, a small laugh taking him before a louder one came from the other table and he turned again to glare at the men who laughed. Thoros spoke quietly before Sam did as well, and Edric frowned looking to Jon.

She watched Jon shake his head and look to them, pressing his fist into his cheek until a suddenly another laugh came from the opposite table and he rose. “Jon!” They said in whispered yells, Edric rising and reaching to stop him, but Jon pulled his hand away.
Myrcella and everyone who heard his friend’s pleading whispers turned to watch Jon grabbed the back of Jacor Hogg’s doublet and yanked the burly man from his seat while throwing a fist into the man’s face. The moment Jacor hit the ground Jon was on top of him, pummeling his wide face with punch after punch. Sam and Thoros rose with Edric, who ran over the table and past Sam to thrust his shoulder into one of the men laughing with Jacor who moved to attack Jon.

Thoros punched a man about to kick Jon’s head, knocking him back to the table while Sam pulled at Jon’s shoulders to try and make him stop, but Jon just dug his hand into Jacor’s thick throat even deeper. His second punch had cracked the bone beneath Jacor’s left eye, which leaked blood through its lids to join that from his mouth and crushed nose, turning Jon’s hand scarlet.

The room seemed to rise as gold cloaks hurried to break them up, Thoros and Edric pulling Jon off before the gold cloaks could. They grabbed him and brought Jon before the high table where Joffrey wore an amused smirk tainted by his disappointment that they hadn’t let Jon simply beat the man to death.

“What is the meaning of this?” Cersei demanded, glaring at him for disturbing the feast despite earlier looking as though such a sight would be a relief to the boredom she felt.

“The man spoke vile things of the princess, your grace,” Jon told them, standing tall and firm. “Things I dare not repeat. Things no knight would dare speak, let alone at the feast celebrating her name day.”

Cersei’s ire faded some as she glanced at Myrcella, who wore a somber smile. Jon had defended her honor, but that it was questioned at all was a reminder of the rumors. Joffrey arched his brow. “Did anyone else hear his words?”

“My companions, and any close enough to hear them,” Jon said nodding back to where they had sat. “They spoke loud enough for me to hear from the neighboring table.”

Joffrey waved his hand. “Ask those around them. I’ll have the tongue of any man who lies.”

That was enough to make any who might have lied speak the truth to the gold cloaks, telling them of the man’s crude comments. Once they returned and told Sandor, the kingsguard shot a glare toward the bloodied man before making his way to Joffrey and whispering the words so only he could hear.

Joffrey’s face darkened some, nodding before he stood. “Ser Jon acted as a knight defending my sister’s honor. Ser Jacor Hogg, for your slanderous words you will spend the day in a cell, and in the morning we shall have your tongue and two fingers from each hand. Let us see what you would do then.”

The man was clearly terrified, and tried to yell but his pain paired with his swollen lips and broken bones made it near impossible to say anything coherent by the time he was dragged from the room.

Joffrey turned to Jon. “Ser Jon, I thank you for your honesty and haste to defend my sister’s honor.”

“Though perhaps next time it would be best to ask the man outside, or have a guard handle him,” Cersei added.

“I apologize,” Jon said with a bow. “I behaved rashly, allowing my anger to take control. I will seek to be better should any dare to question the princess’ honor again.” He turned to Myrcella and bowed again. “And I apologize for disturbing your celebration, princess.”

Myrcella shook her head. “I thank you for acting on my behalf, Ser Jon. There are few finer gifts
than knowing I have those who would defend me even at risk of themselves.”

Jon bowed to them once Joffrey dismissed him, returning to his table. One of Tyrion’s savage men came to speak to him, and shortly afterward Tyrion excused himself. “I’ll need to speak to my sworn shield on his behavior before I’m too drunk to remember it,” he said with a laugh as he left the table.

Myrcella watched him head down to Jon’s table, pulling the knight aside and speaking to him quietly. When Jon nodded, Tyrion swiftly grabbed his jerkin, pulling him low and held his finger to Jon’s face in a clear warning. Jon simply smiled and nodded, patting Tyrion’s raised hand and speaking something assuring enough to make Tyrion release him and pat his cheek. With a final few words he laughed and turned, returning to the table where he stopped and squeezed Myrcella’s shoulder. “I apologize if my sworn shield has hindered your enjoyment of the feast at all, dear niece.”

“He hasn’t,” Myrcella assured.

He nodded, patting her arm lightly. “Enjoy yourself, just not too much.”

She was confused, tugging at her sleeve lightly as she nodded. “I will.”

Tyrion glanced toward Jon, who was leaving the hall, before returning to his own seat and telling Tommen a quick joke to make the boy laugh.

Myrcella said farewell to Rosamund and Sandor, who escorted her to her room. It was only once she had stepped inside and latched the door that she heard a slight shifting sound and gasped, turning to find Jon sat in her room with a harp in his lap.

“I’m sorry to intrude,” he said with a smile, “but I thought it best few know of my gift.”

Myrcella’s fear gave melted and she smiled. “Of course.”

He motioned to the chair across from him, sat before her window letting pale moonlight fill her room. Myrcella swiftly sat and watched him strum the strings, testing them and adjusting a few before looking to her.

“No laughing if I mess up, okay?”

“I swear.”

“I wasn’t sure what kind of song you’d prefer, or if you had any favorites I should learn, so I had Sam help me make one up. I hope that’s alright.” Jon took a breath as he looked to the strings before closing his eyes. He ran his fingers across them silently before finding the first to strike.

Myrcella sat in captive silence as she watched him play and listened to his song, or her song perhaps. One written by him for her sake. She watched his fingers dance across the strings, occasionally opening his eyes for a second to glance at them and make sure he was doing it right before closing them. He’d clearly practiced enough to make it second nature.

The song seemed so light at first, but grew somber and sad with deeper strings, almost dark and mournful yet remaining resolute in a way. It rose in parts, rousing and hopeful before sorrow came again and she felt her chest tighten watching his face show hints of emotion that came through his fingers. Just as it grew even quieter and grim she found it rising slowly, mixing with deeper chords as she saw his brow tighten slightly, looking determined it grew quicker before cascading into a gentler, peaceful melody.
Once the final chord fell silent Jon exhaled and looked to her. His smile faded when he saw her wiping tears from her cheek. He swiftly set the harp aside. “Hopefully it wasn’t so bad it drove you to tears?”

Myrcella shook her head and laughed. “Not at all.”

“You liked it then?”

“I loved it.” She sniffed, wiping her face of any tears before rising to her feet. “Thank you for the gift, Ser Jon.”

She saw a sly smile take his lips briefly as he stood. “That wasn’t your gift.”

“It wasn’t?”

Jon shook his head. “That was me paying my end of our deal from the tourney.”

Myrcella arched her brow. “But you said it best they not know of your gift.”

“Aye, it is best they don’t know.” He said, stepped forward and brushing his fingers through her hair as he leaned in and pressed his lips to hers. Myrcella froze slightly before closing her eyes and tilting her head toward his, pressing her lips to his in return.

After a moment he stepped back and they separated, each smiling sheepishly before Jon glanced at the door. “Tyrion helped me because he thinks the song your gift. I hope that was okay?”

Myrcella beamed at him. “It was.”

“I had a feeling it was something we’ve both wanted in a way,” he said with a solemn smile. “Was it your first?” When she nodded he smiled. “Then I have claim to your first kiss and being the first to write a song for you.”

“And I will cherish both forever.”

“As will I,” he assured. “But if I’m found here I fear I’ll lose my head, and Tyrion threatened me if I spent too long.”

Myrcella nodded, but when Jon moved to grab his harp and depart she stepped forward and reached for his cheek, standing on her toes to press her lips to his. Without the shock of it, she made her kiss fiercer, parting her lips more to feel more of his lips before she sank back to the ground. Pulling in her lips she smiled at the hints of wine mixed with the taste of him.

Jon’s shock at her forwardness gave way to a smirk as he took the harp and bowed to her. “Sleep well, Myrcella.”

She kept her hands entwined in front of her as she turned her head to watch him move to the door. “You as well, Jon.”

As they went to sleep that night, dreaming of what could be between them, neither knew that those dreams could never be thanks to the letter Tyrion was crafting. A letter to Doran Martell, prince of Dorne.
I imagine Rosamund and Myrcella switching places wouldn’t be something they only did on the ship after her departure or for Arys’ trick with Arianne. So I thought it a fun way to intro a chapter focusing on her perspective.

I couldn’t not make Jon be the one to notice right away. Others in the keep I imagine would have noticed? Tyrion and Sandor. I’d doubt even Varys or Littlefinger, more because they think so little of Myrcella than any lack of intelligence. Tyrion would obviously know, but Sandor I imagine pays enough attention to notice.

I don’t think Joffrey necessarily cares much about Hobb’s insult to his sister as much as it just being an indirect insult toward him as well, but he plays up the sister defense angle for the public. Joffrey’s punishment should be hint enough at what Jacor was saying. If not just let me know and I’ll answer in the comments if anyone really cares enough to know.

For anyone wondering, Jacor Hobb is made up, but meant to be related in some way to the Hobbs of Sow’s Horn. Originally I had it as Lothor Brune, mostly to piss off Littlefinger, but he’s too quiet to draw Jon’s ire in such a way so I just made it some low knight.

At this point Jon has been practicing the harp about two years, I think? So he should be good enough that his song at the end is actually pretty good. Of course it’s all bitter sweet as they finally kiss but clearly are going to be separated again.

Next Chapter: Dom joins Cat on her journey to meet with Renly.
Bitterbridge To Storm’s End

Chapter Summary

Robb sends Cat to treat with Renly and sends Dom with her to speak with Loras.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It had started with Robb planning to send Cat away to wait for Ned in Winterfell even after she insisted her place was at her father’s side. When she tried to make him reconsider sending Theon to deal with Balon Greyjoy he might have listened if it hadn’t been for Edmure.

Robb had decided to send Cleos Frey to King’s Landing with his terms. Not only was Sansa’s betrothal to Joffrey at an end, but the remains of those who died in service of the Starks would be returned, as would his father’s greatsword Ice. Tywin was to release his captives from the Green Fork and Robb would do the same for his from the Whispering Woods and the Battle of the Camps, save Jaime who would remain hostage. Though last had been the demand that the North and Riverlands become it’s own domain, the oddest had been the return to Jon Snow to Winterfell in exchange for Willem Lannister.

“A trueborn son for a bastard is more than fair,” Robb told them afterward, when it was only him and his family.

“But why would we want that traitor back?” asked Edmure. “I know you thought him a brother but he’s-”

“He is my brother,” Robb said firmly. “And he is surviving as best he can. If you were in his place, do you think you’d hold out, or would you bend the knee and do as they say?”

“I’d never betray my family,” Edmure scoffed.

“And we should leave him there to do so? Shall we line up our army and turn our backs so they can stab them as well?”

Edmure’s ire faded some. “You want to get him away from them?”

“Better then leaving them with a Stark to replace us,” said Robb. In truth he sent the terms more as a test of the their willingness to come to an armistice. They had no one of worth to trade of Jaime, but if there was a chance they’d stand down and accept any of his terms he had to try. He didn’t to go to war just for his own sake, he’d prefer to stand down and build a decent defense while gathering their forces for the war to come. He doubted they would accept any of his offers, but he hoped to use it as a measure of what their thinking was.

Edmure looked to Catelyn. “Good thinking, boy.”

“Do not call me boy,” Robb said, rounding on his uncle. “I’m almost a man grown, and a king—your king, ser.” He bit back harsher comments he’d been holding back after his dismissal of Jon, but he had to play into Jon’s actions. That only made him grow angrier since he couldn’t release it all upon his uncle.
Instead he turned it on Catelyn when she tried to have him send someone else to deal with Balon Greyjoy. Her resistance to his command to return to Winterfell didn’t help. Even remembering Jon’s wariness of Theon, Robb stuck to his decision as if to spite her. She hadn’t been the only one to question him, but she was the one who made him feel most like a child. He was king now and part of a plot even she couldn’t be trusted with, yet she treated him like he would come running to her when he scraped his knee.

Robb had considered others, but if he was honest it felt like the Twins again. He’d considered sending Dom to the Iron Islands, but he was too valuable, not only as the Bolton heir but to Jon and now as part of Robb’s inner circle. This time he wouldn’t have his army surrounding them if Balon thought to hold the negotiator hostage, so couldn’t risk sending people like Tytos Blackwood, Jason Mallister or Stevron Frey. The only one he thought stood a chance of not being held hostage was Balon’s own son, Theon.

“That makes sense, but what if he turns?” Dom had asked when Robb brought it up with him.

“He’s fought beside us this long. He saved Bran. Why would he turn on us now?”

Domeric had simply frowned at him. “Your father hasn’t pressured you to obey him?” Seeing Robb look down in thought, Dom continued, “It’s easy enough to ignore them when they’re away. It’s another to go against their will when they are before you. When your father returns, will you give your crown to him if he asks for it?”

Robb shook his head. “No. The lords gave it to me. We have a better chance of gaining allies with me wearing the crown. Even they said as much.”

“Because you’re here. But when Eddard returns, what then? What if he demands it?”

“What does this have to do with Theon?” Robb asked rather than answer.

“He’s lived his life as a hostage. If his father offers him freedom then what’s to stop him from simply staying on the Iron Islands and waiting for the war to end? Or sending his men after us if he thinks the Lannisters more likely to win and sides with them?”

“Then who should I send?”

“I can’t say,” Dom admitted. “Theon may work out, I only hope to remind you that even sending him doesn’t guarantee his allegiance. I’ve tried to remind Jon of this with his aunt as well, but whenever he mentions her it was always as an ally. He forgets that others actually want the power of the Iron Throne, not just to make sure the unworthy don’t have it.”

That greed for a crown was one his mother had warned him of as well. “Balon Greyjoy is not a man to be trusted,” she had told him. “He wore a crown himself, remember, if only for a season. He may aspire to wear one again.”

“I will not grudge him that. If I am King in the North, let him be King of the Iron Islands, if that’s his desire. I’ll give him a crown gladly, as long as he helps us bring down the Lannisters.” And he will kneel as well when Jon comes to them with his dragon and a crown his own. Let Balon play at king alongside Robb until his brother comes to take their crowns.

It was her concerns for their war effort that drove Catelyn to seek out aid from Renly Baratheon. Robb couldn’t send Brynden or Edmure, but decided he would send Dom with his mother. After his part in returning his sisters to him, there was little doubt he could return Catelyn. Not only would there be Loras there to likely keep Dom safe, but should Renly still decide to hold them
hostage he at least could send others to get them without needing ships.

“You also know Ser Loras from your time in King’s Landing,” Robb said as he told Dom of his intent. “You could speak to him, have him speak to his sister and let her convince Renly to join us.”

Dom gave a small laugh. “Robb, Loras and Renly are more like to share a bed than he and Margaery.”

Robb’s eyes widened. “What?”

“It is a known secret,” Dom explained. “It’s of little concern, but if that is all you seek, speaking to Loras would be enough.”

Robb looked baffled. “I’d heard rumors of it, but is he truly like that? I thought it perhaps others speaking ill of them. Sansa spoke so highly of Ser Loras, I thought perhaps to seek a betrothal for her sake.”

“I imagine it’s something he can’t help,” Dom shrugged. “Some compulsion. It’s queer, sure, but once you know him you realize it matters little.”

Though wary, Robb nodded. “Either way, I’d ask you use your friendship to aide my mother’s efforts.”

“I may not be the best choice. If I’m honest, I am just as like to greet him coolly as I am to launch myself at him.”

Robb arched his brow and smirked. “I might like to see that. Though I’d ask you keep a cool head for now.”

“If you think it best than I’ll join her.” Dom said with a nod, thinking it good if only to give him less chance of crossing paths with his father.

It would be difficult to maneuver with Jon’s apparent betrayal. They couldn’t reveal Jon’s true nature, so had to play into it, while not allowing Loras’ friendship with Jon to possibly turn them against Catelyn. When she left, Catelyn found herself hating her sister, not only for her lies and her behavior with Petyr, but for her lack of support of Robb. Whatever part it played in forcing Robb to march rather than wait in Riverrun, Catelyn would remember this when she met Lysa again.

At first she had been wary of Bolton heir who she knew to be friend to Jon, but he had also helped Sansa and Arya escape King’s Landing and killed men for their sake as much as his own. It was rare for her girls to agree on anything, but both had agreed that Dom was good, so Catelyn put her faith in him to prove trustworthy.

It had been a long time before they arrived at Bitterbridge to meet Renly and his host, finding them holding a melee which ended with a knight in cobalt armor defeated Loras. While Lady Catelyn went to meet with Renly, Dom kept his distance before approaching Loras, no small part of that being his desire to stay far from Randyll Tarly lest her throttle the lord.

“They may tease you,” Dom said as he found Loras’ walking to his tent, “but there’s no shame in such a loss.”

“Dom?” Loras asked, wide eyed as he stared at the Flayed Knight. Shaking the loose armor from his arm and into his squire’s hand, Loras rushed forward to embrace the man. “Thank the gods you’re alive.”
“Others might be as well if we’d known you were leaving,” Dom said icily.

Loras stepped back with a frown. “I couldn’t. Lord Stark had made his decision. He could have had our help but he turned Renly down so we fled.”

“You could have—” Dom stopped himself from arguing further, shaking his head with a sigh. “It won’t change anything to be angry. We got out, that’s all that matters. I made sure Jon’s sisters got to safety.”

“Yet Jon returned to King’s Landing,” Loras frowned as they entered his tent, waving off his squire and pages. “We’ve heard he spoke ill of the Starks and even scourged his father on Joffrey’s command. They say he has betrayed them to befriend Joffrey and earn his legitimacy and be given Winterfell.” Relief came to Dom hearing Loras’s dismissive scoff. “The fools clearly know nothing of Jon Snow.”

“Aye, he’s doing what he can to survive and help his family keep their heads, surely.” He hated that he had to be conscious not to confirm the truth. Loras was a potential enemy and he couldn’t risk him knowing for certain.

“It feels cruel to think, but I hope they keep him hostage.” Loras looked somber as he sat down to remove the armor from his legs. “I’d rather not face him on the field.”

“You not need to if you convince Renly to join Robb Stark,” said Dom.

Loras laughed, sliding the armor off and looking to Dom. “So that why you’ve come? To have me try where Lady Cuntlyn will surely fail?” Seeing Dom’s confusion he smirked. “Renly asked me what I knew of the Starks from my time with Jon, so I told him and he took to calling her that.”

“I’d hope he doesn’t slip as he speaks to the lady.”

“Renly’s careful,” Loras assured.

“We shall see, but I doubt even the might of the Reach can win a throne alone.”

“We’ve the Stormlands as well. We will take King’s Landing and Renly shall sit upon the throne as the people wish.”

“They wish him only because they think it their best option,” said Dom. “They don’t know the truth of matters.”

Loras furrowed his brow. “And which truth is that?”

“That Renly is near as poor a choice as either of his brothers.”

Loras’ face hardened, rising from his seat and taking a step toward the Bolton despite not wearing any armor or weapons. “Why is that?”

Dom kept his arms crossed, unafraid of the closed distance. “Because he calls a king’s mother Lady Cuntlyn.”

“It is a jape.” Loras scoffed. “There are worse things.”

“It speaks to how little he thinks of others. It’s not as if she is the only one he speaks ill of. You always have a story to tell of his thoughts on those of the court. What of the ones you haven’t told us? What were his thoughts on the flayed fiend of the north and the bastard squire you took pity
Seeing Loras’s gaze shift uncomfortably, Dom continued. “Why is it he never took Samwell as a guard? Surely you would have asked him before Lord Stark made the offer? It’s not as if he is incapable. Is it because he thinks little of him, isn’t it? He thought him a joke, same as everyone else. What good is a king who can’t even see the worth of someone like Sam when someone they care for suggest they be given a chance? How can such a man ever hope to be objective when it matters?”

“Because it would be different. Him not hiring Sam is different from dealing with warring lords or the like.”

“If he cannot be kind in the smallest ways than why should any trust his larger kindnesses? If he does them only for glory, then they’re worthless.”

“He is kind,” Loras argued. “The smallfolk love him.”

“They don’t know him,” said Dom. “They know he throws them gold at times and is charming when he wants to be, but they don’t care to know how he thinks of others. How little he thinks of his own family, from his brothers to his niece. I can’t imagine he’ll have much good to speak of that female knight who bested you.”

“And you’re so perfect?” Loras scoffed.

“I’m not trying to be king.”

“Why are you so against him?” Loras asked angrily. “Would you rather Joffrey sat upon the throne?”

“I’d rather someone who deserves it,” Dom answered simply.

“And who better than Renly? Robb Stark? A boy raised in the North, hiding behind his mother’s skirts?”

Dom sighed, his mind instantly finding his answer he couldn’t speak. “Renly has done nothing for the North or the Riverlands. Robb has fought for them and won while you’ve barely moved.”

“He’s won a few battles, it doesn’t make him a king.”

“His lords choosing him makes him a king.”

Loras laughed. “And I would be named king when I played with others as a child, that doesn’t mean I can be king.”

“Then neither can Renly.” Dom shook his head, realizing they weren’t getting anywhere. Instead he asked, “What do you want, Loras?”

“What?”

“What do you want? From all of this, what’s your best hope?”

It took Loras a second to find his answer. “For us to live better lives than we would under Joffrey and the Lannisters.”

“I hope the same.”
“Then why are we arguing?” Loras asked somberly. He glanced to the opening of his tent before meeting Dom’s gaze and saying quietly. “You know why I will never not follow him. You aren’t the same. You don’t care for the Starks any more than I do. Join us. We can find Jon and Sam and free them both. Renly would give them places of honor for my sake.”

Dom frowned. “Even if he thinks so little of them?”

“All kings show favor for those they love.”

“Aye, but why would they want to serve him when they know him? If I know how he is then so will Jon and Sam.” Dom seemed sympathetic as he continued, “I know you care for him, Loras. I can’t say I understand as much as I wish I could, but I do understand that you can’t help who you care for more than any other man. I’d offer only that there are better men, to follow and care for. Others who deserve your loyalty more than a man who speaks ill of near everyone he knows and even while marching to likely slay his own kin, does so with reverie.”

“Would you rather us a mournful march?”

“Honestly? I’d rather none of us march. I’d rather we all go back to our keeps and gather for a council, but it will never happen. So if we must then let us march knowing what we intend beyond a better life.”

“And Robb intends more than that?”

Dom nodded. “Robb intends to give Westeros a true king worthy of the crown.”

“He’s a boy, Dom, younger than Jon even.”

“And Jon would make a better king than any of them,” said Dom.

Loras smiled sadly and nodded. “He might. It’s a shame he isn’t as Lady Catelyn fears, else I’d truly do all I could to see us support him. I might have even asked father to have Margaery wed him instead of Renly.” Loras sank into a chair with a sigh. “At least then she may have more to look forward to than a crown and children born from need.”

“You’d truly do that?” Dom asked tilting his head.

Loras nodded, looking to Dom. “I don’t know Robb. He may be a worthy king as you say, but I know Jon. I know his kindness and care for others. I know his strength, his bravery and will which let him earn his knighthood by winning the second tourney he ever rode in.”

“That same strength of will let him survive being cut down by Gregor Clegane.”

Loras’s eyes darkened. “It’s true?”

Dom nodded. “We’ve heard them say the Mountain cut through his mail, slicing him open from collar to waist.”

“How did he live?”

“By the grace of the gods,” Dom said with a shrug. “Apparently Thoros of Myr returned to King’s Landing with him, so perhaps Jon has favor with his flaming god.”

Loras put his head in his hands. “I should have been there.”

“As should I,” said Dom. “But now we’re here. Maybe Jon would have made a better king than
either of ours, but we need to be smart about this. We gain nothing from them warring against each other, not while the Lannisters live. What is there to gain from killing one another? All it would do is harm our cause. Isn’t it better to sheath our swords and look over everything before swinging at one another? It makes us fools helping our enemies.”

Loras thought much on his conversation with Dom over the next month as Lady Catelyn joined them in riding to Storm’s End to meet with Stannis. For the first time since he was a boy made squire to Renly, Loras felt plagued by confusion. His mind was aflood with thoughts which shifted enough to make him wonder if he had gone mad at times. Ultimately he still loved Renly and thought him best suited for the crown, but found himself thinking that his child with Margaery would be better.

Yet it was Dom’s final questions that came to mind as he came upon Renly’s pavilion and found him dead. In a flash of anger Loras found he’d drawn his sword and slashed through the throat of Emmon Cuy, who stumbled back gasping. “Brienne… killed him,” he said, almost pleading that his words would be enough to halt his death.

Instead it was Dom’s question which stopped Robar’s death as Loras looked to the dying Ser Emmon and realized he had become the fool Dom feared. His anger sank and twisted as he looked at the blood dripping from his sword, then looked to Renly and saw his gorget had somehow been cut clear through. The slash was too clean even for someone as large as Brienne to do.

Loras fought back tears as he turned to Robar, dropping his sword. “What happened?”

“I don’t know,” the knight said releasing the hilt of his sword. “Lady Catelyn said it was sorcery. A shadow. Stannis I think. Or at least his doing. She swore Brienne had no part in it, for she loved Renly.”

Loras noticed Parmen Crane had fled after he struck Emmon, leaving him with Robar who looked to Emmon Cuy dying on the ground while Loras walked to Renly and cradled him. “Go get a maester,” Loras said shakily. “Please.”

Robar frowned and nodded. “Of course.” With that he turned and left the tent.

Loras pressed his lips to Renly’s forehead, finally unable to hold back his tears as he pressed his head to Renly’s. “I’m sorry.” Though Loras had questioned if Renly would be a great king, he felt sure he would be Loras’s greatest love. There were tales of the Long Night casting the world in darkness, and that was how Loras felt now that the sun of his life had fallen. He didn’t care who they sided with, but he would avenge his love.

Miles away Dom fled with the others, eventually watching Brienne of Tarth swear herself to Lady Catelyn. He wondered when her tale of a shadow slaying the would-be king became one he didn’t immediately dismiss.

Like the others he’d thought at first it perhaps an assassins she simply didn’t see properly, but once she explained it he reminded himself of Jon’s revival and his dragon in the north. If such things were possible then he couldn’t say for sure that one couldn’t have a shadow slay a man. Instead he feared the person who cast the shadow. If this was Stannis’ doing Dom feared what would happen should the man set his sights upon not only Robb but any of the Starks, let alone Jon who he would surely see as siding with Joffrey. He wondered if there was any hope of Robb sending him as envoy to Stannis and simply taking the false king’s life.

Once they took Storm’s End and many who followed Renly came to follow Stannis, Melisandre asked her lord for guidance on what Stannis might face while seizing King’s Landing. Through her
flames Melisandre saw only snow.

Chapter End Notes

I like playing on reader knowledge of what would be, like with Edmure here saying he would never betray his family like Jon has, but we know he eventually does give over Riverrun later on in canon.

Robb considering Dom to the Iron Islands is basically what I planned originally. Early on I had a plot with Dom at the Iron Islands, but changed it for what we have coming up.

Dom tells Robb about Loras and Renly because he should know at least that if he’s to deal with them. It’s also not a grand secret, more something unspoken. Even Dom can’t foresee Balon claiming as king rather than siding with whichever side he thought would win.

This is basically the bulk of Catelyn’s plot from ACOK, bar her return and freeing Jaime. Here we’ll see her return and reunion with Eddard later. The timeline here is later than it will be next chapter which returns to King’s Landing, but I thought it best to keep it all one chapter, plus I wanted the ending bit.

Next Chapter: Jon gets bad news again and again and again and again.
Forlorn Farewells

Chapter Summary

Jon learns of Myrcella’s impending departure, but that is only the start of the bad news which comes over the months before battle.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After their kiss Jon felt more confident than ever. Thoros called him a monster in the training yard. He felt as if he could conquer the seven kingdoms himself without Bloodwing or Ghost. Even when Myrcella suddenly seemed to give him faltering smiles rather than the brilliant ones she had, he felt as though he was himself cloaked in dragon scales.

Yet that grand feeling died when Tyrion asked him to join in a game of Cyvasse. “I don’t know the game well, my lord.”

“Sit and I’ll teach you,” Tyrion told him.

After one game spent telling Jon the rules and some basic strategies, which he picked up quick enough, Tyrion reset all the pieces. Tyrion spoke of simple matters, though sometimes slipped in bits of information likely meant to test his knowledge despite his keeping Jon from court most days, information which Jon had learned from Thoros or Sam. What caught him by surprise was the question Tyrion asked him after taking his ivory heavy horseman.

“You spent time with the Kingsguard. Who would you choose to join Princess Myrcella in Dorne?”

Jon looked from the board to Tyrion. “In Dorne?”

Having not announced the betrothal at court, Tyrion saw Jon’s surprise wasn’t feigned. With a nod, Tyrion poured himself a drink, waiting for Jon’s move. “A betrothal to Trystane Martell has been arranged. She’s to leave in just under two moons and be ward to Doran Martell until she is of age to wed.”

Jon lowered his head and closed his eyes, taking a moment to press all of his rapidly rising anger into a ball he tucked away in the core of himself. When he finally opened his eyes and moved a piece he found the Imp arching his brow at him.

“Well? Who would you send?”

“Samwell,” Jon said quickly.

Tyrion snickered, looking to the board. “Your fat friend? You think him a worthy guardian?”

“Well,” Jon shrugged and used that moment to think, “surely you’d send Rosamund with her as well, wouldn’t you?”

Tyrion nodded, moving his piece and sitting back to drink. “Of course.”
“Sam has mentioned how pretty the handmaiden is,” Jon offered with a slight glance to play up it being a shared secret rather than a fabrication. “Perhaps if he went with her, he could find the courage to speak to her as he wishes.”

Tyrion laughed. “You wish to send your friend so he would have a chance of bedding my niece’s handmaiden rather than one to guard her?”

“She’ll have a personal guard and a kingsguard, wouldn’t she? If she has need of a sworn shield I’d offer myself but I’m sworn to you. You could ask Thoros. Surely he would join her if you asked.”

“If you asked perhaps,” Tyrion said with a knowing smile. “But you are correct, she’ll have a kingsguard as her sworn shield. What do you think of Ser Arys Oakheart?”

“He seemed the most willing to speak with me while I squired to Ser Barristan, but I didn’t know him well enough to truly say. With Sam at least, while I can’t say he is a masterful warrior, I can say he’s been getting fairly good with his bow and is far better with a sword and dagger than he was when he arrived.” Mostly passable was far better than completely awful.

Tyrion sat back sipping at his wine. “If not for his honor guard I might send him.”

Jon looked to the board. “You’re no fool, Lord Tyrion.”

“I should hope not. What’s your point?”

“I mean to say you know the truth of Sam by now surely? Of his father’s feelings toward him.”

“Ah,” Tyrion frowned and nodded. “Yes. I do.”

Jon moved his crossbowmen before meeting Tyrion’s eyes. “Then you know better than most that his father is more like to let your guards kill him than give up anything for him. Hells, if he could he may well provoke you into killing Sam just to be rid of him. He’s all but disowned Sam, made him sign away his rights as heir before coming to join us.”

He could see the dwarf likening his own experiences to Sam’s, just as Jon hoped. It surely didn’t hurt that though Sam was worthless as a hostage Cersei seemed to think him worth keeping, and freeing him to join the guard assigned to Myrcella would annoy her. After a moment Tyrion took another swig of wine and smiled, taking Jon’s crossbowmen. “Perhaps the heat will help him shed some weight and act a better guard for my niece.”

When Jon found Sam and told him of what he’d suggested to Tyrion, his friend gaped at him. “You want me to guard her for you?”

“I want you to help her in my place,” said Jon. “Be her friend.”

“But I’m to act a lovesick fool around her handmaiden?”

“Is that such an awful thing?” Jon asked with a laugh. “To try and earn the affection of a pretty lady?”

“No, but…” Sam sighed. “What of you?”

“I have a squire now,” Jon said with a solemn smile. “And Thoros, whatever he is. And I don’t need you as a guard, I have a set of my own.”

Sam chuckled with him as Jon nudged his head toward the Lannister guards stood off to the side.
“Still, my training—”

“You can keep that up on your own for now, or find someone there to aid you.” Jon leaned forward, meeting Sam’s gaze. “Sam I’m asking much of you, but this isn’t about sending you away or just guarding Myrcella. I want to know what the Martells are like so I know if they’re the type I can consider seeking as allies or if I need to look for others to overthrow them as well. And I need you to make sure they don’t harm Myrcella.”

Sam frowned. “You think they would harm her?”

Jon sighed. “She’s a Lannister.”

“You think it true?”

Jon shrugged. “It doesn’t matter. If it is then she is a full blooded Lannister, and if not then she still has their blood in her veins. The Martells despise the Lannisters for what Gregor did to Elia. Tyrion says this is to quell that anger before it festers like that with the Tyrells, but they could try something, or even one of the houses sworn to them may try something to gain their favor. Either way, we can’t let them harm her.”

A teasing smile took Sam’s lips. “You intend to wed her instead?”

Jon frowned, thinking a moment before answering, “No matter what we may need her to bring the Westerlands into the fold.”

“Be honest, Jon.”

Jon thought for a moment. “I’d like to see her happy, whether it be with me or another.”

“Even if the rumors are true?”

Jon wore a smirk as he responded quietly, “Why should that matter to a Targaryen?” Sam laughed, quickly putting his hands over his mouth when he saw the guards glance at them. Jon snickered before shaking his head and looking to Sam. “I just wish I could speak to her before she leaves.”

“If I’m to go with her we could work out a code as well and give you messages she tells me in our letters.”

“Thank you Sam. Could you send some to my uncles and keep Robb informed?”

“Of course.” Sam smiled. “I’ve taken up arms and seen battle for you, Jon. Sending letters is easy.”

Tyrion had taken to sending Jon away to train with Edric while he tended to court. Jon had no idea until much later that Tyrion had not only denied Robb’s terms of peace, but dismissed Alliser’s claim of wights at the wall. He wanted to ask what Robb and Tyrion’s terms had been, but knew Tyrion wouldn’t tell him, so instead asked Thoros, who had become his main source for information.

“He wanted to trade me?” Jon asked with a laugh. “Why?”

“Maybe to keep the Lannisters from using you to usurp them,” said Sam. “Or so he’d say.”

“Maybe I should have written to him before I left,” Jon said crossing his arms. “Surely Alyn told them my intent?”

“That wouldn’t stop them worrying,” Sam noted, thinking he would try the same. “What we do
here is a risk. They merely want you safe.”

“And Tyrion’s terms?” Jon asked Thoros.

“To lay down arms and retreat to Winterfell, free Jaime and then march against Renly and Stannis. To have all loyal to them send hostages to the court, and offered to exchange some of their hostages for others your brother took.”

Jon nodded. “And Ser Alliser?”

“The hand he brought as evidence had rotted by the time he finally came before them, so they disbelieved it.”

Jon sighed, thinking back to his letter from his uncles. “Benjen and Aemon wouldn’t lie about it. It has to be real, doesn’t it? Tyrion is a fool to ignore them.”

Over those next few weeks they all noticed he seemed more dismissive and irritable than usual. When Jacor Hogg shot him a glare during dinner one night, Jon had stood up and glared at him as though he was ready to murder the man, who turned away while Sam and Edric made Jon sit back down.

His anger didn’t fade much as time passed, instead it grew when word came of Renly’s death. Some said Stannis had an assassin kill him in his tent before battle, sparking many to call Stannis a coward and a kinslayer. Jon had never been close to either lord and found he didn’t care what Stannis did half a much as he did the thought of Loras’ sorrow at the death of Renly.

Before either had made a claim Jon hoped they might follow him instead of Joffrey, but their claims had complicated things. Now with Renly dead he hoped the Tyrells would side with Robb, but wondered if they might make their own claim rather than side with the Starks. Either way he was certain now he had little desire to help Stannis.

Shireen could serve as his heir, or Jon could make due with one of Robert’s bastards, but Stannis would never rule Storm’s End or any land once Jon rose. He didn’t dislike the man during his time in court, but he did little to endear himself to any and Jon would rather avenge his friend’s lover than waste his time seeking Stannis’ aid.

It helped having Edric there to spar with, letting him vent some of his building anger. It was during one of their matches that Sam arrived and called to him, “Jon!”

He left Edric to practice with his greatsword and made his way over. “What is it?”

“You trust me, don’t you?”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t I?”

“Because I need you to go pray.”

Jon tilted his head. “What?”

“Go pray.” Sam pointed to the godswood.

Jon stared at him for a moment before sighing. “Fine. Help Edric, okay?”

Sam’s eyes widened as Jon handed him his blunt sword and walked off toward the godswood. Edric walked over and smiled as he waved for Sam to join him. “I could use some work on my
archery.” At that Sam’s face lit up and he hurried to join Edric in exchanging their swords for bows.

It was near the heart tree of the Godswood that Jon found Myrcella. She wore a simple red dress with her hair straight again, which meant Rosamund was elsewhere with curly hair pretending to be her.

“This again?” Jon asked with a laugh as he approached.

Myrcella turned to him and smiled. “They didn’t know before.”

“So you sent Sam to get me.”

While he nodded, Myrcella shook her head. “This was his idea. He told me to come dressed as Rosamund today. Though I figured out his intent quick enough.”

“Well I’m sorry,” Jon laughed. “I fear he did this for my sake.”

“Your sake?” Myrcella asked, watching him come to a stop before her.

“I heard you were leaving.”

Myrcella’s lips sank along with her gaze. “You heard?”

“Tyrion told me.”

Myrcella sighed. “I hate that we can’t even speak anymore without resorting to tricks.”

“I wish we had earlier,” Jon sighed. “I like talking to you.”

“And I you,” she said turning her head slightly to hide her smile. “Though I don’t think I could have spoken very much after our last meeting.”

It took Jon a moment to realize the last time they spoke had been her nameday. It had felt like so long ago, yet he smiled at the memory, suddenly feeling as though he could still feel her lips on his. “I hope that wasn’t too much.”

Myrcella shook her head as she looked to him. “Not at all. I’d been waiting.”

Jon smiled. “I’m glad at least we had that night.”

“I wish we could have more,” Myrcella said failing to stop her cheeks from going flush. “I tried to tell Tyrion I didn’t want to go. I even had an idea, but he turned it down. He said mother would never accept it.”

“What idea?”

“I know Joffrey offered to legitimize you and let you rule Winterfell when the war is won,” said Myrcella. “I thought the best way to assure our allegiance might be for me to wed you.”

Jon arched his brow. “You wanted to wed me?”

“I thought it best for all involved,” she said raising her chin.

Her pompous expression made him smile. “I’d have liked that.”
Her expression crumbled as she looked to him. “You would?”

“A bastard like me wedded to a princess?” Jon laughed. “I’d be the greatest fool to reject such a thing, even if it weren’t you.”

Her smile was brief as it quickly fell away and she looked down. “Even with all the things they say of me?”

“Do you believe them?”

“Do you?” She asked meeting his eyes.

“I don’t know. I suppose it’s possible, but that doesn’t matter, does it?”

“Of course it does,” Myrcella said with a huff. “It means-”

Seeing her freeze up he smiled. “You’re a bastard?” She flashed him an apologetic look but he leaned forward conspiratorially. “So am I.”

Her lips quirked up as she shook her head. “It’s different. I’m…”

“Born like many a Targaryen,” Jon shrugged. “It doesn’t truly change anything about you. You’re still the same person you were before. Why should this change that?”

“Because all of that was a lie,” she said stepping forward. “If it’s true then my father-Robert was never my father, my uncle Jaime was. It means I was never a princess. I wasn’t even a Baratheon or a Lannister, but a Waters.”

“There is little doubt you’re a lion, Myrcella.”

“It doesn’t matter. I just…” She sighed, shaking her head. “I don’t even know what I want anymore.”

Jon leaned his head slightly to look upon her downcast face. “What do you mean?”

“If I’m not a Baratheon then why should I be a princess? Because my brother sits on the throne?” Myrcella scoffed. “Joffrey doesn’t deserve it.”

“No,” Jon said shaking his head, “he doesn’t.”

Myrcella smiled at his easily speaking treason with her. “I don’t want this is if it’s a lie.”

“You don’t know what it’s like to be a bastard, princess. It’s not something any would desire. Even being a lord’s bastard kept within his house doesn’t erase what you are from the minds of others.”

“Surely it’s better than living a lie?”

Jon kept her gaze while shaking his head. “I’ve done both. It’s not.”

Myrcella arched her brow, glancing toward the trees before stepping to him. “How have you lived a lie?”

“Many ways,” he answered. “Every day here is a lie.”

Myrcella’s eyes narrowed as she smirked. “You’re not as Joffrey believes are you?”
Jon smiled. “What does he believe?”

“That you don’t care for your family. That you’ve come out of a desire to forge your own path, much like our father, as he wishes he could.”

“I do want to forge my own path,” Jon admitted, “though I doubt many know the one I seek.”

“Which one is that?”

Jon eyed her for a moment before answering, “One that takes me from Westeros.”

“You plan to leave Westeros?” Myrcella frowned despite knowing she would likely leave long before he ever could.

“In time if I’m able,” Jon admitted. “I have things I seek to achieve that might be easier on other shores. Either way it would end with me as neither Stark nor Snow.”

“Perhaps I should take a similar path.” Myrcella chuckled as she turned to look at the heart tree. “Maybe I should stay as Rosamund, let her take my place and marry Trystane.”

Jon smiled, lowering his head in thought before that smile faded and he looked to her. “You should.”

Turning to him she chuckled. “I should? Why?”

“Because you’re going to Dorne, Myrcella,” he said without amusement. “You’re to be ward to the Martells. They might seek to harm you, or use you to gain some vengeance for Elia Martell.”

Myrcella put on an even expression. “You think they would?”

“I think they could,” he nodded.

Myrcella smirked to Jon, turning to him. “Tyrion thought the same.”

That surprised Jon, his brow rising briefly. “He did?”

“He told me that once we’ve set sail Rosamund and I are to switch places before meeting the Dornish escort.”

“I don’t know whether thinking like him is good or bad,” Jon said with a laugh.

“Good,” she nodded. “If you both think I should then I shall.”

It was for the best, Jon knew at least that much. “Have you heard Sam will be joining you?”

“He will?” Myrcella’s brow arched. “I thought him kept here.”

“Tyrion told me he intends assign him to your guard as a favor to him.”

At first Myrcella smiled at the idea of having a guard she enjoyed speaking with, but then it faded as she looked to Jon. “You remain while all your friends will have left.”

“I still have Thoros and Ned,” Jon assured. “And it’s not as though I’ll never see Sam or Dom or Loras again. Once things have settled we’ll all meet and share stories.”

They spoke for a time but when it neared too long, Myrcella turned to Jon with a sigh. “Will you be
there when I leave?"

“I imagine they’ll let me near, if only to say farewell to Sam.”

Myrcella nodded. “I’m glad, though I doubt we’ll have much chance to say farewell.”

“Then I say now, farewell dear princess.” Jon bowed his head.

He was ready to depart when she grabbed his hand. “Jon,” she whispered, her emerald eyes somber as they met his. He matched her solemn expression as she reached up to brush a bit of hair hanging beside his eye. Her fingers slid along his beard before she lifted herself and he closed the gap, letting their lips meet again.

Jon held her for a moment, tilting his head as they kissed. Though neither wanted to stop they soon parted,

“I’ll try to keep in touch,” Myrcella told him, biting her lip.

“Sam can help,” he told her. When she nodded, Jon stepped forward and placed a kiss on her forehead, quickly walking backward, away from her. “Until we meet again, Myrcella.”

“Until we meet again,” she said with a forlorn smile.

With a nod he turned and left the Godswood, quietly cursing himself for kissing her despite having enjoyed it. Even he knew it would only make things harder.

When the day of their departure arrived Jon, Edric and Thoros came to see of Sam, each exchanging a hug with him. Sam vowed to write them and exchanged brief goodbyes, waving to them from aboard the ship. Jon’s eyes drifted from Sam to Myrcella and smiled when he saw her glance at him while waving, directing it at him briefly. Sam seemed closer to tears than her, who had consoled Tommen before leaving.

It was on their way back that Joffrey sent Sandor after the peasant who threw dung at him, causing a riot. The moment it started Thoros and Edric moved closer to Jon, who himself moved with Tyrion toward the keep.

In the mayhem that followed, Jon stood silent as Tyrion slapped and kicked the king, letting others stop him while he pretended to speak with Thoros. When Tanda Stokeworth begged them to find her daughter, Jon was tempted to go, but knew he couldn’t risk it. Instead Sandor soon returned with the simple minded woman wrapped in his cloak, having scared away dozens of men who had taken her one after the other behind a tanner’s shop. Jon found part of him wished he’d been there not only to stop them but to make sure none who took part lived or kept their manhood.

Jon had thought things would get easier as time went on, but he felt the absence of Sam near constantly and Myrcella’s at least once a day no matter how little he tried to think of them. He worried that they would somehow see through Myrcella’s ploy and harm her. He worried Sam would be picked on and tormented without them there to support him.

The knot in his stomach grew when word came of Balon Greyjoy naming himself king. It grew again when they heard that Stannis Baratheon had taken Storm’s End, meaning he was surely coming to King’s Landing soon.

When his sixteenth nameday came Tyrion offered to take Jon to the best brothel in the city and let him have as many as he wanted, but Jon opted to drink with Thoros. Edric joined them, but drank only a few sips. Even drinking all Thoros offered him didn’t help quell the boiling bile at his core.
The little bit of control he felt over it all broke when Tyrion told him, “Theon Greyjoy has taken Winterfell. They say he killed Bran and Rickon Stark and mounted their heads on spikes along the walls.”

Jon sank back into the chair Tyrion had told him to sit in. After a moment he leaned forward and pressed his hands to his forehead, rubbing it before looking to Tyrion. “Are you sure? They said I was dead too.”

“I’m sorry, Jon,” Tyrion offered somberly.

Jon stared at the table for a long moment before closing his eyes and holding his face in his hands. He sucked in a breath to try and cool the burning in his chest, but it only added to the fire. So he did as he had before and let it sink into him, twisting with the rest and covered in ice enough for him to exhale and look to Tyrion.

Seeing the boy go from broken to composed so quickly was startling. “Are you okay?”

Jon nodded. “Just more people for me to kill.”

Tyrion arched his brow and smiled. “I hope I’m not among them.”

“Not yet.” Jon offered with a smile. He was glad it worked enough to make Tyrion snicker despite the smile tasting like poison on his lips.

It felt like he was sick. Everything about him felt off, shifting between hot and cold, struggling to think clearly at times. He already had times where he needed to sit in the open and get some air, and then Stannis’ vanguard arrived five thousand strong and ignited the kingswood, sparking Tyrion to burn houses the smallfolk had built near the city walls.

Jon was stood on a wall looking out to the fires outside the city when a rasping voice asked, “Thinking to throw yourself from the walls?”

Turning he found Sandor Clegane walking toward him, the guards assigned to him looking on warily. “Not yet,” said Jon. “Shall I step aside and let you go first?”

Sandor scoffed. “Why should I fear battle? It’s a gift to have more men to kill.”

“You truly enjoy it?”

Hearing the young knight’s doubt, Sandor snorted. “You realize being a knight means more than wearing favors and riding in tourney’s, don’t you boy?”

“Of course, but that doesn’t mean we should think so little of those we kill, does it?” Jon looked out to the flames. “No victory is guaranteed, and they are men no matter whose banner they follow.”

“They’re bags of meat,” said Sandor. “No matter who they are, no matter who they follow, be they man, woman or child, they all bleed and die the same.”

“Doesn’t that just prove what I said?” Jon asked turning to Sandor. “We’re all the same.”

“Worthless?” asked Sandor.

“Alive,” said Jon. “For now.”

“You anger may help with that.” When Jon looked at him questioningly Sandor chuckled. “I’m not
blind, boy. I’ve seen you sulking around here more than usual. It’s easy enough to figure out you mourn your brothers. I bet you’re angry you can’t go and kill the cunt who killed them, right?”

Jon looked to the kingsguard’s burnt face and nodded. “I am.”

“Good,” said Sandor, stepping closer and looking down at the young knight as he tapped his chest. “Use all of that anger and you’ll find your joy in battle. Revel in it if you can. Should you die at least you’ll do so happily.”

Jon looked to the fires again and thought of the empty dark he saw after he died. “I’d rather live.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Ned arrives at Riverrun, reunites with his family and meets with the Kingslayer. Robb has taken the Crag when he hears distressing news.
News From Winterfell

Chapter Summary

Ned arrives at Riverrun, reunites with his family and meets with the Kingslayer. Robb has taken the Crag when he hears distressing news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ned’s arrival at Riverrun had been delayed due to the Lannister forces. They had stopped twice at towns taken by Lannister men and found themselves chased by another small group that had nearly slain Ned before Gendry knocked the man off his horse, leaving the man unconscious for one of the Fellowship to end with an arrow. The rest were swiftly slain by the Night’s Watch Recruits, who had been gathering arms along with them as they moved north. Only two had to be killed when one tried to flee and another tried to slay Yoren in his sleep.

Normally Yoren might have joined Ned in entering Riverrun, but if any were in their cells they would have been prisoners of war too valuable to send to the Wall. Instead he said farewell to the lord, vowing to give his words to his brother and return with any news on his next journey south. Having already skipped many a keep while speeding south, he would take his time visiting others throughout the north, meaning he wouldn’t head to Winterfell, but Ned could write there himself now he was safe.

Lothar Mallery led the group that rode with Ned and Gendry to meet with Edmure and the men of the Riverlands. Once Edmure handed him the purse of silvers, he waved a hand and Ned looked to Harwin. “Are you certain?”

“My place is here for now,” Harwin nodded. “I’m certain of that at least.”

“Your father would’ve been proud.” Ned gave the man and all those who helped him a nod. “I can’t thank you all enough.”

When he and Gendry passed Lothr Mallery the man gave him a smile. “Be well, Lord Stark.”

Edmure greeted Ned with a smile. “Welcome back, good brother. Who are your companions?”

Ned nodded. “This is Gendry. He’s served as a squire of sorts during our trip.” He motioned to the portly knight bound to his horse being handed to the Riverrun guards by a man of the Fellowship. “That is Amory Lorch. A prisoner I picked up along the way. I intend to keep him in the cells of Winterfell. I hoped you could hold him until then.”

“Of course. We still have room in ours. Come,” the Tully said turning his horse back to Riverrun, “your daughters await.”

They rode into Riverrun where many had gathered to see the Stark lord’s return, though Ned was sad to hear of his son and wife’s departures. He’d hoped to find both when he returned, but his daughters were a relief to see safe within the walls of Riverrun. He also noticed Syrio stood beside Arya and Jeyne stood with Sansa.
Once they were inside and came to a stop, Gendry hopped from his horse and moved to help Ned down. It was mostly out of habit now, as Ned’s leg hadn’t been bothering him too much apart from random pains every now and then. Once he was on the ground he took a breath and looked to his daughters, smiling as he moved forward and held out his arms enough to spark them running to him. Arya was the first to reach him, leaping into his arms while Sansa stopped in front of him as though to wait her turn. Ned had none of that, grabbing her and pulling her close so he could kiss the crown of their heads.

“Thank the gods you’re okay,” he said before releasing them.

Arya had been so proud as they stood waiting that she hadn’t started to go glassy eyed like her sister. Now that she saw her father so skinny and gaunt she found it harder, but the moment she saw a tear slip from Ned’s eyes she felt herself break and shot forward again to hug him. Ned chuckled, rubbing her back while Sansa smiled at him, holding his other hand.

“Mother and Robb wanted to be here,” she told him while Arya backed away and sniffled.

“I’ll see them when they return,” Ned said confidently. “I’m happy enough seeing you two safe.” His eyes then drifted up to where he saw six wolves standing where they had been. One was unmistakably Ghost, yet the others left him confused. “Is that Nymeria?”

Arya beamed and nodded. “We found her near the Gods Eye. Her and her pack.”

“Except for that one,” Sansa said pointing to the small one with streaks of black in gray fur. “He returned with her a sennight back.”

“Ghost returned with some of the men from the group that brought you,” said Arya. “They met with Robb and left Ghost here.”

Ned nodded, smiling somberly at the returned direwolf before looking to Sansa and kissing her forehead, feeling even worse for having slain Lady. “I should see the maester,” Ned said standing straight. “It’s been some time since one checked my leg.”

They took him to Maester Vyman who checked over his leg while they told him of their trek with Dom and Syrio. The instructor had kept his role under Robb’s command, teaching Arya all he could while they stayed in Riverrun. Speaking with the man, Ned found he was committed to teaching his daughter all he could, where it was mattered little.

Ned had been intending to depart for Winterfell, but Vyman seemed suspicious of the lingering pain Ned felt so asked him to stay. He’s considered the possibility that Pycelle had set the leg wrong, so wrote to Bran and Rickon that he would come once he was sure his leg was fine. Vyman had mentioned the possibility they may need to re-break it, but assured Ned it would only be in the most extreme of cases.

It gave Ned time to learn all he could of what had been happening from his daughters and Edmure while thinking on what he would need to do going forward.

It wasn’t until they slew the Lannister guards that returned with Cleos Frey and failed to release him that Ned finally went to meet Jaime. Edmure seemed wary, afraid he may kill the Kingslayer, but Ned assured him of his desire only to speak. Edmure joined him at first, telling the guard to depart and return only when Ned left, giving him time to speak alone with Jaime.

Upon seeing him stood in the dark cell, Jaime laughed and shook his head. “Lord Stark.”

“You’re Joffrey’s father,” Ned said.
Jaime raised his chin slightly, noting it wasn’t really a question. “Why ask when you’ve clearly decided the truth?”

“You sister told me the truth,” Ned revealed, “or should I say lover.”

Jaime turned his head and closed his eyes, silently cursing Cersei for her stupidity before looking to Ned. “Joffrey is mine, as are the rest of her brood, I suppose.”

“And Bran’s fall was your doing as well?”

Jaime simply tilted his head and smiled.

“Will you not answer?”

“Why should I answer your questions? I gain nothing from it. It’s not as though you’re to kill me if I don’t. You’ll trade me soon enough.”

“For whom? The only one left at King’s Landing is Jon,” said Ned. He noted the flicker of concern that came to Jaime’s smug face. “Robb will never trade you for him now he’s betrayed us.”

Jaime’s brow furrowed. “He betrayed you?”

“Answer my question,” said Ned, “and I will answer yours.”

Jaime stared at him, laughing as he realized what the lord had done. Sinking back against the wall he nodded. “I pushed him. He came upon Cersei and I, spying through the window, so I pushed him.”

Ned’s hands balled tightly, wanting to beat the man until his golden hair was soaked red, but he had promised Edmure not to touch him. Instead he took a moment to calm himself. “All because he saw you?”

Jaime simply shrugged. “That was one answer, if we ignore the first.”

After a moment Ned nodded. “Jon spoke to the court asking for mercy but spoke of my deserving punishment. When Joffrey ordered him to flog me, he did as commanded.”

“You think because he doesn’t risk his life for you he has betrayed you?” Jaime scoffed.

“He made clear where his loyalty lies,” said Ned, remembering what he’d heard. “He spoke of Robert giving him what I never did by knighting him, allowing him a chance at a better life rather than one wasted in the cold at the Wall. Of how I let him suffer under a woman who made clear her dislike for him.”

Jaime laughed at that. “Your wife must have been awful to make him turn on you. And yet you and every fool who followes you will still blame him, I’m sure.”

“Jon is still young and doing what he thinks best,” Ned said carefully. “He’ll come around and return to us.”

“Ah, but the North remembers,” said Jaime. “What’s to stop some spiteful lord wanting to grovel at your feet from running a dagger through his gut and letting him die for your sake?”

“Their loyalty to me.”

“A man who failed at his coup, putting his own daughters at risk?” Jaime nodded sarcastically.
“What a great man you are, Lord Stark. They should all strive to be as honorable as you, the man who threw a newly knighted boy against the Mountain. To think that boy thought of you as a father. But of course now that you say he’s betrayed you, they’ll ignore him just as you did.” Jaime laughed bitterly. “What fools they are to think you somehow honorable. Perhaps you were meant for King’s Landing after all, Lord Stark.”

King’s Landing had taken Ned’s honor. He had lied to save Jon again and again, and would do so a thousand times more if he could. Honor mattered little to those of the south. Ned wondered if that was why Jaime had thrown his away. “Do you even regret it?”

“Regret what?” asked Jaime.

“Pushing Bran.”

Jaime was quiet for a moment. “I wish he wasn’t there. I wish he hadn’t seen it.” His gaze turned to Ned then. “But then I also wish we’d never come north. At times I wish your wife hadn’t driven Jon away, and then at others I’m glad she did.”

Ned knew Jon had grown close to this man for some reason. His face had grown solemn whenever Jaime was mentioned upon their return to King’s Landing, but he knew from what Jon had written to his children he looked up to the Kingslayer. To think the man who had pushed Bran could speak of Jon with the tone of a friend and mentor was surprising.

“Do you care for Jon?”

“You’ve asked four,” Jaime said, shifting uncomfortably.

“And you answered three,” said Ned, moving closer. “Do care for Jon?”

Jaime winced as he looked past the lantern Ned held to find his face and met the lord’s eyes. “He’s a good knight. He deserves better than to suffer for your mistakes.”

Ned knelt to be near a level with Jaime, still just out of range for him to attack. “Do you ever regret what you did?”


“Do you ever regret slaying Aerys?”

“The Mad King?” Jaime scoffed. He shook his head and looked away for a moment, then saw Ned kept his gaze on him, looking sincere in his question. “No. Never. He was…” Jaime paused, shaking his head and sighing. “Would you regret slaying a man who burned others alive? Cooked them in their armor, and then would go to take his wife as she screamed for help you couldn’t give because it is your duty to guard a king from enemies and not his family from him? To slay a man who hoped to burn the city rather than let Robert have it? To slay a man who ordered Rossart to ignite the wildfire he had stashed to destroy the city and every life within, then ordered me to bring him the head of my father. Instead I slew his pyromancer, slit his throat and handed over the throne to someone I hoped might be better, but proved to be as much a fool as Aerys was mad.”

“And what of Elia Martell and her children?” Ned asked grimly.

“I had no hand in that,” Jaime said firmly, sitting forward, unwilling to accept the blame for that. “I never wanted them hurt. I… They never deserved that.”

His desperate tone surprised Ned, but gave him hope. “That’s what you regret, isn’t it? Their
Jaime’s brow knit, shaking his head as he slid back. “What of it? What would that matter?”

“It would mean you’re not a soulless monster,” said Ned. It meant he might be of use.

Moments passed in silence before Jaime looked to him. “I never thought he’d hurt them.”

“Yet you say you saw such horrors.”

“Aerys’ horrors,” said Jaime, “but it wasn’t him who killed them, he only kept them prisoner.”

“Would you have stopped Clegane if you had been there? Would you have killed Lorch if you saw him drag the princess from her bed? Would you slay your father had you heard him give the command?”

Jaime stared at Ned as the lord rose and left the cell, leaving Jaime to think alone. That night he couldn’t stop the nightmares from coming, nor any of the nights to follow.

Ned hated the man for what he’d done to Bran, but he had cast aside his honor for Jon’s survival and bore shame for Jon’s cause. Perhaps he was strong enough to cast aside vengeance as well, if Jaime could help him survive where Ned couldn’t.

As much as he wanted to go be with his sons in Winterfell, the more he began to look and feel like his old self the more he wanted to ride alongside Robb. Robb may have been crowned King in the North, but Ned would still be Lord of Winterfell, making it his duty to lead the northern forces for his son.

Perhaps it was that desire to be of use that made it so frustrating watching Edmure try to lead. He wanted to include himself more, but knew so little of their plans he might be a hindrance. He couldn’t know the blunder it was sending Roose Bolton to join Helman Tallhart in heading south to retake Harrenhal.

Catelyn returned before Robb, her grim expression giving way to tears as she saw him and dismounted to embrace her husband. “Ned,” she wept into his shoulder as he rubbed her back. Finally she stepped back and wiped her eyes, turning to greet her daughters.

Ned found some solace in Catelyn that night, but that strained as they spoke of all they’d been through since seeing one another.

“I never thought Petyr would lie to me,” Catelyn said frowning. “I just don’t understand why he would.”

“To have you do as you did,” said Ned. “He knew how Tywin would react if we went after Tyrion. Whatever his game, you played into it by taking him.”

Catelyn sat up beside him grimacing. “It must be King’s Landing. It’s changed them.”

“Maybe,” Ned said seeing she needed to believe that. “Either way, you can’t trust him or your sister. We need to at least consider them as potential enemies.”

“Lysa wouldn’t go against us or Robb.”

“If Robb decided he needed the Vale and went to siege the Eyrie to get it, would you go against him?” Ned asked turning to look at his wife, seeing her lower her gaze, he sighed. “She is your
sister, but you no longer know her, Cat.”

“So I’ve lost a sister and a friend?”

“A sister and an admirer,” Ned said bitterly. “Or have you forgotten how he challenged Brandon for your hand?” Catelyn hadn’t, but she didn’t like to think on it. “Whatever he felt for you lingers.”

“But you say he is likely with Lysa?”

“To have one sister when he can’t have the other,” said Ned. “It wouldn’t be hard to convince her to lay with him. The way Jon described her she seemed obsessed with him.”

Catelyn let out a small snort. “And you trust his word so readily?”

“No more than you ignore what you know,” Ned said firmly. “You know your sister mad, you know Baelish a liar, and yet you think Jon lies? Do you hate him so much you would step into flames if he warned you they burned?”

“You act as if he is you, but he lies to a court of liars and goes unnoticed.”

Ned threw their furs aside and grabbed his clothes. “I thought I had wed a woman, not a petulant girl.”

“No,” she started, wincing as he left wearing his small clothes, slamming the door behind him.

That wasn’t the last time he found himself fed up with her and leaving to get air, but after each they would make up. He couldn’t bear a grudge against her. Being with her was too much a relief for him after so long apart.

Dom was the first to tell Ned the truth of what happened to Jon when he rode against Gregor Clegane. Ned had been regretting the choice ever since he heard what happened from Varys, even before that in moments, but now he wasn’t sure. Jon had suffered surely, but had also done the impossible twice over. He still wished Jon hadn’t died, but was glad he had so many witness the truth of him now that his own word was lesser.

Ned decided he would stay in Riverrun to await Robb’s return while Catelyn took their daughters back to Winterfell. He was a day from seeing them off when Vyman came to them with the grim news of not only the loss of Winterfell but of their sons as well. He had grown so used to pretending one betrayal mattered it felt odd to have another that did.

“I’ll leave for the Dreadfort by nightfall,” Dom told them, rising from his seat as Catelyn wept into Ned’s chest.

“Ser Domeric-”

“I will avenge your sons, my lord,” Dom said, his fist pressed into the table.

Ned smiled and shook his head. “No.” He looked to Catelyn and his girls. “You three will stay here while I ride north with Ser Domeric.”

“Ned-”

“I am the Lord of Winterfell,” Ned said firmly. “My son is the King in the North. I will rally any who remain and reclaim our son’s kingdom, and see Theon and all who aided him meet justice.”
Robb felt like the gods were on their side as he swept into the Westerlands, taking castles and gold mines. He was sure Tywin would come for him, allowing them to surround him in his own lands and end the war. Taking the Crag was just another step, one he did with Grey Wind and his personal guard at his side when he came through the gates while Smalljon Umber and Black Walder Frey led the men who scaled the walls.

An arrow had nearly hit his arm, but Torrhen Karstark had stepped in the way, crying out in pain as it pierced his side. Having his brother guard him, Robb led the charge with Grey Wind tearing through the Westerling men until they surrendered to the might of the North and Riverlands.

Torrhen laughed off the wound despite needing to stay off his feet for a time. It seemed all felt invincible until news came of Theon taking Winterfell and mounting the heads of Bran and Rickon on it’s walls.

When he heard it Robb excused himself, storming through the castle until he found a secluded place within the godswood of the castle. Grey Wind kept a distance as Robb drew his sword and slashed at one of the trees as hard as he could. He did it again and again, until his hand was numb and then kept hitting it.

Finally it was too much and he dropped the sword, holding his hand open now that it hurt near as much as his chest. The sword was chipped and twisted into uselessness, but he picked it up once it no longer felt like a thousand needles pierced his hand. When he went to leave the woods he found the tall, dark haired Dacey Mormont leaning against a tree with her head down, clearly left to guard him despite Grey Wind being there. He could understand it though, they were in an enemy castle.

Seeing his battered sword, Dacey offered him a sympathetic smile. “I imagine you’ll need a new sword, your grace?”

Robb snorted. “Depends on who I’m meant to face. Theon would deserve the pain of a beheading by this blade.”

“Then shall we keep it for that day?” Dacey asked, holding out her hand to take it from him.

Robb nodded, handing it off as he made his way to the chambers he’d commandeered. “Did I miss anything else?”

“No, that was all of import.”

“Stannis, Balon and now this,” Robb sighed. “Will Robert Arryn claim for king next?”

“Would they call him the Suckling King?”

Robb chuckled, shaking his head as his smile quickly faded. Arriving at his room he noticed the guards kept their distance to give him space to grieve, allowing only he and his companions to pass.

“I trusted him as much as any I fought beside,” Robb told her. “I thought him a brother. We all did, making him as much a kinslayer as he is a turncoat.”

Looking to her king, Dacey wore a sympathetic smile. “I’m sorry you’ve had to face such tragedy, losing your brothers one after the other, two in betrayal and two in blood. It’s awful.”

Robb turned to her as he opened his door. “No. I still have one.”
Dacey arched her brow, then frowned. “Snow? Robb, you’ve heard—”

“It’s a lie,” Robb told her firmly. “Jon isn’t like that, he’s not a turncoat. He’s always been loyal to us. He’s not like Theon. He never was. He told me to be careful around him.” Robb turned and punched the threshold of his room, “I should have taken his head the day Jon told me not to trust him.”

Dacey furrowed her brow, glancing over her shoulder before looking to Robb and asking him, “Is Jon still loyal to you?” She watched his eyes widen, realizing what he’d said before turning to look at her, his expression making it clear enough she gasped. “It’s a trick?”

Robb pulled her into his room, the battered sword falling from her hand as she turned to see him slam the door, leaving Grey Wind standing guard. “Dacey, you can’t tell anyone,” Robb said half pleading half demanding. “He’s already putting himself at risk being there. Without him my father might still be in King’s Landing.”

She put a hand to her mouth, thinking of all the awful things she’d said of Jon along with everyone else. If he was truly on their side, working within the shadows of the lion’s den, then they should all be ashamed to think such awful things of him. He wasn’t some craven born of sin and given to avarice, he was risking his life in his own way.

“I didn’t know,” she said full of regret. “None did.”

“You can’t tell,” said Robb. “No matter what, no one can know. The only who do are my family and those loyal to Jon.”

Dacey nodded before furrowing her brow. “Loyal to him?”

Robb winced, feeling like he was losing it all. He looked at the eldest of Maege Mormont’s daughters and thought that she of any would be loyal to them. She wasn’t boisterous like some of the others, or like to betray them as the Freys. “The men he rode with against Gregor Clegane, the Fellowship of Fire? They’re all loyal to him. They act as he told them to. As my father traveled North it was on his command they kidnapped and freed him to us. It’s on his command they aid the Riverlands and rob the Lannisters.”

“Why would he go back?”

“They said it was to save my father and find allies where I can’t,” Robb told her. “He’s always been loyal to us. Even my mother, knowing he did so for us, still worried he meant to betray us. And it was Theon. The one I trusted despite everything both her and Jon said.” Robb laughed bitterly. “How will any follow me when I’m such a fool to miss what they saw? If I’d listened then my brothers would still be alive.”

“Robb,” she said placing a hand on his shoulder and offering him a smile when he looked to her, “lord or king, you’re a man. Men make mistakes. Women too. We all do, but your mistake doesn’t make you the one who slew them. We all have choices, and it is our burden to bear them, but to take the burden of another is folly. You didn’t make Theon a turncoat and a coward, he chose to be one. I don’t think you could be a coward if you tried.”

Robb kept his gaze on her, nodding as she spoke. “Maybe if I try hard enough.”

Dacey laughed. “Maybe, but even then, I know it would be for a good reason. We all believe in you, Robb. Don’t let a coward ruin you.”

Robb nodded, his chest a swirl as he felt his eyes sting for half a second before feeling like he
wanted to go ruin another sword. He reached up to pat her hand on his shoulder, his hand lingering on hers a moment, their eyes meeting before he reached for her head as she leaned in to catch his lips.

He’d always pictured himself with women shorter than him, so it was odd being with one taller than him by a bit. She was lanky, her long legs wrapping tight around him as she brought him into her. Robb felt a boy with her, figuring out things while she guided him along. His hunger and aggression was more than enough to make up for his lack of skill, which would surely come in time. It didn’t hurt that he barely paused before going again, having more he needed to release.

Before long they lay together enjoyably exhausted, though that faded quickly as sense returned to Robb. “I’m so sorry. I don’t know what came over me.”

“Don’t be,” Dacey said with a shrug. “It was enjoyable and we both needed it.”

“You needed that?” Robb asked curiously. Watching her nod he sat up and looked down. “I still shouldn’t have done that. I’ve dishonored you.”

Dacey sat up with her brow arched. “Dishonored me?” Dacey laughed. “Your grace. Do you think my mother dishonored?”

Robb took a moment to put together what she meant of her unwed mother and shook his head. “No, I-”

“She would need to do what we have to give me and my sisters life,” Dacey reminded. “You don’t dishonor me any more than my father did my mother, and I know no more honorable a woman than her.”

Robb smiled at her, nodding. “Your mother is… fierce.”

Dacey laughed, slipping out of bed. “I should leave before they wonder if you’ve murdered me.”

Robb looked panicked. “Dacey, they’ll know.”

“And I’ll put a mace through the arse of any who speak ill of it,” Dacey said pulling on her pants. “That includes you.”

Robb stood, shaking his head. “I never would. It was…”

Dacey smiled, remembering it had been obvious she was his first. Still holding her tunic in hand, she held his cheek and kissed his lips. “You as well, King Robb.”

“Dacey…” He felt such guilt, and yet she left with little shame. It felt odd, but he somehow felt better and worse at once. It wasn’t the last time he would feel that way, nor the last he would watch her leave his chambers.

Chapter End Notes

The Karstarks and Robb’s other battle guards not being dead means more people around Robb, so the arrow that injures him and lets the Westerlings screw him over (excuse the pun) doesn’t hit him. Plus, without the Frey deal, even if it did it wouldn’t be as much an insult.
Robb being able to share Jon’s secret with Dacey, even if it’s a mistake from him reacting without thinking, is what I think mostly leads to what happens in a similar way Jeyne healing him did. Otherwise both are likely just the girls close to him at the time. Plus I thought it interesting if she was the type who would reject his need to marry her for claiming to dishonor her, using her mother as an example, and what that could do to him.

The age difference is a little odd, but he’s near the age of adulthood in their world and is a king. Just like Jon/Whoever might not be endgame like Jon/Myrcella, Dacey might not be who he ends up with ultimately. I haven't decided anything relationship wise for him or anyone else.

Next Chapter: Battle of the Blackwater.
Battle of the Blackwater

Chapter Summary

Stannis’ army arrives at King’s Landing and finds Snow upon the field.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once word came of Stannis’ ships appearing, Jon left to prepare with Edric. Jon wore gray beneath his black plate harness which he wore while earning his knighthood, the silk streamers still set upon the ridge of his close helmet. Once he was secure, Jon helped Edric don his own set which Jon had bought for him weeks earlier. Jon has purchased a gray surcoat with a red eyed white direwolf across the front while Edric wore a lavender one with a white sword and falling star across the chest.

Jon had also purchased barding for their coursers, coating each in light plates and mail beneath caparisons matching their surcoats. While Edric wore his dagger and longsword much like Jon, he also had a two handed sword secured to his saddle while Jon would wield a lance. Each saddle also held shields bearing their sigils as well as a bow and quiver he’d bought in case they had to fall back to the city walls.

Thoros wore his usual armor, though it was mostly hidden beneath his robes. He also purchased a jug of wine which hung from his saddle along with six swords ready to be sacrificed to wildfire. While Edric would be squiring to his knight, and Jon would be with his lord, Thoros would be in the fray.

Jon and Edric followed Tyrion and Podrick along the city walls late in the afternoon. Jon found it odd seeing Tyrion dressed in armor with a battle-axe slung below his shield. The Imp’s armor paled in comparison to the king’s gilded mail, enameled crimson plate and helm baring a lion’s head.

It wasn’t hard to tell Tyrion was keeping Joffrey occupied so he would remain on the wall and keep up morale. When he saw the boy growing bored, Jon stepped away from Tyrion and made his way to the king. Osmund Kettleback, a new kingsguard assigned to guard the king, put a hand on his hilt and eyed Jon as he called to the king.

“Your grace,” Jon said, making the tall boy turn to him. “That seems a resplendent sword on your side.”

Joffrey smirked at that, drawing the blade. “I call it Hearteater.” He slashed with it a few times before moving to sheath his own and nodding to Jon’s. “What of yours? Why is it so thin?”

“I thought it best for moving quickly and slipping into gaps,” he said tapping the pommel. “More than enough to end a life.”

Joffrey laughed, motioning for him to draw it. “Let us see.” Jon bowed his head, drawing the blade and turning so he wasn’t facing the king as he slashed with it. It seemed quicker than Joffrey’s, but that had more to do with Jon than the blade. When the knight sheathed the blade, the king asked,
“Have you named it?”

“Aye,” Jon nodded, noticing that Osmund had turned his attention to Tyrion and few others were paying them attention. For a moment he considered slashing and opening the king’s throat, which helped him smile as he answered. “Compared to my armor the blade’s color is light, so I thought to call it White Fang.”

Joffrey grinned. “I hope to see your fang turned red today, Ser Jon.”

“As do I, your grace. Your presence is a relief, and I pray you bear witness when the battle arrives and I slay the pretender Stannis.”

Joffrey laughed, which made a few others follow suit even having not heard what Jon said. “I look forward to it.”

The sun sank as Imry Florent led Stannis’s fleet into the river, where pots of pitch were tossed and trebuchets within the city flung stones at the ships. Jon stood behind Tyrion, watching as wildfire took the river and the screams of dying men filled the night while a chain rose from the water, trapping them all while cutting off Stannis’ host from the Lysene galleys in the bay.

Before the battle Jon had made his way to the Godswood and prayed, and yet as he stood upon the walls of King’s Landing watching emerald flames burn men, he found himself praying again to another god. He prayed to any who would hear him. He wanted to survive this, but would need to do more than sit on the sidelines. He just needed a chance.

Even as their ships burned some made it to shore, unloading men while Stannis was among those across the river. Tyrion let Joffrey run off to fling the captured Antler Men from his trebuchets, the Whores, and then heard that hundreds had landed in the tourney grounds to ram the King’s Gate. Edric and Podrick Payne waited with their horses, riding with the lord and knight while Ser Mandon Moore rode hard behind them.

They arrived quick enough thanks to the streets being clear, hearing the booming crash of the ram against the gate. Within the gatehouse square they found plenty of uninjured sellswords and gold cloaks to form a column. “Form up,” Tyrion shouted as he leapt to the ground. “Who commands here? You’re going out.”

“No.” Dismounting, Jon saw the voice belonged to Sandor Clegane. His snarling hound helm was scorched, dented and missing its left ear when he pulled it off and let it fall to the ground. Blood from a gash above his eyes set blood to run across his burn scars.

“Yes.” Tyrion told him.

“Bugger that,” Sandor responded. “And you.”

“We’ve been out,” said a sellsword. “Three times. Half our men are killed or hurt. Wildfire bursting all around us, horses screaming like men and men like horses-”

“Did you think we hired you to fight in a tourney? Shall I bring you a nice iced milk and a bowl of raspberries? No? Then get on your fucking horse. You too, dog.” Sandor drew his longsword, his eyes white with fear. Jon wanted to laugh, remembering what he’d said days earlier. Tyrion tried to explain to him, “They’ve taken a ram to the gate, you can hear them, we need to disperse them-”

“Open the gates. When they rush inside, surround them and kill them.” The Hound thrust the point of his sword into the ground and leaned on the pommel, swaying. “I’ve lost half my men. Horse as well. I’m not taking more into that fire.”
Ser Mandon Moore moved to Tyrion’s side. “The King’s Hand commands you.”

“Bugger the King’s Hand.” Sandor spat, his face white and pale beneath the blood and scars.

“Someone bring me a drink.” A gold cloak officer gave him a cup, but when he took a sip Sandor spat it out and flung the cup. “Water? Fuck your water. Bring me wine.”

Tyrion saw that the men were lost without their leader. He considered Mandon Moore but knew he wasn’t a man any would follow. He wasn’t sure what to do, feeling almost hopeless until suddenly Jon strode forward and punched Sandor square in the jaw, knocking the taller man off his feet.

“You worthless coward,” Jon said staring down at the scarred kingsguard. “You speak of finding joy in battle but all I see is a man who doesn’t deserve to wield a sword. Even Sam who all called craven would go and fight were he here, but instead they’ve left these men to follow you. Even your brother, too weak to kill a boy like me, would be better than a runt like you.”

Sandor rose to his feet, glaring at Jon. “Try that again, boy.”

Tyrion stared at the two, wide eyed as Sandor clenched his fist.

“You call me boy?” Jon scoffed. “When the night ends and you’re off hiding behind skirts and suckling at teats like whimpering children, I’ll have the glory of killing the false king.”

“You’ve never even slain a man, have you, boy?”

“Wolves hunt stags in the woods,” Jon said coolly. “And they slay dogs who get in their way.” Sandor watched him turn and walk toward his horse. “If you’re angry then use it and you might find your joy in breathing once the fighting ends. Until then I’ll ride out and slay them myself if you’re all incapable.”

Tyrion saw the disbelief on their faces as they watched the sixteen year old knight put on his helmet and mount his horse. “Ser Mandon, you’ll bear the king’s banner. Pod, my helm.” The boy obeyed as Sandor stared at the young knight grabbing his lance while his squire mounted his own horse. Ser Mandon helped Tyrion mount up again as he shouted, “Form up!”

Atop his red stallion bearing crinet and chamfron with silk over a coat of mail, Tyrion took his helm and heavy oak shield. He saw some of the men move to follow his command, almost sixty. Tyrion glanced at Jon, who had turned to the sally port. “They call him a green boy and say I’m half a man,” Tyrion called out to those who hadn’t moved. “What does that make the lot of you?”

A few more were shamed into joining them. Having already been called a coward by a boy, they couldn’t bear being less than a dwarf.

“You won’t hear me shout out Joffrey’s name,” Tyrion called out. “You won’t hear me yell for Casterly Rock either. This is your city Stannis means to sack, and that’s your gate he’s bringing down. So come with us and kill the son of a bitch!” Tyrion unsheathed his axe, wheeled around and followed Jon to the sally port, not daring to look back and see who remained. He didn’t see that once Jon was out of sight, Sandor reached for his helm, taking a horse from one of the injured men and riding out after them.

Tyrion rode ahead of Jon, giving him a firm nod before calling for the others to form a wedge with him at the point. Podrick kept to Tyrion’s left while Ser Mandon took his right. Jon took Podrick’s left with Edric beside him.

Jon paid little attention to the arrows or rocks coming from the city, instead focusing on the mob of men at the King’s Gate. Tyrion called for lances and sped to a canter, Jon raising his own lance as
they moved through mud and blood until Tyrion called out, “King’s Landing!”

Others took up the cry but Jon remained silent, staring through the slit of his helm and gripping his lance. He shifted the angle at the last moment, and watched the spearhead push through the man’s surcoat showing a fox peering through a ring of flowers. The first man he killed was a Florent. The lance pierced his torso entirely and dug into the side of another behind him before the shaft snapped.

Jon held the broken shaft back, swinging it into the head of a soldier hard enough his helmet rang while he fell to the ground, where he was killed moments later. Letting the remnants of the shaft fall away, Jon drew White Fang and slashed out, finding a gap in the throat of another soldier. He barely even saw the man’s sigil before swinging his sword to deflect a blow and thrust White Fang through the eye of another soldier.

A spear slammed into Jon’s shield, deflected wide enough it was easy for Jon to thrust White Fang through the gap in the man’s arm pit. He held the shield in front of him, letting an archer loose two arrows before Jon swung so hard into his chest the man flipped back off his horse and loosed his third arrow straight up so it came back down through his own face.

A man in a surcoat bearing the swordfish of House Bar Emmon came at Jon’s back with a lance, as Jon made to turn he saw Edric’s white courser charge forward, letting the squire thrust his sword through the man’s throat. He was nearly knocked off his horse when another soldier swung at him, forcing Edric to raise his shield, but Jon charged to him and cut through the man’s arm as he went for his second swing, letting Edric easily slice through the man’s neck.

“We’ll ride to the Mud Gate,” Tyrion commanded once they had dispersed the man around the ram.

“The Mud Gate!” Jon called alongside Ser Mandon as they took off.

“Halfman! Halfman!” They shouted for Tyrion.

“White Wolf! White Wolf!” They cried for Jon.

Jon sped ahead, slashing through arms and leaving men bleeding in his wake as he charged toward a figure in scarlet robes slashing through men with a sword coated in green flames. As he moved to join Thoros, Jon noticed a makeshift bridge of broken boats where soldiers were coming to shore from across the river.

Leaping from his horse, Jon ran to Thoros’ side and thrust his sword through the neck of a man ready to stab the red priest with a spear. When Thoros turned and found Jon throwing the dying soldier into another so he could stab through the second man’s eye, he felt a mix of relief at seeing the knight he followed come to his aide and sorrow at how easily the young knight moved from killing both men to slashing through the gambeson of another.

“The bridge!” Jon called, motioning for Thoros to follow as he made for the broken boats. Edric pulled his greatsword from the saddle, leaving their horses as he followed Jon and Thoros through crackling flames and creaking planks.

Passing through the bridge they cut through men while others rushed past them, many caught by the others following after Jon. When he reached the last ship Jon leapt to the shore and stared out at over fifteen hundred men as Thoros and Edric came to his sides with barely a hundred backing them.
“STANNIS!” Jon bellowed. “Come and face me! Let’s end this!”

The men around them laughed at Jon’s challenge. A group charged at Jon, but Thoros’ flaming sword caused their mounts to rear while Edric swung his greatsword at another, throwing the rider from the horse as blood sprayed from his opened torso. The unmanned horse reared back and turned, barreling toward another as some of the men rushed forward to bring them down.

“Your king is too great a coward to come face a boy?” Jon called to the men as he cut through the neck of a fallen rider who moved to stab him. “You wear flame hearts but are too weak hearted to face me?”

A knight dismounted and strode forward as others backed away. “Still your mouth, Ser Wolf!” The knight called to Jon as he came to him, drawing his sword. “You face Ser Bryce Caron, Lord of Nightsong!”

“And you the White Wolf, Jon Snow!” Edric called out with a laugh.

Jon smirked hearing his squire speak up on his behalf. “Surrender and be spared, Ser Bryce. Stannis need die for his crimes, not you or any who surrenders.”

That seemed to make the knight shift slightly, but he shook his head. “You’ll die, bastard!”

Jon charged forward, moving in a slight arch toward the knight’s left. Bryce tilted his head, confused why one would attack from his shield side. With the shore soaked from the sloshing river, it was easy enough for Jon to fall to the ground as he reached the knight, Bryce’s sword slashing where he’d been while Jon slid across the mud and cut through his knee.

Bryce stumbled to the ground as Jon turned and, pressing his shield into the ground, thrust his sword into falling knight’s throat. It ripped through his neck as Bryce fell and Jon stood, leaving it hanging half cleaved when Bryce Caron hit the ground.

Slashing his sword to throw loose blood on the dead knights cloak, Jon turned to gaze through his slit at the others.

“Bryce.” Ser Rolland Storm sat frozen watching his brother lay dead at the shore.

“She spoke of him,” Stannis said staring at Jon from the center of the group.

“Your grace?” Rolland asked.

“Melisandre told me that coming here I would face Snow,” he said lowering his visor and taking up his reins.

“Your grace,” Rolland said in surprise, moving with him as Stannis’ squire, Devan Seaworth followed.

Jon watched the men attacking his company back away as others parted, making way for their king, who dismounted before them. Stannis wore gray plate with a cloak of gold cloth flowing from his broad shoulders. His breastplate bore a flaming heart inlaid above his own, and his helm bore spiked points that might have been short antlers or a flaming crown.

“You are a shame to your father, boy,” Stannis told Jon as he drew his sword and revealed its glowing blade which shined as though it were aflame.

Thoros looked confused at the falsely ignited blade. “It’s a glamour,” he told Jon quietly while
drawing his own unignited sword. The last he had. “Don’t fear his flames.”

“He should fear mine,” Jon said raising his bloodied slender sword.

Raising his shield, Stannis started toward Jon. The young knight took a breath and stepped forward, the knight and king staring at one another through their helms.

Tyrion looked for Jon, unsure where he was until Balon pointed out the men coming ashore. He found the makeshift bridge and followed it to where he saw Jon facing Stannis Baratheon and laughed. “Those are brave men,” he said motioning to those who rushed past Jon and his company to cross the bridge. “Let’s go kill them.”

Once they had walked toward the opposing sides, Jon dashed at Stannis, holding his shield up and drawing his sword back beneath it. He slammed his shield into the taller man’s flaming stag shield and slashed at his leg, but Stannis brought his Lightbringer down to block. He was stronger than Jon, strong enough to make the young knight stumble back with a shove of his shield.

Catching his balance Jon dashed forward again, shifting to the side and slashing at Stannis after a moment of delay. It had nearly worked, making Stannis move his shield to the side to block while Jon struck high a moment later, but Stannis used a larger shield which he raised just enough to deflect Jon’s strike.

Jon’s raised arm left an opening for Stannis to thrust his Lightbringer at the gap of armor near Jon’s upper thigh. He burst a few links of mail as the sword sliced through Jon’s cloth and flesh.

Backing up with a hiss, Jon felt blood pouring from the wound which didn’t feel near as bad as the last time someone had cut his thigh, but still hurt and bleed a lot. It bled enough that when Stannis pulled his sword back his eyes widened seeing the blade ignite where Jon’s blood had sank into the steel.

“Lightbringer!” Some of Stannis’ men marveled as Thoros and Edric looked to Jon, who slammed his arm to his bleeding leg.

Jon stared at the flaming blade and considered dousing his own in his blood if that was what it did, but he’d seen what happened to Thoros’ swords enough to not bother trying. However he smirked remembering he had another sword waiting for him. One that might not melt under a flame.

Stannis laughed at the man, raising his flaming sword in the air when they heard a sudden rise of yells. Turning back, Stannis and his men saw a host of men rising toward them, men led by Tywin Lannister, Mace Tyrell, Randyll Tarly, and Renly Baratheon.

“Renly!” Men cried in fear as they turned to face the incoming host.

“His specter!” Another yelled.

With a laugh Jon stood up and waved Stannis forward. “Come, Stannis. Time to join your brother!”

Stannis turned on Jon in time to deflect his slash and slash at the knight. Jon backed away, watching the flames pass before his visor before using his shield to knock the blade aside. He stepped back and then forward, thrusting his sword toward Stannis’ but the king dodged and threw his shield up. This time when Stannis went to stab him Jon stepped to the side, slashing at Stannis’s shield, sending sparks flying as they separated.

“Your grace,” Rolland called out, turning to watch them exchange blows.
Jon felt all of his anger rise suddenly as he threw his shield down and grabbed his longsword with both hands, bringing it down as hard as he could on the false king. Stannis raised his sword to deflect the blow, angled so he might have thrust at Jon afterward, but Jon’s bloodied White Fang snapped the burning Lightbringer and sank into Stannis’s neck.

“Stannis!” Men cried as others gasped and turned to watch Jon pull his sword back, letting blood pour down the right half of Stannis’ body.

Jon quickly stepped forward as Stannis fell to his knees clutching his throat. He grabbed Stannis’ helm and pulled his head back, making the king meet his eyes as Jon pressed the tip of his longsword to the gap between helm and gorget at the front of Stannis’s neck. Keeping his gaze through their visors, Jon whispered so only Stannis could hear, “This is for my father. Rhaegar.”

Stannis gasped as the sword pushed through his throat, sinking through his chest and pierced his beating heart. Jon kept his gaze before stepping back, kicking the flaming heart on Stannis’ chestplate to rip the blade free, its pale blade coated scarlet.

“Retreat!” Rolland called out as he turned and made for the ships Salladhor Saan had brought to shore.

“WHITE WOLF!” Men bellowed around Jon, cheering as he stood over the corpse of Stannis Baratheon.

Pressing his hand to his leg, Jon stepped back and staggered until Thoros came and put an arm under his. “I’ve got you, Jon. Don’t worry.”

Jon looked toward the makeshift bridge and saw Podrick knelt beside a small figure who could only be Tyrion and yelling for help. He turned his gaze to the rider then and saw Renly cutting a path through the men. Beside him rode a knight in resplendent armor Jon instantly recognized. “Loras?”

He saw Loras glance at him before returning to the side of Renly’s ghost. Jon watched them cut through the fleeing Baratheon host as others surrounded him, cheering for his victory. Looking upon Stannis’ corpse, Jon wondered how many other kings he would slay before he sat upon the Iron Throne.

Chapter End Notes

White Fang is a two fold reference, one for literary nerds the other for anime nerds. I considered a few others, but White Fang is nebulous enough that it could be a wolf or a dragon fang, kind of like Longclaw.

Most of the Sandor bit’s dialogue is from the books but I tried to add little bits with Jon there before the change. I imagine he joined them after Jon’s punch partially to see if Jon dies, but he definitely wasn’t among the hundred that crossed the bridge. He would’ve just stayed at the King’s Gate afterward.

Why I had Jon kill Bryce Caron should be apparent next chapter, but killing Stannis is something I considered pretty early. I know people jerk him off a lot and I think he’s still fairly interesting, but I thought the change it brings more interesting since we already see him in canon and he’s basically never side with Robb so would end up
with basically the same story bar maybe asking the North to swear fealty to him and getting pissy when they don’t.

I couldn’t remember anything about if Stannis needed to be near Mel for his sword to glow, so just went with he doesn’t. Same with Jon’s blood igniting his blade, since we only see Beric using his blood to ignite the sword by magic while he’s alive.

Next Chapter: Court gathers to reward the heroes from the Battle of the Blackwater.
Rewards and Pledges

Chapter Summary

Court gathers to reward the heroes from the Battle of the Blackwater.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The court gathered in the throne room where Tywin Lannister entered atop his warhorse and was made Hand of the King. When Joffrey came down from the throne to hug his grandfather and proclaim him Savior of the City, some dared whisper “White Wolf.” Word had spread quickly of Jon’s deeds during the battle, none louder or faster than his defeat of Stannis Baratheon.

Trumpets greeted the heroes of the day as they came through the doors, starting with Mace Tyrell and his sons Garlan and Loras. Joffrey descended from the throne again in a show of honor to give each a chain of golden roses holding a gilded disc with a ruby outline of the Lannister lion. “The rose support the lion, as the might of Highgarden supports the realm,” he proclaimed. “If there is any boon you would ask of me, ask and it shall be yours.”

“Your grace,” said Ser Loras, “I beg the honor of serving on your Kingsguard, to defend you against your enemies.”

Joffrey drew the Knight of Flowers to his feet and kissed his cheek. “Done, brother.”

Mace Tyrell, a once powerful man who remained handsome even as he grew fat, bowed his head. “There is no greater pleasure than to serve the King’s Grace. If I was deemed worthy to join your royal council, you would find none more loyal than me.”

Joffrey put a hand to the lord’s shoulder and kissed him when he stood. “Your wish is granted.”

That left Garlan Tyrell, five years Loras’ senior and taller with a beard across his jaw. He was thicker at the chest with broader shoulders, comely no doubt, but lacking some of Loras’ beauty that attracted many. “Your grace,” the knight said as the king approached him, “I have a maiden sister, the delight of our House. She was wed to Renly Baratheon, as you know, but Lord Renly went to war before the marriage could be consummated, so she remains innocent. Margaery has heard tales of your wisdom, courage, and chivalry, and has come to love you from afar. I beseech you to send for her, to take her hand in marriage, and to wed your House to mine for all time.”

King Joffrey played at surprise. “Ser Garlan, your sister’s beauty is famed throughout the Seven Kingdoms. And since my former betrothed has proven herself a traitor,” he said helping Garlan to his feet, “I am free to heed my heart. I will wed your sweet sister, and gladly, ser.” He kissed Garlan’s bearded cheek as the court cheered around them.

Mace took his seat at the council table and his sons joined the knights and lordlings beneath the windows as others were brought in. Paxter Redwyne entered flanked by his sons Hobber and Horas, who limped from a wound taken in the battle. Lord Mathis Rowan went next, followed by Lord Randyll Tarly, Ser Kevan Lannister, Ser Addam Marbrand and other western lords.
Last of the lords was Edric Dayne. As he was already lord of Starfall, fully armed by the knight he served, but not yet of age, they had little to offer him, but promised him a horse and arms of his choice as well as aid in brokering a betrothal of his choice when he was of age. It was little, but he cared little for their reward as he made his way to the side.

Then came those of lesser birth who had distinguished themselves. For capturing Jon Fossoway and slaying Bryan and Edwyd Fossoway, Lothor Brune was raised to the estate of knighthood and granted land and keep within the riverlands at the war’s end. Josmyn Peckledon received a sword, suit of plate and warhorse of his choice from the royal stables as well as a knighthood when he came of age. Thoros was granted a similar boon of his choice of arms to make up for those used in the battle as well as a horse of his choice, while Goodman Willit was gifted a spear with a silver-branded haft, a hauberk and a helm. Willit’s sons were also to be taken into service as Casterly Rock, the elder as squire and younger as page, which the chance to become knights.

Last of the lowborn and first of the rest was Ser Jon Snow, whose entrance caused many to stand and try and gaze upon him. He wore a gray doublet with slashes of black beneath a black jerkin with a trail of snow embroidered around the collar which lead to a pair of red eyed white wolf heads near his chest. His beard had been trimmed as had his hair, leaving it hanging about his ears as he stood before the king and his council with his head raised bearing his usual sullen expression.

“Ser Jon Snow,” the herald spoke. “Sworn shield to Tyrion Lannister, he rallied those disheartened men at the King’s Gate and lead the sortie to stop it’s destruction. He then lead the charge across the burning bridge of broken ships across the Blackwater Rush and challenged Stannis’ rearguard with less than one hundred man at his back. It was there he slayed Ser Bryce Caron in single combat, and then slew the pretender Stannis Baratheon in single combat.”

Joffrey looked down on him with a grin. “Ser Jon. You were raised a bastard within a grand keep. I would offer first to legitimize you, whether it be as a Stark or any name you wish to take.”

“I am not a Stark, your grace. I would take a name of my own making. Snowfire for my crossing the Blackwater amidst ashen snow and wildfire.”

Joffrey nodded. “Then for your valor and the slaying of Ser Bryce Caron, you shall henceforth be known as Lord Jon of House Snowfire, and to you shall go all lands, rights and income of House Caron. However I cannot give even you, who slew Stannis Baratheon, Dragonstone or Storm’s End, so I ask what other boons you might desire.”

“When I returned after my father sent me to hunt Gregor Clegane, I found my reward from the Hand’s tourney where I earned my knighthood held had been taken due to my father’s actions. If the crown thinks it should still be held then I accept it gladly, but if not then I would ask it’s return and the crown’s aid in its use.”

Joffrey arched his brow. “Its use?”

“When I was first knighted I thought lordship impossible, your grace, so thought to challenge myself by building a trade of my own, and would like to try it still. I had hoped to use the coin to buy or build boats I could man myself and send across Westeros, Essos, even the Stepstones or beyond if I could. I had hoped my father’s place as hand might aid me in finding builders or sellers, but with his treachery I would have to rely on myself, and I fear they would all but rob me of my coin. It would be with such dealings I would ask the crown aid me, to assure I am treated fairly.”

Joffrey laughed and nodded. “It is done, Lord Jon. Your coin will be returned to you, as well as a reward for slaying Stannis. You may meet with the master of ships to discuss choosing your first three of your ships from those salvaged from Stannis’ fleet as well as the purchase or construction
of any others and aid finding men worthy of manning them.”

Jon gave a bow. “Thank you, your grace.”

With that Jon of House Snowfire, Lord of Nightsong made his way to stand with Edric and Thoros who greeted him with smiles. Jon could barely hold back his own as he watched Joffrey, who had unknowingly offered to help Jon earn his first crown.

It seemed like so long ago that Jon had met with Sam and Dom while Ned was unconscious. “We can’t let the gold sit,” Dom said shaking his head. “Someone will steal it and we’ll never get it back.”

“We could buy ships,” Sam suggested. “Build a trade of your own and use that to sneak information to your aunt. Even keeping some for use here we should have enough for some decent ones and to find men we can trust to man them.”

“Or we could use it to name you king,” Dom laughed.

Jon and Sam shared a look before turning to Dom. “What do you mean?”

“Go be Daemon,” Dom said as though it were obvious.

“Isn’t he kind of already?” asked Sam.

“Targaryen, not Blackfyre,” Dom clarified. “He took an army to the Stepstones and crowned himself king. Forty thousand should be enough to get a few sellswords and kill some pirates, right? Plenty to build and work from there, building an army.”

“Why there?”

“Because you can say you want to win it for the crown,” Dom explained. “They might even help you or you can try convincing Dorne. You could get help from the North, claim you captured their ships and turned the crews to your side.”

“And we’d be going to war with Myr, Tyrosh and Lys,” Sam noted incredulously.

“Who can be made to war with one another with us helping one of them win,” Dom offered. “Granting you allies on both sides of the Narrow Sea, and a clear path to travel your aunt and her forces to aid you here.”

Jon had sat in quiet thought. “So King of the Stepstones and the Narrow Sea.”

“Then Westeros.” Dom nodded.

“I used to think I’d be happy if my father gave me a lordship over some rundown keep, and you want me to be king twice over? How many crowns should I take?” Jon asked with a laugh.

Dom shrugged. “Take as many as you must. If they come easy enough, seek another, one for each head of the dragon.”

Jon had thought it barely a vague possibility which had sunk even lower when he returned to find his gold stolen and his father named traitor. He’d hoped to convince them merely to give him the gold back in time, but now with them giving him ships and leaving his gold to build a foundation, there was a chance.

Watching six hundred men be knighted felt like it had diminished the worth of knighthood, yet Jon
found it hard to doubt most of the men had earned it somehow during the hellish battle. Either way, he was glad he didn’t have to do as they had standing vigil the night before and walking across the city bare footed to prove their humble hearts. With the last of them knighted and standing beneath the windows, the captives were brought forward.

Lords and bastards were among the hundreds brought before them. Those who changed sides need only swear fealty but those who had fought until the end were compelled to speak. Jon felt sorry for those who dared to speak the truth and question Joffrey, losing their heads for it.

It was the bastard of a Florent who called out, “Do not imagine this done, boy.” He shot Jon a glare and scoffed before turning back to the king. “The Lord of Light protects Queen Selyse and our princess, now and always! All your swords and all your scheming shall not save you when your hour comes!”

“You hour has come now,” Joffrey told him, beckoning Ser Ilyn Payne to come take his head.

Once they dragged the corpse away another knight with a fiery heart on his surcoat shouted, “Edric is our true king! The true last Baratheon son! A monster sits on the Iron Throne, an abomination born of incest!”

Jon pitied the poor fool, for he spoke some truth, yet it would surely cost him his head. He would be lucky if that was all it cost after his claims drove Joffrey to rise, demanding his head and swinging his hand straight into a blade of the throne which slashed his hand open, making the king wail, “Mother!”

The knight had seized a spear from one of the gold cloaks and used it to push himself back on his feet. “The throne denies him! He is no king!”

Cersei ran to the throne while Tywin remained still, seeming unconcerned with the man aiming a spear at them. He had no reason to be, as gold cloaks quickly grabbed him by the arms, letting him shout, “No king!” as Osamund Kettleback stuck his sword through his chest.

Once the maesters ushered Joffrey through the king’s door the room broke into conversation until Tywin rose. “We continue,” he said clear and loud enough to silence the murmur. “Those who wish to ask pardon for their treasons may do so. We will have no more follies.” He moved to the Iron Throne and sat himself upon a step merely three feet off the floor.

The sun was sinking by the time the session had ended, leaving many exhausted as they exited.

“A lord,” Edric had laughed. “That’s incredible, Jon.”

“Truly, this can only help us,” said Thoros.

It didn’t hurt that Jon was no longer being followed by an honor guard. He was sure some still kept eyes on him, but they weren’t so close and ready to slay him.

“The ships may prove the bigger boon.”

“Starfall is near the end of the Torentine, where it meets the Summer Sea.” Edric looked pleased to be of help. “We can keep the ships harbored neaby once we’ve manned them.”

“That would be great,” said Jon. “Nightsong is at the edge of the Stormlands, right? Not far from Dorne.”

“West of Blackhaven,” said Edric. “North of the Prince’s Pass.”
Jon furrowed his brow, slowing his walk as a hollow laugh escaped him. Edric stopped and arched his brow while Thoros turned asking, “What?”

“My mother died there,” Jon whispered.

“She did?” asked Edric.

“Lord Eddard, he told the Tower of Joy was in the pass. It’s where I was born.”

Thoros wore a somber smile as he clasped the boy’s shoulder. “Then perhaps this is meant to be. In time we should travel there.”

“I take it you wouldn’t be willing to go act as castellan in my stead?” Jon asked knowingly.

“I’m afraid I would have to reject the over, my lord,” Thoros said with a smirk.

“I’m sure there’s already one there,” said Edric. “They’ll send word soon, else they’ll risk you informing the crown.”

“I should write tonight then,” Jon said continuing their walk. “It would be best to know the people there even somewhat before I arrive claiming to be their lord.”

“When will you visit?”

“I don’t know. I hope to be there when Tyrion wakes.”

Edric frowned at the grim tone he used. “It’s not your fault, Jon.”

“I’m his sworn shield,” he argued. “I should have been there.”

“You were busy slaying a false king, Jon,” said Thoros.

Jon frowned as he thought of Jaime, locked away in a cell somewhere, and wondered if he had felt so sure when he slew Aerys. Jon had felt little doubt on the field, speaking confidently to make it true as Jaime had taught him. When he put his sword through Stannis and saw the man’s life end before him, he felt little guilt and little joy. In that moment it had simply been a thing he did, and looking back he wasn’t sure what he should feel, if anything. Stannis wouldn’t have been a good king, Jon told himself. He would never be Jon’s ally, not if he slew his own brother rather than come to peace with him. A man like that was lucky to have such an honorable death.

Edric, Jon and Thoros were sat in the yard discussing things quietly when a voice called out to them. “Lord Jon!”

Sers Loras and Garlan Tyrell made their way toward the group as the lords and red priest rose to greet the knights.

“Jon,” Loras said looking anxious as he came to a stop before him, a white cloak now hanging down his back. “It’s been a long time.”

“That is has,” Jon said with a nod. Deciding it would be best to break the tension and feeling more relieved to see his friend than anything else, Jon stepped forward and embraced the Tyrell.

Loras let out a breath as he returned the hug, the men patting eachother’s backs. When they separated, Loras frowned. “I’m sorry I couldn’t help your father.”

“And I’m sorry about Renly,” said Jon.
Garlan arched his brow at the new lord as well as his companions. A somber smile took Loras’ lips as he nodded. “He didn’t deserve that.”

“No,” Jon shook his head, “I don’t think he did.”


Jon smiled, looking to Garlan. “Pardon my rudeness, Ser Garlan. I am Ser Jon Snow.” He paused for a moment before correcting himself, “Lord Jon Snowfire.” Thinking that didn’t sound quite right either, Jon shrugged and extended a hand.

Garlan smirked, taking Jon’s offered hand and shaking it. “I’ve heard much about you, Lord Jon. Loras tells me you’re of par with him at most things, especially the sword.”

“Of a par?” Jon smirked. “He thinks too highly of himself.”

Loras laughed, smacking Jon’s shoulder. “When did you get so arrogant?”

Garlan smiled. “Either way, I admit his talk has me hoping to meet you in the yard.”

“I would offer to do so now, but I am still recovering from a wound,” Jon said with an apologetic smile. “The maester says the discomfort should be gone soon enough, but give me a day or two and I’d gladly do so.”

“And it seems you’re to meet our father soon as well.” said Garlan. “When you do, don’t fear him. Loras’ fondness for you means our father will surely do all he can to help you with your ships.”

“Seems I’m like to meet the bulk of your family soon.” Jon nodded toward the throne room. “Your father sits on the council and Margaery is the youngest of you, surely your mother will join them soon?”

“And our grandmother, most likely,” said Loras, earning an odd look from Garlan.

“I look forward to meeting our new queen,” Jon offered with a smile.

“Perhaps you can give her tips on how to rein in the golden fool,” Loras said with a laugh.

“Loras,” Garlan spoke in a warning whisper.

“It’s fine,” the younger brother assured. “Jon knows the king’s true nature better than most.” He looked from his elder brother to Jon. “Even when I met Dom I told him this was an act done to survive. Though I admit not knowing why you returned when you could have gone to your brother and his army.”

“I didn’t know of them at time,” Jon admitted. “But even if I had I would have returned.”

“For your father?” asked Loras.

Jon glanced at Garlan and the white cloak across Loras’ back. This could be some game meant to trick him, the Tyrells seeking to weed out betrayals quickly, but Jon didn’t sense that from Loras. He sensed his friend.

“He lives now,” Jon said. “Or so I think. They wouldn’t let me write to anyone, even my uncle at the Wall, and Tyrion told me little of import. I’m lucky he told me of Bran and Rickon’s deaths.”

Loras frowned. “I’m sorry you had to suffer this, Jon.”
Jon put on a smile and backed up. “At least it wasn’t alone.”

Loras nodded to Edric and Thoros. “Where’s Sam? I haven’t seen him.”

“In Dorne, guarding the princess.”

Loras arched his brow. “He left with her? We’d thought he would be hostage.”

“He was for a time, but I spoke to Tyrion and he thought it best to send him with the princess, giving him a chance to speak with her handmaiden.”

“Or so he believes, I’m sure,” Loras said with a knowing smile. “Will you two write through him perhaps? Write of your forbidden love?”

“She’s betrothed,” Jon said shaking his head.

“And you’re a newly made lord with the king’s favor,” said Loras. “You could ask. Use it as a way to assure alliances.”

Jon had considered it, but Lord Tywin’s stern face had made it seem impossible, not to mention the insult it would be to take back the betrothal from the Martells who were already likely to strike the Lannisters. He was relieved he’d even gotten the money back, let alone the ships. “There will be others,” Jon told himself what many others had told him.

“No candle can replace the sun,” Loras said mournfully. “If it’s true, don’t let is set.”

Seeing his sorrow, Jon knew what he meant and nodded. After a moment he looked to the brothers and said, “I had thought you might go to Robb.”

“We considered it,” Garlan admitted.

“Your brother is warring in the west. Stannis was coming here.” Loras’s sorrow had turned to anger. “We wouldn’t let him win.”

“So it was vengeance that drove you here,” Jon nodded. His eyes then met Loras’ as he asked, “And now that it’s had, what keeps you?”

Loras glanced to Garlan, their faces darkening slightly as they looked to Jon. “Why do you ask?”

“I imagine Margaery’s queenship is a part of it,” Jon said looking to Garlan, who had made the request. “But she doesn’t need to be a Baratheon to be queen.” He added with a smirk, “She could be a Greyjoy.”

Loras snickered. “I’d rather you and I take one of your ships there and scorch the islands to avenge your brothers.”

Jon nodded. “I’ll keep you to that. But there is another king to be had, and you know even were I to give her advice on how to handle Joffrey that wouldn’t stop him from being as he is.”

“Jon,” Thoros warned.

The new lord shook his head. “Loras. This is your sister. I know you care for her. She will only suffer under him.”

Loras and Garlan shared a look before each glanced at Edric and Thoros. “Do you trust them?” Loras asked Jon. “As much as you trust Dom or Sam or I?”
“Without question,” said Jon.

Loras looked to his elder brother in a silent exchange before they moved closer to Jon and he revealed quietly, “Joffrey won’t be a problem for long.”

Jon’s brow knit. “You mean to—”

“Not me,” Loras quickly clarified. “I don’t know how, but I know it’s to happen. I’ve told them all you told me. They know how he is. Tommen will be easier to handle.”

“But not a king worthy of Margaery,” said Jon.

“No,” Garlan admitted, seeming reluctant as he glanced at Loras, “but one we can control until Cersei and Tywin are handled. Then perhaps we could discuss a true marriage.”

Though Jon disliked the idea of them using Tommen, he asked, “Would you harm him?”

“He’s a boy,” Loras said shaking his head. “We’d keep him safe as best we can.”

Jon glanced back to Edric and Thoros, each exchanging a quick look with him before Thoros turned to the Tyrells. “This is a great risk you’ve taken by telling us this.”

Loras shrugged. “Jon trust you and I trust him.”

Jon suddenly felt the guilt twist his chest. “Loras…” He sighed, looking down for a moment before meeting his eyes. “I have to tell you. I’ve… kept things from you. Things I’ve had to keep secret for some time.”

Loras tilted his head. “What things?”

“Some things that will be more believable later when I’m no longer in the city, but… I can tell you why I truly wanted the ships.”

The Tyrells both shared surprised and confused expressions. “What, do you mean to become a pirate?” Loras asked with a laugh.

“I plan to be become King of the Stepstones and Narrow Sea,” Jon told them firmly.

Edric looked nervously from Jon to the Tyrell brothers gaping at him in shock. They looked from him to each other before laughing.

“With three ships?” asked Garlan.

“Three ships, a direwolf, the Fellowship of Fire, and a dragon.”

The men looked on confused. “A dragon?”

“Are you sure about this?” Thoros asked in a whisper.

Jon nodded, turning his head slightly but keeping his eyes on the Tyrells. “Loras, I’m sorry I lied to you for this long, but I couldn’t be sure you wouldn’t tell Renly.”

“Tell him what?” asked Loras. “That you somehow have a dragon?”

“That my name isn’t Jon Snow, or Snowfire,” he said waving his hand. Meeting Loras’s gaze he told continued, “That I was born Aegon of House Targaryen, son of Rhaegar Targaryen and
Lyanna Stark.”

The brothers stared at him before Loras slowly shook his head. “No, you’re… You’re a Targaryen?” His tone switched from dismissive to inquisitive.

“Trueborn,” Jon nodded. “My uncle Benjen saw them wed on the Isle of Faces. My father- Lord Stark, he kept a dragon egg left for me by Rhaegar which hatched after I was attacked by Gregor. I… I died, briefly, but Thoros brought me back. Or so we think. Either way that was when the egg hatched.”

“We saw it,” said Edric. “All of us in the Fellowship. He was pale and lifeless, and then Thoros gave him his lord’s kiss of life. The egg hatched and Jon awoke moments later.”

“Where… where is it?” Garlan asked looking around as if expecting the dragon to suddenly appear.

“He should be at the Wall with my uncle Aemon,” said Jon. “Ghost is…” He paused, thinking to the dreams he had some nights of walking through a keep and seeing Arya training, Sansa sat with Jeyne Poole, and more recently of Eddard and others camped at night. “He’s with the Starks.”

The Tyrells stood in silence for a moment before looking to each other. “Jon if this is true-”

“I’ve been planning my claim slowly,” Jon told them. “Barristan is in Essos acting as kingsguard to my aunt and seeking her aid. Robb swore himself to me when I arrived at Winterfell after learning the truth and visiting the Wall. Other than the Fellowship in the Riverlands, they are the only allies I have, and the only ones who know the truth.”

“This is a lot to trust us with,” said Garlan.

Jon looked to Loras, the Tyrell’s face flooded with a mix of emotions before meeting Jon’s eyes and seeing the hidden dragon smile at him. “You’re Loras’ family, and I trust Loras.”

The kingsguard smiled, his golden eyes glistening as he nodded to Jon while Garlan laughed and shook his head. “So even if she were to wed your brother, or cousin I suppose, Margaery wouldn’t be queen should you take the throne, unless she were to wed you.”

“Father will have to settle for his granddaughter being queen.” Loras said with a smirk, “when she marries the son of King Aegon, sixth of his name.”

At that the friends and rivals embraced, Jon feeling relief at Loras’ acceptance of his truth. “Thank you.”

“Thank you,” Loras said patting his back before taking a step back and holding Jon’s shoulders. “I swear I’ll help you all I can. And none of us will reveal who you are until you’re ready to make your move. I will guard your secret as well as your life if I can.”

The relief Jon felt seeing Loras’ quick support of him twisted until Jon felt awful. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you earlier.” Jon’s regret was apparent even to Garlan.

Loras shook his head. “You were right not to. I would have asked Renly to help,” he admitted somberly. “I doubt he would have reacted well. He told me more than once he wished his brother had just killed your aunt and uncle.”

“Well Viserys is dead,” Thoros told them. “Killed by Daenerys’ Khal husband.”

“Father can help us,” Loras told them.
“You mean grandmother,” Garlan corrected.

Loras laughed as he stepped back nodding. “Either way. House Tyrell will stand with you, I swear it.”

Chapter End Notes

I wasn’t sure what to give Edric since he’s already a lord, so went with them not giving him much consideration due to his age, but him not caring.

Jon’s reward was something I had in mind since I started thinking on the Battle of the Blackwater. Philip Foote basically doesn’t matter, so I gave Jon his reward. It felt fitting he should get Nightsong, not only for it being north of the Tower of Joy, but his links to the Night Watch, the Song of Ice and Fire, etc.

His house name isn’t original I’m sure, but I’m not necessarily striving for originality as much as that it fits well enough and that I have some play with it. His coat of arms will be revealed in a few chapters.

Wasn’t originally planning on having Jon tell Loras now, but didn’t have anywhere else planned either so just went with the flow.

Tyrells definitely have their own plans, and even without Sansa there to wear the hairnet it would be easy enough to slip the poison in, so they’re likely going with the same plan for now. Littlefinger likely isn’t involved here, but would still have gone for the Tyrell aid because he would want the reward, hoping to earn a higher position so he can go about the rest of his plans. For now he’s trying to set up and guide himself to where he wants to be.

I’ve disabled anonymous commenting because someone has been spamming them for a while and they couldn’t even be funny or interesting about it.

Next Chapter: Ned rides north to retake his home.
Chapter Summary

Ned leaves Riverrun to retake Winterfell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The night before he left Riverrun, Ned had gone to the cells again and found Jaime looking even worse than before, seeming sallow with his golden hair in knots. Upon seeing Ned again, he laughed and leaned his head back against the wall. “Come for more questions?”

“Did you ever find answer for my last ones?”

“Maybe,” Jaime offered, “but what would it matter? What’s done is done.”

“And if it wasn’t?” Ned asked, meeting the Kingslayer’s eyes.

Jaime’s confusion grew as he sat up. “What do you mean?”

“If Rhaenys revealed herself to you, would you slay her to secure your son’s claim to the throne? Or if she asked your aide in reclaiming it herself would you help her?”

Jaime stared at Ned as though he’d gone mad. “You know as well as I that she’s dead.” Ned simply stared at him until Jaime finally sighed. “I don’t know. Why her? What if she’s like her grandfather?”

“She isn’t,” said Ned. “Let us believe she would never be. She comes to you and asks your help in setting her upon the throne. An act which surely means deaths among your family if they will not stand aside, which we know they won’t.”

Jaime frowned at the situation, confused by what brought this on but perhaps too thankful for company to avoid answering. He would play into his questions rather than ignore him. “If she was decent, then maybe. She would be better than Joffrey, certainly.”

“And your father or sister?”

“What of them?”

“You think Joffrey would reign alone? Your sister would likely have a hold on him, and Tywin will surely be his Hand. Do you think they would allow her usurping the king they control?”

Jaime looked down in thought. “Father could remain her hand.”

“You’re not so foolish, are you?”

His gaze rose to meet Ned’s. “What is this about?”

“I wonder if you are a true knight or not,” said Ned. “You asked if I would do as you did if I saw a king’s cruelty. I tried and have failed. I wonder if you would try as well, or if you did so only
because they were not of your blood.”

“You’d have me be a kinslayer as well?” Jaime laughed. “You truly mean to see me rot in all the hells, don’t you?”

“I wish to know if you’ve any honor left, and if it would drive you to do what is right even when it is harder than slitting an old man’s throat.”

Jaime’s eyes hardened as they met Ned’s. “If he was like Aerys, perhaps.”

“And would you help put Rhaenys on the throne over Tommen?”

“Tommen is a babe,” argued Jaime.

“Even better to control,” said Ned. “Would you spare him being a pawn in their game even if it meant placing another dragon on the throne?”

Jaime’s brow rose as he laughed. “You mean to support the two across the sea, don’t you?”

Ned stared at him for a moment. “Robb is King in the North. We’ll need someone to take over the south as well.”

“You think they would settle for that?”

“Who can say? Perhaps they will. Perhaps Daenerys would need to wed Robb and keep the Seven Kingdoms united through their children. Either way, I wonder if you would go against your family to do what is best for the realm by supporting Rhaegar’s kin, or if you would simply kill them to secure your family’s puppets.”

The next morning Ned found Catelyn waiting beside Arya and Sansa. Behind them Brienne stood tall, glancing cautiously at the wolves sat beside Nymeria. Gendry was helping Dom prepare a horse for Ned while Robin Flint and Wendel Manderly handled their own. To Ned’s surprise, Ghost stood near the gate rather than beside Nymeria.

After saying his farewells to Catelyn and his girls, he mounted his horse and looked to Ghost. “You should stay, Ghost,” he told the direwolf, but when they went through the gate the white wolf followed. Though he was well behaved, it seemed Ghost did as he pleased, or what he thought best.

They took their time to bypass Moat Cailin, the group splitting so Ned went to White Harbor with Wendel, Gendry and Ghost while Domeric took Robin Flint to Barrowton before riding hard to the Dreadfort. Lord Wyman greeted him with pitying sympathy, as Ned had noticed many treated him even before the death of his sons. At first he wasn’t sure if it was their reaction to his apparent failed coup, or how much he had withered in the cell. Most likely it was both.

Before they left, Ned had sent ravens to other Northern houses, seeking their aid and calling any who remained to help reclaim Winterfell. When he joined the men of house Manderly in sailing up the White Knife and came to Castle Cerwyn, he found men from Widow’s Watch, Rills, Barrowton, Karhold and Last Hearth all waiting alongside a mass of six hundred Stark men as well as another six hundred from the Dreadfort led by Domeric.

Within Winterfell Theon felt only dread upon seeing over two thousand men marching toward their gates. He saw no siege towers, but more than enough wood to craft them as required. Worst of all was when he peered through Maester Luwin’s Myrish lens tube and saw it wasn’t Rodrik Cassel leading the men, but Eddard Stark with Rodrik to one side, Domeric Bolton to the other, and a
white direwolf ahead of them.

He saw that Black Lorren disagreed with his choice to go out alone to parley while they handled Beth Cassel as he had ordered. His murderous look made it clear he had turned on Theon much as it seemed all others had. It was clear he had no friends among his men, nor anywhere it seemed. He was surrounded by enemies and men who looked down on him for being… What was he anymore? Ironborn? Northman? A turncoat?

Riding through the gates, Theon made his way toward the winter town market where he found Lord Stark sat astride a gray courser with Ser Domeric atop his red stallion, Rodrik Cassel atop a dappled gelding and Cley Cerwyn holding a staff waving the Stark direwolf from atop his chestnut steed. Smiler seemed anxious beneath Theon as the horse spotted the direwolf stood off in the distance while Theon noticed the a line of mounted knights to his left, spearmen to his right and archers along the roofs. No man there would hesitate to kill him, apart from one.

“Lord Stark,” Theon said pulling his reins to halt. “It grieves me that we must meet as foes.”

“My grief is for my lost sons,” Ned said staring at Theon somberly. “All three of them.”

Theon felt his chest stir but shook it off with a laugh. “I always knew Jon would betray you.”

“I wasn’t speaking of Jon,” Ned said, keeping his voice even and cold as ice. “He is not lost to me. He remains alive in King’s Landing while the other boy I raised has killed his brothers. Though not of his blood, they were his brothers all the same, and he a kinslayer.”

“Brothers?” Theon scoffed. “I am a Greyjoy of Pyke. Prince to King Balon Greyjoy. The cloak my father swaddled me in bore a kraken, not a direwolf.”

“For ten years you were our ward.”

“Hostage and prisoner, I call it.”

“You weren’t in chains or kept in a cell,” Ned said, his gray eyes feeling like they were daggers at Theon’s throat. “I raised you alongside my own sons, the sons you butchers like animals. I saw you trained and taught by knight and maester. I gave you a better life than you might have had with your father, and you murdered my sons!” Ned’s voice shook as it rose at the end, gripping his reins as he did his emotions, letting them sink again.

Theon felt shaken seeing Ned’s ice crack to reveal his anger, though it was brief. His throat bobbed as Theon took a breath and sat up. “I came to parley, not suffer your whimpering. Say what you have to say. What would you have of me?”

Ned stared at him for a moment, disappointment evident as he exhaled. “Winterfell and justice.”

“Justice?” Theon asked with a dismissive laugh.

“Face the block or take the black. I will give you that mercy for the piece of you that had been the boy I raised. Command your men to open the gates and lay down their arms. Those who murdered no one will be escorted to their ships and seen off, but you and any who took part in murders will be held. You will serve your sentence and they can wait for Robb’s return.”

“Robb will never look on Winterfell again,” Theon promised bitterly. “He will break himself on Moat Cailin. You know better than most that no southern army can pass it.”

“Moat Cailin will fall once you lay dead or ride north,” Ned said briskly.
“Then it will stand,” said Theon. “Now here are my terms. You have until evenfall to disperse. Those who swear fealty to Balon Greyjoy as their king and to myself as Prince of Winterfell will be confirmed in their rights and properties and suffer no harm. Those who defy us will be destroyed.”

“Are you mad, Greyjoy?” Cley Cerwyn asked incredulously.

“Only vain, lad.” Rodrik Cassel said shaking his head. “Theon has always had too lofty and opinion of himself, I fear.”

“You’re a fool if you think we need Robb to take you and your men,” Dom said as his eyes settled upon Theon. “Fight and you damn your men to die alongside you.”

“You don’t have the men to repel us,” said Rodrik.

“I have something better than men.” Theon signaled and from the walls behind him Beth Cassel was placed between the tarred heads on spiked, crying with a noose around her neck.

Rodrik’s chin quivered with fear as he said, “This is craven. To use a child so… this is despicable.”

“Oh, I know,” said Theon. “It’s a dish I tasted myself, or have you forgotten? I was ten when I was taken from my father’s house, to make certain he would raise no more rebellions.”

“It is not the same!” Rodrik bellowed.

Theon kept an impassive face. “The noose I wore was not of hempen rope, that’s true enough, but I felt it all the same. And it chafed. It chafed me raw.” The words had been planned but felt truer once they left his lips.

“No harm was ever done to you,” said Ned.

“And no harm will be done to Beth, so long as you-”

“Viper,” Rodrik spat, his face red with rage. “We gave you a chance to save your men and stand down with some small shred of honor, Turncloak. But even that was too much to ask of a childkiller.”

“Don’t let your fear claim your life, Theon.” Ned spoke with ice for Rodrik’s rage. “Don’t let your pride force you to be a fool like your father.”

Theon stared at Ned before asking, “Will you accept my terms?”

“I offer myself,” Rodrik said drawing himself straight. “Release my daughter and take me as your hostage. Surely the castellan of Winterfell is worth more than a child.”

“Not to me,” said Theon. “Nor to any of these men. No, I’ll keep the girl… and keep her safe, so long as you disperse and swear fealty you spare the girl’s life. It is in your hands now.”

“You’ll have to kill her.” The words drew eyes to Dom, who looked from Beth on the wall to Theon before them. “Unless you’re a fool you know we won’t leave. So either you’ll have to hang her and force us it kill you all, or you won’t and you should help us to not risk your men learning what you truly are and slaying you. Is your life truly worth whatever sliver of power you feel playing Lord of Winterfell like a child? Or are you a man, willing to admit defeat and help people instead of letting your greed claim their lives as well as yours?”
Theon met the Bolton’s pale eyes before turning to Ned. “If this host is still at arms before my gate when the sun sets, Beth will hang. Another hostage will follow her to the grave at first light, and another at sunset. Every dawn and dusk will mean another death, until you are gone. I have no lack of hostages.”

They watched him leave, returning to Winterfell. Ned turned to Rodrik, his icy demeanor falling to regret. “I’m sorry you had to suffer that, Ser Rodrik.”

The man shook his head. “I blame the turncloak, my lord.” He cast a glance to Dom before nodding in his direction. “Ser Domeric has the right of it though. Either he will make good on his threat or he won’t, and should they kill Theon she would be left to his mutineers.”

“I don’t know Theon very well,” Dom said looking to Rodrik and Eddard. “Do you think him capable of killing her?”

Eddard looked ready to shake his head but stopped to frown. “I never would have thought he could kill Bran and Rickon.”

Cley Cerwyn sighed. “Is there no way in you know of, my lord? A way he wouldn’t think to guard?”

“Not that we could get men through without them noticing.”

They rode back to meet with others in charge of their companies to discuss plans. Rodrik had been the one to suggest an attack to distract them while others scaled the walls. He wasn’t the first to think it, but none would speak of risking his daughter just yet, so he brought it up to have it done with.

The sun was sinking low in the sky when one of the men entered the tent in a panic. The lords all turned to him as the man’s eyes set upon Domeric. “Lord Bolton.”

Domeric furrowed his brow and turned to him, recognizing him as a man-at-arms sworn to his house. “Yes?”

“There are traitors among us,” he said quietly.

The lords all turned to him as Domeric’s eyes narrowed. “Who?”

The sun was had nearly set as the men started to prepare to move. At the rear of the group was a company of men from the Dreadfort led by one in a close helmet. While they heard the men preparing to rally, he turned to signal his men, and saw them gasp before he turned just in time to watch a dozen arrows loosed upon them, one of them piercing the helmeted man’s thigh.

Sour Alyn took an arrow to the throat while Yellow Dick took one to the shoulder. With a roar he drew his sword and charged on the men who fired on him, only for a dozen more to come from the sides with spears. One was shoved through his side before another stabbed through his neck.

The would be betrayers were all put down or injured in a matter of moments by a mixture of men from across the North. They all parted as Domeric lead the group of lords toward the betrayers while Barrowton and Hornwood men raised the leader to his feet.

Domeric watched as they removed his helmet, revealing an ugly, big boned man with sloped shoulders and blotchy pink skin across his broad nose barely hidden by his long dark hair. His wide lips were twisted into a sneer of disdain, as though he saw himself above all around him. What unsettled Domeric were his eyes, small, close-set and pale like chips of dirty ice, not unlike his
“What is your name?” Domeric demanded.

The young man turned his eyes on Domeric and his sneer shifted into a wet-lipped smile. “Don’t you know me, brother?”

Domeric’s eyes widened as he felt suddenly sick. “Your name?”

“Ramsay.” He smiled, though it didn’t reach his eyes. “Snow, they call me. But I say Bolton.”

“You sick…” Rodrik stepped forward with a growl. “I left to put an end to his atrocities when he set himself upon Lady Hornwood after her husband was lost at the Green Fork. The monster, he…”

“She questioned why he was amassing men at the Dreadfort,” said one of the surviving men behind Ramsay.

That made the bastard whip his head around and glare at the man. “Shut your mouth, Damon.”

“Shut yours, pretender,” Damon spat back. Turning his gaze upon Domeric, he continued, “She was seized and made to marry him the same night, my lord. He ate her fingers, beat her and locked her in a tower to starve to death. She wasn’t the only one either. He and his companion, Reek, they would hunt women through the woods, chasing the girls until they caught them and Ramsay raped and killed them, leaving Reek to have his way with the corpses.”

Domeric felt sick as he stared at his bastard brother. “Take his hands.”

Ramsay’s eyes widened. “What?”

Domeric looked to the Hornwood man. “You can do it if you please. Any Hornwood man may if they have the stomach for it. Take each finger one at a time before you cut at the wrist.” He looked to another of his men-at-arms, “Make sure he doesn’t bleed out.”

“Domeric,” Ned started.

“He’ll have his justice,” Dom said coldly, turning his gaze back to Ramsay. “For now we can’t trust him, so he’ll lose his hands first.” He then turned his gaze upon another of the men-at-arms from the Dreadfort. “If he makes a noise or so much as blinks, take his feet as well. And once it’s done, leave him a eunuch, so even if he does escape he’ll be no threat to anyone.” Ramsay tried to struggle as Domeric waved his hand. “Get him out of my sight.”

“Brother! Do it yourself, you coward! Face me yourself!”

“You are no brother of mine,” Domeric said keeping Ramsay’s gaze as he was dragged away.

“Lord Bolton…” The others stared at him, shocked by the brutal order.

“The rest of you,” Domeric called out as turning to the survivors once Ramsay was taken away “You are all named guilty of treason. Come morning we’ll decide whether you wish to take the black or meet the king’s justice at the block.”

Domeric turned and strode forward, adjusting his gloves as he ignored the pleads of the men being dragged away. He had gone to prepare for battle when Eddard entered his tent and found the Bolton heir sat on his cot with his head in his hands.

“I couldn’t let it stand,” Domeric told him, lowering his hands to turn his head toward Ned. “I’m sure you think it cruel, but he deserves much worse than what he’ll suffer.”

“Would death not be enough?”

Domeric rose to his feet shaking his head. “No.”

“He is your kin.”

“Which is why I’m not the one taking him apart and I can’t be the one to take his head,” said Domeric. “I don’t care if they think me cruel or cold, but I won’t have them name me kinslayer.”

Seeing the boy struggling to contain his distress was odd, but he wasn’t surprised. With a sigh he walked forward and clasped the young man’s shoulder. “I’m sorry it had to be your brother.”

Domeric said simply, “My brothers are all south of here.”

Once the sun set Eddard was prepared to lead the distraction force at the gate while others sneaked around the walls with grappling hooks. Domeric hadn’t been to Winterfell very often, but remembered it well enough from his brief stays and the map Lord Stark had drawn them.

After Luwin came again to tell him to surrender, Theon found himself considering the honor he could find if he took the black. He could could rise high, even command a ship of his own if he served at Eastwatch. However he didn’t know how to avoid his men’s anger. They were already disbelieving of him and likely to kill him if he tried to surrender. His concerns grew as they called for him, telling him the host was at their gate.

“Shall we get the girl?” Black Lorren asked.

“Not yet,” Theon offered. “Let me see what they plan.” Perhaps he could signal them in some way. Find a way to free himself from this without losing his head to his own men.

Theon made for the walls where he took a bow and drew an arrow aimed down at the host of men. Among he found Ned Stark wearing a suit of gray armor beneath a white velvet surcoat bearing the Stark direwolf over his heart. His helmet was a direwolf with it’s mouth as the visor which closed to a slit. Gendry had a hand in designing and forging the helmet himself while the rest was made in Riverrun at Catelyn’s behest.

“Theon!” Eddard called out, aiming his arrow at Theon.

With a glance to the boy on the wall, Eddard raised his hand and suddenly arrows flew up, enough that they had little chance to dodge before the men around Theon were littered with them. They all fell back dead, leaving him alone.

Theon gasped, stumbling back and turning just in time to see a man in scarlet fluted dark armor cut through Black Lorren’s throat while others killed the rest of his ironborn who fought back. He turned when he heard the gate opening and saw Eddard Stark leading the group of riders inside. Falling to his knees, Theon felt tears burn his eyes, unsure if they were out of fear or relief.

When Domeric came toward him Theon held up his hands and turned his head with a wince as he yelled, “They’re not dead!”

“I’m afraid they are, Theon,” Domeric said grabbing his collar and lifting him to his feet.

“Bran and Rickon live!” He said looking to Eddard atop his horse.
The men all looked to Eddard with gasps and murmurs as he the lord dismounted and took Theon from Domeric. “Where?!”

“I-I don’t know.”

“If this is a lie-”

“It isn’t,” Theon promised and begged. “I swear it, I swear! They fled, so a Bolton prisoner helped me, said his name was Reek, he slew the miller’s boys and flayed them both before tarring them to let others think the boys dead.”

Eddard looked to Domeric, whose pale eyes darkened. Throwing Theon to the ground, Eddard turned to the others. “Search the castle! My sons may still be here somewhere!”

Maester Luwin rushed to greet him, revealing he knew their deaths had been faked but didn’t know where the boys were. He joined the company in searching the grounds while the rest returned to the camp.

It was only hours later that Eddard made his way toward the crypts, calling into them, “Bran! Rickon! If you hear me it’s safe!” He frowned at the thought that they might not trust him since they may not remember his voice. “I’ve come home for you!”

He was holding the lantern high when he heard something and turned, reaching for the hilt of his sword until he saw red eyes and recognized Ghost striding toward him. “Do you smell them?” He asked the wolf, who guided Ned ahead before stopping and sitting.

Ned blinked in confusion until he heard movement and turned toward it, raising his lantern. “Bran? Rickon?” He called out shakily.

“Father?”

He saw a large figure step forward and felt a moment of concern before realizing it was Hodor carrying bran. Rickon followed with a woman he didn’t recognize as well as a young woman near Robb or Jon’s age another another younger boy. The direwolves Summer and Shaggydog made their way forward, making their way to sniff at Ghost while Eddard stepped forward.

“Father!” Bran beamed with relief as Rickon ran straight to him, leaping at Eddard, who knelt down to hug him.

Ned lifted Rickon, holding him in his arms as he moved to Hodor and Bran stretched out his arms, wrapping them around Ned’s neck while he held him up. A shaky sigh escaped Ned as he squeezed his sons close. “I missed you both.”

“I missed you too, father.”

“Me too,” Rickon said nodding into his shoulder.

“I’m home now,” he said tapping the sides of his head with theirs. “You’re safe.”

Chapter End Notes

Ned questioning Jaime is pretty fun to write, since his arc is a bit different here due to
his not being set free by Cat. Originally I had Ghost with Robb, but thought it best he stay in Riverrun, then decided to have him head north with Ned.

Ramsay’s presence will be explained a bit more when we get around to meeting Roose and Dom asks about it. If you’re curious, it’s basically Roose couldn’t be sure about Dom and had a backup close by. I only say that because I’m not sure when we’ll have him meet Roose since Dom is largely making a point of avoiding him for now.

Early on I considered not having the whole Theon betrayal arc, but decided to go with it because I can do other stuff going forward from here.

This is essentially the end of the A Clash of Kings section, which went quicker than I thought it would. I felt more like a climax to the AGOT section in a way.

Next Chapter: A scarred Tyrion speaks with Jon. Davos, having survived the Battle of the Blackwater, returns to Dragonstone.
After waking with a scarred face, Tyrion speaks with the new lord of Snowfire. Davos heads to Dragonstone and finds a new goal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After waking to what seemed to be the betrayal of all he knew, Tyrion was surprised that Jon Snow was not among them. Instead the young knight, now a lord, had come to visit him as Podrick had said he’d done many times before, though often when Tyrion was asleep or too sick to remember.

“I hear you’re a lord now. Head of House Snowfire, is it?”

“It is,” Jon nodded, sitting in the chair across from Tyrion. “They’ve made me Lord of Nightsong. I’ve written there, though I’ve yet to hear back or visit yet. Hopefully they hand it over willingly.”

“Will you leave soon?” Tyrion asked.

“Not just yet,” said Jon. “I intended at least to stay through the royal wedding, if only to meet the queen.”

Tyrion nodded. Bronn had told him of Jon’s apparent closeness to the Tyrell brothers. He’d been to see them train one day, joining a crowd which had gathered to watch the new lord battle a kingsguard and his elder brother.

“How was he on the field?” Bronn has asked him.

“Good,” Tyrion said thinking back to the figure in black and gray atop astride a dark courser as he cut through men. He’d cut through near a dozen, leaving them bleeding and weak for others to end as he’d rushed off to aid Thoros before leaping across the burning bridge. It had made Tyrion wonder if Jon could cut through their guard and killed Joffrey if he so desired.

“Well I won’t doubt it,” said Bronn. “The new kingsguard, the bastard bested him a dozen times.”

“What of his brother?” Tyrion asked, having heard that as good as Loras was Garlan was better.

Bronn’s arched brow made him cock his head. “Garlan won their match, but the bastard’s stronger than he looks. If he’d aimed at the Tyrell’s head he’d have likely left him simple minded if not dead instead of having to mend a scratch in his chestplate.”

Tyrion had been left to think on the young knight that bested Set Bryce Caron and Stannis Baratheon in single combat. Deeds too grand and witnessed by too many to ignore. They might see him as a threat if he’d shown any hint of disloyalty, but the boy had played his part well so far. Joffrey clearly wanted to convert him, and even his father thought he could prove useful if they cemented his loyalty to them.

Seeing Tyrion rub what was left of his nose, Jon frowned. “I’m sorry. I should have been there for
you.”

Tyrion laughed and waved his hand. “You were smart to abandon me and go for Stannis. If I’d known you would win I would have sent you myself.”

“Still, I failed as your shield.”

“You shielded the realm and the city,” said Tyrion. “Even I can admit they matter more than me.”

Jon smiled reluctantly. “What will happen now?”

“With you?” Tyrion shrugged. “It seems you’ve earned your freedom, or at least a longer leash.”

“What of you?” asked Jon. “What did you get for your planning and actions on the field?”

Tyrion’s face soured. “What they thought appropriate.”

“So nothing?” Jon asked knowingly. “They should at least give you a keep or some land of your own if not Casterly Rock. It’s not as though Jaime is likely to return without notice, and even if he did he would still be a Kingsguard.”

Tyrion snickered, leaning back in his chair. “You truly think such a thing matters against my father’s will?”

“No,” Jon said shaking his head, “but I would think he would consider you at least a little. Though I suppose men like Randyll Tarly aren’t as rare as I had hoped.”

Tyrion nodded. “Have you heard from your friend?”

“Only of their arrival, nothing else yet. I wrote to him before and after the battle though, so I hope to hear back soon.”

“And your family?”

“I haven’t heard news of them apart from Robb’s invasion of the Westerlands. It’s not as though I intend to write them.”

Tyrion thought for a moment, tapping the edge of the table before sitting up. “Your father was kidnapped by a band known as the Fellowship of Fire and sold back to your brother at Riverrun.”

Jon put on a frown and looked down. “What of the men sent with him?”

“That’s smart,” said Tyrion. When Jon raised his head to look at him he continued. “Asking of his companions, showing general concern to mask concern for him, since surely if they lived then he would likely be uninjured. Clever, though not as clever as convincing Joffrey to make him take the black.”

Jon’s brow knit slightly. “My lord?”

“Come, Jon, no need to play the obedient pup. I’ve seen you in battle to know you a wolf, and seen clearly you’re not dumb enough to return on a whim. You came back to free your father and succeeded, but then you stayed and earned more than you might have if he’d remained as hand. You’re clearly working the middle to some degree, aiding us but doing what you can to help your family survive. It’s noble, and difficult, but you’ve done well so far.”

With a sigh Jon sat back. “If I could convince us all to stand down and work together I would, but
I’m not naive enough to believe it possible. Instead I hope to find another path that ends in a better place.”

“You say you’re not naive than speak like a child,” Tyrion derided.

“It’s childish to hope for the best and work for it?” Jon arched his brow. “Then let me be a child so I keep some piece of that hope should even the Long Night come.”

Tyrion laughed, shaking his head. “I won’t begrudge you seeking news of your family, though I would council that you do so with grace.”

Jon nodded, looking at Tyrion for a moment. “My lord, do you feel up to a game of cyvasse?”

Him asking Tyrion made him perk up, as previously it had always been on Tyrion’s suggestion they took to playing. “You feel like losing after such a grand victory?”

“How else should I keep my ego from matching yours?”

Tyrion grinned and nodded. “Go get the board.”

Jon went about setting up the board and pieces, claiming the onyx pieces this time. Once they sat down and went about their first moves, Jon decided to be the first to speak rather than let Tyrion use it to gauge Jon. “My lord, you traveled a lot, haven’t you?”

“As far as I could,” Tyrion said while moving his rabble.

“Don’t lie, Lord Tyrion,” Jon said with a smirk. “Have you ever left Westeros?”

“No,” Tyrion admitted. “I had hoped to tour the Free Cities as my uncles had when they became men, but it was forbidden and instead I was given charge of the cisterns and drains of Casterly Rock.”

“Even after that, you never left?” Jon asked while looking over the board.

“I hoped to join my uncle, Gerion, on his journey to Valyria when I was eighteen, but was forbidden then as well.”

Jon moved a piece and looked to Tyrion. “Why Valyria?”

“For him or me?”

“Both.”

Tyrion looked over his pieces briefly before looking to Jon. “He sought to regain our family’s lost Valyrian steel sword, Brightroar. I hoped to find adventure and perhaps a hidden dragon.” He chuckled as he looked from Jon to the board and moved a piece. “I could return riding it as I dreamed of when I was little, setting fires and imagining them as dragonfire.”

It was hard to miss to somber expression Jon wore for a moment before looking to the board. “What happened to your uncle?”

“Gerion never returned. My father said his men traced him to Volantis, where half his crew deserted him because they were too cowardly to sail into the Smoking Sea, so he was forced to replace them with slaves. Beyond that he was lost. Likely one of the ghosts that haunt the ruined realm.”
“Why not go look for him?” Jon asked, watching Tyrion move his light horse. “Find the sword yourself.”

“And die like him?” Tyrion scoffed. “I prefer the comfort of a warm bed, a beautiful woman and a fine wine.”

“You wouldn’t want to do what your father never could?” asked Jon.

Tyrion grinned. “I see you’ve given up playing the fool.”

Jon moved his catapult and shrugged. “It’s only a question.”

“Meant to make me want to go against it,” said Tyrion. “Why do you care about me following my uncle?”

Jon offered him a somber smile. “Because Sam is free of his father for now and I would have the same for you.”

His sincerity was surprising to Tyrion. Where nearly everyone had betrayed him while he was unconscious, Jon not only visited when he didn’t need to, but spoke with true concern for his well being. He’d assumed Jon cared little for him since he’d done little to endear himself to the boy, and yet he wanted to help him. Tyrion shook his head, looking to the board. “You need not worry after me, Lord Jon. I’ll find my place in time.”

Jon watched him move his elephant and smiled. “Hopefully it’s not one too far,” Jon said moving his dragon forward.

After hallucinating a conversation with the seven, Davos almost doubted the sight of Dragonstone rising over the horizon. There he would find Melisandre, and there he intended to kill the red woman he blamed for their failure and the deaths of his sons and king. She would be waiting there in all her beauty and power while their king’s head was mounted on a spike in King’s Landing.

Melisandre had taken a piece of him to craft her shadow and left him weak. That had to be why he lost. That is what Davos told himself after boarding the Lyseni ship that found him and learning the fate of his king.

It was aboard a commandeered Pentoshi ship that he learned from Salladhor Saan that though his elder sons had died in the explosion of wildfire, Devan had made it aboard the ships with the Florents which retreated to Dragonstone.Apparently he was all but dragged away by Rolland Storm, who put aside his own morning to bring the boy as he led the retreat.

It was Salladhor who told him of the tension between those loyal to the queen, or more likely loyal to Melisandre, and those loyal to the king and his Baratheon name. It seemed Edric’s life was on the balance. The Florents and those following R’hllor wanted to burn the boy to support Selyse and Shireen while the only thing stopping them was the king’s men who wanted to raise Edric as their Baratheon king.

That had fueled his desire to let his dirk cut the heart from her chest, though Salladhor had tried to talk him out of it. Once brought ashore he was guided to Aegon’s Garden. It was there he came upon princess Shireen and her jester Patchface running from Edric Storm, Robert Baratheon’s bastard who shared the Baratheon’s strong jaw, cheekbones, black hair and blue eyes along with House Florent’s prominent ears.
They had barely finished speaking when he saw Ser Axell Florent arrive with a dozen guards in quilted jerkins bearing the Lord of Light’s fiery heart. “Ser Davos, and undrowned,” he said with none of the courtesy or warmth he’d held for Davos before. “How can that be?”

“Onions float, ser. Have you come to take me to the queen?”

“No.” Ser Axell waved to his men. “Seize him, and take his dirk. He means to use it on our lady.”

Davos expected to be taken to a dungeon, to rot in the dark until they brought him out to burn. Instead he was brought to the Stone Drum and brought to a room with Melisandre and queen Selyse. Once Ser Axell was at the queen’s side, the men released Davos to his seat with his hands and feet in manacles. Their chain clinked as he bent forward to cough, taking a breath before sitting as tall as he could manage to look upon them.

“Why did you mean to kill me, ser knight?” asked the red woman, standing ahead of the queen and her uncle.

Davos was quiet for a moment before answering. “I will tell you if you tell me who betrayed me.”

The red woman laughed. “No one betrayed you, onion knight. I saw your purpose in my flames.”

Davos noticed the queen looking righteous at Melisandre’s claim. “If you can see the future in these flames, how is it that we burned upon the Blackwater? How is it our king lays dead? You gave my sons, my ship, my men, our king to the fire!”

Melisandre frowned, but it was only a moment before she shook her head and regained her composure. “You wrong me, onion knight. Those were no fires of mine. Had I been with you, your battle would have had a different ending. But His Grace was surrounded by unbelievers, and his pride proved stronger than his faith. His punishment was grievous, but others will learn from his mistake.”

“I thought him your savior?” asked Davos. “Why would your lord let him die if that were true?”

Melisandre’s gaze sank, looking almost disheartened, as if Davos’ words were ones she’d asked herself before settling upon the answer she gave when meeting his eyes. “He was one who might have been, but now will be a predecessor meant to serve as a guide.”

“A guide to what?” Davos asked with a scoff.

“A guide to you.”

The knight slid back slightly, unsettled by the trio staring at him. “To me?”

“Not only have my flames shown me your intent upon your arrival, but it showed me your purpose.”

Davos’ brow sank. “What do you mean?”

“They showed me a ship with onions on deck,” Melisandre answered. “A ship sailing from a show where stags and wolves stood together. From it a dozen others sailed.”

Selyse raised her chin and pursed her lips. “You are meant to unite us with the wolves of the north.”

Davos looked to the queen. “You mean to join the Starks?”
“It is what the Lord of Light says will save us,” said Selyse.

“How do you expect me to help?” Davos coughed and held up his manacles hands.

“Sail us north to meet with them,” Melisandre told him.

Davos realized that despite being bound, he had power here. However he had to use it wisely, else they would think him not worth it. He couldn’t ask them to abandon their faith, that would be a waste and likely cost him his head. Instead he would use it to do some good and keep some power.

“I’ll sail you there and help you,” he told them, “but only if you spare Edric from your flames and let me help you broker your alliance.”

To his shock they not only agreed, but had him handle forming the letter to Robb Stark, though Selyse demanded they see it before it was sent. With help from Maester Pylos, who offered to give him reading lessons while he could, Davos crafted his letter and sent one to Riverrun, hoping for once Melisandre’s flames were true and this was the correct path.

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

In the dark beneath Riverrun, Jaime Lannister was plagued by nightmares. Some days he found himself actually praying for a dream of Cersei, and sometimes she would come to him in his dreams only to abandon him, or use him as she always seemed to. With little else to do but think despite doing all he could to go away inside, she would come to his mind.

Other men might have cast their ill deeds upon her, but he wouldn’t do that. Jaime had been the one to shove Bran from the tower and into a coma. However she had been the one to make him distance himself from Jon afterward, just as she had been the one to convince him to join the Kingsguard for her sake, only to have their father resign as Hand and take her to Casterly Rock, thinking her plot to name him Kingsguard a slight by Aerys intended to rob Tywin of his heir. How things might have been different if only Jaime hadn’t succumb to her meddling then.

Most nights he was accosted by Eddard Stark’s words, dreaming of his regrets, of Rhaegar demanding to know why Jaime had failed to save his family. He dreamt of little Rhaenys smiling up at him until Amory Lorch grabbed a handful of her black curls and stuck a dagger in her stomach half a hundred times while she screamed and cried, reaching out for Jaime who couldn’t reach her. He watched as Gregor Clegane crushed the silver haired infant’s skull against a wall. He saw Gregor rape their mother before taking his hands, still covered in her son’s blood, and pressing them into her face, crushing her skull.

Other nights he dreamt of another rumor he'd heard which left him sick upon seeing it. A rumor which said a dagger hadn’t been the only thing Amory used on Rhaegar’s daughter. He had screamed as he woke, his heart pounding in his chest as he tried to stop it, still seeing Amory laugh as he thrust it into the wailing girl while stabbing her.

His stomach was in a knot throughout the day, so when his meal came it was easy enough to vomit. He moaned and groaned until the guard came to check on him and he managed to convince the man to spare some water. It was that kindness that let Jaime grab the man and put his chains around his throat until he was unconscious. Taking the keys from his belt, Jaime freed himself and took the man’s dagger.

He could have tried to escape, but instead he took a torch and moved to another cell. Inside the portly man seemed confused, rising to his feet with a laugh as he saw Jaime Lannister opening his door.
“My lord,” said Amory Lorch, “thank you.”

Moving to the door, Amory gasped as Jaime thrust the dagger into his chest. When he stumbled back, Jaime followed, stabbing him again. He followed the pig faced man to the ground, stabbing him again and again until Jaime’s body was half scarlet with blood.

Exiting the cell, Jaime tossed the dagger next to the chair where the guard would sit, and dragged the unconscious man back there. He left the keys on the man’s lap and went back to his cell where he put his manacles back on.

When the guard woke he was shocked to find the prisoner he thought escaped covered in blood, and found Amory Lorch stabbed near a hundred times in a nearby cell, a dozen or so having left little of his genitals and another dozen having nearly severed his jaw from his skull. After that two guards were assigned to the cells at all times, though Jaime never tried to escape and found sleep came easier that night.

Chapter End Notes

I figured Tyrion as he was in ACOK wouldn’t be as open with Jon, but injured Tyrion recovering would, especially when Jon stays in touch despite everyone but Pod and Bronn seeming to turn from him.

The little slips in Mel’s composure should be hints at a larger break before Davos arrived which I hope to go into at some point. It’s early enough it isn’t quite as devastating as it could be to hear Stannis died, so by the time Davos arrived she’s put together again and has given them a new goal.

Originally I had no idea what to do with Amory when I had him taken prisoner, but after I had Ned and Jaime talk I pretty much had his end here in mind.

Next Chapter: Jon goes to choose his ships from Stannis’ fleet, then sups with the Tyrells after Margaery arrives.
Flowered Shores

Chapter Summary

Jon travels with the master of ships to choose his ships from the remnants of Stannis’ fleet. Then after Margaery arrives Jon goes to sup with the Tyrells.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon made his way to the chamber of the new master of ships, Mace Tyrell. There he found the lord speaking with his son, Garlan, turning to greet Jon when the guard had him enter.

“Father, this is Lord Jon Snowfire,” Garlan said motioning to the approaching lord.

“My sons speak well of you, Lord Jon,” Mace said shaking his hand.

“As I would of them, my lord,” Jon assured. “And please, Jon is fine.”

“Good to hear,” the man said motioning for him to take a seat. “Give me a moment to find the manifests and we can head out.”

“Do you mind if I join?” Garlan asked Jon. “Loras wanted to, but asked me to go in his stead while he guards the prince.”

Jon shook his head. “It’s fine. I’ve Edric and Thoros waiting with the horses.”

“Ah, here we are,” Mace said getting to his feet while rolling parchment. “Off we go.”

Jon followed the Tyrells through the keep, noting the guards in green following them rather than the red guards he’d grown so used to over the past months. Though Jon had told Garlan and Loras his secret, and they had yet to tell even their father, it was a relief to not feel completely surrounded by enemies.

“Have you had your gold returned to you yet, Jon?” Garlan asked as they rode from the keep.

“I have,” Jon nodded.

He had been making his way to visit Tyrion when a Lannister guard stopped him and told him he was sought at his chambers. That was also how he learned he had been moved from servant quarters to guest chambers, as servants were there ready to help him move his things. Thankfully he no longer hid anything in his bed, and it was easy enough to remove the few things he kept hidden while he was alone. When he arrived at his new room he found a guard waiting with a cart filled with gold, all Sam had told him was missing plus a reward for slaying Stannis.

“Ask and I’d have a guard on your room,” Garlan told him.

“I thank you for the offer, but I have a feeling it will be going quickly should today go well.”

“My presence should save you some gold, my boy,” Mace said with a laugh. “I would be glad to
assign a guard to your room should you have need. Otherwise I would suggest you look into sending it to the vaults of your keep.”

“A keep I do not know is even mine yet,” said Jon. “It’s castellan has not written back yet.”

“The raven would only have just arrived, I’m sure,” said Mace. “Though if they remain silent, let us know and the Tyrells will aid you should the crown itself not decide to step in.”

Garlan flashed Jon a smile as though to say, ‘See, all this because you are Loras’ friend.’

Jon held back a laugh. “Thank you, Lord Mace.”

“Think nothing of it,” he said with a grin. “Any friend of Loras is a friend to the Tyrells.”

Garlan rolled his eyes at his father’s favor for his third son, but gave Jon a nod to tell him he spoke true.

“Have you thought where you intend to work from since Nightsong is landlocked?”

“There is a harbor near Starfall,” Edric said, riding at Jon’s side with Thoros. “I offered Lord Jon to house his ships there and travel any goods to Nightsong.”

“Very generous of you, Lord Edric.”

“It is the least I could do,” Ned said with a smile while Jon gave him a nod, agreeing with Mace’s words.

“Though both require men you can trust,” said Thoros. “And those might require the bulk of your gold.”

Jon had considered finding a way to sneak the Fellowship in to man his ships, but they likely wouldn’t take the position. Their duty was protecting the riverlands, and word had it Beric was doing a decent job of it, making him wanted by the Lannisters. Thoros has even earned a few odd looks since word spread of the fellowship seemingly following his god, having been converted by him before their separation.

Instead Jon would have to find others he could trust. Men who not only were skilled enough to man the ships, but to do so in battle and could be made to turn against the crown in time. He would worry about that later, when Mace knew the truth and could help him find better men than he would offer now. This trip was meant to focus on finding which ships he would take and taking ownership of them. Any belonging to the crown as part of the royal fleet would simply have their manifest and ownership handed over by Mace, while Jon would need to visit the owners of any others he took. Worst of all, both would require acceptance by the Hand.

Passing through the battered river gate, they came to the docks and dismounted, a Tyrell guard taking their horses while Mace opened his manifests and began showing them the ships captured from Stannis’ fleet.

“That one,” Jon said as Mace showed him a one hundred oared war galley from the royal fleet. It wasn’t particularly unique, though it was from before the rebellion so still had a slender dragon along the front. That wasn’t what made Jon take it though. It was the name.

“The Princess Rhaenys,” Mace said aloud, letting his steward scribble on the parchment to keep record of which ships Jon showed interest in, so they could draw up documents afterward. “Belonged to the royal fleet. As with the rest, whatever damage it had has been repaired.”
Jon was still down a way when he spotted an ornate ship with a red hell etched in white. Where the Princess Rhaenys had a dragon at it’s front, this one had a wave with a crab atop it. “And this one?” Jon asked as they came to it.

“Belonging to Ardrian Celtigar, who bent the knee to King Joffrey,” Mace told him. “Named the Red Claw.”

Jon bit back his smile as he nodded. “This one.”

“I thought as much,” Mace said with a laugh as his steward marked it down. “You could likely sell this and buy two more if you wanted.”

“No, though I’ll change the crabs.”

“I shall look up crafter to alter the figurehead to whatever you desire,” Mace told him.

The last he chose, after waiting to look through the rest, was another fairly ornate ship painted sea green and silver with a large seahorse figurehead, aptly named the Seahorse. “This looks like a good ship,” said Jon.

“It belonged to House Velaryon, though was captained by the Bastard of Driftmark,” Mace told him while the steward marked it down. “Are you certain of these three?”

Jon looked to Edric and Thoros, who seemed as lost as he felt. “I suppose so,” Jon offered. “Do you think them decent choices, my lord?”

Mace looked down the row of ships and nodded. “I would say so. Though they are all fairly large, that should do well for carrying more cargo. And their few armaments should help ward off some pirates.”

“And the crew will need to fend off the rest,” said Garlan. “But we can choose those another day.”

Mace looked a bit put off at the idea of spending another day working this, but nodded for his son. “For now, let us return to draw up whatever we must and go have them signed.”

Once they returned to the keep Thoros went off on his own while Jon sent Edric off rather than have him follow him to the Tower of the Hand. Jon made his way to the chambers that had belonged to Eddard before Tyrion took them over, and found Lord Tywin seated below a window writing quietly.

“Lord Tyrell,” he said with a nod to Mace before looking to Jon, “Lord Snowfire.”

The hint of effort to not simply say Snow was noticed by both men, but neither made it known as they bowed and moved to the seats Tywin offered. It was simple enough having Mace hand him the documents and explain which ships he showed interest in, but Jon felt nervous before the Lannister patriarch. He could have turned them down, claimed them for the crown. He almost feared the man would somehow know the truth of Jon if he looked at him too long.

“Any reason why these three?” Tywin asked.

Because I want the ship named for my sister, I want a Red Claw to match my White Fang and Bloodwing’s color, and the Seahorse to be my steed and link to Daenerys’ Khal while also possibly drawing House Velaryon to aid another Targaryen, Jon thought while answering, “I thought they looked the best, my lord.”
Mace chuckled. “The Seahorse and Red Claw in particular, no doubt.”

Jon offered a sheepish smile. “I understand if they are too much.”

Tywin eyed Jon for a moment before reaching for his quill. “No, you’ve earned your fair share. You should have gained his lands, but they belong to the crown. This will have to do in their place.” Jon thought it more likely his deed was too well known to be snubbed as Tyrion’s had, so they needed to make a show of giving Jon some rewards.

“This is more than enough, my lord,” Jon said with a bow of his head, realizing he’d nearly called him your grace. There was little doubt he was the man ruling the kingdom, though Joffrey wore the crown.

Tywin signed the documents and placed his seal, making it clear that the king had agreed to hand the ships over. He also signed the documents marking the king’s decree that the Seahorse and Red Claw go to him as well, though they still would give the owners the chance to simply sign them over.

First was Ardrian Celtigar, a sour old man in a mantle patterned with red garnet crabs. It was clear he disliked signing over the rights to his ship, but had little choice to do so. He couldn’t even return home to Claw Isle, fearing reprisal from Stannis’ forces which remained in the area.

After him they traveled to meet with Aurane Waters, the Bastard of Driftmark. He was a lean young man with gray-green eyes and long silver-gold hair that reached his shoulders and stretched across his jaw, hiding his cleft chin.

He looked upon his guests with a smile. “Welcome, my lords. I take it you’ve come to claim the Seahorse?”

“That we have,” said Mace. “I’ll need you to sign this.”

Aurane turned his gaze to Jon as he took the parchment. “Have you ever captained a ship before?”

“Not yet,” said Jon.

“Few chances for a lord’s bastard to gain his own ship,” Aurane said as he went to his desk.

“And yet you captained one,” noted Jon. “Perhaps you could give me some advice?” Aurane looked up from the parchment as Mace glanced at him as well. “It was your ship after all.”

Aurane snorted. “And it is no longer.”

“I’ve no crew,” Jon said, “no one to man any of my ships. I could use help understanding them and finding men I can trust. Who better than a lord’s bastard to know how to deal with the small folk who man the oars and the lords who own the harbors?”

Aurane sat up and arched his brow. “You think to make me captain to one?”

“I don’t think I could,” Jon admitted. “The crown holds you, not me. But I would be willing to speak on your behalf, and let you captain other ships should you prove loyal and helpful.”

Aurane noted the order which he spoke those and nodded. “I could be both.”

Once he signed the papers and handed them over, Jon signed it and claimed his third ship. After agreeing to meet with Aurane to tour the ship the next day, Jon left with Mace.
Edric, Garlan and Thoros joined Jon on his tour with Aurane, who showed him through each of the ships, which had been moved together. He showed them all he could, from small secret compartments to how the armaments all worked.

“You’ll want them young,” Aurane said of who he should choose. “Poor as well. Men you raise will prove loyaler than experienced men who feel themselves worth more.”

“How would I know if they’re any good?”

“There are tells,” said Aurane. “You should be able to tell a man who can captain from one best left manning an oar. If you’re uncertain, I could spot the difference for you.”

“Could you look into it some? Let me compare your list to the crown’s?”

Aurane nodded. “I’ll gather a list of men I think capable. Not just captains, either, I’ll keep an eye for all types.”

“Thank you, Aurane.”

The bastard smirked. “Thank you, Lord Jon.”

Before they could meet again however, the city gathered to greet their queen to be as she arrived, Joffrey meeting her at the King’s Gate. While many had vied for the attention of the Tyrells and their queen to be, Jon was among the first invited to dine with them in private after supping with the Lannisters. It would seem little more than a show of favor for his friendship with Loras, but Jon knew it was more than that. It would be less a meal and more a meeting.

When he arrived he found a large table set up and occupied by the core of the Tyrell family rather than the retinue that had arrived with them.

Loras was the first to greet Jon, who brought him forward where he gave quick greetings to the familiar Garlan and Mace. He came to a tall woman with long silver hair who held herself with dignity Jon doubted he could match. “This is my mother, Alerie Hightower,” Loras told him.

“It’s a pleasure, Lady Alerie,” Jon said hoping he hid his anxiety, or that she would at least take it as nerves of a young lord rather than nervousness over the revelation to come.

“It is ours, Lord Jon,” she said as he kiss her hand. “Loras has told us much of you.”

“Only good,” Loras assured.

Jon chuckled, following Loras to the slender girl with softly curling brown hair and large eyes who greeted him with a sweet smile. “This is my sister, Margaery.”

“Welcome, Lord Jon.”

“You brother’s words have failed to match your beauty, my lady.”

“Thank you,” Margaery offered with a curtsy. “His words have failed you as well.”

Loras snickered watching Jon kiss her hand. “You two simply lack imagination.”

“He spoke of you often enough I feel I already know you,” she said taking Jon’s hand, guiding him toward the table. He fought back his surprise as she lead him the chair at the end holding a small white haired woman. “I am honored to present my grandmother, Lady Olenna, widow to the late Luthor Tyrell, Lord of Highgarden, whose memory is a comfort to us all.”
“No need to put on a show,” Loras told her as he stood with his arms crossed behind them.

The elderly woman looked Jon over before giving a nod. “Kiss me, child.” Jon realized he’d stood still under her examination and did as she beckoned when she grabbed his wrist. “It is kind of you to sup with me and my foolish flock.”

“It is kind of you to have me, my lady,” Jon offered.

“I knew your grandfather, one of them at least. Though I did not know Lord Rickard well.”

Jon nodded. Rickard was technically still Jon’s grandfather. “Then you knew him better than I, born after his death.”

“I knew that, child. Though I wonder if perhaps I knew any of your other family as well,” she asked with a smile. “Do you even know them yourself? Or is that some secret you’re unwilling to share?”

Behind him Loras and Garlan shared a look while Jon simply smiled. “And rob the realm the fun of guessing?”

Olenna flashed a smirk. “Perhaps you’re not just a bastard skilled at poking others with a long stick.”

“Mother,” Lady Aleria scolded.

“Hush, Alerie, don’t take that tone with me. And don’t call me mother. If I’d given birth to you, I’m sure I’d remember. I’m only to blame for your husband, the lord oaf of Highgarden.”

“Mother,” Mace said, half scolding and pleading.

They sat and ate for a time, Loras having suggested that Jon give them the chance to know him before telling them the truth. He knew Loras and Garlan well enough from his time in the yard with them, and Mace from their few meetings, leaving him to learn of the women.

Alerie came off much like she looked, refined but caring. She was considerate of others where Olenna wasn’t, speaking her mind without hesitation. It was funny at times but surely would be grating enough to earn her the moniker Queen of Thorns. Margaery seemed every bit a lady, the kind Jon had hoped Sansa might become, though she seemed more intelligent and shrewd than many he’d met, likely due to a lifetime with her grandmother. She spoke with the grace of her mother, but the wit of her grandmother at times. Jon almost felt bad at the thought of his revelation taking away her place as queen in the future.

It was Loras who broached the topic once the servants had come to take their plates, but only after he had Butterbump sing for them. “Father, Mother, Grandmother,” Loras said looking to them. “There is another reason Garlan and I asked you to invite Lord Jon to sup with us.”

Olenna sighed. “Is he another like Renly?”

Loras laughed. “No, Grandmother. He had his eye on the princess before she left.”

She chuckled. “High aim for a bastard.”

“He is no bastard, Grandmother,” said Garlan.

“Being raised to a lord doesn’t take away the way was born,” said Olenna.
Jon noted she looked to him, as if to appraise his reaction. “You are right, Lady Olenna. It doesn’t take away how I was raised. But I wasn’t born a bastard.”

“Lord Eddard wed before Lady Catelyn?” asked Mace.

“No.” Jon shook his head. “But Eddard Stark was never my father.”

The Tyrells all exchanged looks, bar Loras and Garlan who looked to Jon. It was Margaery who tilted her head asking, “Who is then?”

Jon glanced to Loras and saw him nod before looking to the others. “Rhaegar Targaryen.”

Mace laughed. “No, that-”

“My mother was Lyanna Stark,” he cut the lord off. “My uncle, Benjen Stark, witnessed them wed on the Isle of Faces before my birth. Before they knew what it would cost.”

“So you’re the cause of the war, hm?” Olenna asked with narrowed eyes. “He put you in her and tried to have some honor or the like?”

Jon shook his head. “I was born near the end of the war. Too long to be the cause. When Lord Stark went to find his sister, he found her dying and me in her arms. But knowing what Robert had done to my siblings, he claimed me as his own. My name isn’t even truly Jon, but Aegon Targaryen. I’ve only known the truth for a year and some months. But since then I’ve been working slowly to garner allies and make a claim. I had hoped to do it when Robert died, but he did so suddenly, before I had a chance to gain enough support.”

“And have you since?” asked Olenna.

“Not as many as I would like,” said Jon. “The only ones pledged to me are the Fellowship of Fire in the riverlands, my father-Lord Eddard, and my brother, Robb, who vowed to bring House Stark and their allies with them.”

“And us,” said Loras, looking to his family. “House Tyrell owes a debt to House Targaryen than can never be repaid, but even without that, I know Jon could make a good king.”

“Even with us and your cousin’s forces, there would still be a war,” said Olenna. “You would need others on your side.”

“Not with a dragon,” Garlan laughed.

They all looked to Jon. “You have a dragon?” asked Mace.

“He is at the Wall with my uncle, Jon explained. “I sent him there to grow while I prepared in the south. I hope to call for him once I have some distance from the city. Whether it be at Nightsong where I can have him hide in the Dornish Marches, or when I begin my conquest of the Stepstones to gather forces.”

Olenna looked at the boy before looking to Garlan. “You believe this?”

Garlan nodded. “I do. His story makes sense, though even this is still lacking the grander parts.”

“Which are those?” asked Margaery.

“His death and rebirth,” said Loras. “Gregor Clegane truly cut him down, and he died surrounded by his fellowship. It wasn’t until Thoros of Myr gave him the Lord of Light’s kiss of life that his
dragon was born and Jon revived before a hundred witnesses.”

“Likely less now,” Jon said with a frown. “They’ve been helping protect the riverlands and have surely lost some of their number by now.”

“Either way, both Thoros and Edric Dayne spoke of seeing it.” Garlan looked to his grandmother and parents. “I believe him.” He glanced at Loras before adding, “It’s why we told him of our plan with Joffrey.”

Mace’s face darkened as Olenna’s eyes narrowed. “You have?” Looking to Jon she asked, “And your thoughts?”

“I intended to kill him whenever I made my claim public,” said Jon. “I’d ask you not harm Tommen or Myrcella, Tyrion as well, but I don’t care what you do to Joffrey or Cersei.”

Mace frowned as he looked to Margaery, who looked lost in thought. “If we were to aid you, would you agree to marrying Margaery?”

“No,” said Loras on his behalf. “It would be some time before Jon moves. Margaery could still have her time as queen, whether to Tommen or perhaps even Robb should things go that way. Her children can wed Jon’s, and Margaery will still be queen until Jon makes his claim.”

“If you’ve two armies and a dragon, what are you waiting for?” asked Olenna. “We could take King’s Landing.”

“I wait for it to be a war we could win,” said Jon. “As you say we could take King’s Landing, but they could ruin Highgarden. We could go take it back, and leave King’s Landing open to them. We could call for reinforcements from the North, and they would savage the riverlands while the ironborn take more of the North. If my dragon were more than a wyrm perhaps it could aid us, but I doubt he’s grown to Balerion the Dread in the time since I saw him. I’d also like to know where the Martells and Dorne might side, which is why I’ve sent someone I trust as much as Loras there with princess Myrcella.”

Olenna looked him over and smirked. “I am surprised you can be so patient.”

“Though my father’s house words are fire and blood, my mother’s remind me that though slow sometimes, winter always comes. I would rather be a cold wind that they cannot stop than a fire that fizzles at their shores.”

They spoke for some time after that, and in the end Jon felt relieved to know he had another great house supporting him. He just hoped they weren’t the last.

Chapter End Notes

I basically went through the wiki for ships involved with the Battle of Blackwater and looked through any not destroyed, and picked from the list. At one point I had Jon given four ships so included the Horned Honor, which I thought also fit Jon, but 4 ships felt a little much for them to willingly give away after their own fleet was decimated.

Next Chapter: Robb returns to Riverrun to find letters waiting for him, then decides
what to do with Jaime. Jon meets with Tyrion, who shares information from a small council meeting.
Robb returned to Riverrun leaner than he had left, freshly shaved but with his auburn hair falling to his shoulders, topped by the sword crown they had fashioned for him of bronze and iron. He had hoped to return with Tywin as captive, or at least his head, but his uncle had ruined that.

Edmure was never meant to face Tywin as he had, nor send away men to recapture Harrenhal. His defense of the Red Fork at Stone Mill wasn’t only a waste, but actively harmed their plans. If he’d let Tywin pass he would have fallen into their trap. Their battle had also given Tywin time to receive news from the south and rush to King’s Landing. Still, Edmure was his uncle, so Robb would praise him publicly to spare him disgrace.

For a moment he was surprised to see his mother and sisters there to greet him, but then remembered the news he’d heard at the Crag. The news which had sent him into bed with the tall woman riding near him. While that explained their presence, he had expected them to look more mournful.

Instead when he dismounted and Grey Wind went off to greet Nymeria and her pack, his sisters rushed over to greet him with hugs, followed by his mother. “Father left?”

“To retake Winterfell,” Catelyn told him near tears while smiling. “He wrote to say he found the boys in the crypts. They had been hiding while Theon faked their murder.”

Robb felt the knot in his chest break and fall away, letting out a breath which felt like he’d been holding for weeks. “So they’re alive?”

“Bran wrote us himself,” Arya told him. “He said the wildling you took on helped them.”

Robb nodded. “And Theon?”

“We only know he was captured.”

“If not for Moat Cailin I might march there myself to see justice done.”

“Your father did write he plans to retake it,” Catelyn said thinking back to his letter.

“Then I’ll lead a force to meet him,” said Robb, looking to Brynden at his side who nodded.

“Distract them from the south, leave the ironborn open to your father in the north.”

“We should have time before Tywin takes to the field again,” said Robb.
“There is other news though,” Catelyn told him. “There was an incident with the prisoners.”

Robb frowned. “What happened?”

“Jaime Lannister got free, he-”

“He escaped?” asked Robb.

“No,” she assured. “He killed another prisoner but then returned to his cell.”

“Another prisoner?” Brynden asked with a laugh. “Who is worth the trouble?”

“Amory Lorch.”

“Did he say anything before or after? Did he speak with anyone?”

“None of the guards mentioned anything,” said Catelyn, “nor did you father.”

“Father?” The knot in his stomach reformed.

“He spoke to the Kingslayer before he left.”

Robb sighed, wondering if his father had told Jaime the truth. If he did that meant that he was no longer someone they could ransom or exchange. Instead Robb would have to take his head before anyone else spoke with him.

“I’ll speak to him,” Robb told them. “I’ll decide his fate afterward.”

Once he’d made a show of thanking his uncle, and let him know of his blunder in private, Robb left for his quarters. It was there he found letters waiting for him.

The first were those from his father and brother telling him of their retaking Winterfell and survival. His father had apologized for not being there to greet him, but said he hoped to see him at Moat Cailin. Robb found himself remembering Dom questioning if he would give up the crown should his father ask, but shook his head and moved to the next.

Aemon at the wall had sent him a letter on behalf of his uncle, or the letter seemed to say. In truth, he saw it was a message from Jon relayed to Aemon through Samwell Tarly. It was mostly an explanation of what Jon had planned going forward. Should he get his gold back it seemed he intended to buy boats and set up trade, which he hoped would allow him to slip north and visit them, while also traveling to gather allies.

The last letter bore a seal he didn’t recognize immediately, taking a moment to remember the burning heart of Stannis Baratheon. Opening it he found it was from Davos Seaworth, Hand to Selyse Baratheon, asking to meet with the intent of forging an alliance. Robb had laughed, sitting back as he looked the letter over again. It was clear they were desperate. Unwilling to claim Selyse as queen yet claiming to have a hand, offering marriages and suggesting to legitimize bastards.

Yet before he could pen a reply he needed to know all he could, so went to the dungeons to meet Jaime Lannister. The guards left as Robb commanded, leaving him with Grey Wind as he opened the cell.

Jaime’s gaze rose toward the lantern before shifting to Grey Wind, who entered and stared at him while Robb stepped into the cell.

“The King in the North comes to see me?” Jaime laughed. “What an honor. Have you come to bore
“Me like your father?”

“I’ve come to hear why you killed one of my prisoners.”

“I did you a favor, boy,” Jaime said with a dismissive nod toward the cell where Amory had died.

“You took away someone I could have sold back to your father for one of mine,” Robb told him.

“You cost me that deal. I will know why you killed him, and why you returned to your cell afterward.”

“Where would I go? Should I have cut down all of your men and opened the gates myself?” Jaime tilted his head as if in revelation. “Ah, I probably should have. It’s not as if I couldn’t.”

“And yet you didn’t even try,” said Robb. “You didn’t even kill our guard. Only Amory, whom they think you must have hated to kill so brutally. Was there some grudge between you?”

Jaime shrugged. “An old grudge over a lost bet.”

Robb wore a smile as he shook his head. “I expected you to be a better liar after cuckolding the king all those years.”

Jaime leaned his head back. “What do you want, boy?”

He saw Robb’s face darken as his brow sank, his blue eyes focusing on Jaime as he whispered and a low growl drew the kingslayer’s gaze to Grey Wind. The direwolf stepped toward him, teeth bared and snapping his jaw at him. “The truth. You spoke to my father before your escape. You could have left, but you didn’t, you killed one of your father’s men and returned to your cell. I want to know why.”

Jaime looked from the direwolf to Robb. “Get him away.” He said nothing Jaime could hear, but Grey Wind took a step back, his growl becoming a low rumble before he went quiet. With a sigh Jaime turned to Robb. “It was your father. He got in my head about what Amory had done, so to find some relief I killed the man. What do you care? It’s not as if my father would give anyone of import for him.”

“What do you mean my father got in your head?”

“Well, he spoke of things he knew. Jon’s supposed betrayal. He asked if I regretted slaying Aerys, if I regretted letting Elia and her children die. As though I had some hand in it.”

Jaime glanced at Grey Wind before sighing. “He spoke of things he knew. Jon’s supposed betrayal. He asked if I regretted slaying Aerys, if I regretted letting Elia and her children die. As though I had some hand in it.”

“What do you mean my father got in your head?”

“Rhaegar’s family,” Jaime revealed looking to the floor. “About Rhaenys and what Amory had done to her.”

Robb furrowed his brow, wondering why his father would ask about Rhaegar’s family and bring up Rhaenys to Jaime. “Amory Lorch was the one who killed Rhaenys.”

“So I murdered him,” said Jaime.

Robb felt his doubt shift to suspicion. “What else did you speak of with my father?”

Jaime glanced at Grey Wind before sighing. “He spoke of things he knew. Jon’s supposed betrayal. He asked if I regretted slaying Aerys, if I regretted letting Elia and her children die. As though I had some hand in it.”

“Your father’s men did,” said Robb. “Likely your father as well.”

“And that should be my fault?” asked Jaime. “I take it since you still have your head you’ve yet to lose a battle?” Seeing the boy nod he asked, “Then should you also take responsibility for your
father’s failures? For his failure to kill Joffrey and take the throne himself, for his failure raising your brother, his failure protecting Robert.”

When Robb didn’t answer, Jaime laughed. “Has he even told you he plans to back the dragons across the see? That was what he asked about last he came. If I would back Rhaegar’s kin rather than my family. Let them rule the south while you take the north. As if he knows they won’t just be like their father. The girl may be spared as Rhaegar was, but I’d bet my life Viserys is like his father. The embers were there, waiting to be fueled by years on the run driving him as mad as Aerys. Now it seems your father wishes to damn us all to suffer another awful king.”

“That’s it? That’s all he said?”

“Why would I lie about that?” Jaime shrugged. “If I were going to lie I’d make him speak of riding north to hunt grumpkins or the like.”

Robb nodded. “That still doesn’t explain why you killed Amory and returned to your cell?”

“Because he bothered me.”

“The gaoler says the man was quiet after his first days here,” Robb said motioning to the bench the guards had sat at. “After he squealed he went quiet, though I’m sure he was loud enough when you stabbed him to death.”

Jaime growled, not wanting to answer but sitting up. “I saw him kill her.”

Robb frowned. “Rhaenys?”

“Not the real one,” said Jaime. “But ever since your father spoke of it, I saw it every night after. Every night until I shoved the guard’s dagger into his stomach and heart and balls and face. Then it was only some nights. Other specters visit me the rest of the time.”

Robb took a knee, raising his hand for Grey Wind to stand beside him. “What other specters?”

Jaime knit his brow. “I don’t mean literally, boy.”

“What do they say to you?”

Jaime shook his head warily. “I don’t know. They come to berate me as you do. What does it matter?”

“You said my father spoke of other things beside Rhaegar’s kin, what were they?”

“I told you, things he knew. Things you know as well,” said Jaime. “Then he told me of Jon’s betrayal and we spoke of how your mother drove him away from your family.”

Robb nodded, thinking on it all. His father spoke of what they knew of Jaime, meaning his affair with his sister and pushing Bran. Then they spoke of Jon’s betrayal before his father spoke of Jaime’s regrets, and then asked if he would aid a Targaryen against his own family. That was enough to make Jaime slay one of his father’s men. Had Eddard planned to turn Jaime? Had it worked?

“So you murdered Amory because he plagued your dreams?”

“It’s not as if he was of much worth.”

“Then why not leave afterward?” asked Robb. “The guards your cousin brought before tried.”
“Before I was kept here.” Jaime motioned to the cell around them. “One guard is easy enough, but the dozen between here and the gate? Why bother when I’m too valuable to be kept like this for too long.”

Robb nodded. “You’re right.”

Though shocked, Jaime put on a smile. “Finally some intelligence.”

“Grey Wind, if he lies, rip out his throat.”

The direwolf growled as Jaime slid back, looking from Grey Wind to Robb. “What are you doing?”

“Showing how important it is for me that you’re honest right now,” Robb said meeting his eyes. “Do you want Joffrey on the throne?”

Jaime kept Robb’s gaze and shook his head. “I don’t care.”

“Do you care about any of your children with Cersei?”

His fear grew somber as Jaime shrugged. “I want them to live, but other than that… why should I?”

Robb laughed, asking dismissively, “You care more about my bastard brother than you do your own children, don’t you?”

Jaime frowned. “He was my squire for a time.”

“But I bet if I promised to spare Cersei if you kill him, you would stab him in the back wouldn’t you?”

Jaime shook his head defiantly. “I’d help him stab yours.”

Robb laughed. “At least he isn’t lesser than your children. It seems odd to consider him so highly yet think so little of your own bastards. I bet you look down on my father, but at least he cared for Jon enough to acknowledge him. He was a father to his bastard, but you’re nothing to yours. Just a guard who hung around them but did little to stop their elder brother from tormenting them, same as you sat there and let Aerys lock Rhaegar’s wife and children away. Same as you let Amory Lorch murder a little girl. Same as you let Gregor Clegane murder an infant and rape his mother.”

Rising to his feet Robb shook his head. “If only kingslaying was your greatest failure, you might be worth something as a man, a father or a knight.” Turning, Robb closed the cell and locked it, meeting Jaime’s eyes. “Let’s see if your father thinks you’re worth.”

With that he left the dungeon, praying this would work as he went to go craft letters.

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

Jon made his way to Tyrion’s chambers for what had become a near daily bout of cyvasse when he found the small lord already finishing a cup of wine. “Starting early, my lord?”

Tyrion frowned as he looked to him. “Time already? I’d forgotten. I met with the council. You speak to the master of coin.”

“Has Littlefinger abandoned the position?”
“To go and woo the Vale,” Tyrion said sliding into his usual chair. “Meanwhile I’m left to learn how he turned sand to gold, or whichever trick he used.” He watched Jon set the board before him and smirked. “Any chance you’d be willing to hand over some of your reward for the good of the crown?”

Jon offered an apologetic smile. “I’m afraid it’s unlikely I’ll have near as much for long. I’ve begun looking to man my ships.”

“Is that coming along well?” asked Tyrion.

Jon was surprised at what seemed like genuine interest. Though he hadn’t finished setting up the pieces so Tyrion hadn’t quite gone into his usual mode of play. “Well enough, I suppose. I have Aurane Waters helping me meet with the men Mace Tyrell suggested.”

“Aurane Waters?” Tyrion asked. “Why him?”

“The Seahorse was his ship.”

“Ah, of course, he’s the Velaryon bastard.” Tyrion chuckled. “Seems cruel to make him man the ship you stole from him.”

“I’ve offered to let him captain others for me once he was released if he proved true now.”

Tyrion nodded. “Buying later loyalty with current loyalty. Risky, but clever. You two share a bond as lord’s bastards. Has that helped much?”

“Some, I think,” Jon admitted, sitting in the chair across from Tyrion. “Hard to know for certain.”

“And your keep? Will you be riding off to claim that soon?”

“It seems not,” Jon said watching Tyrion make his first move. “The castellan wrote to me pledging his loyalty to me and the crown.”

“Who is it?”

“Seban Cartwell,” Jon said with a shrug. “No house I know. He gave a list of the staff there as well, but I can’t remember them all just yet.”

“Make sure you do before you arrive.” Tyrion watched Jon move his rabble. “Better to have them think well of you early on.”

“You forget I lived among the servants, my lord,” said Jon.

“Ones who kept their distance from you.”

“Not those in Winterfell.”

“This would be different though. You would be their lord, not some bastard stealing cakes from the larder.” Returning his attention to the board, Tyrion moved one of his horsemen. “When will you leave?”

“After the wedding.”

“Hm, you should meet with the Dornish then.”

“Which ones?”
“Three hundred that ride to bring Doran Martell to claim his place on the small council,” Tyrion told him a smirk. “Surely you should be able to convince one of them to bed you during the feast?”

Jon shook his head. “I’ll find a woman to bed in time, my lord. I’ve no need of your concern.”

While moving his piece, Jon saw Tyrion’s face sink into a frown. “My concern is an order,” Tyrion revealed. “My father has demanded I consider brides or he will find one for me. He suggested I wed Asha Greyjoy since her father has offered peace with us.”

“Balon’s offered peace?”

Tyrion nodded while drinking. With a sigh he set the goblet down. “He hoped to keep everything north of the neck and leave us the south. Which is why father left it to him or your brother to aid the Night’s Watch.”

Jon watched Tyrion stare at the board. “Aid them with what?”

“Wildlings,” said Tyrion. “Apparently they’re stirring thanks to someone named Mance Rayder. Father thought it best to break the knees of the gold cloaks who fled rather than send any to the Wall. Said they could aid the Watch themselves, or should the wildlings make it through he could make a deal with their leader.

“Of course he considered it as real a threat as the kraken Varys told us downed an Ibbenese whaler near the Fingers, or the three headed dragon in Qarth.”

Unsure what to make of it, Jon looked to Tyrion as he made his move. “What does that have to do with your concern of my bedding someone?”

That seemed to remind Tyrion of what they’d been saying. “My bride is not the only one he told me to find. He means for me to find you one as well. Though he also told me not to tell you.”

Sitting back in his chair Tyrion shrugged. “Seems I’ve failed already.”

With a laugh, Jon gave a nod. “Thank you.”

Tyrion shrugged. “I won’t force you to wed someone you don’t care for, but I’d help you with any you consider. Bedding as well, though I doubt you’d need much help.”

Jon was quiet for a few turns. Sam had offered to keep him in touch with Myrcella, but even if things went as he planned she was gone. She would be wed to Trystane once she flowered while Jon would be working to take over the Stepstones. He could wait for something that would never come, or he could do as almost everyone told him to.

“Will you be there to greet Prince Doran and his retinue?” Jon asked while moving his catapult.

“Most likely.”

“Could I join you?”

Tyrion looked up from the board with a grin. “Think to find yourself a Dornish beauty?”

“Seems as good a place to start as any,” Jon said evenly. “And it should help keep your father off your back.”

Tyrion wore a sympathetic smile as he nodded. “It’s for the best, Jon.”

“I know,” Jon said keeping his eyes on the board.
“Don’t worry,” Tyrion said with a smirk, moving his elephant. “I’ll tell you all I can so you don’t embarrass yourself.”

“It should be easy enough to speak to one, shouldn’t it?” Jon asked, already uncertain.

“I meant in bed,” Tyrion said with a grin as he reached for the pitcher of wine, “but I can help with that as well.”

When Tyrion finished pouring his glass, Jon took it from him and downed half of it, making Tyrion guffaw and reach for another goblet.

“If I’m not to whore I can at least pass on all it’s taught me,” Tyrion said setting the pitcher back. “First lesson, make sure they enjoy it too. Then they’ll want it as much as you.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Ned and Robb meet in Moat Cailin. Barristan speaks to Dany after helping her take Meereen.
Untainted

Chapter Summary

Ned and Robb meet in Moat Cailin. Barristan speaks to Dany after helping her take Meereen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With his sons safe, Ned left behind a battalion of men to man Winterfell with Rodrik at their head while he led well over a thousand to Moat Cailin. They expected to catch the ironborn by surprise to avoid what might be a prolonged siege.

After the scouts returned, Dom lead a small company meant to infiltrate them while the ironborn focused on defending themselves from Robb’s force to the south. They hid until Ned and the rest charged in, splitting the ironborn so Dom could have his men cause chaos.

By the time the sun set Moat Cailin was theirs, they’d lost near one hundred men but killed as many ironborn and captured the rest. They had turned down Robb’s surrender and their chance at returning to the Iron Islands, leaving them to be gathered and bound until they decided what to do with them.

Ned removed his wolf helm and felt the tension leave his body as he watched his son dismount and approach him in a harness of steel plate so light gray it seemed silver at in a certain light. Handing his helmet to his squire, Robb closed the gap and embraced his father, ignoring the onlookers wearing smiles as Ned squeezed his eldest son.

Stepping back, Ned held his shoulders, wearing a smile as he looked over Robb before meeting the boy’s eyes. “I couldn’t be more proud.”

Robb grinned. “Nor me more relieved. Are you okay? Has your leg healed fine?”

“Well enough,” said Ned. “It pains me from time to time, but little else.”

Nodding, Robb looked his father over and laughed. “I never thought I’d see you ride to war.”

“And I hoped to never see you do so,” Ned sighed as he stepped back. “Though I’m glad you’ve done well so far.”

As Robb told Olyvar to let them know he wanted the prisoners questioned immediately, he asked to speak alone with his father and Domeric. He greeted the Bolton heir with a firm handshake. “Thank you for aiding my father.”

Dom shook his head. “It’s nothing.”

“It’s not,” he said with a frown. “I heard of your brother.”

That brought a frown to the Bolton heir’s face as he thought of his brother, eyes wide and bloodshot, filled with madness and anger as he screamed at him from the moment he was dragged
out until the moment Lord Stark’s sword passed through his neck.

“He deserved worse,” Domeric said simply. “I would have asked to let him live, but he would only be a burden on those left to care for him, and he has already ruined too many lives.”

Robb nodded. “Either way, he was your blood and I’m sorry he wasn’t worthy of you.”

“I have other brothers,” Dom said evenly.

A smirk took Robb’s lips as he said, “Well one of them is now lord of his own house, or so I’ve heard.”

Ned blinked at that. “Jon?”

“News came from King’s Landing where they call him hero.”

“How?” asked Dom.

“Stannis Baratheon rode with his host to sack the city, but they fought back. Jon slew a lord and knight in single combat so was rewarded House Caron’s keep and made lord of his own house which he named Snowfire.”

Dom shook his head. “Is that the best he could think of?”

“House Caron.” Ned wore a frown as he said, “Their keep is Nightsong.” Near where the Tower of Joy had stood in the Prince’s Pass, he thought silently.

“That wasn’t his only reward,” Robb said with a laugh, “supposedly he got to choose some ships from Stannis’ fleet.”

“Ships?” Dom asked arching his brow.

“That seems more than they would give for killing Lord Caron,” noted Ned.

“But still too little for killing Stannis Baratheon in single combat,” said Robb.

Both men went wide eyed as Robb grinned. “He did?” asked Dom.

Robb nodded. “So they say. Cut straight through his burning sword and then stabbed the pretender as he knelt before him.”

Ned had lowered his gaze and was lost in thought, not seeing that Dom had looked to the side before letting out a hollow laugh. “He can do it.”


Looking to them, Dom answered, “He’s going to become King of the Stepstones and Narrow Sea.” Seeing their confusion, he told them how he’d suggested it while Ned had been unconscious, but they had thought it unlikely, but with him being given ships he could manage it.

“He could reach us, or us him,” said Robb. “Though we’ll need to prepare ships. Make a fleet of our own, both to aid him and help us counter the Iron Fleet.”

It wasn’t until they questioned the men they captured that they learned why Victarion Greyjoy abandoned the keep.
“A Kingsmoot?”

“They mean to choose a new king,” Dom noted, remembering the word from old tales of the rock and salt kings. “Which means Balon is dead.”

“Could he have gone after the Lannisters as well?” asked Wylis Manderly.

“He’s only claimed the Iron Islands and the North,” answered Brynden Tully. “No reason for them to care about him just yet.”

“Either way it works out for us,” said Dacey Mormont. “With them focused on their Kingsmoot, we can go reclaim the northern keeps and secure them.”

“And what of the riverlands?” asked Ser Perwyn Frey. “Without King Robb’s aid the Lannisters will be free to burn them. We need men to defend them.”

Robb’s laugh drew their attention. “We’ll have them.”

Eddard furrowed his brow. “What do you mean?” He hoped he didn’t think to speak of Jon’s plans just yet.

Seeing his father’s concern, Robb quickly gave his father a look as though to say ‘not that’ before smiling to the others. “I received word from Selyse Baratheon asking to meet with us and discuss an alliance.”

“Do they even still have an army?” asked Wendel Manderly. “I thought them all burnt at the Blackwater?”

“Some escaped and sail to White Harbor to meet with me. I’ve already written Lord Manderly to act as host should I arrive late, though I imagine I’ll arrive ahead of them now.” Robb looked to his father. “Lord Stark, could you aid me in dealing with them?”

Ned nodded. “Of course, your grace.” It felt odd being referential to his son, but also gave him a flicker of pride to see so many looking to him. He hoped to be one of the few men to know the pride of seeing two of his sons as king.

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

In King’s Landing one had to learn to lie, even if they disliked it and did little of it themselves. That might have been why it was so easy to be Arstan Whitebeard and act as squire to Belwas when Illyrio Mopatis sent them to Qarth to find Daenaerys Targaryen.

He disliked the magister, but he was Barristan’s best chance of finding Jon’s aunt, having arrived too late to help Viserys. He had kept his purpose secret since leaving Jon, acting as though he simply wished to serve Daenaerys herself. He trusted no one here enough to know the truth of Jon, especially not if he remained in King’s Landing.

Though he hated the idea of leaving him unguarded, he hoped at least Jon wouldn’t be alone. He had returned from his mission to hunt the Mountain with Thoros of Myr seeming reverent of him and his own squire in Lord Edric Dayne. Sam had been training with a bow but still lacked as a combatant, and Dom had gone with the Stark girls, so Barristan hoped they would be enough to protect his uncrowned king.

It was almost startling to see the young Daenaerys Targaryen walking through the docks of Qarth with Ser Jorah Mormont. Barristan had considered simply outing the man, but knew better. She
wouldn’t know him, at least not until he had saved her from the manticore given to her by a Sorrowful Man.

Barristan played the part of Arstan Whitebeard, hoping that he could reveal the truth to her while they went to Westeros, but she chose to sail to Astapor instead. Not willing to tell her the truth, he instead took to observing her, seeing if she shared any of the madness he saw in her father, or the hints he’d seen in Viserys as a child.

He disliked the idea of her buying the slave army, but could do little to convince her otherwise. Thankfully she used the Unsullied to conquer Astapor and free the slaves, turning her attention then to Yunkai. The more he spoke with her, the more he saw beyond the queen to the girl longing for a family. It reminded him of Jon, who even having the Starks still sent Barristan to find and help her in hope of clinging to another piece of his house.

It was why he didn’t hesitate to slay Mero of the Second Sons when he attacked her in the refugee camps after fleeing and letting Brown Ben Plumm take his place. He knew enough of her by then to tell her the truth of who he was, but made sure to do the same for Jorah. For that both were sent into the sewers with Belwas and others to capture Meereen.

He came before her with his head raised, having shaved away his white beard and feeling the relief of a bare jaw. The fool Jorah kept interrupting her like a guilty child. When she spoke of their deceiving and betraying her, she turned to Barristan.

“You protected my father for many years, fought beside my brother on the Trident, but you abandoned Viserys in his exile and bent the knee to the usurper instead. Why?” She demanded. “And tell it true.”

“Some truths are hard to hear. Robert was a… a good knight… chivalrous, brave… he spared my life, and the lives of many others… Prince Viserys was only a boy, it would have been years before he was fit to rule, and… forgive me, your grace, but you asked for truth… even as a child, your brother Viserys oft seemed to be his father’s son, in ways Rhaegar never did.”

“His father’s son?” Dany frowned. “What does that mean?”

The old knight kept her gaze. “Your father is called ‘the Mad King’ in Westeros. Has no one ever told you?”

“Viserys did. The Usurper called him that, the Usurper and his dogs. It was a lie.”

“Why ask for truth,” Ser Barristan said softly, “if you close your ears to it?” He hesitated, then continued. “I told you before that I used a false name so the Lannisters would not know that I’d joined you. That was less than half of it, Your Grace. The truth is, I wanted to watch you for a time before revealing my purpose. To make certain that you were not…”

“…my father’s daughter?”

“…mad,” he finished. “But I see no taint in you.”

“Taint?” Dany bristled.

"I am no maester to quote history at you, Your Grace. Swords have been my life, not books. But every child knows that the Targaryens have always danced too close to madness. Your father was not the first. King Jaehaerys once told me that madness and greatness are two sides of the same coin. Every time a new Targaryen is born, he said, the gods toss the coin in the air and the world holds its breath to see how it will land."
He saw her pause at the mention of her grandfather. “So I am a coin in the hands of some god, is that what you’re saying, ser?”

“No,” Ser Barristan replied. “You are the trueborn sister of to Rhaegar, whose trueborn son has sent me to seek you.”

That seemed to make the room grow tense as Daenerys tilted her head. “I will not hear more lies.”

“And I will not speak them,” said Barristan. “It was the hidden prince and rightful king who sent me to seek you on his behalf where he can not, less he risk his life. He wanted to come and seek your aid, but could not risk you sharing his grandfather’s madness and taking his head, not when he already risks his life by traveling Westeros.” There were only slight lies, partial in that they inferred things that weren’t truths, but were true in how he meant them.

“Prince Aegon lives?” Dany asked in quiet shock.

“Yes,” Barristan said in another half truth. “Though I dare not say where or as who.”

Dany’s brow furrowed. “Why?”

Barristan frowned and glanced to Jorah, who looked as shocked as any while the old knight looked to Dany. “It is proven your followers are not as loyal as you thought. I dare not risk my king’s life any more than your own. Revealing he lives has already put his life in even greater danger, to reveal any more to any but yourself would all but assure his death. If that is unacceptable, than take my life, for it is my duty as kingsguard to protect him, and if this is how I must then I do so gladly.”

Daenerys stared at the old knight, his head lowered as if awaiting a blade to strike it. She felt a hint of relief at the knowledge that there could be another Targaryen out there, one born of her brother Rhaegar. If Barristan was worried she held the madness Viserys had inherited, then surely that meant the boy he swore to did not, meaning he might well be like Rhaegar rather than the only other brother she’d known.

And yet she couldn’t ask of him immediately because they had a turncloak in their midst. She almost regretted asking Barristan to reveal even that much. That was why, when she turned to Jorah and asked to hear the truth from him she was so disappointed to see him lie, denying it was him who told them of her pregnancy even when Ser Barristan spoke of being in the room when their spymaster told them and speaking of his pardon.

She wanted to banish him, but knew she couldn’t. There was already risk of one of the others sending word to Westeros, she couldn’t risk him seeking his pardon by revealing her nephew lived. Instead she had him dragged away to a dungeon to rot until she decided what to do with him.

“Ser Barristan,” she said after dismissing her captains, “I would speak with you alone.”

Barristan hadn’t made to leave, wearing a smile as he approached. She had him follow her to her chambers where her handmaiden helped her change in to more comfortable clothes before moving to the terrace. There she found Rhaegal asleep beside the pool, Drogon perched where the bronze harpy had stood atop the pyramid, and the pale wings of Viserion over the distant river.

“How can you be certain?” She asked turning to him.
Barristan glanced to Rhaegal and smiled. “Because these are not the only dragons alive, nor would they be the first in Westeros.”

Dany gasped. “He has dragons as well?”

“Just the one, I believe. He named his Bloodwing,” Barristan told her. “He told me it has scales like blood with wings dark as if it were pooled and golden eyes. He sent it the Wall to be with your great uncle Aemon, brother to Aegon the fifth.”

Dany’s eyes widened. She thought back to the House of the Undying and the vision of a red and black dragon sat atop a massive wall of ice as its golden eyes stared south. She’d seen visions of snow falling upon a city beside a bay of black water and a blue flower sat in the snow as flames burned a grand white tree with a mouth and eye carved into it leaking blood.

“When did he birth it?”

“When he died for a time,” Barristan said to her shock. “His father, the man who raised him, sent him with a company to hunt down Gregor Clegane, but the Mountain cut him down. It was a red priest named Thoros of Myr who gave him the Lord of Light’s kiss of life, and after that his dragon was born and he revived.”

“The man who raised him sent him to take revenge for his mother?”

“Not his mother,” Barristan said with a frown. “I apologize, your grace, but there was a slight lie told only because it would help them learn his identity.”

Dany’s brow knit in a mix of confusion and annoyance with another lie. “What do you mean?”

“His name is Aegon Targaryen, but he was not born to Elia Martell. He was born after Rhaegar Targaryen wed Lyanna Stark in secret.”

Dany crossed her arms. “So he is half Stark?”

“More than that if you were to look at him,” Barristan said with a smile. “It is how he was able to go by unnoticed. Eddard Stark claimed him as his bastard to keep him from suffering the same fate as his siblings.”

Dany wore a frown as she thought on it. “So the Usurper’s dogs took him in? Why help him but send assassins for me?”

“Eddard never wanted you harmed,” said Barristan. “He quit as Hand to King Robert when he told Lord Stark of his intent to see you dead. Before that he had been helping Jon plot to take the throne in time.”

“Jon?”

“Aegon,” Barristant explained. “He was raised Jon Snow.”

A bastard. Dany thought it awful to have a boy who should have been king raised a bastard, but then he had been a lord’s bastard. He would have been safe in a keep while she and her brother fled and scrambled.

“What is he like?”

“Brave, kind, thoughtful,” Barristant said quickly. “A man ready to be king.”
“Which would leave me princess?” She had been set upon returning to rule. If Viserys were alive he’d likely speak of sending assassins to slay the boy who dared take his crown. Of course he might not do it, but he would speak of it and whine as he always had.

“Is that so awful a thing? You’ve been queen twice now,” Barristan looked to the city below, “you know the burden ruling holds as well as the power.”

Dany nodded, looking to sky. “Should I run to his side then?”

“I don’t know where he is,” said Barristan. “Last I knew he was intent to stay in King’s Landing under the guise of betraying the Starks to find a way to undermine Joffrey and the Lannisters.”

Dany turned to him. “A dragon within the lion’s den? Does he have another guard?”

“I was his only guard when I left,” he told her. “One of his friends had left to join Renly Baratheon’s cause, another left to help Jon’s Stark sisters escape the city when the Lannisters tried to capture them. He has three others, but I don’t know if they remained in the city.”

“Then how should I help him?”

“Contact Aemon,” he told her. “They have some code worked out. Write to your uncle, and have him relay where we are to Jon. He’ll contact us as soon as he can.”

Dany sighed, looking down in thought before watching Viserion land on the terrace and settle in to lay beside Rhaegal. “Fine,” she said turning to Barristan. “I’ll rule Meereen and do what I can until we hear from him. I won’t let Rhaegar’s son fight alone.”

Chapter End Notes

It’s little, but hopefully people pick up certain moments like Dom saying “He’s going to become King of the Stepstones and Narrow Sea” instead of ‘he could’ like Robb does the line after. That’s definitely one of those intentional displays of his confidence in Jon.

Been a while since we saw Barry, but his story is basically the same as canon to this point, and will be mostly the same afterward to around the Second Siege of Meereen most likely.

Rather than do the Dany scene in the undying for the few changed visions, I left them for here rather than include a short scene which wouldn’t have much changes. I have an idea for the next scene in Meereen, which is a bit away but well before the second siege, so it might not be as long before we see them again.

Next Chapter: Jon joins Tyrion in greeting the Dornish retinue. At the Wall Benjen and the Night’s Watch face wights, Others and mutineers.
Jon joins Tyrion in greeting the Dornish retinue. At the Wall Benjen and the Night’s Watch face wights, Others and mutineers.

Jon was among the group joining Tyrion to greet Doran Martell and escort him across the Blackwater. The sickly Lord Gyles Rosby’s coughs left little silence, but was added to make sure it wasn’t just a dwarf and a bastard who greeted Prince Doran. The dark copper haired Ser Addam Marbrand joined them, as did the exiled Summer Island prince Jalabhar Xho and a few others or some repute.

Edric and Thoros were at Jon’s side as Podrick and Bronn were at Tyrion’s. While Podrick named each of the houses showing banners, Jon looked to Edric. “Have you met any before?”

“A few, but only in passing as Lord Beric’s squire. Or if it was earlier than I was too young to remember” Seeing Jon nod and look to the approaching group, Edric sighed. “I’m sorry, my lord.”

Jon offered him a smile and shook his head. “Don’t be. We’ll manage. We’ve found other allies, we can find more here.”

“Your ties to the Tyrells may hurt our chances with the Martells,” Thoros said quietly.

Jon glanced to him. “True, but I’d still like to see them as allies if it’s possible.”

Seeing the lords riding to them dressed in silk and satin robes with jeweled belts and enameled armored inlaid with copper, silver and gold made Jon unconsciously run his hand along his front, where his new coat of arms had been sewn into his surcoat. He’d taken a white sword with scarlet flames around the blade on a black field as his house seal.

The story of him having cut through Stannis’ flaming sword gave him reason to use it on his coat of arms, and thus reason to have gone to Tobho Mott and have him switch out the hilt of his sword with one having a waved golden guard that leaked into a black hilt, which had gilded lines through it leading to a fire shaped pommel. He’d also had another sword made to match his with it’s new hilt, just in case the one he wore from the Blackwater broke, though Tobho had assured him it had been made good as new while switching the hilt.

He watched as the tall, slim Dornish leader rode his black stallion to Tyrion, his pale red silk cloak fluttering from his shoulders as his copper armored shirt glittered. His high gilded helm displayed a copper sun on the brow, and the round shield slung behind him bore the sun-and-spear of House Martell on it’s polished metal surface.

Jon watched him remove his helm when Tyrion asked which of them was Doran. Beneath it was a man with thin arched brows and black eyes. There were few silver streaks among his black hair which receded from his brow in a widow’s peak pointing at his nose. “Prince Doran has sent me to
join King Joffrey’s council in his stead, as it please His Grace.”

“His Grace will be most honored to have the counsel of a warrior as renowned as Prince Oberyn of Dorne,” Tyrion said before looking to the others. “And your noble companions are most welcome as well.”

"Permit me to acquaint you with them, my lord of Lannister. Ser Deziel Dalt, of Lemonwood. Lord Tremond Gargalen. Lord Harmen Uller and his brother Ser Ulwyck. Ser Ryon Allyrion and his natural son Ser Daemon Sand, the Bastard of Godsgrace. Lord Dagos Manwoody, his brother Ser Myles, his sons Mors and Dickon. Ser Arron Qorgyle. And never let it be thought that I would neglect the ladies. Myria Jordayne, heir to the Tor. Lady Larra Blackmont, her daughter Jynessa, her son Perros." Oberyn motioned to a black-haired woman to the rear, beckoning her forward. "And this is Ellaria Sand, mine own paramour."

Jon was drawn back to the prince as Oberyn wheeled his horse around to face the Dornishmen. “Ellaria, lords and ladies, sers, see how well King Joffrey loves us. His grace has been so kind as to send his own Uncle Imp to bring us to his court.”

Bronn snorted back laughter, and Tyrion feigned amusement as well. "Not alone, my lords. That would be too enormous a task for a little man like me." It was not Tyrion’s turn to name names. "Let me present Ser Flement Brax, heir to Hornvale. Lord Gyles of Rosby. Ser Addam Marbrand, Lord Commander of the City Watch. Jalabhar Xho, Prince of the Red Flower Vale. Ser Harys Swyft, my uncle Kevan’s good father by marriage. Ser Merlon Crakehall. Ser Bronn of the Blackwater, Thoras of Myr, Lord Edric Dayne and Lord Jon Snowfyre, four heroes of our recent battle against the rebel Stannis Baratheon, whom Lord Snowfyre slew himself. And mine own squire, young Podrick of House Payne.” Jon fought the urge to squirm when Tyrion singled him out, but sat straight and steady under their scrutiny.

“My lord of Lannister,” said Lady Larra Blackmont, “we have come a long and dusty way, and rest and refreshment would be most welcome. Might we continue to the city?”

“At once, my lady.” Tyrion turned his horse and called to Addam Marbrand, who commanded the gold cloaks to part, letting the column set off for the river and King’s Landing.

He noticed Oberyn speaking with Tyrion until the dwarf pushed ahead, leaving the Martell with a wry smile. Jon wanted to go speak to the prince, but saw him fall back to his paramour. Deciding he could simply try later, Jon looked to Edric. “Who were the houses you mentioned between Starfall and Nightsong?”

Edic thought back a moment. “North along the Torentine would be Starfall, High Hermitage and Blackmont. Then east to the Prince’s Pass, so we’d need House Manwoody of Kingsgrave and House Fowler of Skyreach within the pass. Nightsong is at the northern end of the pass.”

Jon nodded. “No Fowlers or Daynes of High Hermitage, but the rest are here. We should make a point to speak with them before long.”

“Now?” asked Edric, seeming nervous at the prospect.

“No,” Jon said to the boy’s relief. “Let them settle before we think to speak of business.”

Boarding the ferry barges waiting for them on the southern border of the Blackwater, Jon watched the Dornish guests board from beside Tyrion. “Any you like?” He asked with a light laugh.

“Some,” said Jon, “but could you help me meet with Lady Larra? I’ve never done this type of
“So you like them older, hm?” Tyrion asked with a smirk.

With a sigh Jon explained, “I thought to ask if we could come to an agreement to move shipments from Starfall to Nightsong, stopping at Blackmont if we can’t go straight from Starfall to Skyreach. I’d need to speak with Lord Dagos as well to speak of passage through Kingsgrave. I can deal with the Fowlers when I head to Nightsong.”

Tyrion seemed impressed as he nodded. “Of course. I’ll see if I can arrange something.”

Not long after they had set out beyond the wall, Benjen had settled in for the night, laying his head against one of the countless roots with snow clinging to it. That night he had dreamt of their destination, only it was nothing like he’d ever seen. The stone ringwall stood firm and undamaged as a man left it.

Benjen seemed to follow him out of the protective ring, past a stream until he came to a hole where he placed a bundled black cloak. Covering the earth again, he watched as the brother strode off into the forest, mounting an elk. Left behind, Benjen looked to the mound before rustling made him look up to find a figure with glowing blue eyes staring at him.

When he woke there was no sign wights, only sleeping brothers of the Night’s Watch. Brushing off the snow that had settled around them, he moved closer to the fire, leaving the white root barren.

Benjen had always disliked Craster, but seeing his daughter wives going about made him contemplate the man’s use. If not for the food he offered, Benjen would think it might be better to simply have the empty hut there to house them from snow. Instead it seemed even Jeor was willing to put up with the man.

Thankfully they didn’t stay too long as Benjen pushed for them to move quickly. With a larger party it took them longer to move, but in time they had arrived at the Fist of the First Men. While others setup camp, Benjen thought of his dream and followed the path he’d taken while scouting the perimeter. Passing the stream, he found the mound he’d seen in his dream, but looking around saw no wight nearby. Instead, he dug and found the bundled black cloak held a cache of dragonglass.

“How did you find it?” Grenn asked as Benjen handled out the dragonglass weapons.

“Stumbled over the raised earth,” he told them, thinking it more believable than saying it came to him in dream. It was one thing to be rescued from the walking dead by an undead brother in black, but another to claim he had visionary dreams.

It was sometime before Qhorin Halfhand and the men from the Shadow Tower arrived, having run into a wildling scouting party. From their prisoner they learned that Mance was searching for some magic to bring down the Wall. Months earlier Benjen might have dismissed it as foolish, but now he wouldn’t doubt it could exist.

Benjen was given command of one of the scouting parties, with Qhorin and Jarmen Buckwell leading the others. He lead his party into the Frostfangs, keeping near the Milkwater where they would find thousands upon thousands of wildlings moving together.

On their way back he tried to consider their options, but found little he liked. Returning to their camp he found theirs was the only group to return, yet knew that within ten days the wildling
vanguard would be upon them.

“Let them come to the Wall,” said the prune faced Ottyn Wythers. “Let them face our dragon.”

“Our dragon is little more than a cat with wings,” said Mallador Locke. “It can’t even breath fire.”

“Surely it’s grown by now,” offered Ottyn. “It was newly born when Aemon brought it.”

“The last dragon never grew much bigger,” reminded Jeor. “For all we know it will remain that way until it withers and dies like the rest. We can’t rely on it just yet.”

“Then we rely on ourselves,” said Benjen. “We are the watchers on the Wall. Let us defend it. If we must fight, let it be a fighting retreat.”

“And leave the others out there?”

“We could wait, but I would suggest we leave before the van arrives,” said Benjen. “If they other parties arrive to find us gone, they would be able to find their way back.”

Jeor sighed, stroking his beard. “We’ll wait a few days for their return, but if they haven’t then we’ll make south and send word to any we can while preparing the Wall.”

They would never know if Qhorin or Jarmen’s parties returned as the cold came upon them and the camp was roused by horn blasts. Three blasts.

“Others,” Benjen gasped, rising to his feet and rushing to prepare a torch, as did nearly every other man there.

At first they had tried to fight back, launching flaming arrows upon the wights, but it soon became clear they would be overwhelmed as wights began to make it past their volleys. Benjen watched brothers die, and put burning arrows into their corpses as well as those that had killed them, not wanting to let the brother rise and attack them.

Jeor had called for a retreat early enough that near half of them fled the Fist of the First Men, most on horseback while others trekked through the snow. All carried arms and torches, fighting off the wights who pursued, leaving only a few stragglers to fall and likely join their ranks if they didn’t simply alight themselves as many did.

Atop a horse, Benjen pulled back and looked to those trailing behind. Holding a torch he called to Jeor, “I’ll catch up!”

“Ben!” Jeor called as his First Ranger turned and sped toward the rear of the group as war horns blew.

He rode past other riders to those on their feet, caught in the swirling snow which seemed like a wall of white from the front of their wedge. Benjen looked and found a stout brother before him. “Brother,” he called out to the man he recognized as Bannen, one of Jarman’s scouts who had been left at the Fist, but as he moved to take Benjen’s hand they heard a sudden soft wet plop of snow falling from a tree.

It was enough to draw their eyes to a horse stepping through the swirling snow, one covered in frozen sweat with black entrails dragging from its open belly. On it was a rider pale as ice. Benjen took a breath as the Other slid gracefully from the saddle to stand upon the snow. Its armor rippled and shifted as it moved, it’s feet never breaking the crust of the new-fallen snow.
“Run,” he told Bannen, leaping from his horse and tossing the torch to his left hand so his right could draw his sword.

The stout man shook his head, drawing his own sword and one of the black daggers Benjen had handed out. “Is this a nightmare?” The man asked quietly.

“Either way I mean to live,” Benjen said holding the torch out like a shield.

The Other’s sword gleamed with a faint blue glow as it moved to Benjen, slashing lightning quick. When the ice blue blade brushed the flames, a screech stabbed their ears and the head of the torch tumbled sideways to vanish beneath a deep drift of snow, snuffing out the fire. Tossing the remnants at the Other, Benjen pulled one of the obsidian daggers from his belt as well.

Where the wights were slow and clumsy, the Other was quick and graceful. It slid away from Bannen’s slash, its crystal sword twisting as it pierced his leg, the blade letting out a hiss. His blood smoked off the sword as it was pulled from him, making the brother yell. Bannen stumbled back and fell, slashing again and hitting the pale sword aside.

Now, Benjen thought, his eyes narrowed as he dashed forward with his sword low. When the Other spotted him it brought its sword forward again to cut through him, only it hit steel as Benjen raised his sword at the last moment to parry the strike. That moment was enough for Benjen to thrust the black dagger into the Other’s neck.

He heard the skin crack like ice beneath a man’s foot as the dagger pushed through it, making the Other screech so shrill and sharp Benjen stumbled back wincing. He nearly fell as he watched the armor melt and run down the Other’s body as pale blue blood hissed and steamed around the dragonglass dagger in its throat. It reached down with two bone-white hands to pull out the dagger, but where its fingers touched the obsidian they smoked.

Bannen slid back in the snow watching the Other shrank and puddled, dissolving away. In twenty heartbeats its flesh was gone, swirling away in a fine white mist. Beneath were pale, shiny bones that melted too, leaving only the dagger which Benjen scooped up only to fling it down with a hiss.

“It’s cold,” he marveled. After a moment he picked it up again, the cold having faded enough for him to tuck it away.

Bannen stared wide eyed as Benjen turned and helped him to his feet, guiding him back to the horse which he helped him mount. It was that horse that carried them forward and all the way to Craster’s Keep.

Days passed with a daughter wife wailing in her birthing bed while men wailed on their deathbeds. Of the near forty men injured in their retreat, eighteen died in the first few days. The rest were near it as they lingered. Bannen was getting better in the days since their return, though it didn’t help they could barely keep him or any of the others fed.

Benjen was sat outside Craster’s hut helping Bannen try to walk steadily when Mormont called to him. Leaving Bannen with a walking stick and Small Paul to take him back inside, Benjen walked over to Jeor, who greeted him with concern. “I’ve been thinking about this dragonglass of yours.”

“I just found it,” said Benjen.

“Either way, if dragonglass daggers are what we need, why do we only have five of them?” The rest had been lost at the fist, leaving them with a handful of daggers, a pair of spears and a dozen or so arrowheads. “Every man on the Wall should be armed with one the day he says his words.”
“We should have known.”

“We must have known once. The Night’s Watch has forgotten it’s true purpose, Benjen. You don’t build a wall seven hundred feet high to keep savages in skins from stealing women. The Wall was made to guard the realms of men… and not against other men, which is all the wildlings are when you come right down to it. Too many years, Ben, too many hundreds and thousands of years. We lost sight of the true enemy. And now he’s here, but we don’t know how to fight him. Could your nephew’s dragon help us forge weapons? Or is it some other process?”

“Aemon or Cayle might know,” offered Benjen.

“If they kill them as you claim, we’ll need more of it.”

“We had more at the Fist.”

“Small good it does us here. We’d need them to reach the bloody Fist. And there are still the wildlings to deal with. We’ll need to find it someplace else.”

Benjen crossed his arms in thought. “The children of the forest used dragonglass blades. They’d know where to find obsidian.”

“The children of the forest are all dead,” said Mormont. “The First Men killed half of them with bronze blades, and the Andals finished the job with iron. Why a glass dagger should-”

The old bear broke off as Craster emerged from between the deerhide flaps of his door. The wildling smiled, revealing a mouth of brown rotten teeth. “I have a son.”

That had been the start of it, with Craster deciding they had already used too much of his hospitality. Some of the brothers demanded more food and Craster answered by standing with the axe gifted to him by Jeor, but Dirk opened his throat, letting the wildling fall to the floor and drown in his own blood.

Dirk grabbed one of Craster’s wives and when Jeor demanded he unhand her, Garth of Greenway and Ollo Lophand yanked him back, both with a blade in hand.

When Mormont grabbed for Ollo’s dagger, Ollo twisted his hand free of the old man’s grasp and thrust at Mormont’s belly. Instead Benjen grabbed his hand and raised it, shoving the dagger into Ollo’s throat, ripping it through the side as he pulled it from his lone hand. With that the world went mad.

Jeor drew his sword and sliced open Garth’s throat as others drew their arms and the mutineers came at them. The number of who died grew with even some of the injured passing, but when it ended the mutineers had joined them.

Benjen went about gathering the remaining brothers to prepare to leave while Jeor went to offer Craster’s wives a chance to join them traveling south. The next day as the sun rose the men of the Night’s Watch left alongside Craster’s wives and his son, leaving a scorched pile of corpses beside the abandoned hut.

Chapter End Notes

Though it’s setup for Jon to reclaim Dark Sister, he hasn’t yet, they’re just swords
which look a lot like it apart from lacking the ripples in the blade. Just thought I’d make it clear in case people think he had Dark Sister now. He doesn’t.

Using a bit of the Jaime chapters with Benjen sleeping on a weirwood root to get his dream since Ghost couldn’t be there to find the cache.

As far as I can tell, Others’ weapons shattering steel isn’t an instant process in book canon. Waymar fought them off for a bit before his shattered, so I figured Benjen’s could take at least one hit.

Next Chapter: Jon meets some of the new arrivals from Dorne. The Stark women arrive in White Harbor where they greet the Baratheons.
A Spark

Chapter Summary

Jon meets some of the new arrivals from Dorne. The Stark women arrive in White Harbor where they greet the Baratheons.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With Edric at his side, Jon met with the heads of house Blackmont and Manwoody, both of whom were amenable to letting his men pass through their lands to deliver goods. When Jon went to leave after his meeting with Lord Dagos, it was his brother Ser Myles who stopped him, wanting to test himself against the man who slew Stannis Baratheon. He wasn’t the only one to challenge Jon, nor would he be the last he defeated in sparring.

Ever since he gained his lordship knights had come to test themselves against him, and he decided early on to accept them all, though in his own time. A few had challenged him in the middle of meals, which he’d refused with an offer to meet them with blunted steel and a shield in place of his knife and dish. He disliked showing his hand too much, but made sure to hold back with most people. Even with Garlan and Loras, after their first matches which had left him sore for a day after, weren’t done with all they could muster.

Still he found it enjoyable testing himself against knights, many of whom looked down on him for his former bastard status. Some thought him undeserving of his time apprenticing to Barristan Selmy, where others thought he only saw favor because he was a turncoat ready to be used by the King and the Lannisters. They rarely said as much openly, but Thoros heard enough in his walks that Jon knew when to give a bit of effort, denying certain men a chance at victory and all but humiliating them before whoever came to watch.

With the Red Keep’s master-at-arms, Ser Aron Santagar killed in the riot after Myrcella’s departure, Jon had offered to help Tyrion’s squire Podrick, and occasionally Tyrion would stop by to see their progress. More than once he saw Joffrey come to witness him beating someone, which meant Jon had to make more of a show of picking them apart, but when Tywin was around he tried to make it look as though he was doing it all in an effort to demonstrate and teach.

The return of Loras meant the return of women to observe their matches. Garlan drew a similar attention as a comely knight, but few matched the fervor Loras could raise by waving to a group of tittering girls. Where Garlan let his brother play the act in their matches, Jon more often then not simply swatted his rear with the flat of his sword. Any joy the giggling girls gave Jon was diminished by the enraged Loras he had to face afterward.

After their matches Loras would be approached by women asking him whatever they could to try and gain some familiarity while Jon was left with his squire. In their time together they found both didn’t mind silences, so often Edric would simply hand Jon a cloth to wipe his face, leaving him to quietly work over his matches while his friend was berated with questions. However that peace was ended one day by a female voice.

“Even in defeat you strike quite a figure.”
Jon’s eyes opened to meet the sapphire eyes of Jynessa Blackmont, her dark brown hair falling about her chest. She shared her mother and brother’s aquiline nose, though her skin was a paler olive than either. It seemed as though her family held a mix of a salty and stony Dornish traits King Daeron had observed, making her striking even among the Dornish ladies he’d seen.

“Thank you, Lady Jynessa,” he said with a small smile. “Though I assure you I’ve no need for pity.”

“There’s no pity in my praise,” she assured. She cast a glance to the gaggle of women fawning over Loras before turning back to Jon with a slanted smile. “I simply have a keener eye than most.”

“Keener?”

“To spot a man of interest,” she said with a nod. “As well as one who doesn’t likely share my interest in men of interest.”

“I don’t know what you mean, my lady.” Of course he did, but he couldn’t admit it.

“A poor jest,” she assured. “I meant no insult, only to say I take note of what I hear and observe beyond that.” Jynessa gave him an appraising look. “If I didn’t know better I would think you Dornish, if not relative to House Martell.”

Jon’s brow knit as he cocked his head. “Why is that?”

“You remind me of Prince Oberyn,” she offered. “Not in features, though your hair is maybe dark enough, but in how you fight compared to the little I’ve seen of him.”

“Perhaps I was born in Dorne,” Jon offered as he rose to his feet. “My father said so little of my birth I may well share a mother with one of Prince Oberyn’s Sand Snakes.”

“If they did not say you look so much like your father I may wonder if perhaps you were some lost prince,” Jynessa said with a laugh.

Edric turned away to hide his own smile while Jon nodded. “Aye, I might as well.”

“I’ve seen you face a dozen different knights since we’ve arrived,” she said looking to where Garlan had taken to sparring with Ser Myles Manwoody. “Have you tested yourself against the Prince yet?”

“Not yet,” he answered. “I hoped to speak with him, though I’m unsure how to approach him.”

“I hear he can be quick tongued,” she said with a small laugh. “In both senses, I suppose. Though I wonder if you’d enjoy either.”

Edric seemed confused, while Jon took a second to realize what she meant and shake his head. “Wit is enough.”

Seeming pleased with his answer, Jynessa stepped to his side, turning to face him as he did the same for her. “My brother, Perros, is squire to Ser Ryon Allyrion, whose son Ser Daemon Sand squired to Prince Oberyn. Perhaps I could be of assistance in helping you gain audience?”

That surprised Jon, who nodded. “That would be great, my lady.”

“Please, my lord, feel free to call me Jynessa.”

“Then please do the same for me.” Jon was certain she was a bit older than him, maybe only a few
years if that. It may have simply been how she held herself, but he somehow felt childish before her.

“Then I shall have my brother speak to Ser Daemon on your behalf, Jon.”

It seemed she did so as the next day he was approached by a handsome, strong jawed knight with light sandy brown hair and azure eyes wearing a surcoat baring the hand of House Allyrion.

“Ser Daemon Sand?” Jon said looking up from where he was practicing with Edric.

“Lord Snowfire,” the bastard knight said with a nod, shaking the young lord’s hand. “I’ve heard much of you since our arrival.”

“As I’ve heard a tale or two of you,” Jon said, remembering the few things Jynessa had told him of the Bastard of Godsgrace.

“Though some are hard to believe,” Daemon said with a nod to the flaming white sword on Jon’s surcoat, “I’ve seen you in the yard enough to know there’s some truth. Perhaps you would like to join us in our training one day when you’re not surrounded by flowered men?”

Jon knew enough of the animosity between Martell and Tyrell to nod. “I would appreciate the chance to test myself against other warriors of Dorne, Ser Daemon.”

The knight chuckled. “Let us hope you keep that enthusiasm while facing us, my lord.”

It was hard, but Jon felt he managed to keep it as he went the next day and found much of the Dornish retinue gathered to watch their prince spar with Ser Ryon Allyrion. He moved to stand with Perros Blackmont, who Edric spoke to while Jon observed the men in the ring, ignoring the few glances sent toward Jon.

Oberyn was definitely as skilled as he was flashy, twirling his spear as he backed away before sliding it behind him and thrusting at Ser Ryon’s shield. When the tip glanced off the hand painted across the front of the knight’s shield, Oberyn turned, swinging the spear back around, stepping back only to step forward and thrust high, looking a scorpion as his blunted spear slammed into the helm of the knight.

Once they backed away, Oberyn turned and found Jon among the crowd. “Ah, Lord Snowfire. It is an honor to have you here,” he said standing his spear vertical while making a show of bowing.

“It is an honor to be welcomed, Prince Oberyn,” Jon said with a nod.

“I must admit, I have hoped to face the hero of the Blackwater myself. Might I have your first match?”

“Would you be at your best, or shall I wait for you to recover?”

That made the prince grin. “Fear not, my lord, I have stamina enough for you.”

“So I’ve heard,” Jon nodded, turning to Edric, who handed him his helmet and shield along with a blunted version of his sword with a simpler hilt.

“And I’ve heard much of you, Lord White Wolf,” Oberyn said as Jon made his way toward him, lowering his visor. “They say you’re one of the finest swords in King’s Landing. Though they also call this city great.”
“And they call you a viper,” Jon said as they began to circle one another, “yet I see only a man.”

“And a viper would seem only a snake to a naive boy.”

“Or just kindle to the flame,” said Jon, dashing forward.

Oberyn laughed, sliding back to keep some distance as he thrust at the lord. Jon took the hit on his shield, thrusting it forward and tilting it so the spearhead slid past him as he thrust his own sword at the prince. It hit Oberyn’s spear-pierced-sun shield, and when he made to step back Jon pushed forward, slashing low to make him lower his shield. That left him open for a back swing at the prince’s face, which might have opened his mouth if Jon hadn’t stopped the swing.

His lips twisted in a grin, Oberyn bowed his head and backed away. Once they were at a distance, Oberyn made his move first, putting Jon on the defensive. The moment Jon made to close their gap, Oberyn moved to the side or back, thrusting at Jon again and forcing him to keep his distance. When he managed to catch a strike against his shield, Jon moved to rush in, but found Oberyn let his shield hang from his arm while drawing the spear back with both hands. In a blur it had slid back and thrust forward, straight into his pauldron while Jon moved to swing at Oberyn.

It might have been enough to win the round, but both knew it was just as likely a Pyrrhic victory that might have cost Oberyn his neck had it been a true battle. Once they separated, Oberyn put aside his spear and took a sword. That would earn Oberyn cleaner victories, though only two before Jon claimed all of his.

He noticed much of the humor had left the faces of the onlookers by the time he parried Oberyn’s sword and thrust his shield into his arm, knocking it back so Jon could slash beneath it. Edric seemed to be the only one smiling, proud to see the man to whom he squired best a prince of Dorne and one of the better warriors in the realm.

“For a man of the north you’ve a fiery will, my friend,” Oberyn said as he held his blunted sword and extended his hand to Jon.

“I’m not all ice, Prince Oberyn,” he assured, shaking his hand, “I’ve some fire in me as well.”

Oberyn flashed him a sly smile. “I hope to see more of it in time, Lord Jon.”

“Perhaps we should try this again sometime?” Jon offered.

Oberyn had moved back to where Ellaria watched them, his paramour eyeing Jon after kissing Oberyn deeply. Turning back to Jon, Oberyn licked his lip and smirked. “I look forward to it, my lord of ice and fire.”

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

Robb wore a grin as Sansa and Arya took turns trying to squeezer the life from him. Once they failed their mother took a turn after trying with their father.

His mother wore confusion as she looked to the tall, muscular young man wearing a brown doublet and breeches beneath a golden yellow surcoat with a black stag across the chest. He had thick black hair that ended past his ears, a trimmed beard and bright blue eyes that took in the group that arrived with the Stark women. The young man seemed uncomfortable, adjusting his sleeves slightly.

“Who is this?” Catelyn asked on the behalf of many.
“This is Gendry Baratheon,” Robb said turning to let Gendry step forward, patting his shoulder. “Natural born son of Robert, legitimized as his heir and Lord of Storm’s End.”

That drew a few shocked gasps, which they had expected when deciding to make his identity known.

“He could cause problems,” Dom had said when Ned revealed his identity to them.

“He’s good,” Ned assured. “All he wants is to wield a hammer at a forge.”

“Then why not let him keep his identity unknown and let him be apprentice to Mikken?” asked Robb.

Ned had sighed. “Because it could give the Baratheons and Florents less to hold over us if we have someone we could name as Lord of Storm’s End. You’ve read their letter, they think they are doing us a favor by seeking your aid. Better to let the boy know the truth and take an advantage from them when we meet with them.”

Dom and Robb had shared the opinion that Ned was more intent on telling Gendry the truth than using him, but after what he’d been through with Jon they could understand his preferring to be honest. When they met with Gendry to tell him the truth, the boy had denied it stubbornly, but as Ned explained how he found him, Gendry seemed to accept it.

“You think the one who left me was Varys?” Gendry asked while staring at the ground.

“I’m almost certain of it,” Ned had told him.

“My father was King Robert?” Gendry looked to them, blinking before pouting. “Are you going to use me to try and take the throne or somethin’? Cause I don’t want it.”

Relief took Ned’s smile as he shook his head. “No, but we were hoping you might be willing to take rule of Storm’s End. With Robert and his brothers gone, it would be yours by right.”

Gendry shook his head warily. “I don’t know anything ‘bout being a lord. All I know is swingin’ a hammer.”

“Which seems to be all Robert knew,” Dom said with a smirk, earning a snicker from Robb and a frown from Ned.

“We could help you, Gendry,” Ned told him. “You wouldn’t have to give up working in a forge either. You could use your place as lord to build the grandest forge in the Seven Kingdoms and make House Baratheon into one that will be known throughout history for it’s craft.”

That seemed to appeal to the young man, though after a moment he shook his head. “Why me? Why tell me now?”

“Because your good aunt Selyse Florent is coming with your cousin, Shireen Baratheon, and your half brother, Edric Storm,” Robb told him. “They mean to seek an alliance with us, likely through having me legitimize Edric and marry him to Sansa or Arya. Having you take his place as heir would take that away from them. If we have our own ruler of Storm’s End, it should make it easier to make them agree to join us.”

“Assuming they don’t take it as an insult,” said Dom.

“I’ve heard Edric is a fine lad,” Ned assured, knowing the hint of bitterness in Dom’s tone came
from his doubt of bastard brothers. “And all have said Shireen is a sweet girl. It is more the elders who would be of worry, but we would handle negotiations.”

“They don’t have any other choices,” said Robb. “Unless they mean to go seek the Greyjoys or whoever they choose as king.”

And with that Gendry went from a bastard to lord of one of the great houses of Westeros. He was a bit awkward in his greetings, but was polite to all he spoke with. Then he saw Arya, or more accurately he saw the sword sheathed at her side.

“I know that,” he said pointing to the thin blade. “I helped forge it.”

“You did?” Arya asked with surprise.

“I worked at Tobho Mott’s shop,” he said with a nod. “Your brother, Jon Snow, he had it made.”

Jon’s name garnered a few odd looks, though Arya beamed. “Does that mean you’re the one who made all of his armor?”

“Some of it,” Gendry nodded.

Sansa felt a bit put out seeing her sister easily pick up a conversation with the new lord, though she and Jeyne later laughed it off. “Of course it was over a sword,” Jeyne had snickered.

Still, Sansa had found herself feeling left out as she watched her sister spend her days in Riverrun training with Syrio while her mother tried to get her back into her old routine. She was a woman now, flowered and growing, yet her mother treated her like she was the youngest while her sister ran around gathering bruises. Sansa felt like she was everything she feared. Everything her sister said in her worst moments.

“You Grace,” Lucas Blackwood said grimly, “we’ve news you need to hear.”

“Of course,” Robb said, leading them to a room Lord Wyman had prepared for them as a war room while Jaime Lannister was taken to the dungeons.

Arya and Sansa were sent to their chambers while Olyvar Frey gathered lords for Robb’s council. While waiting, Catelyn shared the first bit of bad news, telling him of Hoster Tully’s death shortly after he left Riverrun. The next came with the lords there gathered to hear of Robett Glover and Helman Tallhart taking it upon themselves to attack Duskendale, apparently out of vengeance against the ironborn taking Torrhen’s Square and Deepwood Motte. Harrion Karstark joined them, losing nearly a third of his infantry in the process.

When they supped that night it was hard not to notice Robb keeping to himself. Sansa tried to speak with him, but he was clearly disinterested. To her surprise he seemed to brighten some when Dacey Mormont stopped briefly to speak with Ned and him before returning to sit with her mother, Maege.

As a child Sansa had looked to her mother as an idol she could learn from, but that had faded in the days since their return. She saw what people thought of her mother. They showed respect to her when in her presence, but when not under her gaze that was gone. Many of the people of the riverlands blamed her for their misery as much as the Lannisters.

Even as they ate and Sansa looked about the hall, she saw the different women gathered and found herself questioning if she wanted to be like her mother. She seemed happy sat beside her father, but when he was spoken to by someone else she had no one else. Even before she was blamed for this,
Sansa never knew her mother to have many friends. Whatever she became, she didn’t want to be alone. She knew she couldn’t be queen now, but she still wanted to be someone people looked to with respect.

Sansa knew she could never be like the Mormont women, she wasn’t a warrior like any of them. Arya and Brienne were more like them. She’d never felt weaker and more hopeless than she had watching her sister spar with their brother the next day, a proud grin on his face as she landed a blow on his stomach. It felt as though everything she’d ever teased Sansa about would be true. Sansa would end up marrying some lord, having his children and little else. She would never be anyone important. She would never be queen. The best she could hope for would be her children might be more important than her.

Shortly after arriving at White Harbor, they gathered to greet the Baratheon party at the harbor. While coming off the boat, many of their party seemed to stop upon seeing Gendry stood beside Robb and Ned. They hadn’t expected them to already have a Baratheon of their own.

She noticed that the slight man with a weathered face who introduced himself as Davos Seaworth looked as though he’d seen a ghost. The big eared, sharp nosed Selyse Florent looked a mixture of angry and fearful upon spotting Gendry’s Baratheon surcoat. Little Shireen with her scarred face had her blue eyes grow with interest while behind her Edric Storm tilted his head, looking wary of the new Baratheon.

All the knights and lords who came through seemed unsettled by Gendry, all but the beautiful woman with hair the color of burnished copper. Taller than many knights, she was slender and graceful and held herself with distinguish she seemed more a queen than Selyse ever could. It was easy to see the men also revered her more than they did the queen or any of her retinue. The red woman held the respect of most of the people who arrived with her, and Sansa found herself wondering how it was possible she seemed more regal and grand than the woman who had been queen.

As they came ashore and exchanged introductions, the woman named Melisandre cast her burning gaze upon Sansa. For a moment she felt as if the Red Woman were searching her soul before a knowing smile took her lips, and Sansa fought back a shiver despite no wind blowing a chill through her.

“What are you doing?” Arya asked.

That made Sansa realized she had grabbed her sister’s hand, and felt a fool. “I thought I saw a bug,” she said taking her hand back and looking down.

At supper Sansa found herself looking around again, watching the Mormonts laugh with lords while her mother quietly speaking with her father and Selyse sat beside her brother and daughter. Neither had any but their family to speak with. The only other woman sat at the high table with the Florent and Baratheons was the red woman, who spoke with many throughout the night. Many of whom looked to her reverently, even more so than most looked to Robb.

That discrepancy kept her up that night until finally she decided to leave her room and make her way down to the kennels. If it had only been the direwolves they might have been able to keep them in their chambers, two more wolves had joined Nymeria’s pack, so they were kept together.

It was there she heard an odd scratching noise repeating itself before coming upon Dom sat in the yard with Ghost sat before him. He had a dagger in hand which he ran across a whetstone again and again.
“He came back from the dead,” Dom said to the wolf between strokes of the whetstone, “he’ll get out of there alive.”

“Ser Domeric?” Sansa asked quietly.

He stopped to turn toward her. “Lady Sansa? What are you doing up?”

“I couldn’t sleep,” she said making her way forward. “What of you?”

“I thought to speak with Ghost,” he said with a smirk before waving his dagger. “I had to sharpen this and thought to get some fresh air, so took Ghost for company.”

“Could I join you?”

Domeric nodded, moving aside to leave her room on the small bench he occupied. She sat beside him, watching him sheath his dagger before looking to her. “What’s kept you up?”

Sansa was quiet for a moment, reaching over to pet Ghost. “Do you think I’m pathetic?”

“Pathetic?” Dom thought for a moment and shook his head. “No. Not in any way I could think of.”

“Then why do I feel it sometimes?”

“I couldn’t truly say, my lady,” Domeric offered sympathetically. “What’s made you think this?”

“My sister trains all day to fight from a renown swordsman while I study under my mother, whose greatest deeds are birthing a king and starting the war that made him king,” she said with a frown. “Is that what I’m to be? A woman whose only claim is her failures and whom she births?”

Dom considered saying that wasn’t all Catelyn was known for, but couldn’t say what else there might be. Instead, he looked to Sansa. “You don’t need to follow your mother’s example. It’s easy to obey and harder to challenge orders and do what is best for you, but sometimes you just have to endure it. If you want to change, then you can.”

“Then what do I change to though?” Sansa huffed. “I can’t be a fighter like Arya. I don’t want to join the Silent Sisters. What should I do then?”

“The easiest way it to try and emulate someone you look up to,” Dom said after a moment of thought. “Who do you wish you could be?”

Thinking, Sansa found herself frowning at the thought of the women she looked up to. Beyond her mother there was Shella and Jonquil, two known only for their romance with their beloved knights. There was also Queen Naerys Targaryen, but again that was as much for her tragic love of Aemon the Dragonknight. She certainly didn’t want to end up like her, in love with one man she could never be with while wed to a miserable man who spread lies about her and her son. Cersei had seemed so strong and powerful when she first saw the queen, but the more she knew her the more she pitied the woman, and in time despised her for her part in harming Bran.

“I don’t know,” Sansa admitted with a frown.

Dom got to his feet, and Ghost with him. “Think on who you wish you could be and try to be like them. Most likely you won’t, but you’ll be closer than you are now and might find whatever it is you want.”

Rising, Sansa asked, “Who did you look to?”
“When I was a child and all I cared for was being a knight it was Ser Ryam Redwyne who I looked to, or Brandon the Breaker for fighting back the Night’s King and his corpse queen,” Dom said with a laugh. “For a time I admired Viserys Targaryen, second of his name, though lately I find myself thinking to Criston the Kingmaker and even Ser Brynden Rivers.”

Sansa snickered. “I had thought perhaps someone grim if not all gallant knights.”

“I try to chose men who have things I wish I could,” he said somberly, “only I would do them better since I know of their failures.”

Chapter End Notes

I feel like Ned’s death shielded Cat from a lot of disrespect, so without it her place as Hoster’s daughter isn’t enough to make the riverland people not blame her. Plus in general the only people close to friends she seems to have are those literally paid to obey her and a creepy guy obsessed with her. Realizing all of this and not having her mother as some martyr figure is striping that part of Sansa, but without something to fill it she looks to the next great source of power, which happens to also have red hair.

I’m sure some see it as a hint at shipping, but the scene with Dom talking with Sansa isn’t meant like that necessarily. I made a list of all the relationships I want to build toward in the end, and that list has changed multiple times. So very little is solid in that sense until it happens.

I had some fun thinking of who Dom would look and aspire to be like. I figured their reasons should be simple enough, though I suppose I could explain my thinking more if it isn’t.

Next Chapter: Robb receives news and comes to terms with the Baratheons. Jon meets with captains, sups with Tyrells, and becomes a man before becoming a beast.
Stark Dreams

Chapter Summary

Robb receives news and comes to terms with the Baratheons. Jon meets with captains, sups with Tyrells, and becomes a man before becoming a beast.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Robb first had a chance to speak with his father about his conversations with Jaime Lannister, Ned was shocked to hear not only had his son deduced his purpose but made use of it by writing to Tywin with new terms for Jaime’s release. Seeing his father agree with his terms, Robb felt pride in his decision.

That joy in his father’s pride withered when his mother arrived with news from the south, and died when Tywin’s answer came. He found even as he took Dacey to bed that night he couldn’t quell his anger in the joy of her.

“What has you so worked up?” She asked rising from the furs after laying beside him and recouping. “Duskendale?”

“Ice,” Robb said sitting up.

“What about it?” she asked. “Isn’t it in King’s Landing?”

“I sent terms to Tywin, but it was too late.”

“Too late for what?”

Robb sighed, brushing back his hair. “They melted it down into two swords.”

“If they reforged it then maybe you can reforge it into Ice?”

“Maybe, but it wouldn’t be the same,” said Robb. “Though I guess nothing will be the same anyway.”

She looked sad as she nodded. “Probably not, but that doesn’t it can’t be good.”

His hand stroked her cheek, making her look to him. “Is something wrong?”

Dacey pressed her hand to his chest and smiled as she straddled him. “No.”

Going to greet the Baratheon party, Robb kept Gendry close. The shock on the faces of the Florents and Baratheon supporters when they arrived left Robb feeling anxious as he went to meet with them.

After introducing himself and his family, he continued, “This is Gendry Baratheon, eldest son of Robert Baratheon.”

Gendry gave the group a nod, his eyes meeting those of his half brother, who stared at him in
confusion. “It’s an honor to meet you all.”

“He has the look,” said Alester Florent.

“So does half the realm,” Axell Florent said dismissively.

“And Robert took enough women they may all be his,” the silver haired Alester retorted with a laugh. “Gendry, who was your mother?”

“She died when I was little, so I don’t remember much of her,” answered Gendry. “As far as I know or remember she worked at an ale house and had blonde hair.”

“So low born,” Axell said with a glance to Edric, who wore a sympathetic frown.

“But still Robert’s eldest son,” Eddard said before the stout Florent knight could dismiss Gendry. Ned knew of an elder daughter, and hoped to get to her as well, but she was in the Vale and they hadn’t heard anything from there in some time.

“My lords and ladies,” Wyman Manderly said with a jovial smile, “please, let us return to New Castle and we can begin our discussions.”

That was enough to start them moving again, the group departing the harbor for New Castle, the Manderly’s seat within the city. It was there that King Robb Stark, Lord Eddard Stark, Ser Brynden Tully, Ser Domeric Bolton and Ser Patrek Mallister sat with Selyse Baratheon, Ser Alester Florent, Ser Axell Florest, Ser Davos Seaworth and Melisandre of Asshai.

Negotiations began simply enough with each saying what they wanted, or at least what they were willing to admit they wanted. As it stood, the Baratheon forces wouldn’t be much of a boon. Their forces were near fifteen hundred, most of whom were Florent men, some of which were left behind to hold Dragonstone.

They had little reason to take them in, but one thousand men could be of use somewhere, and Robb saw potential in other areas. They could tie House Baratheon to House Stark beyond Gendry’s loyalty to his father. They could secure allies among the few houses of the Crownlands and Stormlands that remained among the Florents of the Reach. But most of all, Robb wanted Davos in his command.

He’d heard tale of him from Dom and a few others, enough to know the man knew how to sail. He would have some advice on building and manning a fleet, and if he could convince him, he might even be of help to Jon. Then there was a more immediate task which Davos seemed perfect to undertake.

For that Robb accepted most of the Baratheon’s terms once they swore fealty to him and joined their cause. Shireen was to wed Bran once both were of age and Edric would be legitimizd as a Baratheon and squired to Ned. Robb also included Davos’s son Devan, who had squired to Stannis, making him squire for Domeric Bolton.

Robb even met with the pirate Salladhor Saan and came to an agreement to keep him on their side. At first it seemed he might leave once Robb made it clear he wouldn’t let him continue to claim his thieving trade ships as taking taxes in his name. What kept him was promising the Lyseni pirate a bounty on any ship he captured from the Iron Throne and brought back to become a part of the Northern Fleet. It seemed doubtful he would be enough to keep his loyalty for long, but was better than nothing, which was about all he had from Stannis’ promises.

After supping with their allies, Robb left for his chambers but later that night he woke to find
himself looking up at Dacey as she sat in the courtyard near the kennels. She was stroking her fingers through his hair, her smile sad as she sniffed and wiped her cheek with her free hand.

“It’s a good thing,” she said to him, “I know it is. But he won’t like it, will he?”

He wanted to ask what was wrong, but licked her cheek, tasting the salt in her tears as he realized what was happening. Where he was. Who he was.

“I have to tell him though,” she said stroking his head again. “It could be his heir until he finds some lady to put another one in.”

Robb sat up with a gasp, his mind tracing back on what he’d seen as he shook his head, telling himself once again, “I’m not a wolf.” It became a chant whenever he had dreams like that.

But hearing a knock at his door, he wasn’t surprised to find Dacey on the other side, nor did her somber expression surprise him. Once inside, he watched her move toward the hearth and thought on what he’d dreamed. They had proven true in the past, and now he wasn’t sure if he wanted it to or not, but when she turned to look at him he knew it would.

“Robb,” she said quietly, “I’ve not had my moon blood for two months.”

“That long?” he asked, closing the gap between them.

“I knew what you’d say and what will come of it,” she answered frowning.

“This is wonderful,” he remarked with a laugh as he stepped to her, wrapping his arm around her waist and placing a hand to her stomach. “We should tell everyone tomorrow. We could wed in Winterfell.”

“No,” she said stepping back, taking his arms from her. “We won’t.”

Robb’s brow knit. “Why not?”

Dacey sighed, seeming to steel herself before meeting his gaze. “Would you give your crown for me?” Seeing his confusion she asked, “If you weren’t king would you give up Winterfell? Let your brother take your place as heir?”

“What are you-”

“That’s what you’re asking me to do,” she told him. “I’m heir to my mother. I’m to be Lady of Bear Island. Alysane would be a fine, but I was raised for it. It’s my responsibility. I won’t just give it up so I could wed you and be your queen and have your babies.”

“I’m not asking you to give it up.”

“Of course you wouldn’t,” Dacey said somberly, “but I would still need to.”

Robb was shaken, stepping forward and offering almost pleadingly, “You’d be queen.”

“Which is more than I would ever want,” she said solemnly.

“So what becomes of…” He looked to her stomach.

“I don’t know,” she said holding a hand to it. “If you can’t find a queen, or she can’t give you heirs, then they could be, otherwise you’ll get your heirs and this one will be mine.”
“They’d be a bastard,” Robb said quietly, thinking of how even as a lord’s bastard his brother still bore the ills of that.

“They’d be a Mormont,” said Dacey, “same as I or my sisters. It’s not law that made your father name Jon as Snow and not Stark. He did it to separate him from you and your siblings. Our child wouldn’t be separate.”

Robb frowned, realizing he’d never thought of it, but she was right. The bastard surnames were a custom. How things might have been different for Jon if he’d been named Stark rather than Snow, but even then his mother would have still hated him. Robb’s child might be a bastard, but they wouldn’t be raised one. They’d be the opposite of Jon, and yet Robb would be glad if his child was anything like his uncle.

“If you think it best,” Robb relented, “but I’d ask to have some hand in their life.”

“You’d be their king,” she offered.

“I’d be their father,” he retorted. “And by the time they can recognize that, I likely won’t be king.”

Dacey furrowed her brow. “What do you mean?”

“If I can’t trust you with this, then I can never hope to trust another.”

“With what?”

“With the knowledge that Jon Snow isn’t my brother but my cousin,” he said to her shock, “born to my aunt Lyanna after she was married in secret to Rhaegar Targaryen. That my cousin, Aegon Targaryen owns a dragon which waits at the wall with his uncles Aemon and Benjen. That once he’s gathered enough allies and we think it’s time, he’s going to raise banners against those in King’s Landing.”

Dacey backed toward a chair and sat down. “He has a dragon?”

“I saw it, touched it,” he said nodding while sitting across from her. “And as Torrhen knelt for the first King Aegon, I shall kneel to the sixth.”

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

“You sure we can trust them?” Jon asked following Aurane through the streets.

“As much as you can trust any man not bound by blood or friendship,” Aurane offered with a glance back to Jon, Edric and Thoros.

The Red Priest had to join them, as he had agreed to sailing ahead with the ships to see their safe arrival at the harbor near Starfall. He would also use the chance to scout the area around the Stepstones and try to get an idea of what they’ll need to take it over.

Aurane took them to meet with the men he’d gathered with some help from Mace Tyrell, forming a crew for each of his ships. Jon made sure to learn the names of as many as he could, especially the captains and officers. They were all either lowborn or from smaller houses like Anthor Pyre, Colren Parge and Javer Bridges, who would be captaining the Red Claw, Princess Rhaenys and Seahorse, respectively.

They spent most of the day meeting his crews and letting them familiarize themselves with the ships they were to man. Each seemed thankful for the opportunity, and showed little concern at
missing the royal wedding, showing that perhaps none were particularly loyal to the Lannisters or Baratheons. Hinting at his intent with the Stepstones was simple enough to mask as a joke to take it for Westeros. To his surprise, none seemed stunned by the suggestion.

“I may have hinted at there being a chance you might seek your own path,” Aurane said with a slick smile. “I hope I didn’t assume too much.”

“No,” said Jon, “it’s for the best. Perhaps with some luck I can convert some of the men there to join my company.”

“It would be simpler to wipe the pirates out and build from there,” said Aurane.

“I’ll still give them a chance to prove themselves loyal,” Jon said moving to the railing along the deck of the Red Claw, “but if they don’t then they’ll lose their heads and I’ll find new captains for their ships, if they aren’t ash at the bottom of the sea.”

Once they were done Jon went to sup with the Tyrells and thank Mace for his part in choosing his crews.

“Think nothing of it,” Mace said with a nod. “If we’re to make this work you’ll need good men manning them, though I don’t know if I’ll be able to help any you take while at sea, I can at least help man any you look to buy.”

“For now,” said Olenna from her usual seat. That made them nod grimly, knowing the city would be chaotic after Joffrey’s death. “Come sit, dear,” Olenna said patting the chair beside her, across from Margaery.

“Of course, my lady,” Jon said with a smile pushing back a smirk to answer Loras silently shaking his head. Ever since finding out the truth of Jon and his plan, Olenna made sure to have him sit beside her whenever he joined them. Sometimes she would ask of his day and check if he enjoyed their meals, seeming more considerate with him then she was with others.

“Beware, my friend,” Garlan warned after supper one evening, “if she tries to play your mother any more I fear she might seek birthing you.”

Jon had simply smiled, having figured out what she was trying early enough, though it was Thoros who made him see one possible reason why. “You’ve a dragon. It’s easier to befriend you now and make you care for them, so once you have the beast at your side they need not fear your wrath.”

Whatever the reason, Jon let her continue her game rather than confront her just yet. “I hear you’ve been battering the men of Dorne,” Ollena said eyeing him. “How do you find them?”

“Same as most,” Jon answered. “Some are playful or showy, others earnest or quiet. They’ve all been friendly and welcoming.”

“Some more than others,” Loras said with a snicker.

Margaery smiled. “I did see you out the other day with Lady Blackmont, though I didn’t want to interrupt what seemed an intimate moment.”

Jon shook his head. “I don’t know what you mean, my lady.”

“How many times must I insist on Margaery,” she sighed, “or shall I call you Lord Jon as well?”

“Forgive me,” he said bowing his head. 
“Only if you speak truly,” she said with a teasing smile. “I saw you two together. What was it that had you so captivated? Your topic, or your company? Do you even recall the topic?”

“How could I without knowing what you speak of?”

“You were walking the gardens while she held a flower,” Margaery answered, and Jon remembered the conversation.

“Ah, she had just come to ask how I found my time with Prince Oberyn. She heard from her brother that I had won my match with him the day before. I’d been going to ask Thoros to eat with me since Edric was off training with some Dornish squires.” Jon said, leaving out that he’d asked Edric to do so under the guise of wanting to better know his Dornish brethren while hopefully gauging each, “but I ended up walking with Lady Jynessa and invited her instead.”

“An improvement in company over the red priest, I’m sure,” Olenna said with a smile. “Where he would spend the meal speaking of his burning lord, she surely spent hers trying not to speak of her burning loins.”

“Mother,” Mace said shaking his head after a glance to Margaery.

“She’s a grown woman,” Olenna said waving her hand, “she’s felt it a time or two by now, I’m sure.”

“Grandmother,” Margaery said shooting her a sheepish look.

Olenna shrugged and looked to Jon. “You’re a handsome lad. I’m sure this girl felt it as well.”

“I couldn’t say,” Jon forced himself to say, “but you probably saw us walking back. She’d picked a flower from a bush on the way back to her chambers.”

“Did you take her to bed as well?” Garlan asked with a laugh.

“No,” said Jon. “Of course not.” He noticed that garnered smiles and smirks from the others. “Why?”

“Did you kiss her?” Margaery asked innocently.

“No.”

“You should have,” she said reaching over to pat his hand. “The way I saw her looking at you, she’d have enjoyed it.”

Jon thought on that when he ran into her after meeting with Thoros the next afternoon. He found her with her handmaiden Teya, who left as Jynessa made her way to Jon.

“Coming from Flea Bottom?” Jynessa asked.

“I’ve found a shop or two I prefer with friends,” said Jon. “I could show you sometime if you’d like.”

“How did you find them?” Jynessa asked.

He told her of Barristan sending him out to learn the layout of the city and realized they had started to walk, though he wasn’t sure where to. It seemed she didn’t either, the two simply walking as they spoke. Jon told her of the time he found a pair of dogs fighting over scraps and bought some food he ended up sharing with them during one of his first times out alone. He told her of the time
he helped a lost girl get home despite barely knowing the way, and was treated to a meal by her thankful mother.

“She was hoping you would throw aside her meal and eat her instead,” Jynessa said with a laugh.

“This was years ago,” he said coming to a stop to look out on the blackwater. “I was barely here a few months.”

“Perhaps she was being nice,” she relented, “but a woman so desperate to thank you likely hoped for more. Especially once she saw the comely squire her daughter had brought her.”

“More a nervous boy.”

“One she’ll regret not taking to bed until the end of her days, I’m sure,” Jynessa teased, turning to Jon with a smirk.

“A pity she’ll never have a chance to make amends,” he said with a playful nod. “Though there are others I’d prefer not live with such regret.”

Jynessa arched her brow as he looked to her, holding back a laugh at his sudden forward comment. Stepping toward him she placed a hand on a stone rail as she met his gaze. “Such as?”

He made himself lean in and press his lips to hers, his hand sliding through her hair to hold her head as she slipped an arm around him and leaned into it. Though he tried not to, it was hard not to compare it to his kiss with Myrcella. Jynessa wasted no time brushing her tongue to his, something Myrcella had been too shy or inexperienced to try in their few kisses. It was passionate, lacking the nervousness that had been there anytime Jon kissed Myrcella. Even the taste of her lips was different from Myrcella, though he imagined that had more to do with her coming from a meal much as he had.

When they finally broke away, Jynessa wore a grin. “I’d been waiting for that.”

“What else have you been waiting for?” Jon asked, pressing his lips to hers again for a second before pulling back and meeting her sapphire eyes.

Staring into his dark gaze Jynessa started to slide her hand down his chest until he grabbed her wrist. She blinked up at him and was surprised to find a heat there she thought impossible for a man of the north.

That heat lingered even as they returned to his chambers and he watched her strip. She laughed as he lifted her and set her upon the bed. She seemed shocked when he kissed down her body and between her legs, remembering what Tyrion had told him of giving them pleasure. For all he’d imagined it, now was his chance to put it to use.

After hearing so much of it and having many speak of it as some grand thing, Jon was surprised by how simple it seemed at times. It had always seemed something where he’d have to work and prove himself much like he felt at times in the yard, but he felt none of that in bed with Jynessa. It was fun finding out what she liked, near as much as finding out what he liked, which she seemed to enjoy as well.

It made him wonder if any of the people who spoke of it had ever laid with a woman before. They spoke of women tasting either like the greatest fruit in the world or something he had to work through, but it was neither. Every aspect of his time with her was nothing like he’d heard. She didn’t lay there and squawk or squeal like some spoke of, and she wasn’t some banshee screeching so they heard her in Essos.
By the time they had finished he felt exhausted, sinking into his mattress while she turned and lay against him so her head rested on his chest while her feet hanged off the edge. “You’re a quick leaner,” she said looking to him.

“I’ve had good teachers,” he said stroking her hair.

“More than I?”

“Advice counts, doesn’t it?”

“Not if it’s from other green boys,” she scoffed.

“As far from that as I could imagine,” he said with a laugh.

Getting to her feet, Jynessa went about cleaning herself as best she could before looking for her clothes. Seeing Jon join her she shook her head. “You don’t need to-”

“I won’t leave you without an escort,” he said while pulling on his small clothes and breeches.

Jynessa seemed surprised, looking down with an almost guilty smile as she continued getting dressed. Though he wasn’t much help, Jon still tried to help her with her hair as best he could. Once she was set they left his chambers and he escorted her to hers, stopping outside the door to share a final kiss before she went inside.

Jon wasn’t sure what would come of this, but he didn’t want to think of that right now. He spent over a year fretting every day over the future, it was a relief to simply enjoy the moment. She might not end up his queen should he take the throne, but he told himself there was little wrong with relishing his time with Jynessa.

Yet walking to his room he found himself frowning at the thought of him enjoying it too much and ending up some bizarre mixture of not only Robert, but one of his lesser namesakes. He’d always focused on Aegon the Conqueror, Aegon the Dragonbane, Aegon the Unlikely, but what if he became another Aegon the Usurper or even Aegon the Unworthy. Jon couldn’t risk sleeping around and fathering a bastard, but he knew he wouldn’t wed Jynessa. As much as he had enjoyed it, he found himself feeling bad for taking advantage of her while not intending to wed her. She was nice and smart, but Jon didn’t see her sat beside him on the throne when he tried to picture himself ruling.

Half the time it wasn’t even from the Iron Throne, as more than once he’d considered having Bloodwing melt it all. He often thought of himself alone upon the throne with his friends around him, but every so often there was a queen with golden hair and emerald eyes. An impossible dream that left him somber as he returned to his room, the anger boiling inside of him that night leaving him with shifting dreams.

One moment he was running through the woods, leaping upon a stag and ripping out its throat. Once he had his fill he sniffed at the air and rather than head back, he continued forward.

The next he was falling toward the ground where he saw people fighting, slamming his body into a large man in bronze scale armor. His foot pressed into the man’s chest, he yelled in anger, watching the man’s face twist in horror as scarlet flames enveloped him.

His eyes rose as he heard a clang and saw his uncle Benjen parry the strike of a man who went to strike the burly Jeor Mormont who lay upon the ground with his left hand laying near his feet. Jon felt the chest of the man beneath him collapse as he pushed off it and soared toward the widling attacking his uncle, his claws digging into the man’s raised arm a moment before he roared and
melted his helmet across his head while Benjen rushed past him and slashed through another trying to strike him.

“Bloodwing,” Benjen called to him, but it wasn’t him who flew up and roared, blowing scarlet streaked flames upon the bronze armored wildlings.

Jon suddenly woke gasping and covered in sweat as he looked to see the sun shining into his room as a knock came from the door. “One moment,” Jon called out, realizing he’d overslept.

Thinking back on his dreams he decided to write to his uncles that afternoon, hoping that was just an odd dream and not as real as it had felt.

Chapter End Notes

The opening is a bit before the end of last chapter, as this is kind of Robb’s perspective of the whole thing compared to Sansa’s last chapter.

It'll be a bit before anyone else finds out about Dacey, so no reactions from Catelyn, Ned or the girls just yet.

Next Chapter: The Starks reunite in Winterfell, where Robb speaks with a prisoner and learns of the attack on the Wall. Jon attends the royal wedding.
The Starks reunite in Winterfell, where Robb speaks with a prisoner and learns of the attack on the Wall. Jon attends the royal wedding.

The first time Ned had returned to Winterfell after his time at the Vale he’d been torn between the joy of being home and the disappointment of having left his friend. The next time he returned he did so as it’s Lord with his sister’s child in his arms. After that he’d returned with a ward he hoped could be more than a prisoner. The last had been to force that same boy out, but now Ned felt a sense of relief as he led his family through the gates of Winterfell.

For the first time in near two years, the Starks were all within the walls of Winterfell, bar his brother at the Wall and his Targaryen nephew in King’s Landing. And then there was Ghost, who he hadn’t seen since shortly before their departure from White Harbor. He’d been concerned the wolf might be harmed, but Robb and Arya assured him their direwolves would know.

Rickon stumbled while running as fast as he could to his mother while Hodor carried Bran toward them. Once Rickon released Catelyn, who wiped at her cheeks and rose to hug Bran, the little wolf scampered over to Robb, who took a knee to greet him. After he’d hugged them each, Catelyn was surprised to see her youngest hurry to the side of a tall, lean woman with shaggy brown hair.

“Thank you for caring for my brothers,” Robb told the wildling Osha.

“They played a part as well,” she said nodding toward a pair of short, slim siblings with brown hair and green eyes.

While Robb went to speak with the Reeds, Ned watched Bran exchanging hugs with his sisters. He saw the boy glancing nervously toward the Baratheon party that joined them, in particular Shireen, who was busy looking around the keep from atop her pony. Ned wondered if perhaps the boy already had some attraction to her, or if perhaps he knew what they had decided. Even Shireen didn’t know just yet, her mother having decided to tell her once they arrived in Winterfell.

After making their introductions, Luwin pulled aside Robb and Ned, showing them a letter he’d received the day before. Handing it back, Robb told Luwin to let everyone settle but tell the lords and captains to meet in the Grand Hall that night after supper.

When he didn’t make for his own quarters, Catelyn asked where he was going and Robb answered, “To speak to a prisoner.”

In the cells of Winterfell Theon had sat for weeks ignoring the world around him. He had failed everyone in every way, and if not for the manacles keeping him bound he might have simply bashed his head into the iron bars until he stopped caring and breathing. Instead he sat with his head slumped forward wishing he could stop thinking about it all again and again.

Just as he was starting to feel like he could simply fade away and die he heard the guards reverently say in surprise, “Your Grace.”
Theon’s head rose to find Robb and Ned approaching his cell with Grey Wind at their heels. Ned opened the gate and Grey Wind stepped inside first, followed by Ned and finally Robb, whose jaw was set as his eyes narrowed upon Theon. Though he turned his gaze to the floor, Theon still felt their disappointment and anger.

“If you were another man, I might just have Grey Wind rip out your throat,” Robb told him quietly. The direwolf growled, stepping forward.

Theon stepped back and turned his head. “I’m a prince,” Theon said raising his chin but still not looking at them. “I’m too valuable not to be traded back.”

“Traded to who?” asked Robb. “Your father is dead.” Theon turned to him with shock as he continued, “The ironborn have left to hold a Kingsmoot and choose his replacement. Why should the new king want you when no one else does?”

Theon’s head sank again as he trembled and shook his head. After a long silence he looked to Robb. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.

“So am I,” Robb said somberly. “I’m sorry I sent you there instead of someone I could trust. I’m sorry I ever thought of you as my brother.”

Theon felt his eyes burn as he shook his head. “I-I never wanted to hurt-”

“But you did,” Robb interrupted with a shout. “You betrayed us! You betrayed me. You murdered people all to act like someone you never could be.” Stepping toward Theon, Robb saw him shift back slightly as if afraid Robb might strangle him. “Maybe a life at the Wall could help you figure out who you are. And if you decide to turn cloak then as well, know that all will think what became of the bastard Ramsay Snow as a blessing compared to what you suffer.”

Tears trickled from Theon’s eyes as he watched them leave, slumping to the floor and whimpering. Robb wanted to say so much more but knew it wasn’t worth it. They had other things to worry about.

“We need to send men to the Wall,” Robb told the lords gathered in the Great Hall that evening.

“To take the black?” asked Rickard Karstark.

“To aid those who have,” Robb said standing at the high table. “An army of one hundred thousand wildlings is marching on the Wall. They’ve already begun their attack and burned Mole’s Town. If we don’t help them the Night’s Watch will fall and the wildlings will be free to raid the North more than the ironborn already have.”

After a moment of hush Lucas Blackwood asked, “What of the riverlands?”

Patrek Mallister nodded. “If we’re busy fighting the wildlings we would leave them with only those left behind.”

“What of the ironborn, Your Grace?” asked Galbart Glover. “They’ve taken Deepwood Motte. My brother’s family was there when it was taken.”

“If there are truly a hundred thousand wildlings coming south, even if they all had bone daggers and arrows that is enough to cut plenty of us down before we end them all,” said Ser Axell Florent.

Robb had yet to lose a battle himself yet it felt like he was destined to lose the war if this kept up. With enemies attacking from all sides, he felt the weight on his shoulders growing. Pressing his
hand into the table he took a breath and looked to the lords.

“We’ll send a thousand from White Harbor to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea and ride to support the men at Castle Black.”

“One thousand?” asked Wylis Manderly. “Your Grace, how can they hope to stand against a force one hundred strong for each of them.”

“They won’t all be fighters,” Robb explained. “They couldn’t muster that many men alone, so some of them will be children, women and their elderly. And the thousand from the east will be supported by another we send to Castle Black from here.”

“Even still,” said Greatjon Umber, “half their number will likely be fighting. Horses won’t be enough to keep most of those sent from dying.”

They would find out soon anyway. “A dragon might.” A wave of confusion spread through the room and Ned and Dom looked to Robb, who gave Dom a quick nod before looking to the others. “Ser Domeric has come upon word from multiple men who passed near the Wall that they have a dragon in their ranks.”

“You can’t be serious,” Smalljon said with a laugh.

“He is,” Domeric said raising to his feet. “The men I questioned said it had been some time since they passed, so the dragon which they claimed was small likely has grown since then. Whatever its size, it could help startle the wildlings enough for us to overpower them.”

“And what’s to say these men haven’t lied?” asked Ser Axell Florent.

“A flayed man has no secrets,” Domeric said icily, “but neither does one questioned by the Flayed Knight.”

That earned him wary looked, which Domeric ignored as he sat back down. Robb gave him a quick nod, thanking him for darkening his reputation. “It wasn’t just one who spoke it, but multiple men. There’s little doubt their words are true.”

“Then let us go save them and take it with us,” Torrhen Karstark said with a laugh.

“How do you plan to tame it?” asked Daryn Hornwood.

“However the Night’s Watch have,” said Torrhen. “Ser Domeric can make them tell us if they are withholding.”

Dom held off a frown as he crossed his arms, keeping his expression even while Robb shook his head. “Unless some of you are Targaryens then I doubt it will work,” he told them, drawing some confusion. “The only reason it serves them is likely their maester, Aemon Targaryen.”

Seeing the disappointment of the few starting to get behind Torrhen’s idea he wondered who he should send when a voice called out, “We will leave for White Harbor on the morrow.”

The room turned to see it was Selyse Baratheon who spoke, rising to her feet with a glance to Melisandre, who nodded as though it was under her command.

Selyse turned her gaze to Robb and stood as straight as she could. “As a show of our unity, those newly sworn to you shall sail and ride from the east.”
“And I shall pray for quick winds to carry us north,” Melisandre said standing beside the former queen, a genial smile taking her lips.

Robb met the red priestess’ fiery gaze and was sure there was something going on, but being unsure what and not wanting to look suspicious of his new allies, simply nodded. “Thank you, my ladies.”

“I’ll lead the men North.” The room then turned to Eddard Stark as he rose.

“No,” Robb said shaking his head, his father leading them wasn’t something they’d discussed like Dom’s supposedly finding out about the dragon. “You’re the Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North-”

“And it is my duty to defend her,” Ned interrupted. “The ironborn have left reserves, making them less of a threat then the one hundred thousand wildlings looking to pass through the Wall. Your Grace can send men to take back the keeps taken by the ironborn while I lead the force north and help keep out another army of raiders.”

Robb’s jaw shifted, disliking that to deny it still would likely shame his father, meaning he had to accept. “If you think it best, my lord.”

The next day the sun had barely risen when men prepared to leave. While most of the Baratheon forces would be going to White Harbor to board ships taking them north, Edric Baratheon would be riding with Ned. After exchanging a hug with his cousin, he was surprised to see his half brother approaching with a sack in his hands.

Shireen stepped aside, looking nervously between the two base born Baratheons as they eyed one another. “Lord Stark’s a good man,” Gendry told Edric. “He’ll take care of you. Just make sure he isn’t straining his leg too much. He won’t say if it hurts, but you can tell.”

Edric was surprised to hear his brother give him advice. “Thank you, my lord.”

“Gendry,” he said with a solemn smile, “please.”

“Of course,” Edric nodded.

With a sigh Gendry nodding to his bag. “You’ve got some decent armor, right?” When Edric nodded, Gendry opened the sack he held. “Hopefully this is better than whatever you have.” He removed a dark gray helmet with a pair of wooden antlers at the top which he removed easily, revealing they clipped on and off, making it easy to replace them and easy to snap if someone tried to grab them.

Edric took the helmet from him and looked it over with surprise. “You made this?”

“I started after I heard you were coming.”

“It’s too nice,” Edric said shaking his head. “As the head of House Baratheon you should wear it.”

“I already have my own,” Gendry said waving it off before chuckling. “Though I guess a bull doesn’t really fit anymore.”

Nodding, Edric looked the helm over again. “Thank you, Gendry.”

The older Baratheon nodded. “I’ll try to make you more for your return.”
“I’d ask you keep our cousin company in my absence,” Edric said with a glance to Shireen.

“I will,” Gendry assured, extending a hand which Edric shook.

Eddard would lead a battalion north along with a few guards for Theon and the ironborn willingly taking the black while Selyse Baratheon and Melisandre would head to White Harbor. Galbart Glover also left with a force heading to reclaim Deepwood Motte while a smaller one went to the villages of the Stony Shore to drive out any lingering ironborn.

Robb disliked not going to the Wall himself, but knew he couldn’t be seen as abandoning the other wars. For now he would stay in Winterfell and work from there.

It was only two days after his father’s departure when his mother came to him as he broke fast in the Great Hall with some of his battle companions. She was clearly distraught, worry etched into her face as she moved to Robb’s side.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Do you know where Bran is?”

His brow furrowed, Robb looked to the others who shook their heads. “He’s missing?” Robb asked.

“As are Summer, Hodor and the Reed children,” she said quietly.

Robb rose to his feet, turning to the nearby guards. “Have the men search for my brother and the Reeds.”

“I’ve checked the crypts,” Catelyn said shaking her head. “They weren’t there.”

“You went alone?”

“I’m not so helpless,” Catelyn said to his reproving tone.

Robb shook his head, turning from her and leaving to go search for his sibling, starting with asking his others. He didn’t expect the girls to know anything, but Rickon not knowing was surprising.

To their shock it was Gendry who approached Robb with a way to find out what happened to Bran. He then led the king to his cousin, Shireen, who wore an ashamed frown as she stood before Robb.

“He left?” Robb asked after she told him. “How do you know?”

“He came to see me before he did.”

It was only a few days after they told him of his betrothal to Shireen, so Robb had feared he might have been scared and run off, but didn’t expect him to stop by to see her. Though he’d taken the news easily, they noticed Bran had seemed distant and assumed it was his displeasure with the betrothal.

“Did he say anything about why he was leaving or where he was going?”

Shireen shifted uncomfortably before looking to Robb. “He told me it wasn’t because of me. That he had to leave to help you.”

“Help me how?”
Shireen frowned. “I don’t know. He only said he had to go so he could help his brother win the war.”

Robb’s brow knitted slightly. “What else did he say?”

“Nothing, he just…” She put a hand to her scarred cheek. “He just kissed my cheek and left. Though the other boy, Jojen, he said Bran would be back in time for our wedding.”

XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO

“It should be a grand wedding,” Jynessa said as she and Jon saw men making preparations for the upcoming royal wedding during their walk.

“I’d imagine so,” Jon nodded absently.

“You’ll be attending, won’t you?” She said in a leading tone.

“It would be rude not to,” he said carefully as he always did when speaking of the wedding.

Jynessa shook her head slightly. “If you’re not too busy, perhaps you’d ask me to dance?”

With a glance to her he chuckled, realizing why she had seemed so odd the last few days. He’d doubted it was nerves as it had only started days after their first time together, and in the time between they’d laid together a dozen times.

“Forgive me, my lady, but I had simply assumed I would escort you,” he said, seeing her relieved smile.

“Oh,” she snickered as they came to a stop.

“I would be honored to be your escort for the wedding,” he said turning to her. For a time he’d doubted it would even come to happen, but had heard enough of their plan to know it would. He disliked the idea of their first outing being one destined to end poorly, but had little choice. To avoid it would be suspicious and he didn’t want to turn Jynessa away.

When he met with Tyrion one day he saw his gift for the wedding and asked to look through it. Jon ended up reading through most of it by the time he left. The illuminations were incredible, the gold and silver truly enhancing each image. It made his only idea for a gift seem trifling, but it was the best he could think of without wasting his coin or looking like he put no effort into it.

Days before the wedding, Jon went to the docks with Edric to see off their ships and Thoros.

“Are you certain you’ll be fine?” The red priest asked looking toward the Red Keep.

“It’ll be chaotic but they say it will seem he choked,” Jon assured quietly. “I’ll leave once things settle after the wedding.” Patting his shoulder, Jon smiled. “Be safe, Thoros.”

The priest nodded. “You as well, Jon.” He moved to Edric then and shook the boy’s hand. “Keep him safe, my lord.”

“I’ll try,” Edric said smiling.

Watching the red priest sail from King’s Landing, Jon thought back on his awakening beneath the hollow hill after Gregor Clegane had cut him down. Part of him had always thought should the worst happen Thoros could bring him back again, but with the red priest gone so was that hope, and Jon was left with another ally out of reach. If not for Edric he would have felt completely
alone, but his squire stayed at his side even as they left for the wedding festivities.

Jon went to the Queen’s Ballroom to break fast with the other noble men, finding himself sat beside Tyrion with Edric on the other. After Cersei gave Joffrey a wife’s cloak worn by her mother and herself, others went about giving their gifts.

“Your Grace,” Jon said as he came to the table empty handed, “perhaps you have heard I have taken to playing the harp at times. If it is acceptable, I’ve written a song fit for a king I would play at the feast.”

“We have a harper,” Cersei said disdainfully.

“And has he written a song for me?” Joffrey asked her before turning to Jon. “If you do not fear performing before my guests, then I would accept such a gift, my lord.”

“Thank you, Your Grace,” Jon said bowing his head and returning to his seat.

He watched Tyrion give the king a copy of Lives of Four Kings before Lord Mace Tyrell gave him a seven sided chalice.

Looking it over Joffrey smirked and glanced to Jon. “A splendid cup, but we’ll need to chip the wolf off and put a burning sword in it’s place, I think.” Jon made a point of flashing him a smile as though in thanks for his confidence in his burgeoning house.

Tywin went last, and Jon heard Tyrion snicker as he presented the boy with a longsword. Its scabbard was cherrywood, gold and oiled red leather studded with golden lions’ heads with ruby eyes. Unsheathing it revealed a shimmering crimson blade.

Joffrey looked excited enough to kill someone, his lips twisting into a grin as he looked from the red blade to Jon as if to say, ‘A red blade to surpass your white fang’. Instead he slashed at the air and laughed. “A great sword must have a great name, my lords! What shall I call it?”

His Lion’s Tooth had been thrown in the Trident by Arya and Hearteater left unused in the Battle of the Blackwater. As others called out names, Jon looked to Tyrion who was snickering. “What’s so amusing?”

Tyrion looked from the crimson blade to Jon. “My father had Ice melted down and made into a separate pair,” he said eyeing Jon, who looked confused. “He intended to give one to Joffrey, but then your brother sent word he was willing to trade Jaime and a few prisoners in exchange for Ice and some of his captured men.”

Jon looked to the crimson blade which was clearly not Valyrian steel. “He made the deal?”

“Have a care, Your Grace,” warned Ser Addam Marbrand when he swung close to Balon Swann, “the blade was made by Tobho Mott to be close to Valyrian steel.”

“The swords left King’s Landing days ago,” Tyrion said looking to Joffrey with a smile.

“I remember,” Joffrey said bringing the sword down onto the leather bound book Tyrion gifted him. “I’m no stranger to Valyrian steel, and this is near as sharp!”

Tyrion’s smile crumbled as he watched the boy swing his sword into the Lives of Four Kings again and again, hacking at the book to pieces.

“Your Grace,” Garlan said. “Perhaps you did not know. In all of Westeros there were but four
copies of that book illuminated in Kaeth’s own hand.”

“No now there are three,” Joffrey said dismissively while undoing his old swordbelt to don his new one. “You owe me a better present, Uncle Imp. This one is all chopped to pieces.”

Tyrion stared at his nephew, doing his best to keep in his anger. “Perhaps a knife, sire. Once surpassing even your new sword. Made of fine Valyrian steel… with a dragonbone hilt, say?”

Jon glanced from Tyrion to Joffrey as the boy gave him a sharp look. “You… Yes, such a fine dagger would be good. A… A gold hilt with rubies in it would be better. Dragonbone is too plain.”

“As you wish, Your Grace,” Tyrion said while downing another cup of wine.

Jon found himself staring at Joffrey before looking to Tyrion. He thought Joffrey was behind Bran’s assassination. Jon wanted to ask him about it, but knew he couldn’t do so publicly without drawing some questions. Watching Joffrey afterward, Jon felt an odd desire to figure some way to save him only so he could be the one to slay him, but knew it would be pointless. Joffrey was going to die at some point in the day, and that would need to be justice enough. It was better for the realm he die as soon as possible.

Though it lingered, much of his anger faded as he met with Jynessa outside the Sept of Baelor. She wore a light yellow silk dress with black lace feathers embroidered across it and small pink swirls within some of them. Jon thought her beauty was near a match for Margarery in her ivory silk and Myrish lace with a skirt decorated in floral patterns picked out in seed pearls. A signal she was a Tyrell and not yet a Baratheon, something she would never truly be even upon marrying Joffrey and Tommen.

Jon tried to enjoy the day as much as he could, but his hope that his gift would be forgotten in the mayhem went unfulfilled as after Hamish the Harper sung Lord Renly’s Ride, A Rose of Gold, the Rains of Castamere, and Maiden, Mother and Crone before ending with My Lady Wife, Joffrey rose and called on Jon to share his gift and perform for them.

Jynessa looked as shocked as many others, though Edric gave Jon a sympathetic smile when Jon rose and made his way to where Hamish the Harper handed over his instrument. After adjusting the strings, Jon looked to the table. “I have called this A King’s Path,” Jon said before taking a breath and strumming the first string.

It started slow and careful, growing more complex as it went along, mixing high and low chords, even tapping or knocking on the side of the harp like a drum at times. Many watched as the sullen lord crafted a melody which roused them at times as much as it filled them with melancholy. Even Tyrion sat shocked at the gift his former sworn shield showed, but even more shocking was when he looked to others and saw tears in the eyes of many at the more somber moments.

When the strings fell silent and still Jon seemed to exhale and hand it to Harmish, who looked baffled. “Thank you,” the lord said with a nod before looking to the high table. “I hope that was acceptable, Your Grace.”

Joffrey arched his brow before nodding. “A wonderful surprise, my lord, and a grand gift.”

Jon made his way back to his table, giving a few thankful nods to those who turned to share their appreciation for his song. Once he made it back to his table Jynessa was grinning. “I didn’t know you had such skill, my lord.”

“I rarely have need of it,” Jon said with a smile. “Though it has some use.”
“That is does,” she said taking his hand in hers beneath the table and sliding it up her thigh. “I knew your skilled fingers had some training.”

Jon saw in her gaze she wanted him to move further, but he carefully slid his hand back down, turning to whisper, “I’d rather not have them think me torturing you.”

“I could be quiet,” she assured.

“Then it would be pointless,” he said with a laugh, kissing her cheek before sitting straight. In truth he simply didn’t wasn’t in the mood knowing what was to come.

Though it took a while to make it through the songs and performances which lead to Joffrey emptying a chalice of wine over Tyrion, the pie arrived and Ser Ilyn Payne cut it, allowing doves to fly free.

Jon saw no hint of what was to come in the faces of any Tyrell, but when Joffrey began to cough and claw at his throat Olenna and Margaery called for help. The kingsguard could do nothing for the boy as his face grew darker and his mother wailed and pleaded for someone to help him.

Jynessa clutched his hand as they stood on their feet watching the king die. Jon might have felt sorry if he didn’t know it was for the best. Instead he watched Tyrion approach to try and pull his sister from her dead son, only to have her claim he poisoned the king and having the kingsguard drag him away.
Jaime returns to King’s Landing to find his brother on trial, and Tyrion receives guests.

After being dragged north, Jaime was placed in the prison of the Wolf’s Den until he was dragged into the city. The angry look in Robb Stark’s face when they brought Jaime before their king left him wondering if his father had denied his ransom again. However to his surprise Robb told his men, “Shave him and bathe him. He’s going home.”

Relief flooded Jaime even as some butcher took sheers to his knotted hair, wincing as it was cut short and he was shaved. Where he’d seen others look years younger upon showing up bare faced, Jaime thought he looked older, the bags under his eyes more apparent.

He was joined by a few other prisoners, including Cleos Frey, who would be joining them on their journey. While a small group of guards was gathered to escort them to their destination, Jaime Lannister was given personal guard in the tall female warrior Brienne. In an attempt to prove her worth, she was put in charge of handling him.

Davos helped captain their ship south, which proved to be an easy enough journey for Jaime, bar the presence of Brienne. If he hadn’t a year in captivity he might have simply ignored her, but he’d been willing to talk to anyone, especially one so easy to tease. Of course he would regret it once she prattled on about honor. It didn’t help that most nights he was still plagued by specters damning him.

He couldn’t get much of an idea where they were going, but at some point men arrived with Brienne and wrapped his head in a sack which left him blind. Eventually they forced him up and guided him off the ship with the other prisoners. They were packed together in a cart and rode for what must have been at least half a day before they had the bags removed to find Maidenpool on the horizon behind them and a small town not far ahead of them.

It was there they were exchanged for Stark men holding a large bag Jaime was sure held weapons, though too short to be Ice. Brienne gave Jaime a quick nod before she left with her group, leaving Jaime to ride back to King’s Landing. It was only then he learned that Joffrey had been killed days earlier, and that his brother was charged with slaying him.

Even with the guards escorting them, people looked to their group and wondered where Jaime Lannister was. It mad him laugh, yet he felt weaker than ever as he separated from the group.

He found Cersei in the sept while Ser Osmund stood guard, and as usual she did not come to him but he to her. She told him that Tyrion had slain their first born, and then looked him in the eye as she spoke. “You’ll kill him for me, won’t you? You’ll avenge our son.”

At that Jaime pulled away from her. “He is still my brother.” He pulled at the clothes which hung around his thin body, “And I am starved and out of practice to kill anyone.”

“I’m not asking you to best the Hound in battle. Tyrion is a dwarf, locked in a cell. The guard would stand aside for you.”

Trial of Lies

Chapter Summary
Jaime’s stomach turned as he looked upon his sister, so desperate for him to be the honorless murderer everyone thought him to be. She would have him become a kinslayer for her own sake.

Perhaps it was simply a year without, but even having realized what she was playing at when she kissed him, he went with it. He even asked her to wed him so they could stop hiding their love. Tommen might have lost the Iron Throne, but would still be heir to Casterly Rock. He wondered what exactly made her turn him away then, the thought of people knowing the truth of them, or the drop in status from Queen Mother to Lady of Casterly Rock.

Passing a tall, stooped man with gray hair in frayed and poorly sewn robes exiting his father’s office, Jaime met with his father. Again his stomach twisted as his father spoke of bribing the High Septon to release him from his vows to the Kingsguard and marry him to Margaery. Much like Cersei, his father then turned from him, claiming he was not his son.

It was the next day that Tyrion’s trial began, and Jaime kept to the back where he went unnoticed as Tyrion declared his innocence. Without witnesses of his own, the claims of those Cersei brought, and more than likely bought, went without refute.

Once they had let out for the day, Jaime started back to his chambers when he spotted a lord in a surcoat bearing a flaming white sword and felt his heart stop. He’d heard tale of the boy’s deeds since he last saw him, but still felt as though he would batter him as he made his way toward the new lord and his squire.

“Lord Jon,” he called out, noting how Jon froze mid step, taking a moment before turning to face him.

Finding the thin man before him, Jon fought back a frown as much as he did his own desire to punch Jaime square in the jaw. Perhaps if he looked like Jon remembered him he might have struck him, but he seemed weaker as he stood there near gaunt and lacking his golden hair. He almost seemed a different man, his smile sad rather than wry as he stood before them.

“Ser Jaime,” Jon said evenly. “You’ve returned.”

“Released by my captors,” Jaime said with a nod. With a hollow laugh he added, “A broken man traded for a broken sword.”

Jon looked him over. “I imagine it will be simpler to put you back as you were.”

“I don’t know if it’s possible,” Jaime said with a shrug. “Or if I’d even want it.”

That surprised Jon, though he didn’t show it much. “How were you treated?”

“As a prisoner,” Jaime said with a smirk, before it fell and he answered, “as well as could be expected. Though I had to suffer conversations with your family.”

“A pity,” Jon offered with a nod.

Jaime snorted, crossing his arms as he looked to those who had passed them, leaving them alone. “Your father thought to berate me with questions of regrets while your brother hounded me to tell him of my nightmares.”

“That seems odd even for them,” Jon noted.

“I think they intend to seek out Daenerys Targaryen in Essos,” Jaime offered. “They kept asking if I’d support Rhaegar’s kin and the like. As though I would suddenly decide to aid someone I’ve
never met, or her brother who was no doubt as mad as his father.” Seeing a hint of confusion there as the boy nodded, Jaime motioned to the coat of arms on his surcoat. “I see you’ve done well while I’ve been gone. If only they could see you now.”

“Yeah,” Jon said with a solemn smile.

With a laugh Jaime noted, “They’re like to call you Kingslayer as well now they’ve sided with the Baratheons.”

“They have?” Jon asked. With Thoros gone and Tyrion in a cell, his sources for information were limited.

“They put a sack over my head, but I could still hear enough of their talk to figure out that much,” Jaime told him.

Jon wondered if that was a boon or not. They might hold a grudge for him slaying their king, which could cause problems once he and Robb united.

“It’s odd seeing you like this,” Jaime said after a moment, a sad smile on his lips as he looked over Edric and Jon. “A man with a squire, a keep and a trade. Barristan would be proud if Joffrey hadn’t been fool enough to dismiss him.”

“Thank you.”

“I am as well,” Jaime said with a snort, “as little as that may matter.”

Jon found it odd that despite the anger Jon felt for Jaime, it did matter. Jaime had been awful to his family, yet he had also been a friend before all of that. Something about seeing him again made Jon think less of the knight that had pushed his brother and attacked his father, and more of the man he sparred with at night. The man he had thought a good knight too easily dismissed by others, and one he’d hoped to fight beside someday.

When they separated Jon was left confused, yet on the way back to their rooms when Edric asked, “Are you sure about tonight?” Jon knew his answer hadn’t changed.

In the days since his arrest Tyrion had few visitors. Days earlier he had called for Bronn, who left him to fend for himself rather than stand against the Mountain as his champion, saying he had been paid well by the Queen now he was set to marry Lollys Stokeworth.

Besides Podrick, his most frequent visitor was his uncle Kevan. At first he had come to let Tyrion know Tywin, Mace Tyrell and Oberyn Martell would judge him, but that night he came tell Tyrion his only hope was to admit his guilt and take the black. As most things seemed to, it ended up coming back to his father, but Tyrion refused to admit guilt for a crime he did not commit.

It was after his uncle left that he was drawn back to the door as it opened and a laugh came to his throat as he saw Jon Snowfire enter. “My lord,” the young lord said making his way toward him.

“Come for a final game of Cyvasse, Jon?”

Jon wore a smirk as he took the seat across from Tyrion. “No. I’ve come to see justice done.”

Tyrion laughed, sitting back as he set down his goblet. “You think killing me would earn you even more favor? Perhaps even Myrcella’s hand?”

Jon frowned. “Kill you? Why kill an innocent man?”
Tyrion’s bitter amusement fell away as his eyes widened and he sat up. “What?”

“You didn’t kill Joffrey,” said Jon.

The knowledge of truth in his voice sounded like absolute confidence to Tyrion, which was a relief after days of being told he was guilty. “You sound so sure. Have you come to ease the mind of the man who takes your blame?”

Jon flashed him a small smile and shook his head. “No, I had no hand in his death, but I know you didn’t either. If you had you wouldn’t have been so angry when he destroyed your gift. If anything I would imagine you’d have found it another reason to enjoy it.”

Tyrion chuckled. “You know me well.”

With a nod Jon sat back in his chair. “I would ask you something though, before I speak of my purpose here. After he took his sword to the book, you spoke of buying the king a Valyrian steel dagger.” Jon’s eyes darkened as he asked, “I’m sure it was Jaime who pushed him, but did Joffrey send the catspaw who tried to kill Bran?”

Surprised by the question, Tyrion shrugged. “I couldn’t say for certain, though I suspected as much. It would be simple for him to get the dagger from his father, and he was certainly the type to think it a mercy to kill the boy, as well as use it as a chance to prove himself his father’s son. Of course it would be his stupidity which sparked the wars ravaging Westeros even after his death.”

Seeing Jon nod, Tyrion asked, “What does that have to do with your purpose here?”

“Nothing,” Jon admitted as he sat forward, “but I thought it better to ask that before I offer to be your champion in trial by combat.”

Tyrion’s eyes bulged as he sat up. “You?” His mismatched eyes flicked toward Jon’s chest before meeting the boy’s dark eyes. “Jon, they would have the Mountain be their champion.”

“And he would again fail to kill me,” Jon assured. “He is the same as he ever was, but I am changed.”

Tyrion stared at him for a moment before sitting back laughing. Once he settled and quieted, Tyrion took a drink and sighed. “My uncle said I should simply admit my guilt and take the black.”

“I doubt the cold would suit you any more than the black,” Jon said with a smile.

“Certainly not as well as it does you,” Tyrion said with a nod to the boy dressed in black. “Do you think the trial hopeless?”

“Who could say?” Jon offered somberly. In truth he likely could. The little he’d interacted with the Martells made it clear they disliked the Lannisters, and Jon had little hope Tywin would feel enough fatherly affection to save his son. The Tyrells thought it a boon that Tyrion could be blamed for their murder of the king, so Mace would surely damn him. That was why Jon hadn’t told them of his offer to Tyrion.

It also didn’t hurt that he knew the crown’s champion would be Gregor Clegane. That had seemed obvious from the moment they arrested Tyrion, and was a part of the appeal. Jon wanted to end the beast that had destroyed his family. And once he was dead Jon could focus on the beast’s masters.

“Though I do have a condition,” Jon told him.

Tyrion snickered. “Of course. Shall it be gold?”
“Something worth more than any gold,” Jon told him.

“I’ve no maidenhead to give,” Tyrion said with a laugh. “I have nothing of worth, my lord.”

“You have your mind,” Jon told him. “If I am to be your champion and save your life, I would expect it to be the payment for the debt you would owe me.”

Tyrion scrunched his face. “What? You mean to save me to kill me?”

“No,” Jon laughed, shaking his head. “I mean to have you be my man until the end of your days. I would have you be my ally and companion until either of us dies. Loyal to me above all others.”

Tyrion stared at him for what must have been a minute before sitting forward. “Why?”

Jon smiled somberly. “I enjoy our time together. Once I defeat the Mountain, would you rather spend your days here with a family which look down on you, or joining me at Nightsong or aboard one of my ships, helping me build my future?”

After another moment of staring, Tyrion laughed. “What is it with you helping fools like me and Samwell? Is it because our fathers?”

Jon shrugged. “Perhaps I have a fondness for cripples, bastards and broken things.”

The next day of trial Varys had all but damned Tyrion. Most telling had been his suggestion that Tyrion thought the king could be guilty of sending the assassin after Bran Stark and starting the war that ravaged Westeros. Jon noticed the man glance at him, and put on a smile that seemed to make the mummer’s brow shift. Almost as if he knew that had been the moment Jon decided he would see Dark Sister open his throat.

That night when Tyrion returned to his room he did not expect to find himself with an abundance of champions when Oberyn came and made the offer. Tyrion wore a smile as he told the prince, “I’m afraid I already have a champion.”

That shocked the prince, who arched his brow. “You surely can not mean your brother? He is barely half a man withered by his time as prisoner.”

Tyrion’s brow furrowed. “Jaime’s here?”

Oberyn tilted his head in amusement. “He is not your champion?”

Shaking his head Tyrion admitted, “I thought he would still be making his way here.”

“He returned the day before your trial,” Oberyn told him. “Though if he is not your champion than who is?”

“Lord Snowfire,” Tyrion told him. “He seeks vengeance for the scar the Mountain gave him.”

Oberyn’s brow knit. “I had heard that tale but thought it nonsense.”

Tyrion shook his head. “No. I’ve seen it myself. The boy has a scar from shoulder to waist from the Mountain’s blade. Thoros of Myr would tell you the boy died and was revived by his Lord of Light after he breathed fire into the boy’s mouth, though I’m more like to think the boy simply startled awake by the pain.”

The next morning while Jon trained using his longsword against Edric’s greatsword, they were approached by the Dornish prince, who called out to Jon, pulling him aside.
“I hear you have offered to act as champion for Tyrion of Lannister,” the prince said crossing his arms.

“I have,” Jon said with a nod. “I would call him a friend, and I believe him innocent.”

“I heard as much, though I would ask you stand aside, my lord.”

Jon’s brow knit as he tilted his head slightly. “Why should I?”

“Allow me to take your place,” Oberyn offered, surprising Jon, who clearly thought he was attempting to threaten him to let the dwarf die. “Surely you have heard tale of what the Enormity The Rides did to my family. Should things go badly for Lord Imp, I would like the chance to avenge my sister and her children and have him admit to his part in it.”

Jon met the pleading man’s eyes and for a moment wanted to simply tell him the truth. They wanted the same thing, they should be on the same side, but Jon still didn’t feel he could risk it. He hated lying to this man who should have been his ally. Hells, in another life he could have been his uncle, yet Jon couldn’t trust he wouldn’t blame him for being Lyanna’s child and somehow damning Elia and her children. He wanted to be the man’s family, but feared he could end up an enemy, so somberly shook his head.

“I’m sorry, but I have my own reasons for facing the Mountain.”

“For slaying you?” Oberyn said with a snort.

“Only one of the reasons,” Jon said simply. “I’m sorry to disappoint you, prince Oberyn. I truly hope you come to understand why I need to do this, but should Lord Tyrion chose trial by combat I will be his champion and I will slay Gregor Clegane. Though if it eases your concern, I assure you the man will suffer for his crimes.”

The dark look that took Jon’s face as he finished surprised Oberyn, who knew then Jon would not be convinced otherwise. Disappointed, he looked down and sighed, taking a moment to think before looking to the boy. “If that is how it must be, then I ask you let me train with you to face him. If my hand can not be the one that ends his life, then let me have a part in training the hand that does.”

Surprised by the offer, Jon smiled. “I would appreciate the help should it come to that.”

Of course, that was the day that Shae was brought forward to spew her lies of Tyrion. Tyrion felt it all slipping from him, everything good he ever did being turned against him by her lies. He had saved the city, and yet they all sought to damn him and turn him into some monster. All but the lord he saw glaring at Shae’s back as though the lies were being spoken of him. That was all that made Tyrion smile for the briefest of moments before he pushed forward and shouted, “MY LORDS!”

Tywin raised a hand, and bit by bit the hall grew silent.

“Get this lying whore out of my sight,” Tyrion spat, “and I will give you your confession.”

Lord Tywin nodded and gestured, Shaw looking half terrified as gold cloaks formed around her. Likely as they would back in their barracks, Tyrion was sure.

Staring up into his father’s cold golden flecked green eyes, Tyrion spoke, “Guilty. So guilty. Is that what you wanted to hear?”
Mace Tyrell nodded while Tywin remained silent and Prince Oberyn looked mildly disappointed.
“You admit you poisoned the king?”

“Nothing of the sort. Of Joffrey’s death I am innocent. I am guilty of a more monstrous crime.”
Tyron took a step toward his father. “I was born. I lived. I am guilty of being a dwarf, I confess it. And no matter how many times my good father forgave me, I have persisted in my infamy.”

“This is folly, Tyrion,” declared Lord Tywin. “Speak of the matter at hand. You are not on trial for being a dwarf.”

“That is where you err, my lord. I have been on trial for being a dwarf my entire life.”

“Have you nothing to say in your defense?”

“Nothing but this: I did not do it. Yet now I wish I had.” Tyrion turned to face the hall, that sea of pale faces. “I wish I had enough poison for you all. You make me sorry that I am not the monster you would have me be, yet there it is. I am innocent, but I will get no justice here. You leave me no choice but to appeal to the gods. I demand trial by battle.”

“Have you taken leave of your wits?” Tywin asked.

“No, I’ve found them. I demand trial by battle!”

The Queen mother was delighted. “He has that right, my lords,” she told the judges. “Let the gods judge. Ser Gregor Clegane will stand for Joffrey. He returned to the city the night before last, to put his sword at my service.”

For a moment Tywin’s face was so dark it seemed as though he’d been poisoned as well. His fist slammed down to the table, too angry to find words. It was Mace Tyrell who looked to Tyrion and asked, “Do you have a champion to defend your innocence?”

“He does, my lord,” Jon called out, stepping through the crowd and coming to a stop at Tyrion’s side.

Mace’s shock gave way to a frown as the crowd broke into an uproar. Tyrion found some joy in the doubt that took Cersei’s eyes. Jon stood firmly at Tyrion’s side, unaffected by the hundred gold cloaks pounding their spears against the floor to quiet the throne room.

By then Lord Tywin had recovered. “Let the issue be decided on the morrow,” he declared in iron tones. “I wash my hands of it.” He gave his dwarf son a cold angry look and strode from the hall, through the king’s door behind the Iron Throne with his brother Kevan at his side.

As they made to escort Tyrion back to his room, Jon turned to him and bowed his head as he said quietly, “Thank you.” Yet Tyrion could only laugh. Never had he heard a man thankful to be sentenced to death.
“You remember how, don’t you?” Jon asked holding Edric’s shoulder. “How I showed you. How Barristan showed me.”


“If you can’t then don’t,” Jon told his squire. “It could only be used if absolutely necessary. Steel should be more than enough for this.” When the Lord of Starfall nodded, Jon gave a pat to the side of his head. “Be safe, Ned.”

Stepping back he watched his squire turn, pulling the hood over his head to hide his hair as he left the keep. With a breath Jon turned and went to to his room to prepare his things, and it was there he found Loras and Garlan waiting for him.

“What are you thinking?” Loras demanded.

“I’m defending an innocent man and dealing justice in one stroke,” Jon said stepping into his chambers.

Once they followed him inside and closed the door, Garlan turned to Jon. “And risk yourself and your plans?”

“Do you truly have no confidence I’ll win?” Jon asked him.

“Even if you do,” said Garlan, “what then? They might think on who actually did it.”

“Do you truly not know how they work yet?” Jon asked with a scoff. “They will think him lucky, and likely still try to have someone kill him. Tywin and Cersei have hated Tyrion since the moment he was born. He saved them and all of King’s Landing yet they all hate him and look at him like some sort of monster. Why should this change their opinion of him?”

Loras stepped forward, grabbing Jon’s jerkin. “You’re too important to risk yourself like this.”

Jon slammed his forearm into Loras’s, knocking his hand away as he met the Kingsguard’s pained eyes. “If I cannot do this then I don’t deserve anything I seek. And those tied to me will find little affect to their plans. Should I die then go seek Robb’s aid. Come to terms with him.”

“Let me take your place,” Loras pleaded.

“Why would you do that?” Jon asked. “They would grow suspicious and risk you ruining your plans.”

“Please,” Loras said shaking his head. “I can’t see you die, Jon.”

Garlan frowned at the pain in his brother’s voice. He could still remember finding his brother in
the tent cradling Renly’s corpse, coated in the blood of the man he had loved. As odd as he thought it, he knew his brother had loved him.

Jon placed a hand on Loras’s shoulder, squeezing it and patting the side of his head as though he were a child. “I expect an apology for this doubt when I kill him.”

That managed to make Loras laugh, though the kingsguard turned his head and sniffed once Jon stepped back. Taking a breath, Loras turned back to Jon. “Do you need our help?”

Jon shook his head. “Thank you, but no. Oberyn’s offered, and I hope to use this as a chance to earn his allegiance.” Seeing them each look put out at being turned away for a Martell, Jon laughed. “Honestly, do you think one more day of training with either of you would affect my chances so much?” Once each shook their head he continued, “Exactly. Nothing much will change between today and tomorrow to improve my skill, but at least I can use this chance to build something for afterward.”

After sharing a glance, Garlan gave a relenting sigh. “If you need anything, ask it. I would help squire for you tomorrow should you need it.”

“I’ve Edric,” Jon assured. “He should be enough.”

“One last piece of advice, if I might?” Garlan said as they made to leave.

“Of course.”

Turning to him, Garlan wore a smirk. “Do not take Jynessa to bed tonight.”

Jon snickered. “You think it would exhaust me?”

“No,” Garlan said shaking his head, “but I’ve found some men seem to lose their hunger for victory if they’d been satiated the night before. Leave it for the day after and you will have another reason to win.”

“I will keep that in mind, my lord,” Jon said before seeing them out and going to change.

He wasn’t particularly surprised to find a group had gathered to come watch him train with the Dornish prince. Knowing he had to prepare for the next day, he opted for a slower, more calm practice than anything that would risk leaving him sore the next day. Most of what Oberyn shared was known to him already, but Jon appreciated the sentiment of his giving advice.

“Are you a fool?” Jynessa asked as he took a break to get a drink. He found her waiting for him with a frown.

“Perhaps,” Jon answered before taking a long drink of water and splashing some across his head.

Jynessa crossed her arms. “Do I displease you so much you seek to leave me as brutally as possible?”

At that Jon nodded solemnly. “Thank you for your confidence, my lady.”

When he made to leave she hurried to his side, grabbing his arm to turn him around. “Forgive, my lord,” she pleaded. “I did not mean—” She stopped herself to sigh before holding his neck and collar while pulling his lips to hers. Her apology was clear in her kiss, but still Jon frowned knowing that would be as far as it went that night. Running a hand through his hair she met his eyes and seemed so sad that Jon felt his stomach twist in guilt. “I wish you well, Jon.”
She remained supportive after that, cheering him whenever things picked up between him and Oberyn, forgetting for a moment that Jon had a more important fight the next day. The afternoon passed quickly enough before Oberyn invited Jon to sup with him and Ellaria along with Jynessa.

After his first time introducing Jon to Ellaria and watching to gauge the boy’s reaction to her, as though forgetting Jon had been a bastard as well, Oberyn found some joy in teasing the northman. As they ate, Oberyn leaned in to kiss his paramour.

“You are more delicious than even this meal,” Oberyn told her, stroking her cheek.

“Behave and you may try more,” she teased.

Their eyes met before turning to where Jon sat with his eyes off to the side while Jynessa smirked. “How impolite of me,” Oberyn said sitting up and kissing Ellaria’s hand. “Of course you are invited to that meal as well, my lord and lady.”

“Not tonight,” Jon said without thinking, earning surprised amusement from the trio as he realized how it could be interpreted. After fighting back a wince Jon looked to Oberyn and explained. “Garlan Tyrell spoke of some men losing their hunger for victory if they are satiated the night before, so I thought it better not to risk it.”

Ellaria clicked her tongue, looking sympathetically to Jynessa. “You poor thing. I’ve no doubt even a day is too much for young things like you.”

“Perhaps another night then,” Oberyn said with a smirk.

Jon wasn’t sure what would be rude, so stayed quiet by stuffing food into his mouth, which seemed to surprise them near as much when he didn’t yell at the heat of the spices as many not of Dorne did. If he was to face the Mountain the next day, some Dornish spices weren’t enough to make him scream, though it was enough to make him down half a glass of wine.

Having left the city without being noticed, Edric made his way to a tree far from the walls of King’s Landing. With a spade he’d kept hidden under his cloak, he made sure none were around before he took to digging and found a bundled cloth in the spot Jon had left it a year earlier.

It was when he started to pile the dirt back that he heard it. A low growl in the dark that made him drop the spade to draw his own sword and look around him. He didn’t hear him approach, but turned to find a pair of crimson eyes staring at him.

“Ghost?” Edric whispered as the snow white direwolf stepped silently through the brush. He let out a laugh and sheathed his sword while looking at the direwolf who, despite Edric’s own growth spurt, seemed to have grown almost twice as large since he last saw the direwolf. Though that was more a trick of a mind, there was no doubt the beast was twice the size of other wolves.

“How the hells am I to sneak you inside?” Edric asked with a laugh, though the direwolf silently turned and left.

If not for the Valyrian steel sword laying beside the half filled hole, Edric might have followed the direwolf. Instead he swiftly pushed the dirt back in the hole and tucked away the sword and spade before making his way back toward the city.

After walking Jynessa to her chambers, Jon returned to his own and found Edric waiting for him inside.

“Jon,” Edric said in half a panic as Jon closed the door, “I saw him.”
“Him who?” Jon asked. “Could you not get the sword?”

“What? No,” Edric opened his cloak and held out the weapon wrapped in bundled cloth. “It is safe.”

Jon took it and saw that within Dark Sister was un tarnished. “Then what is it?”

“I saw Ghost,” Edric told him.

Jon’s gaze rose. “Where?”

“With the sword,” he told him. “He was there.”

Jon wrapped the sword and handed it back to Edric. “Keep it safe,” was all he said before turning and leaving his chambers, running to his horse and riding it through the city. He noted quite a few gold cloaks laughing, surely thinking him craven as he hurried toward the Gate of the Gods. The guards were confused as Jon slowed to a stop and looked past them as if expecting to find someone there.

“Is something wrong, my lord?” asked one of the men.

“A boy told me he saw my wolf,” Jon told them as he dismounted and guided his horse to the gate. “Tell your men if any shoot my direwolf they’ll suffer my wrath.”

The guard disliked the threat but feared facing it, so turned and called to his men to not shoot a white wolf should one arrive.

“GHOST!” Jon called out, releasing the reins of his horse to cup his hands and yell it again.

Minutes passed with Jon occasionally calling out for his direwolf before he gave a relenting sigh. He wanted to ride out and find him, but there was too much ground to cover. Instead he could only hope to try tomorrow after he slew the Mountain, though he would never get the chance as he heard one of the guards yell and turned to see a massive white wolf striding along the road.

“Ghost,” Jon said leaving his horse behind to run out toward the direwolf.

The wolf kept his eyes on the guards at the Wall before Jon slowed to a stop and walked up to wrap his arms around his neck. “Gods you’re big.” Taking a breath, Jon stepped back to rub the direwolf’s head and meet his crimson eyes. “I’ve missed you.”

Ghost answered by licking Jon’s cheek, making him laugh and rub his head. “Let’s get you inside.”

Jon noticed the further he got into the city the more people seemed to step out to watch him pass with the large white direwolf at his side. The gold cloaks that had laughed at his being a craven gasped and backed away in fear and awe as Jon dismounted and walked back to the keep with Ghost at his side. He left the direwolf a few feet away as he put his horse back in the stables, then guided him to his chambers.

By the time morning came word had spread of Ghost’s return, so Jon wasn’t too surprised when Jaime Lannister arrived that day dressed in white scale armor beneath his white cloak. The somber expression he wore shrank away upon seeing the large white wolf stood beside Jon when he opened his door.

“It’s true,” Jaime said with a laugh.
“It is,” Jon said warily. “What of it?”

Hearing the edge in his voice, Jaime raised his hands. “I mean no harm. Though I’m sure Cersei will still want his pelt, I simply came to check that he is controlled. The beast did unhorse me for your brother.”

“He was masterless and looking for solace from the master of his brethren,” Jon offered the story he’d thought up earlier.

Jaime looked to Jon with an arched brow. “So the White Wolf turned sides simply to survive?”

Jon tilted his head. “Must I suffer distrust from all sides?”

Jaime frowned and shook his head. “It was a jest.”

“He won’t harm anyone,” Jon said turning to pet Ghost.

“Not even Gregor?” Jaime asked.

“He’s not my weapon if that’s what you’re asking,” Jon told him. “And should I die then perhaps he’ll prove a lion and flee after attacking.”

Jaime frowned at the accusation, the disappointment and hurt in Jon’s voice. “I’ll trust you on this, but if he harms anyone-” The kingsguard winced as the door swung shut in his face. With a sigh he brushed a hand over his shortened hair and turned. “Damn it.”

Tyrion woke from a deeper sleep than he expected and broke his fast, quenching his appetite before asking leave to attend his champion. Ser Addam gave his consent, so Tyrion left to seek out Jon.

He was shocked to find the young lord joined by a massive direwolf. “Gods,” Tyrion marveled at the beast. “That certainly makes me more confident.”

Jon laughed as he sat securing his left cuisse while his right leg was already sheathed in dark plates. “You’re the second Lannister I’m to tell, he won’t be my weapon.”

“Of course, but it still helps,” Tyrion said walking toward the creature which eyed him silently. “May I?”

“Ask him,” Jon said as he stood and tested the armor on his legs.

Tyrion frowned seeing him working alone. “Where is your squire?”

“He should be here any second,” Jon assured. “I sent him to secure something I wanted altered late last night.”

Tyrion told himself to trust the boy, so turned toward Ghost and made his way toward the giant wolf. Raising his hand he saw the direwolf carefully lower his head, letting Tyrion run his hands through the ivory fur.

He nearly shit himself when the door burst open and he turned to see Edric hurrying inside taking heavy breaths. “Forgive me for taking so long,” Edric said before noticing Tyrion holding his chest. “Oh, sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Tyrion assured with a wave of his hand. He saw Ghost looking at him and scoffed, turning from what he took as a judgmental look to watch Jon look over what he recognized as his
round steel shield. “What did you have altered? Did you switch it to your house’s coat of arms?”

“I had a thought last night. A trial by combat is done to seek the judgment of the gods, yes? Let them decide your guilt.”

“So they say,” Tyrion said crossing his arms. “Though I intend to rely more on your skill saving my head. Have you taken to the seven? Painted a seven-pointed star upon your shield?”

“You know I follow different gods,” Jon offered, “and though I doubt they will aid us, I thought it best to look to them instead of those I don’t follow. Especially when all those who do will be against us.” At that Jon turned the shield to reveal the black of his shield now had a white weirwood tree painted across it with a white sword at the center of a scarlet flame within the thick bark. A flame not unlike the one worn by some of Stannis’ men who followed the Lord of Light.

“You think to play the heretic?” Tyrion asked looking from the shield to Jon. “They certainly didn’t help Stannis.”

“Stannis wasn’t raised from the dead by R’hllor,” Jon said with a smirk that told Tyrion the comment was more born out of retort then belief. “They already hate you and distrust me. I thought perhaps it best to embrace that and be true to myself. It won’t be some boy seeking their favor that kills Gregor Clegane, it will be me.”

Jon set the shield aside, adjusting his mail before Edric helped him into his cuirass. Tyrion looked to the shield and nodded. “Show them their belief is worthless, or at least no better than your own. A strong statement to make should you win.”

Edric finished tightening the straps of his cuirass and moved to get his arm harness while Jon looked to Tyrion. “Have you thought on my terms?”

“That I be your man for life?” Tyrion laughed. “I already told you I agreed to it. If you win of course I would forever owe you a debt I could never repay. If that pays it then I’ll be glad to work with you.”

“What of now?” Jon asked. “Does my attempt buy any loyalty, or only my victory?”

Tyrion was confused as he watched Edric slide the armored pieces along Jon’s arm, securing them and moving to get another while Jon tested the fit. “Why do you ask?”

The armor clinked when Jon shrugged. “Curiosity. If I told you I intended to send Ghost into the crowd and murder as many as he could, would you run off to tell someone?”

With a glance to the direwolf laying in the corner, Tyrion shook his head. “Let him have his fill.”

“Truly?” Jon asked doubtfully. “Even if it were your family?”

Tyrion took a moment to think. “You wouldn’t go after Tommen, so I wouldn’t have much of a desire to warn them.”

Jon laughed as Edric secured his left pauldron. “Good to know.”

After a moment Tyrion asked, “Do you intend to?”

“No,” Jon said shaking his head, “of course not. I’m just curious what your loyalty means.”

“It means I’m on your side.”
Edric glanced at Jon, who tested the flexibility in his armor. Once he seemed to deem it acceptable, Jon gave the boy a nod. Jon pulled a tabard over his armor which was secured by his sword belt over that. Checking the white hilted Rondel Dagger on his belt, he then looked to Edric as the squire laid our three swords on Jon’s bed.

Tyrion laughed, stepping closer to look at the three matching blades, each with near exactly the same golden flame hilt and black scabbard with golden chape and hangers. “I see you’re at least prepared.”

Jon turned to him, making Tyrion meet him. “You remember how we spoke of your uncle going to do what your father could not?”

“Gerion?” Tyrion nodded. “Aye.”

“Well I’ve done what your father couldn’t,” Jon said reaching for one of the swords and drawing it. Tyrion’s eyes widened as he looked at the smokey ripples of the Valyrian steel blade before him. “Is that-”

“Valyrian steel,” Jon said tapping the blade. “And my last resort should things come to it.”

“How do you have that?” Tyrion asked, pulling back slightly when Jon offered to let him hold it. “Are you sure?”

“I doubt even if you managed to slay me and give it to your father he would spare you,” Jon said with a smirk.

Tyrion laughed and nodded, taking the blade and turning away to give it a swing. “Incredible.”

“Would you believe Maester Aemon gave it to me for speaking with him at the Wall?” Jon asked carefully.

Tyrion scoffed. “Perhaps if the speaking was while you were in his bed.” Turning back to Jon he handed the blade off and met his gaze. “Though I doubt that’s how you came about it.”

“It will have to be enough for now,” Jon said sheathing the blade and taking one of his others. “Should I live, perhaps I’ll share another tale.”

Tyrion arched his brow. “You’re an odd one, Jon.”

Flexing his hands now the sword was secure on his belt and his gauntlets slid on, Jon looked to Tyrion with a laugh as he thought of a response worthy of the imp. “Boring men sink. I intend to soar.”

Sliding on his close helmet, Jon strode toward the outer ward which had been chosen for the combat. People looked on in awe, though whether it was of the young lord in his full set of armor or the massive white wolf at his side, Tyrion would never be quite sure. He was only sure that Jon could have walked faster, but kept a slower pace so Tyrion didn’t need to run and match his longer strides.

The sun struggled to break through the clouds, leaving the day gray and windy as they arrived to find what seemed well over a thousand people that came to see who would live or die. They lined the castle wallwalks and elbowed one another on the steps of keeps and towers. They watched from the stable doors, from windows and bridges, from balconies and roofs. And the yard was packed with them, so many that the gold cloaks and the knights of the Kingsguard had to shove them back
to make enough room for the fight. Some had dragged out chairs to watch more comfortably, while others perched on barrels. Some even had small children sitting on their shoulders to get a better view, many of whom shouted and pointed at the giant white wolf stood beside the knight in black armor.

Though flashing a hateful glare toward the wolf, Cersei seemed half a child stood beside Ser Gregor. In his armor, the Mountain looked even larger than normal. Beneath a yellow surcoat bearing the three black dogs of Clegane he wore heavy plate over chainmail, a dull grey steel dinted and scarred in battle where Jon’s shined like obsidian. Where Jon wore a close helmet with a pointed visor and ridge from which he’d removed his silk streamers, Gregor wore a flat-topped greathelm bolted to his gorget with a narrow slit for vision and a stone fist atop it.

The man looked as though he lived up to his name, chiseled out of rock. His greatsword was planted in the ground before him, six feet of scarred metal, a foot or two beyond Jon’s longsword. He clasped the crosshilt to either side of the grip in huge steel mitten gauntlets as Tyrion was sure he saw the man’s eyes narrow upon seeing the direwolf.

“*It seems he remembers,*” Edric said with a laugh as he looked from the Mountain to his lord.

“*Remembers?*” asked Tyrion.

“*Ghost took out most of the men who ambushed us,*” Edric told him. “*And unhorsed Gregor a dozen times. Or so I’d heard.*” He winced internally, remembering that the others in the Fellowship had said it was a dozen times.

“*It was three times,*” Jon clarified, adjusting his armor.

“*Do you have a plan?*” Tyrion asked, noting Jon didn’t seem significantly lighter than Gregor since both wore sets of plate.

Jon looked to the mountain he needed to ascend before answering, “*Win.*”

Tyrion frowned, watching Jon remove his scabbard and hand it to Edric. For a moment he wondered if he might have been better off with Oberyn, but seeing both Jon and his squire showing no sign of doubt gave him some faith. He turned his gaze to the platformed erected beside the Tower of the Hand, halfway between the two champions. That was where Lord Tywin sat with his brother Ser Kevan. He was grateful at least that King Tommen was not there, so might avoid seeing the mess that would surely come.

Once Tywin glanced briefly at his second son, he lifted his hand and a dozen trumpeters blew a fanfare to quiet the crowd. The High Septon shuffled forward in his crystal crown and prayed that the Father Above would help them in this judgement, and that the Warrior would lend his strength to the arm of the man whose cause was just.

At that Jon slammed his fist against his chest plate, staring down Gregor as even the septon went quiet to look at them. It suddenly felt as if the air had turned to water, drowning them all as the men glared at one another through the slits of their helms.

Ser Osmund Kettleback brought Clegane his shield, a massive thing of heavy oak rimmed in black iron. The front of it had been the hounds of Clegane painted over in favor of a seven-pointed star the Andals had brought to Westeros when they crossed the narrow sea to overwhelm the First Men and their gods. Tyrion noted a few murmurs when Jon answered the sight by baring his own shield bearing signs of the Old Gods and even the fiery heart of the Red God of Essos.
There were fifty yards between them as Jon locked his visor down and took his sword, drawing it from the scabbard in Edric’s hands while stepping forward. Tyrion noted the blade lacked any hint of smoky ripples.

“Why would they chose you to fight me?” Jon called out when they were ten yards apart. “You’ve already failed to kill me once!”

“You can’t run this time,” Gregor said through grunts as he pressed forward.

Jon moved to the side, making Gregor start turning to face him. “If I were you I would kneel and beg mercy. You won’t get any from me, but perhaps when I stick my sword through your heart the gods may grant you some if it isn’t cursed!”

Jon came to a stop, holding his shield up with his sword drawn back while sinking into the dirt. His gaze locked on Gregor through his slit visor, seeming like a statue as the mountain let out a laugh and charged forward.

It was easy enough to avoid the first slash, though Jon was surprised at how quickly Gregor stopped the greatsword’s momentum and turned his slash toward him. Jon gave up his slash to raise his shield, letting it take the slash which made him stumble back.

With a quick wince he cursed himself for letting the hit land while he wasn’t firm. But then he saw Gregor shift and prepare for a follow up, so Jon waited for the last moment before dashing to his left, ducking under Gregor’s slash. His sword scraped against the side of his dented steel cuirass, leaving a light scratch before Jon turned and threw his shield forward just in time to block Gregor as the mountain swung his hand back. The pommel of his greatsword slammed into Jon’s shield as the Lord of Nightsong thrust his right arm forward and roared as the tip of his sword slipped through the greathelm’s visor.

The crowd gasped when Jon drew his sword back from the stumbling Mountain who screamed in pain. When he swung wildly, Jon backed away calmly, letting his shield rest at his side. He couldn’t see clearly through the thin visor, but was sure he’d pierced the mountain’s left eye. While that was surely a boon, Jon was disappointed it hadn’t been his sword side, which might have made things a bit easier.

Tyrion let out a laugh as he saw his sister sneer at Jon while the Mountain tried to lean his head, but struggled uncomfortably against the bolted helm.

“Would you rather me let my wolf face you so at least you have a chance?” Jon asked, tilting his head to try meeting the Mountain’s gaze. “Oh wait, you lost to him as well.”

Gregor growled, throwing his shield aside to wield his sword with both hands as he charged at Jon. Tyrion was shocked by how different much quicker Gregor seemed without the shield, Jon just barely managing to dodge his strikes and block them with his shield. Yet he glanced to his side as Edric scoffed.

“Is this truly the Mountain?” Edric asked with a dismissive laugh.

“Of course it is,” Tyrion snorted, “unless they’ve dressed a auroch in his armor. Why?”

Edric shook his head. “Your father must be what kept him alive.”

Tyrion furrowed his brow, turning back to watch as Jon dodged another strike, swinging at Gregor’s helm again only to hit the side. He glanced toward the judges and saw that while Tyrell sat on edge, gasping with each dodged strike like most of the audience, his father was sat still with
a flicker of frustration each time Gregor’s sword scraped across Jon’s shield. At his side Oberyn’s grin grew each time Jon struck, even though none shed blood. It wasn’t until Tyrion looked again and saw another strike ring the Mountain’s helm that he saw what must have been obvious to any trained in combat.

Unlike the first which Jon had dodged, each of Gregor’s strikes slammed into the dirt, throwing up streaks of dirt as Jon stepped aside, slamming his helm again and preparing to dodge the followup strike.

It was almost a minute before Gregor finally had enough and stumbled back shaking his head. Jon took the chance to roll his shoulders and adjust his grip on his shield before looking to Gregor. “Beg for mercy or burn, Gregor!”

“Shut up,” boomed, pressing a gauntlet to his helm.

“I wonder what will become of your keep once I kill you?”

“SHUT UP!” Gregor roared.

Jon stood tall as Gregor glared at him, speaking as clearly as he could. “You’re a murderer and a rapist, Gregor Clegane. A craven afraid to care for any but himself!”

“You talk to much,” Gregor grumbled. “You make my head hurt.”

Jon stepped back, grabbing his shield with both hands and driving it into the ground. It almost seemed as if the weirwood painted on it was coming from the dirt as Jon stepped in front of it, letting the shield stand behind him while he gripped his longsword with both hands.

“Speak your crimes and you may find peace in death,” Jon told him, garnering murmurs from the crowd.

“Crimes?” Gregor asked with a growl as he stood straight, letting his gauntled hand fall aside. “What crimes? You mean killing you and the other idiots sent by your pathetic father? That was no crime.”

“Crimes unworthy of a knight,” Jon said carefully. “Crimes committed even within the walls of the Red Keep.”

Tyrion’s eyes widened, shifting toward his father whose head shifted slighthly while casting a brief glance toward Oberyn. The Dornish prince’s amusement had faded, his hands squeezing the arms of his chair as he sat up, looking like he was barely keeping back from leaping into the fray himself.

Jon thought back to the dream he’d had the night before. Even before his fear had twisted it all it had been too much. He’d entered a dining hall to find his family waiting for him. The family that could have been if things were just a little different.

Lyanna Stark and Rhaegar Targaryen were still dead, but he wasn’t without a father or even a mother. Ned had been a father to him and the Starks his siblings, but Elia had been there to welcome him with a hug for her second son. A true mother’s hug, even while the world might have looked down on him she never had, making sure he knew a mother’s love.

His sister Rhaenys was a true Dornish princess, her and her mother helping guide her handmaiden Sansa while also acting a mentor to Arya, showing her what she could be. At the head of the table was King Aegon the Wyrm, a true Targaryen king with silvery hair and violet eyes that shined with
brotherly affection as he embraced Jon.

Even that had been enough to make Jon restless, his chest in a knot as he looked over his family. But then reality seeped through and from the crackling embers of the hearth a lion roared, spearing out three burning hounds which tore them apart as Jon could do nothing but watch.

“You raped a princess and murdered her children,” Jon said with a sneer beneath his helm. “Beg forgiveness and thank the gods you face a wolf of the North rather than burn to the dragons in the east.”

The crowd was split between confusion and whispers as Tyrion let out a laugh at the foolish boy he’d pinned his future to.

“Wolf?” Gregor huffed. “I’m going to rip out your eye and fuck your skull, boy! I’m going to find your sisters and drag them North so I can make your brother watch as I take them like the worthless bitches they are.”

Jon lowered himself into a stance with the end of his sword across his left forearm. “May the Lord of Light use your sin to fuel his flames.”

The Mountain let out a laugh before gripping his sword and striding forward. With each step Jon saw a nightmarish flash of everything that had haunted him the night before.

He saw Gregor riding into Winterfell and crushing Rickon’s chest against a wall before slashing through Bran and the girls, skewering Robb and their father. He saw him grabbing Dom’s face and ripping the skin from it, he saw him punch Sam’s stomach and rip out his intestines. He saw Gregor throw Thoros into burning spikes and slam his fist down through Edric’s skull. He saw Gregor enter Hollow Hill and cut through the Fellowship. He saw the Mountain dressed in direwolf pelts as he drove a lance through Loras’ heart and raised it to let the corpse slide down, making room for the rest of the Tyrells. He saw Gregor crush Oberyn’s skull while Ellaria wept at his side. He saw Gregor grab Myrcella by the neck, crushing it to silence he begging Jon for help. He saw Gregor standing over his bedridden mother covered in blood as he pressed his hand into her face while she cried out his true name.

It felt like Jon’s entire body was on fire. He was struggling to keep himself composed, feeling like his skin would rip from him if he didn’t strike.

Ghost howled, drawing a few gazes as Gregor raised his sword overhead. He was smart enough to figure out Jon planned to use his arm to help aim for his visor, so only used one hand while his other gauntlet was ready to block the slit of his helm.

However when Jon raised his arm to adjust his aim the longsword slipped under it, thrusting up as Jon dropped to the ground. It was enough to pierce the mail and leather in the gap of Gregor’s right armpit, letting blood trickle down the blade. The moment Jon’s back hit the dirt he took a breath, accepting Gregor’s greatsword slamming into his chest. It might have been enough to dent his chestplate and break a few ribs if the pain of Jon’s strike hadn’t made him shift his strike at the last moment, lessening the impact.

His foot digging into the dirt, Jon turned himself enough to kick the back of Gregor’s right leg. When the Mountain started to stumble back grasping at his armpit Jon quickly turned and slammed his shoulder into his side, knocking Gregor aside and unbalancing him enough to topple the Mountain.

The crowd gasped, Tyrion stepping forward in shock as he watched Jon knock the Mountain to his
The White Wolf didn’t let up though, his left hand grabbing the hilt of Gregor’s greatsword while his right brought the pommel of his own sword down on the Mountain’s greathelm. When Gregor roared and tried to grab Jon’s right hand, the White Wolf pushed himself, pulling the greatsword from the Mountain’s mitten gauntlet and throwing it aside.

Before he could step back Jon was knocked back by the Mountain’s boot slamming into his stomach. He stumbled back, but that only gave him a running start as Gregor sat up and Jon charged in and threw his sword aside while drawing his dagger. The poleyn over his knee rang off Gregor’s helm, knocking him back to the dirt as Jon fell atop him, his left hand grabbing the fist on his greathelm and using it to keep his head steady while driving his Rondel dagger through the slide, pushing it to the right and making sure he took out that eye as well.

Drawing his dagger back, Jon rolled backward, away from Gregor’s hand as he grasped at his helm and screamed. Jon quickly got to his feet, throwing his dagger toward Edric and Tyrion.

Tyrion picked up the dagger, gaping as he looked from the bloodied blade to Jon standing over the screaming mountain rolling in the dirt among the silent crowd.

“Admit it and I’ll end your pain!” Jon bellowed, his voice filled with fury that shocked most of the crowd. “You raped Elia Martell! You murdered her infant son!” His chest heaved as he shook his head and called out, “You’re unworthy of knighthood!”

Tyrion watched with awe as Gregor blindly raised his arms toward Tywin and cried in agony, “Help! Please!”

The patron of House Lannister sat unmoved by his dog’s pain. Tyrion wondered if the flicker of anger he saw was for Jon or for Gregor’s failure. At his side there was no doubt the cause of the tears in Oberyn’s eyes.

Jon bent down to pick up his sword and let out a breath as his gaze fell on the fallen Mountain. “May the gods judge your deeds, Gregor Clegane.”

The White Wolf strode forward silently, raising his sword overhead with his left hand against the tip. His fingers wrapped around it a second before he came to a stop and thrust the blade down, guiding it straight to Gregor’s heart.

With a twisting screech the blade pushed through the thick steel of Gregor’s plate to tear open his chest and pierce his heart. It had also sliced through Jon’s glove and palm, coating the blade in blood. Jon’s eyes flickered as the steel drank his blood a split second before bursting into flames. "For my family,” he whispered as Gregor's screams fell silent.

At that the crowd screamed, shocked and horrified as Jon backed away, letting the flames flicker from the wound. He gave them all a moment to see the flames before stepping forward and yanking the blade free. With some thought he managed to make the flames fade, something he’d practiced privately with a cheaper sword days earlier.

To the crowd it seemed the blade ignited the moment it pierced Clegane’s heart and died once Jon withdrew it. Just as Jon had planned.

In the silence of the crowd Cersei’s angry scream was like water to a man crossing the Dornish desert. Tyrion laughed, unable to stop even as he felt tears fall from his eyes. When he finally did he turned his gaze toward the judges.

Tyrion saw Oberyn sat with a grin, brushing a stray tear from his cheek while beside him Tyrell
wore a somber expression that seemed almost thoughtful. His father’s gaze was locked on Jon as the young lord made his way back to Edric, hanging the sword over along with his scratched shield before turning to face them.

Seeming resolute as the crowd turned to them, Tywin rose from his seat. “The gods have made their will known. Tyrion Lannister, in the name of King Tommen of the House Baratheon, first of his name, you are hereby deemed innocent.”
“How the hells did you do that?” Tyrion asked as they entered Jon’s chambers so he could go about removing his armor.

Jon looked to Tryion as he set aside his helmet and removed his gauntlets. “The answer will have to wait until we’re out of the city.”

Tyrion’s brow arched at that, but he nodded, understanding the desire to avoid little birds overhearing anything after his trial. “Either way, consider me your man from this day until my last. Had I a sword I would lay it at your feet.”

“We’ll get you one before we leave,” Jon told him as Edric helped remove his armor. “Best you’re armed.”

“No need. I prefer my axe.”

“We’ll still get you a dagger to carry. I doubt your innocence will stop your sister or father from trying to end you. If we can’t trust anyone to be your guard, I’d at least want you armed while you’re here.”

Tyrion snickered. “I appreciate the concern.”

“I’ll need to bring White Fang to Mott’s shop anyway,” Jon sighed. “I probably destroyed the tip by putting it through Gregor’s plate and letting it burn.”

“So what now?” Tyrion asked taking a seat at the table beside Ghost who lay on the ground. “When do we leave?”

“I think a fortnight would be best,” said Jon. “Long enough to not seem as though we’re running from guilt and properly prepare.”

It didn’t take long for there to be a knock at the door. Edric reached for one of Jon’s swords as he went to open it, but found only Podrick Payne on the other side. The skinny boy looked from them to Tyrion and smiled with relief before looking to Jon, silently asking permission to enter. Waving him inside, Jon closed the door, letting the boy rush over to Tyrion while Edric finished removing his armor.

News spread quickly of Jon’s victory. While some thought the flames a trick learned from his time with Thoros, others thought him as a divine avenger. Some took the flames as some sign from the Lord of Light where others saw it as the sins of Gregor manifest, or even the flames of the seven hells coming from Gregor’s heart. It had also made Gregor seem so filled with sin the gods damned him and scorched his heart, making the things Jon had accused him of stick in their minds.

Jon was just getting finished dressing when another knock at their door made the squire look to it while Jon walked toward it adjusting his doublet and jerkin. Waiting for him as he opened it was
Oberyn Martell, who greeted him with a grin.

“Please, come in,” Jon said motioning inside.

Oberyn saw those already within and bowed his head to Tyrion. “My lord. It seems you chose well.”

“I’ve no doubt you’d have done just as well,” Tyrion said with a nod. “I hope you took no offense.”

“None at all,” Oberyn assured. Once the door was closed and Jon moved closer Oberyn turned to him and reached over to squeeze his shoulder. “House Nymeros Martell owes you a debt, my friend. Though he did not admit to them, the smallfolk do not doubt his guilt.”

“I’m sorry justice took so long. Princess Elia, Princess Rhaenys and Prince Aegon didn’t deserve such cruelty.”

“You’ve done more than Robert or any others since their death,” Oberyn said somberly, withdrawing his hand, “that is all I can ask. I thank you for avenging them, and swear to you that House Nymeros Martell shall be a friend to you and yours. If you need of anything, ask and you shall find aid with us.”

Jon seemed to examine his face for a moment before nodding. “I hate to ask so soon, but there is something House Martell could help me with. Something I’ve tried to keep quiet.”

Oberyn smirked. “And that is?”

Jon crossed his arms, glancing at the door and Tyrion and Podrick, who shared Oberyn’s interest as he met the prince’s dark eyes. “The ships I have aren’t just for building a trade. I plan to follow Daemon Targaryen in naming myself King of the Stepstones and Narrow Sea, making them part of Westeros.”

Oberyn’s gaze shifted to Tyrion, who shared his shock, nearly matching Podrick’s wide eyed expression. “You seek a crown?”

“Tales tell of the Stepstones being the Arm of Dorne before the greenseers and Children of the Forest shattered it,” Jon said thinking back on the stories he’d read.

“I tend to believe Archmaester Cassander’s thought that they were lost to rising seas from prolonged summers and warm winters,” Oberyn said with a laugh.

“Either way, I seek to reclaim what was once part of us.”

Oberyn nodded. “What would you need of us?”

“As I understand it Dorne doesn’t have much of a fleet, so I would only ask that my ships be allowed to find shores along the Broken Arm of Dorne to work from, and perhaps seek solace and trade in Sunspear at times.”

“My brother shall help,” Oberyn assured, “but I will have him speak with House Toland to aid you as well, should you move north some and Ghost Hill be a better place for you to seek refuge. Perhaps you could even find some use of the men in Ghaston Grey.” The older prince laughed, crossing his arms with a smirk. “Were I not set here I might consider joining you in such a venture.”

“It will be lesser for your absence, Prince Oberyn.”
Though it had been meant as a compliment, Oberyn’s smile faltered at the sincere comment. “Do you intend to bring your Lady Jynessa with you?”

Jon shook his head. “No.”

Oberyn nodded. “That is for the best. I would suggest distancing yourself early. It will make the departure less painful.”

“I’ve been through it before,” Jon said solemnly.

“Is that so?” Oberyn arched his brow. “When was that?”

Jon had shared with them his intent for the Stepstones, though perhaps not his true purpose in using it. He trusted Tyrion, and knew Podrick enough to know the boy was loyal to Tyrion. He could have made up a lie, but wanted Oberyn as an ally, and thought it best to be honest. “When Princess Myrcella left for Dorne.”

Tyrion frowned hearing the boy’s somber tone while Podrick again wore shock and Oberyn snickered in surprise. “Did you know the princess well?”

“Better than most here,” he said confidently. “I often guarded the royal family with Ser Barristan so grew close to her and Tommen.”

“Oh yes. I remember now. You named her queen of love at beauty when you won your tourney.” Oberyn nodded with an impressed look. “To have done that and kept your head must have been no easy task.”

“I thanked her for calling me Ser and making we feel a knight when I was a bastard. They took it as only that.”

“Did she return your affection?”

“Yes, though nothing ever came of it. By the time I saw her as someone I wanted to spend time with my father had been named traitor and I couldn’t speak to her. So I kept my distance and I have since she left.”

“You should speak with Daemon,” Oberyn offered with a grim laugh. “He’s shared your plight of longing for a princess he cannot have.”

It took Jon a moment to put it together and nod. “Princess Arianne?”

“He even asked my brother for her hand, though was denied of course. He may know your pain even better than most men who long for those they cannot reach. Though I assure you it shall fade in time.”

“You’ve gone through it?” Jon asked.

Oberyn wore a grin as he shook his head. “Never once. How else do you think I’ve come to have eight daughters?”

Once Oberyn left Jon packed the few things he needed repaired and for the first time strapped Dark Sister to his belt, wearing it as he left his chambers with Tyrion and their squires. He didn’t want to risk leaving it unattended, and had excuse enough to claim he wore a spare of the same design as his White Fang.
After so long having people ignore him, Jon was shocked when people called out for him as he passed through Flea Bottom. Some stopped him to shake his hand or even thank him for slaying a sinner like Gregor.

Tobho Mott was expecting Jon, having heard of his battle. He checked the sword over, finding fine fractures near the tip, though the steel wasn’t badly warped by the flames since it was only in them for a moment. He left one of his apprentices to repair the sword and another to fix the scratched round shield.

“Shall we repaint the same seal, or go back to your coat of arms?” Tobho asked handing the shield to his apprentice.

“Blank, if possible. If I’m to face pirates I’d rather have a blank black surface to not draw arrows should they attack at night.”

“Well thought,” Tobho said waving away his apprentice.

“If possible I’d also like something smaller to use more easily,” Jon told him looking around a shop. “A buckler of a sort.”

“Simple enough to make.”

“Well, I actually had an idea I was hoping I could run by you to see if you think it worth the effort compared to a normal buckler.”

Tobho took a second to think, and perhaps if Jon wasn’t a regular he might have simply turned him away, but the young lord had earned some of his time. Taking the young lord aside, Jon and he spoke for a while, with Tobho arching his brow as he thought on some of Jon’s wants from his buckler, drawing out how it could be made functional. By the time Jon left, he did so with an order for seven of them, each colored differently.

With Jon’s order taken he left with Tyrion now owning a new dagger, though the Lannister wouldn’t let Jon pay for it. “You’ve already given me my life today. Let me at least spare you this.”

On their way back to the Red Keep, Tyrion looked to Jon and asked quietly when none were around, “Why the Stepstones?”

“To test myself and build,” Jon answered.

The honesty surprised Tyrion, who had expected to be told the answer would come later like the Valyrian steel sword and his fire trick. His desire also surprised him. What could he be testing himself for, Tyrion wondered, but doubted that answer would come within the walls of the city.

When they returned to the keep Tyrion noticed a beautiful young Dornish lady waiting for them with a somber expression that brightened some when she saw Jon and patted the man’s back. “Good luck.”

Jon looked down at him and nodded. “Stay safe, Tyrion.” With a smile he added, “I’m owed more than a day of your life.”

Tyrion chuckled watching Jon walk over to his lady after a quick word with Edric, who asked Podrick if he would like to spar some. When the boy looked to Tyrion, the little lord shrugged. “Perhaps you two could escort me to my room first?” Even with his new dagger, he wasn’t sure his sister wouldn’t just have Ilyn Payne or one of the Kettleblacks waiting in his room to kill him.
Instead Tyrion found Jaime waiting outside of his chamber door, a light laugh escaping him as he sent the boys to go train. His brother looked older than he ever had, weaker as well, and yet still stronger than half the men he’d ever seen, Tyrion was sure. When he saw Tyrion approaching Jaime stood straight and gave a solemn nod.

“Impressive scar,” Jaime said waving a hand across his face to mimic the scar across Tyrion’s.

“They made me fight a battle without my big brother to protect me.”

“I heard tell you almost burned the city down.”

“A filthy lie. I only burned the river.” Entering his chambers, Tyrion turned to watch Jaime close the door and suddenly remembered his fears and the hold Cersei had over their brother. “Are you here to kill me?”

“Of course not,” Jaime said frowning. “I owe you at least that much. Had Jon not stepped forward I might have, if only to pay my debt.”

“Debt?” Tyrion cocked his head. “I don’t understand. What debt?”

“Perhaps it’s best. Some doors are best left closed.”

“Oh dear,” said Tyrion. “Is there something grim and ugly behind it? Could it be that someone said something cruel about me once? I’ll try not to weep. Tell me.”

“Tyrion…”

The fear in his brother’s eyes was a shock. “Tell me,” Tyrion said again.

His brother averted his gaze as he answered softly, “Tysha.”

“Tysha?” Tyrion’s heart twisted at the thought of the fool he’d been, falling for some trick played upon him all. The love and peace he felt before learning the truth and watching the woman he loved whore herself before him. “What of her?”

“She was no whore. I never bought her for you. That was a lie that father commanded me to tell. Tysha was… she was what she seemed to be. A crofter’s daughter, chance met on the road.”

Tyrion felt as though he was back in the cells with the Mountain’s hands around his throat and in his chest, crushing his heart and insides. Jaime wouldn’t meet his eyes as Tyrion tried to search them for some hint that this was one of Cersei’s games.

He tried to remember what Tysha looked like. Her hair. Her eyes. She’d been a girl. She had been “My wife,” he croaked. “She wed me.”

“For gold, Father said. She was lowborn, you were a Lannister of Casterly Rock. All she wanted was the gold, which made her no different from a whore, so… so it would not be a lie, not truly, and… he said that you required a sharp lesson. That you would learn from it and thank me later…”

“Thank you?” Tyrion choked. “He gave her to his guards. A barracks full of guards. He made me… watch.” He couldn’t say the truth. That he had taken her too. Made to pay her more than the others. A price worthy of a Lannister.

“I never knew he would do that. You must believe me.”

“Oh, must I?” Tyrion snarled. “Why should I believe you about anything, ever? She was my wife!”
“Tyrion-”

Tyrion rushed forward and pushed him as hard as he could, Jaime’s armor clinking as he stumbled back a step.

“I suppose I earned that.”

Tyrion pulled the dagger from his side, aiming it at his brother, who frowned at the point of it. “You’ve earned more than that. You and my sweet sister and our loving father. You all deserve your own sharp lesson.”

“Tyrion, put that away.”

He met his brother’s eyes expecting to see it was a demand, but saw only sorrow. Tyrion wondered if Jaime would have let him kill him then rather than fight back, but Tyrion put the dagger back in it’s sheath. “You’re right. This wouldn’t be enough. You deserve to suffer as I have, and this is worse than a dagger to the heart.”

Jaime shook his head, not in disagreement but in realizing this hadn’t gone as he had intended. “Tyrion, I’ve given you the truth. You owe me the same. Did you do it? Did you kill him?”

Tyrion laughed at the question, which was another knife twisting in his guts. “Are you sure you want to know?” Seeing that his brother felt he needed to, Tyrion wondered which answer would hurt him most. “Joffrey would have been a worse king than Aerys ever was. He stole his father’s dagger and gave it to a footpad to slit the throat of Brandon Stark, did you know that?”

“I… I thought he might have.”

“Well, a son takes after his father. Joff would have killed me as well, once he came into his power. For the crime of being short and ugly, of which I am so conspicuously guilty.”

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“Must I spell every little thing out for you? Very well. Cersei is a lying whore, she’s been fucking Lancel and Osmund Kettleblack and probably Moon Boy and half the city. And maybe I am the monster they all say I am, but either way the gods have judged me innocent of killing your vile son.”

Jaime looked at his grinning brother before turning and leaving the chamber. Tyrion waited for a long moment before walking over to the table and pouring himself a cup of wine. Part of him hoped it was poisoned, but he downed it still, the entire cup before throwing it at the wall and screaming as the rage within him boiled and burned him.

If it had been any but Jaime he would not have felt so betrayed. Yet as he tried to think of the girl he had loved, who haunted him even when he did not think of her and could not remember the details of her face, he crumbled to the ground and held his head in his hands. Tears ran warm between his fingers, his back against the leg of the table as he shook, his whimpers becoming laughter by the time he looked to the door with a relieved sigh.

He was saved from a life here among them. If they didn’t kill him he would have gone insane unless he had made his father watch him rape some woman he loved, maybe even Cersei before he opened her throat and tore out her heart. Yet he would be free of them in time. He would be able to find his own life away from these awful people, a chance for him to find better vengeance, to be away from it all as they withered and died.
Tyrion would do all he could to see Jon wear a crown as King of the Stepstones and Narrow Sea. But that would not be the only crown he wore. What better vengeance was there than to take from them all they wanted, and set a bastard they both now surely hated and feared upon the Iron Throne?
Chapter 47

Chapter Summary

Sam sits with royalty in Dorne while Eddard rides beyond the wall.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was surprising to see such levity born from death, though Sam couldn’t say he was surprised or that he didn’t share it. With news coming of Gregor Clegane’s death at the hands of Jon Snowfire he had nearly come to tears in relief. He had feared his friend foolish enough to take up such a task, and dreaded the days without knowing.

That had been the hardest part of traveling south. At first it had been the heat, oppressively ever present heat beating them every moment of every day, even in the midst of autumn. Yet in time Sam grew accustomed to it, finding little tricks to ease it beyond simply fanning himself. He’d expected his biggest problem would be the guards, and it might have been, but by the time the heat became less of a problem so had they.

At first they clearly thought little of him, knowing he was placed there on Tyrion’s command and assuming it was some show of favor. Most ignored him, especially once he ignored their japes of his weight and the like as Jon suggested. He wanted to answer back, tell them how unoriginal they were, but suspected them the type to hit him afterward, and even after training with Jon, Dom and Loras he still dreaded being hit.

While he hadn’t found friends like those in King’s Landing he found a few he spoke to easily enough. The older bald Maester Caleotte had been kind to him when he showed interest in Sunspear’s library, as had the young Maester Myles. Dake, one of the Lannister guards, shared a similar build to Sam, and had given him some advice when he found Sam swinging his sword while in full armor. Dontin had joined them in training along with Morsan and Rolder.

They also helped with his archery, which he realized only months into their stay had grown easier. He no longer struggled to pull the string. He’d also noticed his clothes stopped fitting as they should, perhaps sweating some of the fat around his middle, but he was sure his chest had broadened some, as had his arms, which grew thicker the more he trained with his bow.

Wielding a sword didn’t exhaust him near as much either, though he was still hopeless when it came to the skill of using it. Still, he trained as much as he could. He wanted to be ready for what was to come, and he knew it would require fighting even if he disliked it.

For a time it seemed as though each letter Jon wrote gave them another enemy. First it was Balon Greyjoy who named himself king, then Stannis Baratheon who slew his own brother and took Storm’s End.

And then news came of Theon Greyjoy taking Winterfell and slaying Jon’s youngest brothers. Sam had been surprised at finding himself contemplating riding north with Jon, sure his skill with a bow had grown enough to help Jon and the others retake the keep, and wanting to put an arrow through the Greyjoy’s head for Jon’s sake.
When word came of Stannis’ impending attack on King’s Landing Sam had feared for his friend, and for the first time truly regretted leaving him. He disliked it, but knew it had a purpose he did his best to achieve. However if Jon died when he could have been there to help he would have lived the rest of his life in misery, unable to make up for failing to be there. To his relief it was only days later he heard that not only had they won, but Jon had been the one to slay Stannis, earning himself a lordship and ships to begin their ‘trade’.

He also learned that Loras and Garlan were told the truth of things, and shortly afterward all the Tyrells knew. If he was honest, Sam disliked that, but understood that lying to Loras had been one of Jon’s regrets. Either way, it seemed to work out well as Jon hinted at plotting with the Tyrells. Though he wouldn’t risk telling him what they plotted, Sam suspected he found his answer when news came of Joffrey’s death at his wedding to Margaery.

In his letters Jon had spoken of his budding friendship with Tyrion born over games of Cyvasse. He also spoke of his growing alliance with Aurane Waters, who helped him man his ships, and his relationship with Jynessa Blackmont. Yet still Sam was surprised to hear Jon had stepped forward as Tyrion’s champion, claiming victory and taking the Mountain’s life.

Sam had expected he would be alone in his joy, yet it seemed to spread through all of Sunspear, and likely much of Dorne. The day news came it spread quick, and by the afternoon many had raised glasses in honor of the Northman who avenged their princess.

After training with Emannar he went with Rolder to guard Princess Myrcella and found her sat with Princess Arianne. Noticing his presence as he switched places with Dontin, Arianne turned and waved to him. “Ser Sam,” the Dornish princess called, “could you come here for a moment?”

Emmanar shrugged when Sam looked to him before making his way toward where the princesses sat. “How may I be of service, Princess?”

“You know this Lord Snowfire, don’t you?” Arianne asked turning to him. “Myrcella spoke of you being his friend.”

Sam glanced to the princess, making sure it was actually her. Since their arrival, Myrcella frequently had switched places with her handmaiden, and as far as Sam knew none had noticed when they did. Thankfully this wasn’t one of those times.

“The best of friends,” Sam said looking to Arianne. “Brothers in all but blood.”

“Then you should be celebrating as well, surely,” she said tapping the spot beside her on the cushioned bench. “Join us.”

He looked to Myrcella, who flashed him a smile to tell him it was fine. Taking the offered seat he bowed his head, taking the cup she offered him. “Thank you, Princess.”

“Tell me of him,” she said looking between the two. “What is this Lord Snowfire like?”

“Is it so easy to describe someone, princess?” Sam offered. “To speak of his bravery may lead you to doubt the time he spent studying history or training at the harp. No one is so simple, surely. No one of interest, anyway.”

Arianne giggled. “True, though I find there is always some things core to a person which can be summed up.”

“Then I would say he is unstoppable,” Sam answered after a drink of the tea offered, setting down the glass. “I saw Gregor Clegane’s greatsword slice open his chest. I saw him go cold and silent.
And I saw him wake when Thoros of Myr breathed fire between his lips. If death could not stop him, how can anything else hope to?"

Arianne’s brow knit as she listened to him and saw his sincerity, speaking earnestly of the man he saw revived. Clearly she doubted him, but believed that he believed as much. “Then I imagine you are not surprised to find he brought the Mountain down.”

“He had failed to slay Jon before,” Sam said with a smile, “there was never any hope of him succeeding.” That was a lie, Sam had been terrified, but he didn’t need to share that.

“And you, Myrcella?” she asked turning to the Baratheon princess. “What do you think of Lord Snowfire?”

“I think him all Samwell says. My uncle could have chosen no finer a champion.”

“And do either of you know of his intent to take the Stepstones?” Arianne asked sitting back and sipping at her tea.

Though Myrcella wore shock from the revelation, Sam’s came from her knowledge. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“He has spoken with my uncle and asked for our aid should he need it as well as permission to base himself in the Broken Arm.”

Sam wondered how she would know since it was surely asked of Doran, and realized she likely knew because he had her go about achieving it. “And you agreed?” asked Sam.

Arianne seemed impressed as she nodded. “We have, of course. My uncle swore it to him for avenging Elia. Had we ships he may have promised those as well.” Arianne looked between the two. “Do you think his words against his family true?”

Myrcella and Sam shared a glance, confused by the question. “Pardon, Princess?”

“Do you think him truly loyal to your family,” Arianne said with a look to Myrcella, “or do you think it an act?” She turned to Samwell then. “You knew Lord Eddard some. Do you think he would still be loyal to his natural born son?”

Samwell shrugged. “It is hard to say, Princess. He cared for Jon, I know, but I couldn’t say how he thought of Jon after he spoke the truth of him at court. If I must then I would say he is the type to accept the truth, but that doesn’t mean his lords will. After all, they say The North Remembers. I doubt they would forgive so easily.”

“I don’t doubt his loyalty,” Myrcella offered. “Why else would he have risked his life for my uncle?”

“Your uncle isn’t linked to the crown,” Arianne noted.

“But is still blood to my brother, whom both Tyrion and Jon were close to. Tommen looked up to Jon. Before we left he had taken some lessons in riding with him. Jon was more a brother to Tommen than Joffrey.”

Seeing the somber expression she wore mentioning her dead brother, Sam nodded. “I know he cared for the prince as well.”

“King now,” Arianne said crossing her arms and glancing at Myrcella.
‘For now’ Sam thought, but silently reached for his glass to finish his drink before going back to guarding the door. He was sure Jon would spare Tommen, but even with Joffrey gone it still left the Lannisters in power. Even if he didn’t know they would do little good in power, he might still take the throne to stop the war with the North.

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Returning to Castle Black, Benjen found Yoren and his recruits among those who greeted them. Most shocking was Bloodwing, who had grown as large as a wolf or large dog, though he was all wings and neck and tail, lighter than he looked. He had to be to find it so easy to swirl through the air above them, blowing out puffs of flame whenever he took a perch before observing the newcomers.

Craster’s wives had been shocked at the sight of the dragon, and Benjen was sure it would no longer be a secret as some of the brothers brought the women to Mole’s Town.

Jeor and Benjen met with the maesters to ask after Dragonglass, though neither had any knowledge of how they could craft it themselves.

“The smallfolk like to say obsidian is made by dragons, but it comes from the flames of the earth,” Cayle told them, before adding, “or so the Citadel teaches us.”

“If the dragons have some part to play it is unknown,” Aemon said nodding in agreement.

“If I must, I would say the Citadel is right in this.”

Jeor had crossed his arms and nodded. “I’ll send out word to any I can asking for information on obsidian. Until we have some, all men should carry a torch as they do a sword.”

They had barely settled when the wildlings began feinting all along the wall, forcing Jeor to send out groups of brothers to counter them. Benjen had wanted to join them, but Jeor asked him to stay, using his having just returned as an excuse to keep him. While they prepared for an attack from the north, it was Bloodwing which foretold the attack from the south.

If not for him roaring and blowing flames to the south, they might not have thought something was wrong and been armed when the wildlings attacked Mole’s Town. It was early in the morning when they arrived to storm Castle Black, and it was then that Jeor lost his left hand, the stump sealed by flames.

The archers they had set up managed to pick off most of the wildling force while Benjen and Jeor held the gate. To the relief of many the wildlings perished before reaching the stair where Donal Noye had prepared a final defense that would set it ablaze but destroy their main means of transporting materials to the top of the Wall.

Aemon tried to keep Jeor in bed to avoid infection of his wound, but he would have none of it. He stood on the Wall with the others as they fired volleys of arrows upon the mammoths and giants that came for them. Donal Noye led a group to use the murder holes in the tunnels to kill them.

When Benjen tried to go instead, Donal Noye scoffed. “You stay and rain arrows on them. You’ve a further pull than I,” the smith said motioning to his missing arm.

Benjen would look back and wish he had pushed for him to take more men, otherwise they might not have found Donal Noye crushed by a giant with his sword through its neck.

While Mance assembled his host beyond the tree line, out of range of the archers on the Wall, the
Night’s Watch prepared for them and repelled each attack that came. Though at first the giants and mammoths had shaken many men, they died the same as men when oil and fire poured down on them or enough arrows pierced their flesh.

When Jeor grew too frail to stay out, Benjen was left in charge. It was him who lead the day Mance’s crudely made armored turtle came. It had been the only time he considered simply having Bloodwing fly down and burn it, but barrels of frozen gravel shattered it soon enough.

It wasn’t the arrival of reinforcements from Eastwatch that brought relief to Benjen, but the sight of a thousand men who arrived with his brother.

They embraced warmly once Eddard dismounted, Benjen squeezing him and looking him over with a sigh. “I could not be more thankful to see you.”

“Nor I you, brother,” Ned assured. “How have you fared?”

“We live, so well enough,” Benjen offered.

A screech startled the men, who looked up to where a red dragon leapt off the King’s Tower and soared toward them. Many backed away, though Ned remained beside his brother, both men watching it land with a thud before them.

“Gods,” Ned marveled, meeting the creature’s molten gold eyes.

“He was half the size when I left on our great ranging,” Benjen said with a laugh.

“And half that before we left.” They turned to see Jeor making his way toward them, pulling his cloak tight around him before extending his right hand to Eddard. “I thank you for coming, my lord.”

“And I thank you for holding the Wall,” Eddard said with a nod. He glanced over to Bloodwing as the dragon took off, flying up to the top of the King’s Tower where he sat perched while staring south.

“We’ve much to speak on, brother,” Benjen told him.

Jeor nodded, motioning for them to follow to his chambers. Eddard sent his men to work before joining them. However while they neared the chambers, Benjen stopped them and looked to Satin, one of the new recruits he had taken as a steward while taking Jeor’s place in command.

“Go find the others and have them watch Janos Slynt, but keep their distance unless he makes to attack my brother or any other from the south. To do so would be breaking our vows to remain neutral. If he does, have him captured and brought to the cells, or stopped if he cannot be captured. We can’t have them thinking us traitors while we can barely hold off the wildlings.”

“Tell them it is the Lord Commander’s order,” Jeor added before the young man hurried off to do as he was told.

Eddard sat before them, listening intently as they spoke of impossible things. An army of wights and Others who melted when stabbed by obsidian. He wanted to not believe, yet found it difficult when he saw the honesty in their eyes and had stood before a dragon nearly as large any of his children’s direwolves.

“I doubt the Lannisters will have peace, even if they did believe this,” Ned said with a sigh. “Even if we abandon the wars to the south we don’t have obsidian to arm ourselves, and you said fire did
little against the Other you faced.”

Jeor sighed, resting his left elbow on his lap as he stroked his beard with his right hand. “True, but we cannot push them back alone should they come for the Wall. We can barely hold off the wildlings, and they stay down once we put arrows in them.”

Ned nodded, glancing toward his brother before asking, “What of the wildlings?”

“What of them?” asked Benjen.

“Would they not help?” asked Ned. “Surely the only thing that could lead to such a host could be their fear of something greater. If that thing is the Others, then would they not be willing to stand with you as living men rather than die to us?”

Jeor and Benjen shared a look before the Lord Commander sat up. “We had discussed it, but weren’t sure it an option we could take. With your forces we could try to speak with them. Do you know when those from the east will be in place?”

“Ser Axell spoke of sending a scout to the gate and waiting a response. We could send our plan with him when he arrives.”

It was the next day that word came of a lone scout at the gate and they found a man cloaked in white waiting for them. Once inside, he spoke with Lord Stark and the Lord Commander before returning to the southern battalion.

When morning came, before the wildlings could attack the gate opened and Eddard Stark rode out beside his brother and Blane, another senior ranger who had survived the Fist of the First Men. At the same time another group with unlit torches went to the top of the wall where they were to watch the sun and wait.

No sooner than they set out did they see a rider from the wildling camp come forward. The horse carried a short, broad man with a snow white beard stretching to his chest. His arms were thick and hidden beneath heavy mail ending beneath golden bands engraved in runes of the First Men.

“Two crows and a wolf,” the man said with a laugh. He introduced himself as Tormund Giantbane while leading them into the camp. He laughed off the death of Mag the Mighty to the one armed smith, and asked what became of the Thenns they fought off.

Making their way through the camp they saw these weren’t monsters come to raid and kill, but families running scared. Something which scared them enough to face death at the Wall.

They came to a white fur tent raised at the edge of the trees and found the King-beyond-the-Wall waiting outside, his ragged red-and-black cloak blowing in the wind. He was a slender man with long graying brown hair armored in black mail and a bronze helm with raven wings at each temple. At his side was a squat, round woman and a small, gray-faced bald man wearing a shadowskin cloak. The bald wildling was attended by a large shadowcat striped in white and two lean grey wolves. Their presence certainly took away any doubt Ned had about bringing the others.

“Lord Eddard Stark,” Mance said with a frown to hide his surprise. With some sarcasm he added, “It is an honor, my lord. I am Mance Rayder.”

“It seems I am known to you,” said Ned.

“As are your companions,” spat the woman, glaring at Benjen and Blane.
”And you are?” asked Blane.

”Harma the Dogshead,” the woman said with a snort.

”Vasamyr Sixskins,” the bald man said carefully.

Ned noticed him glance above, toward an eagle that circled overhead. “I’ve come to find some peace.”

”Peace?” Harma laughed. “Is that why you burn us and rain arrows on us?”

Eddard ignored her, looking to Mance. “The hope you had ended when my men arrived. Surely you know that?”

”We know,” Mance said removing his helm with a sigh. “We know how few there were. How many came from Eastwatch. How their supplies dwindled. How many on the Wall are straw propped up to boost their number. How you keep your dragon at bay. We know.” He opened the flap of the tent. “Come inside. The rest of you, wait here.”

”What, even me?” said Tormund.

”Particularly you. Always.”

Eddard and Benjen dismounted, stepping into the warm tent. Inside they found two women, one of them round enough none doubted Mance as he told them, “Dalla’s time is near. She and Val will stay. They know what I mean to say.”

Ned looked around the room, noting that laying beside a bronze-headed spear was a huge, eight foot tall black horn so wide at the mouth that he could have put his arm inside up to the elbow. It had golden bands around it, old and graven with runes.

”Ah, you’ve noticed,” Mance said with a smile. “The Horn of Winter which Joramun once blew to wake the giants from the earth.”

Ned held back a sigh at the thought of another impossible thing entering his life while Benjen crossed his arms. “If you’ve had the Horn of Joramun all along, why haven’t you used it? Why bother building turtles and sending men to kill us in our beds? If this horn is what you say, why not just sound it and be done?”

It was Dalla who answered, great with child and lying on her pile of furs beside the brazier. “We free folk know things you kneelers have forgotten. Sometimes the short road is not the safest. The Horned Lord once said that sorcery is a sword without a hilt. There is no safe way to grasp it.”

Mance ran a hand along the curve of the great horn. "No man goes hunting with only one arrow in his quiver," he said. "I had hoped that Styr and Jarl would take your brothers unawares and open the gate for us. I drew your garrison away with feints and raids and secondary attacks. Bowen Marsh swallowed that lure as I knew he would, but your band of cripples and orphans proved to be more stubborn than anticipated. Don't think you've stopped us, though. The truth is, even with the southern men you are too few and we are too many. I could continue the attack here and still send ten thousand men to cross the Bay of Seals on rafts and take Eastwatch from the rear. I could storm the Shadow Tower too, I know the approaches as well as any man alive. I could send men and mammoths to dig out the gates at the castles you've abandoned, all of them at once."

"Why don't you, then?" asked Ned, unphased by the threat.
"Blood," said Mance Rayder. "I'd win in the end, yes, but you'd bleed me, and my people have bled enough."

"Your losses haven't been that heavy," said Blane.

"Not at your hands." Mance studied the men of the watch. "You saw the Fist of the First Men. You know what happened there. You know what we are facing."

"The Others," Ned said to Mance’s surprise.

The man nodded. "They grow stronger as the days grow shorter and the nights colder. First they kill you, then they send your dead against you. The giants have not been able to stand against them, nor the Thenns, the ice river clans, the Hornfoots."

"Nor you?" Ned asked.

"Nor me." There was anger in that admission, and bitterness too deep for words. "Raymun Redbeard, Bael the Bard, Gendel and Gorne, the Horned Lord, they all came south to conquer, but I've come with my tail between my legs to hide behind your Wall." He touched the horn again. "If I sound the Horn of Winter, the Wall will fall. Or so the songs would have me believe. There are those among my people who want nothing more…"

"But once the wall is fallen," Dalla said, "what will stop the Others?"

Mance gave her a fond smile. "It's a wise woman I've found. A true queen." He turned back to Ned. "Go back and tell them to open their gate and let us pass. If they do, I will give them the horn, and the Wall will stand until the end of days."

Ned studied the man for a moment before asking, "Are you their king?"

“I’ve never had a crown on my head or sat my arse on a bloody throne, if that’s what you’re asking,” Mance answered. “My birth is as low as a man’s can get, no septon’s ever smeared my head with oils, I don’t own any castles, and my queen wears furs and amber, not silk and sapphires. I am my own champion, my own fool, and my own harpist. You don’t become King-beyond-the-Wall because your father was. The free folk won't follow a name, and they don't care which brother was born first. They follow fighters. When I left the Shadow Tower there were five men making noises about how they might be the stuff of kings. Tormund was one, the Magnar another. The other three I slew, when they made it plain they'd sooner fight than follow."

"You can kill your enemies," Ned said bluntly, "but can you rule your friends? If we let your people pass, are you strong enough to make them keep the king's peace and obey the laws?"

"Whose laws? The laws of Winterfell and King's Landing?" Mance laughed. "When we want laws we'll make our own. You can keep your king's justice too, and your king's taxes. I'm offering you the horn, not our freedom. We will not kneel to you."

"You would rather die than take our hand?" Ned asked. "Bring down the Wall if you want, but my son and his army wait for me. Will you run from him as you do the Others? Should I die, you and all here die." He pointed to Dalla. "Would you leave this child to the Others because you’re too craven to join us?"

"Join you?" Mance laughed. "Spend our days doing what? Serving you?"

"Helping us," said Ned. "Have your army man the Wall while the rest settle in the Gift and integrate among us. Or do you truly expect us to accept cannibals roaming the roads and men
stealing women as they please?”

“You would have them abandon all they know?”

“I would have them not murder and eat men and take women against their will.”

Mance stuck out his chin defiantly as he shook his head. “If you refuse, Tormund Giantsbane will sound the Horn of Winter three days hence, at dawn.”

Ned wore a frown as he crossed his arms. It seemed it would come to that. “I’ll have to write back to the King before I agree to anything.”

That seemed to surprise Mance. “Which one is that?”

“The King in the North, Robb Stark.”

“Your son,” Mance said with a laugh. “Not you?”

“He was chosen because he is a fighter,” Ned said thinking back on Mance’s earlier words. Mance laughed before Ned glanced to Dalla. “They have two maesters, you could have your lady joined by guards to seek their aid and I would swear to keep her safe.”

Mance, Dalla and Val each scoffed and laughed dismissively, which was unsurprising. When he left, he hoped that she and her child would be spared. Yet still he signaled to the men on the Wall, who ignited their torches in a specific order based on his signal.

Shortly after the gates opened to let them enter, the eagle that had scouted the keep burned and Vasamyr wailed as three columns of mounted men rode from the northeast and a battalion of Stark men and brothers of the Night’s Watch rode from the Wall.

Bloodwing watched quietly from the King’s Tower until suddenly he shrieked and leapt from his perch. Ned watched him soar past them, flying straight toward Vasamyr. The wildling turned to run, but Bloodwing dug his claws into his shoulders and threw him to the ground where he blew fire on him and the wolves that moved to attack him, sending the beasts running while the man died screaming.

Once the shadowcat turned and made to attack Bloodwing, the dragon blew out a ball of flames that enveloped the beast. The moment it hit the ground crying out in pain, the dragon dug it’s claws into him and flew up, throwing the shadowcat’s corpse into another wildling.

It didn’t take long for the wildlings to surrender, but it had been long enough for Dalla to go into labor, and though her child made it through the gate to Castle Black, she never would.

“It’s not worth the chance,” Ned said as they brought the horn into the courtyard of Castle Black. Aemon stood beside Bloodwing, who stared at him as the old maester spoke a command in High Valyrian, but it was only after the second time that Bloodwing turned to the war horn and blew out a stream of scarlet streaked flames which sparked green and yellow as the runes shimmered in the air above before the gold melted and all that was left was ash.

Chapter End Notes

While there's a glimpse of Myrcella here, we'll get more from her in a few chapters.
I've always planned her story to expand more in later half, and we're about where hers will start. She's basically a year older than Jon was at the start of the story. I was considering a timeskip coming up, but I think I can avoid anything major for now.

This story is going off idea Mance actually had the horn and now it's destroyed, meaning the wall can't be brought down by it. This gives more time to focus on the south and leave the Others and beyond the wall for the endgame.

Next Chapter: Jon leaves King's Landing and visits a ruin.
Reminder In A Ruin

Chapter Summary

Jon departs King's Landing and visits a ruin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As days passed and their departure drew closer, Jon grew more anxious, as though fearing someone would suddenly see the truth of him and prevent it. To his surprise everything seemed to go smoothly, even when he spoke to Jynessa of his departure.

“I understand,” she said as they dressed after a night together. “You forget, I am heir to Blackmont. I know the responsibilities of a lord.”

“I’ve still dishonored you.”

“No more than I have dishonored you,” she said with a frown. Her somber expression was a surprise to Jon, who expected a smirk and smile as she spoke innuendo.

“You haven’t, my lady,” he assured as he approached her. “You’ve given me some joy.”

“Jon, I…” Jynessa sighed, brushing her fingers across his cheek before kissing him. She held his face a moment before stepping back and looking him over with a solemn smile. “Perhaps I will find some reason to visit Nightsong.”

“I may not be there often, but it will always welcome you,” Jon said brushing a strand of dark hair behind her ear and kissing her cheek.

In the last of their days in King’s Landing, Jon was surprised to find Tyrion so dour despite their victory. Whenever he went to Tyrion’s chambers he often found the lord with a cup in hand and half into a pitcher of wine.

It was the day before their departure when he arrived fairly early, so Tyrion had only just started. Waving the lord into his chambers, Tyrion moved to the table. “Shall it be another game today?”

“I’m afraid not,” Jon said once he was inside, holding up the bag he’d brought with him. “I’m to meet with some of the Dornish, but wanted to give this to you first.”

“A gift?” Tyrion eyed the bag. “What is it?”

“Something I had crafted for those close to me,” Jon said setting it on the table. “Though you’re the first to receive it.”

Tyrion walked to the table and arched his brow, watching Jon open the bag. Inside sat an odd buckler with a long dome over the hand and a series of inward arches instead of an even circle. The arches elongated at the bottom coming to a point, reminding Tyrion of the wing of a bat or dragon. Set around the central dome was a circle of small spikes, and while the dome and flat of the shield were painted red, the spikes and arched edges were gilded.
“I suggested the design to Tobho Mott who refined it,” he said holding the golden handle at the back and showing how it was held with the elongated point at the bottom. “I thought it best we have bucklers when we have to fight on the ships.”

“When?” Tyrion noted, taking the buckler offered.

“I doubt many pirates will be willing to parlay,” he said with a shrug. “What do you think of it?”

Tyrion looked the shield over, noting how it was smaller than the shield he used for battle, but larger for him than it had been for Jon. His small size meant it covered more, and might actually be better for him. Holding it up he imagined punching with it, perhaps using the spikes to puncture or tear cloth or mail. He then raised it and drove the bottom down like its own spike, laughing as he imagined it piercing his father’s throat.

“Menacing,” he said looking to Jon. “Thank you. You said you had others? Who will get them?”

“I’ll take one and I’ve had them made for Edric and Loras as well. Thoros will get his when we meet up and I’ll keep Sam’s for whenever I see him. The last would be for Dom.”

“Bolton?” Tyrion asked. “He’s with your brother, isn’t he?”

“For now,” Jon said with a shrug. “Would you need anything else before we leave? I believe Nightsong has a smith, but I’d rather be set before we head out.”

Tyrion shook his head, sliding into a seat and setting the buckler on the table. “You’ve already given me more than enough.”

Jon watched him for a moment before sitting across from him. “Then what has you so down lately?”

“My legs,” Tyrion said with a smirk. “If you look you’ll find they’re fairly small.” Seeing Jon’s lips unmoving, he sighed and sat back. “Jaime told me something I had feared. I went to my father to confirm it, and when I did I… found a girl exiting his room.”

The grim expression on his face told Jon it was someone he cared for. “Shae?” Tyrion glanced at him and Jon offered a kind smile. “I saw how much her lies hurt during your trial.”

Tyrion scoffed, crossing his arms. “I should tell you now you’ve brought a fool into your service. A fool who is surprised when a whore proves herself a whore by fucking his father, and a fool who thought a girl he loved a whore despite knowing her heart.”

The pain in Tyrion was new for Jon, who thought the dwarf easily pushed aside such emotions to leave a smile or smirk. Instead he saw a man hurting over a truth.

“What was her name?”

Tyrion looked to Jon, the man who had saved his life, and decided he could at least be honest with him. “Tysha,” Tyrion said quietly. “I married her. I loved her. And then when my family told me she was just a whore paid to take my virginity I believed them and I hated her.” He sighed, reaching up to rub his forehead. “I should have killed every man there that day. I should have been better.”

“You still can be.” Jon leaned forward, his arm on the table as he met Tyrion’s gaze. “Whatever you did wrong before, you’re still alive. Maybe you can’t make things right, but you can make them better. You can be better so that the next time something like that happens you don’t make
Looking to the younger man, Tyrion laughed, sliding out of his chair to get the cyvasse board. “Today I’ll take black.”

When Jon met with Edric he gave the squire his spiked wing buckler which was violet with white edges and spikes where Jon’s was black with red edges. Loras’ was white with the central dome painted like the golden flower of Tyrell and green along the edges and spikes.

Looking over the buckler, Loras smiled. “I’ll cherish it.”

“Hopefully you’ve no need to use it, but may it serve you well should you need it.”

“It feels like we just found each other again and already must part,” Loras sighed.

“I have to go play my part, as you must play yours.”

Loras frowned. “If you’ve need of anything, write. I may not be able to help, but perhaps Garlan could. He serves as Lord of Brightwater Keep which isn’t too far from the shores or even Oldtown should you head that way.”

“I appreciate the offer, truly, but I hope to do this on my own for now. Or at least with my own men.”

“Then at least try to stay in touch and keep us informed, hm?”

“I’d ask the same of you.”

Leaving the White Sword Tower, he was spotted by the Kingsguard’s Lord Commander, who called out to him. Coming to a stop he turned to Jaime, who seemed healthier each day.

“I hear you’re set to leave with my brother,” Jaime said coming to a stop. “Off to your new keep?”

With a nod Jon answered, “For a start.”

“Well, Tyrion won’t speak to me.” Jaime sighed, shaking his head. “Can you tell I’m sorry, and wish him well for me?”

“Are you sure? I could ask him to meet you.”

Jaime shook his head. “If he doesn’t want to see me I can respect his wishes. I just want him to know I’m sorry and I wish him well.”

“I’ll tell him.”

“And you as well,” Jaime said with a somber nod. “I wish you well… and I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what?” Jon asked, though he had an idea.

“For your brother, your father,” Jaime sighed. “For keeping my distance after I pushed your brother. For not being a better friend.”

Hearing from his own lips, Jon fought back the urge to punch the man. “You were with my family. Did you tell them you pushed him?” When he nodded, Jon glanced down and asked, “Why did you push him?”
Jaime looked around before answering Jon. “He caught me with Cersei. She was worried he would
tell so I decided to do it.”

Jon took a breath, meeting the man’s emerald eyes. “So it’s true? They’re your children?”

Looking into his dark eyes, Jaime nodded. “They are.”

Jon wasn’t sure what to think of it. He had suspected as much as anyone else, but to hear the truth
of it only made him feel sorry for Tommen and Myrcella. He wondered if it hadn’t been something
they had to hide could Jaime have been a decent father to them, at least better than Robert who had
ignored them. Perhaps even Joffrey might not have been as he was. Though he would still have
Cersei for a mother he might not have been the type to mount heads on spikes.

As noon neared Jon met with Oberyn and Daemon, joining them in sparring with some of the other
dornish lords. He made sure to speak with Aurane as well, vowing to meet should he find himself
free of King’s Landing.

It was after he returned to his chambers he heard pounding on his door and opened it to find Sandor
Clegane staring at him.

“The king calls for you,” he told Jon.

Surprised but pleased, Jon nodded. “Give me a moment to change into something more
appropriate.” With that he turned, but Sandor stepped into the door frame to keep him from closing
it.

“You’re set to leave, hm?”

“I am,” said Jon. “Not much left for me here.”

He watched Jon pull on his jerkin, adjusting his doublet. “I thought you’d be dead by now. Either
from the battle or my brother.”

Jon glanced over to him and nodded. “Sorry to have taken that from you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Killing your brother,” Jon said grabbing his sword belt and tying it around his waist. “I imagine
you wanted to be the one to take his life.”

“And be a kinslayer?” asked Sandor.

Jon made his way toward him with a nod. “Then perhaps you’re grateful I ended him.”

“For killing my blood?”

“For killing the man who scarred your face.”

Jon bit back a grunt as Sandor turned and grabbed his shoulder, throwing him into a wall. He met
the scarred dog’s angered gaze with his own even one. “You know nothing about what he did.”

“I know he’s dead because I killed him,” Jon said meeting the larger man’s hardened gaze with his
own. “And I know you’re not him.”

Sandor shoved him aside with a scoff. “Piss on what you know.”
Jon dusted himself off with a sigh and followed him to Tommen’s chambers. The youngest Baratheon, or Lannister more like, sat up in his chair and grinned at Jon as the Hound brought him inside.

“Grandfather says you’re leaving,” said the round faced king. “That you have to go home to your keep. Can you really not stay anymore? Now I’m king I could have you be a guard again.”

Jon smiled at the offer and shook his head. “I don’t want to be a guard, Tommen. I need to find my own life outside of King’s Landing for now. But I’ll return, I promise.”

Tommen frowned. “I wish things hadn’t changed.”

“So do I, but we have to make the best of it all now.” Jon reached over and held the boy’s hand on the table between them, noticing Sandor watching him with his hand on the pommel of his sword. “Just be a good person, and you’ll be a good king. Listen to your council but think for yourself and do what you think best. Do that and they’ll sing songs of you.”

He spent some time speaking with Tommen to make up for all they couldn’t before, who said he wanted to see him off the next day but was told he couldn’t. He was relieved when Jon told him it was for the best, as he’d told all he could not to bother as they would be leaving early.

Once the sun rose their cart left King’s Landing through the King’s Gate, heading southwest. While he’d mentioned to some the possibility of them taking a path from Tumbleton to Bitterbridge, Longtable and Ashford, Jon’s group would reach none of them. Instead they moved south.

“Where are we heading?” Tyrion asked as they sat camped their first night.

“Summerhall,” Jon answered.

Tyrion and Podrick exchanged a glance before the squire noted, “That’s well east of Nightsong, my lord. Shouldn’t we head west before then?”

“We’ll move west from there, but I’ve a need to see it.”

“Why a ruin like Summerhall?” asked Tyrion. “There’s not much beyond the scorched castle.”

Jon looked to the two as Ghost lay beside him and Edric watched him, curious what he would say. After a moment of thought Jon answered with a somber smile, “Because in another life Summerhall would have been mine to rebuild.”

That confused the two, with Tyrion asking, “You mean if you’d asked for that instead of ships or Nightsong?”

“I mean had Robert Baratheon not slain my father and Gregor Clegane not murdered my brother.”

“Your father?” Tyrion asked as Podrick looked to him, hoping his lord would understand what he did not.

“Rhaegar Targaryen,” Jon answered.

Tyrion shook his head and scoffed. “What? You can’t be…” His eyes rose slightly as he thought on it, his smile fading before they moved to Jon.

“He never stole Lyanna Stark, they fled to be wed and then she had me and died handing me to her
brother, who claimed me as his bastard.”

Tyrion stared at Jon as Podrick gasped, clutching his mouth. Moments passed before Tyrion sat forward. “So you mean to say you’re not a pup but a wyrm?”

Jon smiled solemnly. “Well, I have both, though my dragon resides at the Wall until I claim him.”

Tyrion’s eyes widened, gasping as his squire matches his expression. “You’ve a dragon?”

“I haven’t seen him since shortly after he hatched, but yes.” Jon wondered if that was true as he’d had another of his dragon dreams, though nothing like the prophetic dreams heard in tales. His were of him as his dragon, much as he had dreams of himself as Ghost.

“And Lord Stark,” Tyrion said with a laugh, “he wasn’t trying to claim the throne for himself or Stannis, but you?”

“I believe so,” Jon nodded. “I hadn’t asked him to, but then my plans never accounted for Robert dying so soon.”

“And what plans are those?”

“Plans to claim my first crown as King of the Stepstones and Narrow Sea,” Jon told him. “Plans to build foundation there and use it to raise myself and build an army of my own to support those sworn to me.”

“And who exactly has sworn to you?”

“Robb was the first, and the Tyrells allied themselves with me once they arrived in King’s Landing.”

“They have?”

Jon nodded, though that wasn’t quite the truth of it. The Tyrells hadn’t sworn to him as Robb had. They had shared secrets and told Jon that they would support him once he made his move, but there was no vow. Jon felt he couldn’t press the issue without being asked for things he couldn’t promise, but hoped Loras’ loyalty would extend to his family. If not he hoped at least Loras’ loyalty wasn’t surpassed by blood lest he fear what would come of them meeting on the field.

Tyrion shook his head and laughed. “How long have you known?”

“Since we went to Winterfell for my father-for Lord Eddard,” Jon sighed, deciding he had to stop that.

“How did you learn it?”

“He, my uncle Benjen, and Ser Barristan met with me and told me. Then showed me the dragon egg my father left with my mother, and the sword he left with her.”

“The sword?” Tyrion’s confusion vanished as his brow rose. “Your sword.”

“Dark Sister,” Jon said drawing the longsword. “Brynden Rivers had it at the Wall, but left it and Maester Aemon gave it to Rhaegar, who left it in the Tower of Joy with my mother, but she was taken by fever and died giving birth to me.”

Tyrion frowned at their link, both having lost their mothers before they knew them. “You say they had wed?”
“Benjen was witness to it.”

With a laugh Tyrion noted, “So you were never a bastard.”

“I was still raised and treated like one,” Jon said with a bitter edge, “but no, I was never truly a Snow. I was never Jon. My mother named me Aegon.”

“Which would need to be changed lest Robert bash your head as your brother’s was.” Tyrion sighed, sitting back. “Still, why Summerhall? You’ve surely read about the tragedy there.”

“Barristan had mentioned that R—my father, he loved Summerhall. I couldn’t say why, but I’ve…” Jon sighed, seeming embarrassed as he sat forward. ‘I’ve seen the statue of my mother and felt some sense of knowing her for it. Not truly, of course, but when I think of her I see her face and feel as if I have a sense of her. I don’t have that for Rhaegar. I… Maybe there is something there. Being there might help me have a sense of him, or see what he saw in the ruins.”

The closer they got the more Jon felt anxious, yet when they set eyes upon the castle he felt on sorrow looking upon the scorched structure. It looked as though the central part of the castle had exploded, leaving scattered black stones thrown beyond even the courtyard. Crows stood perched atop the collapsed tower, half of which lay in the courtyard beside a melted dragon slumped into a dry fountain.

Jon dismounted and made his way inside while the others seemed hesitant. He felt no fear for whatever specters might linger, only a need to see for himself. Stepping into the hall he looked up to the sky visible through its missing roof, standing among ash and dust that might have been the furnishings, yet could have been his kin.

He heard tale of the reasons for it, of Aegon the Fifth’s desire to restore dragons to Westeros, but doubted that was all that caused it. He wasn’t like the Aegon before him, he was Unlikely, not Unworthy. Though perhaps he lived up to his epithet, as it seemed unlikely he would risk his family’s lives in such a way. Either way Jon hoped to avoid such a tragedy himself, to be better than all who came before him. He would fight his war himself if he could, but he would need Robb at least, if not his aunt.

“Are we staying?” Edric asked as Jon made his way to the courtyard.

“No.”

“Did you find anything of your father?” asked Tyrion.

Looking over the ruins Jon nodded. “A reminder.”

Riding with the boy, Tyrion found himself smiling. His spiteful hope to usurp his sister wasn’t just a vengeful dream, but one with true possibility, and one that could benefit the realm as well. Though first they had to claim the throne.

Chapter End Notes

For those interested you can look up the Talhoffer buckler for an idea of what the bucklers Jon had made would look like.

Next Chapter: 'Tragedy' hits King's Landing, leading Jaime to question a suspect while
Jon arrives at Nightsong.
Evening Dirge

Chapter Summary

'Tragedy' hits King’s Landing, leading Jaime to question a suspect while Jon arrives at Nightsong.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Not only did the realm learn that Tywin Lannister laid with whores, they learned his was in fact not gold but so rotten it had killed him. When Cersei was woken from her slumber she had the whore taken to the dungeons and immediately suspected Tyrion had a hand in it. Though Jaime dismissed the idea, another came to Cersei and whispered what she wanted to hear.

“I fear your father may have been poisoned, your grace,” said the disgraced maester Qyburn. He had come to them shortly before Jaime arrived to meet with their father, yet found them as they moved to the sept. “Widow’s blood shuts down the bladder and bowels, poisoning the man with his own waste. I believe your grand maester had some in his possession.”

“One of those Tyrion stole,” Cersei said turning to Jaime.

The Lord Commander sighed, crossing his arms to keep from dismissing her openly. Instead he asked the man in tattered robes, “How would one administer such a poison?”

A flicker of a frown touched his lips as Qyburn answered, “It would take multiple doses to keep the victim from simply having a traumatic movement.”

“How long could they go from their last dose to death?” Jaime asked.

Qyburn seemed to think on it, deciding it better to answer honestly rather than speak the answer Cersei wanted and have Jaime check another source. “Days at most.”

“And Tyrion has been gone a fortnight,” said Jaime.

“They who else would use…” Cersei’s faced darkened as she looked to Jaime. “The Viper.”

“Martell?” Jaime shook his head. “Why would he poison father?”

“For his pathetic sister,” she offered with a scoff. “To play at vengeance. He blames us for the Mountain’s misdeeds, so took our father.” She met his eyes and pleaded, “You have to arrest him before he flees the city.”

Jaime doubted it, but thought it at least more likely than Tyrion. So Jaime held off on his vigil for his father and went to find Oberyn Martell.

He found the Dornish prince in the courtyard with his paramour and the Blackmont heir. Upon seeing his approach the prince stood and smiled. “The White Lion comes to greet us.”

Jaime held back the flicker of anger he felt thinking back to his father’s suggestion that Cersei
marry the prince while he wed Margaery. The Prince had no hand in that, only his father, whom he should be standing vigil over.

“Prince Oberyn, may I have a moment of your time?”

His serious tone surprised the three, though Oberyn nodded and turned to the women. “Pardon, my beauties, I am needed.”

Jaime moved away, putting some distance between them as Ellaria and Jynessa walked a few feet to give them space. Once Oberyn made his way to him, Jaime met the man’s dark eyes. “Did your brother send you, or did you ask to come here?”

Oberyn’s brow arched. “An odd question. And one with an obvious answer you already know. He is ailing where I am not.”

“He could have sent his daughter,” said Jaime. “Let her take his place as she will in time.”

“And put her in such a dangerous place?” Oberyn laughed. “Only a careless man would let his daughter face such danger.”

Jaime stared into the prince’s eyes, wondering if the threat had any bite. A comment meant to insult him or hint at his relationship with Cersei was worthless, but a threat to their daughter would have cost the man his head. It seemed innocent enough for Jaime to look past it, though he decided to be blunt rather than speak with innuendo.

“Why did you come here? Was it for vengeance?”

The question surprised Oberyn, his amused smile fading as he nodded. “And justice. Though it was not my hand which claimed it.”

“Then your purpose was done with Jon’s victory?”

Oberyn shook his head. “No. My brother asked me to serve on your council, so I shall.”

Jaime examined him a moment. “Gregor was your only target? Not my family?”

A smirk took Oberyn’s lips as he tilted his head. “It was. I had planned to find a way to make you all wither so your father might suffer as my family has, but it seems the gods would not even let me have that much. Instead the vileness of his heart spread to his bowels and poisoned him as he poisoned the world.”

“And as you poison your enemies.”

“Me?” Oberyn was confused for a moment, then laughed and shook his head. “You think I would poison him?” He thought for a moment. “Ah, you think him the victim of widow’s blood. Vile and painful, yes, but too little I think for your father.”

“So you say you had no hand in it?” Jaime asked. “Why should I believe that when you just spoke of killing him.”

“Because I spoke of making him suffer. Perhaps his name has suffered, but he is dead so feels no shame for his death.” Oberyn scoffed. “I would have taken his life only after all he cared for was gone from the world and he was left destitute and alone. And I would have used something which made even his death suffering. The Strangler perhaps, to leave him choking and gasping for breath, or Tears of Lys to eat away his belly and bowels, leaving him ill before it took him rather
Jaime’s brow knit as both poisons Oberyn mentioned made him think of others who met the ends mentioned. “The Tears of Lys, how would it be known?”

Confused by the shift in questions, Oberyn answered, “Only by its maker. It is clear, tasteless, odorless. It leaves no trace that it had been added, only the corpse and tears of those it leaves.”

“And the other?”

“The Strangler? It…” Oberyn turned his head before nodding. “Your son.”

Jaime’s hand clenched. “Did you-”

“No,” Oberyn told him. “No. I told you, I hoped to take what your father cared for. The king’s death took nothing from him.”

“It took from the Tyrells,” Jaime noted, thinking of the rivalry between the houses.

“How?” asked Oberyn. “Their daughter still weds a lion. To me it seems they have lost nothing. Only gained a younger husband.”

Jaime felt his stomach twist at the thought of the Tyrells having manipulated them all, killing Joffrey to gain Tommen. “This strangler, you say it’s rare?”

“It is difficult to make,” Oberyn said after a glance around the yard while crossing his arms. “Made from plants found on islands in the Jade Sea and spices of the Summer Islands. The maesters are the ones who call it the strangler. Your Grand Maester should know of it.”

Jaime went to Pycelle then, asking after each of his poisons before bringing up the Tears of Lys, Strangler and Widow’s Blood. Pycelle told him mostly what Oberyn had told him, which left Jaime to think on the possibilities as he went to stand vigil over his father’s rotting corpse, which left him feeling ill himself.

It was hard to think beyond the stench which lingered even after the silent sisters treated Tywin’s body, but Jaime did. He was sure that someone had used the Tears of Lys on Jon Arryn, who had seemed to fall victim to a stomach illness. When he wondered who, he thought instantly of Varys, who had disappeared after Tyrion and Jon left King’s Landing. He might even have been the one to poison his father, though he wasn’t sure why he would.

Yet it was the strangler which left him anxious. If the Tyrells had a hand in it then it would be as difficult to prove as it would be to get free of them. When Jaime returned he found near as many Tyrell men as Lannister men in King’s Landing. Even the wrong question could turn them against the Lannisters, which was a battle he wasn’t sure they could win. After that they could claim the throne themselves or ally with the North to take on whoever challenged them.

He had hoped they could look to the Martells as allies, use their rivalry with the Tyrells should they end up needing support. Yet as his vigil came to an end he found little hope.

After having Shae tortured and learning how Varys helped she and Tyrion use secret tunnels to meet without her knowledge, Cersei had the Tower of the Hand searched. When they found a secret path to the Hand’s chambers, one she decided was used to slip Tywin the poison, she vowed to burn the Tower of the Hand down and had the gold cloaks arrest Oberyn Martell for the murder of Joffrey and Tywin. It was Jaime’s questions which made Pycelle suggest to her that the strangler had been what killed her son, and without Tyrion to blame it seemed she had found her next target.
It just happened to be the one that Jaime had hoped might help them.

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Bells rang out across the Stormlands as the Singing Towers of Nightsong heralded the arrival of their Lord. The formidable castle was backed by the Red Mountains, leaving no way to approach unseen. The outer walls of Nightsong stretched across the mouth of the Prince’s Pass and stood dozens of feet high while the inner walls stood even taller with a wide moat between them. Three towers loomed over the walls, where the bells sang.

The portcullis opened as they approached, Jon noticing a few guards in the bulwarks flanking the main gates as they passed and made their way across the drawbridge. Passing through the inner wall’s main gate, they found a large group gathered within the courtyard to greet them.

Central among them was an olive skinned man with swept back chestnut hair and azure eyes wearing a surcoat with a yellow wheel with seven spokes upon a white background. To his right was a slim, fair haired man with a freshly shaved square chin wearing a surcoat showing a green wave across a brown background. To the left was a short, round faced pale maester without a spot of hair upon his head. Beside him stood a tall knight wearing an visorless bascinet with an aventail hanging to the mail and surcoat he wore depicting a brown centaur wielding a golden lance across a green field.

Once the bells fell silent and they had dismounted, the man bearing the seven spoked wheel led them bowing to him. “Nightsong is yours, my lord.”

They all rose and Jon gave a firm nod, walking to the man. “Thank you, Ser Seban. I relieve you of your duties as castellan, but ask you stay as Master-at-arms.”

The man was surprised, but nodded. “If it please my lord.”

“It would,” Jon nodded. Turning to the armored man he asked, “I take it you are Ser Kellen Lanser?”

“I am, my lord,” the man said with a bow of his head. “Captain of the Guard for Nightsong.”

“You’ve served her well?”

The knight eyed him before nodding. “I believe I have.”

“Then I hope you shall,” Jon said with a glance to the walls. “If possible, I’d like to meet the men. Perhaps we could arrange a meeting and you could show me what they do?”

“Whenever it suits you,” the captain nodded.

“Soon,” Jon said looking to Seban. “I may need you to act as Castellan again while I travel to meet with my ships at Starfall.”

“That may be a greater risk than it is worth, my lord,” said the maester.

“Maester Elmar, yes?” Jon asked the short, hairless man, who nodded. “Why do you say that?”

“I hate to do so upon your arrival, but I have received ravens from King’s Landing with grim news. I am afraid Lord Tywin was found dead.”

“My father?” Tyrion asked taking a step forward, shaking his head in disbelief. “How?”
The maester frowned. “Poisoned, it would seem. They have arrested Prince Oberyn for his murder, as well as that of King Joffrey.”

Tyrion stared at the ground for a moment. Jon had told him the truth of Joffrey’s killers so he knew that was false, but he also knew Oberyn blamed his father for Elia’s death. The more he thought on it the more he thought this ill tidings. He cared not for his father’s life, but of their plan. “If Dorne marches as your brother did,” Tyrion said looking to Jon, “they will come here.”

“Can we hold them?” Jon asked those gathered.

“Nightsong has been besieged thirty seven times in the last thousand years, my lord,” said Elmar. “If we prepare well we shall survive a thirty eighth.”

“Then I’ll want the men training, especially with a bow or crossbow if they’ve never held a bow before,” Jon told Kellan.

“We should have men take what trees they can off the mountain,” said Tyrion. “Use the wood to build catapults and scorpions while we can.”

“Are you certain it’s worth it, my lord?” Elmar asked. “We don’t know if they’ll march.”

“Build them. If we need them then we’ll be thankful, and even more so should they go unused.” He turned then to the man with the green wave across his chest. “Jarvas Furrow?”

“Correct, my lord,” the man said with a smile of surprise. “I am Jarvas Furrow, Steward to Nightsong.”

“Could you show us to our rooms?”

“Of course my lord,” the man nodded. With a glance to Ghost he asked cautiously, “Should I take you first to the kennel master, Herrath?”

“No,” Jon said rubbing Ghost’s head. “He’ll go where he pleases, but fear not. He’s trained better than most men.”

The lord’s chamber sat near the top of one of the central towers, the only one without the carillon bells the others held within their peaks. Looking out the window he saw the mountains to his right and plains to his left. Being so high up with the sky before him made him think of his dreams.

It had been only days earlier that enjoyed the chilled air rushing over him, cooling his body as he soared over the wall. It was oddly soothing, lulling him into a routine that broke when he saw dark figures in the snow beyond the wall. At first he felt a spark of rage ignite inside him, but then he noticed a large wolf beside them, and glided away from the Wall, passing over the trees and looking to the shocked group gaping at the dragon.

He felt his heart flutter as he noticed an auburn haired boy reach out to grasp the direwolf beside him and swiftly understood it was Bran. Not only was his brother alive, but he was North of the wall, carried by a large man who could only have been Hodor. They were joined not only by two others he didn’t recognize, but a man in ragged black clothes that drew his attention. Even with only a brief pass he could smell death emanating off him.

Jon turned, but found the group running to the trees, only Bran daring to cast a glance back toward him before they disappeared into the woods. Frustrated that he couldn’t help Bran, Jon let out a roar, throwing himself higher with each flap of his wings until the icy air cooled him and he woke to begin another day’s trek toward Nightsong.
With a glance to Ghost, who nudged his side to pull him from his thoughts, Jon reached down to rub his head. “I wish he were here too. You think I should sail to Eastwatch to claim him?”

A knock on his door drew his eyes to it as Tyrion entered the room, looking around with an approving nod. “I take it these are the grandest chambers you’ve had.”

“For now,” Jon said with a small smile.

Tyrion smirked, coming up beside him as Jon stood at the open doors to his balcony, looking to the Red Mountain. After a moment Tyrion asked quietly, “Do you think he’s guilty?”

Jon glanced at him before shaking his head. “I don’t know him well, but I would say no.”

“As would I,” Tyrion said with a sigh. “I know he hated my father, but I had thought he would save him for last, not open with his murder.”

“The problem then is who else could have murdered your father?”


“How would he administer some poison to him? It would have to be someone there, wouldn’t it? Someone known to them, able to move close to him while in plain sight. A cup bearer?”

Tyrion shook his head. “They would need someone guiding them. Not even the dumbest man in Westeros would kill my father without someone telling them to.”

“Were Littlefinger there I would guarantee it was him,” Jon said looking to Tyrion. “Though Pycelle did speak of poisons at your trial. Might it have been him?”

Tyrion thought before shaking his head. “He is loyal to Cersei. I doubt he would move without her or my father’s say, and she would never kill him.” With a frown Tyrion realized there was another within the small council who knew secret paths through the keep. “Varys.”

“The mummer,” Jon said with a nod.

Tyrion gave an impressed laugh at Jon’s lack of surprise. “Yes, the mummer. He knew of the Red Keep’s secret passages. He would not only be close enough to poison him during meetings, but within his own chamber as well. Though I can’t imagine him doing so. He is smart enough to know the chaos this will bring.”

“Who is to say chaos isn’t his goal?” Jon said stepping onto the balcony and gripping the railing. “Perhaps it’s best you stay here as Castellan instead of Seban.”

“No,” Tyrion said walking up beside him. “Little as I am, I am your man. These people opened their gates to your once, they will do so again. Especially if the next time we come we do so with this dragon of yours. I would be useless to you here.”

Jon nodded, looking to Tyrion. “What do you think of them?”

Crossing his arms, Tyrion looked through railing to the courtyard below and shrugged. “I think them willing to see sense. They were relieved you seemed concerned with their defense more so than taking a sword to them.”

“You think they could hold it while we’re gone?”
“I pray they have no need to,” Tyrion said patting the young lord’s hand before leaving him to stand on his balcony.

They spent only days at Nightsong, though Jon did all he had to while there. He found the keep’s vaults held not much more than what he added, which was still enough to be a boon for his cause and enough to keep the castle secure. He met with the guards and was shown through the keep by Kellan, who introduced him to his brother Kegan, who served as Nightsong’s blacksmith. The man marveled at his odd buckler and sword, though Jon had worn White Fang that day rather than Dark Sister, just in case he had need to draw it.

Jon wrote many letters, keeping their content from Elmar though he needed his help finding the proper ravens for their destinations. He sent only simple updates, letting them know he had arrived at Nightsong but was departing to Starfall intending to set sail. It was that evening he found the rookery held not only ravens but dozens and dozens of other birds who sang as the night faded to dawn.

When Jon first went about walking the keep’s small godswood he noticed Seban making his way toward the keep’s sept. It was run by Septon Dallin, whom it seemed traveled to neighboring villages from time to time. Jon learned that Seban visited daily, telling Jon his family had always been pious, hence the seven spokes of their coat of arms.

“I wasn’t always a man worthy of the seven,” Seban told him somberly one morning as they walked toward the sept. “My father was the son of a merchant. He thought the seven had gifted him his knighthood, but I disliked that. I wanted to know that I didn’t need the seven to earn my knighthood, so I sought battle as soon as I could. I wanted nothing more than to prove I was better than him and my brothers who shared his love for the seven.

“In the Rebellion we stood with House Connington against Robert, and for that I saw my father slain by Baratheons while my brothers were killed by knights of the Vale.” He pulled up the sleeve of his jerkin, revealing a long scar along his forearm. “I nearly lost my life as well, but a septon found me clinging to their bodies and dragged me away to close the wound. Any longer and it might have been infected.”

“Is that why you visit the sept? To thank the Seven for your arm?”

“No,” Seban admitted solemnly. “I go to speak with my family. They have no graves and my father had no keep or lands of his own, so I have nothing of him but his name. In the sept at least I feel closer to them.”

“I think that’s why I still visit the godswood,” Jon said with a nod. “I’ve prayed to the Old Gods, the Seven, even the Lord of Light. I find my loyalties lay not with the gods who I can never know, but the men I do.”

“If only they were easier to understand,” Seban said with a laugh.

Jon left the master-at-arms as Castellan again, asking him to write to Starfall should anything happen, assuring him he would let him know when he planned to return and wishing them luck should it come to the worst. When they set out along the Prince’s Pass, Jon found himself growing anxious again as they made their way toward where the Tower of Joy had stood.

Ned had told him he tore it down, but Jon still hoped there would be something there. Some shadow of his mother waiting for him. Yet much like Summerhall he found little of her there, only an empty cellar and a series of cairns Ned told him were to mark the men who died there the day he arrived.
Jon walked through them all as Edric frowned approaching one with the top most stone marked by a sword and falling star. “This must be for my uncle.”

He watched the boy touched the stone, closing his eyes to say a silent prayer for the fallen Sword of the Mourning. Once he had finished, Jon made for his horse. “There’s nothing here.”

“I’m sorry,” Tyrion offered from atop his stallion.

Sliding into his saddle, Jon shook his head and tapped Dark Sister. “I have all that might have been here.” Gripping the reins of his destrier, Jon rode from the place of his birth wondering if he was a fool to chase the past when his future remained uncertain.

Chapter End Notes

Obviously, this is going off the theory that Varys poisoned Tywin, which I've always found more believable than Oberyn if one has to believe he was being poisoned. I considered having Tywin live but as much as I think it could be fun having him around I think having the Lannisters try to survive without him is more interesting, especially with what I have in mind down the line. Besides, it would only be a matter of time before Tyrion or Jaime killed him, and killing him here gives me more Oberyn stuff.

There are two appearances in this chapter that are hints at background storylines that will become more obvious later. Qyburn is fairly obviously one, but so is Jynessa. I'm honestly surprised no one has commented on the hints I've placed about her in previous chapters. I guess either it wasn't interesting or was somehow too little, either way unless things drastically change she isn't completely gone from the story. It would feel hollow if I had her show up, sleep with Jon and then disappear.

All of the characters within Nightsong are original but, as I tend to dislike OCs, will have minimal importance beyond utility. As for Jon, a lot of things are building up to what will happen in the next few chapters. But first...

Next chapter: Myrcella begins to see beyond the mirage of Dorne as she speaks with Sam before deciding to take a risk when Arys comes to her with a plan.

Speaking of future chapters, as insipid as it may sound part of what got me to write again was actually a video I saw on youtube. (GOT) The dead don't need lovers. by TheHiddenOne. It has about 10 seconds of clips pieced together around Jon and Myrcella, but it was enough of a spark to make me want to write more about them. If anyone knows of any other vids about them let me know. Part of what kept me going with Northern Conqueror was Jonsa and Jonerys videos and TheHiddenOne's is the only Jon/Myrcella one I can find. Obviously it's a rare crack ship, but I figured I'd put it out there since my google fu is crap.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed the chapter. Let me know what you liked in the comments.
Dornish Mirage

Chapter Summary

Myrcella begins to see beyond the mirage of Dorne as she speaks with Sam before deciding to take a risk when Arys comes to her with a plan.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Watching Sunspear crest the horizon had eased some of the sorrow Myrcella felt leaving King’s Landing. The Martells had gathered to greet Myrcella, or rather Rosamund who had switched places on the ship from King’s Landing. It wasn’t until they were alone that night that they switched back, though it wouldn’t be the last time Rosamund took her place.

With her arrival in Dorne, Myrcella knew there was no escaping the truth of things. Whatever her life had been was gone. It had ended the moment her uncle had attacked Eddard Stark. Anything after that was just a mummer’s farce she let herself believe. This was her life now and she could do nothing about it.

While Rosamund had been the one to accept the Martell’s greetings, it was Myrcella who spent time with them most days. Despite the fears of Tyrion and Jon she found them to be perfectly nice at the least. However she also saw how they thought of her.

Doran was kind and understanding, making an effort to have her feel comfortable within the Old Palace. He frequently had stewards checking on her well being, though Myrcella soon wondered if they were more like guards come to check a prisoner. She was never barred from going anywhere, but her safety was of such import she was never allowed anywhere without not only her own guard but some of Sunspear’s men escorting her.

Arianne as warm as the sun, treating Myrcella like a sister of sorts, bringing her into court and introducing her to those of import and even a few of ill repute. Still, Myrcella could tell something was off. It was almost as if she thought of Myrcella as a child, or perhaps simply too stupid to be sincere with.

Trystane was simpler, but at times the one Myrcella most hated being with. Despite their frequently playing Cyvasse, he was the only one she felt didn’t treat her like some pawn in a game. He never got upset when Myrcella beat him, and always showed genuine interest when they spoke. And yet that only made her feel worse because whatever time she spent with him she always came to the same disappointing conclusion that he wasn’t Jon.

Sam had become one of her few true friends in Dorne, though he had proved a poor method to keep in touch with Jon through no fault of their own. It seemed that once Myrcella left King’s Landing began to fall apart with Jon inside it even as her uncle Stannis attacked their walls.

She had been sick with worry after ravens came asking Dorne for support against Stannis’ army. She could figure out on her own there was little chance of them arriving before the attack. Even knowing the kind of man her uncle was, she still hoped that he could at least find sympathy for Tommen and spare him, but Myrcella was sure there would be none for Jon or Tyrion. She knew
he would be involved in the fighting, though she never could have guessed he would be the one to slay her uncle and claim lordship for himself.

“Perhaps we should switch again,” Rosamund said with a smile as Myrcella told her the news.

Looking up from her cup Myrcella arched her brow. “What do you mean?”

“We could say Rosamund fell for him, let her go be with the bastard born lord while Princess Myrcella stayed with her Dornish Prince,” Rosamund said with a laugh.

Brushing her thumb against the rim of her glass, Myrcella’s smile faltered. “No. If anyone ever found out none of us would be safe.”

And yet Myrcella found herself contemplating doing that as shortly after Oberyn left with his retinue, news came of Theon Greyjoy taking Winterfell and with it the lives of Bran and Rickon Stark. She’d considered what she could do to help Jon in his mourning, thinking back on how his face was alight when he spoke of making Bran his squire, and yet she knew there was nothing she could do to ease it.

She’d thought it cruel they didn’t write to one another more than once directly with little more than cordial words, but considered the truth of their situation. Certainly it was crueler to play along at a lie for their own sake. To write to him while betrothed to another would be cruel to both men.

Myrcella tried to be the princess they thought her, and yet when news came of her brother’s death she found it difficult to mourn him. Instead she found her tears with the whispers of Lady Jynessa Blackmont courting and bedding the new Lord Snowfire.

Thankfully she had managed to feign disinterest whenever Arianne brought it up. Being in Dorne had helped her learn to hide herself behind the veil of a princess, or when it became too much she would switch with Rosamund and spend the day as a handmaiden.

Though she told herself it wasn’t jealousy since she’d known he would have to move on eventually, the thought of Jon with another made her ill. It wasn’t just the idea of Jon being with someone else. It was that it mattered to her at all. If she were a proper princess, the kind they thought her to be, she would find her happiness in Trystane. A part of her feared that her heart lingering with Jon would make her into her mother.

Yet when whenever Trystane complimented her Myrcella struggled to tell if he was sincere. When her held her hands she found his hands too soft and thin for her liking, wishing they were sturdier, a knight’s hands rather than a prince’s. She wished his skin paler, his hair wavier, his eyes more fierce. She wished he was the kind of man who would be her uncle’s champion even when facing a man who’d nearly cut him down once before.

She’d been so lost in her self disgust that she nearly missed the odd smile Arianne wore when she spoke of Jon courting Jynessa. There was some sympathy for Myrcella there, she’d shared her friendship with Jon and though she claimed to hold no deeper feelings toward him Myrcella was sure Arianne assumed as much. It was the hint of satisfaction that stood out to Myrcella upon reflection. It was the same smile she had when a servant brought her something she’d asked for, as if she were basking in that moment of power. The same smile she had whenever Myrcella agreed to do something with her.

It was the smile that brushed away the mirage of Dorne for Myrcella. It was a reminder that they were playing the game of thrones and to the Martells she was just another piece for them to play.
Myrcella felt foolish that it took her months to put together that Arianne was indisposed whenever Ser Arys went off on his own. It made her angry thinking of how two knights could so easily become the pawns of Dornish women. It left her doubting the loyalty of her sworn shield, leaving her with Sam as the only one she was certain she could trust.

To the Martells he must have seemed so unimportant, but when news came of her grandfather’s death and Prince Oberyn’s arrest, Myrcella made sure Sam was frequently among those guarding her. While he might not be the best with a blade, she at least trusted his loyalty to Jon, which would mean some loyalty to her. For all she knew Arianne could ask Arys to cut her down and he would do it without hesitation.

“It’s as if they think me a child,” Myrcella said as she was escorted back to her room by Sam after supper with the Martells.

“I’m sure it’s only concern for your well being, Princess,” Sam said, though his tone made his own doubt clear.

Once they arrived at her chambers in the Tower of the Sun, Myrcella invited Sam in. “Speak freely, Sam. You doubt their concern as well, don’t you?”

The portly man sighed. “Forgive me, Princess, but… I trust none but the brothers I’ve not seen in months.”

Myrcella snickered. “You avoid the question.”

Nodding, Sam met her emerald gaze. “I think they see you as necessary for the future they want. If I had to guess I would say they want what all their ilk seem to want; the Iron Throne.”


“This is Dorne, my lady,” Sam gently reminded her, “they have been ruled by queens since before Aegon’s Conquest and let women act as heirs over their brothers. They could try to claim the throne is yours by right as you are the elder sibling.”

“And who would agree?” asked Myrcella. “Dorne is different from the rest of Westeros. Here a bastard is just another child while the northdamns them.”

Sam smiled realizing what had caused her interest in the treatment of bastards. The pain in her eyes and anger in her voice was almost shocking. That was the first time he wished he could simply tell her the truth of Jon, but knew better than to even broach the subject. Instead he decided he would do all he could to protect her, as he knew Jon would.

“Princess, you are a hostage here,” Sam said so firmly Myrcella sat up in shock. “I think you have always been their hostage, and until you are bound to them I doubt the Martells will ever see you as more than that. Even then I’ve my doubts. They are so bound by the past and their thoughts of themselves I fear them blind to all else. The arrest of Oberyn has simply made your value rise… and I don’t think it will last long, my lady.”

Myrcella suspected as much, but to hear another say it stung. She wanted to believe she was more than a pawn, but she knew enough of the game of thrones to know that was all she would ever be to them. Not just the Martells but even her mother and any other nobles that could use her.

“What do you mean it won’t last?” she asked, sitting as straight as she could. She shouldn’t let the anger and fear filling her keep her from being a princess.
“My lady, I-I fear it unwise to stay here much longer,” Sam said quietly.

Even with the warmth of the day clinging to the air Myrcella fought a shiver. “Why?”

“Forgive me for saying You Grace, but I don’t trust any in the Red Keep to give Prince Oberyn a fair trial.” Sam saw the recognition in her face telling him she knew he meant her mother most of all. “If Jon were there I might fool myself to believe he could help, but I have no doubt he is long gone by now. He’ll be at Nightsong if he hasn’t already left for his ships.”

Myrcella shook her head. “I doubt Arianne would harm me.”

“As do I,” Sam said with a nod, “but there are many here with blood as hot as the noon sand and I fear such a fool will see harming you as a way to serve the Martells or raise their own house.”

She watched him slide forward in his seat, his gaze hardening as he began, “Myrcella, Jon sent me here to—”

Her brow rose as he stopped, realizing he did so as Rosamund entered with a tray of wine she set on the table between them. “Cousin, would you please excuse us a moment?” Rosamund was quick to agree and depart, Myrcella waiting until she was gone to turn her attention to Sam. “What were you saying?”

Sam sighed. “He sent me here to protect you, even if that meant taking you from here.”

Feeling her heart flutter, Myrcella asked, “He did?”

The smile tugging at the corner of her lips amused Sam, who nodded. “We had planned different destinations, but I think given what’s happened we could try for Nightsong first. If we can’t reach him then we could do as we planned originally and head north until we reach Loras or Dom.”

“Domeric?” Myrcella’s brow knit, confusion outweighing the flicker of fear in her stomach as she asked, “Doesn’t he serve Robb?” Did he intend to turn her over to the Starks to be a hostage there instead?

Sam flashed her a small smile. “Domeric has always served one man.”

Myrcella shook her head. “What do you mean?”

“Before we left Jon charged Domeric with protecting his sisters,” Sam said, his smile growing somber as he continued, “when they were to be taken hostage he did as Jon asked and took them to safety. Even if it’s with those who hate Jon, Sansa and Arya are still the Stark’s daughters and Dom a son of the north. They would protect them. You’re no different. Should you find one of us we are vowed to protect you.”

“Why?” The question escaped her mouth in a whisper.

Sam’s gaze softened as he answered, “You know why, Princess.”

Myrcella clutched her skirt as she rose to pour herself a goblet of wine, taking a shaky breath before she downed it, biting back a smile. After pouring herself another cup she turned to Sam, her glassy eyes steeled as she asked, “So what do we do?”

“It depends on what you want to do,” Sam said carefully. “Would you want to return to King’s Landing?”
Myrcella lowered her gaze and thought it over. “Tommen’s there.”

“That’s true, but he is the king.”

“And two have died recently,” Myrcella said shaking her head as if to shake the uncertainty from her voice.

“Princess,” Sam sighed, tilting his head so she would meet his gaze. “What do you want to do?”

She found tears stinging her eyes as she shook her head. “I don’t know. If I go back to King’s Landing then I’ll just end up like this again, won’t I? The only thing that would change is I’d be somewhere else. If-if I find Jon and Uncle Tyrion then at least I know they’ll keep me safe, but… I won’t be there if something happens to Tommen.”

Sam nodded realizing she had her answer but needed help accepting it. “Would you be there if you didn’t go to them?” When she looked to him, Sam forced himself to smile upon seeing her glassy eyes. “If you believe you’ll just be sent away again then what’s the difference?”

“Then you think I should find Jon and Tyrion?”

“I think you should worry about your own safety, Princess. King Tommen will have the Kingsguard and your mother’s men to protect him, but here you’ve only myself, and I’m afraid I’m not much of a guard.”

A wet laugh escaped Myrcella’s lips. “Nonsense.”

“It’s a truth I’ve long ago accepted.” Sam’s smile softened as he said, “If we find Jon and the others I know they’ll keep you safe. Even if you decide to go to King’s Landing it might still be best to seek them out.”

“But that’s what we’ll do,” she declared, rising to her feet. “Let us take the night to think. Tomorrow we can plan and begin gathering anything we’ll need.”

Once Sam left Myrcella swiftly wiped her face, putting on a smile as Rosamund entered and they went about their nightly routine. Rosamund would undoubtedly have a part to play in her escape, but Myrcella wanted to have a plan before telling her.

Though she spent the night tossing and turning, it seemed the gods were on her side as it was only the next morning that a plan presented itself to her when Ser Arys Oakheart asked to speak with her privately. The guilt she had felt all morning at the idea of letting him get in trouble for her escape faded when Arys told her, “Lady Arianne has offered to secret us to a safe place on the Greenblood.”

“Why?” she asked cautiously. “Does she think someone will attack us?”

Arys took a moment to think over his answer. “With how things have been-”

“Ser Arys,” she said holding up a hand to stop his lie, “please be honest with me. I know you share her bed. What does she want of me?”

Arys’ face paled, nearly dropping his head before stopping himself. “I’m sorry, Princess. I have disgraced myself.”

“Only if you continue to lie to me,” Myrcella offered kindly.
With a nod Arys looked to her. “Princess Arianne hopes to crown you queen. She believes the Dornishmen will rise to defend your rightful claim.”

“And what do you think?”

The kingsguard was surprised, quickly shaking his head. “I don’t doubt her belief. With your claim and her support Dorne will surely ride to war should any deny it.”

Myrcella nodded. “And how would she have our flight go unseen?”

A proud smile colored Arys’ face as he slid forward in his seat to explain. “We’ll claim you’ve come down with redspots, that way you’ll be left alone. Then we’ll have your handmaiden switch places with you while we depart through the desert.”

Myrcella knew she should have asked what would come after they arrived at Greenblood, how Arianne expected to convince Dorne to follow her, how she would find other allies, yet she remained silent. None of that would matter because she wouldn’t be the one leaving with them. No, in that moment she knew her plan would use theirs. Rosamund would be the one who left with them while Myrcella fled with Sam. Once Prince Doran’s people found Arianne’s group Rosamund could tell them the truth since Myrcella would be long gone.

Sam was shocked hearing her plan, but found it difficult to think of a better one. Myrcella was the one to bring in Rosamund, though she didn’t tell her where they would be going. It was better if her cousin couldn’t tell them where to find her once they realized what they’d done.

She and Sam had only days to gather what they needed, but Sam pulled through and had a cart full of everything they would need. When Arys brought Rosamund in so they could switch places, Myrcella simply hugged her cousin and wished her well while she stayed in her room.

It was an hour before she heard the knocks she’d arranged with Sam and hurried out the door to find him waiting for her in a black jerkin with no hint of his guards attire. She had dressed down as well, wearing a dress Sam had picked up the day before. He knew enough of the guard routes for them to easily weave their way through the keep until they arrived at the cart. She climbed in the back while he took the reigns and guided them out of the city.

All she could do was stare up at the night sky as the cart shook beneath her, her heart thumping in her throat and hands clasped over her chest in silent prayer. She prayed for her cousin’s safety and her brother’s protection before praying for their success.

Though Sam wouldn’t let her take a turn steering the wagon, on the second day he relented to let her sit up front with him. She had needed it, having spent the morning frowning as she mused that was the day her brother was supposed to wed Margaery Tyrell and rather than being there to celebrate it with him she was on the run.

It was two days later with the sun at its peak when they first heard the ring of Nightsong’s bells. Sam pushed the horses through the Prince’s Pass, leaving Dorne to enter the Stormlands and see Nightsong’s towers crest the horizon.

They were surprised to see the castle so busy, having passed men taking down trees and hearing construction over the walls as they came to the gate. When the guard asked who they were, Sam decided to test the grounds. “I’ve come to see Lord Jon Snowfire. Could you tell him Sam has come to see him?”

The guard looked him over before stepping to the cart and asking quietly, “Are you Sam The
Brave?”

Myrcella smiled as Sam sighed and rolled his eyes. “So he likes to claim.”

The guard nodded. “I’m Ser Kellan Lanser, captain of Nightsong’s guard. Lord Snowfire told us you might arrive with a guest. Please, come inside.”

“Is he here?” Sam asked hopefully as the cart followed the captain through the gate.

“I’m afraid not. It’s been a sennight since they left.”

Myrcella felt her heart sink. “Do you know where he’s gone?”

“He said he was going to Starfall to set sail,” the man answered. A sympathetic smile touched his lips as he looked to them saying, “He said he should be back within three months, though he would send ravens before then.”

Myrcella and Sam shared a frown before they arrived at the stables. Bringing the cart to a stop, Sam got out, rushing around to help Myrcella down while Kellan went to speak with a man he would introduce himself as Ser Seban Cartwell, Nightsong’s castellan.

The man bowed to Sam and Myrcella. “Lord Snowfire has told us Sam the Brave would know which beast is pale with green eyes.”

Myrcella felt herself flush upon realizing that could describe her, followed by a flicker of agitation at the idea of being called a beast which faded as Sam answered, “A crow.” It took a moment for her to remember the Knight of White Crows, leaving her with a smile.

“Good,” the castellan said looking to the guard. “Make sure all know not to speak of the cart’s entrance.” While the guard hurried off, the man turned to the confused pair. “Our lord told us should you arrive it would be best kept secret. Take what you wish, I’ll have the rest brought to your quarters and the cart stored away should you need it.”

Myrcella was stunned as she followed Sam into the keep, the older boy unwilling to let her carry her own bag. “Did he really plan all of this?” she asked him quietly as he brought her bag into her prepared chambers. They weren’t grand, but apparently had been chosen to have them blend in among the castle’s staff.

“I doubt he’d have known we were leaving, I didn’t write him. I couldn’t know it was safe.”

“Then what do we do now?”

“That’s up to you, Princess,” Sam said with a nod. “If you want to leave we can, otherwise we can stay here for as long as we can and wait for them to write.”

“Could we reach Starfall before they depart?” she asked hopefully, though it was crushed by him shaking his head.

“I doubt Jon would wait to set off. If he’s even still on land, he’ll have sailed by the time we arrive, and going back south would only risk running into Dornishmen looking for you.”

“And what of you?” Myrcella asked frowning at the portly guard. “You’ll be wanted for kidnapping a princess no doubt.”

Sam nervously rubbed his arm. “I suppose that’s a possibility, though I see it more as rescuing her.
Hopefully that would earn some leniency.”

Both knew it was unlikely if her mother was involved, but still chuckled at the sentiment. Once their amusement faded, Myrcella looked to Sam. “Thank you.”

“I’ve only done as Jon asked,” he said with a dismissive wave of his hand. “It was nothing.”

“No,” Myrcella declared with a smile, “Jon was right. You are Sam the Brave.”

Chapter End Notes

Though Oberyn lives yet, I figure his arrest and the slightly stretched timeline is enough for Arianne’s group to rile themselves up. She still thinks she's being replaced by Quentyn, so has reason to push others if they hesitate, and I imagine would be able to convince the Sand Snakes to begin making moves.

The Myrcella swap is another one of those times I don't necessarily believe a theory but wanted to play with it.

For anyone confused by the line "It made her angry thinking of how two knights could so easily become the pawns of Dornish women", she means Arys and Jon.

I contemplated extending their escape to be more tense, but the story is already long as hell and should be enough to get the point across. There should be plenty of tension in the stuff coming up.

Next Chapter: Jon arrives at Starfall and makes a decision. Though Tyrion has his doubts, he begins to see there is more to Jon and his plans than the would be king lets on and makes a suggestion of his own before they set sail.
The King In The Shadows

Chapter Summary

Jon arrives at Starfall and makes a decision. Though Tyrion has his doubts, he begins to see there is more to Jon and his plans than the would be king lets on and makes a suggestion of his own before they set sail.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Starfall broke the horizon, bringing smiles to the faces of Jon’s band. Edric had ridden ahead with Podrick to act as heralds of a sort, mostly to avoid any guards shooting at the giant wolf approaching the castle.

It was Edric’s aunt Allyria who greeted them to the glittering white keep with violet stained glass windows beside the entrance. The dark haired woman gave Ghost a wary glance, but greeted Jon with a curtsy and smile. “Welcome to Starfall, Lord Snowfire.”

“Thank you, My Lady. Not only for your welcome, but for housing my ships.”

Allyria chuckled. “Well Edric left little room to argue even if I’d wanted to.”

“Thoros is here,” Edric told Jon, motioning into the keep. “I thought we could speak.”

Jon nodded, turning his gaze on Allyria. “My lady, would you join us?”

Edric’s eyes widened while Tyrion’s brow knit and he quickly tapped Jon’s hand, looking up to the would be king. “Are you certain? Our business-”

“It that of her betrothed and her nephew,” Jon said firmly, though smiled to the confused lady. “If Edric trust her then so do I.”

“Your-” Tyrion stopped himself, wincing as he corrected himself, “Jon, please. It’s best to keep this-”

“Tyrion,” Jon said turning to look at the shorter man, meeting his eyes.

It took barely a second for Tyrion to nod. “As you wish.”

Seeing his Allyria’s confusion, Edric sighed. “Come, Aunt, we’ll need someplace away from prying eyes and stretched ears.”

The group made its way into the keep, entering Edric’s solar where he told two house guards to stand at the ends of the hall and allow no one through. Ghost stayed outside the door to make sure the men kept their word.

Inside Thoros rose from his seat, rushing over to greet Jon with a smile, clasping his shoulder. “I leave you and you throw yourself at the mountain again?” The man laughed bitterly. “Next time will you go off to face the Others yourself?”
Jon’s smile faltered slightly thinking of his uncle at the Wall, but nodded to the priest. “I guess the Lord of Light still has use for me.”

“I suppose he would love a fool,” Thoros mused.

Once they all found a seat, Jon looked to Allyria. “My lady, have you heard from Lord Beric Dondarrion?”

He saw a flicker of fear color her eyes before shaking her head. “I haven’t heard from him since he left King’s Landing.”

Tyrion snickered while Jon kept his own amusement to a smile. Thoros shook his head, turning to her. “My lady there’s no need to lie. Lord Jon is the one who gave the Fellowship their mission to help the Riverlands.”

Confused once again, she turned to Jon. “You are? Forgive me, My Lord, but you were just a boy then. Why would they-”

“Because his wolf saved us,” Thoros interrupted. His eyes shifted to Jon, who nodded, so Thoros continued, “And we watched him return to life just after his dragon was born.”

“Come back to- dragon? What?” Allyria looked around the group but found solemn expressions before meeting Jon’s gaze. “How?”

“A gift from my father, left with my mother before they died.”


Nodding, Jon told her what he could, letting the others fill in the gaps of their own knowledge of him. Allyria sat in shock as he spoke, pride coloring her upon hearing the respect Jon held for her nephew and his squire. Once he finished Lady Dayne sat in silence for nearly a minute before looking to the would be king.

“My lord- Your Grace-”

“Please,” Jon quickly interrupted, holding up a hand to stop her, “for now I ask to avoid that. Should the wrong ears hear it we would all be doomed. Jon if fine, but I’ve no crown yet, and thus no grace.”

Allyria snickered. “Of course. Is there anything you need of Starfall?”

“A safe harbor is all I ask for now,” Jon said with a frown. “I’ve told those in Nightsong to send word here should anything happen, but I won’t be in touch as often as I’d like.”

“Should we be readying forces?” Allyria asked Edric and Jon. “Preparing boats?”

“I doubt you could without someone noticing,” said Tyrion. “Assuming Varys hasn’t fled and is still working for her, my sister will have birds waiting to send word of anything odd, not to mention what the Martells will think.”

“I think it’s worth the risk,” Edric said before Allyria could speak. “We could say we’re preparing in case something comes of Oberyn’s arrest. It would be no different from Nightsong.”
“That’s easy to explain away as a new lord putting his people to work,” said Tyrion. “If you ready for war without word either side could question why.”

“Maybe it doesn’t matter.” Jon’s words broke his silence, having been quietly staring at the floor until he spoke. “Maybe it’s time to take a real risk.”

“What do you mean?” asked Thoros.

Jon rose from his seat, taking a breath as he walked toward a window. “Maybe it’s time we join the fray.”

Tyrion looked to the others who shared his confusion. “What are you talking about?”

Looking out to the sea Jon sighed, then turned to the room. “I’m going to get Bloodwing.”

“Your dragon?” Thoros asked, looking to the others. “My lord, are you sure that's wise?”

“No,” Jon admitted with a smile, “I imagine it’s not, but… it’s time.”

“My lord,” Allyria said cautiously, “what if someone pieces together the truth?”

“Aye,” Tyrion said nodding, “despite how stupid most are there will be some smart enough to figure it out.”

“We could say it’s a blessing from the Lord of Light,” Edric suggested, motioning to Thoros.

The red priest frowned. “I don’t know if people would believe even that, my lord.”

“Not over the more obvious answer that Eddard Stark lied about his bastard,” noted Tyrion. “Even with your dragon the Stepstones won’t be so easy to take. This will all take time, Jon.”

“I know,” Jon assured, walking back toward the couches, “but how much can we ask people to lie and risk their lives for us?”

Edric’s eyes had been raised in thought before a smile took his face and he rose from his seat. “I think Jon’s right. I think we can win.”

The others were surprised by the proclamation, even Jon arching his brow while Allyria asked, “What do you mean, nephew?”

“I mean I think we already have the advantage.” Edric grinned as he held up his hand, raising fingers to count off, “Lord Stark has been on Jon’s side since before any of us knew him, we have the Tyrells on our side, and now the Martells. If Oberyn lives then he’ll help convince them to join us, and if not then all of Dorne will go to war to avenge him so they’ll have to join us.

“With those alone we’ll have the south, the north, and the largest force right in the heart of the Crownlands and Reach. The Riverlands will surely join the North, which gives us the four largest kingdoms on our side. Even if the Vale and Iron Islands join the Crownlands, Stormlands and Westerlands, they won’t be able to stand against us!”

Tyrion shook his head. “Don’t count your coins before the sale.” Edric deflated as Tyrion sat forward. “The Tyrells won’t like giving up their place in the king’s bed.”

Edric scoffed. “Then the Martells-”

“Will blame Jon for Robert’s Rebellion,” Tyrion finished with an apologetic frown to Jon. The
young king-to-be’s expression told the short lord he’d considered that, or perhaps even blamed himself for it already.

Edric glared at Tyrion. “Jon wasn’t even born!”

Tyrion turned to the young lord. “I don’t blame him, but some will. They’ll ask if his birth was worth the deaths, especially those of Elia and her children.”

“His siblings,” said Edric.

“All of whom died because of his parents,” countered Tyrion, frowning as he turned to Jon. “Of course there’s also the North. I don’t doubt your belief that Robb would want to help you, but will his men all agree with him? Will they accept another King Who Knelt? Especially to one who publicly denounced their king’s father?

“Even ignoring that, these are people who have spent a decade looking down on you, most not even bothering to do so behind your back. They have spent your entire lifethinking you nothing more than a stain on your father’s honor and making it clear they thought as much. Wouldn’t it be easier to deny you rather than risk their new king taking vengeance on their families for the disrespect they’ve shown him his entire life?”

The room fell silent as Tyrion shook his head, feeling defeated at having said more than he’d intended. It felt like he’d destroyed their hope, at least until Jon asked, “Then when?”

Blinking, Tyrion looked to Jon and found he seemed unaffected by the tirade he had just gone on. “What?”

“When is the right time to risk someone learning the truth?” Jon looked to the others before settling his gaze on Tyrion. “After we’ve won? How will we do that?” He sighed, crossing his arms as he walked back toward the couches. “Jon Snowfire is a bastard who raised his status in combat. He has little more than a keep taken from a dead man. It is Aegon Targaryen who has all of that as well as the pledges of the North’s king and Warden, knows the Tyrells slew the previous king, and has a dragon waiting for him at the Wall, as well as a claim to the throne. Not only through conquest or to make right the Baratheon’s usurping it, but though blood.”

Thoros tilted his head asking, “How so?”

It was Tyrion who answered after a laugh. “Of course.” Seeing the confusion of Thoros and the Daynes, Tyrion motioned to Jon as he said, “Aegon the Fifth would be Robert’s great grandfather through his daughter Rhaelle and her children, and would be Jon’s second great grandfather. Meaning if one sees Robert as claiming the throne through his speck of Targaryen blood, then to some Jon would have a better claim than even Robert’s bastards.”

“But not his own children,” Thoros said with a frown.

“If he had any,” said Jon.

Tyrion’s head snapped to Jon as Allyria frowned. “So you think the rumors true?” She asked, “They aren’t his?”

“Jaime admitted as much to me,” Jon answered, returning to his seat. “I doubt it will matter to many, but it could help us calm the Stormlands. Those who shared Stannis’ staunch enforcement of the law could be swayed in such a way.”

“With what proof?” asked Tyrion. “I doubt Jaime will go tell each lord what he shared with you.”
“They already believe,” Edric noted with a laugh. “Otherwise they wouldn’t have joined Stannis.”

“And most of his forces will have gone North,” said Jon, “meaning it could help guide the northern lords, who will want to follow the Starks.”

Tyrion groaned. “That still only gives us the North, a small fraction of the Stormlands and whatever remains of the Riverlands at best. I know you call Loras a friend, but the Tyrells won’t abandon their position so easily.”

“I know.” Jon’s words surprised Thoros and Edric, though Tyrion’s surprise was more pleasant. “They won’t give up their grasp on the throne, but they know the truth of me. I think it enough to make them hold back against us and our allies, especially since I know of their plot against Joffrey. They’ll wait until they think one side is set to win before backing them completely.”

“Have you known this entire time?” asked Thoros.

Jon nodded, sheepishly admitting, “I wanted to tell Loras the truth, which meant telling his family, so I considered their position.”

“That seems like a big risk to tell your friend a secret,” Tyrion noted with a laugh.

“It was a risk,” Jon agreed, the humor leaving his face as he spoke firmly, “but since they owe their place among the great houses to House Targaryen I thought it a fair chance. If they help us then we are better for it, but if not then other houses can take their place.”

The cold declaration to potentially wipe out one of the great houses left the others in shocked silence as Jon sat back in his chair with a sigh. Looking them over he asked, “What do you all think? Is it time to begin taking such risks?”

Allyria was surprised that Jon looked to her first. “I-I think so. If you truly have a dragon then I doubt any of this will matter. People will flock to you. Whatever your purpose, whatever your character, none of it will matter to most, and to those it might you’ve already claimed enough accolades to prove your capability.

“If people followed Robert then I imagine they could follow you as well. Since Aerys died it is as if all that remained of King’s Landing was his corpse, bloating until the vermin finally burst through to reveal themselves. No doubt people will cheer someone coming to clear away the rotting remains of Robert’s Rebellion.” Allyria smiled to Jon as she concluded, “Who better than the lost prince that should have been.”

Edric nodded to his aunt before looking to Jon. “I agree. All of these wars have broken the realm. We need to unite them again, even if it must be by dragon fire.”

When Jon looked to Thoros the priest glanced at the unlit fireplace and sighed, meeting his would be king’s steely gaze. “I don’t know.”

Jon turned to Tyrion, the Imp chuckling as he asked, “Does it matter? I’m outvoted.”

“I’m asking your opinions but this isn’t a vote. The choice is mine.”

The young man’s tone impressed Tyrion, who examined him before nodding. “I trust your decision, whatever it is.”

Jon tapped the arm of the chair he sat in before rising to his feet. “Then we sail in two days.”
“North?” asked Tyrion, hopping off the couch.

“To Sunspear. We’ll see how the Stepstones are and test ourselves. By then Dommie should receive the letter I’ll send him and meet us at Widow’s Watch. From there we can decide if we’ll head to Eastwatch and claim Bloodwing or head to White Harbor to meet Robb.”

Allyria showed them to the chambers she prepared for them while Edric looked over his solar. It had been years since he last slept in the lord’s chambers, at times feeling more a squire than lord of Starfall. It was that feeling which led him to leaving his chambers and making his way to Jon’s, where he found Ghost laying on the ground outside his door, a soft whine escaping his throat before standing to greet Edric.

“He locked you out?” Edric said petting the direwolf’s head, though concern bubbled in his gut as he knocked on Jon’s door.

When the door opened Jon smiled upon seeing Edric. “Missed me already?”

“I thought I would see if you needed anything.”

Jon chuckled, shaking his head. “You’re the lord of this keep, Ned.”

“And still your squire.”

Jon looked him over a moment before nodding. “Then how about my squire joins me in going to check our ships, then the lord can show me his grounds.”

Chuckling, Edric stepped back and nodded. “I think I can do that.”

Though it had been some time since he had been there little had changed. They met Thoros on their way to where the Red Claw, Princess Rhaenys and Seahorse were docked. They had determined that Jon and his men would take the Rhaenys as their flagship, so prepared quarters for him and the others.

After going over the ship they returned to Starfall where Edric showed them around the keep, the humble boy exchanging greetings with those they passed. It was Thoros who noted as they walked through the keep’s corridors, “I’ve not seen Dawn. Is it not kept here?”

Edric shook his head. “No. It’s locked away until another Sword of the Mourning arises.”

Jon’s hand slapped Edric’s shoulder as he smirked. “It won’t be long before you’ve earned it.”

Looking up to the older boy, Edric nodded, pushing aside his solemn expression when Allyria called out to him. “Go,” Jon said pushing him forward, “we’ll meet at supper.”

Thoros watched the boy rush over to his aunt, who bowed toward Jon before ushering her nephew to another room. Once they were alone, Thoros looked to Jon. “How have you been, my lord?”

The res priest chuckled. “True, but it seems that was no easy task.”

Jon shook his head. “No, but I imagine it will seem that way compared to what will come.”

“I imagine few conquerors find the task simple,” Thoros mused.

“Am I a conqueror?” Jon laughed. “I suppose I intend to be.”
“The Stepstones are a challenge no king has settled. Daemon claimed them, but they were soon lost again.”

“Because the realm was lost to war. Unless my aunt challenges me I doubt we’ll face another Dance of the Dragons in Westeros.”

“And I doubt the Quarrelsome Daughters will sit idle.”

Jon looked to Thoros. “So long as we don’t fail at every turn I imagine we’ll have a way to deal with Tyrosh, Lys and Myr.”

Thoros brow knit as Jon strode forward and the red priest felt as if he understood a vision he’d had days earlier. While sailing to Starfall he had prayed to the Lord of Light and in his flames saw a dragon’s growing shadow stretching across the sea. He had seen it as a sign they were right to focus their tasks on the sea, but perhaps the lord of light had given him a glimpse of the young king’s potential.

Starfall’s great hall filled with music as the sun set and those within found relief celebrating the brief return of their lord. While most enjoyed the feast, it was Tyrion who noticed how Jon turned down more food despite giving half his meal to Ghost. It seemed the lost prince had decided to find his fill in a cup, downing three before excusing himself.

Tyrion did the same, running once he exited the hall so he could catch up to the young lord outside his chamber. “Jon,” he called out, stopping the boy in the corridor.

Turning to see the short lord chasing him Jon asked, “Something wrong?”

“You tell me,” Tyrion said coming to a stop beside him. “You seem as if you’ve something on your mind.”

A smirk took Jon’s lips as he tilted his head. “I doubt any of us have a clear mind these days.”

“Perhaps you’ve simply not had enough wine.”

Jon snickered, his shaking head stilling as he looked Tyrion over before waving a hand and making his way toward his chambers. “Come. I think I’ve some wine in my chamber.”

Tyrion followed him and Ghost into the room, taking a seat at the small table beside the hearth while Jon poured him a mug of wine. Jon set down Tyrion’s mug, drinking from his own as he sat across from him. It was surprising to see the boy down the mug and set it aside before looking to Tyrion.

“I understand your doubts,” he said watching Tyrion sip from his mug.

“I should hope so. They are fairly simple ones.”

“They’re ones I share, but I can’t let that stop us. Moving on the Stepstones will call attention to us,” Jon sighed, sitting back to cross his arms, “why stop there? Why not take as much as we can and use it all? Haven’t we waited enough? We can’t linger and pray for things to fall into place, we need to find our openings, and if there are none make them ourselves.”

Tyrion nodded, setting his mug down and his elbows on the table so he could lean forward. “Why the Stepstones?”

Jon shrugged. “Why not?”
There was a slight shift in the young man’s jaw that told Tyrion there was more than what he’d been told. “You don’t need them to prove yourself. They won’t matter to any in Westeros. So why focus on them? Why not take Dragonstone? It could at least be a symbolic victory.”

Ghost’s whimper was all that broke the silence as Jon looked to the window, clearly thinking over what to say. His hand instinctively reached out to stroke the direwolf laying beside him until he exhaled and turned to Tyrion. “I want them to be a bridge.”

“You want a build a bridge over the Stepstones?” Tyrion asked dubious of such an idea.

Chuckling, Jon shook his head. “Not a literal bridge, no. One would be nice, but I doubt we’ve the means to build it quick enough.”

Tyrion took another sip of wine as he thought it over. “Then you mean a bridge to Essos for trade and the like?”

“I mean a bridge to my aunt.”

His answer made Tyrion sit up, setting his mug down. His eyes flickered as he thought over the possibilities of what he could mean. “You want to bring her to Westeros.”

“That was part of it. I knew she had the Dothraki behind her and considered having her help us take the Disputed lands, but it seems she’s moved to Meereen to free slaves as a queen in Essos.”

“Then what? Are you too stubborn to change your plan?”

Jon shook his head. “No. If I thought it pointless I would turn my attention elsewhere, but I think there’s merit in taking them. Making them our target gives us reason to travel the narrow sea as we please. We sail north to capture criminals and make them serve us or cross the sea looking for allies. If Cersei calls for us to join her wars we have our own to battle lest we bring them more enemies.”

“And how does this involve your aunt?”

Jon pointed at a spot on the table, moving as if drawing on an unseen map while he spoke. “It determines how we take the Stepstones. If she’s amenable, then we could simply avoid it all to join her and head east, taking Tyrosh, Lys and Myr, securing the Stepstones as a way into Dorne, and then make our way North burning down all who stand in our way with four dragons.”

Tyrion felt his hair stand on end at the idea of four dragons wrecking havoc across Westeros, not to mention the Dothraki horde and whatever army they amassed along the way.

Jon’s finger shifted back to it’s starting point. “If she is wary or doubtful then we can convince one of the free cities to join us in taking the other two. Let Lys or Myr take control of the lands in exchange for helping carry my aunt’s forces across the sea. If she’s unwilling to help, then we have a base of our own in Essos to challenge her.”

Tyrion frowned, never having thought there might be another Dance of the Dragons, let alone in Essos.

“The Stepstones also give us a way to hide ourselves,” Jon said sliding his finger back on his invisible map. “Who can say who the Pirate King of Dusk is when he leaves no survivors bar those who join his ranks aboard his commandeered ships? He can’t be me, I barely survived a battle with him.”
Tyrion laughed at the audacious claim and practiced feigned innocence. “The King of Dusk?”

Jon shrugged. “Thoros told me there’s someone calling himself the Corsair King near the Basilisk Isles. All it would take is one stolen pirate ship to act as the flag ship for the King of Dusk.”

“That’s amusing and all, but will take time. When do you intend to turn your attention to Westeros?”

Jon shook his head, taking his hand from the table. “Those are only some of the ideas I’m considering. If none of those work out then I have others, but I think you’re right to doubt our alliances here, which is why I need to know where my aunt stands. If she sides with us then taking Westeros is just a matter of time. If not then it seems inevitable she’ll come for us, and if necessary I might be able to push Essos against her, maybe even claim her dragons and use those allegiances to take Westeros piece by piece. Either way I can’t keep waiting in the shadows.”

Tyrion had put his faith behind Jon yet found the boy’s planning a surprise. When he first learned of his heritage and goal Tyrion wouldn’t have been surprised to find the boy was a cruel, cold fool who thought the world would be handed over because it was owed to him. Instead here was a boy who seemed to have at least put thought into multiple plans to face whatever may come.

“I believe I’ve chosen the right king,” Tyrion offered with a smile that might have crinkled his nose if he had one.

“I thought I chose you,” Jon retorted, earning a laugh from the shorter man.

“Perhaps. Either way, I’m glad you’ve at least half a mind in your head. Seems its more than the others with crowns.”

“Careful. My brother is one of those empty heads you speak of.” The smile he wore made it clear the warning was in jest, though Tyrion held up an apologetic hand while drinking his wine. Jon took the chance to pour himself another mug, looking into it as he asked, “What of your family?”

Tyrion’s gaze darkened. “What of them?”

“I know you’ve little love for your siblings, but you still have a nephew living and a niece here in Dorne.”

His brow knit, Tyrion nodded. “I do.”

“Do you think them safe? Tommen has Cersei in his ear and Myrcella is bound to the family of the man charged with killing your father.”

“I doubt Cersei will let anything happen to her precious Tommon,” Tyrion said biting back a smirk. It wasn’t hard to figure out Tyrion had purposely stopped there to torment Jon. Still, he couldn’t help himself from waving a hand asking, “And?”

Grinning at the boy’s frustration, Tyrion sat back shaking his head. “I doubt they’ll harm my niece. She’s too important to kill. If anything I’d imagine the Dorne may go after Tommen to place Myrcella on the throne, or perhaps her children should she marry the Martell boy.”

The Imp chuckled at the groan that came from Jon as he took another drink, sneering into his mug. “You still care for her?”
Not wanting to let himself be so obvious, Jon asked, “Who?”

“My niece,” Tyrion said shaking his head. “I assumed your childhood crush would fade once you’d tasted another woman.”

Jon’s gaze lingered in his mug as he asked, “Even if I did it doesn’t matter.”

“It depends on how much you care.” The young man’s gaze rose to Tyrion as he sank back against his chair. “She is my niece and one of the few that share my blood whom I still care for. If all you want is a pretty girl then I assure you there are plenty out there for you to claim. If it is something more…” A bitter laugh escaped Tyrion as he raised his mug, “Then I wish you better than I ever had.”

Jon frowned remembering Tyrion telling him of Tysha. “Is it really only her and Tommen? Are there no cousins you got along with? Maybe an aunt who thought Cersei a brat so spoiled you to spite her?”

“I wish!” Tyrion’s laughter faded along with his smile. “I did have an uncle who wasn’t so invested in the game my father played. He thought it better to mock it than play and lose as my other uncles did, so he spent his time making japes.”

“Gerion?” asked Jon, earning a grin from Tyrion, clearly pleased he remembered.

“Yes, Gerion. He has a daughter, a bastard girl named Joy. A sweet girl, though she keeps to herself.”

Setting his mug down, Jon nodded. “When I take the throne I’ll legitimize her.”

Tyrion laughed and shook his head. “You don’t need to, not for my sake.”

“For your uncle’s sake or hers. Either suits me.”

“I doubt my uncle will care. No doubt his corpse has long since been picked apart by whatever creatures roam the Smoking Sea.”

“I pray my aunt has better luck in Slaver’s Bay.”

Tyrion stared at Jon for a moment and saw for the first time hints of the stresses of his position. He wore it well, but five drinks in his usual sullen disposition had begun to show the cracks that came from a young man holding the weight of the world on his shoulders. Even after all these years in the south he had remained paler than most, as if he truly did live among the shadows.

“I’ve been thinking,” Tyrion began.

The moment he took to clear his throat was enough for Jon to arch his brow. “Should I worry?”

Tyrion shook his head with a laugh. “Not unless you’ve become codependent in out time together.”

The humor left Jon’s face. “You want to leave?”

“I’ve been thinking on how else I might help. While I’m certain I could help you deal with whatever lords we seek to join us I doubt my charms will do much for pirates and their ilk that you couldn’t do with a sword in hand or a dragon at your back. I’m no warrior like Edric or Thoros, so I had thought to suggest I travel the country and secure allegiances with the lords of Westeros, but perhaps it would be best for me to seek passage to Essos. Whether it be securing allegiances with
the free cities or convincing your aunt to join us, I think I could do more there than I would fending off pirates.”

Jon ran his head across Ghost’s back as he thought on Tyrion’s suggestion. “How would we contact one another?”

“It’s what kept me from mentioning it sooner,” Tyrion admitted. “Nightsong could be lost to some invading force or taken from us once they learn our goals. We can’t trust the Martells and their ilk, and it would be a waste to continually go north. Our best option may be here, but if they learn of the Dayne’s joining us others may come to take it.”

Jon stroked his chin, his fingers brushing across the black hairs coating it. “We can find a way. Hells, I’ll get us an Ironborn sail and go raid a town for their maester and make him set a rookery on one of our ships if I have to.”

“I take it you think my idea has merit?”

“We’ll find you a ship to take you to Essos and ask Thoros to escort you.”

“I doubt the priest will leave your side for so long,” said Tyrion. “Not unless the Lord of Light tells him to. Besides, I’m sure I could manage well enough with Podrick.”

“We’ll have time to think on it,” Jon said rising from his seat. “Until then, let us rest and use tomorrow to prepare whatever we’ll need.”

Tyrion left his room with a bow, lingering in the corridor and frowning as he looked back to Jon’s door. It felt like for the first time since he’d met him he had a chance to see a glimpse of the real Jon Snow, or perhaps Aegon Targaryen.

The day before their departure was spent gathering goods for their journey. After a quiet dinner Jon sent an unsigned letter to Robb and Domeric. He’d considered Loras and Sam, but each had their own tasks he dared not pull them from. His brothers in the north would need to know he would be on his way.

When morning came Jon sincerely thanked Allyria for her assistance before he, Ghost, Edric, Thoros, Tyrion and Podrick boarded the Princess Rhaenys. The lady stood on the docks with a pair of guards at her sides, waving to the ship where Edric leaned against a rail waving to her and the others who came to see off their lord.

Walking to his side, Jon placed a hand on the squire’s shoulder. “You sure about this, Ned? You could stay here, help guard Starfall.”

Edric shook his head, turning to Jon. “I’m your squire. My place is at your side.”

A somber smile crossed Jon’s lips as he pictured the boy donning white armor, quickly shaking his head as he squeezed Edric’s shoulder and looked back to Starfall. Thoros stood to Edric’s left, looking not at Westeros but the sea as a cloud passed overhead, blocking the sun and casting the sea around them in its shadow.

Chapter End Notes

While I’d figured Jon would tell Allyria as a kind of sign he was throwing in with the
Daynes because of Edric and her betrothal to Beric, I hadn't planned much else of this chapter.

I figure this is kind of the result of a lot of stuff building up in Jon, especially over the last few chapters.

Also I imagine Tyrion is surprised when Jon talks about Dany cause if he mentioned her, Tyrion assumed he'd ask for her to send troops to help, not actually bring her over.

Next Chapter: Jon's group arrive at Sunspear's shadow city incognito and hear grim news.
After another night soaring through the skies of the far North a chill lingered in Jon as he blinked his eyes opened. Along with the knock at his door which woke him was the soft creak of the war ship which made Jon wince slightly as he sat up. He looked to Ghost laying in the corner, who seemed to be the only one aboard as down as him, though Jon took a breath and tucked it all away as he called out, “Enter!”

Edric entered his quarters with a smile. “Morning, my lord.”

“All right?” Jon asked with a laugh, tossing aside his blanket and forcing himself out of bed. He stumbled on his first step, Edric swiftly rushing over to help him, though Jon had already regained his balance. “Still haven’t found my sea legs,” he laughed, though his misstep had more to do with the transition from flying to walking and how late it was when he finally fell asleep.

“Well we’re not far from land. We’ve passed Sunspear so will anchor before noon.” Hearing Ghost whine, Edric flashed the direwolf a sympathetic frown. “I think you’ll stand out, Ghost.”

After looking to his direwolf, Jon shook his head as he stripped off his shirt for a fresh one. “I’ll let him roam outside the city. It won’t matter if they know we were there, only that we are.”

“Then why are we avoiding them?” asked Edric. “I’m sure the Martells would welcome us.”

“Ignoring that we have a Lannister in our party, I trust those who deal with sailors to tell us of the Stepstones more than those colored by the Martell’s plots. Besides, I prefer to avoid letting the realm know our location if we can.”

Jon dressed down as much as he could, choosing older, cheaper clothes, yet still tied Dark Sister to his waist along with his wing buckler. It left him looking a hedge knight, or were they in the north perhaps a craven brother of the watch as the bulk of his attire was still black.

He met with the captain, who showed them where they would set anchor, letting Jon’s group sail to the nearby shore where they would trek south to Sunspear and its shadow city. “You should reach Sunspear near midday. Should you begin your return at nightfall we should be able to pull anchor by midnight.”

Jon glanced to the distant city with a tall tower topped by a spear aimed at the sky. “Should we stay the night we’ll return by midday tomorrow.”

“We’ll wait as long as it takes,” Colren assured. “I doubt any would look to attack us so close to shore.”

Once the ship stopped the crew prepared their boat, Jon and the others joined by Sarrac, the
Princess Rhaenys’ first mate, who manned the boat that carried them ashore. Once they had taken their things he sailed back to the ship while Jon’s party began walking south.

Trekking through the desert made Jon long for the icy winds he’d felt in his dreams. He felt worse for Ghost, whose tongue hang limp from his mouth after an hour. Once they were closer Jon let Ghost go off on his own with an order to return to him before nightfall.

Entering the shadow city beside Sunspear their group separated, Thoros and Edric heading off on their own while Podrick left with Tyrion. That left Jon on his own to walk the streets, eventually making his way to a bazaar.

He stopped by a few stands, striking conversations that went no where until he came to one stand run by an older, copper skinned man with gray hair. His table held mostly jewelry and trinkets, though Jon noticed a set of small bells that he pointed to. “Are these special?”

“Aye, you’ve a good eye, Ser,” the salesman said with a nod, picking up one of the bells which jingled as it dangled from his fingers. “These are the bells taken from a fallen Dothraki warrior.”

From the little research he did of them, Jon knew Dothraki wore bells in their braids to signify a victory. “When you say do you mean to say it is one made to be like those by the Dothraki?”

“No, Ser. I swear it to the Seven,” the salesman assured. “I bought them from a friend in Pentos. Apparently he won them in a game after the owner was killed during a Dothraki wedding that took place there.”

Jon struggled to keep his eyes from widening as he looked to the bells on the table, hoping the man wouldn’t see his realization that these were from his aunt’s wedding. With a slight nod Jon looked to the other goods on the table. Pointing to a small iron ring with a small bone where others might place a gem, he asked, “And this?”

“Ah, a grim piece,” the man said setting the bell down. “I won this from a sailor who said he took it from a corsair who delivered skulls to a dark god in the Basilisk Isles.”

“Is this actual bone?”

The man nodded. “It is. Though I couldn’t tell you which.”

Jon nodded, asking, “You say you won it off a sailor and the bells were bought from a friend. Was this recently?”

“I returned last month,” the man answered, clearly uncertain why he was asked.

Jon nodded and pointed to the bells. “How much for a bell?”

The man clearly looked Jon over, gauging how much he could take him for. Eventually he settled on, “Twenty pennies.”

Jon stopped reaching for his pouch and clicked his tongue. “Twenty? I could buy a bell for eight.”

“Perhaps, but not one from a dead Dothraki,” the man said with a smirk.

“A story none will be able to verify,” Jon said shaking his head. “Ten is more than fair.”

The man shook his head. “Sixteen is the least I’ll accept.”

Jon gave him a gauging glance before reaching for his pouch. “How about forty two for all three?
That’s fourteen each.”

The man was surprise by the jump but nodded. “Okay.”

“Great,” Jon said with a smile as he placed a stag on the table worth fifty six pennies. “Let’s say the rest is for a bit of information.”

Shocked, the man around before quietly asking Jon. “What information?”

“You’ve sailed recently. I know of a ship whose captain wants to make a name for himself by hunting pirates in the Stepstones. Do you know what it’s like there?”

The older man chuckled, nodding. “Not good, Ser. It seems that someone hit a few stray ships and sold them to a lord in the north for some kind of bounty. This has many of their ilk on edge. I’ve heard many are paired off, though as they always do it has led to many fighting each other as well. I fear a lone ship would fall to all but the greenest of crews.”

Jon tucked his purse away and nodded as he picked up the three bells. “Thank you.”

“Thank you, Ser,” the salesman said picking up the silver stag.

Jon continued through the bazaar, taking the simple northern brooch from his cloak, sliding the bells over the ring before he refastened it. He almost felt bad for giving the man only a silver as he’d have probably handed over every coin he had if he had to. Now in one piece he had ties to both his families which he could explain away by saying he wanted to emulate the bells of Nightsong. He knew of the Dothraki’s tradition, so wore his bells for his victories over Bryce Caron, Stannis Baratheon and Gregor Clegane.

His smile soon faded as he sat on the edge of a fountain picking apart a fruit he’d bought and his gaze fell on Sunspear. ‘She’s there.’ The thought echoed in his mind, growing louder and louder until he took a breath. Myrcella was so close Jon could almost feel his body aching to carry him there, to see her, but he knew it would only hurt him more if he did.

Jon would never admit it, but that was the largest reason he had been wary of letting their presence be known. The Martells would have to be hospitable hosts and they would have to oblige them, meaning Jon would not only have to see Myrcella for the first time in nearly a year but would do so while she was with her betrothed.

Though his nights had been spent soaring the northern skies his days had been filled with nightmares as he imagined being forced to visit Sunspear. There he would see Myrcella again and find she barely remembered him. To her he was nothing but a childhood infatuation she outgrew the moment she left King’s Landing. He would have to sit there and watch her fawn over some Dornish prince, sitting in his lap, feeding him fruits and giggling whenever he spoke.

“My assumption that fruit insulted your mother?”

The words pulled Jon from his nightmare, looking to the old man sat at the corner nearby who had spoken to him. When the balding man nudged his head forward, Jon’s gaze fell to his hands where he found he had crushed the small melon, its juice dripping from his fists.

Watching Jon groan and turn to wash his hands in the fountain left the old man snickering. “I take it you don’t like the Martells?”

Waving his damp hands in the air, Jon shook his head. “No, I don’t know them well enough to say I like or dislike them.”
"You were glaring at the palace like a Lannister owed a debt."

Jon chuckled. "I guess I was just imagining how much better they have it."

"Ah. We've all been there." The old man plucked at the sting of the small harp in his lap. "Better to enjoy what you have then concern yourself with the nobles."

"You speak the truth," Jon mused, wiping his hands on his cloak as he looked around. The bazaar was fairly well occupied, but few paid attention to the old man plucking at his strings. Looking to him, Jon motioned toward the man's harp. "Do you mind if I try?"

The old man arched his bushy brow, a wide smile stretching across his face as he pushed himself to his feet, sitting near Jon and handing him the harp. "I'd assume the only thing you know how to handle would be a blade. Do you know how to play?"

"Some," Jon said with a smile as he plucked a few strings, adjusting two before he let his fingers strum the harp's taught strings. He started with a simple melody, one he'd practiced a dozen times. It wasn't until he glanced at Sunspear that he began to hit dissonant chords.

It was the first time he wished he could return to King's Landing, if only so he could play for her more often then he had. He'd been so worried about his own embarrassment he had forgone a chance to do something for her. He had deprived her of whatever joy she might find in his playing. He felt cruel.

The chords fell still as Jon took a deep breath, slowly exhaling as he glanced to the palace and decided he would play for her. Even if she couldn't hear him, he would play for her.

While he started from one of the songs he knew, he quickly diverged. One hand kept a base melody while the other built upon it, changing the tempo as he pleased. He watched people slow their pass to watch him play. Eventually someone tossed a copper coin at his feet, and as he continued playing more joined it.

When he struck the final chord, letting the note hang in the air, Jon had a pile of pennies at his foot worth at least a stag. With a bow of his head to the clapping group around him, Jon picked up half the pile of pennies and handed it to the old man along with his harp. Seeing his shock, Jon assured him the copper coins were, "For borrowing the harp."

The rest he picked up and split into even piles he handed out to the few children who lingered around the fountain. When a boy gawked at the pile, Jon waved him off, "It's dark. Go before the snarks come for you."

With a gasp the boy hurried down the street, Jon watching him until he noticed the others had arrived at the square. Edric and Thoros' smiles were touched by pride while Podrick's shared the somberness radiating from Tyrion's grim expression.

Jon made his way to an alley where the others joined him. He looked to Tyrion, who stared at the ground while telling the group, "I found little of note."

"I'd imagine it's difficult to ask questions while one plays the minstrel," Thoros teased.

"You would be wrong," Jon said with a laugh. "I learned Robb or some other northern lord has set a bounty on pirate ships which has caused them to start pairing off to stay safe but that has them fighting each other as well."

"What's with the bells?" Edric asked motioning to his brooch.
“They’re from my aunt’s wedding,” he said fondly. The others looked to him in surprise so he explained, “They’re bells from a Dothraki who died at a wedding in Pentos.”

“That is fairly specific,” Thoros noted.

Jon nodded, looking to Tyrion, who once again had his brow furrowed at the ground. “What’s wrong? I expected you to chastise me for buying into some merchant’s lies.” His teasing tone fell when Tyrion looked to him with sorrow in his eyes. He looked to the others, who suddenly shared Tyrion’s grim expression. “What happened?”

“It’s Myrcella,” Tyrion said before the others could speak.

His whispered answer felt like a dagger in Jon’s gut. “What about her?” He noticed Edric turn from him, pulling his shoulder inward as he grimaced, looking like a child in line to be punished.

Anger contorted Tyrion’s face as he told him, “She was attacked and the kingsguard with her killed.”

It felt as if Jon had suddenly been transported to beyond the wall, a shiver running through him, barely managing to shake his head. “Is she…”

“Most say she lives, but…” Tyrion shook his head as he looked to the ground.

Jon turned toward Sunspear, basked in twilight. “Did they do it?”

“No, my lord,” Thoros said with a sigh, “they way I heard it they were riding when they were attacked.”

“Then who?” Jon asked turning to them.

“Gerold Dayne,” Edric answered, not meeting Jon’s gaze as it turned on him.

“Why?”

Edric shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“Then let us find out,” Jon said stepping out of the alley.

The others shared a shocked glance before rushing after him. “We’re meant to rejoin the ship by midnight,” Thoros reminded him.

“They’ll wait,” he said before coming to a stop and raising his head to call out, “Ghost!”

He earned more than a few odd glances from those thinking him a madman yelling of specters, but their amusement turned to gasps as the albino direwolf sprinted into the square. The smallfolk watched as Jon reached up to stroke the beast’s head before it followed him on a path to palace.

“Are you sure this is wise, Jon?” Thoros asked the jingling would be king, though he didn’t answer.

With Ghost at there side it didn’t take long for them to be noticed as they approached Sunspear. Most gaped in awe of the direwolf while some screamed and fled, signaling the guards who ran toward them. A group of them hurried into the bazaar they were passing through, most of the guards coming to a stop upon seeing the Ghost. It took their captain forcing them forward to break their stupor, leading to the guards rushing ahead of them.

“Halt!” The captain called out amid the clang of spears crossing to block their path.
“Move aside!” Jon bellowed, his left hand resting on the pommel of Dark Sister as Ghost bared his fangs. “Tell your prince Tyrion Lannister comes with Jon Snowfire to see his niece!”

The men glanced at the noseless dwarf glaring at them from beside Jon and Ghost. In the captain’s moment of hesitation Jon began walking again, so he quickly turned and waved his men off. “Go tell them,” the captain told one of his men who rushed off toward the palace while he and the rest of his squad followed Jon’s group until they passed the palace gates, letting the Martell guards handle things.

They were greeted in the bailey by barely half the court led by Sunspear’s old, blind seneschal Ricasso. The man was clearly startled by their sudden arrival, a shaky laugh escaping him as he bowed to Jon’s party. “Welcome to Sunspear, my lords.”

“Where is my niece?” asked Tyrion.

“Resting in her chambers,” the blind man assured with a nervous laugh, “I’ve sent stewards to rouse her and my prince. If you would please follow me, they will meet you in the hall.” Shifting his head slightly in the direction of Ghost’s heavy breaths, he added, “We could prepare a place in our kennels if it—”

“No,” Jon said flatly. “Take us inside.”

The old man bowed his head with a frown. “As you wish.”

Jon started to walk as if to overtake the courtiers who greeted them, but Thoros placed a hand on his shoulder. “My lord, please calm yourself,” he whispered. “This need not end in bloodshed.”

“That’s to be seen,” Jon said brushing Thoros’ hand away before following the seneschal.

They arrived at the feasthall where servants rushed forward carrying a tray of wine, bread and salt. When Thoros went to reach for the bread Jon grabbed his wrist, stopping him, a gesture which brought silence to the room. Guest right meant no blood would be shed, so to deny it would to declare at least a willingness to do so.

It was only as they stood in the hall that Tyrion felt his anger fade enough to clear the haze of his mind. It was then he turned to Jon, tapping his side to gain his attention as he quietly counseled him, “Be careful here, Jon. Doran may seem weak but he is a man who weighs every word he says. He speaks as you wield a sword.”

“I’ve experience with such a man,” Jon said flashing a slight smile that quickly faded as he turned back toward the high table.

When the doors at the back of the hall opened it was not the prince, nor even a Martell who entered but a trio of woman. Though he hadn’t seen them before, Jon had heard enough of the Sand Snakes to guess at their identities. The long-legged, big boned mannish looking woman with knotted rat-brown hair would be eldest, Obara. The slender woman with pale olive skin and straight black braided hair pulled back from a widow’s peak would be Nymeria. The golden haired girl with blue eyes and dimpled cheeks would be Tyene. Oberyn’s three eldest daughters made their way to Jon’s group, each casting a wary glance toward Ghost and Tyene even switching to Nymeria’s right, letting Obara be closest to the direwolf.

“It is an honor to meet our aunt and cousin’s avenger,” Tyene said as she curtsied while her elder sisters nodded to Jon.

As much as he hated their time wasting, he respected Oberyn enough to not insult his daughters.
“The honor is mine, Lady Tyene. You father has told me much of you, Nymeria, Obara and your other sisters. I wish we could have met under better circumstances. I hoped to host your father at Nightsong should he return to Dorne once his innocence is proven.”

The sisters were clearly surprised he not only knew of them and who each was but so openly spoke of their father’s innocence, especially in the presence of the Imp who was clearly not as interested in them, having noted they had ignored him until he cleared his throat. “This is all nice, but where is my niece? Shall we send Ghost to find her?”

“The princesses will be down in a moment,” Obara’s brisk assurance came with a poorly hidden sneer at Tyrion.

“We ladies need time to assure we are presentable,” Tyene said with an airy laugh.

“And the princes?” Jon asked, looking to the door, only then realizing he would have to see Trystane.

He noticed a dark look shared between the sisters before Nymeria said coldly, “Prince Quentyn is with Lord Anders Yronwood. Doran and Trystane will be down shortly.”

Jon wanted to ask about Myrcella and Sam, having a feeling the Sand Snakes knew something of what happened, but decided to wait for all of them to stand before him so he could better gauge their reactions. It seemed Myrcella had survived, but if Sam were dead Jon hoped he could keep a cool head. As much as he may want to cut through them all in the moment he doubted he could make it out of Sunspear alive after killing everyone in the hall. Besides, in a sense they were his family, though not by blood.

When the door opened it was the broad shouldered, white haired Areo Hotah who entered ahead of the elder Dornish prince whose gout aged him beyond his fifty plus years. It was difficult to imagine such a frail old man had fathered the buxom, olive skinned princess at his side, her thick ebony hair falling in ringlets along her back.

Jon felt his stomach twist upon seeing the olive skinned prince following them. The knot grew upon seeing a slender, golden haired girl beside him. He felt himself gasp not only at the hideous, raw crimson scar across her cheek leading to her missing ear, but because he noticed her nose was slightly pointed in the way Rosamund’s was.

Jon and Tyrion looked to each other, their anger colored by confusion as they turned back to the group coming to join the Sand Snakes. Doran, Arianne and Trystane cast wary glances to Ghost as Jon placed a hand on his head.

“My Lords,” Doran said with a nod to their group, “welcome to Sunspear. I’m afraid we didn’t prepare for your-”

“What happened to my niece?” Tyrion said before he could finish his platitude.

Jon noticed Rosamund flinch slightly. Though he knew it wasn’t Myrcella, it still hurt him to see her doppelganger cousin terrified. What little he had interacted with Rosamund told him she was a nice enough girl. She didn’t deserve to live with such a scar.

“I’m afraid there was a tragic incident,” Doran said somberly. “Ser Arys Oakheart gave his life defending the princess, though her attacker was able to strike her before the knight could stop him.”

Jon bit back his harsher comments to ask, “Where’s Samwell Tarly?”
The question confused the group before Doran asked, “You mean the Lannister guard? He’s fled our lands, my lord. Days before our Princess was attacked he left the keep with her handmaiden.”

Jon felt a flush of relief knowing not only was Myrcella out of Martell hands, but was with Sam, who he trusted would keep her safe. However that still left Rosamund.

“Myrcella,” Jon said with a small smile that told Rosamund he not only knew who she was but intended to help her, bringing a relieved smile to her face. “How are you?”

At her side, Trystane pursed his lips, clearly displeased seeing her smile for the first time since her return to Sunspear. By merely saying her name Jon had succeeded where he failed day after day. He’d heard tale of the bastard crowning her queen of love and beauty but believed her assurance he chose her to gain favor with her family. Now it seemed he could see the truth of things, or so he thought.

“I’m fine,” Rosamund said quietly, taking a breath to steady herself. “The maesters have been treating my wounds. T-they say it may fade some in time…”

Tyrion frowned hearing his niece’s voice crack as tears trickled from her eyes. He stepped forward, reaching out to take her hand. “It seems us lions must bare scars for the world to know our mettle.”

“Do not think such a thing could tarnish your beauty, Princess,” Jon said bowing his head to Rosamund as the girl trembled, taking her hand from Trystane’s to wipe her eyes.

“Thank you.”

Jon smiled, something he found easier noticing Trystane’s disdainful glare aimed at him upon complimenting Rosamund.

“What happened to the one who did this?” Tyrion asked stepping back to look at Doran.

“He’s fled,” the prince assured.

“Who was it?” asked Jon, keeping his gaze on Rosamund.

“Gerold Dayne,” Doran said with a sympathetic nod toward Edric, who shook his head and looked to the floor.

Jon watched Rosamund’s eyes shift as if to nod. “And he killed Arys Oakheart?” This time Jon looked to Doran, though kept Rosamund in his periphery.

“Gerold Dayne is skilled with a blade,” Doran answered. “Some call him Darkstar.”

Noticing Rosamund’s gaze shift toward the white haired guard beside Doran, Jon looked to Tyrion and shook his head, laughing. “You were right, Tyrion. He chooses his words carefully.”

The room seemed to tense as Tyrion looked to Jon, smirking. “Exactly enough to imply Gerold Dayne killed Ser Arys without quite saying he did and making him a liar.” Tyrion turned to Doran with a smirk. “It’s almost clever.”

The Dornish prince was unamused, his fingers tapping the arm of his wheeled chair. “You insult me, my lords.”

“No more than you insult us by thinking us too stupid to pick up on your little word games so you can lie to us.” Jon sighed, looking to Rosamund. “Do you want to leave this place?”
“What?” Half the room must have exclaimed that, including a shocked Rosamund.

“If you don’t feel safe here I will personally guarantee you safe passage to King’s Landing.” To their surprise, Jon looked to the Sand Snakes adding, “You as well should you wish to go support your father. We can arrive within a fortnight should the winds favor us.”

“My lord—”

“You’ve already proven you can’t keep my niece safe,” Tyrion said before Doran could finish. “How can we know this isn’t some misguided plot born of anger over Oberyn’s arrest? That this is where the violence against her ends?”

“You are beyond your bounds, Tyrion,” Doran said icily.

“If you think yourself wronged then call a champion and let this be settled.”

Jon’s proclamation had the desired effect of giving them pause. Defeating the Mountain had given him a reputation, though no doubt it helped having Ghost at his side.

“It seems I was wrong to think you northerners might be cool headed to a fault,” Doran said with a scoff, agitation showing through his cracking facade. “You come to my palace without warning, you refuse guest rights, and now you insult me and insinuate I had a hand in this tragedy?”

“And my niece has nearly died in your care,” Tyrion snapped before Jon could respond. “Now she will bare the marks of your incompetence for the rest of her life! If you’ve a grievance with her mother then let her suffer, not an innocent girl who has no part in the suffering of your family.”

The imp turned to Areo and snapped his finger, “Fool! Go get my niece’s things. She will be leaving with us.” While Tyrion wore pure bravado he silently prayed that Jon would have his back should this take a turn for the worst, which felt inevitable.

“Shall you spit in my face as well, Tyrion?” Doran asked motioning to Trystane and Rosamund, whose hand hadn’t returned to the Dornish prince’s. “You intend to break their betrothal?”

“I intend to take her someplace safe. Should Trystane wish to accompany her he may,” Tyrion said with a nod to the boy, “but until I have Gerold Dayne in chains before me I will not allow her back in Dorne.”

Doran’s nostrils flared, glaring at Tyrion as he said, “Ricasso, have the Princess’ belongings packed and taken to…” He blinked, shaking his head. “How have you even come here?”

“Thoros,” Jon said keeping his eyes on the others, “go to ship. Tell them to come pick us up. I’m sure the Prince will allow you to borrow a horse. The guard he’d have follow you can return it.”

Doran smirked at the sudden use of his proper title as well as him bluntly acknowledging he expected Doran to have the red priest tailed. “Take any you wish from the stables.”

The red priest let out a breath he’d been holding since they entered the hall. “As you wish, my lord.” With a bow of his head Thoros turned and left the hall.

“They should be at your docks before sunrise,” Jon said before looking to the Sand Snakes. “And I stand by my offer. Should you wish to be at your father’s side I’ll do all I can to see you arrive safely.”

He noticed the sisters give a mostly subtle glance to Doran before Nymeria answered, “Let us think
“As you wish,” Jon nodded.

Doran shook his head. “Now that things have cooled, shall we share bread and salt?”

“If it will ease your mind,” Tyrion said with a glance to Jon, who nodded.

A servant hurried over with the trey Jon had refused earlier, allowing each to take a piece of bread. Jon even gave a small piece to Ghost.

Once Tyrion had his piece he looked to Doran. “If I may borrow you maester I would like to write ahead to let my sister know of our new destination. Hopefully it will keep her from doing anything too stupid once she hears of Gerold Dayne’s mistakes.” His tone made clear that while he doubted Doran’s hands were clean he was willing to look past it for now and play into his tale.

“Of course.” Doran then turned to his children ordering, “Arianne, help the Princess pack her things. Trystane, show Lord Tyrion the rookery and have Maester Myles help him however he needs.” He looked to the lords, “If you will forgive me, my lords, my condition causes me to tire easily and it is already late.”

“Rest well, Prince Doran,” Jon said with a sincerity that surprised most of the room.

As the Dornish nobles turned to depart, Jon looked to Tyrion, rubbing Ghost’s head to silently ask if he should have him escort Tyrion. The imp quickly shook his head, tapping Podrick’s stomach.

“Come Podrick. We’ve letters to write.” After taking a few steps he stopped to look back at Jon asking, “Shall I write to Nightsong as well?”

“If it wouldn’t be too much trouble.”

Jon watched them leave before Ricasso approached him and Edric.”My lord, would you like to rest?”

“I’d like to take in the sights if I may. We had hoped to avoid bothering the prince as we came to ask the locals of any pirate activity in the area so had no chance to enjoy Sunspear or her shadow city.” Jon hoped that would answer Doran’s questions whenever he asked his people to find out why he was in the area without their knowledge.

“I’m afraid there’s not much open at night apart from, well, the usual.”

Jon shook his head. “I’d be happy to stand on a wall and take in the sea or desert.”

“Ah, of course.” The old man bowed his head, motioning toward the door, “This way, my lord.”

The seneschal showed them to a section of the castle wall which had a view of the desert and sea depending on which direction they faced. Though the seneschal quickly excused himself, Jon noticed pairs of guards positioned further down the rampart attempting to not obviously watch them.

Once they were left to themselves however, Jon turned to lean against a merlon and released a sigh.

“Gods I thought we would be fighting our way out of here.”

Edric let out a laugh. “I thought you were hoping for that.”

“I’m sorry,” Jon said turning to Edric. “I should have handled myself better.”
Seeing Jon looking distraught, Edric quickly shook his head. “No need to apologize. I understand. I… I know how much you care for her. How much Myrcella means to you.”

He was surprised to see Jon chuckle, reaching out to squeeze Edric’s shoulder as he quietly told him, “That wasn’t her.”

Edric’s confusion quickly broke as his brow rose. “Rosamund?” When Jon nodded he pieced together the rest. “That means she’s with Sam.”

“It would seem so.” Turning turned back to the crenellations, pressing his arm against the merlon as he looked out to the sea. “What do you know of Gerold Dayne?”

Edric’s shock faded. “Not much.”

Hearing his squires sullen tone, Jon looked to him. “You know I don’t blame you.”

Though he seemed relieved to hear it, it was brief as Edric scoffed. “Do you think Cersei will feel the same?”

“At least we need not feel bad throwing him to the wolves,” Jon said, adding with a shrug, “or lions in this case. Though I’m sorry if my behavior here causes trouble for you or your aunt. No doubt I’ve made myself a target for the prince’s plots. He’s probably telling Oberyn’s daughters to poison my meals or throw me overboard.”

Edric snickered, “I’m sure we can find someone to test your meals.”

“Would your aunt know more of Gerold? Who he was close to or where he might go to hide?”

“I couldn’t say, but I can write to her.”

Jon nodded, waving his hand. “Go find Tyrion. I’ll wait here.”

“Are you sure that’s wise?” Edric glanced at the guards down the ramparts.

“I can send Ghost with you if you’re concerned,” Jon teased, making his squire sigh before making his way back to the keep.

Left to himself, Jon pressed his hand into a crenel and took a deep breath, thinking back to his dream of icy winds. He felt as if his insides had been burning since the moment he sent his sights on Sunspear. He hadn’t planned to get so heated with the prince, but found the spark of concern within him swelled with agitation and rage until he was hoping Doran chose a champion. In his mind he saw the frail prince call the white haired guardian Rosamund glanced at as his champion, allowing Jon to open the man’s throat for his part in letting her come to harm.

When he recognized Rosamund he had thought it would allow him to grow cold and handle things with a clear head, but he was still angered by the whole thing. If not for them switching places then it would have been Myrcella who bared that scar if not perished in whatever game they were playing. And even still an innocent girl had been harmed. Rosamund nor Myrcella had done anything to harm these people yet they used her, let he be harmed because of their plotting. It enraged Jon to think he could end up like them. It was inevitable that people would be harmed in the war to come, but he needed to do all he could to avoid incidents like this. Children should not bear the crimes of their parents, if that was even the purpose of this. If it was them plotting for the throne then he needed to be sure he involved only those who knew the risk and accepted them.

With some relief he mused that the nature of his secret made such a rule necessary lest he risk the
wrong person learning the truth too soon, but even still it was his responsibility. Yet another for him to hold.

Tyrion, Podrick and Edric found Jon sat on the rampart with his back against the crenellations while Ghost laid his head in his lap. He wore a sullen expression while sliding his fingers through the direwolf’s fur. Hearing them approach he looked up, continuing to brush his hand through Ghost’s fur as he asked, “Did everything go well?”

“Letters have all been sent. If they’re at Nightsong they should know by tomorrow or the next day.”

“If they’re there,” Jon said with a nod. “Did I screw up everything here?”

“Only somewhat,” Tyrion said with a laugh, moving to stand beside Jon. “I fear I did more to ruin things than you. The girl is still my blood.”

Jon stopped himself from responding when he saw Obara Sand approaching them. Ghost lifted his head, exhaling as he stood, letting Jon get to his feet. “My lady,” he said with a nod to the woman.

“My sisters and I will be boarding your ship,” she told them, crossing her arms as she focused her gaze on Jon. “Since Princess Myrcella’s sworn shield is dead, we will take his place until she’s safe or finds another.”

“Oberyn’s daughters are always welcome,” Jon said with a nod. He could worry about their part in whatever plot harmed Rosamund once they boarded. If anything perhaps he could convince Oberyn to make them tell him the truth of what happened.

Obara narrowed her gaze before scoffing. “We’ll be ready within the hour.”

The moon was approaching its peak when the Princess Rhaenys anchored near Sunspear, releasing a trio of ship to come carry them aboard. When Rosamund exited the keep, she took a moment to hug Arianne, a gesture which seemed sincere as the older princess took the chance to whisper in her ear.

Rosamund wiped a tear from her eye and nodded as she stepped away from Arianne, who looked down, shame etched in her features. It was when Rosamund moved to say her farewell to Trystane that the boy stepped forward to pull her into an embrace, pressing his lips to hers. Her eyes widened, pressing her hand to his chest as she quickly pulled away, shocked by the kiss. Her cheeks flush, Rosamund moved to give Doran a curtsy. While she likely missed it, Jon and many others noticed the smirk Trystane shot at him, though Jon gave him no reaction.

After the Sand Snakes bid their uncle farewell the departing group made their way through Sunspear, but on their way to the shore Jon clicked his tongue and Ghost broke off into a sprint heading west. It was sudden enough even those used to Ghost’s presence were startled, the guard group with them yelling in surprise as they watched the direwolf speed into the distance.

Jon let out a sigh that was a bit more dramatic than he intended. “That damn beast.” With a dismissive wave of his hand in Ghost’s direction, Jon looked to the others. “He knows his way to Nightsong. Let us not dally lest the queen mother worry.”

While the guards seemed uncertain, Jon wasted no time turning and leading them to the ships. Wherever Sam and Myrcella were Ghost would find them and protect them. That would be worth more time apart, not to mention Ghost clearly preferring his time on land. If only Jon were so lucky.
The bells were added when I was going over the chapter. I used the RPG coin value table which is on the wiki when I was thinking up the prices.

Cause I'm sure someone will ask why Arianne stuff still happened and it'll be a bit before I have a chance to explain it in story, she still thinks Quentyn is replacing her and sees a chance so is pushing for it. Sand Snakes are there because she basically manipulated them to further her goals leading to their events.

When I originally went into this chapter I didn't expect things to be as aggro as they are here. It just kind of felt right and more interesting as I wrote it so I went with it. All said it was fun to write Tyrion giving Jon advice his father gave him about Doran, Trystane's little rivalry with Jon, Rosamund's bits and Doran's careful wording. There was definitely a point where I considered having it so real south but it better to hold off on any bloodshed.

Next Chapter: Robb deals with matters of the North and hears news from the south. As one father returns to Winterfell with news from across the sea and learns a secret, another returns with a wife and southron concerns.

This has nothing to do with the story and I'm not sure how many people even read these notes but I thought I'd share something after speaking with someone I feel had a pretty disgusting attitude, saying they saw actively discouraging writers from posting things they don't enjoy as a victory. I don't want to cheat around the character limit so will try to keep things brief compared to the multiple pages I could write about this.

So many people give more weight to the negative comments they receive, letting a single negative comment hold more value to them over numerous positive ones. It's something I make a point to avoid doing with comments on my story, but I believe a way to help counter this is to put as much thought into what we enjoy as most do with what they dislike. It's something I want to be better about myself.

Many think they are being 'brutally honest' when leaving negative reviews, but an actual honest critic who wants to help someone gives feedback on both positive and negative aspects of a work. I’ve no doubt the truth is they simply want to feel superior, which is a shame because we are ultimately all fans of some work looking for a way enjoy it further. If you want to think you’re helping, remember considerate criticism works better than condescension.

If the only time someone leaves a comment or review is to be negative their words have almost no value. They like to think their comments more valuable than a simple 'Great chapter' but are just as easily dismissed because their words are worthless. If someone makes the choice to give more effort to their negative opinions and seemingly ignore any positives it devalues their opinion for me.

I'm not saying don't say negative things as I'm sure some will take this. I simply believe for any criticism to have value it has to be more than negatives. Telling someone I stopped reading a story without having said a single thing beforehand about what I enjoyed, as if it matters I'm no longer reading, is ridiculous. I was at best a number on a view counter and if I stop it means nothing. If I want my opinion to
matter I have to give voice to the things I enjoy as much as what I don't.

I'm not asking for more comments or anything. In fact I doubted adding this because I don’t want the comments to be only talking about this section. I appreciate so much about the comments I receive. Seeing people positively engaged with my story is so encouraging, especially when I see people talk about things they noticed, sections they enjoyed or even a fairly well thought out theory which was a pleasant surprise. It makes the thought and time I put into a work feel appreciated. I'm lucky not every long comment I receive is negative, which often seems to be the case.

Ultimately my point is not only the typical don't be a dick, but whatever else you read please consider giving at least as much thought and effort to sharing what you enjoy about something despite it being so easy to find negatives.
Split Swords

Chapter Summary

Robb deals with matters of the North and hears news from the south. As one father returns to Winterfell with news from across the sea and learns a secret, another returns with a wife and southron concerns.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Never did Robb Stark think he would prefer riding into battle over being in Winterfell, yet seeing castle on the horizon brought little joy beyond the hope of a warm bath and comfortable bed. It was not that he hungered for war, but rather found a crown more tiring than a helm.

It had been well over two years since the war began, inching ever closer to three, and though Robb had not expected it to be easy it was still overwhelming. It was one thing to oversee the North as he’d been raised to do but now he had the Riverlands to worry about while the North was attacked from two fronts. In the grand scheme they had been lucky his aunt was hidden away in the Vale, keeping her people apart from the fighting, as he had little hope she would side with them.

While Winterfell may hold comforts they would need to wait. Not only were there a line of tasks waiting for him, but Dacey had begun to show. Though it was small enough to hide with tunics and armor they had agreed he would tell his family once his father returned to Winterfell. He couldn’t help but cast a glance to the Mormont heir as she dismounted, quickly hiding his concern as he hugged his mother.

His personal guard split as most tended to their horses while those who had become a sort of council for Robb moved to his side. Though he cared for all his personal guard there were those he continually looked to for advice. Wendel Manderly and Robin Flint were the eldest of his guard while Lucas Blackwood was one of the few Riverlanders to follow the Old Gods. Beside Dacey and Domeric, there was also Daryn Hornwood, who Robb found he shared many things. Since his father’s death at the Battle of the Green Fork, Daryn had become Lord of Hornwood and even had his own bastard brother he thought of as true kin.

It was that group which remained with Robb while he gave his squire Olyvar a quick thankful nod for handling his stallion before turning his attention to Maester Luwin and his mother, who stood with Brienne and Ser Davos, who flashed a smile to his son Devan before the squire guided Domeric’s horse away.

“Did they keep their word?” Robb asked Davos.

“Ice’s remained have been returned to Winterfell, Your Grace,” Davos said with a nod.

“I suppose Lannisters would feel it a debt to be paid,” the dark haired Lucas mused with a scoff.

“I suppose even debtors have honor at times,” the immense Wendel said with a laugh that shook his large mustache.
“No problems otherwise?” Robb asked the pair.

Davos shook his head as Brienne said, “Ser Jaime had complaints, but otherwise cooperated the entire time.”

“The pieces have been brought to the Lord’s solar,” Luwin told him before turning to led them to it.

Entering the solar, Robb quickly noticed a pair of rolled cloth sheets laying on the table besides piles of letters he would need to read. As he approached the table he noticed two were sealed by three drops of crimson wax, meaning they had been sent by Jon directly. Peeling away the cloth, Robb found Ice’s remains had not only been split into two longswords but the smoky Valyrian steel now had dark red ripples through it. Both blades lacked a hilt or scabbard, likely taken from the forge the moment they received Robb’s ransom letter.

Robb looked to Luwin. “Have Mikken or Gendry seen them? Do they think it could be reforged?”

Luwin frowned and shook his head. “Both saw it but agreed it unwise to put the blades to forge again. Though it’s possible, the color would remain lest you alter the steel, and the resulting sword would likely be more brittle than these.”

Though he was glad to have them back, Robb still frowned as he felt his stomach twist into a knot. He had dreamt of wielding Ice, and now the sword of his ancestors would forever be broken and stained by the Lannisters. Wrapping the cloth around them, Robb sighed. “We’ll have Mikken craft hilts for them. I’ll ask Gendry to help so they might be ready by the time Father returns.”

Luwin nodded, stepping forward and picking a letter from the pile, handing it to Robb. “Lord Eddard sent word from the Wall, Your Grace. I think you should ready it first.”

Robb took the letter, glancing to his mother whose frown told him she already knew what it said. Taking a seat, Robb’s brow knit as he read his father’s account from the Wall. Seeing concern spread among his features, Dacey asked, “What’s happened?”

“The Others are real.” It felt as if a gale cut through the room as the others looked to one another. “Uncle Benjen has fought them along with half the Watch and countless wildlings, who came south to escape them.”

“T-that can’t be,” Robin Flint said shaking his head. “Surely there must be some other explanation.”

Robb shook his head. “He spoke with men of the watch, people from different tribes, and all speak of the same thing. Men of ice raising an army of the dead.”

“What do we do?” Dacey asked, unconsciously pressing a hand to her abdomen. “How do we fight not only another army, but one that is already dead?”

Robb finished reading the letter, setting it on the table as he turned to the others. “They say the wights raised from the dead fall to flame. The Others… they die when stabbed with dragonglass.” He let out a laugh as he said, “Benjen killed one himself with a dragonglass dagger.”

“Where can we find Dragonglass?” asked Robin Flint.

Lucas shook his head. “At least the wall still Stands to keep them at bay.”

“Aye it stands,” said Wendel, “with all but three keeps unmanned.”
“Not all of them,” Robb said drawing their attention. “The wilding king has convinced his people to man the walls so their families might cross it.”

None in the room were pleased with the news, a mistrust of wildlings all but ingrained in children of the North. Still, all there knew it was necessary, especially if they were meant to fend off Others.

“Did you send out the letters we prepared?” Robb asked Luwin. No doubt other lords of the realm would be upset upon hearing of the wildlings, so they hopped to quench it before any got too heated.

The maester nodded. “As soon we could.”

Turning to the pile of letters Robb asked, “And how many of these are complaints?” That earned a few light chuckles, cracking their dour mood.

“There is news from the South, Your Grace,” Luwin said moving a set of letters in front of him. “It seems Tywin Lannister has died.”

Wendel guffawed while the others brightened some and Lucas asked, “How?”

“Poison, or so they say,” Luwin explained as Robb read through one of the letters. “They’ve arrest Prince Oberyn for the crime. I’m not alone in expecting him to follow the Imp’s example and ask for Trial by combat.”

Wendel scoffed. “And who slew him?”

“Jon,” Robb’s voice escaped his lips as he read the letter.

“Your brother killed the Imp?” Dacey asked with a gasp.

“No, my lady,” Luwin said with somber smile, “he was Lord Tyrion’s champion. He slew the Mountain before the court.”

The room was silent as they took in the news. Domeric’s hands balled into a fist, his eyes closed as he fought to keep his relief from showing.

“There is also Princess Myrcella’s attack.”

Domeric’s eyes snapped open at Luwin’s words. “What happened to her?”

His demanding tone surprise the others apart from Robb who asked, “Does she live?”

“As far as I know she does,” Luwin told Robb. “I know not the details of the attack, the letter saying only that the kingsguard with her was slain and she was injured.”

Domeric and Robb shared a look, Dom having shared Jon’s interest in the princess with him. Picking up another letter, Robb opened it and told the others, “Why don’t you all go rest? We can meet again once I’ve read all these and had a warm meal.”

As the dismissed group turned to leave, Robb turned to the desk and called back, “Ser Domeric, Dacey, stay a moment.”

The two nodded at the others, watching them leave before returning to Robb’s side. He turned in his chair, waving the letter he had picked from the pile to read. “Theon’s arrived at Eastwatch.”
“Have you kept us to share the burden of reading?” Domeric asked with glance to the letters.

“No. I thought you might like to know what waits within these,” he said picking up the pair with three red drops of wax.

“From your brother?” asked Dacey while Dom smiled. Looking to the Bolton heir, Dacey asked, “Could he truly have slain the Mountain? Was he so skilled when you last saw him?”

“Skilled enough to best a lumbering auroch,” Dom said with a nod. “The Mountain lets his strength overwhelm people, but so long as fear doesn’t take you those like Gregor Clegane will always fall to a skilled man with a mind half as keen as his blade.”

Robb let out a laugh, opening the second letter. Dacey watched his smile fade as he sat up, shaking his head. “What is it?”

“He says he intends to use his ships to sail north not only to come to us, but to reclaim Bloodwing. He thinks the Stepstones and Essos are worth the risk of the realm learning his true name.” Robb shook his head, handing the letters to Domeric. “Essos?”

“His aunt,” Dom said with a sigh, looking over the letters. “He wants her help.”

“He can’t know that she’ll give it,” noted Dacey.

“I’ve told him, but he’s said if she denies it then they would settle it with another Dance of the Dragons.”

Robb felt his his stomach in his throat. “What in the seven hells is he thinking? We can’t support a war in Essos! We’re already being pulled in a dozen directions. Not only the Lannisters and Greyjoys, but now we need worry about the wildlings turning from the Wall and the Others beyond it. Must we add dragons as well? Or does he intend to do that on his own?”

Dacey moved to Robb’s side, rubbing his shoulder while Domeric shook his head, then chuckled when he saw Jon wrote of ‘visiting the Widow for a night’. “He intends for me to join him at Widow’s Watch.”

“You could speak to him,” Dacey implored. “He already intends to risk his identity becoming known by taking his dragon, let us reveal he is an ally. We could even say he has been leading the war this entire time to help convince the lords he should take the crown.”

Domeric considered it briefly, but just as quickly shook his head, looking to the letters. “I doubt he’ll even make it north anytime soon.”

Robb looked up from the letter he’d started to read. “What do you mean?”

“Myrcella,” Domeric said with a solemn smile. “He’ll have heard of her attack, which means he’ll go to her. If the man who attacked her lives then he’ll chase them down and make sure it’s him who takes their life.”

Robb shook his head. “I know you said he cares for her, but so much he would abandon his plan?”

“Wouldn’t you?” asked Domeric.

“It’s one thing to hold affection for someone,” Dacey argued, though Robb’s frown made his agreement clear.
“He is a Stark,” Robb said with a sigh.

Surprised, Dacey looked to each man. “Does he truly care for her so? Does she even know of it or care?”

Bemused, Domeric nodded. “Very much so. One night Ser Barristan was in his cups and said the princess fancied Jon from the moment she saw him, but it was his first gift to her that surely won her heart.”

“His first gift?” Dacey narrowed her eyes. “Gods, did he bed her?”

Domeric laughed at that. “When I left they’d don’t little more than dance together when he named her Queen of Love and Beauty. No, it was her nameday and Jon noticed how little people cared compared to Joffrey’s. Even when the court gave her gifts they were all a way to earn the crown’s favor except for her uncle Tyron and a few guards who knew of the garden she kept. So Jon had Robb send a bush of winter roses from the glasshouses of Winterfell.”

“He lied to me about it as well,” Robb said taking another letter. “Said he was feeling homesick and it would ease his heart.”

“But that’s only half of it,” Domeric said with a laugh. “When he went to retrieve her gift a guard captain was murdered and Jon was injured trying to stop the man. Thus Jon had risked his life while getting her a thoughtful gift unlike any other in Westeros, and for that he had forever earned a place in her heart.”

Dacey had never been one for songs and doubted there was a Lannister worthy of love, but she couldn’t help but smile. “That is sweet, but for all we know it could be dealt with already.”

“I suppose either way I should go. Even if he’s held up he’ll come eventually. I’ll leave within the next three days and wait until he sends word otherwise.”

“Would you bring your squire?” asked Dacey. “Do you think Devan trustworthy enough to bring him with you?”

Robb’s brow knit as he turned to Domeric before he could answer. “You can’t leave.”

Domeric frowned at what he thought was a command. “I serve one king, Robb.”

The Stark heir nodded, holding out the letter he had been reading. “And you only have one father.”

Domeric’s eyes widened, snatching the letter from Robb and quickly scanning it. “He’ll arrive within a fortnight?”

“Shouldn’t Roose be at Harrenhal?” asked Dacey.

Robb shook his head. “He’s passed it to Black Walder.”

“Without an order?” Dacey looked to Domeric, who handed the letter back to Robb before moving to a window.

They looked to the Bolton heir as he took a moment to breath before turning to them. “I can’t go to Jon. Not yet.” Not until he knew why his father had truly abandoned his post.

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Robb was relieved when Eddard arrived two days later. By then Robb had managed not only to get
a warm bath and decent night’s sleep, but had time to think over all he had learned upon his return. So when he met with his father in his solar that afternoon he did so with little of the unease he felt the days before and two sheathed swords in his arms.

Sat at his desk, Eddard looked up and got to his feet with a frown. “Is that…?”

“What was forged from ice,” Robb said setting the swords on the desk. Each now had simple black leather scabbards with the hilts wrapped in white leather and silver for the pommel and guard made to mimic Ice’s hilt.

Eddard picked up the smaller blade, drawing it to look upon the crimson streaks among the smoky swirls of the blade. “I take it nothing could be done?”

“Not by any here,” Robb answered, watching his father sheath the blade.

Setting it down, Eddard looked them over. “It seems improper to call them Ice.”

“Icicle perhaps?” Robb suggested with a smirk, glad to see his father chuckle.

“No. Though they may be stained by the Lannisters they are still born of Ice. Let us not disrespect it’s descendants.”

“What then?”

Eddard looked to Robb thoughtfully before turning to pick up the smaller sword. “I’ll call it Honor’s Hail.”

Robb nodded, tapping the larger longsword. “And this one?”

Eddard picked up the sheathed sword. “It’s yours to name.”

Though Robb had considered asking for one of them, it was still an honor to have it given to him. Few houses had a Valyrian steel sword and now Robb would not only wield one of the two House Stark owned but be the first to do so.

Taking the sword, Robb took a moment to think before he glanced at Grey Wind laying beside the door. With a smirk he dubbed it, “Frostgale.”

“Fitting,” Ned mused, setting his own sword aside. In a way this had been a boon. He’d tried using Ice in war but always found it more difficult than he liked. It did more good as a symbol of his house or an executioner’s blade, but now not only could he easily wield it in battle but his son would have one of his own. Should he ever face someone his equal at least he might find an advantage in the steel of his blade.

“Have you heard of Jon?” Robb asked gaining Eddard’s attention.

“Luwin spoke of him slaying the Mountain.”

“Aye,” Robb said handing him the pair of letters Jon sent him, “and he sent these from Nightsong and Starfall before setting sail.”

Eddard looked them over, smiling when he read he was sailing north, but it quickly faded when he saw it was to collect his dragon and Domeric. “He means to take Bloodwing from the Wall?”

“And seek his aunt to ask for her aide. If she denies it… Domeric says Jon was willing to have a Dance of the Dragons in Essos.” Robb’s grim expression twisted when he saw his father laugh.
Seeing his son’s confusion, Eddard shook his head. “Before I left Aemon told me he received a letter from Daenerys Targaryen. One concerning Jon.”

Robb had to take a seat beside the desk. “What did it say?”

“Jon sent Ser Barristan to speak with her and see if she suffered her father’s madness,” Eddard said shaking his head. “He helped her take Meereen and revealed to her Jorah Mormont had been following her for Robert. She said she wants to meet him, to make sure Rhaegar’s son is not alone.”

Robb suddenly felt as if a weight had been lifted from his chest. “She wants to help?”

“It seems that way.”

For the first time it felt as if they had a true stroke of luck. With a laugh Robb mused, “Surely we can win all our wars with four dragons on our side.”

“If they’re as large as Bloodwing then I’ve little doubt we can. He stands as tall as a horse with wings wide enough to cross a tower.”

“Gods, to think I first saw him in a box.” Robb’s smile faded as sighed and looked to Eddard. “Father?” Once his father looked to him, Robb said, “Dacey Mormont and I have…. She’s with child.”

Eddard’s eyes widened, turning to face his son. “Since when?”

“I couldn’t say beyond a few months. She’s only just started to show, though small enough to hide under armor and tunic.”

A somber smile took Eddard’s lips, reaching over to hold his son’s shoulder and meet his gaze with his own glassy grey eyes. “This is wonderful. Whatever comes, a babe is a wonderful thing. A new life in this world is never bad so long as it has people to care for it.”

“I will,” Robb assured but his confidence quickly crumbled. “Though Dacey doesn’t want to wed.”

Eddard smiled sadly. “You want to wed her?”

Robb thought on it for a moment before shrugging. “I don’t know. I did but I know she doesn’t. She feels she can’t leave Bear Island just to marry me.”

“Do you love her?”

Robb started to think it over but quickly felt ashamed that he needed to, which felt like an answer, but he lingered a moment to consider his feelings. “At times I think I do. I enjoy her company, how she looks, how she seems to wear armor as well as she does a dress. I trust her as much as anyone. More maybe. I’ve shared so much with her, even the truth about Jon.”

Eddard wore a smirk as he sat up and said simply, “But?”

“I won’t give up Winterfell,” Robb frowned at his father. “She won’t give up her place as Bear Island’s heir for me, nor would I give up Winterfell for her. It makes it…” Robb sighed, shaking his head to clear his jumbled thoughts. “It feels like a summer snow. A flurry we can enjoy for a time, but one that will last only so long before it disappears.”

Eddard was glad to hear his son speak so sincerely, even if he was clearly pained by the idea of his
relationship with Dacey Mormont having an inevitable end. “I can’t say I’ve experienced the same, but I’ve had my share of heartbreak.”

Robb asked quietly, “Ashara Dayne?”

Eddard nodded. “I wanted nothing more than to be with her. Day and night I dreamt of her, but in time they faded and I found happiness with your mother and our family. Despite how it felt at the time, what I felt for her is little compared to what I feel for all in our family.”

“There’s also…” Robb sank back in his chair. “I feel… guilty, I guess.”

“What for?” Eddard chuckled. “You’ve done the most natural thing for a man and woman to do.”

Looking sideways to avoid Eddard’s gaze Robb said, “I saw how people treated Jon.”

Eddard frowned. “You’re worried because they’ll be a bastard?”

“I know it’s pointless, but I do and I feel guilty for it, but Jon was a lord’s bastard and people still looked down on him.”

Eddard felt as if he’d been stabbed in the heart. It was another sign of his failure as a father. If he had been a better father to Jon and kept not only outsiders but his own wife from treating him so poorly then perhaps his son wouldn’t be pained by something he should be enjoying.

“Have you discussed what will happen once they’re born?”

Robb nodded. “Dacey will raise them. She’ll name them Mormont. She said it’s best so I can find another bride and let our children take Winterfell while hers take Bear Island.”

“Is that what you want?”

“It’s what she wants, which is enough for me,” said Robb, his smile making clear he was sure. “I still want to be a part of their life. I won’t let them wonder about their father as—”

Seeing Robb stop himself, Eddard concluded, “As Jon did his mother. If I thought I could have told him I would, but thankfully you’ve little need to hide unless you’re wed to someone worried the Mormonts may come to claim Winterfell.” When Robb chuckled and got to his feet Eddard followed suit, hugging his son before stepping back grasping his shoulders. “For now enjoy it. Whatever comes, I know you’ll make me proud.”

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Domeric was nervous. He had escaped King’s Landing in the midst of a coup, raided Winterfell to free it from raiders, even been to war, and yet he dreaded meeting his father most of all. It wasn’t that he feared his father, but rather feared he would fail because of him.

It was one thing to refuse his father’s order to return to the Dreadfort while he was already in King’s Landing, it would be another to deny it as he stood before him. While he had enjoyed his time as a knight, Jon’s companion, the Stark girl’s protector and Robb’s advisor, he was still heir to the Dreadfort. The future of his house lay on his shoulders, especially now his bastard brother was dead, leaving only him to carry on their name.

Yet not only had he sworn to help Jon, he truly thought of Jon as his brother. Ever since he learned of Ramsay’s existence he had imagined the kind of man he might be and how close they could become only to have all of those dreams ripped apart by reality.
His brother was every thing people had warned him of, everything people had feared in bastards, and yet he knew Ramsay being a bastard couldn’t be to blame. Jon had been raised a bastard and even Daryn Hornwood was close to his bastard brother Larence, which was why he asked to join the battalion riding to reclaim Deepwood Motte where Larence Snow was under the care of House Glover. Both had brothers they cared for while his own blood had been dreck. In truth Domeric had felt betrayed upon seeing what Ramsay was and felt little pain watching him die. Had he lived he would have been a stain not only on House Bolton but Domeric. The world was better without him in it.

And yet he felt certain Roose would be upset with him for having a hand in his brother’s death. Not because it could be misconstrued as kinslaying, but because he had little doubt Roose knew what he had done. Ramsay had risen too fast, done things no bastard could manage on his own.

When word came of Bolton riders approaching Winterfell, Domeric made his way to the great hall where Robb was sat upon a throne with Eddard to his right, Davos on his left and Robb’s personal guard standing beside them. Domeric made his way to stand beside Davos much as Dacey stood beside Eddard.

The doors to the great hall opened and Domeric watched his father enter to stand before Robb. He was a plain faced man who had an average height and build and kept his face beardless and hair trimmed, leaving his pale eyes as his only notable feature of his face. When he bowed to Robb, he did so with an even expression even Domeric struggled to read.

“You Grace,” he said in his usual quiet voice. Domeric could count on his fingers the times he had heard his father raise his voice.

“Lord Bolton,” Robb said watching him rise. “Why have you abandoned your post at Harrenhal?”

“Because I wished to bring my wife to her home,” he said motioning to the back of their group where a short, large woman with braided blonde hair stood. “Because I bring word of my good father’s concerns with Your Grace.”

“What concerns are those?” asked Robb.

“He complains that I am the only of your men to wed his daughters,” Roose answered. “That Your Grace has yet to fulfill his agreement for his allegiance.”

Domeric looked to Robb and saw the Stark heir was as annoyed as he was, sitting forward slightly as he asked Roose, “And you left Harrenhal without my order and gave command to his son?” The implication of Roose’s stupidity did not go unnoticed by the hall.

“I thought it best to come secure my keep now we have wildlings roaming our lands,” said Roose, his even voice leaving the bite of his comment inferred. “My good brother is capable and awaits my return once I have settled matters in my own lands.”

Robb shook his head. “Then attend to your duties and return to Harrenhal. Petyr Baelish may yet bring the Vale to reclaim it.”

“I will do my best, Your Grace,” Roose said bowing his head before leaving the hall.

Domeric held in a laugh as he watched his father leave. Not once had he even cast a glance at him, as if he hadn’t existed

“Gods, piss on Walder Frey and his complains,” Smalljon Umber exclaimed with a scoff before looking to Ser Perwyn Frey and Robb’s squire Olyvar. “Surely your father understands we are at
“war and have better things to worry us than your sisters maidenheads.”

Perwyn shook his head. “Should he feel wronged he will not let it go.”

“Perhaps it’s because he sits in his keep while we ride to battle,” suggested Torrhen Karstark. “To him his days are no different than before the war.”

“That doesn’t explain why Lord Bolton would give Harrenhal to Black Walder when he knows Lord Frey is displeased with our alliance,” Lucas Blackwood said looking to Domeric.

Seeing the room turn their attention to him, Domeric felt a flare of frustration with his father for forcing him to answer his mistakes. “Perhaps he thought it would help appease Walder to entrust his second son with such a task.”

Robb sat in thought for a moment until a smirk took his lips. “Then let us make things right and have his daughters wed. We will arrange it within the month.”

“So quickly?” asked Perwyn.

Robb looked to his guard. “I know Daryn is betrothed to Alys Karstark, but do the rest of you have any I should know of?”

“You plan to marry us off?” asked Eddard Karstark.

“It’s not a bad deal,” Robin Flint said crossing his arms. “You get not only a wife but a dowry of her weight in silver. Perhaps Ser Domeric’s father had the right thought in finding the heaviest one to wed.” Seeing Perwyn shoot him a glare, Robin chuckled and held up a hand, “I mean not offense. I speak only of practical matters.”

“Then why don’t you wed one of them?” asked Patrek Mallister.

Robin shrugged. “If my king demands it.”

“I’ll not demand it,” Robb assured. “If none here will take a wife then I’ll find others.”

“We’ve our pick of them, aye?” Wendel asked in contemplation.

Surprised he took the initiative, Robb nodded. “That was the agreement.”

After a moment Wendel nodded. “I suppose it is near time for me to start a family as my brother has.”

Domeric chuckled at him feigning a desire to settle down. No doubt the more appealing thing was the chance to garner favor by helping Robb settle matters with Frey and having the chance to choose the prettiest of the Frey daughters. Though Wendel was an honorable, jovial man he knew women would not see it in the immense man. Domeric found it amusing to think of noble ladies ignoring Wendel to fawn over a knight like Loras who had no interest in them. For that he wouldn’t begrudge the man taking a chance to find a beautiful wife when few lords had any choice in who they wed.

After a brief debate on if the other members of his personal guard might take the second marriage, Robb dismissed them all. Robb gave Domeric a look that told him to linger, a look he shared with Dacey and Eddard, who stayed behind.

Once they were alone Dacey asked, “What changed your mind that you now look to rush these
weddings?"

Robb smiled at Domeric. “If you can’t go to Jon then we’ll send the Fellowship in your place. We’ll have them meet us and hide among our ranks to make their way to Widow’s Watch and join Jon.”

“You would take them from the Riverlands?” Eddard asked uncertainly. “They already struggle to fend of the Lannisters on their own.”

“You said yourself we already struggle to match the battles on all fronts,” said Dacey.

“Can we truly rely on them? They aren’t our men. They don’t serve us. They serve Jon, so let them bolster his ranks. I doubt their departure will cause the Riverlands to collapse. The Riverlands are not so weak they’ll fall without a vigilante group taking vengeance against the Lannisters.”

Though Domeric wanted to go he was glad Jon could end up with the hundred said to be in the Fellowship aiding him. It eased some of Domeric’s concerns, but still he considered leaving and never looking back. He could ignore his father as he’d ignored Domeric in the hall and head to Widow’s Watch to wait for Jon’s ship. Instead he made his way to the guest chamber prepared for his father and found Roose sending off one of his men.

“Have I missed your wife?” Domeric asked not seeing her in the room.

“It would be difficult were she here,” Roose said turning to remove his woolen cloak embroidered with droplets of blood. “She wished to see the grounds and the Stark’s glass garden.”

Domeric nodded. “I hoped to get to know her.”

“You can speak with her on our way to the Dreadfort,” Roose said turning to Domeric.

He had expected this, but it still annoyed Domeric he would presume so much. “I’m needed here.”

“You are needed at the Dreadfort,” Roose said in a firm, cool tone that might have sent a chill down Domeric’s spine were he not a man raised hearing it. “Your duty is to House Bolton as my heir.”

“I’ve a place at the king’s side.”

Roose stepped toward his son, their pale eyes meeting as he said carefully, “Your loyalty should be to House Bolton and it’s people, not the Starks.”

Domeric’s brow sank as he said, “I do what I do for the realm, not House Stark.” While not entirely true, his loyalty for the realm came above the Starks. If they turned on Jon he would not hesitate to kill every Stark he could find, so in a sense the realm came before the Starks for him.

The hint of offense and agitation in his voice was enough to convince his father his words were sincere. A hint of relief showed on Roose’s face as he nodded. “I had feared you their dog when you ran off without warning.”

Domeric shook his head. “It would have been foolish to refuse such an offer from Lord Stark himself. I’ve learned near much in King’s Landing as I did in Barrowton and squiring for Lord Horton in the Vale.”

“And yet you slew your own kin,” Roose said with an examining gaze, clearly testing his son.
Domeric scoffed. “Ramsay was a fool. Surely you must have known him? He allied himself with Theon Greyjoy and tried to attack a battalion of men with barely twenty of his own. He was even known to the realm for torturing Lady Hornwood when her son is one of the closest to Robb. He may well have turned the Starks against us all because he was a mad dog, so I had him put down as he deserved.”

The disgust and anger laced through Domeric’s voice seemed to please Roose, who nodded. “It would seem you made the right choice then. I’m thankful at least you knew enough not to stain yourself with his blood and be forever marked a kinslayer.”

“Though he shared our blood I would not consider him kin,” Domeric said bitterly. “I had hoped for a brother but he was nothing more than a beast threatening to ruin our house.”

A light smile touched Roose’s lips as he clutched his son’s shoulder. “You may yet find kin worthy of our house once Walda births the babe I’ve put in her.”

“She’s pregnant?” Domeric asked with genuine surprise.

“Only just, but the maester confirmed it,” Roose said with a nod. “Which is a reason why I’ve come north so she may birth your brother or sister in the Dreadfort where they belong.”

Domeric’s smile faltered slightly as he noted his father said it was ‘a’ reason for his trip north, wondering what the others truly were. He had said he came north to bring his wife home but in truth did so because she was pregnant… was there perhaps more to Walder Frey’s complaints than his father said?

Silently cursing his father, Domeric asked him, “When do we leave for the Dreadfort?”

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In all her life Asha Greyjoy had never felt so lost as she did in Deepwood Motte. She found some solace in bed with Qarl the Maid, but it only took her mind from her troubles. She was still left with no place to go, exiled while her uncle used a seal in her place to wed her to Erik Ironmaker. It was enough to keep her from promising a marriage to gain the support of a lord.

It was shameful for an ironborn to be lost as sea, and there she was feeling adrift as she tried to find a way out of this. Then came a rider waving a green cloak covered in silver fish, the arms of House Botley. They found it was one of Maron Botley’s sons, Tristifer Botley greeting him as the young man told them of his escape from the Stony Shore.

“Something startled their horses and they knocked over a cart,” he said with a laugh pulling apart the bread they gave him, nearly choking as he tried to fill his aching belly. “I managed to take knife and used it to cut my bindings. I stole a horse and have been riding since.”

“So you fled?” Hagen asked eyeing the man skeptically.

Cromm grunted. “You should have died at the shore if you were going to prove yourself a coward.”

Pranar Botley scoffed, spraying bits of chewed bread on the table where he sat. “I survived. I’ll reach the Drown God’s halls when I must, but until then I’ll live until I’ve had my fill.” Wiping his mouth on his sleeve he looked to Asha, who looked disinterested in their argument. “Besides, I thought you would want to know what came of your brother.”

“The wolves got him,” she said waving a hand dismissively. There was nothing to be done for him.
now. Her only relief was knowing the Starks weren’t the type to mount his head on the walls of Winterfell. If what he said of them was true then they may even put him in a river so he might join the Drowned God.

“And sent him to the Wall,” Pranar said with a smirk, “or so his men say.”

Asha sat up in shock as a few of the others muttered quietly. “They didn’t kill him?”

“They say he faked the deaths of the Stark boys, so he was neck was spared.”

Asha felt a knot in her stomach break. “Did they say where?”

“Eastwatch,” said Pranar, “so he might put his knowledge of the sea to use for the realm they said.”

Asha threw her head back, her laugh echoing off Deepwood Motte’s walls. Her sudden joy confused her men, but she quickly calmed herself, shaking her head as she leaned forward to tell Pranar, “You’ve done well.” Getting to her feet she told the others, “Take all you can! We leave tomorrow.”

“Leave for what?” asked Grimtongue. “Where will we go?”

“To rescue my worthless brother,” she declared with a laugh. “And bring him forward to declare the kingsmoot unlawful since he was not there to participate.” Her eyes were wide, flooded with vicious vengeance as she said, “We’ll rip the crown from Euron’s head and show the fools who voted for him what comes to men like him.”

The Black Wind set sail as the sun reached it’s peak the next day, and the following day Larence Snow was among the crowd gathered to welcome a battalion of Stark men led by his his brother Daryn Hornwood as well as lords Robett and Galbart Glover, who were heartbroken to find Robett’s wife and children long gone from its walls.

Chapter End Notes

For the blade names I echoed the pattern of Oathkeeper and Widow's Wail but shifted them to the Starks, both having cold aspects but then Ned pushing honor while Robb obviously makes an allusion to Grey Wind.

It was fun to play with the different fathers. Ned is thoughtful with Robb, embracing his future and regrets his failures with Jon. Roose pays Domeric no attention until he goes to meet him, demands Domeric come with him, and brushes off his bastard's death. There's also a brother theme through the chapter chapter with the bastard brothers, Asha going to rescue her brother, Domeric wanting to join up with Jon who he considers a brother.

Next Chapter: A southron tale is told during a feast, Robb shares news with his family, Sansa questions the magic of the world, and Sam and Myrcella receive a letter which leads to a decision and an awkward situation.
In Decision

Chapter Summary

A southron tale is told during a feast, Robb shares news with his family, Sansa questions the magic of the world, and Sam and Myrcella receive a letter which leads to a decision and an awkward situation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sansa, Arya and Jeyne were among those gathered to see off the Bolton party, finding their way to Domeric. They thanked him for helping them escape King’s Landing and return North, but he brushed it off as he always did.

Once they stepped aside, waiting to watch them ride off, Sansa noticed Davos Seaworth making his way toward Domeric with Robb. While her brother spoke with Domeric, Davos moved to his son Devan, a skinny, square faced boy with thin brown hair. After a few words the two hugged, and once they were apart Sansa noticed Devan’s eyes shift toward the ramparts where Melisandre stood. Sansa couldn’t tell if Devan longed for her or feared the red priestess, but either way his gaze lingered on her even once he mounted his horse.

Robb shared a quick hug with Domeric, both of them seeming to speak and nod slightly before they separated. Once Domeric was in the saddle of his crimson destrier and started to follow his father through Winterfell’s gates he cast a quick glance back to the courtyard, a slight smile touching his lips as he looked to her and her siblings. Sansa spared a quick wave which he answered with a nod before turning away, letting her gaze shift from the stallion’s red fur to the burnished copper hair of Melisandre watching the men ride to the horizon.

Domeric’s words echoed in Sansa’s mind as they went to sup that night. Before they left for King’s Landing Sansa never would have thought she could feel envious of Arya, but she did every time she saw her sister sparring with her brother and his guard. They were the only ones her mother trusted enough beyond Syrio, or so she said. Even her father practiced with Arya. Her sister knew what she wanted but still Sansa felt unsettled. Her time at King’s Landing forever scarred the few dreams she had.

She spent most of the evening speaking with Jeyne as usual, but perked up slightly when she heard one of the men near the high table mention ‘the bastard Jon Snow’. She did her best to not make her attention obvious while straining her ears to pick up his tale heard from one of the Bolton men of Jon’s battle with the Mountain. The people around him were enraptured as he spoke of Jon suggesting he give up lest the gods curse him when Jon stabbed his heart, then moments later had stabbed through his visor.

It was as if the room grew quiet and she was not the only one listening to the man continue, telling how the blinded Gregor Clegane threw aside his shield when Jon taunted him, saying he suggested he face Ghost instead, but then remembered the direwolf had already bested the Mountain at Mummer’s Ford. She felt her heart thump in her chest as he spoke of Jon dodging the Mountain’s strikes while landing his own on the giant man’s helm again and again before thrusting his shield into the ground and demanding he speak his crimes.
Sansa and half the hall were enraptured as the knight spoke of Jon telling the court Gregor had raped Elia Martell and killed her children, telling Gregor to beg forgiveness and thank the gods he faced a wolf of the North rather than burn to the dragons of the east. That had shocked more than a few people, including her mother. Sansa looked to her family and found Arya clutching the table, her gaze glassy while Robb wore a grin and her father’s smile was full of pride. It was her mother who gaped as if finally realizing perhaps she was wrong to disbelieve Robb’s assurance that Jon’s disloyalty was an act.

“The fool threatened not only the bastard but our lord’s daughters,” the man said shaking his head grimly, “and Jon told him ‘May the Lord of Light use your sin to fuel his flames.”

Sansa’s gaze shifted to Melisandre and saw her eyes flicker, surprise coloring the red priestess’ features. Her interest grew as the knight spoke of Jon toppling the Mountain, and even when kicked by Clegane used it to run in and stab a dagger through his visor again, demanding the screaming man confess to his crimes. That was when the Mountain reached toward Tywin and begged for help, so Jon told Clegane the gods would judge his deeds and leapt to force his sword through Clegane’s breastplate.

“And when he pierced the mountains heart, the blade itself ignited as if scorched by the Mountain’s sin,” the knight told those around him. “They only faded when he tore the blade from Clegane’s heart.”

“That must be lies,” said an older knight.

A younger one beside the storyteller shook his head. “Four others all said the same thing. The moment he pierced his heart the blade was a flame.”

Sansa glanced to Melisandre and found the red priestess’s gaze lowered to her plate with a thoughtful expression. Beyond her however she noticed more than a few of the Baratheon lords and knights speaking in hushed whispers, some looking confused while others seemed almost panicked or afraid. Her own family looked shocked by the tale, though she caught Robb and her father sharing a somber look.

It was Rickon who leaned forward to ask, “Is Jon magic?”

When they finished their meals she was surprised to see Robb rise from his seat, going to her mother and sister, telling them he needed to see them in the Lord’s solar. “Is something wrong?” Sansa asked turning to him.

Robb shook his head. “No. It’s good news. I just want you all to hear it from me first.”

Watching him leave the hall, she noticed him nod toward Dacey, who started speaking with her family as well. Catelyn rose first, taking Rickon’s hand to lead him from the hall before motioning for Sansa and Arya to join them.

They arrived at the solar and found Robb pouring himself a cup of wine, stopping to motion toward the couches. “Please take a seat.”

Catelyn frowned, sharing her daughters’ confusion, but they did as he asked. Watching him seem to prepare himself Catelyn asked, “What did you think of that knight’s tale?”

Surprised by the question, Robb shook his head. “I don’t know. I’m sure some of it was exaggerated but I don’t doubt Jon slew the Mountain.”

“Do you think he truly said those things?” Catelyn clarified, “That he truly still thinks himself a
wolf of the North?”

Robb laughed, though Sansa noted a hint of relief as he smiled to his mother. “I think so. You know his disloyalty an act. He helped father return to us.”

“And then slew Stannis, saving the Lannisters,” Catelyn said shaking her head. “He helped Tyrion.”

“An innocent man,” said Robb.

“If he is still loyal to us then what has he done to aide us?”

“His fellowship-”

“Act on their own,” Catelyn said before he could finish. “Why hasn’t he slain Cersei or written to tell us their plans, or-”

“He has written us,” Robb said in frustration.

Arya gasped, leaping to her feet. “He has?”

Robb winced, glancing to the door as he held a finger to his mouth. “Yes. He has.”

“What did he say?” asked Arya. “Is he okay? Did he really beat the Mountain?”

“He’s fine,” Robb assured, “but what he wrote doesn’t concern you and isn’t why I’ve brought you here. There’s something I’ve kept from you all for a time, but I think you need to know. I want you to know the truth from me before you hear rumors from another.”

“Is this to tell us you’re… courting Dacey Mormont?” Catelyn asked dubiously while Arya and Sansa gasped in surprise.

Robb looked guilty. “You knew?”

A prideful smile took her lips as Catelyn nodded. “A mother always knows.”

“Well, I thought I should tell you all that Dacey’s pregnant.”

It was Sansa’s turn to leap from her seat. “You’re going to be a father? I’ll be an aunt?”

Chuckling, Robb avoided answering, turning his attention to Catelyn. He was clearly surprise to see her well up before standing and hurrying over to hug him. A second later they followed example and Robb was chuckling as he tried to get his arms around them all.

Once they parted, Catelyn beamed as she began, “We can have you wed before you leave and she can stay here when you ride out. I can-”

“We’re not getting married,” Robb said trying to cut her off before she got carried away, apparently knocking the air from her lungs as she turned to him.

“What?”

“We don’t want to wed.” Robb sighed. “I won’t give up my place here nor she her place in Bear Island.”

“Robb,” Catelyn said in a broken whisper, “your child… he’ll be-”
“A Mormont,” he said, clearly anticipating her. With a flicker of agitation he said firmly, “They’ll be a Mormont, raised by their mother and knowing their father a wolf.”

“Will we get to see them?” asked a frowning Arya.

“Of course. Dacey and I agree they should know both of us, but they’ll be of her line.”

“She has other sisters who can take her place as Lady of Bear Island,” Catelyn argued, her glassy eyes trembling with her voice.

“And it’s her duty,” said Robb, “much like it’s mine to rule Winterfell, not Bran or Rickon. So long as I live I will be Lord of Winterfell.”

Sansa blinked in confusion. “Can you be a king and a lord?”

For a split second Robb seemed annoyed by the question, as if she’d asked something he didn’t want her to, but it was quickly washed away by amusement as he looked to Sansa. “Why not?”

“When will the baby be here?” Rickon asked, confused by everything.

Kneeling to his brother, Robb shook his head. “I’m not sure, but it will be a few months. Right now he’s too small, so we’ll have to wait until he grows a bit more before he can come see us.”

Rickon’s gaze narrowed slightly asking, “Would I be his uncle?”

“You would.”

Leaning closer to his elder brother, Rickon asked with a frown, “Do I have to go to the Wall too?”

Robb quickly shook his head, reaching over to ruffle Rickon’s hair. “Not at all. I want you here to protect them whenever they visit.”

“What’s his name?”

“I haven’t decided yet,” said Robb, “but for now we can’t tell anyone about them yet, okay?”

Rickon nodded as if trying to dislodge his head. “I won’t say anything.”

After hugging Robb again they were sent to bed, Sansa helping Rickon, who spent the time whispering about how he wanted to play with the baby. Once she made her way to her room Sansa found she couldn’t sleep. As happy as she was for Robb she felt frustration whenever she thought of the knight’s tale at supper.

How had the glowering boy she remembered become not only the one she saw be knighted after winning a tourney, but a lord who defeated the Mountain. Jon Snow was supposed to be a bastard. He would be lucky to become the master-at-arms for northern house, and yet somehow he had become a southron lord who no doubt would have songs sung about his deeds if he didn’t already.

The question lingered even when she woke and went about her daily duties, eventually making her way to the yard where she found a large group training. Robb’s guards were paired off while Robb and her father helped Edric Baratheon wield a war hammer and Arya was off to the side dodging strikes from Syrio’s wooden sword. Even Rickon was busy playing with Shaggydog while their mother was checking the stores and Jeyne was visiting the sept, leaving Sansa with no one. It felt like Sansa was alone more often ever since their return to Winterfell. Unlike the others, even her direwolf had been taken from her.
Sansa’s hands were pressed against the fence when she heard footsteps to her right and turned to see Melisandre towering over her, a crimson dress clinging to her flesh much like the red gold choker across her neck, its ruby shimmering in the sun. “Are you enjoying your afternoon, Lady Sansa?”

It took her a moment to nod. “Yes. Yourself, Lady Melisandre?”

The red priestess looked to the men training. “I’m well. The king is skilled. Is it true he trained only under Winterfell’s Master-At-Arms?”

“Ser Rodrik,” Sansa answered with a nod, motioning to the stout knight stood off to the side working with some of the younger boys.

“Then he would have trained your other brother as well.”

Sansa shook her head. “Bran and Rickon are too young.”

A slight smile took her lips as Melisandre said, “I had meant your bastard brother.”

Sansa winced, looking to the ground. “Oh. Well, yes, but he left years ago to train in King’s Landing.”

“And now he is slaying kings and Mountains,” Melisandre said with amusement. “I wasn’t at the battle of the Blackwater, but those who were say he was skilled and fearless. Is that how you knew him to be?”

Sansa glanced at the red priestess, taking a moment to think before shaking her head. “I don’t know that I knew him well at all. Not here at least. I-I made an effort to not concern myself with him while I was in Winterfell… but he wrote to me.

“He told me of King’s Landing. He told me the truth of it before I would ever accept it. He told me of Joffrey’s nature and all I cared to hear about was the dinner with royals and lords. When they killed Lady, my direwolf, he let me sit with his direwolf, Ghost whenever I wanted. He didn’t make fun of me for crying like Arya might.” Blinking to stop her eyes stinging, Sansa concluded, “I treated him like a bastard but he only ever treated me as a sister instead of the fool I was.”

“I doubt you’re a fool,” Melisandre said kindly. “You seem quite the lady in the making.”

Sansa looked to the red priestess. “Thank you, Lady Melisandre. When I heard the Baratheons would bring a red priestess with them I hadn’t expected… Well, the last I saw was Thoros of Myr, and he was quite different than you.”

“Is that so?” Melisandre snickered. “I’ve heard of him. It seems he stands with your brother, the bastard one at least. Perhaps the Lord of Light will let Thoros guide your brother back to your family.”

“Maybe,” Sansa said quickly avoiding eye contact, as if Melisandre’s gaze would let her see their secret. After a breath, she asked, “If I may, My Lady, how did you come to follow the Lord of Light? Is it common for those of Asshai to follow him?”

Melisandre’s smile revealed her pleasant surprise as she turned to face Sansa. “Certainly more common than here. There are red temples all across Essos. I was brought to one and found my place among them.” Her somber tone turned curious as asked, “Do you perhaps wish to learn more of R’hllor?”
Sansa nervously shook her head. “I follow the Seven.”

“Do you?” Melisandre’s voice held doubt as she continued, “Or were you raised to follow them?” When the girl frowned, the red priestess said, “Many find their way to the Lord of Light from the Seven.”

Sansa shook her head. “I don’t mean to abandon the Seven.”

Seeing Sansa’s wariness, Melisandre smiled. “Knowledge of other faiths harms only the ignorant. In Asshai no practice is forbidden. Many study under each god to find which they will follow, or simply to expand their perspective before returning to their old gods.”

“How have you done that?” asked Sansa. “Studied other faiths.”

“I’ve studied many things in my years,” answered Melisandre. “Gods, sorcery, history, and all have led me back to the Lord of Light.”

“Sorcery?” Sansa gasped, then asked quietly, “What kind?”

The woman seemed to examine her a moment before answering quietly. “I’ve learned ways to wield the Lord of Light’s flames and known some who twist the shadows he cast. I’ve seen those who could weave streams as a seamstress does thread or even raise walls of water rivaling those around Winterfell. I’ve known those who could control the air itself and change the sky as they pleased while others could do the same for themselves and alter how the world saw them.”

Sansa stood enraptured by the things she must have seen. “Are such things common in Essos?”

Melisandre shook her head. “It isn’t so easy. Many believe magic in their bloods because their ancestors claimed such gifts, yet find they can do nothing while a slave with muddled blood can enter the dreams of a lord across the world. However such grand feats are no easy task and require study to master. Few are willing to dedicate their lives to something they have no way to know is even possible for them. So even those who can rarely take the chance.”

“How can such things be possible?” Sansa said sullenly. “It seems the only magic here comes from Old Nan’s tales.”

“I have noticed that,” Melisandre said with a contemplative nod. “To the south I’ve only heard of the Alchemist Guild, but here in the North I know you’ve tales of skinchangers and greenseers from before the Wall was built to hold off evil beyond measure. It seems as if sometime after such things faded from here. Some who have since turned to the Lord of Light believe it was the Andals bringing the Seven to Westeros which stole the possibility from the hearts of men.”

“How do you truly think such a thing possible?” Sansa said sullenly. “It seems the only magic here comes from Old Nan’s tales.”

“I believe anything is possible should the Lord of Light deem it so,” Melisandre said solemnly. “I know you have faith in the Seven, but if you truly belong with them then I doubt much could sway your heart, so there is little harm in learning more. Or so I believe.” With a smile Melisandre held her skirt to depart as she concluded, “But if you’ve doubts then know there is always a place for you in the warmth of R’hllor to learn and grow.”

Sansa watched Melisandre turn to leave, then glanced back to the training yard where Arya had her hands behind her back as Robb swung a blunted sword at her. She watched as Arya’s petite body gracefully danced around his strikes before he moved in close and swung at her. It was too close for her to avoid even if she leapt back, but Sansa watched as her sister kept her hands behind her back while rolling her body to handlessly cartwheel over his blade, which passed beneath the
crown of her arming cap.

The moment she landed, Arya gasped and threw her hands in the air while Robb cheered and pulled her off the ground in a hug. Even their father wore a grin painted with pride while the others clapped and Syrio gave an approving nod and Rickon cheered for her.

As she felt a knot in her stomach, Sansa decided to break it and spun around to follow the red priestess.

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After so long in King’s Landing and Dorne, Myrcella found waking to two towers full of birds singing a pleasant change of pace. She noticed a few of the locals grouse at the birds waking them, but most had grown used to it and it was a novelty to her.

She and Sam had decided to stay in Nightsong for at least a sennight to think over what they would do next. In truth it was her who needed to think, Sam having given her the options he knew of and made clear he would do whatever she wished.

The obvious answer was to return to King’s Landing. She would be with her family, but she would be with her family. As much as she wanted to be there for Tommen she knew she wouldn’t be allowed to stay there. She would have to leave, whether it be sent back to Dorne or wed to another lord. At best she would be sent to Casterly Rock to keep her safe, but still unable to help Tommen.

But beyond Tommen, what did she have in King’s Landing? Her handmaidens had all been older than her, her cousin being her first real friend apart from Jon, Sam, Loras and Domeric. She felt real with them, not the pawn she was to many others.

Her time with Sam in Dorne had proven as much, at least for him. She had put his life on the line to get her to freedom and safety, but even before that he spoke to her with respect few showed her. Many were reverent of her as a princess, but so many thought her simple minded so spoke down to her. None in Jon’s group had treated her like that. They didn’t treat her like a glass doll, they discussed books they’d read, teased her and shared jokes, spoken sincerely. To them at least she was more than a princess.

However she didn’t think it wise to go North. As nice as it might be to have Domeric’s help she didn’t see how she would avoid becoming a hostage. Unlike most of the realm the Starks would recognize her and she would once again become a pawn.

It seemed as if all roads led to King’s Landing. If not Domeric’s help they could seek Loras’, but he was in King’s Landing. If she fled to Casterly Rock or other Lannisters she knew they would tell her mother where she was and be sent to King’s Landing.

While Nightsong felt safe, it also felt as if she was trapped there. Heading north meant going through the Stormlands where half the families would be against her, risking being recognized and forced to play her part, chancing bandits through lands at war, or becoming a hostage, and yet going south would risk her being taken back to the place she had escaped.

It kept Myrcella up at night as she tried to think of what to do, leaving her exhausted throughout the day. Eventually every time she tried to think of what she should do she ended up with her stomach twisted in knots. She wished Sam would have been more of a help but he shared her uncertainty, noting how there seemed to be no safe places anymore.

A fortnight after their arrival that Maester Elmar approached Sam and Myrcella, who were sat with
Seban Cartwell and his wife Sharley, who served in the kitchens. The man wore a somber expression as he came to a stop beside their table, holding out a small letter. “My lord, I was told to give you any letters address to ‘My dear friends’ should you be here.”

Sam’s eyes widened, carefully taking the letter. “Thank you.” Sam glanced at it’s contents and frowned. He found Myrcella giving him a questioning look as he turned to Seban and Sharley. “If you would please excuse us.”

Myrcella joined him in getting up, though she stopped to curtsy to the pair. “Thank you for letting us join you again.”

“Of course, dear,” Sharley said with a wave of her hand. “I hope all is well.”

Following Sam through the corridors, they returned to his chamber before Sam once again unrolled the scroll to read it as she asked, “Who is it from?”

“Your uncle, Tyrion,” Sam said taking his time to read it over, not only to make sure he understood what they were saying but to make sure there wasn’t some code he was missing.

Seeing his frown deepen as he read, Myrcella asked, “What does it say?” When he glanced to her and hesitated to answer, Myrcella felt a flare of agitation, stepped forward and yanked it from his hand. She quickly stepped away, turning from him to read it and ignore his muttering protest.

‘My dear friends, we will be altering our plans for a time. We arrived in Sunspear and learned Gerold Dayne had slain Arys Oakheart and attacked Princess Myrcella. She was injured but lives, so we will take her to King’s Landing with Oberyn’s daughters. Should you need anything, we should reach Blackwater Bay within a month at the latest.’

The knot in her stomach returned as she read her uncle’s words, thankful she had walked toward a chair so she could grab it and sit before her trembling legs collapsed. The letter slipped from her fingers as they rose to cover her mouth, a shaky breath filling her lungs when she looked to Sam.

“It’s my fault.”

“No it isn’t, Princess,” Sam said hurrying over to her side, a hint of panic in his voice. “You can’t believe that. If it’s true then the only one to blame would be Gerold Dayne.”

“If I hadn’t made her switch places with me,” she began.

“Then you may have died where she was only injured,” Sam offered, frowning as he sank into the seat beside her.

“And Ser Arys,” Myrcella put her face in her hands to hide the shame she felt as tears burned her eyes. “I thought-I thought such awful things of him. I thought he had betrayed me, that he might even harm me, but he’s…”

Sam nodded sympathetically. “There were plenty of times he chose to take Arianne to bed rather than do his duty and watch over you. Any would doubt him, Your Grace. I think it better to see that at least at the end it seems he had not forgotten his duty as he had before.”

“And what of Rosamund?” She raised her head and Sam frowned seeing her eyes puffed red. “What if it was because we switched places? If they found out—”

“They wouldn’t have wrote that Myrcella had been attacked,” Sam said pointing to the letter. “Whatever happened wasn’t because you switched places. You’re not the one at fault here. If this is true then Gerold Dayne is to blame.”
“What do you mean if it’s true?” Myrcella sniffed and wiped her cheek. “You think it a lie or some trick?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Sam said with a sigh. “I mean only that we don’t know what happened, and even they might not know the truth. No doubt Princess Arianne will be desperate to cover up her plan to take you from Sunspear. For all we know she has blamed Dayne for her own failure, or they put the blame on him to hide the hand of another house. Only those involved will know the truth of it.”

Sitting up, Myrcella took a breath and steeled herself before turning to face Sam. “Then let us ask her.”

“Forgive me, Princess, but-”

“We’ll return to King’s Landing,” she said rising from her seat. “If my uncle and Jon will be there then so will we.”

“What of-”

“We’ll stay in Flea Bottom, hide ourselves and find a way to contact him.”

“Your Grace, if someone recognizes you-”

“I’ll tell them you helped me escape after suspecting an attack and we were reluctant to reach out until we were certain there was no one from Dorne who would try to succeed where Gerold Dayne failed. However I think it should be simple enough for us to blend in among the masses of Flea Bottom.” She concluded with a bitter edge, “None know my face well enough.”

She had switched places with Rosamund enough to know how few people actually paid attention to her. The few who might recognize her face would have forgotten the details in the time she had been away, and she would make sure to keep her distance from the Red Keep. They could pay an urchin to get a message to Jon and Tyrion.

It wasn’t the best idea, she wouldn’t fool herself into thinking it was, but at least she made the choice. If all roads would lead her to King’s Landing then she would go on her own terms knowing she would have people she could trust there to help her. It also didn’t hurt knowing they could always escape aboard one of Jon’s ships.

Sam nodded, looking up to the younger girl with a smile. “If that is what you wish.”

“It is,” she said with a firm nod. “We should try to time our arrival close to theirs, which will mean leaving fairly soon.”

“It may be longer if we avoid the kingsroad,” Sam noted.

Myrcella swiftly shook her head. “If we’re to fool the people of Flea Bottom we can fool those on the way there.”

Her firm tone surprised Sam, who nodded. “Then I’ll have the cart and horses prepared by midday tomorrow.”

Myrcella was tempted to tell him not to rush himself, but it would take near a month to return to King’s Landing and she didn’t want to risk missing Jon and Tyrion as they had in Nightsong. Instead she bowed her head slightly. “Thank you, Sam.”
After they said their farewells Myrcella and Sam rode from Nightsong, a somber smile touching her lips as she looked back to the shrinking towers when she heard the distant noon bells ring.

Having spent the night before thinking over what might come of this all she considered letting Rosamund go on as her. Myrcella’s guilt made her want to give Rosamund all she could in hopes of making things up to her, so could let her live a pampered life as a princess while she returned to Nightsong. She could spend her days in the kitchen with Sharley, away from the game of thrones, and could be there to welcome Jon and his men home whenever he came ashore. It would be hard but she at that moment she felt she would be lucky to have such a life, not only because it would mean she could be with Jon but because a servants life was more than she deserved for letting her cousin get injured for her sake.

If things did end with her revealing herself and once again becoming a princess she would make sure her cousin wed a handsome lord who cared for her. Any who spoke ill of her wounds would find it folly to speak poorly of a lioness and her pride.

It was only as dusk settled into evening and they found a place to settle for the night that Myrcella grew annoyed with how her smallclothes stuck to her so excused herself while Sam prepared a fire. Sam nodded and turned in the opposite direction as he always did despite her walking well out of sight before lifting her skirt.

Myrcella felt her stomach drop as she lowered her smallclothes and saw a burgundy stain along the middle. She was frozen for a moment, flushed with embarrassment and dread. Not only had she not prepared for this, but now that she had flowered there would be no easy excuse to have a lord wait to marry her. She felt tears prick her eyes but quickly blinked them away and shook her head, taking a breath to calm herself as she pulled them back up and fixed her skirt.

Samwell looked up from the fire he’s started with a flicker of relief upon seeing the rustling he heard we her return. He’d been jumpy every night since they left Dorne, anticipating some attack that thankfully hadn’t come.

“I’ve enough goods to last us through the Stormlands at least,” he assured, holding up a bag.

Myrcella offered a smile, then looked to the cart as she stood beside the fire. “Sam, did you pack any extra rags?”

“I’ve a few so we can bath,” he said dubiously. “Did you want to bath? I’d suggest waiting until it’s warmer. We can stop whenever you-”

“No, no,” she said shaking her hands. Taking a moment to think she glanced down, frowning when she looked at her skirt before sighing and looking to Sam. “Could I… borrow your dagger?”

Sam shook his head, quickly rising to his feet. “Whatever you need I can manage, your Grace. I couldn’t let you hurt yourself by accident. What do you need it for?”

Myrcella held in a growl of frustration, wondering why Sam couldn’t just let this be easy, not that it even was. “I want to cut one of my dresses into rags.”

Sam’s brow knit, shaking his head in confusion. “Why would you want to-” He stopped himself, seeming to piece together why she might ruin a dress to make rags she suddenly needed. His plump cheeks turned bright pink as his eyes widened and he nodded, “I see. It’s okay, Your Grace. Are you okay? I-My sister, Talla, she-” He sighed, walking toward the cart, “Just relax. Sit and give me a moment, please.”
Myrcella flushed seeing him realize her problem, watching him dig through the cart before leaping off a moment later and returning to the fireside. Setting down a small box as he sat pulling a gambeson across his knees. After looking it over he began to cut the padded cloth into strips, making her eyes widen. “Sam, you need not ruin that! One of my dresses would be more than enough. You may need that for protection.”

“I’ve others,” Sam said smiling as he continued to cut his gambeson. “Besides, this one no longer fits me. I only brought it so I might hide my mail shirt beneath it should we go somewhere armor might stand out.”

Myrcella still felt bad about his ruining his own gambeson, but smiled as she realized how much he had changed since she first met him. Not only was he braver than she’d thought him in King’s Landing, but the Dornish sun had caused his belly to shrink some while his arms had seemed to grow. He was still large, yet seemed now more a bear or boar than a pig.

When he was finished he set the strips down beside him and opened the box he brought, revealing a set of needles and thread. Watching him begin to sew the edges of the strips he cut to keep the padding in, Myrcella gasped and moved closer. “I can help!”

Sam pushed the sewing kit to her. “At least they won’t all be awful.”

“I doubt I’ll prove much finer,” she said with a laugh as she threaded a needle and stitched an edge. “Sansa was much better with a needle than I.”

“I feel that too high a bar even for a seamstress,” Sam said with a laugh. “It might be like comparing my skill with a sword to Ser Jaime or Garlan or Jon.”

Once they were done Myrcella went off again and changed her smallclothes, putting the gambeson padding rag in them while hiding the stained ones in her bag. When she returned to the fire Sam offered her a small skewer and cup. “Thank you, Sam.”

“No,” she said meeting his eyes with a sheepish smile. “Thank you.”

Sam flushed and shook his head, swallowing the mouthful of meat before speaking. “It’s nothing. You handled it better than my sister,” he told her with a laugh, “she spent the day in bed, weeping whenever my mother couldn’t soothe her.”

Myrcella made herself smile while carefully biting a piece of meat from the skewer, finding she envied Talla Tarly. While she might have been in pain, at least her mother had been there to care for her. Even if Myrcella had been in King’s Landing she doubted Cersei would spend her day caring for her. Beyond telling her how to keep it from dripping down her leg or leaving a trail as some of the small folk supposedly did, the most her mother said of moonblood was that it had embodied her womanhood, not because of fertility but because it was fitting the only time she found solace from the desires of men was when she was made to suffer pains they couldn’t share.

As much as Myrcella had disliked Lady Catelyn from hearing of her treatment of Jon, she still envied Sansa and Arya for having a mother who seemed to care for them. No doubt when they had their moonblood she would dote on the girls as Sam’s mother had his sister. She had little doubt Lord Stark would dote on them as well, but Myrcella had no one. Her mother would probably be annoyed by her return to King’s Landing, whether it be Rosamund or should she reveal their switch. And of course her father was dead, or at least the man she had grown up thinking of as her father if the rumors were true. Though it wasn’t as if Jaime had cared for them more than an uncle
serving the kingsguard might.

Maybe it was the occasional headache or sharp ache in her stomach, but Myrcella felt herself growing agitated as they traveled. It had been her choice to leave, but what other choice did she have? Without Sam she truly would have been alone. It might even have been her who was injured, or as Sam said she might have died where her cousin survived. Perhaps leaving Rosamund to spend her days acting as her wasn’t some gift but a punishment. At least her own parents would care for her should she return to Lannisport rather than live with a mother who no doubt saw her as a possession and a potential father who likely saw them only as charges he would protect, not to mention the bastard spawn of incest.

Sam didn’t miss her sinking mood, but was thankful she handled it better than his sisters, from whom he remembered a few tricks they used to ease their own symptoms. He suggested some and though few helped Myrcella appreciated the effort.

They were on their fourth day when they stopped for the night and he went about preparing their fire while she went to wash in a stream nearby. He was contemplating going on a hunt just to have a break from the preserves they had but doubted he could manage. While he had gotten better with a bow the thought of taking a life still left him queasy. If Myrcella wanted they could stop in a town for a meal, but she had also been the one pushing them to ride as much as they could.

Sam was warming his hands by the fire when he heard grass crunch to his left and turned toward it with a smile before realizing Myrcella had walked off to his right. With a gasp Sam leapt to his feet, rushing to the cart where he pulled an arrow from the quiver Jon had gifted him and notched it in his bow, aiming it toward the brush as he called out, “Who goes there?!”

He heard the rush of steps from behind him, glancing back to see Myrcella come to a stop upon seeing him drawing his bow. With a quick shake of his head he looked ahead, not seeing her rush forward to hide behind the cart. Inchng her way to the edge she peeked around, a gust of wind blowing the brush before a giant white wolf stepped into the clearing.

Myrcella gasped and stood up as Sam lowered his bow. “Ghost?”

The albino direwolf was nearly as tall as a horse though seemed much larger as he stepped toward them, his crimson eyes briefly catching the moonlight. Myrcella walked around the cart, leaving her clothes on the ground behind it as she stood beside Sam.

“Shouldn’t you be with Jon?” Sam asked as if the direwolf might answer.

Instead he came up beside them and licked Sam’s cheek before turning to do the same to Myrcella, who chuckled as she pulled her head away, “I just washed myself.”

Ghost ignored her to lick her again before turning and making his way to the fire, Sam rushing to calm the horses who tried to back away upon seeing him. Myrcella went to put her clothes away, thankful that her last gambeson pad had naught but a long dried spot when she went to wash in the stream. Once Sam calmed the horses she joined him in sitting by the fire which Ghost had been slowly circling like a sentinel.

“Did Jon send you here?” she asked, drawing the direwolf’s attention as she took a seat. No sooner than her rear hit the ground did Ghost make his way toward them, laying beside her with a huff.

Sam chuckled. “I guess that’s a yes.”

Sat by the fire, Myrcella found herself smiling for what felt like the first time in days as Ghost laid
his head in her lap, letting her run her fingers through his fur. Somehow his presence had eased her heart, letting her look from him to Sam and know that while her parents may not pay her mind she wasn’t without those who cared.

Chapter End Notes

Originally I considered having a bit thing where Robb and Dacey told their families together, but realized Dacey wouldn't need to keep it from her mother like Robb would his, so she would already know about her pregnancy. When Dacey turns to speak with her family here it's to let them know Robb's going to tell them. While we only get Catelyn initial reaction for now, we should get her thoughts on it all later.

I've already written a story about show Sansa twice, and as much as I like the idea of Jon/Alayne stories, I wanted to do something different with Sansa. So if Melisandre can turn half the Stormlands, why not a girl going through an identity crisis of sorts?

I'm sure some will find the period stuff gross, but I thought it fitting with one of the themes for Myrcella's section. She's becoming physically mature why maturing and taking a more active role in making a decision that is risky instead of just staying safe in Nightsong. She's shifting from cub to lioness.

So for this chapter I originally had a small bit about makeup which I cut, but it caused me to do research on medieval makeup which was interesting. I also did research on what medieval women did about their periods and saw a few places say it was either a rag or just doing what Myrcella describes for small folk.

When I was thinking about how Cersei might have prepared Myrcella for her period I tried to imagine what would be completely self centered and dumb.

Next Chapter: Domeric gets a glimpse of his father's plans for him and the realm. Tyrion and Jon learn what happened in Dorne and Jon learns about the Martells. After a stop at Ghost Hill Jon tries to earn a snake's trust on the way to Blackwater Bay.
Ploys and Plots

Chapter Summary

Domeric gets a glimpse of his father's plans for him and the realm. Tyrion and Jon learn what happened in Dorne and Jon learns about the Martells. After a stop at Ghost Hill Jon tries to earn a snake's trust and makes a bet before sailing into the Blackwater Bay.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Standing at the bank of the Weeping Water river, the Dreadfort’s high walls and triangular merlons looked like stone teeth ready to devour all who crashed against them. There had been a time when he thought of it as a home, back when his mother would read to him, her silent smile the only thing that warmed the grim keep.

Since Bethany passed nothing of the Dreadfort felt like a home to Domeric, not after seeing Barrowton, the Redfort, Winterfell and even King’s Landing. Growing up he had always assumed the coldness that engulfed the Dreadfort was due to it’s place in the North, but thought now it had more to do with its lord. Winterfell had felt alive and warm even with Winter approaching, yet riding through its gates he found the Dreadfort as inhospitable as ever.

Walda seemed to enjoy it, though he had noticed on their ride she seemed almost reverent to his father. He imagined it was simply because he had chosen her to wed. Roose could have chosen any but clearly chose Walda because she was the largest of the Frey girls available, meaning he would get the most coin for her.

No doubt she knew this, and yet still smiled as if his father had saved her. It reminded him of how Sam had reacted whenever they were kind to him after his arrival. How awful must the Freys be for a woman to beam as she at in a hall with rows of skeletal human hands jutting from the walls to grasp torches.

“How did you like your time in King’s Landing?” Walda asked after he told her how he intended to return after his time squiring for Lord Horton Redfort only to end up heading south as a favor to Lord Stark.

“It was different from any other place I’ve been,” he taking a drink. “Not just the warmth but the people. There’s some from every realm in the Seven Kingdoms as well as across the sea.”

“And you were close to Lord Stark’s bastard?” she asked biting into a tart.

“I was sent to act as his companion.” Domeric maintained an even expression as he reached for his mug. “I befriend him and two other southron boys.”

With a teasing smile Walda asked, “Any girls?”

Domeric shook his head. “None that mattered.”

“What of Sansa Stark?” Roose’s question surprised both Domeric and Walda, though only Walda’s
confusion was clear on her face as they looked to him. “She came to see you off.”

Domeric shrugged. “I helped them escape Lannister guards and return north.”

“Why?” asked Roose, his tone casual but eyes drilling into Domeric, waiting to read the truth should he lie.

“I was asked to guard them not only by Lord Stark but Jon as well. I’d promised they would be safe in my care, so I fulfilled it and brought them north to their mother.”

Roose seemed to find that acceptable, so nodded and looked to his plate. “Then perhaps she’ll be glad should we offer to marry her to you.”

“What?” asked Domeric.

“It will tie the Starks to us,” Roose said holding a skewered piece of meat, “with her bound to you none will be able to question us.”

Though confused by his reason Domeric kept quiet knowing he would learn more in time than he would pressing his father for information.

The information came days later as he entered his father’s solar and found him sat in chair reading through a small pile of letters, throwing those he finished into the hearth. The sight stole Domeric’s momentum, slowing to a stop as he watched his father move to the next letter and begin to read it as Roose asked, “Yes?”

“I came to tell you Steelshanks Walton has arrived.”

“He can wait,” Roose said with a wave of his hand.

“What are all these?” Domeric asked, walking around the desk to stand before his father, looking at the pile of rolled letters. He saw one had a gauntlet symbol pressed into the wax sealing it.

Roose looked to his son for a moment, watching him eye the pile curiously before his pale gaze rose to Roose and he arched his brow. The Lord of the Dreadfort rose to his feet with a slight smile, tossing another letter into the fire. “Word has spread quickly of the wildlings on the Wall.”

“So why do they write to you instead of Robb or Lord Stark?” Domeric asked innocently.

“What would they say? They’ve already allowed an army of savage men to cross the Wall and live among us.”

“Why write to you?” asked Domeric though he suspected he knew.

“Because I’ve a means to do what none before me could,” Roose said meeting his son’s gaze, “tear control of the North from House Stark and bring us peace again.”

Domeric furrowed his brow, looking dubious as he asked, “How?”

“House Stark is unfocused. They prolong a war they began. They let people suffer under raiders and wildlings while sending our men south. So I sent the Lannisters an offer that serves us both.”

“What can we offer them that they would want?” he asked, intentionally including himself with his father, which seemed to relieve some tension in Roose.

“The Starks.”
Domeric chuckled. “And how will we do that? They have an army at their command.”

“A broken army stretched across two realms.”

Domeric crossed his arms and thought it over. “Does that mean the Lannisters will ride north to aide us?”

“Only after they know we’ve attacked.”

“And how will we…” He looked to the letters. “Who else has sided with us? Why would any houses side with us over the Starks?”

Roose seemed almost impressed as he glanced at the pile of letters. “Robett Glover had a family in Deepwood Motte who were missing when he and Galbart went to claim it. Because of Catelyn Stark’s war his family was taken along with dozens of others slain by the raiders, not to mention the wives and daughters they raped and ruined.

“I spoke with Rickard Karstark whose son Harrion is still imprisoned after the battle at Duskendale. While the Starks waste their time sending armies to the Wall only to have the wildlings cross anyway, his son suffers in the jaws of lions. He was thankful when I told him I had a means to see his son returned to him the moment the Lannister forces ride north.”

Roose flipped over a letter as he concluded, “I’ve sent men to other houses who all share Karstark’s concerns the wildling mass will turn their attention to their lands.”

“Even still without the Lannisters I fear we would fail,” Domeric said shaking his head. “We might succeed in an attack, but we would be open to retaliation and lose in a war with the Starks before the Lannisters make it through the Riverlands.”

“We have allies in the Riverlands,” said Roose.

“The Freys?” Domeric shook his head. “The Tullys could still muster enough allies to slow the Lannisters.”

Roose picked up another letter, holding the parchment out for Domeric. “We’ve another ally who could grant the Lannisters passage to the North.”

For a moment he wondered if perhaps his father expected the northern lords to work with the Iron Islands, but taking the letter all he needed was to see the seal before he understood. “The Vale. They’ve decided to join the war.”

“And all they ask for their allegiance is we spare the Stark women, which works out for us as once you’re wed to Sansa we’ll rob the North of another reason to refuse our rule. Our blood will forever be bound to theirs so none can challenge those who follow us.”

That changed everything for Domeric. He realized then that his father could win. If he had the support of the Lannisters in the aftermath then all they needed to do was make sure their first attack wiped out anyone important. Even if the Iron Islanders didn’t attack again losing the Freys would be a blow in the Riverlands, especially if they lost some of the houses wed to Freys. Stretching the Starks between the Freys and the Northern houses that turned on them would leave them to be eviscerated by the Lannisters and knights of the Vale.

Domeric’s face darkened, his lips curving into a smile as he looked to his father. “We can win.”

Roose practically smirked, turning to pick up another letter which he handed to Domeric. “And
Robb Stark has already told us when we should attack.”

Taking the parchment, Domeric chuckled as he read it. “A wedding.”

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When Jon’s group boarded the ship it was Edric who gave up his chambers beside Jon’s to Rosamund so they could brush off the extra guards as being to protect the ship’s owner. The Sand Snakes were placed in Podrick’s room opposite Thoros while the squires moved into their lords’ rooms.

The first day was spent playing into the act of Rosamund being Myrcella, but when the sun set and they returned to their rooms Jon and Tyrion knocked on Rosamund’s door and she quickly let them inside while Edric and Podrick relieved the guards. The blonde girl took the chance to hug both men before stepping back with a smile. “Sorry.”

“No need,” Jon assured. “How are you?”

“Well,” she said pressing a hand over the bandage she’d applied to the side of her face. “I’ve been caring for it as the maesters said.”

“No pain? The salt in the air isn’t making it worse?”

Rosamund shook her head. “No, I’ve made sure to keep it covered as much as I could.”

“Could you tell us exactly what happened, Rosamund?” Tyrion asked moving to take a seat at the small table in the corner. “How did this all take place?”

“How far back should I begin?” Rosamund asked following Tyrions example and taking a seat across him while Jon stood beside the table.

“When did you switch with Myrcella?” asked Tyrion.

“Right before I left with Ser Arys and Arianne’s party, but Myrcella had planned her escape with Sam before that.”

“Did they say why?” asked Jon.

Both lords stayed silent as Rosamund told them of Myrcella and Sam’s concerns about Dorne before Ser Arys came to Myrcella with Arianne’s plan, which she twisted to facilitate her own escape. Tyrion’s hand clenched to a fist as she finished and he scoffed. “So this all happened because that idiot wanted to play queenmaker.”

Jon ignored his own frustration to ask, “What happened when you rode to Greenblood?”

“Prince Doran’s men were waiting for us. Ser Arys, he-he charged them, and the guard captain, Aeo Hotah, he cut him down. That was when Gerold Dayne drew his sword and attacked before fleeing.”

“Did he say anything?” Jon asked.

“I-I don’t know, I don’t remember much,” she admitted, sheepishly looking to the table, “it was all so much I was overwhelmed and barely paying attention to him when it happened.”

“You’ve no reason to blame yourself or be ashamed,” Jon assured, reaching out to squeeze her arm. “I know it may seem impossible, but you can find pride in this. Though it’s left its mark you’ve
survived all this and have proof no one can deny. How many lords have such scars? How many knights?"

Rosamund sniffled and nodded. “Thank you, My Lord.”

“Jon,” he said with a smile.

Tyrion looked on proudly as the girl quickly nodded. “I assume you returned to Sunspear then?”
He asked, pulling their attention to him. “Obviously you didn’t tell them the truth.”

“I couldn’t,” said Rosamund. “If they knew I wasn’t Myrcella they surely would have killed me to silence me. Being Myrcella was all I had keeping me alive.”

“You may have to continue being her for some time,” Tyrion said with a sympathetic frown.

“I can manage,” Rosamund assured, sitting up a bit straighter. “It’s been months since they last saw us and even then we fooled everyone.”

“Then we’ll leave you to rest,” Tyrion said sliding off his chair.

Jon seemed to hesitate before he said, “I still have some questions.” Looking to Tyrion he said, “You go ahead. I won’t be too long.”

Tyrion chuckled, not begrudging Jon his curiosity, so left without a word. Once they were alone Jon moved to take Tyrion’s seat. With a smirk Rosamund asked, “Are you going to ask about Myrcella?”

Jon snickered. “Some, but I also want to know about the Martells themselves. Clearly I opened relations between us poorly so I’d like to have a better idea of what they’re like.”

“Of course.”

“Let’s start with the three joining our voyage.”

“I don’t know much of them to be honest,” she answered regretfully.

“They weren’t in Arianne’s party?” When she shook her head Jon felt some relief. “Then Arianne.”

“She seemed nice most of the time, but Myrcella thought she treated her like a fool,” said Rosamund. “More than once Myrcella said she felt they saw her as a glass doll to play with.”

“Beyond that?”

Rosamund shrugged. “It’s hard to say. She was smart but fun. Some said she was wanton, but I only knew she had laid with Ser Arys because Myrcella told me he admitted it to her. She was flirtatious at times, but it seemed all in Dorne were.”

“And Prince Doran?”

“He was always kind to us, but I only spoke with him a time or two.”

Nodding, Jon asked, “What about prince Quentyn? Was he truly not there?”

“We’d never met him. He was gone since before out arrival.”

“Which leaves Trystane,” said Jon.
“He was kind and thoughtful,” Rosamund said with sympathetic smile. “He likes cyvasse but never got upset when Myrcella or I beat him, which was more often than not.”

“How did he treat Myrcella?” He then added with a laugh, “Or you.”

“Kindly,” she said before her smile faded.

“What?” Jon felt his stomach flip as he asked, “Did he do something to you or her?”

Seeing embers of anger in Jon, Rosamund quickly shook her head. “No, no! Nothing like that. It’s just… sometimes he would sneak a kiss.”

Letting out a breath, Jon nodded. “Ah.”

Snickering, Rosamund mused, “I actually kissed him before Myrcella.”

His stomach suddenly in a knot again, Jon nodded despite wishing he’d never bothered to ask while simultaneously wanting to know every detail. It was frustrating, so Jon ignored it to say, “At least he treated you well.”

Rosamund could see he was trying to hide his displeasure and felt a bit bad for him after he’d been nothing but kind to her. “She missed you.” When he looked to her she saw a smile briefly touch his lips. “She never told anyone else, not even Sam, but she thought of you often. Even after hearing you’d killed Stannis she smiled nearly two whole days because you had become a lord. When we heard you defeated the Mountain she was elated. I think her greatest joy in Dorne was when ravens came with news of you.”

Though clearly enjoying learning all this, Jon found his smile fading as he said, “I should have written her more.”

“She understood,” Rosamund assured. “Everything happened so quickly, and with your place in court being so unsteady… she thought it best since it might make everything easier.”

“I thought the same,” Jon admitted with a laugh. “Whenever I thought to write her I would tell myself she was busy being courted. It seemed better to let her enjoy her new life away from King’s Landing then try to keep her bound to it for my sake.” With a sigh he rose from his seat. “Thank you for sharing all this. I’ll let you rest. If you need anything at all ask. Not just while you’re aboard this ship.”

Rosamund watched him start to leave, taking a moment to make herself ask, “Do you think it’ll be different?”

Stopping to turn to her Jon asked, “Will what be different?”

“You and Myrcella. You’re a lord now with your own keep, not to mention your ties to the North. Will she have to go back there… or are you-” She sighed, then asked simply, “Will things be different?”

Jon frowned and shook his head. “I won’t let them send you back there if you don’t want to go. If anything Myrcella Baratheon will be ‘kidnapped’ by vagabonds and taken somewhere safe.”

Rosamund giggled, relieved by his assurances, “And if she returns?”

“I’ll help you get wherever you need to go to feel safe,” he said with a shrug. “I’ll send you to the North if that’s where you’d feel most protected.”
Jon left her room and returned to his own to rest and think, which seemed to hinder his rest. He tried to consider how to handle everything, how to keep Rosamund and Myrcella safe, but Westeros felt like a mess. It was part of the reason he wanted to focus on his aunt first. If he returned to Westeros with four dragons and the threat of a Dothraki horde across the narrow sea waiting to be unleashed on them there was a chance he could avoid half the destruction that would come from him marching south with Bloodwing and the armies of the North behind him.

There was also the other Lannisters to consider beyond Myrcella, Tommen and Rosamund. As much as he hated Cersei she was still Myrcella’s mother. Not long ago he’d dreamt of killing her but as he thought on it he wanted to find another way. He could have her stripped of any power and sent to live the rest of her life in Casterly Rock if not someplace far from anyone she could manipulate. If he did she would be cut off from making things worse as she did in King’s Landing but would also still be alive for Myrcella and Tommen.

Yet people would still want her death. He would still want her death if he didn’t think it might upset Myrcella and deprive her of something Jon wished he could have, even if she was cruel. He would fool himself to think he could break Cersei and make her change if there was a chance she could be a decent mother.

Jaime was the more complex one for Jon as he had his own relationship with Jaime to consider. He had been a friend and mentor at times, even an inspirational figure, but had also hurt his younger brother and attacked his uncle. He was Myrcella’s father and a kingsguard but was also Cersei’s lover and had fought in her war with the Starks.

Over the following days he did his best to go about things normally. Once they rounded the Broken Arm Jon’s ships made their way to Ghost Hill where Nymella Toland hosted him and his party for a day. As they sat in their halls feasting Tyrion found great joy in Jon’s sheepish smiles whenever Nymella’s eldest daughter Valena flirted with him, making no effort to hide her interest in him.

If things had been different Jon might have accepted the offer to escort her to her room. Valena was a tall girl with a fierce beauty he admired as much as the bright red hair tumbling about her shoulders. Jon would be lucky to bed her, to have her wash away the memories of his time with Jynessa, but he couldn’t. He found himself glancing to Rosamund apologetically as she seemed to pout whenever she noticed Valena brush his hand or offer him a taste of her meal straight off her fork.

When Jon left his chambers the next morning to prepare for their return to the ships he sent Edric off while he took the chance to walk the chalk white walls of Ghost Hill on his own. Rounding a tower his gaze shifted from the blue Sea of Dorne to the Sand Snakes stood on the ramparts quietly conversing with one another. Just as he was about to turn Nymeria noticed him, causing the others to stop and look at him, all but forcing him to approach.

“Good morning, ladies,” Jon said with a bow of his head.

“My lord,” Tyene and Nymeria said while Obara eyed him.

“Will we be stopping at Greenstone next?” Obara asked sarcastically.

“The Stepstones more like,” Jon answered.

“So it’s true then,” Nymeria said crossing her arms. “You mean to take them and crown yourself king of the Narrow Sea.”

“You delay our arrival for lunacy,” Obara said shaking her head. “Three ships won’t win you the
“No, I don’t imagine it will,” Jon said with a smile.

“Then why waste our time?”

Jon’s smile lingered before he asked, “Were you three involved in Arianne’s plot with Myrcella?”

The Sand Snakes tensed. Jon noticed Nymeria’s hands tug at her skirt, surely preparing to raise it and draw the daggers stashed beneath it. Tyene’s hands moved toward her hip where she no doubt had a vial of some poison prepared while Obara simply clenched her hands and glared at him. Their tension broke slightly when he chuckled.

“I know you weren’t involved.”

“And how would you know that?” asked Obara.

“Because Myrcella doesn’t know you.” His answer surprised them. “She did know the clever, flirtatious Arianne quite well however. So I suppose the question is… should I be insulted she made no attempt at me, or was she mute during our meeting because it was her failed ploy which cost Myrcella her ear?”

“What would it matter?” asked Nymeria as the Sand Snakes eyed him curiously.

“Because I want to believe House Martell aren’t just desert Lannisters,” Jon said to the sisters’ surprise. “I want to believe the Martells would know better than to blame children for the crimes of their parents, or have they forgotten the namesake of the ship we sail?”

The mention of Rhaenys seemed to deflate the girls’ anger. As they looked to one another it was Tyene who asked, “Why do you care about House Martell?”

For a moment Jon was tempted to tell them the truth, even some small piece of it, but couldn’t trust them with that yet. Not when he saw their distrust of him so clearly. The few moments he thought he saw one start to crack another would speak or glance at them and he would see them shut down. He knew he would never convince them to trust them, not while they were together, so simply smiled at Tyene’s question and gave the sisters a nod before he walked past them.

Though he hoped his words had planted seeds of trust in them, Jon suspected only their father could foster that trust. Jon would need to earn it and the easiest way would be through Oberyn. While he’d decided he wouldn’t go out of his way to ignore them, he also wouldn’t strain to ingratiate with them either. There was only one he thought he could edge toward his side, but he knew the others would be impossible.

Tyene seemed simple only to a fool, and Nymeria was difficult for him to place beyond her curt, courtly manner, but he could earn some trust with Obara during their journey. She was clearly stubborn but she was also a warrior.

It took him until he had completely circling the ramparts to craft his plan. He was about to return to the guest quarters when he saw Podrick practically leading a groggy Tyrion in the same direction. Walking up to the short lord’s side Jon said as loud as he could, “Long night?”

Tyrion leapt and spun to Jon, clutching his chest. “Gods. Are you mad?”

“More curious,” Jon said with a smirk.
“It’s my last day on solid ground for weeks before I’ll be surrounded only by men, my niece and three women who are like to kill me. Is it so wrong for me to take time to enjoy myself?”

“Not at all, but I’ve need of you.”

Tyrion sobered and nodded. “What is it?”

Jon pulled his coin purse from his belt and handed it to Tyrion. “I need you to buy blunt swords before we depart. Check with the blacksmith and master-at-arms. Hells, take broom sticks if you have to. Anything close enough for men to train with.”

“You plan on training the crew?” Tyrion asked pocketing the purse.

“I plan on charming a snake,” Jon said grinning as he made his way to the keep.

Tyrion came aboard while Podrick pulled a cart filled with blunted steel and wooden swords which Jon kept in his chambers for the first night. A day after they left Ghost Hill Jon had Thoros take the cart on deck while Edric had the captain gather every available crewman. Once he was alone in his quarters, Jon locked Dark Sister in a large chest with the coin they brought.

It took minutes for the deck to fill with confused crewmen, including the Sand Snakes who stood not far from where Rosamund sat with Podrick and Tyrion. There was a low murmur of questions that went quiet when they heard the jingling of their lord approaching and those on deck turned to watch Jon Snow step onto the deck having donned his armor. He had tied a crimson sash around his waist with his ringing brooch through the knot and sword belt over it holding one of his White Fang swords.

The crew looked to one another in confusion as Jon came to a stop and raised his visor. “In time our destination will be the Stepstones, but over the next few days we will be sailing past them, which means there is a chance pirates will attempt to board us,” Jon said as loud as he could without killing his throat. “Every day we are at sea I will come to deck and train with any who want to learn or keep their skills as sharp as their blades! I will not accept any of my men dying to a fucking pirate!”

That earned a cheer from most of the men, including a chuckling Thoros. Jon had those who wanted to learn split off into groups and spar with one another using the blunt swords Tyrion bought. Occasionally Jon would step in to show someone a technique but it wasn’t until he’d spent time with each group that he stepped to the side and asked Thoros to spar with him.

His reputation was enough that it didn’t take long for the crew to stop so they could watch the man who slew the Mountain. After taking one of the blunted swords himself, Jon pulled his buckler from over his sheathed sword and tapped it to signal he was ready. Thoros spun his sword before charging with a roar. Jon swiftly stepped to the side, jingling as he let his sword dig into the red priest’s side before yanking it forward in a vicious slash. He jingled again as he spun on his heel, pressing the tip of his sword against the back of Thoros’ neck and giving an almost mocking slash across the air beside it to cement his victory.

Beneath his visor Jon’s gaze fell on Obara, her brow knit as she watched Jon step back for another round. Eventually Thoros moved on and another took his place. Some would land strikes on him, but Jon landed more than he got. After each match he would look to Obara, seeing the Sand Snake’s interest clear on her face.

It was two days before he helped the man he bested back to his feet and found Obara stood before him holding a wooden staff with bundle at the end mimicking the balance of a spear. Beneath his
visor Jon wore a victorious smile while asking, “Lady Obara, would you like to join us?”

Raising her round shield of steel and copper Obara spun her spear, aiming it’s round end at Jon. His sword had barely left the buckler to signal their start when she dashed forward, thrusting at him. He laughed as he kept his sword tip against the buckler, raising it to deflect the strike as he stepped forward, letting it thrust past his shoulder as his sword ran along the haft of her spear to slice at her wrist before turning to aim the tip at her throat.

With a growl and barely half a step backward she yanked the spear back, thrusting at him again, but Jon deftly dodged each thrust, twice using his buckler to knock the blunt spearhead aside. Eventually she dashed to her right then turned and leapt, twisting the spear to thrust down at Jon. He stepped aside thrusting his buckler into her shield to press it against her chest as his sword slashed at her exposed wrist.

“You would do well to wear proper armor in a real fight, my lady,” Jon said as he stepped back.

“I prefer to keep my speed,” she said swinging her spear at him, which he avoided by leaping back.

“Yet here I am easily dodging you in my armor,” Jon noted, letting her swing and thrust at him. “You’re swift but even in armor I outpace you. You’re strong but you don’t use it well outside of wielding a shield and spear. You’ve the strength to keep your speed in at least a decent armor should you try. I’ll even buy it for you if you would promise to wear it when facing true steel.”

Obara scoffed. “What? You tired of girls and decided to try your prick against a woman?”

Jon felt a flicker of annoyance he swiftly quenched by slashing at her, which she easily deflected. She had pulled her spear close and thrust it forward, swinging it as he dodged to slam the haft into his side. Before he could grab it she had yanked it back to her hand and thrust at him again, but this time he dropped to his knees, leaving her wide eyes as he thrust his buckler into the deck to force himself back up under it, his sword slipping past her shield to slash across the length of her torso.

Back on his feet he turned to her saying, “If you can best me more often then not before we arrive at King’s Landing I’ll tell you why I was really in Sunspear without your uncle knowing. If I win you use the armor I buy you.”

She looked to him in confusion but then nodded in silent agreement before backing away to begin a new round. Each morning she was there to spar with him, sometimes waiting to be the last he faced so he would be drained but still he pushed through to gain at least two strikes for each she landed on him. Within a sennight Nymeria joined them, using a pair of blunted daggers to face him while Tyene watched alongside Rosamund and Tyrion.

They passed Cape Wrath with only a single incident where they saw a ship on the horizon without its sail raised, no doubt a pirate waiting to find its prey. Though part of him wished it had come for them to test their steel he wouldn’t provoke them with Rosamund on board.

Jon made sure to keep up his duties training Edric and Podrick. At night Jon often sat on the deck, letting the cool air rush over him as it did in his dragon dreams.

After what felt like months of uneasy sleep Jon found he woke feeling well rested the night he dreamt of laying beside a tree with his head in Myrcella’s lap as she gently ran her fingers through his hair, at times scratching his scalp and jaw. He would be hard pressed to think of something that felt better than he had before she fell asleep beside him and he eventually woke to the swaying sea. They were certainly more enjoyable than his dreams of stalking through the woods and eating hares. It felt less like he was losing himself and more soothing.
It was the third week when they finally sailed past Dragonstone, Jon looking to the grim island keep as they entered the Blackwater Bay.

Standing on deck Jon looked to King’s Landing as emerald flames and screams flashed in his mind which he quickly shook away. Tyrion wore a frown as he came to stand beside him, looking through the railing to the growing city.

“Even knowing it unlikely I could avoid my siblings forever I’d at least hoped I would go longer before returning.”

“Sorry,” Jon said as Tyrion chuckled and shook his head.

“It’s best for her,” Tyrion said waving a hand dismissively. “I can deal with Cersei and Jaime. The question is what will you do?” Seeing Jon’s questioning look, Tyrion said, “Oberyn is jailed for a crime we all but know him innocent of. We return a false daughter to a madwoman. For all I know you intend to tell her the truth of what happened in Dorne and demand to kill Oberyn yourself in exchange for the hand of the mummer’s lion we return to her, or you may well step in as his champion and tell the Queen mother Myrcella roams the wild with a wolf and a fat squire.”

Jon chuckled. “I’m not so anarchic… am I?”

“I jest, my lord,” said Tyrion. His smile faded as he returned his gaze to King’s Landing. “Where do you think Myrcella is?”

Looking to the Kingswood Jon answered, “I’m sure she’s safe.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sure some will have problems with the Karstarks and Glovers turning, but I think there's enough reason in their anger over their family situations, fear of wildlings, frustrations with the war and the prospect of raising their status in the north once the Boltons take over, especially knowing he has the Vale and Lannisters on his side. Plus it furthers some plots and sets up others.

Part of the inspiration for Jon getting the bells is Gan Ning, a chinese military general who was originally a pirate. I'm a Dynasty Warriors fan and while Gan Ning was never one of my favs I thought it an interesting aspect I could use.

Next Chapter: Jaime grows frustrated with Cersei's seemingly erratic behavior and his duties to Tommen before Jon's ships arrive. Jon quickly makes his influence felt before supper with the Lannisters, a meeting talk with the Sand Snakes and a sparring match.
A Wolf's Influence

Chapter Summary

Jaime grows frustrated with Cersei's seemingly erratic behavior and his duties to Tommen before Jon's ships arrive. Jon quickly makes his influence felt before supper with the Lannisters, a meeting talk with the Sand Snakes and a sparring match.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

In all his years Jaime Lannister had never felt as unsteady as he did in King’s Landing after his time as a prisoner of the Starks. What had started with his brother’s departure had grown with their father’s death and swelled since then. In the weeks that followed he had watched the king he served, his son, marry a girl from the family he suspected had killed Joffrey. Worst of all was that despite having been together since birth, for the first time he truly struggled to understand Cersei.

She didn’t trust the Tyrells enough to have Paxter Redwyne become master of ships instead of Aurane Waters, yet dismissed any suggestion that Oberyn wasn’t to blame for the deaths of their father and son. She despised Margaery yet kept Taena Merryweather close all the time even knowing she was a spy for the Tyrell girl. He had no doubt she was behind the deaths of the guards outside Tywin’s chambers as well as the High Septon, though he could barely understand why. She’d even burned down the Tower of the Hand with wildfire as if it were some kind of pyre for their father. To her everyone was an enemy, which would only lead to it being the truth.

Jaime had no doubt the only thing keeping Cersei from sending him off to war was her demand he be there to serve as champion for Tommen when Oberyn requested a trial by combat. He hadn’t told her he planned to refuse. The righteous knight in him said it was because he doubted Oberyn’s guilt and wouldn’t put a man to death when he wasn’t certain, but that wasn’t all. In truth a petty part of him wanted to deny Cersei, to anger her for how often she had been keeping herself from him. He hoped that Oberyn killed Boros Blount or whatever fool she convinced to fight him for her false accusations just so he could watch Cersei scream and shriek like a petulant child. It was spiteful, but the thought of it kept him smiling whenever Cersei reminded him of his duty to protect the king as a way to make him leave her.

The only reason he hadn’t pressed things with Cersei, grabbing her by the throat and making her beg as he had dozens of times before, was his concern for Tommen. If the Tyrells were willing to kill one king before the court they would do it again the moment they could be rid of Tommen. Were he only a few years older Jaime suspected Margaery would have already taken Tommen to bed and had him put a babe in her so she could give birth and be done with him. Thankfully Tommen was still a sweet round faced boy who spent most of his days running about the keep waving a string to lead his pack of cats through the halls.

Still Jaime did his best to stay beside Tommen as much as he could, ever watchful. It was the first time Jaime felt like a father watching his son as much as he did a knight guarding his king. When they were alone he would sit with Tommen and his cats, helping him care for and play with them. It felt like the only thing that made him smile in King’s Landing anymore, except for when he thought of how Joffrey had been the opposite, picturing the numerous animals the boy had
skewered. He could never be a father to his children, not openly, but he could still be more than a knight to them, he could be a fatherly figure and help guide them however he could.

It was that fatherly side of him which took grasp when Loras rushed to him as he returned from the stables one morning to tell him of Cersei’s distress. His fingers had hurt from clutching his sword so tight, ready to draw and tear through the city the moment he heard her say what the Tyrells had done to Tommen. Instead he found her screaming angrily as she threw a vase across the room, letting the pieces join her toppled table and the flagon of wine pouring across the floor.

Making sure to close the door behind him he rushed over to grasp her by the shoulders as he exclaimed, “Calm down, Cersei!”

“They’ve ruined her!” She yelled, struggling to get free.

Jaime furrowed his brow but grew frustrated with her smacking his chest so tightened his grip around her arms and lifted her off her feet slightly before stepping forward, pressing her back against the stone wall. She gasped meeting his eyes, finding them narrowed fiercely as he told her, “Calm yourself and tell me what’s happened.”

For a moment Jaime saw the girl he had loved his entire life, but she faded as Cersei’s gaze drifted toward the toppled table where the wine soaked into the corner of a letter. “They’ve hurt our daughter.”

Jaime eased his grip on her, letting her stand on her own. “Who?”

“Those sandy cunts,” she spat, glaring at the letter. “Oberyn killed our father and our son, and now his brother has tried to kill our daughter.”

Jaime followed her gaze before walking over to pick it up. Shaking some of the wine of the corner, he read the letter he was shocked to see was from Tyrion. Jaime almost doubted it, thinking the Tyrells would be clever enough to use their brother to frame the Martells and pull attention from themselves, but quickly saw it was more than that.

His own anger grew as he read Tyrion’s account of events. Not only had Ser Arys been killed, but Myrcella had survived an attack which cost her an ear and half her cheek. His relief upon seeing she would be brought back by Tyrion and Jon was surprising to him. He trusted Jon to get her back safely. Even without knowing he cared for Myrcella, Jaime knew the kind of man he had become.

Folding the letter, Jaime pulled the table upright and tossed the letter onto it as he turned to Cersei, who had sunk into a chair. “I’ll have one of the Dornish party tell us how he looks and make sure all the guards in the city know what to look for. Gerold Dayne will face the king’s justice for this.”

Seeing her glaring ahead lost in thought, he asked, “What will you do about this?”

Still seething she scoffed. “I’ll have the Boltons to come flay him before the court and have him hanged by his intestines!”

Jaime shook his head. “I meant about Myrcella. Tyrion says he told Doran he wouldn’t allow her back in Dorne until he knew it was safe to avoid officially breaking the betrothal.”

He could practically see Cersei’s mind divided between going along with and going against what Tyrion said. Eventually she decided on answering, “If they had a hand in this then I will see the Martells join House Reyne in Castamere.”

Tommen had taken the news as well as he could, Jaime having asked to tell him since Cersei was in no state to be delicate. And yet as Jaime sat with Tommen and his cats that night it was Cersei
who interrupted them, spending the evening sat with him on his bed, holding Tommen until he fell asleep and she returned to her chambers. For the first time in what felt like months she had him escort her as an excuse to take him to bed, clutching him and demanding he go as hard as he could until they were exhausted.

Jaime spent the next three weeks waiting for word of Jon’s ships while Cersei tried to deal with matters of the court, including the new Septon and his rabid followers. When the day of their arrival finally came Jaime escorted Tommen to the docks along with what felt like half the court.

Jon was the first off the ship, looking to Tommen with a sullen smile. Turning back to the boat he watched as Myrcella stepped onto the ramp, but stumbled slightly before Edric Dayne caught her. She gladly took his offered arm, letting the squire help her down the ramp safely while three women followed them. Tyrion and his squire came after them along with Thoros of Myr.

Once they gathered on the dock Tyrion shared a look with Jon before leading them toward the king and his court. Tommen stood straight beside his queen, Margaery wearing a kind smile while Cersei frowned upon seeing their daughter come to a stop before them with the right half of her face hidden behind her long golden hair.

Tommen hesitated a moment, seeming almost confused before frowning and remembering to say, “Welcome home, Myrcella.”

“Thank you for coming to greet me, Your Grace,” she said with a curtsy.

“How are you, Princess?” Margaery asked placing a hand on Myrcella’s shoulder.

“I live,” Myrcella said with a smile that surprised Jaime.

“Well we’re glad you’ve returned safely,” Margaery assured as she stepped back to Tommen’s side.

“It was Uncle Tyrion who demanded my return until my safety assured and Lord Jon gave me safe passage along with those Prince Doran assigned to act as my personal guard until I have a new sworn shield.”

Jaime had his suspicions of the women she looked to, so stepped forward. “I’ve assigned Ser Loras to act as your sworn shield for now, Princess.” Turning to the women he nodded. “Thank you for your services, Lady…”

“Obara Sand,” said the tallest with a smirk.

“Nymeria Sand,” said the ebony haired girl.

“Tyene Sand, Ser Jaime,” the blonde said with a graceful curtsy.

“Oberyn’s bastards,” Cersei said with a sneer.

“We would like to see our father as soon as possible,” Nymeria said with a smirk to Jaime while Obara barely hid her sneer and Tyene simply smiled.

“I’ll arrange for it,” he assured, turning his attention to Myrcella who looked to Loras as the kingsguard moved to stand beside her.

“Do you truly think him guilty?” Jon asked them. When he saw most the group nod, Jon asked, “Has he already asked for trial by combat?”
“I doubt he’ll need you as his champion too,” Cersei said with a glare to Tyrion.

“As do I, Your Grace, but I hope to let him avoid a trial by combat as I can vouch for his innocence.” That garnered some gasps from the crowd as he explained, “I remember the day of King Joffrey’s death and I was sat at a table with Prince Oberyn. Even as I played my song for the King I had kept an eye on the lady I escorted and saw he left for nothing and had no chance to poison King Joffrey’s wine.”

Tommen’s eyes widened. “Really?”

“I’ll swear it before all gods,” Jon said with a nod, “and any who judge him.”

Jaime noticed Cersei sneering at Jon briefly before they started back toward the Red Keep. Somehow the boy he’d rode to Winterfell to escort to King’s Landing had found himself able to undo all of Cersei’s work convincing Tommen that Oberyn was guilty. He valued Jon’s promise of honesty above his mother’s assurances, which clearly infuriated her. Jaime barely held in a laugh as he imagined how furious Catelyn would be to see him rise so high while her children froze in the north unknowingly setting their head onto the block.

Jaime had Loras escort Myrcella to her room while a Lannister guard showed Jon and those who arrived with him to the guest quarters. They had barely left them when Tommen looked to Cersei saying, “I want to eat with Myrcella, Uncle Tyrion and Jon tonight.”

“You don’t need to eat with them,” Cersei said dismissively. “Your sister-”

“I want to,” he repeated, then stopped and turned to Jaime. “Tell them the king wants to eat with them. Jon can even bring Ghost if he think they’ll be okay with Ser Pounce and Lady Whiskers and the others.”

Seeing Cersei’s clear agitation, Jaime nodded, “I’ll let them know.”

Once he returned them to their chambers and positioned a few extra guards to quell Cersei’s suspicions the Sand Snakes had come to kill them, Jaime went to clear their visit with Oberyn. It was easy enough, so he went to the guest chambers and informed the Sand Snakes of their arranged visit before going to tell Jon, Tyrion and Myrcella about their invitation.

To Jaime’s surprise he found Jon in the courtyard speaking with the silver-gold haired Aurane Waters while Edric and Podrick sparred in the ring beside them. The men were clearly familiar with each other, speaking quietly with Aurane wearing a smirk while Jon wore his usual sullen expression.

When they saw him approaching, Aurane excused him self, sparing Jaime a nod as he departed, leaving Jon to turn his gaze on the boys sparring. Jaime stood beside him for a moment, watching as Edric wielded a blunt greatsword against Podrick’s sword and shield.

“They’re coming along well.”

“They are,” Jon agreed. “Ned’s already as good as if not better with a greatsword than I am.”

“You intend to help him inherit Dawn?” Jaime could still remember the milkglass blade Arthur Dayne wielded better than most men do a longsword.

“Only he can control that,” Jon said shaking his head. “No doubt if he wanted he could take it now as the head of House Dayne but he won’t, not until he feels he’s earned it.”
“Well it seems you’ve earned a meal with the king,” Jaime said turning to Jon. “He’s invited you, Tyrion and Myrcella to join them for supper.”

Nodding, Jon looked to Jaime. “Do you think Oberyn guilty, Ser Jaime?”

“It’s not my place to judge,” Jaime said as he had ever since Cersei made clear it didn’t matter. “Will you be the one to face him if he demands trial by combat?”

Jaime sighed. “That’s for the king to decide.”

Jon nodded. “If you could please tell the city guard to keep an eye out for Ghost, he ran off while we were in Dorne but should find his way here eventually.”

Though he scoffed and shook his head, Jaime said, “Fine. But try to keep your mutt in line from now on. You’re a lord now.”

Jaime left Jon and made his way to the guest chambers, taking a breath before he knocked on Tyrion’s door. The moment it opened and his brother saw him a sneer crossed Tyrion’s face. He expected his brother to slam the door in his face, but instead he asked, “What do you want? Come to arrest me for father’s murder as well?”

“Tommen wants to sup with you, Myrcella and Jon.”

Tyrion’s featured softened some as he smirked and nodded. “I can suffer through a meal with you and your lover for his sake.”

Jaime’s eyes widened just as Tyrion slammed the door. Suddenly Jaime wanted nothing more than to go punch Jon, but knew that wouldn’t do much. If he said anything to Tyrion it was only confirming what his brother surely suspected.

Thankfully the last he had to speak with was Myrcella, so he went to her chambers and smiled when she opened the door. “How are you, Myrcella?”

“I’m fine, Uncle,” she said with a shaky smile. “How may I help you?”

With a glance down the corridor he motioned to her room and asked, “Could I?”

Myrcella sheepishly nodded and stepped aside, sitting by the unlit hearth while he followed and closed the door. Once he sat before her Jaime tried to examine her face but she turned her head to the right.

“Please, Princess, you don’t have to turn away,” he assured, removing the glove from his hand before reaching out to brush her hair back. She let him move it, revealing the dark pink scar. Jaime felt his inside clench but met her eyes with a smile. “Even such a scar does little to dim your beauty, niece.”

Myrcella lowered her gaze and smiled. “Thank you, Uncle.”

“I promise I’ll see the man who did this punished.” Jaime waited until her eyes raised before asking, “Could you tell me exactly what happened?”

Myrcella seemed somewhat nervous, surely shaken by the memory, but pushed through to tell him. “Princess Arianne wanted to go riding. Gerold Dayne was among the group riding with us. He…”

He didn’t say much, but then when we decided to return to Sunspear he drew his sword and struck
me.” She sniffled, but took a breath before meeting his eyes, her own glassy as she told him, “Ser Arys died trying to protect me.”

Jaime reached out to clasp her hand within his, shushing her as she sniffed and wiped her eyes with her free hand. “I wish I could have been there instead.”

“None of us knew he would do anything,” she said shaking her head. “I thought him odd, perhaps a bit pompous, but nice enough. No one thought he would try to hurt me.”

Jaime hated this. He hadn’t felt so helpless since he had to stand outside the king’s chamber listening to Rhaella scream whenever Aerys saw fit to be with her. Not even when he was in chains in the North. He had known he would come out of that okay but he could do nothing to change what had happened to Myrcella. To his daughter.

He felt himself start to speak, to ask her about her time in Dorne, but stopped himself, sliding his hands from hers as he smiled to her. “Tommen’s asked you to join him for supper with Tyrion and Jon. I’m sure your mother will be here before then to check on you. If you need anything let Loras know. It’s not official, but for now consider him your sworn shield.”

When he left Myrcella Jaime somehow felt as if that had been the more challenging one for him to speak with. For a second he’d wanted to tell her the truth, to let her know as her father he would get vengeance for her. He wanted to console her and make her feel better much as he had Cersei whenever she was upset. For all his life he’d thought Cersei the only person he loved, but he felt seeing Myrcella hurt much as he had seeing Cersei after Robert smacked her. He could do nothing about it yet ached to do anything, even if it hurt him he would do it to make them better.

For the first time Jaime wished Cersei had just sent him to go attack the Starks. Ever since he returned it felt as if he was losing his edge. It had been so easy to cast aside his own children but now he feared for their safety beyond the measure of a kingsguard and ached at their pain. It felt like he was going mad and it he didn’t know how to stop it.

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Jon had been surprised to find Aurane among those gathered to greet them, let alone learning he had joined the small council.

“I’ve convinced the queen mother to let me build a fleet of ten dromonds,” he told Jon with a laugh after they met in the courtyard.

“Then I guess this means you won’t be captaining a ship for me anytime soon.”

A grin stretched across the Velaryon bastard’s lips as he said, “Who knows where the winds may lead us, my lord.”

Jaime’s arrival cut Jon’s thoughts short as Aurane excused himself, leaving Jon to speak with the kingsguard. Once he left Jon alone he turned his attention back on the squires. Or at least he attempted to, his mind lingering on Aurane’s words. Even one of those ships would be a boon for him, not to mention having Aurane to lead them. If he could trust Aurane to control his ships Jon could focus his attention elsewhere.

He spent his afternoon considering the possibilities, forcing himself to stop when he prepared for supper lest the Lannisters somehow read it in him. Much as he had since his first day of training aboard the ship, Jon tied a sash around the waist of his surcoat, securing it with his ringing brooch before putting on his sword belt. Though he was in King’s Landing Jon decided to keep Dark Sister
with him, so hoped to keep it sheathed.

Edric knocked on his door to tell him he’d been called to supper so followed his squire. They met Tyrion along the way, who smirked to Jon’s questioning look. “If I must eat with them I won’t do so alone.”

Loras flashed Jon a smile before signaling the guards to open the door, letting them make their way past to find the Lannisters sat at a table loaded with food. Tommen was sat with Margaery and Cersei to either side of him while Rosamund flashed Jon a smile from her seat beside Margaery and Jaime sat beside Cersei.

“You came!” Tommen exclaimed with a grin. “Come eat! You can have as much as you want!” He puffed his cheeks out a bit and said in a deeper voice, “So says the king!” He barely made it halfway through before he started snickering.

While Jon chuckled Tyrion made a point of walking around the table to take the last seat beside Rosamund rather than sit beside his siblings. Taking his seat beside Jaime, Jon nodded to Tommen. “Thank you for inviting us.”

“You can eat with me anytime you want,” Tommen said with a smirk. “I’ll make sure you’re taken care of along as you’re here.” The boy blinked and looked around. “Where’s Ghost? I asked the cooks to prepare their biggest bones for him.”

Smiling at the kind gesture Jon told him, “He ran off as we were boarding the ships in Dorne. He was miserable the whole way to Sunspear. I guess he just couldn’t stand another voyage so took off on his own. I’m sure he’ll show up eventually. Ser Jaime’s said he would ask the guards to keep an eye out for him, so hopefully not too long.”

Tommens nodded, looking to Jaime. “Make sure no one hurts him. I want Ghost to meet Ser Pounce.”

“I’ll make sure they know,” Jaime said with a laugh.

“My dear king is so considerate,” Margaery said holding Tommen’s hand and smiling to him.

Tommens beamed at her, clearly enjoying praise from a pretty girl.

As they ate, Jon noticed Tyrion keeping his gaze from passing over his siblings while Cersei spent time shifting between glaring at him, frowning at Myrcella or watching Margaery help Tommen, wiping his mouth or handing him his goblet. Though Jon had merely been looking for a way to ease the tension of the room, he should have known better than to ask, “What happened to the Tower of the Hand?”

“I had it burned with wildfire,” Cersei said with smile, turning her gaze on Tyrion, “along with the whore who helped Oberyn. Though I made sure to block the little hideaways they used so she couldn’t escape.”

Tyrion briefly frowned at the thought of Shae trapped in the burning tower, but finally turned his gaze to his sister. “I notice Varys isn’t here. Was he in the tower as well?”

Jaime furrowed his brow as Cersei’s arched. “He disappeared shortly after you left.”

Tyrion scoffed, setting down his fork. “Meaning the actual man who killed our father goes free while Oberyn rots in a cell.”
Jon noticed how Margaery’s shocked gape almost matched Tommen’s while Rosamund kept her lips closed, letting her eyes widen. Cersei shook her head while Jaime asked, “How do you know it was him?”

“Because he knew about all those little tunnels. He thought himself clever much like Littlefinger did. They think themselves better than the crown because they think themselves smarter.”

“Why would he poison father?” asked Cersei.

“Does it matter? He disappeared just before father dies and you decide to arrest the man who stuck around rather than look for the perfumed mummer?”

“Oberyn made no secret that he wanted vengeance against father,” said Cersei.

“He wanted to see father suffer,” Tyrion said staring at Cersei. “I’ve little doubt he’s the kind of fool who thinks it okay to punish a child for the crimes of their father, so the fact you and Jaime still breath are proof enough for me the man didn’t kill father. The fact we’ve any coin left to our names is proof enough. Yet now with father gone we have no one guiding us, no Warden of the West.”

“Daven Lannister is Warden of the West,” Cersei said as if she was telling Tyrion he wouldn’t be getting what he wanted for his nameday.

She clearly expected him to be annoyed but Tyrion smirked and looked to Jaime. “Find people you trust to check the sewers, dungeon and every chamber in the keep for secret passages and exterminate all of Varys’ little birds, though they’re more like rats who will do as their master demands.”

“Is this how you show your loyalty?” Cersei asked with a huff. “The Martells have let my daughter be scarred and you think to aide them? To cast doubt on Oberyn’s guilt?”

“And?” Tyrion held up his hand as he said, “I imagine Oberyn has less allies in this city than I have fingers on one hand and I’ve seen how you lot hold trials. He’ll need all the help he can get.”

Jon noticed Cersei’s agitation fade briefly as she glanced at Tyrion’s hand. A smile tugged at her lips before she shook her head and turned her attention to her food. Jon knew that wasn’t good, but wasn’t sure why.

When dinner ended Jon returned to his room with Edric and found the Sand Snakes stood outside his door. As he approached he saw they wore sheepish expressions, which surprised him.

“Good evening, my ladies.”

“We owe you an apology, my lord,” Obara said bowing her head.

“For?” Jon said opening his door, waving for them to enter.

Once they were all inside the women turned to him and Nymeria said, “You spoke out for our father before the king. When we told him he… He had tears in his eyes. It seems half those who arrived with him have left and among the few left that support him none have made a difference, but you said it to King Tommen who believed you. Before the small council and half the court you spoke on his behalf and had it heard by the one who could overrule whatever tricks Cersei uses.”

“We thought ill of you but you’ve given our father a chance at freedom,” Tyene said with an apologetic smile.
The sisters all looked to one another before Nymeria said, “Prince Doran arrested us to stop us from riding here to free our father.” Seeing Jon’s confusion she explained, “That was why we were at Sunspear.”

“We weren’t involved with whatever happened to Myrcella,” said Obara. “We were locked away so had little idea what took place.”

“My brother rode to war for the same thing,” Jon said with a laugh. “Even with all the men of the North and Riverlands he still hasn’t won.”

“But he has his father back,” said Tyene.

Meeting her blue eyes he responded, “Because I helped him.”

The sister’s were clearly shocked by his admission. “How?” asked Obara.

“I convinced Joffrey to send him to the Wall. He made me flog him, but he sent him north where some waited and freed him.” Jon crossed his arms as he watched them take in his words. “Eddard Stark lives not because my brother rode to war, but because I convinced a cruel king to show mercy.”

It was Tyene who asked, “Why share this with us?” While he hadn’t exactly admitted to helping those who freed Eddard, the implication was obvious.

“Because I want you to trust me enough to explain why you wanted to risk Cersei killing your father to start another war. I doubt any of you would risk his life. Was it Prince Doran? I know it was his men who slew Ser Arys.”

“How?” asked Nymeria.

“Because I’ve been guarding Myrcella since I was twelve and know when she lies better than any but Barristan Selmy. Gerold Dayne attacking her wasn’t a lie but him killing Ser Arys was. So if Arianne was quiet because she had some hand in what happened, but it wasn’t one of her party who slew Arys, that makes me think Prince Doran learned of her plot and saw the risk of it so sent his men to stop her. Ser Arys might have thought they meant to harm Myrcella so attacked and died, which was an opening Gerold used to attack Myrcella.” Once he finished he asked arching his brow, “Am I close?”

It seemed his effort in thinking up a way to explain him knowing beyond Rosamund telling him had worked as all three women stood shocked by his piecing together what Doran had told them happened. At first he thought none would answer but Obara nodded. “As far as we know.”

“So it was Arianne,” Jon said with a sigh. “Do you think she had a hand in what Gerold did?”

All three women shook their head. “Never,” Tyene assured, then hesitated before deciding to just speak. “She wanted to crown Myrcella over Tommen.”

Jon frowned. “Why? It’s not as if she would take the throne. Trystane or maybe Quentyn would become Myrcella’s prince consort.”

“But she would take Sunspear,” said Nymeria. “She believed Prince Doran wants to push her aside to place Quentyn as prince of Dorne despite her being the eldest.”

“Why would he want to?” asked Jon. “Dorne’s been led by women for ages.”
“We don’t know, though I know Princess Arianne found a letter saying as much years ago,” Tyene said frowning at the memory of finding her cousin crying afterward. “Prince Doran wrote of Quentyn taking his place to rule Dorne over Arianne.”

“She told us she believed our uncle would let our father die her so he could convince the lords of Dorne to go to war,” Nymeria said crossing her arms sheepishly. “She thought he would use that as a way to convince them to pass her over so they could have their leader ride to war with them like Quentyn would.”

Jon reached over to scratch his shoulder. “Well at least we don’t have to worry about that now.”

Before Tyene could speak there was a knock at the door and Jon held up a hand to silence them as he called out. “Who’s there?”

“Jaime,” came the voice on the other side. “I’d hoped we might spar to work off our meal.”

Obara grinned. “I want to watch.”

Jon rolled his eyes, walking to the door and opening it. Jaime looked past him to see the Sand Snakes and his squire. Looking to Jon with a smirk he teased, “I heard you had a thing for Dornish girls but all three? You’re generous to share with the boy.”

Nymeria scoffed. “He wishes.”

Jon shook his head. “Give me time to have Edric retrieve my armor and sword and I’ll meet you in the yard.”

“You’re welcome to watch the lord lose, my ladies,” Jaime said with a nod to the Sand Snakes before turning to leave.

“I guess that means I’ll be back,” Edric said with a sigh before looking to Jon and asking quietly, “should I take your sword back with me?”

Jon shook his head. “She’ll stay with me for now.”

Once Edric left and Jon closed the door he found the Sand Snakes giving him examining looks.

“What are you?” asked Nymeria. “At times you seem a Lannister dog and others it’s as if you work against them.”

With a smile Jon answered, “I’m my own man.”

It took some time for Edric to return, the Sand Snakes using it to share that their father was well enough, though clearly not fed well. He’d been shocked to see they were his guest and almost furious with Jon for bringing them before hearing what he’d said to Tommen.

When Edric returned he helped Jon quickly don his armor, switching Dark Sister for his blunt training sword. Edric held Dark Sister while following Jon and the Sand Snakes to the training yard. There he found not only Jaime waiting for him but Loras, who took the chance to greet Jon for real with a brief hug and pat on the back.

“Didn’t take you long to return to us,” Loras said with a smirk.

“I take it you’ve found another sparring partner once I left?” Jon said to Jaime, who shrugged.

“He saw me and asked what I was waiting for.”
“I don’t mean to intrude,” Loras assured, “only observe.”

Jon drew his blunt sword and looked to Jaime as he entered the ring. The kingsguard smirked before lowering the visor of his helm and drawing his sword. Once Jon lowered his visor Jaime tapped his sword against his vambrace to signal their start.

On the second tap Jaime dashed forward, slashing horizontally, forcing Jon to step back and hold his sword straight at Jaime, keeping the point on him. When Jaime tried to knock his sword aside Jon rolled the tip of his, dodging the blade and keeping his aimed on Jaime’s chestplate.

“You’re dexterity’s improved. You’re keeping your circles tight.” Jaime’s smirk was audible. “But you’re about to back into the rail.”

Jon chuckled. “I know my place, Jaime. I’ve still some space before then.”

“Good. Then you’ve no excuse,” Jaime said dashing to Jon’s right, only to stop halfway and make a hard left, slashing at Jon as he turned to cut Jaime off. The tip of Jaime’s blunt sword nearly scraped the front of Jon’s helm just as he threw his head back, waving his sword to knock Jaime’s aside. However the Kingslayer raised his sword, pointing it toward the sky to avoid Jon’s before pushing forward, keeping up with Jon’s backstep and bringing the blunt blade down on his shoulder.

Lowering his sword to accept the hit, Jon sighed while Jaime returned to his starting position. Once Jon had returned to his Jaime once again tapped his vambrace, but this time Jon dashed forward, diverting from his straight charge to round Jaime. The kingsguard tracked him, turning just in time to raise his sword, blocking the slash Jon threw at him. The tip of his sword aimed at the ground, Jaime thrust it down, pushing Jon’s down just enough that when Jaime slashed up his the impact of his sword on Jon’s helm echoed through the yard.

Jon backed away, but once again dashed the moment he could, however this time Jaime matched him and their swords clashed. As Jaime reached out for Jon’s arm, the knight in black armor released his dual grip on his sword to catch Jaime’s hand. However that left his arms crossed. Once again he could almost hear Jaime’s smirk as he yanked Jon forward, unbalancing him while thrusting his foot into the boy’s gut. To leave no doubt of his victory he twisted his right hand to thrust his blunt sword at Jon’s heart just as they separated.

They had well over a dozen brief matches and all but one ended in Jaime’s victory, and that had more to do with Jon using an atypical strategy. While they were exchanging blows, Jon dropped to his knees, letting Jaime’s pass over his head while thrusting his own blade into Jaime’s chest. Of course just as the thrust landed he noticed Jaime had already diverted his swing, which would have hit Jon if Jaime hadn’t stopped it.

As the men sheathed their swords and removed their helms to reveal their sweat soaked faces, Jon saw Jaime wore a prideful grin. “You’ve improved, though you’re not yet Selmy’s equal.”

“I’m certainly not yours,” Jon said with a nod. It stung to have proven, but Jon couldn’t be too upset. He had at least kept up with Jaime for the most part, and followed everything he did, which he struggled to do years ago.

“Not yet,” Jaime said with a shrug.

Jon saw the intended praise and suddenly realized Jaime hadn’t said a word the entire time they sparred. Every other time he’d met him in the yard at night Jaime had spent half the time talking, asking Jon questions, but this time he hadn’t said anything. This time Jaime had been serious. Even
if he wasn’t his equal, the fact that Jaime respected him enough to not hold back and take him serious struck Jon deeper than he’d expected. While Jon thought Jaime had been awful for what he did to Bran and Eddard, he’d always respected his skill with a sword, so knowing Jaime did the same for him was enough to have Jon fighting his own prideful smile.

“Thank you, Ser Jaime,” Jon said bowing his head.

The kingsguard’s smile softened as he shook his head. “We’ll spar again at least once before you leave.” With that he bowed his head to Jon and the others then departed.

Loras let out a breath as he came over to Jon, clasping his shoulder. “You did well. I’d say you’re even better than when you slew the Mountain.”

“He’s been training every day we sailed.” They turned to find Tyrion approaching, having been standing off to the side to avoid his brother. “Every morning he faces a dozen men, often in pairs, and these ones,” he said with a thumb toward Obara and Nymeria. “Not to mention the time he spends with our squires.”

Loras grinned to Jon, making the young lord sigh. “Tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Originally I had it more obvious that Myrcella stumbling and being helped by Edric was practiced as a way to hopefully counter any blame people might turn on him for Gerold. Same for Tommen's moment of hesitation about Myrcella he brushes off cause he figures they wouldn't go this far with a game.

Early on I was planning to have Shae hanging somewhere Tyrion sees it but thought her in the tower worked better. Also had it more explicit Tyrion smirks when Cersei taunts him with Daven being Warden of the West because he doesn't care about not having the position since he's sided with Jon.

First draft had a completely different take on what Jon says to Tommen to help Oberyn, but I think this ultimately works better with what's to come.

Hopefully people pick up on Jon copying Jaime's start signal for matches in the earlier chapter.

Next Chapter: After Ellaria comes to thank him Jon spars with Loras, makes good on his bet with Obara, and reignites an old flame.
A Day of Triumphs

Chapter Summary

After Ellaria comes to thank him, Jon spars with Loras, makes good on his bet with Obara, and reignites an old flame.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It felt rare for Jon to go to sleep as content as he did after his first night in King’s Landing. Even in loss he’d achieved a victory of sorts, one he knew not many shared. It was a minuscule victory and did nothing to help the countless problems and responsibilities he had, and yet it helped him cast them all aside for the night and get a fairly peaceful sleep. The dream of Myrcella once again stroking his head certainly helped.

The next day he woke to train Edric and Podrick with Thoros while Tyrion sat off to the side overcoming a night of drinking. By the time his hangover faded enough to stop clutching his head Tyrion noticed Obara and Nymeria were approaching the training ground with Tyene and Ellaria Sand.

Oberyn’s exotic paramour stood at the railing with the Sand Snakes until Jon noticed them and told the squires to finish with Thoros. Making his way to the Dornish group, Jon gave each a nod before looking to Ellaria. “My lady, how have you been?” he asked standing before her.

It was only then he saw her eyes were glassy, her smile shaking slightly as she reached over to pull Jon into an embrace. “Thank you. Thank you. You’ve given us hope where I thought we had none but my prince risking himself in some foolish trial by combat. I can never repay you.”

He felt her tears on his collar, his hand rubbing at her back. “I’m sorry it came to this. If I could guarantee his freedom I would, but for now this is the best I can do.”

Ellaria sniffled as she pulled her head back. “You’ve done so much for us, dear boy. So much more than we deserve. I’m the one who needs apologize. I swear upon my life I will never forget what you’ve done.”

“I’ve done nothing deserving of this,” Jon said sympathetically reaching up to let his thumb brush a tear from her cheek. “So long as I can help it Oberyn will not die. None of House Martell would if the gods favored me.”

Ellaria marveled at his words, shaking her head while the Sand Snakes looked on in confusion. “What has House Martell ever done for you to deserve this?”

A somber smile touched his lips as Jon took her hands in his, meeting her eyes. “I’m truly sincere when I say I wish I could tell you. All I can say is I care for House Martell as though they were my own blood.”

Ellaria’s eyes widened briefly, catching that Jon had let slip that he still cared for House Stark, but in doing so said he considered House Martell his family. With a laugh she asked, “Was your
mother perhaps some forgotten lady of Martell? Some daughter to Ser Lewyn Martell? A cousin of my prince?"

Jon’s smile was pulled by the frown he fought off. “It’s not so simple, I’m afraid.”

Ellaria chuckled, reaching up to brush a strand of Jon’s hair behind his ear with her own somber smile. “Whatever ties you to House Martell, consider it forever bound to you and you to her.”

“I don’t think Prince Doran or Princess Arianne will agree,” he said with a laugh.

“They both of them are fools,” Ellaria said with a scoff. “If not for you returning Princess Myrcella I’ve no doubt they would have killed my love to avenge her. And then where would it get us? These girls would come seeking their vengeance,” she said motioning to Obara, Nymeria and Tyene, “and when they die my daughters who worship them will come to avenge them, and my youngest ones to avenge their sisters. You’ve stopped us from losing eight lives because of the foolishness born of Arianne’s ignorance and Doran’s inability to open his mouth when it matters. You have saved eight Martell lives, my lord.”

His eyes widened when she grasped his hand in both hands and pulled his head down to place a kiss on his forehead. Like an echo from another life he saw in his mind a beautiful, slim Dornish woman doing the same to a pale dark haired boy. Blinking the heat from his eyes, Jon nodded as she released him. “Thank you, my lady.”

“Ellaria. I will except nothing else.”

“Ellaria,” said Jon. After taking a breath he looked to the smirking Sand Snakes. “Shall we?”

Obara was the first to leap over the railing, having borrowed a blunt spear from the Dornish retinue remaining in King’s Landing. Jon looked to her arching his brow. “Are you looking forward to going shopping today, Obara?” When the woman looked confused, Jon reminded her, “I won our bet.”

Scoffing, the older woman shook her head, raising her spear. “Worry about yourself. You don’t have your armor.”

Jon shrugged. “A mail shirt’s enough.”

The truth was he felt just about invincible, especially after his talk with Ellaria. He felt like he could go take the Stepstones himself right then, but settled for sparring with Sand Snakes. Even without his armor he had little trouble taking more victories than loses from Obara, easily dodging all but the subtlest of techniques. Occasionally Jon would use only his sword but switched between shield and buckler with Obara while using a blunt dagger in his left hand against Nymeria. He’d used one of Nymeria’s spares on the ship and was using one taken from a barrel, so decided to buy one for himself.

Their shopping would have to wait though. Once he finished with the Sand Snakes Jon took some time to go to the godswood, relaxing as he said silent prayers to the weirwood tree watching him until noon. When he arrived at the training yard he found a crowd gathered just as they had years earlier. Not only were there servants and guards, but it seemed half the court had come to watch them.

Stood on a walkway overlooking it all was Tommen standing between Margaery and Rosamund with Jaime, Sandor Clegane and Balon Swann guarding them. Tommen beamed and threw his arm in the air to wave at Jon, who offered a small wave in return. He gave a slight questioning look to
Rosamund which she picked up and answered with a smile.

Tyrion stood with Thoros and Podrick, smirking as he made a bet with the aged Gyles Rosby, Cersei’s appointed master of coin, or lord treasurer as she now called him. Beside him was the bald man in a yellow doublet Jon recognized as Harys Swyft, Tommen’s Hand of the King. Beside him was the master of laws, now justiciar, Orton Merryweather who stood beside a shapely ebony haired Taena Merryweather. Aurane flashed Jon a smirk while Jon answered with a nod.

Across from them he noticed the Dornish remaining in King’s Landing had joined the crowd. Ellaria smiled warmly upon meeting his gaze while the Sand Snakes nodded, smirked and gave a light wave. Daemon Sand stood beside them, a light smile touching his lips as he gave a nod while mouthing a silent thanks. It was when he saw Jynessa stood beside him with a solemn smile that Jon felt a fleck of guilt, but quickly brushed it aside to smile at her before turning his attention to the ring.

Loras stood waiting, smirking as he watched Edric swiftly help Jon put on the armor he’d asked him to bring. Rather than wear their full kits both men had opted for gambesons, mail shirts and cuirasses with sallets, which Jon was thankful for. Training every morning aboard the Princess Rhaenys in full armor had been hellish but not only helped him avoid arriving with his body forever stained black and blue; it had grown his stamina so even the morning sparring with the Sand Snakes hadn’t left Jon drained as he stood before the Flower Knight.

It was Loras who started things by tapping his side with his sword, both men forgoing shields. When the Flower Knight rushed him, Jon thrust his sword forward, stopping Loras’ charge. When Loras tried to slash at him as Jaime had the night before, Jon dipped his blade beneath his in a similar way, but then dashed forward. Loras’ eyes widened, swinging his sword back, but Jon turned his hands, catching the blade against his blunt sword. The two sparked as Jon’s slid along Loras’s blade, pushing Loras’ just enough so he could slash across the Flower Knight’s chestplate.

Though Jon had a dominant opening, it didn’t take long for Loras’ smile to fade as he grew more focused, landing his own hits on Jon. After he landed his second hit beneath Loras’ armpit, the two opened their next match by rushing one another, their swords ringing as much as Jon’s bell brooch every time they bounced off one another again and again in a flurry of rapid exchanges neither won. Each read the other’s movement and caught it, but their counter attack was parried and their followups blocked. It lasted almost two minutes before a frustrated Loras swung full force at Jon, knocking his sword aside before turning his blade to hit Jon’s shoulder.

The fierce exchange had garnered applause, though both men walked away frustrated. Jon had predicted it but had underestimated how much power Loras would put into his swing, leaving him open when he’d planned to dodge and counter. However his frustration cooled while Loras’ grew, ensnaring him as they typically did whenever their matches went too long. Jon lost every clash of their blades, Loras’ anger allowing him to easily overpower the cool headed young lord, but nothing came of it as Jon began dodging nearly all of the Flower Knight’s followups. The crowd watched as the White Wolf deftly avoided strike after strike, picking the Flower Knight apart like a maid might a daisy.

Watching Jon sidestep yet another slash from the Tyrell only to step forward and slash across his stomach, Jaime couldn’t help but smirk. Jon hadn’t just won, by the end he’d done so handily and with skill. He hadn’t overpowered the stronger Loras or used uncommon tactics, he played by the rules of a knight and won with his sword alone. It was rare for Jaime Lannister to look forward to facing anyone but he felt a wave of anticipation at the thought of another match with Jon.

Loras let out a grunt, looking to Jon after he tossed his sword to a Tyrell page. With a laugh he
said, “This would be different were we at the list.”

Jon chuckled but nodded. He didn’t doubt it as not only had Loras always been better with a lance than a sword but Jon had barely done any jousting since the Mountain cut him down. Apart from a few times while he’d been training Edric and Podrick, he’d kept his focus on the sword and few others. Barristan had always made sure he was at least somewhat skilled with any weapon he should touch, but Jon had focused in on the sword. It was something he enjoyed but he would have to make sure he made an effort to grow his riding and lance work lest he fall behind. Such skills might be a greater boon than any with a blade should he end up riding to war across an open field.

The crowd gave light applause as the knights shook hands before sharing a brief hug. Loras hurried off to return to his duties as Rosamund’s assigned kingsguard while Jon made his way to Edric, removing his sallet while his squire helped remove his cuirass. Tyrion came to the other side of the rail with a handful of coin and a smirk. “You’ve won me a fine night, my lord.”

“I’m glad,” Jon said with a sigh of relief once the cuirass was off, letting the heat swelling within it escape. Were he not in the midst of a slowly dwindling crowd he might have stripped to his bare chest, but settled for his mail and gambeson, leaving the thin tunic beneath. Seeing Ellaria and the Sand Snakes making their way toward him Jon told Obara, “Give me time to wash and we can leave.”

The Sand Snake shook her head. “Take all you need.”

Jynessa clicked her tongue, looking from Obara to Jon. “Set your sights on another Dornish woman, have you?”

Jon shook his head. “Just making good on a bet.”

Jynessa’s smile softened as she watched Jon climb out of the ring. She placed a hand on his chest to stop him, leaning in to press her cheek against his as she whispered, “I don’t know how long you’ll be, but I hoped I might visit tonight.”

Though part of him wanted to give himself distance to shrink the flicker of guilt he felt seeing her, the hunger within him was greater. His hand on her hip he nodded, whispering as he kissed her cheek, “When I return.”

As Jynessa stepped away from him Jon failed to hide his sheepish smile, which garnered chuckles from Tyrion and a smirk from Thoros. While the Sand Snakes all wore expression of amused interest he noticed Ellaria was frowning watching the Blackmont heir depart. Turning to Jon she stepped forward to hug him before offering a kind smile. “You were marvelous.”

“Thank you for coming,” he said with a nod as she turned to leave. Jon noticed how Daemon followed Ellaria, scanning the crowd in a way that told Jon Oberyn had asked his former squire to guard his paramour.

Once Jon cleaned himself off in his room and changed to something fresh he found Obara and they rode to the street of steel with Edric. Entering Tobho Mott’s shop the slim serving girl greeted them warmly, though gasped when she saw Jon.

“The White Wolf,” she said with a wide smile.

Obara scoffed seeing the thin girl fawn over Jon, who seemed surprised. Her reaction caught the attention of Tobho Mott, who walked over with a smirk. “Welcome back, my lord.”

“Thank you,” Jon said with a nod to both the girl and Mott. “I was hoping to purchase armor for my
“What kind of armor?” Tobho asked, motioning for them to join him further inside.

“I can’t force her to wear a full suit, but I’d hope for greaves, vambraces, a gorget, spaulders or pauldrons, and at least a cuirass. A mail shirt too, unless—”

“I have my own,” she said, shaking her head when he looked to her. “I’m not a fool.”

“What of a helm?”

“I’ve a visorless sallet,” she told them.

“If you’re forgoing the visor then a burgonet might be better,” Tobho said, showing her a helmet with a fixed peak above the open face, hinged cheekpieces and a ridge along the top.

Obara looked it over and nodded. “Alright.”

“Will you want it custom?” Tobho asked, looking her over. “I may have a few pieces that could fit you with minor adjustments.”

She shrugged. “I care not, he’s paying.”

Jon shook his head. “Try whatever you have made already. Anything else can be custom forged and colored for House Martell.”

“You’re of House Martell?” Tobho asked Obara.

“First daughter of Prince Oberyn,” she said with pride.

“I have a few pieces in the Dornish style, come,” Tobho said, waving her along.

Jon stayed behind to look over a table full of daggers. With a glance to Edric he asked, “What about you? Anything you want?”

“I’ve all I need, my lord,” Edric said, shaking his head. “My armor still fits well enough.”

Jon returned his gaze to the daggers as he thought back on the man who gave him the white hilted rondel dagger he wore. Barristan hadn’t let him buy sword or armor until he’d sneaked off on his own to buy them so he could play the Knight of White Crows. Edric was younger than Jon had been then and yet had rode to war with him and taken lives. He wished he could be a better knight for his squire, a better mentor for the boy, but hoped at least he might prove a better king for the young lord of Starfall.

Though they left Mott’s shop empty-handed it was only because it would take time to prepare all they ordered. Obara would get her new set of armor and Jon had opted to buy two sets of daggers, one sharp and one blunt. He’d bought another rondel in case Barristan’s was ever damaged as well as a baselard dagger. He’d asked for both to have their hilts done in black and crimson, not only for his true house colors and those of his false sigil but so he would never mistake the rondel for the one Barristan gave him.

As they mounted their horses and made their way back to the Red Keep, Jon asked Obara, “Once your armor’s done I’ll help you get used to wearing it with a few matches.”

“Good to know you make good on your bets so long as you win,” she said, shaking her head, though he noticed a smile touch her lips.
Riding beside her he said quietly, “I hid my presence in the shadow city to avoid seeing your cousin with the princess.”

Obara’s eyes narrowed as she turned to him. “What do you mean?”

“Since well before I named her Queen of Love and Beauty I’ve cared for Princess Myrcella,” Jon admitted quietly.

Obara gasped, leaning forward slightly. “That’s why you were so enraged at Sunspear.”

Nodding, Jon told her, “I planned to visit the shadow city to ask about pirates in the area and then leave so I might avoid having to see her with her intended. Instead I learned she was attacked. I went to Sunspear without thinking or worrying I would have to suffer her fawning over him as I had days before.”

“And now you’ve rescued her,” said Obara. “Perhaps you intend to convince the crown she would be better off with you?”

“She would,” Jon said meeting her teasing smirk with sincerity, then shook his head, “but I doubt they’d agree to it yet.”

Nodding, Obara’s brow knit as she noted, “Yet?”

Once they returned to the Red Keep and went their own ways Jon made for his chambers before looking to Edric. “Go tell Lady Jynessa I’ve returned. If any ask for me tell them I’m exhausted from the day. If you see a maid have then bring wine as well. After that you can do as you please for the night.”

“The whole night? If you’re exhausted are you sure it wise, my lord?”

Jon smacked his shoulder. “Not you too.”

Edric made his way down the corridor chuckling. Entering his chamber, Jon dusted himself off as best he could and rinsed his hands, beard and hair once again, brushing his fingers through them. It wasn’t long before a maid arrived with a flagon of wine for him and he poured himself a glass while taking a seat, staring at his door.

He’d felt things ended cleanly with them when he left and hoped this wouldn’t complicate things as he didn’t plan to stay too long, but Jon had found his desires seemed to grow after he did left. If not for his aversion to bastards he might have spent his evenings at brothels as Tyrion did. He’d imagined it plenty of times, telling the owner he’d have a woman from every kingdom in Westeros and across the seas he housed. Jon would take them all at once if only so he could have that experience. A part of him enjoyed the thought of being pampered and cared for by the women as much as he did taking them in turns.

The baser part of him was worrying though, so he hoped this might sate it for a time. It had started to get out of hand. More than once along their journey Jon had considered trying for a night with one of the Sand Snakes but ultimately decided he hadn’t trusted them enough. Their connection to Oberyn didn’t help, though Jon found that led him back to the memory of Oberyn offering to let him and Jynessa join him and Ellaria in bed, and though Ellaria wasn’t a traditional beauty she had an exotic sensuality that was appealing. At Ghost Hill he’d considered taking the risk of bedding Valena Toland, but didn’t know her well enough to trust she would take moon tea, not to mention the awkwardness of flirting with Rosamund near. Hells, if not for her betrothal to Beric Jon might have considered flirting with Edric’s aunt, her beauty not going unnoticed by Jon.
Jonathan wished he could be like Oberyn seemed to him. Though he didn’t share the Dornish prince’s apparent affection for men he admired Oberyn’s willingness to be open about his desires, finding it almost admirable. His bastards had been welcomed among his family so he had no reason to fear one of the women he and Ellaria took to bed giving birth. He hadn’t spent years watching a king avoid his family to spend time with his mistresses. He didn’t have to fear he might follow a line of Targaryen kings who proved themselves unworthy. To Jon his desires felt like madness.

When he heard the knock on his door Jon downed the rest of his cup and made for the door. Opening it he found Jynessa in a yellow dress with black sleeves and pink laces across her abdomen, the colors of House Blackmont. Her dark hair had been brushed to her left, hanging to her chest while her right side was bare for him to greet her with a kiss of her cheek.

“Come in,” he said taking her hand, guiding her inside before closing the door and turning to her. When she turned to him he found a somber smile coloring her dark lips. Reaching up to brush his fingers across her cheek beneath her hair he asked, “Is something wrong?”

Jynessa quickly shook her head, sliding her hand over his and taking a breath. “I’ve just missed this.”

She gasped when his left hand grasped her hip, pulling her to him as she clutched his jerkin and pulled him to her lips. Jynessa smiled feeling his hand slid from her cheek to her neck, his fingers pressing into her breast and making her moan against his mouth before his tongue brushed her lips. She could feel him tug at the laces on the front of her dress and giggled, grasping his hand to stop him.

“Let me, lest you tear it as you did my teal one,” she said turning away from him.

“I said I would replace it,” Jon said slowly following her as she walked toward his bed.

“The memory was worth it,” she said as she came to a stop and looked to him over her shoulder. Then she shrugged and her slack dress fell from her, dropping to the floor leaving only her pale olive skin. She climbed onto his bed and snickered as she shook her rear at him, “Come show me your burning sword, my lord.”

Her moans soon filled his chamber, nearly screaming as she’d hit her peak before coaxing his. It was only after their first time they stopped to drink the wine he’d had brought to him, but soon her wine stained lips were around him and then whimpering in his ear. He felt a sense of pride hearing her praise and pleading, her fingers digging into his back to let him know the truth of her shivering moans.

Jon expected her to leave after a few hours but midnight came and passed with her still in his room. She was sat across his lap giggling as she told him of what she’d been doing since his departure while kissed her shoulder and collar. Her hands kneaded at his chest, fingers brushing the dark hairs across it as she dug her palm into the muscle of his unscarred pectoral. It was when he lightly bit her collar that her sapphire eyes darkened once again and she moved to straddle him, reaching down and gasping when she put him inside her once again.

He dreaded waking the next morning to train with the squires and Sand Snakes, but he was too focused on enjoying the moment to stop himself. It felt much like he did well into his longer training sessions. All he did felt instinctual, almost automatic, and yet pushing himself to do better every time. Here his victories came when she did, her laying limp against him as he kissed her neck feeling like a triumph.

When she finally pulled herself away from him Jon fell back against his headboard and let out a
long breath, smiling as he watched her go about washing herself. Seeing him look at her she shook her head, wetting a rag she then threw at him to clean himself while she finished up on her own.

Walking back to his bed moments later she found him having put on his smallclothes and breeches. He stopped tying them to hold out her dress, which he’d picked up and put on a chair earlier.

“No tears,” he said with a smirk as she took it and slipped into it.

“I’ve already had some but after tonight I may need a flagon of moon tea,” she said with a laugh as she started tying the pink laces.

“Sorry if it was too much,” Jon said sheepishly. “I guess I got carried away.”

Jynessa turned to him with a laugh, reaching up to stroke his cheek. “Nonsense. Tonight was… I will forever look back on it fondly.”

“As will I,” said Jon, sliding on a tunic and sitting to put on his boots while she looked for her shoes.

Once she took the seat across the table from him and both finished with their shoes, their eyes met and they sat up, turning to face each other. Jynessa wore a solemn smile as she reached across the table to take his hands in hers.

“You’re a good man, Jon,” she said

“What brought that on?”

Jynessa shook her head, lifting one of his hands to her lips and placing a kiss on the back before meeting his eyes. “I want you to know I care for you,” she said solemnly. “I know I’m not your great love but I hope you hold a spot of love for me as I do for you.”

Though surprised, Jon nodded. “I do. I’ve always enjoyed our time together.”

“As have I,” she said squeezing his hand. “Never once have I regretted a single moment with you. Though we may not spend our lives together or fill a keep with babes, to say I love you is no lie.”

Amidst the sincerity in her voice Jon noted a hint of desperation that made him think on how she had clung to him as they laid together. Every since they’d gone to bed she had barely let him from her grasp apart from when she went to take a drink or clean herself. “Nessa, if this is to make me stay…”

“It’s not,” Jynessa assured while rising from her chair. Jon did the same and she brushed her hand across his cheek. “I just want you to know how I feel before you leave again.”

“Jynessa I-”

Her hand slid to his lips, stopping him as he started to shake his head. “Don’t. For now just think of tonight and know you’ve a place in my heart. Let me go to bed sore and thinking I’ve some small space in yours as well.”

Jon sighed, but nodded. Once she took her finger from his lips Jon leaned in to kiss her which she met with a smile before parting her lips. Once they separated Jon kept his gaze locked with hers as he told her, “Let me walk you back.”

Sliding her arms around his, she followed him out of his chambers and they walked the darkened
corridors, ignoring the curious looks of a few guards. Once they reached her door Jynessa turned to Jon and slipped an arm around his neck, pulling him into a kiss. He’d almost expected something heated before they ended up backing into her room for another round, but the kiss was almost chaste. There was a hint of emotion but little of the Dornish passion she seemed to exude when they were together.

Once she pulled away, her fingers trailing his jaw before falling from his chin, Jynessa opened her door and waved to Jon. “Sleep well, my lord.”

She closed the door and Jon walked back to his room just as confused as he was enthused by his time with her. He was sure something was on her mind but decided not to let it ruin his day. If it was something he needed to know she would have told him. Worrying over it would only ruin his mood and keep him up, and he was feeling the strain of a long day before he even made it back to his room.

Laying his sword belt on the table beside him, Jon sank into a chair and sighed after tossing another log in the dying hearth of his room. He was so tired he felt every ache of the day resonating through him, keeping him from peacefully drifting to sleep, so he poured himself the last of the wine.

He wanted to help Jynessa but also didn’t want to deal with another problem. It felt as if he was already struggling to keep up with those he had. Rosamund had to stay a secret but he also had to give Myrcella and Sam time to arrive in case they needed to get away with them as well. He had to worry about the realm learning who he was and turning against him, but also knew taking Bloodwing from the Wall meant weakening their defense from wildlings and Others. He had to hope Robb could hold at least the North if not the Riverlands while he went to seek his aunt, who may not even care to help him.

It felt like he had to choose a road to focus on but had no idea where any led beyond forward. He wished he had some kind of guide, but felt alone. He had his friends and companions but it was his responsibility to lead them and his choices which forged their futures.

Letting out a breath, Jon leaned back, downing the last of the wine and watching the flames dance within the hearth before him. The brilliant oranges, golds and reds weaved into each other, casting shadows across his room. Jon watched as the flames twisted until he saw a field of animals shifting before him.

Jon saw a black canine running after a large flaxen cat, but was quickly drawn to where a wolf stood atop a hill of snow. He watched an armored hand break the snow to grasp the wolf’s neck as the sun grew brighter yet the snow remained unmelted. It howled as its fleshed was seared by unseen flames and birds of prey dove in to tear chunks of skin from the wolf until it the hill collapsed. Once the snow settled he watched as a creature climbed out of the muddied earth, realizing only as it stood that it was a hairless lion with a fierce look that softened as a shadow washed over it. Before he could take in the shape of the shadow the sky darkened, leaving only the moon, which he watched crack like ice before shattering. Among the falling remains he saw a wolf fall to earth where it too shattered, but from its crystallized remains a long limb rose and an ivory spider formed. Just as it seemed to turn its gaze on him the dark shook beneath a trio of overlapping roars.

With a gasp Jon woke to Edric knocking on his door. Sitting up in the chair he’d slept in, Jon rubbed his eyes and blinked at the empty hearth. He tried to make sense of the images he’d seen, wondering if it had all been a dream until Edric knocked once again and he set aside his empty cub, rising to begin another day. Though the day before had felt almost ideal the vision left him with a
sense of dread for the day to come.

Chapter End Notes

Ellaria is an interesting character for me. In the books her being against the Sand Snakes vengeance made her so much more interesting, so it was a shame to see the show turn her into a murderous war monger.

Obviously the 'echo' Jon sees is him imagining Elia and him. As I wrote it I noticed how motherly it felt and decided Jon would feel the same, especially with his longing for connections to family. Even with the Starks he hasn't been with them in two years so what he's definitely longing for that kind of a connection.

Considered skipping over Jon's spar with Loras but ended up expanding it a bit to give a quick reminder who is around or on the small council at the moment. Plus it gave me a chance to remind that Jon has just finished weeks of rough training which should help explain a jump in skill.

There's stuff here I thought interesting when we remember Jon is sixteen. When he thinks about Edric it's as if he's an old knight. The pressure he puts on himself as his mentor makes Jon feel he's failing Edric because he's seen bloodshed, but Jon is only three years older.

Then there are his sexual thoughts and desires which are pretty normal for a sixteen year old boy but shaped by his situation. Unlike the Wall he has access to a lot of woman who are attractive in different ways. Not only does he have sexual desires fueling his thoughts but a desire for affection, hence his fantasizing not only about sex with multiple women but having them care for and pamper him and his dueling views of Ellaria as both a maternal figure and a sensual one. But all of that is twisted into something he thinks he has to control and fear because he doesn't want to become another Aegon the Unworthy or Robert Baratheon. To him it feels like madness, another fear of his lest he end up like his grandfather.

Next Chapter: Jon seeks out Thoros to help decipher his visions, learns how wildfire is made, and has a revealing meeting with Ellaria.
Chapter Summary

Jon seeks out Thoros to help decipher his visions, learns how wildfire is made, and has a revealing meeting with Ellaria.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though getting little sleep the night before Jon went to the yard to help Edric and Podrick train. He’d hoped to cut things short and avoid exhausting himself with a repeat of the day before, but when the Sand Snakes came looking to spar he decided to accept.

Ellaria joined them in the middle of their matches, standing off to the side watching with Edric and Thoros. When they finished she complimented her daughters before moving to Jon, who greeted her with a slight smile. “Good morning, Ellaria.”

“To you as well,” said Ellaria. “If it’s not too much trouble, I’d like to invite you to sup with me this evening.”

Though a part of him had hoped he might see Jynessa again tonight, both to try and best the night before as well as figure out what bothered her, Jon quickly nodded. “I’d enjoy that, thank you.”

Ellaria tried to smile, though struggled to maintain it. “I’ll send word.”

Watching the women leave them, Thoros came to Jon’s side arching his brow. “Something wrong?”

“Hm?” Jon turned to him.

“She seemed upset. Almost afraid.”

Jon frowned as he looked to the women’s shrinking backs. “Could it be something with Oberyn?”

“Short of killing him and drawing suspicion to someone else, what can they do?” Thoros asked shaking his head. “The prince is likely safer in his cell waiting for his trial than any of us walking free. He’s certainly less likely to lose his head thanks to you.”

Crossing his arms, Jon looked to Thoros, hesitantly saying, “If you’ve time I’d like to speak with you.”

“Of course, my lord,” said the red priest.

When they arrived at his chambers Jon asked Edric, “Make sure no one comes near the door without us knowing.” The squire quickly nodded and Jon invited Thoros inside. He took a seat in front of the hearth, staring at it as he asked Thoros, “What is like when R’hllor shows you a vision?”

Sinking into his seat, Thoros’ brow knit. “Why do you ask?”
With a sigh Jon said, “I think either I had some kind of dragon dream or I saw something in the hearth last night.”

Thoros whispered as his eyes widened, “What?”

“I was so tired I passed out in this chair while I was watching the fire so it could have just been a dream but… It felt different. Important.” Jon turned to him, concern coloring his face. “It’s either that or madness.”

Thoros smiled sympathetically as he leaned forward. “I doubt that, my lord. I would say as much if I saw madness it you, but I do see the spark of something great. Something I know R’hllor means to grow.” Honestly he felt relief at the thought of R’hllor bestowing the man he followed with a vision. It felt like vindication and proof he’d made the right choice to follow Jon. “What was it you saw?”

“It was all animals. Some of it seems obvious but others…”

“R’hllor isn’t always direct with his message,” Thoros offered. “He speaks in symbols to test us. To challenge us to see beyond what we view and find the truth in what we see.”

Staring at the hearth Jon thought back and recounted all he saw in the flames. Thoros listened quietly before taking a moment to think over all he described, deciding to start at the end.

“What kind of roar was it?” Thoros asked him.

“I don’t know. I didn’t see anything but I could tell it wasn’t just one roar.”

“What about the spider?”

“Old Nan used to tell us the Others rode ice spiders,” Jon said with a shrug. “But what does that have to do with the moon shattering or a wolf falling from it.”

“What color was the wolf?” asked Thoros.

“It looked white, but not like Ghost.” Jon tried to think back and find details. “It was snowy. Like it was just covered in snow and…” Jon opened his eyes and looked to Thoros with a hint of fear. “Bran went beyond the Wall.”

“Your brother?” Thoros shook his head. “Why would he go beyond the Wall?”

Confused, Thoros asked, “How?”

“I-” Jon stopped himself, realizing he’d seen it in once of his dragon dreams. “A dream.”

Frowning, Thoros asked, “Are you sure it wasn’t just a normal dream? I know you want to believe them alive-”

“It was real,” Jon assured.

“It’s easy to believe what we want, Jon,” Thoros warned, “we need to be careful we don’t incorrectly interpret these things or we might do something to make things worse.”

He watched Jon sit in quiet thought for a few seconds before turning to meet his gaze, making sure he saw the sincerity with which he spoke. “I’ve been having dreams where I… I’m Bloodwing. Or
Thoros’ brow sank as he leaned forward. “You mean to say you see through their eyes?”

“It’s more than that,” Jon said shaking his head. “In the dreams I am them. I know Myrcella and Sam are safe because Ghost is with them and sometimes she sits up at night petting him. With Bloodwing I get to fly, I feel the cold winds against my scales. I fought wildlings at the Wall as him. I saw Jeor Mormont’s severed hand laying beside him. Either it’s true or I had dreams of burning wildlings and ripping them apart. Either it’s true or I’m my grandfathers heir.”

The hint of fear in Jon’s voice surprised Thoros, who reached out to grab the young lord’s hand. “Jon you’re not mad. I’ve heard of such things. Beastlings and skinchangers who could make beasts their thralls and live within them. If you’ve such an ability then it’s a gift we can use, not something to fear.”

Jon nodded as Thoros patted his hand. “You’re right.”

Seeing the boy’s concerns soothed filled Thoros with pride, making him smile as he sat back asking, “So you saw Bran while you were in your dragon’s mind?”

“Him and a few others. I thought maybe he was being attacked by this person who smelled like death, but he didn’t seem scared of it before they ran into the woods.” Jon thought back on the dream, shaking his head when he looked to Thoros. “Still it doesn’t explain the moon.”

“Things aren’t so literal. The moon might simply be meant to represent a cold place beyond our reach.”

“And it shattering means the Wall will shatter?”

“I’d hope not, but it’s difficult to say for certain. What about before that?”

“There was the black wolf or dog chasing the cat,” Jon said sitting back.

“Which was it? A dog or a wolf?”

“I don’t know. It saw them only a second before seeing the wolf.”

Thoros thought for a moment before turning to Jon. “I can think of two ways to view it, though I’m not certain of either. If it’s a wolf then I think there’s a fair chance it’s you.”

“But people call me White Wolf.”

“Yet you’re dark of hair and wear black as often as men of the Watch,” Thoros said with a laugh, though his humor quickly faded. “However if it was a dog then we know a dog bound to a type of cat. And since you think it a large cat perhaps it’s simply a young lion. So either you or Clegane are chasing Tommen or Myrcella or perhaps even Rosamund, though we know of one Clegane might hunt should certain facts come to light.”

Jon’s face darkened. “So I’m supposed to stop him?”

“We don’t know it’s him,” Thoros quickly reminded him. “For all we know it’s you or someone else we haven’t considered.”

“If there’s a chance he’ll hurt Myrcella or Tommen or Rosamund,” Jon said turning to Thoros, “then maybe it’s better to just kill him and be sure of it.”
“And end up in a cell alongside Oberyn?”

Without hesitation Jon shook his head. “I could convince Tommen to send me to the Wall and I’d be freed before I got past Winterfell. Even if they send me by boat Robb would send someone to Eastwatch to get me before then. Hells, Bloodwing may come help.”

“I still think it best we avoid that,” said Thoros. “What of the other lion you mentioned? The hairless one.”

“It just climbed out of the mud and then a shadow covered it. I couldn’t see the shape or anything before the sky went dark. I didn’t even see if it was a male of female.”

Sighing, Thoros struggled to think of how they might interpret those, ultimately moving on to the easier one. “The wolf on the snowy hill is more obvious. Someone is going to attack the Starks at Winterfell. You say there were hawks attacking it?”

Jon frowned. “House Fowler’s blazon is a hawk, but I can’t imagine why a Dornish house would suddenly attack them.”

“Are you certain it was a hawk?”

Jon thought back and realized there was another possibility. “House Arryn.”

“A falcon,” Thoros said with a nod.

“They’re going to attack the Starks?” Jon asked looking to Thoros. “I suppose Lysa Arryn is deranged enough to have the Vale attack her sister’s family. Especially with Littlefinger in her ear.” Among other places, he thought shaking his head.

“What of the hand pulling the wolf? If the Dornish are involved then it could be House Allyrion. Their blazon is a golden hand. Or House Gardner who wear a green hand. I’m sure there’s a house in the Iron Islands who use a skeletal hand.”

“One of the Flints use a gray hand,” Jon added while shaking his head, then stopped as he looked to Thoros. “House Glover. The hand was in a gauntlet.”

“A northern house?” Thoros frowned. “Why would they join with the Vale?”

“Could it be the Baratheons? The wolf was burning.”

“Maybe,” said Thoros. “You didn’t say anything about a fire, a stag or even a fox, only that it was burning.”

“There wasn’t a fire. It was like it was so hot out it was burning the wolf.”

“Could it have been the sun?” Thoros said hesitantly. “Perhaps House Martell?”

“It felt different, like everything was cold. The snow on the ground didn’t melt. The sun wasn’t even yellow or red, it—” Jon’s shaking head stilled as he looked to Thoros. “Karstark’s words are The Sun of Winter. The sun was so bright it was white.”

Thoros nodded. “So House Karstark and Glover are going to turn on your brother and attack with the Vale?”

Jon rose from his chair. “We need to write them and warn them!”
Thoros got to his feet asking, “How?” Jon stopped his movement to the door and looked to Thoros. “You don’t want anyone here to know their allegiance.”

“I’ll tell them I’m writing Robb to tell him he’s a cunt,” Jon offered with a laugh, then shook his head. “A raven can reach the wall in what, a sennight? From there it could reach Winterfell in a day or two. I’ll write to Aemon.”

Jon threw open his door, startling Edric who watched Jon stride down the corridor with purpose and rushed to follow him. He arrived at the rookery and had Pycelle show him which raven went to the Wall. He took one of the small parchments Pycelle kept and used his quill to write a letter he watched Pycelle attach to the raven and send off. Like most he wrote it would probably come across as the scrawling of a mad man to all but the few who knew the code.

Once the letter was sent Jon made his way back to the guest chambers before deciding to go to the godswood. Without knowing when their attack would happen Jon couldn’t just go to help them. Even if he went by boat to avoid weeks of riding he couldn’t know if it happened by the time he arrived, and even then it would take him time to ride from White Harbor to Winterfell. If Sam and Myrcella were coming to King’s Landing like he thought then he had to be there when they arrived. The most he could do beyond sending that letter was pray that it arrived in time.

Jon was on his way to the godswood when he saw Rosamund walking through the courtyard and made his way toward her. Loras spotted him and whispered to her, so she stopped and turned to Jon, greeting him with a smile.

“Lord Jon,” she said stepping forward to wrap her arms around him. He could feel the relief pouring from her.

He briefly returned the hug, watching her step back as he asked, “How are you?”

Rosamund saw the meaning of his question in his eyes and nodded. “Fine. Mother visited me after my return but has been busy elsewhere. Helping Tommen rule.”

“Then the gods are good.”

That earned a giggle from Rosamund and a snort from Loras. “Are we set to meet again this afternoon?” the Flower Knight asked.

“Not today,” Jon said shaking his head. “I struggled to sleep so was left unrested.”

Loras glanced to Rosamund, clearly holding back on a teasing comment about Jynessa for her sake. “Another time.”

Turning to Rosamund, Jon asked, “Has Pycelle looked at your scar?”

She nodded, reaching up to gently touch it beneath her hair. “He gave me a new ointment to use before I go to bed and when I wake.”

“Well it seems to be healing well,” he said sincerely before meeting her eyes to ask, “Has it ached at all?”

Rosamund recognized the coded question they’d arranged, asking if she thought anyone suspected her. “Not that I’ve noticed,” she said carefully.

“Should you need anything just ask,” he reminded her.
Rosamund nodded. “I will. Thank you.”

Loras spared him a wave before following the departing princess after her curtsy. Jon went to the godswood where he sat among the red dragon’s breath flowers growing around the heart tree. Once he said his prayer Jon rose and stopped to look at the tree before him as he thought back on all he’d seen in the flames. If it was true and not just madness taking him then it meant the Lord of Light had spoken to him in a way not even the Old Gods had.

“Do you even care?” He asked the tree, shaking his head as he turned to leave but stopping when he heard a crow caw. The bird sat on a branch nearby, staring at him for a moment before it flew away and Jon snorted as he left the godswood.

Word came that his daggers had been finished, so Jon rode with Edric and Thoros to go and pick them up, having already paid the day before. While they were on the Street of Steel Thoros stopped by a smaller shop to buy a pair of cheap swords then led them to an apothecary.

“Are you ill?” Jon asked as the red priest returned, handing Thoros the reins he’d been holding for him once he climbed into the saddle.

With a smirk Thoros told him, “I mean to make a batch of wild fire for when we set sail.”

“With that?” Edric asked motioning to the bag he now carried.

“And a bit more I’ve prepared,” he said with a nod.

“Can you show us?” asked Edric.

“It’s a dangerous process, my lord. Prepared improperly it could become unstable and incinerate the maker.” Thoros frowned. “Even if I wanted to it will be slow finishing the batch as I mean to make it vial by vial to avoid having a jar of it sat around waiting to explode.”

“There’s no harm in at least knowing of the process,” Jon said looking between the two before settling on Thoros. “We need not stand over you the whole time.”

When they returned to the Red Keep they all went to Thoros’ chamber where he showed them all he’d bought over the last few days to make his mixture. They were most startled when he took his chamber pot and boiled its contents with animal bones, using the resulting substance to mix pinches of pale powders with a yellowish black oil and a blue acidic liquid. He spoke in quiet prayers as he mixed the ingredients which swirled in vial before he let it settle and they watched the contents turn green. Jon might have been concerned he found the scent of wildfire somewhat enjoyable if he wasn’t comparing it to the pungent odor of boiling piss.

Thoros gave each of them a vial to try and mix on their own, and though he told them what to say both mixtures ended up much darker than the ones Thoros made. “Careful,” the red priest said taking them from the lords.

“I guess we failed,” Edric said watching him cautiously pour another powder into the vials, causing the substance to bubble and grow darker until black powder lay at the bottom of a pale brown liquid.

“It still has its uses, but not as wildfire,” Thoros said capping the vials. “I’ve heard some use it to as a way to signal others from afar. Though it dies in a moment it burns thrice as bright as any flame.”

Realizing it was getting late Jon went to his room to wash the stench of their work off him lest he
turn Ellaria off her food. Thankfully it didn’t cling to him so he was finished preparing by the time Obara came to escort him.

“You can take the night again if you’d like,” Jon told Edric as he stepped out of his room.

His squire quickly shook his head. “I don’t mind. If anything I can be a lookout.”

Jon sighed and shook his head. “I’ll be fine Edric. Why don’t you go help Thoros with his task? You’ll be of more use there than waiting for me to finish eating. I’ll even bring you some food when I return.”

Edric looked torn. He clearly wanted to go act as Jon’s guard so he wasn’t alone, but also wanted to learn more about wildfire and put his time to use. If it had been the Tyrells or Lannisters his choice would be easy, even if it had been the Martells before they came to King’s Landing he might not have trusted them alone with Jon, but Edric knew Ellaria cared for Jon and the Sand Snakes at least respected their fathers opinion of him and what Jon had done speaking out on his behalf. “I’ll help Thoros.”

Jon silently squeezed his squire’s shoulder in thanks before leaving with Obara. For a moment he’d worried he might be under dressed, but seeing Obara in her breeches, calf-length tunic and copper sun belt made him feel better. The clothes he wore weren’t his best by any means but they also weren’t ragged or in need of a wash.

The smile he wore as he entered Ellaria’s chamber faded when she saw Jynessa sat to her left at the table. Obara closed the door and walked past him to take her seat to Jynessa’s left, opposite Nymeria while Tyene sat to Ellaria’s right, leaving Jon a seat opposite Ellaria.

Taking his seat, Jon briefly bowed his head to them, “Evening, my ladies. Thank you for inviting me.”

“Thank you for coming,” Ellaria said motioning to the trays of food across the table. “Please help yourself to whatever you like.”

Nodding, he glanced to Jynessa and saw she turned her head from him. Sensing the tension coming off the Sand Snakes Jon sat back in his chair with a sigh. “Is something wrong? Have I done something to upset you all?”

Ellaria frowned and shot the Sand Snakes quick looks before she shook her head. “Not at all, my lord.”

“Then what’s going on?” He glanced at his cup asking with a halfhearted laugh, “Did you poison my wine?”

“Never!” Ellaria exclaimed while Jynessa looked to her empty plate and Jon noticed a tear trickle down her cheek. “Jon, I asked you here to tell you something you deserve to know. Something I wish I didn’t have to say, something I regret, but… given what you’ve done for us I believe you need to know.”

He quickly tried to think of what it could be, deciding they couldn’t know what he was. For a moment he wondered if they maybe set him up for a crime, but he thought that more likely for the Tyrells as a way to get rid of him so Margaery could remain queen. Rather than rack his brain he asked, “What have you done?”

“I’m sure it is no surprise to learn we’d heard of you before arriving in King’s Landing,” Ellaria said somberly. “Not only had you risen to a lordship but had garnered some fame by being the one
to slay Stannis Baratheon. When Oberyn learned he would be sent here… My prince and I met with Jynessa and asked her to court you. We knew you close to Tyrion so asked her to make you open up to her and share whatever information you were privy to while also guiding you to us so we could turn you against the Lannisters.”

Jon stared at Ellaria a moment before his gaze shifted to Jynessa, her head hanging as she wiped tears from her cheeks. He briefly glanced to the Sand Snakes who wore sheepish expressions before settling back on the grim faced Ellaria. “Wh… You… You set that up to turn me against the Lannisters? To use me as an informant?”

“We thought you their dog,” Ellaria offered quietly. “We wanted to take a rising lord from their ranks, one bound to one of their own, who would no doubt know the secrets of the keep after squiring to Barristan Selmy.”

Jon felt like he was choking as his mind was flooded, overwhelmed with emotion. He was embarrassed for being such a fool, ashamed he’d let himself believe any of their lies. His chest ached at the thought of everything he’d felt for them. He felt disgusted by all he’d done with Jynessa, all done because she wanted to use him. It hurt to realize how worthless he was to them beyond his use to their goals.

His skin burned with anger that radiated off him, but he wasn’t just angry at them. He was angry at himself for not knowing this, for not seeing it sooner. Because he wanted to believe the Martells could be his family as the Starks were he’d missed that they were playing the game of thrones. And Jon had let himself be their pawn.

Jynessa had been the one to approach him as he sparred with Loras. She suggested he train with Oberyn and arranged it. His mind filled with all the times he happened to bump into her and end up on long walks. How after sex she would talk about her day and ask about his. He’d thought she cared about him but it was all a way for her to pick him for information.

“Nessa,” Jon struggled to get through his throat. After a breath he asked, “Is this true?”

Jynessa’s chin sank toward her chest as she looked away from him.

She and Ellaria gasped and all seated flinched when Jon’s hand slammed into the table and he rose from his chair, which flew back as he bellowed, “Look at me!”

Jon noticed how Nymeria’s hands slipped toward her waist and Obara braced herself to rise from her seat. Clearly they’d been brought to try and stop him from killing Ellaria, though he doubted any but Tyene and her poisons would be able to take his life, and that would only come after he’d taken all of theirs.

When Jynessa finally turned to look at Jon he felt sick seeing her quivering lip and glassy eyes. He turned his hand, pressing his knuckles into the oak table as he stared at his plate and let out a laugh. Pulling his hand up he quickly slammed it through the plate, his glove keeping the shattered dish from tearing at his hand while he raised his head to set his eyes on Ellaria.

His gaze held hers for a moment before he pulled his fist from the table and turned to leave. “Jon,” he heard Ellaria say, rising from her seat as he threw open the door to her chamber and left.

He had no idea where he wanted to go beyond away from there. They might go to his room but Jon wouldn’t be there. He considered the godswood but he didn’t want to be around anyone and if they went to Edric or Thoros they would look there. They would check the boats as well and as tempted as he was to sail away now, whether it be to take the Stepstones or go claim Sunspear for Tommen,
he wouldn’t leave behind the people who actually seemed to care about him.

Jon hated that he felt a flicker of doubt about that. That he found himself questioning everyone he knew as every little doubt he’d felt or considered now had grounding within his heart.

What if Robb enjoyed being king so much he wouldn’t bend the knee to him? What if the Starks thought he had done too much for the Lannisters or too little to help the North so wouldn’t help him? What if Domeric decided Robb was the better king? What if Loras’ was part of his family’s plan to get rid of Jon so Margaery could stay queen? What if Sam resented him for sending him to Dorne? What if Barristan decided Daenerys would be a better ruler than him? What if Tyrion was just using him to get back at his siblings? What if Robb didn’t believe his letter? What if they thought it a sign of Jon going mad like his grandfather Aerys?

It made him want to rip his hair from his scalp and scream, but he strode out of the Red Keep without a sound apart from his stomping since he’d left his brooch and sash in his room. He kept his brow furrowed, taking breaths and blinking to combat the tears burning his eyes while weaving through the streets much as he had years earlier whenever Barristan sent him to explore.

Part of him just wanted to disappear. To take his ships and sail to Essos. Let Westeros tear itself apart before the Others even had a chance to come kill them all. Let them become a continent of wights. He almost laughed as he thought that it might be easier to win the throne then as all he’d need to do was ride over with Bloodwing, laughing as he watched them burn and reclaimed his kingdom.

It was that thought which made him shiver and slow to a stop in an alley as he pictured Aerys II laughing as Rickard Stark screamed hanging over a flame while Brandon Stark strangled himself trying to free him. Fear ran through Jon, his fingers slipping into his hair as he pressed his back to a wall, taking a moment to breathe.

“I’m not like him,” he told himself as he clamped his eyes closed. “I won’t become like him.”

With a breath he cooled his heart and strode into the night. He couldn’t just be a better man than his maddened grandfather, he had to be better than all his predecessors. Jon needed to be a king worth of not only the wars he hoped to end but all the lives lost in Robert’s Rebellion.

So many things weighed on him every day but for now Jon would cast it all aside and be the heartbroken fool he feared he truly was.

Chapter End Notes

Since part of the story is Jon plotting it wouldn’t make much sense for him to not think over what he saw and try to decipher and use it.

The wild fire stuff is some suspected ingredients for Greek fire that have mostly been disproven, but I figure since stuff like gunpowder supposedly work differently in universe so might the ingredients. Plus magic is a component.

Bit about Jon's clothes is there to show he isn't dressed up so can blend into crowds once he leaves the Red Keep. He can blend in like a hedge night much as he did in the shadow city.
I imagine Ellaria might have held off telling Jon the truth until after the trial but changed her mind when she saw Jynessa go after him. Then realized she couldn't let it keep happening, which grew to her feeling she needed to tell him everything. She knows him an honorable sort so trusts he'll still speak the truth during the trial, especially since he already said it in front of half the court and suddenly denying it would look bad for him.

I'm sure the reveal is disappointing to some given some of the ideas a few people had, but I enjoy what comes from it over the next few chapters.

Next Chapter: With Jon missing Edric, Tyrion, Podric and Thoros search King's Landing for their king to be. They learn Ghost has been spotted and go to retrieve him.
Beneath The Dancing Statue

Chapter Summary

With Jon missing Edric, Tyrion, Podric and Thoros search King’s Landing for their king to be. They learn Ghost has been spotted and go to retrieve him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When morning came Edric Dayne rose and quickly went about dressing himself, thankful he’d taken the time to scrub clean the night before rather than risk rushing off smelling of piss and sulfur. Once he tied his sword belt over his surcoat and hung his wing buckler over his sword Edric made his way to Jon’s chamber.

Knocking on the door Edric leaned against the wall expecting to wait as Jon woke. He’d forgotten to bring Edric any food so the squire assumed he’d caught up with Jynessa and gotten little sleep. After a minute he knocked again, but another minute passed without a sound. His brow furrowed, Edric slammed the bottom of his fist against the door but once again heard nothing on the other side.

Edric looked around, contemplating trying to kick in the door but realized he was overreacting. Despite what he thought at times he wasn’t Jon’s guard or sworn shield, he was his squire. He didn’t have to worry about him and watch over him every moment of every day. For all he knew Jon had just slept at Jynessa’s room and decided to meet him at the training yard or had gone to pray.

His concern rose when he went through the godswood and found no sign of Jon, but pushed it aside to quickly walk toward the training ground. When he arrived Edric found Thoros standing beside Tyrion and Podrick awaiting his and Jon’s arrival. He felt his stomach twist as he walked toward them whispering to himself, “Shit.”

Podrick hopped to his feet while Thoros and Tyrion turned to him, all three looking confused while Tyrion asked, “Our friend running late after another long night?”

“I don’t know,” he said shaking his head. “He’s not in his chambers and he wasn’t in the godswood.”

Podrick frowned as Tyrion laughed asking, “Have you checked Lady Jynessa’s room?”

The smile that came to Thoros’ lips quickly fell, replaced by a hint of dread as he looked past Edric. It wasn’t until he saw Tyrion’s smirk crumble that Edric turned and found what drained their amusement was a concerned looking Jynessa approaching them. They could see here eyes were a bit red as she looked around the yard before asking them, “Jon isn’t here?”

“We thought he might be with you,” said Thoros.

“Did something happen last night?” asked Tyrion.

Jynessa ignored Tyrion’s question to ask Thoros, “You don’t know where he is?”
“He hasn’t answered his door,” Edric said crossing his arms.

“Why are you looking for him?” asked Tyrion.

“I hoped to speak with him,” she answered somberly.

Tyrion crossed his arms and gave her an accusing glare. “After last night?”

Her eyes widened slightly in surprise. “He ran off before we could say anything.”

He had no idea what happened the night before but she clearly avoided his earlier question so he was glad to see his change in tactics had worked. Maintaining an indignant stare he said, “Well of course he would after what you did.”

“It’s not as simple as he thinks,” she assured. “I know it hard to believe but it wasn’t all an act for me. I was sincere in all I said to him.”


“Yes,” Tyrion said raising his chin to look down his half nose at her. “Why don’t you explain yourself so we don’t misunderstand?”

Jynessa shook her head. “Please just tell him what I’ve said. Ask him to speak with me before you leave again so I might have a chance to make him understand how little was a performance and how much was the truth.”

Disappointed his trick hadn’t worked Tyrion scoffed, leaving it for Thoros to nod and tell her, “We will, my lady.”

Once she left Edric turned to glare at Tyrion. “You’ve no idea what happened last night, do you?”

“I tried,” he offered with a shrug.

Thoros was frowning as he told them, “Jon was worried yesterday. Perhaps I should have counseled him more.”

“What was he worried about?” asked Edric.

Thoros hesitated a moment before telling them quietly. “The night before last Jon watched the flames in his hearth and saw visions from the Lord of Light.”

Tyrion scoffed, though seeing Thoros’ sincerity his disbelief faded. “What did he see?”

“Many things, none good so far as I can tell, but the most pressing we deciphered was that the Starks are to be betrayed by House Karstark and Glover with the aide of the Vale.” As the others gaped Thoros continued, “Jon wrote to Aemon to relay it to Robb, but we’ve no idea if this is meant to happen before then or months from now. And even if we weren’t waiting to give Samwell and Myrcella a chance to arrive we might not arrive in time even if we sailed north.”

Tyrion sighed. “First Myrcella, Rosamund and his poor meeting with the Martells, now this and whatever’s happened with the Blackmont heir. Perhaps it wore him down.”

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“We need to find him,” Thoros said firmly.

The hint of fear and desperation in the red priest’s voice surprised Tyrion, who suggested, “If he wanted a day to himself perhaps it best we let him have it. No doubt he’s off drinking or
whatever’s happened with the Lady Blackmont broke his aversion to brothels.”

“And if someone means to harm him?” asked the scowling Edric.

Tyrion laughed. “He’ll slaughter them. As much as I’d enjoy seeing it I doubt he’d go get so drunk he couldn’t even defend himself, and I’d say him half drunk is still more than most knights.”

“Well I’m going to find him,” Edric said turning toward the stables.

“I’ll join you,” said Thoros.

Tyrion looked to the frowning Podrick, clearly concerned for the man who had helped grow his skill with a sword but remembering he was technically Tyrion’s squire. Rolling his eyes Tyrion asked, “You too?”

“He could be hurt, my lord,” the boy offered quietly. “Even if not he’s still alone and likely upset. He’s always been here for us. Shouldn’t we be there for him?”

After a moment Tyrion waved his head and groaned, turning to follow the others while waving Podrick to follow. “Fine,” he called to the others, “let’s find Jon before he’s made as many bastards as Robert.”

Their first stop was the ships but none of the crews had seen Jon either on the ships or in the taverns in the fish market or Fishmonger’s Square. They passed through the Street of Steel as Edric led them to the a shop not far from Cobbler’s Square Jon had taken him sometimes, but the owner hadn’t seen him either.

As they rode through Flea Bottom Tyrion shook his head looking over the low class brothels and taverns. “I know Jon doesn’t mind being among the small folk but I think him smart enough to avoid such places. He has the coin and status to easily chose better places where he’s less likely to be bothered by fools or catch something from some half-wit.”

All the group turned to Tyrion. When he noticed and was confused Thoros waved a hand, “Lead the way.”

Laughing, Tyrion gripped his reins and led them toward the Street of Silk lined with brothels. Tyrion handed his reins to Podrick as he looked around. “I’ll run to each.”

“No doubt they’ll know you,” Thoros said watching Tyrion dismount. “Remember you can return on your own time, my lord.”

“I know, I know,” Tyrion assured, making his way into Chataya’s brothel. He exited moments later and hurried toward the next while Edric, Thoros and Podrick’s horses slowly trotted after the dwarf running from brothel to brothel along the street.

When he exited the last and took his reins from Podrick he sighed. “None have seen him, though it seems quite a few have bets on who will bed him.”

“A pot like to stay full,” Thoros said with a laugh, then looked toward the Old Gate. “He wouldn’t have left the city, would he?”

“And leave us?” Edric shook his head.

After stopping to fill their stomachs the quartet made their way around the Hill of Rhaenys. Trotting past the Dragon Gate when they heard the strum of harp strings amid the chattering of a
crowd. With a shared look they hurried along until the found a group gathered around a statue of Aegon I’s wife and sister Rhaenys Targaryen dancing while Jon sat at the foot of it plucking the strings of the dark red wood harp against his shoulder.

It was clear to those who knew him Jon’s focus was completely on the harp. The crowd around him could have disappeared and his playing wouldn’t stop. At his side was a cup they saw only when they dismounted and approached was filled with coin.

Tyrion ignored the few shocked looks he got as people either recognized him, were horrified by him or both, backing away as he walked to Jon, leaving Podrick to hold the reins of their horses. He stood beside Jon, for once standing taller than the seated man. “Jon, how long have you been here?”

“If it’s not an emergency leave me be,” Jon said icily as he kept his eyes on his harp.

“My lord, we were worried something happened to you,” Thoros told him quietly as the crowd began to murmur, some seeming to realize who Jon might be.

When he didn’t answer the men looked to each other with concern over what could have made Jon so cold to them. Edric frowned, tilting his head to try and look at Jon’s face.

“Lady Jynessa asked for you,” Edric said watching Jon’s face twist into a sneer as he played. The pace of his music jumped slightly, his agitation coming through his fingers before cooling once again into a melancholy melody.

Tyrion sighed. “I understand you’re hurt but let’s return to the keep and we can find you a better girl.”

Thoros nodded. “Aye, there’s no shame in being heartbroken.”

That broke Jon’s focus for a moment, his gaze snapping to Thoros briefly before turning back to his harp. Before they could get frustrated they noticed the song he played winding down until he struck the final chord and moved the harp from his shoulder. The crowd began to break, a few sparing some applause as they started to drift away seeing Jon pick up his cup of coins.

“When was your last drink?” Tyrion asked with a smirk.

“Two days ago,” Jon answered picking the harp off the ground. “Why?”

“Clearly something’s happened so we thought you’d spent the night at a brothel or tavern,” said Tyrion.

“If I drank I’d have killed someone and I can’t trust some whore not to lie about taking her moon tea.” Jon said as he looked to Edric, “I’ll ride back with you.”

His icy tone chilled them, watching him walk to Edric’s horse and tie the harp to the saddle. Edric hurried over, taking the reins from Podrick as the others did with their horses.

“Why would you kill someone?” asked Thoros while climbing onto his courser.

“Because I feel as if the moment I’m angered I’ll draw my sword, and the moment I do I’d like little more than opening someone’s throat, especially some obnoxious drunken asshole.” Motioning ahead of them he told Edric, “Go through Flea Bottom.”

As they started to move Edric glanced back and saw Jon looking to the smiling statue of Rhaenys,
the color of it faded so only the scarlet of her robes stood out. After a few meters Jon pulled a coin from his cup and tossed it toward a somber looking girl sat at a corner. Her eyes widened seeing the coin bounce off the cobblestones, rising to look at Jon. Her questioning look was answered by his nod before he turned and tossed another coin out.

They rode in silence, Jon reaching into his cup every so often to throw coins out to those they passed. When his cup emptied he pulled a small purse from his pocket and started tossing those coins as well. They were mostly coppers and a few silver ones earned from a day spent playing the harp for all who passed.

““You sure that’s wise, Jon?” Tyrion asked bringing his horse beside Edric’s. “You must’ve given out near a dragon’s worth of pennies and stags by now. It may not seem a lot now but most your gold is locked away at Nightsong or on the ships.”

“Think of it as gaining the small folk’s favor should I want them on my side if I decide to do something worthy of trial,” he said tossing another coin toward a young man in tattered clothes.

Edric frowned while Tyrion and Thoros again shared a concerned look but said nothing while they rode. Once Jon emptied his purse he told Edric to pick up their pace and hurry back to the Red Keep. It was nearly dusk as they arrived at the stables and they made their way back to their chambers where Tyrion suggested they all gather in Jon’s chamber.

Once the door was closed Tyrion looked to Jon. “What happened last night that’s made you disappear for the day?”

“I’m half surprised it hasn’t been found out,” Jon said with a hollow laugh as he sank into a seat facing them. “I’m sorry to tell you all you’ve followed a fool.”

“No need to be dramatic Jon,” Tyrion said walking over to sit beside him. “What? Did Lady Jynessa take another man to bed while you were gone? It’s understandable to be upset but this is-”

“She took me to bed to get information,” Jon said before he could finish, leaving Tyrion gaping as Jon continued, “and set me up to be used by the Martells. They sent her to me to take to bed and fuck me until I told her whatever she wanted to know. And then they had her bring me to Oberyn and Ellaria so they could turn a new lord they thought served the Lannisters against them and use me like a pawn for their plans here. That’s all I ever was to them, some worthless fucking pawn they wasted their time trying to manipulate.”

The room fell silent as Jon said back, crossing his arms. Edric stared at the floor a moment before asking, “This whole time she was with you because of them?”

When Jon nodded Tyrion groaned. “That’s what she meant by an act.”

Thoros nodded, looking to Jon. “Lady Jynessa came to us this morning looking to speak with you. She said,” he paused to think back on her words, “it’s not as simple as you think. It’s hard to believe but it wasn’t all an act for her. She was sincere in all she said to you.”

Jon rolled his eyes. “And I’ve an army of dragons awaiting me in Valyria.”

“With you I wouldn’t be surprised,” mumbled Tyrion.

“She wanted to speak with you before we leave again. She said she wanted to make you understand how little of it was a performance and how much was the truth.”

Shaking his head Jon said, “They must truly think me a cretin if they expect me to ever hear a
word from their lips again. I would walk through dung to avoid dirtying my feet by stepping on any of them.”

The bitterness in his voice was familiar to Tyrion, who had sounded much the same when he’d tried to convince himself Tysha deserved her fate to ease his own guilt and shame for what he’d done. It had been easier to blame her than admit his own weakness. Tyrion felt his chest tighten not only at the thought of all that had come from his marriage to Tysha but that Jon would feel the same over what happened to him.

“Jon,” he said drawing the young lord’s attention so he could meet the boy’s eyes with his own sympathetic gaze, “none of this is your fault. None of it.”

“I should have known,” Jon said a sneer as his jaw shifted. Tyrion could see within his grey eyes how raw it was for him, but he’d let himself sink into ice to keep himself from burning to ash.

“You couldn’t have known this,” Tyrion said shaking his head. “You wanted to gain their favor and thought them worthy of it. There’s no shame in that or anything else you’ve done. Anyone would have fallen for it. Jynessa is a beautiful woman who had a goal and you a young lord. You’d have been a fool to turn her away, especially when she presented a chance to get close to the Martells as you wanted. Whatever you told them wouldn’t have mattered and their plan to turn you just shows they are as stupid as Joffrey and the small council to not know you never served the Lannisters.”

Jon leaned forward in his chair. “I have to be better than that. If I fall for things like this, things I should have seen, what if I miss something else? What if I don’t see through some other game and it cost your life? Or Thoros’? Or Podrick’s? Or Edric’s? Or Myrcella’s, Tommen’s, Rosamund’s, Loras’, Sam’s?” He looked too drained to continue with names. “My mistakes don’t end at me. If I slip then all bound to me are hurt, often worse than I am. I can’t let myself be so foolish. Not again.”

It was disconcerting for Edric to hear Jon speak so calmly and sound so hollow. Edric couldn’t decided if some part of Jon had broken or he was suppressing all his rage, leaving only a cold fury that sometimes showed through sorrow.

It was Podrick who broke the silence of the room as he gasped from where he stood beside the door and told them, “I hear someone.”

Barely three seconds later someone knocked on the door, Podrick scampering toward Tyrion as Jon rose from his seat and opened it. On the other side stood a Lannister guard who stood straight as he said, “Pardon, my lord, but the captain of the Lion Gate said they saw a giant white wolf.”

Everyone in the room leapt to their feet as Jon let out a droll laugh. “Thank you.”

The man nodded and turned to leave. Jon waited for him to get far enough away to close the door and turn to the others. It was Tyrion who said, “They’re here. Do we have a way to get them inside?”

“I can get out of the city without anyone noticing. If anything I’ll have Ghost run back out tonight and chase after him so I can sneak them into the city then go back out and return.” Jon let out a breath and scratched his shoulder. “I’ll set them up someplace for the night and then we can slip out and meet them in the tomorrow to figure out what we’re going to do.”

“We shouldn’t all go,” Tyrion said crossing his arms. “Since it’s just Ghost I’ll stay here with Podrick.”
The trio rode through King’s Landing, arriving at the Lion’s Gate where the guard captain greeted Jon with a nod. “Welcome, Lord Snowfire. One of my men said he saw your wolf last night but thought it just a normal one until near an hour back when he saw it closer and realized how large it was.”

“Do he say which direction he was in?” Jon asked, looking through the gate to the Goldroad which led to Lannisport.

“Neral,” the captain called out, causing a tall, round faced goldcloak to turn to them and hurry into the gatehouse. “Which way was the lord’s direwolf?”

“Off by the Rush,” Neral said pointing toward the Blackwater Rush river.

“Thank you,” Jon said reaching out to shake the man’s hand, which surprised the guard as well as the captain when Jon did the same with him. “If you think your men might be startled please let them know I’m going to call him and try to bring him inside. He won’t harm anybody I just don’t want someone to shoot him in a panic.”

The captain nodded. “I’ve already warned them all against it.”

“Thank you, Ser,” Jon said again before making his way forward with Thoros while Edric stayed with the horses. Sucking in a breath, Jon let out a long whistle before calling out, “GHOST!”

He was in the middle of letting out another whistle when he saw a large white figure crest the horizon. The direwolf raced to his side, slowing as Jon held out a hand to stroke his jaw while pressing his forehead to Ghost’s before leading him through the gate.

Edric smiled at he reached up to pet Ghost, who licked his arm before the squire climbed into his saddle along with the others. Before they could start riding an urchin rushed toward them and Edric’s hand slid toward his sword seeing the boy go toward Jon.

“M’lord! Can I pet you wolf?” The boy asked shakily, staring at Ghost.

Jon arched his brow, glancing at Ghost before nodding. “Sure,” he said, clearly thinking it better to just get it done with than risk the small folk thinking he looked down on them. Ghost would’ve smelt any poisons and would bite through the boy before he could hurt the direwolf. Ghost eyed the boy oddly as he raised a shivering hand and pressed it to the wolf’s side, stroking his thick neck. The boy’s tensions faded realizing Ghost wasn’t going to attack him. A moment later the boy withdrew his hand, looking proud of himself before he turned to Jon.

“Thank you, m’lord,” the urchin said while grabbing Jon’s hand in his. Both men saw Jon’s brow knit as he reached out to pat the boy’s hand before the urchin spun and fled back into the streets.

“Ghost walk ahead of us back to the Red Keep,” Jon said as he turned to take his reins in hand. The direwolf did as he ordered, leading them through the streets back to the Red Keep.

People gave them a wide berth, clearly uneased by the large beast. Once the Lion Gate was out of sight Edric saw Jon open the hand the urchin grabbed to look at a small parchment. “What’s that?”

“The urchin slipped it into my hand,” Jon said breaking the seal to read it. Thoros and Edric watched him, a sincere smile touching his lips for the first time since they found him, though it quickly fell as he tucked it away. When they reached another corner and Ghost started to go right Jon called out heading left, “This way.”
He led them through the city, weaving through the streets until they came to a two story inn outside of Flea Bottom. Jon dismounted and tied his horse off, Edric and Thoros doing the same while he moved to stroke Ghost’s head and tell him quietly, “Howl if anyone comes for us.”

Thoros and Edric tensed and looked to one another, wondering what was happening but following Jon inside. Taking a coin from his belt, Jon set a silver on the counter as he asked the man behind it, “Three cups and a room to the south.”

The man’s eyes widened slightly, Edric quickly figuring out it was some kind of code as the older man turn and filled three cups with ale before handing them to Jon saying, “Last room on the right.”

After handing them their cups they made their way to the staircase, Jon leading them to the last room. Setting his cup down on a table beside the door, Jon gave four quick knocks. Along with the lute of the minstrel downstairs they heard muffled voices and quick steps before the door opened and Samwell Tarly greeted them with a grin.

“You got my message,” Sam said with relief.

“Samwell,” Thoros whispered with a laugh, his hand leaving the pommel of his sword as Jon and Sam stepped forward to meet with a hug. Both wore smiles as they patted the others back, Jon shaking his head as he stepped away to let Edric take his place. Thoros was last, chuckling as he patted Sam’s side while stepping away. “You’ve shrunk some.”

“The Dornish sun tried to murder me slowly,” Sam offered with a laugh. His smile grew solemn as he looked to Jon before stepping aside.

The room was fairly big, large enough it curved past the hearth to where the bed sat while a table stood in the corner to their left by the windows. As they entered Sam closed the door while Jon scanned the room, stopping when he saw Myrcella waiting around the corner beyond the hearth to stay out of sight from the door. She wore a white smock beneath a blue tunic tied at the waist by a yellow ribbon girdle. Though it showed its wear from their travels and might help them blend in among the small folk it did little to hide her beauty.

Jon let out a sigh upon seeing her, looking her over as he said with relief, “You’re safe.”

“Thanks to you and Sam,” she said with a smile before stepping forward and wrapping her arms around him.

With a light laugh he returned her hug, her long golden curls falling past her shoulder blades and covering his hand as he soothingly rubbed her back. She squeezed her arms around him, basking in the sense of safety that washed over her within his arms. The relief she felt was obvious to the others as she closed her eyes and leaned her head against his chest, feeling all the concern she’d carried since the moment she decided to leave Sunspear melt away.

“Any trouble on the roads?” Thoros asked looking to Sam to avoid the feeling he was intruding.

Myrcella stepped back shaking her head and answering before Sam could, “I think Ghost scared off any animals that might have come for our food and we camped away from the roads.”

“We avoided towns as often as we could,” Sam told them with a nod.

“How’s Rosamund?” Myrcella asked turning to Jon. “Your letter said she was injured.”

Jon could see the guilt in Myrcella’s eyes as he told her, “She lost her ear and some skin across her
cheek. She’s scarred but alive.”

Pushing aside her frown she asked, “Do you know what happened to Ser Arys?”

“Doran’s men came to stop them and he charged them. The captain, Areo Hotah, he cut him down then Gerold Dayne took the chance to attack Rosamund.”

“Why?” Her voice pained she looked to them all before returning to Jon asking, “Why would he attack her? Or me?”

“We don’t know,” Jon said with a sigh. “Rosamund said Arianne was upset by it and kept apologizing to her so I don’t think it part her plan. It would seem it’s either his own doing to cause chaos unless someone else led his hand, but we’ve no way to know until he’s found.”

When she lowered her gaze with a somber nod Jon reached out to hold her shoulder, waiting for her to meet his eyes before he told her, “You’ve no blame in any of this. Rosamund doesn’t blame you nor do any who know of it. The ones at fault are Gerold Dayne, Doran and Arianne.”

She nodded motioning for them to sit at the table. Jon sat to her left and Sam to her right with Edric taking the seat across from her while Thoros stood beside the window overlooking the street below. Once they sat she asked, “Beyond the scar is she okay? Do they know or is she still acting as me?”

“None suspect it so far,” Jon assured. “She seems to be handling it well. Loras was assigned to guard her and it seems your mother is too busy ruling for Tommen to find a reason to doubt her.”

Myrcella’s smile soured at the mention of her mother, but she quickly shook her head and brightened it asking, “What of you? I’ve heard so much but only in letters and tales.”

“Dorne calls you a hero,” Sam said with a smirk that faded when he saw Jon’s face darken. He was surprised to see is mimicked by Edric and Thoros.

“I doubt the Martells think so fondly of me,” Jon said with an edge that surprised Sam and Myrcella.

“We all but stormed Sunspear when we heard what happened,” Thoros explained. “It worked out in the end, but things were tense when we demanded to bring you back.”

“Still, the rest of Dorne celebrated your victory over the Mountain,” Sam offered sympathetically, “and we were surprised to hear you not only fought on the Blackwater but downed a knight and Stannis.”

Jon looked to Myrcella. “I’m sorry I had to do that to your uncle.”

She shook her head. “I wish he could have lived but he chose to attack. At least my cousin yet lives.”

After nodding, Jon looked the room over asking, “Is this where you’re staying?”

“We’ve a room at an inn in Flea Bottom,” Sam said shaking his head. “Once we’re done we’ll return.”

“How long have you been here?” asked Thoros.

“We arrived yesterday near dusk,” Myrcella answered, glancing at Jon with a knowing smile.
His confusion was answered by a smirking Sam who told them, "Flea Bottom has been abuzz about a young lord who had been playing a harp since dawn and then rode through tossing coins to those he passed."

"I heard you played a wonderful song at Joffrey’s wedding as well," said Myrcella. "I’m glad you still play."

Jon shook his head. "Not often."

"Why play at dawn though?" Sam asked with a careful glance to Myrcella, hoping the answer wasn’t something involving Jon’s true name.

They watched Jon’s face darkened again before he answered. "I stayed out all night and heard the harp coming from an inn so I went and bought it off the band. I was playing it before dawn."

"Were you drunk?" Sam asked with a laugh.

"No," Jon answered sitting back with his arms crossed. "I learned something I need to think on so spent the night cooling off lest I harm someone."

"We only found him this afternoon," Thoros told them.

"Did something happen?" Myrcella asked, reaching out to place a hand on his arm.

Jon met her emerald gaze and shook his head. "It’s not important."

Myrcella saw he was holding back, not just from her but from himself. Within his steely gray eyes she saw a swell of raw emotion he swiftly cooled before it could boil over and show anywhere else. She pressed her fingers into his skin, hoping he could feel her sympathy was sincere.

"I’m sorry about Winterfell," Myrcella said with a frown. "I heard what the Greyjoys did to your brothers."

Jon frowned. "I think it false."

"You’ve heard something?" Sam asked, meeting Jon’s eyes so he could see the unspoken question of whether Dom had been in contact to tell him.

"I know Theon," Jon said carefully. "He’s the type to lie about a thing like that and all who spoke of it mentioned he’d had their bodies covered in tar which could be to hide a lie."

"I hope you’re right," said Myrcella. "Rickon was so sweet and poor Bran already suffered so much."

"Either way there’s little I can do for them," Jon said uncrossing his arms and looking to Myrcella. "However we can help you. We need to decide what to do about you and Rosamund. I’d hope we could include Tyrion and her, but I think it will be hard to bring her anywhere without someone finding out and questioning where we took her."

"I spent nearly every moment of our journey from Nightsong trying to figure out what we should do but I still doubt either choice," Myrcella admitted with a frown. It had occupied her mind most of the days on the road and kept her awake late into the night as she sat petting Ghost trying to ease her heart and clear her mind. "Either I let Rosamund continue on as me and find another life or reveal what I’ve done and risk causing a war with Dorne."
“It might not start a war,” Sam said, his voice making it clear even he didn’t believe what he said.

“Arianne tried to crown me over Tommen,” Myrcella said shaking her head. “My mother will be upset and might harm Oberyn, which will make Dorne turn against us. I should wait until his trial is finished. If I reveal we’ve switched places at least then I won’t be to blame for what happens to him.”

“If?” Jon asked curiously. “So you’re truly considering letting Rosamund remain as you?”

Myrcella sheepishly nodded. “Part of it is guilt and another greed, I suppose. I don’t want to be sent back there, not after this, but even if I’m not I’ll just be sent to wed another lord. I know it cowardly but Rosamund could live as a princess while I…” Myrcella looked to Jon with a solemn smile. “I could go to Nightsong and hide among the staff. I helped in the kitchens some while we were there.”

Jon matched her smile, and though he enjoyed the sentiment he shook his head. “Not Nightsong. If something happens with Dorne it won’t be safe. Surely they were still preparing for a siege when you got there.”

“We saw them cutting down trees and building scorpions and catapults,” Sam said nodding.

Pleased to know they had continued after he left, Jon looked back to Myrcella. “I told Rosamund I wouldn’t let them send her back to Dorne if she didn’t want. I would arrange for her to be kidnapped and be sent somewhere safe.” His eyes focused solely on hers, Myrcella sinking into his as he told her, “I would do the same for you. I can send you wherever you think you’ll be safe. If you let them know you switched places and come to regret it then all you need do is tell me and I’ll have the world think me the man who kidnapped Myrcella Baratheon.”

Myrcella bit the inside of her lip as they stretched into a smile. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“We should go,” Thoros said noticing a group of people looking at Ghost. “Give them time to wait before they leave.”

Sam told them where they was staying as they got to their feet and Jon told them, “We’ll meet here again tomorrow night with Tyrion. After that we’ll find someplace to meet. There’s a statue of Rhaenys not far from here. Unless it’s an emergency I’ll go there in the afternoon and play the harp again if I think we need to meet.”

Myrcella was shocked to see how easily they planned exchanging messages and arranging clandestine meetings. They went over a few code words and phrases for different situations before Sam and Jon hugged again.

“Thank you,” Jon told him before stepping back and chuckling at Sam’s sheepish expression.

While Sam moved to say his farewells to Edric and Thoros, Myrcella finished with hers and moved to Jon. “Stay safe, Ser Jon.”

Smirking, Jon told her, “I’m a lord now you know.”

Myrcella wore a teasing smile as she said, “You’ll always be Ser Jon to me.”

The humor faded from his face, leaving him with a solemn smile. After how foolish he’d felt over everything with Jynessa the idea that Myrcella would never lose her image of him as her knight was a comfort. He hoped it was something that would maintain even when the truth of him came out.
When she once again wrapped her arms around him Jon returned the hug and squeezed her lightly, hoping it was enough for her to know he appreciated her. “Whatever happens I’m here for you,” he whispered, feeling her nod against his chest before stepping back.

Sam escorted them to the door, closing it behind them and turning to Myrcella as she sat on the bed with a hand over her heart and sighed.

When they returned to the Red Keep Jon made his way to Tyrion’s chambers and told him of their meeting with Sam and Myrcella. Though relieved, he was surprised she was considering not revealing her switch with Rosamund.

“You think she was being sincere?” Tyrion asked after a sip of wine.

“I do,” said Jon.

“She seemed torn about it,” Edric offered, “but it seems like a real possibility she might choose.”

“And you’ve already arranged another meeting for tomorrow?” When Join nodded Tyrion sighed. “Then there’s little to do until then. I’ll talk to Rosamund tomorrow For now let us rest before we decide the depth of our lies.”

Chapter End Notes

When deciding where Jon would be I looked at a map and using the wiki one figure it’s near the area marked for Shae's mance, outside of Flea Bottom. Having him near Rhaenys' hill felt fitting for a couple of reasons. Not only is there his lost sister, but I think he views Myrcella similar to how people describe Rhaenys.

I considered having Jon go full blast and get drunk, beat up some fools or maybe even go hunt down some criminal to kill them but it didn't feel right. Considered having him buy out a brothel as well, but even angered Jon still has his aversion to bastards and now has a reason to distrust even women he thought he could trust so would be wary of them.

I didn't spend too much time having them discuss things during the reunion because their next meeting is longer. Here it's just them touching base to let them know they're safe. There's a spot where I slipped in certain wording to hint at things that become clear in the next meeting with Myrcella and Sam.

I thought it amusing to show Myrcella all dreamy after Jon talks about whisking her away like some pulp novel, hence the biting her lip and clutching her heart. She's a teenager too so gets caught up in that.

Next Chapter: Domeric kills a Stark spy. Oberyn is called to trial early.
Cold Choices

Chapter Summary

Domeric kills a Stark spy. Oberyn is called to trial early.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We’ll have to send our force south tomorrow,” Roose looking over a map of the North and Riverlands laid across a table in his solar. “We can’t trail Robb or we’ll miss our opening and they need to think we’re heading to Harrenhal.”

“I don’t think you should go,” Domeric said looking over the map.

“What do you mean?” asked Roose.

Domeric pressed his hands into the side of the table as he looked to his father. “Shall we hold their pricks while they piss as well? If we mean to rule the North then let us act as rulers and let the men who serve us serve us. If our best people fail then we never had a chance to succeed anyway and at least if we’re here and that happens we can get away safely.”

“You don’t fear some thinking us craven?” Roose asked more so to hear his answer than argue the point.

“Let them think whatever they please so long as they serve us,” Domeric said shaking his head. “The fool falls with fools while the wise man rises above it all.”

Roose smiled at his son’s shrewd wisdom. When they first returned to the Dreadfort Roose was prepared to have his son locked away so he could make him see sense. Even as he told Domeric of the plan he forged Roose worried what he might have to do to his son. That changed when Domeric heard of the advantage Roose secured and he saw his heir come to the forefront.

Domeric had insisted on helping plan their attacks and his input had been stellar.

“While we are safe in the Dreadfort,” Domeric said as he moved his hand about the map, “Robb rides south, as we suggested, to ease tensions with Walder Frey by attending the marriage he arranged. He’ll bring the Baratheons as a show of him supporting the Riverlands by bringing his new allies while the Karstarks and Golvers will remain at Winterfell with the rest.

“The Freys and the men we send south kill Robb and his inner circle the same day the Karstarks and Golvers kill Eddard Stark and secure his wife and daughter. We meet our agreement with House Arryn by sparing her Catelyn Tully and arrange for a marriage between Sansa and myself, and keep Arya as a spare in case Sansa tries something before I sire an heir with her.”

“That sounds-”

Roose was cut off by a sudden crash beyond the door to his room. He and Domeric hurried to the door, throwing it open to find a table in the corridor knocked over. Domeric rushed past Roose and looked around the corner, his eyes widening as he whispered, “Devan.”
“Your squire?” Roose’s brow knit before he realized the boy must have overheard their plan. “Ge-”

Before he could say more than a syllable Domeric took off running down the corridor, chasing after his squire. Roose turned back to his room, grabbing his sword belt and quickly tying it around his waist as he ran down the corridor.

“Don’t run, Devan!” Domeric’s voice echoed off the Dreadfort’s walls, leading Roose in the direction they went. He came to a staircase and saw his son rushing down them along with another figure already at the bottom.

“Hurry!” Roose bellowed as he sped down the stairs.

Once he reached the bottom of the stairs Roose ran to the courtyard, calling for a pair of guards to join him. As they stepped into the bailey they found Domeric returning from the western gate holding a bow taken from one of the four guards following him.

“I didn’t see where he went but his horse is still here. If he’s on foot he’ll-” Domeric stopped to grimace and shake his head, rushing toward the southern gate. “THE RIVER!”

“What?” Roose asked as he motioned for a pair of passing guards to join them.

“He’s the son of Davos Seaworth,” Domeric exclaimed. “He’ll prefer a boat to a horse.”

When they sped through the southern gate and made for the Weeping Water river Domeric was proven right as they saw a small skiff drifting along the water. Devan sat at the bow holding a lantern in his lap and looking to the river ahead of him.

Domeric gave a frustrated snort as he grabbed his dagger and stabbed into his sleeve. He let the dagger fall as he ripped the cuff off his sleeve and wrapped it around the head of an arrow before sticking it in the flames of a torch a guard carried. Without a word he notched and loosed the burning arrow, watching it trace a crimson line across the sky before piercing Devan’s back.

They watched the boy slump forward, knocking over the lantern in his lap, which paired with the burning arrow through his heart started a quickly spreading fire.

Domeric scoffed and handed the bow back to the guard. Looking to the other guards he told them, “Get my horse. We’ll ride ahead to cut it off and pull the skiff ashore before someone else sees it.”

Roose clasped Domeric’s shoulder as the guards rushed to get the horses. “You did well here, son.”

There was a flicker of pride in Domeric’s smile before it faltered. “Thank you, father. I’m sorry I didn’t know about this sooner. I should have been more careful.”

“It’s dealt with,” Roose said looking to the burning skiff. “I know how much knighthood means to you. What it means to take a squire, but you put us ahead of it. That’s all that matters.”

“We’re all we have,” Domeric said somberly, before adding with a smile, “At least until Walda gives birth.”

Roose nodded. “You’re right. We need to be the smarter men. Let the servants serve while the rulers rule.”

Domeric smiled somewhat sheepishly. “Thank you, father.”
“You’re my heir,” Roose said sliding his hand to his son’s cheek, making him meet his pale eyes. “All I have will be yours. The Dreadfort, Winterfell, all of it.”

When Domeric and the guards managed to pull the skiff ashore half of it had been lost to flames and the body with half blackened bone. While they rode back to the Dreadfort with the half charred corpse Domeric’s gaze drifted westward, where Devan Seaworth sat crouched atop a horse carrying him from the Dreadfort.

He could barely hear his horse galloping over the thump of his heart. Thankfully Domeric’s plan had gone flawlessly.

Devan had been shocked when Domeric asked him to join the knight in his chambers one night where the Bolton heir took a seat and told him, “I’m going to kill you three days from now.”

“What?” Devan asked gaping at the Flayed Knight.

“My father has plans to kill the Starks and their allies. The Freys are going to turn on them and kill as many as they can in the Riverlands while the houses he’s convinced to join us will raid Winterfell and kill the rest. The Vale and Lannister forces will help us pick off the rest so he can take over as Warden of the North.”

Devan’s nostrils flared as he drew his sword, aiming it at Domeric. “I won’t let you.”

The Flayed Knight’s lips curled into a smirk as he sat back. “Good. I can trust you to find Robb and tell him before it’s too late.”

Confused, Devan lowered his shaking sword. “What?”

Domeric shook his head. “You’re smart, Devan. Think.”

With a frown the boy said, “You mean to betray your father.”

“Of course,” said Domeric. “But I can’t do that so easily, which is why I need you to go and tell Robb what’s happening, and I need you to do it without anyone disloyal to him knowing.”

“How do I do that?”

“My father hasn’t turned the Manderlys and Wylis is manning Moat Cailin for the moment. An army moves slow enough for you to get there before them. Have Wylis hide you and arrange for you to meet Robb so you can show him a letter I’ll give you explaining everything. After that he’ll be able to hide you among a few Manderly’s troops Robb has join him heading south.”

“You think he’ll still go south?” Devan asked sheathing his sword. “Shouldn’t he just attack them there or set up an ambush?”

“I’ve put some suggestions in the letter but what Robb does it ultimately his choice,” Domeric said with a sigh. “But first you need to die. So in three days you’re going to overhear us planning and flee the keep. You’re going to get on a boat and I’m going to shoot arrows into you, knocking you and your lantern over so you and the boat are burned beyond recognition by the time we pull you ashore.”

Devan warily sat across from Domeric. “I’m not going to be on the boat, am I?”

“No,” Domeric said shaking his head. “You’re going to wait outside my father’s solar and then knock over a table. I’ll chase you down the stairs and you’ll hide in a nook I’ll show you. I’ll pass
you and check the western gate, but you won’t be there so I’ll have the guards follow me to search the keep. Then I’ll lead them to river while you hurry to the western gate to ride away as fast as you can while I lead them to get your corpse.”

Devan stared at the knight for a moment, shaking his head. “Won’t they know I left if my horse is missing?”

“Which is why when we ride into town tomorrow to secure a few supplies you’ll buy a horse and we’ll hide it nearby.”

Devan groaned, sitting forward. “What about the boat?”

“There’s a skiff near the river the men sometimes use. We’ll set everything up before hand.”

“I meant the body,” said Devan. “If I’m riding to Robb I can’t fake my death in the boat.”

“We’ll prop up a corpse to look like you,” he said with laugh. “You’ll have to wear something close to whatever clothes you spare for the body in case it doesn’t all burn away.”

“A corpse?” Devan asked with a chill. “Will we have to dig up a grave or something?”

Domeric shook his head, his smile fading. “I’ll bring it back with me tomorrow and hide it with the horse and the rest of our supplies.”

Frowning, Devan asked, “Are you going to kill someone?”

“Yes,” Domeric answered without hesitation. “The body can’t be decaying since I can’t know if the fire will take all the flesh before we catch up to it. I’ll set it up so when I shoot it the body is knocked forward, knocking a candle we’ve set up into some oil to make sure it ignites. That will take off the face, but if any flesh remains it’ll be easy to tell if it’s dug up and we can’t set more oil or we risk it burning too quickly and him figuring it out all the same.”

“You’re just going to kill someone in town?” Devan asked disgusted. “Some innocent person?”

“I’ve gathered a list of people who have committed crimes and hope to find one of them near your size, but if I can’t I’ll find someone else,” said Domeric. “If we don’t do this my father is going to kill the heads of half the houses in the North and any even slightly loyal to them. The Baratheons aren’t going to turn to our side. They care more about justice than winning. They won’t let this stand.

“Either I can let them all die or I can send you to warn Robb about his betrayers so he can live and those that come after us might live in a better world. So if all it takes is me killing one person, whether they be a criminal who got away because his mother fucks the castellan or some stable boy, I’m going to make sure ours children have a chance at a better world. It’s not a choice for me. Not when I know what will come if my father wins.”

Devan squeezed his knees, his head hanging for a moment before he opened his eyes and looked to Domeric. “Let us make a better tomorrow.”

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Jon got little rest that night, spending most of it sat on his bed with a hand hanging off the side intermittently scratching Ghost. When his mind finally quieted and exhaustion took him, Jon felt a sense of relief at the rush of cold air across his scaled body.
He soared across the sky silently before spotting a familiar figure stood on the walkways of Castle Black. He drifted to the ground and landed where he’d previously seen Jeor Mormont laying beside his severed hand after burning a wildling alive in his copper armor. His molten eyes turned on the elderly man who watched him walk toward the railing.

Aemon smiled as he held out his hand for him to sniff, the old man’s hand bathed in warm air when he exhaled. “Restless again?” Aemon asked sliding a hand over his scales. “I find myself much the same lately. Too much to do for me to sleep, though I doubt it’ll be long before I can catch up on all the rest I’ve missed.”

A somber trill escaped his throat, making Aemon smile. “Don’t worry. He’ll come for you and then when he meets his aunt you won’t be alone any longer. Neither of you.”

He watched Aemon go inside before digging his feet into the dirt and throwing himself in the air, his wings thumping as he flew up until he crested the clouds. It felt as if he slipped then before his eyes snapped open and he sat up in bed hearing Edric knock at his door.

When he opened the door Edric smirked. “I was worried you wouldn’t answer again.”

“Sorry about that,” Jon said turning to prepare for their morning.

“I was just worried something happened,” Edric said entering the room. “I’m sorry I left you alone that night. If I’d been there-”

“I would been mortified,” Jon said taking a seat as he set his boots in front of him and looked to Edric. “You’ve no idea how stupid I felt. How pathetic I…” He sighed, brushing a hand through his hair to push a stray strand from his face before returning his gaze to Edric. “I wanted to be alone, but I’m glad you’re here now.”

Edric nodded. “I guess this means we’re probably not going after an alliance with the Martells.”

Jon chuckled and shook his head as he focused on getting dressed. “I don’t know.”

“I guess you could always go after the Yronwoods. They’re the next most powerful house in Dorne, and they’re of the First Men like House Stark.” Watching Jon lace his shoes, Edric looked from him to the hearth he was leaning against. “Is it true you saw a vision in the flames?”

“Thoros told you?” Jon asked looking up.

“He said you saw the Vale and some northern houses attacking the Starks.”

“I’ve already done all I can,” he said with a sigh. “For now we need to focus on figuring out what to do with Myrcella and Rosamund.”

Edric walked over to where Ghost laid on the floor and knelt down to rub his stomach. “What are you going to do about Jynessa and the Sand Snakes?”

Jon stood and shook his head as he started putting on his sword belt. “What can I do? Should I kill them for playing a game I play from the shadows? For upsetting me? What would that gain me?”

“Satisfaction?” Edric said uncertainly as he stood straight and moved aside so Ghost could stand as well.

“I won’t kill them over such a petty thing,” Jon said before looking to Edric with sorrowful eyes, “but they are dead to me. I spent the day letting the pain I felt burn my heart so I could cut them
from it. I thought them the house of the siblings I never got to know, a family robbed from me by murder and lies, but I was wrong. My brother and sister were Targaryens, not Martells. The second mother I might have had may have been born of them but she wed Rhaegar and was of House Targaryen. My family are dragons and wolves. Not snakes.”

Hearing the shift in Jon’s voice from sorrow to resentment sent a shiver down Edric’s spine. There was an inferno of fury in him that had been cooled by ice. He’d seen men explode in anger but found what he saw in Jon more frightening.

Jon seemed to notice Edric’s unease and chuckled, walking over to rub Ghost’s head. “Don’t worry. If they come to bother us I’ll just ignore them until either they or I leave. Then we can leave here once things with Myrcella and Rosamund are settled.”

Looking relieved that Jon wouldn’t suddenly start fighting the Sand Snakes if they showed up, Edric followed him out of the room with Ghost at their side. They arrived at the training yard and found Thoros sat alone waiting for them. Spotting them he smirked and motioned to his empty sides.

“I hope we don’t have to spend the day looking for Tyrion.”

“I’m sure Podrick’s waking him,” Jon said looking to Edric. “Did you get anything done yesterday?”

“Not really,” Edric admitted.

Jon sighed. “Sorry.”

Thoros smiled knowing Jon’s disappointment came from his concern about being a mentor to Edric and Podrick. When they arrived Jon quickly went to work showing the boys how to quickly draw their weapons in different situations.

Once some time passed Jon felt an odd sense of something missing. After wondering if he forgot something realized it was around the time the Sand Snakes usually arrived looking to spar. Deciding to spend more time with the boys he had them attack him with blunted weapons then went over any flaws he saw in their attacks while explaining his reactions, having them repeat them a few times before moving on.

They had just finished up and were preparing to leave the they saw Loras rush into the yard, hurrying toward them with a hint of panic on his face. “Jon!”

Jon’s left hand rested on the pommel of Dark Sister, glancing past Loras as he asked, “Is something wrong?”

“Cersei’s begun Oberyn’s trial,” he said motioning behind him.

“His trial isn’t set to start for another sennight,” Tyrion said furrowing his brow. “Is she trying to rush it because she knows he isn’t guilty?”

“I don’t know,” Loras said looking from Tyrion. “I know you were close. I figured you’d want to be there.”

“We’re,” Jon muttered quietly, then sighed. “Fine. Lead the way.”

Jon and the others followed Loras toward the Great Hall where lords and ladies of the court gathered while Tommen carefully took his seat atop the Iron Throne. Margaery was stood at the
base opposite Cersei, who wore a smug smirk. Jon stood off to the side with the others while Loras made his way over to where Jaime stood, taking his place beside Rosamund so Jaime could move to his spot beside the throne. Almost opposite him on Cersei’s side was a thin gray haired man with a heavily lined face Jon didn’t recognize dressed in a simple white tunic that fell to his ankles.

Looking out to the crowd Jon quickly spotted the Dornish party near the front of those gathered. Ellaria and the Sand Snakes shared concerned looks while Jynessa wore a frown, seeming as if she were barely paying attention to whatever her mother was saying.

At the dais before the throne sat Orton Merryweather, Gyles Rosby and Aurane Waters. When their eyes met Jon saw a silent apology in Aurane’s gaze and realized none of the men looked pleased to be there. Gyles was agitated while Orton seemed bored, resting his cheek in his palm.

The doors opened and a pair of goldcloaks guided a cuffed Oberyn before the dais. It was the man in the white tunic who stepped forward to say a prayer, his hardened eyes glaring at Oberyn as he asked the Father Above to guide them to justice. Tyrion’s brow knit as he said, “He must be the new High Septon.”

Orton sat up and looked to the shackled man before them. “Oberyn Martell did you kill Tywin Lannister and King Joffrey Baratheon?”

“No,” Oberyn said with a shrug. “Though I-”

“You’ve killed my father and my eldest son,” Cersei exclaimed so suddenly it startled half the hall. They watched her smile grow as she continued, “And for that the crown challenges you to a trial of seven!”

The hall filled with muttering as Jon stood straight, looking from Cersei to the nonplussed Oberyn. “What?” was all the prince managed to say, though it was barely audible.

Orton stood up, glancing at Cersei before telling the hall, “The accused will have one day to find six others to join him. Since the accuser is too young to participate the accused will face seven champions chosen by the crown. The accused shall be found innocent if the accuser’s champions are either defeated or yield. If the accused is slain or he is unable to find six men who will stand with him then the gods have judged him guilty.”

It didn’t matter that Jon could vouch for Oberyn’s innocence with Joffrey or that they had a better suspect for Tywin; Cersei was going to kill Oberyn Martell.

The Dornish prince gaped until he heard Ellaria crying and turned to her. “It will be okay, my love,” he called out to her, drawing her eyes to him as he felt his heart rip seeing tears trace her cheeks.

Cersei stepped forward, grinning as she said, “The Crown’s champions will be Lord Commander Jaime Lannister, Ser Loras Tyrell, Sandor Clegane, Ser Osmund Kettleblack, Ser Balon Swann, Ser Boros Blount, and Ser Osfryd Kettleblack.”

Oberyn felt as if he’d had his legs cut from under him as he turned back to the dais where Orton Merryweather stood and looked around the hall. “Are there six here who will stand with Prince Oberyn Martell?”

“I will.” The crowd turned to see Daemon Sand step past the Sand Snakes and stand behind Oberyn.

But he was the only one. Oberyn already had few allies in court but the prospect of facing the six
remaining kingsguard and the commander of the City Watch clearly had the effect Cersei hoped.

Oberyn let out a hollow laugh, but then he heard another voice say, “I will as well.”

His eyes widened as he turned to see Obara stepping beside Daemon. “Obara,” he said shaking his head. “What are you doing?”

“Standing by father,” she told him before glaring at dais. “I’ll fight with him if all the men here are too craven to stand beside an innocent man!”

Oberyn looked to Ellaria, his eyes begging for her to help him convince Obara to recant but found her wide eyes locked on something off to the side of the hall. He followed her gaze to find she was looking at Jon Snow. The young lord was stood with his arms crossed and half a sneer as he met Ellaria’s pleading gaze.

Jon turned his gaze to Oberyn before he snorted and turned, Ghost following him as he departed and left Oberyn to his fate.

Chapter End Notes

Originally the second half of this capped off previous chapter but it was a bit too long so brought it over, then as I started to write it realized there was a nice cut off so include the opening part. I originally had the Domeric stuff revealed a bit later in a burst of North chapters but think it fits here.

I was contemplating having it that Roose and others barely noticed Devan so Dom just switched him out like Myrcella and Rosamund. Obviously it's a bit too jokey but I thought it could be amusing, though not as enjoyable as Domeric's ruse was. Plus Devan gets to be a badass.

Tyrion's comment about Oberyn's lack of allies gave Cersei the idea for the trial of seven as a way to basically force a conviction. Even if he wanted to help them Jon can't get to Tommen in time to convince him to show Oberyn mercy by sending him to the Wall because it's only a day and no way does Cersei let Jon near Tommen.

Hopefully Daemon and Obara stepping forward to help Oberyn had some people thinking it was Jon, but by trying to be decent people and not have a lie taint their relationship with Jon they inadvertently left Oberyn to the lions.

Next Chapter: After another meeting with Myrcella and Sam, Thoros meets with Jon to ask forgiveness before revealing a secret.
A Choice Already Made

Chapter Summary

After another meeting with Myrcella and Sam, Thoros meets with Jon to ask forgiveness before revealing a secret.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Edric gaped at the spot where Jon stood moments earlier, looking back to the defeated looking Oberyn and Ellaria who turned to weep against Tyene’s shoulder. Orton told the hall they would reconvene the next day to see if any might join Oberyn.

Tyrion laughed, looking from the guards ushering Oberyn out of the hall to the door Jon left through. “I was sure he was going to join them.”

“As was I,” Thoros said with a frown.

“I guess he meant what he said,” Edric said as he started for the door.

“About what?” asked Thoros.

Once they were out of the hall and away from strained ears Edric told them what Jon had said about House Martell being dead to him.

“It’s understandable,” Tyrion said nodding. “They’ve burned him once already. Why should he put his live on the line for them? Even if it wasn’t to face the kingsguard it’s not as if they deserve his aide.”

“You’re right but I still thought he’d help them,” said Edric. “Though I guess it’s better he doesn’t. At least this way we don’t have to worry about him dying.”

They returned to the Red Keep and heard Jon’s harp before Thoros, Tyrion and Podrick went off on their own, leaving Edric to knock on his door. “Enter!” Jon called out so Edric opened the door and found Ghost laying at the foot of the bed while Jon sat with his back against the headboard plucking at his redwood harp.

Jon kept playing as Edric moved to the table and took a seat, reaching over to pat Ghost’s rear before sitting back with a sigh. After a moment Jon said, “Say whatever you’re thinking.”

Edric looked to Jon and saw him look at Edric while still playing lightly. “We were all surprised you didn’t step in to help Prince Oberyn.”

“And risk all we’ve prepared? For him?” Jon shook his head, looking to his harp. “He’s not worth it.”

“Are any of us?” asked Edric, his question making Jon’s fingers still as he looked to his squire. With a smile Edric said, “I have no doubt that you would fight all seven kingsguard yourself were it me in Oberyn’s place. I can think of at least a dozen people I’m sure you’d do it for. Thoros,
Tyrion, Podrick, Sam, Domeric, Robb, Eddard, Arya, Sansa, Barristan, Myrcella, Rosamund, Tommen, Jaime, Loras, Rickon, Bran… Hells, even Daenerys and we’ve never met her.

“But are any of us worth it? Your goal isn’t just to be king but to make a better world for all who live beyond the wars we fight. If I must die so that you can live and secure that future I would gladly do so.”

“Ned,” Jon began, but Edric shook his head.

“I mean it. Not just because you’re the knight I serve or someone I wouldn’t hesitate to call a friend, but because I truly believe you’re a man who can do so much good for the world. I want to see the world you make. I want to know that I wasn’t just a part of it but helped support you as you forged it. I want that live to wield Dawn and make sure that in a hundred years it’s my name people say and not my uncle’s. And yet if you told me I needed to I would open my throat right now to guarantee you would get to sit on the Iron Throne, kill all the Others and bring true peace to the realm I would do so.”

Jon shook his head. “What are you saying? What does have to do with-”

“My point is,” Edric said brushing a hand through his pale blonde hair, “I know we have to make sacrifices to get what we want from this. I’m willing to give up all I want to see you succeed. I’m sure Ellaria or the Sand Snakes will try to make you feel guilty about this but you shouldn’t. You’re a king. Maybe not officially yet, but you will be and already are as far as I’m concerned. Sometimes a king has to do things like this and I don’t want you to feel guilty for something you’ve no blame in. I don’t want this to rob you of your heart.”

A solemn smile touched Jon’s lips as he laid his harp down on his bed. “You’re right, we do have to make sacrifices… but you are worth it. All you mentioned are to me. Your value in the war to come isn’t what makes you important, not to me.” With a smirk he added, “Though I’d probably have Ghost help me if I had to fight the whole kingsguard.”

Edric snickered and shook his head. “I knew you’d say something like that, which is why I would make that sacrifice for you.”

“You’re a good little brother, Edric,” Jon said picking up his harp as Edric grinned proudly. His grin faded some as he noticed the somber melody Jon played, taking a moment to recognize it.

“And who are you, the proud lord said, that I must bow so low?” The Rains of Castamere echoed through the Red Keep as Jon played and Edric sang.

When they set out for their meeting that night they spoke little before arriving at the inn where Jon once again told Ghost to act as guard. Jon knocked again as he had the day before, though this time stepped back so Tyrion could stand in front. When the door opened Sam smiled to them and waved for them to enter.

Tyrion hurried inside, smiling at he saw Myrcella stood out of sight from the door. She let out a gasp upon seeing him. “Uncle,” she said as tears stung her eyes, “how did this happen?”

For a moment Tyrion was confused, then as he scrunched his face felt the lack of his nose crinkling and remembered she hadn’t seen him since he lost it. “Oh gods, I forgot,” he said with a laugh, brushing the little that remained of his nose. “I lost it in the Blackwater. It’s a blessing though. I no longer have to smell the city.”

Myrcella bent over to hug Tyrion. “I’m sorry I reacted like that.”
“Not at all, I should have remembered you might not know,” he said brushing aside her concerns as they parted.

Edric stood beside the window watching the street below and Podrick stood guard by the door while Jon moved to stand by the hearth, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed while he watched the others sit at the table. “I assume you spoke with Rosamund, Tyrion?”

“She said she’s willing to do whatever we decide, though she worries someone will learn the truth eventually.” Tyrion turned to Myrcella with a sympathetic smile. “I know it’s tempting to live a life far from your mother, but I think it’s wrong choice.”

Myrcella wasn’t alone in her surprise in his blunt opinion. “You do?”

“I do, and I think you feel the same. I think some part of you wants to be found. For your mother and all the realm to know what you’ve done, because the moment they do they’ll have to admit you outsmarted them all.”

“I came here because everywhere else would end with me being sent back here anyway,” she said shaking her head, “but this way it was my choice instead of being found hiding in Lannisport or Ashford.”

“I’m sure that was the deciding factor, but I also know you and how smart you are. If you really wanted to stay some nameless cook you could have stayed at Nightsong and had one of the people living there write to Jon implying your intent to stay. We could have had this talk months from now when we return there, yet here you are.”

“Because you and Jon can help,” she said looking from her uncle to Jon, who watched with his brow furrowed and arms crossed. “Anywhere else I go I’ll have to look over my shoulder but if I asked to stay with you then I’d be safe.”

“But you haven’t,” Tyrion pointed out. “You haven’t asked to sail with us. You want us to help you make a choice you’ve already made.”

She sat in silence for a moment, staring at the table before slowly nodding. “You’re right. I wouldn’t have come here if I wanted anything else. I just…” With a sigh she looked to Tyrion. “I don’t want to go back to Dorne and I don’t want to be sent off again, but I know I will.”

“You won’t,” said Tyrion.

“You really think my mother will just let me do as I please?” Myrcella asked with a scoff.

“No,” Tyrion said reaching out to put his hand over hers on the table, “but I think you strong enough to fight for what you want.” Tyrion sighed as he squeezed her hand. “My dear niece, you have to understand I… it was never your mother who wanted you gone. She fought me when I made the arrangement.”

“She could have stopped it,” Myrcella said shaking her head. “She could have made Joffrey stop you.”

“And take my head? I’m already short enough.” Seeing she didn’t crack a smile at his joke he shook his head. “I did it because I thought it the right thing at the time. Clearly I was wrong otherwise I would never have put you in a place where some fool might attempt to harm you. Use that if you must, but I know you’ve a brighter mind than half the council here so don’t doubt you’ll find a way to get what you want.” With a smirk he added, “Besides, if things go wrong I know a kidnapper who could take you somewhere safe.”
Myrcella smiled at Tyrion, glancing to Jon at the mention of a kidnapper. “It’s the right thing to do, isn’t it? Rosamund’s family will think she’s run away unless we do this.” Sitting back in her chair with a sigh Myrcella said, “Then whenever Oberyn’s trial is finished I’ll go to the Red Keep.”

Thoros and Tyrion exchanged looks while Jon noticed Sam frown, but before he could speak Edric scoffed. “Won’t be long then.”

“What do you mean?” asked Myrcella.

“I’d heard some rumors but wasn’t sure what was true,” Sam said looking around the group. “What happened?”

“Your mother challenged Oberyn to a trial of seven,” Tyrion told them, “but it looks like Oberyn won’t be able to find the six others required, supposedly proving the gods have judged him guilty rather than Cersei frightening the knights of the realm by pitting them against all the kingsguard. He’ll be found guilty before he has a chance to defend himself.”

“Surely there must be six among his party who would help him?” asked Sam.

“Many have returned to Dorne,” Tyrion said shaking his head. “The only ones who stood with him were his old squire Daemon Sand and his daughter Obara.”

Myrcella looked to Jon, “I thought you were close to Prince Oberyn?”

Jon’s face darkened as he looked down, leaving it to Edric to answer, “Not anymore.”

“What’s happened?” Sam asked with concern.

“It doesn’t matter,” Jon said before anyone could speak, pushing off the wall to step toward the table. “Once Oberyn’s trial is done we’ll help Myrcella reveal she switched places with Rosamund. After that we’ll wait a bit and if they try to send her back to Dorne to quell whatever tensions rise from Oberyn’s death we’ll kidnap her and keep her safe.”

“Should we tell them what actually happened with Ser Arys?” asked Edric. “What Arianne tried to do?”

The room grew quiet until Jon shook his head. “Only if we think war with Dorne unavoidable.”

Sam met Jon’s gaze saying, “I thought Oberyn was your friend.” In his eyes it was clear to Jon Sam was saying he thought Oberyn an ally in the war to come. “Surely if the knight who slew the Mountain stood with him others would join you.”

“Maybe,” Jon said with a shrug.

“But?” Sam said leadingly.

Frustration showed on Jon’s face as he said, “They don’t deserve my aide, not after-” They watched him stop himself and sigh, crossing his arms as he looked away. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Is it me?” Jon turned to Myrcella hearing her somber question. “Is it because House Martell used me as a pawn and put my life at risk?”

“It’s not,” Jon said shaking his head. Seeing she clearly didn’t believe him, Jon turned to walk toward the bed, running his hands over his face and through his hair, groaning before he turned back to the table. “It’s because they used me.”
Myrcella and Sam looked to one another, noticing the others frowning before they turned back to Jon. “Used you how?” asked Myrcella.

Jon stared at her a moment, grimacing at his internal debate which ended with him dejectedly admitting, “They told Jynessa Blackmont to get close to me so I would give her information and so she could introduce me to Oberyn so he and Ellaria to make me their ally.” Deflated, Jon looked from the frowning Sam to the gaping Myrcella, sighing as he sat on the edge of the bed, his gaze drifting to the floor. “Everything with them was a lie, all set up to make me their pawn. I wanted to help them but they never cared about me. They only cared what I could tell them and what I could do for them.”

“Is that why you told them about the Stepstones?” Myrcella’s question made Jon’s gaze snap to her along with all but Sam. She answered his shock by telling him, “Doran told Arianne and she told Sam and I.”

Jon sighed, shaking his head. “I told him because I wanted him to be an ally and I thought it would help having friends in House Martell.”

Sympathy colored her features before she asked with a smile, “Do you truly intend to take the Stepstones?”

“I do,” he said nodding.

“Why?”

He lingered on her eyes, the firelight reflecting in them like gems in a crown. It was only then he realized how he’d easily accepted her into a part of his life he’d previously kept from her. Here she was planning and plotting with them, talking of kidnappings and the politics of the realm, but she hadn’t felt out of place.

Jon could tell her the truth. He trusted her enough and thought at least she cared enough about him to not tell others if not actively help them, and yet he knew he wouldn’t. It might change things for her, whether it be how she sees him or what she considered doing. If she cared for him and felt anything like Edric she might put aside her own self interest for him.

“I don’t intend to fight Robb. I don’t intend to fight the Martells. The wars here aren’t my wars,” Jon said carefully. “The Stepstones are just that, a stepping stone.”

“To what?” asked Myrcella.

“A better world,” answered Jon, looking to the windows. “We shouldn’t linger long.”

Tyrion seemed to know Jon was looking to escape so he could avoid lying more to Myrcella so quickly hopped off his chair. “He’s right. There’s an inn near the Fishmonger’s Square, the Iron Hook, we can meet there next time.”

“When will that be?” Myrcella asked pulling her gaze from Jon to Tyrion. “After Oberyn’s judged?”

“Unless something else comes up,” said Tyrion. Before she could get up he held out his arms, letting her stay seated as so she didn’t have to kneel or bend so much to hug him. “Be smart and stay safe.”

“I will,” she assured. “Thank you.”
He reached up to pat her cheek before stepping away, watching her gaze instantly shift to Jon, barely hiding her sympathetic frown. Clamping down his magnanimous smile Tyrion looked to Sam, deciding he would favor being an uncle. “Samwell, I think I owe you a drink. Come, let me buy you one before we leave. Thoros you can join us while Podrick and Edric tend to the horses.” Turning to Jon he said, “My lord, I’m sure you won’t mind guarding my niece while I thank her guardian?”

Jon failed to keep from rolling his eyes, shaking his head as he said, “Do as you please.”

He rose from his seat on the bed to watch them exit, leaving him and Myrcella alone as the door closed. “Does he think he’s subtle?” Myrcella wondered aloud.

“I think he enjoys feeling clever more than he cares to be subtle,” said Jon. Turning his gaze to her he smiled. “You’re sure about revealing your switch with Rosamund?”

“It’s for the best,” she said nodding. “Rosamund may deserve a pampered life but she doesn’t deserve to be sold off in my stead or the burdens that might come from those who think her me. If anything as princess again I might be able to assure she marries a decent, comely man who treats her well.”

“And yourself?” Jon asked sitting beside her.

“I’ll do what I think best,” Myrcella said staring into his dark grey eyes, like crowns of Valyrian steel around his pupils. “I’m sorry for what happened.” Seeing him arch his brow she said with a frown, “What Oberyn did to you.”

“Oh,” he said flatly, looking down. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Of course it does, Jon. They used you and hurt you.”

Jon sighed as he looked to her. “I don’t care that this was part of their plan so much as I do that it’s tainted everything. And it was all pointless. I wanted to befriend them, to make them allies. They could have just spoken to me, asked me to tell things and they would have learned all the same things, but they didn’t see me as an ally. To them I was just a pawn.”

Myrcella frowned sympathetically, having felt the same. “It feels awful, doesn’t it?”

“You’re no pawn, your grace.”

“At least they told you,” Myrcella offered. “It means they didn’t want to continue lying to you.”

“I suppose,” he said lowering his gaze in thought. “They gain nothing by this.”

Myrcella shook her head. “They get to be decent and avoid your relationship with them being forever tainted by the fact they began it intending to manipulate you. Whatever comes now can be built on honesty instead of lies.”

Jon met her gaze for a lingering moment, looking contemplative before his eyes fell again and he shook his head. “There’s nothing to be done about it now. I told Edric I don’t care to get revenge but to me they exist as much as House Reyne.”

“That’s why you won’t help Oberyn?” she asked tilting her head to try and catch his gaze.

“You say that as if I should still help him.”
Myrcella frowned at the bitter edge to his voice, hating that it was aimed at her. “Do you think him guilty?”

She saw his jaw shift and his nostrils flare before he exhaled. “I know he didn’t kill Joffrey and Tyrion and I believe Varys likely behind Tywin’s murder.”

Myrcella sighed, reaching out to take one of his hands in hers. She saw his gaze quickly track it, watching her squeeze his hand before drifting back to her eyes. “I understand why you don’t want to help them. To be honest when you said what they did I wanted nothing more than to take a dagger to Jynessa Blackmont’s throat.”

Jon chuckled. “Please don’t. Not for my sake.”

“It would be for mine,” she said firmly, her hardened eyes softening as she added, “for hurting the best man I know.”

“Myrcella,” he started but she squeezed his hand, shaking her head lightly.

“I won’t do something so drastic, I promise, but it’s how I felt. That’s how much you mean to me, Jon. If you wanted to get revenge I would help you. I would see Oberyn exiled, sent to the Serpent Isles to never see his family again so he might suffer for what he’s done. I’ll never judge you for the anger you feel. I only ask so I can better understand. I want to help you. I want to make you feel better, to see you smile.”

To no surprise she watched Jon’s lips curve into a small smile as he told her, “You already do.”

“I want to make sure you’re making the choice you truly think best rather than the one you think you have to make,” she said quietly.

His smile crumbled, his hand slipping from hers as he sat back. “I know you were frustrated with how the Martells treated you in Dorne. Rosamund said you felt like a glass doll. I thought you’d understand.”

“I do,” she said pleadingly, sliding forward in her chair. “I do, Jon. I just-I know you. I don’t want you to do something you’ll regret. I know some part of you wants to help him but I understand why you would choose not to. I just don’t want you to make that choice and then look back on it wishing you had helped him.”

“There’s no point to me risking my life for his,” Jon said shaking his head. “If it were just a normal trial I’d tell the truth, but facing the kingsguard? No matter which six join him people will die.”

“I know, I just…” She sighed. “When Tyrion said I had already made my choice he was right. I did but I was afraid I might regret it. I wanted others to help me make it so whatever regrets I come to have aren’t mine alone. I’m not asking you to help him for my sake, I just don’t want either of us to regret our choices, whatever they may be.”

The speck of anger in his eyes faded as he leaned forward slightly. “That’s it, though, Myrcella. They made me regret so much. When I heard they were coming to King’s Landing I wanted to meet them, to know them and be their friend. When I was with—”

Her stomach twisted knowing he’d stopped himself from mentioning Jynessa, and yet she felt a flutter within it sensing he’d done so for her sake. As much as she didn’t want to think of them together she wanted to help him, to let him get out whatever he needed to say, so reached out to place her hand over his forearm. “It’s okay, Jon. When you were with Lady Jynessa…”
Jon gave her a questioning look she answered with a nod before he continued quietly. “When I was with her I thought it was my choice. She was nice to me, and...” She didn’t mind him stopping from going too in depth, watching him hang his head for a moment then look to her with a frown. “I thought they cared about me but all they did was make me regret the time I wasted with them. I regret every moment I spent caring for Jynessa. I regret letting myself admire anything of Oberyn or think of Ellaria as if as she was like.”

Myrcella felt her heart tear as she watched his Valyrian steel eyes grow glassy before he let out a breath and turned from her. She raised a hand to his cheek, her fingers brushing against the hairs coating it and slowly turning his face toward her again. Biting her lip she met his gaze and saw a sorrow and pain that made her heart ache.

“I’m sorry,” he said shaking his head.

“Don’t be.”

“I know you don’t want to hear about my time with them,” Jon said glancing to her hand as she brushed her fingers through his beard to stroke his jaw.

“I don’t mind it. I like that you can talk to me like this. I wish you could do it more.” Her hand slide toward his cheek, a solemn smile filling her lips. “I want to be the one you seek when your heart grows weary.”

Jon reached up to place a hand over hers as he leaned into her palm slightly. “Myrcella, I-”

The door opened and they turned to see Sam go wide eyed upon spotting them. “S-Sorry,” he offered meekly, “Tyrion, he, uh, he worried it was taking so long because-well, he implied certain things and sent me up.”

Myrcella chuckled, looking to Jon, who held her hand as it fell from his cheek and met her eyes. “I’ll make sure whatever choice I make it’s one I won’t regret.”

As they stood Myrcella felt glad that it was Jon who slid his arms around her before she slid hers around his torso. Once they separated Jon gave her a small smile before he turned and walked to the door, patting Sam’s shoulders and giving his friend a silent nod before leaving the room.

Tyrion and Thoros waited by the door, Tyrion eyeing him suspiciously as he approached. “Do I need to worry about what took so long?” he asked crossing his arms.

Jon scoffed, pushing open the door as he said, “Only if you don’t want to be a granduncle.”

Thoros chuckled as Tyrion spun around with a gasp and followed Jon exclaiming, “What?!”

As they rode back to the Red Keep it was hard to miss the lightness in Jon, though some of that might have been his teasing argument with Tyrion. After securing their horses they separated for the night, heading to their chambers.

Thoros went about his nightly ritual of lighting the candles he placed around his room before lighting the hearth. However before he could take his seat before the flames Thoros stared into them and thought of Jon as the young lord left the Great Hall. A somber smile touched Thoros’ lips as he sighed and left his room.

Jon opened his door with a smirk after Thoros knocked on it. “I’ve been expecting this,” he said motioning for Thoros to enter. The red priest sat in a chair looking at the fire Jon lit in his hearth as the dark haired lord sat beside him. “So have you come to convince me to help him or dissuade me
from standing with Oberyn?”

Thoros chuckled. “I’m not sure. One moment I want to ask you to leave here and the next I think you need to stand beside him.”

Glancing at the hearth Jon motioned to the flickering flames. “Has your Lord showed you nothing of this?”

That stole the light from Thoros’ eyes, the red priest frowning as his head fell in shame. “I’ve come to apologize, Jon.”

Jon’s expression grew grim and guarded. “Don’t tell me you were part of it.”

“No,” Thoros quickly raised his head, shaking his hand. “No, sorry. I… I’ve kept things from you.”

“What things?”

Thoros looked to the hearth as he answered, “R’hllor has shown me things I believe meant to guide and warn you.”

Though it started as a flash of anger it was with confusion Jon asked, “Why would you keep them from me?”

“Because I feared you might see them not as warnings to contemplate but targets to charge toward,” Thoros said turning to him. “You’ve run to danger time and time again. You returned to King’s Landing after the Lord of Light brought you back to life. You charged across a burning river to face an army with barely a hundred men behind you, calling out their king to face you. You asked Tyrion to choose you as his champion so you would face the Mountain again even though you bear a scar across your chest from the last time you faced him. You court danger like a man in love.”

“It’s not as if I do so easily,” Jon said with a shrug. “I could have returned to the Starks but what could I have done there that Robb hasn’t on his own? They might have won their battles a bit easier with my dragon but he can’t win their war on his own.”

“I’m not judging your choices,” Thoros clarified, holding up a hand. “It’s part of why I respect you and will never regret following you, even if you aren’t Azor Ahai.”

“Azor Ahai?” Jon shook his head and snickered. “You think me The Prince That Was Promised?”

Thoros’ gaze was sincere as he nodded. “I’ve no doubt of it. I once heard prophecies called puzzles used to obfuscate the truth from those who would try to manipulate fate while giving those who struggle a light to guide them. They are wildfire, liquid flame which shape to whatever lay beneath.

“They say that when the red star bleeds and darkness gathered Azor Ahai will be born again amid smoke and salt to wake dragons out of stone. You’ve done that. As the red comet streaked across the sky you fell to darkness and were revived, born again amid tears and flames having allowed the first dragon to be born from an egg all thought long turned to stone. Your blazon is a flaming sword which you can manifest.”

Jon looked down as he thought it over, slowly shaking his head. “I don’t know. It all seems…”

“I know,” Thoros said sympathetically. “As it always is there are other ways to view the prophecy. We could say the smoke and salt meant Robert’s Rebellion, or your mother’s tears and a smokey hearth. The bleeding star could be Arthur Dayne dying to protect you as the darkness is death
coming to your mother or the lie which kept you in the dark about your birth. All prophecies are easily distorted by those who wish them filled. If we tried I’ve no doubt we could claim half of Flea Bottom fills the prophecy.”

“Then why me?” Jon asked skeptically.

“Even if you filled none of the aspect of the prophecy I would still think you will fulfill it. I also don’t believe you need to live your life as Azor Ahai did. You don’t need to take lives to forge Lightbringer, you already have your burning sword. You are the light in the Long Night that we’ve been suffering since before Robert died. I believe Azor Ahai reborn only need be the one who pulls us from the dark of the world no matter how deep it goes.

“The man I see before me makes me believe you Azor Ahai. One who not only gave life to a dragon or whom the Lord of Light used me to revive, but a decent one who could bring peace to a broken realm. One who can unite humanity against the Others and bring a new dawn brighter than all before it. I know you a man who does what he thinks right no matter the risk. The kind to be a hero even in a world undeserving of one.”

Jon’s brow furrowed as he looked to the flames silently.

“I didn’t come here to question your choices, my lord. I’ve come to explain why the one you’ve made with Oberyn has made me question my fear and concern for you. I worried you would hear what I saw and rush to answer it. If I misinterpreted something and it led you down a false path and you were harmed it would be my fault. For that, part of me was glad to see you chose not to step forward. It showed me you don’t blindly rush in.”

Turning to him Jon arched his brow asking, “But?”

Thoros smiled sadly at his leading tone. “I think it’s a choice you’re making for the wrong reasons.”

Jon shook his head, more with grim amusement than in disagreement. “How so?”

“We know Oberyn is innocent,” said Thoros. “We know who slew Joffrey and we’ve a decent idea who slew Tywin. Given your renown I believed there was a chance for Oberyn to be proven innocent and regain his freedom, but Cersei stole from him. I know he manipulated you and understand how much it hurt you, but I think that alone isn’t reason enough to let an innocent man die. Not because Cersei abused some forgotten law of The Seven that forces him to be found guilty or risk six other lives to earn his freedom.”

Jon sat in silence for a moment, but when Thoros said no more he asked, “How long have you been keeping your visions from me?”

The red priest sighed, accepting he’d said all he could and now had to answer for his lies of omission. “They came to me after I sailed from here to Starfall.”

“What were they?” Jon asked, and before Thoros could answer he met the red priest’s eyes with his own hardened gaze as he said firmly, “All of them.”

Nodding, Thoros took a breath and glanced at the fire before meeting Jon’s gaze to let him see his honesty. “The first was of you. Cast in shadow while another you mimicked your actions, only it was gilded and grew larger as your shadow seem to fade, drifting into the growing dark until it enveloped everything and a red dragon swam through the pitch black sky.”

“Was it Bloodwing?”
Thoros shook his head. “No. Its scales were brighter red. Like the Targaryen blazon.”

“The gilded version of me, are you sure it was me? Not Tommen or some other Lannister?”

Thoros nodded. “It was you, or close enough I couldn’t tell the difference. When I say he was gilded I mean he was formed of gold much as the other was formed of shadow. The details was lost but the outline was yours.”

Jon scratched his shoulder as he leaned back with a sigh. “Could it just be showing the difference between the me working in the shadows and the me working with the Lannisters? In the end the shadow took over and a dragon was born from it. It could be a sign we’ll succeed.”

“It’s possible but I fear that too simple a view. I don’t believe R’hllor would have shown me that just to encourage us.”

Nodding, Jon asked, “What was the next?”

“It was at a shore. I watched two griffins land only for one to lose its feathers and fur, revealing a basilisk. Then the basilisk’s glittering yellow scales began to melt like cheese as the other griffin cried out until all that remained was a snake that sank into the dirt.”

Jon shook his head. “Why must these be so odd?”

Thoros snickered. “They are a test we must pass to gain the information we seek.”

“I long for the days of lessons with Maester Luwin,” Jon said with a laugh. “Two griffins? That could be House Connington.” When Thoros gave him a questioning look Jon said with a somber smile, “Barristan mentioned once Jon Connington was a friend of Rhaegar. He served as hand until he lost the Battle of the Bells during Robert’s Rebellion and Aerys exiled him to Essos. They say he drank himself to death there. Their blazon is a pair of griffins.”

“It’s possible, but remember there was only one true griffin,” said Thoros.

Jon rubbed his jaw and nodded. “What was the next one you saw?”

Thoros tensed, hesitating. “I saw a pack of wolves among a field of roses running after the shadow of a dragon.”

Jon sat up. “Do you think it means the Starks and Tyrells can work together?”

“Again I don’t know for certain, my lord,” Thoros said apologetically. “The wolfs were old, many covered in moss with roses growing from them.”

His brow knit, Jon asked, “Maybe I’m supposed to have Robb marry Margaery? But I’d have to break her marriage with Tommen. Maybe it can be annulled? What about the shadow? Was it the red dragon from before?”

The rapid burst of questions as Jon tried to adjust his plans for the potential meaning of his vision made Thoros chuckle. “I didn’t see what cast it, only the shadow they chased. Before your vision I feared it a sign the Starks and Tyrells would betray us and hunt you but now I’ve no idea if it was meant as a warning or guide.”

Jon sat in quiet contemplation for a moment before asking, “The next?”

“Those were the only ones of note,” said Thoros. “Otherwise all I saw was ice, waves, smoke and
shadows.”

Leaning back in his chair Jon crossed his arms, letting out a breath. “None seem to give me any idea what to do here.”

“It doesn’t seem so, no.”

“You think I should fight for Oberyn?”

Thoros shook his head. “I trust your judgment, whatever it may be. If you decide he doesn’t deserve your aide I will always respect your choice… But tomorrow I plan to stand with him.”

Jon tilted his head. “Even if I don’t?”

“He’s an innocent man,” Thoros said solemnly. “R’hllor’s light drives us beyond the shadows of the Seven. I can’t stand by and watch him die because they’ve falsely judged a man I might save.”

His fingers bouncing across the arm of his chair, Jon said, “At least you’ll be there to revive me again when Jaime kills me.”

A grin stretched across Thoros’ face. “R’hllor lead us from the darkness and fill our hearts with fire so we may walk his shining path.”

When Jon opened the door for Edric the next morning his squire blinked in surprise. “You’ve shaved.”

He followed the clean jawed young lord into his chamber so Jon could finish dressing, having been awake before Edric arrived. Jon wore a black jerkin over a scarlet slashed white doublet and black breeches leading to black gloves and boots.

As he tied a scarlet sash around his waist, Edric asked with a knowing smile, “You decided to dress up for our training?”

Once he secured his sash with his brooch Jon looked to Edric. “I’m sorry, Ned.”

Edric shook his head. “I’ve known since we rode back last night. Are you sure you want to do this?”

“I’m sure it’s the right thing to do,” Jon said reaching for his sword belt.

Arriving at the training ground the others looked to Jon, a somber smile taking Podrick’s lips as Tyrion frowned. “I see you’ve dressed to impress.”

“I suppose I just needed help to make a choice I already made.”

Tyrion chuckled. “Well I know we rode to battle together once before but I’m afraid I won’t be much help this time.”

“I don’t expect you to join us,” Jon said shaking his head. Then he motioned to the squires, “And you two. Edric, Podrick, you both are barred from even thinking about joining in.”

“But.”

“This is an order,” Jon said before Edric could do more than mutter.

“Alright,” Edric relented, crossing his arms as Podrick sympathetically patted his shoulder.
Jon kept their work light that morning as their minds were elsewhere. Eventually noon neared and they made their way to the great hall which quickly filled with even more people than the day before.

Among the Dornish lords and ladies Jon quickly found the mournful looking Sand Snakes and Ellaria. They looked to the doors as guards once again brought Oberyn to the dais before the Iron Throne. Jon saw him make an effort to keep his head raised either to keep himself from accepting his fate or to put on a show for his daughters and paramour.

“Prince Oberyn Martell,” Orton Merryweather said rising to his feet, “your day of judgment has come. You have been challenged to a trial of seven.” Turning his attention to the crowd he asked, “Will any stand with the accused?”

Without words Daemon Sand and Obara Sand stepped forward to stand beside Oberyn, who gave them a somber, thankful smile. Looking over the unmoving hall, Jon took a breath to steel himself, tapping the railing he had been leaning against.

“Oberyn Martel, you stand accused of killing King Joffrey Baratheon and Lord Tywin Lannister,” Orton began. His voice was a booming declaration that was interrupted by another voice calling out, “Only two men in this hall have killed a king!”

The crowd began to part as Jon made his way to Oberyn with Ghost and Thoros at his sides. Ellaria let out a trembling gasp, clutching her throat as she saw Jon stand before the dais. Oberyn shared the confusion of his daughters, which echoed in the pouting Tommen while Margaery frowned.

“I know Prince Oberyn had no hand in poisoning Joffrey Baratheon and the crown already knows who I suspect had a hand in the death of Tywin Lannister. The only men who I know have slain kings here are Jaime Lannister and myself.

“The Lord Commander slew Aerys Targaryen to spare Westeros suffering another day of his madness. He drove his sword through the man who hung my grandfather over an open flame and laughed as my uncle strangled himself trying to reach a sword to save him!”

Jon turned to look over the audience who watched him speak. “And I slew Stannis Baratheon to spare the realm suffering beneath a man who twisted his faith to suit his need for war. He took a god who is meant be a light in the darkness and a warm embrace to protect against the night and twisted it to drive those he armed to do his bidding. He armed men with steel and false words and brought them to our shores to claim a throne that was never his, and so I broke his magic sword and drove mine into his heart!

“But Oberyn Martell is no kingslayer,” Jon said turning back to the dais. “The day Joffrey died I and many others sat at tables with Oberyn and not once did he leave his table to poison the king’s cup.”

“A lie to save your friend,” Cersei exclaimed with a scoff.

“Why would I lie to save a man I hate?” Jon said firmly, drawing more gasps. “He’s lied to me since the moment we met and has betrayed my trust as no other has. I would find joy in seeing him pained… but not dead. Not for a crime I know he didn’t commit.”

As Cersei fumed it was the High Septon who shook his head saying, “It matters not. You have only five to face the trial, thus the gods have judged–”

“I’m worth more than half your champions,” Jon said crossing his arms. “If you truly believe this
some judgment of the gods rather than a sign that the men of this realm simply fear facing all the kingsguard, potentially leaving the king without protection, then why not let us fight and prove who the gods truly favor?’

The High Septon smirked. “Things may be different with your Old Gods or Burning Lord but if you knew anything of The Seven then you might-”

“Do not think me a fool because I don’t limit my faith to one order,” Jon snapped, silencing the older man. “Whether they be the Seven Who Are One, the Lord of Light, the Old Gods or even the Drowned God I look to the wisdom in all and use it as ore to a smith, forging my own belief. I seek wisdom from all the gods so that I might be a better man than those that came before me and make a better world for those that follow!”

Seeing a flicker of agitation in the old man, Jon felt a flash of pride. It was petty, but he had never liked the Seven much, not since he lived in Winterfell and associated the sept with the woman who made him miserable. Seeing even the dregs of King’s Landing cling to the Seven as if it propped them up or use it as a veil to hide their hideousness had only soured the faith to him. He didn’t mind the faith but there was undeniably a pleasure in knowing he was annoying the High Septon who was helping Cersei’s lies. It felt much as he had seeing anger in the pompous, self righteous lords who looked down on him even as he unhorsed them to earn his knighthood.

The murmuring filling the hall rose slightly as a fair skinned man with short brown hair and a thin beard came forward. Despite his Andal appearance he was dressed in a Dornish attire. “Ser Arron,” Oberyn said as Arron Qorgyle came to stand beside them.

“I’m sorry for not stepping forward sooner, my prince,” Arron said bowing his head.

Oberyn glanced to Jon before shaking his head and smiling to Arron. “Thank you for doing so now.”

The murmuring grew again as five men made their way forward. From the Dornish retinue Jon recognized Myles Manwoody while the others were those who bent the knee after the Blackwater. Jon barely recognized Bonifer Hasty or Tanton Fossoway, instead his attention was drawn to the husky man with a long red beard and hair falling about his neck. Even without his crimson and white surcoat he recognized the man as Ser Ronnet of House Connington.

“Ser Ronnet,” Jon said as Oberyn looked overwhelmed. He quickly hide his surprise with a chuckle. “I’ve heard you’re a fierce knight.”

Oberyn glanced to Jon, curious why he would single out Red Ronnet above the others, but decided he owed Jon at least this much. “If it please you Ser I would gladly accept your aide.”

“And I would gladly give it,” Ronnet said with a bow of his head.

Oberyn turned to Obara, “My dear daughter, please stand aside so one of these men might take your place.”

For a moment Jon thought she might agree, but she forced herself to shake her head. “No. I said I would fight at your side and I shall. I know you innocent, and thus the gods will favor us.”

Orton cast a glance to Cersei before taking a moment to think, clearly not having planned for this. It was seconds before he looked to the crowd telling them, “A field will be raised in the tourney grounds to accommodate the trial. Until then Prince Oberyn will be returned to his cell.”

As the goldcloaks came to take him Oberyn turned to Jon. “Thank you, Jon. Thank you.”
Jon spared him a glance but said nothing as the Dornish prince was taken from the hall, leaving the others to turn to him. Obara bowed her head to him. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet,” said Jon, his brow furrowed as he looked them over. “We have until they finish securing the field to train and I’ve a plan that might make it so we don’t all die.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry I wasn't more responsive to comment last chapter. Spent the last couple days spewing like Regan MacNeil.

There's a couple instances of double talk in the Jon Myrcella conversation that I think are pretty obvious, one I even made sure was more obvious than it was originally. It was nice showing Jon crack a little in front of her, showing how open he can be with her.

I feel like Thoros' visions are more and less obvious than Jon's depending on the reader. I'm curious to see if people crack them all as it'll be a bit before they're made clearer in story.

The lords mentioned were basically my shortlist to fill out the seven when I had the idea, then when I was doing the visions I realized Ronnet was still around in canon.

Next Chapter: During their training Jon and Obara go to pick up her armor from Tobho Mott's shop. After a conversation with Jaime turns to a confrontation Jon speaks with Jynessa the day before the trial.
Before the Seven

Chapter Summary

During their training Jon and Obara go to pick up her armor from Tobho Mott’s shop. After a conversation with Jaime turns to a confrontation Jon speaks with Jynessa the day before the trial.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Agreeing to meet the next morning, Jon left the hall with the rest, making his way back to his chamber when he heard someone calling for him. Tempted as he was to ignore it and keep moving he made himself stop and turn to find Ellaria making her way to him.

“I don’t know how to thank you, my lord,” she said quietly. “Why did you change your mind?”

Crossing his arms, Jon shook his head. “Because even though you’ve made me regret ever wanting to know you, I won’t let you thinking me some worthless fool force me to make a choice I might regret.”

Ellaria’s heart broke as she quickly shook her head, taking a step closer to him. “We never thought you some worthless fool, Jon. We regretted what we’d done well before Oberyn was arrested.” She sighed, stopping herself from reaching for him. “If there was anything we could do to make it up to you we would.”

Meeting her dark eyes Jon told her, “If your prince has any honor than after this his life is mine.”

Ellaria’s frown was mirrored by the Sand Snakes, though she noticed Jon’s companions seemed confused. Crestfallen she asked, “You mean to save his life only to take it yourself?”

His eyes were ice as he told her, “From the moment I make Jaime Lannister forfeit their accusation until his death Oberyn Martell’s life is mine. Every breath he draws is one I’ve given him and I mean to collect his debt like a proper Lannister dog.”

In that moment Ellaria saw through the cold steel of his gaze to the boy whose heart they broke. The boy who cast aside his anger and pain to help them, and in doing so would draw them closer to him. She felt tears stinging her eyes as she smiled. “I told you before… House Martell is forever bound to you.”

Watching him snort and turn to depart Ellaria gave silent thanks to the Lyseni Lady of Love for letting Jon’s kind heart outweigh the anger she feared might consume him. She didn’t know if he would ever truly trust them again but so long as he allowed them she hoped they could earn a place in his heart again.

When morning came Jon’s group met with not only with Ellaria, the Sand Snakes, Daemon Sand, Arron Qorgyle and Ronnet Connington but the other lords who moved to join them in the end. Ellaria marveled at how easily the sixteen year old Jon took the reins to guide the older knights’ training, even including Edric and Podrick so they didn’t go without. He wasn’t the tallest or
largest of them yet stood as though he towered over all attending.

She imagined it was because it was impossible to deny his skill. Undoubtedly Daemon was one of Dorne’s finest swordsmen, yet she watched Jon defend himself against not only the Bastard of Godsgrave but Thoros and Arron. Much of their time was spent in groups as was inevitable in the trial to come. After his display Jon took to circling the ring observing the others spar. Occasionally he would have the attackers switch out or randomly join one side. In the end he would review it with all there, asking for observations beyond his own.

“He’s a good teacher,” she told Oberyn when she was allowed in his cells three days after the trial was arranged. “Jon takes his time to assure they all understand and take in his lessons. He truly wants them to grow from this.”

“I’ll need to spend time in the yard lest Obara surpass me before I’m too old to match her,” Oberyn said with a frail smile.

“And when will that be?” Ellaria asked him, reaching out to brush a hand through one of the silver streaks among his lustrous black hair. “You’re three-and-forty, my love. How long must you devote yourself to your spear?”

“So long as I have things I wish to protect,” he said caressing her cheek. “It is my duty to defend all I love. Whatever the means I will assure they survive beyond me.”

“I hope this means you’ll carry me when I’m ugly and too old to walk,” she said with a somber smirk.

“Only to bed,” he said with a laugh. “Though I imagine I’ll be the one too decrepit to walk long before your beauty fades.”

Ellaria frowned looking him over. It was clear he wasn’t being fed well were despite his assurances he was fine. Though he wasn’t quite gaunt she saw he had thinned since he was first taken away in chains. She also noticed a few more gray hairs along his receding widow’s peak.

“Yours will never fade,” she said meeting his dark eyes, “no matter how much time passes you will always remain the sun of my life.”

*~*~*~*

By their fifth day of training they had garnered a crowd, though Tyrion told him Cersei made sure Tommen and Myrcella were kept from visiting. “It would look bad for the crown to support the accused,” Tyrion repeated mockingly, waving his head and jerking his hand dismissively while speaking as Cersei.

A Lannister guard approached the ring and made his way toward Jon when Nymeria stepped in front of him. “What do you want, lion?”

“I’ve a message for Lord Snowfire,” the man said looking to Jon as he and the others turned to the commotion. Jon excused himself and hurried over to Nymeria’s side. “A boy arrived saying Tobho Mott has asked you come pick up the order you left with him.”

Jon’s brow arched asking, “Me?”

“The boy said his master specifically said for you to claim the order,” the guard said with a nod.

Jon thanked the man, watching him return to his duties as Jon wondered why Tobho Mott would
ask for him to pick it given he’d already paid and told him to contact Obara in case he left King’s Landing early. Perhaps there was a problem, but Jon wouldn’t know until he went to the blacksmith’s shop.

Obara had just switched out with Ronnet when Jon approached. “It seems your armor is finished and we’re to go pick it up.”

Setting down the waterskin she drank from, Obara wiped her mouth. “Already?”

“So I’ve been told.” Jon shrugged. “If it’s true then we should go soon so we can use what time we have left to get you used to wearing it.”

“Then let’s go,” said Obara. “The rest can continue without us until we return.”

Edric joined them as they rode from the Red Keep to the Street of Steel. Half the others offered to join them fearing the Lannisters might target them before the trial began, but Jon assured them they would be fine. He doubted Cersei would target them openly now. She was more likely try convincing some of them to turn against Oberyn, or so Jon thought.

Were it him he would go after Ronnet and the other lords. Though they’d bent the knee after being captured during the Blackwater, he knew at least Ronnet and Tanton were originally part of Renly’s army so might be persuaded to aide Tommen for Margaery’s sake. Of course that would mean relying on the Tyrells which he doubted Cersei would do.

Entering Tobho Mott’s shop they were once again greeted by the serving girl who flashed Jon a smile before Tobho himself made his way toward them. “Welcome my lords, my lady. Please,” he said motioning for them to head further into the house.

He led them upstairs where Obara’s finished armor was laid out atop a cloth covered table. “I heard of you would be part of Prince Oberyn’s trial,” said Tobho, “so I had these finished as quickly as I could.”

“Thank you,” Jon said looking from the armor to the blacksmith.

Obara walked to the table to look over the various pieces. Though they were forged from steel each one had been bronzed and the buckles coated in copper. On the greaves and vambraces was a design of a snake wrapped around a copper spear while her gauntlets were scaled. Her gorget had a snake coming from either side slithering toward the spear pierced red sun at the center. While she’d chosen spaulders for her shoulders she also had circular besagaws to cover the pits of her arms, each one housing the red sun and golden spear of House Martell. The burgonet helm she chose had also been bronzed with the ridge along the top colored red with small spikes mimicking the rays of the Martell sun. Beside it was the brigandine she chose, the plates covered by a dark crimson cloth with dozens of polished copper rivets.

“This is all incredible,” she said running her hand along the bronze snake symbol on a vambrace. Even Edric looked impressed as he flicked the brigandine.

Tobho smiled at the praise, then looked to Jon. “While the lady tries them on could we speak privately?”

Surprised by the request, Jon nodded and looked to Edric. “Help her.” His squire gave him a questioning look Jon answered with a nod, following Tobho to a room a few feet away.

“You know after you slew the Mountain I had men from every realm come to me looking for a sword like the one used to kill Gregor Clegane,” Tobho said unlocking the door. Opening it he
stepped inside and waved for Jon to follow. “Not to mention the Stark men who came on your recommendation and the others who come looking for a sword to match ‘Ser Jon’s White Fang’.”

“I’m glad I could be of help,” Jon said warily upon seeing a large cloth over the table in the room. Clearly there was something under it so he turned to Tobho asking, “What’s this?”

“I noticed you’re not using the swords I made you,” Tobho said motioning to Dark Sister hanging on his side.

Jon’s brow knit slightly. “What?”

“The flames on the pommel are different from mine,” he said tracing the waves of the pommel in the air before him. “Mine were longer, the middle one not so thick.”

“You’ve certainly got a good eye,” Jon said with a laugh, glancing at the pommel as he tapped it.

“Did something happen to them?” Tobho shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. Either way I must insist you not use that sword. If it fails you not only might people think my steel to blame but I would lose my best customer. I won’t let you face this trial with faulty steel and I trust none but myself to arm you properly.”

Pulling the cloth from the table, Tobho revealed eight swords of varying styles laid before them then turned to Jon. “These are the best I have in the shop at the moment. I can make you another after the trial, but for now pick whichever suits you best.”

Jon’s baffled expression broke as he looked from the table to Tobho Mott with a shocked laugh. “You’re serious?”

Tobho nodded. “I’ll consider this a gift so no coin need change hands if you don’t have any on you.”

Jon chuckled, stepping to the table and looking over the swords. They were all incredible, not only well made by their shapes complimented by beautifully crafted hilts ranging from ornate to simple polished metals. He passed over the greatsword and a water dancer blade to a blade nearly half a foot longer than Dark Sister and slightly wider with a thick fuller down the center to cut the weight of the hefty blade.

“A bastard sword,” Tobho said with a nod. “Not long or heavy enough to require two hands like a longsword but more than a longsword. In the right hands it can prove more powerful should your skills suit it.”

Jon looked it over and imagined Dark Sister’s brother in its place. He had no idea where Blackfyre could be. He knew from his study of history that Bittersteel had taken it with him after Daemon died at the Redgrass Field and apparently refused to let his son take it as Daemon II didn’t bring it during his failed rebellion. Beyond that it was lost, leaving House Targaryen with a single Valyrian Steel sword.

Setting the bastard sword down Jon looked to Tobho Mott. “Why would you do this for me? I doubt you’d do this for just any customer. I’ve seen how you haggle.”

Tobho chuckled, his face softening some as he looked to Jon. “I see how people speak of you. They come here seeking arms to match yours because they respect you. Not only with a blade but they see you as someone to admire and I know you some. You’re an honorable sort, the kind not often seen here. We need more like you, not less, so I can spare a sword or two to do my part in helping make sure you survive saving an innocent man.”
Jon watched him closely as he spoke and saw the man’s heart in his words. With a nod Jon drew his sword, Tobho taking a step back as if afraid Jon meant to cut him down and take all the swords. Then his eyes settled on the dark blade Jon held and his eyes widened.

“Valyrian steel,” he marveled before looking to Jon. “How did you come across this?”

“Years ago I visited the Wall and befriended their maester. He was old and alone there so when I spent time speaking with him he gave me this, left by the former Lord Commander, Brynden River.”

Tobho gaped at him. “This is…”

“Dark Sister,” he said with a nod.

“May I?” Tobho asked. Jon contemplated a moment before turning the blade to present the hilt to him. Tobho smiled as he took the blade and looked it over. “It’s true Valyrian steel. The hilt’s certainly well maintained, though there’s some wear on the grip. I could repair it if you like.”

“I’d prefer not to leave it behind.”

“Of course not, it should take no more than an hour. I’ll do it myself.”

“I would appreciate it.”

Tobho nodded, handing the sword back to Jon. Watching him sheath it he said, “Why keep this a secret?”

“Because I was a bastard given a lost Targaryen sword,” Jon said with a laugh. “If the crown didn’t try to take it from me brigands or knights acting as brigands would have. You know as well as any the value of Valyrian steel, not to mention this one in particular.”

Tobho nodded, crossing his arms. “You mean to use it in the trial of seven?”

“I do. The kingsguard are a greater challenge than the Mountain so I’ll need every advantage I can get, even if I risk some trying to take it from me.”

“Months ago you paid me to find and purchase every bit of Valyrian steel I could and reforge it all into a blade for you,” Tobho said meeting Jon’s gaze. “A blade I’ve worked on secretly and given to you today.”

Jon’s brow knit realizing what he was doing. “It’s why I chose a slim longsword rather than a bastard sword as it would require less steel to forge.”

Tobho chuckled. “If not that I could say it my attempt to mimic Valyrian steel much like what I forged for King Joffrey. That way you need not worry about being targeted once you set sail again.”

“Thank you,” said Jon.

Waving a hand Tobho said, “Just make sure you let me craft a proper scabbard someday.”

The Qohorik blacksmith took some time to repair the weathered leather and polished the gold, making sure not to tarnish it in any way before returning the sword to Jon. Obara’s armor all fit well over her copper coated hauberk, testing it by heading outside to run around Tobho Mott’s shop, leaping over a barrel and even cartwheeling before she went upstairs to doff it for their
journey back to the Red Keep.

Once they met with the others she donned the armor again. While most left to sup on their own she trained with Daemon Sand, Nymeria, Podrick and Edric to get used wearing it while fighting. Not long after the sun set that Jon noticed Tyrion tense up beside him and curse, “Shit. Jaime.”

Jon turned to see the Lord Commander of the kingsguard come to a stop a few meters away. He waved for Jon to join him, and when he noticed those in the ring stop training, looking ready to rush over and attack if Jaime tried anything, Jon held up a hand. “It’s fine. Continue.”

Jaime looked over his shoulder to watch them start attacking Obara again. “I see you’re training in groups. Smart.”

“What do you want, Jaime?” Jon asked crossing his arms. “Has Cersei sent you to convince me I should stand down?”

Jaime shook his head. “She’s convinced we’ll kill you all.” Glancing past him Jaime shrugged before looking to Jon. “Though I imagine you’ll survive it.”

“I hope we can all survive,” Jon said quietly, blooking into Jaime’s emerald eyes. “You know Oberyn is innocent. All you need do is yield and we can all live through this. No blood needs to be shed.”

Frowning, Jaime shook his head. “I’m the Lord Commander of Tommen’s kingsguard. It’s my duty to protect him and act as his champion.”

“You’re still a knight, Ser Jaime. You do nothing for him or the realm by furthering Cersei’s lies. If you truly want to help Tommen then be someone he can look up to and admire. Be the knight I know you capable of being. Be his father.”

Jon regretted his last words as he saw them draw anger from Jaime, his eyes narrowing on Jon, reminding him of Cersei in that moment. “Don’t speak of things you know nothing of, Jon Snow.” Her snorted and sneered telling Jon, “The field is raised but they’ll wait until the day after tomorrow to hold the trial. If you hope to survive this then abandon your conscious and use your brain. Let Oberyn die so you can go back your ships. Don’t waste your time here. No matter what you think or how high you rise a bastard will never be worthy of a princess.”

Narrowing his eyes, Jon thought of replies but decided to remain silent until Jaime scoffed and backed away before turning to leave. He could have said something to hurt him as Jaime had with him but it would only make him angrier. Besides, when Jaime cooled off Jon had no doubt he would regret saying that to him, especially when he learned Jon wasn’t a bastard.

When they met the next morning Jon told the others the following day would be the trial so they should do as they pleased. “No matter how hard we train today it may yet be our last and I’d rather we spend it enjoying ourselves than exhausting ourselves.”

The others agreed so after going over their plans they separated for the day. As Nymeria helped Obara doff her armor Tyene watched Jon turn to Edric and Podrick and go about working with them.

“I thought you said to relax, my lord?” Tyene asked, drawing the attention of Daemon, Ellaria and her sisters.

“I still need to do my duty with them,” Jon said with a nod to the boys. “Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine.”
Nymeria shared a look with her sisters before leaving Daemon to help Obara while she moved to Jon’s side. “I can do knife work with them so you can relax like the others.”

“I have nothing better to do.” He had little doubt Cersei’s master of whispers was tracking him so couldn’t risk going to see Myrcella or Sam. Biting back on a harsher comment since he knew she had no part in Oberyn’s plots, Jon turned back to the squires. “Thank you for your concern, but I’ll be fine.”

When they left Tyrion turned to Jon asking, “You sure you don’t want to cut it short today?”

“You too?” Jon asked glancing over his shoulder to the short Lannister.

“You’re not invincible, Jon,” Tyrion said crossing his arms. “I’ve seen the scars to prove it.”

“It’s not as if I’m going to spar against the crew,” Jon said rolling his eyes, then looked to Thoros. “You talked to them? I already spoke to Aurane.”

The red priest nodded. “They know what to do should the worst happen.”

When they finished up and started for their chambers Jon saw a familiar golden haired girl walking beside a knight in enameled white armor. Rosamund gasped when she saw him, looking around before she raised her skirt and hurried toward him.

“I’m sorry I didn’t come to see you,” Rosamund said frowning to Jon. “Cersei—” she winced slightly, glancing at Loras beside her as she corrected herself, “Mother kept me from—”

“It’s fine,” Jon assured. “I understand.”

“I wish you didn’t have to fight,” she said with a pout, turning to Loras. “Are you sure you can’t do anything?”

“I told you I’ve spoken to your uncle already, you grace,” Loras said with a sigh, disappointment clear on his face as he turned from her to Jon. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.” Jon looked around briefly before meeting Loras’ gaze and telling him. “I’m sending Daemon after you.”

Loras’ eyes widened slightly, momentarily shocked Jon would make him a target, but then saw the truth of it in Jon’s eyes. Relieved, Loras nodded. “I’ll be there to meet him. Let a true Tyrell knight meet the bastard servant of the Martell.”

With a thankful smile Jon said, “I’m sorry it has to be me.”

“I knew it would be,” Loras said shaking his head.

“Guard,” Thoros said quietly.

Rosamund groaned. “Forgive me. Good luck, Jon, Thoros.”

“Thank you,” Jon said with a nod watching her walk past them.

Then as Loras passed the Flower Knight raised his arm and with a smirk Jon raised his, letting their forearms impact before Loras continued following Rosamund. Jon smiled as he kept his eyes forward and walked toward the Red Keep relieved for a sign that they would still be friends and brothers in arms even if those arms were put against each other.
When they arrived at the corridor housing the chambers Jon came to a sudden stop when he found Jynessa stood against the wall beside his door. The others looked confused before looking past him.

“Oh gods,” Tyrion said shaking his head pitifully.

While Thoros and Podrick frowned it was Edric who clamped his hand down on the pommel of his sword to keep it steady as he stomped down the hall. “You! You path-”

Edric stopped as Jon clamped a hand around his arm, stopping him as Jynessa stared wide eyed at them. “She’s not worth it, Ned.”

“But she…” His pleading gaze silenced Edric, who sighed and crossed his arms as Jon released his grip. “If you say so.”

“Go ahead,” he said looking from Edric to the others.

Jynessa kept herself against the wall as she watched Jon’s companions pass her and enter their chambers before Jon approached and unlocked his door. “Jon,” she began in a whisper.

“Inside,” Jon said opening the door, letting Ghost enter ahead of them. When she looked inside hesitantly Jon rolled his eyes. “I hope to at least make the court work to learn my shame rather than say it for all to hear.”

She entered and sat at a table, watching Jon remove his sword belt and sash. “I know you’re angry.”

“I always knew you were smart,” Jon said turning to her, leaning against the wall beside his hearth. “If you’ve come here to tell me I should have expected this, that it’s all part of the game or some other nonsense to make yourself feel better about this then don’t bother. That doesn’t suddenly make this okay. If you’ve come to tell me you were a victim all along don’t bother lying.”

Jynessa scoffed. “I wasn’t a victim and neither were you, Jon. You wanted to know the Martells. You wanted me. You got all you wanted from this. I did what it for a chance to gain favor from a great house and learn of a lord who inherited lands near our own. If I felt nothing for you then I never would have taken you to bed. That’s what I want you to understand, Jon. Me telling the Martells whatever matters of court you mentioned to me and my caring for you aren’t mutually exclusive. I did both.”

“You must think me such a pathetic dimwit imbecile if you expect me to believe that.”

“I never thought such a thing of you,” Jynessa said frowning. “Not even before we met did I think so poorly of you. At worst I thought you might be a naive boy who rose because he was skilled with a sword. I never thought you a fool, not after knowing you. I thought you a good man.”

Jon shook his head. “You never would have spared a moment for me if they hadn’t sent you.

“You truly believe that?” Jynessa asked with a furrowed brow before laughing. “Maybe you are a fool after all.” Seeing him glare she quickly held up a hand. “I jest. Whatever you think of yourself there are plenty who see you for what you are. They see it in how Edric and Thoros look at you, how you’ve made the Imp and his squire your followers just as you have a red priest and the heir of Starfall. If they hadn’t sent me after you the only thing keeping me from pursuing you would have been my own self doubts.”

“If you really cared for me before we went to bed then you wouldn’t have let us do so without
telling me the truth,” Jon said with a sneer.

Jynessa frowned asking, “When we were together did you care for me?”

“Of course I did,” he said flatly.

Cocking her head she asked, “Did you tell me all your secrets?” Seeing the heat leave him she nodded. “See?”

Jon’s face scrunched as he shook his head. “See what? My secrets don’t involve you, they never did. You weren’t just some pawn for me to play with.”

“You weren’t a pawn,” she said rising to her feet, shaking her head. “I swear to all the gods, new and old, I never saw you like that, Jon.” Her sapphire eyes locked with his as she took his hands in hers, squeezing them when it seemed he might pull away. “I told you that last day that I never regretted a single moment with you and I meant it.”

“Did you know then what was going to happen?” asked Jon.

“Ellaria came to me after she saw us set up our night together. She thought I was doing it to get more information from you and asked me to stop. Ellaria told me she intended to tell you the truth so when I went to you I feared our time was ending, though I didn’t know it would be so soon.”

Jynessa raised a hand to caress his shaven cheek. “I didn’t go to you for them or anyone else. I went to you because I wanted to have another night together before I lost you for good. I told myself before I knocked on your door I would never lie to you again and I swear to you now I won’t and I haven’t.”

Jon searched her eyes before shaking his head. “You really don’t see how awful this was, do you?”

Jynessa sighed, her hand falling from his face as she shook her head. “No. What harm did you suffer? It’s not as if you were injured or poisoned.”

“Good to know you understand,” Jon said to her confusion before he continued, “I’ve sent men from my crew to your mother’s chambers to knock her out, have their way with her and read all her letters.” Seeing the horror on Jynessa’s face Jon said with a stoic shrug, “But she won’t be injured or poisoned.”

She shook her head, “Why would you do that?”

Jon’s brow knit as he shook his head. “How could you think any of that true?”

Jynessa frowned, clearly annoyed at feeling foolish. “I don’t know what you might do because you hate me.”

“I don’t hate you Jynessa,” he said shaking his head. She didn’t deserve the space in his mind, and if he wanted to rule he would have to use people like her. He’d rather think her ignorant and naive, her callousness coming from not wanting to admit what she’d done wrong rather than maliciousness she’d hid from him.

“You don’t?” Surprised, she asked, “You forgive me?”

“I will in time. I won’t care for you as I did but in time I can bring myself to forgive you.”

A relieved breath escaped her as she nodded. “I guess that’s the best I can hope for.”
As she took a moment to think Jon asked, “Was I the only one?”

Her gaze rose to his as she frowned. “You weren’t my first but you were the only I was with while we were together.”

Before he could nod he tilted his head. “But not in King’s Landing?” He groaned seeing her frown grow. “Who?”

“Does it matter?” she asked quietly.

“I’d rather know in case some cunt decides to taunt me about being with you.”

“I doubt Oberyn and Ellaria will taunt you,” she said looking away.

“Gods,” he groaned, turning away from her. “Them?”

Sheepishly she said, “I’m sorry, Jon. It was before you.”

Jon turned back to her with a sigh. “It doesn’t matter. You’re not mine.”

“And you were never really mine either,” Jynessa said with a frail smile. “But you’ll always have a place in my heart. No matter if you forgive me or not you’ll always have a friend in me should you need one.”

Moving to the door he opened it for her, not especially surprised when she stopped to face him. She stroked his left cheek while kissing the right, then step back to met his eyes with a small smile before she left.

Once Jon closed the door he turned to Ghost, answer the direwolf’s furrow browed gaze with a shrug before moving to his desk. Pulling a piece of parchment from the desk, Jon spent some time putting ink to paper before taking out his harp and visualizing the battle to come. It would be unlike any he’d faced before not only because of who he face but the role he intended to take. Tomorrow the realm would learn he wielded Valyrian steel and would take the life of at least one kingsguard.

His plans would fail. Good men would die. Death would come for Jon Snow. But when did he would make sure Aegon Targaryen rose from the ash.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not explaining Jon's plan because it's going to be shown next chapter. I'd rather have people focus on the other stuff than nitpicking his plans.

For those who forgot Jon and Loras bumped arms before they rode against each other in the tourney too.

So over last few chapters I've got a bunch of comments and reviews and stuff that have been honestly kind of shocking and disturbing.

Obviously part of the story is the split between siding with Jon blowing off the Martells or thinking he should be the bigger man to help them. It's not Robb or someone he is close to or really cares for so he might have actually just stepped aside
if he didn't have some reason to help them. The only reason Jon cared for the Martells was because he wanted a link to his siblings, any boon of alliances came after that in his mind. He doesn't owe them anything or have any reason to blindly risk his life and his plans for them, especially against the kingsguard and especially after everything they did. He would be a pathetic idiot to just blindly accept it because it's the right thing to do without thinking it over.

I get people like the Martells but what they did is fucked up. They sent a 20+ year old woman to fuck a 16 year old boy to get information out of him and manipulate him. They sent a woman to basically commit rape by deception. Yet people are acting like he shouldn't be upset. How is that not fucked up? It being part of the game doesn't make it okay. It being part of the game doesn't suddenly make it fine that Tywin had a garrison of Lannister soldiers run a train on Tysha and force Tyrion to finish her off. Shit isn't suddenly no big deal because it's part of the game. It's still gross.

Especially when you consider how Jon's played the game so far. He isn't grooming Edric to go fuck half of Westeros to get information out of them. He isn't even setting assassinations yet. His whole game is about lying about allegiances to survive, covertly helping his allies or people he cares about, and forging alliances through friendships. That doesn't suddenly excuse or somehow make him to blame for being taken advantage of.

I changed Jon and Jynessa's talk a bit to reflect this and added Jon's line about her mother as a kind of mockery of how ridiculous it is to dismiss his side of things.

Next Chapter: Prince Oberyn Martell's Trial of the Seven.
When Edric arrived the morning of the trial he did so wearing a white gambeson beneath a lilac surcoat bearing the snow white blazon of House Dayne’s crossed sword and falling star. He found Jon already getting dressed, wearing a scarlet gambeson with black straps beneath a dark steel hauberk that clinked as he sat to finish tying his sabatons in place. Once Edric helped him put on the rest of his armor they wrapped a scarlet sash around his waist with little excess beyond where it was tied off.

“You’re sure about this?” Edric asked holding Jon’s bell brooch. When Jon nodded Edric carefully placed it on the sash before letting Jon put on his sword belt.

Once Barristan’s rondel dagger and Dark Sister hung from his waist Jon walked to the desk where a trio of sealed letters sat. He picked them up and held them out for Edric, who arched his brow.

“Should the worst happen take the single sealed one to my brother or uncle in Winterfell. Give the twice sealed one to Myrcella, and try to get the three sealed letter to my aunt.”

Edric’s curiosity crumbled as he looked from Jon to the letter. “My lord, you-”

“Please,” said Jon. “It’s only if the worst should happen. Otherwise burn them.”

“If the hearth was lit I would do so now,” Edric said taking them with a sigh before carefully tucking them into a pouch on his belt.

“Thank you.” With that Jon picked up his black iron round shield while Edric took his close helmet and they left his room with Ghost.

They met Thoros who wore newly purchased crimson robes over his armor and held a ridged Myrish helm with hinged cheek pieces and an aventail. Beside him Tyrion wore a crimson doublet with gold slashed sleeves and a roaring lion embroidered across the front while Podrick wore a purple and white checkered surcoat over a yellow gambeson.

As they left the Red Keep they found Ronnet Connington waiting for them. He wore a suit of polished plate armor with a white and red griffin adorning the large besagaws covering his right and left armpits respectively. He also wore a red and white tabard bearing the blazon of House Connington, which had also been painted onto his heater shield. Like the others he’d clearly taken the chance to represent his house.

“The Dornish have ridden ahead of us to help Prince Oberyn prepare,” said Red Ronnet.

They rode from King’s Landing, Ghost helping clear a path as people backed away upon noticing him, letting them easily cut through the crowds making their way to the tourney grounds. There they found a large ring had been erected, not unlike that used for a melee. Arron Qorgyle waited
for them in his laminar armor made of overlapping dark steel strips making him look half a scorpion like the trio adorning his red shield. Once he spotted them he led them into the area where their comrades in arms gathered.

Obara looked up from where Nymeria was helping her finish putting on her armor, the copper of her byrnie shining against the bronzed plates and dark crimson brigandine. Beside her Daemon Sand had a page fastening the cuirass of his armor which had a copper hand at the center, the besagaws he applied next having reversed the red and black gyronny of House Allyrion beneath a copper hand instead of gold.

Past them Jon found Oberyn Martell stood beside a seated Ellaria Sand watching Daziel Dalt help the prince don his armor over his flowing silks. While the scales over his byrnie were gleaming copper his gorget, spaulders, vambraces and graves were enamaled red with copper etchings. His ridged barbute helm with an open face lacking even a nasal guard sat beside a round steel shield brightly polished to show the sun-and-spear of House Martell.

“You’ve nothing more solid?” Jon asked looking him over.

“I prefer to avoid being hit,” Oberyn said with a half smirk. It faded as he reached out to place a hand on Jon’s pauldron. “I am forever in your debt, Jon. All you asked of Ellaria I promise to you willingly and beg your forgiveness.”

“You can thank me when we’re done,” Jon said glancing to Tyene, who stood off to the side polishing Oberyn and Obara’s spears. The oily substance of the rag clinging to the steel. “You know the plan?”

“I’ve been told. Are you certain it wise?”

Jon turned without a word, taking his close helmet from Edric and taking a breath before he put it on. His visor raised Jon walked over to Ghost beside Tyrion and Podrick and scratched the direwolf’s chin, meeting his crimson eyes.

As they all gathered to make their way toward the exit Jon put a hand on Daemon’s shoulder before he could lower the visor of his bascinet helmet. The Dornish knight nodded to Jon. “I know my part, my lord. I swear I’ll do my best.”

Handing Obara her spear, Oberyn stepped before them all and took deep breath looking them over. “I know it no easy task we have before us, but I swear to you here I am innocent of these crimes. Whatever comes, I thank you for standing beside me.”

Oberyn led them to the field, Edric putting a hand on Ghost’s back as they stopped at the rail surrounding the cleared ground. Jon’s gaze quickly looked across the massive ring to the seven men entering from the other side. All but Osfryd Kettleback wore the snow white cloak of the kingsguard.

Jaime Lannister led them adorned in glittering gilded mail beneath enamaled white plate with silver fastenings. On his left arm he wore the unemblazoned white shield allowed only to the kingsguard along while from his waist hung a dagger and longsword with gilded hilts.

Loras was easily recognized at the Lord Commander’s far right in his glittering gem encrusted plate beneath his white cloak. His sword was sheathed at his side while he held a green shafted spear over his shoulder. Jon felt a smile tug at his lips seeing the spiked buckler he gave Loras hanging from his waist.
To Jaime’s immediate right was the looming Sandor Clegane who wore soot-dark armor beneath his snarling black hound helm and white cloak. Though he wore a longsword and dagger on his waist he held a warhammer in his right hand.

Between Loras and Sandor stood Balon Swann, who wore a greathelm ornamented by wide white wings while black and white swans fought on his shield. In his opposite hand he held a morningstar with a rounded head unlike the cylindrical one wielded by Arron.

Osmund Kettleblack stood beside his younger brother Osfryd. While the elder wore the white enameled scale and breastplate of a kingsguard, Osfryd wore a black breastplate ornamented with four golden disks and a gold cloak showing his place as commander of the City Watch. Both brothers wore swords on their waist while wielding maces with their shields. To their left standing was the Flower Knight’s opposite, the bandy legged Boros Blount, who almost seemed to be using the spear he held like a walking stick.

Jon’s gaze then shifted to the crowd. It was easy to spot Tommen sat between Cersei and Margaery with Rosamund and the small council, including a frowning Aurane who seemed to meet his eye to give him a somber nod of support. Not far from them among the Dornish nobles still in King’s Landing Jon saw Jynessa, her eyes trailing him and concern painting her face.

His head turned as he scanned the crowd, nearly stopping when he spotted a heavyset man and blonde girl among the small folk stood beside the railing surrounding them. Sam wore a dark red surcoat while Myrcella wore a matching dress with a black cloth girdle around her waist. Jon noticed the frown on her lips as her gaze shifted from him to Jaime.

Jon felt himself exhale and look across the field to the Lord Commander, the visor of his armet lowered so his face was unreadable. In his periphery Jon saw the High Septon approach the podium to shout his holy words across the field, asking the Seven for justice.

With a glance from Jon, Thoros stepped and took a breath as he lifted his arms and prayed, “Lord of Light, look down upon us!”

“Lord of Light, defend us!” Jon said back loudly, though from the stands Edric, Tyrion and Podrick joined him.

“Lord of Light, protect us in the darkness!”

“Lord of Light, shine your face upon us!” Jon shouted, this time joined by Obara and Daemon.

“Light your flame among us, R’lllor. Show us the truth or falseness of these claims,” the red priest said looking to Oberyn, “Strike him down if he is guilty and give strength to our swords if he is true. Lord of Light, give us wisdom.”

“For the night is dark,” Jon called out along with the rest of their group, “and full of terrors.”

Adjusting his shield, Jon flexed his right fingers watching the High Septon shoot them a glare as he stepped down to return to his seat. Jon scanned the group ahead of them before stepping forward, motioning toward each of the others to line up around him. Daemon sand stood to the far left with Obara between him and Oberyn while to Jon’s right stood Thoros, Arron Qorgyle and Ronnet Connington.

Jon lowered his visor, which caused the others on both sides to do the same. Jaime drew his sword, leading Cersei’s champions in their approach while Jon stepped forward and drew his own sword, holding it up so all could see its smoky black blade.
He noticed all of Cersei’s champions stop as a murmur broke out among the crowd, growing when Jon suddenly broke into a run, causing the others to charge Cersei’s champions. Jaime was quick to shake off the shock of seeing Jon wielding Valyrian steel and charge straight at him.

However Jon suddenly took a hard right, his brooch ringing as he diverted his path while Thoros, Arron and Ronnet all shifted left. Jon threw his shield up, ignoring the Kettleblack brothers as Boros Blount thrust his spear at Jon. The spearhead rang against Jon’s round shield, pushed up so Jon could step toward forward and thrust Dark Sister forward at an angle allowing him to slip past his breastplate and hit the scale beneath it with a roar.

Dark Sister’s blade instantly slipped beneath a scale, severing the binding and bursting the rings beneath it. Jon grunted as he felt the shift in resistance break as he hit flesh, piercing Boros Blount’s heart and yanking the blade free in seconds.

The old kingsguard stumbled back clutching his chest as scarlet stained his white armor and he fell to his knees. When he tried to reach a shaky hand for his sword Jon slammed his shield into Boros’ helmet, knocking the man to the ground where he would bleed out in moments.

Jon raised his shield to block a mace swing from Osfryd, who quickly leapt away from Ronnet’s sword. Near them Osmund and Arron had broken off, rushing past Thoros who had ended up dodging Sandor’s warhammer when Jaime shifted his attention to Oberyn. Osmund tried to rush forward and join Jaime, but the Dornish prince’s spear shot out, keeping them back and out of range.

Arron passed Oberyn to join Obara, whose metal shield dented against the spikes of Balon Swann’s morningstar. Seeing Arron’s swing at him, Balon leapt to the side, swinging his shield forward as he backed away. Obara took the chance to turn and thrust her spear toward Osmund, forcing him to back away from her father, who blocked one of Jaime’s strikes before forcing him back with a swinging thrust of his spear.

Jon looked past them all to where Daemon and Loras has paired off to the side, the Bastard of Godsgrace, deflecting the Flower Knight’s strikes while his own were dodged. Through the fierce exchange Jon saw neither giving it their all, though it was nearly impossible to tell. While Jon wished he could have Daemon elsewhere as he was known as one of the best swordsmen in Dorne, but that reputation would help make their stalemate believable.

Osfryd pushed his shield forward to knock away Ronnet’s sword, but as he swung at him he heard ringing from behind him and swiftly turned to block a strike from Jon. As he did he heard footsteps to his right and backed away, Ronnet’s sword scraping his vambrace as he turned while Jon ran past him.

Sandor was midswing when he heard Jon’s bells and turned, letting his warhammer ring against Jon’s shield. When Jon slashed at him Sandor quickly threw up his shield to block it while backing away. He barely turned in time to swing at Thoros, cutting off his thrust aimed at Sandor’s back while Jon dashed past them. Before he could try another swing Ronnet rushed toward him, slashing at Sandor then quickly backing away when Osfryd charged him.

Hearing Jon’s bells Jaime swiftly abandoned Oberyn and turned to meet Jon, who avoided him by running straight for Osmund. The elder Kettleblack had just swung at Oberyn, scraping his shield and forcing the prince back when he heard Jon’s bells. Just as Osmund turned to him Jon called out, “Obara!”

Her eyes widened as she swiftly choked up her spear to thrust it at Osmund. The kingsguard laughed as he threw his shield up to block Jon’s slash while his mace knocked Obara’s spear
downward. However Jon thrust his shield into the shaft of Obara’s spear, forcing it back up until it was aimed at Osmund’s armpit as she thrust as hard as she could. It was enough to slip between scales, pop a few rings and slash through his gambeson, though little more than a few drops of blood ran down his white armor.

Obara quickly pulled her spear back, letting Jon run past them as Osmund stumbled away, Jaime nearly knocking him aside as he chased Jon. He could see Arron and Balon dodging each others morningstars, but felt Jaime on his heels so spun around, slashing at the Lord Commander, Dark Sister leaving a deep scratch across Jaime’s white shield.

That seemed to be when Arron’s morningstar slammed into Balon’s shield with a thump, but the spikes stuck through it, allowing Balon to force Arron’s arm down. That left him open for Balon to swing his own morning star full force into the side of Arron’s helm. The Dornish knight screamed as the spikes pierced his temple and he was knocked aside. When he hit his knee he looked up just as Balon brought the morningstar down, smashing in the side of his helm, letting Arron fall over dead while ripping the morningstar from his skull.

Hearing the scream and smash behind him Jon grit his teeth, moving aside to pull Jaime away from the others. The Lord Commander tried to thrust at Jon, but he pulled his shield in to block it then slashed at his blade. When steel met Valyrian steel Jon stepped forward, forcing Jaime’s blade up while his own slide down toward Jaime’s chest. The Lannister leapt back and Jon slashed at him, scratching a line across his breastplate. While Jaime was still stepping back Jon was already doing the same, turning on his heel and running to where Oberyn and Obara were keeping Balon and Osmund at bay.

Balon charged past Oberyn’s spear but the prince leapt aside to avoid it. Osmund stepped forward to swing at Oberyn’s back but Obara rushed to her father’s back, throwing up her shield to deflect the strike. It allowed her father to run forward swinging at Balon, forcing the kingsguard to back away raising his shield, yet he turned the failed swing into a thrust aimed at Osfryd’s back. The spearhead pierced the younger Kettleblack’s gold cloak and backplate, making him hiss and stumble forward, missing his swing at Thoros.

It was Jaime who forced Daemon and Loras into the fight, rushing toward the two hoping to pick off another of their rank. Thankfully Obara noticed and took off toward them while Osmund turned to deflect a strike from Jon upon hearing his bells. The elder Kettleblack quickly turned to rush toward his brother, who had turned to face Oberyn, leaving Sandor with Thoros and Ronnet.

After deflecting a swing from Thoros, Sandor stepped back to dodge a thrust from Ronnet. Having thrown his warhammer up while dodging, he swiftly brought it down, crushing Ronnet’s pauldron and the shoulder beneath it. When he screamed in pain and stumbled back, Sandor started to push toward him until he heard the rush of fire igniting and turned to see Thoros had poured a vial of wildfire over his sword, coating it in emerald flames. The Hound stumbled back, switching to the defensive as Ronnet fell to his knees clutching his shoulder.

“Behind you,” Loras whispered just loud enough for Daemon to hear it and turn in time to block Jaime’s thrust.

Daemon stumbled back slashing at Loras to push him away while shifting his shield to deflect blows from Jaime. Obara let out a yell, warning Loras to turn to her. Both thrust at one another’s shields, the Sand Snake rushing past him and swinging her spear into downward thrust at Jaime’s side. The noise had been enough for him to notice them, stepping back to avoid her strike.

Jaime’s shield slammed into Obara’s spear, forcing it to the dirt as he turned, letting his sword scrape her shaft as he moved to her side. Just before his sword rose to cut at her neck Obara threw
her head back, letting it pass over her face. Though he quickly changed paths and slashed at her face she already had her shield over it, turning and thrusting her spear at him, forcing him back.

Daemon charged in from his side but had his thrust knocked aside, wincing at the thudding impact of Jaime’s counter thrust slamming against his shield. When Obara swung her spear around to realign for a thrust at Jaime, Balon Swann stepped in front of it, letting her spear bounce off his shield as he stepped toward her. She tried to retract her spear and force him away but Balon was already swinging his morningstar, which crashed against her side.

Sharp pain tore through her, making Obara scream as the spiked mace snapped a rib and became stuck in the twisted metal plates of her brigandine. She clamped her arm down before he could rip it out, forcing Balon to stumble back empty handed.

“OBARA!” Oberyn bellowed, stopping his thrust at Osmund to run to his daughter.

Balon drew his sword just in time to deflect the thrust of her spear. With practiced movement she yanked it back in a flash but Balon was already moving forward with his sword pulled back until he felt Oberyn’s thrown spear slam into his back. While it didn’t pierce his plate it was enough to make him stumble, letting Obara thrust her spear into the gap of his gorget and helm, piercing his jaw.

When she ripped the spear free and stumbled back Balon gargled and choked on the blood flooding his mouth, pouring through the holes of his bascinet helm and coating his white armor. He turned his head just in time to watch Oberyn kick his spear off the ground, catching it and thrusting it straight into the kingsguard’s visor.

Jaime deflected Daemon’s strike and turned to rush Oberyn as Balon’s body fell to the ground. Obara tried to move to block him but yelped in pain from the mace hanging off her side, leaving Oberyn to quickly step back thrusting at Jaime, who deflected each to close the gap until he once again heard jingling bells.

Jon stepped in front of Oberyn, cutting off Jaime’s advance. “Give up already, Jaime! There’s been enough bloodshed!”

“And you’re outnumbered,” he said turning to deflect a strike from Daemon.

Jon grimaced seeing Loras rush him. Jon let the spearhead hit his shield, screeching as it scraped across the blackened steel while he swung at Loras wide enough for him to read and move back.

At the same time Jaime had parried a strike from Daemon and took two steps back, smirking when he saw Daemon take a larger step to try and keep up. It was enough for Jaime step forward, raising his shield to stop Daemon while his sword thrust beneath the shield to stab the exposed inside of Daemon’s leg. It made the Dornish knight scream and stumble back, struggling to stay on his feet.

Before Jaime could finish him off he heard jingling again, turning and backing away to avoid Jon’s slash, watching him stand in front of Daemon as Loras came to Jaime’s side.

“Obara! Get Ron and Daemon together!”

Obara looked over to where Sandor was trying to defend himself from her father. The Hound was also making sure to keep his distance from Thoros’ burning blade as the red priest fended off the Kettleblacks. She couldn’t help but notice their somewhat sluggish movements before spotting Ronnet clutching his limp right arm.

Thankfully he had been watching them so saw her wave him over. Picking up his shield, Ronnet
ran across the field, sliding to their side while Daemon sat in the dirt clamping down on the hole in his leg. While it was soaking his breeches in blood it wasn’t so much he feared the artery severed.

Meters in front of them Jon had blocked a strike from Loras’ spear, angling his shield so it guided Loras to turn. When Jon went to slash through the shaft of the spear Loras swiftly retracted it. Jon quickly changed the angle of his shield to block another thrust that rang out before he noticed Jaime rushing toward him, stumbling back to avoid the Lannister’s slash.

Spotting Oberyn with his back to him, Jaime took off, leaving Jon to Loras. However Jon chased after him and Loras followed, Jon thankful it left their injured alone. If it ended soon they might make it through with nothing but a few scars.

“Oberyn!” Jon called out, causing the prince to turn just in time to gasp and block Jaime’s thrust.

However that left his back open to Sandor, who threw his warhammer up and let out a yell as he brought it down.

Jon saw a flash of green and red as Thoros ran between them, the warhammer crashing through his weakened sword and crushing his breastplate into his collapsing chest.

“THOROS!” Jon screamed as Ghost howled.

It seemed to snap Jaime out of his fury, making him hesitate as he watched the red priest fall to the ground while Jon pushed past him and Oberyn. Sandor quickly moved backward when Jon thrust at him. Oberyn quickly moved to his side, swinging his spear to keep the kingsguard at bay as they circled around in front of them.

Jon’s sword swayed as he tried to keep it aimed at them, but Jaime shook his head. “Admit your guilt and let the maesters tend to your daughter, Oberyn.”

“Jon!” Thoros yelled yanking his helmet off and coughing up blood.

Taking a step back Jon let Oberyn move in front of him while he looked down at Thoros. “Just hold on. We can get you help once I-”

“Your blazon,” Thoros said with a gasping cough.

“What?”

Thoros clutched his leg, forcing himself up as he stared at Jon. “Become… burning sword… become… Azor…”

“Thoros,” Jon said watching him fall back. Looking to the kingsguards Jon took a knee before turning to Thoros. “Th-” Was all he managed before he saw the red priest’s lifeless eyes staring at the sky.

Jon felt tears leaving burning trails down his cheeks as his heart thumped in his throat. His skin burned, his stomach twisting itself into a knot as he felt a chill in his bones.

“Jon,” Jaime called out, stepping forward raising his visor. “Give it up. He isn’t worth your life. None of them are.”

After a moment Jon took a shaky breath and threw his shield behind him, flying almost a two meters before it hit the dirt. Jaime took this as a sign of him forfeiting, but then as Jon stood he did so pulling Thoros up by his broken breastplate.
“I’m sorry,” Jon whispered before turning Dark Sister in his hand and thrusting it down into Thoros’ torso. His left hand gripped the base of the blade, letting the Valyrian steel slice through the palm of his gauntlet as Jon ripped the blade from Thoros’ body and in doing so ignited the mixture of their blood.

The arena gasped and those in the stands rose from their chairs watching Jon turn to Cersei’s champions wielding a burning Valyrian steel sword. His left hand yanked the rondel dagger from its sheath as Jon strode forward, breaking into a run once he passed the gaping Oberyn.

The bells of his brooch rang as Jon turned toward Osmund Kettleblack. He swung at Jon, but moved slower than intended, allowing Jon to move in close. Dark Sister caught the haft of the mace as Jon crossed his left arm to the right and thrust the rondel dagger through Osmund’s visor.

The kingsguard screamed while Jon forced Osmund’s right arm down, then slashed up across the gap of his gorget and helm while ripping the dagger from his eye. His screamed turned to gurgling choked, falling as Jon strode past him.

“OSMUND!” Osfryd yelled, throwing his shield down to draw his sword, wielding his mace in his left hand as he charged Jon.

He barely managed to throw his arms back before Jon was in front of him, the rondel dagger thrusting into Osfryd’s left thigh. The Kettleblack screamed as Jon pushed the dagger hard enough to lift his leg, making him topple over so his helmet rang as it bounced off the ground. Ripping the dagger which had been pushed down to Osfryd’s knee, Jon thrust Dark Sister beneath his helm, piercing the left side of his jaw. The knight in black armor stepped over Osfryd’s corpse, letting his sword hang behind him until it dislodged from Osfryd’s neck, unleashing a torrent of blood onto the grass.

His steps seemed to make the ringing bells more pronounced until they jingled as he dashed forward. Jaime slammed his visor down and raised his shield only to stumble back as Jon slammed his shoulder into it while slashing at Sandor, who quickly backed away from the burning blade.

“Jon, please—”

Before Loras could finish Jon had turned while moving to the side in a single movement, slamming his forearm into the side of Loras’ helmet. The clanging steel echoed through the stands as Loras fell over unconscious.

In the stands Margaery screamed, “LORAS!”

Jon’s head snapped to the side just in time to spot Jaime charging him. However Jon charged toward him as well, falling to his knees so he slid across the dirt and grass while slashing at his armpit.

Jaime stumbled and hissed at the impact under his arm while Jon rolled across the ground and slammed his left fist into the dirt to throw himself up. He was barely upright when he broke into another charge, this time heading for Sandor. The Hound dropped his warhammer and reached for his sword. While he tried to block with his shield Jon slashed Dark Sister into it, knocking the shield aside. He just managed to draw his sword in time to slash upward and parry Jon’s dagger.

However Jon stepped forward and leapt up, slamming his knee into Sandor’s breastplate. When he hit the ground he thrust Dark Sister at the stumbling Hound, scratching his blackened armor. It slid to the left and once it was under his left arm Jon swung Dark Sister up, Sandor screaming as it dug into his mail and burned the gambeson beneath. His shield fell from his grip as he swung at Jon
with his sword, but it was blocked by the rondel dagger.

Before Jon could thrust his dagger into Sandor’s eyes he heard movement and slammed his fist into the Hound’s chest, forcing him to stumble back. At the same time Jon yanked Dark Sister from under his arm, slicing across his armpit as he turned to block an overhead slash from Jaime. Forcing Jaime’s sword aside, Jon swung the rondel at him with his ice pick grip, but Jaime pulled his shoulder back so it merely scraped his breastplate.

In that moment Jaime looked into Jon’s visor and saw his gaze was somehow both chillingly cold and filled with burning rage. It pierced the lion’s heart, making him swiftly raise his shield to block Jon’s swing and back away from the enraged beast before him.

Jon tilted his head slightly when he saw Oberyn looked past Jon with wide eyes. He heard the thump of a foot and ducked to the left, avoiding an overhead slash as Jon turned and slammed his forearm into Sandor’s middle. When the Hound reeled from the blow and stumbled back Jaime rushed in, but Jon crossed his arms to stop Jaime’s shield with his dagger and his slash with Dark Sister.

Jaime met Jon’s ice and fire gaze as he lowered the Valyrian steel sword just enough to slash at the kingslayer’s gorget. The burning blade shredded through the enamel, leaving a seared gray gash across his throat as Jaime stumbled back and fell over while a voice cried out from the crowd.

“JON! NO!”

The voice rang out across the field and Jon looked to where Myrcella stood against the railing with tears trickling down her cheeks.

Jaime raised his head to look to her, clutching his gouged gorget as he sat up and looked to his daughters doppelganger in confusion.

Jon’s head shifted back when he heard Sandor charging him from behind. He turned and let Sandor’s sword bounce off Dark Sister while dropping his rondel dagger to grab Sandor’s now raised right arm. Before he could press Dark Sister into Sandor’s throat and slowly drag it across neck Jon heard Myrcella’s voice again.

“JON STOP! UNCLE JAIME PLEASE STOP THIS!”

Beneath his helm Jaime’s eyes widened as he whispered, “Myrcella?”

Jon stared into Sandor’s snarling helm and suddenly he understood one of his visions. It was as if he could see the noose around Sandor’s neck go from his hand to Myrcella’s, becoming a leash. The black dog wasn’t running the young lion down but following behind it like a guard.

His fingers dug into Sandor’s wrist as he twisted it, making the Hound cry out in pain and bend to the right with his aching arm. This gave Jon enough leverage to flip Dark Sister and slam his fist into the side of Sandor’s helmet with a resounding clang, making him fall over clutching his head.

Releasing Sandor’s arm, Jon turned to Jaime, who slowly rose to his feet, looking from Myrcella to Jon. “Is that Myrcella?”

“Give up,” Jon told him. “Don’t make me kill you in front of her.”

Jaime glanced back at his crying daughter before looking to Jon and throwing down his sword. “I yield!”
The crowd broke into cheers with Tyene and Nymeria the loudest among them while Ellaria was in tears clutching her heart. Edric was gripping the side of the rail, his face scrunched in a failed attempt to stop his tears as Podrick sniffled and wiped his eyes beside him and Tyrion frowned looking from Thoros’ body to Jon as he let the flames fade from Dark Sister. Unlike those he’d used before she hadn’t warped or grown brittle under his flames, instead leaving her pristine as it burned away the blood staining the blade.

When Sandor finally removed his helmet, still wincing from the ringing in his ears, he looked up to see Jon stepping toward him. The Hound chuckled and sat up with a groan, shaking his left arm as it woke from the numbness he’d felt since Jon hit its pit. “Go ahead, Pup. Kill me.”

Standing before Sandor Clegane, Jon reached up to remove his helmet, letting it fall to the ground so he could meet the man’s eyes. His jaw shifted as he fought back a sneer and kept his voice even. “Your death won’t bring him or anyone else back. Only life can pay for that and you don’t owe me yours.” He motioned to Myrcella. “You owe her.”

Sandor looked to Myrcella who was wiping her cheeks as Jaime made his way toward them. “The princess?”

“The real Myrcella,” said Jon. “You life belongs to her now. White cloak or no, you serve her. Be her guardian where I can’t.”

Sandor stared at him a moment then scoffed. Jon glanced to the side as a page warily passed him, coming from the group that entered the field so they could tend to the injured. When the young man tried to help Sandor stand the Hound pushed him over with a growl. “Piss off!”

After shooting Jon a glare Sandor turned and walked from the pitch on his own holding his left arm. The page frowned, reaching down to pick up Sandor’s discarded helmet before rushing off to pick up his other arms. Putting a finger to Dark Sister, Jon felt the blade had cooled so sheathed it and picked up his dagger, brushing some blood off on the grass before sheathing it to pick up his helmet.

When Jon picked up his discarded shield he turned to find Edric, Podrick and Tyrion standing beside Thoros’ body. They looked to him as he walked over, his face set in a stoic expression.

“I failed him,” Jon said looking at Thoros’ bloodied corpse. “He thought me the Prince That Was Promised but I should have been able to stop this.”

“You didn’t fail him, Jon,” Tyrion said shaking his head. “You saved him. You gave him his faith back. You let him believe in a better world.”

Chapter End Notes

I didn't go over Jon's armor too much cause it's the same dark plate he's had since the hand tourny and wore against the Mountain. I figure there's plenty of space with padding to accommodate his growth so far, but he'll be getting new armor eventually. Jaime having his gilded mail under his white armor is a kind of manifestation of the old him showing under the kingsguard. He's abandoned the gaudy armor he wore before but there's still that bit of his old self there under the honor of the knight, especially after his argument with Jon.
Personally as a bit of an arms and armor nerd seeing how scale is used in ASOIAF always bugs me a bit but I can't deny it fits the visual theme with dragons and snakes. It's often used as a replacement for mail, and is how I imagine it used with the kingsguard who would wear cuirasses or even just breastplates over their scale armor. It's a minor nerd thing but it bugs me like it does whenever bastard swords and longswords are brought up and I remember longswords here are basically arming or sideswords.

While Jon technically got the first kill I gave Balon the first real one because I think he's a decent enough knight. I wanted him to feel like the real loss for the kingsguard side since he seems like a good guy and is clearly skilled.

For those who maybe don't get the plan, Jon is basically running around the field screwing with everyone, wearing his bells so people know he's coming and he can distract them and pull their attention away. Basically, he's Ghost at Mummer's Ford. Hence the chapter title. Also part of the plan was Tyene putting poison on the spears Obara and Oberyn used, so the Kettleblacks were so slow because they were poisoned.

Thinking with the burning sword is Valyrian steel has higher heat thresholds so isn't damaged by Jon's flames like a normal sword. I also had one major and one very minor reason behind it leaving so many scratches on armor. Firstly as a sign of it being dangerous while also showing it doesn't cut through armor like cheese or something, and secondly in a very minor way showing he continually was just a bit short of making more of an impact. If only Dark Sister were slightly longer...

I'm sure someone wants to whine cause there wasn't enough death, but I strongly disagree with people who think that somehow makes stories better. I want deaths to matter so less is more for now.

Next Chapter: Oberyn finds Jon preparing a pyre and speaks with him as it burns. After witnessing the trial, Myrcella is taken to meet with her brother and mother as well as those closest to them. As she begins to reintegrate into her old life, Myrcella is surprised who shows support and whom she butts heads with.
Funeral Pyre

Chapter Summary

Oberyn finds Jon preparing a pyre and speaks with him as it burns. After witnessing the trial, Myrcella is taken to meet with her brother and mother as well as those closest to them. As she begins to reintegrate into her old life, Myrcella is surprised who shows support and whom she butts heads with.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though they’d heard stories of Jon on the Blackwater and his duel with Gregor Clegane, Myrcella was awestruck watching Jon fight. She’s watched him ride in two tourneys but seeing him in a true battle was completely different.

Before it began she saw him as she always had, a dark knight as gallant as any other and near as skilled. Yet it wasn’t a knight who fought on the field, at least not the kind knight she’d heard of in songs. He had brutally killed Boros Blount in seconds, and then with almost graceful movement weaved a path through the battle trying to defend all his allies. It almost seemed as if the longer he fought the better he got as near the end he had defended himself against Jaime and Loras.

She had little fear of being recognized, instead the knot in her stomach throughout the fight was born of fear one of the few she knew would be injured or killed. Then she saw Thoros die and her heart ached seeing Jon kneeling beside him. That was when she first began to fear what might come of it, though she had been shocked to see Jon stab his sword into Thoros’ torso and pull out a blade coated in flames. Somehow he not only had a Valyrian steel sword of his own but was able to use some sort of magic that shocked the crowd. She heard them whisper of the Lord of Light as they watched Jon enter the fray alone.

The shift in him from then on was jarring. The way he moved had changed from graceful and practiced to a stream of movement that was startling quick and brutal. He deftly slew the Kettleblack brothers with seemingly little effort and great force, pulling Osfryd off his feet like he was a child. It left only Loras, Sandor and Jaime standing among the Kingsguard.

It was when she saw him brutally knock Loras unconscious in a single burst of movement that she began to feel an unnerving dread. For most it would have looked like Loras had spent the trial having complex exchanges with Daemon Sand and Jon, but she had seen them countless times before and knew even before she left she had seen them try harder than they did with live steel. Clearly they had decided to avoid harming one another, yet Jon hadn’t hesitated to hit him with a blow that sounded as if it might have dented all but the thick steel of a helmet.

When she saw Jon seemingly rip open her uncle’s throat she felt her screams well up inside her before they ripped through her, pleading it all to end. For a moment she feared Jon would ignore her, but then he spared Sandor and spoke with Jaime, letting the kingsguard yield.

As people rushed the field to tend to the wounded and deal with the dead she found her gaze shifting between Jon and Jaime. She saw Jon speak with Sandor and was confused when he pointed to her before the Hound stormed off, but then he stood beside Thoros with her uncle Tyrion and
their squires. She felt tears sting her eyes but quickly blinked them away as she turned her attention to Jaime, who had removed and tossed aside his helmet on his way toward them.

“Myrcella?” he asked between breaths, coming to a stop before her and Sam. “How…” He glanced back to the stands where Myrcella saw Rosamund stood among the nobles.

Across the field Tommen gasped and rushed over to Rosamund. For a moment she seemed panicked until she saw sorrow fill his eyes. “I knew it but I thought—I’m so sorry!”

While the rest of the booth looked on in confusion Rosamund quickly shook her head. “It’s me who must apologize, your grace. I swear I only did as I was asked.”

“I should have at least asked,” Tommen shook his head. “No, I should have just known. This whole time I—I’m so sorry for what’s happened to you, cousin.”

“Myrcella?” Cersei asked, her eyes widening as she watched Tommen hug Rosamund.

Myrcella chuckled seeing her brother hug their cousin, holding her hand and pulling her from the booth, likely hurrying to their carriage. Margaery and Cersei quickly followed with their guards while Myrcella turned to Jaime. “I’ve been switching places with Rosamund since before we left King’s Landing. I was frustrated with how I was being treated so when Samwell mentioned he suspected someone might attack me I asked him to help me escape since he was the only person there I trusted.”

Jaime glanced at Sam, who nervously nodded, then turned to watch Jon picking Thoros off the ground, carefully placing his corpse on a cart one of the pages brought over. Myrcella frowned watching Jon wave off the page, moving around to pull the cart himself. Oberyn and Ellaria looked like they wanted to speak with him but held off to stay with Obara as a maester looked over her wounds.

“Tyrell!” Jaime yelled when he turned to where Loras was getting to his feet having removed and tossed aside his helmet. Turning back to them Jaime held out his hand, which Myrcella took so he could help her climb over the railing.

When Jaime started to walk away she turned and waved for Sam to follow, and after a wary glance at Jaime he climbed over the railing. Jaime clearly didn’t care as he waved over a page while picking up his discarded sword. When the boy neared he told him, “Get four horses for us.”

“Sam,” Loras said with a weak smirk which turned to confusion as he blinked upon seeing Myrcella beside him without her scar.”Myrcella?”

“The one we’ve been guarding is my niece, Rosamund. They switched places before she was attacked.” Jaime turned to Sam then. “Samwell, you’re relieved of your duty. Ser Loras will take over as Myrcella’s guardian.”

Sam nodded. “It’s for the best.”

“Thank you,” Jaime said extending a hand to him and meeting Sam’s eyes for what felt like the first time.

Myrcella smirked seeing Sam flush as he shook Jaime’s hand muttering, “Of course, my lord, um Ser, I mean Lord Commander.”

Loras chuckled, the kingsguard leaving their discarded arms and armor to be picked up by pages and squires as they made to leave. Myrcella looked over her shoulder to where Oberyn was leaving
on the other side of the field following the wounded and a cart pulling Arron Qorgyle.

When Loras grunted and clutched his head, Sam reached out to grab him in case he fell, earning a laugh from the knight who swiftly waved him off. “I’m fine. What of you?” He asked reaching over to smack the back of his hand against Sam’s middle. “We’ll have to get you to Mott’s for new armor. I take it you’ve kept up with your bow?”

“He’s great,” Myrcella assured. “I saw him practicing every day until we left Dorne. I’d say he’s ever fair with a sword.”

“Really?” asked Loras.

“The princess is being kind,” Sam said shaking his head. “I’ve only ever beat men wider and older than I.”

Myrcella noticed he hadn’t denied her praise of his bow skills, something Loras seemed to have noticed as well as he arched his brow and nodded before moving to help her onto the horse brought to them. The snow white caparisons left little doubt they were being given horses belonging to the dead kingsguard, but none said anything of it as they rode around the grounds until they saw the royal carriage.

They followed them back through King’s Landing, arriving at the Red Keep where Jaime dismounted and moved to help Myrcella. The moment the carriage stopped the doors opened and Tommen came down the steps with Rosamund close behind. Myrcella could see how nervous she was, and the reason for it was apparent when she saw her mother exit the carriage with a scowl while Margaery was the last to exit with a wry smile.

Tomman rushed to Myrcella and threw his arms around her, laughing as he squeezed her and she returned the hug. “I was so worried. I should have known it wasn’t you. I thought maybe but then I thought Jon would’ve noticed too.”

Myrcella chuckled as she rubbed his back gently before they separated. After flashing a quick, thankful smile to Rosamund, who shook her head, she turned her gaze to Tommen. “If they said anything then the people working with Gerold Dayne might have found out and would go looking for me. This way no one knew so they didn’t look for me and Rosamund stayed safe with you.”

“They knew?” Tommen asked with a pout.

“You said you did,” she said tilting her head. “Don’t you think Uncle Tyrion would have as well?”

Tommen nodded. “I guess you’re right. She might not have been safe if we didn’t treat her like you and you could’ve been hurt too.”

“Exactly,” she said brushing a bit of hair from his cheek. “If they lied they did it to let me get here safe.”

Myrcella glanced to the others and saw Loras and Jaime see through her lies. Jaime giving a silent laugh as he whispered to himself, “Ghost.”

Seeing her mother standing behind Tommen, Myrcella watched the anger on her face fade as she examined Myrcella’s. Stepping forward Cersei wrapped her arms around Myrcella with a sigh. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

Myrcella hesitantly returned the hug. “Thank you, mother.”
“Come,” she said taking Myrcella’s hand and looking from her to Rosamund. “You two can tell us exactly what happened.”

Sam looked a bit confused as he watched them all make for the Red Keep, but hurried to follow when Jaime looked back and waved for him. He kept quiet as he watched a tall, stooped old man in poorly sewn maesters robes lacking any chains join the group, moving to Cersei’s side as they entered Tommen’s solar. They listened to Myrcella and Rosamund give their account of things, which left out Arianne’s desire to crown her.

When they explained that her and Sam’s suspicions were fostered by Ser Arys slipping in his duties Sam made sure to tell them, “We never found out who he was meeting with, but I followed him once and paid an urchin to sneak to their window. When he returned to me he said Arys had been slamming himself against a screaming woman.”

“Did they see who he laid with?” Qyburn asked from Cersei’s side.

Sam quickly shook his head. “He told me he saw only Arys’s arse from the window.”

Cersei snickered as she leaned back in her chair saying. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he was sneaking around with the whore princess.”

Once they all finished their tale Tommen sat up asking, “So no one knows why Gerold Dayne hurt Rosamund?”

“Beyond thinking her Myrcella, no,” Sam said shaking his head. “I hadn’t even known it was him who would attack. I feared it would be some man-at-arms hoping to make a name for himself.”

“Clearly it’s unsafe for you in Dorne,” Cersei said looking to Qyburn. “Let them know my daughter won’t return to their lands so long as they let fools attack innocent girls.” She turned back to where Myrcella and Rosamund sat beside each other, a frown touching her lips as she said, “If my daughter hadn’t been smarter than any there it might be her with a ruined face.”

Myrcella reached over to squeeze Rosamund’s hand in a silent apology for her mother’s dismissal of her, but Rosamund glanced to her with a quick smile.

“House Martell might expect the princess to return with Prince Oberyn should he leave,” Margaery said with a frown. “They might view keeping her here as breaking her betrothal to Trystane.”

Scoffing, Cersei waved a hand. “Then tell them there are plenty of bastard whores in Dorne for their son to wed if they can’t make it safe for a true princess. My daughter deserves more than to live in fear among fools undeserving a lioness.”

For once Myrcella appreciated her mother abrasive haughtiness. However it was Margaery who said solemnly, “That would strain things more than they already are with House Martell. I’m sure they’ll be able to protect her now. House Tyrell can even have a knight sworn to her to aide Sandor or whatever kingsguard rise to replace those who fell today.”

Myrcella noticed Loras’ brow furrow as he looked to his sister while Cersei shook her head. “I’ll send her to Casterly Rock before I send her back to Dorne.”

It was Tommen who said firmly, “She’ll stay here where it’s safe.” Then he looked to Myrcella saying, “Unless you think Casterly Rock is safer.”

Margaery nodded to Tommen. “What should we tell the Dornish lords and Prince Doran then?”
“That she is my sister and I don’t care who wants to marry her, I want her safe,” Tommen said obstinately. His face softened when he saw Myrcella smile at him.

Qyburn whispered in Cersei’s ear, but the queen mother scoffed. “Not the Bolton boy. I won’t let my daughter rot in the cold.”

“The cold?” Myrcella asked. “I thought we were still at war with the North?”

“It’s only a matter of time before it ends,” Cersei assured.

Myrcella looked around the room and saw all but Jaime and Qyburn shared her confusion. Seeing a gap in the conversation Myrcella decided to take the reins a bit and looked to her mother. “I intend to keep Rosamund as a lady-in-waiting, and until the kingsguards are replaced I’d ask Samwell remain as my guard.”

“Him?” Cersei asked looking over the portly young man.

“He served me better than any of the Lannister guards returning from Dorne and I trust him more than I would a knight who could be paid off by Gerold Dayne or any of his conspirators that may be in King’s Landing. Until Uncle Jaime assigns a kingsguard to me or I have a sworn shield, Samwell and those loyal to him are the only ones I trust to protect me.”

“Those loyal to him?” Jaime asked with a laugh. “You mean Jon.”

“And Ser Loras,” she said with a nod. “Though surely with only three Kingsguard remaining the king and queen will take priority over me.” Looking to her mother she prepared for her to bristle as Myrcella told her, “I also want to choose my own handmaidens so I know I can trust them as I do Rosamund.”

While she’d expected Cersei’s annoyance, she found it shifted to contemplation the moment she brought up trust. Her mother gave a nod and crossed her arms. “I’m sure we can find you ladies of conviction.”

“Until then you can always call upon my companions,” Margaery offered kindly. “I trust them with all but a sword.”

“Thank you, good sister,” Myrcella said with a nod.

Tommen’s smile faded as he looked around the room. “What happens with the kingsguard now?”

“We’ll have to find new knights worthy of their positions,” Jaime said with a sigh.

“They can easily be replaced,” Cersei said sending Jaime a harsh look.

Sensing the rise in tension between them, Tommen put on a smile and turned to Myrcella. “We should sup together tonight. Ser Sam, you can come too.”

“I’m not a ser, your grace,” Sam said with a laugh.

“Oh?” Tommen frowned. “I can make you one.”

Loras smirked at Sam while Rosamund and Myrcella smiled at him, but he quickly shook his head. “Thank you, your grace, but to speak honestly I hoped that should I earn it then it would be granted by those who helped me do so.”

Tommen arched his brow. “So Jon or Loras?”
“If he thought so,” Sam said looking to Loras.

In his glance he saw Sam’s wariness and looked to Tommen. “To be honest, your grace, though he’s helped the princess return I wouldn’t feel proper knighting him without knowing his skill.”

Tommen nodded. “Then find out and knight him as soon as you can.”

Loras chuckled. “I will, your grace.”

When they rose to leave Jaime escorted them to the door while Cersei, Qyburn, Tommen and Margaery remained in the solar. At the door he told Loras, “Have the guards on alert and tell them to find Sandor. Make sure he hasn’t run and if they find him let them make sure he knows to meet me immediately.”

“Of course,” Loras said with a nod before turning to Myrcella. “Come, I’ll escort you to your chamber before meeting the guard.”

At the door to her chambers Sam bowed his head to them. “I’ll be right outside the door, your grace.”

“Thank you, Sam,” she said with a brief smile before entering the room with Rosamund.

Outside the door Loras turned to Sam and pulled him into a hug, squeezing the big man for a moment, clapping his shoulders and laughing before he hurried off to do as Jaime asked.

Once the door closed Myrcella turned to Rosamund, taking her hand. “I’m so sorry, Ros. If I’d known this would happen-”

“I know. It’s fine though. It’s as Jon said, I can find pride in this,” Rosamund said putting a hand to her scar. “Not many lords or knights have scars to show they’ve survived such an attack.”

Myrcella smiled, giving a silent thanks to Jon as she squeezed Rosamund’s hand. “I still want you to know I’m sorry and I’ll do what I can to help you. I’ve already decided to make sure you marry a handsome, dutiful lord worthy of you.”

“If I must,” Rosamund said with a laugh.

Myrcella led her to the table where she had Rosamund tell her all that happened since they separated. She was shocked to hear her cousin speak of her attack with only a single moment to take a breath before continuing with her time returning to Sunspear. She found some joy knowing Jon and Tyrion’s behavior in Sunspear was born of their concern for her. It wasn’t surprising to find that once they reached King’s Landing Cerisei had paid little attention to her injured doppelganger.

Even at supper her mother barely said a word to her, spending her time seething over their losses rather than celebrating her return. Jaime tried to give her a smile every so often but his mind kept drifting elsewhere. Margaery was nice enough but said little, leaving only Tommen who was clearly pleased to have her back. After they ate he spent twenty minutes introducing her to all his cats and letting her play with them.

When they met again to break fast there was little difference, but this time as they left the solar Myrcella turned to Jaime. “Uncle Jaime, could I walk the grounds some before returning to my chambers?”

Jaime nodded, motioning for Loras to follow the king and queen. “Of course.”
“I’m sure we’ll be safe,” Myrcella said motioning to herself, Rosamund and Sam. “We won’t leave the keep’s bailey.”

“I mean to see if anyone’s found Sandor,” Jaime said shaking his head, “I can put it off for a bit.”

“I don’t want to keep you from something serious,” said Myrcella. “Is he in trouble?”

Jaime chuckled and shook his head. “Don’t worry about the Hound.”

Looking to the others Myrcella shrugged before making her way to the courtyard so she could walk the grounds. Though she hadn’t been gone a year things felt so different knowing all she’d missed. The day she left there had been a riot and not long after they repelled an attack and set the Blackwater on fire. Even the Tower of the Hand was gone, leaving only a ring of charred stones at the base it once occupied.

Though it had looked the same riding toward King’s Landing, now it felt as if a dozen little things had changed. Maybe it was more her for just as she’d come to see through the mirage of Dorne it felt as if she was pulling back the curtain of King’s Landing to find it a place she didn’t truly know. Though she’d grown up there she’d spent almost all her time within the Red Keep which suddenly felt entirely different, as if all of it had changed in her absence. At least until she saw an older maid hurry around a corner and when she followed her gasped upon seeing the woman tending to Myrcella’s garden.

The old maid wore a slight smile that turned to shock when she heard people approaching and found it was not only the princess but she somehow had a double without her scar and the kingsguard’s Lord Commander beside her. Quickly rising to her feet the woman curtsied. “Princess,” she said to Rosamund.

The girls exchanged a look as Myrcella said, “I’m sorry, but this is my cousin, Rosamund.”

“What?” The woman blinked in confusion. “Oh, I-I’m sorry, your grace, I swear-”

“It’s fine,” Myrcella assured before looking past her. “Have you been tending to my garden?”

“I don’t know much of plants so asked her to continue as she had been,” Rosamund told Myrcella before looking to the maid. “Thank you again.”

“Oh it’s no bother. The lord paid me more than enough so it’s the least I could do.”

“A lord paid you to maintain my garden while I was away?” Myrcella asked glancing at Jaime, who did little to hide his suspicious expression.

“Lord Snowfire,” the maid said with a nod. “I told him I didn’t need coin but he gave me three dragons to make sure nothing wilted and so far I’ve kept my word.”

“Of course,” Myrcella said with a smile. “Thank you for caring for them. They look healthy.”

Myrcella walked through the garden, looking over all the flowers before kneeling beside the bush of winter roses. Brushing her fingers over their pale blue petals, she quickly rose to her feet and returned to the others. “Uncle, is Jon staying in the keep?”

Jaime eyed her a moment before nodding. “He was, though he wasn’t seen returning after the trial.”

“Are his ships still here?” she asked with a hint of panic that faded when Jaime nodded. “Sam, could you please find him? Jaime can escort us to my chambers and we’ll stay there until you
With a quick glance to Jaime, Sam departed with a nod, leaving her with Jaime and Rosamund. They were quiet until they came to the door and Rosamund hurried to open it for her. When she turned to say her farewell to Jaime he crossed his arms to give her an examining look.

“You know it can never be. You and Jon.”

Myrcella held back a frown, furrowing her brow. “I only mean to thank him and ask him to-”

“Don’t lie, Myrcella,” Jaime said shaking his head. “I know he cares for you. He sent Ghost to escort you here and probably helped you get into the city without anyone noticing. I just want you to be careful. You think you can trust him but clearly he’s playing us.”

“He’s not playing us,” she said with a scoff. “Jon’s only ever helped me and treated me like a princess even when people thought...” She sighed and shook her head. “He never once was untoward or presumptive. He never looked at me like I was just some doll for him to play. He didn’t sell me off to some family I’d never met. Even when he wasn’t there for me he made sure his friend was and sent Ghost to come protect me when no one else knew I was gone. You, mother, none of you knew it wasn’t me he brought back. I’m not just some piece for him to use in his little game like I was to my own parents.”

Before Jaime could speak she threw the door shut, holding it and quickly locking it. She could feel the tears stinging her eyes, the truth of what she was still too much for her to accept.

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Once he saw the maesters had finished tending to Obara, Daemon and Ronnet, Oberyn went to his and Ellaria’s room where he soaked in a bath she’d had prepared for him. The water quickly turned black from all the dirt and soot of the cells. Ellaria said little as she helped wash him, taking the chance to wrap her arms around him once they were safe.

The sun was sinking toward the horizon when he left his chambers fully dressed and found Nymeria and Tyene helping Daemon and Obara onto a cart near the stables. He chuckled, helping them and Ellaria before getting his horse and riding with them toward the King’s Gate. They could see a crowd gathered just outside it and passing through found they were watching Jon, Edric, Podrick and even Tyrion in the distance carrying planks and logs from a wagon to build a pyre beside the Blackwater Rush.

The men worked quietly even after hearing the cart approach, sparing a glance their way before going back to work. Oberyn frowned seeing Jon’s stoic expression, so handed his reins to Ellaria after he dismounted and moved to help them. Nymeria handed the reins of the cart to Tyene while she hopped down to join them while Daemon and Obara looked on, their injuries keeping them from doing the same.

By the time dusk settled into evening they had finished and though it wasn’t some grand pyre it would burn well. Jon was the one who pulled Thoros from the blood stained cart and carried him to the pyre, Oberyn rushing to help him lay the red priest across the surface. He noticed then Jon had removed Thoros’ armor and put him in a set of untorn crimson robes which had darkened where blood stained them.

Though the squires had prepared torches Oberyn saw they waited to light them. His confusion was quickly answered when he saw Jon pull a bundle of swords from the cart holding Thoros’ body. They were cheaply made things, the kind he’d seen Thoros use in melees time and time again.
Jon walked around the pyre stabbing three swords into the ground along each side as the others left the cart to stand with Oberyn. Tyrion then handed Jon a thirteenth sword, the scorched one Thoros had used in the trial. Once the last sword was put in Thoros’ hands, Jon and Edric went around pouring vials of green liquid across the other twelve. After they were all coated the pair backed away and Podrick held a torch Tyrion ignited, letting Jon and Edric stick small sticks into the flag and throwing them at the swords, engulfing each in emerald flames.

Podrick then handed the torch to Jon, who stood before the pyre saying, “The night is dark and full of terrors. Lord of Light guide us. Fill our hearts with fire so we may walk your shining path. For letting us bear witness to his life we thank you and pray you welcome Thoros so he might find peace in your warm embrace, for he was a man worthy of your light.”

With that Jon tossed the torch to the pyre, letting the straw within catch and spread the flames which soon enveloped Thoros of Myr one last time. Ghost let out a mournful howl as Jon watched the crimson flames amid emerald towers. Soon the swords melted, leaving only the pyre to join the moon in illuminating the night.

“I’m sorry for this, Jon,” Oberyn said having stood beside him for some time. “I wish things had been different. Not only the trial but everything.”

He turned to look at Jon with a frown, the young lord having long ago stripped off his armor leaving him in his scarlet gambeson, black breeches and boots. “I wish I could take back what I’ve done to you. I should have tried to know you before thinking you some dog to be trained. I should have given myself the chance to see the man who would risk his life to save a man he cares little for. You asked for my life and I tell you now you have it. I will never lie to you again, this I swear before all gods and man.”

Jon’s hand slipped from Ghost’s back as he turned to Oberyn. The prince wore a somber expression before Jon slammed a fist into his jaw, knocking the prince to the dirt.

“Oberyn!” Ellaria screamed in shock as they all turned. Through their pain Daemon and Obara tried to prepare themselves to step in and separate them while Nymeria and Tyene stepped in front of Ellaria. Edric, Tyrion and Podrick were all surprised by the punch but less interested in stopping whatever followed. However Jon simply stood looking down at the prince who pushed off the ground with a groan as he looked to Jon.

The flames caught his eyes and in them Oberyn saw something beyond the fury he’d expected. There was an oppressive vigor radiating off him, warning Oberyn that it could destroy him, and yet much like the flames beside them felt warm as Jon extended a hand to help him to his feet.

The Dornish prince laughed as he took the offered hand. “Fair enough, my lord.”

Ellaria wrapped her arms around Oberyn once he stood while Jon turned back to the flames asking, “What do you intend to do now?”

“I hadn’t decided.” Oberyn said with a glance to Ellaria. “Why? Do you need something of me?”

“I haven’t decided yet, but if I asked you to stay here as my agent would you?”

“Your agent?” Ellaria asked as Oberyn looked intrigued.

“I have to leave but I need some here loyal to me. I had considered having Tyrion act for me here but I intend to send him elsewhere in time.”

“Thank the gods,” Tyrion said quietly, glad he didn’t have to stay here with his family.
“You already have a place here, no doubt you’ll find joy in your presence bothering the Lannisters so long as you don’t provoke them or attack them.” Jon turned back to him crossing his arms. “Can you do that?”

“You wish me to dance about the lions den and avoid stepping on their paws?” Oberyn grinned. “I could do such a thing if you asked. I doubt they’ve filled my position as adviser to the small council. What would you have me do?”

Jon considered him a moment before answering. “I’m going to unite the realms again.”

Oberyn’s eyes widened as Ellaria asked. “You want to broker peace with the North?”

Staring into the flames Jon answered, “No.”

The Dornes shared a look before Oberyn looked to Tyrion and their squires. The little Lannister frowned as he watched Jon, an expression matched by the quiet Podrick and mournful Edric.

“You mean to join the war yourself?” asked Oberyn. “Is that why you want to become King of the Stepstones and Narrow Sea? To make this a war of six kings? Jon, you have to-”

“My name isn’t Jon,” he said turning to the Dornes.

“What?” asked Ellaria, shaking her head in confusion. “Jon what do you-”

“My name is Aegon Targaryen the Sixth of His Name,” he said silencing them as the pyre burned beside him, “rightful King of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men. Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm.”

They all stood in awed silence, glances toward the other three revealing they knew the truth of his words. It had been why they looked somber, they knew by saying he didn’t plan to broker peace he meant to tell them all who he was.

Anger flared in Oberyn as he grabbed Jon’s gambeson. “How can you lie about such a thing to me? To act as Elia’s Aegon. If you knew anything-”

Jon grabbed Oberyn’s wrist, pulling it from him as he held his gaze. “I’m not Elia’s Aegon. I was born to Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark within the Tower of Joy. As my mother lay dying she told Eddard Stark my name, though it was one he could never share.”

Seeing their confusion Tyrion said, “Lord Stark raised him as his bastard to keep Robert from killing him.”

“Even then you would be Aegon Sand or Waters,” said Nymeria.

“They were wed,” Jon said releasing Oberyn’s wrist. “My uncle Benjen was there as witness and I’ve seen letters they wrote referring to one another as husband and wife.”

Oberyn rubbed his wrist, glancing toward the others. “It’s simple enough to lie about such a thing.”

“It’s hard to lie about the dragon I sent to my uncles at the Wall,” Jon said to their shock. “A dragon hatched upon my chest as I lie dying among weirwood roots until Thoros breathed fire into me.”

“You truly have a dragon?” Ellaria asked, looking to the others.

“I saw it hatch,” Edric said nodding. “He sent it to the Wall so he could return here to save Lord
Stark and earn a place of recognition in court."

“Before I heard what happened to the girl your brother and niece thought Myrcella I intended to sail to the Stepstones and begin my conquest, which is why I need someone here on my behalf.”

“Why the Stepstones?” asked Nymeria. “Why not ride North to the Wall and reclaim the dragon then bring it back here?”

“Because either the pirates of the Narrow Sea will follow me or I will kill them to destabilize it, leaving them fighting each other while I sail north. Then I can return with my dragon and burn a path from Dorne to Essos so I can bring my aunt Daenerys and her three dragons back to reclaim my throne. While I do that I’d prefer to have someone here convincing the lords of the realm to bend the knee and answer my call should it come to war, because our wars will not end once I claim the Iron Throne.”

He spoke with a persuasive conviction that surprised even Tyrion and the squires, leaving the Dornes stunned until Tyene asked, “What do you mean? What other war could there be?”

“My uncles wrote of the Others at the Wall,” he answered. “They sent a man to show the crown proof but it had rotted to nothing in the months it took him to arrive. If the Others have truly returned then the Wall will only hold them for so long, which is why I mean to make my claim with four dragons so I might avoid killing men we’ll need in the war to come and give us an advantage no other can boast.”

“The Others as in those from the Long Night?” Oberyn asked cautiously. “You’ve seen them?”

For the first time since he started Jon hesitated before telling them. “I might have seen a wight when I was in the mind of my dragon. Beyond that no, but Aemon and Benjen wouldn’t have written to me of them nor sent a man with false proof.”

“What do you mean in mind of your dragon?” asked Ellaria.

“Thoros said people call us skinchangers and beastlings, though I heard them called wargs in tales. Either way they seem to mean the same thing.” Jon glanced to Ghost beside, reaching up to stroke his head. “I can enter the minds of creatures and form a bond with them.”

“And you’ve done this with a dragon?” Oberyn marveled.

Jon nodded. “It’s how I know the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, Jeor Mormont, lost his hand to a wildling.”

Oberyn searched Jon’s eyes but found them unflinching. The more he looked the more he felt it wasn’t just a trick of the mind letting him see flecks of obsidian within the dark gray of Jon’s eyes. He took a quick breath, tears filling his eyes as he saw the echo of another man with deep purple eyes who shared similar features. Jon’s chin the same with a slight indentation too feint to be considered cleft. His nose was thick with a rounded tip like the dragon prince but with a slight curve at the bridge. Though his hair was darker than the silver of the prince it fell in the same wavy pattern to frame his face. From the few times he had seen Lyanna he recognized her sharp cheeks and the longer face of the Starks.

“It’s true,” Oberyn whispered, reaching up to touch Jon’s cheek with a shaky hand. “I see them in you. From all that war and pain your were born. No wonder you inherited Rhaegar’s sullen looks.”

“I’m not to blame for that,” Jon said defensively.
“No, you aren’t,” Oberyn agreed looking into the boy’s eyes.

A part of him had blamed Rhaegar for Elia’s death. He’d even blamed Lyanna when he thought her just some poor girl the dragon prince kidnapped, but clearly there was more to it than that. If they were wed then Elia would have known of it and yet she said nothing to them. She kept their secrets even as she died. Perhaps she loved her silver prince more than he knew.

Either way Oberyn couldn’t blame Jon for that, and yet he had little doubt the boy blamed himself for it. It was likely part of what drove his belief that children shouldn’t suffer the crimes of their parents. If he believed the opposite than all the bloodshed of Robert’s Rebellion would sink to him and he didn’t deserve such a thing.

“You may not be my blood but you are the blood of my blood. Sibling to my beautiful niece and nephew. Even if Elia hated Rhaegar risking them for your mother she would never hate you for that. If she had lived I know she would have taken you in as her own rather than damn you to the cold as you were.”

They all saw Jon’s stoic expression crack at the mention of Elia, and Ellaria sighed as she realized why he had taken their betrayal so hard. “Oh sweetling,” she whispered shakily.

“If you believe me,” Jon said taking a breath, “then help me take the throne.”

Oberyn withdrew his hand asking, “How?”

“Swear that your loyalty lies with me above all others.”

Ellaria, Daemon and the Sand Snakes gaped watching the Dornish prince take a knee, looking up to Jon. “I swear to all the gods that I will be serve no other but my king, Aegon the Sixth. I will never cause him harm and will observe my homage to him completely against all persons and without deceit.”

Tyrion gasped hearing the Dornish prince swear fealty. Though he wasn’t the head of his house he would still carry some sway. Jon’s gaze shifted from him to the others, who quickly joined Oberyn in taking a knee, Daemon leaning against Nymeria to do so while Obara clutched her side. Jon glanced to the King’s Gate in the distance and waved a hand, “Stand.”

They quickly did so as Oberyn said, “I could speak of what could have been under Rhaegar. How his children might have led Westeros better than Robert and his spawn.”

“Don’t turn people against the Baratheons,” Jon said quickly. “I don’t mean to see Tommen or Myrcella harmed so I can take the throne.”

Oberyn chuckled. “Of course. I nearly forgot your affection for the princess.”

“Tommen as well,” said Jon. “He isn’t Joffrey. He doesn’t deserve to suffer because of deeds he had no part in.”

Oberyn nodded in thought before asking, “How many know this? I imagine the Starks will know.”

“Obviously Eddard knows but the only one I’ve told is Robb.”

“At least we know they’ll aide you,” Oberyn said with a shrug.

Jon shook his head. “The North still thinks me a traitor. They might resist unless I earn my place among them and prove myself.”
“I imagine a dragon will ease concerns of following you,” Daemon said with a laugh.

“Anyone other than them?” asked Oberyn.

“The Tyrells know,” Jon said crossing his arms, “but I wouldn’t rely on them.”

“Why would you tell them?” asked Nymeria.

“So I wouldn’t need to lie to Loras,” Jon answered simply. “Their house has long supported the Targaryens so I hoped that might keep them from working against me. Though they’ve said they intend to help when the time comes I imagine it more dependent on their view of my success. For now though they say nothing of my origins and I say nothing of their poisoning Joffrey.”

While the Sand Snakes and Daemon were shocked Oberyn grinned as Jon’s words confirmed his suspicion. “It was them.”

“Again, I know House Martell has a history with House Tyrell but do not provoke them or taunt them with this knowledge.”

Oberyn quickly waved a hand. “I’ve no ill will toward House Tyrell, not enough to work against them if they are our allies. While his family might blame me for his misfortune Willas does not. I still write to him at times. Perhaps I can seek his aide in securing their support.”

“That would be great,” Jon said with some relief. “I don’t want to harm Loras’ family but it feels as if the moment I threaten Margaery’s place as queen they’ll turn on me, and now she’s married to Tommen I imagine their interest in supporting me has begun to fade.”

“Are there no others who support you?” asked Ellaria.

After a moment of thought Jon shook his head. “I helped forge the Fellowship of Fire in the Riverlands, but I’ve not spoken to them since I returned to King’s Landing so I don’t feel secure in counting them. I sent Barristan to my aunt but haven’t heard from them yet. The North could follow me but I fear we might lose all but those most loyal to the Starks. And the Tyrells have only given words in secret.”

“It does seem hopeless when we take account of our allies,” Tyrion said with a laugh.

While the squires shared a dubious smile, Jon remained convinced as he turned back to the pyre. “It may take time but people can see the ruin Westeros is set to become if we continue like this. Whether it be of their own will or by dragon fire they will bend the knee.”

“Then let us rest so we can discuss it all tomorrow,” Oberyn said placing a hand on Jon’s shoulder, but his comforting grasp did little to move Jon, who shook his head.

“Leave me. I need time to myself.”

Tyrion frowned, leaning over slightly to look up at Jon. “We can stay.”

“Don’t,” Jon said waving a hand. “Go rest. Ghost can guard me for now.”

After a moment of silent debate the others moved from Jon, leaving him to stand vigil over the pyre beside silent kingsguard cloaked in white fur.

Chapter End Notes
Myrcella's sense that Jon does better in longer battles is from Jon being very perceptive, the idea being the longer it goes the more he has to take in and account for. Her picking up on that when it's a very minor thing that didn't get much play in the trial is kind of a hint that she's perceptive as well in her own way. Which is repeated in her seeing through Loras and Daemon's act.

Cersei was fun to write here because of bits like where she says it's not safe in Dorne. In one sentence she compliments Myrcella and insults Rosamund, but she also never says Myrcella, only saying her daughter so it's still technically about her. In essence complimenting herself for having such a smart daughter rather than complimenting Myrcella.

Originally I planned to have Jon reveal to the Martells before he left King's Landing when he was more secure of their allegiance, but it felt right here. Jon is raw and it's never explicitly said but at this point he doesn't care about the risk. If they took it badly and went to tell the Lannisters Jon would've been fine just cutting them down and leaving. With his mood at the moment he'd probably cut through half of King's Landing if they tried to stop him, but thankfully the Martells took it well and now he has at least five more allies.

I went back and forth on the order of the halves of this chapter since technically the Myrcella half ends after the Jon half. But I think the opening works better coming off the last chapter than in the middle of this one, and I like the closing line better this way. Plus I imagine most people will talk about the Jon stuff anyway, so end with the bigger thing.

Next Chapter: After a night standing vigil Jon speaks of the faith with Tyene and Nymeria before catching up with Sam. After a dicussion with Cersei, Jaime decides to try mending thinigs with Myrcella.
Valyrian Steel Gaze

Chapter Summary

After a night standing vigil Jon speaks of the faith with Tyene and Nymeria before catching up with Sam. After a discussion with Cersei, Jaime decides to try mending things with Myrcella.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Dawn came and Edric made for the stables when he saw Nymeria and Tyene speaking with Obara and Daemon Sand. He could see Daemon was arguing with the sisters until Nymeria spotted Edric and smirked saying, “He can join us.”

Blinking in confusion, the young lord waved his hands. “Forgive me, but I mean to find Jon since he isn’t answering his door.”

“He hasn’t returned,” said Tyene. “We asked the guards and they haven’t seen him or his direwolf within the keep. We were going to search the brothels.”

“He won’t be there,” Edric said shaking his head as.

“Then where?” asked Nymeria.

Edric thought for a moment, and soon after was proved right as they rode through the King’s Gate to find Jon sat on the bank of the Blackwater Rush looking over a pile of ash, listening to the burbling river as Ghost lay beside him. When they approached him, Ghost watched them dismount before laying his head down with a yawn. Jon finally looked over his shoulder as they approached, clearly amused seeing Edric joined by Nymeria and Tyene instead of Tyrion and Podrick.

“I half expected you to have another harp,” Edric said with a smirk while the Sand Snakes shared a look as neither got the joke.

With a halfhearted smile Jon shook his head as he looked back to the remains of the pyre that held Thoros of Myr. Once they all stood close enough Jon said, “I spent the night praying for R’hllor to show me another vision in the flames.”

While Edric frowned at Jon’s somber voice the Sand Snakes shared surprise before Tyene asked, “You’ve had visions before?”

“Only once,” Jon said shaking his head. “I asked all night for him to show me something. Anything… but I saw nothing. Only flames.” With a hollow laugh he got to his feet motioning to the river. “Perhaps it was a mistake to build it so close to the river. Perhaps I was more like to get an answer from the Drowned God.”

Tyene examined him for a moment. “You truly believe in R’hllor? Or did you believe in what Thoros said of him?”

Chuckling, Jon looked to her. “At first I only believed in the Old Gods, but even when I still
doubted him I still felt like Thoros joining us was a sign. It meant R’hllor had given us his blessing where no others had. We didn’t have a Septon on our side or a priest of the Drowned God, and the Old Gods have no priests, but after my vision it felt like R’hllor was guiding us.” Turning to watch a chunk of ash be blown into the river, Jon concluded, “Now it feels as if the Seven have stolen that from me.”

“It wasn’t the Seven who did this.” Her grim tone clashed with Tyene’s sweet voice. “Many use them for evils but they can only do so much against the ill will of man.”

Jon snickered. “You sound like a septa.”

“My mother was one,” Tyene said with a gentle smile. “Though I took to gaining my father’s knowledge of poisons I also studied the ways of my mother. I’ve done all but take the vows.”

“Then maybe I should have asked you to speak with the High Septon to change his mind.”

Tyene frowned and shook her head. “You saw him at court. How he truly thinks himself the righteous voice of god. I doubt any could make him act against his will.”

“Cersei convinced him to go along with this,” Jon said shaking his head. “She must’ve found a way to convince him.”

“Perhaps he isn’t as righteous as he acts,” Nymeria suggested.

“Or he is so self righteous he doesn’t realize he is beyond his depth,” Jon said with a sigh. “The luster of gold is too much for many.”

“You think Cersei is aiding the Faith somehow?” asked Tyene.

“I don’t know, but I’d rather think the Septon a fool than some murderous shit eager to see an innocent man die because he thinks a few people choosing him makes him the voice of god.”

“I’m not so certain they actually chose him,” Nymeria said sparing Tyene a glance.

“What do you mean?” Jon asked, turning to the sisters.

“We’ve heard the High Septon is called the High Sparrow,” Nymeria explained. “He was supported by those displaced by the War of the Five Kings who call themselves Sparrows. When the old High Septon died and the Most Devout gathered to chose another the Sparrows forced their way into the chambers with their little leader upon their shoulders, so the Septons and Septas gifted him the crystal crown to avoid suffering their axes.”

Jon’s brow knit as he listened, Edric beside him gaping at the audacity of what she said happened. Once she finished Jon shook his head and chuckled. “They’re no better than bandits.”

“If it’s true then no, he’s not,” Tyene said frowning.

Jon sighed at another problem being laid before him. Even if he disliked the Seven for his own petty reason the masses could cause problems if he didn’t at least consider them alongside the Old Gods or R’hllor. Once he took the throne he would have to deal with them, but he’d rather not deal with a white veiled bandit and his axe wielding cultists. Perhaps it would be better to burn them and let the Devout chose another. Hells, he could even send them off to Oldtown as they had been before Aegon’s conquest.

Like embers those passing thoughts ignited the countless others he spent the night trying to sort
through. Just as he was starting to push them all aside they heard a hoofbeat and turned to find Sam making his way toward them. Jon quickly forced his thoughts aside to greet him with a hug.

Sam looked past them to the mound of ash. “Is that Thoros?” When Jon nodded Sam glanced down, giving a quick silent prayer for the red priest before looking to Jon. “I’m glad at least you made it through.”

“How’s Myrcella?” Jon asked glancing toward the city. “How have they taken her switch?”

“Well enough,” Sam said with a shrug. “Cersei was more accommodating than she feared but I think it more to do with other things occupying the queen mother’s mind.”

“Wouldn’t take much,” Nymeria muttered under her breath.

“What about Jaime, Loras and Sandor?” asked Jon.

“They’re strained for proper guards. Myrcella’s convinced them to let me stay on as her guard and even said she’d only trust those I trust, so you or Loras.” Sam chuckled as Jon shook his head. “Jaime has his men looking for Sandor.”

“He’s missing?” Jon felt a flicker of doubt for his interpretation of his vision. Knowing Sandor loyal to Myrcella would ease his concerns for her while Jon dealt with other matters. It was necessary but it would ease his mind when he left.

“Some of the guards joked that he was likely drunk somewhere,” Sam said glancing to the Sand Snakes who he noticed eyeing him curiously. “Um, could we perhaps speak privately?”

Jon glanced to the sisters and shook his head. “They’re fine, Sam.”

Sam met Jon’s eyes, saying carefully, “I’d hoped to speak of delicate matters.”

Smirking, Jon said, “They know my name Aegon. Say whatever you need.”

Sam’s shock drew smirks from the Sand Snakes, who nodded to confirm what Jon said when he glanced at them. “Who all knows?”

“For now just Oberyn, Ellaria, Daemon Sand, these two and their sister Obara. The Tyrells. Whatever remains of the Fellowship.”

“Any word from Dom?” asked Sam.

Jon shook his head. “Nothing from the North, but I’ve written them and plan to head there after a quick visit to the Stepstones. Assuming all goes right I should be able to retrieve Dom.”

Sam nodded, holding back disappointment as he said, “I suppose I’ll need to stay with Myrcella in case they end up sending her off again.”

Jon’s brow furrowed, shaking his head as he reached out to grasp Sam’s shoulder. “I’m not leaving without you, Sam. I want you there with me when I reclaim Bloodwing and meet my aunt.”

Though relieved, Sam shook his head. “What about Myrcella?”

“I’ll ask Loras to look out for her,” Jon assured. “Not to mention she’ll have Jaime nearby and if what I saw in R’hllor’s flames was right then Sandor will swear himself to her as well.”

“Sandor?” Sam blinked. “Wait, you saw something in R’hllor’s flames? Like a vision? Not Thoros,
“He saw other ones, but one of the visions I saw was a black dog running after a small lion. I thought it was chasing it but looking back I think it following it like a guard dog.”

Sam’s brow knit as he thought it over. “That could be one way to see it, but if we’re wrong—”

“I know,” Jon said cutting him off. “I’ve already discussed this with Thoros before...You and I can go over them all later. I’m too tired to think.”

Sam frowned looking over Jon’s face. “Myrcella sent me to find you. I think she means to have you act as a guard until they find others for her.”

“You’ve found me,” Jon said with a shrug. “Tell her I’ll find her tonight. I swear it to all the gods, but I’ve stood a night of vigil for a fallen friend and need to rest.”

Sam nodded. “I’m sure she’ll understand.”

“Which is why she deserves better than she has,” Jon said making his way to the horses, Edric having brought his along. Once they all mounted Jon rubbed Ghost’s head and had him lead the way to the Red Keep. Whatever happened would have to wait until he’d had a chance to sleep.

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“Do you think it truly her?” Cersei asked as she sat at her table, looking to Jaime stood beside it.

“Who else would it be?” Jaime asked with a laugh. “Don’t tell me you think this some game to replace your scarred daughter with an uninjured lookalike.”

“It’s certainly more appealing,” Cersei said pouring herself a cup of wine. “What parent wouldn’t want to think their child still innocent and beautiful rather than some hideously scarred thing?”

The humor quickly left Jaime’s face. Though it had been a short time he’s grown protective of the scarred girl and had been ready to batter any who insulted her. Even if she wasn’t his daughter she was still of his blood. “She isn’t some hideous thing, she’s a girl who was injured protecting our daughter.”

“For all we know either of them could be some Faceless Man hired to kill Tommen or I.”

Jaime shook his head and scoffed. “And who would have to coin for such a thing? They’re supposed to cost as much as a mercenary army to kill some pauper, imagine how much the king of Westeros and his mother would cost.”

“They need only kill me for it all to crumble,” she said with panic in her wide eyes.

“No one is going to kill you, Cersei,” Jaime said bringing a hand to her cheek. He watched the fear melt from her until his fingers brushed her neck and she swiftly smacked his hand away and turned from him.

“Do you believe that fat oaf was smart enough to foresee her attack before any of our guards?” she asked before downing half her cup. “He’s a Tarly. They’re loyal to the Tyrells. He might have been involved.”

Jaime took a breath, flexing his hand before shaking his head. “The little I know of Samwell tells me he isn’t bound by his father’s loyalties. Oberyn’s arrest wouldn’t have sat well with Dorne,
especially since we’ve given the Tyrells more power by making their daughter queen.”

“And I gave them my daughter and they tried to kill her!” Cersei slammed her cup on her table, letting out a huff. “Why does it feel as if every day more slips between our fingers?”

“Maybe you grasp at too much too quickly,” Jaime said thinking back on old advice. “We can only retain so much before-“

“I take what is owed to me,” Cersei said haughtily.

Jaime held in a sigh as he nodded. “Either way, I know that is our daughter.”

“My daughter,” Cersei snapped, turning to him. “You’re no more a father to them than Robert ever was.”

“I’ve spent my entire life protecting them-“

“And one is dead, another attacked and those pious cunts still won’t swear to Tommen! If only you hadn’t yielded to that damned bastard!” Cersei bellowed, rising from her chair. “What comes next? Will Oberyn take vengeance on me through my daughter? Will his bastard daughters seduce my sweet, innocent boy as their whore of a father demands? I do all I can to keep the Tyrells from turning him against me, now I must worry about the Martells as well?”

The pommel of Jaime’s sword dug into his palm as he pressed down onto it, his jaw shifting as he bit back his anger. “I will not let anyone harm our family.”

Cersei scoffed and fell to her chair shaking her head. “Leave me. You’re just another useless thing to deal with.”

In that moment he saw himself stalk forward, grab her by the neck and pull her from her chair, making her meet his face as he told her, “And you’ve only one use.” He’d slam her against the desk, rip her dress open and find her wet and ready as ever, which is why he did none of that. This was all part of her game.

Instead he turned and left without a word, leaving her to fume in her room alone. Or knowing her lately Taena Merryweather would be rushing over soon to console her and tell Cersei how great she was, or whatever other nonsense he imagined she made the woman do to feed her ego. Either way Jaime would have none of it anymore.

He made his way to the yard where he spotted Loras and a bolstered group of guards following a group of young lordlings and ladies led by Tommen and Margaery. Among the greens, blues and yellows of the party led by the gold clothed Tommen, Jaime saw Myrcella dressed in a black and yellow dress beside Rosamund in Lannister crimson and gold while Tarly in his dark greens and scarlets rode beside them.

As usual the girls were joined by admirers, courtiers, guards and servants laden with baskets of fresh flowers. The gangly squire Alyn Ambrose still rode beside his betrothed, the willowy Elinor Tyrell, who ruled over Margaery’s companions. The tall Ser Tallad rode beside the shy Alla while the one armed Mark Mullendore rode with the plump Megga Tyrell. The Redwynes rode with Meredhry Crane and Janna Fossoway while exiled Summer Isle prince Jalabhor Xho lingered behind with Ser Lambert Turnberry.

Riding beside Samwell, Rosamund and Myrcella was Wat, a handsome young bard who dressed in blue and dyed his curly, shoulder length hair in the Tyroshi fashion, clearly coveting the name Blue Bard. Gently strumming at his lute as they rode, the bard spoke to the blonde girls with a
smile neither found as entrancing as he thought. They were nice enough, but quickly moved on when Tommen pointed out a bird sat on the wall of the keep.

When he tried to whistle and call it to him but it flew away Margaery was quick to say some sweet words and ease his mind. It reminded Jaime that as much as Tommen would be up to to ride at a quintain he was just as happy petting the mane of the horse he rode or playing with his cats. He was certainly happier doing those than sat atop the Iron Throne. Too gentle to be anything like Joffrey, and yet some part of him feared that Cersei would twist him into a copy of his brother.

It was hard to miss how they all wore smiles, though Jaime noticed the way Myrcella glanced to Rosamund and Samwell protectively at times or how she rode tall so she wouldn’t be seen as lesser than the older girls. More amusing was seeing Alyn Ambrose pout whenever Elinor spoke to someone in her usual flirty manner. Anger showed when he saw her laugh at something Sam said, jealousy making him ride over to insert himself while Sam shook his head and moved to speak with Rosamund. Myrcella had seen it all so moved to speak with Elinor, their conversation quickly boring Alyn who moved back Mark Mullendore.

When Jaime rode up beside Loras, Myrcella cast a glance back toward him and quickly turned her attention back to Margaery’s cousin. Loras arched his brow as he looked to Jaime. “Something wrong with the princess?”

“None of your concern, Tyrell,” Jaime answered quickly. “Any news of Sandor?”

“Clark said he saw him heading to White Sword Tower an hour ago.”

Jaime let out a sigh of relief. He’d have to speak with him but at least he only had to chose four new guards so far. “What about Snow?”

Loras bristled slightly at his use of the bastard surname for Jon, but answered the same. “Ghost was seen returning earlier. Sam said Jon needed rest. Apparently he spent the night standing vigil at the pyre by the Blackwater.”

Jaime grew quiet as he thought back on the trial they had survived. Jon had slain three of their brothers, each with an unsettling ease. There was a moment near the end, as he watched Jon nearly rip Osfryd’s leg off his body to uplift him, that Jaime was reminded of the Smiling Knight only with all his madness refined into a cruel unwavering force set on slaughtering them. It had unnerved him more than he cared to admit, especially since he had thought so highly of Jon, thinking him another Barristan the Bold or Arthur Dayne in the making.

Yet it seemed clear to him now there was something more to Jon. There was something darker in him. It felt like he had to be playing them, like he’d tricked them into giving him such a high status, but he couldn’t deny the boy had earned his place at court or his reputation.

After earning his knighthood by besting himself, the Hound and Loras he went on to slay an invading king in singles combat, shattering his magic sword. A magic sword it seemed he’d somehow inherited along with somehow obtaining a Valyrian steel blade. When he fought for Tyrion he used the trial to bring Gregor Clegane to justice for killing Aegon Targaryen and raping Elia Martell, and made the Mountain That Rides beg for help before killing him. He began Oberyn’s trial by barking at the High Septon without hesitation, showing he had a better mind than the old man thought, and went on to slay half the kingsguard on his own.

Jon had earned his reputation as a feared and respected knight. He was wild and untamed as any beast and just as deadly, yet was often cold as ice and respectful. And yet Jaime couldn’t forget the inferno he saw in the steely gaze beneath his visor.
It had felt overwhelming in a way he rarely felt. The Smiling Knight held a similarly oppressive gaze, but so had Barristan and Arthur at times. He’d seen similar looks from Robert before he took the throne and even Rhaegar when they sparred or rode against each other in tourneys. However what lingered with Jaime as it always did was Aerys. It had reminded him of Aerys’ gaze as he dealt out justice. A gaze Jaime had watched warp into the maddened one the king had as he ordered the city to be burnt.

It was that gaze Jaime feared. The one twisted by madness. Jon wasn’t some frail old man who wouldn’t trim his nails or cut his hair out of fear of being betrayed. He was one of the best knights he knew and would only get better. If he watched that gaze be twisted by madness then Jaime wasn’t sure he would be able to stop him as he had Aerys.

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When they finished their ride and had supper together Jaime had Loras tail the king and queen while he followed Myrcella’s group. As they near her room Jaime said firmly, “Myrcella, we need to speak.”

“I’d rather not, Lord Commander,” she said moving to her door.

Jaime put a hand against the threshold as he looked to her saying, “That wasn’t a question.”

“And you are a kingsguard,” she said throwing her door open as she turned to him with a snort. “You serve me, remember?”

Jaime shook his head, looking to the others. “Go to your chambers. She’ll call for you when we’re done if she needs you.”

While Rosamund silently looked to the sneering Myrcella it was was the round faced Sam who took a breath and straightened himself before looking to her. “If the princess asks it.”

His hand clenching, Jaime laughed at the fat fool’s misplaced bravery, but before he could do anything Myrcella held up a relenting hand. “It’s fine. The Lord Commander knows his place. You two can rest. Thank you for your service today.”

Samwell and Rosamund shared a concerned look before bowing their heads to her and departing. Jaime wasted little time stepping past Myrcella to enter her room, letting her close the door once she entered.

“What do you want, Uncle Jaime?” she asked leaving no doubt of her displeasure.

Unsure where to begin Jaime turned to her saying, “I want you to understand that I care for you Myrcella.”

Standing before him she crossed her arms saying, “And?”

Seeing her defenses already raised Jaime sighed. “I know I upset you yesterday bringing up Jon, but you have to understand I don’t do so lightly.” Seeing her brow knit he quickly shook his head. “Myrcella, I care for Jon myself. I thought him hardy, smart, everything worthy of being Barristan’s squire. I would have been happy to have him as my squire.”

Suspicion colored her emerald eyes as she asked, “But?”

“I think there’s more to him than we know. More than he shows us. I think we saw him as this subservient stray wolf but forgot he was raised a bastard and looked down on his entire life for it.
There’s an anger in him that most don’t see, a brutality he hides, but I saw it at the trial. You saw it as well otherwise you wouldn’t have begged me to stop the fight as you did.”

“I begged you to stop so more people wouldn’t have to die,” she said shaking her head. “He’d already killed three of you. Should he have killed you all?”

“You didn’t say anything until after Thoros died and you felt the same way I did. I’ve seen men with eyes like that. They fall to madness, Myrcella. They kill to quell the fire burning them inside but it’s never enough, it only ever fuels their hunger and leaves their blades thirsty.”

“You think Jon some mad murderer?” Myrcella scoffed. “You’re the man who started a war with the North because you attacked Eddard Stark rather than just demand they return Uncle Tyrion!”

“Catelyn Stark started that war,” Jaime yelled, stepping toward her. Though he regretted the threatening move he was impressed Myrcella remained where she was, glaring at him. “I did what I felt was right to get my brother back. I would hope you would at least do the same for yours.”

“I wouldn’t attack some man barely involved with what happened,” Myrcella said shaking her head.

Jaime winced and shook his head. “None of this matters. What does is that I know Jon is dangerous. I think he’s used his connection to you and Tommen to allow himself to rise quickly so he doesn’t need to hold back his true self as much. Think of how he’s changed since his stature rose.

“When he first came here he was a meek little bastard, but then as soon as his family was gone he clung to us, to Tyrion. He made sure to prove himself against the Baratheons and the moment he could he made your grandfather give him warships of his own as well as his own keep and lordship. Now he throws himself at the Mountain, speaks back to the High Septon as if the old man were a boy, slays half the kingsguard, and strolls about the court guarded by a direwolf who not only slaughtered a dozen men at Mummer’s Ford but helped Robb Stark capture me.”

Myrcella found herself torn between smiling and frowning as she listened. To her it felt like Jaime was plucking at unstrung strings, and yet she smiled thinking of how she’d seen Jon change from a shy squire to a young lord.

“I’ve changed just as much in that time,” Myrcella said shaking her head, “but I imagine it would be hard for you or any but a handful here to have noticed. I’m not the same girl I was back when Lord Arryn would sneak me candies or even before my father died or I was sent off to marry some boy I’d never met. But none of you even know what I look like enough to tell the difference between me and Rosamund. Why should I trust your judgment with Jon?”

Frustration boiled in Jaime until he exclaimed, “Because I’m your father!”

The words struck Myrcella like a fist to the gut, making her gasp and step back.

Jaime frowned seeing her reaction, quickly shaking his head and groaning. “I…” His shoulders sank as he looked to her. “I’m sorry, Myrcella.”

“So it’s true then?” she asked shakily. “You and mother really… Like the Targaryens?”

Jaime nodded. “I’ve loved her all our life.”

Myrcella’s lips quivered as she said, “But not me. Not Tommen.” Seeing him struggle to respond, she laughed bitterly. “Gods! To think there was ever a moment I told myself maybe it was better
this way. At least it meant my father yet lived, but I was a fool to forget it meant you clearly never
cared for us enough to do anything about it. You ignored Tommen and I the same as everyone else
did.”

Before he could speak he saw anger flare in her, stepping forward with emerald eyes blazing as she
told him, “And you stand there speaking of Jon as if he’s some vile creature while you spent years
lying to us, standing in the shadows doing nothing to care for us while you sneak behind the back
of the man you let me believe was my father. When I learned of this and tried to make myself
believe Tyrion’s excuses it was Jon who helped me accept the truth of it all whenever I thought of
it. It didn’t matter to him if I was a Baratheon, a Lannister or a Waters, he never doubted me a lion
or saw me as anything but a princess. It wasn’t you or Tyrion or mother who helped me find a way
to see the good in this but the bastard squire you think some heartless murderer you’re terrified
would have killed you if not for me! All because you wouldn’t give up and admit Oberyn was
innocent before all the others died. All because you were so set to obey mother and support her lies
to let an innocent man die rather than hunt down the true murderers. People think Jon some
Lannister dog but you’re the Lannister dog!”

Jaime gaped at her, shocked by her outburst. In a sense it told him she was right as it felt odd
hearing those words from the little girl he would stand around watching tend to her garden, but she
wasn’t that delicate little girl anymore. She was practically a woman. Not much younger than
Cersei when she seduced him, spending a night convincing him to give up Casterly Rock for her
and join the Kingsguard.

It was as if in his mind she had suddenly gone from barely reaching Tyrion’s chin to towering over
him by a head or two at least. She was nearly as tall as Jon was when he first arrived at King’s
Landing. Much as he had realized Jon’s graceful, lean build had filled out and broadened over time
to that of a man and skilled knight, so had hers changed with her own slender curves and a
blossoming beauty rivaling any in the realm. She wasn’t some naive little girl to be pushed aside.
She had outwitted House Martell and the court of King’s Landing, proving them all unperceptive
fools.

Still he couldn’t just accept it, not when his daughter’s safety was on the line. “I’m sorry, Myrcella.
Nothing can make up for how I… I can never make right what’s passed. I can’t be the father you or
Tommen deserved, but I can guard and protect you going forward not only as kingsguard by as
your father.”

“Protect me?” she scoffed. “If not for Rosamund, Sam, Jon, and Tyrion, I might have died in
Dorne! You, your guards, even the sworn shield they gave me were all worthless! I protected
myself more than you or any but a handful of people ever have!”

“Myrcella, you-”

“Get out!” Myrcella yelled, pointing to the door. “Leave before I call guards.”

Jaime rolled his eyes. “Really? The guards I command?”

“The guards who know what to do with a kingsguard who disobeys a princess,” she said meeting
his gaze.

Jaime’s eyes hardened. “You think they can do anything to me?”

Myrcella took a breath and said with a biting smirk. “I’ll call Jon.”

Jaime reeled back from the threat, a laugh escaping him before he shook his head and walked past
her saying, “You are your mother’s daughter.”

He stumbled forward suddenly as she turned and slammed her palms into his back. When he opened the door he turned and saw the tears burning her eyes through her sneer. “Don’t ever speak to me again or I swear I’ll tell every lord what you and mother did!”

“And ruin yourself?” he asked shaking his head.

“I won’t be ruined,” she said standing straight, her chin raised defiantly as she shook her head. “I’ll find a better life. One away from you and her, with people who don’t just see me a thing to use and protect whenever it suits them. The kind where people truly care for me. Something you’ll never know.”

Though he lingered for a moment, she stood unmoved by his frown before he left, letting her slam the door shut and lock it. She managed to wait nearly a minute before she made it to her bed and screamed, letting out some of the anger that had been boiling inside her. She started to tear at her pillow and throw chairs but stopped herself each time knowing it would only make a mess for others to clean up. In the end all she could do was lay on her bed clutching a pillow as she let herself weep into the night.

Myrcella was half exhausted as she lay in bed watching her hearth fade until she heard a quick trio of four rapid knocks that made her heart jump. “Jon,” she whispered in a panic as she wiped at her cheeks. Needing a moment she called out, “Who’s there?”

“Jon,” he said with a laugh through the door. “I’d hope I’m the only one calling on you so late.”

“One moment!” In her frustration she’d forgotten she was expecting him so had forgotten all she’d planned. She had no time to reapply her powders and makeup her face or even try the eye makeups she learned of in Dorne like she’d intended. Instead she rushed to a basin and wiped her face, figuring it was better to have a plain face than one streaked from tears.

Reaching the door she gave a final sniffle and took a breath before opening it with a smile. She found Jon stood outside her door in a scarlet slashed black doublet with his wavy hair still damp and brushed from his face. He was stood with his arms crossed, looking off in thought until he heard the door open and she watched a smile cross his lips as he turned toward her.

“Myr-” was all he got out before she watched his smile give way to confusion as he saw her and finished with concern, “-cella? Have you been crying?”

She tried to stretch her smile and shake her head. “No. I’m fine. Please, come in, it’s getting cold.”

Jon’s brow knit as he entered the room, turning to watch her close and lock the door behind him. “Was it because I took so long to come speak with you? I swear I truly needed the rest.”

Myrcella swiftly shook her head as she made her way toward him. “No, I swear it had nothing to do with you.”

She saw a small, victorious smile flash across his lips as he noted, “But it was something.”

Myrcella groaned. “You’re not clever.”

“But I know you,” he said reaching up to brush his thumb across her cheek. “Whatever it it is I’m here to hear it and ease your heart as you’ve done for me.”

She doubted he could anymore than he already had, but if she wanted him to speak more openly
with her she knew she would need to do the same with him. Taking his hand she led him to a seat beside the hearth and sat beside him, pouring both some water neither touched as he watched her.

“I had a fight with Uncle…” Her voice trailed off as she looked to Jon and said, “My father.”

In his face she could see he knew the truth, so that wasn’t what made him frown. “He’s told you it’s true then?”

“I told him if he ever spoke to me again I would tell the realm what he and mother did. He acted like-all because—”

She groaned feeling anger boil inside her anew until Jon reached out to grasp her hand within his long fingers. “Start from the beginning and take your time. I’m not going anywhere.”

Her hand lingered within his as she told him of everything that happened after the trial to all she said to Jaime, including his concerns of Jon. She saw he wanted to interject or say something a few times but stopped himself, letting her speak and get it all out. When he saw her start to get heated in her recounting her argument with Jaime she felt his thumb rub against her hand, calming her so she remained coherent rather than try to add the things she’d spent the last hours thinking of as an addendum to her argument.

She wasn’t terribly surprised to find him looking sullen as she finished her tale, nor that his first words to her once he knew she was finished were, “I’m sorry I caused this.”

“You didn’t,” she said turning her hand in his, letting their palms touch. “It was barely about him going after you and more that he chose now to act as though he cares for me.”

“Maybe he does,” Jon offered. “Maybe he changed. I saw a difference in him when he returned from his time with my family in the North. He said they spoke to him about his regrets so maybe it made him think and part of his regrets was how he treated you and Tommen. Maybe he’s being sincere in his desire to be a better father to you.”

“But now? I—” She stopped herself, seeing him look confused by her sudden sheepishness before she looked away saying, “I’m not a girl anymore. I’m a woman flowered.”

With a sympathetic smile he said, “That doesn’t make you no longer their child. If he cares for you as a father should then he’ll feel the same whether you’re a little thing tugging at his ankles or tower over him as he clings to a cane to stay upright.”

“I know but it doesn’t feel right that he gets to care now when I don’t need it. I have others I care about, others I can rely on, and now he wants me to rely on him? Why should I let him have that when he’s ignored me my entire life?”

“Because it could be worse,” Jon said quietly.

“Him being alive isn’t reason enough,” she said shaking her head. “I’d almost rather Robert be my father. At least he was funny at times. He was an idiot but a decent enough man. Jaime’s lied to us all, cuckholded the king behind his back, attacked your father.”

“He could be like Samwell’s father,” Jon said drawing her gaze. “He chained Samwell, nearly drowned him, bathed him in auroch blood, all because he wasn’t the warrior he wanted. He hated Samwell and when he sent him here told him he had to give up his rights to Horn Hill and place as heir to the House Tarly or they would go out for a hunt and Sam would have an accident and die in the woods.”
Myrcella raised a hand to cover her mouth. “How could he…”

As her voice trailed Jon said, “Or he could be like Tywin.”

“Grandfather?” she asked with a frown.

“He did things to your uncle which are…” Jon shook his head. “Not just mistreating him because he’s a dwarf but… horrible, awful things no man would ever do to someone they care for.” She saw him shake the disgust from his face before looking to her. “This isn’t to say your father is some grand, gallant knight. He’s the one who pushed Bran from the tower.”

“It was him?” she gasped, remembering the broken little boy laying in bed as his mother wept beside him.

“Bran saw Jaime with Cersei in the tower and she was worried he’d tell Robert so Jaime pushed him. When he told me I had to stop myself from punching him, but even still I know there’s some decent part of him. I’ve seen glimpses of a man I looked up to for a time. If nothing else at least he told you and you don’t have to spend your days wondering. You can come to accept this and grow stronger for it and be ready to face it should any ever try to use it against you.”

Myrcella met his Valyrian steel gaze, a smile touching her lips as she snickered. “To think not long ago I tried to convince my mother to legitimize you and wed you to me to secure the North, and now if the truth came out and the Tyrells abandoned us I’d probably be too low for you to wed.”

He quickly shook his head, turning his hand to interlace their fingers. “You can never be so low. Whatever they call you I’ve always known you a lioness, even when you were cub hiding among deer.”

Myrcella squeezed his hand suddenly, her eyes hardening as she said, “You say such things but do you mean them? If we could, if I wanted, would you wed me?”

She watched his surprise give way to a flicker of fear at her doubtful question before easing to a frown as she finished. He seemed to hesitate before asking quietly, “You truly didn’t believe what Jaime said of me?”

When she started shaking her head she noticed a pained look in his eyes and realized some of what Jaime said might have hit close to things he feared of himself. “No. I know you’re not some cruel killer. I’ll admit it was startling to see you kill those men but only because I’ve never seen you wield true steel, let alone Valyrian steel, which I can’t even fathom how you came to possess. Either way I know you’re more than some mindless knight who finds his purpose in killing others.”

He tried to smile, she saw it flash across his lips before crumbling as his hand slipped from hers and he sat up. “It means a lot to hear that from you, Myrcella… but there’s much of me you don’t know as well.”

“Like what?” she asked warily.

Jon glanced to the door before looking to her. “There’s a reason I came here alone tonight.”

Myrcella was torn over whether that was good or bad. “Why?”

“Because it’ll be easier for me to escape if you get angry and call the guards.”

She felt a flicker of fear wondering if it was some kind of threat, but he sounded almost defeated.
“What do you mean?”

“I’ve come to tell you something that may cost me my head. If you get upset and call for the guards I’ll have to leave. I’ve already sent Edric and the others ahead in case this all goes wrong, but I hope at least you’ll hear me out before deciding whether you wish me dead or not.”

Myrcella felt her eyes swell with tears as she shook her head pleading, “Please don’t tell me Jaime was right. That I’m some pawn in your game.”

“You’re not,” Jon assured, sitting forward in his chair. “I never saw you that way. If you’re a piece at all you’re a prize, but I know you more than that.”

“Then what?” she asked with a sniff.

“I was raised as Eddard Stark’s bastard. For years I believed that was all I would ever be. Coming here I learned what we are doesn’t determine who we are, and I truly believe that. Our houses, our blood, none of it determines the choices we make. But not all of what shapes us is our choice.” Jon lowered his gaze a moment, licking his drying lips before he looked to her saying, “My name isn’t Jon Snow. I was never Eddard Starks bastard. That was a lie he told to stop me from being murdered before I could walk.”

Myrcella’s eyes widened and she shook her head. “What? Your name isn’t Jon? Why would anyone want to kill you as a babe?”

“Because long before I was born Rhaegar Targaryen fell in love with Lyanna Stark and stole her away to wed in secret,” he said watching her gasp and begin to piece things together. “Eddard Stark rode to the Tower of Joy and found his sister dying, so she made him promise to keep her son Aegon safe from Robert lest I end up like my siblings did here. So he let the world think me his bastard until Barristan Selmy saw my true father in me and made them tell me everything.

“They told me of my true heritage, that despite being raised and treated like one I wasn’t even a bastard, and they gave me all my parents left for me.” He tapped the sword at his side, but kept his gaze on her as he said, “They left Dark Sister for me alongside a scarlet egg that hatched the day Gregor Clegane gave me the scar across my chest. And while I’ve been able to reclaim Dark Sister I plan to sail north and reclaim the dragon I sent to my uncles at the Wall.”

Myrcella gaped at him, her eyes taking in the details of his face to look for hints this was a lie or some trick but found only truth. “Aegon? Your name isn’t Aegon?”

Jon nodded. “When I met with Aemon at the Wall he told me Rhaegar believed his son Aegon would be the Prince That Was Promised. Aemon believed him obsessed enough to insist his sons all share the name as his daughters would be named Rhaenys or Visenya.”

“You’re a Targaryen?” she asked looking to his scarlet slashed doublet and suddenly remembering how she’d noticed more red joining the black, gray and white of his wardrobe. He chosen the colors for his new house to let him wear the colors of his true one.

“I am,” he said with a nod, watching her as she sat in silent thought.

“You’ve known for years but you never told me,” she said furrowing her brow.

Jon quickly slid forward in his seat. “I know, but I barely told anyone. Even now the bulk who know only do because they were there to watch Bloodwing be born as I lay dying in weirwood roots.”
“Bloodwing?” Myrcella blinked. “That’s your dragons name?”

“He has scarlet scales and his wings are black like pooled blood,” Jon said with a fond smile, almost like a parent speaking of a child while searching her face. “You have to believe me Myrcella. I didn’t keep it from you just to lie or keep a secret.”

She examined him for a moment before asking quietly, “You mean to take the Iron Throne, don’t you?”

Jon held her gaze while nodding. “I do. I would have been happy as a knight, but I saw how Robert ruled. I saw what Joffrey was. I can’t let your mother make things worse. I have to do something. I have to take what belongs to me. Besides... there’s a worse war coming.”

“What do you mean? What worse war?”

“My uncles wrote of Others at the Wall.”

“Others? White Walkers?”

“They tried to send a part of a wight here but it rotted before they could see it but I know they wouldn’t lie about it. Not to me. I’ve...” He sighed, glancing to the fire before telling her, “Thoros and I saw visions from R’hllor. In mine I saw ice spiders and the moon cracking like ice. I think the Wall is going to come down and the Others are going to come for us.”

Myrcella laughed dryly, “You saw visions?”

“I know it’s hard to believe-”

“This is all hard to believe,” she said shaking her head. “You’re not Jon, but Aegon? You’re not a bastard but secretly a lost Targaryen King? You’ve a dragon and the lost Targaryen sword Dark Sister…” She looked at his sheathed sword then met his eyes. “What are you going to do to take the throne?”

Seeing the hint of fear in her, Jon slid back looking heartbroken as he shook his head. “I’m not going to hurt you or Tommen.” She felt bad letting a momentary doubt show. He looked defeated, almost betrayed as he continued, “I wish I could claim the throne without bloodshed and even hope to do so with what I think might be the least bloodshed I can, but I’ve never intended to see you or Tommen harmed for this. If anything I intended to see Tommen take over Storm’s End or Casterly Rock if not serve here or as a lord in his own keep.”

“You would legitimize him as a Lannister?” Myrcella shook her head. “Let the world know our true parents?”

“Why should you be shamed for it? Why is it something they suddenly care about? Why do they suddenly think the gods view it as some vile thing when they said nothing of the Targaryens wedding siblings?” Jon scoffed, agitation showing briefly on his features as he asked, “Have any of them even spoken to the gods to know this, or is it just the words of some old fools who think they know the will of the gods?”

Myrcella nodded before asking, “What of me?”

Jon looked to her and she saw much of the fire fade from him, seeming almost hesitant to speak before meeting her gaze to say simply, “A king needs a queen.”

Myrcella gasped, sitting up. “What? You want me to...” Her hand moved to her chest before she
shook her head. “Even knowing what I am?”

“What you are?” Jon sighed, reaching out for her hand but then stopping himself, letting it hang from his knee as he look to her. “Myrcella. When I try to picture myself as king no matter what changes I’m always beside a queen with golden curls and emerald eyes. Whatever the world thinks of you, you’re the only woman I want beside me.”

He glanced down when he felt her fingers brush his as she slid forward. “You mean that? You’re sure?”

Returning his gaze to her he nodded, a solemn smile taking his lips as he told her, “At first it was simple. I care for you like no other I’ve known. I want to see you happy and give you all I can to do so. I want to share the joys of ruling with you and find solace in your arms. But now it can only be you. Not only because I fear I could never trust another woman as much as I do you, but also because I know in my heart I can be better man and a better king with a woman I love at my side.”

Whether she was still raw from the day or just overcome by it all, Myrcella felt her eyes burn with unshed tears as he spoke. It was why he practically stormed Sunspear when he thought her hurt. He’d come to retrieve not only the girl he loved but the girl he intended to crown his queen, much as he had when he earned his knighthood and gifted her a crown of roses.

Jon tensed when she pulled her hand from his, but was shocked when she nearly leapt from her chair to climb into his lap, bringing her hands to his face. He was so startled he pulled his head back asking, “What is this?”

Myrcella giggled as she grasped his cheeks. “I’m kissing my king.”

“You’re not going to send me away or call the guard?”

“Never,” she whispered, pressing her lips to his.

He was so confused it took him a moment to react to her kiss, shaking his head slightly before he closed his eyes and returned it, letting his arms wrap around her. After a moment her hands slid down his neck to press into his chest, pushing herself away from him. They examined one another’s faces before a relieved laugh escaped him and she grinned, pulling him up to meet her lips.

It didn’t take long for her to feel herself reacting to how his tongue brushed hers or how his hands felt through the silk of her dress on her back. She quickly pressed her hands into his chest again to pull herself away, this time sliding off him and returning to her chair as she tried to catch her breath.

Jon let out a long breath, looking at the ceiling for a moment before he sat up and looked to her, finding her watching him with a knowing, prideful smile. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” she said shaking her head.

“I mean about everything,” said Jon. “I could have told you sooner but… honestly I wasn’t ready. I wasn’t lying when I said the bulk of those who know only do because they were there when Bloodwing was born. I’ve only told Sam, Domeric and Robb so none of the other Starks know unless he or Eddard told them. Everyone else I’ve told has either been working with or for me in some way apart from the Tyrells.”

“The Tyrells?” Myrcella’s brow knit. “Margaery knows?”
“I cared about Loras knowing and helping us more than them knowing.”

“So they’re on your side?” she asked thinking on her day of riding for clues.

“Not really,” he said shaking his head. “Loras told them I wouldn’t wed Margaery but I think they still expect me to if I become king. Either way it seems they’re waiting to see what happens before deciding whether to truly back me. But obviously she’s already married Tommen and I chose my queen long ago.”

Myrcella beamed at that. “So we can’t let them know you’ve already chosen another? That I know the truth?”

“I don’t know,” Jon glanced at the fire and sighed, “though Thoros saw a vision of wolves in a rose meadow he thought showed a unification of the houses. I thought maybe it meant I had to wed Margaery to Robb but it could be Willas and Sansa. I don’t know. We couldn’t figure it out.”

“Maybe we can,” said Myrcella. “I want to hear it all. All you’ve done so far, all your plans, your allies, who knows the truth or whatever versions of it you’ve shared. Everything. I want you to tell me everything.”

Jon looked to her and smiled before he did just that.

Chapter End Notes

This is around when Cersei is getting paranoid about the prophecy, hence her smacking Jaime's hand away from her neck.

For any anime nerds I imagine Jaime's spiel about Jon's gaze kind of Conqueror's Haki from One Piece. The people who have it are usually not just super powerful but also important. Here half of them are royalty and the rest great knights but Jaime's pessimist is showing in that he sees this not as a sign that Jon is bound for greatness but that he should fear him like he did the Smiling Knight and Aerys. It'd be like fearing someone who has it will be like Doflamingo when Shanks and Luffy also have it. Plus it was a place to give the first signs of Jaime seeing Rhaegar in Jon.

Someone tried to leave a review saying they liked the conspiracy stuff but saying I suck at the relationship stuff or something. I barely remember it beyond noting how worthless a review it was. Stuff like that doesn't help and isn't a criticism, it's just a vapid complaint that waste your time the moment you decide to type it out and ends up wasting my time. It's fine if you prefer the conspiracy stuff. Focus on that if you want. The relationship stuff isn't being dropped, it's a part of the story. Complaining about it is pointless.

Also apparently this is something people keep trying to nitpick but get wrong so to avoid having to deal with it going forward; Jon as king would be Aegon the 6th. Last king Aegon was the 5th. Only crowned kings get the number added on. If you think Elia's Aegon counts then Jon would be Aegon the 38th or something with all the others ones before him. Even if you count Aegon the fake who isn't in the story yet he isn't a Targaryen and isn't crowned so both ways he doesn't fit. Hell, he technically doesn't even have the Blackfyre name in this version. People calling Jon the sixth is them showing their support and belief in him succeeding.
It was a lot of fun thinking up what were the worst things Jaime and Myrcella could say to taunt each other at the end of their bit.

Last few chapters were all kind of building on each other leading to Jon revealing to Myrcella and bringing her into the conspiracy, bring the wyrm and cub together at last now that both now neither thinks them a pup and fawn. In case it wasn't obvious he's telling her everything, so going forward they're in it together completely. We see the beginnings of it in chapter 68. But next few will be in the North.

Next Chapter: Robb's forces arrive at the Twins for a surprise while in the north Domeric makes a decision.
Evening passed into night as the Stark camp settled north of the Twins along the Green Fork leading to Greywater Watch. Olyvar Frey could see the towers of his home on the river, close enough they would reach it well before noon once they rode in the morning. The only thing keeping them was the hour. They’d only stopped once it was dark as Robb wanted to make sure they arrived early the next day.

Once he finished making sure Robb was settled in his pavilion, Olyvar left the King in the North and the Trident to find a meal before he took a sentinel shift. Every since Moat Cailin Robb had those among his guard take shifts standing sentinel around his tent each night. When the moon neared its peak he was called over to switch out with Robin Flint and found his brother Ser Perwyn had switched out with Lucas Blackwood. Smalljon and Wendel had also switched out with the brothers Karstark, so Torrhen and Eddard took the western corners while the Frey brothers took the east.

Crickets chirped as the four stood in the dark, looking through the gaps of the tents around them and distant trees. Given the position of their tent and how Robb never kept an especially audacious pavilion, they felt little concern any who thought to raid them would near without the guards elsewhere raising an alarm.

But Olyvar saw cloaked figures rushing toward him suddenly. He barely got a word out before he someone wrapped their arm across his throat and he was lifted off his feet, choking as he tried to suck air into his emptying lungs. He tried to look to his brother but saw him held in a similar position by a massive man in black cloak, almost waving Perwyn about before dumping his limp body on the ground. All he could do was watch the world around him collapsed into darkness.

It wasn’t long before they woke and Olyvar found his mouth gagged as he was tied to tree. The moon had sunk enough to make him think he’d been out for hours, though it was still dark out. To his left he saw his brother while to his right were the Karstarks, looking confused at the tents in the distance, just beyond the treeline. Realizing they were still near their camp the men began screaming into their gags and rattling their chains to be noticed.

“Don’t bother.” The booming voice called out as they looked to where Greatjon Umber strode toward them. “The camp’s all but empty.”

Perwyn spoke into his gag until Greatjon rolled his eyes and sent one of the men beside him to remove it. Olyvar’s brother sputtered once his mouth was cleared and he looked to the large northerner. “What is this about? Where’s Robb?”

Greatjon’s lips stretched into a grin as he said, “Riding north to kill the Boltons tailing us.”
To the North silence of the Bolton camp shattered when Grey Wind sprinted through the rows of tents before leaping onto the first guard to spot him. His fangs ripping through his neck turned the man’s screams into fluctuating screeches before he was silenced and Grey Wind charged toward the next, knocking him over and biting through the man’s jaw.

By the time the guards started to react, yells came from the trees at the edge of the field where they camped and the Bolton men watched a thousand men of the North charge toward their camp. Leading them all was the Young Wolf himself wielding the Valyrian steel sword Frostgale, which he used to cut through men as they ripped apart their camp.

It wasn’t long before the rest of the camp joined the fray, but they lost dozens of men by the time most donned their armor. Their screams laced through the clattering steel until eventually a Bolton scout rode in from the south yelling to his comrades, “The Freys ride to us!”

The Bolton men cheered as Robb pointed to the scout, who was swiftly knocked from his horse by an arrow that pierced his breastplate. Lucas Blackwood rode to Robb’s side saying, “Our scouts say the same. The Twins have mobilized.”

“Pray my Uncle does as asked,” Robb said with a smirk. “Otherwise we can fall back once they pass our camp.”

Frey horses burst from the Twins, their riders waving Frey banners as they rode toward the Stark camp. The lead rider barely made it to the first tent before they heard horns blaring behind them and turned to see men on the towers waving for them to return. Their confusion was answered when they looked past the Twins and found hundreds of riders coming from the south waving not only Tully and Blackwood banners, but a black one bearing a bright red flame used by the Fellowship of Fire.

The Frey riders panicked and turned their force around, half of them heading back to the Twins while the others rode to meet the incoming force. However barely half those who rode across the bridge made it before the gate closed, trapping them outside as the other riders crashed against the rivermen charging the Twins. Those left on the other side of the gates had little choice but to turn and face the riders. The few who made it past the volley of arrows they released on the Twins were swiftly picked off by spears or surrendered while their fallen brethren floated down the green fork.

Robb saw a distant rider approach one of the Bolton commanders in a panic, and moments later horns blew. Shock washed through the Bolton forces as men called out, “RETREAT!”

Cheers roared through the Stark forces as they watched the Bolton men running from the field, leaving their fallen while Robb signaled for his men to fall back. He would let even the unhorsed men retreat for now, as he expected some of them might end up fighting for him again.

Greatjon Umber grinned when one of his men rode back to them saying, “The Boltons have retreated and the Freys are hiding in the Twins. They barely reached our camp before they spotted the Rivermen and rode back!”

The Frey brothers looked to each other confused as Greatjon turned to the others and motioned to the captured quartet. “Get ’em on their feet. The King will want to speak with them once he returns.”

The sun had crested the horizon by the time they were brought back to camp and found the men they rode beside the entire way south now looked at them warily, some even wearing betrayal on their faces. It left the men baffled as they were brought before Robb, who stood outside his pavilion where the area before him had been cleared. All four noticed a thick log to the right his
right as Grey Wind stood on his left coated in the blood of Bolton men.

Once they were set before him Robb frowned and motioned toward their lips. “Remove the gags. There’s no one for them to warn anymore.”

Umber’s men did as ordered, all four men taking deep breaths as they looked to Robb. “What is the meaning of this, Robb?” Eddard Karstark asked, confusion and hurt in his voice.

“Roose Bolton has betrayed us,” Robb said crossing his arms as he looked the four men over. “He’s crafted an alliance to take the North from House Stark. He left Harrenhal and rode north with complaints from Lord Frey to arrange a marriage he demanded I attend. A marriage he planned to end with my murder.”

Perwyn and Olyvar glanced to each other, neither able to deny it was something their father might do. They knew better than most the cruelty and distrust festered within the Twins.

“How the fuck does that involve us then?” Torrhen Karstark demanded, taking a step forward only to have Smalljon step forward and slam a hand into his chest to stop him. The Umber man frowned, clearly as unhappy with this as any but unwilling to let him near Robb.

The King in the North frowned as he said, “Right now House Karstark and House Glover will be attacking Winterfell, waiting for knights of the Vale to come help them finish off whatever Stark forces remain. Or so was Roose’s plan.”

“What?” Torrhen scoffed. “Why would we do that?”

“Harrion,” Eddard said with a sigh, looking to Robb. “Father wanted him back.”

“And Roose has a deal with the Lannisters to allow that,” their king said with a nod before stepping forward, looking to each man. “I need to know. I need to hear it from your lips, to hear the words etched in your hearts. Did any of you know this would happen?”

“I don’t even understand how you knew it would happen,” Torrhen said with a laugh.

Robb turned to look at the group of Manderly men who joined them from Moat Cailin. One stepped forward, removing his helm to reveal Devan Seaworth. “A Seaworth slipped through the cracks.”

“I didn’t know,” Olyver said shaking his head, his shoulder slumped after glancing toward the Twins and seeing it surrounded on either side of the river by a mix of North and Riverland forces. Meeting Robb’s gaze he declared, “I swear it to all the gods I knew nothing of this, your grace.”

“I doubt any of us knew,” Perwyn said with a sigh. “Father would have waited until we were in the keep to bring us aside and force us to keep quiet and stay out of the way.”

When Robb turned his gaze on the Karstarks he found Torrhen looked to Eddard. “He wouldn’t have just let us die, would he?”

Eddard Karstark frowned and shook his head. “He probably expected the Freys to send us back with the Boltons or for us to meet with the Lannisters to retrieve Harrion.”

His grimace twisted with anger that faded when Torrhen shook his head and looked to Robb. “I swear, Your Grace, we knew nothing. Our father said nothing of this to us.”

Robb looked from the four to Grey Wind, the direwolf stepping to his side where Robb placed a
hand on his head. Looking them over, Robb’s face fell to a frown as he said somberly, “I’m sorry. I hope you understand why we had to do this and keep this from you.”

Torrhen huffed. “What about our men? Some of them might have known.”

“They’re being held elsewhere to be questioned,” Robb said patting Grey Wind’s head, signaling for the direwolf to turn and move back toward the tent. “I didn’t want to risk one of them being involved and harming you if you weren’t, so I kept them elsewhere. I hope you’ll help with questioning them.”

“You’ll need that block,” Perwyn said with a nod toward the log Grey Wind sat beside. “I don’t doubt half the men father sent would’ve known of it but said nothing to me.”

“When the time comes,” Robb said before looking to Umber. “Unshackle them.”

“Thank you, your grace,” Olyvar said with a bow once the chains were removed.

“Again I’m sorry it came to this but if you understand then I hope I can rely on you to help me dealing with your families. Some will die, but I want to avoid wiping out houses. We can’t afford to lose so many, not with the Others coming.”

Robb had the four taken aside to rest while he and Grey Wind rode toward the besieged Twins. He quickly found his great uncle Brynden leading the Tully riders alongside Tytos Blackwood, who smiled seeing Lucas riding beside Robb.

“Uncle, did any make it into the Twins?” Robb asked looking over the towers.

“They closed the gates before we could reach them. Trapped half their men out here with us though. Eventually they started surrendering.”

“The bodies,” Robb said looking to his uncle, “did you-”

“Already prepared. Any word from the North?” asked Brynden. “Is your mother going to be okay?”

“I don’t know,” Robb admitted. “For all I know the Boltons had a group trailing them and killed the raven I sent from Moat Cailin or the messenger I sent to Winterfell.”

Robb’s eyes shifted past the Blackfish, a smile touching his lips as he saw men bearing the scarlet flame of the Fellowship of Fire striding toward them. Those near watched as the men walked to Robb and rather than take a knee they nodded while Robb greeted them with a smile and stepped forward to shake their hands, smirking at the few familiar faces. “You look well, Ser Alyn.”

“I’m glad you’re safe, my lord,” Alyn said with a somber smile before motioning to the man beside him. “This is our leader, Lord Beric Dondarrion.”

Beric certainly stood out even among the other men. Not only did his breastplate display the forked purple lightning bolt of his house, but he wore an oddly striped black and white mantle over his cloak and was missing his right eye, the lid remaining closed as he bowed his head to Robb. “My lord.”

“I’ve heard much of you and your fellowship, Lord Beric,” Robb said looking over the men. “I’m relieved you answered my call.”

“Your words were specific,” Beric said eyeing Robb. “Come north and return to your king for he
has need of you.”

“He does,” Robb said holding his gaze. “I mean to send you to Widow’s Watch where you’ll meet with trusted men.”

Beric looked relieved to see they both were discussing Jon, so looked to Alyn. “We should make sure the men are ready to leave by dawn. No dallying.”

“They’ll be ready,” Alyn assured, looking to Robb. “Could we speak privately?”

Robb nodded, looking to Brynden and the others who seemed confused. “Arrange the Parlay with the Freys while I speak with them.” Though hesitant, Brynden nodded and went to do as he was ordered. He looked to the Blackwoods and the rest of his guard, “Go ahead, I’ll be fine. I’ll keep Grey Wind with me.”

He kept a hand on the direwolf’s head, watching the others give them space, though they kept their eyes on Robb as he turned back. Only Beric, Alyn, Anguy, Harwin, Raymun Darry and Gladden Wylde lingered while Lothar Mallery went to see to the rest of the fellowship.

Raymun chuckled as he looked over Grey Wind, still red with blood. “He reminds me of Ghost at Mummer’s Ford.”

Anguy snickered. “You could barely see the white under all the blood.”

“Did he ever make it back to Jon?” asked Alyn.

Robb nodded. “Some have said he was with him when he slew the Mountain.”

The mention of Jon’s victory brought grins to all the men who had been there to see the result of their first clash. “I wish we’d been there to see it,” Beric said shaking his head. Turning his attention to Robb he asked, “What made you call for us? Is Jon in trouble?”

“We heard he left for Dorne,” said Raymun.

“He sent word that he intends to sail north to reclaim his dragon and begin the next phase of his plan,” Robb said looking them over. “You’ve all done good here but I thought it best you aid Jon. He’ll need all the men he can get for now.”

“Our duty given by Lord Eddard was done when Clegane died,” Harwin said to the others. “We’ve little more to do here. The Mountain’s men are broken or dead, even the Brave Companions are all gone.”

Beric shook his head saying, “Zollo and Biter remain.”

“Dennet killed Zollo, remember?” Harwin said with a laugh. “Lem tried to hang him but the branch broke, so Dennet put an arrow through his heart.”

“Ah, of course,” Beric said with a sigh.

“And Swampy Meg got her Zorse mantle when she killed Biter at the sept.”

“Forgive me.” Beric tapped his head. “Too many close calls.”

“Is that what happened to your eye?” asked Robb. “I heard Vargo Hoat shot you in the eye and you ripped the arrow out to fire it back through his throat saying you could see the evil inside him.”
The men all laughed as Beric sighed and shook his head. “No. I earned my cloak from killing Urswyck. Vargo who took my eye with a stray shot in the midst of a battle, but it was a maester who took the arrow and eye out for me and it was Anguy who put an arrow through Hoat’s throat.”

Robb chuckled. “Either way I’m glad so many of you answered the call.” As they rode over he’d seen what looked to be a hundred men among the fellowship.

“Sadly it’s not our full number,” Beric admitted. “We’ve lost some since Jon left us, and many who joined us to defend the Riverlands didn’t want to leave them. Still, Those left of the originals and a dozen others have come.”

Their conversation ended when the men noticed the gates of the Twins open. Robb made his way to his horse with the others, meeting up with his uncle. The Stark and Tully forces backed away from the shore and start of the bridge, leaving Robb with Grey Wind, Brynden, the Blackwoods and Smalljon while a group of Freys rode toward them.

Leading them was a pale, slender man with a constipated look wearing a finely tooled gray jerkin beneath a blue cloak. Brynden quickly reminded him it was Edwyn, Walder’s great grandson born of firstborns.

“What madness is this, Your Grace?” Edwyn asked Robb. “Why have you suddenly attacked us?”

“Because Roose Bolton’s plan is known to us,” Robb answered without airs. “Don’t bother playing games or lying to me.”

Edwyn’s pinched nose crinkled as he brushed back his dark hair. “You won’t be able to break our walls. Don’t waste your lives here. Have your men retreat and I’ll ask my father to meet with you so you might make this right.”

“I don’t have to break your walls. I’ll not send a single man across either side of the bridge,” Robb said looking past them to the Twins. “Those gates are going to be opened and my men will be invited in to come claim the Twins.”

Edwyn scoffed. “Is that so?”

“Every raven that passes your walls will die. Every fish in the river will choke in nets well before they swim beneath your bridge. And when the wells run dry and you look to the river you’ll find it little more than muck as not only will our latrines empty into it, but we mean to spare the trees from the flames.”

At that Brynden raised a hand and men rushed out of the woods pushing carts. They turned them into the river, dumping piles of corpses into the water. Edwyn watched as every man who fell outside their walls was thrown into the river alongside the fallen horses. Scarlet streaks cut across the water, stretching beyond the dark blotch of the growing pile of corpses.

Robb looked from the river to Edwyn as he concluded, “It won’t be long before you’re thinking about which of your brothers you’re going to cook and wondering if you can drink his blood. And when you start to kill each other, one of you is going to want to live more than they care about your lord’s legacy.

“So go. Run to your lord and tell him the wolves are at your doors and winter has come for House Frey.”

*_*_*_
“The letters should arrive by morning, my lord,” Maester Tybald said to the Lord of the Dreadfort in his solar.

Roose nodded. “Make sure to find me once they do. Wake me if you must.”

Bowing to the lord, the red haired maester turned and fled the solar, pulling the door closed behind him. However in his haste to return to the rookery he didn’t notice the latch didn’t catch thanks to a chunk of cloth stuck in the lock while it had been opened moments earlier.

He also hadn’t noticed how the hinges had been oiled days earlier, making them squeak only when opened all the way. So when the door was gently pushed open it barely made a sound, and certainly not one audible over the crackling hearth. Roose was sat at his desk looking over letters with his back to the door, not seeing his son enter the room behind him.

Domeric looked at the back of his father’s head and wondered if the man ever loved him. He cared for him, but at times Domeric was certain it was only as his eldest spawn. If Ramsay had survived he might have even welcomed him into his house if Domeric had died in the south. He wouldn’t have cared that Ramsay was a mad dog, only that he was his progeny.

When his mother died Domeric had been angry with his father for sending him away. Perhaps she was the last thing he loved, though Domeric didn’t recall any hint of such a thing in his memories of them. It was present only in the memories of his mother as she showed him how to play the harp and sang songs to him. If there had ever been anything good in his father than it died with her, or so Domeric believed.

With a silent breath Domeric drew his dagger, his eyes stinging as he stepped toward his father. Tears came not for the man he intended to kill but for himself. Doing this would stain Domeric forever. There would be no denying him a kinslayer. People would be right to look down on him, but it was worth it. He would bear any stain to do what he knew needed to be done to see Jon not only crowned king but unite all of Westeros.

As Domeric raised his arm it wasn’t his fathers breath he heard or even his own, but one from behind him before he turned straight into a vase that smashed against his skull. The Flayed Knight crumbled to the ground with a grunt and in his fading moments saw it was Fat Walda who had spotted him through the open door and come to save her husband.

It was that same husband who burst from his chair after seeing his son bleeding from his head and grabbed Walda by the neck. Roose nearly lifted her off the ground as he yelled in her face, “What have you done!?”

Darkness encroached Domeric’s vision as he saw Walda point to him and choke out, “Dagger.”

Roose looked to Domeric and released Walda when he saw the dagger near his son’s hand. He tried to reach for it but Roose swiftly kicked it away, staring down at him and shaking his head with disappointment etched into his face.

Domeric felt tears slip from his eyes as consciousness left him and his king’s name died on his lips.

Chapter End Notes

Originally planned to show Robb at Moat Cailing, then move into the Twins, but
decided to open with the four being rushed down and explain along the way. I even considered a version that was setting up for the Red Wedding to just happen like normal then have the reveal be Robb was the one betraying them, but he wouldn't break guest rights.

Was tempted to have Beric's legend go full Xiahou Dun and rip the arrow out and eat the eye off it, but toned it down since the whole 'Blood of my sire' thing wouldn't fit as much as in the Three Kingdoms.

I had this planned as one long chapter but it felt too disjointed so split it with the next. Briefly considered adding more but I don't want to stretch things pointlessly. Story's already long no need to needlessly stretch it just to fill out a chapter.

If you didn't pick up on it the implication is the attacks are planned to happen on or around the same day to prevent their targets from warning the others.

It felt fitting to have Domeric's hesitation to kill his father bring him down. It's his humanity that makes him a better man but also left him open for something like Fat Walda to hit him because he was so caught up in his own emotions he didn't get in, kill Roose and run like he'd planned.

Next Chapter: Catelyn takes note of changes before Winterfell faces betrayal. Domeric wakes in chains.
Death of Illusions

Chapter Summary

Catelyn takes note of changes before Winterfell faces betrayal. Domeric wakes in chains.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Catelyn Stark felt as if the gods were playing a cruel trick on her when Robb told her he wouldn’t wed Dacey despite her carrying his babe. Her very first grandchild would be a bastard. They would be claimed by the Mormonts but that wouldn’t change how they were born. It wouldn’t change how people saw them. Her innocent grandchild would suffer for their parents unwillingness to do what was right, and it felt like it was all some punishment for how she had treated Jon.

At first she wanted to blame the Mormonts. Cat knew her son would want to do what was right the moment he learned she was pregnant. He would’ve taken her as his queen in a moment, so it had to be her decision to return to Bear Island that was stopping them. However Dacey was also her best chance to change things. It wasn’t as if he had any others he cared for and whenever they brought up his marriage as a way to gain an alliance with Dorne or to convince the Vale to join them Robb was firmly against it. If Dacey decided she did want to be with Robb then he would marry her.

While Robb rode south he’d sent companies of men across the North to run out any lingering ironborn and help begin rebuilding the keeps and towns ruined by them. Eddard had suggested it as a way to show the North they intended to help and assure those lords wary of their decision to allow the wildlings past the Wall.

She knew Eddard was still in contact with not only his brother and the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, Jeor Mormont but the King-Beyond-the-Wall, Mance Rayder.

“How did you get them to agree to your terms?” Davos Seaworth asked as they sat for supper with the Baratheon party after Robb’s departure. Apart from the Mormonts they were the only lords to stay in Winterfell. The rest either left with Robb or to check on their keeps before Robb’s return. Most left a few captains at Winterfell in case anything of import happened.

“They’re people the same as us,” Ned said reaching for his cup. “Their ways are different but in the end they want the same things as us. They’re just a wild horse we need to care for. They’ll buck but in time they’ll settle and be tame as any other.”

“You say that but you’re all the way down here while my daughters are half the distance from where you’ve let them settle,” Maeg Mormont said with a laugh. “I don’t think they’ll be too happy when they come to steal a wife and my Lyra or Jorelle put maces through their skulls.”

“They know the laws here,” Eddard said shaking his head.

“And why should they keep them?” asked the stern faced Selyse Florent. “You trust those uncivilized men to obey your laws because you ask? They know no gods but the twisted things they dreamt in the cold night.”
“They obey because they are free to keep their customs among themselves,” Eddard said grimly, “but I’ve told them the moment they take a thatcher’s daughter she’ll be found and a company of Northmen will put to rest whatever clan or village thinks themselves wildling raiders rather than free folk of the North.”

“You would wipe out an entire village for one man’s crime?” Axell Florent asked with surprise.

“I hope the threat a way to avoid such a thing,” Ned admitted. “If I said simply the man who took her would die then they might kill any girls they take and hide the bodies once they knew we were looking for them. This way I hope once others learned the girl taken they might kill the raider for his crime. That way when our men arrive the girl will be taken care of and the kidnapper dead by the time our men arrive so they need not risk themselves getting her back.”

“Or it could band the village together against you,” Gendry said looking up from his plate.

“It could,” Eddard said with a nod, “but then they are supporting the kidnap and rape of some poor woman and deserving of what comes, don’t you think?”

“If they’ve agreed to your terms is there a reason they’ve yet to come swear to our king?” asked Selyse.

“They will by the time he returns. There was so many of them,” Eddard said with a grunt of agreement from Alester and Axell Florent. “It felt like they stretched through the entire forest. Even when I left they were still bringing people through.”

“Could they have actually won if you didn’t get them by surprise?” Arya asked from her spot beside Shireen, who was laughing along with Rickon while Patchface danced off to the side.

It was Edric Baratheon who scoffed. “Not unless we fought with our hands and abandoned our horses. Most of them still used stone or bone for their weapons. Any decent armor or steel they wield is taken from dead rangers or raids. Only the Thenns were fairly well armed, and even then only with bronze. The few horses they had were used for burden more than mounts. A company of skilled men in well made armor could’ve torn through them in time.”

“It sounds as if all the Watch needed to defend itself was more men and better equipment,” noted Davos.

“Preparation slays more opponents than steel,” Arya said with a smile.

Sansa turned to her sister asking, “Another one of Syrio’s lessons?”

“It doesn’t just mean it’s better to prepare though,” Arya said nodding. “It’s a reminder that steel itself doesn’t take lives. Steel on its own is nothing. It’s the person wielding it who is the danger.”

“A good thing to remember,” said Melisandre, which Sansa took notice of.

Catelyn frowned noting how her daughter had been spending more time with the red priestess. She’d seen how feverishly devoted Selyse was at times, but Sansa still followed the Seven. Thankfully she still came to the sept with her each day and spent as much time with Jeyne as she did speaking with the Asshai woman. Instead she focused on her grandchild.

“Still it is unsettling to know they could do something before we have time to reach them,” Cat said shaking her head mournfully. “It’s bound to happen. Some young fool will think himself above the law and some girl will suffer for it, and even more after that.”
Eddard frowned hearing his wife say such a thing, though thankfully it was only before those close to them and not the other lords of the realm. “We can’t account for all the evils of man. None can.”

“Oh course. I only mean to say I’m our girls are safe here within the walls of Winterfell.” Turning to Dacey she said, “Perhaps it’s better to stay here at least until things have settled with the wildlings?”

Dacey shook her head. “Bear Island is as safe as any place. Our people might be less in number but they’re worth more than most. We’ve dealt with stray wildlings for years. This should be no different.”

“How long before you return?” Catelyn asked cautiously.

Dacey frowned. “I’m not sure. We agreed to discuss where they’ll be born when Robb returned. The only reason I didn’t ride with him was Domeriec mentioning Walder might see it as an insult that he put a babe in me but wouldn’t marry one of his daughters.”

“He’s like to find insult in the water not parting to keep his feet dry,” Selyse said with a scoff, earning some chuckles from the table.

Catelyn tried to find ways to spend time with Dacey. She would let Rickon run around with Shaggydog and Osha while she when to watch Arya and Eddard in the yard, which just happened to be where Dacey would be. Thankfully she wore extra armor and those who sparred with her avoided her torso. While praising Arya and Eddard she would pay compliments to Dacey and escort her back to the keep or on her way to pick up Rickon.

It was over a sennight before she felt a tense shift in the air.

Eddard seemed quieter than usual and then one day asked her as they lay in bed together, “Have you noticed any of the men behaving oddly?”

“Not enough for me to have noticed.” She turned and saw he was contemplative so asked, “Why?”

“Some of the lords left men here,” he said more to himself than her.

“Surely to act on their behalf if not to ease their hearts as well as that of their king knowing their number bolster our guard,” she said with a somber smile as she stroked his beard. “Last time Robb went that far south Winterfell was taken by a turncloak. It would do him no good to worry of such a thing happening again while he settles things with the Freys.”

She saw Eddard’s gaze harden, though he nodded in agreement with her. “It would do no good to worry him.”

However that didn’t seem to settle things with him as the tenseness in him lingered. Over the next few days she noticed him often seeking out Gendry, Davos, the Florent brothers and oddest of all even Melisandre. When she asked him why he sought them out he answered simply, “I’m their host and lord of Winterfell. It’s my duty to care for them.”

“That’s my duty as Lady of Winterfell to make sure their needs are met,” she argued.

“And you’ve done so well,” he said with an assuring smile, “but while you tend to their comfort I have to ease their minds and assure them their support isn’t ill placed. All we’ve done so far is give their forces refuge, but they still have lands and people beyond the Riverlands. If they feel ill cared for or ignored they may abandon our cause to try and make their own once again.”
Pushing it out of her mind she focused on making Dacey feel at home in Winterfell. She called back to all the little tricks she’d picked up during her pregnancies. She did her best to help her but she noticed the girl was tense, seeming almost paranoid at times. Dacey wore mail nearly all the time, wore a sword half the day and kept a dagger for the rest.

Then one day she snapped when Catelyn asked, “Wouldn’t it be better for the babe to not wear your mail so often?”

“Gods, are you truly so blind?” Dacey yelled as she came to a stop, startling Catelyn, Maege, Brienne and some of the guards who followed them. “I know what this is. I know the only reason you spend so much time with me is to try and convince me to wed Robb. He’s warned me you might try something like this, feared you might even embarrass yourself begging me to marry him, but at least that would be honest instead of this pathetic game you play while being so blind to everything else around you.”

The Mormont heir internalized a scream and stormed off, Maege giving Cat a quick apologetic look before rushing off after her daughter with a trio of guards. Brienne walked to Catelyn’s side, frowning as she looked from the retreating Mormonts to her liege.

When she came to supper Dacey met her to apologize, saying it was the unbalance of pregnancy that drove her to say such things. Catelyn quickly forgave her, having experienced it herself at times. She spoke frankly with Dacey, who shared her reasons for wanting to remain Lady of Bear Isle. It felt like a defeat Catelyn could only accept, but found the woman’s words lingered with her.

It started as they sat to eat that she noticed it wasn’t just Dacey and Eddard who were tense but half the court seemed to have an anxiety about them. Osha had become a kind of nanny for Rickon whenever she and Eddard were busy, the wildling woman having proven herself during Theon’s betrayal. Now she was one of the few Rickon trusted as much as his family, and she even seemed to be able to rein in Shaggydog at times. Yet even when Catelyn hadn’t asked her the wildling woman was near Rickon watching him, or rather watching those who came near him.

Arya had devoted herself to her training since the moment they returned, but now it seemed as if Syrio was beside her all the time. No longer did she stumble across her daughter in some odd disguise or running about keep while balancing a blunt dagger on her palm or any of the other countless tasks Syrio sometimes sent her on. Even Sansa suddenly spent more time with Melisandre, who joined her on her walks with Jeyne while her Baratheon and Florent guards followed.

It dawned on her how Brienne had suddenly taken to following her more often than she had weeks earlier. She wasn’t sure she’d been without her for more than a few moments. Her sworn shield hadn’t even been to train, and she found it was Eddard who asked her to guard her.

When she asked him about it Eddard looked up from his desk to tell her, “You said last time Robb went this far south Theon tried to take Winterfell from us. Before that when I went south it was you and Bran who were attacked.” He rose from his chair and took her hand in his, opening her palm to trace the feint scar from where he had held the catspaw’s Valyrian steel dagger. “You bear enough scars, my lady.”

Though she had kissed him and taken him to bed, as she lay there afterward she couldn’t help but feel there was more to it than he said. His concern for her might explain Brienne but the others? Was it truly the memory of what Winterfell faced when its men rode south that drove their paranoia?

Her answer came when she was pulled from her sleep by a clattering in the hall. She sat up with a
groan and found Eddard had leapt from the bed and grabbed his sword belt which lay beside it.

“What was that?” she asked as she narrowed her eyes toward the door and strained her ears.

They heard a grunt and suddenly a dozen wolves howling from the yard. She gasped and climbed out of bed as Eddard drew Honor’s Hail, tossing the scabbard aside as he made for the door and glanced to her as she followed him to the door, pulling a robe over her chemise.

“Stay back,” he warned before opening the door.

Cat gasped as she saw guards in the corridor, half of them trying to kill the others. Brienne stood against a wall beside their door, the table outside it smashed as she held the wrists of a man nearly as tall as her trying to drive a dagger into her neck. Her sword lay buried in the armpit of another man beside them and she was struggling to keep the dagger away as it scraped at her breastplate.

When the attacker heard their door he gasped at the sight of Eddard, but before he could pull away from Brienne she tightened her grip on his wrist and held him in place. His shock faded as Honor’s Hail was driven through the side of his neck, Brienne’s cobalt armor turning indigo as the blade’s withdrawal unleashed a torrent of blood before she could throw the man aside. With a grunt she pressed a boot into the body of the other fallen man, ripping her sword free and rushing forward to help the other guards.

Before Catelyn could stop him Eddard followed Brienne, helping the female warrior tear through the betrayers until only the few loyal guards remained. “Go check on the children,” he told four of them while keeping two to follow him and Brienne back to their room.

“What’s happening?” she asked as Eddard stormed past her, throwing open the chest holding his armor.

“We’ve been betrayed,” he said setting his Valyrian steel sword down to quickly put on his greaves.

“By who?” she asked watching him grab his cuisses and polyns, putting them over his thighs and knees before getting to his feet.

“Help me,” he ordered as the guards stood sentinel at the door. Catelyn rushed over when he pulled a hauberk on, Brienne setting down her sword to help her secure Eddard’s cuirass.

“I can handle the rest,” she told Brienne, taking a vambrace from her. She went about putting on Eddard armor asking again, “Whose betrayed us? Who are the men attacking us?”

“They’ll be Karstark and Glover men,” Ned said looking to Brienne. “Did everyone prepare as I told them to?”

“Prepare?” Catelyn asked putting on his pauldron as Brienne nodded. Once the second was secure she asked him, “You knew this would happen?” When he nodded and turned to pick up his helmet she asked, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Before he put the armor on he met her eyes, frowning as he told her, “Because Jon wrote that he saw this happening in a fire.”

Catelyn’s eyes widened. “Like the red priestess?”

“I wasn’t sure you would keep quiet about it once you heard it was just something he saw in a vision,” Eddard said putting on his helm and picking up his Valyrian steel sword before turning to
leave the room. As he passed the threshold he ordered Brienne and the guards, “Stay with my wife!”

Catelyn stood at the door watching him run through the corridors ready for battle. For a moment she was silent, overcome with shock. Not only had he kept this a secret, but he knew about it because of Jon and some vision in the flames?

“Brienne,” she said looking to her sworn shield. “Is what he said true?”

“I don’t know for certain, my lady,” she said warily. “I know the lord had been concerned lately and asked certain people to discreetly prepare themselves, but I wasn’t certain why.”

Catelyn gaped at the corridor before leaving the room. Brienne put a hand on her shoulder but before she or the guards could say anything Catelyn told them, “He said to stay by me, not for us to stay here. Come or don’t, I’m going to check my children.”

They followed her as she made her way through the keep, the sounds of battle ever present. She could hear steel clashing as men yelled and took their final breaths, cheers of victory alongside agonized screams.

Her heart caught in her throat when she came to the corridor of her children’s rooms and found Osha stood in the corridor with a bloodied dagger in her hand, bouncing a sniffling Rickon on her hip while Arya stood in front of him making funny faces despite her thin dancer’s sword behind her back being soaked in blood from one of the six men Syrio was pushing aside in the corridor.

“Rickon,” she gasped, rushing to his side.

“Here’s your momma, little lord,” Osha said turning to her, holding her dagger away from him as she let Catelyn take Rickon.

Arya smiled as she looked past her to Brienne. “Thank you for keeping her safe.”

Brienne smirked at the praise. “Of course, my lady.”

“Have you seen Sansa?” Arya asked with a frown. “She wasn’t in her room.”

“She wasn’t?” Catelyn asked, looking to the open door to Sansa’s room. The bed looked slept in but the heart had a fairly fresh log in it.

“Rickon sent Shaggydog to find her,” Arya said with a frown, “but I’m not sure he understood really. Maybe I should go-”

“No,” Catelyn snapped before she could finish. “Syrio, please make sure she doesn’t leave her room.”

“As your wish, my lady,” he said with a bow of his head before stepping past her, waving a hand toward Arya’s door. “Go, girl.”

Looking to Rickon she said, “I need to find Sansa, okay sweetling? I want you to stay here and stay quiet. I’ll send Shaggydog back as soon as I find him.”

“Okay,” Rickon said with a pout, hugging her before she let him down and he took Osha’s hand, the wildling nodding to her before they hid inside Arya’s room.

The morning sun was cresting the horizon enough for them to see out the windows as they
continued through the keep. In the bailey she saw some of the Glover men left screaming as Nymeria and a dozen wolves tore at them while Eddard and a group of guard knocked them out and killed them before rushing toward another group making for the gatehouse.

Eventually they heard someone cry out in annoyance as they passed the library, “Stop it, Shaggy! Stop!”

Catelyn quickly threw open the door to find Sansa pushing away a Rickon’s black furred direwolf tugging at the sleeve of her nightgown. Stood off to the side looking through the pages off a book was Melisandre. Not far from them was a table where a Baratheon guard lay dead atop it while two burn men lay at his feet, their bodies little more than scorched masses of flesh and bone.

“Ah, Lady Stark,” she said with a smile. “Lord Stark said you were fine but it is a relief to see it for ourselves.”

“Sansa?” Catelyn said walking to her before rubbing Shaggydog’s head and telling the direwolf, “Go to Rickon. Protect him and Arya. I’ll protect Sansa.”

The direwolf whined before turning and leaving the room. Sansa frowned and called out, “Thank you Shaggy!” With a sigh she turned to Catelyn telling her, “Father said we should stay here. I’m sorry if you worried.”

“Why weren’t you in your room?” she asked looking from her to Melisandre. The red priestess arched her brow at Sansa, who sheepishly looked down.

“I couldn’t sleep so I sneaked down to find a lemoncake and came here to read something Lady Melisandre mentioned.”

“I found her here reading,” Melisandre said turning to Catelyn. “When the men found us my guard tried to stop them but they proved more than he could handle himself. Thankfully my Lord hasn’t left me so defenseless. Thankfully Lord Stark told us this was to come else I fear we might have lost more than a few loyal guards.”

“He told you of this?” asked Catelyn.

Melisandre nodded. “He warned Lord Gendry and Alester as well as Ser Davos and Axell, but asked me to look over the letters he received from the maester at the Wall. It seems he saw this attack in a flame so we’ve had time to prepare.”

Catelyn gasped remembering the night Eddard had seemed so tense, when he said it would do no good to worry Robb. It seemed clear he had known since then this would happen since then.

Suddenly they winced as horn blasts cut through the dawn air. Melisandre turned to look out the window and smirked. “I look forward to meeting this Jon Snow. It seems all he saw has come to pass.”

“What do you mean?” asked Catelyn.

Pulling aside the curtain, Melisandre motioned outside the window saying, “Here come the falcons to tear at their prey.”

Carelyn left the two guards with Sansa as she rushed out to the corridor, finding a window looking out to the eastern fields where a host of a thousand men were making their way to Winterfell. Among them she saw banners flying not only for house Karstark and Glover, but Hose Arryn and half a dozen other houses of the vale from Borrell and Corbray to Hunter and Waynwood.
She saw a line of men escorting a battering ram cutting through the host, but before they could begin their charge more horns sounded, and this time not from the attacking force. Instead half came from the mass of a thousand Baratheon riders charging in from the south west of Winterfell while the other half came from the near three thousand wildlings charging from the trees to the north.

The Vale knights peeled away to try and cut off the Baratheon forces while the Karstark and Glover forces turned to face the mass of screaming wildlings. She watched the forces crash into each other, hundreds of men dying in moments as spears skewered steel and flesh.

Then came the howls and horns as the gates to Winterfell opened and she watched Eddard ride out with two hundred men, decimating those guarding the ram before joining the wildlings in picking off the northern men who betrayed them. She did her best to look for Ned in the fray but it was nearly impossible, so instead she went to the courtyard and listened to the screams and yells, waiting until it grew quiet and a guard finally called for the gates to be opened for their lord’s return.

The moment Ned had dismounted she ran through the men gathered to throw her arms around him, not caring that she now had other men’s blood staining her gown. She only cared that it wasn’t his. “Were you hurt? I tried to track you but I couldn’t keep up with it all.”

He pulled off his helm, taking a deep breath as he looked to her with a somber smile. “I’m fine, Cat. I feared you might have hoped I would returned injured for keeping this from you.”

“Never,” she said shaking her head. “I know you had you reason but you can explain after you’ve questioned the captured men about why they’ve done this.”

Eddard shook his head. “There’s no need. They attack us because their lords have fallen in with Roose Bolton just as the Freys have.”

“The Freys?” She gasped, her eyes widening. “Robb!”

“Will be fine,” he quickly assured. “He knew of this as well as the attack from the Freys and Boltons following him south.”

Catelyn shook her head. “How?”

“Domeric,” said Eddard. “He helped his father come up with this plan, but also faked Devan’s death to let the boy ride to Robb and meet him at Moat Cailin to tell him all of it. He even suggested means for us to counter his father’s attacks. It’s why I had the free folk camping in the woods. It’s how I knew to make sure we had at least a thousand riders to overwhelm those from the Vale.”

Seeing her shock, Eddard frowned and took her hand. “Come. I’ll show you the letter. There is some you need to read yourself.”

She followed him to their chambers, watching him pull a folded letter from a pouch on his belt and hand it to her. Unfolding it she found it was actually multiple letters. Two from the Wall, or rather one from Maester Aemon explaining the more confusing one from Jon which warned the old man of winter heat and suggested falconing. Then there was a raven letter from Robb warning them of the attack as well another more detailed one about their plan. She gasped as she read that it was Petyr Baelish who involved the Vale through their tepid alliance with the Lannisters.

Not only that, but his only true demand for sending men to aide them was that they capture her
alive and ship her to him. It wasn’t her sister wanting to make sure she and the children were safe. Petyr’s only demand was her, though Roose intended to wed Sansa to Domeric to secure their position and keep Arya as a spare until they had a healthy heir, at which point they’d kill her and Sansa as they would Rickon.

She had cried into Eddard’s shoulder after reading them as the illusion of the man she had considered her friend finally died and she was left to see the truth of Littlefinger. In time she calmed and dressed with Eddard as the lords all gathered for a feast to celebrate their victory.

It was Eddard who stood from his chair at the high table, quieting the room as he held his cup in hand. “Looking upon all gathered here I see only those I can trust. Those loyal to House Stark. True men of the North and knights of the south.”

Cheers went out across the room as Eddard smiled briefly but motioned for them to quiet.

“We are war. For more than two years we have been locked in a war with southron lords who look down on us, but we have also fought alongside southron lords. We’ve stood shoulder to shoulder with men of the Reach and Stormlands. Even men and women from beyond the Wall.”

Eddard took a moment to motioned toward the man in a patchwork cloak he introduced earlier as Mance Rayder sat beside a beautiful blonde woman, a lean grey eyed man and a snowy haired man with a massive belly and golden bands covered in runes. The free folk tilted their cups toward Eddard as he looked back to the room.

“Today we faced something all of us fear. A betrayal from men we fought beside and called brothers. However we we able to fend them off because we knew their intent before they ever took up arms. If not for that I fear few of us would be here now. For that we have two men to thank.

“The first is Domeric Bolton, who disobeyed his father to let my son know he was marching to his death with an army of Bolton men following him. Without Domeric sacrificing his loyalty to his family to do what was right I and many others would have lost families instead. To him I gave thanks!”

“Domeric!” Men cheered, as well as, “The Flayed Knight!”

Eddard took a quick drink before looking back to the crowd as they quieted after taking their own drinks. “And while Domeric is likely riding to us as we speak, the other one responsible might still be trapped in the lion’s den. For that I ask you all understand some secrets kept to let other live. And sometimes those require larger sacrifices, ones made without hesitation by Jon Snow.”

There were a few gasps from the hall before all went quiet to watch their lord speak somberly of his son in the south.

“When Jon learned I had been arrested he returned to King’s Landing knowing he would play the turncoat, and by doing so convince the cruel boy king to send me to the Wall rather than take my head. It was him who formed the Fellowship of Fire that freed me from my sentence and brought me home, much as it was him who asked Domeric to guard my daughters with his life and return them to Robb should the worst happen.

“It was his message which arrived over a fortnight ago which told me he or the red priest following him saw this attack in a vision. Despite the risk of being found out he sent a message to us. To me there is no doubt now, nor has there ever been, that Jon Snow is a true son of the North! I will take no umbrage with those who spoke ill of him before, but from this day forward I will not suffer any who speak poorly of the boy I raised and care for as any of my blood. For there should be no doubt
now that as all true born sons of the North, he remembered! So let us not forget his sacrifices and instead honor a young man who has fought for us alone, surrounded by vipers and lions!”

People cheered and raised their glasses, half of them yelling for Jon Snow while the northerners bellowed, “The North remembers!”

Catelyn saw Eddard sit with tears in his eyes, taking a breath as she reached out to squeeze his hand. Yet it was her who started to weep as she clung to his arm. While others shed tears of joy in the face of death, she wept for her mistakes and the boy she damned who saved all she loved.

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Chains rattled as Domeric woke to find himself hanging from a wall in the Dreadfort’s dungeons. Taking a breath he raised his head and found his father stood before him as the frowning gaoler held a torch behind him.

“You succeeded, Domeric,” his father said meting his eyes. “You failed to kill me, but that matters little in face of your other successes. The Freys are likely suffering a siege while the men I sent south struggle to return to me. The Starks dine in Winterfell with wildlings and southron lords while Karstark and Glover mourn their losses and the knights of the Vale stand vigil for their fallen brethren. Let none say that my son hasn’t achieved a great success today. Nor should they say any less of the fool who fits his foot into his mouth.”

Domeric winced as Roose slammed a gauntlet covered fist into his chest. As he coughed Roose grabbed his jaw, making him meet his cooled gazed. “You mother might have suffered your delusions but I won’t any longer.”

“Don’t speak of her,” Domeric said trying to shake his head, but his father held his face in place. “You don’t deserve to.”

“She was my wife,” he said grabbing a handful of Domeric’s hair before smacking him across the face. “I put you in her. If I so wish I’ll dig her up and let her join you here. I’ll make you eat whatever hair and nails remain of her and lick her bones clean. I am your lord and you are my son. You have no say in my life. It is I who determines what you deserve. What you’ve earned.”

He roughly tossed Domeric’s head aside and stepped back, pulling off his gauntlet and tossing it to the gaoler. “I’ll tell you what I deserve. A worthy heir.”

Domeric chuckled. “I’m sure Walda will bear you many a halfwit child. I pray my brothers and sisters suffer the pain of being orphaned so they might have a better life.”

Roose shook his head but kept his eyes locked on Domeric’s. “You misunderstand, son. I’m not a kinslayer and you are still my eldest son and heir. I’m going to break your fantasy and make you into a worthy heir.”

Domeric’s confusion faded as Roose grabbed his throat, his fingers pressing into his neck until he could no longer breath. He pulled at the chains holding his wrists and ankles but could do nothing as his bulging eyes met Roose’s pale, icy gaze.

“I won’t kill you, son.” Watching consciousness fade from his son, Roose told him, “I’m going to kill the man you think you are.”

Chapter End Notes
Man to be honest the show has actually killed a lot of my enthusiasm, which sucks cause next few chapters were some of my favorites to write but I haven't been in the mood to go over them. I hated the first episode, thought the second was fine but the third really disappointed me. I legit laughed out loud when I realized I got some shit with Northern Conqueror for not killing main characters and having the walkers die before Cersei and Euron, and then that's what happened in the show. I've read fanfictions that have handled characters better than paid writers on a multi million dollar show. If it wasn't literally just 3 episodes left I'd dump it but now I just want to see how bad it'll get. At least there's Endgame, which really just makes the show look even worse beyond the awful choice to make everything so dark.

I'm sure someone is gonna go on and say how Edric is wrong about his assessment of the battle at the Wall, but remember it's coming from a thirteen year old and isn't the point of why I had him say it.

Ending was originally very different but I switched it up, extended the Dom bit and moved the end bit to the next chapter. The Dom bits are a bit of a cheat timeline wise but I think narratively they work better the way I've divided them.

I always struggle with chapter titles, but thought this one kind of fitting as it came to me when I switched out the ending. Originally I had the ending line in the middle of all the Dom stuff, but thought it a better line to end on and more fitting with the North's view of Jon being shattered and Cat's illusion of the man Jon is dying as well as the final nail in the coffin of who Petyr is and what he's done.

Next Chapter: Jon gathers his allies for a meeting before he departs King's Landing. Robb returns to Winterfell but a vision guides him elsewhere.

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